s

# 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 thin green leaf hangs down and over the thumb. The peach has colors like the warmth of the sun. The vivid yellow and orange colors 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.

Winter 2022

A picture containing text, person, indoor, people

Description automatically generated

This picture contains the following people:

Cecily Laney Nipper, Betsy Grenevitch, and her guide dog James, Marsha Farrow, and Kathy Morris.

GCB Officers for 2022:

Cecily Laney Nipper, GCB President, 470-218-7885, [roses828@comcast.net](mailto:roses828@comcast.net)

Marj Schneider, GCB First Vice-President, 912-352-1415, [marjschneider@bellsouth.net](mailto:marjschneider@bellsouth.net)

Judy Presley, GCB Second Vice-President, 706-878-2962, hoyal@windstream.net

Kathy Morris, GCB Secretary, 706-466-2253, mkumorris@yahoo.com

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

Betsy Grenevitch, GCB Member at Large Representative, 678-862-3876, [blindangel61@gmail.com](mailto:blindangel61@gmail.com)

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

Janet Parmerter, Assistant Editor, 551-247-1195, [Janet@ParmerTours.com](mailto:Janet@ParmerTours.com)

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Believe It or Not, I Still Can’t See, by Janet Parmerter

Could a young girl be pretending not to see? Could a school nurse know more than numerous ophthalmologists? How could someone’s life grow stronger by adversity? Read this memoire and find out.

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 considerable 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, Cecily Laney Nipper, for her presidential message with information about momentous events, legislation, and projects. I also appreciate the contributions from our new GCB Digest committee, each member who sent articles, and those 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 points, and please underline the Heading which 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.

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The Georgia Council of the Blind has a new Instagram account! Please check it out! To find it, search on Instagram for gacounciloftheblind. That represents ‘GA Council of the Blind’ without spaces and in all lower-case letters.

GCB Presidential Message:

by Cecily Laney Nipper

As I write this, I am filled with a profound sense of gratitude to GCB, its members, friends, and allies. At the recent hybrid GCB Conference and Convention held in Cartersville, Georgia and on the Zoom platform, the biggest thing to happen to me was not my election to the office of president, although that was certainly monumental in my life, but my most significant take-away from the conference was that with our vote to change the GCB bylaws, all voters were enfranchised to have their voices heard. Even if they were participating virtually, this will enable all of GCB to have a voice at our membership business meetings and elections!

For members I have not yet had the privilege of getting to know, here is a little bit about me. Since 2012, I have been employed as a medical transcriptionist. Reading talking books, playing the piano, and walking with my guide dog are some of my greatest joys in life, however, coffee is my one true love. In all seriousness, in the field of advocacy, I aspire to strengthen GCB with plans which hinge on building from the legacy of my mentors: Alice Ritchhart, Marsha Farrow, and Phil Jones, just to name a few. All of you mean so much to me, and I look forward to collaborating with you as we round the corner to a new year. Let us cooperate to strengthen our chapters by connecting virtually and get acquainted with one another. Where that is not possible, let us get back to old fashioned phone calls and braille notes. Who knows if a note to a fellow member you have not seen in a while might make their day!

For this Digest, the last thing I will mention is the database. Creating a record of the calls that come in, and how we work to assist those individuals who need our peer support and advocacy will benefit everyone now and in the future. In an accessible format, it will form the basis for a document which may be passed down from one administration to another. This will enable us to record the progress of GCB through the years and have ready access to those resources that can benefit the people we serve people with vision loss throughout Georgia.

May health, happiness, and many blessings be yours throughout this holiday season and throughout the New Year!

GCB Chapter News:

Athens Chapter:

The Athens Chapter reported that they held their holiday party on Saturday, December 11, 2021, at 11:00 AM. Their party was held at the Taqueria la Parrilla Which is located at 855 Gaines School Road Suite B, in Athens, Georgia. The Athens Chapter elected new officers they are Jamie Teal, president; Jamaica Miller, Vice-president; Jerrie Toney, Secretary; and Robin Oliver, Treasurer.

The Athens chapter meetings are held on the phone on the fourth Saturday of every month at 10:30 AM. The call-in number is 605-313-4818 and the access code is 463476#. For More information contact Jerrie Toney at (706) 461-1013 or [jerriemt2@gmail.com](mailto:jerriemt2@gmail.com).

Augusta Chapter:

The Augusta Chapter held their Christmas holiday party meeting on Saturday, December 15, 2021. The Augusta Chapter officers are Debora Lovell, President; Stanley Lopez, Vice-President; Ron Worley, Secretary; and Kathy Morris, Treasurer. 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 they held their holiday party on Saturday, December 11, 2021. There was a recitation of the Night Before Christmas with the radio talent of our own Phil Jones as well as Christmas Trivia. Everyone who participated was given the same number of questions to answer. The one with the most correct responses received a gift card. The East Georgia Chapter officers are Phil Jones, President; Elsie Aguilar, Vice-President; Linda Williams, Secretary; Linda Cox, Treasurer; Patricia Ganger, Cecily Laney Nipper, and Tiffany Montalvo as board members. The East Georgia Chapter meetings are held on the second Saturday on Zoom from 10:00 AM, until 12:00 PM. For more information about the East Georgia Chapter, please contact Phil Jones at 770-713-3306, or via email at [Brilman1952@gmail.com](mailto:Brilman1952@gmail.com).

Greater Hall County Chapter:

The Greater Hall County Chapter reported they have been invited by Brenau University to partner with their chapter in welcoming six blind and vision impaired students from the Republic of Panama. We will be participating in a Zoom meeting with the professors the second week in December. Our chapter graduate student, Tommy Woodyard, has agreed to be on the Zoom call, and we believe Tommy will be able to give unbelievably valuable advice to the University on how to accommodate these special students. We continue to invite guest speakers to our meetings that will educate and advise our members on topics of vision loss. Their Christmas party was held on Saturday, December 11, 2021, at O’Charley’s at 12:00 PM. The Greater Hall County Chapter officers are Dianne Roberts, President; Judy Presley, Vice-President; Sue Heskett, Secretary; Roy Carder, Treasurer; a Don Linnartz, Bob McGarry, and Matt McGowan as board members. The Greater Hall County Chapter meetings are held on the second Saturday at the Smoky Springs Retirement. 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).

Northwest Georgia Chapter:

The Northwest Georgia Chapter held their Christmas party at the Choo-Choo BBQ & Grill which is located at 12960 North Highway 27 in Chickamauga, Georgia, on Tuesday, December 14, 2021, at 1:00PM.

Photo: from a recent meeting

A group of people sitting around a table

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This picture contains the following people:

Fred McDade, Sharon Nichols, Debbie Young, Angela Zimmerman, and Charles Stubblefield.

The Northwest Chapter officers are Sharon Nichols, President; Ron Burgess, Vice-President; Charles Stubblefield, Secretary/ Treasurer; and Robert Sprayberry, Chaplain. The Northwest Georgia chapter meetings are held at 1PM on the second Tuesday of the month at the Bank of Lafayette Community Center which is located at 104 North Main Street in Lafayette, Georgia. For more information, please contact Sharon Nichols.

Rome Floyd County Chapter:

The Rome Floyd County Chapter met on Tuesday, November 16, 2021, at the Landmark Restaurant. The Rome Floyd County Chapter officers are Amanda Wilson, President; Tonia Clayton, Vice-President; Marsha Farrow, Secretary; Jan Morris, Treasurer; Barry Vaughn, Chaplain; and Quinn Smith, Dana Tarter, and Debbie Young as board members.

Photo: from the Rome Floyd County Chapter Christmas PartyA group of people posing for a photo

Description automatically generated

This picture contains the following people:

Jan Morris, Miranda Sumner, Chris Holbrook, Carla Holbrook, Casey Owens, Mike Owens, Quinn Smith, Debbie Young, Tonia Clayton, Wendy Simone, Amanda Wilson, Marsha Farrow, and Barry Vaughn.

The Rome Floyd County Chapter held their Christmas party on Tuesday, December 21, 2021, at Sam Burger Deli in Rome, Georgia. The Rome Floyd County Chapter meetings are held on the third Tuesday, at different restaurants in Rome at 11:00 AM. For more information, please contact Amanda Wilson at 770-547-4700, or via email at [moonrocks@bellsouth.net](mailto:moonrocks@bellsouth.net).

Savannah Chapter:

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

South Metro Chapter:

The South Metro Chapter officers are Brent Reynolds, President; Sam Howard, Vice-President; Chris Baldridge, Secretary; Steve Longmire, Treasurer; and Lisa Jones, Maquatia Dutton, and Lafayette Wood as board members. The South Metro Chapter meetings are held at the Piccadilly Cafeteria, which is located at two thousand Crescent Center Boulevard in Tucker, Georgia. 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 from Georgia Guide Dog Users,

By Marj Schneider

On Friday November 12, as part of the GCB annual conference and convention, GGDU held its fall membership meeting. More than 30 members and guests were in person at the Courtyard by Marriot in Cartersville, Georgia or on the Zoom platform to hear first from our guest speaker, Becky Floyd, the executive director of Gallant Hearts guide dog Center in Madison, Mississippi. Becky established this training program over a decade ago and has been a guide dog handler for 57 years.

Her topic was stress and anxiety in our guide dogs, the sorts of things they may find stressful or that provoke anxiety and what we can do as handlers to address those situations. There is such a variety of things that can cause dogs to feel stressed or anxious, everything from loud noises to being separated from their handler, may cause dogs to display a wide variety of ways they are experiencing stress or anxiety. The methods to address these situations are equally varied and depend on the person and the dog. Becky fielded several questions about situations people were experiencing with their dogs that further demonstrated how diverse and individualized the solutions might be.

Following Becky’s talk we held a business meeting that included election of new officers for GGDU who will serve two-year terms. Marj Schneider was elected president, Cecily Laney Nipper was elected vice president, Betsy Grenevitch was elected secretary and DJ McIntyre was elected treasurer.

Since those elections at our meeting, DJ McIntyre has let the board of GGDU know that she can’t take on the duties of treasurer right now, so the board has appointed former treasurer Alice Ritchhart to serve another term. The board has also appointed Sam Hogle to complete the term as director formerly held by Cecily. Tonia Clayton will continue in her role as the second director for GGDU.

