

**THE BLIND CALIFORNIAN**

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CALIFORNIA COUNCIL OF THE BLIND  
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In accepting material for THE BLIND CALIFORNIAN, priority will be given to articles concerning the activities and policies of the California Council of the Blind and to the experiences and concerns of blind persons. Recommended length is 1800 words.

The deadline to submit material for the winter, 2018 issue of THE BLIND CALIFORNIAN is noon, November 15, 2017.

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Please send all address changes to the Executive Office.

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## **The Editor's Desk**

**Mike Keithley**

O dear, summer's over!  
Walks are getting shorter,  
picnics are fewer, book  
clubs were fun, but now  
they're done. It's Back to  
school, work, ho-hum,  
hum-ho. And after all that,  
the fall Blind Californian  
just arrived in your hands.

And it's packed with fall  
things like President  
Wilkinson's message  
about remembering to will  
something to CCB, Gabe  
Griffith's detailed report  
on how CCB'S

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Constitution and Bylaws  
need to be updated with  
the expectation that you'll  
help the process, a profile  
of the San Diego Braille  
Club from Susan Glass,  
Cathy Skivers description  
of her participation in the  
Braille Challenge last  
spring, a poem or two, and  
more! And be sure to read  
Gabe Griffith's "My Roller  
Coaster Ride." You'll be  
wishing him successful  
living for sure.

Enjoy!

## **Presidents Message: Spring And Fall**

**Judy Wilkinson**

The two things certain in  
life: death and taxes. We  
grumblingly talk about

taxes but are far more  
reluctant to speak of  
death. The poet Gerard

**Manley Hopkins describes this universal reluctance in one of my favorite poems which I cite in part here: note especially the final two lines.**

**Spring And Fall: To A Young Child**

**Margaret, are you grieving  
Over Goldengrove  
unleaving? . . . .**

**Now no matter, child, the  
name:**

**Sorrow's springs are the  
same.**

**Nor mouth had, no nor  
mind, expressed**

**What heart heard of, ghost  
guessed:**

**It is the blight man was  
born for,**

**It is Margaret you mourn  
for.**

**You read the  
announcement as the final**

**item in every issue of the  
BC:**

**"If you or a friend would  
like to remember the  
California Council of the  
Blind in your Will, you can  
do so by employing the  
following language:**

**'I give, devise, and  
bequeath unto the  
California Council of the  
Blind, a nonprofit  
charitable organization in  
California, the sum of  
\$\_\_\_\_\_ (or \_\_\_\_\_) to be used  
for its worthy purposes on  
behalf of blind persons.'**

**If your wishes are more  
complex, you may have  
your attorney  
communicate with the  
Executive Office for other  
suggested forms. Thank  
you."**

**In fact, in preparing this  
message, I checked the**

summer issue of the BC so I could quote accurately: No Final Message! I checked the Spring issue: No Final Message! But it was there in the Winter issue. It turns out that in editing the spring issue, that announcement inadvertently got dropped and the error understandably was repeated in the summer issue.

My point is, we all read it but it goes straight out of our mind, and in fact, when it wasn't there, apparently no one even noticed, and if I hadn't needed the quote, I wonder if it would ever have been missed!

In the past several years, we have lost countless members, and not one

remembered CCB in their final plans. A notice in our quarterly publication is clearly insufficient to encourage us to remember the council in our estate planning or in our wishes for what charities we would like our friends to support in our memory.

Almost all charitable organizations have a prominent way for members and friends to remember the organization in their estate planning. Most definitely, when our website is redesigned, we will provide an easy mechanism for members' (and their friends') wishes to be made known to CCB.

But frankly, we don't want to wait until a person's death to acknowledge

**them: We want to honor those who remember CCB in their estate planning while they are still with us. We will be announcing plans in the near future to support you, your family and your friends in remembering the CCB when you plan your estate. Those with few resources of your own can announce your intention to have us remembered by your friends and communities.**

**IF you have or plan to include CCB in your final wishes, don't wait for a refurbished website to inform us. Please feel free**

**\*\*\***

**to discuss these matters with me or Paul Shane if we can assist you as we move forward.**

**To quote another one of my favorite poets, Andrew Marvell on this subject:**

**"At my back I always hear,  
Time's winged chariot  
hurrying near."**

**{Editor's note: The "bequeath" paragraph is back where it belongs. And as a little bonus to my error, there is now a paragraph in the masthead about how to donate to CCB while shopping at Amazon.}**



## **Background Report to the Members of the California Council of the Blind**

### **From the Constitution and Bylaws Committee**

**We have been charged with making sure that our Constitution serves our organization's interests, and does not unknowingly impede them. This report has been prepared by your Constitution and Bylaws Committee to explain the steps we hope to take to preserve and build our organization, and to provide the membership with the necessary background information for evaluating our proposals.**

**Although many things will remain familiarly the same, some adjustments are required in order to comply with law; to qualify for fund-raising**

**opportunities; to function effectively in the modern nonprofit-organization environment; to respond to the opportunities and the risks posed by modern communications technology; and frankly, to deal with the phenomenon of an aging and shrinking membership base.**

**Grass-Roots Organization: CCB is first and foremost a grass-roots organization, composed of and governed by its membership. Sovereignty and ultimate authority have always rested with and will continue to rest with the members. How that authority is exercised;**

how parts of that authority are delegated to officers, employees and the Board; and how the membership exercises oversight are all questions that our new governing bylaws will answer.

#### **The Outside World:**

As a modern, nonprofit organization, CCB is accountable not only to its members but also to outside entities and forces. These include the laws of the state and nation, the requirements imposed by funders, the transparency and other expectations emanating from public oversight, and the technological demands and communications imperatives of the electronic age.

