

Access and Independence

Full Program Transcript

- My name is Noah Malone. I attend Indiana State University and I'm a student athlete. I try not to think about myself being vision impaired every time I step on the track, because then sometimes I can bring stress, because then a lot more issues come into mind like, "Oh, what if I run out of my lane? What if I do this and that?" So I try to just have an open mind and then, just run the race. So it was the first day of eighth grade, probably about five years ago at this point. And I was just sitting in the classroom and I just happened to look up at the whiteboard and I couldn't really notice what the teacher was writing on the board. So I just texted my mom and we thought it was just a normal, "Oh, we're just going to go and get some eyeglasses." But it was a lot more than that. A couple of days later, we went to kind of like a local ophthalmologist and we found out I have a eye condition called Leber's hereditary optic neuropathy. And what that means is it strips away most of my central vision and leaves me with my peripheral vision. It was shocking and kind of scary, cause I didn't know how bad it was going to get. It did get a lot worse as the year went on. So I kinda just took it how it was and just hoped for the best, pretty much, that's really all I could do. Honestly, going to the Indiana School for the Blind, freshman through junior year, half and half with him was in Southeastern, they really taught me how to be an advocate, especially, you know, transitioning into the adult world and being independent for yourself. I really had to learn how to say what I needed. The classroom was probably the biggest setting where I had to have adjustments made in order to be successful. This campus is pretty accessible for the low vision, I feel like. We have a really, really good disability service office that has helped me a lot so far. A lot of adjustments had to be made. As of now I use every, I use a laptop and an iPad. So all my schoolwork and assignments have to be either emailed to me, or I just have to go get it transferred into a document on my iPad. So I can either listen to a long reading on a textbook or zoom in on something that I wouldn't be able to zoom in on if it was just paper. So far, I had to get the physical textbooks, bring them to the disability office, five minutes from my dorm. And then they had to scan the whole thing and then make probably about, I mean, it depends how big the textbook is, but probably 10 PDFs and email all those to me. My transition has been pretty smooth so far. I mean, due to COVID we've been having online classes. All my classes are pretty much hybrid. So some are online, some days and then somewhere in person, other days. It's definitely different. I've never really experienced anything like that, but it is nice because the learning environment is much smaller. There's only about 10 kids in the class instead of probably 30. So I do like it when it comes to that.

- 35, 36, seven, eight, nine, 40, 41.

- Noah initially caught our interest because of his performances on the track. But as I started to recruit him, his personality really fit with what we're looking for here on the team. He's a hard worker, he's a good student, but just a great kid, great guy.

- So when I'm just running on the track, I can see the lines vaguely. Some tracks are easier than others, but I can see the lines. Usually I can see the finish line. Some finish lines are a little bit different just based off kind of like how the track is made. Back in eighth grade and a little bit of ninth grade, if there was like a hurdle or a set of blocks on the track, I stepped on him a couple of times, cause I didn't see them. And not even stepped on them, I like ran over them. And I like had a couple of fractured ankles. So those were a couple incidents where it was kind of scary because I didn't know if something was in front of me. I was kinda running anxiously.

- Just the fact that he has obstacles to overcome, it doesn't deter him from striving to reach his goals and working hard to achieve them.

- Being a track athlete in high school was a really good experience. I got to become state champion in the 200 last year, as a junior, and runner up in the 100 as a junior. And then freshman year and sophomore year, I also placed some state five times throughout the two years. And then being with the Paralympics is a very, very great experience. We get to travel the world and advocate for ourselves and just kind of let people know what the Paralympic movement is, and also compete at the same time, which is good.

- I'm really looking forward to working with Noah this year and through the rest of his time at Indiana State, and hopefully beyond. He is a very talented young man who I think can do a lot of great things for our program, and our university, but also for Paralympic athletes everywhere and the sport of track and field.

- I am a hurricane Katrina survivor. So hurricane Katrina hit my hometown and my college closed. I mean, everything shut down. And I had been texting with my friends who live here that I had had no power. My gas in my car was getting low and I was running out of supplies, and my best friend said, "Well, we're going to come get you." And I was like, "Are you sure? I mean, it could be dangerous." They picked me up and they drove me back here to Indianapolis and I've been here ever since. And so that's how I graduated from IUPUI, because I had to stop attending school in Louisiana. My parents went out on a date one evening and I was with my grandmother and she took me into the other room and laid me down for bedtime. And my grandmother had two big dogs at the time. And for some reason that evening, the dogs started to bark very loudly. And my grandmother thought that I would start crying. So she went in the room to check on me and I was fast asleep and she kind of suspected that something might be up, that I might have a hearing issue. So my parents took me to an audiologist in New Orleans and they did what they call brainstem test. And basically that test looks at the nerve, the nerve connection to the brain, to see if the brain is responding to sound. My brain wasn't responding to noise or sound. So I was diagnosed as profoundly deaf or severely deaf. I have been advocating for myself my entire life. I've faced, I face barriers every day. I advocate for myself if I need to communicate with somebody in a specific way. My parents decided since I, you know, I wasn't able to speak, they wanted me to be able to have good reading and writing skills in English, because the world is hearing centered. And that is how I became the person I am today, that I'm able to communicate independently and maneuver in the world. If I need communication access for an event or any kind of activity, I need to request an interpreter. And I need to, you know, sometimes explain about the American with Disabilities Act. And that's what allows me to have access to programs and services that are being provided to the public. The biggest project that we're working on is we're planning a digital outreach for early voting. So we are trying to spread the word to the disability community about their options of voting early. You can vote in person or by mail early.

