QUE PASA

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Quarterly newsletter of the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico

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# PREAMBLE

The National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico (NFBNM) is a 501(c)(3) consumer organization comprised of blind and sighted people committed to changing what it means to be blind. Though blindness is still all too often a tragedy to those who face it, we know from our own personal experience that with training and opportunity, it can be reduced to the level of a physical nuisance. We work to see that blind people receive services and training to which they are entitled and that parents of blind children receive the advice and support they need to help their youngsters grow up to be happy, productive adults. We believe that first-class citizenship means that people have both rights and responsibilities, and we are determined to see that blind people become first-class citizens of these United States, enjoying their rights and fulfilling their responsibilities. The most serious problems we face have less to do with our lack of vision than with discrimination based on the public’s ignorance and misinformation about blindness. Join us in educating New Mexicans about the abilities and aspirations of New Mexico’s blind citizens.

(Adapted from NFB of Ohio newsletter.)

# EDITOR’S NOTE

By Tonia Trapp

After fifteen years of unflagging loyalty and dedicated service, Jim Babb has decided to retire as the editor of Que Pasa. I now have the honor of assuming that role. Way back when, on August 5, 2003, when State President Arthur Schreiber appointed Jim as Editor of Que Pasa, the newsletter had not been published for quite some time. Jim was the perfect choice to resurrect Que Pasa, as he had published a newsletter called AEROGRAM for the Association of Education and Rehabilitation Professionals in Ohio.

With Jim at the helm, Que Pasa has been published every three months since that time, with only one exception (when we did not receive enough contributions to publish the newsletter). On behalf of everyone who reads or has read Que Pasa, I want to express our deepest gratitude to Jim for his leadership and commitment to publishing Que Pasa. He will continue to contribute to future issues by compiling USEFUL WEBSITES, for as long as he is able and willing to do so.

As your new editor, I will do my very best to continue to put out a newsletter of which you can be proud. If you have comments, ideas, or suggestions about changes you would like to see in future issues of Que Pasa, please share them with me. My contact information is on the first page.

I do want to announce one small change that I have decided to make. The next issue will be published in October rather than September, and after that, issues will be published in January, April, July, and October. Hence, this newsletter will still be quarterly: we are simply shifting the publication dates forward by one month.

# THE TIN CAN NAVY

By Don Burns

Thanksgiving 1956: As I cradled my tray on my arm, my cranberries ran into my potatoes which then attacked my turkey. It was necessary to hold the tray against my chest because the ship was pitching and rolling so severely that the tray could not be left on the table. It was my first Thanksgiving away from home, and how I missed my mom's cooking, not to mention the homey atmosphere. I had been assigned to a destroyer named the Harwood, which bounced around in the Atlantic.

After graduation from high school, my identical twin brother, Ron, joined the Navy. We had never been separated, and I spent a horrible night thinking about him. The next day I told my mom I was going to enlist and went to the recruiter's office. When he saw me, he said that he had the paperwork ready for me. When I questioned him about it, he said that most of the time when one twin enlisted, generally the other twin would follow.

Soon after enlisting, I was flown to San Diego, where I was housed on the second floor of the barracks. One of the guys came running up to me and said there was a guy downstairs who looked just like me. I went to the area and found Ron bending over the sink washing clothes. I tapped him on the shoulder and asked, "Got a light?" Ron turned around and said, "What are you doing here?"

Ron and I completed boot camp in San Diego. Afterwards, Ron was sent to Seattle and I was sent to Great Lakes, Illinois for training. After that I was sent to New Port, Rhode Island and was assigned to the USS Harwood. Soon afterwards, the ship set sail for Europe. Our first port was Athens, Greece where we were on patrol as part of the Sixth Fleet. We then cruised to just off the coast of Turkey, where I was faced with my first Thanksgiving dinner away from home. How ironic. We were in a huge storm which caused the destroyer to bounce around like a tin can, causing the problems with my Thanksgiving dinner. I learned then why they referred to the destroyer fleet as the "tin can Navy."

