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I can hardly believe that it has been more than one hundred days since you elected me to serve as president of the National Federation of the Blind of Illinois! Every day that I do the work of our organization, I am energized to know that we are working collectively to improve the lives of blind residents of Illinois.

In these short and productive one hundred days, we have worked together to retain our seats on the Illinois Blind Services Planning Council. We have gained co-sponsors for HR 431, the Access Technology Affordability Act. We are planning our first virtual Midwest Student Spring Seminar, and we are continuing to collaborate with Illinois stakeholders to ensure our right to vote secretly and independently. I am so proud of our first one hundred days together, and I’m looking forward to the spring, when I know that our affiliate will produce fruit for a future harvest.
HAIL TO THE CHIEF!
A Chat with Marilyn Green, President, NFB of Illinois
by Robert Gardner

The purpose of all this, I told myself as I made the call, was to get to know our newly elected NFB of Illinois president, Marilyn Green. I realized I really didn't know as much about her as I should. So after getting the preliminaries out of the way, I smiled into my cell phone and asked Marilyn my first question. It was a question meant to be an ice breaker, based on a hint I was given about her. "Tell me about you and Puerto Rico."

Her response was immediate and enthusiastic. "Puerto Rico is one of my loves!" Her excitement was evident as she told of her many trips to the island over the past ten years. "At the time I started visiting, I didn't know very much about it."

"How did it all start?"

"I took a cruise—that was twelve years ago—and I fell in love. The people, the music, the culture. Just everything."

We discussed her affection for travel and her easy communication with other people, even strangers. Her mobility skills seemed evident. Guessing overall that she led a very independent life, I asked, "What tools or methods do you use to deal with your blindness?"

"I use a screen reader, JAWS, on my computer. I use a variety of apps on my cell phone, such as Seeing AI for reading text, and sometimes AIRA to help me read bills. And of course I use the long white cane for travel."

About the same time Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico, Marilyn became very active in the National Federation of the Blind. With those two factors combined, she hasn't been back to the island since. In 2018 she was elected president of the At Large Chapter of the NFBI, and later that year she also was elected to the state board. Now, between her job and her new duties after being elected affiliate president in 2020, she has little time for recreational travel. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic has put some limits on her ability to go anywhere, as it has for all of us.

I was curious. "Tell me about your job."
"I've been working for the Chicago Public Library for twenty years next June. I do collection development, and I set up various programs. I serve as a reader advisor and do administrative stuff. I work there fulltime."

"Are you a native of Chicago?"

"Yes," she said. "Born and raised on the far south side."

Marilyn went through public schools in Chicago, attending a magnet high school. Despite her vision problems, which really started to affect her in high school, she showed her determination not to let that limit her future. "After finishing high school, I went on to college. I did a double major at DePaul University here in Chicago. My majors were English literature and women's studies."

After that, continuing to push her life and career forward, she went back to college to get a Master's degree in library and information studies. But significant events in her personal life forced her to discontinue that effort.

I asked, "What do you do in your leisure time?" I had to laugh, doubting she had much time for recreation in a life with a fulltime job—and now as our new Illinois affiliate president.

"One of the things I love is travel. That was one of the things that drew me into the NFB. Being able to go to all these events, and to meet all these different people. And to have a purpose in going to all these places.

"And I need to get back to yoga." Referring to the current pandemic and the limitations it places upon us, she added, "My intention is to go back. The studio where I practice opened up this month. I plan on going back soon, especially now with everything I have to do.

"What we always talk about in Yoga is 'Take these sixty minutes just for yourself. Don't think about before; don't think about what you have to do after.' I need that so much right now!"

It's often interesting to find out how someone got connected with the NFB. Marilyn's story is truly one of those. "I was talking to a friend, and he mentioned that with my university education, I could have been a lawyer. I said, 'It's ironic that you say that. That was my intention when I started as an undergraduate.'"
And that got her to thinking, and "ignited something in me." After seeking advice about whether it was realistic for her to become a lawyer, she was connected to Denise Avant, affiliate president at the time.

"Denise told me about the NFB, which I'd never heard about." Denise then invited Marilyn to attend meetings of the Chicago Chapter, but that didn't work for her, as she had to be at her job on Saturdays. Denise then told her about the At Large Chapter, which meets by phone on Sunday evenings.

