September 2024 minutes of the meeting

The National Federation of the Blind of California

San Fernando Valley Chapter

Date: September 14, 2024

The meeting was called to order at 10:07 am. We began with the Pledge of Allegiance, the NFB Pledge and the 1 minute message.

Question of the day: Who is your favorite author?

Attendance:

John & Nancy Albarran, Granel and Terry Almy, Keith Caballa, Jaymee Castillo, Sheila Castro-Secretary, Racquel Decipeda, David and Valerie Delawder, Ron Hilliard - Member-AT-Large, Tiffany Johnson,

Lindsay Kerr-Treasurer, Candace Luther-Vice President, Lilia Mares, Lynne Nishihara,

Jo Anne Seaman, Julie Skujins, Joy Stigile, Robert Stigile-President, Julian Vargas, Bill Grosjean, Guillermo Robles, David Lavaggi, , Jane Suh, Robin Smith,

Jose Lomeli, Betsy Estrada, Anita Arakawa, Shelby Felter, Anthony Melena, Juanita Herrera, Matthew Schrieber, Melissa Whitney-guest, Steve Baur-guest and Britney-guest.

Total: 36 – with 33 members and 3 guests.

We started with Robert introducing our guest, Melissa, a blind author. Melissa began by sharing a bit about her background from childhood. She has been visually impaired since she was six years old, diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa. She is the author of a book titled *First Smile*, which she will debut on October 12th. As a blind author, she discussed her experiences living with visual impairment and how she came to write her books.

Melissa has lived with visual loss for nearly her entire life, participating in activities like school and sports, which she always found enjoyable. A passionate reader, she spent a lot of time at her local library as a child, reading large print books when she still had some vision and using certain magnification. Now, audiobooks are her primary way of reading. She wrote numerous short stories as a kid and later earned a Master’s in Social Work, working in healthcare for 16 years before transitioning to administrative and management roles.

During the pandemic, she worked 12-hour shifts in a hospital. Reading books helped her cope with stress, and she began to revisit some of her hobbies, including writing. She finds it interesting to navigate the publishing world as a blind writer. She published her first book, *In and In Goodbye*, in April, a second-chance romance reminiscent of stories by Nora Roberts and Danielle Steel. In July, she released a Jane Austen-inspired novel called *Fighting Home*, which received great reception.

Melissa has been particularly excited about her latest book, *After Smile*. Initially scheduled for release in 2025, her editor urged her to publish it now. Pre-orders for the e-book and paperback will be available, with the audiobook set to release on October 1st. During our Zoom meeting, she showed and described the cover of her book, providing a detailed description and an overview of its themes related to relationships, disability, and blindness.

In celebration of Blindness Awareness Month, she is looking forward to an event on October 12 at Underdog Book in Monrovia, starting at 4 PM, where she will have a book signing. This event aims to foster conversation about disability representation in fiction, particularly within the romance genre. Her final approval for the audiobook will also be completed on October 1st.

**Secretary’s Report**
Grinnell's name was missed and needed to be added to the attendance list. Joy made a motion to correct the August minutes by adding Grinnell's name as attending last month's meeting, which was seconded by Terry. The motion carried.

**Treasurer’s Report**
Lindsay sent out the August Treasurer’s Report on September 13, 2024, via the listserv. Juanita inquired about tracking the membership dues, as she noticed on the report that someone had paid for two years’ worth of dues. She asked if someone was keeping track of this. Robert confirmed that they are. For example, Matthew and Carie Schrieber have paid their dues for 2024 and 2025.

Robert noted that we are now in the month of September, and the NFB has changed its membership dues structure from aligning with the chapter calendar to following a calendar year. Dues will now run from January to December instead of starting in October. They should be paid by January 1st.

**Committee’s Report**
**Fundraising**
Robert reached out to Robin regarding any upcoming fundraisers. She hasn’t had a chance to come up with anything yet due to her school commitments. However, Robert emphasized the need to initiate fundraising efforts, as we have several events coming up, including Washington Seminar, the State Convention in March and the National Convention in July. We want to ensure a strong turnout from our members, so fundraising is essential to support these programs. Robert also mentioned that we had discussed holding a fundraiser at Bob’s Big Boy, but Joy was unable to organize it last month due to her health condition.

Robert moved on to the next topic regarding activities. A few months ago, there was a suggestion for a jazzy night at Casey’s Tavern, which Robert learned about from Eddie Salcedo. Eddie originally proposed that we host an event at this venue, where he used to hang out. Unfortunately, he can no longer attend our monthly meetings due to work commitments.

