

BREAKING BARRIERS

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My Life as a Blind Musician

I was born in Brandon, Manitoba, in 1957 to Dutch immigrant parents, and was raised in the Christian Reformed Church. I was introduced to music very early in life. My mother told me that while I was in the playpen she would sing Dutch nursery rhymes to me and I would sing them back to her. We had a Reed organ in the house, and at about age three I struggled to plug in the electric chord to start the organ. This was particularly difficult for me as I was born blind, my optic nerve having never developed. I am told I stood on the foot pedals and started playing music that was in my memory.

The earliest struggle I can remember was at age five, when no kindergarten class in any school in Brandon would accept me because of my blindness. Therefore I was enrolled in a Roman Catholic school. The Sister would send me home with music

for my mother or father to play for me, and I would then accompany the class.

At age six I was faced with another challenge. I had to travel by train from Brandon, Manitoba, to Brantford, Ontario, unaccompanied by my parents, a distance of approximately 1,500 miles. There were a few staff members from the Ontario School for the Blind aboard the train. The Ontario School for the Blind in Brantford, Ontario (now the W. Ross MacDonald School for the Blind), then became my "home away from home" as I lived in residence there. My family later moved to Brantford to be closer to the school so that I could go home on weekends. I made many friends during elementary and high school.

The school did not have grade thirteen, so upon completion of grade twelve I had to enroll in a regular high

school, Pauline Johnson Collegiate, named after Canada's well-known poetess. This was also a challenge, going from a school for the blind to a school for sighted students. Nevertheless I graduated as an Ontario Scholar in recognition of high academic marks.

Music has been a large part of my life. I've been playing concerts since the age of ten. I studied in Paris with the world-renowned blind organist Jean Langlais. I also studied in the Netherlands with Piet Kee, another well-known organist. During these times of study I was accompanied by my mother, the late Mrs. Gloria Vandertuin.

I felt my first calling was to be a minister, but it has been impossible for me to accomplish this for reasons other than academic ability or my blindness. In recent years I was accepted at a theological seminary, but due to financial restraints I have been unable to pursue such study. Therefore music is my ministry.

I have always endeavored to play for the glory of God and in this way to bring the gospel of Christ to people who may not know him as their

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Dr. John Vandertuin

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From the Director



Today there are more people living with disabilities than ever before, and the rate of this increase is accelerating. The baby boomers, who are now growing old and living longer than their parents did, are adding to the number of those living with age-related disabilities.

And people who would have died from accidents or diseases in the past now survive to live with disabilities. For example, traumatic brain injuries killed nine out of ten victims in the past, whereas now nine out of ten survive, most with long-term disabilities. The result: more people living more years with disabilities.

Where will we get the money to make accommodations for all these people? Professional skill may cure or rehabilitate some of them, though this is costly in itself. Many, however, will need adaptations and ongoing care, some involving considerable expense. This gives rise to two of the most challenging moral temptations society faces: to euthanize the frail, and to dispose of defective and surplus embryos. Both of these will reduce or limit the number of disabled people and help relieve the financial and social pressure on the rest of us.

One power we modern humans have is the ability to keep the body of a dying person functioning indefinitely, well beyond a natural and dignified death. But we also can convince ourselves that it is right and merciful to bring about the death of a frail and disabled person well before death is at hand. In the future, pressure to consent to this solution may build, and society may become more and more persuaded by this solution.

Another power we now have is the ability to operate on human sperm, eggs, and embryos. We can enable parents who cannot conceive in the normal way to conceive children. In time we may be able to cure many disabling deformities and diseases by operations on genes and embryos. However, this power also can be (and regularly is) used to destroy human embryos because they have presently incurable defects or because the mother cannot carry additional children to term.

Letters are welcome in keeping with the purpose of *Breaking Barriers*. They may be edited for style and length.

—Rev. James Vanderlaan

Caregivers!

Using the following web community address, caregivers can ask and answer questions or make comments that they feel could benefit someone.

www.caregiver.guidedvision.com

Please try it out and let us know what you think.

—JV

I have studied and reflected on these matters for many years, and I am convinced that life begins at conception, whether that conception takes place in the womb or in a test tube. Of course, the embryo does not have a beating heart or generate brain waves like an adult. If an adult's heart stops and the brain waves are flat we rightly say that death has occurred. But we have no right to use such a standard for the humanity of an embryo any more than we can demand the newborn to speak or the two-year-old to do algebra.

