

# **Vision Access**

**A Magazine by, for and about  
People with Low Vision.**

**Volume 24, Number 1  
Spring, 2017**

**Published Tri-annually for Members  
in These Formats:  
Large Print, Email, and Audio CD.**

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by  
the Council of Citizens with Low Vision  
International,  
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the American Council of the Blind.**

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**Vision Access welcomes submissions from people with low vision, from professionals such as ophthalmologists, optometrists, low vision specialists, and everyone with something substantive to contribute to the ongoing discussion of low vision and all of its ramifications.**

**Submissions are best made as attachments to email or may also be made in clear typescript.**

**Vision Access cannot assume responsibility for lost manuscripts. Deadlines for submissions are: April 1, August 1 and December 1.**

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## **From the Editor's Desk**

### **BY Mike Keithley**

**Welcome to the spring issue of Vision Access. Hey, it's getting warmer, evenings are longer and those languorous times in the park are beginning. Soon it'll be June, and darkness won't happen until 10 p.m.**

**I just got home from the California Council of the Blind, CCB's conference and convention, where the CCCLV and Technology Committee program was featured. Dr. Bill Takeshita gave us a survey of CCTVs, magnifiers, the evolving field of telescopes (see the Enhanced Vision article in this newsletter), video glasses, and the various retinal research projects now underway. The push to help people regain or keep their eyesight is really underway with many studies where you can participate (visit [clinicaltrials.gov](http://clinicaltrials.gov)), and it seems that we can think of changing the question: "Will I have to live being vision impaired for the rest of my life?" to, "When can I start getting my lost vision back?"**

**Dr. Bill pointed out many times that the key to living well after losing eyesight is to get used to what you have and live graciously, overcoming the anger and frustration of adjustment. And then someone in the audience paraphrased a comment from Mike May (who regained a lot of his sight): Waiting for the cure is not the important thing; how you're living is. So much is going on, and I might entertain the notion of a cure to my vision loss in my lifetime. But I've lost a huge benefit of the cure by my anger, meanness and not trying to be an outstanding person.**

**So what's happening in Vision Access? Well, we learn a lot about what'll be going on at the upcoming CCLVI convention in Sparks, Nevada, and Richard Rueda pretty much wrote his own profile. Jim Jirak writes about the Midwest Leadership Conference, and we have an interesting blog post from Enhanced Vision. And there's more. So spend a slow evening reading Vision Access!**

# Organizational News

## President's Message

By Leslie Spone

Dear CCLVI Colleagues,

We are excited to welcome the Kentucky Council of Citizens with Low Vision (KCCLV), as a new chapter to CCLVI. Thanks to Patti Cox for all of her efforts to establish our latest chapter, and best wishes to our new members. Also, we are thrilled to have the CCLVI Firecrackers walk team back for a third year captained by Kathy Farina. Let's get behind the Firecrackers and reach our goal of \$1,000. Read her article in this issue.

CCLVI was well represented at this February's ACB Legislative Seminar with four officers, two board members and our convention chair in attendance. I shared several electronic low vision devices with Congressional staff members and was encouraged by their interest and enthusiastic response. ACB is still promoting a replacement bill for HR 729 in this 115th Congress. We will let everyone know the bill number when it is released.

ACB is working hard on a new Strategic Plan for 2017, and CCLVI was asked to participate

in the January planning session. The new plan will concentrate on the following five focus groups: Membership and Affiliates, Convention and Meetings, Advocacy and Legislative Affairs, Resource Development, and Marketing and Communications. The published action plans for these focus groups will be released in April.

We are looking forward to the upcoming convention. CCLVI will have a suite for welcoming our old and new members throughout the week. This will be highlighted by an open house on Wednesday afternoon, July 5, until 7 p.m. You will have a chance to win a Pebble Mini portable electronic magnifier or a Target Gift Card when you sign up for the monthly Monetary Support (MMS) program, which benefits both CCLVI and ACB. We have had great participation from our membership in our many committees that meet monthly to do the hard work of CCLVI. The CCLVI Board meetings are now on the first Wednesday of the month, with the next two meetings scheduled for May 3

and June 7. On April 1, CCLVI's information line will have a new number. It is (844) 460-0625.

I hope everyone has a good summer, and I'll see you in Sparks. Your President, Leslie.

