

# **"Sightings"**

**Wyoming Council of the Blind**

**November 2021**

## **President's Message**

**From Sherry Leinen**

**Hello again everyone!! I need to apologize about it being so long since you have received a newsletter. It has been a busy year with me working on advocacy issues that are important to our organization. The newsletter ended up on the bottom of my to-do list and I apologize to all of our members for that. With the board's help, I hope that we have the newsletter handled for now. We are always looking for an individual who would be interested in writing the newsletter or even just contributing an article or two. If you know of anyone who would be interested, please let us know. Or if you have suggestions about topics that you would be interested in learning more about, let any of the board members know and we will try to find someone to write that article.**

**You are always welcome to participate in our monthly board meetings. They are the second Thursday of every month at 7PM. The meetings are held by conference call and you can join by calling:**

**605-472-5395. The access code is: 569373**

**We ask that, if you do call in, please announce yourself so that we may add you to our minutes. If you have something specific that you would like to discuss, please call or email beforehand so that I may add you to the agenda.**

**My email is: [president@wycb.info](mailto:president@wycb.info) and my phone number is 307-746-6166.**

**We are updating our website, [www.wycb.info](http://www.wycb.info). Please let us know if you have any ideas on how to make it better.**

**You can find out what is going on across the country by checking out the American Council of the Blind at [www.acb.org](http://www.acb.org). You will find a link on our website.**

**For several months, we have been working on two very important advocacy issues that could impact many of our members.**

## **White Cane Law – Updates**

**The committee has worked hard to write a proposal to update the very outdated White Cane Law in Wyoming. The penalties for hitting a pedestrian walking with a cane or a guide dog are too lenient; you can receive a worse fine for abusing an animal in Wyoming. We would like to see the fines and penalties**

increased. We would also like to add some pedestrian safety information in the Driver Education Manual and also a question added to the driver's test about White Cane/Guide Dog safety. The proposal is nearly ready to present to the legislators.

## **Talking Books Program (TBP)**

Last year, we were informed that the Talking Books Program was losing its funding in June of 2021. With help, we rallied some troops for 2 waves of letters, emails and phone calls and, thankfully, the Department of Education found another year of funding. The Talking Books Program is currently slated to be defunded in June, 2022. We must remain proactive in educating legislators and others about the importance of this program. The Talking Books Program provides access to printed material in alternative formats for individuals who are unable to read print by traditional methods. These individuals include those who have blindness, visual impairments, reading and learning disabilities, physical disabilities, cognitive impairments, and/or any other condition that prohibits an individual access to printed material.

WyCB has enlisted the help of the folks at Wyoming Protection and Advocacy System, Inc. (WY P and A) to help us develop an all-inclusive policy paper on the TBP. The paper references appropriate federal laws which call for equal access to printed materials by individuals with visual impairments, physical disabilities, and learning challenges. This policy paper has been sent to the Governor, selected members of his staff, and

**the Superintendent of Public Instruction. This policy paper will also be sent to all of the Senators and Representatives along with numerous other individuals and organizations willing to help with this advocacy endeavor. It is necessary to conduct an ongoing effort to encourage our legislators to understand the importance of the TBP in our state. We are asking you to take the time to contact our state legislators by phone, letter, or email to express your thoughts on this issue. All of our members will receive a copy of this TBP policy paper along with contact information for the elected officials. Permanent funding for the Talking Books Program will eliminate the need for the Wyoming Department of Education to struggle with the funding for this program every two years during the legislative budget sessions.**

**PLEASE take the time to contact your elected state officials and ask them to ensure permanent funding for this vital program.**

**We will continue to update you as we receive new information about both advocacy issues.**

**Once again please don't hesitate to contact myself or another board member if you ever have any questions, comments, or concerns. Please let us know if there is anything WyCB can help you with.**

**Please Stay Safe and Healthy!!**

**“Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.”**

**Sincerely,**

**Sherry Leinen, WYCB President**

# **Strange Phenomenon with Vision Loss**

by Sharon Byers

Hi, I'm Sharon Byers and I'm 67 years old. I've had to deal with poor vision since I was in second grade. I learned how to adapt.

