



# Through Trevor's Eyes

A Dubuque boy's journey into blindness

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## What is it like?

Most people will never experience what it is like to have a visual impairment. Here are two examples of simulations of what it may be like to experience a visual impairment.

- Cover the lenses of glasses with Vaseline and look through them.
- Make a pinhole in a piece of cardboard. Close one eye and look through only the pinhole with the other.



JESSICA REILLY • *Telegraph Herald*

# Through Trevor's Eyes

More than four years ago, TH photojournalist Jeremy Portje met kindergartner Trevor Meyer, who was learning to walk with a white cane. Jeremy observed Trevor in his daily life and was moved by the everyday obstacles Trevor encountered because of his low vision. Jeremy struck up a conversation with Trevor's parents and began to document Trevor's journey through life.

Trevor is, in many ways, a typical kid navigating elementary school. Now a fifth-grader, Trevor is getting more accustomed to his blindness.

We believe his story is one that will resonate with parents, teachers and children. Jeremy managed to capture in his photographs what the life of this little boy is like. We're privileged to tell this compelling story.







*“Because I’m blind . . .”*

*“It’s not fun . . .”*

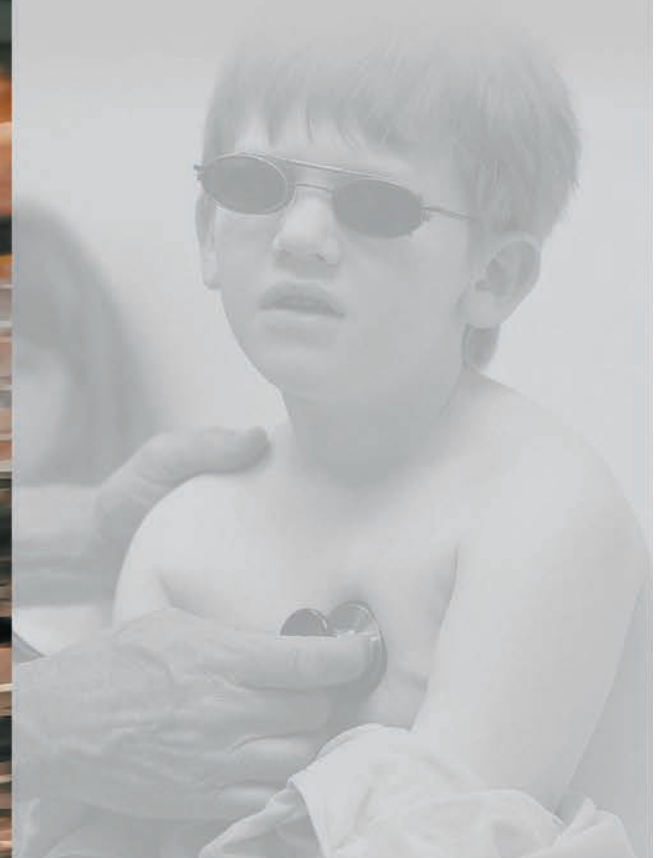
### **Tap into your other senses**

People with visual impairment maximize the use of their other senses to experience the world.

Think about how you use your other senses in everyday life.

Close your eyes and think about the following:

- Take a bite of something. What does it taste, smell and feel like?
- Find a fuzzy blanket. What does it feel and smell like?
- Walk outside and close your eyes. What do you hear, smell and feel?

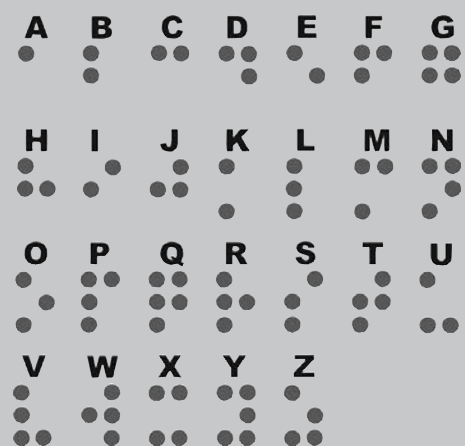




## ABCs

Braille is a system of raised dots that represent letters of the alphabet.

