



# GEM STATE MILESTONES

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A Publication of the NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF IDAHO

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## "IT WAS REALLY EMPOWERING"

*Photo: "The Red Umbrella" artwork by  
Rebecca Bruyere*

This piece by Ms. Bruyere is made from cardboard and acrylic paint. Her teacher, Ms. Shanafelt, helped with cutting out shading. Together they used a sponge and toothbrush to add the fine details. At the time of this creation, her vision allowed her light perception only. She counted on her tablemates and teacher to help her with color identification. "When I was finally able to see, I was astonished that I was able to create a detailed piece with no vision. It was really empowering."

*See Rebecca's complete story, "I didn't Feel Like I was Good Enough" on page 4.*



## PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

*Dana Ard, NFBI President*



*Photo: Dana Ard*

January is one of the most exciting times of the year to look forward to upcoming events with our affiliate and with the National Federation of the Blind. The three events to look forward to are the Washington Seminar, our state convention in Idaho Falls, and our national convention in Houston, Texas.

The Washington Seminar will begin on February 10. I will be participating in this event along with Erin Olsen, our state treasurer, and Alison

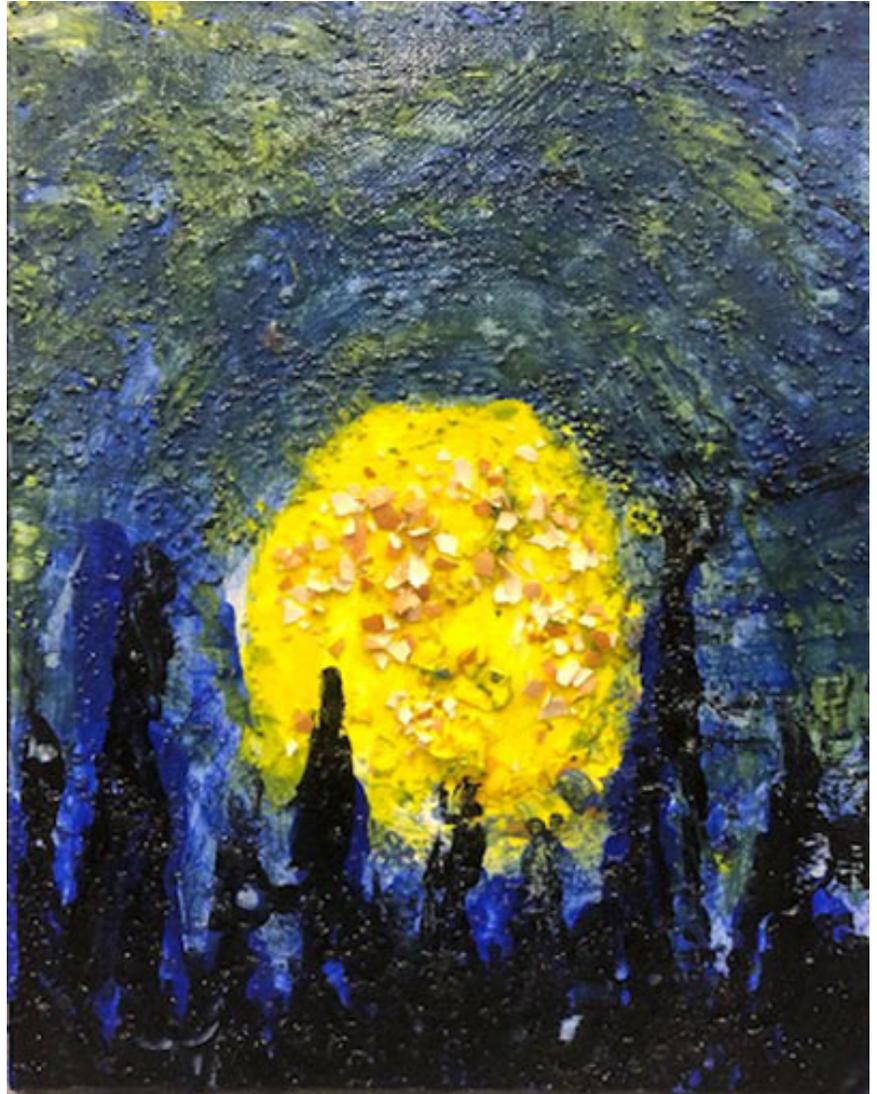
Steven, one of our board members. We have all of our appointments with the house and senate scheduled for Tuesday, February 11. The three issues to be presented for this year are the Access Technology Affordability Act, which will provide a refundable tax credit of \$2000 for individuals who purchase access technology. The second issue is the Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education (AIMHI.) This bill would create a purpose-based commission to develop guidelines for institutions of higher education to follow when making materials accessible to blind students. This bill has met with opposition in the past, but the concerns have been addressed and our federation government affairs representatives feel it has a good chance to pass this year. The third issue is the GAIN act. Through this act we are asking accessible standards to be developed and implemented for home appliances, medical equipment and exercise equipment. Following the Washington Seminar, we will need all members and friends to contact our congressional representatives to ask them to cosponsor these bills. In the past few years, our representatives have not cosponsored any of our initiatives. The best way to improve this situation is for all of us to get involved. Several times during the year, I post requests for members to call or email our members in congress. We must all get involved. Our success is not up to one or two people. It is all of us working together.