- We don't do advocacy because we make giant paychecks. Everybody that works at Indiana Disability Rights is extremely passionate about the work we do. So we hire passionate people. Catherine showed us from the very beginning, she was extremely passionate about voting issues, voting rights and disability rights and advocacy in general.

- An individual's vote is the core of everything that we have, our way of life here in America, especially for the disability community, because we are reliant on programs and services that help us have more independence, that we are able to have employment access, access to education, equal access to housing, to healthcare.

- Having somebody who comes in with lived experience is so fundamental to the work we do. And it's so fundamental for making us better. There are things that Catherine's going to catch that I'll never catch. There are things that she's going to bring to the table that are solutions that I'm never going to think of. And that's just because we're different people with different experiences.

- I provide information on voting training and we do discuss from registering to vote, to how to vote, to how to make an informed choice, how to screen candidates and screen information. Your vote is one kind of form of self-advocacy where you're able to say, "I want to have an equal opportunity. I want to have equal education. I want to have equal communication access." So your vote is a simple way for you to say who you want, you know, whoever you choose, but it's just a simple way for you to advocate for yourself and what you want from your leadership. If people do not vote, services and programs may be cut. So there's a risk of, for not voting.

- There was a time when I had to call my mother, and I told her, I said, "I lost my sight." And she immediately says to me, "Well, son, you've lost your sight. That's God's plan. I didn't raise you to be a weakling. So what are you going to do about it?" My name is Lee Martin. I'm a member of the National Federation of the Blind, and yes, I am blind.

- [Announcer] The National Federation of the Blind- NEWSLINE Indiana, Monthly Report, with your host, Lee Martin and cohost Florence Myers McSwine.

- You want to know about Lee Martin? I have been working with Lee with the National Federation of the Blind-NEWSLINE Indiana show for a little over three years. Lee is a very innovative man.

- Florence said that about me?

- And he just knows how to make things work.

- What's really nice is what we do together. We want to welcome our guest back to the National Federation of the Blind-NEWSLINE Indiana show, Ms. Rhonda Chapman. Thank you for coming on again and sharing your reality with us, your road to independence. Independence is what I've been blessed with. And I'd like to share that independence with others.

- I work out at a gym that I kept seeing this blind fellow come into with his cane and he would walk back into the locker room and go about his business of exercise and cleaning up afterwards and go on home. And his independence was amazing to me. And then I saw him back in front of his locker room and he was shining his shoes. And I thought, this is a guy that I've got to, I've got to meet. And so I went up to him and said, I introduced myself and said, "You're blind." He says, "Yes, I am." Says, "And you're shining your shoes, why, why are you shining your shoes?" And he says, he looked up at me and he said like, "Well, I want to look good." That's just Lee Martin. His shoes have to look good, even though he can't see them.

- Lee wasn't born blind. He lost his sight in his mid-forties due to a condition called phlebitis.

- In June of 1999, I was 46 years old and I lived a fairly productive life up until that point. And while working at DaimlerChrysler, I lost my sight and then I lost my job and it wasn't fair. So it took DaimlerChrysler to court.

- One of the toughest things about being blind is the ability to get employment. The unemployment rate for people that are blind is over 75%.

- The legal case against DaimlerChrysler received national exposure. It opened my eyes and I got involved with the National Federation of the Blind to help others achieve independence. And one of the ways that I do that is through a program, the NFB-NEWSLINE.

- [Man] Hoosiers can hear Indiana magazines, circulars, national magazines and information from across the globe. Learn more by calling [855-963-6476](tel:855-963-6476), or visit nfbnewsline-in.org.

- It gives them an opportunity to have all this information right there at their fingertips.

- [Computer] What would you like to do?

- Read the New York Times.

- [Computer] Reading the New York Times, dated September 25th, 2020.

- A person that's that's informed, they make informed decisions. And this service helps allow that.

- There are so many things that Lee is so passionate about.

- Education of our youth, as well as education for our adults.

- The right of blind and visually impaired citizens to vote is guaranteed by the United States Constitution.

