The Blind Californian

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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: 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 2022 issue of The Blind Californian is noon, May 15, 2022.

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. Wouldn’t it be cool if it rained all the days of the upcoming CCB convention in May? That way everyone can attend as it’s a virtual event. Check out Save the Date.

Associate Editor Susan Glass has published a poetry chapbook: The Wild Language of Deer. The book was released by Slate Roof Press in January of 2022. Slate Roof is a member-run press based in Western Massachusetts. Susan’s manuscript won the Slate Roof

Elise Wolfe Poetry Prize in 2016. The Press is committed to making all of its books accessible via audio and braille editions. Susan will let us know when her accessible editions become available, and she is researching how to go about placing them on BARD.

Enjoy the spring greens coming up! Jeff Thom’s Governmental Affairs Report sketches an encouraging environment for our advocacy, and the ACB 2022 legislative imperatives are included. Regina Brink gives us a thought-provoking article on thinking beyond blindness skills, and Sarah Harris explores invisible disabilities. There’s lots more.

Bye!

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Announcing the 2022 California Council of the Blind Virtual Conference and Convention: "Navigating the Future Together"

By Sarah Harris

Main Event Dates: Thursday, May 12-Sunday, May 15

**Stay tuned to
ccbnet.org/drupal7/node/818
for updates including Programming, Pre**

and Post Convention Activities, Registration, Sponsor and Exhibitor Opportunities, and so much more!

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Governmental Affairs Report

By Jeff Thom

About the only constant in the realm of governmental affairs work for CCB is that there never seems to be a dull moment. As this article will demonstrate, we are working on this year's agenda and preparing for next year. Regina Brink and I, with the help of many, especially Governmental Affairs co-chairs Alice Turner and Ardis Bazyn, provide CCB with a robust advocacy team. So, let’s take a look at just some of the topics in which we are leading the way for people who are blind or have low vision.

Regina continues to be the point person for CCB in the Californians for SSI Coalition. We are closer than ever to regaining some of the lost benefit amounts due to the recession of almost 15 years ago, and that coalition is attempting to raise benefits in the 2022-23 fiscal year rather than through an uncertain benefit increase promised in 2024. Regina is also working hard to find a legislator who will author our resolution that would establish a legislative taskforce to come up with solutions to solve the array of accessible drug labeling issues that plague people with print impairments in California. This taskforce would have representatives from all aspects of the industry along with advocates and accessible drug labeling providers. Our goal is to put into place systemic solutions within the next couple of years and not to wait a decade, or even five years for incremental change.

On the special education front, we have suffered a minor setback, but will be forging ahead. In 2019, CCB worked with special education professionals and Assemblywoman Quirk-Silva to pass AB947 that allows, but does not require

school districts to provide services in what is known as the expanded core curriculum (ECC). These services represent skills that sighted students can largely acquire through interaction with parents and peers but blind and low vision children cannot. Technology training; social skills, including those of young children or those related to dating for teens; daily living skills, including hygiene, dressing, cooking, cleaning, etcetera are just part of the ECC. We have now developed, in conjunction with special education professionals, a bill to require these skills to be provided for blind and low vision pupils when the need is demonstrated through the IEP process, and in fact, Assemblywoman

Quirk-Silva is likely to introduce it for us. However, the committee chair does not intend to allow any bill that requires districts to perform additional duties to pass his committee, so we have been advised to wait until 2023 when there will be a new chair.

Our biggest breakthrough has been in the area of vision rehabilitation services for adults, including mental health services, orientation and mobility, daily living skills, technology training and more. Through the work of CCB first vice-president Sarah Harris, Assemblyman Joaquin Arambula has become very concerned with the unmet needs for these services in California. He has

already held one hearing on this topic and has introduced two placeholder pilot project bills, AB1990 on mental health services and AB2480 on vision rehabilitation services that would generally begin to address the funding gap for these services. Moreover, we are working more closely than ever before in our advocacy efforts with the private agencies in California that provide these specialized services, and our educational efforts are also beginning to resonate with the broader aging and disability advocacy community. We are also beginning to acquire useful data to assist in our advocacy efforts. I won’t even try to predict what success we will have in the short-term with the Legislature and

the Newsome Administration, but I can say that I am far more optimistic in this area of our work than I have ever been, that we can have a real impact in the long-term.

As many of you know, AB571, our bill to require renters of e-scooters to have insurance to cover collisions with pedestrians and for those who fall over these scooters when left on the sidewalk, stalled in the Senate. However, the bill is still alive, and we are working on ways to save the bill and we will learn this summer what happens. So stay tuned as we will almost certainly need your advocacy assistance to fight the industry.

Of course this article has only scratched the surface. I haven’t even mentioned work in the areas of guide dog advocacy, the right to return our ballots online instead of having to print and send them back, advocacy by our Department of Rehabilitation Blindness Advisory Committee representatives, and the work of CCB members in the areas of transportation and access to the built environment. Moreover, many of you will be working in March to advocate with our congressional delegation on the legislative imperatives of the American Council of the Blind, but that’s another article for another time.

In conclusion, you should be proud of what you do, but remember that Californians who are blind or have low vision need you to keep up the good work!

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ACB’s 2022 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 people who are blind and low vision in the United States, 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.

The Exercise and Fitness for All Act (S. 2504/H.R. 4756)

For the 25 percent 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 urges Congress to pass the Exercise and Fitness for All Act, which was reintroduced in 2021, so people with disabilities can Get Up and Get Moving. 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 Stephanie Deluca 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.

The Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act (H.R. 4853)

The majority of home use medical devices and outpatient equipment utilizes digital display interfaces that are inaccessible to blind, low vision, and DeafBlind users. Class 2 and Class 3 medical devices such as glucose monitors, blood pressure readers, and at-home chemotherapy treatments do not have any non-visual accessibility features like text to speech output,

tactile markings, or audible tones built in. As a result, people who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind cannot independently manage their health from the privacy of their own homes in the same ways as people who are not disabled.

ACB calls on Congress to pass the Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act to ensure that medical equipment with a digital display is accessible and that people with disabilities can take back control of their health. This legislation would require the Food and Drug Administration to consider non-visual accessibility when approving Class 2 and Class 3 medical equipment and

devices with a digital display to ensure access for patients with disabilities. Offices in the House of Representatives interested in cosponsoring the bipartisan Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act, H.R. 4853, should contact Kate Durkin in the office of Rep. Schakowsky (D-IL-9), and offices in the Senate should support introduction of a Senate companion bill to H.R. 4853.

The Website and Application Accessibility Act

Access to websites, applications and online services impacts most aspects of everyday life, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made digital inclusion

more important than ever. However, the Department of Justice has not finalized enforcement standards that clearly state websites, applications, and online services must be accessible to people who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind. As a result, people who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind face countless barriers when accessing workplace portals, educational platforms, healthcare and public health information, transportation services, shopping, and entertainment over the Internet.

Congress must give clear guidance to the Department of Justice to finalize and implement enforceable online information access standards. These standards must include a strong functional definition of accessibility and should not require any person to exhaust administrative processes or notify website and application owners and operators that their online services are violating the rights of people with disabilities.

ACB calls on Congress to require the Department of Justice to protect the civil rights of people with disabilities online and provide clear guidance that websites, applications and online services must be accessible.

The Communications and Video Accessibility Amendments Act

The Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA) guaranteed access for people with disabilities to advanced communications services, telecommunications hardware and software, accessible video displays and user interfaces and digital apparatuses, and required the delivery of audio-described content. For more than ten years, ACB and its members have worked to implement and enforce the CVAA, and in several key aspects, we have reached the limits of what the CVAA is able to

enforce.

It is time for Congress to update the accessible video and communications requirements of the CVAA. This legislation should ensure that everyone in the United States may receive audio-described content from their local broadcaster utilizing the technology already required to deliver accessible emergency alerts, and ensure that accessible user interface and audio-described content requirements are modernized to reflect the shifting landscape to Internet protocol and online delivered video content. And any legislation should require the Federal Communications Commission to ensure that all video communications services are accessible to people with disabilities.

