**The Intersection of Law and Love**

An Address Delivered by
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We in the National Federation of the Blind have known for well over half a century that the task before us is to alter the status quo both for the blind and for the society in which we live. We can achieve equality only if we believe in our fundamental worth, and if we take steps to ensure that the society of which we are a part shares this belief.

If a group of disenfranchised individuals wishes to be accepted as part of the broader culture, at least in some respects, it must come to be admired, and certain representatives of that group must themselves behave in such a way that they also can be the subject of admiration. Théophile Gautier, the French writer, has said, “To love is to admire with the heart; to admire is to love with the mind.” Thus, admiration denotes love. However, an added element of this admiration is a tension, an uneasiness, an apprehension that the person or organization being admired may present a challenge, a demand for altered patterns of thought or behavior, a threat to the status quo.

In 1532 Niccolò Machiavelli said, “It is desirable to be both loved and feared, but it is difficult to achieve both, and, if one of them has to be lacking, it is much safer to be feared than loved.” He was speaking of the political processes required for governing a kingdom, and a substantial element of his argument was intended to avoid revolution. Such sentiments may be true to maintain the status quo, but pursuing a true equality—altering the fabric of society to accept disenfranchised groups—demands a different set of principles. Rather than relying on fear, this attempt at a recognition of human capacity and value requires the exact opposite—a reversal of the Machiavellian creed—a reliance not on fear but on love.

The United States became a nation by declaration of the Continental Congress, which stated that the establishment of our country was based upon “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.” This would seem to be a very powerful combination, but it did not prohibit slavery, and the Constitution (which was written eleven years later) was itself insufficient, at the time of its adoption, to do so. Much of the argument about human equality which arose from the debate over slavery in the United States was founded upon natural law. No consistent uniform agreement exists about the meaning of natural law, but three bases for it recur. These are a comprehension of justice given meaning by experience and the nature of human beings, the development of custom over time, and the inspiration of God. The English philosopher John Locke wrote that “Man being born . . . with a title to perfect freedom, and an uncontrolled enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of the law of nature . . . hath by nature a power, not only to preserve his property, that is, his life, liberty and estate, against the injuries and attempts of other men, but to judge of and punish the breaches of that law . . . .” Thus, according to Locke, human beings are not merely governed and controlled by law, but we participate in the creation and implementation of it. A variant of the Locke assertion was incorporated in the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. These documents, which are bedrocks of American law, derive their authority from “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God,” or from the people who, according to Locke, derive their authority from the law of nature.

What are the natural characteristics of human understanding and behavior that underlie and support natural law? What in the essence of God creates obligation? What is the substance that makes people believe in fairness, justice, or equality? Among the characteristics that naturally occur in humanity are many that we know from personal experience—fear, greed, apathy, cowardice. However, the ones we admire have other names—courage, generosity, faith, love. No one of us can summon at will each of the characteristics in this second group, but all of us have known them at times, and most of us admire those who seek them.

Recently, Pope Benedict XVI wrote an encyclical entitled “Deus Caritas Est”—God is love. The common characteristic between the laws of nature and of nature’s God is arguably the experience of love. Although the law possesses many characteristics worth criticizing, its fundamental source of power may be its reliance upon and its wish to express the experience of love. That law and love have anything whatever to do with each other is not often expressed. However the interesting parts of law deal with the nature of justice and the wish to ensure equality for all. This idea has a persistent appeal which cannot easily be justified by arguments in other realms. How the appeal is interpreted changes with time and circumstance, but the fundamental nature of the appeal remains strong. It must find its source in the human heart.

Many will offer the opinion that society is governed by aggression or a competitive spirit and not by generosity. In 1859, Charles Darwin wrote *On the Origin of Species*, which has been interpreted to mean that the fit survive while others die—that the principle governing social interaction or growth is competition for scarce resources—a person can win only if that person is bigger, faster, meaner, or more intelligent than all others in the competition. However, in 1776, Adam Smith wrote the *Wealth of Nations*. His book recommended that recognition be given to the value of the nation based upon the productive capacity of its people and the ability they possessed to cooperate with one another in creating products that are the basis for wealth. Modern game theory has supported the argument that cooperative endeavor to reach a goal is more productive than selfishness.