In the coming months we plan to do much more outreach to guide dog handlers in Georgia to encourage their participation in GGDU. One way we will be doing this is by holding regular gatherings on the Clubhouse platform to give those who work with guide dogs the chance to meet and talk with others in Georgia. We hope such regular events will increase our membership and thus give us more of a voice, as guide dog handlers in the State of Georgia.

If you know someone who works with a guide dog, let him or her know about GGDU. We’re here to provide support and to bring guide dog handlers together.

For more information, contact Marj Schneider, 912-352-1415 or via email at marjschneider@bellsouth.net.

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 GCB community phone calls.

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.

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 delightful 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.

Georgia Council of the Blind Conference and Convention Overview:

The Georgia Council of the Blind In-Person and Virtual Conference and Convention was held on Friday, November 12 and Saturday, November 13, 2021, in Cartersville, Georgia. We would like to thank convention committee co-chairs, Marsha Farrow, and Cecily Laney Nipper, as well as the resolute convention committee: Jennifer Bray, Tonia Clayton, Danielle McIntyre, Phil Jones, Steve Longmire, Jamaica Miller, Judy Presley, Alice Ritchhart, Marj Schneider, Jerrie Toney, and Amanda Wilson.

We also would like to thank our sponsors. Our first sponsor this year is Vanda Pharmaceuticals.

The main event on Saturday was held in a room sponsored by Vanda, who has been our loyal supporter of our conventions.

Visiting with nurse educator, Vickie Preddy, in the exhibit hall, and hearing her speak is something we all looked forward to and appreciated.

[cid:image006.png@01D6D853.9DFA7390](https://non-24.com/)

Above is their logo: A blue and green pentagonal symbol with the words “Vanda Pharmaceuticals, Inc.” written in blue ink beside the symbol.

Text from their advertisement:

“Vanda Pharmaceuticals is dedicated to raising awareness of Non-24-Hour Sleep-Wake Disorder (Non-24) and supporting the blindness community. Non-24 is a rare circadian rhythm disorder affecting up to 70% of people who are totally blind. People living with non-24 experience excessive daytime sleepiness and nighttime sleeplessness, which leads to impaired social and occupational functioning. This is due to the misalignment between the internal master body clock and the 24-hour day.”

“Come visit us at our booth to learn about non-24 and sign up for additional information.”

“Call a health educator toll-free at 1-855-856-2424. 24 hours a day, every day. Visit us online at [www.Non-24.com](http://www.Non-24.com).”

Our next sponsor is Democracy Live, a company working toward the goal of people with disabilities being able to vote privately and independently using electronic means.

A picture containing drawing

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Pictured is their logo, which reads, “Democracy Live Voter Information Technologies.” The letter “o” in “democracy” is filled with a check mark.

“Democracy Live – Accessible Voting Technologies. Anytime. Anywhere.”

“In too many states, voters with disabilities don’t have equal access to voting independently and privately from home. Fortunately, there are new accessible at-home voting technologies now available.”   
“The Democracy Live OmniBallot accessible at-home voting system is a fully ADA Section 508, WCAG 2.1 compliant remote ballot marking solution. The system has been evaluated to meet the accessibility requirements of over 90 combinations of browsers, operating systems, screen readers and devices. OmniBallot has been deployed as an accessible absentee tool since 2008, in over 4,000 elections, serving 2,500 jurisdictions, in 23 states and 96 countries around the world. OmniBallot has been evaluated and reviewed by members of most every leading disability organization in the nation.”

For further information, please contact Democracy Live: 855-655-VOTE (8683) Toll Free | Email: [info@democracylive.com](mailto:info@democracylive.com) | [www.democracylive.com](http://www.democracylive.com)

A picture containing text, clipart

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Pictured is a dentistry symbol in honor of the profession of our anonymous donor. We would like to thank them for their generous donation that made it possible to offset hotel expenses for those in need for this convention. They are dedicated, both in their profession, and with their philanthropic efforts to helping others every day. Thank you!

Bryan Finney

A native of Seattle, WA, Bryan Finney entered the voting technology world during the Bush/Gore election in 2000. Bryan received his MBA in Technology Marketing and has two decades of experience in the elections and voting technology space. Bryan was nominated and selected as a founding member of the Homeland Security-sponsored Elections Sector Executive Committee and Chairs the Elections Sector Emergency Response Group. Bryan has been a speaker at the United Nations, presented to Congress and is a national leader in secure and accessible voting technologies. Starting off as a young staffer in Washington DC and then leading one of the fastest growing internet companies during the 1990’s, Bryan saw the problems that occurred during the 2000 Gore V Bush election as an opportunity to modernize voting in the U.S. After a decade working in the voting technology space, Bryan merged his political, business and technology background to start Democracy Live in 2007. Through a series of strategic partnerships with Microsoft and Amazon and in collaboration with the University of Washington Center for Technologies, Democracy Live has grown into one of the largest providers of cloud and tablet-based voting technologies in the U.S.

As Bryan likes to say, “Why not fix the big problem?”

This year, we held a silent auction to benefit the youth fund and senior fund, with half of the proceeds going to both funds. A list of these fabulous auction items was sent via email. It was a perfect time to do your holiday shopping! Unless prior arrangements had been made, bidding for most items was In-Person only.

The winning bids were announced at the banquet on Saturday at 11:30 AM.

On Friday, November 12, 2021, at 1:00 PM, all GCB members gathered in the hotel lobby to register and to pick up their registration packets and gift bags. At 1:00 PM, all GCB members visited the exhibit hall where they got a verbal description of all items. Our vendors this year were DJ McIntyre with Pampered Chef items. She mixed up some raspberry mayo for us to try. If you wish to reach DJ McIntyre to place a Pampered Chef order, call DJ at 678-343-7550, or via email at [dgrenevitch@me.com](mailto:dgrenevitch@me.com).

Vickie Preddy with Vanda Pharmaceuticals. Email address, [Vicki.preddy@vandapharma.com](mailto:Vicki.preddy@vandapharma.com) .

Mike Martenson with Visual Enhancements email address is [mike@visualenhancements.com](mailto:mike@visualenhancements.com).

At 2:00 PM, all GCB members were invited to tour the Booth Museum in Cartersville, Georgia.

At 4:00 PM, all Georgia Guide Dog Users had a membership meeting. All were welcome to attend, either in person or through Zoom. For the first part of the meeting, we were joined via Zoom by Rebecca Floyd, executive director of Gallant Hearts Guide Dog Center in Madison, Mississippi. Becky has been a guide dog handler for 57 years and has led Gallant Hearts for the past decade. She will be speaking to us about stress and anxiety experienced by our dogs. How do we know when they are anxious or stressed? What signs should we be looking for and what can we do to minimize these problems for our dogs? The second part of our meeting will include the usual business items for GGDU, including election of new officers and directors.

Becky Floyd is the Executive Director of Gallant Hearts Guide Dog Center and its cofounder. She is a 1971 graduate of the University of MS School of Law with a Juris Doctorate degree and holds a B.A. degree from the University of MS in Psychology and Sociology. From December 1982 through February 2009, Becky was Executive Director of MS Protection and Advocacy System, a federally funded organization that protected the legal and human rights of people with disabilities. Becky has ten years of work experience from 1972 through November 1982 in services for the blind. In 1972, Becky, with guidance from Durward K. McDaniel, who was Executive Director of The American Council of the Blind, founded The Mississippi Council of the Blind.

She is an avid student of canine health and training and for many years was a devoted equestrian. After retiring from MS Protection and Advocacy System in February 2009, she decided to follow her longtime dream of founding a guide dog school, thus Gallant Hearts was born.

At 7:00 PM, all GCB members enjoyed our welcome reception featuring a menu of chicken tenders, nachos, meatballs, fruit plate, and vegetable plate. We enjoyed a presentation to honor Kay McGill, as well as live music, and the Emcee was Donnie Parrett, a minister and entertainer, who related stories about Kay and shared his music and humor with us.

Donnie Parrett will be 60 years old in December. As a 6-year-old in 1968, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor that was the size of a baseball and was given a 25% chance of living through the surgery. The only side effect I experienced during the surgery was permanent optic nerve damage, which is the reason for my extremely limited vision today. My vision is 20/800. My parents started taking me to church when I was only 2 weeks old, and I gave my heart to Jesus on June 19, 1976, at the age of 14. In August 1982, I felt the Lord calling me into the ministry. About that same time, I met Leisa, who would become my wife in May 1983, and we have been in ministry all our married life. In May we will celebrate our 39th wedding anniversary. In January 1986, God gave us our first son, Brad, who started preaching himself when he was only 10 years old. Brad is 35 now and is pastoring a church in London, Kentucky. Then in June 1987, God gave us our second son, Nathan. We started pastoring at House of Prayer in April 1998 and remained there until May 2018. So, we now have 3 grandchildren.

After the dinner, Jerrie Toney, the nomination chairperson read us the slate of officers for the next day elections.

Saturday, November 13, 2021, at 8:30 AM, all GCB members were able to register if necessary. Ann Martin played the harp on Zoom in the background for us while we came in and prepared for the business meeting.

At 9:00 AM, we held our GCB business meeting

Georgia Council of the Blind Business Meeting:

The Color Guard from Cass High School Junior ROTC, Battalion Commander Aaron Whitlock, Battalion XO Jessica Zukowsky, and Command Sergeant Major David McQueen. This was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and the National Anthem sung by Betsy Grenevitch.

Fred McDade gave the invocation, and we remembered Suzanne Barton Jackson from the Rome-Floyd County Chapter and Janet Barlow.

Suzanne was a retired elementary school teacher and Former Assistant Editor of the GCB Digest. She passed away on February 5, 2020. For the blind members of our Rome-Floyd Chapter, words are simply not enough to express what our beloved Suzanne meant to us! Suzanne’s father, Mr. Wint Barton was visually impaired and a Charter Member of the Rome-Floyd County Chapter, and her brother George encouraged us to keep the Chapter going for low vision individuals. For many years, Suzanne served as our Chapter Treasurer, and she and George provided rides for many members to be able to attend the meetings. Rome GCB Members acknowledge that Mr. Wint and the Barton Family were the foundational cornerstone of the Rome Chapter. Everyone enjoyed their kindness and hospitality as Suzanne and George frequently prepared delicious meals for many of our chapter lunches. At our Christmas Celebration, Suzanne always read portions of The Best Christmas Pageant Ever and George played his beautiful renditions of Christmas classics and well-known classical pieces.