"I started attending meetings," Marilyn said, "as best I could. Then I started hearing about the NFB National Convention and Washington Seminar." With her love of travel, that got her attention.

Still early in her investigation of the NFB, Marilyn went to her first national convention. "Okay," she said, remembering back, "I'll go to Florida and the national convention. And hey, if I don't like it, if I don't like the people, I'll go to Disney World." We both laughed.

"So," I asked, "what happened?"

"As it turned out, I never left the convention center. I fell in love. It just felt like home. Everyone was so welcoming, willing to give me information and to offer guidance. I found a home!"

I guess you could say the rest is history. As I mentioned before, Marilyn became a chapter president, and then a member of the state board. She demonstrated great leadership skills as she involved herself in the Washington Seminar, eventually becoming the coordinator of the NFBI team. And of course, she was elected affiliate president at our state convention in 2020.

When asked what she sees in the future for the NFB of Illinois affiliate, she had these comments. "I'd like to get more people involved in the efforts that require accepting responsibility for making something happen. We need to widen the number of people doing those serious, intensive jobs within the affiliate." She added, "I'd also like to see us move the state convention around the state again."

I thought her next words really sounded like Marilyn Green. "I'd like to see us find a way to bring fun into our affiliate activities. Or maybe we should say that having fun should be one of our standard activities of the NFB of Illinois. I'd really like to see that."

I was particularly impressed with Marilyn's natural humility. At the end of our chat she said, "Especially in a role like this, it's important not to get so . . . into yourself and let the title start to
be who you are. I never plan to forget who I am and where I've come from. I hope there never comes a time when the title of state president becomes my identity."

Finishing the call, then breaking the connection, I had only one thought: the NFB of Illinois is in good hands."

**INSPIRATION, ASPIRATION, ADVOCACY, AND TRAVEL**

by Juliette Walker

I am so happy to be here with you this morning! I'm here to tell you how the National Federation of the Blind changes people's lives—in particular, how it has changed my life. I'd like to start by giving you a little history about me.

I was born and raised here in the city of Chicago. I am the eldest girl in a family of five children. I am a product of the Chicago public school system. I graduated from Chicago State University.
with a bachelor's degree in elementary education, and I received a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Loyola University. I worked for the Chicago public school system for twenty-one years, until one day I woke up and saw that my world had changed.

One morning when I woke up it seemed as though I was viewing the world through a glass marble. I had to be rushed to my doctor, and from there I was rushed to an ophthalmologist. She looked into my eyes and saw that something was definitely wrong. She wasn't quite sure what it was, and she needed a second opinion. I was sent to a retina specialist, where I waited for two hours. They conducted various tests and ultrasounds. Two hours later I received the news that I had become a member of the blind community.

Of course I was devastated when I heard this revelation. The doctor told me there were three things I could do. Trying to find some semblance of hope, I asked, "What are they?"

I hoped she would tell me she might be able to bring my vision back, but she said no. "It's gone," she said. "There's nothing we can do about that. What I want you to do is, Number One, I hope you didn't drive here."

I said, "No! I couldn't see to drive."

She said, "You know what? You can't drive any more. That's Number One.

"Number Two," she said, "you need to fill out disability paperwork. At this point I don't see you working any more.

"And Number Three, you need to call a Chicago-based organization that can provide you with rehabilitation."

I just went to work the day before! Yesterday I drove! Now she was telling me all of those things had changed!

I felt horrible about what had happened to me. I cried in her office, and I went home and cried some more. I cried so much that my younger sister told me, "Maybe if you stop crying you might be able to see after all!"
I felt I was living through a nightmare—but when you have a nightmare you wake up. I'd open my eyes, and I still couldn't see. The nightmare wouldn't end.

I did everything the doctor told me to do. I stopped driving. I called the Chicago-based rehabilitation agency, but they told me they couldn't help me. I didn't have the paperwork they needed. It would take a while before they would be able to do anything.

I went into a deep, dark depression over all of this. I went to see another primary-care physician. She asked me a list of questions, and when I answered them honestly she said, "You are in a state of depression." I said, "Well, duh! My life as I knew it has changed. It's over."

She said, "I think you need to speak to someone. We have a young lady who has just joined us. She's a therapist. Maybe you'll like her."

