**The Blind Missourian**

 **June 2019**

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Presidential Report – 2019

By President Shelia Wright

Since our last convention the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri has been very busy. The work we do cannot be accomplished by a handful of members, and I am proud that more and more members are stepping up to take on assignments or initiate new ideas. This report will cover some of the highlights and is certainly not a complete listing.

The National Federation of the Blind of Missouri is committed to Braille literacy and continues to work to assure that blind children have the opportunity to learn Braille at an early age. Many of us know from firsthand experience the harmful consequences that occur when young people do not have the opportunity to learn Braille at an early age. We address this issue on all fronts here in Missouri.

Last summer we conducted our fifth Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning Program – BELL Academy in St. Louis and our first BELL Academy in Kansas City. We had a combined total of fourteen children in these two programs. The BELL Academy is a two-week program which focuses on Braille activities to promote literacy. Our Missouri statewide and Kansas City Coordinator was Debbie Wunder and the St. Louis Coordinator was Jenny Carmack. Let’s give a special thank you to Debbie and Jenny for their leadership in this program. Later today you will hear more about our 2018 BELL Academies and what is planned for the summer of 2019 BELL Programs. This past year our Kansas Affiliate partnered with us and I’d like to express our appreciation to them. Finally, if you helped to staff our 2018 BELL Academy, please stand and say Braille Rocks!

The NFB of Missouri registered for our Nationwide Braille Readers Are Leaders Contest which provided an opportunity for K-12 students across Missouri to participate. Although our number of children was lower this year, we are proud of Holly Connor, an 8th grader from Clayton, MO, who was the top reader having read a total of 4,001 pages. Congratulations Holly!

Advocacy on behalf of both blind youth and adults is a big part of our work. Often our first contact with parents is when Braille or adequate Braille services are being denied or minimalized by the IEP team. Over the past year, the National Federation of the Blind has been represented in IEPs and follow-up meetings for three students in the Kansas City Metropolitan Area.

To our parents we want you to know the National Federation of the Blind is a valuable resource. In addition to advocacy, our youth programs are designed to challenge participants to explore areas where blind youth have not been permitted to engage in activities with their peers in school because of low expectations. These programs also provide mentoring with highly successful adults. The National Federation of the Blind of Missouri is working to rebuild our Parents Division and expand opportunities for you and your children through the NFB National Organization of Parents of Blind Children.

Requiring an accurate researched based assessment such as the National Reading Media Assessment, is still our top legislative priority. We were very disappointed when this was removed from SB 680 and HB2535 last year. An additional setback occurred when the senator who has introduced the bill was not re-elected. We have been working this year to find a new sponsor for the bill as we intend to put a stop to blind students being denied Braille instruction in Missouri.

Tomorrow morning you will hear more from our Governmental Affairs Committee Chair about our Jefferson City Seminar and appointments with key governmental officials. For now, I ask you to help me thank Roger Crome who chairs our GA Committee. I want to ask our Governmental Affairs committee members and other Jeff City seminar participants to stand so we all can thank them for their hard work. This is a group of dedicated members that truly work as a committee.

 The emphasis on transition is one of the major changes in the passing and implementation of the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act, WIOA. In fact, every VR agency must dedicate a portion of its budget to providing transition services to youth.

Last year, there were two 17-year-old blind clients in Missouri who had planned with the support of RSB to attend the summer program at the Colorado Center for the Blind. One family had been planning for over a year for their teen to participate in the program. The other teen would turn 18 shortly after the program began. Less than a month before time for their summer program was scheduled to begin, both families were notified that it was against state policy for a minor to go to an out-of-state program. Their summer planning seemed to have come to an abrupt halt.

To his credit, Keith Rodderick, the deputy director with Rehabilitation Services for the Blind was willing to talk with the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri, the parents of both clients, and multiple times with the state attorneys and in short time resolved the issue by offering language that satisfied the lawyers and permits young Missourians to participate in youth programs that provide skills training, pre-employment skills, and work experiences. Parents will need to transport the students to and from the center in order for RSB to cover the cost of the program. Both teens were present for the first day of the program at the Colorado Center for the Blind. It is refreshing when everyone can work together for the good of the client, and we are fortunate to have an agency director who is responsive to the blind of Missouri.

The Washington Seminar is always a highlight in our Federation year. There are always other events that precede our Great Gathering in. This year Carla Keirns was able to participate in the Parent Leadership Program (PLP) at our national center before joining the rest of our Missouri delegation at the Holiday Inn Capitol in Washington. Those representing us this year were Robin House, Christopher Tisdal, Carla Keirns, Gary Wunder, and Shelia Wright. This team worked on the Hill two days visiting our eight Congressional Members and both Senators to introduce our legislative priorities for 2019. This was a strong team that had prepared well for their presentations. Please join me in thanking them for giving of their time, energy, and financial resources to represent all of us.

