**THE WHITE CANE BULLETIN**

**Florida Council of The Blind, Inc.**



## March – April 2017

Articles for the White Cane Bulletin must be submitted to Greg Lindberg no later than the 15th of the month before it is published. Greg’s email is: glindberg@gmail.com

If you do not have access to a computer and email please find someone in your chapter to help you. We want to hear from anyone who wants to contribute to our newsletter, so if you can not find a way to submit your article, call Greg and he will be glad to assist you.

Articles published in The White Cane Bulletin are in compliance with Public Law No. 104197, Copyright Law Amendment of 1996. This law allows authorized entities to distribute copies of previously published non-dramatic literary works in specialized formats, including Braille, audio or digital text that are exclusively for use by Blind people or those with disabilities. Any further distributing of such articles in another than a specialized format is an infringement of copyright.

Those much-needed contributions, which are Tax-deductible, can be sent to the Florida Council of the Blind treasurer, Linda Jacobson, at 2915 Circle Ridge Drive, Orange Park, FL 32065.

To remember the Florida Council of the Blind in your Last Will and Testament, you may include a special paragraph for that purpose in your Will or Trust. If your wishes are complex, please contact the FCB at 800-267-4448.

The FCB is a 501(c)(3) organization.

For other ways to support the Florida Council of the Blind, visit our Fundraising page found at [www.fcb.org](http://www.fcb.org).

ARE YOU MOVING? – Sally Benjamin

If you are moving please notify me of your new address so you will continue to receive your White Cane Bulletin. Also if you know of anyone interested in joining FCB and who would like to receive the White Cane Bulletin and the Braille Forum please contact me at: (850) 877-1512 or E-mail: salbenjamin@comcast.net

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**President’s Message**

By James Kracht

Advocating for Access: Another Adventure

Yes, it’s time for yet another President's message. The Washington, D.C. trip is rapidly approaching for this year's FCB legislative team. We are ready. We will hit the Hill doing the best job we can to represent your organization and try to get a feel for expectations in the coming years.

As a few of you know, I am an avid collector of antique music boxes. About two-and-a-half years ago, I received advanced notice that a very prominent author was soon to publish another Encyclopedia on Disc Music Boxes. The year 2017 began with the announcement that this book was now being printed. I have ordered 5 print copies of the 715-page book with its 1,700 images. But for me to read it, I will need an accessible PDF text file of some kind. Hence the story begins.

Simultaneously with the announcement of this book's upcoming printing, after a 4-year battle, I was pleased to finally receive and read current issues of the bimonthly publications from both Music Box Associations in January. The end result was that I was eager and excited to push for more. As I have repeatedly told many of our members, "nothing ventured, nothing gained". If you do not ask, you will not receive.

Floating on a high from my music box periodical read of accessible formatted Music Box Bulletin issues, I contacted the publisher and book layout arranger for the author, Q. David Bowers. My fight for a readable copy of the new Encyclopedia began. If the book's publisher, the Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors Association (AMICA) would make the current issue of its Journal available, certainly I thought that it would have no problem providing me with a copy of the accessible chapter files of the Disc Music Box Encyclopedia, which were files I knew they already had. Yes, right? But not quite.

Thus began my quest for access to a book that I really wanted to read – but which might not be made available to me in an accessible format. This adventure was made even more exciting because they sent me an accessible copy of the book's first chapter. After reading it, I knew that I really had to read this book. It seems, though, that when copyright waivers and the distribution of a non-protected copy of the book were mentioned, the involved members of the Association and the author expressed security issues and concerns about sending out a non-image file of the book. Not being a computer or scanned text junkie, I began my learning process so that I could convince the author and publisher of my intentions, my needs, and of the virtues of access to these materials by the entire blind community.

