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**The Iowa Blind History Archive
History of Blindness in Iowa - Oral History Project
Interview with [Name]
Conducted by [Name]
[Date]
Transcribed by [Name]**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

**Beverly Tietz, Vinton, Iowa
Meredith Ferguson
Bev's home in Vinton, Iowa
10-18-2011, 12:45 p.m.**

Meredith Ferguson: This is Meredith Ferguson. I'm interviewing Bev Tietz today. The date is October 18, 2011. The interview is taking place at Bev's home in Vinton, Iowa.

The time is about 12:45 p.m. Bev, could you please state your full name?

Beverly Tietz: Beverly Sue Tietz.

Ferguson: Okay, thank you. The purpose of the interview is that it will become part of the Iowa Department for the Blind's History of Blindness in Iowa, Oral History Project. Bev, do I have your consent to record the interview?

Tietz: Yes.

Ferguson: Thank you. Okay. Bev, could you state your age and your place of birth to start off with?

Tietz: I'm 53 years old. I was born in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania.

Ferguson: You're parent's names, if you're comfortable, and any siblings you have?

Tietz: My parents Ralph and Dortha (and that's D-O-R-T-H-A) Parmer (P-A-R-M-E-R). I have a brother, Rodney Parmer.

Ferguson: Okay; older or younger?

Tietz: He's older.

Ferguson: He's older?

Tietz: Three years older.

Ferguson: Okay. Bev, I have a list of questions that I kind of put together based off of what you submitted to us, which was really great, thank you. It gave me a really good place to start. But is there anything in particular that you wanted to talk about to start off with?

Tietz: Well, I guess I thought I'd talk a little bit about going to public school and some of my experiences there.

Ferguson: Yeah, go right ahead.

Tietz: I have mixed feelings about having gone to public school, especially since I have known my husband. He went to a school for the blind here. He went to the school here in Vinton. His experiences compared to mine, I guess, I feel like he seemed like he had more of a social life than what I did. But yet, in public school I felt that academically I was probably more, what's the word I'm looking for? I felt that academically it was a little bit better, maybe. That's not to put the Vinton school down, that's just I ended up going to a private school for high school, and the academics standards there were really high.

But in elementary school, even as a child, I felt really misunderstood. The kids at recess time...I used to hate recess, because the kids would play these weird little games with me where they would come tease me. They would come up and put their hands over my eyes and say, "Who's this?" We had a flight of stairs at the school that I had a hard time seeing even...I was a high partial back then, but I still had a hard time seeing when I was coming to those steps.

Ferguson: I don't mean to interrupt, but what do you mean by high partial?

Tietz: Yeah, that's a good question. I had quite a bit of partial vision. I could read Large Print. I could get around without the use of a cane or a dog, although it was difficult.

Ferguson: Okay.

Tietz: I should have had a cane because I could not see the top of the stairs. I couldn't tell when I was coming up to the stairs; I had no depth perception, so the stairs just blended in. It looked like just a flat area to me.

Ferguson: Okay.

Tietz: Because the stairs were wooden and they were just...So the kids would...I would slow down before I would get to the top of the stairs, and some of the kids would try to push me. It was stuff like that, that even as a young child, it started making me feel like kind of a misfit. I had some teachers who really tried hard to...I could get some of my books in large print, so that helped. Some of my teachers in elementary school really tried hard to do what they could for me. They copied things in Large Print with a felt tip pen. I could see that real well.

But then I had other teachers in middle school, in junior high, it seemed like there were...I remember one teacher, my science teacher. And, you know, as a kid I had thought this was great, but when I look back on it now that I'm older, the science teacher in middle school said, and "Well, you just sit there and listen, and I'll pass you. Don't worry. You

just sit there and listen and get what you can out of it, and don't worry; I'll pass you." Well, of course, in middle school I thought that was great, as a kid. But then I realized later the teacher didn't want to put anything into working with me. But then I had some really dedicated teachers, too, that would sit down and write everything out. Write out all my homework out with felt-tip pens so I could see it. But, I never learned Braille. I had a doctor who told my parents that I should never learn Braille. I should always be forced to use the vision I had. He told them that even if I dropped something on the floor, he would say, "Make her look for it. Don't let her feel for it."

Ferguson: What year was this?

Tietz: The doctor?

Ferguson: Yeah.

Tietz: It would have been in, let's see, probably around '60; 1960.

Ferguson: And this was in Pennsylvania, correct?

Tietz: Right. So, he kind of started that whole thing where my parents didn't want me to learn Braille because of what he said. You know, make me use my vision.

Ferguson: Was he your only doctor, or did you have multiple doctors along the way?

Tietz: He was the main doctor.

Ferguson: So, did you start going to him when you were really little? Because that was about middle school you said, right or was that...?

Tietz: I started going to him when my parents took me to him when I was an infant. And actually, there were five doctors that saw me when my parents first realized I had a vision problem. That was because they noticed I wasn't following the toys. When they'd try to show me a toy or try to get me to look at anything, I wouldn't follow it.

Ferguson: Sure.

Tietz: So, they were concerned that something was wrong, so they took me to someone. I don't know how they found out about Will's Eye Hospital in Philadelphia. So they took me down to Philadelphia to this Will's Eye Hospital, and there five doctors there that looked at me. And one out of the five said that I had any vision at all. The other four said that I was totally blind. So, of course, they went with the one...they stuck with the one that said I had some vision. He, I guess, would use lights and shine lights, and he said that I was following with my eye; that I was following the light with my eyes that he would shine. So he said that I definitely had some vision. So all through my childhood, and up 'til I was about ten years old, or so, my parents took me to see him as a doctor.