#### **A New Governing Format:**

The first and most striking thing you will notice is that our fundamental governing document will no longer be the Constitution but our Bylaws. The Bylaws will serve the same functions as the Constitution did, but they will also do much more. Many of the constitution's provisions will be carried-over in tact; other provisions will be added, some will be modified or deleted.

Since the Bylaws cannot possibly address or foresee every question, anymore than the Constitution could, the Bylaws will be supplemented by Policy Statements. These Policy Statements will play much the role filled until now

by our old bylaws, except that these will be issued over the course of time as needed.

### **Make-up of the Organization:**

The CCB is made-up of 6 basic components: the membership; the chapters and affiliates; the president and officers; the CEO and employees; the board of directors; and the committees. Our existing constitution concerns itself mainly with matters of internal governance: conventions, voting, elections, terms of office and removals, and most important of all, with due process and the commitment to the democratic process that has always defined our organization.

The current Constitution does not address the role of the CEO or other employees, the legal protection of chapters and affiliates, and many of the disclosure, reporting and other requirements and relationships so crucial to our future. The new governing Bylaws will address these matters, and indeed, failure to do so would deprive the membership of its rightful role in guiding our development as well as place us in unnecessary legal jeopardy.

### **Major Features:**

So what specifically will be new or different: On the new side, we of course have to incorporate:

**The CEO:** CCB has long employed an

administrative assistant, and we will long and affectionately remember the great service that Ed Branch rendered to us. But with growing complexity, it became clear that a professional employee was needed to carry-out the instructions of the membership and the Board, to manage the day-to-day activities of the organization and the office, and to build the increasingly demanding relationships with various governmental funding or oversight bodies, with nonprofit or corporate sponsors, with potential partners, and with the public.

No organization could afford to have a governing document that did not note the existence and

describe the role of its CEO. The governing Bylaws will reflect the creation of this position and will delineate the CEO's role, coordination and accountability.

**Existing Components of the Organization:**

The new governing Bylaws will seek to enhance the existing components of the organization as well:

**The Chapters:** Our chapters need help. They are in trouble. All too many have ceased to exist, grown too small to be active, grown too dispersed to hold regular meetings, or just stopped communicating. The Bylaws will try to address this crisis by giving the chapters key support,

such as by bringing as many as possible under the umbrella of CCB's tax-exempt status and by offering other supports including elimination of the confusion in dues collection and roster data arising from the existence of different classes of membership.

**The Membership:**

Although we are beginning strenuous efforts to recruit new and younger members, we know that, for a while anyway, our numbers may continue to decrease while our average ages go in the opposite direction. This decrease in membership is disappointing to all of us, but it also has huge practical implications for our ability to impact the lives of our members and

of the community, and for our ability to conduct business.

The sovereignty of CCB's members has always been exercised through the Convention, and convention attendance has dwindled in recent years, to the point where in 2017 only 118 people registered. We have witnessed decisions being made by fewer and fewer of us. Almost certainly they made the same decisions the rest of us would have made, but declining participation is perhaps the most serious problem that a democratic organization can face. Nor is the decline random. That is to say, through no fault of anyone and without anyone intending it to happen, the people

who are able to participate at the annual convention are more and more those of us with relatively more money, and those in relatively better health, and those without pressing caretaker responsibilities.

We cannot afford to lose a single member, but we may be leaving irreplaceable ones behind. Many of us fear "technology," but our new governing document needs to lay the groundwork for a careful investigation of non-in-person techniques for ensuring that all of our members can participate in convention deliberations and decisions. We will ask you to authorize several of the other components to

investigate and test alternative and supplementary approaches to ensure participation for those who cannot attend in person, and to allow the membership to have more input between conventions.

One other serious consequence of members' declining ability to attend conventions is its effect on voting by chapters. Unless a chapter has been able to poll its members in advance, its delegate cannot be sure how to cast its votes in the event of a real controversy. And unless the delegate, alternate or someone from the chapter is present at the convention, both for the credentials meeting and for the vote, the

chapter gets no vote at all. This results in yet more disenfranchisement of members, and in more unintended inequality among voting members.

**Chapter Voting:** If the voting rights of our members are to remain meaningful, we may need to modify chapter voting. Each member of CCB should have one vote, whether a member of a chapter or affiliate, or an at-large member. Today, too many have none and a few have two.

Our new governing Bylaws will ask you to authorize us to carefully develop a remote voting system that will enfranchise all and that will free the chapters for their real and important work.

### **Chapter and State Relationship:**

We need to assure close, cooperative and mutually supportive relationships between the chapters and the state organization. Neither can prosper without the other, anymore than a tree can live without roots or trunk.

As it relates to the new Bylaws, we will also do such things as eliminate unrealistic and rigid dates from existing constitutional provisions bearing upon chapters' obligations to submit rosters and other information. We will replace those with time frames that are agreed-upon, adjustable, and that work for everyone.

**As noted earlier, chapters will be invited, and newly-created chapters required, to operate under CCB's 501 (c) (3) protective umbrella. This is important for the organization as a whole and for the chapters. It will increase the flow of resources to chapters, free them of administrative burdens and provide other benefits to them, while giving the organization the up to date and statewide information it needs.**

#### **The Board:**

**The Board of Directors plays a vital but sometimes underutilized role in the life of this or any organization. The new Bylaws will require, not merely request, those who seek to serve on the Board to submit information to**

**the membership in advance of voting that will allow members to evaluate and compare them in the light of the issues facing the organization. We intend to request similar provisions regarding the submission of resolutions.**

#### **Committees:**

**Committees play a key role in researching various issues and in creating in-depth knowledge on important matters. But to be effective, committees need to be flexible, meaning that the Board should have the ability to create, terminate and modify them as necessary. For that reason, the new Bylaws will abolish standing committees, leaving to the judgment of the president and Board and membership, and to**



the demands of the time, the determination of what committees are needed and when. We will also clarify that, in those cases where outside expertise is necessary, the committee may be chartered to include a person or persons who are not members of CCB. Of course, CCB members will always make up the majority of committees. Special committees will be convened to conduct the research described above.

