

Philip: Hello Inclusion Believers and welcome to the Access champions podcast. I'm your host Philip Dallmann for this week's journey into the galaxy of accessibility and inclusion Uh, we've got a great episode this week with an outstanding guest uh, just the most excited this week we have Han's Weinberg uh, the creator of the Be My eyes app uh, some of you may have seen some of the short videos and press that's been out there on the app uh, we shared some of that on our social media earlier this week, um but it's this volunteer based app that connects people who are blind with sighted volunteers to help with anything from checking if the milk is bad to navigating a tricky website. It's really great use of modern technology to help create more independent living for those with vision loss but uh, before we get to the interview, I want to highlight a few things in the world of inclusion and access going on.

Philip: Um, it we'll start with uh, uh, access champion tweet of the week, which comes from at Tourette's hero Aka Jess Thom who wrote today's real #Tourette's. There's a beaver in my bum writing an essay about dogs #daily outburst uh, If you aren't following at Tourette's, Hero, you absolutely need to be, uh, she just gives such a candid look into the world of Tourette's and if you get a chance go ahead and dive down the google hole on Tourette's hero and just Tom uh, T-O-M uh, it's amazing. She's amazing uh, Her Tourette's hero project and touring show uh, is amazing Um, and hopefully we'll get a chance to have her on the podcast in the future um, and consider this your informal invite just formal request to follow. This month is uh, pride month and so I do want to take a moment to talk about that and the world of inclusion and sort of two parts.

Philip: First is how inclusion reaches beyond disability. A lot to most of this podcast so far has focused on access and inclusion in the world of disability um, and that's solely because that's my background and the folks that I know best that will be evolving as the podcast continues. Um, we will be rolling out some new symbols in the logo to highlight as much of the inclusion field as possible, including gender, race, financial access, sexual preference, inclusion, all those things we're going to start adding as this podcast goes on um, continues to evolve because there's amazing work being done in those fields, um, as it relates to access and inclusion and I and I just can't wait to chat with those folks. I'm just the biggest geek uh when it comes to talking to people doing amazing stuff in the world of helping other people um, I just love it.

Philip: I'll I, I love the work that's going on out there and if there's someone out there you know, doing amazing work, please shout them out to us uh either on Facebook, you can tag them uh, in a comment or just write their name in a comment uh, or tweet at us on Twitter at Access Champion, or shoot us an email um at accesschampionatGmail.com. We want to meet everybody. We want to talk to everybody on our listeners are extremely important to us. I value your opinion, so if you do think someone's doing uh something really interesting, something amazing, uh, something champion status, uh, please, please let us know and then the second part uh, [inaudible 00:03:32] is, if you are participating or organizing pride events this month, please don't forget your, your family with disabilities. Go ahead and use accessible routes for marches. Let's make sure there's ASL interpreters and captions for speeches. Um, and let's also go that next step and includes sensory warnings and options for those who need that support.

Philip: And if we can, you know, let's be supportive of our, uh, not if we can, let's definitely (laughs) be supportive of our folks with vision loss and and those were service animals. I'm unfortunately just read an article uh, about a person being denied access to the Stonewall Inn with their service dog, which they use uh, since they are blind. Uh, the bouncer, it seems was ill informed about the ADA and requests a certification or an ID card which you cannot ask for, uh, legally. Uh, you can ask two questions, um, and hopefully, um, this will be informative to you all and, uh, those who encounter services [inaudible 00:04:43]. So the two questions you can ask is, is the dog a service animal required because of a disability? And you can ask what work or task has the dog been trained to perform? This this person, uh, Lindsey Elvin, who uses the pronouns there, there's ,um, unfortunately has apparently had this experience more than once, which is more than they should, um, when they've been trying to access bars as a person who is blind.

