**A Conversation with Haben Girma Transcript**

**Narrator:**

Thank you for connecting online with us for the AFB Virtual Leadership Conference 2020 and this session titled "A Conversation with Haben Girma. "Now, a welcome message from Kirk Adams, Ph.D., President and CEO, AFB, and Roslyn Adams, Spouse and AFB Ambassador.

**Dr. Adams:**

Hello, I am Kirk Adams. I am President and CEO of the American Foundation for the Blind.

**Mrs. Adams:**

My name is Ros Adams, I’m married to Kirk and I’m a longtime supporter of AFB.

**Dr. Adams:**

And we thank you all for joining us from your living rooms and home offices across the country. We are in our apartment here in Arlington, Virginia, and we welcome you to our Virtual AFB Leadership Conference. Now our Leadership Conference is really the highlight of our year, we bring hundreds of people together, all dedicated, passionate individuals, who are all committed to creating a world of no limits for people who are blind. This year, for obvious reasons, we’re bringing you our conference virtually.

**Mrs. Adams:**

We’re really excited that you’re joining us, and as an educator I’m particularly happy about the fact that we’re using technology to help us stay connected at this time.

**Dr. Adams:**

We wouldn’t be able to present you with this virtual conference without the help of our supporters and partners and friends. I want to thank Bridge Multimedia for lending a hand in creating this virtual content, and our sponsors who make it possible for us to provide this content free of charge for anyone who could find it useful. Please do share!

**Mrs. Adams:**

So I just want to stress that this is our opportunity to continue to learn from each other. So do enjoy the session and please take the time to visit us online at AFB.org/VirtualAFBLC.

**Dr. Adams:**

Hello. This is Kirk Adams, the president and CEO of the American Foundation for the Blind. And I have the honor and privilege to have some time to have a conversation with our friend Haben Girma. Haben is a bestselling author, she is a graduate of Harvard Law School, she's a disability advocate, she was named a White House Champion of Change. And the last time we spoke, we were in her hometown, Oakland, California for the AFB Leadership Conference. And we were awarding Haben the Helen Keller Personal Achievement Award. And we had a nice conversation before the ceremony, and I, I recall typing on a Bluetooth QWERTY keyboard and Haben reading on a braille display and responding to me verbally. So I'd, I'd love to know how we are going to be communicating today, Haben.

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=WF4uZG8mkz5FwK92vPBoOGoAIstK2QLTdWtEGI7y7LImBnA0TnWuTybq8RfjjexBJjextX7aT-TDZp3QErEJ3yHmFAA&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=311.46)

Great question, Kirk. And for communication, I'm using a braille computer and keyboard. I'm doing this because I'm Deafblind. I'm not able to hear what Kirk is saying. Growing up as a Deafblind person in a sighted, hearing world, it was really frustrating to miss out on information. Kids want to make friends, kids want to watch TV, have conversations. And most of that is in visual or audio format. And when I tried going into blind spaces, they were always telling me, "listen to this, listen to that." Later, when I was older, I started to focus more on my strengths and ask myself, what am I really good at? And how can I tap into that to create a communication system that would make it easier to access conversations, make friends?

One of my strengths is my sense of touch. I'm a strong braille reader. And when a new braille computer came out that supported Bluetooth, that ignited the idea – this was back in 2010 - to pair the BrailleNote with an external keyboard. And by doing that, I was able to immediately connect with people: blind people, sighted people, people who can type. And if someone can't type, we can have an interpreter typing for them. So for this conversation with Kirk, because Kirk is in another room, we have Gordon in the same room as me, typing on a wireless keyboard. And I'm reading on a braille computer, I'm holding it up. So it's the BrailleNote Apex for those of you who know assistive tech. There's a line of braille on the bottom and I run my fingers over the dots to feel the letters. So that's what I know what Kirk is saying. All right, back to you, Kirk.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=rh3Jtx1qE3DjcH8_TlvRD11mlfirvlFDWf7FzRezb_7zcCnhlXslrxq2Jbap2A9vzBF1WcMaBa3fwpTuMfE5CdCTw1M&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=454.22)

Terrific. So Haben, I just finished reading your memoirs last Friday and I downloaded a braille-ready file from Bookshare. And I read your memoirs on a braille tablet: a BrailleSense Polaris. So we're both using braille devices a lot in our lives. We're both strong braille readers. Bra-- braille is beautiful. I wanted to ask you, when I read your memoirs, I was struck by the incredible level of access you had as a student. And your, your student days, especially at Lewis and Clark College in Portland. I went to the Oregon State School for the Blind as a child, so I lived near there. I went to another liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest, Whitman College in Walla, Walla. And I started college in 1979, so it was before the ADA. And I had no access to Braille. I'd been used to reading all my textbooks in braille through high school.

So I, it was very much sink or swim. I was able to get some books recorded by volunteers from Recording for the Blind. I had some money from the Commission for the Blind to hire readers. But I was, I was quite frankly, I was very envious when I read about the Disabled Student Services offices at Lewis and Clark and the access you had to braille. So with the anniversary of the ADA just a couple of weeks away, I would love for you to give your personal reflections on the importance of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the personal impact on your life, how meaningful the ADA is for all people with disabilities.

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=hSrmYCOIyB2SV7n89RZZlAKdAL3dwIY1V7uAsOXkh1ARthVLZZaYJarCfsEHxvWYQSLIac02LD9rSY_h85cpxF307ks&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=738.92)

Kirk, you made a really good point. I had incredible access to braille when I was growing up. It was unusual. So many instructors tell their blind students, "Just listen to the story. You don't need to read braille; just use screen readers." Screen readers are helpful, but it's difficult to develop literacy, to learn how words are spelled, how punctuation is used if you don't have direct access to written texts. So I was blessed to have teachers who believed in braille and I was taught braille early on. When they were teaching me braille, I could see enough to read large print and I could read print using magnification, CCTVs.

