

SPRING 2020

The Sounding Board

The Publication of the National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey

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Live the Life You Want

THE SOUNDING BOARD
Spring 2020

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DREAM MAKERS CIRCLE

You can help build a future of opportunity for the blind by becoming a member of our Dream Makers Circle. It is easier than you think. You can visit your bank and convert an account to a P.O.D. (payable on death) bank account which is payable after your passing to the National Federation of the Blind or one of our affiliates. Your legacy gift to the National Federation of the Blind or the National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey can be made in the form of a will or living trust, an income generating gift, or by naming us as the beneficiary of a retirement plan, IRA, pension or a life insurance policy. You can designate a specific amount, a percentage, or list the NFB as one of several beneficiaries. For additional information, please contact Patti Chang at 410-659-9314, extension 2422 or at pchang@nfb.org.

Mission Statement

The National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey, Inc. is an organization of blind and interested sighted people who plan and carry out programs; work to improve the quality of life of the blind; provide a means of collective action for parents of blind children; promote the vocational, cultural and social advancement of the blind; achieve the integration of the blind into society on a basis of equality with the sighted; and take action that will improve the overall condition and standard of living of the blind.

The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.

The National Federation of the Blind Pledge

I pledge to participate actively in the efforts of the National Federation of the Blind to achieve equality, opportunity and security for the blind; to support the programs and policies of the Federation; and to abide by its constitution.

The Sounding Board

The Sounding Board is the magazine of the National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey. It is published twice a year. Through *The Sounding Board*, we aspire to provide a source of hope, inspiration, pride and camaraderie through the personal stories featured in our publication.

Hundreds of readers receive our publication via email and *Newsline*. *The Sounding Board* is also available for download in its entirety from our website at www.nfbnj.org. We encourage our readers to share *The Sounding Board* with family members, teachers, professionals, neighbors, friends and any other interested parties. We estimate our circulation to be in the thousands, as readers from across the country regularly report that *The Sounding Board* influences their lives.

Twenty-two people contributed to this issue by sharing stories, editing, interviewing and proofreading. It is truly a collaborative effort. We hope you enjoy the fruits of our labor.

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PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

Greetings Fellow Federationists,

When a person is tested for visual acuity, 20/20 is the standard for “normal” eyesight. In the year 2020, we are all being tested in another way: to determine if we can weather the challenges of the novel coronavirus. How will we approach this battle? Are we able to prepare, plan and participate with others in showing that we will continue to care, share and grow and that each of us can make a difference as we collectively wage this battle? Will life as we know it ever return to “normal”?

I’m proud to say that our Federation family is using their ingenuity and strength of purpose to provide the love, hope and determination to win this invisible war. Zoom, Skype and phone calls, emails and messaging allow us to continue to make personal contacts and continue to conduct trainings and chapter and division meetings. From this outpouring of commitment and creativity, I’ve developed the following tips that I think can be useful in overpowering some of the painful effects we’ve been feeling as a result of COVID-19:

1. Conquer each day with a plan, purpose and goal
2. Obstacles need to become opportunities
3. Volunteers will lead us to victory
4. Imagination, innovation and inspiration are the keys
5. Determination and desire make a difference!

I want to thank those who have participated in outreach calls and messages during this time of need as we strive to live the life we want. Educational, motivational and inspirational materials are forwarded through email for your interest. Every seven to 10 days, I will distribute *Notes From President Ruffalo* that will include items of interest such as websites, phone numbers and upcoming Zoom calls for training on various subjects as well as upcoming conference calls.

A few days ago, President Riccobono announced that the Federation will conduct its 80th anniversary national convention Tuesday, July 14 through Sunday, July 19. With COVID-19 upon us, a decision was made to conduct the national convention virtually via the Zoom platform. Keep a watchful eye out for emails and please read the upcoming *Braille Monitors* for additional information.

As we enter spring, the season of growth, let us continue to provide our love, hope and determination to transform dreams into reality!

With Much Respect,
Joe Ruffalo, President
National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey

FROM THE EDITOR
THIS ROLLER COASTER AINT NO FUN

I'm on a roller coaster flying through some unprecedented, unbelievable territory called COVID-19. I'm not enjoying the ride. There are moments when I've got it together, and then some news breaks, and I crash into an agonizing despair that renders me incapable of anything but excruciating depression and tears.

Yeah, yeah, I know this is normal and totally justified given the circumstances. But hey – anxiety and panic attacks are no fun. I want – *need* – to get my head straight and move on in a more positive way. Following these sensible tips adopted from the Veterans Administration is giving me some peace and perspective, so I'd like to share them with you:

1. **Pause. Just stop. Stop what you're doing.** Do not feel you have to be doing something productive every minute. Please, for the time being, forget what your mother always told you about using time wisely. Take breaks. **Pause** ... and do #2 ...
2. **Breathe.** Inhale for the count of 5, hold your breath for 3, exhale for 5. This slows your breathing which helps to lower your heart rate and calm your nervous system. Repeat every time you feel on edge.
3. **Exercise every day**, even if it's only a few minutes. Getting your blood flowing refreshes your brain and your body. Get in the habit of exercising every day – a 10-minute walk, squats, dancing, go up and down the stairs, **just move**.
4. **Practice Healthy Sleeping Habits.** If possible, make your bedroom a stress-free zone. Do not read or watch any stressful information while in bed. Your bed needs to be preserved as a safe, peaceful place for rest and relaxation.
5. **Eat Healthy** and on a regular schedule – fruits, veggies, whole grains, lean protein and dairy (as you can). Stay hydrated. And keep those hands clean before cooking or eating.

By following these tips, I've been able to overcome the sense of powerlessness, worry and loss I've been feeling. You know your own challenges. To manage them (because they probably will not go away any time soon), begin by trying to take care of yourself with kindness and compassion and then extend the same to others. A friend recently reminded me of these words from Helen Keller that seem so very appropriate right now: "Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much." For me, reaching out to my family and friends makes every day brighter. Each of them makes me smile and know there's a reason to keep finding the light every day. I hope you, too, will find people, moments and stories to lift your spirits and give you strength, peace, determination and hope. Each of us can use – and share – a powerful dose of that medicine, which certainly has an exponential effect. As an eternal optimist who is also exceedingly patient, I'll be able to wait this storm out. Please join me. We will get off this roller coaster. Share the medicine. Stay safe. Stay in. Stay well.

THE 2020 WASHINGTON SEMINAR ISSUES: SUCCESS ON THE RISE

By Ryan Stevens, NFBNJ Legislative Director

Greetings, once more, my fellow New Jersey Federationists. Yet again, over 600 NFB members converged on the City by the Potomac to meet with our congressional representatives and senators to discuss issues which affect the daily lives of blind Americans. This year, the Washington Seminar was held February 10 to 13, and a dozen of the attendees were from the Garden State. We presented three pieces of legislation during our meetings on Capitol Hill. All three address concerns that the Federation has been pursuing for quite a number of years:

1. Access Technology Affordability Act (HR2086/S815)
2. Greater Access and Independence through Nonvisual Access Technology Act (HR3929)
3. Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education, or AIM-HIGH, Act (HR5312/S3095).

Below are descriptions of these bills in detail, including information on how the New Jersey affiliate is faring in getting support from our state's congressional delegation.

