

The Blind Canadian

A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind

In this issue:

- **Speeches and participant testimonials from the 2014 CFB Convention**
- **Find out about the National Network for Equitable Library Service**
- **Blind People in Charge: the new community program from the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind**



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, grass roots organization, incorporated on June 2nd, 1999.

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

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

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

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

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**Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)
'Breaking the Mold' 2014 Convention
May 23 – 25, 2014, Bowen Island, B.C.
Convention Report**

By Mary Ellen Gabias, President

It's Friday evening and the sounds of seabirds calling and waves lapping on the shore drift through my open window, along with the scents of flowers and of the sea. The place is Bowen Island Lodge and the event is the 2014 convention of the Canadian Federation of the Blind.

Longtime Federationists and new invitees arrived by ferry and water taxi in time for the 3:30 p.m. technology information sharing session. Highly technically skilled people talked to one another in codes unintelligible to the rest of us. We basic information seekers asked, "What does it do? How long will it take me to learn how?"

Those uninterested in learning what has fallen from the Apple Corporation tree lately, or the relative merits of WindowEyes and NVDA (screen-reading software), strolled along the beach or took the short but invigorating walk to the village or hung out on the patio with friends.

Later, after a gourmet dinner that set the pattern for the entire weekend, Donna Hudon's carefully prepared icebreakers proved to be unnecessary. Conventioneers had already broken the ice very well. A few hearty souls headed for the cove to kayak. Others performed music in the all-purpose room or sat around a snapping fire intent on solving as many of the world's problems as possible in a few short hours. The Lodge's hot tub also beckoned.

Despite reports of very late nights for some in attendance, the crowd was alert and enthusiastic when president Mary Ellen Gabias called the convention to order at 9:00 Saturday morning. The sessions were ably recorded by Sky Mundell.

After introductions and announcements, Mary Ellen delivered the convention keynote speech, "Breaking the Mold: From Clienthood to Citizenship."

We were delighted to hear from Alex Jurgensen, vice president of the Bowen Camp Society for the Visually Impaired, about how a group of determined blind individuals are reviving and improving upon the adult, youth and children's camps that had been in danger of oblivion when CNIB sold the Bowen Island Lodge. We thank Alex for his warm hospitality and logistical support throughout the weekend.

Gary Wunder, editor of the *Braille Monitor*, representing Dr. Maurer and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), gave the first of his three outstanding presentations.

Human rights advocacy is central to the activity of the CFB, and few are more determined and skilled in the practical effort of dealing with human rights tribunals than Graeme McCreath. No wonder that the human rights panel, chaired by Graeme, provided both inspiration and practical tips. Oriano Belusic and Elizabeth Lalonde shared their personal experiences. Juliana Dalley of the Community Legal Assistance Society (CLAS) explained the laws underpinning provincial and federal human rights procedures.

The Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB) operates the 'Blind People in Charge' program. Director Elizabeth Lalonde, staff members Ashley Charlton and Danielle Fernandez, as well as program participants Erin Lacharity, Heidi Propp, Sky Mundell, Aedan Staddon and Miriam Youssefi, touched everyone deeply as they told how what they are learning in the program is making Federation philosophy come alive in their lives.

Our luncheon speaker, Allan Carlson, of the British Columbia Libraries Branch, talked about the National Network for Equitable Library Services (NNELS) in his speech, 'NNELS: Then and Now'. He told of the development of this new library service, the first in the world using this integrated public library-based organizational structure. It is refreshing to hear government officials acknowledge and warmly welcome participation by blind individuals and their organizations. In acknowledgement of the pioneering work in developing the NNELS concept and structure, CFB awarded Certificates of Excellence to Allan; Jacqueline Van Dyk, former head of the Libraries Branch and current Director of the North Vancouver Public Library; Trevor Surgenor, head of the provincial library of Manitoba; Ben Hyman, Director of the BC Libraries Co-op, the entity housing NNELS and overseeing its day-to-day operations; and Maryann Kempthorne, Access & Learning Specialist at the Co-op, who has (in her own words) midwived the outreach, collection development, and library patron beta testing for the project.

Finding work and adapting to the rapidly changing employment market is challenging for everyone – blind job seekers face additional significant challenges. Oriano Belusic, CFB first vice president and a successful entrepreneur, told of his successes and setbacks and interviewed Alex Jurgensen and Danielle Fernandez about their personal career paths. Gary Wunder followed up with a hard hitting but compassionate and humorous outline of the skills and attitudes we must have to face change, both when looking for work and on the job.

Johnny Tai is a counsellor by day and a martial arts fighter and instructor by night. In a funny, yet very touching, presentation, Johnny shared many life lessons. Among them, "As you stop thinking of yourself as a victim, you teach others to stop thinking of you as a victim."

Formal convention sessions adjourned, but the learning and sharing intensified. Maryann Kempthorne showed individuals how to connect with NNELS and use the

service. Johnny Tai taught introductions to martial arts to interested individuals. Groups hiked the island or went shopping in the intriguing boutiques in the village. Others soaked in the sun walking on the ocean beach.

We were all back together to enjoy a relaxed but festive banquet. Gus Thorn, our “loud and proud” door prize and auction chairman, was kept busy handing out loot and encouraging us to raise bids on unique items donated by members. Tepi Hughes ran a 50/50 raffle that raised much-needed cash. The highlight of the banquet, without question, was the address given by Gary Wunder. Gary's deeply personal and moving account of the joys and problems of growing up as a blind child hit close to home for many of us. We left the banquet feeling a deep sense of kinship, knowing that we share more than we sometimes realize.

At the AGM on Sunday morning, the following executive was elected:

Mary Ellen Gabias, *president*;
Oriano Belusic, *first vice president* (elected in 2013);
Paul Gabias, *second vice president*;
Heidi Propp, *secretary*;
Graeme McCreath, *treasurer*;
Donna Hudon, *member-at-large*;
And Elizabeth Lalonde, *past president* (continuing position.)

Conventioneers headed for the ferry feeling exhilarated and exhausted. We all look forward to getting together for the next CFB convention. In the meantime, we're invigorated to do the work that lies ahead.

A special thank you to our sponsors:

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Breaking the Mold: From Clienthood to Citizenship

Keynote Address

by Mary Ellen Gabias, President

*Landmark keynote address delivered by Mary Ellen Gabias
at the 'Breaking the Mold' Convention
Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)
May 2014, Bowen Island, B.C.*

“It ain't easy to break out of a mold, but, if you do your work, people will ultimately see what you're capable of. Too often, people find it easier to make assumptions and stick with what they believe. They put you in a place, and it makes their job easier.”

~ Christopher Meloni, television actor.

We in the Canadian Federation of the Blind work to break the mold that binds and constrains our opportunities. We understand the ways old patterns harm us. We have examined our past and recognize that we have sometimes failed to challenge people when they make assumptions and stick with what they believe. If we don't speak out with courage, unflinching honesty, and compassion, we will not be able to chart a better future.

What forces have molded the climate in which blind Canadians find themselves? How have governments, the public, and the monopoly elephant in the room called CNIB contributed to the current situation? Above all, what responsibilities do we, the blind people of Canada, bear; and what can we do to break the mold that does us harm?

Much as we dislike it, the history of blindness in Canada is bound up with the history of charity. In its most profound sense, charity is a loving and personal means of sharing time and resources. One individual has a need; another individual with personal knowledge of that need does whatever can be done to alleviate it.

In the small self-contained communities of the past, person-to-person, heart-to-heart charity worked well. The giver and the recipient were accountable to one another. The increasing size and complexity of society during the reign of Queen Victoria resulted in the depersonalization and corporatization of charity. Just as the industrial revolution caused immense increases in the efficiency of the processes of manufacturing, the development of corporate charities brought economy of scale to the processes of generosity. By giving money, donors could provide service far beyond their personal presence. Specialized staff could be hired to spend full-time on charitable endeavors. Effort could be laser focused; the same charitable individual no longer needed to be concerned with poverty, the aged, disability, orphanages, and disaster relief.

Despite its obvious advantages, corporate charity broke the bond of mutual accountability. In the corporate model, a charitable individual donates to an organization based on its emotional appeal and its reputation. Rarely does the giver experience the charitable corporation's actions firsthand; the funds are given, and the professional staff is entrusted with achieving the hoped-for results. Career charity workers frequently came to think of their corporate employer's aims as indistinguishable from, or far worse, more important than the needs of those receiving charitable service. Recipients, too, were often tainted by the charity process. Rather than viewing themselves as temporary beneficiaries of assistance to meet a pressing need, they came to think of themselves as permanent clients. They stopped wanting a hand up; they didn't even content themselves with a hand out; they wanted their hands held for life.

In 1918, Colonel Baker brought corporate charity for the blind to Canada. In 1918, blind people were scattered, isolated, bereft of hope. In 1918, a strong, centralized organization focused desperately-needed national attention on blindness. In 1918, bylaws requiring the titular head of the charity for the blind to be a blind person seemed to guarantee that the organization would remain true to its mandate to serve the blind. Less than a decade ago it took one vote of the sighted people who actually call the shots to show how flimsy that protection really was. In 1918, charity existed to be the face of the invisible and the voice of those who could not speak for themselves. The phrase, "nothing about us without us," had not even been conceived. Yes, Colonel Baker brought about changes that moved blind people forward in 1918, but it isn't 1918 anymore.

In his book, *The Politics of Blindness*, Graeme McCreath explained the history of blindness policy since the 1918 founding of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). Any attempt to telescope his carefully researched and written arguments into one short synopsis would do a grave disservice to his work. Needless to say, he discussed charity to parity in blindness policy. He showed how our issues are part of a broader context.

Madame Justice Louise Arbour, former Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, has eloquently articulated that broader social and political context. In an interview with Paul Kennedy on the CBC Radio program, *Ideas*, she described the shift in thinking concerning charities over the past century. She talked at length about the differences between the charity paradigm and the paradigm of defining social and economic justice as a human right.

Describing circumstances in many underdeveloped countries, she quotes the leaders of those countries: "We want the right to food, the right to health, the right to education, and the right to development." She contrasts those aims with the emphasis on political and civil rights in more developed countries: "...certainly human rights theory says there are no such divisions. Human rights are by definition universal and indivisible.

You cannot segregate them. ...When I come here (to Canada) and I go to a lot of other western countries, I have to try to persuade them to abandon their reluctance to recognize social and economic rights as rights. I need to urge them to get out of their charitable disposition and to acknowledge that this is a matter of human dignity, and it should be grounded in legally binding obligations."

The CFB agrees with Mme. Arbour. We are pressing government to recognize that we too have a right to food (a standard of support for those without employment that meets basic nutritional and housing needs), education (for blind children, but also for adults who become blind or who haven't received the education they needed when they were children), and development (the chance to gain skills and attitudes leading to employment and full participation as equals in the economic and social life of Canada). We too are asking that our country "get out of its charitable disposition." Put another way, blind Canadians are no longer willing to lead third-world lives in a first-world country.

CFB values the legitimate role charities can play in innovation and service provision. It can also be legitimate for government to contract with private entities, whether charity or for-profit, when doing so serves the public interest, provided that the funding public retains genuine control. Any arrangements need careful, ongoing scrutiny to prevent the public purse from being raided by unaccountable entities, such as CNIB, who have cloaked themselves in the mantle of philanthropy. Governments across Canada have not held CNIB to account because it has been perceived as in charge of the blind people it purports to serve. In effect, government has believed CNIB is serving blind people effectively because CNIB has said so. Unless we want 2018, the one-hundredth anniversary of the founding of CNIB, to be a national year of mourning for opportunities lost and lives of blind people wasted, we must put aside the charity paradigm of 1918 and replace it with a rights-based service model.

Socrates said: "The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new." For far too long, blind Canadians have focused their efforts on criticizing CNIB or attempting to gain influence within CNIB in the hope of reforming it. We open ourselves up to conflict, frustration, and bitterness when we try to apply twenty-first-century participatory democracy standards to what is at heart a Victorian enterprise. CNIB is controlled by a self-perpetuating governing body. It is not a participatory democracy, has never claimed to be one, and has no interest in becoming one. It is long past time for us to accept that reality.

For far too long, blind people have behaved as if we are CNIB's customers. Unhappy customers ask for improvements and expect to get them. We must face the fact that CNIB's real customers are the giving public. The product the public buys is the sense of well-being that comes from being told they've helped to meet the needs of the blind. So long as the public feels good by donating to CNIB, the corporation will have satisfied its customer base. Nothing will change unless the public learns that money is being sucked into an administrative black hole; we aren't getting what they're paying for.

If we are not CNIB's real customers, where do blind people stand in relation to the charity? CNIB needs blindness, but it doesn't have to deal with blind people on our terms. It needs for us to appear needy enough to justify its ongoing requests for charitable dollars. It needs for us to appear reasonably content, or at least not to be too vocal about our discontent. Above all, it needs to retain its perceived position as arbiter and articulator of our neediness.

CNIB will work tirelessly to serve us, provided that serving us also serves its corporate agenda. All one must do is recall the history of the Bowen Island Lodge to know what to expect when CNIB's corporate interests conflict with the expressed desires of blind people. Compare Bowen Island camps during the last few years CNIB ran them with the upbeat work of the blind people who have created the Bowen Camp Society for the Visually Impaired to understand how much better off we could be if CNIB's monopoly came to an end.

James Allen wisely said: "A man has to learn that he cannot command things but that he can command himself; that he cannot coerce the wills of others but that he can mold and master his own will." Blind Canadians would be wise to take Mr. Allen's advice, and stop attempting to mold CNIB into something it was never intended to be. When it comes to CNIB, we know our place. We are not citizens of CNIB; CNIB is not the "country of the blind." If we choose to deal with CNIB, we are clients, always and forever clients. To the extent that CNIB offers services we value, we should avail ourselves of those services and do so with appreciation and without hesitation. But, we should never forget that we are only clients.

Though the appearance of client-agency interaction is different from interactions of the Victorian era, the underlying assumptions are the same. If it serves the corporate agenda to listen to clients, CNIB will listen. If it doesn't, they cannot expect to be heard. Pretending otherwise sets everyone up for fruitless dialogues reminiscent of Charles Dickens. Blind Canadians must stop playing Oliver Twist to CNIB's Mr. Bumble. If we do "want some more," and we most decidedly do, we do not want more from CNIB. We assert that CNIB's structure is no longer suitable. It is right and fair that we express sincere gratitude for the evolutionary role CNIB has played in our history. We harm only ourselves if we feel rancor at the corporation because it remains what it has always been. We value what we have learned from our past; but right here, right now, in 2014, we declare that it is time to move on.

