On The Right Track: Avid hiker makes the most of every step he takes

In 2011, Dan Varney had surgery to remove a non-cancerous brain tumor that left him completely blind. After receiving support from Braille Institute, Dan – who was previously active as a biker and a rock climber – began a walking regimen of up to 25 miles a day. SCENE checked in with Dan to talk about his journey.

When you first began classes at Braille Institute, what was it like?
After six months of being blind, my wife took me to Braille Institute. We talked to everyone there, everything felt okay and I signed up for a class. Then as we left, we ran into a few guys who were part of a men’s group there. They didn’t want to just talk about vision loss, they also wanted to joke around and have a good time. It’s been great just having that community and people I could relate to. From there, I took all of the classes, including computers, cooking, debate, and independent living skills. I worked with a great orientation and mobility specialist, Tzeng Yen.

After working with Tzeng, when did you began walking alone? What suggestions do you have for others?
When I started, I didn’t really think about going outside. Then I began walking the length of the sidewalk, up and down my street. I didn’t venture further out because I worried about my safety. Now I go all over, usually by myself. I’ll walk with my wife on the weekend but she works during the week. I’ve only gotten lost a few times. That’s when I’ll call and she can help me using mobile phone video or GPS.

If you’re just beginning, go with someone else just to get out there. Take all of the classes at Braille Institute and do what’s right for you. And work with an orientation and mobility specialist like Tzeng. It’s great to partner with a professional who can work with you and get you started.

You can learn more about Dan’s story on the Braille Institute YouTube channel: https://youtu.be/NYKy6oe9vDw
Meet the Explorers
Snapshots of our community members and their favorite places.

Richard Ellsworth, Santa Barbara, CA
How are you connected to Braille Institute?
I'm the independent living skills instructor at the Braille Institute in Santa Barbara.

What do you like most about the outdoors?
My favorite thing about being outside is experiencing the relaxing qualities that fresh air and nature have on me.

Leslie Miller, La Jolla, CA
How are you connected to Braille Institute?
I love the library and I've always loved reading. I get so many reading ideas from other library patrons. I've made so many new friends in Braille Institute classes.

What is your favorite outdoor activity?
Walking by the beach. My favorite sensation while outdoors is feeling the sun on my back on a cool day.

Marion Reed, North Hollywood, CA
How are you connected to Braille Institute?
I completed my first year as a Braille Institute student in June. I've taken online and in-person classes, including Connection Pointe training and orientation and mobility training.

What is your favorite outdoor activity?
I love the long walk through the park to see my grandchildren. It's the best part of my day. I need to be outdoors. I get out every day for at least an hour. It's medicine to me.
Your Tech Guide for Getting Around

This overview of navigation apps and travelling tips was provided by Skylar Covich, Access Technology Instructor at Braille Institute in Santa Barbara.

Tools for Travel
Apple Maps and Google Maps come with every smartphone and are the core apps most people with vision loss use to navigate sidewalks. You can open one up and use Voice Over to navigate and map out a specific location. Ride share apps such as Uber and Lyft are also accessible using Voice Over. Third-party apps may be used by family members to connect remotely to people with vision loss and offer help through video.

Challenges
Apple and Google Maps don’t alert you if there are obstacles in your path such as trees, fences, or construction. They also don’t tell you when you need to cross the street. You have to practice patience with the apps and the talking voice commands. Orientation and mobility training still plays a big role in getting around these obstacles.

Getting started
Start with your neighborhood. Ask your Maps app to chart a course to a place you already know so you can practice. Get training on Voice Over so you will know how to make adjustments to Maps if you need to. Start with a friend. Get the route in your mind. Make a list of the spaces between businesses and stores and study it; you’ll become less dependent on the phone. Then when you’re good at it and feel safe, try a little by yourself.

Remember, the apps and suggestions here are an overview of technology available to people with vision loss. Consult your doctor or occupational therapist before engaging with technology for travel.

Paths to Giving
A Portrait of Giving Back from our San Diego Community

“Our desire is to help bring educational opportunities to the youth in our community, so we are proud to support the work of Braille Institute.”

Gary and Zoraida Payne, donors and volunteers

F R E E W I L L

A New Resource To Protect What You Love The Most

Braille Institute is excited to introduce a new resource that will support you and your loved ones’ future: a free estate planning tool. It’s simple, quick, and free. Scan the QR code for more information or get started at FreeWill.com/Braille.
In this issue, SCENE celebrates the outdoors and what we gain from it, regardless of sight. Being outdoors has many benefits to our bodies and minds. Whether you’re stepping out to exercise, to travel, or to discover a new place to shop or dine, you’ll be inspired by the people and their stories inside this edition of SCENE.

I hope you can get outside today and experience the positive impact it can have on your life. You won’t regret it!

Gary Jimenez
Vice President of Development

Contact Information

Would you like to speak to someone about making a gift or do you have further questions?

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Email give@brailleinstitute.org

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