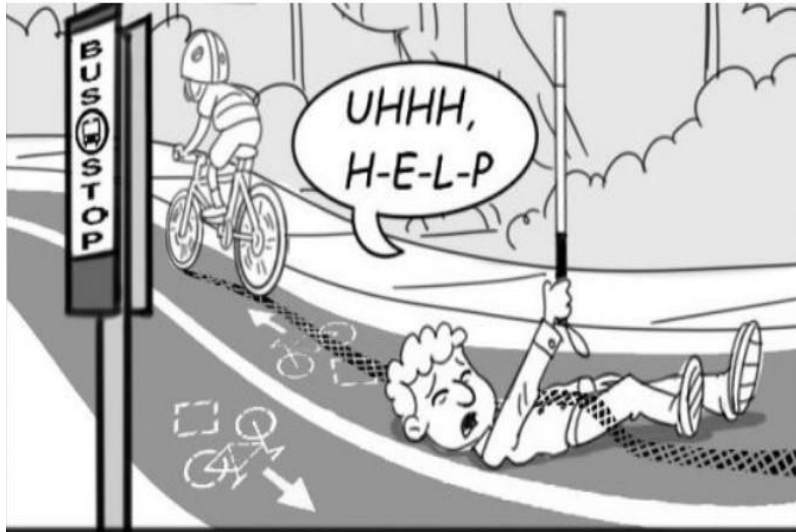


The Blind Canadian

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



In This Issue:

- Human rights advocacy – bike lanes
- The 7 principles of universal design
- Info on equitable taxi service for customers with guide dogs
- 50th iPhone delivered! – Lions iPhone Project for the Blind
- Outlook On Radio Western 100th episode: Interview with Sky Mundell – winner of Vancouver Island’s Got Talent 2011



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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our Philosophy

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

We believe it is respectable to be blind.

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

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



CFB

The Blind Canadian

*Committed to the
equality of blind Canadians*

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
- Archives historical documents

The *Blind Canadian* is published twice annually and comes in print and on CFB's website at www.cfb.ca in both Web and PDF versions.

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What's Up With CFB Lately?

by Doris Belusic

Here we are in the second year of the pandemic. As an organization we, like many, have become familiar with having our monthly meetings, our executive meetings, our Technology Pub Nights, our December holiday party, our convention planning sessions and Kernels of Hope meetings, all virtual via Zoom.

CFB's 'Choices and Goals' convention was hosted on Zoom this year (April 30 – May 2), like last year's very successful U.S. NFB 'Anywhere & Everywhere' convention, which will be virtual again this summer, July 6 – 10. Both conventions are annual events and open to all. They are truly valuable experiences for any blind person to attend. Our next issue will cover the 2021 CFB convention.

Being an advocacy and mentoring organization, CFB continues to be very active across Canada.

In Victoria, BC, we have been involved in several human rights cases over the last several years.

We have been advocating against dangerous, discriminatory bike lane infrastructure that impedes blind people's safety in crossing and accessing "floating" bus stops. Last fall CFB took the City of Victoria to the BC Human Rights Tribunal, which ruled that, yes, the City's bike lane infrastructure where floating bus stops are implemented is discriminatory to the blind. A "cease and desist order" to build more of these type of bike lanes was given to the City. Now we await the BCHRT remedy session. We thank our lawyers with Crease Harman LLP for their generous support in this case.

But, this work is not done as now Nanaimo, up-island from Victoria, is planning to put in these same dangerous bike lanes. And, they exist elsewhere.

We have also been advocating for the rights of guide dog teams to access taxi cabs without discrimination. It is quite common that blind people who travel with guide dogs are refused cab rides. The drivers give differing excuses or drive past when they see a customer waiting with a guide dog. We've learned that, mostly, drivers just don't want a dog in their vehicle. We've had several cases taken to the BC Human Rights Tribunal over the past several years to try to rectify this situation, with and without success.

Because of this systemic taxi problem, we worked with a lawyer and the Victoria City police, who drafted an information sheet to Greater Victoria taxi companies, stating guide dog team rights and taxi industry obligations (see article in this issue).

And we have been advocating for governments to support books for the print disabled by asking that they fund the equitable public library system through the National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) instead of funding a charity to provide the books.

In December 2020, we published the report, "CNIB: Canada's 100-Year Monopoly", researched and written by Daryl Jones. We filed this monopoly report with the Competition Bureau of Canada (see *The Blind Canadian*, Volume 18 at www.cfb.ca under publications).

Back in 2012, we teamed up with the Lions Club to offer new, unlocked iPhones to blind people in the Vancouver Island and Vancouver areas through the Lions iPhone Project for the Blind. The 50th iPhone has been delivered and more are on their way. CFB offers start-up lessons if needed (see article in this issue).

Our Walking Proud Program still offers free long, rigid white canes to blind individuals. These canes are longer and lighter than traditional canes and offer better mobility. During the pandemic, this program has been on hold due to source availability.

CFB has grown in the last few years and we are proud to have an Ontario chapter as well as our BC chapter. We have members all across the country.

We sponsor a very active listserv in which we discuss all topics related to blindness. We maintain a website, www.cfb.ca, and twice a year we publish CFB's magazine, *The Blind Canadian*, which contains all sorts of interesting, informative and inspiring articles and stories. It is published in print and as well, all issues can be read on CFB's website.

One of the things that makes CFB different is our positive attitude and our philosophy on blindness. These provide the basis for what we believe and what we do. We closely align ourselves with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the U.S. and in off-pandemic years, we help fund and fly (through our Aeroplan points program) blind people to NFB blindness conventions, the largest gathering of blind people in the world and the most influential learning ground.

We are proud to be associated with the radio show, Outlook on Radio Western, hosted by two of our members through the University of Western Ontario. We are also proud to be aligned with the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind, in Victoria, B.C., which was started by

one of our members. We also align with Camp Bowen Society who are advocating to save this property, originally meant for the blind, from loss and development.

During COVID-19 we have had to work differently as an organization. Our get-togethers have been virtual. No in-person meetings, conventions, fundraisers – no in-person socializing. We are looking forward to when we can meet once again.

50th iPhone Delivered! Lions iPhone Project for the Blind

By Don Jones, Victoria Imperial Lions, and Doris Belusic

The Lions iPhone Project for the Blind, coordinated by the Victoria Imperial Lions Club is proud to announce that it has just delivered its 50th iPhone! Nancy Gill of Burnaby, BC, is the latest happy recipient. This surely has surpassed the original projection of delivering 12 iPhones!



This project was created by Don Jones, Oriano Belusic and the late Gerald Lundgren of the Victoria Imperial Lions and adopted by Zone 19-1-2 as zone project on November 25, 2012 during the term of then-Zone Chair Georgia Medwedrich. The project, which to date has raised approximately \$35,000, quickly expanded beyond the zone and has been supported by 17 Lions and Lioness Clubs. The clubs have fundraised to purchase and deliver these iPhones to blind people on southern Vancouver Island and the lower BC mainland.



*iPhone recipients Elizabeth Lalonde, Jondalar Sekhon and Ann Moffat (presented by Oriano Belusic)
Photos by Don Jones*

At the project's inception, the Lions Club and the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) partnered to equip blind individuals with their very own unlocked iPhone.

"We like to purchase the unlocked version," said Oriano Belusic, a Lion and CFB vice president, in a speech at the 2017 CFB convention. "The reasoning and thinking behind this is that it enables blind people to be flexible on their affordability plans."

When the program began, people received the iPhone 5, each valued at \$783, including taxes. Today it's the iPhone SE, valued at \$670, taxes included.

The Lions have recognized that the iPhone is a very powerful information access tool for the blind. The project's goals are: to boost individuals' employment prospects, enhance individuals' independence, increase community participation, integration, and generally improve one's quality of life.

The iPhone is born accessible – right out of the box! By using a system of hand swipes and taps on the screen, a blind person can navigate the iPhone features with the VoiceOver screen reader for audible output, as well as use Siri voice recognition to give it verbal commands. And there are many free and inexpensive apps that are very useful to the blind, such as WhereAml, BlindSquare and Soundscape GPS-based apps.

The iPhone is replacing some devices used by the blind. Belusic explains, "For years and years, Lions have been purchasing very expensive equipment for blind people...reading systems...talking computers...(but) the iPhone can actually replace a lot of those tools that are dedicated, specifically built for the blind and quite costly."

Did you know:

This mainstream device is being used by the blind to participate on social media, such as Twitter and Facebook; to identify the colour of clothing; browse web pages; listen to audio books and YouTube; send and receive email; identify products and objects; convert printed text into spoken information; explore city maps; obtain real-time GPS information while travelling; identify Canadian and US bank notes; confirm whether household lights are on or off; do audio recordings of classroom notes or favourite recipes; make and receive phone calls; not to mention Siri, which is available to answer all kinds of inquiries; plus much, much more in specific disciplines and hobby pursuits.

To learn more about this project, please see CFB's website: www.cfb.ca

Outlook Surpasses 100 Episodes!

by Kerry Kijewski

~ Inspired by CFB ~

Editor's note: Blind siblings Kerry and Brian Kijewski, both members of CFB, co-host Outlook On Radio Western through the University of Western Ontario. Congratulations on your success!

The first episode of Outlook On Radio Western aired Monday, September 10, 2018 at the radio facilities at the University of Western Ontario in London.

It is said we get good at something after spending 10,000 hours doing it. So, 100 episodes worth of practice on air, means we must be getting close. This is my radio talk show and podcast which I co-host with my younger brother, Brian.

To start with, you need the idea for a show. Then you need hosts and, hopefully, some guests. It's not necessary, but it's fun having a co-host for something like this, and it's perfect when it's your own sibling.

Then we started with the germ of the idea: it would be a talk radio show about blindness and disability – an example of representation and awareness. We, as sibling co-hosts, had curious natures which served us well all our lives as blind people, to one degree or another.

My brother is musical. He knew the importance of a catchy theme tune for our show. It turned out that another talented musician, Tom Dekker, also blind, happened to be travelling in our area.

We invited him onto our show, one of our first episodes, when we still didn't have a theme tune. We didn't plan to have him create the 70s-sounding vibe that now starts our shows. But, a return trip back to see Brian's music and recording setup was what brought about our theme song, after a short session of Tom's improvisation.

A few months into the show, we received some unexpected media attention from local TV stations – a pleasant surprise to us, yet on the other hand, a rather sad sign and commentary by them on the fact that we were two blind siblings on the radio. Blind people doing this sort of thing is still not nearly common enough.

At one year in, we celebrated our anniversary by putting up a video onto YouTube of us in the radio studio.

The pandemic pushed us in some new directions that we may not have thought of otherwise. We moved forward as both a radio show and also with a podcast – a way to catch and build an audience on the radio, live, and also streaming from anywhere, whenever, as a podcast. We were soon up on all podcast services as Outlook On Radio Western and growing our audience.

