

Transcript- Episode 60 – The Blind Sport Podcast

Blind Alive with Mel Scott

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Introduction

This is episode 60 of The Blind Sport Podcast entitled Blind Alive with Mel Scott.

Hi I'm Mike, and this is The Blind Sport Podcast. The sports show for the blind, the partially sighted and the supportive sighty. Thanks for joining me for episode 60.

On the show we'll be talking with Mel Scott from the US about Blind Alive.

BlindAlive.com is a result of Mel's desire to find accessible fitness programs that can be done in the comfort of your own home.

How do you follow a fitness instructor when the instructions are mostly visual? By designing routines that can be followed with audible instructions. That's how, and that's just what Mel did.

Hi there, I hope this episode finds you fit and well.

Before we chat to Mel, I would like to thank you for the feedback received re episode 59, where we spoke with the adventurer Miles Hilton-Barber from England.

Some of the comments that I received included:

From Jen. Fantastic podcast! As someone new to ultra running and as a running guide I found this episode really inspiring and insightful. Some great guiding tips
From Terry. Wow! What a guy. Talk about lead by example.

Please email me with any comments

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Interview

Mike - My guest is Mel Scott from Blind Alive, which is an online source of audio workouts for blind and vision impaired people who are interested in their health and fitness. Check out the website www.blindalive.com for all of their great stuff.

Hi there Mel. Welcome to the show.

Mel – Thank you. This is great. I'm excited to talk to your people.

Mike - That's the way. Can you just start off by telling us your personal story of vision loss?

Mel – Sure. I was diagnosed with RP when I was seven. RP as in Retinitis Pigmentosa. I don't know exactly what variety I have. RP tends to be a larger umbrella and I actually did go get the genetic testing done last year but I opted to go for the free route and they said it would take up to two years to get their results back so it's a year later and I still don't know what the results are so I don't know exactly what I have.

So I was diagnosed when I was seven and I could read print up until about the tenth grade and then I used a CCTV through college and when I took the GRE that last year of college, the Graduate Record Exam, it made me physically ill and I just said "Ok, it's time to let go" and I put the pen down and I said "Ok, I'm done" and I never tried to read print again after that. It's hard to let go.

So I'm 57 now and I've been using a guide dog now for twelve years and I'm on my fourth dog. So that's kind of the short of it.

Mike - Very cool. Now can you give us the quick description I suppose? What is Blind Alive and Eyes-Free Fitness?

Mel - Ok. What I do is create myself and I produce and I bring together people that can create well described fitness programs. I have fitness instructors, Jennifer Kern, Shana Maleeff, Joe Simek and I've even created a few myself and the Pilates Instructor Edye Fisher. I make sure I have certified fitness instructors and then what I do is I work with them and we work together to create a script so that it's well described. My goal is to get the most description in the least amount of words possible. Sometimes, we do well at that and sometimes we don't do so great. But we're learning how to cue people so that they can follow along without needing to see the videos. So that's the short version. I'm happy to go in to the long version if you want.

Mike - For sure. So what inspired you to get this project up and going in the first place?

Mel – I like being fit and I'm not a sports person. I know most of your audience are mostly sports enthusiasts and sport has never been my thing. I've never felt super

coordinated and I guess I got intimidated as a child trying to play baseball and realising that I could never hit the ball. And I didn't understand why I could never hit the ball and I guess I got a complex around it. And riding bikes at a young age, once again, I was riding with the gang around my town and when I just about killed somebody I kind of got intimidated with that as well.

So I rode horses for a long time and that felt safer until I was riding through the woods and got knocked off with a branch and so I just decided, you know, I want to do the kind of fitness that you see on the Infomercials. The Chalene Johnsons and the Jane Fonda's and Billy Blanks, the Tae Bos, you know those kinds of things. So what I would do is, I would order those DVDs or whatever, VHS at that time. And I would order them and I couldn't do them. And I would get so upset, I would have to bribe my kids or my husband or I would invite friends to come over and teach me the routine. I'm an independent person, I'm an introverted person, I'm a contemplative type personality and I wanted to do it by myself.

So a couple of years ago, I was riding on my bike and I was thinking, Gosh, I really want that Chalene Johnson, that Piyo Pilates/ Yoga combination workout. I knew I would get it and I wouldn't be able to do it, and I was whining, and moaning and bitching to myself and I thought all of a sudden, what a minute. This isn't who you are. You're not a whiner. You are a smart, articulate person and I can do this myself. You know, there's no reason in the world why I can't do it myself.

