

Volume 24, December 2024

# The Blind Canadian

A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)



*Happy 25th Anniversary CFB!*

## In this issue:

- Celebrating What CFB Means To Us
- Writing Contest Winning Entries
- *I Am Blind*, a Book on Blindness For Children
- Canada Post Rules re Mailing Materials for the Blind
- Advocacy – Guide Dog Discrimination;  
Floating Island Bus Stops
- In Memoriam



# CFB

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is not an organization speaking for the blind — it is the blind speaking for themselves.

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# CFB

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is a non-profit, grassroots organization created by and for blind Canadians. Its mandate is to improve the lives of blind people across the country through:

- a fresh, positive, empowering approach to blindness;
- blind people mentoring blind people to gain knowledge, skills and self-confidence;
- public education about blindness and the abilities of blind people;
- advocacy to create better opportunities and to strengthen rights of blind Canadians.
- raising expectations, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our goals.

The long white cane is a symbol of empowerment and a tool for independence.

With proper training, opportunity and a positive attitude, blindness is nothing more than a characteristic. Blind people can do almost everything sighted people can do; sometimes they just use alternative techniques to get the job done.

We are educated. We have skills. We are independent. We are parents. We are teachers. We have wisdom. We represent the same range of human diversity, strengths and weaknesses as any other sector of the population.

The CFB would like to realize a positive future for all people who are blind. A future where blind people can find employment; a future where blind people are valued for their contributions; a future where blind people are treated like anyone else.

This future involves you. No matter who you are, blind or sighted, you can work with us to realize this dream.

Together, we can create change in our social landscape, for the real barriers blind people face are erected by ignorance and misunderstanding. Help us achieve what we all want: to be treated with dignity and respect. Join us today and be a part of the solution

## **Our Philosophy**

**We are not an organization speaking on behalf of blind people; rather we are an organization of blind people speaking for ourselves.**

**We believe it is respectable to be blind.**

**We believe that with proper training and opportunity, blind people can compete on terms of equality with their sighted peers.**

**We believe the real problem of blindness is not the lack of eyesight. The real problem is the lack of positive information about blindness and the achievements of blind people.**



**CFB**

*Committed to the equality  
#It's Respectable of blind  
Canadians*

# The Blind Canadian

**A publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind**

The **Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)** is a not-for-profit, entirely volunteer, grassroots organization, incorporated on June 2nd, 1999.

The Blind Canadian is the leading publication of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB). It covers events and activities of the CFB, addresses issues we face as blind people, and highlights our members. The Blind Canadian:

- Offers a positive perspective and philosophy on blindness
- Serves as a vehicle for advocacy and protection of human rights
- Addresses social concerns affecting the blind
- Discusses issues related to employment, education, legislation and rehabilitation
- Provides news about products and technology used by the blind
- Tells the stories of blind people
- Covers convention reports, speeches, experiences
- Archives historical documents

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*The Blind Canadian welcomes articles, resources and letters to the editor for possible publication.*

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# Grateful In Celebration of CFB's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary! 1999 - 2024

by Doris Belusic, editor

I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Paul and Mary Ellen Gabias for their work in bringing Federationism to Canada, to expose blind Canadians and our society to the NFB newer ways of thinking about blindness and of blind people's capabilities. Not the older take-care-of-the-blind paternalistic charity model we've known in Canada for over 100 years, but a more modern model of blindness where blind people are in charge of their lives. We've learned to think differently, with more positivity, to hold higher expectations of ourselves and of society, we've learned the reality that blind people can and do succeed to live the lives they want. We've learned that with opportunity, inspiration, alternate techniques and technology, proper blindness skills training, and with group and self advocacy, we, as blind people, can dream bigger, lead full, independent, productive, successful lives. We've learned that we have power, that we can be proud of who we are, of how we manage, and of our achievements. Being blind is challenging, yes, even difficult at times, but the Federation tagline "Live the Life You Want" and the positive Federation philosophy are super guides and reminders for us.

A central theme in CFB and NFB is that we are all mentors and mentees, learning from each other. And who better to learn from and be inspired by than by those who live blindness daily, who walk in those shoes. It's a comfort to learn how to do things from other blind people, as they have the lived experience and are experts in their field – and one gets the feeling that "if they can, then I can, too."

## The Beginning

Federationism began in Canada in 1992 when Dr. Paul and Mary Ellen Gabias arrived in Canada to live, and with them they brought the knowledge and experience of a new and better way for blindness to be viewed and treated, by both the general public and the blind themselves. This new way to think and be, came from their time involved with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) in the United States. The Federation's "can do" positive attitude and its philosophy stood out. It was something most average blind Canadians had never heard of in our country's traditional, older-style charity model. The Gabiases knew this would be of great benefit to Canada's blind, just as it has been since 1940 for the 50,000-member-strong movement of blind people south of our border.

## Federation Philosophy

We are an organization of blind people speaking for ourselves.

We believe blindness is a characteristic and not a handicap; that blindness is not what defines us or holds us back.

We believe with proper training and opportunity blind people can compete on terms of equality with sighted peers. Blind people can do almost anything sighted people do, sometimes we just use alternative techniques.

We believe the real problem of blindness is not the lack of eyesight. It is inequality in society, low expectations, an old charity model, and the lack of positive information about blindness and the abilities and achievements of blind people.

We believe it is respectable to be blind and that the white cane is an empowering tool for independence and a symbol of freedom and pride.

## Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)

CFB was incorporated in June 1999 and our fledgling organization began. Over the past 25 years, CFB has been active and influential in mentoring, education and in advocacy. You just need to read through some of the issues of our magazine, *The Blind Canadian*, print copies or on our website ([www.cfb.ca](http://www.cfb.ca)) to see much of what we've been up to – from hosting CFB conventions, to funding attendees to the all-important, learning grounds of the large, annual US NFB conventions; from advocating for bus announcement systems, to fighting guide dog/taxi discrimination cases; from advocating for equitable public library service, to advocating, involving a court case, against recent, widespread implementation of discriminatory, dangerous floating island bus stops due to bike lanes installation design. We even brought advocate Sarah Gayton to Victoria all the way from the UK NFB to help with the bus stop/bike lanes issue. And CFB, together with the Lions Club, has run the iPhone Project for the Blind, providing over 50 new iPhones to blind recipients in the Greater Victoria / Vancouver areas.

We've informed blind Canadians about the "long" white cane, and provided knowledge about the existence of intensive NFB blindness skills training centres in the US (Louisiana Center for the Blind, Colorado Center for the Blind, and BLIND Inc. in Minnesota), and we've advocated for the same here in Canada, since there is a lack of adequate, government-funded blindness skills training. We held a Rally for Change and Choice years ago, where many blind British Columbians marched at the BC Legislature, asking the government to fund blindness skills training. CFB assisted in funding Gina, a blind Victoria woman, to attend the Louisiana Center for the Blind – you can read about her nine-month training journey in her article "Free as a Butterfly"

(*The Blind Canadian*, Volume 13). Elizabeth Lalonde was inspired to start her own NFB-style rehab training centre in Victoria, the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind, after her nine-month training at the Louisiana Centre for the Blind (her training generously gifted by the NFB). She documented her training in her blog, then in an article, “My Journey at the Louisiana Center for the Blind” (*The Blind Canadian*, Volume 5).

We’ve been hosting a listserv, a website, running meetings and holding annual AGMs where our all-blind executive board are elected. We’ve held many fundraising events, like our concerts, dinners, and fun trivia nights, and we’ve held socials, like our annual December holiday dinners. Our flagship magazine, *The Blind Canadian*, has been in publication since 2002. It is one of the best resources in Canada on blindness. (To learn more about our magazine, check out the article, “*The Blind Canadian* Magazine Celebrates 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!” in Volume 22; and take a look at *The Blind Canadian* page on CFB’s website.) And we’ve written and sent out a ton of advocacy letters over our 25 years. Plus, so much more!

## CFB Presidents

Oriano Belusic, 1999 (CFB inception) to 2003  
Elizabeth Lalonde, 2003 – May 2012  
Mary Ellen Gabias, May 2012 – September 2021  
Douglas Lawlor, September 2021 – present.

## CFB Conventions

We have held eleven successful CFB conventions, including

- ‘Believe’ in 2005
- ‘Moving Forward’ in 2007
- ‘The Blind Leading the Blind’ in 2008
- ‘Louis Braille: From Literacy to Liberty’ in 2009
- ‘The Journey’ in 2012
- ‘Breaking the Mold’ in 2014
- ‘Vote of Confidence’ in 2017
- ‘Organize’ in 2018
- ‘Employment-Empowerment’ in 2019
- ‘Choices and Goals’ in 2021 (virtual)
- ‘Positive Outlook’ in 2022 (virtual)

## Some of What I've Gained Over Our 25 Years

Besides the camaraderie of meeting and knowing CFB members and many blind Canadians and Americans, I have gained so much in my association with CFB. Almost everything I know regarding blindness, I know because of my involvement with CFB and NFB. Being diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) in my early 20s, it took many years of gradual vision decline until I needed to start depending on a white cane and using some alternative blindness methods of getting things done.

I feel so fortunate to have been in the company of many very capable, independent and successful blind people, role models, who I've learned a lot from. Having met blind professors, blind teachers, blind lawyers, blind authors, blind business people, blind entrepreneurs, blind physiotherapists, blind musicians, blind leaders, blind students, blind parents, and so on. This all showed me that there need not be limitations to what's possible, and helped to give me confidence.

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) annual, national conventions of which I've attended three (New Orleans, Atlanta, Dallas) opened my mind big time, as it has done every Canadian I know who's attended one. This is where one needs to go to experience blindness at its best and to feel the normalcy of being in a majority for a change. The knowledge and inspiration gained at these week-long conventions is life-changing. Imagine being in a hotel convention room with 3,000 other blind attendees! White canes and guide dogs everywhere! These conventions are organized and run by the blind for the blind – and what great events they are – from the speeches, to the Independence Market, the Exhibit Hall, to the dinner banquet – it really is the best learning grounds for the blind – and attendees come from around the world to be there.

Our CFB conventions, on a smaller scale, have been very informative and inspirational too, and fun, and we've had attendees from right across Canada and the US. All organized and run by CFB members. We've been fortunate to have had the company of NFB leaders at our conventions, like Dr. Marc Maurer, NFB's then-national president, as well as Carla McQuillan, Oregon state president, who joined us at three of our conventions. We've had the late Mike Freeman, then-Washington state president. Also, virtually during the pandemic, we've enjoyed both the late Scott LaBarre, then-president of Colorado, and Marci Carpenter, current Washington state president. We even had NFB's *Braille Monitor* magazine editor, Gary Wunder, attend our convention on Bowen Island. Good work, good company, good memories!

Thank goodness for white canes! I mean the long white canes used in the Federation – those that go from your chin or nose to your toes! Not the old-style up-to-your-chest



shorties that aren't as practical. It is through the CFB and NFB that I gradually became comfortable using and being seen with a white cane. Through mentors like Elizabeth, I learned the proper way to use the white cane – swing it left as you step right, swing it right as you step left, so you are always checking ahead with it. And it was Elizabeth who told me that you can feel driveway slopes with it – which, believe it or not, was news to me when I was new to using a white cane! I have always remembered her saying that at one of our conventions. Of course, over many years now of walking with my white cane, it is now a part of me and I am more aware of the information it gives me about my surroundings. I've learned to listen well to what my cane tells me. Thanks to CFB and NFB, I have learned to feel more independent, confident, comfortable and proud in using my cane, seeing it not as a symbol of disability, but of my ability to be mobile. It is the reason I can travel around and not promptly land on my nose, knees or butt somewhere I don't want to be!

