**THE FEDERATIONIST IN CONNECTICUT**

**FALL/WINTER, 2016/17**

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The National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut 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.

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**Reflection: the Hartford Symphony's   
Talcott Mountain Music Festival**

**By Cheri Duquette**

This summer, several members of the Central Connecticut Chapter attended the Hartford Symphony's Talcott Mountain Music Festival titled " A Tribute To Ray Charles, Motown and Beyond”. This show was created by Mr. Ellis Hall, who plays piano and does the vocals, in honor of Ray Charles.

In 2001, Ellis met the legendary musical icon, Ray Charles, who took him under his wing and eventually signed Hall as the only other artist on his label Crossover Records. Hall worked on Mr. Charles' album "Straight Ahead". Hall has played for several notable luminaries including Oprah Winfrey, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Rose Kennedy, and the late Nelson Mandela, who was a declared fan of his work. He also had the distinct honor of performing at Helen Keller's funeral and was specifically requested by former President William Jefferson Clinton to perform at this first inauguration ceremony.

Mr. Hall was born in Savannah, Georgia. He was diagnosed with glaucoma as an infant, and lost sight in his right eye early on. After doctors informed his parents that Ellis would eventually lose sight in his left eye as well, his parents made the decision to move the family to Boston so Ellis could attend the Perkins School for the Blind. While at Perkins, he mastered the bass, guitar, keyboards, piano, and drums, readying himself for the inevitable by practicing his instrument in the dark.

It was a very nice night of music on the lawn and after the concert we all had the chance to do a meet and greet with Mr. Hall. The event allowed audience members to get photos (and of course, purchased his CD). The show was fantastic and I would highly recommend it to anyone should he come around in the future.

**Excerpt: Slam That! Living the Life She Wants Begins**

**with the Federation**

**by Jordyn Castor**

From the beginning my teacher for the blind emphasized the importance of learning Braille [applause]. She helped me to understand that Braille is the key to literacy and employment for the blind and would not allow me to use any technology in the classroom until I was proficient in grade 2 and Nemeth Braille [applause].

Although I didn’t use technology heavily in the classroom until about the fifth or sixth grade, my love of technology started in the second grade when my family purchased our first desktop computer. I was fascinated with what the computer could do for me and others like me, and had dreams of inventing a computer that could produce Braille someday. My teachers would hand me a piece of technology and they’d say, “Here, play with this. Figure it out, and then show us how to use it.” I would spend hours playing with applications on the computer, looking at my email, and IMing [instant messaging] my friends. Little did I know the enormous role technology would play for me in the coming years.

One of my most treasured experiences in elementary school was participating in the Buddy Program. My friend and I would play with children on the autism spectrum at recess, and I realized then that these children wanted what every other little kid wanted—a friend; someone to share cookies and chips with at lunch; someone to slide down the twisty slide with while it was covered in snow, because, well, that made you slide down faster. Through those three amazing years, I watched my friends’ lives change and transform. And with that my teachers gave me the opportunity to learn that giving back and helping others with disabilities was what I wanted to do as a career for the rest of my life.

But my childhood wasn’t always a plethora of treasured memories and experiences. Around the age of thirteen I began to experience a feeling of isolation and loneliness I’m sure many of us know very well. When I attended middle school, I started to realize something was different about me. My elementary school friends no longer thought it was the cool and popular thing to do to hang out with the blind kid. Teachers and others treated me differently. I found myself alone at the lunch table, excluded from groups at school, and with no one to talk to in class. I was the only blind student mainstreamed into my particular elementary and middle schools, so most students and teachers had never seen or worked with a blind person before. My knowledge of other blind students and adults in the area was extremely limited, and I felt as though I was the only blind person in the entire world—it was so tough.