Philip: I think this particular incident was extra heartbreaking because it is pride month and Stonewall is such a landmark for the LGBTQ2 community, but just making it a sort of blowing it up and looking at it ,um, from a bigger picture. It's similar to one, we were talking about the X-box adaptive controller coming out (laughs) and how I just said, you know, everybody should be able to lose hours ,uh, on [inaudible 00:05:30] everyone should be allowed to get into a bar. Uh, we should all be able to go to a bar and have a nice time and get kind of silly ,um, or have drinks with friends. Um, and we should be able to go to whatever bar we want to and so, um, you know, it was really disappointing to see that this in this bar that is inclusive in so many ways was exclusive in this particular way to their credit Stonewall has owned up to the mistake. Um, and it seems like a case of inadequate staff training. Um, so, uh, to me this just emphasizes the need for inclusion training for any front facing, uh, company just needs to be a priority over other. Let's go back to the happy part. It's a happy pride month to all my LGBTQ2 listeners, friends and family, um, and let's try and be as inclusive as possible at when we celebrate them and now without further ado, access champion Hans Weinberg.

Philip: Oh right. Uh, thank you. Uh, Hans Weinberg, who's joining us right now, the ,uh, creator of the Be My Eyes app. Uh, thank you for joining us man.

Hans: Thank you for having me. Great question.

Philip: I love this app. Uh, I think it's amazing. I, um, you know, the miracles of, um, a social media knowing my interests. Uh, I (laughs) guess advertising. Um, one of the press things on this app to me, I guess a little over a week ago and I was amazed and I immediately downloaded it ,um, to sign up to be a volunteer because I just thought it was amazing. Um,

Hans: Thank you.

Philip: It's fascinating to me that the creation of something like this, um, how, what was the journey like for you? What led you to wanting to create this app?

Hans: Well, um, I am, uh, I'm not blind, but I'm visually impaired and I have a tunnel vision and and my vision is ,uh, slowly ,uh, disappearing. Uh, and I have been working for the Danish Blind Association for a number of years and uh, so I, I know myself and a lot of other blind and visually impaired people. Uh, So in that sense it was pretty straightforward. Uh, I'm not technical at all myself ,uh, but ,uh, I did get ,uh, an iPhone at some point. Uh, this is back in 2012 so it's already six years ago that I came up with this idea and um, it's um, well I, I just saw that it was possible to do it and and some of my friends were using uh, Skype and Facetime to call friends when they needed a virtual assistance and and one of them said, "But I always have to call someone" Um, and,(laughs) and this was a way I came up with this idea that we should make a group of volunteer that could take that kind of course, so he didn't have to call it his brothers and sisters and so on. Uh, so that ,uh, was(laughs) pretty straightforward.

Philip: Uh, So you say you weren't, you weren't technical, but, um, what were you doing before, uh, diving into designing this app? What is what is your background?

Hans: If we go way back, uh, I was a set out to become a farmer.

Philip: Okay.

Hans: I'm a born and raised on a farm in in here in Denmark and uh, and that was what I wanted to be and then in when I was 25 years old, uh, my vision ,uh, started to, uh, yeah give me trouble driving and so on and and then I decided ,uh, to quit that and I went back to school and, uh, I ended up studying philosophy (laughs)

Philip: Oh

Hans: At the university in here Denmark. We're two and a half year. Then I got married. Uh, we got some two lovely kids and uh, uh, my wife is a [inaudible 00:09:42] and I'm working together with her in, in her business. Uh, and then beside that I was working for the Danish Blind Association. Uh, so (laughs) it's kind of a mix, a career I have had ,uh, but mainly I'm working together with my wife and uh, and then having this job with the association Uh, besides that.

Philip: Well ,um, what exactly is your role with the Danish Blind Association?

Hans: Well, uh, I have had uh, I don't have time to do it anymore because it would be my eyes.(laughs)

Philip: Fair enough. Fair enough.(laughs)[crosstalk 00:10:15]

Hans: But I was in the beginning, I was hired as a consultant ,uh, and then later on I became a chairman for the blind people in in my area, uh, and a member of the national board and all kinds uh, you can say kind of political, uh, things, uh, fighting for the Levites for buying people and for for yeah,[crosstalk 00:10:40] the wave blind pupils get a job and that all that kind of stuff.