## **Ante Up**

**By Jim Jirak, Convention Chair**

As this article is being read, we are just a matter of weeks from the convention and annual membership meeting. If you plan on attending in Sparks, Nevada, our programming dates run from Saturday, July 1 to Wednesday, July 5. Remember that 2017 is the first year of the convention being shortened by one day. As a result, we are starting programming on Saturday as opposed to Sunday. The host hotel is the Nugget Casino Resort. Room rates are \$89 single or double occupancy and \$10 per person per night for triple or quad occupancy. Current taxes are 13.5 percent plus an additional \$2 nightly tourism assessment fee. Please be aware that the group rate is inclusive of the daily resort fee which affords convention attendees round trip airport shuttle, complimentary wireless Internet in all guest rooms, two daily complimentary bottles of

(Editor's note: The Medicare Demonstration of Coverage of Low Vision Devices Act of 2017 (HR2050) is the replacement for HR729 mentioned above. For info, visit [www.acb.org](http://www.acb.org) and follow the "Advocacy" link.)

water in guest rooms, unlimited use of the year-round Atrium Pool, unlimited use of the fitness center, and full service concierge, valet and self-parking in the secured parking structure. Reservations can be confirmed via telephone by calling the Nugget Casino Resort at 800-648-1177 and mentioning group code GACB17 or online at <https://reservations.travelclick.com/96145?groupID=1676959&hotelID=96145#/guestsandrooms> For those flying, Sparks is served by the Reno/Tahoe Airport (RNO). Amtrak, Greyhound and Mega Bus have stations within five miles of the hotel.

Before sharing details of this year's program, I'd like to take a moment and recognize the plenary committee. Sara Conrad of Madison, Wisconsin; Zelda Gebhard of Edgely, North Dakota; Angelo Lanier of North Little Rock, Arkansas; President

Leslie Spoone of Orlando, Florida; and Richard Rueda of Sacramento, California, have worked tirelessly to ensure the programming is not only diverse, but also entertaining and informative. It is hoped that should you encounter them during convention week that you will take time to express your sincere thanks for their hard work and willingness to serve.

Resulting from the positive feedback received from last year's implemented changes, we again have our own suite. As the suite is smaller than last year's, our Scholarship Mixer will return to either the President or Executive Director's suite. Please consult the convention program for location confirmation. Hopefully it can return to our own suite in 2018. We are also bringing back the package price ticket which includes admittance to all ticketed events. We have several events for which we are charging to help defray associated costs. Old favorites like the Low Vision Vender Showcase return to Sunday afternoon, while game night with its cash bar moves to Tuesday evening at 8 p.m. We are also having a first ever CCLVI Open House in our suite Wednesday afternoon from 2:45 to 7 p.m. The purpose is to network with and educate

people about the organization. For your registration and planning purposes, the entire program schedule is being published here. When applicable, the first price is the pre-registration amount and the second price is the amount if registering on-site. Those events being held in suites are duly noted.

**CCLVI Convention Program  
CCLVI: Come Place Your Bets!  
Leslie Spoone, President  
Orlando, Florida**

**Registration: \$20 \$25  
CCLVI Package Price: \$75 \$100**

**Saturday, July 1: 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.--Pre-convention Board Meeting**

**This meeting will also include preliminary reading of constitutional amendments and resolutions.**

**3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.: CCLVI Mixer \$15 \$20 (if not purchased via CCLVI package) While reacquainting with old friends and making new, come meet the 2017 Fred Scheigert scholarship winners. Executive Director's or President's Suite**

**Sunday, July 2: Programming Session \$6 \$8 (if not purchased via package)**

**1:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. - What's New in Low Vision**

**Medical advances result in the development of new treatments and visual aids for common eye diseases. Come learn about many new advances improving the vision and lives of people with low vision with Dr. Bill Takeshita.**

**Sunday, July 2: Programming Session**

**2:45 p.m. to 4 p.m. - Low Vision Vender Showcase**

**Come see what is new as exhibitors demonstrate the latest in low vision technological advances.**

**Sunday, July 2: Programming Session \$6 \$8 (if not purchased via package)**

**7:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. - Truth About Vision Loss**

**Resulting from your visual impairment, do you struggle with anger, sadness, isolation, depression or many other emotions because of stress? Come learn about tips and strategies that may improve the quality of your life.**

**CCLVI Suite**

**Monday, July 3: Programming Session \$6 \$8 (if not purchased via package)**

**1:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. - All About You**

**Create a totally positive you from the inside out. Invite yoga and laughter into your life to get healthier, beat stress and improve your mood. Then**

**learn about styles and colors to help you look as great as you feel.**

**2:45 pm to 4:00 pm: CCLVI's Advocacy Jumpstart \$6 \$8 (if not purchased via package) Come join us as we hear from individuals who have advocated for themselves. We'll learn about basic advocacy steps including the inclusion of low vision devices in Medicare Coverage and other vital issues of importance.**

