



## **PERISCOPE**

**A Quarterly Newsletter sponsored by the  
Mississippi Council of the Blind, Inc.  
Summer, 2021**

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Tax deductible contributions may be sent to:

MS Council of the Blind

P O Box 31112

Jackson, MS 39286

Anyone wishing to remember the MS Council of the Blind in a last will and testament may do so by including a special paragraph for that purpose. If your wishes are complex, please contact MCB for clarification.

Contributions to the James Doyle Case Memorial Scholarship Fund or to the Carter Gable Memorial Technology Assistance Fund should be appropriately marked, and sent to the above address.

Phone MCB at 601-672-0973.

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

By Ralph Smitherman

Hello, MCB members and friends. I hope all is well with everyone. Summer is fast approaching. I want to encourage everyone to participate in the ACB national convention, which will be virtual this year. There will be good information in the various sessions. The dates of the convention are: July 16

through July 23. I encourage everyone to read the ACB Braille Forum to keep up with events.

As an early reminder, MCB will host a face-to-face state convention later this year. Mark your calendars for October 29, 30, and 31. Once again, we will meet at the Holiday Inn in Pearl, Mississippi. Room rates for the overnight rooms are set at \$109 plus twelve percent tax. The deadline for making room reservations is September 29, 2021. It will be wonderful to be with everyone in person. The number to call to make reservations is: 601-939-5238. Our state Board will meet in June.

For those of you who read braille and are interested, make sure you call our cooperating library and sign up to be on the list for the NLS E-Reader. I am not sure when the E-Readers will be distributed; however, it will be good to have your name on the list when they become available.

As many of you know, I have been having computer issues; thanks to all who continue to assist me in working through this concern.

Thanks to all of you for your patience and endurance in this time of social distancing. I hope all of you will continue to stay safe and practice proper protocols. If anyone needs to talk with me,

call me at: 601-672-0973 or you can email me at: [redbird26@bellsouth.net](mailto:redbird26@bellsouth.net).

Don't forget about our monthly community calls; typically, we hold these calls on the fourth Thursday of each month at 6:15 p.m. If you call in by telephone, you may call: 312-626-6799 and use the following ID and password. The ID is: 683 089 3811 and the password is: 123 456 and if you use the Zoom app just enter the ID and password.

We continue to maintain our storage unit. Thanks to all who help with our newsletter. Not wishing to bloviate I will end for now.

## **MCB STATE BOARD HIGHLIGHTS**

The MCB State Board met via Zoom/conference call on March 20, 2021. Following roll call and the establishment of a quorum, President Ralph Smitherman called the meeting to order and led the board in a word of prayer just after 10:00 a.m.

The minutes from the January meeting and the Treasurer's Report were accepted as distributed. Committee and Chapter Reports were given and all were accepted.

Technology chair Kenneth Reed would like to remind everyone that the committee meets the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. The team is eager to help and ready to receive applications.

Convention: After President Ralph Smitherman opened the floor for discussion, the motion was made by Kris McNair, seconded by Ken Maddox and approved by the board to have the **MCB 2021 Convention** in October this year in person. Chair Eddie Turner will contact and reserve the Holiday Inn - Trustmark Park in Pearl, MS on the dates available.

E-Reader Survey: President Smitherman reported that when you sign up you have to fulfill all three surveys. It appears that the time is getting closer for the readers to be distributed. If anyone is interested, contact the Library and get signed up.

Community Calls: Held every 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of each month at 6:15 p.m. central time on the same Zoom platform. President Ralph Smitherman encourages everyone to participate.

Membership: Rene Virden reported there are a total of 76 members statewide that have paid at this time.

The next MCB State Board meeting has been scheduled for Saturday, June 19, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. via Zoom/Conference Call.

Respectfully Submitted by,  
Wanda Allen  
MCB Secretary

### **A NOTE OF SYMPATHY**

It is with great sadness that we report the recent passing of one of our dear, longtime MCB members, Lavada Caffey. Lavada died on May 12, 2021, at the age of 89. Many of us in MCB who knew Lavada, remember her fondly and will miss her greatly. She is now reunited with her husband Winfred (or Hutter, as so many of us affectionately called him) and with her parents and our Lord Jesus Christ. Our deepest sympathies go out to Lavada's children and grandchildren in their time of loss. Miss Lavada, thank you for your many years of service in MCB and for your friendship. We love you and will miss you!

(Editor's Note: In this issue of the Periscope, we are honored to be able to highlight one of our own beloved MCB members, Pshon Barrett, by presenting the article below. This article was originally published in a recent issue of AccessWorld Magazine (<https://www.afb.org/aw>), reprinted here with permission.)

