The Blind Canadian

A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind

In this issue:

- Effects of the new BC Guide Dog Act
- Discrimination persists for guide dog users
- Tell the CFB about your outlook on rehabilitation
- TEDx Talk by Anne Malone on the origins of misbeliefs about people who are blind





The Canadian Federation of the Blind is not an organization speaking for the blind – it is the blind speaking for themselves.



The Canadian Federation of the Blind is a non-profit, grassroots organization created by and for Blind Canadians. Its mandate is to improve the lives of blind people across the country through:

- blind people mentoring blind people;
- public education about the abilities of blind people;
- advocacy to create better opportunities and training for Blind Canadians.

The long white cane is a symbol of empowerment and a tool for independence.

With proper training, opportunity and a positive attitude, blindness is nothing more than a characteristic. Blind people can do almost everything sighted people can do; sometimes they just use alternative techniques to get the job done.

We are educated. We have skills. We are independent. We are parents. We are teachers. We have wisdom. We represent the same range of human diversity, strengths and weaknesses as any other sector of the population.

The CFB would like to realize a positive future for all people who are blind. A future where blind people can find employment; a future where blind people are valued for their contributions; a future where blind people are treated like anyone else.

This future involves you. No matter who you are, blind or sighted, you can work with us to realize this dream.

Together, we can create change in our social landscape, for the real barriers blind people face are erected by ignorance and misunderstanding. Help us achieve what we all want: to be treated with dignity and respect. Join us today and be a part of the solution.

Our Philosophy

We are not an organization speaking on behalf of blind people; rather we are an organization of blind people speaking for ourselves.

We believe it is respectable to be blind.

We believe that with proper training and opportunity, blind people can compete on terms of equality with their sighted peers.

We believe the real problem of blindness is not the lack of eyesight. The real problem is the lack of positive information about blindness and the achievements of blind people.



B The Blind Canadian

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The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) is a not-for-profit, entirely volunteer, grassroots organization, incorporated on June 2nd, 1999.

The Blind Canadian offers a positive philosophy of blindness; serves as a vehicle for advocacy and civil rights; addresses social concerns affecting the blind; discusses issues relating to employment, education, legislation and rehabilitation; and provides news of products and technology used by blind people.

We publish two issues annually of "The Blind Canadian" targeted at informing members of the general public about blindness and issues blind Canadians face. It is the leading publication of the CFB; it covers the events and activities of the CFB and addresses the issues and concerns of blind Canadians. Look for the magazine at **www.cfb.ca** in print, Braille, or audio downloadable form, or request a physical copy.

Thanks to an agreement with Public Sector Publications, businesses are offered the opportunity to advertise in the print edition; the print magazine is widely distributed.

To add individuals or community organizations to the mailing list, please email us at: info@cfb.ca.

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Introduction



Doris Belusic Photo: Thelma Fayle

This issue of *The Blind Canadian* covers many topics near and dear to the CFB. You will read about the importance of the need to drop charity status for the blind; read that many blind Canadians want and need government funding to attend quality Federation-style blindness skills training from U.S. centres of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), to learn independence and positive attitudes to live fuller lives, something not available in Canada (see Gina's story); read about the value of attending the annual, week-long NFB blindness conventions, one of the largest gatherings of the blind in the world; read an essay of one person's experience being blind and using a white cane; and read about our strong advocacy work on guide dog taxi discrimination in Victoria, B.C. – please read about the Victoria

case gone wrong, and how Calgary got it right. Working for the betterment of blind Canadians is never dull!

Ending the Business of Blind Charity

By Sam Margolis

As it presently stands, Canada's 42,000 blind citizens of working age are viewed by the vast majority of government officials as charity cases and not capable, contributing members of society. Nine out of ten blind Canadians are not gainfully employed. With no income and forced to live off of benefits, many live in poverty, unable to fulfill their potential, unable to lead a full and dignified life.

The situation for Canada's blind, however, need not be so dire. It can be turned around, as Graeme McCreath, a blind physiotherapist in Victoria, argues in his book, *The Politics of Blindness*, if an attitudinal shift from "charity to parity" were made at all levels of government. In other words, remove the demeaning stigma of inferiority that charity creates and instead bring the blind within the mainstream of public services.

McCreath asserts that blind Canadians can only become fully respected members of society when the charity label is lifted. Government must also recognize that, though blindness can present challenges to young people seeking to gain skills for life and

employment, blindness should be viewed more as an inconvenience rather than a disability which excludes a person from the same possibilities that other members of society enjoy.

As evidenced by examples of the blind in Canada and elsewhere who have had successful careers as lawyers, professors, businesspeople, community leaders and other professions, these skills are not out of reach. Given the opportunity, blind people can contribute as much to society as their sighted counterparts.

Moreover, Ottawa violates its Charter of Rights and Freedoms by establishing and permanently accepting the charity status of blind Canadians. According to the Charter, written in 1982: "Discrimination is defined as a distinction, intentional or not, which is based on grounds related to the personal characteristics of the individual or group concerned and that has the effect of imposing disadvantages or burdens not imposed on others or withholding advantages or benefits to others."

Often implicit in charity is the perception that those on the receiving end are incapable or dependent; the charity status becomes a barrier for blind Canadians in leading a normal productive and successful life. Supporting barriers, which prevent blind citizens from accessing optimum opportunities for leading a normal life, is discriminatory.

The government's perception that the blind fall into the realm of charity exacerbates the general lack of awareness amongst the public regarding the true capabilities of the blind and this has had very negative consequences for too many blind Canadians.

The CNIB: More Corporate Than Charity

Instead of guaranteeing blind individuals the same opportunities for a prosperous and fulfilling life as it does for sighted people, the Canadian government chooses to defer the fate of the blind to charity, one controlled by a private, top-heavy, self-serving organization: CNIB. This organization appears more focused on its survival as a business than serving the people it was charged with helping. While tens of thousands of blind Canadians struggle to subsist, CNIB operates like a holding company, handling tens of millions of dollars in real estate and special accounts. In Ontario alone, at least 22 CNIB executives earn over \$100,000 per year.

The unacceptable situation for blind Canadians has changed very little since CNIB was formed in 1918. Yet, despite its dismal record, CNIB still persuades Canadians that it is best able to take care of all matters concerning the blind. While CNIB sells properties, young working age blind adults lack much-needed training, preventing them from participating in the social and economic life that most Canadians take for granted.

During the past decade in British Columba, CNIB has sold off many of its desirable properties. Most notably, its Vancouver and Victoria buildings, the Bowen Island Lodge, and several other donated properties in the province. The sale of this combined real estate totalled just under \$15 million. The properties were originally funded by well-meaning supporters who saw the need and wished to make a difference, intending to benefit the blind.

The need is visible and clear to everyone. CNIB's real estate deals are kept quiet; but at the same time, their fundraisers ask people to donate. CNIB's original capital campaigns stressed the overwhelming needs to expand its services and acquire properties to meet the growing demands of the increasing numbers of blind clients in local communities. But the Institute in B.C. now only leases back as little as one-third of the space in these buildings, though still maintaining that they serve their clients. Either the original needs stories were misleading, or CNIB places less importance on serving the people on whose backs they raised the funds.

A report in the March 27, 2013 issue of the Victoria Times Colonist newspaper led with the lines, "The CNIB's Victoria office is not on the auction block. Despite rumours, the CNIB is not actively engaged in an exercise to sell off its assets, said John Mulka, the CNIB's executive director for B.C. and the Yukon."

Shortly after that report was published, commercial real estate firm Avison Young was advertising the property. Less than a year later, on February 4, 2014, the CNIB Victoria building was sold for \$2,350,000. Yet years earlier, CNIB stressed the need to spend donated dollars to expand.

Indeed, as millions of tax-free dollars in capital gains leave the community, the charity manufactures an artificially desperate situation, one that will be used to ask the generous public for even more of their hard-earned money. It should be pointed out that very few blind clients, if any, knew or had any say in these purely business decisions.

Placing the care for the blind under the auspices of a charitable group, however, allows negative misconceptions to flourish regarding the blind's capabilities. The lives led today by the vast majority of blind people in Canada should appall Canadians. It does not need to be this way.

License To Beg

TEDX Talk, by Anne Malone

From the CFB President: Anne Malone is a blind woman who, until recently, lived in St. John's, Newfoundland. She contacted CFB several years ago, and, as you can tell from the talk she gave at a TEDX conference in St. John's, she's been thinking about what blindness means, and, more significantly, what it doesn't mean.

I thank Anne for telling her story, and ours, in a forum where our voice can be heard around the country and around the world.

Anne says, "It is all seed—opportunities to germinate new discourse and ways of thinking about blindness, and the vast potential that is resident in all of us, regardless of how we experience the world."

TEDX: Published on Oct 7, 2015 Watch "License to Beg | Anne Malone | TEDxStJohns" on YouTube:

https://youtu.be/OVxFgmudwtc



Anne Malone

It happened secretly and painlessly while I slept. Tiny blood vessels, deep within my eyes, burst, shattering my visual field. In the morning, I opened my eyes to a world that had disintegrated into a psychedelic swirl of optical confetti.

On a sunny August morning in 2006, my identity as a sighted person dissolved. When I looked into a mirror, I couldn't see my face.

Adapting to the change in my eyesight was easy compared to my struggle to adapt to the social and economic realities of blindness.

Job interviews, for the first time in my life, were excruciating, an agony of indecision – to disclose or not to disclose that I am legally blind.

In Canada, the unemployment rate of blind and visually impaired people is between 80 and 90 percent.

Blindness does not limit my ability to move, learn or communicate. My personality, intellect, skills, talents, and creativity are untouched by blindness.

I, and many other people who are blind, completely reject the belief that blindness is a disability. It is simply a different interface with the environment.

People who are blind are not disabled by blindness. We are disabled by belief – the belief that blindness somehow diminishes or limits a person's ability to function and participate in mainstream society.

This idea of blindness being an incapacitating condition traces back to our earliest civilizations. I am here tonight to challenge that belief, a belief that is so deeply embedded in our collective subconscious that it has solidified into an unquestioned paradigm.