**Officers:**

Officers are typically among the most experienced members of the organization. As such, their effective utilization is vital. The Bylaws will implement clear liaison relationships and require Board members to actively

take on specific responsibilities, consistent with their skills and campaign pledges.

The foregoing summary of some of the Constitution and Bylaws committee's thinking to date is submitted to you with the hope that it will engage you and provoke your thoughtful and robust feedback. Nothing is written in stone and nothing is decided. We look forward to your joining us for a conference call, announced on the various CCB mailing lists and the Connection, where we hope to hear from as many of you as possible, to answer your questions, and no doubt to participate in a few lively debates. Thank you for

**your attention and  
support.**

**--Your Constitution and  
Bylaws Committee**

**\*\*\***

## **Letter to Visual Cortex**

**By Susan Glass**

**Perhaps you are not my subject of address;  
but your reputation for flexibility precedes you,  
as my fingertips and I well know.**

**We were there, you see,  
when you captured the initially meaningless pebbles-  
ticklish filigree lace on cardboard paper.**

**I still recall our first word: rain.**

**In contracted braille, it arrived:**

**Cell one: three dots left and one at mid-level right.**

**Cell two: one dot at top left.**

**Cell three: two subtler points, better mannered, less  
demanding,**

**nestling midrange, mid finger pad.**

**On that afternoon of first differentiation,  
it was, in fact, raining in the leaf-flecked garden.**

**Sycamore and oak muted the drops  
so that they hissed like skillet garlic.**

**So too, those dots beneath my right-hand index finger  
hissed into recognition.**

**(ten-fingered mastery came later for me.)**

**That first neural path, from fingertip to visual cortex,  
bypassed my passive eyes and forgave their shyness.**

**With one word, rain,  
the new wiring laid itself  
into place.**

**\*\*\***

## **My Roller Coaster Ride**

**by Gabe Griffith**

**It is somewhat ironic that I  
don't like roller coasters,  
considering the roller  
coaster ride my life has  
been over the last 20  
months or so. I had  
always thought of myself  
as relatively healthy, but in  
January of 2016, I was still  
putting my life back  
together after my wife  
passed. Then I found  
myself getting weaker and**

**weaker. I was finally able  
to get in to see my doctor,  
and she sent me for some  
tests in the hospital. They  
diagnosed me with Guillon  
Barre, an autoimmune  
disease that affects the  
nervous system. I ended  
up getting so weak I  
couldn't even get out of  
bed on my own and spent  
almost 5 weeks in the  
hospital between the ICU**

and physical therapy. And then I spent another 5 months in out-patient physical therapy.

In many ways, that episode saved my life. The therapy gave me something tangible I could work toward. While I was laying there, too weak to even get out of bed on my own, I started setting some goals for myself. The first one was to climb an 1100 foot mountain that I had been too weak to even make 20% of before going in to the hospital. The therapists told me my goal of August 1 was too ambitious, so I changed it to September 1 to appease them. I completed that climb on July 23rd of that year.

When I was discharged from therapy, I decided to

join a gym and get back in the pool. I had been a competitive swimmer in high school and swam recreationally through college, but I hadn't been in a pool to swim laps in over 10 years. In addition, I signed up to work with a personal trainer. As a result, over the past year, I have not only gotten back all the strength I lost with my illness, but I am now in the best shape I have been in in many years.

Earlier this Spring, I met a guy at the gym where I swim who asked me if I had ever done any open water swimming. I had done some in my younger days, but hadn't done any open water swimming in over 15 years. He asked me if I would be interested in a relay swim across

lake Tahoe he was in charge of organizing. When I said yes, he connected me with a team of disabled and able-bodied swimmers.

Our team consisted of myself, a guy with Usher's, a guy with a spinal cord injury who wasn't able to walk, and 4 other "able-bodied" swimmers. The relay technically consists of 6 person teams to swim a 10 mile trek across Lake Tahoe. We were able to have 7 because Corbin and I would always be swimming with another person.

Our team exchanged several emails and had one video conference call before the race, but most of us had never met in person and trained on our own. I finally met a couple

of my teammates the day before the race when we got together for a practice swim. That was also the first time I had ever swum while tethered to another person. The tether consisted of a length of bungee cord tied with a loop to go around each person's waist and one thigh. There was also a straight length of cord to allow each swimmer to be separated by about 3 feet, allowing freedom of movement while keeping the sighted swimmer close enough to guide.

Swimming in the lake is much different than swimming in a pool, and the practice swim prepared me well for the relay the next day. By this time I had worked my way up to swimming about

2500 meters without stopping but that was in an 80-degree pool. The lake was much warmer than almost any other year in anyone's memory, but it was still only about 65 degrees. Once I got moving it wasn't bad, but the first time I jumped in the water, it took my breath away. Also, the water itself had a much different feel from pool water, which is difficult to describe.

Race day finally arrived on July 22nd. We got together at about 6:30 AM, and our division of the race kicked off at about 8:30 AM. The way the relay is supposed to work is that each person swims a 30 minute leg in the first round. Then everyone swims for 10 minutes at a

time after that until the 10 mile trek is completed. When we weren't in the water swimming, we were riding along in the chase boat. I ended up swimming 3 separate legs of the race. Since our team wasn't actually competing, we didn't stick to the strict time requirements as much or the strict order in which we started. During my first leg, my partner and I swam for our 30 minute segment. In the second round, I swam with a different partner, and we swam for about 15 minutes. This time, just to be different, we did a tandem dive off the front of the boat while tethered together. Luckily it came off just as it would have been drawn up, and we

managed not to get a concussion. My teammates let me and a partner swim the last leg. At that point, I'm not exactly sure how far we swam, but it was probably another 15 minutes or so. I'm not positive how far I swam all together that day, but it was somewhere around a couple of miles.