Philip: And currently, [inaudible 00:10:48] I'm not familiar, Um, what is the feel towards inclusive hiring like that helping that kind of employment push for people who are blind in Denmark?

Hans: Well, it's, um, I think like in, in any country, we have a, a staggering high unemployment rate. I think it's around 80% or something of those people who who can and will, uh, uh, work that are unemployed. So it's really a struggle and I feel that it is, a lot of it is the employer does not know what the the rules are and and how much support you can get and and how skilled or many of the blind people are if they just kind of get into the right place and, uh, and does a little flexibility from, from both sides and so on. You can really ,uh, get good benefit of hiring a blind person and um, so, so it is, in my opinion, is really a matter uh, of educating both the blind people, of course, but also the the employers.

Philip: So honestly it sounds not ,uh, too far off them. Um, what uh, a lot of people are are fighting for here. Um,

Hans: I think pretty much[crosstalk 00:12:06]

Philip: Well, that's great. Um, so farmer turned uh, app creator, uh,(laughs) you're on your very own superman for vision loss,(laughs) uh, out of (laughs) out of the farms. You, you've come up with this idea and I'll say, you know, I, um, I have a lot of friends who were very creative and things like that and um, I'll say a lot of people have ideas. It's that next step of [crosstalk 00:12:34] actually creating it. What, what did that look like for you guys?

Hans: Well, uh, I was, uh, actually in my wife a business and when I got the idea and I had no clue what to do with this idea (laughs) I knew it was possible to do it and and I was a I won't say frustrated, but it was on my mind constantly. Uh, and then, uh, yeah, at some point I was listening to the radio and I heard about an event in ,uh, pretty much across the country from where I live ,uh, called startup weekend and it's a place where you can, you can basically walk into the street and then you get one minute in English to present an idea and then ,uh, there bunch of people there and then hopefully ,uh, some of the other people like you idea and they want to join uh, this achieved around the idea for the weekend. Uh, and, and that's what's what I did. Um, It costed like a \$200, but then there was a free beer all weekend. So I think, what the (laughs)

Philip: That's a good trade off [crosstalk 00:13:42]at the very least.(laughs)

Hans: So, um, so I went to this event and presented the idea and um, there was seven other people who joined me and then we we made this a team around this idea and, and uh, on the, uh, there was some judges on the Sunday and we won the price as the most innovative idea. So we were pretty fired up about that.

Philip: Yeah, that's fantastic.

Hans: And then we all went back home and then we started to have a Skype meetings ,uh, every Monday night at 8:00 and um, and we started to write some applications for some of the the bigger foundation that would kind of support ideas and so on.

Philip: And was this the team the the team of folks who were teaming up with? Were they all Denmark based or were they from other places?

Hans: I think we were in ,uh, three different countries. Um, I'm one of them was from a career and uh, in in some parts of Europe and, and uh, one was studying in Sweden. So...

Philip: [crosstalk 00:14:51]little spread out

Hans: ... the the most, most of them were from Denmark, [inaudible 00:14:56]but none of them were, uh, developers. So so we had to ,uh, raise some ,uh, money. Uh, that's where we we started. Then we spent almost a year raising the the first \$300,000. Uh, and when we got them from one of the biggest foundations in Denmark called Velux they make windows for houses (laughs) and and they give away a bunch of money that we year and and we were lucky to get ,uh, \$300,000 and that was basically day one in our business because then we could start hiring real developers and, and uh, experimenting and prototyping and then we, uh, we got an office at ,uh, institution for blind people in in Copenhagen and and that was really a great thing because we could kind of just walk out and ask one of the blind persons that would you mind come in and try to sign in ,uh, or do something with with our prototype and so on. So we really worked together with, with a number of blind people developing this and it was extremely important because ,uh, the developers were great, but they had not been working with blind people before. So it was really important to have ,um, some firsthand experience. So...

