"Sightings"

Wyoming Council of the Blind
https://www.wycb.info (307) 629-1916
Nov 2026

President: Cheryl Godley, Casper.
Vice President: Gary Olson, Powell.
Secretary: Bonnie Harrison, Cheyenne.
Treasurer: Tom Smyth, Casper.
Directors: Shelby Kappler, Laramie. Sherry Leinen, Newcastle. Robin Loen, Cody. Sara Sexton, Buffalo. Debra Thompson, Rock Springs. Linda Woodruff, Sheridan. Gregg Burroughs, Torrington.
**

President's Address by Cheryl Godley

The past two months have been pretty exciting for the Wyoming Council of the Blind. On September 26, we had our convention with interesting speakers and new attendees. Then on October 23, 24, and 25, International Speaker, Michael Hingson spoke to us about blindness, in general, and his

experiences, and what he learned from escaping from the World Trade Center on 9/11.

Our annual convention and the Hingson presentations offered us an opportunity to interact and see one another, as many folks were able to make it to at least one of the events. Thank goodness for Zoom that helps us participate in events when transportation is such a challenge in our state.

I believe the presentations by Mike offered a strong opportunity for our communities to know more about WyCB, and what we are about. Before I introduced Mike to our audiences, I had an opportunity to talk about WyCB, our mission, and how we attain that mission.

I want to express our deep appreciation to all of the people who assisted us with making the Michael Hingson presentations such a success. Vision Outreach Services made tremendous efforts to contact and bring blind and visually impaired students and their parents to Casper College for Michael's presentation on Friday. In the morning they had wonderful opportunities to interact with Casper firefighters and chances to climb aboard two firetrucks brought in for the occasion. A big thank you to the Casper Fire Department for their time and for bringing the firetrucks to campus. I especially want to thank our generous financial sponsors: the

Montgomery Trust, Dan Grace, Karst Industries, and the Casper Mountain Lions Club who made Michael's visit possible.

Also, as we move into the Holidays, I wish each of you a blessed and special season.
**

Guide Dogs and Lessons: A Conversation with Michael Hingson by Abbie Johnson Taylor

On October 24, 2026, at the invitation of WyCB, Michael Hingson visited Casper to share his remarkable story and the lessons he has learned about trust, courage, and teamwork. Blind since birth, Michael became internationally known after escaping the 78th floor of one of the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001, with the help of his guide dog, Roselle. He has since shared his experiences and insights in three books. I had an opportunity to sit down with Michael for a virtual chat to talk about growing up blind, his journey with guide dogs, the stories behind his books, and the lessons he hopes readers will take away.

AJT: First, tell us about yourself—where you were born and raised, how many guide dogs you've had, your college degrees and jobs, and what you're doing now.

MH: Best way to answer this question is to give you my bio.

Michael Hingson, blind since birth, was born in Chicago to sighted parents who believed in raising their son with a can-do attitude. Treated like all other children in his family, Michael rode a bike, did advanced math in his head, and learn to read and write – Braille that is! Michael's family relocated to the warm Palmdale area of California when he was five years old. It is here that Hingson had his first adventure with Guide Dogs for the Blind and received his first guide dog. He later went to college, receiving a bachelor's and master's degree in physics along with a secondary teaching credential from the University of California at Irvine. Michael then enjoyed a nearly-30-year career working for high tech companies spending most of his time in management roles.

Michael Hingson's life changed dramatically on September 11, 2001 when he and his guide dog, Roselle, escaped from the 78th floor of Tower One in the World Trade Center moments before it collapsed. Soon after, Michael and Roselle were thrust into the international limelight, where Michael began to share his unique survival story and 9-11 lessons of trust, courage, heroism, and teamwork.

Mike has served as The National Public Affairs Director for one of the largest Nonprofit organizations in the nation, Guide Dogs for the Blind. He has served as the vice president of the National Association of Guide Dog Users. Michael has held a seat on the Fort Worth Lighthouse for the Blind board of directors. He is the chair of the board of directors of the Earle Baum Center for the Blind and is the vice chair of the Colorado Center for the Blind. Michael is the National Ambassador for the Braille Literacy Campaign of the National Federation of the Blind.

Until October 2019, he worked as the CEO of the Do More Foundation, the non-profit arm of Aira Tech Corp, a manufacturer of assistive technology, which makes a revolutionary visual interpreter for blind people. In January, 2021, Mike joined accessiBe as its Chief Vision Officer to help advance the company goal of making the entire Internet fully inclusive. He held this position through June of 2026.