From the time of the beginning of the National Federation of the Blind, we have been seeking equality of opportunity. Many have believed that we, who are a minority, must gain equality by obtaining it from somebody else—by demanding that we be given this right by sighted people who are in possession of our equality and have been denying it to us. However, if justice incorporates the notion of love, we cannot get it solely by insisting that it be ours—though this may be a necessary element. Nobody gets love by demanding it. It comes to those who behave in such a way that they can interact with others in a loving spirit. It comes to those who are willing to give it to others. This means that we are not separated from the equality we seek. We are not controlled by others. We participate in the mechanism of gaining our own freedom. We are worthy of admiration, and we, along with others, have come to recognize this truth. We welcome our colleagues and friends who have joined us in celebrating the accomplishments of the blind. For those less perceptive, we have a message and a challenge. We have the ability to inspire respect and sometimes emotions beyond respect. We will participate in the creation of our own freedom, and we will not let anybody forget who we are.

How easy is it to admire blind people? Some blind folk make it more difficult than it would be without them. An article dated April 29, 2008, which appeared in the *National Law Journal* tells the story of a blind lawyer charged with fraud for paying himself and his friends more than $6 million from a health insurance company while the company was becoming bankrupt. The story says in part:

*A federal judge in Louisiana has ruled that Barry Scheur, a managed care executive who is an attorney and is blind, is competent to stand trial in the government’s case that alleges fraud and conspiracy in the management of a now-defunct health insurer.*

*Scheur, a Yale Law School graduate and former partner at LeBoeuf, Lamb, Leiby & MacRae, along with two other former executives are charged with unlawfully paying themselves $6.1 million and misleading the Louisiana Department of Insurance into believing that the insurer . . . was operating in the black.*

*Scheur’s attorney, James A. Brown . . . had argued that Scheur was unable to read and comprehend the financial statements that are the heart of the government’s case. “He has been totally blind since birth,” Brown said. “He is not in a position to assimilate these financial documents.”*

This is what the *National Law Journal* reported, and although the press sometimes exaggerates, I have reason to believe that this story is accurate. Before the case went to trial, a lawyer for Barry Scheur called to ask that the National Federation of the Blind intervene to persuade the judge that his client, because of his blindness, did not have enough on the ball to understand the documents. Can you believe it? Some lawyer wanted me on behalf of you to say that blind people (even those trained at the Yale Law School) are incompetent to understand documents. What insufferable gall! Any executive working under my direction who expresses the sentiment that the executive cannot comprehend documents essential to the business will have an exceedingly short tenure. Blindness and intelligence are not coextensive. I have met some dumb blind people, but blindness didn’t make them that way. The Barry Scheur argument is an unvarnished flimflam. The outrage is intensified by the sheer idiocy of the attempt. Those who lie should at least try to make the stories they tell plausible. Barry Scheur has been convicted. Perhaps his experience of the law does not remind him of love. If it does, it will be the sort known as “tough love.”

It may be worth reporting that at a dinner I was hosting some years ago, Jim Gashel (then, our director of governmental affairs and now, our corporate secretary) invited Barry Scheur to step outside to settle an argument they were having. Although I prevented the brawl, I think Jim Gashel would have acquitted himself well if he had been permitted to address himself to the argument with his fists.

A phenomenon reappearing in the United States from time to time is currently denominated “Dining in the Dark.” Those who conduct these events bring sighted people together to enjoy a meal served in a darkened room. Sometimes blind people are invited to participate. In some formulations of the event, the blind people serve as escorts and waiters. In some events the blind people join the sighted at table to talk with sighted diners about the experience of being blind and to serve as role models. Often a considerable quantity of wine is served with much commentary about avoiding accidents such as spilling the wine, spreading the food across the table, and becoming overfamiliar in the dark with other diners. Sometimes dinner is served in a lighted space, but the diners are blindfolded. This permits sighted people to peek and waiters to serve who are not required to learn anything about managing without light.

