

THE MICHIGAN FOCUS – Spring 2009

THE VOICE OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF MICHIGAN

Geer Wilcox and Mike Powell, Editors

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Address changes, and subscription requests should be sent to The National Federation of the Blind of Michigan, 20734 Fairview Dr., Dearborn Hts., MI 48127 or by e-mail to NFBofMI@yahoo.com.

Contributions to The National Federation of the Blind of Michigan should be sent to- The National Federation of the Blind of Michigan 1212 North Foster, Lansing, MI 48912, or electronically at our website “nfbmi.org” using the Paypal option.

Please send letters to the editor, comments and articles for the Focus to Geer Wilcox, Editor, The Michigan Focus, preferably by e-mail at ggwilcox@comcast.net; or by snail mail at 1985 Wembley Way, East Lansing, MI 48823. To be considered for publication material must be formatted in the following ways.

1. Material is preferred to be emailed to the above e-mail address.
2. Material may be sent using a standard medium for computer either as a Microsoft Word document (*.doc) or as a text document (*.txt).

3. Print materials may be mailed but they must be A. Flat, not folded in any way and B. Typed, not hand-written.

4. In Braille.

5. On cassette.

Your cooperation in this matter will assure consideration for publication of your submission in future issues of the Michigan Focus.

Focus subscriptions cost the Federation about ten dollars a year. Members are invited and nonmembers are requested to cover the subscription costs. Donations should be made payable to the National Federation of the Blind of Michigan and sent to the National Federation of the Blind of Michigan, 1212 North Foster, Lansing, MI 48912.

The Michigan Focus is available at our website nfbmi@org, on NewsLine or by e-mail. If you wish to receive the Focus by e-mail please forward your e-mail address to our secretary at: 20734 Fairview Dr., Dearborn Hts., MI 48127, or by e-mail at: nfbfmi@yahoo.com.

The National Federation of the Blind is not an organization speaking for the blind. It is the blind speaking for themselves.

Published on the World Wide Web at "nfbmi.org" by the National Federation of the Blind of Michigan, Fred Wurtzel President.

If you or a friend wish to remember the National Federation of the Blind of Michigan in your will, you can do so by employing the following language. "I give devise and bequeath unto the national Federation of the Blind of Michigan, 1212 North Foster, Lansing, MI 48912 the sum of" blank dollars" or "blank percent of my net estate" or "the following stocks and bonds" to be used for its worthy purposes on behalf of blind persons."

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

The NFB of Michigan Summer board meeting will be held on Saturday August 8 at the Grand Rapids Riverfront Radisson Hotel, 270 Ann St. N.W., Grand Rapids, MI 49504, ‘

Telephone: 616-363-9001

Room rates are \$79 across the board for singles, doubles and quads.

The meeting is scheduled to begin at nine AM and end at three PM.

The Michigan Affiliate is now selling Leelanau roasted coffee, flavors- Super Duper Yooper, Mackinac Bridge Blend, Michigan Cherry and Detroit Decaff.

Order by calling Larry Posont: 313-727-3546

The Michigan Association of Blind Students is raffling off a Sinderio GPS system to be drawn for on July 8 at the national

Convention. For more information contact Matt McCubbin

(matt@campt.org) or any MABS member.

NATIONAL CONVENTION RELATED

There are opportunities to serve-

The Michigan Information Table needs hosts. Those interested should contact Sharon Kingsbury at phone: 313-805-1351

The Michigan Hospitality Room needs hosts. Those interested should contact Regina Alvarado at phone: 313-215-1202, or Mary Wurtzel at phone: 517-485-0326 or once at the convention at the Hospitality Suite phone and room number 6805.

On July 1 there will be a social get-together in the Michigan Hospitality Suite from 6:00pm to 8:00pm. There will be sandwiches for which donations will be appreciated.

The Michigan Delegation to the convention will caucus on July 1 at 8:00pm in the Michigan Hospitality Suite, room 6805 immediately following the social time.

Detroit Tigers game and picnic-July7

Here is a great opportunity to add big fun to your convention time in Detroit. We have for sale, tickets to the Tuesday night 7:05 game against the Kansas City Royals. At 6:30 we proceed to the Mountain Dew Porch for a picnic with hamburgers, hot dogs, baked beans, pasta salad, cole slaw, chips and drinks. Then by 8 we proceed to our seats on the lower level third base line. Public transportation is available on the people mover or an energetic person could walk to Comerica Park.

Tickets can be purchased by sending sixty dollars per ticket to Donna Posont 15429 Prospect St. Dearborn, Mi. 48126.

Checks should be made payable to Donna Posont. Call or email with any questions. 313-220-8140 or Donnabutterfly50@gmail.com

The announcement which appears below announces that testing for the National Certification in Literary Braille has been scheduled for Austin, Texas, Detroit, Michigan, Orangeburg, New York, and Albuquerque, New Mexico.

National Blindness Professional Certification Board would like to announce that the NATIONAL CERTIFICATION IN LITERARY BRAILLE (NCLB) will be held on the following dates and locations:

Austin, Texas
Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center
Friday, June 12, 2009
8:00am-5:00pm

Detroit, Michigan
Detroit Marriott Renaissance Center
Saturday & Sunday, July 4-5, 2009
1:00pm-5:00pm

Orangeburg, New York
Dominican College
Sunday, July 12, 2009
8:00am-5:00pm

Albuquerque, New Mexico
Albuquerque Grand Airport Hotel
Saturday, Sept. 26, 2009
8:00am-5:00pm

A combined application/testing fee of \$250 applies. For updates, application deadlines, and to apply online go to:
www.nbpcb.org/pages/announcements

For additional information, please visit the NBPCB website at:
<<http://www.nbpcb.org/>>www.nbpcb.org, or contact Louise Walch, NBPCB Coordinator, at (318) 257-4554 or
<[http://mail.nbpcb.org/src/compose.php?send_to=braille%40nbpcb.org](mailto:braille@nbpcb.org)>braille@nbpcb.org.

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THIS I BELIEVE by Fred Wurtzel

Fred submitted this to NPR and we reprint it here.

I believe in the power of one person to make a difference for all humanity. I believe that circumstances are not a predictor of the power of the individual to make a difference.

On January 4, 1809, a little boy was born in Coop Frey, France. Four years later, he was playing in his father's workplace and severely injured himself. There was no OSHA. There were no antibiotics or the knowledge of germs. There were no telephones or 911 paramedics to call. Some people believe that a tragedy happened that day. I believe a miracle happened that day: the world changed forever.

A little boy injured his eye with his father's leather working tool. He eventually lost all of his eyesight. No one would have thought it unusual if the little boy had grown up to be a beggar or the ward of his parents and siblings. No one would have been surprised if he had died poor, broken and desolate.

Such was not the case. Something within young Louis Braille drove him. He thirsted for knowledge. He wanted to read. He wanted to teach. He wanted to express his creativity through music and language.

It is well-known that Louis Braille invented a portable and easily reproducible reading and writing system for blind people based on six dots read by touch. The Braille system is much more than that. The ability to read, write and record thoughts and ideas is arguably the most powerful invention of humanity. Inventing a universal system to extend this power to blind people has made all the difference.

Some people believe that the first blind astronaut has been born. We have seen blind artists, physicians, lawyers, politicians, judges, teachers, factory workers, secretaries, inventors, scientists and the list grows every day. Little Louis Braille's accident led to the liberation of millions of people. One little boy whose curiosity, drive and imagination was not blotted out with his eyesight -- One little boy of humble beginnings changed the world, just as have thousands and millions of others whose passion would not allow them to stop before their dreams were realized. I believe that, regardless of

circumstances, every one of us possesses the God-given power to change the world.

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NEWSLINE ONLINE

This is a press release that Georgia Kitchen brought to our attention. It highlights fresh advancements in NewsLine. The article that follows is reprinted from a Braille Monitor from early NewsLine days which is still relevant today, especially with NewsLine's enhancements.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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<<mailto:cdanielsen@nfb.org>>cdanielsen@nfb.org

National Federation of the Blind Enhances and Expands
Newspaper Service for the Blind

NFB-NEWSLINE®

Online Offers Blind Individuals More Options for Accessing the News

Baltimore, Maryland (March 31, 2009):

NFB-NEWSLINE®, the largest electronic newspaper service in the world for blind and print-disabled Americans, is pleased to announce the launch of NFB-NEWSLINE® Online

(<http://www.nfbnewslineonline.org/>www.nfbnewslineonline.org).

Through NFB-NEWSLINE® Online's groundbreaking features, subscribers can enjoy both an enhanced experience in reading the news and dramatically increased flexibility in how they choose to access their favorite publication's content.

Dr. Marc Maurer, President of the National Federation of the Blind, said: "The NFB-NEWSLINE® service was created so that blind

people could benefit from independent access to information on world news and hometown events in the same way that our sighted colleagues can. The new features offered by NFB-NEWSLINE® Online are an extension of this service's ability to allow independent and flexible access to news content by the blind. I am very proud of the increased choice and convenience that initiatives like Web News on Demand and NFB-NEWSLINE® In Your Pocket provide to NFB-NEWSLINE® subscribers."

NFB-NEWSLINE®, which began operation in 1995, offers over 275 newspapers and magazines as well as TV listings to over 65,000 subscribers through a standard touch-tone telephone. With the exciting launch of NFB-NEWSLINE® Online, subscribers also now have unequaled access and unrivaled flexibility in how they read their favorite publications. Two new initiatives have been designed to enhance the subscriber's experience: Web News on Demand and NFB-NEWSLINE® In Your Pocket.

Through the easy-to-use Web News on Demand feature, subscribers can, for the first time ever, visit a secure Web site that offers a customizable reading experience and the ability to send entire publications, particular sections, or single articles to their e-mail inbox. NFB- NEWSLINE® In Your Pocket is a dynamic software application that a subscriber installs on his or her computer. Through an Internet connection, this software automatically downloads the publications of the subscriber's choice to his or her portable digital talking book player (such as the Victor Reader Stream or Icon/Braille+).

Jerry Moreno, a retired social worker from North Carolina, said: "I love being able to get my favorite papers onto my digital talking book player in such an easy and quick way! NFB-NEWSLINE® In Your Pocket does it all for me, so that I can go about my morning routine and by the time I'm done my papers are loaded and ready for me to read along with my cup of coffee."

