***Slate & Style***

**A publication of the Writers’ Division of the National Federation of the Blind Summer 2017**

**Division President:**

Eve Sanchez

**First Vice-President:**

Chelsea Cook

**Second Vice-President:**

Myrna Dupre’ Badgerow

**Secretary:**

Katie Colton

**Treasurer:**

Shawn Jacobson

**Board Members:**

Robert Gardner

Shelley Alongi

**Slate and Style Staff:** a team of dedicated members working together.

**Table of Contents**

[From the Keyboard of the President](#fromthekeyboardofthepresident)

 by Eve Sanchez, page 1

[On the Slate](#ontheslate), page 3

[**To the Child of a Blind Parent**](#tothechild) by Joanne Gabias, page 4

[**Adventures in Soccer**](#adventuresinsoccor) **b**y Leslie Hamric, page 15

[**Writing About Difficult Subjects**](#aboutdifficultsubjects) by Barbara Irvin, page 17

[**Advocacy is More Than Speaking Up**](#advocacyismore) by Eve Sanchez, page 20

[Let’s Write the Lives We Want;](#letswritethewordswewant) page 22

**From the Keyboard of the President** by Eve Sanchez

 Well another year is coming to an end. Okay, it is not actually a new year that is approaching, but National Convention is upon us and this brings many changes within the Federation. Generally all of these things are addressed at the Annual Business Meetings of each division held at convention. For the Writers’ Division, we are doing something a little different this year.

 Some of you may recall my polling of the membership regarding attendance at National Convention. Well, due to a vast variety of reasons, personal and otherwise, we are not having representation at convention for this one year. We thought to have our Annual Business Meeting via telephone, but were told that this is not possible. Red tape has snuck its way into our plans. It truly is too bad as we have so many active members who do not ever attend convention due to health or financial issues, so we thought, for this one year, we can include them in the business and decision making. Yes, we have in the past streamed our meetings, but it is not the same thing. There is less clarity for communication in those instances.

 Well, as said, we cannot hold an official meeting outside of convention, but like all Federationists, we adapt and accommodate. We hold monthly meetings called Gatherings and will continue to do so. The June Gathering, which is slated for the last Sunday of June, right before the gathering in Orlando, will be a pseudo meeting.

 It had already been set aside to discuss the future of the division, so plans will continue. We are hoping that all members, potential members and exploring writers will take part in the call and voice what you want.

 Since we are not holding an official meeting at convention, we cannot either hold elections. You may notice that we have two slots open on our board of directors. Those positions will be filled via appointment sometime following the gathering. Mostly during our time together we want to discuss the future of the Division as a whole and hear what you are pleased with, what you are not so pleased with, what changes you would like and where you would like the division to go. Of course we also will be discussing how you can participate in making these things happen.

We will be announcing the winners of the contest at the June Gathering as well. The Annual Writing Contest has always been a huge part of the division and continues to be, so giving kudos to our talented writers is very important. The next issue of Slate and Style will again start highlighting those winners. Remember though that you do not need to be a contest winner to submit something for inclusion in Slate and Style. We are always looking to highlight your talents and to hear your voices.

The Gathering will be on this Sunday, the 25th of June. If you are in the Pacific Time zone you will want to call in at 4:00pm. For our Mountain friends, dial in at 5:00 and 6:00 for the Central Time Zone. Last but not least is the Eastern Time Zone which will be calling in at 7:00pm.

Since this call is open to everyone rather than just paid members, there may be many of you who do not have the number, so take note. It is (712)432-0460 and has an access code which you will be prompted to enter once the call connects. That access code is 568839 pound.

I cannot wait to hear all of your voices. I am anticipating many familiar voices of old friends and many new voices of new and future friends.

**On the Slate**

 In this issue there are some selections regarding blindness and overcoming obstacles. For those that are planning on attending the upcoming National Convention in Orlando, it is a warm up of all that you will take part in and learn from. For those who are unable to attend the convention, we hope that you will find some inspiration from our shared stories of experiences.

 We know what it is to be blind as a parent, a child, a student in growth or a professional. It does not matter who you are, if you are blind it is just one of your characteristics. If a family member or friend is blind, and you are not, you will likely recognize that it does not hold them back. Now together, we somehow someday will teach the rest of the world what we already know. Enjoy this issue of Slate and Style and no matter what your plans are for the coming month, be safe.