This does not necessarily mean that an embryo may never be killed or that there can never be a reason for an abortion. The Christian church has always acknowledged that there are circumstances when it may be right to take a human life. However, the reasons for killing the embryo or the fetus must be so clear and weighty that they rise to the level of justifying the killing of a human being. This is also true for all experimental surgery on embryos. How many destroyed lives are acceptable as we work at developing life-saving techniques? We can do marvelous things, but may we?

This brings to mind a Bible passage. "That slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted, will receive a severe beating. But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded" (Luke 12:47-48 NRSV).

God has indeed given us impressive powers, and we can do great good with them. However, when we use these powers to destroy human life as well as to preserve it, we are accountable to God for what we have done.

—JV

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Dear Editor,

Thank you for the disability concerns binder you sent us last spring. We were impressed with the information and were spurred on to make the issue of inclusion, "To Build Bridges," the theme for our worship services this fall. After discussion with the liturgy committee, our pastoral committee decided to highlight disabilities in our services and education programs.

The response from our congregation has been very positive. People are talking about the issues from a biblical perspective and learning to practice empathy. In short, we have been blessed by this series. I wanted you to know that your work is appreciated and used.

Thank you and God bless you in this work.

Shalom,

Melle Fluizinga

Administrator, Fellowship Christian Reformed Church
Edmonton, Alberta

"CELEBRATING SPIRITUAL RELATIONSHIP, CHURCH OR ORGANIZATION" was the theme for November's nominations of the Minnesota State Operated Community Services.

An organization of the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Roger came to Willmar about 12 years ago with a strong spiritual background and ties to the Edgerton CRC. The Willmar Church welcomed him into their church with open arms. They provide Roger and others with transportation to and from church for both morning and evening services. They also started Friendship Bible Studies for Willmar Area people with mental impairments. These classes have grown over the years, and now it takes two nights of bible studies to accommodate over 100 people.

Willmar Christian Reformed Church
1708 S.W. 8th Street, Willmar, MN 56201

Your church and its members/volunteers were nominated for recognition by the staff at MSOCS Lakeland SOCS#1 for the contributions and commitment which help our people attend Church services and Tuesday evening Bible Studies.

This effort is greatly appreciated and helps our people experience a socially valued role in their community. Roger Huisken and Ron Pabst both look forward to Tuesday Bible Studies and are quite proud that they can do this independently with out their staff.

Again thank you for your commitment!!

Mike Thompson

Letters

Dear Rev. Vanderlaan,

My compliment on your periodical "Breaking Barriers." Thanks for the many informative and encouraging articles. In your winter 2003 edition my attention fell on two articles.

The first was the article on Friendship programs by Rev. Nydam. The second was Mrs. Richard's peace on deafness, very timely and educational.

There is a similar problem for people who are partially deaf and who may or may not do very well with a hearing aid. They continue to have quite a handicap with many hours of frustration. Many people keep their distance from them and avoid conversation, especially in groups, social gatherings, and the like.

Maybe your committee can publish some advice to hearing aid handicappers, and also advise church councils to install the right audio technology in church auditoriums—the Loop system. The general public needs some education as well on how to include hearing aid wearers in their groups.

May your effort break many barriers.

Friendly Greetings,

T. Ferwerda

Brampton, ON

Dear Editor,

My daughter worships in a small Presbyterian congregation an hour north of Toronto where they had occasion to reach out to several deaf people in the community. We have maintained a prayer action for some time to find an interpreter for the deaf so they could be welcomed to church. It is remarkable how God answers prayer, because the solution proved to be much simpler than finding a qualified signer for such a small church with its very limited resources. My daughter took a laptop, keyboard, and screen to church and sat beside the deaf visitors and typed on the screen whatever was said or sung.

The whole process was a great success, and the deaf people were very pleased with the wonderful way they could participate in the service. They were used to reading subtitles on TV. All that is needed is a laptop with a word processing program and a person who can type comfortably at the rate people speak, with some skill to shorten the text to accommodate the readers. I thought you might like to know about this and pass it on to others who may be able to minister to the deaf in this rather simple yet effective way.

