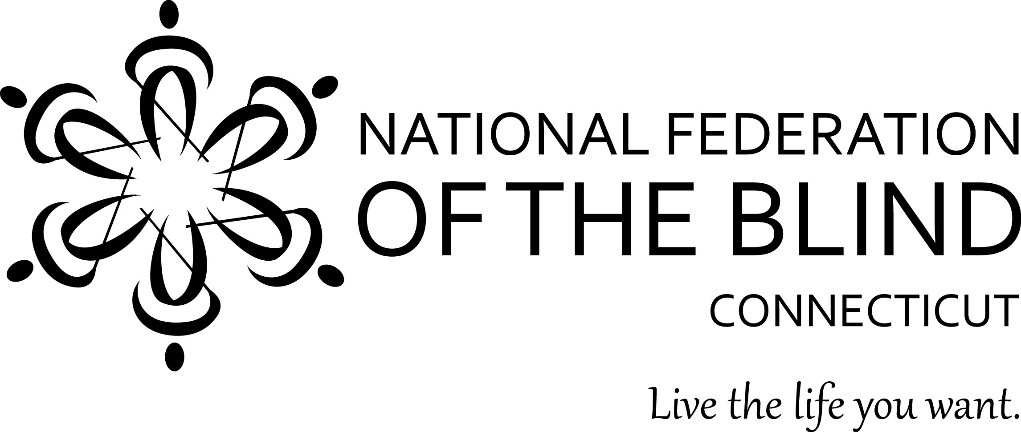
**THE**

**FEDERATIONIST**

**IN CONNECTICUT**

**Spring 2019**

**Executive Editor: Melissa Carney**



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**From the Editor**

**Melissa Carney**

**Executive Editor, The Federationist in Connecticut**

Happy spring to all! The cold weather, endless hours of shoveling snow, and fast-approaching sunsets are now behind us. It’s time to drag the grills out of our sheds for a nice barbecue, inhale the sweet scent of lilacs and magnolia in the air, and spend our afternoons soaking up every last ray of sunshine. For many of us, the winter was a time of hardship and struggle, but with the change of seasons comes a renewal of energy, a twinge of excitement in your stomach that symbolizes hope and new adventures on the horizon. It is only fitting, then, that this issue of the Federationist speaks to empowerment. Several of our members tell the stories of how they became involved with the National Federation of the Blind, pursued various avenues of leadership, advocated on the behalf of people with disabilities, and most importantly, found confidence and perseverance within themselves to achieve their greatest aspirations. These adults and students did not let the characteristic of blindness define them, rather, they used their disability as an enabling asset to their success. They fought against low expectations, educated others about the virtues of inclusion and acceptance, and paved the path for others to advocate in their footsteps. In addition, they tell the difficult truth undermining many of our experiences within our home communities.

I want to extend my sincerest gratitude to Maryanne Melley, the previous Editor of the Federationist, for passing the responsibility of this wonderful publication on to me. She has given me a fantastic opportunity, and I hope to produce the same quality work in her wake. Please enjoy the following articles about journeys of trials, triumph, self-growth, and success. If you would like to submit your own piece of writing to the next issue of the Federationist, send it my way. This publication cannot exist without the support of our CT NFB family. I want to hear your stories, your successes, your struggles, and everything in between.

Please sit back, relax, and enjoy the latest issue of the Federationist!

Feel free to direct any suggestions, questions, or concerns to Melissa Carney, executive Editor, at [ctabs.president@gmail.com](mailto:ctabs.president@gmail.com).

# **Reflections on Washington Seminar: How Do You Define Advocacy?**

## **Words from Isabel Rosario**

This was my first time going to Washington Seminar, and I am very happy to have had the opportunity to attend this wonderful event. I recently lost the rest of my vision, and I was reluctant on going because I feared that I would get lost or that something would go wrong being that I am new to being blind. What motivated me to push myself to go to Washington was the fact that the Bills that were being presented were so important and extremely relevant to my current situation. Being able to go to Washington and having my story told was a blessed experience and I am very thankful. Thank you for your time and I am grateful for the experience.

