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The Blind Canadian

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



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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:

- a fresh, positive, empowering approach to blindness;
- blind people mentoring blind people to gain knowledge, skills and self-confidence;
- public education about blindness and the abilities of blind people;
- advocacy to create better opportunities and to strengthen rights of blind Canadians.
- raising expectations, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our goals and dreams.

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.



Committed to the
equality of blind Canadians

CFB The Blind Canadian

A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind

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

The Blind Canadian is the leading publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB). It covers events and activities of the CFB, addresses issues we face as blind people, and highlights our members. The Blind Canadian:

- Offers a positive philosophy about blindness to both blind readers and the public at large
- Serves as a vehicle for advocacy and protection of human rights
- Addresses social concerns affecting the blind
- Discusses issues related to employment, education, legislation and rehabilitation
- Provides news about products and technology used by the blind
- Tells the stories of blind people

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

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The Blind Community and the COVID-19 Crisis: Adapting to Life in a Pandemic

By Elizabeth Lalonde

Editor's note: Blind people function with their other senses, touch being an important one. We need to be tactile and that can be difficult during this COVID-19 time. We may need the arm of another person to be guided in unfamiliar places. We may need someone's help picking out our groceries in a store. Distancing can be difficult. How do I as a blind person judge being six feet from the next person? Follow arrows, dots, yellow tape? Take the right distanced seat on a bus and then distance getting off? These are some of my own ponderings. Consequently, I haven't been doing certain things I normally would do. In the following article, Elizabeth gives an overview of how this pandemic is affecting the blind community.

Elizabeth is the Executive Director of the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB) in Victoria, BC. During the pandemic, centre staff have been working virtually with their students. In September they will also resume some one-on-one mobility training. Elizabeth is also Past President of CFB and is the mother of two children.

Last year, who would have believed our current reality: people working from home, students attending virtual school, restaurants closed or just doing takeout, movie theatres empty.

But here we are in the midst of one of the largest worldwide catastrophes in modern history.

I was asked to write an article about how this pandemic is affecting the blind community. It is difficult to think about how one community specifically has been affected, when every person and group around the globe has been impacted in so many vividly different, yet miraculously similar ways.

One interesting thought that keeps going through my mind is how this crisis has changed our lives as blind people more in degrees rather than in fact.

Some of the methods society is using to combat the virus, such as social distancing and staying home, actually existed in many blind people's lives before COVID-19. The only difference is that now being housebound, being away from others and not getting out and about has become a proactive action;

performing these distancing measures empowers people because it is the only way to save lives and keep people from getting sick.

Before COVID-19, the lack of exposure to others derived from lack of training and opportunity for blind people, not from a global pandemic.

Pre-COVID, blind Canadians often did not have the independence skills, encouragement or chance to move around in the world, travel confidently with a long white cane, secure employment or get involved in the community.

This social isolation caused depression, fostered low expectations, squandered talent and left many blind people feeling unequal to their sighted peers.

The COVID-19 crisis has so far taught the world many things, but one thing that is becoming extremely apparent are the terrible inequities in society and in communities. COVID-19 has unveiled the reality many face even in regular times; this revelation is particularly apparent in the lives of blind people and other people with disabilities.

I do not want to overgeneralize, since blind people are as diverse as any other population of humans. We are rich, poor, old, young, of varying ethnicities and religious backgrounds, with advanced post-secondary education and without high school diplomas, employed and unemployed. However, this article focuses on a common experience during an unprecedented time.

Blind people are accustomed to dealing with public misconceptions about blindness and the abilities of blind people. For example, we often have difficulty using websites with screen readers and Braille devices – not because of our blindness – but because some of these websites do not have accessibility features. We struggle to navigate online forms and PDF images with varying success. The need to accomplish so many tasks online during this pandemic has made it even more important to make websites work for blind people.

Last month, a blind person told me he was unable to apply for employment insurance unassisted because the federal government employment insurance website application form did not function fully with his screen reader.

A blind friend on Facebook posted about how she was struggling with an online grocery app because of some unlabelled links.

Still another blind friend posted that she could not use an online learning site for the same reasons.

As a parent, I've been having trouble helping my son with his school work because the assignments uploaded to Google Classroom are not readable by my talking computer or even my Smart Phone. To solve this problem, I print out the documents and then scan them in one by one, so they can be read by my speech technology.

Again, this digital gap was always a problem for the blind community, but because even more of what we have to do during COVID-19 is online, the challenges are larger and have become more of an issue.

Visual cues such as signs, painted strips and directional arrows used to facilitate physical distancing present another challenge to blind people, as they make it harder for us to get necessary information.

As well, the frustration caused by people forgetting to verbalize when they communicate with blind people has always been a problem. Pointing, gesturing or using facial expressions to convey a message were always barriers to blind people, but during COVID-19, the challenge is more obvious.

For instance, the social distancing necessary for safety makes it harder to hear what somebody is saying. When I was at the grocery store the other day, I could not understand the cashier because of the Plexiglas separating us, and I could not get her to assist me with my credit card. I am not complaining; this barrier is essential to maintain safe physical distance.

One long-time obstacle for the blind community is transportation. People with guide dogs are sometimes refused rides in taxis, audible announcements on buses are often not set at the correct volume or are not turned on at all, drivers do not always communicate effectively with us when we use public transportation, which can result in much anxiety, missed rides, missed bus stops, being late for appointments, etc. Many of these challenges have been exacerbated by COVID-19. These safety measures are vital during this time of COVID-19, and as blind people, we find ways to deal with such challenges, but the fact that visual information is often not complemented by audible and tactile cues, is a larger problem in society at the best of times.

Since blind people cannot drive, we must use the limited public transportation currently available and also risk being exposed to the virus. Our reliance on public transportation options also makes us more likely to encounter COVID-related discrimination. For example, at a recent meeting, a man said his wife

was refused by a cab because she said she needed to go to a COVID-19 testing centre.

Another situation that has arisen during COVID-19 involves needing sighted assistance. Occasionally some blind people need help from others for tasks like reading, driving, shopping, and obtaining necessities. Deafblind people or blind people with other disabilities may require further support with daily life.

For instance, some deafblind people work with intervenors who help them understand what is happening around them. The intervenor uses various tactile communication methods like hand-on-hand sign language.

A blind runner who is training for a marathon voiced concern about his regular running routine. Normally, he runs with a guide who is close. He either holds the guide's arm or the two are harnessed together.

Physical distancing poses some challenges. I always wear a mask now when I am out; I believe everyone should take this precaution to protect themselves and others; and the mask gives me an added sense of security because I cannot always accurately judge how far I am away from others, if they are particularly quiet.

Other people's distancing issues also cause us trouble. A friend posted that he was travelling on an airplane. He was walking through the airport with his long white cane, confidently moving and exploring his surroundings. He says he was grabbed by some passersby who seemed panicked, as if he needed urgent assistance. They did not speak to him first; they just reached out and invaded his personal space and body.

Many blind people will tell you this happens far too often; it feels as if we are the only group in society with whom people forget the norms of accepted contact. I was shocked, however, to learn this was even happening during a pandemic.

Mostly, we are managing to cope with the pandemic. Just like sighted people, we make mistakes, feel lonely and afraid. But we are meeting the challenge with courage, grit and fortitude.

As blind people, we regularly face situations where we use creativity and innovation to solve problems and find alternative non-visual techniques to do things that sighted people do with vision; our techniques are usually quite effective.

As the pandemic continues, blind people will continue to adapt and demonstrate resilience. We will use our support network of other blind people in the blindness community and the Federation, as we always do, to think of new ways of doing things and to keep the vital circle of connection alive despite our physical distance from each other.

Access: Technology lags for people with vision, hearing impairments

Accessibility barriers addressed at the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind

By NICOLE CRESCENZI, NINA GROSSMAN
Oct. 23, 2019 4:30 p.m. Victoria News
Reprinted with permission



Elizabeth Lalonde (left) executive director at the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind, Alex Jurgensen and Heidi Propp each help blind and partially-sighted people learn how to navigate the internet. However, some frequent shortcomings make accessing many websites very difficult. (Nicole Crescenzi/News Staff) [Alt Text: A woman in a red and blue striped shirt using a white cane stands next to a young man in black and yellow, also using a white cane. Seated on the right, a woman in blue sits next to a computer. On the wall in the background is a Braille chart.] Photo: Victoria News/ Black Press Media.

This is the third instalment of “Access,” a Black Press Media three-part series focusing on accessibility in Greater Victoria. See Part One- Access: A Day in the Life Using a Wheelchair in Victoria, and Part Two- Access: Greater Victoria non-profit brings the outdoors to people of all abilities.

Heidi Propp's fingers run over the raised white cells on her BrailleNote Touch Plus. She easily reads more than 200 words per minute, consuming online content with the tips of her fingers faster than most people can with their eyes.

Without vision since birth, Propp doesn't 'see' the words in her head when the pins pop up to form Braille words on the android-based Braille tablet, she instead hears them like a narrator. She's sitting in an office at the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB) in Victoria, but the Braille display allows her to read and write almost anywhere. With a Braille output, Propp can check her email, browse the web, download apps and more.

The device is a model of technology that's added ease to her life, but not all aspects of digitization have made the same leap; many aspects of the internet remain hidden to the blind community.

For example, devices called 'screen readers' make web pages accessible, but often stumble when navigating inaccessible websites. Elizabeth Lalonde, PTCB executive director, opens a Wikipedia page on grizzly bears and a robotic voice begins washing over the screen at a rate too rapid for most of the sighted population to consume.

But before the screen reader reaches the information, Lalonde has to navigate a series of unlabelled links and buttons – small hurdles standing in front of the content she's trying to reach.

PTCB helps people who are vision-impaired learn how to navigate the world around them – from crossing the street and taking transit to cooking dinner or reading Braille.

The centre also focuses heavily on using the web – a skill more or less required in order to survive the modern world. But technology is advancing beyond the speed of accessibility, says Alex Jurgensen, lead program coordinator at PTCB, who adds that creators end up playing catch up, adapting their websites and devices for vision and hearing-impaired users long after initial creation.

"A lot of information is out there, but websites can often be inaccessible," Jurgensen says, noting things such as forms, apps and anything with unusual or unlabelled text can pose a challenge. Scrolling through unlabelled links will have the voice reader say "link" with no further description and scrolling over an image with no alt text embedded in the code will simply read off the name of the image file.

Lalonde says Instagram, for example, is simply not worth using for the vision impaired. But it could be if people described what was in their photos, or if Instagram added an alt text option for each picture, so users could describe what they posted, such as “pug sits on a red blanket in the park on a sunny day.”

Jurgensen describes it as adding a ‘sticky note’ to your image – an easy step that allows those who are vision-impaired to access a prominent element of everyday internet use.

But some elements of the information age don’t adapt. For example: memes. Text created as part of an image is indistinguishable for screen readers. Jurgensen notes apps such as Skip the Dishes can be difficult too. Without labelled button options, he’s ordered food far spicier than he’s intended.