Ferguson: Okay. Do you want to talk a little bit about what was your...I know you talk about in your paper, the transition

from public to private school and how you really, really liked that.

Tietz: Yes.

Ferguson: Can you explain a little bit about why?

Tietz: The private school was smaller. It wasn't a school for the blind, but it was a religious private school. The teachers there, because there weren't near as many kids, the teachers had more time to spend with individual students. And so, they could give me more of the help I needed; even special tutoring and things like that. So, academically, it was really good for me.

Ferguson: What about socially?

Tietz: Socially it was good, too. I had a circle of friends that I hung with. I made some really, really close, special friends while I was there.

Ferguson: Good. I forgot to ask earlier, but what is the cause of your blindness?

Tietz: Retinitis Pigmentosa is what was diagnosed, or undeveloped retinas.

Ferguson: Okay, and did they diagnose that when you first went to see the doctors?

Tietz: Un-huh. When I first went to see the doctor, he diagnosed it. He told my parents it was undeveloped retinas, which now they call Leiber Congenital Amaurosis.

Ferguson: I've heard that term.

Tietz: Really?

Ferguson: Yeah, actually. It's amazing, the different terms.

Tietz: (Laughter) It's a fairly new one, so yeah.

Ferguson: Okay. Can you explain a little bit why you didn't go to the school for the blind in Pennsylvania?

Tietz: My parents went to visit the school for the blind in Pennsylvania. They never told me in detail, but they didn't like what they saw there. I think they saw kids that had a lot of "blindisms," as it's called. They just said it was too much of an institutional atmosphere, and they didn't want to send me there.

Ferguson: Can you explain what you mean by "blindisms"?

Tietz: My, okay let's see. They said there were kids rocking, you know, doing a lot of the jumping up and down in place; putting their hands in their eyes, that kind of thing.

Ferguson: It's interesting, I've never heard that term before until doing the interviews, and people. You pick up on "blindisms," and this just doesn't even occur to you.

Tietz: Yeah, yeah!

Ferguson: Do you feel, if you're comfortable, I was going to ask you about your family dynamics. Your relationship with your parents at all, and if their view...particularly your mom...if her view towards your blindness really seems to affect you, and your view towards blindness?

Tietz: I felt that my mom had a hard time dealing with my blindness. That affected me. I just recently found out that she said it's because she always felt guilty that I was blind. She wonders what she did wrong when she was carrying me. But as I was growing up, and I guess now when I look back on it as a mother myself, that any mother would have done this. But for some reason, it bothered me that she wanted to take me to just pretty much any doctor she found out about, whether it made any sense or not to take me there; doctors that had nothing to do with vision. But she was so desperate to try to find a cure for my blindness. And, she took me to faith healers. I think I saw all the famous faith healers. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Oh really?

Tietz: Yeah. I think I met every one of the famous ones.

Ferguson: Oh, wow!

Tietz: She just had to take me to every faith healer that there was, any doctor she heard about, like I said, whether it had anything to do with vision or not. I always interpreted that as she could never accept me. For some reason, that's

the way I always felt that she couldn't accept me as I was. I remember as a teenager I even said, "Mom, can you just try to accept me as I am, because I'm trying to accept myself as I am." That was my message I was always giving her.

Ferguson: Do you feel...I don't want to lead you to say something. But do you feel like she limited you in any way, or like, activity wise?

Tietz: You know that's interesting, because if anything she pushed me to get involved in things. She'd push me to do things I didn't want to do. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Could you give me an example?

Tietz: She...I think I have to thank her really for pushing me to do a lot of things that, maybe, I would have been more scared to do. Like ride a bike, even when I was a teenager. They even got me riding a moped. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Oh wow! (Laughter)

Tietz: We figured out that if someone would ride directly in front of me, and I followed them, that I could ride a moped.

Ferguson: Okay. So it's like a version of a tandem bike, except you're not on the same bike.

Tietz: Right.

Ferguson: Okay.

Tietz: Kind of doing it by vision. As long as they stayed in...I have just real limited...I have a central field of vision. Just a little bit of vision straight in front of me, central vision. So if that, if the bike in front of me stayed in my central vision I could follow it. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Oh wow!

Tietz: (Laughter) And so, I actually rode bike that way, and, well, actually I rode bike on my own even without a person to follow. I mostly rode mopeds by following someone.

Ferguson: Okay. Did you do that just when you were younger or into high school?

Tietz: I think I did it up until I was about, maybe, fourteen years old or so. Then I kind of lost, my mom says I lost my spunk. But I lost confidence in riding a bike, or anything, because I got hit by a car.

Ferguson: Yeah, that would do it.

Tietz: (Laughter) Fortunately, it wasn't a major accident. I wasn't hurt real bad or anything, but I didn't see the car and they didn't see me. They collided into me and knocked me off my bike. I was riding a bicycle at the time, and it just shook me up enough to where I didn't want to do it anymore.

15:00

Ferguson: Wow.

Tietz: But she pushed me. She did push me to do a lot of things that I probably, normally, wouldn't have done. And she pushed me socially. I was very shy and introverted, and still am to some extent. But I was very shy and introverted when I was in school, because I think I never felt like I fit in with the other kids. And so I wanted to kind of pull away, and pull into my own little shell. So, she would push me to be social.

Ferguson: And it sounds like you have mixed emotions about the years; kind of grateful, but.

