A NEW ERA DAWNS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

PRESIDENT OBAMA SIGNS BILL TO CREATE THE INDEPENDENT LIVING ADMINISTRATION
Product Review

Microsoft’s Surface Pro 3 Measures Up
By John M. Williams

For 18 months, I have been enamored of my IPad. It is a versatile communications tool. It gives me instant access to the Internet. I can use it as a camera, photo album, notepad, research tool, telephone and map. With it, I can watch movies, play games, listen to music and read books, newspapers and magazines. It still amazes me that I can carry all these activities in one hand. It is both a laptop and a tablet.

My IPad, though, has fierce competition from Microsoft’s Surface Pro 3 tablet. I find that now I am more enamored of the Surface Pro 3 than I am of my IPad. The Surface Pro 3 is a little larger than the IPad. Their thickness is about the same and so is their weight. In my opinion, this is where the comparisons end.

The Surface is the easiest computer I have ever operated. It comes preloaded with the Microsoft Windows 8.1 Pro operating system, and you can install your favorite desktop software, including the full Microsoft Office Suite (sold separately) and thousands of programs created for the Windows platform. It also has a fourth-generation Intel Core processor, which delivers information at unbelievable speeds.

It is the fifth computer and the fourth laptop that I have owned in more than 20 years. It barely tips the scales at 1.76 pounds, and its thinness is a huge asset to someone who has bad memories of lugging older and much heavier laptops through scores of airports on hundreds of flights.

I first became fixated with the Surface when I saw a commercial for it on TV. I knew I had to try it, and I am glad I did. The Surface Pro 3 is a gem.

When I turned on the computer, I was instructed to provide my name and a password. I did, and I was immediately taken to a page with many, many apps. There were apps for email, sports, weather, maps, Skype, Internet Explorer, music, finance, news, photos, documents and on and on.

The wild-eyed teenager placed the gun against the side of my head and told me not to move while he waited for another person to empty my pockets of 63 dollars. Then he shot me. The bullet entered just in front of the left temple, tore into the frontal lobe, crossed the midline of the brain, and came to a stop in the right frontal lobe. There it remains.

August 24 marked the thirtieth anniversary of what I think of as The Shooting, the day the contraction of a finger, the squeeze of a trigger, changed my life, far more than I realized at the time. Although I would not be aware of it for nearly 10 years -- brain injury, traumatic brain injury, TBI, were not part of common parlance in those days -- the shooting left me with a disability.

Sadly, I am not unique. I know many who sustained brain injuries and did not realize that the change in their behavior, their emotions, their ability to manage life was a result of brain damage.

When you are the victim of violent crime (and many other forms of trauma, for that matter) your “It can’t happen to me” attitude is gone. It is not coming back. This leaves the survivor with the task of taking part in life again knowing these things happen, in some cases, more than once.

I was held up again at gunpoint some nine months after the shooting and, while I was not shot that time, the fear level was off the charts. Yes, I was terrified the first time. but the first time I was still wedded to the belief that I would not get shot because I wasn’t resisting. The second time I felt that death was imminent. The terror was mind-blastingly savage. It resulted in my remaining in seclusion for one year. When some would ask, “Why don’t you go out?” my thought was, “You’re kidding, right?”

Some years ago, I was in a conversation with three other men, all of who had been shot in the head. The anniversary question came up. How do you frame or view the day you were shot? To expand the question, How do you view the day a traumatic event -- whether a shooting, car accident, stroke, overdose, fall -- nearly killed you?

One of the men in the room said: “I see it as a second birthday. I got the gift of life the day I was born, and I got the gift of life the day I got shot and should’ve died. Second birthday.”

We all identified with this philosophy. I still do.
In U.S., a New Era for Independent Living

By Dale S. Brown

It’s a new day for independent living in the United States. This past July, IL on the federal level has changed from being a mere “program” into an “administration.”

The Independent Living Administration was established on July 22, when President Barack Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act into law. Previously, independent living funds and programs had been part of the Rehabilitation Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Education.

The recently enacted law transferred independent living, as well as funds and programs for assistive technology and research, to the Administration for Community Living of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The WIOA will take effect July 1, 2015.

“It’s a huge change,” said Kelly Buckland, executive director of the National Council on Independent Living, a key player in advocating for the legislation. “We have our own administration now. We are in an agency that wants us and wants to help us grow.”

The Independent Living Administration was the result of many people with disabilities working on the local, state and national levels.

“The idea for the change bubbled up from our membership,” Buckland said. “They developed a position paper and took it out to the regions, the states and the members. We did draft after draft. We worked with Senate and House staff and with other disability groups. Members visited their representatives on (Capitol) Hill.”

Every year, during its national conference, NCIL organizes a march from a Washington, D.C., hotel down Pennsylvania Avenue to the U.S. Capitol to demonstrate support for the independence of people with disabilities. After a rally at the Capitol building in which congressional representatives, disability leaders, government officials and other notable people speak, NCIL members seek out their own congressional representatives and advocate for independent living issues.

“The ILA is the only federal agency program mandated to take people out of institutions,” Buckland said. Independent living centers are now required to provide transition services to people who are leaving institutions, people who can be prevented from entering institutions, and students with disabilities who are moving from school to economic self-sufficiency. The responsibility for transition is new. Prior to the passage of the WIOA, IL centers were responsible for four core services: independent living skills training, peer support, information and referral, and advocacy. Transition is now the fifth core service.

“Now we are in the same agency that houses grant programs with a similar goal: Money Follows the Person, Balancing Incentives, and aging and disability resource centers,” Buckland said. “What could that mean to us in terms of using those funds?”

According to the agency website, the mission of the ACL, where the ILA is housed, is “to maximize the independence, well-being, and health of older adults, people with disabilities across their lifespan, and their families and caregivers.”
If you’ve ever wanted to visit Italy but thought it might be difficult or virtually impossible because you use a power wheelchair, let me assure you it can be done. It isn’t easy, and you’ll need to do a lot of preplanning, but you will be able to see and do almost as much as any other tourist. Recently, I returned from a 10-day tour of Italy, a trip I began planning nearly a year earlier because I use a power wheelchair. My three companions and I wanted to visit Rome, Florence, Pisa, Venice and the Tuscany region, but I knew that my tour likely would present many logistical and access-related challenges.

When I began to plan, I initially believed it would be easiest and best for me to fly to Europe, then board a cruise ship with ports of call in the cities I wanted to visit. While taking a cruise is usually a great way for people with mobility-related disabilities to travel, I quickly came to realize that cruising wouldn’t be ideal in this instance because I really wanted to spend time exploring each city. Because cruise ships spend limited time in each port and often dock far from a city or attraction, a wheelchair-using traveler would need to book an accessible tour that can be both very expensive and, by necessity, short-lived. That option, therefore, was not practical.

