Hadley

Holiday Gifts and Vision Loss

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, Steve Kelly and Lisa Salinger, join us to discuss holiday gift ideas. Welcome to the show.

**Steven Kelley:** Hey, y'all.

**Lisa Salinger:** Thank you. It's good to be here.

**Ricky Enger:** Happy, Happy Holidays. It seems like it comes earlier and earlier every year.

**Lisa Salinger:** I know. I think I saw Pumpkin Spice in August.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah. There's just something way wrong with that.

**Steven Kelley:** Oh, come on now, pumpkin spice is pretty much good anytime.

**Ricky Enger:** Oh, you think that's a universal thing.

**Steven Kelley:** I suppose. Yeah, absolutely.

**Ricky Enger:** Well, I'm really happy to have you both on the show. I always thoroughly enjoy this chance to get together with a couple of staff members and just chat about things. And this time we actually have a topic, which is again, gift ideas for the holidays, both giving and receiving. So, I think it's going to be a great time. But before we get into that, why don't we just take a moment and tell us who you are and then maybe just a hobby or two that you enjoy outside of work time. Let's start with you, Lisa.

**Lisa Salinger:** Okay. As Ricky said, I'm Lisa Salinger. I am the access technology specialist here at Hadley. So, I have the pleasure of talking to some of you on the phone and helping to test to make sure that the information we put out is accessible for everyone. And hobbies, I love to read. I'm involved in a lot of music, especially this year, taking piano lessons after 30 years, and have joined a choir. And if you define a hobby as the place where your money goes, I have a dog and I enjoy spending time with her, but that also is where some of the money goes.

**Ricky Enger:** Awesome. How about you, Steve?

**Steven Kelley:** Well, I'm Steve Kelley, and I too am on the technology team here at Hadley and people have probably heard me on Get Up and Go and one of the other discussion groups. And for hobbies, photography and bicycling are two of my favorites. And yeah, I spend some money on those two as well.

**Ricky Enger:** I bet. That's the thing about hobbies is that they can be a little bit expensive at times.

**Steven Kelley:** They can be, yeah.

**Ricky Enger:** Well, perhaps this is your first time listening to Hadley Presents. So, I'll do a brief introduction for myself. Along with doing this podcast, I'm the practice leader of assistive technology at Hadley. So, I get to lead this fantastic group of people as we show you how to use those new tech gifts and gadgets that you may get over the holidays, or at any other point. And technology is both the thing I do in my daily life, and it's an expensive hobby too, because I enjoy gadgets outside of work as well. And much like Lisa, and I know Steve, even though you didn't mention it, you're an avid reader as well. So I fall into that club too.

One of the reasons that I wanted to have everyone introduce themselves beyond just letting people know a bit about you is that turns out we're not one-dimensional people. It seems like when you experience a vision loss, suddenly friends and family, they care as much as they ever have, but there's this feeling of, "Well, now that you've lost some vision, I would have gotten you a drill, or maybe a cool eye shadow palette or some yarn from the craft store or whatever." But now that you have lost some vision, well, everything needs to talk or it should have braille on it, or just suddenly everything is framed in this different way.

I thought it would be good if we could step outside that a bit. So rather than having this holiday list where everything is kind of generic and doesn't take your particular hobbies into account, it would be good to go through just a list of things. And if you're into crafting, here's what might be a good gift that someone could give you, or something that you could buy for yourself. So, is there an example of this that either of you could share where a friend or family member did do this? They got you a gift and it was clearly well intended, but it just turned out not to be appropriate for whatever reason?

**Lisa Salinger:** Oh, yeah. I got two of these from two different lovely people in two different years, and they are the large glass balls like you put on a Christmas tree. And each of the balls had, I think one of them in glitter braille said Merry Christmas, and the other one said Happy Holidays. And apparently, it was very pretty. But in both cases, they wanted me to read this braille. If you give someone a gift that has braille on it, it’s important to know that it may be more what I call artistic braille, which means it's made to look like braille, but as far as shape and scale, it might be quite hard to read. And it took my mother whispering what was on each of the balls out of the side of her mouth for me to say, "Oh, it says Merry Christmas." It really was well-intentioned, but it just didn't really work for me, except it has been a wonderful illustration of what not to buy.

