# The Braille Forum

# Volume XLVII July 2008 No. 1

# Published by

# the American Council of the Blind

**The American Council of the Blind strives to increase the independence, security, equality of opportunity, and to improve quality of life for all blind and visually impaired people.**

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# Table of Contents

[**President’s Message: A Brief Look Over My Shoulder, by Mitch Pomerantz**](#PresidentsMessage)

[**Court Decides in Favor of Accessible Currency, by Melanie Brunson**](#AccessibleCurrency)

[**Generating Interest in ACB, compiled by Ardis Bazyn**](#GeneratingInterest)

[**A Comparative Review of Four Screen-Access Products, by Josh Kennedy**](#ComparativeReview4)

[**Accessible Pedestrian Signals Receive Presidential Zeal, by Ken Stewart**](#APSReceivePresidentialZeal)

[**The Morning Walker, by John Lee Clark**](#TheMorningWalker)

[**A Day in My Life, by Carson Wood**](#ADayinMyLife)

[**The Guilty Pleasures of Guide Dogs, by Alysia Wells**](#GuiltyPleasuresofGuideDogs)

[**Affiliate News**](#AffiliateNews)

[**It’s Never Too Late!, by Karen Woodfork**](#ItsNeverTooLate3)

[**Here and There, by Sue Lichtenfels**](#HereandThere)

[**High Tech Swap Shop**](#HighTechSwapShop)

[**I Do Not Stop Because the Sign Is Red, by John Lee Clark**](#IDoNotStop)

[**ACB Officers**](#ACBOfficers)

[**ACB Board of Directors**](#ACBBoardofDirectors)

[**ACB Board of Publications**](#BoardofPublications)

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# President’s Message:

# A Brief Look Over My Shoulder

# by Mitch Pomerantz

**While this is being written in early June, most of you won’t read this until after our 47th annual convention in Louisville, Ky. The convention will mark my first year as ACB president and as such, this seems an appropriate time to take a brief look back over the preceding 12 months and share a few thoughts with you. In doing so, I’ll save the discussion of ACB’s numerous successes for the next two columns which will be taken from my report to the membership Sunday evening of the convention. Instead, I’d like to focus on more personal observations about this past year and the overall state of the American Council of the Blind.**

**Initially, let me acknowledge and thank everyone for your kind words and active support since last July. You have demonstrated — as you have so many times before — that regardless of how competitive the various races for ACB office may have been, once elections were concluded everyone came together to work cooperatively to improve the lives of blind and visually impaired people. Without exception, I’ve experienced wholehearted support from the board of directors, affiliate presidents and rank-and-file members, whether they previously voted for me or not. Those of you who I’ve called upon for assistance in taking ACB in a new direction have responded without hesitation. I will ask many more of you to become involved in the vital work of our organization during the year to come and I know that the response will be similarly positive.**

**One of the things I have truly enjoyed as president — and previously as a board member — has been the opportunity to attend state affiliate conventions. For me, the best part of attending these gatherings has been the chance they offer to meet members who don’t normally attend national conventions. Since last July, I’ve sat with a group at the North Carolina convention playing Bingo. Although I didn’t win a single game, I had a wonderful time and met some fine folks. At the Mid-Atlantic Regional Convention, I participated in the fund-raising auction where I bid on and won a Victor Stream. Again, I met a lot of great people who, for whatever reason, can’t make it to our national conventions. At the New Mexico convention, Donna and I had lunch with an enthusiastic group that, after starting up a chapter a year earlier, was hosting the state convention. As they say, travel is broadening.**

**Another personally rewarding experience over this past year has been the hosting of office hours, the semi-regular opportunity for everyone and anyone to engage in a dialogue with me and at least one other member of the board to discuss whatever they choose to bring up. I’ve learned much from these interactions and participated in some thought-provoking discussions. I must mention here that perhaps half of the program content for this convention was suggested by callers during one office hours devoted specifically to gathering such ideas. These calls will continue, and I hope to hear from even more members in the months to come.**

**Another enlightening experience for me has been my participation on ACB’s two active lists: Leadership and ACB-L. While only a relatively small percentage of our membership is subscribed to these lists, it has provided me with another chance to find out first-hand what the members (and a few non-members) are thinking and feeling. On occasion I’ve responded to a particular thread, although I have refrained from some of the more political discussions for obvious reasons. What this give-and-take demonstrates is that the free exchange of views on a wide variety of blindness-related topics is one sign of a healthy ACB.**

**It has been tremendously gratifying to hear from so many of our members who have rediscovered their commitment to, and pride in, the American Council of the Blind. Granted, much of this renewed commitment and pride has resulted from our achievements over the last year. There is nothing so powerful in rekindling one’s belief in ACB as successfully challenging both the Social Security Administration and the Treasury Department in court; gaining access to our personal credit histories through negotiated settlements with the three major credit reporting entities; and getting the attention of a key Congressional committee in our efforts to achieve total access to consumer electronics and the Internet. I’d like to believe, however, that at least some of this renewed pride in the American Council of the Blind is grounded in our rededication to the democratic principles which the founders of this organization worked so hard to establish back in 1961. Whatever the reason for this turn-around, it’s most definitely a positive step forward. But, to paraphrase that old saying, we have miles to walk before we sleep. So, let’s keep walking.**

# Court Decides in Favor of Accessible Currency

# by Melanie Brunson

**As many readers of “The Braille Forum” may remember, ACB filed suit against the United States Treasury Department several years ago based on our contention that the Treasury Department’s failure to design and issue paper currency that can be readily identifiable without vision is a violation of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. We argued that by virtue of the fact that people who are blind have no way of determining the denomination of bank notes without resorting to assistance from either sighted individuals or expensive technology, the government has effectively denied blind people meaningful access to its paper currency. In 2006, the district court agreed with ACB, but the government appealed this decision, claiming that because blind people have developed mechanisms for coping with this problem, and can avoid using paper currency if they use credit cards, there is no denial of access under the law. On May 20, 2008, ACB learned that the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia had announced its decision. In essence, the court affirmed the decision of the district court, which had found the government in violation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.**

**Judge Judith Rogers, writing for the majority, said that the council had demonstrated both the denial of meaningful access and the availability of accommodations that are reasonable and efficacious, and that the Secretary of the Treasury had not demonstrated that implementation of such accommodation would involve an undue burden. The following are some excerpts from the opinion issued by Rogers, writing for the court’s majority.**

