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President's Address

Dana Ard

In mid-August, I traveled to northern Idaho to teach Braille writing at Idaho's first Bell and Beyond Camp. I taught three classes daily of two students each. In addition to increasing and strengthening each student's skills in Braille writing, each class wrote a story, a poem, and an essay. The best story was written about Louis Braille. One student had read a biography of Louis Braille's life, and contributed significant facts to the story. The second student has a tremendous love for Braille, and shared her appreciation for the work that Louis Braille did



Photo: NFB President, Dana Ard

to make it possible for blind people to read. All students participated in a spelling contest, where they received a point for each word they spelled correctly. Points were totaled and all participants received a prize, with the winner receiving the grand prize.

In the NFB, October is "Blind Equality Achievement Month." On October 11, the NFB of Idaho held a seminar entitled "Idaho's White Cane Law: Guaranteeing Freedom and Access for Idahoans who are Blind or Disabled." Our national president emeritus, Marc Maurer, provided introductory remarks about the history of the white cane law, and the influence of Jacobus TenBroek, our first NFB president. Retired attorney, and lifetime NFB of Idaho member Eric Petterson, provided specific information on the Idaho law, which was updated in 2019 to include all persons with disabilities. This event was very successful with over 20 persons in attendance including staff from the Idaho Commission for the Blind, Idaho Educational Services for the Deaf and Blind, NFB members, and the Ada County Highway District. *(Continued on page 8)*

It's Your Toolbox

Joe Thompson



Clip Art: Tool Box

I carried a leatherman multitool on my belt for many years, and I'm sure I've pulled it out, at least once a day to accomplish some mechanical task, such as opening a box with the knife, or tightening a screw with a driver or cutting and bending a piece of wire with the needle nose pliers part of it.

When I got my first smart phone with a holster, I had to takeoff the leatherman to make room since both items would have been overkill. Fortunately, the smart phone is a multitool as well and has become my indispensable blindness tool of choice. In fact, I am dictating this article in Pages with it.

As my vision has waned over the past few months, I am beginning to lean on that tool for an increasing number of tasks. There's the ubiquitous daily emails that can be quickly read by voiceover and responded to with voice; however, the bulk of them will be dispatched with the flick of a finger.

Navigation: The other night I got lost in my neighborhood walking around in the dark so I tried to use the maps and compass apps to find my way. I was struggling with my phone when I was rescued by a woman who was letting her dog out. She told me where I was and walked me home. Hence, another blindness tool, the kindness of strangers. I have since learned how to use the Maps app and will be better prepared the next time I get lost.

Seeing AI (a free blindness phone app) is another great tool that I'm sure most blind people know about and have used. I use it to sort out the junk mail from the bills and to read the rare piece of correspondence and other printed material. It can read the denomination of my greenbacks too, if I would use it. The other day I paid for a four-dollar meal with a 20 thinking it was a five and said, keep the change. Again the kindness of strangers prevailed and I was given \$16 back. Am I painting a bleak picture of my independence? I hope not. I just happen to be in transition and it takes time. I don't like coming across as being incompetent so I ask for help when I need it and do the best I can with the tools that I have, and I will continue to accumulate additional ones by and by.

Transportation Committee

Allan Schneider

An idea came to me at the Treasure Valley Chapter's summer picnic when one of our newest members was unable to attend because he or she could not afford an UBER to get to the picnic location. The idea was simple: Ask any blind or visually impaired person what their biggest challenge is and probably without exception the answer will be, "I can't drive." To me it was simple: if transportation is our members' biggest challenge, isn't that where we should spend the most of our money?



Clip art—van

A committee has been formed to address this question. We are first looking to identify, describe, and then index--in an accessible, easy to understand and use format--all means of transportation already available to us. We are looking at fixed route and on-demand services as well as "Go Go Grandparents," Non-emergency medical transport (NEMT), volunteer driver organizations and so on. Once we have catalogued existing transportation possibilities, we will consider the NFB's role in helping members with additional transit needs. If you have ideas that should be included in our research, please contact me at aaschneider@hotmail.com or 208-870-4831.

“It says, ‘I love you’”

Bill Buley

Editor’s note: Originally published in The Coeur d’Alene Press

As Mackenzie Gibson takes a few steps from her daughter, she turns and says, “I’ll be right back.” Aubri, blonde and seven years old, nods. “All right mom,” she says.



