Hadley

Vision Loss Bloopers

Presented by Ricky Enger

**Ricky Enger:** Welcome to Hadley Presents. I'm your host, Ricky Enger, inviting you to sit back, relax, and enjoy a conversation with the experts. In this episode, Hadley staff join us to share the funnier side of vision loss. Our guests are Doug Walker, Tiffany Mpofu, and Lisa Salinger. Welcome to the show, everybody.

**Douglas Walker:** Yeah, it's great to be here.

**Lisa Salinger:** Yes, thank you.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Elated to be here. Thanks.

**Ricky Enger:** So glad to have you all. It is always a good time when Hadley staff can get together and share with each other and with you, and this promises to be no exception. We're going to have a fabulous time today and hope you do as well. So, before we get into our stories, let's just take a quick minute to get everyone to say "Hello." So first off, we have Chief Innovation Officer, Doug Walker. Give us a shout out.

**Douglas Walker:** Hey, it's great to be here, Ricky. It's always fun doing these.

**Ricky Enger:** Awesome. And we have the one, the only, Assistive Technology Learning Expert, Tiffany Mpofu. Welcome.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Hello. Hello. Thanks, Ricky, for having me.

**Ricky Enger:** Glad to have you. And, we have a hybrid, for lack of a better term, Access Technology Specialist and also Assistive Technology Learning Expert. So, wearing multiple hats, Lisa Salinger, welcome.

**Lisa Salinger:** Thank you. I'm still deciding exactly what I want to be when I grow up, I guess.

**Ricky Enger:** Well, if you're anything like me, you have a while to decide. I'm not sure the growing up thing has quite happened yet, but maybe someday. All of us here are blind or low vision, and just like everyone else, our lives have moments of mundane things and then, we have those really proud moments, those triumphant things. And then, we have the ones that should probably end up on the blooper reel. We never want them to see the light of day, except we thought it would be fun to talk about those moments, because they deserve some attention, just as much as when things really go right.

So, we thought we would all share some stories, where vision, or lack thereof, has played some sort of role in making something happen. I think we're going to have a lot of fun with this, and I'm looking forward to hearing everyone's stories. Doug, something tells me that you have at least one awkward or funny story to share about something that happened in public, because naturally, a lot of these things, they're never just you so you can forget it and move on. It's always in front of somebody else, right?

**Douglas Walker:** Oh yeah, absolutely. My family actually knows this one as the elevator story, so it has its own name. This blooper happened just before COVID hit. My wife and I were on vacation at a hotel in New York City. This is kind of key to the story here, but there was no braille in the elevator where we were staying. The print on the elevator buttons was super tiny. So, I memorized where the lobby button was. My wife was like, "The lobby button's right there, and there's the fourth-floor button there." I got where they were, so I could at least get to my room and then to the lobby. Anyway, they have a continental breakfast here. The next morning, I told my wife, "I'll run down and get us something." I do have some remaining vision, enough to go down to the lobby and back.

I decided to leave my cane in the room, so I could carry more stuff. Got to get more stuff in my hands, and I didn't think to grab my phone either. I went on down to the lobby, and I got my hands full with a couple of muffins and a coffee and a coke. I get back in the elevator, and there's already this woman in the elevator. And she has her hands packed full, fuller than me, of breakfast stuff. And so, with my little finger, I pushed the fourth-floor button, which was the button for my floor. And she says 14. I tell her, "I'm visually impaired." And I can't see the 14 button, so I'm expecting her to direct me, whether it's up and to the right or whatever. Well, it turns out that she doesn't speak English, and so, she doesn't understand a word I'm saying. And her hands are stacked full of this breakfast stuff. Awkward to even try to put down.

And remember, I left my phone back in the room, so I don't have my magnifier app with me. So, I can't look. I'm getting down. It looks like I'm sniffing the wall. And she didn't understand that I couldn't see it. She's trying to figure out what I'm doing. They were just too small to see. I couldn't see them. So anyway, the elevator door opens up on the fourth floor, which again is my floor. And so, all I can say is "I'm so sorry. I'm sorry." And I just got off the elevator, and the elevator door closed. And then, that's the last time I've seen that lady. But I felt so bad about that. I tell you, Ricky, you better believe that I always take my cane and my phone with me now, no matter what.

**Ricky Enger:** Yep. Now you know, lesson learned.

**Lisa Salinger:** I bet somewhere there is a lady right now, sitting and talking on a podcast about the rude American who couldn't even be bothered to press the button for her.

**Douglas Walker:** Probably so. I think she was French or something. Anyway, she knew how to say numbers, but that was it. So anyway, probably so, Lisa. Probably so.

**Ricky Enger:** Oh my gosh. I love it. Lisa, something tells me you have at least one or two funny things to share. So, you're up next. What do you got?