I am pleased to say that I am now working with Bookshare to try to sell the importance of and need for access to these music box materials through the Bookshare program. I just sent information to the author and publisher about Bookshare's Digital Rights Management (DRM) Program, mission, goals, and process to maintain the integrity and security of scanned texts for copyright holders. While it is easy to resent the limitations and perceived obstacles imposed by DRM, I am pleased to be a part of Bookshare's advocacy for the promotion of Digital Rights Management, and I am hoping that it will be enough to persuade this author and publisher. I have had to learn by asking questions, finding answers, and understanding that there are reasons that authors and publishers don't automatically say “yes” to copyright waiver and the afforded protections of DRM. Thus far, it appears that there is a willingness to listen. We shall see. In the same vein, I regularly communicate with a well-known expert and author of 2 excellent British music box books. I am educating him as I go, hoping that we can get Bookshare to put his titles up as well.

I do not mean to suggest that antique music boxes, their collectability, or books about them are for everyone. However, I wish to reiterate that you have to ask for and advocate for what you want if you expect it to happen. I would never have gotten this far in my quest for accessible copies of these books had it not been for the encouragement and help of many of my friends and fellow advocates, including my wife, Brian and Kim Charlson, Paul Edwards, and Gabriel Lopez Kafati. Thank you all for urging me to go forward. I am fortunate to have an interested audience with respect to all 3 books. I have engaged Bookshare's personnel as well. It has not been that difficult. But it takes time, energy, patience, and perseverance.

So again this month, I ask you all to advocate. As with the cable TV providers and accessibility that I wrote about in my last column, we have a long way to go. Neither of my cable providers really has an accessible alternative for a set-top box that I can use. One has tried by providing a brand new laptop computer with available NVDA on it, but there are no instructions on how to work it or access cable. The other has provided myself and its other visually impaired customers with nothing.

Yes, we have work to do: advocating for the signing of the Marrakesh Treaty by the U.S. Senate, adoption of the Low Vision Aids Medicare demonstration project, passage of the Cogswell Macy Act in Washington, acquiring an accessible menu, audio described movies, or an accessible book on a crazy hobby like music boxes. We must push forward. I urge all of you to pick out something special for you to achieve in 2017, and go for it. If you stay tuned, I may even be able to report back on my success in getting a music box book – or 3 – on Bookshare's website, thereby growing its library collection to 516,678 accessible titles.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jim Kracht, President, Florida Council of the Blind

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 **2017 FCB State & Chapter Awards**
By Sheila Young, Awards Chairperson

Dear FCB members and friends,

Have you ever been thanked or recognized for something that you have done for others? How did it make you feel?

If you say “really proud” or “happy” to that question, then please read on.

This year, the FCB Awards Committee is desirous of honoring all members that deserve recognition for their devotion to improving the lives of the blind and visually impaired community.

Please take a look at our awards listed on the [fcb.org](http://www.fcb.org) website and consider a submission honoring those who take time out of their day, whether it is a state or chapter award, recognizing a member, organization, or a person in the community who blesses your life with their service to us. The chapter cost of the plaques will be determined, and you will need to send a check for the cost to Linda Jacobson, prior to the convention. If you wish to submit a chapter award, the exact spelling of your recipient must be submitted to the committee no later than April 15th, 2017.

Our committee is dedicated to keeping submissions confidential, and the recipients will be announced at our state convention in Jacksonville from June 1-4, 2017.

The committee accepts all submissions, and the absolute deadline for entry is April 15th, 2017.

If you wish to submit a letter for an award, please e-mail it to sheilayoung125@att.net. If you have any questions regarding our awards or system, please feel free to contact one of our committee members.

Thank you for taking time to honor the people who assist in making life better for us!

Sheila Young
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**2017 FCB Scholarships**

By Sheila Young; Chairperson of Education & Leadership Committee

The Florida Council of the Blind (FCB) Scholarship Program consists of awards totaling $4,000, which are offered to exemplary students who are enrolled in academic education, professional, or technical training beyond the high school level.

The scholarship opportunities are:

* Gayle M. Krause-Edwards Scholarship: $1,500.00– Available to an eligible applicant who is enrolled full-time and has completed one semester of college, in a course of study which will increase advancement potential in his/her chosen field
* Teresa Blessing Scholarship: $1,000.00– Offered to an outstanding full-time college student
* Timothy Turpin Scholarship: $1,000.00– Offered to a high school student graduating and exhibiting academic and leadership excellence planning to attend college full-time
* Bobbie Probst Scholarship: $500.00– Awarded to an eligible applicant who is enrolled part-time in a college or university, or a student enrolled in a technical institute.