I said, "I have nothing to lose. Why not?" So I went to her, and we talked. She said, "You know what, Miss Walker? We're going to get you started. We need to figure out how to make things right."

I said, "I don't know if you can make things right. I just want to make something better."

She said, "Let me talk to my professor. He's blind, and he's one of the best professors I ever had."

At that point my expectations of what I could do had gone totally down the drain. I said, "A blind professor? I didn't know blind people could be professors!"

The only blind people I knew of were Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder and the gentleman on the corner who shook his cup and asked for change. I knew I couldn't sing like Ray, but maybe I could work something out with the gentleman on the corner. We could shake our cups together or something. But first I had to figure out how to make it to the corner!

The therapist called her professor, and he said, "Miss Walker, I want you to go to an organization that I think can help you. They have a support group on Wednesdays for people who have RP [retinitis pigmentosa]."

I said, "I don't have RP."
He said, "It doesn't matter. They'll give you support. It's a group of people who can't see, and you need to be there with them."

I went to the support group, and I met a wonderful bunch of people there. I had a chance to discuss what was going on with me, and I felt much better knowing I wasn't the only one. While I was there I met a young lady who told me, "We can help you with your independent living skills. We can help you learn to move around. We can help you get your job back."

I said, "Please, help me!" I had nothing to lose.

She did help me. While I was there I met a bunch of other people who were seeking the same things. I also met some people who had been blind for most of their lives, and they were taking classes. There was a group of students taking a computer class. One day over lunch they mentioned a meeting they'd attended with the National Federation of the Blind. They were excited about an upcoming convention, and they were excited about President Riccobono's speech. I said, "What are you talking about?"

They said, "We're talking about the National Federation of the Blind. Our chapter meets the second Saturday of the month at Exchequer Pub and Restaurant in downtown Chicago. You can get a good meal and a whole lot of new information."

I said, "Can anyone go?" and they said, "Yes!"

So I went to my first NFB chapter meeting. From the moment I stepped through the door, I saw blind people moving around independently. I heard people talking about their new business ventures. I heard them talking about cases they needed to go home and work on. I thought, there are a lot of people here who are doing things I used to want to do myself! I heard about authors and lawyers and business owners. These were professional people—professionals like I used to be myself.

I got inspired. From that moment on, my life changed.

Every time I go to a meeting of the National Federation of the Blind, I get four things. First I get inspiration. I move into aspiration. I find new ways to advocate for myself, and I do some traveling.
I get inspired by going to these meetings. At one time I didn't think there was anything I could do. I found out I'm still the person I was before I lost my sight. I just have to figure out a different way to do what I did before.

Then comes the aspiration part. I thought, I might want to go back and do what I did before, but maybe I want to do something even greater. I changed lives before, but I think I can change many more lives. I can be the best me that I can be. I can live the life I want.

The third thing is advocacy. Advocacy has been empowering and enlightening for me. You all are very supportive around the things we go through as blind and low-vision people. If things are not working out the way we want them to, if we see that an injustice has been done to us, we can tackle that injustice together. If you found out that dealing with the injustice done to you can benefit other people, you can write something called a resolution. You put in your whereases and therefore and all your specialized language, and we can submit the resolution at the local level. Maybe it can be submitted at the national level, too. Maybe we can even turn it into a law!

Finally, traveling. When I first lost my sight, I was afraid to go anywhere. Now I take trains, buses, and planes. I had the opportunity to attend the national convention of the NFB in Las Vegas in 2019, and I got there independently. I went through the convention independently, and I got home independently. I was so proud to walk among all those white canes and guide dogs, to hear those canes tapping across the floor! Moving from place to place and going to those sessions I learned so much! I was so proud to make it there and get back home by myself! I went to Las Vegas thirteen years ago, when I was fully sighted. Now here I was, a blind person, and I was able to get there and back independently.

The National Federation of the Blind has helped me redefine who I am. It has helped me realize I still can live the life I want. I'm still the same person. I didn't lose my mind, I only lost my sight.

THE POSSIBLE FUTURE OF SCREEN READERS
by Dan Tevelde

Recently I attended an interesting technology conference called “Sight Tech Global.” The conference brought together people from mainstream companies such as Microsoft, representatives from established blindness assistive technology companies, and researchers who are developing new products to address a variety of barriers blind people face every day. It was a
good opportunity to imagine the future and think outside the box. The conference was completely accessible, and it will be repeated next year.

