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The Blind Canadian

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

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CFB

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

CFB

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our Philosophy

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

We believe it is respectable to be blind.

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

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

CFB

Committed to the equality of blind Canadians

The Blind Canadian

A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind

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

The Blind Canadian 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

EDITOR: Doris Belusic
ASSISTANT EDITOR: Kerry Kijewski
FRONT COVER: Photo of CFB President Doug Lawlor and Victoria members,
Photo Credit: Daryl Jones
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Canadian Federation of the Blind
Douglas Lawlor, President
PO Box 8007
Victoria, BC V8W 3R7
Phone: (250) 598-7154 Toll Free: 1-800-619-8789
Email: editor@cfb.ca / info@cfb.ca
Find us on Facebook, Follow us on Twitter: @cfbdotca
YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/CFBdotca

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Federationism Celebrates 30 Years in Canada
1992 – 2022

By Doris Belusic

Cheers to us as we celebrate a milestone 30th anniversary of Federationism in Canada this year! We are on a journey, moving forward, with new beliefs and ways, on the heels of a great US Federation movement, its history and accomplishments – and creating our own here in Canada!

Dr. Paul Gabias & Mary Ellen Gabias, founders of the CFB Photo credit: Joanne Gabias

In 1992, Dr. Paul Gabias and Mary Ellen Gabias founded Federationism in Canada. It has evolved over the last three decades and the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) was founded in 1999 and has become a thriving, vital force in this country.

In the year 2000, Dr. Paul Gabias received his second doctorate, this one an honorary degree from the University of Victoria in recognition of his work bringing Federationism to Canada.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), is a grassroots, all-volunteer, mentoring, advocacy and civil rights movement of blind people – run by the blind for the blind. But 30 years ago, in Canada, few blind people knew about Federationism and its positive, empowering messages.

Thinking Back

Though the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), the largest movement of organized blind people in the world – over 50,000 members strong – had existed since 1940 just south of our Canadian border in the United States, for most blind Canadians, Federationism was an unknown and new concept.

Past president, Elizabeth Lalonde, in her 2005 CFB convention speech, "Putting it into Context: What is the Canadian Federation of the Blind? Why are We Here? And What Do We Want for Blind Canadians?" asked the question:

"How could such a large and influential and positive organization exist on the same continent for over 50 years, without my knowledge?"

In Volume 3 of CFB's magazine, *The Blind Canadian*, Elizabeth explains the core beliefs of our movement in her president's message, "The Feeling of Federationism":

"Blindness is a characteristic. It's respectable to be blind. With proper training, opportunity and a positive attitude, blind people can compete on terms of equality with the sighted. The real problem of blindness is not the lack of eyesight, but the lack of positive information about blindness and the abilities of blind people."

In her message, Elizabeth says, "These statements represent the philosophy of the Canadian Federation of the Blind and explain the core beliefs of Federationists; they provide focus, direction and purpose to our movement, but they only describe part of who we are as Federationists. The other essential quality of the Federation exists beyond statements and beyond words; it dwells in the realm of feeling – the feeling one experiences when attending a Federation gathering, the feeling of camaraderie, of belief in a common goal, of working together with other blind people who feel good about who they are and who they are becoming."

The Canadian Federation of the Blind has brought a new understanding of blindness to Canada – one that views blindness with a positive perspective, holds high expectations of ourselves as blind people and of equality in society, and that recognizes blind people's abilities, accomplishments and potential – and that says it's OK to be blind.

Here is a taste of what CFB has been up to over the years:

Long White Cane: Federationism introduced the NFB-style long white cane to blind Canadians, and also the notion of 'structured discovery', a method of independent travel used by blind people that emphasizes problem-solving and self-initiated travel. CFB has adopted October 15 as White Cane Day. When available, CFB has provided free long white canes through its Walking Proud Program.

Blindness Skills Training: Federationism introduced the concept of individual choice in rehabilitation options for blind Canadians, and CFB has advocated strongly since its inception for government-funded, accountable, NFB-style intensive, immersive blindness skills rehabilitation training.

This kind of positive, skill-mastering, intensive training is not available in Canada, but at three US world-renowned Federation centres: The Colorado Center for the Blind, in Littleton, Colorado; the Louisiana Center for the Blind, in Ruston, Louisiana; and BLIND Inc. in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In 2009-10, Elizabeth Lalonde, past president of CFB, attended Louisiana Center for the Blind for nine months of intensive training and wrote a blog about her journey. Since then, her mission has been to bring this important, necessary, proven model of intensive blindness skills training to Canada. She founded the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind in 2011 in Victoria, BC, and as its director since then, has been running this part-time school. But her goal is to have a full-time, Federation-style, immersive training facility here in Canada for blind Canadians.

CFB helped fund Gina, a blind Victoria woman who attended nine months of training at Louisiana Center for the Blind in 2016-17. After she completed the program and returned home, we held a congrats party. In her article, “Free as a Butterfly: My Blindness Rehabilitation Journey,” in *The Blind Canadian*, Volume 13, she tells her incredible story.

Blindness Conventions: Federationism in Canada introduced the US National Federation of the Blind (NFB) conventions to blind Canadians. This annual, week-long event brings together up to 3,000 blind people from around the world to speak, listen, learn, empower and inspire each other. Federation conventions are one of the best learning grounds for the blind.

Dr. Paul Gabias and Mary Ellen Gabias raised funds to support more than 90 Canadians to attend the New Orleans NFB national convention in 1997. This was an introduction and a new experience for most blind Canadians. Since then, often through CFB funding support, many blind Canadians have had the opportunity to attend these NFB conventions and have gained transformative, life-changing insight, knowledge and inspiration.

CFB members have also attended NFB state conventions, such as in Washington and New York states. And the CFB has held eleven of its own successful conventions, including: ‘Believe’ in 2005; ‘Moving Forward’ in 2007;

‘The Blind Leading the Blind’ in 2008; ‘Louis Braille: From Literacy to Liberty’ in 2009; ‘The Journey’ in 2012; ‘Breaking the Mold’ in 2014; ‘Vote of Confidence’ in 2017; ‘Organize’ in 2018; ‘Employment-Empowerment’ in 2019; ‘Choices and Goals’ in 2021, and ‘Positive Outlook’ in 2022.

At our conventions, members have been honoured to host some of the top NFB leaders. Dr. Marc Maurer, the then national president of the NFB, and his wife Patricia, attended our 2007 convention. In 2005, 2008 and 2019, Carla McQuillan, the president of the NFB of Oregon, attended. In 2012, the late Mike Freeman, who was president of the NFB of Washington state, attended. In 2014, Gary Wunder, editor of NFB’s leading publication, *The Braille Monitor*, was our representative. Last year, 2021, at our virtual convention (due to the pandemic), we were honored to have both Marci Carpenter, president of NFB of Washington state and Scott LaBarre, president of the NFB of Colorado, attend.

Human Rights: CFB has worked on a lot of human rights advocacy over the years. Members have attended many government meetings, written hundreds of advocacy letters, conducted media interviews and held several rallies and protests. Advocacy issues have ranged greatly.

We have been involved in several human rights cases over the years, the latest case still in progress, against the City of Victoria, regarding its implementation of discriminatory, dangerous bike lanes with inaccessible floating island bus stops. We’ve also had cases against BC Transit when we advocated for audible stop annunciation on their buses, and members have had cases against several taxi cab companies rising from discriminatory service when drivers refused rides to blind customers with guide dogs. In Victoria, we worked with a lawyer and the City police, who wrote an information sheet for Greater Victoria taxi companies, stating guide dog rights and taxi industry obligations.

Just recently, Victoria, BC members had the pleasure of hosting CFB national president, Doug Lawlor, who travelled from Kingston, Ontario to check out Victoria’s dangerous bike lanes and floating island bus stops.

Library Service: We have advocated fervently for many years that government should fund equitable, public library service for the print disabled, instead of funding our books through a charity.

Lions iPhone Project for the Blind: CFB and the Victoria Lions Club have partnered since 2012 (with funding help from other Greater Victoria and Vancouver area Lions and Lioness clubs) to provide unlocked iPhones for the blind on southern Vancouver Island and in Vancouver, BC. To date, over 50 recipients have received an iPhone, which is born accessible – useful to the blind right out of the box – having VoiceOver, speech recognition, and GPS, and they can use many helpful apps geared for the blind.