For three months we cruised, sailing to the Greek Islands, where we went ashore. In Athens we came upon a vendor with a cart using charcoal, and he was cooking kebabs, which looked good. The vendor could not speak English, and we could not speak Greek. One of the sailors pointed to the meat. The vendor moved his hand in a pattern that suggested that the meat was fish. We ate the meat, which was very tasty. The next day we were allowed to return to town. We spotted the man with the cart and decided we would have another fish kebab. A Greek customer just ahead of us acknowledged that he could speak English. We asked him to learn what kind of fish he was cooking. He started laughing and said that it was not fish but a delicious kind of snake. We left, and it was many years before I could eat another kebab.

While cruising the Mediterranean, we dropped anchor in Spain, France, Italy, and Gibraltar. While in Naples, Italy I purchased a mandolin from a vendor who hand-made them. It was a very attractive instrument, as it was made of woods which were two different colors. A shipmate knew how to play it and was going to teach me. While in a nighttime storm, the ship was rolling from side to side, and my beautiful mandolin fell to the steel deck and shattered into a hundred pieces. That was the end of my music career.

The ship returned to New Port, Rhode Island for the Christmas holidays, where I spent my first Christmas away from home while the ship was circling around the anchor.

After the first of the year, our destroyer division was assigned to a training mission that took us to Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, and Chili. This was my first of three trips through the Panama Canal and my first of four trips across the Equator. Our assignment was to train the South American Navy in the skills of anti-submarine warfare. There were three destroyers and a submarine in our squadron. In each country we were joined by one of their destroyers, which were all old ships that had been donated by the United States. In each country there was a crew exchange of about forty sailors, which allowed the American Navy to teach and observe these war exercises. It was fun sharing meals with the sailors from the South American Navy. I had a few mystery meals that were tasty but of unknown origin.

Approximately two weeks into the cruise, we were experiencing a powerful Atlantic storm. A young sailor was washed over-board on one of our sister ships and was lost at sea. This cruise was dedicated to his memory.

After leaving South America, our destroyer division sailed into Havana, Cuba. Approximately one hour later, a small group of us were seated in a bar when gun shots and explosions were heard all around us. Looking outside, we saw a tank shooting at a building and a lot of Cuban soldiers firing rifles. The Short Patrol pulled up in a van and took us to the ship immediately. After returning to the ship, all hatches were secured and no one was allowed on the deck. We remained tied to the pier for three days. We learned that a revolutionary by the name of Fidel Castro had taken over the city. Our destroyer division returned to the United States.

My brother Ron and I had been in the Navy a little over a year when the Chaplin from his ship announced to the crew that he was being transferred to a destroyer on the East Coast. Guess what? He was being transferred to the Harwood, my ship. Ron told him that the Harwood was the ship that his brother was serving on. The Chaplin asked why we were not serving together. Six weeks after the Chaplin learned this, he was instrumental in helping Ron to transfer to the Harwood.

We served on three different destroyers together. The two of us created a fair amount of confusion on each ship. Ron and I sailed both coasts of South America, the West Indies, and many Mediterranean ports. It was a great experience for both of us. I would highly advise any young person who is looking for a career, and an opportunity to see the world, to explore joining the Navy. I feel extremely honored and proud to have had the opportunity to serve my country.

# BLIND TEACHERS WORK SUCCESSFULLY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By Pat Munson

NOTE: I directed a 100-girl middle-school chorus, and I taught music, history, and eighth-grade English, along with higher-level English to foreign students. Many other blind educators have worked and retired from all aspects of education.

The very first day of student teaching, I said to my students that I could not see their raised hand, so they should raise their hand and say their name. I further stated that I would give them assigned seats and expected that is where I would find them. I walked the room from time to time and would stop and ask a student a question. Also it did not take long to figure out which students had some sort of "sitting problem." I spent time that first day talking about respect and why they were in the room in the first place. Sometimes I would do something not related to learning, and they caught on that I was using this as a learning moment.

One day I was in the teachers' lunch room and heard a couple of teachers talking about the things students would do when the sighted teachers were writing on the board or reading to them. Some students simply are at school for reasons other than learning. One of the best stories was from a teacher who was walking down the hall during classes. A student was almost out the open back door, crawling to sneak out of the room. When the crawler turned around and saw the teacher in the hall, the look on the student's face was rather funny.