**Tuesday, July 4: Business Meeting**

**1:15 p.m. to 5 p.m. CCLVI Annual Membership Meeting including elections and adoption of proposed constitutional amendments, bylaws and resolutions.**

**8 p.m. to 11 p.m.: CCLVI Game Night: \$10 \$15 (if not purchased via package)**

**After a busy day of information and networking, unwind and have some fun while playing themed Jeopardy and Name That Tune. Perhaps win a prize or two in the process. And a cash bar is also available for your enjoyment.**

**Wednesday, July 6:**

**Programming Session: \$6 \$8 (if not purchased via package)**

**1:15 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.:**

**Traveling Through the Ages.**



**Insights in traveling the world with vision loss. Learn detailed ways from trip planning, setting up guided tours and navigating vast global transit systems. For all ages, low vision travel will be thoroughly explored.**

**2:45 p.m. to 7 p.m.: CCLVI Open House**

**We invite you to a reception with light refreshments to meet our low vision community and share experiences from the**

**convention. We look forward to saying hello and getting to know you better in a relaxed social setting.**

**CCLVI suite**

**Its convention time across this great nation**

**Bringing joy, excitement and anticipation**

**The program agenda promises fun**

**Sign up now before reservations are done**

## **Join the CCLVI Firecrackers in Reno this July**

### **By Kathy Farina**

**CCLVI is once again participating in the ACB Brenda Dillon Memorial Walk. It will be held at the 2017 ACB national conference and convention in Reno, Nevada, July 1. Our team is called the Firecrackers. This is a fundraiser for ACB, and one-half of the money we raise comes back to CCLVI.**

**There are two ways you can participate. You can get friends and family to sponsor you, and walk July 1. If you want to walk but can't attend the conference, you can "walk at home" and donate the money you raise to the ACB walk. The link to the Firecrackers team**

**page is**

**<https://acb.donorpages.com/2017ACBWalk/FireCrackers>**

**If you are a couch potato but want to help us raise money, you can donate by going to the above Firecrackers' team web page and making a donation.**

**CCLVI's fundraising team will also have a table at the ACB marketplace, in the hall outside the general session room. Stop by and buy a chance (or five!) on some lovely jewelry and gift cards.**

**Hope to see you in Reno!**

## For Leaders and Aspiring Leaders

By Jim Jirak

Smack in the middle of our great nation is a state that requires some explanation. To east and west coasters who'll come right out and ask ya "Is there anything of interest in the state of Nebraska?"

It's true, we don't have mountains all decked out in snow, But we do have the world's biggest live chicken show.

We're the makers of Spam. We invented Kool-Aid, And this is where the first Reuben sandwich was made.

Our insect, the Honeybee. Our bird, the Meadowlark. The strobe light, our creation, works best in the dark. Governmentally speaking, we're a freak of nature. Since we have the only one-house legislature.

On Arbor Day, when you plant a tree, Remember that it started in Nebraska City.

We were once called a desert, but that name didn't take, since we have the country's largest underground lake.

We have the world's largest forest planted by hand, and

more miles of rivers than any state in the land. The College World Series calls Omaha "home, and yes, this is where the buffalo used to roam.

We were the first state in the nation to finish our Interstate section, and the first to run two women in a gubernatorial election. We invented 9-1-1 emergency communication, and we're the number one producer of center pivot irrigation.

Our woolly mammoth fossil is the largest ever found, and our monumental "Carhenge" is certain to astound. We have several museums that could be called odd, Dedicated to Chevy's, fur trading, roller skates and sod.

In Blue Hill, Nebraska, no woman wearing a hat, Can eat onions in public. Imagine that!

We built the largest porch swing and indoor rain forest, and anyone who visits is sure to adore us.

It is the backdrop of St. Louis' Gateway Arch that saw the culmination of the collaborative efforts of several Midwestern states to launch the initial Midwest Leadership Training

**Conference in August 2011. Dubbed the ABC's of ACB Leadership, each agenda item worked around this theme and provided a cohesive and meaningful conference experience.**

**Building on the momentum of this conference, two previously held national leadership training conferences and the 2014 Midwest Leadership Conference again in St. Louis, MO., several individuals from the states of Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska and Ohio have gotten together to discuss having another Midwest Leadership Conference this summer. The host hotel is the Regency Lodge in Omaha, Nebraska, 909 S 107 Ave. Room reservations are now available and can be made by calling (1800) 617-8310. The conference dates are Aug. 4- Aug. 6, and the group rate is \$81 plus tax.**