David DeNotaris, director of Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services with the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, said: "As a husband, father, avid sports fan, and busy professional, I particularly appreciate the fact that Web News on Demand allows me

to access relevant local, national, and international news quickly, simply, and independently."

To experience the groundbreaking features of NFB-NEWSLINE® Online, please visit

<<http://www.nfbnewslineonline.org/>>www.nfbnewslineonline.org.

For further information please write to

<<mailto:swhite@nfb.org>>swhite@nfb.org or call (866) 504-7300.

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EQUAL ACCESS TO A BLACK AND WHITE WORLD by Ryan Osentowski

From the Editor: Ryan Osentowski is an energetic young leader in the NFB of Nebraska. Here he explains why he works hard to strengthen NFB-NEWSLINE® in his state. This is what he says:

"Dad, what does 'arson' mean?" I asked as I sat next to him on the couch, interrupting him midway through an article he was reading aloud to me from the Kearney Daily Hub.

"It's when people set fires on purpose," he answered.

"Like in a fireplace?" I asked.

"No, like in a building," he patiently answered. "Sometimes people burn buildings because--" but I had already lost interest in what my dad was saying. Mention of the fireplace had caused me to reach up and feel the newspaper he was holding in front of his face. Until then I had assumed that newspaper was just something you stuffed into a fireplace to help the fire burn brighter. But here was my father reading to me from one.

"Dad, why are you reading that?" I asked.

"I like to know what's going on around town," he answered, putting down the paper. Evidently he had decided that he would never make it to the sports page with a curious four-year-old pestering him with questions. I immediately grabbed another page, putting it to my nose

and smelling the ink. I ran my hands over the smooth surface of the paper, listening to the rustle as it gave way between my fingers. Then, after a few seconds of this exploration, I crushed it into a ball, fired the papery projectile across the room, and laughed. My dad sighed and commented that he hadn't really wanted to read the sports page anyway.

Ten years later I began to realize how much more important a newspaper was than mere fire fuel. In my eighth-grade social studies class, our teacher, Mr. Henderson, began a weekly ritual of Friday morning current events trivia contests. He told our class that we were to read the Thursday evening paper, and he was going to test us on Friday morning to see how much we had absorbed. The person who answered the most questions correctly would win a free soft drink and candy bar from the teachers' lounge. Soft drinks and candy bars might as well have been contraband at the time, since no vending machines were available to students at our school.

This prize was enough to jar the students out of the world of comic books and television for one night in order to acquaint themselves with the real world reflected in the Kearney Daily Hub. I realized that I would have to enlist my parents' aid to help me win, so I began urging them to read the paper to me on Thursday nights. Unfortunately, raising three boys and working full time didn't always afford them the necessary time to read the complete Kearney paper aloud. I soon discovered that I could bribe my friends to read the paper to me. This worked for about two weeks until my mother found out what I was doing and informed me in no uncertain terms that lunch money was to be used for lunch and nothing else. Somehow I couldn't convince my mother that a soft drink and candy bar were as nourishing for lunch as the daily mystery meat and potatoes that faced us in the cafeteria.

I cursed motherly intuition and began searching for another option. Then I learned about our state radio reading service, but was disappointed to learn that they did not read the Kearney paper regularly. When they did read the Hub, they excerpted it. Eventually I resigned myself to the fact that I would never win a free soft drink and candy bar.

Six years after that Dr. Kenneth Jernigan and the National Federation of the Blind brought one of my fondest dreams to reality with the creation of NEWSLINE for the Blind. During high school and early college I began paying more attention to current events. I watched the evening news and listened to AM talk radio and political commentary. Many times I heard a journalist on TV or radio quote from an article in USA Today, the Wall Street Journal or the Los Angeles Times. I found myself frustrated that they would never read the entire article. My curiosity was aroused, but I could never find out more about the subject being discussed. Mixed with my frustration, however, was a growing fascination that the media pundits on radio and television always quoted from the newspaper. This told me that, despite the thriving world of electronic media, the printed word in newspapers still had its place.

I always felt frustrated, convinced that I was shut out from a part of the world of current events into which my sighted classmates could freely dip. I had a computer but hadn't yet logged onto the Internet. When I heard that the NFB had invented a service by which blind people could read the entire text of a newspaper by telephone, I became excited. My excitement was short-lived when I learned that it wasn't available in Nebraska, where I was attending college. I experienced that same old feeling of disappointment--no soft drink and candy bar for me. But this time it was worse. Instead of sugary treats, I was being denied equal access to a big part of the ever-changing face of our world. Newspaper articles were often discussed in political science, journalism, and philosophy classes that I took. I had better luck convincing classmates to read an occasional article to me if it grabbed my interest, but I still could not browse an entire newspaper at will.

Three years later I had the opportunity to see NEWSLINE in action. I was attending the Federation's annual Washington Seminar, and Dr. Maurer demonstrated NEWSLINE by speaker phone during the great gathering in. I was impressed and excited when Dr. Maurer informed us that we could all use NEWSLINE while we visited Washington, thanks to a test number set up by the national office in Baltimore. I stayed up much too late those few nights, browsing the Washington Post and the Baltimore Sun, soaking up the latest headlines. I couldn't get enough, much to the annoyance of my roommates, who

were more interested in getting sleep than the news. We all left Washington full of determination. I was determined to help fight to get NEWSLINE in Nebraska, while my two roommates were determined to find a different roommate the following year.

In June of 1999 my hopes were finally realized as the NFB of Nebraska officially launched NEWSLINE in Lincoln with a grand ribbon-cutting ceremony. I was like a kid in a candy store, getting my Coke and Snickers bar ten years late. I was always on the phone checking out national headlines as well as the Omaha World-Herald. By that time I enjoyed Internet access, but the idea of walking around my apartment with my cordless phone in hand, browsing the Washington Post, was very liberating.

It was a big step up from the days of readers and radio reading services, but I still felt limited. I had only four papers to choose from. Yet I loved the service and felt I had come full circle when I became the Nebraska NEWSLINE outreach coordinator in the fall of 2000. The work itself is easy and rewarding, demonstrating NEWSLINE for blind persons who are interested and helping them to sign up for the service. I take a great deal of pride in sharing the joy of equal access with others who can benefit from NEWSLINE.

Since I have been a part of NEWSLINE, I have seen it grow and touch the lives of more people. With the new national service that came to us courtesy of Congress in March of 2002, the limits have become even less constricting. Whereas before I was able to read only four newspapers, I am now able to choose among some fifty-five state and national papers. The benefits of this became starkly clear last semester when my criminal justice professor took up an issue of USA Today one morning and began reading an article about the Enron scandal. I realized that I had read that very article just a few hours before. I could finally recognize an article that my professor was quoting. I made it a point to approach him after class and discuss the article in depth. Later that semester I had the opportunity to debate my philosophy professor in his office regarding an article from the New York Times on cloning. He was impressed that I was so well read and asked, "Who reads your newspapers for you? Do you have to pay someone?"

"Not at all," I said and pointed to the telephone on his desk. "I get everything from this." Needless to say, my professor was impressed.

While the events I have described have all been beneficial to my education, I never fully realized how vital NEWSLINE could be as a part of my life until just last week. Nebraska is right in the middle of tornado season, and my hometown of Kearney was pummeled by a band of intense thunderstorms on June 12, 2002. No actual tornados were sighted in the city, but much of the area was pelted by hail the size of softballs. Lincoln is located about two hours east of Kearney, which meant that my hometown was outside the news coverage of local television and radio stations. Beyond a quick mentioning of "bad hail and thunderstorms near Kearney," the people on the ten o'clock news said relatively little about the impact the storms had had on the city.

I had received a quick phone call from my parents, telling me of the damage done to our home, but I knew nothing about the destruction that the rest of the city had endured. It was disconcerting to be unaware of the damage that many of my friends who still live there had suffered in the wake of the storm. It was heartbreaking, yet comforting, to call NEWSLINE the following day and read more extensive coverage of the storm in the Omaha World-Herald. It also made me realize just how far we still have to go in our effort to make more newspapers accessible to the blind. The Kearney Daily Hub is not yet a part of NEWSLINE, and we have many other newspapers in the western portion of the state that haven't signed on with our service. The incident with the storm has only strengthened my resolve to continue working to promote the benefits of NEWSLINE, not only to the blind, but to potential newspaper participants as well.

NFB-NEWSLINE® has made a strong impact on my life, and the results are nothing but positive. Along with my daily news headlines, I can read movie and book reviews, editorials, and human interest. I can keep up with the Nebraska Cornhuskers on the sports page or find out if it's raining in Baltimore. The world of black and white denied me for so long is now at my fingertips, and it serves me well.

In reflecting upon the benefits that NFB-NEWSLINE® has offered to me, I find it difficult to understand how anyone could oppose

NEWSLINE. We, the blind of this country, have taken a great leap forward in gaining access to a world that was largely denied to us for many years. NEWSLINE truly embodies Dr. Jernigan's vision of independence, and any blind person can be a part of it. I hope those who have not yet signed up for this revolutionary service will do so and enjoy the world of black and white that I have come to love.

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WASHINGTON SEMINAR by Mike Powell

This is an update of a piece Mike wrote for a previous issue that did not come out.

In 2005, I attended my first Washington Seminar. I wrote an article about my experience and impressions to be published in a future edition of the Michigan Focus. I have since attended two more seminars; one in 2007 and again, this year, in 2009. I am still struck with the importance of it all and the great sense of responsibility it stirs in me. Here we are, blind people from all over the United States, from all walks of life, coming together to discuss issues important to us all; then meeting with the members of Congress to try to give them a sense of how real these matters are to us and how our lives can be affected by the decisions they make. No one of us can know what memory of a conversation about our life experiences as blind people could be recalled by one of our representatives when he or she is called upon to address matters that influence policies concerning the blind. So I continue to approach these seminars very seriously and also with a feeling of excitement to convey the message that we are capable of living happy and fulfilling lives.

