The logo picture is inside a light yellow circle, which has a saying at the top and bottom in large, upper case, bold black letters. Around the top of the circle is the saying, ‘A HAND UP NOT A HAND OUT’.  Under the circle,  the saying is ‘GEORGIA COUNCIL OF THE BLIND’.
In the center of the circle is a pencil drawing in grey tones, of the palm of an open right hand cradling a Georgia peach. At its top, from the left side of a short brown stem, a green thin leaf hangs down and over the thumb. The peach has colors like the warmth of the sun, the vivid yellow and orange colors contrast the black, upper case letters GCB in the middle of the peach. The corresponding Braille dots are directly under the acronym GCB. 

The logo picture is inside a light-yellow circle, with words at the top and bottom in large, upper case, bold black letters. The top of the circle reads, ‘A HAND UP NOT A HANDOUT’.  Under the circle, the

words are, ‘GEORGIA COUNCIL OF THE BLIND’.

In the center of the circle is a pencil drawing in grey tones, of the

palm of an open right hand cradling a Georgia peach. At its top, from

the left side

of a short brown stem, a green thin leaf hangs down and over the thumb.

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contrast with the black, upper case letters GCB in the middle of the

peach, with corresponding Braille dots directly under the three letters.

The GCB DIGEST

A publication of the Georgia Council of the Blind

An affiliate of the American Council of the Blind,

An organization promoting a hand up and not a handout.

Spring 2021

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

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Table of Contents:

From Your Editor by Amanda Wilson

GCB Presidential Message by Alice Ritchhart

GCB Board Meeting Minutes by Betsy Grenevitch

GCB Chapter News

Georgia Guide Dog Users News

GCB Community Phone Calls

In Memory of Phillis Jehu and Dianne Robert’ Mother, Lucy Baker

Recipe: Easy Cake by Rhonda Partain

Update from Tommy Woodyard and Andrew Stepat

Extra, Extra, Read All About It, by Mike Hall

GCB One-Day Event Overview

Pedaling My Way to Fame and Misfortune, by Janet Parmerter

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 her editing skills and for the many hours she has worked on the magazine. 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.

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 the Georgia Radio Reading Service, GARRS.

GCB Presidential Message

By Alice Ritchhart

Last February, I was among several members of the Georgia Council of the Blind who were attending the American Council of the Blind (ACB) president’s meeting and legislative seminar when we heard about the COVID-19 virus. We knew it would be serious, but no one knew by March what a huge impact it would have on the blind community. We found ourselves being quarantined at home for what we thought would be just a short period of time; however, here we are a year and a half later and things are still uncertain. What we do know is that the consequences of COVID-19 have had both a negative and a positive impact on GCB and the blind community.

Due to the threat of covid-19, we found ourselves cut off from family and friends. Many of us found ourselves out of work or learning a new way of carrying out our jobs by working from home. Sadly, we found ourselves worrying about family and friends who contracted the virus, and some who lost their lives because of it, and felt helpless since we could not be with them or attend their funerals.

Due to all this, we found an increase of depression among our group for those who deeply missed social interaction and human touch, which is so especially important for blind individuals and those who are visually impaired.

For our school children, we had to fight to make sure our students were not being left behind by using a virtual school platform. Since we learned most of the platforms were not accessible to our students, we had to be proactive to ensure they continued to get the education their sighted peers received.

Due to the virus, we found it hard to receive the medical care we needed, because many of the ways to communicate with our doctors were not accessible.

Due to the virus, GCB really took a hit! Our membership dropped because many felt disconnected since we could not meet in person.

Yet, we soon learned ways to cope with COVID-19, and found many things we could do to make the best out of a bad situation. The ACB started community events and conference calls, which allowed us to interact through Zoom.

By hosting a virtual convention/ conference, we learned many of our members who could never afford to attend the national convention/ conference in person could now take part. Many of our GCB members took advantage of this and got to know and understand the workings of ACB.

GCB followed suit and began holding community calls and virtual conferences. It would be nice if I could say that this caused our membership to increase, but the number who participated remained about the same as when we met in person.

Since activities of daily living services could now be taught virtually, and because the teachers spend less time traveling and more time working with the clients, we learned this was a win-win situation. As I stated earlier, we learned that many jobs can be done at home, which proves that individuals who are blind can be a productive part of the workforce, especially without barriers such as transportation to get back and forth to work.

Another positive thing we learned was we could be just a little kinder and caring for others, and we are now starting to slowly turn the corner due to the vaccine. Now, our communities are starting to open back up, we can go out in public again, and even hold small group gatherings. By the summer or fall, I know, once again, many of you are planning to start holding in-person meetings. Let us hope that by coming together again our membership numbers will increase.

As you do begin gathering together, I would ask that you take precautions to remain safe. Perhaps it might be good to start by holding meetings outside at a park. Have a picnic and enjoy the sunshine. Remember to wear your mask and wash your hands often. Most of all, though, enjoy those friendships and be kind to one another.

GCB Board Meeting Minutes

By Betsy Grenevitch

Georgia Council of the Blind Board Zoom Meeting

January 16, 2021

Call to Order, President Alice Ritchhart:

Alice called the meeting to order at 10:10 AM.

Invocation, Sharon Nichols:

Sharon led us in the invocation.

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; Jerrie Toney, Athens Chapter; Deborah Lovell, Augusta Chapter; Cecily Nipper Jr., Each Georgia chapter; Judy Presley, Greater Hall County Chapter; Dianne Roberts, Greater Hall County Chapter (She was there to listen but gave Judy the voting rights for this meeting.); Sharon Nichols, Northwest Chapter; Tonia Clayton, Rome-Floyd County Chapter; Marj Schneider, Savannah Chapter; Steve Longmire, South Atlanta Chapter and GCB Webmaster; Amanda Wilson, GCB Digest Editor; Teresa Brenner, GGDU and Keith Morris Immediate Past President. Guest’s present were Cecily Nipper Sr., DJ McIntyre, and Kathy Morris.

President’s Message, Alice Ritchhart:

Most of the calls that she is now receiving concern seniors looking for services. She did have a call from a young man moving from North Carolina to Georgia to an assisted living facility. Alice gave the mother assurance that the staff would be educated about how to work with this man. As of January, vocational rehab has gone to the order of selection process and only those under Category A will currently be served. The reason they gave for doing this is because they are out of resources. The Georgia Vision alliance is planning on resubmitting the Commission for the Blind bill. Alice and Stephanie met with the legislative council attorney to make sure the language we are wanting is in the bill presented to the legislators. There are still a lot of issues with the voting machines and the absentee ballots are not accessible. Alice will send the information for Betsy to send out to the membership telling us where to send our complaints concerning these voting issues.

ACB is holding the legislative seminar virtually via Zoom this year. We will be able to visit with our legislators via Zoom during this time. There will be one day for the presidents’ meeting and two days for the seminar. The focus of the presidents’ meeting will be on diversity. The rest of the week can be used to meet virtually with our legislators.

Alice has a concern that the ACB community lists are not all-inclusive. The attitude seems to be moving aside our senior membership in positions of leadership to younger members. Alice also expressed concern against the ACB’s stand against what happened at the Capitol on January 6. Judy shared her concern that ACB took a stand about the event at the capitol, but they did not put out a statement when the Black Lives Matter event took place. She said this was also a concern of some of her chapter members and she asked her chapter members to send out an email with their concerns.

More Information Concerning the commission for the Blind Bill: The legislators are wanting to know the cost of having a Commission for the blind. Mary, Mac, Jeanette, and Stephanie are working on obtaining this information for the legislators. The Georgia Vision Alliance is planning on having a meeting with the legislators with some commissioners from states who have a commission for the blind.