But my teachers still believed that braille is a useful tool for blind students, especially for students whose vision was deteriorating. Which happened for me; my vision grew worse over time. So in first grade, I could read large print. But several years later, I was, I depended fully on braille rather than trying to use CCTVs and magnification. So we should help teachers teach blind students braille. Then when they grow up, they can have the choice to just use screen readers or use braille and screen readers.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=iRtP6HqdYkMZgBYXHJN23ciJc54EzKxTbiH3dYWqonSgAWo_yXLCc1SbOfL-AClQx5RBqcU7HgcZguCJ7kbm_14VgL4&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=847.4)

Haben. I use braille from morning till night. I have a slate and stylus in my briefcase. I have a couple of Perkins Braillers here in the apartment, one on my desk at work. I have the braille tablet, I have an 80 character braille display for my PC. And there're stacks of braille magazines and books wherever I've lived. And I was talking to my mother over the weekend. My mom and I were reminiscing about, we lived in Silverton, Oregon, and she would drive me into Salem to the braille library, and I would cruise through the stacks for hours and fill the back of that station wagon with braille books. And I had a braille room with bookshelves where I could store all my braille. So you, you and I are kindred spirits in that respect.

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=hSrmYCOIyB2SV7n89RZZlAKdAL3dwIY1V7uAsOXkh1ARthVLZZaYJarCfsEHxvWYQSLIac02LD9rSY_h85cpxF307ks&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=738.92)

I love hardcopy braille books. They're hard to come by, but there's a special joy of being able to put a physical book in your lap and open it and run your hands through it.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=ef0v36kdzusmk-bSHUFZjBVcuTvYHt6AJEo66anFbHzgGrOUuH2l_V2942LGef0Ntw5KjA3N5NDcxNSOoWtnpiRuiNQ&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=940.57)

Absolutely, absolutely. And then, as I was, I was mentioning earlier when I read your memoirs about your college experience, or your undergrad experience, at Lewis and Clark and the fabulous access you had to braille materials for your education. And my, my experience was quite different when I went to Whitman College. There was no disabled student services at all. So I started my undergrad before the ADA and I... think you started your postgrad, your graduate work, your undergraduate work, and then on, onto law school after the ADA. So I was just wondering your, your reflections and thoughts on the importance of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=Xn4yRg71hzRULZF5vMZJJzpAWW1yTnURa6IhXcHXE3AynKudTGjuMNfSWhUmUrLlX-dxKXmJ7UBM99HDQgr9Io8qXCo&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=999.06)

The ADA helped move our culture forward. There were laws before that. There was the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which was focused on K through 12. Then there was also Section 504, requiring all entities (including schools) receiving federal funding to make sure that programs were accessible to blind students. So colleges had legal obligations before the ADA. But the ADA's passage in 1990 further drove home the message that it's not right to have separate services and deny access to disabled students. Disabled students should have full access.

It's still a problem even after the ADA. When I was looking for colleges to attend, one school told me, "We're very sorry, but we don't have a braille embosser. We're not sure how we will make your books available to you. We don't know if we'll be able to make them available on time. You'll be on your own. You know, you should really reconsider going to college." That was one school. Then the other school, the school I went to was Lewis and Clark. And they told me, "We don't have a braille embosser, but we'll get one. We'll learn how to do it over the summer. We'll have a reading specialist come and learn how to produce braille, so we can get your books to you on time."

And they did. They made it a priority, they worked directly with the professors to make sure my books, quizzes, all written material was available in braille. And that meant I could just focus on being a student rather than trying to be a student and make my materials accessible and constantly coordinate with professors and make sure they get materials to the disabled students office on time. That was amazing. I had a lot of access in college. There's still many colleges after the ADA that don't provide full access to blind students, and that's not fair. That needs to stop. Schools need to meet their legal obligations.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=ar-i9B_dWUiiZ4r_jeGrWIdTpbPqftQ7RAxCVvqZlzJ98Sp_Kr4Z50fPaAwvTDAO4qYHJfgm2LechBVsKdFq8vBMj7o&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1159.71)

Haben, that makes me think of advocacy and self-advocacy. I think you had stronger self-advocacy skills than I did as an 18 year old. I hadn’t learned how to advocate for myself. After I left the School for the Blind after third grade, I was always the only blind student in all the, all the schools I attended. And as I look back, stronger self-advocacy skills would have served me well. And when I went to graduate school for the first time, I earned a master's degree at Seattle University in Not for Profit Leadership. And that was 15 years after I graduated from Whitman.

And at that point I'd learned about advocacy. And I was able to say that I will enter this program only if I can have all of my materials in braille. And they purchased a braille embosser and a scanner and had two wonderful work study students. Their work study was converting all my materials into braille. So it was night and day. But you are such an effective advocate for people with disabilities. I would ask if you could think about any advice you would give to a young person with a disability as they're starting their journey into independence and self-sufficiency, and those who have an inspiration to be advocates. Any, any advice for those young people?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=kblpccvLlh7QyjNSsrun98VpEka_4f7WeWChZIE-dgXzojph2bne3tTZuTxzxQhTJu05kOCJUeroNcYFcxwdzwazpUs&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1260.3)

My advice is build up your community now. It's really important to have a strong disability community. Meet up with blind leaders, make sure you have mentors within the disability community who could pass on wisdom, share advice. You have to build that community now, not when you're struggling, but even before you're struggling you should invest in that community. Then when you do have a moment where you're struggling, dealing with discrimination, you'll already have the relationships in place to support you, whether it's being a friend and empathizing or recommending resources and organizations. There are nonprofit legal centers that will provide free legal aid, civil rights support for people dealing with ADA and other civil rights violations.

So build up your community. I met a lot of amazing blind advocates when I attended blind organizations, like when I was in high school. And even back in middle school, I went to a camp for the blind in California, called Enchanted Hills, and I met blind counselors there who were already in college, already have jobs and I could ask them all my questions. Then later, when I was in the process of applying to college, looking for jobs, I could reach out to them and say, "How did you do this? What should I be doing?" Those relationships, those friends take time to build up. So work on building them now so that when you're struggling, when, when your time to apply to college or grad school or get a job arrives, you'll already have the network.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=7yi9yBQAsQUcWs9te9AzLg0lVDTpY39XFNFJ6ykgNozZVVG36wr74Tp79Rg3y_OUGY7E9CTzL5eps1YKzQ9YZp-Z2Zg&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1384.07)

Beautiful, Wonderful advice. Now in reading your memoirs, it reminded me, parts of it reminded me a lot of my doctoral research. I finished a PhD program last year and earned a doctorate in Leadership and Change from Antioch University. And my dissertation was called a journey through rough country: an ethnographic study of blinded adults successfully employed in large American corporations.

