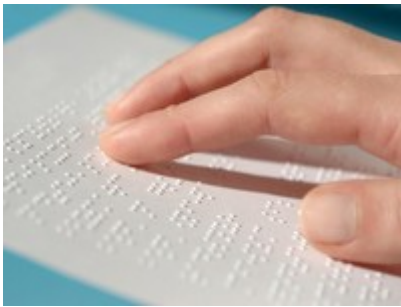


# Everyday life through the eyes of a blind man

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## 1. Introduction



Zdroj: <http://ocni-vady.zdrave.cz/den-bile-hole/>

Currently, there are approximately 1 million people with disabilities in the Czech Republic, of which about 100,000 are visually impaired. Many people believe that it is impossible to live a full life without sight. This is not always the case and many blind people do not share the view that it is impossible to live a „normal“ life. At the same time, however, it is necessary to point out that living with such a disability brings a number of difficulties that need to be dealt with, whether with one's own or someone else's help. In order for these people to lead a happy life, they need several things in addition, such as compensatory aids that enable them to manage their daily duties. It is equally important to have people around who are willing to help and, of course, to have forms of assistance that are enshrined in legislation.

Unsurprisingly, people with visual impairments need time to cope with this difficult life situation, which can be difficult for many of them. However, the support and patience of those around them also plays a very important role.

It could be said that time is the enemy. Some activities that are a breeze for sighted people and take only a few moments can become a „long run“ for a blind person. Whether it be in normal life situations, travel or work activities. It is therefore very important for society to realise how challenging life can be for the blind and the pitfalls it presents. Unfortunately, these people are not always met with understanding, tolerance or help from their sighted fellow citizens.

## 2. Aim of the work

The aim of this thesis is to take a closer look into the lives of the blind. To know the specifics and pitfalls of their everyday life and integration into society.

## Research-Question

Is the life of the blind substantially different from that of the sighted?

After reading the previous sentence, everyone probably thinks, „But it is clear that the life of a blind person is very different from the life of a sighted person!“ It does not have to be so. In an interview, Mr Stanislav said that he would rather be blind than have diabetes and thus not be able to eat what he wants. A very strange opinion, isn't it? He also holds the view that a blind person can do almost anything and there are very few things he cannot do. So what about the lives of the blind?

## 3. Literary Research

We usually begin to value health only when we lack it, and if our children's health is disrupted, we feel the disruption even more intensely. Severely disabled children have significant difficulties in socialization, education, family conditions, and other areas. The sick child must be treated and at the same time, according to his or her abilities and skills, appropriately integrated into social life. Both the child and his or her family need help in the most difficult moments when they learn of the illness, as well as permanent help based on high professional expertise and deep humanity. The problem is not only to make the diagnosis in time and correctly, but also, according to the state of the family's knowledge, to think about when and how to communicate the diagnosis to the family and how to work with the family to overcome the initial crisis as quickly as possible and to integrate into normal life. <sup>1)</sup>

In the Czech Republic, the issue of people with disabilities was very taboo until the 1990s, so society first had to come to terms with the fact that such individuals exist and how many there are, that they are not a negligible part of society. Nowadays, no one stops to think that there are wheelchair access to many shops, schools and institutions, adapted entrances to public transport, etc.

Sports competitions, artistic activities, beauty queen elections, etc. are organised all over the world to help the personal development and integration of people with different types of disabilities. Society is therefore breaking down physical barriers, which is relatively easier, unlike the psychological ones, which take many years to break down.

However, there are still a number of problems that accompany the integration of the disabled, such as:

- the still unfavourable climate in society,
- the lack of financial resources to create the conditions for integration,
- lack of experience and expertise - for example, of teachers,
- the lack of appreciation of teachers who work with children with disabilities,
- the lack of personal assistants and their poor financial remuneration.

A very good solution is to start integrating people with disabilities into society from the earliest age, from kindergarten onwards. This way, children get used to the fact that the population is „multicoloured“ and begin to perceive other qualities of life and appreciate the basic values that

shape this world. A necessary element in the integration and teaching process is the introduction of individual education programmes.

The integration of the disabled among the healthy population brings the disabled a greater opportunity to be included among healthy individuals, the possibility of experiencing life in a more diverse way, increasing the conditions for a more all-round development of the disabled person's personality, for self-sufficiency and adaptability, for the possibility of employment on the labour market and, conversely, reducing differences in lifestyles, feelings of exclusion and the violent division of society into healthy and sick. Social sensitivity, tolerance and consideration on the part of society increase.

From a psychological, economic and societal point of view, it is far more beneficial for disabled children and adults to live in a home environment with temporary inpatient medical and educational care. Residential care should be indicated in very serious cases where it is not possible to manage care in the home environment. A disabled person is aware of his or her human dignity especially when he or she is at least partially self-sufficient. If an economically active disabled citizen is involved in wider social structures, he or she is integrated into society in a macro-socially significant way and can legitimately participate in the functioning of society. In Euro-Atlantic societies, the possibility to participate in the labour market is linked to the fulfilment of civil liberties and rights, regardless of health status <sup>2)</sup>

## Blind

For those who have been blind since birth, it can be an advantage that visual impairment is most likely to be accepted, the person concerned has accepted it as a fact and from early childhood learns to function as independently as possible. He or she learns to read and write Braille, navigates in a space where he or she moves frequently, and as an adult can manage shopping and household operations and self-care.

A person who goes blind during life must first come to terms with his or her disability. Reactions to sudden vision loss are varied. Clients go through individual stages of reaction according to Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. They then have to learn self-care and spatial orientation. The fact that they have seen in the past will help them in some ways. They have formed and retained ideas about space, objects, colours, etc. Blind people do not have these ideas from birth. <sup>3)</sup>

A sunset or sunrise, the magic of a blooming flower, the colourful leaves of trees and bushes in autumn, a rainbow after a rain, a favourite sports match or series..., these are just a fraction of the endless number of events we can watch every day. Unfortunately, we rarely realize this privilege. But there are those among us who will never see the golden sunshine, the azure blue of the forget-me-nots, the fiery red of autumn leaves or the grey hair of a worried mother. <sup>4)</sup>

Most sighted people do not even acknowledge these facts and differences, but it is unfortunately certain that the life of the blind is very different from „our ordinary“ life, and these differences do not diminish even in today's advanced age of modern technology.

Many obstacles we are not even aware of, but blind people overcome them every day in very ordinary life situations. Examples from the lives of the blind are given to illustrate this:

### **How the blind...**

## ...travel?

Blind people usually travel in the company of a seeing-eye dog that has been trained specifically to guide blind people around obstacles. Any blind person over the age of 18 is eligible for a blind dog after meeting the requirements.

