**Blindness: The Other Half of Inertia**

An Address Delivered By Kenneth Jernigan
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An essential component of being human is the ability to think; an essential component of the ability to think is the ability to verbalize; and an essential component of the ability to verbalize is a knowledge of the meaning of words. It is not that a knowledge of the meaning of words can make us human or create humanity, but to the extent we lack such knowledge our humanity is diminished. To the extent we have it our humanity is enhanced. And it is not simply the speaking but the understanding of words that counts—the delineation of the subtleties of meaning, the comprehension of definition and connotation, the flow of imagery and association: love ... hate ... poverty ... longing ... loneliness ... desire ... dream. Words—the building blocks of humanity.

There are words for every occasion—words for children, words for scientists, and words for statesmen. There are also words which have special significance for us. Consider, for instance, the word inertia. What does it mean? What does it connote? And why does it have special significance? When most of us think of inertia, we think of something not moving, something inert--and it is not just the physical but also the social. The dictionary tells us that inertia means "lack of skill, idleness, laziness."

But this is only half of the meaning. There is the other half. The full definition is this: Things at rest tend to remain at rest, and things in motion tend to remain in motion, at a uniform rate and in a straight line. The only way to change the inertia of an object is by pressure. It is as hard to stop something which is moving as it is to start something which is not.

When the blind came to organize in 1940, the situation was about as bad as it could possibly be. It was almost static. It was worse than static, for there was enough motion to tantalize but not enough to encourage or stimulate hope. At the pace of 1940 it would have taken generations (perhaps centuries) for the blind to achieve meaningful lives and real opportunity—and a promise which is measured by centuries is no promise at all. It is only a shadow and a mockery. More than twenty years ago, in their struggle for recognition and freedom, the blacks (that minority with whom we have so often compared ourselves) said it all: "If not now, when!"

Regardless of the future, the world of 1940 held little hope for the blind—certainly none for the blind of that generation. It was custody, control, condescension, inferiority, pity, and lack of opportunity.

Then, everything changed. Dr. Jacobus tenBroek and a handful of others organized the National Federation of the Blind. Suddenly it was not centuries but decades—and, yes, something for the blind of that generation, something for the blind then alive. In the beginning the force of inertia worked against us (things at rest tend to remain at rest); but pressure was applied, and the acceleration was noticeable and immediate. Of course, at first the progress was slow (it always is). The situation was aggravated by the mass involved, for with a given pressure the build-up is always in direct proportion to the mass which has to be moved. And the mass which we had to move was tremendous. It was all of society—all of it (including ourselves): society—with its accumulated stereotypes, misconceptions, and prejudices; society—with its mistaken ideas and "freaky" notions about blindness going back to the dawn of history, ideas and notions imbedded in literature, locked in folklore, and sanctified by tradition.

I joined this movement in 1949. I met Dr. tenBroek in 1952, and I came to my first National Convention the same year. I have been to every National Convention since—all thirty-two of them; and I can tell you from firsthand experience that during that time we have moved an awful lot of mass.

Now, we are in 1983. What is our situation today? Where are we? How is the state of our inertia? In the first place we should keep in mind the basic principle: The only way to change the inertia of an object is by pressure. It is as hard to stop something which is moving as it is to start something which is not. That is the rule, and it is as immutable for organizations as for objects. By the terms of inertia no pressure is ever lost. For forty-three years we have worked and struggled to accelerate our movement and send it in a straight line toward freedom and independence. The efforts of tens of thousands of blind men and women have been spent for almost two generations to reach the current momentum. Today we are moving with a mighty force. It would take as much pressure and effort to stop our progress and push us back to 1940 as it has taken to get us where we are. I find that a comforting thought, for there is no force on earth that can do it. There is no group (no combination of groups) that can find the nerve, muster the determination, or feel the need. We can summon the strength to resist any conceivable pressure which would slow our acceleration and push us back—for we have experienced pain, We know what it is to hurt. Through the centuries we have yearned for acceptance; longed for opportunity; and dreamed of a full life. And too often we have waited. But no more! Never again! The waiting did not work. We have learned our lesson—and learned it well. Equality will not (perhaps cannot) be given to us. If we want it, we must take it. So the waiting is over. The yearning and the longing are at an end. And not just someday or tomorrow—but now! From this day forward it will be action. Let people call us what they will and think what they please. We are simply no longer willing to be second-class citizens. We want no strife or confrontation, but we will do what we have to do. To the extent required we will meet pressure with pressure and force with force. We know who we are, and we will never go back.