**This time, we are reaching beyond the Midwest to invite not only those affiliated with ACB and CCLVI, but also those individuals who could possibly benefit. Please begin thinking about who would benefit most from a program such as this. Guidelines for consideration include, but are not limited to, having a scholarship winner who has expressed genuine interest in and follow-through with projects. Perhaps you, or**

**board members, are new and need to share the experiences of others.**

**In an attempt to reach younger participants, the plenary committee has teamed up with ACB Board Member and ACB Ohio Executive Director Katie Frederick who will be facilitating a Young Professionals Seminar. The purpose of this portion of the seminar is to encourage leadership of young professionals in the blindness community and in their personal communities, as well as to facilitate effective leadership across ACB. Young professionals are often uncomfortable with programming that is not specific to their age-level.**

**By providing this seminar in conjunction with the Midwest Leadership Conference, young professionals will have the ability not only to strategize and grow with their peers, but also to engage with people of varying ages in leadership.**

**The festivities begin Friday, Aug. 4 with an icebreaker. Some of the topics being discussed for Saturday, Aug. 5 include working across generations, having fun while fundraising, what future affiliate conventions may look like, networking in today's world and life with a guide dog.**

We will top off the day with a Saturday evening banquet with a potential high profile leader from the past.

If you're looking for a singularly effective means of increasing affiliate membership, training tomorrow's leaders, improving the ability of current leaders and creating a vibrant, active and empowered state or special interest affiliate, look no further than the Midwest Leadership Conference and the Young Professional Seminar.

## **Richard Rueda: A Profile** **By Richard Rueda**

{Richard wrote the following "profile" from a series of questions}

**What are you doing now?**

**Answer:** After working nearly a decade as a Rehabilitation Counselor in the San Francisco Bay Area in Menlo Park, Fremont and Oakland, and later working both in management positions at the LightHouse in San Francisco and Junior Blind of America, I am now working as a Transition Specialist consultant with the Society for the Blind in Sacramento. After selling my condominium in Union City, I now reside in

If you have further questions or need more information about the conference in general, please contact me at [jjirak@inebraska.com](mailto:jjirak@inebraska.com) or by calling (402) 679-8448.

So pack up the kiddies, the pets and the wife, And see why Nebraska is called "THE GOOD LIFE."

(Oh, gosh - I didn't even once mention football? OR that the yellow color of the school buses originated in Franklin, Nebraska.)

**beautiful Sacramento, California's state capital city.**

**Is it fun? Rewarding?  
Challenging? Adventuresome?**

**Answer:** I have been with the Society for the Blind since late summer 2016 and have been contracted to facilitate a career readiness program for teens and young adults interested in employment opportunities. The program is called CareersPLUS. The program is in its infancy, and we are thrilled to be offering at virtually no cost to the youth and their families these invaluable hands-on and tangible experiences. It has been quite a while since

Sacramento has had its own career preparation program for youth, and with the support from the Sacramento community, our executive director and the agency, the program of which I am assisting in the development is off to a good start. Having been a part of initiating new programs for blind youth and adults as part of the career paths I have chosen over the past decade, I have come to realize that I thrive on innovation and challenging myself to find unmet needs for our community and build sustainable programming and resources.

When I am not at work, I love taking Odif, my Seeing Eye dog, on long walking adventures in Sacramento and in the San Francisco Bay Area: I find that I am a restless person by nature, so I always need to be doing something. Often it is doing some urban hiking, drinking dark roast coffee and working out poolside in the summer.

From 2013 through 2016, I pulled back on a lot of volunteer and extracurricular activities, as I had long work days and often 70+ hour work weeks traveling from Sacramento to Los Angeles and back. Although I do miss parts of that job, I decided to reward myself with a much needed

work-life balance with the contract work at the Society for the Blind. Also, a positive consequence of the transition is that I have been able to come back to CCLVI and lend a hand in our much-needed advocacy and helping organization-wide on several of CCLVI's committees and critical initiatives.

How is it evolving?

Answer: Since late August 2016, CareersPLUS is thriving. Our primary goal is to facilitate day-long hands on seminars that tackle all things employment. When working with youth and young adults who are blind and visually impaired, we are often working with many new beginnings. This ranges from career exploration to interacting with blind mentors and engaging our youth into the community. Young students who are eager to roll up their sleeves and learn and kick start their career exploration will be among the most successful of blind job seekers as they have the number one component to success, which is "self motivation." Although I have been a part of similar programs across California, the job continues to challenge me in good ways, and at the same time, it is not only rewarding, but amazingly fun.