It was discussed that since there are currently no fundraisers or activity events planned, we could combine both a fundraiser and an activity at Casey’s Tavern. We could host the fundraiser while enjoying a jazzy night or hangout at the same time. Additionally, Robert recalled that there are a couple of restaurants near Casey’s Tavern that could also be involved in the fundraising efforts. He remembered a pizza place and a grill restaurant on the other side of the tavern, which we could consider for potential fundraising ideas. Eddie also informed Robert that the jazzy night used to be held on Tuesday nights but has now been moved to Saturday nights.

**Holiday Party**
A question was raised regarding our holiday party venue. Although Robert could have made an executive decision, he opted to let the Chapter decide. Our reservation at The Magnolia Grill is currently being arranged, and the date is set for the 2nd Saturday which will fall on December 14th.

There were two suggested time slots for the party: from 5 PM to 8 PM or from 6 PM to 9 PM. We conducted a vote, and 13 members voted for the 5 PM to 8 PM slot, while 11 voted for the 6 PM to 9 PM option. The Chapter has decided that the party will be held from 5 PM to 8 PM.

**Adopt a Child for the Holiday**
Robert explained the "Adopt a Child" program, which we used to do before the pandemic and continue each year during the holidays. We identify families with children who are legally blind or visually impaired and invite them to our holiday party. Chapter members enjoy shopping for gifts for the children.

Now that everything is back to normal, we plan to revive this program. We already have a couple of potential candidates. We need to distribute the application so families can apply. If you know of any family with a blind child, please gather their information so we can send them the application.

Shelby raised a question about whether there are specific requirements regarding where the families live. There are no restrictions on living areas. If you know of a family in L.A. County, even if they live outside the San Fernando Valley region, encourage them to apply. The committee will discuss and make a decision regarding their application.

**Next on the Agenda**
Robert wanted to highlight some important items from the Presidential Release. First, he discussed the National Association of Guide Dog Users (NAGDU), where he is now a board member. The NAGDU and the National Federation of the Blind have organized a protest against Uber and Lyft. This blindness-related event is open to anyone with a guide dog, anyone with a white cane, and even sighted individuals are welcome. We want a strong turnout from attendees.

A hotel has been arranged for those who wish to stay overnight at a rate of $139 per night, plus tax. The protest will take place on October 15 from 10 AM to 3 PM in front of the Uber and Lyft headquarters. The schedule is as follows: from 10 AM to 12 PM, everyone will gather in front of the Uber headquarters, and from 1 PM to 3 PM, we will move to the Lyft headquarters. cIf anyone in this Chapter is interested in attending and needs assistance, please contact Robert. This is a significant advocacy and education effort, as we want Uber and Lyft to change their policies regarding accessibility and ensure zero tolerance for drivers who deny service to individuals with disabilities. Previous lawsuits against them have not been effective, and we want to emphasize the need for better education for their drivers.

The next item on the agenda is a career fair scheduled for October 22nd from 1 PM to 4 PM Eastern Time, which will be held on Zoom. Registration is required to participate, so please reach out to Robert for more information.

Next, Robert discussed the Sense Player from HIMS. If you are a user of the new Sense Player, it now has the ability to download and play Newsliner. If you are not a subscriber, Robert is the California coordinator for Newsliner and you can contact him for details.

Robert then mentioned that the National Federation of the Blind is looking for participants for the Dream Makers Circle program. Both he and Joy are members. This program allows individuals to leave a percentage of their contributions, whether through property or monetary donations, to the National Federation of the Blind upon their passing. Signing up does not require any immediate donations; it simply expresses your intention to leave a legacy. This is a personal decision, and Robert wanted to make sure everyone knows this program is available.

There is also a vehicle donation program. If you know someone who has passed away and has a vehicle they can no longer use, they can donate it through the NFB website. By signing up for vehicle donation, they will pick up the car the next day, and the NFB receives a percentage of the donated vehicle.

There are many ways to contribute to the NFB, including the Pre-Authorized Contribution (PAC) plan, which our Chapter contributes to monthly, along with other Chapters. This helps fund advocacy work, scholarships, and Washington seminars, among other initiatives. If you would like to become a PAC member or increase your PAC donation, please reach out to Robert or visit NFB.org/PAC to sign up. Donations can start as low as $5 or be as much as you choose.

Lastly, Robert mentioned that the format of the Presidential Release will be changing starting in October. While they will continue to hold a live Presidential Release, the next one will be on October 15 from San Francisco, California. The Presidential Release will remain as it is, but the Chapter Presidential Release version will change from a 30-minute presentation to no more than 15 minutes, focusing on one topic each month.

Robert also shared one more announcement from his good friend JonathanMosen , a prominent figure in the technology field. Jonathan's podcast, "Living Blind Fully," is no longer in production as he has taken a position with the National Federation of the Blind, where he is now in charge of the technology department.

