**THE**

**FEDERATIONIST**

**In Connecticut**

**Summer 2020**

**Executive Editor: Melissa Carney**

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**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF CONNECTICUT**

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**From the Editor**

**Melissa Carney**

**Executive Editor, The Federationist**

**When we read the last issue of the Federationist together, none of us could have imagined the events that would unfold in the following months. I first want to offer my sincere condolences to anyone who has lost a friend or loved one to COVID-19. My heart is with you, as I, too, have been deeply affected. Many of us have become fighters overnight, doing our absolute best to give strength to those around us, despite the fact that we grow weary ourselves. As a result, I felt that it was crucial to take a step back from tragedy, and try to focus on what we are grateful for, the experiences and memories we cling to in times of grief and unrest. This issue of the Federationist spotlights individual journeys to blindness, the ways in which our members learned about acceptance, perseverance, and raising the bar on societal expectations. Each journey looks a bit different, but there is no single correct approach to a unique situation. Our members understand struggles, but they also recognize that there is a way to combat the “darkness” and appreciate life circumstances for what they are, rather than what they are not. I will let each individual’s piece speak for itself. I hope that the summer issue of the *Federationist in Connecticut* allows you to find the positivity in your own lives, and strive to continue to support those in your local communities as we battle the uncertainty of the future ahead.**

**If you would like to submit your own piece of writing to the next issue of the *Federationist in Connecticut*, send it my way. This publication cannot exist without the support of our CT NFB family. I want to hear your ideas, stories, successes, struggles, and everything in between.**

**Feel free to direct any suggestions, questions, or concerns to Melissa Carney, Executive Editor, at carne23m@mtholyoke.edu.**

**White Canes, Guide Dogs, Education and Lots of Love**

**By Pam Garde**

**I do not know who said this. But “Love is blind.” What? What’s this? Love cannot see? No, this quote does not mean that at all. When you mix love and blindness together, you get positive reinforcement. You find great people, who show and teach you the ways of the world.**

**I was born 3 months premature. I do not know why this happened. Perhaps, it was because I was in a hurry to leave the womb? Anyway, I was born on October 12, 1960, instead of January. I became the first 6-month born baby at Manchester Memorial Hospital to live. My parents told me that I was even given The Last Rights by a Catholic Priest after Baptism. But, God had other plans for me.**

**I grew up in East Hartford. Like many other kids my age, I was punished when I misbehaved, and hugged and kissed when I behaved. I’m the middle child of 3 siblings: 1 older sister and 1 younger brother. Both of them are sighted. I spent 10 years at Oak Hill in Hartford. I cannot forget the time when a social worker, Miss Witmore, came by my house. She brought some cool toys with her. I had the time of my life playing with them. During my time at Oak Hill, I learned Braille and became very proficient with it, as well as other subjects identical to any other school course load: math, reading, history, science, gym and even art. I also learned how to travel with a white cane. Although I did well enough, I was a wise guy at times. A bunch of my friends would goof off in the dining room, singing songs about the teachers we could not stand. We paid the price dearly.**

**Then, something changed, drastically. In 1974, my parents and a couple who were blind themselves, persuaded me to attend public school. My parents met this couple from their time owning a clothing store. I was living in West Hartford at the time, one of few towns in Connecticut which offered mainstream schooling. Unfortunately, my grades at Oak Hill were not the greatest. I went through a phase of fooling around, but my parents were convinced that public school would fit me well. Despite my troublesome years at Oak Hill, I was going to miss it. I spent 5 years there as a day student and 3 years as a resident student. How would the sighted kids take to me in public school?**

**From 1975 to 1982, I attended public school. In a nutshell, public school was exactly what I needed. The first 2 years were difficult at times and served as an adjustment period. My first itinerant teacher, Anne, was very strict. Sometimes, when I rocked by accident or even moved myself to be more comfortable in my chair, she’d take a whistle out and blow it in my ear. After a few times, I told her to stop. My ears felt violated. She taught me advanced techniques of the abacus, expanding on what I learned at Oak Hill. My next itinerant teacher, Gail was the complete opposite. She was more warm and personable than Anne. She helped me with my homework so that I would not have to do it at home. She gave me my quizzes and tests. Gail would be the teacher I would have until graduation.**

