

**BayLines**

**Fall, 2015**

***BayLines***



**Bay State  
Council of the Blind**

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## **She Called Me Friend** **by Brian Charlson, BSCB President**

The other day, as I sat in my chair writing my first President's Message in many years for BayLines, I got a call from my wife, Kim, telling me that our good friend, Marcia Dresser, had passed away that morning after a long battle with cancer, and a final week-long stay in hospice. It was only the day before that I had spoken to Marcia's husband, Steve, giving him an update on the goings-on within BSCB since her resignation as our president in early September, so that he could pass it on to her the next time he went to sit at her bedside. Even knowing she was in hospice, hearing of her passing came as a blow.

We first came to call one another friends through our leadership roles in the American Council of the Blind. She was president of the Connecticut Council of the Blind and I was the president of the Bay State Council of the Blind. We attended ACB meetings and conventions together, and shared the joys of teaching, baseball, and reading.

While I have many fond memories of times spent with Marcia, one in particular comes to mind. Kim and I had invited Marcia and Steve to come to our home and share a summer dinner on our deck overlooking our swimming pool. For some reason, the dinner had to take place on a week night so I had to do some of the cooking in advance, and also had to take off work a bit early to get things set up at home.

When I arrived at home, I found that I had left my keys at work, requiring that I crawl over the fence into our back yard, jimmy open the bathroom window, go through the window head first, narrowly missing the open toilet bowl, and make my way to the kitchen and the food I had prepared.

On the menu that night were pulled pork sandwiches made with pork I had cooked on my smoker overnight, corn on the cob, potato salad, and ice cream sandwiches to finish things off. The umbrella was up, the ball game was on the radio, the strawberry coladas were standing by, and the Dressers arrived.

While laughing over my near miss with the toilet bowl, I started bringing out the platters of food. “Here are the pulled pork sandwiches”, I said. “Here is the corn on the cob, I said”. And, “Here is the potato salad”, I finished. “What would you like to have?” I asked. Marcia replied, “Only potato salad and a bit of pulled-pork for me”, “I don’t care for bread and don’t much care to eat things with my hands”. SHOCK! Steve chimed-in saying, “She even eats her Fenway Frank at the ball park without a bun.” DOUBLE SHOCK!!

Now comes the friend part. Marcia said, “Knowing how much you enjoy cooking, Brian, just seeing your joy in bringing this out to us has made this evening for me.” We clinked glasses, passed around the potato salad, and cheered on our Red Sox. Now, that’s friendship.

I know that many of you have similar stories to share about Marcia, and I hope that you take the time to do so. She was a kind soul. She will be missed. I can only hope that I will leave others with a tenth of the wonderful stories Marcia has left with me.

I am sure that I speak for many of you when I say, “Goodbye friend. You will be missed and fondly remembered.”

During the meeting at which Marcia tendered her resignation, we elected David Kingsbury First Vice President, Chris Devin Second Vice President, and Jim Denham as a new board member. Bob Hachey resumes his role as Immediate Past President with

Marcia's passing. All of us will act in our new roles until our March convention, at which time all of these offices will be up for election.

For now, we are moving ahead on the fall conference to be held on Saturday, November 21<sup>st</sup> at Perkins, and on several other issues such as membership development and fundraising.

Best wishes to you and your loved ones over the holiday season. Nothing means more to us than those we love, and we are especially mindful of this sentiment this year as we say goodbye to our friend Marcia.

## **BSCB Board Briefs by Bob Hachey**

The November, 2014 board meeting began with a budget update from Paul Saner, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB). Saner is concerned about the Community Services budget which has been cut and serves the majority of MCB consumers. He thanked BSCB for our advocacy on behalf of MCB, and especially the BLIND Day event. WE received a United Way donation of \$3,825.00. BSCB dispersed funding for White Cane Safety Day and for a delegation to attend the 2015 ACB Legislative Seminar and president's meeting.

The December meeting began with a debrief of the Fall Conference, which all agreed was a success. Jennifer Harnish resigned her position as Second Vice President, and the board unanimously elected David Kingsbury to fill that position until the 2015 convention. Next, PJ Fernandes was elected to fill the vacant director position, also until the 2015 convention. We then approved the newly formed North Shore Chapter. Our next item was an update from the Web Committee. Our new website is

[www.acbofma.org](http://www.acbofma.org). We also heard from Convention Coordinator Frank Ventura. We passed a motion requesting that the Boston Beer Works, site of recent BSCB social gatherings, add accessible signage to its restrooms. The motion included funding to help make this happen.

In January, the board received updates on the spring convention, and BLIND Day 2015. We also discussed regulation of ride sharing companies such as Uber and Lyft. Finally, we decided to hold a budget retreat before the spring convention.