Developments in the area of library services over the past five years demonstrate once again that there is no hope that the charity and rights-based models can coexist harmoniously. CNIB's actions towards libraries clearly demonstrate that the charity corporation will not hesitate to pursue its quest for funding and control, even when that effort is in direct opposition to the blind community's clearly expressed desire for integration and full inclusion.

In the ongoing struggle over library services, CFB has always aimed to promote a publicly-run, publicly-funded, and publicly-accountable service. Our advocacy has put

us in direct confrontation with CNIB. The struggle is a sad but unavoidable byproduct of our determination to promote a new idea that threatens old patterns. No matter how clearly we remain focused on what we hope to create, we run the risk of being disparaged as haters who want only to destroy.

Rollo May said: "Freedom is man's capacity to take a hand in his own development. It is our capacity to mold ourselves." We intend to mold our future by engaging government, the public, and blind Canadians in conversations aimed at fostering human-rights-based approaches to rehabilitation and public services. All blind Canadians, as individuals, are by right a part of the discussion. CNIB as a corporate entity carries so much baggage and wields so much illegitimate financial and political power that any discussion including CNIB is effectively over before it begins, no matter how much consultation or how many advisory boards are part of the window dressing. The discussion required is a discussion between blind Canadians and our public servants. We will not let public officials off the hook by allowing them to insert the charity paradigm, represented by CNIB, between blind citizens and their elected governments.

Sighted Canadians don't ever have to doubt that they have the right to become literate and to move freely on the streets and sidewalks of their country. Our schools and our highways are paid for with public money. We defy anyone to explain to us the moral justification for failing to fund our equivalent services publicly—training in Braille, the use of the long white cane, and other confidence and blindness skills. How dare governments in this country declare that we do not have a right to acquire the skills we need, that the prospect of government funding our training is an optional "nice thing to do," but only when public coffers are full!

The people who run our governments are not cruel. They are conforming to the role they have been molded to occupy. Without consciously intending to do so, blind Canadians have helped create that mold. It is our responsibility to break it. We have always had articulate and fearless advocates among us. To the enduring shame of our community, those advocates have far too often stood alone. Our numbers are tiny in comparison with other interest groups. We have behaved as if tiny were synonymous with insignificant, and have assumed that nobody would listen because we could not muster thousands to march for our cause. Government processes are complex and confusing. We have felt intimidated and left the work to people we believed were more expert.

Legislators are called on to deal with hundreds of issues. We have not wanted to appear too demanding. Secretly fearing that our deepest desires for full economic and social equality might be impossible dreams, we have sought small concessions instead. Legislators have told us that they find differing points of view among blind people confusing and that they'd be glad to help us when we can all agree. We have allowed ourselves to be bullied into settling on compromise positions that aren't what we truly believe, for fear that publicly expressing honest disagreements will leave us

with nothing. We have not had the courage to ask the legislators, who insist that we must all agree, why they don't expect the Catholic Women's League and the National Action Council on the Status of Women to agree on reproductive issues. What about the Sierra Club and the Gateway Pipeline promoters? Since when have blind people been the only Canadian group that is not allowed to speak with a multiplicity of voices?

To our legislators we say: "We have more faith in your capabilities than you seem to have. You were elected because the people in your district believed you are capable of discernment. We are your constituents, and we expect you to exercise that discernment and evaluate the matters we bring to your attention. We will do what we can to ensure that our arguments are clear, reasoned, factual, and complete. You're being paid to be perceptive; if you take the time to really think about what we have to say, we trust your capacity to make wise decisions. When you decide instead to give us the you-must-all-agree speech, please realize that we aren't buying that baloney."

To ourselves and to all blind Canadians we say: "We are all very, very tired of being patronized by those who still believe that our only authentic faces and voices are the face and voice of charity. Sometimes the task we have undertaken feels too formidable and the results of our efforts too minimal. At one time or another, every one of us has wondered whether the results justify our effort. We do not have the power to mold others; but we can educate and inspire new patterns of belief. We do have the power to mold ourselves through our courage to dream, our capacity to care, and our determination never, ever to quit. Whether we win on the policy issues quickly or with painful slowness, we stand tall as equals in the civil life of Canada. As we work to break the mold that has restricted us to the role of passive charity recipients, we gain personal strength and freedom. That's a new mold we can grow into with joy."

Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Members Elect New Executive Board 2014 - 15

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) elected a new executive board at its annual general meeting on May 25, 2014 at the Canadian Federation of the Blind convention on Bowen Island, B.C. All members of the executive are blind and serve without compensation.

Thank you to Gail Copp for her service in the position of Secretary for the past year.

Members re-elected:

Mary Ellen Gabias, President

Dr. Paul Gabias, Second Vice President

Graeme McCreath, Treasurer

Members elected:

Heidi Propp, Secretary

Donna Hudon, Member at Large

Members are grateful to Oriano Belusic, First Vice President, and Elizabeth Lalonde, Immediate Past President, for their continued hard work and service.

Congratulations and thank you to the new executive board.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is an organization of blind people committed to the equality and empowerment of blind Canadians. Through advocacy, public education and mentoring, members work for change, promote a positive perspective on blindness and together gain confidence and skills.

Meet the CFB Executive for 2014 – 2015:

Mary Ellen Gabias, President, is a board member of the American Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults, and a national and international employment advisor for the blind. Mary Ellen has more than 35 years of experience in work with blind people, including rehabilitation counselling, work with blind seniors and program development.

Before immigrating to Canada, she served as Assistant Director of the Job Opportunities for the Blind project of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the United States where she created and taught a career information curriculum to more than two thousand program participants. Since coming to Canada in 1989, Mary Ellen has served as the editor for a national blindness magazine and is a co-founder of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB). Mary Ellen and husband, Paul, are the parents of four children ages 15 - 24.

Oriano Belusic, First Vice President, was born in Croatia. At age 11, he immigrated to Canada with his family. He attended schools for the blind in Zagreb, Croatia and in Vancouver, B.C., and later, public school in Victoria, B.C. Oriano graduated from the University of Victoria with a Bachelor of Science in Economics.

Oriano has his own business in adaptive computer equipment for the blind and has been general contractor, having built three houses along with his wife.

Oriano is a founding member of CFB and was its first president. He is an active member of the Victoria Imperial Lions Club.

Dr. Paul Gabias, Second Vice President, was born in Montreal and obtained his Ph.D. from New York University in 1988. He currently works as an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan, where he has developed several courses, including courses in tactile perception and in the psychological aspects of advocacy. Dr. Gabias founded the CFB and holds an honorary doctorate from the University of Victoria in recognition of his pioneering work improving opportunities for the blind of Canada.

In the United States, he served as president of the National Association of Guide Dog Users, a national division of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), and was the founder and president of the NFB of Northern Nevada.

For the past 14 years, he has been an independent Wellness Consultant associated with the Nikken Corporation, marketing wellness products through the direct sales industry. Dr. Gabias lives in Kelowna, B.C. with his wife Mary Ellen and their four children, Joanne, (24) Jeffrey, (21) Philip (17) and Elliott (15).

Heidi Propp, Secretary, studied psychology at the University of Victoria. Heidi's goals are to attend the Colorado Center for the Blind in the U.S., to help bring a blindness skills training centre to Canada, and be part of realizing the dream of full, equal participation in society for blind Canadians.

Graeme McCreath, Treasurer, was born in Liverpool, England where he attended a school for the blind and attended a physiotherapy training program in London, specifically designed for blind students. After immigrating to Canada, Graeme worked at the Victoria General Hospital for several years before opening his own physiotherapy practice in Victoria, B.C., with his wife. He is the author of the book, *The Politics of Blindness*. Graeme and his wife have three adult children.

Donna Hudon, Member at Large, was born in Edmonton, Alberta, where she graduated from Grant McEwen College with a Rehabilitation Practitioner diploma prior to moving to Nanaimo, B.C. in 1993. She carried on to get married, have two children and continue her education in the field of Child and Youth Care with a specialization in Child Protection, and graduated in 2013. She has gained valuable experience and opportunities to expand her knowledge of linking individuals with formal and informal resources and is currently looking for employment with government and non-government agencies in the field of family support.

She brings with her a positive philosophy of blindness and her involvement in paid and volunteer experiences working with individuals with varying abilities. She is committed to promoting the well-being and a positive philosophy of blindness with children, youth and families in a context of respect and collaboration.

Elizabeth Lalonde, Immediate Past President, has extensive personal and professional experience in the field of blindness. Elizabeth recently completed a nine-month intensive blindness immersion training program at the Louisiana Center for the Blind. After earning a BA with a double major in journalism and anthropology from the University of Victoria, she worked as a communications coordinator for the Province of British Columbia, and served as president of the CFB from 2003 to 2012. Elizabeth is now Director of the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind. Elizabeth is the mother of two boys.

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Living the Life You Want Is for Blind People Too

By Gary Wunder

*Banquet Address Delivered by Gary Wunder
Representative from the National Federation of the Blind (NFB)
at the 'Breaking the Mold' 2014 Convention of the
Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)
May 24, 2014, Bowen Island, B.C.*

(transcribed into print from audio recording)

When I came into the world, it was three months too early. I weighed two pounds and went down to one pound fourteen ounces, so they said goodbye at the same time that they said hello, but it didn't work out that way.

There was a lot of guilt in my family about the fact that I was blind. It turns out my mother had been playing a little game of basketball with my father the day before she went to the hospital to have me. He had thrown the ball to her and it was high enough she had to jump for it. So, when she realized that she had a child who was premature, she associated it with this basketball game and felt terrible about it. My father did the same, feeling that I was blind because he threw a ball too high. My mother died in 2008, but my father still feels guilty today. I wish this was a burden I could take from him, for I have as much reason to believe my early start has given me an advantage, as I do to believe it has placed me at a disadvantage.

My parents, after having me in the hospital for about four months, brought me home, and they thought, maybe, that was the worst of it. Then they realized I wasn't making eye contact or tracking objects. They took me to the doctor and got the news. My father tells the story that when he came home he saw my aunt, my grandmother, and my mother crying. They told him the news, and he said, "I'd like to tell you I was concerned about you, son, but my original thought was that I am screwed. What in the world am I going to do? Here I am, a young husband. We want to have other children. What in the world am I going to do?"

But, the world went along and the doctors gave their prognosis, which was that my father and my mother should immediately plan for how I would live out my life. They should provide for me, at least for the rest of their lives, and, if they could manage to be successful enough, they should provide for me the rest of my life.

Think about what that would feel like to you as young parents if that was the kind of sentence that you got from the medical community. But time passed, and I grew and started talking, and like most of you, learned that the radio was one of my best friends. I was considered a child prodigy because I knew all of the songs on the Forty Star survey, a little countdown of songs on our local radio station. Being blind and a child

prodigy meant that I was spoiled. All the women in my life—they loved me and they coddled me and they thought I could do no wrong. Unfortunately, there were more people in the world than those women. There were men—one of them was my father, and he said, "This kid is never going to grow into anything if you let him have his way all the time and do whatever he wants to do." He was the disciplinarian. Luckily, he worked a lot, and as far as I was concerned, the more he worked the better I liked it. It turned out he left home at 6 o'clock in the morning and didn't get home until 8 o'clock at night. I couldn't figure it at the time, but that was fourteen hours of good time, and if you counted eight hours for sleeping, I only had to put up with him for two hours. But, he managed to make his influence felt, and I kind of came to have a different opinion of him, which I'll tell you about later.

I got lots of conflicting messages about what it meant to be blind. I expect you did too. I got the message from my folks that, "You can do anything," and they tried to make that message real for me. For instance, when I wanted to learn to ride a bicycle, they said, "Sure, you can learn to ride a bicycle." And, when I wanted a horse, they said, "Well, if your brothers and your sister are going to get a horse, we'll give you a horse too."

I didn't think anything about that at the time, but I later learned that my grandfather came to my father and he said, "This is the most irresponsible thing I have ever seen you do. I must have raised a jackass. How could anybody be so stupid. I want you to know that if that boy gets killed or hurt riding that bicycle or riding that horse, I will be the first one to go to the prosecutor and urge you be charged with murder or willful neglect." I can't imagine what it was like for my father to endure being called stupid by his father.

My grandfather really thought we all had gone over the edge, when my dad went out and bought motorcycles for my two brothers. He came home and I said, "There are only two motorcycles there."

He said, "Yes, I got one for your brother, Jay, and one for your brother, Mark."

I asked, "Well, why aren't there three?"

He said, "Because your sister is too young to ride one."

I said, "I wasn't thinking about my sister."

"Then you are telling me that you want one?"

"Yeah."

"I thought you told me that you used your ears a lot to ride the bicycle, and you know, a motorcycle makes a lot of noise, and it goes faster than a bicycle. Is this really a smart thing?"

I confidently said, "I think it is."

In a very thoughtful and somewhat hesitant voice he said, "Well, I'm in no position to judge. You're fourteen years old. You're smart enough to figure whether you can do this or not. If you think you can do it, we'll get you one."

Now, I didn't have a big motorcycle. It was a Harley-Davidson though, a 50cc engine-- Not much of a motor—a two-cycle engine that you had to mix gas and oil together to operate. But, I rode that thing—and it was cool. I did make believers out of people who rode in front of me. One rule could not be questioned: When they planned to stop, they were to look over their shoulder and yell, "I'm stopping." My motor did make enough noise that it was difficult to hear their motors at the same time, especially if they were dropping in pitch and amplitude.

So those were the positive messages and life experience that said blindness was okay and I could do anything. I got to do a lot of things as a kid that made me believe that I had some capability. But, there were other messages that I got that weren't quite so good about blindness. There was my grandmother, who was one of those women who loved to spoil me. She said, "You are smart. I think you can do almost anything. You can talk on the radio, since you already know all those record people and the songs they sing. Maybe you can be a disc jockey. Or maybe, you can be a preacher, because they get paid, you know, to stand up and talk and one thing you've proven to us is you can talk. Maybe one day, I mean, if you really work at it, you can be a lawyer, if you want to—you know, like Perry Mason." I thought this was pretty good because I watched Perry Mason on TV, and from what I could tell, he only worked one day a week, and then, only twenty-six weeks a year; the rest were reruns. That seemed like a pretty good job.

That was the positive message, but then she said, "Now, of course, you are blind, and therefore, the welfare will have to come in every day, and they'll have to make sure you brush your teeth and wash your face and make sure you're ready to go out into the world." That didn't feel so good. You can imagine how it felt when, one day before I went off to school, I brushed my teeth really quickly and didn't really wash my face well enough and left with toothpaste on my lips. I knew then that my grandmother had to be right and that bothered me for the longest time. I really did think that, maybe, somebody would have to come in and check my face. I was smart enough to know that I could brush my own teeth and that I could remember to do it, but it really shook my confidence about whether I could wash my face and get it clean.