Now every member can help move forward our legislative concerns by writing or calling both of our Missouri senators and your member of congress to ask them to support legislation. We will provide information throughout the session to keep you abreast of developments. When the call for help goes out, please act by making that call or sending an email message. Never hesitate to ask questions you have. It is our joint action that gets results and your involvement can make the difference.

* **The Access Technology Affordability Act (ATAA)**

The cost of critically needed access technology is out of reach for most blind Americans. By providing a refundable tax credit for qualifying purchases, Congress will stimulate individual procurement of this technology and promote affordability of these tools.

* **The Greater Accessibility and Independence through Nonvisual Access Technology (GAIN) Act**

Advanced digital interfaces create barriers that prevent blind individuals from independently operating essential devices that enhance quality of life. Congress must end the digital divide that threatens the independence of blind Americans by developing minimum accessibility requirements for such devices.

* **The Disability Employment Act (DEA)**

An outdated approach to employment fails to adequately equip workers with disabilities for the challenges of the twenty-first century. The Disability Employment Act will spur innovation that will increase and enhance modern employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

 This report could not be complete without talking a little about the work of our Sports and Recreation Committee. In 2017 the Old Drum Chapter hosted a rafting trip and invited other members across the state who were interested to join them. It was such a success that The Old Drum Chapter President asked if our state affiliate would be willing to help plan a 2018 rafting trip. Amy and Bill Wilson visited several sites and thought that everyone would like Bass River Resort in Steelville, Missouri.

 The planning commenced, and we had eleven happy campers who enjoyed a beautiful day on the river and a great weekend disconnected from the internet and engaged with one another. It was delightful that no one at Bass River Resort seemed to question our abilities to navigate the camp facilities or the river.

 The National Federation of the Blind of Missouri was asked to participate for the second time in the 2018-2019 Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield/USABA National Fitness Challenge, and with the support of our NFB of Missouri State Board of Directors we accepted the challenge. We had 43 Missourians who signed up this year and 40 that show-up on the leader board as participants. Because we plan a number of events and need thousands of impressions, it is the best advertised program our affiliate has ever engaged in. All of our affiliate chapters have participants and are on the move. Come join us in our meet-ups, which will be popping up now that it is spring. We also will have a team participating in the Kansas City Trolley Run on April 28, which raises funds for the Children’s Center for the Visually Impaired, and we will be hosting a Blind Sports Day at the Missouri School for the Blind on May 5th. Let’s all thank our Sports and Recreation Chair, Robin House. To give you all a few seconds to get some steps in, if you have been involved in the National Fitness Challenge, please stand and say our motto: Every step counts – Go Team Go. I’m confident the Sports and Recreation Committee will find new projects and hope that even more of our members will engage in our efforts to get more active.

 Our Communication Team is made up of Public Relations, Social Media, our web presence, and the Blind Missourian. Each area has its committees and proofers that make sure all of our programs and activities are tools which help get our message out to the public, to our members, and prospective members. Lets’ thank Daniel Garcia – Public Relations, Randy Carmack – NFBMO Webpage, Amy Wilson – Social Media, and Carol Coulter Editor of the Blind Missourian. Thank you too to the Committees and proofers that work behind the scenes.

 Our membership outreach is one of our most important areas and the Membership Committee works hard to find more ways to reach out to those that don’t know about the NFB. However, this work needs to extend beyond the Committee. All of us can help us reach out to blind Missourians who can benefit from being a part of the National Federation of the Blind. Think about what the Federation has done for you. Think of why you are here today. Think of the hundreds of blind people who do not have the love, hope, and determination that comes to us through the Federation. Nothing is as powerful as to have friends who believe in you and when you falter who can pick you up. We need to reach out to those that do not know us yet. Take pride in being a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri and make a difference by telling our stories and inviting new members in.

 If you have not discovered where you want to serve, talk with me and other leaders in our affiliate about your interest. The Federation is a great place to stretch yourself and grow. While doing so, you can help the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri to grow. The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future.

Every day we raise the expectations of blind people because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. Blindness is not what holds us back. You can live the life you want. Let’s go build the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri!

Resolutions, Constitution Amendments and By-Laws

passed at the 2019 state convention.

