

## **My History of Blindness**

**Submitted to IDB by Sandra M. Harmon**

**I was born visually impaired. I am lacking the “IRIS.” I had acuity of 20/50 with glasses. Back in the ‘30s, ‘40s, the schools and public health, or welfare offices, made sure blind or visually impaired students went to Vinton. And so, legally we could not go to public schools.**

**In 1945, at the age of about 10, in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade I was sent to the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School in Vinton, Iowa. I was considered as a high partial impaired student, because I could read large print. Of course, being a campus style school we had florescent lighting and trained special teachers for handicapped children.**

**I enjoyed going to IBSSS. I feel trained teachers for blind students is the best formed way of education for that section of students. I feel I am a whole lot smarter because of the Vinton school and the training and education we got, and the one-on-one rapport.**

**I have a lot of the blind/visually impaired family members. The way the Doctors at the eye department of University of Iowa explained my situation, it is very much an inherited inconvenience. There were two chromosomes that split and caused the “no iris” defect, which the research states every first and last child will be inflicted. There were five of us, and my first sibling a sister was impaired and myself the last. My sister had two children who were both inflicted; a**

**girl and boy. I had one a girl impaired. The no iris problem is called "Aniridia." I know several mothers impaired, and a couple not; but children first and last with Aniridia had impaired children.**

**We all at birth, or later as adults, incurred glaucoma. I was the only one that I know of, family or friends, who was able to drive for a short time with a restricted license. I have had cornea transplants, which have failed over time, and my daughter has had transplants and hers has lasted better than mine. It has been suggested and offered by the University of Iowa Hospitals, to have an artificial cornea transplant. I have hesitated on that, because after having knee surgery a few years back I also got staph infection and I am diabetic now. I am afraid of the success of the surgery. The artificial cornea is something new in the United States lately. It is FDA approved now, I believe. It is kinda like a plastic prosthesis covering over the eye with a contact covering for the protection of the front of the eye.**

**In tenth grade, my mother remarried, and we moved to CA. That was a big change for me in school. I was used to a school of about 160 kids, and went to Hollywood High, a school of 2,000 students. We had a special classroom, which had good lighting, no strain of reading a blackboard, and a homeroom teacher who had us do our assignments by typing, not handwriting; was a big help, but embarrassing leaving the classroom every time a teacher wanted us to study a chapter, etc. I had a history class of over 50 kids,**

**and just as in the elementary classes ,we were talked about because of our difference and at times called names like: dopey eyes, quire eyes, sleepy eyes, four eyes when we wore glasses; very hurtful. We didn't get the closeness and attachments to others. I never was invited to the school reunions, compared to the IBSSS ones.**

**I married a visually impaired, former IBSSS student who went on to really make something of himself as a teacher and coach; and actually taught at a state blind school in another state, as well as at his own IBSSS.**

**Blindness for the normal public, and many times in families, is hard to understand. Not to mention working conditions; many times resented, because special adaptations and conveniences have to be made. Many thinking we are specially treated and bosses pet, which isn't true, because we are trying to be one of the workers like everyone else. I have so many times heard, even here in my apartment building, comments like, "How does she think, or do it? She can't see to do it." The public is so ignorant of blindness, no matter how many years we have tried, and tried, and improved teaching and showing our independence. Other handicaps are accepted so easily, but blindness is not; and feared. Just because some can't give or receive that direct eye contact, we are considered different. Feared and considered blind, deaf, and dumb; which is so hurtful, untrue, and their loss.**