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Gabe Griffith, CCB President
Concord, CA
925-222-5762
president@ccbnet.org

Executive Office

California Council of the Blind

2143 Hurley Way Suite 250, Sacramento, CA 95825

916-441-2100 voice; 916-441-2188 fax

1-800-221-6359 Toll Free

Email: ccotb@ccbnet.org

Website: www.ccbnet.org

Ardis Bazyn and Alice Turner, Co-Chairs

Governmental Affairs Committee

800-221-6359 Toll Free;

governmentalaffairs@ccbnet.org

Webmaster

webmaster@ccbnet.org

Mike Keithley, Editor

650-386-6286

editor@ccbnet.org

Susan Glass, Associate Editor

408-257-1034

editor@ccbnet.org

Deb Runyan, proofing and large print production.

Andrea DeKlotz, CCB Happenings Editor

Email submissions for the CCB Happenings to:

submit.happenings@ccbnet.org.

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In accepting material for THE BLIND CALIFORNIAN, priority will be given to articles concerning the activities and policies of the California Council of the Blind and to the experiences and concerns of people who are blind or have low vision. Recommended length is 900 words, 1800 max.

The deadline to submit material for the summer 2021, issue of THE BLIND CALIFORNIAN is noon, May 15, 2021.

Non-members are requested and members are invited to pay a yearly subscription fee of \$10 toward the production and support of THE BLIND CALIFORNIAN.

Shop at Amazon, donate to CCB.

Access smile.amazon.com/, log on to your account and select California Council of the Blind as your charity.

Please send all address changes to the Executive Office.

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Editor's Corner

by Mike Keithley

Welcome to the spring Blind Californian, where the world is brightening; getting warmer, perhaps hot; spirits are rising; and Covid is waning. Daylight savings time sprung you forward, and I hope you didn't fall down. Believe me, I'd have trouble getting up!

With spring comes the 2021 ACB Legislative imperatives and Jeff Thom's optimistic Governmental Affairs Report. Regina Brink tells us about the rise of the IDC, and Deborah Armstrong extols the benefits of volunteering. The CAAVL is quite active,

and the CCB convention is just around a sharp corner!

You'll read Susan Glass' commentary on a blind poet's life with evolving technology, plus Daveed Mandell's big question: are we losing independence to technology?. And check out Ed and Toni Eames' South African Odyssey. Also note important changes in the masthead.

The BC has long provided us with a legacy of CCB's history. Please read the following request from Board of Publications member Daveed Mandell and

contact him if you have relevant information.

Daveed writes:

For decades, this magazine has served as a permanent record of CCB's history and achievements.

Unfortunately, we have lost more than twenty years of the BC's back issues, from 1988-2010. If

you have any of these issues, or know others who might have them, please contact Daveed Mandell, a member of the Publications Committee, and indicate which issues you have and in which formats: digital file, braille, large print and/or audio. His email address is daveedmandell@gmail.com. Thank you.

* * *

CAAVL's Role in the Nationwide Campaign for Blind Seniors

by Frank Welte

Even though the majority of people living with vision loss in the United States are older, blindness rehabilitation services to the senior community are severely underfunded. It has been

reported that current funding levels are only enough to meet three percent of the demand for those services. This funding shortage will get even worse as the senior blind population continues

to grow in the future. Anecdotal evidence indicates that healthcare providers, senior centers, nursing homes and other senior service organizations are not prepared to meet the specific needs of blind and visually impaired clients.

Our community is mobilizing to fight back against this deplorable state of affairs. The Aging and Vision Loss National Coalition, AVLNC, is a group of organizations in the blindness field that have come together to advocate for a tenfold increase in federal funding for services to older blind individuals and to promote a constellation of other initiatives to improve

services to this population.

Through our affiliation with ACB's Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, CAAVL (the California Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss), will actively participate in the AVLNC campaign for positive change in our state. We will help to survey our local Area Agencies on Aging to determine the extent of senior blind services in our communities. We will advocate for state and federal legislation and regulatory changes to improve these services, and we will encourage local service providers to fully integrate people with vision loss into their programs and activities.

Since all of us are, or eventually will be, members of the older blind community, each of us has a personal stake in advocating for better senior blind services by joining CAAVL and becoming active members of this growing CCB statewide affiliate.

Here's how to join California Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss.

To join, send your \$25.00 dues to our Treasurer, Denise Weddle, at the following address:

Denise Weddle
4058 Moore St.
Los Angeles, CA 90066

Also, we'll need your contact information for our member roster. We need the following information:

Name:

Home address:

Preferred phone number:

Preferred Email address:

Vision status (totally blind, legally blind, low vision, fully sighted):

Your preferred alternate media format (braille, large print, audio, Email):

***Disclosure status: (disclose, do not disclose):**

***You may elect to share your contact information with CAAVL committee chairs for their use in the conduct of official business, or to keep this information private. However, we are required to submit this information to the CCB office.**

Please send this information to Denise

**Weddle at the following
Email address: Email:
deaniew21@verizon.net**

**For more information,
please contact Frank
Welte, CAAVL's Interim**

**President, by email at
Frank.A.Welte@gmail.com
or by phone at (510) 541-
1442.**

**Join the CAAVLry
today!**

*** * ***

IDC, Becoming an Affiliate

by Regina Brink

We're dotting all the I's

And crossing every tiddle,

And each time we do this,

We shudder just a little.

Will we forget an important step

Or will the Constitution crash and burn?

Will we forget everything we knew

Or realize everything we still have to learn?

As the anticipation grows

And our fellow members call into virtual meetings,

We pray we can make a difference.

We pray our work will not be ignored or fleeting.

We remember the blind and low vision activists of all backgrounds

Who stepped up when it mattered,

Blazed the advocacy trail when it was a wilderness

And paved the way for the rungs of that ever present ladder

To be festooned with our dreams

And to be scaled with our determination.

We know diversity is a gift

That can only strengthen our organization.

We know there are layers of pain and layers of hurt

That many of us carry because of layers upon layers of discrimination.

IDC will continue to advocate for equity,

Inclusivity, diversity, and healing our nation.