Due to Covid-19 pushing us out of the studio on Monday mornings, we decided to move everything into our homes, forced to be separate. We realized we could keep making Outlook using personal equipment that we already had on hand. And, we were given the opportunity to extend our little half-hour show to one hour. We realized that, with more time on the air, we could have more in-depth conversations with guests.

In the first few years we've interviewed assistive technology specialists, writers, music teachers, radio station program directors, parents of blind children, athletes, lawyers, audio describers, engineers, and students – many of them blind. We've spoken with old friends and new, volunteers, advocates, activists, as well as other podcasters.

We've brainstormed and outlined. We've repeated and practised. We've written, recorded, booked guests, prepared documents of questions for our guests, and advertised on social media. We've come up with topics and takes on issues in the news, whether political, social or recreational.

It was a pleasure to speak with and hear the stories of every guest we've met and/or had on the show thus far. In fact, we wouldn't be surpassing 100 episodes of Outlook without the friends we have, all along the way – those who have helped us and those we've met since and through this show. It all comes back and around to friends and the people who've helped us make Outlook what it is today.

In the fall of 2018, we had a friend here visiting Canada from Ireland. We needed a name for the show. He suggested Outlook, something simple, easily repeated and recalled. And two-and-a-half years along and 110 episodes later, here we are!

And so, cheers, as we raise our glasses to these first 100 episodes and our next 100 to come!

Note: Outlook's theme tune creator Tom Dekker, sadly, passed away in the fall of 2020.

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Podcasts: soundcloud.com/outlookonradiowestern

The Sky's the Limit Outlook On Radio Western – 100th Episode! Interview with Sky Mundell (winner, Vancouver Island's Got Talent, 2011)

Hosts: Brian and Kerry Kijewski

Aired January 25, 2021

Outlook On Radio Western, University of Western Ontario

~ Inspired by CFB ~

Editor's note: 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 this interview. And, thank you, Sky, for sharing your story.

Be sure to check out the original Outlook episode that this transcript was drawn from to hear Sky perform three fabulous tunes on his piano. Click your choice of podcast service at the end of this article.

Brian: Hello. Good day and welcome to Outlook. And guess what, Kerry?

Kerry: What?

B: It is our 100th episode!

K: We need one of those party horns – you know the ones you blow on New Year's Eve, those really obnoxious ones?

B: Yeah, some way to really show off the celebrations. Maybe in post production I'll add something, I don't know.

But today we have another guest. Today we have Sky Mundell. Hi, Sky and thank you so much for being on our show.

Sky: Well, thank you very much, Brian. It's a pleasure to be on Outlook. And I've been listening to Outlook for a while now. You guys are doing a wonderful job with that show.

B: Thank you so much. And we really appreciate you listening. We've wanted to have you on for a while now, so I'm glad we were able to work this out. Yeah, I'm excited for this.

S: Yeah, me too.

B: So whereabouts are you calling in from today?

S: Okay, so I guess I should start off by telling you a little bit about myself first.

B: For sure.

S: I was actually born in Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada in 1991. I was born with retinopathy of prematurity, which left me blind. I also have, besides blindness, cerebral palsy, with a bit of a limp in my left leg. Plus, hearing impairment as well. Upon being born, I had to be put in an incubator. I was in an incubator for about six months or so. When I was born, I was really tiny.

When I was born, I had two parents who couldn't look after me. They were both seventeen years old. So as a result of that, I was adopted. I'm still living with my adopted mom and dad. I've been living with them for almost thirty years now.

B: Yeah, coming up on thirty years, I guess.

S: Another thing as well, the doctors told my mom and dad. They said, "He will never be able to walk or talk or do anything."

K: Right, yeah. Doctors often say that and then they get proven wrong.

S: (Chuckles) Yeah, they do.

K: So, did you have any siblings growing up? Or was it just you and your parents?

S: That's a good question. Originally when I was born, I had one brother, who I still have, and two sisters.

But then, during my lifetime, I've had another sister come into the family. She was also adopted, but then, unfortunately, she is no longer with us. She couldn't eat or talk or anything. She couldn't walk or do anything. She only lived for fourteen years.

So I've had a couple of siblings from my adopted family. And then I've had one sister and a half sister from my birth family. So in total, I have, if my (Emily) were still alive, I'd have maybe six (siblings), maybe five sisters all together.

B: Wow, I only have two.

But yeah, I think this is so great because this show is about all disabilities. The focus is on blindness, as Kerry and me are both blind, but it's so great to have someone on who also is, and has some hearing issues and has cerebral palsy – these other things, because we want to talk about this stuff more. I think discussing this is important. It's things that need to get talked about more in society. So, I think that that's so great.

K: So, what about school growing up?

S: Well, yes. That's a bit of a long story. So, when I grew up, the first school I went to was a preschool. It, at that time, had a school for disabilities, but they also had a hearing classroom. This was a classroom specifically designed for folks that were hard of hearing. In that school we did things like go swimming. They had a pool there. They had a Sensory Room there, which had lots of things to listen to. They had lots of toys and really great staffers and there was always so much to do.

Then, after that, I got into the regular school system. That's had lots of ups and downs. I say that because in kindergarten, up until middle school or actually the first part of high school, I was integrated into the regular school system. I'd been in the mainstream classroom.

However, starting in sixth grade, I had an aide. Actually, I had several aides, one of whom worked with blind students.

She knew braille, but what happened was, when I got into grade ten in high school, there was another student that was entering our district who was blind and she needed to go and work with that student.

So I was left with an aide that knew nothing about braille. It took three years before the aide learned braille and, by the time she was done, I'd pretty much graduated.

B: It was too late...you were already...I mean, it's never too late to learn braille but, at the same time...

S: In my last couple years in high school I was also segregated into a disability resource program, with folks with disabilities. We did things like go swimming and all kinds of things. It was like a day program type of environment.

They wouldn't let me in the music program in high school. The aide didn't want...there was not a lot of effort to push me into the mainstream after grade ten. I was pretty much segregated.

K: Wow, that's quite the journey, yeah. Ups and downs, like you said.

B: And that's the thing with integration into schools that we talk about on this show. It has pros and cons for everyone and it works differently depending on the help you can get and the aides and, it just depends.

S: Yeah, you're absolutely right about that. Even schools for the blind had their challenges. If there had been a school for the blind, it would have been a lot easier because I would have learned the skills. Plus, I probably would have been integrated into the music program because the artists I listen to, the blind artists like Ronnie Milsap or Ray Charles or George Shearing, a lot of them got their education, not from a mainstream situation but from a school-for-the-blind situation. And they were able to learn independent living skills and they were able to be integrated. Plus, they worked with teachers who, I think, some of them were blind themselves.

But, in the mainstream system, it's hit and miss.

K: So you read braille, then?

S: Yes, I read braille. I've read braille since I was a little boy. It's pretty interesting because when I started learning braille, my vision teacher at the time, had gotten some braille books.

So, I read the braille, and that was okay. But then, a couple years later I got a braille notetaker called a Braille Lite 18.

For those listeners who don't know what a Braille Lite was, it was a notetaker and it was made by Blazie Engineering in the 1980s. It had a braille display on the bottom and it had a braille keyboard. When I got that thing, I just fell in love because I was able to hear the voice, as well as read my braille. I could read it from the braille display. Now granted, I still read books, but I also read braille from the braille display as well. And that's what got my love, got me started into technology.

K: That's for sure, something to talk about with you – stuff I don't know that much about.

B: Kerry's not too into technology. Well, you are because you like it, but at the same time, it's like everything – it can be frustrating sometimes with technology, when it's not working. At the same point, it's pretty amazing that we do have these devices now, with braille and speech. It was World Braille Day at the beginning of the month here (January) and then this is the last show of January we're airing. It's great to talk about braille and it's just really awesome to hear that you read braille too. It's one of those things, it's just so important to us here.

S: Yes, it definitely is important. One comment I wanted to make on the braille, it is not only important to learn braille but there are also students who are totally deaf and blind, where braille is their only medium as well.

K: And how about braille music? Do you read that, or no?

S: That's a good question. I started learning braille music, but I found it a struggle. The struggling part that felt complicated is, let's say, for example, you had a (musical) note on the piano like C, D, and E – those are your scales.

In braille music, the letter D would be a C, E would be a D, and F would be an E. It's kind of a funny way of reading it, but no, I didn't get on really well with braille music.

B: I don't know if you know why they do it that way, but I was always kind of curious too. In high school I briefly learned some braille music, but just very basic. I wasn't very great at it either and I believe (like you), you would just play by ear and that's how I've always played. Braille music to me, it just seemed like too much of a challenge. It's not like I couldn't do it if I'd really wanted to, but the fact that I can play by ear, I just never really pursued it, either.

S: Yeah, mhm. Braille music is a challenge. As well, there's all these weird symbols. It's difficult to explain, but there's these weird symbols that indicate whether a note is a minor or a major or flat or what-have-you. It's definitely confusing but there are blind people out there who do read braille music.

B: For sure. We did have at least one on this show before. It's one of those things I would like to pursue one of these years, but I don't know if I will.

So maybe talk a little about music in general, and when your love for music...when you started getting into music, and a little about what instruments you play.

S: That's a good question. I started getting into music pretty much growing up. My dad had a Walkman. When I was little, I used to get frustrated and bang my head. That was because I couldn't communicate very well and I was frustrated about things.

So, my dad discovered, if he'd put the Walkman on me, it would calm me down. And he had tapes of the romantic crooners because that's really what generation my parents were from, and when rock and roll was getting started. So Dad had tapes of Johnny Mathis and Nat King Cole and he'd put them on for me and it would just calm me down. That's really what got my life into it.

Then, when I was about three years old, we were at a shopping mall for something. I don't know what we were at the shopping mall for exactly, but what happened was there was a piano there. It was in a piano store that we have, called Dave's Piano and Keyboard. They are, or were, a piano store in Victoria and they sold pianos.

But they also sold keyboards and the keyboard they were playing had demo songs that they were playing, I guess to demonstrate the keyboard, and I wanted a real piano. So, I pestered my dad and I told him I could play the piano. And he said, "No, you can't. You just mess around." Because, at that time, my grandmother bought me a Casio keyboard.

B: Nice.

S: And it had a keyboard that, I believe, had "Just The Way You Are" by Billy Joel, as a demo song. So I nagged my dad and he made me a deal. He said, "If you learn how to play Beethoven's "Fur Elise", I'll buy you a real piano."

So, I learned the song and he comes home from work and my mom asks him, "Do you have some money to spare?"

And he said, "Why?"

And she said, "You gotta listen to this."

So I played, but lo and behold, after that they got me a real piano. But in all honesty, I didn't end up playing the real piano too much at first. I would play it from time to time, but not a lot.

But it was really when I was about sixteen, I think, when I really got into it because during the time I was growing up, my mom and dad had tried me with several music teachers. They had keyboards, they had pianos, but they were what we call electric pianos, but with sound on them or demo songs.

What would happen is, I'd always want to play demo songs and they were trying to teach me how to put my fingers and stuff. They didn't have patience for me because I would just mess around and they said, "Sorry, I can't teach him."