I was often disturbed by my parent's reactions to blind people they saw on the street. If they saw a blind person walking down the street with a cane, they would say, "Well, I wonder if he's going to be okay? I wonder what he's doing out alone? I wonder if he knows that there's a big street up here that he's going to have to cross?" They were very afraid for him—not afraid enough to stop and help, but they were very afraid of what it was like to be blind. So, I grew up with the idea that they were comfortable with

the fact that I was a blind kid, but they were not comfortable with the fact that I would grow up to be a blind man. So, neither was I.

I'm sure your parents offered you a lot of hope about what was to come in the same way mine did. In my day, it was: "If we can send a man to the moon, certainly, by the time you turn sixteen, there'll be a way for you to drive a car." That message sounded pretty good when I was seven. It sounded pretty good when I was ten. I started to have some doubts about twelve. At fourteen I thought, maybe, this was a little optimistic, and at sixteen I was pretty darned disappointed, because it didn't happen. And, it hasn't quite happened yet. Part of the hope, part of the fantasy, and part of the denial was that I would not grow up to be a blind man.

The biggest problem I had growing up was that I didn't have positive blind role models. We were in a small town, but we didn't really work to go out and associate with other blind people. The teachers who worked with my parents discouraged it: too much association with the blind would not be healthy for a young man who was going to live in a sighted world.

I did know some blind folks, however. I knew this one blind guy in my town. His name was Hawkey. I don't know how he got the nickname, but that was it. He was renowned in my little town of 216, because he helped his neighbours. He could travel enough with a cane to go to the post office, and not only would he get his mail, but he'd get mail for several of his elderly neighbours. And, the thing that so amazed people was that he could keep their mail straight. So, what was this great technique that he had? Well, he'd take his mail and put it between his thumb and his first finger, and the next neighbour's mail between fingers one and two, and the next neighbour's mail between two and three, and the next between fingers three and four. The more people bragged about that, the more I got the impression that this was the low expectation that would be held for me. I mean, I was glad that he did a good turn for his neighbours, but I didn't think it was the most inventive technique in the world to use the fingers of your hand to separate mail. So, my buddy, Hawkey, was a fellow I liked a lot, but I did not want to grow up to be like him. People loved to drop by his house and talk to him, but that was about the extent of what he did--that and listen to the radio. He was the guy who listened to the radio and he knew all the town gossip. Yes, he loved the town gossip. He would share it if people wanted to go and get some of it. Why, he'd fill them up with it. But, he wasn't somebody I wanted to be like. He was somebody I wanted to visit from time to time, but I wanted to be like my father. I wanted to be a mover and a shaker, somebody like my father was.

I had ham radio buddies, and some of them were blind. It was cool because we could talk with one another, but some of my blind buddies used ham radio as a way of avoiding going out and getting jobs. They said, "We handle emergency messages. We do phone patches for people. This is the thing that we do in lieu of a job." And, that scared me, because these were bright people, but they didn't go out and do what I wanted to do. And, the work ethic they lived by would not earn me the respect of my family.

I kept getting this message that, "You can do anything you want to do. You'll be different from those few other blind folks that you see out there." I clung to that message, hoping it was true, but having little evidence to support that hope.

One Christmas, my folks got me a guitar, and it turns out that I have some musical aptitude—not very much, but some. For instance, I can hear a note and usually tell what the note is, which means that I learned to play by ear. Having that kind of talent serves you really well as an amateur, but not very well as a professional. My father, however, got the idea that, if I had this kind of talent, we had now figured out what I could do for a living. But to me, it was just fun, just cool to be able to play some kind of instrument I could carry with me. Every day when he got home, my father would say, "Did you practise your guitar today?" Sometimes the answer was yes, but mostly it was no.

If my father found me shy, he knew the cure. He would make me come out and sing in public for people—relatives, company, at talent shows, and I dreaded it. I can stand and talk with you without breaking a sweat, but if you make me play guitar and sing for you, I'll start sweating terribly. It won't matter whether it's hot in the room or cold, or how many clothes I have on. It just bothers me. I cannot do it.

One night we were out in a fishing boat. My father and I are alone. It's late and we're having a nice time in the boat waiting for a fish to hit. And, my father says, "So, Gary, did you practise your guitar this week?"

I said, "Well, no, not much."

"Not much?"

I said, "Well, no, not really at all."

He shifted his weight in the boat uncomfortably and said, "All right, Gary, I ask you every week if you've practised your guitar, and mostly your answer is some, or no, or not very much. So, son, you are sixteen years old now. I want to ask you, if you don't learn to sing and play that damn guitar, just what in the world are you going to do with your life?"

Now, that scared me a lot, because I knew what kind of musical talent I had. We had tape recorders in my day. I could sing into a tape recorder and could realize that I did not sound anything at all like the people that I would want to emulate, were I to be a musician. I did not have the three and a half octave voice range of Glen Campbell. I did not have the song writing ability or the guitar skills of a James Taylor. I had other musical idols that probably some of you wouldn't think about or recall. But, what really scared me was that I pinned almost all of my hopes on the fact that my father, above all people, had told me, "You can do anything." I found out that evening in the boat, that my father had no more idea in the world what I could do than I had.

The fact that none of us knew what I might do for a living didn't lessen the family pressure that you would go out and get a job. If you were going to be something, you had to work, you had to do something to pull your own weight. But, I knew that I could not be a musician.

Now, my wife tells me that I made a mistake. She said that she had none of this confidence problem when it came to her musical ability. She said, "Your mistake was that when you practised and sang, you used a microphone. If you had sang into a hairbrush like I did, you wouldn't have had any doubt about how good you sounded."

I started looking at career options, and I ruled out musician. Though I went to church, I ruled out being a preacher, because I did not have the calling. I looked at a career in radio, and I realized that most people who worked in radio made \$75 a week, and that only the really good ones—the anchorman and the network broadcasters—made \$100,000 a year. It wasn't that I needed \$100,000 a year, but I needed a lot more than \$75 a week.

I latched on to some other ideas that I began to share with some people that I knew in the Federation. One of them, I talked with on a regular basis was a man named Carl Slavens. I said to him one day, "You know, I think I have figured out that my next task is to write a book about my life."

He tried to suppress a chuckle and said, "You're going to write a book about your life? You're sixteen, right? Let me suggest that when you do something in your life worth writing about, that you then worry about writing about it."

I can't tell you whether at that time I loved or hated that man. Maybe I held both of those things simultaneously, because, you see, I really thought that I was something worth writing a book about. Besides, a book might pay something, and that might be my career. I hated the fact that he was kind of laughing at the idea that I was going to write a book about me—the bicycle rider, the horse rider, the motorcycle rider, the fellow who actually learned to wash his face after he brushed his teeth. But, I loved him too, because what he was suggesting was that, if I played my cards right in life, there might actually be something to write about. I liked that. Maybe, my book did not have to be about Gary, the blind hero, but Gary, the man who could compete in the world that included the world of the sighted.

So, where does the Federation come into all of this? The Federation I learned about big time when I saw a television show about guide dogs. It was called, "Atta Girl, Kelly," and it was the first exposure I'd ever had to guide dogs. I decided that I wanted to know more about them, than that little television show would tell me. I asked around and found that there were a couple of fellows—there was one fellow who had a guide dog who'd be willing to talk with me and his name was Jim Coutts. He was an old fellow, by which I mean, compared to what I was then. He was probably close to my age now. I called him up and he talked with me about guide dogs. After he talked

awhile about guide dogs, he would say, "Now, you know, it's real important if you get a guide dog that you do obedience. Like, even when I go to the convention of the National Federation of the Blind, which is the largest organization of blind people in the country, we draw people from everywhere..." and, he'd go off on talking on this tangent, and then he'd get back to guide dogs and tell me how you make the dog sit, lie down, and fetch, and all that sort of thing.

Then I'd say, "Well, what about grooming?"

"Oh, it's important that you groom them. Even when I go to the convention of the National Federation of the Blind. Let me tell you, we had congressman such and such there from Utah, and we had Senator Dole..." and, he just went on and on about this Federation. Finally, I got tired of it. I was getting a lot less guide dog information than I was Federation. I suggested to him, "You know, you're a very busy man, being in the office supply business. Maybe, you could give me the name of somebody else that I could talk with and take some of this burden off you. I just want to know about guide dogs."

He said, "Yeah, I know. It probably would be good for you to find somebody closer to your age to talk with. I've got this fellow you can talk with. His name is Melvin Lewis."

He gave me Melvin's number, and I hung up the phone and smiled to myself. I thought, "This is the end of this Federation stuff. I'm going to get guide dog 24X7." So, I call up this Melvin Lewis, and in fact, he's a young law student who has a German Shepherd named Belle, and he's all interested in telling me about her—and then, he starts talking with me about how, if I want to see Belle, I should come to a chapter meeting of the National Federation of the Blind. Turns out, he was the Kansas City chapter president.

I wanted to see the dog, but there had to be something easier than going to see a group of blind people. But, the more I talked with him, the more I realized that probably that was the only way I was going to see Belle. He said, "You ought to come,"

"I don't have any transportation."

"I'll get you transportation."

"Well, Friday nights are bad."

I should have anticipated the next question, "Why? What do you normally do on Friday nights?"

"Well, watch television."

That didn't buy me much. "Look, man, they have donuts at the meeting and everything."

That did it. "Okay. If you're going to give me a ride, I'll come to the meeting. What kind of donuts, and will the dog really be there?"

I saw the meetings, and I saw the dogs, and I ate the donuts, and I wasn't all that impressed with the Federation. But, I was really impressed with Melvin Lewis. I respected him. He was doing something I might want to do. More importantly, he was showing me that I could be something, other than a musician or a stay-at-home ham radio operator. Still, I was bored at the meetings and wondered if there was a way to stay in good with Melvin without the Federation. But, when those wise old Federation members realized I might leave, because I was bored, they elected me to an office, playing on my ego and sense of guilt. They elected me as the corresponding secretary. In that chapter, this was a do-nothing job, but if I had the job of corresponding secretary, I had to come to the meetings. Having an elected position made people, like Melvin Lewis, proud of me, and I wanted them to be proud of me, in the same way that I was proud of them. One thing led to another, and pretty soon I got involved in the Federation. I started to meet people who told me that my narrow outlook about how I couldn't do anything if I couldn't be a musician, or a preacher, or a radio disc jockey, was very limiting. They, actually, had this radical proposition, that you could do the average job, in the average place of business, with the right training and opportunity, and they said this not only applied to them, but to me. They told me they knew where I could get the training and they would do their best to see that I had the opportunity. And, what amazed me about these blind people was that they were people who were movers and shakers, just like my father – and, I wanted to grow up to be like my father, blind or not.

Kenneth Jernigan was a mover and shaker. He could put somebody up on the stage, they could give their speech, he could reveal it for the hogwash that it was. He could do it all politely, but very firmly, and I thought, "That guy's like my father. That's wonderful."

Well, the Federation had that same message that my friend, Carl, had about the book, which is that: we'll give you a reward when you're worthy of a reward, but mostly, you got to do something that is different than just existing, to be recognized in a positive way by us. That was very liberating, because again, it sent a message that I could do something of value and that they weren't giving up on me. They just weren't going to give me false flattery.

One of the questions they made me ask and answer was fundamental: as a blind person, was I shafted or was I challenged? They made me come to believe that I was challenged and, if it turned out I was shafted, that would be my doing.

So, how have I fared? Well, my Dad likes to tell the story that I told you earlier about being told that he'd have to take care of me for the rest of his life. And, the truth is that, financially, I'm probably better off now than my two brothers and my sister, because being blind gave me a shot at a college education, it gave me a shot at materials that

they've never had the chance to read, it gave me something very wonderful—this contract between rehabilitation and blind people. Now I'm not famous. I'm not rich. There is not much chance that I'm going to be immortalized through history. But, I have my own family of four. I have a decent job, maybe even better than a decent job—a good job—on most days, I have an excellent job where I am trusted, respected, and appreciated. In real life, it doesn't get much better than that. I pay my taxes. I complain about my taxes like everybody else. It's a pretty darn good thing for a guy who was afraid he might end up doing nothing but living off those taxes.

I love the Federation because it helped give me the life that I have, the education that I have, the rehabilitation that I have, the belief that I can do my job and be a contributing part of society. If the Federation did all of that for me, then I have no choice, if I have a conscience, which I do, in deciding that I'm going to pay back those people who did so much work for me. Not only am I going to try to pay them back—Jacobus tenBroek, Kenneth Jernigan, Marc Maurer, Jim Coutts, Melvin Lewis, and all of the people who worked hard, either to build what we have or to get me involved. I want to do that for them, but I also want to pay it forward. I want people to have it at least as good as I've had it. I have not a thing to complain about in my life that other people don't complain about. I urge you to do what you can to reach out to people--not to make them wait until they're sixteen or eighteen to have role models—but, to show them from day one, that being blind is a nuisance, it's an inconvenience, but it can be as positive as it is negative, and it all depends whether we create the opportunity that makes sure that people have the training that they need to live normal and enriching lives. I thank God for the life I have. I thank my parents for the life I have. I thank the Federation for the life I have. Last but not least, I thank you guys for listening.

Gary Wunder ~ Biography ~



Gary Wunder
Photo Courtesy NFB
www.nfb.org

Reprinted courtesy of the 'Braille Monitor', the leading magazine of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), January 2007, from the section "Who are the Blind Who Lead the Blind?"

Gary is editor of the 'Braille Monitor' and is a former programmer analyst expert and electronics technologist.

Gary Wunder was born three months prematurely in 1955, the oldest of four children. His family lived in Kansas City, Missouri, and Wunder remembers that, since he had been blind from birth, he managed to persuade everyone in his family, except his father, to do precisely what he wanted. It would be many years before Wunder could appreciate his father's instinctive understanding that Gary had to learn to do things for himself.

Wunder tells with amusement the story of his dawning awareness of his blindness. When he was quite young, his home had sliding glass doors separating the living room from the patio. When those doors were closed, he could not hear and therefore did not know what was happening on the other side and assumed that no one else could either. One day he found several soft drink bottles on the patio and broke them. His father then opened the doors and asked if he had broken the bottles. Gary said he had not and that he did not know how they had been broken. His father then astonished him by saying that both his parents had watched him break the bottles and that his mother was now crying because she had thought surely her baby couldn't tell a lie. Gary's response was to say, "Well, she knows better now."

Wunder attended grades one through five at a Kansas City public school. When he was ten, a boy who attended the Missouri School for the Blind persuaded him that he was missing real life by staying at home. At the school his friend told him kids rode trains and buses. They could bowl and swim and didn't have to listen to parents. As a result, Wunder did some persuading at home and was on hand for sixth grade and some necessary but painful lessons about that real world.