This year there were again three issues we brought before the members of Congress. For a more complete account of the legislative agenda for 2009 I would refer you to the April Braille Monitor. Establishing a minimum sound standard for quiet cars was the subject of issue number one. The eventual development of a technology bill of rights for the blind that would ensure non-visual access as products and appliances become more technologically driven was the subject for issue number two. The third issue

concerned removing work disincentives for recipients of Social Security Disability Insurance.

As in 2005 and 2007, I continue to enjoy the company of the members from Michigan who attend these events. Whether it is rushing to make it to an appointment that had to be rescheduled at the last minute, or laughing at a misadventure that always happens when trying to manage the unexpected, I always leave these events a little tired but elated over how much ground we covered within a few short fully packed days. Not only that, but we did it on our own, working together and helping each other.

Being with people you care about and who you know care about you is what it's all about. Talking on the train, spending time in the cafeteria between appointments, or enjoying café mocha at Starbucks makes it all worthwhile. I have stories I could tell, but that will have to wait for another time, or, you can look me up at national convention this summer. Right now, enjoy my reflections from the 2005 Washington Seminar. They are still as relevant today as they were then.

WASHINGTON SEMINAR
A FIRST TIMERS VIEW
By Michael Powell

I have observed that when I attend an event or activity of the National Federation of the Blind I shouldn't be surprised to have my attitudes about blindness readjusted. It can be as subtle as having some of my feelings reaffirmed and my awareness of possibilities expanded. Or, it can be as direct as having a reason to venture out of my comfort zone to work alongside others in totally unfamiliar surroundings to meet and enjoy people. When I determined that I would be able to go to the Washington Seminar this year I was prepared to have an adventure and have a good time doing it. Whatever I would have to face I would be among friends. In making the travel arrangements a few of us decided to take the train and others preferred to fly out. I hadn't been on a train since 1990 so I figured I was due for another trip as part of my adventure.

A group of us taking the train met at Donna Posont's house. There were Sharonda and Chris Greenlaw, Donna and her daughter Ruthann, and I. Stenetta Burroughs was waiting for us at the station in Dearborn where we would catch a bus to Toledo. Sheila Latham and her daughter Melinda would already be on the bus having caught it in Lansing. As the suitcases were being taken out of the Posont home I asked Donna if she was going on some kind of extended cruise or European vacation. She said it was all part of the adventure. It took two cars to get our luggage and us to the station with Chris Greenlaw driving one and my wife Paulette driving the other. When we got to the station Paulette kissed me goodbye, told me to try to keep the country and myself in one piece, and I was off to meet Washington DC. On the bus we hooked up with Sheila and Melinda.

It was around ten when we got to Toledo so there would only be an hour wait for our train, so we thought. Due to a number of freight trains running that night our trip was delayed until 1:40 A. M. Saturday morning. I remarked to Donna that if I were flying out to Washington I could probably get there by the time the train gets here. She suggested that I start walking to the airport now if I hoped to catch the next plane. We had a good laugh and remembered that this was all part of our adventure. When the time came we boarded the train and settled in for the long ride.

Throughout the night I talked with Chris and Sharonda, went up stairs to see what the rest of our little party was doing, and met another blind seminar attendee who had gotten on the train in Chicago. We arrived in DC around three in the afternoon. We checked into the hotel and had dinner that evening with John Scott who had flown in from Detroit at one that afternoon and still managed to beat us to the hotel. Christy Witte, who had come from Grand Rapids, also joined us.

On Sunday morning I struck out on my own and went for a nice breakfast in the hotel. Coming back to my room I ran across George Wurtzel. He had just arrived from Lansing. Christy Witte, Tim Paulding, and Diana Mohnke were at the student seminar. Christy called me from the seminar to tell me there would be some sessions that afternoon on NFB training centers if I wanted to go.

When I got to the Venus room for the meeting I met Dick Davis, from BLIND, Inc., who was setting up a literature table. I also ran into Melody Lindsey, Director of the Michigan Commission for the Blind training center. I met Pam Allen, Director of the Louisiana Center for the Blind, and Julie Deden, Director of the Colorado Center for the Blind. For a while I was the only one in the room who had not been a student at one of our training centers. So instead of, as they say, preaching to the choir, I got to ask the choir and its staff questions. After that I spent some time in the hotel lounge with Eric Woods, director of youth services at the Colorado Center. I had mentioned during the meeting that my background also included work as a professional musician. Eric and I talked about his work at the Colorado center, our work and interests as musicians, and my future plans. After Eric left I talked some with a fun group from New Jersey. Then it was time to get ready for the student banquet.

With the help of Diana Mohnke I located Tim Paulding who had my banquet ticket. Since I have been the master of ceremonies at our state convention banquets I was eager to see someone else in action and who knows, get some good material. Little did I know some of that material would come back to haunt me later in the week.

On Monday Sharonda, Chris and I took a tour of our national center in Baltimore. I hadn't been to our center since 2003 so I was eager to see the Jernigan institute. On the bus I sat next to a very nice lady from Georgia and we talked the whole trip. I happened to be among the first bunch of people that got off our bus. We were directed to the auditorium and the seat I took was right up front. President Maurer welcomed all of us and when I asked him a question I heard what sounded like a camera shutter. I don't know if a picture was being taken but it felt for a moment like I was at a national press conference. We then split into three groups and toured the center. We were all given a bag lunch for the bus trip back to the hotel.

Around 4:30 that afternoon, Sharonda and I began making our way to the Columbia ball room for the Great Gathering-in Meeting. As we passed by the deli Sheila called me over. In stopping to talk with her for a brief moment Sharonda and I got separated but I knew she would make out all right. The room was already starting to fill up and

I am glad I got there when I did. Locating a row of seats I moved in. I asked the lady next to me if I could join her and she said it was fine. We introduced ourselves and I found that I was next to Melissa Riccobono. The crowd continued to build and federationists began filling in the seats around us. Scott Labarre was a few seats to my right and our friend Kevan Worley was behind me. At five, President Maurer called the great gathering in meeting to order. He told us there were 46 state affiliates represented with over four hundred in attendance. We then got down to the business of the seminar.

Around seven our Michigan delegation met in Diana's room for pop and pizza courtesy of our state affiliate. Print and Braille copies of the legislative agenda were distributed. I gave Diana the NewsLine materials that Georgia Kitchen mailed to me and she put them into the folders that we would be handing out to legislators. We then read through the fact sheets together and discussed the issues to get a good understanding of them. We went over our appointments for the week and would meet in the lobby the following morning to go to Senator Debbie Stabenow's office to meet with her and have coffee as part of "Good Morning Michigan". I was very proud of the way our delegation carried itself. We took turns speaking and when any one of us would leave an opening someone else could jump in and take up the presentation. We never interrupted one another or stumbled over words. We used examples from our personal experiences to make these matters real to our listeners. Take it from a musician. Our timing was right on, our chemistry was good, and we played off each other well. We then split into smaller groups and began making our rounds. Some of us went to breakfast.

Somewhere in the course of the morning Ruth Posont told me because my winter jacket had purple in it she was going to get people to start calling me Barney, as in Barney the dinosaur. It didn't matter that my jacket really didn't look the part. A minor detail like that wasn't going to stop Donna. Sure enough! Whenever Donna wanted to make sure I was still behind her or in front of her as we were traveling she would call out for Barney and I, being programmed for obedience would always answer. Why did I answer? Well, she really needed to know we were together regardless of what name she decided to call me. She even got other people in the act though I can't prove it.

As we had some time between two of our appointments we went to a cafeteria for lunch. There were different lines depending on what you wanted and I immediately was attracted to the grill line. A cheeseburger, coke and fries and I would be good to go. I was concerned how we would find each other since we ended up in different lines, my colleagues, apparently, not preferring my selection. Donna told me she had everything figured out. As I was paying for my lunch a cafeteria worker walked up to me and told me there was a table where Barney's friends would soon be joining him for lunch. The Barney thing got to be a little code word between Donna and me. I am sure when she sensed my getting concerned or stressed about how we were going to manage something she would use it to lighten me up. As if I couldn't leave well enough alone I made the mistake of telling her about the audience participation song I learned at the student banquet. There is a line in the song where you have to name an animal and give an action or description that rhymes with the name of that animal. Donna told me that the song has been used on Barney's TV show so he really must be part of my destiny since I learned one of his songs without knowing it. I was beginning to wish John Scott were in our little group as he is an attorney and I could have retained his services to keep from digging myself in further.

For our Tuesday afternoon appointment we had to go to the Rayburn building and Donna said we could get there through the tunnels. We needed to take the elevator to one of the ground levels and I confidently assured her that Christy and I were right with her. After we were on the elevator and began our descent Donna's cell phone rang. It was Christy. Thank God for cell phones! Christy had no trouble finding us as we were still laughing as she came out of the car right next to us. The trip through the tunnel was an adventure in itself but by then nothing fazed me. Our appointment done we caught a cab back to the hotel and my first day on Capitol hill was behind me. The cab driver laughed so hard with us he said he should pay us for entertainment. But he didn't.

Back at the hotel we went to the Mercury room to file the reports on our legislative contacts. I visited with John and Sandy Halverson. Christy and I watched reports being given and by the end of the week we were giving them on our own. On Wednesday I did a few

appointments with Tim Paulding, George Wurtzel, and Christine Brown, director of Disabled Student Services at the University of Michigan.

No longer novices, Christy and I went on our own to the office of Sander Levin, my congressman, and we had no problems finding it with the directions we were given by people at the Rayburn building. As I walked the halls that afternoon I began taking in my surroundings and thought about my friends back home. Many of them blind and sighted have never come to our nation's capitol let alone have the opportunity to present issues before representatives of Congress. As these buildings, in a sense, belong to all of us I didn't worry about touching all that I could; the doors and doorways, the walls with their different textures and paneling. The American flag and State flag by the office doors, the Braille office numbers and the office furniture. I met people who were there on behalf of many different interests ranging from the Department of Agriculture, to mental health. I am sure they did their share of looking around so I didn't feel uncomfortable exploring as a blind person. Later that evening Christy, George, Diana, Stenetta, and I left the hotel and walked to a seafood restaurant. Some of the streets were blocked off so we had to go a few blocks out of the way. When we were leaving our waitress offered to get us a cab and a driver even offered to take us but we walked back anyway.