Next, I looked at taking a river cruise, which would solve the problems of getting from port to city and spending too much time in port. But I found that there were few, if any, river cruises through Italy. There also appeared to be only one accessible river cruise ship operating in all of Europe, and it didn’t dock in an Italian port.

So that meant my only real option was to research a land tour. I discovered that this plan would best enable me to see what I wanted to see, as long as I could find and book accessible hotels, transfers and transport to those sites without break-

We Remember...

Elmer Bartels (June 10, 1938 -- July 5, 2014). Bartels, a national leader and pioneer in disability employment and vocational rehabilitation who headed the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission for 30 years, died of pneumonia in his home in Bedford, Mass. He was 76.

Bartels, who served under seven Massachusetts governors and was believed to be the state’s longest-serving commissioner, was instrumental in improving the lives of tens of thousands of people with disabilities. He also helped establish the personal care attendant program and pushed for the creation and availability of assistive technology to allow people with disabilities to succeed at their jobs.

Bartels helped create the Massachusetts Association of Paraplegics in 1964, the Massachusetts Council of Organizations of the Handicapped in the late 1960s and the Boston Center for Independent Living in 1972. He also was a key figure in securing passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, considered a landmark law that focused on rights, advocacy and protections for people with disabilities.

Though finding jobs for people with disabilities was Bartels’ primary focus at the MRC, under his watch, an independent living department was created within the agency in the late 1980s.

“Elmer was the architect behind establishing that division,” said Charlie Carr, current MRC commissioner and a protégé of Bartels. “Elmer was a (vocational rehabilitation) guy, and I’m an IL guy, and sometimes we had clashes, but at end of the day, we’d always have a solu-
“We may have an opportunity to influence HHS,” Buckland added. “HHS is trying to create consumer control and self-advocacy. Having an Independent Living Administration there will influence them.”

At the state and local level, the WIOA empowers statewide independent living councils (SILCs) and independent living centers (ILCs). For example, they can conduct “resource development,” which allows them to raise funds other than their federal allocation.

SILCs write the plan that serves as a road map for state IL services, otherwise known as the State Plan for Independent Living. The plan provides guidance for almost everything that the centers do, including how money is spent, what positions are open for hiring, whom the centers select as partners, and how the centers expand their activities.

Before the law was passed, each SILC needed to have the plan signed by its state’s vocational rehabilitation agency, which oversaw the independent living programs in each state. Under the WIOA, the plan must be signed by the SILC and 51 percent of the state’s IL directors. Now, each SILC can select its designated state entity. The DSE serves as a fiscal intermediary and can use no more than 5 percent of the supplied funds for administrative costs.

Executive directors of ILCs interviewed at this year’s NCIL conference were unanimous in their support for the changes and expressed a determination to use the law to improve services for consumers who came to their centers.

Mary Margaret Moore, executive director of the Independent Living Center of the North Shore and Cape Ann, said: “The biggest thing is we are going to get more money. Our funding stream will increase. We have recognition from Congress that independent living is the way to go.”

Jan Derry, executive director of the Northern West Virginia Center for Independent Living, said that funds were particularly important for her state. “We have not had a dime of increase. We have been operating since 1986 on $220,000. With this bill, we stand a chance.”

Buckland had a number of recommendations to people on the grassroots level for making the law a reality: “Have discussions in your state. The law opened up policies on how to do things differently. The state plan was once written by the SILC and the DSE. Now the state plan is written by the SILC and the centers. The SILCs can do resource development. They can write grants and during a lovely little jaunt to Stratford, Ontario, with my college roommates to celebrate our three birthdays recently, I was particularly smitten by Canadian cash. Dozens of foreign countries have currency that can be identified without visual verification, but, for me, this was a first.

All of our American bills, of course, are the same color, size and texture. A $1 bill feels exactly like a $100 bill, a $20 just like a $5. If your eyes don’t work — or don’t work well — you simply can’t tell one piece of money from another.

In Canada, my glee was rooted in the delicious texture of the money — it’s made of a slick plastic amalgam that holds its shape after many transactions — and the distinct tactile markings on every bill. A rectangle of six dots (exactly like the braille full cell) in the upper left corner of each bill identifies its value: one block of dots for a $5 banknote, two for a $10 note, and so on. (Single dollars in Canadian currency are coins, not bills.)

It was just so much fun to hand over cash and receive it with such immediate recognition of just how much money I was handling. And now, finally, people in the United States who are blind or visually impaired, deaf-blind, or have other print-related disabilities can take control of their own cold cash, too.

The American Council of the Blind filed suit against the U.S. Department of the Treasury nearly a decade ago,
ing the bank.

The first thing I did was research where I intended to go and what I was planning to do when I got there. You can’t just say, “I want to see Italy.” You need to narrow that down to, “I want to be in Rome three days, Florence three days and Venice two days, and see these certain sites each day.” This is where the Internet and travel guides are most helpful because they will indicate which hotels and sites are at least somewhat accessible and which are best to avoid.

After you’ve put together a basic outline of where you want to go, what you’d like to see and how much you want to spend, talk to a reputable travel agent. When you have a mobility-related disability, unless you already are familiar with the area you wish to travel, or know and trust a tour company that specializes in accessible tours, trip planning with a professional who has already traveled to the areas where you are going is not only important but critical. I consider myself to be a fairly good trip planner, and I’ve successfully coordinated and booked many trips on my own that included accessible transport and accommodations. I still decided it would be best to use a travel agent for this trip because it was overseas and, no matter how much research I did on my own, there simply were too many access-related variables I didn’t know. I came to see that just because a hotel or attraction was listed as “handi-

maintaining that the bureau was violating the Americans with Disabilities Act by not making money (the identification of it, that is) accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired. The ACB won the suit, and the U.S. Bureau of Engraving and Printing has been conducting research for some time to help determine what the bills of the future will look like.

But “future” is the problem here, because the plan is to update currency with new, tactually identifiable currency as bills deemed unfit for circulation are replaced. And that is going to take a very long time.

For its part, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing did develop an iPhone app called Eyenote that takes a picture of a bill and announces its value. The problem with that solution, of course, is that not everyone owns or wants to own an iPhone.