If you want more details please let me know and I will follow up with my daughter on this.

Blessings on your work,

Jack Van Meggelen

Willowdale, Ontario

The Life and Death of Our Son Edward

Our youngest son, Edward Neil, was born in May, 1969. Everyone complimented us about this good-looking child with his big blue eyes and beautiful blond hair. Physically he developed well; he was toilet trained early and his walking and coordination developed normally. However, he seemed to live in his own little world and was long unable to speak even simple words. This made it difficult for him to socialize with other children.

We did not realize it at the time, but he showed definite signs of autism. Even though we spent many hours encouraging him and giving him motivational incentives, it seemed a never-ending task to teach Edward to talk, to read, and to play with others. The one aptitude that helped a little to offset his many deficiencies was his remarkable proficiency in remembering various pieces of music. Once when he played a piece on his keyboard, I asked where he learned it. He answered, "I heard it on the radio." He enjoyed his music lessons, which he took at a very early age. Edward was also fascinated with numbers, distances, and heights. When he finally learned to talk he

wanted to know the meaning of every word. He seemed to have a particular gift for remembering all kinds of data, and this almost became an obsession with him. Edward's questions were not only very repetitious but also extremely monotonous. He would constantly ask questions like: "Is heaven very beautiful? Was the apostle Paul a bad man before he became a Christian? How high is Mount Everest? How high is the CNN Tower? What would happen if I would jump from a steep mountain? How many miles is it from here to the moon?" The questions would go on and on and on. Edward already knew the answers, and when in doubt, he would patiently look them up in his world book encyclopedia.

Because autism is an invisible disability and is not understood by many of our teachers and other authorities, autistic individuals and their families are often subjected to harsh and judgmental criticism. For the average person who is not trained in psychology and lacks diagnostic skills, autism looks like unruly behavior that should be corrected by the parents. Edward became more and more isolated, withdrawing into himself, and experienced bouts of depression and anxiety along with hyperactivity. Although we desperately wanted to help him, as vulnerable as he was, we found it impossible to reach him in his deepest needs. At those times we cried for him, and prayed for him. When we moved to Edmonton Edward was enrolled in a program for special education. He was unhappy there since he encountered students who enjoyed teasing him with rough language. Yet he would never complain. We realized that he was often depressed and very anxious, and we consulted a child psychiatrist in the University Hospital in Edmonton. This psychiatrist prescribed small doses of Haldol, a medication to lessen Edward's anx-

ety level. However, the doses were too small, and the anxiety remained.

Late one afternoon in 1987 we were anxiously waiting for Edward to come home from school. It was getting late and he was usually home by four. We were almost ready to phone the school when the phone rang and a voice informed us that Edward had suffered a sudden panic attack and had jumped from the lower side of the high level bridge. We are quite sure that he had been teased on the bus and that he had left the bus when it approached the bridge. In a panic he had jumped. If it had not been for the mud and grass he would have been dead. Edward's injuries were very serious, and the doctor informed us that they would have to start immediately with extensive surgery on both of his ankles and his back. He was not sure whether or not Edward would ever be able to walk again. We stood next to his bed in utter helplessness and softly uttered prayers to God, asking him to guide the surgeon and to grant Edward his healing power. After the surgery we were informed that Edward's back surgery had been successful but that it would take at least six months to know whether he would be able to walk again. Edward was out of danger, but the surgeon was not sure what the ultimate outcome would be. He said: "We have to see, but we may have to amputate part of his legs, especially if infection develops." After six months of hospitalization the day finally came for Edward to come home. He slowly began to walk again, and a few weeks later I took him outside and helped him use his bicycle. A month later we took him to Hawlerick Park where many people skate during the winter. After a few minutes Edward was skating again.