ACB urges members of Congress to support a Communications and Video Accessibility Amendments Act when introduced.

For questions or further information on the 2022 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 2022, and we look forward to working with you during the

remainder of the 117th Congress.

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Connect the Dots

By Regina Brink

I love to touch, to feel.

People say my world is empty now that I can’t see

People and lights and Saturday morning cartoons,

Send that message to me,

But I am 5 now and the school bus will come for me in the morning.

My heart is full of happy expectation.

Mommy says there will be new friends

And new toys to play with

And swings and bars to climb in,

Better than the trees in my Grandfather's yard.

I will have lots of new things and I can touch them all,

No mean ladies to slap my hand like in the grocery store

When I touched the beautiful flowers that smelled so good

And my mother told her I couldn't see.

I don't think she ever understood.

Anyway, I was young and small.

The bus comes and I have to put on a seat belt.

No standing up in the back seat,

Waiting for Daddy to yell at us to "sit down!"

I have new clothes to wear

And I even got a new nightgown.

There are new friends and new toys,

New girls to laugh with

And some annoying little boys.

Then, the new teacher that smells like lavender flowers

Gave me a real book.

There were pictures I could feel

And lots of dots to touch.

The girl had real hair and such,

Her pigtails swinging off the page.

I could feel her dress

And read “girl” below it.

The fabric forms pictures so we can know it.

A little girl, just like me,

Only my ponytails don’t swing around like that.

My pigtails are all curly like little powder puffs.

I can feel the farmer’s boots and overalls

And the word “father” below it.
The fabric forms pictures so they can show it.
My Daddy doesn’t dress like that either.
He wears a “uniform.”

They say my life is empty now that I can’t see
People and lights and Saturday morning cartoons
Send that message to me,
But I see it all in the books!
I can touch the fabric and the dots
And find a whole new world of hopes and thoughts

Where the cow can jump over the moon!

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Opinion: Climate Change Impacts People with Disabilities

By James Collins, California Council 'Time of Use' Community Educator

February 21, 2022

From extreme heat and destructive wildfires to severe droughts, human-induced weather events have become a daily fixture of life today in California

and beyond. But despite Mother Earth’s warning signs, the gap between what we should do to reduce the impacts of climate change and what actions we are taking is wide—and getting wider. However these natural disasters do not play out in a vacuum. During climate-related emergencies, disabled people might be disproportionately affected because of structural challenges inherent in our community.

Taking Its Toll

As we have seen in recent years, wildfires can start and rapidly spread with little warning. Evacuation orders may come too late, especially for those

with additional mobility considerations. Even excessively hot days can be life threatening, with a variety of conditions such as spinal injuries making it difficult for the body to regulate temperature. Compromised health also makes disabled people more vulnerable to extreme climate events. In a climate emergency, disabled people may be more vulnerable to contracting infectious diseases because of underlying conditions. For example, Hurricane Katrina was found to disproportionately impact more than 100,000 people with disabilities ranging from visual and physical impairments to learning disabilities. Even in non-extreme events, like air pollution, health can be compromised in the long term,

especially for vulnerable populations.

As part of California Council of the Blind, we are steadfast in working with our chapters across the state to bring awareness to using cleaner energy. The state’s electrical grid is increasingly powered by clean, renewable sources of energy—when the sun is out and the wind is blowing. However the challenge remains in the late afternoon and evening when demand for energy peaks. Between 4 PM and 9 PM, electricity is more likely to be produced by carbon-intensive energy sources emitting greenhouse gases.

We need to understand that when we

use electricity does matter, not just how much electricity we use. The Central Valley has begun to undergo a transition to a new rate plan that encourages use of cleaner energy. This transition is happening statewide to help Californians have more control of when they use energy.

Our team is being asked about how to do household chores, make dinner, help children with homework—all activities that happen between 4 PM and 9 PM.

It’s important for everyone to hear this: The state is not asking Californians to refrain from using energy, change their lifestyles or turn their schedules upside down. Instead, it encourages Californians to shift energy use to parts of the day when electricity from renewable resources (such as solar and wind) is more readily available.

When making dinner, turn off the TV in the living room. Think about ways to shift doing laundry to the morning.

The coming years will be defining—deferring ambition and action is no longer an option. Together, we can close the gap between "should do" and real action. For information, visit energyupgradeca.org and join us to make a better, cleaner energy future for all Californians.

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An Important Update for Guide Dog Users Traveling Internationally: CDC Relaxes Restrictions for Dogs Entering the United States from High-Risk-for-Rabies Countries if Dogs Have Received Rabies Immunization in the USA

As seen on the ACB Leadership List

On December 1, 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced revisions to rules regarding

bringing dogs into the United States from countries at high risk for rabies. The rule change removes the previously announced requirement for a CDC Dog Import Permit, which since July of 2021 and until December 1, was required for any dog entering the United States from countries which have been determined to be at high risk for rabies. This change, which exempts dogs whose owners can verify their dogs’ having been immunized against rabies by a licensed veterinarian in the United States, represents good news for any guide and service dog handlers who plan to travel internationally with their dogs, since they will no longer have to comply with the time-consuming and somewhat

burdensome process of obtaining a CDC Dog Import permit even before they embark on travel outside the USA with their dogs.

If your guide dog has a current U.S.-issued rabies vaccination certificate signed by a licensed veterinarian; if your dog has been microchipped; if you can provide the printed certification of your dog's rabies-protected status (the rabies tag dangling from your dog's collar is not acceptable proof!); and, this is important too, if you and your dog enter the United States through one of the 18 United States airports equipped with a CDC quarantine station, then you should be able to bring your guide dog into the USA

without any difficulty.

If, for any reason, you cannot provide the certification, if your dog received a rabies vaccination in a country other than the United States, if you cannot produce the required paperwork, if your dog has not been microchipped or the chip cannot be read, if the rabies certification has expired, or if your plane is arriving at an airport that is not included on the list of 18 acceptable ports of entry, then you will be separated from your guide dog, and the dog will be returned to the country from which you departed (no matter how long or short your stay in that country was, and no matter how many connecting flights you

took on your return trip from the country of departure) at your expense!

These are the 18 United States airports through which you and your dog will be permitted to return to the USA from international travel:

- **Anchorage (ANC)**
- **Atlanta (ATL)**
- **Boston (BOS)**
- **Chicago (ORD)**
- **Dallas (DFW)**
- **Detroit (DTW)**
- **Honolulu (HNL)**
- **Houston (IAH)**
- **Los Angeles (LAX)**
- **Miami (MIA)**

- **Minneapolis (MSP)**
- **New York (JFK)**
- **Newark (EWR)**
- **Philadelphia (PHL)**
- **San Francisco (SFO)**
- **San Juan (SJU)**
- **Seattle (SEA)**
- **Washington DC (IAD).**

Be sure to keep this list of approved ports of entry in mind when you make your international travel reservations.

GDUI recommends that you discuss the requirements for microchipping and up-to-date printed certification of your dog's protected status against rabies with your veterinarian as soon as you begin

planning for your trip abroad. If you are traveling to one of the countries at high risk of rabies, your dog must be microchipped before you leave the United States. Check with your school and/or with your veterinarian, to assure that your dog was chipped and that the chip is still readable.

Carry a record of the chip number along with the other paperwork that you will be required to present when you and your dog return to the United States. You will also, of course, need to be aware of and comply with any U. S. Department of Agriculture requirements or those of your destination country that apply to traveling internationally with your guide

dog. Visit this link for further information: guidedogusersinc.org/cdc-import-permit-requirement-for-dogs-coming-from-rabies-high-risk-countries

We are pleased that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has removed what many guide dog users found to be overly burdensome requirements for obtaining a special CDC Dog Import Permit to bring dogs into the USA. After all, as blind and visually impaired people who depend on our dogs for independence and safe travel, we are highly committed to maintaining our dogs’ health and wellness and safety from the first minute we grab onto that

harness handle and from then on, throughout our dogs' lives.