So I got so excited and it was just like in an instant and I knew, ok this is what I'm here for, this is my purpose. And I got off my bike and went straight to my computer and started making a list of all the things that I needed to do to create a company. And all the things that I needed to do to find someone that can work with me, a fitness instructor, because I'm not a fitness instructor. I was a massage therapist for 32 years and loved the human body and I love people and I love anatomy. So I understood form and function and I understand blindness and I thought ok, I can do this.

So I started calling people and it fell in to place just so easily. And those first six workouts, just boom, they just happened in a period of about eight months of working like a dog to make it happen. But I had so much fun doing it and so that's how I got started.

Mike – Brilliant. With these audio files, do people who listen to those need any special equipment or can they put it on pretty much anything?

Mel - They are MP3 files and you can download them on the computer and we do have an App in development. It's been in development for a long time because we keep running in to road blocks but it's going to happen.

And Lisa Salinger who works with me is a techno wizard as far as I'm concerned and she's figured out how you can download it on to the computer and then put it in to

Dropbox and then over to Voice Dream so it will play in a Voice Dream reader and she has also figured out how to transfer it in to VLC so you can do it on the phone with some finagling.

And the other thing that we do is, you can put it on a Thumb Drive, you know copy it to a Thumb Drive and then you can play it on a National Library Service for the Blind player. I don't know if you have that in New Zealand or not? But in the US, we have what's called an NLS Player and it will play on that.

I also have them as CDs on Amazon so you can get the CDs for that. So everything is digital download at this point or on Thumb Drive so that's how we're doing it now. Hopefully before too long the App will be available and you'll just be able to play it straight from the App.

Mike – Awesome.

Mel – Yeah, I can't wait.

Mike – Now, these routines can be done for or by, if you like, people that have spent their life pretty much sitting on the couch or the sofa?

Mel - This past year I really targeted people who have been more sedentary or have not ever worked out before or they are, you know, recovering and need gentler workouts. So I have the gentle workout set and that can be done all in a chair or standing, either way. And that's a series of twenty minute workouts because I wanted them to be shorter so that people could alternate from one day to the next. And then I have a Pilates workout which is done in the chair with a Pilates ring and then I have the gentle workout for beginners which is Yoga. It's not a workout, it's a Yoga flow if we're using correct Yoga language and it's all on the floor. I decided to have all of the Yoga poses on the floor because I know people get intimidated by Yoga and Yoga has saved my life. I started doing Yoga when I was fifteen and I wanted to bring people up slowly so that one is all done on the floor. And then the two Pilates mat workouts are all on the floor, so we're not worrying about balance or falling or anything like that.

That's the last workouts that I've been working on over the past twelve months and the first twelve months were cardio workouts, sculpting with weights workouts, stability ball workout and a boot camp workout so they can be pretty intense and they're great for people. If you can't get out and do your workout or do your sports or whatever, you can stay fit inside. So that's what I've got so far.

Mike – Excellent.

Mel – Yeah.

Mike - These exercise routines are hard enough for those people that are, I suppose, extremely fit as well?

Mel – Yes. The Cardio Level 2 in particular and the Sculpting with Weights Level 2. Of course, you're using weights, you can make it as hard or as easy as you want according to how much weight you use. But I'm not using, they are not any machines, it's all using dumbbell. So you can get as heavy as you want or use ankle weights. And of course with the cardio workouts, I like to work out with hand weights myself, just holding weights with the workout to add a little bit of extra oomph.

And then with the stability ball once again, you can add weight to your wrist or your legs if you want to. Some people actually put sand in their ball to add extra weight to it so you can make it more difficult too. And with the stability ball, you're using hand weights also with that. But we're also using body weight exercises like planks and push ups and using the ball to increase the intensity of the workout.

And then the boot camp, you're doing planks and push ups and it's a more interval training type workout.

I mean, from my perspective, their intense. Maybe from somebody that's super, super, super fit, maybe not. I think you can make them as hard as you want to really.

Mike – Definitely. Especially when you're using them as a cross training tool maybe for another sport that you're focused on.

Mel – Sure, absolutely. And it's good to have variety.

