



## Welcome to the July 2020 issue of the Voice

### Sticks and Stones, and Braille Phones, and Words that Never Hurt Me

Thirty years ago this month, President George H. W. Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) into law. It's just so hard to think that it's been three decades since the enactment of what has come to be known as the Emancipation Proclamation for all people with disabilities. I didn't get to attend what was apparently an extremely hot outdoor signing ceremony at the White House on July 26. I was busy doing some sort of grunt work for the Summer internship I had prior to beginning law school in DC that Fall; I was twenty years old; AER was only six.

After graduating from GW Law in December '92, it was a really tough time for me trying to find work. I think it was during those depressing days when I truly felt "disabled" for the first time in my life. I'll never forget the fancy K Street law firm hiring attorney who, after interviewing me for nearly an hour and making very pleasant conversation, said to me, "Well, young man, you've got a very impressive profile, and I'm sure your parents must be very proud of you, but I'll be honest with you; I'm just not sure how in the world you could work for us because we don't have any braille phones." I couldn't believe what I was hearing, and I tried to make some joke about how my father could have provided copies of the long distance phone bills I used to rack up calling out-of-town love interests, but the guy didn't laugh. Mind you, this kind of open and ignorant discrimination was perpetrated by a brilliant lawyer at a prominent firm just three years after the ADA became the law of the land. How shamefully ridiculous.

No, I didn't sue the law firm or grandstand or throw a tantrum or go on the disability minstrelsy circuit playing piano and telling jokes about how I overcame

such blatant prejudice to become the successful person with exceptionalities you see before you. No, I just kept going to frustrating and hurtful interviews and kept getting told no until one day when someone said yes. And that “yes”, thanks be to God, opened up a whole world of work in the public policy and national leadership arenas; that “yes” was how I ultimately got to know you. That “yes” allowed me to attend a White House signing ceremony on October 8, 2010 where President Obama wrote his name on a bill that included a lot of my wordy writing, a bill that continues to this day to spur on a revolution in mainstream technology accessibility including the accessibility of phones and other gizmos that none of us seem to be able to live without. Sometimes I think back on that lawyer who turned me down because their office didn’t have any “braille phones” and wonder whether he would’ve reconsidered had he known he was interviewing the future author of federal legislation that would transform the telecommunications industry.

I guess my bottom line points are these. I am so grateful for having been told “no” as many times as I was. Every “no” was a slammed door to a destiny that was neither meant for me nor deserving of me. Each “no” prodded me forward, whether I wanted to or not, toward opportunities I never thought I’d have. So I suppose lesson one is that we should never allow the word “no” to hurt us. Just like speed bumps, the “no”s we have to roll over just jostle us as life’s autonomous vehicle speeds along toward our final destination.

But the other bottom line isn’t quite as inspiring, though it needs to be frankly named. More often than not, the “no” you hear will come from the very source that should know better, and very likely does -- the renown civil rights law firm who wantonly discriminates in hiring; the sighted disability advocate who would never dream of having someone blind as a colleague, friend, lover, or especially a boss. That managing partner from long ago was right; my family was very proud of me. Yet I think we all know that sometimes even the proudest parents of disabled kiddos can be among the most profligate perpetrators of discriminatory practices. Why does this happen? Why do the very ones we count on to do the right thing so often fail us? Quite simply because, like you and me, they are flawed human beings who have fears and self-centric points of fundamental reference. It seems to me that the best thing we can do is accept this as a fact of life about others, recognize the tendency in ourselves, and get on with the business of trying to rise above our limitations as we challenge each other to grow and excel.

Anyway, as you can see, I've been thinking about the ADA lately, and about AER, and everything else, and how far we've come, and how so much farther we have yet to go. Was it really only within my father's lifetime when people like me would've been involuntarily sterilized? Was it really just a couple years before my mother was born when a child, Gerhard Kratschmar, was born blind, just like me, but euthanized at the request of his parents because of his disabilities? Nobody chants Gerhard's name today, and yet the euthanasia program that the Nazis launched with his murder inaugurated the pilot testing for the industrial mass killing of the holocaust. Kind of puts things in perspective, doesn't it? We've come so far and have such a long way to go, but in so many ways, we're so spoiled. We indulge our feelings of self-pity and manufacture cases and controversies where none exist when there's plenty of actual work to be done and plenty of people with truly impaired character to feel sorry for and rise above. You and I are so blessed to have the opportunities put before us. Let's renew our resolve to make the most of them, to welcome "no" as we would a vaccine against complacency, and say "yes" to a future that has our fingerprints all over it.

