

Hi. My name is Greg Lindberg, and I'm from Wesley Chapel, Florida in the Tampa Bay area. I am 37 years old, and I have LCA, which stands for Leber's congenital amaurosis. It's a retinal condition in the RP, the retinitis pigmentosa family. So I've had deteriorating vision throughout my life, and currently have light perception.

So in terms of my career, I work for Full Sail University in the Orlando area. I'm a senior copywriter. And I've worked in marketing and communications my whole career, and I definitely have a big passion for storytelling, for interviewing people, and for communicating, you know, messages that are meaningful and impactful to others.

So in terms of ACB -- so I first joined the Pinellas Council of the Blind chapter back in 2013. And at the time, I was really just looking for connection to the blind and visually impaired community. I really didn't know anyone else, you know, maybe one other person who was blind. And at the time, I think my vision might have been starting to change a little bit more, and I thought, "Hey, you know, why don't I just google blindness organizations?" And so that's literally what I did, just typed in Pinellas County, Florida, blindness organizations, and the Pinellas Council of the Blind and Florida Council of the Blind both popped up on Google.

And so I went to my first meeting and really was immediately sold. I was hooked, just being around others that I could really relate to, and, you know, that have had similar challenges, similar struggles, but also who are very knowledgeable about different resources, different types of advocacy, and, you know, just issues that are important to

the blind community was also very empowering. And so I served as secretary of that chapter for four years, and then eventually led to serving as editor of the "White Cane Bulletin," which is the Florida Council of the Blind newsletter, which I was definitely honored to serve in that role for about four years as well. And I just really enjoyed collecting and then writing content important to Floridians who are blind and visually impaired.

And then that also kind of led me to ACB Next Generation, which is a special interest affiliate of ACB designed for the 18 to 40 year old demographic. And so I was lucky enough to be sort of a founding member of Next Gen. Back in 2018, we had our first Zoom meeting, back when Zoom was not, you know, really a thing yet for a lot of people. So you know, a lot of growing pains, but a lot of hard work and effort in those early years really led to this amazing organization, this amazing affiliate of ACB, and have gone on to multiple roles within Next Gen. Served as secretary for a couple of years. I've been the publications committee chair now for a few years, so responsible for our Next Gen newsletter, which is the "Next Gen Insight." We also started a podcast about a year ago -- "Next Up with Next Gen." Super, super pumped about that and excited about that initiative. And then also the blog at ACBNextGeneration.org -- managing that. So again, being able to use my passions when it comes to writing, to podcasting, to communications, it's just been a true honor to be able to kind of combine, you know, being involved in blindness organizations with those passions.

So in 2016, I was lucky enough to receive the DKM First Timer award for the east

through ACB and attended the national convention, the ACB convention in Minneapolis. And so that was just an amazing experience getting to go to my first national convention, really getting to meet such a diversity of, you know, people from all walks of life, all ages; people in such a variety of careers. Just learning so much more about ACB that I really knew a little bit about going into that. But coming home from that convention, I just felt so empowered and so much more aware of, you know, what ACB does, its advocacy efforts and initiatives, and the various special interest affiliates and kind of how the organization works. So that was just a true, true honor to get to do that.

And then in 2021, I was lucky enough to win the JPMorgan Chase Leadership Fellows award in that class. And so the convention that year was virtual but was fortunate to attend in person in 2022 when we were back in person in Omaha. And again, you know, I had been involved in ACB at that point for a few more years, obviously compared to when I first went in 2016, so had a little more experience, a little more knowledge about ACB, but still got to meet more, you know, new individuals and make more connections that, again, were just super empowering. Getting to connect with the class of, you know, award winners in our class, and we kind of kept up that connection, you know, for a while, and have continued to support each other in many ways.