Much of the February board meeting was taken up with final planning and logistics for the spring convention. Transition to the new website has been delayed by technical issues. We allocated funding for the 2015 Braille Challenge.

On March first, the board held an all-day budget retreat. First, we discussed the pros and cons of developing an annual budget. The pros far exceeded the cons. Hence forth, BSCB will approve an annual budget on or before November 1 of the prior year. The bulk of the retreat consisted of a detailed analysis of BSCB income and expenses. All agreed that the goal here was to continue the worthy mission of BSCB, and to ensure that BSCB will be financially sustainable going forward. The Board created a Budget and Finance Committee, and mandated that we develop an investment policy.

In March, the board continued the budget process begun at our earlier retreat. The board created a Social Media Committee. In addition, the transition to our new website was completed.

The April meeting began with a spring convention debrief. We thanked Nina Kagan for her dedicated service to the board, and welcomed Mary Haroyan to the board. We discussed the low attendance of convention attendees in the exhibit hall. We will

consider moving exhibits to a more favorable time for future conventions. In addition, we will look to streamline the registration process. Bob gave a report from the Legislative Committee. Thanks to the hard work of Rick Morin, we now have a database that indicates the state representative and senator for each BSCB member. This will facilitate targeted legislative advocacy going forward. Bob has dreamed of this day for a long time, and Rick has made that dream come true. Brian updated the board on national issues. Brian will be attending a meeting with the Federal Communications Commission. He will express discontent at Verizon's slow progress in producing an accessible talking set top box. If any BSCB members who are Verizon customers wish to work on this issue, please contact Bob Hachey. The board then appointed representatives for the ACB national convention.

In May, we heard from the Social Committee about an upcoming birding event at the Boston Nature Center. We also heard from Jim Denham of the Social Media Committee. We now have a Twitter presence and our number of followers is growing nicely. We allocated funding for the Disability Law Center gala, the ACB auction, and the ACB Forum raffle.

## **Save the Date**

Please mark the following date in your calendars. BSCB is pleased to announce that our annual fall conference will take place on Saturday, November 21, at the Grousebeck Center on the Perkins campus in Watertown. Jim Denham is this year's Conference Coordinator.



## **2015 BSCB Convention Highlights by Bob Hachey**

The 2015 BSCB convention took place on the weekend of March 27th, 28th and 29<sup>th</sup> at the Burlington Marriott. We continued the tradition of technology presentations on Friday afternoon. David Kingsbury, instructor at the Carroll Center for the Blind, presented tips and tricks using JAWS and a number of applications. He delved into things like skim reading and how to edit documents. This was a good session for beginners and experienced JAWS users alike. Next, Frank Ventura, Technology Specialist at the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), offered a similar presentation using the Mac and Voice Over. There were more PC users than Mac users in the room, but it was clear that accessibility on the Mac is improving, and it comes built into the Mac. Part of the discussion included comparisons between the PC and Mac for screen reader users.

Next we heard from Ashley Brow, a Carroll Center for the Blind instructor, on how to shop using Peapod. Peapod is an online shopping service offered by Stop and Shop. There were a number of Peapod users in the room and we all experienced what it is like to shop virtually for weekly groceries. Jim Denham, director of Assistive Technology for Perkins, next presented grub hub. This is an iPhone app used to locate and order from local restaurants. The app allows the user to peruse the menus, and lets the user know if the restaurant delivers, or if the order will need to be picked up at the restaurant. I'd say that Grub hub is a good way to find restaurants in your area that will deliver. In addition, it looks like it would be a good app when you are on the road.

The final presentation for Friday was led by Frank Ventura and Brian Charlson. IT was entitled "shopping online with a Gentle Manly Touch." Frank got this one rolling with a demonstration of Amazon.com. This expansive site can be accessed using a PC, a

Mac, or a SMART Phone. Frank had us roaring with laughter as he proceeded to purchase boxer shorts! Some of the customer reviews of this item were probably a bit too detailed for some folks. The Amazon site is very busy, but it is also accessible. Amazon offers a tremendous variety of items delivered to your door. Then, Brian Charlson led us in a discussion of a variety of Smart Phone apps used for shopping. He demonstrated how some of these are accessible, and others are not. He pointed out that when some of these apps are updated, the accessibility of those apps gets broken. He encouraged all SMART phone users to complain to developers when this occurs. Ideally, complaints of this type to app developers lead to quick solutions. However, sometimes, this is not the case.

Friday evening featured meetings of two BSCB chapters. The first was Guide Dog Users of Massachusetts (GDUM). Our featured speaker was Jeff Dugan of the Massachusetts Office on Disability. His topic was emergency preparedness for persons with disabilities and their service animals. He passed out very nice accessibility packs for both people and dogs. GDUM is still looking into the MBTA RIDE policy which restricts service animal users to vans. The final event was a meeting of BSCB Students.

