Hadley

I Redefined My Life

Presented by Douglas Walker

**Douglas:** Hello, and welcome to the Insights and Sound Bites podcast, where people facing vision loss share insights about what has helped them cope and adjust.

**Voice 1:** You cannot do this alone. You need people who are experiencing the same thing.

**Voice 2:** Probably the hardest part was just navigating through the emotions of it.

**Douglas:** My name is Douglas Walker. It’s easy to define who we are with what we do in life. Today we’ll hear from Kara. Kara will share with us how she found new ways to express herself and her love of visual art. And redefine meaning in her life.

**Kara:** Hi, my name is Kara Snyder and I am from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

I have been a type one diabetic since I was seven, then sometime when I was in my twenties, that's when my vision changes really ramped up and I had a number of detached retinas. The left eye is even after the two retinal attachments, so I lost vision totally in that eye. So, then I was still able to drive with one good eye, but then as soon as that right eye started to have the detached retina, I developed cornea issues. And then that is what impaired my vision with that eye. So, I'm legally blind in the right eye.

I work primarily as a visual artist which is funny, but I've always been a visual. I was an arts administrator and then did visual art for fun on the side. But then once I started losing vision, I realized, wait a minute, I really want to be a full-time artist. And so interestingly enough, as the vision started to fade, that's when I really launched my visual art career. I entered into a number of juried groups and began exhibiting in the Pittsburgh region.

Because the loss of my visual art at the time when I lost vision, I was freaking out. And I thought, oh my God, that's my livelihood. It's my life. It's the thing I love the most.

I had to go through a period of uncertainty, what was perceived as down and dark and depressing. But it was like I grappling to find my feet again. Because the markers I used in my life to define myself or define meaning often were based in a visual interpretation of the world. So, when that became lost to me, it really made me redefine what constitutes meaning in my life if I don't have the visual. It helped me to point to my relationships.

And I realized just because I lost vision doesn't mean I'm not going to call my mom and have conversations with her. I'm not going to not go to her kitchen table and drink coffee just because this change in my physical being occurred. So, once I realized there was such deep meaning in those moments, it made me redefined my sense of being in the world.

But it was really a very basic human need to know how do I proceed in my life with this huge change? And I had some key people in my life who were very supportive. One friend in particular, who really, it was almost like a drill sergeant. You don't give up because just because you think you can't paint doesn't mean you can't paint anymore.

So I was like, what am I waiting for? So I just started to experiment with painting. So I'm not saying it was a perfect seamless bounce back into happiness. It's up and down, up and down.

I still grieve the loss of being able to see others' artwork, other people's artwork, because that was a huge joy for me. It's a loss. But I was able to use that whole recipe of finding meaning and use it for my art, because I used that dialogue sitting at the coffee table with my mom metaphor to then bring it over into my art.

**Douglas**: Was there something that someone said to you or something that happened along the way that made all the difference in the world in helping you adjust to living with vision loss?

We‘d love to hear from you if you’d like to share with us, just leave us a message on our Insights & Sound Bites voicemail by calling, 847-512-4867. Or, you can use your smartphone or computer and email us a recording to podcast@Hadley.edu. Again, my name is Douglas Walker. Take care and I’ll see you next time.