Mike - For Sure.

Mel - Yeah, that's what I like. I don't like to do the same thing every day. I like to change it all around and that's why I've created a variety and this year, right now we're working on more of an aerobic type, Zumba type exercise program and a few others. I don't want to say what I'm working on because then they may be miserable failures and you don't know until you get in there how difficult it is going to be to describe something. It's been more challenging than I thought, to do it.

Mike - Is there any accommodation for people with any other disabilities or possibly other health conditions that people find challenging when they are doing exercise?

Mel - Well you know balance is always an issue for us a lot of times and so I've really taken that in to consideration and always suggesting that there be a sturdy chair near or a wall or that the modifications, you can do them from a chair. So, those modifications are there and I always have the disclaimer, you need to consult your doctor if you feel like there's a reason why you might not need to be exercising for whatever reason. But there's really very few reasons why a person can't move in

some way, shape or fashion. So I like to encourage people to give it a try. Pretty much anybody can do the Yoga and the Pilates because they are not moving and jumping around and flailing around. You're not going to fall, because you're already on the ground.

Mike – I suppose in the beginning too, it's getting the whole coordination thing happening, when someone says lift your left leg and your right arm goes up and all that sort of thing.

Mel – Well what I like is, it's about having fun and it's about moving your body. I don't want people to get caught up in having to do it perfectly. It's important to have good form but at the same time, it's good to come in to your body and read your own body. You know your body better than anybody else. And let your body talk to you.

That's why I really encourage sighted people to do the audio workouts because if you're constantly looking at the hot chick on the TV screen, you're not in your body and so I like to encourage people to come in to your body. Feel your body. Know what it's saying and listen. You don't have to do it perfectly. You might not be able to put your hands up in the air while your legs coming up. So what? Just do your legs or just do your arms.

I talk to people or whoever cueing, let's keep it upbeat and don't worry about doing it perfectly because you're not going to do it perfectly. You just get better and better. The more you do it, the better you get. I just like to have people, be easy on yourself. If you can't do the whole workout do five minutes, do ten minutes, just keep adding until you get it. I love them. I've been doing my own workouts now for two years and I'm not tired of my own workouts which to me is, I don't know, I'm proud of that.

Mike - That's good.

Mel - Yeah.

Mike - Do we need any specific equipment or different tools to do these workouts?

Mel - The stability ball needs a stability ball.

Mike - Yeah, that would be useful.

Mel - Yeah, and I have links to everything that you need on my website. I'm not a big believer in lots and lots of equipment and machines, because I think we have everything we need in our body. But the stability ball, you need that. You need hand weights and ankle weights if you choose to use ankle weights. You need a good Yoga mat or a Pilates mat. Some kind of mat that is a non slip cushioning mat. And other than that, that's all you need. You just need your body and that's pretty much it.

Mike - Excellent. People can listen to a sample of these workouts as well Mel?

Mel - Yes, I have all of the workouts on the website so if you go to the website and you go to the Buy Workouts page, there's a short description, a long description and a sample that you can listen to and I also am very proud, now we have a testimonials page so you can see what people are saying. The sample is a thirty second sample, so it's not super long but you get the feel for what it is.

Mike – And as well as the individual sessions or routines, you're also doing sort of bundled packages?

Mel – Yes. What we do is we bundle what I think people would like, like the start up bundle which is Cardio 1 and Sculpting with Weights 1 and then at the end of the year, I bundled all of the workouts. I call it the First Anniversary Collection which has all of the first six workouts and then I'm just getting ready to put together the Second Anniversary workouts together which will be all of the more gentle workouts.

Pretty soon we hope to have a shopping cart so that you'll be able to add items to the shopping cart and so it will be kind of easier to get different ones all at the same time. We've tried really hard to make the website as friendly as possible and my Web Developer Chris Cox has done a beautiful job with it. It's tricky though, it's not a perfect thing. Accessibility is just not, it's just not. And so there is a contact form and anybody can call Lisa or contact us and we will put the order through for you if we need to. So we want to make it available for as many people as we possibly, possibly can.

Mike - One thing I like about your project Mel is the fact that you have brought in a team. You do work as a team and all that sort of thing. You've obviously found that quite beneficial.