I highly encourage anyone to attend this conference. It is free, and the organizers do everything they can to make it accessible. If anyone is interested, they can review the conference information at https://sighttechglobal.com. This will take them to the information page about this year's conference, and it has links to the conference sessions. There is also a registration page for next year.

One interesting topic that was addressed was the future of screen readers. Glen Gordon from Freedom Scientific participated in a panel discussion with leading accessibility experts about the future of screen readers. The title of the session was, "If the Jetsons Had Screen readers, Would They Still Be Using Keyboard Commands?"

I had high hopes for this session, but I was disappointed. The discussion centered around the use of voice commands to interact with a screen reader. This approach is helpful, but it does not address the limitations screen reader users encounter when they interact with a computer. I have tested most of the available speech-to-text interfaces, and they are still lacking.

While I listened to the presentation, I thought about how the introduction of the iPhone has revolutionized assistive technology. Before the iPhone, some of us did not believe that a mainstream technology might be useful and could lower some of the accessibility barriers we experience every day. Often we are persuaded by companies such as Freedom Scientific that a proprietary and expensive screen reader will solve all of our problems. This notion limits our freedom of choice and interferes with the independence we are seeking.

The introduction of the iPhone and VoiceOver was a real paradigm shift. For the first time blind people could use a mainstream device without the additional cost of a screen reader. An iPhone user can get up and running in no time. People who work in Apple stores are familiar with VoiceOver, and they can activate the program when a customer buys a new iPhone. A blind iPhone user can get up and running in no time.

The iOS operating system as implemented on an iPhone or iPad offers many advantages. Gestures are standard across all applications. There is no need for specialized scripts or configurations. I can select items or even drag and drop applications from one location to another. This is not an easy or intuitive task using Windows.

The blind person can obtain spatial information and get a basic idea of how information is presented. Examples include maps and charts. The representation of spatial information will
improve with the advancement of artificial intelligence and the use of vibration patterns on the phone screen.

A blind person can use as many or as few gestures and commands as they choose. A blind person can enter text in Braille directly on the phone screen. This is helpful for individuals who cannot afford a Braille display. A blind person can use peripheral devices such as keyboards and Braille displays when they do not want to interact with a phone using touch gestures.

I hope this information is helpful. If you own an iOS device and feel adventurous, try some of the features I mentioned in this article.

MAKING THE MOST OF THE ZOOM PLATFORM
by Gregory D. Rosenberg

INTRODUCTION
When the COVID-19 pandemic transformed our lives, Zoom became a household word. We use the Zoom platform to attend classes, hold family gatherings, and take part in meetings on the job. Even when the crisis abates, Zoom will be woven into our way of life.
I have used many meeting platforms over the past three plus decades, and I find Zoom to be the easiest to learn and most accessible for blind users. You can use Zoom on every computing device available today. Even if you don't have a computer, you can dial in to a Zoom conference with a touchtone or smartphone and take part as an audio-only participant. Usually you will find a dial-in phone number and the needed access codes when you receive your Zoom meeting invitation. The dial-in option is vital for those who are away from their technology, those who don't have a microphone and speakers on their computer, and those who don't have access to the Internet.

The Zoom meeting software runs natively on most Microsoft Windows, Apple Mac OS, and Linux desktop/laptop computers. Zoom is widely supported on nearly every modern computing device, e.g., mobile phones and tablets as well as the Apple Watch.

You can mirror (or cast) your Zoom meeting's audio and video onto most modern Smart TVs or TV Boxes such as Apple TV, Google Chromecast, Roku, Sling, and Amazon Fire. This can be done using Apple's Airplay with an Apple TV box or an Airplay-enabled Smart TV. You can do the same with Google Chromecast technology. By no means are these the only choices, but they are the most common. If you are an audiophile, you can pair Zoom audio to any Smart Speaker of your choice.

For desktop and laptop computers Zoom has some minimum software and hardware requirements. You should try to meet these requirements to achieve the best possible meeting experience. For Apple Mac computers you should be running Mac OS 10.10 (Yosemite) or newer. For Windows PCs you should be running Windows 7 or newer. For the most current operating system and hardware requirements to get the best experience with Zoom, visit https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/204003179-System-requirements-for-Zoom-Rooms.