Here is the alphabet in Braille...



Learn more about Braille at [www.braillebug.org](http://www.braillebug.org).

## ACTIVITY

Practice using the Braille alphabet. Write out your name in Braille on the lines below.

---





*“Sometimes  
I’m sad  
about it...”*

## ACTIVITY

Make compound words by matching the word on the right with one on the left.

|           |        |
|-----------|--------|
| s k a t e |        |
| ⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠    | ⠠⠠⠠⠠   |
| ⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠    | ⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠ |
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b o a r d

⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠

## I can ...

Use the Braille alphabet to translate the words and match them up.

These are activities that, with adaptations, visually impaired students are able to participate in.



## Educating the whole student

Students with visual impairments have unique needs and their education is focused on developing skills they will need for success. A curriculum that is used to help students with visual impairments is called the Expanded Core Curriculum.

It covers nine areas:

- Compensatory or functional academic skills
- Orientation and mobility
- Social interaction skills
- Independent living skills
- Recreation and leisure skills
- Career education
- Technology
- Sensory Efficiency Skills
- Self-Determination

Trevor envisions his future in vivid hues.  
*“Bright colors. Big colors. Cool colors.”*





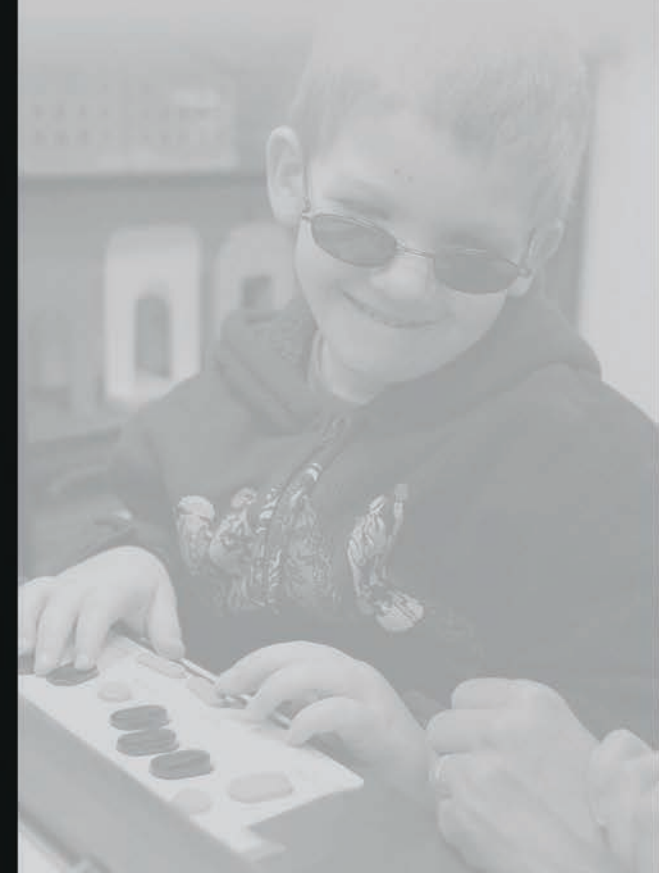
His mind's eye captures reds and yellows and blues. His actual vision confines him to an existence in shades of gray. Still, as an 8-year-old, he dreamed without limitations.

*"I want to be a car driver. A fast car driver. I want to drive real fast cars."*

### Behind the wheel?

Technological advances might make it possible for people who are visually impaired or blind to drive someday. And it might be closer than we think. Research is underway to create driverless cars, which could be a breakthrough for individuals who are visually impaired or blind wishing to drive.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21720318>





## Big dreams

Although Trevor still likes cars, his current interest is all about fish and river monsters.