Mel - Oh my gosh. You know, I knew from the beginning that there was no way I was going to be able to do it by myself because I have a creative mind and I tell people I think in spider webs, not in straight lines. I really need somebody to kind of keep me focused because I'll just jump from here to there to everywhere. I mean I have an idea a minute and it's hard for me to pick one and stick to it.

Lisa Salinger, I was so, so fortunate to find her. She has come on board and she keeps me straight. Our personalities are almost completely opposite of each other. But we work super well together. And Chris Cox, my Web Developer, he understands the accessibility challenge.

And what my goal has been with the people that I bring on, is I want to keep that blindness connection. The fitness instructors all have a blindness connection. Shanna Maleeff's mother is blind, Lynne Maleeff and Jennifer Kern's mother is blind and my music composers, Jimmy Fontanez and Jamie Pauls and Jason Castonguay

are all blind and Jamie Pauls does all of my podcast editing. So I have tried to keep that connection as much as I can because we understand who we are and what we need. I want to employ blind people to the best of my ability. Once again, I bring on sighted people when I need to because that's just the way it is. And I'm ok with that. That's been my attitude. There are a lot of people working with me on this whole thing and I'm so grateful for every single one of them.

Mike - Tell us about your podcast and blog as well.

Mel - Ok, so I have the Eyes-Free Fitness Podcast, that comes out every few weeks. And I interview people and Lisa does a lot of the interviewing as well. Then Peggy Fleischher and Wayne King do a segment called Let's Eat and it's about cooking. Just bringing in and creating healthy dishes and how to do that. And then I do a segment once a month called Fitness Speak and it's mainly for me to have fun because I love talking about the body and I love teaching people about their body.

I find that so many people don't have a clue what's going on in their own bodies. They don't know where their liver is, they don't know what their pancreas does. So I'm doing a segment right now on body fluids and I'm taking a different body fluid. I mean to me, I don't know, I think it's great fun. I talk about saliva and blood and mucus and next time I'm doing urine. Some people get kind of squeamish about it and if I'm going to be talking about anything explicit I give people a warning a head of time because I'm not shying away from anything.

And next, after I finish the body fluids, I'm going to start talking about organs, starting with the heaviest organ in your body and moving through. I get silly. I love talking about the body and talking to people about things that they need to know because it's where we live. We live in our body and we need to know what's going on in there. So obviously you can tell where my passion point is. That's the podcast.

And then the blog. We have a blog that comes out every week. It just covers a lot of different topics and I write and Peggy Fleischher writes and Melanie Peskoe comes in and writes and Lisa writes and sometimes we have other guest posts from other places, so that's a weekly thing that happens.

And then I have a newsletter that comes out whenever I feel like there is something I want to say. I don't like this hard sales thing and I don't like spamming people so I put a newsletter out when I've got a new workout or I've got something to say and people can subscribe to that by going to the website blindalive.com and subscribing to the newsletter because I like to let the people that subscribe to the newsletter know what's happening first. And by subscribing to the newsletter, people can get a free morning stretch. I created a morning stretch, just to help people get up, out of bed and start the day well.

Mike – What is the most surprising thing that you've learnt about yourself by doing this process?

Mel - Well, I have learnt that I can push my comfort zone to the limit because when I started this I knew that I was pushing my comfort zone. And the only way for us to grow as human beings is to constantly push that edge and I tell you what I'm pushing my edge right now by talking to you. I do it now with excitement and alongside that anxiety but I've grown such a tremendous amount in the two years. I can get up in front of people now and talk. I'm petrified but I can do it. Or getting on the phone and talking to people.

Yesterday I was on a conference call and there were over one hundred people on the call and I just told myself, you need to make your voice heard because people aren't going to know that I have anything good to offer unless I use my voice. Because that's my medium, my voice. And so that's the thing, is pushing my edge and knowing that I can and that I don't die in the process.

Mike – Can you share any specific customer success stories that you found particularly interesting?

Mel – I get emails from people that say I'm so excited to have found these workouts and people have said to me, I've lost weight, I feel so much better about myself and I get emails often. They make me feel so good, it's like ok, this is validation. I'm doing what it is I'm supposed to be doing because there are so many of us that don't move our bodies and they don't know that they can move their bodies.

