



RVIB news

Christmas by Touch...

Christmas is always a hectic time for a mother with two children. For Katie Levey and her husband Grant there are additional challenges because their daughter Veronica is blind.

Now aged six and a pupil at the RVIB School in Burwood, Veronica has been blind since birth. Her younger brother Nathan, three, is fully sighted.

From the moment Veronica was born, Katie has had to learn parenting skills specific to bringing up a child without sight.

Helen Smith, an RVIB Early Childhood Educator, visited the family weekly and helped Katie to adapt.

'I soon realised that I would have to compensate for Veronica's lack of sight by using more touch and sound and physical interaction,' says Katie.

'We removed pictures from her playmat, and replaced them with objects she could touch, nailbrushes and toothbrushes, tin foil, metal spoons and even an egg whisk with a bell inside.

'It was this kind of very practical support that gave me the confidence and the skills to mother Veronica in a way that gave her the most opportunities to learn and develop.'



▲ Veronica Levey at play at the RVIB School in Burwood.

These principles are also the foundation of Christmas present buying.

'Most toys for children rely quite heavily on a visual element, which is useless for Veronica,' says Katie. 'We look for things that have audio elements, are tactile and with as many interactive features as possible.'

This means dolls that talk and can be fed, rather than just dressed up. Or toy cars that have an engine sound and moving parts, balls with bells in and musical instruments.

More exhausting than the challenge of presents is the lead up to Christmas.

► Continued page 2.

RVIB Carols by Candlelight

QANTAS

presents



**Monday, December 24
from 8.30pm**

The Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind, in association with Qantas and the Nine Network, will showcase some of Australia's finest performers at this year's RVIB Carols by Candlelight.

The star-studded line-up includes Hi-5, Human Nature, Bardot, Marina Prior, Gina Jeffreys, Rhonda Burchmore and king of rock - Billy Thorpe. Also making a special performance will be Lauren Hayes, a 16 year-old vision-impaired student from RVIB, who will take the stage for her debut performance.

How do I buy tickets?

Simply call Ticketmaster7 on 136 100. All proceeds from RVIB Carols by Candlelight go to the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind (RVIB).

Sing when you're Winning

► Continued from page 1.

Nathan sees decorations, TV adverts, cards, and Santa in the shopping centre, but Veronica will only know about these things if someone tells her.

Katie and Grant play Christmas carols more than most families in the lead up to December to get Veronica excited.

The easiest way for Veronica to understand is to feel, so they use styrofoam decorations instead of glass baubles and lots of tinsel on the tree so she can touch them.

But this approach isn't always possible.

'Explaining about Santa and his elves wasn't so easy,' says Katie. 'The conversation went something like this:

'What's an elf?'

'It's a very small man, with pointy ears who helps Santa deliver presents in his sleigh.'

'What's a sleigh?'

'Like a buggy, but instead of wheels it sits on flat boards that turn up at the ends like ice cream sticks. And it's pulled by reindeer.'

'What's a reindeer?'

'Like a little horse with big curly horns.'

'What's a horn?' And so on.

Veronica has no visual images as a frame of reference, so everything has to be explained in terms of what she already knows.

Katie says it's not really a question of harder or easier, it's just different.

'Nathan and Veronica are very different and as parents we have to recognise that and adapt to it,' she says.

'But there's one thing that's the same, and that's the smile when they open their first present on Christmas morning'.

Some families have the radio on for company, other households turn the TV on for background noise and in the Hayes household they have Lauren.

Lauren, 16, has a penchant for making noise. At five years old she started playing the piano and at nine joined a local choir to sing.

'My parents Colin and Pam decided if I was going to do it I should do it properly, probably for their own benefit as much as mine!' says Lauren 'So I started having proper lessons.'

It's a familiar story to thousands of Australian parents, except for one thing. Lauren is totally blind.

The lessons paid off and Lauren, a talented soprano, has sung with choirs across Victoria and opened countless gala and charity events.

And this year she won the RVIB Betty Amsden Music Scholarship and will sing at RVIB Carols by Candlelight.

“ Carols by Candlelight has always been a traditional part of our Christmas and being part of it is like a dream come true. ”

Lauren's involvement with RVIB goes back much further. Born prematurely, her eyesight was affected at birth. The family moved from South Australia to Victoria when Lauren was a toddler, where they contacted RVIB.



▲ Lauren Hayes will be performing at this year's RVIB Carols by Candlelight

Home visits from RVIB Early Childhood Educators introduced the family to Support Skills Programs and ultimately to Music Therapy at the RVIB School at Burwood.

As well as the introduction to music, I learnt how to read Braille Music and attended RVIB annual Braille Music Camps which kept my skills up to date,' says Lauren.

'It means I don't have to rely on anyone else and can sing and play the piano independently.'

A lover of classical and popular music, Lauren plans to study music, specialising in music therapy at university.

In her first Carols, Lauren will sing 'When a Child is Born'.

'I'm really excited to be part of Carols this year for two reasons,' says Lauren.