Saturday morning began with our keynote address, presented by civil rights attorney Robyn Powell. MS Powell has worked with the Disability Policy Consortium here in Massachusetts, and currently works for the National Council on Disability (NCD) in Washington DC. She told us about a report she co-authored in 2012 entitled "Rocking the Cradle" that documents discrimination against parents with disabilities in great detail. NCD had been hearing about many instances of parents with disabilities losing custody of children during divorce proceedings due to their disabilities. This report represents the first time that a governmental agency has examined this issue. It also includes possible solutions to this problem. Robyn told us about a blind couple from Missouri who

had their infant taken from them by social services. It took them 57 days to be reunited with their child. The report tells of many similar situations. Robyn told us that seven states have passed new laws which ensure that parents with disabilities will be treated fairly in divorce proceedings when it comes to making custody decisions. She also told us about a similar bill here in Massachusetts, H 1370. If passed, Massachusetts will join the list of states where parents with disabilities will have equal rights when it comes to child rearing and child custody decisions made in divorce proceedings. This bill is currently awaiting action by the Joint Committee on the Judiciary. It was featured in a hearing in late June. Even though there was no opposition to the bill, it still awaits action. Please contact your state representatives and senators and ask them to support H1370. The NCD Rocking the Cradle report can be found on the web at <http://www.ncd.gov/publications/2012/Sep272012>. Robyn urged us to continue to support the cross-disability movement.

Our next presenter was Paul Saner, Commissioner for the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB). Saner gave us a state budget update. He told us about two small 9C cuts that were made in November and February. Fortunately, these cuts resulted in no reduction of MCB services. Saner is concerned because the Community Services account has been cut by over 24 percent in the previous decade in the face of a growing population of elders becoming legally blind. This account provides a wide range of social services from the Deaf-blind Community Access Network - two case managers for elders new to vision loss. Saner is extremely concerned that the Governor's budget for fiscal year 2016 will cut the vocational rehabilitation account budget by \$300,000.00. This would also result in a matching federal cut if passed in the final budget.

(Editor's note: I am happy to report that this funding was restored to the budget by the legislature.)

Our next presentation was a panel entitled “Focus On Employment.” The panelists were Paul Saner, Dave Power, President of Perkins and Joe Abely, President of the Carroll Center. Dave Power outlined new initiatives at Perkins to prepare students for employment. He is reaching out to the business community in efforts to both educate employers and find opportunities for things like internship and other transitional programs. Joe Abely reminded us that the federal government is placing greater emphasis on youth and employment. Paul Saner delved further into the newly passed Work Force Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). He encouraged BSCB and other consumer groups to read and comment upon the proposed regulations. Saner is concerned because it is likely that WIOA will eliminate the use of VR funding for homemaker outcomes. The homemaker outcome has often been part of the transition from being newly blinded to going back to work. All panelists pointed out the paramount importance of making sure that students have the necessary skills to compete in today’s tough job market. It is clear that the three agencies are working more cooperatively than ever in efforts to lower the high rate of unemployment among blind and visually impaired persons. Saner reminded us that one size does not fit all. MCB has had an internship program for twelve years. He told us that at least 50 percent of recent interns have found employment. Saner wants to provide more VR services to those who are not on the college track.

Saturday afternoon began with a presentation on Uber and Lyft, two more transportation options for us. Uber and Lyft require customers to use SMART phones; the customer requests a pickup and trip and the name of driver, make of vehicle, and license plate appear on the phone. The customer can contact the driver. This service costs around 60 percent of the cost of taxi cabs. Presenters for this session were Rick Morin, BSCB Treasurer, Amber Percy, President of Guide Dog Users of Massachusetts and Steven Max-Faults, a student at Harvard

University. Those who have used these services like them a lot. Rick pointed out the importance of increasing transit options and the idea of spontaneity which we don't have with paratransit. Concerns were raised that these services are not available to those who do not own SMART phones.

Chris Devin next gave a brief report from the Constitution and Bylaws Committee. While there were no amendments this year, Chris told the membership about how the board is creating new committees and the desire to place new non-voting members on the board representing BSCB chapters.

Our next presenter was Jill Juran, Rehabilitation Teacher Supervisor from MCB. Her topic was low-tech, low-budget low-tech options for everyday life. She began by stating that we all use a wide variety of tools. The first type she talked about was what we all think of as tools - screwdrivers, hammers and the like. If you don't want to drop a small screw that you'll have trouble finding, use a magnetic screwdriver. She mentioned how the microwave, toaster oven and the tray make life easier in the kitchen. Then, she talked about what one should keep in the car for possible emergencies.