**Ricky Enger:** Well, there you go. Steve, what about you? Do you have any gifts or traditions or whatever that just somehow have not worked so well for you for whatever reason?

**Steven Kelley:** Well, yes, but not nearly as entertaining as that one. That was pretty good. Like every person who's got low vision, I think somebody has handed us a magnifier, like a magnifying glass thinking that this is surely something that you will use and need. And it was one of those, oh gosh, the thing was probably 40- or 50-years old glass, the little metal thing around the rim and the handle. And in your situation, Lisa, what do you do? It's like, "Oh gee, this is wonderful. Thanks so much." And where's the drawer I'm going to stash this in? So, it was a bit of a failure, which isn't to say that magnifying glasses aren't great. They can be, you just want the right one and maybe one with light and so forth.

But on the other hand, I did have a positive one years ago. I was using this little device called an NEC MobilePro, which was a really cool device at the time. It had a little keyboard on it and a little screen, and my new partner at the time said, "Oh, you need one of these things called an iPad. They're brand new and they've got this nice screen and I understand that you can make the screen zoom in and out." And she was kind enough to get one for me. And I thought, "Wow, it's worth having low vision to get a gift like this." It was a game changer. So, on the upside, that was a real positive.

**Ricky Enger:** Wow, that was really cool. It wasn't just that iPads are cool, it was iPads are cool, but also there is a low vision aspect that is going to be useful for you beyond what the iPad already does. So that's nice.

**Steven Kelley:** Oh, for sure. Yeah. Yeah.

**Ricky Enger:** So, what about giving gifts or some aspect of gift giving? I know for me; I have never been able to manage the art of even halfway credibly wrapping a gift. It looks like a toddler had fun with the scotch tape and the wrapping paper. So, I've been very thankful that gift bags are perfectly appropriate things to do. So, what about you? Have you had some aspect of giving people gifts that you kind of struggle with, and then what did you do to figure that out?

**Lisa Salinger:** I actually am relatively good at wrapping gifts, but I am painfully slow and forget the bow. Bags are great, but my biggest gift-giving nemesis I think is cards. This year, I have small gifts. People take turns every week of the month and a different person gives me a ride to church, so I have gifts for them, and it's a card with a certificate in it and a print braille magnet. And so, what I will do is just sign the card. I can't write a personal message. It's not really as good as I would like, but it gets the job done.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah. What about you, Steve? I know that it can be a challenge too, if you're having to try and handwrite something, there are ways that you can do this under a magnifier, but there are probably pros and cons to that as well. So how do you handle this?

**Steven Kelley:** Well, to be honest with you, I guess I probably don't handle it particularly well. I mean, I think probably 20, 25 years ago I just started, anytime I was printing, I did it in a block capital letters and it was just a little bit easier for me to read it back and that sort of thing. What Lisa was describing is doable, but sometimes it's not pretty. I mean, what happens is sometimes I'll be writing along and it's like, "Oh, look at those lines, slanting down there to the bottom." And there have been times when I've tossed the card away and as far as gift wrapping though, I feel like I'm a pretty darn good gift wrapper. Ricky, I don't think the gift wrapping has got anything to do with vision. I've seen plenty of folks with plenty of vision that do a horrible job of gift wrapping. They're just not patient, or something. I don't know.

**Ricky Enger:** I absolutely agree with that. And it's a really good point to say that things you might struggle with at the holidays are not necessarily just confined to this is a vision issue, sometimes it's just that we are all unique and we have things that we're good at and things that we aren't. So, I guess the bottom line is be kind to yourself and you can be creative with how you decide to tackle whatever challenge that is. It doesn't have to be a beautifully written Christmas card. You can find a way that's still uniquely you and that gets the point across.

**Steven Kelley:** Yeah. And just as a follow-up, no one yet has complained about any of my cards. So even though it just doesn't satisfy me sometimes to look at it, slanting, or whatever, I think everybody's very, very flexible and appreciates just the thought.