Applicants must have at least a 3.0 grade-point average (GPA) with the exception of the Gayle M. Krause-Edwards Scholarship.

The prestigious Gayle M. Krause-Edwards scholarship requires a 3.2 GPA and completion of one semester in a college or university. This scholarship is awarded to a student exhibiting outstanding academic and leadership achievements.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR ALL SCHOLARSHIPS are as follows:

1. Applicant must be legally blind. Specifically, the applicant must have vision in the better eye of no more than 20/200 with corrective lenses OR may have vision greater than 20/200 in the better eye, but with a restricted field of vision of no more than 20 degrees.

2. Applicant must be a current resident of the State of Florida. However, the college or university doesn't have to be in Florida.

3. Applicant must have a high school diploma or a high school equivalency diploma. (High school students who are graduating this term may also apply.)

4. Applicant must be enrolled in an accredited college, university, or technical institute or be accepted for enrollment. A letter of acceptance is required.

5. Applicant must be seeking a college degree or certificate.

6. Applicants who are full-time must carry at least 12 credit hours per semester/quarter to be eligible for the full-time scholarships. Those who are part-time must carry a minimum of 6 credit hours per semester/quarter to be eligible for the $500.00 scholarship.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS WHICH MUST ACCOMPANY THIS

APPLICATION INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

1. An explanatory or descriptive statement regarding vocational objectives and outlook for employment in a chosen field. Please include any awards or scholarships received or that are pending. Part-time students must include an explanation for part-time status (e.g., employed student, family responsibilities, etc).

2. Two letters of recommendation.

3. Sealed official transcript from school currently or most recently attended.

4. Letter of acceptance from accredited college or university.

5. Certification of visual status (detailed physician’s eye report) MUST be mailed by certifying entity.

Certification of visual status and transcript(s) MUST be postmarked no later than April 15, 2017.

Please forward Certification of visual status and transcript(s) to:

Florida Council of the Blind
c/o Sheila Young

2304 Amherst Ave.

Orlando, FL 32804

Please e-mail application packet, all recommendation letters, and supporting documents electronically to: Sheilayoung125@att.net

All applications and documents must be received no later than April 15, 2017.

The Education and Leadership Committee will review all applications and select the four winners. Recipients will be notified prior to the annual state convention, and the winners will be announced during the Awards Ceremony on June 2, 2017 in Jacksonville, FL. All scholarship winners will be invited to attend the annual convention and will be given hotel accommodations for one night for two persons and two tickets to the Awards banquet. Additional banquet tickets may be purchased by the scholarship recipients.

The Florida Council of the Blind will pay transportation costs by train or bus. Prior approval for travel by plane is required. Mileage by automobile to the convention will be reimbursed on the following basis: $0.445 per mile.

For more information about our Scholarship program, you may contact Sheila Young at sheilayoung125@att.net or by phone at 407-425-9200.

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**2017 FCB Convention Preview**

By Sally Benjamin

Get ready for FCB’s annual convention for 2017! The dates are June 1 to June 4, 2017. The convention hotel is the Lexington Hotel & Conference Center Jacksonville Riverwalk Hotel, located at 1515 Prudential Drive, Jacksonville, Florida 32207. Our room block is now open, and you can begin to make your reservation and plan to attend.

Room rates are $89 per night. Reserve your room by calling 904-396-5100 or 877-539-7070. Remember to mention that you are with FCB to insure you receive the convention rate. Please reserve your room now to guarantee our special rate. The rate includes a voucher for breakfast. The FCB convention will be exciting and educational, full of varied and informative programs and, of course, will have ample time for visiting and fun! There's something for everyone here, so don't miss it!

Thursday night will start us off with a barbecue with plenty of good food and fellowship. Some highlights will be our annual legislative workshop, a workshop on advocacy, a technology workshop, and much more!

Watch for your convention call that will be coming out in the next few weeks. It is an 8-by-11-inch half piece of paper that will be several pages in length. It will be folded in half. The form for registration is on the back.