Today we are not in 1940, nor will we ever be there again. Neither have we arrived at our goal. We are in mid- passage. The balances are shifting, and the force of inertia is now more with us than against us. We are moving with accelerating motion in a straight line toward the future, but there are counter pressures—forces of opposition, which seek to slow us down and push us back.

Upon superficial examination it might appear that we are not dealing with one group, but three: the general public, the governmental and private agencies, and ourselves. In a sense this is true, but both the blind and the agencies are part of the larger society, and to the extent we move society as a whole, we also move the component parts. This is so despite the fact that the sheltered shops, the rehabilitation establishment, and the other governmental and private agencies have a heavy investment in the status quo and, thus, a built-in resistance to change. They may come kicking and screaming—but they will come. We the blind are also part of the general public, and even though we are the primary force generating the change and creating the acceleration, we cannot outdistance the inertia we give to the rest of society.

Things at rest tend to remain at rest, but today that half of inertia is not our major concern. The focus is on the other half: things in motion tend to remain in motion. With growing pressure we are accelerating toward the goal of security, equality, and opportunity for the blind. Although our overall momentum is increasing rapidly, the progress is not uniform. In some areas it is steady; in others it is exponential; in still others it is uneven; and in yet others it is hardly noticeable at all.

We have made much progress, but we still have a long way to go. The mistaken notions and ancient stereotypes which people have about blindness are all pervasive. They are so ingrained as to be almost second nature. They go to the central core of our being and permeate every shade of our simplest thought. This is true of the blind as well as the sighted. Sometimes those of us who are blind (even those of us who consciously work on a daily basis to change the status quo) accept the public view of our limitations, without even knowing we are doing it. Sometimes we do it while in the very act of speaking to the contrary.

A few years ago I went to a cafeteria with a sighted associate. We took our trays and moved down the line. When we turned from the cash register and started for the table, an accident occurred. A glass of water fell from the tray and splashed on the floor. "There will be those," I said, "who will see this and think the reason I spilled that glass of water is because I am blind."

"You are right," my sighted associate replied; "for you didn't spill it. I did. It fell from my tray, not yours."

What I have already told you is bad enough, but there is more, and worse. I didn't leave it there: "How did you do that?" I asked.

This time my associate (who is as well versed in our philosophy as the rest of us) responded with more than a touch of acid: "I did it the same way anybody else would," she said. "I tipped my tray. Do you think it is normal for the blind to be clumsy and the sighted to be graceful? Do you think sighted people don't have accidents? Why did you automatically assume that you were the one who spilled the water?"

It was a fair question, and it caused a lot of soul searching. I reluctantly conclude that (despite all of my philosophy and knowledge to the contrary, despite all of my experience with this very sort of situation dressed out in other forms) I fell into the trap of social conditioning. I hope I won't do it again, but I can't be sure. The force of inertia is powerful, and changes in public attitudes about blindness are hard to set in motion. Things at rest tend to remain at rest.

The blind are like other minorities. Some of us have come a long way on the road to equality; others have only started; and many have not yet begun. The plain truth is that (because of low self esteem and the role society has taught us to play) a lot of blind people, along with most of the sighted, simply do not believe that it is respectable to be blind. Mainly such people are not in this organization (at least, not actively in it), for we are moving on a different track. We have tested our theories and put them to the proof. The basic tenet of our philosophy can be stated in a single sentence: the average blind person (given reasonable opportunity and an even break) can make the dollars and take the knocks with everybody else.

