The GCB DIGEST

This is a publication of the Georgia Council of the Blind

We are an affiliate of the American Council of the Blind

An organization promoting a hand up and not a handout

Summer 2020

GCB officers for 2018-2020:

Alice Ritchhart, President, 912-996-4213, [alice.ritchhart@comcast.net](mailto:alice.ritchhart@comcast.net)

Philip Jones, First Vice-President, 770-713-3306, [brilman1952@bellsouth.net](mailto:brilman1952@bellsouth.net)

Jamaica Miller, Second Vice-President, 706-316-9766, [mai2@bellsouth.net](mailto:mai2@bellsouth.net)

Betsy Grenevitch, Secretary, 678-862-3876, [blindangel61@gmail.com](mailto:blindangel61@gmail.com)

Marsha Farrow, Treasurer, 706-859-2624, [marshafarrow@windstream.net](mailto:marshafarrow@windstream.net)

Valerie Hester, Member at Large Representative, 912-398-9985, [valerie\_hester@yahoo.com](mailto:valerie_hester@yahoo.com)

Amanda Wilson, Digest Editor, 770-547-4700, [moonrocks@bellsouth.net](mailto:moonrocks@bellsouth.net)

Janet Parmerter, Assistant Editor, 678-407-9787, [Janet@ParmerTours.com](mailto:Janet@ParmerTours.com)

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From Your Editor

By Amanda Wilson

Hello, GCB Family. We thank each one who has submitted articles in this issue of our magazine. If you have any change of address, telephone number, email address, or desired change of format, please inform our GCB treasurer.

Thanks to everyone who makes our GCB Digest such a big success. I particularly want to thank Janet Parmerter, assistant editor, for the many hours she has worked on the magazine, for her editing skills. I want to thank our president, Alice Ritchhart, for her presidential message with information about important events, legislation, and projects. I also appreciate the contributions from our new GCB Digest committee, and each member who sent articles and who made suggestions.

Note

From this point forward, please send any comments, articles or messages to the GCB Digest editor in Font: Arial, Font Style: Bold, Font Size: 16 point, Font Heading Size: 20 point and please underline the Heading. This will make things more consistent for reading and for Braille.

Note:

The GCB Digest is now on NFB Newsline and on Georgia Radio Reading Service, GARRS.

GCB Presidential Message

By Alice Ritchhart

As the year 2020 began, we were optimistic that this was going to be a time for new vision and great things after all 2020 means a perfect vision. We never dreamed that by March things would change so quickly and our vision would turn cloudy and uncertain. First the Corona virus which would cause us to have to physically social distance, followed a couple of months later was by the unjust actions of a few which would lead to so much violence and division. The world seems to be spinning out of control. Many of our communities have been rocked to the core. I have spent many nights crying, and praying to God to ask Him to help make sense of it all. I think his answer came to me this past week in showing me that no matter how crazy the world seems right now there is a community where we are still one and that with its members I can still find a vision of hope, and true friendship and family. The community I am speaking of is the American Council of the Blind (ACB), and Georgia Council of the Blind (GCB). As the states shut down, and we were forced to shelter at home due to the virus, ACB found a way to help our membership stay connected to help cope with the isolation by offering community calls. The community calls take place daily, and topics range from coffee breaks to crafts, to technology and just about anything that might be of interest to folks who are blind or low vision or anyone who wants to understand blindness. Many of our GCB members have taken part in the different calls, and as a result suggested maybe we could do something on a smaller level here in Georgia. So with the help and talents of some of our members and friends we began in April to host community calls on a smaller scale. Our first call was a book club which meets monthly. Since then we have added calls on travel, Braille, crafts, cooking, and even a call to just talk about how we are feeling about being stuck at home, and having to cope with the isolation. I have to say one of my favorite calls has been with Tommy and Mary Woodyard which is game night. They have adapted some of the games they have led us in the last couple of years at convention/ conference to playing them from home on our conference line. The only disappointing part of the calls is I really hoped that we would have more members involved since it does not require money to attend, and it is a chance to get to know one another a little better. So I hope many of you will consider joining us on one of our calls, or if you have an idea for a program to get in touch with myself or our membership committee chair Amanda Wilson and share your hobby or talents with GCB.

The Corona virus was stressful enough, but then came the riots and frustration from the minority groups who feel as though their concerns and feelings have gone unaddressed. It is an issue that affects the world as a whole, but has even been expressed within our community of visually disabled people. I wish I could say that people in the ACB community were open, and calm in the way the subject matter was handled, but some individuals were not so kind and compassionate with one another when engaging in discussion. However I am happy to say that ACB and our leaders of our special interest affiliates stepped up to the plate and again used the community call forum to have a safe place to have an open and educational dialog to work through these matters. We are a family, and we share in so many issues that affect all of us due to our common trait of blindness that it is important to remember each one of us is unique, but that is what makes us all important and worthy of respect. One of our former members, and now President of Texas Council of the Blind, and Chair of the Multi Culture Committee said on one of our recent ACB community calls talking about Blind Black Lives Matters Peggy Garrett said, “Just as we say we are people first when we refer to our disabilities it is true of all else.” We are all people first, and the culture and how we want to be perceived is just a small part of our total make up. So we must remember we are all people first, and we need to respect one another, and have compassion, and recognize that we do have differences, but that should not stop us from letting each individual be allowed to reach their fullest potential in our community. In closing I as I most often do want to make a challenge to you all. I would ask that each and every one of you take the opportunity to do an act of kindness to someone you don’t know. It might be just holding a door for them, saying hello, or treat them to a soda or coffee known as “sharing forward.” Get to know a person who may be different than you. Let us move 2020 back to the focus of a new vision. It is important that we open ourselves up to learning about things that may be uncomfortable to us, but also it means not forcing people to necessarily totally agreeing with you, but being able to accept one another for our differences. We are a family!

We have great news to share with all of you! Georgia’s Senator Kelly Loeffler made a very generous donation to GCB in the amount of $3,800.00. She has been mailed a letter of thanks from our GCB family. The following is a photo and some history.



About Kelly

U.S. Senator Kelly Loeffler was the fourth generation on her family’s grain farm, where she worked in the fields and showed cattle at the 4-H county fair. Helping out on the farm and in her family’s trucking business, she learned about small business and agriculture markets.

Her blue-collar upbringing in the heart of rural America instilled the values of faith, family and hard work. It also gave her a deep appreciation for all hardworking Americans who support their families to live the American Dream.

Kelly attended public school and waitressed through high school and college. She was the first in her family to graduate from college, and earned her degree at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Kelly returned to school to pursue an MBA from DePaul University and also earned the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) designation.

For over 25 years, Kelly moved around the country to build her career in financial services, moving to Georgia in 2002 to help build a startup company, Intercontinental Exchange, which later grew to become a Fortune 500 company. In 2010, Kelly acquired an interest in the WNBA Atlanta Dream. Most recently, Kelly was the CEO of a financial technology firm she helped found, and built it from one employee (herself) to 70. Kelly broke barriers in business and sports to become one of Georgia’s most successful businesswomen.

Kelly believes that when you set a goal and work hard, success is always within reach. She is a tenacious advocate for freedom and pro-growth policies that propel our country forward and create economic opportunities for all Americans.

Kelly left the private sector to serve as a United States Senator, working to empower every Georgian to achieve their American Dream. She was sworn in to the U.S. Senate in January 2020 after Georgia Governor Brian Kemp appointed her to fill the seat of U.S. Senator Johnny Isakson. She is a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions, and Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry, and the Joint Economic Committee.

Georgia Council of the Blind Board Meeting Minutes

By Betsy Grenevitch

Georgia Council of the Blind Board Meeting January 25, 2020

Call to Order, President Alice Ritchhart:

President Alice called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. We began the meeting with playing the game “Operator”. She was trying to stress the importance of communication in a clear manner.

