

The Tactile Traveler script Show #27

Nick Isenberg

From KDNK Community access Radio in Carbondale, Colorado, in the United States this is program #27 of the TACTILE TRAVELER-EMPOWERING BLIND AND LOW VISION PEOPLE TO EXPLORE THE WORLD AND HELPING OUR SIGHTED FRIENDS SEE THE WORLD IN A NEW WAY.

I'M Nick Isenberg.

When blind people go places, we don't experience them like our sighted friends. We don't see beautiful mountains, or romantic sunsets. The goal of this program is to identify and even create experiences that are more meaningful, or just more fun for us and for our sighted traveling companions. Frequently as people lose their eyesight, they become more and more isolated.

The Tactile Traveler hopes to empower people not only to go literally around the world, but around the block to new adventures in their lives.

Blind ranges from people who are visually impaired and glasses and contact lenses no longer help them to live a normal life to people, like me, who are totally blind. And to sighted parents who have a blind child to blind parents who have sighted children and blind parents with blind children. And people of all ages, interests and physical abilities.

On today's program:

What it's like being blind in the truckers convoys in Ottawa, Canada.

How little screens can make a big difference in your life.

And, how to eat with silverware.

NICK: On January 28TH a new way of protesting began...

(NAT SOUNDS HORNS HONKING AND MOTORS REVVING)

NICK: Truckers upset with Canada's requirement that truckers coming into, or returning to Canada from the United States must be vaccinated for COVID19 began blocking traffic in Canada's capital Ottawa's Parliament Hill. It was a nuisance for most people and devastating for businesses that were forced to close for weeks. But, it was even an additional problem for people who are blind. And since copy-cat demonstrations almost immediately began in Australia, New Zealand, France and the Netherlands, it won't be long before we have to deal with similar demonstrations wherever we live. Ottawa's demonstrations began with semi's, other trucks, motorhomes and cars frequently parked bumper-to-bumper tooting their horns day and night until a judge eventually issued an injunction to their tooting.

(NAT SOUNDS OF HORNS AND MOTORS)

NICK: But they still continued to run their engines 24 hours a day, which are especially noisy and disorienting when parked next to curbs.

DR KATE RICCOMINI: I went with a friend. I don't think I could've gone by myself. There were trucks idling and last weekend they were still honking their horns repeatedly and often so there's really no way to hear what the traffic is doing to cross roads safely. Add to that some roads are blocked off, some roads aren't, some lanes are down to one lane of traffic and it's very hard to tell which ones are what so knowing when to expect traffic was very difficult.

NICK: Dr. Kate Riccomini from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind Foundation.

DR: RICCOMINI: The people who have been downtown this entire time had an even more difficult time because currently downtown buses aren't even running in the area, services have not been able to go pick up here, especially on the weekends when there are more people here. So that means that people who are trying to go to appointments, get deliveries, go to work, all things people do everyday, have been limited. Someone with sight loss it has been even worse, they can't take a bus or an uber but they also can't necessarily walk safely either. So essentially people have been sort of stuck in their homes .

NICK: Kim Kilpatrick lives in the middle of where the convoys took place. She says her guide dog did well, but sometimes couldn't hear her commands. She says other guide dog handlers weren't so lucky.

KIM KILPATRICK: It is also sort of disorienting being around all those motors. If you're walking along and all you hear is that and you can't hear other things so you could get disoriented and walk into a space you might not normally walk into. Because they were staying in their trucks and sleeping in their trucks there would be a lot of stuff on the sidewalk. Also when the motors are running all the time you wouldn't hear when people were approaching so you couldn't know when someone walking close to you or walking past you or even it was a bit scary to think "am I going past someplace that could be dangerous for me or I could have a confrontation", so that was not so good.

NICK: Finally, Kim says prepare if it appears similar demonstrations will be happening near you.

KIM: If it looks like this might be something that is going to happen near where you are, make sure you have supplies in case you don't feel comfortable going out and you might want to have ear plugs perhaps or noise canceling headphones. And if you really feel unsafe, think of places you might be able to be. For example if your service dog or a family member or your kids or you were really affected by the noise or if you're worried about your safety think of maybe if there's a place away from the protests where you could stay.

NICK: Quite simply," says Dr. Riccomini, " protesting for freedom from mandates has taken away our freedom to move about our city.

NICK: Artem Kudian and James Prenger helped us with the sounds of the trucker convoy, Siri BandhKhalsa and Corrine MacArthur helped with this story and Listener George Dutch suggested this story.