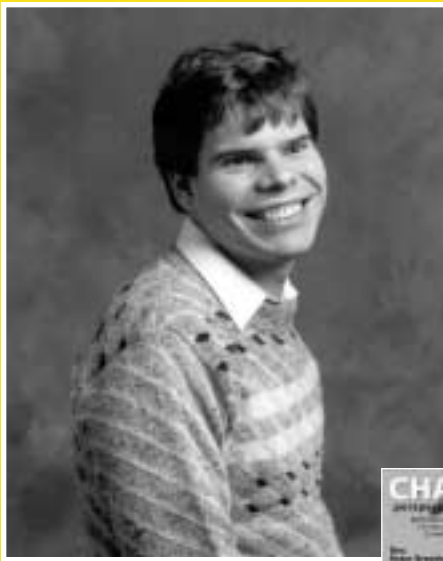
It was about eight years later, just as we arrived home from a long camping trip with Edward, that it



Edward

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The Life and Death of Our Son Edward — continued



Edward

happened. A few months prior to this Edward's doctor had reduced his medication because high blood pressure is a side affect. He prescribed a milder form of medication. During the camping trip we had noticed that even though Edward was much more alert than he had been for a long time, he also had different mood swings. Once he suffered a panic attack while we were eating at a roadside diner. At times he was anxious and easily upset. We were very worried and commented to each other that we should see the doctor again to ask for a better medication.

When we got back to Edmonton, Edward seemed his natural self again. While we were unpacking, he asked us if he could go for a bike ride. We told him to stay in the neighborhood and to be back for supper in an hour. I still remember that he left with a big

smile on his face. We had the impression that he was happy to be home again. However, it was the last time we saw see him alive. When after two hours Edward had still not returned, we became concerned, and I began to look for him in the various places he rode his bicycle. I could not find him. After another hour, fighting panic, we contacted the police. They did not take our concern very seriously and told us not to worry. But, knowing Edward, we were worried, and I continued looking for him, praying many times, "Lord, let me find him alive." When darkness fell and Edward still had not returned we were desperate. We contacted the police again. An hour later they came to our door and told us they found his bike on the high level bridge over the North Saskatchewan River and that someone had reported

seeing a young man falling or jumping from that bridge. Immediately we realized that Edward must have suffered another panic attack and that our worst fears had come true.

For several days a search party consisting mostly of members of our church tried unsuccessfully to find Edward. One of them chartered a special boat to search the river. It took about a week before we were contacted again by the police, who informed us that they had found Edward's body in the river.

I still vividly remember all the feelings of grief and bereavement we experienced during that time. It was a blur of church members, friends, faces, intense emotional pain, tears,

agonizing memories, and prayers. We felt as if part of our lives was suddenly cut off. However, we were so numb that the dreadful reality of what had happened hardly penetrated.

When our other children came, we hugged, cried, prayed, and talked. All these things were very hard for us, but we had to do them. We realized that we had to go on living. Even after the death of our child and brother, life continues with all its pains and agonies as well as with its happy times.

Edward was a deeply committed Christian, and some years earlier he had made public profession of his faith. We keenly realize that as Christians we no longer have to worry about him. But in spite of that, parting is still a very painful sorrow. We know that death is the last enemy, yet it remains an enemy. Still, while we grieve we affirm the apostle Paul's words: "Where, o death, is your victory? Where, o death, is your sting? . . . But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

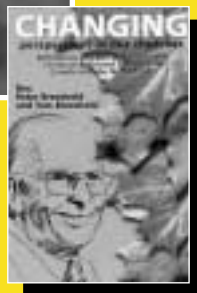
—Excerpted from Rev. Breedveld's biography

Changing Perspectives in Our Churches (Essence Publications).

For more information or to order a copy of the book, please contact Peter Breedveld:

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or 780-466-9786 (from April 15 till November 1).



You may now access *Breaking Barriers* through our website at

<http://www.crcna.org/crdc/index.htm>



News From Friendship Ministries

There have been several recent changes in Friendship Ministries. Probably the most significant is the release of the new Friendship Bible Studies curriculum. Last summer, our original Old Testament curriculum was completely redone; it is now called *God, Our Father*. This revision includes brand-new art, new lessons, a first-ever *Program Guide* and new resources for Christmas and Easter. *Jesus, Our Savior* will be ready in summer 2004, and then in 2005 *The Spirit, Our Helper* will be finished. To complete this project we had to raise \$800,000 in donations! This task was undertaken by Ralph Honderd, board member and volunteer for Friendship Ministries.

In July 2004 we hope to have a Spanish translation of *God, Our Father* finished as well. This will give us two years of materials in Spanish. Elizabeth Rodriquez Waterfield is our part-time staff for Ministerio Amistad (Spanish for Friendship Ministries). There are Amistad classes in Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Argentina, El Salvador, and Cuba. Many of the people who are in these Amistad classes have been abandoned to institutions by their families. Often the churches do not have money to pay for the complete curriculum so they hold bazaars to raise money. Sometimes we are able to find donors to help fund a class.