Around 20 years ago, during an eye exam for my driver's license renewal, I learned that I'd lost the central vision in my left eye. After going to several eye specialists, Dr. Peddada of Casper said I had pathological myopia. I was told it only affects 3 percent of the population. My first thought was "Yep, it's payback for the 70's."

One evening while walking into the living room, I froze. I saw a curved light bar with silver lights that were running up and down like a marquee. Next to it were squares and triangles with lines and dots in them like dominoes. It was so strange! The eye doctor said it was an ocular migraine.

Another strange one, I'd see peach or pale orange elephants and sometimes, they would be draped in red scarves with tassels. One night, I saw a skunk pacing in a cage with a branch of leaves leaning off the top of the cage while a breeze rustled the leaves and the skunk's fur. It was so real! It scared me and my kids; I thought I had a brain tumor. My eye

**doctor said it was the Charles Bonnet Syndrome, which is common among the elderly with deteriorating eye conditions. It's described as hallucinations without sound, yet they appear very real. They can be random simple patterns or detailed images and can be in color or black & white. You can't control the visions. It is said that animals can look realistic. I've seen visions on my bedroom wall of a village with paisley print silk material laid over it. Crazy, huh?**

**Seven years ago, my retina detached and I lost my peripheral vision; I had surgery to reattach it. Two days later, the retina had detached again which left my left eye with zero vision.**

**I'm working with my eye doctor to keep the vision in my right eye. So far, I seem to be maintaining.**

## **Parenting a Child with Vision Loss**

**by D'Anna Feurt**

**Let me just say this, it's been quite the learning experience! Our daughter was born 5 weeks early and with congenital facial anomalies that we later learned were part of Goldenhar Syndrome. She had a cleft lip, cleft palate, and a cleft in her left eyelid, but she was otherwise healthy. She spent her first few weeks of life in the NICU at Children's Hospital in Denver. We learned within days of her birth that she was hearing impaired with the most severe hearing loss in her right ear. She was fitted for hearing aids at around 6 months old and continues to wear them to this day.**

The full extent of her vision loss was not apparent until many years later. She battled corneal ulcers in her left eye from birth which eventually caused scarring on her corneas. She was prescribed glasses at around 5 years old which we assumed corrected her vision to 20/20; however, once she started school we kept hearing from teachers that they didn't believe she was seeing very well. We continued to take her to a specialist but only received adjustments to her prescription. At age 7, frustrated by the lack of information and support from her local eye specialist, we took her to a pediatric ophthalmologist in Fort Collins, CO. At the initial visit, we learned that her corneas were so dehydrated that he was unable to do a refraction on her. So, we were prescribed eye ointments to help hydrate and heal her corneas. Several weeks later, we returned and he was able to do a refraction, but could not get her corrected better than 20/100 in either eye. She was then scheduled for a retinal test at Children's Hospital in Denver. She completed the exam and the results indicated that the cells in her retinas did not function properly and that was why she couldn't be corrected to 20/20. From this point on, she was considered visually impaired and received services at school for both hearing and vision issues.

Our daughter has done an amazing job at learning to adjust to her vision issues. She is currently only corrected to 20/100 in her left eye and 20/400 in her right eye. Despite her vision limitations, she has learned to navigate her environment very well. She has always had the ability to identify landmarks to find her way around her schools, work, the city, etc. Even as a small child she quickly learned our frequently used routes and was quick to tell us if she thought we were going the wrong

**way! She has played sports including basketball and soccer and did well in both. The most difficult part for our daughter is her vision loss combined with her hearing loss. She's unable to use her hearing to help accommodate for her vision loss and so she oftentimes is unaware when danger may be present such as an oncoming car in a parking lot or street. Since she is unable to drive, she has to rely on public transportation to get where she wants or needs to go. As a young adult, this makes it harder for her to stay engaged with friends and involved in activities as she has to plan everything in advance in order to arrange transportation. As parents, we have had to learn to be more attentive to where she was in relation to us to ensure that she could see us or hear us. This frustrated her as she grew and became more independent because she couldn't go off by herself at a store, but we found ways to allow her more freedom by using her personal FM system with her hearing aids and later using texting to keep her informed of our location.**

