

## Registered blink with Claire Sisk

Chantal Boyle:

Welcome to the Sunflower Conversations. I'm Chantal. And joining me today is Claire Sisk. Claire is registered blind due to retinal dystrophy. Claire has also been awarded with the Social Media Impact Award from the RNIB for the work that she does to raise awareness of what daily life is like with sight loss. Welcome Claire, how are you today?

Claire Sisk:

I'm good. Thank you. How are you?

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah, I'm really well, thank you very much. So can we start off by explaining, if you wouldn't mind, what is retinal dystrophy?

Claire Sisk:

So retinal dystrophy is just a name given to a group of eye diseases where it affects the retina of the eye. With my condition, I've got several different diseases. They're not really sure what they are. So it's just a name that you can just say to people, "I've got retinal dystrophy."

Chantal Boyle:

So, it's an umbrella term for-

Claire Sisk:

Yeah, pretty much.

Chantal Boyle:

And when did your sight loss start?

Claire Sisk:

My sight loss started in 2009 after I had two strokes. And initially, it was my night vision that started going with my light receptors because of my rods and cones were damaged from my stroke. At the time, NASA had invented bionic rods and cones, and I was going through tests to see if that was going to be an option to have mine replaced. But these tests then determined that there were other diseases in my eyes. And by fixing my rods and cones, it wouldn't actually benefit me because of the other diseases impacting my eyes.

Chantal Boyle:

That's incredible. So NASA, as in the space agency?

Claire Sisk:

Yes. I know. How cool? I was like, "I'm up for that."

Chantal Boyle:

And you actually started those tests. Had they done anything to your eyes at that point?

Claire Sisk:

No. No. So I'd gone to a specialist hospital in Sussex, where I was living at the time, where I underwent the basic visual field tests that everyone has to do when they start saying about their eyesight. And they do that to determine whether you are safe to be driving. So they did those tests first. And from the research and the understanding that they knew of rods and cones being damaged, the response to the tests that I was given were very different. And that's when they were like, "Well, we feel that there's probably more wrong here." And then they referred me to Moorfields where they have a lot more specialist equipment and are able to look more in depth at each layer of your eye. And that's when Moorfields could see that there was other situations going on there that they just couldn't explain, but they could see that something wasn't right.

Chantal Boyle:

So Moorfield is the hospital in London, isn't it? The eye specialist hospital. Is that the number one hospital in the UK for eye care?

Claire Sisk:

It is as far as I know. Yeah. I think they have another branch in Leeds, but London is their main one. Yeah.

Chantal Boyle:

And you having stroke, it should be said to our audience, Claire is very young. How old were you when you had your strokes?

Claire Sisk:

Well, I was 29 when I had my strokes.

Chantal Boyle:

So you think perhaps without having those strokes, they may not have discovered the diseases that you subsequently found.

Claire Sisk:

I mean, there's the potential, because the rods and cones were what triggered it. I mean, the diseases were probably always there. I just wonder if the stroke just made it all happen a bit quicker. I know when you get ill, things change in your body and that can bring other things on. So possibly. But with what they've told me now, and when they've looked at all the layers of my eyes, they can tell that my peripheral vision isn't like a normal eye should be. And in fact, they've never seen a peripheral like it before.

Chantal Boyle:

So would you mind just stepping us through what that means, peripheral vision. What you can see now, and what you can't see.

Claire Sisk:

So with your eyes, when you look at something, you are looking directly at it. You're using your core vision. When something captures the corner of your eye, that's your peripheral vision. That's the vision that sees movement. And with my eyesight, the core vision is what started to go first. So when I looked directly at something, it's just not there. But I could see it if I looked up or down, left or right because I could see it out of my peripheral vision. And that's how it started. But now that has spread into the peripheral vision, and that I've got big black spots in the bit of vision I have. So the bulk of my vision is in the top left corner of my eyes. On both eyes, it's exactly the same. But I have fragmented pieces around. So I could be in the kitchen doing something, and drop something on the floor, but I might be able to see it because it's right in that spot that I've got a bit of vision. If it's not, then I'm on my hands and knees looking for it.