Churches here in North America are trying new ways to use Friendship Bible Studies. For children who are 4-6th grade level it is often too early to begin a regular Friendship class, but regular Sunday school materials do not work either. So these churches are using Friendship Bible Studies and rotating in children from the same grade-level Sunday school class to be with the children who have disabilities. This reverse inclusion hopefully will help to promote relationships between the children.

For the first time a Cadet council has asked Friendship Ministries for help in integrating cadets with disabilities into the club and cadre. Grand Valley Council held a workshop on this in January.

I have been experimenting in my own Friendship class. If a neighboring church wants one of its members to attend my class, I ask the church to send a mentor with him/her. This is working well. My congregation would not be able to supply the number of volunteers that would be needed to have a one-on-one relationship with members from other churches besides our own. With thirty friends coming and about thirty-five volunteers needed, it is a challenge. Thus at Plymouth Heights CRC's Friendship class we have volunteers from Church of the Servant, Burton Heights, First CRC, and Sherman Street. We gain new friendships not only between mentor and friend but also between mentors. Truly this becomes a broader family. Five Calvin College students have been volunteering as well. They have majors in geology, recreational therapy, nursing, and special education.

This Spring we are planning to begin a campaign of "Each One Reach One." We hope to encourage each



Friendship class to reach out to one other church in their area and help start a new Friendship class. Not everyone will be successful. It often takes a while after the seed is planted, but it can be done. For example, Ralph and Carol Honderd went to visit with Ada CRC last winter on a Sunday morning. They had called ahead to the pastor to let him know they were coming and were able to meet with the adult education class. This October they began their first Friendship class. They had 16 friends and 17 mentors and had a wonderful time! From a chaplain in the area who works with clients attending that class I heard that wonderful things are happening. One man who never smiles greeted the chaplain with a huge smile after the first class and asked if he could come again! Way to go, Ada CRC!

Calvin CRC in Muskegon has been nominated for a National Caring Church Award. This will be presented at the April Christian Council on Persons with Disabilities Conference. This is given to a church that goes above and beyond in several areas of Disability Ministries. Calvin CRC was host to the Friendship Conference in October.

Big news in Canada: There is a new executive director of Friendship Groups Canada. Meta Shamrock has agreed to take on this challenge. Some of you may know her from Calgary, Alberta, and others from where she lives now in Ontario. Send her an e-mail of greeting at Meta_friendshipgroupscanada@rogers.com or call 1-888-649-5555. Meta was one of the authors of Friendship's *Living God's Way*, a course on the Ten Commandments.

—Nella Uitolugt, Director of Friendship Ministries

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In Christ We Need Each Other — Give Thanks for Julianne

(Editor's note: The following is a moving account of Julianne becoming a full member of her church, Cascades Fellowship CRC in Jackson, Michigan. Included is an adaptation of the form for public profession of faith, found on page 964 of the *Psalter Hymnal*, which was approved by the church.)

Our daughter Julianne has multiple impairments. She is mentally impaired and is blind and hard of hearing. She also has mild cerebral palsy and narcolepsy.

In our letter to the church council we requested that she be received as a full member even though she would not be able to respond to any questions and would not be able to say, "I love Jesus." We did not ask for her to participate in the Lord's Supper or vote. Juli loves church, and the music in particular, frequently singing phrases of praise songs and occasionally playing parts of them on her keyboard. The service of her reaffirmation of membership (she became a member of the church by baptism as an infant) was very moving. The congregation repeated the vows they had made when they professed their faith, vows which bound them to serve those in need of help or aid. Rachel Lanham sang, "You are Special," and the praise band chose Juli's favorite song for the service. Juli attends the praise band's rehearsal for the worship service as her "Sunday school" because she loves and gets so much out of the music. She smiles and waves her hands and feet, and she claps and shouts when she particularly likes a song. There was a special banner in church, and a special cake for coffee time that said, "In Christ we need each other. Give thanks for Julianne." These added to our celebration of thanks to God.