It is through CFB that I have gained the knowledge, experience and confidence to have functioned as Secretary – learning to take minutes and how meetings are run – and, that I have a voice. CFB is also where I've gained my early skills as editor of our magazine, *The Blind Canadian*. I am grateful to Mary Ellen who gave me my first experience in writing an article for the Federation's previous magazine, and I'm grateful to Elizabeth who started up CFB's current magazine and eventually passed along the opportunity for me to take on the role as editor, which I've done for some 15 years now. This has even proved helpful in boosting my own writing career.

I have been very encouraged by learning about the US NFB blindness skills training centres and have enjoyed hearing and reading about Gina's, Elizabeth's and also Danielle's nine-month journeys through Louisiana Center. I have thought for years that I'd also like to gain better blindness skills and maybe one day would go.

Looking back over my 25 years in CFB, I've gained a lot, and I've given back too, as we Federationists do, and had good fun in the process.

## Thanks Go Out!

Thank you to everyone, including our kind and generous sighted allies, who, over the past 25 years have supported the aspirations of CFB in bringing Federationism and its benefits alive in Canada, all for our betterment as blind Canadians.

Here's to the next 25 years!

# Writing Contest Winning Entries: Celebrating CFB's 25 Years

by Doris Belusic, editor

I'd like to announce the winners of *The Blind Canadian* magazine's writing contest held this fall to celebrate CFB's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. These three articles were submitted to the contest, each one very informative, unique and inspirational. All three are winners of \$100 each. Thank you to Nancy Gill who wrote "CFB Rocked My World!", to Blaine Deutscher who wrote "It's Respectable to be Blind: The Lived Experience of the NFB", and to Oriano Belusic who wrote "Prepare, Prepare, Prepare: Let's Go Travelling!". Articles like these show why CFB is valuable and they make the magazine what it is. Congratulations!

You can read these three winning articles next, below. Please enjoy.

## CFB Rocked My World!

by Nancy Gill

Some roads are straight; others curve up, down, and around through a changing landscape. My relationship with the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) hasn't been simple and straight, but the direction has always been clear.

I'm blind from Usher's Syndrome, a rare condition that combines serious hearing loss with retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a condition resulting in tunnel vision and eventual total blindness. I've never been able to read print easily, and hearing in a classroom or other noisy place without a hearing aid has always been a challenge. When I was a young girl, hearing aids were big and bulky, and extremely noticeable. They didn't look at all fashionable; wearing them made me stand out as different and disabled. I hated that! I was too young to understand my situation, so I opted to hide my vision and hearing impairments, even though doing that meant I lost out on a lot of learning. I was bright enough to fake my way through to some degree, so I got what I wanted at the time. I slipped quietly through the cracks.

I finished at school and became a hairdresser, something I did for nearly forty years. When the chemicals involved in hairdressing started causing me health problems, I got a job as a cashier in a grocery store. My memory was very good. I was able to do

the job, though I couldn't easily read the cash register screen. I did it by memorizing all the item codes in the store. My coworkers knew I had vision problems, but nobody knew how little I could see until the company sent a mystery shopper through my till with a magazine under his arm. I didn't see it; he got by me without paying. If not for my involvement as a union steward and the specialized knowledge offered by CFB, that experience would have been even more traumatic than it was. But more about that later.

I found CFB purely by accident. One Monday I was home from work and turned on the TV community show at noon. The guest was a woman named Elizabeth Lalonde from the Canadian Federation of the Blind. She was talking about hope, accomplishment, and the need for blind people to come together and solve problems. She said something that rocked my world! Blind people could truly be in charge of our own lives!

That was certainly news to me! Practically every other message I was receiving confirmed my conviction that I was a victim of circumstances. I had a part time job which I loved, but my deteriorating eyesight made it increasingly difficult to do. I was the mother of a nearly-adult daughter and a young son. I loved them dearly, but believed I had no choice but to turn my child into my human guide. Everywhere I turned, limitation and lack of opportunity stared me in the face. Something in my soul hated that message! I wanted more, but couldn't imagine how to be hopeful.

The show host invited people to call in and talk with Elizabeth. I did and was greeted with warmth and encouragement. That was the beginning of a friendship that has only grown stronger over the years. Elizabeth invited me to attend the convention of CFB in Victoria. I have family there, so decided to go.

What a shock! The hotel was small and cozy. Dozens of blind people were walking confidently around the building as if getting around was the most normal thing in the world. Some were reading Braille; I'd heard of it, but the code was a mystery to me, and the thought that I could learn to read using my hands seemed a little like science fiction. But, more than anything else, I bloomed in the encouragement I got from other attendees. They told me, in word and deed, "I've gone through difficulties as a blind person, too, and probably will again. I worked through my doubts and believe you can, too."

Then Elizabeth, who was CFB president, along with the executive found the money to help me and another recently blind man to attend the convention of the National Federation of the Blind (the U.S. sister organization to CFB) in Dallas, Texas. I was more than a bit nervous, but travel has always been my happy spot. I took the plunge, boarded the plane, and arrived In Dallas for the most exciting shock of my life!

I took my son, Nathan, with me. I thought he'd enjoy the trip, but I also believed I couldn't manage without him to guide me. What a shock when Elizabeth told me he would go to child care while I attended the convention sessions.

The first day I cried. Nathan guided me to child care where I signed him in. Suddenly I was on my own! I was so frightened that I sat in the corner of the room for three hours until I could pick Nathan up and he could guide us to get lunch. Elizabeth found out and gently but firmly guided me to a new way of thinking. She encouraged me to walk with her. She encouraged me to walk by myself. She encouraged me to reach out, take my courage in my own hands, and try.

I found there were a lot of people, blind and sighted, who would support me. It was scary, but I learned that Nathan could be a kid in child care and I could manage without him as a constant guide. I would be lying if I told you it was easy; letting go of that security was one of the hardest things I've ever done! It can still be very scary to be on my own. Because I don't hear well, there are times when going it alone makes no sense. But often these days, I think of stepping out independently as an adventure rather than a trauma.

My white cane is my friend, now! In fact, I've named it Tequila. Before I got involved with CFB, the thought of carrying a cane and using it caused deep shame and embarrassment. One snowy day, I was struck by a car, partly because I attempted to use sight which I didn't have to cross a street. It was a hit and run. Instead of passersby thinking that I was a blind person, they wrongly assumed that I was drunk and didn't offer help! Even after that incident, I tried to reject the cane. Finally, a CFB friend tried a little tough love. She said she wouldn't walk anywhere with me unless I was using my cane. I resented her at first, but have come to recognize her wisdom. Sometimes the most loving thing to do doesn't seem nice, but having a cane has probably saved my life more than once, so "nice" isn't always true kindness.

I've been to four NFB conventions, two in Dallas, one in Orlando, Florida, and one in Las Vegas. My memories of what happened at each convention blur together. At my first convention, I attended a meeting of blind parents. I thought I would sit quietly and listen, but somebody encouraged me to tell my story. I found myself sharing my most frightening experience ever! My son's father was trying to use my blindness to gain full custody; I talked about how frightened and alone I felt. When I finished, the whole room erupted; I got a standing ovation. Now I'm far less frightened of public speaking.

I remember winning \$2,500 in Dallas in 2010. (Never pass up an offer to buy a raffle ticket!) I remember getting caught in a huge downpour while walking with a blind man to a restaurant in Orlando. I remember how happy I was when Nathan was fifteen and made friends with the sons of another CFB member and spent the week hanging out

with them in Orlando. I was really happy for him, but not having him around to take me where I wanted to go forced me to be more independent than I thought I could be. It was scary, but I did it! I remember bringing friends with me to experience the NFB convention in Las Vegas. I remember how much I enjoyed listening to the guest speakers, and going around talking to people. And, I remember listening to NFB's then-president, Dr. Marc Maurer, when he attended one of CFB's conventions in Victoria. I want to go back to convention again; each time I do, I get a little braver and try a little more.

After I'd been involved with CFB for several years, the mystery shopper came through my till and it became clear I couldn't continue as a cashier. CFB worked with me and the union to try to find other work I could do in the store. The company, union, and CFB all worked with me in good faith. My coworkers were supportive and would have been delighted if a new career path could have been found. But slipping through the cracks and denying my deafness and blindness had a steep price. Because I'd used my memory to get by and hadn't developed strong academic and blindness skills, transitioning wasn't possible. I retired on disability.

At first, being unemployed reinforced feelings that I was no longer useful. Was I ever wrong! My blind friends needed me.

Probably my greatest joy in CFB is being able to give back. I've made speeches about my convention experiences and about experiencing tourism as a blind person. The whole CFB convention cheered when I described climbing to the top of a mountain in Africa. (No, it wasn't Everest!) For me, though, the experience of taking a trail to the top was symbolic of my new thinking about being blind. I loved passing around items I gathered while on my travels; letting my CFB friends touch my souvenirs was a great way to share my memories.

In 2009, CFB held a convention commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille. I still remember being handed half an egg carton. The six places for the eggs were in the same shape as the six dots in a Braille cell. Suddenly the mystery of Braille was a little less mysterious. Now I use the same tool to show my two-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter what Braille is all about. She's fascinated!

My granddaughter isn't the only family member who has learned because of CFB. My son still keeps in touch with friends he made at the NFB convention and he always encourages blind people he meets. My sister is blind from the same condition. How satisfying to be the one who introduced her to this movement. Her story is hers to tell; I will only say that she has travelled the road from deep despair to a full and satisfying life and is now happily married with a blind man.

I've helped plan CFB conventions like the one that started me on this journey. In fact, I've come up with at least two convention themes!

Within CFB I'm known as the "Door Prize Lady," or the "Queen of Door Prizes." I love telling community stores and restaurants about what we do and receiving their support. Giving door prizes to pleased CFB members at the convention is even more fun! I've done this job for many years and hope to continue for many more.

With the strong encouragement of CFB, I organized a community service evening for blind people in my city of Burnaby, BC. Nearly seventy people attended and learned about blindness resources, as well as enjoying an evening of networking that has expanded into a thriving network of friendships.

Now I'm working with Elizabeth and the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind, hosting a community event called "Let's Support Each Other" every two weeks. Guest speakers talk about issues or technology valuable to blind people. We share experiences, encourage one another, and build strong bonds of friendship. I love this work and am deeply grateful that I stayed home and turned on the TV to hear Elizabeth that Monday in 2006.

As NFB's president, Mark Riccobono, says about living the life we want – this is exactly what I want to do!

## **It's Respectable to be Blind: The Lived Experience of the NFB**

by Blaine Deutscher

Throughout life we experience moments of excitement and joy. As children we wake up on Christmas morning itching to go see how many presents are under the tree; we finally get to go to school after seeing our older siblings leave. For me, one of those exciting experiences was being able to go to the NFB convention.

I first heard of the National Federation of the Blind in July 2007 when I attended a guide dog school where it was mentioned that a few of the staff members were attending NFB conventions. Until this time, I had not heard of any organization in the United States that either served blind people, or were "of" blind people. I don't recall if they gave us some publications or how I found out about the NFB, but what I heard

excited me. I've always been one to gravitate towards blind people that didn't look at themselves with pity, but with their head held high, who navigated the world with confidence.

When I met more people in the States through various online platforms, I started to hear of this organization called the NFB, where braille was accepted, blind people were in charge, and long white canes promoted independence. I liked what I saw, as to my knowledge Canada had no such organization.

Growing up, I knew the CNIB had a blind president/CEO, but in 2009 when CNIB changed their Constitutional requirement that the CEO be blind, the organization started to change direction. Prior to 2009, as a teen, I remember going to CNIB camp and braille was everywhere. Independence was taught through cooking, cleaning our own gender washrooms, and campers were encouraged to use their white canes (even if you knew where you were going). Nowadays, kids have day camps and braille isn't being taught. I used to work at CNIB and I remember an office building fun activity day where we had to have braille races using a slate and stylus. I remember one of the staff that works with children didn't know how to use it, as not all the kids know braille.