'Firstly, Carols by Candlelight has always been a traditional part of our Christmas and being part of it is like a dream come true.

'And I know first hand how proceeds from the event benefit people who are blind and vision impaired and am proud to be contributing to a cause that makes so much difference to so many peoples' lives.'

Upcoming RVIB Events!

DECEMBER 2001

▶ **RVIB Carols by Candlelight**

This will be the 64th Carols by Candlelight staged at the refurbished Sidney Myer Music Bowl. Carols will be the public launch of this \$18.5 million upgraded venue.

2002 EVENTS

▶ **RVIB Fete**

Continuing the tradition, the RVIB fete will be held over two days - March 23 and 24, 2002.

▶ **Alaska and Canada Tour**

Join Ugly Dave Gray on a tour of Alaska and China through Collette Vacations. See page 4.

▶ **Egypt by Touch**

In March, there will be a unique opportunity to explore the ancient Egyptian civilisation by touching authentic replicas, listening to audio or reading brailled descriptions.

▶ **Victorian Music Festival**

Set over the Easter weekend, this new music festival, located in Mornington, promises to be a great showcase of music and entertainment.

▶ **Bass Strait Crossing**

On 14 April, RVIB client and paralympic gold medal-winner, Russell Short, will defy the odds and cross the treacherous Bass Strait in a custom-built kayak.

Message from the CEO



As our population grows older, more and more people will experience blindness or vision impairment. Already we know that one in five people in Australia experience a print disability.

However, RVIB clients can be found across the entire age spectrum from a newborn baby with a congenital eye condition to older Victorians who may experience vision loss through a range of causes including cataracts, glaucoma or diabetes.

Every client has differing needs throughout their lives and RVIB provide a comprehensive service ranging from early childhood education to employment counseling and adaptive technology to library services.

Many people other than RVIB staff and specialists make this possible. As we embrace the International Year of the Volunteer we have special reason to recognise the contribution of those who support the work of RVIB.

People who give time to RVIB clients in their communities, or who support RVIB staff in one of the 12 sites throughout Victoria, the 85 Auxiliary groups who raised \$134,530 through fundraising events this year, and those who have supported us financially.

The demand for RVIB services will continue to grow and RVIB, as one of Victoria's oldest charities, relies heavily on public support to continue our work.

This would not be possible but for the generosity of our friends and supporters.

Thank you for your continued support, and we wish each of you, and your families, a safe and happy festive season.

Sincerely,

Doug Kent
Chief Executive Officer

Another step towards independence - You can bet on it!

Over the next year, RVIB will develop a library of storybook kits for children who are blind or vision impaired.

Helen Smith, an early childhood educator at RVIB for more than 20 years, died in January.

She was passionate about equality and literacy for children.

Helen was concerned that standard childrens' books rely heavily on pictures with limited text, and are therefore meaningless to children who are unable to see.

At her memorial service, her husband Don and children Kirsten, Andrew and Anna requested donations to RVIB.

They raised \$5000 and the storybook project was born.

Additional support came from a corporate sponsor.

Tattersalls have donated a substantial amount of money

that will enable a dream to be realised to the benefit of many across Victoria.

Trustee and Director, David Jones, explains why they have provided funding.

'This is a great opportunity for Tattersalls to be partners in a unique opportunity of providing literacy for children. We are pleased to be able to help such a worthy organisation.'

The storybook kits will include tactile versions of 100 well known and loved books, and will be available in large print and braille.

The kits would be available for loan to RVIB clients and to the community.

An area at the RVIB School at Burwood will be refurbished to create an appropriate, accessible and fun environment for these children and their families.

Visit Canada and Alaska with Ugly Dave Gray

Ugly Dave Gray, well known for his many TV appearances on programs such as 'In Melbourne To-night', 'Celebrity Squares' and 'Blankety Blanks', will host a spectacular trip to Canada and Alaska as a special fundraising initiative for RVIB.

Departing on 28 May 2002, this fully guided 13 day tour will cover the Canadian Rockies and Alaska, with seven nights onboard a luxury cruise ship.

The tour will begin in Calgary, Alberta, where you will visit Canadian Olympic Park, home to the 1988 Winter Olympics. A trip across the Continental Divide will follow, where you will see the spectacular Moraine Lake and Valley of the Ten Peaks.

The journey will continue across the Icefields Parkway and on to Peyto Lake.

Next is the cruise, onboard the 'Vision of the Sea', where you will see the magnificent Hubbard Glacier, Lynn Canal and Alaska's capital Juneau.



▲ Valley of the Ten Peaks is one of the destinations on this special tour

This unique fundraising event has been made possible by Collette Vacations, with a percentage of proceeds from ticket sales being donated to RVIB. Tickets cost \$5,606pp, which covers airfares, twin share accommodation, transfers, taxes and most meals.

If you are interested in finding out more about this unique holiday experience, or about the other package deals offered by Collette Vacations, telephone them on Freecall 1800 663 660.



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