

# JVIB & News Features

## This Mattered to Me

**“Mental Processes Mediating Independent Travel: Implications for Orientation and Mobility,” by John J. Rieser, David A. Guth, and Everett W. Hill, published in the June 1982 issue of *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, Volume 76, Number 6, pp. 213–218.**

*Recommended by George J. Zimmerman*

Like many readers of *New Outlook for the Blind* and the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness (JVIB)*, I began teaching in the early to mid-1970s. I first became certified as a teacher of students with visual impairments at Kutztown State College, as it was known back then. I taught for a few years, and then went on to complete master’s degree work at Western Michigan University in orientation and mobility (O&M). My master’s degree mentor and advisor was Everett “Butch” Hill. Having Dr. Hill as an advisor and working with him as a reviewer and editor on the text of *Orientation and Mobility Techniques: A Guide for the Practitioner* (the “blue book”) was a memorable experience, and one I will always cherish.

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The series editor of “This Mattered to Me” is Stuart H. Wittenstein, Ed.D., superintendent of the California School for the Blind.

When I returned to practice as a dually certified professional, I found that most of the articles I read in the journals of the field of visual impairment and blindness tended to be geared more toward the interests of educators rather than those of O&M practitioners. Although what educators wrote about at the time was valuable and I learned a great deal from their writing that helped inform my practice as a teacher, I always felt that the O&M aspect of my professional life was cheated by the lack of information on O&M. I wanted there to be a significant amount of writing on O&M in journals, and especially wanted to read more about the cognitive and orientation processes involved in O&M.

As I continued to stay informed about current research and trends by reading *JVIB*, the published body of literature on O&M began to grow. In the early 1980s, I came across an article that caught my eye because of its title, “Mental Processes Mediating Independent Travel: Implications for Orientation and Mobility.” Admittedly, the first time I read it, I struggled with the technical nature of the research. Despite this obstacle, I felt that the article included exactly the level of content I had been hoping to see for a long time. As I read the article a second time, it almost felt as though its three authors were somehow inside my head, addressing the issues and questions I had been struggling with for years.

This article “mattered to me” in another way. It had a far-reaching impact on my career path. I had been teaching in the Peripatology Program at Boston College during the time the article was published, and it was one of the reasons why I decided to go back to school to pursue my doctorate. I loved teaching at the college level, and

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thought that the opportunity to continue teaching, combined with being able to study again with Butch Hill as well as with John Rieser in the area of research presented in the article was beyond my dreams. I successfully defended a dissertation that was framed by the type of spatial cognitive research that was the emphasis of much of the research in the field of O&M during the 1980s, thanks in no small part to John Rieser, Butch Hill, Dave Guth, and Dan Ashmead.

Why should this article matter to you? It should matter to you because, in my estimation, it is the seminal work of our field on spatial cognition and O&M. Without being too presumptuous, I think I could safely rank this article with the classics in the broader body of literature of our field. This article helped articulate, and came closest to defining, a scientifically rigorous research agenda for the field of O&M.

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#### ON THE WEB

The article relating to this commentary is available free to subscribers at *JVIB Online*: <[www.afb.org/jvib/jvib760602.asp](http://www.afb.org/jvib/jvib760602.asp)>. Nonsubscribers may purchase a copy of the article from the *JVIB Classics* area of AFB's ePublications web site: <[www.afb.org/jvibclassics/jvib760602.asp](http://www.afb.org/jvibclassics/jvib760602.asp)>.

## From the Field

### Access

#### LANDMARK CURRENCY RULING APPEALED

In November 2006, the American Council of the Blind (ACB) won an initial victory in its four-year court fight against the U.S. federal government over inaccessible paper

currency. A federal district court judge ruled that the U.S. Treasury Department illegally discriminated against people who are blind by printing its paper currency on bills of the same size that could not be distinguished by touch and that this was a violation of the Rehabilitation Act, which prohibits discrimination in government programs against people with disabilities. In his ruling, Judge James Robertson wrote, "Of the more than 180 countries that issue paper currency, only the United States prints bills that are identical in size and color in all their denominations." Among the examples of accessible currency given by the judge to bolster the argument that the accommodations sought by the plaintiffs were reasonable were euros, which come in bigger sizes for higher denominations and have raised numerals as well as foil patches in different shapes; and yen, which include rough patches that are designed to help individuals identify various denominations by touch. During the court proceedings, the Treasury Department argued that making bills identifiable by touch would create an undue financial burden for the government. It estimated that printing different sizes for different denominations would cost \$178 million for new printing presses and as much as \$50 million for new plates.

Justice Department lawyers, on behalf of Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, filed an appeal in mid-December 2006, to overturn the ruling. In response to the appeal, Christopher Gray, president of ACB, issued a statement in which he said, "We are committed to this fight—even to the Supreme Court, if necessary—because it is the right thing to do. . . ." The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) applauded ACB for championing this issue to ensure that all people can easily identify and use money without assistance, and Carl Augusto, president and chief executive officer of AFB, expressed hope that the court ruling was a "sign that more and more of our world will be made accessible to all people."