Hadley

It gave me a sense of meaning

**Ron:** Losing your vision can throw you into a bad place for lots of reasons, but not being able to work in the estuary was certainly one of them.

**Marc:** This is Hadley’s Insights and Sound Bites, where people facing vision loss share what has helped them cope and adjust.

**Ron:** My name is Ron Peterson. I'm 73 years old and I live in Imperial Beach, CA.

I went to school, studied engineering. I worked for the Navy as an engineer in weapon systems, and there were so many times in my career when I, when I thought, gosh, I should have been a Forest Ranger because I just love the outdoors and nature.

I retired about 10 years ago and I began working as a volunteer at the Tijuana Estuary. I loved working out there because I always loved being around nature, so I was planting native plants and removing invasive plants and helping maintain and clear the trails and such. Very satisfying work.

But then, about five years ago, I lost my vision to glaucoma. I'd actually experienced glaucoma symptoms about maybe 15 years ago, but I was able to control it with drops and such, and a couple of surgeries, but finally it caught up with me. 5 1/2 years ago, the bottom dropped out pretty fast. And it kind of surprised me. I wasn't really prepared for it.

And I was really in a funk there, are kind of in a deep hole for a few months.

That was very disheartening to me and losing your vision can throw you into a bad place. For lots of reasons. But not being able to work in the estuary was certainly one of them.

One of the things that I learned after losing my vision is that you need to ask for help. And I talked to the staff there at the estuary. I said, I want to continue to volunteer here and I love, I love these plants. What can we do and how can I help?

And together we came up with this perfect solution. That I would become a docent, and I would guide visitors in sharing the beauty of these native plants using the other four senses besides vision especially touch and smell.

And that's what really helped me along with the love of nature that I learned to basically climb out of that hole that I was in for a number of months.

I'd already learned how to identify 30 or 40 plants by sight, but I took a year or so and learned how to identify all these plants just by touch. And at this point I can go out there and wander around in this beautiful estuary with my guide dog and I can identify nearly 40 plants just by touch and smell.

On my nature walk which I give once a month, and I also give this walk on special visits from both sighted and blind groups. But we take about an hour, hour and a half and I introduce my guests to about 15 or 16 of these plants. The most beautiful plants and the most interesting plants.

But what it did for me was amazing. It gave me a sense of meaning. Connecting my love of nature with this business of volunteering and giving to others and it brought a lot of meaning to my life. And I'm frankly as happy now as I've ever been in my entire life, even without vision.

**Marc**: You never know who might need to hear your story. 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@HadleyHelps.org.