- And when it comes to voting, blind people would love to vote independently and the technology has to be developed for that. Now, as far as the employment with the blind, we're not asking for any more or any less, but just a fair shot. And that fair shot comes with creating the opportunities, the proper training that we need, the proper technologies that we'll need so that we can work independently.

- This is Studio B at WHMB TV 40. And this is where we normally would produce the National Federation of the Blind-NEWSLINE show.

- We want to welcome you back with Pastor Melendi.

- [Announcer] And of course, now, since COVID hit, now we have to do things a little differently.

- We want to welcome you to the National Federation of the Blind-NEWSLINE Indiana show.

- Does Lee Martin let any dust settle on him? No way.

- As busy as Lee is, he takes time to have fun and he knows how to dance, and he knows how to celebrate life in a wonderful way.

- The bottom line about Lee Martin is he is a joyful, encouraging and professional activist.

- There's an old Chinese proverb, "Be not afraid of moving slowly, but be afraid of standing still." I kind of like that.

- I was always the new kid. I was the new kid everywhere that I went, moving so much in combination with having a visual disability that already requires you to explain it to people, because they don't understand what it is. It was kind of a perfect storm. My name is Andrew Neylon, and I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin. I have low vision. I'm legally blind, as well as completely colorblind.

- Starting with kindergarten, sometimes there was a lot of difficulty explaining to a teacher what it was that Andrew saw, what vision was in Andrew's world. Six feet out, everything's kind of a blurry world for him. When Andrew was just a baby, they told us then, you know, that Andrew wouldn't be able to drive or any of those things. And I remember being absolutely crushed for him to be able to have the sense of independence, but also the ability to get around.

- When Andrew got into high school, I was his orientation and mobility instructor, and that's someone who works with a student on being independent and moving around their community or their neighborhood.

- So it was a lot of like, at that time, learning how to route basically, how to figure out like, "Okay, I want to go to this store to get something," that maybe it was like a treat for me, "And then I'm going to work my way back with the bus system or something."

- Obviously there was instruction, but there was a lot of walking in between instruction. And I got to know his tastes in music and movies and just the depth of his intellect. And I just got to know him really well.

- Andrew's mobility trainer found this contest that was being sponsored by the braille org and one of the film companies. And they were, I think, trying to get children to express what they see, you know, "This is how I see."

- The first film that I made, which was called "The Viewmaster," it basically, it relies on this metaphor of this idea of like, when you look through a Viewmaster, you click and you see different images. I remembered this experience of kind of looking through it and talking with other kids about what I had seen and what I saw maybe differing from what they saw, but kind of this idea of going along with it, because I didn't really know how to say like, "Well, I can't see that, you know, I don't see that the same way that you do." While that seemed like the best way to go through life when I was in kindergarten or first grade, as an adult, or like an emerging adult, you know, I sort of am aware enough of my disability at this point to recognize that you have a different perspective and, sort of making the effort to understand that, rather than just sort of hiding it away to be part of the group.

- I think we worked together editing and we did some kind of visual effects to emphasize the visual aspect of the theme. I was confident that he could win just because of Andrew's talent.

- Andrew got a call from a producer to say that he had won and that they were flying him out to Los Angeles to get a check and his award, which was pretty cool. I was really, really proud of Andrew in that moment.

- The beauty of perception is that a rainbow, isn't a rainbow, it's a gray mass, a symbol of hope, the work of God, a color spectrum, or even just a unicorn bridge, but most importantly, it is perceived through the heart of its beholder. When I applied to grad school, you know, I included that piece as sort of part of my body of work, because I do think it speaks to who I am as a person in a really strong way. In my day-to-day life right now, is I'm living with my mom and her husband in Indianapolis. I'm in grad school. I'm studying film. So I have maybe, I don't know, 20 plus hours of Zoom every week doing school. I think one of the big things that influenced me through working with Beth that I still use today, is knowing that there are people around me that I can ask for help. I mean, that's really big. I'm having to talk to a person who's doing color correction, who is of course used to working with somebody who has opinions about the color and having to go, like, "Do you agree that it might not look right?" And so kind of moving to the next echelon of having those conversations with professionals and kind of learning, like, "How do I dialogue with someone about how to, how to make a professional product?" and around that I'm not 100% comfortable in. And that was really rewarding to me. And it did feel like kind of a full circle in some ways for what I'd experienced before. Beth said to me, like, "I have a student right now, who's interested in filmmaking. Can I have them contact you? And I always say yes to those things. It's always weird to me, because I feel like I'm still learning how to express myself and deal with it, and things of that nature. I don't think of myself as like, you know, this person others would look too, but again, when there are so few people that are able to do it, it is important to be that person. And I think just learning more about the range of human experience makes you more empathetic and understanding. And it's just part of where I think we're headed as a culture in terms of understanding diversity.