Until the hatred is exposed and rejected,

Until the myth of color blindness is deflected,

Equality will elude us and we will pass this to our youth.

Join in celebration of this truth!

Join us in the hope and the fight

For Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asian, and POC to unite

With like-minded allies to be treated equally,

**To climb that ladder of dreams together in harmony
Born of the treatment of each person as of equal value
With equal rights in each layer of our community.
We will advocate for this and reach out to members, old
and new,
Toward a new reality born of respect and unity!
Come with us on this journey!
Be a part of IDC!**

*** * ***

2021 ACB Legislative Imperatives

The American Council of the Blind is the nation's leading member-driven organization for individuals who are blind and experiencing vision loss. With over 65 state and special-interest affiliates across the country, ACB is committed to increasing the security, independence, quality of life, and economic opportunity for Americans

who are blind and visually impaired, and ACB stands committed to advocacy that lifts up our values.

The following legislative imperatives represent several key issues in the 117th Congress that ACB believes will help us on our road to full independence and

participation in our society.

Secure Independence for Seniors and Medicare Beneficiaries

For more than a decade now, Medicare has refused to cover the cost of low-vision aids, due to an eyeglasses exclusion that prohibits the purchase of any durable medical good with a lens. While the regulatory exclusion was seen as cost-saving by not covering eyeglasses, it has had a negative impact on those who, through the use of special low-vision aids, could significantly increase their independence in the home. ACB believes that

adaptive low-vision aids can have a significant impact on an individual's ability to remain independent in the home. Such personal independence can have long-lasting effects toward aging in place, rather than necessitating costlier institutional services.

ACB calls on Congress to reintroduce the Medicare Demonstration of Coverage for Low Vision Devices Act, which would measure the various costs and benefits of removing the Medicare eyeglass exclusion. This bipartisan legislation is a smart approach to finding workable solutions that help seniors age in place. Offices in the House of Representatives interested

in supporting reintroduction of this legislation should contact Danielle Sumner in the office of Rep. Maloney (D-NY-12), or Shayne Woods in the office of Rep. Bilirakis (R-NY-12).

The Disability Access to Transportation Act

Congress must reauthorize the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act by September of 2021. The FAST Act fulfills the constitutional directive that dictates that investment in transportation and infrastructure is a core federal responsibility. It oversees the development and maintenance of roads, bridges, public transit, and

rails. As the language of the new bill is developed, language that would positively impact the transportation options and safety for the blind community must be included.

Specifically, ACB calls for the reintroduction and inclusion of the Disability Access to Transportation Act, or DATA Act. The DATA Act would provide greater flexibility in paratransit services to increase the independence and economic opportunity of disabled passengers; increase accessibility for pedestrian infrastructure; and modernize the U.S. Department of Transportation complaint process for consumers with disabilities. Offices

interested in supporting the DATA Act, and including it in the FAST Act reauthorization, should contact Katherine Lee in the office of Rep. Langevin (D-RI-02).

The Exercise and Fitness for All Act

For the quarter of Americans with a disability, equal access to fitness or exercise equipment and instruction remains elusive. As a result, people with disabilities are more likely to suffer from chronic health conditions including heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

ACB calls for the reintroduction of the Exercise and Fitness for All Act. This legislation would require exercise

and fitness facilities to provide a base level of accessibility for disabled consumers, both in the equipment as well as the instruction they provide. Offices wishing to support the Exercise and Fitness for All Act should contact Kalina Thompson in the office of Sen. Duckworth (D-IL) in the Senate, and Sarah Jackson in the office of Rep. DeSaulnier (D-CA-11), or Kevin Swanson in the office of Rep. Young (R-AK-At Large) in the House.

For questions or further information on the 2021 ACB Legislative Imperatives, please contact Clark Rachfal, ACB's Director of Advocacy and Governmental Affairs,

crachfal@acb.org, or by calling (202) 467-5081.

The American Council of the Blind greatly appreciates your support

on these critical issues for 2021, and we look forward to working with you during the remainder of the 117th Congress.

* * *

Governmental Affairs Report

by Jeff Thom

Despite the pandemic and all of the challenges that it has created, the struggle for equity and racial justice, the polarization in our nation, and the sheer level of uncertainty surrounding the world in which we live, it is an exciting time for those of us in the California Council of the Blind who enjoy advocating for the rights of and opportunities for low vision and blind Californians. By the time

you read this, approximately 30 CCB members will join others in ACB as participants in the ACB Legislative Seminar, where they will have virtual appointments with our members of Congress on issues that include the coverage of low vision aids under Medicare, transportation concerns, including paratransit, and the need for accessible exercise equipment. A large percentage of these

participants have never participated in the in-person Capitol Hill visits during prior years. I hope and expect that this new experience will light the flame of advocacy in even more CCB members, and have a long-term impact on our organization. Many thanks to each and every one of you who will be zooming to Capitol Hill, and a special shout-out to Gabe and our Governmental Affairs Committee co-chairs, Alice Turner and Ardis Bazyn.

However, our involvement with federal legislation does not mean we are slowing down right here in California. Many CCB members, led by Gene Lozano, Regina Brink, and Stephanie Watts, joined the battle for

more accessible housing units as a condition for the granting of tax credits. Although we have far to go in this arena, we were successful in obtaining an increase the accessible housing unit requirements, and we can be proud that CCB was a prominent participant in that effort. Regina is also leading CCB's participation in the battle to ensure that state stimulus checks, which are contained in the 2021 Governor's budget proposal, are provided to SSI recipients. Finally, having Stephanie and Regina as part of our Governmental Affairs team enables CCB to have a far more robust bandwidth. We can navigate scheduling conflicts and

ensure our voice is heard on far more issues than in the past.

The remainder of this article will focus on three items: electric scooters, Medi-Cal coverage of vision rehabilitation services, and accessible drug labeling.

