



# BTBL News

Braille and Talking Book Library,  
California State Library, Sacramento, CA

New Series no. 6 (Winter 2011-2012)

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## A Message from Mike Marlin, Director

Greetings and Happy New Year to all of you! It has been a while since we've managed to publish BTBL News and we apologize for the long delay since our last issue nearly a year ago. I sincerely hope we will be able to publish more frequently. And that may mean that some of the issues will eventually be produced electronically only and unavailable for distribution via large print or cassette. That is not slated to happen for a while and we will give plenty of advance warning if it does. Some of you may wonder when and if we will convert the newsletter audio version to digital cartridge since so many of you no longer use the cassette book machine. We are researching that possibility and will report back to you when we are able to make it a reality. It would mean circulation of newsletters on digital cartridge with the expectation that the cartridges and containers would be returned to us just as you return books. We'll keep you posted.

Drum roll please... I am happy to announce the rollout of the library's Descriptive Video Service. BTBL is now able to loan both DVD and videocassette formats of nearly 200 distinctive movies and television programs with an audio narration track describing the action in between the characters' dialogue. Thanks to a grant from Sacramento's Kelly Foundation, we have an inaugural collection to loan; and if the service is successful we will add more titles in the future. Please see the article later in this issue about borrowing descriptive videos from BTBL and how you can sign up for this free service.

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I wish to thank all of our wonderful patrons (nearly 200) who attended BTBL's 80th Anniversary Celebration of the National Library Service (NLS) on October 15, 2011. State Librarian Stacey Aldrich, representatives from the Office of California Senate President Pro Tempore Darrell Steinberg and the office of State Assemblymember Alyson Huber, and BTBL patrons Marie Rudys, Thomas Mason, Linda O'Neal, and Stacy Cervenka spoke about the meaning and importance of braille and talking books. Stacey Aldrich received, on our behalf, a California Senate resolution commemorating Talking Book Awareness Day and also a framed copy of an entry read into the *U.S. Congressional Record* by the Honorable Congresswoman Doris Matsui in honor of the BTBL program. Longtime patron and web radio host Bill Barker read selections from *Chicken Soup for the Soul* in braille, and longtime volunteer narrator Sandra Swafford read an autobiographical and humorous passage by William Saroyan from a book in the locally recorded Californiana collection. BTBL staff in attendance were delighted to meet so many of the people they talk to throughout the year.

The event also included an historical reenactment, with actors in period costumes, of the Pratt Smoot hearings held 1929-1931 that led to the founding of NLS. BTBL staff member Robert Freitas wrote the script based on actual hearing testimony, recruited actors, rehearsed them, and provided a delightful rendering of the debate that led to the NLS enabling legislation.

Finally, those in attendance were entertained by the Fulton Street Jazz Band, led by pianist and BTBL patron Bob Ringwald, playing 1920s and 1930s era jazz standards including Cab Calloway's "Minnie the Moocher" which charted at #1 in 1931.

The event recognized both the California State Library (CSL) and the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped for their support of such a vital program. CSL's Books for the Blind program actually started in 1904 with braille book circulation and later joined the NLS Network upon its founding in 1931, and took part in the introduction of talking books on phonograph in 1934.

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We've come a long way since then with digital books on flash memory cartridges and downloadable DBs via BARD (the Braile and Audio Reading Download website ) to play in the new NLS digital talking book players or on pocket-sized third party commercial devices. Technology has greatly enhanced the ability for print-disabled individuals to access information and books, and sometimes it feels like it's happening so fast it's hard to keep up. Whether you're a "techie" with all the latest assistive technology software and gadgets, or a person who just wants to be able to read old-fashioned braille or listen to a good book, or somewhere in between, we're happy to be part of your lives. Ultimately, our satisfaction comes from providing access to reading materials to all of you. Thanks for making the job of the BTBL staff so rewarding. It's a pleasure to serve you.

## **BTBL Launches Descriptive Video Service!**

### **What is descriptive video?**

A descriptive video is a movie or television program that includes special narration which provides an in-depth description of what is happening in the story, including key visual elements, such as character actions, gestures, costuming, facial expressions, scene changes, and onscreen text. The narration occurs during the natural pauses in the film dialog.