Claire Sisk:

It's like sometimes, if something's glistening in the sun, it will catch that bit of vision, but I'll try and look for it. But because I'm trying to use my core vision to look for it, I just can't see it. It's very complex to try and make people understand it, because my family, they always say, "Amazing, for a blind person, how you see crumbs." And it's just, if it's there, in that bit of vision that I've got, I'm like, "Mm."

Chantal Boyle:

And the rest of what you can see is just black?

Claire Sisk:

It's really bizarre. It's like it's all crumpled up. So if you were to smash a mirror, and in the bit where it smashed, it merges together. The best way I can describe it, if I was looking at your face, I could see your hair to your skin if you've got dark hair and light skin, or dark skin and light hair. But I can't see any features because your mouth would be up where your hairline is. So it's just all...

Chantal Boyle:

Oh, I see. Wow. That is really distorted, isn't it?

Claire Sisk:

Yeah. Yeah. So I can't see any finer detail. But if I get close enough and stare long enough to look at my child's face, if she lets me, I stare really long, and I moved my eyes and that. After about 10, 15 minutes, I can get an image of what she looks like in my head.

Chantal Boyle:

And that deterioration of your eyesight, was that rapid? Or has it been slow?

Claire Sisk:

It started in 2009. And in 2011, I noticed it was getting really bad because I was still allowed to drive at that point. And in 2011, I thought, "It's just not good enough for me." So in 2011, they took my driving license off of me. And then in 2013, they registered me sight impaired.

Then between 2013 and 2017, it was a slow progressive loss. And then one day, in 2017, I woke up and I thought, "Oh I can't see so well today." And I mean, I wasn't shocked because in 2013 they told me, by the age of 40, I'd potentially be fully blind. And I was 37 in 2017. So I was a bit like, "Okay, well they did say this might happen." And I thought, "This is the start of me going fully blind."

Claire Sisk:

So I luckily got an outpatients appointment at the ophthalmologist that day, and she registered me blind there and then, but told me that there's nothing that the local hospitals can do. They just don't have the equipment. So she got me another appointment at Moorfields. And from then, they just said, "Because we don't know what you've got, we can't say whether you will lose your eyesight completely, whether it will stay like this, whether it will slowly deteriorate. All we can do is see you every few months and just compare those images to see the progression of the deterioration."

Claire Sisk:

And that's basically what I've been doing. And that, from 2017 to when I last went, which was April, the core cells, there was a little bit of dark, which indicates the dead cells, and then a patch of lighter ones. They're now all black. So that whole core vision has completely gone. But with the peripheral vision that I have, because it's so... They've got no understanding of it, all they can do is just keep imaging it, and comparing it to last time, and scratching their heads, saying, "Okay, well, we'll see. We'll put it in the database and see if anyone knows anything." But still, as of yet, no one really knows anything about it.

Chantal Boyle:

How does that make you feel?

Claire Sisk:

I mean, in a way I'm... It's one of those things. It's like, "Well, do I want to know I'm going completely blind or not?" And the thing for me is, if I lose my eyesight completely, it isn't the end of the world because I have adapted to a life living in a sighted world as a sightless person, because the eyesight I have isn't great. I think the bit that bothers me the most is I can still hold my daughter's head in my hands, and look for a long time at her face, and take that in. That's the bit that upsets me, is the fact that I won't be able to do that. And I will no longer be able to see a tree against the sky. I can see those shapes, and those outlines, and those contrast of colors. And that's what helps me get through my day. So it does make me feel a little bit sad, but at the same time, it's like, "Well, it's just one of those things." I'm still here. My strokes could have killed me. So I'm grateful that I'm still here. All right, I've lost my eyesight for that, but I'm still here. And I'm grateful for that.

Chantal Boyle:

I guess when you put it like that, the alternative of what could have happened with the stroke... Before you had your stroke, would you have described yourself as a very resilient person?

Claire Sisk:

Absolutely not. My stroke and my sight loss have changed me completely. I was quite loud and obnoxious, and I was quite a rude person, I think, when I was younger. I just didn't really care about anyone else's feelings. It was all about me. And my stroke definitely changed that in me because I was then, all of a sudden, surrounded by people who were incredibly vulnerable. And I was also one of those vulnerable people thinking, "Hang on a minute. There is more to life than being an absolute horrible person." I mean, I wasn't horrible. I was still a kind and caring person, but I was just a bit gobby, I think, and just bolshy. And that really toned me down, and I just became a lot more aware of people's feelings. And I'm quite an abrupt person. I wouldn't think twice about saying, "Oh, what have you done with your hair today," to someone. I had no filter. And I've learned over the years that, actually, you don't know why someone is the way they are. It could be for many, many reasons. It just makes you think twice about what a person's situation might be and why you shouldn't judge them.