**“The Secretary’s argument is analogous to contending that merely because the mobility impaired may be able either to rely on the assistance of strangers or to crawl on all fours in navigating architectural obstacles, they are not denied meaningful access to public buildings. Such dependence is anathema to the stated purpose of the Rehabilitation Act, and places the visually impaired at a distinct disadvantage in two‑way transactions involving paper currency because they can neither control the actions of those with whom they deal nor independently discern whether the paper currency they receive is correct. Instead they are compelled to rely on the honesty and carefulness of sighted individuals who often are on the opposite side of a financial transaction.**

**“Further, credit cards do not provide an adequate substitute because they have not replaced cash in many daily transactions and may pose challenges similar to those posed by paper currency if the visually impaired cannot verify the charged amounts stated in the receipts. The availability of credit cards also does not overcome obstacles for the visually impaired in securing certain employment opportunities, such as various entry‑level jobs. Moreover, the courts have recognized that the mere ability of the disabled to spend substantial sums of money to overcome obstacles attendant to a government benefit or program does not eliminate a denial of meaningful access under Section 504.”**

**The court also noted that the estimates submitted by the Bureau of Printing and Engraving for the cost of providing the requested accommodations appear to be inflated. For one thing, though the secretary suggested that the accommodations identified by ACB could require modifications that would result in the need for more frequent replacement of paper currency, which would increase the cost of currency production, both the district court and the appellate court judges noted the absence of “statistically significant evidence” from the secretary on reduction in life span of bank notes.**

**Finally, the court says, “…because other currency systems accommodate the needs of the visually impaired, the secretary’s burden in demonstrating that implementing an accommodation would be unduly burdensome is particularly heavy. The secretary has not explained why U.S. paper currency is so different or the situation of the Bureau so unique that the costs associated with identified accommodations would constitute an undue burden.” Rogers noted that the secretary did not challenge the district court’s findings that the bureau’s cost estimates for the design modifications identified in ACB’s complaint would constitute a small fraction of the Bureau’s annual expenditures, and that these costs could be even further reduced were new features incorporated into redesigns planned for other purposes, such as to address counterfeiting.**

**ACB is very pleased with this decision. We recognize that there is still a ways to go before we can expect to see appropriate changes to U.S. bank notes. The government has the option of further appeals, and it is unclear at the time of this writing whether they will exercise that option. However, as ACB president Mitch Pomerantz said in a press release issued shortly after the court’s decision, “This is a tremendous victory for the ACB and for every blind and visually impaired person living in the United States today and in the future. We hope that the Treasury Department will now sit down with us to come up with a mutually satisfactory way of making our currency accessible.”**

**We will keep readers informed as this issue develops, so look for more articles on this subject in future issues. We will also include updates on the Washington Connection and keep affiliate presidents informed on future developments as they occur.**

# Generating Interest in ACB

# compiled by Ardis Bazyn

**How can we get more people to attend ACB activities as well as at state and national conventions? This was the topic on our last ACB membership focus call. First, we talked about how to get people to local meetings. Choosing a good restaurant seems to draw many, particularly if it is easy to find by bus, train, or paratransit. Having interesting speakers was also a priority. Suggested speakers’ topics were: aspects of audio description; public transportation spokespersons; blind and visually impaired people talking about activities they’ve done — sailing, tandem biking, sky diving, water skiing, bowling; and speakers on services available for those who are blind and visually impaired or low income, such as the telephone reader, library services, and city services.**

**Many participants mentioned secondary activities besides the regular meetings as necessary to getting and keeping members in a chapter. Some chapters’ additional activities included:**

* **Book club meeting once a month**
* **Audio-described movie night**
* **Guided museum trips**
* **Tandem bike rides**
* **Bowling trips with rails provided**
* **Picnics and barbecues**
* **Camping weekend for members**
* **Sailing outing with volunteers**
* **Mall shopping with volunteers**
* **Discussion groups: e-mail, phone, or Internet chat**
* **Christmas dinner/party**
* **Game night: cards, board games, etc.**
* **Live plays audio-described**
* **Golfing outings**
* **Senior center low vision discussions/low tech products and information**
* **Beach party: swimming, water skiing, tubing, and fishing**
* **Karaoke night or sing-along (guitar or keyboard)**
* **Providing winter sports: cross‑country skiing, downhill skiing, sledding, sleigh rides**
* **Having retreats**

**In order to get more attendance at events in chapters or conventions, it was suggested that chapters have fundraisers in order to give members incentives to attend. Active members who participated in fundraisers would get discounted tickets, discounted meals, free transportation, and other benefits. Scholarships could be granted to first‑timers for conventions. Interested people could write letters stating why they’d like to go. Rehabilitation centers might provide stipends if enough programs were provided for orientation students. A youth leadership conference could be incorporated into your convention, or you could provide youth activities and employment panels.**

**Other activities and assistance for conventions could entice more people to attend:**

* **Publicizing availability of assistive listening devices**
* **Chartering a bus**
* **Using a speakerphone or Skype system**
* **Writing workshop**
* **Low vision sessions: gardening, cooking, practical aids**

**Each quarter, the membership committee sponsors a membership focus call. The next one will be held on Aug. 25, 2008 at 8:30 p.m. Eastern (5:30 p.m. Pacific). The call‑in number will be 1-866‑633‑8638. Generally the meeting ID is the date, but it was too early to set up the call at press time. Stay tuned to the membership e-mail list. If your affiliate doesn’t have someone on this list, please contact Ardis Bazyn at abazyn@bazyncommunications.com.**

# A Comparative Review of Four Screen‑Access Products

# by Josh Kennedy

**When most people think of screen readers, the first thing that may come to mind is JAWS, Window‑Eyes, or Hal. While these are good screen access products, they may not be suitable for everyone. In this article, I will review four lesser‑known free or low‑cost products.**

**JAWS, Window‑Eyes and Hal, while very powerful and extremely configurable, are also very pricy, ranging in price from $800 to over $1,000. They are often purchased through government agencies for their blind clients, and they are also purchased in bulk for use in organizations, workplaces, schools, and some libraries. But what if you don’t have the money to buy a screen reader such as JAWS? What if you’re unemployed and you can’t justify the need for one of those three screen readers? You bought a computer because computers these days cost anywhere from $400 to $800 for a decent desktop or laptop computer. But, since you’re blind, you still need that thousand-dollar screen reader plus the SMAs to keep it up‑to‑date, right? Not necessarily. This is where Thunder, NVDA, System Access, and the newly released beta System Access To Go can help you.**