On Thursday we had to be checked out by two that afternoon so I was glad I did most of my packing the night before. After our appointments I went to the Mercury room to say good-bye. With the filing of my report all of Michigan's congress people had been seen. When the last group of us got to the train station it was too late to check in our luggage but we got our bags on the train.

If I had to give any tips to future attendees of our seminars and activities I would say, be ready to walk, and be ready to work. Don't let things get to you and be prepared for change at a moment's notice. Don't be afraid to make yourself do things even if it makes you feel uneasy at first. Let people get to know you as you, in turn, get to know them. This will give you support when you need it and confidence as you work along with others and on your own. It is the job of all of us in this organization to use our experiences to reach out

to help other blind people get to where we are and where we are going. After all, changing what it means to be blind is what the National Federation of the Blind is really all about.

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VERY SUCCESSFUL BRAILLE LITERACY AND COIN UNVEILING EVENT by Mary Ann Rojek

Here Mary Ann brings us the Michigan unveiling of the Louis Braille Coin and lays out its purpose.

On March 26th, members from several chapters of the NFB of Michigan came together at the rotunda of the state capitol. Dave Robinson, President of the Lansing chapter, spoke about the need for and the importance of Braille Literacy. Fred Wurtzel, President, of the Michigan Affiliate, gave some background information about Louis Braille and talked about how access to Braille can empower blind individuals. Mary Ann Rojek, Michigan Braille Literacy Coordinator, summarized key points from the report on the Braille Literacy crisis in America entitled: Facing the Truth, Reversing the Trend, Empowering the Blind given by Dr. Maurer in Baltimore.

Michigan's Governor, Jennifer Granholm, proclaimed the day Braille Literacy Day in Michigan. The gubernatorial proclamation was read and proudly displayed as part of the festivities. Kathleen Straus, President of the State Board of Education, expressed her commitment to partner with the NFB to increase Braille Literacy of the State's blind children.

The commemorative Louis Braille bicentennial silver dollar was on hand as were chocolate coins for all to sample and enjoy. Braille alphabet cards were also available for those in attendance.

A reporter from WLNS, a Lansing television station, interviewed Dave Robinson and a segment appeared on the 5:00 news. There was also coverage on Fox 47.

The commemorative Louis Braille coin is now available for purchase either online by going to: <http://www.usmint.gov> or by calling 1-800-USA-MINT (800) 872-6468)

TTY: 1-888-321-MINT (6468).

Outside the 50 United States: 001-202-898-MINT (6468)

Available seven days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 midnight (Eastern Daylight Time).

Hearing- and speech-impaired customers with TTY equipment can call Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time).

The coin is also for sale from the Independence Market at the National Federation of the Blind 410 659-9314Ext. 2216 beginning March 26th. The main objective will be to urge people to buy from the United States Mint because the mint is set up to sell and distribute coins. However, the Independence Market will have coins and will sell them.

Coin prices are as follows:

March 26-April 26: \$33 uncirculated and \$40 proof plus actual shipping costs

After April 26: \$34 uncirculated and \$42 proof plus actual shipping costs

USA Mint Pricing:

Uncirculated Louis Braille Bicentennial Silver Dollar

Introductory price: 31.95 plus actual shipping costs

Regular Price: 33.95 plus actual shipping costs

The uncirculated Louis Braille Bicentennial Silver Dollar will be offered in an easy-to-open capsule for those who would like to feel the tactile elements offered by the coin design.

Uncirculated Louis Braille Bicentennial Silver Dollar in Easy-Open Capsule Proof Louis Braille Bicentennial Silver Dollar

Introductory price: 37.95 plus actual shipping costs

Regular price: 41.95 plus actual shipping costs

The purpose of the sales of the coin is to develop programs to enhance the use of Braille and increase the numbers of students who learn and use it.

Quick Facts

Braille is equivalent to print. It is the only system through which children with profound or total loss of sight can learn to read and write. There is a significant relationship between Braille literacy and academic success, higher income, and employment.

Braille literacy = independence, confidence, and success

Today only 10 percent of blind children are learning Braille.

While audio devices are useful sources of information for blind people, only Braille offers complete command of written language.

The number of legally blind children in the United States has increased due to several factors, including advances in medical care for premature infants.

Most blind children (85 percent) attend public schools where few teachers know Braille. America would never accept a 10 percent literacy rate among sighted children.

The National Federation of the Blind is initiating a campaign to double the number of Braille readers by 2015.

"Braille Readers are Leaders" is a public awareness campaign to increase support for Braille literacy among blind children and adults.

Campaign Goals

#1. The number of school-age children reading Braille will double by 2015.

#2. All fifty states will enact legislation requiring special education teachers of blind children to obtain and maintain the National Certification in Literary Braille by 2015.

#3. Braille resources will be made more available through online sharing of materials, enhanced production methods, and improved distribution.

#4. The American public will learn that blind people have a right to Braille literacy so they can compete and assume a productive role in society.

Braille Program Development

As part of the Braille Readers are Leaders campaign, the NFB is developing Braille literacy programs and outreach projects. Below are descriptions of some of these programs.

Braille Outreach Projects

Big ideas begin with grassroots innovation. The NFB includes seven hundred local chapters located in each of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Thousands of blind people come together in these local chapters to establish programs in partnership with members of the community to improve the integration of the blind into society on terms of equality. A significant focus of the Braille literacy campaign will be providing local grants to innovative outreach and education programs around the country that have a clear emphasis on Braille.

"That the Blind May Read": An Educational Documentary

The National Federation of the Blind will raise awareness of the 2009 Braille campaign by helping to produce a one-hour documentary about Braille, its history, and the role it plays in empowering the blind all around the world. Never before has an accurate and in-depth educational look at Braille been produced in a multimedia form for a wide audience.

"Braille Reading Pals"

A Braille reading-readiness program for blind infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and older students with reading delays will enhance literacy through early exposure to Braille. The program will equip parents with early literacy materials and will connect them with resources to support their child's literacy development throughout the years such as mentoring from other parents of blind children and free Braille books.

"Braille Readers Are Leaders" Contest

A dynamic program encouraging Braille reading at all grade levels (K-12) and awarding prizes in a number of categories to students reading significant amounts of Braille each year.

"Braille Is Beautiful" Curriculum

An innovative curriculum to teach sighted students how to read and

write the Braille alphabet code and increase students' sensitivity to and understanding of blind persons will be introduced. This modular curriculum will be flexible, with components to serve different age ranges.

"Braille Certification Training Program"

NFB will undertake an aggressive outreach effort to significantly expand the pool of teachers certified in standardized teaching of Braille and individuals certified in transcribing and proofreading Braille in all Braille codes (literary, math/science, and music).

"Braille Research in Literacy"

The National Federation of the Blind will help improve Braille-related programs by filling gaps in the Braille knowledge base, designing studies to evaluate the effectiveness of currently available Braille curricula and teaching strategies for blind people of all ages, measuring the blind population and Braille readership, and disseminating accurate information about Braille-related research.

"Braille Technology Development"

In the 21st century, literacy requires the integration of and accessibility to technologies that facilitate reading, writing, and access to information. Tremendous potential exists for stimulating such development and incorporating the use of Braille into technologies in order to enhance literacy for the blind. Electronic refreshable Braille displays, dynamic tactile pads, new Braille writing technologies, and machines for producing tactile graphics are all examples where technology development is required. New, low-cost Braille writing technologies are also needed as the current tools have not been significantly improved in decades. The National Federation of the Blind will establish a technology development team made up of strategic university, industry, and other supporters to generate new Braille-related technologies and bring them to market at an affordable price.

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THE BRAILLLE LITERACY CRISIS IN AMERICA

This report from our National office is so thorough and comes at such a critical time that it needs to be circulated as widely as possible and so is reprinted here.

Facing the Truth, Reversing the Trend, Empowering the Blind
A Report to the Nation by the National Federation of the Blind
Jernigan Institute

March 26, 2009

Executive Summary

A good education is the key to success, and every American deserves an equal opportunity to receive a good education. Inherent to being educated is being literate. The ability to read and write means access to information that, in turn, leads to understanding and knowledge. And knowledge is power—the power to achieve, function in the family, thrive in the community, succeed in a job, and contribute to society.

Nearly 90 percent of America's blind children are not learning to read and write because they are not being taught Braille or given access to it. There is a Braille literacy crisis in America.

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB), the largest and most influential membership organization of blind people in the United States, is taking swift action to reverse this trend. This year, 2009, marks the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille, inventor of the system that allows blind people to read and write independently. Coinciding with this anniversary, the NFB has announced specific action to address the education of America's blind children so that every blind child who has a need for Braille will have the opportunity to learn it.

In this report to the nation on the state of Braille literacy in America, the NFB examines the history and decline of Braille education, addresses the crisis facing the blind today and key factors driving it, and proposes a number of action steps to double the Braille literacy rate by 2015 and eventually reverse it altogether.

Key Report Findings:

I. Facing the Truth - Fewer than 10 percent of the 1.3 million people who are legally blind in the United States are Braille readers. Further, a mere 10 percent of blind children are learning it.

Each year as many as 75,000 people lose all or part of their vision. As the baby-boom generation moves into retirement age and as diabetes (the nation's leading cause of blindness) approaches epidemic proportions, the NFB expects this number to increase dramatically and, if nothing is done, the Braille illiteracy rate as well. The current effects of this crisis are dire. Over 70 percent of blind adults are unemployed, and as many as 50 percent of blind high school students drop out of high school.

Factors contributing to this low literacy among the blind include: The Teacher Crisis. There is a shortage of teachers who are qualified to teach Braille.

In 2003 there were approximately 6,700 full-time teachers of blind students serving about 93,600 students. In that same year the number of new professionals graduating from university programs to work with blind or low-vision students fluctuated between 375 and 416 per year. In addition there is no national consensus on what it means to be certified to teach Braille, and states have a patchwork of requirements for certification.

The Spiral of Misunderstanding. There are many misconceptions about the Braille system. For example, "Braille isolates and stigmatizes students from peers who read print," or "Braille is always slower than reading print and difficult to learn." Yet studies have found that Braille is an efficient and effective reading medium with students demonstrating a reading speed exceeding two hundred words per minute.