**What do you see doing in the future?**

**Answer:** To answer this, let me first start by saying that for nearly the past ten years, I have spent much of my career in both a management role as well as one who has worked in the trenches with his staff to smoothly run and facilitate programming for persons of all ages. To that end, and coupled with outreach and travel for work, many work weeks often surpassed that of a 40-hour week. In my current role where it requires much less travel across California, I am happy to continue doing what I do best and at the same time achieving a work life balance is true gold for me. Having more free time has also allowed me to assist and contribute more to CCLVI. To the exact question, I see myself doing this job as a consultant for the foreseeable future. The future holds endless possibilities for me.

**What is your family like?**

**Answer:** Both my parents are alive and active as they near retirement. My folks live in southern California and I often visit them both several times a year. As I like to travel, I am always on the road either through Amtrak, Mega Bus or flying on Southwest Airlines. I also have an older brother who

I also keep in touch with, as well.

**When did you start having vision problems?**

**What was done about it?**

**Answer:** I was born legally blind. I grew up managing Glaucoma in my right and only functioning eye. Although I have always had low vision, it was not until my mid-twenties that I began to lose more vision as my eye necessitated several Corneal transplants and, just five years ago, surgery to reattach the retina in the right eye.

**What do you expect to happen to your vision in the future?**

**Answer:** Since retina and corneal surgeries in 2013 coupled with a consistent flow of eye drops, my vision continues to remain stable. Yet, as the retina has been reattached three times since 1985, you never know. I live each day with what vision I have and am thankful for what I do have. Were I to lose more or all of my vision, I will adapt accordingly.

**Can you describe your career? Was it worth the effort?**

**Answer:** I have spent the past 16 years working professionally in the blind community, first as a

Rehabilitation Counselor and later working in various middle management jobs. Often I get asked why I left such a comfortable state job. Although the state job as a Rehabilitation Counselor had its positive moments, I think I work best in mobile environments and thrive on working with folks on innovating programs and services for those most in need in our community.

What do you do for entertainment? Books? TV? Exercise? Anything else you can think of?

Answer: Outside of hiking, swimming and traveling to new places, I enjoy reading books. With literally thousands of books at my fingertips available from the National Library Service (BARD), Bookshare and even through the Amazon Kindle book store, I get a kick out of reading both through the iPhone and the Victor Reader Stream. I find that I get the most out of reading while traveling on Amtrak or on Mega Bus to and from San Francisco from Sacramento.

How do you feel about young visually impaired people today? Students? ADA?

Answer: I think that young blind people live in an age of

bountiful resources. Yet at the same time, we cannot take for granted the critical guidance and mentorship young people need to be held accountable for their actions, both good and otherwise. Mentoring young folks is so powerful and necessary for a myriad of reasons, notably providing encouragement and motivation to seek out a quality of life and ultimately attain gainful competitive employment.

How do you feel about older people and their adjustment to blindness?

Answer: With the baby boomers now aging into and well past retirement age, it is essential that groups such as CCLVI, ACB and other national agencies ramp up efforts in advocacy to assist the growing number of seniors. As there is a trend nation wide via the Work Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) to funnel money away from within the Rehabilitation system for aging adults with vision loss to that of young people and working age adults, service providers and our own low-vision community needs to collaborate and step up efforts to help the aging blind population.

What pushes your buttons?

**Answer: By default, I like to give people the benefit of the doubt. I consider myself fortunate to have had choices with employment and some flexibility to adjust my career goals mid-life. At the same time, I grew up raised by parents and my older brother who all had at an early age, and still have a very strong work ethic. I had my first job and first pay check at 16. With that first work experience, I grew ever more excited about going to college and being successful. The first person in my immediate family to go to college, I like to underscore that knowledge and ongoing networking is what gets people employed. When I meet young people who are not motivated and moreover who expect things to come to them, it does push my buttons. Fortunately, this is the exception and not the norm.**

**How do you encourage low vision people?**

**Answer: I like to lead by example. As much as I like to work hard, I have found in**

**recent years that achieving a work-life balance is key to my overall health. My encouragement to others in our community is simple: live every day with a smile and be generous with your actions.**

**What have you done in CCLVI?**

**Answer: I have been a member of CCLVI since the early 2000's. I believe in 2006 or 2007 I was encouraged to run for the board and served both as first and second Vice President. I was CCLVI's President from 2010 to 2012. Although I was encouraged to run for another term, I had to respectfully decline due to growing work demands. I rejoined the board in 2016 and currently serve as second Vice President. During my time as President, Dr. Bill Takeshita and I co-authored "Insights Into Low Vision," an invaluable resource on low vision resources. The book has various chapters written by leading specialists in the field. I am most proud of the book that will soon be published in Spanish.**



## QUALITY OF LIFE

### A Day in the Life of Enhanced Vision's MoJo

From a post on the Enhanced Vision website

Ms. Ima Hapenow was devastated by the news that her ophthalmologist gave her last summer that she has macular degeneration and she is considered legally blind. In the past six months, it has been such a disappointment to not be able to do all those things that she has always taken for granted. But today is the first day she is going to use this new magnifier that was delivered to her house just yesterday.