However, my life, my views, and my attitudes towards blindness began to change in the summer of 2006 when I attended a games and technology camp at Camp Tuhsmeheta, affectionately known as “Camp T.” This is a camp specifically for blind students run by blind staff. Camp T was where I first encountered the NFB philosophy and where I was influenced by successful blind adults like J. J. Meddaugh and George Wurtzel, who showed me that everything would be just fine and that blindness did not have to hold me back from pursuing my dreams [applause]. Having blind friends and mentors is crucial to success. The individuals that I met at camp that summer are still great friends and mentors to this day, and I’m so grateful for everyone that I met that summer because they helped pull me out of the darkest place I’ve ever been. When I went back to school that year my confidence was completely restored, and I knew that everything would be all right, no matter what battles lay ahead.

In the summer of 2007 my perceptions and expectations of what a blind person could achieve as a career were absolutely shattered as I attended a STEM academy known as the NFB Youth Slam! [applause] I participated in the computer science track, where I wrote my very first computer program. I wrote a chatbot that could look up weather, news, dictionary definitions, and even play fun games such as Simon Says. Having instructors such as Jeff Bingham, and successful blind independent mentors such as Lindsay Yazzolino who believed in us and our ability to program was so empowering because it showed me that computer science was a possible career for me. I absolutely loved programming and was hooked. I was very emotional when I had to leave because I felt that the opportunity to program a piece of software was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I might never have again. One of the key phrases at Youth Slam was “Slam that!” Every time people said that blind people couldn’t participate in STEM-related activities we’d say, “Slam that!” Throughout the week, whether it was dissecting sharks, programming chatbots, or launching rockets, we realized that no dream was too big for us to achieve. Blindness did not define us [applause]. With the right tools, technology, resources, and support from our friends and family in the NFB, we could go anywhere and do anything we set our minds to.

Throughout the remainder of high school, I participated in other NFB programs, including a second Youth Slam and multiple leadership academies. At the 2009 Youth Slam, I participated in the astronomy track, where we touched space equipment in Shuttle Discovery in 2011 and felt tactile graphics of images taken from space telescopes—I still actually have my tactile graphic of Jupiter. At the NFB leadership academies, we learned about NFB philosophy and were empowered by blind mentors. At one particular leadership academy we had the choice of doing a variety of evening activities such as learning to play goalball, taking apart a computer, and applying makeup. Now the class that I chose was not the class for applying makeup, but the one for learning how to operate a chainsaw. My instructor was Mark Riccobono [applause], and we all wore sleepshades as we sawed logs and broke down the barriers of blindness. Participating in NFB activities has shattered even my own perceptions of what a blind person can achieve, and my NFB family continues to challenge, push, and inspire me beyond what I even thought was possible.

After graduating from high school, I attended Michigan State University [cheers] where I chose to receive my degree in computer science, but I faced many challenges along the way. Professors would say things like, “Are you sure you want to do this?” And I’d think to myself, “Slam that!” They’d say, “Isn’t there a field that’s more suited to you?” And again the only thing running through my mind was, “Slam that!” I had to develop strategies with my professors to make seemingly visual projects accessible to me. For example, we had to create an aquarium and software to animate cartoon characters, and the tools that we used to write our software were not always the most accessible. So I found myself memorizing my code files and the locations of my various functions and classes, just like I would memorize every page of my books when I was younger. Even though there were some individuals who did not believe that I could achieve my dream of becoming a software engineer, many people did. The Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at Michigan State was instrumental to my success in college as they helped by providing Braille math and science textbooks as well as 3-D printed models for calculus and physics. I leaned on my NFB family and friends when the challenges seemed to be greater than I could handle. Being a part of the NFB has allowed me to connect with members all over the world, to share tips, tricks, and advice for navigating the world of college—and not only that, but life as a professional as well. And this, coupled with my desire to help others with disabilities, got me to keep going, even though sometimes I wanted to give up.

I had internships helping to make software accessible at USAA in San Antonio, Goldman Sachs in New York City, and Apple in Cupertino [applause]. Last December I became the first totally blind undergraduate student to receive my degree in computer science from Michigan State [applause]. After graduation I moved to San Francisco to start my career as a software engineer. I now work at Apple full-time on the Accessibility Team [applause, cheers]. My job is incredible. I work with a passionate team of individuals dedicated to ensuring the accessibility of all of our products and features for everyone. Through my work enhancing the quality of features such as VoiceOver, I am able to give back to the blindness community that has given so much to me, as well as to make technology more accessible than ever for the future generations of blind people. I am so blessed and grateful for this opportunity.