"CNIB: Canada's 100-Year Monopoly" Report: In December 2020, we published this important report which was researched and written by Daryl Jones, in consultation with CFB. We filed it with the Competition Bureau of Canada. (To read this report, see *The Blind Canadian*, Volume 18, Special Edition, at **www.cfb.ca** under Publications.)

The Politics of Blindness: From Charity to Parity: This award-winning book was written by long-time CFB member, Graeme McCreath, and published in 2011. A testimonial in the book was written by Michael J. Prince, University of Victoria Lansdowne Professor of Social Policy. It examines the conventional approaches to numerous problems that affect people who are blind in Canada. McCreath says it's time for change. Find his book at: **www.thepoliticsofblindness.com**

Outreach & Mentoring: CFB holds regular monthly meetings, sponsors a listserv, maintains a website **www.cfb.ca** and twice a year publishes its magazine, *The Blind Canadian* (found on CFB's website). We also hold other meetings, such as Kernels of Hope, and post-pandemic we'll get back to in-person socials. As mentioned earlier, we in CFB, plan, run and attend our own CFB conventions for the blind in Canada.

We also raise awareness of the NFB and their wealth of information that we can learn from, including from their immense website **www.nfb.org**, their magazines, their many job and hobby divisions, their meetings, their large blindness conventions, and of course, their leaders and members.

Federation members are mentors, but also mentees. Each member gains blindness skills from working together and sharing mutual knowledge and experiences, such as cane travel, technology, Braille, self advocacy, as well as confidence, independence and inspiration.

Several years ago, CFB in Ontario mentored a blind man with life skills, so that he was able to live independently in his own apartment.

Outlook on Radio Western: Inspired by CFB, two of our members, siblings Brian and Kerry Kijewski, have co-hosted this radio show on the topic of disability since 2018 and have produced well over 100 episodes. They air out of London's University of Western Ontario radio station. Many interesting guests have been interviewed, including many CFB members. Listen live Mondays at 11 AM Eastern at radiowestern.ca/stream and podcasts are found on your favourite platforms, including soundcloud.com/outlookonradiowestern

CFB Growth: CFB has grown in membership across Canada in the past few years and we have active chapters in Ontario and BC.

Let's continue our work, goals, accomplishments, share camaraderie and feel this passion for CFB's mission and movement for the next decades to come!

Giving Thanks

Members of the Canadian Federation of the Blind acknowledge the generosity of community organizations, government grants, businesses and individual supporters, sighted and blind, who believe in our cause and who show their belief through their volunteerism and generous support. Thank you!

CFB: An Embodiment of the NFB
Why does CFB have ties with NFB?

by Erik Burggraaf

Editor's note: This article is a compilation using some of Erik's emails that he posted to CFB's listserv in December 2021. His emails were responses to questions from a new member on the list interested in the relationship between the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the US. Questions like: Is CFB its own entity or an umbrella organization for NFB? How much independence does CFB have? Is there a business reason why CFB is tied with NFB? What about the NFB being called "militant" or an "old boys' club" by some people? Erik addressed these and other questions in his emails with such well-articulated, explanatory answers – that they just seemed perfect for putting together into an article.

Erik is President of the Ontario CFB chapter, as well as our past national Second Vice President, and now our newly-elected national Treasurer.

How do we communicate 80-years worth of all of the ramifications of a unique way of thinking about blindness to people who have never had such an idea before? I have been reading and listening for five years, and I still haven't heard nearly all that there is to absorb on the subject of blindness and the real abilities of blind people. An answer that does the subject justice takes time. To understand is one thing, to articulate is another.

The NFB in the US started in 1940 with a simple and profound vision to raise expectations for blind people. The basis of raising expectations for blind people is the belief that blindness is a characteristic. Over years of experimentation and research, the belief that blindness is a characteristic led to beliefs that first, all characteristics are limiting to one degree or another, but that blindness need be no more limiting than any other characteristic. Secondly, that the sum of blind people encapsulates and embodies every other human characteristic. Decades of research and experimentation led from these to a third belief – that there is almost nothing that can be done, which cannot be accomplished by a blind person. This is what we mean when we use this Federation message:

“The Canadian Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day, we raise expectations for blind people, because low expectations are the real obstacle between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want. Blindness is not what holds you back.”

If you want to start delving into what has been thought about all this over the years, the CFB resources page has more material in our NFB section than any one of us could probably consume in a lifetime. And there’s CFB’s page with *The Blind Canadian* magazine, too.

The reason that we are tied to the NFB is because CFB is first and foremost, a values-based — I wouldn't say faith-based — but absolutely a belief-based organization. The point of being, CFB is to bring the positive philosophy of blindness to people, demonstrate that it works, show blind people that they can embody the philosophy, and help them grow in skills, experience and confidence. We got the philosophy, the research, the branding and the belief all from the NFB. So, the belief, the mission and values of the organization are the reasons for the relationship, not to mention, friendship.

As far as an actual relationship goes, we do use the NFB's branding along with research materials, networking, messaging and other things that come from NFB. We use their expertise from time to time. We keep ties with them by donating on behalf of the organization to support the NFB's work. We will always endorse sending our members to NFB conventions, and we will always include the NFB in our conventions. Traditionally, a CFB membership has de facto included, as part of its premium, an NFB membership, so that CFB members can build our own networks and take advantage of resources personally relevant to each of us.

All of this is not to suggest that the NFB has an advocacy arm in Canada. Neither should it be interpreted to show that CFB can't do the day-to-day work of the organization without depending on the NFB. The two organizations are separate and distinct. The CFB does great work on issues related to Canada by talented Canadians. The NFB doesn't suggest what projects we should work on. It doesn't tell us how to raise money. It doesn't even adopt our resolutions as they affect the NFB. We don't receive money from the NFB. The CFB is wholly an independent Canadian organization. Only the policies we create for our organization are deeply informed by our understanding of the positive philosophy of blindness, and most of that work comes from the NFB.

There are a lot of advocacy organizations of and for the blind in Canada. There is CNIB, which is in the heavily conflicted position of advocating for blind people while also being a commercial retailer and service delivery organization for the blind. Thus, it mainly advocates for more money for itself, whether it delivers goods and services or not. Then there is the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB), which I know very little about, but which seems to be largely a community group that does advocacy by doing what CNIB asks them to. Then there is Fighting Blindness Canada, an organization funding research on cures for genetic eye conditions. It does advocacy mainly with an eye to ending blindness. Then there is the Alliance for the Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC). This is a splinter organization that formed roughly the same time as did CFB.

Back in 1992 in Canada, there was the beginnings of Federationism when Dr. Paul and Mary Ellen Gabias formed the NFB:AE (NFB: Advocates for Equality) which existed for some years. Because some members didn’t want to be associated with Federationism and its philosophy, NFB:AE splintered into two factions: CFB and AEBC. CFB works most closely with AEBC. They most closely reflect our views on situations like the CNIB monopoly and access to independent travel. All of which is to say, there's a lot of advocacy being done and a great deal of conflicting interests in the Canadian blindness landscape.

Because of the belief-based nature of the NFB, and by extension CFB, our organizations tend to be somewhat polarizing. If you believe that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future and want to push the boundaries of what is possible for yourself or blind people as a whole, or if you want to learn about the idea, the CFB makes sense. If you don't believe in the underlying premise of CFB, then the scope of the belief can seem daunting, even threatening.

My own personal view is that there needs to be such a radical, pure, positive message about blindness in order to act as a balance to the incredible array of negative messages there are about blindness. At a Fighting Blindness convention a few years ago, one of the presenters claimed that they would, "stamp the cancer of blindness from the face of the earth!" to hundreds of cheers. In 2016, I sat in a courtroom in Nevada where a heavily disadvantaged blind mother was fighting to prevent her child from being placed up for adoption. A lawyer characterized her progress in learning cane travel as "getting around with the aid of a walking stick," as if the mother, learning orientation and mobility for the first time, were actually in physical decline and deteriorating to the point of using crutches. When I came back from Nevada and saw the response arguments to my first human rights complaint, I couldn't believe what I read. The term, "suffering from blindness", appeared three times in the submission in terms of "The applicant didn't tell us that he was suffering from blindness."