There was one guy who my mom and dad took me to, and the same thing happened with him. Although, after I won Vancouver Island's Got Talent, which was a talent competition, I got back with that same piano teacher that said he couldn't teach me. And I studied with him for a couple of years.

B: That's great. Like you said, if it maybe didn't work out with him the first time, but then eventually you figured things out on your own a bit and then you go back and maybe you get a few more techniques from him and he can help out a little bit again. It also just really goes to show the power of music. We like to talk about music on this show any chance we get and it's just, I know for me and Kerry too, it's just really been a big part of my life and it seems to be the same for you. It's just so important.

S: For sure. Yeah, it is.

B: We'd love to talk a bit more about your Vancouver Island's Got Talent. But, for anyone who's just tuning in, you are listening to Outlook here today on Radio Western and we're speaking with Sky Mundell, calling in from British Columbia.

You have perfect pitch, is that correct, Sky?

K: So does Brian.

S: That's totally correct, I do. The perfect pitch has enabled me to do lots of good things. The way I play music is by ear. So I don't read braille music or anything.

B: Right. That's the thing, when it's perfect pitch. It helps a lot to play by ear with perfect pitch because then you can figure out stuff on your own. You don't really need the music to follow.

K: That is nice that the two of you have something in common.

B: Yeah, when did you hear about that term, perfect pitch, Sky? Or, when did you realize you had perfect pitch?

S: I honestly can't remember when I realized I had perfect pitch. I guess, when I got serious about playing when I was sixteen, I kind of realized I had perfect pitch.

What got me seriously playing – now I told you about the piano teachers already that wouldn't teach me – but I didn't tell you about what finally motivated me to play. When I was sixteen, I met a piano teacher. This teacher was different. He knew that I couldn't...that I was pretty good at listening by ear, so he introduced me to a blind musician from England named George Shearing, and he got me a George Shearing CD. That's what motivated me to start getting serious about playing the piano.

K: Hmm, yeah. I'd never heard of him.

B: Yeah, me neither. I'll have to look him up sometime.

S: Yep. He's a real interesting guy. He was born in London in 1919. He got his education in England at a school for the blind, which I actually visited one time when we were on vacation in England. I didn't get to go inside it, but we saw the outside of it. It's a beautiful place, it's called Linden Lodge School for the Blind. It was, and still is, a residential school for the blind, but it now caters to people who are not only blind but also with other disabilities as well.

B: Vancouver Island's Got Talent — if you could tell us a little bit more about that. We heard you were a winner of that back in 2011.

S: Absolutely. I don't know the history of when Vancouver Island's Got Talent got started, but I will tell you it was in 2010 when – I'm trying to remember when we heard about it – I think it was from a newspaper advertisement.

I don't know if it was the news or what it was, but we'd heard about this audition of a new talent show called Vancouver Island's Got Talent and they were doing an audition in the mall. At that time, I was looking into being a recording engineer full time. I didn't really have any other occupation in mind other than being a recording engineer. I wanted to get into the music industry and play some role, whether it be a musician or engineer or whatever. My mom and dad told me, it's very hard to get into the music industry these days because things are changing rapidly.

B: Yeah, it is.

S: They suggested, "If you really want to give it a try, why don't you enter this competition." And so I entered into the competition and I played a song...I basically just climbed through the ranks.

There were a number of shows. A number of judges made some comments. One of the judges actually, believe it or not, was the wife of the very well-known producer named David Foster.

B: Yeah I've heard the name David Foster before.

S: She was very impressed by me. She even suggested, "You should get an agent, Sky. You should get an agent."

B: Wow, big time.

S: At that time, when the competition was going on, I was going through university and I couldn't just drop out and just do this full time, even if I wanted to, because I had schoolwork to do.

Anyway, I went through the whole competition. It was in 2011, when I went in for the last time, and I won.

The winner of the competition won a free sound demo CD, recorded in a professional recording studio in Victoria; a trip to Vegas (Las Vegas) to play in Planet Hollywood; also a website and social media presence, photography as well, for the free song demo.

After winning Vancouver Island's Got Talent, I did the photography, did the song demo. Only it turned out to be a twelve-song album instead of a three-song demo CD because, of the fact that I had the recording equipment to record some of it at home and some of it in the studio.

And I took the trip over to Vegas in April 2011 and played at Planet Hollywood. And then, a really well-known local musician that's well known in Las Vegas, named David Osborne, I got to hang out with him. It's really neat because David Osborne, he was a musician and he played for all the U.S. presidents, every single U.S. president from Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan, to the two Bushs, to Obama, to Trump I presume, and maybe to Biden.

K: Yeah. Maybe.

B: That must have been quite the experience. I've never been to Las Vegas and it seems like quite the place and Planet Hollywood is a big spot.

S: Oh, yes. Las Vegas is wonderful. They have restaurants everywhere. They have shows you can go to. For example, when we went to Vegas, I took my friend, the aide I was working with at the time, and he and another guy that came on the trip, they went to the Beatles show called "Love", all songs about the Beatles.

And my dad and I went and saw the Rat Pack, you know the Rat Pack impersonators, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., those guys.

And, there was a Nevada talent agency that was going to represent me, but we didn't end up signing the contract with the Nevada talent agency because that would have meant that I'd have to do shows all the time. And, also, I was going for school and I couldn't drop out just to do that.

B: Yeah. It's amazing, eh, to see the opportunities that come out of winning that contest. And then, being able to go to Vegas and get offers there. And it's a tricky industry too, because if you really wanna get into it, you have to sometimes move to places. And it's big decisions to make and, like you said, you were in school at the time. You know, it's probably a lot to think about at that time, but congratulations on that. That's just such an accomplishment. I think that's amazing.

S: Oh, thank you.

K: So what has technology been for you in your life? Has it been part of the work that you do? Do you use it every day?

S: We should talk about my technology experience. I got into technology at a very young age. My first technology that I ever used was when my dad took me into his office and he taught me how to use his computer. Now at that time, it was a Windows 3.1 computer with a program that came with the Creative Labs sound card. For those of you who don't know what a sound card is, it is a card used to generate sounds from the computer, and it is a card that sits in the computer.

And at that time, the cards that he had were from Creative Labs in this computer. And one of the things it had in it was a program named TextAssist, and TextAssist had a synthesizer in the program called DeckTalk. My dad used to demo songs on the DeckTalk, to make it sing. And he would change the words and make up funny words. And the computer would say things and I really enjoyed that. The DeckTalk singing made me giggle.

Then when I got to school, I got into the technology in the school. I started out with a Braille Lite 18, made by Blazie Engineering, and that helped me out.

Then I got into the computer stuff, like the screen reader. I started out using and growing up with JAWS (screen reader), like everybody.

B: As we did too, back in the 90s.

S: Yep. Started out using JAWS and then when I was growing up, using the technology, I had no training in it whatsoever. So I had to teach myself all of it.

I started by using the JAWS basic training tapes.

B: Yeah, I remember those tapes.

S: Because I started out on JAWS 3.5, by the way.

Another thing that I was taught with technology was – I used to listen to a show for the blind, hosted by Jonathan Mosen called Main Menu. Main Menu was a technology show and it was on ACB Radio.

I really liked how Jonathan did it – there were two things I liked about what he did. First of all, in his reviews, he wouldn't trash a product. He'd point out where the product was falling short. So, say for example, if you had Window-Eyes (screen reader) –which was a competitor to JAWS – from what used to be GW Micro, which is no longer around. Well, he would point out not only the strengths, but he would point out the weaknesses.

And another thing I really liked about him was how Main Menu, under him, would do good quality investigative journalism. One of my favourite, one of the ones I remember hearing about, was when Main Menu first started: Freedom Scientific was being formed by amalgamation, a merger (April 2000). There were concerns about this merger and what that might mean, and there were employment practices that weren't particularly good for blind customers, as well.

And so, he would do these investigative pieces and ask difficult and probing questions. And I think that's one of the things I really lament about blindness coverage these days, is there's not really enough good quality investigative journalism going on as there used to be.

B: Yeah, I mean that's the thing, especially with technology, in particular. It's just, there's so much out there. There's so many different products and it's great if you can find a show like that that really does give good, informative reviews and points out the good parts and the negative things about a product. There's just so much to choose from and we're kind of on our own sometimes, not knowing what to pick. It always helps when we can find someone to look up to or that have opinions that we trust. I loved learning about all that technology growing up. I know, Kerry, maybe not quite as much – I'd kind of figure it out and show you things sometimes.

We've been speaking with Sky Mundell from British Columbia.

K: So, how are things going with the pandemic, Sky? You doing alright?

S: There's still folks out there, still getting infected. It's a hit and miss.

B: How is it affecting you, having to maybe stay inside more? Have you noticed much from that?

S: Not much, because I spend a lot of my time in the house anyway. I hardly ever go out and when I did go out it was to go to the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind, which is where I work as an adaptive technology specialist.

B: Right. Great centre out west.

S: Yeah, it is. It does have some challenges, for sure, for teaching remotely. For instance, teaching braille is difficult, doing it remotely. As well as the iPhone. That's difficult remotely. But there's also some other challenges as well. One of the challenges is I'm trying to get an upgrade to the screen reader, JAWS, so I can keep current on the latest versions, so I can

teach my clients. I've been trying to get ahold of someone from the company that makes it and I haven't got any responses from them whatsoever.

When we were in person, I could teach simply by either using it on my computer or, if a student had it on their's, I could use their computer to teach it. But because my licence is old, it's on 17, the problem with that is because I'm on Windows 10, it might not function very well on the newest version of Windows 10. So I have to keep current with the screen reader and that's one of the challenges I'm running into – not getting very good communication from the company that makes it.

B: Yeah. It's one of those things. There's not as many employees out and about and working, and everything. So it's tricky for everyone, obviously, during these times. And, this has been great. Thanks, so much, Sky, for coming on the show. We're pretty much out of time here today, unfortunately, but this has been awesome. If people want to find any of your music online, is there anywhere specifically? I know if they just look up Vancouver Island's Got Talent on YouTube, there's video of you on there I saw. So I'm sure people can find you on there if they look up Sky Mundell.

S: Yeah, I'm available on Youtube.

K: Great. Well, check him out guys. See how he looks. I'm sure he looks great playing piano. So lovely.

S: Thank you.

B: Alright. Thanks again, Sky, for coming on the show and hope to have you on again someday.

S: Hey, you're very welcome, Brian and Kerry. And keep up the good work and I look forward to hearing your show in future.

K: Thank you.

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

Hear this episode with Sky (including his music) on these podcast services:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/outlook-2021-01-25-episode-100-skys-limit-sky-mundell/id1527876739?i=1000506533458>

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1gy0CGg8QapYPUk1hX8kGX>

<https://soundcloud.com/outlookonradiowestern/outlook-2021-01-25-episode-100-the-skys-the-limit-with-sky-mundell>

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CONTINUING ADVOCACY: DANGEROUS BIKE LANES / BUS STOPS



[Alt Text: Cartoon image – man lays in a bike lane near floating bus stop, holding white cane in the air, yelling “help!” The cyclist who hit him rides away.] Cartoon by Kent Webb.