The author Tasha Hoggatt says, “You must never doubt your ability to achieve anything, become anything, overcome anything, and inspire everything.” I would not be where I am today without the encouragement and support of my family, friends, and NFB family pushing me to strive for greatness and never to give up. Thank you to my mom for believing that I had a fighting chance and that I would overcome any obstacles placed before me even though the doctors felt otherwise; to my instructor Mrs. Curtis for her steadfast commitment to teaching me Braille as I now use a Braille display every time I write a piece of code [applause]; to my teachers, friends, and playground buddies for showing me that giving back and helping others is one of the greatest feelings in the world and that it’s okay to get a little snow in your snow pants every once in a while; to Jeff and Lindsey for empowering me and showing me that I could achieve my dreams of becoming a software engineer; to this guy right here, Mark Riccobono, for helping me to step outside my comfort zone and try dangerous things I never knew were possible [applause]; and to everyone else who has inspired me to never give up, strive for greatness, and let nothing stand in the way of where I want to go in life. The future of the NFB is so bright, and I look forward to all we will accomplish together as we continue to shatter the misconceptions and perceptions of blindness, while providing the opportunities, resources, and support to show the future generations of blind people that they, too, can turn their dreams into reality. Blindness does not define us and will never hold us back [applause, cheers]. When times get tough, when people say you can’t do something because you’re blind, and when it seems like everything is falling apart, remember the phrase, “Slam that!” And rise up, rise up unafraid. You can live the life you want. Thank you so much.

**The Blind Gardener: PLANT OR WEED**

**By Al Daniels**

What did you learn in this past year, anything about gardening? There are a multitude of things to learn. I can’t imagine what you have learned and there are too many things for me to enumerate, that I have learned. I’ll try to tell you about some of the things I have discovered. I have previously talked about watering, and in that department, I feel daily is better than an infrequent heavy watering. It is advisable to wear shorts or roll up your pants when watering. The blind gardener can’t help getting feet and legs wet, sometimes a blessing in hot weather. Save your old shoes or sneakers like you would for fishing. Flip-flops or loose fitting sandals are not good on wet boards. Your feet get slippery when wet and good traction is important, when navigating around your precious plant buddies. Let me not get ahead of myself. Preparing the soil is primary. Everybody has different ideas about fertilization, organic or chemical, and how often, how much. Let’s suppose you get through those steps, and consider the plants themselves. Plants already started from a nursery or garden center are more easily identified, simply because they are larger than any other plant matter, providing you have cleared the soil properly. Weeds can grow up fast, so pull them out as soon as they appear next to your plants. At the same time you can dig around your plants and loosen the soil, so they will receive nutrition and water from the surrounding area. You may want to “hill” around some plants, idde., dig around the plant and put a small mound around the base of the plant. This prevents the water from collecting and just sitting at the base of the plant, giving it “wet feet”.

TOMATOES are distinctive in their scent and rough leaves with a main stem sprouting smaller branches. It is a large plant in its mature state and should be staked. Lettuce is a crop that usually likes cool weather and as you see it in its mature state is leafy with not much of a main stem or branch, idde. The leaves seem to grow directly out of the ground. Pepper plants are interestingly like tomato plants with a main stem growing up from the earth but the leaves are very smooth and glossy. The main stem is interesting as it tends to resemble a square shape as it grows. The stem is also smooth with no roughness at all. Basil is an herb that is an annual also. Annual meaning like the plants above it grows only for one season and leaves no roots to sprout again the following year. Perennials, on the other hand, have some roots that remain in the ground and if you are careful to tend the soil in that same area, it will grow again the next year. Basil has a main stem but is not more than about six inches in height. The scent alone is a pleasant mild scent. If you touch it, and sniff your finger, it will have some scent on it. The leaves branch off with stems of their own and they have a cupped shape, with edges turning down. The leaves are also smoother than most other plants around them. Cucumbers are a vigorous grower and need plenty of space to stretch out. Squash plants and cucumbers are similar in the space requirement, and in the fact that the large leaves and stems are “furry”. That is to say they feel like they have some fuzzy, furry feel when you touch them. Most squash plants extend from a center point in all directions, but cucumbers crawl willy-nilly looking for something to climb on like a fence or grid. Eggplants resemble the tomato, as they have one main stem and grow vertically also like a tomato plant.