Our next presentation was entitled "BSCB Happenings," presented by Nina Kagan, MCB Social Worker, and Bob Hachey, BayLines Editor. First, Nina updated us on what the BSCB board has been doing lately. We had an important budget planning meeting on March 1 of this year. Hence forth, BSCB will be producing an annual budget. The board also approved the newly formed North Shore chapter. BSCB has worked on accessibility at Mass Eye and Ear, and structured negotiations with Netflix. She gave insights into the ACB 2015 Legislative seminar. Finally, Bob Hachey encouraged BSCB members to submit articles for BayLines.

We next heard from our national ACB speaker, Dan Spoone, who is a member of the ACB Board of Directors. He shared with us some of what the ACB board has been doing. Dan told us of an interesting question he was once asked: "If ACB were not here tomorrow, what would we miss?" Now, that's what I'd call a thought provoking question. Dan shared some of his personal story with us. He got involved with ACB so that he could spend time with people living similar experiences. Like many other national board members, Dan began getting involved in his local Florida ACB chapter. Until he retired, Dan was not as active as he is now. He encouraged us to attend national conventions. He then started talking about all of our advocacy efforts in areas such as accessible video equipment, prescription labels and video description. Dan then began to talk about the importance of fundraising. ACB counts upon bequests, which may not be a stable funding source. Dan and his wife Lesley went to their first national convention in 2009. He talked of getting to know Dan and Brenda Dillon. The Dillons lead by example and showed Dan the way toward greater ACB involvement. He began joining more and more committees and was elected to the ACB board in 2012. Dan encouraged all of those in attendance to join one ACB committee. Dan concluded with an update on ACB legislative priorities, magnification devices for persons with low vision, and enhanced educational services for deaf-blind students.

Next, President Marcia Dresser filled us in on BSCB finances. She gave us a detailed accounting of where our money goes. It funds everything from our convention and fall conference to sending BSCB members to the ACB Legislative Seminar. Marcia also encouraged attendees to get more involved in BSCB.

Saturday afternoon concluded with BSCB elections. David Kingsbury was elected Second Vice President, and we elected the following directors to the board: Chris Devin; PJ Fernandes, Mary Haroyan, and Frank Ventura.

After a wonderful banquet meal, BSCB presented its annual awards. Cheryl Cumings and Sharon Strzalkowski served on the awards committee. The first award to be presented was the Community Access Award to Dr. Beverly Scott, General Manager of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). Scott has moved the ball forward when it comes to accessibility at the MBTA. Before coming to Boston, Scott served as the General Manager for the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, the first woman to serve in that position. Scott was instrumental in getting RIDE fares rolled back from \$4.00 to \$3.00. Recall that RIDE fares were increased from \$2.00 to \$4.00 in 2013. Scott has also engaged the MBTA in attempts to diversify the RIDE such that options like taxis could be used for shorter trips to help decrease overall costs and increase the quality of the service. Next, the Outstanding Service Award was presented to Myra Burloff, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD). Burloff has worked at MOD for 20 years and was named Executive Director in 2002. Prior to that, she was an advocate for the Metro-West Center for Independent Living. She has made a career of being a staunch advocate for the rights of all persons with disabilities. MOD produces a wallet-sized rendition of guide dog access law to be used by guide dog handlers when they are denied access. MOD more recently has offered emergency preparedness kits for service dog handlers. Last but certainly not least, BSCB was particularly honored to present the Betty Gayzagian Advocacy Award to Marcia Dresser. Marcia has served ACB at many levels. She was president of the Connecticut Council, on the ACB Board of Publications, and now serves as our own BSCB President. She also served on the leadership of the teachers affiliate and library users. She was instrumental in starting up two BSCB chapters, the North Shore Chapter and the Student Chapter. She is a life member of ACB, which is her number one passion. Marcia was a teacher of the visually impaired for over 30 years. We love you Marcia!

Next, we heard from Greg and Laurie Massing, volunteer talking book readers for the Perkins Library. David has been volunteering for Perkins since 2008. He began as a cassette inspector. It was not long before he began reading books. For quality control reasons, the readers work in pairs, one reading and the other monitoring. David says his partners kept leaving. Therefore, he finally convinced his wife Laurie to join him. At first, Laurie was very nervous about reading aloud. They described the wide variety of books they have read for Perkins. The books ranged from sports and medical issues to fiction books about gang members. It was clear from their presentation that reading talking books has become a very important part of their lives. They plan to continue as partners for some time. They ended the presentation with excerpts from books they have read.