**Our greatest fear as parents of a deaf/blind child is that her impairments could one day put her in danger of being hurt. Finding the balance between her independence and her safety is an ongoing pursuit, but we constantly work on finding ways to educate her and give her opportunities to learn firsthand. We have faith in our daughter and her ability to overcome any obstacle put in front of her. She, like so many others with vision loss, is capable of doing most anything they set their minds on. We are her biggest cheerleaders and encourage her to pursue her dreams.**

# **Tech Talk - Optical Character Recognition**

**by Chris Johnson**

**I've previously talked about text-to-speech. But what if you want to hear the printed text from a paper document? In the 1980's, Ray Kurzweil came up with Optical Character Recognition, or OCR for short. It was expensive and not very accurate. Now there are apps for smartphones and tablets that do this well for free or less than \$5!**

**Wow! Do you see the possibilities here? How about labels, medications, business cards, receipts, signs?!**

## **OCR Apps for SmartPhones**

**Over a year or so ago Microsoft came up with a free iPhone app called Seeing A I. It will just start reading whatever is in the camera's view or you can snap a picture of a document to hear it and even have it describe the landscape.**

**Some other pretty good iPhone OCR apps are ones such as: Prizmo, Prizmo Go, and Text Grabber. And for Android, the best ones are called Text Fairy, Text Scanner, and Microsoft Office Lens, which can even pick up some handwriting (though probably not mine). Generally, OCR doesn't work well on handwriting (except when opened up in note taking apps like Google Notes, Evernote, or OneNote). I'll cover note taking, Calendars, and Reminders another time.**

**Lastly, when doing OCR from a tablet or phone, make sure your document or printed text is in a well lit area, with a lamp for example. With your elbows on the table, hold your device up above the document you'd like to read. For better precision, you may consider setting up a stand or purchasing one like Scanjig.**

## **OCR for the computer**

**If you have a copier or scanner the likelihood is that a competent OCR program was put onto your computer already when your scanner's software was installed. If not, there are lots of options, like the popular ReadIris software or free favorites, Simple OCR and FreeOCR. Another option to consider is an inexpensive document camera with accompanying OCR software, or a self-contained CCTV magnification device with OCR such as HIMS GoVision.**

**Lastly, some screenreaders can perform OCR as an add-on feature. NVDA and JAWS both have the ability to perform OCR capturing of a screen's image that is otherwise not read by the screenreader.**

**Another thing to consider is document cameras that interface with your computer or device. They are inexpensive and can capture an image of a printed letter, for example, then send it to your computer, convert it to "editable text," to where your screenreader or other text-to-speech program will read it with**

synthetic speech (aka robot voice). They also can work great as an inexpensive CCTV or magnifier.

As always, if you need assistance with setting up some of these things or have questions, comments or suggestions for something you'd like to find out more about, feel free to contact Chris Johnson at (307) 277-0582 or [chris@expressable.org](mailto:chris@expressable.org).

## **Meet Your WyCB Board**

### **SHERRY LEINEN**

I have been a member of WyCB since 2008 and am the current WyCB President. I am a Wyoming native and currently live in Newcastle. I was an early childhood/ elementary teacher for over 15 years before I lost my vision and retired early.

I am married and have 2 grown children and 3 grandchildren.

I have many hobbies that keep me busy. I enjoy traveling and visiting my grandchildren. My dog, Snickers, keeps me very busy; we both enjoy long walks and hiking in the country. While hiking, I love finding rocks and antique glass. I stay busy woodworking and making wire-wrapped jewelry and other crafts with the rocks, antique glass, and sea glass that I have found.