Invocation, Fred McDade:

Fred gave the invocation.

Adoption of Agenda:

Marsha moved that we make the addition of the item “Any Other Business” to the agenda. Fred seconded the motion and the motion carried. Deborah moved that we adopt the agenda and Marsha seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Roll Call, Betsy Grenevitch:

those present were: Alice Ritchhart, GCB President; Philip Jones, GCB First Vice-President; Jamaica Miller, GCB Second Vice-President; Betsy Grenevitch, GCB Secretary; Marsha Farrow, GCB Treasurer; Valerie Hester, GCB Member-at-Large Representative; Keith Morris, GCB Immediate Past President; Jerrie Toney, Athens Chapter; Deborah Lovell, Augusta Chapter; Cecily Nipper, East Georgia Chapter; Dianne Roberts, Greater Hall County Chapter; Fred McDade, Northwest Chapter; Amanda Wilson, Rome-Floyd chapter; Marj Schneider, Savannah Chapter; Tiyah Longmire, South Atlanta chapter; DJ McIntyre, Georgia Guide Dog Users; and Steve Longmire, Webmaster. Guests: John W. smith, Annie Obasih, Judy Presley, Hoyal Presley, Todd Turansky, Charles Stubblefield, Cecily Nipper Sr., Jennifer Bray, Patty Smith, and Kathy Morris.

President’s Report, Alice Ritchhart:

She is still receiving calls from seniors looking for services in rural areas. She refers them to Kay McGill. There is a global program based in Oregon that has foreign exchange blind students. One of those students is currently attending a college in Milledgeville and they have never had a blind student before. GVRA has let some of their staff go and the consultant firm they have been using is now working on recommendations concerning services. The status of GVRA has been exposed by a reporter on WSBtv. Sean Ryan has assured us that he is going to keep Georgia Industries for the Blind open. National Industries for the Blind is coming to help get things right with them. Senator Davenport, from Hampton, Georgia, is going to drop the Commission for the Blind Bill on the senate side. Representative Gilliard is going to drop the bill on the representative side. Alice and Dorothy Griffin with NFB are continuing to meet with Denine Woodson and Shirley Robinson on a regular basis. Denine and Shirley wants to know when we hear about problems.

Board Training, John W. Smith (Smiddie) and Annie Obasih:

They are members of Toastmasters. Some of their key points were:

* You must have effective communication to blossom and to move forward.
* The best way to overcome your fear of speaking is to just speak. You should also be prepared to speak.
* Speaking has a two-part component, speaking and listening.
* You need to be able to receive what a person is saying to you and how they are saying it and pay attention to how they are saying it. Do not allow your actions or behavior to get in the way of listening. You must be able to hear what they are saying in order to transmit to someone else their concerns.
* You should put your own agenda aside while listening to someone else speaks.
* If you do not understand something the person is saying repeat it back to them for more clarification.
* Conflict resolution concerns convincing a person of your point of view, by giving your point and then, listening to their viewpoint. Sometimes you have to agree to disagree.

Approval of Minutes, Betsy Grenevitch:

Deborah made a motion to approve the minutes as they were sent out and the motion was seconded by Jerrie. The motion carried.

Treasurer’s Report, Marsha Farrow:

As of January 18 below are the amounts in the different accounts.

Main Checking: $6,268.23

There are several funds in this account: Senior fund: $3,609.29; Operating fund: $2,658.94. We moved $742.30 into the main account in order to give us a cushion going forward. We have received two donations totaling $180 to go into the senior fund. Recently we helped a lady get some credentialing for her work by giving her $130. GCB Conference and Convention Account: $1,050.40. Al and Cora Camp Scholarship Account: $3,872.70. The money market account has been closed which was account #9565. We now have a $5000 CD that will mature on October 7, 2020 from the money from this account. Long term Investment Account: $18,585.69. The interest that we received on this account last year was $363.47. We have received $1,585.69 in interest since this money was invested. Way Financial Account: In October we had $65,184.58. As of December the amount was $66,638.46. All chapters have either paid or will be paying their dues. Marsha moved that the report be filed for audit. The motion was seconded by Jamaica and the motion carried.

Finance Report, Jerrie Toney:

The committee went over the final budget for 2019 and the proposed budget for 2020. The committee received the spreadsheets. The funds for Kroger were so low; we did not receive a check for 2019. We did not get a bookkeeper since of the way things are now being done is working out well because of the checks and balances that have been put in place. DJ read the proposed budget for 2020. Marj asked why the scholarship fund is not part of the budget and Jerrie said that she would rectify that. Fred made a motion to accept the proposed 2020 budget with the addition of the scholarship fund being added to it. Amanda seconded the motion and the motion carried. Marsha requested that the finance committee revisit the policy concerning the amount that can be written via a check by the treasurer without a second signature. A motion was made by Deborah and seconded for the finance committee to develop this policy concerning the amount of the check that can be written without a second signature and the motion carried.

Conference and Convention Update, Marj Schneider:

They have found a hotel in Gainesville—The Wingate Hotel. They proposed that the conference and convention be held on May 1-2, 2020. The cost of the meeting rooms are $250 per day. They can offer us a block of 30 rooms for $84 per night plus tax. A motion was made by Marj and seconded by Jamaica to hold the conference and convention at the Wingate Hotel in Gainesville on May 1-2, 2020 and the motion carried. They do not have a location for the conference and convention in the fall but they are looking at the possibility of holding it in Albany and/or the Academy for the Blind in Macon.

Membership Committee, Amanda Wilson:

They recently had a meeting with Cindy van Winkle who is the membership coordinator for ACB. She talked to us about how to attract new members. We did have 175 members in 2019 but now have around 150. The deadline to send in our numbers is in March and the money has to be sent in April. Marsha suggested that we begin holding phone meeting calls for at-large members.

We broke to receive our lunch at 11:35 AM.

We began our meeting again at 11:49 AM.

Technology Committee, Steve Longmire:

They are looking for more members to be on this committee. At their meeting they talked about new technology. They also talked about the updated GCB website. Steve asked us to contact Jerrie or him if they have any resources to put on the website. The site now has the back issues of \_The \_GCB Digest since 2005.

Scholarship Committee, Marj Schneider:

We offer three different scholarships: Al and Cora Camp Academic Scholarship, First-Timers Scholarship, and the Leadership Scholarship. The members of her committee are Deborah Lovell, Jamaica Miller, tom Ridgeway, Philip Dillard and Granger Ricks. The Leadership Scholarship will be awarded in the amount of $550 for Cecily Nipper, Jr. to attend the ACB Washington Seminar in February. Al and Cora Camp Scholarship: Marj needs clarification concerning how many scholarships we can award this year. The deadline for this scholarship is March 1. The TVIs in the high schools are working on how to circulate the word better to the blind/visually impaired students in colleges in Georgia. First-Timers Scholarship: The deadline for this scholarship is also March 1. The updated guidelines for the Al and Cora Camp scholarship are now on the website.

Parliamentarian, Alice Ritchhart:

Roderick is no longer able to be our parliamentarian due to his stroke. We owe him $50 but he is not able to provide us an invoice. Phil made the motion seconded by Keith to go ahead a pay Roderick the $50 without the invoice. Dianne suggested that we use the board meeting minutes as our evidence that Roderick was present at the meeting. The motion carried. Marsha made a motion that we send $100 to Roderick to let him know that we are thinking about him and value his work with us. Jamaica seconded the motion. There was some concern expressed that this was not the best use of our money. Concern was also brought up that we need to make sure that he receives the money and it gets spent where it needs to be spent. Tiyah offered that she and Steve could be the agents to get the money to him. They could also help him get the training that he needs and is currently not receiving.