**To The Child Who Has a Blind Parent** by Joanne Gabias

When I saw this post regarding children who have a blind parent this morning, I couldn’t let it go. I needed to put in my two cents. When I first saw this title [To The Child Who Has A Blind Parent], I thought “Oh cool! Finally something about my life” but I quickly realized, this has NOTHING to do with my life at all! All I can say to a blind parent who reads this and says “those are my kids”, or if you know a blind parent who “has kids like these”, YOU NEED TO GO TO TRAINING! Your kids are not responsible for your safety! You should be looking out for their safety! I am going to go down the list and give my view on each topic.

To the child who drives to pick up their siblings because we can’t drive. -- Guess what! Everyone picks up their siblings from school. They say “with great power, comes great responsibility”. If your parents bought you a car or let you borrow theirs (YES my BLIND PARENTS own their own car!), this is not a free for all. There are some compromises that need to be made. “If you have the car tonight you have to pick up your brothers” Sounds reasonable right? Only people that don’t have to do things in order to be able to use the car are spoiled brats that need some discipline. I didn’t only pick up my brother’s from school (only when I went to the same school as them mind you) I also picked up their friends, my friends and whoever else fit!

To the child who has to ask for rides because we can’t give them one. -- This one goes off what I was just saying, I never had to ask for rides. My parents ALWAYS had rides covered whether they made arrangements with my friends’ parents before and or if they got Paul to come pick us up, or told us to take the bus and gave us money beforehand and made sure we knew what buses to take, we NEVER felt like we couldn’t go somewhere because we didn’t have a ride. Again, many of our friends asked us for rides. Paul was the best and would pick us up or drive us wherever we wanted and would pick up our friends as well. When my brothers and I got older, we all would do the same thing. We would drive from Rutland to the Westside to pick up a friend, I would drive all the way to Folkland to pick up a friend for a sleepover (1h30 away!)

To the child who says “curb!” without even realizing it when walking with us. – Ok. All I have to say is, you need to go to training! Your cane or your guide dog should tell you when there is a curb. If they don’t then you need a new guide dog or you don’t know how to use your cane properly. The responsibility to find a curb is not on your child. You need to teach them that you are the parent and you are the one in control. You need to teach them, that just because you can’t see doesn’t mean you can’t navigate your world. If they are doing it unknowingly, it’s only because it was conditioned into them. I know my brothers and I never do that. And if you know any of my past or present students, they would say the same thing! I NEVER announce those things because they are going to learn one way or another to trust in their abilities and their cane and that they don’t need a sighted person.

To the child who counts down those last few steps when we’re going down stairs. – This again, GO TO TRAINING! You do not need to count steps, your child shouldn’t be counting steps (unless maybe you are playing a game to learn how to count). I know a blind person that grabs his child and runs down the stairs and SHE LOVES IT! She always wants to do it again! I promise you, he is focusing on safety and not counting. If you know how to use your cane properly you never have to worry about how many steps there are and your kids shouldn’t either!

To the child who knows exactly why we ask for their elbow. – Again, never a thing I really knew about. I didn’t know what that meant until I was receiving my Master’s degree! When I was a kid you had to hold mom or dad’s hand not because I was guiding them but because I needed to stay close and not run away. As I got older, it was a natural thing when you are walking and talking to stay close. I never felt like I was responsible for my parents’ safety and I knew my parents were always in control. My dad hated walking with me because I walk way faster than him and he said I would pull him and I refused to walk at his pace. So when we would walk home I would just leave him in the dust and say “Meet you at home” (I know I was bad loll). Another time, neither my dad or my brother was paying attention and my dad accidently fell off the dock and into the water (it was a weird dock). My dad was super mad but he was more mad at himself for relying too much on his kid and not on himself. To this day, my dad walks alone on docks to make sure he is in control and knows what is going on. (It was a pretty funny situation to be honest!)

To the child who offers to place your Amazon order because they can do it in half the time. – Amazon isn’t really a thing in Canada. At least not when I lived there. We never placed those orders but we do help him place orders for his business. HOWEVER, we don’t do it because he can’t or because it takes less time. He makes us to it, I believe so we learn how it works and he is slowly grooming us to take over his business one day. Because to be completely honest, we kick, pull and scream when he asks us. It is like pulling teeth to get one of us to help him with that (Pulling teeth HURTS, I know from experience!)