**Ricky Enger:** Yes.

**Lisa Salinger:** And people always say, "Well, the holidays are about family, or the meaning of the season, or it's about the kids." But you know what, it's about you too. I just don't have the time to wrap like I used to. And so, I buy bags because I would rather take the time to make good things for family and friends to enjoy. I think you can do what you enjoy and concentrate on your strengths. And I think if you can find the humor in things, I'm sure for some people if this is your first holiday dealing with vision loss, there will be some tears, but there can be some hilarity in there too. And I think it's good to look for that.

**Ricky Enger:** Absolutely, love that.

**Steven Kelley:** That's so true, yeah.

**Ricky Enger:** So we've talked about giving people things and how do you go about doing cards and things like that, but we haven't talked about what are these cool gifts that we might like to get ourselves, or just some ideas for people that are thinking about, "Hmm, I need to make this holiday list and tell people what I want." So, we have a couple of different categories here. And as much as we talked about braille in the beginning, glitter braille does not appear in any of these suggestions. But obviously, if you don't know braille and you have no intention of learning, then you probably don't want gifts related to that. But if you are either at the beginning of your braille journey or maybe braille quite well, I think there are some really cool gift ideas that do involve braille.

The one I haven't tried yet, but seems kind of interesting and seems like it might be a nice hostess gift, or host gift if you're taking something to the holidays and could be an interesting conversation starter too, is there is a French winemaker and all of their bottles of wine have braille labels, and you can get them locally so you don't have to order from France. It will become readily apparent that I don't speak French, but I think it's M. Chapoutier is the winemaker, and the prices range from $10 to $900. So, you're probably going to find some quality wine that you like among those. But I've not seen a bottle with a braille label yet. And now I'm curious.

**Steven Kelley:** Well, I think one of the other examples too, and you mentioned was braille chocolates. Well, I'm not a braille reader, so if something is sent to me in braille, I'll figure it out, but it's not going to be as readily as someone who's a regular braille reader. That said, however, wine with a braille label, Merlot, please. I'm okay with that. And those braille chocolates. Oh yeah, send those along, that's fine. Maybe I'll take a moment to figure out what the chocolate is before I pop it in my mouth. Maybe I won't. It won't matter. So, I'm good with those.

**Lisa Salinger:** The funny thing is with the braille chocolates you can get, there are two different things. You can get candy bars or smaller ones that are more like business card sized that have braille on the chocolate. So, it will say Happy Holidays or Season's Greetings or Happy Birthday or Thank You or whatever. And you can buy these made up. But at some bakery and hobby shops you can also buy the molds and make them yourself, or family can make them. The other kind, there is a company, at least one that makes boxed chocolates, and the chocolates are high-quality chocolates, but the little map of what's in the box is in braille. And I was lucky enough to get one of these as a gift, so I could go through, and I could pick out the peanut butter filled ones and generously share the buttercream with family and friends.

**Ricky Enger:** And we'll have a link to that in the show notes. That's Purdy’s Chocolates, P-U-R-D-Y, they're out of Canada. It's a bit late this year to get the Advent calendar, but they do have an Advent calendar as well. But they do have them available at least through January. And they are the braille chocolates that we described.

**Lisa Salinger:** And we talk about getting gifts with braille, but I think it can be fun to give gifts of braille. Like I said before, I have gifts for my rides to church and I get each one of them a little print braille magnet, and it says, "When I count my blessings, I count you twice." I got them through National Braille Press. That way they will have a reminder, I mean, if they see a braille magnet, they're probably not going to forget where it came from.

**Ricky Enger:** That's a great point. One last braille thing I wanted to mention is fairly recent. Maybe you want to play with the grandkids, or maybe you just like it yourself. There are braille Lego bricks, which I think is really cool. I don't have this set yet. I do have braille UNO cards, which have provided lots of enjoyment, but I'm looking forward to building with Lego. And the bricks themselves have braille dots and there're activities online, so for example, I think there's some game that you can play that involves using this braille set and you can play it as a family, which is really cool.