## ... read?

If they are only visually impaired, they use a special magnification device. If they have total vision loss, they read books written in Braille or use specially adapted computers with scanners, tactile displays or screen-reading software with spoken output. Most of the books they can borrow from the library for the blind and even some websites tend to already be voiced. Ondřej says that the internet is 90% soundproofed. <sup>5)</sup>

To integrate people with visual impairments into society, it is necessary that they are prepared for normal everyday life - they have mastered specific skills (walking with a white cane, reading Braille) and have sufficient compensatory aids. On the other hand, society needs to be prepared to accept such disabled people - to have enough information about their lives and how to communicate with them and how to help them. <sup>6)</sup>

Sight most often „replaces“ hearing and touch for the blind, thanks to which they get an idea of the world around them. The blind are people with impaired vision. They may not be blind, they may have residual vision, severe glaucoma or colour blindness. We meet them every day. They stand on the side of the road, fearful to cross. It is up to each of us to decide whether to help them or leave them to their fate. <sup>7)</sup>

The help of others is especially important for the blind person in an unfamiliar environment. Sometimes it is enough to use the eyes of the sighted person as a visual check (e.g. the sighted person checks whether the blind person has washed all the dirt from his/her clothes), sometimes the sighted person performs an activity together with the visually impaired person (e.g. shopping in a supermarket). Some people are lucky enough to have „their“ people around them - parents, partner, friends - for whom helping a loved one is a matter of course. Others who are visually impaired have the opportunity to use various services (guide and pre-reader services, personal assistance, volunteer programmes).

Everyone may meet a blind person at some point, but not everyone can practically help. It is important to remember that people with visual impairments „only see“. This means that there is no need to shout or speak simplistically. Above all, remember to approach the blind person normally and offer help. Let's not be upset if they refuse our help and let's not take it personally. Many blind people will welcome our help because we will save them valuable time and energy. Walking with a white cane is attention demanding and requires great concentration. <sup>8)</sup>

„When we talk about removing barriers for the blind, we shouldn't just mean barriers on the street, but above all breaking down barriers between people. And we should do this so that we can come together as people, not as two different worlds of able-bodied and disabled.“ Mr. and Mrs. Novotný - the end of the event „Life in the dark“. <sup>9)</sup>

## 4. Methodology

For the preparation of this thesis, many internet discussions, articles and book publications were first

read. With their help, a certain idea of the life of blind/blind (as they „prefer“ to call themselves) persons was subsequently created. Subsequently, after gaining at least a minimum of knowledge about the world of the blind, associations were contacted that try to make life at least a little easier for blind people. They help them with official errands, finding a job, organize various meetings, trainings, trips and events for them.

All the employees of these facilities were very helpful and pleased with our interest in the cause. Unfortunately, they don't often meet with public interest. We were invited by Mrs. Erika Gaňová to one of the seminars organized for blind or partially sighted persons. Here, with the permission of Mrs. Gaňová's permission, we conducted three guided interviews with blind people, during which we found out the specifics and pitfalls of life for the blind in today's hectic, hectic and unfortunately very impatient times. All the interviewees were very kind and helpful. Thanks to this meeting we gained a lot of valuable information. The specific transcript of the interviews can be found in the Appendix.

Our chosen method of guided interview proved to be the best way to obtain information from specific blind people. The interviewees answered all questions willingly and often elaborated extensively on their answers themselves. The interview with one interviewee even extended to 1.5 hours. The use of a conventional questionnaire was not an option, partly because the interviewees were blind, but the main reason was the impossibility of generating tick-box responses to specific questions from the questionnaire. Yes, it was possible to use open-ended questions in the questionnaire, but in this way we would not have been able to obtain as much information as in a guided interview. Obviously, the observation method was also out of the question, as we would not have learned much information about the lives of specific blind people and this method would have been very time consuming.

## 5. Research section

The importance of sight and hearing for human life is also expressed in our language. The words deaf, deafblind are part of our natural speech, and we all know the word blind, blind. Sight and hearing provide for the reception of the greatest amount of information from the outside world. In contrast, we have no original simple words in our language to describe people with impaired touch, smell or taste. Touch, taste and smell convey „only“ additional information. <sup>10)</sup>

The blind have been in human society since time immemorial. Some developed nations have cared for them in the distant past and promulgated legal provisions to protect them. For example, there were several known blind singers and oracles in ancient times. However, the laws in Sparta and Athens ordered the blind to be thrown into mountain ravines or left to their fate at the crossroads. On the other hand, in Rome, Egypt, or among the Jews, the killing of the blind was not permitted. Penalties were applied for violation of the ordinance.

The findings show that there has been some social responsibility for several centuries, but even today in the twenty-first century, life for the blind is not entirely simple, and even in this day and age of modern and advanced technology, many of the limitations of life for the blind have still not disappeared. The most important aspect of a quality life for the blind continues to be the help of the rest of us. <sup>11)</sup>

The following text is about how each of us can help the blind without diminishing their human dignity.

## Guide for the Blind

Anyone with good will can become a guide for a blind person. However, it is necessary to be familiar with a form of assistance that does not diminish the human dignity of the visually impaired person<sup>12)</sup>:

- *Contacting* - it is advisable to offer your help unobtrusively and naturally, especially so that the blind person knows for sure that you are talking to him/her (you can address the blind person by name or touch his/her forearm). The blind person must not be pulled anywhere. An arm is offered by the guide and the blind person decides whether to take advantage of the help offered.
- *When walking* - the guide walks casually and calmly about half a step ahead of the blind person and always on the side that is less accessible and may possibly be dangerous, e.g. excavations on the pavement.
- *Continuous contact* - both tactile (holding the offered arm above the elbow) and verbal contact. If the guide is forced to move away for a while, he/she will find a suitable place for the blind person (e.g. not facing a wall), describe the surroundings and indicate the appropriate orientation to the environment.
- *Information* - the blind person is always informed about the environment by the guide. If it is an urgent journey in adverse conditions, short information about the most important points and events is sufficient so that the blind person is not unnecessarily distracted. On the other hand, if it is a quieter journey, the guide can also describe seemingly unnecessary and trivial things and does not avoid visual impressions, including colours. At a more advanced level of interplay between the blind person and his/her guide, the latter can convey information by moving his/her hand, turning his/her body, speeding up or slowing down (e.g. change of direction, obstacle, etc.).
- *Doors* - when approaching a door, the blind person must already be on the side of the door where the hinges are located. With his free hand the guide opens the door, takes the handle in his hand, which is held by the blind person, who then slides his free hand over the guide's hand to find the handle and then closes it himself.
- *In transport* - the guide walks slightly in front when getting on, off or on escalators. If the blind person wishes to sit down, the guide puts his hand, which the blind person is holding, on the back of a vacant seat and the blind person slides his hand onto the seat and then sits down himself.
- *Sitting at the table* - the guide and the blind person approach the chair from behind. Already during the approach to the table, the guide warns the blind person about objects he/she might drop (e.g. flowers, cutlery, etc.). The guide adjusts the chair so that the backrest is not too far from the edge of the table and is parallel to it. He places his hand on the backrest, which is held by the blind person, who finds the table and chair, pushes it away and sits down. The guide then takes his place, preferably next to the blind person, and tactfully and unobtrusively tells him what people are at the table and where they are sitting.
- *In a restaurant* - the same procedure applies here as when sitting down at the table. Then the guide briefly and clearly describes the room. The guide also helps with the selection of food and describes the layout of the food on the plate before eating it, using the numbers on the clock face. When paying, it is helpful to help with distinguishing money.
- *Personal hygiene* - if the guide is of the opposite sex to the blind person, ask a trusted stranger to help. Clearly state what is being asked for and what is being asked for. If the guide is of the same sex, familiarise the blind person in the toilet with the type of facility. While maintaining the principles of hygiene, he/she guides him/her to the toilet bowl, stands in front of the bowl or on the edge of the trough. He will also show him the toilet paper, basin, soap and towel. It is

most improper to maintain a false tact in case of soiling of the blind person's clothing or other „accident“. The blind person will be very grateful for any notice and help in correcting them.