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When I came crawling out of the lake that day, it was such an accomplishment, not only for that day but for everything I'd been through in the past two years. I could never have done any of it without the support and encouragement of my family and friends.

## **The Domestic Violence and Hate Crimes Committee**

**by Pamela Metz**

The CCB Domestic Violence and Hate Crimes Committee is alive and well! Its mission is to advocate for creating accessible shelters, and to educate the blind community regarding

domestic violence and hate crimes against it.

Please see the definitions of Domestic Violence and Hate Crimes at the end of this article. If you find yourself in any of these situations, please don't hesitate to contact your

local police, your church, a family member, or a friend. Do not allow this to happen to you, and do not live in fear or silence any more. Come up with some plans and strategies to break the cycle. There are resources in your area that can quickly begin the process of eliminating all of these violent situations, but the final action is for you not to hesitate in contacting someone to help you. And the Domestic Violence and Hate Crimes Committee can also help. As the chair of the DVHCC, and a person who has experienced these violent actions herself, please understand that physical, emotional, and mental violence can and does occur to many of us in our

own community. My phone number is; 818-882-3610. Please contact me if you have questions.

**Definitions: From the Department of Justice Oct. 31, 2016:**

**Domestic Violence:**  
"Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain, or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological."

**Hate Crimes:**

According to the FBI: "A hate crime is a traditional offense like murder, arson, or vandalism with an added element of bias. It is



**a criminal offense against  
a person or property,  
motivated in whole or in  
part by an offender's bias  
against a race, religion,**

**\*\*\***

**disability, sexual  
orientation, ethnicity,  
gender, or gender  
identity."**

## **Message from your Advocacy Committee**

**Steven Mendelsohn, Chair Advocacy  
Committee**

**Many of us have  
encountered or soon will  
encounter inaccessible  
retail kiosks and terminals  
in restaurants, stores,  
medical facilities and  
other service  
establishments. As  
businesses seek to reduce  
labor costs through use of  
technology, such  
automated transactions  
will become more  
common. But in all too  
many cases, the access  
needs of people utilizing  
nonvisual access are**

**overlooked or  
disregarded. In situations  
where the kiosk is the only  
means of getting  
information or services,  
making a purchase, or  
performing some other  
transaction or task, its  
inaccessibility either  
prevents us from  
conducting our affairs, or  
forces us to give up the  
speed, privacy and choice  
that others take for  
granted.**

**This is unquestionably a  
civil rights issue, and**

many of us are familiar with the legal settlements that have been reached on behalf of our community's technology access rights. Such as the settlement with the movie distributor Redbox and of course victories in web access cases such as Target.

If you have encountered a barrier posed by one of these inaccessible machines and been unable to get the store or other facility to provide the human assistance necessary to overcome the problem, you may be thinking about seeking the advice or services of an attorney. The choice of an attorney to represent you is a very important one. Just as in the choice of a doctor, you need someone who is not only

knowledgeable and skillful, but also someone you feel comfortable with; someone with the same goals for the outcome of the case; someone with whom you can agree on methods and someone with whom you can communicate effectively. Among attorneys of equal skill, one may prefer to negotiate first, while another may favor filing a lawsuit straight away. One may seek publicity for the case, while another adopts a low-profile approach. One may seek money damages, while another focuses on getting the accessibility fixed. One may be easy to reach when you have a question, another not. One may prefer representing a group of people in one

case, while another focuses on individual situations. One may be sensitive to the danger of inadvertently making bad law, while another may not appreciate this risk.

There is no one way that is always right or always wrong. Success and satisfaction depend on the fit between you, the attorney and the case.

Each case, each lawyer, and most of all each client needs to be a good fit.

Before deciding to work with any attorney, you should seek a second opinion about the legal diagnosis and the proposed legal treatment, and if a lawyer charges you nothing, find out whether they expect to try and collect fees from the other side and if so, how

that desire would affect their handing of the case. Speak to several lawyers if you can in order to find someone with whom you are comfortable; whose approach, methods and advocacy style are right for you; who has the same objectives you do, and most of all, who has the necessary knowledge and experience.

CCB can help. CCB welcomes as many advocates as possible to join in this important work, and over the years, we have worked with a number of attorneys and firms for whose skill, experience and dedication to our members we can vouch. These are people who we know from experience will combine state-of-the-art legal

knowledge with a sensitive understanding of many of the issues facing our members in daily life. So if you have decided that you need to consult a lawyer, we hope you will talk to us, but whether you talk to us or not, always try to get a second opinion.

Feel free to contact me (510-357-1844, smendel@panix.com) to

\*\*\*

talk about it. And even if you're not considering legal action, please let your advocacy committee know about any instances of inaccessibility you encounter and how they effect your life, because that kind of information will help CCB focus its advocacy efforts where they can be most valuable to you, our members.

## **A Braille Challenge Adventure**

**by Catherine Skivers**

On February 25th 2017, I was pleased to be invited to attend the Northern California Regional Braille Challenge, the National Program of the Braille Institute, that was held at the Lighthouse for the Blind in San Francisco.

The new Lighthouse for the Blind location is wonderful, and they have many programs for the blind in the area. The Braille Challenge was sponsored in collaboration with the California School for the

**Blind, The Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and many people from the area who served as volunteers and others who handled the various events taking place throughout the day. Children from everywhere, from grades 1 through 12, came together to participate in the Braille Challenge. They competed in a contest that includes reading and comprehension, speed and accuracy, proofreading, spelling, and chart and graph reading. Some of the children received prizes for their efforts. In addition to this, some other events included workshops and panel discussions for parents and teachers. The**

**program lasted all day and began in the morning with the students marching into a central meeting room. It was such a surprise to see so many young people using white canes—they start much younger than we did in my day!**

**Stuart Wittenstein, retired Superintendent of the California School for the Blind, led the children in the Braille Challenge. Caitlin Hernandez, a recent recipient of a Master's Degree in Special Education from San Francisco State University, was the keynote speaker. She currently works as a resource specialist for the San Francisco Unified School District. She pleased her young listeners by sharing with**

them that she had been a winner in the first Braille Challenge in 2009. She is very energetic and has a lot of musical talent. As an undergraduate at the University of California at Santa Cruz, Caitlin sang in and was the assistant director for an acapella group on campus. She was involved in many other student activities. She has written 3 plays, including a short musical in which she starred in a production in Los Angeles. She gave many words of encouragement to all her listeners.