One of our most primal fears is the fear of the dark, and blindness has always been linked to darkness. Blindness was imagined as such a dreadful thing, that it was believed to be a divine curse, a punishment for some horrible wrongdoing on the part of the blind person, or one of her ancestors. To be blind was to be shamed. Blind people were often banished from their communities, or shunned within them.

There was, however, one notable exception – and that was the soldier who was blinded in battle. These wounded warriors were celebrated as heroes and were regarded with great respect.

Have you ever wondered about the oddity of the term "legally blind"? Why not legally deaf or legally paraplegic? And what's the link between blindness and the legal system? The idea traces back to the Middle Ages, a time of great scarcity, when people who could not work, or who had, for some reason, been expelled from their communities, roamed the roads of Europe, eking out a living as itinerant beggars. Then, as now, people who did not work for a living were viewed with suspicion and judgement. Many of them starved. A law was passed stating that only beggars who held a license would receive charity. To get a license, you had to prove that your need was real, that you weren't a malingerer, an idle burden on the hard working, charitable citizen. If you received a license to beg, it was proof that your need was real – for blind people, the begging license meant that you were "legally" blind, and therefore one of the "deserving poor."

Visual artists expressed these beliefs in images that depict blind people as frail, impoverished objects of pity and scorn, who are mostly shown to be totally unoccupied – often bedridden or even crawling on the ground – by far the most iconic image of blindness is the blind beggar, stick in one hand, tin cup in the other, dog at his feet. For thousands of years all of us, the sighted and the blind, have inherited and absorbed, beliefs handed down to us, from generation to generation, and, although they are based on nothing more than medieval superstition, we have not abandoned them – and they show up in the 21st century as bias and discrimination.

Today there are two groups of blind people in Canada. The first is comprised of soldiers who have been blinded in combat and people who have been blinded in industrial or other accidents. These people have access to private rehabilitation programs, to expensive adaptive technologies and devices for reading, to re-training opportunities and to service dogs. All of this is funded, as it should be, by health insurance and workers compensation programs.

Then there are those who are born blind, or have degenerative eye disease. There is no insurance coverage, as the blindness arises from a pre-existing condition. In Canada, there is NO provision for ANY rehabilitation for blind people in the public health care system. People who are born blind or who have a degenerative eye disease are referred to a charity organization for these services. They must purchase their own adaptive technology (some provinces offer funding assistance, but if you live in a province that does not (like NL), you may get caught in a loop of defeat. The technology is expensive. If you are one of the unemployed, you may not have the resources to buy it. Many of us rely on this technology to read.

Why are we still, in the 21st century, assuming that the needs of those who are genetically blind are less than the needs of those who are accidentally blinded? We, like those primitive societies, have created two classes of blind people.

In my wallet I carry a picture ID, with a client number on it, verifying that I have been "registered" with a charity organization for the blind. I must present this card to qualify for "charity" perks like free movies, or free domestic airfare. If I am one of the 80-90 percent who is unemployed, this card verifies to the government that I am entitled to a disability pension. I am legally blind.

I stand here tonight on the shoulders of giants, blind activists and sighted allies from around the world, who have been declaring "Parity, not charity" in a unified voice for more than half a century. That message has been drowned out by the voices of well-intentioned charities who are challenged by the contradiction of, on the one hand, proclaiming the abilities of the "rehabilitated blind", while on the other hand, falling back on the very stereotypes we are struggling to overcome in order to soften the public heart to give generously to the cause. It's a mixed-up, confusing message, and the result is an unemployment rate of 80-90 percent in one of the wealthiest, most progressive, and inclusive countries on the face of the earth.

We live in a time of unprecedented technological possibilities – unlimited access to information, social connection, a time of retinal implants, of stem cell regeneration, and virtual realities. Yet for many unemployed blind people the only technology that is financially accessible to them is still a stylized stick.

I own a Smart Phone that advertises its accessibility features, one of them being voice-to-text messaging. I can verbally dictate a message and the phone will convert my speech to text, and I can send that text with the verbal command. However if you send me a text, the phone will not read the text to me.

On my tablet, which also boasts accessibility, I can magnify my browser and email, but anything that runs in an app is immune to the accessibility software in the device. Facebook, Google Play, Netflix, any shopping app – all inaccessible to blind or visually impaired people.

When you entrepreneurs and innovators begin co-creating these technologies with the people who actually use them – you will be deconstructing barriers AND creating wealth for yourselves. When you open the doors of your design to your blind and visually impaired colleagues, you are unleashing human potential that has been held in captivity since the dawn of civilization.

None of us should be defined by the bodies we live in. No one should be held hostage to an archaic belief about what is or is not possible. The creativity, intelligence, and resilience resident in the human spirit transcend the boundaries of flesh and bone, of sight and of sound....

This is an idea whose time is long overdue – there is no "them", there is only "us", and together we can create a more inclusive and beautiful world – for everyone.

A Letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

By Graeme McCreath

Office of the Prime Minister 80 Wellington St. Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A2

January 3, 2016

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau,

As a blind citizen of Canada and a member of the Canadian Federation of the Blind, (cfb.ca), who believes in upgrading Canada's blind population from second-class charity recipients to full contributing members of society, I call on you to make this happen.

As you are a passionate and socially aware Canadian, I hope you will give the time to appreciate my message, both in my book and my statement below:

BLIND CANADIAN INFERIOR STATUS

In 1982 our Federal Government created the Charter of Rights and Freedom and Section 15 states:

"Discrimination is defined as a distinction, intentional or not, which is based on grounds related to the personal characteristics of the individual or group concerned and that has the effect of imposing disadvantages or burdens not imposed on others or withholding advantages or benefits to others."

For the last 90 years blind Canadians have been portrayed as universal charity recipients which has imposed disadvantages and burdens related to rehabilitation, job training and other fundamental rights. Availability of these fundamental services for the blind is often dependent on public donations rather than the normal government channels of delivery afforded to others. The charity status stereotypes blind people – implying incapacity and dependency.

To impose, indefinitely, a specific ideology which portrays blindness negatively and segregates a group from the mainstream, permits prejudice and stifles social progress.

As you said, we are now in the 21st century and I am sure you can appreciate that the old, Victorian way of treating blind Canadians is obsolete. Although the intention of the original founders of the CNIB was to temporarily help blind soldiers after the First World War, society is dynamic and progress must occur. Segregating us through the CNIB is demeaning, undignified and violates the United Nations Declaration of Rights of the Disabled.

Please find enclosed a copy of my book, *The Politics of Blindness*, which I wrote with the idea of helping to change what it means to be blind in Canada. Integration of all blind people into the mainstream should be a priority of your government as we wish, like others, to be part of the future and not held back in the past.

A. Graeme McCreath

cc: The Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities



Gina's Preparing For Blindness

By Gina Huylenbroeck

From CFB President Mary Ellen Gabias: Gina is working to attend the Louisiana Center for the Blind. She recently began a GoFundMe campaign. We now have two people, Gina and Nancy, who are seeking money through GoFundMe in order to receive quality blindness skills training. What a sad commentary on the irresponsibility of the province of British Columbia. We're all proud of them for doing what they must do to raise the money they need. It's too bad that blind people are forced to raise money privately for what should be an expected part of government funded service.



Please support Gina at GoFundMe: https://www.gofundme.com/blindnessprep

GoFundMe started February 22, 2016

Greetings!

My name is Gina and I am embarking on a new challenge in my life. When I was 19 years old, I was diagnosed with Progressive Cones Dystrophy, which is not a corrective condition. It has left me with no central vision, and although I can see images of shapes and bodies, I am unable to make out any details. Over the last few decades my vision has continued to deteriorate. It wasn't until last year that I truly accepted my disability. It was at this point that I started using a white cane and realized my potential to remain independent. Although I still have some minimal useful sight, it is highly likely that I will go blind at some point.

Canada does not have any full-time extensive training centers for the blind. I have been accepted to attend the Louisiana Center for the Blind (LCB). This is a nine-month training program which involves me being blind-folded for nine hours a day. I will be taught intensive cane travel, Braille, daily living skills, and most importantly, technology training. I am both excited and terrified about this opportunity.

I have been working part-time in Victoria, BC, as a waitress at Paul's Restaurant for 25 years, which supplements the disability assistance I receive each month. I'm finding it increasingly difficult to perform my duties, especially those related to using the computer to enter orders. I rely on my job not only for financial means but more so for self-sufficiency, and to feel productive, social, and appreciated.

By attending LCB I will gain the skills and knowledge necessary for me to remain employed and continue supporting myself. Without these tools, it will be difficult for me to reach my full potential that I now believe I am capable of. This training opportunity is coming at a perfect time in my life, as I feel that I am now ready and willing to embrace this challenge. It is time for me to prepare myself for the likelihood of being totally blind.

My hope for the future is to one day share my knowledge and skills with other visually impaired people here on Vancouver Island. This education may also allow me to make a career change in order to continue to support myself.

Any monies raised will go towards my flights, housing, tuition, medical insurance, maintaining my housing in Victoria while I am away, food, etc. If I am to exceed my fundraising goal of approximately \$28,000, I will donate all extra funds to the Pacific Training Center located in Victoria, BC.

I appreciate any support I receive and thank you for taking the time to read about my story.

If you would like to learn more about the Louisiana Center for the Blind that I will be attending, please go to this link: www.louisianacenter.org

Update from end of March 2016:

The time has finally arrived! Heading off to what might be the greatest opportunity of my life! This experience will be life changing in the most positive way imaginable. Being given the tools and taught skills I will need to build the kind of life I want for myself is a priceless gift. Thank you to everyone who has donated funds to help offset my costs. To all of my cheerleaders who remind me that I can so do this. Your votes of confidence in me, help me to persevere through my own fears and insecurities. I feel truly blessed having so much love flowing in my direction. Bon Voyage!

