

Cane Training: My Own Terms

By Brandi Darby



The need or desire to use a cane within the albinism community is met with a variety of responses. Adults with albinism often see cane usage as overkill, while parents tend to view it as an additional tool for their child to navigate with. One thing we can all agree on is that cane usage is a personal decision that is best made on a case-by-case basis.

I'm 37 and a few weeks ago, I made the decision to receive cane training. My parents were offered this option for me when I was a child but declined because I seemed to navigate well without it. As an adult, I agree with their decision on my behalf. Although I'm legally blind, not having a cane as a child gave me time to find my own way and to incorporate tools if and when they became necessary.

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As an adult with albinism, I understand the idea of canes and other such tools being excessive if the suggestion is that we should *all* be using them. I believe using a cane at a young age would have led me to think that I couldn't navigate without it. The confidence

I gained from finding my way without it has taken me further than a cane ever could.

Conversely, as a teenager, when I learned exactly how wide the spectrum of albinism was, I met people who shared my condition but had less vision acuity and more eye fatigue than me. My teenage peers taught me how their tools allowed them to do the same things I was doing, thus bridging the gap between our abilities.

Confidence isn't the only thing I gained along the way: I have experienced defensiveness as a common accompaniment to albinism. Society assumes a lot about our abilities, or lack thereof; therefore, if we're keeping it real, ego plays a part in many of our decisions to go tool-less. I felt small amid all the vision aides people insisted I needed and the things they said I couldn't do. I was determined to defy every limitation ever applied to me, and I did. It's always been important for me to define my own limitations and not allow them to be assigned to me. When I sought out cane training, it was with pride because I had come to it on my *own* terms, which is the most empowering position to make this kind of decision from.

I'm comfortable in my routines; my grocery store is 185 footsteps from my apartment, the nearest bus stop is across the street, and Target

is .7 miles down the road. If my life existed within the limits of my city or neighborhood, a cane would never be helpful to me.

In the last few years, I've seen my travel frequency increase for work, weightlifting, and social purposes. In other airports and cities, I recognized my need for more navigational time. The first time I flew to Charles de Galle

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airport in Paris, I really would've appreciated a cane as a visual cue to others that I had limited vision while I traversed the busy airport. The same went for walking around in Minneapolis, Chicago, Phoenix and London; those cities are not as familiar to me, so a cane indicating that steps I didn't see were present, or that the grade had changed on the ground would have been very helpful.

For all the things that make us different on this spectrum of albinism, something we're all looking for is our own way in the world. I'm grateful that we have a variety of tools at our disposal to allow that. I respect my friends who've rejected the stigma of using para-transit, canes, dogs, braille and other assistive assets to bring the world to them.