I was pleased to be able to speak for a few minutes to the children and their parents. It was wonderful to see all the parents accompanying their children and offering so

much support--that doesn't always happen. In my remarks to them, I congratulated everyone and told them about what braille meant to me. They seemed to enjoy my telling them that while they are blind children with mostly sighted parents, in my family it is different--I am the blind parent with sighted children. I did point out that this didn't mean that my kids got away with anything! I congratulated the parents for bringing their children, and the children for participating in the Braille Challenge. I ended my remarks by telling the children that everyone there that day would not win a prize, but that they did not need to worry about that because they

are already learning braille and using it, and that, in itself, is a great prize to any blind person. Stuart came over to me and said he thought that was an important point to make. He had attended a Braille Challenge meeting where he saw a little girl crying in the dining room, so he went over to see if he could be of help to her and her father. The father told him that she was the only blind child in her class and had been used to being recognized a lot and was unhappy not to have won a prize. He asked me how I happened to think of telling the children this and, I told him that once upon a time I was a little girl who didn't win a prize. It is a well known fact that the majority of blind

people who are employed know braille. The Council currently has an affiliate—The Braille Revival League of California. In a recent BRLC meeting held to determine whether we wanted to merge with the Library Users of California, we learned that while many people use braille, they do not belong to the Revival League. As far as I am concerned, I think we can all agree that braille is currently under siege from many sources. We need to urge people to have their children taught braille, and I would urge those of you who know braille and simply haven't joined BRLC affiliate to do so. I think supporting the Braille Challenge is an excellent project for BRLC to support. I can't think of

anything better for us to do. It would be time and energy well invested, and certainly in keeping with

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the fine work CCB has done throughout the years.

## **Kettle Working for the Salvation Army**

**by Erik Smiley**

{Editor's note: Christmas is just around the corner!}

Rain drips from the roof just above me, and tires swish on the wet pavement of the shopping center parking lot. On my left, a sliding electric door rolls back and forth, back and forth, back and forth as patrons enter and exit the drug store. "Merry Christmas", says an elderly gentleman, while depositing coins into the plastic kettle that hangs in a stand just in front of me that also holds a sign announcing the Salvation

Army. For the last 5 minutes, I've been playing a set of Irish jigs on a penny whistle, close cousin of the recorder. For the last 5 years, I've been a Salvation Army Kettle worker. Every December since 2012, I've spent the month standing near the entrance of a drug store or market soliciting donations and greeting people as they hurry about their errands. "Thank you for the music," says someone else as she adds to the donations.



The original suggestion to work for the Salvation Army came from my wife Karen in the fall of 2012 when we lived in Sacramento. "My ex brother-in-law is a bell ringer. "He gets just minimum wage, but it pays for a nice Christmas," she said.

My job search, (still on-going) needed to start getting even seasonal results and it happened to be just the right time to call, because it was time for the Salvation Army to put their kettle program together for the year. Near the end of the first interview, I mentioned that I had been playing Irish music on the penny whistle since 1988. "What!" said Ralph, one of the interviewers.

"Can I play out there?" I asked.

"Certainly," he agreed. "I used to play trumpet when I was bell ringing in Chicago. They would let us ring in the building when it got down to 3 degrees," he recalled. I was glad I didn't have to worry about 3 degrees above 0 in Sacramento and I was starting to like the idea of the job.

"People don't realize how hard it is," said Ralph at the orientation about a week later. "You'll be on your feet from 1 to 3 hours at a time," he told a group of us gathered at the local Salvation Army Corps. Paper work was completed, information was exchanged and I was told, "You'll get a call around Thanksgiving."

The call around Thanksgiving came late on the Friday after, and I had already turned my cell phone off for the day. On Saturday morning at about 8:00 am, I heard the message saying that I was to be at a place called Sunrise Mall at the back entrance of a JC Penny's department store. "Oh, I wish I'd seen that message yesterday" I thought as I quickly threw a lunch together. All I knew about Sunrise Mall was that it was all the way across Sacramento from where I lived, something like a 15 mile trip, and I had to be there in about 2 hours.

A call to the local transit agency which operates 7 days a week, a portable GPS, a 2 hour bus ride

with an unfamiliar transfer spot and my good friend Todd helping me through the giant shopping center, I was at my spot before the kettle, bell, and apron arrived. That first day passed like they said it would with me standing ringing for about 2 hours at a time between two 10 minute breaks and a 30 minute lunch. I'm sure they said something about dressing warmly or at least being prepared for weather changes. It was 5:00, dark, and the weather was changing. I don't even think I brought a heavy jacket or a hat. After that long chilly hour passed and the pedestrian traffic had almost stopped, Todd and the Salvation Army van arrived at almost the same time. The

**Army picked up my things and Todd gave me a ride all the way home which included a hamburger along the way.**

**On the following Monday morning, I had a general knowledge of where I was to meet the Salvation Army and start my shift. The location this time was only a 2 mile walk from my house along a pleasant creek trail, and I was to work the spot for the rest of the season. This time, I brought the penny whistles with me, and after a few minutes of ringing the bell, I pulled one out of my front pocket and started to play one of the Irish tunes that I've learned over the years. Over the next hour or so, I started hearing things like: "I've never seen anybody**

**do that before," or "Thank you for the music; it's so much nicer than the bell." All right, this might work. I spent the next few hours playing for about 30 minutes, and ringing the bell while I thought up some more sets to continue with for the next 20 minutes or so.**

**During the last week of the 2012 season, I was approached by a man who introduced himself and said he was from the local NBC news station. "I'm doing a piece on Bell Ringers who do something different while providing this great service. I'd like to interview you and get you on our local news tomorrow night."**

**"Of course," I said and we arranged a time to meet**

during my shift the next day. On the following night, the local news featured a piece on me, and on a woman who sings Christmas carols while ringing. Over the last few days of the season, I was recognized for the music and thanked for being out there providing this valuable service.

