

BLINDNESS

GARY MONROE

SOUTHEAST MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY

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PHOTOGRAPHER'S STATEMENT

Although never haunted by it, my feeling about being blind was one of dread. It was unfathomable to me. I couldn't imagine the world in which blind people lived. I couldn't imagine living blind, or even wanting to live if blinded. Seeking to soothe my discomfort and hoping to allay my curiosity, I decided to spend time amongst blind people. In 2006, Ronee Silverman, President/CEO of the Center for the Visually Impaired in Daytona Beach, Florida, offered to facilitate my photographing and interviewing some of the people whom the organization helps. Before long we were discussing a book about blindness.

I listened and wrote about how these people live, reckon with being blind, and what they value. I stopped short of editorializing, knowing that I could not really empathize since I had no first-hand experience with their situations. No doubt my brief essays are subjective, but hopefully not speculative or sentimental. Now that the book is a reality, I cannot say that I know any more about blindness. In fact, I am more perplexed. Not one of these people expressed horror. None confirmed my fears. Simply put, these sixty-one people seemed happier, or at least more jovial, than I am, and that piece of knowledge is confounding.

People, it has been pointed out, return to their normal state of contentment after twelve months of an accident or tragedy. I wondered if they, when blind, simply lowered the bar for themselves and that solace is realized with tasks that would not bring satisfaction when sighted. Regardless, I still do not understand how these people could be as angst free and well adjusted as they seemed. Perhaps their values and perceptions have taken a turn away from our material world. Maybe there is no other choice. Maybe they have little or nothing to fear now; they appeared at ease and genuinely happy. Maybe they were the crème of the crop—each one praised CVI's facilitating their adjustments to living sight impaired or blind by the tools and techniques they learned there. Possibly it's the attention of being interviewed and photographed, or of participating in this work, knowing that they count, that they will be recognized and help others.

They're certainly resilient. Their stories matter.

– Gary Monroe

INTRODUCTION

Victor Frankl, psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor once stated, “We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.” Losing one’s vision must give rise to a similar emotion; here also, the potential loss of human freedoms can be devastating. Hearing the words “you are going blind” from an ophthalmologist is truly a traumatic experience. Despite such a life-altering diagnosis, finding the determination to overcome and achieve success in life is definitely possible.

The barriers that confront blind people vary. These include overprotective yet well-meaning family and friends, misconceptions about a blind person’s capability, lack of adequate transportation and the knowledge and skill to travel independently. However, often the greatest challenge that many face comes from within. Some shut down in the face of adversity and blame others while some broaden their perspectives by viewing challenges as opportunities for growth.

Acquiring the self-determination to overcome challenges is the key to moving ahead to a productive life. We all have the opportunity to make choices in life, to view the glass as half empty or half full. Looking forward rather than backwards, planning, experiencing and finding meaning in life enables the blind person to embrace the future with confidence and enthusiasm. With time and appropriate training, this wider view helps the blind person to build a repertoire of skills and resources that ultimately open new doors of opportunity.

Focusing on the disability of the individual rather than utilizing a holistic approach has dominated the field of blindness rehabilitation since World War II. The former approach to rehabilitation causes people to lose the positive features that make life worth living: hope, wisdom, creativity, courage, responsibility and perseverance. Research has documented how people endure under conditions of adversity but has little to say on how they flourish under such conditions. For many, failing to give in to the emotion surrounding a crisis may be hard to imagine but it can be done with new skills acquired through rehabilitation. According to the American Foundation for the Blind, more than ten million people in the United States are blind or severely visually impaired; indeed, many of us will be touched by this problem in our lifetime.

It is my hope that the content in these pages will provide you with a new perspective about blindness. The photos and stories shared by the clients of the Center for the Visually Impaired provide glimpses into the varied lives, experiences and attitudes of these dynamic individuals. The people portrayed in this book are like you; they have similar challenges, hopes and dreams except that blindness has impacted their lives. The inner strength of character that has enabled each of these people to continue despite his/her challenges is heartening. Hopefully, you will be inspired to carry on with a positive attitude in your own life and light up your corner of the world.

– Ronee Silverman
President/CEO, Center for the Visually Impaired, Inc.
Daytona Beach, Florida

FOREWORD

The Southeast Museum of Photography is pleased and honored to be able to participate in the publishing of this important book of photographs, *Blindness*, in conjunction with the Center for the Visually Impaired (CVI) in Daytona Beach.

The author, Gary Monroe, has labored long on this delicate and inspiring subject to craft both text and images which are nuanced, insightful and beautiful. The evident strength, resilience and verve possessed by the subjects of these photographs, people who are now without vision, is truly inspiring. A photographer who has turned his lens on so many uncomfortable subjects over the decades, Mr. Monroe has never shied away from difficulty. In fact, Mr. Monroe contends that it is through his photography that he is able to confront, mediate and learn about those very things in the world around him that are troublesome, intriguing or beguiling. In these rich and empathetic images, we find beautiful portraits of visually impaired individuals whose stories and presence have been so gracefully charted by his lens and words.

As a result of Mr. Monroe's unique art of encounter and interpretation, this book could stimulate anew a passion, enthusiasm and empathy for humankind that perhaps has lain dormant within the viewer/reader. Mr. Monroe's art and life are inextricably linked to sight and vision; that he could have such insight into the lives and hearts of those who are visually challenged is just another beguiling paradox in the work of this extraordinary photographer.

It has been truly rewarding to work with Gary Monroe and CVI's Ronee Silverman. Their energy and commitment have taken this project now to its final form in this lovely and enduring text. The Southeast Museum of Photography is proud to bring *Blindness* to a wider audience.

– Kevin Miller, Director
Southeast Museum of Photography

Nobody speaks to me at school. They all say “hi” to the dog, but not to me.

AMANDA FADDEN

b. August 18, 1990 Sanford, Florida

Amanda Fadden’s retinitis pigmentosa and optic nerve pallor that caused her blindness probably was inherited from her unknown father. When Amanda was fourteen months old, Bernita, her grandmother, assumed legal custody of her after Amanda’s mother, Judy, had fallen to drugs. Seeking a fresh start, Amanda and Bernita moved to Las Vegas. Less than two years later they learned that Judy was killed; her drug habits had escalated and she had resorted to prostitution. She had lived on and off the streets, in and out of jail, sometimes vanishing for days.

When Amanda was five years old, she went blind. She began learning Braille and received Braille Book of the Month volumes. Bernita began to search for the best school for her granddaughter and was directed to St. Augustine’s Florida School for the Deaf and Blind. However, Amanda did not like living in the dorms there.

Amanda then transferred to a public high school, where she was mainstreamed, lost in a sea of American youth. In addition to her formal studies, Amanda enrolled in ballet, gymnastics, violin, judo and wrestling classes. She took piano, flute, and guitar lessons. She joined the R.O.T.C. and carried the colors at football games. Bernita is quick to point out that as a youngster Amanda had all kinds of girlfriends; now she is shunned by classmates. “They just don’t get to know her,” Bernita laments.

Amanda knows that her fellow students here are different than those overseas because she and her grandmother have traveled abroad. She comes alive in foreign countries and is even more animated while talking about being in those places. Amanda may focus on language arts in her higher education. She may become a translator/interpreter, a fashion designer, or a massage therapist. “I want to go overseas and live there, in England, Scotland, or Germany,” she says. When that day arrives, Bernita says, “I’m going to go back to New Jersey, when I know Amanda’s taken care of.”

Palm Coast, 2008



If anyone made fun of me, it was my cousins.

ASHLEY YEARGIN

b. July 3, 1991 Fort Lauderdale, Florida

“When I was smaller I didn’t notice it [her vision problem] but my mom did,” Ashley Yeargin explains about discovering that her sight difficulties were the result of optic atrophy, damage to the optic nerve fibers. Alerted to possible vision problems because Ashley bumped into things, her mother took Ashley to a park and asked her if she could see the fishes in a pond. When Ashley reported that she couldn’t see anything, her mother took her to have her eyes checked. Ashley recalls playing checkers and thinking that she was picking up a piece but “wasn’t picking up anything.” She gravitated to the front of her classrooms so that she could see the board but she did not like to use a magnifying glass because it slowed her down. The children in school were sympathetic, sharing their notes with her.

Ashley moved to Palm Bay in 2007, together with a multitude of family members who had bought homes far away from the traffic of South Florida, where they were among the many Haitian immigrants who had carved out new lives. Ashley, surrounded by cousins, likes to talk on the phone and shop at the mall. She also volunteers at Life Care Center, a facility near her home, where she provides care for the elderly. She takes pride in transporting the inhabitants to their rooms, polishing the ladies’ nails, and playing Bingo with them.

Her mother reports that Ashley is very strong and very independent; she does not talk about how her vision affects her. In fact, she wants to own and drive a car. She would like to attend Bethune-Cookman University. However, a counselor told her that, because of her low vision, it would be unrealistic to aspire to become a pediatrician. Now she intends to study psychology.

“She is a very serious girl most of the time and sometimes I have to get her to loosen up,” her mother explains. “Ever since she was little she was always quiet, very well behaved. People really get attached to her and like her sense of humor. She can carry on a conversation well. She doesn’t talk that much to me but people love her demeanor. She is just a really genuine person.”

Palm Bay, 2008



I see through a fog.

BARBARA SCHAEFFER

b. April 26, 1926 Newton, Massachusetts

As a child living during the Great Depression in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Barbara Schaeffer “got to watch the George Washington Bridge go up.” She remembers “seeing Depression-people jump off this point.” But this low time in American history did not impact her developing reserve, which she would need to draw upon later in her life.

Once, as a child, Barbara purposefully failed an eye chart exam because she liked a boy who wore glasses and wanted to connect with him. “Now I really do have an eye problem,” she says. Her eyesight began failing by 1970; she could still type, but macular degeneration would soon take away this ability. She explains, “If I’m ten feet away from a person I don’t see a face, I can’t see features. In fact, I don’t see mine. I have to feel my face to see how my hair is falling down.” Well educated, she could no longer read, and laments, “I gave up reading everything. Even street signs. It’s awful.” Still she refuses to use a cane, citing fear that she will lose it because she once had left a cell phone behind. However, there is likely another explanation for her actions.

Although she became resigned to the inevitability of virtual blindness, she would not ever totally accept this fact. “I don’t think people know I’m blind. I think I present a good front,” she says. “I don’t go on about it but don’t mind if they know it. I address people with my solar plexus, don’t get a response from eye contact anymore, because I don’t see them, so I have been exploring that place in your body between the ribs that is untapped. It’s a direct honest approach.” Barbara believes that sighted people do not relate well or easily to blind people. She explains, “If people don’t know about it and I know about it, I think they’re being especially careful with me,” and this makes her self-conscious. “I just want it to go away. I pretend it’s just not there,” she says about her attitude of living normally, which she does.

Orange City, 2008



Some people have problems and some have real problems.

BARRY HYDE

b. February 3, 1972 Kannapolis, North Carolina

Since June 1, 1998, Barry Hyde has been blind. At 4:32 P.M. the plane in which he was the only passenger went off of Roanoke's radar and crashed into a field in rural Floyd, Virginia. A woman thought that the noise she heard was a car door closing so she went outside to greet her husband. She phoned 911 when she saw the wreckage, then fell to her knees and prayed. Nearby paramedics arrived soon enough to insert tubes into Barry's collapsed lungs to save his fading life.

Prematurely, Barry was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital; the chaplain called his family to come identify the body. Barry spent the next twenty days in a coma, waking up on Father's Day to wish his dad a happy one. His nose was obliterated and the roof of his mouth was knocked loose from his face. His left eye popped from its socket on impact and lodged behind his left cheekbone; optic nerve damage led to a cataract that cost him his vision in the right eye. Besides collapsed lungs, he also had thirteen broken bones of which eight were in his face, four breaks to his jaw, two cracks in his cranium, a crushed vertebra, a broken right leg, and four missing teeth.

The young pilot's aviation career was just getting started. Barry was one week away from a job interview with US Airways Express. He looked forward to joining flying race teams when he was not commercially flying. Those dreams appeared to have instantly vanished, but they had not. Barry learned the requisite skills a blind person needs. He also relearned to walk and talk. As his memory improved he went back to school, with his guide dog, Lincoln the Navigator. Barry Hyde is the first and only blind person to earn the FAA's advanced ground and instrument ground instructor's licenses which certify him to teach flight instruction in the classroom. Meanwhile he is working on a Masters of Science Degree in Aeronautics, specializing in Aviation Safety and Aviation Operations at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

Daytona Beach, 2006



I had to surrender my driver's license in 2002.

BEA SILVERMAN

b. April 23, 1927 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Both of Bea Silverman's parents were Russian Jews who had escaped the Motherland by hiding in a haystack that was prodded with pitchforks. In America, her father became a pharmacist and a cantor; he also taught Hebrew. Her parents ultimately had seven children.

Bea earned a Masters Degree in Mental Health Counseling. Eventually she managed a brother's medical office where he had given her a sign reading Free Advice. She also sold real estate and enjoyed volunteering. In 1989 she and her husband moved to Florida, where he wanted to live in retirement. Unfortunately, he passed away that same year. Their daughters, both attorneys, live out of state. Now Bea's Old English Sheepdog, Lady Guinevere, keeps her company.

One day Bea looked at a license plate and one of the numbers appeared to be lifted up. "I knew something was wrong with my eyesight," she says. Her ophthalmologist was away so she waited for medical attention. She became depressed as her sight deteriorated. Now she says, "I feel if I went to a retinologist I would have gotten better results. It's kind of scary, the prospect of losing more vision." She had hoped to benefit from injections that slow down deterioration but, she says, "I waited too long, it seems it's too late. There's too much damage done."

Bea is blessed with a sense of humor and observes, with jest, that her siblings are dying in chronological order. Now living in Ormond-by-the-Sea, she tells of a neighbor who refers to her as "that Jew down the street." Hearing about this reminded her of a limerick from her youth, from when she was five years old:

Ish Kabibble, King of the Jews

Wiped his ass with the Daily News.

Bea points out that there is a whole new raft of people living in this last stand of old beachside Florida, in small ranch homes with terrazzo floors and jalousie windows. She says, referring to the woman who made the crass remark, "I feel sorry for her."

Ormond-by-the-Sea, 2008



I couldn't drive—that was like being castrated.

BOB LASSONE

b. June 26, 1940 · Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Bob Lassone had limited vision in his right eye since childhood. He lost vision in his left eye during his senior year of high school as the result of a car accident. However, Bob was able to use his right eye; he could read if he held the print close to his face.

After graduating from high school, Bob moved to Albany and found night shift employment with the Post Office. When Bob read a book about mobility, he moved to Boston to study mobility instruction at the St. Paul Institute for the Blind. He then returned to Albany to become its first mobility instructor.

In the mid 1960s Bob learned about the newly formed Medicare system that offered assistance for the working poor. Bob left the Albany Association for the Blind to work for the health department. He was elected to the health department's board and proposed extending job protection to those blind people who left the agency and wanted to become more independent outside of the industry. This policy was accepted by the board; Bob was especially proud of that accomplishment.