Update from mid-April 2016:

Right now, I'm on a bus to the Louisiana State NFB convention for the blind, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This training is difficult, yet already rewarding. My biggest accomplishment so far! I can navigate around the whole training Center. I have already mentally mapped every class, office, washroom and entrance. This is with sleep shades (blindfold) on! Everything I am learning, I am learning as a blind woman. I was so nervous to come here. Now that I've been here for a couple of weeks, I know what to expect and what's expected of me. I'm excited to see what life will be like for me in 8 1/2 months! I've made a few friends and I think my instructors are amazing! This Center is definitely the right choice for me.

Message to the editor from Gina, April 17, 2016:

We so need a training center like LCB. This center is amazing. I hope that one day, Canada will make changes. The sooner the better. Everyone should be able to have this experience so they can live the life we want. It's only been two weeks so far and I've experienced success and I'm proud of my small accomplishments already. I can't wait to see where I'll be in 8 1/2 months from now. I'm so lucky to be here.

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2016 BC Budget Consultation

Once again the Canadian Federation of the Blind has submitted written testimony to the Budget Consultation Committee of the British Columbia legislature. Our submission deals with the need for accountable rehabilitation. Below is our submission:

Blind British Columbians continue to be denied access to meaningful training in the skills and attitudes of blindness that are required to become proficient and to live up to their optimum potential. The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) submits the following statement of principles we believe are essential if British Columbia is to develop a meaningful habilitation and rehabilitation training system for blind individuals.

Position Statement of the Canadian Federation of the Blind Concerning Rehabilitation

- 1. Blind and vision-impaired Canadians have the right to the opportunity to learn the skills and attitudes of blindness necessary to succeed economically and socially. Because the opportunity to learn these skills is a right, it must be provided at government expense. Just as the right to a free and public education exists for all Canadian children, the right to rehabilitation must be provided to blind adults.
- 2. Blind and vision-impaired Canadians are not a homogeneous group. Therefore, it is appropriate that a variety of rehabilitation options be available to meet varying needs.
- 3. Individuals seeking rehabilitation have the right to informed consent when choosing the type of services that best fit their needs.
- 4. Funding for rehabilitation should follow the individual, not the program.
- 5. An Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan, specifying the type of training to be provided, the responsibilities of the entity providing the training, the government funding it, and the rehabilitation student, and the expected outcomes, must be drawn up and agreed to jointly by the government, the blind individual and the service provider.
- 6. Evaluation of contracts for rehabilitation will be based on the outcomes for the students, not merely on the contractor's provision of services.
- 7. Students may not be geographically limited in their choice of training options; those choosing training out of province or in another country will continue to receive medical coverage and other public benefits while participating in the training course.

As experienced and knowledgeable blind citizens, the members of the Canadian Federation of the Blind recommend a whole new accountable method for providing responsible skills training for blind British Columbians. Rather than the government offloading its responsibility onto one private corporation, as it is currently doing, we strongly recommend a program of direct funding based on the needs of each blind candidate. It is vital that blind clients have control of their own destiny.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind recommends a system in which individualized service plans are developed jointly by the individual needing services and a navigator who is responsible for assisting individuals to explore options and to help develop choices that are not currently available. Blind people will be much better served if current funding is freed up for development of innovative service models that would foster healthy competition.



Mary Ellen Gabias CFB President

Adopting this approach with respect to skills training and rehabilitation would not lead to increased costs since money to fund it would replace the current grant funding allocated exclusively to CNIB.

For decades the private charity, CNIB, has been the exclusive service provider and has accepted funds from the provincial government. We recommend that the province consult with blind individuals and independent organizations of blind people to develop publicly managed individually targeted services. Simply funding CNIB with no outcome based oversight is wasteful of provincial funds.

Mary Ellen Gabias President, CFB

A Call for Input: Your Dreams Toward a New Rehab Reality? By CFB President Mary Ellen Gabias

Lately I've been having conversations with blind people in and out of CFB about what services to blind people should include.

There's almost unanimous agreement that what we have is not working at all well. Defining the problem is a useful beginning, but I'd love to gather people's thoughts about possible solutions. Although many of us have discussed options over several years, I don't know if I've ever seen the collective wisdom of the community gathered together for discussion.

So here are some theoretical questions to start the dialogue. If there were no CNIB at all, how would you want services to be structured? Who would pay for them? What would be the role of the consumer, the service provider, government? What services do you think are most critical? Is your top priority Braille, technology, independent travel, job skills and placement, low vision services, attitude challenging activities, homemaking? If you want all of the above, how do you think they should be delivered? Do you want centers where people leave their community for full immersion, teachers who work with people at their homes, day programs, some combination?

Dream! If you could wave a magic wand and structure services exactly the way you want them, describe your dream solution. In this exercise there are no right or wrong answers. In fact, the best answers may not have been dreamed about yet!

If this topic intrigues you, please share your thoughts. Also, pass this along to anyone you know who you think has something to share. The broader the range of people who discuss these topics, the better.

For the sake of this discussion, I'd ask that people think outside of the current structure as much as possible.

Those of you who are on the CFB list, please share your thoughts with all of us. If this reaches someone who is not on the CFB list, please send your comments to president@cfb.ca and I will gather all comments together to be compiled in order to get a sense of the creative power of the blind community.

I have my own thoughts, but I'll wait to share them because I want to encourage other people to broaden my perspective with brilliant ideas! I promise, though, that I am not asking you to do something I'm unwilling to do myself. I'll throw my thoughts into the mix once there's a significant mix of ideas.

Mary Ellen

Using Victor Reader Stream as an Audible Teleprompter By Doris Belusic

I had the opportunity this April to give a seven-minute reading of an excerpt of my essay, *The White Cane*, at the book launch of the 2016 University of Victoria undergraduate literary journal, *This Side of West*. My essay is one of the written selections printed in this compilation. I had hummed and hawed about doing the reading. I didn't know how I could read out loud because I hadn't been able to read print from paper to give any sort of talk or speech for some years due to my progressing blindness. And, I don't know how to read from Braille notes. I had thought about asking someone else to read it for me, and, I had thought about not doing it at all.

Then my husband told me that my Victor Reader Stream (VRS), a small, super-duper digital recorder specifically designed for the blind, can be used as an audible teleprompter. Great idea, I thought! He sent me an email with the audio link to listen to a description on how to do it. The audio link of the teaching presentation is called, "Public Speaking and Reading Fluently Aloud Using an Audible Teleprompter: An Alternative Technique," by Bruce Gardner.

I was surprised how easy it was to learn. What I did was record myself onto the VRS as I read my excerpt out loud. (I used my CCTV, a desktop magnifier to read my excerpt from a paper printout). Once I had the excerpt nicely recorded on the VRS, I then put



Doris Belusic reading at book launch. Credit: Thelma Fayle

on headphones or earbuds and practised listening to the recording while simultaneously speaking the words out loud as I heard them. I practised over and over for a few days until I felt comfortable that I could manage to give the reading.

I succeeded giving a fine reading at the event and now I know that I would be able to present any sort of speech or reading if I ever needed to again. It is empowering to know that I can.

Below is the link to that very helpful audio clip on how to use the Victor Reader Stream as an audible teleprompter. It suggests downloading the document you want to be able to read out loud onto your VRS from your computer. I didn't do it that way, as I'm not that techy yet.

Here's the link:

http://s3.amazonaws.com/nfb/app/public/system/audios/734/original/audible_teleprompter iphone app.mp3?1381965609

or find it by googling "Bruce Gardner Victor Reader Stream teleprompter"

or find it on the www.blindhow.com at the link:

http://www.blindhow.com/posts/734#content

The White Cane – An Essay

By Doris Belusic

This essay was originally written as an assignment for a university writing course and was selected to be published in the 2016 University of Victoria undergraduate literary journal, "This Side of West."

I hold my long, rigid, fiberglass white cane in my right hand and swing it side to side. This cane identifies me as legally blind. I glide or tap its metal tip on the ground, past my shoulders' width to check the path for my feet and body. "Opposite, opposite, opposite..." I'd mutter, training my white cane and feet to function in unison: left foot forward as white cane taps right; right foot forward as white cane taps left. My own, "Same side, same side, same side..." sense of rhythm tries to coerce me. After a few weeks the pattern feels natural.

I have known for over 30 years that I was gradually becoming blind. At age 20, I was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a degenerative eye disease in which retina cells slowly die, taking peripheral vision and then progressing inward to claim central vision. Usually it's hereditary, but I don't know anyone in my family with this condition.

I don't remember the opthalmologist giving me the news. At the time, the eventual full impact of blindness seemed far off. I was only in the initial stage of losing peripheral and night vision and could still see enough to drive, study, work at a local hospital and dance in a folk dance group.

Clliiink. My white cane's metal tip clangs over a metal manhole cover in the sidewalk. I feel a sense of satisfaction. "Yes, I am centred and on track." Any feedback to help confirm that I'm where I want to be is appreciated.

The white cane is a basic tool and is essential to getting around. With it I stay on the sidewalk, feel curbs, stairs, doorways, objects and even puddles. The landscape's uneven concrete, gravel and grass edges, driveway and wheelchair cuts, inclines, declines, and twists and turns are all environmental clues to a blind person using a white cane.

Wooden canes or walking sticks have been used by the blind as mobility tools for centuries. A blind British man in 1921 made the first white cane by painting his walking stick white to be visible to traffic. In France, in 1931, a national white stick movement began providing white canes to blind citizens. In the United States that same year, the Lions Clubs International began promoting the use of white wooden canes for the blind. After World War II, an American veterans' rehabilitation specialist designed a better cane for blinded veterans that reached as high as the sternum. Many Canadians still use this length.

My neighbour once asked if the fine scattering of fallen pine needles over the sidewalk by her house is a problem for my white cane. I told her, to me, the needles are a smooth textural landmark, a neat sense of place. There, my cane glides as if on ice. Leaves cluttering sidewalks are a different story. Sloshing through leaves makes the cane heavy to swing and reduces what I feel on the ground.

I was on one of my quick daily walks on a side-street in my neighbourhood, following its gravel edge with my white cane. A man walked by and said loudly, "You're doing well. You're on Aldridge Street." He was kind, but wrongly assumed I needed the information.

Although the white cane empowers me with independence, confidence and safety, the sight of a white cane in our society conjures up beliefs of the polar opposite—of dependence, inability—and evokes patronization and pity. So why is the white cane perceived this way in society?