The notion of blindfolding sighted people so that they can learn about blindness is not new, and it is frequently a harmless novelty, although comments about alterations in the senses or sensibilities of blind people are repeated. Some folks tell us that we enjoy our dinners more than sighted people do because the lack of the visual sense enhances our taste buds. Occasionally, Dining in the Dark is actually intended to expose diners to the experience of blindness. However, frequently the name is associated with fundraising conducted for the purpose of persuading sighted people that they should contribute money to research programs involving the search for cures for ailments that cause blindness. When the objective is to encourage sighted people to know about blindness, and when the instruction is competent, the experience can be positive. When exploitation of the fear of blindness becomes the primary motivation, harm is the result.

The *Tampa Bay Times* reported on March 10, 2010, that a foundation dealing with blindness conducted Dining in the Dark to raise $100,000. Did the sighted participants learn that blind people are normal, that the experience of being blind need not be scary, and that the blind have value? Not exactly. The *Tampa Bay Times* said, “For those assembled, a half hour in the dark was a humbling, and bumbling, reminder of the magnitude of the gift of sight.” One of the participants who spoke to the assembled gathering is the mother of two children who have been diagnosed with an eye condition which will probably cause blindness in the future. Her message was the tragedy of blindness and the urgency of raising money for research to prevent it. She would agree wholeheartedly with the adjectives humbling and bumbling used by the *Tampa Bay Times*. She does not want her children to spend a lifetime with no choice except bumbling humility.

Although the occurrence of blindness can be a tragedy, it need not be. However, nobody in the room offered this point of view, spoke of the productivity of blind people, or recounted the dramatically positive experiences many of us have had. This mother came to the event, participated in it, and departed believing that the future for her children contains nothing but tragic pain.

One of our members, Nijat Worley, who is at this banquet tonight, and who decided to be a part of the Dining in the Dark experience in Los Angeles, was told that he was prohibited from bringing his cane into the dining facility where the event was taking place. Apparently, he (a blind person) might look too normal or too competent to fit the distorted image that the fundraisers had in mind. They did not want our member to share the spotlight with them. They did not want a blind person to be admired. They wanted all the admiration for themselves and their so-called expertise in the subject of blindness. I did not ask Nijat Worley whether he intended to teach these people about the law. Those who deny blind people the opportunity to participate fully in a public event using their travel aids are violating nondiscrimination principles of the law. Dining in the Dark may want us to believe that our primary value consists in frightening people into digging into their wallets, but we know better. The value we possess is sufficient to inspire admiration. For those who do not recognize this truth, we have a message and a challenge. Our rights and our lives have as much value as theirs, and we will never let them forget who we are.

On March 6, 2012, *Forbes* magazine printed an editorial claiming that hiring disabled workers would place an unconscionable burden upon employers. Of course, *Forbes* did not review the history of employment of such workers. When the National Federation of the Blind was formed in 1940, almost no blind people were at work. Currently the estimate is that perhaps as many as 30 percent of the blind who are seeking employment are working. However, this same statistic was often quoted in the early 1970s. Have the employment opportunities for the blind not improved in the last forty years?

In the 1950s, through action in Congress and the courts, the National Federation of the Blind caused federal employment to become available to the blind. In the 1950s and 1960s Federation principles were first applied to rehabilitation programs, which dramatically improved placement rates for blind job seekers in competitive employment. In 1973 the Rehabilitation Act contained nondiscrimination provisions dealing with certain types of employment for the first time, and in 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act expanded coverage of the law to the employment of disabled workers. If the law has any power to modify human behavior, these nondiscrimination provisions should have changed employment prospects for the blind. However, the 70 percent unemployment rate remains the estimate today.