Philip: Yeah, that's uh, I mean that's incredibly important. We had ,uh, we had a guest on a couple of weeks ago um, who worked in digital accessibility. Um, on a site here for Broadway and um, you know, she she spoke a little bit about some of the hurdles of things you just wouldn't think about

Hans: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Philip: um, unless you had the disability. Um, in navigating either an app or a website, what were some of the things that came up that maybe you guys didn't anticipate uh, in the development of the, uh, of the app?

Hans: Well, I think it's, it's small. We, uh, in the beginning we had a bunch of ideas uh, about what the app should be able to do uh, and then we looked at the money (laughs) and we looked at, uh,

Philip: ...as you should.(laughs)

Hans: Yeah (laughs) and then we, uh, we we kind of ended up with, let's see how simple we can make it. Uh, so we we can always build something into the app or add a new feature or something, but let's let's start with the most basic and then see uh, what people are asking for and so on and then add that later on. Uh, and it kind of got into a sport uh, and we ended up with uh, in the first version of Be My Eye there was only one button of the[inaudible 00:17:43] (laughs) beside going into settings. Um, but when you open the

App, there was only one button, uh, and then and was a request a volunteer. Uh, and we were pretty proud about that actually. Uh, and also we we try to make the login as easy uh, as possible so it was a matter of cutting everything on necessary uh, away and make it really easy to to to use.

Philip: Yeah, I mean it's even from my end, uh, using it as a volunteer is, it is incredibly easy to navigate um,

Hans: As a volunteer, you you cannot really do (laughs) a whole lot

Philip: Yeah [inaudible 00:18:29]to answer the call you but I I wouldn't want it to have, if it had more it would be uh, more confusing or more time consuming to get set up. Whereas I think in a lot of ways you guys are served by the fact uh, of the simplicity of it.

Hans: One thing that we we uh, we we the feedback we get is the people that they like it, that now you can actually go in and listen to some user stories and that stories from volunteers and from black people uh, sold it just sold you can do something in the app when you[crosstalk 00:19:07]

Philip: Well, it was incredibly helpful.

Hans: Then you can go in to listen to other people's experience and so on.

Philip: Yeah I that to me was, was like, oh, okay, this is how it works and this is how it, how somebody helped somebody else and great. I feel even more confident that I can, I can handle this and I can do this. Um, that's really great. Backtracking a little bit pie. I love when random commercial companies like this window company that you're talking about have massive philanthropic arms that just tried to do good, you know, their day to day is windows, but I can only imagine the joy that they get from funding things like your project. Um, so I'm always really excited when I see stuff like that because um, it's always companies uh, that you wouldn't think of would have those kinds of grants. Like I, (laughs) if you had asked me what kind of company probably gives away you know grants to develop these kinds of apps, I would not have guessed a window company.(laughs)[crosstalk 00:20:09]

Hans: Denmark is a very small country. We only 5.5 million people. Uh, so it, (laughs) it is small than any of your state I think,(laughs) but but but so so so the foundation is is pretty well known in Denmark. So so we knew and those are kind of a handful that you kind of send your application to...

Philip: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Hans: Uh ,that are the major ones and in Denmark. So they are pretty well known in Denmark.

Philip: Gotcha. I guess every office space with easy access to a sort of an internal focus group, which is great. The first version of the App you said had the one button. What were,

what were the next steps after that after you, this first version that you guys were pretty, pretty proud of?

