

Announcer:

Welcome to the Eye on the Cure podcast, the podcast about winning the fight against retinal disease from the foundation, Fighting Blindness.

Ben Shaberman:

Welcome everyone to the Eye on the Cure podcast. I'm your host Ben Shaberman with the foundation, Fighting Blindness, and I'm very excited to have as my guest for this episode, James Rath, who, if I may say, is really making the most of his vision loss. He's established himself quite impressively as a professional storyteller and film filmmaker. And what caught my attention is his role as host, creator, and director for the travel documentary, Blind Spots. It's on a streaming service called Curiosity Stream. That's a documentary streaming service, and we're going to talk a lot about Blind Spots in a moment. I've seen many episodes. It's fun, it's informative, it's well-produced. And again, we'll talk about that in a moment.

But a little more on James. In addition to filmmaking, he's a podcaster and was an accessibility consultant at PlayStation, and his work is a blend of advocacy and artistry, and he continues to inspire and bridge gaps between the visually impaired community and the wider world. And that makes him a notable figure in both the creative and accessibility realms. And through his work and stories, he aims for his audience to see differently, and in Blind Spots, you definitely do that. So welcome to the podcast, James. It's great to have you on the show.

James Rath:

Thank you for having me. This is quite the introduction. Appreciate it.

Ben Shaberman:

Well, it's very well deserved. You've done a lot of great stuff in terms of filmmaking and accessibility, and one thing I learned early on in my role at the foundation, Fighting Blindness, is that everyone with a retinal disease has their own unique visual experience and challenges. Sometimes we talk about these diseases in a textbook fashion and generalize, but everybody's experience is their own unique situation. And James, you have a condition called ocular albinism, and that's genetic, but can you tell us more about the condition and how it affects your vision?

James Rath:

Yeah, so ocular albinism, it stems from just the overall albinism, which you may have seen in animals or you may have heard about some people having albinism or being an albino person, and that is having a lack of pigment or melanin in the skin and hair typically, but it's also in the eyes. There are a few different types of albinism, and the one I do have, like you mentioned, is ocular albinism, which means, yeah, I do have, if you look at me compared to my parents or some other folks in my family, lighter skin and lighter hair. But this does mainly impact my eyes in both vision and it causes another condition, which may not be the same for everyone, but it can. Just depends on how your DNA gets coded.

But for me, it causes my eyes to usually be this grayish, bluish, greenish color. My vision is quite blurry and very light sensitive. So everything I look at... Right now, I have a pair of prescription sunglasses on to help minimize... I put lights on, I'm very used to being on camera, but sometimes the lights can be a little much, so I got to protect them. But that can also cause other conditions to occur. And there's one that makes my eyes a little bit more noticeably visually impaired or at least noticeably different. And that is nystagmus, pretty much.

Ben Shaberman:

Right, and just to go a little deeper into the albinism, at the end of the day, the reason you have these issues is because of a lack of pigment in both your iris and then also in the back of your eye and your retina, and that leads to underdevelopment of some of the cells.

James Rath:

Yeah, correct. And that's why light will come into my eye more powerful than a typical person can handle light in their eye. It makes me a little bit more certainly sensitive to that change of light. Rapid going from a dark room to a light room or outside can definitely... I know anyone can say... It's like when you go outside of a movie theater and you get hit with the daytime, suddenly. Anyone's ever experienced that, but it feels like a similar feeling just going from one room to another.

Ben Shaberman:

I think many people have, or at least I experience that as well. It's very uncomfortable, the sudden brightness. But you mentioned nystagmus, and I want to talk about that a bit. Tell us what exactly nystagmus is.

James Rath:

Yeah, so nystagmus is definitely something I maybe even talk about a little bit more because it's visual and it's noticeable in my eyes. Some people may not even realize I have albinism. That's just the truth, because my skin isn't as light as some folks with different other types of albinism. But then my eyes are doing this constant song and dance, quite literally. They are rapidly involuntarily shaking. I know you've seen it probably last time we chatted and I take off my sunglasses, but you can notice my eyes are involuntarily moving back and forth, and that is nystagmus.