Everyone is aware of the safety hazard that "shared mobility devices", including electric scooters and other similar vehicles, create for pedestrians and especially those of us with vision loss. Whether we are hit by one, or fall over one that is left in the middle of the sidewalk by the user, such incidents can lead to significant injury. I would love to enact requirements for heavy fines for anyone not parking such a device in a

docking station, but at this point in time we do not have the practical ability to pass such a bill. I would note, however, that your city or county does have such authority, so get out there and make sure that if they allow these devices, you have the most stringent regulations possible to protect pedestrians. That doesn't mean we are not going to work on this issue, and that is why CCB, under the authorship of Assembly Member Reginald Jones-Sawyer of Los Angeles, has introduced AGB371, which will do two things. First, current law requires liability insurance when these devices are rented, but this insurance is not required to cover pedestrians. AB371 would

require that this insurance would cover personal injury or property damage suffered by a pedestrian when there was negligence involved on the part of either the company or the user. Secondly, it would require that every device contain tactile identification enabling people who are blind or have low vision to know who to contact in case of an accident. We will certainly need your advocacy to ensure that this legislation passes, and we especially want to hear from those of you who have either been injured, or just had access issues due to these devices being in the middle of the sidewalk.

A second area in which we hope to achieve

results this year is the CALAIM program. This program is another initiative to reform Medi-Cal, which provides health care coverage to millions of Californians, many of whom have vision loss. One of the things this new program would do is allow Medi-Cal managed care plans to voluntarily provide or arrange for the provision of an array of services for which they could be reimbursed. It is our goal to work with the Newsome Administration to ensure that this service mix include vision rehabilitation services that are currently provided under the Older Individuals who are Blind program, including orientation and mobility services, technology

training, daily living skills instruction, self-advocacy training, and peer support. If a managed care plan is authorized to contract with one of our blindness agencies to provide these services, this will have the potential of significantly impacting public funding for these services.

Finally, here is a brief update on our efforts at handling the thorny issue of accessible prescription drug labeling. Although significant progress has been made with large chain stores and mail-order pharmacies, there is still much left to do, especially with respect to

smaller, local pharmacies. We are working on plans to ask the Legislature to bring the stakeholders, including ourselves, together, to hammer out a solution. If this does not work in an expeditious manner, we will certainly take more aggressive action. More to come, as we finalize our plans.

In conclusion, your help is vital not only on the issues in which we are currently engaged, but in order to bring to light other concerns that you believe the organization should be attempting to tackle. Working together, we can make a difference.

* * *

A South African Odyssey

by Toni and Ed Eames

As we crashed through the South African bush in an open Land Rover, we could hear ranger John's radio receiver crackling the news that a pride of lions had been sighted fairly close to our position. Slowing the vehicle to a crawl, John warned us to be quiet. Suddenly we heard a shared exclamation from the other members of our party--the lions had been spotted and the vehicle came to a halt. For Ed and me, the dreamlike quality of this encounter with wild animals in the African bush was reinforced as

members of our group described the scene in barely audible whispers. Everyone seemed to hold his/her breath as an adult female lion sauntered alongside our vehicle and crossed the road in front of us. At one point she was no more than eight feet away.

This rendezvous with lions was just one of many memorable experiences we had during our two day visit at Exeter Game Lodge. While crashing through the bush, we came almost within touching distance of leopards, zebras, giraffes, elephants, and hundreds

of impala. What gave these adventures a dreamlike quality was the inability to touch or hear these animals. Except when Ed climbed down from the Land Rover to feel the footprint left by a lion who had recently strolled by, the reality of the situation was filtered through the descriptions of our sighted friends.

When we share photographs of this dream like trip with friends back home, they ask where our guide dogs were during this adventure. We explain that although Echo and Escort have accompanied us to many American zoos, their presence in the African bush was another story. While we were having our untouchable dreams, they were quietly

awaiting our return at the lodge. Although the wild animals in the preserve are used to Land Rovers filled with people, they are not exposed to dogs, and we agreed with the Exeter manager that it would be a good idea to let them relax back in our room.

Fortunately, we have been able to obtain a tactile impression of many of these African animals. The rangers working for Exeter, a wild game lodge on the outskirts of Kreuger National Park, had collected the skulls of many of the animals inhabiting the area. Examining the skulls, jaw bones, horns and antlers of the many varieties of deer, helped turn our dreamlike Land Rover trips into a more realistic

image of what they were like. In addition, a taxidermied lion pouncing on an impala, exposed us to what raw and savage nature was all about.

Both Ed and I grew up in New York City where animals such as those roaming the South African bush were only found in zoos. Love of animals was a central theme in my childhood. As a young blind child, my mother took me on frequent outings to the Bronx Zoo, but could not adequately describe the variety of animals on display. Always anxious to encourage me to explore the world around me, my mother encouraged touching objects in the environment. Since lions, tigers and bears were not

accessible to touch, she began purchasing realistic ceramic, wood, glass, plastic and brass miniatures to teach me about the structural differences among various animal species. Over the years this collection has grown and expanded, and I have become expert at identifying animal statuary by touch. On the other hand, Ed, sighted until his early 40s, visited zoos and received his animal information through visual images.

One of the attractions of Fresno California where we eventually moved, was the presence of a wonderful zoo with an understanding director. Dr. Paul Chaffee was fascinated with the idea of transforming my

knowledge of animal statuary into knowledge from real-life experience. He invited us to visit behind the scenes to get "in touch" with many of the exhibits. Over the years, we have been able to touch elephants, Galapagos tortoises, spider monkeys, skunks, an oryx, ferrets, and a variety of birds. Being able to feed apples to Chauncey and Nosey in the elephant holding area was a thrill, although Ed was a bit apprehensive one day when Chauncey wrapped her trunk around him with the message that it wasn't time for Ed to leave! Paul relished our obvious pleasure and excitement at these encounters with his zoo residents.

Realizing our passion for animal interaction went far beyond what was available in Fresno, Paul arranged with directors at other zoos where we got to touch a sea lion, emu, clouded leopard, chinchilla, kinkajou, octopus, armadillo, snakes, lizards and some insects.

I also enjoyed exploring a full-sized stuffed buffalo on display in a South Dakota museum and a lion at the Theodore Roosevelt museum in New York.

The hunt for touchable animals has been enhanced by our careers as writers and lecturers. During our travels, we take every opportunity to visit zoos and museums with

touchable animal exhibits. Thus, we certainly couldn't resist the chance to go to South Africa with its wondrous array of exotic animals!