The motion carried with a majority of the vote. After some discussion we decided that we would need a parliamentarian for the state conference and convention but not during our board meeting. We will consult with people in Roderick’s parliamentarian group to find someone to help with this parliamentarian need.

Nominating Committee, Alice Ritchhart:

Jerrie has agreed to chair the nominating committee. Judy and Steve will also serve on the committee.

Conference and Convention Program committee, Alice Ritchhart:

Amanda, Steve, Jerrie, Cecily Nipper, Jr., and Jamaica will serve on this committee. Steve and Cecily will co-chair this committee.

Legislative/Advocacy Committee, Alice Ritchhart:

Betsy has agreed to chair this committee. Teresa Brenner, Marsha Farrow DJ McIntyre and possibly Sharon Nichols will also be on this committee.

Upgrade for Duxbury, Betsy Grenevitch:

Betsy requested that GCB help with half of the cost to update Duxbury. Deborah made a motion seconded by Marj that GCB pay half of the Duxbury costs for Betsy to update her version. Before the motion was voted on Deborah amended the motion which was again seconded by Marj for GCB to pay for all of the cost. The motion carried.

Day at the Capitol, Alice Ritchhart:

The Georgia Vision Alliance will be sponsoring the Day at the Capitol on January 28 in Room 307 from 10:00 AM-2:00 PM. If you are not able to attend please call your representative and senator to ask them to support the Commission for the Blind Bill.

Transportation, Phil Jones:

He asked the chapters to send in the information concerning transportation in their area to the technology committee so they can put the information on the website. Alice suggested that he ask the members of his committee to call the chapter presidents to get this information and not wait for it to be sent to them.

Facebook Page, DJ McIntyre:

DJ asked the presidents to send her information in advance of any events so that she can get it on the page seven to ten days in advance of the activity.

Affiliate Brag and Steal, Everyone:

Fred McDade from the Northwest chapter reported that they invited people to have Christmas dinner with the chapter and as a result they gained two new members. They have a speaker for each meeting. Fred will be speaking in different schools about various topics.

Judy Presley from the Greater Hall County Chapter reported that we are going to purchase a gift certificate and let members invite people to a chapter meeting and put the member’s name in a jar who brought the visitor. At their picnic in June the person’s name will be drawn. Their name goes in the jar at any time they bring a person to a meeting.

Deborah Lovell from the Augusta chapter reported that one of their projects is serving veterans in Augusta. They have technology meetings to learn about new apps. They have had speakers from the census bureau speak at a recent meeting.

Marj Schneider from the Savannah Chapter reported that our chapter now has a social butterfly committee. They are reinstituting a social time before their meetings begin. Someone from the Humane Society will be speaking at their next meeting to explain how the members can volunteer at the Humane Society. They are talking about new ways to find new members. She reminded us that we want to think about ways that we can give to our community.

Steve Longmire from the South Atlanta Chapter reported that he volunteers to teach computer skills at GLASS. During these classes he invites people to attend their chapter meetings and as a result they have gained three new members this past year. His chapter has birthday celebrations at a different time from their regular meetings. The person can choose where they want to have their birthday celebration.

Amanda Wilson from the Rome Floyd County Chapter reported that they go to Sloppy Floyd State Park in December. It is an overnight event. They stay for several nights. They have had people come from all over North Georgia to this event. This year they had their third camp—the second Christmas one. The Lions Club helps volunteer at these camps as well as other volunteers from the community. They have various activities such as going to an audio-described movie and bowling.

Cecily Nipper from the East Georgia Chapter reported that they have been having educational meetings. They had a march for White Cane Day and the people participating wore T-shirts that had been made for them. They made tactile jumbo Braille signs that they carried during the march. ACB President Spoone will be speaking to them via the phone in March.

Jerrie Toney from the Athens Chapter reported that they have an annual picnic every year. At Christmas they have a luncheon which is usually held at the Blind Pig. They have a speaker at each of their meetings.

Next Meeting:

Our next meeting will be at the upcoming conference and convention in May in Gainesville.

Alice urged the program committee to be communicating with Amanda or Betsy so that information about the upcoming conference and convention can be sent to the membership.

Voting Machines, Alice Ritchhart:

A press release went out to all state employees saying that the voting machines will be in the room during The Day at the Capitol. We have requested to be able to use our IPhones to read our ballot once it is printed. This is being discussed at the Secretary of state’s office. There is still a problem signing your signature on the machine so they are requesting that a signature guide be put on the screen.

Update on Sarah Hooper, Judy Presley:

Sarah now has a professorship in Saint Kitts in the Caribbean. She will continue her research on bats while teaching there.

Adjourn:

We adjourned at 1:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted by

Betsy Grenevitch, Secretary

Georgia Council of the Blind Emergency Board Phone Meeting

By Betsy Grenevitch

February 6, 2020

Call to Order, President Alice Ritchhart:

President Alice Ritchhart called the meeting to order at 7:07 PM.

Roll Call, Betsy Grenevitch:

Those present were: Alice Ritchhart, GCB President; Philip Jones, GCB First Vice-President; Betsy Grenevitch, GCB Secretary; Marsha Farrow, GCB Treasurer; Keith Morris, Immediate Past GCB President; Jerrie Toney, Athens Chapter; Deborah Lovell, Augusta Chapter; Cecily Nipper, East Georgia Chapter; Dianne Roberts, Greater Hall Chapter; Judy Presley, Greater Hall Chapter; Amanda Wilson, Rome-Floyd County Chapter; and Marj Schneider, Savannah Chapter.

We learned that Mr. Garcia, the man that we spoke to from the Ramada Inn, was not actually on the property of the hotel thus not able to make the final decisions about the hotel. The real manager of the hotel had not even been told about the plans that had been developing with Georgia Council of the Blind. We are going to have to move the conference and convention from the first weekend in May—May 1-2-to the following weekend, May 8-9. Deborah moved that we change the dates of our conference and convention to May 8-9 due to the conflict with the hotel. The motion was seconded by Keith and the motion carried.

Adjourn: We adjourned at 7:17 PM.

Respectfully submitted by

Betsy Grenevitch, Secretary

Georgia Council of the Blind Emergency Board Phone Meeting Minutes

By Betsy Grenevitch

Thursday, March 12, 2020

Call to Order, Alice Ritchhart:

Alice Ritchhart called our meeting to order around 7:05 PM.

Roll Call, Betsy Grenevitch:

Those present were: Alice Ritchhart, President; Philip Jones, GB First Vice-President; Jamaica Miller, GCB Second Vice-President; Betsy Grenevitch, GCB Secretary; Marsha Farrow, GCB Treasurer; Valerie Hester, GCB Member-at-large Representative; Keith Morris, GCB Immediate Past President; Jerrie Toney, Athens Chapter; Deborah Lovell, Augusta Chapter; Patricia Ganger, East Georgia Chapter; Dianne Roberts, Greater Hall County Chapter; Sharon Nichols, Northwest Georgia Chapter; Tonia Clayton, Rome-Floyd County Chapter; Marj Schneider, Savannah Chapter; Steve Longmire, South Atlanta Chapter; and Amanda Wilson, GCB Digest editor.

Our topic was whether we should postpone our upcoming conference and convention. Alice told us that ACB would be holding a board meeting on March 30 to decide whether the ACB conference and convention will be canceled. During our discussion about what we felt we should do concerning our conference and convention Steve suggested that we have the conference and convention but set up ways for those who are at high risk to be able to conference into the meeting so that they could still participate. Marj suggested that we postpone the conference and convention until a later date. Marsha added to this suggestion that we hold the conference and convention at the same location but at a later date. We could hold our scheduled board meeting on the phone. Dianne stated that we could hold our elections a different way this year. Betsy told us that she has a conference line that can be moderated where people have to raise their hand in order to speak if we decided to have that option. Marj made a motion that we postpone our annual conference and convention from May until the first or second weekend in November and that the board would assess the situation in August to determine whether or not we could actually hold an in-person meeting; and that our election of officers would occur at our November conference and convention. Deborah seconded the motion. A voice roll call vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously.