The argument is out there that technology will replace braille with audio. I do understand if there is a reason that you can't read braille due to neuropathy, but I feel that if you can learn, you should. You may not read a novel, but simple things like labeling spices or reading playing cards to play popular games is useful.

Now that CNIB no longer has a blind CEO, the trickle down effect is happening, where people in executive roles are also sighted, and last I heard, only 50% of the board is made of blind people while the rest are made up of doctors, ophthalmologists and others.

When I heard that the NFB has a rule, that to be on their executive board you have to be blind, it excited me. I found online speeches given by NFB presidents at past convention banquets and thought "how do blind people run an organization?"

Having gone to several events through CNIB and other organizations that have a similar mandate, there still is an emphasis on having sighted people do jobs that "blind people can't". I was one of those kids that argued all the time that blind people can do more than what they were allowing us to do. I remember being a bowler and arguing that, as a totally blind person, I shouldn't have to have a sighted person accompany me on the bus for a provincial tournament.

Seeing what NFB was doing, and learning later on about their structured discovery training centres, made me want to learn and be involved with the NFB. I reached out to them to enquire if there were ways for Canadians to get involved and that's how I found out about the Canadian Federation of the Blind. Having found the CFB, I took it upon myself to learn more about this organization, to really believe in the philosophy of blindness from the Federation perspective, and I dreamed of attending an NFB convention one day. How cool it would be to see blind people navigating a large hotel, where in the past I've had sighted volunteers assisting me to a chair, getting my coffee, and so on.

I finally had the opportunity in July 2024 to attend the NFB convention in Orlando, Florida.

Everyone I spoke with has mentioned the empowerment one feels when you walk in the convention hotel doors and hear the white canes tapping, people making their way to whichever event/activity they "choose". When my wife and I walked into the hotel, no one came and met us to ask where we wanted to go; we had to ask questions and find our way to the front desk to check-in (my wife is sighted but not great about asking where things are and prefers me to get us where we need to go in unfamiliar areas).

When I found out that I was one of the CFB members able to receive funding to attend this year's NFB convention, I was excited. I heard about how you have to get yourself to the hotel, instead of having volunteers pick you up. (I understand why CNIB does it if you're going to the Lake Joseph Centre, as there isn't transit to get you there from the Toronto airport, but even then I'm sure if I had to, I could figure out a way to get there.) Anyway, I was excited to be able to get myself to the hotel.

The minute we got off the plane, I knew I could manage. I asked questions as to where to go and listened for where people were heading to pick up their luggage. We managed to get our luggage and asked airport staff where to go to get a taxi to get us to the hotel. We managed to find the hotel and, well, that empowerment you feel when you walk through the front doors is so true!

I remember my first event after we were checked in. I walked into the room and found an empty chair. It felt so nice not to have someone running up to me and grabbing me or just saying "I'm a volunteer, can I help you find something?" I liked how I had the ability to ask and if I didn't ask, I didn't receive help, something I enjoyed a lot. There were other things that stood out for me that I plan to incorporate into events with CFB and even for sighted people.



I remember the first time I walked into the exhibit hall and was handed a braille map with a braille list of all the exhibitors. I thought, "this is cool, I know where they are and who is all here, but how am I going to find them?" Well, walking around I soon realized that they had braille on the tables and the names of the vendors were also on the tables. It felt so nice to explore the NFB Independence Market too, and before touching all the items I could check the little braille cards that mentioned what the items were and their prices. The items had tickets attached to a ring holding the braille index card that described the item, which made me feel even more independent. I later found out that they keep this method at the Independence Market at the NFB headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland. This was something they don't do at CNIB.

I remember when I first checked in for convention registration and was handed a little brailled card. I read the card and it said "scan to play, a colour, then scan QR code". I made mention to them, that it was the little things like putting that in braille that made such a difference to me to be able to have the autonomy to independently use it. Again, something you don't see at CNIB. Instead, they would have had sighted volunteers tell you what to do or offer to help you scan the QR code.

I remember the first time I walked into general session and wondered how a blind person would find the sitting area for one's own State. I didn't realize, again, the little things, like putting braille on things. What they did is put the State name in braille and large print on each State-designated flagpole. This way, blind people were able to go and independently navigate a large hotel convention room, find the seating area for their States (or International section) themselves – and if you were running late, you could just ask someone which State section they were sitting in and they would tell you. Then you could make up your mind where you needed to go next.

I remember visiting the NFB convention presidential suite and, again, saw blind people living the lives they want, by greeting guests who walked into the suite. Again, if I were doing an event at CNIB, they would have had sighted volunteers come up to you and offer to get you a coffee. I wasn't sure what to expect when I walked into the presidential suite and asked someone if they had coffee there. I was told where to go get it. I walked towards where the kitchen area was and what I found really surprised me – braille metal tags with what was in the pots. So again, you could serve yourself decaf coffee if you desired or hot water for hot chocolate, etc. Again, it was the little things that made such a huge difference for me. It was so nice to see blind people being independent, and even me as a first timer, helping other blind people figure out where things were.

I've listened to the NFB conventions online in the past and felt empowered, but going to the convention is another story! I can't wait to attend next year and learn even more. In fact, I'm on the list to attend one of NFB's training centres, Colorado Center for the Blind, because I want to really believe in the positive philosophy of blindness – and, as I mentioned to people, I know how to travel around my neighbourhood but want to be able to feel confident in traveling areas I don't know or have never been.

I want to not do something because I'm blind, but because I choose to. I saw a lot of this when attending the NFB convention. It was amazing to see their tagline “Live the Life You Want” and their philosophy lived out over the six days we were there.

My wife got to see blind people being independent and not having to be taken places, just verbally given directions. My wife got to see how I mentioned to her that I never want blindness to be a reason why I don't do something, and she saw this all during the week. From the blind people working the registration booths to the people being "talking signs", her eyes were opened to what we can do. The only blind people she's met before, besides me, were ones that needed a sighted person, or it was expected that she would do different things because she's sighted.

This was an experience of a lifetime. I can't wait to attend next year's convention and I want to thank the CFB executive for allowing me to have this opportunity. Now let's go build the Federation in Canada!

## **Prepare, Prepare, Prepare: Let's Go Travelling!**

by Oriano Belusic, CFB First Vice President

My desire for independence and travel came about in my late teens. I was fortunate back then to meet a couple of very independent blind role models who took me under their wings. They were Erol Hembroff and Mike Brodsky. When I'd go places with them, they wouldn't always choose the easiest, most direct travel option of getting to a destination. They would not hesitate to walk or take public transit, which is definitely more challenging than taking a taxi or getting a ride from someone. They would go on their own explorations.

Later in life, I came to understand their motivation and drive for independence, no matter how easy or challenging their task was. There's something very satisfying about accomplishing things on your own. It is true that when you attempt to do something challenging and you are successful at it, it boosts your confidence.

I may not endeavour to go out into the wild outbacks on my own, but feel greatly rewarded when I travel somewhere independently. Simply put, the path of least resistance is not always the most rewarding way to go. Banking or shopping for groceries, or for medication at the pharmacy, or to get someone's birthday gift, it's all a little more rewarding when, if need be, you are able to accomplish these tasks on your own. It helps to reinforce your ability to function as a regular individual in society.

As I became more involved in activities with the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) and the U.S. National Federation of the Blind (NFB), I learned that this theme of independence and ability to function on one's own, like most others do in society, was encouraged and stressed. Over the past 25 years as a CFB member, I have learned, gained and given back. Being around successful blind role models in the Federation has expanded my ways of thinking, my knowledge, my abilities, and has supported me to be a stronger advocate – all increasing my sense of independence and self confidence. What more can you ask for from an organization of blind people there to support each other?

For the past five years as I transitioned from my last building project to retirement, I have really enjoyed travelling two or three times a year to my birth country of Croatia. For those of you wondering where in the world Croatia is, it is in central Europe, bordered by a bunch of Balkan countries and near Hungary, Austria, Greece and is a short boat ride across the Adriatic Sea from Italy. Zagreb, the capital city where I like to go, is in central Croatia. In this article, I will focus on the times I've undertaken this travelling venture on my own.

Compared to most sighted people, travelling for a blind person can be a daunting and scary endeavor, given all the potential travel industry service challenges and often our own lack of self confidence. Let's face it, the world isn't designed to make getting around easy for a fully blind person such as myself. Visual signage, large open spaces, lack of useful environmental sounds and cues are some of the barriers we face. But travel is possible and extremely rewarding if we learn a few tips and use some alternative techniques.

The mechanics of travelling is common knowledge to some, but not to all who may wish to challenge themselves. There are some small mechanical things you can do to make it all work out, so that travel is much easier and even fun.

## **Before You Leave: Plan, Prepare!**

Blind travellers need to prepare a bit more than the average sighted traveller, so anticipate what you will likely encounter during travel and what you will need once you are at your destination.

When you are booking your airline ticket, you can, at the same time, request a “meet and assist” person who will then meet and assist you through the airport(s) on your outbound and return days of travel.

Also, when booking your ticket, make sure the airline(s) have your email address and/or your mobile phone number, so you can be notified of any departure gate changes, which do happen and are nothing to worry about as long as you are made aware of them.

Prior to travelling, plan and make a check list of all the things you will want or need to bring with you, especially those items you cannot do without. And note down the things you’ll need to do before you travel. If travelling abroad, this would include verifying the expiry date of your passport, obtaining medical insurance, and picking up foreign cash. If you will be away for a period of time, it may be wise to pay your home bills in advance. Also, ask someone to pick up your mail while you will be away, or you can pay the post office to hold or redirect your mail.

Prioritize items you’ll put in your carry-on bag. It’s important to put items into your carry-on that you cannot do without, in case your suitcase should go missing for a few days. For example, I wouldn’t want to do without my medication, spare white cane, mobile phone and my bone conduction Bluetooth headset, so I make sure these are all in my carry-on bag. It’s not likely, but it does happen that luggage goes missing for several days.

Know that you must keep any devices with batteries with yourself or in your carry-on bag. Electronic items without batteries may go in your check-in suitcase. Remember that no containers of liquid, aerosol or gel greater than 100 ml (3.4 ounces) can be with you or in your carry-on, so make sure those items go into your suitcase.

Read your ticket to familiarize yourself with the travel information on it, like maximum suitcase weight, your departure gate number, and the recommended airport arrival time for check-in prior to departure.

Learn as much as possible ahead of time when booking your airline ticket about your departure, transfer and final destination airport terminals. Such information could be necessary. For example, will you need to go from Terminal 1 to Terminal 2 at a transfer airport? If so, will you need to pick up your suitcase to clear it through customs, then re-check the suitcase to your final destination airport?

Now, something important to know, should things not go smoothly and you need a little vital assistance at the airport (ferry or train) terminal. Keep a note of phone numbers of their 24-hour security or disability assistance customer care. For peace of mind, these phone numbers may be helpful to have with you in case you need some assistance that you did not predict, or in the event your requested meet and assist team gets clients confused or some detail is missed. (I've included these phone numbers for major Canadian airports at the end of this article.)

Before ever leaving for my destination of Zagreb, Croatia, I basically build a mental picture or map of where the nearest bakery, coffee shop, restaurants, grocery store, tram stops, newsstand, etc, are located to the place I'll be staying. To do this, I use a GPS app called BlindSquare and simulate my destination location to pre-explore the local neighbourhood. I find that the more I know about a place and how to get to things beforehand, reduces my anxiety level and strengthens my confidence.

## **At the Airport Check-in Desk: Where the Magic Begins!**

Ask your driver/taxi driver to help you to the check-in counter for your airline or at least to the customer information desk. The larger airports, like Vancouver and Toronto, have airport staff that are also available to meet you at the taxi drop-off stand and get you to the check-in desk.

If you missed requesting "meet and assist" when you booked your airline ticket, you can still do this now at the check-in desk.

If you have arranged for the meet and assist service, someone will meet you at the check-in desk and guide you through the airport, security, and to your departure gate area.