One exception is the iPhone, which becomes usable for vision-impaired users with the simple slide of a toggle that turns on ‘voice over.’

“Camera. Maps. Google. Finance Folder.” The robot voice used to guide drivers to their destinations guides Lalonde through her phone. She double taps on the screen when she’s ready to use an app.

But devices with built-in accessibility software are few and far between – a disheartening reality for the more than six million Canadians living with disabilities.

Lalonde and Jurgensen say websites and online content should be “born accessible,” with accessibility built-in as part of the creation, instead of as afterthoughts or available only through expensive or impractical add-on software.

People with vision-impairments aren’t the only ones facing challenges either. A huge number of videos fail to include subtitles or descriptions of content, throwing in barriers for anyone who has hearing impairments.

And the barriers are nothing new. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines were published in 1999 by a group of international experts in digital accessibility. The guideline was used internationally to create digital accessibility policies.

The experts created a testing and scoring format for websites and programs, finding the most successful sites included criteria such as audio tracks (so people who are hearing impaired can understand audio information), the ability

to re-size text, the ability to turn off or extending time limits on tasks, and designing consistently, so people will always know where to find what they are looking for when they are navigating the site.

And while the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms included people with disabilities when it was created in 1982, it's only recently that a bill relating directly to accessibility was taken to the House of Commons.

The Accessible Canada Act (Bill C-81) received unanimous support in May and is in the final stages of becoming law. Accessibility Minister Carla Qualtrough called the bill "the most transformative piece of legislation" since the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and called its progress "a testament to the work, commitment and contributions of the Canadian disability community."

The bill, still not fully formed, is expected to include digital content and technologies law, likely based on the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines – meaning a number of official sites might be scrambling to get their content up to code.

"A lot of the solutions are fairly simple," Lalonde notes. "But it's a question of getting businesses and innovators to adapt accessibility into their process from the start.

"It's a catch-22," she adds. "Technology has made a major difference in my life and I know [in] the lives of a lot of blind people because it's allowed us to access so much more information than we could access before. In some ways it's been absolutely phenomenal, but ... the lack of accessibility keeping up with the technology – that's the problem."

Jurgensen nods. "No matter how many steps we take forward it feels like it's a cat and mouse game, and we're the ones who are one step behind.

Exclusion is never the way forward on our shared paths to freedom and justice.

~ Desmond Tutu

Arrested While Wanting to Grab a Cup of Coffee

Interview with Ben Fulton: A guide dog discrimination case

Hosts: Brian and Kerry Kijewski

Aired February 17, 2020

Outlook on Radio Western, University of Western Ontario

Editor's note: This is a slightly excerpted transcript of Ben's interview. We feel what Ben endured and what he has to say are important to document. This article may be an additional platform to help further people's knowledge about guide dog rights, which are set in law. Incidences of refusals with guide dogs in public places are a continuing problem. Thank you, Ben, for sharing your story and for pursuing this case for everyone's benefit.

Brian and Kerry Kijewski, brother and sister, hosts of the show, are members of CFB. Brian is the national treasurer and Kerry is the secretary of Ontario's chapter, as well as assistant editor of The Blind Canadian magazine. Thank you both for granting permission to print the interview.

Kerry: Welcome to Outlook and our first interview of 2020 with Ben Fulton.

We wanted to have a guest on today to talk about an issue that's been in the news quite a bit, about guide dogs. Brian and I have been out of that world for so long now, me being the older sibling, I got a guide dog first and then Brian got one three years later. But once you're out of that, and you're back to using a cane, you sort of drift away from that world. So we wanted to talk to somebody who's right there in it.

So good morning Ben.

Ben: Yeah, good morning. I was a cane user for a long time and just started using a guide dog a few years ago now and I've really enjoyed the switch.

Kerry: Is this your first guide dog then?

Ben: Yes, and she's working out great.

Kerry: And where did you go to get her?

Ben: She's from Canadian Guide Dogs. That's in Ottawa. They're independent, they do all their own funding. Sometimes they get mistaken for the CNIB's guide dog school, but they're not in any way affiliated. They do all their own program and the dogs there are top quality.

Brian: And how long have they been around in Ottawa?

Ben: A few decades. I think they started in the 80's sometime.

Kerry: Yeah, I had a guy in my class in Quebec who went to Ottawa to get one.

Brian: We both got our dogs there in Quebec, at MIRA, which is also a great school.

Ben: Well, the one thing we're here to talk about is the way store owners and businesses treat people with guide dogs, which is something I wasn't really aware of before having a guide dog myself. Shortly after getting my dog, I started hearing about other people experiencing this kind of treatment. I haven't really experienced a lot of it myself, but on my way to B.C. recently, I was kind of surprised to have a store owner try to refuse me service. So that was kind of a shock to me.

I have been in restaurants before where they say they don't want dogs, but I usually just explain to them quickly that she's a guide dog and so, by law, she's allowed in the restaurant. And when you see how well behaved she is, you realize pretty quickly that there isn't going to be any problems with letting her in any place of business. And really, that's why the law is there, to make it so that those of us using guide dogs, like myself, are allowed to enter these businesses without anybody refusing us services. And that there really isn't any reason to, because of the level of training the dogs receive. There is a standard of behaviour. The dog is...I find her to be a really excellent companion and a wonderful guide, an endless help. I couldn't imagine not being let in anywhere with her. I'm just kind of amazed to find out the number of stories there are out there from other people who have had similar experiences, having had been refused services or been denied entry because they were travelling with a guide dog.

I can continue the story of what happened to me in B.C. one fateful Sunday evening on my way to see my mom, who lives in Kamloops.

Brian: That's kind of how we connected in the first place. We're on the Canadian Federation of the Blind email list and saw an email you put on the list back in July of last year, right after this incident had happened. And that's how we started following your situation and then thought you'd be a great interview for on the air.

I just wanted to quickly touch on...when Kerry and I had guide dogs fifteen plus years ago, we had a couple incidents in restaurants.

This happened in Woodstock, Ontario, where we were with our grandmother.

Kerry: All we wanted to do was have a nice lunch with our grandmother and –

Brian: At a nice Chinese restaurant in Woodstock there and we went in and they pretty much said the dogs weren't welcome. We were both young, we were teenagers and with our grandmother. It was kind of awkward and we just –

Kerry: We let them lead us back, all the way through the restaurant. We'd gotten all the way through to the far side and then they're like, "Well, with this buffet...no guide dogs." And yeah, we just didn't fight it.

Brian: It's something we'd look back at and maybe say we should have fought it. Sometimes it's hard to always be fighting, advocacy and this stuff, especially when you're younger and you're not as confident, but obviously you took a different approach and it's super important that you did.

So if you want to continue on with what happened to you and what approach you took when you were refused.

Ben: I can just touch on, for the benefit of your listeners, a bit about myself and advocacy, my role in advocacy and how everything unfolded.

I, myself, recently graduated law school and finished my articles.

Coincidentally enough, the trip out west to visit my mom and other family members was kind of like a celebration of the completion of my legal education. Being blind myself, I've done a lot of work in human rights.

Kerry: But it's no small feat, right, to get through law school for anyone?

Ben: Well exactly, and it's a time of great celebration for many students. It's customary to take a trip for two weeks. I've even known a number of people who took a month-long time away from all the books and everything to just, you know, celebrate that accomplishment.

Kerry: When my friend graduated medical school, she and a group of students, friends, they went to Hawaii. So yeah, that's a time you wanna celebrate.

Ben: Yeah, yeah, and that was my celebration, a road trip out west to visit family. It took about two weeks. My dad lives in Alberta. My mom lives in B.C. I have friends and family in both of those provinces.

On the whole, I had a pretty fun time. I tried not to let one incident impact my whole trip. So I sort of waited until I got back to pursue a lot of what happened.

In my role of advocacy, I'd been reading about people who had been denied taxi service and had taken their complaints to human rights tribunals. Some with some success, some with less success, but nonetheless, these people were engaged in this kind of advocacy on behalf of themselves. I wanted to make sure I was being a part of that fight for these rights, not just for myself but for others working with guide dogs and people who maybe don't know their rights or who may be younger, easily intimidated, like you guys, not wanting to put up a fight at the restaurant. A lot of times, I've been in restaurants and all I have to do is explain the situation. Sometimes, especially when I'm with a friend of mine who's also a human rights lawyer, he's pretty quick to throw in the lawyer card and that usually changes their attitude a lot.

But on this particular Sunday, the employee didn't really want to listen to the fact that it was a guide dog and he kept insisting that no dogs were allowed and that's just the policy. He wouldn't serve us. We were at the counter, we were making our coffees and that's when he started talking to us about the dog.

And so I got out my guide dog ID card from my wallet to show him, and basically, he just didn't want to look at the card, just retreated to this area that was behind glass.

He said, if we didn't leave, he'd be calling the cops.

I'm like, well, I know my rights under the law, the B.C. Human Rights Code. I'm allowed to be here with my dog, that they can't lawfully refuse me service.

So I figured, I'd just wait until the cops showed up and we'll get to the bottom of it.

I can talk a little about how the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) are trained. They're responding always to the person who makes the call. This is something the officer said to me at the end of the incident when they were releasing me – they get there and they only have half of the story and so they have to go on that half of the story.

As I was explaining to them at the end of all this, it was unfortunate they didn't hear my half of the story before they arrested me.

Unfortunately, what happened when the police showed up is they were operating under the call that was made by the employee, and even though the call mentioned a dog as part of the call (and I'm still trying to get the 911 footage on that), but this is something that has come to me through discussions I've had.

They said they didn't see the dog. That's what a spokesperson said in a press release, that they didn't notice the dog at first. It's a little unusual that trained officers would arrive on the scene and not notice that I had a dog, like right beside me.

Kerry: It's hedging their bets, to say that.

Ben: Yeah, I disagree with a lot of the things that the spokesperson has said about the incident, including the fact that the spokesperson said that I was released as soon as they saw I was blind. The fact is, they actually did arrest me. They put me in a cruiser and detained me for twenty minutes before they said that I could leave.

So I was detained for twenty minutes and I'm convinced that they knew I was blind the entire time I was in the back of the cruiser.

Going back to the point where the police entered the store...we were at the counter and ready to pay and the police showed up. There were two officers, a male and a female officer.

The female officer was the first to speak and she asked me a question. She said, "Why don't we go outside and talk about this."

I answered her question and I said, “I don’t want to go outside because I’m standing here at the counter trying to get service.”

She repeated her question word for word. She said, “Why don’t we go outside and talk about this.”

I said, “Well, I just told you, the reason I don’t want to go outside is because I’m standing here at the counter trying to get service.”

Now, at this point, the employee, he is, like I said, separated behind a glass partition. I figured now was a perfectly reasonable time to speak with the officers right there. Unfortunately, after I basically answered the question that I was asked the second time, the male officer placed his hand on my wrist and said, “I’m arresting you for mischief.”

And that was the part of the situation I found was the most shocking to me, that the cops were not enforcing the B.C. Human Rights Code, the law as I’d understood it – and my understanding was fairly informed by a recently attained legal education.

