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Experiences as a Deafblind Learner

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This transcript is being provided in a rough-draft format. The transcript reflects the transcriber's best effort to express the full meaning intended by the speakers. It is not a verbatim transcript.

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Speaker: It's 3:01, should we get started? We are going to close videos so we have Jason and the interpreter visible. I can help people with that. Today we have with us Jason Corning. He is a deafblind individual and will talk about his experiences growing up. As an owner of his own company,

Three Monkeys Communication. We will hold questions until the end and please use the chatbox at the end for questions. Jason, if I'm forgetting anything, let me know. We will flip back and forth between the slides and Jason presenting so communication flows freely. There is a sign-in sheet. There's a link to it in the chatbox, if everyone present could please sign in. Jason, go ahead and take it away.

Jason: Thank you so much, Jen, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to participate and share a little about myself. My name is Jason Corning. I will show the agenda for today if you could bring the slide up. Okay, fantastic. I do want to talk a bit about my background. Typically, I am very interactive when I present but because we're doing this via Zoom, I will do more of a lecture format. Don't be scared to put questions in the chatbox. We will have allotted time for Q&A. Fantastic.

That slide pretty much introduces a bit about my background. As a deafblind person I have of course faced many barriers. I use my stories to help you envision what it's like and how to be prepared as parents for when your child is born if they are differently abled. Things like language, culture, and the ability to travel to different countries. Learning how to navigate new experiences. Having a deafblind child is similar to navigating a different culture or language. I like to explain things metaphorically.

If you wanted to go mountain climbing you would look on the internet, map out your path, follow the advice of professionals, navigate and cut your own path if you're so inclined, making sure you have all the equipment you need, changes for the weather, camping equipment, being able to communicate in an emergency. You would want to make sure you are familiar with all those things. The same is true for the day to day experience of a deafblind person.

I need people around that know how to sign and know pro-tactile interpreting. There are things I have to prepare for especially now in the time of COVID. I need to make sure I'm comfortable navigating all these things. Understanding there's no perfect experience and path. Anything you do you will encounter barriers. Never give up. My goal is to talk about my education and work experience, talking about the barriers I faced and how I broke some of those down to best help you in supporting your little

ones in their journey. I was born and raised in Wisconsin. I went to Wisconsin School for the Deaf through kindergarten through 5th grade at which time I transferred to the Blind Institute until the 12th grade.

There were certainly challenges I had. When I was placed at the School for the Deaf, they suggested I be put in special education because they couldn't accommodate my vision issues. That wouldn't work for me, I'm of average intelligence. I could understand things. My parents went back and forth with the school. It was through their support that I had a successful experience. There's also the cultural piece.

As a deaf person I have lots of experience in the Deaf culture. I also had experiences being bullied and not being able to participate in sports. I had frustration with teachers for not receiving enough support. I didn't always pick up on social cues. In middle school, my IEP talked about transition planning and planning for my future. My parents started having conversations about me going on to college. At the time, the School for the Deaf didn't recommend things like that for me. The decision was made at that point that the focus would be on things like teaching me braille, getting me ONM training and other skills to function as a deafblind person. That's the "transition" program they had at that time. I had the opportunity to visit college campuses and ask questions. I look back on that as a beneficial experience for myself. The Wisconsin School for the Blind had a small house on their campus that was used for was essentially to allow students to practice independent living skills.

Students would stay for a week at a time and they would cook, clean, pay bills, etc. That house also had dorm staff that supervised students there to make sure everything was okay and answer questions. They didn't really help students, they just supervised. I had the opportunity to experience that and that had a huge impact on me. To be able to leave the dorm and the school and grocery shop, to experience those challenges. This was approximately 15 years ago. At that time, we didn't have, dog barking, sorry.

We didn't have Uber Eats or DoorDash that could bring food to your house. You printed out your grocery list and you went to the store. I never really was a fan of that. I didn't like having a personal shopper, I liked to pick out

my own things and price compare. It ended up being a lot but it was a good experience. That being said, along with the independent skills that I was learning there, I also took ONM which gave me the opportunity to practice navigating the world at large. Looking back, I am so grateful to my ONM teacher because they really prepared me for challenges I would face in the future.