To the child who becomes our 24 hour tech support for every device we are learning to use. – Hello my parents are Baby Boomers, and we are a bunch of Millennials, OF COURSE we help them out! Which kid doesn’t! To be honest, I even would ask my brothers for help, half because I didn’t know how to do it, half because I was too lazy to do it myself loll.

To the child who reacts like a hazmat team and wipes up the glass of water we knocked over. – This infuriates me actually. This never happened! My mom was always on her hands and knees cleaning up OUR messes. She was the one that told us to leave and put shoes on. If we helped it was just us telling her, she missed a spot. She did not want us helping because she didn’t want us to get hurt. Like all mothers should be like!

To the child who cares enough to tell us our sweater is inside out before we go out. – Guess what world! This happens to everyone! It happened to me this morning, I was rushing to get ready so I could write this post and I put my shirt on backwards, I only figured it out because I felt the tag brush against my arm. If this happened to you, you’d hope someone would let you know but eventually you’d figure it out.

To the child who has had to help find our sunglasses, purse, phone, headphones, etc. because we didn’t put them in that “designated” place. – I call BS. There is not a “designated” place for things in my parents’ house. If there was, I never knew about it. If you lost something, ask MOM. She knows where everything is. She is a ninja! But don’t ask dad. He couldn’t find something if his life depended on it. (See not blindness related!)

To the child who stands in the store aisle and smells the candles with us – So I don’t really get this one, do blind people have a fascination with smelly candles and their sighted kids just go along for the ride? If this is a thing, I am late on the uptake. If this is talking about enjoy beauty together, yeah parents and child can find pretty flowers that smell or beautiful jewelry or sculptures or whatever else they find beauty in. If this has to do with shopping, sometimes my mom and I enjoy browsing through stores but for the most part my mom and I have the same philosophy when it comes to shopping, you go in, get the stuff you need, and you get out! Dad’s philosophy: if it is expensive, it must be nice!

To the child who will read the menu to us if we ask them. – This was usually me. But I enjoy reading the menu! This is how you learn about new things and get to try new things so it was always fun to see what cool or weird things they serve. Especially now that I am a vegetarian, I get to read about things that sound delicious but I can’t eat (I’m weird, I know). I don’t know if my brothers read the menu, maybe one of them. But usually my dad talks to the server anyways and gets the lowdown from the kitchen; Always the best source of information. Especially when your kids are just learning how to read and have to sound out every word (it would take all month to read the whole menu).

To the child who will figure out any issues with our phone or computer because they can. – Again, this has nothing to do with blindness and everything to do with generation gap!
To the child who answers the hundreds of times we ask “What’s that?”. – I feel like this question is asked just as many times by the child as by a parent. But I promise you it is not only blind parents that say that! When you hear your child in the other room doing something they are not supposed to, you will ask what is that! How are kids supposed to learn what things are if they don’t ask their parents. Sometimes when I was growing up, I would ask what something was and then my parents would ask me to describe what I was asking about. Sometimes they knew and sometimes they didn’t, just like any other parent. Parents don’t know everything and that doesn’t have anything to do with blindness. I don’t think that asking what something is, is a negative. I think it is a part of life and that is how you learn and grow by asking questions.

To the child who laughs at our wacky “Blind” jokes… because we’ve always been funny. – Some jokes are funny I guess but usually I thing blind jokes are dumb and they show insecurities but on the other hand sometimes they are funny and you need to be able to laugh at yourself. Context is everything!!

To the child who eats the dinner that looks like a disaster at times. – Ok so this one I have mixed feelings about. When I was in kindergarten my parents were on a HUGE health kick and I wasn’t allowed to have chocolate, we had carob instead. If you have ever cooked with carob it is not easy to make icing or spread it on the cake. My mom made me this carob cake and I brought it to school for my birthday celebration. It literally looked like the “pile of poo” emoji, no joke. This was not my mother’s fault at all, it was the carob’s fault. For my best friend’s 16th birthday we had a surprise party at my house and my mother made her a chocolate cake with raspberry filling and chocolate icing in the shape of a giant heart! It was beautiful! One of the nicest cakes I had ever seen! But this cake was made with good old fashion chocolate! So yes, sometimes it looks like a disaster but it has nothing to do with blindness! And I promise you that if something looked gross, my mom would never hear the end of it. Everything my mom makes is DELICIOUS and some things no matter how hard I try, never taste as good as when mom makes it!