Sunday morning began with a writers panel entitled “Blogs and Grub Street” presented by David Kingsbury and DeAnn Elliott. Grub Street is a Boston-based organization dedicated to creative writing. They offer a wide variety of writing course designed for all types of writers, from expert to beginner. Their headquarters is located in the famous Steinway Piano building, 162 Boylston Street in Boston. Grub Street can be found on the internet at <https://www.grubstreet.org>. David enjoyed the courses he took very much, and informed us that the instructors were happy to make the courses accessible. David and DeAnn have both taken courses with Grub Street and, having read examples of writing from both of them, there is no doubt that they are both accomplished writers. David has been published in the Boston Herald and DeAnn was very recently published in the Wall Street Journal. David does a wide variety of writing. While I was most impressed with the writing he did for BSCB as a part of our Transportation Committee, he says the kind of writing he enjoys doing most is more along the lines of escapist and nonsensical. DeAnn finds writing to be therapeutic. She has written many blogs for the Carroll Center. Her piece in the Wall Street Journal was



about web accessibility. They expounded on the importance of timeliness when it comes to being published.

Next, Dan Spooone presented on the topic of fundraising. First, he outlined ACB fundraising initiatives. He reminded us that contributions to ACB's Monthly Monetary Support program could be designated to support one's favorite ACB affiliate. Dan next described a variety of possibilities for local fundraisers. The first was a trivia night. He talked about how the Florida affiliate broke down the major job of pulling off a trivia night into small enough chunks to be assigned to various committees. Committees included trivia, food, marketing, and logistics. This process seemed to energize the affiliate and it offered an opportunity to do outreach to the wider community. The Florida affiliate has now held three very successful trivia nights. Next, Dan encouraged us to get convention sponsors. This is easier to do if you have a prepared and professional presentation.

Our final presenter was Kim Charlson, Director of the Perkins Library. BARD has now approved the Perkins Library such that locally produced materials will be added to the BARD site. Library Without Walls gives patrons the opportunity to participate in conference calls with book authors of NLS and locally produced books as well as those presenting on topics deemed of special interest to blind and visually impaired persons. Kim informed us that despite changes made by the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, Perkins Library staff are still helping patrons to receive free currency readers. The Library has just produced a supplement listing many newer titles to the ever-growing collection of described DVDs. An NLS app for Android SMART phones is due out in May. Kim is starting a new book club that will meet at Perkins on Sundays.

Finally, we moved to BSCB business. Rick gave us his Treasurer's Report. Rick Morin has done a tremendous job as

Treasurer for the last decade. He asked the group to toss out fundraising ideas. Ideas presented included a dance, a coffee house, and a raffle of lunch or dinner with a celebrity. Our Saturday night auction raised over \$3,500.00. A heartfelt thank you goes out to Nina Kagan and Frank Ventura for doing the lion's share of gathering together all of the donated items.

The next item of business was BSCB resolutions. This year, we had two resolutions; they both passed unanimously. One asked that funding be restored to the MCB Vocational Rehabilitation account and the other urged passage of a bill ensuring the rights of disabled parents during divorce proceedings. These resolutions are printed elsewhere in this newsletter.

## **BSCB Visits Boston Nature Center by Jerry Berrier**

On June 27 my wife, Elaine and I hosted a BSCB Social Committee birding event at the Boston Nature Center known as BNC. This Mass Audubon nature sanctuary is located at 500 Walk Hill Street in Mattapan and is accessible via The Ride. Property manager Michael McWade introduced us to the center and gave an informative nature talk. He also played a variety of unusual bird sounds, including several kinds of owls. We took some time to chat among ourselves and eat brown-bag lunches we had brought with us, and then we headed outdoors to experience BNC's accessible nature trail. We smelled the flowers in a butterfly garden, touched various kinds of trees, and heard some interesting bird sounds, which Mike and I identified for the group. Attendees enjoyed the accessibility features of the sanctuary including braille, audio, and large print descriptions of the trail and surroundings as well as items that can be touched including one that illustrated the transformation from caterpillar to butterfly.

After the walk, each participant had a chance to listen to birds through my Wildtronics amplified parabolic microphone system. A couple of us even took turns listening to a participant whispering from 30 or 40 feet away to see how well the device can amplify the human voice. Although the day was cloudy at times, there was no rain, and everyone seemed to have a good time.

Located just outside of downtown Boston on the former grounds of the Boston State Hospital, the Boston Nature Center is a community-based urban sanctuary. Trails and boardwalks traverse meadows and wetlands, home to over 150 species of birds, 40 species of butterflies, and more than 350 species of plants.

To learn more about BNC, go to <http://www.massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/wildlife-sanctuaries/boston-nature-center>.

And here's a link to accessibility features at BNC, including an audio tour:

<http://www.massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/wildlife-sanctuaries/boston-nature-center/about/accessibility>.

At the nature center, there is a Victor Stream player purchased by Mass Audubon to enable visitors to listen to the audio guide while walking the trail.

You can reach the cell phone versions of the audio tour at 617-618-1182. It is available in English and Spanish, and there is even a children's version.

## **Steering My Way Toward Boating Accessibility by Bob Hachey**

On a perfect July day, I embarked upon a kayaking trip with an organization called Waypoint Adventure. The boats were launched into the Charles River in my home town of Waltham. I had been on many kayak trips before and was looking forward to a relaxing time out on the water, and, perhaps a bit of power kayaking.

