Welcome to the February edition of Blindness matters, the forth issue of the News Letter for the Utah Affiliate. This publication is being electronically provided as well as being printed in braille. If you'd like a copy in Braille please let your chapter presidents know. We have many articles written on chapter and division events as well as scholarship information for state and national awards for 2013.

This electronic version of the News Letter has been formatted to support the heading search options so please try it out and give us your feedback.

If there are any suggestions for future newsletters please email Jerry Nealey co-editor at utahnfb@gmail.com

Bacon’s Bits:

The weather outside is still a bit frightful, but thankfully, spring is right around the corner! The NFB of Utah has been quite busy this holiday season!

There were great Christmas parties in the Salt Lake Chapter, the Weber/Davis Chapter, the Utah County Chapter, and even down in the Red Rocks! Iron County

And Cache Valley also was able to get together as well.

Our fundraiser “A night with the Utah Grizzlies” turned out to be a great success! We were able to sell close to 100 tickets and our name was announced over the loud speaker to all of the audience in attendance! I want to personally thank Mac and

Sonia Biggers for their help in putting the fundraiser together!

Our Annual Utah State Convention is right around the corner and should definitely heat things up for all of us! We are scheduled to hold our convention at the Provo Marriott in Provo, UT. May 2nd-4th and our registration will be open beginning on March 1st! The hotel rates will be between $79 and $89 per night! Please keep checking our website at

www.nfbutah.org for more information! You can also call our NFB hotline at 801-INFO-NFB (463-6632).

I look forward to seeing all of you at our Annual state convention and I also hope to see you at an upcoming Chapter meeting! Please feel free to contact

Me at my email address

baconev@yahoo.com

 If you have any questions or items you would like to discuss with me.

Cordially,

Everette bacon

President, NFB of Utah

baconev@yahoo.com

801-INFO-NFB(463-6632)

www.nfbutah.org

Blind 101 by Cassie Kelly;

Welcome to the Real World. This ain’t no training center, Sweetheart.

Wwwwoooo-Hhoooo! Project STRIVE! St. George here we come! … My first trip with Project STRIVE. I was so excited. This was gonnna be awe-some! And it was - among other things.

Awesome. Fun. New. Exciting. Interesting. Informational. Those are the words that I knew would describe my trip. But I had no idea that alongside those words I would find others. Like challenging. And embarrassing. Frustrating. Overwhelming. Shocking. Yet still uplifting. Encouraging. Eye-opening. Even life changing.

I’m not going to attempt to chronicle my trip. This recorded insight is not to reflect the cool experience I had in regards to the sweet charter bus or the fancy dorms where we slept. Or even the fun activities in which we participated. No. This little excerpt is to try and express the lessons I learned about what it means to be blind – to both the blind and the sighted.

I’m fully sighted, right? But a huge part of my new role here with DSVBI is to try and understand what it means to be blind. Not just what it means not to be able to view things with my eye balls, but what it means to live blind, experience life blind and interact with other people blind. You would assume there wouldn’t be too much difference doing those things blind as opposed to sighted, but turns out sometimes there is.

So, there we were. Saturday morning. I had committed to wearing my sleep shades and being blind from the time I walked out of our dorm room, through breakfast, during our nature walk and until the completion of our campus tour. No big deal I thought. It’s just 5 hours or so. I was a little apprehensive, but I had already been doing cane travel among other things at the training center. I knew somewhere inside me that I could do it.

Breakfast went smoothly – mostly. I served my own hash browns and eggs onto my plate. I included some ketchup. The nice lady in the cafeteria asked if I wanted help finding an open seat. I said sure without too much of a second thought. I was receptive to some help. Sure I wanted to be independent and do it on my own, but I was okay to accept some direction. After all, she did ASK if I wanted help and I could have very well said no thank you. It wasn’t like some of the weird confrontations I’ve heard about where someone runs up and grabs your arm to “help” you. … The hash browns and eggs were quite good. At least until my eating techniques started to wane and the next thing I knew everything on my plate just tasted like ketchup. Oh well. It was a success for the most part. Onward ho.

Onward ho for sure. To the nature walk. I was a little nervous and asked that someone stay close by so that I could have the auditory help of following the tapping of someone else’s cane or footsteps. But you know what, before I knew it, I was trucking along all by myself; staying on the path with no need to follow a leading tap tap. And then things got interesting.

(I have been reading that book – Freedom for the Blind. It talked about some perspectives and attitudes of and toward the blind community. Something I knew I had already started to struggle with in my mind was how some blind folks feel one way about what is expected from the sighted community while other blind folks feel and expect other things. It’s a complexity that exists in other facets of life, but seems to appear more apparent when dealing with blindness. At least for me right now anyways.)