Ms. Ima immediately went to read the Sunday paper, which is something she always enjoyed doing before going to church. With a simple push of a button, her MOJO with its CCTV docking stand enables her to read her newspaper in a manner that she has done for years. Since she has multiple viewing modes on its large 24-inch screen that can easily adjust to increase or decrease of different magnification levels, she finds this reading so helpful with her vision impairment.

Since it is Sunday, it is off to church and, as she arrives a bit late, she is sitting in one of the

pews to the rear of the church. The service begins and with her taking the MOJO out of her purse, she is able to look at the small billboard at the front of the church that signified what songs were to be sung today. This was great that now she could participate again because the MOJO gave her the ability to see at a distance. Knowing what song to sing, she opened her book, and placing the MOJO to her eye, she pressed the zoom button to create the magnification she needed to read from the song book. Since she could now read at home (newspaper), at a distance (billboard) and even by keeping the MOJO 4 inches from her text, she was able to sing along with the choir just like she used to.

Afterwards she was invited to breakfast with her friends, and they went to a local restaurant. In the past she felt she was disturbing her friends if she asked them to read the menu. Not today, since she read it herself and felt in total control! Her friend mentioned during breakfast that there were some gorgeous birds outside the window at the bird bath. Ima immediately pointed her MOJO at the flock and saw blue jays,

cardinals, orioles and a host of other birds at a distance. When her bill came, again she could verify the amount on the receipt so she could leave the proper amount of a tip.

It has not even high noon yet and Ima realized what an incredible help this MOJO is to her. With a full day planned of watching her grandson in his little league game, a stop at the grocery store and even setting the alarm clock for tomorrow

morning, she was confident that she made the right decision in getting the MOJO.

Ms. Hapenow completely agrees with Barb Thompson who stated, "Mojo is my new best friend. I take Mojo wherever I go. It has given me back my independence and has made me extremely happy." And Ima lived happily ever after.

## **Product Guides: Helpful Products and Technology for Living with Vision Loss From the AFB website**

Several guides can help you locate the best products to help you adjust to vision loss:

**American Foundation for the Blind Product Search:** This is a comprehensive listing of assistive technology products used by people who are blind or visually impaired. It is the place to go to search for a product or manufacturer, find out what products are out there and decide which product is best for you, a family member, or one of your clients. You can browse by task, product category or manufacturer. You can link to product reviews published in AccessWorld®, AFB's online technology magazine. Be sure to read

**AccessWorld's article on Selecting Products for Seniors with Vision Loss.**

**Specialty Products Sources:** Many products are available in the marketplace to help you live more independently with vision loss. AFB has compiled a comprehensive list of specialty resources to help you find what you need. If you know of a resource that we do not have in our list, please let us know at [visionaware@afb.net](mailto:visionaware@afb.net)

**AbleData:** This site provides objective information about assistive technology products and rehabilitation equipment available from domestic and international sources.

AbleData does not sell these products, but can help you locate the companies that do.

## **Losing My Freedom**

### **By Yvonne Garris**

As I was listening to music today, the R.E.M. song "Losing my Religion"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=if-UzXIQ5vw> started running through my head.

Then a friend called me, and as we were talking, I said that I missed driving so very much, thus my new song "Losing My Freedom" was born. If you are anything like me, your car was your ticket to freedom.

Now that I am legally blind and use a white cane, I no longer have a car. Instead of a white cane, some people have a guide dog. While I have some independence, I can only walk so far. Let's take a look at some options blind and those with disabilities have for getting around without driving.

The first option, as I said before, is walking if you have two feet. Otherwise, those with disabilities generally have a wheelchair. However, you can only go so far under your own power.

Next is the public bus. If you are lucky enough to live in a place where there is good

public transportation, then you may be OK for the most part. But for those of us who live where public transportation leaves a lot to be desired or there is no public transportation, then you have a real problem.

Depending on where you live, there may be Para-Transit or a similar shared ride program. This is usually a subsidized program. Now this can be good, but there can also be restrictions on when you go, where you go and if you are allowed to have someone go with you.

Of course, there are always family and friends if you are lucky enough to have them and they have cars and have time to take you. If you have a wheelchair, you will need to consider if they have room for your chair.

