



MANN-U-SCRIPT

The Face of HMEA



Gloria Stuart was born in Canada, but moved to the U.S. when she was a small child. She was born with no vision in one eye, and limited vision in the other, and would have been institutionalized in Canada, so her parents brought the family to Massachusetts to Mass Eye and Ear for her diagnosis and care. At a later date, her Mom, Gloria and her brother moved to Rhode Island.

As a child, Gloria was raised to be independent, and told that she could do anything, just in a different way from other people. Gloria says that her mother lovingly spoiled her in every other way, but did not make allowances for her vision deficit, other than reading her books and providing help with homework.

Upon graduation from high school, she was uncertain about her future career, and decided to attend Community College of Rhode Island for prerequisite courses. Gloria's work/study job was to learn software and hardware for assistive technology for students with disabilities, and then train other students in its use. She became so interested in the work that she left to pursue computer programming at NE Institute of Technology; later, she returned to CCRI. She fulfilled internship requirements at TechACCESS and upon completion, stayed on to volunteer and was later

hired. Her first tasks were to get donated IBM computers up and running with the assistive technology software, and then to demonstrate the software applications. She also coordinated the assistive technology catalog library. She was sent to her first international assistive technology conference in California and states: "I was hooked; I knew that this was the work I wanted to do for life".

She is now the blind/low vision technology specialist. She evaluates and provides training for school districts and adults entering the workforce again. She assesses the technology needs, provides professional development to teachers of the blind and visually impaired, and trains people on how to use assistive technology. Additionally, Gloria is a user of assistive technology and has worked on both local and national levels for legislation regarding assistive technology for people with disabilities, and is involved in the development and implementation of a comprehensive plan to educate blind and visually impaired in the state.

When asked to share a particularly meaningful experience of assisting someone with a disability, she responds "it happens every week". One such experience involved an electrician in his 40s. Due to some medication interactions, he lost some of his vision, resulting in his inability

to perform job functions. He came to TechACCESS, in despair that he could no longer maintain his business. Gloria was able to secure a "Jordy" for the man (the Joint Optical Reflective Display is a unit that fits over the head like glasses, and enables people to see by magnifying objects up to 50 times, and to change contrast, brightness and display modes. People can see objects at any range, thus allowing them to enjoy television, sporting events, and plays, among other things. A docking stand for the Jordy also allows images to be projected onto a computer screen.) Using the device, this electrician was able to identify electrical needs for businesses. Within a few months, he informed Gloria that he was again a licensed electrician, and had restarted his business.

Gloria is especially proud of the TechACCESS youth program for blind and visually impaired students. The students have named the program "Cybervision. There are two major goals of the program, which was begun with a grant from Citizens Bank. One is to allow students to socialize with others who are visually impaired, and the other is for students to teach one another in the use of assistive technology. Participants in the youth program are also taught about advocacy, and leisure activities. In addi-

tion, vendors visit to introduce new technology. Gloria is very excited about the affiliation with HMEA and

hopes to be able to extend and expand the youth program to include not only young adults with visual disabilities, but others who are older and who have different types of disabilities as well.

Today, she enjoys wilderness camping, kayaking and walking. She has had her own woodworking business and has made a lot of furniture. She is an animal lover. For several years, she lived with a service dog, a German Shepherd female named Stevie (for Stevie Nicks) and says she was amazing. Gloria describes the service dog/owner relationship as a team thing; the two worked together very closely in a reciprocal relationship of love and assistance. They traveled around the country, and went to many schools to explain to children about service animals. She says that, if she had to do a lot of traveling again, she wouldn't hesitate to get another service dog. Right now, she lives with a male Papillion named Jackie. She has trained him herself to be of assistance to her, and he is also a pet therapy dog. Gloria lives exactly the kind of life she chooses for herself. ◀