## Thunder

**Thunder is a free screen reader created by the screenreader.net company. It works with Windows XP Home, XP Pro, and Vista. It has a talking installer which, when launched, installs Thunder with little or no intervention by the user. Thunder works with popular applications such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, calculator, the Windows XP desktop, basic PowerPoint support, media player, and possibly more.**

**Thunder lets you control the physical mouse, simulating it with keys on the number pad. The only disadvantage to the mouse simulation is there is no button for right-clicking, but there is one for left-clicking. You can also make Thunder play musical tones to help you get oriented to the screen. Thunder can read tables in Word, the titles of windows, the status lines of some applications and more. You can also set marks, kind of like virtual windows, if you want to read certain areas of the screen frequently. Thunder is updated once every three to four months. You can write scripts for Thunder to work better with applications if you can obtain the Visual Basic development environment and learn VB‑Script. Scripts can also be written in Notepad.**

**Some people have complained that Thunder crashes often on their machines and is not very stable. I would give Thunder a 3 out of 5 rating. Thunder works reasonably well with the applications it has been scripted for, but don’t count on making major changes to Thunder because the source code is not available. Obtaining the Visual Basic integrated development environment may be difficult for some people to do.**

**There is also a Thunder Pro version which allows you to have a little more functionality such as telling the font and formatting styles in Word. You can also buy more natural‑sounding voices for Thunder for $49 each from www.screenreader.net and www.screenreader.co.uk. You may also purchase a special version of Thunder pre‑installed onto a USB thumb drive for about $300.**

## Nonvisual Desktop Access

**Nonvisual Desktop Access (NVDA) was created by Michael Curran in December of 2006. He created his own screen reader because he was tired of paying for upgrades to his traditional screen reader. NVDA is both free and open‑source. It is written in Python, a programming language recommended for beginners or for non‑programmers to start out with. NVDA is registered under the new general public license, which states that the program and its source code may be obtained and modified, but that all changes to the source code must be made known to the developers.**

**As of version 0.5, NVDA comes with a talking installer. You can choose to use the talking installer, which loads a temporary copy of NVDA, allowing you to install NVDA without any sighted assistance. You may also opt to install using an existing screen reader you have running by pressing cancel or escape and installing without speech. There is also an NVDA portable version which you can unzip to a USB flash drive or CD and take with you. NVDA will run on any Windows 2000, XP, or Vista computer. It does not yet have mouse simulation; the developers are waiting until they learn how to implement video hooks before they add that feature.**

**NVDA does, however, have a different method of object navigation. You can use the number pad and the insert modifier along with keys on the number pad to navigate windows by the order in which they appear logically in a program. For example, the desktop is the “parent” window and the topmost window in the entire operating system, while the other windows, such as those in your applications, are considered “child” windows. NVDA allows you to navigate through these windows, which may even include graphics, and activate them with a single command. You can also route the mouse to these objects, or you can route the navigator objects to the mouse location if you want. NVDA does not yet give you a way to click the mouse, so the mouse has little use. If you’d like, you can download both the Python development environment, Python help, and NVDA source code and implement these features or any other features you desire.**

**NVDA works with applications such as Outlook Express, Internet Explorer and Firefox. It presents web sites in virtual buffers. Many of the navigation keystrokes you are familiar with using JAWS will also work in NVDA. NVDA also works with Microsoft Word, Excel, the calculator, and other applications. At press time, the developer is re‑writing some of the code to make it work better in some edit fields which currently do not speak when you arrow around.**

**NVDA also comes with a free and open-source text-to-speech engine which sounds a lot like Hal’s Orpheus. This synthesizer is called eSpeak. You can obtain a SAPI5 version of it by going to http://espeak.sourceforge.net. There, you can download a version of eSpeak which is SAPI5 compatible and will work with your other screen readers. If you don’t already have eSpeak installed before installing NVDA, don’t worry. ESpeak has been made into a .dll file; this is a small application tied directly into NVDA. The .dll version of eSpeak is not SAPI5-compatible. For the latest features, it is recommended that you also install the SAPI5 version of eSpeak on your system. The two may coexist without interfering with each other.**

**In addition to the eSpeak speech synthesizer being able to speak many languages, NVDA itself has been translated into over 10 languages. You can switch between the language interfaces in the NVDA preferences by bringing up the NVDA window with insert+n. In addition, it is easy to change the NVDA modifier to whatever you like. It’s as easy as editing a text file. And if you know Python, you can change NVDA to suit your needs and even make it work with that stubborn inaccessible program your employer may want you to use. NVDA does not currently support braille displays, but that is being worked on.**

**A final note on NVDA. If you wish to donate to the project, you may do so by going to www.nvaccess.org. NVDA also has an e-mail list. Information on this can be found on the community link of the main web site, www.nvda‑project.org.**

## System Access

**System Access is a low‑cost screen access solution created by Serotek Corporation. At a cost of $129 per year, you can have System Access on up to two computers. System Access has both desktop and laptop layouts built into it by utilizing more than one modifier key. Since System Access is not free and not open-source, it cannot be modified by the user. Serotek did say, however, that they will be coming out with braille support and scripting capability later this year.**

**System Access lets you work with popular applications such as Outlook, Outlook Express, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Internet Explorer. It does not work with Firefox. System Access renders web sites and e-mail messages in virtual buffers in much the same way that JAWS, Window‑Eyes, and NVDA do. System Access also has a virtual mouse mode with full mouse click capabilities. You may label graphics and create program packs to upload to the System Access users’ community.**

**In addition, System Access lets you connect to the Freedom Box network if you have a Freedom Box account. System Access’s default synthesizer is DECTalk, but it will also work with any SAPI4- or SAPI5-compatible synthesizer you have on your computer. Both System Access and System Access To Go have a remote mode which will allow you to take control of another person's computer to provide technical support. This works best when the other person is also running System Access and is logged in. But you can remotely control computers that are not running System Access using the remote control feature built into both System Access and System Access To Go. System Access can also be put onto a USB flash drive. It works on any Windows 2000, XP, or Vista computer.**