The first legislative issue we brought to the attention of Congress was the **Access Technology Affordability Act (HR2086/S815)**. Access technology enables blind people to participate in today's connected world and to perform tasks that they were once unable to accomplish themselves. Today, the blind most often acquire this technology through their state blindness agency. The problem with this is the length of time it takes to receive the equipment. Quite often, this waiting period causes blind people to miss out on employment opportunities. Unfortunately, the cost of access technology also prevents most blind people from purchasing it themselves. The Access Technology Affordability Act helps to alleviate this burden by providing the individual with a \$2,000 refundable tax credit over a three-year period when buying such equipment. The legislation will also sunset after five years. As of March 15, New Jersey Congressmen Bill Pascrell, Albio Sires and Chris Smith have co-sponsored HR2086, and Senator Cory Booker has signed onto S815.

The second bill on our agenda was the **Greater Access and Independence through Nonvisual Access Technology (GAIN) Act (HR3929)**. The rapid proliferation of advanced technology is undeniable. Most new stoves, glucose monitors and treadmills now require that consumers interact with digital displays, flat panels and other user interfaces which are inaccessible to blind individuals. Inaccessibility is not a mere inconvenience; it can threaten the safety, health and independence of blind Americans. Advancements in technology have the potential to transform how people live in a society, but are designed for those with no functional limitations. Nonvisual access is achievable, as demonstrated by a number of mainstream products such as Apple's iPhone and iPad with voiceover. Virtually all ATMs and voting machines are also

accessible using simple fixes. Although the Americans with Disabilities Act and other laws require physical accessibility for people with disabilities (e.g., wheelchair ramps and Braille in public buildings), no laws protect a blind consumer's right to access technology. The GAIN Act would call on the Access Board, an independent federal agency and leading source of information on accessible design, to conduct a nonvisual access standard review and issue a report with findings and recommendations for a minimum nonvisual access standard for home use medical devices, home appliances and fitness equipment. The US Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Trade Commission would then be tasked with enforcing the rules established by the Access Board. Even though we are in the second year of the current congressional term, there is still no bill in the Senate to accompany House Bill HR3929.

The final piece of legislation we addressed was the **Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education, or AIM-HIGH, Act (HR5312/S3095)**. Much of the material used by university and college faculty to teach their courses is available to students only electronically or online, and a good portion of these tools are not accessible to blind and print disabled students. While the Americans with Disabilities Act and other laws mandate full accessibility in the classroom, there are no guidelines for institutions of higher education and manufacturers of these materials to follow to ensure compliance. AIM HIGH would establish these guidelines for users and creators of such software. This bill got a late start, not being introduced until December of 2019, but it is gathering steam. It also has support from the other major stakeholders, such as the organization that represents most colleges and universities and the publishers of the actual materials. This is helping to minimize the resistance against this legislation.

For more details and the full fact sheets for each of the issues described above, go to <https://nfb.org/washington-seminar>

The fact that we now have three New Jersey members of Congress and Senator Booker signing onto the Access Technology Affordability Act shows that we are making progress on continuing to turn our legislative priorities into reality. Of course, the only reason we make any progress at all is because of the hard work all of us in the National Federation of the Blind, including our own New Jersey affiliate, do. Throughout the year, we will be sent legislative alerts that we need to act upon to maintain and increase the momentum. Let's give the effort asked of us to ensure that blind people can live the lives we want!

To contact your member in the House of Representatives or the US senators from New Jersey, call the Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121. To find your House member, you can either contact your local public library or go to www.house.gov and enter your zip code.

2019 RAISING EXPECTATIONS AWARD PRESENTED TO RICK FOX By Carol Castellano

The Raising Expectations Award was created to honor the work of extraordinary members of our affiliate. It is presented at the state convention, and this is only the fourth time we have presented it.

Rick Fox, the recipient of this special award, is someone who has worked on behalf of the blind of New Jersey—and the nation—for almost 50 years! And, believe it or not, he is still young!

Rick has been a long-term member, officer and leader not only in our state affiliate, but also in three others. The list of Rick's accomplishments is long and remarkable. During his term as president of the Connecticut Affiliate, he helped to raise \$150,000 from corporations and foundations for the establishment of *Newsline*. In our own state, he has held many positions, most notably as a member of the affiliate board of directors and as board member and president of the Northeast Chapter, as a knowledgeable representative and team leader at the NFB's annual Washington Seminar, and as an active and valuable member of many committees. Rick also represents NFBNJ on the State Rehabilitation Council, currently serving as chair. His exemplary career includes technology and administrative positions at IBM, DeWitt & Associates, iCanConnect at The College of New Jersey, The Computer Center for Visually Impaired People at Baruch College and as technology consultant in B&F Teaching & Technology.

Rick grew up in Ocean Township with his brother and sister. He was educated in public school, with services from the New Jersey Commission for the Blind. Rick has a plethora of school, community, church and leisure time activities—wrestling, cross country track, skiing, biking, watching the Yankees, reading, hanging out at the beach, serving in many roles at his church, including, of course, singing in the choir, and playing keyboard in a rock band. Along with his lovely wife Debbie Bloomer, Rick loves spending time with family and friends, hosting a monthly church book club in their home and traveling.

My first memories of meeting Rick involve gathering around the piano at national conventions and then harmonizing our unofficial state affiliate song, *Under the Boardwalk*, at state conventions. Over the years, Rick became an inspiration, a role model, a trusted mentor and a friend to our family, always willing to share his experience, expertise and thoughtful advice.

Rick is a remarkable person and my guess is that virtually everyone in the NFBNJ has been a beneficiary of his generous spirit, his thoughtful analysis of issues and his wonderful laugh. I can't remember one time he ever said no to anything we've asked of him, including when we—well, I—asked him to appear onstage in a grass skirt and coconuts! It would be impossible to count the number of people he has assisted and we are all enriched by his presence in our lives. The words on the plaque presented to Rick read:

The National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey

—live the life you want—YOU make it happen!

Presents the ***Raising Expectations Award*** to

RICK FOX

In Recognition of Invaluable Contributions

to the Quality of Life of the Blind of New Jersey and the Nation

Your contribution is measured not in steps, but in miles;

Not by individual experiences, but by the impact you have had on the lives of the blind.

Whenever we have asked, you have answered.

We call you our colleague with respect.

We call you our friend with love.

Together, with love, hope and determination we transform dreams into reality.

November 9, 2019

From the grateful members of the NFBNJ

THE 2019 STATE SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

By Lia Stone, State Scholarship Committee Chair

The NFBNJ State Scholarship Committee proudly announced the following five state scholarship recipients during the 43rd State Convention of the NFBNJ. Thanks to all who contributed funds to this educational and leadership program and to all who serve on the committee. Congratulations to each of our 2019 scholarship recipients!

Amy Albin is a junior at Montclair State University studying psychology. She is interested in a career in human services where she can make a difference. She is also the winner of one of this year's national NFB scholarships.

Mary Fernandez is in her final year of her MBA studies at Duke University. She has completed an internship at Cisco in their marketing department. After graduation she hopes to work in management, sales or marketing at a Fortune 100 company.

Natasha Ishaq is a freshman at The College of New Jersey majoring in physics with a minor in law, politics and philosophy. She is interested in doing work that helps people in either the government or nonprofit sector.