Resolution 2019-01

A Resolution Commending Bob Watson for Helping Raise Public Awareness of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri

Whereas, the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri is one of fifty-two nationwide affiliates of the National Federation of the Blind, the nation's oldest, largest, and most effective civil rights and self-advocacy organization of the blind; and

Whereas, the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri routinely engages in public relations efforts aimed at raising public awareness of our programs and issues affecting blind Missourians; and

Whereas, Bob Watson is a reporter for the Jefferson City News Tribune who has worked collaboratively for many years with members of the Jefferson City Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri; and

Whereas, thanks to Bob Watson's work with the Jefferson City News Tribune for at least two decades published multiple articles about National Federation of the Blind events and legislative priorities; Now, therefore:

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri in Convention assembled this 23rd day of March, 2019, in the City of Columbia, Missouri, that we commend Bob Watson for his valuable role in increasing public understanding of our organization and issues that affect blind Missourians.

Wording between asterisks denotes the change in the amendments.

Article III Membership

Section A, Requirements:

At least a majority of the active members of this organization must be blind. Active membership shall be of two (2) classifications: active members who are affiliated with local chapters, and active members who are not affiliated with local chapters. To become a member, all persons shall be voted into the Federation family by a majority vote of their chapter, division, or a majority vote of the affiliate board if not affiliated with a chapter or division.

Article IV Local Chapters and Divisions

Section B, Divisions:

Any organized group of special interests wishing to become a division of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri may form a special interest group and after meeting regularly for two years may apply to become a division by applying for a charter by submitting to the President of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri a copy of its constitution and a list of the names and addresses of its members and elected officers. When the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri either in convention assembled or by action of its Board of Directors shall have approved the application, it shall issue to the division a Certificate of Charter. Annually, within fifteen days of the end of the State Affiliate Convention, each division shall provide to the Recording Secretary and to the Treasurer of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri a current list of its members and their addresses. On or before February 1 of each year, each division shall forward to the State Treasurer a detailed financial report of its activities for the preceding fiscal year. The fiscal year of this organization shall be the calendar year. As new members enter a division, their names and addresses shall be sent, without delay, to the Recording Secretary of the state organization. The President of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri shall be an ex-officio member of each division. In the event of the dissolution of a division, or if (for whatever reason) a division ceases to be a part of this organization, its assets shall become the property of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri. Divisions shall not pay affiliate dues for their members, except in the case where a person has not already had dues paid by themselves or a local chapter. In such a case, dues must be paid at our annual state convention and immediately forwarded to the State Affiliate Treasurer. The affiliate shall have the power to dissolve any division that is not regularly meeting or fails to meet at any state convention.

Changes to the NFB of Missouri Bylaws

Adopted March, 2018

6.04 The nomination deadline for the Jernigan Award, tenBroek Award, and Gary L. Wunder Award shall be February 1.

**Big Opportunities in a Small Town: Thinking Outside the Box**

**By Dennis Miller**

**From the Editor in collaboration with Gary Wunder: Missouri is a rural state with a lot of farmland and many small towns separated by a considerable distance. In most of these there is no bus service, no taxicabs, and no rideshare; there simply are no rides to be had. Many people who are blind have the idea that the only way for us to be independent is to move to a place large enough to meet our basic transportation needs.**

**Although for many this is a choice, for some it is not. Perhaps they are unwilling to part from the family support which is the primary focus of their lives. Some blind people are themselves the support for their loved ones as they take care of older parents or siblings who cannot take care of themselves. So what do you do when you’ve gone through school, have gotten rehabilitation money to get a college degree, and find yourself in a small town here in Missouri?**

**The answer to this question can be found in part in the presentation made to the convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri on March 23, 2019, by Dennis Miller, a member of the Missouri affiliate who is blind and significantly hard of hearing. In these remarks he provides concrete examples of how he has managed to get work and some uncomfortable examples of why we sometimes fall short of the goal he has achieved. Here is what Dennis said about finding employment where he wants to live as a part of living the life he wants:**

Thank you, President Wright. What an honor it is for me to be here among you folks today. This is only my second National Federation of the Blind convention, and I’m very much enjoying it.

I’ve known Shelia Wright for almost thirty years now, and when we first met it was at an agency called Blind Focus. While I was a student there, and I was going through a lot of difficult adjustments, this lady was kind enough to shepherd me through all of it. Ever since that point, when she has asked me to do something, I’ve asked three questions: when, where, and how much am I getting paid? After a few years I realized that the answer to the third question wasn’t going to change, so now I just ask when and where.

I want to talk briefly today about my experience living in a small town and being employed. The residents of my small town may not like some of the things I say, but so be it. Actually, Kirksville is a very small community of 17,000 people. It’s ninety miles to the north of Columbia, and some of you in your lifetime have probably had the misfortune of traveling through it on your way to somewhere else. Kirksville is one of these towns where once you’ve gone to the Walmart supercenter, you’ve about seen everything.