One reason is that humans have an innate fear of blindness. Sight is such a dominant sense that the average person cannot imagine functioning, even living, without it. Naturally, people believe they'd be helpless, and this belief, among others, ends up on the backs of the blind. Society (including some blind people and some parents of blind children) views blindness through uninformed or misinformed lenses, distorting the realities of blindness and the potential and capabilities of blind people.

Recorded history, also, has much to do with the stigma. For centuries, historians have misrepresented the blind with half-truths of exclusion, abandonment, extermination, shaming/shunning, the lunacy edge, dependence and inability—of people living in squalor and of people stuck in chairs staring blankly. Some thought the blind had special powers, and some religions believed blindness was due to past-life sins. Dr. Kenneth Jernigan, a former president of the American advocacy organization, National Federation of the Blind (NFB), said in a 1973 speech, *Blindness: Is History Against Us?* (nfb.org) historians haven't accurately recorded the blind's active participation in society. Instead, they were swayed by prejudice and preconceptions and tried to deny and explain away the blind's capabilities and successes. Jernigan said that historical myths of inferiority and helplessness kept the blind down, with many blind people and society at large accepting this.

Literature and movies, such as *Blindness* (2008), have also wrongly depicted and misrepresented the blind through stereotypic stock caricatures. No wonder a strong stigma surrounds the white cane. Jernigan points to a very different historical reality—one with many capable, successful blind people—Dr. Jacob Bolotin being one such example.

Dr. Bolotin, in the early 1900s, was America's first blind physician. Had it not been for a relative who wrote the book, *The Blind Doctor, The Jacob Bolotin Story*, he would have been forgotten in the hollows of history. Dr. Bolotin fought prejudice to go to medical school, to write the medical license exam and to get his first position, but through hard

work, persistence and brilliance, he excelled and became respected worldwide as a heart and lung specialist. All this before today's white canes and technology. Patients loved him and when he died, 5,000 people attended his funeral.

I, too, know many successful, capable blind people, who've been my mentors, many without knowing it. I know blind university professors, church ministers, a physiotherapist, business people, a computer specialist, lawyers, amateur radio operators, a builder/contractor, writers, government workers and social workers. I've met blind martial artist, Johnny Tai, who won gold against sighted opponents at a 2014 International Self-Defense tournament and qualified for the Olympics. I've met the Right Honourable David Blunkett who held powerful positions in Prime Minister Tony Blair's cabinet, including Home Secretary. I've listened live to a blind opera singer, and I enjoy tenor Andrea Bocelli on CD. I also know a blind man who recently took apart and fully restored a hybrid electric car battery, something most mechanically and electrically-savvy sighted people would not attempt due to the danger—this, being my husband of 27 years.

The blind, like other people with differences, are often considered the "other." This is a common way to think—until a certain situation affects you or someone you know. I worked at an election polling station as a teenager and saw a blind man come to vote. I noticed because he was the first blind person I'd ever seen. Blindness was foreign to me then. But as I discovered, a white cane can become anyone's tool. Blindness doesn't discriminate.

Because of this baggage, blind people commonly find it awkward to begin using a white cane. I was one of these. I'd tuck my telescoping white cane into my purse whenever I could. I wanted to hide being blind, mostly because I didn't feel understood by others (even some family, friends, acquaintances and co-workers), and I had to keep explaining. I had been legally blind for many years, with a little useful, narrow central vision which kept getting narrower, but people often misunderstood me and my blindness. For many years, my periodic internal conflict was difficult, so comfort with my white cane was too. And, like anyone, I didn't want to be considered helpless or the "other."

By giving into society's pressures, which fuelled my internal struggle, and not using my white cane when I needed to, I gambled with my confidence, mobility and safety. I couldn't count on vision to give me accurate information as my blindness worsened and I'd sometimes walk into people and things.

On three separate occasions, I sprawled out flat on my chest on busy asphalt roads because I misjudged curbs. After many years of dealing with my blindness and associated issues, I came to a place that writer, Anais Nin, describes when she said, "Then the day came when the risk it took to remain tightly closed in a bud became more painful than the risk to bloom." I decided to stop gambling and get on with being blind. I wrote the article, *Out of the Closet–With My White Cane,* in 2008 (*The Blind*

Canadian, Vol 3; cfb.ca), to put my struggle into words, like therapy, and through this I learned others had the same experience. In 2010, at age 52, with my vision mostly vanished, I finally took a long, rigid, white cane into my hand for good.

One day after an opthalmologist appointment, I craved a cinnamon bun from the bakery located just outside along the strip mall. I glided my cane with anticipation. I came across a woman sitting on a bench by the building. "Excuse me," I said, "is this the bakery?" She didn't answer, so I asked again. She still didn't respond. I began to think she didn't speak English. Then, I remembered I had seen this woman a few years earlier—a clothed dummy sitting in front of the clothing consignment store, next door to the bakery. I was embarrassed and filled with laughter—but I got my cinnamon bun.

Some blind people, like myself, still have a little residual vision, which may or may not be helpful. What I see (or if I see at all) depends on the quality of light, the direction of it, the amount of visual clutter, contrast and whether I'm wearing sunglasses and visor. When walking, I sometimes see things: shapes, and stark colour contrasts, like white crosswalks painted on blacktop, yellow-painted sidewalk curbs, or dark trees silhouetted against light sky. Sometimes things I think I see, I don't. One day, I saw a fast-moving dark shape on the sidewalk and I moved out of its way, only to discover with surprise it was the long shadow of a passing bicycle. One recycling day, I saw what seemed to be a recycling box on the sidewalk ahead of me. On my walk that day, my white cane had hit a few of them. That box soon transformed into a motorized scooter as it passed.

I am a founding member of the blindness advocacy organization, Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), formed in 1999 and run by blind people. We promote and use lightweight, long, rigid, fiberglass or carbon fiber white canes that reach the chin or higher. These lengths make for faster, safer, more efficient mobility. CFB learned about and adopted these canes from the NFB. The shiny metal tip on the bottom of these canes creates environmental feedback to your hand and ears. With usage, these tips slowly grind down, get thin, and can fall apart, so it's smart to keep a replacement tip in your pocket or purse.

Blind people have differing levels of mobility skills. Some don't get out of the house much, some travel to work with their white canes every day, and others, like adventurer, Erik Weihenmayer, climb Mt. Everest.

It's inspiring how well some blind people travel with a white cane, especially after good cane mobility instruction. In the United States there are three world-renowned NFB training centres where many American and international students learn cane travel, Braille, life skills, and a positive "can-do" attitude. There is no equivalent, quality rehabilitation training in Canada nor does Canada provide funding to attend these centres, despite rallying and lobbying of governments by blind people.

After the nine-month intensive blindness skills training program at one of these centres, a blind person is equipped with the best white cane skills possible, that are tested to

the max with the dreaded "drop off." The student is driven to an undisclosed location in town and left to find their own way back to the school, with only one allowed question to ask a stranger along the way. And, if a student has any residual vision, they wear sleep-shades, like they did during training.

Over the years, I've been lucky to glean wisdom from other competent blind cane travellers. So I should have known better several months ago when I made the mistake of listening to someone else as I waited at the busy intersection crosswalk near my home, which I've crossed many times before. I know to listen to walk signals and to traffic flow. But, I heard a woman's voice yell, "Why don't you go?" For an instant, I forgot what I knew and listened to her. I thought I had maybe misread the traffic and that she was yelling at me. I stepped out into the street and into the oncoming traffic. Cars stopped, I was lucky they hadn't picked up speed. I don't remember hearing one honk but I do remember my anger and yelling, "You told me to go!" hoping the woman would hear. I backed up, my heel hit the curb, and I fell onto it.

Now, I believe this woman was yelling from her car at the cars ahead of her in the traffic lineup and not at me at all. That day, a hard reminder imprinted on me: listen only to myself and my white cane.

The more I walk with my white cane, the more confidence I gain, although I am nervous finding my way in unfamiliar places. Possibly one day I'll attend an NFB training centre. For now, I enjoy my neighbourhood walks and my long white cane has become an extension of my body, as integral to me as feelers to a bug.

It's been nine years since I've retired, six years since I've started using the cane full time. My husband and I have tapped our white canes in other parts of the world–along narrow streets and beaches, and in the cafes of Croatia–and amongst 2,000 to 3,000 other tapping white canes at numerous NFB blindness conventions. Their philosophy? You can live the life you want. Blindness itself is not what defines you, your future or what holds you back. My philosophy now, in 2016, is this: a white cane is respectable. It's one of your best tools for success. As you use it, be proud. It symbolizes your freedom.

NFB Convention Thank You Letter and YouTube Video By Michelle Creedy

From the editor: Michelle lives in Chilliwack, B.C. and is one of five Canadians that CFB sponsored to attend the week-long National Federation of the Blind (NFB) blindness convention in Orlando, Florida in July 2015. These annual NFB conventions are one of the largest blindness conventions in the world and are very beneficial for blind people to attend. At the end of the letter below is a link to a short, superb ShawTV video YouTube clip about Michelle and her appreciation of the Federation. Thank you, Michelle, for this beautiful way of giving back.

Dear CFB Executive and Board

I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for giving me funds with which to attend the NFB convention in July 2015. It was truly a life-changing experience!

I will never forget the first afternoon at convention hearing all of those canes. I insisted on having a video of me walking just so I could keep the sound alive. It suddenly dawned on me that, wow, I am not alone. The Convention was one of the most empowering experiences of my life because for the first time in my life, I met other people who have done what I am trying to do. I met other blind people who have adopted children. Adopting a child has been a life-long dream for me and as you can imagine, my life has been filled with nay-sayers who think I can't do it. The nay-sayers are often people close to me who could potentially have a great deal of power over my life. Thanks to this experience, I have been able to come back and keep dreaming and living the life I want. There are still nay-sayers, but they have a whole lot less power.

There are two reasons that this note is so late coming to you. The first reason is that I wanted to wait and see if my home study for my adoption would be accepted before writing you the note. I'm happy to report that it is in the process of being accepted and the social worker who completed the home study is recommending me for adoption. I'm yet to be formally approved but that day will be a major bell-ringer for all blind Canadians. I could never have done this without your support.