In April of this year Fred Schroeder, who is one of our coming young leaders, represented the Federation at a meeting involving a number of officials from the governmental and private agencies. One of the occurrences which he reported has particular relevance to what we are discussing: "During lunch on Thursday," he said, "I observed an incident which brought into vivid clarity the way in which these folks view themselves as blind people. Mr. Y, who is blind, had joined the group for lunch and was sitting next to Mr. X, who is also blind. I overheard Mr. Y say, 'I have been sitting next to you for ten minutes, and I still don't know whether you are blind or sighted.' With obvious pleasure Mr. X responded, 'Why, thank you very much. I'm blind."'

What a damning commentary. He thought it was a compliment! This man works with the newly blinded. He serves, if only by example, as a role model of what blind people can do and expect to be. No wonder it has taken us so long to achieve momentum! Last fall I, too, had occasion to observe Mr. X. He chaired a meeting which I attended, and when it came time for a pause, he said something to this effect: "There are coffee and rolls in the back of the room. We are not going to take a break just yet, but if you like, those of you who can see can go back during the next couple of minutes and get refreshments."

If this attitude of low self esteem is held by the agency leaders (and it is not just the blind who hold it but often the sighted as well), how do they treat the blind they are employed to help? Many of you in this room do not need documentation to tell you. You know firsthand from painful experience. But the documentation exists. All too frequently, I am sad to say, the agency officials express their feelings of frustration and inadequacy by taking the tack (of course, they do not do it consciously) that if they cannot succeed in business or achieve leadership anywhere else, at least they can bully and dominate the blind.

Consider, for instance, the following letter which I recently received from a blind adult who had attended a camp for the blind in California called Enchanted Hills. "The director and staff," he said, "can stay up as late as they wish—smoke, drink, make noise, and keep the campers up. The campers, on the other hand, can't drink, smoke, or make noise—and we have a curfew. We are adults like they are, and just because we're blind, they think they have the say-so over us."

As you can see, Enchanted Hills is far from idyllic; but it is a model of freedom compared to the Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany, New York—which (with the help of state and federal funds) operates a rehabilitation training program. Under date of May 17, 1983, our New York President (David Stayer) wrote to the Executive Director of the Northeastern Association as follows:

"Dear Mr. Friedman,

"It has been brought to the attention of our organization that you operate a residential facility for blind adults. We have heard that the residents are not treated as adults, and their dignity is nonexistent. As President of our New York Affiliate, I am specifically requesting the written policy clearly explaining all the rules and regulations related to your residence, Doc's Motel. I am also requesting the statement of rights that the residents have....

"If what we hear is valid, your agency is a disgrace for the way it treats those of us who are blind. It is reported that adults are ordered to bed right after dinner, that specific permission must be obtained before a resident is allowed to leave the motel, and that a ten p.m. curfew exists."

Mr. Friedman responded under date of May 27, 1983. His letter should be studied with care by those who say we exaggerate when we talk about custodialism. He is so out of touch with reality that he does not even know what he is admitting. Yet, his attitudes are closer to the norm than the exception. Here is what he says:

"Dear Mr. Stayer:

"Your concern about the treatment of blind adults is one that is shared by everyone at this association. We are concerned that all individuals are treated in a dignified manner.

"You refer to our operation of a residential facility for blind adults. This is incorrect. Doc's Motel is separate and apart from the area in which certain blind individuals reside. While it is true that the boarding host is the proprietor of a motel, the individuals residing with her live in her home, not in the motel proper. It is also untrue that adults are ordered to bed right after dinner. A 10:00 p.m. curfew exists only in the sense that individuals are expected to respect the rights of others beginning at that time. Quiet hours begin then and usually last until the early morning hours....

"In general we expect residents to interact effectively as adults residing in the same situation. However, as a result of experiential deprivation, the existence of other handicapping conditions in addition to legal blindness, and a certain amount of social immaturity, this is not always a realistic expectation. The guidelines were developed to protect the basic rights of the individuals residing at the boarding home, in which are provided clean, comfortable, quiet places to sleep and three meals each day.... Access to any other portions of the boarding host's property (aside from common eating areas at appropriate times and bedroom facilities) is on a voluntary basis.