Blind Children with Low Vision Are Deprived of Braille Instruction. Parents often find themselves battling with school administrators to get Braille instruction for their children with low vision because of the historical emphasis on teaching these children to read print. Many students with residual vision cannot read print efficiently even with magnification. Children with some residual vision account for around 85 percent of the total population of blind children.

The Paradox of Technology. Eighty-nine percent of teachers of blind students agree that technology should be used as a supplement to Braille rather than as a replacement. Advances in technology have made Braille more available than ever before. Computer software can

translate any document into literary, contracted Braille quickly and accurately. Further, hundreds of thousands of Braille books are available from Internet-based services.

II. Reversing the Trend

Undoubtedly the ability to read and write Braille competently and efficiently is the key to success for the blind. The National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute is committed to reversing this downward trend in Braille literacy in order to ensure that equal opportunities in education and employment are available to all of the nation's blind.

Braille literacy can be accomplished by:

Increasing access to Braille instruction and reading materials in every community nationwide.

Expanding Braille mentoring, reading-readiness, and outreach programs. Requiring national certification in literary Braille among all special education teachers. By 2015 all fifty states must enact legislation requiring special education teachers of blind children to obtain and maintain the National Certification in Literary Braille. Requiring all Braille teachers to pass the National Certification in Literary Braille (NCLB) in order to assure their competency and fluency in the literary code.

Advancing the use of Braille in current and emerging technologies. Researching new methods of teaching and learning Braille.

Making Braille resources more available through online sharing of materials, enhanced production methods, and improved distribution. Educating the American public that blind people have a right to Braille literacy so they can compete and assume a productive role in society.

III. Empowering the Blind

Blind people who know Braille and use it find success, independence, and productivity. A recent survey of five hundred respondents by the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute revealed a correlation between the ability to read Braille and a higher educational level, a higher likelihood of employment, and a higher income.

Hundreds of thousands of blind people have found Braille to be an indispensable tool in their education, their work, and their daily lives. In the hearts and minds of blind people, no alternative system or new technology has ever replaced Braille. For this reason the National Federation of the Blind is launching a national Braille literacy campaign to enhance the future prospects for blind children and adults in this country and to help make Braille literacy a reality for the 90 percent of blind children for whom reading is a struggle, if not an impossibility.

The future of sighted children depends on a proper education; the future of America's blind children is no different.

Introduction

Unquestionably a good education is the key to success. In national polls Americans routinely identified this issue as an important national priority (Blackorby, 2004). Education is generally understood to encompass literacy, defined as "the ability to read and write" (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2009). According to the National Institute for Literacy, literacy is "an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society" (<http://www.nifl.gov/>). Schools not doing a good job of teaching children to read and write are correctly seen as failing schools. Yet, for thousands of children across the United States, it is considered acceptable to fail to teach them to read and write. These children are blind, and they are not learning to read and write because they are not being taught Braille. Despite its versatility and elegance, and notwithstanding the fact that it is the official system of reading and writing for the blind in the United States, Braille is not being taught to most blind children or to adults who lose their vision. This has led to a literacy crisis among blind people. Many commentators on the Braille literacy crisis agree that one of the most significant contributing factors is a negative societal attitude toward Braille (Riccobono, 2006; Hehir, 2002). The bias against Braille is further evidenced by hundreds of published accounts from blind people themselves. The archives of the monthly publication of the National Federation of the Blind, the Braille Monitor, are full of personal stories detailing the problems blind people experience when they are not taught Braille at an early age. When educators and

parents insist that children who are blind or have low vision read print to the exclusion of reading Braille, the ultimate result is that many of them are functionally illiterate.

Braille has been controversial since its invention. At the time Louis Braille developed the system, most of those who were attempting to educate the blind were not blind themselves but sighted people with altruistic impulses (Lorimer, 2000; Mellor, 2006). They believed that the blind should be taught to read print rather than using a separate system. Many educators still believe this today, arguing that Braille is slow and hard to learn and that it isolates blind children from their peers. These arguments and their mistaken assumptions will be addressed in detail in the following pages. Beliefs among educators about Braille are only one reason, albeit a very significant one, that Braille literacy has declined in the United States to the point where it is estimated that only 10 percent of blind children are learning it.

Other factors include a shortage of teachers qualified to give Braille instruction, the need for improved methods of producing and distributing Braille, and not enough certified Braille transcribers (Spungin, 1989, 2003). All of these issues must be addressed if the downward trend in literacy among the blind is to be reversed. And it must be reversed, for to fail to reverse it is to condemn blind children and adults to illiteracy and to a permanent struggle to keep up with their sighted peers in getting an education. By contrast, reversing the downward trend in Braille literacy will ensure that current and future generations of blind children, as well as adults who lose their vision, have access to knowledge and the power and opportunity that it represents. This report discusses Braille's history and effectiveness, the reasons for the crisis in Braille literacy, and what the National Federation of the Blind is doing to address this crisis. It is a call to action for all who are concerned about the welfare of America's blind children to join with the National Federation of the Blind in our effort to ensure that every blind child and adult who has a need for Braille will have the opportunity to learn it.

A Brief History of Braille

Braille is a system of raised dots that allows blind people to read and write tactilely. Named for its inventor, Louis Jean-Philippe Braille (1809-1852), the Braille code is the universally accepted method of

reading and writing for the blind. It is the only system that allows blind people to read and write independently and to do both interactively. Because of its effectiveness, Braille has been adapted for almost every written language. Other Braille codes represent mathematical and scientific notation and music. Even blind computer programmers have a Braille code, computer Braille. All of these codes are based on Louis Braille's original system, a cell consisting of six dots in parallel vertical columns of three each. The Braille code was first introduced into the United States in 1869 but was not adopted until 1932 as the Standard English Grade II Braille code.

Graphic: Braille cell

Graphic: Braille alphabet

For most of human history no method existed allowing blind people to read and write independently. Some blind people did learn to read print in a tactile form, but usually they had no way to write tactilely; even if they learned to reproduce print characters accurately, they could not read what they had written. In addition, the difficulty and expense of producing books with embossed print lettering made such books rare.

As a result most blind people were condemned to illiteracy, along with the poverty and deprivation accompanying it. If they earned a living at all, they did so as storytellers or musicians or through certain kinds of manual labor, including basketry and massage. This was the state of affairs when Louis Jean-Philippe Braille was born in the small village of Coupvray, France, just outside Paris, in 1809. At the age of three Braille was blinded in an accident, probably resulting from playing with tools in his father's harness-making shop (Lorimer, 1996, 2000; Mellor, 2006). Braille's family was not wealthy, but his parents were literate and determined that their son would obtain an education. When it became clear that the local school could no longer meet Braille's needs (though he had progressed astonishingly far given that he could not read and write), a local nobleman put up the funds for him to attend the Royal Institute for the Young Blind in Paris, the world's first school for blind children (Mellor, 2006; Lorimer, 1996). At this school Braille found a limited number of books with embossed print letters and quickly read all of them.

In 1821 a French army captain, Charles Barbier de la Serre, came to the school to show the students an invention that he thought might be

of use to them. Barbier had developed a system called “night writing” consisting of raised dots punched into cardboard with a stylus. A metal frame, or slate, was used to guide the stylus in the proper placement of the dots. This system was invented as a way for soldiers to transmit messages in the dark without striking a match, which would give away their position to enemy gunners. While Braille recognized the system’s potential, he believed that it could be improved. In particular he thought that the dot formations should represent alphanumeric characters instead of sounds (Barbier’s system was also called sonography because the symbols represented the sounds of speech rather than letters). He also thought that the number of dots making up each character should be reduced so that they could be read with a fingertip rather than having to be traced.

Braille worked on improving the system for several years. By the age of twenty he had developed the six-dot Braille cell that is used today and had published a booklet on the method. Braille’s fellow students adopted his new system immediately. Not only could they now read books, which were hand transcribed by Braille and his friends, but they could take their own notes in class and read them back later rather than learning exclusively by listening and memorizing. The instructors at the school were skeptical, however, and some of the administrators were actually hostile. The school was a political showpiece and made money from selling crafts produced by its blind students; if the blind became too independent, its prestige and revenue might be reduced (Mellor, 2006). At one point the school’s director burned all of the books that Louis Braille and his friends had transcribed by hand and confiscated the students’ slates and styluses. The result was an open rebellion among students, who began to steal forks from the dining room to replace their lost writing implements. This early struggle for the acceptance of the Braille system would be only the first of many battles pitting blind people against those who professed to know what was best for them. These struggles continue to this day.

Despite these setbacks the Braille system was eventually adopted by the Royal Institute for the Young Blind, and two years after Braille’s death it became the official system of reading and writing for the blind

in France. To this day Louis Braille is considered a national hero in his native country; his body is interred in the Pantheon in Paris. The Braille code was later adopted in England because of advocacy by the founders of what is now the Royal National Institute of Blind People, and other blind people and educational institutions for the blind began to use it. Helen Keller reported using the system. Rosalind Perlman (2007), in her book *The Blind Doctor: The Jacob Bolotin Story*, reports that the first physician to have been born blind, practicing in Chicago during the early part of the twentieth century, learned Braille at the Illinois School for the Blind and used it for notes in medical school and throughout his subsequent career. Braille was adopted as the exclusive means of teaching blind people to read and write in the United States in 1932. At the height of its use in the United States, it is estimated that 50 to 60 percent of blind children learned to read and write in Braille. Attention Box on page 7: Only about 10 percent of blind children in the United States are currently learning Braille. Society would never accept a 10 percent literacy rate among sighted children; it should not accept such an outrageously low literacy rate among the blind.

The Decline of Braille Literacy

The decline in the number of Braille readers since 1963 (Miller, 2002) has been widely discussed by professionals and censured by consumer groups (Rex, 1989; Schroeder, 1989; Stephens, 1989). Although there is no consensus on the causes of this decline, a number of factors have been cited. Among them are disputes on the utility of the Braille code (Thurlow, 1988), the decline in teachers' knowledge of Braille and methods for teaching it (Schroeder, 1989; Stephens, 1989), negative attitudes toward Braille (Holbrook and Koenig, 1992; Rex, 1989), greater reliance on speech output and print-magnification technology, and a rise in the number of blind children with additional disabilities who are nonreaders (Rex, 1989). The greatest controversy over whether to teach a child Braille arises when a child has some residual vision; such children account for around 85 percent of the total population of blind children (Holbrook and Koenig, 1992).