And that could come in many forms for other people. It could come in circular motions, vertical. For me, it's horizontal, and that can sometimes be noticeable from a visual standpoint for you as a person who has it. For me, that can occur. Typically, I have to reset my eyes. Anytime I'm not in control or I'm not focusing with them, they suddenly will start shaking and visually comes through into my vision where not only are things overexposed or a little blurry, but now they're shaking and they're getting more blurry and out of focus. And I'm even seeing this almost earthquake effect.

So just to maybe put into perspective, when I first lived in Los Angeles a few years back, it took me a little while to realize earthquakes were happening, because even when I was in the midst of a few of the first ones, my eyes were just shaking and things always just were moving, so I didn't even notice. It took until more the heavier 3.5 or higher magnitude to start to notice them.

Ben Shaberman:

That's pretty funny. I'm sure at the time, it wasn't funny, but... Your eyes have their own little earthquakes in a way.

James Rath:

Correct, yep.

Ben Shaberman:

And in your documentary series, you do show a simulation of what it's like to have nystagmus, and that looks challenging to have things in your visual field shaking on a pretty constant basis.

James Rath:

Yeah, definitely. If I'm sitting right now, it's mainly prominent when I'm moving, right, because my brain is trying to translate the motion happening, but then my eyes are also adding a filter on top of that. When I'm sitting, it's still a little noticeable. Things don't feel still, but I know I'm still, I know my center of balance. But yeah, it's like when I'm actually moving or if I take up an activity like surfing or something, the nystagmus can be a little bit of a distraction.

Ben Shaberman:

I'm sure. So obviously you've had ocular albinism your whole life. You were born with it. Tell us about what your journey has been like with this condition from when you were a little kid to growing up, moving into adolescence and young adulthood.

James Rath:

Yeah, it certainly wasn't... I'd say it was pretty smooth sailing the first 10 years. I didn't really have to think about it too much. And growing up, there was a camp for the blind that my brother and I attended, a day camp in the summertime. So we were with folks who were totally blind, who had different, more severe conditions at the time. So I was around folks who had all types of visual impairments growing up. But then it was during the school years where suddenly I'm the only one. Like many of the kids from the camp are back in school where whatever school you went to, you're probably the only one in your class. And that can certainly be a little weird and different. And at a point, you maybe get a little self-aware about it and start thinking about it. And for a long time, no one said anything to me. No one had an issue. I think people knew that my eyes were different, mine were different. I had bigger papers and dome magnifiers and was taken out of class once a week by a visual specialist in the Pennsylvania public school system to go just check in, check your IEP, do all that stuff.

But around maybe the first year of middle school, sixth grade, it's when some ignorant kids started deciding to, out of nowhere, people who I've talked to before but more maybe acquaintances, suddenly decided to start poking fun and saying some hurtful things to an 11-year-old with a visual impairment. And so with that, it definitely put me in a darker place when overthinking my eyes and then realizing, "Oh, I can't have a conversation with someone." It made me think that's the only thing people are noticing now are my eyes shaking. And I'll be honest, that's when the eye contact was a little hard to keep with me 'cause I started looking down when talking to people or trying to hide my eyes.

And it put me in a pretty dark place where, at a really young age, I was diagnosed with depression. I feel like no 11-year-old should be able to be diagnosed with depression, but unfortunately that's the reality we live in. And so I searched high and low to figure out something and my parents came across this experimental surgery that I did have, and it was during middle school where my eyes were slowly increasing with the acuity because of this experimental surgery, but it was still very experimental and risky for me and my brother. Now, my brother ended up getting it after me and his vision did increase in acuity. It wasn't good enough to drive, but we can now maybe read the chalkboard from the first row in class, if not maybe even a second row back. Whereas prior, I couldn't even see the chalkboard, even from the first row in the classroom.

Now, this pretty much went overnight though for me. My brother still kept the vision that he had gained from the experimental surgery, but when it came to me... And I guess for some context, my brother has the same condition. It's not as severe as me. You get to know him a little bit in my travel show. He appears in episode six. We talk about what that's like, growing up with two brothers with visual impairments. But going back to that, basically first year of high school in the fall, it was about a month into high school, I woke up one morning, my vision was just blurry again, and we were trying to figure

out what was going on, figured it was maybe just I was tired. But we went to the eye doctor in the week and they did confirm my vision was legally blind again. Whereas prior, it was still visually impaired, but it was actually out of the legally blind mar. It was about 20 over a hundred, if I'm not mistaken. Whereas now it was back to 20 over 300, just overnight.