Eventually Bob was unable to do his job as his vision began failing even more. For the last three years of employment he sat behind a desk, never quite getting used to reviewing Medicaid records on a computer screen. "I had a great big CCTV monitor. I had to sit so close my hair would stick to the screen, reading one letter at a time. I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't tell an eight from a six or a nine," he recalls.

Within a year of retiring in 1982, Bob and his wife moved to Daytona Beach, Florida. Bob quickly returned to advocacy and initiated successful reforms for the handicapped. He lobbied for better public transportation and safer pedestrian traffic conditions. His activism led to extended hours and routes of public bus transportation. He got the city to realize that blind people can't read Walk/ Don't Walk warning signals at intersections and lobbied for Audible Pedestrian Signals. With his example of accomplishments, Bob was asked to serve on the board of the Center for the Visually Impaired. He returned there in 2002, after he went totally blind, to once again take mobility classes.

Daytona Beach, 2012



You can do anything you want, sir.

BRANDON DEBENEDICTIS

b. August 9, 1990 Jacksonville, Florida

“I never saw my dad. He does all sorts of bad things,” Brandon DeBenedictis says about his father’s drug and alcohol abuse. His mother fared no better. Things worsened after she remarried; when she faced jail time, she let her father and stepmother take custody of the young boy. Prior to this action, she had denied the grandparents the privilege of even seeing him. His mother reckoned that leaving the boy with them was preferable to the Department of Children and Families taking him away, and they were breathing down her neck.

During his mother’s early pregnancy, the doctors knew that Brandon would suffer from her abusive behaviors. He was born with hydrocephalus, nearly blind; he would be developmentally delayed. Lacking fine motor skills he was unable to master Braille.

When it came to taking custody of the boy, his grandparents talked, and concluded, “If we don’t we’ll never see him again. We couldn’t live with that. We weren’t willing to lose him. We went and got him. He had no clothes, no nothing, no hair on his head.” About the neglect, Belinda, Brandon’s grandmother says that “he was as round as he was tall.” At four years of age he was still drinking from a bottle.

His grandparents’ first priority was to protect Brandon. Belinda says that when they knew that the court agreed to give her and her husband custody, “we held him like this,” and demonstrated a bear hug. It has been that way ever since. Calling him “son,” she says that “We are so blessed.” He replies, “That’s why I love you.”

Today Brandon is about to graduate from high school. He, with his happy-go-lucky attitude, lights up his grandparents’ lives with his good cheer and unfettered love. He has invited his mother to “come visit me and Nanny and Papa.” Belinda ponders, “Why God lets some things happen.” She muses, “Brandon led my children, grandchildren and my husband and me back to the church. Brandon, with his loving heart, gives back.”

Holly Hill, 2009



I encourage people to better themselves in life.

CALEP MACK

b. October 21, 1958 Jacksonville, Florida

Calep Mack lives a life of luxury. His electronic wonders and many collectibles in his newly constructed home are protected by security monitoring cameras and electric roll-down shutters; a generator kicks in should the power fail. Inside are three large plasma TV sets, a towering sound system, a computer room, and trinkets covering every surface. Shooting fountains create dancing streams of water that crisscross in the fiber-optically lighted pool, like they do in Las Vegas; an electrically operated fireplace can be turned on for effect as well as for warmth.

Calep often sits on his non-descript screened-in front porch dishing out advice to his neighbors and friends, many of whom come to him seeking counsel. He knows how things work. He “pushes them in the right direction” by explaining the ins and outs of government programs involving food stamps, voter registration, tax preparation, and scholarships. He says, “The Lord wants everybody to be profitable.” He adds that he stands up for people, as he did during his twenty years as a poll worker with the Department of Elections. “I know my job,” he offers, while telling of helping a man who lost his Voter’s ID card but was still able to cast his ballot because of Calep’s assistance.

He was fired and claims to have been called an “arrogant nigger” by his supervisor. But he carried on, volunteered with the Red Cross and Salvation Army and worked as a fast-food cook. He takes pride in his own cooking, and even caters. He learned to cook by watching his parents and by being a chef while serving in the Army.

As Calep’s eyesight deteriorated due to macular degeneration, he developed a positive attitude. “You gotta put a good foot up. You can cry, but you got to face reality. Depression doesn’t change anything,” he explains. So he stays contented, enjoying the fruits of his good fortune and lawsuits. He would like to meet the Queen of England because she reminds him of his mother. “It’s the nose and hairstyle,” he points out. His mother was “a strong woman,” while his father was “more of a city slicker.”

Daytona Beach, 2008



I guess if my parents wanted to change,
they'd make the effort.

DANNY SEWELL

b. May 15, 1990 Lansing, Michigan

Danny Sewell was a crack baby. His parents abused drugs and alcohol. Born prematurely, at twenty-six weeks, he weighed one pound and four ounces. "He fit in my hand," says his grandmother, Pat Wysocki, whom Danny calls Mom. Upon birth, he had hydrocephalus, cerebral palsy and a need for eye surgery. He was left with a totally blind left eye and limited vision in the other. Danny's visual acuity is 20/400 today. He wears Coke-bottle sized lenses and is planning to have a prosthetic eye placed over his yellowing blind eye. He tried using a contact lens but found it too difficult; his long eyelashes obstructed its easy positioning. After multiple surgeries, he is able to use his limbs efficiently; they no longer are distorted. "He's a miracle" says his grandmother who is his caregiver, along with her husband, Stanley.

Danny is in the 11th grade and says that he enjoys school now that he is no longer required to enroll in the ESE program. He prefers the regular classes; in middle school it was difficult for him to socially interact while he was in special education. He enjoys the camaraderie in his church's youth group. Its members serve guests at church functions; for this they receive monetary credit to pay for excursions. Danny was one of fourteen group members who traveled by limousine to Georgia. He points out that the luxury vehicle's charm was lost on the cramped travelers.

Danny is mature, exhibiting a good nature about his condition and limitations. "Only thing I wish I can do is drive. I save money on insurance by not switching to Geico." Both of his parents are out of the picture. His mother contracted hepatitis C and his father married another woman with whom he has had more children. He has expressed no interest in Danny and his two siblings, nor has he paid any child support. Says Danny's grandfather: "He [Danny's father] owes more than he's worth."

Port Orange, 2008



The worst part of it is I can't drive. -David
I had God on my side the whole time. -Barbara

DAVID CISSELL
BARBARA CISSELL

b. April 4, 1947 Louisville, Kentucky
b. December 9, 1960 Miami, Florida

David Cissell is one of the ninety-five percent of veterans who developed diabetes after being sprayed with Agent Orange in Vietnam. In 1999, his health went from bad to worse when macular degeneration set in, leaving him with only minimal peripheral vision. He had been working unloading packages from UPS planes, but couldn't do his job efficiently. He then got a job managing a Circle K near his trailer in Ft. Lauderdale, but lost everything because his live-in girlfriend wasn't paying the bills.

In 2002, Barbara Thiell became sick when she was in Miami chasing her former husband who had their children. Delirious and with a high fever, she went to the hospital only to be turned away because personnel claimed she was reacting to a drug overdose, but Barbara has never used drugs or even drank alcohol. She tried making herself comfortable in the E.R. but was removed from the premises by security. She was found under her pickup truck, in a coma, three days later. She remembers being helpless but she was able to hear one nurse tell another that, "She's dying." That was her last memory for two-and-a-half months.

Barbara came out of the coma singing Jesus Loves Me. A nurse told her to be quiet but she could not refrain from singing this joyous song. Barbara was diagnosed with meningitis and afflicted with polio. The resulting deterioration of her optic nerve left her totally blind.

The next year she was off to Michigan to Leader Dogs for the Blind where she and David were placed in the same instruction group. "I fell for him, then and there," she smiles, adding, "He started flirting with me." David chimes in, "I flirted with all of them." Eventually they married.

The couple honeymooned in Cancun, Mexico, where David had their guide dogs' names, Spartacus and Zella, tattooed on his leg. The process caused blood poisoning, from which he recovered. Unfortunately, David tripped on a tree root in front of his house and since his diabetes prohibits surgery, the accident left him confined to a wheelchair. Barbara, who says, "I want to do something with my life besides nothing," is studying medical transcription.

Port Orange, 2008



I want to live my own life.

DEE FONTAINE

b. January 27, 1921 | London, England

Dee Fontaine could not tell anyone what she did during the war, not even her husband; it was TOP SECRET. Dee had married a soldier in 1943, an attorney stationed near her, in London. They were members of their countries' militaries; he was American and she was British. She spent "five years, eight hours a day" working in the headquarters of Air Defense of Great Britain. She identified aircraft flying in the sky and crossing the English Channel before reaching their destination, to drop their bombs.

Her husband, Thomas Babb, returned home, to Laurens, South Carolina, to work in the prestigious law firm in which his father was a partner, while she remained in the service. When Dee came stateside to be with her husband and meet his genteel family, she fit right in. She and Tom led a good life in Laurens, where they raised their son, Thomas. Her husband became a member of the House of Representatives and she then was a coordinator of Civil Defense. After eighteen years there, they relocated to California where the couple divorced in 1980.

After the loss of her son in 1998, she boarded a luxury cruise ship and sailed slowly to Australia. There she resumed an earlier interest in art, and signed her paintings with her maiden name. His death was hard on her, but she chose to get on with her life. She explains, "A lot of people sort of dwell [on their tragedies] the rest of their lives. If you want to live your own life, you don't dwell." After returning from her travels, Dee chose to settle in Daytona Beach, a "delightful" town.

During an office visit in 2000, Dee's physician suggested that she give up driving. One day, while driving and making a right-hand turn, Dee lost vision in her right eye. Macular degeneration had set in. She then relinquished her license, sold her car, and moved into an assisted living facility where she participates in its active social life. "The question of men, of love and marriage – No. When you get older the men that are available to you, you wouldn't have on the end of a barge pole," she exclaims.

Daytona Beach, 2012



I wish I could bake; I can hardly walk.

DELORIS GOLDSBORO

b. February 5, 1937 The Bronx, New York

“It was hard for a black woman to get an office job,” explains Deloris Goldsboro who, upon passing the Civil Service exam, worked for the City of New York doing data entry in the late 1960s. When she began in this field she was keypunching for the Magistrate Court. Deloris left government employment but continued entering data, spending the last eighteen years of her employment with Pan Am. She laughs now about the T-shirts, emblazoned with the words “Marry Me/ Fly Free,” that she and her fellow workers wore.

Deloris’ marriage didn’t work out. Her abusive husband would “sweet talk” her, promising to mend his ways, but he didn’t; he continued “fighting, beating me up, and drinking,” she relates. She separated from him and a few years later, in 1984, divorced him. She had a boyfriend soon thereafter, but he passed away in 1989. A few years went by and then Deloris was ready “to get out of New York. It was too push-push, shove, shove,” she says. A friend told her about Daytona Beach, and through the Housing Authority she moved into a high-rise apartment in February of 2004 with a magnificent view of the marina and ocean.

Then Deloris took custody of Jolisa, a young girl her sister had adopted from foster care. Jolisa’s biological mother had HIV/AIDS. Deloris was glad to do this, perhaps in part because she never had children of her own. However, shortly after taking custody of Jolisa, Deloris lost her eyesight to glaucoma. The youngster did not adapt well to having to care for her. “She stopped taking her medication, claiming that the pills were too big for her to swallow,” she says of Jolisa’s reaction to this new situation. Deloris thinks that this was a ploy; she told Jolisa’s caseworker about Jolisa’s actions. Jolisa was then placed back into the foster care system in Jacksonville. “I think she intended to get away from me because I’m blind, and I’m old,” acknowledges a good-natured Deloris Goldsboro.

Daytona Beach, 2008



I had to give up my motorcycle.

DON CAMPBELL

b. February 4, 1954 Columbus, Ohio

Don Campbell grew up in a small town near Columbus, Ohio. After his mother divorced his stepfather, the family moved to Florida in 1974. His biological father had left before Don was ten years old but Don and his father reconciled when Don was in his thirties. Although he had studied printing at a trade school, he found employment as a darkroom technician in the Radiology Department at Halifax Hospital in Daytona Beach. Macular degeneration crept in while he was working; he did not even know that he had it.

Born two months prematurely, Don believes that an excessive amount of oxygen pumped into the incubator in which he was placed led to retinopathy of prematurity, his eye deterioration that resulted in loss of vision. It left him blind in one eye. “Since I never had two [eyes], I never missed it,” he says with nonchalance. However, giving up his motorcycle was troublesome. Also afflicted with cerebral palsy, he took to getting around on an electric scooter after a hip replacement in 1992. He enjoyed playing table tennis and boasts that he has had a paddle in his hand since he was five years old. He has given that up, along with shooting pool. He says, “I miss that, but it could be a lot worse.”

Now Don watches television; he enjoys it, but he doesn’t appreciate “the dumb commercials.” He is aware that his vision continues to fail; he doesn’t know how much longer he can play video games. He refuses to go to the doctor, thinking, “Why do I want to get more bad news?” Instead he frequents the mall, socializes with his neighbors in the apartment complex where he has an efficiency apartment, and delights in music.

He hasn’t always had the good attitude that he has now. “I was pretty angry it happened,” he admits. “I thought it was time for a new pair of glasses.” However, he kept his good cheer when a doctor told him that he is going blind and that there is not much to do about it. The doctor asked him if he played poker; he replied that he had but can no longer see the cards. Then he was told that he would have 50/50 chance of benefiting from surgery.

Daytona Beach, 2008



I have a lot of dusting to do, but it doesn't bother me because I can't see it.

DORAMAE BRUMMETT

b. July 1, 1920 Willamette, Connecticut

Born to a French mother and an Irish father, Doramae Brummett and her dad moved from Willamette to Bristol, Connecticut, after her mother unexpectedly died when Doramae was nine years old. The move was traumatic for her because of the extreme cultural differences. "We were separated by town, schools and church," she explains. The Irish, she suggests, were cold and silent. But she found the French there to be "loving, humble and much more caring." She recalls that, "All I got till I was nine were hugs, then I was always wrong."

When she was thirteen, she and her father moved to New York City. Doramae married Bud after graduating from high school. She says, "I turned from a rag to a queen when I got married." When she was forty-five, Bud died. Because of monetary concerns she worked seven days a week at two jobs while volunteering at a hospital.

Three years later she married Norman. She gave up gainful employment then to care for Norman's three children and her son, Jim. When Norman died, Doramae stayed with Jim and his wife until they divorced. She and Jim came to Florida where she worked in his beauty salon. "All of a sudden the lights went out," she says. With stronger reading glasses, she could still manage to read three newspapers a day but she began leaving work early, while it was still light. Her granddaughter joked, "Grandma's got to go before she turns into a pumpkin."

A doctor tried laser treatments but these did not alleviate her condition. She overheard a nurse tell the doctor that "She's legally blind but still driving." The following day, her car was gone. Jim said it needed repair, but she knew better. Now Doramae cannot see well enough to read. She says, "People think I can see because I don't wear glasses. Glasses do me no good. They say, 'You don't act blind'. Well, how do you act blind?" She reckons that her failed vision is the result of having lived too long. "I just wore them [her eyes] out," she says. She thinks that bright sunshine contributed to her macular degeneration. "Back then," she points out, "only movie stars wore dark glasses."