In fact, his dream is to meet Jeremy Wade, the host of the television show “River Monsters.”



And if the fates granted him sight for just a moment, he would gaze upon the glory of that god of gears and wheels.

*“A Camaro — the biggest, most beautiful Camaro in all the world. I would want it to be all colors. I would want all colors on that Camaro.”*

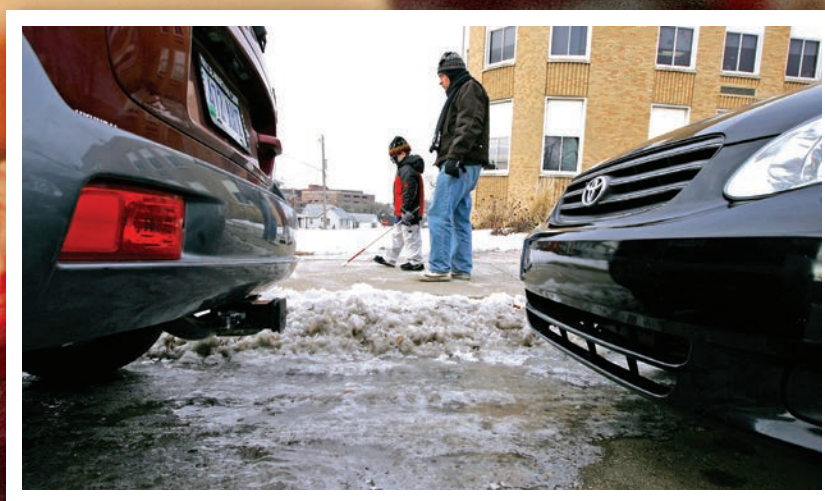




## Eye doctor

Trevor has a dedicated team of individuals assisting with his care. A key component of this is an ophthalmologist — a physician who specializes in care of eye conditions and related diseases.

*<http://www.webmd.com/eye-health/eye-doctors-optometrists-ophthalmologists>*



But it's not likely driving will be in Trevor's future.





## Resources abound

Although Trevor has light perception only, it does not stop him from learning to read or write. He now experiences books and games using a variety of special devices. Here are just a few:

- **BrailleNote:** An electronic Braille note taker that allows for word processing and Web connectivity and uses wireless ear buds.

- **Window-Eyes:** A screen reader that allows for controlling Windows-based computer applications.

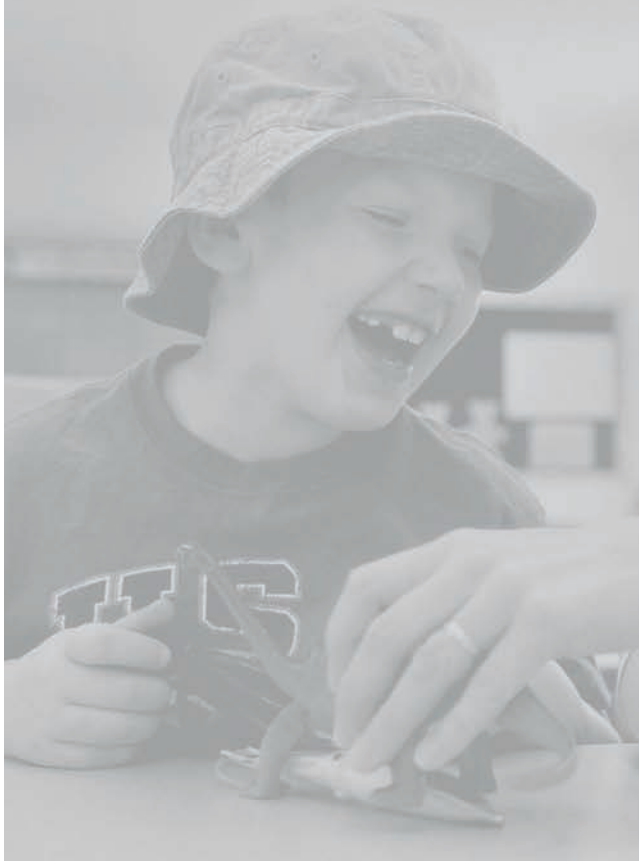
- **VoiceOver:** An application that allows for use of an iPad and other Apple devices.