As adults mill around the room, the Hayden girl continues using a Braille, similar to a typewriter, to produce Braille. She is learning this system of raised dots that represent letters and can be read with fingers because she is blind. “I love making letters,” she said.

Photo: Aubbri Gibson

Aubri was among a small group of blind and visually impaired who took part in “Celebriaille” on Saturday at North Idaho College. The event was organized by Jordana Engebretsen, president and owner of Vocalife, whose mission is to “empower students with visual disabilities and enrich his or her vocational and/or life goals.” About 50 people attended the hour-long gathering that saw her students sing, play keyboards and share the history of Braille.

Jordana Engebretsen, who is blind, pointed out it is Blindness Awareness Month. “Those who can’t see still have vision and can still do absolutely everything,” Engebretsen said, citing algebra, music and math. “Anything you want to do.”

Mackenzie Gibson said Aubri was born blind, but they didn’t know it until she was six months old after taking her to a specialist. That forced some lifestyle changes. “I wasn’t creative until she was born,” Gibson said. “I learned how to be creative and how to do things differently.”

Today, Aubri is outgoing, involved in dance and jiu-jitsu. “She’s actually pretty open about showing friends her different life,” Mackenzie said. Aubri overcomes tough times. About seven months ago, she told her mom she didn’t like being blind. “It’s been a struggle for her,” Gibson said.

The second grader began attending the Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind in Gooding, earlier this year. While she is escorted to and from her plane seat, she flies, unaccompanied, there twice a week. She is courageous and calm, says her mom.

“It’s the hardest thing, I’ve ever done as parent, sending her to school,” her mom said. But with limited resources in North Idaho it’s necessary, she said, and it’s helping her daughter. “She has totally thrived and loves learning,” she said.

Gibson said it's important to treat the blind and visually impaired the same as everyone else. “A lot of people in the community see our kids and think they have to dumb things down,” she said. “To be inclusive is to treat them the same and to make an equal playing field. “It doesn’t mean it’s fair for everyone, but it’s equal for everyone,” she continued. “And that’s really hard for people to learn with these blind kiddos. They underestimate them, a lot.”

Saturday, no one underestimated Aubri. “She’s a strong little one,” her mom said. Tina Johnson, a teacher for the visually impaired, has worked with Aubri since she was 6 months old. She encouraged Aubri as she used the Perkins Braille, praising her as she produced names and words. When Aubri was done, Johnson picked up the white sheet of paper with the raised dots and read it. “Look what she wrote,” she said, beaming with pride. “It says, ‘I love you.’”



Upcoming NWABA Events in Idaho

For more information contact: Sam, spicciano@nwaba.org
[360.718.2834](tel:360.718.2834)

GOALBALL CLINIC, TAFT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL Fri., Nov. 4 at 6:00 pm | Boise
BROOMBALL CLINIC AT SETTLER’S PARK Sat., Nov. 5 at 11:00 am | Meridian
GOALBALL CLINIC AT EAGLE MIDDLE SCHOOL Fri., Nov. 18 at 6:30 pm | Eagle
BROOMBALL CLINIC AT EAGLE ROCK PARK Sat., Nov. 19 at 11:00 am | Boise
SWIMMING CLINIC AT BOISE CITY AQUATIC CENTER Sat., Dec. 3 at 3:00 pm | Boise
SWIMMING CLINIC AT BOISE CITY AQUATIC CENTER Sat., Dec. 10 at 3:00 pm | Boise
ROCK CLIMBING EXPERIENCE AT VERTICAL VIEW Fri., Dec. 16 at 5:00 pm | Meridian
BOISE–COMPETITIVE GOALBALL TEAM (WEEKLY PRACTICES) YEAR-ROUND
MOSCOW–COMPETITIVE GOALBALL TEAM (WEEKLY PRACTICES) YEAR-ROUND

The NFB and Me

TJ Squires

For some things, the beginning is clear as day. For others, it seems to be a part of your life as far back as you can remember. For me, it's a little of both. I was aware of the National Federation of the Blind ever since I was a high school student. The first concrete memory I have of the NFB is trying to win the NFB scholarship my freshman year of college when Ramona Wallhoff was the state president. I didn't win, and my NFB aspirations died.

As I continued on with my early life, I was invited by Dana, my rehab councilor at the time, and still didn't take the bait. I read online, on the budding phenomenon known as "Social Media" that the NFB was an organization crushing blind barriers throughout the courtroom. I fell victim to a narrow view. It took a person who is very close to me. Her enthusiasm for the organization helped me to get another picture; removing my own self-created barrier of advocacy organizations filing lawsuits.