### **EMPLOYMENT MATTERS: PSHON BARRETT, ASSISTANT U.S. ATTORNEY NOW IN PRIVATE PRACTICE**

**By Deborah Kendrick**

Initially, Pshon Barret contacted me to recommend that I write about a friend of hers. As it happened, that friend was already on my list of extraordinary people whose lives and careers would interest *AccessWorld* readers. But I knew a little something about Pshon Barrett, who happens to be rather extraordinary herself, so sidetracked her to tell me more about herself. I persuaded her to let me write about her before getting on to the recommendation prompting her to contact me in the first place. (You'll learn more about the friend she was promoting later; this one is Pshon's story.)

### *Mississippi Lawyer*

Pshon Barret retired in 2018 from her role as assistant United States Attorney, where she worked on all manner of cases for 30 years on behalf of the United States Attorney. She didn't retire to stop working. She retired because she got a job offer – and the change was both challenging and rewarding. After traveling the state on behalf of the government for 30 years, she was hired in January 2018 as a senior associate in a private firm. Today, she works from home, putting her expertise in disability law to work for families and individuals who come to ADA Group LLC for help.

Throughout our conversation, Pshon repeatedly protested that her life was boring, her experience not particularly interesting. It is perhaps the very “normal” trajectory of her success when tracked from college to retirement and second career, that makes it so extraordinary. She didn't suffer years of unemployment or thousands of resume rejections. Instead, she managed, by some

mysterious blend of intellect, charm, and savvy to get the jobs she deserved in a timely manner.

### *In the beginning*

Blind since birth due to retinopathy of prematurity, Pshon was the first in her family to attend college, and seems to have had an innate sense from an early age of how to get where she needed to go. Her first school, for kindergarten through grade 12, was the Mississippi State School for the Blind in Jackson, Miss. There, she learned to read and write braille, and other skills of blindness. When she graduated high school, she got a guide dog from Pilot Dogs in Columbus, OH. It turned out that would be her only experience with a guide dog, but she relishes the memory. Role models, she says, have always played a vital role in directing her, and her first rehabilitation counselor had a guide dog, which prompted her to follow suit.

In college at Mississippi State, she decided to pursue a law degree, and eventually attended law school at the University of Mississippi. It was in college that her passion for politics emerged and, somewhat indirectly, led to her professional success.

Her father, a hardware salesman, talked about a man who was running for governor. Pshon wanted to meet that man – and wound up working on his political campaign. He was seeking office as Mississippi governor, and Pshon was thrilled to make speeches and phone calls on his behalf. She fondly recalls taking his calls on the pay phone shared with several other girls in her college dormitory. Her candidate was elected. They remained

friends, and later, when a vacancy occurred for legal counsel in the governor's office, Pshon was offered her first real job.

While there, she applied for all kinds of jobs without real results. Then, she heard a presentation about the role of United States attorneys, and knew that was what she wanted to do. There are 94 U.S. attorney offices, located throughout the United States and its territories and Pshon began applying for any opening. She interviewed in Miami and Houston and elsewhere, but it was the job as assistant United States attorney in Jackson, MS that became her professional home for nearly 30 years.

She had interviewed in Memphis and while they weren't able to offer her a job, the hiring individual in that office sent Pshon's resume to Washington. Many government jobs were on hold at the time, and the woman who received that resume was impressed with Pshon; she reminded the attorney in the Mississippi office that his vacancy could be filled by bringing Pshon in under Schedule A. (Schedule A is the provision giving priority to applicants with minority status – such as color, gender, or disability.) The suggestion worked. Pshon was hired. Mississippi had their vacancy filled. The result was a victory from all perspectives!

Her office location as assistant U.S. attorney was Jackson, MS, but much of her time was spent traveling the state, getting facts and testimonies. Early in her work for the government, she was sent on a detail to Washington DC, where she was immersed in law connected with disability rights. When she returned to her job in Mississippi, she became a leader in ADA (Americans

with Disabilities Act) enforcement. Her cases ran the gamut from simple to complex, involving criminal law, financial complications, and clients making restitution in a variety of configurations. The U.S. Attorney's office provided her with an assistant who drove her to meet with clients throughout the state, provide reading assistance, and offer support with other visually oriented tasks when required. She worked on all sorts of cases, but describes the role as primarily a "motion practice" involving a fairly small amount of time appearing in court.

### *Tools of the Trade*

Although she is a proficient user of technology today, Pshon worked her way through college and law school with a Perkins braille, a tape recorder, and human readers.

Only after she was employed in the Federal government did she begin her journey with technology. Because she worked for the Federal government, her employer furnished basic accommodations as required. In Pshon's case, these accommodations over the years included computers, screen readers, braille displays, and braille embossers. When she was offered a job with the ADA LLC Group, a private law firm located in Montgomery, Alabama, she had to leave her access technology behind. Her new employer provided her with a computer with JAWS, a braille display, and a braille embosser. Now that she works from home, with travel no longer a vital component of the job, she needs an assistant only part-time, an accommodation her new employer also supports.