Ruling on B.C. bus stops reflects cities' 'terrible' track record on accessibility, plaintiff says

'Floating' bus stops used by many cities discriminate against blind people, human rights tribunal finds

Bethany Lindsay, CBC News, Nov 21, 2020 Reprinted with permission, CBC Licensing
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-floating-bus-stops-human-rights-tribunal-1.5811152>

A human rights ruling that found Victoria's so-called "floating" bus stops discriminate against blind people could have implications for other B.C. cities that use similar designs.

Last week, the B.C. Human Rights Tribunal upheld a complaint filed by Oriano Belusic, vice-president of the Canadian Federation of the Blind, about bus stops that require transit riders to cross a protected bike lane to catch their bus.

Belusic argued the stops, located along Pandora Avenue and Wharf Street, are dangerous for blind and vision-impaired bus riders, who often can't hear the sound of oncoming bicycles over the traffic noise.

He told CBC the design of these floating bus stops make it clear city staff weren't taking the needs of people with disabilities into account.

"The evidence shows that they are terrible at it," Belusic said. "There's a real pro-cycling and healthy living agenda at the moment, and we're all for it — blind folks believe in cycling as a healthy way of living — but it shouldn't be at the expense of somebody's safety and the ability to use public transit."

Bill Eisenhauer, Victoria's head of engagement, points out that the tribunal found the city acted in good faith when the bus stops were installed, and said staff have been working on solutions to make them more accessible.

"We had heard early on in our ongoing work with accessibility groups that they just were not meeting their needs, that there were challenges for blind people to get across," he said.

The human rights tribunal has yet to determine a remedy for the discrimination against blind transit riders in Victoria, but says the recent installation of a pedestrian-activated audible flashing yellow light at the Wharf Street stop was an acceptable solution.

But this isn't just a Victoria issue. According to Eisenhauer, the bus stops are based on international design standards, which could mean plenty of other cities will have to make similar changes.

"These floating bus stops and the design for them are in many cities in Canada and right across North America, including Victoria, Saanich ... Vancouver, Ottawa and many others across the country," he said.

In fact, Vancouver has about 15 of these floating bus stops beside protected bike lanes, according to a city spokesperson.

'We thought we had the answers'

Director of transportation Paul Storer said his team is looking into the Victoria decision to determine how it applies to Vancouver.

He admits that when the first one was installed in 2012 next to the Dunsmuir Street bike lane, potential problems for people with disabilities weren't really a consideration.

"We hadn't really thought a lot at that point about the accessibility issues," Storer told CBC.

He said that in the last five years, planners have realized many other recent innovations designed to keep pedestrians and cyclists safe — things like raised crosswalks and protected intersections — have only created new challenges for some people with disabilities.

"Maybe a decade ago, we thought we had the answers. We had a little tool kit and we applied it," Storer said.

"[But] designing something for someone who has mobility issues and someone who might have hearing loss and someone who has autism, it takes a lot of work and it takes a lot of consideration to work with those communities."

He acknowledges that Vancouver has a lot of work to do when it comes to making streets and sidewalks accessible, and city staff are continually learning from the experiences of members of its advisory committees for people with disabilities and seniors.

"If we can design for people with a wide range of disabilities, we are designing for everyone," Storer said.

'Cyclists have the vision to cope'

In Victoria, Eisenhauer said there are no immediate plans to install more floating bus stops, but the city plans to bring in pedestrian-activated flashing lights on Pandora Avenue similar to what's in place on Wharf Street.

He said educating cyclists about the importance of stopping for pedestrians will also be key.

But Belusic isn't satisfied with Victoria's solution, explaining that a flashing light doesn't guarantee cyclists will stop.

"A friend of mine has had his white cane mangled and destroyed, actually, on the Wharf Street bus stop, which is where they have the horrible flashing lights," he said.

Blind people and those with vision impairments can't drive cars or cycle, so access to public transit is essential, Belusic said. He'd like to see the bus stops moved back onto the sidewalk, and the bike lanes placed beside vehicle traffic.

"The only thing that would mean is that the cyclists are slightly inconvenienced while the bus is picking up and dropping off passengers — but cyclists have the vision to cope and deal with that," he said.

Cycling guidelines need to be revised in wake of tribunal ruling: advocate

*Roxanne Egan-Elliott, Times Colonist, November 22, 2020 06:00 AM
Reprinted with permission*

The province will need to revise its design guidelines for protected bike lanes after a human rights ruling last week that the City of Victoria's "floating" bus stops discriminate against blind people, says a Victoria cycling advocate.

In a decision released Nov. 13, B.C. Human Rights Tribunal member Norman Trerise said requiring pedestrians to cross bike lanes on Pandora Avenue and on Wharf Street to reach a bus stop discriminates against those who are blind or visually impaired, because they can't know when it's safe to cross.

Several witnesses for the complainant testified they rely on their hearing to determine when they can cross, but noise on busy streets drowns out the sound of an approaching bike.

Trerise agreed with testimony from cycling and transportation experts that the city had followed international best practices for the bikeway design. The city consulted several design guidelines to create the protected bike lanes, including B.C.'s Active Transportation Design Guide, which is used by municipalities across the province.

Corey Burger, policy and infrastructure chair of the Greater Victoria Cycling Coalition, said the ruling affects communities across B.C., many of which are now discussing the decision and wondering what it means for planning cycling infrastructure.

It's crucial that the province's design guidelines are revised based on the tribunal decision to provide consistency across the province, he said. "So if an unsighted person goes to Vancouver or goes to Kelowna, etc., they're going to have the same experience crossing that bike lane that they do here in Victoria," he said. "Let's make sure that's built in across the province."

The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, which is responsible for the 2019 document, said in a statement the design guide was introduced to make it easier for B.C. communities to incorporate active transportation into their infrastructure planning.

A spokesperson for the ministry said they're not able to answer questions about whether there will be a review and update of the design guidelines until a new cabinet is sworn in on

Nov. 26, saying only that the province will continue to adopt best practices and work with stakeholders to revise the design guide so it works for all British Columbians.

Burger said he was glad that the human rights decision affirmed the importance of building safer cycling infrastructure, noting that bikes are a way for some with mobility challenges to move around the city.

“There needs to be this balance of, you know, different people moving around the city, and everyone has a different set of challenges,” he said.

Oriano Belusic, who initiated the human rights complaint on behalf of the Canadian Federation of the Blind, said his needs are still not being met by the tribunal decision. Trerise wrote in his decision that the city installing pedestrian-activated flashing lights that make an audible signal when activated is a reasonable accommodation.

“The accepted solution is in some ways worse than what we were complaining about in the first place,” Belusic said.

He said that the audible signal to pedestrians indicating that the light is flashing gives a false sense of security that it’s safe to cross.

“It doesn’t mean that at all, because the cyclists don’t actually behave any differently because of the audible beeper or the flashing light,” he said.

The District of Saanich also has three “floating” bus stops: one each on the north and south sides of Lansdowne Road near Camosun College and a third on McKenzie Avenue east of Cedar Hill Road.

Belusic said he wasn’t aware of the Saanich stops until recently, because they’re not part of his regular routine, but he plans to check them out.

Graeme McCreath, former treasurer of the Canadian Federation of the Blind, said he’s currently focused on having concerns addressed in Victoria, but he expects the federation will likely reach out to Saanich in the future.

“I’m just fed up chasing around after this stuff,” he said. “I just can’t believe that we’re dealing with this stuff in these modern times. We seem to be left behind. Nobody thinks about us. And that’s not right.”

A spokesperson for the District of Saanich said they plan to review the tribunal decision to determine if any changes are needed.

A second hearing will take place in the future to determine a remedy for the City of Victoria floating bus stops

regan-elliott@timescolonist.com

<https://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/cycling-guidelines-need-to-be-revised-in-wake-of-tribunal-ruling-advocate-1.24243483>

Blind pedestrians need a safer way

Letter to the editor, Times Colonist, Victoria, December 31, 2020

If Victoria's goal is to find a least-cost way of addressing the Canadian Federation of the Blind's human rights complaint about bike lanes, then installing flashing lights before the floating bus stops on Pandora Avenue will likely be successful.

However, if the goal is to make it safe for blind and visually impaired citizens to take public transportation, then the city needs to continue looking for a better solution. I believe that the flashing warning lights could make a bad situation even more dangerous by giving the blind a false sense of security.

I am a friend of Oriano Belusic, the blind individual who initiated the human-rights complaint against the city. In August, during the tribunal process, Oriano asked me to film him as he tested the lights installed for the floating bus stops on Wharf Street.

The design-crossing requires that the blind locate the pole with a beeping button at the crosswalk to the floating bus stop. They push the button, which triggers flashing yellow lights, advising cyclists coming in both directions that someone wishes to cross the bike lane to get to the bus stop.

The first obvious problem was that most cyclists using the bike lane weren't familiar with the lights or their purpose. Once, if Oriano had walked out shortly after pushing the button, he would have been hit. However, if Oriano showed any hesitation in crossing, the cyclists continued though the crosswalk regardless of the flashing lights or his white cane.

We filmed for about 20 minutes, but stopped because I was terrified that Oriano would be hurt. In the 20 years I have known him, he has always been a very capable pedestrian, but this new bus lane configuration is dangerous. We need a better solution.

I have heard from members of the blind community that this is a problem in other countries as well. Surely the professional planners somewhere in the world must be working with blind pedestrians to develop a safe and solid arrangement?

Thelma Fayle, Victoria

More discriminatory inaccessible bus stops

Letter to the editor, Times Colonist, Victoria, March 12, 2021

Six months ago, at a three-week human rights public hearing, the City of Victoria was found to have discriminated against blind pedestrians when they installed hardscape bike lanes with inaccessible bus stops on Pandora and Wharf streets.

A “cease and desist order” was issued, meaning no more of these types of inaccessible bus stops can be built.

Incredibly, after members of the Canadian Federation of the Blind, who filed the case, had contact with Nanaimo, including Mayor Leonard Krog, Nanaimo announced that they were copying the Victoria model of inaccessible bus stops.

This is a form of tyranny directed towards a vulnerable, powerless group of Canadians who chose the correct process for redress but found themselves beaten into submission by bullying, sighted, powerful, deceitful individuals.

Preaching safety as the reason cycle lanes are needed is an obvious self-serving process, as the safety of disabled pedestrians has been conveniently removed from the thought process.

The seven principles of “Universal Design” have been available for decades, which would have prevented even the idea of inaccessible stops.

However, because each municipality lacks any moral ethics to make their infrastructure inclusive, Nanaimo Coun. Don Bonner wishes to have improved safety for him and other cyclists, but does not seem to care about blind pedestrians in his city.

Blind Canadians must either keep fighting for justice or once again suffer the tyranny of the powerful and more influential majority.