Janet Barlow (below written by Beezy Bentzen, Lukas Franck, and Bastian Schroeder with Georgia AER).

It is with great sadness that we write to let you know that our colleague and friend, Janet Barlow, passed away quietly on Sunday, August 1. Still cared for by Doug and the girls, Janet spent her last days at home in Asheville. With her contributions to the low vision field being almost incalculable, Janet spent many years in the practice of orientation and mobility (O&M). On many streets, Janet taught sight impaired individuals to travel independently, most notably at the Center for the Visually Impaired in Atlanta and was President of Accessible Design for the Blind (ADB), a small research organization started by Beezy Bentzen. Under Janet’s leadership, ADB became well-recognized for human factors research related to environmental access. She authored many papers and was a sought-after speaker at conferences and workshops, while participating in numerous national and international meetings of the Transportation Research Board and its various committees. Throughout the written words of journal papers, research reports, guidebooks, as well as in the memories of many, her words and impact will live on. As a tenacious and deeply knowledgeable advocate for blind and low vision individuals, she was a mentor, a role model, and an excellent leader, and we will miss her dearly. In transportation and in the field of blindness, Janet cared deeply about so much and so many consumers and professionals alike.

With competence, knowledge, and a legendary work ethic, Janet’s joy and passion for her chosen occupation, family, and friends was a fire WHICH warmed many. As we travel through the environment WHICH she helped shape, her contributions will live on, though we will miss, remember, and celebrate her life.

During the GCB business meeting, President Alice Ritchhart called the meeting to order, and Betsy Grenevitch gave the secretary report (see below for the business meeting from 2020). Marsha Farrow gave the treasurer report and Kay McGill, gave us an update on Project Independence. Alice Ritchhart updated us on what she has been doing since last year. Marj Schneider gave us an update on the changes to our Constitution and Bylaws. (See below for the changes.) We then held our election of officers, Jerrie Toney, the chair of nominations committee stated the slate of officers and we elected Cecily Laney Nipper as President, Marj Schneider as First Vice-President, Judy Presley as Second Vice-President, Kathy Morris as Secretary, Cecily Nipper. as Assistant Secretary, Marsha Farrow as Treasurer, and Betsy Grenevitch as Member at Large representative.

As chair of the GCB apps, Steve Longmire gave us an update on the new GCB Link App for our mobile devices. Betsy Grenevitch gave an update on the Georgia Guide Dog Users group, GGDU, who elected new officers. They are Marj Schneider as President, Cecily Laney Nipper as Vice-President, Betsy Grenevitch as Secretary, and DJ McIntyre as Treasurer.

At 11:30 AM, We held out award Banquet. Matt Santini, the Mayor of Cartersville, Georgia came to welcome us to Cartersville, Georgia. We enjoyed boxed lunches from Panera Bread, and listened to Keith Bailey, an Anthropologist from Georgia State University, who has been the Interpretive Ranger and Curator at Etowah Indian Mounds State Historic Site since 2013.

After he presented a brief overview of Native American history in the Cartersville area, the presentation of GCB state awards followed.

The GCB award chairperson, Judy Presley, presented Betsy Grenevitch with the Walter R. McDonald Service award, and the June Willis Guiding Eyes Service award was given to Michelle Grenevitch, Presidential Diamond awards were given by Alice Ritchhart to Steve Longmire, Phillip Jones, Jamaica Miller, and Debbie McDonald.

At 1:00 PM, we listened to a presentation by Bryan Finney and Charlie Kinnune with Democracy Live, regarding how blind and visually impaired people can achieve accessibility goals through secure online voting.

At 2:00 PM, we listened to Shirley Robinson and some of her staff as they spoke to us about the recent changes to Vocational Rehabilitation, and how those changes would affect us as individuals with no, and low vision. Shirley M. Robinson, Coordinator of Blind Services, Vocational Rehabilitation: For twenty plus years, Shirley Robinson has served within the blindness community, after earning her master’s degree and CRC. From Georgia State University, in 1997, Shirley began her career as a vocational Specialist with the Center for the Visually Impaired in Atlanta. This led to her present affiliation with the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, where she served as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. In 2008, she completed the Vision Specialist Certification program through Mississippi State University’s Graduate Studies program. Then In April 2009, Ms. Robinson was promoted to the position of Rehabilitation Unit Manager for the Metro Blindness Services Unit. In September 2016, Ms. Robinson was promoted to Service Area Manager overseeing the DeKalb and Rockdale County Area, and in October of 2017, she was promoted to Assistant Director of Blind Services. Most recently, in October 2020, Ms. Robinson was promoted to Coordinator of Blind Services with GA VR.

Aside from trainings, Ms. Robinson serves as the Employment Committee Chair with the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind, and Board Member of the National Rehabilitation Professionals Division of the National Federation of the Blind. In addition, she sits on the advisory boards with Tools for Life and the Audible Universal Information Access Service. As the 2018 and 2019 President of the Georgia Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Association Division, Ms. Robinson has a passion for assisting the Georgia blind community and developing methods for improving the lives of individuals with disabilities.

At 2:00 PM, there was a concurrent session where Nathan Coflin, from the Medicare Access Group, spoke to us about fraud, scams, and how to avoid them. Since 2018, Nathan Coflin, a graduate of Old Dominion University, has been the Atlanta area representative for Georgia Senior Medicare Patrol (SMPs), which are not-for-profit programs funded by the US Administration of Community Living. These exist in all fifty states in addition to the US Territories, and the mission of the SMP is to empower and assist Medicare beneficiaries, their families, and their caregivers. It helps them prevent, detect, and report health care fraud, errors, and abuse and is done through outreach, counseling, and education. Since the program’s inception 23 years ago, over 130 million dollars in total estimated savings to Medicare and Medicaid has been attributable to SMP projects.

At 3:00 PM, we held our GCB board meeting, swore in our new officers, and planned for our next January 2022 board meeting. One plan is on improving how 200 million people vote in the U.S’.

# GCB Conference and Convention Comments:

Expressing her thoughts about our past GCB conference and convention, Suzanne Schilling stated she was impressed with the entire conference, the hotel was lovely, the rooms were very comfortable, and the staff was accommodating. After saying she enjoyed all the meetings, the dinner and the entertainment, Suzanne said she would like to come back again next year.

As for someone who attended the convention on the Zoom platform, Janet Parmerter commented, “Though I enjoyed attending the sessions from the comfort of my office chair, I totally missed the interaction with other members and the warm chatter between sessions. Nothing can replace the sounds and excitement of being at the convention with everyone else. Even more so, I miss being an exhibitor in the live exhibit hall. Still, I am grateful the hybrid Zoom convention was available for older ones or those who could not personally attend, and I thank the GCB for making that possible.”

Georgia Council of the Blind Annual Membership Business Meeting via Zoom

Saturday, November 7, 2020

Call to Order, President Alice Ritchhart: Alice called the meeting to order at 10:34 AM.

Pledge of Allegiance: Dexter Durrante led us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

God Bless America: Betsy Grenevitch led us in singing “God Bless America.”

Invocation: Sharon Nichols led us in the invocation.

Ronald R. McDonald Award: DJ McIntyre read the nomination letter that was written for this award and the recipient was Roderick Parker. Roderick thanked us for recognizing him with this award.

Secretary’s Minutes, Betsy Grenevitch:

Betsy read the minutes from our May 2019 membership meeting. Note: We were not able to vote at this meeting to approve any reports since our current constitution does not permit us to vote during a virtual membership meeting.

Treasurer’s Report, Marsha Farrow:

Georgia Council of the Blind Treasurer’s Report

Virtual Conference

November 7, 2020

GCB Main Checking #9530 $11,925.23

Included in this account:

Senior Fund Total August 2020 $2,658.45

Donations since August 2020 $1,500.00

Senior Fund Balance $4,158.43

Youth Fund /Senator Kelly Loeffler Donated $3,800.00

Legal Defense Fund $1,000.00

Conference PayPal $915.00

the PayPal Fee: $6.10 Total $921.10

This money will be moved into our conference account.

GCB Operating Funds $2,238.06

GCB CONFERENCE Account #9685 $1,257.90

Al and Cora Camp Scholarship Fund #9557 $1,874.70

This year we presented two $1000 scholarships.

GCB CD #6527 $5,069.63

Interest to Date $69.63

364 Days Interest Rate 2.53 Interest

Established October 2019 $5,000.00 Interest Rate .55 Matures October 27, 2021

GCB Long Term Investment 0198260855 $18,863.34

2019 Interest $364.37

Way Financial Investment:

August 2020 $62,164.46.

Note: Due to Way Financial Transition unable to obtain September and October Statements

Marsha Farrow, GCB Treasurer

Marsha also mentioned a correction in Betsy’s minutes that we had only gained 60 cents of interest not $60.00 in interest.

Senior fund: We have served 12 individuals this year. We have received $1500 to go in this fund this year. We have purchased items such as talking watches, Pen Friends, repaired a Brailler, canes, paid for a woman to obtain a chaplaincy license, to name just a few items. We are looking at ways to support seniors and help them be a part of their community.

Finance Report, DJ McIntyre, and Jerrie Toney: DJ read the report from our bookkeeper. The bookkeeper has completed putting all the records from January through October 2020 into Quicken. She is now able to print off any report we might need. She has completed the Secretary of state’s reports that are due by the end of this year.

The donation form has been developed that will be used when donations are received.

She will be working on the previous years and putting that information in Quicken.

Jerrie told us that the finance committee is requesting that the PayPal account be closed, and a new account be opened.

Due to time constraints, we did not have an opportunity to go over the budget, but I am placing it here for the convenience of the readers of the minutes.