College was a different experience. I was able to refer back to the ONM training I had and I knew I would be able to utilize those things and be independent. My ONM teacher themselves prepared me for different situations by seeking them out. Before that time, I didn't realize many of those things could happen. Things like talking to the bus driver and maybe they forget and what do you do when you're not dropped off where you thought you would be? I was able to experience these real world situations and I'm grateful for that. The first time I was really on my own was when I moved to Maryland and got my first apartment after college. It was a culture shock to be in a new environment, not have any friends to rely on, to navigate the grocery store in a new place.

It was nice that I had a neighbor who kind of recognized that I needed some help getting used to my surroundings as well as my boss. I learned not to rely on a boss or a neighbor. They won't always be there with you. In the event of a serious emergency you have to figure out what options you have. In the course of my time I have traveled to many states and countries. I have been to Europe, France, Taiwan, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand. There are challenges to traveling internationally. One of the best approaches is show you're interested in people first. When that happens, people are usually willing to help you.

Typically, people react with a lot of anxiety because they don't know how to interact with a deafblind person. If you show them you are capable and can handle most things, people typically warm up and become friends and can pitch in when necessary. Going back to my schooling, I did utilize having a large screen and contrasting colors to understand things on the screen. I had an interpreter, I got things like extended time on tests. I preferred doing some of my tests at home, I had more control over that environment. I could focus and not have visual distractions.

I could adjust the screen size and font if necessary. If I didn't have control I would suffer from a lot of anxiety. If I was interacting with someone one on one I would be taking the class with an interpreter, but when I would look at the test, it's in printed English. Sometimes I would have a hard time translating that information. One of the accommodations I found was helpful was having an interpreter interpret the questions on the test instead of having to go back and forth between two languages. Now I want to talk about my professional career and work experience and some challenges I faced in that atmosphere.

I did an internship at the Department of Homeland Security in 2007. I focused on airport security in their headquarters. Looking at screening processes for people with disabilities and how to make policies more effective. Things are constantly changing and people are becoming more sensitive to terminology and things of that nature. Everybody is in the process of relearning everything. 9/11 had a huge impact on travel to other countries. In our current atmosphere with the protests and pandemic, things are even more in a state of upheaval.

Really, my first job, going back further, was I worked in a country club. I was a dishwasher there. That taught me work ethic. I noticed that I was experiencing the same situations other deafblind people do. Luckily, I had a very good boss who was flexible. At one point, there was a change in leadership and supervisors and I ended up being let go because they said I wasn't meeting expectations. The new boss wasn't as accommodating. I can understand the plight of the deafblind community.

These are the things I think about. When I worked for the state of Maryland later on, the Department of Rehabilitation Services, I was helping with job training, working as a job coach. I saw many situations where bosses and supervisors would listen to their employees but they didn't always know the full story. I think people have to take the time to look at the other person's perspective and see what's causing a thing to happen. Oppression can lead to behavioral issues in the workplace. I think a lot of times, people aren't given a fair chance. They don't get the opportunity to shine because of the barriers in the workplace.

Some people don't have access to information until an interpreter is called

in. During my college experience, what really influenced me the most and made me decide to go into information technology is I did a work study. I worked for the IT department as an administrative assistant for AAPD and it was a hugely beneficial experience. I know when I was a kid I was unique. I liked being unique and I got a lot of attention because of that. That being said, when you're out there in the workplace, it takes a lot of work to be able to show what you're capable of doing.

I think one of the things . . . basically, part of my job responsibility is people would send in helpdesk tickets and I realized there were times where I could teach them to fix it themselves and sometimes I had to do it for them. When I first started, I very much enjoyed any time I got a help ticket. I found it interesting that over time, as I taught people what to do, they didn't request those tickets anymore because they knew how to handle the problem on their own. That was part of my maturation process in the field. You have to make sure people understand what's happening.

I learned that and it was a very important thing. I thought, initially, that I wanted to become a lawyer. However, law terminology and politics was not my field. I had to find classes that matched what I was good at. I was good at coding and computers, it came very naturally to me. One thing I think that's important to remember is that when you're setting up for your child or your older child's transition plan or future plan, it's not going to be something that's set in stone. You have to realize it's going to be flexible. What this young person is exposed to is going to vary. The more opportunities they're exposed to will change the trajectory of their life. I never expected to work for the government, that was not on my radar. I worked for the Department of Defense for 8 years. I learned a lot of things. However, I did experience a lot of things.