Hans: We launched the App in ,uh, in January 2015. So so we spent uh, all, all of a 13 and 14, uh, raising money and developing and then, uh, by the end of 2014 we were ready to launch and we did that in January 2015. Uh, and we had a tremendous amount of press and and so on from from the beginning

Philip: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Hans: Uh, I think it was because we were, I think we were one of the first one to really ,uh, crowd source, uh, for a good course and and uh, and we were definitely the first one to to um, do something like this where you as a normal sighted person could do something good with your too expensive smartphone (laughs) and and and ,um, so I think a lot of people just felt in love with this idea and uh, especially uh, yeah journalist and a radio and television and so on. So we got a tremendous amount of press in the first half year of 2015 and Yeah, and even til this day we get a interviews on a regular basis and one of the the, the kind of funny thing was that we have built in a kind of a game [inaudible 00:22:12]elements. So when you, as a volunteer had helped someone, you would gain some point, you could not use the point for anything but a points are good( laughs). Um, and um, but but it, it turned out that from the beginning that it was really difficult to even get a call. So this points system didn't really that make much sense. So and and when we have uh, in a weave, at some point we simply removed it because people were asking too many questions about what was the purpose of this. And we couldn't really explain that (laughs)

Philip: That's a good reason to remove something.(laughs)

Hans: So ,uh, but we thought we should do kind of encourage people to come back and stay on the app and so on but it turned out to be ,uh, that's turned out to be so many good people out there who really want to help, uh, in this, uh, uh, convenient and easy way to do it and so so the the biggest thing that we are working on constantly is reaching out to ,uh, blind people and finding ways to do that, uh, and it it's not just posting something on Twitter and Facebook and so it's more about reaching out to a blind organization and have them post something about Be My Eyes , or send out a newsletter to their members...

Philip: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Hans: ...or have relative to blind people tell their loved ones about this app and so on. So so it's it's kind of another way to reach a blind people than to read the sighted volunteers.

Philip: Absolutely. Yeah. Um, and I know a little bit about that from working Internet accessibility program that was providing audio described performances and that outreach It's just different. Um, it's it's different than side effects. It is, you're right, it's less social media. It's more trying to get to that, that grass roots level. Um,

Hans: Yeah yeah and you can't, you cannot really have uh, you can not pay anyone to do this.

Philip: No. There is Nope. I tried, I tried to find somebody, (laughs)

Hans: So it is something you have to do on your own and with the help of good friends and so on.

Philip: Absolutely. Oh, one of the things that was astounding to me um, in sort of that realm of outreach is that how many users you guys have it, which is which was closing in on I want to say it was like 90,000 when I looked at it. Then also how many volunteers you have which (laughs) was well over a million, right?

Hans: It is, yeah. We have uh, a more than 1.3 million volunteers right now and we have uh, we have had uh, a crazy last 20 days or something like that because uh, on the 17th uh, it was uh, world accessibility awareness day

Philip: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Hans: ... and uh, apple and google were posting something about the Be My Eyes as one of the things that they thought were worth mentioning. Um, and when those guys, (laughs) they push something, things that happened. Uh, so we have, we have gotten more than 300,000 volunteers within the last 20 days. So it's been really, really amazing.

Philip: That's amazing.

Hans: Mm-hmm (affirmative) yeah and also I think increased the number of blind people with 20% or something like that. So so it has been...

Philip: That's fantastic

Hans: ...absolutely amazing, but I also need to say that I'm super super proud of having uh, 80,000 blind people but when you look at the fact that there's uh, a quarter of a billion blind or visually impaired people in the world, then you can say, well, (laughs) and so what, uh, because we, it it's basically nothing and so we have a long way to go and and hopefully we can go hand in hand with, uh, the spreading of smartphones in India and Africa and those places where most blind people they live...

Philip: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Hans: ...and and also getting better and better internet connection and so on. So we are we're super excited about looking into the the coming years here because I think we will experience [inaudible 00:26:48] exponential growth in, uh, in the number of blind people who get online and then they can decide if they want to use Be My Eyes or not but but uh, it's, I think it's, it's really amazing what's what's happening in the developing world, uh, these, uh, these coming years here. So...



