

# LIMITLESS



## I'm Not So Afraid of the Future

Patricia Jefferson first learned about Earle Baum in 2000 when she began bringing her mother to the Center to take advantage of the many services provided. Patricia started volunteering, mowing the lawn, painting buildings, and driving the 15-passenger bus to take folks on field trips. When then CEO Allan Brenner learned she was looking for work, he offered her a job. That was 2003.

Patricia's mom passed away in 2004 and, thank heaven, she

stayed with us. A true ambassador for the Earle Baum Center, Patricia's program reaches hundreds of participants in our support groups throughout the four counties we serve. "I run a class/monthly support group at senior centers, one library, and senior retirement homes," she says. "It's important that Earle Baum has a presence in outlying areas. Those who come to the Center are mobile, but some people aren't able to take transit, at least until they build up those skills."

"It's also very hard for seniors to find out about the services available to them. When I arrive each month, I learn about the people who make up the group and I gear the session toward what will best help them. Sometimes I'm asked to research a topic and come back the next month to talk about it. For some sessions, I'll demonstrate the talking book player and help people sign up for the Library of Congress program and get a digital player sent to them."

"In many sessions, we work with magnifiers. We learn about talking watches, talking bathroom scales, the California Telephone Access Program (CTAP) and a variety of other equipment and services. We also talk about techniques—how you can find new ways of doing daily tasks. For instance, if you have a white tablecloth, don't put white plates on it. I'll never forget my mother saying 'I have a hard time getting the toothpaste on the brush' and a guy said, 'Mary, just squirt it on your tongue!' That's just one example."



Patricia Jefferson, helping people at a senior living center.

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# Message from the CEO



## Respecting Seniors and Wisdom

My swim buddy, Jim, took his last breath the day before I wrote this. He was 81. He led a life filled with learning, adventures, compassion, and work. He was most happy when he had a creative project going—a book of poetry, an exhibition of his photographs, or a person he was mentoring. We were good friends for over 20 years. We swam the English Channel as members of a 6-person relay team in 2002. I learned a lot from him; he shared his wisdom with many.

Jim received some services from the Earle Baum Center. He was a kind donor as well,

enabling us to help others with their vision loss. The vast majority of people served by the Earle Baum Center have age-related vision loss. The average age of folks we help is around 72. Government support for many has diminished or ended. Insurance doesn't cover blindness or low vision training. Seventy percent of the blind are unemployed.

We strive to train people of all ages with vision loss to have active, fulfilling, and engaged lives. We look to our community to help us continue training seniors to travel safely with a cane, prevent falls, and remain safe and independent at home. With you in

our corner, we'll keep offering access to books, the internet, and email. We'll help all who need us adjust to vision loss and learn to advocate for themselves as family and community members. We'll also offer activities for people to practice these learned skills and come together in groups to enjoy new or longtime interests and to embrace the support of their peers.

Many thanks to Jim and other individuals and organizations that help. I intend to heed his lessons of compassion and generosity. If you have the means and wisdom to be here for the Earle Baum Center today, we will be here for you tomorrow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dan". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dan Needham,  
CEO

## I'm Not So Afraid of the Future *(continued from page 1)*

"People share tips in these sessions and that's so important. It gives them a way to help others. The same holds true for supporting the Earle Baum Center, whether with time or money. It makes your life so much better. The fact that people ask themselves 'how can I help the next person coming into the Center?' is one of the amazing things about this place. When my mom moved here from Idaho and knew no one but me, the Earle Baum Center connected her with special people. They took us in

and made the last part of my mother's life so much richer. It was a very special time and for that, I'm eternally grateful."

To those reading this article, Patricia encourages you to share the Earle Baum Center's story with your network. You never know who may need this kind of help. "I see evidence of the difference we're making in lives all the time," says Patricia. "People often say to me, 'I came to the group and was so fearful and stressed. I left feeling not so afraid of the future.'"



Patricia Jefferson working with client Laura Jean Rick at the Center.



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# It's Easier When You're with Others

Jean Colbert is 87 years old and has had macular degeneration for 16 years. Over the last five years, it's gotten progressively worse and glaucoma is now an issue too. One day when she was coming home on Volunteer Wheels from a doll club meeting (making porcelain dolls is a passion of hers), someone on the bus told her about the Earle Baum Center and recommended it highly.

Being Jean, she threw herself into the program completely. "The classes aren't touted as group therapy," she says, "but they are. They're super. And the Independent Living Skills class with Denise is wonderful, too. We learned how to organize the kitchen so I'm safe and know where things are. And we've eliminated tools I no longer need or can't use. It's a slow process, paring down, but a necessary one as your eyesight worsens. I imagine other seniors are like

me, struggling with sight loss and a house full of clutter. I wish we could tell all of them about the Earle Baum Center."