Our two-day stay at elegant and lavish Exeter, a haven for animal lovers, exceeded all expectations. Even after returning to the lodge following the Land Rover expeditions, the presence of untamed and free-roaming animals was an ever-present reality. Monkeys inhabited trees near the veranda during the morning hours hoping

to swoop down on some unprotected food. At dawn and dusk, a hippopotamus drank at the river skirting the compound. It was apparent that just outside Exeter Lodge was a world as far removed from our childhood homes in New York City as one could imagine.

We brought home many new wild animal miniatures. The next time we visit the elephants in our Fresno zoo, we can tell them we met their relatives in South Africa!

* * *

Building Our Future...

Remembering Our Past

The 2021 CCB Virtual Convention is Almost Here!

by Sarah Harris

The 2021 CCB Virtual Conference and Convention is right around the corner. The Convention Planning Committee and other great folks have been hard at work putting together a fun-filled month of activities!

Preceding the Pre-Convention, you can get Zoom Ready with beginners and advanced classes on March 30 and April 1, the Membership Committee will kick us off

on the evening of April 5th followed by numerous Affiliate, Committee, and recreational events.

The main event will start at 6:00 pm on Thursday, April 22nd leading off with a discussion about our CCB History and other fun surprises. We will have valuable panel discussions, Advocacy Workshops, Elections, Virtual Hospitality Rooms, the CCB Awards Banquet, Door Prizes, and so much

more. We wrap up with our traditional business meeting on Sunday, April 25th.

This year we are happy to announce that you will be able to receive the Program in the format of your choice. There are limited copies available of Braille, Large Print, and Audio versions. The Braille Program was made possible by The Braille Project and Transcribing Mariners. The printing of the Large Print Program was donated by an anonymous donor. The Audio Version was recorded by the awesome

team of Guillermo Robles and Steve Bauer. And of course, you will be able to find the electronic versions available for download on the CCB website. I want to thank Annette Carter for her fantastic formatting skills and dealing with my last-minute edits along the way. Annette, you really made everything look beautiful and readable!

As you read this, registration is most likely already open. So, don't delay, register today! Visit the CCB Website for more information.

* * *

What Volunteering Can Do For You

by Deborah Armstrong

So often when we are asked to volunteer, we are told how much we can help the organization. They appeal to us by suggesting that giving back is good for the community.

And it is. But thinking selfishly, remember that as much as you give, volunteer work, appropriately selected, can give back to you too.

When my sighted friend Linda began volunteering at the humane society front desk, she had never used a computer. She was expected to enter data into the society's database.

She was asked to format documents in Microsoft word. And to top it all off, she also had a receptionist software application which tracked volunteers she was expected to master. Linda loved animals and was not afraid to walk fierce Rottweilers or work with pit bulls. But she found herself working with frightening and unfamiliar machines.

Linda quickly found her footing. As a senior citizen, she'd been afraid to apply for jobs that required computer skills since computers weren't regularly used when she'd

been a secretary. Though her knowledge of shorthand was no longer useful, she found her touch typing skills were, and she soon landed temporary secretarial work to boost her income.

If you are concerned that your office abilities are not up to snuff for an employer, you can look for work that expands those skills. Organizations that need volunteers are more willing to explore accommodations than employers who might decide your blindness is more of a barrier than it actually is. Plus the skills you learn in the volunteer job boost your resume when you begin to seek out paid employment. In her volunteer job, my friend Mary learned to use

Outlook with her screen reader, and she also got to practice scheduling appointments for others. She made errors but everyone was patient because they understood she was new to computers. Later, she was able to help a new hire, who was sighted to master the tricky parts of appointment scheduling.

When I volunteered a few hours a week for a suicide prevention center, I discovered the software to track calls was difficult to use with JAWS. But I was just learning to write JAWS scripts so I wrote one, which wasn't perfect, but which solved the access issues. When I was asked to write a blog for another organization, I had another skill to learn. And

in my volunteer jobs, it was often easier to get people to read print to me because there were other volunteers who were often between tasks and needed something to do.

When I took on my current volunteer work as editor of Northern California's golden retriever rescue newsletter, I got tons of pictures with the articles that I requested. People love pictures of golden retrievers. But everyone had a different way of sending them to me. Some used email attachments. Some embedded them right in the email. Others sent me a google doc with pictures inside. So I had to learn different ways using my screen reader to

access and extract those photos.

But growing more tech savvy is only one of the benefits. Many volunteer positions require people and organizational skills. Mastering the logistics of planning events, motivating others, communicating both verbally and in writing can make you a more well-rounded person. Even if you don't need these skills for an employer, it can better help you to co-exist effectively with family and friends.

Volunteering gives you the chance to try something new with less fear of reprisal. You might not wish to confront your sister about some behavior you find

unacceptable but you can practice this with another volunteer you barely know who also has behavior you find objectionable. Maybe you want to try out a new time management tool, a different way of taking notes, or anything that seems kind of scary, getting your feet wet with a small volunteer job can be just the thing.

When Alex lost his sight, he felt awkward and stupid. Even after he got a guide dog, he told me he felt like everyone was watching him when he walked around. But then he was asked to become a volunteer docent at a museum. At first he didn't think he could. What if he lead the whole group in the wrong direction? But after he went on a few

tours with experienced docents, he realized they laughed off their mistakes. "We're supposed to go to the reptiles before we look at mummies" one told the group, "But I forgot how much the kids want to see dinosaurs." Alex realized getting turned around was no big deal.

When my Mom developed macular degeneration, she trained as a transit ambassador for Roseville's growing public transit. She knew it was just a matter of time before she would be unable to drive, and transit ambassadors help citizens learn to read transit maps and ride the buses around town. By the time her vision declined, she was very comfortable with the

public transit in placer county.

When my husband trained to be a volunteer at Kaiser hospital, he was expected to completely know the facility so he could assist any patients who were lost. Because I often accompanied him I also learned the complete layout. This really helped when I didn't feel well and had to find an office, pharmacy or urgent care. When he got sick, I was able to easily navigate the facility on my own to provide him much needed assistance.