### **How do you play descriptive videos?**

VHS videocassettes can be played on a VCR hooked up to a television and DVDs can be used with a DVD player hooked up to a television or on a computer. No other special equipment is required to use these videos. When you insert a DVD into your player the movie will either begin automatically OR you may have to use visual menu navigation to find the description track. Assistance from a sighted friend or family member may be helpful when using menu navigation. The description track is usually found under languages or set-up menus. The films that do not begin automatically with descriptive narration upon insertion are noted as such in our catalogs.

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## How can I order videos?

First, patrons must register for Descriptive Video Service (DVS) by reading our policies and completing a separate Descriptive Video Borrower Registration Form. The registration form and policies are available on our website at [btbl.ca.gov](http://btbl.ca.gov) or you can request that the library mail them to you. After registering for DVS, patrons can begin requesting movies in the same way that they request books (by phone, email, mail, online catalog, fax). Patrons are allowed to have one descriptive video item out at a time. The video can be checked out for up to 14 days with no renewals.

## What videos are available?

We have videos in a variety of genres and areas of interest, including television shows and recently released movies. A complete catalog of videos can be found on our website at [btbl.ca.gov](http://btbl.ca.gov) and they are included in our online Braille and Talking Book Library Catalog under subject headings that begin "descriptive video." To request a brief order form via mail, please contact the library.

## Overdues

We recently mailed overdue notices to several thousand patrons and it caused quite a stir! We apologize for any misunderstandings. Our voicemail and phone lines were overwhelmed after these notices were sent out and we hope that with more frequent, regularly scheduled mailings, the number of overdue items will lessen.

These notices are not meant to be punitive. They're merely a reminder to return loaned items in a timely manner or to help us clear from your accounts items that have gone missing either when mailed to you or returned to us. We plan to send out such notices quarterly. Please contact us if you receive a notice and there are items listed which you don't have or books you wish to renew. There are no fines or fees for lost or overdue items.

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# How to Reach Your Reader Advisor by Telephone

The Braille and Talking Book Library has incorporated a series of phone menus to help our callers reach the library staff member who can best help them. When calling in to the library, some patrons have reported difficulty deciding which numbers to press to reach their reader advisor.

**Please be aware that these phone menus will undergo revisions in the near future.** For the time being, we hope these tips will make it easier to contact your reader advisors with any questions or requests you may have.

Here is a step-by-step guide to help you:

- Press 1 for English
- Press 2 for BTBL Staff Members
- Press 1 for Reader Advisors
- If the patron's last name begins with the letters:
  - L, M, N, O, P, Q, U, X or Y, Press 2
  - E, G, S, V or W, Press 3
  - H, I, J, T or Z, Press 4
  - A or C, Press 5
  - B, D, F, K or R, Press 6
  - For Institutions, Press 7

Once you are accustomed to the menus, you can speed up the process for yourself in a couple of ways.

- After you select English there is a general announcement that begins "Thank you for calling the California State Library ... ." You can skip this announcement and go directly to the next menu by pressing any number while the announcement is playing.
- When you are in a menu and you already know what button you want to push, you don't have to wait for the prompt to finish before you push the button. For example, if your last name is Franklin, the button you need to press for your reader advisor is "6." As soon as the Reader Advisor menu prompt starts, you can immediately press "6" to be connected to your reader advisor.

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## Headphones in Short Supply

NLS, who supplies our headphones, has informed us that headphones will not be available from them for three to six months, and possibly longer. If you have headphones from us which you are not using, consider returning them to boost our supply. Please send only OUR headphones and only if you really don't need them.

## Digital Talking Book Machine Tips

Here are solutions to three common problems you may be having with your digital talking book machine (also called a digital player).

**Problem:** I inserted a library book into the player and now the player is beeping and says "Updating your player's software; please do not power off your player or remove the cartridge from the player."

**Solution:** Some of our new books on cartridge are programmed to automatically update the player's software. Follow the instructions and DO NOT turn off the player or remove the book. You will hear a series of beeps and in a few minutes you will hear the player say "Software upgrade complete; stand by while your player is restarted." After the player turns back on it will say "Player on," and you can continue using your player as usual.

If you accidentally remove the book or turn off the player during the update, the player will announce an error message and turn off. If this happens, simply reinsert the book, turn the player on, and follow the instructions above.

**Problem:** No matter how long I leave my player plugged in, the battery will not charge up to its original battery life of 29+ hours.

**Solution:** Your outlet may not have power. Try plugging the player into a different outlet, preferably in the kitchen. There is usually power in the kitchen outlets. If the player still doesn't charge up to its original battery life, it still may be OK, as long as the battery charge is over 12 hours. If the battery stays below 12 hours, please contact BTBL for a replacement machine.