Learning to use a white cane for safe travel and fall prevention has helped Jean immensely. "I didn't expect the cane to work for me, but it really did," she says. "I try to take it with me whenever I go to strange places." And now that she's learned the basic skills, there's no stopping her. "Someone mentioned the book club and I thought 'I've never belonged to one; I don't think I want to do that.' But I was wrong. I joined and I love it. I attend exercise class twice a week and Art History class and now I'm in Ukulele too! Just started. It didn't appeal to me at first but I saw everyone was having such a good time, I wanted to try it too. Now, I love it! It makes me happy. I think music does that for people."

"I also go to the low-vision group run by Patricia. Sometimes she has guest speakers. Very often, she'll show us a new tool or remind us of one we may have forgotten about. It's interesting—a lot of give and take. There's also a group of people who come together with a facilitator to help each other use their smartphones. The women and men I've met at the Earle Baum Center are strong and willing to work to adapt to the changes we all go through and to help each other get through them. It's not always fun and it's not easy, but it's easier when you're with others, working toward the same goal of independence."

"The staff at Earle Baum is remarkable. They're just remarkable people. Very helpful and kind—that's an important quality. I feel badly that more people don't know about the Earle Baum Center. When people lose their sight, they're often scared and angry and they may feel handicapped, which is hard to accept. There's a community here for them and my greatest wish is that we could share news about this wonderful place with all who need it."



Jean Colbert practicing for her Ukulele class.

**SAVE THE DATE!**

Join us for our annual **EarleFest** Saturday, Sept. 23rd



SONOMA COUNTY  
**EARLE FEST**  
A CELEBRATION OF AMERICANA MUSIC

Photos by Chris Kittredge

# Thank God Earle Baum Is There

Harriet Boysen is an amazing woman. A former postmaster, she hasn't lost a bit of her strong nature. She'll tell you, "My body knows it's 95 but my mind says it's 35!" This came up because we were on the topic of seniors and she was explaining how many of them just don't want to admit they're old. "People don't want to admit they're failing. They'll say, 'I'm fine. Don't worry about me.' And I'll think, but you're not, lady! You can't see!"

Harriet lives at the Lodge at Paulin Creek and has for the last 11 years or so. Ever since she's been there, she has been going to the low-vision group, run by Patricia Jefferson. Harriet was



*Harriet Boysen working with Patricia Jefferson at the senior living center.*

monocular for years and lost sight in her second eye 2½ years ago, so she relies greatly on Patricia's help. (See the article about Patricia's program on page 1.)

Never one to take things lying down, Harriet one time got in a tussle with Kaiser when they referred her to the Earle Baum Center to learn how to use a white cane to safely cross streets and get to the store or work or wherever. But Kaiser refused to pay any part of it. "I filed a grievance when they refused to cover the costs," she says. "The grievance was first denied but I appealed and told them about all the things the cane allowed me to do. 'If I broke my leg, you'd pay for it,'" she told them. "I broke my eye! Why can't you help me with that?" The squeaky wheel got the grease and Kaiser reimbursed Harriet the \$250 she was out of pocket, but they didn't reimburse Earle Baum for the \$1,300 grant they gave Harriet for the training. "I think Kaiser should have covered the whole thing," says Harriet.

When asked if this is why she donates to the Earle Baum Center, Harriet says, "I give

because Earle Baum helps all those who need help. I give as I can afford it. By donating, you're giving Earle Baum the opportunity to learn all they can about vision loss and to purchase the equipment they need to help people. Without donations, they would be unable to teach. They would be unable to give people the independence they need."

"If I need help, I ask. A lot of people won't." Harriet tries to tell other seniors with low vision how Earle Baum can help them with safe travel and fall prevention and anything else they need, but they'll say, "oh, I don't need help, even if they're running into things! You couldn't reach these people with a two by four. It's so discouraging."

"My cane tells me whether I'm safe or not. The Earle Baum Center has given me my independence. If I didn't have Earle Baum, I wouldn't have learned to use my white cane. I wouldn't have learned to have the independence to live by myself. Thank God Earle Baum is there. I thank them for all the help I've had; I really do."

## Please join our Legacy Society!

Become a member! Help the Earle Baum Center continue serving people with sight loss by including us in your will and estate plan. Gifts may include cash, stocks, IRAs, real estate, life insurance, charitable trusts and automobiles—all may become the means to help others in the way you or your loved ones have received assistance. Please call Bob Sonnenberg at **707-284-1088**, or email [sonnenberg@earlebaum.org](mailto:sonnenberg@earlebaum.org) for more information or questions. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.

