Hadley

Hadley Presents: Hadley Presents: Sites Unseen: Traveling the World without Sight Part 2

Presented by Ricky Enger

October 21, 2019

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. Today's experts join us for part two of our series discussing travel from a blindness or low vision perspective. We welcome again Dr. Wendy David, author of Sites Unseen: Traveling Without Sight, and Hadley learning expert, Debbie Good. Thank you, guys, for coming back. How are you?

Wendy David: Great. Thanks so much for having me back.

Debbie Good: Yes, and I'm doing great too. I just came back from Paris and I'm all fired up.

Ricky Enger: So we had a huge list of questions and I've probably thought about 20 more since our last recording, but we only have time for a finite number of them. Let's jump right into that Debbie, shall we?

Debbie Good: Sure. In your book, you mention perhaps the first day that you arrive in the city, just getting your bearings, so then you can go off and see the sites more efficiently because you've taken that one day just to figure out where you are and what things are close.

Wendy David: And that's helpful for me. Often there's jet lag involved, too. If I have my dog with me, just finding the best relief area. We've had to be very creative. Some relief areas have had to be down in a parking garage in the middle of downtown. Some relief areas have had to be between two houses in an alley in Italy. Sometimes it does take a little while to kind of figure these things out. So if I can get those things figured out the first day, then the rest of the trip is a little less stressful for me and I can really get going on what I want to do.

Debbie Good: That makes sense. And you mention traveling with your guide dog. Are there any instances where you would not bring your guide dog, and use the cane instead?

Wendy David: First of all, I would say that I always bring a cane, whether or not I have a guide dog with me because there may be instances where the cane will be handy as well. For instance, on the airplane, the little teeny tiny bathrooms are often not possible to get you and a dog in and out. There's a story in the book about one of my dogs who had to stand on top of the toilet for me to open the door. I usually, from the get-go, train my dog to stay right at the seat or attach her to the seat post and then use a cane to go to the bathroom. But there's other places where maybe I just prefer not to take my dog. I recently started doing some third world travel. I hadn't done that before. It's kind of a whole different situation with very long trips.

A cane, you don't have to get out and relieve. A cane also can't get sick by eating something off the ground. Some of the places I've been to, the water you had to drink only bottled water. Some of them didn't have good drainage and so you were walking through lots of puddles and getting very wet. And some of the places I've been to such as Nepal has a very high rabies rate so it would not have been a safe place to take my dog. And I also felt that I wanted more sighted assistance as well. And so I went with a tour group. However, when I go to places that I feel I can navigate fairly well and it makes sense to take my dog, such as cruises or Hawaii or Europe, I'm very happy to have my dog and I feel much more confident traveling that way.

Debbie Good: And when you arrive at a place, then you go to a hotel, do you have any tips you could share with us about getting around in a hotel?

Wendy David: Hotels are interesting because they're not always what you think they're going to be if you just go by the website I want to know that I'm accessible and can get around fairly well and I do want to know that Usually I prefer to have a restaurant either in the hotel or nearby, possibly room service, not always. And at least someone there at the desk that I'd be able to ask if I have a question. And so those are sort of “before I get there” kinds of things.

But when you get there there's quite a few things that you can do that make it quite easy. I mention in the book some different tactics such as bringing a rubber band and putting around the doorknob, if it's an older place or in Europe where they don't have braille signage that could be helpful to find the door. As long as the maid doesn't take it off. You can take your key card, the electronic keycard and maybe bend a corner, put a piece of scotch tape or cut a corner. It's always good in your packing to carry a thing of scotch tape and maybe some extra rubber bands. I like to throw in a pack of Loc-Dots in case they have a microwave or something. Little easy things that you can take if you don't want to take Loc-Dots, which can get a bit pricey, are those little sticky reinforcements that you put on three-hole punched paper when the whole tears. You can just take a little reinforcement and stick it on something like a shampoo bottle, so you know the difference between that and conditioner.

And then I try to get as good an orientation as I can to the room when I first go in. And usually I'll give the person a fairly good tip if they've spent some time with me, making sure that I know if the curtains should be closed or not. Because sometimes people can see in and you don't realize it. Maybe where an exit, fire exit is or the staircase if I need to get out and the elevators aren't working and if it has room service, perhaps what the hours are. But a lot of those things you can find out from the front desk staff also. And also, it's helpful to know how to retrieve your voicemail in case you're expecting calls if you're meeting up with people or that sort of thing. Sometimes it's little buttons that you push and that's another nice use of Loc-Dots or the little sticky reinforcement to just put something on the button that you might be using quite a bit.

Debbie Good: Thank you. Can you tell me again the name of the dots?