He is the author of the #1 New York Times Best Seller: *Thunder Dog –The True Story of a Blind Man, a Guide Dog & the Triumph of Trust* – selling over 2.5 million copies Worldwide. In 2013, Mr. Hingson published his 2nd book *Running with Roselle*- which is the first of its kind, a story for our youth shedding light on one of Americas darkest days. Mr. Hingson's third book, *Live Like A Guide Dog*, was released on August 20,

2024. This book shows readers how they can learn to control fear and not, as Mike would say, "become blinded by fear in the face of crisis."

Aside from his talents and advocacies, Mr. Hingson has traveled the globe; Japan, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and throughout the US. Speaking to some of the world's most elite: from former President, George W. Bush, to Larry King, to Fortune 500 companies and colleges and universities nationwide. After sharing his story of survival on hundreds of TV and radio programs, Michael is now an expert hired by many of today's major corporations and organizations. Speaking and consulting on the importance of teamwork and trust, moving from diversity to inclusion, as well as offering adaptive technology training – spearheading innovation for ALL! - thus, bringing organizations to the forefront of the ever-changing competitive modern world.

In June, 2024, Mike was inducted as an alumni member into the honors Fraternity Phi Beta Kappa. Currently Michael lives in Victorville, California with Alamo, Michael's eighth guide dog, and his rescue feline, Stitch. More information on Mr. Hingson is available on his website.

AJT: In your book, *Live Like a Guide Dog*, you talk about attending a public elementary school at a time when

mainstreaming wasn't the norm. How receptive were teachers and students to your blindness? How easy was it for you to learn and get textbooks in Braille?

MH: I learned Braille in kindergarten in Chicago while attending a special class for blind kids. We then moved to Palmdale, California, and I had no access to Braille until the 4th grade. My parents helped me with assignments. I learned as said above, to do math in my head and could do algebra by the age of 6.

Going into the 4th grade, the school district had enough blind children that they hired a "resource teacher" who worked with me on Braille and was responsible for getting me Braille texts so I could better participate with the rest of my classmates. Teachers were generally quite supportive as they saw that I could hold my own. Back then, we also did not have much bullying so I did ok.

AJT: Wow, you were lucky. So, you received your first guide dog, Squire, when you were starting high school. What was it like being the only kid among a class of adults at Guide Dogs for the Blind?

MH: Actually, while I was 14, when I got my first guide, there was also a 16-year-old boy who was also getting his first guide

dog in the same class. We did ok and were generally accepted. I ended up being the Valedictorian for the class at our graduation.

AJT: In high school and college, how did you find readers and receive material in accessible formats?

MH: The same resource teacher, Mrs. Hershberger, followed me to high school and helped get texts in Braille. It all did work out ok.

AJT: In *Live Like a Guide Dog*, you have a scene where you and Squire encountered a pack of dogs on the college campus. Thankfully, you both survived. Has another dog attacked any of your guide dogs?

MH: No. With the incident you mention, Squire also was not specifically attacked as he took matters into his own hands, uh paws, and faced down the pack before they could attack. I had never seen him become so aggressive before that event and he never was so again. Aggressive was what he had to be and he acted quite appropriately as far as I am concerned. I have not experienced other attacks since.

AJT: Well, maybe other dogs heard somehow through the pooch grapevine that they shouldn't mess with Squire if they

knew what was good for them. Other guide dog users I've known haven't been so lucky.

Anyway, your first book, *Thunder Dog*, is about how one of your guide dogs calmly led you out of the World Trade Center on 9/11. What prompted you to write about this?

MH: In December, 2002, my wife, Karen, Roselle, and I attended the AKC Canine Eukanuba championship dog show, where Roselle was to receive an award. While there, I met the publisher of *The American Kennel Club Gazette*, George Berger. He convinced me that I had a story worth telling, and he encouraged me to begin writing a book. I began writing down things. Finally, in 2010, I received a phone call one Sunday from Susy Flory, who was writing a book entitled *Dog Tails*. She wanted to include Roselle's story. After I told her my entire story, there was a pause, and then she said, "You should write a book, and I want to help you write it." We worked with her agent, Chip MacGregor, who also became my agent. He got the book contract with Thomas Nelson Publishing and *Thunder Dog* was published in August of 2011.