They didn't always have interpreters and that limited my access to information in the workplace. I experienced a lot of barriers and discrimination. I had enough and set up my own business. My business is consultation, training, and more for other members of the deafblind community. When I was still working for the federal government, I went back for my master's degree. I went to Johns Hopkins University. I was very proud.

That's something I never thought I was going to do, get a master's, let alone from one of the top prestigious universities. I had lots of accommodations. I had access to Adobe Script and it made things so much easier instead of them saying I couldn't watch the film and would get a transcript. Adobe Script gave me direct access. I had my own laptop where I could change things like the font to make it visually accessible. I was able to learn and access things I had never done before. I even used ebooks and things like that. It was a wonderful experience and I really enjoyed it.

I saw something pop up, I just wanted to check. Before I go on, when I was in the process of setting up my own business, there were some core services I wanted to focus on. These are outlined on the PowerPoint. The provision of equipment and I was a keynote speaker, I do a lot of those. I also do group trainings for SSPs, for example. I do pro-tactile training. I do a lot of one-on-one coaching. It might be improving communication and teaching style and a variety of skills. I make those things go a lot smoother. I do accessibility consultation. That's giving people resources like a variety of different apps that makes it more accessible for the Deafblind Community.

I have also written. When you tally the points for golf, for example and that helps you figure out how you need to improve, I do similar things. I can almost do a score card for what people's accessibility is. I talk about my experience and exposure to those experiences might look like for other deafblind people. As a side gig, I also teach at [Inaudible] University here in Baltimore.

That's something I just started doing in the spring. Another thing I never thought I'd be doing. One of my friends runs the Deaf Studies program there and asked me to work at a Deaf Youth Camp last summer. They approached and asked if I'd like to teach a class. I thought, "Why not?" I'm used to standing and giving presentations, but doing an entire semester was a very different experience for me. Interestingly enough, some of the challenges I faced with that is that colleges typically wait until the last minute and based on enrollment set up classes.

Last minute doesn't work for me, I tried to be very patient. I tried to use the

old syllabi and make provisions on that. I used the same textbooks from the previous semester. I taught two classes. One was Deafblind Culture and the other was Communication. To give you an idea, the first day of class I came in with an interpreter. I had everything set up on the computer. I'm thinking I would have somebody voice interpreting for me like I am right now. The department chair gave me feedback and said there was no interpreter for class.

That took me back. "How could I teach this without an interpreter?" They explained their program doesn't have interpreters. I had to figure out how to communicate through different avenues like writing on the board or projecting on the screen. I had a pro-tactile interpreter for me and they let me know what was happening in the classroom. That's more one way communication. Pro-tactile is done on the back. They also will do things on the arm and leg to let you know what's happening in real time in the environment you're in. One of the things I want to emphasize is that it's important to know all the resources available for yourself and your child.

The ADA as well as the Maryland School for the Deaf and the School for the Blind located in Baltimore, there's a lot of local resources. There's organizations in New York and Washington. There are people out there who know this information. You can also Google information that you want. The resources are out there, it's simply a matter of tracking them down. I'm also a member of two advisory councils. The Maryland Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and GABTR. That's something I also encourage people participating in. I provide advice to anybody who uses relay services and provide the perspective of a deafblind consumer to make sure our needs are met. Going back to some of my teaching and my learning experience from that.

I just wanted to put it out there that it's very important to make sure you have access to the right equipment as well as having the right expectations in your workplace. For example, I had to find how to run my class best. I was very nervous on my first day of school. I had my boss telling me that they're gonna do my homework and whatever I tell them to do. I'm very thankful for my supervisor there. They gave me a wonderful opportunity. I had everything I needed to run the class. I was able to do my lectures through Zoom once COVID happened. That was my first time using that



medium which was very challenging. How do you work with an interpreter via Zoom when you're deafblind?

I'm very thankful for the opportunity. We were able to do distance learning as soon as spring break hit. I was happy to continue working with my kids and providing them with what they needed. We communicated via email. We sent a lot of videos back and forth. There were some challenges involved. The students preferred the in class environment. Instead of standing in front of a class, I now had to send them videos. I felt I had lost the connection to them. I had several students who had challenges of their own within my class. It was important to remember that.