"With regard to the imposition of quiet hours, it is reasonable to expect that trainees who are participating in a full-time day training program usually require as a minimum eight hours of sleep per night. Thus, quiet hours are from 10 p.m. to 6:30 a.m. on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday nights. Quiet hours of twelve midnight to 8:30 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights have been established. Should an individual wish to remain outside of his or her bedroom area after ten p.m. on week nights and after twelve p.m. on weekends, the individual is free to do so. However, the in- dividual is not permitted to return to the bedroom area until the end of quiet hours. In the case of week nights, this is 6:30 a.m., and in the case of weekends this is 8:30 a.m. Thus, no curfew as such exists. An individual can be required to return to the bedroom area after the taking of the evening meal. However, as I have previously mentioned, no individual has ever been ordered to bed or to sleep at that time....

"All current residents are aware of these guidelines and rules, and each has agreed to sign a copy of the rules and guidelines when the final draft is completed.

"Mr. Stayer, it is unfortunate that an individual who feels that he or she has been mistreated by our association would not seek justice to redress the alleged violations of his dignity as a human being within the agency that is providing services to him or her....

"For the past seventy-five years the Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany has worked with members of the blind community in assisting them to achieve their maximum potential and independence within the framework of the services we offer.

"I look forward to the time when we all can work constructively for the individuals about whom we are rightfully concerned.

"Sincerely, "Michael B. Friedman "Executive Director"

Remember that this exchange of correspondence is less than two months old. A young blind woman wants training to be a secretary, so she goes to the Northeastern Association for help. And what does she find? The Association is "concerned that all individuals are treated in a dignified manner." Mr. Friedman tells us so. Furthermore, it is not a residential facility for blind adults—because Doc's Motel is separate and apart from the area in which certain blind individuals reside (and besides, they do not live in the motel proper). A 10:00 p.m. curfew exists only in the sense that individuals are ex- pected to respect the rights of others beginning at that time, presumably being free to violate such rights at 9:59 and before. And what is all of this talk about restriction? Residents are not required to be in their rooms by ten on week nights and twelve on weekends. Well, of course, if they happen to be late, they can't come back until the next day. They can, one assumes, sleep wherever the party was—or in the park. Probably it will decrease their "experiential deprivation" and lessen their "social immaturity."

Then, there is the matter of ordering people to their rooms after dinner. Not true. Well, all right—perhaps they are ordered to their rooms, but no one has been ordered to bed or to sleep. Can you believe it? How on earth would you order someone to sleep if you wanted to? But, not to worry—"For the past seventy-five years the Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany has worked with members of the blind community in assisting them to achieve their maximum potential and independence within the framework of the services we offer." In fact, doubly not to worry. The Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany is accredited. By whom? You guessed it—by that advocate of high standards and quality services, NAC, (the National Accreditation Council for Agencies Serving the Blind and Visually Handicapped). The accreditation is assured until 1986.

And, anyway, the trainees will sign a statement agreeing to the rules. They have already approved them, even before the final draft has been written. Mr. Friedman says so. To conclude this sorry business, let me give you just one brief quote from Mr. Friedman's rules:

"The resident," the document says, "has the individual right to occupy his bedroom and store his belongings within the bedroom. Each individual is also permitted to allow other residents to enter or exit. If the individual wishes to carry on private and personal conversations with individuals of his or her choice, he or she may do so. He or she is not obligated to allow entrance to any other parties, with the exception of the boarding host or any person assigned as a supervisory figure."

I don't know how all of that strikes you—but I, for one, would starve before I would take training from that organization. Doc's Motel is not on the roster of places I intend to visit—unless, of course, I go there to picket (which, incidentally, I may). The Northeastern Association of the Blind at Albany is exactly the kind of organization we intend to reform or put out of action. Perhaps we can teach them something about the other half of inertia. Things at rest can be put into rapid motion if you apply enough force and pour on the pressure. We want no strife or confrontation, but we will do what we have to do—and we don't intend to be sent to our rooms after dinner or kept off the premises until 8:31 on Sunday morning or badgered about our "experiential deprivation." We are simply no longer willing to be second-class citizens. We know who we are, and we will never go back.