This summer, the BEP launched its interim currency reading solution, which has been met with wild enthusiasm. The iBill, a small currency identifier made by Orbit Research, has been selected as the device of choice to be distributed to every single blind or low-vision person in the U.S. who wants one. About the size of a pack of chewing gum, the iBill is simple to use. It has a button on either end and a guide on one flat side for sliding in a piece of currency. Pressing the button of the iBill at either end activates a clear female voice that announces “one,” “five,” “ten,” etc. up to $100 values.

By holding down one button while tapping the other, you can change the identification output to beep or vibrations. You might prefer the beeps in situations in which you’d
A Conversation With: Young Adult Author Brian Conaghan
By Kathi Wolfe

When you’re a teenager, you want more than anything to be “normal.” This can be difficult -- especially if you have a disability.

When Mr. Dog Bites, a funny, poignant and engaging young adult novel by Brian Conaghan, is the story of 16-year-old Dylan Mint, who has Tourette’s syndrome. According to the website of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, Tourette’s is “a neurological disorder characterized by repetitive, stereotyped, involuntary movements and vocalizations called tics.”

Dylan longs to be normal, but his Tourette’s makes it hard for him to be cool like the other kids.

Dylan’s life changes when, during a checkup at the hospital, an overheard conversation makes him believe he’s going to die. To get the most out of his remaining life, Dylan attempts to complete a list of “Cool Things To Do Before I Cack It.” Along his journey, Dylan encounters bullying, friendship and his first crush.

When Mr. Dog Bites, from Bloomsbury Publishing, is a crossover novel that has appeal for adults as well as teens. Kirkus Reviews called the book “an appealingly offbeat look at friendship, sex and what’s really normal.”

Conaghan, born in Scotland in 1971, has a master of letters degree in creative writing from the University of Glasgow. Over the years, he has worked as a painter, decorator, barman, DJ, actor and special education teacher. Conaghan has Tourette’s.

When Mr. Dog Bites is his debut American novel. He lives in Dublin with his wife, Orla, and daughter, Rosie.

Accessible Content This Firm’s Specialty
By John M. Williams

Since 2002, Bridge Multimedia has provided a variety of universally accessible media services benefiting people with disabilities. The New York City-based company develops interactive and assistive technology and produces high-quality digital media.

Bridge was founded by Matt Kaplowitz with the goal of universal access for all individuals. Since its founding, Bridge has become one of the largest U.S. producers of accessible media.

The senior management team includes Linda M. Kahn, director of programming operations; Wendy K. Sapp, director of research; and Jeff Williams, general manager. The staff of 45 includes developers, systems integrators, curriculum standards specialists, writers, voice directors, video editors, sound engineers, blind/low vision content evaluators, translators and captioners/subtitlers.

Bridge’s advisory board represents some of the most exceptional individuals in the U.S. working in the fields of autism spectrum disorder, speech and language development, cognitive research and blind/low vision.

The company provides a variety of services, including audio description in every media format; bilingual description; captioning and dubbing; accessible website development; cross-disability product design; English as a second language; and comprehensive media production.

As a leader in accessible digital media development, the company works with a developer/programmer/designer team of World Wide Web Consortium and Section 508 specialists to create engaging web content that is accessible to people with and without disabilities. (Section 508 is an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 added in 1986 enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology.) As a result, Bridge’s technology integrates the needs of the blind/low-vision, deaf/hard of hearing, print-disabled, intellectually disabled, mobility-impaired, and low-literacy populations.

Kaplowitz believes universally accessible media increases the freedom, independence and productivity of people with disabilities and fosters a more open and dynamic society.

Conaghan
Continued on page 10

Bridge
Continued on page 9
tion. He’d have a solution for my concerns, and I’d have a solution for his concerns.”

“Elmer had a vision to put all kinds of community supports and services under one branch of the agency alongside independent living centers,” said Bob Gumson, who worked at the MRC’s administrative office under Bartels from 1986 to 1992.

“The disability community was prevented from using substance abuse services: prevention, treatment and recovery services,” added Gumson, manager of IL services of the New York State Education Department’s Adult Career and Continuing Education Services. Bartels changed that.

“He’d say, ‘I want to do whatever it takes to organize the disability community to make substance abuse prevention and treatment and recovery services changes that make it possible (for them) to make use of the full array of services,’” Gumson said.

“He was an extremely hardworking person, an intelligent person and an innovative leader,” said Rick Arcangeli, MRC deputy general counsel from 1985 to 1994 and currently the agency’s general counsel.

“He had the best rapport with people with a wide range of disabilities of anybody I’ve ever known. He dealt with university professors just as easily as he dealt with people with developmental disabilities.”

Whenever people had difficulty being understood by those listening, Bartels came to the rescue, Arcangeli said. “He had the most incredible knack for understanding and communicating for others what people were trying to say.”

He was the third of four children, and the first boy, born to Dorothy and Elmer Bartels of Newton, Mass. Beginning when he was 12, young Elmerspent many summers at Camp Agawam, a boys camp in Raymond, Maine. There, he fished, camped, swam and made lifelong friends.

After graduating from Newton High School, Elmer attended Hebron Academy, a prep school in Maine, for a year, and then Colby College, also in Maine, where he studied physics. During his summer vacation, he served as a counselor at Camp Agawam, and he later told his only daughter, Joanne Stanway, that he felt as though he had “the world by the tail” at that time of his life.

That all changed suddenly. On Dec. 5, 1960, when he was 22, Bartels tripped on the ice playing a pickup hockey game at Colby and slammed headfirst into the boards, severing his spinal cord. Instantly, he became a quadriplegic and required the use of a motorized wheelchair for the rest of his life.

On Jan. 21, 1962, the day after he was discharged from Lemuel Shattuck Hospital in Massachusetts, he married a nurse he had met there, Mary Foster. He returned to Colby College two days later to redo his senior year and, with Mary’s constant assistance, graduated with a physics degree. He later earned a master’s degree in physics from Tufts University.

His landed his first professional job as a scientific computer programmer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s nuclear science laboratory. To operate an electric typewriter, he used inverted pencils inserted into his wrist splints, and he worked at an elevated table instead of a desk.

He later was hired at Honeywell Information Systems and worked as a programmer, a senior systems analyst, and a department head. Because he had no other means of transportation, Bartels’ wife would drive him to and from work every day.

With a group of friends who desired accessible public buildings and transportation along with equal employment opportunities, Bartels helped establish the Massachusetts Association of Paraplegics, a group that helped organize the first Bay State Wheelchair Games. That advocacy experience was the beginning of an activist spirit that would become his hallmark. He later pushed for laws that would set aside a portion of public housing for the disabled and for legislation to modify sidewalks that prevented wheelchair access.