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah. Your disability has given you an ability, and empathy is definitely one of them.

Claire Sisk:

Absolutely.

Chantal Boyle:

So what has your journey been like with the deterioration of your eyesight, not being able to see very much, not being able to drive, with regard to work and socially?

Claire Sisk:

Well, when they took my license away from me, my daughter was 13. And I think that was the hardest thing, was saying to her, "I can't drive you to school anymore. We've got to learn how to use a bus." And it impacted her social life. And that was the hardest for me, because at the age of 13, you're establishing your friend group. Your parents' restrictions are a little bit less on you. I allowed us to go into town. I mean, she was always allowed to go to sleepovers, but I was now relying on other parents to drop her back, or my parents to chauffeur her around. And she also would have to sacrifice her time to help me. So I was a single mom and every other weekend she would go and visit her dad. So on the weekends that she was with me, she would be able to see her friends, say, on the Saturday. But on the Sunday, she'd have to be with me to help me go food shopping. And I get really emotional about this because I just look at her now, because she's nearly 22, and I just think what an amazing little girl she was because she never moaned ever.

Chantal Boyle:

Oh, bless.

Claire Sisk:

And we would walk around town, and we'd be crossing the road, and she would take my hand. At the age of 13, she was holding her mum's hand. And I just remember saying to her,

"You don't need to hold my hand, darling. It's fine." And she's like, "You're my mum and I want you to be safe." And I just remember thinking, "You are just the most beautiful little soul ever," because most kids would just be embarrassed, "What if my friends see me holding my mom's hand?" But she just didn't care. She just wanted to know that I was safe and I was okay. And she actually said to me, not that long ago, she said, "I used to love our weekends together." We used to spend so much time together doing just stuff like food shopping or going around town. And she's like, "But I absolutely loved it." And it just made me so happy because I, for such a long time, have felt like I was such a burden on her life when actually I wasn't. She was enjoying that time we had together. So that was the hardest-

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah, you had those magic moments.

Claire Sisk:

Yeah. And they were the hardest parts. And then with work, my work, to start with, I was really scared of telling them. I had been working there for 10 years when this started. And I was really scared of telling them. And I hid it for quite some time because I wasn't aware of the Equality Act at the time. So I didn't know that I would be a bit protected and I wasn't aware of the Disability Discrimination Act. So obviously, my work knew I'd had the stroke, because I'd been in hospital for a number of weeks. And I then had another one six months later. And then, when I went back to work, I did a phased return and I had in depth occupational health appointments, where again, I didn't really tell them because I was worried.

Claire Sisk:

And then in 2013, when they took my driving license away from me, I thought, "God, I'm not going to be able to hide this, because now I'm going to be getting public transport. I've got to get my daughter to school. The timings aren't going to work and stuff. I'm going to have to say something." So I did. I told my boss that my eyesight had started to go. And it was a really hard conversation for me to have, because all I kept thinking is, "They're going to sack me. They're going to find..." I mean, I know they can't sack you for being blind, but I just thought, "They're going to find a reason to get rid of me." But my boss was absolutely amazing. I could not have faulted her one bit. She was just an absolute angel and she did everything she could to help and support me.

Claire Sisk:

And she would even go off and do her own investigation on equipment. Like, "Oh, I found this." And it was called an Isle of View, and it was really expensive. I think they were over £1,000, because I would struggle in board meetings to see the projection. And she's like, "Oh, you could hold it up if you wanted to. It might be a bit embarrassing, so don't feel you have to." And she was lovely. And then she left, and I got a new manager, and I'd worked with him the whole time. And he, again, was absolutely amazing. Honest to God, I could not fault them. The support they gave me, when every time, Access to Work came in and made recommendations, they were like, "Yep. You just get whatever you need to be able to do your job." They made all the reasonable adjustments I could have asked for. Even though

sometimes I knew it wouldn't work for them, they agreed to it. They were incredible. But sadly, because of the pandemic, I got made redundant in December, 2021. And since then, I haven't been able to find a job. In June 20... Hang on. What year are we in now?