The affiliate highlight of the year is our annual convention which will be held April 16-18 at the Hilton Garden Inn, 700 Lindsey Blvd. in Idaho Falls. Room rates are \$94.00 for king rooms and \$99.00 for double queen rooms. There is a free breakfast for all guests. The phone number for reservations is 208 522-9500. We will have presentations on accessible voting including absentee voting and voting in non-federal elections, education of blind children, our expo of blindness products and services, our dynamic banquet with scholarship winners and other awards, possible presentations by our governor and/or lieutenant governor and much more. If you

have topics or speakers to recommend, please let me know. Our national representative has not yet been announced.

Our 80th national convention will take place at the Hilton Americas in Houston, Texas, July 14-19. Room rates are \$105.00 per night plus sales tax of 8.25 and occupancy tax of 17%. Book your room by calling 1-800-236-2905. The first night's room rate and taxes will be deducted from your credit card when you make your reservation. This convention is predicted to be the largest ever, so get your room reservations in early to be sure you have a place to stay. On-line registration will be open March 1.

As I write about our exciting year ahead, I can't help but reflect on the loss of three federation-ists during this past year; Becky Sherman, Hary Gawith, and Bill Morgan. These members were all leaders and educators in their own way. As we remember them and mourn their loss, we must look within ourselves to think how we can better serve our great movement. In addition, we must find a way to reach and guide other blind people and sighted friends into this movement. Being a member of this organization is a commitment. We are only as strong as the commitment we make. Let's work together to build and strengthen the National Federation of the Blind of Idaho.



*Photo: "EGG MOON RISING" Artwork by Rebecca Bruyere*

## TECH FOR THE BLIND

*Windows Keyboard Power User Guide* is a book intended to help you become a more proficient user of Windows, JAWS and Word. It is available in Word and MP3. To explore the table of contents, or learn more, visit <https://techforblind.us>.

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Photo: "Fruit Row" Artwork by Rebecca Bruyere

## "I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE I WAS GOOD ENOUGH BECAUSE I COULDN'T SEE"

Vision and Visions of a Young Artist: A Visit with Rebecca Bruyere

Allan Schneider

Becca's art and her relationship with the individual pieces reveals a uniqueness of character and creativity as singular as the artist herself. Her wonderful works involve water color, acrylic, egg shells, hot glue, cardboard and more. Her musical interests involve viola, cello, violin, ukulele, guitar, and piano. Because of a rare eye cancer, her vision involves unpredictable fluctuations ranging from 20/100 to 20/900. Becca's remarkable art, her varied interests, and her resilient soul acknowledge adversity and celebrate diversity.