**Despite the occasional bully, I made many friends in public school. I even dated. Friends came over to watch TV and listen to music. I went to both proms with a great guy. I did a lot better academically and made the National Honor Society and National French Honor Society, graduating in 1982 with a good GPA.**

**From 1982 to 1985 I attended Greater Hartford Community College and Eastern CT State University. I did pretty well at both schools. Traveling around alone with a white cane was good for most of the time, and allowed me to be independent, although using the cane throughout the halls at school presented some challenges. If I accidentally hit someone, the kid would be offended even after saying I was sorry. While Greater Hartford was only in 1 building, Eastern was many buildings. One summer day in 1984, during a mobility lesson, my instructor asked me, “Did you ever think of having a guide dog?” Being as honest as I was, I said that my skills were not the best. But Steve convinced me that a dog would do me good. So, I worked hard to achieve this goal. I majored in Sociology with a concentration in Human Services. Those classes were housed in portable classrooms and different buildings which required walking to both sides of a large campus. I employed walkers to help me get to class on time at Eastern, but I did get to some classes on my own.**

**In 1988, I received my first guide dog, Chessie. She, along with Faith, Vonda and Elcee, came from Fidelco. Then, I received Hildy from Guiding Eyes and now, Ume. I may have issues at times, but for the most part, my current guide, Ume, is a big hit.**

**I never used a dog in college but I wish I did. Then, I would not have had as many mobility issues. I enjoy working with a dog. I can talk to her when I’m down or sing to her when I’m in a good mood. She’s so great!!**

**In closing, having great family, friends, teachers, employers and instructors, made and still makes a big difference in my life.**

**Journey into Blindness in the Last Green Valley**

**By Justin Salisbury**

**On an evening flight between Boston and New York City, sighted passengers can look down at a constant path of city lights until they think something went wrong. For one stretch of the flight, there is a landscape emitting no light, and the ground appears to have vanished. This is the Last Green Valley, and this is where I grew up.**

**As a sighted kid, I spent a lot of time on my schoolwork and dabbled in sports because that was what I could do for a social outlet. I moved to Willington in the third grade, a time when kids are developmentally challenging the people around them. None of the kids who moved to Willington that year developed a strong social network, but we somewhat bonded over that shared experience. I took a lot of abuse from my classmates, and I often wanted to disappear or escape. I think I was too quick to find ways to escape social interactions, like using my frequent headaches to go lay down with an ice pack at the nurse’s office or maybe to go work on something during recess. I had some friends, but I struggled. Over time, we all hit our growth spurts, but I hit mine earlier than anybody else. By the time I was in the seventh grade, I was the biggest kid in my grade, but the bullying continued until I realized that I could fight back. By the end of that year, I didn’t have any more trouble. This gave me the confidence to sign up for the local pop-warner football team, and I started to find some semblance of confidence for something outside of academics.**

**In Willington, middle school ends after the eighth grade, and we then choose which high school we want to attend. The two most common choices are Windham Tech, which could prepare me for a skilled trade, or Smith, which was located on the University of Connecticut campus in Storrs and made a habit of preparing students for college. This was the point when I started to learn what college was. My first instinct was to go to Windham Tech to pick up a trade because that was what people in my family did. Nobody in my family had ever been to college. I felt no connection to it. I eventually decided to apply to Smith, with the general idea that it would give me more options down the road. They took me, and I attended Smith.**

**In that new school environment, I had a fresh chance at making friends, and I did not waste it. Smith pulled students from Ashford, Columbia, Coventry, Mansfield, Willington, and Windham. Since most of my classmates had university employees as parents, being smart was a good thing, and I focused on my studies. During the winter of my sophomore year, my stamina dropped, my grades suffered, and I was having some trouble with my eyesight and concentration. By March, we learned that I had problems with my brain swelling. I had brain surgery and all kinds of excitement to go with it, and I missed a lot of time from school that year.**