Pressure from consumers and advocacy groups has led thirty-three states to pass legislation mandating that children who are legally blind be given the opportunity to learn Braille. The Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act also mandates that the teams who help to write educational plans for students with disabilities presume that all blind children should be taught Braille unless it is determined to be inappropriate. But these laws have not ended the controversy. Whereas professional groups have called for a renewed emphasis on teaching Braille (Mullen, 1990), others have opined that Braille is only one educational option. Braille should be viewed as one tool among many, a tool that allows blind people to operate at a high degree of proficiency when performing a multitude of functional tasks (Eldridge, 1979, Waechtler, 1999).

But rather than seeing Braille as a tool that every blind child should have in his or her toolkit for dealing effectively with vision loss, to be used in conjunction with and not to the exclusion of techniques that rely on the child's remaining vision, some educators insist that a choice must be made between print and Braille and that only one reading medium must be used (Federman, 2005). These disagreements translate in the field into disputes among professionals in planning meetings researching how to deal with individual children. Parents caught in the middle of these disputes and often themselves confused about the best course of action find that they and their children become the real victims in these academic battles.

The Crisis Facing the Blind Today

The American Foundation for the Blind (1996) has estimated that fewer than 10 percent of people who are legally blind in the United States and fewer than 40 percent of the estimated number who are functionally blind are Braille readers. The American Printing House for the Blind estimates the Braille literacy rate among children to be around 10 percent. Experts estimate 1.3 million blind people live in the United States, and approximately 75,000 people lose all or part of their vision each year.

These numbers may increase dramatically as the baby-boom generation reaches retirement age. Macular degeneration, the most common form of blindness in older Americans, is likely to increase as this population increases, particularly since Americans are living longer. The nation's leading cause of blindness, diabetes, has

reached epidemic proportions in this country, so a higher incidence of blindness can be expected.

The Teacher Crisis

U.S. education faces a chronic shortage of teachers qualified to teach Braille. In 2003 there were approximately 6,700 full-time teachers of blind students serving approximately 93,600 students (Spungin, 2003). Far too few teachers of blind children have graduated from accredited programs; a 2000 report observed that the total number of new professionals graduating from university programs to work with students who are blind or have low vision fluctuated between 375 and 416 per year during the previous seven years (Mason, et al., 2000). Not all of these teachers are qualified to teach Braille. Many teachers who are considered qualified to teach Braille have not necessarily learned it themselves. There is no national consensus on what it means to be certified to teach Braille, and states have a patchwork of requirements for certification.

Local school districts depend upon state education agencies to set the certification standards for teachers. All states have specific certification standards for those who teach children who are blind or have low vision; however, these standards vary across the country (Vaughn, 1997).

States license or certify candidates who want to teach children who are blind or have low vision in three ways: requiring the candidate to graduate from an approved bachelor's or master's program from an approved college or university; requiring the candidate to have a generic degree in special education; or requiring the candidate to have an endorsement to an existing certificate in early childhood, elementary, secondary, or special education, with certain courses needed to gain that endorsement (Frieman, 2004). In order to approve a program, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education requires performance-based criteria. The Council for Exceptional Children has developed performance-based standards for programs to train teachers of students who have a visual impairment. If a candidate graduates from an approved program that follows the Council for Exceptional Children's standards, an administrator can predict that the teaching candidate will have the necessary background to teach Braille. However, only nineteen states require candidates to have graduated from an approved program. Seven states require that candidates have only a generic

degree in special education with no specific mention of Braille. Twenty-four states require candidates to have taken courses in order to earn an endorsement. These standards specify that the teacher has taken at least one course in Braille, but give no guarantee that the individual is actually competent in Braille or is able to teach it (Frieman, 2004). Teachers who are uncomfortable with Braille are likely to be reluctant to teach it, especially when they can get by without doing so for students who have low vision but can read some print.

To act in the best interests of blind children and adults, schools must require that every child who is blind will have the right to be taught Braille and that Braille be taught by someone who is competent in its use. This is not what is currently happening in schools (Vaughn, 1997). Today there is no guarantee that a teacher, even one with formal credentials, will be fluent in Braille. In order to assure Braille fluency, teachers of blind children must be tested on their actual Braille skills by way of a comprehensive and validated test. States should require Braille teachers to pass the National Certification in Literary Braille (NCLB) in order to assure competency and fluency in the literary code. Passing the NCLB examination will not in itself ensure effective Braille teaching, but it will provide a measure of how well a person knows and uses Braille.

Even assuming a teacher is competent in Braille, the size of the teacher's case load will often influence how well his or her students learn Braille. An itinerant teacher is essentially a consultant who is responsible for meeting the needs of several students.

Teachers of blind students often must travel within or even between school districts each week to help a number of students. They are typically expected to teach sixteen or more students who are widely spread over large geographic areas (Caton, 1991).

As a result many students are trained in Braille for only two to three hours a week, and some even less than that.

Attention Box page 9: There is a chronic shortage of teachers who are qualified to teach Braille. It was reported in 2003 that there were approximately 6,700 full-time teachers of blind students serving approximately 93,600 students.

Teachers of blind students must often teach a number of skills, including cane travel and the use of technology such as a computer with text-to-speech screen access software, and there is evidence that Braille instruction is not prioritized. According to one survey

respondents spent an average of 35 percent of their instructional time using assistive technology with students in grades 7-10 (Thurlow et al., 2001). The primary goals most often cited for instructional time were “become a proficient user of assistive technology” (42 percent) and “read using a combination of approaches” (30 percent), with “become fluent Braille reader” (18 percent) selected less often. Respondents spent an average of 27 percent of reading instruction time on direct instruction of how to use assistive technologies to assist in reading, 19 percent of time in supported reading aloud, and only 9 percent of time in direct instruction of phonemic strategies (Braille or print). Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that a teacher of blind students spends more time tutoring than teaching blindness skills (Amato, 2002).

Attention box page 10: Experts estimate that 1.3 million blind people live in the United States, and approximately 75,000 people lose all or part of their vision each year.

The Spiral of Misunderstanding

Attitudes about Braille, which are often based on myths and misconceptions about the system, are also a barrier to proper Braille instruction. One of the major reasons for the increasing illiteracy of the blind and those with low vision is the historical emphasis on teaching children with residual vision to read print (Spungin, 1996). Most blind children have some residual vision; they are legally blind but not totally blind. But many students who have residual vision cannot read print efficiently even with magnification; attempting to read print results in eye strain, headaches, and other problems. Furthermore, many degenerative eye conditions are progressive, meaning that the student’s vision will continue to decrease over time, making print harder and harder to read. Students with low vision are particularly at risk for not receiving appropriate instruction in Braille. These students tend to receive less direct service from teachers of blind students and are surrounded with more emphasis on “vision” over nonvisual skills and learning techniques. Additionally, if Braille is not introduced early, student motivation to accept Braille will greatly decrease due to frustration in learning Braille, emotional issues with looking and acting different from one’s peers, and issues involving emotional acceptance of additional vision loss. It is important for educators to give these students appropriate instruction based on

their needs in the long term rather than simply considering only their most immediate needs.

Parents often find themselves battling with school administrators to get Braille instruction for their children with low vision. The Colton family of Park City, Utah, took out a second mortgage on their home in order to hire lawyers for litigation against the school district to get Braille instruction for their daughter Katie, who has a progressive eye disease (Lyon, 2009). "We'd had to argue a wait-to-fail model is not appropriate for a progressive disorder," her mother was quoted as saying in the Salt Lake Tribune.

The Jacobs family was told that their blind daughter could read print if the font was 72 point or higher, so there was no need for Braille (Jacobs, 2009). Needless to say, the child will never have access to print that large in the real world, except perhaps on billboards. The school system justified having the child read print by claiming that she was "resistant to Braille." But a school district would never refuse to teach a sighted child to read because he or she was "resistant" to reading. Furthermore, resistance to Braille is often a product of the way it is taught; if Braille is presented to a blind child as different and hard, rather than the positive way in which reading is presented to sighted children, then the child will naturally absorb the expectations of the adults doing the teaching (Craig, 1996; Stratton, 1999).

The experiences of the Colton and Jacobs families are not uncommon; they are merely examples of the experiences of hundreds of families across the United States. On the other hand, the experiences of parents of blind children who have successfully introduced their young readers to Braille and fought for inclusion of the system in the child's education suggest that, when Braille is simply presented as reading and reading becomes fun for the family, children readily absorb the system.

Others argue that Braille isolates and stigmatizes students from peers who read print.

This has never been backed by any kind of research; it is without foundation. Blind children will always have to use alternative technologies or methods to read, ranging from holding a book close to their face to using a magnification device or putting on headphones to listen to recorded text. Their peers notice these differences as surely as they notice that the child reads Braille instead of print, but they do not necessarily treat the child differently because of reading differences.

Ultimately, all of these mistaken beliefs about Braille come down to low expectations of blind students. Whether they will admit it or not, many of the sighted educators and administrators charged with providing instruction to blind students do not believe in the capacity of their students or in the effectiveness of Braille and other alternative techniques used by blind people to live successful, productive lives. As one commentator has put it: “A little honest reflection about this situation (decline in Braille literacy) suggests that the real culprit here is the inadequate and inappropriate education of the special education teachers who are not competent or confident themselves in using Braille and who also believe that their students should not be expected to compete successfully in school or in life” (Ianuzzi, 1999). Blind students who are not properly taught Braille and other blindness skills and who therefore struggle with literacy ultimately experience low self-confidence and a lack of belief in their own ability to live happy, productive lives. By contrast, those who do receive effective Braille instruction and use the code effectively gain a sense of hope and empowerment. Dr. Fredric Schroeder (1996) commented that Braille literacy “should be viewed more expansively than simply as a literacy issue.” Schroeder’s analysis of interviews with legally blind adults “found that issues of self-esteem, self-identity, and the ‘stigma’ of being a person with a disability were integrally intertwined with the subjects’ reported feelings about using Braille...For some, Braille seems to represent competence, independence, and equality, so the mastery and use of Braille played a central role in the development of their self-identities as persons who are capable, competent, independent, and equal.”