AJT: How did you meet Keri Wyatt Kent and come to write *Live Like a Guide Dog* with her?

MH: Susy Flory introduced us early in 2020. We spent time strategizing and also writing and rewriting chapters until *Live Like a Guide Dog* was completed. Keri had an agent, Steve Laube, who got us the contract with Tyndale House and in August of 2024, *Live Like a Guide Dog* was released.

AJT: Pat Grimes, who narrated the audio version of *Live Like a Guide Dog*, did an excellent job. How did you get this book recorded?

MH: Tyndale arranged that, but I was the one to approve the reader.

AJT: I like how, in *Live Like a Guide Dog*, you use your life's story to illustrate important lessons about courage and other topics. Why did you write the book this way as opposed to writing a self-help guide?

MH: Keri and I felt that writing the book as we did would have the most positive impact with readers. Also, the original intent of the book was to help people learn to control fear during the pandemic rather than letting fear control and incapacitate them.

AJT: Finally, where can we learn more about you and find your books and get in touch with you?

MH: My website is: www.michaelhingson.com. I also can be contacted at: speaker@michaelhingson.com. Most of what I do today is to travel and speak, not only telling my story, but also passing along life lessons from my eight guide dogs, my late wife's dog Fantasia, and from things I learned about trust and teamwork, leadership, resilience, emergency preparedness, and inclusion. If anyone wants to reach out to me to explore me coming to their event to speak, I am happy to talk with them.

Michael Hingson's story is about much more than surviving one of the most tragic events in American history. Through his experiences with blindness, education, guide dogs, and his work promoting accessibility and inclusion, he reminds us of the importance of trust, teamwork, resilience, and facing our fears without letting them control us. His guide dogs have taught him lessons that reach far beyond guiding a person safely, and he continues to share those lessons through his books, speaking engagements, and podcast *Unstoppable Mindset*. Michael's message is an encouraging one. When we focus on what is possible rather than what we fear or assume we cannot do, we open ourselves to new opportunities and a fuller understanding of one another. His story is a powerful reminder that with the right support, a willingness to learn, and

a little courage, we can all move forward with greater confidence.
**

Michael Hingson's Visit to Casper by Tom Smyth

During the weekend of October 23-25, WyCB hosted three presentations at Casper College by bestselling author and 9/11 survivor Micheal Hingson. The first on Friday, was for Wyoming students of all ages with blindness or low vision and their parents and teachers. There were roughly forty people in attendance. On Saturday, members of WyCB and their friends and family, about thirty people in person and fifteen people online, got to hear and meet Michael. Sunday's presentation at Wheeler Concert Hall was open to the public with a little over a hundred attendees. At all of these events Michael was very engaging, energetic, and more than happy to meet and interact with everyone of any age.

Many of you who read Sightings were able to hear at least one of Michael's inspirational presentations so my going into detail about what he talked about would be redundant. But I think his key points, or what I took away as his key points, are worth highlighting. Most important is his empathetic declaration that people with blindness or low vision are not less than sighted people, they only receive information about the world around

them differently. Lack of vision does not equal lack of capability, but it often takes a lot of persistent effort to convince sighted people of this fact. He used many examples from his life to demonstrate this, from riding his bike to school, to closing sales contracts worth millions of dollars.

Like many people with blindness and low vision, Michael has experienced many instances of discrimination throughout his life. Many of these had to do with employment opportunities. What struck me especially was that when Michael was in grade school his school superintendent insisted that the school district's policy of no animals on school buses applied to prohibiting Michael's guide dog. Despite the vehement disagreement of Michael's father, who showed the school board that the law clearly allowed guide dogs everywhere, the school board voted to uphold their all-animals prohibition on school buses. It required action from the governor of California to compel the school district to comply with the law.

Michael's fight for his rights to use his guide dog brings to light a very important point. Even though the law may be on your side, it is still possible for people with blindness or low vision to be discriminated against. Such discrimination should not just be accepted. Instead, sufficient advocacy should be employed until such discrimination is stopped.

Of particular interest to me was Michael's extreme dislike for the term "visually impaired." Michael is adamant that the term is demeaning due to the use of the word "impairment" and that this brings with it the belief that people with diminished vision are impaired and therefore less capable. Vision has nothing to do with a person's capabilities or their worth as a human being.