At the close of seventh grade Wunder returned to public schools, having learned several vitally important lessons: he knew the basics of using a white cane; he recognized that his father's demands on him had sprung from strong love and eagerness for his son to succeed; and he understood that people beyond his own family had worth and deserved his respect. But, he had also learned that the school for the blind was not the promised land, and he was delighted once more to be in public schools for eighth grade and high school. He was elected to the National Honor Society in his senior year but struggled with the mechanics of getting his work done. Braille was not readily available, and readers were hard to recruit without money to pay them.

Wunder planned to attend the University of Missouri at Kansas City in order to live with his grandmother, but, after a taste of freedom at the orientation center in Columbia, Missouri, the summer before college, he decided to enroll at the university's Columbia campus, where everyone walked everywhere and where he could contrive as many as three or four dates an evening if he hurried from place to place.

Wunder enjoys recounting the adventure which persuaded him that a blind person should always carry a white cane: "I was having dinner with a young woman who lived near me, so I had not brought my cane, figuring that I wouldn't need it. To my consternation and her distress, my plate of liver and onions slid into my lap. She asked if I wanted her to walk me home so that I could change. I was already so embarrassed that I assured her I would be right back and that I did not need her assistance. The busiest intersection in Columbia lay between me and clean slacks, and after I successfully survived that street crossing, I swore that I would never again be caught without my cane."

Wunder decided to major in political science and philosophy because he felt compelled to avoid the science and math that he loved but feared to take. During his sophomore year he met a professor from Central Missouri State University who suggested that he was ducking the challenge. Together they explored the question of whether or not a blind person could follow schematics and read voltmeters. The answers seemed to be yes, so Wunder transferred to Central Missouri State, where he graduated in 1977 with a degree in electronics technology.

He had done well with the courses, but he did not see how he could run a repair shop with its responsibility for mastering hundreds of schematics for appliances. He could teach electronics, but the professors from whom he had learned the most were those who had firsthand experience. He didn't want to be the theory-only kind of teacher.

Wunder looked for interim jobs after graduation while he tried to decide what to do, and he discovered the hard way that blind job seekers have to be better than the competition in order to be considered at all. He vowed to become so well-trained at doing something that would-be employers could not ignore him. He enrolled in a ten-month course in computer programming offered by the Extension Division of the University of Missouri. No blind person had ever entered the program before, but Wunder completed it successfully and was hired immediately (in the fall of 1978) by the Pathology Department of the University of Missouri Hospital and Clinics in Columbia. Years and promotions later, Wunder was a programmer analyst-expert in the Information Services Department until he left that position to become editor of the *Braille Monitor*, the most influential publication in the field of blindness.

Wunder first learned about the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) the summer before his senior year of high school. He says, "In the beginning I thought this talk about discrimination was a pretty good racket. No one did those things to me, and I assumed that all this Federation talk about jobs being denied and parents having children taken away from them was an effective way of raising funds. I didn't realize that my father's name and reputation in my hometown were protecting me from the worst of real life. So far I had gotten what I wanted, including a motorcycle to ride on our farm and my own horse. It was some time before I recognized that these talented and committed blind people whom I was getting to know in the Federation were trying to teach me about the world that I was going to inherit. They frightened me a little, but more and more I wanted to be like them."

In late 1973, several months after Wunder started college in Columbia, a Federation organizing team arrived to establish a new chapter, and he took an active part in the preparations. Wunder was elected president, and when he transferred to Central Missouri State two years later, he organized a chapter in Warrensburg. In 1977 Wunder was elected first vice president of the NFB of Missouri, and in 1979 he became president. Except for one two-year term he has continued in that post ever since. Wunder was elected to the board of directors of the National Federation of the Blind in 1985 and in 2002 was elected secretary of the organization. In 2008 he was the recipient of the Jacobus tenBroek Award, the highest honour that the NFB bestows on any of its members, for his years of dedication and service to the Federation.

Looking back over the years of his involvement with and commitment to the Federation, Wunder says: "Despite all I learned from my parents about honour, responsibility, and the necessity to be competent, what I could never get from them was a sense of where blind people fit in a world composed mostly of sighted people. Friends and loved ones had always told me how wonderful I was (wonderful for a blind person, that is), but until I came to know members of the National Federation of the Blind, no one had the experience or knowledge to say how I could expect to measure up alongside the sighted. The NFB was the first place where I didn't get a round of applause for performing the routine activities of life. If I wanted my Federation colleagues' recognition and admiration, I had to merit them."

"It sounds contradictory, but, while I was learning that I wouldn't be applauded for insignificant accomplishments, I was also learning that I didn't have to possess special compensatory senses or talents to make my way in the world. When you believe that your only opportunity for success lies in being a musician but you know that your only musical talent is in listening and then you suddenly find that you are capable of doing the average job in the average place of business, your sense of freedom, hope, and possibility knows no bounds.

Gary now lives with his family in their Columbia, Missouri, home.

Sara's Take on the CFB Convention

By Sara Batt

I moved to the Sunshine Coast, B.C. this February. I learned about the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) and attended my first CFB convention this May, held on Bowen Island, B.C. When I attended, I learned so much and took away some added tidbits that I had not known about before.

I learned about what the CFB is wanting to achieve, about their advocacy work and their goals for being part of communities. I learned about different organizations that I wasn't aware of, like the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind, a demonstration project in both Victoria and Nanaimo, B.C.

Being at the convention, and the only person from the Sunshine Coast, I felt very pleased and encouraged by what this blind community is doing and what they are striving to do and overcome.

Being able to meet new people, who are just like myself, with different challenges that we are trying to overcome – including, to get governments, as well as the general public, to realize that we are as much of this world as anyone else. It also made me feel very happy and encouraged that I'm not alone in facing challenges, and that governments really need to take people with disabilities seriously.

It was good just being able to meet others, since moving into the province of B.C., and not feeling lonely. Meeting others made me feel so very welcomed into the CFB community. I feel very honoured to be able to be a part of a wonderful group of people who both want to strive for what we feel and know is right, as well as have the support of one another to know that we can have that support to lean on when we need to ask questions.

I would just like to take this one last opportunity to say that I have made my new home here on the beautiful Sunshine Coast, I feel and want to be able to help in anyway I can to make opportunities, so more doors can open for people with visual disabilities.

CFB Convention Testimonials

Maria Kovacs from Maple Ridge, B.C. wrote:

This weekend, I attended the CFB convention at Bowen Island, which made me write this message.

Thank you Mary Ellen and Donna for encouraging me to attend my first conference. It was great to be around and listen to what CFB has to offer and I came back feeling pretty good and very tired for lack of sleep.

This group is full of energy for the work they do, and then great at partying afterwards.

I loved attending this conference and what it brought to my life! It was really great to hear all the guest speakers, and I enjoyed the great food the lodge served us.

Thank you all, for the very welcome time I have received!

Sky Mundell of Victoria, B.C. wrote:

I want to tell you that it has been a wonderful convention. And, I had a great time recording it.



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National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS):

Then and Now

By Allan Carlson, Project Management Specialist, Libraries Branch, Province of B.C.

Speech delivered at the 'Breaking the Mold' 2014 convention of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), May 2014, Bowen Island, B.C.

Good afternoon everyone, thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today – I'm thrilled to be here.

It's been two years since I had the pleasure of addressing this group, and I'm delighted to be here to talk about the progress we've made on the NNELS project. To fully appreciate the progress we've made, we need to understand where we've come from and why.

Prior to 2009, B.C., like most other provinces and territories, had participated in the CNIB's partnership program. For a relatively modest fee, that program made the CNIB library available through B.C. public libraries. In 2009, something monumental happened: B.C.'s bill for accessing the CNIB library went from \$28,300 to \$640,000. The timing for that kind of increase could not have been worse. In the post-2007 economic downturn, B.C., like most provinces and territories, was forced to decline and as you know, access to the CNIB library was cut off. Not a good situation, but it certainly got our attention and got us thinking more seriously about what alternatives might exist.

It was about that time that none other than your president, Mary Ellen Gabias, approached my former boss, who was then provincial librarian, Jacqueline van Dyk, to talk about library service for the print disabled. That conversation underscored for us at Libraries Branch the driving need for action to address library services for the print disabled. We weren't completely without options and we retained hope that something would come out of what was then a current piece of work: the Initiative for Equitable Library Access (IELA as it was called) led by Libraries and Archives Canada (LAC). With \$3 million dollars to spend and federal leadership, we could be forgiven for having some hope. That hope was dashed however, when after months of consultations, matters bogged down over governance and cost. The model we were being asked to agree to would have cost the provinces and territories a total of \$6.5 million per year, with the CNIB library at the centre and no guarantee we would have a controlling interest in governance. In the economic conditions at that time, conditions that persist even today, that proposition was just not feasible – we had to have the ability to direct service and control cost. The whole thing ended with LAC backing away, saying library services for the print disabled were the responsibility of provinces and territories. CNIB was given funding and directed to conclude successful consultations with provinces and territories. Nothing came of those extensive consultations, lasting nearly two years, for the same reasons IELA bogged down: high cost and uncertain governance.

As exhausting and trying as things had become, I think it really had to come to that, because with that last hope vanished, we began to see that the only way forward was to take matters into our own hands. In typical public library tradition, we started looking for cost-effective, pragmatic solutions and we took the first steps on the road to where we are today.

Before I go any further, I think I need to explain who and what I mean by “we”. I've already used that term many times this morning without really saying who “we” are. The B.C. provincial government is certainly part of the “we” that is NNELS, but so too, are the other provincial and territorial governments who participated along the way. It includes the Provincial and Territorial Public Library Council (PTPLC) that funded and supported the NNELS proof of concept. Today, the provincial funding partners: B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Nova Scotia make up the core jurisdictional members, but NNELS also includes our service partner, the B.C. Libraries Cooperative, represented here today by Maryann Kempthorne, whom I know many of you have already met. “We” also includes public libraries, Canadian publishers, local, national and international accessible format producers, and stakeholder groups, like the CFB. Indeed, members of the CFB played an important role by participating as Beta testers of the Canadian Accessible Library Service. So now that you have a better sense of who “we” are, I'd like to crow a little about what “we've” accomplished in the past two years.

Back in 2010, when the “we” was a lot smaller, we were envisaging what a “made in B.C.” solution would look like. We convened meetings of K-12, post-secondary, and public library accessibility services folks, and took stock of current capacity. While we were able to make some progress in framing such a collaborative approach for B.C., we really lacked the means and the capacity to make it work and our thinking returned to the national table. It was the experience of working on IELA initiative that led us to believe that a pan-Canadian solution was not only possible, but quite feasible. Much of the work we had done on the IELA initiative put us in closer touch with our provincial/territorial counterparts on the accessible library issue. Timing, they say, is everything and it was Jacqueline's idea to bring the notion of an alternative national solution to the PTPLC annual meeting in 2012. A couple of weeks before the PTPLC annual meeting, Jacqueline asked me to prepare a project proposal. With two pages of high-level thinking, Jacqueline set off to sell the idea. Some of you may know how persuasive Jacqueline can be, so it should come as no surprise to you that the PTPLC passed a resolution that year, which was then endorsed by the Canadian Library Association, to pursue an alternative accessible library solution. Although it didn't have a name as yet, NNELS was born.

From such a beginning, and in something less than a year, we had working repository in place with over 10,000 books on file, we had local, regional and interprovincial production capacity, a strategic plan in place, standards and best practises worked out...in short, a going concern. On December 3, 2013 the project moved from proof of concept to reality when the entire province of Saskatchewan lit up live on CALS. By the way, just to keep things thoroughly confusing, we have two acronyms that keep floating

around: NNELS is, of course, the National Network for Equitable Library Service and this is the management/governance arm for what is the Canadian Accessible Library Service (CALs). Many folks use the acronym NNELS as synonymous with CALs...so be it; they can call us anything they like as long as they don't call us late for dinner.

I want to stress that the achievement I speak of here didn't amount to simply repurposing and rebranding an existing technology and service; this was no less than a new service, built from the ground up. We envisioned real-time connection to public library IT systems to enable automatic authentication. We wanted a responsive, highly scalable repository and bi-lingual interface. We wanted the ability for all members of the network to create, contribute, and share across the enterprise. And so, using open source IT tools, we literally built from the ground up, what is now the Canadian Accessible Library Service, an astounding technology achievement. But, CALs is only the tip of the iceberg, compared to what we've been able to achieve in creating what is NNELS; a growing network of contributing partners, jurisdictions, publishers and libraries sharing in governance, production, training, acquisitions and best practises. We have production capacity at the B.C. Libraries Cooperative and in the Manitoba government public library services department, as well as the Winnipeg Public Library. We've been able to leverage excess capacity in local post-secondary accessible library services and soon other public libraries will be able to join production. We have support from Canadian publishers, international producers and organizations, like the CFB. We look forward to not just English and French content, but to multi-lingual content, including Inuktitut and other First Nations languages, as well as Mandarin, Cantonese and European languages, as demand drives production. In short, we've created a community-based, distributed network that shares services in an integrated way that makes it highly efficient, enormously resilient and positioned for success. We know from experience in the public library world that this model of service delivery nets us the best return on investment and provides both transparency and public accountability. NNELS is happy to do its business completely in the open – in fact, that is where it draws much of its strength, from the community in which it was created and in which it is shared. Though we didn't know it at the time, nowhere else in the world has such an approach been taken: an accessible library service built entirely on open source IT tools, funded and governed by and accountable to provincial government bodies and delivered through a network of contributing public libraries. When print-disabled stakeholders said they wanted parity, not charity, NNELS listened. I could go on, but suffice to say: that was then, this is now.

Between then and now, NNELS has covered a lot of ground and it is the people who have done the leg work that deserve the real credit. This includes the PTPLC itself for funding and managing the proof of concept project that preceded NNELS and the CLA for having the courage to endorse it. It includes our counterparts in participating partner jurisdictions for their tireless organizational, management and financial support. It includes the CFB for its ongoing support and for providing folks to help test drive the service. And, it includes our international partner, the Commonwealth Braille and Talking Book Cooperative. Many of you will recognize the name, Gregg Kearney, who was instrumental in helping us to get started. It includes folks like Maryann

Kempthorne, Scott Leslie, Ben Hyman and many others at the B.C. Libraries Cooperative, who worked tirelessly to get the service ready for prime time; these are the people at the pointy end of battle, who all too often are overlooked when it's time to hand out the medals. Folks like me, at the political end, produce a lot of hot air, but it's these folks, who perform where the rubber meets the road, that make reality of blue sky.