- *In the office* - or at the doctor's office and in other interiors, the guide informs the blind person about the arrangement of furniture and persons in the room. Before signing official documents, the guide first familiarises the blind person with their contents. The act of signing may take place: the guide places the signature template on the place of signature or places the forefinger of the blind person's hand on the line where he/she is to sign or places the tip of the pencil held by the blind person at the beginning of the future signature.
- *Not to decide for the blind person.*
- *The white cane* can be used by the blind person when accompanied by an inexperienced guide to avoid some misunderstandings (e.g. clashes with other people).<sup>13)</sup>

People who are interested in guiding the blind can contact, for example, TyfloCentrum Praha, o.p.s., SONS (United Organization of the Blind and Partially Sighted of the Czech Republic), Tyfloservis, o. p. s., Okamžik - association for the support of the blind and others. Guiding at such organisations can be done on a voluntary basis or on a contractual basis for a fee. However, it should be noted that the amount will not lead to getting rich.

## Twelve to Help the Blind

- 1) Keep in mind that blind people are normal people who have different personality traits.
- 2) When meeting, act naturally and practically. Offer help, but do not impose. Ask specifically what help is appropriate.
- 3) When accompanying, it is best to offer the blind person to hold your elbow. A verbal description of the situation is very valuable.
- 4) Enter curbs and stairs perpendicularly. Slow down and verbally inform the person of the situation and any special features before entering.
- 5) When entering or exiting public transportation, go first, attach verbal information about the start of the stairs or the location of the handrail.
- 6) At a vacant seat, you can help the blind person find the armrest with your hand or specifically describe where the vacant seat is (do not use the words there, near, etc.).
- 7) Always greet/address the blind person first.
- 8) If you enter a room where a blind person is, make yourself known. Announcing your departure is also practical.
- 9) Do not discuss the blind person's business with their guide (the guide is not a representative of the blind person). Blind people think.
- 10) In a restaurant, a blind person usually needs help finding a seat, a dressing room, a coat rack, etc. The arrangement of food on the plate (using the clock face), items on the table, and communication of the presence of other people at the table is welcome information.
- 11) When accompanying the blind person, you can offer a description of the surroundings, its main features and points of interest. When describing, you do not have to omit visual impressions,

including colours.

12) Your timely and factual verbal notice of a dig, new scaffolding, a car parked on the sidewalk, etc. can be an invaluable aid to an independently moving blind person. <sup>14)</sup>

## Compensation Aids

Compensation aids are essential items in the life of a blind person, which facilitate his/her everyday activities.

By a compensatory aid for the disabled we mean a tool, device or equipment specially made or specially adapted to compensate for a deficiency caused by a given disability by its characteristics and possibilities of use. <sup>15)</sup>

Purpose of compensatory aids According to the purpose of use, compensatory aids for the visually impaired are divided into:

- aids that facilitate or enable orientation and movement of the blind person (e.g. white cane);
- aids for everyday use and for the home (e.g. clocks, measuring instruments, banknote templates,...);
- aids for accessing and processing information (e.g. special and conventional typewriters, camera magnifiers, specially adapted PC,...). <sup>16)</sup>

### Description of selected compensatory aids

1) *Digital reading device for the blind with voice output* - enables the blind to „read“ normally printed texts (such as books, magazines or scripts) and write completely independently. The text is converted into digital audio form and read to the user by a program of scanned printed text recognition, voice synthesis and screen reader. For this, a suitable text editor with voice output support is still required. The price of a similar device is around 150 000 CZK. <sup>17)</sup>

2) *Wristwatches for the blind* - a compensatory aid that falls into the field of timekeeping. It is used to remove information barriers, i.e. to allow the blind to determine the time. Wristwatches are available in both men's and women's versions and are covered by SOC at 50% of the purchase price. Some watches offer both a tactile display and a one-button voice output in English. <sup>18)</sup>



(price 2700 CZK, SOC reimbursement: up to 50%) Source:

[http://is.brailnet.cz/pomucky\\_vypis.php?name=&spe\[\]=2](http://is.brailnet.cz/pomucky_vypis.php?name=&spe[]=2)

3) *Sounding mobile phone* - currently, we offer two ways to make working with a mobile phone more accessible. The first one consists in complete sounding of the environment using a readout program

and voice synthesis. Not only are all the normal functions of the phone, including signal and battery status, caller identification, phonebook handling, reading and writing SMS messages, but also most advanced functions, including Internet access and phone settings, are sounded. The second solution is to use a special program that offers a customized environment with quick access to voice-activated functions. The easiest way is to use the phone (notification of who called-caller, notification of time, read SMS message and similar). Other functions are also intuitive and useful, offering for example GPS usage, text reading or music playback. The environment beyond this program is no longer voiced. Currently, a solution is also offered on our market which, in addition to sounding the mobile phone environment, offers magnification of the information displayed on the display.<sup>19)</sup>

4) *Picht's typewriter* - it is a very basic aid facilitating communication and the possibility of writing text in embossed blind Braille. The six points correspond to six keys and the desired character is obtained by pressing their respective combination simultaneously. Handwriting of blind text is also done with the help of the Prague Table, which consists of two plastic sheets. The lower one has moulded dimples, the upper one has rows of templates with six dots. Paper is inserted between these sheets and a special spike is used to create the individual dots. The Picht typewriter, as a compensatory aid for the visually impaired, is eligible for a grant of 100%.<sup>20)</sup>



(Price: 14100,- CZK, SOC reimbursement: up to 100%) Source:

[http://is.brailnet.cz/pomucky\\_vypis.php?name=&spe\[\]=2](http://is.brailnet.cz/pomucky_vypis.php?name=&spe[]=2)

5) *Vessel level detector* - used by the blind when pouring a conductive liquid into a container. It is housed in a cylindrical housing made of light plastic, the dimensions of which are 35 x 55 x 25 mm and . Two stainless steel control electrodes come out of the housing. Power is provided by three button cell batteries. The detector is suspended by the electrodes from the rim of the container. As soon as the level of the liquid to be poured reaches the electrodes, the detector will emit an audible signal. When removed from the liquid, the detector will go silent.<sup>21)</sup>



Source:

<http://handicapovani.blog.cz/0905/kompenzacni-pomucky>

6) *ColorTest* - although blind people cannot perceive colors, it does not mean that their surroundings do not perceive them. Matching the appropriate colors of clothing, choosing the right make-up, not wearing a different sock every time, these are problems they have to solve despite their handicap. One option is the aforementioned organisation of their wardrobe according to colours, materials, etc. However, this is not always enough. ColorTest is a colour recognition device. It has an „artificial eye“

with which the entire spectrum of colours can be recognised. It recognises the colours of objects, light and translucent liquids. It determines whether objects are dark, light, monochrome or multicoloured (e.g. clothes with a pattern). In addition to these activities, it also has time, date, stopwatch, and information functions. Of course, it is voiced in Czech. <sup>22)</sup>



(price 17900 CZK, SOC reimbursement: up to 100%) Source:

[http://is.brailnet.cz/pomucky\\_vypis.php?name=&spe\[\]=2](http://is.brailnet.cz/pomucky_vypis.php?name=&spe[]=2)

**Methods of obtaining compensatory aids** Compensatory aids can be obtained by the visually impaired:

- by purchasing in specialized Tyflo aids shops;
- on prescription - this includes mainly white canes, level indicators, light indicators, blood glucose meters with voice output and Czech-speaking medical thermometers;
- for a contribution from the social department of the municipality of the applicant's place of residence.

The expert advisory points are the regional centres of Tyflo servis, o.p.s. <sup>23)</sup>

## The White Cane

A pure white cane is used by both blind people and people who have limited vision, e.g. a very narrow field of vision where they can see the space in front of them but cannot see the ground at the same time. The cane is therefore used to feel the space in front of their feet as they walk. It is therefore not true that the white cane is used exclusively by the blind. And even blind people do not always have to use a white cane, the exception being in a swimming pool or the aforementioned guided walking. Physical pain - muscle strain, but also psychological pain - the fear of being irrevocably branded with a white cane and condemned to blindness forever - can also be an obstacle to using a white cane. Thus, some people do not leave the house for many years, voluntarily remain under house arrest or only go out accompanied by a family member. The second variant is the white cane with red stripes, which is used by deaf-blind people. <sup>24)</sup>

Learning spatial orientation and independent movement with a cane to provide maximum safety, speed and aesthetically acceptable walking form is not easy. Users must make considerable effort to acquire and maintain these skills. They can be assisted by expert instructors as part of an individual course. Such services are offered, for example, by the Institute of Rehabilitation of the Visually Impaired UK and Tyflo servis o. p. s. Understanding the cane makes it difficult for the user, for example, snow cover, when its use does not help much, wind, gloves but also hand fatigue and others. <sup>25)</sup>

## Training of guide dogs



Available:

<http://handicapovani.blog.cz/0905/kompenzacni-pomucky>

According to Decree No. 182/1991 Coll. of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, which implements the Social Security Act, a guide dog for the blind is a compensatory aid. Its purchase price is covered up to 100 % by the social departments of authorities with extended competence (municipal and district authorities). A citizen of the Czech Republic who, because of his/her visual impairment, holds a 3rd degree special benefits card (ZTP/P) is entitled to a guide dog allowance. The allowance must be applied for from the social department of the authority of the place of residence. The price of the guide dog is currently around CZK 190 000. <sup>26)</sup>

Guide dog training is one of the services that significantly contributes to the independence and autonomy of the blind. The Guide Dog Training Centre was established on 1 October 1991. Its production, an average of 25 guide dogs per year, fully covers the needs of the blind in the Czech Republic. Since 1994 it has been a member of the International Federation of Guide Dog Training Schools, from where it draws its professional information and experience. <sup>27)</sup>

For the service to the blind, suitable dogs are selected from the Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever, German Shepherd and American Canadian White Shepherd breeds. The training process is divided into two phases - puppy rearing and vocational training. Puppy training is carried out by volunteer caregivers who guide their charges towards disciplined behaviour in the home, on the street and in transport. <sup>28)</sup>

### Selection, training and testing of guide dogs

Puppies are tested for temperament and health at the time of selection and at three-monthly intervals during their upbringing. If they meet all the requirements, at the age of one year, they move on to vocational training, which lasts six to eight months. Follow-up tests are carried out at two-monthly intervals during this phase. After the final tests, the trained guide dogs are handed over to pre-trained blind clients. The centre staff continue to keep in contact with the clients. They give them advice and help them solve problems that arise. Most clients also use the mail order service for food and special aids that the centre operates. <sup>29)</sup>

So training and preparation for handing over the guide dog is an important part of this. In order for a guide dog to be an effective tool for its owner, any blind applicant for such a dog must be properly informed, prepared and trained. People applying for a guide dog not only have different personality traits, but also very different requirements. These arise from many different factors relating to place of residence, employment, degree of visual or other disability, family, etc. <sup>30)</sup> V době, kdy prochází

výcvikem pes, prochází zácvikem i nevidomý klient našeho střediska.

Each applicant for a guide dog therefore undergoes a 3-day training course, where the organization makes sure how the client is with spatial orientation and independent movement, what is the nature of his possible other disabilities. The applicant will thus get as much information as possible about what to expect when the dog comes home, what help he can expect from the dog. They will also try walking with dogs of different natures in terms of walking pace, command technique and the dog's guide skills. After this training, an instructor will visit each client at their place of residence. We need to know what environment our clients live in and possibly what routes they take. The instructor will also advise on seemingly small things, such as where to place a dog bed in the home, where to find a safe place to walk the dog or to find a veterinary clinic near the residence. The instructor will also find out the specifics of the place of residence for which the dog will need to be properly prepared. This visit usually takes place at a time when a dog has already been selected for a particular client and the instructor will bring the dog in to introduce him or her. <sup>31)</sup>

### **Transmission of training dog**

The first part of the handover takes place in the accommodation facility of the training centre. Here, each client is housed for one week so that they can learn to interact with their dog in an environment that is familiar to the dog. The client is given all the professional care he needs to get to know his dog as much as possible, to learn how to care for him, how to walk him, how to put a harness on the dog, how to brush him, how to feed him. After a week, when they both have the opportunity to get to know each other better and understand each other, they both leave together and it will be much easier for the dog to get used to the new environment in the form of the new owner's apartment or house. The second week of the handover takes place at the client's home. Here, under the supervision of an instructor, the client learns the specific routes he normally uses. The length and method of handover can be adapted according to the needs or the type of disability of the client. It takes several weeks to months for the dog and its new master to become acquainted. <sup>32)</sup>

## **Personal stories and insights from the life of a blind man**

We would like to bring you closer to the everyday life of a blind person. The inspiration for the next few lines comes from the very engaging and interesting book *Nevidáno* by blind authors (Miroslav Michálek, Pavla Francová, Jan Jakeš) who present their everyday joys and sorrows and from Mrs. Pavla Kovaříčková from her website.