My very favorite day teaching was when a boys' PE teacher had to go to the dentist in a hurry. He was my friend, so he asked me if I could possibly do the baseball class on my prep period. I said I could. First the boys lined up for roll, which one boy always took. Then they went in to dress. I told them I would stand by the door, and if I heard anything I did not like, I was coming in. They knew I would because I had done something similar.

I stood by home plate and got a play by play description. Not all of them could play at the same time, so I told them they could each tell me one play, and then the next guy could have a turn. When the class was over, they reversed the dressing and came out, with all fifty still having two legs attached. My high heels had the dirt cleaned off, and I was as good as new!

I had a one-hundred girls' choir. First we learned the music, which was the easy part. Then I taught them how to climb up and stand on the risers with the tallest in the back; we had four rows so they could see me as I conducted in the auditorium. The girls wore long robes, so they had to learn to walk and get on the steps without stepping on the hems, which would knock them flat on their face if they did. Finally we practiced walking from the classroom to the auditorium in order, so we would not repeat the boys' choir's small error. Something had gone wrong for those unfortunate boys: no one seemed to notice that the shortest boys ended up on the top row with the giants on the bottom row, and the tiny guys were trying to peek around the taller guys in front of them. It was quite a performance!

We sang in other schools and public venues. This required great self-control and respect. I had a couple of helper girls who made sure everything looked in order; however, singing in a new place was always interesting, because the acoustics are different in each auditorium.

The bottom line is that you want to start the year with more rules than you might need, because it is much easier to loosen the rules in the classroom than to tighten them down the road. Learning to interact with teens or humans of any age is an art. First, one must believe one can control the situation. Of course sometimes one loses control, whether blind or sighted. It is best to ask another teacher for advice who does well with control issues.

During the thirty-five years of my teaching experience, I did jump from one grade level to another and changed subject areas several times. For me it did not matter, because I enjoyed my work and found it interesting to teach different material to different age groups. I had all my material in Braille, much of which I transcribed myself, and I employed a number of persons to read to me. I never had a sighted person in the classroom with me. I was always the teacher in charge.

# TEACHING OR EDUCATING

By Veronica Smith

Teaching or educating, is there a difference? I was talking to a friend recently about educating the sighted about blindness, and her reply was, “I am sick of teaching them.” From my point of view as a blind person, I feel that our role as “teacher” or “educator” will be a constant as long as we are living. In general, sighted or able-bodied individuals will remain uninformed about our disability--or any disability--unless someone teaches them. But what exactly is the best way to do this?

Obviously, being rude is not the way to do it. Being rude to those who don’t know about blindness just makes them think that we all are the same. They will think that every blind individual they meet will snap their heads off if they inquire about how a blind person does this or that.

How about just ignoring them when they ask us how this or that is done? Again, ignoring the question, in my opinion, is just downright rude. And like I said before, we don’t want to be rude, do we?

So what is the best way to teach or educate? I have come to the conclusion that no matter whom I am with, whether it be a sighted individual or another blind person, I am not unobserved by others. Even if people nearby do not ask me any question directly, I am educating them. They learn from my actions: how I use my cane, tapping it back and forth in front of me; how I eat my meals, whether picking something up with my hands or using a knife and fork to cut something. They are learning how I enter and exit the city bus, how I know to get off at the right stop. They can see me cross busy streets by myself. They can see me reading Braille menus. They can see me counting out change to pay my bill. They can see me at movie theaters, at sporting events, at picnics, at parties, at conventions, at the park, and at work. They can see me interacting with children on the playground, laughing, smiling, clapping, crying, and sleeping--all of which shows others that I am just an ordinary human being who just happens to be blind! Whether we like it or not, we are educating others about what we, the independent blind, can or can’t do.

# GERMANY

By Veronica Smith

Speaking of educating, last summer my daughter and I traveled across the ocean to Germany. It was, for sure, an eye opener. It had been some time since I traveled across the ocean, and so many things had changed. For starters, they insist you have a ticketless voucher; I would have done that anyway, but it was funny to me that the blurb online put those words in big black letters, and my screen reader said, “Note: Must, then suggested.” Well it made me laugh, nonetheless.