And we discussed maybe doing the surgery again, but again, it was experimental. The research on nystagmus, they were afraid of maybe doing permanent damage to my eye muscles. It wasn't out of the realm of possibilities, and it was something to maybe keep discussing going into adulthood. But ultimately I decided I didn't want to do any permanent damage to my eyes if I could avoid it. And I'd say freshman year was really tough. Suddenly I was able to play basketball the year prior. It wasn't great, but there was some depth perception suddenly. So I was playing basketball, I played some football, and in the beginning of this year, I was playing pickleball, which it's like tennis. It's very small. And that was an achievement for me sports wise. And that was just gone overnight. I was terrible the next day when I tried playing.

So it made me open up to sports for the blind, goalball. And that's a whole other story. We talk a little bit about that in my travel show. We played some goalball. It's a lot of fun. But yeah, I had to come to terms with, all right, well I was born visually impaired, and everyone has their own idea when it comes to fate or destiny or what's meant to be. But I thought like, well, maybe this is how things are supposed to be for right now. And so I came to accept it. It took a little time. I'd say probably towards the end of my senior year of high school is when I really was fully accepting it. I was happy by my senior year.

And so I crawled out of this dark period in my life, this depression, and I even encountered that bully again from sixth grade. Funny enough, it was such a big high school. It was such a big middle school, too. I never encountered him once throughout the whole time that my eyes were... The nystagmus wasn't as noticeable 'cause it was slower and my vision had improved. But funny enough, I get into a class with him the second semester of that year after the vision goes and he tries pulling the same thing that he did in sixth grade. And I'm like, "You haven't grown up in three years?" I literally just confronted him. I'm like, "You haven't changed. And you're not going to, are you?" And all I said was, "Be better." And I don't know if that struck a nerve with him or not, but it was towards the end of the school year and I didn't care. I didn't talk to him again.

Funny enough, he keeps trying to add me on Facebook, just funny. In adulthood. I left that high school actually after that year. I went to a different one, smaller, something I wanted to do for my own education and to be able to use Apple technology in the classroom. That's a whole other fight I had with the public school.

Ben Shaberman:

Well, it's great that you rose out of your dark place and were able to stick up for yourself. And at the end of the day, we all know this as adults now, but often the bullies have more insecurity than the person they're bullying, and I think that came out for you. And what I think is ironic that you are somebody with chronic vision loss and yet you decided to move into filmmaking. And can you talk about how that happened and what movies you began to make?

James Rath:

Yeah, so going back even earlier, when I was about eight years old... I can tell the story pretty quickly, my origin story, if you will, the spider bit me in the back of the neck. So I just came across this camcorder. My parents filmed everything from birthdays to holidays. They weren't ever filmmakers themselves. So the only inspiration I really had, funny enough, was my dad's best friend growing up that he did make super eight films with, the one who was really passionate, was directing those little films in

the neighborhood, he went on to make movies. I called him uncle, Uncle Jody. And there's also his brother, Uncle John, who's worked on other great films like Narnia. But Uncle Jody worked on the Spider-Man films. And Spider-Man is a cult classic that any kid can gravitate towards.

So knowing that suddenly these Sam Raimi films that were coming out were like, "Oh, I never thought about it, but yeah, people are making these movies and there's a process to it." And I was young. I was about five, six, seven around the timeframe. And so now going to that, it's like I love storytelling and superheroes, but then suddenly I come across the camcorder, I turn it on without parents' permission. I don't know where they were. I was in the basement being a kid and getting into mischief, playing with dad's expensive camera. And I turned it on and suddenly I looked through the viewfinder and I was like, "What is that?" And so I'm toggling the little zoom dial and I'm zooming into the room and seeing these details and the textures and the furniture and the wall and just things I didn't know were there. And it was an eyeopening experience, quite literally. And just knowing that there's so much visually to the world around me.