So I interviewed quite a number of blind individuals who self-identified as being successfully employed in companies that had 500 employees or more. And one of the constant themes that emerged with each person was that they had had some sort of defining experience or set of experiences, usually in their teen years, that gave them that sense that they could accomplish whatever they set out to accomplish, that they could create their own future, that they could forge their own path. And when I read the sections of your book around the time you spent in Mali, I thought that was the set of experiences that gave Haben that sense that she could do whatever she wants to do with her life. So could, could you talk about your time in Mali a little bit and what did the significance that time is, has had in your life?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=b6po3soAgfJMiVFSUWQvhlbfrAdxW9IRcuymtpiUdH5sWEn2JK7-FnwJACnq2fiyn64Hs3AGrHPPHSJTM5um_OhGQNs&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1488.56)

That's one of my favorite stories from my book. So when I was in high school, I joined a club that helps build schools in developing countries like Mali in West Africa. They paid for the program, they paid for the trip. So I went to my parents and said, "This is a free trip to Mali. I will help build a school. I'll live in a village, physically building the school." So I'm making bricks, digging the latrine, all of that under the Saharan sun. And my parents said no. I told them, "There are kids who need an education. I want to help give them the opportunity of education. I want to make a difference in the world." My parents said, no.

I tried to get them to explain, "Why are you saying no? What's wrong?" And they told me, "What if there's a snake on the path? You won't see it. Then what?" And they were right. If there was a snake on the path, I wouldn't see it. I probably wouldn't notice it until it bit me, which is terrifying. And if my parent's plan was to scare me off, that came very close to scaring me off. But it didn't quite work. I told them, "There's snakes here in California. I can't be afraid to go into my own backyard for the risk there may be a rattlesnake. I don't want fear to control my life. I want solutions. And I'll come up with solutions for how to build a school, just like the non-disabled students." They still said no.

So I brainstormed, regrouped, recharged. And I realized part of the problem is that my parents saw me as a child. I was 15 at the time and did not feel like a child. But maybe if the message came from a fellow adult, a fellow non-disabled adult, maybe they'll listen. So I talked to the program manager and asked her to sit down with my parents for lunch. And they did and they shared their concerns. She listened and told them, "We don't know exactly how Haben will build a school, but we'll find a way. We'll make it work. It's, it's teamwork." And they finally agreed. I flew to Mali with my team of American high school students. And we spent three weeks in the village helping to build the school.

Now, just to be clear, there are amazing school builders in Mali. They technically did not need us to come and build a school in Mali. The main part of this program was really to help high school students in at-risk communities, build up self esteem and confidence and realize they could build a difference in the world. And that's what I learned in Mali: it's okay to go into the unknown, you'll figure it out, you'll come up with solutions. I found ways to use a shovel and sift sand and make bricks and jumped down into a pit and did the latrine so the students would have a bathroom. All those things I did, and then I went back to California, back to my parents. They felt a little more competent in my abilities, but just a little bit. They'll always be parents.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=vC6O0Nej3YK2_cW1WFj9zWtltIAU_vNc_UeKGIw8ZOQAkSK1mMfdFnprEZek-SfSGo1rL073tTLheVKpWFIJxnvnp6g&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1738.38)

Haben, when you're talking, making me think about my daughter, she, she lives in Oakland. And she texted us when she was heading out to a Black Lives Matter event in Oakland yesterday and texted us when she got home. But with unprecedented focus in our country right now on inclusion and systemic barriers to inclusion and how to make the voices of the unheard heard. And then I'm thinking about the intersectionality between race and disability and you as an African-American and a person with multiple disabilities. I know that in 2018 through Twitter, you shared a BBC article called, "Don't Shoot, I'm Disabled." So obviously you were thinking about this intersectionality and the systemic inequities in the way policing and justice are administered. So I I'd love to get your thoughts on how do we seize the moment that's before us in our country and, and move forward in inclusion and bringing everybody into the conversation and eliminating inequities and injustice.

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=1eO3kn7OW7LsoWFY80s_epUpM-GgUJCSMzXbysaCYR6rC_sAtzOviFPwTTC2urgAHEF5jbklAZO_TooC4Qcrb-yV-pI&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=1833.39)

About a third to half of those killed by police are disabled people. That's according to a study in 2016, I'm sure the numbers are actually much higher than that. A significant number of disabled people are killed by the police. And the vast majority of those are black and brown disabled people. Police walk into situations assuming the people can see and hear and move in certain ways, and don't have any invisible disabilities. And when they issue a command and the person doesn't immediately respond, they assume the person's a threat. And that's why we have so many disabled people being killed.

As a deaf person, this terrifies me. I've had many situations where people are shouting orders, commands at me and I don't hear them. And they don't know that I'm deaf and they get angry. They might see that I have a guide dog or white cane and assume she has amazing hearing, she's ignoring me. When people in power are making assumptions, it can be life and death when ableism is multiplied by racism. We need a new way to make our communities safe that isn't infected with racism and ableism. And for those who don't know, ableism is the wide-spread belief that disabled people are inferior to non-disabled people. We're not inferior, but a lot of people think so.

