

The AER Voice



Welcome to the May 2021 issue of the Voice.

A Heartfelt "Teacher Appreciation Week" Love Letter

On the first day of school in seventh grade, through the door of my Advanced Social Studies class, entered a man who changed my life. His name was Mr. Ivey. Back in those days, I had a smidge of vision which allowed me to see walking right past my cramped desk a tall, slim, and trim, dapper black man in an all-white three-piece suit and dark tie. Even his shoes just sounded stylish as his confident and purposeful stride headed for the low dais at the front of the echo-ey tiled room where an enormous desk awaited him. He set down on it what sounded like a tower of weighty tomes and then turned to face us. In a gentle but commanding voice he said something like, "Superstars and angels, good morning! I'm Boyd Ivy, and I am so very blessed to get to be with you over the course of this next year as we explore and discuss and debate the origins, the principles, the contours, the aspirations, the failings, and the greatness of our society and system of government. Beyond being a son, a husband, and a soon-to-be father, I have no greater privilege in my life than to get to spend this time with each one of you as we discover together how we all can exercise our responsibility to make our union more perfect. While I won't promise you that we'll always agree, in fact I can almost guarantee that we won't, I can promise you; it's going to be an adventure, and since there's not a moment to lose, let's get to it!"

As each of us took our turn introducing ourselves, you could just hear in the voice of each student that we all knew somehow that this wasn't going to be just another class. Mr. Ivey kept his promise, and in the adventure that ensued, we didn't merely learn about history and civics. Mr. Ivey used to say that, "I don't want you to simply be a sponge for knowledge; your destiny, every one of you if you'll embrace it, is to be an inventor of knowledge." Really? Do you mean it? A pimply and portly pubescent blind kid should have the temerity to try one day to shape events and not just study them?

This kind, charismatic and compelling teacher, a true gentleman, and an authentic soul, held our attention because he held our hearts. I loved him so much. The academic success of his students was absolutely a priority for him, but ultimately for Mr. Ivey, it was all about lived values and integrity. After his death in 1994, the high school dedicated a gymnasium in his name; when Mr. Ivey wasn't holding court and molding minds in the classroom, he was helping to tone bodies and shape character on the basketball and tennis courts. The dedication plaque included his often-heard exhortation: "Use your education as a ladder to pursue the cause of excellence, decency, and justice."

By far, I wasn't Mr. Ivey's best student; that class of 35 or so gifted and mostly privileged kids included both the superstar and the angel who eventually became the valedictorian and salutatorian of our high school graduation. And yet, Mr. Ivey made me feel like #1, and he didn't do that just by offering inspiring words of encouragement; his actions said it all. After giving our class an assignment to prepare a research paper based on a series of readings that students were to find either in the school or public library, my TVI, whom I'll call Ms. McBride, set about the business of tracking down recordings of the materials. This being forty years ago, you can imagine how empty handed we ended up being. Naturally, my mom was ready to pitch in with the reading to complement however much of it Ms. McBride's or volunteers' schedules would allow.

As the days rolled by and precious little material had gotten into my head and onto braille paper in the form of very sparse notes, it was looking pretty grim. And then one day when I went to see Ms. McBride about the next cassette tape she might have recorded for me, she said with a warm smile in her voice, "Well I don't have anything for you, but Mr. Ivey left you something." And then she put in my hands a lunch bag filled with nine 90-minute cassettes, each one of them containing Mr. Ivey's magnificent voice reading nearly all the remaining assigned materials but also a couple of shorter items, along with his own, always insightful, and often very funny, quips and commentary on what he had just read. I do not remember what grade I ultimately got on the paper, which probably means it wasn't an A. And I can't recall who all of the great thinkers were that Mr. Ivey must have read into a cheap personal tape recorder late at night when the teaching day was done, the coaching was over, the after-dinner dishes were dried, the little one tucked in bed, and maybe even after the wife was well and truly kissed goodnight. But I promise you that I will always remember a Master Teacher who meant the world to me because he opened that world for me.

To be sure, Mr. Ivey wasn't the only one, and the amazing TVI and O&M professionals I got to learn from for eleven out of the thirteen years of my mainstream public education experience have had an incalculable impact on the course of my life and career. Believe me, if you had the same O&M instructor every week at least once a week, from kindergarten to tenth grade, then you too would hear her voice in your head every time you reach for your cane. It's kinda scary, but extremely helpful and often brings a wry smile to my face when I think about the many scrapes I got into and the many more I managed to avoid and conquer thanks to her.