Going through security is always an adventure. I’m not sure why it is, but the cane is a constant hassle for anyone except a blind person. “Here Ma'am, give it here. You cannot go through the metal detector with it.” That was in Albuquerque. In Texas, it was a whole different story: “Here Ma'am, go right through here.” But of course, that was after they politely asked me if they could take it and run it through a separate metal detector and make sure it was safe.

When we finally boarded the plane that would take us far, far away, everyone was super- nice. We took American, and unfortunately for us, our seats were smack dab in the middle of the center aisle: one person to the right of me and two to the left of me. Thankfully one of those to my left was my daughter. We were off, with fourteen hours of solitary confinement, and not once did anyone talk to me as if I was anything but a respectable individual.

Now, you have to realize in Germany and most other places in Europe, blind individuals are honored citizens and have special privileges. In fact, there is a whole day named Blind Person Day, and it is celebrated as a holiday. Of course, we noticed Germany has a ton of holidays where everyone takes the day off from work. Independence Day is not one of them. I was embarrassed after asking, “Hey why are your trash-men working today, isn’t today the fourth of July?” My nephew and all his children laughed at me, “Aunt Veronica, they don’t celebrate Independence Day here.” My husband also laughed at me, “Not like you were in another country or anything like that.” But to put things in perspective, we were staying with my nephew and his family, and when you stay with Americans and they do American things and they hang out on the American base, you forget you are not in the U.S.

Anyway, the moment we landed in Germany, someone quickly came over to me and tried to take my cane: “Ma'am, you don’t need that here. We will be happy to help you anywhere you need to go.” I was polite and told them I needed it with me. I am positive I offended them.

In just about every museum or place of interest where a sighted person has to pay to get in, they do not let blind people pay, though I kept trying. When we went to the Louvre, I pre-paid on the bus, and oh boy, the person at the desk was all in a tither when she heard that. She insisted that I go back to the bus I came in on and get my money back. I did not. I tell you, it really upset her.

When we went to Triar, the little town where Karl Marx lived and Constantine lived and where his church was, we had another altercation about payment. The moment my daughter and I walked into the restroom, the woman who takes the money grabbed me and shoved me into a large stall. I kept shaking my head, as all I wanted to do was wash my hands in the sink. She then turned and grabbed my daughter and shoved her in behind me. She snatched my cane out of my hand and banged on the side of the toilet with it, and in broken English, she told my daughter she needed to help me. She then slammed the door and stood guard. At the time we were stunned and angry, but now it is a bit funny. Sheesh!

At the Eiffel tower, it is a good thing I was blind. The line to get in was probably three hours long, but again as soon as the security guards saw us coming, they rushed out and nearly pushed me and my family forward to the front of the line. And they didn’t charge us anything. Once I found out the line we bypassed was just to get tickets, and the line to actually get into the tower was still three hours long, we opted not to venture in or up, and we snuck out into a beautiful park that surrounded the Eiffel tower. It is a beautiful building, but there are way too many people there. I was terrified that I was going to get separated from my daughter, or from my nephew, or from any of his kids. It was crazy scary there. I cannot speak French, and most of the people there do not speak English.

The hotel in Paris was interesting to say the least. The elevator was incredibly narrow: it was designed for no more than two individuals, who have to stand one in front of the other. Of course for the brave and agile, you can take the skinny spiral stairs to the floor above. I personally hate spiral stairs, so my great nephew and I tried our hand at working the elevator. First you have to put your room card key into a slot, then one set of doors opens to reveal two more doors and a button to select your floor preference. Then we squeezed in.

Our hotel room was tiny--and when I say tiny, I mean really tiny. I guess they don’t think you will spend any time there, as it was just big enough for a bed and enough space to walk around it. The bathroom was yet another challenge for me and my sighted daughter. For starters, we could not figure out how to close the door. We pushed on it, we pulled on it, and it did not budge. My daughter could not figure out how to turn on the lights either. Thankfully I don’t need the lights or the door. I finally asked my nephew to help us out. He grabbed my card key and placed it in this slot by the door, and voila, the lights turned on and the bathroom door moved--strange, very strange. Live and learn. Oh, and the shower had buttons on the wall: the center button made the water come on, the buttons on the side made it warmer or cooler, and the big button under them all made the water shoot at you from all directions.