Secretary’s Report, Betsy Grenevitch:

Betsy read the minutes from our November meeting after which Phil made a motion seconded by Deborah to approve the minutes as read. Alice asked that the section about the scholarship under the Children and Youth committee be changed to reflect that it is referring to the technology scholarship. The motion carried.

Treasurer’s Report, Marsha Farrow:

Due to Marsha currently not having a computer, Cecily Nipper, Sr. read the treasurer’s report that Phyllis Waters, our bookkeeper, and Marsha put together. Phyllis has filed the Secretary of State report. The amounts in our various accounts show what we had at our last meeting and what we have now.

GCB Main Account: $8462.54, $11,399.65

Designated funds in this account:

Senior Fund, $2291.43, $135 donation; $2426.43; Legal Defense Fund: $1000

Technology Fund: $3800

Conference and Convention Account: $1037.90; $295.75.

Honorary donations that came out of this account:

#1006 Georgia Southern UN Disability Services: $100

#1107 Magnifiers.com Wendy Mons: $100

#1108 Hadley Institute: $100

#1009 ACB Radio Support: $500.

Al and Cora Camp Scholarship Account: $1874.70 (remains the same)

CD: $5,000.000 and it matured on October 20, 2020. It has now gained $69.63 in interest and the new balance is $5069.63.

Long Term Investment: $18,769.70

This account has gained $93.64. The current balance is $18,863.34.

Way Financial: $60,898.67; $66,638.46

Total Assets: $104,173.70

Marsha said that we will be moving $975 out of the main account and putting it into the conference and convention account. These were payments received from PayPal from our virtual conference and convention. Marj wanted to know whether we needed to raise funds to continue paying Phyllis, but Alice felt that she has pretty much completed updating everything. She said that Phyllis is planning on setting up a way for us to know what comes in from PayPal and for what it is designated so that it can be categorized properly. Marj wanted to know why there seems to be a difference in the cost each time of printing the GCB Digest. It was explained that it is due to the size of each issue. We are also printing more copies since the recording option is currently not available. Marsha made a motion seconded by Marj that the treasurer’s report be accepted and filed for audit and the motion carried.

Finance Report, Jerrie Toney:

Kathy Morris read the highlights from the C200 2019 form that Phyllis filled out for the Secretary of State’s office.

Our Assets

Conference Account; $1080.40

Main Account: $893.23

Scholarship: $4422.70

Accounts Total: $10,396.30

Other Assets

CD: $18,585.69

CD: $5000

Money Market: $0

Way Financial; $66,638.46

Total Other Assets: $90,224.15

Total Assets: $100,620.48

Liabilities and Equities

Current: Scholarship Fund: $71,061.16

Total Other Current Liability: $71,061.16

Equity: $693.87

Opening Balance of Equity; $30,533.04

Retained Earnings: $666.56

Net Income; $2334.15

Total Equity; $29,559.32

Total Liabilities and Equity; $100,620.48

The finance committee has not met yet due to health issues for Jerrie, but will be meeting soon. Alice said that a special board meeting will be called to approve the budget once it has been prepared.

Scholarship Committee, Marj Schneider:

The 2021 application for the Al and Cora Camp Scholarship is on our GCB website. Marj has been sending an announcement to colleges in Georgia about this scholarship. She is trying to connect with the financial aid officers at the various colleges. Such places as GARRS, InfoLink, Kay McGill’s list, the GCB Facebook page, and K-12 TVIs will also be receiving an announcement about the scholarship. Our deadline for the application to be received will be on March 1. The committee would like to put together a resource list for college students that will list where to obtain books such as the National Library Service. Marj would like to write a brief history about Al and Cora Camp to put on our website, so that individuals understand for whom the scholarship is named. We need to discuss as an organization how these scholarships will be disseminated since we will not be meeting in person. Dr. Philip Dillard has asked to leave the committee and Marj has asked Alice to consider Mary Woodyard to replace him. Alice is still waiting on a response from Mary.

Youth Awareness Program, Cecily Nipper, Jr.:

The committee put out the guidelines concerning the technology scholarship at the end of November. The application deadline was on January 15. Cecily thanked her committee, and especially Marj, for their assistance. She has received a few calls concerning transition services.

Membership, Amanda Wilson:

Amanda reminded us that it is time to send in our dues. We are still having five community calls each month. They include Marsha’s support call, the Braille call, Mike Hall’s new prayer and praise call, the book club call, and the fashion call. She attended a training session with ACB concerning the database. They have added two new fields where the race and gender can be entered. Alice suggested that the members be called to obtain their permission to fill in this information, and if given, the information they want to be given. Amanda wanted to know if we should have a second person to learn to do the database so that there can be checks and balances. Deborah offered to learn the system.

Technology Report, Steve Longmire:

For several weeks he conducted trainings on Zoom. They had quite a few attend these sessions in the beginning. He thanked Jerrie for assisting with the training sessions. Steve complimented those who came to the sessions and are now using Zoom effectively.

Jerrie and Steve will be working on a GCB mobile app. One of the features of this app is that you will be able to tap on a button to call the GCB president. Push notifications will also be able to be sent out concerning upcoming events or meetings.

Organizations like GCB can obtain a free development account for IOS or a one-time fee of $25 through Android.

Senior Fund, Marsha Farrow:

We received a donation of $135 toward the senior fund. Marsha has not received any requests for any funds since our board meeting in November. We help pay for devices and/or send seniors to conferences or programs. We can provide up to $200 to go toward products, services, or a conference. Alice suggested that Marsha write an article concerning this fund for The GCB Digest and for Kay McGill’s list.

GCB Digest, Amanda Wilson:

Amanda is asking for help from someone with vision to format The GCB Digest. She made a motion that we ask Patti Smith to read/edit the newsletter before it goes to publication. Teresa seconded the motion. Marsha made a friendly amendment that we provide Patti with a $25 honorarium after each issue from the Digest fund. The friendly amendment was accepted by Amanda and Teresa and the motion carried.

Transportation, Phil Jones:

Last fall, they had a call with Jamaica who discussed “Wheels of Hope International” which is a volunteer organization who provides transportation services. On one call Sheila Styron talked about some transportation work that she does. Alice recommended that Phil do more transportation calls. Marsha wanted to know if we could get on the agenda for all county commissioners in Georgia at one of their meetings. Phil will find out when their next meeting will take place.

GGDU, Betsy Grenevitch:

Under the new regulations from the DOT only service animals such as PTSD, psychiatric dogs and guide dogs are permitted on the plane. Alice explained that forms must be filled out 48 hours ahead of time for each flight if the airline requires them. Melanie Brunson is now over the advocacy committee for GDUI since Charlie Crawford has passed away. Marsha wanted to know what guide dog schools are doing to help with the situation about the forms, but no one knew what is happening except that some of the schools are informing their clients about these changes.

Final Summary after the Virtual GCB Conference and Convention, Cecily Nipper, Jr.:

Most GCB members have been called to find out whether they attended the virtual GCB conference and convention and to obtain their feedback if they attended. 40% of our members attended and about 20% of them that did not attend, it was because of the technology that was needed. It was suggested that we have a person available to help those who have difficulty getting into the conference and convention. Some suggestions given for future sessions were transportation, arts and crafts, veterans’ related topics, and a fashion show. The #1 suggestion was for technology sessions. We had over 73 people register for the conference and convention. We had 45 from Georgia included in this number. The exhibit hall and the banquet each had 42 attendees. Many of our other sessions had between 25-30 attendees. The special interest affiliate showcase was the next highest attended event. These numbers do not include those listening to ACB radio. Marsha suggested that we have a virtual component when we begin holding this event in person.