## **Words from Jim McCollum**

This year I participated in my fourth consecutive National Federation of the Blind Washington Seminar, and it seems that each year it proves to be more meaningful for me than the year before.

This year I gained more knowledge of how our congressional representatives and senators approach deciding what bills they will or will not support. This knowledge came from presentations by Federation leaders, from interacting with my fellow Federationists, and from visiting the offices of our representatives and senators, and engaging with their staff members. I believe this will make me a more effective advocate for the blind, and a better mentor for those who are less experienced in our work. I always find the enthusiasm for the Federation and its ideas so refreshing at Washington Seminar. We know who we are, we know what we want to achieve, and we’re confident that we will achieve. In my day-to-day life, I encounter so many obstacles, due to the fact that the world is made to best accommodate the sighted majority, and to the frustrations that come from dealing with people who don’t understand blindness and blind people. I always leave Washington with a renewed sense of confidence and energy. Seeing others learn, and practice what they’ve learned, makes it clear that our movement, and all we do to support it, are good, and will continue to improve the lives of blind people for years to come. I would like to thank the nine members of NFB of Connecticut, who attended the Seminar with me, for yet another wonderful experience.

## **Words from Brianna Rigsbee**

Growing up completely blind has been nothing short of a challenge for me. I’ve had my share of support, but over the years, I’ve had to learn to stand up for myself, both academically and socially. My recent involvement in the NFB has encouraged me to continue to advocate—not only for myself, but for others as well. My independence and self-advocacy skills have strengthened a great deal. This has allowed me to make valuable connections with successful blind individuals who share the same drive, passion, and willingness to succeed in life as I do. They have empowered me to step out of my comfort zone. For instance, I traveled to Washington DC to speak with my local congressman about different legislative initiatives that are affecting blind and visually impaired people today. This year, in particular, was a very special one for me. I had the distinct pleasure of briefly speaking with Jahana Hayes and Joe Courtney. Everything was genuine—from the gleeful hellos, to the sincere goodbyes. Even though they weren't my own local congressmen, I still felt heard, like my voice mattered. It's not every day that you get to actually get the opportunity to sit down with the people in charge, so that's why it was so important to me. Although this was my second year going to lobby on the Hill, I can honestly say that this was the best year yet. I look forward to the many years to come.

# **Losing Sight, but Restoring Vision**

# **By Honorata Szymczyk**

I was an art teacher in the Connecticut public school system for fifteen years. During that time I grew to understand the importance of my students advocating for themselves in (and out) of the classroom. It was their voices that helped me become a more effective teacher. When encouraged to ask the right questions, express their difficulties, voice their opinions and negotiate within reason, the students sparked drastic changes in the classroom that heightened their interest in learning and improved student-teacher relationships. In teaching my students how to empower themselves, their creativity and ownership in learning blossomed. Over the years, I had students with various disabilities in my classroom. I took on the role of advocating for these students by openly, honestly, and respectfully addressing disability etiquette amongst their peers and my colleagues. By promoting understanding and inclusion, I promoted social change and renewed my faith in humanity. Due to a decline in eyesight caused by Retinal Pigmentosa, I struggled tremendously to continue to maintain my level of effectiveness as a teacher. I found myself being pushed out of my job by the school district, and felt that while I had been able to aid the students in advocating for themselves, I failed in doing the same for myself. With my poor vision, I had found it difficult to do my own research to learn my rights and my employer’s responsibilities. I reached out to various agencies for six weeks looking for guidance, but was dismissed each time as soon as I mentioned the Board of Education. I felt lost. Through one of the agency referrals, I ended up talking to Gary Allen, who was later elected the NFB Affiliate president. During that difficult time, he graciously lent me a hand, resulting in an extension of my employment for another year. I then realized that it was not that I had failed in self-advocacy, but more so that I did not have the support and resources to do so. Losing my job and spending more time traveling independently thanks to my now best friend, my white cane, has made me realize that many adults do not have basic knowledge or intuition on how to best interact with people with disabilities. People who serve the public often lack basic etiquette of interacting with disabled individuals. To make matters worse, workers in public safety and local government are oblivious to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as was I before starting my own research in disability rights. Of course, I was familiar with Title 1 and 504 plans, but neither during my college preparation nor my 15 years of teaching career did the Americans with disabilities act come up. How are we supposed to change the culture and eliminate prejudice without educating those who serve the public? Approximately 1 in 5 people in the United States have some form of disability.