So, the militant thing. Yes, people who don't know or don't like the NFB have this excuse that the NFB is militant, and so it is. They will say this as though it is a bad thing. Personally, I acknowledge it and respect it. I like the NFB hard-line stance. The NFB has a philosophy and set of values around blindness that directly challenges ignorance, superstition and public attitudes about blindness that are culturally ingrained in people for centuries or perhaps millennia. Biases and stereotypes about blindness and the products of such are so limiting and so damaging to blind people, that an uncompromising message of power and positivity is required in order to keep from being swept away by the tide.

To that point, I think there are two things to keep in mind here. First, the NFB is run by people, and people are flawed. People play politics. They play for personal advantage. Some are even legitimately bad actors. Even with the best intentions, people make a decision using the information they have available, and sometimes they just get it wrong. The NFB doesn't always get it right. I don't agree with every decision merely by being a member, neither do they require me to as a member. Even with all that, the track record of excellence and success in the NFB is very, very high. Certainly it's high enough that they have earned the right to take a stance on an issue and have their position considered without being pooh-poohed as militant, as though that were somehow a bad thing.

Then, as Dr. Marc Maurer, NFB past president, pointed out at a New York state convention a few years ago, the NFB is involved in a lot of projects that have nothing to do with legal or legislative advocacy. The organization sent a braille coin to the moon. They send braille letters from Santa to children. They fund research into technology. They run training centres. They do organizational things that we want to start putting into place in Canada, like mentoring programs. NFB, for an organization its size, covers a wide scope and is fairly flexible. It also has a history of being accountable for its mistakes. You can be militant on a position if your best information says it's the right decision and if you are willing to accept the consequences for making the wrong decision.

Here's another memory that occurred to me. Many years ago, my good friend, Eddy, from Alabama, found out I was helping my ex with NFB and he started whining, "Aw, those militants," I remember him saying — or words to that effect. He continued, “All that furor in the 80s because the airlines made us store our canes. Seriously? If I'm ever in a plane crash that cane isn't going to do me any good. Just let them have it."

I said to Eddy at the time, "OK, but now, thanks to the NFB, you have a choice. You can keep your cane or store it, but either way, the attendant has to look you in the eye, ask you what you want respectfully, then abide by your decision. All because the NFB challenged the airlines."

I found out later that during that period, blind people were abused and even groped inappropriately while being escorted from planes for not relinquishing their canes. If you lived through that, you might be forgiven for being passionate about it. If you didn't live through it, then you have the benefit that airlines all over the world now respect the cane without you having had to assume any of the risk. So, I'm comfortable with militancy.

Mary Ellen Gabias, CFB past president, lived through these civil rights years of the NFB, which I have only been able to hear recordings of.

As for the NFB being called an "old boys' club" among people who don't like the NFB for one reason or another, there's an element of pettiness, even sour grapes, in calling an organization of 60,000 people with hundreds of chapters and divisions, world-class training and research facilities and a 26-million dollar a year budget, an old boys' club.

Having said that, I do have some negative experiences involving NFB leaders who held multiple positions – as many as five offices at various chapter and division levels at once. Certainly in an organization like CFB with 60 members, only about 1/3 of which are active at any given time, is bound to have some overlap, though we really want to be doing more to involve as many people as possible. With the NFB's numbers, finding and training leadership should be fairly easy. Yet, they do have a propensity for electing one person to an insane number of offices, the work of one of which I would be hard pressed to carry out in my current situation. In that sense, the NFB might be, as they say, a bit of an old boys' club.

Not only do I believe in the Federation message and the need for it, but I believe that our message has a right to be given voice, and at least as much credence and respect as the messages of other organizations where money will solve all our problems, technology will solve all our problems, cures will solve all our problems – in another 50 years.

The CFB and the NFB are my voice in the world, and we say that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. We say it with conviction and pride, and then we go out and do our best to make it so, whether by filing human rights and accessibility complaints, or by teaching someone how to use a white cane, or creating a special interest group, or standing up in a legislature to ask for accountable spending on blindness services. It's a passion and a calling, one that seems out of reach a lot of the time, and one that gets bogged down in the details a lot, but one that keeps us going through good times and bad.

I'm a member of both CFB and NFB because I love blind people. I believe that achieving full equality for blind people is worth doing, and I believe that in order to do that, we need something bigger than ourselves or our case or our project to look up to. The NFB offers that and the CFB works hard to embody it. So, it's a good relationship for us to be involved in and makes our organization unique in Canada and uniquely valuable to blind Canadians.

To be clear, there will never be a CFB constitution that does not recognize some tie to the NFB. Our constitution will always recognize the positive philosophy of blindness and that, of course, originated with the NFB. There will never be a CFB that does not recognize the contribution of the NFB.

Together with love, hope, and determination.

Canadian Federation of the Blind's President Visits Victoria and its Bike Lanes

by Kerry Kijewski

Editor's note: For more in-depth information about CFB's bike lanes / floating bus stops human rights case against the City of Victoria, please see the past several issues of The Blind Canadian magazine and our website page, both at ***www.cfb.ca***

CFB President Doug Lawlor (3rd from left) with members of the CFB in Victoria

Since the start of this pandemic, his first trip in two years, Canadian Federation of the Blind's president Doug Lawlor says, "It felt okay. The only thing different was that you had to wear a mask in the terminal, on the plane and technically, on the bus as well. But otherwise, you know, things were moving."

Lawlor was on a mission to visit British Columbia's capital city of Victoria, on Vancouver Island, for the first time. Since taking over the role of CFB president in September from its previous president Mary Ellen Gabias, it turns out 2022 won't be Doug's first in-person CFB convention as its new president, since circumstances have meant another year of going virtual. He would have gone to BC for the May convention, but instead, he visited Victoria for five days in early March to check out the city and some of its infrastructure impacting blind people.

The best way to understand something like bike lanes and floating bus stops (with insufficient warnings for all) is to experience it up close for oneself. “I’ve heard descriptions of this, but I have not really seen a [hardscape] bike lane,” Lawlor says. “The closest I've seen here [in Kingston, Ontario] were these things that were painted on the side of the roads. They weren't these totally-built infrastructure that they've got in Victoria. These bike lanes are completely different. You walk down the street, you've got the sidewalk, then you've got a drop off the sidewalk, like you'd get down into the street, except this is the bike lane. And on the other side of the bike lane is the bus stop, which is on an island separating the street from the bike lane.

CFB President Doug Lawlor & 1st Vice President Oriano Belusic prepare to cross a Pandora Ave bike lane in Victoria to get to the floating island bus stop. Photo credit: Sam Margolis

In solidarity with everyone dealing with this, he says, “Yes, well, I could understand. When I saw this, I could understand where they [the Victoria blind community] were coming from a lot better. Because the way it is, you go up, you've got these stops and you've got signage and lighting for each stop. So they have yellow flashing lights. You press a button and you get a message in English, saying that yellow lights are flashing, cross with caution, vehicles may not stop. So you're told right from the beginning that you're in a dangerous situation. You're crossing something with potentially moving vehicles. So, I would stop and listen, but it's very hard to listen for a bicycle when you've got the street full of traffic right in front of you. You'll never hear a bicycle over all the traffic.”

Doug ventured out exploring solo many times over the days he spent there. His thoughts on Victoria: “Oh, it's a lovely city to navigate. I just had to get used to the wider streets. I'm not so used to crossing four and five lane streets. Like here in Kingston, my area of town is mainly two lane streets. And you've got one lane of cars going one way and the other lane going the other. So that was a bit of a different thing to get used to. Downtown Victoria is very walkable and there’s lots of audible pedestrian lights. I have never seen so many. They don't have any here in Kingston.”

Sometimes solo, and at other times meeting up with those who’ve been seeing this situation evolve (or not as the case may be), this particular type of city design is spreading elsewhere.

To help him find his way in the new surroundings, he made use of GPS and apps, such as Aira and Microsoft Soundscape. Next time, he figures he’ll be even more familiar with how things are laid out in Victoria.

On Microsoft Soundscape, Doug describes it like this: “When you're in, say, a vehicle or a bus, it's designed to be a transit app, as well as a pedestrian app. So when you're in a bus, a tram or train, you're hearing the stops going by. It's not, you know, how some GPS apps are very street focused. So you're passing this intersection and passing that intersection. You're passing this bus stop at this corner.”

