



The Torch



Edition #29

10 fascinating facts about the white cane

Tap tap tap. That's the sound of independence.

That's the sound of people with visual impairments around the United States – and all over the world – using a white cane to confidently navigate to work, around their neighborhoods or to wherever their plans take them.



There's no better day to celebrate the power of the white cane than October 15 – White Cane Safety Day. It's the day set aside by the federal government to recognize the independence and skill of people who use white canes. It's also a reminder that laws in all 50 states require drivers to yield the right of way to people with white canes, even when they're not on a crosswalk.

In honor of White Cane Safety Day, here are 10 quirky facts about the white cane:

Yes, it's legal to take a white cane through security at an airport, according to the TSA, but it has to go through the X-ray machine.

White canes are white because of George A. Bonham. In 1930, Bonham, president of the Peoria Lions Club (Illinois), watched a man who was blind attempting to cross a street. The man's cane was

black and motorists couldn't see it, so Bonham proposed painting the cane white with a red stripe to make it more noticeable. The idea quickly caught on around the country.

White canes are going high-tech. Inventors in India, Great Britain and France have equipped white canes with ultrasonic devices that detect obstacles up to nine feet away. Vibrations in the cane's handle warn users of potential hazards in their path.

The standard technique for using a white cane was pioneered in 1944 by Richard E. Hoover, a World War II veteran rehabilitation specialist. His technique of holding a long cane in the center of the body and swinging it back and forth before each step to detect obstacles is still called the "Hoover Method."

Most people who are visually impaired don't use a white cane. In fact, only an estimated 2 percent to 8 percent do. The rest rely on their useable vision, a guide dog or a sighted guide.

There are actually three different kinds of white canes. There's the standard mobility cane, used to navigate. There's the support cane, used by people with visual impairments who also have mobility challenges. And there's the ID cane, a small, foldable cane used by people with partial sight to let others know they have a visual impairment.

Unless you're willing to "walk the walk," you can't become a certified Orientation & Mobility specialist. O&M specialists teach white cane technique to people who are blind, but to become certified, you must spend at least 120 hours blindfolded, navigating with a white cane.

Today's modern, lightweight canes are usually made from aluminum, fiberglass or carbon fiber, and can weigh as little as seven ounces. Some white cane users prefer straight canes, which are more durable, while others prefer collapsible canes, which can be folded and stored more easily.

White caning can be fun. The Braille Institute sponsors an annual Cane Quest, where youngsters aged 3-12 compete to quickly and safely navigate a route in their community using their white canes. The contest helps kids master proper white cane techniques and encourages independence.

In some states, it's illegal for a person who is not legally blind to use a white cane to gain right-of-way while crossing a street. Get caught in Florida, for example, and you'll face second-degree misdemeanor charges and up to 60 days in prison.

Source: Perkins.Org

Google launches Reading Mode app to help blind and partially sighted users

Google has introduced a new app called Reading Mode as part of its December Android update, reported by TechCrunch. The new app is designed to help those with vision loss or dyslexia to read what is on the screen.



How does the Reading Mode app work?

You will have to install the app via the [Play Store](#). Then you will have to specifically turn on the toggle button under Accessibility settings. This will enable the app to have a floating button on the screen irrespective of the app that might be on at that moment. This way, Reading Mode can be invoked on any app or webpage, allowing users more options to read the content if they are unable to do so in its present form.

How will this enhance the reading experience for partially sighted users?

With Reading Mode activated, there are going to be none of the other distractions like any animations or ads and such usually present on webpages or applications. Rather, the entire focus is going to be on the text portion. Further, the app also provides several ways to enhance the reading experience all the more. That includes the option to adjust the contrast, font type and size, and line spacing.

How does it help blind users?

Apart from these, the app also provides the option to read aloud what is on the display and adjust the reading speed as per user convenience. Plus, there is also the option to change the reading voice as well from several natural-sounding voices available. Languages supported right now include English, French, Italian, and Spanish.

Which Android devices are compatible with the app?