And speaking of blue sky, let me conclude with this. I've been speaking lately to international stakeholders, who observe what's happening here in Canada with great interest and confusion. Many can't understand how, in a country with such a small population, there should be two emergent services, NNELS being one. The other, of course, is a more familiar library service, rebranded with a new name. I can only tell them what I've told you: the realities of our situation directed the course we've taken, but that doesn't mean we aren't open to discussion. As long as provincial and territorial governments maintain control of governance and cost, there's no reason why Canada's print-disabled community shouldn't have access to all the existing capacity.

CFB Awards Certificates of Excellence

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) believes that our friends should be recognized and should be treated with appreciation. In acknowledgement of the pioneering work in developing the National Network of Equitable Library Service (NNELS) concept and structure, CFB awarded Certificates of Excellence, which were presented at the CFB 2014 convention by president, Mary Ellen Gabias.

The certificates read:

Certificate of Excellence

For leadership in developing the publicly-run, publicly-funded and publicly-accountable library services for Canadians with print disabilities.

Presented to:

~Allan Carlson, Project Management Specialist, Libraries Branch, Province of B.C.

~Jacqueline Van Dyk, former head of the Libraries Branch and current Director of the North Vancouver Public Library

~Trevor Surgenor, head of the provincial library of Manitoba

~Ben Hyman, Director of the B.C. Libraries Co-op, the entity housing NNELS

~Maryann Kempthorne, Access & Learning Specialist at the Co-op

Thank you for your service in helping to bring about a fully inclusive library system to Canada. We have a long way to go and there are still obstacles, and we'll need to work to continue to see that the spirit this represents is implemented practically, but without all of you, this would not have happened.

Blind People in Charge

Report from the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB)

Delivered by Elizabeth Lalonde, Director, with PTCB staff and program participants at the 'Breaking the Mold' convention of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) May 2014, Bowen Island, B.C.

(transcribed into print from an audio recording)

Editor's note: The Pacific Training Centre for the Blind is a demonstration project in Victoria, B.C. and Nanaimo, B.C.

The Pacific Training Centre for the Blind is a nonprofit service organization, founded and run by blind people; the centre offers cutting-edge blindness skills training, based on the positive, world-renowned model used at the three National Federation of the Blind (NFB) centres in Minnesota, Louisiana and Colorado.

At the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind, project leaders believe in blind people's capabilities and in the limitless possibilities open to them, and adopt a non-custodial approach; it's not about sighted people doing things for the blind, it's about blind people doing things for ourselves. And, it's about blind teachers working with blind students to increase skills and confidence.

Our vision statement:

"Blind people empowering blind people to be employed, independent and free."

As Mary Ellen mentioned, we recently received our first grant from the Disability Without Poverty Network to provide our 'Blind People in Charge' program, a demonstration project that focuses on blind people of working age who are currently receiving the PWD benefit, though all blind people are welcome to join us. (Note: since the convention, we received two additional grants from VanCity and the Greater Victoria Credit Union Legacy Foundation to help us with our program.)

Blind People in Charge offers classes two days a week in Victoria and Nanaimo. The skills taught include learning the basics in Braille, travel skills, computer technology, cooking, job readiness, and most importantly, a positive perspective on blindness.

All teachers and mentors in the program are blind. Some examples of activities we've done so far include: planning and preparing meals, such as honey lime chicken and mash potatoes, stir-fries, peanut butter chocolate squares, cookies, and cornbread; taking several trips using transit and walking to grocery stores to shop independently; going to the mall and the food court, where we carried our own trays and found our own tables; mentoring each other in adaptive technology; working on goal setting, time management, resume writing and budgeting; and researching ways blind people can find work and increase incomes (since so many blind people unfortunately have such low incomes as a result of minimal disability benefits).

At the program we also teach Braille, use of the slate and stylus, labelling and increasing Braille reading speed. Of course, we also teach the essential skill of how to travel independently with the long white cane, which I truly believe is one of the most important basic skills a blind person can have - the ability to move around your environment, when you want to, where you want to.

We give each participant a new long white cane and teach techniques, such as open palm technique, pencil grip, learning to make mental maps of surroundings, learning to go to different places in town and around the area without being limited to exploring, and even getting lost, because that's what it's all about.

We're working towards our goal. It's basically a "taste of", it's not a full training centre; it's a foundational step towards building a much-needed intensive training centre in Canada, because nothing like this exists in this country.

This is from our news release we put out a few months ago when we first received the grant:

“The unemployment rate of blind adults is unacceptably high. We want to improve employment opportunities for people who desperately want to be included in the workforce. The simple truth is that blind people are not helpless. A blind person can do pretty much anything a sighted person can. All they need is the right training and opportunity.

Our goal is a full blindness immersion program, based on the highly successful National Federation of the Blind (NFB) training centres in Minnesota, Louisiana and Colorado, where 80 percent of their graduates find employment or go on to pursue post-secondary education that leads to employment, and where centre graduates earn at least \$11,000 more per year than people who haven't had the opportunity to attend a centre. (stat from the Louisiana Tech Institute on Blindness.)”

I was fortunate to receive training from the Louisiana Center for the Blind, thanks to a scholarship from the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), which gave me that amazing opportunity. I wanted to bring the centre to Canada.

Once we get the full centre going, students will be enrolled in a 9-month immersion program, 5 days a week, 9 o'clock until 5. They'll live in apartments, owned or rented by the centre and they'll travel to the centre every day for the program. The idea is to simulate a working schedule. The program is based on an alternative civil rights model of blindness training called "structured discovery learning", where blind people learn to become fully independent, based on senses other than sight. Students who have some vision wear sleepshades or blindfold, to allow non-visual learning to take place. This approach allows blind people to learn to problem solve, make their own decisions, and have high expectations of themselves and other blind people - basically, take charge of our own lives.

As James Omgig, a prominent NFB blind scholar said:

"A successful blindness skills training centre must instill a belief in its students that blind people are simply normal people who cannot see; and, that the average blind person can live a normal life and can compete on terms of absolute equality with the sighted, if given proper training and opportunity."

I'd like to call on Heidi Propp. Heidi is a participant in our program in Victoria.

Heidi:

I've been a participant since the beginning, January 20, 2014, when the program started. I can't begin to tell you the areas in which the program has impacted my life tremendously. The main area is that it has inspired me to find employment for myself online and it fosters a spirit of entrepreneurship within me. It gives me the belief that I can find employment for myself. And, I did just that. I went online and found that there are quite a few great opportunities to earn some money, and one of them is audio transcription for the deaf. You, basically, turn an audio recording into a plain text document and submit it.

The program has increased my cane skills and my confidence, but more importantly, it has inspired me to make a goal for myself of moving from my parent's home and that is my main dream. The environment in which I'm at doesn't currently allow me to participate in society as a fully-independent individual, so it is my goal to move out from home next year, barring being in Colorado. It is my dream to attend the Colorado Center for the Blind, for myself, but I would love to come back and teach what I've learned to other blind Canadians, because I don't want to see them suffering in poverty and dependence the way I have for the majority of my adult life. The trainers at the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind have fostered independence and the philosophy that anything is possible when you are blind. Thank you.

(Note: Since the convention, Heidi has moved out on her own, achieving her dream and goal to live independently!)

Elizabeth:

Now, I'd like to introduce Erin Lacharity, another program participant in Victoria, who has excelled tremendously in the program. I hope Erin will talk about some of the things she's been doing.

Erin:

I do currently live on my own, and let me tell you, the Centre has increased my confidence tremendously. When I started, I thought I knew about independence. I thought I had it all, and the Centre made me realize that independence is a lifelong journey. It's not an instantaneous "you take a couple of courses in school, you graduate with a degree of independence". It doesn't work that way. You're constantly learning, you're constantly developing, you're constantly growing.

My cane skills have grown tremendously. I love the open palm technique. It's much more relaxed and plus, I won't get carpal tunnel syndrome. It's such a freedom to be able to walk across that tiny little crosswalk in front of my apartment building, go to Save On Foods, go to the customer service desk and ask for assistance with getting my own groceries, and, having the freedom to walk back is golden for me. Also, being able to go to and from the Centre by bus is awesome.

I'd like to thank Danielle Fernandez, as she has really inspired me and many others at the Centre. She's shown us that you can travel safely and independently.

When I told my mom I was crossing three downtown streets the other day, she said, "Be careful," and, "Why aren't you doing it with her?"

I said, "Because I don't have to. I can do this by myself. Yes, I'll be careful and there's lots of people downtown."

I crossed the street with a bunch of people, but I didn't go sighted guide. I felt a little panicky because I crossed the street fast, but yes, it was downtown and I made it to the number 11 bus stop to go to dragon boat practise.

Cooking skills, I still feel that I need to practise. The Centre is absolutely golden and I'm so proud that we have one in Victoria, B.C., Canada. Yah!

Elizabeth:

Aedan Staddon is a representative from our Nanaimo program which has been doing tremendous work. Aedan is also an amazing networker, and he's been bringing people to the program. Thank you Aedan.

Aedan:

The Centre in the few months I've been going there, has helped me to focus the large void of impossibilities I've seen in solving life problems into manageable rivers that I can step across.

I found the biggest advantage of being at the Centre is a like-minded, smart group of blind people to help me solve problems - so I can ask questions - "How do I tell meat is rare, medium or well-done when my sense of smell could be described as lacking?" And, there are other things, that people have different blind-friendly ideas about. I'm really glad that we have such a like-minded group in our city and I'd like to see more grow in other areas.

I want to extend a heartfelt thanks to everybody involved in the formation and the implementation of the Centre, from Elizabeth, to Donna, to Ashley, and say how everyone's unique information and intelligence have made this project the wonder it is today.

Elizabeth:

Now, Sky Mundell will tell about some of the things he's been doing.

Sky:

I've been teaching technology at the Centre. I've been cooking meals, such as macaroni and cheese. I've cooked desserts, such as peanut butter squares. But, most of all, I've learned that it is OK and respectable to be blind.

Elizabeth:

Sky has been practising walking without sighted guide and with his cane on his own. And also, thank you to Sky for recording this convention.

And now, this is Miriam Youssefi who's in our Victoria program.

Miriam:

I've learned a lot from the program and learned a lot from all of you. One of the biggest things for me has been confidence building. It seems to go hand-in-hand with motivation. For me, my blindness hasn't been the only challenge. I've had other challenges, physical challenges and I think that blindness has been, in part, playing into it. I'm learning that, for example, I don't have to look at my future to be in a wheelchair, I could actually exercise and hope that I can gain some employment. I'm 45 now. I live by myself. I've learned a lot from all of you and thank you.

Elizabeth:

I'd like to reiterate something Aedan said, that there were a lot of people involved in the formation of the Pacific Training Centre, and I want to thank everybody for your support. It's been a dream for a long time of mine. I feel it is so important to start this, to get going in Canada.

I want to introduce Danielle Fernandez, our wonderful staff person who trained with me at the Louisiana Center for the Blind and is a fellow graduate of that Center. She is here to share her tremendous independence and spirit with us.

Danielle:

I was living in Louisiana and going to Louisiana Tech after I went through training (at Louisiana Center for the Blind). I was trying to find myself, trying to figure out what I wanted to do, because I felt so alive in myself. I hadn't felt like that before - "I can do anything - I just got to figure out what it is!"

I was soul-searching and realized after two years of college, I'm not that big of a school person. Then I thought, "Maybe, I'll do something else." So, I went to a hospitality centre, the Statler Center, for two and a half months, and realized that's my thing! I love working with people, and while I was looking for jobs, I came across the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind's posting for a mobility instructor and it hit me, "I want to do that, because I love that!"

I worked with kids every summer for the last four years, teaching them cane travel and home economics, and pretty much everything under the sun. So, I thought it would be awesome to get the job with the Pacific Training Centre.

I just made the transfer. Not a lot of people are gonna just drop everything and move to Canada. That was a big thing and, I thought, "It's OK, because I needed a change of scenery and I would love to go out of the country and teach other blind people and educate them and help them lead long and fulfilling lives, because what the Louisiana

Center did for me, I want to do for other people."

I came here and just went right into it. I've worked with Heidi, and Erin, and Sky, and Miriam, and even Aedan - I've worked with all of them at different times since I've been here and to see the change, it's really great.

I think the one I've seen the most in right now, just because I've worked with her a lot, is Erin. I'm going to get a little teary - because, Erin, reminds me of me. That's why it touches me so much, because seeing her want to really get out - she's 34 - she's older than I am - and, to see the changes and how she really wanted to just get out there and accomplish stuff. Erin is just like, "I'm gonna do it. I don't care what you say, I'm gonna do it."

We worked really hard. We worked three hours downtown to really make sure she can get on that bus and she wouldn't get lost, so she could go to her dragon boat racing and feel accomplished. I want that for her. And, I would love for her to go to whichever training centre she wants to go to in the States, but right now she's here, and if I can give her something that's going to help her. if she can never go to one of those (U.S. training Centres), I want her to get it at the Pacific Training Centre, regardless. She has persevered to a whole other level, like she said, she's now taking the bus to and from the Centre. Before, she was just taking HandyDart. She didn't even take the bus at all. And so, to do that, in what, a month?!

Now, Heidi is a beautiful speaker, and so is Erin, and she is like a computer. When we go out on travel, I can't even explain, it's like, "Where are you, Heidi?"

"I'm north and..."

I'm like, "Wow, do you really need to go to a training centre?"

Heidi is working on her street crossings, we've worked really hard on those, and she's definitely accomplishing a lot. Her cane skills are awesome and I'm so proud of all the students.

Aedan, the other day, right before we came to convention, we worked on finding the library, and we totally did structured discovery. We didn't really know where we were going. I mean, we looked up some directions, but really, does that give you the whole effect of how to get there? Not really, because you still have to find the door, right?

So, we decided, we're going to walk from the 710 Club all the way to the library. And so, we walked and we discovered and we talked and every time we would cross a street we would talk about: "What did we just do? Do you remember certain clues that we passed? Are there auditory clues? Tactile clues? Anything that's going to give you a direction or something to remind you how you can come back?- How you can find your way?" You know, he did awesome. And, that's what we want for every blind person in

Canada and hopefully, we can get more people involved. We just have to spread the word.

Elizabeth:

This is why I do what I do. It's the moments like this, it's the moments I'm actually out with somebody and I really feel that there's been some learning taking place and someone feels that they - like, when Erin called me when she got to dragon boating and said, "I did it! I did it! I went on the buses and I did it!" That's why I do this.

I'd like to introduce Ashley Charlton, who is the facilitator of the Nanaimo Blind People in Charge program and Ashley is also dealing with vision loss herself and I know this journey of empowering others has been tremendous and I'm very grateful.

Ashley:

Elizabeth has been dreaming about the Pacific Training Centre for a really long time.

I have been an angry victim for most of my life, very angry. When I first met Elizabeth, I was so excited there was going to be a chance that I could do something with this anger. I always feel like I just need to do something, that I can't just sit there, I'd just go crazy. And slowly, over the past year, part of that anger has started to fall away.