**After brain surgery, I went through a lot of testing to determine how well my brain was functioning. I was a bit unstable at first while walking, but I think my muscles figured that out pretty quickly. I remember my first mobility lessons in the hospital, where the therapist strapped a belt around my waist, and she held the other end. It worked just like a choker collar for a dog. When I went somewhere that she didn’t want me to go, she tugged on it, and I stopped. She was totally friendly and supportive, but this was my introduction to what it would be like to walk around as a blind person.**

**I did not really get back into school in the normal sense until the following fall, at the beginning of my junior year. I worried that I was no longer good enough in basically every way, and I started acting out in ways that undermined by academic trajectory. I started talking like I didn’t like school or learning. I started intentionally avoiding more rigorous academic content, and I started asking for shortcuts. My school suggested that I should learn braille and orientation and mobility, so I accepted the instruction. My braille teacher had pretty good attitudes about what blind people could accomplish, but I was somehow on a sequence that took me three years to learn braille. I elected to take a second senior year, foregoing normal graduation, so that I could learn braille before college. Since I never integrated braille into my daily life or academic work, I did almost nothing with it for some years after high school. With orientation and mobility, my instructor was really nice, but I couldn’t figure out what I was gaining from the instruction. I remember the day that I had to teach her how a blind person could use an escalator since she told me she didn’t know how to teach a blind person how to use an escalator. Someone told me about a training center for the blind that offered summer programs. I had never had the opportunity to go to any kind of summer camp before, so I jumped on it. I got to know a lot of blind kids in my age group, and I got to know a few blind adults who worked at the center.**

**I remember learning that one of the blind men who worked at the center had a second wife, as the center joked. I learned that he and his wife were blind, and his “other wife” had been one of his readers during college. The story was that she lived with them and basically took care of them while they went out and worked. To me, this was a powerfully damaging form of role modeling. I internalized the idea that I would not be able to live on my own as a blind person, that I would need a sighted person to take care of me. I did not know any blind people who were as independent as I am today.**

**When it came time to choosing a college, I depended on the prevailing words in society about public colleges being more affordable and where you go to school not being important. I tried to find something that looked appealing, a big school with lots of options for extracurricular activities and a low sticker price. I later learned that families where people had been to college understand the decision process quite differently. I was admitted everywhere that I applied, but I chose East Carolina and took off. In some ways, I think I felt like I was escaping the competitive atmosphere and taking on something that would be more appropriate for me as a blind person. After all, I was the most successful blind person I had ever met.**

**Since I needed to pay for college, I applied for every scholarship I could find. I told stories about how hard it was to be blind, and committees kept rewarding those essays. I received a scholarship from a national blind organization, and they were very hospitable to me. They taught me that the most important thing I could do was hate the National Federation of the Blind. I didn’t know who the NFB was, but I knew that I had a group of blind people giving me money and telling me to hate the NFB. Money talks. In the fall of my freshman year of college, I received a call from Bruce Woodward, who chaired the scholarship committee of the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut. We arranged for me to fly up to Connecticut for the state convention, where I would receive a scholarship.**

**I put on my mental hardhat and told myself that I would not let any of the extremist and militant philosophy of the NFB affect me. I was determined to get in, make friends, take the check, and leave, only to return if there was more money available at another point. My parents sat through the sessions with me, and they pointed out how they were surprised that there were so many blind people who were happy. Blind people were doing things with their lives. I kept waiting for it. Then, at the banquet, Parnell Diggs, our national representative, got on the microphone and told his personal story. I saw myself in that story, and I realized that I had suffered because of the same kinds of attitudes that had affected him, as well. Then, he talked about how the Federation was working to change those attitudes about blindness, and I understood what people meant about the philosophy of our movement. I was moved to say the least. After his speech, we presented the scholarships, and I did my best to integrate all of my past messaging about blindness with the new ideas that I had just heard. I talked about how science was hard as a blind person, but I would do my best to succeed. I still only half believed it, but that was far better than where I had been only an hour beforehand.**