Jun-Oct Budget

Budget Item Projected Revenue Actual Revenue Difference Notation

Membership Dues $2,700.00 $2,302.84 $397.16 Based on 162 members

Interest Income $200.00 $200.00

Fund Raisers $2,280.00 $504.26 $1,775.74

MMS Program $300.00 $373.00 ($73.00)

General Fund Donations $0.00 $3,921.53 ($3,921.53)

Legislative Projects $60.00 $0.00 $60.00

Discretionary Fund: $200.00 $50.00 $150.00

Total Projected Rev $5,740.00

Total Collected $7,101.63

Difference ($1,361.63)

Projected Expenses:

President’s Travel $900.00 $0.00 $900.00 This will cover convention expenses, visitations to local chapters, and other special presidential duties.

Operation Costs $2,000.00 $2,181.46 ($181.46) This will cover the Website, fees to the Georgia Secretary of State, calling post, Post Office Box and any other operating cost GCB accrues

GCB Awards $150.00 $0.00 $150.00 This will go towards covering GCB Annual Awards at convention.

GCB Digest $400.00 $265.57 $134.43 This will cover the printing costs for the Braille and Large Print Edition of the Digest, mailing costs of Large Print information to sighted members. These costs may be deducted either from the Digest funds or from the operating supplies funds.

Office Supplies $100.00 $22.00 $78.00 This will cover stamps, mailing supplies, paper, and other office supplies.

ACB Membership dues $1,000.00 $795.00 $205.00 This will cover the $5 dues for GCB memberships.

Discretionary Funds $200.00 $0.00 $200.00 This will cover the President’s and/or Officers’ utilization for special projects.

Legislative Projects $60.00 $0.00 $60.00

Parliamentarian $500.00 $150.00 $350.00 This will cover the Parliamentarian at the GCB Board meetings.

Public Relations $100.00 $0.00 $100.00 Brochures and printing.

Total Projected Expenses $5,410.00

Total Spent $3,414.03

Difference $1,995.97

Beginning Balance: Donated: Ending Balance:

Line Item OBP $3,774.29 1,500.00 $5,274.29 Money donated for the Older Blind Program

Line-Item Deductions: $5,274.29 $1,482.86 $3,791.43

REGIONS VISA CARD #7256 Closed for inactivity/remaining funds bank kept for fee

Memorial Fund Donations:

Scholarship Fund: $4,422.70 $2,550.00 $1,872.70

In-Kind Donation Estimated In-Kind $2,000.00

The Older Blind Program for those 55 and older, Kay McGill: There are 56 programs nationally in the older blind program. Georgia ranks 10th in the US in the amount they receive for this program. We received $871,000 this year. Nationally, the program currently receives $32 million annually. These funds are spent on direct services that are not covered by insurance.

They began providing remote services in March 2020. They have been able to do most programs remotely except for O&M.

They have been having phone calls for those teaching the visually impaired remotely to discuss what is and is not working for them. they also talk about how they have been doing personally during the pandemic. If you would like to contact Kay via phone, she can be reached at 404-780-6649.

President’s Report, Alice Ritchhart: We have been working on two key issues this past year. The first issue concerns the Georgia commission for the Blind. We are now on our fifth executive director of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency. Mr. Wells is now the new director of this agency. He asked us not to go ahead with the commission, but we went ahead and introduced a bill concerning the Commission for the Blind that was going to be sponsored by Senator Davenport. The legislative counsel changed the wording in the bill making the commission and advisory group. We asked for the bill to be pulled and put our language back into the bill. It was sent back to the legislative counsel but because of Covid the bill did not go anywhere. We hope to reintroduce the bill in the upcoming legislative season. They are willing to collaborate with us now.

The second issue concerns the voting process. We have been trying to get the Secretary of State’s office to produce a way for visually impaired people to be able to vote privately. We mentioned to them about Democracy Live and they have seen it but not done anything about being able to use it.

We have also been working on the problems with the voting machines. A printed ballot now must be available, so the concern was how we were going to be able to read our printed ballot. It was decided that we could use our smart phone or iPad to scan the print ballot but not everyone has these devices. They are working on this process, but nothing has been decided yet. We have been working with the ACLU and with the Georgia Vision Alliance to get these problems resolved. Chris Harvey, with the Board of Elections, told us there was not anything else they could do for us. He suggested that we could file a lawsuit. The Georgia Advocacy, Law and Policy Center has already been trying to help us with this problem. There have been problems with the new machines such as being able to use them properly and having them coded correctly by the poll workers.

We now have a bookkeeper, Phyllis Waters, who is filling out the forms we are required to submit every two years to the Secretary of State’s office. She is being paid for her work.

Community Calls: We are now holding community calls through the Georgia Council of the Blind.

Technology Fund: Kelly Loeffler donated $3800 to Georgia Council of the Blind. As a board, at our last meeting, we voted to form an ad hoc committee to determine how this money would be used, how to apply for assistance, and who would oversee this fund. The results of this committee will be voted on at the next board meeting. The proposal is that this scholarship will cover Chrome Books and iPads for students. This scholarship might be turned over to our Youth Awareness Committee.

Steve Longmire said that a member has suggested that the items be expanded that are available for this scholarship because the school systems already have these devices for the students. This member also suggested that instead of the application having to be type written that it be made available on our website. The member also suggested that the scholarship be named after Kelly Loeffler and that a way be developed for people to continually be able to donate to this scholarship.

Vanda Pharmaceuticals: Vanda Pharmaceuticals was a diamond sponsor for our virtual conference and convention this year. They donated $1000 to the Georgia Council of the Blind.

Vanda Pharmaceuticals Phone Call, Cecily Nipper: Cecily announced that a Vanda Pharmaceuticals representative would be holding a call from 5:00-6:00 PM for anyone who was interested in discussing non-24.

Board Meeting: Alice invited everyone to attend the upcoming board meeting in the afternoon.

Adjourn: We adjourned at 12:07 PM.

Respectfully submitted by

Betsy Grenevitch, Secretary

GCB Constitution and Bylaw Amendments:

From the GCB Constitution: Current language

Article V: Officers, Directors and Appointees  
Section 1: Constitutional Officers

B. A member to be eligible to vote must be wearing a name badge with a star to indicate he or she is a paid member of GCB. Each voting member attending, and annual conference and convention shall be entitled to one (1) vote. A record vote shall be composed of a secret ballot vote by which the individual votes of certified voting members are taken, to be conducted in a manner as provided for in the Bylaws.  
C. These officers shall be elected by a majority vote of the members who are present and voting. If a nominee does not receive a majority on the first ballot, there shall be a run-off between the two (2) candidates who have received the greatest number of votes. Voting shall be by standing vote unless otherwise designated by most of the members who are present and voting. The president and both vice-presidents shall be legally blind.

Proposed language

Article V: Officers, Directors and Appointees  
Section 1: Constitutional Officers

B. A member to be eligible to vote in person at a conference and convention must be wearing a name badge with a star to indicate he or she is a paid member of GCB. Members attending and voting by other means at the annual conference and convention must be verified as paid members by nonbiased vote counters. Each voting member attending an annual conference and convention shall be entitled to one (1) vote. A record vote shall be composed of a secret ballot vote by which the individual votes of certified voting members are taken, to be conducted in a manner as provided for in the Bylaws.  
C. These officers shall be elected by a majority vote of the members who are present and voting. If a nominee does not receive a majority on the first ballot, there shall be a run-off between the two (2) candidates who have received the greatest number of votes. The president and both vice-presidents shall be legally blind.

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From the GCB Constitution: Current Language

Article VI: Meetings  
Section 1: Annual Meetings  
GCB shall hold an annual conference and convention, the time and place of which shall be determined by the membership or by the Board of Directors. At least most of the members present, and voting will constitute a quorum to transact business. A parliamentarian shall be appointed at each conference and convention, and the meeting shall be conducted according to the GCB Constitution and Bylaws and the most recently revised Robert's Rules of Order.

Proposed Language

Article VI: Meetings  
Section 1: Annual Meeting  
GCB shall hold an annual conference and convention, either in person, through a virtual platform, by telephone conference call, or with a combination of these formats. The date, place and format of the annual conference and convention shall be determined by the membership or by the Board of Directors. At least most of the members present, and voting will constitute a quorum to transact business. A parliamentarian shall be appointed at each conference and convention, and the meeting shall be conducted according to the GCB Constitution and Bylaws and the most recently revised Robert's Rules of Order.

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From the GCB Bylaws: Current Language

Article V: Officers and Directors  
Section 1: Election  
Officers and Directors shall be elected according to the provisions of Article V of the Constitution, provided, however, that most of the Board of Directors shall be legally blind. No two (2) Constitutional Officers can be from the same chapter.

Proposed Language

Article V: Officers and Directors  
Section 1: Election  
Officers and Directors shall be elected according to the provisions of Article V of the Constitution, provided, however, that most of the Board of Directors shall be legally blind. No more than two (2) Constitutional Officers can be from the same chapter.

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From the GCB Bylaws: Current Language

Article V: Officers and Directors  
Section 6: Board Meetings  
A. The Board of Directors shall meet on the third Saturday of the first month of each quarter except the quarter in which the convention takes place. For that fourth meeting, it should take place immediately following each annual conference and convention.  
B. Board meetings may be held in person or via telephone conference, as determined by much of the Board of Directors. Locations of In-Person meetings shall be determined by the Board of Directors. With the approval of much of the Board of Directors, the president may, if necessary, change the Board meeting to another Saturday in the same month.  
C. Any board member participating via the telephone shall be given opportunity to participate in the board meeting. Rollcall voting shall take place if any board members are participating via telephone.

D. No voting by the GCB board shall take place via e-mail.

Proposed Language

Article V: Officers and Directors  
Section 6: Board Meetings  
A. The Board of Directors shall meet on the third Saturday of the first month of each quarter except the quarter in which the convention takes place. The fourth meeting shall be held immediately following each annual conference and convention.  
B. Board meetings may be held in person, through a virtual platform, or by telephone conference call, as determined by most of the Board of Directors. Locations of In-Person meetings shall be determined by the Board of Directors. With the approval of much of the Board of Directors, the president may, if necessary, change the Board meeting to another Saturday in the same month.  
C. All board members shall be given opportunity to participate in board meetings, regardless of format by which they are attending. Rollcall voting shall take place in the event of a close voice vote.