New Business

Upcoming Conference and Convention, Everyone:

Alice wanted to know if we wanted to meet in person or virtually and the consensus was to hold a virtual conference and convention in the fall. It was suggested that we have a one-day in-person business meeting in the fall. Marj suggested that we hold a virtual board meeting and a couple of sessions in the spring. She suggested that an ad hoc committee be formed to bring the proposal to the board concerning this possibility. Cecily Jr. made a motion that we hold a one-day virtual event in May with a board meeting and a couple of sessions and then an in-person general business meeting and elections in November—Covid permitting. Marj seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

Brag and Steal

Amanda’s chapter had a Zoom meeting in December. Betsy, Rachel, and DJ did music for them.

Marj shared that they had a good chapter meeting in December. A couple of members from a local NFB chapter also joined them. They had a gift card exchange where people were paired up to give each other a gift card.

Marj suggested that chapters sponsor their members and at-large members to attend the virtual legislative seminar.

Phil Jones said that they are going to work on building up their membership this year focusing on blind and visually impaired individuals. Cindy Hollis is going to speak to their chapter about membership.

Steve made a motion that the funding for the GCB mobile app through Android for a $25 fee and if necessary, pay $99 a year for the IOS fee. Tonia seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Marj made a motion that the GCB at-large representative, with the help of others, identify five at-large members who would be willing to represent GCB at the legislative seminar and meet with legislators virtually. Teresa seconded the motion. There was a friendly amendment added by Amanda that the individuals would be expected to write an article for the Digest about their experience. The amendment was accepted, and the motion carried. Betsy asked what fund these fees would come from, and it was decided that they could come from the scholarship, legislative or the Vanda donations fund.

Adjourn:

We adjourned at 12:36 PM.

Respectfully submitted by

Betsy Grenevitch, Secretary

GCB Chapter News

Athens Chapter:

The Athens chapter would like to welcome our newest member, Caesar Mattioli Jr. We also have a familiar past member who is rejoining our chapter. Welcome back, Roger Keeney. During our April chapter meeting, Rebecca Arayan, the executive director of the Georgia Radio Reading Service (GARRS) joined us as a guest speaker for a lively discussion of how GARRS provides radio programming for people with visual impairments. Volunteer readers record live readings of magazines, newspapers, and books for the enjoyment of readers who connect to GARRS through the Internet or devices such as Amazon Alexa. For more information about GARRS and ways to subscribe to the service, visit [www.garrs.org](http://www.garrs.org). The Athens chapter meetings are held on the fourth Saturday at 10:30 AM. 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:

For more information about the Augusta chapter meetings 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 reports that they are meeting via Zoom.

On March 17, 2021, Rita Harris, president of the Madison Lions Club, partnered with the Eatonton Lions Club to distribute 700 food boxes. Rita conducted a presentation for Life Span on May 6, 2021. Life Span is a nonprofit organization which provides resources for the elderly. From memory, Rita will recite several poems on the program, “Communicate and Be Heard,” sponsored by GLASS. It takes place on Thursday, June 24, 2021, from 2:00 PM until 4:00 PM and is a virtual presentation. If you wish additional information, please call Vanessa Meadows at 404-657-1452.

At our May meeting, Dan Spoone, our American Council of the Blind ACB President discussed membership development by recruiting new members, supporting chapters, corporate sponsors, balancing budgets and endowments, scholarship funds, advocacy, steering committee, virtual conferences, and conventions. Dan Spoone complemented Marsha Farrow and Debbie Young for helping with the auctions.

The East Georgia Chapter monthly meetings are held via Zoom, on the second Saturday from 10:00 AM to 12:00 Pm.

For more information, please contact Phil Jones at 770-713-3306 or via email at [brilman1952@bellsouth.net](mailto:brilman1952@bellsouth.net).

Greater Hall County Chapter:

The Greater Hall County Chapter reports that on Saturday, April 10, 2021, our chapter met by conference call and heard a presentation from Suzanne Schilling, a Gainesville resident who has worked summers at Yellowstone National Park.

Starting as a residence coordinator or house mom for students, later Suzanne became a recreational director. “The park embraces people who are visually impaired or have other disabilities,” says Suzanne, “If you can do the job, they will put you to work.”

On Saturday May 8, 2021, we held our first in-person meeting since the pandemic, gathering back at Smokey Springs Retirement Residence. Our temperature was checked, and we were asked to wear masks. The guest speaker for the day was Lion Steve Williams, immediate past District Governor, and current Global Membership Team leader for Lions District 18-I. After giving a brief history of Lions Clubs, Steve shared how he became a Lion and spoke about the five major initiatives supported by Lions Clubs in the local community and around the world. On June 12, we hope to have our June lunch at O'Charley's.

Tommy Woodyard received one of the GCB college scholarships this year.

One of our charter members, Phyllis Jehu, passed away and her memorial service was held on April 27th.

In the early days, she and her husband Dick drove separate vehicles to bring people to meetings. In later years, she provided fresh baked cinnamon rolls to go with our coffee at meetings.

Dianne Roberts’ mother passed away on May 7, 2021. You may send a card to Dianne at 6114 Lollis Creek Road, Flowery Branch, GA 30542-5510. You may call Dianne at 770 932-1112.

The Greater Hall County Chapter phone meetings are held on the second Saturday at 11:00 AM. For more information about the Chapter, please contact Judy Presley at 706-400-2185, or via email at [Hoyal@windstream.net](mailto:Hoyal@windstream.net).

Members at Large:

The members 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 Georgia Chapter:

The Northwest chapter meetings are held on the second Tuesday, at the Bank of Lafayette Community Center which is located at 104 North Main Street in Lafayette, Georgia at 1:00 PM.

For more information, please contact Fred McDade at 706-278-4084.

Rome Floyd County Chapter:

The Rome Floyd County chapter phone meetings are held on the third Tuesday at 4:00 PM. This summer we are planning to meet in person. For more information, please contact Tonia Clayton, at 706-346-8940 or via email at [toniaclayton71@gmail.com](mailto:toniaclayton71@gmail.com).

Savannah Chapter:

During the holiday gathering each year of the Savannah Council of the Blind, we have had a tradition for several years of members donating to a community project chosen previously. It might be hurricane relief, Toys for Tots or providing pet food for seniors. This year, because we could not meet in person over the holidays, we did not have an easy way to collect donations, but we still chose a project to receive contributions.

We decided to give to Second Harvest of Coastal Georgia, which provides food assistance to people in need in our area. Members who wanted to, mailed in their gift, or donated on the organization’s website. We kept track of the amount and how many donations were made, and then our chapter matched that donation amount. That meant we were able to contribute $170 from members and an equal amount from our chapter treasury. Once we can meet in person again, we know these annual community projects will be even more successful, but we are pleased we could provide this help to people in need in our community.

We do anticipate meeting in person again for the first time with our meeting in June. Regrettably, that meeting will also be a good-bye party for two of our members. David Newman and his husband Jon Bairnsfather will be moving this summer, leaving Georgia for Las Cruces, New Mexico. David’s birth family lives there and he wants to be closer to where they live.

David and Jon have been long-time members of our chapter, regularly attending meetings and contributing to our activities. Jon has served as our treasurer for more than half-a-dozen years and we will miss his exceptionally reliable and capable handling of our funds. We will greatly miss both Jon and David and wish them all the best in their new life in New Mexico.