Henry Young is a freshman at Drew University. He is double majoring in computer science and political science and hopes to continue on to a master's degree in software engineering at Stevens Institute of Technology. His ultimate goal is to work for a large tech corporation or the federal government.

Jonathan Zobek is a senior at The College of New Jersey where he is majoring in communications. He is interested in pursuing a career in the blindness field either as a vocational rehabilitation counselor or as an O&M instructor.

LESSONS FROM MY FIRST NATIONAL CONVENTION
THOUGHTS FROM NEW JERSEY'S FIRST TIMERS SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

Editor's Note: *Joanne Mallard Bentall, Ada Crandle, Anne Marie Harris and Tony Santiago were New Jersey's 2019 recipients of the Kenneth Jernigan First Timers Scholarship, which provided funding for their attendance at the NFB National Convention in Las Vegas. Each recipient expresses gratitude for the opportunity to attend and below shares their personal reflections.*

Joanna Mallard Bentall *is a member of the Northeast and At Large chapters, the Technology and Sports & Recreation divisions and a leader in the BELL program.*

Since joining the NFB NJ several years ago, I've always hoped to be part of an NFB National Convention. Thanks to this scholarship award, my dream became a reality – and I had the privilege of addressing my fellow Federationists on the first day of the General Session. As I made my way to the stage to make my presentation, I was a little nervous but I managed just fine. I was sharing topics not only familiar to me personally, but to most of the people there, as well. I spoke about how I lost my eyesight and the steps I took to get to where I am now. Is it a day-to-day decision to live the life you want? Yes! You may have lost your eyesight, but you didn't lose your vision. Continue to keep your vision at the forefront and anything is possible!

Encouraging others to live beyond limitations is something I strive to do. I will continue to live the life I want because with the Federation family by my side and God as my shepherd, I will always be able to make those mountains be stepping stones. You can do the same.

Was it a challenge navigating a hotel that was huge? Yes! And it was all worth it. In the future, I hope to serve as a source of encouragement to others to live the life they want regardless of statistics, judgments and seemingly insurmountable hurdles.

Ada Crandle *is a member of the Central Jersey Chapter as well as the Senior, Sports & Recreation and Technology divisions.*

I was extremely excited to be part of the 2019 National Convention, but for a short while, due to storms and high winds in Newark, it seemed we might not get to our Las Vegas destination at all. My husband and I had boarded our flight and then waited five hours before we were told it was cancelled. I immediately felt disappointed and frustrated that I wouldn't arrive on time for the Rookie Round-Up for first timers on Sunday. Fortunately, my daughter, who had already landed in Las Vegas, was able to book us a flight for the next day. Upon arriving at Mandalay Bay, I admit to being overwhelmed, as I had never been in a place with so many people moving around.

The most important and profound moment of the convention was having my family with me to experience the opening ceremony. Joanna Mallard's speech was icing on the

cake. The banquet was beautiful, and it was gratifying to see people receiving scholarships to further their education. I was also in awe of the various vendors in the exhibit hall and proud to see so many blind and visually impaired people involved.

I left Las Vegas feeling more empowered than I have ever felt throughout my journey.

Editor's Note: *Anne Marie Harris is a board member of the Garden State Chapter and a member of the Senior and Technology divisions. She has been in charge of ordering and selling our affiliate T-shirts.*

As my travel date approached, I became a bit nervous. This was only my third time traveling alone. Leaving New Jersey wasn't easy. There were delays, a cancellation, rebooking and luggage that arrived late to Nevada. I learned with each inconvenience that I can travel independently and address things as they happen. What a confidence builder!

The convention was chock-full of information and activity. It was amazing to see over 2,500 blind individuals – including me! – living the life we want. The enormous General Session room was filled with the positive energy and unity of NFB members from 49 states, Canada and Puerto Rico. Each speaker shared something new. It was awesome to be in the room each time President Riccobono addressed the crowd.

I went to a sports and recreation seminar where I learned how blind people in other countries play cricket. I attended a seminar for seniors where the main speaker was Dan Frye. At the General Session, I was impressed to witness how issues are addressed and decisions made at a national level. The exhibit room was filled with vendors from the US and Canada. Many state affiliates had items for sale to eat and to wear. There were all kinds of raffles offering amazing prizes. I had as much fun working our New Jersey table as visiting other tables and shopping.

I had a great time sharing rides, shopping and meals with all my New Jersey friends, and I had wonderful roommates. Our bedtime laughs were the best. I can't wait for Texas later this year!

Editor's Note: *Tony Santiago is a member of the Sports & Recreation and Technology divisions, and a member of the Capital Chapter.*

I have never been to a gathering of the blind where there were so many nationalities and ethnic groups represented, and it was a beautiful thing to experience. There were so many interesting sessions going on that I had to prioritize and carefully schedule my time. There are only 24 hours in a day, after all. It worked out well because I learned something from every session that I attended.

The exhibit hall was exciting but huge, and for a technology lover like myself, it was like tech sensory overload. I enjoyed meeting some of the leaders in the blind technology field and shaking their hands in thanks for all the great work that they have done over the years to improve the lives of the blind.

One topic I was eager to learn more about was the future of autonomous vehicles. There were two speakers on the subject, and it was exciting to know that it is a reality that will happen in my lifetime. I truly believe that autonomous vehicles will bring us a new level of independence.

I also had the honor of meeting President Riccobono in his own suite, and I found his speeches at the General Sessions to be inspirational

Although there were many great speakers, many sessions where I could learn so much and awesome technology that I could check out, the thing that impressed me the most was observing our blind youth in action. This hotel was immense, and to hear our youth walking with their canes and making their way with such confidence was amazing. It goes to show what an influence the NFB has on their lives. It seems to me that the future of our organization and the blind community as a whole will be in competent, confident hands.

Finally, I want to thank my wonderful wife Jocelyn for helping me navigate through this convention and putting up with me and all of my interests.

BE COUNTED ... BECAUSE YOU COUNT!
Adapted from Email Received from NJ 2-1-1

Every 10 years, the US Constitution requires the federal government to perform a census to count all persons living in the US – citizens and non-citizens. You can respond to the census in any one of three ways: online, by phone or by mail. Answering the questions takes about 10 minutes.

Our representation in Congress is based on the census, as are federal funds for vital programs and services that address homelessness, provide utility assistance, SNAP benefits, healthcare and more. These are resources that many of our communities desperately need and deserve.

“Participating in the census count is one of the most powerful things you can do for yourself, your family and your community,” says Melissa Acree, Executive Director of NJ 211.

The 2020 US Census will NEVER ask for your social security information or other personal information like your bank account numbers or political information. Under the law, census data can only be used for statistical purposes and is confidential.

You can expect to be asked about: how many people are living/staying at your home on April 1, 2020; whether you own or rent your home; the age, race and sex of each person in the household; whether a person in the household is of Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin; and the relationships of each person in the household to one central person (usually the person completing the form for the household).

The Census is safe, easy and important. Be Counted ... Because You Count! If you need more information dial 211 or visit nj211.org.