**Mark Richert, *Interim Executive Director, AER***

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## President's Corner

A fellow Board member recently mentioned the difference between climate and culture, which had me pondering those concepts for AER. In my novice interpretation, I think our culture can be determined by a set of core values we stand behind. AER's strategic plan identified those as compassion, diversity, independence, and integrity. My understanding of climate is the way people FEEL about AER. Do we feel diverse? Do we act compassionate? Are we modeling the promotion of independence? Are we trusted?

I imagine we would see a variety of responses if those questions were posed to our membership and our community. If nothing else during 2020, I've learned that opinions vary widely in our nation on most topics, and I don't always understand viewpoints different from my own. However, I'm striving to give equal consideration to the perspectives of others.

So, I ask, how can AER find new ways to live into our core values and what growth needs to be made? If you have ideas for improvement, I hope you will share them with [aer@aerbvi.org](mailto:aer@aerbvi.org). We are here for you, our members. If you include recommended resources with your ideas, I'd personally love to hear about them. I'm doing some self-study of my own and reading many titles currently on the New York Times best-sellers list. If you haven't seen the list lately, you should take a look, because those will be basis for many conversations in days to come.

Writing from Texas, a state with record numbers of coronavirus cases in recent days, I plead with you all to stay safe. Practice social distancing, wash those hands, wear masks in public, and make good choices. At the risk of sounding parental, take care of yourselves and others.

**Emily Coleman, *President*, AERBVI**

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## News You Can Use

### **AER's 2020 Award Winners! Honoring our AER Heroes 2020**

"A hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles." These are the words of Christopher Reeve and they are so appropriate for so many who have risen to overwhelming obstacles in recent months. As AER members we all have more than a little hero blood in us and there are a few who seem to have this hero blood coursing through their veins. Every other year throughout our organizational history, we have celebrated a number of these heroes with special awards that exemplify their contributions to the field. These heroes deserve a ticker tape parade and a celebration that honors their achievements, motivates others and in some ways is a celebration for all of us and all of our work.

As would be expected there were many peer nominations this Spring which we thought was leading up to our beloved International AER Conference in St Louis in July. As our committee began its work, we read through so many deserving nominations. As hard as it was to choose just one recipient in each category, it was a pleasure and honor to carry out our duty. Every nomination letter was a reminder of how many amazing professionals exist. As our work continued, we learned that it

was no longer possible to meet in St. Louis, but we knew how important it would be to see this process through and honor our heroes in spite of a new and overwhelming obstacle. Like most obstacles, this one is meant to be overcome. The planning of what we hope to be a beautiful and memorable ceremony to honor the 2020 AER award recipients is in its infancy, but we are excited and ready for the challenge. Stay tuned for updates this summer.

It is my pleasure to announce the following recipients of the 2020 AER awards:

**Michael Bina**, Mary K. Bauman Award

**Brian Charlson**, Douglas C. MacFarland Award

**Fran Kelly**, Alfred Allen Award

**Rodney Kossick**, Ambrose M. Shotwell Award

**Michele McDonnel**, John H. McAulay Award

**Tiffany Wild**, C. Warren Bledsoe Award

**Pennsylvania Delaware AER Chapter** – Outstanding Chapter Award

Please [click here for a special message](#) from AER President Emily Coleman and me!

Paul Olson

Chairperson, AER Awards Committee

#### **AER's Amended Bylaws**

Thank you to all the AER members who cast their vote for the critical amendments to the AER Bylaws. The vote met the 2/3 quorum required to pass. Below please review the right-hand column, Adopted Amendment.

<b>Current Bylaw</b>	<b>Adopted Amendment</b>
<b>ARTICLE IV. OFFICERS</b> <b>Section 4. Term of Office</b>  The term of office shall be two years and shall commence upon adjournment of the Biennial Business Meeting.	<b>ARTICLE IV. OFFICERS</b> <b>Section 4. Term of Office</b>  The term of office shall be two years and shall commence upon adjournment of the Biennial Business Meeting. In the event that a biennial business meeting does not occur for any reason, the

	incoming officers' term of office shall commence on August 1.
<b>Current Bylaw</b>	<b>Adopted Amendment</b>
<p><b>ARTICLE V. BOARD OF DIRECTORS</b>  <b>Section 2. Directors</b></p> <p>The directors shall be elected as provided for in ARTICLE X of these Bylaws. Each director shall hold office for a term of two years, which shall commence upon adjournment of the appropriate Biennial Business Meeting. No director shall serve for more than two consecutive terms as a Board Member at Large, division or Canadian representative.</p>	<p><b>ARTICLE V. BOARD OF DIRECTORS</b>  <b>Section 2. Directors</b></p> <p>The directors shall be elected as provided for in ARTICLE X of these Bylaws. Each director shall hold office for a term of two years, which shall commence upon adjournment of the appropriate Biennial Business Meeting. No director shall serve for more than two consecutive terms as a Board Member at Large, division or Canadian representative. In the event that a biennial business meeting does not occur for any reason, the incoming board of directors' term of office shall commence on August 1.</p>
<b>Current Bylaw</b>	<b>Adopted Amendment</b>
<p><b>ARTICLE IX. MEETINGS</b>  <b>Section 1.( a) Biennial Business Meetings</b></p> <p>The Board shall provide an opportunity for the AER membership to meet in-person to conduct business in each even-numbered calendar year.</p>	<p><b>ARTICLE IX. MEETINGS</b>  <b>Section 1.( a) Biennial Business Meetings</b></p> <p>The Board shall provide an opportunity for the AER membership to conduct business in each even-numbered calendar year. In the event a biennial International Conference does not occur for any reason, the board has the authority to convene a meeting of the membership pursuant Section 2, Special Meetings.</p>
<b>Current Bylaw</b>	<b>Adopted Amendment</b>