As I write this piece, the 2016 kettle season has ended for the year in Eureka, California where Karen and I now live. For the last five Decembers, being a Kettle Worker has been a great source of full-time temporary paid employment. "I'm proud of you, and you're doing great things for our family," Karen has said on those nights when I have

come home tired, stiff, cold, cranky, and hungry. The job gives me a focus, and I have been a model employee, on-time, cheery and flexible. All my supervisors thus far have been very accommodating to this totally blind kettle worker in that they have helped familiarize me with new locations, and shown me routes to rest rooms and comfortable places to take my lunch breaks.

Not only has the kettle work been a paying job, but I have met interesting people each season. Some people have not noticed that I am totally blind, I think because my long white cane leans against a building support column just behind me. "Do you always play music with your eyes

closed!", I have been asked several times this season alone. Or, "Could you watch my bike for me while I go in, oh, sorry." Last year, one man got out of a truck and said, "Katch!", and something bounced off my kettle, my hip, and skittered a few feet back behind me on to the wet ground. I didn't want to feel around down there on the wet concrete near the door of the hardware store where I was working that day. I played music and rang the bell for about 10 more minutes before someone came out, picked up whatever that was back

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there behind me, and said, "Oh, here yeh go," and gave me an ice cream bar before getting in to his truck and driving off. I ate the treat quickly because I knew it wouldn't last long even on a cool winter day. The stories, the chance to play music and meet people, and the temporary work opportunity have brought me back to the Salvation Army now for 5 seasons. I plan to do this community smart seasonal work where ever I live with an apron, bell, the proper weather attire, and a penny whistle ready to play.

## **San Diego Braille Club Celebrates Its 90th Birthday**

**by Susan Glass**

**That's right. Founded in 1927, the San Diego Braille Club celebrates its 90th birthday this year!**

**Congratulations. I caught up with the club's current President and Membership Chair Patricia Bogard, who spoke enthusiastically about the club and the camaraderie that she finds there, and who has been a member herself since 2006.**

**Sixteen women and nine men comprise the San Diego Braille Club for a total of twenty-five members. Five of these members are totally blind, fifteen are visually impaired, and five are sighted. Additionally there**

**are three guide dogs. All reside in San Diego County, except for one person, who lives in Riverside County. Several in the club are good chefs, and there's also an artist and two athletes who bike and rock climb. Every third Friday of the month, the chapter organizes a social activity such as visiting a local museum, sailing with Challenged Sailors San Diego, taking a ferry boat trip to Coronado or a bus trip to Las Vegas or riding the San Diego trolleys. The club also co-sponsors events with the San Diego Deaf-Blind Cultural Society.**

**"It's amazing," says Patricia, "how you can live in a place for some 50 years as I have, and as others in the club have also, and yet not seen a lot of the local sites." She's glad that the San Diego Braille Club makes this possible.**

**Every first Friday of each month, the club holds a business meeting that usually features a speaker who addresses issues related to blindness, health, lifestyle, and laws that affect visually impaired people. Near election time, the local voter registrar's office also brings voting machines to give members an opportunity to practice using them before election day.**

**When asked what challenges face the San Diego Braille Club, Patricia's answer was immediate:**

**"Recruitment. We need suggestions for how to recruit new members. We try to be a big presence at the 5K run for Fighting Blindness that is sponsored by the Junior Blind, and other similar events. Even so, we are not having much success at recruiting new people to join the club."**

**I asked her about her hopes for the club's future.**

**"Even though we have two members on the CCB Board of Directors, I'd like for us as a group to be more involved with CCB. Attending CCB**

conventions is informative and fun. Addressing something smaller, I'd like to find a permanent location where our chapter

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could hold its monthly business meetings. I think that a home base makes you stronger."

## **Member at Large Focus Call**

**by Vivian Younger, Membership Committee Chair**

Have you found a happy home yet? Have you been considering whether or not to join a CCB Chapter lately?

For those of you who are Members at Large, you may want to participate on the upcoming Members at Large Focus Call. The purpose of the Focus Call on September 25th, is to provide an opportunity for those of you who are Members at Large to share what your CCB concerns, interest and needs are at

this time. The CCB Membership Committee would like to answer any questions that you may have about the structure of the CCB organization, and/or learn about the benefits for joining a Chapter. Whether you belong to a Chapter or not, are a Board member/President, and/or you wish to invite a prospective Member to join the focus call, everyone is invited. If you have any questions about



**the Focus Call, contact Vivian Younger at 562-879-6693.**

**The focus call information is as follows: Date: 9-25-17; Time: 7 PM; Call-in number: 712-432-3066, Access code: 778159**

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**Note: This notice will appear in the California Connection as well.**

**The CCB Membership Committee is looking forward to an enlightening and robust Members at Large Focus Call!**

## **About Our History**

**by Catherine Skivers**

**The leaders of ACB were wise to hire professional writers to write the ACB history. It took several years to assemble, and the resulting document is excellent. If you have not yet read People of Vision, you have missed a great opportunity to learn about a wonderful organization. Work ,began on the CCB history some time ago, but unfortunately, we did not**

**have access to professional writers. Although \$1500 was allocated for the purpose of preparing our history, the only money spent to date has been by those of us in the membership who are working on it. We have been blessed with some wonderful help. Much of our material is in braille and has to be put into other formats. Over**

the years, many articles have been submitted by a number of different people. This has created challenges, since our committee members live all throughout California, and we have not been able to send braille to them to be transcribed.