**Immediately after our scholarship speeches, the banquet adjourned, and the members of the affiliate were welcomed to come greet the scholarship winners. I was immediately surrounded by a blind civil engineer, a blind graduate student in environmental science and policy, and a blind PhD chemist. They wouldn’t pity me as a blind person studying science. In fact, they wanted to help me succeed, and they knew how I could do it. That was the first time that I had found myself in that situation, and it was one of the most confusing moments of my life. How could all of my ideas about blindness be wrong?**

**Those three scientists were my earlier mentors, and the Federation led me to many more. I learned about the training offered at some real training centers, with blind staff who lived on their own and took care of themselves. After college, I decided to attend one of those training centers, the Louisiana Center for the Blind. I learned that I did not need to take painkillers every day for the headaches, neck muscle spasms, and back pain that came from straining to see everything. I learned that, just because I could see to use a computer without a screen reader did not mean that I should try to use a computer without a screen reader. I learned that nonvisual techniques were not inherently inferior to visual techniques and that doing something that a totally blind person might do did not make me inferior. Today, I am a social and extroverted person. I like engaging with the world. The National Federation of the Blind has helped pull me out of the shell that was once mine. The Last Green Valley is still my long-lost home, but my feelings about myself and the worl****d are so much better today.**

**How the Deterioration of Sight Leads to**

**Determination of Mind**

**By Deb Reed**

**I remember getting my first pair of glasses at around six years old. I was told that while looking out the front door of our family home, I misidentified someone across the street. My parents began to notice that things were getting worse. I always sat on the floor close to the TV set. I can’t tell you how many times one of my parents would say, “Debbie it’s not good for your eyes to sit that close.”**

**I recall my first pair of eyeglasses were pretty thick. I’ll never forget the day in first grade as I did my schoolwork with my face about three inches away from my paper, the teacher, grabbed a bunch of my hair and pulled my head up! I was so humiliated. Did she think I was doing that because I liked the way the paper smelled? Keep in mind this was in 1963. What kind of person becomes a teacher that would do something like that? By the age of 10, with my vision continuing to get worse, the doctor decided to try hard contact lenses. They definitely took some getting used to but it was nice not to have those heavy glasses on my face. Unlike the soft lenses of today, the hard ones could easily become detached from your eyes and then the fun began. I remember losing one at recess, playing Chinese jump rope. Tears came to my eyes as I knew how expensive these lenses were and money was tight. I remember losing one at an eighth grade dance! The band was playing and we were dancing and then it happened. The song finished and the lights went up to find Debbie‘s contact lens. I mean there were so many people moving around the chances of finding it in one piece, but WE DID!!**

**Fast forward to high school and by then I was told that the glasses they were going to make me were the strongest they’ve ever made. They were supposed to serve as something to use around the house to rest my eyes from the uncomfortable hard contacts. I was at a basketball game on one of the bleachers pretty high up from the court, when it happened again. The lens popped out of my eye and down in between the bleachers. After feeling around where I was sitting and not having any luck, my friends and I decided to go underneath the bleachers and again we found the lens.**

**When I g*o*t to the point in my life when I ha*d* to give up driving, that was the big change. After being diagnosed with glaucoma on top of the myopic degeneration, the glaucoma doctor took one look at my file and said you should definitely not be on the road. I loved the work I did and the people I worked with as a homemaker companion. You become like family to these people and know you’re helping the quality of their lives.**

**The first thing you’re concerned with after surrendering your license is transportation. At the time, fellow NFB member Cheri Duquette worked for the Connecticut Regional Planning Agency. Both she and Paul had just gone through all of these initial challenges after their motorcycle accident and Paul’s vision loss. Cheri proceeded to share with me their story and all of the resources that they learned about. It was her office that certified people to ride Paratransit. She also told me about the Central Connecticut Chapter of the NFB. I was grateful for all this information and then to become part of a group of people who had similar challenges. I have been a member *since 2010,* and each year brings more knowledge, empowerment, friendships an*d* opportunities to fight for civil rights.**

