So, yeah. So my name is Clark, I'm from Portsmouth. I don't know why I'm doing Charlton Athletic football club. I have no idea. And obviously the hashtag to be seen.

As you see, I like to be seen, which is not too warm for a blind person. I am wearing my brialle suit, one of my brialle suits, so basically look like The Riddler put in braille. And I am a professional international artist. Now, from my age of six. I started losing a sight in my right eye between four and six and then would go to the hospital having the patches, looking like a pirate, but just likes Beth in school back.

In the mid 80s as a blind someone who's losing their sight. I was put in the back of the class and left with my own devices, either building blocks or playdough because I didn't know how to react with a vision impaired person. I was a danger to myself, apparently, and a danger to others. But what changed my life?

I mean, I grew up in a council flat in a very deprived area, but my school took me to a gallery at the age of six. And some reason, just going into that space, I knew I wanted to be an artist. And at the age of six, it just opened my eyes, literally, to possibilities. To be, I don't know if you know, a painting called The Yellow Cow by Franz Mark. My favourite painting of all time.

Remember, you were a child and you were told what a cow looks like. A cow is black with white blotches or white with black blotches. That's your cow. Imagine seeing a cow that's bright yellow with purple splotches. The world has many possibilities because of that painting.

And that's what I held dear going through my life. At the age of 14, I had bad kidneys, so I left school. But I'm a fighter. I got back into education, I got an MPQ, a diploma in art design. I did a first year fine art, but we were given a project.

And then I don't think I saw my tutor for for 15 weeks and I was wondering, how am I being taught art if I never saw anyone? So some essentially, we do a degree in model making. Now, I'm a huge film fan. My dad, for his sins, named me after Superman, and he always thought it'd be funny to put the E on the end of my name as well. So it's Clark E.

I said, oh, that'd be interesting. No one's taught me how to draw and paint. It's always come from the heart. So I thought if I get a skill base behind me, I could do all the crazy stuff later, I could be that famous artist that I want to be. So I got my degree and it just happened to coincide with the financial crisis in 2006.

So the next ten years, I stacked shelves. I was a delivery driver? Oh, yes, I did drive, yes, even a one eye, I did drive and then I finally get a job that I could use my degree for, I became a dental model maker. Now, when you're young, you have ambitions, don't you? Go, I'm going to be an astronaught, I'm going to be an archaeologist.

You don't turn around and say, I'm going to be a dental model maker. Do you know it's one of those professionals like, oh, this is so interesting, but I learned so much and it was a great environment. I mean,

any art job, there's not a nine to five where you go and play darts when you got spare five minutes is a great job, isn't it? And I loved it and then I just noticed a dark shadow in my left eye and I thought it was tiredness because it really fine, detailed work that was doing someone had really sharp teeth and gouging, I had to pull the stone in and stuff and I thought, I just need stronger glasses. So I went to the opticians this is Spec Savers, by the way.

And they said, oh, there's nothing wrong, guys. There is. So, you know, I put my foot down, I went to an independent. They took some scans. I went to the hospital, had four opticians look at my eye.

Look up, look left, look down, look right, shining in the torch. And I knew something was wrong, because four people look at your eyes, you feel like a proper VIP. And then as I sat down so this is how you're told in your mid thirtys and this is not common people, a lot are told in their mid thirtys to how they lose a something. They asked me, do I drive? And I said yes, and they said, Hand your license over, you're going blind.

And that's how I was told and that's how many people are told, where was this support network? Well, sort it out yourself. So at the time I had to give up my job, we were made homeless and my daughter had just been diagnosed with mild cerebral palsy, so well, I could get better anyway, could it? I was right at the rock bottom. So the first thing I did was I Googled a sports team.

I'm not a sporty person, so I googled a sport team. And I found blind cricket amazing because obviously I didn't know any blind people and I wanted to be in that environment. We could all laugh at each other. And I played professionally four years for Sussex and Hampshire. I was opening batsman, and this was at the time when England would do so badly, I could put my name in the hat and do better than them.