**ARTICLE IX. MEETINGS**  
**Section 1.(b) Time and place**

Biennial Business Meetings shall be determined by the Board, who shall provide written notice to the membership, thereof, by mail, no later than 180 days prior to each meeting. The time and place of international conferences, meetings, and business meetings, shall be determined by the Board, who shall properly notify the membership. To the extent possible, location of Biennial Business Meetings shall rotate around the North American continent as determined by the Board.

**ARTICLE IX. MEETINGS**  
**Section 1.(b) Time and place**

Biennial Business Meetings shall be determined by the Board, who shall provide written notice via postal or electronic mail to the membership, thereof, by mail, no later than 90 days prior to each meeting. The time and place of international conferences, meetings, and business meetings shall be determined by the Board, who shall properly notify the membership. To the extent possible, location of Biennial Business Meetings shall rotate around the North American continent as determined by the Board.

**Current Bylaw**

**Adopted Amendment**

**ARTICLE IX. MEETINGS**  
**Section 4. Quorum**

A quorum at a regular business meeting shall be constituted by the presence of at least one-tenth of the entire voting membership in attendance at the international conference during which the business meeting is being held.

**ARTICLE IX. MEETINGS**  
**Section 4. Quorum**

A quorum at a regular business meeting shall be constituted by the presence of at least one-tenth of the entire voting membership in attendance at the international conference during which the business meeting is being held. A quorum of special meetings of the membership shall be constituted by the attendance of 50 members eligible to vote.

AER is proud to announce a new scholarship for grad student applicants studying for a career in the field of Orientation & Mobility or Teachers of the Visually Impaired. The three \$2,000 scholarship winners will be announced in the Fall of 2020.

*Deadline for submitting applications is **August 31, 2020**, and scholarship recipients will be notified on or around October 2020.* Refer to the application for eligibility criteria. The deadline for consideration of the 2020 Scholarship is August 31, 2020. All application materials must be submitted to the AER office no later than August 31. [Download the application by clicking here.](#)

### **Accessing the *Journal for Visual Impairment and Blindness***

Do you know that AER members have full access to JVIB issues? Take a moment, login and discover the Journal! As an added plus, each issue contains up to two articles that you can read, take a quiz, and earn valuable CE hours! Below are instructions for accessing the journal. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact [michele@aerbvi.org](mailto:michele@aerbvi.org).

[JVIB Login Steps – Word](#)

[JVIB Login Steps – PDF](#)

### **Stay current! Member Profile Updates**

If you have changes to your membership profile information, you can update the information (i.e. email, postal address, telephone numbers, etc.) online via your member account. If you need to update your membership information and need assistance, please send an email to [michele@aerbvi.org](mailto:michele@aerbvi.org) or contact her via telephone at (703) 671-5875.

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## **History and Memorial Committee Update**

### **Commemorating Colleagues We Have Lost**

July already? *REALLY?* July of an even-numbered year and *no AER conference? Unheard of!* Yet, even in the time of COVID-19, some things remain the same...and our AER Memorial List will be one of them.



As our association reaches the end of another biennial term, we, AER's History and Memorial Committee, return to ask you to help us memorialize our colleagues and friends who have left us since our last conference gathering. Although we will not be able to assemble in person and to recognize these individuals as we normally do at the AER International Conference, with your help, we will complete the formal Memorial List for the 2018–2020 biennium. At this writing, plans are being constructed for a virtual presentation.

AER's History and Memorial Committee depends on your assistance in identifying those in our "professional family" who have died during the 2018–2020 biennium. We encourage you to report names of colleagues who have died since January 2018.

Please submit information using the following link: [bit.ly/AER2018-2020Memorial](http://bit.ly/AER2018-2020Memorial).

The submission form will ask you for the following information:

Your email address;

Deceased colleague's name;

The colleague's state or province of residence;

A brief statement of her or his role in the education or rehabilitation of people who are blind or visually impaired;

A link to an obituary or tribute if available.

