My name is Anita Adkins. I am a blind, nontraditional college student, majoring in Elementary Education with a specialization in Language Arts. However, my end goal is to work in the field of blindness.

I will share with you my philosophy of blindness, which, in turn, will result in my summarizing my history. While growing up in West Virginia, I received an excellent academic experience at the West Virginia School for the Blind.

As a youngster, I did not receive adequate training in necessary blindness skills. However, I possess a spirit of adventure, which enabled me to learn many blindness skills through trial and error, though further training would certainly benefit me as a blind adult. It was probably due to this and the encouragement from the staff at WVSB, who taught me Braille and introduced me to a cane, that I developed a positive attitude about my ability to succeed as a blind person. I believe that blindness cannot keep me from my goals if I am motivated to reach them, and that I can use alternative techniques to accomplish them.

After graduating from high school, I briefly attended college, but I was there for others and not myself. Like my sighted family, I wanted the right and freedom to immediately walk down to the local grocery store or nearest restaurant and obtain employment, a feat unattainable by me as a blind person who was untrained and who was dealing with a society acting out its negative view of blindness.

Fortunately, in 2001, I obtained employment at T-base Communications, a company that produced documents in multiple formats. While there, I was able to proofread Braille and to learn how to create WebPages in order for me to test websites for accessibility and usability. Website testing also forced me to become very familiar with assistive technology because it is crucial to know whether it is the website that is inaccessible or the inexperience of the user of the technology. I loved the job because I love Braille and I love to learn, but I bumped up against the glass ceiling, so I decided to apply at Blind Industries and Services of Maryland. I learned how to sew at this company. In addition, I volunteered and then obtained employment as a Rehabilitation teacher in their Rehabilitation Department where I worked with seniors and other students who were blind, teaching Braille, computer technology, cane travel, and independent living skills.

A friend and colleague encouraged me to return to school to obtain a degree because it would provide a larger income and a wider range of job possibilities for me. I loved what I was doing, but I decided to take the advice because it enabled me to take wise action toward a future career, though I had not yet defined what exactly this career would entail.

Education became my major because I was a teacher already and it seemed the logical choice at the time. It was after much frustration and many classes that I finally realized that I didn’t want to simply teach; I want to step into an employment position where I can make a positive impact in the lives of the blind.

As I work toward graduation, I educate the world around me by incorporating the topic of blindness in my courses, whether it is teaching Braille, talking to a group of future teachers about how technology can improve the learning experience for students in the general education classroom, or writing papers concerning educational placement for blind students. In addition, I involve myself in the local Lion’s Club and attend local NFB meetings when opportunity permits.

After obtaining my bachelor’s degree, my future plans are to search for meaningful employment in the field of blindness and to begin working toward obtaining certification in vision as part of a master’s program in Special Education.

As a child, I always wanted to be a teacher and a writer, and my degree will open up many opportunities for me from teaching students, to researching about blindness, to guiding blind students along a career path, to serving in the blindness community by speaking about what the blind can do and beyond.