The Braille Monitor, September, 1957

Part One

MISCONCEPTIONS

Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of twelve articles prepared by

three of the militant young leaders of one of our St. Louis, Missouri chapters.

These authors have taken very seriously the proposition that one of the chief

functions of the National Federation, and of all its affiliates, is to carry on

a continuous, relentless campaign of education in order to extirpate) from the

minds of the sighted those persistent misconceptions about blindness which" have

resulted-and still result-in social ostracism and the denial of economic

opportunity to the blind. The entire series was published in one of the big St.

Louis dailies and received a great deal of attention. I propose to reproduce

these articles in successive issues of The Braille Monitor for a number of

reasons. 1. The articles are extremely well written. 2. A good many of our own

blind people can stand a little education. 3. It is hoped that many readers of

this magazine will become inspired to obtain similar publicity in their own

areas. The authors grant full permission to use all, or any part of this

material.

The principal author is Mr. Jack Murphey, who is one of the most brilliant

deaf-blind persons to be found anywhere today. His resourceful and highly

intelligent wife, Alma, who is herself totally blind, has devised a system of

communication so ingenious and so efficient that she is able to relay to her

husband every word spoken in his presence. This makes it possible for Jack to

participate in all discussions and he does this so well that strangers are not

aware of his deafness. Dr. tenBroek recently wrote to the Murpheys, stating that

the Federation had been missing a good bet by not availing itself fully of the

talents of the team but that this was to be corrected at once. The third

collaborator in the writing of the present series is David Krause, president of

RITE, whom many of us believe is destined to rise high in the NFB.

I. THE MEANING OF BLINDNESS

It is not easy for the uninitiated to grasp the true meaning of blindness

because without seeming to do so, sight tends to steal the show from the other

senses. Using his marvelous eyes not only whenever necessary, but whenever

possible, one is seldom content to hear of smell or feel without actually trying

to see the object that attracted his attention. Nor is he likely to dress in the

dark or shave without consulting a mirror, or do the simplest arithmetic without

using pencil and paper. Sight permeates everything he does! Naturally, this

lavish (though perfectly reasonable) dependence upon one faculty helps to

obscure the efficiency of the others, and leads to the formation of distorted

conceptions of the meaning of blindness.

Probably the most common of these distorted views, and the least defensible, is

the one which assumes that being blind is like living in the dark. Often used by

propagandists to dramatize in the hope of prying open reluctant purses, this

theory hasn't a leg to stand on. Darkness can reduce sighted people to near

helplessness, yet it cannot impair the efficiency of the blind in any way.

Strictly speaking, you see, blindness is a challenge to meet every problem of

life without even being able to perceive darkness-or light.

Defined as lack of sight, blindness is at worst an affliction, at best a

handicap, and always a nuisance-always; rather like being unable to start the

car when you are late for an engagement; like climbing a slippery hill and

sliding back a portion of each yard you ascend; like being obliged to make

innumerable detours while your rivals are favored with a clear road. Given the

right environment, adequate training, initiative, determination, patience, and

luck, you may surmount such obstacles but the odds are against you-and laxness

and pessimism mean failure. So it is with a blind person; he must expend more

effort or daring or thought or tact or money--or something-than the same

achievement would cost him if he could see.

So let us try to remember that blindness is neither a synonym for darkness nor a

justification for shirking. Let us also bear in mind that, while it disqualifies

one "To trace the stars and search the heavens for power", and bars one from

many another priceless thrill and skill to which sight holds the key, the true

meaning of blindness is not to be found in the limitations imposed by lack of

sight, but in the individual's adjustment thereto. To those who bow beneath its

weight, blindness is a great affliction; to those who accept this challenge, it

is a variable handicap.

The Braille Monitor, December, 1957

Part Two

MISCONCEPTIONS

[This is the second in a series of articles written for a St. Louis newspaper by

Jack and Alma Murphey and David Krause. Mr. Krause is the author of this

particular installment.]

II. BLIND PEOPLE ARE ALL ALIKE

"I've noticed that blind people are always happy. Why is this?" I heard a radio

commentator ask his blind guest this question during an interview recently. That

same day I overheard two women discussing blind people while riding a streetcar.

"You know," one said, "I feel so depressed when I am near blind people. They

always seem so unhappy."

Now, quite obviously, both the radio commentator and the lady on the streetcar

can't be speaking the facts. Actually, of course, neither of them was making a

true statement. Blind people are merely people who do not see. As all

individuals differ, blind people differ, too. I know some who are happy a great

deal of the time; I also know those who are miserable most of the time.

Unfortunately, however, generalizing and stereotyping seem to be a habit of many

people when they discuss blindness. If a man happens to know a talented blind

pianist, then to him all blind people have musical ability. If a woman should

happen to know a blind girl who attends her church and who is of a rather

religious nature, then she is very apt to pass along the word that blind people

are religious. If a blind person exits from a bar obviously having had one too

many, the odds are ten to one that before he goes a city block someone will be

heard to say "Look at that drunken blind man. Isn't it a shame? I don't know why

they all drink like that."