Port Orange, 2008



I can't say I can't.

DORIS ARMSTRONG

b. February 27, 1920 · Patterson, New Jersey

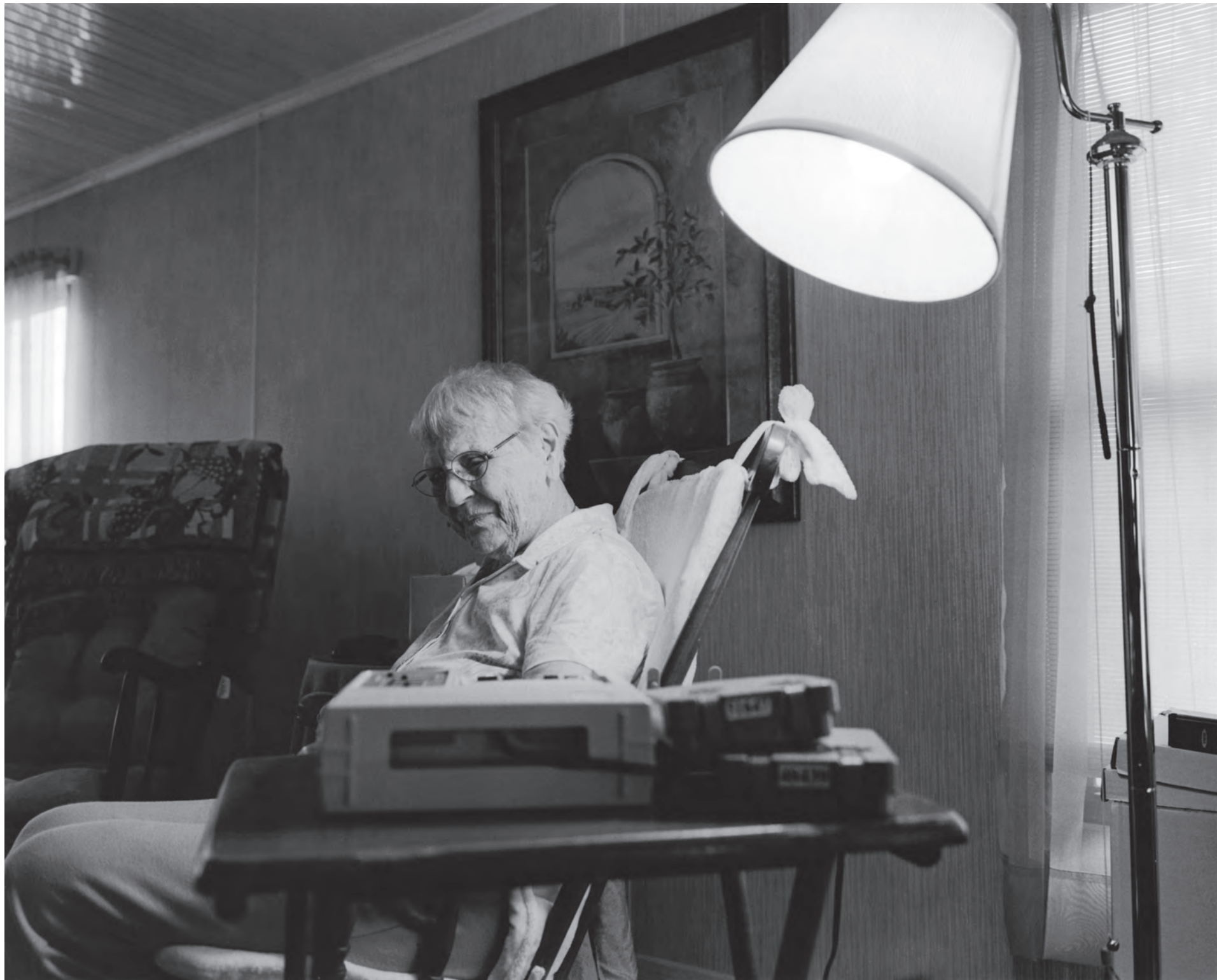
When Doris Armstrong says things like “These hearing aids cost \$500 but they’re not worth five cents” and “I’m getting used to Florida; it never gets cold,” one might mistake her observations as criticism. But they are not. She was raised to not complain. When she expands upon her remarks it is clear that she is an appreciative person. She explains, for example, that she likes to see the seasons change and adds, “I like the deciduous trees.” Her frustration with hearing and vision losses does not get the better of her.

Her family life while she was growing up was centered around the dining room table. “Father would sit in his rocking chair and Mother would serve dinner,” describes Doris. Gentle conversation would ensue. Voices were never raised. Her English-gentleman father would ask if anyone had anything they wanted to tell him. This was tantamount to asking, according to her, “if you wanted to squeal on yourself.” In this house, if one did not do what was expected, the silent treatment followed.

Growing up, Doris was not permitted to say, “I can’t.” In her home, one had to try. Only after repeated attempts, at the point of total frustration, was she allowed to approach her father and ask for his help. For a short time, she indulged in denial when she was faced with the onslaught of decreasing sight brought on by macular degeneration. But not being allowed to wallow in self-pity as a youngster instilled a spirit of accomplishment in her. Doris had become self-sufficient during her childhood; she drew upon this attribute when she became legally blind.

“It’s all new to me,” she says, adding, “I think I’m adapting quite well.” Doris does become insecure at times, but thinks that everyone gets frustrated when they want to do things that seem prohibitive. So she tries. Although she cannot sew today, she did knit a crib blanket for her granddaughter by memorizing the pattern and feeling the stitches, counting her way through the process. She used dark needles and light-colored yarn but, still, she says, “It wasn’t easy, but something I wanted to do.” By all accounts, she’s a terrific dump-cook, adding the herbs and spices that she grows in her yard.

New Smyrna Beach, 2008



I have a nice family. I love them all.

DORIS ROBEY

b. November 8, 1924 Washington, D.C.

Doris Robey once supervised an office staff of more than 150 people at Arthur Anderson Accounting during the pre-Enron days. Her husband, an accountant, also worked there. While she still draws a pension from this firm, her husband died in 1981 after having been retired for only two years. During that same year macular degeneration, an unknown affliction to Doris, took its toll on her eyesight.

Pleasant and upbeat, Doris remains active and “is bound and determined to stay at it.” She goes to the beauty shop and grocery store regularly. She keeps a meticulous home. She enjoys playing cards with her friends as long as they use a jumbo deck. Doris chuckles that her husband would “have a fit if he saw how long I’ve lived.” But she lives in a way that would likely make him proud; it was probably the way they lived together.

“I love fussing around the house, cooking and doing things,” Doris offers. In fact her home seems like it was plucked from the 1970s; it is like a model showroom of that era. It is airy and bright, with dominant purples and beiges. Ribbons are draped over formal dining room chairs, commemorative plates and cups and saucers intermingle with an endless array of decorations; all are carefully placed and spotless.

Doris proved the doctor wrong when, thirty years ago, he had rudely told her that “you won’t need a seeing-eye dog for at least a year.” Well, she never did need one. “He scared the living devil out of me when he said that,” she remembers, thinking his comment was brash and insensitive. Besides, a dog would be out of place in her immaculate home with the folded linen napkins set on the dining room table.

Ormond Beach, 2008



I was ready to jump out a window and end it all.

ELDON BEACH

b. January 12, 1921 | Daytona Beach, Florida

The dots on a wall map show the places in Southeast Asia where Eldon Beach served his country, when he spent two years “chasing Japs” during World War II. He transported troops and supplies from India to Kunming, China, and ferried planes to England from the U.S. He says that he, as a flight engineer, was “more important than the pilot.” He was stricken with malaria while in the Sindh Desert, and, sixty years later, still suffers from bouts of it when he gets rundown.

Once, during the London Blitz, he ventured out from the subway shelter to the streets, where he witnessed “the whole city lit up on fire.” Eldon came home, studied architecture and then worked with his father in the construction business. Their firm built houses and some motels throughout the resort town of Daytona Beach. In 1981, when he retired, he and his wife moved into a fine apartment overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway. Things worsened for him – in one year his wife died and his eyes hemorrhaged. Alone and with a seventy-five percent loss of vision, he was withdrawn and depressed. Eldon thought of jumping from his fourteenth floor apartment to his death.

A doctor suggested that he learn to play a musical instrument, so Eldon bought an electronic keyboard which had the capability of becoming a one-man band. He practiced diligently, memorizing the many buttons and exploring their functions. He enrolled in computer training classes. He purchased a giant-sized television on which a screen-saver becomes a life-sized saltwater aquarium. He began his new life and even made friends with a young woman who visits him regularly, takes him shopping and escorts him to dinner.

His apartment reflects the glitz and glamour of the early 1960s. Glossy wallpaper covers every wall, and shag rugs cover every floor. The paper has an iridescent foil-like finish with paisley swirls. The rug is comfortable to the point of cozy, and the entire apartment is sensually decorated. Plush couches, marble lamps of Grecian nudes, bowls and trinkets cover every surface; all of this was his wife Margaret’s doing. Above Eldon’s bed hangs a large oil painting of his wife. She poses nude and proud, beautiful and unabashed.

Daytona Beach, 2008



I'm never driving again.

ELIZABETH MAGARIAN

b. July 13, 1940 · Orlando, Florida

A daughter of a Methodist preacher, Elizabeth Magarian was raised throughout Florida, but when her father became an Army Chaplain during World War II the family moved out west. Nevertheless, she chose Florida State University as the place to earn her Ph.D. in Mathematics. While a student there she began bumping into her bed and, at a roommate's suggestion, tied sponges to its corners to avoid pained and bruised legs. Soon after graduation, in 1968, she accepted a teaching position at Stetson University where she stayed for thirty years.

Her eyesight began deteriorating due to retinitis pigmentosa. In 1972 she relinquished her driver's license and called her parents to ask them to pick up her car. She then bought a house within walking distance to the campus. In 1987 "someone broke in there and raped me at knife point," she explains. Upon arriving home from a vacation a few weeks later, she found a broken window and blood. The police determined that her attacker had returned; they subsequently advised her to move. She then purchased a condo one block away from the college. Her parents bought a unit there two years later.

Elizabeth lived the academic's life at Stetson, enjoying all it had to offer. She attended lectures and music recitals; she became impassioned with ceramics. Shelves in her home are filled with her own vessels and platters. As her eyesight worsened, she replaced painting her distinctive designs by incising them in the clay. This method allowed her to "see" her work.

Elizabeth kept journals in which she took notes "from faculty meetings, lectures, and where ever I went." Sketches of the people involved compliment these observations. She made afghan throw rugs during faculty meetings.

The university, fearing a student who failed Elizabeth's class might sue, encouraged her to retire. Teaching had become stressful so she reluctantly complied, realizing that retiring was the prudent thing to do. She remained active as long as she could; she designed her own version of a white cane – PVC pipe with red tape. It was durable and functioned well as an aid during her Tai Chi sessions. Elizabeth does not go out much anymore because of her failed vision; instead she plays the piano and keeps busy at home. "I'm frightened," she explains.

DeLand, 2009



I always did good in school.

ELIZIA PIERRE-ANTOINE

b. June 9, 1991 Miami, Florida

Elizia Pierre-Antoine plans to study sociology in college and then earn a Masters degree in Business Administration. These have long been her goals, even before her eye problems occurred. The cause of her spontaneous bilateral retinal detachment remains unknown but it occurred four years ago, when she was twelve. Then a doctor at Nova Southeastern University asked her, “How can you see?” She replied, “What do you mean?” She thought that she was okay with glasses, but the doctor’s statement was more of an exclamation than a question. She next went to Bascom Palmer Eye Institute in Miami. There she was told that she needed surgery or she would go blind. After five operations on each eye, her vision is stable. “I’m doing good in school,” she says, but she has always performed academically at a high level. This will serve her well because Elizia, a Haitian-American, plans some day to start a school in Haiti which students can attend without charge.

She did not tell her mother about the increased difficulty she was having with her vision because she had gotten used to the gradual deterioration of her sight, which started in her infancy. Often people with such problems do not recognize when eyesight worsens. Elizia became aware of the severity of her eye problems in the second grade when she failed a test; she emailed her teacher to ask her why she failed and signed the letter “the blind girl.”

Elizia’s eye condition was more traumatic for her mother than for her. Elizia thought doctors could cure her. Last year she told her mother that she realized that her disability was permanent and that she accepts it. When Elizia was young, her mother cried a lot because of her daughter’s eye condition. At that time Elizia gave her mother comfort, telling her not to worry. Mrs. Pierre-Antoine says “She is a very strong girl.”

Palm Bay, 2008



People are more than willing to help all the time.

FRED MORGAN

b. November 13, 1940 Taraho, Indiana

Fred Morgan hated golf; he was terrible at it. Nevertheless, he played when business called and when his golf team needed him. One day in 1971, on the seventh hole, a partner said to him, “If I didn’t play any better than you, I’d go drinking.” So Fred gave up golfing and soon found a new interest. He whole-heartedly got into flying, owning three Cessna planes at one time. “I can fly anything with wings,” he boasts. In 1979, he flew to watch the races at the Daytona International Speedway and Fred became an ardent fan of auto racing. Not only did he begin to transport racing teams from track to track, he flew all over the country to see the races. He bought a second home in Daytona Beach Shores.

Life was good to Fred, his wife and their three children. Fred once worked for the American Can Company but it was while he was employed by Dole that he became renowned for his knowledge about canning. He lived around the world for the company and pioneered the steel ecology-friendly EZ open pineapple six-ounce can. After his wife of thirty-two years died, Fred eventually married again and moved to Florida in 2003.

In 1995 a brain tumor caused Fred to lose his sight. His adjustment to being blind was tough, he admits, adding, “What are you going to do? Sit around and mope and not have any fun? That’s not how I want to live.” Fred chose to live fully. He attended his fiftieth high school reunion in Indiana. On his last birthday, when his friends took him flying, he took the stick. “I got to fly,” he exclaims happily. Fred joked that he and his brother, who is stricken with MS, could drive a car as a team; his brother could navigate while he controlled the car.

“Whenever you think you got it bad,” Fred points out, “there’s always someone who’s got it worse.” When his wife decided she wanted to be near her children up north, he, hating cold weather, declined to accompany her. The couple divorced and Fred remained in Florida, where “not a day goes by when I don’t think about my first wife. She was my partner – Madonna Sue.”

New Smyrna Beach, 2008



I have eyes in my fingers.

GEORGE KOFFEMAN

b. May 29, 1921 Jackson, Michigan

George Koffeman was a practicing chiropractor for sixty years, specializing in applied Kinesiology, a diagnostic process that tests muscles to examine how a person's body is functioning. Established in 1964 by George Goodheart, "a guy who was in the next century," George's life revolved around this healing art. In fact, he considers himself to be the best Kinesiologist in the field today, even though blindness and retirement in Florida have ended his ability to practice chiropractic medicine.