As a typical sighted person, I did not encounter as much ignorance and incompetence, but once I lost most of my sight it became apparent that there is a great need for teaching others blind etiquette. Surprisingly, those hired as service to the public continue to exhibit a dire need for sensitivity training. On the other hand, there were many strangers that I encountered in my travels who were intuitively courteous and respectful members of the general public. They were eager to learn and assist if needed.

For this reason, and many others, losing my sight was quite daunting at times. As I was not connected to the world of blindness, I sought understanding of my loss by joining support groups for the blind on social media, which gave me greater strength and courage. Aside from a couple of blind students in the Connecticut school system, I had never met any blind adults. This new internet resource opened up doors to new friendships and the realization of being quite typical in this recently discovered blind world. Around that time, I met my now fiancé, Phillip Magalnick, at the 2016 state convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut, spurred by his invitation. As our relationship grew, so did the realization that our collective knowledge and background in social service sectors makes up for a perfect storm. We formed The Blind Voices. We promptly sought out and participated in many local seminars, trainings, and conventions in order to learn and network. Once again, we crossed paths with Gary Allan and met with him at the 2017 NFB of Connecticut state convention. We were both eager learners who dove right in. That weekend changed our lives for the better. I no longer felt that we were lonely soldiers pushing for equal access. The NFB is a collective voice of the blind. From the moment we were enveloped into the organization, we felt as though we belonged to a community. President Riccobono’s speech held us captive and focused, as he spoke of his journey with blindness, as well as obstacles and barriers that the Federation has successfully taken down. He called for action for, “we walk alone and march together”. I was honored to be there. I felt empowered to move mountains, now that I had the guidance and confidence to contribute to future movements.

# **Tackling Opportunities: How One Student Found His Stride**

# **By Brian Martin**

My name is Brian Martin. I’m 21 years old and live in Stamford Connecticut. I am currently a second semester sophomore at Mitchell College in New London, Connecticut. Ever since I was a little kid, I never let my blindness hold me back from being a normal person. I attended mainstream schools all my life. I learned about the NFB through my Vocational Rehab Counselor during high school. In the summer of 2015, I traveled to Minnesota, where I attended the Blind Inc. summer prep program. I learned how to build upon, and gain, blindness skills. In this program, this program also enabled me to attend my first ever National Convention. At first, I didn’t know what to expect, but I was very excited. I looked at the agenda when it first came out and made a list of the activities I was interested in. In particular, I looked forward to finding a group of people around my age that I could be a part of. For this reason, I joined the National Association of Blind Students. In doing so, I was given the opportunity to speak at the 2015 Connecticut state convention. Justin Salisbury asked me to speak about my experience as a participant at the Blind Inc. summer program. I was then elected president of the Connecticut association of blind Students. I was very proud of myself. I realized that I had potential as a leader, and could inspire other people to unlock the same confidence in their abilities. Not long after, in the fall of 2016, I attended the Colorado Center for the Blind in order to get my daily living skills on track. The 9-month program drastically enhanced my independence. Leadership roles kept popping up in that environment as well. I was asked to teach a couple of braille classes when my instructor was absent. I found pride in yet another accomplishment. I discovered that I wanted to work in the blindness field, whether it be teaching blind students or adult’s braille, technology, or mobility skills. As a result, in the upcoming year, I intend to change my major from communications to education. Additionally, when I graduate from Mitchell, I hope to obtain a Master’s degree in special education for blind and visually impaired people from Northern Illinois University.