Tietz: Yeah! I do have mixed emotions, yeah. I'm grateful that she did push me some, and as sometimes she'd push me too far. You know, she would... For instance, when I was a senior I couldn't get a date for the Senior Banquet. So she went and asked somebody for me. That was embarrassing. That was just totally humiliating. She would do things like that, that to me were kind of out of character or a little bit...that would embarrass me. She would, you know, sometimes she would try to force people to be my friends. And that was embarrassing.

Ferguson: Okay. Where was your dad in all of this?

Tietz: My dad kind of took a back seat. My mom was a control freak, and still is to this day. My dad just kind of took a back seat in everything. He was there, but he just never said anything one way or the other, how he felt about anything. He did, when I was a little girl, he used to take me and spend a lot of time with me, just doing things. He'd take

me for rides with him when he'd go somewhere. Things like that.

Ferguson: So did you feel he was supportive of you, or?

Tietz: I did to some extent. One thing I never understood that he did to me, that to this day doesn't make sense. Sometimes, not all the time, but sometimes instead of talking directly to me he would ask my mom, "Well, what does she want to do?" Or, "What does she want?" (Laughter)

Ferguson: It sounds like he was uncomfortable.

Tietz: Yeah.

Ferguson: Yeah.

Tietz: And I never understood that. Even my mom would say, "Well, she's sitting right there, ask her." (Laughter) And you know, I don't know why he did that. But then other times, you know, like I said, he would...we would go for rides and we'd talk, and have just a really good time together.

Ferguson: How about your brother?

Tietz: My brother when I was growing up, I really don't remember about him. He seemed like he was gone all the time, you know, in active...school activities. He was really involved in sports. What I found interesting, and I still don't understand to this day, was like, he hardly ever brought his friends around me. You know, he would...because he would never bring his friends around me. I thought that was kind

of interesting. We never were really close. I wish we were; we never were.

Ferguson: Do you think he was similar to your dad, uncomfortable with your blindness, or just didn't know how to deal with it?

Tietz: I'm not really sure. It'd just be, you know, that's the way I interpreted it. He must be a little awkward.

Ferguson: How did you feel about having your brother being a lot more social? Going out and doing more activities. Did that make you feel a certain way at all?

Tietz: I'm trying to think. I guess I really didn't think much about it. No, I really didn't. It just...I just felt like, you know, I really didn't know why he was so social and gone all the time. I guess it was sports mostly. I really didn't think much about it.

Ferguson: Let's move on. I know that you eventually went to the Pennsylvania Department? Was it called the Department?

Tietz: It was called The Commission for the Blind back then.

Ferguson: Okay. Did you...You learned your blindness skills there, correct?

Tietz: Actually I learned my blindness skills in Cleveland, Ohio. The Commission for the Blind in Pennsylvania sent me

to Cleveland, Ohio to...it was called the Sight Center or the Cleveland Society for the Blind for Rehab.

Ferguson: Okay. And can you maybe explain a little bit the road that took you there? What happened after you graduated high school? And what made you want to learn those skills?

Tietz: After I graduated high school, all during school I never learned any coping skills of blindness at all. And I wish now that I had known some, because things would have been a lot easier. I relied mostly on Large Print and taking notes with a felt-tip pen and things like that, when I was in school. I never was taught cane travel or anything. So when I got out of school, a person from the Commission, from the Pennsylvania Commission for the Blind came to my house and talked with me and my parents about me going to rehabilitation, or going through rehabilitation since I had never learned any of the blindness coping skills. And they told me about two different places. They told me that there was a place in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania that was a rehabilitation facility for the blind; and it had a dormitory situation. And then they told me about this one in Ohio that they sometimes sent people to, the Cleveland Society for the Blind. They said that their program you actually live in your own apartment while you were taking training and you learned...you kind of did and learned at the same time. I loved that idea. I was nineteen years old and I wanted to get away from home. I just loved the idea of being put in my own apartment. So I told them that I really wanted to go to the Cleveland Society for the Blind really bad.

So arrangements were made, and I went out there. At that time they had an apartment. It was an old hotel that had been renovated into apartments. It was kind of low-income apartments, I believe. But they had a section of apartments in that building that were just for their students. The whole building wasn't just for their students, just a certain section. So my parents took me out there and helped me get settled into my apartment. The apartment was just a little way away from the rehab. center. The rehab. center had a bus that would come every morning, pick us up and take us to the Center, and then they'd bring us home in the evening back to our apartment. We each had a roommate. Usually, there were two of us to an apartment. It really, you know, for me coming from a small town, because I grew up in a real small town. Going to the city of Cleveland and living in this low-income neighborhood, it was quite an experience; but believe it or not, I liked it. Even though I was in a low-income neighborhood, even I really liked it. I learned a lot. I just feel like it was one of the best things that could have happened to me.

Ferguson: During that time at all, did you hear anything about the Iowa Department for the Blind, in terms of the philosophy or anything like that?

Tietz: No I hadn't; not at all.

Ferguson: Okay. Just curious because of the different Departments and services that throughout the nation...Iowa sometimes had people that went to the different schools. So I didn't know if you had heard of Iowa at all, or if you felt comfortable maybe comparing the philosophies? Because

you now live in Iowa, and you've had some experience with the Department and the Commission.

Tietz: Right.

Ferguson: Possibly comparing that to the school in Ohio? Kind of, in terms of the classes that you took, could you start there?

Tietz: Well, as far as the classes, we had what they called communications, which was where you learned Braille. They did teach me Braille. I was glad they did.