We are indebted to Lynne Laird, who transcribed into braille the one print document we had: "The 50 Year History of the California Council of the Blind." The cost will be approximately \$200.00 but as yet, we are not ready to offer it to everyone.

For a while, I was editor of the "Council Bulletin," which is the forerunner of "The Blind Californian". The last copy I edited was in February, 1959. I have the one remaining braille

copy that we are aware of, and my thanks go to Connie Skeen, who has allowed me to read the entire magazine to her; she has then typed it into a format to send to Lynne for transcription. The Bulletin was a bi-monthly publication and was 90 braille pages. We have one more chapter, and the job will be completed. This is an important document because it was written just at the time when one quarter of the delegates of the California Council of the Blind left and eventually formed the Associated Blind of California. This group was instrumental in forming the American Council of the Blind, and was its first California affiliate. This publication contains many

articles written by Bob Campbell, George Fogerty, and Catherine Skivers, setting forth the various reasons for their resignations from the CCB. It also has articles delineating the many legislative issues the council had introduced, along with a variety of other interesting articles that impacted the blind in California at that time.

The committee has been very fortunate to have Steve Medelshhn join us. He and I are going to work on a taped format of some information on our history. Some things will be written about me. Steve feels that there is information the blind community should know about my participation in our history. I think I will

even tell him about the time when we moved into our new office in Hayward and found a cable to the phone system had been cut. I was distressed to think that, not only had we moved to Hayward from Burbank, but people would be unable to access the California Connection. I spoke to the telephone company and asked if it would be possible to put that line into my home for a week and they did.

That's when I found out that people like to call the Connection at 2 or 3 AM or any time of the day and night! My family really didn't appreciate it, and I strongly advise any future presidents not to try it!

Now at the ripe old age of 92, you could say that I am on borrowed time. I'm not

sure how much I am going to be able to borrow, so I am concerned about completing the task of writing our history. But with people like Lynne Laird, Connie Skeen, Steve Mendelsohn, Don Queen, Joe Smith, Bernice Kandarian, Roger Petersen, and countless others who have worked throughout the years, I'm confident that we will have enough of the history saved to insure that future generations will know

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about the Council and how much wonderful work we have done. I just hope that there are enough of you who will support the Council to continue to be important leaders in the blindness community in California and the nation.

If any of you have information that you think should be included that has not been, please forward it to me immediately. My address is 836 Resota St., Hayward, CA 94545.

## **The Beauty of a Book Club**

**by Bonnie Rennie**

In the months before my much-anticipated retirement, I often found myself in this pleasant mental picture: comfy

chair, welcoming round table, perhaps a cup of coffee in my hand, sunlit room. Around the table, friendly voices taking

turns in animated conversation. A book's story or subject, its merits and flaws, quality of character development, the take-aways we each got from reading that book, and so much more in terms of delightful discussion.

I had listened to sighted coworkers relating their happy book club experiences, with a mixture of envy and eagerness. When I did retire, I set about finding the best book-sharing venue for my needs and abilities.

The term "book club" is a broad one, encompassing myriad styles, genres and formats. One can be integrated into a sighted group that meets in a library, bookstore, church,

you name it! Some concentrate on everyone reading the same best-seller, mystery, or poetry. Others may each read a different tome and critique it to the other members. Some people who are visually impaired want to be integrated into a sighted group while others prefer a club of visually impaired peers. Interesting options can be endless and depend on what one wants from the social connection, and how flexible one can be in obtaining the reading material.

Here are just some of the many benefits of joining a book club:

1. Encourages you to keep reading, and getting something from the experience.

**2. You get introduced to books, authors, perhaps even genres, that you were unaware of or thought you would not like. Even if you end up not liking that book selection, you may well grow from the exposure.**

**3. It's an opportunity to develop a sense of community, deeper connections with like-minded people, or just nice folks. These very positive relationships may be forged over time.**

**4. A great way to stimulate those all-important brain synapses, encouraging your mind to stay active, healthy, and engaged.**

**5. The club experience is fun, or can be made to be**

**a good time you look forward to.**

**6. It could be a positive way to promote CCB in your area, attracting potential members who enjoy reading.**

**In my case, I fell into a book club at the Braille Institute that was starting up, and has run for 6 pleasurable years. We now have an opportunity to move the group to our Orange County past CCB President's home. We hope that this setting will naturally blossom into a place where it's appropriate to highlight the benefits of CCB and the California Library Users of America (CLUA) to the participants.**

**Speaking of conducive environments, remember,**

there are many ways to be part of such a wonderful book community. And they do not require one to leave the comfort of home or sit face-to-face. The mighty telephone now offers satisfying gatherings of readers.

Perhaps you know that the CCB affiliate California Library Users of America (CLUA) and the ACB national affiliate Library Users of America (LUA) both hold book discussions throughout the year, via group conference calls. Long distance charges apply, unless you have an unlimited plan. Take it from me, these calls are informative and enjoyable. A free option is the Senior Center Without Walls book

club. It meets on the first and third Saturday afternoons of the month and is called BookShare. Each person who wishes to can talk briefly about a book they've read and recommend. To register and participate, you may call SCWW at 877 797-7299.

I was surprised at how many ways that being a book club member has enhanced my reading experience. For book-lovers, what an enriching avenue to expand our social and literary horizons!

For more information on joining the CCB California Library Users of America, please contact the CCB office. You may ask for my contact info there.