And I'm not someone who's walking around like, "I need that in my own eye," but it brought a little perspective. It made me realize the camera's just this glorified magnifying glass and I have all these magnifiers from school and for homework, but this is just a big one, and I can hit record and capture a moment in time and story tell with it. And so everything just clicked. And I took the camera and neighborhood kids and I just started going off making films and parents weren't angry with me. They weren't mad. I took their expensive camera, I think my dad saw as like, "Oh, he's doing what I did when I was his age." But then I think something clicked more where it's like, "He really seems to enjoy this and he's able to see through that lens," and to bring the world into...

For just a little bit more context, I am a little nearsightedness, so there's a little bit more detail within a few inches of my eye. So that's where the viewfinder can come in handy. They got me a camcorder of my very own later on that Christmas, I think the following year after I really showed I was into it. And next thing you know, I created a YouTube channel at the age of 10, and my channel is about to be an adult next year. It's turned 17. So it's been a wild ride.

Ben Shaberman:

That's a great story. I didn't realize you started getting into filmmaking or video making at such a young age. But there was a particular moment where you achieved some celebrity, if you will, and can you talk about that?

James Rath:

Yeah, the channel, I was posting anything from my student films to things I was making on the side, like vlogs or tech things. So I was just playing with every genre and just experimenting, having fun. Eventually I start niching down a little bit more, answering questions about why my eyes are shaking and more of the "I know you're curious" kind of way. And we start building community, start building a little bit of number. And tech played a huge role in my life. So I talked about how tech made my education and getting into filmmaking accessible for me.

And that ends up leading to a short film I made called How Apple Saved My Life. And I get a little bit more detailed into the darker times of my life, from the era that we had previously talked about, but how technology really was one, not just a coping method, but almost like a savior for me, 'cause I was able to then do a creative outlet. And I think creativity and the arts are so important at a time when you're going through a dark period and you can't express how you feel correctly to people. And it was through video making that I was able to get that out.

And so it was Apple's computers that, back in the early 2000s, incorporated proper vision accessibility. But then Apple also made really good video editing software, both for consumer and professionals. And I started learning the professional one. So I tell that story and how Apple saved my life. And that makes its way, I think, around some Apple Store staff and some Mac blogs in the first couple of days it got released, and this is when I maybe had a smaller, maybe 2000 subscriber audience. I can't remember exactly. But I wasn't expecting it to get any more traction than being shared on a blog or two.

But within four days, it made its way all the way to Apple HQ. And the story goes that the VP of marketing at the time apparently showed it to Tim personally in his office. That's what I was told. And Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, ended up tweeting it out, and that was the first non-Apple-produced content that he ever shared on his Twitter. And since then, he's opened up to more. But it was my testimonial pretty much for the products that make my career possible. And next thing you know, you have CNN calling and doing interviews with outlets and staying in contact with Apple's PR over the course of the week. But then Global Accessibility Awareness Day, which is a day in tech where tech companies try to bring more awareness to the tech they produce and make it accessible. That was happening the following year.

And for Apple to Partake, they ended up inviting a few content creators, including myself to their headquarters, where we got to do a speaking panel on the same stage that Steve Jobs announced the original iPod, which I thought was like... As a tech geek myself, I'm sitting on that stage. That was really cool. But then the following day, I got to sit down with Tim Cook and do a one-on-one interview that I produced, [inaudible 00:21:30] him up with a mic and that felt weird. I'm like, this feels a little out of my element, but I'm setting up multiple cameras and I'm shooting my main camera on an iPhone, which he really liked, while the two DSLRs are getting our headshot. And I got to talk about Apple's history with accessibility and what they were moving into at the time. So this was 2017.

And I think at the time I was the first independent content creator, or among the first, to have that kind of sit down interview with Tim Cook. It wasn't part of a news outlet. It wasn't part of a group on YouTube who had their own tech company. So it was quite the achievement for me personally.

Ben Shaberman:

And that's such a great story. And what comes out in Blind Spots is how passionate you you've become about accessibility. And it sounds like your relationship with Apple, Apple products really spawned that. And your passion for accessibility is really infectious. Personally, I'm not affected with significant vision loss, so I understand accessibility and the need for it, and we at the foundation really focus on accessibility, but watching your show and hearing your story, my appreciation for it and interest in it is just taken to a whole nother level. And I'm sure that's part of the inspiration behind your documentary series, Blind Spots, but can you tell us a little more about how that came to be?