**Lisa Salinger:** Mm-hmm. There's also a stamp, apparently, again, I think this is a National Braille Press thing, and you can stamp braille letters and I think it has the print equivalent as well in Play-Doh.

**Ricky Enger:** Ooh, how fun.

**Lisa Salinger:** So, lots of fun things to do with the grandkids.

**Ricky Enger:** Right. So, we've talked a lot about braille and maybe you're not into braille and you're thinking, "Well, hmm, what's available for me?" I think one thing that's pretty universal across a lot of different hobbies is a way to keep yourself organized. And I guess it becomes more important as you can't just glance around and see that this is a blue colored yarn, or a yellow colored yarn, for example, if you're crafty or colored beads, things like that. Any number of reasons why you might want to keep things organized. So, are there some recommendations that you guys have for things that kind of fit the bill there?

**Lisa Salinger:** I think my favorite gift both to give and get for organizing is bags. Some people say you can't have too many shoes, you can't have too many bags. You can use it for organization, and you can buy little bags with lots of pockets and organizing things. Again, some people like that. I had a bag that I loved, but it had so many pockets. I ended up giving it away because it gave me what I jokingly called pocket panic disorder because it's like, "Which one of 79 pockets did I put that thing in?"

**Ricky Enger:** We had a suggestion from the gardening group about this and it sounds really simple, but I had not really thought about it. It's a tool belt, so a leather tool belt for your gardening tools. And so, you have everything all in one place, all of the things that you might need, like your shears and snips. And in any case, all of these things can be attached to this belt that goes where you are, so you're not hunting around for whatever tool it is that you need.

**Steven Kelley:** I was going to say, I tend to use buckets for that. The shed has got a bunch of different buckets with tools for this project, tools for that project. And the ideal, under perfect circumstances, is that you go in and everything you need is right there in the bucket. But unfortunately, things don't always go that way. It's a good idea in theory. This question also, as soon as I saw it, I guess I put on my vision rehab hat and started thinking about stocking stuffers. I was just thinking about those assortments of bump dots and the puff paint that you can get, and you can even get that at Michaels.

Those two things alone I think are just so perfect for a lot of different labeling. You can use them for all kinds of things. And then the other thing that I thought about too was I'm still a big fan of the PenFriend. Again, this is one of those things that is a little bit more for folks with vision loss as opposed to more general stuff. But I did notice it's gone up in price since I last looked at it, but I still love that as kind of an all-purpose labeling device. I think it's great.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah, it allows you to stick these labels on the things that you're hoping to keep track of, and you can then record a message as to what that thing is, and then you just point your little PenFriend or touch it to the tag and there you go. That actually reminded me, speaking of tag, I was thinking on the text side of things too, AirTags or Tile trackers. So, these are things that you can connect with your phone. And if you're always losing a particular thing, then you can put this tracker on it and then you're able to use an app to make that thing ring from wherever it is and go, "Oh, there's where my purse is." Or whatever thing it is that you're often misplacing and just have that auditory way of finding it. It's really neat.

So, turns out that we're all book lovers, and I was thinking of what kinds of things you might get for your favorite book lover. The first thing that springs to mind is an audible subscription. If you're not accustomed to reading audiobooks, and so you might say, "I'm not sure I want to spend my hard-earned money on these audiobooks, because I'm just not ready to do that." But if it's something that someone has given you, maybe you're a little more likely to browse that library and find something that you're willing to try with audio and just dip your toe in the water a bit. What about you, Steve?

**Steven Kelley:** Well, along the same lines, I mean, this is perhaps helpful for the gift giver who's on a budget. Find out if they have a subscription to NLS. And I was just thinking, "Oh, just go ahead and fill out the application on their behalf, if you can do that." And then get the NLS talking book player. It comes in a nice box. There's no cost for it. Wrap that up and give it to them and let them know how to work the whole program.

**Ricky Enger:** Or let Hadley show them how to use the program because we do have workshops on all that. And by the way, if you are drawing a blank about what the letters NLS stand for, it is the National Library Service. And so that’s a part of the Library of Congress. And like Steve said, you can get signed up and get free audiobooks, magazines and you can even get Hadley stuff on that NLS player once you have it.

