**WASHINGTON**

**COUNCIL**

**OF THE BLIND**

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# WCB NEWSLINE

Spring2023 Edition

﻿“Around the World in 80 Ways”

Julie Brannon, President

Phone: 206-478-3164 Email: [jbrannon0612@gmail.com](mailto:jbrannon0612@gmail.com)

Heather Meares, Content Editor

Phone: 720-519-9104 Email: [hdmeares@gmail.com](mailto:hdmeares@gmail.com)

Reginald George, Technical Editor

Phone: 816-721-3145 Email: [theWCBNewsline@gmail.com](mailto:theWCBNewsline@gmail.com)

WCB Newsline is the 2011 and 2020 winner of the Hollis Liggett Braille Free Press Award, presented annually by American Council of the Blind to the top publication in the nation for promoting best journalistic practices and excellence in writing.

WCB is a 501(c)(3) organization, which means your generous contributions are tax deductible. To make a donation electronically, please send PayPal payments to [TreasurerWCB@gmail.com](mailto:TreasurerWCB@gmail.com).Checks made payable to Washington Council of the Blind may be mailed to the attention of our treasurer, Lisa George, at PO Box 675, Yakima, WA 98907-0675.

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**We will publish the Summer 2023 WCB Newsline in July**

**and are anxious to read your quality content.**

**Please send all submissions byMay 31st.**

**Digital cartridges should be returned by this date.**

## \*\*\* **Publication Guidelines**

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* All opinions expressed are those of the authors, not Washington Council of the Blind or WCB Newsline staff.
* We do not accept anonymous content or letters.
* Articles may be up to 1,000 words.
* Chapter updates may be up to 350 words.
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## President’s Message by Julie Brannon

jbrannon0612@gmail.com

It’s funny to be thinking ahead to spring, when we had snow flurries just this evening in which the report is being written.

The first months of 2023 have been busy for Washington Council of the Blind. Lisa George has been gathering membership information from all the chapters, which will have been turned into American Council of the Blind for certification. Thank you, Lisa, for doing that thankless job.

Also, I worked on committee development, which consisted of being in touch with all the chairs who helped me in gathering current and new committee members for each of our vibrant committees. This year, we saw two committee changes at the chair level. The Senior Vision Loss Committee chair transitioned from Alco Canfield (our outgoing secretary) to our newly elected board member Beth Greenberg. Welcome, Beth, to the role.

Also, Hayley Agers has stepped up again to chair the WCB Families Committee, and she will have with her a new co-chair, Tammy Johnson. Welcome Hayley and Tammy. We’re very excited to have some members who chose or agreed to be appointed to our various committees.

We changed our originally scheduled board meeting from February to March 4, primarily to allow for the board to have an in-person retreat, which took place in Vancouver, WA, the weekend of Feb. 10-11. What a treat that all officers/board members were able to be present, including Denise Colley, past president, all the way from Texas. It certainly must have felt like true emersion for the newly elected board members as we discussed, digested, analyzed and came to understandings on many topics the board rarely gets a chance to discuss. Everyone had ample opportunities to provide their visionary input. Thank you, WCB, for allowing this sharing and bonding time for your new board.

The Leadership Committee has been working tirelessly on the leadership summit, including both leadership training and mentoring.

Looking forward to a great WCB 2023 spring. Stay tuned.

## Letter From the Editors

Greetings and Salutations,

This issue is all about travel, and may we just say, what a fantastic journey it is. For us, your editors, the Newsline is, in itself, a means of travel. It allows us to be where you have been, to experience what you have experienced, and to hopefully understand each other in ways we never could have without this publication. It is a trip into your minds and your lives that is like no other expedition we’ve ever taken.

That being said, if you travel too long, you get tired. You need to revitalize, and you also need to find who to pass the torch to when your journey comes to an end.

No, we are not done. Yes, we are tired, but in a good way. As we have said many times, this is a labor of love for us, and we cherish the opportunity to share our gifts with WCB and beyond. We realize this commitment is huge, and so we need to make a serious effort to start searching for the next Newsline editors, and begin training and mentoring them to someday take over and steer this beautiful flagship.

Is it you? If your answer is maybe, give us a call or send us an email and we will chat.Now, sit back, sip your favorite vacation beverage, and enjoy the ride.

Your Faithful Editors,Heather and Reg

## It’s Your Newsline … Just Say It! by Reginald George

This is the place to express your thoughts, voice your valued opinions of our articles, inspire us with your grandest ideas, and share your feedback as we continue to evolve our publication into the Newsline you can’t wait to read.

Welcome to spring. We have some wonderful podcasts coming out just around the corner. So, stay tuned for those. We will have two chats with puppy raisers hosted by Marilee Richards and Linda Wilder, as well as guide dog focus calls, brought to you by the Guide Dog Users of Washington State, and a demonstration of the ScripTalk talking prescription reading device from Envision America.

We will also be posting Heather’s “Cheshire Cat interview” with Danielle Miller, director of the Washington State Talking Book and Braille Library, from this issue, and the author panel from last fall’s state convention. You can listen to all episodes of WCB Newsline Unleashed at the following link:

<https://wcb-newsline-unleashed.pinecast.co>. Or, just ask your phone or Amazon smart speaker to play it.

The top article, as chosen by you our readers, from the winter Newsline was “It’s a Dog’s Life Chapter III,” by Marilee Richards. Her enthusiasm as a new dog owner is coming through loud and clear, and you will hear more from her about Taryn in this issue.

The deadline for all Newsline submissions, and to cast your vote for the best article from this issue is Wednesday, May 31. Send all votes and content to [TheWCBNewsline@Gmail.com](mailto:TheWCBNewsline@Gmail.com).

Newsline is especially looking for youth writers. If you are a student or know a youth writer with something to say about the state of the blindness community, their own challenges, or the organized blind movement in Washington state, send them our way. We would be most grateful.

**Reader feedback on winter Issue:**

From Linda Wilder: “Again, WCB Newsline is filled with so many great articles, making it difficult to choose. I read every article and there are many I really liked. I am choosing ‘It’s A Dog’s Life Chapter III’ by Marilee Richards. Marilee gave a good description of her training at Guide Dogs for the Blind. However, it was the wonderful feeling I got when she talked about falling in love with T and how rich her life is now, how much freedom she now has with T by her side, and now has a warm sweet companion she can take care of.”

Hayley Agers: “Well friends, it’s 2:24 a.m. on a Wednesday morning, and I want to say thank you for giving me something to read at this ungodly hour. I just finished reading through the entire issue, and there were so many articles that struck a chord. As I prepare to leave my home for two weeks to train with my third guide from GDB, Marilee’s article helped build the excitement I am feeling and brought back memories of past guide dog trainings. I am always so inspired when people are willing to be honest and raw with their feelings, despite it feeling a little vulnerable. Because of that, I appreciated the articles written by Alan Biné and Tim Downing regarding their experiences at their first WCB convention. For me this time, however, I really enjoyed Heather’s interview with Keiko and Naomi Namekata. I had the privilege of being taught by and working under Keiko while both a student and then an instructor at the OTC. I feel like I got to see Naomi grow from a young girl to a woman. I have always enjoyed observing this dynamic mother/daughter duo work together, both professionally and in their personal lives, and I so enjoyed getting to know them even better through this article.”

Note: Opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and do not reflect those of Newsline staff or Washington Council of the Blind.

# FEATURES

## Cheshire Cat Interviews #19 Where in the World is Danielle Miller? by Heather Meares

If you ever thought librarians lead a sedentary life, think again. In fact, for Danielle Miller, director of the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library (WTBBL), it has taken her all over the world. During her lengthy time working there, WTBBL has received the National Library of the Year Award three times, and this is not by chance. We are so lucky to live in a state that is home to such a distinguished library with the most vibrant library director I’ve ever met. As a member of the Patron Advisory Council, I have had lots of opportunities to get to know Danielle and hear about all the happenings at WTBBL, and thought it would be great to let our readers learn a little more about her and the work she does.

Danielle: “I've been really lucky in my time at WTBBL. It's been the last six or seven years that I've had some really exciting opportunities to travel in relation to my work with the library. I've been able to go to Egypt and China, and more recently to Dublin, Ireland, and Zagreb, Croatia, and then just a few weeks ago, New Delhi, India. It has helped me expand my view on libraries, and libraries for persons with print disabilities, and international perspectives on work with disabilities. It's something I'm very grateful for. I was approached by an organization here in Seattle who asked if I would be willing to host two professional fellows. The professional fellows program is through the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. And that was in connection with a program that works with Egypt and Tunisia and Morocco. I said I'd be delighted to. So, I hosted for several weeks, a woman from Egypt and a woman from Tunisia. They worked on projects here at the library. We loved working with them and having them here at WTBBL.

“Then the following year, I was contacted and asked if I would like to participate myself as part of the professional fellows program doing a reverse exchange. I was able to go to Egypt, to Cairo for almost two weeks and visit organizations who are working with persons with disabilities. I got to visit an organization that supports people with intellectual disabilities doing employment, a place that gets wheelchairs for people and customizes them, a school, and some other organizations. I also was able to travel to Alexandria and visit the library at Alexandria, including the Taha Hussein Library for the blind and visually impaired, which is a separate small library within the library for Alexandria. They've got audio books and Braille and computers. That library just lends within the building, so they don't actually circulate outside of the library, but it was a very great thing to see. Egypt was amazing.

“I have traveled previously. I was a French major and lived in France a couple times, lived in Ireland for half of my senior year in high school, and lived abroad as a child when I was very young. But I'd never seen anything like Cairo. The driving and traffic in Cairo is something like I've never seen before. The cars, the vans, the people piled on motorcycles and scooters, it was absolute chaos. I've been to Rome, that has crazy traffic, but this was nothing like that. And even just in New Delhi where traffic was crazy, nothing I've seen rivals Cairo traffic. I honestly do not know how a person would cross a street. Even a sighted person, anybody, and I never saw anybody cross the street. I don't know how you would navigate that. The streets were not very accessible, a very, very old city.

“We did a really big exhibition here at WTBBL where we collaborated with the China Library for the Blind, (China Braille Press), where we did a Braille exhibition at WTBBL. Folks from the China Library for the Blind, (China Braille Press), came out to Seattle and they wanted to put on this exhibition about Braille to coincide with the Chinese President Xi Jinping at the time's visit to Seattle. It was an extraordinary exhibit, where they completely transformed the space. They built an exhibit covering the walls, recarpeting the floor, a completely digital exhibit with lights and shelves, and every aspect of Braille from the beginning of time, to its inception, to current times, assistive technology and Braille displays, Braille in the United States, and Braille in China. It defies the mind what they did and the number of resources they put into it was incredible. Unfortunately, the Chinese president couldn't come. We had U.S. Secret Service and Chinese Secret Service here scoping out the building. And at the time, Amazon was doing so much building around here and there were so many cranes, they felt they couldn't secure the building from snipers. So, they would not allow him to come. But there were several Chinese dignitaries that came, including the Chinese ambassador to the U.S. and several other Chinese dignitaries. There was a really big opening ceremony. We had the exhibit open for a couple weeks, and then they left, and everything was taken down. And I didn't think about it again.

“And then they contacted me in 2018 and asked if I would come and visit the library and Braille Press and give a presentation on our library service and NLS library services, and also attend the Chinese Information and Accessibility Forum in Beijing. They offered to fund my travel and invited me to speak and tour and present there. It's a pretty amazing place, the Chinese Braille Press, Chinese Library for the Blind. They produce a lot of Braille, and books and magazines and audio. They produce really all of their devices and assistive technology that they loan to their patrons. Within the building, they have assistive technology, it's like an accessible museum. They have all sorts of science models and models of the human body that you can take apart to feel the muscles and the bones, and different canes. It's a very tactile museum and space that patrons can use.

“They've got an art museum in there, and they do classes. It's really a pretty fantastic space. I was on a big stage giving this presentation, and everybody had headsets on because there was simultaneous interpretation and people in booths doing the interpreting. I was only in Beijing, but I did get a little bit of time to do sightseeing and visit the Great Wall, some temples, and other things in China.

“Then, just a couple of years ago, I joined the Library Serving Persons with Print Disabilities (LPD) Standing Committee of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and Organizations. The Standing Committee is made up of people from countries all over the world, working together with the goal of helping improve library services for persons with print disabilities and supporting those services internationally, putting together standards and advocating for the Marrakesh Treaty, and working internationally for the types of things we're trying to do here at WTBBL, as well as with NLS. It's an honor to be part of that group, and I'm the secretary.”

Heather: “Can you quickly explain what the Marrakesh Treaty is?”

Danielle: “Yes, absolutely. The Marrakesh Treaty is an international copyright treaty that came into being in 2013 in Marrakesh, Morocco. It's through the World Intellectual Property Organization, or WIPO. And it basically allows for the cross-border exchange of materials in accessible formats like audio and Braille for persons with print disabilities. The U.S. ratified just a few years ago. For any countries that have ratified the treaty, they can exchange these materials. One of the main ways those materials are exchanged is through the Accessible Books Consortium Global Book Service, which is supported through WIPO, as well. It's helping us here via NLS get many more books in languages other than English. And, in fact, even some additional books in English through books from Canada and England, as well. But it's greatly increased access for books for us here. For example, in Washington, many more books in Spanish for our Spanish language readers, and NLS books including books that we make here at WTBBL, our books are shared to the Accessible Books Consortium. So, readers in other countries who want books in English have access to those through the ABC Global Books Consortium. And its goal is to help end that global book famine for persons with print disabilities. There have been many countries that have ratified, but there's still a lot of work to do. Some of those countries are partially along the way, but are still sorting it out with their own country's copyright or their levels of implementation. Or maybe they are not signed up with the Global Book Service yet, or they're in different stages. But it's kind of a game changer. Egypt hasn't ratified yet, but with the work of LPD, and my colleague who's on the standing committee in Egypt, it's actually part of the conversation now in higher levels in Egypt. So, it's helping move things along.”

Heather: “I wanted you to talk about that because not everybody is familiar with that, and I think it's really important that people know what it is, the progress that's happened, and where it still needs to go. So thank you for that.”

Danielle: “Absolutely. Through that committee, I’m able to be involved at that international level and help do some good work.

“I'm the chair of a subcommittee to work on guidelines to help public libraries and other library organizations internationally provide services for persons with print disabilities. So, at that mainstream level, making sure that people are getting the support and services they need if there isn't a specialized library, or public libraries to collaborate with, to make sure that services are inclusive and accessible. More and more things are available, and there may not be specialized services that are needed, or people may not have access where they are. So, we're just trying to make sure that services are as inclusive and accessible as possible, and that people in public libraries, whether it's school or academic libraries, have as much information available as possible to be able to provide services for persons with print disabilities and know what those needs are. The main IFLA conference is called the World Library Information Congress, and it was last summer in Dublin, Ireland. I was able to go to that. There are people from all over the world there, and you get so many different perspectives and learn about different projects that people are doing and different approaches to library services that can help inform what we do here at WTBBL. The library in Belgium has this whole project they do for readers with dyslexia called ‘I hate reading, but I love stories,’ so maybe that's something we can run with. They've created a committee in the German Library Association that's all about accessible training for public libraries. So maybe there's a model that WTBBL can do to get out to the public libraries here. It’s about benefits, that communication and that sharing of knowledge, and being in Dublin was really wonderful.

“As I mentioned, I had lived there for about six months when I was in high school. So, it was nice to be back, see how things had changed. Look for some of the candy I liked. There was a candy bar that was called the Moro bar that was chocolate and caramel and crunchy things, and super sweet. I looked everywhere and I couldn't find it and finally found out that it changed its name. Then I was able to find it.”

Heather: “It sounds amazing!”

Danielle: “There are these things called wine gums. They're so good. And there's a black currant flavor and they're like gummy bears, but not as sweet. The black currant flavor is so good. I had to keep going around finding those and buying them. And I'm not a big drinker, but having a pint of Guinness in a pub was really nice.”

Heather: “In a pub in Dublin! That was not to be missed.”

Danielle: “Of course, there was the work and the conference, but, those are nice things to have. Then my committee working on the guidelines met in November in Zagreb, Croatia. I was there only for a few days, but it was a beautiful city. The weather was very much like Seattle. My host, the librarian from the Croatian Library for the Blind, kept apologizing. And I said, no, this is great. I feel like I'm at home.

“And it was neat to be at the Croatian Library for the Blind and see how it's similar to and different from WTBBL, and see the way they organize their collection.

“They had a couple of recording booths that were set up a little bit different than ours here. They had a few patrons come in. They had some beautiful art that their patrons had made, including a quilt that had the Croatian Braille alphabet on it tactically, where the person had used fabric to make the raised dots of the Croatian Braille alphabet. That was really beautiful. And they're in the same building as the Croatian Association of the Blind which works with another organization. They have a tactile museum in that building that we got to visit, which was pretty interesting. That has some history of the blind in Croatia, including one of their older schools for the blind, and some development of assistive technology, and then some sculpture and other artwork that was made by persons who are blind. It was interesting having those organizations all co-located in one building. It had a little more traffic of visitors than we sometimes get at WTBBL.”

Heather: “Yeah, that's a neat concept, the collaboration of the different units.”

Danielle: “Yeah, I thought that was nice. And that's something that I sometimes miss. I love it when we have patrons come into WTBBL. I'm going to let the cat out of the bag. We're going to try and have a patron art show this fall. So, be thinking about making some art, but I love to get people in the building. And that's one of the hard things about being a statewide service and being located in Seattle. Many people are far away, and it can be hard to be here. But it's so nice when we can physically have our library patrons in the building, because it brings that sense of community. And so, the ways we can try and find to do either virtual programming, or when we can do outreach and travel around the state and try and have programs either at the WCB convention, or collaboratively with a public library, or in some sort of event hall, or somewhere in other cities in the state, I think is really important so we can have those connections. And Croatia was really neat. They had so many outdoor seating areas for restaurants and cafes, even with the rain, it was set up so that almost every place had an awning and outdoor seating, and heating, and lights. You were always able to sit outside and have a coffee or have something to eat. And it was very easy to walk around. There were lots of walking streets that were very easy to get around. And it seemed very accessible, despite being quite an old city, a very beautiful city.