I had my wallet in my hand and so I said to the officer, “Okay, let me put away my wallet,” because the reason I had my wallet out was to take out my guide dog ID card, which I also had in my hand. When I attempted to put my hand back in my pocket, the officer just put the handcuffs on my wrists, hard enough that it caused fairly extensive bruises and scrapes to the skin. So I had a friend of mine with a camera take some pictures.

It was a very unfortunate event. It was very startling to be put in the back of a police cruiser and detained for twenty minutes. To not have the police listen to my side of the story before placing me under arrest. There’s conflicting stories I’m getting from the police themselves. They decided to release us without any charges, but as they were doing so, I asked him if he was aware of de-escalation techniques. He told me that his adrenaline was really high, he didn’t think it was the time or the place for de-escalation, he had to respond quickly.

I’m thinking, that was an unfortunate characterization of the situation.

And then what I said about conflicting information. When I talked to the supervising sergeant, he informed me that taking me out of the store quickly under arrest was the appropriate de-escalation tactic, to separate me from the clerk. But like I said, the clerk was several feet away and behind a glass partition. He was already separated and I wasn’t making any aggressive

gestures. I was just standing at the counter at the time the police came in. I had my guide dog ID card they refused to look at.

I tried to enjoy the rest of my vacation and not let that one unfortunate event spoil what was otherwise a celebratory road trip. And then when I got back, I had a lot more legal work to do because I fairly promptly filed a complaint with the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal, reporting the incident.

So this is where we can get into talking about the legislation and how that works to protect people's rights when people's rights have been violated.

Kerry: It's hard for Brian and me. Why we wanted to talk to Ben today was because we wanted to hear about this. I've never been placed under arrest with handcuffs and all of that. These things become very fraught and it's a he said/he said/she said thing, instead of, like you said, if we can do any work now so that these store owners and people aren't calling the police for a situation that doesn't need it.

Brian: Yeah, it's wasting time for the police that should be dealing with things that actually are a problem, whereas this is legal and there needs to be more awareness. One of the parts that is a good thing, is that a lot of people, if this would happen to them and they get let go by the cops, not arrested, they wouldn't pursue it any further. In this situation, it worked differently, especially you going to law school. You also had more knowledge on this stuff than most people would, which also helps because it allows these things to be investigated.

It's hard sometimes, to keep up with everything and a lot of people just say, "Oh, that was a bad situation but I'm just gonna move on and try and forget about it," but if nobody ever does anything about this stuff, it's not going to change. I think it's great you have made more steps to look into this, to investigate this.

Kerry: But it really is confusing for a lot of people and we almost need to take a course in what to do – this B.C. law and our rights and what are they?

If you wanna tell us what you did when you got back because our listeners, plus us, we don't even know what we would do in that circumstance, what the first steps are, what our rights actually are.

Ben: One thing I could say about the calling of the police. I certainly don't fault the clerk for calling the police. People need to be able to do that. But I might

encourage people who find themselves in this situation, because I have heard of situations involving other people where they were the ones to make the call, and they called the police informing the police of the human rights violation that was occurring, to more or less get them there and involved because you have a credible witness. There's the police and they're there, 'cause their job is to enforce the law, right?

It's just unfortunate that they respond more to the person making the call. I mean, that was as much as admitted to me by the arresting officer who said that they get there seeing only half the story. It may be a bit of an unfortunate reality of the situation at hand, but maybe for the time being, being the first one to make that call might influence how the situation unfolds.

Now, I am hoping to kind of influence the police training through my actions I took when I got home. I filed a complaint with the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal and I listed all the respondents I could think of: the RCMP, the two officers, the parent company Shell, the numbered company, the employee and his boss – basically because it was the boss who had given the employee the instructions to very firmly disallow dogs.

I learned a little bit through this process. The RCMP is under the jurisdiction of the Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) and the provincial B.C. Human Rights Tribunal does not have the authority to act in situations where the RCMP has been named the respondent. So the matter has kind of been split into two separate proceedings, if you will. One is in front of, or going through the process of the CHRC. And then the matter with Shell is under the jurisdiction of the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal and so that matter is going forward under their jurisdiction.

What I'm really hoping to get out of these separate incidences, cases, is better training for all of the people involved because, Brian, like you said, the decision to call the police, that should be maybe made a little more cautiously. I would certainly say if anybody ever feels the need that the police are there, by all means, use that service. But I think if there was more understanding about the laws given to the employee, and indeed all the employees of Shell, that this kind of misunderstanding wouldn't escalate. They would understand the rights of guide dog users.

Brian: Right, and that applies to a lot of disability issues, where employers and employees aren't aware of these rights because they're not talked about all the time and there's only a small percentage of people hired with disabilities and

they just aren't recognized. It's the education from the get-go that is an important part.

How would that tie in, the employer or the employee calling the cops, instead of you calling the cops? Was that something you ever thought of, that you could have called instead or ?

I'm assuming he already initiated the fact that he was gonna call so—

Ben: It is one of those hindsight situations, like, you never know how that kind of a call is going to go.

I, at the time, was thinking, "Okay, when the police show up, they'll get to the bottom of enforcing the law in this situation."

Brian: Yeah, you didn't think of the fact that any of this sort of thing was gonna happen. So you figured, "Oh, he's calling the cops, so no matter who calls them, they're coming anyway and they'll enforce this law and everything will be fine."

Ben: It's kind of one of the things where I see now, after the fact, having talked to other people who have been involved in similar situations, situations where people themselves were the ones to call the cops and the cops are then there on the side of the person who called them. I think that is the reality of the situation, as it is. I think, through my discussions with the RCMP, not only am I going to be wanting to improve their awareness of human rights legislation, but also guide dog identification. I think it's a little appalling that they didn't realize or recognize that there was a guide dog in the store instantaneously.

The comment that was made by the spokesperson just doesn't, to me, signify a high level of training in that area on behalf of the officers.

Brian: Right, and that's what the complaint stemmed from in the first place, from the store clerk calling the police because of the dog.

Ben: I want to have more guide dog awareness training, understanding human rights law in general, for the RCMP, but I think what will happen is, through negotiations with Shell, I'm hoping to work with them to develop what will basically become a nation-wide training. It might be a pamphlet. It might be a page or two in a book of training material that's otherwise handed to employees. I don't currently know a lot about the training that goes into training Shell employees, what they're currently receiving in that area. I certainly understand that whatever we develop will have to be fit within a program that is already

established, but that is my hope, to work with them to improve the education and understanding of all their employees, specifically in relation to guide dogs.

There is a different code in every province, but suffice to say, any province does have a human rights code. The phrasing is a little bit different here and there, but all of them guarantee to everyone with a disability the right to access services that are made available to the public.

So, anywhere in Canada you are, there's going to be legislation that protects your right as a guide dog user to enter an establishment and, say, purchase a cup of coffee, which is all we were trying to do.

Kerry: Because we wanna talk about this, for everyone involved. We don't wanna get to a point where...I've seen a few comments here and there, where blind people are starting to be afraid to get a guide dog because they're like, "Aw, I don't think it's worth it." Discrimination happens to so many people, we see it on the news. So there's a lot of reasons why it's important that this is going forward.

So you said that was last summer?

Ben: 2019

To give you the status of how the files are progressing...The complaint was received by the Canada Human Rights Commission (CHRC) and they have their own process where they need to determine whether or not there is another appropriate venue for hearing the complaint. And there is another institution that's known as the Civilian Complaints and Review Board and this is for situations where somebody in Canada has a complaint or some issue with police proceedings in a matter. The CHRC has asked for my position, as to whether or not I feel that's (the Review Board) the appropriate venue.

My response is, basically, I don't feel that it is an appropriate venue because the Review Board is not able to have any binding power over the RCMP or to make any rulings that would require the officers to receive any additional training. Because of the Review Board's inability to issue the remedies that I am seeking, I feel that it would be more expedient to go directly to the CHRC and have the matter heard there, where we can actually start looking at the training of the officers involved.

Brian: Right, you want stuff to be happening from higher up instead of from just this other organization you spoke about that wouldn't actually be able to make any of these, enforce any of these changes.

Ben: Well yeah, the Review Board, itself, is an internal process. Other officers not involved with the case would be investigating it. There are benefits to the Review Board, it's not a completely useless process, but I just don't think it's appropriate for this particular situation.

And then, the matter with Shell that is proceeding under the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal was scheduled, sort of put down for mediation on February 11, 2020. Unfortunately, through a sort of oversight in planning on behalf, by the Tribunal, the parent company was actually not present at the mediation and so it was just the local franchise owner.

And so, because of course, there's no ability there to, again, deal with the remedies I'm seeking, we had to conclude the mediations fairly pre-emptively and just agree to come back later when the parent company is at the negotiations table and I can talk to them about implementing the kind of changes that I honestly think will be really good for them as a corporation to make. I think this is kind of the direction that a lot of companies are going because human rights is becoming a really important part of the legislative framework in North America. So, Canada and the States have actually in some ways more robust legislation, when you look at their enforcement of online accessibility for blind people using screen readers, which is kind of the aspects I know the most about. The US, their accessibility legislation is superior to Canada's in terms of the enforceability of it.

But all that aside, I'm just trying to get to the point that companies are going to realize the benefits of being accessible, of being knowledgeable of human rights legislation, and of providing that education and training to their employees. It's part of being a responsible corporate citizen and that's becoming more important, I think, in today's climate and economy.

So, I think it's a change that Shell will be rather quite willing to embrace and will benefit their company as a whole. It's in their interest to be pro-human rights and to have that reputation. For them, to implement those kinds of changes now, proactively, instead of just waiting for more incidents to happen, I think will serve them and I'm hoping that they'll realize that.

Kerry: Basically we're at this point where we can fight it, when these incidents happen, and put up a stink and be mad. But at the same time, we're trying to get them to see that it does benefit everybody.

Brian: Yeah, it's like that with all these things we're getting involved with, Kerry and I and everyone else who's involved with the Canadian Federation of the Blind, and advocacy in general, for any advocacy is, we're not just doing this for our own selves, we're doing this for the greater good and for the public and everyone.

Kerry: Not doing it for kicks.

Exactly...so like I said, it's important to have people like yourself who are a little more knowledgeable about these sort of things and work with this. And anyway, I assume you wouldn't ask for this, but I assume it's even been a bit of a lesson, though you've finished law school. But it's still a good lesson to take with you, I guess. Would you say?

Ben: Well, you're always learning and it doesn't really matter what profession you're in, but in the legal profession there's always changes to the laws and you have to stay on top of that.

It certainly has been a learning experience and it's something that...it's important to have this legislation in place so that there is a recourse because without the legislation, obviously there's no breaking of a law without a law there to break. We need the legislation to grant people with disabilities, and a whole bunch of other minorities, the right to not be discriminated against. Then once those laws are in place, that's when we have the possibility for somebody to then infringe the law and then that's when the repercussions come in.

And so, it is important to uphold our rights by making the stands that we make so that people, businesses, store owners, they realize that these aren't just hollow rights without any remedy, right?