Bad as all of this is, we must keep it in perspective. The agencies are not (and cannot be) our principal area of focus. Regardless of their delusions of grandeur and their talk about professionalism and expertise, they do not set the tone. They are merely subordinate parts of the larger society. Their attitudes spring—not from knowledge or "professionalism," as they claim—but from the prejudice and misconceptions of the general public. When we have educated that general public and imparted to it enough momentum to send it accelerating toward first-class status for the blind, the agencies will follow.

And the task we face is formidable. Every day there are letters and articles which cross my desk to prove it. The public attitudes about blindness are straight from the Middle Ages—including witchcraft, superstition, and fear of the dark. There is not a single area of human endeavor which is exempt. The ignorance extends from prison to pulpit, from sex to Sunday school, and from airlines to alcoholism. Do you doubt it?

A journalist from Ohio thinks the blind need special fishing facilities, and he writes me about it: "The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers," he says, "has built thousands of dams throughout the country and plans to build hundreds more. Many of these, such as the Ohio River navigational dams, have tail- waters that, for various reasons, attract millions of fish. These areas offer us a unique opportunity to develop quality fishing for those previously deprived of the experience by lack of sight or mobility."

A locksmith from Wisconsin believes the blind would benefit from specially shaped door knobs (oval and textured, he thinks), and he is willing to design them. These knobs would warn us of stairs and other so-called "danger areas." A pilot from Pennsylvania thinks we should solve the problems we have with airlines by setting up one of our own: segregated and simple—no more trouble, either for us or the sighted public. A woman from Tennessee thinks her blind daughter is unable to play with sighted children: "Lynn is a smart little girl," she writes, "and makes good grades. Since she can't play with other children, she has turned to books. We call her our little book worm."

Then, there is religion. Many people have enlightened attitudes about it, but a great many do not--and when they do not, the blind come in for very special treatment. First, consider the gentle and compassionate. Not long ago the Augsburg Publishing House distributed a bulletin to the Lutheran Churches. It said in part: "To engage in a lively conversation with someone who is blind as if he is not blind is to honor him." I am sure that the sentiment was kindly meant, but not many of us would feel honored. How do you engage in a conversation with someone who is blind as if he is not blind? It is like engaging in a conversation with someone from Missouri as if he were not from Missouri.

But let us leave this subtle stuff and get to the fire and brimstone. Not long ago a woman from Des Moines wrote me and laid it out.

"I have never heard," she said, "of a Christian family having a blind child. The Lord Jesus Christ looks after His people. People are getting so wicked. God is chastising people for not following Him and doing His ways. Fifty years ago I never heard of blind people. Now there are so many. Hundreds of them. Why don't you all get saved? And then the Lord will heal your eyes if you ask Him to—or go have a minister pray for you."

That puts it on the line. Wouldn't you say? Now, I don't know how you read the scriptures, but that is not the way I read them. If the incidents I am relating were isolated happenings, I would not discuss them—but they are not. They occur on a daily basis, with monotonous frequency. They are the typical, the norm. I deal with hundreds and thousands of them in an ongoing pattern.

Here, for instance, is a letter which Ralph Sanders recently got. It is no less condescending than the one I just quoted, but perhaps it is a bit more secular. "Ralph: to think you have been considered a second-class citizen when you have been required to sit in a certain pew disgusts me. Give the sighted some consideration. You count your footsteps and note your directions. Your pew was chosen for you to 'hear' the sermon. It is located where you don't stumble over some sleeping person's feet, and if you happen to really get the spirit during the sermon and forget the footsteps and directions, the person who told you where the best place was for you to sit will be able to identify you and give you companionship as soon as possible."

Yet, they tell us there is no discrimination and that we are not a minority. I have said it before, and I will say it again. We want no strife or confrontation but we will do what we have to do. To the extent required we will meet pressure with pressure and force with force. We are simply no longer willing to be second-class citizens. We know who we are, and we will never go back.