To the child who tolerates us feeling their hair or the shirt they’re going to wear – So many people play with their kid’s hair, it is nothing new to society. I love it when people play with my hair! But yeah my parents touched our hair, more so my brothers’ hair to see if they needed a cut because if it were up to them they would never cut it. My parents didn’t want us to look like slobs and they knew we wouldn’t rat ourselves out so they had to find a way to monitor us. Usually they would tell if there was something wrong with our hair or our clothes because they would smell the stench coming off my brothers’ clothes or hair. No touching necessary. During the phase where all girls’ clothes showed off your mid drift, my parents would come and ask for a hug and sneakily check to see if my shirt was covering my belly button. In my defense, I was always significantly tall for my age and I have a long torso so I always had a problem with that.

To the child who had to learn how to describe color, pattern, shape, and size of just about everything – So… I feel like this is a giant stereotype. If you are good at doing that it’s because you are good at doing that period. It has nothing to do with whether or not your parents have vision. I try my best but I am not the best. I think my parents just understand me enough to get the gist but its only because they are my parents, anyone else would have no idea what I was talking about. I know this isn’t talking about audio describing but I feel like it goes hand in hand. If you want to go to the movies with me and get me to audio describe, might as well plan a nap because I am literally the WORST. I am not a good multi-tasker when it comes to processing information and relaying it simultaneously. On the other hand, one of my brothers, could find a profession in audio describing, he is so good at it!

To the child who will find us in the crowd, because we cannot see enough to find them. – This may be true in a sense but the premise is completely false. I read this as if my parents are incapable of keeping track of me, so I have to keep track of them. My parents always had a plan whenever we went anywhere. If we wanted to wander off somewhere, we had to tell them where we were going and when we would be coming back. My parents were always in control of the situation. We were able to walk away from them because we built that trust. Once my youngest brother walked away from my mom at the Fat Cat Festival in town and it was my mother that found him not the other way around.

To the child who wishes we could get our vision back. – My parents have never had vision so it was never something that crossed my mind. I do see how it would be hard if they once saw and then they lost it. That would change the dynamic in the household until they got proper training. Whether they have vision or not, they are still the same person they were, so really it shouldn’t change all that much.

To the child who is not embarrassed about our disability. – Truth. I am not embarrassed about my parents’ blindness. They embarrass me in other ways but not blindness. And if any child says their parents have never embarrassed them, they are lying through their teeth.

To the child who is proud of us. – I am very proud of my parents for their accomplishments, their tenacity, their love and their kindness. Being proud of them however, has nothing to do with their blindness.

To the child who’s friends don’t believe their parent is blind. – I never had friends that didn’t believe my parents weren’t blind. However, I knew people who didn’t believe they could possibly be totally blind because they function so well. There is no way a totally blind person could get around and do all the things my parents do. That presumption would and still does annoy the hell out of me. This perpetuates the hierarchy of sight which means the more sight you have the better off you are. In other words, if you are totally blind you can’t do anything. This is a flat out lie and it bothers me when people think that. It is pure ignorance. I do understand if you never met a totally blind person and you never saw one living a productive, independent life, I can see that you might not know it is possible but when you have two excellent examples right in front of your face, why question it?! However, if a blind person does have some usable vision, it does not mean that the only reason they are able to live their lives is because they have this tiny amount of usable vision. Vision can be useful, don’t get me wrong but it is not the determining factor of independence!

To the child who wants at least one friend to understand their life. – I have lots of friends that grew up with my parents, my parents are just my parents not my blind parents and everyone knows it. My brothers and I always had friends over all the time; it was very rare that the only people in the house shared the same last name. All our friends wanted to be at our house, my parents would bring us to do awesome things! My mom would cook us whatever we wanted, we had a dog and a big yard and a speed boat in the summer or we would go up to the ski hill in the winter. I had one friend growing up that had one blind parent who I would see once a year and later in life I met other people who had blind parents. I promise you, I had more in common with my friends who had sighted parents than the ones who had blind parents. After we got over the “oh your parents are blind? Mine too!” there weren’t many similarities. Blind people are simply a cross section of society. You have funny blind people, and not funny blind people. You have blind lawyers, doctors, musicians and teachers. I promise you that a blind accountant and a sighted accountant have way more in common with each other and way more personality traits than a blind lawyer and a blind chef.