All of this is enough to make you want to stay home with the covers pulled over your head. No wonder you do not see many people with disabilities people out and about - they can't get there. Or if they can,

it is such an ordeal that they only go out once in a while.

The biggest problem is that rarely does anyone teach those with newly-acquired disabilities how to get out of their homes. We get mobility training and maybe a little instruction on how to read a bus schedule, and the only reason I got that instruction was because I was enrolled in college. This is one of the reasons I started Fresh

## **Reduce Risks of Falling By Junji Takano**

One of the main health concerns of senior citizens is falling, which is often related to poor balance. In fact, many studies show that people begin to have balance problems starting at age 40. The older you get, the weaker your physical body and sensory abilities will be, which are all factors in having poor balance. In Japan, more than 7,000 people a year die from falling accidents, which already exceeds the number of traffic accidents. In this article, we'll examine in more detail the cause of falling and why you lose balance as you age. **Test Your Balance by Standing on One Leg**

You can determine how good your balance is by measuring the length of time that you can

Outlook Coach. I want to make sure that you know how to plan a trip. If you want to go to the store, then I want you to be able to go. Really, why shouldn't people with disabilities be able to run errands by themselves? If you need help, I would love to help you; just send me an email at [Yvonne@freshoutlookcoach.com](mailto:Yvonne@freshoutlookcoach.com), and we can see about working together.

stand on one leg. The following table shows the average balance time by age group in a study conducted at a Japanese health institute.

**Average Time with Eyes Open**  
 20-39 years old: 110 seconds  
 40-49: 64 seconds  
 50-59: 36 seconds  
 60-69: 25 seconds

**Average Time with Eyes Closed**  
 20-39 years old: 12 seconds  
 40-49: 7 seconds  
 50-59: 5 seconds  
 60-69: less than 3 seconds

If your balance time is below average, then you'll have higher risk of falls, or slipping and tripping accidents. In the above study, women tend to lose their balance more than

men but only by a small margin (1-2%).

From this study, it is also evident that there's a sudden significant decrease in the ability to maintain balance among middle-aged people (40 years and above).

Please take note that the numbers stated above are only average. There are people who were able to maintain balance much longer, and there are also those who were only able to maintain their balance at much shorter time regardless of age and gender. The reason why they vary is explained further below.

### **The Soles of Your Feet Have Sensors**

The skins throughout your body have significant amount of tiny pressure sensors or mechanoreceptors. Some areas have few pressure sensors, while other areas have thousands, like on the soles of your feet. The pressure sensors on the foot soles provide information to your brain to help balance your body. As you get older, the sensors will get weaker, and your foot sole will lose sensitivity. But there are also other factors that can lead to weaker pressure sensors.

### **Poor Blood Circulation Can Disrupt the Pressure Sensors**

In our study, people are almost twice as likely to be in a fall accident caused by poor blood circulation.

This can be simulated by soaking your feet into ice cold water for about three minutes. Because of the cold temperature, the pressure sensors on the foot sole begin to lose sensitivity.

### **Pay Attention to Your Forward-Moving Foot**

If your forward-moving foot hit something, your body will be off-balance, causing you to fall or trip. Well, it's a matter of common sense to always have your eyes on the path and watch where you are going. Remember the old adages: "Prevention is better than cure," "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," "Look before you leap," etc.? But that's not the only problem. Here are the other two major reasons why you stumble while walking.

1. Your forward-moving foot is pointed down. If your foot is pointed down while making a step, then you are more prone to falling. To avoid this, your forefoot or toes should be flexed upwards.

**2. You walk like a pendulum.** The height of your step can greatly increase your risk of falling. To prevent this, your forward-moving foot must be higher off the ground (at least 5 cm) while the knee is raised high.

Actually, all the mechanoreceptors located throughout your body as well as the soles of your feet are sending information to the brain that include muscle contractions and joint angles.

When this information is not transmitted well to your brain, which happens as you get older, then the movement will get weak or ineffective making it hard for you to maintain your foot higher off the ground.

**How to Prevent a Fall, Trip or Slip**

**1. Keep Your House Clean:** There are a lot of things in your house that can contribute to clutter that can cause you to trip or fall. Always make sure to put away or store properly

all personal belongings and other unnecessary things even if it is only a newspaper, remote control, and laundry scattered on the floor or carpet.

**2. Stretch Your Feet and Ankles:** You might think that your feet do not need exercise or stretching compared to other parts of your body, but in reality, feet stretching exercise can really help your feet maintain balance.