Ferguson: Yeah, you seemed excited that you finally...

Tietz: (Laughter) I was so glad to finally learn Braille. Even if I didn't use it for reading; just to have a way of labeling things, you know, that I never had before. They taught me Braille first with the slate and stylus. I remember the hardest thing was getting the idea of going backwards, writing backwards. I had a horrible time with that. So they finally introduced me to the Braille Writer because I was having such a tough time with that whole concept, because I had always written, you know, print and went from left to right. So, it was really hard for me to get that concept going back this way.

And then they taught me, they introduced me to the CCTV. At that time I still had plenty of vision, and I loved the CCTV. It was just too wonderful, to be able to put a book underneath that camera and see the print magnified in such a clear manner that I could read it. I knew I had to have one. So when I got home, I got one. My dad helped

me, you know, with financially to get one. That was one of the things I really loved. They introduced me to that. Of course, back then computers were never heard of yet.

I did do transcription. They actually trained me. They had me practice daily transcription from dictation. They claimed I was really good at that. They encouraged me to pursue that as a career.

Mobility was real interesting because I had never used a white cane before. Didn't even know what it was all about. But I remember I was just thrilled. They first taught me mobility, and they taught me how to echo locate in the building. You know, where you listen for doorways and things like that with my cane. We practiced a lot of doing that in the building. Then they finally took me outside on the streets and we did sidewalk...we started out with residential mobility, and then worked into more downtown city mobility. Again, it was quite an experience for me because going from a small town to the huge city of Cleveland. When I was there it was during the winter, so I cane traveled in snow. I remember, literally, in some of the residential areas how hard it was to even find the sidewalk because of all the snow. I really was...I just couldn't believe...I was so shocked that just using a cane, that a blind person could get out and move around independently. Of course, they taught me to use buses and all that.

Ferguson: With the...I'm sorry to interrupt.

Tietz: Sure, go ahead.

Ferguson: With the cane did you...you're talking about...you're hitting on the independence factor and being

able to move freely and have that ability. Did you feel that it was the cane itself a symbol at all? It's often, I guess, the reason I ask is because several people during their interviews have talked about how they...having a lot of pride carrying a cane.

Tietz: Yeah.

Ferguson: And I was just wondering if you have felt that way, or if it was just more of a tool for you.

Tietz: I think it was just more of a tool. In fact, I know when I was in...this is terrible. When I was in middle school, people had told me about white canes. I think somebody from the Pennsylvania Commission for the Blind had told me that I could use a white cane. And I didn't want to. This was when I was junior high age. I didn't want to. I didn't like the idea, that symbol of blindness. My parents always kind of, my mom especially, was like be as sighted as you can be. Don't...she just kind of brainwashed me into not wanting to have anything to do with blindness, or even the word "blind." I think that carried over to my attitude in middle school. I didn't want to use a cane. I wish I would have been more open to it, because once I used one at the rehab. facility I saw how much freedom it gave me. But it was a tool. To me, it was a tool.

Ferguson: Okay. That's good. It's just something...it's a theme that's popped up, so I was curious as to what people's reactions are learning to use the cane. So, were there any other skills or classes that you took?

Tietz: They had...what did they call their cooking class? Well, it was more like a Home Ec. class. It covered cooking and sewing, housekeeping. I really didn't seem to need much in the housekeeping area, because my mom had pretty much trained me to vacuum. Now, sewing I have never gotten the hang of. I'm just not... I'm not good at sewing. I just can't get the hang of it.

30:00

Tietz: They tried to teach me to sew on buttons, or sew just a little bit with a needle and thread. I could just never...I feel like I'm just all thumbs. Cooking went really well. I caught on the cooking real easy, and I love cooking to this day. I really enjoy cooking.

Ferguson: Well good. In terms of philosophy, or how they taught the classes, do you have any experience with the Department's Orientation Center at all?

Tietz: I took a tour. In fact, last January when I came down there for the meeting about the transcription, I took a tour.

Ferguson: I was just curious if you had any thoughts on comparing the philosophies, or?

Tietz: Okay, there's one thing that really intrigues me, is that I noticed that everyone wears blindfolds during the training down there. I'm not sure if it's all day, every day.

Ferguson: Yeah, it's...they wear the sleep shades as long as they are in class.

Tietz: Oh, interesting. They didn't have us do anything like that when I was in Cleveland. Sometimes I wonder if at least, maybe, a little of that wouldn't have been good for me; because I used to cheat in mobility. (Laughter)

Ferguson: I like how you sound! Oh, okay. Do tell, how did you cheat?

Tietz: I was a bad girl! I never told them that I could see the crosswalks, but I could. (Laughter) So I could cross the street as straight as could be, because I could see the crosswalks. I never had any problems, of course, but now that I've lost more vision I am the worst at crossing the street. I veer like nobodies business. And, I wonder if I wouldn't have developed more of a sense of just knowing where I was in relation to everything if I would have been blindfolded.

Ferguson: Yeah. That was one of the things that I noticed when I started working at the Department, is the sleep shade factor. And I had the exact same question, but I came to the conclusion that you just did that. It forces you to work on your other skills so you're not relying on that vision. So if down the road you loose all of it or more of it, then you still have those core abilities. You can depend on those.

Tietz: Right.

Ferguson: Yeah. So it's really interesting that you...it sounds like you learned a lot of the same skills, the basics, and took the same classes.

Tietz: Right.

Ferguson: But, now having the sleep shade factor...

