

The Blind Canadian

A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)



In This Issue:

- A daughter speaks about her blind parents
- Victoria bike lanes dangerous: suit
- Blind man's human rights case goes wrong
- 40th iPhone delivered
- Announcing 2019 CFB and NFB blindness conventions



CFB

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



CFB

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.



CFB

*Committed to the
equality of blind Canadians*

The Blind Canadian

A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind

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**.

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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FRONT COVER PHOTO: Darren Stone, *Victoria Times Colonist*

Graeme McCreath and his guide dog, Marsh, with supporters at the Victoria courthouse.

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The Blind Canadian welcomes articles, resources and letters to the editor for possible publication in *The Blind Canadian*. For further details, subscription requests or to make a submission, contact us at:

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What Does 'Blind' Have to Do With It? The Right to Parent From a Sighted Daughter's Perspective

Editor's Note: This speech was presented by Joanne Gabias at the 2018 National Federation of the Blind (NFB) convention at the Rozen Shingle Creek Resort, Orlando, Florida. Joanne is the daughter of Dr. Paul and Mary Ellen Gabias, who are the founders of Federationism in Canada. Mary Ellen is the president of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB). The Gabias family live in Kelowna, B.C.

This speech can also be found in the NFB 'Braille Monitor', Vol. 61, No. 8, Aug/Sept 2018 (nfb.org)

Audio link to speech:

https://nfb.org/images/nfb/audio/2018_convention_highlights/july_7/am/01_what_does_blind_have_to_do_with_it.mp3



Joanne Gabias

Photo Courtesy: Braille Monitor, NFB

Hello everyone! My name is Joanne Gabias and I am honoured to speak to you all today. I was four months old when I attended my first convention. Although I missed some throughout the years, this happens to be my 21st. I have come to convention by plane, by train, by bus and by car. I was hoping to be able to go by boat next year but that would be hard to accomplish going from Arizona to Vegas. Maybe 2020 will be in Hawaii or Puerto Rico.

My convention experience has changed over the years. I used to go to NFB camp, or what is now called NFB child care, with my brothers Jeffrey, Philip and Elliott. I remember at the Atlanta convention, all the kids went to the Coca Cola factory. I got really sick because I pigged out on all

the free soda from all over the world. My parents normally wouldn't let me drink soda. That was an early lesson on how parental advice is worth considering, even when they're not there to make you do what they say.

Once I was too old to be babysat, I started working for NFB camp! And now I am here as a blindness professional!

Before you all think that my childhood is what got me into this field, I would like to point out that I never even knew the field of Orientation and Mobility existed until I was finishing my undergrad and didn't know what to do with my life. I loved my degree in Linguistic Anthropology and I wouldn't change it for the world, but I couldn't make a

living wage as an anthropologist unless I became a university professor, something I definitely didn't want to do. In fact, I always said I never wanted to become a teacher or go into psychology because that is what my dad did and everyone assumed I'd follow in his footsteps. Well, I now know "never say never" because I obtained my Masters in Guidance and Counseling and I am currently an Orientation and Mobility Instructor at SAAVI Services for the Blind in Tucson, Arizona.

I am here today for you, for your kids, and for the future children of blind parents. I hope that my story will help you convince doubters that children with blind parents can and do live wonderful lives. People made a lot of assumptions about my life growing up, some true, some not so true.

Both of my parents are totally blind due to Retinopathy of Prematurity. When people learn that, I get comments like, "Oh, I am so sorry!" or "Wow, how was life growing up with blind parents? Oh, you must have been a big help around the house!" Most children of blind parents probably can list off a bunch of other naïve comments that we get all the time. My answer is always, well I didn't know any different so it was normal to me. And quite frankly, my childhood was a pretty typical one.

During my schooling at Louisiana Tech University, I attended immersion classes at the Louisiana Center for the Blind. Even after my immersion ended, I attended seminars at least once a week throughout my entire program. One time, the seminar question was, "Who was the first blind person you met and how old were you?" Pam Allen called upon me to speak. I told the group that I was in kindergarten when I first met a blind person. Clearly that's an odd answer from the child of parents who have always been blind! It was in kindergarten that I first realized what people meant when they used the word. Before then, my parents were just my parents. My parents fed me, dressed me, and took me to school. My experience wasn't any different than anyone else's. I also thought it was weird at age four that everyone would say to me, "Oh, you must be such a big help around the house." Like what the heck was that supposed to mean! I'm four! I am pretty sure that those comments engrained in my brothers and me a determination to do the least amount around the house as possible outside of our chores. Even getting us to do those was hard! Mom, the next time you have to yell at Elliott to take the trash out, blame it on the world for making us want to prove wrong the stereotype of saintly children helping their poor blind parents.

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I was spoiled, my mom made my breakfast and lunch every day until I graduated from high school. Even in university, if I asked or if she saw I was stressed with work and school, she would make me food. When I go home to visit, I have my list of favourite foods that I ask my mom to make. As everyone knows, there are just some things that taste better when your mom makes them.

There were expectations, too. On each of our 13th birthdays my mom taught us how to use the washer/dryer. She said, "You're a teenager now. I am no longer doing your laundry! If you want clean clothes, you will have to do it yourself!"

My family has always been very health focused. My dad runs the Gabias Wellness Center out of our family home. Some of you might have met him in the exhibit hall talking about all the Nikken wellness products they offer.

When I was younger, my dad was very strict about what we ate. My brothers are so lucky that he let up as we got older. But as you know, parents are always the hardest and most conscious about their first born. I even have proof! All the pictures from my first birthday party show my dad following me around making sure I was ok. I was running away with an annoyed look on my face. I already wanted to be my own person! By the time they have their fourth child; parents are satisfied if the youngest has clean underwear on!

When I was in kindergarten, my mom made me a cake to bring to my class for my birthday. My parents had chosen not to have chocolate in our house, so my mom tried to make the cake using carob instead. If you have never worked with carob, it frankly tastes like stale dark chocolate. My mom made carob frosting as well, a double dose of yuck! Carob does not spread well. The frosting started clumping and breaking the cake. It was just a mess! I think Apple must have seen a picture of this cake because they made an emoji that looked exactly like it; I think VoiceOver calls it the "smiling pile of poo" emoji. I remember that day so vividly. The teachers tried to shush the kids when they asked why the cakes looked weird. The teachers assumed it was because mom was blind. I was annoyed because I knew it wasn't my mom's blindness or her cooking skills that made it look like that. It was the gross carob!

Mom can bake good stuff. I planned a surprise sweet 16 party for my best friend and my mom made a giant chocolate—REAL chocolate—heart shaped cake with raspberry filling. Everyone loved it so much that all my friends asked her to make them one for their birthdays as well! Misconceptions confusing problems caused by other factors with problems caused by blindness happened all the time.

My family lives in the beautiful Okanagan valley in Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada, minutes away from a spectacular lake. When I was 10, my family bought a speed boat. Growing up we spent most of the summer on the lake, water-skiing, tubing, wakeboarding and swimming. Our family knew a man who drove for us; it was only natural that he would also drive our boat. When I was 12, our driver had a stroke and was in the hospital for most of the summer. My dad tried to hire random people to drive

the boat. The cab driver he chose bent the propeller when he ran aground. The 21-year-old son of a friend gouged the side while docking, to the cost of \$250. Dad was so annoyed with incompetent boat drivers that he started looking into the boat license process. He found out that 12-year-old children can get boat licenses in Canada. Conveniently, I had just turned 12, so I was volunteered. He paid for me and two of my friends to get our boat license. Dad sat in on the class with us as we learned nautical rules and took the licensing exam, which we all passed. The only problem was that we completed the class without ever coming near a boat.

The next day, my dad took me out on the boat at 6am when there weren't many boats on the lake and showed me what all the controls did. His family owned a boat when he was growing up so he has been around them all his life. Whenever my dad gets a new gadget of any kind, he figures out what every button, lever, and widget does. So he knew exactly what to do with his boat. I remember being extremely nervous because of my dad's high expectations. I remember my dad telling me, "Put it in full throttle and turn the wheel." That scared me. "We are going to flip!" He said firmly, "If you don't do it, I will! You need to know how the boat will react to whatever you are doing." Everything I learned about driving the boat—towing a water-skier, docking, or just cruising along—I learned from my dad. I would like to point out that I have never put a scratch on our boat and neither have my three brothers, who were also taught by my dad.

When we all started to learn how to drive cars, my dad insisted that we take a formal course. Dad went to every lesson with us. My dad went through the program four times to be exact! If he couldn't make it to the lesson, he would have it rescheduled because he wanted to make sure that he knew what we were being taught and that we were doing what we were supposed to when we were driving on our own. Even though he wasn't the one directly teaching us this time, my dad was very much at the center of our driving experience.

As I grew older, I became more and more independent. I traveled all over Canada and the US. I even went to France, Guatemala, Mexico and Belize in high school and college. Even when you are legally an adult, there are times when you still need help from your parents. When I came back from Guatemala, my cell phone stopped working. I had insurance, so I brought the phone in to get fixed. I spent three months contending with loaner phones that didn't work and my original phone that was returned to me more broken than before. I was complaining to my mom that they kept giving me the run around. So she came with me to the phone store. My mother is a very calm person. She doesn't really raise her voice, but when she is mad, you know it! My mother calmly but powerfully explained that this was unacceptable and they needed to figure things out. Just like that, I got a new upgraded phone at zero cost to me. If I had known this would have been the outcome, I would have brought my mom the first time. This skill is something I still don't possess. I think my brother, Jeffrey, inherited this skill. Luckily for me, I can still call on my mom when I am in need.

Some kids are denied the chance to grow up learning from their parents, especially children of parents with disabilities. When I was in the 5th grade, my life could have changed drastically. Some random lady came to school and separately pulled my brother and me out of class. She started asking me questions about my parents, whether my dad ever hit my brother, and if I felt safe at home. I thought they were the weirdest questions ever! I was sure they had taken the wrong kid out of class. The questions didn't even remotely make sense in my life. When I came home, my mother was very upset. The random lady had been to our home, too. I told her about my experience. My mom became livid! She had not been given the courtesy of being told that they would be interviewing us at school. The weird lady was from social services. Someone had made an anonymous call about my parents. The complaint was that my dad might, just might, have spanked my brother, our house was messy and that my brother went to school with a dirty shirt. Can anyone in the audience tell me that your house is never messy and that your kids (or you) have never dirtied a shirt? I sure can't!