# **Reality Check: The Importance of Competitive and Integrated Employment**

# **By Melissa Carney**

From a very young age, we are taught that the main focal points of our lives are education, employment, extracurricular involvement, and continuous self-growth. We are pushed to receive stellar grades so that we may land the perfect job, or climb a metaphorical ladder until we obtain success. We are expected to put the money we earn towards our future endeavors, whether that be housing, transportation, insurance, or food on the table. If you cannot meet certain societal standards, you are often thought as lazy or unproductive. However, what many fail to realize is that there are systematic barriers in place that infringe upon one’s ability to secure employment, particularly in regards to people with disabilities. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 65.7 percent of nondisabled people are employed, while only 18.7% of people with disabilities are employed in 2018. Why is this the case? Don’t certain laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act level the playing field and prohibit discrimination?

While the above laws have granted people with disabilities copious opportunities to receive adequate education, prioritized accessibility, accommodations, and greater participation in the workforce as a whole, the lack of supported education to career paths, accessible professions, and segregated employment continue to hinder those with disabilities. It is not enough for people with disabilities to be employed out of a set of federal guidelines or pity; greater quality should be ensured as well. There is a common misconception that people with disabilities are not able to compete as equally in the workforce as their nondisabled peers due to the extra support they may require. For this reason, thousands of people with disabilities are placed into sheltered workshops. These workshops support segregation and subminimum wages. Pay rate is often based on how much an individual is able to produce per hour, which discriminates against those who require accommodations or slower working speeds. Some receive only a handful of pennies per hour.

In general, the tasks that they are assigned do not usually account for individual skillsets, disability-related needs, or interests. A one size fits all approach is neither practical nor realistic; people naturally excel in different ways, and it is grossly unfair to assume that, because one disabled person can complete a specific task, every disabled person can manage similar projects in the same way. In other words, Sheltered workshops are essentially a setup for failure. Some people are better suited for certain tasks than others. Specific skillsets should not be devalued; Individuality is perhaps the primary key to successful employment.

An astounding number of American citizens are still under the impression that people with disabilities must be controlled and monitored for their own safety. However, communities around the country continue to suffer under this mind-set. Nondisabled peers remain ignorant towards the capabilities of people with disabilities, while people with disabilities remain barred from reaching their full potential. Integration is key for knowledge, networking, stepping stone progressions, and individualization. Not all people have the same interests or abilities, but they should all at least be given the chance to build on their skills and take chances as readily as their colleagues.

Society tells us that we should fear the unknown and live by a specific set of expectations. This psychological trap is especially prevalent for people with disabilities. Some are vehemently opposed to leaving behind sheltered workshops and being on their own because they have been made to believe that they must be dependent on others. It is not enough to develop the law to account for the importance of competitive and integrated employment; the attitudes of communities at large must be changed as well. Low societal expectations must give way to programs for confidence-building and empowerment. Fear must give way to receptiveness to education. Half the problem with sheltered workshops and subminimum wages is the sheer motivation behind them. Nondisabled community members must be informed about discrimination issues just as much as the disabled community. Confrontation is in order, and it does not need to be restricted to Capitol Hill alone. Society must be taught that we can all benefit from integration, equal opportunities, and open mindedness.

# **Growing Comfortable with the Uncomfortable: An address delivered at the meeting of the National Association of Blind Students**

# **Reprinted from Braille Monitor, Vol. 62, No. 3, March 2019**

**By Trisha Kulkarni**

Seven years ago I did not know a single blind person, and I was convinced that Braille was simply decorative artwork on signage. Now I've moved across the country with my guide dog Liberty to seize life's opportunities in a new and exciting place independently. Of course I have fallen both literally and figuratively in the pursuit of my dreams, but I have realized that pushing past the boundaries of what is comfortable is the only way to see how far your capabilities stretch. Today I want to share with you a series of experiences that have defined my character and purpose within and beyond the NFB. But more importantly, I want to challenge each of you to embrace the power you have to create meaning in all aspects of your life. In order to fuel the NFB forward into a new generation of leaders and advocates, we need to continue growing as individuals. Only then will we best be able to break down the barriers of expectations that stand between us and our dreams.