Canada is fast becoming a society of bullies bent on crushing and ignoring those who dare interrupt this new green agenda.

Blind Canadians are not opposed in any way to better safety for all cyclists, but not at the expense of blind pedestrians.

Public transportation is vital for a blind person. Compromise must be part of the picture and therefore allowing buses to pull into the curb needs to remain to ensure optimum access for all transit users.

Graeme McCreath, Victoria

The chief handicap of the blind is not blindness,
but the attitude of seeing people towards them.”

~ *Helen Keller*

The 7 Principles of Universal Design: A Reminder to Municipalities

by Graeme McCreath

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (cfb.ca) is an organization of blind advocates working to improve the lives of all visually-challenged Canadians.

It is important to remind municipalities that all public infrastructure should incorporate the principles of Universal Design. This is essential to ensure optimum safety of all our citizens.

The “7 Principles of Universal Design” are:

- **Equitable Use.** The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
- **Flexibility in Use.** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
- **Simple and Intuitive Use.** Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
- **Perceptible Information.** The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
- **Tolerance for Error.** The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
- **Low Physical Effort.** The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
- **Size and Space for Approach and Use.** Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

During a recent high profile human rights case, CFB members, along with the BCHRT, learned that Victoria City discriminated against blind pedestrians by having "separated" bus stops located between bike lanes and the road. This faulty design creates an unsafe barrier for blind transit users and does not incorporate the above 7 principles. Universal Design is well established internationally, therefore, we would encourage all public officials and municipal staff to make themselves aware that these principles should be incorporated in both existing and planned infrastructure.

Hopefully our elected officials will embrace the CFB's recommendation and we would appreciate any feedback.

Please design Maple Ridge with full accessibility in mind

Longtime resident, who is blind, pleads for more consideration in city planning

Letter to the editor, Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows News, Feb. 15, 2021

In the world for those who drive cars, it may appear that the city of Maple Ridge, BC is building an accessible city.

But for anyone like me, a 30-year resident of Maple Ridge who is blind, accessibility is often lacking.

For many years, I have been able to walk throughout my neighbourhood, visiting friends, attending church, and doing errands.

I have relied on a guide dog or a white cane to safely, confidently and independently participate in my community.

This is becoming increasingly more difficult as the city of Maple Ridge continues to place the efficient movement of cars ahead of my needs as a tax-paying pedestrian.

There are tried and proven strategies that can make travelling as a pedestrian who is blind safer, without the need to either compromise my independence or dignity.

Truncated domes provide tactile warnings of pending hazards – but only if they are consistently installed. Maple Ridge, as with many Canadian municipalities, seems to take a bandage approach – installing these essential safety features haphazardly.

Roundabouts, also known as traffic circles, are becoming increasingly more common. They benefit the environment by eliminating the need for vehicle idling and can make for increased efficiency for vehicular movement. But I, as someone who is blind, rely on traffic sound to determine when it's safe to begin a crossing by listening closely to vehicular movement. When the flow of traffic at roundabouts is continuous, the queues I have relied on all my life as a pedestrian who is blind are taken away.

Again, best practices do exist, including accessible pedestrian signals placed strategically adjacent to a roundabouts; refuge areas that are clearly marked and easily detected tactilely, to name only a few.

Zero grade crossings may make for an uninterrupted path of travel, but again, as a person who is blind, I rely heavily on slope and tactile (curb) markings to warn me that I'm about to

enter an intersection. Without these essential safety features I am left to guess where a crosswalk begins.

Cycle paths, becoming increasingly popular in many municipalities, create additional hazards if there is no physical separation between me and cyclists who rarely slow down or warn of their approach with a bell.

Living an independent life is especially important to me. I am a 30-year resident of the city of Maple Ridge and have served on the city's advisory committee for seniors and people with disabilities and actively advocate for accessibility and inclusion.

However, the accessible city I have advocated for on behalf of people with disabilities, seniors, children and moms with strollers is not the accessible and inclusive community which the City of Maple Ridge is spending my tax dollars to build.

Maria Kovacs, Maple Ridge

CONTINUING ADVOCACY: TAXI / GUIDE DOG DISCRIMINATION



[Alt Text: 3-frame cartoon image: 1. Blind man with guide dog waits first in line at taxi stand holding a sign saying 'taxi'. 2. Taxi arrives and drives away with customers who were not first in line. 3. Blind man remains alone at taxi stand, still holding his sign. The guide dog is thinking, 'Wow! We must be invisible.']
Cartoon by Kent Webb.

Cabbie lied about why he refused blind man's ride, admits 'I don't like dogs' to tribunal

*by Bethany Lindsay, CBC News, April 12, 2018
Reprinted with permission, CBC Licensing*

A taxi driver in Victoria has admitted he lied about family obligations to avoid picking up a blind man with a guide dog, a decision that will cost his employer more than \$8,500.

The B.C. Human Rights Tribunal [ordered Yellow Cab of Victoria to pay damages](#) to Oriano Belusic after the lie was revealed, and said the taxi company will have to post notices on all its vehicles making it clear that guide dogs are welcome.

Belusic believes it was only through luck that he was able to prove the lie and win his case.

"It's a step in the right direction, but the problem is still very, very pervasive in B.C. and probably all over North America," he told CBC News.

Belusic and his wife were wrapping up a visit at a friend's house on Dec. 29, 2016 when they called Yellow Cab, according to the decision.

They say they were waiting outside with Belusic's guide dog, a yellow lab named Birch, when they got an automated phone call to say their taxi had arrived.

Belusic testified that he heard a car pull up, then drive away.

In his defence, driver Gurdeep Dhesi maintained that he cancelled the ride because his son had called and needed to be picked up.

That story was enough to convince the ministry of public safety, which dismissed a separate complaint from Belusic, about the incident.

Lie revealed

In the beginning, Yellow Cab was using the same excuse in its defence against Belusic's human rights complaint.

But just one day before the scheduled tribunal hearing, Yellow Cab's lawyer revealed he'd discovered Dhesi's story was a lie.

Dhesi had claimed his son contacted him by cellphone, but when he was ordered to produce call records to prove that, it turned out his son didn't even own a cellphone.

In a letter to the tribunal earlier this year, Dhesi admitted, "I chose not to pick up Mr. Belusic in the afternoon of December 29, 2016 because I don't like dogs."

He acknowledged he had discriminated against Belusic, and defied company policy on picking up passengers with guide dogs.

"I apologize to Mr. Belusic for cancelling his trip. I was selfish and wrong to do that," Dhesi wrote.

Call for more enforcement

Belusic believes this case should serve as a wake-up call for those tasked with protecting the rights of blind people and enforcing B.C.'s Guide Dog and Service Dog Act.

"The enforcement is extremely lackadaisical, or almost non-existent, from the government and other authorities that should be making sure that guide dog access rights are respected," he said.

A spokesperson for the public safety ministry told CBC News that in light of the new evidence, staff will reach out to Belusic to see if he wants to reopen his complaint there.

The tribunal decision grants Belusic \$7,500 for injury to dignity, feelings and self-respect, \$1,000 in compensation for expenses, and post-judgment interest. Belusic had asked for the money to be directed to a charity of his choice, but that request was denied.

One of Belusic's friends has been less successful in proving discrimination in a similar case.

Fellow guide dog owner Graeme McCreath pursued a complaint against Victoria Taxi all the way to the B.C. Court of Appeal, but the justices there unanimously upheld decisions from the human rights tribunal and a B.C. Supreme Court judge to dismiss the complaint.

In that case, the taxi driver had a medical certificate proving he has an allergy and is exempted from accepting rides from passengers with guide dogs — although the certificate presented to the tribunal was only filed after he refused McCreath's ride.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/cabbie-lied-about-why-he-refused-blind-man-s-ride-admits-i-don-t-like-dogs-to-tribunal-1.4615367>

Blind passenger abandoned by taxi in the wrong location not an isolated incident

*by Roxanne Egan-Elliott, Times Colonist, March 17, 2021, 05:44 PM
Reprinted with permission*

Victoria Nolan, a blind rower training for the Paralympics, was able to hold it together when she was dropped off by a taxi driver in the wrong location last week with no idea where she was because it's not the first time she's had an upsetting experience with a taxi.

Nolan, who is visiting Victoria from Toronto for several months in preparation for the Tokyo games, said she ordered a taxi using an app last Wednesday afternoon to take her to an appointment.

She has had problems in the past with taxi drivers refusing her a ride because she has a guide dog and said she sensed tension in the vehicle when the driver arrived.

She provided the address to the plaza she was headed to and the unit number of the business. She said the driver told her they'd arrived at the right place, and he agreed to walk her to the door, but as she was putting on her dog's harness, he sped away with the cab door still open.

Nolan, who has retinitis pigmentosa — a genetic disorder that causes a gradual loss of sight — can see light and shadow in a very narrow field, “like looking through a straw,” she said.

Dropped off in the wrong place and an unfamiliar city, she had no idea where she was.

Nolan tried calling the business she was going to but got their voicemail.

She tried to FaceTime her husband in Toronto to see if he could help direct her, but the connection was too poor.

A few people walked by, but “when you can't see, it's hard to just stop someone and get information,” she said.

It wasn't until she called the cab company and left a voicemail explaining what happened that she broke down. “I was holding it in that whole time you know, trying to keep it together, and then when I had to explain what happened, I just burst into tears on the phone,” Nolan said.

After a second call to the business, she reached an employee who came to find her. She'd been waiting about two minutes, but “it felt like much longer,” she said.

It's far from the first time she's been left in the wrong place by a taxi driver, Nolan said. She used to feel afraid, but now the overwhelming emotions are disappointment and frustration.

She believes the driver was upset about having the guide dog in the vehicle, something she's experienced in taxis across Canada.

These experiences leave Nolan feeling robbed of her freedom and independence, and they can make her hesitate to go out on her own again.

"If I'm not feeling too strong, and something like this has happened, I'm less likely to go out," she said. "I might need something and just, you know, convince myself, 'Oh, you don't really need it. You can just get it another time or wait 'til someone can help you.' You know, I can talk myself out of it, because I'm not feeling up to dealing with it."

Nolan, who is the head of stakeholder relations and community engagement for CNIB Guide Dogs, a program to raise and train service dogs, said she receives calls from across the country relating similar experiences.

Five days after the incident, Nolan got a call from Yellow Cab of Victoria apologizing for her experience. She was told the company would refund her fare and make a donation to the CNIB guide dogs program.

The driver was suspended for three days and is required to retake accessibility training through the company.

Nolan said the company's response is a good start, and she's happy to hear the driver will take more training.

Yellow Cab of Victoria did not respond to a request for comment.

Oriano Belusic, vice-president of the Canadian Federation of the Blind, said he has heard of some instances in which blind passengers are dropped off in the wrong location, but a far more common problem is drivers refusing to take people with guide dogs.

“It’s an awful feeling, right? You’re like a second class citizen. You know that the law affords you equal access to that service — to the taxi service — and yet, you are rejected. It’s a very demeaning, humiliating experience,” he said.