Philip: I would agree, Um, but I would also disagree with you at 80,000 is not nothing, uh, that is something and that is uh, an accomplishment that is absolutely true. There's definitely, as you describe, you know, more folks to reach more work to be done but uh, I would say 80, 80,000 blind people being assisted by your app is something worth noting and worth being a being proud of. Um,

Hans: Yeah get me wrong. I'm super proud of [inaudible 00:27:36] (laughs) absolutely. It just, I think it it's uh, it's a good thing kind of a to have a perspective on how many people out there uh, so

Philip: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Hans: You don't get carried away but(laughs)

Philip: Absolutely. Um, so you answered my next question a little bit um, in talking about sort of the outreach, um, that still needs to be done. Um, but what what does the future hold for Be My Eyes and you, um, what what, what's next? What's going forward?

Hans: One of the things that I've learned about being startup is that you have no idea what's happening on Monday uh, so ( laughs)

Philip: That's fair.

Hans: It's really really, uh, but it's it's super interesting but I, one of the things that we are right now, we have a big chunk of work, uh, because we have launched uh, a new feature a few months ago called a specialized help, uh, and um, it it's just in the beginning and and so if you are blind person for instance in the US and you have an issue with a Microsoft product, then you can uh, use Be My Eyes to call the Microsoft support desk directly from from the Be My Eyes app and and the good thing, those are two good things about this,

Hans: one of them is that uh, Microsoft is also getting the video part. So, uh, because when you call a support, the, the first thing they will ask you is okay, what's on the screen right now or how many green lights are flashing? And if you are blind person, it's pretty difficult to, to answer those questions, but now you just show them the screen or you can show them uh, yeah, whatever they need to see and then they can help you way easier.

Philip: Yeah.

Hans: Uh, and, and actually, uh, uh, they had done some numbers on this and they are telling us that, uh, the support calls they get from blind people are now 30% shorter because it is way easier to help a blind person when you can see what's going on. Uh, so they are super happy about it and the other good thing is uh, that Microsoft is paying Be My Eyes a monthly fee, so we help them help their blind customers. Uh, and and the the hidden part about this is that now Microsoft really get to know about their own products, how they are working, if you are a blind person. Uh, and, and this is one of the things that I'm

pretty excited about that now uh, Microsoft and hopefully a whole bunch of other companies that we are in dialogue with right now uh, will join this and then they will experience blind people explaining to them why their product is difficult to use in this situation and so on and hopefully they will, uh, yeah, uh, have that in mind when they are designing a future products uh, so..

Philip: Yeah, what a great way to have a sort of inadvertent focus groups...

Hans: ...and it's super important for for us that we can Be My Eyes is a free app,

Philip: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Hans: Uh, and and and we definitely want to keep it that way because as we were speaking about before we, we, uh, we have a big focus on helping blind people all over the world and uh, and maybe you, if you live in India you can get a smartphone and maybe you can also get online, but but it will be difficult to pay a \$10 a month or something like that.

Philip: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Hans: Uh, and we we think we can do this without charging a blind people, uh, in any way, uh, and if we can make the company's happy about this as well and they are paying Be My Eyes for uh, yeah, tapping into to our network and service and so on. Uh, I think it's kind of a win win.

Philip: Yeah, I would agree. I think everybody comes out on top on that one. It's exciting to hear that, that a company like Microsoft, I mean, it's not surprising that they're forward thinking enough. They've done pretty well for themselves, uh, but that they are engaged enough to think about uh, serving their customers who are blind in a more efficient way.

Hans: Yeah but they have[inaudible 00:32:08] super excited about this and uh, and it's, uh, yeah, we are, we are pretty excited about having Microsoft as our first customer in in this way and it's, I hope that it will kind of pave the way to other companies to [inaudible 00:32:23]see that one of the world's major companies is involved.

Philip: Yeah, absolutely. I would say anybody that's listening to this podcast, if you're thinking about how uh, to engage your customers in a better way with your service, I would look into this.