Adjourn: We adjourned at 7:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted by

Betsy Grenevitch, Secretary

GCB Chapter News

Athens Chapter:

The Athens Chapter reported that we had planned a picnic this June, but council members decided that the event would not go on as planned due to concerns about the coronavirus and restaurant closures.

Due to the concerns surrounding the spread of coronavirus, the chapter will likely meet over conference calls for the next few months. The Athens Chapter meetings are held on the fourth Saturday, at Multiple Choices, located at 145 Barrington Drive in Athens, Georgia from 10:30 AM, until 12:00 PM.

For more information about the Athens Chapter, please contact Jerrie Toney at 706-461-1013, or via email at [jerriemt2@gmail.com](mailto:jerriemt2@gmail.com).

Augusta Chapter:

The Augusta chapter meetings are held on the second Saturday, at the Friedman Branch Library, 1447 Jackson Road, Augusta, Georgia from 10:00 AM, until 12:00 PM.

For more information, please contact Deborah Lovell at 706-726-4054, or via email at [lovell.d2000@gmail.com](mailto:lovell.d2000@gmail.com).

East Georgia Chapter:

The East Georgia Chapter reported that we have been meeting during the pandemic via teleconference calls. We are grateful to Betsy Grenevitch for allowing us to use her conference call line. Cecily Nipper Junior and Phil Jones have kept us informed about the upcoming conventions. Phil Jones told us about some of the opportunities from ACB. He gave us information about how to join the email list to get the schedule each day. community@acb.org is the email address to find out more. Phil Jones said these phone calls have allowed him to connect with other people. Now, more than ever, we need to be brought together. CBS646 News aired a segment on Living Life Team, Inc. (founder and CEO / President Rita Harris) in April. The news segment featured Living Life Team, Inc. providing COVID-19 care packages for people who are blind/ visually impaired on a weekly/bi-weekly basis. The packages include: non-perishable foods, fresh produce, toiletries, cleaning supplies, masks, and paper products. This is an ongoing project to support the blind community during COVID-19. It relieves the stressful burden of having to go out to buy essential needs, especially when they have limited support and no transportation. Living Life Team is truly elated for the wonderful support the public has shown by donating and volunteering to prepare care packages and delivering to the homes. Brian McCallen from ACB, recently interviewed Mrs. Harris featuring Living Life Team on his radio show "Speaking Out for the Blind". The interview will air on June 24, 2020, at 10:30 PM EST. To learn more about the organization, visit the website: [www.livinglifeteam.net](http://www.livinglifeteam.net) and subscribe to their quarterly newsletter. Our June speaker was East Georgia member and Vision teacher Elizabeth Cantrell. She talked about Dr. Abraham Nemeth. Elizabeth shared his life as a Mathematician, Inventor, Hebrew scholar, Self-taught musician, who devised the Nemeth Mathematics Braille Code for the Blind. Dr. Nemeth successfully navigated the streets, subways and busses of Brooklyn and Manhattan all without the use of a White cane. Dr. Nemeth was a very charismatic person with insightful wit. Among numerous honors over the years, he was named a Thousand Points of Light Award winner by President Bush. Elizabeth was accompanied by former East Georgia Chapter member and Vision teacher, Andrew Prospect Pregenzer. We fondly call him MR. P.

He assisted Elizabeth in securing information about Dr. Nemeth.

Patricia Ganger made a motion that we purchase Seedling books for the Montalvo family so Lucas can read to the baby. Patricia and Ada can make book suggestions.

Serjio and Tiffany Montalvo announce the birth of Leo Scott Montalvo Born June 5, 2020. Baby Leo weighed 9 lbs., and measured 22 inches long. Congratulations Serjio and Tiffany.

Recently, Sara Maddox, Brenda Maddox, Cordarian Moses, Barbara Brooks, Ada Ganger and Carle Cox Wahyudi celebrated their Birthdays in May. Linda Cox told us how they have celebrated birthdays recently. Carle and her family went on a car safari in Cartersville, driving through an animal sanctuary. It is Pettit Creek Farms, and Patricia plans to take Ada there for her birthday. Elsie Aguilar has been downloading and reading books. She has also been tutoring Rosetta on some of the advanced features of the Victor Reader Stream. Era Jarrard has been busy planting and tending her vegetable garden. Birds come to her front porch to entertain her with their lovely birdsongs. Her family does social distancing visits. Cecily Nipper, Jr. has been performing the technical aspects of her Dad’s Ministry. She does the audio, YouTube, videos, emails to the church members, etc. She also anchors her arts and crafts Teleconference calls. Mieshona Moses has turned her living room into a playroom for her children. Recently they celebrated a birthday and she made the playroom into a skating ring with Flashing Christmas lights. Cordarion Moses is reading a lot of books this summer. He is very involved with his family’s activities. Serjio Montalvo assisted by Lucas and Sophia built a playhouse in the backyard. They are also designing flower gardens in the front yard. Phil Jones is hosting his Alexa Teleconference Calls and he is involved in several National ACB Teleconference focus calls. Ann Wheeler and Cecily Nipper, Jr. Call to check on East Georgia Members. Linda Williams keeps East Georgia informed about the weekly ACB and GCB Teleconference Calls. Teresa Dobie attends family virtual video Teleconference calls. She is waiting the time she will reunite physically. Rita Harris is investing much time into Living Life Team. Her Public Relations / Outreach efforts and training Blind people keep her busy. Rosetta experiences Aroma therapy from Gardenias, Roses, and Jasmine in her yard. Several kinds of mint grow in the garden which makes delicious tea, adding to the Aroma therapy. There are many books, magazines, newspapers, and podcasts downloading to the Victor Reader Stream, daily. Rosetta has become interested and is trying to dehydrate fruit. She Thanks Rita Harris and Living Life Team for much- needed care packages delivered to her door. The East Georgia chapter meetings are held on the second Saturday of each month from 10:00 AM, until 12:00 PM, at the Conyers Presbyterian Church, 911 North Main Street NE, in Conyers Georgia.

For more information, please contact Patricia Ganger at 770-853-2040, or via email at [Patricia.Ganger@outlook.com](mailto:Patricia.Ganger@outlook.com).

Greater Hall County Chapter:

The Greater Hall county Chapter is saddened to report that Margie Linnartz and Millie Brackett passed away earlier in June. They were such fateful members who brought such warmth and friendliness to our chapter.  They will be greatly missed. We have not been able to meet for the past 4 months because of the virus.  It will be a happy time when we meet together again. The Greater Hall County chapter meetings are held on the second Saturday, at the Smokey Springs Retirement Residence, 940 South Enota Drive, Gainesville, Georgia from 10:30 AM, until 12:00 PM.

For more information about the Greater Hall County Chapter, please contact Diane Roberts at 770-932-1112, or via email at [harveyroberts2@att.net](mailto:harveyroberts2@att.net).

Members at Large:

The member’s at large group meets on the phone on the third Monday at 7:00 pm. For more information about the members at large group, Please contact Betsy Grenevitch at 678-862-3876, or via email at [blindangel61@gmail.com](mailto:blindangel61@gmail.com).

Northwest Chapter:

The Northwest chapter meetings are held on the second Tuesday, at the Lafayette-Walker Library 305 South Duke Street, in Lafayette, Georgia from 1:00 PM until 3:00 PM.

For more information, please contact Fred McDade at 706-278-4084, or via email at [nwgachaptergcb@gmail.com](mailto:nwgachaptergcb@gmail.com).

