



Growing Up with EBC

Hoby Wedler was attending Petaluma High School just as the internet was gaining in popularity. A pro-active 16-year-old, he wanted to be ready for college and his future. Schools weren't online yet, and he did most of his schoolwork using a BrailleNote. Although he used a

computer for word processing, he required assistance with email and formatting.

In 2004, Hoby sought help from the Earle Baum Center. "EBC's IT staff worked with me to hone my computer skills," he said. "It was amazing to have the vast information of the internet

at my fingertips! I knew I would need these skills, not only to excel in college, but to survive. Now, I could do research to get what I needed. It opened up a set of opportunities that I was unaware even existed."

The Office of Education sponsored a weekly meeting at EBC over the course of 10 weeks for Sonoma County high school students who were blind or visually impaired. There, Hoby was introduced to independent living skills, cooking, exercise, and dance taught by EBC staff. "The program also had a teen support group. We talked about issues facing blind and visually impaired teens in a candid, unabashed environment. That meant the world to me," Hoby said. "I know everyone from the group is extremely grateful to EBC for what we learned through that program."

Hoby first attended EBC before the Center's current buildings were built. "It was awesome to be able to talk with Larry Swenson about the plans for EBC," he said. "Being a blind kid in rural Sonoma County, and hearing from an adult



Hoby hard at work on his laptop using skills gained at EBC.

Message from the Director of Development



Our Thanks to YOU!

Dear Friend,

In this issue of our newsletter, we'd like to introduce you to three local people. They have each explored the Earle Baum Center in different ways and at different points in their lives. All three count their EBC experience as extremely valuable and transformative. Hoby Wedler trained at EBC in its early days, when he was in school. You might say he and EBC grew up together. Thanks to EBC, Jessie Buckley was able to return to a profession she loved after

dealing with vision loss. Emily Vera is actively engaged in expanding services for people like her, who have both hearing and vision loss.

Hoby, Jessie, and Emily are among our most enthusiastic ambassadors. They want other people to know about our services. And they are grateful to be able to enjoy such a vital resource right here in our community.

That's all made possible thanks to loyal supporters like you! We hope that you'll come out to the Earle Baum Center soon.

Come to an event, take a tour, and walk on our beautiful paths and labyrinth. See for yourself what your generosity has made possible for the people in our community who are living with blindness or impaired vision.

Above all, know that we value you and all that you are doing for EBC!

Warm Regards,

Bob Sonnenberg
Director of Development
Interim CEO

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who is blind about a Center that was going to be built right here, for us – it was inspiring."

Today, after getting a Ph.D. in organic chemistry from UC Davis, Hoby continues to be pro-active. He founded Accessible Science, a nonprofit that leads chemistry camps for students who are blind or visually impaired. He and a partner created Senspoint Design (www.senspointdesign.com), a consultancy that creates sensory-based product marketing and sensory design of commercial and real estate spaces. He received recognition by President Barack Obama in 2012 and Forbes Media in 2016. And he plans to launch a new beverage company with a line

of spirits in the fall.

Hoby retains fond memories of growing up with EBC. "Needless to say, it's a fantastic program, and one that I stand by 100%. It means a lot to me."

JOIN THE BAUM SQUAD!!
At Cycle For Sight in Napa Valley, CA
Saturday, April 20, 2019

Cycle^{for}Sight
& ROTARY RIDE FOR VETERANS
Napa Valley, California

We'll be pedaling and partying at the Napa Valley's 12th annual Cycle for Sight & Rotary Ride for Veterans. Please join the BAUM SQUAD when you register for our team at www.cycle4sight.com/. Support our riders through the riders' pledge page ccnbikes.com/#/cycle-for-sight-2019/pledge/1128

JOIN US!

The Story Behind the Patch

Have you ever passed a man who is 6'10" and asked, "How's the weather up there?" It's a friendly gesture on your part, but he must hear it at least once a day -- every day of his life. The comment inadvertently reminds him that his height isn't "normal".

Jessie Buckley is "the nurse who wears an eye patch". She endures well-meaning comments of curious members of the public every day. But she's getting better at dealing with it, thanks to the counseling help she received from the Earle Baum Center.

"Some people tell me pirate jokes," Jessie said. "Others assume I've had cataract surgery. People say, 'Oh, who poked you in the eye?' Some compare me to their pet dog or horse who has only one eye and is doing fine, assuring me that I will, too. But I'm not a pet – I'm a person who needs to earn a living."

Jessie used to feel obligated to tell people her personal medical history – the story



Jessie checks a patient's blood pressure at work.

behind the patch. Doctors diagnosed a tumor in her left eye some 30 years ago. After 17 surgeries and countless treatments, the tumor continued to come back. "It just would not die until they took the eye," she said. She had reconstructive surgeries to repair damage from the treatments. Now, she has a prosthetic eye, but it can be painful to wear it for long periods, so she prefers the patch.

And then, several years ago, a workplace bully blindsided her. The experience resurfaced long-buried fears and emotions from abuse she'd endured in childhood. She continues to experience being startled several times a day, which triggers her fears and

adds stress to her busy life. At EBC, she learned a vocabulary that allows her to communicate to coworkers and staff how she wishes to be approached.

"EBC taught me that I don't have to re-live my story just because somebody is curious about my patch. I can just smile and nod when people make assumptions. They don't need to know my story, or even that there isn't an eye behind the patch. What I would want someone to say is, 'I noticed your patch and I wish you well.' Not even: 'I hope it heals,' because there's nothing that's going to heal. I'm not going to have my vision back. I have strong faith, and I believe in miracles, but I have to live my life. EBC gave me the skills, confidence, and tools to succeed with my vision impairment, and for that, I'm very grateful."



Jessie meeting with Denise Vancil, Vision Rehabilitation Therapist at EBC.



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Sweet Success



Emily using adaptive technology with the EBC staff.

In 2007, Emily Vera lost both her vision and hearing due to a degenerative condition called Usher syndrome. The Department of Rehabilitation referred her to the Earle Baum Center. She was excited to learn that she could take classes such as cooking, and braille right near her home.

Emily has lived in Santa Rosa for the past seven years and has many relatives here. She graduated from the College of the Redwoods with plans to become an administrative assistant. Now, she hopes to find work translating menus into braille for Santa Rosa restaurants. This goal led her to want to hone her braille skills at EBC.

"I usually depend on tactile communication – hand-on-hand – when I'm speaking with someone in person" Emily

explained. She enlists the assistance of sign language interpreters. "But I use braille to communicate with others by text and email, and to do internet research." Emily uses adaptive technology – an iPhone with a refreshable braille display – to connect online. An avid reader, she enjoys mysteries, as well as Young and Alive Magazine for Christians.

Emily is very happy about the services she's received from EBC. She'd like to see the organization expand. "I want EBC to be able to offer more classes and services for people like

me," she said. "I'd like them to have the resources to hire more interpreters." She has found a way to help make her wish a reality: by selling See's Candy bars and assortments that she hand-labels in braille.

"I am a strong advocate for people with disabilities," Emily said. "I was on the board of the American Association of the Deaf-Blind, and was able to raise \$8,000 for them by selling See's products. I hope to be able to do the same for EBC!" Her best customer purchased several thousand dollars' worth to use at a convention.

Emily sells the candies from home, and through Facebook. She also sells them at EBC events. Her February 14th EBC Valentine's Day event was a sweet success. "I want to see EBC grow! It changed my life!"



Emily uses tactile communication when 'speaking with someone in person'.