Coming back was yet another story. As for me and my long white cane, I sailed through security with little or no fuss. My daughter, on the other hand, had problems: she had to be frisked. I guess she looked suspicious. But it wasn’t only her, because security pulled back a few other teenagers. I’m guessing all teens there look suspicious. And getting on the plane was not at all easy, because they immediately insisted that I could not have my cane with me because it was long and did not collapse. I tried to tell them I need it with me at all times, but they’d have none of it. What could I do? I had to let it go. The nice flight attendant promised me if I wanted to walk around she would bring my cane back, but it was a nightmare getting it back when I did want to move around the cabin. Ugh! Then when we landed in Dallas, I had to wait till they had time to return it. Grrr.

Going through Customes was another hassle. We got this cool app that is supposed to speed up your Customs experience. But as soon as they saw I was blind, they rushed forward and grabbed on tightly to my arm, insisting I had to go with them. The entire time my daughter was trying to explain to them we knew what to do, but sometimes it’s like talking to a brick wall. Finally we got to our gate, sailed through security just as we did on the way there, and we arrived home safely!

# NFBNM STATE CONVENTION LOCATION FOR 2019 AND 2020

Our 2019 and 2020 state conventions will be held at a new location, the Embassy Suites by Hilton Albuquerque Hotel and Spa, located at 1000 Woodward Place NE, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102. The amenities at this hotel include free made-to-order breakfast, complimentary drinks and snacks at the Evening Reception, an indoor pool, and a fitness center. Every room is a two-room suite. Each suite consists of a bedroom and living room, with a 42-inch TV in each room. It is a beautiful facility, and the staff are very friendly and eager to work with us. The dates for the 2019 state convention are Thursday, April 4 through Sunday, April 7.

# THE ACCESSIBLE PAPER ABSENTEE BALLOT IS HERE

By Curtis Chong

In an article entitled BLIND NEW MEXICANS ONE STEP CLOSER TO HAVING AN ACCESSIBLE ABSENTEE BALLOT, published in the June, 2017 issue of Que Pasa, it was reported that on April 6, 2017, Governor Susana Martinez signed HB98 into law. Among other things, HB98 directs the Secretary of State to establish procedures by which blind or visually impaired voters, whether voting at the polls or via absentee ballot, can independently mark their ballots.

A lot has happened since that time, but the end result is that as of this writing (mid May, 2018), blind voters in New Mexico can now cast a completely secret ballot—either by going to the polls or by voting absentee. This was achieved with loads of hard work by members of the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico and our Secretary of State, Maggie Toulouse Oliver.

Many of us are familiar with how the ballot can be marked nonvisually at the polls in New Mexico, but I suspect that fewer individuals are aware of the specific procedures involved with obtaining, marking, and mailing in the printed absentee ballot using our low-vision or nonvisual access technology. Here, then, is how all of this works.

To begin with, it is important for you to have the following three essential ingredients:

• A working computer, tablet, or smart phone through which you can send and receive email, review and fill out information on Web pages, and print web pages and/or documents

• A working email address

• A printer that can be reached by your computer, tablet, or smart phone

The Secretary of State's office maintains a website called a Voter Information Portal. The address of this portal is www.nmvote.org. Through this portal, you can register online to vote, update your voter registration information, and apply for an absentee ballot. The absentee ballot application form has been modified so that voters who are blind or visually impaired can request the accessible absentee ballot for the blind.

Your first step is to visit the Voter Information Portal and fill out the application for an absentee ballot. In this application, you will supply your state identification number, your Social Security number, and your date of birth. You will also verify that you are a person who is blind or visually impaired who is not able to fill out the standard absentee ballot, and you will provide an email address to which the link to your personalized ballot will be sent after voting begins.

Once your application has been approved and verified, your county clerk will send you a specialized envelope packet which has on its lower right hand corner a tactile marking which can be felt. The mark is a raised-line square with a printed x in the middle. Inside of this envelope are the two envelopes you need to mail the printed and filled out absentee ballot and your voter certificate to your county clerk. The smaller envelope (which has a hole in it) is meant to contain your ballot (by the time it is opened for counting, there is no way for the ballot to be associated directly with you). The larger envelope will hold the ballot envelope plus the voter certificate, which you are supposed to sign.