Because a right without a remedy isn't really a right at all. Because, if your rights can be just infringed with no consequence, there's not going to be any end to the infringing of those rights.

Brian: Yeah, it's a vicious circle.

Ben: So, to make these stands where they're needed to be made is what's essential to change attitudes and opinions. I mean, if this incident results in the

entire parent company of Shell making sure that every gas station across Canada is staffed by employees that understand this legislation, that's going to be a big step towards changing attitudes and opinions and that's going to have the real effect of ensuring that people's rights are actually being upheld. Considering this, is part of a transition to a more egalitarian society.

Human rights legislation didn't always exist. There was a time before then when it didn't really matter if you were being discriminated against. There wasn't a law around to protect you.

.....

Ben: I can kind of sum up a little quickly by saying that it's important, first, to have that legislation in place. That's step one in making sure that that's there.

And then, once that legislation is in place, then it's up to the ground troops to make sure that that's getting enforced. And through those kinds of activities, that's how we will create the sort of Canada that we want to see, where these rights are not just enshrined in our constitution and our legislation, but actually being upheld in a day-to-day fashion.

Brian: Yeah, not just a bunch of words on a page. They're actually to be enforced properly.

Kerry: Because what you often hear is that the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarian's with Disabilities Act) or now with the Accessible Canada Act (ACA), you hear about these things and you think, "Okay, we're okay," but then, like you said, you find out that the laws are there, but that they're not being enforced or it's going all wrong and it's sort of taking us two steps backward instead of ahead.

Ben: Well, this was certainly an unfortunate incident, but I see it as an opportunity to really make some important progress in this and hopefully prevent this from happening to other people in the future. That only happens with education and awareness.

Kerry: I know a lot of people on the CFB email list have had guide dogs or currently have them and are going through their own struggles with an issue that's happened to them. So a lot of us are cheering for you, there, on the list and appreciate what you're doing.

Thanks for coming on today and talking about this. I would have liked to talk longer. There's a lot more we could talk about. Would you come back sometime in the future?

Ben: Certainly, by all means and I would like to thank the other members of the CFB list. I've gained some knowledge and support from other people and their experiences, they've certainly helped me in dealing with this particular experience of my own. So I have gained some benefits through the CFB on dealing with this. I just want to say thank you.

Brian: That's great to hear because that is a big part of it, with the CFB. It's all of us working together and all of us having previous knowledge and skills in situations that we've all dealt with, that segments of us have dealt with, that we can share our experiences and help everyone else.

Is there anywhere online that you'd like to mention or plug that people can follow up on this? We'll be having you on in the future to follow up on this as well.

Ben: Well, Kerry mentioned the AODA, so anybody in Ontario who's interested in that, they could always look at the AODA Alliance. Other than that, there's always the human rights legislation for your province. Anybody in any province can just look up, just type in "human rights code" and the name of your province and Google will probably have it up at the very top of that list. That's going to be the black letter law and it doesn't get more straightforward than that, as far as what's actually the legislation, but of course, you know, it can be a little difficult to read at times. There's lots of sources where people can get secondary sources. I'd just say that Google can be your best friend there, but I don't think we really need to plug Google, they get enough plugs already.

Kerry: But, both blind and sighted people, if you don't know about it, try and learn a little bit about it and it can help. You can stick up for somebody else. You never know what situation you might walk into, that you could be a support for, if you understand it – which we could all use a little more of.

We wish to thank 94.9 CHRW Radio Western at the University of Western Ontario, in London.

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Rights tribunal to hear discrimination complaint from blind cab passenger

By Jeff Bell, *Victoria Times Colonist*, February 23, 2020 06:00 AM

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Note from "The Blind Canadian" editor: Unfortunately, it is a common occurrence that blind people with guide dogs experience discrimination, especially with the taxi industry. There's probably not one guide dog handler around who can say they haven't been refused a ride. The excuse is under the veil of "not being seen" or that the driver has an allergy. We know most allergy excuses have nothing to do with allergy. Refusals are due to the simple notion of not wanting a dog in the car – dog hair, a wet dog, cultural beliefs, or fear of a dog. But a place of business or service is required by law to treat blind people with guide dogs the same as any other citizen. How a regular citizen would take a cab is how a blind person with a guide dog is to take a cab. You are to treat a person with a guide dog as though the dog is not there.

The unfortunate thing is that most blind people let the discrimination pass without complaint, so it is not documented as having occurred, and therefore it's like it "never happened". The few who do fight the injustice, have to fight for their rights in human rights tribunal or court – these same rights that are protected for them by law. Which doesn't make sense – why the need to fight for something that already exists in law?

Graeme McCreath, a retired physiotherapist, business owner, father of three and grandfather, lives in Victoria, BC. He is a CFB member and has been a tireless advocate for the rights of the blind on several fronts, which in turn is meant to benefit all blind Canadians.

A discrimination complaint leveled against Bluebird Cabs by a blind passenger will be heard by the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal, after the company's application to have it dismissed was denied.

The case involves Graeme McCreath, who uses a guide dog. A cab was called for him on July 25, 2018, after he had finished an appointment at his doctor's office.

"The first cab to arrive did not pick Mr. McCreath up," said the tribunal decision by Pamela Murray. "Mr. McCreath alleges the driver left after seeing his guide dog."

A second cab was ordered, but McCreath said that the driver "immediately proceeded to scold me for not letting them know I needed the pet-friendly cab he was driving," Murray said in her decision.

"For almost the whole way home this driver chastised me, explaining ... the driver of [the first cab] had an allergy and could not take me."

McCreath claimed he was discriminated against based on his physical disability, and found the way he was treated by the second driver "upsetting and offensive," Murray wrote.

Bluebird denied any discrimination, but Murray wrote that the allegation met the standard of an "arguable contravention" of the Human Rights Code.

McCreath said in an interview he expects it could take up to a year for a hearing to go ahead.

"It's rather unfortunate that we even have to go to the tribunal."

He said he knows of several blind people in other cities who have had difficulty with taxis while using guide dogs.

"Don't get me wrong, there's some really good taxi drivers and really nice people."

Bluebird could not be reached for comment.

Murray wrote that there is a dispute as to whether the driver of the first cab saw McCreath. The driver said he didn't see anyone who appeared to be waiting for a cab or who had a guide dog, and left after three minutes.

Documented evidence showed he had picked up people with dogs before and after the incident.

McCreath said he was outside and clearly visible as he waited for the first cab, Murray wrote.

She wrote that Bluebird alleges McCreath assumed or speculated that his disability was the reason the first cab didn't pick him up.

"The overriding question for me is to whether this complaint deserves the time and resources to have a hearing or whether Bluebird has persuaded me the complaint has no reasonable prospect of success," Murray wrote. "In my view, a hearing is necessary to decide what happened and to make credibility findings, in particular about whether the first cab's driver saw Mr. McCreath."

McCreath made a previous complaint to the tribunal against Victoria Taxi in 2014 after a driver said he had an allergy and refused to pick up McCreath and his dog. Another Victoria Taxi in the area picked him up in short order.

The tribunal dismissed the complaint, saying there was a reasonable justification for what happened.

The matter went to the B.C. Court of Appeal in 2017 and was dismissed there, as well.

McCreath is also involved in a complaint with the City of Victoria that says bike lanes make access to some Pandora Avenue bus stops unsafe for people who are blind or have visual impairments.

In 2013, the tribunal upheld a complaint that allowed him to have an early start in the Times Colonist 10K, which he has run with a sighted friend.

jwbell@timescolonist.com

The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of tiny pushes of each honest worker.

~ Helen Keller

Blind riders see discrimination in relocation of Victoria bus stops from curb to middle of road

By Carlito Pablo, May 21st, 2020 at 11:31 AM
The Georgia Straight, Vancouver, BC
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A B.C. Human Rights Tribunal has rejected an application to dismiss a complaint filed on behalf of the blind.

The complaint is in connection with the relocation of bus stops on a City of Victoria street from the curb to the middle of the road.

The so-called “floating bus stops” were installed along Pandora Avenue between Cook and Store Streets, when the road was redesigned to put a protected bike lane.

Bus riders now have to cross the bike lane to get to the new bus stops.

That’s not a problem for people who are not blind, according to the representative complaint filed by Oriano Belusic on behalf of the Canadian Federation of the Blind.

It’s a different story for visually-impaired bus riders.

The complaint alleged that blind people are in danger of getting hit by bikes.

The blind are therefore denied a service customarily available to all because of their disability, which is a violation of the B.C. Human Rights Code, according to the complaint.

Named respondents were the City of Victoria and BC Transit.

BC Transit applied to have the complaint dismissed on grounds that it has no reasonable chances of succeeding.

This was rejected by tribunal member Norman Trerise.

Recapping BC Transit’s position, Trerise wrote in his reasons for decision that the transportation authority “disputes that it has a duty to accommodate the members of the Class including ensuring safety and access to and from the Floating Stop to the sidewalk”.

BC Transit also argued that it had “no role to play in the City’s decision to utilize Floating Stops or Crosswalks”.

The complaint asserted that “by servicing the Floating Stops Transit became a party to the City’s discrimination by virtue of their denial of meaningful access to public bus transportation by blind persons”.

In his reasons for decision issued Wednesday (May 20), Trerise stated that the issue in this case is “whether the Class has experienced an adverse impact from Transit’s service of the Floating Stops”.

“The discrimination which is complained of is that the members of the Class are unable to reach the doors of the bus due to the danger presented by cyclists who do not reliably stop for pedestrians at the Stop Crosswalks,” Trerise noted.

A “second potential incident of discrimination for members of the Class is that they are prevented from leaving the Floating Stops and accessing the curb for the same reason,” according to the tribunal member.

Based on Trerise’s review of videos, a “substantial minority of cyclists filmed approach the Crosswalks at a pace significantly too quick to allow them to safely stop for a pedestrian stepping into the Crosswalks”.

“For a sightless person such as a member of the Class it seems unlikely that they could reliably determine when it is safe to step into the Crosswalk as a cyclist approaches – assuming that they would even know that a cyclist was approaching,” according to Trerise.

The protected bike lane was launched in May 2017.

On its website, the City of Victoria states that transit users have “raised crosswalks to access the ‘floating bus stops””.

Trerise is “satisfied that the evidence suggests the members of the Class are adversely impacted by the use of the Floating Stops because they are effectively prevented access to the Floating Stops or from such Floating Stops to the curb”.

“As a result, they are denied bus service along the relevant length of Pandora Street,” Trerise noted.

With the dismissal of BC Transit’s application, the complaint is headed to a hearing by the tribunal.

Follow Carlito Pablo on Twitter @carlitopablo

Article at <https://www.straight.com/news/blind-riders-see-discrimination-in-relocation-of-victoria-bus-stops-from-curb-to-middle-of-road>

Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Members Elect National Executive Board for 2020 - 2021

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) held elections for its National Executive Board at its Annual General Meeting on June 13, 2020. It was held via phone teleconference. All members of the Executive are blind and serve in their positions without compensation. This year, positions of President, Second Vice President and Treasurer were up for election.