Trevor does not remember losing his sight.

*"I don't think I've ever seen anything."*

He entered the world with perfect sight. It was his heart that troubled him then. When he was 9 months old, surgeons carved out a piece of his tiny chest to make way for a new, disease-free organ. With the transplant complete, Trevor and his family looked to move beyond the diagnosis of cardio myopathy.





## **Retinitis pigmentosa (RP)**

Retinitis pigmentosa is a visual impairment estimated to affect approximately 100,000 people in the United States, according to the Foundation Fighting Blindness. It causes progressive vision loss as the retina's light-sensing cells deteriorate over time.

Then, three years later, a new disease emerged — retinitis pigmentosa — which meant that his eyesight would deteriorate daily.

Sometimes the sun made Trevor's eyes burn. He wore colored glasses to prevent pain.





## World without color

Due to the progression of RP, Trevor's color vision has been severely impacted. He is unable to see or distinguish between most colors.

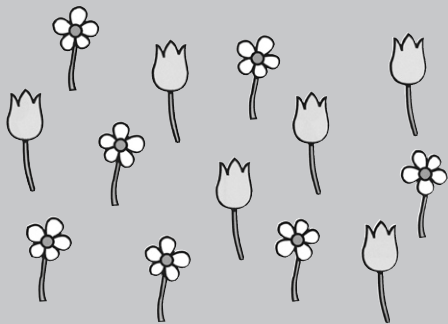
## Did you know?

Color blindness is predominant in men, affecting approximately 9 percent while only affecting 0.5 percent of women.

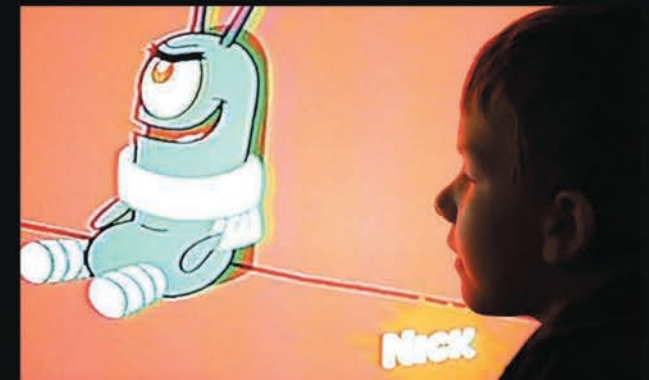
## ACTIVITY

When working with color-blind individuals, shapes are an important tool since colors can't be recognized.

Look in the puzzle below. Use the shapes to determine if there are more tulips or daisies.



Sometimes Trevor could see shapes. He stood an inch from the TV to see SpongeBob, staying up until 2 a.m., 3 a.m., watching TV while he still could.







Sometimes Trevor thought he discerned colors. He loves light pink, but when asked to point to the pink socks nestled among several white socks, he couldn't tell the difference.