But Kirksville is my home. It is where I was born and raised. It is where I went to school as a totally blind person and graduated from the university there. When I graduated from Truman State University, the district supervisor for Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (who has since been put out to pasture) told me that if I ever wanted to be employed, I had to leave Kirksville. He said there was absolutely nothing for me in Kirksville. For a while I thought he might be right.

I graduated with a degree in broadcast communications and minored in political science. I spent several years living out my dream in radio, but I left radio because there was very little money in it, and unfortunately there’s very little need for humans anymore. It’s become almost totally automated.

I worked several years in the independent living industry, and I wanted to do something different. I really liked the idea of thinking outside the box, maybe doing some things on my own. And I think this may be the major focus of my talk today.

Sometimes when you live in a small community, opportunities come down and hit you on the head. If you are there, and if you’re willing, you can take advantage of them. The first opportunity I was given was to spend six years as a contract Braille instructor for an entity over in Milan, Missouri, which is even smaller than our town of Kirksville. Milan is about thirty-five miles to the west. Some of you may remember the young man I helped, because he won an NFB scholarship and took that on to Northwest Missouri State University where he graduated with honors. He’s now married and very happy and very gainfully employed. So I was given an opportunity that required my being in the right place at the right time and being willing to think outside the box, being willing to do something that I couldn’t imagine myself doing. I never thought of being a teacher. I hated school. But being a teacher was what I’ve been in one form or another since 2000.

My experience with the Braille instructor position led to a contract with TAPI [the Telecommunications Program for Internet], a wonderful program operated by the Missouri Assistive Technology Project that provides equipment and instruction to help blind people get on the internet. But after you do so much training in a small town like Kirksville, you run out of people who need it.

The next question I asked myself was where am I going from here? In the summer of 2006, I happened to overhear a conversation among parents who had blind children who were being homeschooled. The state of Missouri had already passed a law that requires all graduating seniors to have a working knowledge of the state and the United States constitutions. That applies to everyone, whether you are in a public school or being educated in a private or homeschool. These parents were commiserating among themselves, saying, “We don’t think we know enough to be able to teach this. We don’t have the skills. What are we going to do? We barely understand the Constitution ourselves. How are we going to teach these crucial documents to our children?”

One of the parents said, “I think Dennis has a background in political science.”

That piqued their interest, and they turned to me and said, “Would you be interested in teaching a civics class for children who are homeschooled, both middle school and high school students?”

My first thought was that I had never taught a group before, but almost immediately my second was that I would certainly give it a try. They also said, “While you’re teaching that, would you mind teaching a public speaking course?” So that’s how my experience in teaching large groups of kids went, teaching civics and public speaking. I developed my own way of teaching civics because there was no set formula. I wasn’t in a public classroom; I was in a private setting where I could kind of do my own thing. I decided that instead of using a textbook, I would teach directly from the documents themselves. This means that I taught directly from the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Missouri Constitution. I had a lot of success with that. The kids seemed to like that it was very interactive. They were encouraged to ask questions and to venture answers.

We came to Jefferson City every year to meet with their senators and representatives. One year we had a particular representative who took a strong interest in our class. I can’t remember the issue (I suspect it was not a major one), but it was up for a vote. Our representative walked over to the kids and said, “How should I vote on this?” They listened to the debate, they told him, and then they were able to see him go vote in the way they had suggested. That may have been how he was going to vote anyway, but it was a different way of doing things that said to them that what they thought mattered.

This year is actually the first year I have not taught that civics class because, through my teaching of that, I have built a reputation as a good teacher. So when the city of Kirksville got a grant for this teaching of English as a second language, they turned to me, and I accepted. We have two manufacturing plants, one in Milan and one in Kirksville. Many of their employees are from African speaking nations as well as some Latin American nations. We have people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Togo, the Ivory Coast, Thailand, Indonesia, Mexico, South Korea, Venezuela, Panama, and Puerto Rico. There are a wide variety of people, but it works.

I happen to go to church with the lady who is responsible for that grant, and I asked her “How do you do that?” She said, “What we really need are volunteers who are willing to talk to the adults. Dennis, you would be perfect at that because you have such a strong curiosity and interest. I think it is something that you would really enjoy, and they would enjoy you.”

I promised her that I would give it a try. For those of you who don’t know, I do have some hearing difficulties. I have a cochlear implant which I got a couple years ago, but I wasn’t quite sure how it would work out. I said, “Okay, I’m not sure if I’m going to be able to do this, but I will give it a try.” I started the job in January of 2018, and they kept asking me to increase my hours. I started out doing this just one day a week, and that went until the end of the school year. They then wrote my position into the grant so that I could teach more hours and actually get paid. The request to increase my hours has continued, and it has been the most rewarding thing that I have ever done in my life. I love every second of it. I would not trade it for the world.