D. No voting by the GCB board shall take place via e-mail.

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From the GCB Bylaws: Current Language

Article VII: Voting  
Vote counters will be considered nonbiased and will not be members of GCB.  
Utilize an assorted color index card for each race during the Annual GCB Conference Business meeting. For example, to vote for Candidate A leave the index card with all four corners.  
For Candidate B tear off top right corner of the index card.  
For Candidate C tear two corners off the index card.  
One box with a slot will be passed so each member can place their own index cards in the slot. The box will be passed to each voter by the unbiased vote counters. The nonbiased vote counters will count the number of cards in each race and report to the President of GCB. If the President is running as a candidate in the race, the Chair of the nominating committee will receive and announce the results of the voting from the vote counters.

Proposed Language

Article VII: Voting  
Section 1: Private Voting

Members shall be able to secretly cast their individual votes at the annual business meeting or a special called membership meeting in the following cases: a close voice vote on a motion, one or more contested races in an election, or when amendments to the constitution or bylaws have been proposed.

Section 2: Procedures

A. For members attending in person, index cards will be used, with instructions to tear off one or more corners, depending on the vote members want to cast. One box with a slot will be passed by the nonbiased vote counters for each member to place his or her own index card in the slot. The nonbiased vote counters will count the number of cards and report the results to the President of GCB. If the President is running as a candidate in a contested race, the Chair of the nominating committee will receive and announce the results of the voting. Ample time shall be allowed for voting to take place.

B. For members attending by virtual platform or telephone conference call, votes may be cast by a phone call, text or email directed to nonbiased vote counters. Each member will provide his or her name for the vote counter to verify membership status. The nonbiased vote counters will count votes cast by phone call, text or email and report the results to the President of GCB. If the President is running as a candidate in a contested race, the Chair of the nominating committee will receive and announce the results of the voting. Ample time shall be allowed for voting to take place.

C. Vote counters shall be nonbiased and cannot be members of GCB.

A Vision Realized:

by Steve & Tiyah F.M. Longmire

Hello GCB Family,

I first want to thank the following individuals for assisting me in this effort in developing the official app for both iOS and Android users. First is my wife Tiyah and then Jerrie Toney, Alice Ritchhart, Cecily Laney Nipper and Marsha Farrow. Being a web developer for over 20 years and having the opportunity to design and develop the GCB website, I wanted to learn the technology to develop a mobile app for the organization. I was assured that the app will be a tool to accessible information to users of mobile devices. The disability-friendly app was officially launched and approved by the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store in October 2021. The name of the free app is called GCB Link. You can ask Siri to search for GCB Link in the Apple App Store or search for GCB Link in the Google Play Store for Android. The app shows the user much of the same information that is on the GCB website. With the app being active, the GCB website will remain in place for users to access as usual. Since this is the first release of the app, we are anticipating working on making enhancements and updates to increase the marketability and accessibility. We welcome your feedback ratings and reviews.

Some may ask what is an app, i.e., application? Well, it is a computer program that runs on a portable device such as a smartphone. It gives users the ability to quickly and conveniently find information and services. The app can conveniently with a click place a telephone call and/or directly send an email to the organization. The development process took over a year (off and on), with some technology highs and lows, yet the outcome and benefits were well worth the process.

Fanny Crosby:

This is Her Story

By Mike Hall and Marsha Farrow

The little town of Summerville, located in Chattooga County in the northwestern part of Georgia, has had a unique kind of Christmas celebration. It is a Victorian Christmas that would reflect Christmas and styles from the 19th century. During one of those celebrations, well known hymn writer, educator and preacher Fanny Crosby was featured in the festivities. When you consider the more than 8 thousand hymns she wrote, the people of her day, who sought out her advice and the connections she made with Christian leaders of the day, it is perfectly fitting that Fanny Crosby should be featured in a Victorian Christmas celebration.

For this celebration, a life-sized figure of Fanny was created by Ms. Linda Espy along with members of the Victorian Art Guild. A gifted doll maker, Ms. Espy molded the face of Fanny by looking at old photographs. The Fanny Crosby scene was given a prominent location inside the Chattooga courthouse, allowing visitors a chance for a firsthand examination of the Fanny Crosby doll and braille. One of the guides for the exhibit was Saunya Jones, dressed in her Victorian outfit and hat. Saunya, a middle school student at the time, was born totally blind. She and her mother Editha shared stories about the life and work of Fanny Crosby. Can you just imagine some of the stories that were told?

Frances Jane Crosby was born on March 24, 1820 and died on February 12, 1915. Widely known as Fanny Crosby, she was an American lyricist best known for her Protestant Christian hymns. A lifelong Methodist, Fanny was one of the most prolific hymnists in history. Fanny is credited with writing over 8,000 songs despite becoming blind as an infant. At age 15, Crosby enrolled at the New York School for the Blind (now the New York Institute for Special Education). She remained there for seven years. During that time, she learned to play the piano and guitar and to sing. In 1843, she joined a group of lobbyists in Washington, D.C. Fanny joined in the effort for support of education for the blind. From 1847 to 1858, Crosby joined the faculty at the New York school, teaching English and history.

Fanny married Alexander Van Alstyne, a blind musician and fellow teacher, in 1858. At his insistence, she kept her maiden’s name. They had one daughter, Francis, who died while a baby. Alexander died on July 19, 1902. Perhaps some of the stories shared by Saunya and her mother explained that Fanny lost her eyesight due to an eye infection that may not have been treated correctly. Other tales reveal the close relationship to Fanny and her grandmother Eunice, who taught Fanny to identify songbirds, the leaves of trees and described vivid colors to her. It would be easy to imagine the Crosby family gathered by the fireplace at night reading poetry and the Bible. All of these activities surely had a profound influence on Fanny's life and writings. Fanny's hymns have crossed many denominational lines and are found in most hymn books. So many have been comforted by the words to Safe in the Arms of Jesus and Blessed Assurance. Others have been challenged by Rescue the Perishing or blessed by Nearer My God to Thee.

I found a good and complete biography of Fanny Crosby from the library. The book is titled Fanny Crosby DB14621 by Bernard Ruffin. Reading time is eleven hours and six minutes. When I started reading the book, I discovered there is quite a bit to learn about Fanny Crosby and I am just on the second chapter. I would like to know more about her growing up. It would be interesting to know if leaving home to go to school was a traumatic experience. Did she use Braille similar to what we use today or did she rely on one of the other raised letters reading systems used in the 19th and early twentieth centuries. Finally, how were her well known hymns inspired and how were the relationships formed between Fanny and such Christian leaders of the day as Dwight L. Moody? Perhaps you would like to join me on the journey to learn more about Fanny Crosby from this book.

In closing, I would like to tell you that the idea for this article came from one of the Prayer and Praise community calls. Marsha Farrow gave me the idea and shared her article about the Victorian Christmas in Summerville. I used much of Marsha's article in this writing.

The Prayer and Praise Community call meets on the third Tuesday of the month at 7:00 PM. To join the call, simply dial 605-562-0400 or 717 275-8940. The access code for both numbers is 7805751 followed by the pound sign. We do not discuss denominations, doctrines or theology. What we do is to share prayer requests and answers to prayer. I find it wonderful to get together and to share concerns and positive outcomes with my fellow GCB members. You are invited to join us.

Thank You from Dianne Roberts:

Dianne Roberts stated that she would like to thank all the kind members of GCB who supported my mother, Lucy Baker, and me during her final battle with laryngeal cancer. It was a very difficult time as she fought hard to eat and speak.  I stayed with her in middle Georgia during her final two months. After her passing, I remained at her house and began the cleaning out process which continues to this day. Outside contact was extremely limited during that time because of her rural location and no access to a computer. I thank you all for your thoughts and prayers for us. Thank you, also, for your kind comments that were shared on the funeral website after her death. I look forward to rejoining GCB life again soon. With sincere gratitude, Dianne.

Thank you from Debbie McDonald:

Debbie McDonald stated that she received the GCB President's Diamond Award plaque yesterday. I would like to "Thank You" both for this award. I am very honored and humbled to receive such a notable mention. The Georgia Council of the Blind has taught me so much about persistence and having a community family. Both of you are Diamonds in the visually impaired network of Georgia! It is a pleasure being your friend. Best Wishes for a Star Bright Future.

Thank you from Kay McGill:

Thank you for all the tributes, gifts and well wishes regarding my retirement. I have been overwhelmed at your kindness and generosity. Dick and I celebrated the first day of the new chapter of my life on Thursday, December 2, 2021, with the sumptuous gourmet dinner of Cornish Hen with a Cranberry Sage Butter with Pumpkin Ravioli with Amaretto Cream Sauce, Sautéed Kale with Onions and Bacon, Mixed Field Green Salad with Candied Pecans, French Bread Rolls and Assorted Desserts. I couldn’t think of a better way to celebrate this day.

The food was delivered on December 2 as scheduled. Wow, what a dinner. Each item was wrapped in a separate container with pretty ribbons. All we had to do was heat the various items. Directions were provided. Even my meat and potato husband ate the Kale! He ate everything – as did I. The desserts were a serving of cheesecake, chocolate brownie and a chocolate cake with marshmallow and chocolate icing. Oh, my goodness, were we ever full. It was fabulous. Our stomachs and Dick and I thank you. What a lovely and delicious gift.

**New Leadership for Project Independence**

Project Independence will continue in the very capable and competent hands of Shirley Robinson. I think most of you know Shirley and will be very pleased with the next phase of Project Independence: GA Vision Program for Adults Aged 55 and over. Kindly send all correspondence and communications to Shirley at [shirley.robinson@gvs.ga.gov](mailto:shirley.robinson@gvs.ga.gov) or 404-783-3545 effective immediately.

You all are a part of me. To be continued, my friends. Take care and stay safe.

Recipes:

by Debbie McDonald

Pumpkin Muffins

Mix

1 box of yellow cake mix

1 can Pumpkin

Bake on 350 for 20 to 25 minutes

Haystacks

1 bag Butterscotch morsels

1 bag chow mein noodles

1/2 cup cocktail peanuts (pecans, walnuts, etc.)