Schroeder’s work connects to other valuable work in self-efficacy and demonstrates that blind people who learn to value and use Braille generally have a higher degree of confidence and do not spend energy attempting to reshape themselves as “normal” individuals. Schroeder’s work is reinforced by more recent investigations by Wells-Jensen (2003) and through the published first-hand experiences of hundreds of blind individuals—some who did and others who did not receive appropriate instruction in Braille in childhood.

Another misconception about Braille that has contributed to the decline in Braille literacy is the idea that reading Braille is always slower than reading print and that Braille is difficult to learn. While some studies suggest that Braille is slower than print and difficult to

learn because of its 189 English contractions—symbols and letter combinations that reduce the size of Braille books by making it possible to put more Braille on a page instead of spelling each word out letter-by-letter—research in this area is unreliable since studies tend to be anecdotal. Other studies have found that Braille is an efficient and effective reading medium (Foulke, 1979; Wormsley, 1996). Furthermore, the experience of Braille instructors shows that reading speed exceeding two hundred words per minute is possible when students have learned Braille at an early age (Danielsen, 2006).

The Paradox of Technology

It is often said that technology obviates the need for Braille. The availability of text-to-speech technology and audio texts, for example, is advanced as an argument against the use of Braille. But literacy is the ability to read and write. While using speech output and recorded books is a way for students to gain information, it does not teach them reading and writing skills. Students who rely solely on listening as a means of learning find themselves deficient in areas like spelling and composition.

Most teachers of blind students (89.4 percent [Wittenstein and Pardee, 1996]) agree that technology should be used as a supplement to Braille rather than as a replacement, even though as cited above, many of them spend more instructional time working with technology than teaching Braille. No one would seriously suggest that alternate sources of information, like television and radio, replace the need for a sighted child to learn to read; the same should be true for Braille.

For the sighted, technology has not replaced print; it has in fact simplified and enhanced access to the printed word. The same is true with respect to Braille; advances in technology have made Braille more available than it ever was in the past. Computer software can translate any document into literary, contracted Braille quickly and accurately, although work still needs to be done to make other Braille codes machine-translatable.

Braille displays and embossers can be attached to computers to generate Braille documents on the fly. Thousands of Braille books are available from Internet-based services like the Web-Braille service offered by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress (NLS) and the online

community Bookshare.org. While scarcity of Braille is still a problem, it is not nearly as bad as it has been in the past. Certainly improvements can still be made in Braille production methods and technology so that more Braille will be available, and this is one of the goals of the Braille Readers are Leaders campaign of the National Federation of the Blind. Assuming a commitment to Braille instruction and Braille literacy is renewed in America and proper steps are taken to ensure the production and distribution of more Braille materials, there will be no need to avoid teaching Braille because of a shortage of books.

Attention box page 12: Many teachers who are considered qualified to teach Braille have not learned it themselves.

The Truth about Braille

The crisis in Braille literacy is real. Thousands of blind children and adults who need adjustment to blindness training are being denied access to the most effective means of reading and writing for the blind ever invented. The effects of this crisis can be seen in the high unemployment rate (over 70 percent) among blind adults, the high dropout rate (40 to 50 percent) among blind high school students, and the lives of dependence and minimal subsistence that many blind people lead. By contrast, blind people who know the Braille code and use it regularly find success, independence, and productivity.

A recent survey of five hundred respondents by the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute, conducted on a national random sample selected from a list of 10,000 people who had had contact with the NFB within the last two years, demonstrated that contact with the NFB increases the likelihood of knowing Braille. Unlike the general sample of blind individuals, where the AFB estimates that only 10 percent read Braille, more than half (59 percent) of those interviewed in the NFB Jernigan Institute study are Braille literate. This is probably due to the Federation's emphasis on Braille literacy; those who have had contact with the National Federation of the Blind tend to believe strongly in the efficacy of Braille and to be committed to learning and reading it. In this sample the ability to read Braille was also correlated with a higher educational level, a higher likelihood of employment, and a higher income level. These relationships were statistically significant. Most disciplines accept that the primary indicators of socioeconomic status in this society are employment and education leading to self-

sufficiency. A study by Dr. Ruby Ryles, now the director of the orientation and mobility master's program at the Professional Development and Research Institute on Blindness at Louisiana Tech University, began to provide the objective information needed on the question of Braille versus print. In a comparison between two groups of blind people, one consisting of Braille readers and the other of print readers, the study revealed that those who were taught Braille from the beginning had higher employment rates, were better educated and more financially self-sufficient, and spent more time engaged in leisure and other reading than the print users (Ryles, 1996).

Dr. Ryles's work showed a striking difference between those who had grown up learning Braille and those who had relied primarily on print. She found that 44 percent of the Braille-reading group, as compared to 77 percent of the print-reading group, were unemployed. In other words the unemployment rate for the print group was actually higher than the generally reported unemployment rate among the blind as a whole (70 percent) (Riccobono, et al.), while the unemployment rate among Braille readers was much lower. The Braille-reading sample had significantly stronger reading habits than the print group, including more hours in a week spent on reading activities, reading more books, and subscribing to more magazines. While the overall educational rate between the two groups was not statistically significant, a dramatic difference was observed at the advanced degree level. Thirty percent of the Braille group had an advanced degree compared to only 13 percent for the print group, with only the Braille group having any individuals with doctoral degrees.

Last, the Braille group was over-represented in the higher income level and under-represented in the lowest income level, while the print group was under-represented at the high income level and over-represented at the low income level (the two groups were comparable at a medium income level). The print group contained significantly more people receiving non-employment-related funding from the government (such as Social Security Disability Income) as compared to the Braille group.

Dr. Ryles's research on the education and employment outcomes for Braille readers, combined with the difference in confidence, self-efficacy, and reported independence of Braille readers, suggests that Braille is extremely valuable for those blind people who learn and use Braille in their lives. The results of this study suggest that teaching Braille as an original primary reading medium to children with low

vision may encourage them to develop the positive lifelong habit of reading as adults, enhance their later employment opportunities, and increase the possibility of financial independence.

The Future Is in Our Hands

There can be no doubt that the ability to read and write Braille competently and efficiently is the key to education, employment, and success for the blind. Despite the undisputed value of Braille, however, only about 10 percent of blind children in the United States are currently learning it. Society would never accept a 10 percent literacy rate among sighted children; it should not accept such an outrageously low literacy rate among the blind. The National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute is committed to the reversal of this downward trend in Braille literacy in order to ensure that equal opportunities in education and employment are available to all of the nation's blind.

The overall goals of this effort are that:

The number of school-age children reading Braille will double by 2015.

All fifty states will enact legislation requiring special education teachers of blind children to obtain and maintain the National Certification in Literary Braille by 2015.

Braille resources will be made more available through online sharing of materials, enhanced production methods, and improved distribution.

Courses in Braille instruction will be added to the curricula in high schools and colleges and offered to all students to ensure that this reading medium becomes an established, recognized method of achieving literacy in our nation.

The American public will learn that blind people have a right to Braille literacy so they can compete and assume a productive role in society. For over 150 years Braille has been recognized as the most effective means of reading and writing for the blind. Hundreds of thousands of blind people have found Braille an indispensable tool in their education, their work, and their daily lives, even as professionals in the field of blindness continued to debate the merits of the system. Certainly more empirical research is needed to break down the wall of misunderstanding that still stands between all too many blind people and proper Braille instruction.

The Braille codes and the technology to reproduce them can and will continue to improve.

But the lives of successful blind people testify to the usefulness of Braille, and in the face of that testimony the only truly professional and moral course of action is to ensure that all blind people have access to competent Braille instruction.

In the hearts and minds of blind people, no alternative system or new technology has ever replaced Braille where the rubber meets the road—in the living of happy, successful, productive lives. That is why the National Federation of the Blind is asking all who are concerned about the future prospects for blind children and adults in this country to help us make Braille literacy a reality for the 90 percent of blind children for whom reading is a struggle, if not an impossibility. The future of sighted children depends on a proper education, and the future of blind children is no different. Let us make the commitment that no blind child or adult who needs Braille as a tool in his or her arsenal of blindness techniques will be left without it.

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FOCUS PROFILE: LARRY WOODS AND BLIND CAMEL by Fred Wurtzel

This lively portrait speaks for itself.

Getting attention in today’s sea of attention grabbing schemes, shticks and gimmicks is not easy. Multi billion dollar corporations with

whimsical names like Apple, Yahoo and Google exemplify our consumer culture's demand to be amused while being served. One may not be surprised by a company moniker of Blind CAMEL. The herder, leader and amuser of this camel is the company President Larry Woods. Though the name is amusing, Larry's focus is service.

Larry inhabits a category of people which is far too small in our fast-paced and all-to-me-centered culture. Larry has what many would classify as a servant's heart. A business owner, a student ministry leader and a missionary, are among his life activities. A family man and community volunteer further express his life's mission of service to others.

Larry was born in Oklahoma City and grew up in Norman, the home of University of Oklahoma. He graduated from Norman High School and the University of Oklahoma. Larry's ambition was to be a meteorologist/TV weather reporter. Upon entry into college, he discovered that meteorology was part of an engineering and physics degree. He changed his major to Business Finance.

Like many people, Larry had low vision from birth but did not learn Braille until he was 30 years old. He experienced an attitude prevalent in our education system that unfortunately exists alive and well even today. The idea is that if a child could read print, even if slowly and only under narrow conditions, Braille is not introduced or taught. Larry and his mother joke that she should have his diploma and college degrees, too, since she read most of his textbooks to him.

During his senior year of college Larry became involved with Christian Ministries. He decided he wanted to go into Christian Ministries to College students. After receiving his Business Finance degree, he went to Florida for a year where he worked as a volunteer with students. He then entered Baptist Seminary to study ministry. At the time there was only one class in college ministry, so he left the Seminary after 1 year. He has picked up some more coursework since.

