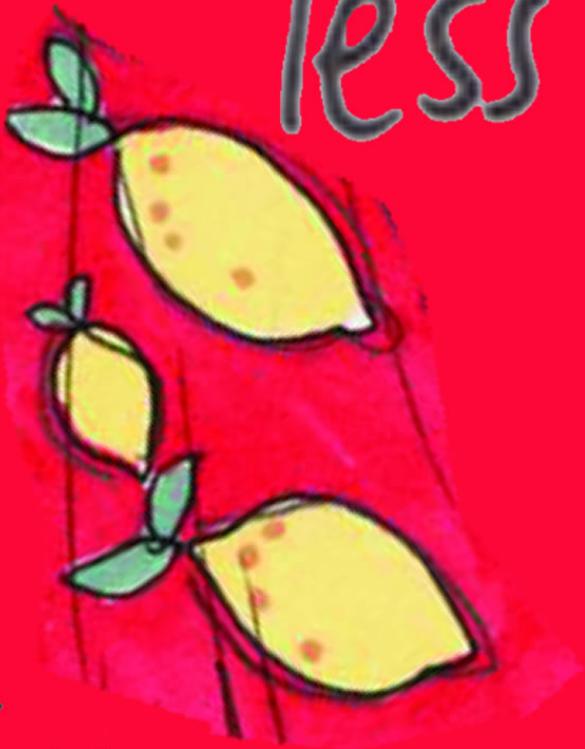


# living with more vision and less sight

BY Steph Cutler



a collection of observations from a lemonade maker

# **Living with More Vision and Less Sight.**

**Collection of observations from a Lemonade Maker**

**By Steph Cutler**

**For my fabulous family**

## **Forward**

Ten years on and I don't look any older (to me anyway), that is just one of the bonuses of sight loss! My experiences over this period have taught me so much which I don't feel I would have come to learn had I remained in my old life of being a hasty commuter on the tube, battling with fashion buyers, chasing trends and suppliers, and partying with the same people in the same places. Not that there is anything wrong with that, in fact it was brilliant, but ten years on my life is richer in every way.



I once bought my Dad a book called, Not Quite What I Was Planning. The book is inspired by the legend that Hemingway was once challenged to write a story in only six words. He responded with the following, 'For sale: baby shoes, never worn', and won his bet.

Subsequently, an American magazine challenged its readers to create their own six-word memoirs, which make up the book I gave my Dad. The memoirs range from the poignant to the hilarious, but they are all very telling. Over Sunday lunch about seven years ago, my family chose their six-word memoirs for a bit of fun. Mine was 'Everything changed, all for the better'.

On this, my ten year anniversary of living with sight loss, I have collated some of my random observations written at various points over this period. This is a collection of my reflections, silly memories and life lessons. It is not my guide to anything; far from it... it is simply an extended version of my six-word memoir: looking back over ten years of living with more vision and less sight.

## Optical Disillusions

Little did I know that an opportunity to stretch my legs on a long journey ten years ago was to be the start of the end of my life as I knew it. I was holidaying in New Zealand at the time and was returning from a sightseeing trip with friends.

There was an optical illusion room as part of Puzzle World, the chosen amusement park we visited to stretch our legs. On one white wall there were a number of vertical black lines. The idea was that you closed one eye and the lines were vertical and you closed the other and the lines changed shape or direction, or something like that, I forget exactly. When I closed my left eye, sure enough, the lines looked vertical and when I closed the other eye I couldn't see the lines at all. 'Wow! That is clever', I thought, not really comprehending that having practically no vision was not the desired effect. After finally making it back to the car via a frustrating maze that I had to cheat to get out of in order to leave before nightfall, we set off on our onward journey.

Back in the car I once again closed my left eye with no change to my sight then closed my right eye and could see very little. 'Oh' I thought and unbelievably that was the extent of my realisation that one of my eyes didn't appear to be functioning properly.

Several weeks after returning home from my holiday I finally went to the opticians in my lunch hour. I closed my left eye and read the lettered chart from the big A to the tiny bottom row with no problem. I went to repeat the exercise with the opposite eye and I couldn't see the chart at all. The optician asked me to go to the eye hospital as a matter of urgency.

The eye hospital happened to be within sight of my office (although not with my right eye closed!) so I took a visit. The waiting time was three hours, which I didn't fancy much so I went back to work. My manager asked how I had got on and I told her, flippantly, that there was nothing wrong - only I couldn't see out of one eye. She non-flippantly told me that didn't sound like 'nothing wrong' to her, and made me go back to sit in the waiting room.

That evening my parents rang. I casually told my Dad that I had spent the afternoon in an eye hospital but nobody could identify what the issue was and so I was going to have to see a consultant. No alarm

bells rang for me, but unbeknown to me the alarm bells were deafening on the other end of the line.

This was the call my parents had always dreaded, as they knew more than me about our family medical history.

### **Miss Impatient Becomes Patient (well, sort of!)**

Becoming disabled was probably the only thing that was ever likely to make me become more patient. But more patient I became. This was not down to any personal development or soul searching, it was out of necessity. Things now take longer and are not so easy, so you need to be patient - whether you are naturally patient or not. This is particularly true when you first acquire a disability. The things you did without thinking now need thinking about - with so much more thought that it can give you brain ache.