And so it goes; one generalization after another. For some strange reason, blind

people are rarely thought of as individuals. And yet they are. If you were

suddenly to lose your sight today-and it happens to a number of people every day

in this country--you would not suddenly become a talented musician, an extremely

religious person, a no-good drunk; nor would you suddenly become happy all the

time or unhappy all the time. You would be the same person today without sight

that you were yesterday with sight. The dictionary will tell you that blindness

is simply a condition of not being able to see. It has nothing to do with

molding moods, creating talent, or building character.

So hereafter, when you hear blind people being placed in one group or another,

speak up and say, "You are generalizing, my friend. Blind people are not more

alike than you and I are. Some are rich, some are poor; some are good, some are

bad; some are capable, some are helpless; some are fun to be with, some are

disgusting to be around." And you might also remind your well-meaning friend

that he is doing a real disservice to the blind every time he stereotypes them.

Increased job opportunities, a share in community responsibility, and a full,

rich, active life will only come to blind people as individuals-not as a group.

And as individuals it will only come as rapidly as stereotyped thinking

concerning blind people disappears.

The Braille Monitor, January, 1958

Part Three

MISCONCEPTIONS

III. DOES HE TAKE CREAM?

(This is the third in a series of articles written for a St. Louis newspaper by

Jack and Alma Murphey and David Krause. Mrs. Murphey is the author of this

particular installment. )

"Have you ever felt that conversing directly with a blind person presents a

problem? This is undoubtedly the impression held by many people because it so

often happens that the sighted companion is consulted rather than the blind

person, even when the matter deals directly with the one who is blind. Those of

us who operate vending stands often have the experience of our sighted assistant

being questioned as to price and other matters when the operator of the stand is

much better informed. When shopping, the sighted companion is consulted as to

the purchase, even though the companion is a child. When desiring personal

information, the questions are often put in the form 'does he?', would she?', or

'do they?'- and so it goes; avoiding direct conversation with blind people

whenever it is at all possible to do so. Actually there is no problem or trick

involved in talking with the blind. The fact that it is impossible to catch our

eye does not mean that we are unaware of having been spoken to. Neither does our

inability to exchange glances mean that we do not understand what is being said.

If sight were necessary to conversation, then blind people would have difficulty

talking with each other, and our most priceless invention, the telephone, would

be a complete waste. So the next time the occasion arises, try talking the

matter over directly with the blind person; he will be gratified and I wager you

will be genuinely pleased with the results.

"When a blind person enters your store or restaurant, do you assume that he

wishes to be a customer, or rather that he would like you to be the customer?

Many blind people have, upon entering such places, been greeted with such

statements as: 'I don't want anything today.' This is most upsetting to the one

who has entered simply to make a purchase, and in most cases will result in the

loss of a good customer. It would be good to bear in mind that while many blind

people work as salesman, we all do business with stores and restaurants, so it

would seem best to let the blind person make known his intentions to you rather

than to assume them.

"When you see a blind person standing on the corner waiting to cross a busy

street, do you assist him or do you feel that perhaps he would rather you did

not interfere? 'I don't know whether to help blind people or not.' This is a

statement which I have heard on several occasions and is always prompted by some

unpleasant experience encountered by a sighted person while helping one who is

blind. There are those blind people who either resent being helped or are

extremely particular as to how the service is rendered, by they are indeed the

exception. Your assistance in crossing streets, entering public buildings,

finding a seat on a bus, and innumerable other small ways, is not only needed

but genuinely welcome by most blind people. In order that we carry on our

employment and do the many other things which make for us a normal life, it is

necessary that blind people go about unaccompanied; and I should like to take

this opportunity to point out that it is the cooperation of the public, which

makes for us this much appreciated independence."

The Braille Monitor, February, 1958

Part Four

MISCONCEPTIONS

IV. THREE MORE MYTHS--PAPER MONEY, KEENER HEARING, VOICE PICTURES

[This is the fourth in a series of articles written for a St. Louis newspaper by

Jack and Alma Murphey and David Krause. Mrs. Murphey is the author of this

particular instalment. ]

In my dealings with the public as a self-employed blind person, the question has

often been presented to me: "Do you know what denomination this bill is?" Often

surprise and sometimes disappointment are expressed when I admit that I do not

know the denomination of the bill; that I am unable to distinguish paper money.

It seems that my customer knew some- body who could, or feels that it would be

possible if I just knew the trick. The impression that it is possible for us to

detect the difference in paper currency is probably created by the fact that

money in our possession is handled in such a way that we know just what we have.

The way a bill is folded or the place in which it is kept indicates to us its

denomination. In this way we are able to produce a specified bill upon request.

Let me point out that the only tasks performed by blind persons are those in

which sight is not required. Those things for which sight is necessary, we do

not do. The numbers on paper currency can be distinguished only by sight.