The second reason for my tardiness is that I have been trying to think of a way in which to give back to the CFB. I hope the following link will show you just how much I appreciate being able to attend the convention. Sorry Mary Ellen, you didn't quite hear the full story when I approached you to do this little clip, but I hope this is one of many we do together about the CFB. You are a one in a million president! Frankly, you and others are the absolute cornerstones of the movement in Canada and I feel a very deep sense of gratitude to all of you who have tirelessly worked to bring the Federation to blind Canadians. I'd like you to lead me so that one day, I can help carry the torch to light the way for others who are so oppressed by the views society insists in holding about blindness.

I am also interested in fundraising to help others go to convention and I'd like to be someone who is sent out to do public speaking to both blindness groups and sighted groups and service clubs about the CFB.

Long Live the Federation!

Michelle Creedy PS, let's go build the Federation!

To see the ShawTV YouTube video, go to:

https://youtu.be/LuQocvMB-4E

My First NFB Convention

By Maria Kovacs

From the editor: Maria was another CFB attendee at the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) blindness convention held in Orlando, Florida, in July 2015. Here is what she has to say:

My name is Maria Kovacs and I am glad to have attended my first NFB convention.

This year, for the first time, I had a chance to attend one of the most empowering conventions I have ever attended in my life! Getting there was not so easy because of all the thoughts running through my mind. This kind of conference, as curious as I was, was bringing me a great deal of fear and also lots of anticipation of what I could learn that could be useful for when I return home.

There is also something I have not said until now—I had never taken a trip totally alone before, with only my dog—without having someone I knew on the other side to greet me. I have travelled a lot all through my years, but once I got to my destination someone would be around to greet and show support. This time, Maria had to do it all by herself with her guide dog—to go learn what other people do and are successful in doing. So off I went!



Maria Kovacs

I got there—and I could not believe what I was surrounded with. The independence others were showing me was overwhelming and exciting at the same time. So I decided to get my feet wet and enjoy most of what NFB had to offer. Electronics teachings were great because I am not brave when it comes to that kind of stuff.

Then, listening to Mark Riccobono, the new national NFB president, and what he shared with us, part of me wished that I was a resident of the United States. The high from those who shared their stories, their trials and their accomplishments brought me home with a lot of information which I know is going to get me into much trouble!

This is an experience I will not soon forget because of many stories and actions I have learned while there. This was a great gift for me to experience, even if it took such a long time for me to get there.

My nervous thoughts were gone the first day. The only thing that did not go away was, how my beautiful guide dog, Cassidy, struggled to be around so many canes. The

canes are overwhelming to the dogs and I made a wrong choice to take her there. If God permits and I should return, I will not travel with the dog. Travelling with a cane will also be a new experience for me, since my preferred choice of mobility is my dog. When I have travelled to Europe or other countries, I used the cane, but like I said, there would be someone there at my arrival to help.

I am very glad to have gone and to have had the experiences I had. And, I must be the only person who has ever been picked for a door prize of one thousand dollars and not been there to collect it! This became a pretty low part of my trip, but it could not be helped!

I had a great deal of pride to be a participant in the umbrella mosaic and that we beat the world record and made it into the *Guinness World Book of Records*.

Who knows what the next convention will bring me?



CFB attendees at the 2015 NFB Convention.

Photo Courtesy: Oriano Belusic

A New Guide Dog and Service Dog Act in B.C.

A new Guide Dog and Service Dog Act came into effect January 18, 2016 in British Columbia. A B.C. government website says:

"The Guide Dog and Service Dog Act makes it clear that discrimination is unacceptable, giving certified guide or service dog handlers access rights equal to those enjoyed by all members of the public. The act updates guide dog and service dog guidelines, by:

- Expanding tenancy rights to include strata properties and certified retired dogs residing with their handlers.
- Providing public access rights for certified dogs in training.
- Recognizing service dogs in addition to guide dogs.
- Requiring a high training standard.
- Establishing a more robust decision-making process for certification.
- Strengthening compliance and enforcement.

Quick Facts:

- Guide and service dogs are crucial for many British Columbians who live with a
 disability. For example, they may help individuals who are visually impaired to
 navigate city streets, or provide assistance with things such as hearing loss,
 epilepsy, diabetes or post-traumatic stress disorder.
- Retired dogs are included in the changes to tenancy rules. Once a dog is no longer certified as a working animal due to age, injury or disease, it will now be able to be certified as retired and remain in the home with its handler.
- Handlers seeking certification for guide and service dogs that were not trained by an accredited school will now be able to have them tested by a neutral third party, the Justice Institute of British Columbia."

The B.C. government, in a received letter, says:

"Dog and handler teams trained by a school that is accredited by Assistance Dogs International or the International Guide Dog Federation will receive certification through a streamlined, simplified process. As the ministry is not in a position to assess a dog's behaviour, its level of training will be relied upon to ensure public safety, including when the dog may be in unfamiliar or stressful situations.

The new Act strengthens enforcement mechanisms, making them among the strongest in Canada. This includes a maximum fine of \$3,000 upon conviction, increased from \$200, and a new ability for ministry inspectors to issue violation tickets for unlawfully denying access or tenancy. Police officers have been made aware of the new legislation, including updates made to the regulations under the Offence Act.

Complaints may be reported to the ministry, via the program's toll-free telephone number at 1-855-587-0185 (option 5) or by email at SPDCOMP@gov.bc.ca (general enquiries may be directed to guideandservicedogs@gov.bc.ca). In order to ensure administrative fairness, all complaints will be reviewed and, if appropriate, investigated. Ministry staff will endeavour to conduct investigations in as timely a manner as possible.

The Act creates a new offence of falsely purporting to be a certified team, with a maximum penalty of \$3,000 upon conviction or a violation ticket. Dog and handler teams may receive identification cards from their schools to verify that they have completed a training program. Such cards may come in varying designs, and they would not violate the Act unless they purported to replicate the standardized provincial identification card which will have security features similar to those of a driver's licence.

The ministry will continue to provide information to businesses and others regarding their obligations under the Act. Ministry staff are also available to answer questions via the contact information noted above."

More information on the new Act:

A local police officer can now issue a violation ticket of \$288 at the time of an infraction, such as:

- -Interference with a guide dog's right of entry and use
- -Illegal denial of tenancy
- -Illegal term or condition of tenancy
- -Interfere with or obstruct a service animal

If one takes a violation through the court system, it is possible that a fine of up to \$3000 can be issued.

There is a guide dog or service dog supplement available. Below is the information from the Act:

"The minister may provide a supplement of \$95 for each calendar month to or for a family unit that is eligible for income assistance or hardship assistance for the maintenance of a dog if the dog and a person in the family unit are a guide dog team, a service dog team or a retired guide or service dog team..."

Learn more:

Read more about B.C.'s new Guide Dog and Service Dog Act: https://news.gov.bc.ca/stories/tails-are-wagging-for-new-guide-and-service-dog-guidelines

Read about Guide Dog and Service Dog certification – Province of BC – Information: http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/human-rights/guide-and-service-dog

Read the full new BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act: http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/15017

Don't Ask for Guide Dog Documents

Letter to the Editor Victoria Times Colonist, January 24, 2016

B.C.'s new Guide and Service Dog Act instituted provincial certification with the twin intentions of guaranteeing access rights for people with disabilities and preventing the public from fraudulently passing off pets as service dogs.

Both are lofty goals, but the unintended consequences of the publicity surrounding the law are causing new problems for legitimate teams.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind has received numerous reports of guide-dog owners being stopped as they go about their everyday business and being asked to produce proof that they have the right to enter public places. This level of inquisition is unprecedented; guide dogs have been legally recognized in Canada for more than three quarters of a century, without their owners being required to systematically show their paperwork.

If you observe a person who appears to be blind or vision-impaired who is accompanied by a guide dog that is wearing a harness and is guiding him or her, assume that all is well and leave them to go about their business. The new law does not require businesses to become credentials police. In fact, demanding documentation without just cause is a form of discrimination. Certification was intended as a means of reducing problems, not creating new ones.

Mary Ellen Gabias, president Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Victoria

B.C. Blind Man with Guide Dog Denied Cab Ride and Related Information By Sam Margolis

On July 15, 2014, Graeme McCreath was enjoying a summer evening out with friends in downtown Victoria, B.C. Graeme, who is blind, was with his guide dog. As dinner at Earl's wrapped up, a member of Graeme's group called for a cab. And the rest of the story is one that is all too familiar to British Columbians who rely on guide dogs to assist them in their daily lives.

The group connected with the cab driver as they left the restaurant. The driver saw the guide dog and refused to let Graeme into his vehicle—an action which is against the law in British Columbia. It constitutes discrimination under the province's former Guide Animal Act and the new Guide Dog and Service Dog Act (2016).

Sadly, this episode is not unusual. There is hardly a guide dog owner in B.C. who could not tell a similar story. Indeed, there are countless stories of taxi drivers barring a guide dog from a cab, or noticing a blind person with a guide dog waiting outside at a pick-up point then driving off, leaving the blind person standing there.

For Graeme and other blind people in B.C., this behavior by some cab drivers is completely unacceptable. It is illegal on the basis of blatant discrimination. As a result of this incident, Graeme filed a complaint with the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal and a hearing was held July 14, 2015 (see following articles for details).

Flagging by taxi companies

It is significant to note that Graeme was not the person who called the taxi company. It was a friend. But, had either he or his wife made the call on one of their phones, landline or cell, their numbers would have shown up—been flagged on the taxi company's computer database as having a guide dog.

In the past few years, guide dog owners have noticed the disturbing trend that, without consent, their information about having a guide dog is stored by taxi companies. This is outrageous on numerous levels and takes the discrimination on the part of taxi companies against the blind another step further.

On a service level, flagging because of having a guide dog, puts blind people below other customers. If a blind person calls for a cab using their own phone, he or she will not necessarily get the cab closest to their location, but may get the nearest driver who is willing to take a dog in his cab. This, naturally, is unequal and puts the blind person at a disadvantage and causes a delay in service. In some situations, for example, if a blind person calls on a holiday like New Year's eve or calls from the outskirts of town, the wait for a cab could be long.