We look forward to hearing from you to indicate that you’ll be attending another fantastic state convention!

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**Greater Orlando Trivia Night – April 8**

By Leslie Spoone

The Greater Orlando Council of the Blind will be holding our fourth annual Trivia Night on April 8, 2017. It will be held at the VFW at 3500 South Goldenrod Road in Orlando, Florida 32822. The time of the event is from 6:30 p.m. until 10 p.m.

We will have goody bags, door prizes, and a silent auction. Also, you will receive one free drink and hot hors d’oeuvres. You can either buy a ticket for $25 or a table for $150 and have a team name.

We look forward to everyone coming out and joining us for some great fun and laughs.

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**BARD Express**

By Sheila Young, President, Friends of Library Access, Inc.

This is to inform BARD users who aren’t aware of this that there is a great new service offered through the BARD website.

We all know we can use our phones and tablets to download and read our digital talking books, but now there is BARD Express.

BARD Express is a Windows-based software that simplifies searching for, downloading, managing, and transferring BARD audio materials to cartridges.

You simply download BARD Express from the BARD homepage and log in one time. You never have to enter your login information again if you use this application. Also, the books are extracted automatically for you, and you can simply transfer them to your digital cartridge or card. The instructions are pretty easy to follow, and help is always available through the Daytona Talking Book Library.

Learn more about BARD and BARD Express at <https://nlsbard.loc.gov/login//NLS>

Happy reading!

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**GOCB Update**

By Martha James

GOCB broke from its annual tradition of having a bake sale in February to instead having Carlos from OrCam come speak to us. Carlos demonstrated the latest technology in facial recognition and text to speech with the device.

Our chapter has several busy months coming up. Our March meeting will be our bake sale, followed by our participation in the Sight and Soul Walk fest to raise money for Lighthouse of Central Florida. The walk will take place on Saturday, March 4 at Crane’s Roost from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Sheila Young is the captain of our team, the Blind Leaders, and we are looking forward to a good time while participating in a good cause.

We will be preparing to host another trivia night on Saturday, April 8. Once again, it will be held at the VFW at 3500 South Goldenrod Road, Orlando. The cost is $25 per person or $150 for a table of six players. The cost includes one free drink. GOCB would like to challenge other chapters and anyone else who thinks that he or she is good at trivia to join us for an exciting night. Let’s see who can come out on top. Thanks to Curtis Earth Trivia for providing everyone with a challenging evening of fun. Thanks also to the women’s auxiliary for graciously providing food again this year. The silent auction, which is always popular, will be part of this year’s event as well. A portion of the proceeds will go to FCB. For more information, contact Leslie Spoone at 407-678-4163.

Our next Dine and Donate event will take place on May 3 at Tijuana Flats, which is located at 7608 University Boulevard, Winter Park, FL 32792. Asli Goncer will keep the festivities lively with her music.

In addition, for those with computer access, GOCB is on Facebook. You can find us on Facebook by typing in “GOCB.”

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**Because You Asked**

By Sila Miller

“Too presumptuous,” I thought when the first person suggested writing an article about myself for the WCB. After about the seventh similar comment, though, I began to give it more serious thought. After all, it is no secret that I've begun writing my memoir. So, here it goes.

I was born into a blended family of six (two girls and four boys) on October 29, 1967. I'm the next-to-youngest child and the only one with visual trouble. My parents, Earl and Frances Goolsby, were "older" when I came along, and certainly weren't planning on a girl, much less a blind girl. My blindness can be laid at the door of Diethylstilbestrol, more commonly known as DES, a synthetic estrogen.

Intended to help pregnant women avoid miscarriages and premature childbirth, DES was discontinued in 1971 when studies found not only that it didn't work, but that women whose mothers had taken the drug had a higher risk of a rare kind of vaginal cancer and 11 other reproductive issues, including infertility, spontaneous abortion, neonatal death, and invasive breast cancer, not to mention other abnormalities. Many other suspected effects are still awaiting further research, but funding is critically missing. Endocrine disruptors like DES impact human health in ways we are only just beginning to understand. One of the two "abnormalities" I inherited was quite apparent at birth, and there was no question that I couldn't see. My left eye was very under-developed, and the right eye had what appeared to be a dense cataract over it. Horrified upon delivering me, my mom's obstetrician burst into tears, crying "I didn't do anything to that baby!” I was whisked away before Mom could even get a good look, much less finger or toe count, and she was left to worry and wonder. After about 24 hours, she'd had enough and demanded to have me brought to her.