One of the things that highlighted for me is that as students they need to advocate for themselves. They need to bring the disability form to their professors. In our class it was easy to accommodate those students because we didn't have formal tests, particularly when we went to distance learning. That's something to consider. I always recommend that students advocate for themselves. Most colleges have a standardized form, that was my experience.

However, what if this person's teaching style is different and what if these things don't apply? What if a teacher does things very differently? Now that I see things through the lens of a college professor, it's very interesting. Regardless of a student's personal challenges, I want to make sure everything is accessibility and I try to follow the universal design for all my students. You need to accommodate individual needs. I almost feel that I prefer . . . it singles people out and I don't like that. Sometimes it draws attention to a certain student. I prefer to level the playing field for everybody instead of singling out one student.

My experience is that if a student needs accommodation, I make the accommodation for the entire class so no one person is singled out. I have talked a little about the challenges I've faced growing up. I want to reiterate how wonderfully supportive my parents were. They sought out opportunities for me to go to things like camp and sports. They kept me active. It helped me learn social communication skills and helped me mature and develop in so many ways. This is covering some important things to consider for your children's future and what you can do to best

help them prepare. One of the things I think helps the most is putting people in real life experiences. I think that's the fastest way people learn.

To give example, things like an independent living classroom where you do things like cooking. Maybe everything is electric. Then, a person goes out and they're in a place with different appliances. As parents, you can help your children. Let your kids experience cooking in your home. When you go on vacation to a different place, teach them how to do things like cook and clean. Give them as many opportunities as possible. Give them an opportunity to spend time away from mom and dad to navigate things independently.

I feel it's been a unique experience to be a teacher. When I come into a classroom, the requirement for the students is they've had ASL classes. Before class they fill out an opinion paper. I read through all of them to get an idea of what they've been exposed to with the Deaf Community. They all related experiences and that it's very visual and etc. You have to seek out that community. In my class, I made sure to tell my students that they were required to attend two different deaf events.

I chose a deafblind organization in DC as one of them. Two of my students went there as a class event. It was interesting, they came into this event, something they had never experienced, they were wondering why everybody was signing. They were trying to figure out who the speaker was. This was their first time seeing a room of people signing. This wasn't something they were used to. There was a deaf presenter giving a presentation. All the attendees were there with their interpreters. The feedback I got was very good in the reflection papers. I also gave students the opportunity to learn some pro-tactile. I think that's hugely beneficial. It was something they could use to interact with me when I came into the classroom.

I had my pro-tactile interpreters there relaying information to me. It's not just about exposing my class to the Deaf Community, but really exposing them to the Deafblind Community so they could understand what that was like. On the bottom left of the slide you might have seen a picture of me meeting . . . oh, we're bringing it up. That's a picture of me. A group of deafblind individuals went to The White House in 2007. That's when I met

President Obama. That was an amazing experience.

Of course, President Obama is a staunch advocate of the disabled community. He very much values members of the disabled community and that had a huge impact on me. I want to talk about why most deafblind people avoid channel. I think it is due to lack of information. Posts online, printed materials, etc., pose challenges for the deafblind community to access. I am married to a hearing individual who is from Taiwan. When we first met, I was the first deafblind person he met, and he picked up sign language very quickly. He is very inquisitive by nature.

He's a very experienced traveler. Through him, I got the exposure to different cultures. You saw the picture of me at Harbor Bridge in Sydney, Australia. That's just one example. I knew about Australia, but I didn't know some of the things it was famous for or the culture. So, we flew there. They said we were going to go bridge climbing. I had never seen anybody climbing a bridge. It wasn't until I got to see it in real time, it was very interesting. You don't really see that in movies or anything.

You actually climb Harbor Bridge. They provided an interpreter as part of a tour. They use Australian Sign Language so that was a bit of a challenge. They knew what to expect and knew how to make it enjoyable for me. It ended up being an amazing experience. The central picture is me sitting . . . can we pull that up? It's in the middle, me sitting in First Class. I do travel quite a bit. I typically favor airlines that provide accommodation services. I have had two service dogs, my first retired at 11 years old and now lives with another family. I now have my second service dog.