Melt morsels on low until creamy

Stir in noodles and nuts

Mix well. Use a tablespoon to drop

little piles onto wax paper. Let cool.

Hawaiian Smokies

Use a small crock pot.

1 pack of beef little smokies

1 bottle of Bar-B-Que Sauce (Brown sugar)

1 can crushed pineapple

Heat on low

Pear Halves

1 can pear halves

Mayonnaise

Shredded cheese

Jar of cherries

Top pear with a teaspoon of mayonnaise.

Next add the cheese and top off with a cherry.

What’s Unique? An Interview with Guide Dog Schools:

by Cecily Laney Nipper

Having listened to guide dog school reports lately at our own convention as well as at the ACB national convention, I felt that a few key things could be added to those reports. Maybe that was because of changes related to the pandemic, or other reasons, but zeroing in on a few key questions seemed valuable. People I had the opportunity to interview included Lauren Berglund of the Guide Dog Foundation, Leslie Hoskins of Leader Dogs for the Blind, and Gretchen Fischer-Orr of Fidelco. Here are a few thoughts from those interviews.

What makes Fidelco unique is their in-person component. Not only do they do exclusively home placements and exclusively German Shepherd dogs, but they also try to visit each graduate every year, when possible, regardless of whether there is an existing issue. They feel that this helps stop problems while they are still small, increasing their statistical success rates.

Requirements for the application to receive a guide dog are very similar among schools, with a few key exceptions. While Leader Dogs does not do in-person interviews, Fidelco always does in-person interviews. Somewhat longer routes are required for the high energy of German Shepherd dogs, so Fidelco looks for somewhat longer routes. Independent travel skills are a necessity for any guide dog handler, but particular emphasis is placed on this in the Guide Dog Foundation application process. For all schools, prospective handlers are encouraged to call the school to speak with a consumer services representative. Contact information for consumer services representatives from each school will be listed at the end of this article. There is always case-by-case consideration given to applicants.

One feature unique to the Guide Dog Foundation is what is known as step identification. Step identification, is defined as, “… a system designed to request a guide dog to step down one step only ahead of its handler on a staircase or other multi stepped situation so the handler can know it is safe to step down themselves … The information gained from a handler stepping down one step and stopping, allows them to determine the depth and width of the steps.”

The Foundation also offers leash guiding, whereby a handler may use the leash alone, without the harness, for guiding in situations of short, familiar trips, such as out to the relief area or from the desk to the restroom at an everyday workplace.

When asked what makes Leader Dogs for the Blind special, Leslie highlighted the Orientation and Mobility program that Leader Dogs offers. Taken from their website, here is some information about the four “tracks” that can be chosen by someone who is accepted into the Orientation and Mobility workshop. “Introduction to O&M: Great for people with little to no experience with a cane; O&M Brush-Up: Ideal for those who have had previous O&M training and could use a refresher course or additional skills; Guide Dog Readiness: For cane users who are thinking about whether a guide dog may be right for them, this option helps build the necessary skills. This option does not guarantee acceptance into Guide Dog Training; Advanced O&M: Designed for individuals who are traveling in complex environments and more challenging intersections.”

Aspects that were once in-person at Leader Dogs, such as their leadership camp for 14–17-year-olds have remained virtual, and TOM talks (Technology, Orientation, Mobility) for 18–24-year-olds have been added. These TOM talks focus on independence, networking, and job application skills. Also offered by Leader Dogs is their program for DeafBlind clients conducted by guide dog mobility instructors who are trained in the use of visual and tactual American Sign Language. Dogs used in such cases are trained to mitigate some aspects of both hearing and vision loss.

Lauren of the Guide Dog Foundation wished to get the word out that GDF has temporarily suspended the use of poodles for new applicants. At this time, poodles will still be available for those who have had poodles in the past and are returning for a successor, or those who have already been approved for a poodle and are awaiting a class date.

Life for a Guide Dog Foundation puppy includes basic obedience in the puppy home, with clicker training, directional cues, and guiding commands being taught by the trainer. For a Fidelco dog, the most emphasized aspects of the puppy home are house manners, adjustment to all situations, and learning to accept love from the puppy raisers.

Contact information:

Lauren Berglung

Guide Dog Foundation

[consumerservices@guidedog.org](mailto:consumerservices@guidedog.org)

631-930-9070

Leslie Hoskins

[Leslie.hoskins@leaderdog.org](mailto:Leslie.hoskins@leaderdog.org)

248-650-7104

Gretchen Fischer-Orr

[admissions@fidelco.org](mailto:admissions@fidelco.org)

860-243-4044

Believe it or not, I Still Can’t See

Janet Parmater

[](http://www.aisquared.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/My-sister-and-me-1965.jpg)

Photo: Janet holding her little sister on the beach

“Mrs. Di Nola, your nine-year-old daughter Janet is only pretending she can’t see. Since you just had a new baby, this is a classic case of jealousy. All you have to do is give her more love and attention, and she’ll see just fine.” Those disturbing words were said to my mother in 1960, after I, as a happy little child, told her I had difficulty seeing the blackboard.

For my parents, it was shocking news and yet confusing to hear nothing was wrong with my eyes, so without downplaying my struggle to see at school, they tried to understand my unusual diagnosis and continued scheduling appointments with different optometrists. Unfortunately, I left many useless examinations with doctors sending me home with a big smile on their face, a pat on my back, and my unfounded feeling of hope. In my little trusting heart, I truly needed to believe the next doctor might help me. Little did I know, because they were all unfamiliar with this eye disease, each new doctor simply agreed with the previous one and continued to label me ‘psychologically blind.’ Doctors were so convincing, they almost forced their unfounded opinion onto my parents, but my mother and father refused to believe I was a liar.

What made it worse was some friends and a few family members believed these experts could never be wrong. They believed I was faking and, right in front of me, repeatedly told my parents, “Don’t let her kid you, Janet sees better than all of us!” Throughout my adult life, these skeptical ‘friends’, continued to say I could see. Sadly, in 2000, when I began using my white cane, one of these individuals still asked, “Why are you using that thing? Do you think it will help you?” Kindly I asked, “When you walk down the street, would you rather walk with your eyes open or closed?” Quickly she responded, “Open of course!” “Well,” I responded, “THAT is exactly why I use my cane, it is my eyes, and I also like to walk with my eyes open.” Sad to say, this friend continued to believe a forty-year-old misdiagnosis of, “Janet really CAN see, she’s just jealous you have a new baby and is PRETENDING she cannot see.” Regrettably, as a child I was not privy to that shocking bit of information. Thus, with my misguided faith in my doctors, I went on with life and believed they were doing their utmost to help improve my vision. At the same time, no doubt my parents were in a state of confusion because they raised my brother and me with strong religious principles and trained us not to lie, yet doctors were certain I was lying to get attention due to our new baby sister. Deeply wanting to believe I was truthful, my parents had a gut feeling something was seriously wrong, however doctors all agreed and continued to say, “Janet is psychologically blind.” So, for them, things just didn’t make sense.

Year after year, doctor after doctor, exam after exam, my parents continued searching for any reassuring answer. Each time I saw a new doctor; they would examine me, hear my prior prognosis, and simply agree with previous doctors, ‘Janet is jealous of her baby sister, and pretending she cannot see’. As if that problem was not big enough, I created an even bigger one for myself. In my childish mind, it seemed to me, the reason I kept seeing new doctors was because I failed all the eye tests. There was one simple solution, I had to figure out how to pass the eye exams. So, while my mother talked with the doctor, I maneuvered myself close to the eye chart and found it easy to memorize the order of the letters. The next time, I passed the test!

Though some exams were not as easy to pass, for a confused child, the challenge became my game. For example, one doctor in Hackensack, New Jersey, made me look into a long square box with some type of projected picture on the back, then asked, “What does the Indian have in each hand?” Oh, I thought to myself, this is going to be easy because we had a real Canadian Indian friend in Nova Scotia and every summer we were there, Nule made my brother and me an authentic wood carved bow and arrow. After analyzing the picture, I reasoned the object on the left is about as tall as the Indian, so it MUST be a bow. However, the one on the right was short and fat, so it could not be an arrow. Proudly, I announced, “IN his right hand is a tomahawk and he’s holding a bow in his left hand.” With a big smile, the doctor said, “Good, good. Now, in this picture what does the carpenter have in both hands?” A carpenter, I agonized, this would be tough … I really did not know any carpenters. Of course, I was incorrect when I named a screwdriver and hammer. Delighted, the doctor again smiled saying, “Good, very good,” and we continued playing the game. Without even knowing, I had reconfirmed his opinion that I was the great pretender. With a tone of vindication in his voice, I remember hearing his smug comment, “After all Mrs. Di Nola, Janet saw EXACTLY what the Indian had in his hands, then at the same distance pretended not to see the other pictures.” Looking back, I do not understand why doctors never caught on to my little game. Didn’t they think an eleven-year-old had enough intelligence to figure out objects simply using her mental faculties? Reflecting on this, it seems to me with my inexpert mind, the exam could have been more accurate had the doctor merely asked,

“What do you see inside this box?”

Since I did not wear glasses, at the start of each school year the same trauma began as my mother asked the teachers, “May Janet sit in the front row, because she claims she cannot see the blackboard?” Understandably, the next question was,

“Then why doesn’t she wear glasses?” Responding with her standard comment, my mother answered, “The doctors say Janet does not need glasses because she is “Psychologically blind.” As strange as it may seem, I only understood the word blind, and I never put together the fact that my mother was inadvertently telling the teachers, “Doctors think my daughter is nuts!” Still, while in school, I continued my ‘memorizing game because I wanted to be like all the other children and, to my own detriment, do my own share of reading. Let me explain by saying, until 1963, in some public schools each day began with a student reading one Bible Psalm. Naturally, I wanted to be like all the other ‘normal’ sighted children and have my turn at reading a Psalm. To me, there was a simple solution … I memorized Psalm 1, Psalm 23, and Psalm 100, and alternated them when it was my turn to read. Not to be singled out as inferior was a satisfying feeling, but it must have been puzzling for my kind teachers. After all, they knew I was a religious little girl who should not lie but was also ‘psychologically blind’. How confusing when they watched me stand in front of the class and read the Bible, or should I say, pretend to read the Bible? That ‘memorizing method’ of coping with life, unintentionally solidified exactly what the teachers were told and probably thought, ‘poor Janet, she has such a very sad emotional problem’.