Tietz: No sleep shades. I don't think I ever had sleep shades on the whole time I was there. I did have a lot better vision then. I do remember using vision to do a lot of things.

Ferguson: Were you encouraged to use whatever vision you had?

Tietz: Not really. No. They did have me pretty much on feel, on tactile; except for the CCTV. They showed me that I could use my vision to read print with that. Other than that, I think they pretty much encouraged tactile.

Ferguson: Well, I kind of want...Do you want to lead into what brought you to Iowa?

Tietz: (Laughter) Okay. Well, actually my husband did.

Ferguson: Okay.

Tietz: I was living in Ohio after I went to the rehab. center. I formed some strong attachments in Ohio, and I didn't want to go back home and be under my mom's control. So, I stayed in Ohio. Anyway, I met Lloyd through, actually, an unusual situation. There's a magazine for the blind called Newsreel. Back then it was all done by tape. People would submit articles to them, and they would record the articles on to tape, and then re-circulate the magazine out to

everybody. I think they still do it that way, as well as make it available on the Internet now. He put an article on that magazine about some correspondence courses he was taking. I was interested in them because, at the time, I wanted to do something like that. So, I contacted him. He gave his address and I contacted him, and talked to him some about...asked him some questions about the correspondence courses. And we got to corresponding back and forth. One thing led to another, and we kind of just became good friends. Then he came out to Cleveland to visit me, and he did not like...he was living in Vinton at the time. He came out to Cleveland to visit me, and he did not like the city at all. (Laughter) I don't blame him. He didn't have too good of experiences while he was there. I was living in a...not a terrible neighborhood, but not too great of a neighborhood either when he visited me.

So anyway, he visited me and then he wanted me to come out here and see Vinton, to see the town; just to visit. So we made arrangements for me to come out here and visit. I fell in love with the town. At the time, I think I was pretty tired of living in kind of a run down neighborhood in the city. I still like the city, but I didn't like where I was living. When I saw Vinton...I just fell in love with Vinton. Back then, there were just so many trees. It was like all woodsy, I loved it. It's an easy town to get around in. I liked that. So the more we talked, he persuaded me to move here.

Ferguson: Okay.

Tietz: And, I had a son at the time. I was a single mom with a four-year-old son. I kept thinking that this would be a

much better environment to raise him in than in the city. So, it just seemed to make sense for me to move here.

Ferguson: Okay. At what time did you become involved with the Department?

Tietz: Not long after I moved here. Let's see...

Ferguson: What year was that?

Tietz: I'm trying to think now. It was in the early '90s. I wanted to learn computer.

Ferguson: Was that not something that you had learned in Ohio?

Tietz: No, I hadn't had a chance to. I wanted to, but the Commission for the Blind there...and this never set too well with me. I don't understand it. It's a long story. But, I had gone to college for a while and then I stopped, and the Commission for the Blind said they would not help me with anything after I quit college. So, I didn't get to pursue computer training. I wanted to.

Ferguson: Can I...I'm sorry to interrupt.

Tietz: Sure.

Ferguson: Can I ask why, or what did you go to college for? And what made you stop?

Tietz: I went to college. I wanted to be a Social Worker.

Ferguson: Okay.

Tietz: I really wanted to work with blind people. They did have classes at the college. At Cleveland State University, where I went, they even had some special classes just for people who wanted to become rehab. teachers for the blind. So, I knew I wanted to get into social work and possibly be a rehabilitation teacher. What happened, one of the things that happened was I just couldn't keep my grades up. I wanted to cut back the amount of classes because I couldn't keep up. I just felt that I couldn't keep up, and so I wanted to cut back in the amount of classes I was taking. And then I thought I'd be able to keep my grades up. Well, the Commission for the Blind said I couldn't do that. They would not...I don't know how...I don't remember how the financial arrangements were made, because I had a Pella grant; but they were also helping me some. They told me that. And, it might have been something to do with the Pella grant. I can't remember, but they said that I had to go full-time. I could not cut back to part-time, so I couldn't do it. My grades just kept going down more and more. Some other social things happened to me, too, that and I just couldn't take it. So I quit. I wish I wouldn't have, but I quit.

Ferguson: Okay.

Tietz: So, then later on when I wanted to pursue computer training they would not open my case back up. They refused to. So, then when I came here to Iowa, I was surprised actually. I contacted the Commission here or the Department. I contacted the Department. I can't remember

even the initial contact, but they were just real willing to come out and open my case and start working with me. I was surprised.

Ferguson: Really?

Tietz: They didn't even want...they didn't even really want anything to do with my Ohio records or anything. They just started a fresh case.

Ferguson: Okay. And you were able to learn computer?

Tietz: Uh-huh.

Ferguson: So can you explain? You learned it here at home?

Tietz: Kind of part...what I did was...I went to Kirkwood. At the time, we were still in what they called the DOS system.

Ferguson: Oh yes.

Tietz: Yeah. And so, I went to Kirkwood and took some...I took a computer class at Kirkwood and learned DOS. Then I took...After I finished DOS...the Department sponsored all that. After I finished the DOS class, then I took a class in Word Perfect. My goal was, eventually, was to do transcription. We thought that's what I would probably do; some kind of typing, transcription. Well, then after the Word Perfect class was when everything kind of busted open and everything went to Windows. (Laughter) After I took the Word Perfect class, then came the Windows era. So I barely had learned all that, and it was time to learn something new.

(Laughter) So Laurie Merryman, from the Department, came and helped me get into Windows. She came to my house and gave me some tutoring on working with Windows. She showed me what Windows was all about. So we did that, and I worked on that until I felt like I had a pretty good grasp of Windows, of the Windows environment. Then I learned JAWS. Then I took...let's see...that would be next.