For me, as a person with modest "visual impairment" I never perceived this as an insult, because to me it was my vision that was impaired not me as a person. Though my visual impairment does impede my ability to do certain things. While the term visual impairment brings no derogatory meaning to me personally, I can see how this term can appear derogatory to others, especially when it is used as a wide-scale, standard descriptor.

**This is a topic that is worthy of some discussion. As I edit Sightings I believe it would be better to use the term "Low Vision" instead of "Visually Impaired." Do you folks agree or is this an instance of overly sensitive political correctness? ** **

You Don't Even Look That Blind by Dave Steele shared by Sherry Leinen

Dave Steele lives in Manchester, United Kingdom. He is an award-winning poet, author, speaker, singer and advocate for the blind. #TheBlindPoet

You don't even look that blind, so it can't be that bad. You seem to get around just fine what's the reason to be sad? I saw you walking yesterday, no cane was in your grip, you didn't even hold a hand or ask for help or trip.

You're using tech, you text with speed your phone lights up your face, if you were really struggling, would you post at such a pace?

You smiled, you laughed, you found your way I watched you take the lead, you don't seem like you're blind at all, there's nothing that you need.

I saw you walk your kids to school you crossed without a pause, you didn't use your stick that day so blindness? What's the cause?

You dress with such confidence, your shoes were clean and new, Blind people don't dress up like that, not ones I ever knew.

You use that cane some days, not all, it looks a bit for show, you pull it out when crowds are big, then tuck it when they go.

You're not like proper blind folks, mate you've clearly got some sight. Don't say you're one of them unless you live in total night.

But blindness isn't all or none, it changes as I do. It shifts with light and time and place, with every point of view.

Some days I walk familiar paths where memories still guide, but other days the world feels sharp, and I need help to hide.

This cane's not there for sympathy, it's strength within my grasp, a lifeline through uncertainty, a tether when I gasp.

It tells the world I'm moving blind, it helps me stand up tall, so I don't stumble in the dark or disappear at all.

At home I know each doorway the floorboards, steps, and chairs. But take me somewhere loud or new, and blindness meets me there.

I'm not pretending, not part-time this loss is always mine, It doesn't leave when I look calm, or speak, or dress just fine.

So, stop the need to question me each time I meet your gaze, I'm not here for performance, or to soften what decays.

I didn't lose my laughter when my world began to fade, but every smile I share was earned through every choice I made.

The truth is, blindness wears a face that you might never guess, it lives in strength, and pain, and grace, and sometimes in the mess.

So, if you see me walking proud, don't think it's all pretend. This fight is real. This is my life. blindness is shades my friend.
**

2026 WyCB Annual Convention by Tom Smyth

On Saturday, September 26th we again held our annual Convention at Pineview Elementary School in Casper thanks to the generosity of Vision Outreach Services for allowing the use of their facility. We had roughly a dozen people attending in person and almost that many attended via Zoom. Again, this year the convention was free to all members thanks to the continued, generous donations of Dan Grace, who was able to join us for the morning presentations.

We heard a number of interesting presentations and had discussions about advocacy, accomplishing tasks as a person with B/LV, and technology, particularly about AI and Meta speaking glasses. Laurel Henry with Vision Outreach Services went above and beyond by giving us not one, but two excellent presentations.

What struck me during the presentations was a surging sense of optimism. Technology is making more things possible and easier for people with B/LV. Keeping up with technological advances is quite challenging. This is why our Convention is so important, because it gives us a chance to interact with others with low vision and to learn and to share the best methods for achieving our goals and for accomplishing our tasks.

Following the presentations, the WyCB membership in attendance heard the annual reports from the Board and elected Board members. Welcome Shelby Kappler as a new director and a huge thank you to Bonnie Harrison for becoming our Secretary!

In addition to the informative presentations and the great opportunities to interact with other WyCB members, four attendees received door prizes. Two won beautiful lapidary jewelry from our Vice-President Gary Olson and two won gift

cards donated by Bonnie Harrison. Thank you, Gary and Bonnie for your generosity to make our annual event even better. We look forward to seeing you all again next year.

I want to conclude this last Sightings of the year with the positive note that our WyCB membership is now up to 37 members. As we continue to grow, and we interact with more and more people, we encourage all of our members to be engaged with us as we move forward to improve fellowship and advocacy for people in Wyoming with blindness or low vision.