After talking to us kids, and visiting my parents at home, they realized that the complaint was unjustified. Luckily, they never bothered us again. But that one incident has lingered with my mother to this day. All of her children are legal adults yet she still wonders who called social services.

We all know that social services did not show up because my dad might have spanked my brother, or because of a messy house and a dirty shirt. They came because the caller said that both parents were totally blind, that was the real issue. It didn't matter that my mother was a stay-at-home mom and my dad was a university professor. Even though we had a parent at home to take care of us and a parent making sure that we had the money to live a happy and prosperous life, the thing that mattered to the social workers was that the parents were blind. I know that many other blind parents have either experienced this visit or live in fear of this visit.

I recently testified at the Arizona House of Representatives in favour of the Right to Parent bill which was passed and signed into State law this summer. One of the committee members was asking a lot of naïve questions about how my parents knew when I was doing something wrong. He seemed convinced that I probably got away with a lot of things because my parents couldn't see.

I told him that when my brother, Philip, was still a preschooler, mom took him with her to the grocery store. While she was busy in the checkout line, my brother quickly grabbed a pack of gum. On the way out, mom noticed that he was being very quiet. She heard him fiddling with something. She did a quick search of his pockets and marched him right back into the store and asked for the store manager. She made my five-year-old brother confess to what he had done and apologize. Then she paid for the gum. The store manager said, "Well, you paid for it, so you can have it back." My mom said, "Absolutely not. I am not rewarding this behaviour, throw it out." My brother was so embarrassed! He never stole from a store again.

The committee member seemed unconvinced. He said, "OK, well, he was young. I have teenagers and it is really hard to keep track of them."

The ways my brothers and I got caught may be unconventional. No matter what, we always got caught. In middle school, the fad was to have your midriff showing, a fad that happens to be having a comeback recently. It's funny how many things have come back from the 90s. Shout out to all the 90s babies out there! Well, I wasn't allowed to show off my belly, but I wanted to be fashionable. Besides, it was hard for me to find shirts that fit because I have always been tall, I have been 5' 9" since the 7th grade. Before I left for school, my parents would ask for a hug. That is how they would sneakily check to see if my shirt was long enough. My dad would ask for a hug from my brothers to check their breath to see if they brushed their teeth. I could go on and on about all the ways we got caught. So when someone says, "Oh, you must have gotten away with a lot of things!" I just laugh because they are so, so wrong.

When I was in high school, I did an exchange program. Sara, a girl from Quebec was to spend six weeks in my home and I would spend six weeks in hers. We had to fill out a profile about our life, interests, family, our parents, what they did for work, etc. There was no line asking if my parents were blind, so I didn't write anything. To me, it wasn't important.

We got each other's paperwork in June but Sara didn't come till the end of January. On her way to our home, she met the program coordinator who remarked on how brave Sara was to go to a home run by two blind parents. Sara started freaking out! She even called her mom! Her mom told her that she should just see what it was like before she panicked and came home.

When Sara arrived at the Kelowna airport, my dad and I were waiting for her with a big sign saying "Bienvenue!" Welcome in French. We picked up her luggage, which my dad carried. When we got home, mom made her a snack and we talked with my parents for an hour before my new friend and I went to my room. She finally told me about her conversation with the coordinator and said, "I realized once I got here your parents are super normal, but why didn't you tell me before?" I told her, "It wasn't important to me so I really didn't think it was necessary to say anything about it." As things developed, I was happy that I hadn't told her. When I asked her what she would have done if she had got this information in advance, she admitted that she wasn't sure she would have even come.

Sara had a great time. It became so much more than a nice trip! We call each other sisters to this day. When she had a semester off a few years later, Sara decided to come back to Kelowna and live with us for three months! Not only does their own flesh and blood love my parents, so do all my friends! Sara was not the only one who lived with us either. I have had 4 different friends live with my parents over the years! My house was the place to be!

I wish my grandparents could see our family now. My grandmother was very upset when my dad married a blind person. She didn't have a problem with him being blind, but she was scared that if he married another blind person, their children would grow up socially awkward because we wouldn't learn any visual social cues. My grandmother died when I was one, so she didn't see any of us grow up. I know my grandmother is biting her tongue from up in heaven.

My mother, Mary Ellen Gabias, used to work at the NFB National Office in the 80s and was in charge of Job Opportunities for the Blind. My father met my mother through that program briefly and then again while attending a leadership seminar. My mom happened to be the one giving the tour to the seminar group. If you have ever been to the national office, you know that everyone helps out where they are needed, no matter what their position may be. Well, my mother says that was the worst tour she ever gave! Anything that could go wrong did. The ancient freight elevator got stuck with everyone on board, among other minor disasters! My father, however, knew he had found his future wife, even if she didn't know it yet. So I would like to thank the National Federation of the Blind, because if it wasn't for this community, I would not exist. Although I may not be blind, this is my family, I am a federation baby, and this is my family reunion.

I am part of the next generation of federationists. The next generation may not all be blind but we know that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you, me, or your child's future. Every day we live with high expectations of blind people; we don't understand why there are low expectations. We are the result of the dreams of blind people. We live the lives you fought for; we know that blindness doesn't hold you back because you have taught us.

Thank you!

Lumberjacks and Librarians: Mary Ellen Gabias on the Power of Accessible Public Library Service

Editor's Note: The following talk was presented by Mary Ellen Gabias, President of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), for the funding announcement with the Honourable Carla Qualtrough at the North Vancouver District Public Library on November 14, 2018. The National Network of Equitable Library Service (NNELS) received \$1M.



Mary Ellen Gabias
CFB President

Photo Credit: Joanne Gabias

Reprinted from the NNELS newsletter of December 3, 2018

<https://nnels.ca/news/lumberjacks-and-librarians-mary-ellen-gabias-power-accessible-public-library-service>

In his lively history "The Library Book," David Obee explained what it is about librarians that make them heroic figures for me. Librarians were on the British Columbia frontier bringing access to books, newspapers, and other information for the loggers, trappers, and fishers who would otherwise have been isolated. Later, in the larger cities, it was librarians who helped immigrants and their children learn to read and write in English or French by providing them with books, a welcoming place to read them, and warm encouragement to become not only basically literate, but well-read.

Librarians quietly and consistently helped generations raise their expectations by offering access to the printed word. Heroes, beyond a doubt!

As a young blind child, I went with my sighted brothers to our branch library. I breathed in that library smell, I touched shelf after shelf of books, and wondered if it would be possible to read all those books and know what could be known. And I felt horrible, because none of those books – none of that mind-expanding knowledge – was for me.

The nice library ladies felt badly, too, so badly that I got the feeling they were relieved when I left. The public library was the only place in the world where I felt sorry for myself and completely unwelcome. I didn't blame the nice library ladies. At the time, library services for blind people were completely separate from the mainstream, and the production methods for the books I read were completely detached from the production methods for print.

For example, if they were produced at all, braille books were published at least two years after the print edition of a new book was released. Many braille books had to be hand-copied in a process that bore more resemblance to a monk handwriting manuscripts than to anything Mr. Gutenberg invented. Audio books were vinyl LP records used only by the blind.

Libraries for the blind all over the world were separate and necessarily segregated places that sent books to readers through the mail. Their collections were pitifully small compared to those in most public libraries. Although a borrower could request a specific book, the library often did not have it, so the selector would choose another book for a borrower and mailed that instead.

Getting a book in the mail from the library was a little like opening a Christmas present. You never knew what to expect. The surprises were often wonderful. When they weren't, getting a replacement often took two weeks which was a very long time to go without anything to read.

When I immigrated to Canada in 1989, a friend who worked at the Fredericton Public Library in New Brunswick invited me to get a library card. I was surprised by her encouragement and wondered why she thought I would bother. That was my first experience with a welcoming public library. The shelves contained commercially-produced cassette books as well as specially produced books for readers with print disabilities. I began to think that, just maybe, the public library had a place for me.

Now, the people at the Rutland Branch of the Okanagan Regional Library deepen my conviction that I can be welcome in a Canadian public library. I have come to respect what a competent and caring librarian adds to my reading life.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind has always advocated for increased access to the printed word. Over time, our understanding of what that requires and of what is possible have changed and grown. Our goal, which was beyond our imagination a few decades ago, is the complete and total integration of blind people into public library services.

But we haven't achieved that integration, yet. We need bridges. NNELS is helping to construct those bridges and this federal grant is helping to build them faster.

I am delighted about every book NNELS produces or acquires, but my real sense of hope and joy comes from three aspects of the NNELS philosophy.

First, NNELS is building capacity by leveraging the skills of libraries across Canada and drawing on the collective experience of the user community. By distributing aspects of services to people with print disabilities across the system, NNELS is helping to deepen the overall knowledge base and to create a resilient service structure. This philosophy has already led to employment opportunities for people with print disabilities which we applaud and trust will continue.

Second, through publisher education and emphasis on building accessibility into the structure of electronic books produced in Canada, NNELS is helping to raise awareness and to make it more likely that commercial electronic publications will be accessible out of the box. Accessibility works best when it's built in as part of the foundation; it can be devilishly difficult when it's added as an afterthought.

Digitization, electronic publishing, optical character recognition – all those processes that are challenging traditional library methods – are continuing to strengthen the hope of the CFB and all blind people and others with print disabilities. In theory, every book that is born digital can also be born accessible. A braille reader can now purchase an iBook or a Kindle book on the day that it is published and have a reasonable expectation of being able to connect a braille display to a cell phone and read. Compare that to the two-year average wait we endured in the past and our profound excitement is easy to understand!

Finally, because public libraries are being encouraged to see providing access as part of their core mission, people with print disabilities will be increasingly able to come to their public library for help in accessing library collections and learning how to read with technology. Librarians are doing more than picking out audiobooks from their shelves: they are burning books to CD from online collections, helping patrons load

books onto electronic book readers, and teaching people how to use ebook and audiobook services the library employs for its print-abled borrowers. This last role necessarily requires that librarians as a group push digital content vendors to be much more accessible than they currently are. We hope and trust that librarians will increasingly become welcome fellow advocates in our quest for accessibility.

Because NNELS is striving along with the community for the full integration of people with print disabilities into the mainstream of library services, Canada is creating a new paradigm that is leading the world in a quiet, but truly revolutionary, way.