My first story begins at a time in life that most people like to forget: middle school. At the start of seventh grade, I not only had to deal with pimples and the start of puberty, but I also had to face a new challenge. A few months prior I had faced a retinal detachment that left me completely blind and face-down in bed for months to recover from surgery. When it was finally time to return to school, I had no orientation and mobility training, no knowledge of Braille, and no access to assistive technology. I was still trying to learn how to get around my house, and it seemed impossible that I would ever learn how to match my clothes again. However, I did have my academic ambitions. I worked hard still to reach my goals in the classroom, and with lots of support I finished middle school with good grades and a determination to continue finding success.

When I got to high school, however, it was harder to ignore the barriers that stood between me and my sighted peers. People began hinting that continuing on the advanced track in school created too much work for my teachers and loved ones. When I sat in meetings fighting for my right to take honors coursework, I was told that the reason my Braille materials were coming in months late was that I was an anomaly for wanting to pursue a rigorous course of study. What was being suggested was that perhaps there was an easier way to graduation?

But I refused to lower my standards. I started taking honors classes and sought involvement in extracurricular activities. Despite the resistance I faced, I sought not only to find success in these endeavors but also my independence. What I came to realize is that there are a lot of preconceived notions about students with disabilities. The expectation is to bring these students up to average, but to excel seems unnecessary. I was often called an overachiever, as if I was striving to accomplish more than I should be.

If you have a goal, do not let other people’s skepticism deter you from reaching it. Stay grounded in the values and missions that are important to you, and do not limit your scope. Sometimes you will find that your actions change minds better than words.

Of course changing expectations came with many hard nights. But in the end the sleepless nights and sacrificed lunch periods were for a greater goal than just getting my high school diploma.

The idea of college started entering conversations in tenth grade, and coming from a competitive high school, it didn't ever seem to leave. My sighted peers and I all worried about what university would best fit our personalities and our academic interests. But I also had to think about my blindness. It wasn't going to deter me from reaching my dream schools, but I did devote many hours to orientation and mobility training, and I received my guide dog before my senior year of high school.

There was just one problem: I didn't know where I wanted to go to school. On a vacation to the west coast, I finally found Stanford. I fell in love with the people and the talent that occupied every aspect of the campus. But as I walked the paved sidewalks listening to the tour guide describe the beautiful scenery and rich history, I couldn't help the doubt that crept into my mind. It was thousands of miles away from home; eighty-eight hundred acres, and had the lowest admission rate in the country—it felt crazy. I remember going home that night, after my parents fell asleep, and I stayed up for hours. It was easily the hardest night of my life. It was the first time that I felt like my blindness would deter me from reaching what I wanted most.

However, after listening to my motivation mix on Spotify and talking to my family, I began to fill out the application anyway. Suddenly all the steps that I had taken forward to reach that moment didn't seem like enough progress. I worried how I'd measure up. But December 8 came sooner than anyone could have expected, and as I sat in my living room with my family, with my finger hovering over the "view status" button, my heart began to pound. I read the word "congratulations" and began to scream.

That night meant so much more than just getting into college for me. It was the first time I'd realized how much there is to lose by not going after what you want. I was so close to not applying because of my fear that I was not good enough. Do not let your fear of failure be bigger than your dreams. Only you have the power to determine your self-worth.

Today I am in my second quarter at Stanford University. Of course my transition to college has not all been comfortable, as a broken tooth, many countless nights of no sleep, and many lost days on that 8800-acre campus can speak for. But I have learned so much about myself and my aspirations since moving to California last September. Being away for school has shown me that I can venture out and find my own way. I discovered a new outlet for my voice by writing for The Stanford Daily and have taken on leadership positions in my dorm government. I survived my first computer science class and have applied to get some of my research published. I have explored the social scene of college life and have spent many late nights talking with my friends and eating way too much junk food.

College has shown me that every day is an adventure, and with every step that you take outside of your comfort zone you learn more about yourself and what is important to you.

I am a Federationist, but I am also a sister, a daughter, a friend, a writer, a black belt in Taekwondo, a chocolate lover, a Harry Potter enthusiast, a social advocate, and a terrible dancer. My purpose in the NFB is not defined by my blindness, but by all the other intersections that I bring to the table.