The Savannah chapter meetings are held on the third Thursday in 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 reported that they have been meeting on Zoom since November, and their March meeting was canceled. They did not meet in April. The South Atlanta chapter meetings are held on the third Thursday on zoom at 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 News:

By Betsy Grenevitch

Georgia Guide Dog Users held its last meeting via Zoom on Saturday, May 15, 2021. We had 11 in attendance. We were privileged to hear from the president of our national affiliate, Guide Dog Users, Inc, GDUI. Sarah Calhoun informed us about the Top Dog conference that will be taking place in St. Louis, Missouri on May 19-22, 2022. They are planning on this being an in-person event with representatives being present from various guide dog schools.

Also discussed was the form that now must be filled out by guide dog handlers before flying. There still seems to be some confusion concerning whether a copy of the health form is necessary.

The discussion continued with the upcoming elections that will be taking place for GDUI and Sarah encouraged us to attend the candidates’ forum that was coming up soon. She talked about some of the sessions that will be held during GDUI’s portion of the upcoming ACB conference and convention.

GDUI’s advocacy committee has two fundraisers they are currently holding, selling wreaths and candy. The Special Concerns committee is setting up a 50/50 raffle. Sarah reminded us that GDUI’s disaster Assistance Program still exists. You can request up to $50 for assistance with needs for your guide dog. Other topics were discussed, but I will leave space for other reports.

For the rest of the meeting, we discussed business topics for GGDU. If you are a current or past guide dog user, or just like spending time with people who use guide dogs, please consider joining GGDU. The cost is $20 per year. Send your check to Georgia Guide Dog Users, Treasurer Alice Ritchhart at 125 Willow Pond Way, Brunswick, GA 31525.

You can contact Alice Ritchhart at 912-996-4213, or via email at [alice.ritchhart@comcast.net](mailto:alice.ritchhart@comcast.net).

For more information about Georgia Guide Dog Users, contact Betsy Grenevitch at 678-862-3876, or via email at [blindangel61@gmail.com](mailto:blindangel61@gmail.com).

GCB Community Phone Calls

The Georgia Council of the Blind is holding community phone calls. The phone number for all the GCB community 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 the 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.

Reading with Touch:

Betsy Grenevitch will discuss all things associated with Braille. This call will be on the second Monday of every month at 7:00 pm.

Praise and Prayer:

Mike Hall will lead us in praise and prayer on the third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM.

Game night:

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

GCB Book Club:

Debra Lovell and Judy Presley

Since the Covid epidemic, our GCB book club has been active for several months and we have read a wide variety of books. These include fiction, nonfiction, as well as biographies.  Sometimes when you read a good book, you feel like you just must share it with others. This is what makes book clubs so much fun. That is why we encourage our members to suggest their favorite books, and would love to have other book lovers out there to join us. We meet the fourth Thursday of each month at 7:30.

In Memory Of: Phyllis Jehu and Lucy Baker, Dianne Roberts’ Mother

Even though she did not have any visual impairment, Phillis Jehu was one of our charter members and served our chapter until she was physically unable. In the beginning of our chapter, Phillis and her husband Dick would take separate vehicles and go in different directions to pick up members who did not have transportation to attend our meetings. Sometimes these were long distances. In later years, Phillis baked delicious cinnamon rolls for us to have at the meeting along with our coffee. In addition, she collected donations so at our annual picnic we had door prizes for our chapter to give out. Phillis was one of the hardest working and generous people that I have ever known. If there is such a thing as a crown in glory, Phillis’s will surely glitter.

Lucy Baker, who was Dianne Roberts' mother, passed away on Friday, May 7, 2021, after a long battle with cancer. Mrs. Lucy Elise Chasteen Baker, age 83, of Macon, Georgia, formerly of Eastman, Georgia, died Friday, May 7, 2021, at her residence in Macon. Her funeral services were held at 2:00 PM, on Saturday, May 15, 2021, at Southerland Funeral Chapel with Rev. Mike Stokes officiating and interment in Chauncey City Cemetery.

Lucy Baker was born in Chauncey, GA, a 1955 graduate and former Chauncey Comets basketball player at Chauncey High School, attended Grady Nursing School, and later, in 1994, completed her RN degree at Macon Junior College. After Lucy left school, she began working for the Dodge County Board of Education as a bookkeeper under the leadership of Ed McCranie, L.D. Bowen, and Dahl McDermitt, Sr. Later, for many years, she went to work as a bookkeeper for the Dodge County Hospital. For years, she and her husband, David Rawlins Sr, lived and raised their family in Dodge County before starting her new life and career where she retired in 2006 from Robins AFB, in Macon, Georgia, where she was also a member of Morning Side Baptist Church.

What brought her great joy was making her yard and home beautiful, gardening, reading, doing word search puzzles, and working in her yard. As a member of the Dodge County Saddle Club, Lucy competed and won numerous trophies and awards.

Lucy was the daughter of the late Jeanette Jones Chasteen and T. F. ‘Sam’ Chasteen and was the widow of John Baker, and was preceded in death by a grandson, Shepherd Lucas, and two siblings: Kendell Chasteen and Toby C. Harmon.

Survived by her two daughters, Dianne R. Roberts of Flowery Branch, Judy R. Gainer of Young Harris, Georgia, her son, James David "Dave" Rawlins, Jr. (Nadja) of Hanahan, South Carolina, three grandchildren, Dennis Rawlins also from Hanahan, Austin Rawlins of Eastman, Georgia, Jenny Lucas of Everett, Washington, two great-grandchildren,– Dailey Rawlins and Emma Miller, and several nieces and nephews.

The family received friends at Southerland Funeral Chapel from 1:00 PM until 2:00 PM on Saturday, May 15, 2021. In lieu of flowers, the family requests contributions to Morning Side Baptist Church, 3519 Jeffersonville Rd, Macon, GA 31217. Stokes-Southerland Funeral Home of Eastman has charge of arrangements.

[www.stokes-southerland.com](http://www.stokes-southerland.com/).

Recipe, by Rhonda Partain

Do you want something sweet but fear you will not do well with a cake recipe? Well, I have an easy recipe for you. It is called a dump cake. It is as easy as 1, 2, 3.

First, you will need a 9x13 pan. I have used those aluminum disposable pans you can buy from the store, but you can use what you have. Take one 21 ounce can of cherry pie filling and 1 15-ounce chunk pineapple and dump these into your pan. Next, take an 18.25 ounce package of yellow cake mix and pour it over the cherry pie filling and pineapples in your pan. Just go ahead and pour it right over all that filling. Next, take a stick of butter and cut it into slices and place these on top of the cake mix.

See, I told you this was easy. Place this wonderful mix in to a 350-degree oven for 45-50 minutes. Then let it cool a bit and enjoy.

Update from GCB 2021 Scholarship Awardee, Tommy Woodyard

Tommy Woodyard is known to many of us in GCB as a member of the Hall County chapter. He graduated from the University of Georgia in 2020 with a major in International Affairs, specializing in comparative politics with a minor in Public Policy and Management. He also earned certificates in Global Studies and Global Excellence. He is now at Stetson University College of Law in Gulfport, Florida, pursuing his law degree, which he plans on completing in 2024. His career goal is to work in alternative dispute resolution at the international level.

Tommy was drawn into disability issues early, having to advocate for himself to take classes he wanted in middle and high school. It was these situations that sparked his desire to be a lawyer. In his first year at Stetson, despite the heavy reading load faced by law school students, Tommy has become involved with several campus organizations, including the International Law Society, the Elder Law Society, and the Immigration Law Society, while continuing his connections with GCB. Further, Tommy has continued to volunteer at his church, Browns Bridge Community Church on the elementary environment’s Technical Team. Finally, Tommy was selected to be a student representative while at Stetson Law in the Tampa Stann Givens Family Law Inn. This is a membership organization made up of law school students, lawyers and judges in the Tampa area specializing in family law.