We would also appreciate a photo, if possible. *Please submit forms by July 20, 2020*

These names have been submitted for AER's 2018–2020 Memorial List:

Clifford Alexander, Tennessee

Loyal Eugene Apple, North Carolina

Alissa Auer, Texas

Burt Boyer, Kentucky

Jeanie Brasher, Arkansas

Matthew Caldwell, Texas

Tommy Craig, Texas

Randall Harley, Tennessee

James E. "Moe" Haralson, Indiana

Deborah Hatton Beck, Tennessee

Willis "Nick" Hazard, Maine

David Randall Johnson, Arkansas  
Gideon Jones, Florida and North Carolina  
Leslie Kay, New Zealand  
Harvey Lauer, Illinois  
Don Maccabe, Texas  
Stephen Perreault, Massachusetts  
Andrew Poteet, Tennessee  
Debra Reames, Virginia  
Liz Schomerus, Nebraska  
Dick L. Seifert, Arkansas  
Rona Shaw, New Jersey  
Sister Melmarie Stoll, Wisconsin  
Sharon "Sunny" Summers, Texas and Maryland  
George Theriault, New Hampshire  
David Vialard, Illinois and Texas

With your help, we will honor our colleagues who have left us. Thanks in advance for your assistance.

Article submitted by 2018–2020 AER History and Memorial Committee:

Julie Hapeman (WI), Co-chair  
Mary Nelle McLennan (PA), Co-Chair  
Gala Brooks (IL)  
Billy Brookshire (TX)  
Rod Kossick (MN)  
Lacey Long (ND)  
Lauralyn Randles (IL)

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## **Welcome AER New Members who Joined in June**

Join us in welcoming the newest members, who joined AER in June 2020. We are so glad to have you! [New AER Members](#)

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## AER New Member Spotlight

Welcome to new AER member, Samantha Ashmore, who joined us in February!



### **Samantha Ashmore**

I currently work as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for the blind at the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services. I first became involved with vocational rehabilitation counseling in 2013, when I became a consumer. At that time, I was a college senior and was interested in the field of mental health counseling. My vocational rehabilitation counselor assisted me with low vision aids assistive technology, personal adjustment training, orientation and mobility training, and job preparation and placement services. Because of those services and my newfound independence, I decided to pursue a career in rehabilitation counseling. The services that I received enabled me to earn my bachelor's degree in Psychology with a minor in Business Administration from Jackson State University and my master's degree in rehabilitation counseling from Mississippi State University. I also became a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC). Because of the assistance that I received from my counselor, I have been successfully employed for 3 years. Most importantly, I am working in a field that I absolutely enjoy. I am currently pursuing a Vision Specialist in Vocational Rehabilitation Certification at Mississippi State University. My goal is to provide the best quality services that I can to as many people as I can. I cannot wait to see what the future holds for me!

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**Employment Opportunities**

Check out the new positions that are available in the field. Here are some exciting jobs that are posted via the AER Job Exchange:

**Executive Director**

**Alexandria, Virginia (Virtual Office)**

Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER)

**Innovation, Development and Research Coordinator**

**Alamogordo, New Mexico**

New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired

**Occupational Therapist**

**Baltimore, MD**

The Maryland School for the Blind

For more jobs that are available, please visit: [Job Exchange](#)

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## What's Cookin' AER

### **Strawberry Eton Mess**

Ahhh....summer! Check out this recipe for Strawberry Eton Mess: a classic British dessert made of whipped cream, store-bought meringues, and strawberries; this recipe is as easy to make as it is impressive to serve. The meringues will soften as they sit, giving just the right amount of texture!

### **Ingredients**

- 1 lb. strawberries, hulled, sliced into thirds, plus whole berries for serving
- ⅓ cup sugar
- 1½ cups heavy cream
- 2.5 oz. store-bought meringues

### **Recipe Preparation**

Toss half of sliced berries with sugar in a medium heatproof bowl. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and set over a medium saucepan filled with 1" of barely simmering water. Let sit until berries are soft and juices have accumulated in bowl, 25–30 minutes. Let cool, then toss in remaining sliced berries.

Whisk cream in a medium bowl to soft peaks. Layer cream, meringues, then strawberry mixture in four 8-oz. glasses. Chill 20 minutes. Top with whole strawberries to serve.

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*The AER Voice is a monthly newsletter that serves as an information hub for members; and offers an easy and dependable way of keeping current. This electronic newsletter includes AER updates, events, special announcements, useful tidbits and so much more. If you have news, resources, information, recipes or any updates that you would like to share with the membership, please send it to AER at [news@aerbvi.org](mailto:news@aerbvi.org). Deadline for the August issue is 7/26/2020.*