As I leave you today, I want to encourage you to grow comfortable with the idea of the uncomfortable. Life will throw many adversities and opportunities at you that you will not be able to control, but they will define your character and purpose more than you realize. If you do not let your fear of failure stand in the way of what you want and do not limit your potential, the world will be a better place with your contributions.

# **From Actor to Dialect Coach**

# **An Interview with Sammi Grant**

# **Reprinted from Future Reflections, Vol. 38, No. 1, Winter 2019**

**Deborah Kent Stein**: Please tell me a bit about your childhood. Where did you grow up? Did you go through school as a blind student?

**Sammi Grant**: I grew up in Buffalo Grove, Illinois, which is a suburb of Chicago. As a child I had a whole series of problems with my eyes—cataracts, glaucoma, and a detached retina. By the time I was ten I was legally blind.

**DKS**: When did you become interested in theater?

**SG**: When I was a child I was always corralling people to watch me put on performances in the living room. My family was very supportive, and I went to acting camp the summer I was ten. From that point on, I knew I wanted to be in the theater. Nobody ever told me that because I'm blind I couldn't act on the stage. My family always encouraged me to pursue my dreams.

**DKS**: What blindness tools did you use in school?

**SG**: I went through school mostly using a CCTV. As a teenager I was very sad and angry about my blindness, and I wanted nothing to do with using a cane or learning Braille. But by my senior year I realized I had a choice. I could learn to use a cane and go to college, or I could refuse to use a cane and stay home. I buckled down and learned cane travel. Today I use a cane, I use a computer with JAWS, and I use VoiceOver and various apps on the iPhone. I've learned Braille, but I'm not fluent enough to use it for reading scripts.

**DKS**: Where did you do your undergraduate work? What was your major?

**SG**: I entered Illinois Wesleyan University in 2008 and majored in theater arts.

**DKS**: Was the college supportive toward you as a blind theater major?

**SG**: Not too surprisingly, the college had never had a blind student majoring in theater before. To their credit, they did their best to make it work for me. During my freshman year a blind actor, Marilee Talkington, came to our campus as a guest artist. My professors made sure I got the chance to meet her. We had dinner together, and we've stayed in touch ever since. Marilee has been a great resource for me.

**DKS**: Did your instructors work with you on things that might be challenging to learn nonvisually, such as gestures and movement?

**SG**: They certainly tried. People would tell me that I looked like a sighted person onstage. I thought that was a great compliment when I was in college, but now I realize it's pretty toxic. It's like saying that I'm okay because I don't look blind; I can pass for sighted. The reality is I'm a blind person, and that's okay. Is it necessary to appear sighted on stage? Should I seek to play sighted characters, or should I just be me? These are big questions to think about. During my college years I became very self-conscious about the gestures I used on stage. My instructors worked with me a bit, and I really learned a lot from a couple of student directors. When I was a senior I did a one-woman show. The play was called The Syringa Tree. I had to portray twenty-one different characters, and they each had their own physicality. It was a tremendous challenge, and I really learned a lot.

**DKS**: What did you do after you graduated?

**SG**: I went to Chicago and started trying out for roles in plays.

**DKS**: How did you deal with the scripts at auditions?

**SG**: Handling the script really wasn't a problem. I'd sit down with a reader before the audition, and we'd go over the script together. I'd memorize the role I meant to audition for. I've developed a really good memory, and I learn lines very quickly.

**DKS**: How did directors react when they found out you're blind?

**SG**: It varied a lot. Some were very cool about it, and we worked together really well. Others were not at all open to me. The director at one small company told me, "If we don't cast you, it's not because you're blind." Now, why would they say that, unless blindness was on their mind? Eventually I learned that if a company wouldn't accommodate me, I was better off going somewhere else. It wasn't worth my time and energy to try to work with people who really didn't want me to be there. It was an unhealthy situation. Today there is a big push for inclusivity in theater. Opportunities are opening up for actors who bring all kinds of life experiences to the stage. I think that the climate for blind actors and actors with other disabilities has improved a lot.