We encourage all guide dog users who plan to travel internationally with their dogs to maintain an awareness of CDC regulations that can impact your travel plans. Visit this page for the latest regulations: cdc.gov/importation/bringing-an-animal-into-the-united-states/dogs.html

We share concern for all of our health and safety with the CDC, and we wish you and your guide dogs safe travels.

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Invisible Disabilities

By Sarah Harris

What is an invisible disability? An invisible disability is an illness or challenge that someone is not aware of by just looking at someone. A person may look, as they say “normal” on the outside, but be dealing with the “abnormal” on the inside. Invisible disability comes in many forms: Chronic diseases like Chronic Pain, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Lupus, Cancer, Diabetes; just to name a few. Add to this list Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, such as Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Attention Deficit

Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and so many more. Mental Health difficulties can also be invisible. Anxiety, depression, Bi-Polar Disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) are on the short list of common diagnoses. People who have low vision can also be part of the invisible disability club; especially when a person does not have a need to use a white cane for mobility.

Invisible disabilities also intersect with visible disabilities. Visible disabilities are those illnesses or challenges that are obvious. Many are apparent by use of mobility devices or alternate forms of communication such as ASL or braille. You may meet someone who uses a wheelchair, and also experiences anxiety and depression. Or you may encounter someone who has low vision, and also has Downs Syndrome. And let's not forget the number of people who are blind and also have Diabetes. These intersections of multiple disabilities can be challenging; sometimes looking more like a 4-way stop on a rural highway than an urban signaled intersection.

How can we address invisible disabilities as a society? One choice can be to assume that everyone has one until otherwise determined. Another choice is to treat everyone with respect, dignity, patience, and kindness. Personally, I think there may be something in between the two choices. There is a road less traveled, a road where we recognize that everyone faces challenges of some sort at any given point in their life. We can’t know what is going on inside of someone just by looking at or speaking with them. We choose to treat people as we would like to be treated, as many of our mothers all said, even when they appear to be having a bad or off day.

My intersection is looking more like one of those massive freeway interchanges in a big city, the kind where 4 or 5 freeways connect and everyone is in a ridiculous hurry, only knows one word and it starts with the letter F, and nobody is practicing good time

management skills. I am a person who is blind, experiences anxiety, depression, and insomnia, has Crohn’s Disease, Chronic Pain, and a really odd cyst in her brain. I am complicated. And complicated is okay. It’s all about managing and maintaining it all; Being okay when I don’t feel okay, advocating for myself when needed, being honest with others and myself if I feel exhausted or overwhelmed, and being patient with others when they don’t understand what my experience feels like.

I share these thoughts that commonly invade my always overstimulated brain with you not to preach or to whine, but to start an internal conversation within

all of our own overstimulated brains. I welcome you to reach out and share if you would like. I am almost always free on Tuesdays at 2:00 AM, except for the 6th Tuesday of every month when I meet with Gabe. Happy almost whatever tomorrow is when you read this... because tomorrow is a new day and it is going to be awesome!

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Great Work! Who Helped You? Memorable Past Job Interviews

By Daveed Mandell

Years ago, long before the ADA, I approached radio stations and networks looking for a job as a reporter. I had studied broadcasting and had worked during that time as a reporter for public station KCRW’s Westside Journal in Santa Monica, and Pacifica station KPFK’s newscast and public affairs programs in Los Angeles. My supervisors were very supportive and confident that stations would jump at the chance to hire me. How wrong they were!

In interview after interview, general managers and news and public affairs directors would praise my demo reels and resumes. I soon discovered that they really weren’t at all impressed with my work. In fact, they damned it with faint praise, saying, “Your work is quite impressive! It’s excellent! Who helped you?”

At first I was stunned. What did they mean by that question? Day after day I attended press conferences and demonstrations, recorded interviews and ambiance, picked and edited sound bites and wrote scripts. I didn’t understand what they meant.

The interviewers were quick to explain. “After all, if I couldn’t see, I would never be able to work as a reporter. Who took you around, they asked, helped you find people to interview at demonstrations, and assisted you to navigate during press conferences?”

I replied that I was on my own, just like any other reporter. They didn’t believe me. Some even thought that was funny.

“That’s impossible!” was the rejoinder. “I mean, you’re blind! There’s no way you could have done all that yourself!”

It was then that I knew I wouldn’t land jobs at those stations. These people were projecting their stereotyped prejudices about blind people’s ignorance, inability, lack of awareness. They felt that without sight, they would never be able to do the job, or any job. They would certainly never trust a blind reporter.

I remember one director saying, “You

know, our reporters have to drive around in vans with two-way radios. You couldn’t do that.”

I suggested that I could take the bus or a taxi and carry the radio with me. “Oh no, that would never do! Besides, every reporter must have a driver’s license.”

No one asked me how I did the work myself. They were never curious about the alternative techniques I created and used to get the job done. Instead, they were convinced that I couldn’t do the job at all, even though I had been doing it for more than two years.

During my job search I did quite a bit of freelance reporting. Thousands of people heard me on the air, among them several station news and public affairs directors.

I finally encountered a news director who was not only impressed with my work, but was also genuinely excited about hiring a blind reporter. She asked me how I did the job without sight, not because she doubted me, but because she found it interesting and intriguing to learn how blind people could do the job and do it well. She was impressed with my skills, abilities, resourcefulness and persistence. I got the job, but it took a long time and many horrific interviews before that happened.

Things have certainly changed in the

21st century’s job interview department. The ADA supposedly prevents potential employers from asking unwarranted and inappropriate questions and making negative remarks about one’s disability. However, biases and prejudices against hiring people with disabilities still remain.

So what advice do I have for blind job seekers? As you look for a job, it’s important to understand the law and know your rights. During job interviews, talk about your skills. Explain how you can do the required work as a blind person. Demonstrate confidence. Always be courteous and polite, but never allow interviewers to underestimate your abilities, talents and assets.

Give concrete examples about how you can or would function on the job. Never back down or give in, even though some questions might be challenging, somewhat difficult to answer, or even imply unexpressed biases.

Practice being interviewed. Find someone to interview you. Make sure they ask some hard questions. Be prepared to emphasize your strengths. Don't overlook or ignore your weaknesses, but never dwell on them.

Be proud of yourself and your accomplishments. Realize that you count just as much as sighted people. Show interviewers that blindness can be an asset rather than a liability. Good luck!

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Beyond Blindness Skills

By Regina Brink

One does not need a degree in psychology to realize that loving oneself, not as in having an inflated ego, but as in self-care, is important to a strong sense of self-worth, and one of those soft qualities that promotes success in our society. However it has also been clear to me what a struggle this is for many people with vision loss of all degrees. Many factors contribute to this, including family dynamics, messages in our media and literature, and life experiences in school and at work. The message that one is “not good enough” or “not as good as” our sighted peers continues from infancy on or, in the case of people losing their sight later in life, as soon as we find ourselves categorized as “legally blind.” Well-meaning sighted people say things to us that convey this message. How many of us have heard “Let me do that, I can see. I can do that faster/easier/better ...,” or “I’m not like your mother/father/grandma, I can see.” When my mother said something like this to my children for the first time and I tried to explain to her how it undermined my authority with my young children, she didn’t get it. I had to be rather unpleasant with her. I had to tell her these were my children and whether she agreed or not, she had to respect my wishes and not say that to them. As a young mother, I knew my young children accepted my authority without question, and they would grow up questioning it and challenging it on their own quite enough without the added message that my blindness allowed them to “get away” with not doing what I expected of them. I don’t believe my mother ever got it, even though she raised me to be independent and have a strong self-esteem. She did honor my wishes, however, which was all I could reasonably ask.

It is difficult for us to think of a movie or popular fictional story about a strong, valuable blind person who is not a superhero or a music star. Where are the blind scientists, authors, teachers, or receptionists? They do not just appear in popular films and novels. They are not part of the "normal" fabric of daily life. We are still depicted as objects of pity and charity or superheroes. Well-adjusted people who are blind or have low vision who run a vending stand, answer phones in an office, or work as social workers or data entry professionals are not seen. Therefore, people do not expect to see them, and hesitate to hire them in these roles.