Members re-elected:

Mary Ellen Gabias, President

Erik Burggraaf, Second Vice President

Members elected:

Brian Kijewski, Treasurer

Since Brian moved to the position of Treasurer, the position of Member-at-large became vacant. Members elected:

Doug Lawlor, Member-at-large

Members are grateful to Oriano Belusic, Vice President and Doris Belusic, Secretary for their continued hard work and service.

A huge thank you to retiring Treasurer, Graeme McCreath, for his many years of dedicated service to CFB.

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.

Congratulations Go Out!

Congratulations to Graeme McCreath, this year's recipient of the second annual "CFB Gabias Award". This was unveiled during the teleconference of CFB's Annual General Meeting held June 13, 2020.

Graeme has dedicated many years to the service of CFB for the benefit of blind Canadians. He has worked tirelessly as an advocate on human rights issues – on discrimination cases involving guide dogs, unsafe bus stops due to poorly-designed bike lanes, and the Times Colonist 10K Run. Graeme has written many letters to government and media and he wrote the book, "The Politics of Blindness: From Charity to Parity". Graeme and his wife, Christine, organized and ran many CFB fun trivia night fundraisers. He has just retired after many years as CFB's Treasurer.

The CFB Gabias Award is an award of appreciation aptly named in commemoration of Dr. Paul and Mary Ellen Gabias, the founders of Federationism in Canada.

Thank you, Graeme, and congratulations!

CFB Testimonials

Being a member of the Canadian Federation of the Blind of Ontario for the past 3 years has been a life-changing experience for me. It has provided me with many opportunities I likely would not have been given elsewhere in society. These include planning and running fundraiser barbecues as well as the role of treasurer. Both of these opportunities helped me to build my confidence and skills as a blind individual. I did not know many blind people growing up and the CFB has connected me with so many. This creates a sense of belonging and the sharing of ideas and techniques through learning from each other and mentoring. I feel so empowered being part of an organization comprised of blind people rather than one that is organized for blind people by the sighted. I look forward to the future of the CFB and hope this organization thrives so that more progress is made for the lives of the blind in Canada.

~ *Brian Kijewski, London, Ontario*

A person's contribution is only as effective as the length of their leash.

Since joining the Canadian Federation of the Blind, every idea I have had has been met with open arms, open minds and open hearts. This openness has allowed me to be successful and to build my leadership skills. The respect, support, love and trust given to me by the Canadian Federation of the Blind have increased my confidence tenfold. In addition to enhancing my leadership philosophy and advocacy skills I need as a blind person, this new self confidence has helped me achieve success in other areas of my life as well.

~ Maggie Bray, Ridgetown, Ontario

A Blind Canadian Senior

by Thelma Fayle

Editor's note: This article is written by my friend who inspired me as a fellow writer. Thank you, Thelma, for your encouragement and support over my six-year university journey.



*Doris
with nephew holding
BA degree
certificate. Photo by
Thelma Fayle*

In 1965 James Brown released a raucous tune called Papa's Got a Brand New Bag. Most North American boomers likely remember dancing to the rowdy number. The Grammy-winning lyrics are about an old man, brave enough to get out on the dance floor of a nightclub. He decided to show a few younger people that he still had some good moves. Brown's song concludes that Papa was "out-a-sight" – very cool – in the hippie-lingo of the 1960's.

The interpretation reminded me of *The Blind Canadian* magazine editor Doris Belusic. In her 60s, Doris graduated in 2019 from the University of Victoria with a BA, majoring in writing – 40 years after she learned that she would go blind with an eye disease called Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP).

Since my friend decided to go back to school as a mature student, I have heard several people comment: "what a waste of time – why bother with going back to school when you are in your 40s or 50's or 60s" – or at 88, as my mother was

when she took her first UVic class. As if an education has no value to a person late in life; or worse, offers no value to society.

Over six years of classes, I have watched Doris, a quiet woman who spent most of her career as a hospital unit clerk, go from being nervous about memorizing a campus route from the bus stop to the classroom of her first Writing 100 course – to skilfully writing a moving poem about the tragedy of a lucrative industry centered around the cruel shearing of shark fins used to make a sadly sought-after, hoity-toity soup.

At the beginning of every term, she fretted over unfamiliar and intimidating university procedures and feared she might not be able to do the course work.

“The requirements are high level,” she often noted as she checked out each new syllabus. She felt she wasn’t as bright as a few of her much younger classmates. She never compared herself to the larger number of students who produced less interesting work than hers.



*Doris
with Thelma Fayle at
UVic grad ceremony.*



*Doris with UVic
Chancellor,
Shelagh Rogers
and Thelma
Fayle.*

But slowly she began to explore. She became a reader, she thoughtfully listened to the perspectives of her classmates and her professors, and she broadened her thinking. After sixty years of being on this earth, her evolving ideas led to an entirely new worldview. She learned to get comfortable reciting her poetry at public events and she began to write powerful articles on a variety of issues. She learned to be able to say: “I am a poet” and “I am a writer”. She also learned that she is smarter than she knew. Doris never mentions it herself, but the woman pulled off several A’s.

She steadily persisted and mastered the campus environment – as a high-functioning and confident blind woman.

It was fun to see a mature student work so hard to accomplish her goal. I observed the value in having the courage to learn at any time in life. A mature student doesn’t need the credentials to earn a living – the learning exercise is not for commercial benefit. It is learning purely for the sake

of challenging and enriching one's own point of view. It seems a more useful choice than chalking up three hours a day on Facebook or Twitter.

How can a person lose – at any age – by choosing a path that leads to owning a better set of critical-thinking skills? I have a feeling there are poems and articles and even books in the new graduate that could take the house down if she decides to write them.

As I watched my friend do the hard work entailed in earning her degree, I was frequently reminded of entrenched oppressive attitudes among the sighted when it comes to misunderstanding the potential of blind Canadians. Many people simply don't know any blind people and consequently often underestimate a blind person's capacity.

Not only did the mature student learn more about our world through her course loads, but in her strong and gentle way, she left a wake of fresh and friendly understanding about blindness issues with the UVic students and staff she encountered. My determined friend dispelled more than a few stale societal notions en route to earning her BA. That seems a stellar value from a late-life education.

Doris Belusic has got a brand new bag.

**CANADAHELPS CAMPAIGN:
HELP OUR HUMAN RIGHTS CASE
AGAINST LIFE-THREATENING BIKE LANES**

Blind citizens are seeking redesign of dangerous bike lanes and inaccessible floating bus stops in Victoria, BC. A human rights case has been launched by the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) against the City and BC Transit. Blind people need to be able to participate in their own (and their guide dog's) safety and the current design prevents that. Crossing these dedicated, hardscape bike lanes is risky because silent bikes often don't stop. No one wants to see injury or death to a person or guide dog. Let's not have these bike lanes set a precedent for elsewhere.

Please see our CanadaHelps campaign page. Donations can be made until October 15 at <https://tinyurl.com/cfbikelanes>. We need your support. Thank you.

OBITUARY: Blind children's author Jean Little wove tales in which disabilities were part of life

JUDY STOFFMAN
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL
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*Photo: Children's author Jean Little reads from *Jess was the Brave One* to her biggest fan, her sight dog, Ritz, at her old stone farmhouse in Elora, Ont., on Sept. 23, 1997. SIMON WILSON/SIMON WILSON VIA THE CANADIAN PRESS*

She never forgot what it was like to be a child: uncertain, powerless, dreamy, vulnerable. Out of the evergreen memories of her childhood, Jean Little constructed a body of literary work – some 60 books – that entertained, touched and comforted children with disabilities and those without. Young disabled characters figured in many of her stories, which were translated into French, German, Danish, Dutch, Japanese, Greek, Welsh and Norwegian.

Her books brought her an Order of Canada, four honorary degrees and every major Canadian literary prize for juvenile literature. An elementary school bears her name in Guelph, Ont., where she lived.

Born with scarred corneas that made seeing a constant struggle, the author overcame seemingly insuperable challenges to make her living as a writer. But first she became an avid reader from an early age. To make out the words, she was obliged to hold a book so close to her face that she had to wash the printer's ink off her nose before she could go out. Reading the classics of juvenile literature educated her imagination and fortified her against schoolyard bullies who taunted her for being clumsy and cross-eyed.

Her younger sister, Patricia de Vries, former head nurse at Vancouver General Hospital, who lived with Ms. Little for the last 27 years of her life, recalled that when the two were children, Jean would pull her to the Guelph public library on a sled in winter, having borrowed the library cards of all her siblings so that she could take out more books than her own library card would allow: "She took out 10 books at a time and my job was to keep them dry on the sled on the way home."

Ms. Little was a fast reader, able to finish a novel in an evening until her vision declined precipitously in middle age. Though she learned Braille, she found it too slow.

Ms. Little died on April 7 at the age of 88 in a Guelph hospice. Her niece Maggie de Vries said she had been suffering from heart disease and may have had a stroke.

Ms. Little was born in Taiwan on Jan. 2, 1932, the second of four children of John Llewellyn and Flora Millicent (née Gauld) Little, two doctors who had been sent out as medical missionaries by the United Church of Canada. Jean's maternal grandparents were also missionaries. The brilliant Flora had started medical school in Toronto at the age of 16 and both mother and father were empathetic and literate. Versions of them appear as somewhat idealized parents in Ms. Little's books; one of these (*His Banner over Me*, 1995) is the story of her mother's life.

Ms. Little was 7 when the family returned to Toronto at the start of the Second World War. Her 1987 memoirs *Little by Little* is a vivid account of her early education. On the recommendation of an eye specialist, she was sent to the "sight-saving" class at Jesse Ketchum School, where she learned to read and print from a caring teacher, using a thick, dark pen and special chalk visible on green boards. But outside class, the name calling and humiliation by sighted children never stopped.

When her teacher saw the visually impaired children's anger and frustration at their own limitations, their inability to untie a knot or deliver newspapers (they couldn't see the house numbers), she obtained materials for each to weave a waste basket, which they managed to complete after some coaching. When Jean gave her green-painted waste basket to her mother for a Christmas gift, her family was impressed, and Jean's confidence grew. The story of the basket made its way into Ms. Little's most popular novel, *From Anna*, about a German immigrant child with low vision. The green basket, which Dr. Little kept all her life, is now in the collection of the Toronto Public Library, Lillian H. Smith Branch.

The Little family moved to Guelph, where young Jean went to a regular school and joined a church-sponsored youth group, Canadian Girls in Training; there she began at last to make friends. She learned touch typing and started writing poems and stories, with encouragement from her adored father. He was immensely proud when Saturday Night magazine printed two of the teenaged Jean's poems.

Against all odds, she graduated with an honours BA from the University of Toronto in 1955, where she was a student of the celebrated literary scholar Northop Frye. In her memoirs, she described with some satisfaction how the registrar of Victoria College had tried to talk her out of enrolling in the degree program, because he did not believe she could possibly do all the reading Prof. Frye would assign. He was forced to eat his words.