“A few weeks ago, I was in New Delhi. From Seattle, it takes a long time to get there, about 26 hours, but worth it. There are a lot of people there. It's a big, big city. I think they said there are around 24 million people living in New Delhi. There are only 7.8 million people in Washington. There is a lot of traffic, lots of honking, lots of people on the street. It feels very busy all the time. So, finding quiet was kind of nice.We had lots of meetings, and we put on a seminar that had about 250 people attend. And we got a lot of work done, had our meetings and our working groups, but we were able to see the Taj Mahal and see several different types of temples and other sites. There was Braille at the Taj Mahal, which was pretty cool.”

Heather: “That is cool!”

Danielle: “There was a little plaque that had several panels of Braille on it. That was the only thing I saw there, but there was Braille at the Taj Mahal. There were people everywhere. I have to say visually, it was so colorful. All the women in different colors of saris, and then the men who were Sikhs with different colored turbans, and the smells of all the food. I've been a vegetarian since I was a teenager, and it was so easy to eat. So much vegetarian food, which was just delightful. There were some Indian foods that I had never had that were really delicious.”

Heather: “What was your favorite?”

Danielle: “Well, I had never had dosa before, which was kind of like a really thin pancake, folded over filling. It came with several chutneys, and you could either have a cheese paneer filling or potato filling. That's from a part of southern India, where it’s more common. And I think that might have been my favorite. That was really fun. And then there was something called chat, which I hadn't had before. It was almost like a balloon of really thin fried dough, and you poked a hole in the top of it because it was hollow, and then you pour these flavored liquids into it, and then drop in these little, I think they were almost like fried chickpeas in it. Then you pop the whole thing in your mouth.”

Heather: “Oh, wow. That sounds so delicious.”

Danielle: “Yeah, and that's more of an appetizer.

“Our host there, Dipendra, is blind, and he works with the Daisy Consortium and one of the places that we visited. He also is the co-founder of the Saxion Trust that works at getting assistive technology to people who are blind or visually impaired in India. They also started a school for the blind that we visited. They work on getting kids academically ready to go into the mainstream schools. And then the kids can also come back to the Saxion school after school for additional support or computer work, homework help, or any additional assistance they need. For some kids, maybe the mainstream school is not their track, and they can work more on independent living skills. There were little kids who were learning things like how to pair up their socks. There were these teeny little kids, and they were sitting there with a bunch of socks, learning how to tell which socks went together. Those independent living, getting yourself ready and taking care of yourself kind of skills. There were kids that were making things and learning skills. They have a little shop. There was a student who had graduated, and he was manning the shop, selling things that they made at the school. They make little bags, and so they covered a bunch of different tracks. It was so positive and the teachers were so enthusiastic.

“We also visited a spot at the Indian Institute of Technology, one of the universities, a program there where they design assistive technology. And they do a lot of testing and work with Saksham. They have a nonprofit arm where they also do a lot of tactile graphics and do tactile books, as well.

“We also visited a community library that is in an area where there are a lot of people from lower castes. Many of them had never read before or had access to books. So, they were really focused on making the community open to everybody, the library open to everybody, being accessible for people with disabilities, as well as people from any caste, being completely inclusive. They had really wonderful programs and had added some Braille to the collection. They had added an embosser, and were adding some audio books. The library staff was so dynamic and excited about including the whole community.”

Heather: “That's really exciting. It sounds like things are really similar to here, as far as services. Do you think there was a lot of differences in the services that you saw, or were they similar?”

Danielle: “Well, I think in some ways it's similar. It's a good question. In Egypt, for example, there's no national library, so the only library for the blind or print disabled is in Alexandria inside a library, and you have to go there and stay there to read an audio book.”

Heather: “Oh, wow. Okay. That's very different.”

Danielle: “Yes. And Egypt's a fairly big country. So, if you're somewhere else, you don't have access. They're trying to work with the public libraries, and one of the things to figure out is how could public libraries provide a service for people? When I was visiting Egypt, persons with print disabilities are still not given very much access. They still haven't ratified on Marrakesh. So, a public library or somebody else can't become an authorized entity yet to access books. So that's pretty different.

“In India, they're working really hard to make things available, and they have ratified on Marrakesh. So, I think it's a little more similar. I'm not sure what their library for the blind or print disabled situation is. We didn't get to see anything like that. But Daisy is really big there. We did see a scanner that can scan something and do OCR and then can translate the text into 16 Indian languages and read those aloud.”

Heather: “That's kind of amazing.”

Danielle: “Yeah. But they're using technology a lot there. In Croatia, it's very similar. In Croatia and Europe, they do have something like Free Matter. So, they do send out books. Theirs is called Secogram instead of Free Matter. They send out CDs a lot of them or their Daisy or Daisy Players. So, it's similar in a lot of places, but some places still don’t have the same amount of access as we have here. We have a pretty good system.”

Heather: “So where are you going next?”

Danielle: “I'm going to Rotterdam in the Netherlands in August, which I'm excited about. We'll be there for a little over a week. Our committee's planning a satellite conference. So, we're going to be holding that for two days. And then following that is the big IFLA, World Library Information Congress. And I may be hosting my colleagues in Seattle in November. It's great for the library, and to have other library exposure, but for me personally, it's getting to see other cultures, it opens my mind, and keeps me humble and grateful. It keeps me thinking and reminds me that there's a whole world out there. That there's just so much to experience. It's not all about the United States, or Washington, or Seattle. There are so many perspectives and hearing about my colleagues, how they do things or how they live, getting to sit and have breakfast with people from other countries and share those experiences. It enriches my life and makes me a better person, and hopefully, a better supervisor. It gives me more to offer, makes me more understanding, more sympathetic, and more human.”

Heather: “What would be the one thought you would leave us with?”

Danielle: “I always like to have the opportunity to explore and see what I find. Because if you only go on a tour or you only go to a tourist place, you're going to miss out on some of the culture or some unexpected gem or experience in a place. Even if it's just finding a coffee shop or a café, or being able to go for a walk or go somewhere that's off the beaten path and listen to people talk, or go to a market rather than doing the tourist things. You can soak up so much more of the culture. Sometimes it can be a little scary because it's unknown, but I think you get so much more out of it by listening and experiencing something that is more the element of where you are. And for me, I think it's always good to try and learn at least, hello, please, thank you, or a couple words in the language of the place you're going. It shows some respect. And maybe you don't use it all the time and maybe you massacre it. But you're trying. You don't have to learn everything and chances are where you're going, people speak some English because people around the world learn languages, unlike us. If you can just learn please and thank you or hello, if you go into a shop or restaurant, that goes really far.”

Heather: “Thank you so much for spending time talking to me today. I love hearing your stories and letting everybody know what you do.”

Danielle: “Thank you, Heather. It was a pleasure to speak with you.”

## Zack and Gramps at it Again by Zackery Hurtz

zackery.d.hurtz@gmail.com

"WellZackariah, school’s done for the summer, and we got places to be. Grab what you need and be ready to roll out tomorrow morning so we can be at the campsite by noon."

Every summer I'd hear some variation of the above statement issued to me by my grandfather who I'll refer to from now on as Gramps. My Gramps was a Vietnam vet who worked a full-time job, but he'd take time off to take me out traveling around the Pacific Northwest. We'd go fishing, camping, and crabbing, and spent time exploring the state parks and federal lands.

Now one thing you need to know, Gramps always had some type of van that we'd turn into our base of operations. It'd be loaded up with sleeping bags, coolers, crab traps, fishing gear, soda, and a stack of Harry Potter audio books on tape. As a young dude, I didn't have need for much of anything, a pocket knife or three, a couple days’ worth of clothes, and a pocket full of change.

This was back in the late ‘90s, early 2000s, so technology wasn't exactly something I carried around with me at that time. For most of our adventures, we answered to no one and checked in with the family by pay phone. As a dude who was diagnosed with ADHD at age 5, these road trips were rather calming to my mind. It was enough stimuli to keep me happy, but also let me find peace in and among the vast forests of the Pacific Northwest.

It's important to note that these experiences shaped my childhood, and at that time, I didn't know just how big of an impact they'd have on my life moving forward. I enjoyed these trips and took them on with a full head of steam, doing my best to experience the world. As I write this looking back, I realize just how they allowed me to find myself.

Gramps and I loved fishing and did quite a bit of it all around Washington. I don't know how he found the places he did, but they'd be tucked back in the woods, and we'd hike to them with a couple of poles, chairs, and a tackle box. Often times, we'd talk about whatever, but it started to change when I turned 12. That's when Gramps began talking about his time in the army and what it was like on the frontlines of the Vietnam war. I didn't realize just how much my Gramps trusted me and felt comfortable talking to me. He never talked to anyone about his experiences and the trauma he went through.

These talks over time built our bond, and I realized that not even my grandma knew what I knew. Fishing with Gramps turned into therapy for him, and I was always happy to listen. I never judged him for what he felt guilty about, nor did I push him to talk. These trips turned into one of the most important parts of my life. They taught me to sit down, shut up, and listen, which was not something I was good at at that age.

While sitting on a series of docks in one of the small ocean towns, with crab pots in the water, Gramps gave me one of the most profound pieces of advice that I still carry with me to this day. We were talking about how my dad never seemed happy with his life. He was so focused on how his blindness was preventing him from living. My dad didn't handle his blindness well, and I tried to make some sense of it as a kid. Gramps saw me struggling with this, and he put it bluntly.

"Zack, don't let your disability be more than it is. Don't let it turn into two disabilities."

I must’ve had a rather dumb and confused look on my face, because Gramps started to break it down. "Look, it's okay to be blind, it's okay to be upset about being blind. It's not going to help you live life, though. You shouldn't constantly dwell on it; it won't help you in the long run to surrender to the depression. Focusing on what you can't do never shows you what you can do. Your dad is letting his blindness control his life. You, though, are doing what your dad needs to do. Get out, experience the world, and test your limits."

The conversation from that day lives in my brain rent-free and shapes a lot of my decisions. Gramps made sure that in life, I was given every chance to succeed, to live a fairly normal life. Whatever I wanted to do, he'd help me find ways to do it, it didn't matter I couldn't see. If I wanted to go shooting, he'd be right behind me, helping me aim, or in the passenger seat, giving me directions as I drove along old logging roads, and most importantly, would be there when life got dark. In a lot of ways, he was my father. That isn't to say anything bad about my dad, but dad often felt like my older brother.

Alright, so let's get back to the road trips. In 2004, my family decided to move from Washington to Missouri, which meant moving two houses worth of stuff. I'd make this trip a few times, serving as the dude who keeps the driver awake.

Many of you read the story I wrote about Oreo, my Amazon parrot, and I'm happy to bring him up again. My Gramps and I left Washington with my cousin's wife and their two kids, with a packed car. We were in a mid-sized SUV that seated five people and one parrot. Both of the kiddos were young enough to need to be in car seats, which meant I, as the older guy, had to sit in the middle of the backseat, aka the hump. If you haven't experienced this, let me tell you it absolutely sucked. Car seats are bulky, hard-plastic demons, and they'll put bruises all over you when you're crammed in between them.

Oreo and I were stuck in the back seat with two very upset children. Oreo had the honor of riding on my shoulder for the entire trip. Of course, this meant I was his safety system and his bathroom. Six hours into the trip, I had a decent amount of feces on my shirt. On top of that, any time the children started crying, Oreo would begin mocking them in the way that only parrots can do. He'd also casually bite my ears if and when I tried to grab a few minutes of rest.

You might think him pooping on me is gross, but as a long-time bird owner, it's just part of the deal. Now being a young teenager, I didn't exactly pack that many shirts, so by the time we reached Missouri, I was one disgusting dude. Oreo, on the other hand, was happy as could be. He'd gotten to go for a car ride and was now reunited with the rest of the family. I quickly put him in his cage and found the nearest shower and burned that shirt. I shall miss you AC/DC shirt!

I learned a couple of things on that road trip, one of which is birds, when excited, will poop on you. It doesn't matter to them if you've been their best friend for four years, when you gotta go, you gotta go.

The other thing I learned on that road trip is I'd make an awful parent. When kids cry, I'm willing to throw myself out of a moving vehicle just to escape the unbelievably loud noises they make. To all of you who are parents, you have my absolute empathy and I will never know how you do it.

Alright, so now let's wrap this up. I fear I've written a novel here and want to keep this short and sweet. If you are offered the chance to travel and experience the world, please push your boundaries and give it a shot. Take a friend or family member and make memories. Use the time to take in the world through your senses and discover yourself and the communities around you. More importantly, use the experiences to get to know those who are traveling with you; it doesn't matter if you've known them for 20 years or just met them. Traveling unlocks something inside of us that allows us to gain perspective about ourselves and others.

If it wasn't for these road trips with my Gramps and family, I wouldn't have such fond memories and wise pieces of advice to help build my life around.

## Taking the Train from Washington to Ohio by Tim Downie

Tjdownie7@gmail.com

I am new to vision loss. I had to abruptly stop work in March 2021. I no longer have a driver’s license or car, and figuring out how to do the activities of daily life poses a challenge. How to get groceries, do banking, get to the doctor, go anywhere. In Snohomish County, I was approved for DART paratransit. But I soon found DART meant rarely getting anywhere on time, and a 15-minute trip could take hours. Today, I use DART, but also use Lyft, and if I have a companion, will use a bus.

Soon after joining Washington Council of the Blind, I started calling in to the Saturday morning Coffee and Conversation. It was there I heard Jim and Holly Turri, both blind, talk about a vacation they took to Space Camp.

What? Travel as a blind person? How is that possible? Daily living was hard enough.

I started asking questions. Flying is also problematic for me, as I have real problems with eye pressure, and although I take eye drops, a long, pressurized, cross-country flight isn’t something I should be trying. I then heard about Amtrak.

I was told if you tell Amtrak about your visual impairment, they will flag your ticket as a red star passenger and take good care of you.

I live in Washington, and wanted to visit my mom in Cleveland, OH. As I struggle with things online, I called Amtrak and booked a ticket, and shared my vision issues and that I was in the process of having both hips replaced. I booked an accessible sleeper car cross-country. Amtrak gives a discount for those with a documented disability.

What was it like? It was absolutely amazing. The Amtrak staff helped me get to the right area to board my car. The accessible sleeper room was incredible. It has two bunks, an upper and lower. The staff converted the bunks into two comfy chairs and table in the day, and into bunks with bedding at night. The accessible sleeper room also has its own sink and toilet. You can choose whether to dine in the dining car or have meals brought to your room. I did some of both, depending on how well I was feeling on a given day.

When I did go to the dining car, I loved it. They seated me with people since space is at a premium. I had some wonderful conversations, and on one leg of the journey, they unknowingly seated me with another blind passenger. That was fun, but I really enjoyed all the people I met. There definitely were several meals I took in my room, due to disabling eye headaches I get, or my hips bothering me. So, the flexibility was nice.

Amtrak does stop to load and unload, and you can get out and stretch. That was great, and often the people I’d eaten with would see me and my white cane and call out to me to chat. It felt like I had many people watching out for me.

I had one layover in Chicago, an absolutely amazing station. I was picked up in a little shuttle and taken to the lounge where there were free snacks, coffee, and sodas, while I waited for my next train. I felt very safe and comfortable.

Sadly, my final destination stop was horrible. Elyria, OH, is a stop, but not a station – just a concrete platform in a rough part of town. And the train goes there at 2 a.m. The Amtrak people asked if someone was meeting me. My sister and brother-in-law were in the car waiting for me, thank goodness. They told me there were people doing drug deals and sleeping on the platform. No thank you, Elyria. I won’t use that platform again.

I had a great visit with my mom in Lorain, OH. Because Elyria was so bad, I changed my departure to Cleveland, where there was an actual train station. I booked a hotel about a 10-minute walk away, but three different hotel clerks told me not to walk it, that I was a huge target with my cane, and there were frequent muggings in that area. Growing up in Cleveland, I know there are very real dangers, so I listened. I took Lyft from the hotel to the station. The station is behind a chain-link fence, close to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, but in the middle of a sketchy field. Inside the station was OK, and there were several Amish families in the station house. Many Amish families in the Ohio and Pennsylvania area take Amtrak.

My trip back was calm, with one exception. A cargo train had derailed, blocking part of the tracks. So, Amtrak had us board chartered buses to get us to the next stop and board our next waiting train. I got confused walking to the buses, but an Amtrak employee saw me and let me put my hand on her shoulder to guide me to the bus. They helped me get to the right train car with my luggage.

I will definitely take Amtrak again. I felt safe, except for Elyria and Cleveland, but that is a problem with my home town, not Amtrak.The Amtrak train was fun, comfortable, and relaxing, and the staff were super helpful. With very limited vision and disability, I am vulnerable, but I never felt that way on Amtrak. Honestly, I’ve had more troubling transportation issues just in my hometown trying to make it to doctor appointments sometimes. If you are thinking of taking Amtrak and have questions, I’d be glad to chat. I’m looking forward to the next time I can take Amtrak somewhere. It’s a great option to have.

## A Hawaiian Holiday at Last by Frank Cuta

frank@cuta.net

Twenty-five years ago, a benefactor reached over the rainbow and grabbed my friend Bill Van Winkle by the scruff of his shirt and dragged him off on a dream ocean adventure. They had access to a small ship, and this group of friends took a couple of weeks to sail leisurely around the less commercial parts of the Hawaiian Islands, enjoying the wildlife and absorbing the native culture. Alas, I was not invited along on this idyllic adventure, but the seed for a future trip was planted.

Well, the years continued to slip by, and last fall I had to face the fact that I am not getting any younger. No twister was going to yank me out of this desert and put me down in the Pacific. I realized that if I wanted this experience to happen, it was time for me to take action.So, I just went to the web.