To the child who ignores the people who stare at us as we walk with a cane or a guide dog. – Not going to lie, I think this is something you really never get used to. People stare because they are amazed a blind person can take two steps by themselves or they think they can’t possibly be doing this on their own. When I teach my students, and I have a cane I get the looks and the questions. But once you are out and about and the more exposure sighted people get to the normalcy of blindness the less it happens. I promise you when my dad is walking through his university campus to go teach a class, people don’t think twice seeing him walking around because they are too busy going about their own business; which is exactly how it should be! If a blind person needs help, they will ask! You don’t have to watch them the whole time as if you will protect them or gain some special super power by obnoxiously staring them down as they walk by. Sometimes I wonder, is this how Beyoncé feels?!

To the child who tries to be strong when we are not. – I feel like this relates to more to parents who lose their vision as they are raising their children. I totally get that this change can be hard if you don’t have the support or knowledge to find non-visual techniques of going about your life. However, I think as the parent you need to be strong for your kids no matter what! You are their role model, you are their hero, and you are their biggest supporter. You need to find a way to get your life back on track so that you can still be that for them. Your child needs that role model because if they don’t see your strength, how are they supposed to find their own.

To the child who feels the need to protect us because we’re blind. – A child should never feel this. If they do it is because you did not teach them a good philosophy about blindness. Blindness is not a crippling disease; blindness is simply a characteristic. If you don’t believe that, you have failed yourself and your children. Parents are supposed to be our protectors. They are supposed to be the person we turn to in our time of need. A child should always feel that no matter what happens their parents are always there for them and will always help them no matter what. I am 27 years old and when I found out that I needed major surgery within less than 24 hours my father sent my mom on a plane to come take care of me for a week while I healed. That is what parents do!
To the child who felt frustrated with us and didn’t know how to express it. – Frustration with parents is a given. By now, you should know that I know how to express myself. Sometimes I express myself a little too much. It must be the French in me. I promise you there was no oppression of letting feelings and frustration out in our house. One thing my family was gifted with was the gift of words and lively expression. You do not want to be on the bad side of a Gabias because we definitely get the last word!

To the child who is doing their best to deal with a parent’s unexpected vision loss – Any major change in someone’s life not only affects the person but their family as well. There has been a lot of unexpected things happen in my family and some were very hard to deal with but if you believe that anything is possible and that there is always a way to figure something out, you can get through anything and everything life throws at you.

And…To the child who thinks we’re pretty badass for never giving up on ourselves. – I think my parents are pretty damn awesome not going to lie but it is not because of their blindness. They let me live in my francophone culture even though we were a minority. They fought for our rights as dual-citizens; Americans and Canadians. They fought for the rights of all blind people. They have fostered in me a sense of adventure, selflessness and strength. They encouraged me in every endeavor I chose to take on, no matter how crazy. For this, I truly think my parents are pretty bad-ass.

I’d like to say to the child of a blind parent, you are going to get a lot of questions about how your parents can do simple tasks and how much your life must be different because you have blind parents. But we know that our parents can do everything just like everyone else. You may help your parents with certain tasks that other kids don’t but other people help their parents out with things you don’t. You don’t have more to help with, it just might be slightly different. You will grow up at the rate that you are supposed to. Some grow up faster; some grow up slower. This has nothing to do with your parents’ blindness and everything to do with your own personality. Don’t think that because your parents are blind or become blind that you no longer are able to be the person you are supposed to be. As long as you live your truth, you will be the best you, you can be! Being able to ask for help is a strength but more importantly, learning the skills to be able to do things on your own is the greatest strength. Like they say, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Our mom teaches us how to cook and our dad teaches us how to ride a bike. When you break it down, our parents are pretty much like anyone else’s parents except they can’t see!

**Joanne Gabias** is an Orientation and Mobility Instructor in Tucson, Arizona. She grew up a little north of her present residence in Canada and has long since thawed out. She has experience in what she speaks of as a daughter of two blind parents, a professional in the blindness field and someone who has undergone full immersion at the Louisiana Center for the Blind to learn her own blindness skills. She believes it can be done, because she knows it can be done

****

**Adventures in Soccer b**y Leslie Hamric

As a blind parent we often wonder about how we will have fun with our children. For example, how do we keep track of our children when we cannot see what they are doing? How do we make sure they are kept safe? My seven-year-old son, Michael, and I have had many fun adventures outdoors, including playing soccer, bike riding, and playing on thee equipment in the park. I would like to tell our story of discovery as we found a way to play soccer.