So these are the issues that, that are out there. I've actually encountered disability organizations that say, "Sorry, we're not going to talk about this. We're not going to address this. We're only interested in disability issues. We're not going to care about race." There are lots of disabled people who are also suffering from racism. You need to be able to address all the different ways systems oppress people. If one group is held back, no one is going to be free. We need to be able to address all kinds of injustices and recognize the disability community is diverse.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=kpSptr5dWT-9y1k3p4mpj-Jhz9GOyqcEB5YdhMDYOv7tCOgFL1VGvlKg0VFR8k5aYnPcLBFq9CKSOwvTg_RpXGFCQnM&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2002.32)

So Haben, as a, as a disability advocate, what are your focus areas if you think about the next 6, 12, 18 months? Where do you see yourself focusing your energies and your talents as an advocate?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=uVm_1IsDV_KLTVUJDJwiS5v3Wr0DVZvrFiw1pmPvEHiYINGWD7WsaIrI15ZNNAny9l1eNhRic8a_hLnKr40K4IIIRKE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2026.46)

I work independently. I am not part of a specific organization, which gives me a lot of freedom to address a variety of different projects. I can address Black Lives Matter without worrying about my organization thinking, "Oh, she's being political." And political is a code word that some people use to address topics that they think that they disagree with. And when, when are actually about justice and freedom and the right to live. What am I going to be addressing in the future? I can't see the future, I can't predict that. But I will continue to, to address injustice and use my talents and abilities to increase access and opportunities for people with disabilities.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=9ocTt9c0dO2L5j_Pz1wBLPoqTeZ-9fSqLA7WZ516vJgORHw-7lXxQwqCYViBk0PYlrnNPhmlimO3yHEM0dg4t1NLL84&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2091.23)

Thank you. So speaking of future, next year 2021 is the American Foundation for the Blind centennial. We become a hundred years old on September 23rd, 2021. And we are planning a year of focus and emphasis on equity, inclusion, and transformation. And we're really going to be focusing on employment. And as you and I both know, the workforce participation rate for people with disabilities is about half that of the general population. And of course that results in endemic poverty and leads to lots of other disparate outcomes for people with disabilities. We are thinking a lot about employment and there are roles for lots of institutions that can lead to significant changes in employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

So when you think about that, and you think about the education systems, the employer community, people with disabilities, the vocational rehabilitation system, are there elements of those systems that stand out for you that you think we should really focus on if we want to make a real difference in the employment outcomes for people who are blind and low vision in particular?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=F1QKhSfrmy_qTK9YeQ47-8N3Flax0yO0Z3KbwOg7r4DX1LabS1o8cgaeLhBNnmAeKyFDb7gUasS7p3Nct_x3e5dhNi0&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2208.96)

In terms of education, it would be really helpful to encourage more teachers to teach braille. Too many of them ~~a~~re choosing not to teach braille because they think the students will get all the access they need from listening from screen readers and audio books. Screen readers and audio books are helpful. But braille, the ability to read, is critical for employment. So that, that would be one thing AFB can do to help blind people increase their employment opportunities. And then the heart of the problem is the employers assuming we're incompetent. So addressing ableism among employers, but also help remove barriers and increase employment opportunities.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=G_-zo1OFRk_JB4Xic3-hFXrv-08Friafla234k7ljOEHSm0Hh38cr9cZCBY6kpchOsox_bWieRNljF8NUNxDg43W9kE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2268.62)

Continuing on with the talk of the history of the American Foundation for the Blind, AFB did a very wise thing and hired Helen Keller in 1924 to represent the American Foundation for the Blind around the world. And she, she did so until she passed away in 1968. And in, in your memoirs, you specifically talk about Helen Keller and Harvard and Radcliffe. And you point out that attending Harvard was not a choice for her because the college did not admit women at the time. And that she instead went to Radcliffe, which was her option, and graduated in 1904. So if, if, if we could put Haben Girma in a time machine and take you back to have a conversation with Helen Keller, what, what do you think you would want to talk about? Are there questions you would want to ask her? Are, are there things you would want to tell her about the future about the impact she had?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=rKrm5s_HTpHTK0w7VkXylgZdZRqAYFH4Ozk_wBEpYM8Zy-qPeEuzYytje2_H9gRdLwKgsFzSYHI6md2abZOzy5ow7pE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2341.26)

[laughter] Oh my goodness. I have a burning question for Helen Keller. So Helen Keller's birthday was just this past weekend. Helen Keller's birthday was June 27, and many articles come out around her birthday. And I recently discovered that Helen Keller had objections to "The Miracle Worker." "The Miracle Worker," the film, the play, the TV show was based on her autobiography. So Helen Keller wrote the words of her story, she wrote her autobiography. A producer came, they signed a contract and he dramatized her work into a film and Broadway play. So what I want to ask Helen is, what you objecting to in the film and play? And what can you teach us about converting disability stories, owning our stories, and allowing them to be converted into formats we don't have full access to, visual formats like film and TV?

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=4ju9vpPjdrNpNMaN1O-Tg05HyTYhgcrZUkesIliAvpYv44e0y5zNb2FJ-pJy7nnBWSYv3aZA9JxQZY3kNSCB_zKek24&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2421.66)

Well, Haben, we are fortunate privileged trustees on stewards of Helen Keller's estate. She bequeathed her estate to AFB. So we have digitized all of her writings, correspondence, documents, drafts, and it's in a fully accessible, searchable archive. We received two grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as American Express and others. Thank you. So we also have an archivist, Helen Selsdon, who knows the archive like, like the back of her hand. So I am going to ask her that question and ask her what the archival materials tell us about Helen's objections. And I will make sure to share that with you.

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=MwHN8R4k3ud-kmh-8n4mV5Ot1XhM4U4SsK02xidkmOxVe34V_gyxQhhPRAw68gZ8O3fluRQK81oSFXavN27RpIZRj90&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2483.11)

[chuckles] That sounds exciting.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=Zbfv0exq4yxXBq2QU56_tJrjQnY4eK-tLgyM8o2GcdQJNe452Xbzd68_lX2Kw-MpxyY1myTPgVW-fwIph4DJZwZUBik&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2567.58)

So Haben, I don't think I've ever asked anyone this question before: Who do you want to play you in the movie?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=4TDeZUdffR6us3nU6Vib5VeMujfDZ6nJ0Va3oJyAg7duH1_k-G9pRL1flLJK0q58nvBnjWxuwP9M-7vOecdmnxhvoVQ&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2582.75)

[chuckles] That is such a complicated question. One of our frustrations with Hollywood is that so many of the disabled characters are played by actors pretending to be disabled. That's really frustrating because there are talented disabled actors ready to play roles, who even want to play non-disabled roles. But they keep getting passed over. Do I know the perfect actor to play me? I have no idea, I can't say. I don't really follow Hollywood enough to be able to name that actor for you. But I would hope that they would be able to authentically represent me.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=86PbZuJ9U8MaoMHcE88hlKBe9F5awSAxhRpshZKSfDvwLEKh0K3zZ8kIJXNtEpcBsAgh3FXYIfpn-pfUBxQ7c5Elv7M&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2632.23)