In order to achieve strong self-esteem, many of us who are blind or have low vision are motivated to shun our blind or low vision peers. If we want to be one of the “cool kids” as so many of us do in school or at work, we need to help sighted people feel comfortable with us by appearing as much like them as possible. Now, I am not debating the value of skills training, professional grooming, or orientation and mobility competency. These are necessary to successful and independent living. Rather, I am reflecting on the way these messages are conveyed to us. In the attempt to empower us, the condition of being blind or having low vision is made the emphasis of our lack or deficiency or, in some extreme cases, shame. How many of us at one time or another have sought to hide that we can’t see or see differently than sighted people? How many of us have rejected people who did not live up to our picture of how a competent person who is blind or has low vision should be? How many of us have felt the horrible drop in one’s tummy and the feeling of extreme embarrassment and failure when we blundered as a blind person. Perhaps we spilled something we did not know or forgot was on the counter or knocked over a podium or microphone stand when we walked up to speak in front of a group of predominantly sighted people.

Perhaps this happened in front of a large crowd of people with vision loss. It is still intensely humiliating for many of us. For some, the lack of witnesses doesn’t matter. We feel the same even when we do things and we are the only ones who know about it.

When a child is classified as blind or low vision or we lose our sight at any age, very little attention is paid to our mental health. Very little if any funding goes to assisting us in adjusting emotionally. Even those of us with resources are not encouraged to seek mental health services. We are expected to concentrate on learning new skills. Those of us who have melt downs or crying jags either

attempt to hide them or are considered “difficult” or “troubled” by blindness services agencies and professionals. Some of us have even felt that way about other people experiencing vision loss because we are so conditioned to do so. We dealt with it and overcame, so this person has to as well.

What about all the people with vision loss who do not “make it” as we believe we have? How many of us have conditions such as depression, substance abuse, hypertension, ulcers or other intestinal problems and do not share these struggles with anyone? How many of us struggle alone because, if anyone knew the truth, they would know we felt less than or lacking or somehow deficient, not good enough?

We cannot know how many people who are blind or have low vision feel this way deep down inside. However, I believe it is way more than we think and contributes to some of the statistics we all know so well, especially those of us who are advocates. I have worked since I was sixteen years old, in many professional capacities where I was the only blind person on staff. I have received commendations and awards and appeared on TV and in newspaper articles. Still, I have felt this way. During this season of spring, a season of new beginnings, let's remember to extend love and encouragement to our blind and low vision peers. When advocating, let’s remember the mental health needs of the vision loss community. Let’s take a moment to reach out to someone who needs mentorship that goes beyond skills training and resources and offer guidance in self-love and self-care. Let’s work together to change the perception in our society so people coming after us might experience an easier road to success as a person who is blind or has low vision.

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On Words and Dogs of German Descent!

By the late Ed Eames

When training with my first guide dog at The Seeing Eye in 1981, I was intrigued by the value placed on certain words used in the training process. In addition to the normal obedience commands of SIT, COME, DOWN and STAY, there were others such as Go Park that most dogs seemed to understand. But the word that completely caught my attention was "PFUI"!

From the wisdom acquired for more than a decade as an experienced guide dog trainer, my instructor assured me that the proper use of this term would strike terror into the heart of any canine, particularly one of German descent. As part of our collective training, members of my class would walk around the second floor dormitory complex repeating the word in an effort to get it right. Of course, we dared not say it out loud and with the correct inflection unless our canine assistants had violated some major credo of guide doghood. Therefore, we practiced saying Pfui in the lounge on those occasions when we left our dogs in the room as part of the training regimen designed to diminish the possibility of unwelcome behavior, such as barking resulting from separation anxiety.

As I explored the issue of Pfui with other staff members, I was assured the hard wiring of all dog’s brains made them so sensitive to this word that it would stop all unwanted behavior before it became habituated. In particular, German Shepherd Dogs (GSDs) and all others descended from German breeding stock found this word so disturbing, they would stop actions in the middle and cringe on hearing it! The fact it did not work on my Black Labrador Perrier was due, I was told, to either the fact that he descended from non-German stock or I was not pronouncing the word properly! It seemed to me and others paired with

Labradors or Golden Retrievers that our peers teamed with GSDs got the desired result from using the dreaded word.

Therefore the explanation offered seemed reasonable at the time so, I, like many of my classmates kept practicing with the hope of one day mastering the usage of Pfui. Based on Perrier’s continued misdeeds, I reckon I never did master it!

There is another German based word that owners of GSDs believe can never be replaced by its English equivalent. That word is “Platz”! According to devotees of German derived breeds, these dogs instinctively drop to the

ground and remain there immobilized when Platz is properly enunciated. The English equivalent DOWN is too effete, too lackadaisical, too English to have the desired result on a German dog, according to these experts. DOWN might work for Golden Retrievers, such as my current guide Latrell, Labrador Retrievers, or even Crosses, but never on a GSD!

While traveling in South Africa and visiting the South Africa Guide-Dogs Association, I was struck by the almost universal use of Platz among students and graduates of Dutch or Boer descent. In fact, one could easily differentiate between English descended and Boer

descended blind guide dog handlers by the use of the two terms, Down or Platz.

One of the most innovative uses of Platz was by my veterinary friend Mel Greenberg. Mel hosted a four hour radio show and one of the mandates was that he could not use his name on the air since that would be a form of advertising and unethical according to South African standards. Mel came up with a pseudonym, Dr. Platzhund or Dr. Down Dog which seemed to satisfy everyone!

When I appeared on Mel’s program several years ago during a trip to South Africa, I had to constantly stop myself from chuckling every time a caller rang in with a question for Dr. Platzhund. This was particularly difficult to suppress when the callers had questions about their cats or other non-canine critters.

The connection between the German language and dogs of German heritage was brought home to me many years ago by my friend Doris, a German Shepherd lover. Doris was waiting for a train on a Manhattan subway platform, and was chatting with her GSD guide dog in German. A curious passerby asked Doris if Flair would tell her which train was arriving at the platform. Noticing Doris' hesitation in answering the question, the curious woman asked if there had been a problem in the past. In jest, Doris noted that indeed there had been a problem, but it had been resolved. She informed her fellow passenger that when Flair had first come to her, since she was a GSD she spoke only German which Doris did not understand. Continuing the enlightenment of her attentive interrogator, Doris then went on to say she had enrolled in a German course and now was able to converse effectively with Flair. Thrilled at this explanation, the woman went on her way relishing the tale she could tell her family later that night about a wonderful blind woman who had actually taken a course in German in order to communicate with her guide dog!

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Seniors Corner

February 2022

By Robert Acosta

We welcome you to read Senior Corner. This column is an attempt to give our senior blind and low vision friends practical tips on how to survive during the Covid era and after. We also appreciate your feedback or your tips to survive the Covid period. Please write to Robert Acosta at boacosta818@gmail.com

We encourage our readers to join the California Alliance on Aging and Vision

Loss, (CAAVL). This is a wonderful special-interest affiliate of the California Council of the Blind. For more information, please call our Treasurer, Denise Weddle at (310) 306-8149. The annual dues are 25 dollars per member. This will entitle you to be a member of four organizations: CAAVL, the California Council of the Blind, our national organization for seniors the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, and the American Council of the Blind.

Our first featured article is from Margie Donovan and Nelly Emerson.

CAAVL Support Group

Margie Donovan and Nelly Emerson host a weekly support group for those experiencing sight loss for the first time, and for those experiencing further sight loss. Both Margie and Nelly have extensive experience in facilitating support groups during their careers with the VA and DOR respectively. This group meets on Zoom every Friday from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.

One can participate on the phone or on the computer.

We currently have about five to nine participants weekly. All the current participants are new to sight loss. One group member expressed to the group how this has saved her life. She had no idea how much she could do as a blind woman and head of household. She has gone from depending on her husband to cooking a full Thanksgiving dinner this year.

Topics are brought to the group by the participants. Should they not have a topic, the facilitators are always prepared with one. We always aim to address the issues of sight loss and how to safely live independently.