Rebecca (Becca) Bruyere, daughter of Brett and Amanda Bruyere, is a 17-year-old senior at Boise High School in Boise, Idaho. She has loved art all her life but concedes with her characteristic humility, "I didn't think I was good enough because I couldn't see." All the more, one art teacher discouraged her from taking art because of her low vision.

Not so with her current teacher, Ms. Katy Shanafelt, who applauds not only Becca's talent but also her attitude toward her

work, "Becca comes with a strong desire which translates into her ability because she really wants to create work that she's proud of." She adds that Becca's originality as far as medium has inspired the whole class. In fact sometimes other student ask why they don't get to do what she's doing. "She's not afraid to try things whether they turn out or not. And that to me is like the hallmark of someone who is going to be successful, because she's not afraid to fail."

Becca is active in the blind community teaching Braille at Bell (Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning) camps and participating in the VISTA (Visually Impaired Students Transitioning to Adulthood) leadership program. She would like to study art in college and her dream school is the School of Visual Arts in New York. "I want to do something I feel is important." Imagine that: a blind student in a visual arts school. "People are afraid to try."



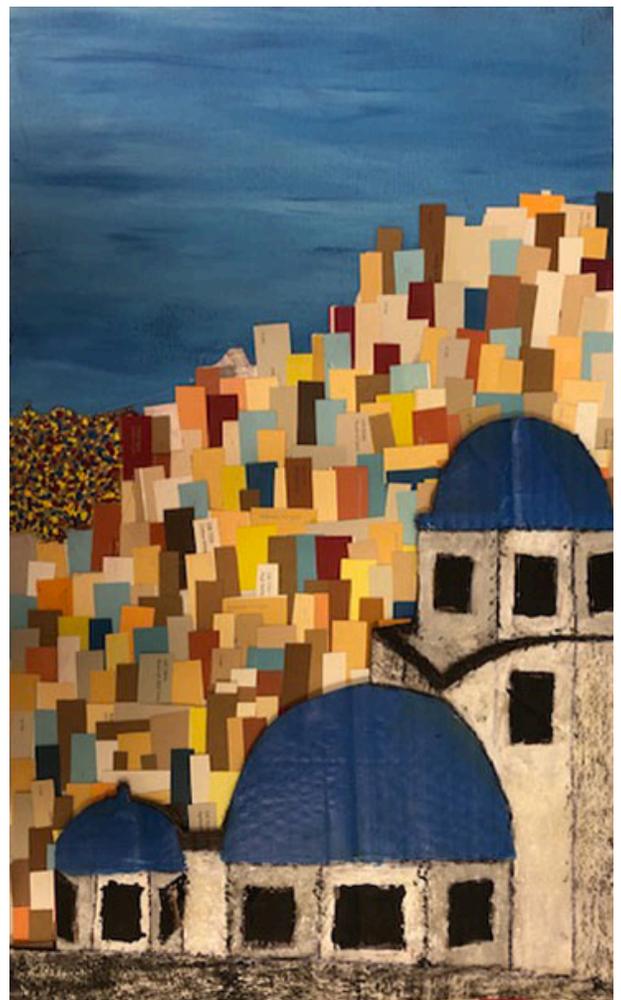
*Photo: "The Cardboard Portrait" Artwork by Rebecca Bruyere*

This piece was made using cardboard and acrylic paint. The cardboard was layered to build the highlights in the face. Becca's vision was her "normal" at the time of this creation.

*Photo: "Greece" Artwork by Rebecca Bruyere*

Acrylic paint was used for the sky. Cut up paint chips were used for the buildings on the hillside, and cardboard and acrylic paint were then used to add depth to the closer buildings. A mix of fine glitter and clear acrylic was used to give the buildings texture.

Becca had her "normal" vision throughout the process. On the last day when she was assembling the piece, she had a minor retinal bleed and had fuzzy vision.