**DKS**: How did you shift away from acting and become a dialect coach?

**SG**: I took a couple of courses on speech and dialect when I was in college, but my formal training in that area was pretty minimal. In one dialects class we learned four or five common accents. Later I did an independent study class with another student and learned seven more. The Syringa Tree, my one-woman show, took place in South Africa, and I had to use ten different accents, some of them completely new to me. Mostly I've been self-taught, and this seems to be true for most dialect coaches. As a blind person I've learned to listen very carefully to people's speech patterns. One very interesting class I took in college focused on IPA, the International Phonetic Alphabet. IPA symbols represent every sound in the world's languages. English contains twenty-six phonetic vowel sounds, and other languages have many, many more. The IPA really helps bridge the gaps between hearing and spelling. I can access the IPA using my CCTV, and also one of my teachers created a tactile phonetic alphabet for me to use. By the time I got serious about coaching, I had lots of contacts in Chicago's theater world. I started working with individual actors who hired me, and after a while directors started asking me to help on a particular show. Looking back now on those first shows I think, "I should never have done it that way!" I learned a lot through trial and error. I taught what I knew, and the actors sounded better. Somehow it worked out. Chicago has a very rich theater scene, so it was a great place for me to start my career. I worked on about sixty shows during a six-year period. I worked with some of the major theaters in the city and the suburbs, such as Drury Lane, Steppenwolf, Goodman, Gift Theater, and the Windy City Playhouse. I have the script sent to me electronically so I can get familiar with the lines. Usually I attend the first rehearsal just to listen, and then I work individually with the actors. I might work with an actor for an hour, or we might have a couple of short sessions together. One show I worked on, Southern Gothic, ran for three hundred performances. I went in several times during the run to work with understudies and new people who joined the cast. I worked on a production of Billy Elliott, where there were a lot of kids involved. The play takes place in County Durham, a poor area of northern England, and I did a lot of work with the kids so they could get the accent down. I would check in on them from time to time throughout the run. For the most part, though, my job is finished once the show opens. I've also had some experience working on TV productions. I worked six days on the set of a drama called The Patriot, which aired on Amazon Prime. I also worked on a remake of The Exorcist for Fox. TV work pays much better than work with a theater. I earned as much in one day working on a TV set as I could working two full stage shows. TV is hiring dialect coaches more and more now, but you might only get to work with the actor for about twenty minutes before they shoot the scene. I'm not always happy with the final outcome. They'll do a bunch of takes for one scene, and the editor gets to choose. They might do ten takes, and they need to choose the best. The best visual nearly always wins out over the best audio. Right now the community of dialect and voice coaches is very small. Only about ten dialect coaches are working in Chicago, and we're always recommending one another. I remember one coach who said, "There's more work than any one of us can do, so there's no need for us to compete with each other." I belong to an international organization called VASTA, which stands for Voice and Speech Trainers Association. It includes anyone who does anything with voice, such as coaches, therapists, and voice teachers.

**DKS**: I understand you're doing further studies right now.

**SG**: About a year ago I started to feel that I had reached a plateau in my skills and my career. I'd been working full time for years, but since it was freelance work, I was always a little on edge about landing the next job. I decided to apply to graduate school. This year I'm at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London, working toward a master's in fine arts in voice studies.

**DKS**: What do you plan to do when you finish your degree?

**SG**: I want to continue coaching, and I'd also like to teach at the undergraduate level. It would be nice to gain a more stable and prosperous life. Maybe I can find a way to work with some clients in the corporate world. Meanwhile, I'm doing my best to stay connected with my Chicago contacts through social media. Liking other people's posts helps keep me on their radar. Several theater companies have already asked me when I plan to come back. Chicago has been good to me, but I'd like to try my luck in New York. When I dreamed of Broadway as a child, I always imagined I'd act on the stage. I still dream of Broadway, and I think I'll get there someday—not as an actor, but as a coach.

**DKS**: Thank you so much! How can our readers learn more about your work?

**SG**: I invite you to visit my website at www.sammigrant.com. There's even a video where I teach the basics of several different accents. Check it out, and give it a try!