In February 1977, he was granted a two-year leave of absence from Honeywell after Gov. Michael Dukakis appointed him to lead the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. He remained in the position until 2007, when he was not rehired as commissioner under new Gov. Deval Patrick.

Afterward, Bartels said he was especially proud of helping about 4,000 people with disabilities find jobs each year.

“Multiply that by 30 years; it’s about 120,000 people who went to work during my tenure, folks who became taxpayers,” he said at the time. "They’re earning money, doing much better than being at home or sitting on a cash benefit."
“The company is at the forefront of setting the pace for the development of tomorrow’s innovations,” Kaplowitz said.

The company received a five-year U.S. Department of Education grant to produce video description for prekindergarten-12 television programming. With TV network and grant funding, Bridge is producing the video description for the entire Saturday-morning children’s blocks on ABC, CBS, NBC, and the CW Network, as well as additional programming on PBS, Nickelodeon, CNN, the Cartoon Network and others — representing more than 30 TV shows per week.

Through TERC (Technical Education Research Centers), Bridge has received four National Science Foundation grants to develop and produce content for an avatar-based sign language system that delivers STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) content to students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

TERC is an independent, research-based organization dedicated to engaging and inspiring all students through stimulating curricula and programs designed to develop the knowledge and skills they need to ask questions, solve problems and expand their opportunities.

In collaboration with the American Foundation for the Blind, Bridge was one of the earliest developers of the Universal eLearner, a fully accessible interactive platform that delivers streaming media.

“The world of assistive technology offers unlimited opportunities for creativity, meaningful work and social justice.”

-Matt Kaplowitz
Bridge Multimedia, founder

Bridge has a partnership with National Braille Press to produce accessible versions of 12 picture books for prekindergartners to 8-year-olds using an innovative multisensory “experiential learning” approach.

Working with TERC, Bridge is developing and field-testing a...
do fundraising. They can have membership. So think about what you want. You can amend your current plan. The old plan couldn’t include advocacy or resource development. They should be added now.”

Lou Ann Kibbee, NCIL president, said “centers for independent living will have an opportunity to improve our services because we will be much more respected by the Administration for Community Living and, hopefully, at the state level, where the disability movement will have influence on the State Plan for Independent Living. Independent living has never been given a true opportunity to shine and show what we really do.

“Independent living has never been supported at the federal level to increase funding to help it grow,” Kibbee continued. “We have never been supported in telling the ‘whole story’ of independent living as to how we make a difference in lives every day.”

Timothy Sheehan, executive director of the Center for Independent Living for Western Wisconsin, described the Independent Living Administration as “a historic opportunity to reframe independent living for the 21st century.”

Dale S. Brown is a disability policy consultant in Washington D.C. She can be reached at dale.susan.brown@gmail.com.

Recently, he chatted with Independence Today by email. Excerpts of the interview follow:

Q: I loved When Mr. Dog Bites! It reminded me of being a teenager – of growing up, forming friendships, having your first crush. I loved your use of language – especially Dylan’s use of rhyming slang and his invention of words! What drew you to writing? Did you want to write when you were a child, or did your desire to write begin when you were older?

A: I didn’t have a desire to write until I went to university. There I was given access to the playwrights Beckett, Pinter, Mamet, Albee, Shepard and Churchill, and that really influenced me and gave me the desire to try my hand at writing. I dabbled in writing for theater, imitating the aforemenioned and not “finding my voice.”

The plays I wrote were a loose mix of political social realism set in dystopia: a bad pastiche of everything that was good. In 2001, I sat down and started writing my first novel and really enjoyed the process of working on longer prose pieces. Since that time, I haven’t written any plays, although I have dabbed in the dark arts of performance poetry.

Q: Why do you write young adult novels?

A: I generally view myself as a writer as opposed to a YA writer. It just so happens that some of my books have teenagers as the main characters and, perhaps, teenage themes. But I do like that world and get excited by it.

Q: I, and every writer I know, find it hard sometimes to deal with the rejection and critical reaction that writers inevitably receive. How do you deal with this?

A: before my first book was published, I received 217 rejections, which I still have. It’s hard to deal with, that’s for sure, but you have to take criticism on the chin and try to use it positively. I believe it’s part of the process for any writer. I always say to would-be writers, “If you can’t take rejection and/or criticism, then don’t do it. Stop now.” I used rejection as a motivator. I wanted to be a writer, so I wrote. I made loads of mistakes. I practiced. I got better. I listened to the criticism. I worked hard. If you’re not prepared for this, then jump off.

Q: I’ve read that you have Tourette’s. Would you talk about what that’s been like for you? Dylan is a person first. But his Tourette’s plays a part in where he goes to school – how others see him. Would you talk about the

Book cover/Google Images
Capped accessible” didn’t necessarily mean it was compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The travel agent I chose knew which hotels in Rome, Florence and Venice were accessible, where in each city they were located and their proximity to the sites I wanted to see because she had personally stayed at those hotels. She also had a good working knowledge of disability-access issues, so she coordinated my trip with Sage Traveling (www.sagetraveling.com), a reputable European tour company that regularly caters to people with disabilities, is reasonably priced and hires English-speaking guides.

Still, no matter how good the travel agent is, you are the only one who knows precisely which accommodations you’ll need and your true capabilities, so be sure to speak up and share that information with him or her. You also should be prepared to solve problems on your own.

One case in point was a major problem that almost forced me to cancel the trip. I had decided to bring my own power chair with me rather than try to rent one in Italy. But because Italy uses 220-volt current, I needed to figure out how to charge the 110-volt batteries in my wheelchair. I considered using a power converter but was told it might not be adequate to charge my chair batteries. Fortunately, a medical equipment supply store in the U.S. was able to secure a 220-volt charger specifically designed for use with my chair when I was in Italy. It worked like a charm.

My travel agent anticipated most other access problems, and she and I spoke regularly over the course of a few months. She also acted as a middleman between me and the various hotel staff, tour and transfer operators and other guides to ensure that every detail of my trip was planned with access in mind. When she presented me and my travel companions with our finished itinerary, it detailed all the usual travel arrangements and also included all my transfer, transportation, hotel and excursion access needs for the entire trip.

Though my access tips here are specific to my Italy trip, many will apply to almost any excursion you may take – especially if where you’re going doesn’t offer some or any of the protections people with disabilities in the United States enjoy due to the ADA.

Rome is a large, bustling city that can be intimidating and confusing, so the first thing I needed was an accessible transfer from the airport to our hotel. A representative from Sage Traveling who was waiting at the airport led my companions and me to a fully accessible van, carefully and professionally got me in, and drove us to our hotel, pointing out sites of interest along the way.