Larry followed the career pattern of a lot of bright, motivated and goal oriented young people. Following Seminar, he worked for 4 years in

Oklahoma in student ministries. He then took on the challenge of starting a new student ministry in Iowa. Larry is at this point nearly 30 years old and has had no what is known as “adjustment to blindness” services even though he had education assistance from the Oklahoma vocational rehabilitation agency. Like many blind people, Larry used his personality and wits to deal with life with low vision. And just like many blind people, his eyesight continued to get poorer. Fortunately, or providentially, his new ministry took him to Iowa where he ran into Craig Sleighton from the Iowa Commission for the Blind. Sleighton provided him with state-of-the-art technology of the time. More important, he talked to him about blindness and taught him Braille. At the time, Iowa was the brightest spot in rehabilitation for blind people. Dr. Kenneth Jernigan had turned a poor performing agency to the best in the nation by developing a philosophy of blindness that accompanied the technology and skills training. Skills and technology are useful tools, but unless an attitude of positive self esteem and confidence are present the tools will have limited value. Larry was able to benefit from the collective learning of a movement of blind people expressed through the Iowa Commission for the Blind.

After 4 years in Iowa, Larry took on another challenge. He moved to Lansing, Michigan where he started ministries at Michigan State University and Lansing Community College. One or two challenges aren't enough for some. Larry has undertaken international mission work to start a ministry to blind people in Ukraine and Africa.

Sometimes enough is not enough. Larry has called upon that Business Finance degree to start a business called Blind CAMEL Enterprises. An acronym is a pronounceable word made from the first letter or few letters of a number of words (SCUBA – Self Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus). An acrostic is a poem or verse where each line begins with a letter of the acrostic. An example is too long for this space. The CAMEL is a cross of these 2 types of abbreviations. It is a mission statement in one word.

C is for “card.” One of the business products is a line of Braille and large print greeting cards. These cards are sold in retail card shops and online from the Blind CAMEL web page.

A is for Accessibility. Taking the idea a step further, retailers are provided training about accessible products and services and ways to best serve blind customers and others. So, Larry's company is using a network of retailers to leverage his dedication to access and extend it to each of his retail outlets and their staffs.

M is for members. Blind CAMEL is a way that retail businesses who sell Blind CAMEL products can be recognized by having their businesses and services listed on the Blind CAMEL web page. These businesses include restaurants that have had their menus Brailled by Blind CAMEL Enterprises.

E is for Eye-line. Eye-Line is a collection of articles and helpful information available through the Blind CAMEL web site.

L is for "links." There are links on the Blind CAMEL Enterprises web site to reach more products and services for blind people and people who wish to reach blind customers.

Larry Woods is an interesting and accessible person. Readers are encouraged to contact him and his company to get Braille Transcription, Braille Greeting Cards and much more. Larry is just a plain nice guy to talk to. You may contact him through the Blind CAMEL Enterprises web site at blind-camel.com or meet him in person on the 3rd Monday of the month at 6:30 pm for the Lansing Chapter meeting of the NFB.

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KALAMAZOO CHAPTER REPORT by J. J. Meddaugh

Our Kalamazoo chapter just never stops!

The Kalamazoo chapter, in partnership with Michigan Citizen Action, was successful in helping to pass a countywide transit millage. This will help pay for bus service throughout the county and door-to-door service used by our members and the community.

The chapter also hosted a successful awareness night in the form of a pizza social for the Midwest Regional Goalball Tournament, held in

Kalamazoo last February. Teams from around the country enjoyed free pizza and refreshments courtesy of the chapter and were able to learn about the NFB and our programs.

The Kalamazoo chapter meets on the second Monday of the month at the First Presbyterian Church, 321 W South St. Meetings begin at 6:15 PM. For more information, call President, Tyler Merren at (269) 207-3000.

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BLINKY Part II by John Scott

John says there will be one more episode, so enjoy and stay tuned.

The stranger watched the approaching blind man walk purposefully down the quiet residential street toward him. His lips curled into an abstruse smile.

The distance between the two rapidly approaching figures closed quickly. One hugged the outer edge of the sidewalk, as he rhythmically tapped his cane with his steps synchronized with the left and right arcs formed by his cane. The other pedestrian while walking with a slight stoop, and long strides moved almost imperceptibly towards the inner edge of the sidewalk. They passed each other wordlessly, silently and resolutely.

Suddenly, and without any warning, the stranger turned and began to approach Blinky from the rear. Having a longer stride, the distance between them was closed quickly, and soon Blinky, the apparent subject being focused upon would be in reach.

The stranger thinks "What is this?" With unexpected alacrity, the blind man has spun around, stepped forward, and struck the stranger on the right side with his cane. He raised his right foot chest high, as he continued pivoting to his left. The movement enabled him to make a 90 degree turn, so the right side of his body was facing the stranger. It was done so quickly that the apparent predator was taken completely by surprise.

Blinky was very much afraid and very angry. The adrenaline pumping through his veins made him feel as if every muscle fiber in his body was firing. He was focused on only one objective. As his body whirled in response to the closely approaching apparent attacker behind him and the kinetic energy generated by his heightened awareness and emotions coursed their way through him, he entered into a near hypnotic state. After locating the exact position of the would-be offender, he knew he was to direct all thought and action on a visualized spot, just beyond the nearest point the attacker was in relationship to him. He was then to deliver the chosen Karate strike, he was taught by the Master instructor at the Dojo, with the speed, intensity, and force intended to destroy or severely damage an opponent. The culprit was only about two feet from him, when he began to strike with the right edge of his right foot.

Suddenly Blinky heard a voice. It was very loud. It was nearly a scream. It was a female voice. It was a voice that was vaguely familiar. The voice said "It's me!!!!" It was his wife's voice! It was louder than his frenetic yell as he was delivering his strike, in the manner he was taught in the Dojo. At the moment he commanded his foot to stop its accelerating downward thrust and attempted to jerk it back, he struck her. It was not nearly as hard as it could have been. Fortunately, she was wearing a heavy coat, which helped to absorb some of the force of his kick. He heard her grunt and gasp. She stumbled back a couple steps. She then said a bit angrily, "You hurt me!"

Blinky exploded. He shouted "Hurt You! I was trying to destroy you! Why did you come up behind me like that? You know better than to do something like that! You must have lost your mind!!!" She said stop yelling. You are disturbing the neighborhood. She had noticed porch lights were coming on, and people were peeking through the blinds and curtains of their windows.

Blinky spun around and began to walk toward his house. His wife followed behind him at a slower pace, and they both were steaming.

When he reached the corner, he did not stop. He walked right out into the street. He did not notice a car was coming. His wife saw the

car approaching and saw him walk right into its path. She shouted "Look Out!!!"

The driver of the car saw someone walk right out in front of him. He slammed on his brakes and tires squealed as the brakes locked and the car began to slide.

His wife's shout, the screech of rubber on the pavement, and the sound of a suddenly appearing automobile engine, snapped Blinky out of his inattentive funky mood. He could do nothing, except attempt to jump out of the way, just before the vehicle struck.

He was struck on the left side of his body in the area of his calf. Pain shot up his left side as his body began to cart wheel over the hood of the car. He threw his arm out and it struck the windshield of the vehicle. As he rolled off the hood of the car, he heard his wife screaming, but he was busy turning his body. He felt himself falling head first and he knew he had to try to break his fall with his hands.

He landed with a thud, but he hit hands first, then his chest smacked the pavement. His sunglasses flew from his face and skittered a few feet in front of him. Fearing getting rolled over by the car, he continued to roll to his left until his body struck the curb.

His wife ran to him and told him not to move, because he was attempting to sit up. The driver of the car jumped out and quickly ran around the front of his automobile. He slipped on Blinky's cane which was laying a couple feet in front of his vehicle. His mood changed at that moment from anger at the stupid SOB, who stepped out in front of him, to sorrow, shame, and fear after realizing he had hit a blind man. He approached Blinky apologizing profusely for hitting him and was relieved to find him sitting up. "I'm so sorry!! Are you alright!! Please don't move! Let me call an ambulance! Are you hurting any where? Please sir, listen to the lady! Don't move until we get some help."

Meanwhile Blinky was angry with himself. He believed it was his inattentiveness that caused the accident. He was embarrassed by the driver's solicitous apologies and offers of assistance.

His leg and arm hurt, but he did not think anything was broken, except for, perhaps his pride.

Suddenly he realized he no longer was wearing his sunglasses. He felt naked without them in front of the overly concerned driver. "Baby, will you please see if you can find my sunglasses." He would not have liked the look on his wife's face. She was thinking. You're worried about your damn sunglasses, and you were almost killed. She said nothing, but did walk over to the place on the street a few feet away, where she saw something appearing to have a reflective quality. It was his sunglasses and miraculously, they were not broken. She came back in time to hear Blinky tell the gentleman what to do. "Don't worry about me. All you need to do is give my wife your information." "You know, driver's license, registration, and proof of insurance." She wiped the glasses off with a Kleenex tissue, she had drawn from her pocket. "Here are your glasses," she said. Blinky reached out, and she placed them into his hand. He put them on. Blinky started to get up, and she said I think you should wait. He said "I'm alright. I'm just a bit sore." He attempted to stand and almost fell. Pain shot up his left leg from the weight, and he grimaced as he shifted his weight onto his right leg.

His wife said, "I'm taking you to the hospital." Blinky said rather sharply, "I don't need to go to the hospital. I will go to the doctor in the morning." His wife said to the driver, "I think we better call the police, or an ambulance. You can see he is not thinking clearly." The gentleman said, "She's right. I am not comfortable with the idea of leaving you out here." He offered to take Blinky to the hospital. Blinky made it clear to the gentleman that he was not going and explained he lived in the next block. It was obvious to his wife that Blinky was in stubborn mode. She defused the situation by saying to the gentleman, "I can go get our car and take him. You are welcome to follow, if you wish." She then turned to her husband and said in her sweetest of tones, reserved for situations like this, when Blinky was stuck on stupid, "Honey you have a choice. You can let this kind and concerned gentleman take you, or, you can wait for the police to come, or, you can let me take you to emergency; so they can check you out. Which one would you like to do dear?"

Blinky knew she had him over a barrel. He knew even if he said call the police, she would probably convince them to take him. Besides, his leg was killing him. He could not hobble up the next block to his home without help. So he probably should go to get something for the pain. He said, "Okay, I will go!"

His wife then turned to the gentleman and said, "Please wait here with him. I will be back here in five minutes." He agreed, and she ran up the street to their home.

(Conclusion in the next issue)

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