I won the T20 finals in 2019 and it's amazing and the camaraderie of the Friends blind cricket is great lever because especially twilight, as blind people know, we're so sensitive to light. It's so funny. Where's the ball? I don't know. It's over there somewhere.

Over there? No. Did you hear the bells? So we laugh at each other and that's blindness is normal. And what I found was I wanted back into my art career.

And I felt because even though I'd studied come an artist, because I had the word disability or blindness, what now society sees me as an artist is, oh, I didn't know you've got a hobby. And that really frustrated me and I worked so hard. People think that at is a dos course, right? But I guarantee I did more hours than a lawyer or a doctor, because they can rock up to university, get their lectures and then go home and get drunk. An artist has to be at 07:00 in the morning, write it, make it, do the evalutions within the space of four weeks, and then plus go after work and pay for the course.

Because in my final year, I spent five grand in twelve weeks on materials alone. Yeah, very expensive. But I loved it. I loved that and I loved what I wanted to be, an artist. But how could I be an artist if you're blind?

So someone gave me a Perkins typewriter. Has anyone seen one of those Perkins typewriters? Oh, amazing machine. It's not changed since 1930s. They weigh a ton.

It's like an old fashioned iron typewriter with only six keys, because that's all you need for braille. And it's like playing an organ. And because I was an artist for 22 years, I was like pressing the keys and I was feeling it, and it wasn't looking feeling about the letters, I was like looking at the patterns. It was like, oh, is this interesting? Can this be turned into an art form?

So what I did is I did a piece called I call it my Rosetta Stone. So I did braille and buttons, and I took to someone who could read brialle, and she read it was the A to Z in braille. And that was the light bulb moment. It was like, oh, this could be used as an art form, just like a type. A typographer uses a letter to express themselves in art form.

There's loads of famous typographers out there. I'm going to be the braille typographer. So I started using braille and I made history by at the Museum Arts and Crafts, by printing braille on the same press that Edward Johnson used in printing the original London Underground posters. And it was official figure, and it was like because you have the dots are not supposed to be blown up. If you actually see braille, it’s so tiny, it’s impossible.

No blind person reads the dots. We don't read the dots. We read what's not there. And I thought, we're blowing it up. You still get the gap, but it's not about the gaps.

So by closing up and then I gave it colour, because I'm a visual artist. We are working a visual environment, so I've created you can go see my standard. There a colour coded braille language because I want braille to be universal. I learnt braille, but where can I physically use it? I don’t need to buy a braille book because that’s like reading War and Peace every day.

I mean, you don't need that. I have audio for that but I want smart braille. The idea is I go to lift and there's braille, I go to a hotel room, there's braille, there should be braille on every toilet and not up here. When you go to hospitalsvision-paired, what person reach up here to look at the open the door? No one.

The brialle should be by the handle. So every visually impaired child, when we push out your big brialle that says M-F-U or D, you speed read. I can speak touch. So for me, the brialle dot is likes a metaphor for blindness. It's so small and insignificant, we don't talk about it.

But when we blow it up and give it colour, give it meaning, we start to talk about what is sight loss, and that's why I go into schools and I teach Braille. And those kids have no filter, so they ask questions that you adults don't ask, and we break down the stigma attached to sight loss. Sight loss is a spectrum. I take these glasses off, I don't look blind, you all look like you're underwater, which is great because I'm from Portsmouth. So the only reason I wear these glasses, obviously the lights bounce around and my condition just helps me not feel seasick, but also makes me look cool as well, doesn't it?

The suit and the glasses. I stand out to be seen and that's the thing, I want to be seen. Even though I've had multiple solo shows around the country, I've done a project in India, I've been to America, I worked in the Commonwealth Games. Major people still see me as it nice you've got a hobby and that really still infuriates me. I worked hard for my profession and because now I'm blind, it's now a hobby.

Why is that? Why can't I compete for the likes of Damien Hearst and Tracy Emen? I use how I see the world to influence my artwork, so I work in words. Each piece tells a story, especially about sight loss. It's no different to a painter, painter, a portrait or landscape.