## System Access To Go

**Imagine for a moment that you went to a friend’s house, or you went to the library, and you need to use their computer. You forgot your USB flash drive with your screen reader on it, and you want to look something up. Or what if you just can’t get to the computer’s USB ports? Well, there is a solution: System Access To Go. By going to www.satogo.com, you will be guided by DECTalk into using System Access remotely. This means that, once loaded, System Access will run from the web site and you can use the public computer or your friend’s computer. System Access To Go has all of the features of System Access. But nothing is installed to the hard drive of the computer that System Access To Go is run on. So when you shut it down, there is no trace of the program left behind. With permission from the library, you can use any computer in the library.**

**System Access To Go may have trouble running on computers with high security firewalls. You may need to ask your network administrator in some cases for permission to run System Access To Go.**

**If JAWS, Window‑Eyes, or Hal isn’t for you, you can consider one of these four alternatives.**

# Accessible Pedestrian Signals Receive Presidential Zeal

# by Ken Stewart

**It was just a coincidence that the meeting was on Valentine’s Day. But the subject of it was certainly close to the hearts of those in attendance.**

**Guide Dog Users of New York chose that evening for one of its regular meetings for the convenience of members only because of other commitments on other evenings. I had been invited to make a presentation on accessible pedestrian signals. While completing the arrangements for my appearance, I requested and was immediately granted permission to invite a representative from each of the other organizations representing the blind community in the New York City area. GDUNY president David De Porte and I were quite pleased when president Karen Gourgey arrived to represent the local American Council of the Blind chapter, and equally pleased when president Ray Wayne arrived representing the local National Federation of the Blind chapter. Added to the GDUNY president and myself, president of the local CCLVI chapter, we were up to four presidents, but that was not all. Mike Godino, president of the state ACB affiliate, was also present!**

**What followed was a very harmonious and focused consideration of a subject obviously at the top of every blindness organization's priorities. Factual information about APS devices was provided, along with a brief history of installations locally. With GDUI members participating as equal voices to “The Brass,” attendees developed a strategy for moving forward expeditiously. A compilation of the most urgent sites would be created and provided to the city’s Department of Transportation. That list, as already agreed between the DOT’s Signals Division Director and myself, would be accompanied by the criteria we were using to weight the relative importance of each of the nominees.**

**The Saint Valentine’s Day Mass Accord identified intersections with unconventional geometry, with a high portion of turning vehicles, with a low volume of pedestrians, and intersections close to popular destinations for blind pedestrians. One mid-block pedestrian crosswalk also made the short list by virtue of lacking parallel traffic sounds coaching a blind pedestrian when to cross.**

**The history of accessible pedestrian signals in New York City heard by attendees that February evening began in June of 2004, when the first one was installed in Manhattan, as described in “On the Avenue, Sixth Avenue” (“The Braille Forum,” September-October 2004). Lighthouse International took the initiative to get APS devices at the intersections nearest to their facility. Since then the city has been responding slowly to other requests. To date there are only 10 sites signalized around the four boroughs, generally selected due to proximity to facilities frequented by people who are blind and visually impaired.**

**When I met with the signals division director late last year, he expressed willingness to accelerate installations. He also expressed a desire to get our help in deciding where to go next. He gave no indication of any budgetary restraints on the program, and so, declined my offer for us to go higher up in the city administration to seek support for his division’s work. I am now optimistic that the prioritized list of additional sites will move things forward promptly. The signals division director now has strong evidence the blind community is speaking with one voice, one strong voice. And we stand ready to assist in the decisions about where to go next.**

**There also was consensus at the Valentine’s Day meeting that users prefer devices that provide minimal non-visual information during every walk cycle, provided without any need for pedestrian actuation. The verbal information is added to the always available vibrating arrow and rapid clicking whenever the button is pushed. Subsequent to the meeting, I was assured by Polara’s representative that its product could be programmed in the preferred manner. Over the past several years, I had been getting mixed messages on that point.**

**While talking with that Polara rep, I learned that the vendor retained responsibility for servicing the devices. He himself has been responding when one of the APS boxes is not working properly. He described finding a paper plate or other trash wedged in between the device and its support. He believed those were simply pranks. My guess was that they were symptomatic of someone protesting when the locator tone was inappropriately loud.**

**At press time, further input has come from the partnering organizations, creating a final version of our list of highest priority sites, and other sites ready for submission. And the director of the New York City Department of Transportation’s Signals Division has confirmed receipt of the first list, and confirmed that site inspections have already begun. Now we must attempt to confirm with our contact at another city agency, the Department of Design and Construction, that our earlier request to include APS infrastructure is indeed being included when major street renovations begin.**

**Some at the meeting may have been pleasantly surprised to find the NFB present and joining the project effectively; I was not. In the last several years, I have always been treated hospitably when I attended an NFB chapter meeting to discuss any of my transportation advocacy notions. I recall vividly getting a spontaneous round of applause when I made a tangential reference to my federal litigation about bus driver non-compliance with the federal mandate to announce major stops. In fact, I had recruited one of my two witnesses in that case from an NFB meeting. When it comes to pedestrian signals, my impression is that most NFB members in this area and most ACB members too have similarly negative opinions about the worst examples of the early generation of audible signals, and similarly favorable opinions on the best of the latest generation of accessible pedestrian signals.**

# The Morning Walker

**I walk each morning through the woods.**

**It is my job. Someone has to do it**

**to bring home morning light.**

**I greet it in the glade where dew rises**

**to let my white cane catch the light.**

**Still fresh from rising, the dawn is nervous,**

**jerking in the shadows of the trees**

**lining my path. But my cane glows,**

**holding onto the light until it grows bolder**

**in the openings between the trees growing**

**warm. As I make the last turn home,**

**it bounds ahead of me, chasing away**

**new‑fallen leaves flying up to my door.**

**By then, the light has grown strong enough**

**to flood my house, and with a flourish of my cane**

**I command it to do so. Light rushes**

**through the windows and around my legs**

**in the open doorway, all at once**

**nuzzling my wife awake while tugging**

**my sons out of bed as it laps my glass of water**

**without draining it. Yes, it is my job**

**to make each morning do its job.**

**I walk each morning through the woods**

**because if not for me, no morning would come**

**in this way. On their own, mornings would come**

**too bright, with a hollow light that covers**

**what should be seen imperfectly, imperfectly**

**or not at all, only warmed for imagination.**

**— John Lee Clark**

# A Day in My Life

# by Carson Wood

**For most of my life, I’ve found great pleasure in the simple act of taking a walk. As my retinitis pigmentosa progresses, the need to be more intensely focused on orientation and mobility has taken away some of the enjoyment. The more congestion I encounter, the more I must take notice of every hint of potential danger. I’ve realized I harbor some deep resentment in that the need for such intense concentration is crowding out the great joy I once felt, even when the hubbub of daily commuting was daunting.**