Google said the Reading Mode app is compatible with any device running Android 9.0 and above, which should cover a huge user base easily considering that Android 9 Pie was launched back in 2018.

Also, the app is intelligent enough to read only the text that matters, and not what might be written on buttons. There is also the option to turn on a toggle that will highlight the portion of the text currently being read. This way, users can also follow on-screen what is being read.

Source: [Tech Crunch](#)

What do blind people see? What to know about sight for those with visual impairment.

About 12 million Americans over the age of 40, and almost 3% of those 18 and younger are blind or visually impaired, according to the CDC.

Because of the variety of visual impairments that exist, it's difficult to generalize about the experiences of the blind and visually impaired. But for those wanting to learn more about the blind community, we spoke with staff members of NewView Oklahoma, a non-profit organization which provides rehabilitation, employment and community programming to the blind and visually impaired in the state of Oklahoma. Here's what we asked them.



What do blind people see?

According to Ronita Smalley, rehab community outreach manager at NewView Oklahoma, there are two definitions of legal blindness. Someone is legally blind if they have visual acuity in their central vision (the opposite of peripheral vision) of 20/200 or worse in their best corrected eye. Someone is also considered legally blind if they have less than 20 degrees of peripheral vision, which Smalley says would be similar to looking through a paper towel roll.

People who are blind or otherwise visually impaired fall within a wide range of visual acuities, and even most people who are legally blind have some sort of visual perception, Smalley says.

"Blindness is really a spectrum," says Ashley Howard, NewView's vice president of marketing and communications.

Just because someone is blind doesn't mean they are seeing a "solid black curtain," Smalley says. Many of those who are blind still have light perception, which allows them to see "clouds" of light and can help them orient themselves in different spaces, Smalley says.

Smalley also explains that lighting, contrast levels and more can affect how well the visually impaired can see. For example, a red apple resting on a well-lit, white countertop might be easier to perceive than the same apple on a brown countertop in a poorly lit space.

Smalley emphasizes that visual memory plays an important role in the experience of the blind and visually impaired.

“Typically, people are not blind from birth,” she said, “and some of them still have some visual memory from when they still had some sight.” She says this allows people to form pictures of their surroundings despite vision loss.

But visual memory isn't perfect and, as such, is not always accurate, Smalley says.

For example, someone who has visual memory of a poodle might map the attributes of a poodle onto other dogs that do not look very similar. But despite its imperfections, Smalley says visual memory can be helpful for orientation and navigation in public and in the home.

What do blind people dream about?

Smalley says visual memory also plays an important role in dreaming. Even if someone is totally blind, they may see objects, places and faces they remember in their dreams.

Smalley also says those who are totally blind still experience visual phenomena in their dreams. “If you haven't really seen things, your mind just makes up its own pictures,” she explains.

Visual memory is imperfect, but those who are visually impaired can still have an understanding of the spatial layout of the world around them, especially when they're in familiar spaces like their homes or workplaces, so they can dream about specific places just like everyone else.

Those who are blind can also experience other sensory phenomena in their dreams. Some who are blind report experiencing olfactory and tactile sensations in their sleep, according to the Huffington Post,

But not all blind and visually impaired people report dreaming. “I talk to a lot of people who are totally blind who say that they really don't have dreams,” Smalley says.

Why do blind people wear sunglasses?

Not all of those who are blind or visually impaired wear sunglasses all the time, but Smalley says there are a few reasons people may choose to wear sunglasses.

Mainly, sunglasses are worn by members of the blind community to protect their eyes. If someone's visual impairment makes their eyes extra sensitive to light, the sun and bright overhead lighting can be a nuisance or can even further damage their eyesight.

Foreign objects can also cause damage to eyes, especially if you can't see them coming and it's important for those with low vision to protect their remaining visual acuity.

Smalley says people who are blind and visually impaired may also wear sunglasses for social reasons.

Smalley doesn't typically wear sunglasses indoors, but she understands how vision loss or blindness can affect social cues. "Because I have macular degeneration, I look off to the side to be able to see somebody with my peripheral vision, and when I do that, people will look over their shoulder because they think I'm talking to someone behind them," she said.