In my experience, from the check-in counter, a meet and assist person guides me through the security area, is able to show me the washroom, assists me to grab some food on the way to the departure gate and even helps me in purchasing items at the duty free shops before dropping me off at the departure gate.

I always prefer to walk during this process, but should an electric cart (sort-of like a golf cart) be offered, I welcome it, as it makes the long stretches of corridors shorter. In some cases, the meet and assist staff insist in wheeling you in a wheelchair as per their training. Frequently, I can talk them out of wheeling me around, but I must admit that once when going through the Istanbul airport, I had to give in. This was due to a serious language barrier, and my understanding was that the meet and assist service was only available to individuals that needed a wheelchair. So be it, as I had to get to my departure gate there.

I prefer to be taken directly to my departure gate once through the security check, as I can sit there peacefully and wait to board the flight. Many large airports though, have waiting areas for disabled travellers (before being taken to the departure gate), where they like to have people wait until shortly before boarding. This may be preferable if one needs to wait for over two or three hours due to the gate area being closed.

Do not hesitate to make use of airport porters for hire. They can be extremely helpful where one needs to transfer from terminal to terminal. I find that it is well worth spending the \$25 or \$30 to get their friendly help and have them deal with my luggage. Also, the larger airports like Vancouver have airport staff that are available to help one transfer between terminals.

Listen for announcements of gate changes and/or check your mobile phone for such information. The meet and assist staff will usually check for this information before guiding you to your departure gate. But, if you know that the gate has been changed and no one shows up to assist you to the new departure gate, and you know your airplane pre-boarding time – just stand up and start walking towards the desk at the departure gate you are at or the nearest adjacent departure gate. You can usually hear where a desk is by the activity around it. After you take a few steps, help will show up. My experience is that as soon as a person starts to move with a white cane or a guide dog, staff appear out of nowhere to help.

Once boarding the plane begins, the meet and assist person or airline personnel will be there to pre-board you along with the other persons with disabilities, children and often, the first class passengers.

## **Onboard the Airplane: Up, Up and Away!**

Before you even get a chance to settle in your seat, an airline agent will offer to inform you regarding the emergency equipment, escape exits, nearest washrooms and even your call button. They want to be useful, so appear interested even if you have flown frequently and don't really need the information once again. I often tell

them to tap me on the shoulder when attempting to communicate with me, as it isn't always easy to tell when the service agent is trying to talk to me. God forbid I miss a chance to have a free drink!

Prior to landing, in order to assist you, the service agent will likely ask you to stay seated until the rest of the passengers have left the airplane. Frequently, one doesn't feel like waiting, but the system is designed to work this way when you are using the meet and assist service, so I don't fight it. Simply put, the airports I use are massive and it is much easier to go from point A to point B and then point C with the help of a sighted guide. My journeys take about 24 hours from departure to arrival (door to door), so making my travel as easy as possible works for me, especially given the tired state I get in.

When the meet and assist person meets me at the plane, he or she will guide me through the airport and help retrieve my luggage. Finally, I ask the person to show me to the taxi stand where I'll get a taxi to go to my hotel or wherever I plan to stay.

## **At Your Destination: Relax and Enjoy Yourself!**

I find several apps designed for the blind very useful on my iPhone. Apps such as Seeing AI, BlindSquare, Soundscape and Blind Compass give me more independence.

In crowded outdoor, large open areas, like a main square or huge outdoor market, it is very difficult to maintain a straight walking line without my Blind Compass app. With this app, I can maintain my desired direction to where I want to go, like one of the numerous restaurants, shops or to the bank machine.

In the event I lose track of where I am while riding the tram or bus, due to daydreaming or the automated next-stop announcement system is not working, it is necessary to open my BlindSquare app to hear the nearest addresses and other known landmarks, so I know when to get off.

I prefer shopping for groceries at smaller "mom and pop" stores rather than large box stores. It is much easier to find a friendly, helpful salesperson in a smaller shop, and if you go there several times, they get to know you.

I must say that Zagreb is a very friendly, functional, accessible city. On the block where I stay, things are so easy to get to. Just on my side of the block, there are two bakeries, two restaurants, a coffee shop, a chocolate shop, a dollar store, a grocery

store, a newsstand, a bank machine, and good tram service. In the fall there is even an outdoor stand selling roasted chestnuts and corn on the cob.

As I said earlier, before ever getting to Zagreb, I basically build a mental picture or map of the area where I'd be staying. I find that the more I know about the place and how to get around, this reduces my anxiety level and strengthens my confidence. Of course, these days, apps such as AIRA and Be My Eyes can be very useful for real-time sighted assistance. I'm looking forward to trying these apps with my new RayBan Meta glasses.

I hope this information will be of help and inspire more would-be travellers to get out into our wondrous world. There's more to travelling than what you can see. For me, it's meeting up with my many blind friends, some I've known since I was a young kid at the Zagreb school for the blind; it's enjoying the great local food; it's the challenge of getting around by foot and trams to get my groceries, stop in somewhere on a whim for a beer and/or coffee and/or a pastry. I go for an almost-daily walk on a forest trail, and once in a while I hike with the local blind hiking club. With practice, I have learned to become quite independent. And practice is always our key to success. The more we do something, the better we get at it, and the more our confidence grows.

So start planning, preparing – and let's go travelling!

### **Major Canadian Airport Phone Numbers for 24-hour Security or Disability Assistance Customer Care:**

Vancouver 604-207-7077

Calgary 403-735-1234

Victoria 250-953-7511

Edmonton 780-890-8382

Toronto 416-247-7678

Montreal 514-420-5030

Winnipeg 204-987-9798

Regina 306-761-7555

Halifax 902-873-4422 902-873-2091

Saskatoon 306-934-7275

Ottawa 613-248-2025



# I'm blind, but I still wanted to experience my beloved Ireland through my other senses

*A rare genetic condition means I can't see the world as others do. But on a dream vacation to Ireland, I decided I would not miss out.*

by Kerry Kijewski  
Special to *The Star* (*Toronto Star*)  
Updated Nov. 8, 2024

As I step out of the airport in Dublin, I discern that the air feels heavier than it does back home in Canada. It's more humid yet still temperate. What I breathe in and what I hear — the cries of the gulls of Dublin Bay — signal to me, *I'm back*.

These senses are more vivid for me than my sight: I was born with a rare genetic condition ([Leber congenital amaurosis](#)), which meant I saw the world through an extremely narrow tunnel of limited vision. I could see colours until around the time I discovered The Cranberries, when I was just 11. Despite degenerating sight in my adulthood, I was determined to visit and fully experience Ireland, my desire inspired by my love of that band.

When I first visited Dublin, in 2011, I looked out the window of the bus while entering the city centre. Ireland's capital came into view, but it was dim and colourless. I had been dealing with that for years. Still, I was grateful.

From the bus window, I watched the treeline, and then the lines on the highway. Later, as we toured ancient monastic sites, I noticed the distinctive circle-on-cross shape of Celtic crosses. On the dappled grass at the grave of poet William Butler Yeats, I observed sunlight filtering through. These were small glimpses of what most people can see, but they meant everything to me.

Twelve years after that first trip, I returned to travel through my beloved Ireland again. I have friends there, both old and new, and went with one who runs women's-only tours.

Again, I found myself staring out from a bus window, my brain doing a double take. But now, I was seeing a blur compared to what once was. The bright light of a daytime drive was an assault on my open eyes. Just looking hurt me, an exercise in exhaustion and futility. I've had a lifetime to get used to blindness, but the change is still painful.



*Kerry Kijewski in Ireland*

This wasn't the Ireland of my memories. In 2023, there was no point in trying to experience the country as I had before. Nearing tears, feeling frequently queasy from the work that my brain was striving to do, I realized it was no longer fruitful to try to take in this place visually.

We live in a sight-centric world. Fear of the dark is common. The fear of going blind is right up there with that of a cancer diagnosis. The latter is life-threatening, while the former is life-changing, yet highly misunderstood.

But humans have more than our sight. This was a dream vacation. I decided I would not miss out — I would try “seeing” Ireland another way. I would draw upon what I could smell, hear, taste, touch.

As I stood on a beach in County Kerry, I was prompted to try the seaweed, and as the salty flavour spread across my taste buds, it didn't matter that I couldn't see it. When I met a baby goat, I concentrated on feeling the creature's curious tongue on my hand. Another time, as I felt my way along a wall with my hands, I came across some stinging nettles, but the irritation was a small price to pay for exploring the world through touch.

Although unable to see the spectacular vastness of the Cliffs of Moher, I could hear the puffins chattering away and listen intently to the sea, the tide roaring in and rushing out. I thought fondly back on my past views of this horizon, now a sweet memory, as I focused on living in the moment with all my remaining senses.

At a roadside stand, I listened to a fiddler playing a tune, and I moved in time with the music. I have long loved the instrument and even tried to learn in my 30s. Now, my white cane, normally used for detecting objects and environmental changes, became my dancing companion. A cane is often seen as pitiable, but I was proud to have it with me, helping me back to this land that felt like coming home.

**[https://www.thestar.com/life/travel/i-m-blind-but-i-still-wanted-to-experience-my-beloved-ireland-through-my-other/article\\_84ee3c60-983e-11ef-9c6e-ef822316d85c.html](https://www.thestar.com/life/travel/i-m-blind-but-i-still-wanted-to-experience-my-beloved-ireland-through-my-other/article_84ee3c60-983e-11ef-9c6e-ef822316d85c.html)**

# *I Am Blind* (Beech Street Books / Saunders Books, 2024) Children's Nonfiction Book, by Doris Belusic

*"Life without sight can still be good and full. It's an important message to share with young readers in our lives – our children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, students... I Am Blind will engage and inform kids."*



*I Am Blind* is a **grades 3 – 6 children's non-fiction book on blindness**, specifically my own lived experience with blindness. *I Am Blind* tells my story with retinitis pigmentosa (RP) and includes resources like **"11 Ways You Can Assist a Blind Person"** and **"Seven Tips for Blind Children"**. It discusses how blindness can occur, the tools blind people use like braille, the white cane, guide dogs and technology, plus there's photos, poems, a glossary, a listing of famous blind people, and more. The book is informative for students and all young people in our lives – and really, for anyone wanting a better insight into blindness. It is written in plain language and through an authentic and positive perspective – one chapter titled "Life is Good".

This book is part of an *I Am* series (Beech Street Books) in which Canadians share their unique lived experiences in visually engaging books, perfect for primary/elementary grade readers.

**ISBN Hardcover 9781774564707           \$32.95**

**Softcover 9781774565063               \$16.95**

**Digital format also available.**

***I Am Blind* is available at stores like:**

**Munro's Books** (in store or online, shipped worldwide)

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<https://applebks.com/shop/show/68431>



*Doris Belusic with a copy of her book  
in front of Munro's bookstore in  
Victoria. Photo by Thelma Fayle*



# “Unstoppable”

by Sam Margolis

Reprinted from *Inspired 55+ Lifestyle Magazine*, Nov / Dec 2023

<https://www.seniorlivingmag.com/articles/unstoppable/>

At 65, and blind, Victoria's Doris Belusic does not allow the lack of sight to serve as an obstacle to a full and meaningful life. She is a poet, non-fiction writer, children's book author, magazine editor, recent university graduate and, together with her husband, the builder of several houses around the city, including a sevenplex.



*Writer and editor Doris Belusic. Photo: Daryl Jones*

All the while, Doris keeps an active social calendar, plays the guitar and ukulele, travels and, according to everyone who has sampled her cuisine, cooks phenomenal meals.

In her early 20s, Doris was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a degenerative eye disorder of the retina, the inner back layer of the eye which has the visual cells that send images to the brain. When retina cells get damaged, it frequently leads to blindness.