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If you are visually impaired you can be less impaired by learning to take advantage of all the things the screens on your smartphones and tablets can be used to improve your life. One of the people who really takes advantage of screen technology is "The Tactile Traveler's" Jason Strother.

JASON: As a journalist I travel a lot professionally as well as personally. I've been to about 30 countries during my career. I'm technically legally blind but it's kind of a nebulous term and I'm kind of in the nether world of vision loss between having quote unquote normal vision and being blind. I can get around without a cane or a dog, I don't have a lot of issues when it comes to mobility getting from point a to point b but along the way especially trying to take in visual data that's complicated; reading signage, reading menus, reading any kind of printed material. So what I do if I need to get some visual information off of a street sign, off of an airport arrivals and departures, a screen. I'll take my phone out and open up the camera and through the camera lens I can then zoom into that departure screen or look at the street sign or look at any other sort of visual information that's at a distance. It's really helpful

NICK: To make reading things even easier, Jason changes the colors of what he's trying to read.

JASON: So, I use an iPhone but I believe this function exists on most smartphones. It's a color inversion. Apple products have a couple different color inversion features so I use what's called a classic inversion. For example, you're looking at your email, normally it would be a white background with dark texts but for me that creates too much glare and it's not comfortable to read. So using a shortcut on my phone, I flip the color screen until it becomes a black background with white texts which completely removes the glare and that makes it so much easier for me to read print.

NICK: Jason sometimes uses another technique to make reading signs easier.

JASON: Sometimes when I'm trying to read some sort of time table like a departure board at an airport for instance standing there holding my phone in front of me, putting it out, pointing it towards this visual data is not so convenient and can be a little bit shaky. So something else I do is take a picture of the schedule or the screen and then it's more convenient for me than to just look at the image and zoom in on that, change colors if I need to. Sometimes that works best.

NICK: Miles Buchanis is a 21 year old art major at Colorado State University. Miles is legally blind from albinism.

MILES: And I'm on the far spectrum of that. So I believe there's 6 or 8 different levels of alenism, the most mild being just a light lack of pigmentation in the eyes, so they'll have dark hair, dark skin, everything else. But my particular condition of albinism is on the other end of the spectrum which is a complete lack of pigment which makes my hair and skin white, and my eyes are quite pink.

NICK: Miles says his smartphone is an important part of his being able to be an art major.

MILES: Definitely! In my drawing classes and my art classes we have about four projects a semester at which point near the end we have to do a four hour discussion about each person's work, a critique, and at that point we are expected to get close looks at people's art and I almost always use my phone or one of my other visual devices to get a closer look. I really like the phone though because of the quality of image, the color and just the versatility, because when I use SCOPE I have to hold my head a certain way or hold my hand a certain way and then the field of view is very, very narrow. But when I use my phone I can just take a picture and then pick my field of view.

NICK: In addition to helping miles in art classes, he uses his smartphone to look at and capture scenery and to help him in restaurants.

MILES: iPhones actually come preinstalled with an App that you can set to your quick screen so it's not hard to get to and it's simply a magnifying glass with only a few options. There's a flashlight option, a zoom option, and a freeze frame option. So I use that all the time to see things close, both near and far because I can't read things in either situation a lot of the time.

NICK: Miles found an app on his I-phone that in many situations is even better than taking pictures. Miles says the advantage of using freeze frame over taking pictures is that you don't get a bunch of pictures that you need to delete from your phone. Freeze frame is available in magnifier. Magnifier is accessible through controls on an I-phone or tablet. If you have trouble setting up freeze frame, call Apple Accessibility Tech Support for free at (877) 204-3930. That's 877 204-3930.

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NICK: About one-third of the world eats with silverware. About a third of the world eats with chopsticks, and another third of the world eats other ways. On today's program we'll talk about how to use silverware for our listeners who live in the two-thirds of the world that don't eat with silverware and will be visiting countries that use silverware or restaurants that serve food usually eaten with silverware.

Occupational therapists are medical professionals who help people learn or relearn functions of daily life that may, or may not necessarily be job related.

Kathryn Marxon-sinson is a legally blind occupational therapist at the Vision Rehabilitation Center Oregon Science and HEALTH University, Casey Eye Institute, in Portland, Oregon. She helps other people who are visually impaired learn to use tools like magnifiers that will help them live with vision loss. Today, she's helping our listeners learn how to use silverware. It's a lot more complicated than eating with chopsticks.

In most homes and informal restaurants, you'll probably be given just a fork, knife, and spoon, and maybe a bigger soup spoon. In an upscale restaurant, or banquet room, like at a wedding or convention, the table setting could be either formal, or informal, which will be way more formal than just a knife, fork and a spoon, or two.