James Rath:

Yeah, certainly. So as I moved out to LA as an adult, deciding not to do film school and just figure out this YouTube thing on my own and what I can make of that, what I started doing was creating, just like the How Apple Saved My Life, I started just making content that shared my experiences and stories and filling in this almost like a niche for talking about why accessibility, or thinking with accessibility, is important on YouTube, through my experiences with tech, travel, gaming. And that's when I started getting these companies calling me be like, "Hey, can we get you in and do something?" And that's how I really monetized it. It wasn't ad revenue. I make very little from the videos I make, but it was really the opportunities that made it.

And eventually, what I wanted to do through all these opportunities to travel, it was like, I'd love to highlight this. So I came with this idea for a travel show hosted by a blind dude, and we've seen that on TV. I know he certainly hasn't. Sorry, that's a self-deprecating blind joke there. So I pitch it around and there was a little interest, but nothing bites. I'm not a celebrity name or anything by that time. I'm just a dude with a YouTube channel of maybe 15,000 followers at the time, and that's very microscopic in terms of people who come in with notoriety trying to pitch them stuff. But then one of the production companies that we talked to that was very interested gets something across on their desk for a Tommy Hilfiger ad and they then want to pitch me as a director for it. I'm like, I've never done that, but sure, okay. I've directed my own stuff. Those are short films, those are like little my own little docs.

We ended up getting it, but what it was was for Tommy Hilfiger's adaptive line of clothing, and it was between me and some very notable commercial directors. If I'm not mistaken, one of them did the Olympics. So to be 21 and just take that job was significant. This was just under a half million dollar campaign for Hilfiger's adaptive line of clothing. And we created some amazing branded films from it that ended up winning at Cannes Lions film... Or not film festival, sorry, the advertising portion of that. So the Festival of Creativity. But Cannes Lions. To win three awards for your commercial is a achievement, especially when it's your first one.

And to take it from there, a little time passes and during the pandemic there's a lack of travel, there's a lack of people seeing travel content. And we build this relationship with a streaming platform, Curiosity Stream, and we take the concept to them a couple years later. There's a Netflix budget and then there's a more niche streaming platform budget, but they knew that I created YouTube content and that we can do this with that style, but then with a doc crew and have this almost mix of a genre where it's that first person, I'm talking to the audience with my own camera and I'm like an onscreen camera guy, but then I also have a camera guy. And so you get to jump perspectives and I get to show you things in my POV and edit that to look like nystagmus. That's the story of how this whole opportunity for a travel show came to be.

Ben Shaberman:

And I have to say, when I reached out to you to do this interview and I had learned about Blind Spots, I thought, well, as an interviewer, I should really watch an episode or two of the show just to learn about it. And I really didn't have big expectations. I didn't really know you well, and of course, didn't know much about the series. But after an episode or two, I really got pulled in. It's really well produced. You have a really natural and effective way of connecting with the audience, at least with me as an audience member, I felt really drawn to your chill, self-deprecating, humorous personality. And it's just a lot of fun, very entertaining.

And at the beginning of each episode as you're explaining to people in the intro who you are, you say, "I was born blind, legally." I love that play on your legal blindness, but I think that sets the tone for the episodes. And you don't go over the top with drama or hyperbole. You're just a guy who has some vision issues traveling through these different locales. And I guess a question I have is, accessibility is a really important theme through all your destinations, whether you're in LA or London or Switzerland. You're really checking out the accessibility of these different places. Did you go in intending to do that?

James Rath:

Yeah, so with episodes, we always did a little research ahead of time, but there were surprises pretty much on every corner. There's things you just can't plan for when it comes to travel and whether it was running into a barrier or some inaccessibility for sure, we certainly have a couple of moments we make

light and brush it off, but there are some things that really surprise you when you actually get hands-on and experience it.