After teacher training in Utah, she was hired to instruct disabled children. Mostly she read to her charges. She noticed that the conventional happy ending in books for such children called for protagonists to throw away their crutches, fully cured. "She thought that was false," said Ms. de Vries, also a writer. "She knew you could live with a disability and still have a satisfactory life."

Her first novel, *Mine for Keeps*, was published in 1962 and won the Little Brown Children's Book Award, launching her writing career. It was followed by other juvenile books at approximately annual intervals. In later life she wrote witty picture books for very young children.

Her prizes included the Vicky Metcalf Award (1974), the Canada Council Children's Book Award (1977), Ruth Schwartz Children's Book Award (1985) and the Mr. Christie Book Award (2000).

Not everyone was charmed. Jewish parents objected to her misrepresentation of the history and meaning of the festival of Hanukkah in *Jenny and the Hanukkah Queen* (1995).

Her most formidable critic was Sheila Egoff, author of *The Republic of Childhood: A Critical Guide to Children's Literature in English*, former librarian at Boys and Girls House in Toronto, who went on to teach at the University of British Columbia for 21 years. In her reviews, the acerbic Ms. Egoff described *Mine for Keeps* as the story of "the trials of a child crippled by cerebral palsy as she learns to adjust to normal school and after five years at a special school. A conventional attempt at 'bibliotherapy.'" She called another book, *When the Pie Was Opened*, "a collection of highly sentimental and inept verse about growing up."

"When she began writing, Jean was deeply hurt by Sheila Egoff's patronizing remarks labelling her books sentimental," recalled Mary Rubio, retired professor of English at Guelph University, editor of the journals of Lucy Maud Montgomery. Prof. Rubio became a good friend and often drove Ms. Little and her Seeing Eye dog to speaking engagements around Ontario. "However, Jean's books were very popular with children and she lived to see herself regarded as one of the most-loved Canadian children's writers of her era," she added.

When Ms. Little was around 30, one of her eyes developed glaucoma and was removed surgically. Prof. Rubio witnessed her getting the children's undivided attention on these school visits by asking if they'd like to see her glass eye, which she would casually pop out of its socket.

When she was in her mid-40s, the sudden loss of vision in her other eye plunged her into a depression and made it impossible for her to work at the typewriter since she could not read back what she had written. The book she was writing at the time, *Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird* (1984) took her seven agonizing years to complete. This difficult period is the subject of her second memoirs, *Stars Come Out Within*.

After she heard about a new talking computer, she tracked down its near-blind inventor David Kostyshyn, in Hamilton. She acquired this device and used it the rest of her life. She also got her first guide dog, a big protective Lab named Zephyr, who gave her greater independence. Guide dogs became part of her persona.

Ms. Little had a full life that included world travel with friends or relatives. Ms. de Vries said it was her Aunt Jean who introduced her to theatre, taking her to Stratford and the Shaw Festival where they usually sat in the front row.

Her life was to have an unexpected coda. At about the age when she received her first Canada Pension Plan cheque, Ms. Little became a mother, of sorts. With her sister, Pat, she took on the task of raising the children of Pat's murdered daughter Sarah, one of the victims of Robert Pickton. Sarah had been a beautiful, troubled young woman who had spent 14 years living on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and her children, Ben and Jeanie, were affected in utero by her addictions.

Kernels: A Year of Hope

By Maggie Bray

Editor's note: The Kernels of Hope Peer Support Group uses articles from the Kernel Book series which are published by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the US. The NFB is a sister organization to the CFB in Canada.

There are currently 27 Kernel Books which tell the stories of blind men and women. When the first editor, Dr. Kenneth Jernigan, was asked why he chose the name Kernel Book, he said: "We wanted to go to the very heart of blindness, trying to show our readers what it's really like—and, for that matter, what it isn't like."

If you are blind, what do you think and how do you look at things – not how do you look at them physically – but what is your point of view and perspective? How about dating and marriage? What about children, recreation, work, and relations with others? In short, how do blind people live and feel on a daily basis? What we are trying to do is to cut through the sentimentality and misconceptions to the very 'kernel' of the subject of blindness.

Kernel Books can be read online at

<https://www.nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/books/kernel1/kernels.htm>

During the past year, in the Canadian Federation of the Blind, something amazing has been happening. People have come together once a month to discuss the ways in which blindness and society's attitudes toward it affect mental health. Through the support group, Kernels of Hope, members of the blind community, both in and outside of the Federation, have exposed themselves to a more positive perspective on blindness-related issues.

Some of these issues include: "What is it like to suddenly wake up blind?", "Being blind in social situations", "Dealing positively with the question, 'What do you do?'", "Finding the washroom in an unfamiliar environment", etc.

Our meetings take place on the second Thursday of every month at 7 PM Eastern and usually run for 1 1/2 - 2 hours. We spend the first part of the meeting discussing our feelings about our topic. We do this by sharing our experiences and empathizing with each other whenever possible. Then we read an article from the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Kernel Book series that is appropriate to the topic we are discussing. Generally, the article presents a more positive view of our topic than that previously held by group members.

This group has been a valuable resource to its members in the following four areas: Firstly, forming and being a part of this group has made us feel honoured. Secondly, it encourages openness with ourselves, each other, and those around us. Thirdly, we have been forced to persevere no matter how difficult things became. And fourthly, seeing how people have used our group to make positive change helps us gain a sense of effervescence.

Honour is not normally a quality I would ascribe to a support group. However, honour is something that many blind people rarely feel. Whether it's trying to get our needs met as a student in school, trying to fit into a church community, apply for a job, or get along with sighted members of our families, honour isn't something we get to feel on a regular basis.

When you honour someone, it doesn't always mean giving them an award or letting them make a speech on stage. The way I see it, honouring someone means listening to them, not just halfway, but hearing them out completely. It means respecting the things they like even though you might not like them yourself. It means giving them a place where they can use their knowledge and experience to become a major contributor to your organization.

Honoured is something I have felt ever since I joined the Federation, and Kernels of Hope only gives us more opportunities to show that kind of honour to others. Even the process of getting this group off the ground made me feel honoured. From November 2018 when I put the idea of a peer support group on the table, to the day in March 2020 when I am writing this article, I have always been given the space to share my ideas and the feedback has been nothing but positive. Even when I needed help developing the group's format so it would be in line with Federation philosophy, things were explained and suggested to me in a very honourable and respectful manner.

When I try to do things like this with other organizations, I often feel like a nuisance who does nothing but get in the way. I have never felt that way in regards to Kernels of Hope. Some members of the group have confirmed to me that they have been feeling the same way. The honour that has been shown to us has given us the confidence that will help us deal with ourselves and the sighted world.

Being in an environment where we are honoured and feeling confident inevitably leads us to develop a sense of openness. In the group this past year, I have seen people who were shy at the beginning grow more and more talkative. It is so nice to hear anecdotes from our group members. In this way, we can get to know each other in a way that we may not have had the opportunity to do otherwise. Our group is a place where people have dealt with

past hurts, discussed present annoyances, and learned to face fears about the future. We have been able to share resources with each other and this contributes to an overall positive quality of life.

In order to maintain the positive atmosphere of our group, I have had to learn many things; not the least of which is perseverance. Since my first nervous breakdown twenty years ago, I have had problems doing academic work, keeping up with technology, getting things done on time, and sticking with projects. Knowing this group is counting on me has helped me improve in all of these areas. Having to read through the Kernel Books to find an appropriate article and writing an agenda every month has helped me retrain my brain so that I can regain my academic skills. Having to get these agendas ready a couple of days before each meeting has helped me be more accountable about getting things done on time.

Although this past year hasn't been easy, we have all been able to see it through. We have helped each other through deaths in our families, social anxiety, misunderstandings about boundaries, and equipment failure. Because we have learned perseverance, I have every confidence that we will be able to see each other through another year.

Feeling honoured, being open, and learning to persevere has created a happy and relaxed atmosphere. "It feels like a bunch of friends getting together," said one group member, "I love the chance to get to know other blind people."

Knowing that this group has provided this kind of atmosphere provides me with a feeling of effervescence. I can't explain the joy I feel after a successful meeting. More importantly, when I realize that we have helped someone succeed in a non-group-related area, I feel as though everything we are doing is worthwhile.

One example of this type of success happened last summer. A member of our group who suffers from social anxiety had a major breakthrough when she came to the Ontario summer social and stayed until the end. I also remember when I had to conduct one Kernels meeting out of my van because I was dealing with a family emergency and an urgent professional situation at the same time. I was so overwhelmed that I actually thought about postponing the meeting. But when I got among my friends at Kernels, I had such a good time that I was able to deal with my problems in a more positive way than I normally would have.

Honour, openness, perseverance and effervescence – these are the ingredients that have helped us to achieve our year of hope. I am excited to see what this

next year has to teach us. Will I be able to grow out of my mental illness and learn to be a productive person? Will some of us learn to stay on topic and keep our tempers? Will we be able to help even more people change their attitude toward their blindness? Will we be able to get more folks to come out so we can develop friendships in the blind community? Why don't you join in and find out?

It is our sincere wish that, as a blind person, you will want to come out to the Kernels of Hope Peer Support Group. Maybe we will make more friends and experience more success this year than we did in the last.

If you are on the CFB listserv, you will learn how to join in the Kernels meetings. If you are reading this and not on the listserv but would like to learn how to join the meetings, please ask at info@cfb.ca

NNELS and What We Can Do For You (National Network for Equitable Library Service)

This article contains information that may be useful to our many new subscribers, as well as our long-time readers. With the impact of COVID-19, the reading needs of people are high, and we want to make sure that you know all about our services. NNELS is committed to our mission of providing reading opportunities for people with print disabilities during this difficult time.

As many of you know, NNELS recently conducted a study on the reading habits and preferences of people in Canada with print disabilities. As a result, we have met a lot of new people, both in person and online, and are delighted to welcome them to the mailing list, and the NNELS world!

In order to warmly welcome you (and perhaps give a refresher to the not-new folks!), we wanted to write and tell you a little bit about who we are, what we do, and why we do it.

Who we are

The National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) is a repository of content owned and sustained by Canadian public libraries. We work with international partners, libraries, readers, and publishers (particularly Canadian

ones) to make copies of books in accessible formats available to readers in Canada who have print disabilities. We love books, and we want to make sure that everyone is able to read the books they want, in the way that they want.

What we do

The Repository

One of the biggest parts of what we do is maintain and develop a repository of accessible books, including MP3s, eBraille, DAISY books, EPUBs, and more. If you don't know how to access our repository, you can start by checking if your library is a participating library. Please check out our [list of participating libraries](#), or use the Sign-Up page to [search and check your library's status](#). If you can't find your library or province, don't worry! Under the [NNELS National Service Model](#), you can still get access to the repository. Send us an email at support@nnels.ca to learn more (and to get at all those accessible books!). If you do live in a NNELS territory or province, you can [make requests](#) anytime: log in, search for a book, and you'll find the request form on every page of search results. We absolutely love fulfilling reader's requests!