While at UGA, Tommy was an ambassador for the UGA Disability Resource Center Speaker’s Bureau speaking out on campus about access issues both with curriculum and the campus environment. In this role, he was able to speak with global teaching assistants and panels of administrators about disability curriculum access. Concurrently, Tommy was an ambassador for the UGA Office of Emergency Preparedness Safety Dawgs and he was able to combine both roles to speak as a student representative with a building representative from every building on campus about disability access issues.

Specific campus improvements resulting from this meeting were increased curb cutouts for wheelchairs, print only (no cursive) labels in the cafeteria, and increased step contrast for some buildings.

Living on campus brought many access challenges for Tommy, from retina picture identification for meal plan access in the cafeteria, to counting meal worms in biology lab. COVID changed student life for Tommy when he was forced to move home and become a remote student. UGA had a much larger Disability Resource Center than Stetson Law’s ADA office. The staff to support students at UGA was 30 members strong, while Stetson Law has one person and an assistant. Because Stetson Law could not offer the same depth of academic support, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency provided some technology and reading resources that were critical to Tommy’s continued success. Advocating within GVRA for resources that are unique to blind students has created a continuous advocacy project for Tommy.

Areas of interest include international travel (when COVID subsides), international music, wrestling and staying informed on current events (domestic and international). Favorite music genres (in accordance with Spotify’s labeling) include: J-Pop-rock (Tommy started UGA as a Japanese major), indie rock peruano, Nordic Classical Performance and Grebo. Discovering different musical genres from around the globe is Tommy’s current passion.

Tommy’s first semester at Stetson Law he took two classes – Torts and Contracts. His second semester focused on Research & Writing 1, and Property Law. This summer Tommy will take a class on Civil Procedure and update us next fall.

GCB 2021 Scholarship Awardee, Andrew Stepat

Andrew Stepat received an Al and Cora Camp scholarship at the recent One-Day Spring Event and is a graduating high school senior at The King’s Academy in Woodstock, Georgia. He plans to major in business management, starting at North Georgia University this fall and exploring where future years may lead. Having always been fascinated with writing, music, and movies, Andrew says he hopes to extend his knowledge of these areas to find a career well suited to him.

Enjoying Spielberg movies and jazz music as a jazz pianist -- he has been learning piano off and on for seven years -- while for the same time Andrew has been involved with the Boy Scouts of America, and earned the 21 merit badges required to attain the rank of Eagle Scout. What an impressive accomplishment! Scouts were a family affair, as all three of his older brothers were also Eagle Scouts. Serving on the student leadership council at his high school, he also led a middle school boys’ group at Fellowship Bible Church. Part-time work at Publix as a customer service clerk keeps Andrew busy when he is not studying, meeting the needs of customers, and assisting them in the store. Currently, he does not have a pet but in the future, he would really like to have a dog.

Extra, Extra, Read All About It!

By Mike Hall

You probably remember the stories of newspaper boys standing on the street corner trying to sell newspapers by shouting out the latest headlines. A big local or national story would make the job a little easier. I do not claim to know that much about promoting an organization or an event, but I have had some interesting experiences along the way.

For about 25 years, my career was working for a radio station. Many of you will remember the old Fox97, which was an Atlanta and Gainesville radio station that played top 40 music and eventually moved to all oldies all the time. While working there, I remember the salespeople talking about a promotion with a convenience store. I do not know if they were giving away discounted gasoline or asking folks to come by and register for a contest. They said you could see the cars change direction and turn into the business once the announcement was made on the radio.

One of my favorite station promotions happened when the morning show announcer agreed to help raise funds to assist the East Hall High School band go to the Rose Bowl parade. The announcer, Allen DuPriest, said he would go up on the roof of the radio station and stay there until they raised the money. Folks could donate a certain amount and receive a rose. The announcer never spent the night up there, but he went up on the roof a couple of times. Fox97 held the Ultimate Oldies concerts for several years. They brought in nine stars from the '60s and early '70s for an evening concert on a Saturday night. The entrance price was reasonable, and it helped to promote the station and get people listening. Some of the real fun was watching how the station promoted the concert. They would announce one or two groups. Then they would announce the headliner and finally they would list all the groups. As the concert began to sell out, they would suggest that they were looking for additional seats so that everyone could see. I could not resist. I sent a note to the general manager expressing my excitement that my concert ticket would allow me to see. Then I asked if Tommy Roe would sing the old rock song “Dizzy for me?”

Part of my job at Fox97 was to write Public Service Announcements or PSA's. Community organizations would send information to the radio station about their events or activities. Index cards would then be typed up and taken to the control room for the announcer to read. Radio stations will announce community events free of charge. I wrote one such announcement for the local chapter of GCB, which was known then as the GFB for Georgia Federation of the Blind. It went something like: "Find out what's happening with the blind and visually impaired by joining the Gainesville chapter of the GFB." One day, a lady named Wanda called after hearing the announcement on the way home from church and said she would like to get involved and help. Back then, Wanda became one of our best members and got her mother and her mother's best friend involved serving us refreshments.

Being inspired to tell these stories by the Blind Lions of Georgia, recently the group produced a brochure and a Lions pin. A lot of assistance in producing the brochure was given by Terie Dobie, DJ McIntyre, Sonia Saylor, and others. Efforts were made to have the brochure readable for screen readers and appealing to people who are sighted. Sighted folks can help us publicize what we do and of course, they are welcome to donate. The pin was an interesting idea. Lions club members wear a lot of pins on their vests. Some pins are for meeting attendance, others recognize state and international conventions as well as other events. Many district governors have their own pin as well as the international president. Our pin, which was designed by Past District Governor Ray Moore, should be pictured in the print Digest. It is an upright oval with the text "Blind Lions of Georgia," along the top. The bottom of the pin says Est 2005, indicating that Blind Lions of Georgia formed in the year 2005. In the middle is a lion wearing sunglasses. It is a hot item. We are on our second batch of 100 pins. These pins are being offered for a $5.00 donation. I will have more to say about promoting Blind Lions of Georgia, GCB chapters and affiliates in the next digest. Blind Lions of Georgia and the Georgia Council of the Blind may be the best kept secrets. We need to change that.



Button Description

Surrounding a lion’s head is a black circle with white capital letters and the phrase, ‘BLIND LIONS OF GEORGIA’.

Inside the circle is the head of a male lion wearing black sunglasses. His straight forward looking face has a strong determined expression. On the bottom rim of the circle is written, ‘Established in) 2005.’

GCB One-Day Event Overview

The Georgia Council of the Blind held its One-Day Spring Event on Saturday, April 17, 2021. Our theme for this event was “GCB Springs Into Action.”

On Saturday, April 17, 2021, in the morning we held our Zoom GCB board meeting where Marj Schneider, our GCB Scholarship committee Chair, presented four students their GCB scholarships.

Al and Cora Camp Memorial Scholarship 2021 Recipients

Each year the Georgia Council of the Blind awards several thousand-dollar scholarships to blind and visually impaired students who are continuing their education after high school at a college, university, or vocational program in the State of Georgia. This scholarship was championed by GCB members Al and Cora Camp, who raised funds for the scholarship for many years. Fortunately, GCB can continue offering these scholarships through money earned through investments, and in March the scholarship committee chose this year’s deserving awardees. They were introduced at our board meeting in the morning of the GCB one day event, the committee wanted all to meet them, and you can now.

Tiana Gates is a senior at Columbus State University, majoring in mathematics with a minor in data analytics. Planning to go on to graduate school, she is uncertain whether her career path will take her to employment in a mathematics-related vocation or if she will end up working in a field that uses data analytics. This summer, she will be completing an internship with AFLAC, and hopes to learn whether she is pulled in the direction of a career in data analytics. Tiana always found math easy, and genuinely enjoys tutoring math students and helping them comprehend the subject. With all her work, she still finds time to volunteer and be involved with clubs and organizations on campus and those that give back to the community, including her school’s gospel choir, the Red Cross, and the Boys & Girls Club.