**3. Keep Your House Warm and Ensure Adequate Lighting:** Cold muscles and pressure sensors work less well and are less responsive to signals. A decreased temperature will also cause your muscles to have less strength and less flexible, which can lead to accidents. Always try to keep your house warm or wear proper clothes and footwear, especially during winter. Since most falls occur indoors, make sure your house has adequate lighting.

Please share this with your friends.

## **Science and Health Fish Eyes May Hold Key to Regenerating Human Retinas**

Article Link:

<http://www.scienceline.com/news/2017030917520088.html>

If you were a fish and your retina was damaged, it could repair itself, and your vision would be restored in a few weeks.

**Sadly, human eyes don't have this beneficial ability. However, new research into retinal regeneration in zebrafish has identified a signal that appears to trigger the self-repair process. And, if confirmed by follow-up studies, the discovery raises the possibility that human retinas can also be induced to regenerate, naturally repairing damage caused by degenerative retinal diseases and injury, including age-related macular degeneration and retinitis pigmentosa:**

**The research was performed by a team of biologists at Vanderbilt University and is described in a paper titled "Neurotransmitter-Regulated Regeneration in the Zebrafish Retina" published online March 9 by the journal Stem Cell Reports.**

**"The prevailing belief has been that the regeneration process in fish retinas is triggered by secreted growth factors, but our results indicate that the neurotransmitter GABA might initiate the process instead," said James Patton, Stevenson Professor of Biological Sciences at Vanderbilt, who directed the study. "All the regeneration models assume that a retina must be seriously damaged before regeneration takes place, but our studies indicate**

**that GABA can induce this process even in undamaged retinas."**

**It turns out that the structure of the retinas of fish and mammals are basically the same. Although the retina is very thin - less than 0.5 millimeters thick - it contains three layers of nerve cells: photoreceptors that detect the light, horizontal cells that integrate the signals from the photoreceptors and ganglion cells that receive the visual information and route it to the brain.**

**In addition, the retina contains a special type of adult stem cell, called Müller glia, that span all three layers and provide mechanical support and electrical insulation. In fish retinas, they also play a key role in regeneration. When regeneration is triggered, the Müller glia dedifferentiate (regress from a specialized state to a simpler state), begin proliferating and then differentiate into replacements for the damaged nerve cells. Müller glia are also present in mammalian retinas, but don't regenerate.**

**Graduate student Mahesh Rao got the idea that GABA-- normally a fast-acting neurotransmitter best known for its role of calming nervous activity by inhibiting nerve**

transmission in the brain-- might be the trigger for retinal regeneration. He was inspired by the results of a study in the mouse hippocampus which found that GABA was controlling stem cell activity.

So, working with Patton and research assistant professor Dominic Didiano, Rao designed a series of experiments with zebrafish--an important animal model for studying regeneration--which determined that high concentrations of GABA in the retina keep the Müller glia quiescent and that they begin dedifferentiating and proliferating when GABA concentrations drop.

"Last month a paper was published in the journal *Cell* that reports GABA levels play a central role in the regeneration of pancreas cells," said Patton. "We now have three instances where GABA is involved in regeneration--the hippocampus, the pancreas and the retina--so this could be an important, previously unknown role for the neurotransmitter."

They tested their hypothesis in two ways: by blinding zebrafish and injecting them with drugs that stimulate GABA production, and by injecting normal zebrafish with an enzyme that lowers the GABA levels in their eyes.

Zebrafish are easily blinded. If they are in total darkness for several days and then exposed to very bright light, all the photoreceptors in their retinas are destroyed.

Due to their robust regenerative ability, however, their eyes recover in just 28 days. When the biologists injected drugs that kept GABA concentrations in the retinas of newly blinded fish at a high level, they found that it suppressed the regeneration process.

On the other hand, when they injected an enzyme that lowers GABA levels in the eyes of normal fish, they found that the Müller glia began dedifferentiating and proliferating, the first stage in the regeneration process.

"Our theory is that a drop in GABA concentration is the trigger for regeneration.

It initiates a cascade of events that includes the activation of the Müller glia and the production of various growth factors that stimulate cell growth and proliferation," said Patton. "If we are correct, then it might be possible to stimulate human retinas to repair themselves by treating them with a GABA inhibitor." The researchers' next step is to



determine if GABA not only stimulates Müller glia dedifferentiation and proliferation, but also causes the differentiation that produces new photoreceptors

and the other specialized neurons in the retina. They are pursuing this in both zebrafish and mice with a grant from the National Eye Institute's Audacious Goals Initiative.

## Request for Contributions

CCLVI gratefully accepts contributions from readers and members to help pay for the costs of publishing Vision Access,. Please send contributions to

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