When my friend Henry decided his old dog was getting depressed, he joined our chapter of Love on a Leash which provides pet therapy for nursing homes, hospitals and even

schools to help children build confidence in reading. Now they even visit colleges to help students overcome the stress of exam week by having pets to hug. Henry says he has so many pet therapy visits they both are more busy than when he worked full time. He also got involved on the planning commission, and due to the insights he got working with seniors whose mobility is compromised, he advocated for longer walk signals, more lights at intersections and more wheelchair ramps. Henry can still drive but his sensitivity to the community has helped many who cannot. And for Henry who previously was painfully shy, this

volunteer work has given him confidence and the realization that his life wasn't over at retirement.

My first volunteer job was counselor at a 4-H camp for sighted kids. I was worried about trying to get around with my cane. Then I realized there was no reason the little kids couldn't guide me. I was in charge of the group because I was older, not because I had sight, and having been to this camp for many years, I knew my way around. But with rivers and cliffs, it was safer for me to have a sighted guide.

The children quickly learned to love their guiding assignment and clamored for the chance to be next. By describing the tree we were standing in

front of they learned to observe nature. By bringing their scavenger items to me to touch they learned that my disability just required a different way of doing things and they too discovered they didn't all have to do things using the same method. I developed leadership skills at that camp by managing conflict and helping kids get over their fears. My Mom had encouraged me to apply and push for a job as a counselor at a camp for sighted children instead of the easier job working at a summer camp for blind kids. Fifty years later, I am still glad she did.

After high school, I lived for a year in Germany as an exchange student. I volunteered as

an English tutor which taught me a lot of German because I had to explain so many of our strange idioms. I also volunteered as a receptionist and had to answer phones and type messages which also forced me to learn more.

Volunteering is a good way to make mistakes. Once when I was young, I violated the privacy of a patient and I was fired from my volunteer job. I learned a valuable lesson about respect, and I never made that mistake again. How fortunate, as a teen I had not made that error in a paid position! I am protecting the privacy of the individuals mentioned in this article too, by changing their names and a few details of their stories.

Perhaps a mistake is less of a sin than it is a simple goof. Perhaps you tried a calendar app that doesn't work as well as you expected. Or maybe you planned an event and the meeting room was too small, or its rental cost your group more than you had intended. A supervisor of volunteers is more likely to overlook errors because it's clear you are still learning.

Volunteering is a great way to make friends and broaden your circle of acquaintances. As blind folk we often need to get help from the sighted but depending on close friends and family for everything we need can be unfair. Once when I was tutoring a fellow college student, he asked how he

could give back and I asked if he'd mind crawling under my house to see where a plumbing leak was coming from. He did, and it saved me a lot of money. I belong to a ham radio club, so when I have a tech issue I can ask for help from a variety of other technically oriented people with a strong tradition to assist. Another friend, involved in boy scouts has plenty of strong young men at her disposal when she needs something heavy lifted. My work with golden retriever rescue entitles me to many free dog training classes where I meet lots of other professionals involved in shelters, canine sports and breed rescue. If I need a dog sitter, there are many

responsible dog lovers where my pet can go for a visit and I don't need to shell out for doggy daycare.

During this time of Covid, it is even more important not to become isolated. Volunteering gives you the chance to do something important while also boosting your own mental health. To find opportunities, talk with friends, the friends of friends, community organizers, senior centers and volunteer bureaus in your town. Ask at community organizations, political affiliations and social clubs. Organizations are always in need of willing help, so get out there and enjoy the way helping others can benefit you!

* * *

The Blind Poet in an Age of Evolving Technology

by Susan Glass

The call for manuscripts popped up one morning in my email inbox. It came from the Creative Writing Opportunities (CRWROPPS) email list to which I'd subscribed for the last four years. Slate Roof Press was accepting manuscripts for an annual chapbook poetry contest. The winner would receive the \$500 Elyse Wolf prize, and 350 copies of her/his manuscript, published as a hand-sewn, letter quality book; he or she would also join the collective for three years, helping to promote the books of

those poets ahead of her in the publication cycle. She'd join the other members in critiquing colleagues' manuscripts and vetting manuscripts for subsequent contests.

I had always dreamed of participating in a writers' collaborative. I had also attended graduate school at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst, and the education I received there forever shaped my thinking, my teaching career, and my writing. Submitting my poetry to a writing collaborative based in

western Massachusetts felt like returning to a beloved childhood home where the warmth of the elders who had raised and nurtured me still resonated.

The poetry I'd composed during the last 30 years lived variously on braille paper, typing paper, Versabrailles, Brailnote mPowers, computers, and Braille Sense notetakers. I'd saved the poems as BRF, TXT, RTF, BRL, DOC, and DOCX files. Each saved document reflected the quirks of the technology that had created it. Thus, as I selected the poems that I would ultimately submit to Slate Roof's contest, I found myself retracing not just my writing process, but also its intersections

with the technological history and technology that had brought it into being.

For several weeks, I retrieved, converted, reformatted, and revised poetry files. For several weeks more I edited and proofread, checked facts using Google and online encyclopedias, consulted the online Oxford English Dictionary for the most historically accurate and thorough definitions of words, and visited online poetry glossaries to be sure that I was properly using a Pantoum form, line enjambment, or conceit.

When at last my manuscript was assembled and properly saved on my Braille Sense notetaker, I printed a copy

using a laser printer that my father had acquired for me some five years earlier. I then scanned and listened to the manuscript using a Xerox Reading Edge (yes, they still exist). As satisfied as I guessed I ever would be with the final product, I asked my friend and teaching colleague, Julie, to read through the manuscript to be sure of its professional appearance. This done, she helped me stamp and address its mailing envelope, and off it went to Northfield, Massachusetts.

On a balmy Tuesday night in mid October 2016, in the middle of doing laundry, I received a phone call from Cindy Snow, a Slate Roof member to say they'd

chosen Listening Blind to a Bewick's Wren as the contest winner. I was thrilled. I'm still thrilled. Participating in a writers' collective is as enriching as I always imagined it would be. I've made new friends whose writing and knowledge of craft is broadening mine. As we work together, we bridge the 3,000 miles between us with technology, Google Hangouts, Zoom, Facetime, emails, conference calls, and good old fashioned one-on-one phone conversations. We share contest manuscripts using Google Drive and Drop Box. Of course it's most fun when we see one another in person. When my manuscript was chosen as the contest

winner in 2016, I flew to Amherst to meet everyone in the group. Now, when we are on a call together, the laughter and voices and nuances of each person ring true even over distance.