So why do I bring all this up? I bring it up because when I came to my first convention in 2006, I didn’t know I could’ve imagined my doing any of those things. I was not a teacher. I knew nothing about teaching. I didn’t even like books unless I was reading them for myself for pleasure. The point that I have come here to make is that we need to be willing to think outside the box. When an opportunity comes your way, don’t be afraid to say, hey, I’d like to try that. A lot of times what happens is that we go to school, we get a degree, and we don’t find a job within a certain amount of time in the area in which we got our degree. We then give up. Yes, the unemployment rate among blind people and people with disabilities in general is extremely high. Some of that is because we are not given the opportunities that we deserve, but, in my opinion, some of that is that we don’t take advantage of all the opportunities that are out there. [applause] You know, if someone said, “Dennis, do you want to collect trash out of the street?” I would have to admit that that is not a job that I would really want to do, but keep in mind that somebody has to do it.

When I started as a civics teacher, it was as a volunteer. The same is true for the ESL class. As I said, they then rolled me into the grant so that I can get paid. Now maybe I didn’t want to start out as a volunteer, but they needed the work done, and I wanted the challenge. Had I not taken that opportunity, someone else would’ve. That somebody else would now be written into their grant, and I would not be working every week.

So my real point in all of this is that when you are looking for a job, be willing to explore—be willing to explore, be willing to experiment, be willing to try something different. If I had an advanced bachelor’s degree in chemistry and I couldn’t find a job in chemistry, I’d probably be upset, but it really comes down to do you want to work or do you want to stay at home? Sometimes I think we limit ourselves because we’re not willing to think outside the box. We too often tell ourselves that we are above this job, or this job isn’t what I want. I know that when I graduated from college, if you would have come to me and asked if I wanted to teach immigrants English, I would’ve said absolutely not. No way! But as I said, this has become the most rewarding thing I’ve ever done in my life, and it is now something I would not trade for the world.

I leave you with this plea and challenge: be willing to try, be willing to expand your horizons, be willing to dream, be willing to go into an area that is outside your comfort zone. I had never been around immigrants before; I told you I live in Kirksville, Missouri. I didn’t even know we had immigrants. I just assumed somebody else did all of those factory jobs. But these people have become some of my best friends. I am extremely comfortable around them, and they are very comfortable around me. They look at me outside of the classroom as somebody they can rely on to help them if they get in a difficult position. But again, that is an opportunity that, had I not been willing to take that chance and take that risk, would’ve gone to somebody else. Don’t limit yourself. Never think that something isn’t right for you until you have taken the opportunity to try it. It’s okay to try it and not like it. I did not particularly enjoy working in the independent living center—it wasn’t my thing. I did it because it was a job, and I needed to work. How do you know if you don’t like something until you try it?

Some of you in here may remember a man named Casey Kasem. He’s probably too old for some of you. Back when I was a small boy, Casey Kasem had a weekly show on the radio called *America’s Top Forty*. He always ended the show with the same signature line, and I’m going to end my presentation in the same way. “Keep your feet on the ground and keep reaching for the stars.”

The 2019 Kansas City Membership Seminar: A Brief Introduction to the National Federation of the Blind

By Daniel Garcia

From October of 2018 through January of 2019 the Kansas City Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri gained nine new members. This explosive growth in membership is due to the work of the state affiliate Membership Committee as well as chapter members telling our story and asking blind and sighted people to join our ranks. To properly introduce these new members to the National Federation of the Blind, the chapter decided that we ought to have a membership seminar. Immediately after this decision had been made, I started working with chapter members Linda Black-White, Ruby Polk, and Willa Patterson to put together this seminar. Several telephone conference calls later all the details of the seminar had been carefully worked out, and we were ready and eager to execute the plan.

The 2019 National Federation of the Blind of Missouri Kansas City Chapter Membership Seminar was held at the Macedonia Baptist Church on Saturday, February 23, 2019. There were twenty-seven people in attendance including the chapter board, six of the nine new members, and a few potential new members. We all recited the NFB pledge and then everyone introduced themselves. The first speaker was our state affiliate President Shelia Wright who gave a brief presentation on our history. President Wright explained that we were founded in 1940, and that though there was dissention in the ranks in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, our organization came through those turbulent times stronger than ever. She then outlined the NFB of Missouri’s advocacy, legislative, and legal work to defend the rights of blind people. There was then a brief question and answer period during which Sam Jones, one of our new members who is a guide dog user, stated that a car rental company wanted him to pay a $150 surcharge on account of his service animal. After a brief discussion on the subject, I suggested to Sam that he contact our National Association of Guide Dog Users.