Following a plethora of referrals, exams, tests, and outright guesses, my parents were told everything from, "Remove that poor child's eyes and replace them with glass ones" to "Put her in a home for retarded children.” Unsure how best to deal with and educate this blind child, my mother heard about a state school for "special children" from her chiropractor. So, at age four, we took a trip to St. Augustine and the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind for evaluation. I scored high on their tests and was accepted for enrollment. My first night, there was the stuff of which nightmares are made. I believed my family had given me away, and I could not accept being put into a bed alone without either of my parents, little brother, or Granny. I can't really say I ever met with success in dealing with the homesickness that plagued me throughout my school days, but I was a good student, made friends, and got an education. At age 11, my parents relented following a long-held misconception of a basic procedure, and I was fitted with an ocular shell that made my eye deformity much less noticeable. This went far to bolster my self-confidence.

Throughout my school attendance, I was involved in extracurricular activities—writing for the school newspaper, singing in the chorus, serving on the student council, cheerleading, and mentoring younger students--my passion was and is people and animals. I got a part-time job at age 14 working on the school's switchboard. I also worked for a time with a local veterinarian, and while those positions provided much-needed spending money, the real reward was interacting with people and animals.

The opposite of many young people wanting to leave home and spread their wings, I wanted to go home, settle down, find work, and be near family. So, following my high school graduation, I poo-pooed the idea of college, went home, and began looking for work. I volunteered at a local human services provider office, Health and Rehabilitation Services (HRS). After six months there, a fulltime position became available. A condition of being considered for the position was passing a typing test (30 words per minute with fewer than three errors). “No sweat,” I cockily thought, assuming they'd have a Dictaphone just like the one I'd learned on and did so well on (80 plus words per minute) at FSDB. Wrong! It was my first real taste of inaccessibility. It took me three tries to pass that darn test with first my dad reading the material to me, then my mom, and finally, my dad again.

It was a rather lonely life without age peers who could accept me and my disability. I always seemed to be "Tim's big sister," the tag-along, or paired with other "special" young folks. I'd always known this during summer and holiday breaks, but it never hit home as it did now with the rest of my life looming large before me. My family was from a little Podunk hole in the road known as the Carr Community, about 14 miles west of Blountstown. Yeah, nobody else ever heard of Blountstown either. Made up of predominately redneck and uneducated folk, I never seemed to fit in, having been mostly raised among people from different backgrounds and cultures, and not understanding or aligning with the backwoods prevailing prejudices against any and all who were different.

In the summer of 1987, I went for a weekend visit with a struggling law school student friend, Owen McFaul, and others who lived in Tallahassee. Owen had a friend pursuing a degree in Criminology who loved to cook and who’d invited him for supper, hence, my introduction to Robert Blane Miller. Robert was “older,” wiser, had a child, life experiences, and we found ourselves mutually attracted. Following a year’s courtship, we married. Meant to be an outdoor, afternoon wedding, God had showers planned so Robert and I were wed in my mother’s living room with 125 guests packed in like sardines. I walked behind my father “down the aisle” because there wasn’t enough room to walk alongside him. It was a sweet occasion much like a family/friend reunion. Mama mixed up the punch in a clean five-gallon bucket and then ladled it into her punch bowl. Robert’s mother, a professional baker, made and decorated our multi-tiered wedding cake and my wedding veil. Our honeymoon was spent in Perry, Robert’s hometown, since the Hotel Reservationist had given our beachside room away when we were only 15 minutes late arriving to St. George Island.