## **TOM LEALOS**

**I worked for a major forest products company in Northern California as a Forest Engineer prior to retirement. About half way through my career, my vision started to fail due to Uveitis. My “low vision” journey lasted for about forty years. I am now totally blind. Over the past many decades I have started two Low Vision Support Groups, the second of which I still lead in Powell, where my wife, Cleo, and I now live. I have been a member of WyCB since 2003, serving as President for four of those years. I have been a Board member and committee chair of the Council of Citizens with Low Vision International (CCLVI), another ACB affiliate for a couple of decades also.**

**My hobbies include woodworking and landscaping.**

**Afternoon naps seem to be finding their way into my days as my age tries to catch up with me.**

## **JACQUIE FLATLEY**

**Being born and raised in central Kansas, I graduated from Kansas State University with a degree in education, then moved to Colorado where I lived for 18 years. While living in Colorado, I started working for optometrists after completing courses for Certified ParaOptometric. Following that path for 14 years, I then took additional classes to be certified as an Ophthalmic Assistant, subsequently working for an ophthalmologist for 2 years. In 2002, I moved to Douglas, Wyoming and began my thirteen year career in Low Vision as**

**a consultant with the Visually Impaired Program (VIP) at Wyoming Independent Living.**

**I have been a member of WyCB since 2003 and have served as a board member for most of those years and also as Secretary. I currently live in Casper and have one son, Nickolas, who lives in Cheyenne.**

## **D'ANNA FEURT**

**Our current WyCB Treasurer, grew up in Casper and graduated from Kelly Walsh High School. She later attended the University of Wyoming and earned a bachelor's degree in accounting. After graduating from the University of Wyoming she worked as a multi-line adjuster for a national insurance carrier before joining the State of Wyoming Insurance Department. She has worked as a policy analyst for the department for the past 16 years. D'Anna has been married to her husband, Brett, for 26 years and they have two children, Hannah and Trevor, all of whom reside in Cheyenne. She enjoys golfing, crafting, and spending time with her family. She joined WyCB in 2019 and has held the office of Secretary and Treasurer.**

## **2021 WyCB Convention Recap**

**The 2021 convention was held in Casper on July 29. It was a small convention, but it was great to see those that came. Our**

speakers were Dr. Cheryl Godley and Chris Johnson. Dr. Godley spoke about aging and vision loss and Chris Johnson talked about some assistive technology devices. They were both great speakers and were very informative.

We held our annual business meeting after lunch and elected new officers and directors for our board. The new board is as follows:

### OFFICERS

<b>President:</b>	<b>Sherry Leinen</b>	<b>Term (2021-2022)</b>
<b>Vice-President</b>	<b>Vacant</b>	
<b>Secretary:</b>	<b>Jacquie Flatley</b>	<b>Term (2021-2022)</b>
<b>Treasurer:</b>	<b>D'Anna Feurt</b>	<b>Term (2021-2023)</b>

### DIRECTORS

<b>Cheryl Godley</b>	<b>Term (2021-2023)</b>
<b>Chris Johnson</b>	<b>Term (2021-2023)</b>
<b>Sharon Byers</b>	<b>Term (2021-2022)</b>
<b>Tom Lealos</b>	<b>Term (2021-2023)</b>
<b>Dr. Nick Brattis</b>	<b>Term (2021-2022)</b>

We voted on an amendment to the By-Laws to add an emergency clause that would allow us to conduct our annual business in other means besides in person at our annual convention.

## **Ski For Light Returns To The Snow**

**The 47<sup>th</sup> annual Ski for Light International Week will be held Sunday, January 30 through February 6, 2022 in Granby, Colorado. Ski for Light is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization that hosts an annual, week-long event where blind and mobility-impaired adults are taught the basics of cross-country skiing. The event attracts more than 250 skiers, guides and volunteers from throughout the United States and the world. During the Ski for Light International Week, each skier with a disability is paired with an experienced, sighted cross-country skier who acts as ski instructor and on-snow guide.**

**If you have never attended what many have called “the experience of a lifetime,” please consider participating in the Ski for Light 2022 International Week as a skier, a guide, or a volunteer. View a brief narrated video introduction to Ski for Light at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjC96E7cyzq>. Applications for skiers, guides, and volunteers are now available at [www.sfl.org](http://www.sfl.org). If you have specific questions, contact Melinda Hollands at [mlhollandstc@gmail.com](mailto:mlhollandstc@gmail.com) or call at 213-590-0986.**