Wendy David: Oh, the Loc-Dots? They're just little raised dots, I have them on my microwave, I have them on my washer and dryer, that kind of thing so you know where to turn the dial.

Debbie Good: Now let's talk about how to get to your hotel. Each type of transportation that you might use: bus, train, airplane, boat or a cruise ship. If you could just give a few tips on each form of transportation.

Wendy David: Some of this may depend too upon where you live in the country and what's most available to you. For buses, I take the city bus all the time, but I'm not that experienced in long range travel on the bus such as with Greyhound, Bolt, Mega Bus, those various ones. I know that in other parts of the country people do take those quite a bit. I just talked to a friend of mine who did take a BoltBus to Canada from Seattle and they found it really great. Buses, I think they work pretty much like train stations you want although some of them aren't open. Sometimes the bus doesn't even stop in a building. It might stop behind. Your guide dog is, of course, welcome on the bus at your feet just like on a train or a plane and it's a good idea to maybe keep track of your own luggage if you can so that you don't have a luggage catastrophe.

I always put my business card in inside and outside pockets as well as I have the gaudiest suitcase. It has bright flowers all over it and it's very easy for anyone to see it and spot it. Some people use luggage locators and some people train their dogs to sniff out their food. I always have had Labradors, they'll sniff out anything, so that hasn't quite worked for us, but everybody can kind of find their own way. But I think the more that you keep it in your control and conspicuous, it can make your travel a lot easier.

Debbie Good: Let's go onto trains.

Wendy David: There usually is a lot more room. It's easier with your luggage. I think most of the time you can take it either on with you as carry-on above you. I did find out once they did allow for extra baggage for the guide dog food and that was really nice. I found the people on the train to be very friendly and very helpful and it just again depends on where you're taking the train. European train travel and US train travel can be very different, but I think pretty much universally now, assistance is available depending on where you catch the train or depart from the train. It may or may not be a manned station and so you may want to find that out ahead of time, but the same rules with them apply if you do want to have additional assistance, it's always good to let them know ahead of time, although you're not required to.

Debbie Good: Let's go onto airplane. I know we could probably do a whole talk or two just on airplanes, but anything you want to tell us about air travel?

Wendy David: Air travel I think is getting consistently more challenging. Fortunately more airports now have dog relief areas inside, although they may not be to your dog's liking. It's very important I think when you’re doing air travel to really know what the law is and know what your rights are. Because oftentimes flight attendants, will tell you where you have to sit and that's not necessarily where you have to sit. You cannot sit in an exit row and you cannot block an aisle. Those are basically the two rules.

The more you can do on your own, the better. But if help is available and you want it, that's always fine too. But just know you're not required to sit in a holding room. You're not required to wait for help if you choose not to have it. You're not required to go in a wheelchair. And if they refuse to take you, what I do is I throw my carry-on in the wheelchair and just walk beside it with my dog. I think deescalating what otherwise could be a very tense situation, I think it is stressful for the people who work there and the stress carries over to the passengers and expect crowded planes. No more are the days of lots of empty room.

Debbie Good: Let's go now to boats and or cruise ships.

Wendy David: I'm leaving on a cruise in about three weeks. I'm very excited. Cruising, I think for blind people, if you like being on the water and you like diversity of culture and different experience, I think it's a great way for blind people to travel. We have some friends who are blind, and we only see them maybe once a year and we take a cruise together and it's wonderful because none of us have to cook, none of us have to clean. We get around the boat, we can be as independent as we want or do things together as we want and it's really fantastic. We enjoy it. You can do it as little or as much as you like. Most of the cruise ships that port in the United States do have to abide by the ADA. Used to be that if they weren't registered in the United States, they didn't have to, but they do now.

And so when you're traveling, if in fact you're traveling with a dog guide, it's very important to know where you're going to be stopping and if you need to have specific requirements for the dog. And some of those change. And so it's always important to look at the current requirements. We are going to be stopping in Mexico, they've changed the law. The dogs have to be, you get this special worming within 10 days of going. Neither of our dogs have worms, but we have to do this in order to go, even if we don't take the dogs off the boat because we'll be in that country's waters. So it's a lot of extra hoops to jump through traveling any foreign place with a dog guide, including on a cruise ship. But I'll tell you it's really wonderful to have the dog on the ship and they will accommodate you. They will put out relief boxes. You do need to request it ahead of time. You do need to do deal with their accessibility department. But I have found that if you deal with them in plenty of time and you continue to follow up and be as friendly as possible, we've had very good responses. I think it's really important that blind people continue to ask for accommodations. I've noticed that on many cruise ships and programs I've been on, deaf people now automatically have interpreters on every cruise. Blind people are very spottily now getting audio description and I think it's important that it's continued to be asked for because the cruise ships aren't necessarily feeling it's a requirement. You will have to request, if you want braille documents ahead of time. Sometimes they provide them, sometimes they don't.