We settled in as married folk, living across the road from my parents on the 40-acre homestead with pine and pecan trees, blueberry bushes, a fishpond, and my dad’s huge garden. For the next couple of years, Robert made the 140-mile roundtrip commute to Tallahassee almost every day to complete his Bachelor’s degree. Life was sweet, but there was no independence. Town was 14 miles away, and the nearest convenience store about five. Upon graduating from FSU, Robert began applying for jobs. “You know I’m not gonna find a job near here,” he matter-of-factly said to me one day. “We really need to move to a larger city, where there is at least the possibility of work.” So, I began looking and applying, and in August of 1990, we moved to the South side of Tallahassee. The change was hard—in many ways like leaving home for school again – but Robert and I had each other, and we soon began to think of Tallahassee as home.

Meanwhile, I was blessed in my career and able to be promoted from clerical work to professional positions based on experience and good work performance. My employers were never less than accommodating when it came to accessibility. The Florida Department of Revenue has been – and remains a – great agency to work for! I currently write child support-related procedures, have a hand in the rule making/promulgation process, and develop associated training curriculum. For a time, I worked in the Legislative Inquiry (escalated complaint) section—by far my favorite of all the positions I’ve held with the state. High stress and a huge workload, after seven years, I suffered burnout and was promoted to my current position. But I still miss those folks on the other end of the line needing help.

On the other hand, Robert’s search for work continued, unfruitful and frustrating. Times were tight financially, and we truly learned how to “stretch every dime.” Getting desperate and depressed about not doing his part to provide for our family, Robert decided to learn about computers. One day, I came home to find him elbow-deep into the computer we’d taken out a low-interest loan to purchase. I freaked out since it was brand new—not yet paid for. Soon, we decided to go into business, and Easy Talk was born. We built adaptive computer systems for people with disabilities, offered Braille transcription services, repaired computers and other adaptive equipment, and sold various adaptive components. Easy Talk opened many doors for us, providing income, opportunities for travel, meeting new people, and learning about the latest in accessible technology.

In the early ‘90s, Robert and I became involved with FCB through our local chapter, Tallahassee Council of the Blind. Calvert Durden was largely responsible for this introduction, encouraging us in areas needing advocacy and in fundraising for the chapter. Those early days instilled a lifelong passion for helping and advocating. From transportation to pedestrian safety, from access to technology to accessible voting, we were busy. I enjoyed and learned from working alongside folks like Carl McCoy, Al Drake, Marie Hoover, Delores Wussler, and Mike Wells. Soon, our involvement expanded to the state chapter of FCB where I met and learned much from such folks as Debbie Grubb, Linda and Eric Jacobson, Paul Edwards, Patti Land, and John Richards. My first job there was on the Awards committee. I very much enjoyed my roles with the Education/Leadership, Public Relations/Publications, Archive, Executive, and Convention committees. Of course, as everyone knows, my absolute favorite duty was Convention Registrar. I had the pleasure of personally meeting and welcoming each of our newcomers and doing my part to ensure all had a good first impression of FCB conventions. Again, I was provided opportunities to help, advocate, meet new people, learn much, travel, and write—my other passion.

As it often does, life had changes in store for me. In 2014, I made the difficult decision to take a step back from some of my duties with FCB. I again began concentrating my advocacy efforts toward the local level, with public transportation being at the forefront. Sometimes it feels like we’re realizing change, while other days, it feels like schlepping through peanut butter. I have grown so much through my involvement with advocacy groups, people, and in my career, and each day brings yet more growth—some days unpleasant. In November 2016, I was eligible to enter the state’s Deferred Retirement Option Plan (DROP) – TERRIFYING! I’ve worked since I was 14 years old and what would I do after retirement? And where in the world has the time gone?

A dozen or so years back, Robert and I were encouraged to get involved with the Florida School for the Blind’s Alumni Association. Possessing organizational and leadership skills, much of which were gained by our FCB involvement, it was a good fit for us. We’ve enjoyed bringing former students, their families, and friends together for an annual, affordable, and fun-filled weekend. Thanks to school staff and board of trustees, attendees are allowed to stay in the dorms on the beautiful FSB campus at little or no cost. We raise funds to help underprivileged students attending school and with other student-related needs that arise. These weekends are a beautiful example of volunteers working together for a worthwhile cause and having a good time doing it!