In an attempt to create a positive environment for the employment of disabled workers, the United States Department of Labor has recently issued a proposed rule to require that 7 percent of the workforce for those who are serving as contractors for the federal government must be selected from among the disabled, and 2 percent of the workforce must be selected from workers with severe disabilities. The editorial writer at *Forbes* magazine is outraged. He begins with the proposition that any requirement to hire disabled workers might simply be an added cost of doing business. The message of the editorialist is that disabled employees cannot be expected to be productive. Consequently, being required to hire them is just one more cost of being a federal contractor. However, the real outrage expressed in the article—the unbelievable imposition on business contained in the Labor Department proposed rule—is that the Labor Department is not willing to accept having “the handicapped” serve in make-work jobs for the purpose of satisfying the regulatory scheme. The Department of Labor expects these “handicapped” workers to be employed at all wage levels “to make sure the handicapped are evenly apportioned throughout an organization.”

I can just imagine the thought processes involved with this editorial writer and his friends as they contemplate the implications of the regulation. As I imagine the conversation it would probably go something like this:

“How awful! Employers are going to have to have some of them in the front office. If they would just stay in the low-paid dead-end jobs that make up the cost of doing business with the federal government, where they belong, the handicapped might be tolerable, but they want to come right into the front office suite. They’ll probably bring their white canes, their blind dogs, their wheelchairs, their crutches! They’ll look funny; they’ll mess up the décor. How awful!”

Although *Forbes* magazine believes that hiring disabled people is bad for business, what is the basis for this assertion? Perhaps they should try it before they reject the proposition out of hand. They say they don’t like hiring the handicapped, but how can they tell? They have never tried it to find out.

The irony is that major employers have used the work of blind people (and those with other disabilities) without hiring the people whose work has benefited them. For example, in the early 1970s, a sheltered workshop in Evansville, Indiana, had a contract to produce material for the Whirlpool Corporation. Tens of thousands of items were made effectively and competently for Whirlpool by blind people. However, Whirlpool did not pay them. Instead it employed the workshop to make the products. The sighted managers of the workshop, being given executive-scale salaries, paid some of the employees less than the federal minimum wage. Whirlpool got the work cheap, and the blind helped make the workshop bosses rich.

However, that was forty years ago. Does the exploitation continue today? As members of the National Federation of the Blind know, we have been trying to get Congress to pass legislation prohibiting payment of subminimum wages. Managers of sheltered workshops have been telling us that conditions are better today than they were in the past. Are they telling the truth? Although a number of blind people working in workshops receive wages substantially above the minimum guaranteed by federal law, this law does not apply to sheltered employment. When we asked the Department of Labor to give us detailed information about the payments being made to disabled workers, we received documents telling us that in 2011—less than one year ago—a person described as an “employee” in a workshop in Fort Wayne, Indiana, was receiving wage payments of seven cents an hour.

What is the effect of these nondiscrimination laws about which *Forbes* magazine makes such great complaint? Are disabled Americans becoming employed in positions of authority in which they can make policy decisions? How many people with disabilities are now serving as judges? How much effort has been made to encourage individuals with disabilities to be a part of the legal profession? When the National Conference of Bar Examiners encounters a blind candidate seeking to take the bar exam, what kind of welcome do they offer? When the Law School Admission Council learns that blind people want to apply for law school, to use their Web site, or to take the law school admission test, what do the officials do to make these things happen?

The number of disabled people serving in the judiciary is tiny; the behavior of the National Conference of Bar Examiners regarding applications from blind law school graduates is obstructionist; and the Law School Admission Council has effectively taken the position that no blind person need apply. However, they can’t lock us out forever. Because of our work, the Law School Admission Council has changed many of its practices; and in the confrontations with the National Conference of Bar Examiners, we have won overwhelmingly. The arguments are not yet complete, but we never give up. Sometimes we lose a skirmish; occasionally we lose a battle; but we never lose the war—because it is never over until we win.