His thoughts on the continued risk for blind travellers with these bike lanes / floating bus stops since returning home to Ontario: “The first thing I do before I move myself, because the lane is only probably nine or ten feet wide, I put my cane out first and then step across it in about three steps and I’m over. So it's not that wide.”

CFB President Doug Lawlor crosses a Pandora Ave bike lane in Victoria to get to a floating island bus stop. Photo credit: Sam Margolis

But it is a gamble, since cyclists are known to not stop and so far, several Victorians have had their white canes broken by moving bikes. Heavier electric scooters and such can also be on these bike lanes.

Unfortunately, guessing and stepping out into a bike lane is no solution and cities need to start listening to those of us who know how unsafe this feels, but until something changes, “I don't know what the next stage of the situation could be. The problem is this infrastructure is already built. That's out there. The challenge is now, how do you make that as safe as you can? I know what the ultimate solution would be. The ultimate solution would be to design these bike lanes in such a way so the buses are brought back in to the curb.”

Along with discovering a new city, Doug was treated to some social gatherings and dinners with local CFB members. He was generously hosted, in their home, by long-time CFB member and past treasurer Graeme McCreath and his wife. Graeme and others have been fighting the city against this dangerous situation posed by constructed bike lanes for several years now. It's a process and the process with this human rights case is ongoing until we learn the final outcome.

ArriveCan App Inaccessible to the Blind

Editor's note: What? The Federal Government is still having issues with inaccessible sites? Below is the text of a human rights complaint letter filed by Mary Ellen Gabias on April 15, 2022 against the Federal Government in regards with the ArriveCan app. Hard to understand, but our Federal Government has a history of creating inaccessible sites that blind people have not been able to use. You'd think they'd do better by now.

Back in 2010, Donna Jodhan, a Toronto blind woman, won a discrimination case against the Federal Government in the Federal Court of Appeal. The Federal Government websites were inaccessible to the blind (not programmed properly to work with screen readers) therefore preventing her and other blind people from applying for federal positions. Unbelievably, the Federal Government even had the gall then to appeal her earlier ruling that said it had discriminated against the blind – the government actually fought her against accessible websites, therefore against human rights, equality and inclusion. There have been other instances as well over the years. Now it's the ArriveCan app where there's a problem.

And it's not just Mary Ellen who's had issues with it. Others have too, even my husband. And it's not due to lack of computer or iPhone savvy.

The Federal Government, of all places, is where you'd expect the proper thing to be done, so that all its citizens can have equal access to its services, which we all pay taxes for. Government needs to be the role model here on inclusion for the rest of Canadian society. If not the government, then who?

To whom it may concern:

I am a blind person filing a complaint on the basis of disability. Government processes should be as accessible to me as to sighted Canadians.

When attempting to return to Canada I was unable to independently use the ArriveCan app because it was not fully accessible to me using a screen reader on my iPhone.

The app requires the user to solve a captcha. Captchas are notoriously inaccessible. The app provides two alternatives. There is a button that can be pressed that says “I am not a robot.” Unfortunately, this button remains unchecked no matter how many times a VoiceOver user attempts to press it. There is also an audio challenge, which is totally unintelligible.

In addition, users are required to register with a medical lab in case they are selected for Covid testing on arrival. This involves going to the lab website, filling out a second registration form requiring a second captcha.

On a previous trip, I was able to receive help from the immigration officer when I arrived at the Canadian border. I had no idea that the process had changed. On April 13, 2022, when I arrived at the American Airlines counter in Tucson, I was informed that I would not be able to board my flight until my ArriveCan declaration was complete. I explained that the app was not fully accessible and was told that the airline was not allowed to take that into consideration. I could not board without completing the process. Had it not been for the extraordinary kindness and patience of the American Airlines staff who spent nearly an hour assisting me, I would have missed my flight.

I have traveled independently for more than half a century and am used to navigating on my own through airports and dealing with ordinary travel-related technology. My experience with ArriveCan was one of the most frustrating, humiliating and embarrassing travel experiences of my life! I should not need to do so, but I would have gone to the trouble and expense of finding and hiring a reader if I had known there would be no accommodation. American Airlines staff should never have been put in the position of having to assist me. I was deeply embarrassed at being made helpless by inaccessible technology and the casual cruelty of the government of Canada that devised a discriminatory system.

The government of Canada needs to make changes in order to cease discriminating against blind travelers.

Captchas are a known access barrier. There is simply no excuse for the government of Canada to include a captcha in its app.

The “I am not a robot” button must be made to work using VoiceOver.

Travelers should not be forced to register with a lab whose site accessibility has not been confirmed. The alternative would be for the ArriveCan app to handle testing registration directly.

These technical issues are easy to manage. There is no excuse for the government to have allowed them to exist since they are so basic to accessibility.

Beyond the technical problem with the app, the government is making an unwarranted assumption with its requirements. Not everyone owns a smart phone. Not everyone carries a laptop. Blind individuals cannot walk into a library or internet café and use any available computer. Not every blind person has sighted assistance readily available.

Although more and more individuals are computer literate, there is still a significant percentage of Canadians, particularly older Canadians, (blind or sighted) who find registering for ArriveCan overwhelming. The requirement to do so poses a significant barrier.

Canada should offer any individual the option to register by phone or to defer completing ArriveCan registration until they reach the border and can be assisted by an officer. Airlines should be instructed to permit this for anyone who informs them that the process is inaccessible. This was possible last August when I last needed to use the app. It should still be possible.

When I arrived in Canada, I was handed a box with a Covid test and told to get it done within 24 hours. I was given no instructions. When I asked how the process worked, I was simply instructed to get somebody to help me. Although not discriminatory and therefore not a part of this complaint, such a brush off and failure to explain process is certainly poor customer service.

If you have any questions, I would be pleased to explain further. I look forward to the successful resolution of these problems. I would hope that the Canadian government will implement the suggested remedies without a protracted human rights dispute.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Gabias

We Still Need Blindness Skills Rehab

by Doris Belusic

In Canada, the blind have been left behind. We have a lack of dedicated, adequate, meaningful, full-time, intensive blindness skills rehabilitation training in Canada. The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) has advocated for this choice for decades and still it's a pressing issue.

Many blind Canadians, especially those who've become blind as adults – through degenerative eye diseases or through accidents – many who are working age – need the opportunity for this training so they can get the blindness skills they need to succeed and to reach their full potential. This means learning to function with confidence, capability and independence, by having focused, immersive training on travel with a long white cane, reading and writing Braille, using adaptive computer and other technologies, and learning home management and employment skills. Blindness skills training centres, like the three world-renowned US National Federation of the Blind (NFB) training centres (Minnesota, Louisiana, Colorado) is the model we want here in Canada, due to their high success rate.

This is what the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB) is working to achieve for blind Canadians. Elizabeth Lalonde, CEO, blind herself, runs this part-time training facility, with other blind instructors, in Victoria, BC, which she founded in 2011. But of course, she wants to see it become a full-time, intensive training centre.

When a person goes blind, it is essential that there is a place to go to get proper rehabilitation. It's more than about time that an intensive, full-time training facility becomes a reality in Canada, and that it be government funded, not dependent on charity dollars. Government needs to take responsibility, to consider this training essential, and provide necessary resources to rehabilitate its blind citizens – who also pay taxes. This is as important as spinal chord injury rehab and post-surgery rehab, which are offered through government.