As a blind writer, I'm struck by both the independence, and the access to writing communities that technological advancements have afforded me. Twenty years ago, learning about writing opportunities like the one offered by Slate Roof Press would have involved trips to libraries with sighted readers to peruse magazines and Writers Market reference books for information about presses seeking manuscripts. Limited

Internet resources and limited access to the net via braille and screen reading technology would have required that we find and read hard copies of publications in order to determine whether or not my work might match their needs. Nowadays, most magazines and small presses have an Internet presence and an online submission process. Current braille and screen reading technology make independent access to this information fairly easy. Braille access to word processing means that I can do most of my manuscript editing without assistance. I still attend local readings and poetry writing workshops; in fact, they are essential to my work. But how wonderful it

is to be able to participate in a writing collective that's on the opposite coast of the United States! This takes the sting out of

writerly solitude, and expands the meaning and possibilities of a writing community.

* * *

Library Adventures

by Maile George

I suspect I'm not alone when I write that I've come to appreciate my talking book library more than ever over the past twelve months. When I download and start listening to a new digital book, I'm presented with soon to be explored places, interesting people and creatures, and mind-expanding ideas and perspectives. Yet despite my intergalactic and cross-continental adventures, I don't run the

risk of being exposed even once to COVID-19! In some ways, enjoying a book is similar to serving on the Northern California Braille and Talking Book Library User Advisory Council (BUAC).

Upon the encouragement of a CCB friend and former BUAC member, Warren Cushman, I submitted an application in 2018, was interviewed, and thrilled when I was invited to join the BUAC shortly

thereafter. Since then, I've become acquainted with a variety of interesting people, learned much from our guest speakers and other council members and their guide dogs, and, until last March, had the opportunity to travel via Amtrak every three months to the California State Library in Sacramento.

If you get turned on by meeting people and exploring innovative ways to bring books and library services to those who are blind, low vision or others with print disabilities, read the announcement below:

The Northern California Braille and Talking Book Library (BTBL), which serves blind and low vision residents and persons

with other print disabilities in Northern California counties, is seeking applicants for the Braille and Talking Book Library User Advisory Council (BUAC). The counties served by the BTBL include Alameda, Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Contra Costa, Del Norte, El Dorado, Glenn, Humboldt, Inyo, Lake, Lassen, Marin, Mariposa, Mendocino, Merced, Modoc, Mono, Monterey, Napa, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Benito, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Solano, Sonoma, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tuolumne, Yolo, and Yuba.

To learn more about this opportunity, please

find the BUAC by-laws and online application form at: <http://www.library.ca.gov/btbl/advisory-council/>

Qualified individuals may apply throughout 2021, or until all open seats are filled.

The BUAC is enriched by a strong representation of the diverse range of ethnic, racial, cultural, and print disability demographics in Northern California. Patrons who are U.S. Veterans, bilingual Spanish speakers, persons of color, and persons with organic reading disabilities such as dyslexia, young adults, and parents of minors with print disabilities, and patrons who possess other physical disabilities that prevent them from

reading conventional print are strongly encouraged to apply. Council member terms last for 2 years.

The BUAC meets four times per year with all travel expenses paid/reimbursed when the council can safely meet in person at the California State Library in Sacramento. Currently, the council holds meetings via Zoom.

The purpose of the Council is to provide advice to the Northern California Braille and Talking Book Library. Council members have the opportunity to advise and make recommendations to management pertaining to possible improvements to library services; however, the Council is not a policy-making body.

For more information
about the BTBL or the
BUAC:

Please contact the
library by phone:

1-800-952-5666

Or by Email:

BTBL@library.ca.gov

* * *

Accessibility to the Visual World: The New Dependence?

by Daveed Mandell

As a blind child growing up during the 1950s and 1960s, my parents, teachers, and several blind adults constantly told me that I must become independent. They said I had to learn independent living skills in order to manage on my own with a minimum of help from sighted people. I would have to prove to myself and to the world at large

that blindness did not mean helplessness.

So I learned independent living skills and worked hard to become as independent as possible. I was proud of my accomplishments and very much appreciated the lessons taught me as a child.

Let's move forward to the more complex, technology-driven world of the 21st century. Much

work is being done to make the world more accessible to everyone. As its complexity grows, so too does the world's visual content, much of which remains inaccessible to blind and visually impaired individuals.

Sounds wonderful, right? Nonetheless, several questions arise. Is this a positive development, or have we embarked on the road to a new dependence? Does expanded accessibility to the world around us necessarily require greater dependence? Is there a conflict between

accessibility and independence? Are the lessons I learned growing up as a blind child out of touch, out of date?

I don't know all the answers to these questions. It is so tempting to call AIRA or Be My Eyes and get immediate assistance. No stress, no pain. I can then move on to deal with other aspects of my life. But the voices of yesteryear sometimes nag at me and tell me that I should be careful not to sacrifice the independence I worked so hard to gain.

* * *

Solving The Health Care Web Portal Puzzle

by Doug and Patti Rose, Humboldt Council of the Blind

Having access to information is empowering. It turns out though, that not all information is created equal, nor is access to information equal. Today many of my health care providers offer electronic web access. A portal is a website patients can use to make appointments, communicate with health care providers, review bills, and review health records.

I have three different portals and all have varying degrees of useful data and varying degrees

of screen reader friendliness. This is to be expected since these are web pages. But even my sighted wife who is an experienced web user finds these portals poorly designed. She finds the default font is very small, links are poorly shown, and there are many non-functioning options.

At first I thought the non-functioning parts were somehow caused by my screen reader, so I started a dialog with the support staff for one of the web portals. I told them of my trouble navigating with

a screen reader. I was pleased that I could actually dialog with the technical support people. This was at least encouraging because frequently I have contacted a web master with a concern and never receive a reply.