Therefore, I am unable, and I feel safe in saying all other people who cannot

read with their eyes, are unable to distinguish paper money.

Blind people have better hearing than sighted people—this is another bit of

widespread information with no real basis. In some instances this might seem to

be the case. We who have been blind for a very long time depend upon our hearing

for many things. It is not that our ears are capable of absorbing more sound,

but the sounds are interpreted and made useful to us. On the other hand it has

been pointed out by a man who has had much experience in work with the blind

that in many cases a person who loses his sight as an adult loses some of the

keenness of hearing. Being unable to see what has attracted his attention, he

begins to doubt that he has heard it. So as time goes on his hearing becomes

less acute. To further discredit the general belief that the blind have better

hearing, there are hundreds of people in this country who are not only blind,

but totally deaf as well.

Another question frequently asked is: "Do you know what I look like by the sound

of my voice?" I am always a dismal failure where this is concerned. A voice can

indicate something of one's mood and personality but it is just not sufficient

to create a picture. To many blind persons, including myself, the color of one's

hair and eyes and his features are of little or no importance....

Braille Monitor, March, 1958

Part Five

MISCONCEPTIONS

V. THE PROBLEM OF THE PARTIALLY SIGHTED

(This is the fifth in a series of articles written for a St. Louis newspaper by

Jack and Alma Murphey and David Krause. Mr. Krause is the author of this

particular instalment.)

(Ed. Note-- It is estimated that 75 per cent of those considered legally blind

have some degree of residual vision.)

Some call them partially-blind people; some call them partially-sighted people,

but whichever you prefer, they are still the blind people who can see or the

sighted people who are blind. Before you think we've been stricken with the

double-talk craze, let us explain ourselves.

While few people ever stop to think about it, actually there are many degrees of

blindness. Some blind people cannot even distinguish light from dark, while

others can see that much but no more. Some blind people can distinguish large

objects a few inches away, and still others can distinguish smaller objects

several feet away. It is not until we come to the blind people with sufficient

sight to travel the streets without the use of a cane or a guide dog that the

real problems begin.

First of all, let's clear up definitions. Blindness means one thing when used by

a layman, but when defined for legal purposes it takes on quite a different

meaning. For our purposes here it is not necessary to discuss percentages of

acuity. Let it suffice to say that while these people may travel about without a

cane or a dog, they are most definitely blind as the law defines the word.

Unfortunately, however, most people do not consult the law in arriving at the

definition of blindness. Blind people, they conclude, are people who use a white

cane or a guide dog.

"But where is the big problem this brings about?" you may ask. When waiting on a

street corner for a bus, someone in the crowd will invariably ask the blind man

with a cane or a dog which bus he is waiting for. However, when the partially

blind person without cane or dog ask someone in the crowd which bus is coming,

the reaction is almost always the same--a look of bewildered amazement, that in

this day and age there are actually illiterates roaming the streets of a big

city. Similar embarrassing situations arise for these people in restaurants. The

waitress thinks nothing of reading the menu to a totally blind person but when

requested to do so by a partially blind person whom she does not recognize as

being blind, she immediately assumes that "how much service can one expect"

look.

When applying for jobs, personnel managers rarely consider these people as

blind, but the examining physician will not pass them as sighted. And so it

goes. At every turn these people find themselves in the middle--too sighted to

be recognized as blind, too blind to be accepted as sighted. The emotional upset

which must accompany such a situation is certainly understandable. It is only by

making the general public fully aware that blind people do not necessarily carry

a white cane or use a guide dog that any real progress can be hoped for in

solving the problems of the blind. Many persons can appear to be sighted when

actually they are legally blind. Be aware of this fact and make your friends

aware of it. In this way you can help with the public education so vital to the

solution of this difficult problem.

Braille Monitor, April, 1958

Part Six

MISCONCEPTIONS

VI. TEN MILLION CIGARETTE TABS

(This is the sixth in a series of articles written for a St. Louis newspaper by

Jack and Alma Murphey and David Krause. Mr. Krause is the author of this

instalment. )

While a blind person with a guide dog is a fairly common sight on our streets

today, unfortunately the public's information concerning these extremely

intelligent animals has not increased as rapidly as has the use of such dogs. A

great deal of misinformation has been spread. In order to set the record

straight, in order to separate fact from fiction, the following questions and

answers are offered.

Q.: Are "Guide dogs" and "Seeing Eye dogs" one and the same?

A. : Not necessarily. Any dog trained to lead a blind person is a guide dog, but

only dogs which come from one specific school, The Seeing Eye, in Morristown,

New Jersey, are actually "Seeing Eye Dogs." In other words, "Seeing Eye" is

merely a brand name in guide dogs, just as "Cadillac, " "Lincoln" or "Chrysler"

are brand names in automobiles.

Q. : Do guide dogs watch the stoplights at an intersection?

A.: No. It is physically impossible because all dogs, including your pet at

home, are color blind. Guide dogs simply watch the traffic. They cross when it

is safe to cross, not when a light says they can cross.