It was a beautiful spring afternoon in 2016, and I had just received a soccer ball with rattles in it from the NFB Independence Market. I wanted to figure out a way to play soccer with Michael like he would with his sighted dad. Off we went to the Tennis court in the park. I guessed that would be a good place to start since the ball wouldn’t get hung up on anything there.

Feeling a bit apprehensive, I positioned the ball at the left side of my right foot, then hesitated. It was now or never and I knew it. One, two, three, kick! Rattle rattle went the ball.

Michael sped after the ball, then got in position. “Here it comes,” he said. The ball rattled back toward me. By following the sound, I learned I could run after it!

Oops! The ball went right past me. Michael brought it to me and I lined up again. “Over here, Mommy,” he said. I pointed my foot straight toward the sound of his voice, slid my foot back, then kicked with all my might. He got the ball this time!

Repeating the same process, I got to where I could keep my “ear” on the ball. Sighted folks learn to keep their eye on the ball and go after it at the same time. Hand-eye coordination. In my case it was hand-ear coordination.

Now, it was the seventh try. I heard the rattle of the ball coming. And this time I went for it and got it! What a triumphant moment. I could do this! All it took was a soccer ball that made sound so I could hear it.

Michael and I must have spent another hour or so kicking the ball back and forth. I couldn’t wait to tell Andy, my husband, all about our soccer adventure when he came home from work. And that evening I regaled him with the account of our fun time!

A few weeks later we decided to have a picnic in the park and play soccer afterwards. Here was a chance to try out my new system. By the end of our little game, Andy and Michael were both in the habit of telling me when the ball was about to come my way. They also let me know when one of them was ready to receive the ball. All three of us had a blast, and I was able to participate equally.

We had so much fun we don’t even know who won. Did it really matter? No, it didn’t. The most important thing was all the fun we had.

I was so excited that day I texted Michael’s soccer coach and told him all about our soccer adventures. I told him about the adapted ball with rattles that made sound. The best part was telling him how exhilarated I felt that I could participate in a game I thought was impossible. I later found out the coach told a student in his fifth grade class all about how I, a blind mom, was still able to play soccer with my family. All it took was a few modifications.

As I bring this to a close, I would like to leave you with some important, yet simple thoughts. Be willing to try new things. It’s okay to wonder whether something will work or not. For example, when I purchased the soccer ball with rattles from the Independence Market, I didn’t have a clue it might change my view of what is possible. But I tried, and look what I found out!

The NFB is only a phone call or email away. Next time you question how something can be done, never fear, go straight to the NFB and find out how to turn impossibilities into possibilities. A simple modification, like the soccer ball described here, might change your life and open up a whole new world. A soccer ball that rattles certainly allowed me to have adventures with Michael and Andy that I hope to experience again.

Leslie Hamric is a member of the Illinois Affiliate. She is a blind parent who believes she gets inspiration from the National Federation of the Blind, but does not yet realize how she provides inspiration through her actions to members and non-members alike.

**Writing About Difficult Subjects** by Barbara Irvin

I will never forget when a fellow writer and friend suggested to me I should write a book. Back in 2000, I was still in high school and just beginning to think of myself as someone who had the potential to affect readers. Despite my blossoming self-confidence and her encouraging words, a touch of skittishness remained. I contributed to the school paper, so I wasn’t exactly embarrassed about having my work published. But writing for a local publication seemed less riskier than committing my time and energy to a large project which may or may not do well. So, I decided to put my friend’s suggestion on hold and continue putting short articles and editorials together.

This plan worked until I graduated from high school. Without anyone to share my writing with, I became a closeted writer. Instead of writing to be published, I wrote for my own enjoyment. This was fun, but after a while, the need to share my creations with others resurfaced. Only this time it stayed with me for good. I think that’s when my friend’s words finally rang true for me. There was a book inside of me, and it had to be written. But before any of it got on the page, I had to learn all I could about the craft and business of writing.

How did I do that? Well, I sought out courses which allowed me to expand my knowledge and experiment with various genres. Growing up, I devoured mysteries and romances. It wasn’t surprising that many of my short stories centered around detectives who became personally involved with their clients or their other associates. Learning about literature and language helped me get a sense of what other choices I had as a writer. As I sharpened my skills, I started to believe I could write anything if I took my time and took the necessary steps to make each project look as professional as possible.

While in a freelance writing program, I began working on a novel that required me to do a lot of research. I made the mistake of trying to write while actually researching the information I needed. Instead of producing quality prose, I was constantly stopping to check facts and procedures. After months of rearranging my plot, I put the partially completed manuscript aside and concentrated on things I knew I could finish.