Rome Floyd County Chapter:

The Rome Floyd County Chapter has been meeting on the phone. We have been calling our members monthly to see how they are doing during this pandemic. In July, we are planning to meet either on the phone or we might meet at a restaurant if the library is still closed.

The Rome Floyd County chapter meetings are held on the third Tuesday at the Rome Floyd County Library, 205 Riverside Parkway, Rome, Georgia from 11:00 AM, until 1:00 PM.

For more information, please contact Tonia Clayton, at 706-346-8940, or via email at [toniaclayton@comcast.net](mailto:toniaclayton@comcast.net).

Savannah Chapter:

The Savannah chapter reported that we met by phone on May 21. Since we had not met in three months, we spent much of our time catching up with each other and sharing news on resources and information available in Savannah during this time of the coronavirus epidemic. All of us were doing well and we only knew a few people who had been sick. We had updates on GCB and ACB, the community phone calls going on and the virtual convention being held this summer. We plan on meeting again by phone in June, possibly returning to in-person meetings in July. In June we hope to hear from a staff member at the Savannah Center for Blind and Low Vision about how they are working with clients in this era of the coronavirus. We also hope we can hold a picnic this summer, with each member bringing his or her own food and while practicing physical distancing. The challenge is figuring out where to hold this event. The Savannah chapter meetings are held on the third Thursday at the conference room at J. C. Lewis Ford, 9505 Abercorn Street, Savannah, Georgia, from 6:00 PM until 7:30 PM.

For more information, please contact Marj Schneider at 912-352-1415, or via email at [marjschneider@bellsouth.net](mailto:marjschneider@bellsouth.net).

South Atlanta Chapter:

The South Atlanta chapter meetings are held on the second Thursday, at the Piccadilly Cafeteria, 2000 Crescent Center Blvd. in Tucker, Georgia, from 4:00 PM until 6:00 PM.

For more information, please contact Brent Reynolds, at 404-814-0768, or via email [jbr53@samobile.net](mailto:jbr53@samobile.net).

Georgia Guide Dog Users, GDDU News,

By Marj Schneider

GGDU held its spring membership meeting on Saturday, May 16 via conference call. Along with our membership we had several guests attending from as far away as Maine and New Jersey. We had invited interested GCB members, as well as any other guide dog users who wanted to attend, because we were fortunate to have Jenine Stanley from Aira as our guest speaker. Aira is a service that connects people who are blind or have low vision to highly trained, remotely-located agents. Through a smart phone app and the phone camera, Aira delivers instant access to visual information at the touch of a button, enhancing everyday efficiency, engagement, and independence. Jenine Stanley is the Explorer Community Manager with Aira. Explorers are what Aira calls subscribers to its service. She has had a long career in the blindness field including guide dogs and technology. Jenine produces and hosts Airacast, Aira’s bi-weekly podcast. She also manages the company’s email list and Explorer Facebook page. Jenine gave an excellent presentation discussing some of the ways people use the service, both at home and out in the world, and she discussed how Aira agents are trained and some of what they can do. We also learned about the cost for the service and ways it can be used free of charge. Some of us had used Aira, and this was a great opportunity to ask questions and discuss what might be in the works with Aira in the coming months. It is remarkable how much more independence current technologies offer us and this trend will most certainly continue into the future. Following Jenine’s presentation we held a business meeting, discussing content for a new GGDU website and ways to increase membership. We also talked about the impact the coronavirus has on dogs and the potential for dogs to contract covid-19. GGDU President Betsy Grenevitch shared information from a veterinarian at the Guide Dog Foundation that dogs are extremely unlikely to contract covid, unless they are in prolonged close contact with someone who is sick. They are also unlikely to spread the virus, unless a dog that has been in close, prolonged contact with a sick person is then around another person who pets or is licked by that dog and doesn’t wash afterwards. There is no evidence at this time that anyone has even become sick through contact with a dog. This is reassuring news since it is inappropriate for other people to be petting or having other physical contact with our guide dogs anyway. Our business meeting also included a discussion with a GCB member who attended and is interested in obtaining her first guide dog. We encourage any of you who want to explore guide dogs as an option for independent mobility to contact GGDU President, Betsy Grenevitch, with questions you might have. You can contact her at 678-862-3876, or via email at blindangel61@gmail.com.

GCB In Memory of:

Quita Rolanda Clements

Quita Rolanda Clements a loving and caring spirit passed away on Sunday, May, 3. 2020. Her visitation was held on Friday, May 8, 2020 from 3:00 PM until 7:00 PM.

Margie (Mantooth) Linnartz

Died June 1, 2020

Margie Mantooth Linnartz entered Life Eternal on June 1.

She was born at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia while it was an active Army Post, home of the 6th Calvary. She and her sister enjoyed the privileges of "Army Brats" as their father remained at the Fort in a civilian role following his discharge from the Army. They participated in Girl Scouts, hiking and many other activities there at the Post. Her parents, Exie Keith & Luther Mantooth and her only sibling, Frankie Mantooth Rice, preceded her in death.

Margie graduated from Chattanooga High School and attended Berea College of Berea, Kentucky. After college, she worked at Fort Oglethorpe as an accountant and ultimately transferred to Camp Gordon, near Augusta, Georgia where she met the love of her life, Lt. Don Linnartz. They were married at Resurrection Lutheran Church in Augusta and moved to San Luis Obispo, California to begin their married life. When Don was sent to Korea, Margie returned to her parents' home and took a position with TVA in Chattanooga, TN, which she held until they were blessed with their first child, Hans Christian, close to a year after Don's return from the war. Gretchen Ann came along 22 months later, completing their small family.

Margie enjoyed arts and crafts, sewing, counted cross stitch, collecting and memorizing poetry. Margie has always had a passion for keeping in touch with friends and relatives and thus developed what Don called her "card ministry." She carefully selected each card for the given recipient so that they felt blessed to be remembered. Among her talents, Margie managed the household budget, stretching limited income to meet the basic needs of the family. She was involved in the Lutheran Church wherever they lived, teaching Sunday school, serving on the altar guild, as a lay reader and for several years as a Stephen Minister. Margie loved her family, her church and her Lord. It was over 12 years after Don retired from BellSouth that they selected Gainesville as home and moved to Lanier Village Estates and joined First Presbyterian Church.

Margie is survived by her husband, Donald, children, Hans Linnartz and his wife, Ann Robertson of Raleigh, NC and Gretchen and her husband, Hugh Canterbury of Cumming, GA, 8 grandchildren, seven great grandchildren and Elizabeth Byrum Linnartz, mother of 5 of the grandchildren

To assist in the furtherance of medical science, Margie requested that her body be donated to Emory University Medical Center. In lieu of flowers, it is Margie's wish that contributions be made to Berea College or the charity of your choice.

A memorial service will be held at a date and place to be determined. Rev. Lee Koontz of First Presbyterian Church will officiate.

To Plant Memorial Trees in memory, please visit our Sympathy Store.

Mildred Hammond Brackett

Died June 5, 2020

Millie Brackett, aged 91, passed away at Willow Brook Court of Lanier Village Estates on June 5, 2020. She was preceded in death by her father (Merle Hammond), mother (Alice Hammond), brother (Donovan Hammond) and sister (Edith Hammond Humphrey Mielke). She is survived by her loving husband Ted, son William (Martha), niece and nephews Julie Humphrey Vega, Mark Humphrey and Jeff Hammond, and by several cousins.

Millie was born in Akron, Ohio on August 9th, 1928, graduated from Kenmore High School with honors, and attended the University of Akron, graduating in 1950 with a BS in Education (Primary Grades). She played clarinet in band and orchestra, sang in the chorus and acted in drama club productions. While at Akron U, she met her future husband Ted, in June, 1947, beginning a 73-year relationship. They were married on August 4th, 1950.