Chantal Boyle:

2022.

Claire Sisk:

Okay. So no, it was December, 2020, because in June, 2021, I'd applied for over 250 jobs.

Chantal Boyle:

Wow.

Claire Sisk:

And not one single company got back to me with an interview. Now I know many people lost their jobs because of the pandemic, and you had more people going for roles, but to go for that many and not get an interview...

Chantal Boyle:

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Claire Sisk:

No. And the reason I tick it-

Chantal Boyle:

So, are you going to stop ticking it now?

Claire Sisk:

Well, the reason I ticked it is because it's that anxiety and that kind of stress that, if you do get an interview, I'm going to rock up with my white cane and be like, "Surprise. I'm blind." And it's that that I can't deal with. And that's why I tick the box. But I feel, "Well, they're not even going to look at me if I tick it. So if I don't tick it, at least they're going to look at me." But it is that whole awkwardness of them being like, "Right. Well, just so you know, I'm blind." I mean, I did register with a recruitment agency. And multiple times, they called me to offer me a job and it was office admin. It was last minute. They'd call me Friday to be, "Oh, you've got to start Monday."

Claire Sisk:

And every single time I'm like, "Okay, but you do remember I'm blind, don't you? And I need visual aids to help me be able to do that job. That's not going to be in place by Monday. This is only a six week contract. By the time you get Access to Work involved, the contract's going to be over." And they're like, "Oh, okay, we'll get back to you." And they never do.

And it's just so destroying and disheartening because everyone just automatically thinks all the things you can't do because you're blind. "Oh, you can't possibly do data input." That was what my career was. I did data input. Yes, I can't read, but I have equipment to help me do it.

Chantal Boyle:

Yes. Yeah. And if only employers would broaden their minds and their scope-

Claire Sisk:

[inaudible 00:19:51].

Chantal Boyle:

... because they're just missing out on such a pool of talent, aren't they?

Claire Sisk:

They really are. And what I think they fail to realize is, when you have a disability, you are forced to think outside the box. Every day I have to make adaptations to the way I do things. I can't do it the normal way because I can't see it. And a lot of the time, things and companies are stale because everyone just does it this way, because, "That's the way it's always been done. And we can't think of a new way of doing it." Bring us in because we'll think of a new way of doing it because we can't do it the way you are doing it. And I had this in my old job. There were many things that we would do. And then all of a sudden I'm like, "Well, I can't do it that way. So I'm going to do it this way because it's easier for me." And then people are like, "Well, that would be really easy for me. So I'm going to do it that way."

Chantal Boyle:

That's such a good point. That's such a good point. And that sentiment of, "Oh we've always done it like this. Why would we want to change it?" And then you've got lots of people who all think the same and do things the same way, so you don't get that diversity of thinking.

Claire Sisk:

Absolutely. And the good thing is, as well, a lot of the time, the way we do it, it makes it quicker because we have to... Everything we do takes so long, so we always try to find a more efficient and effective way of doing it. Any way that I could make my life easier, I would. And even if it meant me spending hours and hours researching, and Googling, and emailing people in IT roles or who are wizzes at Excel, I'll just be like, "There must be a way that I can do this." And they're like, "Yeah, just do this." And then boom, I've done it. And then, I remember my team were being like, "Wow, that's amazing. I'm going to do that that way." And in turn, it actually turned out that this specific task we were doing, that we would spend a whole day doing every single week, we could do in two hours.

Chantal Boyle:

Wow. Wow. I mean, that is a productivity saving, isn't it?



Claire Sisk:

Absolutely.

Chantal Boyle:

I mean, think about the man hours for the people involved in that particular task, and then what you are able to also then achieve with the time saved, it's a no brainer.

Claire Sisk:

Yeah. But just, no one will give us that chance to say, "Well look, I might be blind, but I can do it." Or, "I can't fly plane and I can't drive a car, but I can pretty much do anything else."

Chantal Boyle:

You need to set up a recruitment agency.

Claire Sisk:

I know, I know.

Chantal Boyle:

So what technology do you use? We are recording this via Zoom. How have you enabled yourself to be able to connect to this Zoom meeting, for example?