They are influenced by what they see. So why is it no different to me? And as an artist, you do need luck. No matter how many hours you work, all artists need luck. And I did an exhibition at Newbury last year and Vision Foundation, who are London based Its their centenary, and they asked for a call out of some art to go on the table.

So I made some plaques which are the same size over there and on the plaques and they all raised 3000 pound charity, which is amazing. But at that event was a director of a gallery, a really well known gallery Quantus Qantas. And he took the details down and we had a zoom chat. Didn't chat about the art, we chat about my life, which is how I'm chatting you about now. And he offered me a retainer.

Now, any artist retainer, retainer, professional gallery is like gold dust. All I've got to do is create the work and they have to worry about who buys it, who sells it, where to, who to, you know, so it's perfect for me. And then within six months, I had my first solo exhibition at the London Gallery. And not only this gallery is a commercial gallery, but they're also a media. So I got on every news channel.

I was on Sky News Breakfast Live. I was on ITV, BBC, Channel Five. I was on the front row. I even made it all the way over into Korea in the Korean Herald. It was great.

It gave me a platform just like this. A platform to tell the world I want to be seen, I want to be famous. I want to change how people see blindness so that I can break down barriers for the viually imparied children growing up. I'm now the proud patron of the charity Victor.

If you don't know who Victor is, Victor amazing charity worked with children from age zero to 29. And it's about inspiring visually imparied children to be whatever they want. Blindness is normal. I'm just like, you know, just out of a white cane and, you know, I can't see sometimes, depending on what the day it is, but I jumped out of a plane. I run the London Marathon.

It nearly killed me. By the way, I signed up for again next year. And the beauty about this year one, the actual medal was in Braille, so it's fantastic. It says we run together. And I had a guide runner and literally my hip went and he carried me across the line.

It was a brilliant so my ambition is to be a peer of strictly come dancing. Why can't I be that artist, that rock and roll artist that sits on Graham Norton show, be on The One show? Why can't I have my own TV show? Mr Maker meets Mr Tumble. You get me, Mr Dot.

I go up and down the country and I go to schools and we talk, we teach braille. And as an artist, I don't know if you know this, you have the ability to half your age. So I may be 42, but I'm actually 21 now. Is that great? I'm Benjamin Button.

So for me, I love being blind because I can't change the fact. I can't change that there's no miracle cure. I'm not going to wake up tomorrow, I think, oh, God, someone's going to save my sight. So I'm living the best life I can. And being blind has made me a better person and a better artist.

I'm changing people's perception. I have a classmate marked me in school in London Kings Cross Academy. I did a podcast for BBC4 Four called The Sketches One, and their headmaster heard it and they named their classes after inspirational artists. So they got classes like Grayson Perry and Anthony Gormley. And then I get an email a couple of years ago saying they named the class Reynolds.

Now I'm thinking they've got the wrong Reynolds because it's Joshua Reynolds. So I'm thinking it's spam. So I run up the school and no, I've actually got a class named after me. And that class, that yeast class, know about sight loss and brown because they're named after me. Imagine if I am famous, what I could do then.

That's the power I believe I have. I'm at this age now where it's our time, it's my me and Beth's time to show the world that we're not. We don't need pity. I never ask for pity. I wish that RNIB and Guide Dogs.

We stopped showing pity adverts. Why don't they show adverts of me going down the pub of my friend? Why they show up? Don't show that it's because they think that we're all pity. We don't need pity.

We just need a little helping hand now and again. And we will flourish. We will thrive. Talk about thriving. I'm now in a character in the children's book in America for Flying Blind Academy.

And you come over and see that book and feel that book. It's all in braille. And so, yeah, I'm here all day. I don't take any notes because I'm blind. And what I do this is my first public speaking, actually.

And what I do is I just read the room, I read the environment, I read what Beth just said, and I kind of want to echo that. We're here to be seen. We're here to make a difference and to change how the world sees us and be a mentor for the children that have grown up with, I don't like, the word disability, the word different ability. We're all different ability. Society only tells us what we can do.

So on this note, I can't drive. It's illegal, but I can get my pilot's license, so watch this space. Thank you so much.

And thank you so much.