His wife, Jennie, also earned her Chiropractic degree but went to work with her husband as his office manager. Their sons became chiropractors and took over their parents' business when George retired in 1980. However, he continued to dedicate his life to further understanding this course of treatment. Jennie points out that her husband "never read a work of fiction in his life," adding that "now he can't, of course." The couple had wintered in Florida since 2001, but settled here permanently in 2005, just after George's optical nerve hemorrhaged. Within a week his eyesight diminished to the point of seeing only "daylight and darkness, like looking at an object through the worst fog you've seen in your life."

Although he was undeterred as a blind person, Florida law prohibited him from practicing any longer since he was not licensed as a Doctor of Chiropractic in the state. Nevertheless, George's spirit remained strong while he practiced what he preached, "The road to health is always under repair." Adapting to his new status, he replaced the metal tips of ski poles with the rubber tips from walking canes. These modified poles, as opposed to a single walking stick, enabled his fast-paced walking. His brother-in-law painted the poles white and their ends red to identify the user as a blind person.

George credits his intellect with "detaching myself from most emotional things. It impairs objectivity." He does lament, though, about being blind, saying that "it's an annoyance. It didn't bother me eventually, except I couldn't look at the girls." Jennie recently purchased a tabletop punching bag explaining, "I bought it to alleviate husband-induced stress. This will keep me from punching the one who deserves it," like when George judges people's intelligence. Jennie responds to George's observation that he is tops in his field, saying, "There are others."

– New Smyrna Beach, 2008



You can't feel bad, you just got to get on with it.

HARLEY STEEDLEY

b. June 4, 1989 Daytona Beach, Florida

When the doctor told Harley Steedley that he would be going blind, the then five-year-old asked the physician, "What is that?" The doctor turned the room lights off and told him that was what it was like to be blind. Harley began to turn off the lights in every room that he entered in order to sensitize himself for what was coming. "I took showers in the dark, went to the bathroom in the dark, got dressed in the dark, and got my drinks in the dark." Four years later he went blind. "When that came about it was no surprise," he says, adding, "I was used to it."

Harley was diagnosed with neurofibromatosis. A non-operable tumor, which stretched across his cranium, led to his blindness; he can see only contrasts. The tumor has been in remission since his initial diagnosis and he is as unconcerned about it as he is about being blind. Although Harley does not wallow in self-pity, at first he did feel sorry for himself. He took his condition too seriously for a few years but finally decided that "things happen for a reason." He concluded that the best medicine was nurturing his sense of humor.

He cracks jokes and, as he puts it, makes life humorous. A force to be reckoned with, Harley does stand up for himself. When students in high school referred to him as the blind kid, he immediately told them that if they could not call him by his name, do not to speak to him at all. At school he even served as an office assistant, accepting students' passes and filing these via a numbering system he devised by placing certain passes between different fingers to indicate their types.

Having learned life skills for the blind, Harley looks forward to moving to North Carolina where his mother lives, but he wants his own apartment. He also wants to start a business building doghouses, some of which he will design with five floors. Harley is already skilled in the use of power tools and enjoys taking things apart and reassembling them. He has designed and built shelves to display the elaborate cars that he constructed from wood blocks at Boggy Creek Camp for chronically and terminally ill children.

Ormond Beach, 2008



If you have a handicap it is better to be a person who doesn't care what people think.

JAMES WRIGHT

b. June 17, 1993 Gainesville, Florida

The pink tint that a girl friend put in James Wright's long, curly blond locks didn't come out so he dyed his hair jet-black. Some of his schoolmates teased him about it, anyway. "He's aristocratic and lazy," his dad, Mark, says but adds, "He's a good soul." James taught himself to play guitar and is becoming a performing magician. He worked at Daytona Magic during the summers, learning card tricks and teaching himself other slights of hand.

James seems like a typical teen, but he has Aspergers syndrome, attention deficit disorder and is visually impaired. His limitations can make learning and social liaisons difficult. At times he is overcome with anxiety. Looking normal adds to James' difficulties; people do not notice his disabilities so he "flies under the radar," and slips through the cracks at school, says Mark. "They expected him to understand how to deal with his problems."

"Life is about learning things you don't want to learn," Mark advises his son. Mark emphasizes critical thinking and independence. "I stress to Jamie, all the people who helped you, if they did anything wrong, it's when you were a little cute boy in school, you could fall asleep in class and they would let you sleep. He fell through the cracks. If you do that when you grow up, people don't think you are cute, when you do things wrong they will put you in prison or on the streets. The reality is they will not dote on you. You can't trust your happiness to others."

James has come a long way from when he would go to the beach and scream when his feet touched the hot sand or when he would go in the water and try to run away. He no longer shuts out reality. He would like to go to college. "I am trying to teach him to love thinking. I talk to him about philosophers, concepts in religion, so if he does that, breaks through the barrier that knowledge is a chore, he will break free of the limitations of his disability," says his father. Indeed, James already has a good attitude, is willing to work and is learning to speak up for himself.

Edgewater, 2009



I want to leave a legacy that's not going to be measured by a bank account.

JARIAL Q. HOLMES

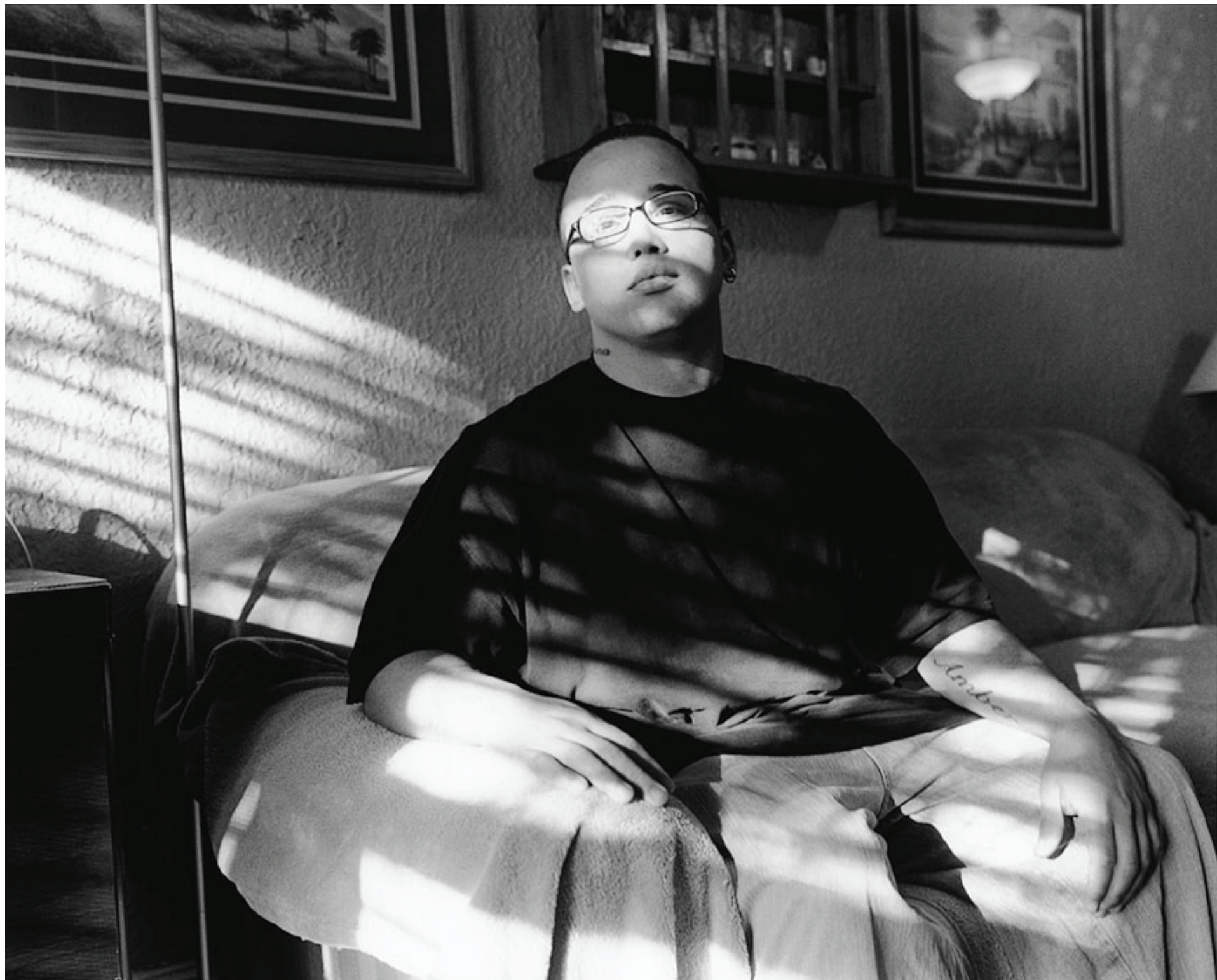
b. June 21, 1988 · Newton, Massachusetts

Jarial Holmes' ex-wife's name tattooed along his neck poses no problem to his fiancée, Kristin. "I got my mistakes out of the way very early," he says, adding, "Don't get married at seventeen." His life has been an uphill battle. His parents were imprisoned when he was two years old and then Jarial came to live with grandparents in Cocoa. Things got worse. His vision began failing while he was in public school, where soon he was a target for bullies. He didn't tolerate other children hiding his books or jamming their fingers in his face and asking, "How many fingers do I have up?" His dad told him not to tolerate such treatment and encouraged him to fight back. He did, but in doing so he got a reputation for being violent.

Although school "created more problems than it solved," Jarial emerged with an attitude that belied his youth; he believed that good works were important. He realized that "you develop your skills for the outside world in school," and learned to channel his anger by studying martial arts. Now he is assertive but not aggressive, he claims. He's learned Braille knowing that his retinitis pigmentosa will further diminish his sight and that he needs "to still be literate."

Jarial had a series of jobs – time-share collections, production line assembly, and providing adaptive technology to the disabled – which have led him to become skilled and insightful, and also compassionate. These new assets have enhanced his personal life as well. Jarial and Kristin met on-line, on Myspace in 2009; their son Hayden was born two years later. Now Jarial plans to complete college and have a career helping people with disabilities. He says, "I want to go to college and get degrees in social work and vocational rehabilitation and work with blind individuals and disabled vets."

Daytona Beach, 2012



Okay, this is really happening.

JERMESA LEE

b. April 21, 1989 Miami, Florida

When Jermesa Lee was four years old, she and her family left Miami to return to their roots in Jasper, a small country town in north Florida. Describing the surroundings of her Jasper home she states, “My neighbors on both sides were cows.” Her grandfather had cows and two donkeys. She enjoyed her youth there. Vibrant and pretty, Jermesa was popular at school and made good grades. “It hit me,” she says when she went for a routine medical check-up. The doctor told her that she had a hole in her eye and that she needed to have surgery the next day. Retinoblastoma took her sight from her left eye when she was fifteen months old; now the same cancer took her right eye.

Jermesa flashes a radiant smile and without a sign of angst says, “I had so much planned for that October.” She was the Drama Club Princess, and says, “I was supposed to walk down the field at homecoming.” Always a determined person, her attitude remained unchanged. “It’s not going to stop me,” she thought. “It’s just another thing I have to deal with.” She has had frustrating moments, to be sure; while she was dual-enrolled at North Florida Community College as she was completing high school, an instructor refused to accommodate her academic needs. Jermesa took a medical withdrawal, but that was the only stumbling block in her pursuit of higher education. “I overcame it. That was okay.” Now a psychology major at Bethune-Cookman University, Jermesa plans to attend graduate school. Frankly, she points out, her parents are the ones who worry. “They are still skeptical,” she asserts. “I think they had more of a problem with my blindness than I did.”

Daytona Beach, 2008



Everything's going good, honey.

JEWELL ANN SWIFT

b. April 14, 1919 Atlanta, Georgia

One would never imagine that Jewell Swift's family was so poor that she and her brother had to live with their grandparents and pull cotton in Alabama while her parents eked out a Depression-days existence. One would instead think she was always a Southern Belle, a lady who might have had a starring role in *Gone with the Wind*. Her home today, built by the river in 1875 and on the Tour of Homes, exemplifies a refined and genteel life. It is decorated with carefully placed early American furniture and a tall clock from a circa 1780 whaling ship. A myriad of fine paintings and vernacular art from Jewell's world travels adorn her surroundings.

After marrying her husband, Joe, the couple settled in Mt. Dora where he built hydroplane racing boats. Their Swift Boats became internationally renowned. Jewell not only ran the company office but she also tested the speedboats; she would sit on her knees when piloting them, the method designed to maximize their speed. "We held all the championships for five years," she says. Swift Boats' banner days were in the 1950s and early '60s, until fiberglass replaced their finely crafted Douglas fir over Sitka spruce framed hulls. She is still acknowledged at Mt. Dora's annual boat show. "I'm a celebrity for the day," she laughingly says about the treatment she receives.

Soon after retiring to Ormond Beach she became a luminary again when her friends at the Yacht Club nicknamed her Miss Magnolia. Jewell's latest title is very fitting, given the décor of her house. Now residing in the town where "if you lived in Atlanta this was the place to come on vacation," she continues to live a charmed life in spite of the loss of her eyesight due to macular degeneration.

Her parents had age related macular degeneration, but Jewell quickly points out that "There wasn't a name for it then. Your eyes were just going bad." She is philosophical about her condition, saying "This is the way it's going to be." The Yacht Club members are her extended family and she expresses her good fortune at "still getting invited to all the parties. For this time in life I think I'm doing very well." Nevertheless, she does get frustrated when she "can't cut deviled eggs down the middle."

Ormond Beach, 2008



I'm uncomfortable being blind. Not bitter.

JIM HALL

b. August 29, 1950 · Daytona Beach, Florida

In spite of losing his sight to “juvenile cataracts, epilepsy and everything else you can think of,” Jim Hall is active. “I’ve been successful at everything United Cerebral Palsy has let me do,” he says, referring to the disabilities service facility in which he’s lived and worked for fifteen years. Jim has attended the St. Augustine School for the Deaf and Blind, and, in Daytona Beach, the Center for the Visually Impaired, Hillcrest School, Conklin Center for the Blind, and Happy Corner School. “I’ve been around,” he says about his education.

Now Jim instructs others about blindness, saying “I have a knack for helping people.” Three years ago Jim joined Toastmasters. Public speaking, so hard for others, came naturally to him, and he had something to prove. “People like myself can do this, do something they don’t think they can do. It takes control, calm and being yourself,” he explains. “It takes determination to go out and do something no one else does.”

He says, “You cannot explain what blindness is all about. We’re different. We just want to be treated like anyone else. We want a chance to get out and get a job.” Jim is employed at CVI, where he is in charge of paper shredding; he also works for UCP.

Jim is very sociable and outspoken today, despite being sensitive to noise; he once reeled away in despair from any gatherings. Jim’s days of locking himself away in his room, of playing blackjack on his computer, and of being by himself while avoiding others, have come to an end.