Q. : All over the country one hears of people who are collecting either the red

cellophane tabs from cigarette packages or empty match-book covers, and always

the story is the same--"When I save so many" (it is usually many thousand of the

matchbooks or so many pounds of the cellophane cigarette tabs) "a blind person

gets a Seeing Eye dog free. Is this on the level?"

A. : No. This is pure fiction. Neither the Seeing Eye nor any other school which

trains guide dogs for the blind has any kind of an agreement with the people who

make matches or with the people who manufacture cigarettes. To put it bluntly,

if you save a million matchbook covers or ten million cigarette tabs, your only

claim to fame will be as the world's largest collector of wastepaper.

Q. : Are guide dogs vicious?

A. : Any dog can be made vicious if his master so desires. Ordinarily, however,

guide dogs are very friendly animals. It should be remembered that they are

guide dogs--not "guard dogs." Quite naturally, as a guide for a blind person,

such a dog comes in contact with many new people each day and, therefore, should

it become vicious or over-protective, its usefulness as a guide will be over.

Q. : Then does that mean that it is all right to pet a guide dog when I see one

on the street?

A. : It does not mean that at all. On the contrary, you are urged not to pet

guide dogs when they are in harness. The dog certainly may enjoy petting, but

you are not being fair to its master. The dog needs to keep his full attention

on his work when in harness. His responsibility is tremendous; his job an

extremely vital one. You can make his job simpler by ignoring him when he is in

harness.

These are the questions most frequently asked about guide dogs. There are

understandably many more that you may have in mind; if so, it is suggested that

you address inquiries to either The Seeing Eye, Morristown, New Jersey, or to

the Leader Dog League, Rochester, Michigan.

Braille Monitor, May, 1958

Part Seven

MISCONCEPTIONS VII. RECREATION

(This is the seventh in a series of articles written for a St. Louis newspaper

by Jack and Alma Murphey and David Krause. Alma Murphey is the author of this

installment.)

There have been frequent inquiries as to just what kind of recreation can be

enjoyed by blind people. That, like all other questions concerning the blind,

has no general answer. Just as our interests and abilities differ, so do our

preferences in entertainment differ. I shall attempt in this article to give you

an idea of the many and varied kinds of recreation that can be thoroughly

enjoyed by blind people.

For those who appreciate classical music, there are the regular symphony

concerts together with other programs of this type throughout the year, and for

those who enjoy popular music there is certainly plenty of that commodity on the

American radio. While the general belief that we are all gifted musicians, or

even that we are all especially appreciative of good music, is utterly false, it

is nevertheless true that a greater proportion of us--especially those who have

attended residential schools--have received individual instruction in voice and

instrumental performance. As a result, a considerable number of us are able to

entertain ourselves and others as producers of musical fare.

The good TV shows and movies also afford a great deal of pleasure. No, it is not

necessary to see in order to enjoy this kind of entertainment. Some productions

are intended for eye appeal, but a program which is built around a definite plot

can usually be followed and thoroughly enjoyed by a blind person.

Radio and TV descriptions of sports events play a big part in our entertainment.

Baseball, basketball and other games are followed with genuine interest by many

of us. There are also activities in which we can participate, bowling being the

most popular. Throughout the country there are approximately two thousand blind

bowlers who attend public bowling alleys and use the standard equipment. The

only special article required by the totally blind person is a portable guide

rail which makes it possible for him to be sure of going in a straight line for

his running approach. Swimming and fishing are two more favorite sports of the

blind.

Now let us turn our attention to recreation in the home. Just like our sighted

associates, we enjoy inviting our friends over for dinner or some kind of party.

For these occasions we may choose any one of a large number of games which have

been adapted for use by the blind. Scrabble is one of the most popular of these

games. The top of the scrabble board is covered with plastic on which the

squares have been formed with raised lines. The tiles are securely placed in the

square depressions, making it possible to handle the board as is necessary

during the game . The squares on the board and tiles contain both braille and

print letters and numbers so that the game can be played with sighted people as

well as with our blind friends. In a similar manner, dominoes, checkers, chess

and several other games have been made possible for us to enjoy. Any blind

person who can read even a few letters of the Braille alphabet can participate

in card games and our basic normality is shown by the fact that card playing is

our most popular indoor sport.

We are as great hobbyists as anyone else and these range all the way from

embroidering and knitting by the women to intricate cabinet-making by the men.

Almost all young blind people learn dancing, both ballroom and other types, and

thoroughly enjoy it. The same goes for roller skating and ice skating. Blind

boys and girls take an active part in scouting and other organized outdoor

activities.

For many of us, just as with people who can see, reading is a favorite pastime.

Newspapers and most current magazines are not available to us, but practically

any kind of literature in book form has been printed in Braille. For those who

do not read Braille easily, the Talking Book--a special kind of record

player--serves this purpose. Records have been made of books of all kinds, read

by many of the most accomplished readers in the country. These records and also

the Braille books are free to us and go through the mails free.