When Leslie, whose story can be found in an earlier edition of the newsletter, won the NFB scholarship and had the chance to attend the state convention, it was a life changing experience for her. When she came home and shared her excitement and passion she had gained, I softened to the idea. Someone my own age was involved, after all, so how bad could it be? Someone whose opinion I trusted and valued, and perhaps because she was a pretty girl, was predisposed to listen to! It sounded like she was having a great time, met great people, and wouldn't ya' know, a meeting was the Tuesday coming up. She said she was going to go and take part. The way she made it sound, I figured I had grown up and was ready to witness the truth, so, I went with her.

I remember my first meeting. I was met with open arms. Like I was family. That's all it took for me. I was all in. It's been five years now, and I still believe in the mission. I still believe that the NFB is relentlessly crushing barriers for blind people without remorse, but rather than doing it in the court room, they are attempting to do it with partnerships, education, advocacy, and lobbying. I couldn't be more proud to be a Federationist. I look forward to the future as a fully-committed member. The NFB has brought a sense of purpose, a community, and a feeling that I am not alone to my life. And much as I have been reminded of this in the past, I should have listened to my elders. My one regret is not joining oh so many years before I did.

(President's Address, continued from page 1)

On October 22nd, Jordana Engebretsen, a member in Post Falls and a teacher of the blind, conducted an activity for blind students and the community entitled Celebraille. Braille equipment was demonstrated, and community participants were able to ask questions and get their names put into Braille. Four teachers of the visually impaired, who work in the area, came to help and participate. This is a great example of NFB's partnership with other professionals working with the blind.

The state NFB board met for the fall board meeting on October 8. We will be giving three scholarships of \$3000 each to individuals who are or will be attending post-secondary programs in the 2023-2024 school year. Applications will be sent the first week in January. We agreed to have a legislative luncheon, and this has now been scheduled for Martin Luther King Day, January 15. The venue for this event has not yet been decided. The websites and software Application Accessibility Act (h.r.9021, s.4998), was recently sponsored in congress. You can read details of this bill on our NFB website. Please contact our senators and your representative and ask them to support this bill. This bill will certainly be brought up in the next congress and will be discussed as part of our Washington seminar which begins January 30.

Remember our state NFB convention is April 27-29 in Boise. Details with the venue are being worked out and more information will be coming. Our state winter board meeting will be on Martin Luther King Day and will fit in with our legislative luncheon.

We now have an easy way to donate to the NFB of Idaho. If you shop on Amazon, go to Amazon Smile and designate the NFB of Idaho as the charity to receive donations from your purchases. When you want to make a purchase from Amazon, go to Amazon Smile. I know many of us, as well as our family and friends, shop on Amazon. This is an easy way to raise some funds for our affiliate.

Our holiday season is coming. Let's make this an opportunity to celebrate with our Federation family and friends as we build the National Federation of the Blind.

Heard Birds

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

Most of the fall migration is over, with fewer birds around right now. But there still a lot to hear, and a greater variety and number of birds will flock to the valley as the mountains become snowed in. Probably the best place to bird this fall and winter is near bird feeders, where we will hear flock, feeding and alarm calls. Surprisingly, we can still hear some crude territorial and mate attraction calls. These are given by young males trying to perfect their songs before next spring. Practice makes perfect: if they aren't perfect, they won't get a chance to breed. Around the feeders you can hear lesser and American goldfinches, black-capped chickadees, California quail, American crows, red-breasted nuthatches, black-billed magpies, house sparrows, house finches, mourning and Eurasian collared doves and European starlings. American robins, and waxwings can be heard especially around fruit trees. All the song birds concentrated around feeders attracts predators such as merlins, and sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks. The hawks are usually silent, but you'll know when they're present by the alarm calls and sudden sound of wings from the terrified songbirds.



Photo: red-breasted nuthatch

There is a website (Birdability.org) that promotes birding accessibility for people of all abilities, including those with visual impairments. It also has a Facebook Group ([BirdabilityBirders](https://www.facebook.com/BirdabilityBirders)). Boise is well represented in this group; a woman from Boise is one of the primary officers. It evaluates individual trails, describing in great detail what amenities are available on each trail. Thirteen trails in the Boise-Caldwell Area have been evaluated. Also check with the Golden Eagle Audubon Society (www.goldeneagleaudubon.org). They have a newsletter with notices of programs and lead birdability field trips, which are open to all birders. Check out these online resources.