Claire Sisk:

So I've used my iPad. And me personally, I find Apple products amazing when it comes to accessibility. I only use the visual accessibility settings, but there are accessibility settings for people who are hearing impaired. I use something called VoiceOver on my iPad. And that will basically narrate the whole screen to me. From the moment I turn my iPad on, and I put in my PIN code, and I swipe right, and it will read out number one, number two, number three. And then I just double tap from the number that I need it to enter. And that is basically how voiceover works. On a laptop, I use something called Jaws, which again works in the same way. Anything you put your cursor over, it is reading it out to you. Whilst I was employed, I used two other programs. One called SuperNova and one called Dolphin. They both do exactly the same. I also use Speech to Text when I'm typing something. I can use a keyboard, because as I'm pressing the keys, it's reading the letters back to me. I'm just lazy and I like to do things quickly. So Speech to Text is better.

Chantal Boyle:

Things in your home, how do you navigate your home?

Claire Sisk:

So I'm quite house proud. Even though I can't see it, I'm quite house proud. So I don't like all grab rails and special equipment like that. So I do just suffer, but there are things that I do need. So on the cooker, microwave, washing machine, I have bumper dots. So I know, on my cooker, I mean, let's face it, regardless of what the packaging says, we all just cook it 180 degrees.

Chantal Boyle:

20 minutes.

Claire Sisk:

So I've got a bumper dot on 180. On the microwave, all the odd numbers have got a bumper dot on it so I know where to turn the dial. The washing machine, I only ever use the eco wash or the bed and bath one. They've got two different bumper dots so I know the dome one is the eco, and the more square one is for bed and bath. And on our fridge, where we've got the ice dispensers, I've got bumper dots, because that's touch and I don't know where those buttons are, and I just have to memorize. It goes from big to small. So it's cube, slush, water. On the treadmill, we've got bumper dots. On our TV, we just got a new one because our old one, the audio description started to not work. So our new TV actually has complete voiceover on it.

Chantal Boyle:

Okay, how does that work?

Claire Sisk:

It's basically the same way as my iPhone and my iPad. So you can actually speak into remote and say, "Open Netflix," because Netflix, there's a lot more audio description stuff on there. And then, as you're scrolling through, it is rating everything to you. So I was watching something called Staircase, and it would tell me, "You're on episode four, season two." I think I was on season one. And then it'll read the synopsis as well to you. And then when you press the button, it'll say whether you're on the back button, whether you're on the home button, and stuff like that. So it is really, really useful.

Chantal Boyle:

So you are comfortable within your own environment. You've got everything set up how you need it. You are listening to the Sunflower Conversations with Chantal. To share your story and find out more information, details are in the show notes. And let's talk about your videos. Claire has over 17,000 followers on her Instagram account, which is called cansecantsee. And your videos are incredible. I really enjoyed watching them. Do you want to tell us what made you start to do that? Were you into making videos before your sight loss?

Claire Sisk:

I mean, I started just over a year ago after an incident in the supermarket. So I'm very independent. I like to try and do things for myself, and push my own boundaries, and I will go out on my own. And I'd gone to the supermarket. My boyfriend had driven me there, but he was sat in the car. I can't remember what I was making, but I was in the herbs and spices aisle. And I use an app called Seeing AI. And basically, you use your camera, and whatever it picks up, it will read it to you. So it's reading me all the herbs and spices. And this lady approaches me and she said to me, "Can I help you with anything?" I had my white cane with me, Rick The Stick. And I said, "No, no, I'm good." I said, "I use this app and it helps me."

Claire Sisk:

And she was absolutely fascinated. And she was like, "Do you mind if I watch? It's just so interesting." And we were having this whole conversation about how I use the app to help me. And then it got onto, "How would you cook?" And it just led on. I walked away thinking, "Oh my God, how amazing that someone wanted to know, and learn, and understand about blind life." And I felt really happy. I was just like, "I've educated someone. Go me." Then I get to the till, and I get my phone out to text my boyfriend to say, "I'm just paying." And I get my phone out. And I'm just about to do my dictation. And the man in front says to me, "Well, you are not blind if you're able to use mobile phone." What?