I have learned which companies are accommodating to Deafblind individuals and service animals. With my first dog, I brought him to Ireland. I wanted to study abroad for three months and they had turned me down and I felt it was discriminatory. They did say I could take a three week class and they could provide an interpreter, so I did that course. My dog went with me and it was a special experience. Last year, I had the opportunity to go to France. My new service dog traveled with me there. I'm sure you heard they had some unrest at the Notre Dame Chapel, and it burnt down. People were texting me and letting me know and I couldn't see it in real time. I was lucky that I got to see some of these things before

all that happened.

There's also a lot of apps there. I helped create some apps for the deafblind community who are looking for SSPs. Deafblind people experience a lot of frustration finding SSPs with training. There's also the issue of who pays for it. Some states cover it, some don't. I was part of developing an app that sets up a screening process for SSPs. I ended up flying to the Philippines. I brought an American deaf SSP. I had to pay for their ticket and meals and hotel. They didn't know anything about the language or culture.

It was very difficult. If you think about Filipino culture, they drive on a different side of the road and etc. I had to navigate a lot of things with the local Deaf Community and I wanted to ask them a lot of questions about trying food, learning their history, etc. I was able to do that with the SSP. That relationship didn't really work. I wonder about other deafblind individuals and how often they go through the same experience with an unqualified SSP. My goal is to have a database of SSPs who are familiar with things like world travel so we can experience things internationally with qualified SSPs. I have my own business called Three Monkeys Communication.

There were three wise monkeys, hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil. I found that somewhat ironic being who I am. You know, "to see, to hear, to speak" and they are covering their ears, eyes, and mouth. The reason I picked that for the title of my company. One app we designed is Miserou [sp?] that's the monkey that sees no evil. The app can bring things to you. The second monkey's name in English is Ewazirou [sp?] that pertains to a youtube channel that sends out information. As I meet more people in the community, I make sure I film that and put the content out so people can see that and learn how to help their children or students and to see what other countries look like. That's all done through pro-tactile communication and hand over hand communication. That brings us to the Q&A part. You can raise your hand or put questions in the chatbox.

Speaker: First question, do you know braille, if yes, are you completely blind or do you have CVI or other low vision?

Jason: I would consider myself low vision. Grade 1 braille, there's my stylus. I can also communicate with another individual who might not know braille. I think it's important for children to learn braille. In many situations I see out there, people with Usher's Syndrome in particular, they put it off until their vision has completely no access and then they very much struggle and it ends up affecting them psychologically. If you still have access to some vision, even if you forget some of it, you can refresh yourself. It's important to get a strong foundation early. Good question. Next?

Speaker: It's very quiet. "This seems very reasonable to me but I think braille is discouraged by the CVI community."

Jason: I know when I was a kid I didn't find it necessary because I could see. My vision hadn't declined at that point. It wasn't until I was trying to communicate with deafblind friends, then I recognized the benefit. If you're dealing with someone who is really resistant, you might artificially manufacture a situation where they come to realize the benefit of it themselves.

Jennifer: I think the issue with CVI is that it's with the brain and processing and that's why braille is discouraged. Given the appropriate modifications, individuals with CVI can become print readers.

Jason: That makes sense. Really, just to piggyback on the, some schools don't require it but it always can be taken as an elective if it's available to them.

[Karen asking question.]

Karen: Hey, thank you very much, Jason for your inspirational message. This presentation has touched my heart. I'm blown away by everything. I have three questions, actually. The first one, did your parents learn to sign?

Jason: My parents did. They learned when I was one. They had a good friend who was an interpreter. She came to the house and taught them. Sorry! Can you repeat that? My parents found out I was deaf when I was

one. Their friend was an interpreter. They came over to teach the basics and my parents picked it up that way. They took formal classes and were very much involved in the community.

Karen: How old were you?

Jason: I was one.

Karen: My second question, what advice do you give to someone who works with a student who is deafblind themselves, but not yet really signing? They are just learning to sign. They don't know braille or sign. The parents have limited communication because they're not signers. Any advice to help this child pick up communication?

Jason: That's a good question. I have seen Maryland's School for the Blind. Pre-COVID I did an observation and liked what I saw. You need to do some evaluation and find out where the child is. One size does not fit all when it comes to students. An approach for one won't work for another. I would rather see people have a lot more patience. A frustration I always experienced was looking at people who don't have patience. I think you need to have all the information at your disposal. I think a lot of people don't take time to find out information and what's available to them. I think people need to be more involved. There needs to be more resources provided to them. There's a wealth of information out there and you need to find what will help that student best. A student may be deafblind but are they given access to an interpreter or braille? There's so much out there and you really need to test the waters to find the thing that's going to be successful. Focusing on their needs and doing the deep dive and finding out why they're struggling. See if the interpreter is not working. Maybe their eyes get tired. Maybe it's an issue of lighting. There's so many factors. It takes a lot of effort and evaluation. I think all those things will help the student be successful. Good question. Any others?