Safety is of foremost to Nelly and Margie. Recently Nelly was able to assist a participant in getting O and M after she was hit by a car, and she has had other

close calls.

Topics covered include styling one’s hair, money organization, using busses and paratransit, using a long white cane, medication management, how one fits in the family after sight loss and much more. The sky is the limit for topics if they relate to adjusting to living with sight loss.

A great big thanks to Jay Harris with DOR’s OIB Program, for sharing our flyer with his OIB programs. We have had participants from smaller agencies and ILCs. Many of these agencies are in rural areas and have few resources.

Staff from these agencies have attended

the group, and then they send their clients. This is how we gain most of our newly blind participants.

To obtain information on the group, please email margie.donovan1@outlook.com or call her at 916-293-9505. Participants can join the zoom meeting by phone or computer, but you will have to contact Margie for the group login information.

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A Place for Mom

From Denise Weddle

Our next article is from Denise Weddle. Deanie has been a worker on behalf of

blind persons for well over 40 years. She is currently very active with Meals on Wheels.

A Place for Mom is a for-profit senior care referral service based in Seattle Washington. The Company provides personal and professional assistance to families in the search for senior care options. It provides information regarding more than 20,000 senior housing and elder care providers to seniors and their families throughout the United States through a network of local "senior living advisors".

Their mission is to empower you with the best information and tools to make the

right senior care decision for you or your loved one. Their extensive network of senior living communities and home care providers ensures more personalized options for you to choose from.

A Place for Mom is paid by their participating communities; therefore their service is offered at no charge to families.

To connect with an expert senior living advisor, call 866-750-5930 or 800-769-0509.

Please feel free to submit articles for this column. Thank you.

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What to Know About Diabetes and Snacks

By Stephanie Watson, Medically Reviewed by Kathleen M. Zelman, MPH, RD, LD on April 22, 2020

To manage diabetes and keep your blood sugar under control, you may need to rethink your diet. Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meat, fish, and low-fat dairy should be on the menu, while most fatty, sweet, and salty foods should not.

That doesn’t mean you have to say

goodbye to all your favorite snacks. In fact, a few strategically planned ones during the day can help keep your blood sugar levels steady between meals. You just need to choose those treats wisely.

The best snacks when you have diabetes are high in fiber and protein, and low in sugar and salt. Good options include fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy.

You'll stay full and keep your blood sugar stable longer if your snacks combine lean protein and healthy carbs, like:

- Turkey, roasted chicken, or other lunch meat with a slice of cheese wrapped in a lettuce leaf

- Smoked salmon and light cream cheese on wheat toast
- Low-fat turkey jerky with baby carrots
- Whole wheat crackers with peanut butter
- Low-fat cottage cheese with berries

Snacks that are high in fiber are also filling, like:

- Light popcorn
- Apples with cheese or peanut butter
- Sweet peppers, celery, and carrot sticks
- Dried fruit and nuts

If you're in the mood for something sweet after a meal, try one of these lighter alternatives to candy, cake, and cookies:

- Sugar-free frozen fruit bars
- Plain yogurt topped with canned fruit
- Unsweetened applesauce
- Frozen grapes
- Sugar-free gelatin

How to Modify Your Favorite Treats

You'll want to stay away from foods that are highly processed or have lots of added salt or sugar. That includes junk foods like potato chips, cheese puffs, candy, and cookies.

You don't have to banish these foods

from your diet. But when you do eat them, keep the portions very small. Better yet, substitute healthier versions like these:

Craving potato chips? Go for the baked kind or some air-popped popcorn.

Want chocolate? Cover some rice cakes in dark chocolate.

Instead of cheese puffs, try some snack mix made from cereal.

Pizza night? Try a whole-wheat English muffin with tomato sauce and mozzarella cheese.

Cookie craving? Try a graham cracker.

If you're a fan of soda, substitute diet soda, light lemonade, or some sparkling water with a dash of fruit juice.

Smarter Snacking

You don't have to deny yourself treats. Just enjoy them in moderation. If you crave chocolate, have a square of dark chocolate. If you're in the mood for ice cream, order a kids' sized cone or get a scoop of low-fat frozen yogurt instead.

Even a healthy snack can cause you to gain weight if you eat too much. And that could make it harder to control your diabetes. That's why it's important to keep your snacks small. Don't bring a

family-sized bag of popcorn or box of cookies into the den while you watch TV. You could eat the whole thing. Measure out one serving and put the rest of the box or bag away.

Make sure that each portion you give yourself contains no more than 150 calories and 15 to 30 grams of carbs. Examples include:

- 15 mini pretzels
- 3 cups of light popcorn
- 1 cup of berries
- 1/4 cup trail mix

Before you head for the pantry or fridge, decide if you’re really hungry. Is a growling stomach behind your desire to eat, or are you just bored or stressed? If you’re not hungry, find something else to fill your time.

When you do snack, try to do it at about the same time each day. If you stick to a schedule with both snacks and meals, it’ll help keep your blood sugar steady throughout the day.

If you’re still not sure about portion sizes, the types of snacks to choose, or when to have them, ask your doctor if they can refer you to a dietitian for help. Your doctor could also let you know if the foods in your diet will help you control your diabetes.

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10 Myths and Misconceptions About Social Security

By Andy Markowitz, AARP

Link: aarp.org/retirement/social-security/info-2020/10-myths-explained.html

Social Security is enormous and complex, paying out nearly $93 billion a month to some 65 million retirees, people with disabilities and their family members. It's wildly popular, supported by more than 90 percent of U.S. adults across the political spectrum, according to a recent AARP survey. And it's critical to older Americans' financial health, with 4 in 5

of those polled expecting to rely on Social Security during their later years.

Given Social Security’s importance, concerns about its current and future state are understandable and widespread. Some of those worries, and the many changes to the program in its 85-year history, have given rise to misconceptions about how it is funded and how it works. Here are the facts behind 10 of the most stubborn Social Security myths.

Myth #1: Social Security is Going Broke

The facts: As long as workers and

employers pay payroll taxes, Social Security will not run out of money. It’s a pay-as-you-go system: Revenue coming in from FICA (Federal Insurance Contributions Act) and SECA (Self-Employed Contributions Act) taxes largely cover the benefits going out.

Social Security does face funding challenges. For decades it collected more than it paid out, building a surplus that stood at $2.9 trillion at the end of 2020. But the system is starting to pay out more than it takes in, largely because the retiree population is growing faster than the working population, and living longer. Without changes in how Social Security is financed, the surplus is projected to run out in 2034.

Even then, Social Security won’t be broke. It will still collect tax revenue and pay benefits. But it will only bring in enough to pay 78 percent of scheduled benefits, according to the latest estimate. To avoid that outcome, Congress would need to take steps to shore up Social Security’s finances, as it did in 1983, the last time the program nearly depleted its reserves. The steps then included raising the full retirement age (see Myth #2), increasing the payroll tax rate and introducing an income tax on benefits (see Myth #8).

Myth #2: The Social Security Retirement Age is 65

The facts: Full retirement age, or FRA, the age when a worker qualifies to file for 100 percent of the benefit calculated from lifetime earnings history is 66 and 2 months for people born in 1955. Over the next five years it will increase by two months at a time, settling at 67 for those born in 1960 and after. The 65 threshold is a longtime Social Security truth that became a myth. When Social Security was created in 1935, 65 was set as the age of eligibility.

In later decades the minimum eligibility age was lowered to 62, when people could claim a reduced benefit, but 65 remained the standard for full retirement.

That changed with the 1983 overhaul, which raised the retirement age to reduce Social Security’s costs. The increase is being phased in over time; 2002 was the last year in which people turning 65 could claim their full benefit.

Myth #3: The Annual COLA is Guaranteed

The facts: Since 1975, Social Security law has mandated that benefit amounts be adjusted annually to keep pace with inflation. But there is no requirement that this cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) produce a yearly increase.