## *Full Life, Full Circle*

While Pshon Barrett has enjoyed a full and successful career as first an attorney working for government and now as a senior associate in a private practice, her life has by no means been exclusively devoted to work. She continues to be passionately involved with politics and current events, is an avid baseball fan, and talented musician (playing piano and singing for her church and elsewhere.) “I did my job before we had technology and didn’t know that was a problem,” she muses, but had no hesitation leaping in to the wondrous pool of access technology once it was on the scene.

Several years ago, she designed and supervised the building of her own home in Jackson, a two-story home in a gated community, with two master suites. As an only child, she knew that someday her parents would come to live with and depend upon her. That day came seven years ago. Her father is gone now, and her mother, at 92, enjoys that second master suite. “She’s become the child I never had,” Pshon says, with a definite blend of amusement and love in her voice.

Above all, Pshon says that people and her relationships with them have been at the core of her multi-faceted success.

There have always been wonderful role models in her life, she says, from her parents to counselors and teachers, peers at school and other blind lawyers. When she was a third-year law student, she and her mother flew to Miami to check out the American Blind Lawyers Association (a division of the American Council of the Blind, today called AAVIA, the

American Association of Visually Impaired Attorneys.). “Here were all these lawyers who were blind,” she says. “They were mostly white males, but they didn’t care that I was female. They were all so good to me, such wonderful examples, and continue to be important in my life.”

She has been active in the American Council of the Blind for decades, serving on Constitution and Bylaws, Scholarship, the Audio Description committee and elsewhere.

In 2017, Pshon Barrett was recognized by the Mississippi Women Lawyers with a Lifetime Achievement Award, and in 2020, she was selected as an ABLA Ambassador by the ABLA National Resource Center. ([See an article on ABLA accounts in the December 2018 \*AccessWorld\* here](#))

She says she has always had a strong sense of determination and willingness to work hard. Time, she says, has taught her to be more confident and comfortable with her blindness, and recommends that attitude to others. She recommends knowing what you need and having confidence to ask for it.

Pshon Barret has a full life with a healthy balance of work and play. Relationships have been essential to her always, and many people have been generous. “I’d like to think,” she says, “that I am now giving some of that back.”

## **NRTC LAUNCHES ACCESS TECHNOLOGY SURVEY**

**Submitted by Emily Damm, Communications Coordinator**

**NRTC on Blindness & Low Vision**

The first survey in our five-year longitudinal study on access technology (AT) use in the workplace by people who are blind or have low vision (B/LV) has launched! More than 300 employed individuals have signed up to participate in the study.

This exploratory study will help us better understand how AT in the workplace is evolving and the greatest challenges people with B/LV experience when using AT. Research questions include:

1. Which ATs do people who are B/LV most commonly use in the workplace?
2. What are users' perceived skill levels with the AT they utilize?
3. Which ATs do they use for specific work tasks?
4. How satisfied are people with the AT they use for specific work tasks?

Our technology company partners will receive annual reports of our findings to help address the challenges and gaps identified. Michele McDonnall, the principal investigator, believes this project is “critical for advancing our knowledge about AT use in the workplace to allow for better recommendations for AT users, employers, and specialists in the field.”

We are still recruiting individuals with blindness or low vision (age 21+) who are not employed but are interested in working to be a part of this study. Individuals interested in participating

can complete our [pre-screening survey](#) or call 662-325-2001 to schedule an appointment for a telephone screening.

Contact Michele McDonnall ([m.mcdonnall@msstate.edu](mailto:m.mcdonnall@msstate.edu)) or Emily Damm ([edamm@colled.msstate.edu](mailto:edamm@colled.msstate.edu)) with questions.

## **OFF TO THE RACES!**

There was a man who was born on the fifth day of the fifth month of 1955, whose lucky number was five. On his birthday he went to the racetrack and was astounded to see that in the fifth race (scheduled for five o'clock) a horse called Pentagon was running, with the odds of 55 to 1. Rushing off to the bank, the man was astonished to find he had \$5,555.55 in his bank account. He withdrew the whole amount, dashed back to the races and bet all of it on Pentagon to win. Pentagon, obviously, came in fifth.

## **EDITOR'S CORNER**

**By Alison Smitherman**

I would like to say a huge "Thank you!" to all who submitted articles for this issue of the Periscope, as well as those who duplicated and mailed our newsletter. Without your contributions and assistance, this newsletter would not be possible.

The deadline for submitting articles for our Fall issue of the Periscope is August 21, 2021. Any articles received after this date will not be included in the Fall issue.

I wish for each of you and your families a happy and blessed Summer! Stay safe and well, everyone!