“Often during this long progression of many years, in my case, from sight to blindness, your central tunnel vision can still be fairly clear, until it, too, fades out,”

explains Doris. “Today, seeing anything depends on lighting, the direction of it, glare and so on. Mostly I see light, shapes, blur and sometimes things with strong light-dark contrast.”

“I use a long white cane to get around,” she adds. “It makes all the difference to independence and safety.”

Doris, who spent her professional career in public health, started work as an operating room aide at a local hospital when she was fresh out of high school. She later moved on to being a unit clerk in orthopedics.

In 2006, as she approached 50, the literary bug bit, and Doris began dabbling in poetry. “I can’t say why I started to write poetry, but I was inspired many years earlier as a teen when I heard BBC personality, Pam Ayres, read her humorous poem on a Victoria radio station. I bought her book,” says Doris. “Since then, I’ve written all sorts of poems.”

In 2013, Doris wondered how many more credits she needed to complete her BA degree, as she had spent several years in her early 20s at the University of Victoria and Camosun College.

When she checked into it, she learned she was half-way towards graduating. With some urging from a friend, she decided to finish her BA, which she completed in 2019 at age 61, by taking writing classes to hone her craft.

“I loved going to classes, learning and being amongst the students and professors. It was all very inspiring and fun. It opened my mind and taught me the skills to write well,” she says. “Being a mature student was great. The students were very nice and treated me no differently. Most of them, in their 20s, impressed me by how intelligent they were.”

Going to school, however, was not without its challenges as a blind student. “A friend put a carrot in front of my nose, offering to drive me to classes the first year to make it easy,” recalls Doris. “Each year, she helped me learn the routes from the bus stop to the buildings and to the classrooms. This was crucial for me, so I could travel around and function independently in an unfamiliar setting.”

For the past 25 years, Doris has been a member of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), an organization of blind people that works to improve the lives of blind Canadians through mentoring, advocacy and education. Among CFB’s core philosophical beliefs are that blindness is a characteristic – not a handicap – and that blindness is not what defines people, nor should it hold them back.

For over a decade, Doris has been the editor of the CFB's publication, *The Blind Canadian*. Each issue of the magazine focuses on the lives of blind people around the country, on their accomplishments and on advocacy for the breaking down of barriers to the blind wherever they may exist.

"Through CFB I have learned most of what I know about blindness and the abilities of blind people," she says. "CFB has had some super role models and mentors over the years. The organization holds a positive philosophy on blindness and knows that with equality and opportunity blind people can live the lives they want."

Earlier this year, Doris completed a Grade 3-6 children's book, *I Am Blind* (Beech Street Books, 2024).

"It's a lived experience book," she says about the project. "I am hoping it may be of interest to those who are thinking about buying books for the little people in their lives. This nonfiction children's book is full of messages that I have been sharing in my advocacy role with the CFB."

Next up on Doris's to-do list is publishing a book of poetry.

"It's a dream of mine," she says.

No doubt she'll make it a reality.



*CFB Celebrating 25  
Years!*

# Kay's Chapter in *Others Like Me*

by Kerry Kijewski

*Editor's note: Kerry's chapter in the book, Others Like Me, is titled "Kay, 34, Canadian, writer". It is beautifully written. Congratulations on having your work published!*

I arrived in Ireland in October 2024, to join my friend and author of the book *Others Like Me: The Lives of Women Without Children*, at her favourite bookstore. This book, published through House of Anansi, has also come out in North America on November 5, 2024.



We were at the bookstore for an intimate, frank and open discussion about our lives without children of our own. We were talking with others who could empathize to the intricacies of the paths we were on, unlike that of so many around us and in our lives. Having kids is such a common life path.

The stigma of the old maid, the childless cat lady persists and this book wanted to showcase a fresh perspective on another, totally valid way of going through life.

I'd met Nicole Louie online in 2018 after she'd found my writing. She was researching for a book she'd been working on for years, about her life and the lives of other women from all around the world, who were living without children due to a myriad of reasons. She asked to hear more of my story and a sort-of working friendship developed. My story highlighted, for those who have no real experience with blindness, including Louie, that being blind is part of my story but not the main factor in my not having a child.

When the book was eventually finished, when agent and publisher had been found, Nicole informed me my story had made the cut and would be included as a chapter in the final product. And this project that meant so much to her, has meant so much to me this year.

So at Hodges and Figgis bookstore in the heart of Dublin, with my beloved Dublin Bay sea gulls as audible backdrop, we shared about the book's journey and I spoke about my involvement in it with the group there, a room full of people whose lives had also been directly affected by the decision or life circumstance of not having a child.



# Canada Post Rules Regarding Mailing Materials for the Blind Postage Free

*When attempting to send Braille materials free to other blind people, I've discovered that most local postal outlets have no idea about the rules or that Braille can be sent without postage. Someone suggested that we publish the official Canada Post rules so they're easy to find. Publishing them in The Blind Canadian might be a valuable service.*

~ Mary Ellen Gabias



## Materials for the Use of the Blind Regulations

C.R.C., c. 1283

### CANADA POST CORPORATION ACT

## Regulations Respecting the Conditions Under Which Materials for the Use of the Blind may be Sent by Post Free of Postage

### Short Title

1. These Regulations may be cited as the [Materials for the Use of the Blind Regulations](#).

### Interpretation

2. The following definitions apply in these Regulations.

*material for the use of the blind* means

- (a) matter impressed in Braille or similar raised type;
- (b) plates for manufacturing matter described in paragraph (a),

- (c) tapes, records and other sound recordings posted by the blind in Canada; and
- (d) tapes, records, other sound recordings and special paper intended solely for the use of the blind if mailed by or addressed to a recognized institution for the blind. (documentation à l'usage des aveugles)

*postage* means the charge payable for the handling and conveyance of material for the use of the blind. (affranchissement)

## Limits of Size

3. Material for the use of the blind sent by post in Canada may be sent free of postage if

- (a) for delivery in Canada,
  1. (i) the combined length, width and depth of the material does not exceed 2 m with the greatest measurement not exceeding 1 m, and
  2. (ii) the material is not less than 10 cm in length and 7 cm in width;
- (b) for delivery outside Canada,
  1. (i) the combined length, width and depth of the material does not exceed 90 cm with the greatest measurement not exceeding 60 cm, and
  2. (ii) the material is not less than 14 cm in length and 9 cm in width.

([Previous Version 4 and 5](#) Revoked)

## Maximum Weight

6. The maximum weight of any item of material for the use of the blind that may be sent by post under these Regulations is 7 kg.

## Conditions

- 7. (1) Every item of material for the use of the blind shall, if for delivery in Canada,
  - (a) by means of marking, printing or labelling, bear the words "Literature for the blind" or "Documentation à l'usage des aveugles" in the upper right corner on the address side of the item; or
  - (b) bear on the address side of the item a label in a form approved by the Corporation.
- (2) Every item of material for the use of the blind shall, if for delivery outside of Canada,

- (a) by means of marking, printing or labelling, bear the words “Cécogrammes” or “Cécogrammes (Literature for the blind)” in the upper right corner on the address side of the item; or
- (b) bear on the address side of the item a label in a form approved by the Corporation.
- (3) Every item referred to in subsection (2) shall meet all applicable customs documentation requirements as described in the [\*International Letter-Post Items Regulations\*](#).
- (4) Every item of material for the use of the blind shall be prepared for posting in such a way that its contents are sufficiently protected while permitting quick and easy verification.
- (5) Every item of material for the use of the blind shall be accepted for registered mail or, in Canada, Xpresspost™ mail at no charge.

Source:

[https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/C.R.C.,\\_c.\\_1283/index.html](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/C.R.C.,_c._1283/index.html)

## **Philanthropy vs Philanthro‘pathy’**

by Mary Ellen Gabias

Philanthropy is defined as “altruistic concern for human welfare and advancement.” Because blind people have generally been less well off physically, financially, and socially than our sighted peers, we have historically been the recipients, and sadly often the objects of philanthropy. Although the paternalism frequently tied to generous impulses has made philanthropy a very mixed experience for us, nobody criticizes others for having altruistic concern for our flourishing.

Recently though, leaders have devised a new concept of philanthropy gone awry. “Philanthropathy” occurs when altruistic impulses are perverted to serve nefarious ends. Examples might include providing a service without informed consent, such as offering indigent patients medication from the donor company only, even though potentially better alternatives might be available. Or a philanthropath might tie delivery of clearly beneficial service to an unrelated action – telling villagers they can have a well in their community only if they agree to market their agricultural products through a donor-favored corporation.

The most insidious philanthropathy occurs when organizations betray their constituents by skewing their activities to fit the “flavor of the month” priorities of funders. There is nothing wrong with seeking funders who support your general

priorities and crafting your request to catch their interest and earn their support. But when “organizations choose to behave contrary to the best interest of the people they are meant to serve in order to raise funds, the line between philanthropy and philanthopathy has been crossed.

Blind Canadians have experienced philanthopathy as much more than an academic discussion. Two examples within the last decade demonstrate how philanthopathy represents a clear danger to our flourishing. (The decisions made about alternate format reading material could also fall into the category of philanthopathy, but two less complex issues describe the phenomenon adequately, so the alternate format discussion can be left for another time.)

Within the past ten years, blind people and donors were surveyed concerning the advisability of CNIB creating a guide dog training program. Blind Canadians, through their organizations and through individual responses, clearly did not want CNIB to enter the guide dog space. Donors thought doing so was a marvelous idea.

Blind Canadians cited several reasons. Four guide dog schools already existed in Canada and it was feared that they could not adequately compete with the juggernaut of CNIB fund-raising, as well as its much higher name recognition. The existing schools had all the capacity needed to fill requests. In fact, some schools had begun to train dogs to serve people with disabilities other than blindness because their classes were not sufficiently filled with blind students. Many blind Canadians chose to travel to the United States to receive their dogs because they valued freedom of choice and found the interchange of information and ideas with American blind people valuable. If CNIB were to compete with American schools, the U.S. programs might hesitate to take Canadian students.

Donors misperceived the high number of Canadians attending U.S. schools as a problem rather than a choice because that’s how the issue was presented to them. They overwhelmingly believed that CNIB was attempting to fill a gap rather than to monopolize a lucrative public relations and funding opportunity. So donors urged CNIB to move forward. CNIB did so!

Although the pandemic has complicated teasing out the reasons for unfortunate changes in guide dog waiting lists and other issues, some ominous trends are appearing. At least one blind person was queried at the border about the reason for attending a U.S. school when CNIB trains guide dogs. (This was a question; no attempt was made to stop the blind person, but the mere fact that the issue was raised is unsettling.) Because CNIB is almost always the first contact newly-blind Canadians have with “the blindness system,” the CNIB guide dog program has a clear recruiting advantage. Blind people feared a CNIB guide dog monopoly; they

have reason to. Ironically, students applying to CNIB for dogs face waiting lists, something the program promised to reduce or eliminate.

Floating bus stops requiring pedestrians to cross active bike lanes constitute a clear danger. Because a blind pedestrian cannot hear bikes traversing the lane in front of them, injury-inducing collisions are highly possible. When Victoria built “kamikaze” bike lanes, the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) filed a human rights complaint. From our vantage point the issue was simple. We are determined to be responsible for ourselves, but cannot when the environment is built so that we are not response “able”.

The judge agreed that Victoria had discriminated against blind pedestrians. Instead of ordering the barrier removed by requiring the city to return bus stops to the curb where they have always been, he prescribed a “remedy” that gave us no agency over our safety. Knowing that blind people found his “remedy” completely unacceptable, he urged government to study the issue.

Governments at all levels are deeply committed to hardscaped bike lanes and found blind citizens who insisted on the protection of our human rights a frustrating barrier to their efforts. They settled on “consultation” schemes to demonstrate their interest in our welfare while still getting precisely the bike lanes with floating bus stops they wanted.