At one point, I studied writing exclusively for children. I found this genre much easier to tackle. I think I had less difficulty with kids as a potential audience because I wrote about things I could relate to. I began working on a middle grade novel about a visually impaired girl who also deals with a weight problem and bullying from other classmates. This book began to take shape in November of last year, and I am proud to write that it has continued to evolve into a story that I hope readers will get something out of.

The creative process that goes into every book is different. When I began developing the characters and the outline for this middle grade novel, I took copious notes. Some traits I used came from people I’ve known, while others I made up as the story moved along. But none of the characters or situations depicted in the book are real. This includes Rachel Rylander, the main character. Often when I am engrossed in a scene, I have to remind myself she is not at all like me. This keeps me from putting too much of myself in the world I am weaving together.

Throughout the entire process of writing my novel, I have gained some insight into my profession that I will carry into my future literary labors. Writing about such a private subject as blindness has helped me get out of that comfort zone I stayed in for so long. Fear stopped me from expressing myself on serious topics, and I now know I can write about such things without embarrassment. Unless I give an interview in which I discuss aspects of my life, the reader has no clue about my own struggles. That is what is so great about fiction. Authors can hide behind their characters, choosing to make what plays out in print as dramatic or as simple as they wish.

Although my book is not quite finished, I am doing everything in my power to make it as polished as it can be. I want to give it the best chance it has at getting published. So, to all of the editors, publishers, and agents out there, be on the lookout for a middle grade novel about overcoming life’s challenges. And to all of the writers, keep writing and never give up. What you are working on now could one day be the next selling sensation. Always have this thought in mind. It will keep you motivated.

**Barbara Irvin** has contributed to *Slate And Style* on numerous occasions. She is currently working on her first book, a middle grade novel, but we hope she continues to submit here.

**Advocacy is More Than Speaking Up** by Eve Sanchez

 Recently I attended a training seminar for professionals. It was two days long and full of a variety of activities to pass along a lot of information concerning procedures and techniques. A lot of it was not accessible in its raw form, but every concession was made to allow me to participate equally with everyone else. They provided materials electronically for my review, they designated a reader to assist me with signing some needed documents and for the most part they took time to explain visuals. The verbal directives were great and they never made me feel less a part of the group than any other attendee. Well, never within the first day and a half that is.

 After returning from lunch on the second day there was supposed to be a hands-on interactive activity to demonstrate flow and productivity. It was pretty simple and straight forward. We were all to have a part to play within one of four groups. The activity had time limits to achieve a particular goal. What it boiled down to was that we were to learn of the power of team work when striving for efficiency. We realized during the instructional period that this would also be fun, or at least it was hoped that we would have fun.

 When the training personnel started to assign our roles for the activity things changed. I was sitting with a deaf woman and though everyone else was to work independently, they paired us up. Now I should point out that I am not totally blind and she was not totally deaf. It should not matter if we were, but some people hearing of this assume that the match up was problematic just because of our different sensory disabilities. We in the Federation know that we can easily overcome minor roadblocks of communication though. No, that was not the problem. The issue as I saw it was that we, the only persons with disabilities there, were the only two people not to work independently. Also, our assigned task was a very minor one that really did not need the undivided attention of a single person much less two people. To top that off, the task itself was completely inaccessible to me as it was the only position within the entire activity which was totally visual. I was a little discouraged, but believed at that point that it was an oversight, that the people running the seminar did not fully realize what had just happened.

 Then there was a realization on their part that could have rectified things, could have but did not. Let us say that this next incident brought about two realizations. They realized that they were a person short for one of the positions needed. “Simple.” I thought. I volunteered to take up this task since I was paired, still thinking it was because of there being an odd number of attendees. I was basically shot down and the task was given to someone who had already had a role. So here lays the foundation for the second realization. I was not to be working independently, or perhaps I should say that neither my partner nor I were to work independently.

 This activity was completed in four rounds that subsequently grew more intensive as roles morphed into segments of increasingly more cohesive teams. I sat through the first round still holding out hope for clarity. I had to be wrong. There could not be that level of discrimination, that low of expectations, within this professional realm. The second round came and through discussion of what had just occurred in the first round, I tried again to be heard and become a part of the group. This time I was all but ignored by the trainers. Some of the other participants had taken notice though, so when the second round was completed and reorganization started to increase the flow for the third round attention was brought to the situation.