Millie taught school in Wadsworth and Akron, Ohio prior to the birth of son Bill. She was very active in her church, beginning with the Methodist Youth Fellowship and continuing in the United Methodist Women, held many offices in her church, including lay leader, and chaired many committees.

Millie followed her husband wherever his job took them, Akron, Minneapolis, Columbus, and Roswell, Georgia, retiring to Gainesville, Georgia. Millie was a Cub Scout den mother, a 75-year member of the Ohio Eastern Star, Triangle Chapter 592, and a member and state officer of the Ohio Federated Women's Clubs. Millie and Ted moved to Lanier Village Estates in Gainesville, Georgia in June, 2001 and became active members of that new community. Vision problems slowed her, but she became an officer in the Greater Hall County Chapter for the Visually Impaired. Millie's remains were cremated at the Hillside Chapel of Gainesville. Interment and celebration of life services are on hold, pending the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions.

Millie loved everyone and was a compassionate, caring friend, always with a radiant smile.

Memorial gifts should be directed to the First United Methodist Church, 2780 Thompson Bridge Rd., Gainesville GA 30506, and discretionary fund.

To Plant Memorial Trees in memory, please visit our Sympathy Store.

GCB Community Phone Calls

The Georgia Council of the Blind has started doing community phone calls. The phone number for all of the GCB community phone calls is 1-605-562-0400, and the access code is 780-5751, followed by the pound sign. If you cannot get in then use this alternative phone number. It is 1-717-275-8940 and the access code is 7805751, followed by the pound sign.

Here is the schedule for the GCB community phone calls.

Seeking the Sunshine discussion group:

Marsha Farrow will discuss any concerns about our local events. This call will be on the first Monday of every month at 7:00 PM.

Tech Talk:

Steve Longmire will discuss things related to assistive technology. This phone call will be on the first Tuesday of every month at 8:00 PM.

Traveling:

Alice Ritchhart will discuss all things associated with travelling. This phone call will be on the first Wednesday of every month at 7:30 PM.

Reading with Touch:

Betsy Grenevitch will discuss all things associated with Braille. This call will be on the second Monday of every month at 8:00 PM.

ACB and GCB conference and convention Stories:

Phil Jones will share his experiences about attending ACB or GCB conferences and conventions. This Phone call will be on the second Tuesday of every month at 7:30 PM.

Game night:

Mary Woodyard will lead us in different types of trivia games. This phone call will be on the second and the fourth Wednesday of every month at 7:00 pm.

Fashion:

DJ McIntyre will discuss anything associated with fashion or make-up. This phone call will be on the second Thursday of every month at 7:00 PM.

Arts and Crafts:

Cecily Nipper Junior will discuss many types of tactile arts and craft activities. She will highlight topics of interest in the world of crafts. In May, questions were answered about creating tactile paintings. At our June meeting, she held a discussion about clay sculpting. Active participation will be encouraged in July as we meet by phone to talk through painting with cookie cutters and do a fun project together. This phone call will be on the third Tuesday of every month at 7:00 pm.

Diabetes

Amanda Wilson will discuss all things associated with diabetes. This phone call will be on the third Wednesday of every month at 7:00 pm.

Marta Mobility:

Mike Avalon will lead a discussion about the Marta Mobility program. This call will be held on the third Thursday of every month at 7:00 pm.

Alexa:

Janet Parmerter will discuss all of the cool things that Alexa can do for you. This phone call will be on the fourth Monday of every month at 7:00 pm.

Cooking:

Kathy Morris will discuss all things associated with cooking. This phone call will be on the fourth Tuesday of every month at 7:00 pm.

GCB Book Club:

We are excited to announce that the Georgia Council of The Blind now has a book club. The book club meets monthly via the telephone on the fourth Thursday at 7:30 p.m. Judy Presley and Deborah Lovell co-host the book discussions. All books selected are available through GLASS and are available for download from BARD. We are always seeking suggestions for future books and encourage others to lead the book group. In April, we read the book “Lake of The Ozarks” by William Geist. In May, we read the book “The Guardians” by John Grisham. In, June we read the book “giver Of Stars” by Jojo Moyes. In July, we are going to read the book, “Miss Julia Speaks Her Mind, by Ann B Ross. We hope you download, read the book and join in on our discussion.

Update from Pagiel Griffith:

Pagiel Griffith lives in Chickamauga, Georgia, recently graduated school and soon will be off to college. It may be hard, with the corona virus, but I know it is possible to fulfill my dream of becoming a Romanian translator. After I turn eighteen I will go off to an NFB school in Minnesota. My mother and I chose this because it is known to teach visually impaired people to be fully independent. The corona virus may slow this down but I am prepared to learn all I can. Another school I wish to attend is known as Visioneers, which is a school in California which teaches people without vision how to see like bats. Echo location has been a dream of mine to learn and learn it I will. After all this is complete I wish to become a Romanian translator. To speak the language and help others understand it has always been a dream of mine and I cannot wait to fulfill this dream of visiting the beautiful nation of Romania. I have enjoyed my time in school and learned a lot. My road ahead is exciting and I am ready to learn more. Even if it is hard I am ready to grow and continue learning.

Update on Darcey Bennett:

Darcy Bennett lives in Douglasville, Georgia and planning on attending Kennesaw State University as a business major. He stated that he is in the process of getting all of the tools he will be using for school and is taking classes on how to use JAWS.

Update on Daniel Cline:

Daniel Cline lives in Warner Robins, Georgia and is planning on attending Mercer University and majoring in mechanical engineering. After obtaining that degree he is planning on attending the University of New Orleans to pursue a degree in naval architecture. He stated that he will be starting a pre-calculus course on Monday, June 22, 2020 and, at Mercer, he will be taking multiple classes in the fall.

Recipe: By Kathy Morris

Cube Steak Casserole

Ingredients:

2-4 pounds of cube steak; flour (to coat the steak); oil (to brown the meat); 1 cup instant rice; 1 cup water; 2 cups water; 2 packages of brown gravy mix.

Directions:

Add salt and/or pepper to the steak; cut steak into approximately 2-3 inch pieces; Coat meat with flour; heat the oil in an into frying pan; place steak in oil and brown on both sides; remove and drain on paper towels. In a casserole dish (sprayed with a non-stick spray), put the rice in the bottom of the dish and pour 1 cup of water over the rice. Mix gravy packets with 2 cups water and pour into casserole dish. Place steak randomly throughout and cover tightly with aluminum foil. Bake in 250 degree oven for 2 hours and stir before serving.

Alternate gravy mix. Instead of using brown gravy and 2 cups water, use a large family size of Cream of Mushroom soup and 1 can of water. Mix well and pour over rice; place Steak in dish; cook as directed.

Braille in Our Lives

By, Cecily Nipper, Junior

Have you ever wondered what it is like to learn Braille? Are you a long time Braille user who is interested in hearing about the experience of others? Join us as we travel through the journeys of three lifelong Braille users: Betsy Grenevitch, Phil Jones and Tom Ridgeway, as each share their experience with us.

The first is our own Betsy Grenevitch, who was five years old when she began learning Braille from her Kindergarten Braille teacher, Phyllis Gordon. Both Betsy and Phil agree, now, since the advent of UEB, to emboss projects takes more pages than in the past. In practical application, by the time the contractions which were added are balanced against those that were taken away, UEB takes up more space.

Betsy has not found any advantages to UEB, and feels because they have combined four different levels of Braille, it also takes more concentration to read and write in UEB, All areas of Betsy’s daily life are benefitted by Braille including the following: labeling items such as a microwave, reading books, writing down addresses and emails etc. One of the most valued aspects of Betsy’s life is Braille and she would definitely tell students learning Braille “Do whatever you have to do in order to succeed.”