Jim goes out on weekends, “like shopping at Wal-Mart. I make a weekend out of doing nothing,” he jests. But he does these nothings with his girlfriend Karen. “I got lucky,” he says, “I asked for her number and she was looking for mine.” The couple goes out for breakfast and lunch; they take VoTran buses to the mall. He took care of her when she fell but now she gets around in a power chair. Jim’s living his dream; he has taken Arthur Murray dance lessons and has more recently been baptized. He looks forward to making speeches and being on the radio regularly. He affirms, “You don’t need sight, you just need to have a voice.”

Daytona Beach, 2012



I don't know anything but being blind.

JODY MILISAVIC

b. April 16, 1973 Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Jody Milisavic is raising two children as a single mother while holding down a full-time job; she is well prepared for both of these roles. She had a normal childhood. Although raised by her mother, neither parent sheltered or pampered her. Some children who are blind since birth are “just put up with,” but her parents treated her lovingly. Jody enjoyed amusement park rides and swimming at the beach with them. Her friends were also kind. She recalls one who would roller-skate backwards while holding Jody's hands so that she too could experience the abandon of gliding.

Jody received an A.S. degree in Human Services from Chattanooga State Technical Community College in 1996. Then she moved to Pembroke Pines in south Florida where her father lived. However, without work experience it was hard finding a job there. She came to Daytona Beach to attend the Orientation and Adjustment Center and then earned a certificate in 1998 from the Manderfield Technology Training Lab, a subsidiary of the Florida Division of Blind Services. Today she works for Votran, Volusia County Transit System, where she makes reservations for special needs people who are eligible for door-to-door service.

“Transportation is the hardest part of being blind,” she says. But Jody's loss of mobility and independence are minor concerns. She wants a house and a yard with a fence around it so that her children can play safely. “My only sadness is living in an apartment,” she says. Jody wants to be able to play ball with her kids. Special balls are designed to beep for the visually impaired. “It's hard to raise a son in this environment. You can't dig up the yard,” she laments. Nevertheless, because Jody was not excluded while she was growing up and “brought up with love” she does the same for her children. She only hopes that she will not be an embarrassment to them when they come of age and are subject to human foibles. She knows that, “You can either live down and without or take that chance.”

Port Orange, 2006



My legs are giving me more trouble than my eyes.

JOSEPH RADZICKI

b. August 12, 1946 · Brooklyn, New York.

In spite of a laborious life and the diabetes-related problems with his heart, eyes, kidneys and legs, Joseph Radzicki is a happy-go-lucky sort of man. “He sings all day around the house. He talks all the time too. Joe’s got a great personality. I love him to death; he is my life,” says his wife, Theresa.

Joe takes childlike joy in learning how to fold paper currency in order to identify its monetary worth. He laughingly tells about accepting a job with the liquidators who dismantled the machine shop where he was gainfully employed. “It went under because all the business went to Japan,” he explains while adding “we lost everything overseas.” He is only momentarily serious when talking about his sister who died at sixteen from the effects of sniffing glue in their Brooklyn neighborhood. “I was devastated,” he says.

Joe took a job with the railroad in New York City. He jokes that “tunnel vision” was needed to operate the trains there. He explained that the engine’s steel sides would allow only viewing from the front window; the sides prohibited someone from shooting into a speeding train. After twenty years of working for the railroad he was eligible for retirement and took it. “I just wanted to get way from the cold!” he exclaims. He and Theresa bought the manufactured home that she had chosen, sight-unseen, from an on-line residential marketing site. He enjoys the climate and living in this pleasant development. However, he needs now to be especially careful when trimming the foliage around his house. Because of his diabetes he must avoid wounding himself; subsequent infections could result in serious ailments.

“I know it’s getting progressively worse,” he says about his vision loss, which began in 1996. He points out “I can’t see phone numbers for beans,” and “I miss my tennis game a lot.” He couldn’t see the ball until it came onto his side of the court and by then it was too late to swing. “I just gave it up. I don’t play anymore, it’s too difficult.” He adds, “I miss my traveling a lot. I’m afraid to travel.” Joe continues to wear his eyeglasses out of habit. He jokingly says, “I can’t think without putting my glasses on.”

Ormond Beach, 2008



Moderation in everything, and two beers a day.

JOSEPHINE IMBUS

b. October 27, 1906 Cincinnati, Ohio

Josephine Imbus, a former opera singer who is now ninety-nine years of age, lives on the top floor of a Daytona Beach condominium far from her home in Cincinnati. For many years, she and her husband enjoyed life in Florida as snowbirds. In 1976, they decided to stay all year to enjoy their panoramic views of the Intracoastal Waterway and the ocean. By the mid-1990s, macular degeneration stole Josephine's eyesight. Recently her daughter, Julianne Messmer, came to Florida to be with her. Now Julianne is a teacher at the Center for the Visually Impaired, where her mother trained for a life with limited vision.

"Everyone has their bag of rocks," she'll say when she hears of another's troubles; this keeps her own in check. Josephine had a hard time adjusting to low vision. In fact, when her doctor diagnosed her as being in the early stages of the hereditary disease, she rebuked him. She reasoned that since it was passed down within families and that its onset is usually late in life, he must be mistaken, as no one else in her family had it. But Julianne pointed out that none of her relatives had lived as long as Josephine had.

Josephine no longer sings. "I know better," she says. Instead, her time is spent listening to music and books-on-tape. She visits with friends by the swimming pool or over the telephone. Josephine can see only faint shadows on her television, but she does not regret being unable to watch any programs, especially the news. This is not because she finds current events depressing; this well-mannered lady finds newscasters' use of the English language to be upsetting. Having a cold beer or two each and every day helps her put up with such abominations.

Daytona Beach, 2006



Sometimes I think about it, but I don't think about it that much.

JOSH STUNDON

b. September 10, 1993 Limerick, Ireland

Josh Stundon's family vacations in Cocoa Beach, flying in from their home in Ireland as many as three times yearly. One day while at the Merritt Island Mall's food court, Center for the Visually Impaired students approached Josh and asked if he would like to join their Transition Program; he did, and he graduated from the course in 2011. Josh then volunteered as a mentor to other young blind students there. Seemingly, he thrives on challenges and mentoring is consistent with his being a second year law student.

Sightless since infancy, he was born three months prematurely, with undeveloped retinas. When he was four months old, the doctor who was scheduled to attach his retinas went on vacation; Josh's condition worsened and he went fully blind. His law suit went to the high court, and he was awarded "a huge sum of money in compensation. The doctor," he adds, "never offered an explanation."

Josh learned to bowl, swim and rock climb, but he admits he's "not too good at bowling." With the assistance of some boys at the park, he also learned to skateboard. "I have a skateboard video on YouTube; I think it has 20,000 views," he says. Josh speaks six languages and plays piano, preferring classical music. His family's trips across Europe facilitated his being multilingual and instilled in him an appreciation for music. Saying that "I can do a lot of things that sighted people can do" is an understatement for him.

Josh believes that his blindness was harder on his parents than on him. Besides, he and his twin sister Robin got along very well. She wears hearing aids and is also visually impaired, but needs only glasses to function. "We were sick when we were born, in and out of hospitals. I spent the first couple of Christmases in hospitals," Josh recounts. The siblings seldom fought. "She was always there for me when we were growing up," he adds. They do have different tastes in music; she prefers heavy metal. "Robin," Josh points out, "hates sharing a birthday... and I hate sharing the birthday cake."

Daytona Beach, 2013



I can still read large-print books.

JUDITH COCHRANE

b. January 13, 1926 New York City, New York

For years, Harold and Judith Hayflick built homes in Palm Coast within an ITT development. It was during that time that Bill Cochrane and his wife were docked at St. Augustine while touring the Eastern Seaboard on their custom-built yacht. ITT executives learned that Bill Cochrane was a visiting dignitary; subsequently they courted him, offering him a prime parcel of waterfront property in their community. Bill ended up building a home there, whereupon the Hayflicks and Cochranes met and socialized.

Harold and Bill became the best of friends. When the men weren't fishing or riding their motorcycles together, Bill was civically involved. He co-founded the Seaside Music Theater in Daytona Beach, was president of the local Easter Seals chapter, and started Flagler County's Chamber of Commerce. These leadership roles were easy for Bill to take on because he had plenty of past experience. For more than two decades, Bill had been an Assistant Parliamentarian of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Soon after their spouses died, Bill and Judith fell in love and married. Judith did not know his political party affiliation for two years, not until she wrangled it out of him. Bill was always discrete and Judith was well suited for life with a man of Bill's standing. Her own background was privileged. Raised on Long Island, she attended fine schools, including the University of Virginia, where she was part of a group of twenty-five young women who were there to see if the administration could cater to co-eds at the then all-boys school. She went on to earn a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and to supervise school reading programs in Farmingdale, near to where she grew up.

While at a movie on a Sunday afternoon in 2008, Judith realized that she could not read the film credits. She had a routine appointment with her physician that week, and told him things had become blurry. He sent her to an ophthalmologist who diagnosed her with the onslaught of macular degeneration. "I'm a reader. That's the love of my life," she says.

Daytona Beach Shores, 2012



I had beautiful parents; we were poor people, but we had lots of love.

JULIA HARMON

b. February 24, 1914, Evanston, New Jersey

The fact that Julia Harmon skydived on her 92nd and 93rd birthdays might overshadow everything else that she has accomplished and cloud her values. An avid swimmer since her youth, Julia always exercised regularly. To this day she still works out in her condominium's Nautilus room. Her voice lessons and lifelong singing have left Julia with good lung capacity. She sang in her church's choir for decades but had to quit because she could no longer read the musical scores. Three years ago macular degeneration set in gradually, further curtailing her activities. She found jumping from a plane while blind "exhilarating" and would have continued doing so on every birthday, but last year her physician told her that she cannot because she had developed osteoporosis.

Nevertheless, Julia bought a car; she had long wanted a sporty PT Cruiser with a convertible top. She cannot drive it but has it for her northern guests and friends to use, especially those who help her, because she wouldn't want them to furnish transportation. Julia often puts the top down and just sits in it. "I want to go out of this world in a convertible," she says.

Jokingly, Julia says, "I taught kindergarten for one-hundred years, and loved it." In fact she taught for about half as many years. Julia's main setback in life was the dissolution of her first marriage. Her husband divorced her for another woman; he returned home from World War II and "met a better drinker than I was." She then married a good friend whose wife had died of cancer; he died twelve years later.

Julia has never minded living alone, claiming "I'm as independent as all get out. I like it." She is fond of and grateful to her friends who help her with daily chores and clothing coordination. "My neighbors tell me if I have a spot on my blouse or if something doesn't match," she says. Still she is proud, if not relieved, that she manages quite well alone and blind, and offers, with a smile, "I still try to put on makeup. I don't know what I look like." Julia lives life fully. She exercises and started taking Boniva "so maybe I can skydive when I'm ninety-five," she says.

New Smyrna Beach, 2008



I'd rather pick up a cobra than a white cane.

KATHY DAVIS

b. December 17, 1942 Rome, Georgia

"I was always legally blind," says Kathy Davis. Although none of Kathy's family members had visual impairments, her parents didn't treat her condition as a problem. "My parents were extraordinary," she says. Advised to place Kathy in a special school or program but wanting her to grow up with sighted children, Kathy's parents moved to Tallahassee where they enrolled her in Florida State University's Demonstration School. Through high school, she took classes alongside students without learning disabilities.

She attended FSU, which had no provisions for disabled students. "I just had to work harder than anyone else," she says. While there she met and eventually married Jim. After his military service, the couple settled in Daytona Beach where they had three children and enjoyed a busy social life. Then things changed; the unexpected death of her mother was hard on Kathy, and her deteriorating vision was hard on Jim. After sixteen years of marriage, Jim divorced Kathy. "I was broken," she says. Her world closed in on her. She was immobile, totally blind, and raising their children by herself.

Kathy took mobility classes. She acquired a guide dog. She took in a boarder, a young woman who paid her rent by transporting Kathy and her children. Kathy met Tom Davis at what is now Daytona State College, where he taught and she was a mental health counselor. The couple "fell very much in love" and married in 1990. Life was good again, until Tom fell ill. Diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, he passed away after thirteen years of marriage.

Kathy's salvation came from service. In 1987, Jean Hendrick had asked Kathy to be on the board of Independence for the Blind through Education and Training. Wanting to expand the program for visually challenged seniors, they started the Center for the Visually Impaired. Initially, CVI floundered but the Division of Blind Services supported Kathy's efforts to make the new center viable. Kathy led CVI's board of directors for two terms and was president of the National Federation of the Blind of Florida for four years. She is still helping students after her thirty-year tenure at DSC – she initiated a scholarship program for those who need CVI's services.

Kathy recently met a man, whom she's dating. They met on-line.

Ormond Beach, 2012



Before I went blind I was a pilot and flew a Cessna 172 back and forth to North Carolina.

LEMUEL WILSON SUMMERLIN

b. July 13, 1926 Miami, Florida

L. W. Summerlin and his wife Beverly were born exactly a year apart in Miami but met at Florida State University where he studied business. The couple married and settled in Daytona Beach, where the Summerlin family had established a woodwork manufacturing company a decade earlier. Duty called and L.W. joined the Navy during the last two years of World War II.

He became a radio dispatcher on a destroyer in the Pacific, after serving as a swimming instructor. While working below deck, two-inch chains secured him to the floor, ensuring that he would not miss a signal while sending and receiving Morse code. Six men worked around a table, often at frantic speeds and in rough waters, so their stools would slide along the steel floor, often causing them to fall. Their being chained to the deck would prohibit this from happening. L.W. did not know the content of the messages because they were encoded; he only knew that he was relaying pertinent information.

Instead of taking employment in the family business, L.W. joined the police force after the war. "I have a bullet in me now," he says, patting his right shoulder, "left in me from 1947." He was a police officer for eleven years when a civically involved neighbor suggested that he run for the school board. L.W. was appreciative but uninterested at first. Ultimately, he did run, won a seat on the school board, and served for sixteen years. After not seeking reelection again, he became the maintenance director for all of Volusia County schools; he held this post for five years, during which time he became President of the Lions Club.

In 2006 L.W. experienced blurry vision. "It [his vision] went from bad to worse," he says. He wryly adds that he has "perfect peripheral vision." A piano player, he can no longer read the music in the church hymnals. Having been constantly on the go, life became frustrating for L.W. "I can't write. I can't see what I'm doing. I haven't read a newspaper in two years," he laments. Beverly adds, "I feel very sorry that he can't get out and do what he used to do."

Ormond Beach, 2008



I can cross A1A with my eyes closed.

LEON ROSEN

b. May 18, 1964 Amery, Wisconsin

It took Leon Rosen two decades to slowly go blind from retinitis pigmentosa. He drove a car until he was twenty-five, when his field of vision diminished and he almost “ran someone over.” He surrendered his license then. A decade later he saw only diffused light; he began using a white cane. Being blind was “somewhat depressing,” but he returned to college and earned two Associate Degrees, in Business and Accounting.