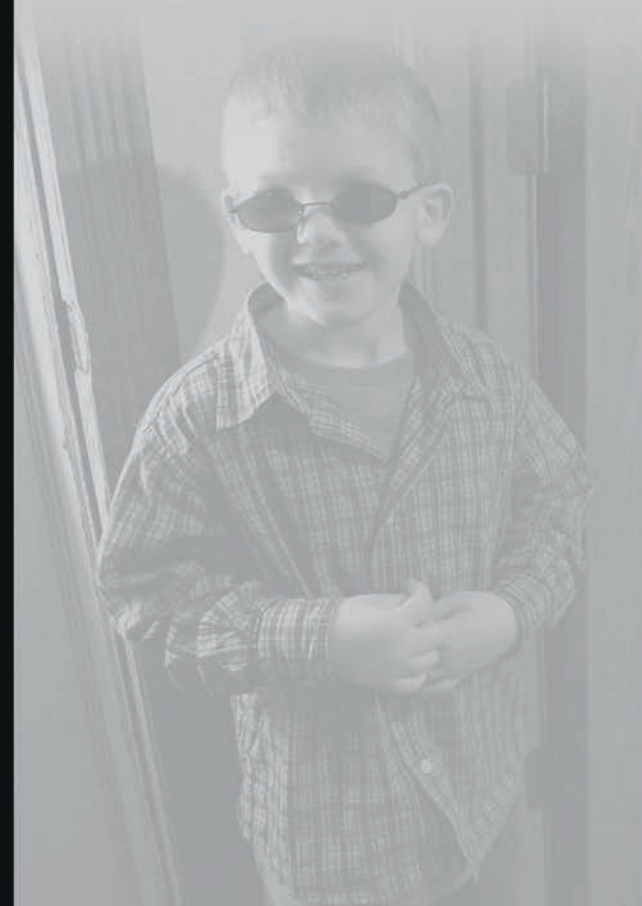
*"I just like pink, OK?"*

### **Awareness and movement**

Orientation and mobility, two common terms that are often referenced or utilized when working with students who are visually impaired or blind, are very important.

- Orientation is knowing where you are in space.
- Mobility is knowing how you are going to get to where you are going.

Orientation and mobility training may be needed in order to teach the student how to feel comfortable in the space they are in and how to travel in the space they are in safely and independently, using special tools if needed.





## 'Cane and able'

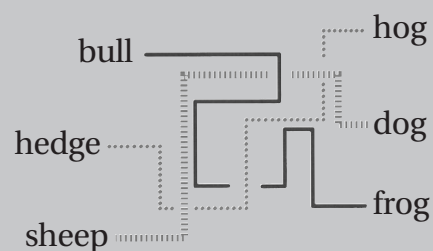
There are many types of travel tools used by those who are visually impaired. Canes are an important part of this tool kit. Here are a few commonly used types of canes:

- A **support cane** is designed to provide physical stability
- A **probing cane**, often called a white cane or long cane, is designed to detect obstacles in a person's path of travel.

Canes also come in a variety of materials, with various sized tips and in folding, collapsible and rigid forms.

## ACTIVITY

Follow the similarly shaped lines to complete each compound word.



When he was still a preschooler, doctors delivered another blow — mental delays hindered Trevor's learning capabilities. Then came one more setback. Trevor's younger brother, Nathan, was also losing his vision, likely from the same disease.

Trevor takes classes to learn to walk with the white stick that stands almost as tall as him. Sometimes he appears to forget its purpose, and instead of holding it in front of him, he grips it in his hand and marches along with it like a walking stick. In moments like these, Trevor is at his most vulnerable, and somehow, also at his most confident.







## Team Trevor

Trevor has a dedicated team helping him succeed and manage his visual impairment. Just like him, any student with visual impairment may also have the same members or more as part of their team. Here are just a few of Trevor's team members.

- Area Education Agency staff
- Special education teachers
- General education teachers
- Counselors
- Paraprofessional support
- School nurse
- School social worker
- School psychologist
- Principal
- Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Iowa Department for the Blind
- Family Connect online resource
- Wonder Baby online resource



Together, the two walk side by side, their white canes tap, tap, tapping along the sidewalk.  
*"My cane, it's like, not good. Not yet."*



## School for students who are visually impaired or blind

Trevor receives significant student support from the Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, formerly the Iowa Braille School. This state of Iowa agency supports the needs of students who are visually impaired.

<http://www.iowa-braille.k12.ia.us/>



His mother, Christine, marvels at her son's calm acceptance of his fate. Sometimes she wonders if it's denial that carries him along. Other times, she wonders if it's merely his age that leaves him unable to comprehend his circumstances.