Learning to read Braille with the fingers, rather than the eyes, is vital for those who still have some vision.

For the first two years of his education, Phil attended the Georgia Academy for the Blind in Macon. That was where he began his Braille learning using a slate and stylus. When he transferred to a mainstreaming program in public school in the 3rd grade, the resource teacher at the school began teaching him to use the Perkins Brailler. From the start I loved to read,” Phil said, “and having this knowledge helped me to read very well.” Braille is a way of life for Phil. He read many books in Braille!  Braille is also helpful for labeling, such as braille letters and numbers on his microwave. When he attended Georgia State University, as in hotels today, having room numbers marked in Braille was extremely helpful. Phil feels his job performance would have suffered if he had not had Braille in his life. Today he would tell Blind and visually impaired students to learn Braille and become proficient in their Braille Skills. Being able to read and write will enable us to do well in other areas including using technology. “The bottom line,” Phil said, “is that I cannot imagine my life without Braille!”

Tom Ridgeway, who lives in Macon, worked for forty-two years at the Georgia Academy for the Blind in Macon. While there, he was a piano instructor, band instructor, taught Algebra, Geometry and Braille. He served on the BANA committee from the late 1970s until recently. He actually had the opportunity to travel to Switzerland in 1992 to a conference to internationalize the Braille music code. He calls the development of Braille over the years “the War of the Dots.” Tom describes Braille as a neuromotor skill: nerves in motion. Starting Braille early in school is therefore very important for children; although it is often a fight with schools who want to put it off for children who can read large print. Compared to reading large print, Tom feels that Braille is much more efficient and enjoyable.

Thank you for joining me on this journey of three lifelong Braille users. I wish to thank Betsy, Phil and Tom for sharing their experiences with us.

Georgia Blind Lions: Helen Keller and Lions History

By Mike Hall

As Georgia Blind Lions meet on our monthly conference calls, we have been talking about how to involve more blind people as blind lions in local clubs. As a part of that conversation, it was suggested that we need to learn more about our history and in particular about the role of Helen Keller in challenging Lions to be "knights of the blind." If you are like me, when you think of Lions, you picture eye glasses or think of some service lions have done for the blind. My first recollection of lions happened when I was in first grade at the Cedar Springs School for the blind, now known as the South Carolina School for the Blind and Deaf in Spartanburg, South Carolina. The local lions sponsored a Christmas party for the students of the school. It was a big affair right before the Christmas break. Parents were invited to be there which a big deal was since most students lived at school. I was one of the few who got to go home each night. Each student received a bag of fruit, which contained some small gifts from the teacher. In addition, each student received a present provided by the lions. I still have the Jack in the Box I received, even though Jack is long gone. I want to attempt to answer two questions about lions. How did lions clubs begin and how did they become involved with people who are blind. Lions Clubs were started by Melvin Jones, a Chicago businessman who owned an insurance company. After attending many business lunches, Jones began to think about how businessmen could use the same energy that made their businesses successful to serve people in their communities. Lions Clubs were formed in 1917, with Lions Clubs International celebrating 100 years of service in 2017. Lions became international in 1920 with the first club in Canada. There are lions clubs around the world now with each club being sponsored by another club and each member being sponsored by another member. The first Lions Club in Georgia was the Atlanta Lions Club, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. The second club was the Macon Lions Club, which will turn 100 next year. I am not sure how Helen Keller received an invitation to speak to an international gathering of Lions, an organization that was not yet ten years old at the time. From reading her speech, which was given on June 30, 1925 in Cedar Point, Ohio, I learn that she was seeking support for the 4-year old organization known as the American Foundation for the Blind. I have heard many long and rambling speeches. Helen Keller's speech was short, powerful and to the point. She described herself as an opportunity to the lions and she asked them to adopt her. What she said she offered the lions were full of "splendid opportunities for service." She asked them to think about suddenly being struck blind and how they would work and what they would do. They would appreciate a friend who would come along and offer to teach them how to do some of the things they used to do when they could see. She said that the American Foundation for the Blind was that friend. Helen Keller's speech ended by asking Lions to foster and sponsor the work of the American Foundation for the Blind and to "hasten the day when there shall be no preventable blindness, no little deaf children untaught, no blind man or woman unaided." She ended with a challenge: "I appeal to you Lions, you who have your sight, your hearing; you who are strong and brave and kind. Will you not constitute yourselves as Knights of the blind in this crusade against darkness?" In the years since that time, Lions have done just that by creating camps, sponsoring schools, funding eye banks and eye clinics, paying for eye surgeries and glasses, buying braille books, braille writers and so much more. In either the late 1980's or early 1990's, Lions Clubs International started a worldwide project called Sight First to challenge Lions to raise one million dollars to eradicate preventable blindness. Eye clinics and hospitals have been set up in developing countries to eliminate such diseases as river blindness, which is a parasite spread from bathing in unclean water. I hope to learn how Helen Keller was invited to speak to the international convention of lions and what caused the lions not only to accept her but to take on her challenge. Did Helen Keller talk about blind people as charity cases or in an unflattering way? Perhaps in some ways she did just that. She did say that the American Foundation for the Blind was “called into existence by the sightless themselves.” I can't believe she called us sightless. But that was 1925. She did describe AFB's objective “to make the lives of the blind more worthwhile everywhere by increasing their economic value and giving them the joy of normal activity.” While that wording is still a little strange, it seems to me that Helen Keller is talking about independence as well as employment, daily living skills and training. These are issues we continue to be concerned about today. Finally, I believe that Helen Keller and her challenge were accepted because she spoke well, she made her vision clear and she was doing something. By the time you read this, Georgia Blind Lions will have had our July conference call. With us on that call will be Ms. Lori Upchurch, a lady from Baxley, Georgia who talks about Helen Keller. When I called her about being on with us, she asked if I wanted her to talk about Helen Keller or to be Helen Keller. I'll be sure to let you know what happens. If you would like to read Helen Keller's speeches, you may want to check out the book Helen Keller, Public Speaker: Sightless but Seen, Deaf but Heard by Lois J. Einhorn. It is available from NLS as DB52120. To find out more about Georgia Blind Lions or if you would like to join one of our calls, please contact Lion Marsha Farrow at marshafarrow@windstream.net.

Mad dogs, Bad Dogs and a Tale of Two Booties, by Janet Parmerter

Now that summer is here, even though Covid has put a damper on traveling overseas, I thought I’d share a bit of travel talk. First let’s discuss an attitude of some people in third world countries. When you really need help, don’t act like an entitled American. People may be indifferent about work, or helping a foreigner get things done. In that you really need help, don’t demand it, and beg for it. Remember, people like to feel important, so use the words, “Oh please, I really need help, are you the one who can help me.” It never ceases to amaze me when people feel they have the power, they are more willing to prove that power by helping. It is AMAZING how those few words cause someone to reply, “Yes, “I” am the one who can do it.” I have seen that work many, many times. Then what about the reputation of American travelers? Being in the travel industry for over forty years, I must admit, Americans don’t have a great reputation for tolerance. Unfortunately, with regards to almost everything, including accessibility issues, many Americans think the world should be on an equal plane with the United States. Some travelers cannot understand why ice is not added to drinks, why butter is not put on the table with bread, why shops close in the middle of the day, why people dine with their pet dogs, and last but not the very least, why everyone does not speak English. Of all the comments written by travel writers, my favorite line regarding intolerant attitudes of some American tourists was written by Sydney Clark. His exact words were, “Americans walk the face of the earth expecting universal mastery of the English language to precede them wherever they go! In one sentence, Sydney Clark beautifully summed up the attitude of numerous inexperienced travelers. Having been an international tour guide for decades, I would be rich if I had a dollar every time I heard an American tourist say, “Don’t let them kid you, they know exactly what you’re saying.” The truth is, they don’t, just like that tourist doesn’t understand the foreigner, and the foreigner doesn’t really understand that tourist. They want to sell, so if they say they don’t understand, believe me, they don’t. In addition, too many times American tourists expect everything to be just like home. Much too often I have heard comments like, “At home we get, or at home we do this or that, or at home it’s not like this.” More than once I had to bite my tongue not to ask, “Then if you want things to be like home, why didn’t you just stay there?” I know, that’s not a very nice tour guide comment, so that’s why I only have half a tongue, I bit the other half off years ago.