### **Sad closets and movers**

Many blind people share a household with a sighted partner. Like every blind person, a sighted person is an original and approaches life and relationships and helping their partner in different ways. Unfortunately, there are still many partners who treat the blind person like a just-moved-in closet. They push them clumsily and awkwardly in front of them, they don't warn them about anything, they just move them rudely from place to place without regard to whether they come to a scrape or a bump on their forehead because they didn't fit through a low doorway. The greatest help to the blind person is a verbal description of the surroundings and the situation in which he or she can orient him or herself, or a gently offered frame, and leaving the blind person free to react to situations as they arise. ***Blind and he can't see to boot!***

Why do we have these two terms referring to the same thing? Blind and one who cannot see! The

word „nevidomý“ (one who cannot see) was „created“ by the past regime in an attempt to improve the fact that there is nothing that can be done about blindness. (You can't beat the wind, the rain, or human health.) To most people, the czech word „nevidomý“ doesn't sound as derogatory and tragic as blind. Unfortunately, confusion in terminology arose when the word „sighted“ was used (to describe a person who can see), which sounds rather un-Czech to the Czech ear, so the term „seeing“ came to be used, but unfortunately it is mainly used in religion. It was necessary to make order in the terminology, and therefore the word tyflos, which in Greek means blind/blind, became widespread. This is how Tyflo-servis, Tyflokabinet, Tyflopomůcky, Tyflosport etc. came into being. (You can't beat the wind, the rain, or human health.) To most people, the word blind doesn't sound as derogatory and tragic as blind. Unfortunately, confusion in terminology arose when the word „sighted“ was used (to describe a person who can see), which sounds rather un-Czech to the Czech ear, so the term „seeing“ came to be used, but unfortunately it is mainly used in religion. It was necessary to make order in the terminology, and therefore the word tyflos, which in Greek means blind/blind, became widespread. This is how Tyflo-service, Tyflo-kabinet, Tyflo-aids, Tyflo-sport etc. came into being. Foreign words inspire confidence, there is a hint of special meaning and a sign, whereas Czech words we all know...

### **Don't cover the eyes of the blind**

The biggest mistake made by volunteers, guides, and others who offer to help a blind person is to numb the „sight“ of the blind person with a blind cane. For this reason, if you are offering help to someone, take the hand that does not hold the blindfold cane, or let them hang onto you. Under no circumstances take the blind man's cane from him. Even if the blind person has a guide, always use the blind man's cane to secure himself - it is his „foothold in the dark“.

### **Don't lean on me - or rather yeah**

Why is it that one time several helpers come and the second time there is no one to be found, even though help is loudly requested? Sometimes a blind person doesn't absolutely need help, but he or she likes to get to know people and also likes to do good deeds, and giving someone a chance to do a good deed for a blind person is actually a good deed too.

### **Volunteers**

As mentioned above blind people need the help of their surroundings. But not always, in all situations, and from everyone. The worst situation for a blind person occurs when help is offered by drunken or otherwise intoxicated fellow citizens who, having been fortified by alcohol, have a strong urge to help and refusal of the help they offer is out of the question. At that moment, without help, the surroundings are rather trapped, because the blind person, even fortified by alcohol, unfortunately cannot escape.

The people who most often offer their help are neighbours and acquaintances of the blind person, high school and university students and the older generation. Sometimes, however, there are also very good and helpful guides among random passers-by. Worth mentioning are the young children from the first grade of primary school, who are unexpectedly perceptive and able to give factual and accurate advice. Often skinheads and gypsies also offer help. These last two groups raise concerns for most sighted people, but blind people are not allowed to have such prejudices (which only confirms that not everything is white or black).

### **Training the route**

Many people assume that a blind person can get anywhere with the help of their blind cane.

Unfortunately, this is not the case. They often associate their movement with the movement of other creatures, people or guide dogs. Those who do not have a dog, do not always have a guide, or even want to walk alone, usually undergo route training, which means that they learn to walk a route that they use repeatedly. This route is first walked by an instructor, picking out important and easily recognisable landmarks and lines for the blind person to follow. The instructor then walks the route himself with blinders on and a blind man's cane. If all goes well, he teaches the blind person the route. They go through the route together as the blind person and the guide, then the blind person practices each section in the sight of the instructor, etc.

This is called route practice!

### **The Middle Ages last**

Unfortunately, even in these days of would-be freedom and awareness, blindness, especially in the countryside and for certain cultural circles, is considered a kind of stigma, punishment or at least an abnormality worth noticing and taking a prejudiced stand not only for the blind person himself, but for all his family and friends. In a difficult situation, too, there are often mothers with inquisitive and talkative children who meet a blind person with glasses and a blind cane on the street. The children want to understand everything and for every answer they have more questions, to which unfortunately the young mothers do not know how to respond properly. How to satisfy a child's curiosity without offending the blind person and other listening people nearby? Prejudice and taboo topics are still around today, and unfortunately blindness is still one of them.<sup>33)</sup>

The blind Pavla Kovaříková reports an interesting experience on her website. For years, she has noticed how the media creates the image of a blind person. Stories and interviews are very often built according to a similar template, when at the beginning or during the course of a person's life an unexpected tragedy strikes - the loss of sight. He or she almost collapses from this blow, but eventually resists the difficult fate and works his or her way to a life of contentment and a sense of equanimity. The texts are written in a spirit of admiration and the blind are portrayed as heroes, but only the utter banalities of life with blindness are conveyed. He takes the view that blind people approach life as differently and individually as anyone else. She finds it difficult to find a common denominator other than stating the fact that these people cannot see.<sup>34)</sup>

How does Mrs. Kovaříková understand what is happening around her? In her words, the world comes to her in fragments, from which she chooses what makes sense to her. She uses her own „inner work“ to process fragments of reality. She is also greatly aided in this endeavour by her imagination and her ability to create internally seen images from a mass of disparate information (e.g. smells, odours, randomly overheard fragments of conversations, a quick description spoken fleetingly, tactile sensations under her hands, the soles of her shoes and under her white stick). The handshake is important to her, it is a materialization of the voice from the space in front of her. The voice and the handshake represent for her an important statement about the person, with their help she can then form a concrete idea about the person.

When asked what is perceived by those who see nothing at all, Mrs. Kovaříková answered that it is simply nothing. A blind person has no visual impression (black colour, darkness, grey fog - all these are still visual perceptions). „So one who really sees nothing sees about what or how much you would see if you looked at the world around you with, say, your elbow.“

He goes on to describe that it depends on each blind person, on his idea of the purpose and meaning of life, his demands on himself, his personal foundation, how far in acquiring the ability to be independent he is interested in going, how much he must then learn to do things differently than if he could see. The blind person learns to get things around him which are quite commonplace for sighted people. For example, this includes how to cook, how to know the food in the fridge, the teas on the

shelf, how to tidy the apartment, how to sort and wash the laundry, how to iron, how to find clothes that match in the wardrobe, and much more. If the blind person establishes a system and order in his affairs, his environment will begin to be clear again. He learns to recognize things from the store in a new way (by the packaging of different shapes, surfaces and sizes). He notices new distinguishing marks in clothing, such as differences in materials, seams, types of necklines in T-shirts, and their terminations. If there is no distinguishing feature on an object, he/she can assign it a unique place or label it himself/herself, e.g. by describing it in Braille. Can a blind person live independently?