But this trip went far beyond my expectations. My usual trips consisted of one to two hour treks through various waterways. But something felt different right from the start on this day. Others on the trip included four persons with a variety of disabilities and a number of volunteers as well as two representatives of Waypoint Adventure. The organizers asked all of us to introduce ourselves, lead the group in a stretching exercise, and tell the group what we might like to learn about kayaking on this date. I latched onto the third of these requests. All of my time spent in a two-person kayak was spent at the front of the kayak as a power paddler. The person in the back does the steering and I'd always wanted to learn how to steer a kayak. Upon mentioning this during my introduction, I was happy to hear encouragement from the trip organizers. One of them came up behind me with a paddle with a couple of unusual tactile markings which made it very easy for me to be sure that my paddle would always be in the optimal position for best results. This was something new for me as keeping the paddle in the correct position had always been a bit of a struggle. He then showed me in detail two methods for steering a kayak. At first, I said that maybe I should let my sighted volunteer steer until we got out into open water, but he assured me that I could steer the boat right from the start.

So, off we went. I was surprised how easily I caught on to steering the boat. After I got comfortable steering the boat, they asked me

to try to follow one of the other kayaks by listening to the sound of the person's voice. At first, this was difficult; it seemed like I was not able to turn the boat quickly enough to stay on track. But after a bit of trial and error, I was able to follow the boat just by listening to the voice. I was never told when the other boat was going to turn. Within one hour, I actually mastered the art of steering a kayak! At one point, we all gathered in the middle of the river and the organizers demonstrated how to roll the kayak without falling out and how to recover if you do fall out of a tipping kayak. On the way back to our launch point, I did get in a bit of power kayaking.

From now on, when I go kayaking, I'm going to be sitting in the back and steering the boat with instructions from my wife or my sighted volunteer. My wife will be happy that she no longer needs to steer the boat. The next time we go out, I'll be teaching her some of the techniques I learned that day. When I stepped out of that kayak, I felt like I was walking on air. For those of you who enjoy boating, hiking or mountain climbing, I highly recommend Waypoint Adventure.

In order to learn more about Waypoint Adventure, go to <http://waypointadventure.org/> or phone 781-325-7980. Way Point Adventure is affiliated with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's Universal Access program. For more information about the Universal Access Program, go to <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/massparks/accessibility/> or phone 617-626-1250. I encourage all of you to take advantage of the wonderful programs offered by these and similar organizations.

**The Challenges of Surfing While Blind**  
**My seeing-eye dog can't help me with your website.**  
**Please code it for accessibility.**  
**by DeAnn Elliott**

[Reprinted from The Wall Street Journal]  
[July 26, 2015 6:39 p.m. ET]

The other day while going about my business on the Internet, I hit a brick wall: a map of the United States.

I was diagnosed at 28 with retinitis pigmentosa and declared legally blind at 41. I no longer see the screen well enough to use my mouse to point and click. But with a standard laptop and some software that reads the screen to me in a voice that sounds like Stephen Hawking, I can accomplish nearly everything that I once did with a mouse using memorized key commands.

But to make a purchase on this particular website, I was asked to choose my home state not from an alphabetical list, but by clicking on a map. For a blind person, that's akin to being in a wheelchair and encountering a flight of stairs.

A well-designed website that conforms to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG) permits use by people of all abilities. In my case, text labels that identify the buttons and graphical features allow me to "see" what's on the screen. The code is hidden and need not interfere with the way the website works for sighted customers. But without these features, a site that works beautifully with a mouse is useless to me.

Technology has removed many of the barriers that people with disabilities face in the physical world, making life in the mainstream tantalizingly close. Can't drive to the mall? There's Amazon! Can't read the electric bill? Bank online! As my guide

dog and I contemplate the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the landmark civil-rights law signed July 26, 1990, the gap between sight and blindness has never been narrower.

The ADA requires government websites to be accessible. Sadly, the law provides little guidance to the private sector on this point, since it was passed before the Internet became ubiquitous. It applies to a “place” of public accommodation—but is the Internet a place? That question has been winding its way through the courts.

Disability advocates have worked to broaden the law’s applicability, with some success. In April, Harvard University and M.I.T. announced plans to voluntarily make their edX website for online courses compliant with the WCAG after deaf advocates filed federal lawsuits alleging discrimination. In 2010, the Justice Department announced it would consider issuing Web-accessibility regulations under the ADA, though the rule-making process lumbers on. With the number of websites growing rapidly, change isn’t coming fast enough.

“More than 50 percent of the websites on the Internet are either inaccessible or unusable for people who use adaptive technology,” Brian Charlson, director of technology at the Carroll Center for the Blind in Newton, Mass., told me in his office a few months back.