On a privacy level, this is intolerable, as it effectively stigmatizes blindness. The companies have no legal right to compile and store this data. Even blind people who have not had a guide dog for several years are still flagged with this information on company databases.

Imagine the public outrage if a B.C. taxi company did not pick up and drive a person to a destination based on ethnicity, gender or religion. And, flagged them as well!

So-called allergies

The reason these drivers do not want guide dogs in their vehicles is because a dog may shed a few hairs in the car. However, these cab drivers know they cannot say this outright, so they have devised a way to preclude themselves from picking up guide dogs: allergies.

It would make an interesting epidemiological study to examine the explosive outbreak of allergies to guide dogs within the Greater Victoria cab driving fraternity in the past two decades. Whereas it is extremely rare for a member of the general public to suffer an allergy so severe that it would prevent a person from being in close proximity to a

dog for a short period of time, the number of allergic cabbies in the Capital Region seems very high, ranging somewhere between 30 to 50 percent of their overall workforce.

Cynicism aside, the very mention of these allergies though, lends credence to the cabbies' unproven argument. On a regular basis, drivers must put up with situations far worse than allowing a trained guide dog into their vehicles. And, people with dog hairs on their clothing can hop into a cab at any time and set off these so-called allergies. With so few guide dogs in the province, a driver is far more likely to encounter rowdy, disorderly and drunken customers who can cause actual damage to the cab.

Human Rights

Every business and service in British Columbia is required by law to allow guide dogs. The British Columbia Guide Animal Act (now in 2016 called the BC Guide Dog and Service Dog Act) is unambiguous about that. The Act clearly states: "A person with a disability accompanied by a guide animal has the same rights, privileges and obligations as a person not accompanied by an animal."

Moreover, the British Columbia Taxi Bill of Rights, a document designed to protect the safety and well-being of drivers and their vehicles, is equally commendable for its clarity, as this relevant section indicates: "Disabled persons have the right to travel by taxi with a certified assistance dog that sits on the floor and is held by a leash or harness. Assistance dogs include guide dogs for the visually impaired and service dogs for people with other disabilities." The Guide Animal Act is cited as a resource for the Taxi Bill of Rights.

2003 B.C. Human Rights Tribunal poor precedence

Unfortunately, a poor precedent—one with negative consequences for present-day guide dogs users was set by the BC Human Rights Tribunal in the 2003 Dewdney vs Bluebird Cabs case in Victoria. A reading of this Tribunal's decision can create the view that the court does not wish to be bothered with human rights cases involving guide dogs.

In that case, the visually impaired woman filed a complaint to the Tribunal against Bluebird Cabs because one of their drivers would not give her a ride, claiming an allergy to dogs.

Tribunal member, Barbara Humphreys, who wrote the opinion in the case, ruled Ms. Dewdney "was not denied a service or discriminated against." Humphreys' decision is mystifying because the cab driver did not have to provide any evidence that he had a medical condition which prevented him from providing rides to people with guide dogs. Contrast that with the proof of disability that blind people are required to produce when they are in need of such things as social services.

Humphreys' written decision is incomplete. She ignored similar taxi discrimination complaints told to her by other blind guide dog users who were present at the hearing supporting Dewdney, and Humphreys also failed to consider the prospect that the

"allergy excuse" can be deliberately misused by taxi drivers. On no occasion did she raise the possibility that blind people have a legitimate concern that their basic human rights are being violated every time they are denied entry into a taxi cab. Incredibly, she suggested that all future complaints of this nature be brought to the very companies that are the source of the human rights violations and not to the Tribunal!

An endorsement of Bluebird's policy of allergy exemptions for drivers by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) is included in Humphreys' 2003 ruling. It is possible at that time, the CNIB, the organization which purports to speak for blind people in Canada, failed to recognize the extent to which these allergy exemptions would be abused by drivers.

The detrimental impact of the Tribunal's decision has been a constant source of frustration to blind British Columbians in the ensuing 13 years. Ministerial and other government officials in various capacities throughout the province have used it as a means to suggest to blind people that they should be understanding of the cab drivers' argument—that these so-called allergies exist and that blind people should accept unequal service—one that says to wait for the next cab that will pick up a blind person with a guide dog—instead of the closest available cab.

It is often the case with disputes that two parties attempt to establish some common ground. This assumes, however, that the other party is acting in good faith and not trying to circumvent an existing law. Taxi service must be equal for all—that is, the same service for the blind as for other members of the public.

Justice for People Who Use Guide Dogs A BC Human Rights Tribunal Decision Gone Wrong

By Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB President

Without your help, three-quarters of a century's work establishing the access rights of guide dog teams may be casually swept away in British Columbia!

Discrimination by the taxi industry is just fine, no more than a minor "inconvenience," according to Jacqueline Beltgens of the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal.

We need your help to raise fifteen thousand dollars to fight for legal redress of a Tribunal decision that gives more credence to hearsay about a taxi driver's unproven dog allergy than to the rights of a person with a guide dog.

Please go to https://fundrazr.com/campaigns/b13jT2 to make your cry for justice heard. As you read Graeme McCreath's story below, consider the implications for guide dog teams everywhere.

Graeme McCreath just wanted to go out for a casual evening with a few friends on July 15, 2014. He never intended to walk into a humiliating bureaucratic nightmare.

The story is all too familiar to anybody who cares about guide dogs and human rights. One of Graeme's friends phoned for a taxi. When it arrived, the driver, Bruce MacGregor, announced, "I can't take the dog. I'll get you another cab."

The refusal of service was a public humiliation. It was also a direct violation of British Columbia's Guide Animal Act.

British Columbia has two laws that are supposed to protect people who travel with guide dogs. The Guide Animal Act says: "A person with a disability accompanied by a guide animal has the same rights, privileges and obligations as a person not accompanied by an animal." The British Columbia Human Rights Act also prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability.

The law seemed extremely clear. Graeme McCreath sought justice from the Human Rights Tribunal. After a year of filings and discussions, the matter finally went to hearing on July 14, 2015. Graeme McCreath, Bruce MacGregor, and Sean Convy, the manager of Victoria Taxi, had nearly a year, more than ample opportunity to produce evidence. The only documentation the taxi company produced was a vaguely worded slip from a walk-in clinic that didn't mention allergies and an internally produced document noting that MacGregor had been given an "exception." Both were dated months after the 2014 incident.

Graeme McCreath and three witnesses to the event testified at the hearing. Bruce MacGregor did not attend. Sean Convy, the manager of Victoria Taxi, represented his company, since the human rights complaint named Victoria Taxi because the company's policies allow MacGregor and other drivers to refuse service.

The facts are undisputed. Graeme McCreath is blind and was accompanied by his certified guide dog. Bruce MacGregor gave no reason for refusing to transport Graeme when the event occurred, but Sean Convy later claimed that MacGregor has both a dog phobia and a dog allergy. Since MacGregor wasn't at the hearing, he never verified Convy's claim.

This is how the tribunal described Graeme McCreath's assertion that he had suffered discrimination:

"[28] Mr. McCreath has established a prima facie case of discrimination. He has a physical disability, he suffered an adverse impact when he was denied a ride by the Taxi Driver, and he was denied the ride because he was accompanied by his guide dog."

Yet the tribunal dismissed Graeme McCreath's case!

The tribunal ruled that denial of service by one driver was a minor inconvenience since another cab arrived within a few minutes. One wonders how the tribunal would have responded to Rosa Parks. After all, it is also only slightly more inconvenient to walk a few extra steps to the back of the bus.

Since MacGregor didn't bother to appear at the hearing, he never had to explain his actions or answer a single question about his reason for refusing to transport Graeme McCreath. Nevertheless, the tribunal ruled that MacGregor had a "disability" that

entitled him to an "accommodation" from the company. Beltgens referred repeatedly to MacGregor's "disability" as an allergy based on hearsay testimony from Sean Convy. Without documentation, Beltgens voided MacGregor's responsibility to obey the law. No proof was required; a claim, with no substantiation of the severity of the alleged allergy, was enough.

We've all met people who say they have a "vision impairment" when what they mean is that they wear reading glasses. Their "impairment" exists, but it doesn't constitute a disability as the term is generally understood. Anyone who wants to establish blindness, medically, must be seen by an ophthalmologist, a physician with the highest available credential for treating eye conditions. The tests are exacting; all available corrective measures must be undertaken before certification of blindness can be made.

The word "allergy" also has variable definitions, ranging from mild sniffles to anaphylactic shock. Clearly anaphylactic shock is disabling. Sneezes are not. Yet the tribunal did not require that MacGregor's claim of a disabling allergy be documented by a physician specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of allergic conditions. She specifically and categorically ruled out any finding that anyone claiming an allergy exemption from transporting guide dogs should undergo treatment, calling the suggestion "untenable."

Ms. Beltgens writes: "The Tribunal has determined that an allergic reaction to animals can constitute a physical disability under the Code." She behaves as if it not only can, but that merely asserting the presence of an allergy is sufficient to claim disability status, even though the presence and severity of the allergy is unproven.

Graeme McCreath's case uncovered disturbing evidence of systemic discriminatory practices on the part of Victoria Taxi. Beltgens writes: "He (Mr. Convy, the manager of Victoria Taxi) says that, in addition to taxi drivers, the owners of a particular taxi are also entitled to place an exception to having animals in a car. He says that five of the owners of taxi cabs have also placed exceptions on their cars preventing the transport of animals." Refusing to take pet dogs is an owner's right. However, the tribunal never raised any issue concerning the legality of applying a "no animals" policy to guide dogs, even though failing to make that distinction is a clearly discriminatory practice.

Unless we challenge this decision, the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal has written a manual on how to discriminate and get away with it! You drive a taxi and don't want to vacuum dog hair? No problem. Just file an exemption so that no dogs can ride in your cab. If you want to be really sure that you can get away with denying service, go to a walk-in clinic and ask the doctor on duty to give you a note that says you have "medical reasons" for not transporting dogs.