Zoom is widely available on mobile computing devices that run Apple iOS, iPadOS, and WatchOS, as well as most Android and Linux operating systems.

Zoom also has some bandwidth requirements. At a minimum you need to have 2.0 megabits per second if you are using Zoom on a WiFi connection. (See the above link for more details.) If you are having problems with audio quality, make sure your WiFi is set at its highest possible speed. Often the default settings are one (1) megabit per second. I know this to be true for Ubiquity Unify WiFi access points (APs).

HOW TO JOIN A ZOOM MEETING
Ideally, you should be running Zoom version 5.x. I encourage you to update your app if it doesn't update automatically. The following information assumes you are running Zoom version 5.x.

FOR MICROSOFT WINDOWS USERS
Here are the very basic shortcuts you will use when participating in a Zoom meeting from a personal computer running Microsoft Windows.

• The <SPACEBAR> is used when you want to talk. This works like a push-to-talk button on a radio. Push the <spacebar> to talk and release it to listen.
• Use the <Alt> + A keys to mute or unmute your microphone if you need to keep your hands free and/or talk for a longer period of time. This works like a toggle.
• You can use the <Alt> + V keys to toggle your video camera on or off.
• Using <Alt> + Y allows you to raise or lower your hand.
• Press the <Alt> + <Shift> + S keys if the moderator has directed you to share content from your computer. This allows you to share your entire desktop or a specific application, such as a Word document or web page.
• Pressing the <Alt> + <From-4> keys opens up the "Leave Meeting" dialogue box when you are ready to leave your Zoom meeting. Then press the <ENTER> key to leave the Zoom session.

FOR APPLE MAC OS USERS
Here are the very basic shortcuts you will use when participating in a Zoom meeting from an Apple computer running Mac OS.

• You can use the <SPACEBAR> when you want to talk. This works just like a push to talk button on a radio's Microphone. Push the <SPACEBAR> to talk and release to listen.
• Use the <Command> + <Shift> + A keys to mute or unmute your microphone if you need to keep your hands free and/or talk for a longer period of time. This works like a toggle.
• Use the <Command> + <Shift> + V keys to toggle your video camera on or off.
• Using <Option> + Y keys allows you to raise or lower your hand.
• Press the <Command> + <Ctrl> + S keys if the moderator has directed you to share content from your computer. This allows you to share your entire desktop or a specific application, such as a document or web page.
• Pressing the <Command> + W keys opens up the "Leave Meeting" dialogue box. Press the <ENTER> key to leave the Zoom session.
FOR APPLE SMARTPHONE OR TABLET USERS

Here are the very basic shortcuts you will use when participating in a Zoom meeting from an Apple iPhone or iPad, as well as from an Android or Linux phone or tablet. The following information assumes you have already joined the Zoom meeting and have the Zoom app in the foreground of your mobile device.

If you have a keyboard paired to your mobile device, you can use the same keyboard shortcuts used by Mac OS users.

If you don't have a keyboard on your Apple iPhone or iPad, you can use the following touch controls.

- If you wish to mute or unmute your microphone, it is located in the bottom left of your device's screen. Just to the right of the microphone you will find a similar control to enable or disable video.
- To raise your hand, you must locate and click the "More" button, which usually is located in the bottom right of your device's screen. Click the button and choose the "Raise Hand" option.

FOR ANDROID AND LINUX MOBILE DEVICE USERS

If you have a keyboard paired to your Android or Linux phone and tablet, keyboard shortcuts are identical to those used on your Windows desktop or laptop. See the "For Microsoft Windows Users" section above.

The touch controls are located in the same place at the bottom of your Zoom app screen as they are on Apple phones and tablets. See the "For Apple Smartphone or Tablet Users" above.

FOR TOUCH TONE OR MOBILE TELEPHONE USERS

Dial an in-country number. If you dial a toll number, your carrier rates will apply. You can find the numbers on your meeting invitation or view a full list of international dial-in numbers at: https://zoom.us/zoomconference.