According to Mrs. Kovaříčková, it is possible. Whether they are individuals or couples where both are blind. However, trying to do everything blindly on one's own is often an enormous effort or even giving up some activities altogether. Even a blind person living alone in a household sometimes needs some help from a sighted person.

Furthermore, Mrs. Kovaříčková points out how to communicate with sighted people. It is important to use language precisely and concretely. Expressions such as „watch out“ or „be careful“ can mean anything to a blind person, from stopping immediately on the spot to frantically running away somewhere (left?! right?!). Similarly, a response to the question of where the post office is, along the lines of „just over there,“ will not help the blind person at all. In contrast, a clear instruction (stop) or clear information (there is a trench in front of you) is a great help to him. The main reason why sighted people express themselves inaccurately is the fact that they have additional and refining visual information: facial expressions, gestures, the environment they see.<sup>35)</sup>

## Everyday life from the perspective of those interviewed

Pavel, Valéria and Stanislav are of the same age generation, ranging from 49 to 57 years old. They were all asked the same questions and we got very similar answers from all of them.

None of them consider their disability as a significant handicap. They agree that if an individual wants to, they can live an almost „normal“ life, without significant limitations, and that it would be much worse to be a wheelchair user and to be limited in movement. In order to cope with the situation, the most important thing, according to the statements, is to socialize with sighted people, to try to go out in the community and, if possible, to work. However, getting a job nowadays is not an easy task even for sighted citizens, let alone for people with certain disabilities.

Two of the interviewees have graduated from high school. There are also schools for the blind, which is a great advantage for them. As far as housing is concerned, they say there is almost no need to change anything. It is just very important that everything is in place (e.g. doors always in the same position). When asked about relationships and getting to know each other, they all answered without shyness. According to them, various events are organised for the blind, which can be used not only for getting to know each other. Some were already in a relationship when the accident happened to them and others are dating in wine bars, restaurants and similar places just like sighted people. The only thing they find a drawback is that they cannot look anyone in the eye and that they have to rely only on their hearing.

Also, they do not find raising children significantly more difficult than raising children in ordinary sighted families. It is only with things like the temperature on the thermometer that they need help. With a smile, Stanislav claimed that when children find out that their parents are blind, they start to „cheat“. For visually impaired people, compensatory aids are very important to simplify their lives. The most commonly seen aids are a seeing-eye dog and a white cane. However, these are not the only aids that blind people use. Other important tools are special watches, colortesters, level detectors for containers, computers with special software and other technology. A seeing-eye dog helps them to orientate themselves in space, for example when travelling. In their opinion, Prague is

quite well secured for blind citizens. Some trams announce the stops, the number of the tram, and a lot of information is already written in a special blind font on the stops. Blind people travel together and abroad. However, this is usually with the help of agencies or persons who assist them. In their free time they play laser games, go to choirs, swim, bowl or read audiobooks, for example. Stanislav even said that a blind person can achieve much more than a „sighted“ person because they do not give up so easily and can overcome obstacles.

## 6. Conclusion

Is the life of the blind substantially different from that of the sighted? This is the research question of our work. Logically, we must answer in the affirmative. The world works primarily for people without visual impairment. And it is up to them what attitude they take towards the world's blind minority. Although it is important to keep in mind that even a blind person must show effort and often courage to fully exist in this world.

Throughout the history of society, the blind have been treated in many different ways. Both inhumanely and with efforts to integrate the blind fully into society. In the 21st century, when technology is advancing very fast, the development of compensatory aids for the blind is not forgotten, thus blurring the distinction between the lives of the sighted and the blind. On the one hand, these are aids that help the blind in their daily lives, but on the other hand, they are still just things, paid for dearly, that do not yet offer the blind a full life. There should still be human solidarity on the basis of which inclusion in society can be built. Why to be in solidarity is a topic for another paper, but we could simply answer that we never know when we, ourselves, will need help.

In the context of the blind, it is not only about practical things, about how to arrange a household, work, study, etc. We also have to talk about the psychological side, which can be quite unstable for the blind. Anyone who wants to help and work with these people must remember this. It must be borne in mind that, although there will be plenty of technical support for the blind, they must be made aware that they are full members of a society in which there is also a place for them. And then these two areas (technology development and human favour) can go hand in hand.

As mentioned earlier in the paper, the time needed for blind people to learn to live in the sighted world through the use of compensatory aids, guide dogs and people willing to help plays the biggest role. But even here time does not cease to play its important role. Working and navigating the world still takes more time for the blind than for the sighted. It is therefore up to those of us who have good eyesight to make this time easier for the blind by our patience and help, and thus enable them to live their lives to the full.

There is, of course, a difference between the life of a sighted person and that of a blind person. But it is up to us whether we make this difference into something that bothers us or something that will make both worlds know each other, complement each other, and thus create a multidimensional world.

## 7. Attachments

## Transcribed interviews with the blind

### INTERVIEWEES

#### **Pavel**

Age: 57

Occupation: self-employed upholsterer

Status: married

Children: 2

Since when can't see: blindness came on gradually, total blindness has lasted since age 54

How it happened: after a botched cataract operation

#### **Valeria**

Age: 49

Occupation: telephone operator

Status: divorced

Children: 2 sons (22, 24)

Since when can't see: since birth, residual vision

#### **Stanislav**

Age: 55,5

Status: married for the second time but about to get married for the third time

Children: son 1980, daughter 1983 both are healthy (wife had residual vision - she was from twins and both had some defect)

Since when can't see: since 15 years

How it happened: „I was fooling around in front of the girls“, I put an explosive in a metal pipe.

### CHANGE

#### 1. Do you think it's worse not to be able to see since birth, or to get used to it?

**Paul:** It's worse to go blind during life. You have to relearn everything.

**Valeria:** It's definitely worse to be in a wheelchair. Blindness is not such a bad (too pronounced) handicap. We can live a perfectly normal life, in slightly different, perhaps for some more complex

and incomprehensible circumstances, with few limitations or obstacles.

**Stanislav:** It doesn't matter. If you lose your sight at 15 you'll cope better. (I may have imagination, but I didn't learn much to read (Braille) and write (Picht's typewriter) and play. Whereas those who are blind from birth learn to write, read faster, and are often excellent musicians too.) You have aspirations and goals, it's so much easier to deal with than when you're 50. That's harder, there's no engine to pull you forward, no desires.

## 2. What has helped you cope?

**Pavel:** Work, although even nowadays there are depressing times. And the psyche is still unstable.

**Stanislav:** Seeing girls, famous people, fun. I used to get drunk like everyone else, go to parties. Young people didn't worry about me.

## 3. How have your relationships with your surroundings changed - with friends, family, acquaintances (if you lost your sight during your life).

**Pavel:** Relationships didn't change because the sight went away gradually and the environment had a chance to come to terms with it gradually.

**Stanislav:** the adults pulled away so as not to accidentally offend. Some of the old acquaintances disappeared, and the remaining part had also disappeared by now, but new acquaintances came.