He’d like to see more fines issued to drivers refusing passengers with guide dogs and stronger protections through the human rights tribunal, which he said accepts “flimsy” excuses from drivers, such as claims of allergies, not seeing the passenger, and vehicles that are too small for a dog.

“It’s very unfortunate, I think, that the authorities that are charged to enforce the law, and those in charge to uphold the access rights are allowing this kind of problem to go on and on and on,” he said.

<https://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/blind-passenger-abandoned-by-taxi-in-the-wrong-location-not-an-isolated-incident-1.24295840>

Note: CFB does not promote CNIB Guide Dogs over other reputable guide dog schools in Canada and the United States.

Uber ordered to pay \$1.1m to blind woman refused rides

BBC News, April 2, 2021, shared <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-56583428>

Uber has been ordered to pay \$1.1m (£795,000) to a blind woman who was refused rides on 14 occasions.

Lisa Irving said on some occasions, drivers were verbally abusive, or harassed her about transporting her guide dog, Bernie, in the car.

One driver allegedly cut her trip short after falsely claiming to have arrived at her destination.

An independent arbitrator ruled Uber's drivers had illegally discriminated against her due to her condition.

It rejected Uber's claim that the company itself was not liable, because, it argued, its drivers had the status of contractors rather than employees.

Mrs Irving, from San Francisco, said she had worried about her safety after being stranded multiple times late at night due to being rejected by drivers.

She also alleged that cancelled rides also led to her being late for work, which contributed to her being fired from her job.

The behaviour from drivers continued despite her complaining to Uber, she said.

A spokesman for Mrs Irving said: "Of all Americans who should be liberated by the rideshare revolution, the blind and visually impaired are among those who stand to benefit the most.

"The bottom line is that under the Americans with Disabilities Act, a guide dog should be able to go anywhere that a blind person can go."

In a statement issued to media following the ruling, a spokesman for Uber said the company is "proud" of the help it offers blind passengers.

"Drivers using the Uber app are expected to serve riders with service animals and comply with accessibility and other laws, and we regularly provide education to drivers on that responsibility.

"Our dedicated team looks into each complaint and takes appropriate action," he added.

It is not the first time Uber has faced a legal battle from the blind community.

In 2014, The National Federation of the Blind in the US sued the ride-sharing app over guide-dog regulations.

The case was settled in 2017 when Uber agreed to ensure its drivers knew they were legally obliged to provide service to people with guide dogs.

"I'm sorry it came to this," [Mrs Irving told the San Francisco Chronicle newspaper.](#)

"I would have preferred that my civil rights be respected. But it sends a strong message that this is not acceptable."

Legal Obligations of the Taxi Industry Regarding Equitable Taxi Service for Customers Who Travel With Guide Dogs

–Information Sheet issued by the Victoria City Police–

January 1, 2021

Information Update for Customers with Guide Dogs and Service Dogs

Victoria Police, local taxi representatives and community members representing those with vision loss recently participated in a teleconference to discuss concerns pertaining to equitable taxi service in our community. From this conversational session, police offered to provide an up-to-date information sheet to ensure that all taxi companies and their employees are fully informed of their legal obligations vis-à-vis guide dogs and service dogs. To ensure clarity, this fact sheet does not apply to any companion animals (pets) and is solely in reference to certified guide dogs and service dogs.

What is a Guide Dog or Service Dog and what do they do?

A Guide Dog is a dog who is trained to be a guide for a blind or visually impaired person. A Service Dog is trained to perform specific tasks to assist a person with a disability. Both guide dogs and service dogs are certified and fall under the protections and powers of the Guide Dog and Service Dog Act.

What does the law say about transporting service animals?

The Guide Dog and Service Dog Act articulates that any guide/service dog team may enter any place and use any service just the same as any person who is not with a guide/service dog. This includes all transportation services such as busses, ferries and taxis.

What are the expectations of the Guide Dog/Service Dog team?

According to the Guide Dog and Service Dog Act, the dog member of the guide/service dog team must not occupy a seat in a public conveyance (such as a bus or taxi) and must be held by a leash or harness. This means that the guide/service dog must be with

the individual who requires the assistance of the guide/service dog. It is common to have the guide/service dog sit directly at the feet of the individual who requires the guide/service dog. There are no limitations on where the guide dog team/service dog team are able to sit in a vehicle, on a bus, etc.

Does a person need to disclose that they have a Guide Dog/Service Dog ahead of time?

It is completely up to the individual whether they let the dispatcher know of their guide/service dog ahead of time - it is not required by law.

What can happen if a Taxi/Cab refuses to pick up a Guide Dog or Service Dog Team?

If a driver fails to pick up a Guide Dog/Service Dog Team (either by failing to stop or by attending and subsequently refusing service) they risk a Violation Ticket in amount up to \$288. This ticket can be issued by any police officer in the Province of British Columbia. Further, the taxi company risks exposing itself to civil litigation which has, in the past, resulted in financial penalties in the range of \$10,000.

Respectfully,

Inspector Michael Brown
OIC Community Services & Traffic Section
Victoria Police Department

**Guiding the Sighted by the Heartstrings
(or, Another Bad CNIB Ad)**

by Thelma Fayle

Editor's note: One more CNIB TV ad in bad taste. Will these sorts of ads depicting blind people as helpless charity cases for the sake of fundraising ever end? And another thing: CNIB has stepped into the arena where guide dog schools already exist. This is one more aspect of CNIB's monopolization of blindness services in Canada.

GRRRRR... can we sighted Canadians please stop falling for the demeaning and highly offensive CNIB television ads? We sighteds have been well trained over the last hundred years with millions of targeted marketing dollars that have been designed to elicit one response:

“Oh no... poor blind people! Wouldn't it be terrible to be blind? Better give some money to the CNIB. Better yet, let's leave lots of money to CNIB in our wills! Wow... and now they are supporting PUPPIES and look at that handsome young Mulroney playing with all those cute pups!!!”

The shameless use of celebs and puppies may be highly offensive to many blind Canadians, but the marketing strategy is guaranteed to work on well-trained sighted ones.

Just watched a 60-second TV commercial on a prime time spot for a high-end Canadian program. In the first 20 seconds, there are several insults to blind Canadians as ominous music plays (think *Jaws* soundtrack) while the camera moves from a black-gloved hand tentatively trying to find a street signal button, to the face of a woman about to cross. We see a close-up of her fearful expression, eyes darting back and forth. The pan continues from her face – full of trepidation at the thought of crossing the street without a guide dog – to the menacing wheels of a moving car and back to the blind pedestrian's fearful demeanour.

If you haven't picked up the visual clues yet, Mulroney's voiceover implores: For Canadians waiting for a guide dog, life is at a standstill. Ahhhhhh, the poor gal is standing still at the crosswalk.

With his highly recognizable warm and friendly television smile, Ben tells us: “Right now, here in Canada we are facing the most severe shortage of guide dogs in our country's history. Make no mistake. This is a crisis. Become a guide dog sponsor for only 66 cents a day.... And you will know in your hearts that you are providing a lifeline...” Blah, blah, blah.

I checked and as far as several blind friends are concerned (people who are on the executive of the Canadian Federation of the Blind): There is no crisis. Repeat, there is no crisis. Covid may be restricting access to dogs from highly reputable guide dog agencies in the States, but Canada has guide dog schools, too. And even if you donate to CNIB for puppies today, the trained guide dog will not be available to the blind person for up to two years – and the pandemic will, hopefully, be long over by then.

If you want to break the hypnosis of your conditioned response to these patently insulting CNIB ads, I urge you to play the ad a few times. First listen to the background music as it moves from ominous to playful, as Ben and the pups roll around on the floor smooching.

And then turn the sound off and just watch the images. There isn't a hint of a strong, resilient blind person who is full of life and *joie de vie*. There isn't a hint of anyone like the accomplished blind people I know from my volunteer work with the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) or its American sister organization, the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). None of the people I know are pathetically fearful as the ones normally featured in the CNIB ads.

Who needs role models in ads featuring strong independent blind Canadians, anyway?

Many people I know choose to use white canes and are highly efficient and effective with them. Others choose guide dogs as their preferred guiding tool. Don't get me wrong, there are many great organizations – with long established histories – that train and offer highly competent guide dogs. But that is not the point.

It is CNIB's negative stereotyping that I object to. The constant staging, the hinting at incompetence, the fearful tones – they are standard tactics with CNIB marketing. Over the decades CNIB has mastered an art to making blind people look pathetic. The more they do it, the more money sighted Canadians donate to them. It is that simple.

What really made me growl about the current ad was the use of the empty harness being held by a blind person. The idea being that without your help, the harness is empty, dogless, and the person is standing still. The blind person is unable to move around without a guide dog. Hurry. Hurry. Get out your cheque book. Poor blind people are immobile without your donations.

Those empty harnesses were a gag-gift twenty years ago. A person would walk down the street with one and onlookers would do a double take and realize there was no dog, just a gimmicky stiffened leash and harness.

Shame on you CNIB.

And for those who are quick to jump to the defense of the Canadian sacred cow, please hear me out. I have two points to respectfully ask you to consider:

1. Ask ten working-age blind people what they think of the CNIB advertising or the organization for that matter. You will usually find that sighted Canadians tend to revere the CNIB, while most working-age blind Canadians revile the CNIB. I have been told by many blind people that they feel the Canadian “charity model” is insulting and an outdated, patriarchal-style of addressing the needs of the blind in Canada. Education and training for blind Canadians should be a government public education responsibility paid by taxpayer dollars, not charity donations. The disdain for CNIB has nothing to do with the CNIB staff or volunteers – there have been thousands of good ones over the last century. According to many working-age blind Canadians, the problem is the efficacy of the CNIB organization that has recently decided (among other things) that the guide dog biz is extremely lucrative as a fundraiser. Because it is.

2. Fifteen years ago, like most Canadians, I saw the CNIB as one of our grand Canadian institutions – until a working-age blind family friend helped me move past my dense, unconscious bias as a sighted person. Moving away from my conditioned allegiance to an agency I have venerated all of my life was a hard transition. After researching the evidence, I cannot go along with the sacred-cow facade any longer. As I look back, I realize, I simply did not want to believe the CNIB is a charity agency that should be abolished. According to 2020 Charity Intelligence ratings, at least 44% of the donations received go to CNIB ‘overhead’; and yet still, the CNIB brand is entrenched in the hearts of Canadians. (You might want to check out the financial records of the CNIB for yourself.)

The fear of blindness in sighted Canadians continues to be exploited by the wily CNIB marketing. And this guide dog ad campaign in particular is disgraceful.

Thank goodness we have civilized discourse in Canada where it is OK to question a sacred cow.

“Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement;
nothing can be done without hope.”