But one thing that we have found super helpful is to bring a thumb drive and they want one that's not been opened yet so it has no contamination. And ask them to transfer the activity schedules, the menus, all the different information that you get piled up on your bed at night, to put all of that on the thumb drive every day and then we can read it with our braille devices and that has opened up a lot of great opportunity and taken some of the onus off of having to ask people to read stuff for us.

Then the other thing is to just don't be afraid to get out and explore. There's always people around, they're always happy to help you. We've met some really lovely people on cruises from different countries. Sometimes we've gone to different countries. I've met people from Seattle. It's just amazing who you'll meet, and it can be so much fun.

Debbie Good: Wendy, we were talking about traveling to other countries. Do you find that people are surprised in other countries that you as a blind person is traveling by herself?

Wendy David: Sometimes that is the truth. A lot of it depends on each country. It depends on their attitudes toward disability. It depends on how accessible the country is, which usually in Europe, Europe is old and most of the streets are cobbly and lots of steps and they don't have the same kinds of traffic laws and patterns and things like that that we have. And many of their hotels and accommodations don't have braille signage. And so it can be very challenging at times and it can also be really enlightening, and sometimes blind people find it a little too onerous. And so they often don't see a lot of blind people traveling solo.

I often, especially if it's a foreign language as well and foreign currency, I'll take several different wallets and I'll label them, so I know, okay this is euros and this one here is going to be pounds and this one here is going to be whatever. I can sort of keep that in mind.

I find that it helps me sometimes to have certain phrases written out on flashcards, like this is a dog for the blind, please show me where the restroom is. I'm gluten free. Things like that that I know I'm going to need to express to people and I don't trust my language skills always. But I think the more that you can try to maybe learn a few phrases, say hello to people in their language, always say thank you in their language, they really appreciate that. I just think it's a wonderful opportunity to expand our world, our personal world, and to really start seeing all that the rest of the world has to offer.

Debbie Good: And can you tell us one of the biggest challenges you found or how you resolved it?

Wendy David: It was interesting when we went on our Mediterranean cruise a few years ago, my husband and I decided that we would go a few days early. It was taking a place out of Rome and we wanted to spend a couple days in Rome. And so, we had our two guide dogs and we looked up all these different places that we wanted to stay and none of them would accept the two guide dogs. And so then we went to the pet friendly sites. But the pet friendly sites often are for small dogs and one dog per room. And a place that was actually quite a big chain that said they accept service animals then told us we couldn't have two service animals in one room. We would each have to have our own room. We felt very limited in where we would be able to stay. But we finally found a place that did allow both of our dogs in the same room and once we got there, we had no problem at all anywhere.

Debbie Good: And tell us what one of your favorite destinations is.

Wendy David: Oh my gosh, there's so many. It just depends on what it is I'm wanting out of that trip. If it's the people and the culture, I'd say Nepal. If it's relaxation and just being totally immersed in the beautiful environment I would say Hawaii by the ocean. If it's the food, I would say Paris. It's just it, it just really depends. If it's if I really want a great adventure or something, I would say skiing in Colorado. It just, I have so many favorites and maybe they kind of fit into different categories. I don't think I could say I have one favorite overall. And I think travel is getting more accessible. I think people are becoming more aware. I think it's easier to get out of our comfort zone a little bit because there's more help out there. And I don't think, again, like I told you in the first podcast that you have to jump into the deep end initially. Ease into it, get some help, join a tour, join a group. There's lots of availability for travel out there. The travel industry is going to become smarter and smarter and want to make it more accessible for us as well.

Debbie Good: Thank you so much Wendy. You've given us lots of tips and inspired us to go out and see the world.

Wendy David: Oh, fantastic.

Ricky Enger: I feel like just hearing about someone else's experience kind of makes travel seem a lot more approachable to somebody that's kind of hesitating and thinking, well, I don't know. What about this? What about that? And just to hear from someone who's thought about these things and actually gone through the experience of doing it, not just in one place, but a number of them, really is very inspiring, I think. And I appreciate you're sharing your stories with us. For those who might need a refresher from the first podcast or for some reason didn't hear it, which if you didn't, you should go back and listen. But for those who are looking to keep up with both of you, let's start with you Wendy. Where can people contact you?

Wendy David: Probably the best way to contact me is through my email, which is dr.wendydavid, W-E-N-D-Y-D-A-V-I-D, all one word @gmail.com.

Ricky Enger: And Debbie, how about you? Where can people find you?

Debbie Good: Well, you could email me at Good… My last name is Debbie Good, no E just G-O-O-D @hadley.edu.

Thank you both again for joining us and happy travels.

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.