Back in January, Elizabeth approached me and asked if I would step up to the plate for the Pacific Training Centre for Nanaimo. And, I thought she was crazy.

I have ten years of human services experience with work; I've done community social service; house co-ordinator at a sexual assault support centre; but, I was not prepared to deal with me - because, a lot of this is a part of you, when you're really living it, you know. And then, you're trying to model and create opportunities for people, and you're stuck with yourself in creating those opportunities for yourself.

Going back to that angry victim thing, I think that one of the smartest people that ever lived was Dr. Seuss. I think he just says it like nobody else, and he once said:

"I'm afraid that some times
you'll play lonely games too.
Games you can't win
'cause you'll play against you."

So, if anybody in this room has sat in a room full of people who are complaining and stressed out and frustrated about organizations and people that are shafting them - and, then everybody walks out of the room and they do nothing. That was my whole

life. I played that victim and I was angry and I was the loudest person in the room, and I was, like, "I hate this and I hate that and I'm so angry," - and, I never did anything.

And again, when it comes to me as a facilitator, I haven't any formal training. When I was growing up, I had a similar story as Elizabeth. I wasn't taught any meaningful blindness skills. I was always told, "You've got to be the most sighted you can possibly appear to be." And it caused me a lot of stress and a lot of strain.

And so, I come to the program - I have this great idea for the plan, "OK, we're going to work on this today or that today," and it always goes out the window, because I have so many fantastic program participants, and once you step back and you stop being that kind of person that teaches things, that we have all experienced growing up, "Do it this way, do it that way." If we just let that dialogue happen and let people begin to interact, just step right back out of the equation as an educator and you just encourage people, things happen. Things really happen.

As much as everybody here has gone up (to speak) and had these tremendous transformative experiences in the program, but, when you are a facilitator and you're really receptive, you're transformed as well!

Elizabeth:

Thank you so much, Ashley. That's, wow. Thank you, everybody, for speaking on the panel today, thank you for sharing in the experiences of our wonderful Centre that "can do it"!

Johnny Tai – Martial Artist

By Johnny Tai

*Speech delivered at the 'Breaking the Mold' Convention
Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)
May 2014, Bowen Island, B.C.*

(Transcribed into print from an audio recording)

Editor's note: Johnny is a very interesting and inspiring speaker and he kept us laughing with a lot of good humour. Afterwards, he gave demonstrations on self-defense and Martial Art.

Some of you probably know me already and some of you don't. My name is Johnny Tai. I'm based out of Richmond, B.C. During the day, I'm an interpersonal social

relations specialist, which is to say, I'm a counsellor that specializes in people's relationship within themselves and with their surrounding, with their society. And, during evening, I take off my work clothes, and I'm a fighter and a Martial Artist and I teach self-defense. So, in a simpler term, during the day I try to make people not kill each other, and in the evening I teach them to kill each other!

Recently, I've had the misfortune of having my name splashed all over 3 or 4 newspapers because of the Tiger Balm International Martial Arts Tournament that I took part in. So today, I'm here mainly through that because my notoriety took a sudden boost!

Not too many people travel with their own cameraman, so it makes me feel pretty special. You may wonder why I have my own cameraman with me. It's because, aside from my regular two jobs, I now also am lead actor or subject for a documentary with RhinoGrade Productions. Basically, they will be producing a series of multi-media platform films. Right now, I think the plan for the next two years is that they're going to do seven biographical films about me, covering different factors of my life.

I have no idea how they're going to go about and market these films because, usually this is done for someone who's already famous, such as Jackie Chan or Bruce Lee, usually someone already dead!

Let me talk a little bit about how I first got involved with the whole filming and movie and stuff like that. A couple of years ago, I started experimenting with taking videos of my surroundings using my cell phone. One thing I always felt in my life is that, for sighted people, there's this very cool thing they can use to keep memories alive - where they go, what they said, who did what. They can take pictures; they can take video. And, ten or twenty years later, they can take it out and show someone, "Hey, this is what I did twenty years ago....I was married, I was....." Stuff like that.

I always say, it's such a regrettable thing that a lot of us who are blind, we don't have such a way to keep life's memories alive, other than, maybe, tape recording or just in our head. While that is all pretty good that we can record, but you're not going to be able to show that to your child, your grandchild. They're never going to have any idea of what they're hearing.

So, I thought, "Why can't I get a video camera?" And, my cell phone just happened to have one. "Why can't I just turn around while I'm doing something cool, like Martial Arts practise or tournament and different ridiculous ventures that I get into, and see how that goes?"

The beginning products were really horrendous. I didn't know what angle to shoot at and stuff like that. And so, through comments I got from friends saying, "Oh, the picture is sideways," I learned to adjust for that. And then, just as I started doing that, I saw this ad by RhinoGrade Productions, that they wanted volunteers - they wanted visually-impaired volunteers to do some kind of documentary.

At the time, it was a really rough idea. They didn't really know what they were going to do. They just wanted to talk to some blind volunteers and see what would come of it.

So, I thought, "What the heck. I kind of want to learn more about filming, so it's a great chance for me to talk to some professionals." We started talking and exchanging ideas, and next thing I knew, they outfitted me with a pair of sunglasses with a high-definition video camera mounted to it. They said, "We're interested to know – go through your daily life, and if you would, just film with these, rather than the cell phone, and these will, basically, discover, they'll see whatever you are facing."

And, from that, it was, basically, something I really already wanted to do, so it was like a great opportunity. I started taking videos like crazy – experimented with cooking shows and little ideas. Some visually-impaired people had been asking me if I can produce self-defense videos accessible - because, there are a lot of self-defense videos you can get on YouTube nowadays, but most of them, unless you already know what they're about, you have no idea what's going on.

So, I started experimenting with that and took tons and tons of video – just everyday - go to work, after work, recreation, and I even went out of my way to come up with weird video ideas. For example, one day, I was walking along the sidewalk, and where I was there was a big, huge concrete pillar in front of me. I was thinking, "Why don't I just pretend I was using bad cane techniques and almost walk into this. Like, this ought to be really, really weird on the video." So, I just walked at my usual fast speed and almost didn't stop myself in time.

This year, they suddenly decided they want to do these documentaries solely focused on me. And then, they said they wanted to pay me – which was a definite bonus! I said to them, "When I first signed on, I never thought that I was going to get paid, but I'm not going to say no to it!"

A while ago, one of you mentioned that to get a job you have to go the distance, you have to go above what you want to do, and you have to really be enthusiastic. And this, pretty much proves that thought.

Now that that's out of the way, I want to go back to the reason I got invited here: to talk more about my experience with self-defense, teaching Martial Arts, that kind of stuff.

I don't know how many of you have heard of the Tiger Balm International Martial Arts Tournament. It's a totally sighted Martial Arts tournament, held internationally. It was held here in March in Vancouver. Two weeks before the tournament, I heard about it through a friend at a Martial Arts studio I teach and practise at, and I thought to myself, "I wonder if they would let me sign on, if they would let me join?"

So, I phoned the organizer and said, "I'm a practising Martial Artist and I happen to be totally blind, and I wonder if there'll be any problem if I join the competition?" And, they

actually said to me, "Well, we're not sure. We have to have several meetings before we can let you know."

So, I waited for their call. Finally, after a whole day, they called me back, "We had meetings about this, and ya sure, if you want, you can join." They didn't really sound all that convinced. They, basically, thought, "OK, if a blind guy is crazy enough to come and get his ass kicked."

This comes to one other point. Sometimes, it's understandable when sighted people out there might underestimate us. It's understandable because they don't have a lot of experience with us, but, sometimes we underestimate ourselves, sometimes we say, "Oh, I probably can't do it." So, you don't do something and then you let an opportunity slip past. In this case, I almost did that. I was thinking, "Wow, international level of competition was....." Granted, I've been fighting with sighted people all my martial art career. This is just one huge step forward. I almost didn't go for it.

In the end, why I decided to go for it, I said to myself, "Even if I lost, I will probably be the first blind martial artist to ever do this, and I wanted to inspire other blind martial artists or other visually-impaired people who might, one day, try self-defense and martial arts, and to let them know that it can be done."

So, I went in with the mindset that I'm probably going to end up in the hospital. Well, I mean, even during my own practise, injuries happen quite often, so getting hurt is really nothing new. In this case, you can say, I went in with the mindset of a martyr! I thought, "Even if I lose, other blind people will see me on the news and learn from the example. That would be cool."

And then, I went into competition and I ended up getting the gold medal in self-defense. I was very, very surprised, and on top of that, I later found out that on my score sheet, I obtained the highest score of all the fighters in the competition.

When I took that gold medal and took the photo with the referee, the referee gave me a letter. I didn't think much of it. I thought it was just a piece of paper. I thought it's, maybe, a certification to thank me for competing....yada, yada, yada.

That night, I went out for a celebratory drink with a friend, and I told him I got a piece of paper from the referee. And, he said, "Hey, let me see it." He read the paper and said, "Did you know you just got qualified to fight on Team Canada for the World Tournament?"

So, that means I'm now going to be preparing for this upcoming September World Tournament, which is going to be held here in Richmond. It is a sanctioned Olympic event. I kind of skipped the whole Paralympics thing and went directly to the Olympics.

So, let's backtrack a bit. How did I get into this whole Martial Arts, self-defense thing?

When I first got into Martial Arts I was seven and a half or eight years old. I didn't like it. My parents didn't give me a choice. I got dragged kicking and screaming into it.

Basically, I lost my sight and half of my hearing when I was three, due to the Stevens Johnson Syndrome. And, because of this disease, I was left a very small, very weak kid. And, going to school - I went to public school - I was constantly getting picked on, constantly getting in fights. Even at home, my brothers would pick on me!

My father finally decided, "OK, enough is enough. You embarrass the family. We have to find a way to toughen you up." So, he hired my first instructor, who was in the discipline of Taekwondo and he happened to be the silver medalist of the Asian Taekwondo Association. We hired him for private lessons and he, basically, taught me how to be strong, get me in shape, and all that stuff.

As a child, I didn't understand that. As a child, I thought I was being tortured for no reason. To a lot of people here, torture might seem a strong word, but here in North America, we're so used to the nice training conditions – padded floor, padded gloves, padded weapons.

When I was trained then, I was trained in Taiwan. My first training day was mostly the instructor holding me by the hand and dragging me around the parking lot, barefoot. And, we ran until both of my feet were just totally skinned off. I couldn't go to school for three days! And, three days later, continued!

After that, I got into all the martial arts – Judo, Muay Thai, Kickboxing..... When I was 14, I trained with the Taiwanese military for nine months. Then, I came here to Canada and tried out fencing and Karate. Right now, I'm an instructor in karate self-defense, Samurai karate and I'm also a member of the local chapter of Krav Maga Force, which is a special force military discipline. Used in Israel, Krav Maga was developed specifically to fight terrorists. I also teach that in my free time.

When did I really start getting into Martial Arts? I think, it was not until I was 13 or 14, when I really understood that if I don't ever want to get picked on, I have to be able to project that aura. I have to be able to say, "I'm not afraid of you." I have to be able to back myself up.

A lot of people think that self-defense Martial Arts means you learn to beat someone up. But, that's not it. Real self-defense is mostly around how to not get into conflict, how to extract yourself from conflict, and how to resolve conflict if it does have to happen.

I want to tell you a little story that my sparring partner told me. He said when he was little, he used to get bullied by this big kid at his school. Every school had a big, fat kid! He used to get his lunch money taken away, get pushed from behind, all that stuff. Then, he went home and told his Dad, "Dad, the kid keeps picking on me in school.

Can you go and deal with it?" Dad said, "No, but I can show you how to deal with it." He said, "OK, cool, how do I deal with it?" His Dad said, "Next time the bully comes or even looks at you the wrong way, just take your hand and wack him over the nose gently. You don't have to do it hard, you don't have to hurt him, just wack him hard enough to hurt a little." "OK, cool."

Next day he went to school, the bully came over, "Hey, give me your money." He took his hand. Wack! The bully kind of looked at him, and then beat the heck out of him. So, at the end of the day, he went back home, "Dad, it didn't work." His Dad said, "I knew it, but just do that again tomorrow."

Next day, same thing, "Give me your money." Wack! He beat the heck out of him again. He went home, "Dad, look at me, I'm all black and blue because of you." Dad said, "No, no, you need to do it again tomorrow." He said, "Really?"

Next day, the bully came over, "Hey, what's up?" Wack! And, beats the crap out of him again. And, that happened to be Friday. He went home, he said, "Dad, I don't care what you say, I'm not going to do that again. I'm not going to do that anymore. You don't know what you're talking about."

He went back to school Monday – the bully never even looked his way again. From that last Friday, the bully never bothered him again. He went home, "Hey, Dad, he left me alone!" His Dad said, "Ya, because he finally learned that he has a choice. He either bothers you and gets wacked on the nose, or he leaves you alone."

So, that's, basically, what self-defense is about. You have to be able to project an impression that you know how to protect yourself, you know how to handle yourself. And, I'm not just talking about fighting. This is about anything – accident, fire, getting lost....

Why should blind people learn Martial Arts or self-defense? Because it gets you out of the victim mode. When you no longer feel that you're a victim or feel that you're going to be victimized, then you will not be a victim. And, this will translate to people not seeing you as a victim. And, to be honest, if you're an employer, you wouldn't want to hire someone who's always a victim. If you're going to pay me \$20, you'd rather hire a winner. You wouldn't want to hire a victim. So, the benefits of self-defense are not just about fighting, although that's a cool part, I'll admit that. It's about how you handle yourself in public, how you interact with your friends. If you're always nervous, if you're always scared, then you'll always run into trouble, because there's always people out there who will look for the easy prey, people who will intimidate you, and try to get you to do what they want.

And, not just bad people. I'm sure some of you will have experienced your friends doing that to you. Your friends will unknowingly, or knowingly, say things like, "If you do this or if you do that again, I'll not help you read your document" or "I will not drive you

home.” If you can stand up and say, “Well, that's OK, I can make my own way home,” then you take that away from them. It makes the friendship balanced. It makes the friendship equal. It puts you on an equal footing.

For my closing statement, I want to tell you that before I competed in the Tiger Balm tournament, just a month before, I had just recovered from a serious ankle injury. I was out of action for a whole month – couldn't go to work, couldn't train, and that month I actually hit a bit of a depression, because I had read somewhere that once you hurt your ankle badly, it will never recover, you'll never be one hundred percent. And, I thought, “OK, that's it. I'm never going to be one hundred percent again. I'm never going to be as good as before.”