*"It's heartbreaking to think about all the limitations. He won't be able to grow up to be a car driver. He won't be able to see his family. I've seen the Grand Canyon. It's beautiful. I've seen Mount Rushmore. But he won't. We thought about going before he lost all of his sight, but . . . time is short, you know?"*







Trevor needs no sight to know he dislikes being disciplined by his mother.

*"Sometimes she's mean."*

Her eyes say words he cannot hear.

*"I love Trevor. Of course I do. But . . ."*

She pauses and sputters for a moment.

*"I don't neglect him, but I don't always know how to deal with him either. He's a stress point for me. He touches everything. But how am I supposed to tell him that he can't touch his food when that's how he sees it?"*



## **Joy is everywhere**

Even in challenging circumstances, joy can be found all around us.

Parents, work to identify a unique quality in your children and reinforce this by sharing one of their positive attributes or actions with them each day.





## Living a balanced life

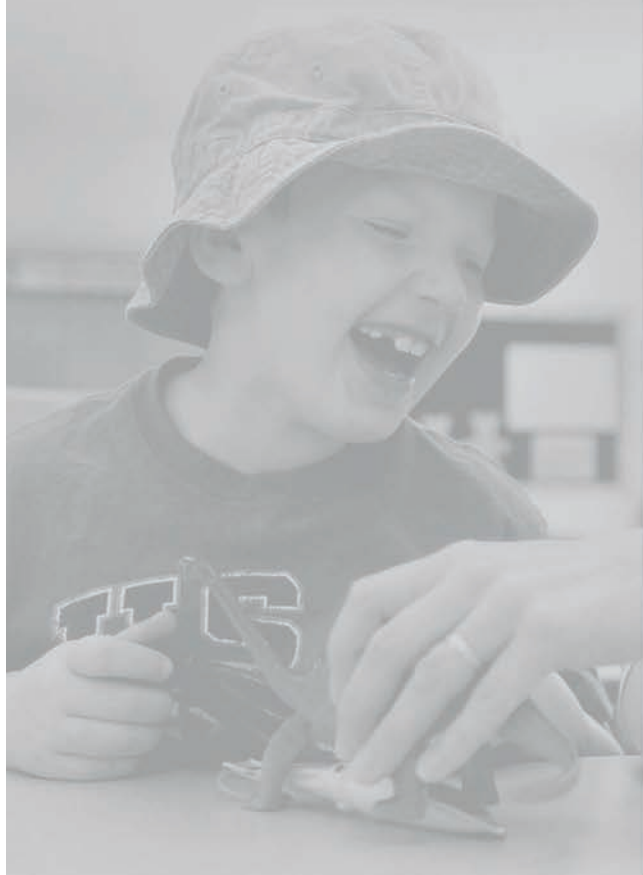
Families supporting a family member with a disability often demonstrate amazing qualities of compassion, perseverance and positive attitudes.

Community support can help fill in the gaps when challenges arise. Family members sometimes benefit from respite care resources that allow them to find small amounts of individual time to run errands or mentally recharge while a trained professional provides care for the family member needing it.

Christine wants to be the best mother.



*"He's like every other kid in that he still needs his baths, he still needs his meals made, he still needs his medicine when he's sick. But he needs so much more than just that. Maybe I haven't sought out the help I really need. I just don't know what to do sometimes."*





So, she keeps loving him, even though she knows their time together could be cut short. While doctors have avoided giving a specific life expectancy for Trevor because of his heart condition, they have confirmed it will be less than normal.



*“Every morning, especially the mornings he sleeps in, I go into his room to make sure he’s still breathing. Because one morning, he might not be.”*

## Celebrating our differences

There are many initiatives designed to support the acceptance of all individuals regardless of their unique challenges.

Here’s how the National Inclusion Project defines inclusion:

**In-clu-sion:** the belief that all kids can belong and participate. The act of making sure that no child sits on the sidelines.