While the envelope packet is being mailed to you, an email is sent to the address you supplied on your absentee ballot application. This email contains the link to your personalized and accessible ballot along with English and Spanish PDF documents which provide detailed instructions. When you are ready to mark the ballot, you should activate the link, mark the online ballot and then print both the ballot and the voter certificate. The certificate is a single printed page with plenty of room at the bottom for your signature. The lower half of the voter certificate is essentially blank, which means you can sign anywhere near the bottom.

When marking the ballot online, you should remember that voting needs to be completed all at once, in a single session. There is no way at this time to save the ballot to be marked at a later time.

We, who are members of the National Federation of the Blind of New Mexico, can be justifiably proud of the work we have done individually and collectively to bring all of this about. If not for our initial efforts, New Mexico would not now be close on the heels of Maryland as the second state in the country to have in place an accessible online ballot marking tool for the blind.

# SENIOR ACTION GROUP ENERGY AT THE 2018 NFB OF NEW MEXICO STATE CONVENTION

By Pat Munson

Note: Although this division is for blind seniors, the group does not check IDs at the door.

The activities commenced with registration. After seniors paid dues, each received a bag containing a signature guide, needle threaders, and tactile dots which can be placed on objects such as phones so certain numbers, etc. can be quickly located by touch. Attendees also bought tickets for a chance to win a Baja jacket.

After we were seated, President Nancy Burns called for the first speaker. This year the group focused on enjoying life in the retired years.

The first speaker was Amy Buresh, the NFB representative who hails from Nebraska. She told of that state's blind senior group's strength and activities. Besides assisting folks losing vision, the group raises needed funds to promote the work of the blind.

Mary Willows continued by talking about the choices blind seniors have for reading printed material, and options for completing the chores most of us have. Newspapers and magazines can be accessed by using the telephone. This service is free through Newsline for the Blind. One can sign up at the New Mexico Commission for the Blind. She further stated that reading of digital books is accessed from the New Mexico Library for the Blind. She concluded by describing care.com. From this online service, a senior might find someone to read, drive, run errands and so on.

Hand-work and games were discussed by Caroline Benavidez. Playing cards are available in large print and Braille, so all the card games can include blind folks. Some board games come tactilely marked. If one cannot find a particular marked game that one wants, call Caroline. She stated that knitting and other hand-work can be done without sight. One can record directions and keep one's place by using a recorder.

Cooking, entertaining and barbecuing were discussed by the pros, Nancy and Don Burns. They always set a colorful table with very tasty food; some is prepared in the kitchen, and some is prepared outside on Don's barbecue.

Next Christine Hall, who never is at home, told of the kind of interaction she likes. Some movies are described, which means one must use certain theaters, but this way a blind senior does not have to have someone whisper to them throughout the movie about action and scenery. Meetings of all types are usually verbal, so it is easy for the blind senior to participate. Senior centers and other groups host many classes, which always welcome the blind. Christine stated that she usually gets a ride from someone in the group living nearby or by calling paratransit.

Urja Lansing will travel abroad soon, so she is sure she has figured out all the details. Long before departing, one must have a passport. Usually airports have personnel who speak most languages; and fellow travelers are always ready to assist. If we do not see her at the meeting next year, well ... maybe she will have had too good a time to return home!

We ended with the business meeting. President Burns had announced she was stepping down. We thanked her for all her work and further praised Don Burns for running registration. The secretary and treasurer's reports were read and accepted. The following people were elected: ShaRon Dandy, President; Caroline Benavidez, Vice President; Pat Munson, Secretary; Urja Lansing, Treasurer; and Veronica Smith, Board Member.

Blind seniors and those losing vision have very active, happy lives. Just follow us around for a day, and you will be convinced!