**Although pride has been labeled as a sin by some, I want respect and demand my right to live a life of dignity and to be valued as a human being. Being haunted by recent news stories where fully sighted pedestrians have been killed and maimed by motorists in hit-and-runs in which even witnesses didn't bother to stop, I’ve been fixated on where my fellow visually impaired people now stand in the scheme of things.**

**On my daily walk home from the gym, I was crossing an ingress-egress driveway which was quite wide. I did not hear the car idling, waiting to turn, so my cane came in contact with the car, which prompted me to go around the rear and head back to the sidewalk. As I passed the passenger side of the car, someone grabbed my arm and started leading me without having said a word. I told the person, “I’ve got this situation under control.” The man said, “Go ahead, fall down!” I cursed at the man and said, “Why don’t you go fall down?!”**

**Later in the day, when crossing Main Street, a vehicle stopped as I waited to hear if it was safe to use the crosswalk. As I crossed, the vehicle driver let out a mocking, Walt Disney’s Goofy laugh as I headed for the opposite curb.**

**Attending my town’s Together Days celebration that evening, I was met by some members of the Lions Club where I’d once been a member. They asked me if I was doing anything other than lifting weights and cleaning my house. The Lions Club professes to be the guardians of the blind, but the way the question was put to me, it was intended to make me feel like a second-class citizen.**

**The loss of my functional vision has taken away many abilities I once had. It has not taken away my spirit and will to go on. I refuse to let it destroy my dignity. Life issues beyond visual challenges are plenty tough enough, such as the impending death of my best friend of 40 years and the impending death of my pet dog. I have to question if the current attitude of the general public is really as callous as it seems to be proving to be.**

# The Guilty Pleasures of Guide Dogs

# by Alysia Wells

**Here we are in our doggie group therapy. Today we’re really just going to roll over, kick back, stretch out, with no taboos. It’s a beautiful day in the doggie neighborhood, and it’s time to reveal some secrets! We are joined by a very cute goldador, Molly. She’s a dickens and kind of an instigator, helping us relax and unleash some inhibitions. Molly’s so little and cute and sneaky that no one suspects her of straying from a rule-abiding course.**

**Some people are moved to tears by our abilities, good judgment and loyalty, and some people idolize guide dogs and imbue us with superpowers. Now I’m not saying that a few of us haven’t been responsible for some miracles that saved lives, but most of us just do a good job most of the time. We’re gifted but not perfect! We’re not lovely statues or robots that conform neatly to every circumstance we’re confronted with, and we develop differently in our careers. We have faults. Needless to say, some of us backslide, forget things, misjudge, fail, act irresponsibly, have a bad moment, a bad day!**

**Despite our training and glorification, we’re still dogs with canine interests, and that’s the topic today. We sometimes consider other things besides guiding you people. Sometimes a random incident which maybe has no comparable human significance thrills us and makes our day! We have chosen to remain anonymous today for you readers because what happens is only for us to know about, so maybe you can hold tight to your ideals and think, “no, no, not my wonderful, innocent doggie!”**

**“A box of Honey Nut Cheerios fell off the closet shelf upside down, and out tumbled many tidbits of delight. My person hadn’t noticed the spill yet, and I became the vacuum cleaner, sucking the sweet morsels down my throat like there was no tomorrow!**

**“Yes, I love to eat forbidden things! Once, my buddy and I consumed a pound of butter left out on the table. And how about a paper towel soaked in bacon grease! Sometimes the TV is on so loud in the other room, I can get in the trash without being caught and extract some real goodies. Yum!” We all lick our lips in unanimous agreement, remembering shameful forays in places we shouldn’t have been exploring.**

**“I noticed a cookie under this long table where many people were convening for a church potluck. The people were blabbing away, and I started inching, inching like an inchworm, stretching my neck, sticking out my tongue, oh, just a little more, carefully straining my leash as far as it would go — ever so slowly — laughter and banter above — this is so cool — I’m getting away with it! Is she putting her hand down here to check on me? Oh, no! She’s just fingering the napkin! Now I resume my quest, concentrate, reach, got it!! Fantastic victory! This was a major accomplishment and as rewarding as any praise for my good deeds!”**

**“You all and your food cravings! I just like mischief sometimes! If I’m left alone, even when I know better, it’s anybody’s guess what I might do, maybe nothing, or maybe get all the stuffing out of a big couch pillow and watch the stuffing expand so I can spread it all around everywhere and have some fun! Yes, I have proper dog toys, but this is more challenging and gratifying!”**

**“My goodness, you’re brave! I don’t like getting in trouble and would rather do something less obvious like jump up on the sofa at night to sleep. No one will know about that because I hear footsteps and jump down!”**

**“Well, that’s just silly and boring! Your fur stays there on that sofa, and the truth will come out soon enough. I love water and can’t resist leading my person through a big puddle once in a while!”**

**“Oh, that’s mean!” Even little Molly is shocked at this point. But we proceed forward with another admission.**

**“I love the ocean, speaking of water, don’t you all?” (Heidi, the prissy German shepherd, lowers her magnificent head in mild disgust.) “Anyway, I love to swim, and I plunged into the ocean, snuffling, reveling, and unfortunately, drinking! As I shook off, my person was happy for me at first, enjoying my glee, but then later, that balmy salt water went right through me, and it wasn’t pretty! My person had to pay an extra fee for cleanup in that hotel room, where they’d been so nice to me, too. Oh well, it wasn’t my money, and I still love the ocean. I just won’t drink it!”**

**Heidi is gloating. How embarrassing! I’m glad we aren’t naming names today!**

**As dogs, we have random, disconnected thoughts and dreams — “I just want to roll in the grass all day! I NEVER need a bath! I don’t like your sister’s perfume. I smell chicken all the time! I dream about dog parks where I’m completely free and meet my doggie soul mate! If that cat comes any closer, it’s dead! I want to dig a hole and rest in cool moist dirt! Please rub my belly, and then scratch under my chin! Make me happy!” Words aren’t as important as actions. I can unwrap a Hershey bar faster than you can. I can open a gate latch which is doggie-proof!**