The lawyers are supposed to enforce the law, including nondiscrimination law. However, many of them (and many of the judges before whom they appear) know nothing whatever about disability, the capacity of disabled people, or disability discrimination. When the cases involving blind people seeking employment are brought before the courts, is it any wonder that well over 90 percent of them are lost? What other reasons are there that nondiscrimination law is often ineffective for the blind? Try the attitudes in *Forbes* magazine. They do not want us in the front office, but we have a measure of control over the question of what we are and what we will become. Part of the time we help to create the law, and when we have created it, we help to ensure that it is enforced. Disenfranchised groups that wish to become a part of the broader community must come to be admired, but admiration requires respect. Danger must be an element of becoming the subject of admiration, and we are creating it. We know our value, and we will never let them forget who we are.

Although some places do not welcome the blind, and although some people do not value the methods we use for gaining information, some do. A story dated January 16, 2012, from the *Los Angeles Times* says, in part: “In South Africa, restaurant chain Wimpy is welcoming blind customers—by serving them burgers with words in Braille spelled out on their buns with sesame seeds.” Wimpy’s is using Braille for advertising purposes to promote its corporate image, to let people know that Braille menus are available in its stores, and to attract potential customers. Several blind organizations have been encouraged to let their members know about Wimpy’s Braille program, and it is estimated that eight hundred thousand blind people have learned about the Braille messages. Although Wimpy’s is advertising itself, it is also advertising us—saying that we are welcome, proclaiming its incorporation of Braille into its programs, and encouraging us and others to know that blind people will be a part of the ordinary commerce provided by Wimpy’s.

Another place where blind people are welcomed is at the Railey Field baseball stadium in Sacramento, California, home of the River Cats, a farm team for the Oakland A’s. Tiffany Manosh, one of our leaders from Sacramento, California, who is also with us at this banquet tonight, says:

*On September 10, 2011, . . . the River Cats, [who had] won the Southern Division, were in the playoffs. . . . It was an event I will never forget. . . . A member of the [River City] chapter had arranged for me to throw out the Ceremonial First Pitch of the game. . . . As I walked out to the mound with a member from the River Cats organization, she asked me how she could assist me. I asked her to just walk with me to the mound and then line me up so I was straight in line with the catcher. The P.A. announcer announced to the sold-out crowd on hand that tonight’s Ceremonial First Pitch was from the National Federation of the Blind and then announced my name. With my cane in my left hand and the ball in my right, I threw the ball to the catcher. It made it all the way to the catcher but hit the ground as it reached the catcher. After I threw the ball, the catcher then walked out to the mound and handed me the ball I threw to him. What an amazing evening, and to top it off the River Cats won the game.*

Being admired by the announcer and by the members of her chapter, Tiffany Manosh participated in a sport she loves—on her own behalf and on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind. She was not told to wait for another day or another year; she was not told that she was not good enough to share the experience; instead, she was invited onto the pitcher’s mound to celebrate her team and her joy in its accomplishments, and she has the baseball to prove it.

Love is a word with many variations in meaning. One of them involves romance. A study reported in *USA Today* for January 17, 2010, declares that researchers have discovered that blind men prefer thin-waisted women. These researchers admit that sighted men also like thin-waisted women, but blind men don’t think they have to be as thin-waisted as sighted men do. The research began with the proposition that a preference for thin-waisted women is generated from the experience of sighted men looking at women. Because blind men could not appreciate this visual examination, it was supposed that they did not share this preference. The research shows that blind men like women who have waists that are thin, but not quite as thin as those preferred by sighted men.

Now, I ask you, is this preference based upon the method of evaluation? The sighted men had to look, but the blind men got to touch. In pondering the enormously significant findings of this study, I find myself reflecting that those who believe that the best way to appreciate characteristics of women is by long-range visual examination lack a certain measure of experience. More ways of knowing exist than the visual. The value gained in other ways may be no less important than learning by sight.