Then the Department helped me make arrangements. I took Medical Transcription training via correspondence. The reason I did it by correspondence was because I could have taken it at Kirkwood in Cedar Rapids, but they didn't have it at the Kirkwood Center here in Vinton. The other classes I had taken...the computer classes I had taken from the Kirkwood Center, here in Vinton. Well, I was having a hard time getting transportation set up to go to Cedar Rapids from here. It's usually always a problem. We worked things out that I could take my Medical Transcription training by correspondence, since I had a hard time getting to Cedar Rapids. I would have had to get to Cedar Rapids for some evening classes, and all kinds of stuff. It just wasn't working out.

Ferguson: I know that you stuck with the transcription because you've been helping out transcribing for the Oral History Project. So, is that basically, since then, the kind of work you tried to find?

Tietz: Right.

Ferguson: Okay. Have you tried, other than the social work when you were going to college; have you tried any other career path?

Tietz: Not in college. I did have some office training at a career type school, a technical type school while I was at the rehab. center in Cleveland. I actually, while I was there I went to this one school to do some office training. So I did have that.

Ferguson: Have you pursued anything else while you were here in Iowa?

Tietz: Not other than transcription. We looked into customer service, and that didn't work out too well because we couldn't find...what am I trying to say...the customer service software that they used on their computers would not work with JAWS. We just couldn't find software. It seemed like no one was using a platform that would work with JAWS. So it's not out of the question. I'm still kind of pursuing that if something comes available.

Ferguson: But it sounds like you ran into accessibility issues as the main...

Tietz: Yes.

Ferguson: Okay. 'Cause one of the...I asked about that simply because one of the main questions we ask is job experiences that people have had in general, and how they feel careers; if they've opened up more towards blind people, or if they've closed, or that kind of thing.

Tietz: That's a good question.

Ferguson: Do you have any thoughts on that?

Tietz: Well, from my own experience, and then from experiences that my husband's had, and it's still pretty hard to get your foot in the door. To get people to understand that a blind person can work. A blind person can work along side of anyone else.

45:00

Tietz: I don't know. It's been a tough road to convince...it seems like its convincing people that you know. It seems like there's a lot of people out there that don't want to be convinced.

Ferguson: Yeah, there are.

Tietz: And I think...I've always...I'm an optimist. I've always felt that there's those few people, that if you can just reach them and find them, that will hire you; but it's hard.

Ferguson: But it sounds like you haven't given up, so that's good.

Tietz: No. (Laughter)

Ferguson: You've mentioned you have a son. And I think you have a daughter, correct?

Tietz: Right.

Ferguson: Could you maybe talk a little bit about raising your children?

Tietz: Sure.

Ferguson: I know that...I guess one of the questions that pops up is, it's just kind of assumed that you need your sight to be able to keep track of kids. Can you maybe explain why, obviously, you were successful in raising them? So, how was it that you went about it? Did you use different techniques or how did you keep track of them; that kind of thing.

Tietz: You know, I have a philosophy about that. I don't mean to sound unfair, but I really believe that blind parents are a lot more in tune to what their children are doing than sighted parents are.

Ferguson: Could you explain?

Tietz: I, personally, have been around so many sighted parents that don't seem to even know what in the world their children are doing. I'm sitting there even gasping, "Well, do you realize what your child is doing? What they're getting into? Now you're sitting there totally oblivious to it." I was always able to pay real close attention to what my children were doing. I don't know if it was just that I felt that I had to really be more in tune with my children because of being blind. One thing I did though when I was out, I trained my children from a really young age to stay with me; to not leave me no matter where we were, whether at a restaurant, store, they were not allowed to just go off and

run because then I wouldn't know what they were doing or where they were. I see so many parents just letting their kids go and run and they have no idea what their kids are doing. But my kids stayed with me. They didn't mind. I guess that's what I'd like to tell parents now, is that kids don't mind if you put those restrictions on them. My kids just grew up thinking it was second nature to not be able to run off and do things. It didn't bother them. They just knew that was expected of them.

Ferguson: Yeah.

Tietz: When they were little, when they were toddlers I had bells on their shoes so I could hear.

Ferguson: That seems to be a popular...yeah. It makes good sense.

Tietz: They always had these tie shoes with a little bell on there. You can tell what room they're in. I did keep my daughter in a playpen a lot when I was doing...my son and my daughter both in a playpen when I was doing things where, maybe, I could not pay total attention to what they...such as vacuuming. Where I couldn't totally be in tune with what they were doing. I'd have them in a playpen then. Outside, I always was at a place where I had a fenced in yard. I kept them pretty much in that fenced in area when they were small. And then as they got older they could go further. Their boundaries were, you know, let up a little.

Ferguson: Do you feel like you faced from other parents or from other people, that they didn't believe in your ability to be a parent.

Tietz: Oh yes.

Ferguson: Do you have anything in particular that comes to mind?

Tietz: The funniest thing is, it's not as much other parents questioning my ability to be a parent, but presuming that I had children help me do things for me. (Laughter) I mean, I ran into that so much, were parents, other parents and teachers would presume that my four year old child would do the dishes for me, or vacuum for me or...And I thought, "Come on."

Ferguson: How did you, when you were faced with an opinion like that, how did you approach it? What did you do?

Tietz: I would just, more or less, set them straight. Oh my goodness, they're just little. They're not capable of doing that kind of thing.