It was then my turn to speak and my topic was NFB philosophy. In my presentation I outlined and explained some of the core principles of our philosophy: the NFB is an organization speaking for the blind; we reject the hierarchy of the sighted; it is respectable to be blind; Braille is the only means of literacy for the blind; the long white cane is both a tool and a symbol of independence for the blind; with the proper training and opportunity, blindness can be reduced to the level of a nuisance; and the problem of blindness is not blindness itself, but people’s negative reactions and misconceptions about the capabilities of the blind. The next speaker was Ruby Polk, who serves on the board of directors of the Kansas City Chapter as Immediate Past President. Ruby talked about the Kansas City Chapter and about the role of chapters in general. It is at the chapter level where most members are first introduced to the NFB and where people get the encouragement and support that builds their confidence and allows them to go forth and live the lives they want. She also emphasized the importance of chapters being the building blocks of the Federation.

Next on the agenda was Willa Patterson, who has been a member of the NFB for forty-seven years. Willa explained the role of the state convention and some of the programs of the NFB of Missouri like the BELL Academy. She then went on to talk about the Baby Mikaela Case (a Kansas City newborn who had been taken from her parents in 2010 solely because they were blind) to illustrate how low expectations of the blind can truly hurt people and the NFB of Missouri’s strong advocacy in this area. The topic of the national organization and role of the National Office was covered by Linda Black-White who was the Second Vice President of the District of Columbia affiliate from 1993 to 1995 and the President of the Greater Washington, D.C. Chapter from 1995 to 2011. Since Baltimore is nearby, she was privileged to often take her chapter members to our National Center for the Blind. To remind us that it takes funds to run the programs of the NFB and to maintain its headquarters, Linda then lead the audience in singing the PAC Plan Song.

There was then a 20-minute break which gave new and long-time members a chance to socialize. After I got everyone’s attention again to resume the seminar, I requested that there be active audience participation. I asked everyone in attendance why they were Federationists. What followed was a very enthusiastic response. New and long-time members alike shared with us why they joined and why they stay in the Federation. The reasons for joining as well as the manner in which they joined might be different, but we are all united in the idea that we want to help ourselves and other blind people live the lives we want.

Keeping Busy in Columbia

By Eugene Coulter

“Spanning the globe to bring you the constant variety of sport” was part of

the introduction to what long-running TV series on ABC? This is just one of the questions contestants had to answer at the Columbia Chapter’s annual Trivia Night on November 3. The crowd was lively and a lot of funds were raised. Not only were folks’ brains tested, but their hunger was satisfied, and there were lots of chances to bid on great prize packages. The Trivia Night was just the first event in what has been a very busy six months for the Columbia Chapter with the highlight being hosting the state convention.

We contacted our newly elected county clerk, Brianna Lennon, right after the November election to invite her to our January meeting. We spoke at length with her about the county’s efforts to secure new accessible voting machines. The upshot was a commitment from her that we would be involved in the process. True to her word, we were able to appoint Gary Wunder to be a member of the selection committee. In early May we also were able to check out the three possible machines for ourselves and give our opinions.

In April we participated in the Earth Day event, and some of us would have also been participants at the Trolley Run in Kansas City except for the unfortunate accident of the Coulter family who were not only to participate, but provide the transportation.

In May we also met at length with a representative from the city bus service to learn about the changes coming on June 3 to both fixed route and paratransit service. On Memorial Day we walked in the Columbia Memorial Day Parade for our thirtieth year led, as always, by our most decorated veteran, Tom Stevens. These activities were in addition to our regular business and of course our annual picnic and Christmas Party.

So, can you answer the question at the beginning of this article? The answer is, “ABC’s Wide World of Sports.”

Memories of the Moynihan Family

By Susie Stanzel

My history with the Moynihans actually began with the Simms family. Bill and Jama Simms were Jana’s parents. Jana said we met when we were children. I actually don’t remember that. I believe I first met Jana in 1968 when efforts were being made to reorganize the Kansas affiliate. I was eighteen years old and didn’t really understand what discrimination was. I left Kansas in 1971 when I was hired as a computer programmer for the City of Kansas City, Missouri. Jana kept inviting me to chapter meetings. Finally, when Patty Shreck was in Kansas City after the 1974 national convention, she contacted me and asked why I was not a member of the Federation. She asked if I had really given it consideration. Patty was the person at the Kansas School for the Blind I really wanted to emulate. With her gentle push, I joined and never looked back.

The Stanzels and the Moynihans were friends through thick and very thin. My middle daughter, Ginny, who now goes by Virginia, coined her phrase “our twin family”. It really does describe our relationship with the Moynihans. We really were twin families. The dates of our marriages were July 26th. The only difference was that Dean and I were married in 1975, and Jana and Jim were married in 1980. I was six weeks from delivering Lori, who now goes by Loretta, therefore I had the easy job of sitting and tending Jana and Jim’s guest book.