Dr. Jacobus tenBroek, who founded the National Federation of the Blind in 1940, was a lawyer and a constitutional scholar as well as a college professor and a social activist leader. His writings helped to change the interpretation of the Constitution of the United States, and his book *Prejudice, War and the Constitution,* won the Woodrow Wilson Award in 1955 for the best book on government and democracy published in that year. Dr. tenBroek, who was totally blind, began his studies at the University of California in 1930. During the years that followed he earned five college degrees and was granted other honorary diplomas.

Henry Wedler (often known as Hoby) is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Davis, in organic chemistry. He, a blind man and a leader in the National Federation of the Blind, was recently honored for his leadership at a ceremony in the White House. He was named a Champion of Change “for leading education and employment efforts in science, technology, engineering and math for Americans with disabilities.”

The scholarship of blind people is, of course, not limited to these two examples, but they span a period of more than three-quarters of a century, and they are indicative of the intellectual capacity possessed by the blind. However, 45 percent of blind high school students graduate—55 percent do not. Why is the number so small? Only 10 percent of blind students in grade school and high school are reading Braille—90 percent are not. Why is the number so small? Are blind students in high school encouraged to excel? Does the Department of Education encourage school systems to teach Braille? When administrators in the school systems refuse to teach Braille, is this done because they don’t trust the reading medium, they don’t trust teachers of the blind, they don’t trust blind students, or they have hidden motives that create a disparate discriminatory impact upon the blind?

Henry Miller (Hank) is a blind student in Oceanport, New Jersey. His mother, Holly Miller, has become a member of the National Federation of the Blind, and she has learned that the potential for her son is greater than she had previously believed. Although Henry Miller has a small amount of residual vision, and although he can use this vision for a brief period to read print, his ability to read in this way is severely limited. His mother asked that he be taught Braille.

Amendments, which became law in 1997, to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act declare that a blind student has a right to learn Braille. The implementing regulations for this statute contain the same declaration. However, often the teachers and the administrators want to avoid this requirement, and they have been given a measure of comfort by the Department of Education.

The education plan for each student is expected to be developed exclusively for that student. This requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has meant that the team of experts in the school district assesses the needs of the student and determines what the student will get. The decision made for students who want Braille is often that they do not get it because the assessment of the team is that the student doesn’t need it. Although the team is supposed to make its assessment for the best interests of the student, it frequently makes its decision for the perceived best interest of the school system, which does not want to go to the trouble to teach Braille.

Henry Miller’s mom came to me some time ago to ask that the National Federation of the Blind help in the effort to get Braille instruction for her son. She had originally asked for Braille instruction when her boy was in the second grade, at the time when learning to read is among the most important lessons that can be had in school. When Holly Miller asked for this help, it was clear that her frustration level was intense, and I wondered why. Because the Millers were living in New Jersey, this request seemed to me to be one that would require fairly nominal effort. I had been told that the education for blind students in New Jersey was excellent, and I was aware that the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired could be called upon to provide assistance in evaluating the needs of blind students. The director of this commission for the blind is himself a blind person, and he had previously declared himself to be a member of the National Federation of the Blind. Undoubtedly, I thought, there has been some administrative snarl that must be addressed to get education in Braille for this blind boy.

But the Commission for the Blind had decided to join with the school district to refuse to teach Braille to a blind student. The decision was made in characteristically bureaucratic language. An evaluator of Henry Miller, not from the school district but from the Commission for the Blind, said, “Braille and print are equally valuable as media for reading and writing. However, a best practice approach encourages reading and writing methods that are least restrictive for the student.” The consequence of this so-called evaluation is: no Braille—because Braille is too restrictive. Henry Miller must hold a print book within two inches of his eyes to read it; he cannot read for more than five minutes; he can read print only if it is large and distinct; and his reading demands enormous amounts of energy so that requiring him to do it in print causes extreme weariness. Yet, the Commission for the Blind in New Jersey said that he may not have Braille because it is too restrictive. The evaluator said he must read print. The evaluator from the Commission for the Blind demanded of him that he do the impossible. What kind of a person would make such a demand?