"Hey Siri, find me an inter-island small ship Hawaiian cruise." She obliged. My dream vacation popped right up at the top of the list. In a matter of weeks, Reggie George, Lisa George, and I had pooled our resources and we were signed up for an unforgettable travel adventure.

Hawaii in late March has roughly twice the humidity and twice the daily peak temperature of the Tri-Cities. Everyone who visits comments on the air, and I have to agree; every pore of my body kept saying yes, yes, yes! Obviously, humans evolved early on to be comfortable in this sub-tropical climate, and 54 years of living in the inland Northwest is not enough to erase what is encoded in our genes.

So, yes, the weather was extremely comfortable. The ship was also great – just your basic small luxury yacht. I could circumnavigate the entire outside railing on our cabin deck level in about 100 steps.During water activity periods, other passengers would dive directly from this railing right into the ocean, nine or ten feet below.

I had expected the captain to be a little concerned about having a couple of totally blind guys out there walking around unsupervised at all hours of the day and night. However, evidently once he saw that we could get around all of the decks and up and down the steep staircases between decks without help, he must have been satisfied.Our independence onboard the ship was never questioned.



Photo to right::

After his turn at the ship’s wheel, Frank steps in as navigator, sitting on the bridge to the left of the acting captain, Chief Mate Talia.Both are holding binoculars and laughing.

The ship was constantly and actively rocking and rolling. I went out on this adventure with a longing to feel like I was really on the ocean and in touch with the sea, and I was not disappointed. The outer railing was only a few feet from my cabin door, and I just left my door open all week so that I could hear the movement of the ship as well as feel it. We were not required to wear life vests. I did not dwell on the thought, but I was very aware that if I did trip and fall overboard when the ship was underway, no one would ever find me.

There was always something interesting going on.We went out in small skiffs, with crew members steering, for whale watching. Once when we were on the water, a number of humpback whales treated us as curiosities, one actually approaching to within a couple of yards of us, and we heard it blow. There were also hydrophones in the skiffs, and we could hear the humpback whale songs.

Reggie and I both got a chance to go kayaking, but we passed on the snorkeling. Definitely a big part of the experience for most passengers was directly observing what was under the water, and time was reserved every morning for this activity.

Each day, we were invited to hear experts among the crew talk about the marine wildlife. Numerous excursions ashore were planned throughout the week, but I only took in one on the last day. On this occasion, we got a chance to meet and talk with a native family who continue to live as much as they can off of the land, and respect the old ways.

Our Hawaiian adventure was an awesome experience and fully lived up to my dreams. However, we had a miserable time flying home, and I would have given a little dog and a flying monkey for a pair of ruby slippers.



Editor’s note:The photo above of a humpback whale’s tail was taken by a crew member on Frank’s vessel, Safari Explorer.This time of the year in Hawaii is the “tail end” of the breeding season for humpback whales.They then migrate all the way to Alaska to feed … so we were informed, Hawaii is the “bedroom” and Alaska is the “kitchen.”

## Road Tripping Family Style by Tom Uniack

tom@wawild.org

I always imagined having a family growing up, with a lovely wife and maybe two kids – a girl and a boy, of course. Things started off just like I planned. I met my beautiful bride while in graduate school at the University of Washington, got married on the UW campus two years to the day where we first met. The next year, we were blessed with a baby boy.

A couple of years later, we decided to try to add a girl to our trio but it did not happen as easily as we hoped. We spent the ensuing years traveling with our son, taking flights to St. Louis, San Francisco, and Hawaii until at last, we got pregnant again three years after our first baby.

At our first ultrasound, the doctor informed us that there were two heartbeats – twins! And both of them girls. So, we ended up getting the girl we wanted – with a vengeance.

Having twins is a blessing but, as I often say, it is also a stop sign. With our family extremely complete, we found it challenging to travel by airplane with twin infants. Have you ever tried getting through airport security with a toddler car seat and a double stroller? I do not recommend it. After the initial flight to Disneyland for our son’s fifth birthday, with twin one-year-olds in tow, we silently vowed never to attempt such a thankless endeavor again.

From that point on began the beginning of seven straight years of epic family road trips, visiting nearly every national park in the western United States. Oh, did I mention we did it most deliberately by car – no planes, no security lines, no overhead bins. But how was I going to manage two infants and a school-age boy in the car for hours on end and make lasting family memories? I recalled what my father said often when I was growing up after I failed to think through my actions – “son, you did not plan to fail, you failed to plan.” Simultaneously, my mother’s knack for organization and scheduling rushed through my veins. That was it. I would create the mother of all itineraries.

The itinerary I created was tailor-made to address several classic challenges of a young family of five. It was literally organized minute by minute with entries like “turn left on I-90,” “check into hotel,” and “leave restaurant and get back on the road.”

To avoid the pace-crushing, impulsive “we want ice cream now” wild goose chase at exit 25, the itinerary included a Dairy Queen locator by exit along our route for each day. Any random request for ice cream was answered with the next confirmed exit serving up Butterfinger blizzards. The itinerary even had blocks of smooth continuous hours of freeway driving identified for the infant twins to nap. Elements like these led to one of my road trips being written up in the May 2014 issue of Seattle Magazine. It also did not hurt that the editor was a good friend.

A lot of thought went into the itinerary to maximize family fun while getting from each national park destination. The first leg of the journey was deliberately one of the most ambitious, akin to a frog not knowing yet how hot the pot of water would get. For example, day one on several road trips venturing south from Seattle would be 500 miles to Yreka, CA. We always stayed at motels to keep prices affordable and avoid the delays of set-up and packing associated with camping. To keep morale up, almost every motel featured a pool for an evening swim – and, in a few cases, it included a waterslide. Between destinations, I would consult with a website that Clark Griswold would definitely approve of – [www.roadsideamerica.com](http://www.roadsideamerica.com). This site lists all the campiest and inane roadside destinations on your potential route – think largest ball of twine, VW Beetle spiders, 50-foot Paul Bunyan sculpture (Acadia, CA), and an erupting volcano house (Salem, OR).

Often, I would look for quirky and memorable places to eat on our trips like: 1) the Black Bart’s Steakhouse, Saloon and Musical Review in Flagstaff, AZ, which has your waiters from the local music conservancy spontaneously break into song; 2) Casa Bonita in Lakewood, CO, which feature members of the local high school diving team cliff diving while you dine in a pirate-themed setting; or 3) a classic saloon where you dump your peanut shells onto the sawdust floor.

But our nation’s best idea – the national parks of the west – was the glue that held everything together. On any given road trip, we would hit anywhere between four and 30 national parks in pursuit of junior ranger badges. Most parks will reward young nature lovers and explorers with a badge after completing a number of tasks and activities in an education activity booklet. The whole affair ends with weepy parents taking pictures of their brave little kiddos raising their hands and taking the junior ranger pledge with a uniformed park ranger. To fill time without electronics in the car, I would call ahead and get most of the junior ranger booklets for the parks we were going to visit ahead of time mailed to me so the kids could work on them between destinations. You would be surprised how well that worked. My son finished up with more than 60 junior ranger badges by age 13. He later went on to become an Eagle Scout and earned more than 20 more rigorous badges.

All of our road trips were courtesy of our Chrysler Town and Country minivan. A key feature is the stow-and-go back seats, which quickly allow you to put the two middle seats up (creating hidden storage below or fold it into the floor in seconds).

One of our first road trips was to the northern Rockies traveling through seven states for 15 days and visiting eight national monuments and parks, including Yellowstone and Glacier national parks, Craters of the Moon National Monument, Grand Teton National Park, and Haggerman Fossil Bed National Monument.

Another road trip focused on the southwestern states covering 5,300 miles over 23 days through nine states and visiting 16 national monuments and parks including Arches National Park, Natural Bridges National Monument, Zion National Park, Grand Canyon National Park, and Canyon De Chelly National Monument.

The largest and last one was focused on Colorado and New Mexico, which spanned 26 days and traversed 16 states over 5,100 miles, visiting 30 national monuments and parks, including Devils Tower, Carlsbad Caverns, Mount Rushmore, Great Sand Dunes, and Mesa Verde National Park.

And then we got a dog – and then the pandemic hit. All good things come to an end and so did our road trips. But it was a hoot while it lasted, and I like to think that my kids have grown up with an appreciation of the wild places in the American west and a lot of great, loving, stinky, rewarding, and unforgettable memories for a lifetime.

## A Brave New World by Holly Turri

[Holly.turri9@gmail.com](mailto:Holly.turri9@gmail.com)

From Dec. 2 to 10, 2022, a dear friend, Gail, and I vacationed in St. Thomas, which was on her bucket list. She has cancer. From her first honeymoon, visiting the U.S. Virgin Islands has been a big dream.

Most people out here go to Hawaii. Many don’t know that these four islands exist and are part of U.S. territories. Apparently, Puerto Rico has better P.R. In fact, I’ve been asked several times if I was going to a monastery to attend a Catholic retreat. To say the least, it was an amazing experience. After reading this, I hope you will be half as excited as I am.

on the way to SEATAC, I was locked in the bathroom of the Airporter Shuttle bus. Since I’m claustrophobic, riding an airport shuttle bus was a special experience. Although I’m sure it wasn’t that long, I felt like I was there for hours and hours. Thank the Lord two lovely ladies and a gentleman helped free me.

Normally, I prefer to travel with Southwest or Alaska airlines. Lucky me, I was sent by the travel consultant on United. It’s really interesting. The first two airlines have lots of Braille markings in the bathrooms, etc. The actual one I took had none, not one, nada. How in the world could they get away with this? Money buys anything, I guess. So much for flying the friendly skies.

In Seattle, it was snowing to beat the band. So, the plane had to be deiced. I’ve never seen that before. A truck came out and sprayed stuff all over the fuselage and the wings. Then we waited for a while for it to soak in.

In Newark, NJ, we changed planes. All I have to say is you better be awfully good. If not, you’ll die and go to that place. You’ll think it is hell and you’d be right. We had to change gates three times.

In St. Thomas, the first thing I noticed was that chickens and roosters roam freely. In 2017, they had two Category 5 hurricanes in a week. The damage was awful. Many of the places the fowl lived in were destroyed. So, they wander around and folks take care of them. Gail said they must be doing a pretty good job because they all looked healthy.

A frustrating thing I learned was that they cannot participate in our elections. Of course, they can vote in local races. They can’t help us determine the next president.

Children in the Virgin Islands wear uniforms. We met some students from a middle school. On Friday, they were at Coral World, which is a fantastic place with lots of marine creatures. We saw a show about sea lions. Did you know they were first discovered in the waters off South America? Unlike our West Coast barkers, these have an actual roar like a lion. They are extremely loud and scared the crap out of me, I can tell you. Ironically, the one we saw was visually impaired.

The Larimar stone is from there and other Caribbean islands. It looks like the beautiful color of the waters. It is green in some lights and blue in others.

The cabs are vans. When we would get in, they had a listing of places and the cost per person. Many people can ride in them.

The beaches are amazing. The sand is powdery and soft. Many of them are white and look like icing sugar.

The ocean waters are so warm. The local people say they are cold now. To a gal who grew up swimming in 50-degree conditions, I thought I’d died and gone to heaven.

Religion is a large and important part of island life and culture. We noticed this by the way they treat one another and tourists, as well. St. Thomas has the first synagogue in the Americas. In the capitol city, which is Charlotte Amalie. They have 5,400 people and 28 churches.

On one of the tours, the guide brought some bay leaves on the bus for us to see. Did you know that there are two genders of that tree? The smaller girl leaves are what we use as spice. The larger, male ones are soaked in alcohol and processed for barbers.

On Monday, as part of a tour, we visited the downtown of Charlotte Amalie and did some shopping. This store called “I Love St. Thomas” had so much beautiful inventory. The sales personnel were very kind. Instinctually, they seemed to grasp what I, as a blind person, would like to know.

A smaller island that is three miles away from St. Thomas is called St. John’s. Two-thirds of the island is a national park. To get there, we rode on a ferry. After that, we took a tour. Highlights included visiting an old sugar-processing factory, views of the water, and swimming at a well-known beach. The guide was very well informed, and it was a most pleasant day.

One of my lifetime dreams was experienced on Sunday. The resort had a program called Sunday Fun Day. We took a catamaran to Buck Island, which is a bird sanctuary, and then to Water Island for lunch and swimming. Ever since my childhood, I’ve dreamed about traveling on that type of sailboat. It was 66 feet long. The captain was a genuine character. At first, he was very uncomfortable around me. But when they stopped to go snorkeling, I started asking him questions, and that was all she wrote. Suddenly, I was his best friend. He went above and beyond to make this a meaningful day for me.

This taught me something. Many men are great in large group situations. When they have to meet with one woman, they are extremely uncomfortable. So, since I am, too, I ask questions. Often, when I begin doing this, they start up and it’s hard to shut ‘em down.

The weather was amazing. Every day we had a gentle shower for a while. Only one thunderstorm was experienced.

On the 9th when we left, it was a much more enjoyable return journey. This time I went through Houston, and it was more relaxed.

If you have any questions, please email me. I love having an excuse to discuss this.

## Our Dream Trip to the British Isles by Linda Wilder

lindasuewilder@msn.com

My husband, Mark, and I planned this trip for over a year, making our flight connections, arranging a 15-day bus tour through England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. We left bright and early on an October 2014 morning to ride to the Sea-Tac airport in a limousine. We boarded our American Airlines flight to London, and our excitement was palpable. We traveled business class and received wonderful service.

When we reached our first connecting flight in Detroit, we waited in a beautifully appointed lounge with an assortment of fancy appetizers and complimentary drinks, including my favorite, Bailey’s Irish Cream. Once on the plane, we were pleasantly surprised to learn everyone in business class had their own private chaise lounge where they could stretch out. We each were given a nice bag with an array of goodies, such as a comb, brush, sleep shade, toothbrush, and toothpaste. We took a limousine at Heathrow to our hotel.

The next evening, we met up with our Irish tour guide, Dedra, and travel companions. The next morning, we embarked on our tour bus. Fortunately, there were only 25 of us on a bus with 40 seats.

Our tour guide was excellent, with an encyclopedic knowledge of history, funny stories, intriguing tales of the people and landmarks, and even sang some Irish songs. We saw all the usual cathedrals; the Tower of London; museums; the two odd-shaped buildings called the Shard, which is a 72-story skyscraper, the tallest building in London and the seventh tallest in all of Europe; The Gherkin Building that’s shaped like a pickle; and the London Eye Ferris wheel, carrying up to 800 people at one time.

The Tower Bridge is 213 feet tall with 311 steps. The elevator was not working the day we toured so I, with my bum leg, walked down those spiral steps with about a hundred other people pressing by me. Our tour included four- and five-star hotels and two castles, one which was said to be haunted. The days were long but interesting and fun. We ate well, and on two occasions, we had Irish Cream on our oatmeal.

On the third day, we set off to York Castle for a tour, where we got to ride in a small elevator that Queen Elizabeth rode in just the week before. Then, off to Edinburgh Castle, which is at the top of the Royal Mile.

Mark, Dee, and I rode in a car rather than walk like many of the others did. That night, we were entertained by a Scottish comedian and dancers, and had a delicious feast, including a delicacy called haggis, a sausage-type mixture stuffed in the stomach of a sheep. I passed on this offering, but Mark tried it. He said it was not too bad.

On to Ireland, my favorite of all the countries we visited. We enjoyed a traditional Irish feast with more dancing and music. We toured too many interesting places to mention. One highlight was a tour of the Waterford Glass factory, where I was able to touch many of the glass objects. There were some unusual items, like a full-size grandfather clock and glass vases as tall as me. Yes, we bought several items, like blown-glass Christmas ornaments, a candy dish, and a honey pot. Belfast was a fascinating town with a rich history and the place where the Titanic was built. We crossed the Shannon River, which is 85 miles long and takes about 20 minutes to cross by ferry to County Clare. No, we did not kiss the blarney stone located in Cork. It was raining and windy with many stairs and only a rope to hold. I loved how clean the entire country was kept. When we traveled to Galloway Bay, it looked like all the houses had just been painted, lawns were freshly groomed, and all the hedge fences trimmed.

Wales was another interesting day of touring a beautiful castle with enough gold to fill Fort Knox. We enjoyed another evening of feasting on traditional Welsh food and entertainment. We stopped at Stonehenge, the famous prehistoric World Heritage Site about eight miles from Salisbury, England. It was much larger than I imagined. Our last stop before returning to London was Bath, where we spent several hours touring the famous spa baths, which were excavated in the early 1900s. We stayed for another week in Piccadilly Square, taking in many more sightseeing excursions. We even saw the play “Les Misérables.”

We took the Euro train to Paris to top off our trip. That train travels 200 miles an hour. We saw the Eiffel Tower, several museums, and we took a boat tour and traveled under most of the famous bridges. The tour guide described all the sites in three different languages. We complimented him, and he told us it was his first day on the job. It was truly our dream vacation.

## Around the World in 80 Ways by Andy Arvidson

arvidsonandy@gmail.com

In August, we are flying to Rome, Italy, via Iceland to spend two weeks on tours that we discovered are blind accessible.

We start out with a couple of days in Rome traveling in taxis, Ubers and cars to different museums and other locations, including the Pope’s summer house, which is about a 45-minute trip. We have been to the Vatican twice, and they have tour guides that are set up specifically for blind tourists. We have had the same guide twice, who does an incredible job.

After a few days, we are going to ride a train to Florence to see some more museums, and the next day we board another train to Ravenna, Italy, outside of Venice.

There, we will get the opportunity to do mosaic tiles set up for blind individuals. Hopefully, mine will not be ugly.