Our travel agent had booked us into accessible hotels in the centers of Rome and Florence and on the main island in Venice. This is an absolute necessity for people with mobility disabilities because few public transportation options exist in Italy. Though not all of our hotels were up to ADA accessibility standards, they were serviceable, as long as you could maneuver in tight spaces and had a companion with you to assist when necessary.

In Rome, we stayed at the Hotel Delle Nazioni. It had no entrance steps, a small elevator – typical in Italy – and a tight but functional accessible bedroom and bath. The breakfast area had steps, so the staff set up a portable ramp for my use each morning.

The hotel’s biggest plus was its location – only a half block from the Trevi Fountain and within walking distance of the Vatican, Roman Forum, Spanish Steps, Pantheon and Coliseum. It also was near numerous accessible shops and restaurants.

The central location was essential because Rome is sprawling, and traffic is New York City-like hectic. Even though we were close to the Vatican, St. Peter’s Cathedral, the Coliseum and other attractions, we still elected to book a Sage Traveling van to take us to wherever we were going each morning to save us time. We then took our time walking back when our tour for the day concluded. Even though this meant I had to navigate uneven cobblestone roads, bumpy sidewalks, absent or blocked curb cuts, and traffic in areas where the only accessible option was the
type of Tourette’s that Dylan has?

A: My Tourette’s is very mild in comparison to Dylan’s. He suffers from coprolalia, which 10 to 15 percent of Tourette’s sufferers have. This is the uncontrollable urge to swear and say the most socially inappropriate things imaginable. As regards my own Tourette’s, it’s not a problem for me any longer. I don’t define myself by it, nor do I allow it to define me. As I said, it’s very mild, and I am getting much better at containing/concealing it. Naturally, however, I wish I didn’t have it.

Q: What has the reaction to When Mr. Dog Bites been?

A: It’s been extremely positive. Teenagers have said some brilliant things about it, as have lots of the mainstream press. Some have commented on the lack of plot, but I’ve always seen the book as a character vehicle anyway.

Q: There’s been some reaction against the swearing in When Mr. Dog Bites. When Dylan swears, it’s involuntary because of his Tourette’s. How do you feel about this reaction?

A: Naturally, a book of this ilk will offend those who want to be offended. It doesn’t affect me or what I want to write. I think some of the criticism around the swearing tickles

Never Miss Another Moment!

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This Operation Can Leave You (Stone) Cold

By Peter S. Kahrmann

“It’s a simple office procedure. We’ll just pull it right out of your penis,” the doctor said.

I blanched. “I gotta tell you,” I said to the urologist. “There are certain sentences I was hoping I’d get to the end of life never having heard, and that’s one of them.”

The doctor is, in truth, both a nice man and good doctor. He was referring to a stent he may need to put in my left ureter, the thin tube that connects kidney to bladder, in order to help with inflammation and pain after he removes a kidney stone currently wedged in the ureter. Both kidneys have a ureter running to the bladder. By the time you read this, my kidney stone, which did not pass on its own because it is the size of Newark -- I’m hoping it will be accepted by New York City’s Museum of Natural History and placed on prominent display -- will be long gone. There is general anesthesia for the stone removal procedure, not so the stent.

“We’ll give you a local anesthetic; it’ll just be a bit uncomfortable,” he added, hoping and failing to provide me with reassurance.

Now, I know I don’t have the right to speak for all men, or any man but myself, for that matter. I know that. But I very much doubt too many men would take issue with my belief that “We’ll just pull it right out of your penis,” is, in any light, an unsettling and scary sentence.

Which brings me to the word “penis” – I’ll get to the matter of kidney stones in a minute. I don’t like that word. I’m not particularly fond of its many nicknames either. I can’t possibly be the only one who’s noticed that “penis” is the only name for a body part -- in either gender, mind you -- that requires a person whine in order to say it.

Anyway, back to kidney stones.

In 2012, the National Institutes of Health estimated that one in 11 people will find themselves with a kidney stone. Ain’t we the lucky ones?

The Mayo Clinic tells us, “Kidney stones often have no definite, single cause, although several factors may increase your risk.” It is a bit worrisome when experts don’t know.

It seems that calcium kidney stones are the most common. Struvite kidney stones are the result of infection, urinary tract infections being one example. Uric acid kidney stones can be caused by those of us who don’t drink enough fluids (caffeinated coffee and tea don’t count,
became the hot celeb of her time. Decades before Keller became the world’s most famous “inspirational” disabled person, Bridgman became a “miracle” for the able-bodied public. Charles Dickens devoted pages of his best-selling “American Notes” to Bridgman and compared her to his “inspirational” heroine Little Nell.

Others compared her to Queen Victoria. In her youth and adolescence, Bridgman was as famous as the long-reigning monarch. Laura Bridgman dolls become the rage. Later in her life, when she was no longer a cute little girl and after she had a falling out with Howe, Bridgman’s fame died down. People no longer came in droves from around the world to see her write on a grooved board or talk by fingerspelling.

Many people with disabilities can identify with Bridgman as she endures both being put on a pedestal as inspirational icon and being cast aside as an ordinary person with a disability who makes people flinch with discomfort.

Bridgman led a lonely life. Howe lost interest in her after she was no longer cute and adopted religious beliefs of which he disapproved. His wife, Julia Ward Howe, a poet, early feminist, and author of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” was often jealous of and uncomfortable around Bridgman. Bridgman, because she lacked the senses of taste or smell, seldom enjoyed food. And although she sometimes liked being famous, Bridgman was keenly aware that Howe was exploiting her. The proceeds from the sale of the Bridgman dolls went to Perkins, and she only received a small amount of money from doing needlework.

It’s known that Bridgman, at 58, a year before her death in 1889, met Helen Keller, when the latter was a little girl. The only recorded fact from their encounter is that Keller stepped on Bridgman’s foot. Elkins’ depiction of this meeting is an example of how fiction can wonderfully capture historical “truth” better than nonfiction.

Of Bridgman meeting Keller, Elkins writes, “I didn’t like children even when I was one, and now I think them worse than dogs,” she thinks. “I’ve shriveled and so they’ve searched for another freak in bloom to exhibit and experiment on. It’s taken Perkins decades to find one pretty enough ... pretty is really the important thing, or at least not too strange or looking like what she is. Not looking like what I am.”

Keller, unlike Bridgman, led a hard but lucky and charmed life. Photogenic, intelligent, charming, endlessly curious and optimistic, Keller, born in 1880, was adventurous throughout the 1950s. (She died in 1968.) Believing that “life is an adventure or nothing at all,” Keller climbed a pyramid in Egypt, performed in vaudeville, donated to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and wrote numerous books.