With only a little creativity, Ms. Beltgens' reasoning can easily be extended to include restaurants or other businesses: "I can't serve you because I'm allergic. It's only slightly inconvenient to go next door."

We do not want to deny the legitimate claims of taxi drivers and other workers who genuinely suffer with disabling allergies. They should be accommodated by their

employers. We know what genuine disability means and we're passionate about protecting all people with disabilities. That is why we are passionate about not wanting disability to be trivialized by those who frivolously and fraudulently seek to claim disability protection.

We urge you to go to https://fundrazr.com/campaigns/b13jT2 and contribute what you can. Graeme McCreath was victimized twice — once when he was refused service and again, in an even more profound manner, when a tribunal set up to protect his rights actively engaged in denying them. If people who care about guide dogs and human rights don't stand together, British Columbia may lead the way in erosion of our rights. If we stand alone here, we may fall separately all across North America.

Sincerely,
Mary Ellen Gabias, President
Canadian Federation of the Blind

P.S. We realize this story seems nearly impossible. Human Rights tribunals were set up specifically to put an end to unfair treatment on the basis of characteristics like disability. With that mandate, how could a tribunal rule the way this tribunal ruled? If you doubt this decision was based on hearsay and that the facts were massaged to permit a preordained conclusion in favour of the business interests of Victoria Taxi, we invite you to read Ms. Beltgens ruling, with all its tortured reasoning, on the BC Human Rights Tribunal website.

Blind Taxi User Was Doubly Victimized

Letter to the Editor Victoria Times Colonist, October 30, 2015

Re: "Tribunal dismisses blind man's complaint against taxi," Oct. 27, 2015.

B.C. Human Rights Tribunal member Jacqueline Beltgens has erred in ruling against guide-dog user Graeme McCreath. McCreath was not seeking a special "accommodation," but rather the protection of his lawful rights.

The Guide Animal Act clearly states that "a person with a disability accompanied by a guide animal may, in the same manner as a person not accompanied by an animal, enter and use an accommodation, conveyance, eating place, lodging place or any other place to which the public is invited or has access so long as the guide animal is prevented from occupying a seat... and held by a leash or harness ... A person must not interfere with the exercise of [this] right."

It is the taxi driver who is seeking a special accommodation, not the guide-dog user. If such an accommodation is warranted, it is up to the taxi company to do the accommodating—not McCreath.

It is outrageous that the company thinks denying McCreath his access rights under the law is an acceptable way to accommodate its employee. It must find another way—one that does not break the law. (Perhaps the installation of a Plexiglas barrier between front and back, which would also be beneficial for drivers' security and ventilation. Perhaps a desk job.)

McCreath's rights are crystal clear and have been violated. He has now been doubly victimized, once by Victoria Taxi, and once by the Human Rights Tribunal.

Frederick Driver Victoria

Blind Denied Access

Letter to the Editor Vancouver Sun, November 2, 2015

Re: "Taxis can snub service animals," Oct. 20, 2015

Jacqueline Beltgens of BC Human Rights Tribunal says Graeme McCreath was only "inconvenienced," when a Victoria Taxi driver denied him service and called a second cab to pick him up. Was Rosa Parks only "inconvenienced" by being shunted to the back of the bus, even though it would arrive at her destination the same time as the front? McCreath was discriminated against, plain and simple.

At the hearing McCreath supplied proof of certification of his guide dog and of his blindness. In contrast, the taxi company lacked any specific dog allergy proof, even stating that some drivers just don't want to take dogs. Yet the tribunal found the taxi driver's evidence sufficient to dismiss McCreath's case. Beltgens defied reason and endorsed discriminatory practices of Victoria Taxi, setting blind people's equal access rights back decades. Beltgens and the Human Rights Tribunal didn't "get" what discrimination is.

Doris Belusic Victoria

http://www.vancouversun.com/touch/opinion/letters/canada+immigration+policies+need+discussed/11481592/story.html?rel=761429

Discrimination Neither Inconvenient Nor Frivolous

Letter to the Editor Victoria Times Colonist, November 11, 2015

Re: "Rights complaint was frivolous," letter Nov. 4, 2015.

As the guide dog user at the centre of a case of discrimination, I am a further victim of BC Human Rights Tribunal member Jacqueline Beltgens classifying an unjustified taxi refusal as just an inconvenience. Her distorted perception is misleading some people into thinking discrimination is just fine.

Imagine that the discrimination was in being refused entry into a restaurant and being told that the one next door will take me. Is the tribunal condoning the refusal because it's just a few further steps?

Suffering discrimination of any kind, particularly when a law has been specifically designed to protect a member of a vulnerable minority, is a blatant display of double discrimination and an abuse of power. Victims of discrimination turn to the tribunal on the understanding that its impartiality will uphold justice and reprimand the perpetrator, not scold the victim and dismiss the case.

What kind of culture condones this behaviour?

Let's be reminded of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms definition of "discrimination," as it does not contain any reference to an "inconvenience."

"Section 15 states: "Discrimination is defined as a distinction, intentional or not, which is based on grounds related to the personal characteristics of the individual or group concerned and that has the effect of imposing disadvantages or burdens not imposed on others or withholding advantages or benefits to others."

Graeme McCreath Victoria

Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)

Deplores Human Rights Tribunal
Incompetence on Disability Issues

PRESS RELEASE – UPDATED: DEC 2, 2015

Canadian Federation of the Blind Demands End to Discrimination Spearheaded by Those Tasked to Protect the Disabled

British Columbia, Canada, December 2, 2015 (Newswire.com) – "Taxi drivers use phony dog allergy claims to deny service to people who use guide dogs. Unbelievably the BC Human Rights Tribunal has bought into this sham," said Mary Ellen Gabias, President of Canadian Federation of the Blind.



Blind Demonstrators and guide dogs outside BC Ministry of Justice, December 3, 2015. Photo Courtesy: Oriano Belusic

Evidence shows no driver allergies exist in any of the published British Columbia human rights cases. Blind people and their trusted guides now have no remedy when drivers discriminate against them. The Human Rights Tribunal is ignoring the facts and destroying guide dog owners' access rights on a taxi driver's.

Blind citizens will challenge this notion and will be making an important announcement on Thursday, December 3, on the International Day for People with Disabilities.

Please come and meet our guide dog owners and their companions this Thursday, at 1:30 p.m. outside the Ministry of Justice, 1001 Douglas Street, Victoria, British Columbia and learn the news that will change lives.

About the Canadian Federation of the Blind:

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is an organization of blind people committed to the equality and empowerment of blind Canadians. Through advocacy, public education and mentoring, members promote a positive perspective on blindness, together gain confidence and skills and work to change what it means to be blind. For more information, please contact us.

CANADIAN FEDERATION OF THE BLIND
P.O Box 8007, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, V8W 3R7
Phone direct at (250) 598-7154 or 1-800-619-8789 or email info@CFB.ca

Calgary Taxi Driver Fired, Fined \$700 for Refusing Blind Passenger With Guide Dog: Inspector | Toronto Star

Dave Balfour, who is legally blind, says he filed the complaint when he and his service dog were denied entry to a cab last week.

The Canadian Press, published January 14, 2016. Reprinted with permission.

From the Blind Canadian editor: This is a perfect case example of what SHOULD happen when a blind passenger with a guide dog is refused service by a taxi driver. A definite and serious decision resulted. Calgary got it right! The BC Human Rights Tribunal should take a hard look at this Calgary case and revise its own decision regarding Graeme McCreath's case in Victoria, BC. (See previous articles to learn more).

CALGARY—An inspector for the City of Calgary says a taxi driver has been fired and fined \$700 for refusing to provide service to a passenger with a guide dog.

Mario Henriques, Calgary's chief livery inspector, says there is no excuse for refusing a guide dog under municipal, provincial and federal legislation.

All taxis are equipped with CCTV cameras, so it was easy to review the video to get a full picture of what transpired.

The cabbie had only been licensed in Calgary for a little over a year.

Henriques says the issue is a key one covered in driver training classes, which the driver would have been required to take.

Dave Balfour, who is legally blind, says he filed the complaint after he and his service dog, McCoy, were denied entry to a cab last week.

"I was hanging out with a friend over at a local pub and called a cab to take us home, because it was very cold that night," says Balfour. "The cab showed up, I went out to get in and he said, 'no you can't get in.' I tried to reason with him a little bit, being as friendly as possible, trying to let him know this is the law and you can't say no. And he still flat-out refused to let me in."

Balfour says he's had similar experiences before but on this occasion he was cold and tired and "that was the last straw."

The 33-year-old called 311 and filed an official report with the city. Officials were quick to take action.

"The city takes these instances very seriously," says Henriques. "It's one of the reasons why we regulate taxis in the first place; to ensure everyone has fair equal access to transportation options."

Balfour hopes the city's strong and swift action will send a clear message to other drivers.

"Just awareness — it's really all I ask for," he says. "I'm not a vengeful person but at the same time, if I didn't report it, it's just going to keep happening and keep happening."

http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2016/01/14/calgary-taxi-driver-fired-fined-700-for-refusing-blind-passenger-with-guide-dog.html

CFB Fun Trivia Night Fundraiser Report

By Doris Belusic

The Canadian Federation of the Blind held a Fun Trivia Night fundraiser on February 20, 2016 at Oaklands Community Centre in Victoria, B.C.

Approximately 50 people attended. The quiz master, John Stonehouse, asked over 100 questions and each table of six players worked as teams casting their answers on sheets of paper which were later marked and tallied. Chatter and laughter filled the room. Some question categories included science, television, geography, music, what comes next, and which one doesn't belong.

Chips and Christine's homemade chocolate chip cookies enticed us on plates on each table and we could purchase beer, wine or pop. Halfway through the evening,

complimentary pizza arrived and we ate.

First, second and third winning tables received prizes of gift certificates/ cards, boxes of chocolate and bottles of wine.

We also played "heads and tails," a quick, easy, fun elimination game. Everyone chips in one dollar to play and then chooses a position: either two hands on their head, two hands on their butt (tail), or one hand on their head and one on their butt. Then two coins are flipped and the result is



Trivia Night, placed 3rd!