For teachers who took a personal interest in me, it must have been especially difficult. In Bogota, New Jersey, I fondly remember my fourth and fifth grade teachers, Miss Zelaya and Miss Reinhart, who seemed to give me special attention. Their tender concern always warmly touched my heart and now I understand why.

Yet, in stark contrast to their kindness, my sixth-grade teacher, Miss Bucko in Fairview’s Lincoln school, was the ‘wicked witch of the west’. This very old spinster who, I was sure, taught in the time of Noah’s flood, was frightening when my father had her. Ms. Bucko wore a long straight vested dress, covering what I thought were thick heeled laced up leather combat boots. When she marched around the wood classroom floor, her boots made a loud clump, clump, clumping sound as if she were surveying her soldiers and camp. Almost gleeful, she marched up and down the rows of our class with folded arms and gripping a twelve-inch wooden ruler in one fist. Looking for someone to terrorize, over and over she tapped her shoulder with the ruler and would strut up and down each aisle. If something were wrong, she slammed the ruler down on someone’s hand or desk so loud, students physically jumped.

With her stern, inflexible attitude, Miss Bucko DEFINITELY did NOT go for any of this ‘psychological blindness mumbo jumbo’! Being determined to make this little psychologically blind brat see the blackboard, she never allowed me to have the front seat; and was not changing my seat closer to the blackboard for anyone, not even the principal of the school. In fact, she seated me in the last seat in the back and cared nothing about my mother’s seat request; NO ONE told Miss Bucko what to do! Seriously, I was terrified each time she walked up the aisle behind me. If I were trying to see the print of a book, and held it too close to my eyes, she would sneak up behind me, unexpectedly grab my scalp, yank my head back, and shove her wooden ruler between my forehead and book screeching, “TWELVE INCHES FROM THE BOOK YOU LAZY THING! YOU ARE MAKING YOUR OWN EYES LAZY! Keep the book twelve inches from your face!”

That school year, sympathetic Doctor Saint Hill, finally tried to prescribe eyeglasses for me, which I faithfully wore in class. Yet, the glasses confused me since they did absolutely nothing to help me read or see the board. What also troubled me was the fact that I really liked Doctor St. Hill and believed he wanted to help me. At eleven years old, even I was confused, and did not understand what was going on with these new glasses and my failing sight.

One day Ms. Bucko silently stood behind me for a long time and finally growled, “Take those glasses off!” After handing them to her, she stomped over to the window, kept looking back and forth through the window, then my glasses, then the window, then again through my glasses and yelled, “Get up here!” Slithering to the front of the class, I was sure the children could hear my heart pound through my chest. As she whipped the glasses at me, she sneered,

“These are worthless; they are nothing more than plain window glass! Now, get back to your seat!”

When the bell rang, I ran out of the school, sobbed all the way home, threw myself on the bed, and in tears shouted at my mother, “These are just sugar pill glasses.” Stunned, my mother did not understand what happened. “You paid money for nothing but sugar pill glasses!” Rambling on through tears I cried,

“These glasses are just like the sugar pills you give grandma, worthless!” (In the past, I heard my parents discussing grandma’s doctor visit. My mother said to my father,

“The doctor says mom really isn’t sick, but she thinks she is, so the doctor prescribed her these sugar pills which will make her think she can get better.”

Those confusing words echoed throughout my brain and scared me. How, I wondered, could my parents let that nice doctor talk them into these sugar pill glasses? For the first time, now I felt my parents really did not believe me either.

The irony of this sad situation was my grandmother, and her friends were the ones constantly saying that I really could see. Over and over, they commented, “Oh, Janet, you see better than us.” Once I recall saying,

“Grandma I wish for just one day, or one hour we could trade eyes, THEN, you would finally believe me.” Now, I felt frustrated with everyone and everything, and drew even closer to God because I knew HE was the only one who really knew I was not lying. From then on, I had to keep reassuring myself nothing was wrong with me or my brain … but there definitely WAS something wrong with my eyes that sugar pill glasses could not help!

To this day, I still have the mental picture of my mother faking excitement over which pretty color frames would look cute for my new glasses. That scene in the store is still vivid in my mind. The fact of the matter was, since I couldn’t see them on my face anyway, I could have cared less what color they were.

Now, after Miss Bucko humiliated me in class, just wearing the glasses made me feel like an imposter … like a hypocrite.

With one swift move, Ms. Bucko’s offensive armylike tactics destroyed my doctor’s defensive strategy to help me. At the same time, she shattered all my hopes to see, while making my parents and the one doctor I trusted look deceitful. Unquestionably, Ms. Bucko had a way of creating havoc out of any good situation and she nearly destroyed my hope. Yet, on a positive note, I must attribute a major part of my excellent memory to Miss Bucko. Out of sheer terror, I memorized everything I had to read aloud in class. Feelings of panic came over me when I had to stand up and read. Once, after I stumbled on some words she shouted, “If you say you cannot see, go stand next to the window and read where the light is better, but read!” In horrible fear of her constant humiliation in front of the class, I memorized many reading assignments.

For example, when students were assigned a poem to read aloud in front of the class, my assignment was The Wreck of the Hesperus by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Sick with anxiety, night after night my Aunt Dolores read me the poem until I memorized all eighty-eight lines.

Standing in front of my class with my book (twelve inches) in front of me, I began to read, or rather “pretended” to read the poem. Slowly I began: “It was the schooner Hesperus, which sailed the wintry sea. The skipper had taken his little daughter to bear him company. Blue were her eyes as the fairy flax and her cheeks as the dawn of day, and her bosom white as the hawthorn buds, which ope in the month of May.”

Just then she cut me off, stood up while pointing to my book and shouted. (For a split second, I imagined her with a pointed black hat, a pimple on her nose, pointing a crooked finger at me and sounding like the wicked witch of the west…) shrieking.

“I TOLD YOU THAT YOU COULD READ; YOU LITTLE LIAR!!!!!”

Feeling the blood leave my face, I am not sure, but I think I turned white. However, one thing I was sure of … my little legs shook underneath my dress, and my ankles weakened. It was all I could do not to faint. So many emotions raced through me at the same time. Fear, anger, embarrassment, and then finally joy, as a sudden thought crossed my mind. Slamming the book shut, I held it against my chest, looked up at the ceiling and boldly continued the skipper he stood beside the helm his pipe was in his mouth

As he watched the veering flow did blow the smoke now west now south.” (As I thrust my right arm in the gesture of the direction west then south, I actually think I heard her dentures grind in anger.)

“Then up and spake an old sailor, who sailed the Spanish Main, I pray thee put into yonder port for I fear a hurricane.” In my little mind, it was not a hurricane I feared, but rather a tornado like storm soon to come from this wicked witch of the west, still I successfully finished the entire poem.

After my last sentence there was silence, DEAD silence. Unintentionally, by NOT reading the poem, I made her look like a fool for calling me a liar. She was LIVID! From her neck to her head, she began turning the one color I could still see … RED! Staring at her for some response, she looked like her head would explode off her shoulders. Possibly, she thought I perpetrated some sort of hoax on her, because angrily her army boots clumped, clumped, clumped across the wood floor as she passed directly in front of me and stormed out the door without saying one word. There I was, shaking and standing in front of my sixth-grade classmates, all still staring at me and wondering if I would drop dead on the spot or survive that unfortunate afternoon.

Suddenly, the door burst open, and in stormed Miss Bucko with the principal. For certain she thought I pulled some sort of prank on her, because the principal always came when someone was in trouble. Folding her arms, she glared at me then gritting her teeth she growled; “Now you do that again!” So, I got it, she thought I was a fake.

Strangely, I was on fire with excitement because I LOVED Mr. Nussio, and this was my chance to shine and my chance to prove to Miss Bucko that I DID memorize the entire poem. When I finished, Mr. Nussio picked me up, swung me around, and said he was SO proud of his wonderful little sixth grader. If I did not know better, I would have thought Miss Bucko’s eyes were going to fly out of her head and burn my flesh. But, with humor and a cheerful outlook, I survived that disturbing experience and others yet to come.

The last Miss Bucko experience I will relate shows how obsessed she was to prove I was a liar and could really see. While learning the concept of osmosis, each student had to place a raw egg in a jar of vinegar until the shell dissolved leaving a semisolid bouncing egg. Being Italian, of course all we had was my grandfather’s home-made wine vinegar, thus my egg became dark purple. Miss Bucko interrogated me about why I didn’t follow her directions and why I put food coloring in my vinegar. Naturally, I had done nothing and did not have any idea why my egg looked different than the others. Later after I told her I did just what she said and used grandpa’s wine vinegar, she finally believed it must have been the wine that changed the color and not that I had deliberately disobeyed her. The children loved my egg and wanted to touch it. Miss Bucko took it out of my jar, as I proudly watched the children delicately handle and lightly bounce my egg. When they finished, Miss Bucko took a step back and said, “Janet, here!” With my arms still at my side, she tossed the egg at me. Not being able to see what she did, I heard my egg hit the floor and my beautiful experiment was gone. Raw egg burst and splattered all over my shoes. This time I refused to let her see how upset I was … and I was determined NOT to cry! It took all my strength, but I won … I did not shed one tear in front of her and just stared her down.

As distressing as that complex year was, I honestly believe Miss Bucko had a lot to do with molding my personality for the better. In a strange sort of way, I owe a lot to her. She indirectly forced me to develop my memory and her insufferable attitude helped me become a stronger, more tolerant, and compassionate person. By personal experience, I learned humiliation can deeply hurt an individual and I vowed I would never put another person through that misery.

Yet, those years must have been especially difficult for my parents. One minute I was crying to them because I couldn’t see, and the next minute I was holding a book and, as it appeared to them, ‘reading’.

