**The Blind Missourian**

**September 2015**

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Learning to Read

By Korey Harper

When I think about literacy, many things come to mind. The one thing that stands out to me is the process of how I learned to read and write. When I was a young child, I walked into Kindergarten not knowing how to read. I could identify some letters, but not all of them. The teacher then began teaching me the alphabet. After I mastered those, we went onto small words and then I learned how to read sentences. I would read small books to my teacher, and as my reading improved I went on to larger and more challenging books. Although this process seemed simple, it was one of the most important things I ever learned how to do. As I got older I read more and more, although it was not by choice; I was forced to read more due to school work. I never appreciated the fact that I was able to read until I could no longer do it.

I became blind at the age of seventeen and this left me without the ability to read or write. My injury was sudden and an unexpected event, so I was unprepared for it. Up until this point I never realized what a big part literacy played in my life. I started my senior year, just like Kindergarten, unable to read. I started to learn the Braille alphabet, which took me several weeks. I first had to learn the dot patterns that made up Braille Then I had to learn how to feel the dots. This was very difficult for me because my fingers would go numb, and I was unable to feel the difference between the letters. I then started receiving Braille Instruction after school four hours a week. A Braille teacher would come and help me learn how to read. After months of hard work I was able to read small sentences. Then my after school training became more intense. I thought I was almost done with the training but soon found out it had only just begun.

I had already learned grade one Braille. I did not know there was such a thing as grade two Braille. This is a series of contractions that makes Braille easier and faster to read. There were over one hundred contractions I had to learn, and although I thought it was impossible, I never gave up. This was unlike anything I had ever seen. It was similar to learning another alphabet, and this was, to say the 1.

least, difficult for me. I did not think the lessons would ever end. It became more and more difficult as each day passed. The training increased from four hours a week to eight hours a week.

I was told by many people that I would not learn Braille by the end of my senior year. They said I should just try to learn the alphabet because anything else was impossible in just one year. I knew I could do better than that. Although I did not think Braille would be as difficult as it was, I mastered my alphabet in what seemed like a decade, but my teacher said I learned it relatively fast. Even though learning Braille was challenging for me, I am very proud that I did it. Braille is rarer than print, but the small amounts found inside buildings are very helpful to me. I am able to read again, and that is an amazing feeling. I am not very fast at reading Braille, but my accuracy is very good. In the overall scheme of things, learning to read has been a very important part in my life. I started my school career as a little boy in Kindergarten learning to read print and then found myself learning to read all over again in Braille my senior year. I am so proud I have the ability to read again. Although learning Braille was difficult for me, I know it was one of the most important things I’ve ever learned. Even though I had to learn twice as much as most people, I feel like it made me appreciate literacy more than I ever would have. The ability to read is a gift we are given; we should not take it for granted. We should all appreciate that we have the ability to read.

Editor’s note: The following article took second prize in the adult division of the National Writers Division Contest. Congratulations, Shirley.

Cookie Cutter Christmas!

By Shirley Ann Grauel

I am not the best cook in the world, but I believe I am a pretty good baker! My specialty is my Christmas cookies. They are a true piece of art! After I lost most of my vision, it became difficult to critique my masterpiece cookies like I was able to do in the past. Because of my daughters, I learned a lesson about creativity, imagination, and the true meaning of the phrase, “Beauty is in the eyes of the

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beholder!” I may have missed out on all of the fun baking and decorating cookies with my girls growing up due to my anal ways, but now, because of the important lesson I learned, I enjoy the time I spend baking with my grandchildren.

My Christmas cookies had to be “true” perfection! The berries on my poinsettia leaves could only be made with red hot candies. Santa’s mittens always had to be red with white cuffs made with coconut frosting. My bells could only have a silver ball as the ringer. Candy cane cookies could only be curved to the left. My gingerbread boy and girl had a specific dress code. And for heaven sakes, you would never see a blue snowman on display! Sprinkles had to match to the color of icing being used. All colors and designs had to be to mom’s satisfaction! What a Drill Sergeant I must have been.