Sometimes the biggest trick is finding out who to contact about a web issue. In this case not only was I able to exchange email messages about my problem, but the host company scheduled a phone call where I walked them through my issue. They performed the same tasks on their computer and found that their web page was not performing as designed. It wasn't me and my screen reader after all! I also discovered that

the host company programs a template of the portal and different health care providers customize the menus and functions. This is just one example of how the portal puzzle is created.

I have encountered other issues too. Some physicians are listed as having contact options, but the message you send them is never read. Some physicians say they just don't have the time to spend on the email system.

Another issue is that the information that appears on my portal is not consistent even though my providers are in the same health care system. Sometimes a test result will be posted for my review, while at other

times it is as though I never had the procedure.

After-procedure instructions are not accessible either. They are set up to send print instructions home with the patient and cannot even put them on the portal. On one occasion, I got a nurse that did send follow-up instructions via email. But she had to bypassed the portal, and I suspect an email message is not per protocol. My hat is off to her for understanding what I need and going out of her way to make my instructions accessible.

One would think that at least the billing and payment portal would be well designed as it is such an important function, but it too is inconsistent. On one occasion, they needed

a document and I couldn't upload it to the portal. They wanted it faxed but I don't have a fax, and when I took it to their office, it disappeared into the ether.

When accessible and working correctly, my patient health care portal has been helpful. I can review my test results and sometimes read them before I talk to the doctor. That makes virtual doctor visits easier as I know ahead of time what the doctor is talking about and I can participate in my own health care decisions. I know that not everyone is fortunate to have an accessible computer, and thus are at a disadvantage when accessing their electronic health care data.

The bottom line is this!
If you enjoy puzzles, sign
up for a health care patient
portal. Although they offer

some convenience, they
will fill your spare time
while you follow your
covid stay-at-home orders.

* * *

CCB Board Meeting Minutes

Respectfully submitted by Linda Porelle, CCB
Secretary

**California Council of
the Blind**

**Open Board Meeting:
Thursday, November
12, 2020**

President Gabe Griffith
called the meeting to order
at 7:33 PM.

Roll Call:

Present:

President, Gabe Griffith;

**1st Vice President,
Sarah Harris;**

**2nd Vice President, Rob
Turner;**

Secretary, Linda Porelle;

Treasurer, Lisa Thomas;

Immediate Past

President, Judy Wilkinson.

Directors:

Steve Bauer;

Christy Crespin;

Nelly Emerson;

Larry Gassman;

Pam Metz;

Guillermo Robles;

Jeff Thom;

Penny Valdovinos;

Frank Welte.

Agenda

- 1. Call to order.**
- 2. Roll call and introduction of guests, Linda Porelle.**
- 3. Additions to and adoption of agenda, Gabe Griffith.**
- 4. Minutes September and October, Linda Porelle.**
- 5. Treasurers report, Lisa Thomas.**
- 6. Newel Perry report, Mitch Pomerantz.**
- 7. President's report, Gabe Griffith.**
- 8. Onthemuv update, Judy Wilkinson.**
- 9. CCB 2021 convention update, Sarah Harris.**
- 10. Members sound off.**

Christy moved and Linda seconded the

motion to adopt the proposed meeting agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

Judy moved and Christy seconded the motion to approve the minutes for the September 10 and October 8 open board meeting and the October 27 executive board meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Guillermo moved and Larry seconded the motion to approve the November treasurer's report. The motion passed unanimously.

Lisa reported that we received the first Energy Upgrade California (EUC) payment and will receive another one in the next few weeks. We also received a quarterly MMS

payment from ACB as well.

Larry moved and Steve seconded the motion to accept the Newel Perry Trust report as presented by Mitch Pomerantz. The motion passed unanimously. This report covers the period from June 1 to September 30, 2020. Going forward, these reports will be presented at our first CCB board meeting after Mitch receives each Morgan Stanley quarterly report.

On May 3, the balance in the Newel Perry Trust was \$115,932.85. On September 30, the balance was \$127,384.32, an increase of \$11,451.47 or 9.9% over the preceding four months.

**President's Report—
Gabe Griffith**

James Collins is joining a statewide Home Owners Association (HOA) group, which will broaden his base of contacts for the EUC grant.

Gabe is working on developing a job description for the EUC internships.

The publications committee will be composing an appeal letter again this year. We will interview Stephanie Watts and Steve Bauer for this year's letter.

The Budget and Finance Committee will prepare a proposed 2021 budget to be presented at our December 10 board meeting.

**Onthemuv—Judy
Wilkinson**

We still have a few sample sit mills left for \$169.

We are getting our site connected with Onthemuv. The sites will be linked with a landing page. The manuals will be there as well. We can also use some of their marketing. In addition, we'll be able to offer a six month PayPal payment option. The business committee asked for a small amount of funding in the new CCB budget.

Patrick from Onthemuv connected us us to a contact at SCORE, who provided additional contacts as potential business consultants. The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) also has a business program

we can contact for guidance.

Judy will be setting up a separate bank account for our Onthemuv project. She thanked Steve M., Steve B., Jeff and Lisa for their involvement with Onthemuv.

**Convention Update—
Sarah Harris**

The convention save the date announcement has been sent. The convention theme will be Building the Future, Remembering Our Past.

Sarah is seeking requests for special interest affiliate pre-convention meeting dates in April.

Member Sound Off

Christy asked Lisa about fund-raising report forms, noting that

chapters need help in this area. Lisa will set up a call in December to review the process.

Guillermo asked if the form should cover a calendar year. The answer is Yes. Lisa has streamlined the report form this year.

Regina is conducting a letter writing seminar about proposed increases in affordable housing that are currently under discussion.

Jeff noted that he is now president of the Disability Rights California (DRC) board and that we were praised by them for our work on important issues facing the disability community.

Vita wants more muting during statewide meetings.

Chris says there's closed captioning. He said that CTEBVI met with APH to discuss their latest convention. Chris asked to hear people's opinions and suggested we could get more engaged. He wants more parents and kids involved as well. Chris's email address is: cfendrick34@gmail.com

Niki offered to read financial reports for Mitch. We let her know that Mitch has his own readers and needs to maintain confidentiality for the Newel Perry Trust.