But probably the one teacher I can't help but remember with a blush on my cheeks was my middle school TVI whom I've already introduced to you. Ms. McBride had just graduated from one of our beloved teacher prep programs, and for her sins but to my delight, I was her first student right out of school. She was so so young, and having no appreciable experience, she tried her little heart out and worked her fingers off but was roundly and sometimes cruelly critiqued by other teachers of mine who almost seemed to want me to hear their frustration with her lack of organization and follow-through. The truth, as always, was a mixed bag; she was terribly green, but she was

also literally pitched in the deep end with zero support of her own and a caseload that grew precipitously in a remarkably short span.

I, of course, didn't understand anything back then about caseloads and sniping judgmental colleagues who weren't fans of my first crush. And honestly in any case, how could a sixth-grade boy like me not lose his heart to this young woman who always seemed so happy to see him, who had these cool tech gizmos (cool for 1980) that just seemed tailor-made for him, who had all these ready-made tips and magic tricks and could somehow make exercises like the tedium of touch typing go so much faster with her playful teasing comments about his many ironic mistakes. For a while there, I was confusing the I and O on the typewriter; my one-page short story about a blind girl who got into all sorts of mischief at the shopping mall took on so much more comedic possibility thanks to my typing "blond" wherever "blind" was intended. For her part, once she stopped giggling beguilingly, Ms. McBride was adamant about being a brunette, and while poking me on the shoulder with one of her long fingernails, she told me in no uncertain terms, "You just remember that." Do you think it's maybe possible she knew I had a crush on her? Just maybe?

One day, I overheard my mother telling a friend on the phone about how Ms. McBride was to have gotten married the Summer right before she started teaching. But her husband-to-be broke everything off at the very last minute and walked away from their relationship altogether. Understandably devastated, she seriously considered postponing teaching but, with the encouragement of family and friends and mentors, decided to stick with it. I wished I had never heard this terrible tale, not only because I was sad for Ms. McBride but because my crush was compounded with an even more addictive formula; Wonder Woman was also now a heartbroken damsel in distress. She was always looking out for me, ready to help me with whatever I might have needed, and now it was my turn to stand watch on the ramparts and from thence to come soaring to her defense. After all, all those mean teachers, many of whom didn't seem to have much time or patience with me at all, who did they think they were mouthing off about this sweet and fun lady who was just trying her best against incredible professional odds and in the face of tremendous personal grief? Ok, sure, I really didn't understand much at all about the professional or the personal challenges, but since when has lack of real-life experience ever tempered an adolescent's righteous indignation?

Ms. McBride was gone by eighth grade, but while I was learning tons about life and about growing into a successful student, so too was she living her life and learning how to grow into being a first class TVI and program manager elsewhere in the community. Our paths crossed once in a blue moon at school when there might be a county-wide meeting of some sort, but as there was no reason to otherwise stay in touch. I lost track of her. And then, when I first worked for AER as Executive Director in the early 2000s and I really thought I had "made it," I thought it would be fun to reach out to her and say hello to see how she was doing, and yes, to show off just a little bit about the lofty perch to which I had flown. And I kid you not; when the call was transferred to her and she answered the phone, I'm certain that I sounded like a fumbling dry-mouthed fool. She, on the other hand, sounded fabulous.

As it turned out, she had really come into her own. Her voice was much the same as I remembered it but with one very important difference. She spoke with a voice not unlike some of the long-term almost legendary expert Capitol Hill staff I've gotten to know over time; it's a voice that communicates, "I'm incredibly together, I'm incredibly busy, and I'm incredibly in charge." I don't mind telling you that right before we hung up and she was gracious enough to proffer me an "I'm proud of you" throw-away line, I mumbled a weak "thanks" when what I really wanted to say was, "Thank you so much; I'm proud of you too!"