It was past two o’clock in the morning, and I was still struggling to decorate my Christmas cookies like I was able to do in the past, before I lost my vision to Glaucoma. While holding Santa in my hand, with my nose only centimeters from the frosting, trying to paint his eyebrows on just right, I mumbled, “I might as well give up. I can’t see to do anything right.”

My daughters Tammy and Audrea said, “Mom, let us finish them for you. We promise to do them just the way you want them done.” After about another hour of frustration I gave in and told the girls to go ahead. Before I went to bed I gave them specific instructions on what colors of icing and what candies went with each type of cookie. “We know! We know!” was their chuckling response.

When I woke up the next morning, the first thing I did was go and examine the finished product. I shrieked, “You’ve got to be kidding me!” I had enough vision to see the orange Christmas trees, purple mittens, and blue poinsettias. At that moment my two darling daughters came into the kitchen giggling. “You really think you’re funny don’t you!” I exclaimed. The girls then took off the top layer of cookies to show me they were just trying to humor me. Underneath were my prize cookies! I gave a big sigh of relief.

That entire day, as hard as I tried, I was not completely able to let go of the trick my daughters played on me. After moping around the house for hours, I

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decided to call it an early night and go to bed. As I lay in bed that night, I tried to figure out if I was more upset because of the loss of vision, or was it because I realized how anal I had been all those years about my Christmas cookies? After hours of meditation with the Lord, I came to the realization that I took away some of my girls creative imagination by imposing my artistic desires on them.

The next morning while drinking coffee and nibbling on cookies, I told my girls how sorry I was for being such a perfectionist. I told them when they got married and would be entertaining others, they would understand. Unfortunately so often women are still rated and viewed by what kind of wife/mother they are by their cooking/baking abilities.

Well, now I am a grandmother and great-grandmother too! I look forward to bringing all of my cookie cutters to my grandchildren’s home for some baking fun! The boys usually just want to eat the finished product, but the girls like to make all kinds of “neat” cookie designs! My granddaughter Lain is my little artist. She can come up with some of the most unique ideas. Mya loves to sample the product as we are preparing our masterpiece. I remember when she was only two; she would sit on the table, with her bare little feet covered in flour, eating the dough! I would not have it any other way.

It has been fifteen years since that “awakening” Christmas. Since then I joined the National Federation of the Blind (NFB). The NFB has taught me that blindness does not define my character. No matter if you have been blind for five, ten, or even seventy five years, you can become all that you want to become! Most of all, by learning special techniques, you can still accomplish your goals, making blindness nothing more than a mere nuisance.

I still love to display my award-winning Christmas cookies; but now you will see one tray with Grandma’s cookies and another with my grandchildren’s master artwork. I will be the first one to go to their tray and taste a purple tree! Better than snacking on their baked treats is the great big hug I get, along with the “Grandma, I love you!”

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My First National Convention

By Erin Magoon

Going to my first national convention was an exciting, thrilling, and exhausting time! I arrived on Saturday, July 4 and spent the evening settling in and trying to learn the hotel. The hotel was set out very well; however it was still hard to learn to navigate, even with help from my furry fellow companion.

I participated in as much of the convention as I could. There were so many meetings and activities to choose from that it was impossible to attend everything I would have liked to. I had to make some tough choices, and I was able to do most of what I really wanted to do. These activities included helping out in the affiliate suite, attending lots of meetings, helping at the affiliate table, wandering around, and buying items from the exhibit hall and meeting new people. Friends and I also worked out a plan to record some meetings for each other so that we could attend more things and share the information later. It wasn’t the same as being there, but it was the best we could do.

I found it informative to hear from the people involved with technology. It was good not only hearing from well-known companies such as Humanware, Freedom Scientific, Learning Ally, AT Guys, and Bookshare but also talking to new companies (for me) such as Baum, the Independence Market, and HIMS INC. It was nice having them all right there so you could do a hands on comparison and ask questions about new and old products.

The exhibit hall was not only filled with technology companies but affiliate and divisions selling items as well. Visiting the different affiliate tables and meeting and talking to new people were loads of fun as well. Everyone was really friendly, outgoing, and helpful when you needed help. The only bad part about the exhibit hall is that it can be hard on your feet and your wallet.