*Photo: Becca and her teacher, Ms. Katy Shanafelt in the art room at Boise High-School*

Ms. Shanafelt says, “I have enjoyed working with Becca more than I could have imagined. She has such a great attitude and welcomes challenges in her work. She has a great drive to create and shows the world that there is nothing she can’t do. She communicates her ideas to me and we have such fun brainstorming how we will accomplish her plans. Sometimes we fail and try again. We learn by doing and are constantly surprised by the results of our play and experimentation. I think that the more Becca works, the less I have to set up any stages for her to work in--she is very independent and wants to be 100% responsible for her work. I admire her and have loved working with someone who, although might appear sight challenged to some, is one of the purest visionaries I have had the pleasure to know.”

## HEARD BIRDS

*Steve Bouffard - Curator of Birds,  
Orma J. Smith - Museum of  
Natural History - College of Idaho*

While many birds have gone south for the winter, there are still a good variety around that we can hear. In fact, the recent Christmas Bird Count in Boise found over 100 different species. One of the most abundant of our winter residents are Canada Geese. We can hear their honking as they



fly around town. If you have bird feeders near your house you can hear House Finches, House Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, American and Lesser Goldfinches and Black-capped Chickadees. They won't be singing their breeding songs until spring, but they have calls that can be used to identify each species. If you have larger trees around you may hear Red-breasted Nuthatches; they sound like a mini back-up alarm. Large trees also attract Brown Creepers, small brown birds with a soft, very high-pitched call, so high that many people can't hear them. If you have excellent hearing you may hear them around large trees in parks and cemeteries. On the opposite end of the spectrum, we have loud and raucous calls from Crows and Black-billed Magpies. They can be heard as they roam about town. If you have some crab apple or other fruit bearing trees, you may hear American Robins or the whine of Cedar Waxwings attracted by the fruit. We have two common woodpeckers during the winter, both can be heard by their pecking and their calls. Downy Woodpeckers give a "pick" call. Northern Flickers give a variety of calls including "keeya" and repeated "wicka wicka wicka". If you happen to be along open water you might hear the rattling call of a Belted Kingfisher. Owls are starting to defend nest territories, that means they are getting more vocal. The large Great-horned Owl's call is a series of deep hoots. I heard one call from my neighbor's yard in Southeast Boise a couple weeks ago. The smaller Western Screech Owl is also calling and is common throughout town. They give a series of five to ten soft toots that decline in volume.

Have a Happy New Year Birding!



## HARRY GAWITH

Harry C. Gawith, 75. son of John and Isabel Gawith, was born March 6, 1944, in Oregon. He died early December 26, 2019, at the VA Hospital in Boise, Idaho, as a result of complications of severe lung diseases.

Harry attended Eastern Oregon and Oregon State Universities, graduating with a B.S. in Industrial Education. Before graduating, Henry served three and a half years in the U.S. Army, serving in Germany.

Harry used his education to train blind adults in industrial arts activities and many life skills. He and his students not only laid the sidewalk on both sides of the ICBVI building, but also replaced the concrete floor in the wood shop.

While working at the commission, he met fellow teacher Jan and they married in 1976.

After Jan opened a cafeteria, he began working for her as cook and assistant manager. Both Jan and Harry liked to bowl and golf. When Jan retired, Harry worked at his favorite place, the golf course. He finished the season this October.

Harry is survived by his wife, Jan; his sister and brother-in-law, Sharon and Steve McCraw and sister Juanita Meyers of Elgin, Oregon; his brother, Roger Gawith, and sister, Verla Trump, of Albany, Oregon; his sister and brother-in-law, Phyllis and Sam Mento of Havlock, N.C.; as well as many cousins, nieces and nephews.

Memorials may be sent to The National Federation of the Blind, 200 East Wells Street at Jernigan Place, Baltimore, MD., 21230 or The Idaho Humane Society, Boise.