The Pacific Training Centre for the Blind's vision is, "Blind people empowering blind people to be employed, independent and free." That says it all. And, the teachers and mentors are blind, which in turn inspires students to own the belief: if they can do it, so can I.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind's magazine, *The Blind Canadian*, has many articles about NFB intensive blindness skills training centres, Canada's need for this type of rehab, and also about PTCB. All magazine issues can be found at **www.cfb.ca** under Publications, in both web and pdf versions. Here are several of the best articles on this topic:

The Blind Canadian, Volume 13:

"On the Road to Rehabilitation: Canadians' Experiences at NFB Training Centres", a panel discussion moderated by Elizabeth Lalonde
"The Road Leads Back Home: The Pacific Training Centre for the Blind", a panel discussion moderated by Elizabeth Lalonde
"Free as a Butterfly: My Blindness Rehabilitation Journey", by Gina Huylenbroeck

The Blind Canadian, Volume 15:

"Passion in Action: A Brief History of the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB)" by Elizabeth Lalonde

The three US NFB training centres:

Colorado Center for the Blind, Denver, Colorado **www.cocenter.org**
Louisiana Center for the Blind, Ruston, Louisiana **www.lcb-ruston.com**
BLIND Inc, Minneapolis, Minnesota **www.blindinc.org**

In Canada:

The Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB), Victoria, BC **www.ptcb.ca**

A new initiative of PTCB and Camp Bowen is the Bowen Island Recreation, Training and Meeting Centre for the Blind and Deafblind. It would house a 10-month intensive blindness / deafblindness skills training program and a summer independence camp. Read more about this capital campaign project that is underway: **https://bowenislandcentre.ca**

> "The ability to read and write Braille competently and efficiently is the key to education, employment and success for blind people."
>
> ~ *Elizabeth Lalonde, CEO, PTCB and former CFB president*

Purdys and Mattel Get Into the Blindness Groove in 2021

By Doris Belusic

Editor's note: This article is about accessibility and inclusion – chocolate boxes that are being made accessible to the blind by using braille and QR codes; and children's toys that are being made inclusive by representing real human diversity.

Purdys Braille Box of Chocolates

Last Christmas we received a box of Purdys chocolates from my sister. After saying, "Wow, thank you!" we noticed the box had a braille label on the top, and inside, a braille legend of the filled chocolate squares, rounds and other assorted shapes.

If it were only my box, I'd feel over the chocolates and mostly know which chocolates were which. It isn't hard to generally tell the solid caramel or toffee squares from the softer, round creams. Sometimes a slight squeeze will give away a clue to the filling! But what about flavours? Raspberry cream, orange cream, dairy cream, or maple walnut cream? Vanilla or bourbon caramel? Or do these flavours even come in this particular box? The chocolates I know for sure by feel are their famous hedgehogs, coconut snowballs, peanut butter daisies – and my favourite, caramels topped with the distinctive, coarse Himalayan pink salt crystals.

You can probably tell that I have intimate knowledge of Purdys chocolates! After all, Purdys Chocolatier has been in the mall near my home for most of my life.

I can't read braille myself, but it was fun when my husband felt the braille legend inside the chocolate box to read which chocolates were which – and where. Using the legend, he located a toffee, a pecan caramel and a Himalayan pink salt caramel for me, then a coffee crunch for himself. It's probably the first time he's independently deciphered chocolate pieces arranged in a box of assorted chocolates – before actually biting into them and finding out that way. But having a legend, he says, isn't a big thing for him, although for many blind people it is.

There is also brailled orientation marks on the chocolate box that tell you which side is left and which is right, so you can be certain the box is facing the correct way to match the legend. Some people also appreciate that the Purdys name, besides being in braille, is embossed in tactile writing on the box lid.

For several months I wondered what the large, bold, high-contrast QR code sticker and braille notation was for on the legend cover. Seemed to me a strange cover design to select. Then I read Purdys website. The QR code, it says, brings you to an accessible screen-reader version of the legend. What a good idea, since some blind people don't read braille and most blind people these days use smart phones. So either way, you can learn the layout of the chocolate box. Now, that's called inclusion – and independence!

This use of the QR code makes me think about some restaurants these days that have QR codes on their tabletops, so people can scan and read their menus.

I remember some years ago when our past president, Mary Ellen Gabias, came to visit us in Victoria from Kelowna, BC. As a gift, she gave us a lovely large pump bottle of L'Occitane hand soap, which was labelled with braille. And once, someone gave me a bar of soap also from L'Occitane which had braille on the box. This is one of the few companies that puts braille labels on its products and has done so since 1997. This company is situated in France.

Accessibility in packaging for the blind has a long way to go here in North America. There aren't many products yet accessibly labelled with braille or scannable QR codes. Countries in Europe seem to be way ahead of us with this.

Mattel / NFB Helen Keller Barbie Doll

Last year, when Elizabeth Lalonde, director of the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind, and past president of CFB, read on Facebook that the toy company, Mattel, in partnership with the US National Federation of the Blind (NFB), had put out a blind Barbie doll, she was thrilled, "I am so happy. I'm going to order one right away. I've always dreamt of a blind Barbie. I know they have Barbie dolls in wheelchairs and such, but I always felt left out. This is awesome. We are finally being represented!"

The collectible Mattel / NFB Helen Keller Barbie came out in 2021 as the newest addition to Barbie's Inspiring Women Series.

Helen Keller lived between 1880 and 1968. She was the first deafblind woman in the US to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree, and whose courage and lifetime achievements as a renowned author, speaker, educator and advocate make her an extraordinary role model.

The Mattel Helen Keller Barbie stands 12-inches tall and has dark chestnut hair which is pulled into a bun at the back of her neck. Her clothes are inspired by her time as a college student in the early 1900s – a floor-length, pink/blue/black vertical-striped skirt with an old-fashioned, ruffled, high-neck, long-sleeved white blouse. Clutched in her hands, she holds a blue book with both the word 'Braille' in bold yellow print and molded braille dots on its front cover. The packaging she comes in is labelled in braille.

The Helen Keller Barbie does not come with a white cane. It seems Helen did not use one. And due to the timeframe that inspired the doll, she also does not come with a guide dog. The first guide dog in the US was not in use until 1918, long after Helen had been at college. Throughout her life, Helen had many pet dogs but never a guide dog.

Some disability advocates that I've read online say Mattel did not go far enough to accurately represent Helen – and therefore, many other blind people. It seems the doll is a slightly "sanitized" version of Helen. The doll has perfectly symmetrical eyes, whereas in reality, Helen did not, until well after college, at about the age of 30, when she received prosthetic eyes.

This hints back to the original 1997 'Becky' Barbie with the wheelchair that did not fit through the Barbie Dreamhouse door. Now, there's a newer Barbie in a wheelchair that can. But it goes to show that small, yet important details aren't always fully thought through or considered relevant during the design process.

Inclusion means equal access, rights, opportunities, treatment, resources, representation, acceptance and recognition. Accessible labeling and information on and in product packaging provides, among other things, independence for people who are blind. And having true representations of ourselves in products and marketing and in other ways, helps normalize, commonize blindness in society, therefore helping to change, reshape ignorance and stereotypical thinking. And priceless are these same positive values that can foster one's sense of self-esteem, self-worth, self-belief and the feeling of belonging within one's society.

Lisa McKnight, an executive at Mattel, said in a statement. "Representation comes in all forms and we recognize that the blind and low vision community is often overlooked, with their stories going untold. We hope that by introducing children to Helen Keller's story of perseverance and determination, they will be inspired to dream bigger than ever before."

Elizabeth said lately, “I did get the Barbie and she is standing on my buffet table. I love her and I always tell people about her. She is quite an education piece.”

To companies who are trying, like Purdys and Mattel, we say, “Bravo! It’s a great start! Thank you. Keep it up.” To others, we say, “Let’s see some action! It’s time to get into the inclusion groove!”

Report Card for the Teacher

by Mary Ellen (Reihing) Gabias

Editor's Note: Mary Ellen wrote this article many years ago, when she was still Miss Reihing, before she married Paul and became Mrs. Gabias. This article was originally printed in 1987 in Future Reflections, the US National Federation of the Blind’s Magazine for Parents and Teachers of Blind Children. This fun, but informative article is still relevant today. You can read issues of Future Reflections on NFB’s website, ***www.nfb.org***

After all these years one of my cherished childhood dreams is coming true. I remember all those times at the end of every quarter when I waited nervously for that manila card with the letters on it that would determine my future. It's my turn now. So just for you Mrs. Brown, here is a report card for the teacher.

Language Arts

Thank you for calling yourself a "Braille teacher," not a "vision teacher." Your terminology emphasized a skill I could learn, not a sense I would always lack. **A+**

Thank you for teaching me to use a slate and stylus in first grade, even though I grumbled at the time. You should probably have hidden that Perkins Brailler until I was older, but your performance was still above average. **A**

Thank you for telling me that you read Braille slowly because you tried to use your eyes to do it – not because Braille was slow or inferior. It was neat to think that I could become better at reading than my teacher.