Chantal Boyle:

Why would somebody make it up, for a start? And what was going through his head to even-

Claire Sisk:

I know, and I was just like-

Chantal Boyle:

So rude.

Claire Sisk:

And then, this feeling came over me. I thought, "Gosh, if this random person thinks that, because I'm using a phone, I'm not blind, what do my friends, and family, and my work colleagues think?" Are blind people just meant to sit at home and do nothing? And I was going to the shop, and I was walking there, and I filmed myself trying to cross the road, because I wanted people to understand that there are some things you can do, but there are also some things you can't do confidently. And you've just got hope for the best. That's my motto. And I filmed myself crossing the road, and I posted it to my own personal Facebook page. And all my friends were like, "Oh my God, this is amazing. You you should let us share this." And I was a bit reluctant because I'm not someone who is like, "Look at me everyone. I'm on social media." I'm quite shy. Probably doesn't come across like that. So I did. I posted it and I was really surprised by the reaction. And that then led to people putting comments, like, "If an electric car was coming, what would you do?" And then I would respond to those comments, which would then lead to more comments. And it just grew from there.

Chantal Boyle:

I notice that you do take the time to respond to people's comments on your posts. And from what I can see, is that your audience are really grateful for what you are sharing with everyone. And they ask you, "What are you using here? And what do you do for that?" And the fact that you're taking the time to educate others and support other people who have sight loss, and people that don't have sight loss and want to understand more. Do you know what the main wave of your audience are, sector wise? Is it people who have got site loss, who are registered blind, or is it not?

Claire Sisk:

The analytics aren't great on Instagram. It will tell me a rough age range. From interacting with the comments, I would say quite a small percent of my followers are blind. Now, it's only been within the last few months that Instagram and Facebook have come a lot more accessible because, obviously, Instagram is a very visual app. It's all about posting photos. Well, it started as all about posting photos. And if you can't see what that photo is, what's the point in using it? But they have this function now called Control Alt, where you can put a description of that photo hidden in the background, so that when a voiceover is being used, whatever you've captioned that photo as, it will read it out to me without it being in the text body of your picture, which is really great. It doesn't do that on videos, but a lot of people who have sight loss, be it visually impaired or blind, will put a video description of what is happening in that video. Depending what it's about will depend on how much information I fill.

Chantal Boyle:

One of your videos I particularly enjoyed was when you apply your makeup. Claire's face is perfectly and beautifully made up. I mean, it's stunning. So can you talk us through, people who haven't had the opportunity to see your video yet, how you put a video like that together?

Claire Sisk:

So when I started losing my eyesight, one of the things that I was worried about was doing makeup. I've loved makeup my whole life, and I've always worn it, and I thought, "Being blind is not going to stop me wearing makeup and being me." You kind of lose yourself a bit when you have obstacles that you've got to overcome. And sight loss wasn't going to change that about me. So as the sight loss deteriorated, I would practice with my eyes closed, and then open them to see what that looked like, and remember the techniques that I used, how it felt on my fingers, how it would feel on my face, on the sponge, on the brush. Whatever I was using, I would just really absorb that feeling, like the sweeping motion with a brush. It's just like, "Okay, what does that feel like?" And do it every day, because it's now at the stage where I don't use a mirror because I can't see well enough.

Claire Sisk:

I mean, if I really tried, I could probably do my eyebrows in a mirror. But I'm lazy, so I don't. And so to do my makeup, it is all done by feel. And I do use a few little tricks to help me, like when it comes to contour, I don't know if I'm drawing it in a straight line. So I use a makeup brush, and I'll put from the corner of my mouth to the top of my ear, and I'll draw my contour, and I'll blend, and blend, and blend more because you can never blend enough. And when I do my eye makeup, I use surgical tape under my eye that goes up to my eyebrow so that I know my eyeshadow's not all over my face. I use eyelash curls to help me put mascara on. And I just listen and feel for those textures to help do it.

Claire Sisk:

And it's probably the biggest compliment I get of all is, "Who does your makeup for you?" And I'm like, "Well, I do it. Thank you very much." And people just think, "Well, you're blind. So you can't do that." I mean, makeup isn't very accessible at all, but there are a few

products that I found that are accidentally accessible. I spoke about this in one of my videos. And I've always used Benefit makeup, and their blushes all have a different scent to them. So I know, just by sniffing, what blusher I'm putting on. And I'll buy makeup pallets that are three or four at the most, because I have to remember what colors are in those pallets and what order they go in. But I just stick to what I know suits me, because I don't know, if I go and put orange on, whether that's going to suit me. I'd have to rely on someone else to tell me.