Ferguson: I guess, I was just wondering if you ever got fed up with it, or if you were able to keep your cool with opinions like that.

Tietz: (Laughter) No. There were times when I find, even to this day, that it depends on the mood that I'm in. Some days I can just brush it off and laugh about it, and other days I feel like I just would like to, you know, yell at that person

and say, “What are you thinking?” I think the thing that really puzzled me was people thinking that our kids did everything for us; even teachers! Our kids at a young age did everything for us! (Laughter)

Ferguson: Wow!

Tietz: Oh my! I just couldn’t believe that there was that backward thinking. But, I tried my best to show people that I took care of my kids and it wasn’t the other way around.

Ferguson: Yes. I’m looking at my list of questions...Well, I know in the paper you submitted you mentioned guide dogs; that you had several experiences, both good and bad. Could you talk a little bit about that?

Tietz: Sure. Well, after I went to the rehab. center in Cleveland, I had met some people while I was in Cleveland that had guide dogs. I felt that a guide dog, then, was like one step up. I felt that it was one step up, you know, of freedom from the cane. I just felt that the people that were traveling with guide dogs, they just seemed free. They seemed to have so much freedom. They didn’t have to grope around for finding your door. The dog would take you up to the door of a building. You know, they weren’t inhibited in going through open spaces like parking lots. The dog would just take them right through the parking lot, around the cars and to the door; where I had a problem with that in open spaces. So right after I got out of rehab. in Cleveland, I decided I wanted to go and get a guide dog and try it. So I went to Pilot Dogs in Columbus, Ohio. I got a dog there.

Unfortunately, my first dog, I can't believe I didn't give up on guide dogs after my first experience; because my first dog was not really a good example of what a guide dog should be. (Laughter) She was extremely high strung, extremely nervous. She was a donated dog. She wasn't raised in the school program. She had been a donated dog. I don't know why they did that. I don't know if they still do that or not. But when I was training with her, I even noticed that she pulled extremely hard. It would be so hard I would have calluses on my hands. I kept telling them that, you know, this was my first experience with a guide dog so I didn't know if a guide dog was supposed to pull that hard or not. But, I would be totally wore out from working with her. I'd go out and work with her and I'd come back just totally exhausted, because she'd been pulling on me so hard. But they just kept telling me, you know, you'll get used to it. You'll get used to it. But anyway, she ended up having some issues after I came home with her. She was terribly afraid of thunderstorms; she couldn't even work in a thunderstorm. During one thunderstorm, she ended up tearing up carpeting in my apartment because she was so upset.

Ferguson: Oh wow.

Tietz: So, I eventually gave her up. I got them to take her back. Then they gave me another dog that was super, super good. She turned out to be one of the best dogs I ever had. I really enjoyed working with her. Things went really well, and I did love the freedom I had with the dog. I still have mixed feelings about all the responsibility that goes with a guide dog though. If you want to travel somewhere, to me it's really a hassle because you have to...If you go

somewhere you have to find a place to take the dog out to relieve itself. And you know, for taking a trip it's kind of a hassle.

Now, with the dog I have right now; I mainly use her for just getting around here in town, which is ideal. She's getting older. She's semi-retired, so I don't use her as much as I used to. Just for getting around here in town, I really do enjoy having a dog. The freedom, you know. And once...I think the thing I like about a dog is, once they do a route so many times they're so used to it. It's like you're on auto-pilot. The dog just knows pretty much where you want to go. (Laughter) And you don't have to concentrate that hard on where you are. So gosh, if I go downtown she stops in every doorway that I normally go to.

Ferguson: Do you still use a cane?

Tietz: Yes, I do.

Ferguson: You do?

Tietz: Um-hum.

Ferguson: Is it, would you say, fifty-fifty? Or in what circumstance would you use the cane versus the dog?

Tietz: I use the cane... Well, I do use a cane when I go on trips. I just prefer that. I prefer not...if I can find someone to keep my dog, which usually if I go somewhere, my dog stays here with my family. It just seems like I feel, in the case of taking a trip, I feel a lot freer just not to have the dog, believe it or not. So, I use a cane then. I use the dog

mainly to just get around here when I want to run errands around here. Like, if I want to go to the bank or the post office, I use her then. If she's under the weather, I will use a cane.

Ferguson: Okay. Can you talk a little bit about what you do for fun? What keeps you busy?

Tietz: Well, to most people this might sound boring, but my kids always said I spend 99.9% of my time on the computer. And I do. I love computers, and for me it's fun. I do a lot of stuff with what they call e-mail lists, which is where you interact with people by e-mail. Lists...there's like discussion lists on all kinds of topics, for all kinds of hobbies. So, I get into those. I also just like to be on the Internet. I love research. I always have. So the Internet has been a godsend to me, because I just love to research things. If I'm curious about it, I just like to go on the Internet and research it. And I also love the computer for streaming stuff; to listen to streaming audio. There's so much out there now that you can just listen to as far as programs, podcasts on all types of topics. I use the computer a lot.

And then, well, let's see, what else do I do for fun? There's not much in Vinton you can actually get out and do. (Laughter) I love to swim, and up until recently we had our own pool. It was an on top of the ground pool, so it finally had to be taken down because of wind damage and stuff. But I'm getting another one. Next summer I'm getting another pool. I love to swim. I love to be in the water. It's a way to be out in the sun.

I love to take long walks. My dog is...she can't take long walks anymore; she's not up to it. But, I love to take long walks when I could with her.

Ferguson: Okay. Do you, or have you ever belonged to any support groups?