~ *Helen Keller*



**Canadian Federation of the Blind
CFB 'Choices and Goals' 2021 Virtual Convention
Held April 30 – May 2, 2021 via Zoom. See www.cfb.ca**



**National Federation of the Blind (NFB) (U.S.)
'Anywhere & Everywhere'
2021 Virtual Convention
July 6 – 10, 2021**

Details at www.nfb.org



Committed to the equality of blind Canadians

Giving to CFB

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-deductible. 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 CanadaHelps, enabling contributions by credit card, Interac or Paypal and receive an instant income tax receipt. Monthly automatic donations can also be set up via CanadaHelps. Please go to: www.cfb.ca and click the CanadaHelps donation button or go to www.canadahelps.org/dn/17020

2) By Mail:

Please make cheque payable to Canadian Federation of the Blind, P.O. Box 8007, Victoria, BC, V8W 3R7

Bequests and Planned Giving

Please consider supporting us in this way. Contact us at info@cfb.ca

[Thank you for your kind and generous support!](#)

Donating Aeroplan Points Helps Blind Canadians Attend Blindness Convention

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) uses donated points 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 favorable accommodation rates are provided, along with good transportation links to enable as many blind participants as possible to attend.

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

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

[To donate, please go to: https://donatepoints.aircanada.com/charity/546](https://donatepoints.aircanada.com/charity/546)

CNIB Off Base in Bid for Government Cash

By Dave Obee
Times Colonist, January 20, 2010

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HISTORICAL ARTICLE

Editor's note: Although this article was written in 2010, we in 2021 are still advocating that library services for print-disabled Canadians be equitable within mainstream libraries – publicly funded, publicly accessed and publicly accountable – and not segregated and provided via charity.

The article's author, Dave Obee, is currently editor-in-chief and publisher of the Times Colonist newspaper in Victoria, BC.

The CNIB — once known as the Canadian National Institute for the Blind — wants the B.C. government to hand over \$624,000 because of what it calls inequities in library funding for Canadians.

It's hard to say no to the CNIB, because the charity has a wonderful reputation. But let's hope that the provincial government does its homework on this request.

The facts do not support the CNIB's argument.

The CNIB said yesterday that it can no longer sustain the "\$10 million annual operating cost" of running its library of braille and audio materials without help from the federal and provincial governments. (The CNIB's annual report puts the cost at \$8 million. Still a lot of money, but not \$10 million.)

"Whereas regular public libraries are funded by taxpayers, accessible library services for blind and partially sighted Canadians to date have received no such support," the CNIB said as it launched its campaign. "Canada is the only G-8 country that does not publicly fund any library services for people with vision loss."

These statements are simply not true.

Public libraries provide service to everyone, including those who are blind or partially sighted. Plenty of resources are available for the exclusive use of the blind and many more — including electronic databases — are accessible to blind patrons as well as sighted ones. An estimated 250,000 large-print books are on our library shelves.

We should not be marginalizing blind people by requiring them to obtain their books through a charity. I'm not alone in thinking this.

“Under the Charter of Rights, people with disabilities have the right to equal access to public resources and facilities; obviously it follows that, since sighted citizens receive books from publicly funded libraries, blind citizens should receive this same public service,” Elizabeth Lalonde, president of the Canadian Federation of the Blind, said in a letter to Library and Archives Canada last fall.

The CNIB is a big business, with 1,100 paid employees getting help from 10,000 volunteers. It has \$50 million worth of land and buildings, including a lodge on Bowen Island that offers, its website says, “a beautiful and scenic view of mountains and water.” The charity’s investment portfolio suffered last year, with a net unrealized loss on its investments of \$6.5 million.

The charity has some financial problems — its operating loss in 2009 was \$4 million, down from \$12 million the year before — so it’s not surprising that it is looking for money.

Bear in mind that the CNIB received \$20 million in government funds last year, including \$1 million from British Columbia, along with \$43 million in public support. It also pulled in \$11 million through fees for its services and the sale of consumer products.

How does it make that kind of money?

Graeme McCreath, a physiotherapist in Saanich, has been protesting the conduct of the CNIB for years. Back in 2004 he fired off a letter complaining that the CNIB was charging the Greater Victoria Public Library \$9.50 per audio tape. Given that some large books might need a dozen tapes, the cost of a talking book could be more than \$100.

At the time, you could buy blank cassettes in bulk for less than 50 cents. Even considering the cost of duplication and distribution, that's a markup in the neighbourhood of 1,000 per cent.

McCreath challenges the notion that the CNIB has been providing library services without government help. To digitize its audio library, he says, the CNIB obtained \$33 million from a variety of sources — including \$6 million from the federal government.

“Blind Canadians wish, wherever possible, to be treated on the same terms as their peers and not always singled out as charitable recipients who must be segregated from the mainstream,” says McCreath, who has been blind since he was eight.

British Columbia has dozens of public libraries. They serve the blind and visually impaired, and have been doing that for years. And yes, they are publicly funded.

But beyond that, this province has scores of small charities that do great work in their communities. They do not have \$50 million in buildings and land or 1,100 employees or investment funds able to absorb a paper loss of \$6.5 million. They would never be mistaken for the CNIB.

The provincial government cut off funding to these small groups without a second thought.

Just a few things for the government to consider as it ponders the latest demand from the CNIB.

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<http://www.timescolonist.com/health/CNIB+base+government+cash/2462544/story.html>

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

~ *Helen Keller*

The Library War: NNELS vs CELA in a Nutshell

by Mary Ellen Gabias

There are presently two library systems for print-disabled Canadians because CNIB wanted to continue receiving funding for libraries while no longer being responsible for operating one. Therefore, they worked with the Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC) to form the Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA). CELA is actually the CNIB library operating under a new structure. CNIB gets rent for housing CELA and funds for providing CELA's computer platform.

The National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS), which CFB endorses, began because provincial public libraries felt they had been hit with unreasonable funding demands from CNIB and were distrustful of a library service that could, in effect, hold them hostage if funds were not paid. Therefore, several provincial libraries got together to create NNELS in order to pool resources for serving people with print disabilities.

Blind people are caught in a war within the public library system. Large libraries work through CULC, while smaller libraries work through their provincial library service. Will large urban libraries run the system, or will it be run by provinces? We're pawns in the library war, complicated by CNIB's continuing desire to monetize library service within its over-extending corporate monopoly.

(To read more about differences between NNELS and CELA, see our report, "CNIB: Canada's 100-Year Monopoly", Volume 18, *The Blind Canadian*, December 2020, found at www.cfb.ca under publications.)

"Literature is my Utopia."

"Knowledge is love and light and vision."

~ *Helen Keller*

Kerry's Outlook: A Most Bitter Winter and a Spring Thawing

by Kerry Kijewski

Editor's note: This is Kerry's second editorial column. Her column will appear in each issue of this magazine. 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 with her brother, Brian, is co-host of Outlook On Radio Western, a radio program aired through the University of Western Ontario.

CONTENT WARNING: Subject could be disturbing to some readers.

Covid would be keeping us apart for Christmas. I knew that I would not be having the yearly Kijewski Family Christmas (or KFC as we've lovingly coined it). We wouldn't be getting together with my older brother, his wife and their two kids. I hadn't missed an in-person Christmas with my niece and nephew since they were both born, ten and seven years ago. But the pandemic was a real threat to several of us in the family living with chronic medical conditions. My brother and family lived close by in Toronto and yet the risk was too high.

I am usually jolly during the Christmas season, normally able to entertain my inner child, but this one felt different rather quickly. Winter looms up for most people by Christmas, but I look forward to the chilly months to come. Then something happened over Christmas 2020 that would temper my enthusiasm for the season.

Sitting on a brisk December downtown street, with lights I could still dimly see, I listened to Brian, my musician brother, and band hired to perform holiday favourites for passing shoppers. The virus meant masks and keeping a safe distance, my hands gripped around the heat of my coffee cup. But I couldn't fully enjoy the music and the ambiance. I was troubled by something and I could not make sense of it in my head and heart, didn't know where I could go to talk things through.

A few days earlier, a story had broken in the blindness community that I was not expecting to hear. Stories started coming out across social media, accusations coming out against certain trainers at U.S. blindness rehabilitation centres, for instance, who were said to have ridiculed and bullied certain students. All the way to stories of rapes that were said to have occurred while at blindness conventions put on by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the U.S. Those running centres and those at the top of the organization were under scrutiny for allegedly looking the other way when a charge was made, a complaint levelled.

Abuse and rape accusations and coverups had come out recently in many different organizations – police and RCMP, Armed Forces, Catholic church, Boy Scouts, sports teams, the entertainment and fashion industry, to name some – but this time it had inched closer to home than was comfortable.

That's the thing though, most of us need to get more willing to push back on our own comfort levels. We are comfortable in our privilege and need to get more used to feeling what it's like to feel uncomfortable, to sit with those things more, because many of us do what we can to avoid the feeling of discomfort. I then began to attempt to parse this situation. I wasn't directly involved in any of it.

Over the past several years, I'd had my eyes opened to the energy and the benefits of attending the NFB conventions, fully organized and run by blind people, 3,000 blind people in one place and having fun. Awkward though it felt, my experience of anxiety at getting lost was nothing compared to the horrors some were relaying about conventions. All across social media, tempers flared and solidarity was shown to those speaking out. I was moved and disgusted when I heard about the fear and intimidations people were saying they'd lived with.

Looking into it, the December 16, 2020 Open Letter of Apology from the NFB president and a renewed statement on their website about conduct were gestures many on social media found hollow and late in coming. I had felt fear at my lack of confidence, a fear of getting lost amongst the thousands of convention goers, but never did I feel unsafe from any person there. But I put myself in the shoes of those who told of the traumas they lived with.

I needed to figure out why I had found myself questioning how organizations run, when they grow as big and powerful as some have. I became involved in the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) because I wanted better representation of blind people in Canada, including myself and my brother and others I cared about. I wanted rehab and blindness skills training access to be plentiful, wanted greater independence and freedom and opportunities for blind Canadians. I did not like what I was hearing on social media though.

At my bluest I wondered about things like prejudices that have been allowed to go on far too long in society. I thought about power structures and how some people flock to that, so they have the opportunities to exert power over others. I knew this wasn't everyone by any means, but I was aware that racism, ableism, misogyny, that taking advantage of others can happen in all places, including in the blindness community.

I had to think about why I was getting involved in an advocacy organization in the ways I was. I didn't think taking my ball and going home would solve anything. I want to make a difference where I can, in the ways I can. Part of that is standing up when someone says they've been hurt. My heart hurt and I couldn't sleep. All of it was unsettling in all the ways it should be.

As winter rolled into spring, I began planning the CFB national convention, playing a bigger part on the committee than I had before. I often lament the small numbers of those who advocate and commiserate and find acceptance together somewhere, like in the CFB. But the thought of it growing larger and losing more control of who's doing what, the resolve to stick around and continue this work I'm doing here in Canada kicked back in with the spring thaw.

I was still angry that anyone in a position of direct power or control would hold that over someone else who was likely vulnerable. When someone thinks 'if only I could attend the appropriate blindness skills training centre or attend a blindness convention' – everyone who makes that leap deserves to land safely in the end.