Blind Canadians were in no way surprised when the opening salvo in this “consultation charm offensive” was hiring CNIB to conduct a “thorough study” of the issue. Having received government funding, CNIB needed to look as if they had done something meaningful to earn the cash. An adequate study could be summarized in one paragraph.

“Never build environments that don’t permit transit buses to load and unload passengers at the curb. Floating bus stops are dangerous and discriminatory because blind people cannot hear speeding bicycles and are therefore unable to keep themselves safe.”

That’s it! The problem is clear. The solution is obvious.

But speaking truth to power tends to dry up future funding. Keeping simple things simple doesn’t look “professional.”

The CNIB study that could have supported our insistence on fair and dignified treatment created additional barriers for us by helping confuse the issue: How will blind people find the crosswalk to get to the floating stop? What sorts of tactile

markings are best? What contrasting colors are needed to mark the pathway? Should there be an audible pedestrian signal? If yes, should it beep, speak, or both? If it speaks, what should it say? How should the audio announcements on the bus be worded? Should Braille and large raised print signs be placed on bus stop poles? How many focus groups of blind people need to be assembled and in which cities?

What should have been a short declarative position statement turned into a multi-page document with a table of contents, charts, and all the pompous language of an academic research paper. The result? Transit systems are building floating bus stops that require pedestrians to cross active bicycle pathways and justifying the discrimination by pointing to the CNIB study and all the “special” shiny objects they’ve put in place so that blind people will find it more “comfortable” to arrive at the spot where they will potentially be smushed!

Governments and CNIB have used one another; CNIB got money; governments got cover for discriminating. Blind people got nothing of value.

Philanthropy is the practice of using one’s reputation for doing good works to hide your betrayal of the people you claim to serve, especially when betrayal is good for the bottom line.



*CFB Celebrating 25  
Years!*

# Accessibility Issues Regarding Floating Island Bus Stops

*Castanet*, Kelowna, BC, Letters, published November 16, 2023

Until recently, bicycles have shared streets with cars – and the results have been tragic for far too many cyclists.

It's not that drivers are out to "get" bikes; it's that even the most conscientious vehicle operator can suffer from a lapse of attention of a few seconds with tragic results.

Cities have long marked bike lanes with paint in the same way all other lanes were marked. That worked – sort of. If necessary, cars could physically enter the bike lanes, and many did. The accident rate remained unacceptably high. Cyclists are justifiably scared to share space with motor vehicles.

Pedestrians don't want to share space with cyclists, either. Bikes are not allowed on most city sidewalks because of the obvious danger to pedestrians.

Five years ago the City of Victoria created dedicated bike lanes to protect cyclists from road accidents. One feature of this construction was the "floating bus stop." Rather than allowing a city bus to pick up passengers at the curb as has always been the case, pedestrians were required to cross active bike lanes to board or disembark. Floating bus stops violate the longstanding convention of keeping walkers and cyclists apart and put pedestrians – all pedestrians – at risk.

Because blind pedestrians use their hearing to know when it's safe to cross, and it is impossible to hear a bicycle on a busy street, the floating bus stop is an even greater risk for us. Imagine being fully sighted and crossing a bike lane where all cyclists are shrouded with Harry Potter invisibility cloaks? How safe would you feel? How safe would you be?

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) filed a Human Rights Tribunal case against the City of Victoria. The heart of the complaint was simple. Blind people cannot hear bicycles and therefore have no agency to protect our safety. We could not be responsible for ourselves if we were not response able. There was some discussion of tangential design features, but safety was the central issue.

The judge agreed that the design was discriminatory on its face. However, the City didn't want to alter their design and the judge undermined his own decision and the

access rights of blind people by allowing bike lanes to proliferate but mandating what he falsely believed were acceptable remedial measures. He shifted the focus from the real problem of our inability to hear bicycle traffic to the distraction of developing “special features for the blind.”

The City of Kelowna is partnering with TransLink to do what governments often do – study the issue. Last week I took part in a review of two Kelowna shared use designs, Sutherland at Ethel and Clement and Gordon at the beginning of the Rail Trail.

The experience was a frustrating demonstration of how loss of focus makes simple things complex, and concentrating on “special” features short circuits basic reasoning.

A group of persons with disabilities and an equal number of city staff began our exploration with a briefing. Staff was kind, courteous, and earnestly interested in hearing what we had to say. One staff member was tasked with riding his bike along the bike pathway to find out whether we could hear him pass. He promised to be a considerate cyclist, but reminded us that there would be people in the area unaware of the study in progress, including “wild bikes.” Staff assured us they would be on hand to prevent any difficulties. “Aren’t “wild bikes” kind of the point?” I asked. They seemed bemused by the question.

The staffer rode past us at least twice at each location. I only know because I asked; I never heard him. “If I can’t hear the bikes passing, the design is a ‘no go’ in my view.” The staffer wrote my comment on a blank space on his questionnaire. That should have been the end of it, but it wasn’t.

My staff guide pointed out several “special” features, such as variations in pavement textures intended to provide information. I’d barely recognized the textures, and thought the ridges were mistakes in concrete pouring; I had no clue that they were supposed to mean something. I did recognize the domes typical of others installed at crosswalks around Kelowna, but the creative new textures were lost on me.

Perhaps the most humorous moment occurred when I was shown a Braille sign on a bus stop pole. It gave the stop ID in both Braille and raised print, which is an extremely valuable addition. Knowing the stop ID makes looking up schedules on line much more efficient. Also, unless there’s a bench or shelter nearby, it’s impossible to know whether a pole signifies a bus stop or a sign for something else. But the Braille continued. It explained that this bus stop was near a bike lane. We both laughed when I pointed out that I’d already crossed the lane before finding the Braille sign and wouldn’t think to look at the bus stop pole when I was getting off the bus. But it was a



“special” Braille sign; the point was the Braille, not the reasonableness of the information it provided.

No doubt city design engineers were earnest and diligent in their efforts to make floating bus stops workable, but they could have saved their efforts if they’d answered the one meaningful question at the outset. Can bikes be heard? Since the answer is a resounding “NO!” why create features that will make it more “accessible” for me to enter a space where I may potentially be smushed?

On the Rail Trail, all that is needed is to clearly mark a sidewalk width strip close to the streets for pedestrians only and move the bus shelter to that side of the path. On Sutherland and at all similarly designed locations, make it possible for a bus to pull into the bike lane to allow passengers to board and exit. Since buses are scheduled approximately every half hour and many times nobody is waiting at a stop or wants to get off there, cyclists would be minimally inconvenienced. Leaving things as currently designed is dangerous. All the “special” features don’t improve my hearing; they’re an absurd needless expense that gives the appearance of accessibility but eliminate safe access.

Mary Ellen Gabias, Immediate Past President  
Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB)

## **‘Quite Devastated’: Blind B.C. Woman Says She Was Kicked Off the Bus Due to Guide Dog**

by [Amy Judd & Kylie Stanton](#), *Global News*

Posted June 29, 2023 6:29 pm

A blind Nanaimo woman says she's had run-ins with a pair of transit drivers over the past five weeks and has had buses pass her by as she waited with her guide dog for a ride.

*From The Blind Canadian editor: these email excerpts come from our CFB listserv in regards with this guide dog / bus discrimination that Donna was subjected:*

*Donna Hudon: “And now I have extreme anxiety to even go to work and come home...More than twice in a span of six weeks, being denied in some way, shape or form, has absolutely made me consider this to be a problem. That’s why I’m standing out. Working towards changes.”*

*Mary Ellen Gabias: "Donna, you did a magnificent job with this! You stood your ground. I hope we can resolve this. BC Transit has no right to ask for certification. They need to understand that...The comments attributed to BC Transit in the news are disturbing and I believe CFB needs to ask for clarification."  
(The letter CFB sent to BC Transit follows this Global News article.)*

**<https://globalnews.ca/news/9803003/blind-transit-rider-kicked-off-bus-guide-dog/>**

A woman from Nanaimo, B.C., says she was kicked off a bus recently because of her guide dog.

Donna Hudon, 54, went **blind** when she was 23 due to retinitis pigmentosa. It was shortly after she lost her sight that she contacted the Canadian **Guide Dog** Association.

Her current dog, Kobe, helps her take the bus to work all the time.

"So to find the bus stop, I will ask my dog to find the bench and then he will point," Hudon told Global News.

"When a bus arrives, I will tell him to find the bus, find the door and he'll, you know, take me on to the bus."

But recently, Hudon said she has had some trouble with taking Kobe on to the bus with her.

About five weeks ago, she said the bus driver pulled up at her spot, they got on and the driver asked to see her papers.

"I said to him, 'Do you think I'm not blind?'" Hudon said.

"And he said, 'I want to see your papers'. I sat down. I said to him, 'You do know that asking for identification and stopping like this is against the Guide Dog Act?'"

But she said the driver insisted on seeing them and he wouldn't move the bus until he did.

Hudon then said she showed him the papers, which showed her ID and that she is blind and can take the bus for free.

**The Blind Canadian 40**

She then showed him her current B.C. guide dog registration card but she said the driver still insisted on seeing her papers.

Hudon said she dropped an f-bomb at that point, which she is not proud about and the driver told her to get off the bus.

“I did not get off at that point actually,” she said. “I sat back down and I said, ‘OK, well I’m just going to phone the police because honestly, this is just bad’.”

The driver then called his boss and the bus sat there until roadside assistance showed up. At that point, Hudon said she showed him the same ID she showed the driver and was told that those papers were sufficient to prove she can board the bus for free with Kobe.

“I talked to somebody today with the Guide Dog Service Act in Victoria and they told me that you’re not, in Canada, allowed to ask somebody to prove they have a disability,” Hudon added. “Which in essence he’s doing when he’s asking me for my guide dog registration to take a bus.”

She said in the past buses have actually passed her by and not stopped to pick her up.

She even had a friend offer to stand with her at the bus stop and the bus would stop to pick her up.

The second time her friend came with her, she didn’t actually get on the bus, but Hudon did and said the bus driver asked her why her dog wasn’t wearing its red vest.

“I said to her, ‘Guide dogs don’t wear red jackets. It could have been a post-traumatic stress disorder dog that you’re thinking of, an anxiety dog, a dog for hearing impaired,’” Hudon said.

However, it is not necessary for guide dogs to wear a red jacket, she explained. Guide dogs have harnesses for the blind person to hold and those come in many colours but they are still a harness.

Hudon said she did get an apology for the first incident and she was satisfied with that but she was surprised a wider message about guide dogs being allowed to ride the bus did not appear to go out to all the drivers.

She heard from another driver that the one who questioned her about the red jacket was complaining about her to all the other drivers on the radio.

In a statement to Global News, BC Transit said its goal is to ensure everyone who chooses public transit is able to ride the bus, regardless of their accessibility needs.

“We apologize for any hardship or inconvenience this customer experienced, and our organization takes this allegation very seriously,” the company said. “We are investigating this matter with our partners at the Regional District of Nanaimo.

“Guide and service dogs that are certified are allowed on public transit at all times. This does not include emotional support or therapy dogs. For customers using a guide or service dog while travelling on one of BC Transit’s services, the animal must wear its harness or leash. A customer may be asked to produce their Guide Dog and Service Dog Certificate.

“According to the Province of British Columbia, it is reasonable to expect a guide or service dog to be well-behaved, clean, well-groomed, free of offensive odours and healthy.”

Hudon said she wanted to speak out because she was embarrassed by what happened and she is now fearful that buses are just going to drive by and not pick her up.

“I’m really quite devastated,” she said “I feel I present myself very well as an individual in my community.

“My guide dog is not posing any problems and for somebody to feel like they have to stop me to get my identification to make sure that he is a guide dog, I feel is against my rights as a human being.”