Tietz: Yes. Well, actually, I'm running one by phone right now. It's not a... We've tried to get support groups here in Vinton. We tried getting support groups going, but it never goes anywhere. I don't know why. I really don't know why. I'd love to have a support group here. We just can't seem to get people together. Transportation, I think, is a problem. I would love to get a support group going here. That would be the thing I'd really want to do. But I do have a support group that I run by phone. It's blind people from all over the country.

1:00:00

Tietz: We're just there to support each other, to share all kinds of things.

Ferguson: Did you start that up, or get pulled into it?

Tietz: I started it up.

Ferguson: Well, go you!

Tietz: (Laughter) Yep, I started it.

Ferguson: So, how did you go about that since it's, you said it's national?

Tietz: Um-hum. Well, I already had a lot of contacts with blind people that I knew all over the country, through a phone system I'm involved in, which is like a phone chat system.

Ferguson: Oh sure.

Tietz: It's a phone chat system; there's a lot of blind people on it. So the people that I had contact with, I just kind of got them all together and said, "Would you all like to form this support group?" That's what we did.

Ferguson: So do you have weekly, monthly conversations?

Tietz: Actually, daily.

Ferguson: That's awesome!

Tietz: Yes, daily.

Ferguson: So, do you come with a topic to discuss, or is it just kind of a free-for-all?

Tietz: Well, I try to throw topics out to kind of keep the interest going, but lately the conversations just been kind of going on a free flow type thing. It's just kind of going on its own. All types of topics. For instance, I got called up for jury duty a couple of weeks ago, so I brought that up. We talked about that, just kind of kept it going.

Ferguson: Let's see. My last question I guess; if you've been involved with advocacy at all?

Tietz: Yeah, all my life I have. When I was in Ohio, I belonged to three different advocacy groups for people with all types of disabilities. And here in Iowa, I was involved for a while with the Center for Independent Living in Iowa City. But again, the sad thing is, I don't know how else to put it. We just can't get people here in Vinton motivated to be advocates for themselves, or to be interested in advocacy. I don't know what the problem is.

Ferguson: Is there a large population of blind people, here in Vinton?

Tietz: I wouldn't say a large population. It's pretty small. But, there are blind people around here. There's enough to get a good group together.

Ferguson: Have you belonged to any of the larger consumer groups, such as the American Council of the Blind or the National Federation of the Blind?

Tietz: I had belonged to the American Council of the Blind for a long time. When I first moved here there was a chapter here in town, but it fell apart because the older members, I guess, were the ones that were kind of keeping it going. As the older people died off or got too ill to be involved any more, it just kind of broke up. So now there's nothing here, as far as the ACB, or NFB, or anything.

Ferguson: Okay. Do you wish there were?

Tietz: Yes.

Ferguson: Yeah?

Tietz: Um-hum.

Ferguson: Do you, even though you don't have any groups here in the immediate area, do you still stay up-to-date on the different topics?

Tietz: Oh yes.

Ferguson: How do you go about that?

Tietz: The Internet. (Laughter) Yep, the good old Internet!

Ferguson: Yep.

Tietz: Yeah, Internet and phone conferences. I keep in touch that way with what is going on with the ACB and the NFB, both.

Ferguson: Are there any particular topics that caught your interest of late?

Tietz: Let me think. This is kind of going back a little bit; the money issue of making currency, somehow making currency, so that a blind person could be able to tell by feel what different denominations of money are. 'Course now with the iBill, I don't feel as strongly as I did. I used to be all

for having some means of identifying currency, you know, making bills some way that they could be identified. But now that the iBill has come out, I really don't...I'm not as worried about it as I used to be. It is affordable. It's pretty affordable for most people, the iBill is. That is one of the topics I think that really caught my attention recently.

Ferguson: Speaking of the iBill, I forgot to really ask about technology; how it's expanded. I mean, just the iBill is a perfect example of how technology has really expanded and made some things a lot more accessible. Is there... Do you feel that technology makes certain things easier to do?

Tietz: Oh definitely, definitely. I have a scanner that I use to reprint materials, to read mail. I am so glad for that. Let's see, I'm trying to think just the technology in general. I'm trying to think what I do; things I take for granted and don't even think of. But yeah, the iBill would be one thing. Let me think technology wise. I don't have one yet, but the bar code readers. I think that's just a wonderful invention that tells you all the information on a package; tells you in speech. I think that's something that has really revolutionized so a blind person can access information on the cans and boxes, so yeah.

Ferguson: How do you feel about the GPS; things to help with travel and getting around?

Tietz: I think they're wonderful. Especially in my case, I have always had a problem with... I can get somewhere, but I cannot for some reason, I have a mental block when it comes to reversing directions. (Laughter)

Tietz: So, the GPS it's a godsend for me. I don't have one yet, but I'm working on getting one.

Ferguson: Okay. I've run through my list of questions. Was there anything else that came up along the way that you'd like to talk more about?

Tietz: I'm trying to think. (Laughter)

Ferguson: Well, we covered a lot of ground.

Tietz: We did!

Ferguson: I didn't want to skip over anything that you really wanted to talk about.

Tietz: I don't believe I can think of anything.

Ferguson: Okay. And we also have your written...your paper you submitted. So once we put this up online, we'll put that up as well.

Tietz: Okay.

Ferguson: So people will get more of the full story.

Tietz: Yeah. Okay.

Ferguson: Okay. I will go ahead and shut this off.

1:08:06
(End of Recording)

Deb Brix
11-8-2011