Bob and Alice DeVries

Public Reaffirmation of the Membership of Julianne DeVries

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Today we are privileged to welcome into the full life of the church's fellowship Julianne DeVries, who has reached the normal years of discretion, but is not and never will be capable of making a public profession of her faith. When she was baptized God made clear his claim on her as his own and she was received into the church.

Therefore, it is now the privilege of the church to invite her to share fully in the life of this congregation and of the whole church of God. Today, we publicly accept and confirm what was sealed in her baptism, confess our faith in the Lord Jesus, and offer ourselves to God as his willing servants. We do this in accord with the words of Christ Jesus our King: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40). We thank God for having given Julianne to us and pray that he will favor us with the presence and guidance of

his Holy Spirit as we take her into our fellowship and make these vows.

The Vows

Congregation, will you stand now, and in the presence of God and his people respond to the following questions:

1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God sent to redeem the world, do you love and trust him as the one who saves you from your sin, and do you with repentance and joy embrace him as Lord of your life?
2. Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God revealing Christ and his redemption, and that the confessions of this church faithfully reflect this revelation?
3. Do you accept the gracious promises of God sealed to Julianne in her baptism, and do you affirm her union with Christ and his church, which her baptism signifies?
4. Do you promise to do all you can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen Julianne's love and commitment to Christ by sharing faithfully with her in the life of the church, honoring and submitting to its authority; thus, joining with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord?

Answer: We do, God helping us.

The Reception

Minister: In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I now welcome Julianne DeVries to full participation in the life of the church. I welcome her to its responsibilities, its joys, and its sufferings. "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20-21).

Congregation: Thanks be to God! We promise you our love, encouragement, and prayers.



Brian DeVries (little brother), Gabe Rowilson, and Julianne DeVries

My Life as a Blind Musician

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personal Savior. This is a challenge for a professional concert organist, even though concerts usually take place in churches where the pipe organs are. Audiences are varied; some are Christian and some are not. My programs vary from the classical to Christian contemporary. Classical music emphasizes religious music; Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frederick Handel were two of the world's most prolific composers and performers, and both were Christians in the Lutheran faith.

I have had an extensive career as an organist and choir director for several churches in various denominations. An organist, especially one who is blind and whose entire educational background has been in music, must take positions in other denominations in order to make a living. Unfortunately, some do not proclaim the gospel as well as they should. During interviews for positions I have been questioned about my religious convictions and have actually been told not to mention that my wife and I are born again Christians and believe the Bible in its entirety. Today politics are everywhere in the churches, and anyone working there in a leadership position has to keep focused on God and his calling. My early background in the Christian Reformed Church and my wife's background in the Evangelical Church hold us in good stead.

Through my university days at the University of Western Ontario in London, where I earned my B.Mus. (Hons.) Degree, Organ Performance, University Gold Medallist, Master of Music Degree, and Doctor of Musical Arts Degree, as well as highest honors from the University of Michigan, I experienced many challenges in coping, in attending and taping lectures, and in brailing many requirements. I was fortunate to know people who offered to help with reading textbooks and so on, and I have

always appreciated any help I received. Obviously my entire musical repertoire has to be memorized either from Braille or by ear. My disability never allowed me to be exempted from the required degree work. I performed everything any other student was required to do. A former teacher at the Ontario School for the Blind spoke at a dinner for alumni and said that my receiving a doctorate had pushed back the barriers for blind musicians. I appreciated these comments from this Christian teacher.

After having performed in Canada, the U.S., France, and the Netherlands over the past few years, I have now been concentrating my music in the contemporary Christian field—including creating and playing my own synthesized compositions and arrangements. Some of them I use as back-up accompaniments for my singing. The texts of my own compositions are based on the Scriptures. In 1999 my CD "Glory to His Holy Name," performed at Holy Name Church in Toronto, was released.

In 2003 three of my organ compositions entitled "Three for Holy Week" were published by Concordia Publishing House, and are available throughout the U.S. as well as in Canada and the U.K.

Although I have been blind from birth, I have always endeavored to serve the Lord to the best of my ability. I believe that the gift of music God gave me should be returned to him. Both my wife and I strive each day to do God's will. Even though there are many hardships in this life, we know that in his time, there will be a better world for all of us. God bless all who are involved in this newsletter.

—Dr. John Vandertuin



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