**Steven Kelley:** We hear from so many people who are not signed up for Talking Books, and I just feel like that's the first thing that I would do is just check to see if somebody is a Talking Book subscriber and get them signed up. I mean, to me, that's a cool gift.

**Lisa Salinger:** Exactly. And it's a little more convoluted, but you can also maybe assist someone in getting hooked into their library because you can get audiobooks. When I think of gifts for readers though, I think of who doesn't like to be cozy when you're reading. So, for example, I got electric heated throws at a good price, or a nice travel mug with a lid. But if I'm going to sit and read, or watch something kind of to get cozy, I like to have something to drink, but I also like to have a lid so that I don't accidentally spill. Or, if it's coffee, something that my dog doesn't decide to head in and take a drink. So, if somebody spends any time reading or just hanging out in a comfy spot, I love to give travel mugs as gifts, and you can fill them up with a little bit of holiday candy and that's all good.

**Ricky Enger:** Oh, I like the way you think. I was just thinking about when you mentioned the NLS player, Steve, and especially when you, Lisa, mentioned not sitting down to read, I was thinking, "Oh, the ability to read while you're washing dishes, or doing housework is so, so important to me." It does require that you become used to reading in audio format, but assuming that you're ready to jump that hurdle, or have already, the NLS player is wonderful and it's a nice thing to have. It's super easy to use, but its portability is not what I think of when I think of the NLS player. You can't really fit it in your pocket, or purse. So, I'm thinking of something that's a little smaller, a handheld device, and there is one called the Victor Reader Stream. I happen to know, Steve, this is on your list too, isn't it?

**Steven Kelley:** It is, yes. Thank you. Just in case anybody's listening.

**Ricky Enger:** So, the way that this works is it is a small device, and it has a phone style keypad and then some buttons below that for just play, stop, and rewind. And it is so small, it's about the size of a deck of cards, and you can clip it to your belt, or just your waistband, or whatever, or slide it in your shirt pocket. It does have a speaker, or you can plug headphones into it, and it will play all of these book formats that we've talked about. So NLS, BARD books, you can get Bookshare books, audible, and even internet radio. So, if you're into streaming music, or sports, or podcasts, then you're going to be able to play them from this device too. And the cool thing is it doesn't have a screen. So, if you are in that mode of, I don't want a smartphone and I don't want to squint at the screen of something, this is really easy to use and packs a whole lot into a tiny little device.

**Lisa Salinger:** I use my smartphone for most of those things. I read on my phone, BARD, Bookshare, et cetera. And I can also enjoy TV shows, Netflix, things like that, all from my phone. And I say all that to say that another really nice gift you can give someone is Bluetooth earbuds or a Bluetooth headset depending on their preference. And again, this kind of comes down to knowing the person, because for me, I don't really use Bluetooth earpieces anymore because I have hearing aids. So, if someone has a hearing aid and they have a smartphone, maybe it's just taking the time to show them, "Hey, did you know you can do this, and you can do that." And it's not like you have to be the font of all knowledge, but let's say that you are a techie and you have a family member who is notoriously not your expertise can be your gift, especially if you are on a budget and you don't have a lot of money to spend on gifts.

**Ricky Enger:** So, I couldn't have planned that transition any better if I had tried, because the one thing I wanted to talk about is something that doesn't get as much attention as it should. And I think that time is such a precious commodity, but it often gets overlooked when we're thinking about either getting a gift from someone and they say, "What do you want?" And you're like, "I don't know." Or maybe you're the one who is looking to give someone something and you're thinking, "Well, I need to buy them the perfect thing." But honestly, the gift of time can be incredible. Whether it is asking someone to go with you to the craft store to look at all of the different things or go to a kitchen store and get your hands on some of these kitchen tools that you might want just to see if they're going to work for you.

I feel like it is okay to ask for that gift and certainly to give it, maybe I'm the only one who feels this way, but just speaking for myself, I often don't like to ask for help because I think I'm going to be a burden on someone, or whatever. But if they want to give me something and I want to feel good about having received it, then I guess giving it that context. This is the gift that you're giving me. We're going to spend time together, enjoying each other's company and looking through the kitchen store. I love that.