Although we cannot drive cars, experiment with photography, or do other things

which to you might seem necessary, a blind person need not be at a loss for

entertainment. Many well-intentioned sighted people and organizations of sighted

people have felt that special entertainment ought to be provided for segregated

groups of blind people, with careful supervision and hovering attention. This,

of course, is a manifestation of the traditional, custodial attitude toward the

helpless blind. Most of us feel that we neither need nor want this type of

spoonfed entertainment.

The Braille Monitor, June, 1958

Part Eight

MISCONCEPTIONS--"HOMEMAKING"

by Alma Murphey

(This is the eigth in a series of articles written for a St. Louis newspaper by

Jack and Alma Murphey and David Krause. Alma Murphey is the author of this

installment.)

"I just don't see how you can do it!" This is a comment often heard when a blind

woman reveals that she does her own housework and cares for her children. As a

blind homemaker I shall attempt to give you some insight into the lives of so

many women, like myself, who are engaged in this activity.

The homes of blind persons present much the same appearance as those of sighted

people. They contain the usual functional furniture and equipment, together with

pictures, lamps, plants, and other decorative objects. I am not going to tell

you that keeping house is as simple a matter without sight as with sight; there

are, however, a number of tasks which can be performed with equal efficiency by

the blind--washing dishes, making beds, dusting, ironing, cooking, etc. There

are many other operations in which sight, though it would be a decided

advantage, is not indispensable. Here is where more time, thought, and just

plain hard work come into the picture. Instead of being able to survey a room

and do only that work which is necessary, the entire room must be cleaned . Even

so, perfect results are not guaranteed but, by giving the job all we have, the

odds are decidedly in our favor. In my own housekeeping I do not use equipment

specially adapted for the blind. Present-day appliances, such as automatic

washers, dryers, vacuum cleaners, modern ranges, etc., contribute much to making

housework easier and more enjoyable for all of us, whether blind or sighted.

Cooking is accomplished by carefully following directions, much as sighted

people do, with special emphasis given to the amount of cooking time specified.

Some blind homemakers do make effective use of a number of special appliances,

gadgets and Braille gauges, such as Braille timers and brailled or notched

thermostatic controls on ranges and pressure cookers, but I have been able to do

quite well without such aids. There is really nothing in the whole range of

cookery which a competent blind homemaker can not achieve. I know of one totally

blind woman, deprived of the use of one hand, who has achieved considerable

local fame by reason of her almost incredibly delicious and beautiful baking

creations.

Caring for the children is another phase of homemaking which is well within our

grasp, but not without that extra amount of time, thought and effort. Instead of

watching that the small child does not climb up to the stove or pull boiling

water down over himself, a folding gate may be used to keep the child from

coming into the kitchen while cooking is in progress. Instead of watching that a

child does not play with matches, medicine or other harmful things, all such

things are kept well out of his reach. Although it might seem like a good idea,

blind people are not given unusually helpful children. So, when you see a

two-year-old in the food market or out for a walk with his blind mother, it is

not a case of the child helping his mother with the shopping or taking her for a

walk. Older children of blind parents, however, are sometimes given

responsibilities which are not usually delegated to children of sighted parents.

On the other hand, our inability accurately to evaluate the child's performance

often releases him from household chores which usually fall to the lot of the

child with sighted parents,.

The simple fact is that there is nothing in the loss of sight which need prevent

a woman (or, for that matter, a man) from successfully performing all of the

tasks which are involved in keeping up an attractive and well-run household. All

too commonly, however, (and this is often nothing less than tragic), a wife and

mother who loses her sight is relegated to the rocking chair and condemned to

the misery of enforced idleness because of the misguided "kindness" of her

family. Her husband or children, or both, may sincerely believe they are

"protecting" her. In reality, because of their unthinking acceptance of the

ancient stereotype, they may be guilty of monstrous cruelty.

To emphasize the point being made throughout this series of articles, the factor

which makes for success or failure is not our lack of sight, but the degree of

training, initiative, determination, patience and genuine interest which we

possess or lack. This is true whether our job be that of homemaker, secretary,

factory worker or any of the numberless other occupations in which blind people

today are successfully engaged. In conclusion, let me say that a woman's

blindness does not make her either a good homemaker or a bad one.

The Braille Monitor, July, 1958

Part Nine

MISCONCEPTIONS

IX. A TWO-WAY STREET

(This is the ninth in a series of articles written for a St. Louis newspaper by

Jack and Alma Murphey and David Krause. David Krause is the author of this

installment.)

What does a blind person want and hope for in a sighted friend? To answer this

frequently asked question, let me relate a personal experience.