Bridgman, who was stuck at Perkins for most of her life, had no such luck. Yet, Elkins deftly shows how Perkins, despite its sometimes cold, even wacky treatment of its students -- Howe believed that blind pupils shouldn’t eat anything spicy, including anything with salt or sugar -- was a progressive environment for people with disabilities. In What is Visible, Bridgman spends some time with Sullivan when the visually impaired youngster became a student at Perkins. Sullivan tells Bridgman how Perkins rescued her from the almshouse where she’d lived as an orphan as a child.

What is Visible is an engaging read. But there are a couple of points about the work that should be made. Though Elkins told Scott Simon, host of NPR’s “Weekend Edition,” that she has “suffered” from depression, she isn’t blind or deaf. Simon asked her if she’d spent time with anyone who is deaf or blind. Elkins, who spent much time doing research at Perkins, responded: “No, I didn’t ... I knew if I really got to know real people, then I would not be able to develop the character.”

For authors and poets, the freedom to imagine their characters is vital. Too much adherence to biography -- such as talking to “real” people -- can put a damper on creativity. Yet, What is Visible could have benefited twofold if Elkins had talked with people who are deaf-blind.

The first benefit would have been to obtain their 21st-century perspective on Bridgman, a seminal, deaf-blind figure in disability history. I’d bet their take would differ from that of the mainstream historical narrative.
As for how I survived and all of what’s behind that truth, who knows? Members of the New York City Police Department’s 84th Precinct in Brooklyn were there in a flash. I would not be here now were it not for them. Nor would I be here now were it not for the extraordinary care I received in Brooklyn’s now-struggling Long Island College Hospital. Needless to say, my friends provided enormous care and compassion, and my daughter, just 7 at the time, was, then and now, one of life’s miracles.

The thing is, I got back to my feet after being shot. It was around 5:30 in the morning, no one was around, and I was alone. Although he died when I was 15, my father, Sanford Cleveland Kahrmann, gets full credit for my standing up. On the ground, I thought about how he had passed from here to there, from life to death. I thought, If he could do it, then so can I. There is no doubt in my mind the comfort found in that thought reduced the fear level to the point that I was able to get to my feet and get help.

From time to time over the years, people have asked me, “How did you survive?” “What made you rejoin life after that year of seclusion, that year of taking stock?” Good questions.

I think the answer lies in two areas.

First, not rejoining life means allowing the shooting, the person who shot me, the brain injury, and the post-traumatic stress disorder far more control over my life than they deserve.

Second, I believe that the source of emotional and spiritual strength is found in one’s capacity for acceptance. I know that when some hear the word “acceptance,” they hear “giving in.” Giving in is the last thing I mean. I believe that when it comes down to the relationship we have with the traumas of life, we -- not the trauma, the brain injury, the blindness, the deafness, the paralysis, the bipolar disorder, the autism, the disability -- deserve to be the decision makers whenever possible.

The only way you can relieve it of its decision-making power is to accept the reality that comes with its presence. Once you accept it, you can manage it. Once you manage it, by availing yourself of any and all healthy strategies, you, not it, are at the helm.

And that, my dear reader, is where you deserve to be: at the helm of your own life. Sharing this 30th anniversary, this 30th birthday, with you has been a pleasure and a gift.

Stay safe, be well, and remember to live.

Peter S. Kahrmann writes a blog on disability issues. He resides in Massachusetts.

Earlier that same year, he lost Mary, his wife, partner and confidant. It was then, according to Bartels’ daughter, that he realized he was a quadriplegic because Mary had assimilated his needs into her daily routine. He credited her with his success and the quality of his life.

Afterward, he started a consulting business; taught a disability policy course as an adjunct professor at Assumption College in Worcester, Mass.; helped produce “Lives Worth Living,” a television documentary about the disability rights movement; and wrote a memoir, The Road Taken: The Personal and Political Life of a Disability Rights Activist.

“He was a great man,” Carr said. “He dedicated his life to improving the lives of others. I stand on his shoulders.”

His daughter wrote of him: “Being paralyzed from the upper chest down for so long did not make him a hero, and he did not identify himself through his disability. He was a man who was faced with a challenge, and with the highest level of focus and exuberance, he figured out how to live life to the fullest while simultaneously helping others in the same boat. That’s what made him a hero.”

Survivors include a son, Jim, who lived with him in Bedford; his daughter Joanne; his son-in-law, Phil; his granddaughter, Jaye Mary Younkim; and three sisters, Jane Lee Young of West Yarmouth, Patricia Hastings of Stevensville, Mont., and Dorothy Denault of Jamestown, R.I.

James Brady/Google Images

James Brady

Brady, the affable, witty press secretary who survived a devastating head wound in the 1981 assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan and undertook a personal crusade for gun control, died surrounded by his family in Alexandria, Va. He was 73.

Brady never regained full health. The shooting caused brain damage, partial paralysis, short-term memory impairment, slurred speech and constant pain. Brady, who spent much of the rest of his life in a wheelchair, died at a retirement community, where he lived with his wife.
When I clicked on the Surface icon, five apps appeared. I clicked on the third icon (field explorer), and the page that appeared read “Get started with your Surface Pro 3. Some tips to get you going.” Eleven tips ranging from “Get to know your Surface Pro 3” to “Protect your Surface” were offered. I went through all of them. They were extremely valuable, and they helped me learn to operate the computer quickly and efficiently.

A touch-sensitive pen accompanies the Surface Pro 3. It takes a battery. The pen opens apps and can be used for word processing and for moving items from one place to another. When placing the pen over an icon, the name of that icon appears in small letters. One problem: The small letters make it difficult to read them. I needed a magnifying glass to read the letters.

An included pullout stand allows you to stand the Surface upright or use an on-screen keyboard. I find it nearly impossible to type quickly when using a stand-up on-screen keyboard. I prefer using a keyboard that is lying flat.

I was very interested in knowing what accessibility features Microsoft included in the Surface Pro 3. I went to the control panel and looked at three features: speech recognition, narrator and visual display.

I started working on the speech recognition program and, within three hours, I was dictating this review. I produced this review using the speech recognition program in the Surface Pro 3. Two hours after I finished the review, I transferred it to my PC.

I tested the narrator briefly. Because I do not have a vision problem, I did not optimize the visual display. I will look at optimizing the visual display in the future.

People with disabilities can benefit from the Surface Pro 3. It can easily replace their laptop. It has mine.