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## **5 Innovative Ways Art Is Becoming More Accessible to the Blind Community**

by Katie Dupere

{Editor's note: This is edited from an article with lots of graphics. The link to the original article is <http://mashable.com/2016/12/29/art-accessibility-blind-low-vision/#VSNdgGx5Qmqz>.}

Art is a universal medium of expression, bridging gaps across language, time and culture. But galleries and museums aren't always accessible to everyone, often excluding blind people and those with low vision from truly experiencing the art world. With about 285 million blind or visually impaired people in

the world, that's a sizable part of the global population being left out. But innovations—both simple and high-tech—are making the art world even more inclusive.

Many blind people and those with low vision have experienced art through audio descriptions of pieces, whether it's recorded commentary from museums or explanations from friends in real time. But this can prevent them from interpreting pieces of art for themselves. Luckily advocates have developed new solutions, creating



tactile ways for art lovers to substitute touch for sight. Here are just a few ways art is becoming more accessible for blind and low-vision communities around the world.

### **1. 3D Printing of Fine Art**

3D printing is making art more accessible by creating touchable versions of art—especially famous pieces. Blind people and those with low vision, some of whom have never viewed works like the Mona Lisa or The Scream, can now feel their way through these iconic works. One company at the forefront is 3D Photoworks, which makes tactile versions of historic paintings and modern photography through 3D printing. The pieces made

by 3D Photoworks also feature sensors, which activate audio descriptions of the work as a person feels around the piece. 3D Printworks has brought its inclusive art to museums around the country, but it wants to eventually provide accessible options for art lovers who can't see in all 35,000 museums across North America.

### **2. Incorporating Braille Into Visual Art**

Including Braille in traditional forms of art is one way to make pieces more accessible, while also celebrating Blind culture. And one particular artist has paved the way for this innovative technique. New York-based artist Roy Nachum creates what he calls

"visual art for the visually impaired." His work is undeniably gorgeous at first glance, even serving as the cover art for Rihanna's album, *Anti*. But for those who can't see Nachum's eye-catching visuals, the art has a different layer of artistic appeal—poetic writings embossed on the artwork's surface in Braille. To highlight the tactile importance of his work, Nachum also lightly covers his art in ash, which leaves fingerprint marks on the work as a person reads the Braille messages. The prints left behind act as a type of documentation of human contact with his work. Nachum's innovative form of interactive art allows everyone to experience

the same art in different—yet equally powerful—ways.

### **3. Extra-textured Paintings for Inclusivity**

Making art more accessible to people who can't see doesn't require changing already existing pieces. Paintings, for example, can be created with this audience in mind from the start, layering paint to make it a more tactile experience. One well-known artist using this technique is John Bramblitt, who began painting after he lost his eyesight due to complications with epilepsy and Lyme disease in 2001. Bramblitt says losing his sight helped change the way he thought about art and color for the better. He

often creates his pieces with thick layers of paint, appealing to touch as well as the gaze of fans who can see. Though layering paint to create more textured work is common, artists who use the technique specifically to make their art more inclusive are relatively rare. Regardless of the lack of popularity, painting with texture is a simple, low-tech way to bring art to those who can't experience it through sight.

#### **4. Tactile Art That Welcomes Touch**

We're used to hearing the phrase, "Please, don't touch the art." But California-based contemporary artist Andrew Myers creates works specifically to

challenge this common, disapproving phrase. Using screws of different heights, the artist creates topographic-like portraits by inserting the screws into wooden boards, making images with the meticulous gaps and grooves. As a result, his work has mass appeal for blind people and those with low vision, who can touch his portraits. Tactile art like Myers'—which includes any art meant to be felt in order to be fully experienced—is engaging for art lovers of all visual ability. From complex pottery to plastic protruding from canvas, tactile forms of art grant a fuller experience to gallery-goers who can't see. Myers documented his work with tactile art in

the documentary **Please Touch the Art!**, which features a blind man feeling a portrait of himself for the first time.

### **5. Tactile Tours of Museums and Galleries**

Some major museums and smaller galleries are throwing the "look, but don't touch" mantra out the window—and it's all in the name of inclusivity. To do this, museums have begun using touch—and even smell—to give those without vision the ability to experience art. Several museums and galleries have started hosting tactile tours, which serve as ways for blind people and people with low vision to touch replicas of

famous artworks. The Louvre in Paris, and the Guggenheim and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, have all established tactile tours, where people can touch pieces of art or casts of famous works. The goal of these tours, one gallery curator at the Guggenheim told *The Atlantic*, is to allow people who are blind or have low vision to "see" with their brains, not their eyes. You can find a list of popular museums in the U.S. offering accessible programs for blind people and those with low vision by going to <http://www.acb.org/adp/museums.html>.

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## **California Council of the Blind Officers and Directors**

**July 1, 2017**

**{Editor's note: We are indebted to Donna Sanchez, who updates and corrects the list of CCB officers and Directors, including the number of the term each is presently serving, the year elected to that term, and the year next up for election. Terms begin on July 1 following election. The presence of an asterisk means that the individual served a partial term before the first full term.}**

### **Officers**

**President: Judy Wilkinson (16-18, 1st term), San Leandro, 510-388-5079 c, [judy.wilkinson@ccbnet.org](mailto:judy.wilkinson@ccbnet.org)**

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**Immediate Past President: Jeff Thom (16-??), Sacramento, 916-995-3967 c, [jeff.thom@ccbnet.org](mailto:jeff.thom@ccbnet.org)**

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**Donna Sanchez**

**Dr. Catherine Schmitt Whitaker**

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**If you or a friend would like to remember the California Council of the Blind in your Will, you can do so by employing the following language:**

**"I give, devise, and bequeath unto the California Council of the Blind, a nonprofit charitable organization in California, the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_ (or \_\_\_\_\_) to be used for its worthy purposes on behalf of blind persons."**

**If your wishes are more complex, you may have your attorney communicate with the Executive Office for other suggested forms. Thank you.**