You did such a good job of protecting me from the stereotypes about Braille that I was in college before anyone told me I would never be able to read faster than sixty words a minute. Since I already read at more than three times that rate, it seemed a little late to slow down. **A+**

I wish you had found a term other than "going to 'out class'" to describe the time we spent in class with sighted students. "Out class" sometimes felt a little like "outcast." **C**

I wish you had told me that the library for the blind had Braille books and not just talking books. I wish you would have helped me learn how to order the books I wanted. It was fun being surprised by what the library sent, but I was in college before I knew that I could make my own requests. **D**

Thank you for making me learn to type and for not being fooled when I tried to waste the time allotted to my typing lesson. At least, you weren't fooled most of the time. (I wish I could blame you for the fact that I still hate to type, but I can't, if I could, you'd get an F.) **A-**

Independent Travel

Thank you for forbidding me to shuffle my feet and hold back when someone was leading me. **B+**

Thank you for insisting that I walk around the school independently. **A**

Thank you for making me learn to run when I was scared. **A**

I wish someone had told you about cane travel for children and you had found a way to see that I had learned it when I was younger. Maybe then I would not have smacked into a wall and broken a front tooth while playing tag. Maybe I could have done things after school with my friends on the spur of the moment and taken the bus home alone afterwards. I did a lot of things with my friends in school, but I always had to plan them in advance. **C**

Attitudes About Blindness

Thank you for trying to protect us from the pettiness of the principal who didn't want us in her school. We still found out that she didn't care for us, but it didn't matter as much because we knew you did. **A**

I wish you had helped me meet blind adults. I was afraid that if I couldn't find a way to stop being blind, I'd have to go on being a kid forever. **D**

Thank you for never forgetting that blind kids always grow up needing to know more from life than pats on the head from indulgent adults. Thanks for loving us enough to insist that we respect ourselves and to earn the respect of others. **A+**

That's your report card Mrs. Brown. You passed. You should be promoted. So should your common sense ideas.

A Summer Walk with My White Cane

By Doris Belusic

I decided to take an early morning walk in my neighbourhood, my usual 30-minute jaunt (when I 'do' go) around St. Michael's University. I needed the exercise. Having felt down for some time during the pandemic, I knew exercise could help. Everything I had heard and read about mental health pointed to getting at least 30 minutes of exercise daily or almost daily.

After a blueberry granola breakfast and coffee, I switched my shorts to capris. I couldn't find the shoes I wanted to wear, so I went out the door in my Birkenstocks. My hair wasn't even brushed but it was up in a ponytail covered with a brimmed cap. And my sunglasses were on, a must for me most of the year.

I always make sure to bring along my cell phone, keys and an extra metal glide cane tip in my pocket or purse when I go for a walk. I don't want to repeat the experience I once had of needing to poke my way home with the stub end of my white cane, after the cane tip wore out and fell apart on the sidewalk – without my having a spare one to replace it.

So off I went, my 57-inch fiberglass, rigid white cane in my right hand ahead of me: left, right, left, right...The rhythm of cane swing to footstep is ingrained in me now after many years of using my white cane: cane tip right as foot steps left, and so on.

St. Michael's grounds are beautiful. When my husband and I built our home and moved to this area in 2011, I could still see the quaint buildings and the large grassy playing field. I remember it as picturesque, always a pleasurable walk. Back then, my eye condition, retinitis pigmentosa (RP), had taken my peripheral vision, but still left me with a little clear central (tunnel) vision. Today, my central vision isn't enough to know what's on those school grounds, let alone what's on the sidewalk in front of my feet.

As I walked I said to myself, let me list the things I can hear. Of course, there were passing cars on Richmond, a busy arterial road in Victoria. There was the roar of a motorcycle, the whizz of a bicycle, the chirp of small birds, the beeping of, I'm guessing, a squirrel, people talking in a yard, a dog barking, cars leaving driveways, the hum of a hydro pole, a roofer pounding nails – and of course, the constant tap or scratch of my metal cane tip on the cement sidewalk or at a gravel edge, and occasionally the metal-to-metal clink of my cane tip across a manhole cover.

Then I said, what do I feel? It was about 8:30 on a summer morning, so the sun was still low, creating dappled light everywhere due to the many tall trees. The repeating sun, shade, sun, shade made for an enjoyable temperature – a bit of warmth, a bit of coolness, over and over – plus there was a slight breeze. My left arm broke a spider's web and was scratched by blackberry bramble, two mounds of pampas grass and a holly hedge that lined someone's front yard. My left eye, bothering me, teared down my cheek and I wiped it under my sunglasses with my free hand. And of course, my white cane gives my hand the tactile sensation of everything it touches: rough and smooth cement, gravel, grass, curbs, a blanket of pine needles, inclines, declines such as driveways, as well as telephone poles and other objects that I come upon.

Then I said, what do I smell? There was a waft of marijuana that lingered in one area. But I did not smell the sweet fragrance of flowers, the scent of fabric softener or someone's cooking as I sometimes do. The day was probably too early for that. There was just a freshness.

What could I still see? With all of the light and dark dappled confusion over the ground, I kept my eyes closed some of the time while walking. I can still usually see high contrast things, like well-painted white crosswalks on black pavement, bushes and parked vehicles next to me, the dark silhouettes of Garry oak and other trees and shapes against the light sky. These slight visual cues can help me keep oriented. But seeing is all dependent on the quality of light and the direction of it. Flat light without dapple, shadow or glare is best for my bit of residual vision. If the sun faces me, it's like trying to see through a sheet of white wax paper. So sometimes I see nothing at all – and sometimes I can see more.

But I don't depend on vision. I need to thank my long white cane. That is what helps me walk around independently these days. Without it, I'd be off track in an instant and land somewhere smack on my nose or butt, with a sprained ankle to boot, or worse. The white cane is a real comfort and an integral part of me now – as my nephew once explained when he was younger, "it's like feelers to a bug."

Years ago, like many blind people, when first needing to use a white cane, I fought it. It drew attention that I didn't want, but ultimately had to get used to. There's a stigma in society that tends to say: white cane, blind person, dependent and incapable. When in reality the opposite is true: white cane, blind person, independent and capable.

> "Braille has been a most precious aid to me in many ways. It made my going to college possible – it was the only method by which I could take notes of lectures. All my examination papers were copied for me in this system. I use Braille as a spider uses its web – to catch thoughts that flit across my mind for speeches, messages and manuscripts."
>
> ~ *Helen Keller*

CFB

Canadian Federation of the Blind
2022 ‘Positive Outlook’ Convention

Held Friday, May 6 to Sunday, May 8, 2022

Virtual (in-person portion was cancelled for this year)

To follow our convention information page **www.cfb.ca/cfbc2022**

NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF THE BLIND
Live the life you want.

2022 National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Convention

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Where: New Orleans, Louisiana / and Virtual

For more information: **www.nfb.org/get-involved/national-convention**

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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

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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

Kerry's Outlook

Senses and Sensitivity: Description For and Of the Blind

by Kerry Kijewski

Editor's note: This is Kerry's editorial column. Her column appears periodically in issues 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.*

It's a changing world, whether we like it or not. During these last two years of the pandemic, I've started doing sensitivity / authenticity reader / consultant work and Zoom has entered most of our lives in one way or another.

At a time when terms like "pc" and "woke" are thrown around like it's some bad thing to be sensitive to other people's needs, to be considerate and compassionate towards them, I've found meaningful work in reviewing literature – whether it's a children's picture book, an historical romance novel or young adult fiction – for authors who aren't blind, but choosing to write about characters in their books who are. This doesn't mean I speak for all blind people, but in a world where blindness has been stigmatized and misconceived for so long, it's refreshing to me to hear of writers willing to learn and receive feedback from someone who lives it in reality, to hopefully make their writing as authentic as possible.

Of course, anything can be taken to extreme and so it's important to find a balance, but it leads me to think about these things that have been happening on Zoom screens for a while now. For instance, here in Canada (Turtle Island), society is starting to make acknowledgments in many meetings, including those over Zoom, to recognize original Indigenous lands that we, as settlers, now occupy. For those of us unable to see the people in the little boxes on Zoom screens, it's now commonplace to go around and have callers introduce themselves, describe what they look like and maybe what they're wearing.