So what did I do? I went ahead with the planning of a diversity and intersectionality panel at our Canadian convention. I thought 'we can't keep quiet and avoid the hard discussions about all the things that make up who we all are, a chance for greater understanding'.

Having something of my own, something to focus on, a "goal" to keep the lines of communication on the struggles, but also on the successes, of other blind people, this gave me a way to at least start to address what makes us all so worth it – worth better.

Being blind doesn't negate the uglier side of humanity. Our fallibility is as visible or invisible as the rest. I have tried to feel the discomfort that privilege can bring. I promised myself I would not keep silent in my support for pain suffered and/ or reported. The idea of systemic oppression and worse, that of many minorities. I want us to use our own experiences with understanding of what it's like to be marginalized and oppressed and ignored, so to be allies to anyone who might be hurting or speaking their truth. I was only on the periphery, though, of the social media outpourings over the last several months.

Thus we arrive at my panel for convention, "In Their Own Words". I've decided, while I cannot crawl into people's heads to know their true intentions and I can't control anyone else, I'm going to stand with anyone who feels alone or disregarded. I'm going to give people as many opportunities to speak their truth and feel listened to, not brushed aside. My convention panel took on even more of a significance now and I write here to make my stance clear.

In our own words.

Note: I only write of my window into the events of this winter. I have no direct link to any of the things I talk about here or any person involved.

For important and updated information on this issue, please read:

January 6, 2021 – A Letter to the NFB Community From the Special Committee at <https://nfb.org/programs-services/safety-support/letter-nfb-community-special-committee>

You Asked CFB: Children’s Braille Books

Editor’s note: The Canadian Federation of the Blind is often asked questions related to blindness. The information we give to the person asking the question can be beneficial to the greater community, so we like to share the questions and answers so that the information is available to all.

Q: Where can we purchase Braille books for children?

A: The Canadian Federation of the Blind does not publish Braille children’s books. We’re happy to recommend some good sources.

First, contact your local public library. Many local public libraries have bought print / Braille children’s books for their collections. Print / Braille books incorporate both print and Braille, either on the same page or on facing pages. They’re designed for blind parents who want to read to sighted children or for sighted parents who want to follow along as their young blind child is learning to read Braille. They also make good tools for educating sighted children about Braille. No public library has an extensive collection, but many libraries have a few. Your librarian can obtain more for you through inter-library loan.

The National Network for Equitable Library Service (NNELS) is a repository of books in alternate formats. It is funded by provincial libraries and offers online service to individuals and service through local libraries. Check with www.nnels.ca for availability of children’s books in Braille. Their print / Braille books must be returned, but electronic downloadable books can be kept by patrons. NNELS can also emboss electronic Braille and send paper Braille copies upon request.

Seedlings www.seedlings.org is located in Michigan. They produce Braille children's books suitable from preschool to middle school. Their prices are higher than the prices for print books, but are still quite reasonable.

National Braille Press www.nbp.org is located in Boston, Massachusetts. They have a print / Braille "Book of the Month" club. You can go online and order books individually or you can pay \$100 US per year and receive all the books on offer for that year.

If you would like some gently used books free of charge, check out www.sharebraille.org. The principle of sharebraille.org is that those with gently used Braille books, which they no longer want, can post their availability online. Anyone who wants a book can request that it be sent. It's an informal, first-come-first-served system. Its advantages are that used books don't get wasted but are passed along to people who want them.

The Action Fund for Blind Children and Adults offers a free "Book of the Month" program for blind children. Children can enroll to receive either kindergarten / grade 3 books or books for older elementary / middle school readers. To enroll, register at www.actionfund.org or phone (410) 659-9315. Electronic versions of books provided by the Action Fund are available online for download.

You might also want to write to the Vision Impaired Resource Network www.virn.ca in Winnipeg, Manitoba. They produced a number of print / Braille books for the Canadian library system and may or may not be able to work with you. I don't have current information about their production capacity.

BookShare is a service that makes hundreds of thousands of electronic books available to eligible blind borrowers. It's a subscription service, but some Canadian libraries can register you without cost. Go to www.bookshare.org to learn more.

Electronic Braille books are similar to eBooks in print. Rather than reading them on a Nook or Kindle, Braille electronic books are read on a variety of devices that are generically known as "paperless Braille" display machines. Often school districts make these devices available to students. Electronic files are loaded into these devices and their contents can be read in Braille via small pop-up pins on the machines' refreshable displays. This includes books specially prepared in Braille and also books in popular formats that were prepared in print.

I hope these resources help.

Mary Ellen Gabias, President, CFB

You Asked CFB: Using baby strollers as a blind person

Q: I'm looking for all the info I can get about travelling with a baby in order to help one of my clients who is going to give birth soon. Do you have anything about travelling with a stroller?

A: When our children were little, my husband and I, both of us blind, used a stroller with a reversible handle. We would walk in front, pulling the stroller behind us. Simply turning a typical stroller around has two major problems. First, the baby is moving backwards, which is not a major problem, but somewhat odd. Of more importance, trying to pull a typical stroller means that the wheels won't turn effectively. With a reversible handle, the stroller faces forward, and the handle is in front rather than behind.

You can buy strollers with reversible handles anywhere strollers are sold, but they tend to be more expensive models.

I've heard of strollers that incorporate a car seat into their design. They're harder to find and, again, it's important to make sure the reversible handle is part of the design. Because we couldn't find a stroller with a car seat, we found one wide enough to hold the car seat. That way we would have a car seat for taxis. The main difficulty can be if the car seat can't be secured into the stroller.

Umbrella strollers may or may not be effective, again depending on their design. Some can be pulled behind and still move correctly.

When buying a stroller, take whatever time is needed to test it out thoroughly in the store. That includes walking around pulling it behind. We bought a double stroller when our second child was born, only to discover after we got it home that it was too awkward to pull.

I also enjoyed baby carriers, especially when the children were old enough to sit in a backpack and hold their heads up. The babies liked them, too, because they got a better view perched on my back.

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) (www.nfb.org), the US organization that CFB is modelled on, has a lot of resources for blind parents, including an email listserv and a mentoring program. Canadians are welcome to participate. They also have a parenting booklet.

Mary Ellen Gabias, President, CFB

Recipes!

Mary Ellen's Meatloaf

This recipe comes to us from our CFB president, Mary Ellen Gabias. She lives with her family in Kelowna, BC.

This meatloaf recipe can be varied almost infinitely. It's extremely simple to make and satisfying to eat. This makes a large pan of meatloaf.

1 large package ground beef, lean preferred, (about 2.2 kg or 5 lbs). You may substitute ground turkey, ground pork, or bulk sausage for part or all of ground beef, depending on preference.

2 slices bread

2 eggs, beaten

Vegetables of your choice: onions, green or red peppers, celery, zucchini, finely chopped. Another option is half a package of frozen fajita vegetables, finely chopped. Dried onion soup mix can be substituted for the onions and salt, if preferred.

Spices to taste: I use salt, pepper, and some combination of Italian spices and garlic; or chilis, paprika, and a dash of hot sauce; or Old Bay seasoning

Ketchup and mustard for topping

Directions:

In a large bowl, mix all ingredients together thoroughly. Press into a 9 X 13 inch baking pan.

In a separate small bowl, combine ketchup and mustard, two parts ketchup for every part mustard. If desired, spicy ketchup or Dijon mustard may be used. Make enough of the ketchup / mustard mixture to generously cover the entire meatloaf.

Bake, uncovered, in a 375 F oven for approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. Tip pan to drain excess fat.

Spartan Life Bread

This recipe comes from Doris Belusic, Victoria, BC. It is a recipe she received from her longtime friend, Mary.

1 pkg regular yeast (or 2 1/4 tsp)
4 c flour (*see below)
1 tsp salt
2 c water (1/2 c for yeast, 1 1/2 c for dough)

Proof the yeast:

Measure 1/2 c water into a mug. Stir in a half tsp of sugar (as food for yeast). Microwave until the water feels lukewarm to your finger. Sprinkle yeast ovetop of the water and swirl to slightly submerge the yeast. Set aside to let the yeast rise halfway or so up the mug.

Meanwhile:

In a large bowl, add the flour(s) and salt and combine. Make a well in the centre of the flour.

When the yeast is ready, stir and pour it into the flour well. Add 1 1/2 c water into a small microwaveable bowl and microwave until it is lukewarn to your finger. Then add it into the flour well. Using a fork, stir the ingredients together to form a dough.

With floured hands, knead the dough a bit. If the dough is slightly sticky, sprinkle it with a bit more flour and knead the dough a bit more. Form it into a ball and place back into the bowl. Cover bowl with a tea towel and let rise for 1 hour or so in a draft-free place.

Prepare your pan. You can use a loaf pan, or you can use a pie plate if you are making a round bread, or a cookie sheet for any shape bread. I use a round pyrex pie plate lined with parchment paper.

Once the dough has risen for about 1 hour, take it with floured hands and place it onto your pan and pat it down to flatten it some. Sprinkle the top with a bit of salt. You can also sprinkle with herbs like rosemary, thyme, oregano, or other things. Then dust with a bit of flour.

Let the bread rise again in the pan, covered with a tea towel, for about 30-35 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

When the bread has risen, bake it for 35-40 minutes. It makes a nice rustic, crusty bread.

Variation ideas:

Cheese bread – knead in pieces of cheddar cheese and put some on top.

Cinnamon bread – After kneading the dough, flatten it into a rectangle and sprinkle with cinnamon, sugar and raisins, then roll the dough up, sealing the end edge with a bit of water. If you want it more like cinnamon buns, you can also put melted butter on the dough along with the cinnamon, sugar and raisins.

Onion bread – knead in some onion powder or onion soup mix (maybe 1 or 2 Tbsp). Can knead in some chopped green onion.

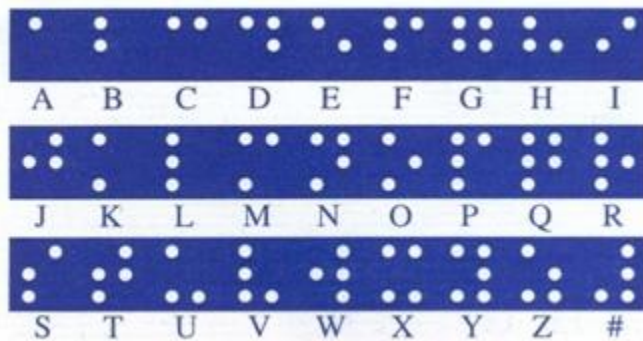
Roasted garlic bread – knead in some roasted garlic or peeled garlic cloves.

Olive bread – knead in some black pitted Greek olives.

Seed bread – knead in your choice of seeds.

Other ideas?

*The flour – use white, whole wheat, or a combo of both flours. Can also use some corn flour or other. A really good bread I make is using 2 c white flour, 1 c whole wheat and 1 c corn flour.



The Braille Alphabet