So here I am trucking it along the nature walk path. I was feeling pretty good about myself. I was moving more quickly than I had in the past. I had trust in my cane; feeling more details around me. And then here comes along a lady from the other direction hooting and hollering. “Great job!” “Awesome you guys!” “Good walking!” When looking from her perspective, she was obviously trying to be supportive. And honestly, I accepted it wholly at first pass. After all, I’m like a little child in the blind world. I’m new to the change. Like a baby. We cheer babies on when they start to walk more confidently, right? Then from behind me, someone in our group hollered back in a thick sarcastic tone. “Yeah! Look at us! Walking just like you!” Then I heard car tires screeching in my head as if my joyful acceptance of the encouragement had come to a slamming halt. I started to process the situation quite differently after that. Fact: Lady viewed a group of blind adults walking. ADULTS. Okay. So now if I view myself as such, as I am. I am an adult, walking down a paved pathway. Just like anyone else. I thought to myself, what if that lady had done the same exact thing had I been walking by myself without a cane. I would have thought she was a total weirdo! Now, I can’t imagine getting mad at her for her ignorance, but at the same time this was my very first real world encounter with how I could be treated as a blind person. How would I feel if I experienced that day after day after day? I might start to get a bit annoyed and transfer my annoyance from redundant insults and warring comments from past experiences to some cheerleading lady I had never met before. Nevertheless, I finished the nature walk strong and had some newly established confidence. I was ready to conquer the campus tour. I gave myself a little pep talk. I knew the campus tour was going to be a little challenging for me, but I had my cane. I had others around me, sidewalks, the tour guide, the sun. I had tools to get through this.

So here we are, starting the SUU campus tour. I had been gearing up for this all morning long. I can do it. I can do it. But why in the world do I need to pep talk myself so much if all I am doing is walking around with everyone else? Again, conflicting emotions come in. I mean, we are just walking. Most anyone can walk - sighted or not. But then again, I am sighted and I have to walk blind now. I mean, I've been walking around the training center and grounds blind for four weeks already, but this is unknown. I've never seen this campus. I have no idea where we will be walking or how long or what will be around me. My head started to spin a little bit thinking about how I would navigate such unknown territory. But again, my thoughts contended with one another. I have been taught how to see with my cane. I know how to see what it is in front of me; stop myself before I walk into any dangers. I have learned how to feel different terrains and surfaces to indicate where I am walking. It's not a big deal I tell myself. And so we start.

Our sweet tour guides. One guy and one gal. I have no idea what they look like, obviously. But they sound young and my first impression is that this is probably the first time they have given a tour to a group of blind people. I could hear the concern and slight insecurity in their voices - like they were trying to be normal about it, but weren't quite able to play it off. The young man helping with the tour was an immediate narrator of everything: the stairs, the hallway, the door, the curb, the light post, the trees, the flowers. At one point I thought he was going to tell us that the wind was blowing! As a fully sighted person myself, I could totally understand his ignorance and I could tell that he just wanted to be helpful. I felt he was just excited to have this experience and be able to give a tour to some blind people. (I could just hear him now telling his friends about it later, like it was so way cooler than giving a tour to sighted people. As if we were cute puppies or something. Hmp.) Again, with my conflicting thoughts and emotions. I got it. I get it. I'm sighted. I can see patterns of the sighted community perspective of blind people in myself and that’s what I’m learning to correct. But here I am in this moment... BLIND! Now what do I think about it? I started to get annoyed with his narrations. His announcing of everything under the sun. Hey, he might have even announced the sun at one point! I started to feel some understanding of how the blind community would feel. I mean, c'mon dude. I will see the step when my cane gets there. I won't run into the light post. I can hear the trees rustling in the wind as well as feel their shade. I can see it. I really can! But not only that, as a "new" blind person, I found his narrations and constant chatter annoyingly distracting. I'm new. I knew I was new. I knew I would have to focus more. And initially I thought maybe his debilitating announcement of every nook and cranny may even help me navigate around, but I quickly learned that it was only a distraction. I had the skills (not totally polished yet, but they were there) to enjoy the tour just like anyone else - sighted or blind. All these thoughts swirled in and out and around my head for the duration of the tour. It was dizzying - mentally and emotionally.