Japan is one of my favorite places and love those episodes because Japan is such an interesting place. We talked to a few blind folks from Japan, a few locals, and you feel it when you get there, especially when you have a disability. There is almost this... Everything feels accessible, to some extent. Different for wheelchair users for sure, as in anywhere, like New York. But when you have a white cane, this is coming from that perspective. The sidewalks in places like Tokyo, Osaka, even parts of Kyoto, which is a very traditional city, but there is some modernization to it, they all have infrastructure like Tenji blocks, but also these tactile lines that help guide you down the street and keep you in a straight line. And then you find those in train stations and that's just everywhere.

But then there is a cultural... Almost, from what I've been told from blind folks who are local, there is a little bit of a culture of shame if you are proud to have a disability or try to be, or at least just take pride in going out about your day and trying to contribute to society, but you happen to maybe look a little different. There's almost this a culture of everyone's just got to fit the mold or fit into a box. And there's a lot of folks and advocates who are trying to break that stereotype within their own society, but also reach out to an international audience, whether they're putting themselves out on YouTube or they are blind and they're break dancing on Instagram and get in contact by Justin Bieber's backup dancers to do the Paralympics closing ceremony.

We meet some incredible people, and I don't want to spoil much more of that, but you do a little research, but you definitely come across some surprises. I was in the train stations in Japan and I wasn't expecting it, but there are fully braille tactile maps of the train stations on the wall. So you just go up to it, the Tenji blocks and lines will lead you to it, and I'm suddenly feeling the whole train station and I'm like, I now know where I am 'cause I can feel that that pin feels a little different, but there's a map here and I now understand the infrastructure of the building I'm in. And it's wild to be able to map it out in your head when you can't see it.

Ben Shaberman:

It's ironic that Japan culturally may not embrace people with disabilities, but yet it's a very accessible place.

James Rath:

Yeah, it's...

Ben Shaberman:

Ironic.

James Rath:

Definitely is ironic indeed. Another eye pun there for you.

Ben Shaberman:

Yes, there you go. One thing I really enjoy about the series is you always take us to great places to eat lots of good food.

James Rath:

I like to eat.

Ben Shaberman:

Lots of good closeups on the food. It always makes me hungry. But I think one of the things that you really do a great job of are finding these really cool and interesting personalities, many of whom have vision loss and have done some really remarkable things. One of my favorites was when you were in London, you went to this art museum that was part of the Welcome Trust, I think and-

James Rath:

The Welcome... Sorry, the Welcome Gallery.

Ben Shaberman:

The Welcome Gallery, that's right. And you were talking with this line person, Carmen Papalia, he's a non-visual artist and he sounded really cool and everything. He does performance art and one of his things was he replaced his cane with a marching band, and I just laughed out loud. He's walking down the street with a marching band and I just thought that was so funny.

James Rath:

Brilliant guy, just super creative, interesting dude. And he's a traveling artist and he's a dad too. And his partner is with him and very supportive of what he does. He's such an inspiring guy with the work that he's doing and putting out there and the advocacy.

We were very lucky with so many of the guests that we had and some folks I'd love to have included. Scheduling conflicts and whatnot. So maybe there's opportunity in the future, but either way, we had an all-out cast, from visually impaired folks who are literally helping to make movies more accessible with workshops and training, to blind surfers who are literally the voice of Fox Sports. And going beyond that, it's like break-dancers and then Carmen, who's this incredible artist and... It's amazing.

I'm really glad I got to highlight so much of our community and the entrepreneurs who are blind cooks and making barbecue out of a food truck and happen to be visually impaired. Blind Man Barbecue, fantastic steak and food if you ever get a chance to go to Austin, Texas. Highly recommend it. And then there's musicians, of course. There's the stereotype that blind people can all play music. We can. And it's such a great skill and talent. When you have someone like D-Madness available to do an interview and play a set, you have to go. It was such an honor to be able to meet so many incredible people and learn so much from them and their experiences.

Ben Shaberman:

It's very humbling, whether you have vision loss or not. Some really great personalities. And I want to let our listeners know that again, the show, I think it's 10 episodes, is Blind Spots and it's on a service called Curiosity Stream. And I think that's curiositystream.com?