Suffice to say, every plant has some distinguishing tactile features. When plants are tiny sprouts, grown from seed, it’s difficult for the blind gardener. And, in some cases, knowing when to pick vegetables is dependent on its color. Size is not always a definite determinate. DAILY attention to a garden is sometimes a lot to ask, but it is important. Growing a garden may work for you, it’s a good habit to acquire.

**Living the Dream: A Life of Indolence**

**By Rich McGaffin**

Life can be somewhat cruel and deliver many strange and unpleasant events, but I find the trick is to look for something to build your dream on. For me it’s working in my back yard, and helping others. I’m not as active member of the NFB of CT as I once was, due to personal issues. However, I still live the dream and hopefully the lifestyle of independence.

I spend my days doing yard work. This summer, I cut down 2 small trees using a bow saw, and pruned a couple of others with a pole saw. I’m not sure how many of you know what a bow saw is. It’s exactly what it sounds like: a saw which is shaped like a bow, or should I say the handle is shaped like a bow, the blade is a thin strip of metal which would be where the string would be located. A pole saw is, again, exactly what it sounds like. The one I have has a chopper which is controlled by a string or piece of rope, and also has a saw, which is also controlled by the same string.

Altogether I believe I’ve cut down about 5 small trees. When I say small I figure they’re about 15-20 feet tall. I cut the last two this summer, along with a branch that stretched halfway across the yard. I couldn’t believe how long it was myself until I saw it lying on the ground.

We have this strange type of ivy that was growing in our yard choking all the trees which is why I’ve had to cut them down. In fact it’s kind of funny that a couple of summers ago, I was cutting down one tree, and when I got about 3 quarters of the tree cut for some reason, I pushed against, and the hole tree lifted right out of the ground, which only goes to show how dead it was.

Although my wife Janet who is sighted mows our lawn, my job is to keep the electric cord away from the lawn mower. We tried it the other way once, and she didn’t move the cord quick enough, and I ran it over.

Recently Janet and I purchased Amazon fire tablets. After Justin sent me a link to learn where and how to set up the accessibility I’ve not only figured out how to use it with somewhat ease, I am also assisting my wife as she learns to create and store files in the word document.

So you see, life is what you make of it friends. The need and challenge of being independent is there for us all, whether you join a picket line or lend a hand to a friend. Living the dream comes in many ways and forms.

**Dr. Grant Visits Louis Braille Shrine**

**Edition: Braille Monitor, December, 1959**

The California Council Bulletin is carrying a series of articles entitled "Keeping up with Isabelle." In the current issue she tells of her visit to Coupvray:

"...The highlight of my four days in France was a pilgrimage to the home of Louis Braille, in a very small village which has neither bus service nor railway station. I left the Gare du Nord on a small suburban train with wooden seats, full of happy children leaving the dusty heat of the city for the summer vacation. Paris mercifully ships its children away for the summer, away from the maddening crowds of tourists which all but take over the city at this season of the year. I left the train at a village which was only two kilometres from Coupvray. I dropped into the village cafe and over a plate liberally filled with sliced tomatoes chatted with the concierge, his wife, and the village gossip--who had come by to have her usual morning aperitif. They helped me find a villager who was willing to drive me to Coupvray.

"The drowsy hamlet was asleep that hot July day as the noonday sun beat down on the quiet countryside, silencing everything but the chirp of the cicada under the trees and the soft lowing of a cow in the distance. A little old lady, Mile. Detour, had the key to the Louis Braille home and accompanied me there. The little house nestled on the side of a hill, the road going by the door of the workshop where Louis's father had carried on his business as a saddler. Inside, the old workbench still showed traces of the making of the saddles. There were still unfinished bits of harness and saddles, and there also were Pere Braille's tools--one of which had blinded the three-year-old Louis. The saddler had been standing on his bench, hanging some completed work on the wall, when a heavy awl had slipped from his hand and struck the youngster.