**Lisa Salinger:** I have a story about attending the end of a silent movie. I was in junior high, and for whatever reason, my classmates were going to see a silent movie. My itinerant teacher, between her and the mobility teacher, they were always looking for extra time to work with me. And so, I went and I worked with her, and we came to a stopping place. And it was about five minutes before the movie was supposed to end, and the next class was going to begin. She felt it important to say to me, "Don't forget, they're going to be watching this movie. Go in quietly, try not to disturb anybody." Some teachers organized everyone alphabetically by seats, except for the blind kid. And I was in the front, right by the door. But unfortunately, that was not the case this time. If they organized everybody alphabetically, I was the third seat across in the third seat back.

I walk into the room, and it is quiet, quiet, quiet. I have my cane, and I'm trying to not make beautiful music off the legs of the desks and chairs. I very quietly, and I was rather proud of myself, I think I did pretty well, moved hopefully quietly and quickly, because I didn't want to block anyone's view. And I found my seat, and I sat down. And I'm sitting there and thinking, "This is the most silent of silent movies. No one is coughing, no one is rustling, no one is anything." I would think that silent movies would even just have a music soundtrack. There was nothing. All of a sudden, I heard this sound in the hall. It was my classmates returning from the location where they had been to watch the silent movie. So, all my caution and care were for nothing. The really nice thing was that I was the only one who knew of my little faux pas. So, every time someone mentions silent movies, it kind of makes me laugh.

**Douglas Walker:** That's great.

**Ricky Enger:** It's always good when you are the only one who realizes what happens. Those are few and far between sadly. Usually, it's some kind of public spectacle. Tiffany, do you have one where it was definitely not just you that was in on whatever happened?

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Oh, my goodness, yes. So, this blooper happened at a grocery store. I have a little bit of a backstory. There was a particular teacher that I had developed a bond with in junior high. And so, after going through junior high and making it to high school, at that point, she had retired, but sometimes, we still would run into each other within the community. On this particular day at the grocery store, it had been some time before I had seen her. I am doing some shopping, and I'm making my way up towards the front of the store to go pay for my things. I see this person, I'm at the front of the store, and I'm like, "Oh, that's her. It's been so long since I've seen her." So, I push my things to the side, and I am going full speed up towards the front of the store.

I grab this person and give them this big, huge hug. And I'm like, "Wait a minute, this is not her." But the lady also embraced me, and she was like, "Oh, my name is such and such." And she was like, "Thank you so much for the hug. I'm sorry I'm not the person that you're looking for, but I was having a really bad day. So, thank you for the hug." And at the end of it, I guess it was still a plus, but I'm like, "Oh my gosh." So next time, I told myself, "I'm just going to wait and make sure that it's the person, instead of just going and just giving hugs out, I guess..."

**Ricky Enger:** Hugging random strangers. It turned out well, though. You really made somebody's day. You probably wish the floor would open up and swallow you whole though.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Yes. It's like one of those moments where you just wish you could melt right into the floor, like, "Oh my gosh."

**Ricky Enger:** Wow.

**Lisa Salinger:** Aren't these always so much funnier though when they happen to somebody else and not to you? Part of me is going, "Ooh," and part of me is going, "Phew, thank you, God, that wasn't me."

**Ricky Enger:** I have one. I was dating someone at the time, and we were going to go out and do a few things. But before we could run our errands, he had a martial arts class that he was taking. And so, I was sitting in the waiting room while he took his class, and I hear the voice. And the voice is a thing that you might be familiar with if your vision is not perfect, and it's evident. The voice is this weird combination of a little bit condescending and annoyance, so like you're a problem to be solved.

So, I hear the voice, and she's like, "Are you planning on joining us today?" "Well, no, I have some logistics to work out. I really want to learn martial arts, but I don't want to take up too much attention from the rest of the class. I just have a few things to get figured out, and I'm really hoping I can do this." "Okay. Now, young man, if you come in and join your sister this time, you had better not pull what you pulled last week." She was talking to her kid. And here I am, responding to this conversation, thinking like, "Oh, well, she's talking to me." And no, not so much. She was annoyed with her child.

**Lisa Salinger:** Oh, the whole thing. But now, with the advent of Bluetooth in people's ears, we have lots of company.

**Ricky Enger:** That is true.

**Douglas Walker:** That's true.

**Lisa Salinger:** Because people don't know if other people are on the phone or whether they're talking to them.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** That's so true.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah. I guess everybody does that. They respond to something and think "Maybe that was meant for me, but I can't really tell." So, it's not all about me, apparently. Lisa, do you have one where you were involved in a conversation of any kind?