Special Projects

Over the last three years, NNELS has had the opportunity to work on a number of initiatives and special projects, funded in part by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program – Disability Component. We are working hard to learn all about accessible publishing and advance the state of accessible publishing in Canada. We have partnered with the Centre for Equitable Library Access, eBOUND, ANEL, and dozens of publishers to do all that we can to improve things.

Why we do it

All readers should be able to access the books they need and want, but this fact does not reflect the current reality. Books need to be born-accessible, and we are proud to be one of many organizations around the world who are working to make this happen.

Keeping in touch

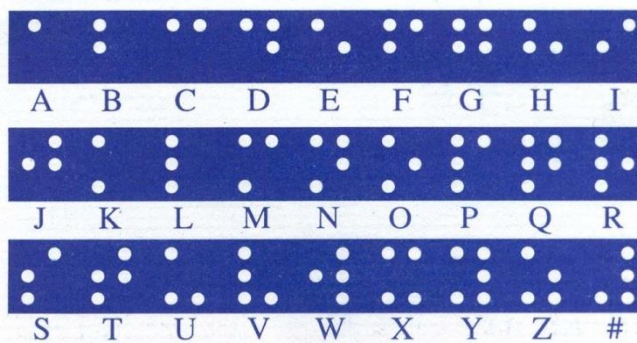
In this email, we've given you a very brief overview of our organization, but we are always trying new things and working on new, exciting projects!

To keep up to date on what we are up to, you have already made a great decision by joining our mailing list. We also encourage you to follow us on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#), and you are always welcome to email us at support@nnels.ca if you have any questions or comments!

National Network for Equitable Library Service
c/o BC Libraries Cooperative
#330-268 Keefer St.
Vancouver British Columbia V6A 1X5, Canada

Keep safe and happy reading!

NNELS: Braille is Literacy (National Network for Equitable Library Service)



Braille is a system of raised dots that people can read with their fingers, either through a physical embossed Braille book or through Braille software designed to read electronic Braille on a computer using a Braille display. With the widespread availability of audiobooks and assistive reading technologies such as screen readers, why are Braille reading materials still needed?

Charlene Young was born in Rosetown, Saskatchewan, without her sight. She began learning to read Braille when she was four years old, at the same time as her sighted peers were learning to read printed books. The first step in learning to read Braille is the development of “tactile readiness”, which is the ability to feel each raised dot. Much like a sighted child learns what the letter “A” looks

like and sounds like, children with sight loss learn what the letter “A” feels like and sounds like. Learning the Braille alphabet, just like learning the printed alphabet, is the gateway for learning to spell and read. These are the very basics of literacy development, which is vital for future success in educational and vocational environments. Charlene is grateful she learned to read Braille as it enables her to fully participate in team meetings at her workplace; she can read meeting agendas and other reading materials on her Braille display at the same time as her colleagues.

Despite the importance of Braille for literacy development, Braille resources are expensive and not widely available. When Braille books are available, they are often released after print publications have already been published. A lack of timely access to Braille resources creates less demand for learning how to read Braille, which in turn creates more dependency on screen readers and other assistive reading technologies that are not as effective in developing literacy and learning capabilities. It is a cycle that is not inclusive.

“Traditionally, Braille readers have often waited for books to be produced into alternative formats - often not having an opportunity to read the books they're excited about until months later. Ensuring that Braille copies of published materials are available on the date of release places Braille reading Canadians on an equal footing with their sighted peers. Braille Literacy Canada commends all those who advocate for timely and increased access to Braille.”

~ Natalie Martiniello (President, Braille Literacy Canada)

The ability to read a book as soon as it has been published ensures people with print disabilities are included in the literary conversation. According to Adam Wilton, of the Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired in British Columbia, “it is not enough to say that reading materials will be accessible; reading materials must be accessible in a timely manner in order to be considered inclusive.”

Ashley Nemeth, a vision impaired Braille reader from Regina, Saskatchewan, progressively lost her sight from birth until she was no longer able to read large print in grade 7. She attended a class to learn to read Braille at that time, a pivotal moment that set her on a course of lifelong reading and learning. Ashley doesn't know how she would have been able to read stories to her children at bedtime if she didn't know how to read Braille. She also loves Braille cookbooks, as they enable her to quickly check measurements and review ingredients as she is making the recipe. Can you imagine how cumbersome it would be to use an audio cookbook? To Ashley, “Braille is literacy”. Ensuring

publications are released in Braille at the same time as print makes her feel like she has equal priority, and that her needs are not an afterthought.

NNELS advocates that inclusive access means access for all readers at the time of publication (also known as “born accessible” books), and thanks in part to support from the federal government’s Social Development and Partnership Program – Disability Component (SDPP-D), we have been fortunate to work with incredible industry partners to advance the born accessible vision. Earlier this year, NNELS worked with House of Anansi Press for the simultaneous embossed Braille and electronic Braille release of the Griffin Poetry Prize Anthology. After this successful release, NNELS has been delighted to work with several Canadian publishers on the simultaneous release of nine additional published works in embossed Braille, electronic Braille (BRF), and EPUB. The fiction and nonfiction books represent a diversity of topics in both French and English, including military history, mystery, poetry, and children’s literature. Visit the NNELS website to learn more about specific titles that have been released.

Bart Vautour, author of *The Truth about Facts*, was thrilled his work can reach an expanded, inclusive audience:

“I am thrilled that my work is part of a large initiative that is working to increase accessibility through our public libraries. What is more, for my work to have simultaneous release in print and Braille formats demonstrates a growing movement to make sure that those with print disabilities are not an afterthought in our literary culture. With the rise and viability of accessible publication formats, I’m eagerly awaiting the possibilities of change and innovation in the ways we as authors imagine our audiences, which in turn can make real change within our literary communities.”

Braille readers can access these titles, and many others, from the NNELS distributed Braille collection. Electronic Braille files may be downloaded, or a physical embossed Braille book may be requested for loan from 14 host libraries across Canada. To find out how you can borrow these Braille books from your library (because any Canadian can!) please send a note to support@nnels.ca or call 1-888-848-9250, option 5.

Our deepest gratitude goes out to publishers Bouton d’or Acadie, Coach House Books, House of Anansi Press, Invisible Publishing, Royal British Columbia Museum, Scholastic Canada, and University of Calgary Press for their commitment to inclusive publishing. NNELS also thanks and acknowledges the fantastic work of Braille transcribers Point-par-point, Braille Jymico, Bonnie Read, and Tactile Vision Graphics.

Publishers are encouraged to check out our [Braille Publication Project](#) to see if your book can be produced in Braille. Let's work together to ensure Braille readers are included in the literary conversation!

National Network for Equitable Library Service
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National Federation of the Blind (NFB) National Convention 2020 Went Virtual!

“Anywhere and Everywhere”, July 14-18, 2020 Unique Event to Present the 2020 View on Blindness

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the US held its annual national convention, July 14-18, 2020. The convention was originally scheduled to take place in Houston, Texas. But due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a change of plans and the convention went virtual.

Congratulations to the NFB for their resilience and persistence and creativity and for all of the immense work that went into putting on such a grand, informative, inspiring and fun convention – where over 7,000 people attended – the largest convention in NFB history!

NFB national conventions are the largest gatherings of blind people in the world, usually with 2,000 – 3,500 attendees. Each year it is held in a large US city, such as Dallas, Atlanta, Orlando and Las Vegas. Blind people travel from all over the world to attend. Many people say that these conventions are “life changing” events. The 2021 NFB convention is planned to be held in New Orleans.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) is the Federation in Canada. Over the years, CFB has introduced blind Canadians to the NFB and sponsored many to attend NFB conventions. These conventions are the best place in the world to learn about blindness and about being blind.

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB), headquartered in Baltimore, is the oldest and largest nationwide organization of blind Americans. Founded in 1940, the NFB consists of affiliates, chapters, and divisions in the fifty states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico. The NFB defends the rights of blind people of all ages, and provides information and support to families with blind children, older Americans who are losing vision, and more. They believe in the hopes and dreams of blind people and work together to transform them into reality. Their motto is "You can live the life you want."

Learn more about NFB at www.nfb.org and CFB at www.cfb.ca

NFB Vegas! A Thank You Letter

Editor's note: The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the U.S. is a sister organization to the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB). The NFB is the world's largest organization of blind people and it holds a blindness convention annually, often in a different U.S. city. In 2019, it was held for one week in Las Vegas. Out of 3,200 attendees (the third-largest convention in NFB history!), 33 were Canadian. The NFB convention is the best place to learn about being blind. There are seminars on many topics, technology exhibits, many successful blind role models and several days of interesting speeches to listen to, learn from and be inspired by, including the banquet address. There is no other venue quite like the NFB convention.

Each year CFB likes to offer financial support (based on funds available) to help people attend the NFB convention because we strongly believe it is important. We raise funds through fundraisers and through donations (see article: Giving to CFB) and we collect Aeroplan Miles (see article: Donating Aeroplan Miles Helps Blind Canadians Attend Blindness Convention) to help with flights.

Below is one attendee's letter of thanks, sent to Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB's president.

July 21, 2019

Hi Mary Ellen,

We didn't get too much of a chance to meet up and chat at the convention. I just want to drop you a quick note to thank you again for helping to subsidize my first visit to NFB's convention. It was a wonderful learning experience. I have never been to a convention with about 3,200+ visually impaired attendees and 100's of guide dogs, plus 100+ exhibit booths with the latest in support products for visually impaired people.

With all the various NFB state chapters represented, I felt like I was in a U.S. political convention. The history of NFB and what it has accomplished over the decades has been a real eye opener. I now have a sense and understanding of why CFB exists and its mission. NFB's resources in both people and funds to support the visually impaired community in the States is overwhelming. I guess it will take a while for us Canadians to replicate the growth and success and passion to create the same phenomena of NFB in the States here in Canada with CFB. I am glad I have been introduced to CFB and NFB as both conferences that I've attended to date have been most inspiring. The life stories of some of the speakers reflected the courage to rise above one's circumstances in spite of one's limitations and struggles. It helps me to say, "If they can do it, I can do it!"

Again, thank you for introducing me to CFB and NFB.

Cheers,

Bill Der

Canadian Federation of the Blind Convention 2021: Save the Date!

Date: first weekend in May 2021

Where: Atrium Inn Vancouver,
2889 E. Hastings St., Vancouver, BC, V5K 2A1

Watch for more details as they become available on www.cfb.ca

Hope to see you there!



Committed to the equality of blind Canadians

Giving to the Canadian Federation of the Blind

Donate Today

Help Change What it Means to be Blind

By donating to the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), you help make a significant difference in the lives of blind Canadians.

Donations are tax-deductable. Registered Charitable Tax Number: 864997291 RR0001

General Donations

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

1) Online:

CFB accepts online donations through Canada Helps, enabling contributions by credit card, Interac or Paypal and receive an instant income tax receipt. Monthly automatic donations can also be set up via Canada Helps. Please go to: <https://www.canadahelps.org/dn/17020>

2) By Mail:

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

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

Bequests and Planned Giving

Please write to our address or email us at info@cfb.ca

Aeroplan Miles Donations

Please see details in this issue or go to:
<http://beyondmiles.aeroplan.com/eng/charity/546>

Thank you for your kind and generous support.