THE SOCIAL DISTANCING DILEMMA: A PERSPECTIVE

By Scott Stoffel, Editor of DB Touch of Everything, Reprinted with Permission

Editor's Note: *Scott is a retired systems engineer and freelance writer in Southeast Pennsylvania. He's also the creative genius who built the Tactile Carnival, more than 50 original carnival-style games that have been featured at DeafBlind camps/retreats, Helen Keller National Center, schools for the blind and twice in New Jersey at Merck Pharmaceuticals in Rahway. Scott is believed to be the first deafblind person to earn an engineering degree. He is the editor of the book Deaf-Blind Reality: Living the Life.*

I work part-time for a nonprofit as coordinator of their DeafBlind services. We offer 10 hours per month of free Support Service Providers (SSPs) to DeafBlind consumers in southeast Pennsylvania. Many of you already know what an SSP does. For those who don't, an SSP helps a DeafBlind adult access the community by serving as a human guide, assisting with communication and providing information the consumer can't see or hear.

One of the main things our consumers use SSPs for is shopping. Many DeafBlind need help navigating stores, finding items, reading labels, communicating with store clerks and so on. It works quite well for this purpose. It not only enables the consumers to take care of their shopping needs, but many of them enjoy the shopping trips with their SSPs.

Then along came COVID-19, like a monstrous spider, and frightened Miss Muffet's SSP services away.

Health officials stress the need for "social distancing" – putting 6 feet of space between people and limiting the number of people allowed in one place, like your local grocery store. Given the way the virus spreads, this is a good idea, of course. But it definitely throws a monkey wrench into the equation for many DeafBlind shoppers.

Little Miss Muffet got off her tuffet,
Because she needed to go shopping today;
But with no one to guide her, no SSP beside her,
How could she go shopping at Safeway?

Forgive the mangled nursery rhyme, but you get the point. Human guiding and tactile sign language require two people to be close together and constantly touching each other. That's a bigger problem than you might think at a glance. Bear in mind that shopping involves touching things at the store. Going back and forth between touching store items and touching each other for communication increases the risk of picking up the virus. It's almost impossible to avoid touching the face occasionally while doing tactile sign or tracking. Both the consumer and the SSP are at greater risk of picking up the virus as they work together this way. Facial masks can help reduce the risk, but they aren't foolproof.

Also, an SSP and DeafBlind consumer shopping together usually takes much longer to shop than the average person shopping alone. Did you just get angry and say, "So

what?” Calm down! The whole reason I work for an SSP service is because I want DeafBlind consumers to be able to go out and do things like everyone else. But the virus crisis shakes things up. The longer you stay in a store or other public place, the greater the risk of encountering the virus. Safety has to come first.

In short, COVID-19 absolutely sucks!

SSP services around the country are struggling with these safety concerns. How the heck can an SSP practice social distancing, work faster and still provide adequate service to a DeafBlind consumer? Use a leash for guiding and telepathic communication? Get serious. Some services let the consumer and SSP decide if they're willing to take the risk or not. Some services are pretty much prohibiting assignments that aren't deemed emergencies. With all the hoarding going on, maybe shopping for toilet paper should qualify as an emergency.

Is there a better approach? That's arguable, of course. One thing about this virus business is that it's showed us all that SSP services might need to consider emergency protocols during unusual circumstances – like now, for instance.

In southeast Pennsylvania, we've had some intellectual discussions on this subject and have formulated equitable solutions. That is to say we've argued like crazy, and nobody agrees on anything but the toilet paper. I've discovered that being a human service coordinator is a lot like being a stick of gum: I get chewed out a lot.

We are allowing SSPs to communicate with consumers remotely, acquire shopping and errand lists from the consumers and do the shopping/errands alone. You might think that's a simple and obvious solution, but in truth, it's totally against the fundamental purpose of an SSP service. This is one of the ways SSPs and professional caregivers are very different. Caregivers can do things for their clients without taking the clients with them. SSPs are supposed to become the eyes and ears for DeafBlind consumers and help them do things, not do things for them. There's a big difference. Unfortunately, the safety hazards caused by the pandemic create a dilemma for standard SSP service. So we're implementing a compromise that enables our consumers to get the items they need from the store, while minimizing the health risk to both consumer and SSP.

Fair enough? Not everyone thinks so. As I said before, going out into the community with an SSP is an important part of some DeafBlind consumers' social activities. I don't get mad when they chew me out over the emergency protocols. I understand how they feel. This is a case of safety versus satisfaction – and I'm the chewing gum.

One very important question the virus crisis has unearthed is whether SSP services and other services for the DeafBlind should modify standard procedures during times of unusual circumstances or just deny service. It's not as easy as it sounds, especially with all of the liability issues associated with interpersonal service providers. Now seems like a very good time to give this matter some serious thought.

SKI FOR LIGHT WEEK FILLED WITH ADVENTURES!

By Linda Melendez

Editor's note: *Linda Melendez serves on the National Sports & Recreation Division board and is president of the NFBNJ's Sports & Recreation Division. She is also first vice president of the NFBNJ, a member of the Central Jersey and At Large chapters, and the Senior and Technology divisions. In this article Linda talks about her first cross country skiing experience.*

A bucket list is a collection of goals, dreams and aspirations that you'd like to accomplish within your lifetime. At the top of my list this year was to participate in the Ski for Light International week with Annemarie Cooke, a veteran of 13 such events.

Ski for Light was founded in 1975 for blind/visually impaired and mobility impaired individuals to learn how to cross country ski. Skiers and their non-disabled guides move along in groomed parallel tracks in the snow. Some downhill ski techniques also are used, depending on the terrain.

The 2020 Ski for Light week took place February 9 to 16 with our home base at the Ramkota Hotel and Conference Center in Casper, Wyoming. The 250 participants – some, like me who were first-timers – came from the US, Canada and five other countries. The event consisted of skiing Monday through Friday at Wyoming Mountain at an altitude of 7,900 feet. It seems that all the snow New Jersey didn't have this year settled in Wyoming!

The daily skiing prepares participants for a 10K race, a 5K rally where participants try to match their own best time on the shorter course, and the Challenge Loop, a mini course mainly for first-timers or recreational (rather than competitive) skiers like me.

I had no idea the week would be filled with so many adventures, and they were about to begin! Prior to our arrival, Casper, Wyoming had a huge blizzard which made for rough road conditions. On Monday, some of our buses made it up the steep and snow-covered road to the ski area where we were able to get a hot lunch and shelter from the wind (in the 10 degree temperature). We had an amazing time skiing; however, the weather conditions changed abruptly and drastically, and we ended up stranded and not able to make our way back down the mountain.

Making lemonade out of lemons, I took the opportunity to mingle with the other participants and get to know them better. Local residents and guides who had personal vehicles were able to take us halfway down the mountain to the Nordic Center where staff and volunteers from the local visitors' bureau provided us with food, snacks and water in a warm and safe environment. That evening the local school district's buses brought all of us safely to the hotel – hours later than usual, and just in time for dinner ... and with more stories to share!

On Tuesday, even though the winds were whipping at 30 miles an hour, we skied again. The wind at my back steadied my balance, and I was able to successfully ski on some hilly terrain. Encouragement from my guide was also helpful. Due to the blowing snow and high winds, the buses headed back to the hotel early for everyone's safety. The hotel hot tub was the best!

The severe weather conditions continued through Wednesday and the fun of skiing in a blizzard was cut short as we again left earlier than usual for the warmth and safety of the hotel.