As a tour guide who loves historic European cities, walking the narrow cobblestone streets of a 15th century city can be frustrating when listening to uninformed visitors complain about eighteen inch wide sidewalks. They fail to realize that’s all they could take away from the narrow cobblestone street. The tiny streets were made for walking and perhaps a horse or two, not for the modern day cars and buses which fight tourists for the right to drive on their ancient roads. Therefore, before considering a trip overseas, I offer two suggestions. First, buy flat crepe soled shoes to prevent twisting your ankle on the cobblestone streets, and now that we all have time to read, order some books and study about wherever you would like your dream trip to be. If you are an educated, knowledgeable tourist and you will not be easily “blind-sided” by the inevitable, yet unexpected different situations. For example, at 18 years old I was in Europe for the very first time and wanted to prove I was all grown up. I wanted to use the rest room alone but failed on my first attempt. Blaming my poor eyesight, or perhaps my Italian was worse than I thought, I returned to the table and once again asked the waiter for the second time where the rest room was. This time I felt sure I understood the directions. But once again, there wasn’t any rest room. The third time I asked, he took me right to the same door I just came from, pointed to the WC, said, “Cabinetto” and walked way. What? Cabinet? Did the WC mean woman’s cabinet? I was so confused so I went into the room supposing there might be another door inside, but there was nothing. At this point, my bladder was telling me if I didn’t find the rest room right away, the WC would mean wet clothing! There was no other choice but to go back to the table and humbly ask my parent’s for help. My mother took me right back to the same door and explained the WC meant Water closet. Now I was ready to cry and sighed, “But mommy, I have been in there three times and it’s not a bathroom.” Calmly she took me inside, pointed to the floor and said, “Do you see those two ceramic feet? Put one foot on each, squat, aim for the hole in the floor and try not to wet on your shoes.” Please let me add, though I came back to the table a bit embarrassed my shoes were dry. That experience was the beginning of my learning to accept, embrace and love the differences of other countries.

As for those with disabilities and service animals, much of Europe is ready, willing, and able to help with both.

To assist disabled travelers, Rick Steves wrote a wonderful book which includes an excellent rating scale for accessibility levels and the helpfulness of hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions. Still, in European restaurants it is not unusual to see pet dogs inside restaurants alongside their owner’s chair. Being a tour group director, I was accustomed to the European experience of dining with dogs, but that was not so for my American clients. For example, one evening after skiing Mont Blanc in Chamonix France, for dinner I brought my tour group to a quaint little French bistro. Our group used almost every table and only about three tables had other patrons. Under the table nearest mine, someone’s large furry pet dog was quietly sleeping. All of a sudden, the woman’s peaceful pet lifted its head, glared out the floor length tablecloth and began a low, constant growl. At first, many of my American clients were surprised by the unleashed and growling dog under the next table, but when the low growl turned into full blown barking they became a bit frightened.

All the French patrons in the restaurant seemed oblivious to the disturbance until I got up to go to the restroom. Immediately, the dog leaped out from under the table and went after my feet. In a second, it attacked my white furry, knee high, goat skin after ski boots. Apparently, he had been watching them from under his table. Each time I moved either foot, which was every second, the disturbed doggie began growling. When I stood up to go to the WC, the dog suspected his meal was escaping and pounced on my legs. Let me tell you this, being visually impaired and in a dark restaurant, I had no idea what was happening and screamed with terror. Well, of course, that made the disinterested diners finally pay attention to the dog’s bad manners and without an apology or a single word to us, the owner called the dogs cute little French name and the sulking canine returned to its concealed spot under the tablecloth.

Granted perhaps they were embarrassed they could not apologize in English, but any gesture of concern or any expression of regret in French would have calmed my pounding heart. So in that terrifying moment, because of the indifferent attitude of the dog’s owner and her friends, I almost lost my temper, I lost a wad of goat hair off my expensive apres ski boots and I lost my appetite. You would think the French dog story ended here, but no. As we left the bistro and began walking toward our return bus to Italy, once again, a tiny little rat size dog bit my leg. This time, one of my clients was videotaping the gorgeous snowcapped mountain when he heard my second scream. He lowered the camera just in time to catch the old French owner of the mangy mut hit my leg with her cane. Not once, but twice. Yes, it’s on video, the old French bitty actually hit me twice, boom, boom, with her cane. I only wish I knew what she yelled in French when her feisty pooch in the red sweater bit my leg. Every time anyone watched the video they laughed and ask, “What’s with the angry old lady and the crazy dog?” Who knows, it was probably the buddy of the bistro dog and they were both out to kill my boots. So, am I done with the apres ski goat hair boot stories? No, I saved the top dog story for last. Up to that point, I thought the problem was, French dogs hated my boots. However, a year later in Cortina d’Ampezzo Italy, our tour group stayed at the Hotel Vittoria Parc and the owner of the hotel had a dog that absolutely loved my goat hair boots. Was that better? No, it was worse. Much worse. I mean the dog loved my boots. He was really in amorato with my goat hair boots and I couldn’t walk through the lobby without that male dog thinking his lover was running away. I’d be walking toward the front door for a relaxing passagiatta, or evening stroll, when the dog would come running from behind, wrap his two front arms around my knees and, well, he would, Um, let’s just say he wouldn’t let go. It was so bad, when we returned from skiing, if the owner saw me, she would have to pull him into her office and shut the door. Unfortunately, the door was glass and when he saw me come into the hotel lobby, he would begin howling and slam his body against the glass door trying to get the attention of my indifferent boots.

This One sided love affair became the evening entertainment for my tour group. Our clients began waiting with their video cameras to record the dogs hilarious attempts at amore. If I knew how to post a VHS video, I would definitely post the evening I came into the lounge for a glass of vino. As I walked in, the dog leaped from behind and attached himself to my right leg. Since he came from behind, my knee buckled and I almost fell over. As I caught myself on the couch, would anyone help me? No, they were all busy laughing and filming the dog trying to have a good time with my boots. For a second I pushed him away but he chased me around the couch three times and jumped onto my right leg. As soon as I pulled that one away, he leaped onto my left leg. When I got them both free, he chased me around the room. When he leaped across the floor and wrapped all four legs around my knee and thigh, I dragged him across the floor limping on the other leg like the hunchback of Notre Dame. Did anyone try to help now? No, because they were bent over laughing. Finally, this big dog knocked me over and when I pulled myself up, I began pushing him off with my right arm. At that point, his face was in my elbow and I guess this fickle dog figured he liked my mink jacket better than my goat skin boots, because in a second, this emotionally confused dog wrapped himself around my arm and wouldn’t let go. Amidst the laughter, you can hear me yell, “This dog is nuts! Hey, let go, this jacket cost a lot of money!” After jerking my arm away, once again, the dizzying race around the couch was off. When his mortified owner caught sight of the fiasco, I was in the lead, but in frustration and failure, she dragged him away to the office doggie jail.

From that point on, I decided I would keep those goat skin apres ski boots out of Europe. They were strictly relegated to US ski resorts where well behaved service dogs were allowed; and good little pet dogs stayed at home with the pet cats.