KATHRYN MARXON-SINONSON: Knowing if it's formal or informal will give you information about which silverware pieces there are and how the table is setup. With a formal setting there are usually four pieces of silverware and dishes at the place setting. You have your plate being in the middle and typically your napkin being on top of that, and the silverware is set out from the left to the right on the left and the right sides of the plate. On the left side of the plate is the salad fork and the dinner fork and then you have your plate, then the right side, left to right, you have your dinner knife and your soup spoon. And then at about 10 o'clock in relation to your plate is the bread plate, bread knife and then at 12 o'clock you're going to have your dessert fork and your dessert spoon and then at 2 o'clock you'll have your water glass and wine glass. An informal setting will be very similar but have less silverware and dinnerware at the table. The silverware may be rolled up in a napkin and placed on the plate in front of you or it may be set next to the plate with the dinner fork being on the left and the knife and the soup spoon being on the right hand side and the water glass and the wine glass at 2 o'clock.

NICK: In choosing utensils from either the left or right side of the plate, go from the outside toward the plate. Now, Kathryn explains how to use those forks, knives and spoons.

KATHRYN: The spoon is held like a pencil typically in the right hand if you're right-handed with the concave part of the spoon facing up, and you're going to use that to scoop the soup or the food and bring it to your mouth. The fork and the knife are going to be used for your main entree and the fork also for your salad and the knife is used for cutting a piece of meat or some vegetables. It's going to be held with your pointer finger on top with the blade facing down and the handle of the knife in the palm of your hand with the rest of your fingers wrapping around it, and then you're going to use a back and forth motion to cut. The fork is going to be used to help hold that piece

of food in place. So that's going to be held with your left hand with the tines facing down to hold that piece of food in place while your knife is cutting it. And for those of us with low vision we're able to use that fork to guide and determine the size of the piece you are cutting, starting from the edge then kind of moving it and then cutting your slice, then moving it a little more and cut your slice.

NICK: If you're used to chopsticks, you're used to eating small pieces of food already cut into manageable sizes. When you use silverware, you'll have to cut your food into bite size pieces. Kathryn says, if you're right handed, put your fork into your left hand and into the piece of food you want to cut. Then, with the knife in your right hand, move the knife back and forth along the back of the fork to cut your food. Then put the fork back into your right hand to eat the food.

KATHRYN: Dining American style you will put your knife down just resting on the edge of your plate at 12 o'clock and you will switch the fork to your right hand and then use that to pick up your piece of food and put it in your mouth. However if you're dining European style you will keep your knife in your hand and you will just stab the piece of food with your fork and then rotate your wrist up and then put it in your mouth.

NICK: Kathrin says when you're through eating:

KATHRYN: There is some etiquette when eating in restaurants to alert the server when you are done eating. Typically you place your utensils on your plate right next to each other with the handles placed in the 5 o'clock position on the plate.

NICK: Even though silverware may sound confusing, stick with it and in no time you'll be able to wolf down massive amounts of food while barely tasting it. I didn't know that glasses usually are at two o'clock, and at my tablemate's two o'clock position. Now I know to look for glasses and move them toward the center of the table, where they're out of the way. And I won't be knocking over wine glasses on the lady sitting next to me, again. She was very nice. She said, "it was white wine, and she'll get the stain out of her dress."

Lorraine Hutchinson, Richard Rueda and Chava Dean helped with this story.

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NICK: Now that you know how to use silverware, we thought it would be appropriate to rerun a story by Lydia Ecker on how to make using that silverware more enjoyable when eating in restaurants

LYDIA: Make sure your server knows you are blind, in case you need special help like reading the menu, or knowing where the food is. When you're pouring things like salad dressing, mustard and catsup, like on hamburgers and French fries, pour it over one of your fingers to see how much you use.

When you're looking for things like water and wine glasses, put your arms out in front of you on the sides where your food is. Then slowly put your hands together, then you'll feel the glasses without knocking them over, or off the table.

NICK: Thank you, Lydia.

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(Digital voice and scale beeping)

NICK: It's my talking scale reminding us that we'd like you to weigh in on how we're doing. Please let us know by sending a e-mail to thetactiletraveler@gmail.com we spell traveler the American way with one quote L." We'd also like to hear your story ideas from all over the world. Send us an e-mail with story ideas in the subject line at thetactiletraveller@g-mail.com .

If you would like to help underwrite this program please send us an e-mail with underwriting in the subject line at thetactiletraveler@gmail.com .

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(UPBEAT WESTERN SWING MUSIC TO FADE TO CLOSE SHOW)