As I have indicated, there are those who base the claim that we are inferior on religion, but there are also those who base it on science. Here is a case in point: "The blind," the writer declares, "can never be truly equal, because they cannot have any combination of senses to equal vision. For example, they cannot view the lives of microscopic organisms or analyze atomic structures by sight. The key to life itself is left unseen by them."

How many sighted people do you suppose this man thinks have ever seen an atom! And what about electrons and protons and neutrons? To quote Isaac Asimov, "As far as the protons and electrons are concerned, the neutrons can go jump in the lake"—which is about the way I feel about the man who wrote that letter.

Pat Barrett is one of the leaders of the National Federation of the Blind of Idaho. Early this year he wrote me about GAMES magazine. GAMES is published by Playboy Press and has adult crossword puzzles. On the cover of the February, 1983, issue were colloquialisms expressed in the form of pic- tures. "Holy mackerel" was a fish with holes in it. "Blind as a bat" was a bat carrying a cup of pencils. As Pat said in his letter of protest to Playboy, "the idea that blind persons usually sell pencils on the street corner is outdated and shallow."

The notion that we are inferior is not limited to the everyday world. It penetrates every corner of existence. A prison inmate recently wrote to tell me that he would like to do recording for the blind. As he put it, "if I can help someone less fortunate than I am, I would like to do it."

In a slightly different vein a man wrote me last year to ask for my help concerning a friend who was in the penitentiary. "He is serving three years on theft of property charges stemming from several checks written for over $100.00," the man said. "Prison is no place for a blind person, and I was wondering if you could intervene for an early parole."

A man in Minnesota thinks blind alcoholics cannot benefit from regular programs used by the sighted and suggests segregated services. The Manchester Union Leader (one of New Hampshire's most prominent newspapers) says that the governor of the state is so bad that only the deaf, the dumb, and the blind could believe he is competent. Hazel Staley (one of the leaders our North Carolina affiliate) was denied the right this year to take a tour with her church group through Cannon Mills.

Then, there is the battle which Don Capps had last year with the Hyland Therapeutics Division of Travenol Laboratories of Glendale, California. That organization pays people to participate in its plasmapheresis program. This is a high-toned way of saying that blood is taken from the person, plasma and other components are extracted from the blood, and the remaining portion of the blood is then injected back into the person's body. The laboratory took the position that blind persons were not capable of participating. Don Capps disagreed. "Dear Dr. Rodell," he wrote: "I must conclude from your letter that you know virtually nothing about blindness or blind people.... Whether you fully realize it or not, your remarks and the policy they imply are blatantly discriminatory.... You subtly imply that blind persons will inhibit or disturb the operation's safety.... You also mention that prospective donors are required to read a detailed Informed Consent Form and then sign it, indicating that the form has been read and understood.... If you will think for a moment, you must realize that blind patients undergoing surgery or medical treatment must also sign Informed Consent forms, as well as a variety of other contracts and legal papers in their lifetimes."

Dr. Rodell didn't like it, but he grudgingly began to give ground. He tried to delay. Under date of October 26, 1981, he wrote: "Since the processing of blind donors requires changes to be made in routine procedures, we are obligated to deny participation until such procedural changes are made in an orderly, thoughtful, and constructive manner. I will instruct my staff to initiate appropriate action in that direction. I sympathize with your concerns relative to problems that are faced by blind persons, but strongly object to and do not agree with your conclusion that we are discriminating against them."

Don was not deterred. He kept at it. When Dr. Rodell (in a letter dated March 23, 1982) finally gave in and said he would accept the blind as donors, he got in as many nasty little licks as he could. In his special rules concerning the blind he said: "On the Donor Master Form, below the area for allergies, print in red BLIND or LIMITED-VISION so that the donor's needs are immediately recognized whenever he presents himself."