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**Problem: My player will not turn on at all!**

**Solution 1:** Sometimes headphones will cause this problem. If you have been using headphones, try plugging in and unplugging the headphones a few times to see if the sound comes back through the player speaker. If the sound becomes intermittent or only plays through the headphones, but not the speaker, please contact BTBL for a replacement machine.

**Solution 2:** If you do not use headphones, try plugging the player into a different outlet, preferably in the kitchen. There is usually power in the kitchen outlets. Try holding down the power key for 10 seconds until a beep is heard. If the player still will not turn on, please contact BTBL for a replacement machine.

## 10 Reasons to Have a BARD Account

1. Free 24/7 access to as many NLS books as you choose to download!
2. Signing up is easy! You just need a computer with a high-speed internet connection and an email address.
3. Avoid the wait list for that popular digital book you want to read!
4. Bypass any delays in postal delivery!
5. Downloaded books do not need to be returned to the library so there are no due dates!
6. Manage your own "library" collection of downloaded books on your computer. Download and delete books as many times as you want!
7. Download magazines, too!
8. Web-Braille joins BARD in early-to-mid 2012!
9. We can teach you how to download books from BARD – just contact us!
10. It's OK to have a friend or family member help you download books!

To sign up for a personal BARD (Braille and Audio Reading Download) account, simply go to [nlsbard.loc.gov/CA1A/ApplicationInstructions.html](http://nlsbard.loc.gov/CA1A/ApplicationInstructions.html) and follow the "Link to BARD application for individuals." Institutional members should follow the "Link to BARD application for institutions." For more information on BARD, please contact us.

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## What's My Password?

Sometimes we'll receive a phone call or message from a patron asking for a password or user name that has been forgotten. These days there are several services provided through the Braille and Talking Book Library which require this kind of login information, so it helps if you let us know which service you are trying to use.

Currently there are four different services which require some kind of login information.

- **BTBL's online catalog**  
Logging in to our catalog allows you to make requests for books you'd like the library to send by mail and to see the current state of your account with us.
- **The Braille and Audio Reading Download service (BARD)**  
The BARD service allows you to download digital books to listen to with a compatible digital player.
- **The NFB Newsline service**  
Newsline provides access to many newspapers and magazines which you can listen to through your telephone.
- **The Web-Braille service**  
For braille readers with a refreshable braille display device, this service allows access to NLS braille books and magazines through the internet. The Web-Braille service is going to be merging with BARD soon, but for now it requires separate login information.

So, if you need help with your user id or password, try to let us know which service you are trying to use so we can be sure to get you the right information.

## Institutional Accounts May Now Use BARD Service

Once established institutional accounts were made eligible for NLS digital talking book players, the next step was to make Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) available to these patrons. As of May 2011, most institutions and their staff are eligible for BARD accounts. BARD is



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the NLS downloadable audio book service that enables users to access any NLS digital book or magazine from any computer with high speed internet service. Books are downloaded onto a user's computer, then transferred to play on an NLS digital player using a USB flash drive or blank cartridge. Multiple staff members at an eligible institution may have BARD accounts, and are encouraged to use these accounts for the following:

1. Demonstrating the BARD service to interested or prospective patrons.
2. Helping patrons who may not have a computer with high speed internet access to download books.
3. Making several copies of the same book available for book groups of eligible users.

Institutions or their staff wishing to sign up for BARD may go to [nlsbard.loc.gov/CA1A/ApplicationInstructions.html](https://nlsbard.loc.gov/CA1A/ApplicationInstructions.html), then choose the "Link to BARD application for institutions."

### **Special note for public libraries:**

At this time, public library accounts will be limited to "demonstration only" access, meaning library staff will only be able to download any of four copyright-free books that have been published by the NLS:

- Biography of the Blind (DB 42343)
- Braille into the Next Millennium (DB 50969)
- Talking Books: Pioneering and Beyond (DB 27606)
- That All May Read (DB 20002)

## **Pet Mysteries**

Animals are such agreeable friends – they ask no questions, they pass no criticisms. ~ George Eliot

For those who love animals and enjoy reading great mysteries featuring human/pet partnerships, we recommend the following series:

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### **The Cat Who ... series by Lilian Jackson Braun**

Beginning with RC/DB 34788, *The Cat Who Could Read Backwards*, this enormously popular cozy mystery series features newspaper reporter Jim Qwilleran and his Siamese cats, Koko and Yum Yum. These clever cats snoop and leave clues to help Jim solve mysteries and disappearances in Pickax City. Some titles also available in BR format.