**Although blindness does change your life significantly, this organization has shown me the important work that we are all involved in every day. The NFB has given me so many positive experiences and courage to face whatever the future holds.**

**Blending Connecticut Values and**

**Expectations for the Blind**

**By Justin Salisbury**

**I am proud to say that I’m from Connecticut. When we move to other parts of the country, as I have a few times, we tend to realize things that are special to our home state that we always took for granted and never questioned.**

**In Connecticut, we have an undying belief in the human ability to learn, grow, and change. This is not the case in many other places. It is part of what has helped me as a teacher, and it is part of why we, in Connecticut, value education so highly. In Connecticut, we don’t become skeptical of people who want to continue their education. We also believe that anyone can know anything. It is perfectly normal for a carpenter who is mending a porch to stop and have a conversation with a kid learning Shakespeare just inside the window. We don’t put up barriers on people’s ability to contribute. Part of this ability to grow and learn means that we give second chances better than any place I’ve ever been. Whatever people do wrong, they can change so that the problem discontinues.**

**Another part of our culture in Connecticut is the emphasis on productivity. Many of our cultural rules are based on the implications for productivity. For example, if we have information that can help the group, that other people do not seem to have, it is our responsibility to come forward with it, not to quietly be seen and not heard. When someone is new in one of our circles, we want to find out what skills and talents that person brings to the table so that they can help the group and help us advance as a community and as a state. I always appreciate the willingness of our people to step up and contribute because we expect it. As a kid, I remember seeing a sign on the way home from school every day that read “Let ‘em work, Let ‘em live.” That’s what we do.**

**Unfortunately, societal expectations for the blind are still low. A negative part of our culture ends up working in tandem against the blind, and it is up to the NFB of Connecticut—no other organization—to fix that. We also have a cultural value that, if a person cannot or will not contribute, they should get out of the way. I would be lying if I said that I did not feel that way toward some people sometimes, though I think it happens less often as I age. I have learned it from our community and culture. The problem really comes in when we assume that blind people cannot perform and cannot learn to perform, so then we must get out of the way. I felt this a lot, even as a kid. I think it has led me to have a fear of missing out, which the college kids today call “FOMO.” I think we all have that to some extent. Now that I know I can be included, I always want to be included. Coming to understand that required that I leave Connecticut, travel west of the Mississippi River, and attend one of the training centers operated under the direction of the National Federation of the Blind. If I had not done that, I would likely still be holding back, for fear of getting in the way and being less competent than the next person.**

**One of my dreams for this organization is that all of our members can overcome that toxic societal message and the feeling that lingers in us until we drive it off. I dream that all of our members can come to the point of truly being active so that we can achieve equality, opportunity, and security for the blind in Connecticut and across the United States. I hope that we can show the entire NFB what Nutmeggers can do and make Connecticut a model state for strong expectations for the blind.**

**Tackling Blindness at the Roots**

**By Al Daniels**

**The thoughts of a blind gardener are subject to change as growing older, or, experience is the best teacher. Basic things like turning over the soil and enriching the soil with fertilizer are the same, but things can be done differently as we learn year after year. This year, because of COVID-19, I had more time to spend working in the garden. Naturally, the results are evident. The more time you spend watering, cultivating and harvesting the more you will get out of the endeavor. That also goes for physical exercise in all of the activity of gardening. In the spring, I planted only plants, purchased from a local garden center. That was fine for lettuce, brussel sprouts, collards, chard and maybe a few other things I can't recall right now. These plants grew and were harvested in a timely fashion and were quite good on the table.**

**But, then it was still early in the season, and I needed to continue garden practice late in June. True, I said that planting seeds was a futile activity for this blind man because they are so tiny when they come up and weeds can fool you by touch. Well, I went against my experience and planted seed. However I planted only things that are a large seed and produce a large cotyledon or sprout. It worked; the squash was large enough to detect when it came up and the same holds true for beans. I did manage to get a few late cucumber plants from the center and they were of good size. Tomato plants are good to plant, but I am plagued by an element, either fungus or insect that decimates my plants when they blossom. I use insecticides and fungicides very sparingly and sometimes not at all, therefore, I have to suffer the consequences. Flowers like marigolds are supposed to prevent those nasty aggressors, but I am not convinced, as they haven't been infallible for me.**