When people discover blindalive.com, they send me these emails and they're so excited and I can feel the excitement coming through the email. So I write them back and I call them sometimes. I love to talk to people and find out what it is that they want and what it is that they need to help motivate themselves. I want people to learn to hear their own bodies talk because our bodies want to move. I just feel like, ok I want to help you hear your body and understand how to move it and when to move and where to move it and that you can move your body. So I do get success stories and they're on the testimonials page.

Mike - Brilliant, that's the idea aye. What about yourself Mel? Do you have your own favourite quotation or personal saying that means something special to you?

Mel – I have a saying that was hanging up in my home from the time I remember and it's Abraham Lincoln and it's "Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be". I have carried that with me throughout my entire life. It's my responsibility to be happy and to choose happiness. Happiness comes from how we make meaning of our own lives and the circumstances that our lives present to us. It's all about perspective and frame of reference. And so, I don't succeed in being happy and peaceful and content every day in every moment, but I do know that it's my choice. So that's my main thing. Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be and I attempt to make up my mind to be happy all day, every day. I don't succeed but I work at it, I work at it.

Mike – Good work. What advice would you give to anybody who is considering starting a program similar to what you're putting out or giving them words of encouragement to get them off their sofa?

Mel – I think knowing that you can move and knowing that even if you start from the tiniest place, if it's just starting with wiggling your toes and your fingers or rotating your wrists and adding a little bit to it every day. The other thing that, if you're alive you can breathe, right? You're breathing. So breathing in and of itself can be an exercise. It can be a stamina building exercise. Learning to breathe deeply and fully through your whole body is an exercise so if you're alive, you're breathing, you can exercise by breathing better.

Mike - Good stuff. Just before we close off here Mel, can you share your contact details again?

Mel - Sure. The website is blindalive.com. I am at Twitter @BlindAlive. I am at Facebook @BlindAlive (capital B and capital A). On Facebook there's also the BlindAlive Community Group where we just talk about health and fitness and food mostly. I'm on audioBoom, same thing @BlindAlive. Is that it? There must be more. Oh LinkedIn @BlindAlive. I think that's it.

Mike - Thanks Mel. This has been awesome. It's given us a good overview as to the project and what you've been up to and what people can get involved with, which is all good. It's great stuff so thank you so much for joining us it's been wonderful.

Mel - Thank you so much. It's been fun.

Mike - Brilliant.

Jingle – You're listening to the blind sport podcast with Mike Lloyd. The sports show that's dedicated to blind sport.

Quotations

OK some quotations for episode 60 that include the word "Alive".

Do not take life too seriously. You will never get out of it alive.

And this one from Dr. Seuss. Today you are you! That is truer than true! There is no one alive who is you-er than you!

Keep your dreams alive. Understand to achieve anything requires faith and belief in yourself, vision, hard work, determination, and dedication. Remember all things are possible for those who believe.

Oprah Winfrey. The whole point of being alive is to evolve into the complete person you were intended to be.

Don't ever save anything for a special occasion. Being alive is the special occasion.

Closing

I hope you enjoyed our chat with Mel Scott from Blind Alive. That was pretty cool.

A huge thank you to Mel for sharing her passion of assisting others to change their lives and improve their health and fitness.

If you're in the process of making a health and fitness lifestyle change yourself, then do send me an email and tell me what you're up to.

If you have a story or know of a person who you think would be great to feature on a future show, then contact me and let's make it happen.

Likewise, if you have any comments or opinions on the show then please do fire me off an email. mike@theblindsportpodcast.com

That would be cool.

Contact Jingle - To contact Mike or comment on The Blind Sport Podcast, submit a feedback form from the website www.theblindsportpodcast.com, email Mike@theblindsportpodcast.com, send us a tweet or follow us on Twitter @blindsportmike, or visit The Blind Sport Podcast page on Facebook.

Mike - To help me with the growth of The Blind Sport Podcast I need your help.

If you know of others who may get value from listening to this show, then please do tell them about it.

Tell your friends, your family, your club members, your work colleagues, whether it be face-to-face or via social networks, let's get the word out there.

If we do this together, we can promote the awareness of Blind Sports and make a difference.

OK, that's us for another episode, so train hard, play fair, give it your all and most importantly, enjoy your sport.

Thanks for listening. Take care. See ya.

Closing Announcer - Thank you for listening to another edition of The Blind Sport Podcast. The sports show that's dedicated to blind sport. With Mike Lloyd. Visit theblindsportpodcast.com

End of transcript