The COLA is tied to a federal index of prices for select consumer goods and services called the CPI-W. Benefits are adjusted annually based on changes in the CPI-W from the third quarter of one year to the third quarter of the next. In 2021, the index showed a 5.9 percent increase in prices, so in 2022 benefits will grow by that amount. But if the index doesn’t show a statistically measurable rise in prices - if there’s effectively no inflation - then there’s no adjustment to benefits. This has happened three times since the current formula was adopted, in 2010, 2011 and

2016. Whether or not it produces a benefit increase, this process is automatic; it does not involve the president or Congress. They would have to take separate action to change the COLA.

Myth #4: Members of Congress don’t pay into Social Security

The facts: A common complaint about Social Security is that members of Congress don’t bother fixing the program because it doesn’t cover them. Actually, it does. Members of Congress came under the Social Security umbrella in 1984, along with the rest of the federal workforce, as part of the sweeping changes to the program enacted the previous year. Before that, senators and representatives did not pay into Social Security and were instead fully covered by a pension plan called the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS).

Those in office on Jan. 1, 1984, were allowed to remain in CSRS, but only in conjunction with Social Security. (If you're curious, two senators and five House members remain from those days.) Those elected since are covered by Social Security as well as a pension program that replaced CSRS. Either way, members of Congress pay into Social Security just like most American workers.

Myth #5: The Government Raids Social Security to Pay for Other Programs

The facts: The two trust funds that pay out Social Security benefits (one for retirees and their survivors, the other for people with disabilities) have never been part of the federal government's general fund. Social Security is a separate, self-funded program. The federal government does, however, borrow from Social Security.

Here's how: Social Security's tax revenue is, by law, invested in special U.S. Treasury securities. As with all Treasury

bonds, the federal government can spend the proceeds on a variety of programs. But as with all bondholders, Treasury has to pay the money back, with interest. Social Security redeems the securities to pay benefits. This borrowing fuels the notion that the government is raiding or even stealing from Social Security and leaving it with nothing but IOUs. But the government has always made full repayment, and the interest increases Social Security’s assets, to the tune of more than $80 billion in 2019 alone.

Myth #6: Undocumented immigrants drain Social Security

The facts: Some have blamed problems with Social Security's financial health on undocumented immigrants draining the system's resources. It's a popular complaint, but a false one. Noncitizens who live and work in the U.S. legally can qualify for Social Security under the same terms as native-born and naturalized Americans, but undocumented people are not allowed to claim benefits.

There is evidence that undocumented workers actually improve Social

Security’s bottom line. Some do obtain Social Security numbers under false pretenses, and payroll taxes are withheld from their wages even though they are not eligible to later collect benefits. A report by Social Security actuaries said that undocumented immigrants made a net contribution of around $12 billion to the program in 2010 and that their earnings would likely continue to “benefit the financial status” of Social Security.

Myth #7: Social Security Is Like a Retirement Savings Account

The facts: The government does not stow your payroll tax contributions in a personal account for you, to be paid out with interest when you retire. Your benefit is based on how much money you earned over your working life, not on how much you paid into the system. As noted above, those contributions fund benefits for current retirees (and their survivors, and people with disabilities). When you retire, those still working will cover your benefits, and so on. You might think of it less like saving for retirement (there are other vehicles for that) and more like an earned benefit the government promises to pay so you have at least some income in your later years.

Emphasis on “some”: Contrary to another common misperception, Social

Security is not meant to replace your entire work income. On average, it provides about 40 percent of a beneficiary's preretirement earnings. The formula for calculating benefits is weighted so that they replace a larger percentage of income for lower-wage workers and a lower percentage for upper-income earners.

Myth #8: You Don't Pay Taxes on Social Security Benefits

The facts: This was true until 1984. The Social Security overhaul passed by Congress and signed by President Ronald Reagan the year before included a provision that made a portion of Social

Security benefits taxable, depending on your income level. You will pay federal income tax on up to 50 percent of your benefits if your income for the year is $25,000 to $34,000 for an individual filer and $32,000 to $44,000 for a couple filing jointly. Above those thresholds, up to 85 percent of benefits are taxable. Below them, you don’t owe the IRS anything on your benefits. (Roughly speaking, Social Security counts as income the money you get from work, pensions and investments; nontaxable interest; and half of your Social Security benefits.) You might also owe state taxes on your Social Security income if you live in Colorado, Connecticut, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Vermont, Utah or West Virginia. Their rules on taxing benefits vary widely; contact your state tax agency to learn more.

Myth #9: An Ex-spouse’s Benefits Come Out of Your Own

The facts: If you are divorced, your former spouse may be eligible to collect Social Security benefits on your earnings record (and vice versa). As with benefits for a current spouse, these can be up to 50 percent of the benefit amount you are entitled to at full retirement age.

But those ex-spouse (or spouse) benefits

don’t reduce your Social Security. They are distinct payments and have no effect on what you receive each month, even if both a current and a former spouse (or multiple former spouses) are collecting them. You get the benefit you’re entitled to, based on your earnings history and the age when you file for Social Security.

Myth #10: You Lose Benefits Permanently If You Keep Working

The facts: Social Security does have a rule, called the “earnings limit” or “earnings test,” that can temporarily reduce the benefits of people who still work. But it doesn’t apply to all working

beneficiaries and is not permanent. The rule only covers people who claim benefits before full retirement age and continue working. In this circumstance, Social Security withholds a portion of benefits if earnings from work exceed a set cap, which changes every year and differs depending on how close you are to full retirement age.

In 2021, your benefit is reduced by $1 for every $2 in income above $18,960, if you won’t hit full retirement age until 2022 or later. If you will reach FRA in 2021, the formula is $1 less in benefits for every $3 in earnings above $50,520. On the date when you hit FRA, the earnings test goes away—there’s no

benefit reduction, regardless of your income. Social Security also adjusts your benefit upward so that over time, you recoup the money that was withheld.

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A Blind Tech Consultant Finds His Calling

By Jon Kalish, PC Magazine

Link: pcmag.com/news/a-blind-tech-consultant-finds-his-calling

Back in 2005, Julian Vargas bought a Nokia 6620 from AT&T for about $100. The phone ran the Symbian operating system, and AT&T sent him a memory

card loaded with TALKS software, which provided text-to-speech access to nearly all of the phone’s features and functions—this at a time when most phones had only numeric keypads, except for expensive BlackBerrys and Palm Treos. The iPhone and Android didn’t yet exist.

“Having that [Nokia] phone was a game-changer for me,” said Vargas, who has been legally blind his entire life. “That was something, to suddenly have a phone that spoke all kinds of things to me that I never had access to before, like my signal strength, my battery level…If I got a text message, it would read that message and, even more importantly, I could respond to the message."

One of the best features for Vargas, and other blind users of those rudimentary Nokia smartphones, was that they could use the TALKS software to store numbers in a contact list. Until that point, Vargas had to memorize his contacts.

Smartphones have evolved by leaps and bounds since then. And Vargas, who is now 53 and lives in the San Fernando Valley near Los Angeles, has made something of a career out of training other blind people how to use smartphones, smart speakers, and all manner of digital technology—even microwave ovens.

ScripTalk

Today, Vargas spends relatively little time on his computer. It’s mostly apps on his smartphones that get him through his day. He’s very keen on Microsoft’s Seeing AI app, which he describes as the Swiss Army knife of blind tools. It speaks text as soon as it appears in front of the smartphone’s camera, can read some handwritten text, and identifies different denominations of currency. Vargas also uses an app that works with En-Vision America’s ScripTalk, the free program whereby pharmacies will put an RFID tag about the size of a quarter on the bottom of prescription bottles. Using the app or a small standalone piece of hardware, all the info on the prescription label will be read aloud. Sometimes, Vargas needs another set of eyes to help him. At those moments he is likely to turn to Be My Eyes, an app in which a sighted volunteer on a live video call describes for the blind user what the camera on their smartphone shows. He also maintains a list of other iOS resources on his website.

“I feel that God gave each one of us a certain talent, a certain ability,” said Vargas. “And I don’t think it was intended for us to keep it to ourselves.”