Heroes – there are so many but alas, space is not limitless. So... Jesse Frances Goolsby was a wonderful mother and role model. Strong and resourceful, wise despite little formal education, she was unafraid to show total love and affection. She taught by example—loving and dealing with a mentally-ill husband, caring for an aging parent who lived with us, making life-shaping and heart-wrenching decisions for a disabled child, long before “special needs” was bantered about, and raising other children, all while going through menopause. I’m grateful to have had an adult relationship with this unsung hero, short though it was. My other hero is my husband. Strong-willed, honest to a fault, and unafraid of straight talk, he’s soft when it comes to love, confident enough to give me the space and freedom to pursue my dreams, and manages to keep me grounded. He’s taught me how to stand my ground, speak up for myself, and he’s loved me despite my imperfections. He gives true meaning to “having my back,” and there’s no one I’d rather “pack it all in” with. From Robert, I’ve been blessed with a beautiful grandson, Jacob Allen, 15, and fast becoming a man. Through Robert, I’ve also been blessed with the unconditional love and loyalty of four guide dogs.

Each of us brings some unique offering/skill to the table. Given a little creativity and patience, we can learn to work together to create something magnificent and significant. When we discover how to utilize and celebrate our differences, we realize the success of putting together the perfect human puzzle. It won’t be what we said, it’ll be how we said it and how we made each other feel that we’ll take away from our interactions. My life is full, and I’m privileged to have the love and acceptance of a sweet circle. I am thankful for the gift of enjoying to help through advocacy, writing, and encouragement. Knowing I’ve done my part for my fellow humans and animals brings me great satisfaction. I love to write, read, listen to music, bake, work in the yard, and find new ways to help others in need—basically “pay it forward.”

I welcome contact at either 850-251-5556 or by e-mail at: silamiller@centurylink.net.

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**The Real Story Behind Valentine's Day**

By Sila Miller

A portion of the following article comes from a daily devotional I receive called “Family First,” led by Mark Merrill. I thought it quite interesting. Yeah, yeah, I know, this isn’t a romance magazine, but a blind woman made Priest Valentine‘s last days happy! We all need “happy,” so read on and enjoy!

This Valentine’s Day you probably either sent or received a valentine from someone. More than a billion were expected to be given away in the United States alone. But just like many of our holidays, there’s a lot more behind it than just cards and gifts. There’s a true-life story. It’s a story that teaches us a lot about love, sacrifice, and commitment —the true meaning of Valentine’s Day.

In the third century, the Roman Empire was ruled by Emperor Claudius II Gothicus. He was nicknamed Claudius the Cruel because of his harsh leadership and tendency for getting into wars and abusing his people. In fact, he was getting into so many wars during the third century that he was having a difficult time recruiting enough soldiers.

Claudius believed that recruitment for the army was down because Roman men did not want to leave their loves or families behind, so he canceled all marriages and engagements in Rome. Thousands of couples saw their hopes of matrimony dashed by the single act of a tyrant. And no one seemed interested in standing up to the emperor.

But a simple Christian priest named Valentine did come forward and stood up for love. He began to secretly marry soldiers before they went off to war, despite the emperor’s orders. In 269 A.D., Emperor Claudius found out about the secret ceremonies. He had Valentine thrown into prison and deemed that he would be put to death.

As Valentine was awaiting execution, he fell in love with a blind girl who happened to be the jailer’s daughter. On the eve of his execution, with no writing instruments available, Valentine is said to have written her a sonnet in ink that he squeezed from violets. Legend has it that his words made the blind woman see again. It was a brief romance because the next day Valentine was clubbed to death by Roman executioners.

St. Valentine gave his life so that young couples could be bonded together in holy matrimony. They may have killed the man, but not his spirit. Even centuries after his death, the story of Valentine’s self-sacrificing commitment to love was legendary in Rome. Eventually, he was granted sainthood and the Catholic Church decided to create a feast in his honor. They picked February 14 as the day of celebration because of the ancient belief that birds (particularly lovebirds, but also owls and doves) began to mate on that very day.