From Ravenna, we will embark on a cruise ship and travel the Mediterranean to several islands and ending in Greece where we have been before. But this time we get to visit the Lighthouse for the Blind Museum. The reason we could not visit before was that in August most places in this part of the world are on vacation and are normally closed on weekends. The regular day for any cruise ship to stop there is Saturday. So, we contacted them and they are making arrangements for us to visit the museum. The thing that really draws our attention to this museum is that everything is touchable. If you are sighted, you get to wear a blindfold and touch the exhibits. Some of the exhibits are replicas of the Parthenon and Acropolis, which I have been to but unable to fully experience the amazement and grasp the magnitude of the architecture of these wonderful structures.

We have done extensive research on our trip to and from Rome to have shorter flights for my guide dog, as the last two trips flying from Rome were about a 14- to 15-hour span of time between relief times for my guide dog, which is quite extreme. So, this time we have gotten different flights. We are traveling through Lisbon, Portugal, on the way home to shorten the flights instead of flying from Rome to Chicago.

To get from our house to Sea-Tac International Airport and back, we have found a private shuttle driver who will pick us up at our front door and take us both ways. It appears that we are quite spoiled.

Colette decided when she retired that we need to see as much of the world as we can and can afford. We still have our martial arts studio that helps us pay for our pleasures. I guess working in our retirement is well worth it and enjoyable at the same time.

# LIFESTYLE

## Book Chat Displeasures of Travel by Alan Bentson, Readers’ Advisor Washington Talking Book and Braille Library

a.bentson@comcast.net

For me, travel is not a pleasurable activity. It’s something you do because you have to, not because you want to. I don’t think the entire explanation is that I’m totally blind and such things as “sightseeing” and “scenery” are meaningless concepts.

When I was a small child in the suburbs, I loved to ramble all over the neighborhood learning about things and making new friends. I think part of the explanation is genetic. My father had the travel gene. He spent his final years driving all over America just to see the country while my mother definitely did not.

When I was seven in 1959, my parents announced we were going to spend Christmas in California with relatives I had never met. My whole world was put on hold for a grueling two weeks in a station wagon with six sighted people aged 3 to 43. Not too surprisingly, after a day or two we ran out of things to say to each other. I learned more about what a trip to California might be like by reading “Grapes of Wrath” in high school, (from the Braille and Audio Reading Download service (BARD) as db#68308 in digital audio or BR#22585 in Braille format.)

I will tell you a funny story about that trip. I liked Arizona, warm in December and full of growing things like oranges and cotton. California was cold and rainy, and San Diego, as any of you know who’ve ever been there, was permanently hazy.

I kept whining, “Can’t we go back to Arizona?”

On the way home, my brothers and sisters woke me up and said, “Okay you got your way, we’re in Arizona now.” So, I leapt out of the car in glee. However, my parents had chosen a northerly route for the way home, and we were in the mountains, in Flagstaff, and I landed head first in a snowdrift.

We didn’t have a chance to visit the nearby Grand Canyon but, in my 30s, I went there, and we even climbed halfway down, but mostly I remember clambering around mule droppings left on the trail, and the endless tourist helicopters roaring by above.

Recommended: “Brighty of the Grand Canyon,” (BARD db#40762, or br#10125), and “How the Canyon Became Grand,” (BARD db#47948).

In my 20s, I thought I might find bicycling a more enjoyable form of travel, so we bought a tandem bike. Though it was interesting to experience the many changes in topography and climate that one is oblivious to in a car, it mostly seemed like torture. I kept wishing I could confess to something so it would stop.

Recommended: “Life is a Wheel: Love, Death and Etcetera on a Bike Trip Across America,” (BARD db#78796).

I have visited four countries: Canada, Mexico, England, and Denmark, and have no desire to visit them again. A story about Denmark. My expat relatives told us, “Be careful, the Danes are very private and standoffish and don’t want to talk to a stranger and will be offended.” But I just stuck to the reputation the Danes have in literature as very happy and outgoing people, and I talked freely to several strangers. The librarian at the Talking Book and Braille Library in Copenhagen was especially nice. My former mother-in-law, who likes to chat with everyone, also had a good experience talking to people in Denmark. My relatives are kind of standoffish, and I wonder if they weren’t seeing themselves and not the Danes. How often we travel far away, only to find ourselves.

Recommended: “Bright Candles; A Novel of the Danish Resistance,” by Nathaniel Benchley, (BARD db#09197).

I always liked the portrait of Phileas Fogg in “Around the World in Eighty Days,” (BARD db#53171 and br#09468), who mostly ignored the trip and sat playing Whist as they traveled around the world. That’s probably how I’d be if I ever went on such a trip. When Phileas does get involved in the adventure, in India and in Nebraska, it definitely adds extra potency to the plot. If you like that book you might like “Eighty Days: Nellie Bly and Elizabeth Bisland’s History-making Race Around the World,” (BARD db#77521), about a couple of New York editors who sent reporters out in the 1880s to see if you really could get around the world. They both made it sooner than 80 days.

I have enjoyed the ACB conventions I have attended and applauded the efforts of various tour committee chair people to find interesting trips. But whoever said “getting there is half the fun” was working for the advertising industry. And whoever said “it is the journey and not the arrival that matters” wasn’t paying attention. I don’t have to tell this group about the mind-numbing boredom of prolonged vehicle rides, the desolate loneliness of train and bus stations, the endless irritation of airports, or the constant hassle of dealing with restrooms in strange places. Sometimes when I think of it, I wonder if I might not look at travel totally differently if they’d had cell phones when I was eight years old. These days with encroaching age and pandemics and terrorism, I am exploring the joys of staying home.

See “Staying Put, Making Home in a Restless World,” (BARD db#38205). Don’t get me wrong, travel is an important skill to learn, for after all, travel is change, and learning to cope with change is learning how to stay alive, for life itself is change.

Happy landings and happy reading.

## Snowshoeing for Beginners with Northwestern Association for Blind Athletes by Heidi Coggins

[Heidi.Coggins@outlook.com](mailto:Heidi.Coggins@outlook.com)

For those of you adventurers out there, this will be an exciting opportunity. For those of you (such as myself) who are not athletic, just stay with me and you may find interest, as well.

I have been completely blind since April 2021. I have been on this journey to regain my feelings of independence since then and jumped at an opportunity to challenge myself with outdoor activities with Northwest Association for Blind Athletes (NWABA). This last December, there were events listed for snowshoeing at Hyak Park at Snoqualmie Pass. I had never been snowshoeing – could I even do this? How on earth would I manage to get around? What if I fell and broke my face? How hard is this? I am not an athlete. Did they expect me to climb a mountain? What if I got lost?

Some of my random thoughts and minor panic at the idea of taking on this event raced through my head, and then I sent an RSVP anyway. If I am going to improve my level of independence, I need to be willing to do things that scare me, challenge me, or both.

I found myself locating my old snow gear and started planning my transportation. The NWABA does pickups at the Department of Services for the Blind in Seattle for quite a few events they host. I plotted. I fretted. I checked and triple checked my winter gear. The day finally arrived and I made my way down to DSB in Seattle all geared up with a packed lunch, water bottles, and extra warm clothing if needed. I felt like an overstuffed turkey on the bus with all that winter clothing on. I found it a bit more difficult to cane navigate with my thick wool mittens and several scarves wrapped around my head that made it hard to hear my surroundings.

I arrived at the pickup point and met with several other adventurers and NWABA staff. After some good morning greetings and quick introductions, we made our way to Hyak Park.

We arrived at the head of the snowshoe trail and unloaded and had a short meet and greet with the volunteers and athletes (I am now called an athlete, wow!). Each vision-impaired individual got paired up with a volunteer, and we sat to put on snowshoes and make sure our hiking poles were set to the proper heights.

My volunteer was Mike, and he had done quite a few other volunteer activities with NWABA. He was a pro. Once we finally got the gear situated, it was go time. I was still wondering how this whole thing would pan out and questioning what possessed me to do this in the first place.

Mike and I headed to the trailhead, and he asked how I would prefer to be guided. I just told him to not let me fall off a cliff or get eaten by a mountain lion. He said he was pretty sure he could follow those guidelines and off we went.

Here is what I discovered about that day:

1. I am pretty great at walking in snowshoes; who would have thought?
2. NWABA does an excellent job of getting really amazing volunteers for their events. Don’t tell Mike, but he was a perfect guide.
3. There are no mountain lions at Hyak Park.
4. Making snow angels is still as fantastic as it was when I was a kid.
5. There are also no cliffs at Hyak Park, whew!

Since my first snowshoeing event, I have attended four more. There is something about having snow fall lightly on my face and walking completely unhindered without a care that calls to my soul. My sense of independence skyrocketed during that first trip. Even though I peeled off most of my excessive layers (I am not going to lie, this was serious cardio), I felt the most freedom I have since I lost my vision. My heart now leaps at any chance I have to adventure out and give something new a go. I wanted to share this with my WCB family as this has been a game changer for me. I crave new experiences, and I cannot wait to see what I do in this upcoming year. I would love to have you join me. The even better part? It’s free! If I have enticed you, please head on over to nwaba.org and check out some of the awesome events they have planned. Get outside, have an adventure, build a memory, make some new friends. Most importantly, find something that makes your soul sing with joy.

## Sporting Spotlight Golfing Blind by Beth Greenberg

merribethgreenberg@gmail.com

Being partially sighted, playing golf or tennis are two sports I have never been into. I don’t see the point of hitting a little bitty ball towards a little bitty hole that is 300 yards away, and doing it 18 times for golf. My husband likes golf and would like to play again, but with his disability has not tried to do it (his disability is muscular and not vision related).

You and I will be learning about golf together. A golf ball is about the size of a plum, or 1.68 inches/42.67cm. There are three types of golf balls:

1) Made of Surlyn resin that is solid and is considered a beginner ball.

2) Has a rubber center with a plastic shell, which is the most used type.

3. Has a solid or liquid core, surrounded by a rubber layer, then the plastic layer.

Golf clubs can be made out of titanium, graphite, and steel. On [www.golf-info-guide.com,](http://www.golf-info-guide.com) they mention that like learning a new language, it is best to immerse yourself in that culture – hanging out at the clubhouse, talking with other golfers, watching the sport on TV. Also, to learn some of the golf terms, look at their website. They have 365 golf terms. From what I read, you could have three to five different terms for the grass areas, for instance. I have gotten confused with some terns that I looked up and have listed here:

* Par – The number of strokes allowed on a hole. The par of a hole is determined by its length and difficulty.
* Birdie – One stroke under par.
* Bogey – Averaging one stroke over par.
* Deuce – A score of two on the hole.
* Eagle – A score of two less than par.
* Handicap – A number given to a golfer based on their previous score to give equality to players of different skills.
* Mulligan – An option to redo the previous shot without it counting as a stroke or any penalties.

I found a quote from Arnold Palmer that has a great description of the game: “Golf is deceptively simple and endlessly complicated; it satisfies the soul and frustrates the intellect. It is at the same time rewarding and maddening – and it is without a doubt the greatest game mankind has ever invented.”

In 1924, Clint Russell, from Duluth, MN, became blind from an accident and became the first blind golfer in the U.S. With the aid of his friends, he continued the sport he loved. He even is in the Ripley’s Believe It or Not Museum for being the first blind golfer. Clint also talked to Veterans Affairs about using golf as a form of therapy after a veteran loses his sight. They have been doing that ever since World War II.

In 1938, there was a competition between Clint Russell and Dr. Beach Oxenham of England for the world title for Ripley’s Believe It or Not. Russell won the championship.

Bob Allman, a lawyer from Philadelphia, and some other blind golfers started the United States Blind Golf Association in 1953.

Blind golf is played basically by the U.S. Golf Association rules. Generally, golf is a one-person game. With blind golf, it is a team sport. The team is the blind player and a coach. The golfer can choose to have a caddie or not. The coach helps line up the player and can adjust them to swing at the ball, but the player is the one that swings after the coach has stepped out of the way. The coach also helps by giving information, such as distance to the hole. Some visually impaired players may have problems with judging the distance when swinging the club if they have difficulty with judging distances.

I did read of a blind golfer who played billiards before he lost his sight. So, his coach uses billiard terms to help him with distance. I don’t have any depth perception. So, even judging a step is hard for me. When I try to describe distances to others, I tend to use objects that I know and hope they know how long something is, such as a football field being a hundred yards.

The USBGA holds regional tournaments, as well as the national one, all over the country. The tournaments are supported by Lions Clubs and other service organizations, medical groups, and private contributors.

If you would like to read the rules for blind golf, go to the U.S. Blind Golf website at [www.usblindgolf.com](http://www.usblindgolf.com).

Guiding Eyes for the Blind started the Guiding Eyes Classic in 1978 in Mount Kisco, NY. It is an annual event, which has become known as the “Masters” of blind golf.

In 2018, Guiding Eyes changed the name of the tournament to the Pat W. Browne Jr. Memorial Tournament. Pat W. Browne Jr. was the all-time most successful golfer. He was an attorney and scratch golfer who lost his sight in a car accident at 33 years old.

In 2021 and 2022, USBGA and Guiding Eyes held a Virtual Pat W. Brown Jr. tournament. With a virtual tournament, they sent in their golf course information to a USBGA official, and they calculated the points.

In 1980, the International Blind Golfer Association was established by Dr. Haruhisa Handa from Japan after working with a blind golfer in Australia. The IBGA holds a bi-annual world championship tournament called the Vision Cup, which started in 2013.

As I have learned about golf, I think it would be great to see how it is in person to understand more of the concepts. I might have a future article about me playing golf for the first time.

## It’s A Dog’s Life Chapter IV by Marilee Richards

[Richjeanne16@gmail.com](mailto:Richjeanne16@gmail.com)

What an amazing experience this journey has taken me through over the past six months. At this point, I would like to introduce you to my beautiful dog, Taryn. She is a yellow lab that has turned more golden than yellow since I brought her home. She has grown longer and taller, too. She was quite small when I got her in September. She has this cute, copper, half-oval eyebrow that rises every time she is trying to tell me something. Many people have mentioned this when they see her up close. She weighs 49 pounds. She is a gentle and social animal. She always has her eyes on me and loves to please me, as I do her.

She has grown to 33 inches long and 23 inches high. She has the most charming brown eyes. She is one of six puppies in a litter and was going to be a breeder, but she had a gene that causes blindness in dogs later in life, so she became a guide dog instead. Her sister became the breeder. All but one puppy in that litter works with blind folks in some manner.

Since I had three friends help me with relieving her when I had surgery on both big toes, she now brings her leash in her mouth so they will walk her. She loves visiting when I go downstairs for coffee (when she is not working for me), and still has my needs first and foremost on her mind.

I have posted rules for dealing with guide dogs in the elevator for all to see. Almost everyone follows them at home, but there is the odd man or woman out that I have to remind every time not to talk to her when she has her harness on. Other dog owners do not understand the strict rules that we need to follow, but it is very important to keep it clear that she is a working dog and not a pet.Following rules has never been hard for me to do, and I find it a privilege to have a guide dog to raise and have her keep me so much safer than I would be on my own.

I hope this gives you a clear picture of my precious friend, Taryn.

It amazes me as we continue to work together how well she keeps me from falling. She shows me curbs, helps me up a flight of stairs, finds my door, (and others in the apartment), and takes me to the elevator. I was astonished when I went back to my hairdresser and she knew the proper door to go into without me telling her the way. When she is comfortable that I am safe, she settles down and relaxes while I am busy with my life. She loves ice cubes, will not turn down a treat, and always reminds me when I have forgotten to reward her good work. She brings joy to so many people at our home.

She is not overly inclined to music like I am, but she tolerates karaoke and, at times, sits with me when I practice my piano. There is so much joy she brings into my life, like my children always did when they were small and needed my help.

I have a friend who has been taking pictures of Taryn on all our travels. We have gone to Fairhaven in Bellingham, where my mom grew up, Boxcar Park by the bay, walked along the Snohomish River, gone to Snohomish on the blue highways, and to church on Sundays. We are taking many different routes when we go out to work on our walks. She seems to enjoy the new locations best, as they offer much needed variety for her days. She has been on Channel 4’s weather news three times. I have not been this happy in a long time.

She comes with me to our Snohomish County Council of the Blind meetings at Denny’s once a month. She has not quite conquered that experience. Since there is so much going on around her, she wants to know what is going on in the room. We have a great group at each meeting, and we grow every month. The room is getting full, and we may run out of room if we grow much larger.

We were going to go to the glass factory this weekend with her puppy-raisers, but we had a family emergency and had to cancel. We will be meeting again in May, as they plan to stay in contact with us as Taryn grows.

We are planning a podcast with Bailey and Rob very soon. If you are interested in learning more about their part in raising these beautiful animals, watch for that announcement in your emails. I sure know they had a lot to do with how well Taryn is trained. I am a novice in raising dogs, but because her temperament is so gentle, I find it very easy, and a great way to lose weight.

For anyone considering the chance to have a guide dog, it is very much worth all the effort you go through to obtain the dog. The rewards are beyond belief. I do not know how I ever survived without a dog before this. No wonder they say a dog is a man’s or woman’s best friend.

There are many guide dog organizations, but I feel that Guide Dogs for the Blind is the best place to get a dog. They have a great program and stay connected with you for quite a long time after you bring the dog home. Think about getting a dog before you can’t get around by yourself. I am training Taryn so she knows everything I need to find, and how to find them. I would be very safe walking with her blindfolded, or if I should lose all my vision. I actually used my night shades down in Boring, OR, during training three times. The difference is that we both know each other well now, and are beginning to be a good team. Stay tuned for more.

For more information, call 800-295-4050, or connect with them online at guidedogs.com.

## New Nonprofit to Offer Music Instruction to Washington’s Blind by Brent Boon, President, PWMB

Brent.s.boon@gmail.com

Pacific West Music of the Blind (PWMB) is a new nonprofit launching soon with the mission of providing accessible music learning opportunities to visually impaired/blind students of all ages and hosting concerts highlighting blind performers. Presently, Marilee Richards, president of the Snohomish County Council of the Blind, is taking virtual piano lessons from PWMB. I have the pleasure and privilege of being the president and board chairman of PWMB.