## **EVERYDAY SITUATIONS AND GADGETS**

### 4. What did you need to do in your apartment in order to continue living there?

**Pavel:** My wife Paul sees and is very helpful to me. Therefore, there was no need to change anything in the home.

**Valeria:** Almost no adjustments are necessary, especially if you have at least residual vision. Occasionally „social security“ will pay for kitchen adaptations and replacement of doors (sliding), but this is not usually an advantage, especially when you live with other sighted people - doors have many positions that a blind person has to take into account. In a blind person's home it is important that all things have their place and that everyone observes this. After all, blind people don't (usually) move often - after all, it is more difficult to get used to new room layouts, room sizes and furniture placement.

### 5. What about work?

**Pavel:** I go to work. I am a sole trader and chairman of an o.p.s. My job is the same as it was before I was blind. The challenge was to learn how to use a PC again (e.g. learning to type with all ten) and to change visual perception to auditory perception. Even learning Braille was not easy, because my hands are already hardened because of my job (upholsterer) and are therefore not as sensitive.

**Valeria:** I have been going to work since I left Slovakia - 26 years ago I work in the same place - in the government as a telephone operator. The blind also get a pension, but it's a pittance. The combination of pension and salary isn't much to jump on either.

**Stanislav:** I worked in a telephone exchange for 23 years (until 1995). Since 1991 I've been playing

harmonica on the street. Since this year I have a trade license to play the harmonica. I am assigned a specific place where I can play and I am there every day for at least 5 hours, no exception is playing from 9 am - 10 pm. Even though I am retired, I need to get tired, I don't want to sit at home all day.

#### 6. Studying - what are the options and with what limitations or financial costs

**Valley:** There are special schools - from elementary to college, unfortunately I don't know the cost of college for the blind. I have not studied in a university. I applied to a conservatory for piano and accordion, but was not accepted due to high interest, later I did not apply). High school and primary school were free under socialism (after all, I am 49 years old now).

**Stanislav:** still seeing, I graduated from primary school for 9 years, (from 4.4. I was lying at home, in August I went to the swimming pool, but only in the evening, because I was ashamed as a blind man among the people in the village. In the village such an accident is more difficult than in the city where there is a certain anonymity. From the 4th of January I started studying 9th grade again, this time in Prague (because there are no schools for the blind in the villages, only in Prague. So we moved from Chrudim to Prague. When my mother asked the doctor how to proceed, she told her to put me in an institute in Ústí nad Labem) and 9. I repeated the 9th grade because of reading and writing (first we scribbled letters on the blackboard through a felt template, then we wrote with Klein's typewriter - it pierces the paper with needles, so even a sighted person can read it, and finally with Picht's typewriter - the letters consist of a combination of 6 dots, which are printed on the paper - i.e. braille, and are read by touch). After primary school I graduated from the blind secondary school in Prague. Blind people learn to type on a traditional keyboard from the beginning.

#### 7. How does the familiarization process work? Does it take place only among the blind?

**Pavel:** Thanks to organizations that bring the blind together, it is possible to meet both blind and sighted people who also participate in the events. Of course, a barrier to contact with people is that a blind person can only rely on his or her hearing, cannot see another person's eyes and face, and finds it harder to move around in a strange environment.

**Valerie:** Introductions are quite normal and common. For example, I met my husband quite by chance in a wine bar on Národní třída. With my current boyfriend it was similar. Both (husband and boyfriend) see.

**Stanislav:** at joint events, anywhere. It is no different from dating sighted people, only with the difference that due to blindness they can „miss „interesting objects.

#### 8. Do you have children? How do you deal with education? Do you need any help? How do you explain things to your children that you have basically never seen?

**Pavel:** I have 2 children - a son and a daughter and grandchildren. They are all healthy. And although my children's upbringing was still going on when I could see, I think that raising children by blind parents is just as possible as raising them by healthy parents.

**Valerie:** I have 2 sons - 24 and 22 years old, both of whom can see. Raising children was kind of a given, something new as it is for any first-time parent, but since I have been blind since childhood, it was a given and a perfectly normal thing. My husband took care of the material side, I took care of everything else. Sometimes mixed marriages (blind and sighted) can be a bit complicated - the sighted individual may not respect the other enough, trust him/her and try to handle situations on his/her own without regard for the blind partner. Explains situations differently than the other partner, etc.

**Stanislav:** Blind women have no difficulties with children at all (bathing, feeding, changing...). The exception is when they need to read the degrees on the thermometer, for example, they can go to a neighbour. We had to be more consistent in raising the children because they eventually find out that their parents can't see and start cheating. Blind parents cooperate with the school in the same way as sighted parents, accompanying children on hikes, collecting paper... The children didn't tell me that they had problems in school because they have blind parents (one totally blind and the other with residual sight). We didn't enslave the children and didn't force them to accompany us, only occasionally, when something needed to be read or taken care of.

## 9. What about transportation?

**Pavel:** Transport in Prague is not the worst for the blind if the person knows the way. But even on unfamiliar routes it is possible to find one's way well by means of compensatory aids (radios, mobile phones...) or with the help of an assistance service. Of course, a white cane is essential. At the moment I see the biggest problem in the lack of sound systems on trams etc.

**Valerie:** We travel often, around town and to places where it is unknown - the dog often helps us. In today's reconstruction era in Prague, we can't even rely on known roads and routes. Sometimes we travel abroad. Some even alone, but mostly in groups, with tours organized by associations of the blind. Otherwise, Prague tries quite hard to think about blind citizens - eyeglasses at bus stops, announcements of bus stations and numbers, signs at crosswalks and sidewalks, etc. In contrast, other cities still have much to improve. People are usually very helpful, but there are exceptions - even among DPP employees - e.g. one tram driver locked me in the doorway and I broke my cane. But on average and from a general perspective, people are still helpful and attentive. I moved alone from Slovakia, where the education and employment system for the blind was not adapted. Even the attitude of the people around me was not accepted, in the Czech Republic I met a different mentality - people here are closer to me. They are more attentive, but I still don't feel that I am inferior here and that people point at me, etc. I have been in the Czech Republic for more than 26 years (more than half of my life).

**Stanislav:** there is no problem in the city, if I don't know, I ask people. What's not quite perfect is trams - there are different models and each has a different seat layout or button on/off the door. I've also had people stand next to me and not press the button when the tram arrived. People let me sit down. The young people are helpful. They are attentive. When I was waiting somewhere, maybe every minute a young person asked me if I needed anything. But over the years, there have been some people saying things like, „If you're blind, sit on your ass at home! (this was said to me by an elderly lady at the station when I asked her where the main station building was). I asked for the number of the arriving tram: „Call from your mobile phone! Or: You have a pension, so take a taxi! I don't always take advantage of the seat offered. If a person with a dog comes to the first seat on the tram - a seat for the blind - I still let them sit down, so that the dog doesn't get its paws trampled. Or I let people with crutches sit. „People are taught to use what they don't need“ - for example, everyone sits down on public transport.