"We climbed the narrow winding stair where perhaps the distraught young father had carried his agonized child up to the living quarters on the main floor, which is immediately above the workshop. This is now the modest museum, housing the family documents and the house-hold properties. Here tables lie covered with the fruits of Louis Braille's imagination and industry. I was especially interested in the letters of encouragement from Charles Barbier, with whom Louis Braille had shared his idea for a system of touch reading when he first saw its possibilities. And so on from one display to another, and at last out into the garden on the upper level of the house, which overlooked the wide and fertile valley below. Louis Braille could not enjoy this panorama but he opened up a wider one to the blind of the world by adhering stubbornly to his idea of touch reading, even though the university in which he was working frowned upon his efforts.

"I visited the village church which the Brailles had attended, as well as the Dukes of Rouen before them. I traced the outline of the bronze monument showing Louis Braille teaching the boy to read with his fingers. I visited the cemetery close by the church where the remains of Louis Braille had been exhumed and re-buried with the great men in the Pantheon in Paris. These only added to the conviction that Coupvray will surely become a world shrine. We, who owe so much to Louis Braille, are helping to make this a reality."

**On Love and Rebuilding**

**By Anonymous**

When I was a small child, I was always comfortable with my blindness. My mum tells me that I would approach people at events and confidently introduce myself. "I'm Holly, I'm four and I'm blind." In my family, blindness was just another part of the many things that made me who I was. I liked to climb trees, ride horses, and bury myself in stacks of braille books. I never felt like I was limited because quite simply my parents never allowed me to feel that way. If I fell down and cried they'd pick me up, and tell me to carry on with whatever I'd been doing. And I did.

I knew I was different from other children. I read braille, used a screen reader and was pulled out of school for an hour a week to learn to use a cane. The adaptations I used were tools that enabled me to be successful, and I loved the freedom they gave me.

Although I had been taught to feel comfortable with my blindness, other people still viewed me as somehow less. I noticed this for the first time, when I was six years old. In these situations I would experience this awful, sickening sensation, like a million bugs crawling through your insides. Your whole body begins to heat up with fear and embarrassment as you try and find a way out of the situation you're in, even though you know your attempts are futile. I went from loving my entire being, to wishing I could be anyone other than myself. School was a place I both loved and feared. I spent five, long years being bullied to the point of screaming, throwing myself on the floor, and refusing to go. I hated my parents, especially my mother for making me. I blamed them for what I was experiencing, after all it was because of them I was blind.

However, in class I was desperate for knowledge, soaking up every bit of information I was given. Yet, knowing I would have to spend time with other children filled me with anxiety. One incident, I remember most vividly. It took place when I was about 8 years old. My class was getting changed for PE, and I'd taken off my school uniform. I reached down to pick up my bag to get my gym clothes, but it was gone. I was crouched in my underwear on the changing room floor, frantically feeling for the bag I knew I had placed beside me. There must have been around 15 other girls in the room who could see what was happening, but none of them would approach me. Nobody even spoke to me. I can't remember if I cried, I can't even remember if I shouted in anger and desperation. Somehow, I must have put my uniform on again, and left the room to find a teacher, but I don't remember doing that either. Much of my childhood is a blur like that, blocked out because, even now remembering causes me to feel sick.

Eventually, a teacher found my gym bag. It was outside having been, I assume, either thrown out a window or carried out of the room by a child on small, fast feet. I begged the teachers to listen to me, to understand that I hadn't done this, that I was scared and lost and lonely. But instead, I was told to be more careful with my things, to not forget where I had left them. From then on, I refused to use a cane, and stopped describing myself as blind. I became angry when my parents mentioned my disability to strangers. Slowly, I began to erase the part of myself that I had once embraced. I was unable to go places alone because I couldn't stand to be seen with a cane, it was yet another symbol of my shameful, awful difference. It took me years of painfully slow progress to reclaim my identity, and begin to heal the chasms that seemed to have opened inside of me.