Hans: Absolutely and if you have some [inaudible 00:32:42] for companies that we should reach out to that you think is relevant for for blind people and then we hit. I think we have about 600 suggestions(laughs) by know but uh, the more the merrier so.

Philip: I know we have a few uh, listeners who are blind, so if you, as you're listening, if there, if there's companies that have come up to the top of your head, we'll connect you to Be My Eyes. Just reach out to us at Access Champion on Twitter or Access Champion at Gmail.com and we're happy to pass you along. When I watched the video and then I use

the app, I spent probably a day gushing about it to my fiancée, to every friend I ran into uh, I was like, you got to see this thing. It's amazing and they all know that I'm a huge accessibility uh, nerd. Uh, so this is not too unusual for them to, to deal with uh,(laughs)

Philip: But uh, I, I just think it's amazing and, and what I, what I'd, I'd love to hear it from you is you know now that you're out here in this field uh, of technology and sort of accessibility. Obviously you're working with Microsoft and things like that. What else out there is exciting to you as both someone who's working in the field and someone who's uh, consuming accessibility items for, for digital access and for things like that and as you navigate the tunnel vision.

Hans: I know it's not a new thing a little but but I still think it is. Maybe it's because I'm 54 years old, but but I am still amazed that I can get help from someone here in Denmark, uh, within 30 seconds from someone sitting in New York or something and and like they can actually see what I'm pointing my phone and just the fact that it is possible to do that.

Hans: I think a pretty amazing, uh, and also the fact that now with all those volunteers week we can we can help people in 182 different languages. Uh, which I also think it's completely amazing that one small company in Denmark can make something that can connect people in, in so many different languages that we don't even speak or so on. So, so it's, it's really, um, that this has amazed me and also the fact that now you can, you have the whole world to play with. Uh, so even this is a super, super small area, but because of we can reach out to to the whole world, then you you can get a great big community around a, a small thing because you have the whole world to, uh, to, to, to work in and this is to me absolutely amazing and to kind of answer your question more, it's uh, a smartphone has definitely been a game changer for, uh, for blind people because now we can, uh, in the good old Nokia days, then you had to buy a super expensive phone and then you had to buy maybe not so expensive but still quite expensive extra program that you had to load into your program or to your phone and it will basically kill your phone.

Hans: Uh, and then maybe you could have your SMS, uh, read to you or something like that.

Philip: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Hans: But now you can buy uh, off the shelf product and you just uh, turn a talk back or voiceover on and then you as the blind of course you need to spend a day or two learning how to navigate and so on.

Philip: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Hans: But pretty fast people will will get the hang of it and then uh, blind people can use the same phone in the same speed as anyone else and and access to pretty much the same things and so on and this is for me, it's a really. Yeah, uh, including people into this modern world. I know there's a lot of things that we are still uh, working on and fighting

for and so on, uh, making a website more accessible and all that, but that's an ongoing struggle.

Hans: But it is a tremendous important big thing that the smartphones are as accessible as they are um, sometimes when there's a new update, those as kind of a pushback something because some things are not made ready for the ,uh, a voiceover and so on yet but um, yeah, that, that's, that's, I think that's still a smaller thing, but that can be pretty annoying but blind people are not better than any body else because when they get used to something, they want that and(laughs) they don't want to puts back in any way.

Philip: That's uh, that's a human characteristic that connects us all. We all hate change (laughs)

Hans: And also um, a lot of people are saying, "Oh, uh, blind people, they are so patient" no they not (laughs) sometimes they have to wait but[inaudible 00:37:53] not more patient than anybody else. So it's, um, and that's important to remember and the super, super personal side, speaking of technology and so on. Uh you see, when I discovered I had this [inaudible 00:38:17] about 30 years ago, there was no sign whatsoever of any kind of treatment or signal in the horizon that it could be done about something about this uh, It was just uh, a doomed to uh, be blind uh, but now within the last four or five years ,uh, I have been following a few sites that are writing about uh, you can implant a chip into the eye and and and you can do something with stem cells and so on. So.