So, before I go, and while I somehow have managed to work up the confidence to say this to each and every one of you, whether you're a teacher with a capital T or otherwise, thank you so much! I'm proud of you! Truth be told, I love you, God help me. You know, there's a part of me that wonders sometimes whether my passion for systems change and my deeply felt affection for all in our field who call themselves teachers doesn't stem from an emotional crossfading of Mr. Ivey and Ms. McBride. Let's all hope that a middle school crush on my TVI isn't the real genesis for the Cogswell-Macy Act, though a perceptive psychologist might find a couple intriguing dots to connect there. To be sure, Mr. Ivey gets all the credit for my now-experience-tempered idealism. In any case, whether you're the dynamo that has it all together and has far too many plaques on your wall, the lone and lonely laborer in the vineyard whose tears too frequently mingle with the sweat from your brow, or someone somewhere in between—you know, just an ordinary rank and file amazing blindness field life changer whose impact will forever echo in eternity—you are all "superstars and angels." Each one of you is a hero in our ongoing adventure together. "And since there's not a moment to lose, let's get to it!"

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

May flowers may be the result of April showers, but all I have noticed so far is Allergy Season is here! For some of you, April snow tagged the blooms, but nature, like all of us, is resilient. Spring will eventually sort itself out and before we can sneeze twice, the school year will be ending, summer activities will be underway, and AER will continue to be your source for information and continuing education. Our Blue Sky Learning Management System (LMS) is moving full speed ahead with live and recorded events. If you have not yet registered, please do so, and take advantage of access to great information from the comfort of your favorite easy chair.

As we begin to embrace a post-pandemic world in the not-too-distant future, there are many questions to answer personally and professionally. When do I begin in-person visits? When should I move back into my office and stop working from my guest bedroom? What changes will I encounter in my workplace? Think about what

concerns you, and I promise there are hundreds of other AER members who have the same concerns. Let's share ideas. Could you do a webinar for your Chapter, with the help of AER staff? Yes! Could you write an article to share with your Division leadership? Yes! Could you address issues around return-to-work nationally through a webinar or an article? By all means, yes! Reach out to leadership at the Chapter, division or International level by contacting someone you already know directly or by sending an email to Interim Executive Director Mark Richert mark@aerbvi.org or me nfairchild@afb.org with your idea. We'll help you get to the right person and find the right platform.

We're making progress toward revising the search and hiring process as well as the job description in preparation for launching the search for a permanent AER Executive Director. Your board has divided into two groups that are working on the process and the job description aspects of the search. We meet monthly to review each groups progress and work through any issues identified by each group. In the end, your board will have worked together to execute the search and hire the right person for the job, to the best of our abilities. Looking from the inside out, I can assure you it's not an easy job nor is it an easy process.

In a little over a year, we will all be in the thick of preparing for our 2022 AER International Conference. Rest assured that Jill Brown and the Conference Committee are already working hard, along with Interim Executive Director Mark Richert and the AER Staff, to plan and execute a compelling conference in St. Louis. Even though it seems like traveling by air or on land to stay in a hotel with a whole lot of people you don't know is hard to fathom, we hope and pray that by next July it will be safe and seem normal again. I missed the Reno conference for health reasons, and I can assure you that I am ready to greet all of you with a big hug or a fist bump, you make the call.

Thanks for all you do to support AER, the staff, the board, the members you encounter. I hope you will reach out to me when you need support. Together, we can do this!

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NEWS YOU CAN USE

College readiness and career training from Perkins School for the Blind

Perkins is currently offering two virtual programs for young adults who are preparing for college and career.



Compass, a College Success @ Perkins program

[Compass](#) is a completely new take on college and career readiness planning for blind and visually impaired high school students. It's a nine-month virtual program for blind and visually impaired high school students in grades 9 through 11 – designed to help them proactively explore and develop a plan for building the critical academic and blindness skills they need to reach their post-secondary goals.

The program engages current research on adolescent development and learning to create an innovative, powerful enrichment program to challenge and support students, families and educators. Through group work and individual coaching for the student and their educational team – including family members and their TVI – [Compass works to fill the often-overlooked gaps in college and career preparation.](#)

[This Learning Triad approach](#) helps highlight skill gaps early enough to make plans to develop skills, prior to high school graduation. Through coaching, students also get authentic feedback on the many skills they need to develop as they plan their next steps. Each team leaves the program with an action plan individually tailored for that student's secondary goals and post-secondary journey.

[The application for September 2021 is now open](#), and this [application checklist](#) is designed to guide students and families through the process. For more information about the program, [visit our frequently asked questions](#). If you would like additional information, email CollegeSuccess@Perkins.org or [submit an inquiry online](#).

