

Anthony (Tony) Balik

Submitted to the Iowa Department for the Blind

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At the age of 17 I was involved in a farming accident in which a valve on a tank of Anhydrous Ammonia discarded Anhydrous into my face and eyes leaving me legally blind.

On June 3, 1961 after finishing my last classes of High School at South Winneshiek, I awaited graduation to be held on June 9. This day I started my summer job applying Anhydrides on a corn field in a North East Iowa community near Castilia, Iowa. This day was a clear beautiful sunny day and a good time to start work. As I began to start applying Anhydrous to the field a valve was leaking and the smell was not going to be tolerated all day so I stopped and shut everything down and went around to the leaking valve and tapped it with a screw driver, as I had done many time before. This time the valve discharged Anhydrous directly into my face. I had no protection and no water on the tractor. I knew I was in trouble and needed water so ran to a nearby farm house and thankfully someone was home and guided me to the kitchen sink where I proceeded to run water over my face. I asked the women to call an ambulance and instead called a neighbor who took me to the Postville Iowa Hospital. The ER Doctor was not experienced with this type of burn and immediately made arrangements for me to go to Mayo Clinics and hospitals in Rochester Minnesota. Also it seemed like in a very short time my parents and my Boss were at the hospital and I was discharged to my parents and taken to Rochester.

The first thing that happened when I got to Mayo Clinic and the Warrol Hospital, I was examined and a Tracheotomy was performed because some of the Anhydrous got into my mouth, throat, and lungs and I was having a hard time breathing. I was assigned a Doctor from the Clinic and he also was not very knowledgeable of anhydrous burns. I was in the hospital for ten days and had some bad days and some good days but mostly my vision was not getting better. I figured this will heal and I'll get back to work but that didn't happen. In fact the scars kept forming on my cornea of my eyes making my vision lessen over time. My right eye was worse, in that scaring appeared to go much deeper than the cornea. My graduation I spent in the hospital and my class taped best wishes to me that was delivered to me a couple of days later by the Superintendent of the school along with my Diploma.

After many visits to the Mayo Clinics and nothing coming about, I along with my family decided to seek another option which eventually led us to University Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City, Iowa. There I received excellent treatment but did not get my sight restored. I went home and for over a year spent many hours patronizing the local establishment in my home town. The scars made my eyes very teary and the light of day irritated my eyes so I stayed home during the day and went out at night. My Parents seeing what was happening to me made arrangements for me to be seen in Waterloo, Iowa at the Department of Rehabilitation Education service and at that appointment I was referred to the Iowa Commission for the Blind now the Iowa Department for the Blind. There I was enrolled into the Rehabilitation Center in Des Moines where I spent 13 months learning cane

travel, Braille, typing, and self-help skills like cooking, cleaning, and personal grooming. I also learned self confidence skills of woodworking and auto mechanics. My time at the Center was very beneficial in that I was counseled and taught techniques that put me back on course to going to College as I was planning after High School. The difference being that I wanted and was going to play Football at Upper Iowa University, but now my emphasis was going to be an education.

I was enrolled at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa in 1963, on a probationary status because of my not so good high school grades. I was provided by the Iowa Commission for the Blind assistance with Books on tape and supportive services to the extent that I did make my proposition status and was well on my way. It was not without making some great friendships that were willing to help me with good study habits and also some great Professors that assisted me with test and tutoring.

In the summer of 1964 I had a cornea transplant that after 10 days rejected and the treatment for was massive doses of Steroids. For most of the summer my system was not tolerating the medications and I was taken off most of them just before going back to College. My second year of College was a disaster. The drugs that I took had me emotionally, psychologically and physically messed up that when I started the semester with 15 hours I couldn't get focused and dropped classes, and became emotionally distraught. It was a professor that took me under his wing and counseled me and tutored me and I did get through that semester with 8 hours of credit. I did maintain my

permanent status and got on to the second semester with no problem. Now that I was behind I attended Summer school and my grades got better as a result.