The campus tour started to feel like it was dragging on. I was trying to focus on enjoying the tour, pretending to be a potential student, but I found myself too caught up in the focus on trying not to fall or run into anything racing alongside my thoughts and feelings about these blind verses sighted perplexities. Not to mention the fact that I walk much slower as a blind person as I do as a sighted person. I had to focus on my unknown surroundings at a faster speed than I was accustomed to. Everyone seemed to be walking so fast. In all actuality, I was just walking slowly. I needed to pick of the pace, push myself. Just as I was having this thought of go, go, go, you can do it, keep up, keep moving, stay focused, but move faster... THUD went my toe into the steps and down I went onto my hands. My goodness! I thought the tour guide fellow was going to pick me up. How embarrassing. Oh and this little incident just unleashed a whole new flood of thoughts and emotions into my entire being. I've tripped before, sighted. It's embarrassing no matter what. Tripping is just embarrassing. But this was way embarrassing. Why? I thought. Why was this so much more embarrassing? It could have been because I was already getting emotionally and mentally drained from the tour experience thus far. It could have been because I really heard the guy come super close to me and I just hoped he wasn't going to touch me. As I thought about it more, it could have been because I'm a stubborn, overachieving cuss and this little stumble seemed like a heavy indicator that I had just failed at my ambition to have a smooth campus tour being blind. But that's ridiculous! I wouldn't have felt ashamed nor disappointed in myself had I fallen sighted! What weird emotions. I was starting to feel straight up crazy. I actually started crying pretty heavily. And then a brand new thought came to me; I love these sleep shades... no one has any idea I'm crying right now! But I survived it and we kept on keeping on.

The campus tour finally came to a conclusion, but of course not before one more lovely run in with the tour guide. I don't know how, but I could somehow feel his presence coming nearer to me from behind and all I was thinking was how can I distanced myself from this dude. Doih! Here he was. "Sooo, you must be kind of new at this or something. I mean, your cane is all bouncy and everyone else's cane is kind of hovering and smooth." What?!?!? Did he really just say that to me!?!?! I mean, seriously. This guy doesn't know my story. For all he knew I could have been in a tragic accident weeks early where my eyes were plucked from my skull! And not only that, the whole time I knew within myself I was trying so hard to stay tried and true to my cane techniques I was taught: cane in the center of my body, wrist not turning and bending, slight tap or double tap as needed on each side of me as a step opposite the cane, keeping the cane 1-2 inches from the ground. I mean, I was hearing Mike's voice the whole flipping time! (Which was annoying in and of itself?) How could this guy say to me - in so many words - you kind of stink at this? Luckily, to my great relief, just as jack-Fannie guide said that to me a fellow campus tour friend with us said to him, "There are different techniques and she was using one of them." Sheesh. Thank you.

I made it back onto the bus blind and as soon as I found my seat I ripped off my sleep shade more vehemently than I ever had before this point. I wanted to burst into tears. From what? I'm not even sure I knew. Frustration? Maybe. Mental exhaustion? For sure. Success and triumph. Yes, that too. So many different and contrasting... and confusing... emotions. And here came Adam to sit behind me. True to my nature, I just started spewing on him about what had just happened. First gingerly as I didn't really know what I could say and not say to try and save my own face, but at the same time be candid and genuine as I tend to be in all aspects of my life. I almost asked him how I should feel. Haha! How do you ask someone how you should feel? They aren't you. You are not them. I felt proud of myself, but then felt like I shouldn't feel proud of myself because it's not like I did anything awesome or amazing. I mean, I just walked. Granted I walked in my first foreign land blind with lots of obstacles - not so much physical obstacles, but many mental and emotional obstacles. I couldn't stop the tears from coming to my eyes at this point. No more sleep shades to hide them. On top of these immediate experiences I had just undergone, I was feeling overwhelmed with emotions of this opportunity. This new job. This trip. These people. The students. These Project STRIVE leaders. They were all amazing. But again, conflicting emotions entered in. I had already heard that it's weird for sighted people to be so amazed with blind people so I didn't want to feel that way. But I did. But the truth of it was that, yes maybe I am impressed with every one's ability to cane travel so much better than me even though they have been practicing and improving for years and myself only mere weeks. But I was really amazed and impressed by this group of people for more than those blind verses sighted foe pas. They had been so welcoming to me, so loving and embracing of me. They had shown such excitement for life and joy for the experience of this trip. They had all been so pleasant to get to know and interact with. I was blessed to be in the presence and experience of this group of people just because they are an amazing group of people. Ah! Another light bulb went on. Sighted people allow for blindness to mask the individual who is blind, not only by creating some "disability" label or cover, but by allowing the blindness to outshine the person. What I mean by that is sighted people allow themselves to be so impressed with people who are blind and function just like everyone else that the sighted person can't really see the person behind the blindness. That sighted person could be assuming Billy Bob is awesome just because he can move about blind, when really Billy Bob is a lame head. And the other end of that is that they can miss out on how awesome Bobby Joe is because they don't even allow themselves to see who Bobby Joe really is. They just see a blind person. Well, I didn't just see blind people. I saw some really awesome people who were doing really awesome stuff for a really awesome group of kids. And none of that had anything to do with the fact that they are blind. It just so happen to be so.