During my first two years in the university I had a very intelligent and

extremely capable young lady employed as a reader in the French courses I was

taking. One day, after almost two years of studying together and attending

classes together, this young lady quite casually opened her purse, pulled out a

snapshot and handed it to me with the comment, "You've never seen a picture of

my husband, have you?" In mere seconds she realized what she had done; that she

had handed a totally blind person a photograph to look at! Her first reaction,

of course, was one of embarrassment, and she began to apologize. I interrupted

before she could get a good start, explaining--"Please don't apologize, for

whether you realize it or not, you have just paid me an extremely high

compliment." And so she had. For, if after almost two years of daily contact,

she could innocently hand me a photograph to look at, then, indeed, I had been

successful in getting her to think of me merely as a person--not as a blind

person.

And quite frankly, I think that is what most blind people want in the way of a

sighted friend; someone who is capable of making a mistake similar to that of my

French reader. If you can actually forget while in the company of a blind person

that that person is blind, then, truly you are capable of treating him as you

would any sighted friend. And that, in the final analysis, is what all blind

persons want a sighted friend to be; a friend who enjoys being in his company

because he genuinely likes him as a person, not because he feels sorry for him

as a blind person, not because he feels he is doing a good deed by devoting his

time and attention to making a little brighter the life of a poor, lonely blind

person. In short, a blind person really wants friendship, not charity. And there

is a great difference. Charity is a one-way street, where one gives and the

other receives; friendship is a two-way street, where both parties give and both

parties receive. Let me illustrate my point. Say that your next door neighbor is

a blind person. If you are constantly doing little favors for him but you never

think of requesting favors in return, then you are giving charity, not

friendship. When a blind couple double--dates with you and your wife, do you

feel an obligation to pick up the check? Do you flatly refuse any attempt on the

part of the blind people to pay their share? If so, and unless you are one of

those rare individuals who always picks up the check with your sighted friends

too, then you are not giving your blind associates a fair shake. Again, it is

simply a case of charity, not real friendship. To be sure, I know there are some

blind people who are quite happy if a sighted friend will always pick up the

check, but after all, how many sighted people do you also know who are chronic

"freeloaders?" That such blind people do exist simply lends further support to

the thesis of all these articles--blind people are merely people who do not see.

They are no more alike than sighted people are alike; and they are no more

different than sighted people are different.

So, if you consider yourself a sighted friend to a blind person, test yourself

on the points made above, making sure that what you think is friendship is not

mere charity. And when the day comes that you catch yourself forgetting that

this individual is blind and find yourself thinking of him as a person, not as a

blind person--then indeed your relationship with him has become a true, bona

fide friendship.

The Braille Monitor, August, 1958

Part Ten

MISCONCEPTIONS

X. BLIND PEOPLE AS EMPLOYEES

(This is the tenth in a series of articles written for a St. Louis newspaper by

Jack and Alma Murphey and David Krause. Alma Murphey is the author of this

installment.)

The major objective of Real Independence Through Employment, Inc., more

familiarly known as RITE, is that of improving employment conditions for the

blind. Progress has been made along this line in the past twenty years, but in

connparison with the existing need, this is no more than a beginning. Only a

small minority of employers have become really convinced of the often-proved

fact that properly trained blind persons make excellent employees, and just as

few realize that there are jobs in plants and offices which do not require sight

for their successful performance. In this article we shall attempt to give you

an idea of the place in private industry being filled by blind persons, together

with a brief explanation as to how this has come about.

First, it is necessary that we consider the blind not as a group of persons

having general characteristics, but as individuals possessing widely varying

interests and abilities. There are many blind people with additional handicaps

which, though they may be much less obvious than blindness, make competition

with sighted workers out of the question. In this article we are dealing with

well-adjusted blind persons who have at least average intelligence, a certain

amount of manual dexterity and a genuine interest in their jobs. They have

simply lost their sight. It should be pointed out that as a rule a blind person

who is successfully taking his place with sighted fellow-workers must, in

practice, be prepared to put forth somewhat more effort than those around him

and, in fact, be competent to do a somewhat better job than would be expected if

he were not handicapped. Almost always more attention is focused upon him than

upon his sighted co-workers and any mistakes he may make are invariably

attributed to his blindness. For this reason, and because statistics show that

among blind employees accidents are fewer, attendance records better and

production rating higher, the employer gets a bargain. Hiring a blind person is

not a benevolent act but just good business. It is hoped that records

established by blind persons as employees and as professional people, together

with the good will, co-operation and spirit of daring on the part of some of our

more forward-looking sighted fellow citizens, will do much to help our

organization realize its objective.

Next, we must realize that while sight is necessary for the performance of some

tasks, there are innumerable operations both at home and at work for which sight

is simply a convenience. Persons possessing this marvelous faculty use it not

only when necessary, but whenever possible, and quite reasonably can not be

expected to distinguish the real extent of its neccessity.

Prior to World War II, with the exception of sheltered work-shops, jobs for

blind people were practically non-existent. Then came the war, bringing with it

a labor shortage so acute that blind men and women were hired in large numbers.

