

Dolores Reisinger Story
Submitted to the Iowa Department for the Blind
February 14, 2011

The popular American author, Danielle Steel, once wrote: "Strong people cannot be defeated." Perhaps her words can be applied to all of us present here. Today, they certainly will be demonstrating my point of view.

I am a native of Brazil. I grew up in a city that is today, the most important industrial complex of Latin-America. Sao Paulo City has nowadays a population of over 20 million people and it is the leading car-manufacturing center of Latin-America.

I was six months old, when my parents learned that I was blind because of the atrophy of my optic nerve. My parents were not rich and they didn't have college education. However, they didn't give up; they didn't lose confidence. Of course, they knew that I was blind, but they also knew that I was a normal person, capable of learning through my remaining senses and, above all, through my mind. I was allowed to grow not only physically but also mentally, emotionally and intellectually. My parents taught me very valuable and important lessons. They were very strong people. Therefore, they were never defeated.

Years later, I left home and went to a specialized school for blind children. It was a Catholic school run by the sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul. They played an important part on the development of my positive attitudes toward life during the earlier years.

After my elementary and secondary educations were completed, I spent four years at the Pontificia Universidade Catolica, from where I graduated with a master's degree in History. I taught in Brazil, until 1968, when I was invited by the USA State Department and the International Federation of the blind to come to America for two months in an exchange program. The purpose of my trip to this country was to visit and observe schools and rehabilitation centers for blind Americans. The following schools and agencies serving the blind were on my schedule: The American foundation for the blind, the Jewish Braille institute, the Library of Congress, the Hadley school for the blind, the American printing house for the blind and the Iowa department for the blind in Des Moines. I had then, the opportunity to visit with the director of the department, Dr. Jernigan, the staff and the students who were taking training at the orientation and rehabilitation center for blind adults. One of their students was my future husband, Jack Reisinger.

When my program ended, I had to return to Brazil, where I remained for sometime. In 1969, when I left Brazil, the country was politically ruled by the army. There was no freedom of press; there was no freedom of speech. We were not allowed to conduct public meetings and could not voice our opinion. So, I managed to leave the country. However, the generals remained in power for almost 16 years, until 1985 when the nation finally held its democratic elections. The army domination of Brazil began in 1963 and ended only 22 years later. During that period, a whole generation of children grew up in Brazil under a very oppressive military

regime. College students, teachers, lawyers, political leaders of the congress and other professional people disappeared over night and they were never found. Popular Brazilian singers who tried to express their sentiment through music were exiled. They were sent to France and returned to Brazil only when democracy was reestablished. So, in 1969, I left Brazil and flew back to this country where I have decided to live and to work.

However, later I learned that my Brazilian degree was not completely recognized in the United States. I went back to college, to the University of Northern Iowa from where I obtained my teaching certificate and a Master's degree in Spanish.

I taught languages in college, Spanish at Columbus High in Waterloo and in 1976, I went to work for the Iowa Department for the Blind as a vocational rehabilitation teacher. For a period of over 18 years, I worked with blind persons in 11 counties. I helped people with the acquisition of skills to make them independent in daily living activities. I also helped them to understand that blind persons given an opportunity can overcome the inconvenience of loss of sight and that the real problem of blindness is not the loss of eyesight. Instead, it is the misunderstanding and the lack of information which exist. The real problem of blindness is quite often caused by public attitudes, misconceptions and social prejudices.

After having worked for the Iowa Department for the Blind for a period of over 18 years, I finally retired.

For the last 16 years, I have done volunteer work for the City of Cedar Rapids. I was a commissioner with the Cedar Rapids Civil Rights Commission. I read and discussed with the director of the Commission the cases for which I was responsible. On October, 15 a white cane safety day proclamation was signed and presented to me by the Mayor of Cedar Rapids, Ron Corbett. I was on the task force for HAVA in Linn County. Our task force looked at three types of equipment from the following three vendors:

- 1. Election systems and software.**
- 2. Diebold election systems.**
- 3. Sequoia voting systems.**

I was a presenter at schools of instruction held for the precinct election officials with the purpose to make them aware of the needs of persons with disabilities and how to address them at the polling place on Election Day. I have helped with the Teaching of English as a Second Language at Kirkwood Community college.

Quite often, I speak in front of groups about blindness and the philosophy of the National Federation of the Blind. Presently, I have private students learning Portuguese and I'm a volunteer for two local organizations: Aid to women and the Cedar Rapids Birthright.

I must finalized my remarks by saying to you, that if you have determination, you will succeed in your endeavors; if you have courage, you will face the problems of life and you will find ways of solving them; if you are strong people, you

will never be defeated and you will see that your dreams will become a reality.

Dolores