Jennifer: Yes, I see one in the chatbox. As an ONM, I have worked with only a few individuals with a dual sensory impairment. Prior to getting a dog guide, did you feel your [Inaudible] was adequate?

Jason: Okay. There are some requirements in order to get a guide dog.

Some are a minimum ONM skill level. You need to be able to cross the street safely and make decisions for yourself. You need to function and navigate through an area yourself. If you meet that, you might qualify for a guide dog. I got my first dog because I would be traveling so much. Even with a cane, it's isolating. I would have a startle reflex when people went by me on a skateboard or bike. When you have a guide dog, people give you more distance. My first dog would warn me if someone was screaming my name since I walk fast. My dog would alert me and give that person a chance to catch up. It had a positive impact on my self esteem. You had to pass certain ONM requirements to do that. I don't know if that answers your question.

Jennifer: I think part of the question was prior to having the dog did you feel your ONM training was adequate?

Jason: Well, it was interesting. There were people who were disqualified from getting a dog because they didn't pass their ONM. I saw a person get kicked out of the dog program because his skills weren't adequate enough. They had too much vision, so they weren't going to rely on the dog enough. If the dog is there to warn you and you disregard the dog and hurt yourself, it's important there's a need for the animal. It's a 95% ratio of needing the animal. If you're going to utilize your own vision and disregard the dog, that's not going to work for you. Cane is not always good enough, absolutely not. I have seen some really egregious situations where people have plenty of vision and they end up getting a dog and they make a mistake and they fall because the dog was warning them but they were relying on their limited vision instead of the dog. I think it's so important to have those good ONM skills ahead of time.

Jennifer: That's great. No other questions so far.

Jason: I see little things popping up but I can't read them, so you tell me. Everybody ready for summer?

Jennifer: I guess so. There's no additional questions? Oh, we got one. We're waiting. For parents, what is your advice for being . . . we're waiting for the end of the question. What is your advice on being patient when the child has a mobility impairment and it impairs their ability to sign?

Jason: I think the first thing that's so important is that as parents you need to really, how do I say? Feel good about yourselves. I think sometimes there's an issue of worrying about how other perceive you and your child. I think that leads to frustration and embarrassment and shame. You need to put those feelings aside. You love your children and you want them to develop into the best they can be. You want them to be successful. The successful parents out there are very active and I have to applaud them. You can't think about what other people think about your family. You need to install a sense of love and give them attention.

I know of a mother that has three children and I don't remember if all of them are deafblind or if she adopted, but the point is, all three of her children, she took them to the zoo. As we know, the zoo sometimes poses challenges, it's difficult to see the animals sometimes. She brought her iPad and would take a picture of each of the animals and then she would enlarge the picture so the child could see it. She wasn't worry about bystanders and onlookers. She focused on helping her children experience as much as possible. Don't give up and know you're not alone. There are other parents who are going through similar experiences. It's important to find a tribe and a group. There are camps where you can talk about successes and failures and share that information with each other. I don't think it's good for any parent to suffer through children who can't communicate. I think it's important to get out there and make that ask. Sometimes that involves getting out of your own comfort zone.

Jennifer: When traveling alone, how do you request assistance?

Jason: I travel alone quite extensively. Typically, the first thing I do is . . . okay, in most situations when I travel, it's work-related. It's not for vacation most of the time when traveling alone. That's not enjoyable anyway. I do my homework. I call ahead to the airport and identify myself and let them know I have a guide dog and need a special seat. When I get to the airport, I ask when check in is. I have a lay of the land before I get there.

I ask for a guide through security. I do pre-check because I carry a lot of equipment with me. I don't want to have the extra worry of having to take that equipment out through security. I think it's like \$75 for five years, I



highly recommend it. As soon as I arrive, I make sure I have a contact person that I text when I land. We always have a rendezvous spot like at baggage claim. One story I can share with you, I think it was about 2 years ago this happened. I was flying to Montana and I was traveling into a small community with no direct flights. I flew into Atlanta. Then I had to go from Atlanta to a smaller plane that would take me to Great Falls. I land in Atlanta and my flight is canceled due to weather.