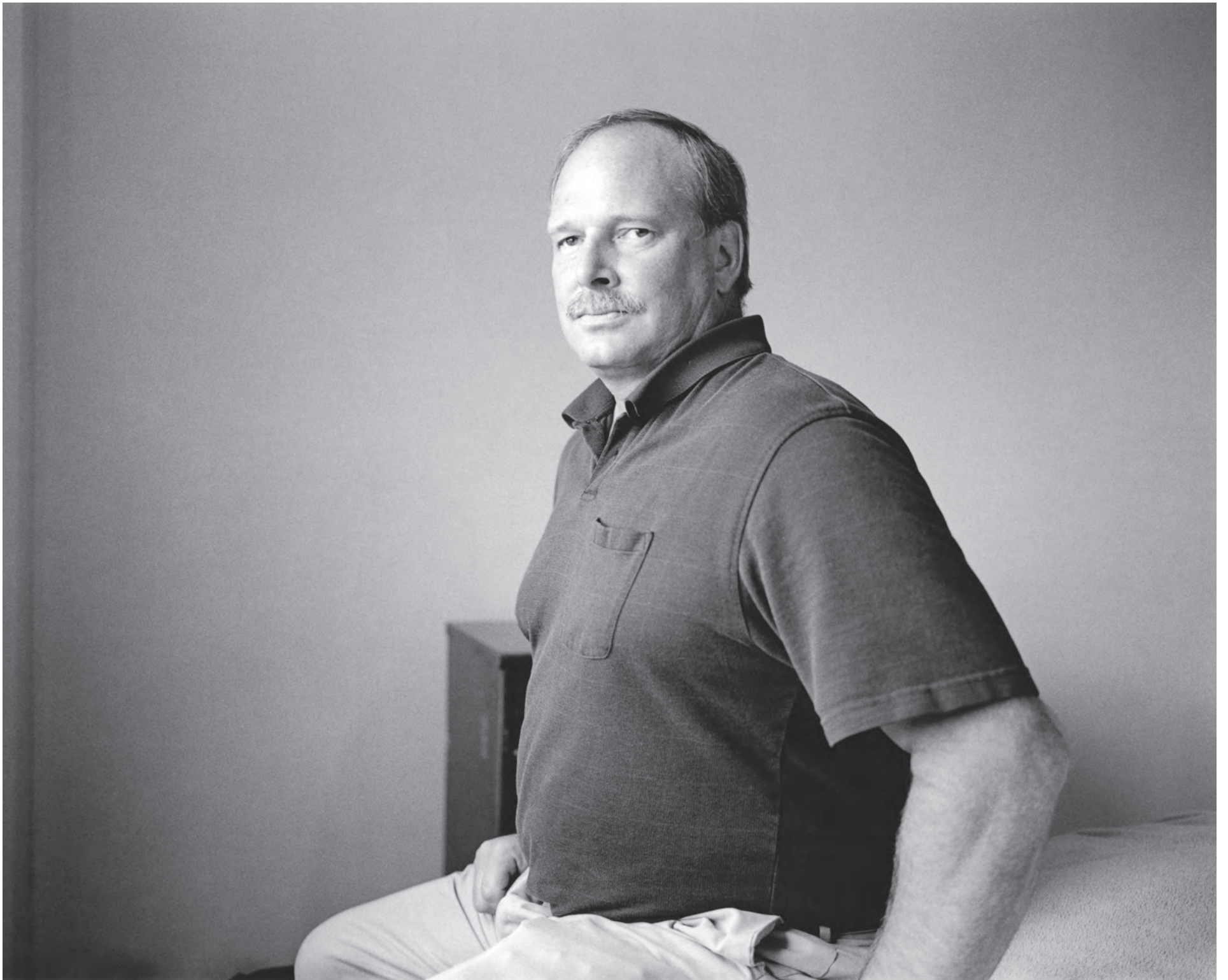
With his wife, Leon started a print shop and a tax preparation business. Using assistive technologies, computer magnification and reading software, he returned to college to earn a degree in business administration. Continuing in higher education, Leon received a Masters Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation in 2005 from the University of Wisconsin. He then moved to Minneapolis where he “spent three years job searching.” At his residential living facility, Vision Loss Resources, he enrolled in classes including independent living, technologies, and Braille.

He applied for a position as rehabilitation teacher at CVI and got an interview via Skype. “He’s the guy,” Ronee Silverman told her staff. Leon flew to Daytona Beach, recalling, “I left at five in the morning and it was zero degrees up there. I got here and it was like eighty-five degrees.” Leon was offered the job but he asked for a few days to think about a decision. He returned home, where it was ten degrees below the freezing point. “It was the end of the thinking,” he says, adding, “It was a wonderful move.”

As an Independent Living Instructor, with certifications in Vision Rehabilitation Therapy and Rehabilitation Counseling, Leon’s responsibilities at CVI are, according to Ms. Silverman, “everything.” To prepare clients for the work force, he oversees a Job Readiness program, a Blindness Support group, and manages the Assistive Technologies department. Leon says that some very scared and depressed people enter the programs, but “after three months they realize that there’s life after blindness.”

He says, “I was very fortunate. The good Lord allowed me to master the sighted world. Now He’s given me the opportunity to master the blind world.” Living blind is “no problem” for Leon who says about his career, “I wouldn’t want to do anything else. I have knowledge to pass on, and there’s still so much for me to learn.”

Daytona Beach, 2012



Being blind doesn't bother me at all.

LOIS BUTTERFIELD

b. December 2, 1956 Middleburg, Vermont

Lois Butterfield moved from rural Vermont to Deltona. The home that she and her husband John bought is new, clean and private. A Perkins Braille, which once survived a house fire, sits on a desk that Lois' great-grandfather made from parts of an old piano. Owning this handsome machine since she was in second grade, she occasionally uses it to note a phone number or a doctor's appointment. Offering slight contrasts to the showroom furniture and prescribed artwork are ornately framed 19th century family portraits and a large model of a sailboat, which John bought second-hand, reassembled and mounted on a living room wall. Lois says, "It's the only way I can tell what one looks like."

Lois lost her sight when she was two years old to retinoblastoma, a "weird and rare" cancer. Although the condition has a propensity to recur, she is grateful that, thanks to early detection, it did not take her life. She takes being sightless in stride because it is natural to her. "Really, it's no big deal," Lois says.

After graduating from high school, she went to a center where evaluations were conducted, and was then sent for dexterity training. After years of clerical positions, she took employment with the Post Office where she operated the switchboard. The position was phased out eighteen years later, and with an "it would be nice not to work" attitude, she and John came to Florida. But not one to be idle, Lois enrolled in a medical transcription program at the Orientation and Adjustment Center.

According to Lois, accepting blindness is easy; it is more difficult to cope with other people's attitudes about the disability. Some think that blind people cannot hear well, and unintentionally make hurtful remarks around a blind person as if he/she was not present, like saying "she's the blind girl." Lois has heard that; in fact, she can hear three conversations at once. She thinks this has less to do with compensating for the loss of sight and more to do with a woman's ability to multi-task. But she says that this talent, "to hear what people are saying," is not always a good thing.

Deltona, 2006



Not being able to drive is really annoying.
I mean really annoying.

MAGGIE MEADE

b. October 31, 1989 Chamblee, Georgia

Maggie Meade was born with leber's congenital amaurosis; she lost all sight at age fourteen to iritis, irritated by glaucoma. "I walked outside one day and everything went black," she says, adding, "I save a lot on electricity." This savings is important because she recently moved out of her family home and into her own apartment nearby.

"It's really good. I really like it," Maggie says about living on her own in her studio apartment. She adds, "It's easier than I thought it would be." She coordinates shopping with her mother and is picked up en route to church services. Her sixteen-year-old brother sometimes irks Maggie. "He's younger than me and he gets to do the cool stuff that I never did, like drive." Socializing has been rough. She is shy, citing her blindness as the reason for her shrinking away from public interaction. "People talk about and around me, and that's frustrating."

Maggie dropped out of the renowned Florida School for the Deaf and Blind in St. Augustine for social and academic reasons. Now she is completing G.E.D. requirements and looks forward to furthering her education. Maggie is not certain of a career path but she is leaning toward psychology. Presently she works part-time, transcribing for a psychologist. She likes spending time watching travel programs and documentaries. "I'm an armchair traveler," she says. She also enjoys creative writing, especially expressing herself through poetry and short stories.

At first, living blind was not easy for Maggie; it is still difficult at times. "I wanted to stay in my room all the time," she says. But whatever the causes of her early extreme angst, Maggie is now able to "put them aside. I don't care about them because I put them aside. There are still things I enjoy, so I enjoy them. I'm still capable of doing many things, so I do these things. You have to keep adjusting every day of your life, the adjusting doesn't end."

At times her positive attitude is challenged. "Sometimes I feel trapped and stuck," she says, like when she walked past her mother's home. Some children pointed her back and she again over-walked the home. Finally, one boy offered his hand to her and walked her there.

Palm Coast, 2008



There are times I just want to go and punch a hole in a tree.

MARGARET BUCHANAN

b. January 4, 1932 Scotia, New York

Her father was Algonquin and Mohegan; her mother was French and Iroquois. Margaret Buchanan says this makes her “a Heinz 57 variety.” It is not surprising that Native American culture always fascinated her. A Tribal Chief in Florida’s Panhandle would eventually name her Gentle Grandmother Winterhawk. Her children, born seven years apart beginning in 1950, the same year of her marriage and graduation from college, became Strawberry Dream, Nighthawk, and Full of Bull.

In the Adirondack Mountains, Margaret was a physical therapist while raising her children and involving herself in powwows. Eventually her life would take some difficult turns and she wound up in Florida in 1983, moving here seemingly out of desperation. She explains, “I had a tough life growing up because my dad was an alcoholic and abusive. What was bad I learned from him.” Margaret’s interest in Native American ways was a refuge, a respite from a cruel world that only intensified after the deaths of her first husband in 1979 and her second husband in 1983.

Margaret did not have the \$3,500 to pay the State of Florida to take the necessary physical therapy exam to become licensed. Instead, she worked in cooking and serving jobs throughout the Daytona Beach area where she would initiate the first Native American Intertribal in Volusia County. Nevertheless, she realized that Florida’s sun didn’t shine for everyone. Referring to politicians as well as to common folk she says that “when I came to Florida I learned what trash we have here.” She contends, “They come from the North,” and she believes that “Florida still is a slave state with a plantation attitude,” adding that “Native Americans aren’t considered worth bothering with.”

In spite of decreased vision caused by macular degeneration, Margaret still designs and sews Native American dresses, shirts and moccasins. Along with her son, Nighthawk, who crafts walking sticks and other related objects, she sells their wares at festivals and powwows. An elder, though no longer on her tribe’s inner circle, people still come to Margaret for counsel. She has learned that “you can’t let them get inside of you. You don’t pull in their pain. It takes away your energy. I did it for too long.”

Holly Hill, 2008



I got tired of trying to see.

MARSHA SUMMERS

b. April 26, 1940 Buffalo, New York

Somehow Marsha Summers' abusive father got custody of her when he and her mother divorced. When she was eleven years old, she and her father moved to DeLand. Marsha's residence had changed but her frightful existence did not; she subsequently was left with many emotional scars. Marsha remembers her mother's side of the family as a very loving one who enjoyed their grand piano and sing-alongs. "They hugged and kissed all the time," she recalls. Wanting the same, she married and had two children. Marsha planned to become a counselor but changed her mind. She discovered that she found music more fulfilling. She had always been musically talented; as a teenager, she had learned to play the piano by ear on an old upright.

In 1979 Marsha left her husband and their two children. Her traumatic past prohibited her from being an effective wife and mother. Yet her ex-husband and their children stayed in touch, concerned with her well-being. "I needed to do a lot of internal growing," she acknowledges. Then largely independent, Marsha decided to become a musician, to make her living with music. She began playing piano at area nursing homes. She crooned at bars, restaurants and country clubs; she formed small bands with other local musicians.

Marsha became a successful musician, playing with regularity around the county. She got a boyfriend, and they have been a couple for twenty years. But in 2004, a series of tragedies struck including the death of her ex-husband. "Every time I turned around it seemed like the rug was being pulled out from under me," she says. Then her vision failed; Marsha was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa. She could no longer drive or use a computer. "I went into depression like all of us do," she says.

Yet again Marsha's world had changed. She says, "I no longer wanted to go out because it's all a blur to me." So she embarked on a new direction – giving piano lessons at her home. Spiritually, teaching became increasingly important to her. She even bought a grand piano: "I played that piano and it was like a marriage. I waited for it all my life." Now she says, "Maybe some of my blindness occurred so I can share with other blind people."

Port Orange, 2008



The only thing is I can't look at pictures.

MARTHA CLYMAN

b. July 2, 1915 The Bronx, New York

"I have a tired heart," says Martha Clyman about losing her nine siblings and burying one of her three children. "I even had to bury my 106 year old aunt!" Nevertheless, Martha survived two heart attacks and a nineteen-foot fall which required more than four years of recovery time. "My husband dropped dead unexpectedly," she says while adding, "he was a man I wasn't supposed to marry." Her husband wasn't American-born or a doctor like most others in her family, but she quickly points out that "he gave me a wonderful life."

Her husband, Sam, had fled Poland to escape the Nazi onslaught. Later Sam lost his deep sense of religion while serving in the military so the Clymans stopped practicing their orthodoxy. However, "we had a Jewish life," Martha says. "I caught him making bacon in my kosher kitchen; I almost killed him," she laughs. Sam became a gemologist in Manhattan's Diamond District and was appointed to the Commission on Human Rights. The couple enjoyed an active lifestyle. "I was a goer and a doer all my life," she says about their socializing and volunteer work. She came to Florida without her husband; he died just weeks before the move.

Martha believes that her vision problems began soon after a dentist hammered too hard while performing implant surgery, hitting her sinus cavity; perhaps he was angry about reduced charges via arrangements with her primary dentist. She had a heart attack while recovering. She continued living actively and says, "I was really legally blind before I knew it." Her ophthalmologist thought that "I was living on memory" because she was able to get along very well as she followed set routines.

Now she and her son, a funeral director, rent a large home in Ormond Beach, but she is isolated; although she still wants her independence she "doesn't get out at all." She lives in her side of the still-undecorated house and points out that they had to install an intercom system to communicate easily. In fact, the arrangement was his idea. "You can be dead for a whole week before anyone would find you," he observed, adding, "You could decompose." Martha laughs off his remarks, asserting, "I'm glad I can't see well. I can't see the lines on my face."

Ormond Beach, 2008



Just because you do things differently doesn't mean you're strange. Sometimes it's what you have to do.

MICHELLE BUCKNER
LAURA BUCKNER

b. December 22, 1992 Springfield, Illinois
b. September 23, 1994 Athens, Georgia

Sometimes people will gawk at Michelle and Laura Buckner. Some make inane and rude remarks about the girls' albinism. They may comment on their occasional clumsiness caused by the severe nearsightedness that accompanies their condition. Or they might say something about their platinum hair. Indeed, some may be envious of the girls' exquisite looks – their flawless alabaster-like complexions, their heavenly blue eyes, their erect postures and their steely, confident expressions. Their mother, Karla, worried about how the girls might be ridiculed, and they were. But, as Michelle points out, "they made fun of our pale skin, not our vision." Laura says that the staring gets "a little annoying." But most comments are complimentary. Some people say, "your hair is so pretty."

Michelle explains, "Sometimes you feel pretty or unique, but some days you also feel hopeless. It's nice to be called pretty, but I'd rather be able to go outside without being sunburned, or be able to read without getting a headache, or be able to drive like other people my age, instead of having to rely on others to take me where I need to go. Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful for what I have in life, and I've accepted my condition, but that doesn't make it easy."

"Everything you do you have to do a little differently, but we've always had to do it differently. I know it's different, but I don't notice it's different." Laura adds, "It comes naturally." Michelle enjoys reading but must use large print or audio books. A magnifying glass helps but still her eyes soon strain. She likes drawing so she holds her own photographs close to her eyes in order to copy them. Laura wants to study marine biology but cannot take exposure to the sun. It is, of course, difficult for each girl to get around; in all likelihood that will change when the boys start calling and insist on taking them out.

Generally the girls are not treated any differently than people without their condition. "I think they can take care of themselves," says Karla. She adds that "They're angelic, but one's got a little devil in her. Both are confident."

Osteen, 2012



The biggest thing about blindness is acceptance.

MIRIAM LIQUE

b. December 9, 1936 Lebanon, New Hampshire

Miriam Lique grew up in New Hampshire farm country but she could not visually enjoy that beautiful area until she was three years old. Then a doctor scraped the cataracts from her eyes; for the first time she saw her mother's face. She remembers vividly the dress that she wore that day, an orange and gold gown with lacy frills. That was also the first time she saw sunshine and green grass.

Children, including her own brothers and sisters, were often unkind to her because of her poor vision. Kids made fun of her and even put dirt in her lunch sandwiches. Her six siblings would not play with her; her parents were overprotective and people felt sorry for her. But all this would make Miriam stronger. "I had to go out and get what I wanted," she explains. She became self-sufficient, and her determination would serve her throughout her life, especially as her vision worsened. While she was in her twenties, glaucoma further robbed her of sight.

After her husband of twenty-one years divorced her, Miriam's children insisted she move from California to be closer to them. She chose to live near her son in Florida. With limited vision yielding to legally blind status, she worked her way from employment in housekeeping to a position in residential care.

She has always embraced the attitude to "go after what you want. You don't learn to handle your hardships until you get out there and do it." Today Miriam is an avid reader, with the aid of a magnifying glass. Books fill cases throughout her apartment and even line the walls of her closet. She enjoys taking buses and walking, crediting her blindness training for the ability to get around on her own. She plans to learn crafts and join support groups, largely to help others adjust to their living with blindness. She takes special pride in what a sister confided to her, tearfully relating that her sibling admitted to not treating her nicely when they were young. Miriam's sister admits now that she is proud of her, adding, "You have gotten ahead and you have done it. That's more than I can say for myself." While looking back on her life Miriam marvels, "Sometimes I don't know how I made it through this far."

Daytona Beach, 2008



The “gift” is having my disability be the ability.

NICK MCNEILL

b. February 24, 1990 West Palm Beach, Florida

Abandoned by their father, Nick McNeill’s mother, Deborah, raised him and his two brothers. After her boyfriend let his DJ practice wane, Deborah was determined to revive it as a family affair, purchasing sound and video equipment. Nick didn’t let ocular albinism and nystagmus deter him from being the team’s photographer.

Legally blind and with the ailments from two conditions, which include an aversion to bright light, sensitivity to touching his eyes, and sight-fatigue, Nick was mainstreamed through high school. The socialization, not the academics, posed a problem; teachers treated him differently. The computer became his lifeline. With the use of a built-in screen magnifier, Nick taught himself PhotoShop.

Nick became a wedding photographer as a young teenager, taking pictures alongside his family members as they worked. He then gave a complimentary slideshow to the bride and groom until he was experienced enough to be the main photographer. When film gave way to digital image capturing, he observed professionals at work, “how wedding photographers interact with people, how they handled themselves in different situations.” With a pleasant and helpful disposition, Nick had what it took to succeed – people and computer skills.

Realizing the irony of a blind person being a wedding photographer, Nick admits “It’s kind of awkward, but if you set your mind to do something, you can accomplish whatever you want.” His mother provides transportation to his jobs, but he explains that she is more than just a chauffeur. Nick is able to control an image’s depth by auto-focus, given modern technology. What cannot be so expertly given is the picture’s form; he composes his photographs by discerning color and shape. Nick understands that what differentiates photographers from technicians is “how the frame is working. It’s more than content, it includes detail.” This is where his mom becomes an integral part of the team; she handles posing the people. She might have the wedding couple “turn a little this way or that.”

Nick wrestles with his condition, while expressing ambivalence. “I feel the disability. It’s kind of hard to explain. The restrictions I have. It’s kind of a gift. At the same time I’d rather trade it with someone who has vision. But I wouldn’t have gotten to go to North Dakota and Wyoming. I also hunt.”

Holly Hill, 2010



I don't think about what I can't do. I concentrate on the things I can do.

NICK NAGY

b. August 18, 1946 Monroe, Michigan

In 1992, when Nick Nagy was forty-six years old, he had a stroke. As a result he lost the upper left vision in both eyes. He was hospitalized six times before having open-heart surgery. In 1995 he lost vision in his left eye in a cataract removal/ lens implant operation. Then he lost most of his vision in his right eye from diabetes. He had a kidney transplant in late 1999.

When the temperature went below sixty-degrees, Nick would “uncontrollably shake.” This made his outside job at the Ford Motor Company unbearable. He left Detroit for Florida in 1996 and came to Daytona Beach because of the climate and his interest in speed. The illnesses that besieged Nick did not hinder his lifelong enthusiasm for motorcycles – he had as many as four at one time – and sailboats and powerboats. He sold all of them but never lost interest in them. He admitted, “I should have quit driving much before I did but did not want to lose my independence. However I knew it was time to give it up.” Fortunately, his bad luck would change.

Ever since meeting Jeanette Cage at a church social, the two were a couple. Neither could have imagined how different their lives would become. “Jeanette stepped to the plate and took the Safe Boating Class offered by the Coast Guard,” Nick related. Actually they both took the class and graduated. Nick was allowed to take the test orally. Then they used their seventeen-foot ninety horsepower outboard frequently. “Jeanette does a great job driving the boat,” he pointed out. Then, in 2005, Nick bought another motorcycle, and had a sidecar installed. Jeanette took on the task of learning to drive so Nick “could have the wind in my face again.”

Daytona Beach, 2006



I was as scared as a cat in a lion's den.

OSWALD KING

b. November 10, 1951 | Bridgetown, Barbados

"I followed my wife-to-be to the United States," smiles Oswald King. The couple settled in New York City, where he became a chef, as he was in Barbados. The couple married in 1987. "I think I'm still married," he ponders aloud. After he built a house in Palm Coast, he learned that his spouse "would rather be gambling in Atlantic City." Soon Oswald became a supervisor at a wholesale bakery. While hanging a banner there, he realized that "everything was blurry."

In 1993, Oswald was diagnosed with diabetes. "That's when my life went upside down; it led to my losing my sight." Furthermore, he and his wife separated in 2003. A year later he lost his sight entirely. Oswald remembers, "I lost my left eye within a month after I was told I would go blind quickly; my right eye was still hanging in there but the retina eventually collapsed."

"Now," Oswald explains, "I use my hands, smell, ears and everything that tells me what's around me." He still enjoys cooking. Without sight, Oswald uses sounds to measure. However, his life is not easy. Although he has completed mobility training and possesses the skills to bank, grocery shop, rent videos, and occasionally visit the liquor store, he has stopped going outdoors much. Afraid of being victimized while walking outdoors, Oswald uses a treadmill.

Once he realized that he was going to lose his sight, Oswald was ready to give up. He succumbed to "sitting in the house all day and going crazy." He wrote a will, accounting for his last living day. Eventually his attitude changed. "I realized that I was still young and had a lot of life left in me and I decided to keep going forward and adjust. I kept on doing what I do best, cooking and taking care of my home, chores, etc. I think the support of my friends and members of my church were a motivation for me and the thought that someday I would rejoin my family back in Barbados. I still have all my family – my mother, four sisters and six brothers. I also have sixteen nieces and nephews back home and look forward to spending time with them. So here I am waiting for the next best thing," he contends.

Flagler Beach, 2009



I take one day at a time, and appreciate what I have instead of what I don't have.

PATRICIA LIPOVSKY

b. November 7, 1950 Woodbridge, New Jersey

Patricia Lipovsky had a headache after playing outdoors one day when she was four years old. Within two weeks she became partially paralyzed and lost her vision. The paralysis subsided but her vision did not return. The doctors surmised that an insect bite had robbed her of her sight. Her mother fought to have Patricia mainstreamed in the New Jersey public school system where the family lived. She learned Braille in the first grade, and began developing social skills. Some children thought it was great fun to hide her lunchbox or her schoolbooks. Others, though, would come to her aid. Not being treated differently than other children made her confident and assertive.

Patricia met her husband during high school, and for years they moved around the country as he climbed the corporate ladder. After twenty-two years of marriage and much contemplation on her part, she initiated divorce proceedings because she felt her marital problems could not be resolved. Patricia was suddenly alone in Jacksonville with three children. She went back to school and got a part-time job. She trained at Florida's Rehabilitation Center, now The Orientation and Adjustment Center, in Daytona Beach years before. She relocated to Daytona Beach in 1993. Independent and able, she bought a house and learned how to pay bills; she now cares for herself and her children sans a husband.

Patricia has dabbled in the real estate market and now owns three houses, two of which she rents out. She also manages a house for a friend, an absentee landlord. She is "always running around." Visiting elderly residents in nursing homes is a meaningful activity for her. She is saddened by their lack of visitors but revels in their "knowledge and wonderful stories." Her visits make them happy and appreciative; in turn, Patricia believes that she is rewarded ten-fold. In the evenings, she is developing a social group, "Over Fifty and Starting Over," which fosters an environment for people to meet and talk.

Daytona Beach, 2006



I believe that I do not have to allow my disabilities to limit my abilities.

PATTIE TEDESCO JONES

b. July 12, 1943 Newark, New Jersey

Pattie Jones painted as a youngster but she never imagined the course of events that would return her to the easel. As an evangelist, Pattie ministered throughout North America, hosted a Christian radio program and ran a 24-hour soup kitchen in New Jersey. She and her husband, David, were called to Pennsylvania to run a halfway house, operate a thrift shop, and hold church services. They retired and moved to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, where they cared for foster children and gave refuge to others.

These activities came to an end in 1996, after Pattie fell on a concrete floor while praying in church. She developed peripheral vision and long term memory loss; she had a stroke which forced her to give up missionary work. Because cataracts had formed, she had surgery in 2004. Vision in her left eye was improved but she was blinded in her right eye by an aneurism which had formed during the operation. She and David moved to Ormond Beach the following year. To her nay-saying friends who discouraged the move because of hurricanes, Pattie replied, "You don't have to shovel heat."

She eventually developed glaucoma in her left eye but refused surgery. She preferred living with diminished sight rather than to chance another medical mishap. Now her vision is "like seeing through a pencil hole in a piece of paper."

Pattie creates whimsical pictures of flowers and fairies which she scans for greeting cards. With a computer and camera furnished by the Division of Blind Services she can see her work in progress on a large television. On the back of each card, in respect to the U.S. troops serving abroad, is the message "Return Home Safe," which she gleaned from the monarch butterflies' migrations and rejuvenations. In addition to running her greeting card company, New Sight, Pattie illustrates children's books.

She is certainly rejuvenated. She was at first stupefied, scared, depressed and bewildered; she could not imagine how people functioned without sight. Pattie has learned from her support group at the Center for the Visually Impaired that things can go wrong but setbacks "do not have to be bad. There's no sense being angry," she says. "I'm not going to get it [her vision] back."

Ormond by the Sea, 2009



I remember pretty much the whole hundred years.

PAULINE BENSON

b. January 11, 1907 Buffalo, Kentucky.

“I don’t have much to complain about,” Pauline Benson says. “My father was told by his doctor that he had six months to live but he lived into his eighties,” she recounts. Nevertheless, he heeded the diagnosis and headed home to Kentucky to say goodbye to his friends. “But after about six months of saying goodbyes he went back to St. Louis,” explains Pauline, where he was fired from a railroad job when management learned that he had allowed a hobo to ride the rails.

The family then moved to Chicago where Pauline completed high school. She worked as a stenographer and attended a business college from which she graduated. “The Depression didn’t scare me. I was lucky. I was never out of work. All you had to do was be good with a typewriter and you could get a job,” she explains.

With adventure in her blood and a railroad pass that her father gave her, Pauline headed to California, where she met and married Albert Wallace Benson. She worked for a Los Angeles newspaper, writing women’s page feature stories. Once, a WAC recruiter came through her office. That night she told her husband, “If I weren’t married I’d join the WACs.” He replied, “Don’t let me stop you.” Next the Navy recruiter came and she expressed her interest to her husband again. He said, “I wasn’t kidding. It will benefit you your whole life. I married someone very smart.” With Albert’s encouragement, she joined the Navy in 1941.

Eventually, the couple had a son and a daughter when Pauline was in her early forties. Her family moved to Miami where Albert was a financial adviser and she taught home economics in a junior high school. Now Pauline lives happily with her daughter and son-in-law. She can read a newspaper with very strong glasses and she enjoys television despite her failing hearing and vision. She remembers, nearly a hundred years ago, the first word she learned – ball. She always has had a love of learning. “Being aware of what words mean was a thrill.” Pauline offers advice about longevity: “Pick the right grandparents.” She advocates “good genes, good shoes and good teeth.”

Interlachen, 2008



It's kind of like the outskirts of Kentucky.

RACHEL SNODGRASS-NEAL

b. January 20, 1991 | Melbourne, Florida

Rachel Snodgrass-Neal has surmounted two hurdles – having aniridia and being biracial. Aniridia, the absence of an iris, prevents normal vision. She has only peripheral vision and, her mother points out, “can see little things but not big things.” She adds, “For example, she wouldn’t be able to see a truck coming down the street.” Hence, she held back from getting a driver’s license because of depth perception limitations, but was unhindered in other pursuits. She played soccer on a few undefeated teams for ten years. She “lost track of [her] trophies.” An avid reader, she favors science fiction and fantasy books. She plans to attend college to major in either law or architecture.

Concerning her vision, Rachel almost takes her problems in stride. “I accept it,” she says, adding, “I don’t live in denial, or it’ll suck. I just live life with the fact that I’m different.” Further, she offers, “There are worse things. It’s not simple. It’s just not terrible. You could have been born with cancer.” Having to learn to live actively with low vision since birth, she explains, was normal to her; she’s not too bothered by it today. “It’s nothing serious, except at night,” she says. Then her friends assist. Her good attitude is traced back to her parents and teachers. None treated her differently. In fact, her parents treated her as they did her sighted sister.