We filled jobs in plants and offices in a manner so creditable as to prove

beyond doubt that blind persons can compete successfully with sighted workers

when given tasks which do not require the use of sight. The trouble is that we

are so often denied the opportunity to prove that a given job or operation does

not require sight.

In spite of their proved abilities the blind were the first to be let out when

the labor shortage ended after the close of World War II. There was a great

turnover at that time among foremen, supervisors, superintendents, personnel

managers and safety engineers and the new ones in most cases were shocked to

find blind persons in what they considered dangerous situations. So, for their

own good, these workers were fired. Also, of course, most blind workers had not

yet attained enough seniority to protect their jobs when layoffs began after war

contracts were completed. Only a very few of those hired during the wartime

emergency have been able to keep their jobs.

One good and lasting result of wartime employment of the blind, with its

convincing demonstration of the competence of blind workers, however, was the

establishment of vocational rehabilitation programs for the blind, through the

instrumentality of private and governmental agencies. These programs have, for

the most part, been pitifully inadequate, but at least they have constituted a

beginning and a move in the right direction. Most fair-minded critics will

concede that the general trend has been toward improvement as the years have

passed, an improvement which has been considerably stimulated by federal

legislation. The weakest parts of the rehabilitation programs have been in the

areas of advanced specialized training and job placement.

As viewed from the vantage point of the present, as contrasted with the

situation a score of years ago, there has been enough progress so that we can

all take heart.

Merely to list the jobs, occupations and professions in which blind people are

now successful would require many pages of fine type. It would be much simpler

and easier to list the jobs, occupations and professions in which no blind

people have been successful. But the percentage of employment among the blind of

working age is still far short of what it could be and even of what it is now

in, for example, the United Kingdom. There are still some states where the

teaching profession is closed to the blind, either by statute or by

administrative practice. Where sheltered workshop employment is available, it is

much easier for the employment counselor to shunt a blind worker off into this

realm of no return, and so claim a "closure," than it is to expend the effort

and energy required to find him a real job. Granting that a considerable

expenditure of effort and energy is required in many cases to place severely

handicapped persons in competitive jobs, the placement counselor is being paid

to do exactly that and should be required to "do it the hard way" when

necessary. There are countless operations in plants and offices which merely

require a brief explanation or demonstration in order for the blind employee to

comprehend and adequately perform them. There are other jobs which require

specialized training, and opportunities for blind people to receive such

training are still decidedly limited.

To conclude, let us bear in mind that blind people are alike only in their

visual disability. In our abilities we differ just as sighted people differ.

When the time comes that the public, and especially employers, will realize that

where one blind person failed another one may succeed, then a great victory will

have been won. Another dream for the future is that the interest, understanding

and co-operation which prompted this beginning in vocational opportunities for

the blind will grow until employment is no longer our major problem.

The Braille Monitor, September, 1958

Part Eleven

MISCONCEPTIONS

XI. PREJUDICE

(This is the eleventh in a series of articles written for a St. Louis newspaper

by Jack and Alma Murphey and David Krause. David Krause is the author of this

installment.)

Television, radio, newspaper and magazines are constantly spelling out the evils

and the unfairness of racial and religious prejudice. And because the majority

of Americans believe in fair play, slow but sure progress is being made in

breaking down the barriers imposed by these prejudices. It is of a different

type of prejudice that I would like to speak in this article.

I refer to the prejudice against blind people that still survives today. I know

that the typical reaction to this statement is the reply that "This is

ridiculous! I am an average member of the sighted public and I certainly have no

prejudice against blind people. Why, in fact, it is quite the opposite. I feel

the very deepest sympathy for blind people. I think they should all have good

pensions and be taken care of." It is just because so very few people believe

there is such a prejudice, and almost no one will admit that he himself is

guilty--that what we are up against here is even more difficult to combat than

racial or religious prejudice. "Prejudice," as Webster defines it, is "the

pre-judging of people or things without factual information on which to base

such judgement." Certainly blind people are confronted with this day in and day

out.

When one of us tries to rent a place to live, he is frequently told that he

cannot rent a particular room or apartment because the landlord is afraid he

might get hurt or that he might burn down the property while cooking or tending

the furnace.

When he tries to get a job he finds this prejudice cropping up time and time

again. The majority of employers in this country will not even consider hiring a

blind person. This despite the demonstrable fact that any plant or office

employing fifty people or more has at least one job in its operation where sight

is not indispensable and which a competent blind person can perform as well as

one who has sight. Employers who have hired blind workers frankly and willingly

endorse the caliber of their work, their loyalty to the firm, their

dependability on the job, and their rather special talent for building high

moral among their fellow workers.

Most of us, at one time or another, have entered restaurants or bars as

customers, only to be greeted with "We don't need anything today." The

assumption being, of course, that if we are blind we must be selling something

or begging.