I thoroughly enjoyed being challenged in this environment to push past my comfort zone. Where else could this Jersey girl be stranded on a mountain and rescued, ski in 30-mile-an-hour winds and blizzard-like conditions with friends, and still be safe at the same time?

Thursday's weather was beautiful, and so I thought that certainly my adventures would be over. The snow was prime for skiing. My guide and I decided to be daring and take a shortcut over the fresh snow to meet the bus. Well, needless to say, another adventure found me: I fell and couldn't get back up on my skis. The only way to get out was to take off our skis and walk about 30 feet through hip deep snow to get to the bus. Fortunately, there were two other guides nearby who assisted my guide in getting me out. Instead of panicking, I made light of the situation. They trudged through the snow first to create a flat path, which I was then able to follow easily while using my ski poles for support.

The weather remained unfriendly on Friday, so in small groups we explored downtown Casper, a location important in 19th century American pioneer history because the Oregon, California, Mormon and other trails intersected there.

Saturday dawned clear and sunny, and my guide and I opted to participate in the Challenge Loop because of my limited ski experience. I am happy to report that I achieved my goal of successfully completing the Challenge Loop without falling! We all enjoyed the banquet that evening and headed to our homes on Sunday.

I always like to come home after a vacation and get back to my normal routine, but more adventures were waiting for me. I came down with Influenza A and spent the next five days in the hospital due to complications with asthma and bronchitis. I was then quarantined at home for another 10 days.

I'm happy to say that I am back to my healthy, energetic and enthusiastic self. Some of you may be saying you would never do this or survive in these conditions. I'm here to tell you that you can do this and yes, you would survive in these conditions because you are a Federationist! To find out more about cross country skiing, check out this link to a YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjC96E7cyzg>

Despite all the challenges, I thoroughly enjoyed myself and plan to participate in a future Ski for Light event because I had the time of my life.

ALL ROADS LED TO ROME – EVEN LIVINGSTON AVENUE!

By Annemarie Cooke

Editor’s Note: *Annemarie is an active long-time member of the New Jersey Affiliate. She serves on the state board and as vice president of the Sports & Recreation Division, board member of the Garden State Chapter, treasurer of the Technology Division, and as a member of the At Large Chapter and the Scholarship and Sounding Board committees. She is a mentor and cooking coach with students in the EDGE program, and her hobbies include international and domestic travel.*



The basement conference room at the Joseph Kohn Training Center in New Brunswick became a time machine last September 28. Twenty NFBNJ members and friends were treated to a multi-sensory trip to ancient Rome by Philly Touch Tours, a company that specializes in making art and history museums accessible to blind and visually impaired people.

Tour guides for the day were Philly Touch Tours Director Trish Maunder, a professional museum educator and parent of a blind daughter, and Katherine Allen, a Touch Tours program manager as well as someone who is personally experiencing vision loss.

The NFBNJ Sports & Recreation Division hosted the event and provided snacks and lunch. Philly Touch Tours offers a tour of the ancient Roman collection at the Penn Museum in Philadelphia. For today, they prepared a special travelling program.

Trish and Katherine passed around replicas from the museum’s collection of everyday objects used in the daily life of ancient Rome. Participants also had the option of donning toga-style draped tops to add to their experience of being in another time.

Participants seemed to very much enjoy the total accessibility of the presentation. In the photo above, Tony Santiago and his wife Jocelyn explore a raised line drawing. In addition, items related to ancient history were touchable, producing some sound, taste-able or sniff-able. Examples of the latter were cotton balls stored in airtight film cans and sprayed with lavender essence (used in personal bathing) and garum, a powerfully-scented condiment made of rotted fish and a precursor of today’s Worcestershire sauce.

Katherine focused on the lifestyle of Roman soldiers who expanded the Roman Empire as far north as Scotland and as far east as modern-day Saudi Arabia. Each soldier was issued an expansive red cloak called a sagum. It was a multipurpose item, used for protection against weather, a sleeping blanket or even a cover for an injury.

Among its programs, Philly Touch Tours offers a hands-on visit to the historic Italian Market in South Philly with plenty of opportunities for tasting Italian ingredients and learning about the development of the market neighborhood. Customized tours also are available in the Philadelphia-New Jersey area.

BELL® IN A NUTSHELL
by Mary Jo Partyka and Ellen Sullivan

The National Federation of the Blind of New Jersey is preparing to launch its seventh Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning (BELL®) Academy. This year's Academy is in honor of Barbara Shalit, a teacher of the visually impaired for many years who was devoted to the establishment and growth of New Jersey's BELL Academy and served as its teacher for the first three years. Barbara passed away in 2019.

The goal of the BELL Academy is to provide children with instruction in Braille and nonvisual skills through fun, hands-on learning activities and adventures. This year, we will encourage our students to cultivate their knowledge of music, engage in physical activity, interact in their communities and exceed their expectations of their arithmetic abilities.

Due to the efforts of Linda Melendez, President Ruffalo and First Lady Judy, we have a new venue for this year's BELL Academy:

Where: Raritan Bay Area YMCA, 357 New Brunswick Ave, Perth Amboy 08861
When: June 29 through July 10, 2020
Time: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

This new location will offer the children access to many of the wonderful facilities of the YMCA including a pool. We do want to make a shout out of thanks to Dr. Ruiz and the Puerto Rican Association of Human Development (PRAHD) who welcomed us at their facilities in Perth Amboy for six years and even helped us identify this new facility.

We have applied for three grants and are optimistic that things will work out in our favor. In addition, when our dear friend and fellow Federationist Jerry Fontenelli passed away in December 2019, his family asked that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to NFBNJ in his memory. Jerry was an avid fund raiser himself and an ardent supporter of the BELL Academy. The funds raised in Jerry's honor are dedicated with pride in support of the BELL Academy and will be used to fund the Jerry Fontenelli "Day at the Keansburg Beach" (with a water park activity!).

Mary Jo Partyka is our BELL coordinator again this year and will work diligently with our Braille teacher to plan fun and exciting lessons for the children. As for our students ... yes, we are busy recruiting and expect many of those who participated last year to attend again.

So, help us to get the word out: NFBNJ BELL Academy 2020 ROCKS! All blind and vision impaired children in New Jersey (ages 4 through 12) are welcome to participate for FREE!

To learn more about the NFB New Jersey BELL Academy, visit <https://nfb.org/bell-academy> or contact the New Jersey BELL Academy Coordinator Mary Jo Partyka at 609-888-5459 or at choirnfb@gmail.com.

ALL GOOD THINGS

By C. P. McKenna

Editor's Note: *Pat McKenna, Esq., is the Director of Employment Services for the Family Resource Network. As such, he is responsible for the Employment Development Guidance and Engagement (EDGE) program, which supports transition-age youth.*

I sit on the floor, my mind and heart racing. I wait. I sit, and I wait, and I try not to think. Try not to think of my beautiful dog, my wonderful dog, my dog who has so loyally guided me for nearly nine years. My partner and companion, with me nearly every moment, of every day for all that time. He was with me when my wife and I were married, and with me when we brought our first son home from the hospital. I try not to think of his devotion, and his hard work, and the number of times he's navigated me through new and sometimes intimidating environments. Subway systems, new airports and cities, through the snow, and thunderstorms. Traveling independently, safely, with such confidence and peace of mind has been such a gift.