I graduated from Loras College in January 1968 with a BA degree in Social logy and Psychology. But now what was ahead? I was married and had one child and now it was time to find a job. With the help of the ICB, I was able to take testing with the State of Iowa Merritt system and I qualified for jobs with the Department of Human Services. My score was good enough to get me interviews and I was hired as a Social Worker in Cedar Rapids, Linn County, Iowa. I started working in April of 1968 as a street Social Worker dealing with families of dependent and neglected children. It was challenging in that planning for placements of children out of their home, like foster care and treatment centers, and dealing with the Juvenile Courts was demanding. I was required to travel over the state and thus hired a part time driver to transport me to wherever I needed to go. I really started to enjoy my job and in two years was promoted to a Supervisory position. I then started working with Child Abuse and Dependent Adult abuse investigations of which I supervised directly for most of my 37 years with DHS.

I worked in Cedar Rapids for 17 years and than was transferred to Marshall County, Marshalltown, Iowa, where I worked for 20 years. I was very much involved in the community serving on several non-profit advisory boards like the Salvation Army, Child Abuse Prevention Services, Drug Task, and served on the Social Concerns committee at Church. I was active in the development of the Child Abuse

laws for the State of Iowa and promoted and developed some self-help groups to combat Child Abuse; served on the Senior citizens local board and helped and supported their legislation for the protection of the Elder.

During all of this my wife, Jane, and I raised six children who have all done very well in spite of our direction or lack thereof. We were active with our family in traveling on vacations and camping, canoeing, visiting friends and relatives. I had many hobbies of wood working, fishing, pottery, playing chess, and going to youth activities as they grew.

The Department for the Blind services was very helpful during my life with computer help, library assistance, and professional help. The American Disabilities Act also came into play in that the Iowa Department of Human Services aided me with recourses to help me complete my job requirements. Reader services and transportation imbursements provided for me at no expense so my Reports to the Courts were done accurately and promptly and I was able to meet all appointments with my staff and community.

In 1970 while working for DHS, I had a second cornea transplant that also rejected after 25 days. I was working at the time and went back to work after 5 weeks off and continued to perform my job duties. Up till my retirement from DHS in 2004 my sight had progressively gotten worse. A cataract developed giving me less vision, but couldn't be removed unless I had another transplant. Also my wife was diagnosed with MS in 2005 which was a set back for us. Our children were all out on their own and a large house with a

large lot that needed to be maintained, some major discussion needed to be made. Thus with most of our children and grandchildren being in the Cedar Rapids area we decided to move back to Cedar Rapids. We moved into a condo on the SW side of Cedar Rapids and have not regretted the move. Shortly after our move to CR, I returned to Iowa City for an eye appointment. At this time the only thing that I was offered was the traditional cornea transplant. After discussion with the Doctors we knew the rate of success was very limited so decided against any surgery. I went on for a couple of years and my cataract was getting worse to the point where I only had light and dark perception. We decide to go back for an appointment in Iowa City. I found out at that time in Oct. of 2008 that there was a new procedure called a Boston K/PRO that I was offered with a 90 percent chance of being successful. Surgery was scheduled for Jan. 2009 and I went home and researched the process and Prayed that the Doctors Hands be guided and the surgery be successful. On Jan 16 2009 I had the surgery that took about 3 hours and was sent home to return the next morning.

Jan. 17th returned to the Eye Department at UIHC in Iowa City and my Dr. took off the patch and I couldn't see anything. Doctors got together and tested me and determined that I had a blood clot or a detached retina. Surgery was scheduled for Jan 26, 2009, and that surgery took about 3 hours. It was found that it was a blood clot and not a detached retina. I stayed in the hospital overnight and at 7 O'clock AM the Doctor removed my patch and I SAW his face and over his shoulder was an eye chart and I could read it the 20/125 line. It was the first time in 48 years that I was

able to read the eye chart. God had blessed me and it was the first time I SAW my WIFE Jane, and my children and grandchildren, along with my Mom, brothers, sisters, and friends. My vision has progressed to the level of 20/20 in my left eye. My right eye was extracted in 1979 and I have porosities for that eye.

During my years of being with sight I accomplished many things and am very grateful to the IDB for all the assistance and mostly for the Positive reinforcement them gave me during my years of collage and work. It would not have been possible for me and my family to be as successful as I had become.

I now during my retirement continue to do many of the same things I did for years serving on different boards of non-profit organizations but I also have some new hobbies like photography, driving, and promoting the Blind Services of the IDB.

**Respectfully,
Anthony Balik**

P.S. To see more of my Miracle please Google me at Anthony or Tony Balik.