The Surface Pro 3 costs between $799 and $1,549. My preference would be to buy the $799 unit and add on later. My first add-on would be the flat keyboard, which you can connect to the Surface. The keyboard costs $130.

unique cloud-based app that will enable teachers of students on the autism spectrum to incorporate specialized annotations and scaffolds into online and eBook documents.

For live entertainment, Bridge is implementing a proprietary, 508-compliant technology that simultaneously delivers captions, description, translations and enhanced listening to tablets and mobile devices, triggered in part by speech recognition.

The company is equipped for captioning production in both linear and non-linear formats. “We can archive all captioned and description data as media assets for a program or series,” said Sapp.

As well as innovating new technological methods for creating and delivering audio-described content, the company also advanced audio description to a new level through the development and implementation of EXTRA Info™. EXTRA stands for EXpanded Tools for Reading and Accessibility.

With an emphasis on details helpful to blind or visually impaired audiences, EXTRA Info provides background information aimed at heightening the overall appreciation and
think Microsoft should make the flat keyboard part of the Surface Pro 3. It would be a more enticing feature.

The is a tablet that offers diverse opportunities for every user in a variety of environments: business, government, science, education, arts and so on. People with disabilities can benefit from it.

John M. Williams can be reached at jwilliams@atechnews.com.

comprehension of a given program. EXTRA Info can be accessed online as streamed audio, as a screen reader document, or as a scalable text file. EXTRA Info, available in various languages, can include set and costume descriptions, character biographies, background facts concerning the settings of a story, and even plot recaps of past episodes of a continuing drama.

Keeping in mind national laws regulating media accessibility, including pending federal legislation, Bridge monitors the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, the National Instructional Materials Accessibility Standard, the Digital Accessibility Information System 3, and the Federal Communication Commission’s reauthorization of video description.

According to Kaplowitz, “the world of assistive technology offers unlimited opportunities for creativity, meaningful work and social justice.”

Next up for Bridge: the 5.1 surround-sound mix and video description for the television production of Lincoln Center’s Sweeney Todd, starring Emma Thompson, Bryn Terfel and Audra McDonald, premiering on PBS on Sept. 26.

John M. Williams coined the term "assistive technology." His website is www.atechnews.com.

It occurs to me that some of the aforementioned stones would be great names for some music groups. Amble on down to the local arena and listen to the heavy metal sounds of the Uric Stones, or wait until next week, when the Struvite Stones and their dazzling mandolin section come to town. Me, I’m gonna wait for the dulcet tones of the acoustic Cystine Stone Trio.

I do know one common thread contributing to the arrival of kidney stones is that many of us simply do not drink enough water. The Mayo Clinic says that doctors recommend that those with a history of kidney stones are well-suited by passing 2.6 quarts of urine a day. Yes, this will require drinking more water than you drink now but, let me tell you, living with a kidney stone can be beyond-the-reach-of-words painful.

So, no, I’m not looking forward to the kidney stone removal surgery, and if I do require a stent for a few weeks, I’m not happy about that either. Nor am I overly thrilled with or convinced that removing said stent is “a simple office procedure.”

Having said all this, I am thrilled at the prospect of being free of the kidney stone and healing. I have pledged to drink more water daily (I already do), and do what I need to do on the exercise and diet front to minimize the possibility of another city-sized kidney stone setting up camp in my innards.

We -- you and me -- don’t just need to take good care of ourselves. We deserve to take good care of ourselves.

Peter S. Kahrmann is a writer and an advocate for people with disabilities.
As for the attractions, admission to virtually every major site is free for a person using a wheelchair and one companion, but be sure to bring a note from your doctor as proof of your disability because most times you’ll be asked to present it. Best of all, almost all of those attractions are largely accessible – including the Coliseum, which boasts a modern elevator and accessible bathroom!

I highly recommend booking guides because they know the fastest accessible routes and where all the ramps, elevators and accessible bathrooms at each attraction are located. Ours all spoke both English and Italian and expertly navigated us through lines or bypassed them entirely, which made our wait times minimal.

In order to travel from Rome to Florence and from Florence to Venice, Sage Traveling booked us on high-speed trains. The train terminals in each city had a specific room to accommodate people with mobility impairments. Once you identify yourself as a passenger, you are escorted to your train, loaded onto a specialized lift and transferred to an accessible rail car. There is a fully accessible bathroom on board, and rail personnel are waiting to reverse the process when you reach your destination. It’s smooth, efficient and easy.

When we arrived in Florence, Sage Traveling was again waiting to bring us to our hotel: the Orto De medici. It is a very old building, but it has been modernized with an elevator, no-step entrance and accessible rooms. It was also an easy walk to restaurants, shopping and the major attractions, including the Accademia, Uffizi Gallery, Pont Vecchio and Duomo. All are accessible, and admission is free to a person who uses a wheelchair and one companion.

Florence is also much more laid-back and compact than Rome, with many at least partially accessible shops (leather, gelato!), only a few cobblestone streets and curb cuts in most sidewalks. Of all the cities we visited, I found it the easiest to get around in.

Surprisingly, the next easiest was Pisa. We took a day tour there and to Tuscany via an accessible van. The area around the Field of Miracles is almost totally accessible, with ramps into almost every building, curb cuts and an accessible, modern bathroom. Only the Leaning Tower itself is inaccessible, but I was still close enough to touch it.

The final stop on our tour was Venice. In many ways, this floating city is the most challenging for a person who uses a power wheelchair. We stayed at the Starhotels Splendid Venice because it is the only hotel on the main island in the city that is both accessible – mostly – and offers passageways by which a wheelchair user can roll to St. Mark’s Square, the Doge’s Palace and St. Mark’s Basilica – all of which are largely accessible – and to restaurants and shopping without encountering any steps.

The hotel also was very modern – and expensive! – but you had better be able to bounce up two-inch curbs just to get in and navigate in extremely tight quarters. I’m really adept at maneuvering, but I still smacked into something in our room every time I moved, no matter how careful I was.

Getting to and from the hotel was also a major adventure for me and not for the faint of heart. My companions and I were picked up from the Venice train station by an accessible water taxi – basically a small boat with a scissors-lift platform designed to allow people with wheelchairs to roll directly onto the boat from the dock and vice versa.

The problem is that the platform is small and flat and has no edges, so you had better be precise when maneuvering your chair onto or off the boat, or you’re going swimming! And, depending on the tide, the lift may be several inches above or below the dock – as mine was both times I used the taxi. The taxi staff had to physically manhandle first me, then my chair, from boat to dock and vice versa. Those were truly scary moments for me and my companions; afterward, we decided to use the taxi only to transfer...
He suffered a bullet wound to his head in the assassination attempt outside the Washington Hilton Hotel on March 30, 1981. Brady’s death was ruled a homicide, District of Columbia police said. But a law professor and an attorney for John Hinckley Jr., who was found not guilty by reason of insanity in the shooting, said bringing new charges against the 59-year-old in Brady’s death seemed unlikely.