I just appreciate the opportunity to ask the question. I'd love to just give you the opportunity, Haben, to talk about anything that's on your mind that's present for you. There's so many topics I could ask you about. But would just like to hand you the microphone. And are there topics you would like to explore or reflect upon? Any top of mind thoughts that I didn't touch on with my questions?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=36Y29QKIKKypKv8f_GnsilDBjIGlKmWrW8kN5305MYjyA9lFT0A3unl7mgfO-UUaoddlrWkZpkta06zdEyltEIKB3tc&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2700.33)

Let's talk about technology. Right now during the pandemic, many things have moved online, from school to employment; organizational work. Some online spaces are accessible, some are not. I've seen this in the blind community as well. I have blind friends who post photos online and don't do image descriptions. How could you not do image descriptions? Everyone, sighted or blind, please add image descriptions when you post photos to Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. On Twitter, there's a feature that allows you to add image descriptions and it doesn't impact your word count, your character count for the tweet. So no excuses! Add image descriptions. And for videos, please add captions, it benefits deaf individuals and deaf individuals do follow blind organizations because intersectionality. There are deaf parents of blind children or deaf people working in the space, or Deafblind people. So intersectionality. Videos should have captions and transcripts. The way I access video is through transcripts.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=SW-3DAtuLWz2NiMowDLAgN00MSbDDT_mIwrNX-rlQxYJ5f7u1HOaYfyPr7qTw-rLFYPK-5ir7vesbeFMUqefqQofS2M&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2802.05)

Haben, I was excited to read the, the afterward, the, the epilogue to your book when you talked a little bit about the process of writing and you, you thanked a lot of people. And I, I was excited when you, you thanked one of your early readers, Caitlin Hernandez. I'm a huge fan of hers and she's out in the Bay area. Got to know her through our mutual love of braille. But we would love to hear a little about about the author's process.

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=ofCQ1hRK7w8xHjAlqxcetqWyioF7w7hPaTEJR0B7AETRMRTsQZ-1vi8F6SZx6IxDjZ-oAZrh08hvfb1IZGFQG1K92Ac&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=2844.36)

I love Caitlin. We've been friends for years, we actually met at the Braille Challenge. So we were both competing. She's a much better braille reader and writer than me. We met at that braille competition and then continued being friends. She's also a fabulous writer and I've read many of her books with amazing blind characters. As a kid, I really wanted to read books with blind characters and they were hard to find. Or if they did exist, they were so stereotypical it was boring and frustrating. So if there are any writers watching this, please include more authentic blind characters in your stories, because blind kids and adults want to read those stories.

The writing process for me, people were telling me for a long time, you should write a book. And I would say, "I'm too busy living life to write a book." I always imagined writers as people who hide away in caves, don't socialize, don't connect and just, just write in their cave. But I realized you can balance it. You can write a little, go hiking, go hang out with friendsas long as there isn't a pandemic. And then balance it out, which is what I did. I found time to write when there was time. I didn't have a set time every day, but the desire to create the stories and book was so strong that I would make sure there was time. And I focused my stories around important lessons that I wanted to teach people.

Most non-disabled people don't know ableism. And a lot of disabled people also have not heard of ableism. Ableism is the belief that disabled people are inferior: ideas like disabled people are unteachable; it's better to be dead than disabled; awful, horrible ideas that are just widespread throughout our culture. So my stories help people identify ableism when it pops up. For example, there's a really adorable story in my book about that time my little cousin, six-year-old cousin, told me blind people can't make PB&J sandwiches. Kirk, can you make a PB&J?

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=-Z0zi7pEaj5kXQpVUjoH4OeA3cd1kd5LsneDWcxnS1Lgzih54JJVpHaJWFG_o6FvWWUcXTsK4KWyKoAKFpfbQ09Wtks&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3007.361)

I've made hundreds, I have two kids.

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=ohB6ut4SwWpRgg_AmsIyD1TitN6FXNTSqTTcdY9b9hIo6cfgjU8of5ABge6aSU5tRifZGZ0HkAvpNU6uR1FnmNqQEr4&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3019.39)

[laughter] Exactly! But my little cousin, who's watched films and TV shows with blind people got the message that blind people are incompetent. So even though he could see me making the PB&J, he was still insisting blind people can't make a PB&J. Now he's older and he knows I could make a PB&J. But it's hard to resist those negative, awful stereotypes that are out there. So my book helps people recognize ableism and build up the skills to fight ableism.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=vTtVo9q9aNF_ZIxwAZlWzpTWtMx6ScQtDCA-VuZvwO-Sc1gqQsPF8TncIcuEaAIw7rrEQ95SZLEae9MGZm8Mb1GvKXU&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3067.17)

Continuing on the theme of food. At Lewis and Clark home, home of the Pioneers, you had great access to textbooks and classroom materials, but that did not necessarily extend to access to information about the cafeteria. Could you talk to us about that exercise in advocacy?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=9BGlQ7zMtlxck737bLfj5i7dRhIek22F-V5QOCmfkh_asRByvwEQKIZTJeYij24y5lOiJz8Dkq27W_4lFDpYSoFuw60&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3096.27)

That's a good story. The cafeteria at Lewis and Clark was a place where a lot of us came together to relax and eat between classes. I was living in the residence halls. And if you lived in the residence halls, you had to have a meal plan. And you were required to live in the residence halls for at least two years. So I was stuck with this cafeteria. And on the wall of the cafeteria by the door was a print menu. Sighted students could look at the menu and then go to the station of choice. I couldn't read the menu, because it was only in print. Blindness wasn't the problem; the problem was the format of the menu. So I went to the manager and asked, "Can you provide the menu in braille or post it online or email it to me? I have assistive technology that allows me to read emails and websites." Manager said, "We're very busy, we don't have time to do special things for students with special needs."