So in terms of ACB Next Generation, like I said, it's really geared toward younger members of ACB, whether it's students, whether it's young professionals, parents, you know, single individuals looking to kind of find their way; in a lot of cases find their niche, find their passions. We've got just a really nice diversity of members with a lot of

different skills and abilities and interests. And so we do have a supporting class of members as well who are over the age of 40, and they can certainly chair committees and be very involved in Next Gen; they just can't serve on the board. So as I do approach, you know, that supporting class demographic of our membership, I absolutely would love to help, you know, in terms of mentoring those younger members, as mentoring those, you know, who have come after me, who have gotten involved in Next Gen since I, you know, was kind of a founding member back in the day. And we are looking to, you know, have a mentorship program and really try to expand on that in order to pair, you know, those more experienced members of Next Gen with those who might be less experienced. And I feel like there's such a big opportunity there just in general for younger members of ACB. Because as we know, you know, there just definitely are not as many statistically. And the role -- I should say the goal of our affiliate is really to increase the number -- not just the number of younger members, but really their engagement within the organization. And if I could play, you know, any kind of role in helping bring those folks along, would just be totally honored to do so.

So as we know, just kind of coming out of the pandemic and coming out of COVID, the world is a bit different than it used to be, you know, back in 2019 and early 2020. And in terms of ACB, you know, obviously we were successful in having multiple virtual conventions. We've had a couple hybrid conventions now. And I think, you know, we've proven that we -- obviously with a lot of learning and some growing pains -- we've been able to find a way to reach out to people across the US and even internationally when it comes to ACB thanks to this technology and in some ways kind of being forced to adopt

it because of the circumstances that we were in. So in terms of Next Generation, you know, obviously younger people tend to be maybe a little more tech savvy and have a little more experience with some of these tools, whether it's Zoom or various, you know, recording technologies, hosting meetings, you know, podcasts, multimedia content. I feel like there's, you know, such a huge opportunity to expand ACB into many of these areas that we're already in, but just to continue to expand our presence, you know, in kind of that digital footprint so to speak, while also maintaining the traditions of conventions, of those in-person gatherings, whether it's DC leadership, whether it's the national convention, or potentially other, you know, other meetings or other events as well.

When I'm not working and then writing for a living, which I absolutely love to do, I do host a podcast called "Eyes Free Sports." And so just based on the name, you know, you might think, "Hmm, what does that actually mean?" But the main focus of the podcast is blind sports, adaptive sports for the blind and visually impaired. Thanks to my combination of passion for storytelling, passion for interviewing; pairing that with my passion for beep baseball, which I've been playing now for over 10 years, and which is an adapted form of baseball for the blind, that's kind of how the idea for this podcast was started. And so I've had the chance to interview a number of athletes, coaches, those who have nonprofit organizations all in the blind sports arena so to speak. So anything from beep baseball to bowling, blind hockey, skiing, goal ball, tandem biking -- the list goes on. There's so many sports and recreation opportunities out there. And so that's really a goal of this podcast is to showcase these various sports and activities and how there really is something out there for everyone.

And you might not think, you know, the word athlete and blind -- pairing those together makes a lot of sense, but there absolutely are many, many accomplished blind athletes out there. And just individuals in general, whether they take walks in their neighborhood, you know, use a treadmill or an exercise bike at home, up to those who play competitive sports like beep baseball, like goal ball, blind hockey. And then even further, you know, those elite athletes that get to compete at the Paralympic level in some of these sports, you know, whether it's goal ball, track and field, etc. There absolutely are opportunities for anyone regardless of age, regardless of physical ability to get involved in sports and recreation. And that's just a true passion of mine to be able to highlight these opportunities and showcase what is out there and what can be done for people to not only compete but also have fun and get physical exercise and fitness as well.