The consequences range from inconvenient to significant. When I can’t place an online order at my favorite Vietnamese noodle shop, I get Chinese instead. If a task is urgent, I pester family and friends for “favors.” When they hover over my screen to help me navigate around a virtual barrier, I’m keenly aware that my charge-card number and the details of my transaction are on display. At work, unequal access in an increasingly networked

economy contributes to an unemployment rate that's more than twice as high for people with disabilities—and that's not counting many who have given up looking for work.

Recently I met a Web programmer who confessed that she omitted accessibility features because they weren't explicitly required. Deadlines were tight. Budgets were tighter. Most customers liked the graphics. I appreciated her candor.

I explained that making a site accessible shouldn't be seen as a bother. Rather, compliance helps a company reach the largest number of customers. As techno-savvy baby boomers age into vision and hearing loss, many more people will need accommodations. Companies that fail to adjust risk squandering years of accumulated goodwill.

Further, accessible websites often perform better in search results since images are tagged with descriptive text. These features benefit people who have limited English proficiency or are using technology in places where they have difficulty reading the screen.

Several organizations, including the nonprofit Carroll Center, offer accessibility consulting to help businesses. "The changes are often cheaper and easier than people think," Mr. Charlson says. There are three levels of WCAG conformance, and though the highest level might look intimidating, settlements to accessibility lawsuits usually recommend the middle one.

In the 25 years since the passage of the ADA, businesses have removed brick-and-mortar barriers to their facilities, erecting ramps and installing elevators. Now it's time to finish the job and tear down the virtual barriers. Besides, I'd rather shop than sue.



(Ms. Elliott is a Boston-based disability advocate who blogs for the Carroll Center for the Blind.)

## **Something for the Book Lover by Mary Haroyan**

About five years ago, I found myself chatting with a friend about the latest book I was reading and hoping she'd read it so I could share a burning thought or opinion about it. Whether she had or not, the conversation would always lead to other titles and the realization of how enjoyable it was to talk about a book. She had been a part of many book discussion groups and I hadn't, so I couldn't help but wonder what it would be like.

Well, I would soon know. Valerie, the fellow book lover who also happens to be the Coordinator of Volunteer Services for Audio Journal (AJ), the Central Mass. affiliate of the Talking Information Center, decided that a radio book discussion program could allow those who love to read and who are blind or visually impaired the chance to participate in book discussions from the convenience of their home. In April of 2011, "Speaking Volumes" was launched. The format of the program is quite unique in that it allows anyone listening to the program through the several available means to not only listen to the book discussion but also to call in with their thoughts and comments.

For the first year we were carried just on AJ's broadcast, but in 2012 the program was aired statewide. "Speaking Volumes" can not only be heard live through special receivers, but also as an archived podcast and on line at [www.audiojournal.net](http://www.audiojournal.net).

On the first Tuesday of each month from 8:00 PM to 9:00 PM, along with Valerie and me, four other Audio Journal volunteers get together in the studio and discuss the book of the month. The

titles are chosen at least four months ahead to give listeners the time to order them from the Talking Book Library. Of course all titles chosen are available on cartridge, so that those listeners who don't download won't be left out. We all suggest titles for selection and invite listeners to do so as well. Our very first book was The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society and our most recent was All the Light We Cannot See. We have even been fortunate enough to be visited by two authors, Nicholas Gage author of Eleni, and Neil Swidey author of Trapped Under the Sea. Our selections have spanned a wide range of reading. Some of us like myself enjoy focusing on the emotions of a book while others are more analytical, resulting in entertaining discussions.

If anyone would like to know more about "Speaking Volumes" and when and how to tune in, feel free to call me at 508-853-6445 or e-mail me at [mharoyan@charter.net](mailto:mharoyan@charter.net). Happy Reading!

## **BSCB Resolutions for 2015**

(Editor's Note: The two resolutions below were passed at the 2015 BSCB convention. The bill mentioned in the first resolution, H1370, is still awaiting action by the Joint Committee on the Judiciary. Please contact your state representatives and senators and ask that they support this bill.)

### **Resolution 2015-01**

#### **Parents with Disabilities in Family Court (H. 1370)**

WHEREAS, a 2012 report by the National Council on Disability (NCD) documented widespread discrimination against adults with disabilities in family court proceedings; and,

WHEREAS, decisions to terminate parental rights, remove custody or deny parenting time to a capable parent based solely on their disability status violates the Americans with Disabilities Act; and,

WHEREAS, custody decisions should be based on the care that will be given to a child; and,

WHEREAS, a bill that is under consideration by the Massachusetts legislature (H. 1370) would require the court to use written findings to determine whether a parent's disability causes harm to his or her child, and determine if the harm can be alleviated by adaptive equipment or supportive services; and,

WHEREAS, H. 1370 mirrors the recommended language in the NCD report; and,

WHEREAS, seven other states have already enacted similar legislation;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, by the Bay State Council of the Blind in convention assembled on this 29th day of March, 2015 in Burlington, Massachusetts, that BSCB asks the Massachusetts Legislature to pass H. 1370, an act prohibiting discrimination against adults with disabilities in family and juvenile court proceedings filed by Representative Paul Heroux of Attleboro; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization will permit the sponsors of H. 1370 to include BSCB on its list of organizational supporters.