Just to be clear, eating is not a special need. Everyone needs to eat. There's this myth that there are two kinds of people: dependent and independent. That's a myth; everyone is interdependent. A lot of you like drinking coffee. Very few of you grow your own coffee beans. You depend on other people to grow the beans, to make your food. And that's okay as long as we're honest about the fact that we're all interdependent. The manager didn't get any of this. So, as a vegetarian, I was stuck picking stations at random, waiting in line, getting food, finding a table, trying the food, and discovering unpleasant surprises. It was really frustrating. How do you eat vegetarian when you don't know which station is serving vegetarian food?

I just thought maybe that was part of being blind. Maybe disabled people should just... accept that we're doomed to inferior service forever and ever. For several months, I just dealt the best I could with the situation. Then my friends reminded me: it's my choice to accept unfairness or advocate for justice. I did research. Then I went back to the manager and explained: the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination against students with disabilities. And if you don't provide access to the menu, I'm going to take legal action. I had no idea how I would do that. I was just 19; I couldn't afford a lawyer. Now I know there are nonprofit legal centers that will help students with disabilities at no cost to the students. But back then, I didn't know that. All I knew is I had to try, I had to do something.

The next day, the manager apologized and promised to make the menus accessible. He did. He started emailing me the menus. Life became delicious. The next year, a new blind student came to the college and he had immediate access to the menus. I talked to him and I said, "You're hearing. Can't you hear people reading the menu to you? Why do you need it emailed to you?" And he said, "Even for hearing blind students, it's hard to hear in noisy cafeterias; hundreds of students, plates, all that noise." So he found it easier for him also to access the menu through email.

And that was back in 2007. Today in 2020, schools have absolutely no excuse. Provide all dietary and food information in accessible formats, online, on apps, so all students can access it. There's students, with dietary needs, there are students who need print access needs. So when menus are in multiple formats, you help more people. So I learned that in college and it inspired me to go to law school. And I started looking into law schools and eventually ended up at Harvard.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=1KxSMkKktbP_89b-ivBbFUk2BiXc55XDbGMOaV5uFxQUM5jpA3UPorBX393cJ9b5I0Sg1bXmAKU1QO1Le7bJOGYoLPA&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3410.44)

So the battles we fight today make, make the road easier to travel for the next person as the student who entered the Lewis and Clark the year after you didn't have to fight that battle of access to information. So won-- wonderful example of everyday advocacy. That's great. I wanted to ask you about a couple other, I think very significant developments in your life. I assume you're still a guide dog user, you write very eloquently about your guide dog experiences. And then there's a chapter in your book that's titled something like, "The Chapter My Parents Should Not Read." So if you could talk a little bit about your guide dog experiences and your experiences in Ruston, Louisiana.

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=2KTQB_2ftT4lbVPXEUTWBC83HZi5RrsA41s2FPFPsoMJaXMrFJTZsS5LwNrESUG0bTKH_TI2eCVW0KoNMRbPzZHaBbU&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3478.76)

Absolutely. I'm still in a guide dog partnership. I'm not a guide dog user. It's not really like a computer. It's very much a relationship. My guide dog's name is Milo, he's from the Seeing Eye. He's a German Shepherd guide dog. Excellent, amazing, very, very sweet dog. But he didn't go to Harvard.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=lz9HQ41aYJuZ2CYcgXjrya6GOoVkyNl8-c60EAgoAOvHejY-4CjUmFRDYOUhY6w3n7qDaWYb5OZ0nBu-I0UOHZ7hobA&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3513.04)

Well, I will, I will try to be mindful of not using the term guide dog user. That is the term I, I grew up with. What should I say, Haben? Are you in a guide dog partnership?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=RqebnNCXuMlX_DnoWZqc2IUuiGmGyiqnZMOsLKUbQbFtk7CJVOIEGY8B93N-4clAhhFMSOFNe-9HwDcqvBp5RS-p6YY&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3536.26)

[laughter] Yes, guide dog partnership works; guide dog team. Also another term is guide dog handler. I'm okay with that one, but not a super fan. I see it more as a partnership.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=V7ukLDrl-JG-S-a6D5b_6nRlCyIpU-BQyyVN1cBFhthNSLWR-BTHC-4_eZSz7z7aup4lNhHFgYini5IbuFGpa8wacGE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3554.11)

Terrific. And then I know you went to the NFB Training Center in Ruston. I've not visited that one. I've, I've been to the Colorado Center for the Blind a number of times and I know a lot of blind individuals who went through that very intensive training at one of the centers. And you, you write, a very exciting story about an experience you have there.

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=SscJgBclsB0eYumOAcIhUs7yQfqBKA5DCUHfKIHeuIwBI7mn1V69CHvc-N616mQgHAbWLCviI7SXhr7HVpAgdC5HrnI&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3585.74)

Yes, I did. I did research before choosing which center I would go to. There was a center closer to me in California. Not an NFB Center, but a training center for the blind. And each center has different levels of expectations. I wanted to go to the one that I felt would be the toughest, would challenge me the most, because I wanted to be able to spend a few months worrying about can blind people do this, how do blind people do that, and then never worry about it again, so that I could spend the rest of my time just being a student rather than worrying about blind stuff.

So based on my research, I felt the Louisiana Center would be the most challenging. So I dared myself to go all the way to Louisiana and spend a summer there building up my blindness skills. It was definitely transformative. And I built up a lot of confidence and important skills there. You're referring to a scene in my book where a friend and I were walking down the sidewalk. Both of us were students at LCB, both of us blind, both of us using white canes. Deafness is a spectrum, blindness is a spectrum. I have some vision and hearing. Sometimes when people are standing next to me, I can sort of hear them.

So this guy and I were walking down the sidewalk and he was talking to me and I was struggling to understand him. There was a lot of noise from the street. There were bells. We heard the bells. He's hearing, I'm, I'm deaf. And we were still struggling to communicate and converse. In other words, we were distracted. And anyone, sighted or blind, can become distracted. It's really, really important that you pay attention when you're walking down the sidewalk. We were walking, then all of a sudden there's a train right in front of us. We were about to walk on the tracks in front of the train. We pulled back at the very last second. It was terrifying.