Philip: Oh Wow.

Hans: It's not that I am really optimistic but, uh, at, at least it does seem to be some pretty good signs out there that, uh, that also I should be able to maybe just jump on some, uh, one of the last[inaudible 00:39:02] (laughs)

Philip: That's, I mean, that's really cool and, uh, uh, I think seeing that progress has to be motivating.

Hans: Yeah, absolutely.(laughs)

Philip: Yeah.

Hans: And this is, most of it is uh, driven by the exponential growth in computer power

Philip: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Hans: Uh, and and and uh, so this is also, I'm, it's it's really exciting to to follow, uh, these check news on a daily basis and and uh, and I very much enjoy doing that.

Philip: Well, Hans, thank you so much for joining the podcast and for all of my listeners out there, one where can they find the app?

Hans: We have a website uh, called Be My Eyes.com and uh, I think the first thing you'll see (laughs) on the website is how you can download the app and so on and um, and then we of course on on Twitter and Facebook and you just search for Be My Eyes and then I think we will pop up and you're more than welcome to send an email to me as well uh, you can find my info on the website as well.

Philip: That's where I found it.(laughs) uh, so thank you again Hans and uh, thank you for all of the work that that you've done. You have made a tremendous impact on so many people. 80,000 folks is unreal and then, uh, opening up the door for over a million volunteers to give back simply through their phone uh, is also something that I think makes you an Access Champion.(laughs)

Hans: Thank you so much. It's kind of funny because of course we get a lot of emails and uh, uh, quite a few of them are from our volunteers and uh, if someone has been helping a person find out if they have said there[inaudible 00:41:00] I've been to the right temperature or something and they really get a kick out of that and, and uh, some of the males, when I read them, I'm a little bit in doubt, who am I helping the most[crosstalk 00:41:09](laughs) of the blind person or the volunteers but it's really, um, it's really great thing that people enjoy helping and and, uh, it makes life a little bit easier for a blind person somewhere. Uh, so it's, uh, it's really a fantastic joy for me to be a part of this and I better remember that, uh, the most of the credit goes to my team because I came up with the idea, but without my team I would never have been able to do anything of what I'm doing. So it's, it's very much uh, a team effort that has brought us to this place. So thank you for that.

Philip: Absolutely. Alright. Well, uh, again, thank you so much and uh, [crosstalk 00:41:57] have a great day.

Hans: Yeah thank you. (laughs)

Philip: Thanks again to Hans and his whole team with the Be My Eyes app. If you want to learn more about the app, you can visit their website at Be My Eyes.com and you can download the app from the app store both on android and iOS. Um, I'd love to see them have a slight uptick in volunteers from the access champions. Listeners, uh, so give the site a visit, see if this is something you can do. I've signed up as a volunteer, uh, and I, you know, you log in, log out when you're available. Um, It's a really just great thing to do. Um, and uh, I think two more volunteers, the better his Han was speaking about uh, their expansion. So I'm into to other countries and things like that. So let's let's get ready, especially if you're bilingual. I'm going to put an extra emphasis out there. If you are bilingual, please consider signing up as a volunteer for this app.

Philip: Uh, I'm happy to announce our rating and review contest winner Aaron Feinstein, uh, Aaron, congrats and thanks for the review. Um, shoot us an email or tweet at us and we'll get that tee shirt on over to you. For the rest of you listeners if you haven't already uh, entered our creative superhero contest, tweet at us or comment on Facebook with a description of your inclusive and accessible superhero ,uh, the winner will get a professionally drawn cartoon of that hero, which is pretty awesome. Finally ,uh, thanks to our producer Matt Kerstetter for making this sound amazing each and every week.

Um, he is my personal hero and, uh, thanks to Eric Walton for the fantastic theme song. I love it every time I hear it. So thank you, Eric. We'll catch you next week. Inclusion believers and remember, never stopped running through that brick wall.