**Anyway, sit up straight, stand at attention, confession time is over! Woof! Woof! Reporting for duty!**

# Affiliate News

## Out of Sight Cookbook Available

**If you missed the chance to buy a copy of the “Out Of Sight Cookbook” last year, the Central Maryland Council of the Blind is offering it again! We still have braille copies for only $20 each. Large print and regular print copies have been reduced to $10. We now also offer the cookbook on CD for $10. For more information, or to place an order, call Ruth Hairsine at (410) 663-3499. Make checks payable to the Central Maryland Council of the Blind and mail it, along with your name, address, and the format you’d like (braille, large print, regular print, or CD) to 2518 Egdewood Ave., Baltimore, MD 21234.**

# It’s Never Too Late!

# by Karen Woodfork

**(Editor’s Note: Karen Woodfork is the high school coordinator at the Hadley School for the Blind.)**

## Who is a Hadley High School Graduate?

**Someone who is determined to succeed! Someone who has chosen to persevere despite all odds! Someone who is resolute in improving his or her quality of life!**

**The majority of Hadley’s high school students are adults between 30 and 90 years of age who are interested in obtaining a diploma to achieve a personal goal. Most do not desire to pursue a college degree, although some have successfully aspired to the challenge.**

**During their high school years, these students were unable to earn a diploma because of low vision, inaccessible course materials, multiple disabilities, etc. And now, years later, they realize the importance of achieving a high school education.**

**When potential high school students inquire about our program, they begin the conversation by discussing their visual impairment and confide how long it has been (20, 30, 40 years) since they were part of a school setting.**

**As I describe Hadley’s program and accessible course formats, explaining that they will be able to study at their own pace in the privacy of their own homes, I hear a sigh of relief. Upon learning that they will be assigned to a specific course instructor who will grade and return each assignment with constructive comments, I sense a determination to succeed. They are thrilled that Hadley is going through the entire process with them one step at a time. They are gratified to discover they will not have to complete an entire course on their own and are seemingly fortified in their resolve that they can, indeed, earn a passing grade. Improving their quality of life and obtaining that once-elusive diploma becomes their primary focus!**

**Hadley’s high school program is available to individuals 14 years of age and older who reside within the United States. They need to be able to read and write at the middle school level in order to complete the course work successfully. Core courses in the areas of English, math, social studies and science are required. Braille literacy courses are available also. Courses are available in braille, large print and audio. Online courses are being developed as well.**

**Among our 100‑plus courses, we offer elective courses in areas of independent living, business writing, technology, foods and recreation. A complete course catalog is available online at www.hadley.edu. To enroll, or for more information, contact Karen Woodfork at 1-800-526‑9909.**

# Here and There

# by Sue Lichtenfels

**The announcement of products and services in this column is not an endorsement by the American Council of the Blind, its staff, or elected officials. Products and services are listed free of charge for the benefit of our readers. “The Braille Forum” cannot be held responsible for the reliability of products and services mentioned.**

**To submit items for this column, send a message to info@acb.org, or call ACB at 1-800-424-8666 and leave a message in mailbox 26. Please remember that postal regulations prohibit us from including advertisements, and that we need information two months ahead of actual publication dates.**

## Boston Marathon Finishers

**The following blind and visually impaired athletes finished the Boston Marathon: Kurt Fiene, Adrian Broca, James Salley, Ivonne Mosquera, Jeffery Benelli, Steven Wood, Erich Manser, Richard Miles, Jennifer Herring, Richard Hunter, Kenneth Clark, Ivan Castro, Alexander Mueller, John Kusku, Charles Plaskon, and Vic Vereshack.**

## Developmental Cycling Camp

**The U.S. Association of Blind Athletes (USABA) is co‑sponsoring the U.S. Developmental Cycling Camp for Riders with Disabilities at the U.S. Olympic Training Center, Sept. 23‑28 in Colorado Springs, Colo. Blind and visually impaired cyclists over age 16 and their sighted partners, who ride tandem bikes, are encouraged to attend. A special invitation is being extended to military servicemen and women who have encountered disabilities from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom who want to learn to race. Riders attending camp will be on their bikes up to two times per day participating in skill drills, practicing safe riding techniques and competing in race simulations. There will also be evening lectures. The hope is that the camp will open new opportunities for sports and recreation to people with physical disabilities. Food, housing and ground transportation to and from the airport will be provided. Athletes will be responsible for their travel arrangements and a nominal camp fee. Riders are asked to bring their own bikes and gear to the camp. Tandem riders are encouraged to bring their own pilots (riding partners), but if needed, USABA will help find partners. For more information, or to request an application, contact Pam Fernandes at pamala@quik.com or call (781) 449‑9563, or visit www.usaba.org.**

## Filing for Stimulus Payment

**People with disabilities are among those who have until Oct. 15, 2008 to file a 2007 form in order to receive the federal tax rebate. Allsup, which represents people nationwide for SSDI benefits, provides additional information on filing for the rebate and tax‑related questions for people with disabilities at www.allsup.com. People with no tax filing requirement, but with at least $3,000 in qualifying income, should file a Form 1040A. Qualifying income includes earned income, non-taxable combat pay and certain Social Security, Veterans Affairs and railroad retirement payments. For more information, visit www.irs.gov.**

## Q&A Guides from EEOC

**The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission recently issued two question-and-answer guides providing technical assistance for employers and veterans on workplace issues affecting veterans with service-connected disabilities. The new guide for employers explains how protections for veterans with service-connected disabilities differ under the ADA and the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Act. The second guide, aimed at veterans with service-connected disabilities, answers questions they may have about protections they are entitled to when they seek to return to their former jobs or look for their first, or new, civilian jobs. Both documents are available at www.eeoc.gov.**

## Digital TV Conversion

**At midnight on Feb. 17, 2009, all full‑power television stations in the United States will stop broadcasting in analog and switch to digital broadcasting. Congress created the TV Converter Box Coupon Program for households wishing to keep using their analog TV sets after this date. The program allows U.S. households to obtain up to two coupons, each worth $40, that can be applied toward the cost of eligible converter boxes. A TV connected to cable, satellite or other pay TV service does not require a converter box. To learn how to get DTV converter boxes and coupons, visit www.dtv2009.gov or call 1‑888‑388‑2009 or 1‑877‑530‑2634 (TTY).**