I grew up with low vision and now am nearly totally blind. While I admit I haven't fully adjusted as I've gone along, I think, for the most part, I've learned how to adapt and it’s a work-in-progress as I face the possibility of losing even more of the tiny bit of vision I have left. Still, my brain tries to picture what’s on the computer screen when I’m on a website or in a menu on my desktop, or on Zoom for that matter. My brain still attempts to envision what’s where. Perhaps I’d need some training or therapy in how to stop from doing this so much, but in the meantime, I like that people are willing to describe what they look like on Zoom and such.

Many blind people have been weighing in on this, so I thought I would state my outlook on this question: Are self-image descriptions necessary on a Zoom or other online group meeting?

As a writer myself, I often wonder how I can write anything in the way of visual descriptions when, with every passing year, I forget things about the images I once saw with some clarity. This means I feel inauthentic when I attempt to do so. Instead, I stick to describing people, places and things in other ways, using my other senses, and I don’t think this is a bad thing at all. This is a great way to show readers that there are other ways of experiencing and describing the world.

Still, while sighted writers would describe the worlds they’re writing about in, say, sixty percent visual terms and forty percent all the other senses, I do it the other way around. As a writer, I want to provide readers with as much information in as many forms as possible, so I’m usually curious about what someone looks like or what an outfit looks like.

There are all kinds of ways of understanding the world around us and when a bunch of voices merge on a computer screen for whatever reason, I, myself, am curious about details that others get in an instant of seeing, which may take me a bit longer to pick up on. This doesn’t mean I don’t pick up on things that others do not. Often others are so focused on someone’s Zoom background, or whose box and face appears bigger and centered on the screen, or some other distraction.

If this message of mine gets sighted people to think about inclusion a little, I take that as a win and any little detail someone thinks worthy of mentioning about themselves is interesting to me.

All of this is not mandatory, of course, but it’s a nice added bonus for someone like me. The argument in the blindness community seems to be that we don’t need to know these visual descriptions, that it takes up too much meeting time, that it focuses on the wrong things.

Sure, if the Zoom call has dozens and dozens of people in attendance, an hour-long meeting would not be nearly enough time to get through everybody, but where time and size of meeting permit, it's a nice attempt at accommodation and can create an added layer of intimacy and trust in a smaller-sized group. We're all likely to have varied opinions on this, on what is necessary to know in a mostly visual world for those who don't see visually. Would we ever claim that land acknowledgments take up too much of our meeting time? I would hope not. So I see nothing wrong with going the extra mile to level the playing field for those of us who might want these visual details.

I haven't stopped seeing, I just see in a different way. I may struggle with this sometimes, but I do see, in my mind. I think this keeps my imagination strong and vibrant. It challenges me to broaden my horizons and it opens my eyes, so to speak.

I'm always curious how any blind person feels about this topic, whether they've always been blind or have gone blind at some point throughout life. I accept what they say and how they feel, but I'm not about to put a firm foot down on the matter and say that one way is the only way to do it. That's just how I am. Sometimes, there's no need to be one way or another.

So whether everyone would agree on the need for a sensitivity / authenticity reader for a book or the need for image descriptions on a Zoom call, to get sighted people to think about how they see the world compared to how others may or may not see it, this is yet another way to broaden all our horizons.

> "We adapt and we survive; those who can be so unbelieving of what humans can do surely have no ability to adapt themselves and have a very shallow opinion of how diversity brings out our abilities."
>
> ~ *Penny Leclair, CFB listserv*

British Cabinet Minister Here for Convention (Historical Article)

Promoting independence and empowerment is the goal of the Canadian Federation of the Blind, says Victoria-based president

by Mark Browne, Weekend Edition, September 16, 2005

Editor's note: Take a trip down memory lane with these next two historical articles about CFB's first convention held in Victoria back in 2005, with honorable guest, David Blunkett, who was at the time a blind cabinet minister in Britain's Tony Blair government. Blunkett is now retired and in the House of Lords. Thanks to Elizabeth Lalonde, these articles have resurfaced lately from the depths of her computer!

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is holding its first convention starting today in Victoria.

The convention is taking place at various locations around the Capital Region today and Saturday.

"We're an independent movement of the organized blind," said Victoria's Elizabeth Lalonde, the federation's president.

Established in 1999, the federation is modeled after the National Federation of the Blind in the U.S.

Its mandate calls for promotion of independence, empowerment and equality among its membership, Lalonde said.

"We feel blindness is about learning skills. If you have the skills and the opportunities, basically you can do whatever you want. The convention is one of our steps in moving towards that and getting blind people together," she said.

The convention, she said, is an effective way of motivating members and giving them confidence to empowering themselves, she added.

The convention kicks off today (Sept. 16) with a cocktail party at Swans Hotel. Among the highlights will be a speech by David Blunkett, Great Britain's Minister of Work and Pensions.

The convention continues Saturday at the Travellers Inn City Centre where discussions will centre around blind children and improving training for blind people.

In the afternoon, a white cane walk is slated to take place for the purpose of promoting independence, empowerment and group solidarity.

The event will wrap up with a banquet and address given by Paul Gabias, a board member with the federation and professor at the University of B.C. Okanagan.

Bonds of the Blind: Local advocate hosts international figure (Historical Article)

by Sheila Potter,
Victoria News, Black Press, September 30, 2005

Editor’s note: Take a trip down memory lane with this second of two historical articles related to CFB’s first convention held in Victoria back in 2005, with honorable guest, David Blunkett, who was at that time a blind cabinet minister in Britain’s Tony Blair government. Blunkett is now retired and in the House of Lords. Thanks to Elizabeth Lalonde, these articles have resurfaced lately from the depths of her computer!

Graeme McCreath is no stranger to advocacy, but he recently imported some overseas might to press for better treatment of blind people. Some well-known might at that. Colourful British MP David Blunkett is currently the British Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. But he is more famous for being part of British Prime Minister Tony Blair's inner circle, reaching the prestigious post of Home Secretary, responsible for Britain's anti-terrorism unit MI5, the police and the prison system, before a sex scandal brought him down. Oh yes, and Blunkett has been blind since birth.

As the minister responsible for British employment, welfare and pensions, Blunkett recently toured across North America. He stopped in Washington to discuss employment programs, visited Vancouver Mayor Larry Campbell and spoke to the Canadian Federation of the Blind at the B.C. Government Employment Union Building in Victoria on Sept. 16.

Paul Gabias, a blind UBC professor, asked Blunkett why he didn't promote his blindness and advocate for blind people; Blunkett responded that he has been simply too busy, especially as Home Secretary.

Although Blunkett could not see them, there were about 45 people assembled from across B.C., as well as North Island MLA Claire Trevena, Victoria-Hillside MLA Rob Fleming and acting Victoria mayor Denise Savoie. The local politicians arrived late and left early. At one point Blunkett addressed Savoie, thinking she was beside him, only to learn she had left the room to attend multiple Terry Fox runs.

Blunkett told the audience it was better to spend money helping people with disabilities enter the work force than to simply give them a living allowance, which amounts to "writing people off."

"Where people can gain independence we have an obligation - and so do they - to take up in this modern technological era the opportunity to become a full player in life," he said.

Blunkett uses readers, Braille printers and a tape recorder to tackle a mountain of ministerial duties. It's exactly the same gear other blind people use - or need.

England currently gives the equivalent of $25,000 for blind people to buy adaptive equipment to use in the workplace, with a review to renew the equipment in five years. The recipients own their equipment and can use it at school and take it from one job to another.

Canadian programs are more likely to help schools and employers to buy equipment. But as Blunkett pointed out, the equipment is "pretty useless" to the employer if his blind employee moves on.

Graeme McCreath, Advocate for the blind: "Give us the tools and we will do the work."

Audience members - some with guide dogs tucked, snoring, under their seats, liked what they heard, and many listened when Blunkett talked of "paternalistic attitudes." It may signal a growing political movement among the visually impaired.

McCreath and many others in the audience are members of the relatively new and small Canadian Federation of the Blind. McCreath described the organization as "grassroots blind people" who advocate for equality. They exist, in part, to help blind people gain independence, especially in the workplace. Canadians tend to opt for disability rather than work to accommodate blindness, McCreath said. Outside of government jobs, there is little money for Braille printers or specialized computers to help blind people be productive, he said.

He told the audience of his new acquaintance, a nurse who recently became visually impaired. Rather than adapt to her job, she is on a disability pension. "Give us the tools and we will do the work" said McCreath. "We don't need handouts."