It’s surprising to know that Valentine’s Day is really founded on the concept of love in marriage. However, there are so many facets of love and expressions of it, that it’s become big business. This year, instead of spending loads of dough on a one-time gift, why not consider some or all of the following low/no-cost, sincere gestures that make a difference the whole year round!

Schedule priority time together. Pull out your calendars and set a date. If transportation is an issue, pick up the phone—talk, don’t text. Note: Movies don’t count.

Laugh together. Share a funny story—even if it’s at your expense and make somebody laugh! It’s great medicine and (jogging on the inside). Loosen up and laugh freely. Live lightheartedly!

Play together. Find a hobby or activity you all enjoy: fishing, bowling, hiking, biking, going out to eat, or trying new wines.

Send a note of encouragement in the mail (no e-mail) every once in a while just to say, “I love you” or “I’m on your side.”

Do something special and unexpected. Cook a meal, bake cookies, babysit, grocery shop, help clean house, accompany them to church, share a good book, or a great new song with them.

Whether mate, family, friend, or just someone who’s lonely, a meaningful gesture sure does go a long way to brighten up life. Challenge yourself to figure out something special to do for someone in need of a little TLC. Then, do it in June or whenever. Make Valentine’s Day last all year. You’ll be glad you did!

Happy Late Valentine’s Day, FCB!

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**Poetry Corner**
By Shelley Sawyer

Greetings to you all. As I have often mentioned, my favorite form of poetry is found in songs. There are several reasons for that. Therefore, I have decided that for this year, my poetry selections will come from songs. I would be willing to bet that at some point, you will read one that speaks to you on some level.

This one says just a little about why I love the poetry of a song. It was performed by a Bluegrass/Country duo Joey + Rory. Joey and Rory Feek were a husband-and-wife team who started performing together in 2008. Sadly, Joey passed away at age 40 in March of 2016 from terminal cancer. This song was on their debut album by the same name. Enjoy.

The Life of a Song

Written by Patrick Jason Matthews

Me, I'm just a singer, though I may be well known,
The truth is I'd be nothing without the power of a song;
I've been blessed with fame and fortune, oh, but in the end,
A song's what I wish I could've been.

I could mend the broke and wounded, I could prove that love is real,
And take someone from China to a Carolina cotton field;
I could comfort every soldier, hum all the homeless home,
I could change the world if I was just a song.

A song lives forever and never ever dies,
Sings enemies together and touches so many lives;
Words and melody will always be, long after we're gone,
oh, how I wish I could live the life of a song.

There's an end for me, it's my destiny,
But this song will carry on and it's just three minutes long;
Oh, how I wish I could live the life of a song.

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**Millennial Mania**
By Greg Lindberg

Attention all millennials and young people reading this newsletter. The White Cane Bulletin wants to hear from you!

Did you recently learn to use a white cane for the first time? Are you thinking about getting a guide dog? Have you ever played beep baseball or goal ball? Did you just download a handy iPhone app that helps you navigate your neighborhood?

We want to hear your stories and give you a voice in the blind and visually impaired community. We would also like your feedback on the White Cane Bulletin and if there is anything in particular you would like to read about in this newsletter.

If you’re in grade school, college, or are a young adult, feel free to send in your stories or ideas to Greg Lindberg at glindberg@gmail.com. Tell us what you’re up to and what your goals are as a young visually impaired person. We look forward to hearing about “what’s up” in your world!

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Bureau of Braille & Talking Book Library: (800) 226-6075

Division of Blind Services, State Office: (800) 342-1828

American Council of The Blind: (800) 424-8666

 (Available 3:00 to 5:30 P.M. EST Monday-Friday only)

ACB Legislative Hotline: (800) 424-8666

 (Available evenings 8:00 P.M. to 12:00 Midnight EST

 and weekends 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. only)

AT&T Disability Services: (800)872-3883

 Press 00 and speak with your long distance carrier,

 or Florida only: (800)982-2891

BellSouth Disability Services: (800)982-2891

 (From anywhere)

Social Security: (800) 772-1213

 (24-hour voice and touch tone accessible

- THE END-

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