**Resolution 2015-02**  
**Massachusetts Commission for the Blind Budget**

WHEREAS, the Governor's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2016 includes a cut of \$300,000.00 in the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind's (MCB's) Vocational Rehabilitation account (line item 4110-3010); and,

WHEREAS, this line item funds programs designed to increase the employability and independence of blind citizens of the Commonwealth; and,

WHEREAS, services covered by this account range from technology training and college financial aid to training in job-readiness skills and outreach to employers designed to encourage employers to hire more qualified blind persons; and,

WHEREAS, if this cut appears in the final FY 2016 state budget, it will trigger a \$600,000.00 cut in federal MCB vocational rehabilitation funds yielding a cumulative cut of \$900,000.00;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Bay State Council of the Blind in convention assembled this 29<sup>th</sup> day of March 2015 in Burlington Massachusetts requests that the Massachusetts Legislature restore the \$300,000.00 that was cut in the Governor's FY 2016 budget proposal in the MCB Vocational Rehabilitation Account (line item 4110-3010); and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization opposes any earmarking language in the FY 2016 budget of MCB; and,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that if MCB employees are offered early retirement that provisions be put in place such that MCB will be able to maintain sufficient staffing to provide a similar level of services to that provided in FY 2015.

## **BSCB Chapter Reports**

### **Guide Dog Users of Massachusetts**

Guide Dog Users of Massachusetts (GDUM) has spent the first half of 2015 focused on transportation issues, as well as ensuring emergency preparedness for ourselves and our canine companions. On the transportation front, we have been communicating with the MBTA concerning access by guide dog users to the ride. We would like to see the MBTA allow guide dog users to ride in both the vans and the sedans, but for now, customers with their dogs will still be placed in vans only. In May, some members of GDUM participated in a demonstration at the offices of the MBTA to help officials understand that dogs of all sizes can fit comfortably in the sedans.

Our annual spring meeting was very informative, and we all left with a great deal more information and bags than we arrived with, thanks to the Massachusetts Office on Disability's Emergency Preparedness Training seminar. Jeff Dougan spoke to us for an hour about the different ways that we can prepare and protect ourselves during an emergency, and he brought wonderful emergency kits for humans and canines, which we all took home.

### **Charles River Chapter**

On Saturday, May 16, the Charles River Chapter (CRC) held its spring meeting at the Perkins Library. This event, which was attended by approximately 25 people, featured a wealth of information and great discussion. President Denham started the meeting by summarizing the recent BSCB Spring Conference. He described some of the outstanding exhibits and presentations at this annual event and encouraged CRC members to attend future conferences if possible. Our featured speaker was Fred Haga from Kenya. Fred is totally blind and works for the Ministry of

Education in Kenya. Through a fellowship program, he is staying at Perkins for several months to learn about the educational opportunities for Perkins students. He described the challenges individuals with disabilities in Kenya face on a daily basis. As an example, due to the prevalence of crime, neglected construction projects and poorly enforced traffic laws, he is unable to independently travel from his home to his place of employment. Fred also spoke about the inability of individuals who are blind in Kenya to obtain accessible technology. Many schools, which serve at least a dozen blind or visually impaired students, only have one or two Perkins brailers. When asked if any Kenyans who are blind have iPhones, Fred stated that the cost of this device is equal to several months' wages for many people in his country.

The next portion of our meeting focused on accessible entertainment options. President Denham and Carl Richardson demonstrated the Apple TV. This is a small box which connects to a standard TV and provides numerous entertainment options. When the built-in accessibility features are enabled, the menus of this device are clearly spoken, making the device fully accessible for individuals who are blind. One of the entertainment options which was demonstrated was Netflix. In addition to a vast collection of movies and television shows, Netflix now offers an increasing amount of audio described content. The demonstration showed attendees how to set up the Apple TV to play this described content whenever it is available.

At the end of the meeting, the dates for some upcoming CRC and BSCB events were provided. The annual CRC pool party will be held on Saturday August 22 in Watertown. The fall 2015 meeting of the CRC will be held on Saturday October 17 at the Perkins Library. If you would like more information on either of these events, please email President Jim Denham at [jimdenham3@gmail.com](mailto:jimdenham3@gmail.com), or call him at (773) 330-0803.

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