**As far as planting next year, and that's always the saying at the end of every season, I think I will start the smaller seeds early in the spring in pots where I can nourish them until they are large enough to plant in the garden.**

**Because I am home every day, I was able to cultivate around the plants almost every other day. That, of course, means I was there to pull weeds and stones out as a ritual. When you have a garden, any experienced gardener will tell you, if you don't spend the time from the beginning, eliminating weeds and let them get ahead of you, it's all over. To pull weeds and stones is not that difficult if you can sit or kneel on a raised seat. An old bucket works fine for me, but you can find all kinds of accommodating seats in a garden center. Bending over is sheer torture. I once heard an editorial comment that people's contortions while working in their gardens are most fascinating and quite humorous. That also goes for apparel while gardening. It's a pursuit that each person does in their own way. So grab your trowel and cultivate, have a happy gardening experience.**

**Steps towards Independence**

**By Bri Rigsbee**

**Growing up completely blind, I was not always taught to do things on my own, most blind children are not. It’s always easiest for the sighted people to do things because unfortunately, we are seen as incapable. Not on purpose, but because we can’t see, it’s a knee-jerk reaction for them to want to help; it’s just instinct. Like me, though, a lot of people who are blind have a glow-up, as us young people say, a time period in which we take steps to better ourselves. We have these moments where we realize that independence is not simply given to us, we have to take it. These are three steps that I have taken to grow into my independence.**

**•Taking my first solo flight**

**Vacations with my family were always long and tiring. We would drive all the way from Connecticut to North Carolina, which, on average, should take about 12 hours or so. Driving with my family, however, took us just a little bit longer. I vowed to myself that if given the chance, I would definitely be flying to where ever I had to go. And low and behold, that opportunity presented itself. In January of 2018, I took my first flight to Washington, D.C. From take-off, to touch-down, it was the best experience I'd ever had. I got through TSA without a hitch, and boarded the plane. I sat next to one of my very best friends, who is also blind, as she described to me everything that was happening while we took off. Flying was one of my biggest, but not so big, fears, and I'm so glad I did it.**

**•My first convention**

**November 2017 was my very first state convention. It was both nerve-wracking and exhilarating to say the least. I arrived at the hotel on Friday, November 1, 2017, and was instantly taken with all the NFB had to offer: new friends within the student division, mentors within the more seasoned Federationists, and more importantly, a community that I could count on for support in the best way possible. From sharing laughs and stories, to sharing trials and tribulations, I am happy that I was able to have such a wonderful experience. It was so empowering to see the room filled with so many dedicated, driven individuals who shared some of my struggles, hopes, and dreams.**

**•Taking leadership roles within my community**

**Just recently, I started a creative writing group called the Wordsmiths. Although I'd taken on leadership rolls before, such as the First VP of the Connecticut Association of Blind Students, I had never done something like facilitating a group all by myself before. I am very proud of myself, and happy that I get to be creative with such innovative thinkers and writers.**

**Betty Woodward**

**By Lucia Lee**

**How would one define Betty Woodward? I can think of many good adjectives: friendly, loving, intelligent, eloquent, dignified, gracious, tenacious, competent, humble, funny; in other words, a true lady. She was also super at advocating and networking. The world is a better place for people like Betty. As Trudy Swenson put it, she was a treasure.**

**She made friends wherever she went…in the NFB statewide and nationwide, at the office, in her neighborhood, at church, on the Hartford Transit bus, at the various stores that she frequented, at Moosehead Lake in Maine, everywhere. Betty thoroughly enjoyed meeting new members and seeing old friends at state and national NFB conventions. She knew and loved many NFB members from all over the country.**