 The lead trainer came to talk to us and asked what could be done to make things more acceptable. I tried talking to her about taking a role to be a part of the activity. In this discussion, she actually said, “I put you two together to make it easy for you.” In other words, she did not think that we could do equal work alongside of the sighted and hearing participants. She took it upon herself to assume what we were and were not capable of and did not feel the need to include us in her thought process. I listened to her a moment and had to stop speaking as I did not want to say anything unprofessional in the heat of the moment. Trust me, I was getting heated.

 We were dismissed. We were disabled. We were seen as less able just because of our blindness and deafness. I was not the only one upset about this of course. In fact, I later learned that this has been an issue with this particular, required, training for years. The Office of Professional Development who put on this seminar has been contacted multiple times regarding the inaccessibility of the exercise and the options of working with blindness professionals to help with this. They refuse the offer repeatedly.

 I was very angry on this day. I was not just angry for myself, but for every disabled person that follows me and will have to go through the same training. I had another realization though. Speaking up was not effective. Advocating to the higher powers is not always effective either. There is one thing that we can all do though that is effective. It takes longer, but is truly the one sure way to gain acceptance as competent people rather than just competent blind or disabled people. We need to, each and every one of us, work on our own skills of competency and independence. We need to live our lives with those skills, showing what we could do every day of our lives and in every situation of which we take part.

 Living the lives we want, with skills to live as independently as is possible, shows the world that we cannot be stopped. We model to the world through our own actions that we are equal human beings. This takes time because we need to work as hard as we can to achieve those skills and it will take repeated observations for society as a whole to truly learn that we are capable. Modeling is part of our daily lives whether we want it or not, so let us model the best we can be. When doing so, we are not only improving our own lives with acquiring the skills we wish to model, but we are improving the perceptions of what can be done by a blind person, we are raising expectations. Without voices, we are advocating through our actions and abilities. By living our lives, we are representing our community, so we need to think about what our actions represent. Are we modeling competency and independence or are we modeling neediness and inability? We can only answer those questions for ourselves and work each day to make our best better with hope that someday they will see and experience their own realizations.

**Eve Sanchez** is a Rehabilitation Teacher for the Blind in the State Independent Living Program and lives in Scottsdale, Arizona with her family. She is presently serving as the President of the Writers’ Division.

**Let’s Write the Lives We Want**

Slate & Style is a quarterly publication of the National Federation of the Blind Writers' Division. It is dedicated to writing pursuits such as literary pieces, resources, and information about various writing styles. A majority of Slate & Style's contributors are blind, but we welcome submissions from any contributor. We also accept submissions touching on any subject matter. We encourage submissions from both experienced and beginning writers with our goal being to hone our writing craft and share our thoughts.

Slate & Style accepts short fiction, short creative nonfiction, poetry, articles discussing and providing tips for various writing styles including literary, technical, editing, public relations, and academic, literary criticism, resource information, and book reviews.

Subject matter is not limited but will be up to the editor's discretion to publish.

S & S accepts material from adults and children. To find the submission guidelines; go to writers.nfb.org/Slate&StylePage Include an attached cover letter and a short biography. This should be no more than 150 words. Keep your bio to the key items you feel are important for the readers

Multiple submissions per email are fine, but all must be listed in the required cover letter. Use Microsoft Word or RTF. No other formats are accepted. Send all submissions and questions to s-and-s@nfbnet.org.

Please read through all the guidelines carefully. Submissions that do not follow these guidelines may not be considered for Slate & Style.

Though submissions are welcome at all times, if your submission is specifically about a particular season or time of year and you would like your submission to appear in that corresponding issue, please read the dates and submission deadlines in the guidelines.

For the Autumn issue, which will come out on September 22nd, the closing date for acceptance of submissions is August 31st.

**Final Reminder:**

 Join the Writers’ Division of the National Federation of the Blind for our June Gathering on Sunday the 25th. The number to call into is (712)432-0460. When the call connects you will be prompted to enter the access code of 568839pound.

 If you are on the west coast, please call in at 4:00pm. If you are in the mountains, call at 5:00. If you are in the Central Time Zone, make that call at 6:00pm. And for the east coast, you had better pick up the phone at 7:00pm.

 We want to hear your voices.

***Find inspiration for writing and for living life where ever you are and through whatever you choose to do.***