Marilee tells us that she loves taking piano lessons and the happiness, and smiles it provides. However, Taryn, Merilee's new service dog, is still trying to figure out if she likes listening to piano music. Initially, I steered away from doing virtual lessons at all. However, I learned new methods to provide them, based upon Marilee's need to meet in this way and her patience while I figured out the best techniques to accomplish it. Through this experience and others, I sparked an idea to head up this new nonprofit organization.

As I think about all the factors that continue to inspire me to create this organization through all the hard work and complications that I never could have anticipated, I decided to start PWMB to share the gift of music that I received many years ago. I have had, and continue to have, a fabulous experience that is important and feel it is the right thing to do – sharing – especially with the visually impaired and blind community, who doesn't normally have this available to them.

PWMB will not have an age limit, yet it will be important for students to have a strong interest in learning music, as well as the dedication and willingness to practice.

PWMB formation is still underway, and we have three outstanding critical needs:

* Music teachers: PWMB will first be reliant upon teachers willing to volunteer and teach visually impaired/blind students. In some situations, and where it makes sense, conducting virtual lessons will span distances and connect teachers with students. Soliciting for teachers will soon be in the works.
* Students: Are you interested? Can you put in the time for practicing? If so, please be ready to sign up. Do you know of a potential student? Let them know about this opportunity. If the student doesn't have an instrument, PWMB will be attempting to work that out, as well.
* Resources: PWMB will be seeking musical instruments and equipment from the public (either new or pre-owned) that are in good condition and usable. There will be a prospective music student list to help PWMB solicit and connect teachers to students with their desired instrument in mind. In cases where students do not have access to instruments, a public solicitation will be made (with our upcoming website, besides other communication vehicles). The list will also specify if in-person, virtual, or either type of lesson is doable. There will be a very delicate dance of balancing teachers, students and resources, so we would please ask for everyone’s patience. Our target launch date will be set by the board of directors at our upcoming meeting.

ATTENTION: To help kick off our inaugural season, PWMB is attempting to set up an initial venue to showcase our students before the end of this year. The location and date have not been selected yet, but we are targeting this fall somewhere in Snohomish County. Be ready to sign up when the PWMB website comes online. Thank you for your time reading this article. We look forward to growing and playing music with you.

## What’s on Your Plate? There’s a New Spring in My Step by Hayley Agers

haydav8@comcast.net

I never imagined that when I reached out to Guide Dogs for the Blind (GDB) to apply for a new dog in April 2021 that it would take so long. So many things played a factor, including the pandemic and what that meant for GDB when it came down to breeding and training new dogs. This was to be my third guide. Over the years, I trusted more than anything to have faith in the process. I did give a few specifics on the kind of guide I would prefer – again, a lesson and reminder in trusting the process. I said I would like a guide no smaller in height than my previous two, both 24 inches. I said I would be open to a dog other than a black lab, since the previous two were black labs. I said I would prefer that my new guide not be too tiny, secretly hoping for the weight to be at least 60 lbs., but the bigger the better.

With so much time having passed, I had stopped waiting by the phone each time it rang hoping it would be a call from admissions saying they had a good match. Just as I found that peace within, and after returning from a trip to California, I remembered to check my messages, and there it was, a message from GDB. When I heard it was them, I immediately called back, not even listening to the message. When I reached Ryan from admissions, his first question was, “How does that date for training sound to you?” A date? I hadn’t even listened to the message and assumed they were calling with an update. What I heard next was going to set my schedule for the next eight days on fast-forward mode. My training would be starting on Jan. 29, and I’d be hopefully graduating on Feb. 11.

In future articles, I will share my journey, and boy was it a journey, both of physical stamina and emotional strength. But for now, I want to introduce you all to the new spring in my step. And when I say that, I mean it literally. This little guy keeps me on my toes, and I feel like I’m bouncing along, sometimes having no control of how fast we are zipping along. His name is Neruda, and he is a gorgeous, 51-lb., brindled black lab. When we were first introduced, I wasn’t sure I agreed with the choice. As training went on, I questioned it for other reasons than size. Because of the amazingly kind and committed staff and trainers at GDB, we were able to be candid with one another and work out all of what was troubling me. I couldn’t be happier. Although small, he is everything I need: fast, has a good strong pull, is so eager to please, and learns quickly. He is so smart and the most affectionate, sweet boy. He is fitting into our family of six, now seven, nicely. Aspen, our pet Samoyed, and Farley, my retired guide, are tolerating him and may even like having him here. David and the children are restraining themselves and not interacting for the meantime, looking forward to the day they will get to. We are already taking adventures together, including a trip to Arizona only four days after graduation, and he was a trooper.

There are always so many beautiful memories made when training with a new guide, and this third time around did not disappoint. I am always so blown away by the compassion given so freely by the staff. I come home feeling inspired and so blessed by the kitchen staff and Katherine’s creations. While coming home feels good, there’s a part of me that feels like I’m leaving good friends behind. Below, I wanted to share with you a few spring recipes, one of which is a recipe similar to one I enjoyed at GDB. I hope that each of you are looking forward to warmer weather, longer days, more time spent outside with loved ones, and that you will find what puts that spring back in your step.

**Lemon Cream Pie Overnight Oats**

* 1 cup old-fashioned oats
* 2 tbsp. chia seeds
* Juice of ½ to 1 lemon
* Zest of 1 lemon
* 1 tsp. vanilla extract
* ¼ tsp. natural almond extract
* 1½ cups unsweetened almond or coconut milk. This version is vegan, but feel free to substitute with your milk of choice.
* 2 tbsp. maple syrup
* Extra lemon zest for garnish
* Optional toppings: blueberries, shredded coconut, slivered almonds

Mix all of the ingredients, except toppings, in a medium bowl. Spoon into one large or two small glass Mason jars. Let sit with lid on, in the fridge overnight. The next morning, give it a stir, top with toppings of your choosing, and enjoy.

**Creamy Carrot Soup**

* 8 whole, large carrots, peeled and diced
* 1½ cups low-sodium chicken broth
* 2 cloves of garlic, pressed
* 1 whole lemon, zested
* 1½ cup half and half
* Lemon juice to taste
* ¼ tsp. Nutmeg
* ½ tsp. kosher salt
* Ground black pepper to taste
* Fresh basil, chopped

Simmer carrots with chicken broth, garlic, and lemon zest for 20 minutes or until tender. Remove from the heat. In a blender, blend carrots and chicken broth until smooth.Add in half and half, ½ of a lemon, juiced, and stir to combine. Add nutmeg, salt and pepper to taste, adding more if needed. Pour back into pan and heat until just warmed through. Serve in bowls and garnish with basil.

**Carrot Top Pesto**

* 1 bunch carrot tops, washed and roughly chopped
* 3 tbsp.Capers
* 2 cloves of garlic
* ½cup pistachios, shelled
* 2/3 cup olive oil
* Salt and pepper to taste

In a food processor, mix carrot tops, capers, garlic until roughly combined. Add the pistachios and while blending, drizzle in the olive oil, salt, and pepper.

I enjoy eating this on toasted baguettes, mixing it into a veggie pasta dish, spreading it on a sandwich in place of mayo, or as a dip for other veggies. The uses are endless and limited only by your imagination.

# BRAIN FOOD

## Technically Speaking A Short Introduction to the Long Press by Frank Cuta

frank@cuta.net

The “long press” is a seriously misunderstood and under-used feature available on almost all mobile devices with touch screens. So, what is it and what is it good for? If you are a Windows user, you have probably used the mouse right-click button operation (shift-F10 from the keyboard, or in Jaws), to bring up the very useful “context' menu.” Modern Windows keyboards often have a context key, also called the application key, that looks like a blank page. A context menu gives you a limited set of choices that is directly applicable to actions you might want to take based on what you are doing and what choices the program thinks you would need to accomplish your task at that moment.

The “long press” is the corresponding operation on most touch screens. This would include Apple and Android tablets, iPads, and iPhones. We are only going to talk about those. It can add a whole new level of functionality to your iPhone experience. If you are like most blind iPhone users, you are probably happy to just use Siri and dictation to do most everything, but I encourage you to keep reading here and stretch yourself a bit. Even if you do not use it now, knowing that this increased functionality exists may help you a lot in the future.

The name “long press” comes from the finger action used to initiate it by those with vision. If you can see the screen, you just touch the associated application icon on the screen and continue to press and hold until the image begins to shake, then you quickly lift your finger. If you cannot see the screen, but you have enabled voice-over on your iPhone, you can accomplish the “long press” with a “tap-tap-hold,” as follows: swipe until voice-over announces the desired application, then tap once with one finger, followed quickly by a second tap which you hold down until you hear a double blip, and then release.

Try this: Start out by swiping over to Safari, then initiate the “tap-tap-hold” gesture. (The first time you try it, it is best to have the phone on a firm level surface.) When you hear the double blip, release your finger. You should now have some interesting choices. One of the first things you will see should be “Remove App.” If you “double tap” on “Remove App,” the app you selected will be removed from your phone. Did you know that it could be this easy to clean house?

There are many other interesting choices on the context menu, but they will be different for each application. However,the choices will almost always include the three buttons to remove the application, edit the home screen, or close the context menu.

To be efficient, most iPhone users like to get all of their favorite apps into folders, or onto page one, the home screen. The primary function of the edit choice on the context menu is to allow you to reorganize your home screen. After you have used “Remove App” to get rid of all of those apps that have just been in your way for years, you should then consider using the “Edit Home Screen” choice to move all of your favorite apps to page one.

An entire article could be devoted to editing, but let's just take a brief look at the basic “Move” process. In earlier versions of the iPhone operating system, you could use the edit function to move apps around, but this required performing a difficult simulated “drag and drop” to make it happen. You no longer need to do the “drag,” but Apple is still using this terminology. Do not be concerned. The process described here is more like a “copy-paste.”

Step 1 – Pick any app and “'tap-tap-hold.”

Step 2 – Swipe over and double-tap on “edit home screen”

Step 3 – Find your page slider on the far right of your phone and swipe up with one finger to the page with the app you wish to move.

Step 4 – Use your swipe gesture to move your focus to the desired app.

Step 5 – Swipe up or down with one finger until you get to the “drag” choice, then double-tap on it (this operation puts the selected app on the clipboard).

Step 6 – Use your page slider to return to your page one (home screen).

Step 7 – Swipe to an app on your home screen that is close to where you want to move this app.

Step 8 – Swipe up or down to the choice that drops the app before or after the selected application and double-tap to drop it.

If you drop it on top, a new folder will be created containing both apps.

Step 9 – Close edit mode by flicking down with one finger on any app to “stop editing apps.”

Pro tip: Once you grab your first app, you can actually add multiple apps to your drag session and drop them all in the same place. You can find another app you want to move to the same place, swipe down with one finger, and double-tap to choose the option called “Add to Drag Session” if you dare. The phone will then say dragging two apps.

This concludes coverage of the housekeeping operations available on the context menu. However, some of the real power of the context menu consists of some novel choices that permit you to jump over a lot of sweeping and tapping, and directly access some common tasks that are often otherwise buried deep in the menus of the app.

Look back at the Safari example above. From its context menu, you can also jump directly to history, favorites, or book marks, skipping everything else in between.

If you use the messaging app to carry on repeated conversations with an established group, you have likely spent a lot of time swiping down to the most current update to the conversation. If instead of “opening,” you “tap tap-hold” on the conversation, you will find on the context menu a little-known option called “preview,” which takes you directly to the newest material.

I sometimes use the default email client on my iPhone, and I have configured it so that everything I want to seriously monitor goes into the very important people (VIP) folder. When I “tap-tap-hold” on mail, VIP is the fourth choice on the context menu, and I can go directly to that folder.

Another awesome choice when you are in a hurry lets you go directly to opening a new message without opening the app and navigating down through to “compose.” A “tap-tap-hold” on a message in your in-box will let you directly block the sender, or reply, or forward, without opening it.

In the free iTunes radio app, the context menu lets you skip all of the promotional offerings and jump directly to the text box to perform a search. You can also jump to “purchased,” which is normally buried deep in the app under “accounts.” The context menu in the app store also lets you directly access the search box, and also lets you easily check for updates.

In the camera app, the context menu takes you directly to “Choose a Mode of Operation:” take a selfie, take a portrait, or record video.

The Uber context menu lets you jump directly to repeat either of your last two trips.

The context menu in the map’s app gives you the ability to quickly mark a location or send your current location to a friend.

The context menu in Google lets you generate an incognito search.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not explain the two alternatives to “tap-tap-hold.” When you first practice the gesture, you may find that you've held your finger down too long, and you will be jumped all the way into edit mode. Of course, you might consider this a feature if you do a lot of editing.

Also, I have found that a triple-tap with one finger will usually bring up the context menu in many applications. You should try this if you have any difficulty performing a “tap-tap-hold” correctly.

This is just a sampling of the power in the context menu on your iPhone. I urge you to check it out. Try the “tap-tap-hold” on all of your favorite apps. You will likely discover some golden nuggets of your own.

## Podtastic Casts by Reginald George

[reggeorge@gmail.com](mailto:reggeorge@gmail.com)

Tired of the everyday routine? Ever dream of a life of romantic adventure? Want to get away from it all? We offer you, “Escape!” That’s what we all want from our vacations, right? A Zen retreat at the top of a mountain, or maybe a blank check to spend at the Mall of America. Or maybe not so much, because this was the introduction to the most terrifying horror and violence the 1940s and 50s could dish up on one of the top old-time radio shows starring William Conrad called “Escape.” So, be careful for what you wish, my friends and readers.

For though I love travel as much as the next person, I get to relearn every day just how much planning, determination, and adaptability it takes to choose to have a good time, no matter how many flights you miss or how much discrimination you encounter, or if your hotel room is at 90 degrees, or the bartender won’t serve you because you are blind, or they seat you at the back of the restaurant because you have a dog, or any of the other myriads of things that can go wrong. We smile, turn a brave face to the world, and keep pushing forward in the hope that we can either slide under the radar or be a good representative for our disability community and not set a bad example by murdering the incompetent, mean-spirited misanthrope blocking our path to an enjoyable day before we have even located the coffeepot. We soldier on with varying degrees of success.

So, today I am sharing some podcasts produced by and about blind travelers to see what we can learn from those who win or lose in their efforts to negotiate the world with style and class and grace.

Surprisingly, two of our most loved and consulted podcasts often come back to the theme of travel. From the Freedom Scientific website: “On FSCast 228, we’re joined by retired Paralympic swimmer Donovan Tildesley. We’ll hear about his odyssey of being removed from a Virgin cruise because the crew panicked when they saw a solo blind passenger, and how his social media presence allowed him to negotiate a solution.”

Because I have always loved cruising, and I recently had a similar negative experience, it gives me a good way to talk about my own recent trip.

Here is an extended quote from the transcript that tells Donavan’s story. Glen Gordan is the interviewer.

Donovan: “My first cruise was in 2015.And at the time, I just really needed a vacation.My dad had just been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer earlier that year.I was just burnt out, needed a break.The travel agency across the way from my office suggested a cruise, and I knew about them.And I thought, okay, let’s give this a shot.

“I didn’t have anybody to travel with.It was the last minute. So, I took an Alaskan cruise on NCL, Norwegian Cruise Lines.And after that week, I was just blown away because I was on this ship, and it was full of people.And I never at any point in time felt that I had gotten significantly lost or lonely or that kind of thing because they were very well set up.

“They knew I was a solo traveler when I first got on the ship, so invited me to solo traveler meet-ups in the evening.The cabin crew knew that I couldn’t see, and so knew that I might need an extra hand getting to and from.I’d meet passengers in the hallway where I was trying to go from A to B, and they’d assist me to where I was.And then I’d make friends along the way.

“And so, it was one of those eureka moments, like, wow, I think I’ve found a new way to travel solo blind.My ideal vacation would be, if I’m not skiing, going to, say, Hawaii and laying on a beach somewhere.But that’s difficult when you can’t see, because what if you want to go swimming?You go into the water, and then you drift, and then you can’t find your stuff.It’s too many moving pieces, whereas on a cruise ship, you’ve got all the amenities you need for your evenings and days onboard.And, then you can organize excursions where you go out and try different things, like whether it be food excursions or horseback riding or hiking, and there are people on those excursions to assist you.So basically, I felt that I was helped every step of the way to enjoy an amazing vacation.

Glen: “So, given your positive cruise experiences, my guess is you were very surprised when you encountered Virgin.Will you tell us a bit about that experience and how it all cametogether?”

Donovan: “Last summer, I guess I decided I needed a winter holiday because it gets very bleak in November in Vancouver.And through a connection to one of my insurance companies, I found a travel agent who highly recommended Virgin because it was a kind of younger, hipper form of cruising.And, of course, he told the company when he was booking my passage that I was a blind traveler.So, I fly to Miami solo.At the time, I had to go through Toronto, and stay overnight there.Luckily, I did have a couple of friends there I could catch up with. Getting to the port the next day, they take forever to onboard me.And they said they were having some issues with a tablet or something or other. I didn’t know what was going on. I get onboard and, of course, my thought is I want to sit in the sun and have a cocktail before we set sail.So, they orient me to my cabin.They kind of give me a verbal walk-through or tell me where everything is.And they take me to one of the open bars on the deck.And I’m just sitting, listening to tunes, having a couple of drinks.

“And I’m thinking, I was about to get up and ask for support to go to the next spot for the sail-away party, when two people from Virgin come up to me and say, ‘We’ve got some bad news.We’ve determined that having you onboard as a solo blind traveler could be a safety issue.So, we’ll unfortunately have to take you off the cruise, and we’ll refund everything to you.’

“At first, I was kind of thinking, is this some sort of joke?Like, this has never happened to me before.I’ve traveled the world.I’ve traveled to South Africa by myself for a friend’s wedding and was very supported, very helped out. And I explained to them kind of my history, who I was, where I’dtraveled.

“They said, ‘Well, we’ll talk to someone. They get the manager of the ship.’And he said, ‘No, this has come from Virgin corporate, Virgin legal.You’re going to have to get off.’