I try not to think of his fur, and his ears, and how he's been such a reassuring presence, by my side, or at my feet. Because it's over, and too much thinking might be more than I can handle right now, sitting here, on the floor, without him.

It's nearly nine years since I first met him. Since the several week required residency at The Seeing Eye, an essential step in learning to travel with a new dog. During that stay, we were trained to work together and so began a new partnership, a partnership that lasted nearly nine years. Nine very fast years.

Then, he got old, and slow. He was quick to lie down, and not quick to get back up. The vet said there was a heart thing, "I don't want you to worry, it's not really a big deal. We'll keep an eye on it. But, this dog should be retired. And he is 10, going on 11. It's time."

I was devastated. And yet, this was a moment I always knew would come.

At home I apologized that I was retiring him, and thanked him for all his love and hard work.

Hugging him close, reminiscing, "Remember that time we got locked out of our hotel in Rochester in a thunder storm? Or in LA, when you reversed course and got us back to the curb when that emergency vehicle ran the red? Or when the train stopped and the doors opened onto nothing, and I told you forward and you refused? Or when we met that clown at the bus stop? Or at that fried chicken place in Louisville when the counter guy spilled 32 ounces of soda on your head?"

He sat and listened. He was a great listener. But he didn't understand when I left, left without him. "I'm sorry," I said, "You aren't my guide dog any more. I'm so sorry."

Sitting on that floor, not having him there, feeling like part of me was missing.

And then, finally, a soft knock on my dorm room door. The instructor enters, and not alone.

“So I want to introduce you to your new friend...”

Words continue to happen, something about size and weight, breed and color, and I’m hearing none of it because my new Seeing Eye dog is licking my face.

A few parting somethings, and the instructor leaves. And not a moment too soon as this is a powerful moment, an emotional moment, meeting the dog that might actually save my life one day. The dog that will guide me to work, and guide me as I take my kids to school. The dog that will sleep by my bed, and be by my side no matter what the weather.

The fur is soft, the ears perfect. We sit on the floor together.

“Hello. Am I going to love you the way I loved your predecessor?”

“Can I trust you with my life?”

“We're going to be together a lot you and me. All the time, every day. And there's a lot of guiding work to do. You up for this? Are you and I going to be best friends?”

I’m licked once, twice, tail thumping the floor.

“I think so, too.”

From the Archives – Fall 2013
A TRIBUTE TO SOMEONE ELSE
Author Unknown

We were saddened to learn recently of the death of one of our most valued acquaintances, Someone Else. Someone’s passing created a vacancy that will indeed be difficult to fill.

Else was with us for many years and for every one of those years did far more than a normal person’s share of work. Whenever leadership was needed, this wonderful person was looked to to bring results. “Someone Else can work with that group,” we all said.

Whenever there was a job to do, one name was on every list: Someone Else! And it was common knowledge that Someone Else was generous toward volunteer organizations. If there was a financial need, everyone just assumed that Someone Else would make up the difference.

Were the truth known, we all expected far too much of Someone Else. Now Someone Else is gone! We wonder what we are going to do. Someone Else left a model to follow, but we wonder WHO is going to do all those things that Someone Else did?

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2ND ANNUAL NEW JERSEY REGIONAL BRAILLE CHALLENGE

By Monique Coleman

Editor's Note: *Monique has been a teacher of the visually impaired in both private and public school settings for more than 18 years. In 2016, she started VISTAS Education Partners in an effort to reach more students in need of 21st Century, learner-centered instruction. Monique holds a National Library Service literary braille transcribing certification and is currently a doctoral candidate at Rutgers University. She lives in Highland Park, NJ with her husband and three sons. She is an active member of her community serving on the Board of Education and several community organizations.*

The NFBNJ and VISTAS Education Partners teamed up to host the 2nd Annual New Jersey Regional Braille Challenge February 22 in Highland Park. Over several months, our team of blind and sighted educators, advocates and mentors planned a full day of education, information and inspiration for young braille readers and their families.

Thanks to promotional support from the NJ Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and the Talking Book & Braille Center, the number of participants doubled from last year to 15 braille readers, pictured below, ranging in age from 8-16 and hailing



from various public schools across the state and St. Joseph's School for the Blind.

On the day of the event, as the young scholars began arriving at 9 a.m., their youthful energy filled the building with excitement and set the tone for a lively day. After a brief opening ceremony, the contestants split into grade-level groups and began their morning contests. They were tested on fundamental braille skills such as reading comprehension, spelling, speed and accuracy, proofreading, and charts and graphs. The two youngest groups took three contests, while the older groups completed four. All contests were proctored by volunteer teachers of the visually impaired.

Meanwhile, parents attended workshops presented by Charles McKenna and Connor Mullin of the EDGE program (orientation and mobility) and Carol Castellano, a founding member of Parents of Blind Children-NJ (fostering independence). After a festive lunch and social hour, afternoon workshops were presented by Joe Ruffalo (collaboration) and Elisa Dahill (parental advocacy). Elisa is a blind parent of a high school junior who is visually impaired.

Braille, art and science also converged at the event. An artist drew tactile portraits, DJ Blind Wonder provided musical entertainment, and an interactive, accessible drum circle was offered. Hands-on science activities were provided by Dr. Dan Steinberg and students from Princeton University.

Meanwhile, volunteers were busy scoring the contests in a separate room. Scoring is based on national guidelines and requires prior training. Most of the contests are

multiple choice answers, but the writing contest require a meticulous, symbol-by-symbol review. In each grade level, a top scorer is determined and all scores are entered into a score sheet for review by the National Braille Challenge.

Once scoring was complete, the stage was set for the closing ceremony. A musical selection by Naquela Wright, vice president of Eyes Like Mine, was followed by inspirational words from Ida Behrini, a software engineer at JP Morgan Chase, and Dr. Bernice Davis, executive director of NJ CBVI. Peter Walters, a nuclear physicist, delivered the keynote address, describing his adjustment to blindness as a teenager and how he forged ahead with his college and career goals. The awards presentation followed, with former and current Braille Challenge national finalists Breanna Murray and Kaleigh Brendle joining me in presenting each participant with a certificate and prizes.

Special thanks to Annemarie Cooke who, via social media, asked for funds in honor of her birthday and raised \$740 for this program. Another \$1,200 was raised through a GoFundMe page, and additional contributions came from the WaWa Foundation, Target Foundation and a local Dunkin Donuts.

By all accounts shared by those in attendance, the day demonstrated the power of successful collaboration. The NFBNJ-VISTAS partnership accomplished our goal of creating a special experience that promoted braille literacy, independence and life success for blind/visually impaired youth and that also provided a memorable event for all who attended: the children, families, volunteers and NFB members. I look forward to an even more incredible experience in future NJ Regional Braille Challenge events!

FLYING WITH A REAL ID

REAL ID start date extended to 10/1/2021

Due to circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the national emergency declaration, the Department of Homeland Security has extended the REAL ID enforcement start date to **October 1, 2021**.

Beginning October 1, 2021, every air traveler 18 years of age and older will need a REAL ID-compliant driver's license/ID, passport or another federally approved form of identification to fly within the United States. Real ID compliant cards have a star in the upper right of the card.