All of this gibbering insanity (this talk of blindness as an allergy, of oval shaped door knobs and segregated fishing facilities, of Christians not losing their sight and blind persons not being equal because of their inability to see atoms) could be chalked up to madness and soon forgotten-- except for this: It translates into cruelty and pain and deprivation. It means lack of opportunity and denial of employment. It leads to broken lives and shattered dreams.

A blind man is denied the right to sell insurance because a company official believes his signature would not be valid. A blind mother in California has her children taken away from her because she is blind, and we have to go to court and the press to get them back. Sighted parents from Illinois tell of the treatment they got when their son became blind:

"Our son is sixteen years old," they write, and went totally blind in May of 1980, after he was hit on the head in the hall at school. Family and friends quietly deserted us. Even now we are that family with the blind child, and our youngest son has been the target for ridicule and cruelty because of his 'stupid blind brother."'

Sally Prentice is one of our members from Connecticut. She went to a job fair to seek employment. "In October of 1981," she writes, "I attended a job fair for the handicapped in Stamford, Connecticut. It was sponsored by the Easter Seal Center. Attending the fair were representatives of many large corporations, among them Xerox. Xerox was having its own business problems and was not hiring at the time. They did, however, take it upon themselves to offer me advice.

"I went to this job fair in good faith, believing that companies also sent representatives in good faith to recruit qualified disabled individuals. I went with my resume in hand (and I have reason to believe it is well done). I dressed in a skirt and blazer, the kind of thing anyone would be proud to wear to a job interview. I went alone, carrying my white cane and portfolio.

"I talked with three representatives from the Xerox personnel office at their booth. After a few moments of conversation, they informed me that they were not hiring and offered the following advice. They said that I was too self- assured, too articulate, and too effective. They advised me that it was obvious from my manner that if anyone were to give me a job,' I would not be 'grateful,' but would feel that I deserved it! They said that this attitude would hurt me and that I should, therefore, try to appear more humble.

"It had never before occurred to me that anyone could think I wanted them to 'give me a job.'I was applying to be employed, and I know I have ability worth paying for. A gift can be many things. It can be given out of love or it can be given to the helpless and needy out of charity. I did not want love or charity from the Xerox Corporation. I might have deserved a job if I had received fair consideration. It was clear to me that no blind person could receive fair consideration from these people. They had set different standards for blind job applicants than for sighted ones.

"It may seem surprising, but I was thinking of the interviews I had when I was sighted. I got every job I ever interviewed for. I made a good impression, and employers were pleased to offer me a position. I do not believe that I should change my whole life style because I am blind. It's not good for me. It's not good for employers. It's not good for other blind people. We must find a way to make employers accept us for what we are. I was shaken by this experience, but I was not taken in by it. I am continuing to use the same techniques I have always used to seek employment."

Sally Prentice is a sensitive and intelligent human being. Her letter does more than speak of employment. It tells of a need which cries to be met. It talks of a people born to be free—and a spirit loose in the land. It calls the blind to joint action, and points the way to where we must go. It shows us the past and how far we have traveled. It looks to the future and the distance ahead. It demands and exhorts and encourages. It causes us to think of what we have been through the ages, of what we have become as a movement, and of what we certainly and surely intend to be.

Sally Prentice (and the rest of us like her) cannot be checked in our growing momentum. We have found the other half of inertia, and we are generating the force to make our dreams reality. The very fact of our Federation is the strongest proof of what I have said. Yes, we still experience discrimination, denial, and lack of opportunity; but the tide is running the other way. It can be seen in our victories in the sheltered shops, in our radio and television spots which blanket the nation, and in the jobs which blind people are getting and holding. It can be seen in the hope, the determination, and the zest for the future which blind people are now feeling. It can be seen in the mood and the joy of this convention.

We have learned the truth of the other half of inertia: things in motion tend to remain in motion—and it is as hard to stop something which is moving as it is to start something which is not. We are moving! We are going with a mighty sweep, straight for equality and first-class status—and no force on earth can slow us down or turn us back or change our direction. My brothers and my sisters, the future is ours. Come! March with me in the quickening pace, and we will make it all come true!

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