James Rath:

Correct, yeah. And there's an app. There's audio descriptions through their app and through the website as well. I will note there, you want to watch it through the app with audio descriptions just because you can access Curiosity Stream through Amazon Prime and Apple TV and maybe a few other services that have third party additional subscriptions, which is great. I love the implementation and the fact that I can search Amazon Prime and find my face, or the Apple TV library of movies and suddenly I'm coming up. I'm like, that's great. Just know though, the audio descriptions... And I tried to like, "Hey, is there a

way to get this over to the other platforms?" But if you do want to watch with the AD, just be sure you're watching it through Curiosity Stream's native app.

Ben Shaberman:

Right, good point. And I'm proud to say that the foundation, Fighting Blindness, provided support for the audio descriptions, and that's always fun to see the foundation logo at the beginning of each show.

James Rath:

Thank you so much for that.

Ben Shaberman:

On behalf of the foundation, we're very privileged and proud to be a part of your series. So to finish off here, I wanted to hear more about where you're headed. Because you're relatively young. Aren't you like 28 or 29, if I can reveal that?

James Rath:

Yeah, I'll be 28 next week, I think. 27.

Ben Shaberman:

Okay. Well happy birthday. This will probably air right around your birthday, but you've really accomplished a lot at a relatively young age, and despite having a visual challenge, you've really made the most of it. Do you have, and excuse the pun, a vision for where you're going over the next few or several years? Do you have a personal mission?

James Rath:

So I'm always open to opportunities and I think as you'll come to learn with my show, it's like I'm going to go with the flow kind of guy where if something were to arise, I'm like, "Let's just go do it." I can do with a little less planning. That's all right with me. And so ideally, what I envision personally is I'm very passionate about YouTube and creating short form content and long form on YouTube. So creating self-produced content is going to be my focus right now. And I'm always open to hosting opportunities and working with other companies and brands to create content together. And so my inbox is always open for things like that, but I'm going to be sharing... You'll get a same feeling from the show as you will in my YouTube content.

This past year, I've been able to put out a few things between... I blindfolded myself for 24 hours 'cause this is something that folks with sight wanted to try to emulate and figure out, and they realized they don't know how to do anything blind. I'm like, all right, I'll do the same challenge. But as someone who grew up learning about accessibility, I'm going to show you how I call my friends, how I get work done on Twitter, how I'm playing a video game blindfolded for 24 hours, how I take my white cane and go for a walk for two miles outside my home. And I'm sitting there recording. I got cameras running 24/7 in my home.

And then beyond that, I stayed in Japanese capsule hotels, almost like Space Age-feeling hotels for seven days straight while in Japan. And this was post-show. So if you still are craving a little bit of the show, bonus content that I put out when I extended my stay in Japan. And then I also climbed Mount Fuji. And there's a longer version of this film already out and incorporates gameplay, and so if you're into Pokemon specifically, I did something a little bit different where I played this game that takes place

in the game in Japan, and I'm playing at all these locations in Japan until I get to the final dungeon, which takes place on Japan's tallest mountain. And I'm playing the game and finishing it on the mountain in the off season in snowy, windy conditions. And it's wild.

But I encounter other hikers who are familiar with Pokemon, who are native Japanese people, and they're looking over my shoulder watching me play this final battle. And they're excited. There's a language barrier, but they know what's happening on the screen even in English. And it's so exciting. And Pokemon was a big thing for me as a child to get into gaming. So it was like a love letter to my childhood. And I'm releasing a different version of that whole thing that just focuses more so on the climb of Mount Fuji this coming week. So anyone who's not familiar with Pokemon doesn't need to be or care to be. If you just want to see a blind dude climbing Mountain Fuji, you'll get that as well.

Ben Shaberman:

Well, that's such a cool story. Thanks for sharing that. And James, thanks for taking so much time out of your day to talk about your experience growing up and all the great work you're doing for accessibility and the great documentary series you've launched. And again, you're young, I'm excited to see where you go in your career. And as a fellow movie geek, I'm even more interested in seeing what happens as you move forward. So thank you. It's great having you and I hope we can meet someday in person. It would be a real pleasure and privilege. So thank you.

James Rath:

Thank you, Ben. Appreciate it.

Ben Shaberman:

And listeners, thank you as always for joining Eye on the Cure. It's great to have you, and we look forward to having you back for the next episode. See you later.

Announcer:

This has been Eye on the Cure. To help us win the fight, please donate at foundationfightingblindness.org.