My children were born between 1980 and 1986. During these years Jana and Jim had two children: J.C., who now goes by James, and their daughter Jeanene. Those of you who have friends who had children of similar ages know how much easier it is to get together. Each house has toys. Each house has a good chance of being cluttered, especially if the children are young. Neither family was ashamed of how the house looked. All the adults wanted to do was to relax and allow the children to play. Loretta’s favorite memory is playing Atari and eating pizza.

The adults went out for dinner on our anniversaries and for birthdays. We loved to go to the Peppercorn Duck club. Jim always had duck. I thought it was the greasiest thing I ever came in contact with.

The absolutely funniest thing that ever happened was when Jim went to The Seeing Eye and got another dog. You absolutely will not believe what his name was. It was “Dean”. As many of you will remember, that was my husband’s name.

When J.C. was old enough to drive, they got a car, but when they most needed it happened to be in the shop. Jana’s father was in the hospital. My father had recently passed away. They were unable to rent a car because J.C. was under eighteen, and Jim and Jana were both blind. We loaned them our van. That is the only time in my life I really thought God friended me. Dean did not even object. In those days we didn’t have anything but taxies, and you never knew when you would ever get one. I had made more than one emergency trip to the hospital and couldn’t imagine not being able to get there. I didn’t want Jana to be in the situation of needing to go to the hospital and not being able to get there, so we lent our car. Sometimes saying you care isn’t enough—you have to show it.

When I say we were friends through thick and thin, I really do mean that at times it was thin. In 2006 Dean was diagnosed with kidney cancer. Jana had been diagnosed with breast cancer several years earlier. Jim and his Barber Shop quartet came to our home and sang to Dean on Valentine’s Day in 2007. Dean subsequently passed away on June 21st of that year.

When you need help packing boxes to move, you really find out who your friends are. When Jana and Jim were packing to move to St. Louis, my girls and I helped pack boxes with the Pen Friend. This is a device that lets you place a tag on a box and then record a message that is played when the device sees that tag. I reminded Jeanene about that when she called me and told me about Jim’s death. Jeanene was very thankful for all the work we did with the Pen Friend. Her mother could not really do any of the unpacking. Jana only lived a few weeks after moving.

Yes, we were friends through thick and thin from 1968 or earlier until April 4th. I think of them often. Our families were each made better because our love and unity was multiplied by two. It is hard to be without Dean, Jim, and Jana, but there is a song by Mary Black called “The Thorn Upon the Rose” that contains these lines that sum up how I feel:

“Win or lose it's just the same -

tears of joy tears of pain:

they're hand in hand, they come as one

you'll never see the moon without the promise of the sun!

for all the bruises for all the blows -

I'd rather feel the thorn than to never see the rose!

So when you pick the handsome flower

don't forget the thorn upon the rose!

it's cut is deep and it's scar lasts forever

It follows love wherever love goes.”

Saying Goodbye or Saying Thank You: Coming to See It Really Is A Choice

By Gary Wunder

Each of us comes to a time in our lives when we find ourselves saying an uncomfortable number of goodbyes to people who are close to our age. It is one thing to say goodbye to great grandma and grandpa who were, after all, nearly sixty years our senior, but it is quite another thing when you hear that someone has died and no one remarks on what a young age he was when he left us.

On April 6 as Debbie and I sat on our deck, the phone rang, and the caller was announced as JC Moynihan. His call was to convey the sad news that our longtime friend Jim had died two days earlier. We were shocked. We knew that Jim was in a nursing home suffering from some kind of dementia which significantly altered certain parts of his personality, but we had no idea that he was close to death.

When I think of Jim Moynihan, I think of a man who was firm in his principles and quite concrete in his understanding of things. You were either a Republican or a Democrat, a conservative or a liberal, and if you couldn't tell the difference, you were either indecisive, deluded, or, as he politely said to me, too nuanced. When his wife Jana was alive, we would have great fun sitting at the dinner table with Jim and ganging up on him. As far as he was concerned, both Jana and I were liberals, but in our minds we were simply Midwestern moderates, the reasonable and only moral place to occupy on the political spectrum. He was, to us, staunchly and unreasonably conservative.

I think I first met Jim at Jim and Jana’s wedding. We were surprised that Jana had her heart stolen by a New Yorker. So when Jim came, a number of us had reservations about this fellow from the east. You know how Midwesterners can be: we believe that we represent normality, stability, and the right way of thinking. The other coasts have their value, but those of us in the center are really the fulcrum of the country, and either end could fall off like a broken teeter totter and we’d survive. But Jim did not appear to be from one coast or the other, save his accent which was clearly that of a New Yorker.