If I think back to a younger version of myself 10-plus years ago when I first got involved in ACB, I was really just starting out in my career and kind of trying to find my footing. You know, what was I really interested in doing in terms of my career, in terms of, you know, hobbies, interests, things of that nature. And I think I, you know, kind of questioned my abilities at times just in terms of, you know, not feeling confident about doing something, or wondering was I capable of this, or, you know, how far would I go in life in spite of having a disability. And having been involved now in ACB for over a decade, it really has been an eye opener -- you know, pun fully intended -- just getting to meet, getting to be around so many amazing, accomplished, intelligent, you know, creative people within our organization has just empowered me and given me so much

fuel to the point where I'm, you know, much more aware of what I can do, and really kind of self aware of my abilities and my potential, you know, maybe even more importantly. And I think that's something I definitely did not have, you know, back when I first got involved. That's just been such a life changing experience, it's been such a life changing endeavor for me to get to be involved in ACB. And looking forward, I think, like I mentioned earlier in terms of mentorship, you know, being able to give back to younger members, to those, you know, maybe recently in ACB or have not even found the organization yet but will in the future, having that opportunity to kind of, you know, interact with them, mentor them on their journeys based on my experience and my journey, I think would be super fulfilling and super rewarding.

I did want to mention a really neat experience I had back in the fall of 2022. I got to attend the SongSight music mentoring retreat, which was hosted by Scott MacIntyre. And if you're not familiar with Scott, he was on "American Idol" in 2009 and came in the top 10, and he happens to be legally blind himself. So he really wanted to give back to the blind and visually impaired community of artists and musicians, so he put on this event out in Scottsdale, Arizona. And so there were seven of us total artists who were blind and visually impaired who got to attend. And it was just such an amazing experience getting to, you know, again, relate to these fellow artists, just kind of picking their brain in terms of their journeys and their experiences, you know, not only in life, but specifically in music, whether it's singing, instrumentation, music production, audio editing. I mean, there were so many things that we got to talk about.

And then we also got to record a song, a group song called "Let the Light In," which is on YouTube. So if you just search for "Let the Light In" on YouTube, you can find that song, listen to that. And the song's theme is really just about, you know, letting the light into your life. Even if you're blind, just kind of that, that metaphor of light and the positive nature of the world out there. If you really let the light in, you can do almost anything. And I did want to mention that Anthony Corona interviewed me on "Sunday Edition" back in January of 2023 about this experience, so you can go dig into the archives of the podcasts for "Sunday Edition" and find that interview as well.

So in terms of ACB Next Generation, obviously we're really focused on engaging younger members in the organization of ACB, but there's certainly many, you know, veteran and experienced members within the organization who have been around for a few decades in some cases, and obviously there's so much that we can pull from those individuals, their experiences, just everything they've seen, and then kind of observed throughout their lives and throughout their involvement within ACB. And I think there's a huge opportunity for kind of marrying those two demographics, those two groups. Again, kind of pulling the experience, the wisdom from those experienced members and then pairing it with the ideas and the perspectives of younger members who might not be as experienced but have a lot of interesting insight. Whether it's technology -- just, again, their experiences, you know, as a younger person living in the 21st century and what that's like and how they kind of fit into the world as a blind and visually impaired person. And I think, you know, there's -- like I said, there's such an opportunity for those two groups, if you want to say, to come together to share ideas and to really help, you know,

move this organization forward into the future to maintain ACB as, you know, a go-to organization in terms of consumer groups when it comes to the blind community.

My final message to everyone is to get up and get moving -- to borrow the name of a committee within ACB. Like I mentioned about my podcast, I'm so passionate about adaptive sports, recreation, just staying active. And find something out there when it comes to, you know, some type of recreation, some type of physical activity, there's something we all can do. And the disability community, unfortunately, you know, is not quite as active for a variety of factors. But if you just do a little homework, do a little digging, you can absolutely find something that you'll enjoy and that will really help empower you for the future.

One of the things that really changed my trajectory as a blind person was getting a guide dog. And just meeting so many guide dog handlers within ACB was really an encouragement and kind of an inspiration for me to consider, you know, having that partner in crime at my side guiding me. And so I do have a four year old goldendoodle. Her name is Goldie. And she's an off-white color, and she is from Freedom Guide Dogs. And I'm just so lucky to have her, you know, with me pretty much everywhere I go. In some ways, wish I would have gotten a guide dog sooner. But again, thanks to my involvement in ACB that was, you know, one of those things that kind of led me down this path, and I'm super happy I made this decision.