Kassie Love has an undergraduate degree in health administration and a master’s in public health, but since her young children will all be in school soon enough, Kassie is starting a program at Northcentral University for certification as a licensed marriage and family therapist, with emphasis on families who face health issues. With intentions to set up a private practice, she believes that families with members who are blind or visually impaired would benefit from working with a therapist who understands their issues. Along with raising three children, Kassie has been a Girl Scout troop leader and has been a co-coordinator for an annual awareness event with Postpartum Support International.

Andrew Stepat is a high school senior at The King’s Academy in Woodstock, Georgia. He plans to major in media and entertainment, starting at North Georgia University and then transferring to the University of Georgia. Andrew says he has always been fascinated with writing, music, and movies, and hopes to extend his knowledge of these areas to find a career well suited to him. Andrew has been involved with the Boy Scouts of America for seven years and has earned the 21 merit badges required to attain the rank of Eagle Scout. He serves as a student council representative at his high school and has led a middle school boys’ group at his church. Andrew also works part-time at Publix and still somehow finds time to develop his talents as a jazz pianist.

Tommy Woodyard is known to many of us in GCB as a member of the Hall County chapter. He graduated from the University of Georgia in 2020 with a major in international affairs, specializing in comparative politics and with a minor in public policy and management. While earning certificates in global studies and global excellence, he is now at Stetson University College of Law in Gulfport, Florida, pursuing his law degree, which he plans on completing in 2024. His career goal is to work in alternative dispute resolution at the international level.

Kay McGill, who is project manager for Project Independence: Georgia Vision Program for Adults Aged 55 and Over, also spoke.

If you, or someone you know, is at least 55 years of age or over and experiencing vision loss or a combined vision and hearing loss? Project Independence can help. This vision program for those 55 years of age or over is administered by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. The services provided may help you remain independent and keep on doing what you like to do. Services may include:

Skills training in your home community by certified rehabilitation specialists so you can keep on doing the daily tasks you like and stay active; mobility training by certified instructors so you can travel safely; support groups that offer opportunities so you can learn from and interact with peers who also have visual loss; comprehensive low vision evaluations by qualified professionals to assess practical and useful ways to access information with magnification; assistive aids/devices such as talking watches and clocks, lighting, big button phones, various household and kitchen aids.

The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency contracts with six Service Providers located throughout Georgia to provide daily living vision services. For more information, please contact Project Independence, Georgia Vision Program for Adults Aged 55 or Over, Web site address: <https://gvs.georgia.gov/project-independence>

Phone#: 1-844-367-4872

Kay McGill, CRC, Project Independence Program Manager, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, Phone #: 404-780-6649, Email address: [kay.mcgill@gvs.ga.gov](mailto:kay.mcgill@gvs.ga.gov), Web site address: [www.gvs.ga.gov](http://www.gvs.ga.gov)

Kay McGill graduated from the University of Kentucky (UK) with a bachelor’s degree (cum laude) in Psychology and master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling. She is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor and Certified Public Manager. She has been with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) her entire career serving as a Rehabilitation Counselor, facility and field supervisor, an Employment Manager, Special Populations Coordinator for the Blind, Deaf, and Deaf-Blind, State Coordinator for the Blind and Older Blind Program Manager. Although Kay retired from Vocational Rehabilitation December 1, 2006, she was rehired in 2010 to work with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency as the Older Blind Program Manager, Project Independence: Georgia Vision Program for Adults Aged 55 and Over. She and her husband, Dick, have been married for 30 years and are the aunt and uncle of Anderson and his triplet siblings Marshall, Harper, and Elena. She is an avid University of Kentucky basketball fan and was on the UK Fencing Team (her athletic collegiate venture!).

Reports were given by the following officers and committee chairpersons. Alice Ritchhart, GCB President, gave us an update on all activities going on within the Georgia Council of the Blind. Betsy Grenevitch, GCB Secretary, Gave us an update on the last GCB board meeting minutes. Marsha Farrow, GCB Treasurer, gave us an update on all our accounts. Jerrie Toney, GCB finance committee Chair, gave us an update on our GCB budget. Cecily Nipper, Jr, GCB Youth Awareness Program committee Chair, gave us an update on the great success of the work they had been doing to supply young blind students with accessible technology. Betsy Grenevitch, GCB legislative chair, gave us an update on all the hard work her committee had been doing with different bills to assist individuals with visual impairments. Steve Longmire, technology committee chair, gave us an update on all the work he has been doing on our website and other technology-related projects for GCB. Marsha Farrow, GCB Senior Fund committee Chair, gave us an update on all the individuals with visual impairments who we have helped this past year. Amanda Wilson, membership committee chair, gave us an update on our membership numbers.

In the Afternoon, from 1:00 PM until 2:30 Pm, there were two concurrent sessions. The first was on the conference call line and was titled, “Visually Impaired author showcase,” which featured DeAnna Quietwater Noriega, who discussed her writing, her heritage, and her lifelong partnership with guide dogs, as well as her recent book, *Fifty Years of Walking with Friends*.

DeAnna Quietwater Noriega is half Apache and a quarter Chippewa. She has been a writer and storyteller since childhood. Her book, *Fifty Years of Walking with Friends* C 2021 is available in e-book and print from Amazon, Smashwords, and other online sellers. She has had work accepted in six anthologies and her writing has appeared in several magazines, including *Magnets and Ladders* and *Generations*, a native literature magazine. She is a peer blogger for the American Printing House for the Blind Vision Aware, "Visually Impaired? Now What?" blog. She has been totally blind since the age of 8. DeAnna lives in Columbia, Missouri, with her husband and 9th guide dog from the Seeing Eye.

In the afternoon from 1:00 PM until 2:30 PM on Zoom, Marcus Griffin and Tom Perski presented about a cutting-edge piece of technology, the IrisVision. IrisVision is a global leader in digital vision technologies. Through its flagship product, the IrisVision Live VR headset and software, the company has helped thousands of low vision people regain their sight, achieve independence, and do the things they love. IrisVision is also developing new telehealth applications for its platform to deliver remote vision care and advanced diagnostics to the broader population. Backed by a research grant from the National Eye Institute, clinically validated and developed in collaboration with researchers from the world's top ophthalmology centers at Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University and University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, IrisVision received a Fast Company World Changing Idea award in 2020 and the CES 2019 Innovation Award.

Marcus Griffin, IrisVision Regional Sales Manager, Atlanta, GA

Marcus joined the IrisVision team in the summer of 2020 to help launch the Digital Vision Clinic telehealth platform. Marcus also works with academic partners, distributors, and eye health providers to grow awareness for the IrisVision Live low-vision technology, and support sales efforts throughout the Southeast region.

Tom Perski, Vice President, Professional and Consumer Outreach, IrisVision

With a career spanning 35 years, Tom is a pioneer in the field of low vision. He founded Macular Degeneration International where he published low-vision journals, and Southwest Low Vision providing service and technology for the low vision community. Tom held several positions at the Deicke Center for Visual Rehabilitation including Director of Counseling. Tom was the senior vice president of rehabilitation services at the Chicago Lighthouse, where he directed the onboarding of assistive technology. Also, he held positions as a board president of the Tucson Association for the Blind, Arizona AER board member and received the Margaret Blum Award for outstanding service to the blind in Arizona.

During the third afternoon conference session, from 2:35 PM until 4:00 PM, we heard about how to be your own best advocate when it comes to transportation. Barbara Salisbury, transportation committee member for the American Council of the Blind, updated us on what is going on right now in the world of transportation.