But because we'd had so much training, we recognized that this is something about being distracted. And I never told my parents that story, because I knew that if they heard that story, they would say, "That's it. You're coming home, you're never allowed to go walk outside by yourself again." [chuckles] And I know lots of parents would have that reaction. But anyone can get distracted, sighted or blind. And blind kids need the freedom to make mistakes and learn. I'm more cautious now [laughter]. And I'm sure the guy I was walking with is also more cautious now. Teenagers kind of get distracted. It's part of growing up and, and turning into an adult. Have you ever had these moments, Kirk? Has something like that happened to you?

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=xGWOKaI9j9bgQ05jg8L6kI-WG9iSyELbG26o-G6HSOIQpxeuG6aqVOAGVKENPouXiTwb6ybVXxpriLgXCCvWFKIrIVc&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3857.8)

Oh yeah, so I've talked to parents of blind kids a lot, and sometimes I say, you know, half joking that you can measure your success as a parent of a blind child by how many times you go to the emergency room with them, because you have to let kids be kids. And when I think about some of the things I did as a blind child, I don't know that I would be comfortable with my sighted children doing that. We lived in a small town so we spent a lot of time in the woods, and making tree forts, and finding a log, and floating down the creek, and lots of bumps and bruises and scrapes and stitches. So, I was thinking, when you were talking about your parents, you talk quite a bit in your book about Eritrean food, and it seems that most of the references have to do with your mother cooking. So I'm wondering if you are a cook? Are you making Eritrean food for yourself or how, how are you getting the food that you love?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=Rf0YxeI9jiE6ptdYwnH18jnDJMw3qltqCSSZcF0u5HU4N7Sof5v6nn8H4oDxb_HFnbnnKoygDW3i3M39Ah5-iHBsHvE&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=3949.62)

Am I cooking Eritrean food? This year in 2020, I've made only one Eritrean dish and I didn't do a good job. I really don't like cooking, but because of the pandemic, if I want delicious food, I have to make it myself. Or order it, but when you order food, it's, your choices are limited, and it may not be exactly the way you want it cooked. So I'm trying to get myself to practice more and, and learn more techniques in the kitchen. I've had blind cooking lessons, so this is not a blindness issue. There are amazing blind chefs out there. This is, this is a Haben issue.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=5fNktfnYK_3zF0ItJHB4lgvOO6J6Hw17T2T6Xs6qY40VbHWZkzgQLgWDc1o32B79JrMf8PrljF2W4FF-lZYSYMBtNMI&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4174.66)

Absolutely, absolutely. So talking about the Braille Challenge, I had the opportunity to do the keynote at the Braille Challenge in 2018, and Caitlin was there to talk as an alumni and I think it was a 10-year anniversary for her. So it was amazing to be around 50 kids who were so enthusiastic and excited about braille. When did you participate in the Braille Challenge?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=uLXWpMwO6CCFgmaQ8EeIQIibcLc2_sLo5kb4HUqujqjjrOFIH1Fbkf47ePQSDcbxdqlLK2o-Pyoe2VyyEyOS9ShHeWQ&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4216.87)

I participated in the Braille Challenge through middle school and high school. So from about 2000 to about 2005.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=Xl_zpJwCsD0kklKf9GyeEtK3PIjelv8T7GSNeaXr_AR3dDbCWedKPgbm8wQPJ2XPtt1kpz-w5ggNh1z71g5G7XNHdu8&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4238.86)

I know you're a strong braille advocate. And I know when we talked about employment, you said that one thing that the educational system can do is focus more on making sure that blind students are skillful in reading braille. And you have taken braille into a new level the way you communicate with the Bluetooth keyboard and your braille display. Can you talk about how you created that innovation, how you first started using technology and braille together in interpersonal communication?

**Haben Girma:**

Yeah, so I had more hearing when I was younger. And as my hearing started to deteriorate, people, instructors, audiologists were telling me, "Use hearing aids, use assistive listening devices." And I tried using those devices, but that's like telling a blind person to just wear glasses. They only work for certain types of vision loss, glasses. And hearing aids, and cochlear implants, and assistive listening devices only work for certain types of hearing loss. So it was really frustrating that the solutions available weren't working. And the specialist didn't have any solutions that would work for me.

So I realized: if I want a solution, I have to come up with a solution. So I was searching around for solutions that met my strengths. Braille is one of my strengths. And when the new BrailleNote came out in 2010, 10 years ago, it had Bluetooth. And that ignited the idea of connecting the braille display to an external keyboard. And handing people the keyboard, they could type on it and I could read in braille. The other thing I considered was tactile sign language. I've studied American Sign Language on and off for several years. I know the basics, but I'm not fluent. The challenge I come up with: 99% of the people I meet don't know sign language. So it's not something I can easily use with them.

They would need to spend time learning it. However, lots of people know how to type, especially millennials. So it was liberating to be able to hand people a keyboard and say type what you're saying. And then I would read it in braille. When I first started using it in law school, I was nervous that people would react negatively, that they think this is weird, this is different. Some people did think that way. Some people, when I offered them the keyboard would say, "Oh no, no, I--" and then come up with any kind of excuse, ridiculous excuses. So I eventually came up with a core group of friends who were happy to type. They already texted and, and wrote emails and were used to chatting on, on devices. So it was a pretty easy shift. So this became a very inclusive way for me to directly connect with people.

**Dr. Adams:**

So a really interesting low-tech accommodation that you mentioned toward the end of your book is ProTactile. And previous to my coming to the American Foundation for the Blind, I was the CEO of the Lighthouse for the Blind in Seattle, which had a long-established Deafblind program and there was a strong Deafblind community there, and I was exposed to ProTactile communication. And, it was just so brilliant. Could you talk a little bit about ProTactile?

**Haben Girma:**

Absolutely. So ProTactile is a philosophy. It was created by the Deafblind community in Seattle, particularly two Deafblind leaders: Jelica and aj And it's the philosophy of trying to center-touch in communication. So if you're trying to communicate an idea, see if you can communicate it by touch. So for example, if you wanted to tell someone that there's a glass of water on the table, you could say it in words, "There's a glass of water on the table." Or, you could slip your hand under the person's hand and move and touch the glass. That's a way to communicate that there's a glass on the table through touch.