These are all examples of situations which nearly all blind people must face and

deal with, and they are the result of prejudice in its most baffling,

frustrating and damaging form. These are examples of pre-judging without factual

knowledge on which to base such judgments. Those who are governed by this

particular form of prejudice refuse to consider blind people as individuals.

Their attitudes and their conduct continue to be based on stereotyped concepts.

They are unwilling or unable to think in terms of the abilities and

disabilities, the likes and dislikes, the talents and dispositions of individual

blind people.

This sort of prejudice cannot be stamped out by legislation. Only a

full-fledged, continuous campaign of public education, aimed at bringing about a

more realistic understanding of the problems of blindness and blind people, can

some day put an end to this type of prejudice. The blind themselves,

individually and through their organizations, must assume and continue to bear

the main responsibility for this campaign. It must be directed primarily towards

the sighted, but it must reach also those among our own people who have

themselves come to accept the stereotype because they have heard so often that

they are all alike in their helplessness and dependency. No part of our program,

at the local, the state, or the national level, is quite so vital as this

educational campaign. It is the only method by which we can eradicate a

prejudice which is the cause of the real handicap of blindness--a handicap

which, in its social and economic consequences, is just as real, just as

damaging, and just as unfair as the economic and social handicaps caused by

racial or religious prejudices.

Braille Monitor, October, 1958

Part Twelve

MISCONCEPTIONS

XII. CHOICE OF ASSOCIATES

(This is the twelth and final installment in a series of articles written for a

St. Louis newspaper by Jack and Alma Murphey and David Krause. Alma Murphey is

the author of this last installment.)

In previous articles we have attempted to show how the handicap of blindness is

almost always intensified by the misconceptions of sighted people. As the final

consideration for this series let us deal with the all too prevalent assumption

that blind people prefer blind associates. To make sweeping generalizations in

this area is most unwise for, as has been pointed out, blind people are simply

individuals from every walk of life who have lost the ability to see. Just as

blindness gives us no special talent, character trait or mood, neither does it

cause us to have a general preference in choosing our associates.

There are extremes at both ends of the spectrum. There are those who, for one

reason or another, either do not know any other blind people or, when they do

know others, avoid associating with them whenever possible. And there are those

who have practically no acquaintances other than among the blind. Most of us,

however, feel that sight is no basis on which to cultivate or discourage a

friendship. We associate with blind people, sighted people or a happy

combination of the two, as circumstances warrant.

Although I have frequently been the only blind person in a group of people and

have found it to be an enjoyable experience, I somewhat reluctantly admit that

it is in a group of blind people that I feel most wholeheartedly accepted, most

genuinely at ease. I believe it is only natural that one should feel most

comfortable and at ease in a group where he is on an equal footing with those

around him. In such a group one does not feel that his particular physical

disability is the focus of attention or the occasion for cautiously whispered

comment. He has the deep gratification of feeling that this company of his peers

needs and wants him; that he is giving as well as receiving. I feel most at

home, therefore, in a group of blind people, made up of those who share my own

disability.

This feeling is definitely not a preference, but rather a reluctant choice made

because of the existence of that intangible barrier which almost inevitably

arises between blind and sighted persons, especially in a group predominantly

composed of those who can see. I, as well as many of my friends, would enjoy

taking an active part in PTA associations, church groups, service clubs and

various other organizations, were it possible for me to do so on an entirely

equal basis.

Rev. Thomas Carroll, well known in work for the blind--a man with normal vision

and a deep understanding of human nature--has said that one of the many "losses"

accompanying the loss of sight by an adult is that of social acceptance. This

man recognized that social rejection (based on historic misconceptions) is the

basic and compelling reason why a blind person is so often forced to seek his

companions among the blind.

We hope and believe that a properly conducted and unremitting campaign of public

education, by the blind themselves, will eventually arouse the intelligent

interest of those who are blessed with sight and that a mutual understanding

will bring about a situation which is no longer affected by discrimination,

superstitious awe or distrust on either side, and where association between the

blind and the sighted, on the basis of complete equality, will be regarded by

both as the norm.

There has already been considerable progress toward that much-to-be-desired

goal. There are unquestionably more sighted people in the world today who have

come to have a real insight into the problems of blindness than there have ever

been before. We are profoundly grateful that this is so, for it has made it

possible for at least some of us to achieve a social and economic status which

approaches genuine equality with our sighted fellows. The willingness to accept

some of us for what we are and for what we have to offer, carries with it the

promise that some day this may be true with respect to all blind people. In the

final analysis, what we are asking is the opportunity to prove our worth, or

lack of worth, as individuals.

We have received a number of requests for reprints of the entire series of

articles which we have called ''Misconceptions". Some readers have felt that

they could induce their local newspapers to carry the series and others have

wished to use it in their state publications.

If you now wish to receive the entire series in mimeographed form, please send

in your request with 50c in coin or stamps to the Braille Monitor. 605 S. Few

St. , Madison 3, Wisconsin, to cover the cost. If we receive a sufficient number

of orders, we will go ahead, otherwise we shall return your money.