Hadley

Having the courage to keep moving

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

**Dia:** Hi, my name is Dia and I live in St. Charles, Illinois. I have a degenerative eye disease called Ischemic optic neuropathy, anterior, which is a medical term for optic nerve stroke. First happened in my left eye approximately six years ago, and it's amazing how the brain takes over and you're able to function with loss of vision in one eye.

And unfortunately for me, which is probably only 20% of the people that have it happen in the second eye, which was my right eye, and that is the worst of the two. I am now considered legally blind. I do have some vision, and I have approximately, they tell me 40% total vision between both eyes.

I remember back probably about three years ago, I was extremely depressed after the second eye had the optic nerve stroke, and I was in tears one evening and I kind of snapped out of it for a minute and started googling. There had to be help for people with my disease. And I googled and I googled and I took down phone numbers and I was my own advocate. And I found several agencies that I reached out to, the following day and spent the entire 24 hours on the phone getting assistance and help and having people come in and assess me for different types of help that they could provide. So, I did it. Took me a long time, took a lot of courage, but I did it. And if I can do it, anybody can do it.

I was fearful of walking outside, terribly fearful. Well, first of all, the fear of falling, that was a big one. And even walking with a cane. It was my friend, but it wasn't really a good friend. And people grabbing onto me was horrible. It was almost a violation in my mind, even though I know they meant well. But that was really difficult, and I had to learn how to teach them how not to grab onto me because that was another fear of falling.

One of the hardest things I had to do was, it took me one year to get into an Uber by myself. I was hyperventilating at times. And overcoming that fear was huge, and it took me quite some time to overcome it. It took me one year to go to my park district for a concert tour. To get into the bus with other people that were sighted. And I remember shaking, physically shaking the entire bus trip until we got to the theater.

Just pushing myself and being persistent and just, I got to do this. I got to do this. I can do this. The whole ride in the car in the Uber or the bus trip to the theater, I kept telling myself, I can do it. You can do it, you can do it. And that was it. It's almost like mind over matter.

In the past six months, I've had to give up my car. I've stopped driving. I had to quit my career for 54 years. I was a salon owner and a hairstylist, and all of that compiled on top of each other and it was a loss. Grieving and getting through it. And right now, I also have a therapist that I talk to once a week, and that helps. I strongly recommend that. Just having courage, the courage to keep moving.

There are days that I just want to sit in my chair and close my eyes and sleep, and then I have to pick myself up and start over and say, okay, you need to move. You need to get moving. You need to do something. You need to be creative. You need to talk to people and help people.

Helping others is who I have been all my life, all my career. The most important thing right now for me is I have a purpose. My purpose is helping others.

**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.