A Long Road

Vargas and his younger brother were raised in an observant Catholic family in New York City. Both were born with a rare genetic condition known as Leber Congenital Amaurosis (LCA). Somewhere around 2003, at the age of 33, Vargas' already-limited vision began to decline. He knew that time would come because LCA is a degenerative disease with no cure or treatment. Not long afterward, he resolved to begin the transition from using magnification software for his Windows computer to an application that did both magnification and screen reading. His goal was to get to the point where he could just use a JAWS screen

reader and no magnification to do whatever he needed to do on his PC.

“The more you increase the magnification, the less screen real estate you get,” Vargas explained. “When you get up to four, five, or six times magnification, you have so little screen real estate, it becomes impractical to use the magnifier and you realize it’s time to go to a screen reader.”

Though Vargas never went to college, he took computer courses in the late 1990s at a vocational center in California. He describes himself as an autodidact who realized that he had a knack for figuring out how to use all sorts of electronic devices. His career as a paid trainer for blind tech users began after a period of helping his friends without charge. That was followed by a series of presentations at blind service organizations, including the Braille Institute, the Council of Citizens with Low Vision International, and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). Word of his tech chops spread to the point where Vargas' presentations at his San Fernando Valley NFB chapter drew people who normally didn't go to meetings.

"I don't want to make people dependent on me," said Vargas. "I tell people from the start that my goal is to make it so that I don't have to hear from them after

a while.”

Vargas soon became a regular at the annual Assistive Technology Conference organized by California State University, Northridge (CSUN). The CSUN gathering, which features gear and software to help blind, deaf, and others with disabilities, has been referred to as the “CES of assistive technology.” In 2009, after the conference’s location moved south to San Diego, a mini version of the gathering called Best In Tech began in the San Fernando Valley. At the last one where Vargas spoke, close to 500 people attended.

Another way Vargas kept abreast of tech

developments was listening to radio and cable television shows that focused on the topic—particularly “The Tech Guy,” the nationally syndicated weekend call-in show emanating from the influential Southern California news/talk station KFI-AM. In 2004, a new host named Leo Laporte took over the show. Over the years, Vargas evolved from being one of the listeners calling in for help to someone Laporte regarded as an authority on accessibility, who would help answer questions from blind listeners struggling with their computers and mobile devices. Radio has long been an important source of information for blind people, and Laporte has noticed that he gets a lot of calls from blind listeners or family members calling on their behalf.

Nokia 6620

Vargas remembers calling in the show when he got his Nokia 6620 and how Laporte was genuinely interested in learning what it was like for a blind person to use it. The radio host subsequently allowed Vargas to promote the Best In Tech gathering on the air. Eventually, Laporte encouraged Vargas to give out his phone number, email address, and website (techjv.com).

“Julian’s very generous of his time,” said Laporte. “He’s a really good guy.”

The respect is mutual.

“Leo doesn’t shy away from taking calls from blind listeners,” said Vargas, who also listens to Laporte’s tech podcast network, TWIT.tv. “He embraces people like me being involved in the show.”

Laporte said he can feel the frustration of his blind radio listeners when they call in to “The Tech Guy.” He tries to imagine the challenge of using a smartphone or computer—or living without them—in this modern world.

“As a sighted user, my experience of accessibility technology is never going to be the same as somebody who cannot see what’s going on,” Laporte explained.

"I'm sympathetic how hard it is and I want to help, but I can't really represent that audience, so it's really important that people who are helping blind people with accessibility are blind themselves because only they can really understand the issues."

Laporte and Vargas have both embraced smart speakers at home in a big way. While Vargas has several flavors of the Amazon Echo and one Google Home in his house, Laporte has Amazon, Google, and Apple smart speakers in practically every room of his home. But as far as Laporte is concerned, voice-enabled devices have not lived up to his expectations of what he thought would

be a transformational technology.

“I don’t think Siri or Amazon’s Echo or the Google Assistant are as good as they could be or ought to be,” said Laporte. “And they’re not improving at the speed I thought they might.”

Paying It Forward

In addition to calling in “The Tech Guy” radio show and doing live tech presentations before blind groups, Vargas has spread the word on podcasts. He has served as co-host of a podcast called “All About Smartphones,” available on the website of the Audio Internet Reading Service of Los Angeles

(AIRSLA). A group he founded in 2012 to discuss everything from high tech to no tech used to meet in person until the pandemic. Since March, 2021, Breaking Blindness Barriers gathers on Zoom and AIRSLA turns its meetings into a podcast.

Smart speakers are one of the things Vargas helps his blind clients learn to use. So is GPS. He taught Bob Acosta, a long-time client, how to follow travel directions spoken aloud on his iPhone by taking a walk with him around the block.

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California Council of the Blind Public Board Meeting

Thursday November 11, 2021 7:30 PM

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

Roll Call

Present:

- **President, Gabe Griffith**
- **1st Vice President, Sarah Harris**
- **2nd Vice President, Rob Turner**
- **Secretary, Linda Porelle**
- **Treasurer, Lisa Thomas**

Directors:

- Steve Bauer
- Christy Crespin
- Nelly Emerson
- Larry Gassman
- Guillermo Robles
- Jeff Thom
- Penny Valdovinos
- Stephanie Watts
- Frank Welte

Absent:

- Immediate Past President, Judy Wilkinson.

Agenda

Call to order. Gabe Griffith

Roll call and introduction of guests. Linda Porelle

Additions to and adoption of agenda. Gabe Griffith

Minutes October 21, 2021. Linda Porelle

Treasurer’s report. Lisa Thomas

President’s report: Gabe Griffith

Board announcements, any announcements board members may have that are of interest to our members.

2022 CCB convention. Sarah Harris

Member sound off

Agenda

Sarah moved and Larry seconded the motion to adopt the meeting agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

Minutes

Guillermo moved and Stephanie seconded the motion to approve the minutes for the October 21 open board meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer’s Report

Linda moved and Christy seconded the motion to accept the treasurer’s report. The motion passed unanimously.

Summary:

Operating Account Balance as of November 11, 2021 - $94,438.90
Accounts Payable/Outstanding: $8,973.00
Estimated Balance at Month End - $85,465.90
Scholarship Checking Balance as of November 11, 2021 - $2,574.76
Scholarship Savings Balance as of November 11, 2021 - $4,532.3

Lisa and the budget and finance committee will prepare a draft 2022 budget for presentation at our December board meeting. When asked about the $17 monthly fee on the Chase account,

Lisa replied that it’s probably due to having a low balance. She is looking into moving that account to BofA, where we have our other accounts. In response to a question about receiving two bills from Comcast, she replied that Comcast bills separately for internet and phone service. Frank asked for an update on our status with the FTB and with IRS. Lisa reported that we haven’t received any response yet.

President’s Report - Gabe Griffith

The proposed student retention task force is not fully appointed yet. The future conventions task force has also not started yet. Gabe reported that

Nicole Pacheco is now a US citizen. When asked about the board liaison committee, Linda noted that we held our first meeting on November 15 and are currently reviewing the liaison policy.

Gift for Nicole

Guillermo moved and Steve seconded the motion for the board to purchase gifts for Nicole in honor of her becoming a US citizen. The motion passed unanimously.

Board Announcements

Sarah and Chris F. attended the BAC meeting on November 17.

Christy attended the ACB membership

meeting tonight and recommends listening to it. There will be a second meeting on December 9.

2022 convention update - Sarah Harris

Convention Dates

Sarah moved and Christy seconded the motion to hold a virtual convention in 2022 from Thursday May 12 to Sunday May 15. The registration fee will be $25. Everyone who registers will receive all the convention related links. The $25 fee will make each person eligible for door prizes, a larger prize at the end, and a keepsake item yet to be determined.

Registration Fee

Sarah moved and Nelly seconded the motion to charge a $25 registration fee with an incentive gift for the 2022 CCB convention. The motion passed unanimously. Sarah also noted that we are still looking for a theme for the convention. Whoever submits the winning theme will receive a free registration and a gift card. Christy asked about the date for submitting credentials. They will be due on March 12.