Those who don't want to draw attention to their visual impairment may wear sunglasses to make social interactions less awkward for themselves and others, she said.

How do blind people read?

Braille is how the blind and visually impaired read. Smalley says learning braille is important for those who are visually impaired from a young age.

"Braille is a form of literacy," she said. "Just like you learned how to spell things with a pencil in kindergarten or first grade, they have to have a way to write things down as well."

People who lose their vision when they are older don't have the same sensitivity in their fingers.

"They have a more difficult time actually learning braille," Smalley says. But for those who were literate at the time they lost their vision, or for those who gained literacy with braille reading and writing, Smalley says there are other options. "There's so much technology out now that using the audible format is great," she says.

Computer softwares, such as JAWS, make laptops and desktop computers more accessible to those with visual impairments, and most smartphones have accessibility features. Many mobile apps also offer text-to-speech services for objects in the real world, such as groceries with nutrition labels or street signs.

Because adults who experience vision loss likely already know how to read and write, they might prefer audible options such as screen reader and text-to-speech apps. But Smalley says it's still important for these people to learn some braille for navigational purposes such as finding bathrooms, hotel rooms, offices in buildings and more.

For those with low vision who read for leisure or want to study up on a particular topic, Smalley recommends libraries that exist for the blind, visually impaired or otherwise physically disabled.

Smalley says NewView typically connects its patients and other community members to the Oklahoma Library for the Blind. [The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled](#) also offers reading materials nationwide through its network of libraries and other services.

Source: [USA Today](#)

Beneficiary News

A dream comes true – by Braam Naude

In December, Braam went on a boat trip for 5 days and 4 nights. It was an incredibly exciting experience.

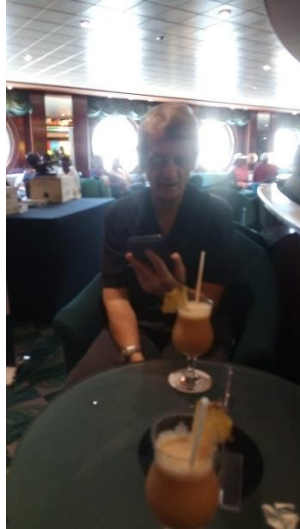


The boat departed from Cape Town on 19 December at around 4pm en route to Walvisbaai, Namibia. I had to check in at 12 pm and due to my visual impairment, which gave me an advantage and I could skip right to the front of the check in que.

As the boat was leaving Cape Town, everyone gathered on deck 11, for the welcome party. Great music was played, and everyone danced right through the evening. During this time, you could also go for the buffet supper.

On deck 5 was a restaurant where you were served instead of the self-help buffet. Passengers were welcome to eat anywhere they chose. You were basically free to eat the entire day.

My room was on deck 9, in and around me where different areas on the boat that took many different forms of entertainment. A disco was held on Deck 12 every single night, people danced right through the night.



I also attended a circus like show., performers did different tricks on various props.

When the boat arrived in Namibia, I opted to attend more shows and thus did not get off the boat.

The weather was stunning; the boat was in harmony with the waves. You had to stand still to feel the movement of the ship.

The cabins were just the right size and very well set out. I could not find fault with anything and getting around was not a problem at all.

Congratulations



Carolina Kawewe passed her matric with a Bachelor's entry. She intends to study nursing in 2023.
Well done Carolina, we are very proud of you.

Birthday Wishes



Sarah Roberts recently celebrated a very special birthday. We would like to wish her many more special years ahead.

Long Cane Rally 2023

JOHN AND ESTHER ELLERMAN
LONG CANE RALLY 2023



ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY
"Independence"

WHEN

- 4 March 2023
- 10 am

WHERE

- Mountain Mill Mall, Worcester



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It has been a few years since we gathered for the Long Cane Rally. We will finally see each other again in March 2023.

For more information about our event, please email the office at info@stdunstans.org.za.

To stay up to date with current news and new developments click [here](#).