You will be prompted to enter the Zoom meeting ID—the nine- to eleven-digit ID provided to you by the host, followed by the Pound Sign "#".
If the meeting has not already started and "Join before host" is not enabled, simply press the pound sign "#" was to wait if you are a participant.

You may be prompted to enter your unique participant ID. This only applies if you have joined on the computer or mobile device or if you are a panelist in the meeting. Press # to skip.

You may be prompted to enter the meeting passcode, followed by "#". This passcode will be included in the meeting invite provided by the host.

If you join by computer or mobile device later, you can enter the Participant ID to bind your phone and device session together and show your video when you speak on the phone. To enter your participant ID once you are in the meeting, enter #Participant ID# on your phone.

The following commands can be entered via DTMF tones, using your phone's dial pad while you are in a Zoom meeting.

• *6 — Toggles your microphone to be either muted or unmuted.
• *9 — Allows you to raise your hand.
• If the meeting requires a password, a phone-specific numeric password will be generated. You can find this password in the invitation listed below the dial-in numbers and meeting ID.

IN CONCLUSION


Hartgen Consultancy have produced free JAWS scripts that enhance the Zoom Cloud Meeting experience even further. Download the free JAWS scripts at: http://www.hartgen.org/zoom. These are described in Mr. Mosen's audiobook.

If you have any questions or need assistance, feel free to reach out to me. I will be happy to answer your questions and, time permitting, I will try to assist you. You can email me at gregg@ricis.com or call my office line at 708-444-2690. Call my office number or email me with your contact information so I can add you to my contacts.
Enjoy your next Zoom meeting, and be safe!

MAKING SCIENCE ACCESSIBLE
by Michael Hingson

From the Editor: This article is based on a presentation delivered at the 2020 NFBI convention.

It's been a while since I've had the chance to be part of a convention in Illinois. I was born in Chicago, so I consider it one of my favorite places. Best pizza in the country!

I want to talk about the concept of science. There are two issues that we as blind people face when it comes to getting involved in science. One is getting solved a lot more quickly than the other.

When I went to high school and college, I didn't get to do much with any of the lab experiments. I couldn't read instruments to get the data. The technology did not exist for me to take part in experiments. I couldn't access print. Now I can read print with the KNFB Reader. Today technology allows blind people to do experiments, whether it's in high school or college or out in the workforce.

The Talking LabQuest II is a product that was developed by Independence Science. It's a box with three connectors on it, into which you can plug sensors or probes. You can measure anything from voltage and current to temperature to wind direction to gas pressure in a tank to pH, which is a measure of the acidity or base of a solution. There's even an expensive one where you can build a bridge on your table. and it will do a structural analysis to tell you whether, where, and when the bridge will collapse. The neat thing is that all of the probes are accessible. For the first time we have a technology that allows us to participate fully in laboratory experiments.

All of this makes a huge difference! Those of us who have been involved in chemistry or biology or physics want to have the same fun and gain the same knowledge that other students do. The Talking LabQuest allows us to do all that.

I hope that Independence Science can meet with the rehab agency here in Illinois. We can work toward making the Talking LabQuest system available to students in this state. It's happening in other states. Nebraska just bought forty-five Talking LabQuest systems, and they will provide them to students to give them full access to their lab courses.
Technology is the first big challenge we face when it comes to STEM. We're dealing with that, and we will continue to make advances. But the second problem for blind people in the sciences is the one we all face all the time—attitudes.

I don't care what anyone says in the world—when it comes to blindness, scientists are as close-minded as everyone else. Bottom line, most of them don't think that blind people can do stuff, simply because that's what society has taught them. No matter how open-minded scientists are on other subjects, they tend not to be open-minded when it comes to blindness.

When I was in college I was very fortunate to have an academic adviser who has since become a Nobel laureate, Dr. Frederick Reines. He discovered the subatomic particle called the neutrino, and he was one of the winners of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1995. He made his discovery by working in diamond mines in South Africa, a mile below the surface of the earth. Light and other particles didn't make it down to a mine that was a mile deep.

Dr. Reines and I had several conversations about blindness. He said to me, "As far as I'm concerned, you can do all the things everyone else can do. Of course, you can't do the lab experiments, but you can still be as much a scientist as anyone else. I can't do most of my experiments in the diamond mines because I'm here with my academic responsibilities. I instruct other people about what I want them to do and how I want them to do it. They go off and collect the data and send it to me. As the lead scientist, I take the initiative to create the theories, and I use the data to draw conclusions."