I also attended the craft show. I never enjoyed going to arts and craft fairs as a child and really did not think I would enjoy it at convention. I was happily very much mistaken. Unlike at the fairs I remember going to, everyone encouraged you to touch and try on their jewelry, smell their soaps and lotions, and I even made an origami dog which was really cool.

Wednesday, July 8, 2015, at 7:00 AM the National Federation of the Blind broke a Guinness World Record by having the largest umbrella mosaic. We spelled out

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Live the Life You Want in white umbrellas on a blue background. It also included a figure from our new logo. That was pretty awesome. My only regret is that I was ill and wasn’t sure I would be able to stand in the heat for that long. I was waiting in the lobby and outside in spirit.

The actual general session part of the convention was a lot of fun and quite different from any state conventions I have attended. It was very interesting hearing about what the other states were doing and how many scholarship winners they had and so on. I liked the way the resolutions were done. Since there were so many of them and it would have taken forever to read them all out loud, President Riccobono had the person just read the BE IT RESOLVED, and we passed most of them that way. It was also extremely interesting to see how it was handled in case you could not tell if the resolution had passed or not. There are thousands of people at the convention and sometimes it is hard to tell, so the delegates of each state poll their membership and announce that state’s official vote. I liked the way this was done and now understand the purpose of us sending delegates to the convention.

We were able to hear the presidential report given by President Mark Riccobono, which covered all the work we have done on a national level this past year. This report really lets you know why we are an organization to be reckoned with. A sampling of other topics covered were defending our rights to parent, accessibility of automatic teller machines, and advancing civil rights for the blind. A fun presentation that got the crowd moving was a history of our federation music. We sang along with a band that played songs that had been written about the different struggles we have had through the years. We were not able to hear from National Library Service (NLS), and I was very disappointed about that.

One of the differences between the national convention and our state convention that I noticed and did not like was that there was not enough time to take questions or comments from the floor. The only exception was resolutions, where a lot of discussion took place. While I didn’t like it, I do understand that if everything was open for discussion with such a large group, we would never get through the agenda.

The banquet was great; I had a great time seeing all the scholarships given out and President Riccobono’s first convention speech. I would have liked to have seen some entertainment or a little more fun after the banquet. I guess I just didn’t want the night to end. All in all it was a fabulous convention, I am very glad I went, and I will definitely be going back!

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BELL: Enriching Children’s Lives

By Carol Coulter in collaboration with Debbie Wunder

On July 20-31, 2015, we held our second Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning Program (BELL) in St. Louis, Missouri at the Delta Gamma Center. It was so exciting to see our enrollment double from the five students last year to ten this year. We believe another fact that speaks volumes for the program’s success is that four out of the five students returned this year. We had children from six to thirteen years old with several in the eight to nine year old range.

The students learned a lot of Braille this year. They used the slate and stylus, Braille Writers, and some of the students even used electronic devices. Depending on where they were with their Braille skills, some of the children even learned some Unified English Braille (UEB).

One of our BELL students this year was a second grade boy who had absolutely no Braille skills at all; by the end of the second week he had learned the entire alphabet and was able to write simple sentences. When the parents came that last Friday for a little bit of a show, he read the sentences he had written aloud. He just amazed us all.

We took time out for some physical activities. There is only so long you can sit and read and write Braille. In the motor room the children used the climbing wall, played Braille games, and sang songs. They also had outdoor time when it was not too hot or raining.

We took the children on two field trips. The first one was to the West County Safety House. This was a fire house set up to let children really experience what it is like when there is an emergency in their home. First they talked about fire safety and then a simulation of a tornado. Next they took the children to a child’s bedroom and showed them, with a door that actually heated up, how to see if it was safe to open that door or not. So now if the door is hot how are you going to get out of the house? They showed the children how to climb out of the window on to this little pitched roof where firemen were waiting to help them. The staff then let the children touch several pieces of equipment and explained what it was used for. One of the firemen dressed in full gear and let the children hear what he sounded like when he talked with his respirator on. He also let them feel his entire uniform

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from his hat to his boots. We commend him for his patience. All of the people at the fire house were wonderful with the students. It was an outstanding educational experience.