**Chantal Boyle:**

Yeah. So the beauty brands need to get in touch with you, don't they? So that you can give them some advice on how to make their products accessible.

**Claire Sisk:**

It would be good. And I did do an interview for a magazine talking about them. And so the Benefit mascaras, they all have a different lid and the texture's different. So I know the difference of that. The Charlotte Tilbury pressed powders are all different shapes and have different textures on the top. So you can learn all that. But yeah, definitely more could be done in the beauty industry to make it more accessible.

**Chantal Boyle:**

So let me ask you about the Sunflower. Where do you wear the Sunflower and why?

**Claire Sisk:**

So with my disability, I use my white cane, Rick The Stick. And to me, that is my aid and people can see that. When I travel, mainly aircraft travel, I will wear my sunflower lanyard, because my stick is folded up and put in the seat pocket in front of me. So when the crew walk past, or other passengers, they know that I have a disability. Most of the time, when I fly, the crew are aware that I'm blind because I mention it. And you board first, so they all can see you boarding with your white cane, but there's a lot of passengers on a flight. They're not going to remember just me. So I will wear it for that purpose.

**Claire Sisk:**

And in the airport, because a lot of the time, my daughter and I do travel a lot, I've found that airport security, a lot of the time in America, they're not looking at you as a person. I guess they're trained to just look at everything because of security. And it became quite an obstacle going through security without my cane and telling every single person, "I'm blind." And I'm like, "There's my white cane." And so to wear that, it just made them aware, and they obviously treated me a little bit better than what they would've done if I wasn't wearing it, and were more understanding because they can be quite rude sometimes.

**Chantal Boyle:**

Well, from that, it's been a long time since I've been to America. But what I do remember is how terrifying they are at security and very aggressive, treat everybody as if they're a major criminal. And it's a really daunting and unpleasant experience.

Claire Sisk:

Absolutely. And they stand there and they're like, "Come, come." And I'm just stood there, because I can't see them doing that. "Mum, they're waving you through." And then I have to say, "I'm sorry, I can't see you because I'm blind." Well, they don't know that. I've got nothing on me to say I'm blind. So by wearing the Sunflower lanyard, at least they know that there is something there, and that they will treat you a little bit more respectfully. I mean, not all people are like that. I have had the odd few. And the way they manhandle you as well, it's just a bit, "Come on."

Chantal Boyle:

Yeah. That must be much more intimidating when you can't see when hands are being put on you well.

Claire Sisk:

Yeah, and they just grab you. You're like, "Well, who are you grabbing me?"

Chantal Boyle:

Yes. Well, I'm pleased to hear that the Sunflower supports you on your trips. Thank you so much for our time together. I actually could have spoken to you for hours, and hours, and hours, to be honest, Claire. You're lovely to talk to. And I've just learned a lot about what living with sight loss is like. And I saw a post where somebody had put something, a comment on one of your posts. And they said, "What your posts demonstrate is we are not so much restricted by our condition or ability, but by a lack of willingness to try." And I thought that really was a fantastic response to your videos and you embody that.

Claire Sisk:

Thank you.

Chantal Boyle:

And I really wish you luck with getting that job. Anybody's listening to this, do get in touch with Claire because she has an awful lot to offer, and she'll be able to increase your productivity. And yeah, so good luck for the future. Please do stay in touch with us.

Claire Sisk:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And thank you.

Chantal Boyle:

Well, welcome to The Sunflower Conversations. I'm Chantal and joining me today on The Sunflower Conversations is my colleague Sandee Facy.

**Speaker 3:**

If you would like to share your Sunflower story or conversation with us email [conversations@hiddendisabilitiesstore.com](mailto:conversations@hiddendisabilitiesstore.com). Find out more about us or listen to this recording again by checking out our insights page at [hiddendisabilitiesstore.com](https://hiddendisabilitiesstore.com). You can also find us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn. Please help, have patience and show kindness to others and join us again soon. Making the invisible, visible with the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower.