

HOUR GLASS

Volume 2, Issue 1 ■ Fall 2008

Blind writers create 'Behind Our Eyes' anthology

by **Empish J. Thomas**

Every Sunday evening for the past two years, a group of blind and visually impaired writers take about two hours to discuss the writing craft via telephone. Writers from Washington, New York, Florida and all places in between use this valuable time to share their stories, ideas, suggestions and resources. During one of their discussions the idea for the "Behind Our Eyes" anthology was spawned. This project was not just an opportunity to write and get published but a greater chance to share with the sighted world the intimate lives of blind people. "I had been encouraging the group for a while to do this project," said Sanford Rosenthal, group facilitator who lives in Florida. "I thought writing the anthology would be a good way to share our personal stories and to empower us to follow our dreams of becoming published writers."

Using screen-reading software, tape recorders and Braille, 27 writers put pen

to paper, so to speak, and got busy. With their submitted short stories, essays and poetry, the anthology was published in December 2007.

One very important element that is highlighted through the entire anthology is a wish for the world to see blind and visually impaired people as just people. "When people read this anthology, I want them to see that they are just like we are," said Bobbi LaChance, a six-year writer who lives in Maine. "That despite adversity we persevere and grow." LaChance's entry titled "Beyond the Call of Duty" speaks powerfully to that point. In the story she shares a personal account of how her guide dog guarded a burglar until the police came and arrested the intruder. DeAnna Quietwater Noriega, from Missouri, echoes that sentiment in her entry titled "The Frog People's Choir," which is an educational Native American story that teaches children to accept

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Anthology

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differences and to look at people's contributions to the world. Another example was written by Ernie Jones of Washington state. In the story "Will You Be My Mommy?" Jones' 8-year-old son asks a close family friend to consider marrying his dad. "I use my writing as a tool to let the world know what blindness is like," said Jones, a 12-year writer. "I use my column in my local paper to discuss this topic."

One of the difficulties of collecting stories for the anthology was working as a team. Members were across the country, working on personal writing projects, caring for family, employed and living their lives. "Bringing people's talents to the table and using their strengths were essential," said Rosenthal. "Relationships are the key to all of this."

"The editing process was one of the most challenging things I had to do," said Marilyn Smith, the chief editor from Kentucky. She had to learn how to work with writers who had different writing styles and personalities. "I used Braille to work on line editing, checking grammar and word usage," she said. "We also had a sighted professional editor to review and copy edit." Additionally, through one of its guest speakers, the group was able to secure a contract with iUniverse to

publish and print the book. Several of the members have sent out press releases, solicited book reviews and had book signings at local libraries. "Doing a radio interview was one of the most rewarding experiences," said Kate Chamberlin, from New York.

"Behind Our Eyes" is available at online sellers and at local Borders and Barnes & Noble bookstores. ■

Atlantic Station hosting 'Dialog in the Dark'

"Dialog in the Dark" has arrived in Atlanta. Hailed as a unique and inspiring social enterprise, this exhibition replicates familiar environments and challenges individuals to perform tasks without the use of sight. Visitors are escorted through galleries in total darkness, where scents, sounds, temperatures and textures turn daily routines into an unforgettable experience that leaves them with a lasting impression of a world without pictures. The exhibit runs through March 1, 2009, at Atlantic Station. Hours are 9 a.m. until 8 p.m. daily. For tickets and schedule, visit www.dialogtickets.com. ■



Are you ready for the conversion to digital television?

by **Empish J. Thomas**

Are you one of millions of Americans who watch television from a traditional analog TV set? Do you still use the “rabbit ears” on your TV? Are you one of many who don’t have cable or satellite? If you answered yes to these questions, this article will be very important to you.

1. Why is this conversion happening?

The Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 requires TV stations to stop analog broadcasts and broadcast only in digital after February 2009. The switch from old analog to new digital signals will provide a clearer picture, and each digital TV station will be able to transmit more channels. Also, freeing up the old air space will give room for first responders and emergency personnel.

2. How will this conversion impact me?

If you do not have cable, satellite, a high-definition TV or a converter box for your old set, you will only get static on your TV next February. You will not be able to watch news or your favorite programs.

3. Do I have to get cable, satellite or a new high-definition TV?

No, you can purchase a converter box, which is about the size of a videotape. The box can be connected to the back of your old TV set, and you will be able to watch your regular programming. You will have to purchase a converter box if

you use rabbit ears or a rooftop antenna and your TV is more than a few years old.

4. How do I buy a converter box?

The federal government has a discount coupon program that will allow each household to receive by mail two \$40 coupons to purchase a converter box. You can call the toll-free number 1-888-388-2009 or log on to www.dtv2009.org and request your coupons, which are good for 90 days. Boxes can be purchased at Wal-Mart, Best Buy, Radio Shack and most electronics stores.

5. How much do converter boxes cost?

Converter boxes range from \$40 to \$80. The cost depends on the manufacturer and the features on each box. You must purchase one box per TV set; so if you have three sets in your home, you need three converter boxes. Each converter box will come with operating instructions and a remote control. You can connect your box immediately, as many stations are already available in high definition. Be mindful that you might need sighted help to connect your converter box and to use the new remote control. Some remotes are not fully accessible to the blind.

The American Association of People with Disabilities discusses the impact of the conversion at <http://www.aapd.com/News/tech/080407aapd.htm>.

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To order your converter box coupons, you can sign up online at www.dtv2009.org or you can call 1-888-388-2009.

The Federal Communications Commission provides a basic information sheet about the conversion at <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/digitaltv.html>.

Consumer Reports reviews 14 converter boxes at <http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/electronics-computers/televisions/digital-tv-converter/overview/dtv-converter-box-guide.htm>. ■

HourGLASS

HourGLASS is published bimonthly by the Georgia Library for Accessible Services (GLASS), a division of the Georgia Public Library Service, a unit of the University System of Georgia.

This publication is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services to the Georgia Public Library Service under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act.

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