Donating Aeroplan Miles Helps Blind Canadians Attend Blindness Convention

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

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

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

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

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

Please help us raise miles so more blind Canadians can benefit. If you know of anyone who may be interested in donating miles, please tell them about this Aeroplan charitable pooling initiative. Thank you for your support!

To donate, please go to: <http://beyondmiles.aeroplan.com/eng/charity/546>

Thank You to Aeroplan Miles Supporters

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

~Erik Burggraaf, President, CFB Ontario

Kerry's Outlook

by Kerry Kijewski

Editor's note: Kerry is a CFB member from Woodstock, Ontario. Besides being assistant editor of The Blind Canadian magazine, she is secretary of the Ontario chapter, and along with her brother, Brian, co-hosts Outlook, a radio program aired through the University of Western Ontario, in London. This article is the first of what will be Kerry's editorial column which will appear in each upcoming issue of this magazine.

My chest tightens and my adrenaline kicks in. A deep frustration with the state of things. A feeling like a force escaping from my body. An anxious energy.

There are things I see or hear that involve people I care about, not to mention strangers who also face barriers and discrimination. I am generally quiet and laid back, a person who hasn't always spoken up for myself, let alone others, but I feel a strong desire to make things better.

In this column I will share my outlook, my take on some of the issues of the day.

In September of 2017, I had barely heard of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), let alone something known as the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS). Both are Canadian organizations and I, in my mid-thirties at the time, had not heard of either.

An old friend told me about the CFB and we soon joined up to form a new chapter in Ontario. Erik had experience with advocacy work and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the US, but where to start with Canadian issues?

At one of our first official Ontario chapter meetings, we had a guest speaker on our conference line. The presenter told us about an alternative way to access books, to that which we'd grown up with and to what we knew was already available.

Along with my younger brother, who is also blind, I had grown up with the Braille and audiobook library through the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, but I knew that resource had undergone changes over the years. So I was thrilled to learn that there was another option. Often for those of us with disabilities, we're eventually granted choice. But it becomes a fight to dare ask for something more than the status quo. We absorb messages that tell us we should be grateful for the one solution that has addressed a problem.

I first had to learn the difference between the library services, then work up the nerve to speak to my local library about it. I was still learning myself, I had a voice, but I lacked confidence.

NNELS was different, I was discovering. I tried to explain at my local library how one service is not the same as the other; that NNELS was an inclusive option which would end our segregation and bring community libraries into the fold. With NNELS, it was expected that the blind deserved to belong to and be served by our hometown local libraries, since blind patrons had as much right as sighted patrons to reading options that were not through charity, separate from the rest of society.

I had an "in" at my local library, or so I thought because I'd been going there several years to attend a writing group. The lady who ran our group seemed receptive, but it wasn't up to her. She put in a good word for me, but my request for my library to sign up with NNELS – so I could access the books that could be made accessible there (mainly digital) – was ultimately rejected. I was told that the libraries in Ontario already had something for any blind patron to access

accessible reading material. It was called CELA, a fairly new subsidiary of the CNIB, which already had connection to libraries like mine. So I was told that what I was asking the library employees for was redundant, since I should be happy with the one and only choice – access to a private, charity collection of books, instead of a publicly-funded and shared one.

The first excuse those of us with disabilities hear, when we ask nicely for more equality and access, is a funding one. And right on cue...there it came.

However, NNELS wasn't going to cost them anything. It would take a morning of training at most for the library to sign up with NNELS, the same thing the employee had done for CELA, which could easily have been done for NNELS.

I was the only person in my town who knew of NNELS, who loved books in that way, I thought, as I mulled over what to do next. I had support and a chorus of voices from the members of the CFB I had met thus far and they were there, reassuring me that I wasn't expecting too much and to keep going if possible, but what would that require and did I have the strength to see it through?

I'd grown up with low vision, learning both how to read large print and Braille. Once I could no longer make out any print, I would eventually become a Braille user almost exclusively. As the 21st century began, technology options took off and I struggled to figure it all out. I still had my Braille and I would gain more of an ability with technology than I'd given myself credit for.

In 2018, I was asked to be one of the writers of a new study that NNELS conducted to improve the availability of accessible Braille in Canadian public libraries. I wanted more librarians to understand what it felt like to walk through a building full of books, my version of heaven practically, and be unable to read a word of any of them.

Yet I tried again, speaking to and emailing my library. In provinces that had not signed up with NNELS, it all had to start one library at a time. Libraries had to show they were willing to sign up and offer patrons with any kind of print disability, another option. We human beings aren't happy with one option for most things, so why did it seem I was asking so much?

This issue has stretched on for nearly three years, but for months at a time I would be frozen with fear of pushing further. I had to decide my next step.

In the fall of 2019, along with the chairman of the Ontario CFB chapter, I met with the new CEO of the library in my town. I didn't have to face this meeting

alone. I needed practice speaking about my equal rights, without feeling intimidated, losing my train of thought and ending up in a pool of tears, because nobody will take you seriously if you cry.

Having previously heard “no” on this issue, many people would think I was making a fuss over nothing. But I hadn’t felt this strongly about something in a while. I could feel the heat of hesitation and fear spread across my cheeks each time I’d have an audience willing to listen, and yet, the intense need to be heard made me push on.

The CEO had listened, giving us an hour of his time, but always he’d take one of our points and stubbornly refute it. I knew I could end up in my usual situation, feeling small and child-like, trying adultly to articulate my position.

And here we are now. Throughout this pandemic, NNELS has managed to make it possible for anyone who wants to directly set up an account with them to do so. Unheard-of circumstances mean that the library issue that I’ve been fighting for is moot, at least for now. I’ve found a way around the problem and now, so will others. But that’s not the point. But still, having access to NNELS is extremely valuable, especially during these times of commonplace isolation and an even greater need to access information equally.

My point was buried by unforeseen events, like COVID-19 and a cyber hacker who kept municipal professionals busy here. But I did ask that library CEO to read the study I’d been a part of (available on the NNELS website). I was proud to have been involved with it, and maybe after reading it, he would understand what I was talking about, asking for, pushing for. It’s exhausting to fight for these things that should be what’s right, especially when my guess is that the CEO never read any of it.

I would not have known about NNELS without having been involved with the CFB, a place where I don’t have to go it alone, where I have others willing to stand with me on what matters to me – and reading, reading accessibly – matters. I just wish a bunch of library employees in my little Ontario town cared as much.

Never bend your head. Hold it high. Look the world straight in the eye.”

~ Helen Keller

Recipes!

These recipes come from Doris Belusic, editor of The Blind Canadian magazine and secretary of the CFB. She lives in Victoria, BC.

As the COVID pandemic began, my friend Thelma picked up a 25 lb bag of organic oats for me. It's always good to stock up, I thought. After all, "Be Prepared" was our motto in Girl Guides when I was young and it still sticks.

With all of these oats in my pantry, I had to see what I could make with them – besides oatmeal and more oatmeal. Here are two great recipes I found. Enjoy!

Blueberry Oatmeal Muffins

These muffins are tasty and moist.

Yield: 7 – 8 large muffins

- 1 cup (80g) old-fashioned whole rolled oats
- 1 cup (240ml) milk (I used 1/8 c powdered milk mixed in 1 c water)
- 1 1/4 cups (156g) all-purpose or whole wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup (115g) unsalted butter, melted and slightly cooled (I used oil)
- 1/2 cup (120ml) honey (I used brown sugar)
- 1 large egg
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 cup (190g) fresh or frozen blueberries (do not thaw)

Combine milk and oats. Set aside for 20 minutes so the oats puff up and soak up some moisture. This is crucial to the recipe!

If you are using butter, melt it now so it has a few minutes to cool.

Preheat oven to 425°F (218°C). Spray a muffin pan with nonstick spray or use cupcake paper liners.

Whisk the flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt together in a medium bowl until well combined. Set aside.

Whisk the melted butter (or oil), honey (or brown sugar), egg, and vanilla extract together in a large bowl until combined.

Pour the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients, stir a few times, then add the soaked oats (milk included, do not drain) and blueberries. Fold everything together gently just until combined.

Spoon the batter (I use a 1/2 cup measure) into liners, filling them all the way to the top, even a bit over.

Bake at 425°F for 5 minutes, then reduce temperature to 350°F (177°C) and bake for an extra 22 minutes or so, until a toothpick inserted in the centre comes out clean.

Allow the muffins to cool for 5 minutes in the muffin pan, then transfer to a wire rack to continue cooling.

Muffins stay fresh covered at room temperature for a few days, then transfer to the fridge for up to 1 week.

Nova Scotia Oat Cakes

The sweet and salty flavour make these tasty treats.

Yield 16 or more, depending on size

Ingredients:

- 2 cups rolled oats/traditional oatmeal (not quick cooking, not instant)
- 1 cup all-purpose or whole wheat flour
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 1 1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 3/4 cup butter

- 1/4 cup very hot or boiling water

Preheat an oven to 375 F.

In a very large bowl, combine oats, flour, sugar, salt, and baking soda. Add the butter and cut in, or use your fingers to work the butter well into the dry ingredients.

Then pour in the hot water and stir until everything comes together, then work with your hands into a thick sticky dough.

You can roll the dough out on a well-floured surface and cut it into shapes, and set them on a large baking sheet. Or, keep things simple and simply press the dough into an even 1/4-inch thick layer on a baking sheet. Score into smaller pieces by using a knife, pizza wheel or spatula edge to cut the dough into squares, but don't separate the pieces.

Bake at 375 until golden, about 13-14 minutes (timing is for the dough spread out 1/4 inch thick over the pan method). Baking time may vary depending on how you cut the cookie – if they are individual shapes on the pan, the size and how chewy or crispy you want them.

When they have finished baking, if you've cut them into shapes, let them cool; if you've scored them, cut them apart if you want (but not necessary) while warm so they cool into squares.

Keep the oat cakes stored in an airtight container up to a week or even two, depending on the heat and humidity in your kitchen. They also freeze well.

“Be serious, be passionate, wake up.”

~ Susan Sontag



CANADAHELPS CAMPAIGN: HELP OUR HUMAN RIGHTS CASE AGAINST LIFE-THREATENING BIKE LANES

Blind citizens are seeking redesign of dangerous bike lanes and inaccessible floating bus stops in Victoria, BC. A human rights case has been launched by the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) against the City and BC Transit. Blind people need to be able to participate in their own (and their guide dog's) safety and the current design prevents that. Crossing these dedicated, hardscape bike lanes is risky because silent bikes often don't stop. No one wants to see injury or death to a person or guide dog. Let's not have these bike lanes set a precedent for elsewhere.

Please see our CanadaHelps campaign page. Donations can be made until October 15 at <https://tinyurl.com/cfbbikelanes>. We need your support. Thank you.