The second field trip was to Soulard Market. This was a farmer’s market, where the children were able to feel and smell all kinds of fruits and vegetables. There were things familiar to the children such as bananas, strawberries, and watermelons, but they also were able to experience less familiar things like a whole coconut, a donut peach, eggplant, kumquat, and kiwi. We not only felt and smelled the produce, but we bought some to take back and have as a snack. What a delicious field trip.

We were able to add a music portion to our BELL Program this year thanks to the wonderful mother-daughter team of Shawnee and Halley Korff. They came to join us during our second week of BELL all the way from the Kansas City area. Shawnee is a music teacher, and she brought all kinds of fun percussion instruments for the children to play. The children particularly liked the bucket drums and learned about rhythm. Shawnee and Halley also taught the children how to play “Hot Cross Buns” on the recorder and even let them keep their recorders; how generous. We would like to thank Shawnee and Halley again, not only for the gifts to the children, but also for coming to teach and letting us enjoy Halley’s beautiful violin playing. Having the music classes was a huge hit.

Another guest who joined us during the second week was Rosina Foster, President of our Parents of Blind Children Division. Rosina visited with parents and joined in on our daily activities. She also came baring gifts. Rosina brought several Braille books for the children to take home with them. Thank you, Rosina, for helping foster Braille literacy and sharing your time with us.

A big thank you goes out to the rest of our volunteers: Debbie Wunder, Adnan Gutic, Chris Tisdal, Bryan Schulz, Dacia Cole, Julie McGinnity, Carol and Elisabeth Coulter, Rhonda Damron, and Kathy Hurley.

First, thanks to Debbie Wunder for coordinating the BELL Program again this year. It is a big job getting both students and staff, because both are needed in order to have a successful program. Adnan Gutic volunteered to be our Braille instructor again. He turned down a paying job at the Missouri School for the Blind for the summer so he could join us at BELL and work for free; how admirable, thank you, Adnan.

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Chris Tisdal is forever sort of an angel there at Bell, doing anything and everything that he can, from carrying heavy stuff for us to working on the slate and stylus with the children. He has even cooked a meal or two. Chris does it all. Bryan Schulz also returned to help this year. He helped our children climb the rock wall, worked on the slate and stylus with some of them, and he was just a huge help.

Dacia Cole and Julie McGinnity did a wonderful job working with the children on their Braille, whether it be on slate and stylus, Braille Writer, or some electronic device. Dacia said that some of these children knew more about technology than she did. Julie also let some of the children experience what it was like to walk with a guide dog. Carol Coulter tried to keep everything organized, helped supervise children, grocery shopped, and did whatever else Debbie needed her to do. Of course those of us from Columbia couldn’t have gotten there if it wasn’t for Elisabeth Coulter. Thank you, Elisabeth, for safely getting a very packed van to and from St. Louis. She also made a special trip to St. Louis to drive for our first field trip.

A special thank you also goes out to Rhonda Damron and Kathy Hurley. Even though they had brought their children, they both helped with driving for field trips, running errands, and helping out in any way we needed. Kathy also did a craft project with the students. Once again, thank you to all who helped make this year’s BELL a success and we hope we did not leave anyone out.

If anyone ever wondered if the BELL Program was worth doing, then you should know that one of the parents was so excited that she called the Louisiana Center for the Blind and talked to Pam Allen. She said I want someone who is definitely in authority to know what kind of an experience we had with the BELL Program. I told all these other people but they may not realize how wonderful it was so I want to make sure that the national people understand that this was just really super. The mother was a mobility instructor so it wasn’t like this was her first contact with the blindness field, and so she was blown away to get any kind of service at all. This was a person who knows what good service should be and still believed that it was so far above the rest that it was worthy of comment.

The students learned a lot but so did we. We had a great time and thank you all for making it happen this year. We hope we can offer the BELL Program again next year but it takes funding so if you believe that this is a worthwhile program please help by pledging your support both financially and by volunteering. Wouldn’t it be great if we could do BELL in two locations!