The decision of the Commission for the Blind was made to protect the right of the student to the statutorily-guaranteed free and appropriate public education. In order to provide Henry Miller an appropriate public education, they said that he, a blind student, may not have Braille. Consequently, the arguments continued. We hired a lawyer for Holly Miller, a bright aggressive woman in Dan Goldstein’s firm named Sharon Krevor-Weisbaum. We demanded Braille. After three years of argument, negotiation, demands, refusals, and bureaucratic red tape, the trial before the administrative law judge finally occurred. The proceedings lasted nine days, and the decision of the judge is more than sixty pages long. The decision of the judge says that Henry Miller gets Braille—not just a little bit but enough to try to reverse the disadvantages of being denied this training for more than three years.

Will Henry Miller be able to earn a college diploma, and will he receive an advanced degree? Will the Commission for the Blind tell him that education at the university level is for somebody else but not for him? Will he have the tools to expand the reach of his mind to the fullest extent of his capacity? The answers to these questions are clear. He will get his education because we have decided that he will, and nobody can keep us from helping him to get it. No doubt, the Commission for the Blind in New Jersey does not admire Henry Miller and his mother, but we do, and we are prepared to stand with them.

Law implies force; love signifies giving. How do these intersect? A law not inspired by love is a hollow thing, and what we are seeking is substance, not a hollow shell. What we want is to become a valued part of our society, recognized for the worth that we possess. In order to achieve this objective, we must have faith in ourselves, but we must also carry within us the faith that others also can have faith in us. This requires a substantial measure of trust.

The nature of trust and the nature of love are similar in that they cannot be had unless they are shared. A human being cannot be trusted unless that human being is willing to trust others, which demands acceptance of vulnerability. If a person or an organization is incapable of being hurt by trusting too much, that person and that organization will be tempted to trust too little and will never know the joy and peace that come from love. Consequently, we must be prepared to risk our judgments, our feelings, our hope for the future. When we do, opportunity opens before us, and we come to know the freedom that can and will be ours. We must build and enforce the law that we need, but we must do it not just with faith in ourselves but also with faith that others will join us.

Our history is filled with incidents that belittle our talent, circumscribe our opportunity, or denigrate our judgment. Some say we can’t understand documents, some tell us that our behavior in social situations is humbling and bumbling, some argue that employment is beyond our physical and intellectual capacity, some assert that we are not good enough to receive the same wages that other people get, and some urge us to believe that our appreciation of physical beauty is altered because of our lack of sight. Some people even tell us that our methods of learning are too restrictive and, therefore, inferior.

Although our past is filled with the pain of restriction and denial, our future will be constructed according to an expanded and inclusive standard that we will determine. It can and it will offer equal access to information presented in forms that we can comprehend. It can and it will incorporate employment opportunities commensurate with our innate abilities and training. It can and it will make education available that will take advantage of the fullest range of our talent. Our future can do these things, and it will do these things because we have the energy, the commitment, the determination, and the love essential to make it happen. Others have made decisions for us in the past, but increasingly we are making them for ourselves. We must believe in ourselves, but we must also believe in others who will come to believe in us. We have the faith to do this, and we have those characteristics that can engender admiration in others. We must behave in such a way that we are worthy of admiration, but we can, and we will.

I have met the members of the National Federation of the Blind, and I have observed what we are. The traits that characterize our movement are boldness, curiosity, an indomitable spirit, and an unfailing capacity for generosity. Our judgment is not always correct, but most of the time it is. Our trust is not always returned, but in the long run and in the ways that matter it is. The demands upon us in intellectual capacity, imaginative spirit, and faith in ourselves and others are enormous. But we will meet them. Because of our determination, nothing on earth can keep us from gaining the objectives we have set. Sometimes we stand on the pitcher’s mound, and sometimes we get our Braille. Everything else that we need is within the capacity that makes us what we are. The future is bright with promise; join with your fellow Federationists, and we will bring the future to be our own!