### **Melanie Travis ... series by Laurien Berenson**

Beginning with DB 71008, *A Pedigree to Die For*, this series follows Melanie, a single mother and teacher, and her poodle, Faith, through mysteries at dog shows, kennels, and obedience schools. Most of this series is available only in RC format for those receiving books by mail.

### **Chet and Bernie... series by Spencer Quinn**

Beginning with DB 68453, *Dog On It*, this humorous series features lovable canine Chet, a police school flunkout, paired with Bernie, a down-on-his-luck private detective. The dynamic duo hit the road to investigate the kidnappings of humans, show dogs, and circus elephants. DB format only.

Additional pet mysteries and a wide variety of animal stories are available in BR, RC, and DB formats. Please call your reader advisor for assistance.

NOTE: While some books in a series may be available as both RC and DB, others may be only one or the other. This is especially important if you are receiving all your books **by mail**. You may need to have both types of player (cassette and digital) to listen to all the books in a series. Many older DB titles are available as "download only," and require a BARD account for access in digital format.

## **Staff News**

BTBL has been fortunate to fill two Reader Advisor position vacancies. Please join us in welcoming Laura Mikelbank and Sarah Connelly. Former Readers Advisory Supervisor Doug Coronado transferred to the Witkin State Law Library last April and his position was briefly filled by John

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Tresch, who retired at the end of September. We recently appointed a long-time State Library staff member, Donna Scales, to fill that post. Donna will be taking on the management of institutional patron accounts in addition to her supervisory duties. With these staff now in place we are already noticing improvements in our response times and hope that you are experiencing the benefits, as well. Circulation staff member, Donna Hodges, retired in December 2010 after 30 years at BTBL. We miss her dedication and her interest in the lives of her fellow workers. Finally, we say a farewell to Receptionist and Registrar, Lakesha Johnson, who has transferred to a position with the Department of Motor Vehicles. We thank her for her 3+ years of service and wish her much success.

## Senior Center Without Walls

We recently had occasion to make a presentation about our services to a group of seniors who connect with each other via telephone through a program offered by Senior Center Without Walls. This is "a nonprofit organization which offers activities, friendly conversation, and an assortment of classes and support groups to homebound elders and others who find it difficult to go to a community senior center. Participants call from the comfort of home through telephone conference calls. No special equipment is needed and the calls are completely free."

You may choose to just listen to a program or you may decide to participate. Either way you must register for a particular session so that you can be given the toll-free conference call number and code. Some of the topics are about serious matters such as living with chronic pain, but you can also just do fun things. The facilitator of our session told us that there was even a group that gets on the phone and sings songs together!

You must live in California and be older than 60 to participate. There is no charge. You may call 1-877-797-7299 to request their Winter/Spring 2012 Catalog (also available on cassette or CD) or you may go online to their website at: [www.seniorcenterwithoutwalls.org](http://www.seniorcenterwithoutwalls.org) to view the catalog plus learn more about the organization.

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Free Matter for the Blind and  
Physically Handicapped

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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*BTBL News* is written and edited by staff of the Braille and Talking Book Library at the California State Library. It is available in braille, on cassette, through e-mail, and in large print upon request, or through our website.

Library Service Hours: 9:30 AM-4 PM, Monday-Friday

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E-mail for customer requests or contact information: [btbl@library.ca.gov](mailto:btbl@library.ca.gov)

Website: [btbl.ca.gov](http://btbl.ca.gov)

Web Catalog: [btbl.library.ca.gov](http://btbl.library.ca.gov)

State holiday closures for February 2012-July 2012: We will be closed on February 20 (Presidents' Day), May 28 (Memorial Day) and July 4 (Independence Day).

Donations to BTBL are accepted at any time and are used to enhance and improve library services. In the case of memorials or donations in honor of a particular person or event, please include the name(s) and address(es) of those to be notified. Checks should be made payable to the California State Library Foundation and should include a note that the donation is for the Braille and Talking Book Library. Donations should be sent to: California State Library Foundation, 1225 8<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 345, Sacramento, CA, 95814-4809. Donations can also be made online at: <http://www.csfdn.org/>. Follow the link to "Join/Donate Online." There is a place to designate BTBL as the recipient.