 There's more to the trip. I had the delightful (sarcasm emphasized here) opportunity to observe just how totally awkward and inappropriate sighted people can be with and around blind people while we attended the Groovefest. Don't get me wrong, the Groovefest was a great time - junk food, bad music, crazy hippies and all. But the Groovefest experience was the stigmas and awkward stories shared in 'Freedom for the Blind' come to life. I watched people act so strangely around my blind friends. I wanted to accept it for what it was as it appeared my blind coworkers did, as I’m sure this was not new to them. But I was bugged! I had to tell myself, just like anything else, we can't change the world all at one time, we can only change the world one person at a time.

I think in addition to all that I learned in this short 24 hour trip, was that these experiences become our responsibility. Those who are blind, those who work with the blind, those who know the blind, those who understand the blind. We must help those who aren't blind, those who don't work with the blind, and those who don't understand the blind to better understand. It is our - my - responsibility to help communicate and educate and share and expose others to the blind community. In the words of Kenneth Jernigan taken from Freedom for the Blind, "What we need is not confrontation, but understanding, an understanding that runs both ways. This means an ongoing process of communication and public education." Exactly. It's not good enough to just share these things within our own blind community or to just get mad or think these things that happen to the blind are nuts. But it is good enough to take each interaction in stride and address things in the best manner possible to be productive, positive, helpful and hopefully in the end, to provide progress in understanding and connecting the blind and sighted world as one - as it truly is one.

And that was Blind 101 for me.

Washington Seminar Report

The NFB’s three legislative initiatives for 2013 are:

1. The Fair Wages for Workers with Disabilities Act

This legislation phases out Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which allows employers to pay disabled workers subminimum wages. By ending this exploitative, discriminatory practice, disabled Americans will receive equal protection under the law to earn at least the federal minimum wage and reach their full employment potential.

2. The Technology, Education and Accessibility in College and Higher Education Act

Electronic instructional materials and related technology have replaced traditional methods of learning in postsecondary settings. Although it would be inexpensive to create e-books, courseware, applications, and other educational devices and materials in accessible formats, the overwhelming majority of these materials are inaccessible to disabled students. This bill calls for minimum accessibility standards for instructional materials, ending the “separate but equal” approach to learning.

3. Equal Access to Air Travel for Service-Disabled Veterans (HR 164)

The Space Available Program allows active-duty military, Red Cross employees, and retired members of the armed services to travel on military aircraft if there is space available. HR 164 reverses the exclusion of 100 percent service-disabled veterans who were discharged before retirement and entitles them to the program’s privileges.

The NFB of Utah sent 16 members to Washington D.C. this year to participate in the Annual Washington Seminar. This trip was very successful and a lot of work was accomplished by our members. Here are the names of who attended, please ask them how the trip went in your next chapter meeting:

Everette Bacon, Karl Smith, Sachen Pavithran, Brian Dulude, Barbie Elliott, Brook Sexton, Mark Turley, Steve Phelps, Barry Campbell, Aaron Timm, Tina Haskin, Nate Ostergard, Ron Gardner, Milt Taylor, and two Project STRIVE members, Chelsea Peel, and Eusinya Olivera.

Weber/Davis chapter news by President Barbie Elliott

 Weber-Davis Chapter meets on the third Saturday of each month at 11:00 AM. We alternate locations between Weber and Davis counties. Our next meeting will be on Saturday February 16th in Davis County. We haven’t established a favorite location for Davis County yet. We are looking into some great suggestions from members. Our March 16th meeting will be our elections meeting. All positions are available for election. Location is still undecided.

Red Rocks Chapter news and updates:

The Red Rocks Chapter continues to grow in number and scope. Along with all of the meetings and activities of 2012, we had a very fun Christmas Party at the Golden Corral Restaurant which 19 chapter members attended.

One of our chapter members recently had a book published. I found it compelling and highly recommend it. The author is Traci McDonald. The book title is “Killing Casanova” and is available on Blio and at the Amazon store.