How to get a Real ID

- If your license/ID is expiring in less than 3 months, go to Motor Vehicle with your required documents between the 5th and 20th of any month before it expires.
- If your license/ID is not expiring in 3 months, make an appointment.

To validate your identity, you must bring the following: proof of your social security number, proof of your residential address and proof of your identification. For detailed information on these proofs, go to <https://www.state.nj.us/mvc/realid/>

IN MEMORY OF BARBARA SHALIT**By Carol Castellano**

Editor's Note: *When my dear friend Barbara Shalit passed away last November, the world lost a bright light. Barbara came into my life 24 years ago when she and several other teachers and blind people evaluated my son Jon for braille education. Over the many years since then, our relationship evolved into a friendship. Barbara was one of the most thoughtfully inquisitive people I know. She and I would brainstorm "outside the box" for hours, fueled by each step of our creativity. Several years ago, she, Jon and I developed an introductory braille curriculum for deafblind. We were considering remote teaching options when she became ill two years ago. Now, I think of her often, missing her creativity, quick wit, sensitivity to humanity, her warmth and kindness. In the next two articles and poem, Carol Castellano, Pat McKenna and Amy Albin share their memories of Barbara.*

On November 5, 2019 our good friend Barbara Shalit passed away. Barbara was a Braille teacher extraordinaire. She made sure her students learned not only the Braille code, but also how to type, how to read charts and graphs, and how to examine illustrations in order to gain full tactile literacy. Barbara's article on how to develop these skills in children appears in a recent edition of *Future Reflections* magazine.

Barbara was the first person my family met from the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired when our daughter Serena was just an infant over 30 years ago, so she's been in our lives for Serena's whole lifetime. Over the years Barbara and I became colleagues and friends, as so many other Federationists have, too. In the early years, she would photocopy articles from journals she thought we would be interested in and bring them to us to read. In the later years, we would meet at the diner once a month or so to discuss ideas, inventions and issues in the blindness field. Another NJ family who benefited immeasurably from Barbara's creativity and dedication were the Gabrys. Their son Jon is both blind and deaf. When he was a young student, Barbara learned sign language so that she could directly communicate with him. She worked with mom Kathy to actually create a curriculum which would provide true literacy for young Jon. Later when our kids were grown, my family, Barbara and her husband Skipp Tullen and the Gabry family would have dinner together and watch with love and pride as our children communicated with each other using refreshable Braille.

Barbara was a true friend of the Federation, of parents and of blind children. She presented workshops at the state and national levels, helped plan Parents of Blind Children-NJ events, taught at our NFB BELL Academy, co-edited our state newsletter, *The Sounding Board*, for years, taught the Braille classes for our future teachers of blind students, and volunteered in countless ways to assist blind children and adults. She will be profoundly missed.

CLEAR SKIES**By Charles Pat McKenna**

Editor's Note: *Charles Pat McKenna lives in central New Jersey with his wife and two sons. Pat is an attorney, and is currently working with his fourth Seeing Eye dog.*

I was four. Happy and inquisitive. And four. Playing in the woods near my home, the sun bright, the sky clear. Then, something happened. Something bad. I was sick. There was a hospital room, and machines, very serious doctors, and very sad relatives. I never thought I'd be able to go home again. A view, I learned years later, that was unanimously shared.

But I did. Weak and compromised. Thin and fragile. But finally able to go home. Happy to be better, but not unscathed. Something had changed. The sun wasn't so bright. The sky wasn't so clear. I was blind.

What does a blind kid do?

Five. And blind. Kindergarten to start in the fall.

We lived in a wooded part of New Jersey. Me. Single mom. Kid brother. Unsure what would come next. Uncertain if I would even be able to go to school.

What does a blind kid do?

"Pat," my mom calls. "She's here."

I join my mom at the front door. Outside, the sound of a gentle, late summer rain. Our guest is tall and polite. She has a soft, pleasant voice and seems very kind. She sounds smart, and wise, and elegant, and reassuring.

"My name is Ms. Shalit," she says. "I'm going to be your braille teacher."

She was part of something called the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and she would teach me braille, as well as the other essential skills I would need to succeed. Skills that would build my independence, my confidence. We would work together at home, and at school, and she told me, "Yes, of course you'll be going to kindergarten."

I sit at my mom's dining room table and we talk. Ms. Shalit works with other kids who can't see, too, and she likes to travel, and she has a big dog named Clyde. "Here," she says. I recognize the sound of paper. "Feel this." A sheet of thick paper is on the cool, smooth surface before me. "It's the braille alphabet." A gentle touch guides my left hand to the paper's top left corner. "Start here and move right." I do, encountering small clusters of bumps. I feel and explore each grouping.

"How did you make these bumps?" I ask.

"Dots," she corrects. "And I'll show you. There are two ways we can make braille letters."

Fascinated and utterly absorbed, I run my fingers over the dots again and again. Ms. Shalit quietly steps back and has a conversation with my mom that I'm not supposed to overhear, but I interrupt, because I'm curious, and I'm five.

"Is this letter a T?" indicating a grouping of 3 dots, two side by side over a third.

"No," she says. "That's an M. Here, this one is a T."

My hand is gently guided to a different character. She shows me braille numbers 1 through 10. Mom makes her tea, and we talk long into the afternoon, before, ultimately, "Well," she says, "we should probably wrap up for today. I'll be seeing you again in a week. Do you have any last questions for me?"

I do, the first of what would be so, so many questions. Ms. Shalit didn't just teach me braille, but how to be independent, how to be confident.

Over the months and years that followed, we would sit together at home, or in an unused room in my elementary school, and cover a multitude of different subjects. We would practice writing and reading braille, and orientation and mobility, and discuss the planets in the solar system, and the impact of the last ice age. We studied basic arithmetic using paper clips as props, and talked about France, and why leaves changed their color. I learned how to use a Perkins braille writer, and a slate and stylus, and how to figure out the answers to questions like, "How do I know when a word starts with a silent K?"

She showed me how to order books from Recording for the Blind (RFB, which has since been renamed Learning Ally), and we read about the giant pacific octopus, the function of chloroplasts and the contributions of founding fathers such as John Hancock. She taught me how to use a manual typewriter, and a talking calculator, and the difference between an atom and a molecule.

Sometimes we met in an empty classroom, smelling of chalk dust, art supplies and sneakers, and other times at my house, sitting for long and fascinating hours at my mom's dining room table, Clyde waiting patiently in her car. Once she came to the house for a lesson with her leg in a complicated cast, the result of a bad skiing accident.

And the lessons continued. Through hot summer days, winter snow storms and even a power outage, we would meet to review Grade 2 braille and the Nemeth Code and to practice the multiplication tables. Wooden models, raised line drawings and a tactile globe made it possible for me to learn about the geography of each of the 50 states and the locations of the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, and to discern, "How big is the Amazon?" Using sets of 3D models, we studied geometric shapes like the rhombus, the cone and the octahedron, which was my favorite. And I always had more questions.

"Why do the days grow shorter in the fall and longer in the spring?"

"Do all birds migrate?"

"For a word like (other): Do I write that in braille using the (the) contraction followed by (R), or by using the (TH) contraction followed by the (ER) contraction?"