**Lisa Salinger:** Long ago and far away, when dinosaurs roamed the earth and there were actual things called bookstores, and you could go in, you could buy paperback books, and they maybe had a tiny little shelf where you had a small collection of audios too. It was pretty cool. But I went in to buy a gift, and I went in with my guide dog at the time, which was a large black lab. I was waiting in line and these teenagers off to my left were having a conversation, and one of them said to the other, "Good dog or bad dog?" And I'm thinking, "That's rude. That's just rude."

And I thought, "But I'm going to be a decent human being, and I'm going to educate." And at the same time, I'm thinking, "Okay, did my dog just sniff them? Or did he grab an entire soft pretzel out of someone's hand? Why are they saying this?" And he had been kind of distracted that day. And so, I looked at them, and I said, "Oh no, good dog, bad day." And they looked at me and burst out laughing. And then, I was really confused. They were looking at a display of books. If you are familiar with the Harry Potter series, that's what they were looking at.

**Ricky Enger:** Oh, it has that three-headed dog.

**Lisa Salinger:** Yes. One is Fluffy, the three-headed dog, who is bad, but the other is Sirius Black, who took the form of a large black dog. And they looked, and they went, "Oh, no, Sirius Black. He's good. You just don't know it right away." And I'm like, "Yeah, that's about how it is with him." So that was my little misperception. Again, back to Ricky's thing, I guess it's not all about me or, in this case, my dog.

**Ricky Enger:** Oh, you just never know what is going to happen when you venture forth from your house and you're out and about. Every errand is an adventure, right, Doug?

**Douglas Walker:** Absolutely. Absolutely. And I have a feeling more than just me has experienced this one. In my previous job I was a teacher of the visually impaired, and I traveled from school to school and saw the different kids all around the county. Well, the school system provided a driver for me. I just finished working with a first grader and I was waiting for the driver outside of the elementary school there, and I couldn't see the people inside the cars. Now, this was when my vision was up a little better than it is, and I didn't use a cane yet, an identifier cane.

So, I'm waiting for this dark SUV to show up, and it pulls up right in front of me, like it always does. I quickly jump in the car, and I buckle my seatbelt. And this female voice, that I do not recognize, says, "Can I help you?" And I just froze. I was just shocked. And it's a lot like the elevator. All I could say was "I'm sorry." I just jumped out of the car and the SUV just drove away. Looking back, she was there for a reason and apparently, I creeped her out so much she just left, she drove away. It was horrible. But it did get worse because my driver was right behind this vehicle.

**Ricky Enger:** Oh no.

**Douglas Walker:** She saw everything. And so, she pulls up, and she is just laughing out loud. She is cracking up. And she said, "You got it in the wrong car. You got it in the wrong car." Of course, it was all over the school system the next day. So yeah, it took a long time to live that one down. But hey, one good thing happened. I started using identifier cane after that happened. So, I guess some good did come after that or out of it.

**Ricky Enger:** Well, there you go. And again, somewhere, somehow, there's a woman telling this story to her family, "This creepy man got in my car."

**Douglas Walker:** But I want to tell you, she did show back up at the elementary school. Because I went back to the elementary school the next day, they were like, "This woman came in. And did you get in the car with this woman?" So, they filled her in on who I was and what was going on. So anyway, there's not a lady, I hope, like the elevator lady, that is talking about me on a podcast right now, I guess.

**Lisa Salinger:** At least your driver laughed. And she didn't say the one word that everyone with low vision dreads here.

**Ricky Enger:** Oh no, that's the worst.

**Lisa Salinger:** "Aw." It's like, "No, make fun of me. I'd rather that than your pity. Thank you."

**Douglas Walker:** Yeah, she was way beyond that. I didn't hear the end of it for a long time.

**Ricky Enger:** I feel like we've talked about cars and bookstores. I feel like meals probably have the potential for some real embarrassment/things that we can chuckle about later. Tiffany, do you have a story about a meal?

**Tiffany Mpofu:** I sure do. This was in high school as well. We're in the cafeteria line and I get fries. It's Taco Tuesday or something like that. So, I get fries, I'm in the line, and they have the taco sauce and the ketchup bottles right next to each other. They are labeled, but I wasn't able to see the labels. The containers were similar, and I really couldn't tell. So, it's kind of like an eeny meeny miny moe type of thing.

So, I grab a container, and I'm pouring sauce all over my fries and it ends up being the taco sauce. So, one of my friends walks up, she sees it, she's like, "You like taco sauce on your fries?" I'm like, "Yeah, don't you?" And I was like, "Try it." She tried it and was like, "No, no, no thanks. No." And I was just like, "Okay." So, in this moment, I'm thinking, "What do you do now?" I'm not really feeling this myself, so I'm just going to go and get something from the school store or whatever. But yeah, that was a blooper for me for meals.