The meeting adjourned at 8:21 PM.

California Council of the Blind

**Open Board Meeting:
Thursday, December
10, 2020**

**President Gabe Griffith
called the meeting to order
at 7:32 PM.**

Roll call

Present:

President, Gabe Griffith;

**1st Vice President,
Sarah Harris;**

**2nd Vice President, Rob
Turner;**

Secretary, Linda Porelle;

Treasurer, Lisa Thomas;

Immediate Past

President, Judy Wilkinson;

Directors:

Steve Bauer;

Christy Crespin;

Nelly Emerson;

Larry Gassman;

Pam Metz;

Guillermo Robles;

Jeff Thom;

Frank Welte.

Absent:

Penny Valdovinos.

Agenda

- 1. Call to order, Gabe Griffith.**
- 2. Roll call and introduction of guests, Linda Porelle.**
- 3. Additions to and adoption of agenda, Gabe Griffith.**
- 4. Minutes for November 2020, Linda Porelle.**
- 5. 2021 CCB budget, Lisa Thomas.**
- 6. Announcements.**
- 7. Members sound off.**

Linda moved and Steve seconded the motion to adopt tonight's proposed meeting agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

Guillermo moved and Nelly seconded the motion to accept the November 12 meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Jeff moved and Guillermo seconded the motion to approve the proposed CCB budget for 2021 with minor changes. The motion passed unanimously.

Summary:

Lisa began by thanking the members of the budget committee: Kevin Berkery, Rex Ransom, Gabe Griffith and Judy Wilkinson.

The total projected revenue for 2021 is \$235,650.00.

The total projected expenses are \$223,795.00.

The projected net income is \$11,855.

Concerns were raised about confidentiality when discussing salaries, the large size of the travel budget for our contractor, and the need to plan for an audit as soon as conditions allow.

Announcements

Sarah announced that the 2021 convention registration fee will be \$25.

Jeff announced that the ACB leadership seminar will be virtual and held in late February with two days for training and meetings and three days for legislative

appointments. The registration fee will be \$20 or \$25. We won't have the legislative imperatives until late January or early February.

Christy announced that there's more time for ordering from Pampered Chef. Her chapter is selling bags as well.

Member Sound Off

Ardis Bazyn announced a fund-raiser for Glendale-Burbank with Terry Lynn, a company selling chocolate and other treats.

Stephanie Rude reported that the East LA chapter had lost a significant amount of equipment and supplies in the fire that impacted the Garcia family home, where they hold their chapter meetings. They will be

setting up a go fund me page for contributions.

Regina Brink announced that the Capitol Chapter has popcorn and snacks for sale.

Mitch Pomerantz reported that a notice of rule making for uniform travel control devices will be posted and that we should be certain to make comments when it is posted.

Chris Fendric noted that they will be getting adaptive pedestrian signals in Bakersfield soon. He also suggested that we check out a great CSB holiday music video.

Move to Exec Session

Linda moved and Rob seconded the motion to move to executive

session. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Session

President Gabe Griffith called the executive session to order shortly after the close of the open board meeting. As in the open meeting, fourteen board members were present. One member was absent.

Christy moved and Jeff seconded the motion to

provide an annual bonus for our CCB staff member. The motion passed unanimously.

Judy moved and Larry seconded the motion to provide a token of appreciation for our EUC contractor. The motion passed unanimously.

Additional financial matters were discussed.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:57 PM.

* * *

CCB Officers And Directors

As Of August 15, 2020

Officers

President:

Gabe Griffith (2020-2022, 1st term)

Concord, 925-222-5762, gabe.griffith@ccbnet.org

1st Vice President:

Sarah Harris (2020-2021, partial term)

Fresno, 559-816-1507 C, sarah.harris@ccbnet.org

2nd Vice President:

Rob Turner (2020-2022, first term)

Sunnyvale, 408-203-9300 C, rob.turner@ccbnet.org

Secretary:

Linda Porelle (2019-2021, 1st term)

San Francisco, 415-577-8437 C, linda.porelle@ccbnet.org

Treasurer:

Lisa Presley-Thomas (2020-2022, 2nd term)

Fresno, 559-250-6760 C, lisa.thomas@ccbnet.org

Immediate Past President:

Judy Wilkinson (2020-)

San Leandro, 510-388-5079 C, judy.wilkinson@ccbnet.org

Directors

Steve Bauer (2019-2021, 1st term), Culver City, 310-738-2853 C, steve.bauer@ccbnet.org

Christy Crespin (2019-2021, 1st term), Highland, 909-800-7189 C, christy.crespin@ccbnet.org

Nelly Emerson (2019-2021, 1st term), Santa Maria, 951-237-2960 C, nelly.emerson@ccbnet.org

Larry Gassman (2020-2022, 1st term), Fullerton, 562-706-7710, larry.gassman@ccbnet.org

Pamela Metz (2019-2021, 3rd term), Chatsworth, 818-882-3610 H, pamela.metz@ccbnet.org

Guillermo Robles (2020-2022, 1st term), Culver City, 323-490-5753, Guillermo.robles@ccbnet.org

Jeff Thom (2020-2022, 1st term), Sacramento, 916-995-3967 C, jeff.thom@ccbnet.org

Frank Welte (2020-2022 2nd term), San Leandro, 510-541-1442 C, frank.welte@ccbnet.org

Publications Committee

Linda Porelle, Chair, San Francisco, 415-577-8437 C, linda.porelle@ccbnet.org

Mike Keithley, Editor, 650-386-6286 H, editor@ccbnet.org

Susan Glass, Associate Editor, editor@ccbnet.org

Sarah Harris

Lynne Nishihara

Andrea DeKlotz

Daveed Mandell

Roger Petersen

*** * ***

Donations

If you, a family member, or a friend would like to remember the California Council of the Blind in your Will or estate planning, you can do so by employing the following language:

"I give, devise, and bequeath unto the California Council of the Blind, a nonprofit charitable organization in California, the sum of \$_____ (or _____) to be used for its worthy purposes on behalf of blind persons."

If your wishes are more complex, please contact the executive office for additional information. Thank you.