What was more difficult to understand was the “twisted people who would shout and swear” at her and her family because her father is African American and mother is Caucasian. “People do look at you differently if you’re a mixed kid,” she says, adding, “There were times when people would say nasty things. I would just say ‘Whatever’.” She knows that it is the parents of these children “who are teaching them to be racists.”

Valkaria, 2008



I could train a sea lion to balance a beach ball on his nose in twenty minutes.

RAY HARMON

b. September 3, 1940 Albany, Indiana

Ray Harmon is an educated, self-made man who, although limited by blindness, is undeterred and unimpeded in his quests. Playing music, especially the blues, is a lifelong pursuit of his. Now he is studying throat singing, in which multiple notes can be sung simultaneously, via a crash course on a CD. With the belief that everything has life and each man has “a little Buddha” residing in him, this was liberating music. He envisions a man sitting on a horse by a flowing river facing a mountain range and thinks to himself, “How lucky I am.”

Ray had once intended to major in pre-med but was sidetracked. He wound up on a nuclear-powered submarine after his third enlistment in the Navy. During his final days in Vietnam, he and his buddies had the same tattoos applied to their calves. In Ray’s case it seems oddly prophetic; the tattoos are of two tiny butterflies that appear as eyes. They are butterflies found in the highlands of Vietnam “that land on your face and drink out of your eyes.”

After his military service, Ray was hired by the Navy to train dolphins and seals in California. He then formed an underwater engineering business. After six years, he became a financial planner. On Christmas Eve of 1982, while sitting at his dining room table filling out forms, Ray was shot in the head at close range. “I went from 20/20 to zip-zip. It didn’t cut the nerves, it destroyed them,” he explains.

He theorizes on what happened. Perhaps people saw him with money. It was likely a two-person job and Ray believes that his then girlfriend was the mastermind. That she had assistance, or perhaps gave assistance, is verified by the fact that there were no signs of forced entry but she was killed in the act. Maybe \$2,200 wasn’t enough to share. Maybe she shot Ray and opened the door for her partner to help remove the body. Maybe her partner wanted it all, with no witnesses. Or maybe she had nothing to do with the crime, but either way she lost more than Ray did. “Tough beans,” he says now, “It could have been worse. I could have awoke a Democrat.”

Daytona Beach, 2008



I had that motorcycle for thirty-six years; I kept it longer than my ex-wife.

ROBERT DEUBLER, JR.

b. March 12, 1948 Niagara Falls, New York

Robert Deubler, Jr. says that his wife of thirty years divorced him because he was going blind. So he left Las Vegas, where they had lived and raised their two children, to come to Florida. Robert claims that he wanted “to get as far away from her as I could without getting my feet wet.” Although she took over the \$500 monthly mortgage of their \$300,000-plus home, she could not come up with the payments, losing the house and everything else. “I’m better off now than she is,” he points out.

Robert feels this way in spite of his blindness and all that it took from him. He loved his career as an electrician and misses it terribly. He wishes he could still build computers from scratch; he built the controls for Disney’s Space Mountain. Life after macular degeneration was difficult at first. Now he takes it “with a grain of salt,” enjoying singles’ dances at the Moose Lodge and other social events, especially those at the VFW. He gets out whenever he can and will “jump on a bus” when there are no friends around to offer him rides.

Still there are challenges. Robert explains that “If it weren’t for the V.A. I’d be living out of a shopping cart,” but adds, “the V.A. knows I’m blind, why doesn’t Social Security?” He has a strained relationship with his sister, who lives nearby. He says she called him “trailer trash,” and made him sleep in their van on the street, not in her home. “She’s goofy in the head,” he says, adding that “she and her husband have got a Corvette and two Harleys parked in the garage, but she’s over 200 pounds, so the two of them can’t ride one bike.”

Robert’s son made a print of two photographs of him, one taken in 1973 and one taken in 2003; both show him standing with his Triumph motorcycle in Daytona Beach. Always lean, he sported a ponytail and mustache early on, but later wore his hair short while keeping the mustache. He doesn’t look too much different today, but he has shaved away the facial hair. Still, he offers, “The bike looks the same; the driver should have been kept in the garage.”

Ormond Beach, 2008



I'm in Florida now!

ROSLYN WATERS

b. January 4, 1907 Barbados, West Indies

"It was beautiful. I could walk barefoot. I lived in the country. My aunt took me shopping," recalls Roslyn Waters about her youth in Barbados, when one-horse buggies and four-horse carriages were her family's modes of transportation. She remembers going to town to buy material, and either sewing her own clothes or having a dressmaker sew her garments. There she met Oxford Brewster, who had come from Panama where he worked on the canal. "Somehow he liked me," says Roslyn. He paid her way to come to America with him. She arrived at Ellis Island and went to Brooklyn. The couple soon married and settled in the Bronx where they had three daughters. Roslyn and Oxford would eventually go their separate ways.

On the day that JFK was assassinated, a rainy day in New York City, Mr. Brewster was struck by a car while crossing a Manhattan street. Although he died on Christmas Eve from his injuries, his untimely death was "a blessing in disguise," says Roslyn's daughter. Roslyn recalls that he had been a mean alcoholic, an abusive Jekyll and Hyde person. Her daughter remembers Roslyn waking up one morning with two black eyes and saying, "That's it." She remembers when her mother wore dark sunglasses, which she later understood was to conceal the beating that Roslyn's husband delivered. She thinks that those beatings were the cause of her mother's later vision problems.

In New York, her daughter says, "All the young women called her Mom. She was everyone's mother. I was jealous!" Roslyn had worked in a laundry, ironing clothes for fifteen years, until her family discouraged her because of health concerns. Then she got a job serving meals at Bellevue Hospital before coming to rural Florida with her daughter; she had wanted to live alone for as long as she could.

Now, even though glaucoma has hindered her vision, Roslyn makes her bed each morning and enjoys "going out." She married a man who shared her enjoyment of socializing and bowling. The only senior citizen on the bowling team at the lanes where they played, Roslyn was an exceptional bowler, once beating one of the professionals.

Interlachen, 2008



When you have to do stuff on your own,
your self-esteem improves a lot.

RYAN MANN

b. May 9, 1981 West Palm Beach, Florida

Born blind, with leber congenital amaurosis, Ryan Mann began attending the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind when he was in sixth grade. He didn't miss the public school's large classes. His vision teacher there had taught him Braille, but Ryan was always catching up on schoolwork. His skills improved in his new school because most of his classes were taught with Braille. Ryan gravitated to the computer labs, where he experimented and learned new programs.

Tentative about attending college, Ryan's self-confidence was assuaged by the good grades he earned at (Daytona State College). His experience there helped him ease back into a mainstream environment when he transferred to the University of South Florida in Tampa, where he earned a Bachelors Degree in Psychology. He enjoyed dorm life; he and his suitemates got along well but "others were nervous about people with disabilities." However, he eventually moved into a different dorm because of too much socializing. "I needed to get some sleep," he says. "I needed to be alert in class."

After college, Ryan got a job at the New Vision for Independence in Leesburg. He walked to work and took pride in his self-sufficiency. When his position was cut due to budget crunches, he moved back home. To maintain his skills Ryan volunteered at the Center for the Visually Impaired; soon he was hired to teach computer classes.

Ryan explains that when sighted people comment, "it's too bad you can't see," it doesn't bother him. "Since I never had it [vision], I'm not missing anything. It's a really hard adjustment for people who become blind later in life. They know what it's like to have sight and that they'll have to do without it." Ryan concludes, "I don't really think much about not having vision. Once in awhile – when something goes wrong with a computer and I don't have access to a screen saver." Besides, he adds, "I'm a little bit of an introvert. I spend forty hours plus around people. After that I want time to myself."

Ormond by the Sea, 2013



It's not my nature to complain.

SUSAN DE ANGELO

b. April 27, 1936 · London, England

Susan De Angelo is a genteel English lady. She lived what reads like a storybook life, for awhile. She married her boyfriend after the couple had moved from England to France, where he attended medical school. The newlyweds eventually relocated to upstate New York and raised four children. Then in 1968, when he was thirty-nine years old, Susan's husband died.

Twenty years later, Susan moved to Florida, alone. When she suffered a massive stroke after open-heart surgery in 2001, she suffered loss of her peripheral vision. However, she maintained her composure and continued at her job at City Island Library when she was well enough to return to work. She loved the library. She translated for the area's many French-speaking Canadian winter visitors while tending to her other responsibilities. But to her dismay, as she puts it, "They [the library] didn't want me back." They told her that she could not do the job. They even gave her a test, but did not furnish adaptive aids so she was set to fail. After five productive years, she was terminated.

Susan enrolled in the Center for the Visually Impaired Independent Living Class. Meanwhile her anger over her unfair firing was intensified by the library's refusal to even listen to her pleas for reinstatement. Then, through discussions with the library staff and bringing to light the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Susan was welcomed back to work. She was transferred to the Ormond Beach branch in 2003, where she works with gleeful diligence while overseeing book mending and replacing worn book labels with the aid of a magnifying glass and JAWS, a blind-person's software program.

"I love working here," she exclaims. "If I didn't work I'd be miserable," she admits. When she's not working, Susan is engaged in biofeedback to help restore her vision; it stimulates parts of the brain that were damaged and led to her vision loss. Susan is constantly checking out books of varying font sizes to measure her progress. She takes great satisfaction with her continued improvement and looks forward to the day when she can again read with relative ease. Her admirable attitude no doubt helps. "It's been a life of challenges. But I might be a very weak person if I didn't have challenges."

Ormond Beach, 2008



Being blind makes you stronger.

TAMIKA BUTTS

b. April 11, 1976 Fort Pierce, Florida

“I cried once,” Tamika Butts said, and then got back to “living my life; I keep it moving.” She remains chipper, active and independent in spite of having gone blind quickly. “I don’t have the time to be down,” she says, adding, “Even when I lost my sight I just kept on going.” Tamika told people who asked to help her, to leave her alone. “I can do it myself. I don’t need a babysitter.”

Tamika explains that too many people get their hands held and they can’t let go. They lose their independence, which Tamika cherishes too much to let wane. “Nothing really changes,” she offers, “but people’s attitudes.” Tamika put herself on the fast-track to learn Braille, and she went about learning it passionately. “I love Braille,” she exclaims. It’s central, she knows, to maintaining her freedom. When she meets young men who are also blind, Tamika asks them if they read Braille. If they say “No,” she replies, “Okay, I’ll see you later.” She doesn’t want anything to do with those who won’t help and better themselves.

“I wanted to leave my hometown of Fort Pierce, but did only when I got blind. More doors opened up for me now than in the past. Being blind makes you want to take that leap of faith,” Tamika observes. Within months of starting a sightless life, Tamika’s parents drove her to The Rehabilitation Center in Daytona Beach, and dropped her off there. “They just hauled buggy. It was scary but it wasn’t that bad,” she recalls. She relished learning ways to live efficiently and productively, and she made plans. She’d capitalize on a Marketing Degree she had earned at Indian River Community College. That’s her first choice because of her love of working with people. “I make friends everywhere I go,” she asserts. But should the job market be slow, she’ll return to college to get a degree in sociology. She’s fascinated by the psychology of how people develop and make life decisions. “I want to know why,” she says.

Daytona Beach, 2012



Macular degeneration changed my life, but I didn't let it take over my life.

TEDD JAKOMAS

b. August 6, 1923 McKeesport, Pennsylvania

Tedd Jakomas, after fruitful careers in the beauty salon, real estate and landscaping businesses, realized his true calling, and became “Tedd, the Bikeman.” His community service was highlighted around the country in newspaper and television reports; it earned him multiple awards and much recognition. He even carried the torch in the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. All of this is amazing because, since 1990, Tedd has lived with limited vision caused by macular degeneration. Nevertheless, he has given more than 15,000 refurbished bicycles to needy children throughout the region after putting them in the hands of fifty-one non-profit organizations. His impairment was “a blessing in disguise” for him. It led to a new, more rewarding life. He credits his wife, Andrea, for his blessed lot in life. “She’s the eyes and the motivation to do all this,” he praises.

Tedd was an accomplished athlete. He excelled in almost every sport, and always assumed each sport’s central position. He is quick to admit that he has forever been a control-freak. However, with his work on getting bikes to those who will appreciate but cannot afford them, he is the cheerleader. He does not perform mechanical labor, but makes sure that everything is in order for the assembly to move smoothly ahead, overseeing a “24/7” operation. He has rallied a crew of expert volunteers, coordinates the workflow, and supervises just about everything else that Andrea does not manage. When funds get low, they supplement the operation with their social security checks. They refuse to take any form of compensation for their labors of love.

Tedd does lament that such severe sight loss was difficult for him to accept at first. After all, he had lived an active life in every respect, “even failing at retirement three times,” points out Andrea. He could no longer drive a car and lost the ability to participate in vigorous contact sports. He says, “I still play golf but I can’t get the ball into the hole.” With his indomitable spirit, “good genes and motivation,” Tedd does insist upon painting an occasional newly refurbished bike, to the dismay of his fellow workers. “They tell me that it will look better if I don’t paint it,” chuckles Tedd.

New Smyrna Beach, 2008



I was blessed. I had a perfect life.

THERESA ASMAR

b. June 13, 1935 Brooklyn, New York

“Glasses are a habit,” says Theresa Asmar explaining that she has always worn a pair. Now, even though they don’t improve her vision, she continues to put them on regularly. “I was born with glasses,” she adds.

Theresa lost vision in one of her eyes because of macular degeneration when she was in her twenties. However, this did not affect her quality of life. She married, and the couple raised two children in Brooklyn. Life was wonderful. “God was good to me until 1995, when God decided I needed a tragedy,” she adds. Then six people within her immediate family died, including her husband. Her daughter asked her to come live by her in Texas and her son encouraged her to be with him, in Ormond Beach. “He brought me here for R and R,” she says. He did not want her living alone. Theresa moved into his house, but spent most of her time “crying, eating, crying, eating, crying, watching TV, and crying and eating.”

Things got worse a few years later when macular degeneration took the sight from her remaining eye, leaving her legally blind. At first she was devastated, thinking, “I’m finished.” It took her awhile to adjust.

After a couple of years of living with her son, Theresa bought her own house, two doors down from his. Then she found an exercise class and “met a dozen people.” Her house became her home and “this made me stay here.” Theresa joined two social groups, the Red Hat Society and the Upbeats Group. She had never sung before joining the latter group and says, smiling, “I still don’t sing. We get together to have fun.” The choral group brings lighthearted joy to those for whom they perform – residents of nursing homes, mostly. Theresa stays active and regularly attends a Jazzercise class. She doesn’t see her son very often; she is always on the go despite her very poor vision. “If I stay home, I get houseatosis,” she jokes.

About a dozen family photographs hang in her living room. “I can’t appreciate looking at them anymore,” Theresa laments about her poor vision. Now it is all about friends and fun. She explains that staying active makes her life a joy.

Ormond Beach, 2008



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– GM