9.

An Inspiring Woman

By Carol Coulter in collaboration with Kathe Hooton

Helen Parker was born on April 15, 1921, in Ft. Scott, Kansas. She has one brother and three sisters, one of which was her twin. They lived in the country until she was in junior high when they moved to town.  Her father was a steam engineer for a flour milling company in Kansas, where they grew lots of wheat.

Helen worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) at the hospital in Neosho, Missouri after graduating from high school, and that sparked her interest in nursing. She really wanted to go to school to become a Registered Nurse, but because of the cost her parents were not able to send her.  During WWII she worked as a CNA at the Army hospital in Ft. Crowder, which was located south of Neosho, Missouri.

In 1940 Helen met her husband at a restaurant which had a dance hall attached to it.  Someone was playing the juke box and her husband asked her to dance.  That’s when their romance began.  They were married in 1941. They had seven children, nine grandchildren, and seven great grandchildren.

Helen said she began to lose her sight gradually, and she thinks by around 1960 she had completely lost her vision due to retinitis pigmentosa.  Helen said her husband was a great deal of help during this time, and the children learned to help out as well. Her husband passed away in 1987.

Helen loves reading and has also done a bit of traveling. She has traveled to London, England; Rome, and Hawaii with her son and daughter-in-law and has made several trips to the west coast to see family.  She said European people seem much friendlier to sight-impaired people than those in the United States.

Helen was and still is very active. For thirty plus years she swam twice a week at the university with friends but finally gave it up.  Helen plays violin at her church fund raisers and is a popular feature for them.  She is also very committed to the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and does all she can to get new members to come to her local chapter.  She travels around the area, speaking at schools and talking on the radio about blindness when she can.

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A good friend helped Helen write her memoirs, which was meant mostly for her family, but I am told it is a very interesting book.  She said she had a hundred

copies printed; they are all gone, and she has been asked for more. Helen, if you have more printed please save one for me; I would love to read it. Helen is a very humble person and says she doesn't know why anyone would want to read about her, but how she managed to navigate having a big family and raising them as a blind woman does make interesting reading.

Helen is ninety-four years old and lives alone in her house in Rolla. She states that she is not afraid to live alone even though she is totally blind. Helen said God has taken care of her all her life, and He is not going to quit now.  She is a very good cook and enjoys having people over to eat with her. Helen has so many friends who take her wherever she wants to go; she says she is too busy to get lonely. The South Central Chapter is very lucky to have such a go-getter as their leader. Kathe Hooton, a fellow chapter member said, “Anyone who is feeling down only has to visit with Helen for a little while and they will feel so much better.  She is so cheerful and positive.” What a beautiful thing to say, and I would like to thank Kathe for her help with this article. I couldn’t have done it without her help.

Upcoming Convention

By Gene Coulter

Our Springfield Chapter is delighted to invite you to the fifty-fourth annual convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri from April 1–3, 2016, to help us celebrate the fourtieth birthday of the NFB Springfield Chapter. The chapter continues to work hard to spread our motto to the Springfield area...live the life you want!

In 1838 the town of Springfield was established. National attention was given to Springfield in 1858 when the city became a stop on the Butterfield Overland Mail, a stagecoach line from Tipton, Missouri to San Francisco.

Springfield is recognized as the birthplace of Route 66. In 1938 Route 66 became the first US numbered road in America — the “Mother Road” — stretching from the Great Lakes to the Pacific Coast.

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Our convention will be at the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel, 2431 North Glenstone, with room rates of $84.00 per night plus 12.6% tax for one to four people in a room. To make reservations call 417-831-3131. The costs for the planned meals are unchanged. In fact our lunches and prayer breakfast in many cases will be less expensive than the hotel’s own restaurant. The registration forms will be posted on the NFBMO.org website in mid-October.

**PLEDGE OF THE**

**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND**

I pledge to participate actively in the effort of the National Federation of the Blind to achieve equality, opportunity, and security for the blind: to support the policies and programs of the Federation and to abide by its Constitution.



Members and friends of the National Federation of the Blind raising umbrellas to spell,

"Live the life you want”

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