Member Sound Off

Chris F. encouraged members to attend BAC meetings. Chris is also the vice president of CTEVBI in charge of

specialists. He once again emphasized the importance of braille and the need for more transcribers and board members for CTEBVI. Regina raised concerns about Uber discrimination. Gabe and Jeff have taken the concerns to ACB, who will be gathering info for building a united response. Margie noted that Uber is charging more for waiting while we find them and suggested printing out ride details. She said CCB should be proactive on this issue. Nicolette mentioned I love braille on community calls. Roger talked about the Braille Project in San Jose that might shut down. Jeff says they actually have equipment to donate. Sarah noted that they produced our last convention program. Chris reiterated that we need to work with CTEBVI. Roger said he was on the BRAILLE board call and talked about BRLC. Roger announced that there will be a celebration of life for Bernice on Sunday December 5 at 1 PM. Zoom information will be sent out soon.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

California Council of the Blind Open Board Meeting

January 13, 2022

Executive board meeting: President Gabe Griffith called the executive meeting to order at 6:35 PM. Ten members were in attendance. Financial matters were

discussed. The meeting adjourned at 7:05 PM.

Public Board Meeting

President Gabe Griffith called the public meeting to order at 7:36 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**
- **Guillermo Robles**
- **Jeff Thom**
- **Penny Valdovinos**
- **Stephanie Watts**
- **Frank Welte**

Meeting Agenda

Call to order. Gabe Griffith

Roll call and introduction of guests. Linda Porelle and Penny Valdovinos

Additions to and adoption of agenda. Gabe Griffith

Minutes December 9, 2021. Linda Porelle

Treasurer’s report. Lisa Thomas

Board announcements, any announcements board members may have that are of interest to our members.

CCB 2022 budget. Lisa Thomas

Member sound off.

Adoption of agenda.

Christy moved and Larry seconded the motion to adopt the meeting agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of minutes from December 9 board meeting.

Guillermo moved and Stephanie seconded the motion to approve the December meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of December treasurer's report.

Linda moved and Jeff seconded the motion to approve the December treasurer's report. The motion passed unanimously. See treasurer's report for details.

Lisa noted the correction to the on-the-muv entry to show that we were credited back $50. We also received confirmation letters from FTB and IRS. They have all of our tax materials. The letters were dated late in October, which is likely an indication of the level of their processing backlog. Christy asked for more clarification about those October dates. Lisa assured her that those particular dates were not reflective of anything at our end of the process.

Board Announcements

Gabe announced that our partnership with EUC has been extended through May. Guillermo has sent link to Google

form for compiling rosters. April 12 will be the last member inclusion date before the May convention. Jeff asked and Lisa responded that we will have the same quarterly payment rate for EUC extension.

Jeff reported on legislative issues we are focusing on this term. They include e-scooter insurance, accessible drug labeling, requiring implementation of the expanded core curriculum, and increasing home, community and mental health services. SSI coalition was also mentioned. Christy asked about plans for setting up a universal health care system. Jeff replied that a framework hasn’t been proposed yet. Jeff reminded

us about the ACB leadership seminar in March and noted that a list of legislative priorities will be announced soon. Sarah also mentioned the BAC meeting coming up on February 10. She will send the meeting agenda. Christy announced the California Diabetics in action (CDA) meeting on January 22. Frank noted that the CAAVL meeting will be on January 15 at 4 PM.

Adoption of proposed 2022 budget.

Lisa moved and Linda seconded the motion to approve the 2022 budget with the proposed amendment. The motion passed unanimously.

Summary and discussion:

Lisa thanked her committee: Rex, Kevin, Gabe, and Judy. Jeff and Christy suggested amending the dues line. Jeff proposed adding $250 for membership coalition on long-term care and support. They’ve added vision loss to their focus. Sarah asked about convention incentives, suggesting an increase from $3000 to $7000. After discussion, the amount will be increased from $3000 to $5000 but could add more later. Jeff asked about including vote now. Lisa says it’s factored in at 500 but might really be 5000, which could be solicited through a sponsorship. The issue can be revisited after the next convention planning meeting.

$181,484 expenses
$147,095 revenue
minus $34,389 net
$75,611 estimated going into 2023

Lisa reminded us that we haven’t made any requests from the Newel Perry Fund in 2021.

Transfer Funds from Lily Perry to Scholarship.

Jeff moved and Christy seconded the motion to transfer $5000 from the Lily Perry account to the scholarship account. The motion passed unanimously.

Questions About the Proposed Budget

from Members.

Niki said she was concerned and suggested fiscal caution. Regina said we probably can’t afford Vote Now.

Member sound off.

Cachet asked about engagement for at large members and paying her dues for that. She suggested the sending of a welcome letter to confirm receipt of at large dues.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 PM.

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New Technique Could Enhance Films for Visually Impaired

link: technologynetworks.com/neuroscience/news/new-technique-could-enhance-films-for-visually-impaired-355364

Researchers at the University of York have developed a new way for visually impaired audiences to experience and enjoy films.

Traditional Audio Description (AD) consists of an audio track in the third person that provides information on the visual layer of a film or television

programme. The current use of traditional AD can sometimes overlap with other sound elements in the soundtrack, such as music and sound effects.

Under the new format, verbal descriptions are minimised and sound design is used as the main vehicle for accessibility, through a combination of additional sound effects, 3D sound, and first-person narration.

Back in 2016, York researchers Dr. Mariana Lopez and Dr. Gavin Kearney conducted a survey which found that 34% of visually impaired people surveyed had not attended the cinema in the last previous 12 months, compared to only 5.5% of sighted people surveyed, with issues of accessibility discouraging visually impaired people from attending.

The new methods result in a more “organic” form of accessibility which will help bring about a more inclusive cinematic experience.

The University of York project, which was funded by the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council, sought to provide an alternative soundtrack that minimised the number of verbal descriptions and, as a result, avoid them masking crucial elements in the original soundtrack.

The project favoured the creation of accessible experiences through sound design strategies by focusing on three main techniques.

The first method is the addition of sound effects to provide information on actions, elicit the presence of establishing shots, convey abstract scenes as well as indicate the presence of characters, time and place. The second method is the use of 3D sound over headphones to allow the conveyance of the position of characters and objects portrayed on the screen. Finally, the use of first-person narration to portray aspects of the story that cannot be conveyed through sound effects, such as feelings, gestures,

colours as well as certain actions.

The effectiveness of these new techniques was explored through a case study, the short film Pearl, which was conducted in collaboration with students of the University. The film focuses on a young girl called Margaret, who has the ability to produce pearls. The cinematography works on darkness and shadows and the production design looks to generate ambiguity by blending Victorian Gothic horror elements with contemporary ones.

The film was chosen as a case study due to the research team's initial involvement as advisors to the

production as well as its unusual storyline.

The study team consulted widely and held a series of focus groups with visually impaired and sighted audiences to demonstrate the potential of these techniques to foster inclusive cinematic experiences.

Dr Mariana Lopez, Senior Lecturer in Sound Production and Post Production in the Department of Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media said: "We have sought to create a new paradigm for accessibility to film and television by shifting the focus from verbal descriptions to the power of

creative sound design and the importance of incorporating accessibility to the creative filmmaking workflows.

“By designing such works, sound can be a vehicle for social inclusion by making cinematic experiences shared accessible experiences.”

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CCB Officers and Directors

As of July, 2021

Officers

President: Gabe Griffith (2020-2022, 1st term), Concord, 925-222-5762, gabe.griffith@ccbnet.org

1st Vice President: Sarah Harris (2021-2023, 1st 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 (2021-2023, 2nd

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 (2021-2023, 2nd term), Culver City, 310-738-2853 C, steve.bauer@ccbnet.org

Christy Crespin (2021-2023, 2nd term), Highland, 909-800-7189 C,

christy.crespin@ccbnet.org

Nelly Emerson (2021-2023, 2nd 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

Stephanie Watts (2021-2023, 1st term),
Sacramento, 916-304-7297,
swwatts3@gmail.com

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

Penny Valdovinos (2021-2023, 2nd term), Bakersfield, 661-378-8282, penny.valdovinos@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

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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.