## Video Description and Converter Boxes

**WGBH’s Media Access Group has tested two of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration/NTIA‑certified coupon eligible converter boxes and has determined that you can receive and hear video description from a broadcast digital TV signal that includes it. The two boxes tested were the Insignia from Best Buy and the Digital Stream from Radio Shack. Both boxes have CC and SAP (or audio) buttons on the remote controls that allow you to access the various caption signals and alternate audio channels without having to go through inaccessible set‑up menus.**

## Audio Comic Book

**RFB&D has released its first audio comic book, Stan Lee’s “Who Wants to Be a Superhero?”, published by Dark Horse Comics. Lee, the world‑famous co‑creator of Spider‑Man™, Iron Man™, X‑Men™, Fantastic Four™ and The Incredible Hulk™, among others, penned the comic book, which features the superhero “Feedback.” The Feedback character, created by Matthew Atherton and his wife Sarah Blevins, was the winner of Sci‑Fi Channel’s season one hit show, “Who Wants to Be a Superhero?” Atherton, an RFB&D volunteer, together with Lee, helped record the audio book at RFB&D’s Hollywood recording studio. Atherton then enhanced the recording with sound effects and original music, written by Jon Mattox of Bright Orange Studios, located in Los Angeles. The audio comic book will be available indefinitely to RFB&D members on CD. And, by special arrangement with Dark Horse Comics, visitors to RFB&D’s web site (www.rfbd.org) can, for a limited time, listen to “Who Wants to Be a Superhero?” For more information, call RFB&D at 1-866‑RFBD‑585.**

## Win a Digital Makeover

**Serotek is seeking individuals to complete its online survey and enroll to win a complete digital lifestyle makeover. The winner gets a digital makeover worth more than $2,000, which includes: ASUS 8G 2 pound Netbook PC, a complete Serotek SAS package, a Victor Reader Stream audio book player, a Zen Stone MP3 player, and 1 copy of any Mobile Speak screen reader courtesy of Code Factory. The winner will be drawn on Sept. 7 on ACB Radio’s Marlaina program at www.acbradio.com. The winner must be at home to win. Serotek is also offering a free Zen Stone to the first 100 people to sign up for its four‑year software service package, for only $24.95 per month, in addition to System Access Mobile for two computers and a memory stick; a four‑year membership to the System Access Mobile Network, and Neo Speech. For more information, visit Serotek on the web at www.serotek.com and click the Summer Sizzle link.**

## New Braille Embossers

**ViewPlus Technologies has begun shipping its Tiger Elite & Premier Braille Embossers. Features of the new embossers include: high‑speed braille along with Tiger super‑high‑resolution graphics; automatic double‑sided embossing; production‑strength hardware made for running long hours, and compact desktop size. For pricing or additional information, visit www.viewplus.com, or call (541) 754‑4002.**

## Medication Assistance

**Take‑n‑Slide™ helps you monitor your medication’s daily doses up to 4 times a day. Just attach the self‑stick dosage strip to your prescription, vitamin or daily supplement bottle of any size and align all “indicator slides” to the left. Then, take your medication and move one indicator slide to the right. Just remember not to place dosage strip over important instructions. For more information, or to order the dosage strips, call (678) 494‑2992 or visit www.take‑n‑slide.com.**

## Spungin to Retire

**AFB has announced that Dr. Susan J. Spungin, Vice President, International Programs and Special Projects, will retire on Dec. 31, 2008, after 44 years of distinguished work on the education and rehabilitation of blind people in the national and international arenas. Dr. Spungin joined AFB in 1972 as a national specialist in education. In this capacity, she identified nationwide issues affecting blind, deaf‑blind, and severely visually impaired children and youth, and worked in partnership with schools, agencies, state departments of education, universities, the federal government, and other organizations to resolve those issues. In addition to her education work, she was instrumental in shaping AFB’s research and policy work, and its national programs in the areas of early childhood development, aging, employment, rehabilitation teaching, low vision, orientation and mobility, career education, and more.**

## Braillerman

**When your Perkins brailler starts to get sluggish or won’t backspace, Alan Ackley wants to make it right. He has reconditioned more than 5,000 braillers from individuals, schools and agencies in every state in the country. He was trained at Howe Press on the campus of Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Mass. He maintains a complete inventory of factory parts and assures prompt turnaround and reasonable charges. For more information, call Alan at (515) 288‑3931 or visit www.braillerman.com.**

## CaptionMax Receives Award

**The National Center for Technology Innovation (NCTI) announced its Technology in the Works 2008 award recipients. The competition recognizes outstanding innovative teams of researchers and vendors who will examine the impact of assistive technologies for students with special needs. One of these prestigious awards was to the joint proposal submitted by CaptionMax and the National Center for Supported eText (NCSeT) for Making Video Content Accessible to All: Exploring the Benefits of Enhanced Captioning and Expanded Audio Description for All Students. Research findings will be announced on Nov. 19, 2008, at the kickoff of NCTI’s Technology Innovators Conference being held in Washington, DC.**

## Free Publications

**The Royal National Institute for the Blind offers several publications for free. They include: Guidelines for the Design of Accessible Information and Communication Technology Systems; Ambient Intelligence: Paving the Way — How Integrated Services Can Deliver a More Inclusive Society; Access‑Ability: Making Technology More Usable by People with Disabilities; Equal Measures: Closing the Accessibility Gap; Making Life Easier: How New Telecommunication Services Could Benefit People with Disabilities; Accessibility for Visitors Who are Blind or Partially Sighted: How Technology Can Help; and Accessibility of Information and Communication Technology Systems: Involving People with Disabilities in the Standardization Process. To request a print copy of any publication, send your name and postal mailing address to Dr. John Gill via e-mail, John.Gill@rnib.org.uk.**

## Older Americans Guide

**Grey House Publishing recently released the seventh edition of its Older Americans Information Directory. It answers questions currently on the minds of all Americans, such as how to find and pay for needed support services, how to deal with health issues, how to be effective self-advocates, and much more. This edition also includes a glossary of health and medical terms and a glossary of legal terms. It costs $165, and is available in softcover. To get a sneak peek inside, visit www.greyhouse.com and look at the Older Americans Information Directory’s online database, or call 1-800-562-2139 extension 118 for more information.**

