

*Our Stories, Our Lives*

Georgia Libraries for Accessible Statewide Services (GLASS) Oral History Project

GLASS-012

Anna Trotman interviewed by Stephanie Irvin

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IRVIN: Hello, my name is Stephanie Irvin, and I'm going to have a conversation with Anna Trotman for "Our Stories, Our Lives," an oral history project with the Georgia Libraries for Accessible Statewide Services, Georgia's talking book and braille library. It is December 14, 2018, and this is being recorded in the Center for the Visually Impaired in Atlanta, Georgia.

Thank you, Anna, for being with me today.

TROTMAN: You're welcome.

I was born in 1981 in Montgomery, Alabama. I was born with jaundice and spent the first three weeks of my life in two different hospitals, mainly because they thought I was going to be retarded. But it turned out that I had blood clots in both of my kidneys that that would continue to decline until I was sixteen years old when they finally failed.

When I was learning to walk, my parents noticed that my eyes would go back and forth, so I had spasmus nutans from chickenpox. They also noticed that I couldn't tell the difference from where the carpet started and the tile ended. So they knew that I had some depth perception problems.

We moved to Gwinnett County in 1985. They also knew that I had some problems with speech, so I started speech therapy when I was four years old.

I went to public school--Centerville Elementary, Shiloh Elementary, Shiloh Middle School, and Shiloh High School.

At the age of seven, I was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, which is an eye condition where light doesn't come in and you can't see some colors, and you also have depth perception and no night vision. I continued to live a healthy life in school. I would sit very close to the board. I'd wear thick glasses and use my listening skills to get through towards high school.

At age eleven, I had to have surgery for--some surgery. And then at thirteen, I had eye surgery to strengthen the muscles in my eyes, but it didn't work.

Like I said, when I was sixteen years old, my kidneys failed, and I was on dialysis for six months, and then my father was tested to be a donor and he gave me his kidney when I was--on October 22, 1998. And I have been rejection-free for almost twenty years.

In 2000, I got black spots in front on my right optic nerve, and a neuro-ophthalmologist at Emory diagnosed me with pseudotumor cerebri, which is a false tumor that puts pressure on your right optic nerve. So I've had four spinal taps to relieve the fluid.

When I graduated from high school, I went on to attend the University of Alabama at Birmingham and earned a bachelor of arts degree in communication studies with a concentration in communication management and a minor in health education.

In 2003, my eyesight got worse. From the second spinal tap, I lost my hearing. So I use digital Bluetooth hearing aids.

I graduated from college. In 2007, I went to the E.H. Gentry Technical Facility. It's a residential adult training center for people who are blind, deaf, and who have general disabilities. So I got to be around other blind people, other deaf people, other people who had general disabilities, and I learned a lot from there. That is where I learned braille in about four months and use it every day since.

In 2008, I decided to go back to school. And in 2009, enrolled in the University of Alabama for my master's degree in rehabilitation counseling and earned my master's degree in 2011.

From there, I didn't really know what to do. My parents had always taught me that, even if you have obstacles in your life, you don't give up. So after my master's degree, I did some paid work experiences and found the love of braille again and teaching it to adults who are blind at the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind.

But there was no jobs in teaching braille, so I decided that I needed some more training, especially in cane travel and home management skills. So I attended the Louisiana Center for the Blind in 2013. Under sleep shades for eight hours a day, learning alternative techniques and everything.

Then in 2015, I got a job as a vocational rehabilitation counselor at the Iowa Department of Blind. But that didn't really work out, because it was isolation and it was with people that were not very friendly or nice. It was just very isolated, so after that, came home, started looking for braille instructor jobs and found this incredible, amazing opportunity at the Center for the Visually Impaired teaching adults in braille. And one thing that it allows me to do is to, once a student learns braille and sees what it can do for their lives, I also help them apply for GLASS, Georgia Libraries for Accessible Statewide Services, so they can get talking books, braille books, BARD. One thing that I love about the State of Georgia: You get a free Bookshare membership, which is not very known in other states. You usually pay for the membership.

My message to other people is, there may be obstacles and other things in your lives, but don't ever give up. And always find mentors and people that can help you and show you the way.

IRVIN: Thank you so much, Anna, for taking time to talk with me today.

TROTMAN: You're welcome.