I think Dr. Reines was absolutely correct in that, except for one small thing. In reality, he learned a lot by doing lab experiments. He learned to do the things that later he was able to assign to other people. He learned them in a way that traditionally has been unavailable to us, until we had technology like the Talking LabQuest.

When I was a student getting my master's degree at UC Irvine, I learned that a letter had been put in my file by a professor in the physics department. The letter said, "No blind student can ever gain the material necessary to obtain an advanced degree in physics." I'm glad I never had that guy as a professor!

Bottom line, I got my master's degree. Due to circumstances I ended up in sales and marketing, and I never worked in a scientific field. But I learned a lot pursuing that degree. I learned to focus on details. I learned skills I never could have mastered if I had not gotten a science degree.

No matter what you do with your life as you go forward, if you're in science and want to be there, you have a team behind you. You have a team in the National Federation of the Blind. You
don't have to go it alone. No matter what you do, you can never say, "I did it alone." Hundreds and thousands of blind people before you achieved the things that made it possible for you to do what you did. If you face problems in science or anywhere else, if you need to advocate and deal with legal issues, you have the National Federation of the Blind as a solid team. The NFB is with you to help you resolve whatever issues you have.

Even if you don't have a problem, the NFB is a great place to get encouragement and education. Lots of us have been involved in the sciences. We can give you a lot of information to help you develop the skills you need.

If you want to contact me, please visit www.independencesience.com. If you want to learn more about the LabQuest technology, you're welcome to contact me at mike@michaelhingson.com.

BELLS IN HOME EDITION
by Deborah Kent Stein

From the Editor: This article is based upon a presentation given at the 2020 NFB of Illinois convention. Applications for the 2021 BELL In Home Edition can be found at nfb.org/bell.

Last January I went to Baltimore for a weekend meeting for the 2020 BELL Academy® coordinators. I talked to people from all over the country, collected ideas, and brought home reams of notes about all the things we would do in our face-to-face BELL Academies.

Then, all of a sudden in March, COVID hit. By May it was clear that we wouldn't be able to have a face-to-face BELL Academy. There was lots of handwringing and despair. And then our resilience took over. Within six weeks Karen Anderson and the team at the National Center for the Blind in Baltimore put together the program they called BELL Academy In-Home Edition.

BELL IN-Home Edition consisted of Three two-week BELL programs during the summer. Children and their families met remotely with teachers and other students to work on projects that involved the use of Braille. Each child who registered received a box of materials that they could work with at home with the help of parents and volunteer mentors.

The BELL mentors were NFB members who contacted the participants every day during the program. They walked the children through projects and answered questions from the parents. We created a BELL experience that was in many ways quite different from what we had done in other summers, yet it was very similar. Through Zoom sessions BELL still allowed families to
connect with one another. Students had the chance to interact with blind adult role models and to get Braille and tactile learning experiences.

Two of the students who took part in our BELL program last summer are with us today, along with their parents, and they have agreed to talk about their experiences. I'll start with Charlie and his mother, Liza. Charlie, can you tell us what you did last summer in BELL?

CHARLIE: Sunflower seeds! We planted seeds, and they're growing.

DEBBIE STEIN: Sunflowers can grow really tall.

LIZA: We planted them outside in the yard. Who was your mentor, Charlie?

CHARLIE: Alex. We read Braille together, and I got the word octopus right!

DEBBIE: That's a long word.

CHARLIE: And I didn't give up. It's like in Jeopardy—do not get discouraged if you don't know some of the clues.

LIZA: We got some videos from BELL that we watched over and over.

DEBBIE: Now let's hear from Thomas. Thomas, what was your BELL experience like?

THOMAS: It was definitely fun. I liked all of the crafts we were able to do. The germination of the sunflower seeds was also pretty fun.

DEBBIE: Did you work on your Braille skills?

THOMAS: Yeah, we used flash cards. We tried to do it as much as possible. I used the cards at night and tried to improve my reading rate and my accuracy with the contractions.

DEBBIE: Mom, is there anything you'd like to add about doing BELL at home?