Jim came to Kansas City with a job as a federal investigator for the Office for Civil Rights. This seemed a wonderful fit since Jim always had a ton of questions. Sometimes he reminded me of the television character Columbo: he would ask you a question, move off to a different topic, and then come back to the same question. Was it some idiosyncratic behavior of his, or was there an investigators method behind this apparent madness? I never figured it out, but it is one of the characteristics that at times amused me, challenged me, and made me love Jim all the more.

At one point in Jim's career he was convinced that the office in which he worked had unfairly denied him a promotion. He asked for help from the National Federation of the Blind, and I was the one who went to help him. The concern was that there was no anonymity in the testing that was supposed to result in offers of promotion, and Jim was able to prove that anonymity was compromised. As the boss was deciding who would get promotions in the second round, she was trying to explain at Jim’s hearing exactly how she had arrived at a process to ensure that the second round would be anonymous. She said something like this: "I was driving down the road, and suddenly I had this idea. I called up my secretary from my car and said, ‘I want you to get the envelopes of all of those who are up for promotion.’ I looked out my window for license numbers, and on each envelope I had her right one of them. I would not know the order, and those doing the grading would have nothing but the number. So I just use those license numbers and that is how I came up with the anonymous code.”

At this point Jim interrupted her to say, "what kind of nonsense is this? You are using license numbers, and you know I don't even have a car." The room erupted in laughter, because even though it was an adversarial meeting, everyone there could appreciate a good joke and the reduction in the tension that had filled the room. The problem was that Jim wasn’t really making a joke; he truly thought this was more nonsensical discrimination.

I had very few rights as Jim’s advocate in this hearing, but I exercise the one

that I had: to recess the meeting and to take Jim outside. I said, "Jim, do you know what just happened there?" "Yes I do. She was doing something that was clearly illegal. She was trying to use license numbers, and she knows darned well that I can't get a license to drive.”

I explained that she was not actually using a license number in order to invalidate his test results but was giving an example of how she was attempting to anonymize the test answers each applicant had submitted.

"Oh, I guess I messed up then. I’m sorry.” I assured him that he had not messed up, but that in fact most people thought that he had made a very funny remark in what could have been a tense situation, thereby demonstrating that he wasn’t angry, but in fact had every confidence that the hearing would be fair. "Oh, so they think I was trying to be funny, and I am okay, right?" He said. I assured him that he was, and we went back into the room.

Jim won that case and was granted his promotion, and I think it made those of us in the Federation feel really good to be able to help him. It reaffirmed for him the reason why he was involved, though I doubt he ever once questioned the why of his being a Federationist.

I don't know how many of you remember that there was a time when the Missouri affiliate was flat broke. We were sitting at a board meeting trying to figure out options about how to take action, but none of the options seemed to have any viability. Jim observed that all of our proposals required money, and he offered to loan the affiliate $1000. We accepted, he agreed that we would pay when we could, and we went on to make some program decisions that day. Jim got his money back, and he felt very good about having saved the affiliate from oblivion.

Our friend was an English major and was a prolific writer of letters. If we needed some kind of assistance legislatively, Jim would take to his typewriter and generate something for us. Technology was not something that came easy to him. He was always enthused about the latest and greatest computer that would make him more productive, but grasping that skill set was not easy for him. He eventually learned the Braille n Speak and marveled at its ability to do word processing, but he had a harder time with the word processors that came on the IBM PC, and he was quite challenged but enthusiastic when he learned to competently use Outlook express. Having email and email lists gave him a great forum not only to tell people what he thought about blindness but what he thought about conservatism, about being a good Republican, and about not selling out to the foolish liberal Democratic line. But, of course, he loved us anyway.

Lately I have attended far too many funerals and have been asked to contribute to too many obituaries. I want to believe in the hereafter, and so I will close my part by saying some words to Jim. Jim, it was an honor to get to know you, to value you as a friend, and to know that our relationship was one of great closeness and trust. I hope that in heaven they still have libraries and that there is always a tension between philosophies and political factions. I hope that you still have a chance to exercise that great mind of yours, to follow the direction of your sweet and kind soul, and that even in heaven one still strives to be the very best that he can be, for that occupied a great deal of your life.

Right now, my goal is to move beyond the grief that comes in knowing that you are gone and to move to the place where I am grateful for the fact that you played such a part in my life. I’m not ready to go, but the thought of going is made a bit easier by hoping and believing that you will be there to greet me.

Pledge of the

National Federation of the Blind

I pledge to participate actively in the efforts 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.

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