## 10. If you need some information, how do you get it and where?

**Pavel:** A lot on the PC and the Internet. Also on TV.

**Stanislav:** I have a computer with special software (there are subsidies for that) and so I surf the internet. I look for connections when I want to combine e.g. bus and train. If I want some simple information quickly, I can call SONS - they have a navigation service from 10-22. (it's free) and I can find out everything I need. They even advised me where to buy a swimsuit, gave me phone numbers... Either someone tells me to take this bus, get off here.. or someone accompanies me, or

sometimes I take a taxi or travel alone, depending on what I find out (he also travelled alone to Slovakia or went fishing alone through the forest - when he arrived at the pond he cast his rod and the line got tangled in the branches, which took him a long time to untangle. On the way back he got lost in the woods and then listened to the sounds of cars for a long time to find the road and get untangled).

#### 11. How does he know which clothes and which colors go together?

**Pavel:** My wife helps me with this.

**Valerie:** With residual vision, it's not the biggest problem, but there is a gadget that recognizes light and colors, with voice output.

**Stanislav:** I don't worry about clothes. My wife always puts clothes over my chair and then I take them. (she has the rest of her eyesight so she can put the clothes together), she also does the laundry. There are colortesters that can recognize e.g. also light/dark blue color, but they are expensive (about 17.000 CZK, the state contributes to it).

#### 12. What do you need when you go shopping and how do you pay for it?

**Pavel:** The most practical way is to change money into small change (coins) that are easy to recognize tactilely.

**Valeria:** I usually pay with a card, but sometimes with money - there are even money templates (value recognition). Of course with practice I can recognize money by the color (in case of residual vision), size and shape of the coins.

#### 13. How do you eat? Do you cook for yourself or does someone help you?

**Pavel:** My wife cooks, I don't.

**Valerie:** An assistant can come to help someone with almost anything. You have to apply. I don't know the conditions completely, but I've never asked. Assistants can be volunteers, where nothing is paid, or professionals assigned by the state, but there is a contribution - the amount depends on what all the assistant does (help in the house, shopping, accompanying to the doctor...).

**Stanislav:** I do the cooking, eyesight is not a factor. I have a talking scale. When you cook, you hear, you feel. With the help of a watch I can estimate the time (talking or where the slide comes off and find the hands by touch). I know blind girls who are excellent at cooking all kinds of food and especially fast.

#### 14. Have you ever considered a seeing eye dog? If so, have you tried applying and how does it work? If you already have a dog how has it changed your life? How difficult was it to get one and make friends?

**Pavel:** I have considered a seeing eye dog but I have a lot to do with myself so it would be a lot for me to handle a dog.

**Valeria:** I currently have a German Shepherd - she is 2 years old, before that I had a Labrador for just under 3 years. I've had that one since she was a puppy. Firstly on so called pre-training, then he went into training, after which he was „returned“ to me. However, he had a serious accident and had to be put down. Unfortunately, a dog becomes the „property“ of a blind person only after 5 years of „use“, until then it is the property of the state. Since the original dog did not live to see 5 years, the

authorities are now claiming 130000,- as compensation for training. I have already filed several complaints against this procedure, but so far to no avail. The Světluška association has also intervened in the matter. A few months ago I contacted the ombudsman. No response so far - since 2008.

I got my current dog from the trainer of the original dog. Sleeping dogs are not 100% reliable and obedient as I always thought. I recognize personality in dogs as well. They too have days when they don't want to obey and pout. They also don't always like all people or other sleeper dogs.

**Stanislav:** I had a dog for 30 years but I don't want another one. I'm lazy and old. I also have health problems and when I am in the hospital I worry about my dog. A dog is a „priceless helper“, I could go with him anytime. I walked faster and safer with him. I could talk to him, understand even the intonation of his voice and know the mood - „he's wonderful“. But he has to be fed, groomed, the question is what to do with him when I went somewhere on holiday. Somewhere they told me „Don't come here with the dog!“, „Keep him!“ and he gets mud all over him. To walk with a dog, a blind person must have mastered the route to be able to tell/indicate right/left to the dog.. A questionnaire is filled out in advance about the dog's sex, race, whether it should walk left or right, whether it will walk in the city, how it will be loaded - if someone sits at home all the time or goes to work, if the dog should be taught to chickens, cats... The training lasts about 9 months and the dog is given to a blind person at about 1 year of age. The dog is seen as an aid so can be returned at any time. But this kind of thing is hard for the dog once it has got used to the master. The speed of assigning a dog depends on how many people are interested.

15. Do you use any aids? What else would you like as an aid, but it is not on the market or unavailable to you?

**Pavel:** I use a PC, an answering machine, a special watch and a talking scale.

**Valerie:** I use a mobile phone with voice dialing. It also reads menus and menus. Recorded books. Books written in Braille. Special PC with reading device. Blind cane and assistance dog. The rest I don't use much and I don't miss anything.

**Stanislav:** I'm sure I'd be amazed at all the gadgets on the market, but I don't need much. I use a talking mobile phone, a PC with special software, an electronic answering machine. I also have a blind cane and formerly a dog. PREJUDICES, SUPERSTITIONS

16. Do you recognize people by their voice?

**Pavel:** That's the only but insufficient option. For example, in job interviews it is important to see a person's face, their gestures and attitudes. With blindness, one can only judge intonation, etc., which can be easily deceived.

17. Do you come across any other clichés, prejudices, commonly known facts that are said or associated with blind people?

**Pavel:** It is not true that a person's hearing improves, etc. But certainly one perceives and enjoys these non-sighted senses more.

**Valeria:** I wouldn't talk about it that way. I haven't thought of anything. Just maybe the difficulty of finding a job. Employers don't want to hire blind people, and women at that. Coming back from maternity leave hasn't been easy either. Again, it depends on the people you have around you and especially above you. You have to be more careful about how you deal with people and especially the agreements you sign, etc.

### 18. What do you do in your spare time?

Valeria: I play laser games - pistol shooting, archery, etc. I also go to choir, bowling, knitting, reading audio books, sometimes books in Braille, but reading for a long time puts unpleasant pressure on the eyes. Oh, and I'm also learning on the PC

### 19. Braille

Valeria: I have been learning it since I was a little girl. For those who have been blind since birth, it is easier in this respect. If they go blind during their lifetime it happens that they never learn Braille.

## **OPEN QUESTIONS - FOR YOUR OWN COMMENTS**

### 20. Financing the lives of the blind

Paul: It seems to me that social security contributes too much. Then the companies producing compensatory aids artificially increase the prices.

### 21. Is there anything you would like to point out?

Stanislav: „You can do everything as a blind person, there are very few things that can be done only with sight - for example, driving a car.“ „There is no better or worse defect (not seeing, not hearing, diabetes...“, „Thank God for blindness“ I wouldn't want to be a „diabetic“ so I couldn't eat what I want. Those with disabilities often achieve more in life. A sighted person (in our parlance, a „seer“) is capable of jumping off a bridge after the first setback.

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