“By this time, I was trying to get a hold of my travel agent, trying to make some calls, some last-gasp, last-ditch effort.But within 20, 25 minutes, I’m off-boarded off of the ship.And they’re booking a hotel for me in Miami because I think they wanted me to maybe fly out the next day.

“And I said, no, I want to stay until at least Wednesday. And as I’m waiting for the van to take me to the hotel, I’m posting to Facebook, this is what happened.I message one of my friends in radio who does a morning show in Vancouver, tell him what’s going on.

“Within four hours of this happening, I get a call from the VP of Virgin Voyages, a guy named Frank Weber, who was vacationing with his wife in Mexico at the time, who apologized profusely for what had happened.He said, ‘Can we make this right?Like, how about if we flew you to Roatan, to Honduras, in two days to join the ship to finish the voyage, would you be okay with that?’

“And I said, ‘That probably works out.Let me think about this.But I’ll get back to you.’

“And my first thought was it made sense.Because the last thing I wanted to do on my vacation is spend it in some sort of fight, some sort of battle.And that’s kind of the mindset I had.I had asked them to send me some sort of formal documentation as to why I had been taken off the ship.That never happened.But the VP did take me out for dinner the following night and basically explained that somehow the shore crew knew that I was coming and knew that I was blind.But the people onboard the ship were blindsided – pun intended.And they freaked out, panicked, because they didn’t think they had the training to support a solo blind traveler.

“And he said that they made two errors. ‘First, you’ve got to ask the person what they need, not just assume. And the second thing, I’ve worked in hospitality for over 30 years. It’s more about making people feel welcome.That’s the first thing you’ve got to do. And throwing somebody off a ship, that’s not how to make them feel welcome.’

“In this time, prior to our dinner, I had had time to kind of think about what more I wanted from Virgin.I’d even actually talked to an advocacy lawyer who explained to me what would be involved if I was to take legal action. And really, you’re just putting your name behind a lawsuit.You just get updates.You might only get $2,000 out of it.And it just didn’t sit well with me.That’s not what I wanted to do, considering they seemed to want to make a pivot.

“So, I said when I had dinner with this guy, ‘I’m going to get this cruise free,’ which he had already agreed to.I said, ‘If I enjoy it, I want a second cruise credit.’

“He agreed.And I said, ‘The next piece – and this speaks to something that I’m also very passionate about – I’d love to come and speak to your team about accessibility and inclusion.’

“So, in a sense, they picked the wrong guy to throw off the ship because I definitely fought back. But, also, they picked the right guy because I want to make sure that this doesn’t happen to other people in the future.”

Glen:“I really like the fact that, at some level, you assumed the good intentions of people who indicated that they had good intentions and carried forward with that.”

Donovan:“I don’t know. I think that’s something I inherited from my late father, I think I like to think the best of people and that people have good intentions.And for the most part, they do …”(end of excerpt).

On my recent trip to Hawaii, I took a cruise that involved a lot of traveling between the islands, snorkeling, kayaking, whale watching, and hiking. The only activity I was interested in was the hiking, but the expedition leader felt that this was too dangerous for me to participate in as a person who was blind. These were difficult heights at altitude across lava fields, through obstacles, 10-foot boulders and trees. I had expected to be challenged, but I didn’t come to sit on the boat all week either. I would have given up completely, but there was a bartender named Matt who said he was willing to be a human guide for me and go as far as I could go. The company was called UnCruise Adventures. To make a long story short, I overcame the objections of the expedition leader and completed as much of the hike as I could handle. At least when I chose to turn back, it was my decision.This felt like a personal win. I did not feel that I won anyone over, but I did my best. And I will be forever grateful to that one individual who was willing to step outside of his role, get permission from his manager to leave the ship, and go above and beyond to make sure that my UnCruise Adventure was the experience of a lifetime that it was meant to be. Every day, we have the choice whether to let others define us, or take control.We must decide how far to go. Are we willing to die on that hill?When does it stop being a vacation, and become a fight to assert our rights and dignity as human beings? There is no right or wrong answer, and no one should be judged for the decisions they make. But there are rewards when you take the harder option.

Many of us have listened to Jonathan Mosen’s many and varied podcast efforts over the years. So, I should announce here that the “Mosen at Large” podcast has now become “Living Blindfully.” My subscription automatically switched over to the new feed, but I was a little disturbed when I couldn’t find it, having missed the announcement of the change.

In Episode 214, there was an extremely disturbing story, at least to me, of blatant discrimination against a young blind couple living in Greece. He is from Iceland, she is native Greek, flying home for the Christmas holidays after two years away with their 1-year-old baby girl. They made it all the way to the gate in Athens. When they tried to board the flight, they were toldthat the captain would not allow them to fly with their daughter without an escort because they would not be safe with theirown child in an emergency. In many of the world’s airlines the captain has the absolute last word over who can fly on the plane. This is a right based on ship’slaw and traditions going back hundreds of years. Not even the airline can make a captain take someone on board that they don’t want to fly.

They only made it home a week later on their third attempt to fly when another sighted passenger from Iceland, overhearing the problem at the airport, agreed to hold their daughter on the flight, and act as their escort, then handed the baby back to the mother.The flight attendants went along with this, thereby invalidating their own policy. Scandinavian Airlines settled with the family out of court and admitted they were in the wrong. There is so much more to the story that you really should listen. You can find this under “Living Blindfully” 214, and the chapter is called “Eythor Thrastarson talks about his horrific airline discrimination experience”

On a lighter note, I discovered two podcasts for blind parents:“Blind Parenting Connection” and “Blind Parenting Every Day.”

Something to keep in mind: Many of the best podcasts are like shooting stars. They blaze bright for a while, and then go dark when life happens, and the producers must go on to other commitments in their lives. But the content lives on, outside of time and space, much of it quite valuable and full of insight and wisdom for anyone who will take the time to listen, learn, and be entertained. There’s a whole world of podtastic casts just waiting to be discovered at your fingertips.

# HISTORY

## Voices: Our Untold Story Two Firsts and A Voice of the Future by Chris Coulter

forestelf3@comcast.net

Part One: Two Firsts

This is the story of two amazing firsts in my life. They both happened on the same date and time, in October 1997. At that time, I was enjoying the fun of being in a weekly bowling team in Everett, WA. Back in the spring of 1997, the captain of our team let us know about a charter cruise. On a cold and rainy morning in October, a shuttle came up to my door and drove me to Sea-Tac airport, where I joined many people I already knew and others I didn’t know, but got acquainted with as we went along.

A few hours later, we landed in Los Angeles. From there, we took a bus to our ship and boarded sometime during the late afternoon. We received instructions on everything from learning to put on life jackets to being educated in the ship’s unique names for the different decks. Because of all of the details we were becoming familiar with, it took a while before we were able to set sail. As the ship began to move away from the dock, I heard the swelling of joyous music coming from many speakers, and I felt the sensation of the ship gliding swiftly and surely toward our most excellent adventure.

We finally had time to sit down and begin introducing ourselves to each other. I was amazed by the number of people who had chosen to come on the cruise, and how many people had attended the Washington State School for the Blind and Central School’s resource room, which was located in Tacoma, WA. I found out that most of our fellow travelers were members of the American Council of the Blind. Soon, I was able to find my way on several excursions to the deck chairs in the sun, or the place where pictures were being taken, and, of course, the cocktail lounge, where I enjoyed watching a review put on by singers and dancers onstage.

My roommate, Mary Hill, had never travelled very far from her own home. She was one of our bowling team members, and she made it known that she was somewhat apprehensive about the trip, but she decided to go anyway. She seemed to feel much better when I told her I would translate in Spanish. Mary was hard of hearing but had some sight; I was totally blind but knew enough Spanish to make sure we would be able to get answers to our questions. We met some very nice people who took the time to help us to and from the cab in which we traveled back to the ship, arriving in plenty of time for all of our scheduled opportunities and tours.

After spending several days in Puerto Vallarta, we cruised to Mazatlán. That was a rather wild experience compared to the easy and natural walk through the streets of Puerto Vallarta. On the day we started moving toward Mazatlán, the waves began to get higher and higher, and most of us ran into our first experience with seasickness. Up until then, I had never been on any kind of craft where I got seasick. Luckily, I managed, with great difficulty, to eat some food and then spent the rest of my time lying on my bunk. We were told that there was a hurricane starting to come up, and that is what accounted for the high, wild waves and our jittery insides.

We all survived the storm, but we didn’t get much of a chance to see many sites in Mazatlán or Cabo San Lucas, but I learned how to negotiate prices while I was shopping in the outdoor market. I even did my negotiation in Spanish.

The other first in my life during the fall of 1997 also had to do with the cruise, although I only saw the connection when we were on the plane coming home. I had never wanted to be a part of a blindness organization. I had the feeling that if I was going to make it in the world as a blind person, I would be making it on my own. After talking to ACB members on the ship, I realized that it was actually quite wonderful to be able to connect with and assist each other. After coming home and listening to my first Newsline on cassette, I made my decision to join the American Council of the Blind. I’ve never regretted that decision.

Part Two: A Voice of the Future

1997 turned out to be a very eventful year for me. I found myself going through a couple of huge, life-changing experiences. The first was the wonder of finding myself at ease on a cruise ship. The second was a conversation I had while flying from Seattle to Los Angeles.

As I was getting settled in my seat after boarding the plane, I learned that Tim and Virginia Schneebeck were right next to me. Tim and I struck up a conversation that gave me some food for thought. Tim was talking to Virginia and I about the latest and greatest invention at the time, the internet and its features, such as screen readers and search engines, among other things I didn’t understand at all back then.

I quite frankly told Tim that I had no interest in using any of the new technologies. My Perkins Braille writer and my electric typewriter were all I needed. I also had memorized many phone numbers in my head. I was sure that my brain would turn into jelly if I used a computer for everything.

Tim explained to me that, as the new screen readers and Braille displays and cellphones came online, Braille paper and the Perkins Braille writer would come to the end of their useful life very soon. I didn’t believe him at the time, and after the conversation on the plane, I went home and continued to use my non-technological devices.

During my post-cruise activities, I read several issues of The Braille Forum and found out that every article was filled with people’s comments on different websites, and there was a term that kept appearing that I did not understand, called DAISY. DAISY was not a flower, but yet another technology that could mark up sections, chapters, and pages of new digital audiobooks. Even now, I don’t know how it works, but I’ve learned to press the right buttons.

About three years after that, I moved into a house that was close to the church I was attending. One of my friends was borrowing the computer that belonged to one of the other ladies in the house. That’s when I became conscious of the first glimmers of understanding of how computers could be of help to me.

My friend Jon, who was using the computer on that fateful evening, started doing searches to learn more about blindness so he could understand more about what made me tick. Within about three months of my moving into the communal house, we realized we were in love with each other, and we followed our hearts by getting married.

Jon encouraged me to learn how to use my Mac computer, and although I’m still not very adroit with it, I can slowly find what I need to find. Tim spoke to me with his voice of the future on that plane, and Jon said that he thought I could really expand my horizons by moving forward with technology. I believe that Tim began the process of teaching me how to shape our history, and Jon was (and still is) my greatest encourager.

# ADVOCACY AND LEGISLATION

## Chronicles of a Happy Warrior #14 Cultural Travel by Mark Adreon, The Happy Warrior

[arosindigo@me.com](mailto:arosindigo@me.com)

Travel is a pain in the neck, dealing with things like packing, tight timelines, crowds at airports, uncomfortable seats on the plane, and so many people creating barriers or trying to provide unrequested assistance. Travel can be so exciting, enjoying a new adventure, meeting new people and cultures, tasting new foods, and experiencing ancient spaces, charming places and the thrill of expanding your mind.

Travel can provide opportunities to share cultural change, expansion of civil rights, and equity strategies. Yes, travel has several varied facets, all depending on how and where you travel, and what attitude and purpose you pack.

Leaving Seattle on Lufthansa Airlines, we fly over the North Pole. We have a long day of travel, as we move ahead one day in time and land in Munich, Germany. There is a short layover, we exchange U..S currency for Tangy, the Kazakhstan currency, and then we transfer to our flight to Almaty, Kazakhstan.

The U.S. State department funded and sponsored this trip under the Professional Fellows and the American Exchange programs. Our stated high-level goal was titled, “The American Experience in Disability Community Empowerment and Protecting the Rights of People with Disabilities.” Kazakhstan has signed on to the U.N. Convention for People with Disabilities, and so we structured our project by sharing the story of the civil rights campaigns to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), using strategies from the civil rights movement for people of color.

I was invited to participate with this project based on my connection to the City of Seattle Office of Civil Rights, as chair of the City of Seattle Commission on People with Disabilities, and my connection to vocational rehabilitation and disability services across the state and country. I was able to provide an office space for the Fellow, Veniamin Alayev, from Kazakhstan in the Department of Services for the Blind Seattle office, thanks to Lou Oma Durand, DSB director at the time.

As we landed in Almaty, anticipation was running high, and we used that energy to mask our fatigue from our flight that brought us halfway around the world. We gathered our luggage and made our way to the transport area, where we had a driver and van waiting for us. Veniamin works for one of the main non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for disabilities in Kazakhstan, and our driver was from the NGO. Our host/sponsor in Kazakhstan wasAli Amanbayev, chairperson of Almaty city society of people with disabilities, chairperson of Union of Organizations of people with disabilities of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and adviser of Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Ali is also chair of the Commission for Recommendations for the U.N. Convention for People with Disabilities (CPD).

Finally, we arrived at our hotel, The Comfort Hotel. It was an interesting place, with standard rooms and an awesome breakfast/lunch buffet every morning. The entrance to the hotel felt like it was in an alley and had roughly 10 stairs to get to the front door entrance, and no rails.

There were three of us in the travel party, including Felicia Earwood, the Seattle Office of Civil Rights, and the administrative support for the commission, Janet Marie Wolf, supporting access concerns, and me. We were considering how well we might do during our two-plus weeks stay in Kazakhstan. We were concerned about how far our limited learned Russian would take us. You know phrases like “hello, thank you, nice to meet you, where is the restroom, tell me more,” and other important phrases.

After we unpacked and were feeling hungry, we spent a couple of hours exploring the city close to us. We found a street vender selling meat dumplings, and we purchased some as we continued our walk. There was a large city park with the world’s tallest wood-frame church with lots of interior gold gilding. There were lots of walking paths, as well as statues and fountains. There was a go-cart rental that might be hazardous on a busy summer afternoon in the park. Oh, yes, there was also a very hip club/disco in the park that we checked out later.

Almaty is the former capitol of Kazakhstan, before the president of 23 years (now 30) decided to move it to Astana, closer to the Russian border. As Kazakhstan borders both Russia and China, it has an interesting political position. As a former Soviet Union country, Russia has a vested interest in the Republic. It is rich in minerals, oil, and has a large land mass that separates these two political giants. The Republic is large with a relatively small population of 18.8 million people. Kazakhstan is international finance, and Chevron/Mobil/Exxon are among large industry interest and influence. As you know, the U.S. utilized the Russian space program in Kazakhstan for trips to the international space station.

Our trip to the Republic of Kazakhstan was a valuable learning experience, and I found myself learning much more than I was sharing. The City of Almaty was an active and vital urban environment that appeared to be strongly connected to the mountains that surrounded it. Produce and apples were high quality, and the city offered a wide range of cuisine. The people of Almaty were gracious and open. Our meetings in the community were always followed by tea and food. People shared their lives in candid and open expressions.

Russian is the primary and business language. There is a movement by some to push for the indigenous “Kazak” to be the Republic’s official language. A point of Kazakhstan legacy is that it was a nomadic country with tribes moving based on seasons. The large open land in the northern region had large herds of wild horses.

On our first weekend in Kazakhstan, Ali shared with the American delegation a traditional Kazakhstan meal that included sheep and horse meat prepared in various ways, farm-fresh tomato/cucumber/onion salad (often served with meat), dried cheeses, five fingers and the genuine hospitality of this country.

Our delegation was honored to be recognized with this elaborate dinner for honored guests. The table had a long white tablecloth, 12 fabric chairs, and full settings for a multiple-course dinner. Our table was the only one outside, placed on a green, grassy lawn and surrounded by flower gardens. Our dinner took four hours with a short trip to the close-by mountains, where we mingled among traditional yurts. It was a small village, and we entered a large yurt that people might use for a small wedding party.

Now back to the dinner. Again, some of the items included various cheeses, some that were aged in the ground, like the nomads would have done, returning to it during the next season. There was camel’s milk. I did try it and I don’t recommend it. The vegetables were amazing, apples as large as a small melon, breads and special course plates. The main entrée was served in a bowl about 3 feet wide. Lots of spices, homemade pasta, sheep and horse.

As part of my preparation for this trip, I studied some of the Kazakhstan traditions. I remember the protocol for this honored guest meal. There was a cooked sheep’s head in the center of the big bowl, and it eventually ended up beside me on a plate. My responsibility as delegation head was to carve meat pieces from the sheep’s head and offer the meat to all male folks at the table, in order of importance or status. Ali got the first piece, and he immediately toasted loudly while pointing at me and said, “Kazak!” I then proceeded to move around the table, skipping my two female traveling partners. This did feel strange to me. I was tempted to change hundreds of years of tradition, and I decided to honor the tradition. We were served by three waiters and appeared to have an endless supply of vodka, each shot requiring a toast to something.

Other memorable events included a trip to the foothills to a trout fishing restaurant, and a man-made pond with many narrow peninsulas jetting into it. We each got a fishing pole, a bucket for our catch, and off to the water we went. It didn’t take long to catch our trout, as the pond was wall-to-wall fish. Then we took the prizes back to the building that housed the restaurant. They were cleaned, cooked, and served at our table, with all the sides. Yes, including vodka.

Veniamin and I did go to several restaurants around the city, and we even shared a pizza. Probably our most uncomfortable meal was at a Russian restaurant. It was my fault for ordering a version of steak tartar. I learned charcoal pills taken for a day or two will bring your digestive track back to order.