Career Launch @ Perkins

[Career Launch](#), an innovative one-of-a-kind training and career services program, was designed with one goal: help blind and visually impaired young adults, ages 18 to 35, land professional, career-track jobs. This program is intense. It's comprehensive. And above all, it's proven. [Participants have gone on to succeed in internships and permanent employment](#) – in some cases, receiving their first-ever paycheck.

[The virtual session](#) starts with two months of [thorough career training](#) – including customer service simulations, extensive Salesforce.com training, access technology lessons, guest speakers, mock interviews and more. That's followed by a year of ongoing instruction, as well as job acquisition and coaching support from the Perkins Career Services team, ensuring [strong start in the working world](#).

[Applications are now being accepted on a rolling basis](#). For more information, contact Associate Director of Recruitment & Admissions Deana Criess at Deana.Criess@Perkins.org or [submit an inquiry online](#).

AER eLearning Center

AER eLearning Center – Happy Teacher Appreciation Week! AER has many courses that can keep teachers of the visually impaired up to date on all new trends in the field and earn continuing education hours via ACVREP. Visit some of our most popular topics today!

- [Education Curriculum](#)
- [Instructional Services](#)
- [Itinerant Personnel](#)
- [Administration and Leadership](#)

During the month of May, the AER eLearning Center is being sponsored by Perkins School for the Blind. Visit their website at www.perkins.org.

Updates from OIB-TAC!

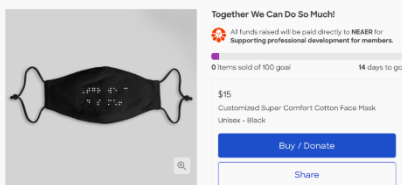
Independent & Daily Living Skills Training from Hadley – Best Practices in Online Education for the Visually Impaired

Highlighted course – Identifying Mental Health Impairments in Adults

<https://nrtc.catalog.instructure.com/courses/mental-health-impairments>

Most people struggle to cope with life's stressors from time-to-time. However, when people are dealing with numerous stressors, or attempting to cope with something as life-altering as a visual impairment, the psychological impact is significant. The World Health Organization defines a mentally healthy person as one who is able to realize his or her abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to the community. People who are struggling with the mental health disorders discussed in this course are not able to function effectively in these ways. There are many common age-related physical and mental health problems that an individual can develop. When a person is attempting to cope with the challenges of aging and then is faced with a physical disability, such as visual impairment, the likelihood of mental health conditions increases. 2 credits

CHAPTER UPDATES



About this campaign

This fundraiser is more about awareness than money. We want the world to see that those who work with individuals with vision impairments or blindness ARE professionals. We want that people to know that while a relatively small group, we are mighty and we are family!

We hope that the presence of braille in the community will encourage others to join the fight. Together we can do so much!

Northeast AER Chapter

We have a great opportunity for you to support the Northeast AER Chapter and to help raise awareness. Click on the image below to learn more on how you can own this cool face mask! Click here to get yours

<https://www.customink.com/fundraising/northeast-aer>

Northeast AER Annual Conference: Navigating Our Way Together

November 4, 2021- November 5, 2021 Virtual Online Conference

The conference committee is currently working on putting together a 2-day unique virtual conference full of engaging sessions with a virtual evening opportunity.

If you are interested in submitting a session proposal, we are accepting proposals through **May 30, 2021**.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeqeN7ja_CKEzNnb3zlCwm6nMS1Ru4DTQ-3saM6nEGdTukj1A/viewform

Northern Rockies AER Chapter

Save The Date! The Northern Rockies AER Chapter Conference will be held virtually on October 26-28, 2021. Stay tuned for more information.

WELCOME TO THE NEWEST AER MEMBERS!

Join us in welcoming the newest members, who joined AER in April 2021. We are glad to have you! [Newest AER Members!](#)

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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

[Director of Accessible Instructional Materials and Outreach Services](#)

Tennessee School for the Blind, Nashville, Tennessee

[TVI – Early Learning/Early Intervention](#)

The Maryland School for the Blind, Baltimore, Maryland

[Classroom Teacher](#)

New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Alamogordo, New Mexico

[Rehabilitation of the Blind Specialist](#)

OK DRS Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Tulsa, Oklahoma

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

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. **Deadline for the June issue is 5/25/2021.**



[Visit our website](#)

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