## Tours at Jewish Museum

**New art exhibits are now on display at New York’s Jewish Museum, 1109 5th Ave., New York, NY 10128. “Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976” is on display now, and runs through Sept. 21. “Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theater, 1919-1949” runs from Nov. 9, 2008 through March 22, 2009. “Dead Sea Scrolls” runs from Sept. 21, 2008 through Jan. 4, 2009. Call (212) 423-3225 to schedule a tour. If you’re making group tour reservations, please call at least one month in advance of your tour date. Tours can be tailored to meet the needs of visitors who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or partially sighted, or have developmental disabilities. Call the number mentioned above, or e-mail access@thejm.org with any questions about access programs and services.**

# High Tech Swap Shop

## For Sale:

**Music of all kinds on cassettes, CDs, and LPs – 45s, 78s. Prices negotiable. Hardback books. Contact Alvin Kentz at (810) 789-7720.**

## For Sale:

**BX 20 PACMate with 20-cell detachable braille display. Comes with Pocket Word, Pocket Excel, Pocket Internet Explorer, FS Edit, FS Calc, clock, calendar, stopwatch, calculator, good help system. Comes with all cables and manuals on CD-ROM. Asking $2,500. Contact Annamarie Huie at (870) 365-8477.**

## For Sale:

**Talking Time-stat. Allows a person to set a timer on an electric appliance such as a lamp or coffee maker. It has other functions as well. Comes with instruction tape. All functions are accessible with speech. Asking $100. E-mail sk22@dslextreme.com or call (310) 948-8605.**

## For Sale:

**QuickLook magnifier, never used. Comes with power supply. Make offer. Buyer pays shipping. Contact Paul Anderson at (918) 273-9173 after 6 p.m. Central time, or e-mail panderson@cableone.net.**

## For Sale:

**BrailleNote QT 32-cell version with Keysoft 5.1. Has all accessories, manual, and box. Comes with superdisk drive and compact flash wireless network card. Asking $850 plus shipping. Contact Eugene at (319) 830-0667 or via e-mail, tptkddp@hotmail.com.**

## For Sale:

**Braille printer. Used very little. Comes with power cord and manual. Contact Boutheina Hayton at (240) 242-3466.**

## For Sale:

**DECTalk Express with power cord, battery still holds charge. Asking $85 (includes shipping). Tap Memo, used twice. In great shape; comes with power cord and instructional CD. Asking $125 (includes shipping). Contact Jeff at (612) 869-7410 or via e-mail, mplsjeffm@gmail.com.**

## For Sale:

**Perkins brailler. Contact Lou Baker in Oklahoma, (405) 364-4374.**

## For Sale:

**PACMate Omni. Asking $1,500 (negotiable). 40-cell braille display for PACMate. Asking $200 (negotiable). Seeking Type Lite. Contact Barbara Mattson at barbieann519@charter.net.**

## For Sale:

**Freedom Scientific StreetTalk. Brand-new, but not in box. Asking $500 or best offer. Call Leanne in New Jersey at (973) 228-2510 or e-mail cliff.leanne@verizon.net.**

## For Sale:

**Merriam-Webster Speaking English Dictionary and Thesaurus, $70. Talking Bible, NIV version with headset, $50. Refurbished Type ‘n Speak, comes with electronic manual and carrying case, $300. All prices include UPS shipping fees. Contact Empish via e-mail, empish@bellsouth.net.**

## For Sale:

**Toshiba laptop computer with 200-gig hard drive, 2 gigs RAM, Windows XP, JAWS 7.10, and ZoomText 8. Brand-new; still in box. Asking $1,250 (includes shipping). Contact Jose at (323) 479-3779.**

## For Sale:

**Complete King James Bible on DVD, Alexander Scourby narrating while print word shown simultaneously. Includes other features as well. Brand-new, still in wrapper. Asking $39 (including shipping). King James Bible on audio cassette, Old and New Testaments, together or separately. Brand-new. Asking $75 for the Old Testament, $15 for the New Testament. New high-quality blank cassette tapes, 62 minutes and 92 minutes. Asking 54 cents each for the 62-minute tapes, 68 cents for the 92-minute tapes. Old-time radio programs from the ‘30s to the ‘70s. Want to buy or trade slates and styli. Contact Joe Kelly at (903) 794-4852.**

## For Sale:

**Type ‘n Speak notetaker. Has new battery, adapter, carrying case and tutorial tapes. Excellent condition. Asking $900 plus shipping and insurance. Contact Jean Sinclair via e-mail, jcts@usamedia.tv, or phone (530) 272-4141.**

## Seeking Good Home:

**Regulation single hospital bed in good condition. Contact Lisa at (757) 495-7179. Leave message if no one answers.**

## Wanted:

**Donation of portable IBM braille typewriter; two Perkins braille writers with keys and hard cases; braille encyclopedia; braille dictionary; braille Bible dictionary; hardback King James Bible and NIV Bible; recipe books in braille; Little House on the Prairie series in braille; other books by Laura Ingalls Wilder and Rose Wilder Lane in braille; slates and styli that nobody wants; raised-line drawing kit and raised-line graphics kit; braille card games and board games; braille sports cards; braille labeler; VersaBraille 2 with internal disk drive that works and comes with manuals; older laptop computer with braille display; braille compass; braille adding machine; braille alarm clock; waterproof braille man’s watch. Contact Melody Edwards on tape or in braille at 1313 Baltic Ave. #412, Atlantic City, NJ 08401.**

## Wanted:

**DVD player. Contact Alvin Kentz at (810) 789-7720.**

## Wanted:

**Bowling guide rail at reasonable price for personal and local chapter use. Call Glen at Hampshire Massage, (304) 822-7175, or e-mail hampshiremassage@frontiernet.net.**

## Wanted:

**Classic braille Scrabble board with tiles. Call Jane at (225) 272-2716, or e-mail her, pitre4@cox.net, and put “Scrabble” in the subject line.**

# I Do Not Stop Because the Sign Is Red

**Some reach their self‑portraits**

**by eyelashing at mirrors,**

**but, sightless, what I reflect**

**is at my fingertips**

**fluttering**

**outside the bus window,**

**reaching for sweet‑scented fields**

**of timothy where the reaches**

**of my hand suddenly glow**

**crimson as I touch a sign**

**at seventy miles an hour.**

**— John Lee Clark**

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