Announcements:

• Lynne mentioned last month in our Chapter meeting that she is a co-host for the San Fernando Valley WordPress Chapter. They will be having a meetup on the last Thursday of this month, September 26th, at 7 PM. The topic will be “alt text,” which many of you may be familiar with. This discussion will focus on WordPress development and the requirements of the ADA. However, the developers are looking for insights on what would be useful for users of JAWS, NVDA, Read Aloud, and similar tools. It would be very helpful for them to understand how “alt text” is utilized from your perspective. If many people can attend, it will greatly benefit both our community and the WordPress developers. Robert requested that Lynne send this information out via the listserv.

Racquel, co-founder of Hearts For Sight, announced the following updates:

Starting tomorrow, we will have a beach day, which some of you may already know about. However, the Surrey bike event has been canceled. From September 27 to 29, we will hold a camping trip at Leo Carrillo State Park, with very limited space for only 10 VIPs. Currently, we have 5 people on the list, along with only 6 sighted volunteers.

For those interested, HFS organizes camping trips at least twice a year. This is a 3-day camp where you'll actually sleep in a tent with your sleeping bag or cot. It’s a fantastic opportunity, especially for those who enjoy the outdoors. The setup encourages everyone to participate actively; rather than sitting around and asking others for assistance, everyone will help with tasks like cooking, washing dishes, cleaning up, serving food, and setting up or taking down tents.

During this camping trip, you'll learn how to be a blind camper and gain independence. Everything you need will be provided, including tents, sleeping bags or cots, and, of course, food. Just remember to bring your personal items and snacks.

Next, Racquel shared the October announcements:

We have Surf Camp scheduled for October 13, Sunday, from 8 AM to 1:30 PM in Huntington Beach. This is a free event, and transportation will be provided. Racquel explained how the surf camp operates. An instructor will teach adaptive surfing, and a large surfboard will be available that can accommodate two people. There will always be an instructor behind you to help, and volunteers will be on the side in case you fall off the board, ensuring safety for everyone.

Despite Racquel's fear of water, she was able to surf and even stand up on her board. So, if you’re interested in trying surfing, now is the perfect time!

Following that, we have a hike planned at Malibu Creek, as well as a tandem bike event, with details to be sent out soon.

Finally, mark your calendars for the fundraising event, the Halloween Monster Bash, on October 26. It will take place at 117 East Los Feliz Rd. in Glendale from 6 PM to 9 PM. Tickets are $50 for adults and $25 for kids. Come in your Halloween costume to participate in the contest! An email has been sent out on the listserv with more details.

 Anthony announced that he relocated to Torrance at the end of June and the beginning of July. He couldn’t attend the meeting because it is his wife Leticia Martinez’s birthday.

 Ron announced that the California Sports & Recreation Division will be hosting a fundraiser with Panda Express. More information will be sent out via the listserv.

 Jo Anne won a prize from the Braille Institute. She will be traveling to Nashville, where her guide will take her to Helen Keller’s home in Alabama.

 Nancy thanked Robin, John, and Jaymee for helping her serve refreshments.

 John added that when Nancy and he are on their way to the hospital for Baby Bella’s arrival, he will call Robert to make an announcement to everyone on the listserv.

**Julian’s Tech Corner Announcements:**

There has been a significant data breach, possibly the largest one in the U.S. For more information, you can visit www.npd.pentester.com. If you find your information there and are concerned about it, Julian advises you to contact a credit bureau and place a freeze on your credit.

Guillermo added that if you suspect your Social Security number has been misused or if you notice something concerning on your credit report, you can also file a report. He can provide resources to help with this process.

On a brighter note, the Applvis website is back, having been saved by “Be My Eyes,” which is providing financial backing for the project. They have even created a paid position dedicated to keeping this initiative alive.

In addition, Apple recently held an event called “It’s Glow Time!” New products announced include the iPhone 16 and iPhone 16 Pro, as well as larger versions of these models, the new Apple Watch 10, and the new AirPods 4. iOS 18 will be released on September 16, and the FDA (or FTA) has given approval for Apple to sell the AirPods Pro 2. Lastly, his Breaking Blindness Barriers will be October 5, 2024. If you are not on his BBB list yet, send him an e-mail at help@techjv.com with the subject: interested in BBB and put your e-mail address on the message body. If you want to hear about the meetings, you can listen to his podcast at AIRSLA.

Racquel made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Lynne. The meeting was adjourn at 12:05 pm.

Respectfully submitted:

Sheila Marie B.C.

Cell: 818-404-7646

Chapter Secretary

NFB.SFV