

# Interviews

For this issue, we decided to interview patrons, rather than librarians. The following are the responses sent to a general call to patrons with disabilities from a number of libraries. We asked individuals to write (or tell) about their library experiences, to share what they'd like to see in libraries, and what they already use in their own libraries.

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## **How Do I Library? Let Me Count the Ways** **Jeremy Brown, Middle Tennessee State University**

My home town library is a small affair, and when I was growing up it had 0 resources for the blind. I loved it. I loved the smell of books. I loved checking out books. When I first went to the Tennessee School for the Blind, the first thing to sell me on the new experience was the library: hundreds of Braille books stacked and organized and ready for me. In high school I worked in that library; I considered a career in library science, but once in college, my goals changed.

I have now used various libraries of differing calibers, and I think that the first and foremost thing to consider is what a visually impaired person can get from a library. Public computer terminals can be made accessible with Jaws, Window Eyes, or other programs. Card catalogs are now commonly accessible via the web in bigger libraries. Some libraries offer scanners for reading books. However, for myself, the greatest joy is books on cassette or compact disk.

I have been using my current town's library on and off for ten years. When I first went there was nothing there for me; my wife checked out books and we read some of those together. We stopped going after a year or so, and I honestly discounted our public library. All that changed when one of my friends asked me, "Did you know the library's got books on CD?" I said no, thinking he meant the university library which I didn't frequent that often. I was steered from this misapprehension and soon we were back at the public library.

Our library is blessed with a large selection of recorded books, but as with most Americans, my need for instant gratification is not satisfied by a large

selection. I want a huge selection. Recorded books are good not only for visually impaired individuals but also persons with learning disabilities, persons who enjoy working while they read, or those many people who enjoy listening to a book while they drive long distances. Some of these books have been godsend to me or my acquaintances. For instance, a friend of mine who teaches English as a second language used recorded books to help her students gain a better understanding of the spoken as well as the written language.

I know that library budgets are generally tight affairs, but if I were the director of a library wishing to expand its services to the visually impaired, I would get software for the public terminals (at least one) and then focus on recorded books. Our library's strategy of concentrating on children's literature and the bestseller list is good, but I would expand this if possible to include more literature and nonfiction. Finally, I would make sure that the most important aid for the disabled was in place (as it is in most libraries) namely, helpful and concerned librarians. I love books in print; I love their smell, their texture, their weight in the hand—but when I am in a library, I am always reminded of the Monty Python sketch about the bookshop. A man enters a bookshop and asks for totally obscure books one after the other. The shopkeeper becomes more and more frantic trying to get rid of his customer. Finally, the man names a book the shopkeeper has; the shopkeeper finds the book and demands that the customer buy it. The customer protests that he has no form of payment (of course forcing the shopkeeper to go through all the options first) and finally the shopkeeper buys the book for the customer. However the customer interjects plaintively, "I can't read!" I feel like that customer whenever I enter most libraries, but the shopkeeper of the piece has a solution: he sits the customer down and begins reading the book to the customer. Recorded books and helpful librarians can be the solution to a similar problem.

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**Shanika Lawson**  
**East Tennessee State University**

Throughout the years, I have had to depend on the library as a resource for both academic and leisure enlightenment. However, as a student with a visual impairment (total blindness in my left eye) my library experiences have often been a challenge, particularly using technology such as

computers and microfilm/microfiche. It is a challenge to locate and then read materials. Specifically, throughout the library there are not random machines with assistive programs that which will enlarge print or adjust visual hues, and also limit glare by way of anti-reflective/anti-glare equipment, neither are there multiple titles in large print readily available whether they be books or periodicals. My library experience would be enhanced if an entire library contained elements of the Disability Services Student Lab of ETSU which is located on the first floor of the Sherrod Library. Within the lab I can use an assistive device to scan my readable pages, increase or decrease printed material to my needs, as well as personalize my screen/monitor for viewing. A library would be beneficial if it contained elements that which would make my reading experiences comfortable and productive, moreover, foster an environment where I could see and read clearly throughout and not just within a single first-floor room.

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**Cynthia Canter**  
**East Tennessee State University**

I have several disabilities which include degenerative disc disease in my low back, asthma, diabetes, and I have had a total knee replacement. The back problems and my knee make it difficult to use libraries that don't have elevators or ramps to get to entrances or second floors, which most do now. I also have a hard time with seeing and/or getting books from low shelves because it's hard to bend or stoop. I know putting seats in aisles would be hard due to space limitations, but maybe the books on the shelves didn't have to be so low. Thanks for making librarians aware of the needs of us with disabilities. There are many kinds of disabilities and this will help all of us.