

*Our Stories, Our Lives*

Georgia Libraries for Accessible Statewide Services Oral History Project

GLASS-009

Brian Mosely interviewed by Kamesha Bradham

December 14, 2018

BRADHAM: Hello. My name is Kamesha Bradham, and I am going to have a conversation with Brian Mosley for "Our Stories, Our Lives," an oral history project with the Georgia Libraries for Accessible Statewide Services. It is December 14, 2018, and this is being recorded at the Augusta Library, in Augusta, Georgia. Okay, Brian, thank you for coming and participating. You can start with your story.

MOSELY: Well, I don't necessarily know where to begin except, perhaps, with my blindness. I lost my sight during an accident that left me blind and with epilepsy and without the sense of smell. I, being blind, didn't know what to do, where to go. I was new to Georgia at the time and learned about a place called Walton Options for Independent Living through another blind gentleman my mother saw. Through that independent living center, I was influenced to go, or consider going to, college. I went to Augusta State University which is now called Augusta University, and it was at that time that I learned how to use a screen reading program called JAWS. And it was at that point that everything changed for me.

When I first went back to, or, when I first went to Augusta State University and met with the disability service department director, I was asked what accommodations I would need. And being newly blind, I did not know. And that's exactly what I said: "I don't know." And I was told they couldn't help me if I didn't know what accommodations I needed, and I asked for all of the accommodations for the blind. After playing around with braille and other options for the blind, again, I chose the JAWS screen reading program because it would allow me to use the computer, and it talked to me and told me what was on the computer, so it was a lot easier for me to picture the rest.

I made it through Augusta State University with a 2.7 which is still a little bit above average grade point average. And my major was in psychology, but then I went on to work for an organization who helps other people with disabilities get jobs, and 80 percent of that job was data entry. And so I learned a lot more about assistive technology and how it could help me be more independent, especially in the workplace. Since learning JAWS, I've also fell in love with the iPhone because, even though it wasn't made for the blind, it helps us in lots of ways, or at least it helps me in a lot of ways.

I have an app on there that allows me to scan typed text, so I can pull my phone out of

my pocket at any time and scan a document, and it will read it back to me. It helps me with navigating my way around if I'm walking with my cane or with my guide dog. So a lot of the voice-activated technology really helps me as a blind person. But during all of this, I never learned to read or write braille; that's something I still would like to learn, but more for professional reasons than personal because with the assistive technology that I just talked about, I've been pretty good with my independence. Like I said, I can read my own mail, navigate my way through the community, and get a lot of things done independently with that assistive technology.

I also am a member of GLASS, so occasionally I can read a good book, and I like to enjoy that. And let me see--again, with the JAWS screen reading program, for me as a blind person, it opens up access to that worldwide web which, again, opens up access for me to what's out there, what's going on. There are still some glitches that they have to fix, some compatibility issues with different programs. Sometimes that's on the developers of the other program, but it has been very helpful with working in the workplace, and it provides me with confidence when seeking employment to inform an employer that I can do something, and here's how I would do it. So other than that right now, I'm looking to utilize some of that with the transition program with the youth with disabilities and trying to help them with preparing for post-secondary life. And that's my story.

(laughter)

BRADHAM: Okay. And you said you became blind because of an accident. Do you want to talk about that time?

MOSELY: No. It's an unsolved mystery.

BRADHAM: Okay.

MOSELY: So yeah, it's not something I really recollect too much about so, yeah.

BRADHAM: Okay. And what were the hardest challenges you faced and how did you get through them?

MOSELY: Well, some of the hardest challenges faced were the actual--my challenge with reading print and functioning in school. Say, for instance, when I had to take my tests: Before I became familiar, in fact, introduced to JAWS, I had to take my notes on a tape recorder, take my test using two tape recorders. And again, I was not able to access anything as far as the web or email or anything like that. And that's where being involved with the independent living center, Walton Options, helped me because they provided me, not only with training using JAWS, but also a little bit more information regarding advocacy and knowing what it was that would best help me to overcome some of the barriers like all the time it would take to listen to the tape, to the questions

on tape, record them on another tape, and then wait to find out what my score was going to be. I was able to actually introduce to Augusta State University how they could put my test on the computer. And by using JAWS, I could independently take the test and I could do it efficiently and effectively which was what helped me to end up graduating and actually not taking too much more than the four years required.

BRADHAM: Okay.

MOSELY: Now another challenge is always people in the community, of course, trying to take advantage of a person that's blind, and that's another reason why it's good to have some of the technology like the money reader, which all of that comes with your iPhone, but it allows you to be able to make sure you're getting your correct change or that you're spending the right bill and, in some cases, that you can even look for certain products independently. So it becomes more of a help than anything. And when you don't always have to depend on someone else to help navigate through the community, it helps with your independence and confidence.

BRADHAM: Okay. So do you want to talk about how you felt when you first became blind?

MOSELY: Yeah. When I first became blind, I was new to Georgia. I had been in Georgia for about eight months because my mom was here by herself and it was out in the country in Appling. And when I became blind, I really thought I was the only person in Georgia that was blind. I didn't know anybody. I didn't know anything about being blind other than Stevie Wonder and Ray Charles. And so I didn't know where to go for any type of resources or help or anything like that. I called my dad who was way out in Los Angeles, and he found someone from the National Federation for the Blind who, in two days, sent a FedEx truck to my house with the white cane that was donated and a pamphlet with information about resources in Georgia. And that was my beginnings because for about a year, I sat on the lawn every day kind of crying to God and just asking, "Why? Why me? What happened?" and finally realized, or God spoke and said, "Well, if you want something to happen, you're going to have to get up and make it happen."

And then I was--got out and that's where I was introduced to an individual, who I don't think would mind me mentioning his name, he was my mentor, Mr. Willie Jones, who introduced me to Walton Options. And it was from there, again, I was introduced to the world of the blind community, resources, and school. So before then, I really felt in the dark. And afterwards, I felt as if I had seen the light because it was after being introduced to Mr. Jones and in the resources that blind people could use. Like I never used a computer when I had my sight. I was a construction worker and a site supervisor training at-risk youth in landscaping. So I didn't know how to type, I didn't use a computer, so I really didn't think being blind that this was something I was going to be able to do. But the moment I heard JAWS speaking and Mr. Jones telling me that's

what's on the computer screen, I was motivated. So after that, I didn't look back. And that's like--I've been using JAWS now for the past 20 years and, like I said, I'm now motivated to try and start learning to read and write braille, more for professional reasons because I love the technology. I think that JAWS was a super, super invention for the blind.

BRADHAM: Okay. Is that all you wanted to share with us today?

MOSELY: I think that about sums up my story at this particular point because I'm--well, I'd like to add that I'm more about the disabled at large than the blind, period. I mean the blind is part of the disability community, so I like to say I'm an advocate for everyone with a disability--young, old, blind, or anything else. And I wanted to thank GLASS for this opportunity to archive our stories because I do think they're important, and they may make a difference to someone in the future. Thanks.

BRADHAM: Thank you.