Barbara Salisbury lives in Bloomington, Indiana and is the president of the American Council of the Blind of Indiana. She also chairs the transportation and mobility committee of the Bloomington Community Council for Accessibility, the city’s advisory committee on disability related issues. She has served on the ACB transportation committee, and on several state and local transportation councils and committees throughout her many years as a transportation advocate. Barbara held the position of mobility manager from 2013 through 2016 in Monroe County Indiana. In this position, she developed a voucher program and researched the viability of a volunteer driver program for the Bloomington area.

Being involved in transportation related activities for over 20 years, Barbara has served on the Board of Directors for a transit company, Lynchburg VA, and developed an ADA advisory committee for the Lynchburg transit Co. While in VA, she worked as a system advocate with the Lynchburg Center for Independent Living, serving on the statewide transportation committee with other centers for independent living systems advocates.

She moved to Bloomington, Indiana, with her family in 2008 where she established a coalition on transportation and mobility in 2011 through an Accessible Transportation Coalition Initiative (ATCI) grant award. Barbara is married to Rhett Salisbury and has 2 adult children, and holds an undergraduate degree in music therapy and is a graduate of the Virginia Partners in Policy making project.

During the fourth afternoon session on Zoom, from 2:35 PM until 4:00 PM we heard from Tamara Rorie, who spoke about what is new with BARD and NLS. Tamara is the Braille Development Officer with the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled in Washington DC, and she spoke about the new E-Book reader and other developments on the horizon for reading audio and braille books.

Tamara Rorie is the Braille Development Officer at the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, and has been employed with the Library of Congress and in this position since 2014.

While managing the Braille Certification and training program, she consults with all NLS sections as they develop and oversee braille products and services. Ms. Rorie graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science and obtained a law degree from Wake Forest University. She has had a private law practice and has held positions in the private sector as well as with state government before obtaining this federal position.

To conclude our One-Day Event, we held happy hour on zoom from 4:30 PM until 5:00 PM and celebrated the day's events.

GCB comments on our One-Day Spring Event from GCB members:

Phil Jones, President from the East Georgia Chapter, stated that he thought that our One-Day Spring event ran smooth, and said a lot of good information came out of the sessions that he attended. He also said that the Board Meeting was very productive.

Mike Hall from the Greater Hall County Chapter said that he attended the board meeting and one other session during the One-Day Spring Event. “It was good to talk to everyone on all the calls”, said Mike, and he continued, “It was an opportunity to meet the scholarship recipients and I enjoyed listening to Kay McGill who always gives an interesting presentation.” Mike Hall stated that while reading the *Braille forum*, he had heard the name Katie Frederick, but he had never heard her speak. Mike Hall said that he thought that the session he attended was remarkably interesting and informative.

Pedaling My Way to Fame and Misfortune

By Janet Parmerter

Now that summer is near, everyone is anxious to enjoy some outdoor activities like hiking or bike riding. Personally, I never liked hiking because tripping over rocks, tree limbs, other hidden obstacles, or twisting my ankle was not exactly what I considered fun. As a child with better vision, every spring my brother John and I hiked through the Naugatuck woods behind the last house on Woodland Street, our grandparents’ home in Connecticut. In order to catch tadpoles, we hammered thick nails and made holes into the bottom of grandpa’s metal bucket, along with the lid of a glass jar, then hiked hours to a large mountain pond. Of course the size of that *huge* pond is relative, since we were only seven and nine years old.

After tying a rope to the bucket handle, we threw it into the water as far as the rope would go, then gently pulled it back, lifted it out of the pond, watched the water spray out from the holes, and gathered up all the shocked little tadpoles we could pick out of the bottom of the bucket. Though grandpa was not happy with his useless bucket, our classmates back in New Jersey were thrilled when the teachers brought in fish tanks for the classroom pets.

The children watched the tadpoles gradually grow front legs, back legs, lose their tails and finally become frogs. Every spring, bringing these aquatic amphibians back to the city made us sort of classroom celebrities, and Johnny and I enjoyed the fame. Since I could still see, we all watched the amazing transformation into frogs. Soon, my own transformation into vision loss became more evident to me. Even more, it became noticeable to friends and most of all made my parents wonder what, and how it all happened.

Sometimes, passing on a genetic disease may be worse for the parent than for the child. How so? Some parents feel responsible for their child being ‘different’. One of my friend’s parents felt so troubled and blamed herself, whereas children easily adapt to situations and may not even realize others see life differently. Yet, when they reach high school level, it is a different story. It can be traumatic going through the year in which their friends Pass their driver’s test and they are hit with the reality of their limitations. Without admitting it, their self-esteem can plummet. In my case at seventeen years old, when friends bragged about getting their license, outwardly, I feigned enthusiastic excitement while inwardly I felt heartsick. It was devastating to come to the realization that my waning eyesight would prevent me from ever driving any type of motorized vehicle. Obviously, I would be doomed to walk, take public transportation, or bum rides from faithful friends. Still, even with limited sight, I bought a ten-speed bicycle so I could feel a bit more independent riding around my local neighborhood. With those two wheels, granted no comparison to four Goodyear tires, I did not feel quite as dissatisfied with my diminishing sight.

Having what was then called, ‘Juvenile Macular Degeneration’, I had a large blind spot in the center of both eyes, so to ride my bicycle, I used the scanning method. Basically, that meant for me to see what was around, and directly in front of me in my central vision, I continuously moved both eyes right and left in a sort of scanning motion and used the vision around the blind spot, or the peripheral vision. That was my quick fix solution to get around the problem when I needed to know what was directly in front of me.

Yet, it was amazing how pedaling those two small bicycle wheels gave me a huge sense of freedom. Three days a week, I pedaled my way to Woman’s World and convinced myself the six-block ride to the gym was my pre-exercise warm up. Pedaling to the gym made me feel somewhat independent and self-confident.

However, one day an unsettling event happened at the gym which destroyed my bicycling confidence. During one exercise routine, a trainer interrupted my weightlifting and said, “You have a phone call which you can take in the unoccupied consultation office.” The lights in the windowless room were off, so I clearly saw the bright flashing red light showing me which phone line had the call. I picked up the receiver and instantly heard something that sent a chill up my spine. Bugs Bunny was yelling, “Wake up you sleepy head, wake up you sleepy head, wake up you sleepy head!” Terrified, I began shaking and slammed the phone down so hard it almost cracked the plastic phone cradle. Why did that silly cartoon voice terrify me?

The answer to that question began weeks before this incident. For about two months I was receiving strange phone calls. Each time I answered the telephone there was no one there. Curiously, there was only the same uncomfortable message. It was the voice of Bugs Bunny yelling over and over,

“Wake up you sleepy head, wake up you sleepy head, wake up you sleepy head!” This weird cartoon voice continued until I would hang up. The first time I heard it I laughed and thought it was a normal childish phone prank. However, after a few months, this unusual and childish phone message became annoying, then, disconcerting, especially when the phone calls rang as soon as I opened my front door. It was as though, no, it was not as though, someone did know exactly when I arrived home. Now, at the gym, shaking in that dark office, the realization hit me like a punch in my gut. This was not a child, this prankster new exactly where I was and what I was doing. That thought gave me an overwhelming sense of terror and convinced me I was being watched. Or worse yet, being stalked?