Despite living under a shroud of self-loathing, I had plans for my future. I wanted to study abroad, to travel the world, and go to university. But I knew deep down that unless I made some changes I would never do those things. Finally, at 17 I bought myself a new cane and tentatively allowed it to become a part of my life again. I was sick of being at the mercy of others, of relying on friends and teachers to get between my classes. I knew that I was capable of being so much more than I was.

I am now 22. I have studied in Spain, started my degree and traveled alone to the US. I have friends who can't imagine the person I once was. They know me as a girl who travels independently, and talks about blindness being an important, much loved part of my identity. The years of fear, and shame may not be visible but they are a constant companion that I expect to live with for the rest of my life. I still have to battle with my mind, to live the life I want, telling myself that it's okay to be seen, that I don't need to hide away, and that I am safe in my own body.

When we talk about the impact of lowered expectations it is often in the context of allowing blind people to obtain an education, and participate in activities of their choosing. I however, believe it goes much further than this. When we expect less of disabled people we are contributing to a culture that allows a bright, confident girl to lose herself in shame and hatred. We must not give power to those who dismiss the voices of disabled people, especially children. I have made the choice to reclaim that power, to make it my own. I will not allow myself to be silenced anymore, and it is my mission to show children that they never have to be ashamed of who they are.

**HAWAIIAN TIKKI FISH**

**By Pamela B. Garde**

INGREDIENTS:

Frozen or fresh Mahi Mahi, (Dolphin).

Nonstick cooking spray

Teriyaki or soy sauce.

Average Size Baking Dish.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees (f).

You will know when oven is ready to go. You will hear either a ding, buzz or click.

Take nonstick cooking spray and place some in dish. Add Teriyaki or Soy Sauce. (There are some low-cal. Sauces on the market).

Then, place fish on top of afore mentioned ingredients. Then, add a little more sauce for a good glaze.

Warning! After taking fish out of refrigerator, check for ice. If fish is icy, place it under warm water which would remove it quickly.

Set timer at 25-30 minutes. After timer goes off, remove dish from oven.

To find out if fish is done, stick a fork into it. If fish breaks apart or is soft all the way through, it is done. Set dish on stove to cool for 10 minutes. Place tin foil or plastic wrap over dish for freshness. I love eating this after the 10-minute cooling time). But if you are not hungry after the fish is cooled, put it in the refrigerator.

Enjoy! Aloha!

**CHAPTER MEETING INFORMATION**

**DECEMBER 2016**

**Note that our chapters generally do not meet in July & August**

**At-Large Chapter Conference Calls Central Connecticut Chapter**

Kimberly Tindall, President Deb Reed, President

860-938-1584 860-973-3679

Conference Call Meetings: Meetings:

3rd Wednesdays at 8:00 PM 2nd Saturdays at noon

Call 641-715-3294; access 433706# Plainville Library

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long distance charges

**East of the River Chapter Greater Hartford Chapter**

Marie Beaulier, President Barbara Blejewski, President

860-569-6436 860-721-8601

Meetings: 3rd Saturdays at 10:00 AM Meetings: 3rd Saturdays at 10:00 AM

St Elizabeth Manor Comm Room McCauley Comm Room

41 Applegate Lane, East Hartford 275 Steele Rd, Bldg A, 4th floor

West Hartford

**Greater Waterbury Chapter Middletown Chapter**

Josefina Martinez, President Terry Woolard, President

203-578-6471 860-346-7526

Meetings: 2nd Saturdays at noon Meetings: 3rd Saturdays at noon

Silas Bronson Library Russell Library

267 Grand St, Waterbury 123 Broad St, Middletown

**Shoreline Chapter Southern Connecticut Chapter**

Jim McCollum, President Encole Stewart, President

860-581-0430 203-923-2191

Meetings: 3rd Saturdays at 1:00 PM Meetings: 2nd Saturdays at 1:00 PM

First Congregational Church Fowler Memorial Building

1009 Main St, Branford 45 New Haven Ave, Milford

**Stamford Area Chapter**

John Padilla, President

203-325-4695

Meetings: 2nd Saturdays at 1:00 PM

Stamford Hospital

Shelburne & West Broad, Stamford