**Lisa Salinger:** Your time and your expertise is the only thing that you can give someone that they could not conceivably buy for themselves. It might be, I could really use two hours of your time to go through and see what clothes are stained. And I have these things I've never worn, and I need to know what they go with. Things like that.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah. Like organizing the pantry, that just popped into my head.

**Lisa Salinger:** I mean, I love to do latch hook and I think I would enjoy other crafts, but you need time, you need help to get set up. Although packages of yarn have red, blue, green, pink, and yellow all in one, and you need someone who can sort those into bags that you label and then braille the pattern. So, it really depends on what your hobby is. I mean, gifts of time really can work so beautifully, and they're meaningful to me, especially because I think it's harder to get gifts of time now even than it is to get monetary gifts.

**Steven Kelley:** You both reminded me of last weekend with my partner, and she may have been motivated for other reasons. I think she had made a couple of comments about this jacket that I was wearing that was torn and had a stain on it and that sort of thing. It was one of my favorite jackets. And she said, "Hey, how about we go to Brunswick." Which is about forty-five miles away, "And go to that swap shop for sportswear in case you want to get a jacket, or boots, or something like that." And I was like ...

And just like what you had said, Ricky, it was actually one of those things that was on my mind, but she doesn't have a great deal of time. And I was reluctant to ask that question like, "Hey, could we go up there, because I want to go shopping at this place." But it was so cool that she just offered out of the blue, so I didn't have to ask. And yeah, when I got up there, I found a replacement for the jacket and boots, and it was just one of those things that I really appreciated, and we stopped and we got a cup of coffee someplace, which was another great thing. So, I think sometimes we really forget just how important those little things can be.

**Lisa Salinger:** It is important when you are blind and you're shopping, if you're purchasing gift cards, you might want to maybe get help from one of the visual interpreter services that are out there now. I guess I'm closing things down on my end anyway, with a bit of a blooper note. One year I bought Amazon gift cards for my nephews who were 12 and 16, and I thought I was getting Christmas trees with snow or something. Well, the graphics labels weren't right, and that was the Christmas I became the cool aunt because I got them Playboy Bunny gift certificates.

**Ricky Enger:** My gosh.

**Lisa Salinger:** They thought it was great. Their mother and I, not so much. She's like, "You did that on purpose, didn't you?" I'm like, "No." I couldn't make this stuff out.

**Steven Kelley:** Oh, really. I didn't.

**Ricky Enger:** No. Any final thoughts then? I'm not sure how we top that one, but any final thoughts as we wrap up and wish everyone a happy holiday?

**Steven Kelley:** Well, I am kind of going back to what you had said originally about one-dimensional beings and stuff. And yeah, there's some really cool things out there like that Victor Reader Stream, of course, for folks who have low vision, or who are blind, but oftentimes that's not who we are. It may be a part of who we are. Maybe there is a gift on our list that has something to do with vision loss, but for the most part, it has to do with our personal preferences and like you said, what we're interested in. I think stepping back and just remembering that there's a whole person there, not just somebody with a vision loss, is a great way to approach the whole gift giving thing.

**Ricky Enger:** Yes, indeed. And chances are the things that they used to love receiving, or the things that you as the low vision listener used to love receiving, you still would. Maybe you're looking for a way to still do that same hobby you always have, but if the people that you surround yourself with can be a part of that creative thinking and figuring out how you still can do the same things you always have, that can be really important too. We will be having links to a number of things that we've mentioned here, and even some that didn't make it into the recording but are nevertheless very cool gifts to put on your Christmas list, so check out the show notes for that.

If you have a unique gift that wish we had mentioned but did not, we'd love to hear from you about that as well. And stay tuned because, at the end of this podcast, we do share our contact info so you can share things with us that way. Thank you again, Steve and Lisa, for joining me, and of course, thank you all for listening and Happy Holidays. 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@HadleyHelps.org. That's P-O-D-C-A-S-T@HadleyHelps.O-R-G or leave us a message at (847) 784-2870. Thanks for listening.