*CFB  
Celebrating  
25 Years!*

# CFB Writes to BC Transit Following *Global News* Article of June 29, 2023

*Editor's note: CFB felt it important to write BC Transit in regards with comments made, attributed to them, in a Global News article (see previous article in this magazine issue) regarding transporting blind persons with guide dogs on buses. It came about through Donna Hudon's discriminatory experiences from drivers on Nanaimo, BC buses.*

August 2023

BC Transit

Erinn Pinkerton, President and CEO

Dear Erinn Pinkerton,

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) is an organization of blind Canadians committed to the complete and equitable integration of blind persons into community life. Full and fair access to public transit is integral to our success.

BC Transit has made commendable strides in making information available to us, particularly in the installation of audible stop announcements on buses.

We are writing to clarify the position of BC Transit on the carriage of blind persons accompanied by guide dogs. The question arose because of a position attributed to BC Transit in a recent *Global News* article concerning Donna Hudon, a blind woman in Nanaimo who reported discrimination on Nanaimo buses contracted by BC Transit. BC Transit was quoted as saying that drivers are permitted to request identification and certification from blind persons who use guide dogs for mobility.

We in CFB believe requests for verification of legitimacy of guide dog handlers may be a violation of the BC Human Rights code. [Human Rights in BC - Protections for people with disabilities who require a guide or service dog \(gov.bc.ca\)](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/soc/humanrights/humanrights_in_bc_protections_for_people_with_disabilities_who_require_a_guide_or_service_dog)

If a person is travelling on a BC Transit bus using the free concession available to the blind, then disability has already been proven. The only legitimate question should be "What service does your dog provide?" It is not the job of a transit driver to act as a credentialing gate keeper. A misbehaving dog may be removed from a transit bus no matter its certification status. In fact, if a dog is not being kept under proper control by its handler, no amount of certifying documents will mitigate the problem. If a dog is

guiding its handler with no behavior issues, then it does not matter who certified the team or whether the team was certified. Behavior is the only legitimate issue.

The CFB is asking BC Transit to inform its drivers – including drivers who work for subcontractors – that asking to see guide dog credentials is an unacceptable violation of human rights. Any dog not kept under control can, and should, be removed from any BC Transit bus. Adhering to this simple concept will save drivers from taking on a role for which they are not equipped. It will also clarify the rights and the responsibilities of guide dog handlers and eliminate a huge source of anxiety for people who do not want to face potential confrontations for simply going about their daily business.

Sincerely,  
Douglas Lawlor, President  
Canadian Federation of the Blind



*CFB Celebrating 25  
Years!*

## **Vancouver cafe ordered to pay visually impaired woman \$12K for discrimination**

Georgia Pike, a 28-year-old Victoria, B.C. woman who uses a guide dog to navigate, says she and her father were refused service by Ooh La La Cafe because they were accompanied at the time by her guide dog, Grainger.

### **People with disabilities face significant barriers to filing human rights complaints, experts say**

By Emily Fagan · *CBC News* · Posted: Aug 15, 2023 8:04 PM EDT | Last Updated August 16

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/guide-dog-discrimination-1.6937500>

The B.C. Human Rights Tribunal has ruled in favour of a visually impaired woman who says a Vancouver café discriminated against her in September 2019.

Georgia Pike, a 28-year-old Victoria, B.C. woman, who prefers the term visually impaired to blind, uses a guide dog to navigate. She says she and her father were refused service by the Ooh La La café because they were accompanied at the time by her guide dog, Grainger.

After Pike spent nearly four years fighting her case, the tribunal has found the café's actions to be discriminatory and ordered it to pay her \$12,000. Pike is grateful for the outcome and the support she received from her father and the University of Victoria Law Centre but says she wishes the process was simpler.

"For one morning when I was denied service, it's taken four years and a tremendous amount of energy just to have an outcome," she said.

"I think about all of the other people who use guide dogs who have been denied service and who don't have the time or means or energy to pursue any justice through that incident, and there's gotta be an easier way."



*Georgia Pike and her former guide dog, Grainger.  
(Submitted by Georgia Pike.)*

William Thornton, CEO of B.C. and Alberta Guide Dogs, says that the long legal process can be a barrier to those who feel they've faced discrimination.

"Many individuals who have guide dogs may not have the financial means to see it through.

### **'Exhausting and demoralizing'**

Pike says she typically encounters people every day who push back when she tries to navigate public spaces with her current guide dog. In these situations, she shows her dog's identification and explains that they're legally allowed to accompany her, which she says normally ends any dispute.



"It's exhausting and demoralizing," Pike said. "It's difficult to travel with ease, and especially since this interaction with the café owner in 2019, I have been much more reluctant to travel on my own because of the negative impact that the incident had on me."

Pike and her father, Tobin Pike, were on their way to a doctor's appointment in Vancouver when they stopped at Ooh La La cafe to eat. She says they were asked to leave by Lu James Li, the café owner at the time, because of her guide dog.

According to a video Pike submitted to the tribunal, they were asked by Li repeatedly to leave, even after explaining that Grainger was a service dog.

Li claimed Pike walked into the café without the assistance of a guide dog, which he said resembled a different dog that he believed to be a pet, according to the tribunal.

In its decision, the tribunal found Pike's claims to be credible and that the impact of this encounter "justifies a \$12,000 order of compensation for injury to her dignity, feelings, and self-respect."

In the wake of that experience, Pike says she has been less willing to go out alone, even to the grocery store, as she wants witnesses with her in case she faces discrimination.

"It defeats the purpose of a guide dog, which is to increase independence," she said.

## **An ongoing struggle**

Pike credits the success of her case to the persistence of her father, who filed the complaint but died before the tribunal released its decision.

"The way this ruling has gone is in big part [because of] him and his persistence and ability to advocate for me," she said.

She hopes the decision will raise awareness for other guide dog users about their rights.

Tommy Leung, advocacy program lead for the Canadian National Institute for the Blind in B.C. and the Yukon, says a lack of awareness contributes to the backlash faced by guide dog users.

"When you're denying the dog, you're actually denying the person with disabilities their human rights," said Leung.

"It's sad that as guide dog handlers, we have to keep advocating. The battle's not over."

"A guide dog is almost equal in many ways  
to giving a blind man sight itself. "

*~ Britain's first recipient of a seeing eye dog, 1931*

# CFB Writes to Media Regarding Maria's Taxi Refusal at Hospital at Night

Canadian Federation of the Blind  
P.O. Box 8007  
Victoria, B.C.  
V8W 3R7

For the attention of *Global News* journalists

Reason for contacting *Global News*:

As an executive member of the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), a grass-roots organization of blind citizens promoting social equity, I am writing on behalf of Maria Kovacs, one of our members.

On 29th February, 2024, Maria Kovacs, a blind lady with her guide dog, was being discharged from hospital at 4:10 a.m. The nurses called her a taxi. Taxi no. 25 of Alouette Taxi in Maple Ridge arrived. The taxi driver refused to take her as she had a guide dog. Under the Offence Act, connected to the B.C. Guide Dog and Service Dog Act, the police have always had the authority to issue a \$288.00 fine for refusing service, which is against the law. Not long ago the Victoria Police issued a communication to all taxi companies regarding this offence and the fine involved.

For several weeks, Maria has been pressing the police to serve the ticket without success. On 3rd April the RCMP emailed her saying they were closing the case as they had been unable to get a response from the taxi company. The RCMP inexplicably advised Maria to go to human rights.

Maria and many other blind people have suffered frequent public access refusals usually, but not exclusively, with taxis across the province. This is primarily due to a lack of enforcement. Maria, therefore, wishes the RCMP to administer the fine to make the taxi company comply with the law as the legislation demands.

The purpose of legislation is to prevent abusive behaviour to disabled people and, therefore, there should be no need for any blind person to try and defend what has already been decided. People should never have to go to human rights when there is a simple and effective deterrent readily available. Legislation is already in place

stating that refusing public access to a blind person is a serious offence. Repeated violations impact many blind people.

Such systemic social rejection takes a huge toll on already marginalized minorities. Blind people are often unsure of retraining with a new guide dog due to this unaddressed targeting of vulnerable taxi and allied service customers.

Scheduling important appointments is full of uncertainty, anguish and frustration with constant delays and direct refusals.

The public needs to understand that blind people have specific legislative rights and we must have support from the police like everyone else. This has and continues to be an ongoing problem.

Thank you for your kind attention to this important matter and we look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Graeme McCreath  
Executive Member, Canadian Federation of the Blind  
Member of It's Your Right

## **For the Record – Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Members Elect National Executive Board for 2023 - 2024**

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) held elections for its National Executive Board at its Annual General Meeting on September 9, 2023. It was held via Zoom. All members of the Executive are blind and serve in their positions without compensation.

This year, positions of First Vice President, Secretary, Member at Large were up for scheduled election. Also, due to a vacancy, the position of Treasurer was also up for election and will be a one-year term to finish off the term.

- **First Vice President:** Members elected Oriano Belusic.
- **Secretary:** Members elected Doris Belusic.
- **Member at Large:** Members elected Graeme McCreath.
- **Treasurer:** Members elected Mary Ellen Gabias.

Congratulations and thank you to the new CFB Executive Board. We are again in good hands!

Members are grateful to:

- Douglas Lawlor for his continued service as President,
- Nancy Gill for her continued service as Second Vice President.
- Mary Ellen Gabias for her continued role as Immediate Past President.

Thank you to all for your hard work, dedication and service.

And thank you to everyone who helps make CFB a success.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is an organization of blind people committed to the equality and empowerment of blind Canadians. Through advocacy, public education and mentoring, members work for change, promote a positive perspective on blindness and together gain confidence and skills.

## **Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) Members Elect National Executive Board for 2024 - 2025**

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) held elections for its National Executive Board at its Annual General Meeting on Saturday, June 8, 2024. It was held via Zoom. All members of the Executive are blind and serve in their positions without compensation.

This year, positions of President, Second Vice President, and Treasurer were up for scheduled election.

- **President:** Members re-elected Doug Lawlor.
- **Second Vice President:** It was decided to keep this position vacant.
- **Treasurer:** Members re-elected Mary Ellen Gabias.

Congratulations and thank you to the new CFB Executive Board. We are again in good hands!

Members are grateful to:

- Oriano Belusic for his continued service as First Vice President,
- Graeme McCreath for his continued service as Member at Large.
- Mary Ellen Gabias also for her continued role as Immediate Past President.

Thank you to all for your hard work, dedication and service.

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## **Rest in Peace, Ken Westlake**

**March 28, 1950 - August 4, 2023**

Remembrance by Mary Ellen Gabias

Saying “Thank you” to a friend for the last time is never easy, especially since this friend has been part of the blind movement for more than thirty-two years.

Paul met Ken Westlake on a Kelowna bus. They hit it off immediately. Soon we came to know Ken, his wife Bev, and their daughter Cassandra (who will always be Cassie to me).

Some people are shameless self-promoters. Ken was the polar opposite. He was so intent on helping others shine that he hid his own light under a bushel.

He joined us in founding NFB:AE in 1992 and served on its board, and later on its staff. He was generous with his time, his cash, and his encouragement.

Ken lost his sight as a result of a horrendous automobile accident. He was rear-ended by a drunk driver traveling at nearly a hundred miles per hour (miles, not kilometers). He was fortunate to live and his recovery took a long time. Just as he was getting back to work, he fell off a loading dock because he had lost his night vision. He was declared legally blind and unemployed within two days. Unfortunately, an ophthalmologist said he had become blind from retinitis pigmentosa, even though his blindness was sudden and there was no history of RP in his family. ICBC refused to compensate him, and Ken didn't know enough about the eye condition or the ICBC system to contest. By the time we met him and heard his story, the statute of limitation had expired.

With no training in blindness skills, Ken went to Okanagan College to earn credentials in computer programming. He taught himself access technology. Despite tremendous struggles, he never failed a course. He did, however, come to the conclusion that he needed to learn more about how to be blind.