**Ricky Enger:** Gosh, I think I actually would like to try taco sauce on fries. I know some people have had mayo on fries, and that seems not good. But yeah, I think I'd eat fries with taco sauce. It is so embarrassing when you think that you have done what you intended, and it turns out maybe not so much. I had one where I used to work with a consulting firm, and we worked with businesses to help them make their websites and apps more usable and accessible for people with blindness or low vision or other disabilities. And so, once, I was on a week-long travel, and we were consulting with a Fortune 500 company. The dress code is pure corporate suit and heels and all that, and you're not there to stand out, per se. It's kind of conservative. Everyone is dressed similarly.

I'm there for a week, and after the training each day, my colleague and I go back to the hotel. We're pretty much on a first name basis with the hotel staff by now and everything is really friendly and great. So, I have a full day of presenting to this group of Fortune 500 employees, and they're learning a lot and all of that. I get back to the hotel, my colleague and I walk in and our friend at the hotel now says, "Oh, hey, such and such. And hey, Ricky, I love your outfit, the burgundy and the green." "Oh, thank you. Wait, what?" I just had this moment of that is likely a horrible combination and regardless, it was not at all what I had intended to wear. So, all day, I've been confidently making this fashion statement and being all edgy or whatever, and I had no idea.

**Douglas Walker:** Your own fashion trend. You're a trend setter.

**Ricky Enger:** Yes, absolutely.

**Lisa Salinger:** At least you found out at the end of the day. If I found out at the beginning of the day, I would feel like I needed to stand up in front of the group and apologize for my insanity or something.

**Ricky Enger:** I'll still never understand why the person at the hotel complimented me. Maybe like, "You're really out on a limb. That's brave."

**Douglas Walker:** "That is a brave look." May have been what the Fortune 500 company was saying too. "How brave she is and how confident."

**Ricky Enger:** Yes. And that’s it. Maybe if we just approach things with enough confidence, then whatever we do is not so embarrassing after all.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Absolutely. I agree. And I'm right there with you. I wore a navy blue heel and a black one. They're like the same shoe, but different colors. I had those on the same day all day long.

**Lisa Salinger:** And you can have all the marking and labeling systems. There's no fix for, "I'm in a frantic hurry."

**Douglas Walker:** I walked around for most of the day with a leather Birkenstock on and a plastic one on the other foot, and I thought they were the same shoes.

**Ricky Enger:** Well, it's like we said earlier, it's not always just us that this happens to though. I've heard so many stories of people accidentally leaving their houses with their house slippers on and going to work and only realizing it once they got there. "Oh, I'm still wearing my slippers." So as much as we think that it's all about, "If I didn't have low vision, if I weren't blind, then everything else would be perfect, and I wouldn't make these kinds of things," no, not at all. I really think this is just part of the human condition.

**Lisa Salinger:** And if you're new to sight loss, you may have something like this happen, then you may have a good cry, and you may invite some of your nearest and dearest friends to a little pity party. But you know what? I think time really makes the best seasoning. And after too long, you'll be able to pull it out and say, "Oh, do you remember that really silly thing I did? I thought I was going to die of embarrassment, but I'm still here to tell the tale."

**Ricky Enger:** And is that how you get through those moments yourself now, Lisa?

**Lisa Salinger:** Absolutely. It's the what doesn't kill us makes us stronger, or I go confidently in the wrong direction kind of philosophy.

**Ricky Enger:** And what about you, Tiffany? What do you tell yourself just to get past some of those moments, so that you don't dwell on it, instead you're able to smile about it?

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Yeah. I kind of just chuckle in the moment to myself, and I'm just like, "Girl, keep swimming. You got this."

**Lisa Salinger:** Just keep swimming.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Just keep swimming. Yeah.

**Ricky Enger:** What about you, Doug?

**Douglas Walker:** Oh, that's great. Well, I think you're so right, Ricky. We all make mistakes whether we have a visual impairment or not. I think it really helps to have that sense of humor and be able to keep that. I grew up in a family that loved to laugh and to joke around. So for me, it's just keeping things lighthearted and just living in the moment.

**Ricky Enger:** Well, I knew this was going to be fun, and it certainly was. I think it helps a lot to understand that, again, it's not just you that these things will happen to. And if you can smile about it and look back on it with a chuckle, it's so much better than sort of wallowing in that embarrassment and thinking, "Oh, everyone is thinking this or that or the other thing about me." I feel like smiling really goes a long way. So I have had such fun with all of you. Thank you for sharing your stories with each other, and of course, with everyone listening.

**Douglas Walker:** Yeah. Well, thanks for having us, Ricky. It's been fun.

**Lisa Salinger:** Yes, thank you.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Yes, thank you.

**Ricky Enger:** Got something to say? Share your thoughts about this episode of Hadley Presents or make suggestions for future episodes. We'd love to hear from you. Send us an email at podcast@hadley.edu. That's P-O-D-C-A-S-T@hadley.edu. Or leave us a message at 847-784-2870. Thanks for listening.