Immediately after that nerve racking phone call, I quickly changed clothes, bolted out the door, hopped on my bicycle and raced home. Naturally, I felt mentally anguished, preoccupied, and understandably distracted. What I most regret, is I did not stop to calm down so I could concentrate on my vision and the vital task at hand, safely pedaling home. It was impossible to stop thinking about that awful phone call. Sad to say, with my distracted brain worrying about being stalked, my eyes froze straight ahead on the road like a deer in the headlights. Bad move for me! Why? One block from the gym, before pulling her car out of the driveway, an older woman nosed her car onto the busy main street. While she was stopped and waiting for the traffic to clear I drove straight into the side of her car door. Weeks later after resolving the accident with that poor agitated woman, this is how she described the tragic incident. "Before I pulled into the street, I stopped, looked right, and left, then saw you coming and thought you would go around the front of my car. In that instant, I became concerned and thought, she is coming awful close, when is she going to go around the car? The next second you rode straight into my door. Your legs were in the air as you flew across my windshield, hit the street and slid on your face to a sickening stop.” Yes, that about sums it up, but it is not the whole story. It happened because I was so preoccupied with the phone call, I neglected to move my eyes side to side, and her car was smack dab in the middle of my stationary blind spot. There was literally nothing visible straight ahead in that center blind area.

It was strange, but I kept visualizing an old cartoon of Wiley Coyote chasing Road Runner. Imagine Wiley riding his bike into a stationary object, flying over the handlebars with feet flapping in the sky, then skidding to a screeching stop on his face. If so, you have the perfect mental image of my five second flight over that car. The only difference was, the cartoon is usually funny, the coyote gets up, shakes off the fall and happily runs away. In my case, I was also happy, happy to be alive, but no one was laughing. After breaking the fall with a face plant, I slid to a halting stop across the asphalt. Not only did I not get up and run away, but I did not get up at all. Since I never saw the car, at first, I was baffled. However, as soon as I smashed into the car, I did hear a loud noise and the screams of a shocked, screaming woman! Apparently, when she saw me fly across her windshield and violently hit the pavement she was horrified and went crazy. She began screaming, “I didn’t hit you; I didn’t hit you!” Next to my mangled bike, she left me dazed and bleeding on the street, jumped out of the car and searched for a witness to confirm she had not hit me. Since it was rush hour and traffic was heavy, I was grateful cars drove around me rather than over me. Still motionless on the street with a bleeding face, a twisted neck and shoulder, her blaring voice made a painful situation worse. How could I silence her relentless screams of innocence?

Fortunately, as she shouted to find a witness, her cries caught the attention of a few quick-thinking construction workers who jumped off their scaffolding and pulled me to safety. As this happened, the crazed woman began questioning them while yelling,

“Did you see I wasn’t moving? DID YOU SEE I DIDN’T HIT HER? Did you see her hit me? Did you see that did you? I did NOT hit her! I wasn’t even moving!”

Her frantic, earsplitting screams were so intense I thought someone better calm this woman down before she has a stroke!

Finally, I begged her, “Please stop yelling, I KNOW you did not hit me, I hit YOU! OK? So please, just stop yelling!”

While still lying on the sidewalk in pain, somewhat groggy, and very embarrassed, I looked up at the construction workers and moaned, “How is my bicycle?” Bewildered, one of them looked at the other guy and said, “Did you hear that? Her bike? She is worried about the bike. Forget the bike, how are YOU?” Another worker yelled, “Someone call an ambulance!”

Immediately I pleaded, “NO, please no. Can’t anyone just take me a few blocks home?” (This was in the days before cell phones, so fortunately no one could instantly call for help.)

One guy had a truck, so they gingerly helped me into the cab, threw my bike in the back and drove me home with a broken bike and a crushed spirit. As soon as we arrived, my Italian neighbor caught sight of me and cried,

“Ooo, mamma mia” and carefully helped me into her house. Anna was quick thinking and did the best thing possible. First, she calmed my frazzled nerves with a few shots of Amaretto, then worked on saving my face. For the next few hours, as ice packs melted, she continued to put fresh ice on my forehead, around my eyes, nose lips and chin. Anna said the ice would not only minimize the swelling and bruising, but it might also prevent scars. In my still dizzied mind, that sounded like the frigid face freeze would be worth it. So, even with one destroyed bicycle and a severely damaged ego, thanks to Anna’s immediate ice remedy, with the skin on my forehead, nose, lips, and chin scraped off, I did not have any permanent facial scars. I never rode that bike again. At that point in my life, without being able to ever drive a car, I felt my brilliant dreams of bicycle independence and stardom quickly flip to a dark reality of despair. Nevertheless, in future years, that too would change, because, thanks to a tandem and a broken marriage, I did not stop bike riding.

Vincent’s bike shop was selling a used tandem for a soon to be divorced couple; so Keith and I bought it. Ironically, one couple’s unhappy breakup, lead to another couple’s happy togetherness. It was wonderful to know we could now safely ride together. He could do the seeing, and I could join in the pedaling. How smart! This had to be the perfect solution. Right? Well, you would think so, but no! That previous bike accident left me with terrible post-traumatic stress. On the street, whenever a car came anywhere near us, I screamed in terror and clawed, pounded, and hid my face into poor Keith’s back. For seven blocks, my screaming resulted in me unbalancing the bicycle as I screamed and grabbed him the whole way to our destination, a beautiful, verdant, peaceful park. Once we finally exited the main street and rode past the stone columns at the entrance of serene Hudson County Park, I was fine. Pedaling around the wide-open streets and lake was lovely, but then, we had to make our way home. After going out of the park entrance, we faced the buses, trucks, and cars on the narrow, terrifying Palisades Avenue.

When we finally arrived home, those so-called, ‘leisurely’ bike rides always ended with poor Keith taking a few Aspirin for his headache and sore back. Could you say Keith was another victim of my bike crash? Absolutely! So again, I say, poor Keith! He so loved bike riding, but he also loved his back, however, our car was too small to carry a tandem bike rack to drive to the park; thus, unhappily, we sold the bike. His back, his ears and my nerves just could not take any more of those ‘pleasurable’ rides to the park.

As far as the crazed phone calls, I made a formal police report, and the local police tapped my phone. Though they never discovered who was behind those calls, as things progressed, I began to suspect one malicious person and planned a little test. In a general conversation with my friend, who happened to be standing next to the one I suspected, I told the phone story and made sure to stress the point about the help from the police department, and how they put a phone tap on my line. Miraculously, those horrible phone calls immediately stopped. Humph? As for my bicycle riding days? I thought it best to stick to snow skiing, give up pedaling a bike and allow Keith to have some alone time to pedal his bike in peace.

Through the years, as I lost more and more of my literal sight, I found more inner sight and learned that modesty means recognizing one’s limitations. Sometimes, being modest and protecting our precious life is worth more than being embarrassed for one’s lack of vision, or what one can no longer safely do. Post-Traumatic Stress and fear can be the aftershock of a horrible incident, but can we learn from a bad situation? Yes, we can learn to make the most of happier things in life. We can learn that life can drastically change in a second, but it can take a good long time to heal. In one moment, a pleasurable hobby could be permanently ruined, yet that does not mean it has to ruin one’s life. There are alternative hobbies, or different ways of doing what was formerly done.

Now that Keith and I live in the south, with much less traffic, we bought another tandem with a Harpo Marx horn for my handlebars. So, as we pedal around our subdivision, the children all know us, yes, we are the two old people riding a bicycle together. As we pass them, I honk and wave to all the bewildered, laughing children as they take pictures of us on their phone. We are famous! Therefore, I conclude by saying to low vision bike riders, rather than taking the chance of never enjoying future bike rides, think of options. Is there a new hobby you might like, or if you can still ride a bike, be extremely careful where and how you ride? Better yet, buy a tandem, find a good trustworthy friend, and safely enjoy the wind across your face as you honk the horn on the back seat of a Cannondale tandem.

The End