Paul worked with Ken's rehabilitation counsellor to get him funding to attend Blind, Incorporated, the NFB training center in Minneapolis. Though it put tremendous strain on his family, they encouraged him to go. Ken returned with more skill, more confidence, and a deep commitment to help other blind Canadians get the same opportunity.

He was hired to work for the NFB:AE and remained on staff after the organization divided into the AEBC and the CFB. Throughout the rest of his life, Ken maintained good working relations with all of his colleagues in both organizations.

Ken retired in 2002 after a stroke. The family moved to Penticton, and later to Oliver. While in Penticton, Ken was struck by a truck when crossing the street. The accident was the fault of the driver, but being in the right didn't relieve him of the pain. His knee was permanently injured. Yet when we visited him, the first thing out of his mouth was a sincere "Is there anything I can do to help CFB?" I was humbled, but not at all surprised.

Ken's moving account of his experiences at Blind Inc. was the spiritual impetus for our 2015 "March for Change and Choice" in Victoria. He marched with us that day and has continued to march with us in his heart. Bev has faced an increasingly

difficult bout with cancer; Ken's continued day after day care for her was just one more example of his commitment to serve and of the depth of his Christian faith.

In July he became ill. Testing suggested that his immune system had been gravely suppressed by undiagnosed lymphoma, but the infection took his life before treatment could begin.

Ken always did what he could. There were times when our efforts seemed to bear little fruit. Then a phone call would come from Ken with an expression of appreciation for our work. Whenever we asked for letters, he would write them, even though his stroke had made writing a misery for him.

He was extremely proud of Cassie and her partner and three children. He loved being a Grandpa and was never more cheerful than when he was telling of the latest exploits of the twins and their little brother.

Whenever Ken and I were finishing a conversation, I could count on him saying "Good-bye, we'll carry on relentlessly." Yes, Ken, we will.

## **John Rae, Canadian Disability Rights Champion Passes Away On April 8, 2022**

Memoriam reprinted from CILT website, April 12, 2022

**<https://cilt.ca/john-rae-canadian-disability-rights-champion-passes-away-on-april-8-2022/>**

On April 8, 2022, the disability community in Canada lost a fierce champion for disability rights whose influence and voice will be deeply missed.

John Rae, a colleague and ally of many disability advocates across Canada, passed away on that day in Toronto, during a health emergency. In his seventies, blind since childhood, and long retired from the Ontario government, John was a dedicated advocate of disability and human rights issues for over thirty years.

He tirelessly performed policy and advocacy work that helped improve accessibility and inclusion for the Blind and broader disability communities, partnering with a legion of local, provincial and national coalitions and groups over the decades. A fraction of these include organizations like The Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians (AEBC) and The Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD), the ODSP



Action Coalition, Ontario legal clinics, the GTA Disability Coalition and CILT, to whom he was a generous loyal friend.

John Rae was a brilliant and jovial man and one of those engaging storytellers with a sharp wit. He often used these gifts to entertain and enlighten his many comrades, but also to critique government on their ableist policies and practices. John was also a policy wonk and rarely passed on a chance to give policy advice to government—whether invited to or not. He saw their ableist structures as needing to be dismantled and reimaged and would often lecture politicians on how to rebuild them with disabled people in mind.

John was well known as a fierce defender of the disability community and conducted his activism work like a soldier. Many colleagues will remember feeling honored to have been in the trenches with John working for social change on issues like accessible housing, livable social assistance rates, and inclusive public spaces. Most of us will miss his generous loyal heart, courageous spirit, and his love of banter, a great joke and a good meal. CILT offers sincere condolences to all of you who knew him. Rest in Peace and Power, John Rae.

*(The Blind Canadian editor post script: CFB is grateful to John Rae who generously gifted CFB in his will.)*

## **Pacific Training Centre for the Blind: Supporting Skills, Confidence and Independence**

At the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind (PTCB), we believe that blind individuals are fully capable of taking charge of their own lives. Our role is to provide the tools, skills, and environment where they can hone their confidence and independence. Please join us in empowering blind people to achieve their goals.

Meet Janel, a recent participant: “At PTCB, I’ve improved my Braille skills, learned to navigate confidently with my white cane and guide dog, and gained the independence to explore new places, like stores and medical offices. What I value most is how PTCB encourages me to embrace life fully and believe in my own strengths.”

For many, like Dorothy, PTCB provides opportunities to discover new skills: “PTCB has given me the confidence and tools to adapt to new challenges in life. Through

their guidance, I've gained essential skills and a renewed belief in my ability to live the life I choose."

We also support lifelong learners like Anita, who shared: "When I came to PTCB, I wasn't using a cane and struggled with mobility. Learning to use a long white cane was a game-changer, lowering my stress levels and helping me move through the world with greater confidence. Now, I'm mastering Braille, independent travel, and even technology like VoiceOver on my iPhone."

These stories are just a glimpse of how blind individuals are achieving their goals with the right tools and support. Help us raise needed funds to continue providing free training programs that build skills, confidence, and connection for blind people.

The best ways to donate:

- Send an email money transfer to [elizabeth@pacifictrainingcentre.ca](mailto:elizabeth@pacifictrainingcentre.ca)
- Mail a check to 817A Fort Street, Victoria, BC, V8W 1H6

Your support ensures blind individuals can access essential training and resources to lead confident, independent lives.

Thank you for being part of this empowering journey.

Warmest thoughts,  
Elizabeth Lalonde, Executive Director  
Pacific Training Centre for the Blind

*P.S. Names in these stories have been changed to protect the privacy of our participants, but the impact of your support is very real. Thank you for helping us make a difference.*



*CFB Celebrating 25 Years!*

## Giving to CFB

### Donate Today: Help Change What it Means to be Blind

By donating to the Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB), you help make a significant difference in the lives of blind Canadians. Donations are tax-deductible. Registered Charitable Tax Number: 864997291 RR0001



#### **General Donations**

General donations are a great way to support CFB programs and on-going efforts to improve equality and opportunity for the blind. Donations can be made online or by mail:

##### 1) Online:

CFB accepts online donations through CanadaHelps, enabling contributions by credit card, Interac or Paypal and receive an instant income tax receipt. Monthly automatic donations can also be set up via CanadaHelps. Please go to: **[www.cfb.ca](http://www.cfb.ca)** and click the CanadaHelps donation button or go to **[www.canadahelps.org/dn/17020](http://www.canadahelps.org/dn/17020)**

##### 2) By Mail:

Please make cheque payable to Canadian Federation of the Blind, P.O. Box 8007, Victoria, BC, V8W 3R7

#### **Bequests and Planned Giving**

Please consider supporting us in this way. Contact us at [info@cfb.ca](mailto:info@cfb.ca)

***Thank you for your kind and generous support!***

# Donating Aeroplan Points Helps Blind Canadians Attend Blindness Convention

The Canadian Federation of the Blind (CFB) uses donated points to fly blind Canadians to the next National Federation of the Blind (NFB) blindness convention. These unique week-long gatherings of over 3,000 blind people from around the world are exceptional educational and mentoring experiences. There is no comparable opportunity that offers the blind so much in such an intensive and compact session. Those who have had a chance to attend in the past consider the experience life-changing.



Many blind Canadians are isolated and do not come in contact with other blind people in their daily lives. What's more, many blind people lack confidence, blindness-specific skills and information. To meet and be mentored by blind people who are positive, capable and successful is the best way for any blind person to learn about blindness and one's own potential.

In addition, numerous blindness-related supports are offered, including hands-on demonstrations of the latest blindness technologies, resources and aids. Blind speakers hold talks on topics of accomplishments, education and rehabilitation, Braille, employment, cane travel, independence, advocacy and inspiration.

The convention is held annually in a large North American city. The most favorable accommodation rates are provided, along with good transportation links to enable as many blind participants as possible to attend.

The Canadian Federation of the Blind is truly trying to change what it means to be blind. We feel strongly that enabling blind people to participate in this extraordinarily positive and inspirational convention is the best way to maximize their chance for a better life.

Please help us raise points so more blind Canadians can benefit. If you know of anyone who may be interested in donating points, please tell them about this Aeroplan charitable pooling initiative. Thank you for your support.

*To donate, please go to: <https://donatepoints.aircanada.com/charity/54/>*

# CFB President Attends Victoria's Holiday Dinner Social

*From the Editor:*

CFB held its Holiday Dinner Social on Saturday, December 7, 2024 at Victoria's Romeo's restaurant. It turned out to be a great evening with 11 attendees, including our CFB president, Doug, who travelled all the way from Ontario to join us. Drinks and food like pizzas, barbequed ribs and pasta, Mediterranean salads, desserts and so on flowed. Lots of loud chatter and laughter. We had two fun events. Sam read out eight Christmasy jokes and Kyla was the lucky winner of a Pure Vanilla Bakery marzipan-covered fruit cake by guessing a correct number. Thanks to Doug for coming all the way out to Victoria to be with us and to everyone who helped make the evening fun. It was really nice catching up with everyone and hearing about their busy lives.

Holiday greeting to all. Cheers, Doris

*From our President, December 8, 2024, listserv email:  
Thank you all for the wonderful dinner last night.*

Good morning, Federationists,

I had the pleasure of attending the CFB social in Victoria last evening, and it was wonderful to reconnect with all of you. As we look forward to another year of growth for the CFB, I am eager to hear your ideas on what initiatives the organization should prioritize in the new year.

I welcome your thoughts and feedback and look forward to collaborating with you to achieve our shared goals.

Once again, here is to a prosperous and impactful year ahead for the Canadian Federation of the Blind.

Best regards,

Douglas Lawlor  
President, Canadian Federation of the Blind  
Email: [doug@cfb.ca](mailto:doug@cfb.ca)

# Recipe!

## Hollyhock Oat and “Anything” Muffins

*This recipe comes to us from our good CFB ally, Thelma Fayle, in Victoria, BC. It is a recipe she found in her Hollyhock resort cookbook, but slightly modified. It makes very tasty, healthy and versatile muffins.*

### Ingredients

1 cup oats mixed with 1 c buttermilk

1/2 cup oil

1/2 cup brown sugar

1 egg

1 tsp vanilla

1 cup white or whole wheat flour

1 tsp salt

1/2 tsp baking soda

1 tsp baking powder

1 tsp ginger and 1 tsp cardamom (spices like cinnamon is good too)

1 cup (or more) “anything”: chopped figs or dates, raisins, nuts, blueberries or a combination. Even grated cheddar cheese is good, believe it or not!

### Method

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Combine oats and buttermilk in a bowl. Let sit for ten minutes.

In another bowl, combine oil with brown sugar, egg and vanilla. Combine the oat/buttermilk into this wet mixture.

In separate bowl, combine flour, salt, baking soda and baking powder. I usually add 1 tsp ginger and 1 tsp of cardamom... but you could probably add any spice you like... cinnamon, cloves, orange zest, etc ?

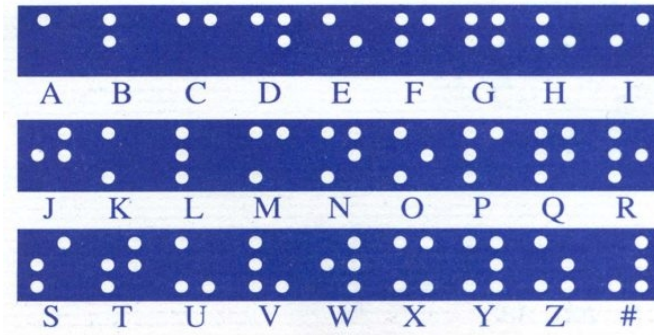
To the dry ingredients, add your grated cheese or blueberries or chopped figs or chopped dates....your one cup of “anything” you like.

Combine dry ingredients to the wet mixture. Mix, but do not overmix.

Scoop into oiled muffin tins or muffin papers.

Bake for 20-25 minutes. Place muffins on rack to cool. Enjoy!





## Alphabet in Braille

*Braille = Literacy*