**A Work Overview**

The City of Almaty has major challenges as it works toward providing equal public access, as the city has many steps and staircases, including steps in the middle of sidewalks, steps going to underground crossings to get to the other side of the street, and many, if not most, of the buildings/businesses/services have steps going up into their space. There was an irony that we found curb cuts in many places, yet if I were a chair user, I would have so few places I could go.

Ali shared that the public access standards that were currently being used are from the Soviet standards in the 70’s. We experienced a wheelchair ramp that had the same raised angle as the steps themselves. I tried to walk up the marbled surface and couldn’t walk up it. It would be hard to imagine a person using a chair, using this ramp.

People with disabilities have developed and established numerous NGOs and disability-related societies to serve specialized functions and missions. Many are formed to provide a sense of community and connection to other people with similar disabilities. Some are intended to provide recreational or activity support. Many provide resource referral and coaching to utilize various services provided by governments or other. All these NGOs and societies are competing against each other for government grants, patron groups, international funds, or other valuable resources.

From my observations, it appears that the disability communities are developing on a separate track from other parts of the culture and there may be a tendency to try to create a “separate but equal” society.

The “Blind Society” we visited was established and has its roots in the worldwide movement for blind people that started in the 1930’s. From our conversations, they were established in 1934, had six to eight blind schools throughout the Republic, had seven to nine work industries for the blind to provide employment and the ability to earn a wage, and had its own building that housed a Braille and tape library, rehab counseling, orientation and training skills, youth services and other support services for the blind community. It was also pointed out that the Blind Society has a strong donor base of wealthy patrons.

In other words, the blind community had its own school system, industry and employer base, self-contained services, advocates and professionals working on behalf of the community, and a private funding stream from wealthy patrons.

At times, it appeared that this was the model that other societies were aspiring to.

The Women’s Society of Disabilities was progressive, in the sense that it was part of an international movement. (Crossed Borders), was an activist group (flash mobs on inaccessible train stations, etc.), and was developing a five-year strategic plan by reaching out to non-disabled groups, friends, and other disability organizations to establish strong collaborative efforts to move equity forward. This is a good model for other societies to consider, as it creates a stronger base of constituencies for disability policy and cultural change.

It was shared with us that the government had indicated that employers were to hire about 4% of their workforce from the disability community. Everyone was clear that there were few, if any, employers that had met this goal. It was shared that employers tell the government that there is no one with a disability applying for work and, therefore, they have no one to hire. Yet, most of the work-aged people we met were frustrated because they could not find employment and were living off a small government pension or other charity sources.

Quick overview of our public forums and engagements from my report to the State Department, Kazakhstan Republic Government, NGOs and societies, and other project partners:

* One of our targeted goals was to empower people with disabilities to action. Our forum was titled “Your Voice.” We wanted to bring the disability siloed groups together and discuss bridge topics, like employment, housing, and rights.
* Our next event was a leadership forum, titled “Charting Your Own Course, Learning from the American Experience,” focusing on sharing the American experience of disability rights, cultural inclusion, and building a movement.

This leadership forum included leaders from NGOs and societies, national and local governments, and international partners, including the State Department.

This was more structured than the previous forum and provided an educational timeline and achievements through activism.

After the presentation, our discussions were focused on how the Kazakhstan experience is progressing as the Republic moves toward ratification of the U.N. Convention for People with Disabilities.

**Potential Action Steps**

One project under consideration is the possibility of collecting 200 donated wheelchairs and walkers in the Seattle area, then shipping

them to Kazakhstan for distribution through the Union of People with Disabilities and other related NGO’s and societies. One goal is to provide some physical relief to people who are currently using crutches (because they are free). If wheelchairs and walkers were also free, many would find these tools less destructive on them physically and probably the more appropriate accommodation. Three months after sending the report to Kazakhstan government officials, they are now providing wheelchairs to those that want them. I guess someone was embarrassed.

More people demanding access creates, clearly, more demand for something to be done. It is a “tail wagging the dog” approach, and this developing demand will support a budding advocacy movement and lead to potential change.

## The Dragon Revealed by Heather Meares

hdmeares@gmail.com

The following is a post from my Facebook page from Feb. 20, following an unacceptable and humiliating experience at Sea-Tac Airport. I am sharing this because I know I am not the only person this, or similar experiences, has happened to. In fact, things like this happen to me more often than not when I travel in airports.

“Lately I have been tired of fighting. Tired of feeling that I, just one person, cannot actually create change, so what’s the point in fighting, right? Wrong. I was reminded yesterday of all the reasons I fight. Just to be clear, this is not a poor me post. This is a change-needs-to-happen post. Yesterday, I arrived at the Seattle airport around 9 a.m. for a flight at 11:25, thinking 2 ½ hours should be more than enough time. I and my traveling friend, who is also totally blind, were promptly seated and forgotten until 10:30 when he ventured out on his own to try and find us some help.

We were then separated for about half an hour as I sat there with luggage and he was hauled off to another holding tank for people with disabilities and had his boarding pass taken to who knows where. Someone came to find me and asked me to follow them to find my friend as she walked off. I reminded her that I was blind and she needed to come assist me, this being the reason we were waiting in these chairs in the first place.

We were reunited in the second holding tank for people with disabilities, my boarding pass was taken to who knows where, and we sat there for another half an hour. Someone finally came to take my friend but not myself, so we tried to explain that we were traveling together and were completely ignored, as two assistants discussed the predicament in a foreign language like we did not exist. At this point I tried to get their attention and was still ignored, so I began to yell. I yelled loudly so that all could hear. I yelled that all we needed was to get through security! I yelled that we had been there over two hours, that we did not need a wheelchair, that our boarding passes were taken for some unexplained reason, that no one was communicating with us and that it was so absolutely ridiculous (insert expletives here) that we were being shuffled around but not important enough to actually help or even be treated with respect or like a human being. My heart was pounding out of my chest, I was shaking, but I got the attention of a supervisor who was just about to clock in, who promptly got us through security and to the gate just in time to board my plane that, luckily, had been delayed. I am saying all of this because today is the day I start fighting again. I have no idea how to start making changes in huge systems like this, but today I start here, by telling my story to anyone who will listen. People with disabilities of any kind are a big portion of the population, and do not deserve to be shoved under a rug, ignored, talked to like a child, dragged around, denied access, or treated like a second-class citizen. Airports everywhere think they are checking the box by supposedly providing access without even knowing what this should look like. It is a serious problem that needs to change. Please share this widely if you wish to help start the conversation.”

And share they did –27 different people, in fact, re-posted this to their own pages and networks, some of whom I did not even know personally. I received an overwhelming amount of comments and responses, but one in particular caught my attention, validated my thoughts, and gave me a sense of empowerment.

John Ammeter: “My wife (Sue Ammeter) and I have had somewhat similar experiences while traveling by air. She passed about 5 years ago, but I remember having ‘troubles’ with the airport and airlines. I’m very happy you finally voiced your troubles very audibly. Sometimes that’s really what’s needed – call attention to what is happening to you. Let the world know you deserve respect. My wife was on the committee that wrote the ADA, and she was a very strong advocate for disability rights. I’m glad you finally got attention.”

Now that a couple of months have passed since the incident, I still don’t know the solution to the bigger problem, but I do know it’s time to start discussing it within our blindness community and organizations. Yes, I am aware that there are technologies that assist with airport navigation, like AIRA and others, but why do they exist? Because the system itself is severely broken in the first place. We cannot just walk into an airport by ourselves, find the check-in counter, get through the security process, and then to our flight gate without assistance of some kind. As we get seated and forgotten, we watch all the able-bodied travelers whizzing by at the speed of lightning to catch their flights. Everyone deserves access to that same process. There are some very significant pieces missing from the puzzle.

I hope to hear from some of you to further the conversation. Please send your comments to myself or TheWCBNewsline@gmail.com.

## Your Legislative Update from Government Affairs & Advocacy by Judy Brown, with contributions from Sheri Richardson’s Committee Report to the WCB Board

**HB 1475 Next Steps**

The Government Affairs Committee met March 1 to discuss next steps regarding HB 1475. This bill would have increased access to elections by allowing certain populations to return ballots using an online ballot portal. The bill would have made a small change that would have had a huge impact in the voting law to allow electronic signatures and ballot marking. A paper ballot would still be printed out by the county elections officials.

The bill would have increased voting security for the military and overseas voting population. Currently, those voters are allowed to submit votes via fax or email. The bill also would have increased access to voting for certain disabled persons who struggle with transportation to get to a county’s accessible voting machines. It would have increased access to certain incarcerated persons who have not lost their voting rights.

From Sheri Richardson, chair of WCB Government Affairs: “If this bill had passed and become law, we who are blind and visually impaired would, for the first time, have been able to fully utilize our state’s vote- by-mail system in the same private, independent, and secure manner as our sighted friends have for many years. … Several of us contacted our representatives to let them know how important this bill is to us personally. Despite our work, the bill died in committee this year. Needless to say, we will continue exploring ways for this method of accessible voting to become a reality in the state of Washington.”

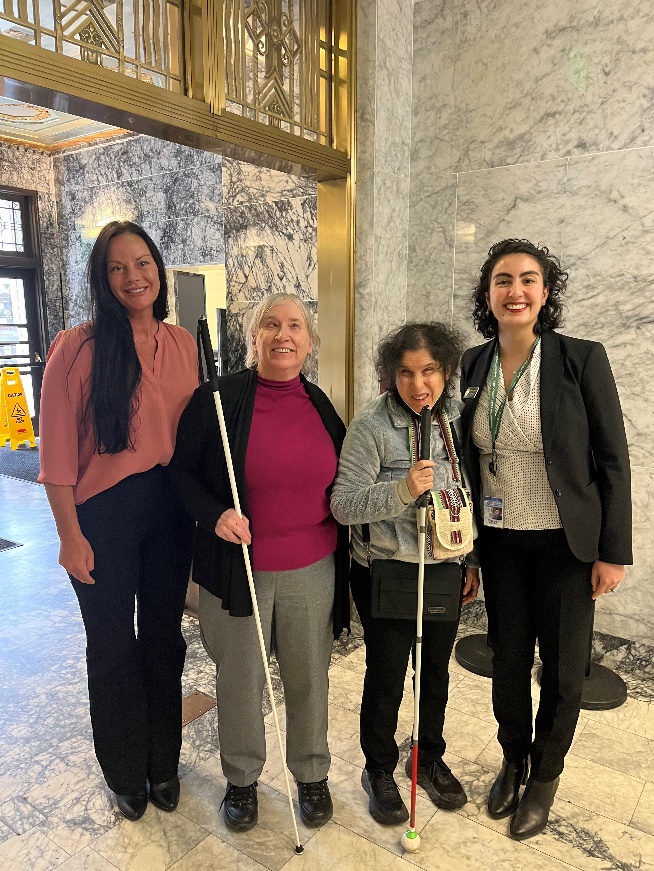
Judy Brown: The bill had one initial hearing in the House State Government and Tribal Relations Committee, which was chaired by Rep. Ramos from Legislative District 5. WCB member Lynne Koral was able to testify in person and WCB member Judy Brown testified remotely on this bill.

Photo to left:

Julie Wise (King County Elections), Marci Carpenter (NFBW), Lynne Koral (WCB), and Rep. Darya Farivar pose for a photo after giving testimony on HB 1475, Jan. 25.

The Government Affairs Committee is hoping to convince the Secretary of State to form a voting work group to further discuss how access can be improved for the disability community. You can take action by contacting your state representatives and asking that a statewide voting work group be formed.

**Update on Accessible Medical Labels Legislation**

In December 2021, we became aware of a bill that would be introduced in the Legislature that would allow languages other than English on medication labels. This bill was sponsored by Rep. My-Linh Thai and promoted by the Health Equity Circle, a group of medical students and others mostly from Spokane. WCB became part of that effort.

(Editor’s Note: And, the story of the life and death of this bill was extremely well told by Judy in the spring 2022 issue of WCB Newsline, but that wasn’t the end of the story).

The Pharmacy Commission did not do any rulemaking activities until they found out what happened with the bill. This was a delay tactic on their part. After the bill died, we started working with the Washington State Pharmacy Association to openly discuss the issues, then make recommendations to the commission. That is where we are now. The commission has outlined the first draft of the rules, and there was public commentary on those rules on March 3. I submitted a written comment on the draft language, as well.

The Washington State Pharmacy Quality Assurance Committee has now developed an initial draft of rules that pharmacies will be required to follow once the rules are enacted. On March 3, the commission heard more testimony on this issue. A statement was sent to the commission from the Advocacy Committee asking for clarification on certain parts of the initial draft. More work needs to be done to fine tune these new rules.

(We here at Newsline would love to hear your personal stories and ideas on what these rules should contain, and why setting universal standards for accessible medication labeling just might be important for everyone in the state. Send your thoughts on all issues that affect our community to [TheWCBNewsline@gmail.com](mailto:TheWCBNewsline@gmail.com), and we may share them in future issues. It takes all of us working together to bring about change.)

# THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

## WCB Families Committee Report on Braille Challenge by Colette Arvidson

The 2023 Virtual Braille Challenge was a great success. Students and parents enjoyed the Friday night pre-competition meet and greet hosted by Cindy Hollis and Meka White with a trivia game for all ages. They especially appreciated the Amazon gift cards donated by Anacortes Soo Bahk Do and the Fred Meyer gift cards from the Edmonds Lions Club, and the grand prize drawing of the Orbit 20+ from WCB Families.

Saturday during the morning break, Washington Council of the Blind had a 20-minute opportunity to discuss the benefits of WCB membership and the work we do, emphasizing the key areas of opportunity, independence and connection – with a focus on FUN. I took the opportunity to solicit feedback from some of our regular members, like Ayden and Jahnavi, to share their memories of activities from bird walks with Skagit and Island Counties Council of the Blind, convention participation including karaoke and talent show, and activities with the Lions-sponsored events like the family fishing, spring egg hunts, and the winter holiday party with Santa.

Here is what a participant in the 2023 Braille Challenge had to say about her experience:

“The virtual 2023 Braille Challenge was very fun! As a participant, I especially enjoyed listening to WCB on Saturday morning. Something that was particularly interesting about the presentation was, listening to students sharing their unique learning experiences of events from WCB. I personally believed that this was very wonderful and amazing to hear, especially from the perspective of visually impaired people within the blindness community. Apart from the presentation, another thing that I liked was meeting several new people. As a previous participant of this event in the past, I always find it very meaningful and significant to notice and overall welcome new people each year at this exciting competition. I hope that this event may continue to be held in the coming years, so that other visually impaired and blind students may have the opportunity to experience the awesome benefits and challenges of Braille. To conclude, I would like to send out a huge thank you to WCB and to WTBBL for planning and making this event a great success!”

Sincerely,

Angie Rodriguez

# AGENCY UPDATES

## Washington Talking Book & Braille Library Update Danielle Miller, WTBBL Director

Greetings, WCB. Staff and volunteers at WTBBL have been working to keep you reading and provide you great library service. Our Audiobook Production Department has been very busy and has nearly 500 talking books currently in process and is uploading new books to BARD every day. Several new narrators are in training who will be able to represent the many diverse voices of the new Northwest-focused materials that have been added to the production queue. We love to hear from you, and your feedback on our locally produced books is always welcome.

We held our annual regional Braille Challenge and hosted 13 students virtually in February. It was a wonderful event, and the students had a great time showing off their Braille skills. There were amazing prizes, including a Chameleon 20, donated by American Printing House for the Blind (APH), and an Orbit 20, donated by Washington Council of the Blind Families Committee. These refreshable Braille displays are invaluable tools for our Braille readers and writers, and we are incredibly thankful to our generous sponsors.

Our Multisensory Storytime also started back up in person on Fridays at the library, with fabulous youth services librarian Erin Groth. It is wonderful to have the energy of the children and families singing, doing crafts, and playing at the library.

We are continuing to increase our programming offerings and invite you to join in on the conversation at our patron book club. We typically meet on the last Monday of each month at 1 p.m., virtually, with both join-from-browser and call-in options. While we’d love to have everyone participate as much as they can, it’s also fine to join for just one or two meetings. The books selected for this year cover many genres, and there’s something for everyone. Some books are set in the Pacific Northwest or have ties to our shared history. Others engage with questions of equity, diversity, and inclusion, while others show history’s reflection to today’s events. A few are acclaimed literary fiction, and October’s will be a little spooky. If you are interested in participating, please either call the library, email integrative services at [ryan.gelskey@sos.wa.gov](mailto:ryan.gelskey@sos.wa.gov), or visit WTBBL.org and click on the Book Club link to register online.

And finally, we want to stay connected with you and be sure you know about any updates or events happening at WTBBL. If you haven’t already, make sure you are signed up for the WTBBL email list by emailing[wtbbl@sos.wa.gov](mailto:wtbbl@sos.wa.gov)with the subject "subscribe to email list." You can also always reach out to me with any questions or feedback on WTBBL services at [danielle.miller@sos.wa.gov](mailto:danielle.miller@sos.wa.gov).

# WCB HAPPENINGS

## Growing from 6 to 32 and Counting by Marilee Richards

[richjeanne16@gmail.com](mailto:richjeanne16@gmail.com)

I have been asked by several Washington Council of the Blind members how our Snohomish Council of the Blind is growing so fast and always filled with excitement and energy. First of all, if you have a passion for anything, it will grow more than other things because it is a desire deep in your heart. This was a passion born from a desire in my heart.

Almost every month, this group is gaining one or two new members. I think it was just over a year ago when members started coming to our group who were newly blind or visually impaired. As the members came, I connected with two or three existing members who could relate to their situation. When you show a stranger love and understanding, they will pay it forward. Each of them has been more than willing to do what they can for someone else.

