



How I got here

BROADCASTER **Lucy Edwards** ON HER CAREER JOURNEY

When a degenerative condition caused her to lose her sight from the age of 11, Lucy Edwards began creating content online to help others with disabilities. Quitting law school after her videos gained traction, she retrained as a digital journalist at the BBC, becoming the first-ever blind presenter to host a show on Radio 1 in 2019. ‘I went into law with the aim of establishing better rights for people with disabilities,’ she says, ‘but I soon realised that I could create change through sharing information that could help or educate others.’ Now a freelance broadcaster, she is also an ambassador for Pantene and various charities, including the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB).

MY PARENTS FIRST KNEW ABOUT MY CONDITION WHEN I WAS FOUR when they discovered bumps on the back of my legs. I had something called Incontinentia pigmenti, which manifests itself in skin abnormalities, but it can also lead to vision loss. They didn’t think much of it, but at eight, I went for a routine eye check and Specsavers basically said, ‘Get her to hospital,’ they were so worried. When I was 11, I lost the vision in my right eye, then, at 17, I lost the vision in my left eye, leaving me completely blind.

toilet. I learned SEO and treated it like a journalism job, writing headlines on my iPhone and formulating series ideas. I applied for a BBC digital apprenticeship scheme and got in. That was huge for me – I met people at the BBC who were blind, who showed me how to believe in myself. **AFTER MY APPRENTICESHIP, I WENT FREELANCE.**

I got a reporting attachment for BBC Radio 4 *In Touch*, a show produced by blind people for blind people. I applied to the BBC in the first place as the website is one of few that’s accessible for my screen reader. Then, in 2019, I sent a show reel to Radio 1. They were looking for stand-in presenters over Christmas and I got a slot. It meant a lot, because for the first time, I was doing something that wasn’t ‘for disabled people’ but specifically about my voice and my skill.

WHEN YOU’RE BLIND IN BROADCASTING OR IN ANY JOB, PEOPLE NEED TO MAKE REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS. As far as I know, none of the 40 London radio studios have screen reader accessibility or compatibility. When I do a show, I have to put Blu Tack on the buttons and that’s stressful when it falls off! There are so many times I’ve logged into software that doesn’t work as someone’s changed the coding and not thought about

‘I decided to show the world, to educate them on blindness’

I SPENT THE FIRST COUPLE OF YEARS AFTER I LOST MY SIGHT LEARNING HOW TO LIVE AGAIN.

I’d had 17 years in one body and didn’t recognise who I was any more, which can be scary on so many levels. Part of recovery was accepting that I wasn’t the girl I used to be, which took a long time because the world we live in isn’t built for people who are blind. I would google the word blindness because I was so sad, but I couldn’t find people like me. I decided to make my own content for visual platforms and, at the same time, learn some of the skills that would enable me to go into traditional broadcasting. **IT STARTED WITH A YOUTUBE VIDEO CALLED BLIND GIRL DOES HER OWN MAKEUP.** I decided to be my own commissioner and show the world how I do things, to educate them on blindness. I’d upload a video of me walking down the street or going to the

accessibility, but I’ve learned to accept that you have to be an ally and help to change things that don’t work.

MY NEXT GOAL IS TO MAKE DOCUMENTARIES.

Last October, I presented a two-part documentary for *BBC News* about being blind on safari in Kenya, looking at the poaching problem. I interviewed James Mwenda, global ambassador for Ol Pejeta Conservancy and former caretaker for the last two northern white rhinos. I’d love to take on hard-hitting subjects and be the next Stacey Dooley.

I USED TO WISH FOR A CURE, BUT I REALISED THAT WAS HOLDING ME BACK IN LIFE. Now

I believe in the social model of disability, which says the world around me needs to be fixed, not me. There’s a lot of work to be done; we’ve seen amazing deaf representation on *Strictly* – but we need to go further, which I think can only happen if we have the right people behind the scenes.

AS TOLD TO: BRYONY GOOCH