JENNIFER: He was very excited getting the box. It was like a Christmas box in the middle of July! We still use some of the flash cards for review. He loves crafts, so we did all the crafts projects.
THOMAS: This is my rain stick. Do you hear it? [Everyone can hear the rain stick as he shakes it.]

JENNIFER: When we did the social time in the afternoon, he got to talk with friends and they read books together. He could even take BELL with him when we traveled. We went to visit my mom, and he was doing BELL in Atlanta! His friend Ryker was in BELL, too. Sometimes Ryker came over and they did BELL together. That made it even more fun.

DEBBIE: Thank you so much!

LIZA: We miss Miss Amy [our longtime BELL teacher]. But it was a really nice experience, and we were pleasantly surprised at how well it worked. The box was the highlight for Charlie.

DEBBIE: Did you take everything out all at once, or did you spread it out?

LIZA: Oh, he took everything out all at once, right, Charlie? He was really excited to go through everything.

DEBBIE: Thank you very much. I hope this gives people an idea about what BELL was like last summer, and I hope people will sign up for BELL in 2021.

MY COVID VACCINE ADVENTURE:

Expect the Unexpected

by Sharon Howerton

For some years I have been a patient of Swedish Covenant Hospital, which recently was taken over by North Shore University Health Care. On January 24 I had a regular appointment with my doctor, and she asked me whether I was registered with their patient portal, Northshoreconnect.com. I’ve never had great success accessing patient portals, but I was registered.

A couple of days after my appointment with the doctor, I received a notice that I could register for the COVID-19 vaccine. I asked an Aira agent to assist me, as I didn't feel like spending a long, frustrating time filling out the online registration form.
Almost immediately I received an appointment to get my first dose of the vaccine on February 11 at 8:50 AM. I was scheduled to receive the vaccine at 2740 West Foster Avenue, Room 114, the same building where my doctor's office is located.

As I was not sure whether I might have side effects from the vaccine, I opted to leave my guide dog, Cameo, at home and asked a friend to drive me to my appointment. Based on her assessment of another location, I thought the process would be quick. I suggested she could just drop me off, and I'd be out shortly. That isn't her way, and I am grateful that she didn't take my advice.

When we arrived at Room 114 at 2740 West Foster, no one was in the lobby. In fact, the door of Room 114 was locked, and there was a printed sign directing us to another address: 2751 West Winona. I might never have found this critical information if I had been alone. I might not have thought to call Aira, since I would have had no idea that a sign was posted.

The address on West Winona is a block away from the address I was given on the confirmation. We found it just fine, but for a person with mobility limitations, the change could have presented serious problems.

When we arrived at the correct location, a number of people waited in a long line ahead of me. It took about forty minutes for me to get to the point where I could register, something I had done already online. The rest of the process went quickly—I got the immunization, got a card with my next appointment, and waited in an auditorium for fifteen minutes to determine whether I had any reactions. I had none.

I mentioned the incorrect information to the person who registered me, and she said other people had the same complaint. She assured me that my next appointment would not take so long, but for me that was not the point. The information I was given originally was not correct, and the information about the change in location was completely inaccessible. I need to call my doctor on another matter, and I will advise her of this situation, just so she knows. In fact, she told me that when she received the immunization herself, she went to 2751 West Winona.

I hope others have a smoother experience when they go to get their COVID vaccinations. As is true in so many cases, we always have to be prepared for surprises.
I MAY BE BLIND
By Patrick Olson

I may be blind
But I still have a fine mind,
No pity party is needed,
Blind doesn't mean I'm unable to succeed.

Blind means adaptation is a factor,
But settling for less can't be my contractor,
Learning new ways is key,
Believing in limits I shoot down with glee.

Blind I may be,
An individual, can't you see?
I am much more than a blind person,
And it's not an abstraction.

To my life's purpose and meaning,
I have much to offer that makes me endearing,
I'm striving forth with my life,
No matter that blindness can give extra strife.

Blind is not what defines me,
Like a movie you may see,
Look deeper past the surface,
Your assumption doesn't affect my purpose.

Get to know the real me,
Trying to make a difference to what you see,
So open your eyes wide,
And listen up as I confide,
Any group assumption is worthless,
Free yourself so others hurt less,
Anyone can be more than you expect,
So give everyone the right to your respect.