**Betty joined the NFB of CT and our Danbury Chapter in the 1970s, I think around 1977. She was very active in that chapter. She and Helen Brennan would organize the chapter hosting a table at the week-long Danbury Fair each year. When she moved to East Hartford, she joined the Hartford Chapter where she served in many board positions over the years. Once she and Bruce married, they hosted the Hartford Chapter picnic each June. The chapter invited everyone in the state affiliate, and each year, the picnic grew in size until it had to be moved to Wickham Park in East Hartford. Betty & Bruce enjoyed opening their home to many a Federationist.**

**I first met Betty when I took a temporary job at the NFB of CT in the basement office at 135 Burnside Avenue in East Hartford. She worked in the big room where in the evenings, our callers were busy making calls to Connecticut residents to raise funds for us. During the day, Betty called businesses trying to raise funds. One day, she called Coccomo Construction in Windsor and talked to a guy named Dick Circosta. Based on his chat with Betty, he recommended that John A. Coccomo, Sr, help support the NFB of CT, thus beginning our relationship with the Coccomo Foundation that lasted for many years.**

**Betty and I would eat lunch together most days. It was during these lunches that she talked about Bruce, her 5 kids and her grandkids; Bruce and Betty’s trips and good times with friends at Moosehead Lake; and enough bus stories to fill a book. She became like family to me; my kids knew her well and loved her. Diane, Betty and I would go out to lunch together three times a year, for each of our birthdays. In more recent years, we would take lunch to her house and sit out on their deck for lunch. This tradition continued until Betty moved to NH to live with her daughter Maria.**

**In 1996, Betty retired from her job as business caller to enable her to seek a board position with our affiliate. For several years, she served first as Board Member, then as President, then as Board Member again, and in 2013, became our President Emeritus. Betty continued to come to the office to carry on Federation work whether or not she was a board member until 2010 or so. She believed that one didn’t need a position on the board to carry out the work of the NFB.**

**Over the years, Betty’s advocacy for blind people was unstoppable. She attended meetings to ensure that blind kids learned Braille; she supported a high school senior who wanted to operate a Business Enterprise Program food stand; she advocated for a young man who wanted to attend tech school to become a certified auto mechanic; in 2003, when then-Governor Rowland closed BESB Industries for the Blind resulting in layoffs of all the employees, she worked tirelessly to help create a plan to reinstate this employment program; and then there were the efforts to keep BESB a stand-alone agency. Many state legislators got to know her very well!**

**For many years, Betty was the Public Relations Chair for our affiliate. She participated in many radio and community cable station interviews, talking about the NFB of CT and our various programs.**

**Betty loved attending State and National NFB conventions as well as Washington Seminars. She could tell you where each convention was and what happened. Beth Rival especially remembers a particularly cold trip to Washington DC for the Seminar. Despite the frigid weather, before their trip home, Betty and Bruce talked Beth and Charlie into forging on to the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum, laughing and freezing the entire way.**

**NFB-Newsline was another passion of Betty’s. In the early years of NFB-Newsline, she and Bruce worked tirelessly to raise over $100,000 that was needed to start up and continue NFB-Newsline in Connecticut. These funds enabled blind people to access NFB-Newsline in two areas of the state; Hartford beginning in mid 1998 and Stamford beginning in early 2000. We can all thank her for that initial drive to bring NFB-Newsline to our state.**

**She loved music, all kinds of music from church hymns to symphonies to rock. She loved it when her son Phillip would get out his guitar, and she and her kids would sing. She especially loved when her kids would sing Crosby, Stills & Nash’s “Teach Your Children”. She so enjoyed going to the Bushnell with Bruce for the symphony where they had season tickets for several years. One of the highlights of our office Christmas party was when Betty would pull out 12 slips of paper, one for each of the “Twelve Days of Christmas”. Each of us would be given one slip (or maybe 2 if there weren’t twelve of us present) and as we all sang the song together, each of us would pitch in their day. No one wanted the first day!**

**Betty loved the National Federation of the Blind. She knew our history through and through, she lived our philosophy about blindness on a daily basis, and she loved her NFB family. She firmly believed in the capabilities of blind people and worked to encourage blind people to live the lives they want. She played such a huge part of our affiliate’s story. We should all strive to follow in her footsteps.**