<http://www.inclusionproject.org/>





## Anti-bullying

In the Dubuque Community School District, there are numerous initiatives that promote respect for all people and are part of a more comprehensive strategy to eliminate bullying at all levels.

Here are just a few:

- Two by Two
- Character Counts
- The Leader in Me

Many area school districts also use anti-bullying frameworks to support bringing an end to bullying.



Trevor knows he is not normal, not in the way his classmates would describe.

*"Sometimes they are mean. I tell them I'm blind, and they tell me they're not. It kind of bothers me. It gets annoying, because I can hear it, them talking, them talking about me, being mean."*





One time a classmate intentionally led the blind boy into a tree.

*"It hurts, running into things."*

### **Career opportunities**

There are many career opportunities assisting individuals with visual impairment. Here are just a few:

- **Certified orientation and mobility specialist:**

A professional who specializes in teaching

- **Teacher of students with visual impairments:**

A specially trained and licensed instructor who teaches travel and safety skills to people who are visually impaired. This includes the use of canes and electronic traveling aids, as well as human guides. This person is qualified to teach special skills that are part of the Expanded Core Curriculum to students with visual impairments.

Source: Family Connect  
[www.familyconnect.org](http://www.familyconnect.org)



## Seeing without sound

Bats, dolphins and whales can see without their eyes using a technique called echolocation. People actually use this technique too.

By making a series of clicking sounds, people can actually listen to the sound waves that bounce back to determine their location and path for movement.

## ACTIVITY

Search the Internet for Daniel Kish, one of the most notable users of echolocation, to find video and articles about how it works.

As a third-grader, Trevor talked a lot about his many friends.

*"I have a lot of friends. Too many friends."*



His respite worker. His mobility instructor. His Braille teacher. Trevor often is surrounded by adults.





Trevor laughs — a lot.  
*“I’m funny. That’s why.”*



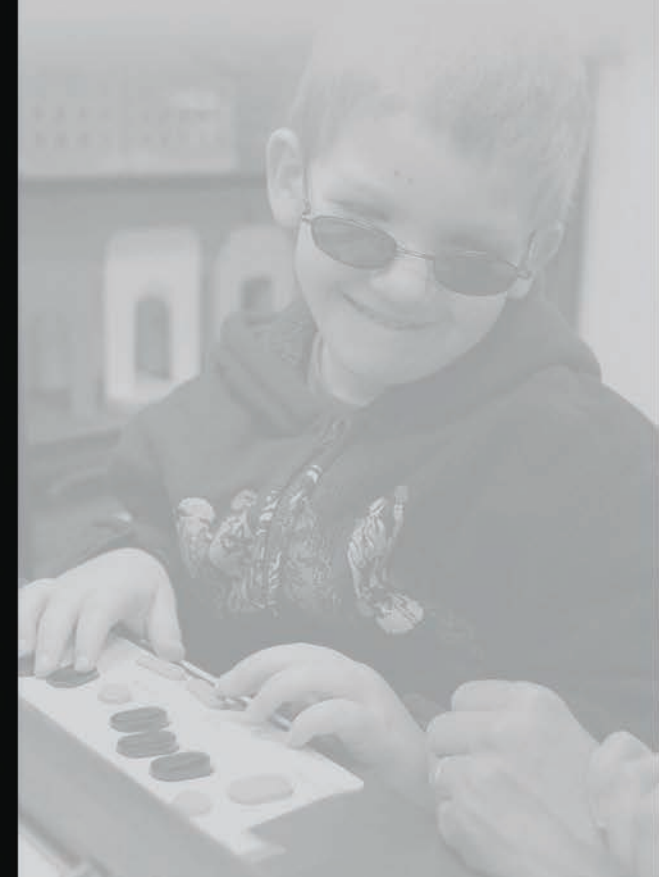
He loves learning new things about what interests him — trucks, cars, SpongeBob, bacon pizza, chocolate milk, penguins.