While I was feeling sorry for myself and stayed home, I had nothing to do. So, I rewatched all the Rocky films. I don't know how many of you remember the Rocky films, but they're immensely inspiring, especially when you're an injured martial artist. Especially, the last film, Rocky 6, called Rocky Balboa. Basically, Rocky, now 70 years old, an old man, wants to get back into boxing, have one last fight of his life. And, there's something he said in this film that resonates deeply within my personality. So, my closing statement, because I'm sure a lot of you will have felt that way, and he put it more eloquently than I ever could. It's quite a mouthful, so I hope I don't mangle it too badly.

Rocky Balboa, when addressing the jury who just refused his boxing licence because of his age, he said to them before he walked out of the door, “It is your right to listen to your gut. It ain't nobody's right to say no to you, especially when you've earned the right to be where you want to be and do what you want to do.”

We need to feel that way when we get rejected, when we feel someone discriminates against us. Just keep that in mind - as long as you've earned the right, nobody can tell you no. Thank you.



Johnny Tai shows off his gold medal won at the 2014 Tiger Balm International competition.

*Photo Courtesy of
Richmond News*

Getting a Grip on Self-Defense

Blind Richmondite Wins Gold

By Dennis Page / Special To The News

Excerpt reprinted with permission of Richmond News. The article can be seen at: <http://www.richmond-news.com/news/getting-a-grip-on-self-defense-1.912149>

Johnny Tai may not see it shine, but his skill in self-defense martial arts has won him gold at the 2014 Tiger Balm Internationals.

Determined not to let his blindness hold him back, Richmondite Tai, who studies the art of Krav Maga, competed against sighted opponents and came away a champion.

Losing his vision at a young age, Tai's family believed he would be behind his peers in self-confidence, and enrolled him in various sports, but it was martial arts that motivated Tai.

"Martial arts is a big part of my life. It gives me a reason to get active everyday, and it is something that I can use as motivation," said Tai.

Although Tai doesn't consider himself a role model, he does hope he can inspire other blind people to not let their lack of vision leave them feeling helpless.



Johnny Tai in action during the Tiger Balm International Self-Defense tournament.

Photo Courtesy of Richmond News

Because of his blindness, Tai initially had a hard time finding a gym where he could train in martial arts. Today, more options are available, such as Richmond's Hit and Run Self Defense.

The program, run by partners James Chartier and Louisa Weizmann, is based on cooperation and letting the participants learn at their own pace. It can also be tailored to suit people with physical barriers, such as wheelchairs and other limitations.

"There are people here from eight-years-old to 68, and they all love it," said sensei Weizmann.

The program stresses a proactive approach to avoid falling victim, starting with the unsaid physical cues.

According to the instructors, the first thing students develop is a stronger sense of confidence, stemming from the knowledge that they're more prepared to deal with an unexpected encounter.

Unlike traditional martial arts training, there's no rigid discipline with this group, and it encourages people of all physical levels to have fun and participate.

Putting the idea that anyone can do this to the test, this reporter had sensei's Weizmann and Chartier demonstrate.

As a writer, my physical activity level is not as high as it could be, and with no knowledge of martial arts, I was hesitant to try it out.

Within a few moments, that hesitation turned to enjoyment as I was quickly shown how to avoid being taken down, how to escape different grapples, how to effectively disarm someone, and was given a preview of just how quickly I could incapacitate an assailant.

Instructors Weizmann and Chartier stress the program is not strength-based, rather it is all technique and is suitable for men, women and children.

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Deaf-Blind Woman Advocates for Herself

by Thelma Fayle

Editor's note: Thelma is a strong supporting member of the CFB. She is especially concerned with issues related to the lack of proper blindness skills rehabilitation training in Canada. She and Daryl Jones (next article) travelled to New York in April. One of their trip highlights was touring and learning about the Helen Keller National Center for the deaf-blind.

When Ann Wasserman was six years old, and got short-changed at a corner store in her New Jersey neighbourhood while buying a soda, her father (a tennis pro) made her go back in the store – by herself – and ask for the right change. Blind or not, no kid of his was going to get ripped off like that.

When she took up ice-skating as a teenager, her father taught her how to relax on impact when she fell. She fell a fair bit, but as a result of her father's guidance, she rarely got hurt doing the thing she loved to do.

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When she graduated from university and went job-hunting, her hard-headed father insisted that she not take a job that would pay any less than what her friends were being offered. Ann went on to do her Masters in Special Education at Columbia University and spent a career she loved, teaching in the public school system.

Ann has been visiting Canada every summer for the last twenty years of her retirement. She did her research and chose Victoria B.C. because she thought it looked like a fun place that she could easily manage.

She never leaves things to chance and started her planning by memorizing the city map. Today she loves to sail, swim, bus and walk around the town she loves for its accessibility. From May till September she enjoys concerts, restaurants, festivals – you name it and chances are she has done it in Victoria where she has a wide circle of old friends.

“Spending summers in Victoria feels like paradise to me,” she says. “Freedom is a key component of what the city has to offer people with disabilities. What I enjoy most, aside from the many activities in Victoria, is my freedom and independence. In the States I have to depend on family and friends to take me anywhere. I don't feel disabled in Victoria. The sidewalks are smooth and un-cracked and well-maintained, and my guide dog and I can just about fly together with all of the other disabled people with wheelchairs, walkers and canes. The streets of Victoria are for everybody.”

“Once you experience freedom, would you ever give it up?” asks Ann.

She reads more fiction and non-fiction than anyone I know, thanks to a brilliantly accessible system the public Library of Congress offers to its blind U.S. citizens. She has probably read 3-4 books a week for the past 50 years.

Suddenly, when Ann turned 72, she started to rapidly lose her hearing. Terror came into my friend's voice. I could hear it when we would chat on the phone when she was back home in New Jersey. The growing timidity was strange and her effervescence was diminishing. The prognosis was not good and a long-shot surgery was suggested. Her doctor recommended a cochlear implant for her deafness.

Ann is a firm believer in trying things and, thanks to her father, an even firmer believer in reaching out to get her needs met. She does not want to become 'dependent' on others.

What would she do if she could no longer 'read' the audiobooks that she consumed by the dozens every month, she wondered. Her Braille skills are rusty. Would deafness coupled with her manageable blindness cause the end of freedom in her life?

She faced the issues head-on and as usual, did her research. She mulled the risks for a few months and even though she was afraid of the surgery, she decided to have it.

Ann became the poster child for cochlear implants in seniors. It was a successful surgery and she regained some of her hearing but still had to cope with some deaf-blind issues.

She learned about the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) in New York and visited

the residential training facility, exclusively for deaf-blind adults. She wanted to check it out before making a commitment to register for a program. She had no intention of wasting her time with “some flimsy agenda”.

She interviewed the HKNC instructors, toured the grounds and saw potential value in the possibility of picking up new deaf-blind skills. She decided to attend a five-week program.

She phoned friends in Victoria to give regular updates on the program. Within a week I heard the return of Ann's resilient strength and character in her voice.

I was so impressed by what she told me about the HKNC, that I arranged to visit and tour the center and interview the people who run the place. I wanted to understand more about the dynamics of the organization that returned my old friend's lifelong joie de vivre.

Helen Keller National Center

By Daryl Jones

Editor's note: Daryl is a strong supporting member of the CFB. He is especially concerned with issues related to the lack of proper blindness skills rehabilitation training in Canada. He and Thelma Fayle (previous article) travelled to New York in April. One of their trip highlights was touring and learning about the Helen Keller National Center for the deaf-blind.



Photo Credit: Daryl Jones

Last April my partner and I were visiting New York and had an opportunity to tour the Helen Keller National Center, a residential training facility for deaf-blind youth and adults located on the north shore of Long Island. Thelma arranged for the tour, as she

wanted to write a story about the positive impact that the Center had on a friend of ours. I tagged along to take a few photos and to learn something about the Center.

There is nothing like the Center in Canada and I was impressed by their focus on empowering deaf-blind individuals through use of adaptive technology and independence training. Therefore, I thought that the readers of *The Blind Canadian* might like to hear a little about the Center. With this in mind, and in no particular order, the following are a few of my personal highlights of our visit to the Helen Keller National Center.

1) Location and Facilities

As we approached the Center the first thing that struck me was the neighbourhood. Specifically, we were driving through a high-end residential community with large properties, grand houses, and meticulously manicured gardens. The taxi driver explained that this was a highly desirable area in New York as it was only a 45-minute train ride to downtown Manhattan, even in the morning rush.

I expressed some surprise that the Center would be located in such an expensive residential area and the driver indicated that initially there had been some resistance from nearby residences. However, he quickly added that the opposition was short-lived and now there was strong local support. In fact, he said that the community felt a strong sense of pride about the work being done at the Center.

Later we would learn that the Helen Keller National Center is located on 25 acres of the Sands Point Preserve, a very beautiful and tranquil setting. There were a number of buildings clustered together, one of which was a student dormitory. It was designed like a typical college dorm, with two people to a room, each with their own desks and beds and a shared bathroom. There was also a cafeteria and lounges in the students' residence. Throughout the complex there were tactile indicators to help the students navigate. For example, there were strips along the floor of the cafeteria to help identify the bins for their dirty dishes and brick walls as they approached an outside door.

The training facilities were in the administrative building and included classes in technology, independence training, and art. In terms of recreational facilities, the Center has a gym, a track, a dog run and there is a swimming pool about four blocks away. There is a sensory garden and green house for students interested in horticulture or landscaping.

There is a simulated independent living space, which enables an individual to live in an apartment setting as though they were living independently. While support is available if it is ever needed, the residents are expected to clean their own space as well as do their own cooking and laundry.

There was also a separate residence for teachers, who come to the Center from

different states or regional centers in order to learn how they can better teach and/or interpret for the deaf-blind when they return home. There also was a video conferencing auditorium, again to help instructors and educators based in the regional offices.

The Center also operates a near-by group home called Destiny Home for deaf-blind individuals who are also developmentally disabled. Currently, five people live there in two separate apartments. We were told proudly that all of the current residents are employed, live independently and are active participants in their local community.

Finally, there is also an “Apartment in the Mainstream” located several blocks away. There is no staff on site but there is a call system if help is ever needed. The intent is to ensure that the graduating student is able and comfortable in living on his or her own.

2) Individualistic Approach to Independence Training

Staff members recognize that the students are adults who are of different ages, possess different abilities, and have different objectives for their training. As a result, they do not follow a prescribed one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, the Center's programs are tailored to help each student achieve his or her personal goals and objectives. For example, this might be preparing the student to live independently,

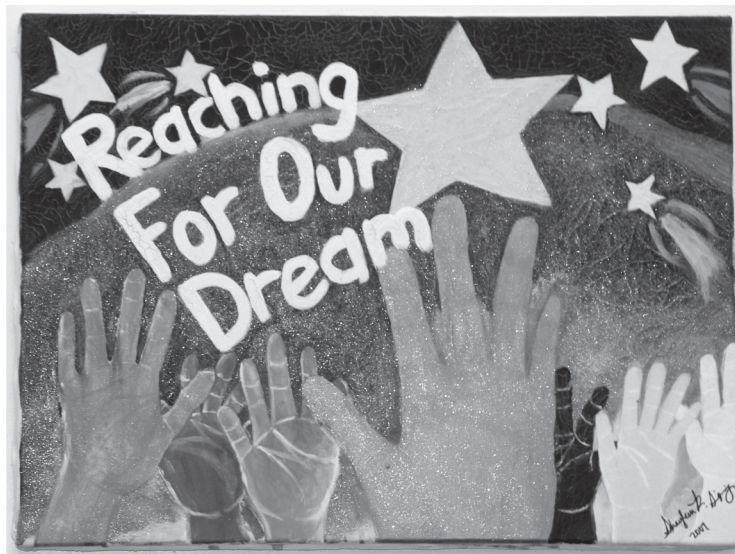


Photo Credit: Daryl Jones

helping them get ready to attend college, or exploring career opportunities. The philosophy of focusing on the needs of the individual is reflected in the Center's corporate mission statement, which is “...to enable each person who is deaf-blind to live, work, and thrive in their community of choice.”

The individualistic approach to training means that some students may be at the Center for a few weeks whereas others might be there for a year or even longer.

Training occurs 24/7 and includes Braille, vocational skills training, adaptive technology, computer skills, socialization skills, mental health, medical services, and independence training. There are both on and off campus activities organized for the students. There is also a strong focus on finding gainful employment.

Although the Center encourages the students to capitalize on whatever sight or hearing they may possess, staff also help them prepare for longer-term issues. For example, if a student's medical prognosis is that they will likely lose more of their vision in the future, then they would be encouraged to use sleepshades during training. However, this will only occur if he or she is receptive to the idea.

One thing that impressed me was the Center's willingness to work co-operatively and share its teaching techniques and experience with their international counterparts. For example, while we were there, there was an observer from Japan, who came to learn about the Center and to adapt their teaching techniques for the deaf-blind in Japan. Following his stay, he was planning to go to Europe and study their teaching methods. We were advised that a delegation from Norway had been there the previous month and were returning in June in order to demonstrate a new system of communications they are developing called Haptics.

3) Funding

We were told that prior to the 1960s, there was very little formal education provided for the deaf-blind in the U.S. Rather, they were generally considered to be “uneducable” and, more often than not, were put into services for the mentally handicapped. However, a rubella epidemic during the 1960s led to a significant increase in the number of deaf-blind people and increased pressure on governments to provide skills training for individuals having dual sensory impairments.

The idea of establishing a national training center specifically for the deaf-blind was proposed by Industrial Lighthouse for the Blind and was authorized by an act of Congress in 1967. The Center's legislative mandate is to provide services and training for deaf-blind individuals as defined by the Helen Keller Act. In addition to the national training headquarters in New York, the Center also operates 10 regional offices as well as working with many state and private agencies. As a national training center, the federal government pays 80% of the costs. The remaining 20% comes from grants, charitable contributions, and fees charged to the individual states that send the students.

Receiving most of its funding from government means that the Center can focus its resources on providing services for the deaf-blind, and teaching the teachers of the deaf-blind, rather than creating, operating, and feeding a fund-raising bureaucracy. However, like many social agencies, the Center's funding is not keeping pace with the demand for its services, which undoubtedly will continue to increase with an aging population.

4) Staff

Regardless of the field of endeavor, an organization's success ultimately depends upon the quality and dedication of its staff. Obviously, a four-hour tour and conversations with half a dozen staff members, does not qualify me to critique the quality of the staff or the delivery of their training services. However, several things stood out about the staff members that we did meet. First of all, many of them started as volunteers and had long histories with the organization. In fact, it was not uncommon to hear a staff member say that they had been working at the Center for 25 years or longer. However, despite having long careers, it was also quite apparent that they continued to feel a genuine passion for the work they are doing.