In short, the NNELS revolution is returning librarians to the role they occupied when this country was frontier territory. We readers with print disabilities are among this century's lumberjacks and immigrants, and we love that librarians are holding open the doors to a world of full and fair access to the books and ideas so important to all of us.



Lion Oriano Belusic helps Ann Moffatt get started using her new iPhone SE.

Photo Credit: Don Jones

40th iPhone Delivered

by Don Jones, Victoria Imperial Lions Club

The Lions iPhone Project for the Blind, coordinated by the Victoria Imperial Lions Club, has just seen the 40th iPhone delivered to a blind person on Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland.

At 81, Ann Moffat of Victoria is still determinedly independent, even though her sight is failing. She is attending the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind in Victoria where she is learning braille, daily living skills and to travel independently as a blind person. The iPhone will be a very useful tool in this process,

allowing her to map her present location while walking and taking public transit, send and receive messages, identify objects including grocery items, find and read recipes and so on. Using a system of swipes and taps on the screen she can navigate the features of the iPhone using the screen reader VoiceOver for audible output, and Siri to give it verbal commands.

The Lions iPhone Project for the Blind was created by Oriano Belusic, Don Jones and the late Gerald Lundgren of the Victoria Imperial Lions and adopted by Zone 19-I-2 as zone project on Nov. 25, 2012 during the term of then Zone Chair Georgia Medwedrich. The project, which to date has raised \$27,455, quickly expanded beyond the zone and has been supported by 17 Lions and Lioness Clubs including: the Burnaby Host Lions, Central Saanich Lions, Comox Valley Lions, Esquimalt Lions, Harbour Lites Lioness, Hub City Lions, Ladysmith Lions, Nanaimo Lions, New Westminster Lions, Saanich Lions, Sooke District Lioness, Sooke Harbourside Lions, Sooke Lions, Victoria Chinatown Lioness, Victoria Chinatown Lions, Victoria Imperial Lions, and the Westshore Lions.

Passion in Action

A Brief History of the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind

by Elizabeth Lalonde, CEO, PTCB



Elizabeth Lalonde
Photo Credit: Scott Heron

Editor's note: This article originated on CFB's listserv as information in response to another email. Elizabeth's passion truly shows.

I was introduced to the Federation in my early 20s, 25 years ago. It was wonderful to finally find an organization that promoted the positive philosophy of blindness that I always had. It felt as if I was coming home for the first time.

Through Paul and Mary Ellen Gabias, I became aware of the training centres that existed in the United States, both government run and private, National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and non-NFB.

It was a completely new world to me, as all I knew was what we had in Canada—and that was next to nothing, in the way of positive and empowering, intensive blindness skills training.

It became my goal to try to do something about this. I advocated for many years, as the president of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), to obtain public funding for individuals so they could choose the kind of rehabilitation they wanted, whether that meant they travel to the United States to obtain training or got training from cnib.

I wanted to see a 'structured discovery'-style blindness immersion training centre in Canada. (**See end of article to learn what structured discovery is.*) I knew this was a lofty goal. It is particularly difficult considering there is no public funding available as it is in the United States.

In 2010, I was extremely honoured to receive a scholarship from the NFB to attend the Louisiana Centre for the Blind. I brought my whole family down to Louisiana and I trained for nine months in Ruston, Louisiana. It was an amazing and life-changing experience. I wanted to do this mainly because I wanted to start a centre in Canada and I wanted to experience the model of training they used before attempting to emulate it. In the end, I was overwhelmed by the personal changes it also gave me in my own journey as a blind person.

For example, I have some residual vision and I was quite anxious and nervous about being able to travel completely blind, independently. I knew it was possible, as I have many friends who did it, but I didn't know how I would be able to do it. After nine months of immersion in Louisiana, I was travelling blindfolded all around the town completely on my own and even travelled out of town on buses everywhere. I was confident and my entire sense of self-worth improved. I knew if I ever fully lost my sight I would be totally fine.

The other thing I learned from training under blindfold was to use my other senses and rely on them more and realize just how much information they gave me. It was quite amazing. For example, my travel instructors in the past had always encouraged me to use my low vision, and they very rarely talked about using my hearing and sense of touch when I was travelling. One day while training in Louisiana, I was at a shopping centre parking lot with my travel instructor. He said, "OK, now I want you to go and find the doors to the grocery store." I said, "How am I going to do that? I don't even know where I am. I am just in the middle of a parking lot." He said, "Listen." I listened and all of a sudden I heard the sounds of shopping carts clinking together, lots and lots of shopping carts, and I couldn't believe that I had never heard that sound before he mentioned it. Immediately I knew which direction I had to go to get to the door. That was one of those a-ha moments for me. After that, I learned to use my other senses to augment my residual vision. Now I know when I travel at night and I have no vision, I can travel confidently. Even though during the day I still use my residual eyesight quite a bit. It is truly a liberating experience.

Also, because I was not taught braille until I was in high school, even though I could only see one very large letter at a time and reading was next to impossible for me, I never became proficient at braille until I went to Louisiana. After reading braille every day and having a wonderful blind teacher who loved braille, I left Louisiana reading 60 words a minute!

Yes, the majority of teachers at the Louisiana Center were blind. Some of them had masters certifications, some of them had learned on the job, some of them were able to take the certification that was available. None of these structured discovery certifications in Orientation and Mobility certification (OMC) are available in Canada, unfortunately.

Knowing that my instructors were blind and we were doing all of these things every day together, helped me so much. I felt so empowered to know that we could do all of this and we could do it together and we did not have to rely on sighted people to teach us.

When you realize that blind people are capable and competent and just as able as sighted people, that is when you realize that we can do it and we can teach each other. It is not rocket science. It is just living your life. NFB past president, Dr. Kenneth Jernigan, began structured discovery with his cohorts, without any certification. The

beginnings of structured discovery were all about blind people teaching blind people, mentoring and peer role modeling. Dr. Jernigan did not believe that blindness skills and cane travel were rocket science.

The masters programs and certifications have only come about due to the hard work of the Institute on Blindness in Louisiana and the wonderful blind people who have worked hard to make our model of teaching respectful and legitimate. However, this does not mean that blind people did not do this before the certifications came about.

As for what I am doing with the Pacific Training Centre, it is not yet ideal. I am working towards an ideal and we are growing and expanding every day. Until we receive public funding, core public funding, so I do not have to spend all of my days grant-writing to make ends meet, we will have to do what we can do. In my opinion, the kind of training and positive atmosphere and life-changing work that we do at the centre is completely worth it, even if it is only for a few days each week. It is certainly better than doing nothing, which is pretty much what we have in Canada. I could no longer sit back and advocate and become cynical because nothing was happening in terms of the government listening to us. I had to do something even if it was something small.

We have had students come to us who were suicidal; we have had students come to us who have lost their sight and received little to no training. We have a student right now who lost his sight seven years ago, could not navigate around his home on his own and who had received no training. We have had students who were living at home and could not use the stove and could not travel on their own, could not even leave the house on their own, and now they are living on their own and are completely productive and happy people. These are true testimonials.

I plan to spend my life doing this important work. I will work to expand the program and try to obtain funding for the full immersion training that blind people in Canada deserve.

**Structured discovery is a non-traditional, experiential, problem-solving method of teaching nonvisual, blindness skills, particularly in regards to travel with the long white cane. The method differs significantly from the traditional, guided learning approach, which has students memorize routes and step-by-step instructions to get from place to place or to do specific tasks. With structured discovery, students learn to use landmarks in their environment such as tactile cues on the ground, direction of the sun, sounds of traffic, etc., to figure out their direction and location in their environment. The method is empowering, allowing the student to take charge of their own training and their own lives. Many teachers of structured discovery are also blind, which allows for positive role modelling in mentoring.*

Blind community says bike lanes put their lives at risk

Visually impaired Victorians say their safety is in the hands of oncoming cyclists

by Nicole Crescenzi, *Black Press Media, Victoria News*
Jul. 7, 2018 5:45 p.m.

<https://www.vicnews.com/news/blind-community-says-bike-lanes-put-their-lives-at-risk/>

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“The Blind Canadian” editor’s note: This human rights case is still ongoing as of the publication date of this magazine issue.

Members of Victoria's visually-impaired community have safety concerns about the Pandora bike lanes.

The biggest problem surrounds the bus stops along Pandora Avenue, which are stationed on medians on the roadway side of the bike lanes. While raised crosswalks are in place, people with visual impairment find it difficult to know when it's safe to cross the lanes to the bus stop, without assistance.

“I was standing on the bus stop island, waiting and waiting and thought 'OK, it must be alright to go,' and I stepped out and a bike passed right in front of me,” recalled Linda Bartram. “I don't hear the bikes until they're literally in front of me.”

Bartram, who is visually impaired, chairs the City of Victoria's Accessibility Working Group, a collection of volunteers who help guide City policy as a way to make services, infrastructure and facilities more accessible.

Her experience on Pandora was part of a demonstration to Brad Dellebuur, the City's manager of transportation and infrastructure design. Bartram and a partially sighted friend experimented with crossing in both directions, using both a guide dog and a white cane to test how people would react. With her dog, Bartram said, she waited long enough that she could hear the bus passing.

“If I had actually wanted to catch it, I would have missed it,” she said.

When she used her cane, she eventually heard a cyclist joke that they were “at a standoff,” because he had stopped but didn't know to tell her to go.

The demonstration happened after the lanes were being constructed, because the working group wasn't formed until after planning decisions for the lanes had been made.

“We were only asked to comment on the bike lane accessibility to the bus stops, and as a blind person I couldn't ascertain that it would be in the middle of the road,” she said. “We've been told it's too late to do much about it in terms of changing things; but obviously this group feels something does need to be done.”

Dellebuur realized there was a problem after seeing the demonstration.

“We came to the conclusion that we need to put some additional markings, which we've incorporated in Fort Street at mid-block crosswalks,” he said. “It's just some additional information for cyclists that there is a legal requirement to stop.”

The additional “crossing ahead” signs are intended to warn cyclists that pedestrians may be ahead, and while they were built into the Fort Street design, they have yet to be placed on Pandora Avenue.

Bartram said the additional signage would help, but that an ideal solution would be some kind of auditory signal that could be heard by the visually impaired.

The difficulty spurred the Canadian Federation of the Blind to come forward with a complaint against the City with the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal. Oriano Belusic, vice-president of the federation, said the City's actions have put blind peoples' lives in danger.