I was very nervous, I didn't know what to do. I knew to reach out to guest services and my contact person. I was supposed to fly into Salt Lake City and there was only one plane flying to Great Falls. I was going to miss my connecting flight. It was a situation. I had to figure it out. I was very fortunate that the host where I was coming into, I had their contact information and I could reach out. They were able to change the schedule. I basically ended up getting a free ticket into Seattle and they rerouted me early the next morning. I didn't know where I would stay for the night. I didn't know anybody in the community. I had some trepidation there. I was able to get a hotel. I got somebody to escort me to the shuttles. They were willing to take me there, got me shuttled to the hotel. I had my dog but not my suitcase or anything like that.

My suitcase was still on its way to Great Falls. Thank goodness I had dog food in my book bag. I got to the hotel, the employees there were very accommodating. They gave me two free vouchers for my meals. They explained how I could use those at the hotel. I was able to get a meal and be comfortable. The next morning I got up, went back to the airport, got my connecting flight to Seattle and got to Great Falls. I assumed my bags wouldn't make it there. I was pleased that my bags made it at the same time.

It was a little bit of a scary experience. A lot of the questions that afternoon were centered around traveling and that whole experience. I think it's important to mitigate for these things as much as you can. Make sure you have contact information. Know the host person and exchange phone numbers with people. That makes things much easier. I think open communication is paramount in any of these challenges.

Jennifer: Karen, do you have a question? Sorry, technology problems.

Karen: What was your breakthrough that led to your success?

Jason: I'm trying to figure out how to answer your question.

Jennifer: She keeps freezing. There is another question. When you're communicating with people that don't sign, are you primarily texting?

Jason: My primary mode of communication is ASL. I will use an interpreter, superficially those that know pro-tactile. I sometimes have to remind my family to sign because I do still have some residual hearing. ASL is my first language. The pro-tactile helps me connect with the people I'm interacting with. It gives me the parts I miss with the facial expressions and the atmosphere in the room. I get that through pro-tactile. If I am dealing with somebody who doesn't know how to sign I use texting and an app called Big. This is Big. It's really nice. It makes communication so efficient.

Jennifer: Karen, do you want to try again? You were freezing before. Get it out, quick. I can see everybody. Oh, she typed it. What was your breakthrough that contributed to your success?

Jason: I think just seeing and experiencing so many different situations. One of the most important things I think for me has been my patience and flexibility and having access to the appropriate resources. Having a really strong support group and support network. One of the biggest things I think becoming an entrepreneur, there were a lot of challenges and there continues to be while running a business. I have five interns, college students, coming up with an app for me. I did a TED Talk presentation. I was invited to do that. I never thought that would happen, me standing on a stage being filmed. I was able to tell my story through that. That being said, I think the only way to be successful is that I have to make the choices to stay motivated and positive and surround myself with encouraging people. You have to make those choices yourself.

Jennifer: Awesome, thank you. One important question, what is the name of your guide dog?

Jason: My current guide dog's name is Niko. It's getting close to dinner time. My last one's name was Beaker. He's retired. Any other questions?

Jennifer: I think that's it. Jason, we want to thank you so much.

Jason: He is very sweet, yes. If you want to reach out to me, I do have a website. We also have a Facebook page and you can follow us on youtube. We are active on social media and post pretty regularly. Thank you all for being here today. This is my first E-presentation. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here.

Jennifer: You can tell me web address and I'll type it in the chatbox.

Jason: It's on the PowerPoint. The last slide has all my contact information. Wwww., oh there it goes. It's there.

Jennifer: Thank you so much, this was wonderful. Lots of comments of how great it was.

Jason: Great! If anyone has addition questions, feel free to reach out to me, anytime. As soon as things calm down and go back to a less COVID state of things, I hope to present in person again.

Jennifer: Before we leave I'm going to do a poll. If people could respond for our evaluation. Great, everyone is saying thank you for a wonderful presentation.

Jason: Absolutely, my pleasure.

Jennifer: I don't know that he can see me. Yeah, we are done. We have stopped recording.

Thanks!