Not surprisingly, some of the instructors and administrators were also deaf-blind. In fact, in looking at a pair working with iPhones and Braille readers in the technology lab, neither Thelma nor I could determine who was the student and who was the teacher.

The most enthusiastic staff member we encountered was a young fellow named Don. He had been deaf for most of his life, although much of his hearing has now been restored as a result of cochlear implants. He told us that the Center has two missions. The first was the training of the deaf-blind while the second was educating the general population about the skills of the deaf-blind.

Obviously, educating the general public regarding the abilities of deaf-blind individuals is no small undertaking, especially since most people have never encountered such a person. As a result, their only point of reference is to imagine themselves as being deaf and blind and all that they can see are the challenges and obstacles, not the potential or possibilities. Fortunately, the Center's staff believe that the deaf-blind can accomplish anything they want, provided they have the appropriate training and adaptive technologies.

Actually, Don's comment about educating the general public caused me to think back to the earlier statement made by our cab driver. You may recall that I mentioned that he said that the community "felt a strong sense of pride" about the work being done by the Center. I found his wording a little perplexing at the time, but in hindsight, it would not surprise me if this pride came from the fact that the students have regular outings in the local community. In addition, the Center works with about 70 local employers to help its students get some practical work experience. I believe that these interactions with local residents not only helped to dispel misconceptions about the abilities of the deaf-blind, but also enabled the community to feel that they are part of the training process.

As we drove away from the Center, I reflected upon the stark contrast between what we had just seen at the Center and the poor level of independence training provided for blind Canadians. While the differences between the two countries are likely attributable to a variety of factors, I believe that a key reason why skills training for the

blind in Canada has not evolved like it has in the U.S. has been a lack of competition. Specifically, in the United States, blind consumers have several options in terms of their independence training. They can go to centers run by individual states (e.g., Commissions for the Blind), or to federally sponsored programs, such as the Helen Keller Nation Center, or private training facilities which receive public funding but are managed and run by NGOs, such as the National Federation of the Blind. While the onus is on the individual to do the necessary research and due diligence to determine their best option, they have choices and I believe that competition among these training organizations has meant that they have become more attentive and responsive to the needs and desires of their clientele. Unfortunately, for most blind Canadians, the CNIB is their only option for independence training and with its monopoly there has been little need or impetus for that organization to change its paternalistic approach and attitude towards independence training.

A New Ham: Desire, Focus and Success

By Glenn Lindsey, VE7GRQ

Reprinted with permission of 'The Canadian Amateur' magazine, of Canada's National Amateur Radio Society, July-August 2014.

From the Blind Canadian editor: Heidi is Secretary of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB). Congratulations, Heidi, for earning your amateur (ham) radio licence!



Heidi and her classmates. At left: Peter Cross, VA7PTR. At right: Andy Woodsworth, VE7VAW

The students in the 2014 Radio Amateur course run by the Westcoast Amateur Radio Association (WARA) anxiously waited for their Monday night class to begin. Last week's lesson dealt with resistors; but capacitors and inductors were on the learning agenda for tonight's class. The atmosphere was electric.

A cell phone rang, and a young woman (Heidi Propp) sitting at a front desk scrambled about in her purse searching for the squawking intruder. It was a call from a seasoned Radio Amateur asking Heidi whether she would like to learn about working local VHF,

and perhaps some HF QRP. She was delighted to receive the call, but she was concerned. After all, she was blind. How would she do?

Heidi was born in Victoria in 1977, and lives in the municipality of Colwood, British Columbia. In September 2013, her good friend Larry Scharschmidt, VE7LWS, asked during a meeting of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) whether anyone would like to become an Amateur Radio operator. “Yeah, me!” replied Heidi enthusiastically. As it turns out, Heidi is very interested in all sorts of technology, and Larry notes admiringly that Heidi “is very, very smart”.

As a youngster, Heidi attended Belmont Secondary School in Colwood. She quickly learned that if she was going to get anywhere in this world, she was going to have to do it herself. When turned down for a computer programming program at a local community college – “they didn't believe blind people could program” – she taught herself the Python programming language. But what about becoming a Radio Amateur? What about learning how to operate a transceiver? And all those schematics: that just might be more difficult.

On the following Saturday morning, Henk van Dalen, VA7HV – the Amateur who had phoned her in class – picked her up in his small SUV and headed to his favourite DX spot, the Esquimalt Lagoon, right beside the Strait of Juan de Fuca on the Pacific Ocean. Once parked, he asked Heidi to get out of the vehicle – it was raining at the time – for her first lesson. Although blind from birth, Heidi is a real hands-on woman. She listened attentively as Henk explained his antenna setup – a homebrew tapped-coil vertical. He had her touch the coil, the taps and the whip. She “got the picture” very quickly.



Back in the SUV, Henk immediately put a Yaesu microphone in Heidi's hand, time for more hands-on. This particular Saturday, the WARA students were practising VHF QSOs – their first opportunities to learn firsthand about simplex and repeater operation. And Heidi was excited. She was learning the skills of a Radio Amateur. Henk comments that Heidi's ability “to listen is her biggest asset, and ironically, Amateur Radio is mostly about listening”.

In the WARA classes, Heidi is a “learning sponge”. Andy Woodsworth, VE7VAW, the head instructor, notes that Heidi is “remarkable in her confidence and has a nice way of speaking... she is one of the brightest in the class”. In order to help Heidi with schematics and graphics, Glenn Lindsey, VE7GRQ, draws “pictures” on the back of her hand. When resistors, capacitors, chokes and other hardware are passed around the class, she explores them closely with her hands.

One of the areas of radio work which attracts Heidi is emergency radio: “I would like to help out during emergency situations, to help other people in need.” Cities and municipalities throughout southern Vancouver Island (and all of BC) have radio rooms,



Heidi Propp, VA7DDL and Brian Mury, VE7NGR

and Heidi will be welcomed in one of them very soon as a competent Amateur Radio operator.

Back at the lagoon, there's another lesson happening: hands-on QRP HF. Heidi learns how to use the antenna tuner before it's time to go DXing. Using Henk's reliable Yaesu FT-817, it's not long before they find a nice strong signal on 20 metres from an American Amateur in Texas; but will he hear their atmospheric-cracking 5 watts?

“AF5OT this is VA7HV”. AF5OT comes back with an astonished “5 by 9”. Heidi makes her first QRP contact under the capable tutelage of VA7HV.

She dreams of setting up her own shack; and with transceivers like the Kenwood TMV71A and the TS590, and assistive technology like the Kenwood Voice and Record board (VGS1), she can live her dream.

On June 2, 2014, Heidi became a brand new Canadian Radio Amateur (VA7DDL) – and a very capable one.

Help Blind Canadians by Donating Aeroplane Miles

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

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

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

The convention is held annually in a large North American city. The most 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 the miles necessary so that more blind Canadians may benefit. Also, if you know of anyone who may be interested in contributing to this cause, please let them know about this Aeroplan charitable pooling initiative. Thank you for your support!

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



Dr. Marc Maurer, President, National Federation of the Blind (NFB). Photo courtesy: NFB website www.nfb.org

NFB Announces the Retirement of Dr. Marc Maurer, Longtime President of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the U.S.

By Dr. Fredric Schroeder

Editor's note: At the time of this issue of the Blind Canadian magazine, NFB President Dr. Marc Maurer has retired and the new President, Mark Riccobono has been elected to the position. The transition took place at this past July's NFB Convention held in Orlando, Florida. Several of our CFB members were honoured to be in attendance.

Here is the announcement issued by the NFB, where we first learned of Dr. Maurer's decision to retire and about who he supported to succeed him. It also gives a brief summary of some of Dr. Maurer's many accomplishments during his 28-year presidency. Dr. Fredric Schroeder, a well-known leader in the NFB, wrote:

Friends:

As you know, Dr. Marc Maurer has been our national president since 1986. He has served as president longer than any of our previous presidents and has guided us through a period of unprecedented growth and change.

It was under Dr. Maurer's leadership that we established the Jernigan Institute and all of the programs that have been so successful in demonstrating the truth of our assertion that given proper opportunity and training, blind people can live and work as others.

In particular, we have developed many programs designed to provide blind children and youth with the skills and confidence they need to compete fully in their education and to develop their life ambitions. We have conducted the Youth Slam, Science Academy, and more recently the BELL programs.

In the area of technology, under Dr. Maurer's leadership, we developed the KNFB Reader Mobile, allowing blind people to have immediate access to print with nothing more than a cell phone and special software.

And then, there was the Blind Driver Challenge. There is no question that lack of access to reliable transportation remains a major barrier for blind people. Yet, the Blind Driver Challenge showed that we could develop the technology to enable a blind person to drive a car, not simply sit passively, in a car that drives itself.

These are the expressions of Dr. Maurer's leadership. Yet at the heart of his leadership is his spirit and his belief in every blind person. He has inspired and encouraged us, faced the most difficult challenges with resolution and strength, and he has kept us together, and never let us waiver in our belief in our own right to live normal, productive lives.

(In December 2013), Dr. Maurer told the (NFB) board that it is his intention to not seek reelection to the presidency next summer at our national convention. He feels the time is right to transition to the next president, the next individual who can lead us for a quarter century or more.

Dr. Maurer is in good health and believes that it is important that he step down from the presidency while he is able to assist with the transition. Dr. Maurer told the board that he, Dr. Maurer, plans to support Mr. Mark Riccobono as the next president of the National Federation of the Blind.

Mr. Riccobono presently serves as the Executive Director of the Jernigan Institute. He is an accomplished individual with the strength and wisdom to assume the serious responsibility of leading our movement. He has brought to his work the imagination and competency we demand from our president.

We are truly fortunate that within the Federation we have individuals who are able and willing to give all they have to furthering our move toward true equality. The demands of the NFB presidency are unimaginable. We require our leader to give all of his time, all of his imagination, and all of his personal reserve of judgment to leading our organization. This is what Dr. Maurer has done for the past 27 and a half years, and it is what Mark Riccobono will do for the time of his presidency.

The transition brings to an end one chapter in our history and what a glorious chapter it has been. We cannot face the loss of Dr. Maurer's leadership without a sense of sadness; but the transition to a new president is not just the absence of what we had before. The transition heralds a new chapter in our history and with it, new opportunities - the chance to take all that has come before and build something bigger and more powerful than we have ever known.

Please join me in thanking Dr. Maurer for his leadership, his friendship and his faithful devotion to our cause; and please join me in wishing Mark Riccobono the very best as he seeks to take the foundation that is all that has come before and build upon it the next great chapter in our history.

NFB-Style Organizational Growth and Power in Canada

Thank You Dr. Maurer

By Dr. Paul Gabias

When I landed in Pueblo, Colorado in 1988 to take up my teaching position at the university, my first hurdle was to make the manager of my apartment stop disallowing me from taking occupancy of my apartment because of my guide dog, Viva.

Diane McGeorge, a well-known leader of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), tackled this problem head on by calling the lawyer for the local NFB affiliate. Within an hour, the manager was off my case and the movers could begin to bring my furniture into my new home.

That night, as an apology, he brought over a bottle of wine, which I shared at the next NFB state board meeting. The lawyer for the affiliate must have put the fear of God into this unreasonable man.

I wonder what I would have done if the NFB of Colorado hadn't been there to protect me against this building manager? Where would I have taken all of my belongings and furniture? Of course, I had previously signed a lease before arranging to move my furniture from Reno.

When Mary Ellen and I moved to Canada, we wanted to build such a supportive and protective NFB-type infrastructure for blind people in Canada.

The NFB has been very supportive of our efforts toward Federation organizational growth in Canada. Below are a few examples:

~To every one of our Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) conventions, the NFB has sent a representative from the NFB National Office. One year, we were even honoured with the presence of Dr. and Patricia Maurer!

~Every year some CFB members, and other blind people we sponsor, greatly benefit by attending NFB national and Washington State blindness conventions. The largest Federationist contingent from Canada at a U.S. NFB convention was just under 100 attendees.

~In the 1990s, Federationists from Canada held a leadership seminar in Baltimore, MD, at the NFB National Center for the Blind.

~Several Canadians have attended NFB Training Centers for the Blind, including our past president, who received NFB sponsorship of a nine-month intensive live-in blindness skills training program.

~NFB sponsored CFB's 'Braille is Beautiful' program by donating 100 'Braille is Beautiful' kits, which we used in Victoria area classrooms when we went to speak to students about blindness and Braille.

~We in the CFB have benefitted greatly from NFB literature, the NFB website information and from all the NFB role models who have been mentors to us over the years, as we strive to grow as individuals and organizationally in Canada.

Presently, in the CFB, we are still working to get renewed government involvement to provide public funding for sending blind people to quality, immersion blindness skills training at the world-renowned NFB Training Centers, only available in the U.S.

We are also working to improve library services for blind people in Canada. Transit issues are an ongoing organizational advocacy concern. We have an iPhone provision project between the CFB and the Lions Club. And, several CFB members are working on providing provisional blindness skills training at a local level. We have a highly informative blindness magazine, *The Blind Canadian*, which comes out twice a year, as well as our website www.cfb.ca and a busy listserv. And, much more.

As a result of NFB support during Dr. Maurer's presidency, I have to say that our Canadian blindness infrastructure is much stronger. Thank you very much Dr. Maurer!

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Recipe!

Mary Ellen's Famous Lasagna

This recipe is from CFB President, Mary Ellen Gabias, Kelowna, B.C. It is a family favourite.

9 to 12 lasagna noodles, cooked according to package directions

Sauce:

Use your favourite sauce, either jarred or homemade. If you don't have a favourite, try this:

2 medium cans (or 1 large can) tomato sauce
1 small can tomato paste
1 can diced tomatoes
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon basil

Simmer sauce gently until flavours are blended.

Pour a thin layer, (about a quarter of an inch) of sauce in bottom of a large (9 x 13 or larger) roaster. Then, cover bottom of roaster with a layer of cooked noodles.

Mix one pound ground beef with one pound mild bulk sausage. Cook in a frypan until browned. Drain excess grease and make sure cooked meat is chopped into small pieces. Add meat to rest of simmering sauce and cook until flavours blend, but do not overcook.

While sauce and meat simmer, blend 2 – 500 mg packages of ricotta cheese with 2 beaten eggs and enough Italian seasoning to suit your taste.

Putting it together:

Cover bottom layer of noodles in roaster thickly with ricotta mixture, then with layer of meat sauce, and finally with a layer of grated mozzarella cheese. Continue layering until pan is full, ending with thick layer of grated cheese.

Bake, covered, at 350 degrees for at least half an hour or more, depending on size of roaster. You will know lasagna is done when warmed through. Then, remove covering and bake fifteen minutes, or until cheese is melted and bubbly.

Serve with salad and garlic bread. Have grated parmesan available.



CFB.ca

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

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