Elections for a President, Secretary, and one Board Member will be held at our regular chapter meeting on February 16th. Our meetings are usually held on the third Saturday of the month at 1:00 PM. The location is in the board room at the Red Rock Center for Independence located at 515 West 300 North, Suite B, Saint George, Utah.

A division for youth is being formulated by some of the older youth who will act as mentors for the blind children in our area. As of this writing, the group is more in the embryo stage as meetings are being conducted to develop the purpose and mission of the group. Having parents involved is crucial. The philosophy of the NFB will be one of the main focuses of the meetings. We will be able to share more information as it moves into the infancy stage and grows.

The Red Rocks Chapter welcomes new members, residents of Washington County, and encourages visitors to enjoy the warmth of our hospitality and weather.

Robert Olsen, President

Project Strive

(Successful Transition Requires Independence, Vocation, and Education(

For young people in seventh grade through 26 years old meets the second Saturday of each month from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

•congratulations to Chelsea Peahl and Yesenia Oliva! They are this year’s finalists to represent project STRIVE at the 2013 Washington Seminar. They will go to Washington DC from February 2-7 to learn about our country’s rich heritage and meet with congress to discuss issues pertaining to blind and visually impaired Americans.

 •In January and February we will help some of you set an individual goal. Accomplishing this goal will help you earn points toward prizes that will be available at our “SILVER” store at the state convention.

 •February 9th, tubing and fun with friends. Since we had to cancel January’s tubing with friend’s activity because of bad weather, we will hold it in February. Bring a sighted friend and come learn about socializing and talking about your blindness with your sighted peers.

 •March 9th, we will hold our annual career fare.

 •April 12-13 we will be camping in Zion’s national park with Deja and Lucas. Lucas is a professional wilderness camper and has some exciting things planned for us.

 •May 2-4 is our state convention, come celebrate all the hard work you have done and redeem your points at the SILVER store.

Senior's division

The NFBU Senior Division is looking forward to our semi-annual senior seminar this coming March 15th in Price, Utah. We are looking for another good turnout. There will be great discussions dealing with such topics as:

Available services, training, transition from sight to blindness and life from a blind person's spouse, partner or friend. There will be a Dutch oven luncheon followed by a technology presentation with hands on approach. We are encouraging seniors from Carbon and Emery County to attend. Reservations can be made with Milt Taylor, President of the Senior Division,

(801) 913-2533.

We will also have the opportunity at the state convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Utah, in working with the seniors who attend, to address their issues and find ways to have greater interaction with seniors throughout the year. Seniors can join the Division and by so doing will have the opportunity to work with the division leadership in assisting seniors going blind or who are already blind adjust and function so their blindness is not a roadblock to an enjoyable life. We also want to speak with seniors about traveling places even though they are blind.

 So as a Senior Division our goal is to reach out to all seniors. The more seniors working together the greater good we can do.

Milt Taylor

President, NFB of Utah Senior Division

(801) 913-2533

milttaylor@comcast.net

Scholarships

It's that time once again for students who are blind or visually impaired to apply for a state and/or national NFB scholarship. It is available online at www.nfb.org/scholarships .

There are two levels of scholarships to be awarded.

Firstly, there are national scholarships which range from $3,000 to $12,000 cash. The applications for this scholarship are due by March 31, 2013, and should be submitted online at www.nfb.org/scholarships or mailed to the NFB Scholarship Committee:

NFB Scholarship Committee,

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND,

At Jernigan Place, 200 East Wells Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21230

If you have any questions in regards to the national scholarship, contact the Scholarship Committee Chairperson, Patti Chang, via telephone: (410) 659-9314 Ext. 2415; or e-mail: scholarships@nfb.org.

Secondly, this year the National Federation of the Blind of Utah is going to award at least 5 $2,000 scholarships. The applications are due by April 15, 2013. If a student would like to apply for a state scholarship, simply send a copy of the national scholarship application which will serve as a state scholarship application as well.

Mail to:

Sachin Pavithran, Scholarship Committee Chair

141 East 360 North,

Providence, UT 84332

In order to give the scholarship committee adequate time to review each scholarship application, please provide a copy of this letter and the application to your students that are eligible for this scholarship as soon as possible. We would appreciate if you could spread the word about this scholarship program. If I can help you with any further information regarding these scholarships

, feel free to email me at sachin.pavithran@usu.edu

Sincerely,

Sachin Dev Pavithran

Scholarship Committee Chair

National Federation of the Blind of Utah (NFBU)

Email : sachin.pavithran@usu.edu