Ms. Shalit was my teacher of the blind and visually impaired (TVI) through the end of fourth grade. A guide, a mentor, a light that came at a time in my life when one was needed most. She was *the* definitive force, teaching me the skills I needed to be independent, to be confident.

That first visit is still fresh in my mind ... a good visit, but my unaccustomed fingers are numb from having been run over the same braille characters so many times. A few dots are a little flatter than they were before. Outside, it's clearing, the rain having moved on. She finishes her tea, returns the cup to the kitchen counter and collects her things.

She stands in the open front doorway. Outside the air smells clean.

"I'll be seeing you again in a week. Any last questions for me before I go?"

"Yes," I say. "What can a blind kid do?"

"Anything," she says. "Anything."

THE LOVE YOU SHARE WILL ALWAYS BE THERE

By Amy Albin

Editor's Note: *Amy Albin, a junior at Montclair State University majoring in psychology, was a 2019 national scholarship finalist at the NFB's National Convention. Amy wrote this poem in honor of Barbara, her longtime teacher and friend. It was sung by the Harmonium Choir at Barbara's memorial service.*

You are my earth,
Like solid ground,
Your character firm,
Your wisdom sound.
My feet are planted on this earth,
Ready to walk to a new destination.

You are my air,
Who gives me room,
Like a flower
To bud and bloom.
And when I'm lost I stop and breathe,
Then I know where I'm going.

You are my fire,
Whose heart burns bright,
Your knowledge guides me
To know what's right.
I light a candle in your name,
Filled with admiration.

My earth, fire, water and air,
The love you share will always be there.

AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE DIABETIC COMMITTEE

By Ed Godfrey & Angela Perone, Chair & Co-Chair of the NFBNJ Diabetic Committee

The NFBNJ's Diabetic Committee invites anyone with an interest in diabetes to join us. Our goals are to share and educate, motivate, teach and learn from each other. Guest speakers at our monthly conference call meetings discuss topics like managing your diabetes, diet, exercise, motivation, accessible glucose meters, insulin pumps, glucose control monitoring systems, medication, legislative issues and more. You're also invited to join our listserv: http://nfbnet.org/mailman/listinfo/njabs-talk_nfbnet.org or the NFB's diabetes talk listserv: http://nfbnet.org/mailman/listinfo/diabetes-talk_nfbnet.org

At the state convention in November we will have a special event for our blind diabetic participants. To receive the date and time of our meetings or for more information, contact Ed Godfrey at 856-628-3657 or edgodfrey1957@gmail.com or Angela Perone at 848-209-9465 or ang345x@gmail.com

SPRING CLEANING? CONSIDER THE NFB FOR YOUR DISCARDS & VEHICLES

For many, springtime means cleaning out closets and cupboards. What to do with all that good stuff that still has lots of life? Donate it to the NFB! Call GreenDrop for a pickup, and your treasures will gain a new life. The funds raised through GreenDrop go to the NFB's general fund to support programs for blind STEM students, veterans and seniors, as well as our ongoing efforts to improve equality for the blind.

In apartment complexes or condos, GreenDrop will, with management approval, place a large blue plastic box in the lobby, community room or club house where residents can drop off gently used items. As with all donations, "NFB" must be written on all your donated bags and boxes to be sure we get credit for your donation.

A listing of accepted items can be found at www.gogreendrop.org. To schedule a pickup, call 1-888-944-DROP (3767) or visit www.gogreendrop.org. To drop off in person, check the website locations in Cherry Hill, Metuchen or Springfield. For an apartment building or condo program, contact NFBNJ's GreenDrop coordinator Linda DeBerardinis at 856-735-5559 or ljdeber3@comcast.net. Questions may also be directed to NFB GreenDrop coordinator Bridget Burke at 410-659-9314, x2271 or GreenDrop@nfb.org.

Vehicle Donation Program

Vehicles donated to the NFB are sold through Vehicles for Charity. The funds raised are then used to distribute free white canes, help blind children access educational services and more. To donate, call 855-659-9314 or visit www.nfb.org/get-involved/ways-give/vehicle-donations. New Jersey's Vehicle Donations coordinator is Andrew Rees: 908-616-3477 or amrees567@gmail.com. You can also contact the NFB Vehicle Donations coordinator Pattie Chang at 410-659-9314 x2422 or pchang@nfb.org.

TECH TALK TIDBITS: DID YOU KNOW?

By Jane Degenshein

Podcasts are audio presentations that can be downloaded or streamed from the Internet to devices from which people can listen at their leisure. It's kind of like Talk Radio: tune in and listen to something of interest.

Podcasts are available on almost any subject and can be heard on any device that connects to the Internet. A podcatcher app is used for searching and listening to podcasts. The podcatcher app can also automatically download podcasts that are regularly broadcasted (daily, weekly or monthly). Here's where to find a podcatcher:

- **In iOS:** It's a built-in app simply called Podcast. It should be on the home screen, or ask Siri to "Open Podcast."
- **In the App Store:** Overcast or Downcast
- **In windows:** An accessible podcatcher can be found at:
<https://www.webbie.org.uk/accessiblepodcatcher/>

There are thousands of podcasts, but here are a few that are blindness and tech related:

- AppleVis Apple Accessibility
- FSCast is Freedom Scientific's official podcast
- Hadley Presents offers a variety of blindness-related podcasts
- iSee David Woodbridge Blind Technology blog
- Dot-to-Dot Amazon Echo
- Mosen At Large, with Jonathan MosenTTJ Talk (The Tech Juggernaut)
- 9to5Mac, the latest Apple news
- Apple WatchCast, all the news on the Apple watch
- Blind Bargains
- Mystic Access, also offers subscribers free and paid classes
- the Stiritup podcast hosted by Cliff Miller where subjects like technology and sports are discussed and guest speakers are featured
- Braille Monitor
- National Federation of the Blind Presidential Releases

If you find your iPhone battery is draining too quickly, you may want to check out some of the 17 tips and tricks in this article to improve the situation:

<https://geeksmodo.com/how-to-improve-ios-13-battery-life-on-iphone-17-tips-and-tricks-you-need-to-know/>

RECIPES
AUNT MARIE'S CHICKEN & SAUSAGE
Submitted by Carol Castellano

This recipe is a favorite in my husband's family. Amounts do not need to be precise and can be easily raised or lowered according to the size of your crowd. Serves 6 – 8.

Ingredients:

6 chicken thighs, bone-in or boneless	Salt
3 Italian sausage links, cut into thirds	Pepper
3 large potatoes, cut into small chunks	4 garlic cloves diced, or garlic powder
3 large green peppers, cut into wide slices	Basil
1 large onion, each half cut into fourths	Oregano
Olive oil	

Method:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees
2. Spray an oven pan with cooking spray
3. Partially cook potato chunks by boiling or microwaving for about 5 minutes (they should be a little soft)
4. Place chicken and sausage pieces into pan. Use a large enough pan to leave a little space between chicken and sausages pieces. Add potato, pepper and onion pieces between and around chicken and sausage pieces. Make only one layer; do not pile up.
5. Drizzle generously with olive oil
6. Sprinkle on salt, pepper, garlic pieces or powder, basil and oregano
7. Place in oven and bake for approximately 1 hour 15 minutes (less time for boneless thighs) or till chicken and sausage are thoroughly cooked
8. Serve with a green salad and Italian bread

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