# A SYNOPSIS OF THE BANQUET AT THE 2018 NFBNM STATE CONVENTION

by Tonia Trapp

We held our annual banquet on Saturday, April 21, 2018 at the Sheraton Uptown Hotel in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The banquet proper began at 7 PM as usual, but before that, people milled around talking and looking at items that were up for bid in the silent auction, while availing themselves of drinks at the bar during the no-host social hour. Our Mistress of Ceremonies was Caroline Benavidez, and she did an excellent job.

The invocation was given by Shane Buresh, husband of our national representative, Amy Buresh, who is President of the NFB of Nebraska and serves on the Board of Directors of the National Federation of the Blind. In addition to Amy and Shane Buresh, the following people were seated at the head table: NMSBVI Superintendent Patricia Beecher and her husband James, Greg and Tonia Trapp, Caroline Benavidez, Adelmo and Soledad Vigil, and Michael Ausbun, First Vice President of the National Association of Blind Students. A $50 door prize was drawn which, much to the audience's delight, was won by a young man known to many of us, Antonio Martinez.

Then Caroline played a song in honor of members of the Federation family whom we had lost during the past year: Vira Chavez, Larry Hayes, Andy Baca, and Patrick Lopez. The song that was played was titled "I Guess It Never Hurts To Hurt Sometimes" by the Oak Ridge Boys. It was a moving tribute, and we all sat quietly listening to the lyrics as we thought about those dear people.

Krista Mireles, who runs the Newsline program at the New Mexico Commission for the Blind, thanked all the Newsline volunteers who read for the program and introduced those who were in attendance at the banquet. She noted that the New Mexico Newsline program has been around for 28 years, and they have approximately 80 volunteers statewide who read for the program. She also thanked her staff for all of their support and assistance with running the program.

At this time, our national representative, Amy Buresh, gave the keynote address, always the highlight of the annual banquet. She began by describing Amish Friendship Bread, which is unusual in that it takes about 10 days to make. Then the person who made it shares it with three friends, along with the recipe, so that they can share it with three of their own friends. She drew an analogy between the NFB and the friendship bread, because part of the richness and beauty of the NFB is that it is a gift that is meant to be shared with others. She suggested that the letters in the word "friend" might stand for the following: F, family; R, resilience; I, innovation and inspiration; E, experience and empowerment; N, nonvisual techniques; and D, determination.

Amy shared a little of her own personal story. She was born in rural Nebraska, and upon learning that she was blind, her parents moved to a particular location in Nebraska where Amy could attend the school for the blind but also spend lots of time with her family, including her brothers. She was taught well at the school and was given a great foundation in skills such as the use of Braille. She excelled in her academics and participated in many activities such as musicals, the track team, and cheerleading.

In the eighth grade, Amy began attending public school. During the next few years, she became a mentor to blind girls, and she got involved in activities with the Nebraska Commission for the Blind, where she met her husband Shane. During her high school years, she felt much uncertainty about her future and wondered what would be possible for her. Would she be able to have a job? Have a family of her own? Go to college?

After graduating from high school, she went to the Nebraska Center for the Blind where she learned to be confident as a blind person, developed additional blindness skills, and embraced a positive philosophy of blindness. She met a strong blind mentor, Barbara Walker. She eventually applied for a scholarship from the NFB of Nebraska, even though she heard that the NFB was a radical, crazy group. As part of the scholarship application process, she talked with the affiliate president and found that she didn't seem to fit that stereotype.

Amy went off to college to start working on her Bachelor's degree. Soon after beginning her college career, she went to the NFB of Nebraska state convention, and she won the first scholarship they had ever given. She met people like Chris Boone and Fred Schroeder, and she realized that a door had been opened to her. The NFB had gotten into her blood, and there was no going back. After attending that convention, she was hooked, and she hasn't looked back since.

At this time, Amy was "volun-told" to start a student division, so she formed the Nebraska Association of Blind Students. Since then, she has held various positions in the NFB. In 2003, she was elected President of the NFB of Nebraska, and in July 2006, she was elected to the Board of Directors of the National Federation of the Blind.

Shortly after being elected to the NFB Board, Amy and Shane's son Noah was born. Amy and Shane never doubted their abilities as blind parents, and they had their NFB family for support. Nonetheless, they were visited by a social worker who interrogated them about their parenting skills. The social worker asked if someone was going to live with them to help them take care of the baby. Then the social worker queried, "Do you know about the Nebraska Commission for the Blind?" Shane and Amy responded enthusiastically, "Yes, we both work there!" After that, the social worker left them alone.