Tactile sign language is an actual language with grammar and jokes and culture. ProTactile is more of a philosophy. There are recommended signals to use, but each individual develops it as their own. A lot of blind people are already using ProTactile, but may not call it ProTactile. I noticed that blind individuals and their partners and core friends will often come up with shared signals. So if you're walking with a sighted friend and you're talking about Kirk, and then Kirk steps into the room, you might have a hidden signal to say, "Wait, one moment, Kirk, just walked in so you should stop talking." It might be squeezing your elbow, it might be moving your shoulder up. But we often come up with our own ProTactile, own physical signals to communicate key information. So that's ProTactile: center, the individual and center touch in the communication of information.

**Dr. Adams:**

I know aj and Jelica very well, and it's great that ProTactile is spreading across the country. And I've found it really useful doing public speaking because there are tack-- ProTactile indications you can get, for instance, on your back through touch that says the audience's looking restless, or everyone's leaning forward in their seat, everyone's really paying attention, or people are starting to slip out. The kind of information that if you're a sighted person speaking from a stage, you would be able to observe yourself. So it's a, it's a wonderful innovation. So I, I know we're almost at time. I just have one last question Haben. I know you are much admired by many, many people. I, I I'd love to know who some of the people that you admire, are some people that you have found as role models.

**Haben Girma:**

Hmm. I learned about ProTactile from aj and Jelica. I attended one of their projects. They're role models. I admire the work they're doing to center touch in communication. I'm more connected with the people around me after attending their workshop. I think each of us teaches other people something, we're all role modeling and teaching others around us. Kirk, do you have a unique signal that you've developed in your own core group?

**Dr. Adams:**

You know, that, that's a, that's a good question. And I think it's more around my family, my children, and my wife are very experienced sighted guides and, and communicators and tactile communicators. So I think there's probably, there's, there's a set of signals, I, that I think about that relate back to what you said about a room; someone's just coming to the room, someone just left, cause often the person will leave the room and not tell you if you can't see. You're, you're, you're standing there talking to them and they're gone or someone will come and join your group if you're in a social setting and not announce themselves so you don't know that they're there. So I know we've developed some, some tactile, tactile signals as a family around those types of things.

As far as other disability advocates that you've gotten to know. I know you've been involved in legal actions around accessibility. I know that you've spent time as a practicing attorney in the disability rights area. Are there people who stand out to you who are doing really good work, who've really made an impact in disability rights and advocacy?

[**Haben Girma:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=Vibeuc6m0HiZKyVPp_K033Z-COkycWQtMXzlKodCWna5yV2Sg4pLohNbd5Y89SKJRHIugBUEjL1HdIMaxiBO7rO9njo&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=4866.26)

I'm a huge fan of Lainey Feingold from Berkeley. She's done a lot of blind access cases, from ATMs, making sure we had access to talking ATMs and websites. So I, I have a lot of admiration for her and her book, "Structured Negotiation."

**Dr. Adams:**

Another book I've read. And Lainey is a longtime friend of the American Foundation for the Blind. And we share admiration for her. Any final comment, Haben?

**Haben Girma:**

During the pandemic, a lot of us are staying home and we each have different levels of access in our homes and with, with the people around us. I think it would be phenomenal to have a workshop or seminar/webinar on the different ways we can increase access in our homes, just by things like reminding people to announce themselves when they enter/exit a conversation or room. Or little things to make the kitchen more accessible. I think workshops like that could be really helpful for, for people who are new to blindness and still developing their blindness skills.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=4nWyWyNrY6a-onYVem0cVbX2SWJtuL5-HIaYkwF9h8nuzpKQw4Tio_sFSqHc0qax8ynOTOFNELuNv9zfOxWzg8wuLCs&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=5107.77)

So Haben, as I think about AFB Centennial next year, I also think back over the last 99 years and how Helen Keller represented people with disabilities and helped change the way that people around the world perceive people with disabilities. Then I think of landmark policy decisions like Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the ADA, and the CVAA, and all these battles that people with disabilities have fought over the years. Obviously those battles make the road smoother for the next generation. For the, for the disabled children of today it makes their lives as adults easier. As you look forward, are there particular areas that you think we as disability advocates should focus on? Are there battles we should choose to fight that you think will really make a difference for people with disabilities in the future?

**Haben Girma:**

A lot of information is moving online, and a lot of it is still inaccessible. So if we could increase access to digital information, make sure all learning platforms online are accessible and work with screen readers. Make sure blind kids in developing countries have access to digital information, digital tools. I think that would help increase access for, for a lot of people and reduce the access divide.

**Dr. Adams:**

This is really the final question. At the American Foundation for the Blind, we are working hard each and every day to create a world of no limits for people who are blind and visually impaired. What does a world of no limits look like for you?

**Haben Girma:**

[chuckles] A world with no limits would have absolutely no limits for blind people who have additional disabilities. Maybe they're Deaf, maybe they use wheelchairs, maybe it's invisible disabilities. Blind people in developing countries would have no limits, blind people who are black would not face increased violence from the police. There would be absolutely no limits.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=mOQLszjByTFDfFmAMZIapQwafvaAy1HmJ9VIviARHYQz4xi-BYngIqpkT5NLlX_GwiAnfjageHiCWAkB93XDxlC847g&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=5405.42)

Thank you, Haben. Appreciate your time, appreciate your wisdom, appreciate your courage. Thank you. And I look forward to others being able to enjoy the conversation you and I have had today.

**Haben Girma:**

You're welcome. Thanks for having me, Kirk.

[**Dr. Adams:**](https://www.rev.com/transcript-editor/Edit?token=lbEhsv2wGK3KB5OtYMeNucOStzZ5iPGKMmPXQLjIhtXDn-AywW7aoCnw77Zlq-NlqMA2T69uZr2vzzopIPMA7UDBX0Q&loadFrom=DocumentDeeplink&ts=5417.54)

Absolutely.

**Narrator:**

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**Narrator:**   
Again, Kirk and Roslyn Adams.

**Mrs. Adams:**

Thank you so much for joining us.

**Dr. Adams:**

And if you would like to help support our work creating a world of no limits for people who are blind, you can do so at AFB.org/Donate, and we would immensely appreciate it.

**Mrs. Adams:**

We truly would.

**Narrator:**

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**END**