“It's like playing Russian roulette,” he said. “Without eye contact, you really don't know if you're gonna get whacked by a bike.”

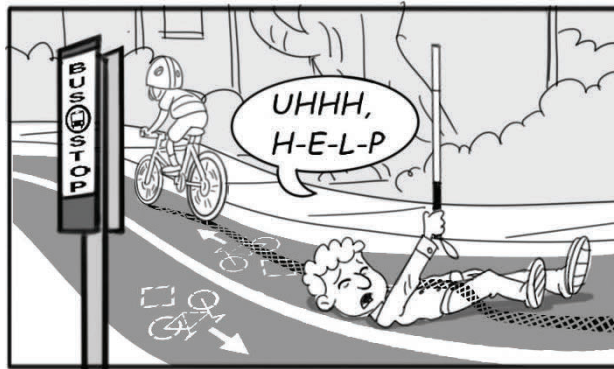
Belusic said a visually impaired friend has had his cane run over several times, and added that he has personally encountered many near-misses. “If you have a close-call experience with a guide dog, it could easily ruin their confidence to work, if they survive.”

“In order for it to be safe, both parties need to be active in that safety,” Belusic said. “If I put my safety solely in the cyclist's hands, that's not good enough, it puts my life and my dog's life at risk.”

Dellebuur couldn't comment specifically on the case, but said the City is open minded.

“We're always open to further design changes and refinements,” he said. “We're happy to sit down and talk to everyone. We all want the same thing: safe, functional, enjoyable use of public space.”

LIFE-THREATENING BIKE LANE DESIGN



Cartoon by: Kent Webb

Visually-impaired Victorians need design change to life-threatening bike lanes

GOFUNDME campaign link: <https://www.gofundme.com/cfb-bike-lanes>

Support our BC Human Rights case to insist that the City change its ill-conceived, life-threatening design of floating bus stops, such as along Pandora Street that requires transit users to cross a separated bike lane to get on or off buses in Victoria, BC.

The blind and visually impaired have already experienced several serious incidents in Victoria — ones we know of — while crossing bike lanes. Imagine the sudden whiz of a bike past you and your guide dog's nose or tires screeching in front of you as you step out to cross a bike lane. These happened to L.B. and O.B. Imagine your white cane run over and broken by a cyclist that didn't stop—even afterwards. It happened to B.B. Close calls. No one wants to see the inevitable—a crash causing bodily injuries or death as a result of the City not changing this dangerous, inaccessible design. Imagine your sense of confidence shaken by uncertainty and fear, knowing you cannot hear oncoming bikes as you step out to cross a bike lane. It's Russian Roulette.

People ask: What's the difference between crossing a bike lane versus crossing a street as a blind or visually-impaired person? We cross city street intersections all the time by listening to traffic flow and pedestrian signals. Vehicle traffic on roads can be heard. Bikes, on the other hand, are silent, stealthily silent, so you cannot judge when it's safe to cross a bike lane.

We need your support please:

- Donating financially (no amount is too little) 100% goes to legal fees.
 - Outspoken comments—letters (to info@cfb.ca), share on Facebook, other social media.
- We, the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), are working to change this life-threatening situation. BC Human Rights Tribunal has recently accepted our case and

we have secured a lawyer, Dr. Charles Lugosi (Crease Harman LLP). CFB is a not-for-profit, entirely volunteer blindness advocacy organization run by the blind, based in Victoria. Learn more about us: www.cfb.ca

Backstory

Hundreds of blind and visually-impaired Victorians and thousands of seniors with compromised agility and vision – who depend on transit – are forced now to risk their lives crossing these bike lanes in order to use public transit. Many even get on or off buses at less convenient locations in order to avoid the danger.

In our communications with Mayor Lisa Helps, Council and City staff, to date there has been no meaningful action to rectify this situation – other than suggestions of more signage targeted at cyclists – which would not enable visually-impaired people to actively participate in their own safety. Looking after one's own safety is paramount to everybody, sighted or blind.

Mayor Helps has been dismissive and disrespectful towards this serious problem which she was instrumental in creating. On a recent CFAX radio talk show Helps was discussing this very danger, posed by bike lanes, with caller Graeme McCreath, a blind Victoria activist. Helps wrongly justified the problem, telling McCreath “the city was designed for people who are able-bodied and people who can see”. It is important to note that the new separated bike lanes and floating bus stops were only just built a year ago and some more recently, and did not involve old inaccessible city infrastructure. Accessibility has been a mainstream design consideration now for several decades in our society, so we wonder: What happened to inclusion and universal design in this case?

McCreath told Helps, “It's outrageously dangerous to just get off—you can't hear 'cause of the traffic. I've done it, I've tried it. It's dangerous. There must be some way—just signs for the cyclists—[no, there must be] a way for ME to know I'm stepping out there and I'm not going to be killed or injured from a bike.”

BC Transit's floating bus stops need to be relocated back along Pandora Street and others so the stops are accessible from the safety of the pedestrian sidewalk.

We are all for safe cycling infrastructure but it must not come at the expense of another significant segment of the community—and one that is very dependent on safe public transit.

Your financial help and/or written support and sharing of our project is very important to us. Thank you for your consideration. Help make our community truly accessible for ALL people in beautiful Victoria.

This scary story below happened in Regina on a sidewalk, but could easily happen in a Victoria bike lane:

Regina woman loses guide dog due to collision with cyclist (Global News), July 6, 2018

<https://globalnews.ca/news/4317938/regina-woman-loses-guide-dog-due-to-collision-with-cyclist/>

Victoria seeks to dismiss visually impaired man's human rights complaint over bike lanes

by Christina Stevens, *CTVNewsVancouverIsland.ca*

December 7, 2018, updated December 10, 2018

<https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/victoria-seeks-to-dismiss-visually-impaired-man-s-human-rights-complaint-over-bike-lanes-1.4209534>

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The City of Victoria is fighting the Canadian Federation of the Blind following a complaint made about the city's new bike lanes.

A source has told CTV News Vancouver Island the city applied to have a human rights complaint made by the federation dismissed.

At issue is the design of some of Victoria's new bike lanes.

The CFB believes the city discriminated against people who are visually impaired by building bike lanes between bus stops and the curbs, making it too dangerous for those who can't see to get on and off the bus.

But Victoria refuses to confirm that it has filed a request to dismiss the human rights complaint.

The reason given for that refusal has changed dramatically in the matter of a few days.

Initially, the City claimed it was legally prevented from revealing what its response filed with the BC Human Rights Tribunal was.

“BCHRT process requires that the content of the City's response remain confidential until the matter proceeds to a hearing. Therefore, I am not able to comment on the specific details of our response until a hearing is held,” wrote Bill Eisenhauer, Head of Engagement for the City of Victoria, in an emailed response.

However, CTV News confirmed with the Human Rights Tribunal that those involved in human rights complaints are not prohibited from discussing their case.

In fact, unless there is a special order in place, they can talk about whatever part of their case they want, with whoever they want.

We went back to the City of Victoria with that information, and asked again for confirmation it had applied to have the complaint dismissed.

We received a new response.

This time the Victoria explained it is choosing not to discuss or confirm any aspect of the complaint, until the complaint is no longer before the tribunal.

“We believe the dialogue should be between the parties and not through the media. Therefore, to encourage productive discussions with the CFIB (sic) to review the concerns they have raised and options for improved safety for users of all abilities, we are not able to provide further comment on this matter,” wrote Eisenhauer.

CTV News is not aware of any current discussions underway with the CFB.

“The City is committed to improving accessibility for all residents and visitors. While the current design and construction of these bike and bus zones are based on the latest Canadian and US transportation standards applied in other cities in BC and across North America, we are open to exploring further improvements,” added Eisenhauer.

“They know there's a hazard created for blind people. It's as if the blind are not a part of the community,” said Oriano Belusic, the person named in the complaint on behalf of CFB.

“Clearly if a blind person cannot safely cross the bike lane you can't say, you can't claim that you've done everything for everybody in the community to make it safer,” said Belusic.

The problem is the bus stops, known as “floating” stops that are along the vehicle lane. The bike lane is between the curb and the bus stop.

The base of the complaint is that bicycles are virtually silent, making it hard for blind people to tell whether a bicycle is coming when getting off the bus.

“For some of us, the solution is to avoid that part of town, getting off the buses and getting on the buses on those particular bus stops,” said Belusic.

“The city decided to prioritize convenience of able-bodied people, that being the cyclists, over the disabled who need protection,” said Charles Lugosi, the lawyer representing the Canadian Federation of the Blind. "It seems kind of unfortunate that the able bodies have been given bike lanes and biased in their favour versus the prejudice that was created with respect to the visually impaired."


The City of Victoria insisted it is committed to improving accessibility for all residents and visitors and has recently taken action to make crossing the bike lanes at bus stops safer.

“Additional signage and pathway markings were installed to reinforce the requirement to yield to pedestrians crossing at the marked crosswalk,” explained Eisenhauer.

But adding more signage and markings for cyclists isn't a safe solution, according to Belusic.

Pedestrians play a role in their own safety, looking both ways before they step into traffic or across a bike lane, but those who are visually impaired can't trust every cyclist will always be paying attention or do the right thing.

“You couldn't make a worse scenario," he said. "It's not as if the bikes make noise and the blind people can actually listen for them or hear them."



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'This is a question of these people's safety':

Human rights expert on bike lanes complaint

by Christina Stevens, *CTVNewsVancouverIsland.ca*

Published December 12, 2018

<https://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/this-is-a-question-of-these-people-s-safety-human-rights-expert-on-bike-lanes-complaint-1.4215837>

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As a cyclist pedaled right through the cross walk, Graeme McCreath and his guide dog hovered apprehensively at the edge.

Then a second cyclist also rode through without even slowing down.

After a few minutes McCreath turned around.

"Did the bike go through?" he asked. He couldn't even be certain there had been a bicycle there.

The design of Victoria's bike lanes is so dangerous, according to the Canadian Federation of the Blind, that the organization has filed a human rights complaint.

The City of Victoria has recently asked the BC Human Rights Tribunal to dismiss the complaint, a source told CTV News.



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That isn't sitting well with the University of Victoria's Dean of Law, who is a human rights expert.

"I'm not the judge, I'm not privy to all of the facts, but at the very least it should go to a full hearing to decide whether or not blind people who are getting off buses, crossing streets are in any danger, as a result of the traffic accommodations that have been done in Victoria," said Susan Breau.

She explained that human rights go back to basic human dignity, and no one should be pushed aside.

"Each one of us can become disabled in our lifetime; it has happened to me, it has happened to many people. I'm disabled as a result of arthritis. We would all want to be treated with basic dignity but also with basic safety in mind," said Breau.

She thinks the case is about more than accommodation.

"This is a question of these people's safety. I believe that Victoria has a real opportunity here, given the aging population to be a model city, that treats all of their citizens properly and I believe that the right thing can be done in this case," she said.

The man named in the complaint said the right thing is tearing out the bus stops, and rebuilding, so the buses can once again pull up to the sidewalk curb.

"They've created a terrible problem and they just don't want to deal with it," said Oriano Belusic.

The City of Victoria has declined to discuss the complaint as long as it is before the BCHRT, and it could be months before there is a decision as to whether it should be dismissed or go to a full hearing.

In the meantime, McCreath is avoiding all bus routes where the bus stops are on the other side of a bike lane.

He said creating a safer environment for cyclists shouldn't come at the expense of someone else's safety.

"We're excluded and we should be included in the entire new infrastructure that's taking place."

Life-threatening bike lanes win an award

Victoria Times Colonist

Letter-to-the-editor, September 20, 2018 12:28 AM

Re: "Despite critics, Victoria's new bike lanes win award," Sept. 14, 2018

It's just remarkable that Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps and her council can build bike lanes with floating bus stops endangering blind and elderly pedestrians, but then receive a provincial award. Maybe we should resurrect Sir John A. Macdonald and give him an award for supporting residential schools.

The province, Victoria council and the media are all complicit in deliberately ignoring this safety exclusion of the disadvantaged.

Canada seems to harbour a caste system, with the blind as the "untouchables."

Despite a human-rights claim and prior input from many quarters, the desire for green bike lanes trumps any responsibility to follow international design codes. Unbelievably, blind Canadians are denied inclusion and justice because those in power with a green agenda refuse to honour fairness and respect for the vulnerable.

What has happened to honesty and basic ethics?

Al Jones

Victoria

Lanes a nightmare for blind pedestrians

Victoria Times Colonist

Letter-to-the-editor, September 23, 2018 12:54 AM

Apparently, the City of Victoria is working with an international group of experts euphemistically termed "the Biketoria Dream Team" to construct our life-threatening bike lanes. Although worldwide design codes are now recognized, the dream-team experts have either just arrived from Mars or have deliberately ignored these inclusive requirements.

Placing "floating" bus stops between the bike lanes and the road, away from the sidewalk, forces blind transit users to constantly cross the bike lanes. Unlike most cars, bicycles are silent, especially when beside a busy road.

This denial of any control over a person's own safety when locating the bus stop or sidewalk defies logic and any respect for another's basic human dignity. The Canadian Federation of the Blind has filed a human-rights claim against the city and B.C. Transit.

Why has such lack of concern for anyone else's safety become so prevalent and why do the media act so flippantly toward safety for blind citizens? Mob rule now trumps any concerns for a powerless, unattractive, disabled minority. Shame on the city, the "Dream Team," the media and even the province for building life-threatening bike lanes, but refusing to acknowledge the safety of a group that just wants accessible bus stops.

Minister of Transportation Claire Trevena knows the potential danger of the present bus-stop location. But that did not stop her giving thousands to help with the construction.

Andrew McCreath, Victoria

Quiet bikes a danger to blind people

Victoria Times Colonist

Letter-to-the-editor, September 30, 2018

Re: "Floating' bus stops remove conflict," letter, Sept. 27, 2018

1. Floating bus stops create conflict for blind pedestrians.
2. Cars can be heard by the blind. Bicycles cannot.
3. Clutter on sidewalks at bus stops, such as garbage bins, seating, planters, hydro poles, etc., are a nuisance, but not a hazard to blind pedestrians, compared with bicycles in bike lanes. Clutter is stationary, so will not move to maim or kill someone. A blind person can safely get around clutter using their white cane or guide dog. In comparison, they cannot manoeuvre safely around quietly moving bicycles (at who knows what speed) in bike lanes. Therefore, a blind person or their guide dog could be injured or killed. It's serious and should be taken as such.
4. Blind people must advocate for accessible bus stops and for their safety, as it seems others who should, such as the city and B.C. Transit, don't. When our safety is compromised, we must speak out. Blind people matter.

Doris Belusic
Victoria

Misplaced Praise for Victoria's Bike Lanes

Letter to B.C. MLA George Heyman

Canadian Federation of the Blind

P.O. Box 8007

Victoria, BC,

V8W 3R7

January 2, 2019.

For the Attention of George Heyman, B.C. Minister of the Environment

Dear Hon. Minister Heyman,

Re: Victoria Bike Lanes endanger Blind Pedestrians

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is a citizen-driven grassroots organization of blind individuals, many of whom live in the City of Victoria. We believe that blind people can live the lives we choose, provided we are given decent training and a fair opportunity.

Members of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (cfb.ca) -- along with other disabled groups -- have previously expressed our serious concerns to the City of Victoria and provincial analysts about the danger of building "floating" bus stops which can only be reached by crossing bike lanes in the middle of traffic flow. Despite our clearly expressed and easily demonstrable objections to the design, Pandora Street now has bus stops between bike lanes and the main road, a design that forces pedestrians to make their way amongst swiftly moving and nearly silent bicycles. As a result, our safe access to transit has been seriously diminished.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind believes strongly in enhancing options for people who do not drive private vehicles. That includes both cyclists and transit riders. We also believe that it is completely unacceptable to increase the hazard to one group of citizens in order to enhance the safety of another subset of the community. We call on you to revoke the award for the bike lanes that you presented to the Mayor of Victoria in September 2018. This was truly a mistaken accolade!

Placing bike lanes on an existing bus route and moving the bus stops to the centre of the road is life and injury threatening for blind pedestrians, along with the elderly and many others.

Much input from various concerned groups such as the City of Victoria Accessibility Working group, the Canadian Federation of the Blind, and knowledgeable cyclists has been ignored. We have been brushed aside in a manner that can only be called contemptuous.

Where is B.C.'s Barrier Free claim of inclusiveness for all by 2024? Do we wait for a serious incident to occur or do we exercise the wisdom of forethought?

Environmental awards should not come at the expense of others' obvious safety. Please have the courage to revoke this award and direct praise to more deserving recipients.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Gabias, President

Canadian Federation of the Blind

(250) 598-7154

A Brief Look Back at the McCreath vs Victoria Taxi Discrimination Case

by Doris Belusic

*with excerpts from previous Blind Canadian articles by
Mary Ellen Gabias, Sam Margolis and Graeme McCreath*



Graeme McCreath & Supporters
Photo Credit: Thelma Fayle

When Graeme McCreath originally filed a human rights case in 2014 because a taxi driver refused him and his guide dog a ride, he never expected the almost fictional drama that unfolded over the following four years. Denied a ride because the driver did not want to take the dog seemed a slam-dunk winning case of discrimination. But the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal ruled against McCreath, even though they agreed he had been discriminated against. It was a clear case of human rights gone horribly wrong.

The Incident

On July 15, 2014, McCreath was enjoying a dinner out with friends in downtown Victoria, B.C. As dinner wrapped up, a member of McCreath's group called for a cab. The group connected with the cab driver as they left the restaurant. The driver saw the guide dog and refused to let McCreath enter his car, giving no reason except that he couldn't take the dog.

This action is illegal in B.C. and constitutes discrimination under the province's former Guide Animal Act and the new (since 2016) Guide Dog and Service Dog Act. As a result of this incident, McCreath filed a complaint with the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal.

Human Rights

Every business and service in B.C. is required by law to allow guide dogs. The B.C. Guide Dog and Service Dog Act 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." The B.C. Human Rights Act also prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. And the B.C. Taxi Bill of Rights states, "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 B.C. Guide Animal Act is cited as a resource for the Taxi Bill of Rights. Taxi service must be equal for all.

Let's be reminded of the definition of human rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. 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."

BC Human Rights Tribunal Hearing

After one year of filings and discussions, the hearing took place on July 14, 2015. McCreath, Bruce MacGregor (the driver) and Sean Convy (the Victoria Taxi manager) had ample time to produce evidence. McCreath and three witnesses to the incident

testified at the hearing. MacGregor did not attend. Convy represented his company, as his company allowed drivers to refuse service.

The facts are undisputed. McCreath is blind and was accompanied by his certified guide dog. MacGregor, during the incident, had given no reason for refusing McCreath. The only documentation the taxi company produced at the hearing was a vaguely worded slip citing “medical reasons” from a walk-in clinic and an internally produced document noting that MacGregor had been given “exemption”. Both were dated months after the 2014 incident!



McCreath Supporters, *Photo Credit: Thelma Fayle*

This is how the tribunal described 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, after deliberation, the tribunal dismissed McCreath's case!

The tribunal ruled that denial of service by one driver was just 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 McCreath. But, B.C. Human Rights Tribunal member, Jacqueline Beltgens, without any proof or evidence of any allergy, kept referring to the driver's “disability” as though it was a reality. The outcome was that the driver just did not want a dog in his car.

McCreath's case uncovered disturbing evidence of systemic discriminatory practises on the part of Victoria Taxi.

B.C. Court of Appeal

Because the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal ruling was discriminatory in itself, McCreath filed an appeal. On September 19, 2017, McCreath and supporters attended the hearing at the B.C. Law Courts. After deliberation, this, too, dismissed McCreath.

Supreme Court of Canada

Determined to set the record straight, McCreath filed an application with the Supreme Court in 2018. Unfortunately, they did not accept his case.

Of course, these past four years have taken a toll on McCreath. There is a level of emotional pain, humiliation, loss of dignity, and a reduced sense of confidence and trust in the fairness and the upholding of law in society.

Cases like this are important as they will become precedents for how other tax discrimination cases will be dealt with across B.C. and across the country.

This has been a brief rundown of McCreath's case, which after four years ended in 2018. Please refer to other articles in this issue and in *The Blind Canadian*, Volume 11 for more in-depth information.

As McCreath said in a letter to the *Victoria Times Colonist* editor, "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."

Blind man says tribunal ruling aids in discrimination

by Louise Dickson, *Victoria Times Colonist*

September 20, 2017 06:00 AM

Reprinted with permission.

Graeme McCreath stood in the B.C. Court of Appeal, his German shepherd guide dog at his feet, and asked the judges to imagine being refused hotel or rental accommodation or having taxis deliberately pass by.

"Imagine not having access to any public place or even service in a restaurant," McCreath said Tuesday.

"All these things have happened to blind people, not just once, but many times even though we have stringent clear laws protecting the vulnerable."

McCreath is appealing a decision by the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal, which dismissed his complaint against Victoria Taxi over an incident in July 2014. A legally blind man who works as a physiotherapist, McCreath filed the complaint after the dispatched driver refused to pick him up. The driver said he was allergic to dogs.

The public gallery was filled with people with visual impairments and their guide dogs. McCreath's supporters listened intently as he described how demeaning, hurtful and humiliating it is to be denied services that are available to others because of his disability.

“It reminds me of what black people went through in the States,” he said.



Graeme McCreath and his guide dog, Marsh, with supporters at the Victoria courthouse on Tuesday, Sept. 19, 2017.

Photo Credit: Darren Stone, Times Colonist

“The idea that discrimination is just an inconvenience I find a very poor approach to the whole thing.”

McCreath and his friends were refused a ride on the evening of July 15, 2014. By coincidence, they were able to flag down another Victoria Taxi driver dropping off customers across the street.

At the tribunal hearing, the taxi company said McCreath hadn't told the dispatcher he had a guide dog. The driver in question had filed an “exception” in accordance with a Victoria Taxi policy excusing him from transporting animals.

The tribunal decided Victoria Taxi had demonstrated “a bona fide reasonable

justification for its, albeit very brief, denial of service.”

McCreath's lawyer, Laurie Armstrong, told the court that blind people should be able to take any cab without identifying that they are blind, saying right of access is built into the Guide and Service Dog Act.

“Someone in a wheelchair doesn't have to phone a restaurant and ask them to put a ramp out,” Armstrong said.

If McCreath advises the dispatcher he has a guide dog, he often has to wait longer for a taxi because of the smaller pool of drivers who take dogs, Armstrong said.

The dogs, which are trained and certified, sit on the floor of the cab and wear a harness.

Outside court, Oriano Belusic, who was with McCreath the night of the incident, said it is shameful that the tribunal is arguing that it is reasonable to exclude people who are visually impaired.

“The real tragedy of this thing is that the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal is actually doing the very opposite of what they are supposed to do. Rather than protecting access rights and human rights, they're actually fighting on the side of making it look reasonable to discriminate,” Belusic said. “People don't understand on an emotional

level what it is to be denied equality or service. It can only last a second, but if you're subjected to it, you would know what he's fighting for.”

Visually impaired people are vulnerable because they have to rely on others for their transportation, McCreath said.

“You have to rely on other people to be fair about things, and they're not. We decided to try and take some action,” said McCreath, adding that he has run out of money fighting this legal battle.

Tribunal lawyer Katherine Hardie told the court it has to determine whether the tribunal's reasons were unreasonable.

The court has reserved its decision.

<https://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/blind-man-says-tribunal-ruling-aids-in-discrimination-1.22849333>

Taxi ruling a black mark for justice

Letter-to-the-editor, Victoria Times Colonist

October 11, 2017 08:11 AM

Re: “Victoria guide-dog owner loses discrimination suit over taxi ride,” Oct 7

Silly me. All this time, I have believed that our justice system was based on proof.

At no time in the Graeme McCreath/Victoria Taxi case — I was present throughout both the human-rights tribunal and the Supreme Court hearings — was any “proof” of driver allergy presented. At the original rights hearing, the driver in question was absent (“unavailable”) and the Victoria Taxi manager neither produced nor was asked to produce medical documentation for his driver. The transcript doesn't mention it, either.

Recently, the Supreme Court justices assumed, again without proof of “allergy,” that the tribunal had proceeded impartially, saying: “The exception policy struck a reasonable balance between the rights of two groups of disabled persons.”

So, an unproved condition of an unexamined witness has been elevated to a “disability.” This is an insult to the truly disabled and a black mark for justice.

John Stonehouse

Metchosin

Hailing Humiliation: What have we learned?

by Thelma Fayle

As a way of understanding Graeme McCreath's disappointment and frustration with legal battles related to a 2015 guide dog/taxi issue profiled in the *Victoria Times Colonist* columns and letters-to-the-editor, my partner and I decided to sit down with McCreath and film him talking about his experience. Our intention was to listen carefully and make sure we are educated about a common challenge for blind Canadians in 2019.



Graeme McCreath and guide dog Marsh.
Photo Credit: Daryl Jones

I came away with two disturbing observations.

Although the tribunal determined discrimination occurred, all of the focus on the minutia – of whether or not McCreath was “inconvenienced” by having to wait a short time for a second taxi, after the first one refused him because of his guide dog; or whether the taxi driver's rights had to be considered because he claimed to have an issue with dogs (according to a vaguely worded medical note written months after the incident); and several other discussion strands of the various aspects of the case – I was surprised the issue of systemic discrimination by the cab company was never addressed.

Some taxi drivers I have spoken to have quietly acknowledged the real reason 15 drivers of the cab company indicated that they did not want to transport animals: Dog hair is messy. Of course no one will publicly admit the fact.

I wondered about the likelihood of 15 drivers in a small company all having severe allergies to dogs. I also wondered about enforcement of the established law that states guide dogs for the blind are to be allowed access to public places. Particularly when the taxi manager said five of the taxi owners in his company excluded animals from their cars. The taxi manager seemed to think it was their right to do so.

However, all is water under the bridge now. After persistent efforts by McCreath and his family and friends, he lost his hard-fought case with the BC Human Rights Tribunal and the Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal.

We posted a 16-minute video online of McCreath's dispassionate and clear observations at the end of his experience. You can Google: 'YouTube Graeme McCreath' if you want to have a look and come to your own conclusions.

I wondered what was learned from McCreath's experience and tried to imagine a different outcome that might have entailed recognition of systemic discrimination.

Had the taxi company owner called McCreath the next day, accepted responsibility and said:

I have come to the conclusion you were, in fact, discriminated against and I have reminded our drivers that it is against the law to refuse guide dogs accompanying blind passengers. The driver has been let go and I assure you this will not happen again. Please accept our apology.


McCreath would have been satisfied and would have welcomed a refreshing, truthful acknowledgement – for a change – that he had been discriminated against by the taxi driver; a regular occurrence that he and most other blind Canadians know all too well.

In this imagined scenario, the Victoria taxi company would have had bragging rights to 'having done the right thing' with a respectful promise to shape up and provide better service in future. The responsible action would have demonstrated the company's intention to be a leader in their field with zero tolerance for discrimination.

But that didn't happen. Instead, an expensive, legal battle dispirited all sides.

On top of being humiliated with his initial experience of discrimination, Mr. McCreath was soundly scolded with a punitive tone – by an agency you would expect to appreciate the nuances of systemic discrimination, a form of oppression.

McCreath was twice humiliated for hailing a cab; an action sighted people wouldn't think twice about. His futile experience raises a host of issues blind people have been unsuccessfully trying to communicate to sighted people for centuries.




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Making Others Feel Comfortable

by Mary Dignan

Editor's Note: Mary Dignan lives in Sacramento, California. She is deaf-blind, a retired lawyer, a guide dog handler, a writer and an artist.

Susan asked me about how I make people feel comfortable around me and my vision and hearing limitations. I've been thinking for hours about how to answer her. I even brought it up over dinner tonight at Sacramento's best restaurant with one of my dearest friends who has known me for about 35 years.

She knew me through my professional days before I went to law school and then during the time I was practicing law, and all through the last two decades of my disabled retired life. She knew me when I could still see well enough to drive and read lips, and has watched me give up driving and a lot of my old-style social life as the brain tumor aftermath and the Usher syndrome deaf-blindness marches on.

"So how do I make you comfortable around me and my hearing and vision issues?" I asked her.

We both had a few sips of our drinks before she finally answered, "It's just part of you. It's not who you are, it's just part of you and we just deal with it."

I don't think she could have said anything nicer. The deaf-blindness is just part of me. Even if it does cramp my style, it still is not the most important part of me.

In my professional life, especially when I was practicing law, the important thing was that I was good at my work and my colleagues valued my contribution. Today, in my retired life, the important thing is that I am a good friend and my friends like being around me. That's a really good thing to know about yourself. I'm blessed. And I'm grateful.

As I've said before, comfortable candor about it all makes it easier for others—the operative word being "comfortable." People around you take their cues from you. If you're comfortable, they are, too. Maybe I didn't like having to ask for an extra minute to set up my FM system at the water right hearing witness table, but I always made sure I got there ahead of time so that it wouldn't be a big deal to give me that extra minute. I put in my fair share of the work to make it a non-issue, in other words.

The water right hearing referenced above started off with a preliminary meeting where we all had to introduce ourselves. When it was my turn, I said something like, "Hi, I'm Mary Dignan from Kronick Moskovitz, here representing the State Water Contractors,

and there's two things you need to know about me. First, I only see through a small keyhole," (and here I would make my fist into a keyhole, hold it up to my eye, and look through it) "so if I see you, I can't see the person sitting next to you." I cracked a joke about how that was good because I didn't like the person I couldn't see anyway (he happened to be a fellow attorney from my firm), and everyone chuckled. Then I added, "So if I don't shake your hand, it's not because I'm ignoring you. I just can't see your hand." I went on to say, "The other thing you need to know about me is that I can't hear worth beans either, which is why I wear these hearing aids," (at this point I pulled my aids out from behind my hair and ears to make them visible) "and why I have that FM system up there on the witness table. It adds juice to my hearing aids and helps me hear everything that's going on." And I ended up with something like, "So, if I say something that's totally off the wall, I have a good excuse." Everyone laughed and then we all got down to business.

Getting down to business was easier because I was able to make it easy and comfortable for my colleagues to understand and deal with my vision and hearing issues. I learned to do this because one of my old bosses, the former Congressman Tony Coelho (who has epilepsy and was one of the primary authors of the Americans with Disabilities Act) taught me that it was okay if I couldn't hear well, but it was NOT okay to pretend that I did not have a hearing problem. He taught me that if I was honest and candid about my situation, I would be able to deal with it effectively, and so would the people who worked with me. He was right.

Just as I was fortunate to have been able to develop a career among a great group of colleagues, I've always been lucky to have great friends, from my childhood and high school days, through my professional life, to the friends I have today from my RP-Usher community and beyond. So it's no surprise that I've taken that comfortable candor that I used professionally and applied it to my personal life as well. Because I've been honest and candid with my friends, and because I'm a good friend to them, they come through for me.

I don't want to make this sound hunky-dory. I often bite my tongue when one of my dear friends cluelessly interferes with a command I'm giving to my guide dog, or completely misses the point about help that I need. And even more often, I'm snapping at Andy, "You should know by now after more than thirty years with me that you don't move things around on a blind woman!!"

And my life is full of hassles and losses. I miss being able to drive, and I miss my private independent mobility. I miss those days when I could circulate around at a party and have a great conversation with whoever I met. I miss the days when I never had to think about the ambiance and noise level of a restaurant. I often tell Andy and my friends, "Look, you go do your thing and then come back and tell me about it, that will be fun for me. And in the meantime, I'll be just fine hanging out here." I'm being honest and really am just fine, but still, I miss those days when a boat trip or hiking trail or a movie was something I could enjoy with them.

The grieving pain for those days and the ease of sight and hearing I used to have is often so heavy I can barely move. The despair and despond that crash down upon me at such times bring on a paralysis of total abject fear about my future.

This is my Life Weather. If you live in Alaska, you learn to deal with snow and blizzards. I live in the RP-Usher Lane and I have learned to deal with never-ending loss, adaptation, and grieving. Yes, the vision and hearing problems are huge. They are huger than I can explain to even Andy and my best friends who are hearing and sighted.

But they're still less important than the good life I have anyway, full of reasonable comforts, full of meaningful activity, full of friends, full of love and laughter. The mosaics, the cooking and entertaining, the getting back in shape—they, too, all aim for the love and the laughter.

And therein is my answer. If, in your deepest recesses, you believe your deaf-blindness or whatever disability you deal with is not the most important part of you, then it isn't. If, ultimately, you focus on the love and the laughter of living well anyway, everyone around you will respond accordingly.

Tap to Travel: A Unique Reason to Visit Orlando

by Kerry Kijewski

Editor's note: Kerry is secretary of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) of Ontario. She attended her first U.S. National Federation of the Blind (NFB) convention this past July 2018 held in Orlando, Florida. She was one of more than 2,500 attendees of this week-long gathering of blind people from around the world. NFB conventions are organized by the blind for the blind and provide one of the best learning environments for the blind. Convention includes many informative, personal and inspirational speeches, an exhibit hall full of the latest blindness technologies and seminars. Conventions are often thought to be life-changing events and many people are repeat goers.

Kerry's article can also be read on a travel blog: <https://inspiretowander.com/tap-to-travel-orlando/>

Upon entering the hotel, on the first morning of a week full of convention seminars, panels, and speeches, I stand frozen in one spot and am lost—afraid to move. The

sound of the tap tap tapping of so many white canes echoes in my ears, in all directions, all around me and seemingly bouncing off wall and ceiling. The braille agendas are available at an information table to my left. From there, they tell me to walk straight and pass the hotel check-in desk and restaurants on both sides, before I can reach the convention area. I walk with my brother, trying not to become separated from each other. We are here in Florida together, close siblings and each other's safety nets. We know we are here to eventually go out on our own, but we resist that eventuality.

We've been to Florida twice before as a family: a two-week road trip in the minivan and then a week-long visit to the amusement parks as guests of the Give Kids the World Village. I've been here as an adult, to attend an ex's best friend's wedding at some fancy resort. We hung out at the pool, made it to Harry Potter World and a baseball game too. This time, this is less of a vacation and more of a work trip. As fairly new members of the Ontario chapter of the Canadian Federation of the Blind, we are here to represent Canada at the National Federation of the Blind's annual convention. This is its final year in Orlando. Where will it move to next year and will we both be so impressed at this first attendance, so much so that we will do anything we can to travel to the 2019 location?

I've been to Disney and all that. I am completely okay to spend this week indoors in this freezing cold, air conditioned convention centre. Every morning and again at night, I step out of the hotel and into muggy Orlando. The humidity hangs in this air and I long to retreat back inside. Visiting Florida in July is the wrong way to go. December/March is a better time. I am not here for beaches or Mickey and his friends.

We are a group traveling from across Canada to attend this convention. We show up at our nearest airports and require assistance from airport staff to check ourselves in and to locate our gates for takeoff. Once on the plane, I am randomly seated beside a young woman and her guide dog. We get the middle seat in our row of three left open so there's more space to let the assistance animal stretch out for the flight. Already we've met a new friend who's also traveling as a first-time convention attendee.

Once we land in Orlando, the staff help us off the plane and a helpful airport employee leads all four of us, guide dog, white canes and luggage through the busy areas to find the luggage carousel for one of us, a relief area for the dog and finally outside to a cab. This requires us all to follow by voice direction and by talking, even while the crowds move fast all around us. The cab drops us off at our hotels. Ours isn't the one where the convention is happening. That one always books up fast. We are in another hotel ten minutes away.

We are shown up to our rooms. I learn which floor I'm on. The elevator speaks each floor. Once I step out, I immediately memorize which way to turn and which hall to walk down, counting rooms on each side until I locate the appropriate wall panel with both tactile and braille room numbers. This is important to note and it matters, in terms of travel accessibility for those of us with disabilities. I scan my card and my door opens. I collapse on my bed in the room and feel a real sense of accomplishment that I can

travel, as I so love to do, without feeling restricted by my blindness or by society's barriers to the meaningful experience of travel.

I still wonder if I receive stares from people, as sometimes I become lost navigating the hotels and convention all week. The convention has extremely helpful UPS volunteers who can offer some guidance, but at certain moments during my convention experience, I am forced to stop and find an out-of-the-way spot where I retreat to catch my breath and regroup, gulping down the lump in my throat at all the concentration this requires. Starting a fresh assessment of my whereabouts, I can do this, I tell myself. It takes time to even begin to know a large convention centre and its many ballrooms and meeting rooms. Again, tactile/braille signs are posted outside each doorway. People serve as talking signs, directing all 2500 or so of us around, to help us find the escalators/stairs. Those of us who know the convention experience well also provide direction and reassurance that it will get easier, eventually, maybe.

Just as I begin to get the hang of this, the week has flown by. By now, my nose is tuned to recognize the smell of the coffee shop and then the Mexican eatery and then the burger place. My feet are sore (though they now expect when they'll detect carpet underfoot, which means convention centre) and my head buzzes with all the information I've gathered and people I've met along the way.

I sit in a chair among many rows of chairs as some important business for the NFB is being conducted. I am trying to establish a similar government, run by blind people for ourselves, to better represent blindness and the value we hold in Canada. I am impressed by the system that has been thriving here for more than seventy years: blind people working to advance their rights and a better life collectively. I meet a friendly man sitting beside me and we talk about our lives, both here in the US and in Canada. The tension rises as the president of the NFB teases the crowd with the news for next year's convention location.

Suddenly a familiar voice speaks, most likely from a speaker and recorded announcement. I know that voice, Brad Garrett, most well-known for his part on *Everybody Loves Raymond*, but for me he is that distinctive voice as a character in *Finding Nemo*. "Next year, this convention will be held in..." Brad says, but the crowd cheers and I don't hear where.

Mandalay Bay, first sounds like Hawaii to me. No such luck, though that is near the top of my travel bucket list, but Las Vegas, Nevada it is. All the casinos, commotion, and noise of Vegas as a place I've yet to explore has always seemed like too much. The crowd goes wild though, with excitement and I wonder if I will be there in 2019 along with all of them to visit a new place for me and learn all the routes again. Travel is one of the most enriching things I do with my life and I don't plan to stop anytime soon.

**"I always get to where I'm going by walking away
from where I have been."**

Winnie-the-Pooh

Announcing the 2019 Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Convention



The Canadian Federation of the Blind will hold its annual convention on **May 3 - 5, 2019** at the **HILTON VANCOUVER METROTOWN, 6083 McKay Ave., Burnaby, BC.**

Burnaby is in the Greater Vancouver area and the hotel is located conveniently close to a Sky Train station. Anyone arriving via rail, bus or air can easily reach the headquarters hotel using public transportation. Taxis are also readily available.

This year's theme: Employment

Convention registration: Please pre-register by April 15. The cost is \$75 which includes Friday evening's reception, Saturday's luncheon and Saturday evening's banquet. Register by sending a cheque to Canadian Federation of the Blind, P.O. Box 8007, Victoria, BC, V8W 3R7 or send a bank email transfer to treasurer@cfb.ca. Either way, include your contact information. The registration fee will increase to \$100, so please make sure to register early.

Hotel booking: Rooms are \$209 plus tax per night, which includes breakfast. CFB has a block of rooms to reserve. To reserve, please call the hotel at 604-438-1200 or use the CFB-specific link below.

<https://www.hilton.com/en/hi/groups/personalized/Y/YVRVMHF-CFB-20190503/index.jhtml>

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Announcing the 2019 U.S. National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Convention



The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.

The largest gathering of blind people in the world, the National Federation of the Blind National Convention is the premier event for training, support, and information for the blind community. It also serves as a governing body, democratically electing our leadership and establishing the year's organizational priorities.

Dates

The 2019 National Convention will take place Sunday, July 7 through Friday, July 12, 2019.

Location

For the first time in seven years, the convention will be held west of the Mississippi at Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada (3950 S Las Vegas Blvd, Las Vegas, Nevada 89119).

Situated at the beginning of the world-famous Las Vegas strip, Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino is the perfect location for enjoying as much or as little of the strip as you want.

It has more than two dozen restaurants and activities for people of all ages to enjoy. Among its features is an aquatic playground called Mandalay Bay Beach which has real sand, a wave pool, and rentable cabanas. The hotel is also home to an aquarium with more than 2,000 animals including sharks, green sea turtles, and a Komodo dragon. Plus, it offers top-notch entertainment including Michael Jackson ONE by Cirque du Soleil.

Hotel Reservations

Room reservations at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino can be made starting January 1, 2019. You can call the hotel at 877-632-9001 to book your room. The hotel will take a deposit of the first night's room rate for each room and will require a credit card or a personal check. If you use a credit card, the deposit will be charged against your card immediately. If a reservation is cancelled before Saturday, June 1, 2019, half of the deposit will be returned. Otherwise, refunds will not be made.

For NFB convention attendees, the nightly rate for singles, doubles, triples, and quads will be \$99 USD. Hotel taxes are 13.38 percent and sales tax is 8.25 percent.

The resort fee (normally \$37 a night) will be waived for NFB convention attendees. However, fees for internet access, local and toll-free calls, and fitness center access may apply.

Registration

Online Preregistration:

Online preregistration will be available between March 1, 2019 and May 31, 2019.

On-Site Registration:

Registration will be available on site in Las Vegas.

More Information

Additional information, including the convention agenda, will be added to this page <https://nfb.org/convention/2019> as it becomes available. Please contact us at 410-659-9314 or nfb@nfb.org if you need assistance.



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- Francis C. Lépine



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Donating Aeroplan Miles Helps Blind Canadians Attend Blindness Convention

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. These unique week-long gatherings of over 3,000 blind people from around the world are exceptional educational and mentoring experiences. 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 the experience 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 favourable 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 miles so more blind Canadians benefit. If you know of anyone who may be interested in donating miles, please tell them about this Aeroplan charitable pooling initiative. Thank you for your support!

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Honestly, nothing teaches blind people how to mentor blind people like the convention of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the U.S. Only when blind people are self-governing, and we force our way out from under the stigma of charity and the legacy of begging will we ever change what it means to be blind in Canada. It begins with meeting successful blind people and the place for that is NFB convention. Thanks to all the supporters.

~Erik Burggraaf, President, CFB Ontario

CFB Philosophy in a Nutshell

We are an organization of blind people speaking for ourselves.

We believe blindness is a characteristic and not a handicap; that blindness is not what defines us or holds us back.

We believe with proper training and opportunity blind people can compete on terms of equality with sighted peers. Blind people can do almost anything sighted people do; sometimes we just use alternative techniques.

We believe the real problem of blindness is not the lack of eyesight. It is the inequality in society, low expectations, an old pervasive charity model, and the lack of positive information about blindness and about the abilities and achievements of blind people.

We believe it is respectable to be blind and that the white cane is a tool for independence and a symbol of freedom and pride.

Cutting Nails and Cutting Meat: Erroneous Assumptions about the Need for Sight

By Dr. Paul Gabias

Editor's note: Dr. Paul Gabias is a psychology professor at the University of British Columbia Okanagan. He and his wife, Mary Ellen, are the founders of Federationism in Canada. Mary Ellen is president of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB). Paul wrote this article many years ago, but it is as applicable today as it was then. The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) is in the United States and is a sister organization to CFB.

In the National Federation of the Blind and the Canadian Federation of the Blind we believe the real problem of blindness is not the lack of eyesight. This is a principle which is incomprehensible to the average sighted person who believes that he or she would be lost without vision. The fear of the dark lurks close to the surface and, to the average sighted person, a life without vision means a life filled with fear and ineptitude. Many sighted people, having seen competent blind people, are prepared to accept that some blind people can succeed with the lack of sight, but they shudder at the thought that it might happen to them. By extension, the blind internalize these feelings of ineptitude and it takes a good deal of teaching and hard work to reverse them. This is what the National Federation of the Blind and the Canadian Federation of the Blind do best.

This kind of philosophizing goes nowhere without personal examples and however painful these personal examples might be to discuss in public, they must be discussed in order to make our point. After all, we say that it is respectable to be blind.

When we say it, we have to mean it! Sighted people sometimes have great expectations for us, except for the little things. Of course, it is the little things that matter. Let's take the simple task of cutting meat. My parents expected a lot of me, but they thought that cutting meat required sight. They said, "Why should you struggle with that? Let us do it, it'll be easier, you can eat more quickly that way." Being a hungry person at meal times and very fond of steak, I didn't object. The school for the blind that I attended never served meat that needed to be cut. I had asked how you should hold the fork and knife and my parents had me hold the fork at the end of the handle in my left hand while cutting with my right. This seemed very awkward because it required me to eat with my left hand or to switch the fork from hand to hand, something I was not used to doing. I figured that the sighted had ways of dealing with this awkwardness and that I would be content to have somebody else cut my meat. After all, in a restaurant it was easy enough to get the waiter to take the plate back to the kitchen so that the meat could be cut or to ask that it be cut in advance.

I don't remember how I dealt with this problem living in the dorm at college. The food service was cafeteria style and maybe I asked for the meat to be cut before my plate was put on the tray. I probably also got help carrying the tray to the table and returning it to the tray rack—something that I don't find necessary to have help with today.

Cutting things must have been a concern to me, even after a few years of college, because I remember going out with a blind couple and their young child, and I remember the blind mother telling the child, "Don't eat your pancakes until I cut them up for you." I remember thinking, "I cut my pancakes as I eat them. I'm glad I don't have to cut a whole plate, keeping track of which parts are cut and which parts need cutting; and then there's the messy syrup to deal with too!" In college, I remember sharing a house with a friend. He shopped and cooked and I did the dishes and cleaned. He had eaten at my parents' house and seen my parents cut my steak, so he did the same thing.

Through meeting more and more blind people who said that they had no trouble cutting meat, I decided to experiment. I discovered that if you hold the fork closer to its tines, the job becomes much easier. Your hand is much closer to the meat and you can tell more easily where the knife is in relation to the fork. With practice, I discovered that you can get away with moving your hand back toward the tip of the fork handle. Of course, if there are peas on the plate, it is prudent to eat the peas first.

Now I wouldn't think of asking anybody to cut my meat, it has become second nature. My wife and I have four children and I routinely cut my children's steaks and roast beef. I carve roasts and turkeys without a second thought. I may not handle these things precisely the same way sighted people do, but I get the job done quickly and efficiently. I have never sliced a finger, not even with an electric knife, even though my parents warned me that I should not use one. I used an electric knife for the first time when we bought one a few years ago at a garage sale. There is really nothing to it, if you keep your fingers out of the way.

The point to this example is that it wasn't blindness that kept me from learning to cut meat, or to carve turkey or roast beef. It was the mistaken belief that I had learned from others that sight was required or more efficient for the task. If you've ever visited sighted people and there is a turkey or meat to be carved, how many of you have been asked to help in that capacity and how many of you would feel comfortable helping in that situation? I gather that most of you have never been asked and most of you would feel awkward. Remember, it is respectable to be blind. Just in passing, I want to tell you that cutting pancakes for children is no problem. Give me fifty plates filled with pancakes and I could do it in no time at all. You can cut or break the pancakes into small pieces and put the syrup on after they're cut.

Another example that can be subjected to the same analysis is the simple task of cutting nails. Oh, I know there are nail clippers, but my mother said I shouldn't use them because they made your nails look square. I am told that today having square nails is fashionable. But when I was growing up, my mother and sister said that square nails were too jagged and that it was more distinguished to have rounded nails. They told me that I had nice fingernails and that I should show them off properly. They were of the opinion that even for men, the cuticle on each nail needed to be pushed back. Blackheads were not a good thing either and they should be removed at all cost. As you may know, I was a boarder at a school for the blind until the end of high school. The nail and blackhead problems were handled by my mother and sister when I came home on the weekends.

Thinking back on it now, my sister gave me a nail kit, with nail scissors, a nail cleaner and a nail file, the Christmas before I went to college. By the time I went to college, I was not going home every weekend. There was a lot of studying to do and also fun things to do during the weekends. I became friends with Chip O'Brien from Maine, the resident assistant on our floor. I remember asking him to help me with my nails. He had the good sense to refuse. He said, "I'll teach you how to do it, it's really not all that

complicated.” It took about ten minutes and I've been cutting my nails with curved nail scissors ever since.

Why did it take me so long to figure out how to accomplish such a simple task? You know the answer as well as I do. It is because I was taught to believe that sight was necessary for even such a simple task. My parents had taught me how to water-ski, but they couldn't figure out how to teach me to cut my nails because I was blind. I believed them because I reasoned that if there had been a way for a blind person to cut his nails with nail scissors, they would have taught me how.

I am sure that, if you think about it, there are still many ways in which you sell yourself short because you think that what you are trying to accomplish requires sight or is more efficient with sight, when in fact, it is simply not the case. The Federation has consistently and systematically challenged the assumptions of our society with respect to the necessity of the possession of sight for competing on terms of equality with the sighted.

RECIPES!

The recipes in this issue come from Doris Belusic in Victoria, B.C. She is secretary of the CFB and editor of The Blind Canadian.

Summer Mango Salad

Romaine lettuce, washed, dried and torn

Walnut pieces

Craisins

Mango, cut into small pieces

Some red onion, halved and sliced (optional)

(Bottled Bolthouse organic raspberry balsamic vinaigrette or other)

To prepare ahead:

Wash, dry and tear lettuce into a large bowl with lid.

Add red onion.

At this point can cover and store in the fridge until time to serve salad.

In a small bowl, place walnut pieces and craisins.

Cover and place in the fridge until time to serve salad.

Just before serving salad:

Cut up mango and place over lettuce.

Take bowl of walnuts and craisins and place over top of mango/lettuce.

Toss ingredients and serve.

Put bottle of raspberry balsamic vinaigrette on the table.

Enjoy!

Mom's Banana Loaf

1 c. sugar (I use 1/2 c. white and 1/2 c. brown)

1/2 c. butter, margarine or oil

2 eggs

3 very ripe bananas, mashed

1 tsp. vanilla

2 c. flour (I use 1 c. white and 1 c. whole wheat)

1 tsp. baking soda

1/2 tsp. salt

1/2 c. chopped walnuts (optional)

In a large bowl, mix together sugar and butter or margarine or oil. Add eggs and mix. Then add mashed bananas and vanilla. Mix well.

In another bowl, mix together flour, baking soda and salt.

Add dry ingredients to wet ingredients and combine. Add walnuts.

(Could also include raisins or chocolate chips)

Pour batter into greased and floured loaf pan. Bake at 350 degrees for about 1 hour and 10 minutes. Insert a wooden pick in centre of loaf to check for doneness. Cool out of pan on wire rack.

Slice to serve.



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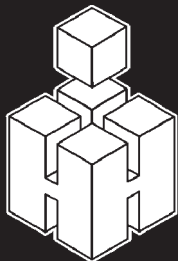
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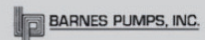
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