An intense question period followed Blunkett's talk, albeit hampered by the fact that Blunkett could not see raised hands to ask questions, and the audience could not see who the moderator was pointing to. People wanted to know about possible government policies, but also how to gain independence as a blind community and as individuals, with Blunkett as an interesting example.

"It's very exciting to celebrate the achievement of a blind person, not because he is blind, not in spite of being blind, but simply, blindness is one of his characteristics," said Mary Ellen Gabias, a longtime blind advocate and member of the Canadian Federation of the Blind.

Colourful character

David Blunkett gained relief from the ever-ravenous British press during his Capital Region swing. With security guards in tow, the British MP walked anonymously through suburban Saanich neighbourhoods in relative anonymity - an anonymity that extended to his address to members of the Canadian Federation of the Blind.

"We invited 130 MLA's and only two showed up," Graeme McCreath, Blunkett's childhood friend, told the audience that travelled from across B.C. to hear the address.

In Blunkett's absence, British press wrote about a possible romance with a younger woman and accusations made in a book by Blunkett's enemy, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Lord Stevens. Last year, press learned of his affair with Kimberly Quinn, the married publisher of British news magazine *The Spectator*. Blunkett resigned over accusations that he fast-tracked a visa application for Quinn's nanny.

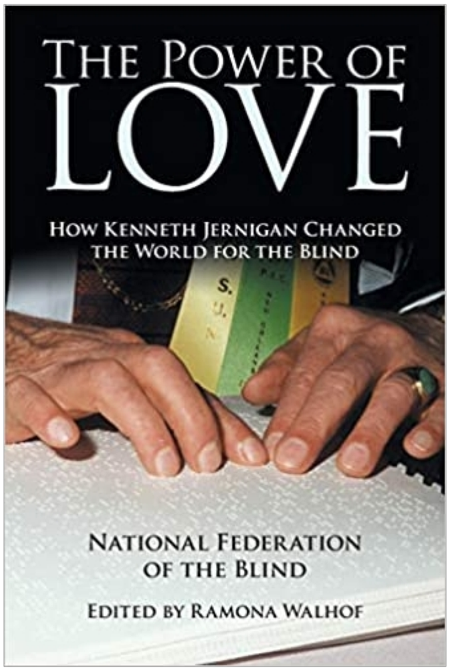
McCreath and Blunkett went to the same dormitory school for the blind in Shrewsbury, England, a school Blunkett said was so bad it "was social

Darwinism. If you could survive it you could survive anything." McCreath and Blunkett and a few others nonetheless pursued higher education. "We had to fight every step of the way," McCreath said.

McCreath went on to open a physiotherapy practice in Broadmead - and pressure the CNIB to be more accountable with its donated funds.

Blunkett studied at university and started political life as a city alderman at 21, emerging as a "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" kind of politician. Blunkett recalls talking to a woman on disability after a heart bypass: she was upset at government policies forcing her back to work. His response: "What on earth do you think we gave you the heart bypass for?"

The Power of Love: How Kenneth Jernigan Changed the World for the Blind (a Book-2016)



This book, edited by Ramona Walhof and put out by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) is a collection of individual voices whose lives were touched by Kenneth Jernigan – an NFB leader for more than 40 years – and these writings reveal the deep truth that serves as the foundation for his life and work within the NFB. Ramona was his friend and colleague. Each author’s reflection has a tie to Dr. Jernigan’s life and work. The book concludes with a chapter, "Blindness: The Federation at Fifty," a retrospective written by Dr. Jernigan in the last decade of his life. Through a polyphonic chorus of voices, this book tells how the power of love, coursing through the life of Kenneth Jernigan, changed the world for the blind and, in so doing, changed the world for everyone. Available on Amazon and elsewhere.
Kenneth Jernigan (b.1926 - d.1998)
(NFB President 1968-1986).

You Asked CFB:

Buying a Car and Insurance as a Blind Person

Q: I'm just going to look at a car for my teenager. I am going to buy him a car. He doesn't have his full license yet. He will have his N in the fall. I want to own the car, but of course, being blind, I don't have a driver's license. How do I do this? I live in British Columbia.

Thank you!!

A: Hopefully all provinces are the same in this regard, but here we are specifically talking about BC.

There's no problem with a blind person buying or owning a vehicle. Some of us have had many by now. When you insure the car, you will need to designate a licensed driver. You will even likely qualify for a discount on the insurance.

As owner, if you are a frequent passenger in the vehicle, keep the gas receipts for a fuel tax rebate.

Congratulations on soon becoming a car owner and your son becoming a driver.

You Asked CFB:

Determining Bank Notes as a Blind Person

Q: As a blind person, how do I determine the denomination of Canadian bank notes?

A: Canadian bank notes are born accessible with features on them so they can be identified by blind people.

Tactile Feature

The tactile feature consists of small symbols of six raised dots (two columns of three). The number and position of these six-dot symbols vary according to the denomination:

- $5 has one six-dot symbol
- $10 has two six-dot symbols
- $20 has three six-dot symbols
- $50 has four six-dot symbols
- $100 has two six-dot symbols separated by a smooth surface that is much wider than that on the $10 note.

This system uses the six-dot Braille cell pattern, but actual Braille is not being used. This bank note labelling system was developed in consultation with Canadians who are blind or partially sighted after research indicated that not all users read Braille.

Device-assisted bank note identification

For those who use a smartphone or tablet, there are several applications that can be used to denominate bank notes. The Bank of Canada has evaluated Seeing AI, which quickly and reliably denominates Canadian notes.

RECIPES!

Baking Bacon, Sausages and Burgers

These recipes come from Doris Belusic, The Blind Canadian editor, in Victoria, BC.

As a blind person, I've discovered that it is easier to bake things, like bacon, sausages and burgers, than to fry them. Just easier than trying to keep track of bacon strips or sausages on a frypan and trying to flip them once you think they're browned enough on the first side. I know some blind people do this well, but for me, baking them is the way to go. Plus, cleanup is so much simpler – no grease spatters over the stovetop and elsewhere. And, if you use parchment paper to line the baking pan, you will have an almost clean pan after baking. Makes sense to me! Cook smart – not harder, I say. You might find this is the way for you, too.

About baking times – you will be able to gauge baking times well after having baked these things once or twice. Bon appetit!

Baking Bacon

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
Line a baking pan with parchment paper.
Place strips of bacon onto the pan.
Bake for about 20 minutes, depending on size or thickness of the slices, how many are on the pan, and if you want chewy or crispy bacon.

Baking Bratwurst or Other Sausages

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
Line a baking pan with parchment paper.
Place sausages onto the pan.
Bake for about 35 – 40 minutes, depending on sausage size, how many are on the pan, and how well done you want them to be.

Baking Homemade Hamburger Patties

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
Line a baking pan with parchment paper.
Ingredients:
About 400 - 454 gr. pkg. ground beef
1/2 - 1 pkg. (Knorr) onion soup mix or chopped onion
1 minced garlic, optional
Some salt, pepper, bit of cayenne.
Mix above ingredients together by hand and form into 3 or 4 hamburger patties, depending on amount of meat used.
Sprinkle both patty sides with a bit of salt and pepper.
Place on baking pan.
Bake for about 20 - 23 minutes, depending on patty size.
These are very tasty, and good cold the next day, too.

> “It's your right to listen to your gut, it ain't nobody's right to say no after you earned the right to be what you wanna be and do what you wanna do.”
>
> ~ *Rocky Balboa (film, Rocky 6)*

“Reading through client reports reminds me so much of what my travel instructor at Louisiana Center for the Blind told me. He said that being a successful traveler, and blind person generally, takes 90% attitude and 10% skill. Though it is crucial to have good skills, they will do absolutely nothing for you if you don't have the confidence to use them or the belief that they are truly comparable to skills used by sighted people. Put another way, if a blind person believes they are truly handicapped by their condition, then they will be.

“I'm reminded how extremely fortunate I was and am to have been trained by blind and sighted role models who truly believe that blindness is respectable and the skills of blindness equal to those used by the sighted. Without these role models, I would have never developed the true confidence needed to put my blindness skills to good use and I would have truly been handicapped.”

~ Jennifer M., NFB member, Facebook post