Personally, I think if you treat others the way you want to be treated, life moves along so much better. This is not a platitude to me, but a way of life. When I was young and wanted friends, it hurt so much. No matter what I did, I made no more new friends. So, I made a promise that if I could be trusted with friends, I would do all I could to make their lives sweeter.

When I see someone in pain, I send them a card of encouragement. When someone is sitting alone, I visit with them. I try to pass on to others the reaction I was hoping to receive from others. This has served me well over the years, and I am amazed how many friends I have made in my adult years.

Now I have an abundance of friends from all walks of life, and I love the variety in their ideas and beliefs. The blind community is my most recent exposure to an awesome group of people. I am now truly proud to be blind. Who couldn’t be proud of a group of individuals that accomplish so much in their lives? It is truly amazing.

If you want growth in the affiliate you are a part of, don’t try to do it all yourself. Share the joy with the many. Here is hoping that all affiliates are busting at the seams soon.

## A Little Excursion by Kim L. Moberg

mobergproductions@me.com

My dad worked for the airlines when I was a small child, so traveling by car and taking many excursions along the way was just part of our regular summer vacations. We would fly from Juneau, AK, to Seattle. Once we landed here in Washington, my parents would rent a car and we would all head out on a road trip to Wyoming to visit my grandparents. We took a lot of fun excursions along the way.

So early in February, when it was time for the Washington Council of the Blind board retreat, those riding in our truck heading to Vancouver took a little road trip. I made plans for us to take a bit of an excursion to Washington State School for the Blind (WSSB) before heading on to our hotel.

Scott McCallum, WSSB superintendent, told me that if I am ever in the area to be sure to stop by the school and say hi, so that is what we did.

Donny, our wonderful driver, Linda Wilder, and I, Kim Moberg, left early in the day so that we would have plenty of time once we arrived in Vancouver to go visit the school before a weekend of getting to know each other as board members and officers. Once on the WSSB campus, we went to the Old Main Building where Scott's office is. He came out and asked if we would like to take a tour of the construction site where they are building a new building for the Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow (LIFTT) program, and also for the Department of Services for the Blind (DSB). When Donny and I first visited the school last August, they were just getting started on this building project.

It was great to see all the progress that has been made. The LIFTT program helps students develop their independence while going to college. Some of them have jobs they go to each day. Students that have graduated from high school and are attending college in Vancouver can take part in this program. At present, they have five students in this program. A variety of opportunities are available for them to experience. For example, there is both a gas range and an electric range so they can become familiar with both. In the laundry area, they have washers and dryers that you might find in a typical home, and they also have washers and dryers you would find in a laundromat, so they learn how to operate both types.

Linda, Donny, and I got to explore the construction site of the LIFTT building. It is a two-story building. Students live on the main floor, while the DSB offices are on the second floor. Each student has his or her own room. The kitchen is rather large, which is really nice, especially when you have several individuals trying to prepare meals at the same time.



Photo to left:

Linda Wilder, Donny Moberg, Kim Moberg, and Junior (Kim’s guide dog) outside the construction site of the new LIFTT building. All are wearing the yellow hard hats required in order to be on the construction site.

There were lots of stairs to climb. Later, the elevator will be in operation once students start living there. It was very dusty, as is the case with most construction sites. When we finished exploring the site, my shoes were no longer white. I love the smell of sawdust, and there sure was a lot of that around. We were able to see where all of the doorways, windows, and rooms would be. When this facility is complete, it is going to be very nice for the students and staff, and for those employed by DSB.This was a great excursion. What we did at WSSB was not planned. We just thought we would stop in and say "hi." That's the wonderful thing about excursions. They just happen and they are fun.

## Intentional Inclusion by Sheri Richardson

sherir938@gmail.com

You probably know the saying, “you don’t see the forest for the trees?” Well, sometimes we miss the individuality of the trees because we are too focused on the forest. I think we all can agree that it is important to focus on both the health and overall well-being of the forest as a whole, while also admiring the beauty and individuality of each and every tree that makes up that forest.

So it is with Washington Council of the Blind. The health and effectiveness of WCB is dependent on, and a reflection of, our chapters and affiliates, our committees, and our governing board. Of course, each of these groups, or smaller groves to use the forest analogy, is made up of unique human beings with their own perspectives and skill sets, which brings us to one more application of my analogy.

You probably know that forests are much healthier if they include many different varieties of trees. They are better able to handle changes in their environment, and they can provide a healthier life source to a larger and more diverse flora and fauna which, in turn, improves the health of the whole forest.

Like a robust and vibrant forest, WCB seeks to provide the kind of welcoming and inclusive environment that allows a diversity of individuals and their lived experiences to flourish and add to the richness and strength of the organization. With that in mind, the WCB board has established a new ad hoc committee whose primary purpose is to expand our outreach to a more diverse population, with the goal of welcoming individuals with a variety of perspectives, backgrounds, and skill sets into our organization through our chapters and affiliates, committees and leadership. We know a more diverse group of people will strengthen WCB and help us be a more healthy, effective, and resilient organization, which will provide an even better environment for us all to thrive as unique individuals.

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee will concentrate for the next year on identifying the communities that are not as well represented in our organization and seek to reach out and welcome individuals to share their stories, their perspectives, and their skill sets with WCB. I am chairing the committee, and I am very pleased that Lynne Koral is the vice chair. At the time of this writing, the committee consists of five members, but we expect to add others. I want to thank the WCB Advocacy Committee for identifying the need and opportunity for creating this committee. You will be hearing more from us in the coming months as we work with all segments of WCB to enhance the strength and health of our community through intentional inclusion.

## Hats Off Compiled by Linda Wilder

[lindasuewilder@msn.com](mailto:lindasuewilder@msn.com)

We extend congratulations to, and celebrate with, the following WCB members:

* Debbi Phillips on her new dog guide named Ruby from The Seeing Eye.
* Jenny Anderson on her new dog guide, Freedom, also from The Seeing Eye, who is a male yellow lab that is almost white in color.
* Hayley Agers on her new dog guide named Neruda, who is a Brindled lab weighing 51 lbs. and is 17 months old, from Guide Dogs for the Blind.
* Mark and Linda Wilder on the birth of their fourth great-grandson, Oliver Mateus Conrad Tracy, born Jan. 21, weighing 8 lbs. 5 oz.
* Wishing Reefa Dahl, a long-time member of United Blind of the Tri-Cities, a very happy 93rd birthday on Jan. 25.
* Sarah Edick on her appointment to the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library Patron Advisory Council
* And our heartfelt congratulations and best wishes go out to Deb Cook Lewis on moving up from first vice president to president of American Council of the Blind.

If you or someone you know has something for inclusion in Hats Off, email TheWCBNewsline@gmail.com with “Hats Off” in the subject line. Those items that may not meet the criteria listed below may still be very appropriate in your local chapter’s “Around the State” article.

The following are reasons for inclusion in this column:

* Birth of a child, grandchild or great-grandchild
* Birthdays 75 years and older in 5-year increments (yearly after age 90)
* Marriage or wedding anniversary 25 years and more in 5-year increments
* Graduation from high school, college, or vocational program
* New job, career promotion, or retirement
* Partnering with a dog guide
* Appointment to a city, county, statewide, or national board or commission
* Exceptional recognition or award

# AROUND THE STATE

## Clark County Council of the Blind by Bob Cavanaugh

It's been a quiet couple months here in the southwest corner of the state, but things are starting to move forward. At our last meeting, we talked about some ideas for fundraising, and started talking about what could be our first big advocacy issue. In August, we switched banks because the bank statements at our previous bank could not be downloaded without sighted assistance. As this particular bank is a local credit union with branches on both sides of the river, it was suggested I work with the chapter in Portland on this. I have reached out to the president of that chapter but haven't heard back as of this writing.

In other news, I've been helping our treasurer, Abby, with her Holman Prize project. She was awarded $25,000, which she will use to establish a technology program for blind students in her home country of Ethiopia.

## Guide Dog Users of Washington State by Andy Arvidson

The GDUWS chapter is looking at returning to our annual in-person Spring Fling. We received an email from the Holiday Inn Express on the Rock in Spokane, where we stayed in 2019 with our last in-person Spring Fling, asking us if we would like to come back. After a deep discussion, we decided to go to Wenatchee first and then chose to look at Vancouver, WA. The choice came as several of us had just been there for the Washington Council of the Blind board retreat and found it to be accessible for our needs.

We are also looking at continuing to have our focus calls. These calls are where we get to ask a representative from a guide dog school to give us an update on how they are doing things now as we migrate out of the pandemic, or as a friend of mine renamed it, the dampenic.

We have had several members apply for, and receive $200 scholarships from the Marlaina Lieberg Scholarship Fund that we created several years ago in Marlaina’s name. This was something she wanted to happen. When someone in Washington state gets accepted for a guide dog school, they are likely to incur some extra expenses that may go beyond their typical budget. Therefore, if they apply and show their acceptance to a program, we send them $200 to help offset those expenses.

## Pierce County Association of the Blind by Linda Wilder

PCAB is growing. The Membership Committee was able to recruit four new members, bringing our total membership to 32. We want to give a warm welcome to each of our new members. We have a full docket of speakers, starting with our first speaker in January, Matthew M. Santelli, Community Outreach & Education Specialist for Aging and Disabilities Resource Center. Matt talked about the services, disaster preparedness, and provided each of us a box with several items to lower the cost of water use and electricity. In February, Al Yardley spoke on several commands for iPhones and provided us with a Facebook website that is more accessible with a PC, which is Mbasic.facebook.com. He also provided us with a list of valuable phone numbers that I am sharing here with you:

* Apple Accessibility Support Line: 877-204-3930
* Amazon’s Accessibility Customer Service: 888-283-1678
* Audible Support: 888-283-5051
* Microsoft Disability Answer Desk: 800-936-5900.

We are looking forward to our speakers in future months: Tara Rogowsky, programs coordinator for Northwest Association for Blind Athletes, March; Rafael Ramirez, IL specialist, April; Elisabeth E. Emerson, education program manager for the Museum of Glass, May; and, hopefully someone from Pierce Shuttle in June.

PCAB would like to extend an invitation to anyone who would like to join our meetings to hear any of these speakers. Just email me at lindasuewilder@msn.com and I will send you the Zoom connections.

## Skagit & Island Counties Council of the Blind by Andy Arvidson

The SICCB is currently having in-person meetings, sometimes two per month. We are meeting at the Anacortes Senior Activity Center in cooperation with a low-vision support group. This senior center is the only one in Washington state that is certified, which is outstanding.

This being my last year as president, I hope to set a good example of leadership. At least three of us have gone through the WCB leadership seminar in the past, including the vice president, who has already let me know he is willing to be available this fall to be the next president.

We are making plans to continue our activities of hiking and bird listening, etc. One of the things we are looking at is a return to our ferry ride to Guemes Island with a hike to the Country Store for lunch. Another is to travel to Whatcom County and visit a scent garden. We have also considered visiting other chapter meetings to spend time with other blind groups and see and make new friends, along with seeing how others mingle and do business.

## South Kitsap Council of the Blind by Jessamyn Landby

Our chapter has started off well so far for the year. We started allowing members to bring food to share with the chapter during our meetings since where we meet there are no restaurants or stores nearby. Our members are happy we are doing this again. We may do some other kinds of potluck ideas besides just bringing whatever you want to share with the chapter.

Since the year started, we had two new members join our chapter. In January, we welcomed Robin Fiscus who is newly blind. In February, we got Lisa Norbut, who several of our members know from Peninsula Council of the Blind. Both Robin and Lisa are nice additions to our chapter.

In March, our chapter has to hold our meeting a week early due to the room that we rent for meetings being given to another group. So, we will be having our meeting on the third Saturday of the month. Our chapter decided to have a short meeting and take care of what business that needs to be dealt with for the month. Then after the short meeting, we will have finger foods. Some of our members will be learning Braille while others are playing games. We have found this is a fun way to get to know each other better, and this way we are not just having meetings. This is what our chapter has been up to so far for the year.

## Snohomish County Council of the Blind by Marilee Richards

Snohomish County Council of the Blind is busting out at the seams. If we grow much bigger, we will outgrow our current location at Denny’s in Everett. We had six new attendees and two guests our last meeting this past Saturday. One of them has already joined, and several of them are considering joining our group.

As usual, the room was steaming with conversation as we awaited our meals.Before starting our meeting, I had each member introduce themselves to the new people. Because we are growing so quickly, I can’t do my spotlight on new members. We have had Barbara and Wayne Franz, Jill Reasoner, and our newest member Sweetpea, who comes to us via Heidi Coggins. She is newly blind and a new mother, too. Welcome to all of you. Our group has now grown to 32 members.

This next April we will be helping WCB Families, the South Everett Lions, and the Northwest Association of Blind Athletes provide a fun day for the young and not so young, families with blind and visually impaired children. It will be filled with games, an egg hunt, maybe the bunny and much more. Last year was real fun even when it had to be held indoors because of bad weather.

The first Saturday of each month, we hold our support group for newly blind and visually impaired people in the state of Washington. We are going to have a contest to come up with a good name for this group. The winner will be treated to a special gift (TBA later). Please come join our group and help others on this sometimes scary journey. All are welcome to join. Danette Dixon sends out a link every month.

I am working on speakers for every other meeting. The most important thing for this group is to allow time for members to talk through their struggles so they get help and support from those who have already been where they are now. I also try to match someone with a new person to connect with them by phone to make a real personal contact. No one has all the answers, but we all try to help each other.

My piano teacher, Brett Boon, is working to put a non-profit music group together that serves blind and visually impaired music lovers with teachers and perhaps even instruments. It will be a 501(c)3 group that will perform at different locations. Watch for his article that will give more information. He is a great teacher and really wants to enrich the lives of the sight-impaired and blind community.

## United Blind of the Tri-Cities by Janice Squires

January always brings the creation of our new year membership list. We would like to welcome our two newest members to the UBTC family, Mary LaMont and Karen Manderscheid. We welcome them with open arms and know they will both be a positive addition to our group.

I want to thank a few of our sighted members, such as our past treasurer, Brenda Vinther. She has served us in this capacity for 11 years, and we are so grateful for all of her hard work. Brenda is always working in some way in the background, such as with our narrated play program and any other special needs we may have. Hats off to you, Brenda, and we welcome in our newest treasurer, Pat Johnson. Pat, too, is always there to help in any way she can. We’re so blessed to have these two special people as a part of our organization.

It takes a village to run a very active chapter, such as we are. Sometimes the little things may mean the most. Vanessa Pruitt always reads us an inspirational quote at the beginning of our meetings and is also our sunshine lady. Sweet member Dixie McDaniels sells our 50/50 raffle tickets and is now bringing an American flag to the meetings, as we always begin them with the pledge.

We cannot say enough good things about the Edith Bishel Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired and their wonderful executive administrator, Shanna Larter. The center gives us a warm and friendly place for our support group activities and provides us with so many of their own fun happenings, from bingo to crafts to lots of fun and laughter. We even celebrated Valentine’s Day with the most lovelyhigh tea party, with delightful tidbits, such as little sandwiches and delicious desserts. Shanna also coordinates our monthly lunch support group, and for the second year, she has taken on the UBTC project of adopting a blind or visually impaired child at Christmas.

Happy spring.

## United Blind of Walla Walla by Heather Meares

Our first item of business this year was electing a new president, Dodie Orlando, who is doing a great jobof bringing new life into our group. We have had some discussions regarding the areas we want to focus on this year and are determining what areas of interest are the most important. Dodie is taking a trip to Scotland with her daughter, which sounds like a very interesting adventure, and we can’t wait to hear all about it when she returns.

Joleen Ferguson has been actively maintaining our website to keep it relevant, current, and interesting in hopes of attracting people to our chapter. She has also been working very closely with the city in regards to traffic signals, roundabouts, and other pertinent issues. She is very proactive at communicating information about these topics with our chapter, and letting us know when action is needed.

We are looking into doing more outreach with families and children with visual impairments in our community and what that might look like for us.

We are finally meeting in person again, which has been really nice. Discussion of possible social events for the year is in the works, and it is exciting to be able to see each other again and refocus our energy on what lies ahead, and how we can affect change.

# 2023 WCB Calendar of Deadlines and Events

For more details on events listed,

please subscribe to the wcb-l list on groups.io or call 800-255-1147.

Saturdays at 10 a.m.

join the WCB Coffee and Conversation Zoom call.

List of Abbreviations:

DSB Department of Services for the Blind

WCB Washington Council of the Blind

WSSB Washington State School for the Blind

WTBBL Washington Talking Book & Braille Library

**MAY**

**2 and 3** – 2023 online GiveBIG fundraiser

**4** – WSSB Board of Trustees meeting

**6** – WCB board meeting from 1 to 3 p.m. (on Zoom)

**8** – WCB Diabetics call at 7 p.m.

**21** – WCB Tech Chat with Reg and Frank at 7 p.m.

**22** – President’s call at 7 p.m.

**31** – Deadline to submit articles for the WCB Newsline Summer 2023 issue

**JUNE**

**5** – Treasurer’s call at 7 p.m.

**9** – DSB State Rehab Councilmeeting from 9 a.m. to noon

**12** – WCB Diabetics call at 7 p.m.

**16** – WSSB Commencement and Board of Trustees meeting

**17** – WTBBL Patron Advisory Council call from9 a.m. to noon

**18** – WCB Tech Chat with Reg and Frank at 7 p.m.

**19** – ACB Conference and Convention begins virtual programming

**20** – WCB committee leaders’ call at 7 p.m.

**30** – ACB Conference and Convention begins at the Renaissance Hotel in Schaumburg, IL

**JULY**

**6** – ACB Conference and Convention ends

**10** – WCB Diabetics call at 7 p.m.

**16** – WCB Tech Chat with Reg and Frank at 7 p.m.

**24** – President’s call at 7 p.m.

**Washington Council of the Blind**

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in the first quarter of 2023

**Thank You!**

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ACB Monthly Monetary Support Program

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WCB would also like to welcome

**John Halliday**

**Doug Payne**

as new **Life Members**