*“I love Batman. Did you know bats see with their ears?”*

## Technology of Touch

Individuals who are visually impaired or blind and unable to read print are taught to use their tactual skills to learn how to read Braille. Several electronic Braille and technology resources are available and help to make information more accessible.

Printable embossers are able to print out 3D Braille pages for use by individuals with visual impairments. There are also many translation programs and input devices to serve a wide range of needs.





## How do you use your eyes?

What if your vision was limited or nonexistent? Think about how you use your eyes and try exploring your house with your eyes closed.

Have a discussion about what you noticed and what challenges you faced.

### ACTIVITY

Think about something as simple as using the phone. What if you had to translate words using the letters on a phone keypad? Try it out here.

1. A twisted snack is a  
7-7-3-8-9-3-5
2. A cold treat is a  
7-6-7-7-4-2-5-3
3. A crunchy vegetable is a  
2-2-7-7-6-8
4. A party food is a 7-4-9-9-2
5. A fruit served in American  
pies is an 2-7-7-5-3

|           |          |           |
|-----------|----------|-----------|
| 1         | 2<br>ABC | 3<br>DEF  |
| 4<br>GHI  | 5<br>JKL | 6<br>MNO  |
| 7<br>PQRS | 8<br>TUV | 9<br>WXYZ |
|           | 0        |           |

He gives a raspy  
chuckle.

*"That's so funny  
that they see with  
their ears. That's  
really weird, really  
cool."*

But Trevor said he  
would not want to  
be a bat.

*"I'd be a spider.  
They have huge eyes.  
Huge, huge eyes."*







Learning about these things is fun. Braille, however, irks him.

*"It's pretty, kind of, you know, hard."*

He runs his fingers over everything, and when he cannot feel something he protests by saying he cannot see it.

## Paralympic sports

There are many opportunities for individuals with visual impairments to participate in fun activities — and paralympic sports are just one example.

Take "goalball" for example. This sport has players trying to push a ball filled with bells into a goal while the opposing team defends it. The United States has a national goalball team and it is an internationally sanctioned sport.

<http://www.paralympic.org/sport/goalball>

<http://www.teamusa.org/Home/US%20Paralympics/Sports/Goalball.aspx>





## Putting together the puzzle

There are many facets to every individual and those with visual impairment are no different. We all have social, educational, emotional and physical needs.

### ACTIVITY

Cut the puzzle pieces below out and put them together. The result, regardless of vision, is a person who is wonderful and loved.



Trevor says one day he will know everything he needs to — how to walk with a cane, how to read books, how to spell his name using a machine that makes raised dots, how to drive a car and make a living that's fast and fun at the same time. Trevor envisions his future in vivid hues.  
*"Bright colors. Big colors. Cool colors."*



That's just his way.  
*"I'll be OK, guys."*





JESSICA REILLY • *Telegraph Herald*



**JEREMY PORTJE** was picking up his daughter from Lincoln Elementary School in the fall of 2008 when he first laid eyes on

Trevor Meyer. A kindergartner, Trevor was learning to navigate the world using a white cane. With the permission of Trevor's parents, Jeremy began to document through photographs the boy's journey.

As Jeremy got to know Trevor and those who worked with him, he took time to go through a visual impairment exercise. As shown in the photo above, Jeremy put on a blindfold and learned

# Telling Trevor's Story

just how difficult a walk through downtown Dubuque can be.

A senior photographer, Jeremy began his TH career as an intern in 2005, when he was a student at San Francisco State University. He soon afterward returned as a staff member, and he has been

capturing life's moments in award-winning images ever since.

**BEKAH PORTER**, then a TH reporter, teamed with Jeremy to write the words that complement the photographs. Today, Bekah lives in Atlanta where she works as a program developer for a nonprofit organization while studying toward an advanced degree in community psychology and public policy.

Dubuque Community School District staff collaborated with TH Media to provide the teaching tools and information in the margins of the pages.

**MIKE DAY**, TH Media senior editorial artist, designed the section.





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