Amy has had other encounters since the birth of her children in which it was clear that sighted people were questioning her and her husband's parenting abilities, though fortunately for them, their children were never taken away, as has happened to other blind parents. Amy encouraged us to continue fighting for the rights of blind parents to raise their children without undue interference from authorities, because we need that kind of legislation in New Mexico and in every state around the country.

Amy concluded her remarks by saying that our biggest limitation as blind people is found in the doubts that are placed on us by society. She encouraged us to serve others, to be grateful for what we have, and to share the gift of the Federation. She urged us, "Leave here tonight, and do something. Enjoy the fruits of your labor. Celebrate your accomplishments, and keep growing." Amy ended her keynote speech by singing the song "You Got A Friend" by James Taylor, and her beautiful voice resonated throughout the banquet hall with sweetness and truth. Many of us joined in the song with her. We thanked her for her words of wisdom, and for singing to us, with a rousing round of applause.

Peggy Chong presented the scholarship awards. She thanked the members of the scholarship committee: Veronica Smith, ShaRon Dandy, Peggy Hayes, and Martin Gallegos. The parent scholarship was awarded to Virginia Gutierrez, who is newly blind herself and has a blind son, Lewis, Jr. The student scholarship was awarded to Lisa Garza, who is President of the Mesilla Valley Chapter. Lisa is pursuing a Master's degree in social work.

Adelmo presented two awards on behalf of the New Mexico affiliate. The first award was given to President Emeritus Art Schreiber, in appreciation of all of his many contributions to the blind of New Mexico and to blind people in general. Mr. Schreiber was unable to be present to receive the award due to illness, but it will be presented to him at another occasion. The second award was given to Curtis Chong for his work on making accessible voting a reality in New Mexico and championing the birth of the accessible absentee ballot in this state, which blind people will now be able to fill out independently using their own access technology.

Drawings were done for several raffles at the end of the banquet, and people were also given a final opportunity to place bids in the silent auction. (There was a mad dash to the auction tables to place those final bids, to which I can attest, because I was part of that joyful chaos.) The banquet adjourned at 8:55 PM.

# FUNDRAISING AT STATE CONVENTION

By Pat Munson

The Mesilla Valley Chapter had a very enticing table at this year's NFBNM state convention. Members had baked two kinds of cookies, which were mighty tasty. Next to them were shirts with embroidery on the back. This hand-work had been done by some members. NFB of New Mexico was printed along with a white cane and of course, a chile. Obviously, a number of workers had put a lot of time and thought into these sale items, and they had done a fantastic job.

Some months ago, the Albuquerque Chapter members came up with the idea of putting Grade I Braille on greeting cards for events throughout the year. Members hosted gatherings at their homes where they did the brailling. The first appearance of the cards was in the exhibit hall at the NFBNM state convention. The cards will also be sold at the NFB convention this year in Florida.

The West Mesa Chapter was busy selling tote bags and chances on a fancy food and drink basket. The SAGE division sold chances on a Baja jacket thanks to the work of Nancy and Don Burns.

Of course, the largest fundraiser of the year in this affiliate is the auction, which raises money to send the family of a blind student to the NFB convention. Items are auctioned during the meetings and during the banquet. Art Schreiber's wines are always a big money-maker, and we all thank him for his donations.

I'm sure there were others selling this and that. NFB members know we need lots of money to forward our important work! New Mexico Federationists are certainly doing their part.

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This allows the establishment of an ABEL account in the name of a disabled person, which can exceed the limits imposed by SSI, Medicaid, etc. for their personal use such as a retirement fund or other uses. Eventually this fund can max out at $100,000. This able law was passed in 2014 by the US Congress and became law soon after its passage. It is known as the Stephen Beck, Jr. Achieving a Better Life Experience Act.

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# MEETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

July 3-8: National NFB Convention in Orlando, Florida

October 20 at noon: White Cane banquet at the Sheraton Uptown Hotel in Albuquerque