What a catch 22 I created for myself and my parents. Unintentionally, I put them through distressing conflictive emotions. Repeatedly they had to explain my difficulty seeing, while not understanding it themselves. Was Janet lying or not? Could Janet really see or not? If Janet really cannot see, what is wrong? What a problem it must have been for them, but I thank God that he was there for me.

One day, a new situation occurred after my new doctor phoned our home. My mother called me in from playing, picked me up, sat me on her lap, hugged me, then, looked me straight in the face and asked, “Janet, do you know mommy and daddy love you?” This sudden burst of emotion while I was outside playing did not make sense. Curiously, I responded, “I know that mommy, now can I go back outside and play?” With a concerned tone of voice she continued, “No, I mean do you REALLY know mommy and daddy REALLY love you? Are you really sure we do love you?” As if I was speaking a foreign language, and she did not understand me, once again I repeated my answer only slower. “YES, I KNOW YOU DO … now … can I go back outside and play again?” For some reason I knew she was not convinced, because next, she asked if I knew my friend Marion’s older sister wore glasses, and they found out she didn’t really need them. This was strange, I thought, why did my mother stop me from playing to have a conversation about Marion’s sister? Confused at this unwanted break into my playtime I asked, “Why would she want to wear glasses if she didn’t need them?” It was so upsetting to me that my playtime was interrupted by this silly conversation, that I never forgot the dialog or how upset my mother was with our whole discussion. I realize now she was trying desperately to make sense of a very disturbing situation. On one hand she trained us, no matter what, tell the truth. On the other hand, she took me to countless doctors who said I was a liar and told her to just give Janet more love and attention and she will grow out of her little ruse.

In defense of my parents, they never gave up their inner desire to believe me. Continuously they tried new doctors. Yet, if you had to find a positive side to this chaos, I became a stronger individual, I just STILL could not see! Certainly, it must have been emotionally draining for my parents to be caught in the middle of the medical community and their mislabeled, untruthful child.

At the same time, an interesting thing was happening. Not wanting to be also labeled foolish or ignorant, I used, as Hercule Poirot often states, “the little grey cells” to remember information, and figure things out. In school, I intensely LISTENED to class work, mentally memorizing everything audible so my comments would bring up my classroom participation score, thus bringing up my average from my failing written test grades. Slowly, my mind replaced my eyes as increasingly I started using it to figure out what I did not see. My personality grew stronger, and I hated to give up on anything. The words, “I CAN’T” were to me, the same as giving up. Unless I TRIED, I failed, so I wanted to try everything.

My mind worked constantly, analyzing things I wanted to see. Using my other senses enable me to “see” without using my literal eyes. Figuring things out became a sort of game and when I was correct, I felt I won! To me it was exciting to correctly evaluate something, and I assumed others would also be as thrilled. Sad to say my exciting way of coping with vision loss caused me many unpredictable, surprising repercussions from sometimes jealous individuals.

Reader’s Digest claimed, ‘Laughter is the Best Medicine’ and I wholeheartedly agree. Even as a child, humor helped me cope with most tricky situations in life. At an early age, I realized I couldn’t CHANGE my situation, therefore if I accepted it and changed my attitude toward it, that seemed to be the sane and reasonable solution. Rather than dwelling on the negative aspect of my vision loss, it was more productive to search for a positive and humorous facet and get on with life.

The next few years brought the same sort of problems, until my first year of high school, when a major change occurred. Mr. De Salvo, my typing teacher, noticed I typed looking at the textbook in a bent over position. When he asked where my glasses were, I responded I did not have any. He immediately sent me to the school nurse. Regretfully, though I have tried, I cannot find out the name of this WONDERFUL woman who drastically changed my life. Out of her concern, the nurse asked, “Janet, how can I help you?” I replied, “Mr. De Salvo sent me to see you since I can’t see my typing book.” Her quick response was the same, “You just need glasses.” (As I grew older, each school year I began speaking for myself.) Thus, politely I responded, “No, I don’t need glasses because the doctors say I’m only psychologically blind.” This dear human, was so disturbed by this she phoned my mother that same day. “Mrs. Di Nola, she firmly said, “If you told me about every other child in this school was psychologically disturbed, I may tend to agree with you. However, Janet is the MOST psychologically WELL-ADJUSTED child in this school. Something is wrong with your daughter’s eyes.” Possibly my mother thought, what could a school nurse know, Janet is psychologically blind; we’ve had six years of optometrists telling us that, but she respectfully answered, “No, Janet does have a psychological blindness.” That fantastic school nurse did NOT give up! She insisted my mental state was not impaired and begged my mother to bring me to a doctor with whom she attended college, Doctor Peter Pinto at the Manhattan Eye Ear and Throat Clinic. After RAVING about his ability, this persistent nurse was so convincing, my mother actually felt hopeful, and the next day phoned the clinic. Sadly, she was informed there was a huge waiting list before I could be seen. In a carefree manner, the school nurse said, “Oh, don’t worry, that’s OK! I know his mother, she’s Italian too and I will give you her phone number, just call his mother and explain your daughter’s situation.” Without delay, while crying in Italian, my mother recounted what happened to her daughter Janet. Mrs. Pinto listened and became deeply concerned for my welfare, telling my mother in a commanding voice,

“Ahmmah like you. Ahmmah gonna tell my son to taykah you lil’ girl! Ahma gonna tell him ta taykah disah l’llah girl disah week!!!”

Despite the fact it was Christmas Eve, with one phone call from his mother, Doctor Pinto immediately gave me an appointment on Christmas day. After he evaluated and examined me all day, about 5:00 pm, he brought my mother and me into his office. Hesitating, he seemed as though he did not know what to say. If I live, I will NEVER forget the next words he said, “Mrs. Di Nola, your daughter definitely has a profoundly serious eye disease,” “but,” he paused, “I’d rather not express my opinion at this time. Almost in shock, I felt numb and thought to myself, ‘oh my goodness someone actually believes me!’ Then he continued, “I’d like to set up a referral to Doctor Eleanor Faye. She is the director of “Low Vision Services,” at the New York City Lighthouse for the Blind. She will confirm my prognosis and further explain Janet’s condition.” My head was whirling … Did he say blind? My condition, blind? Emotionally, it was too much to absorb at once. On the way home, flashes from the past 6 years flew through my mind. Someone KNEW I was telling the truth. Someone KNEW what was wrong with me! Someone actually believed me! My head was still spinning with the news that I was not crazy, when all of a sudden, my mother had to pull over and park the car. She was sobbing so hard she could not see to safely drive. Trying to console her I asked, “Mommy, why are you crying? Someone FINALLY believes me!!! I’m almost fifteen years old and someone REALLY believes I’m losing my sight!” Can you imagine that? It still makes me tear up to remember how THRILLED I was hearing such tragic news. My life would change, I did not know how, but I knew it would change as soon as I saw Doctor Faye.

This incredible woman, Doctor Faye, had her office of ophthalmology at 121 East 60st Street in Manhattan (until she died on, January 2020 at the age of 96). Often, her patients were people told by other doctors their situation was hopeless, yet Doctor Faye provided hope and even renewed sight for many. That’s what she represented to me, HOPE … and I counted the days till I would meet her. At once, Doctor Faye’s warm concerning tone put me at ease and immediately I opened up about my life and feelings. As she examined me, she listened, questioned, and responded to me with genuine kindness. It seemed I had found a friend. She was shocked at the consensus of opinion that I was psychologically blind. Then, with a touch of admiration, she added, “I’m amazed you did not go crazy, after being told six years, you could really see, and you knew they were wrong. All along you KNEW you could not see, but how did you not go crazy?” Having someone finally willing to listen, I explained I really knew I could not see, and I knew God believed me because he also knew I really couldn’t see. Then I explained my strong faith in God and his promise to restore sight to the blind. Isaiah 35:5 assured me I would just have to wait until ‘that Kingdom came on earth’ and I would see again. Later, Doctor Faye said she was so impressed by that comment, she wrote in the Journal of American Medicine, ‘The strong faith of this young child kept her sanity’. Continuing to elaborate on my condition, Doctor Faye explained, “In 1959, your disease was not well known and unheard of in someone your age. But had they known what your condition was, doctors still could not have done anything then, or now to correct your vision.” That alone was most comforting to me, as I intently listened to her insight on this new life situation.

At the end of that 1966 visit, Doctor Faye informed me I had scar tissue at the back of my eye, causing a blind spot in my central vision, and explained that central vision was used to read and see details. It was a juvenile form of Macular Degeneration; a disease normally in senior patients, and said it was rare to see this in a child my age. That helped me understand why Doctor Pinto was so hesitant to reveal his suspicions. Doctor Faye explained she intended to declare me ‘legally blind’, and I would be able to receive assistance in school. All my schoolbooks would be read into reel-to-reel recorders, and others would be remade in large print. The state would assign readers and counselors to help me, and I could join the Library for the Blind because things would definitely become worse. She explained good and bad lighting, light sensitivity, showed me magnification devices, gave me advice how to maximize my vision, and that day, Doctor Faye entered my life and heart.

As the morning passed to afternoon, Doctor Faye’s loyal secretary Bobbie, stepped into the office hinting to the doctor that it was time to wind up the visit. As I would soon realize, this was a standard practice to rescue Doctor Faye from her endearing patients. You see, patients were not just dollars to her, they were people, real people who needed her help and time. She was the friend who cared! Yes, she was the friend who realized this little fifteen-year-old girl had been abused by a system that had not yet come to understand someone crying for help or understand Juvenile Macular Degeneration. Even after moving to Georgia, I still returned to New York City for a bi-annual eye exam. During my last visit, this jewel of a woman chuckled, “Janet, do you realize we have been together now for some 45 years … that is more than most marriages!” We laughed, then I added, “Yes, and we’ve had less fights than most marriages!” Again, we laughed and agreed, humor brought me comfort.

In conclusion, an ironic sadness occurred in my life. Throughout those 45 years, my younger sister Kathleen began slowly losing her sight. Fortunately, I had already gone through the difficulty of finding Doctor Faye. Consequently, Kathleen also became her patient. You see that little baby, born when I was nine, that little baby, whom doctors said I was jealous of, that little baby, whom I loved to dress up and play mommy with, at nine years old, also developed the same tragic eye disease.

The End