Although he returned to the White House only briefly, Brady was allowed to keep the title of presidential press secretary and his White House salary until Reagan left office in January 1989.

A federal law requiring a background check on handgun buyers bears his name, as does the White House press briefing room.

Of the four people struck by gunfire in the assassination attempt, Brady was the most seriously wounded. A news clip of the shooting, replayed often on television, showed Brady sprawled on the ground as Secret Service agents hustled the wounded president into his limousine. Reagan was shot in one lung while a policeman and a Secret Service agent suffered lesser wounds.

On Nov. 28, 1995, while he was in an oral surgeon’s office, Brady’s heart stopped beating, and he was taken to a hospital. His wife, Sarah, credited the oral surgeon and his staff with saving Brady’s life.

Brady remained as transition spokesman after Reagan’s election. But his advisers appeared hesitant to give Brady the White House spokesman's job. Mrs. Reagan was said to feel the job required someone younger and better-looking than the 40-year-old, moon-faced, balding Brady.

"I come before you today not as just another pretty face, but out of sheer talent," Brady told reporters. A week later, he got the job.

He was divorced from the former Sue Beh when, in 1973, he courted Sarah Jane Kemp, the daughter of an FBI agent who was working with him in a congressional office.

Sarah Brady became involved in gun-control efforts in 1985, and later chaired Handgun Control Inc., but Brady took a few more years to join her, and Reagan did not endorse their efforts until 10 years after he was shot.

The Brady law -- formally known as the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act -- required a five-day wait and background check before a handgun could be sold.

President Bill Clinton awarded Brady the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1996. The following year, Handgun Control Inc. was renamed the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence as a tribute to Brady and his wife.

Survivors include his wife, Sarah; son, James “Scott” Brady Jr.; and daughter, Melissa.

-- Associated Press
The second benefit of speaking to people who are deaf-blind is that it would have bolstered the authenticity of Elkins’ novel. Take just one example: In actuality, Bridgman likely didn’t have a lover. In *What is Visible*, Bridgman has, for a short while, a same-sex lover. This is within the realm of possibility. Bridgman in real life was often reprimanded for slipping into the beds of the other girls at Perkins at night. (I make no judgment on that; I’m gay.)

But two things are problematic.

One, Elkins writes in a love scene that during sex, Bridgman could see, taste, smell and hear. Granted that this is fiction, and who knows what goes through anyone’s head at such a moment? Still, the use of this metaphor is questionable. Actual deaf-blind people could no doubt have given Elkins a fresher take on such scenes.

And two, in the novel’s afterword, Elkins writes, “As for my choice to make the sexual relationship a somewhat sadomasochistic one, it seemed natural to me that if one has only the sense of touch, the desire would be to push it to its extreme.”

Elkins’ assumption that because Bridgman only had the sense of touch that her sexual relationships, if she’d had any, would have been “somewhat sadomasochistic” can be construed as ableist – a view from the perspective of a person without a disability. Talking with deaf-blind people might have been helpful to Elkins in creating this scene.

Overall, however, I’d recommend *What is Visible*. Though fictionalized, the book is a gateway into an important, long-neglected figure in disability history.


Rather that those around you don’t hear the amount of cash being identified. The vibrations mode makes the iBill accessible to people who are deaf-blind.

The iBill, which is lightweight and easy to use, also can be attached to a key ring. It is packaged with instructions in print and braille, as well as on an audio CD.

Distributing a product to every person in the U.S. who has a visual impairment is a rather ambitious task, but it appears that the BEP has come up with a method that is going to get the job done without mountains of confusion or red tape.

First, it sent representatives to three major consumer events this summer: the conventions of the National Federation of the Blind, Blinded Veterans Association, and American Council of the Blind. At these events, a room was designated as the distribution point and a schedule announced. Lines were consistently long but moved steadily as the basic contact information of individuals was collected and the boxes distributed.

Second, in September, the BEP will distribute the devices through the network of regional libraries that are associated with the National Library Service for the Blind or Physically Handicapped. Anyone who is a patron of the NLS (or who is eligible to receive books in braille and/or audio format and would like to become a patron) can call his or her network library and request an iBill money identifier. One will be mailed at no cost. Anyone unaware of his or her network library can call 888-NLS-READ (888-657-7323.)

And third, in January 2015, the Bureau of Engraving and Printing will begin taking requests from other individuals who were not reached by the initial distribution phases. Anyone with additional questions can call the BEP at 844-815-9388.

Eventually, the U.S. Treasury Department will distribute bills that can be identified without sight, but that may well be another decade away. In the meantime, an excellent solution has been found that will put a currency reader in the hands of every person unable to see which bill is which. You might say you can take that to the bank.

Deborah Kendrick is a newspaper columnist, editor and poet. She can be reached at Kendrick.deborah@gmail.com.
Conaghan  Continued from page 12

me somewhat. I think some people get so uptight about these issues; it’s simple: If they want to read sanitized books littered with unrealistic, benign language, then so be it. It’s not for me. That’s not my reality. I won’t change who I am to appease them.

Q: What was it like for you to teach at a special (for students with disabilities) school?

A: Initially, it was a shock to the system, but after finding my feet and rhythm, as well as understanding the dynamics of a non-mainstream educational environment, it was fulfilling both personally and professionally. It made me realize how quick I was to (mis)judge certain people because of their differences. I think I became a more compassionate and less self-absorbed person due to this experience.

Q: In the United States, kids with disabilities, as well as black, Latino, LGBT, etc. kids, all too often have to contend with bullying. I got the impression from When Mr. Dog Bites that this is true in the United Kingdom. Is this true?

A: Unfortunately, bullying is a curse that exists in education, in society, and transcends borders. The marginalized, disenfranchised subcultures will always be a target of the bully. It’s vital to stand up collectively and institutionally against this.

Q: What would you like readers (teens and adults) to take away from When Mr. Dog Bites?

A: I want my readers to feel that they have shared in some sort of journey with Dylan and to have experienced some of his emotions along the way. Essentially, I want my readers to have felt entertained by the book.

Q: Are you at work on a new writing project?

A: I am putting the final edits together for my next novel. It will be out next year. It is very different from When Mr. Dog Bites but still has a teenage lad as its protagonist.

Q: Many thanks again for chatting with us!

Kathi Wolfe is a writer and poet. Her most recent poetry collection, The Green Light, was published by Finishing Line Press.