Credit: Sandy Steele

called out. It may be head and tail. So, all those who have one hand on their head and one on their butt stay standing. The rest sit down. The same goes for whichever sides the coins land: heads and heads, tails and tails, or head and tail. Those left standing again choose a postion and the coins are flipped again. People are eliminated until

only one person remains standing, who is the winner. This was played twice during the evening, so there were two winners, one receiving a box of chocolates and one receiving a lovely box of trivets.

The evening started at 6:30 p.m. and ended at 9:30.

CFB would like to sincerely thank our kind supporters for their gifts. Thank you so much to (alphabetically):

Apple Tree Family Restaurant
Charelli's Cheese Shop and Deli
Howard Johnson Hotel, The Lakes Grillhouse n' Bar
Maude Hunter's Pub
Romeo's
Royal Oak Physiotherapy Clinic
Shiki Sushi
Spice Jammer

We would also like to thank our CFB friends who've supported this event by donating gifts or volunteering time. And, a big thank you to all who attended and made this evening such a super success—without your support this wouldn't have been possible.

Lastly, a HUGE thank you to Graeme and Christine McCreath for envisioning, planning and running this fundraiser. Monies raised from this specific evening will be used for advocacy work in relation to guide dog access discrimination.

CFB has received some great reviews. Lisa Thackray emailed: "The Trivia Night was really really fun!! Probably the most fun I have had in a long time!!!!" Another attendee remarked that she wished the Trivia Night was held every month!

Looking forward to the next one!



Trivia Night, heavy thinkers! Credit: Sandy Steele

Help Blind Canadians by Donating Aeroplan Miles

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) uses donated miles to fly blind Canadians to the next National Federation of the Blind (NFB) blindness convention. This unique week-long gathering of over 3,000 blind people from around the world is an exceptional educational and mentoring experience. There is no comparable opportunity that offers the blind so much in such an intensive and compact session. Those who have had a chance to attend in the past consider it life-changing.

Many blind Canadians are isolated and do not come in contact with other blind people in their daily lives. What's more, many blind people lack confidence, blindness-specific skills and information. To meet and be mentored by blind people who are positive, capable and successful is the best way for any blind person to learn about blindness and one's own potential.

In addition, numerous blindness-related supports are offered, including hands-on demonstrations of the latest blindness technologies, resources and aids. Blind speakers hold talks on topics of accomplishments, education and rehabilitation, Braille, employment, cane travel, independence, advocacy and inspiration.

The convention is held annually in a large North American city. The most favorable accommodation rates are provided, along with good transportation links to enable as many blind participants as possible to attend.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is truly trying to change what it means to be blind. We feel strongly that enabling blind people to participate in this extraordinarily positive and inspirational convention is the best way to maximize their chance for a better life.

Please help us raise the miles necessary so that more blind Canadians may benefit. Also, if you know of anyone who may be interested in contributing to this cause, please let them know about this Aeroplan charitable pooling initiative. Thank you for your support!

To contribute: http://beyondmiles.aeroplan.com/eng/partners/546



Committed to the equality of blind Canadians

Canadian Federation of the Blind

Gifts to the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)

Thank you for your interest and your support of the Canadian Federation of the Blind. By donating to the Canadian Federation of the Blind, you can help make a significant difference in the lives of blind people across the country.

Donate Today and Help Change What it Means to be Blind! Together We Can Create a Positive Future for All Blind People.

General Donations:

General donations are a great way to contribute to CFB programs and support ongoing efforts to improve equality and opportunity for the blind. Donations can be made online or by mail.

1) Online:

The CFB accepts online donations through Canada Helps, enabling you to contribute by credit card, Interac, or Paypal. Please go to: https://www.canadahelps.org/dn/17020

2) By Mail:

Please make cheque payable to Canadian Federation of the Blind, and send to:

Canadian Federation of the Blind P.O. Box 8007 Victoria, BC, V8W 3R7

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Please see information on page 41 in this issue for details, or go to:

http://beyondmiles.aeroplan.com/eng/partners/546

We thank you for your consideration and generosity.

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The School of Piano Technology for the Blind

From the editor: A big thank you to CFB member Michelle Creedy who recently helped The School of Piano Technology for the Blind become certified so that Canadian students can now take loans or receive grants through Student Aid BC to help them study at this school. Please see the information below for more details:

The School of Piano Technology for the Blind located in Vancouver, Washington, recently received British Columbia Student Aid designation. The school was founded in 1949 when Emil Fries, a blind teacher and tuner, had the vision to start a school that would teach blind and visually impaired students the skills of piano tuning and repair so they could earn a good living and enjoy independent, productive lives in a financially rewarding profession.

Since the School's inception, over 300 graduates have gone on to careers in universities, music stores, school districts, and most often operating their own business. The nature of vocational training in piano technology for blind students requires high levels of individualized instruction to properly orient the student to new tasks and to the use of new tools. Guided repetition by a skilled instructor creates the necessary understanding of the inter-relationships between parts, tools and technician. Adjusting, regulating, voicing and repairing complicated instruments with 88 keys, hundreds of parts and infinite modifications using only hearing and a sense of touch to make delicate, precise adjustments is difficult to learn and even more difficult to teach. Understanding the unique challenge of the visually impaired when it comes to learning a trade is critical.

Blind and visually impaired students from 40 states and 15 countries have attended the School studying Mr. Fries' practical curriculum and uniquely adapted techniques for piano tuning and repair. The School is licensed by the State of Washington and accredited by the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges of Technology (ACCSCT.) Today, the focus of the School, to provide graduates with the necessary skills in the areas of technology, business, and personal development leading to a career path in piano technology, remains and many students eventually open and operate their own piano service business. Our graduates, most of whom go on to own and operate their own tuning and repair businesses and/or enjoy careers as technicians for music stores, concert halls, school districts or universities, serve as inspiring role models to other blind and visually-impaired individuals. With the current unemployment rate for the blind and visually-impaired standing at 70%, the School, now in its 66th year, is proud to provide an educational opportunity that provides a demonstrated employment rate of 80%.

Cheri Martin, Executive Director, School of Piano Technology for the Blind 360-693-1511 ext. 12 (Office) • 360-798-4350 (Cell) cherim@pianotuningschool.org • www.pianotuning.org

Advocacy in Action

By Mary Ellen Gabias

I'm happy to report that Maria Kovacs has educated the Fraser Health Authority, and perhaps health authorities all across British Columbia. Due to her advocacy, she is now able to receive communications from the Health Authority in a form that she can read independently.

Health authorities have been reluctant to send information via email because of privacy concerns. The Fraser Valley Authority has recognized that everyone has the right to receive information concerning their own health in an accessible form. If any of you are having difficulty getting your health plan (or other vital documents) please make a formal request. This precedent should mean that your request will be honored. If not, Maria has created a precedent we can use to advocate for you.

This is CFB activism at work. The executive can and does advocate, but so do each of us in our own way. Part of the power of CFB is that we can be helped by the benefits of one another's individual work by sharing information and celebrating the fruits of each other's victories.

Recipes!

Salmon Crown

This recipe comes from Doris Belusic, Victoria, B.C. It is an old favourite.

2 cans (213 gr. each) salmon (reserve liquid)

1/2 c. finely chopped celery

1/4 c. finely chopped green pepper

1/2 c. grated cheddar cheese

1 tsp dill weed or few Tbsp chopped dill pickle

1/2 tsp tarragon

salt and pepper to taste

3 tbsp mayonnaise

Pastry for double crust

Drain salmon and mix with remaining ingredients, except pastry. Reserve liquid from salmon.

Roll out pastry in a long rectangle about 18"x6". Spread with salmon mixture down centre of pastry. Fold pastry over spread and seal seam with water. Form a ring or cut in half to form two pieces or whatever shape you'd like. Place on a cookie sheet seam side down. Slit top of pastry, then brush with the reserved salmon juice. Sprinkle with dry parsley, tarragon or dill weed to garnish.

Bake at 375 degrees for 30 - 40 min. until pastry is golden. Let stand 5 min. before serving. Makes 6 meal servings or about 14 hors d'oeuvres (appetizers). As a meal, serve with garden salad.

Lemon Crockpot Pudding Cake

This recipe comes from Maria Kovacs, Maple Ridge, B.C.

Warm lemon pudding over a luscious cake base.

3 eggs, separated
1 tsp grated lemon peel
1/4 cup lemon juice
3 tbsp butter, melted
1 1/2 cups milk
3/4 cup sugar
1/4 cup flour
1/8 tsp salt

Crockpot Temperature ~ on high Baking Time ~ 2 - 3 Hours

Beat egg whites until stiff peaks form, set aside.

Beat egg yolks, then blend in the lemon peel, juice, butter and milk.

Combine sugar, flour and salt, add to egg milk mixture, beating until smooth.

Fold into beaten egg whites.

Spoon into crockpot.

Cover and cook Lemon Pudding Cake on high for 2 to 3 hours.

Yields 5 Servings

Easy Mock Pancakes

This recipe comes from Doris Belusic, Victoria, B.C. This is really like French toast, but when done with English muffins it tastes just like pancakes—and has that perfect round shape! And, they're easy to flip!

English muffins, each separated into halves 2 eggs
Splash of milk
Maple syrup or your favourite topping

Whisk eggs and milk together in a bowl with a fork. Dip both sides of halved English muffins into the mixture to soak up some liquid and then place them onto a buttered medium hot frying pan. Fry on both sides until golden brown or until they feel firm, not liquidy or mushy to the touch.

Place onto a plate and drizzle with maple syrup or your favourite topping. Enjoy!







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Dr. Margaret Kilshaw Inc. 300-1537 Hillside Avenue Victoria, BC V8T 2C1 Tel: 250-595-2443

Dr. Munira Jivraj 448-11520 24 Street SE Calgary, AB T2Z 3E9 Tel: 403-236-4443

Dr. Nick Van Der Westhuizen 1827 Crescent Road Victoria, BC V8S 2G7 Tel: 250-370-8465

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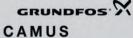
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