As a result, I can persevere with a task more patiently than most. People comment on this, particularly when they see me trying to do something on a website. They are amazed how long it takes and how I patiently seek solutions.

On one hand I have found a new reserve of patience and perseverance, but on the other hand I have become less patient with frivolous people and things. For example, I struggle to find patience when my skinny friends fret they are fat; and friends behave like their world is collapsing when their car is off the road for a day.

It is my experience of living with a disability, and from meeting motivated disabled people, that has helped me to put things into a better perspective. I feel I see things clearly now I can't actually see things clearly! I have learned that so many of us worry about things that are not worthy of worry.

While dismounting from my high horse, I will confess that ten years have past and I still miss not being able to paint my toe nails. Shallow? Of course it is! But the wider point I am trying to make is that I am grateful for my greater ability to empathise with people and their situations. I can now more credibly put myself in the shoes of others. Those shoes are still ideally glamorous stilettos, but if that's not possible then I am more inclined to understand and settle for less fabulous footwear.

From a practical point of view, I am glad I am more patient; and from an emotional point of view, I am glad I can empathise better. If I am really honest, I am glad I still roll at 100 miles per hour and expect everyone to keep up; and yes, I am glad I still care that my toe nails look good.

### **Some Things Never Change.....hic!**

A few years into living with sight loss I received a random call from someone from Newcastle hospital to ask me some questions about my sight loss. He wanted to ask me some questions about my lifestyle as part of a piece of research. One of his questions was to ask me how much I drink. 'Oh no,' I literally wailed, 'don't tell me I have drunk myself blind!' I was laughing out loud, but a small part of me flashed back to being stupidly drunk as a student, a wedding guest, a work-hard play-hard fashion designer, a chick on a hen night etc. ....! 'No, no' he reassured me, and went on to give a party-line type response about getting a wider picture of the condition.

At the time of the call I was happily enough living with sight loss, but I hadn't fully considered living without it. At the end of the call I put the phone down and stayed sitting on the bottom step of our stairs for a while.

If giving up drink would correct my sight, would I give up the booze? It didn't take me long to decide that I wouldn't. At this moment, I feel the need to publicly announce that I am not an alcoholic. I can go days and weeks (and months at a push!) without a drink, but it would never be my ideal choice. I enjoy a drink. I am a social person and I enjoy sharing a drink with good friends. I enjoy the odd drink after a long day, and I enjoy sitting in a beer garden when the sun comes out. I even occasionally enjoy drinking too much.

Sitting on that stair I asked myself.....'C'mon Steph - full sight returned in exchange for no alcohol?' It took me no time to decide that I was not prepared to swap shandy for lemonade for the rest of my days. Right then and there, I knew that I was personally satisfied. I went to the fridge and poured a glass of wine to celebrate not being prepared to quit drinking for full sight. My liver probably groaned but I consciously felt a sort of peace. I had passed a test that I didn't know existed, that resulted in me knowing that I was happy with my lot - and my lot did not require me to have full sight.

## **Mum's Not The Word**

The question of parenthood has been one that I have grappled with since becoming visually impaired. It has not consistently occupied my thoughts, but for one reason or another it has passed through my radar on many occasions.

Upon diagnosis of central vision loss I decided that I would not have children. I don't know why this was so foremost in my thoughts. I had not been one of those women for whom motherhood was part of the master plan. If anything, it was more likely that the master plan did not include creating mini me's. I was not absolute about this but I wavered towards child free than child bearing.

My condition is hereditary. For a reason that is not understood, women pass on the defective gene, but are less likely to become visually impaired; whilst men do not pass on the gene, but have a higher risk of becoming visually impaired.

I was young and I had no immediate plans to settle down and start a family. Yet when I was told I would pass the defective gene onto my children this was, oddly, the one thing that created the most enormous lump in my throat. This may well have been my first unofficial 'Lebers Moment' (read on and all will become clear).

At the time, my medical diagnosis of sight loss came with a self-inflicted diagnosis of forever being childless. I can't explain why I felt this so deeply, and it was something few understood. What I couldn't understand at the time, and I don't understand to this day, was that the same people who found this odd were the same people who were devastated by my diagnosis. All I can determine from this is that you are desperately sad to find out I will live out my days without full sight, but are happy for me to bring other human beings into the world with the threat of a similar existence.

It was not just other people's reactions that made no sense to me: my own reactions at times made no sense either. From the start, I could be heard saying that sight loss is not the end of the world; yet I was saying that I felt strongly that I should not have a child knowing that I will pass on a gene that may result in my child becoming visually impaired. How can I credibly continue telling others or myself that it is OK to be visually impaired whilst also holding this view?

The fact I didn't particularly want children became irrelevant, as an ethical question had been raised that I could not easily answer. I gave considerable thought to how I felt personally and generally about this in the early years and found it difficult to find a position I felt comfortable with.

In time, I became knowledgeable about the disability movement and interested in where perceptions of disability stem from. Who hasn't heard a parent-to-be say, 'I don't mind whether it is a boy or girl as long as it is healthy'? Who hasn't heard someone say on hearing of a new birth, 'Is everything alright with the baby?' What is really being said is, 'I don't mind as long as it is not disabled' or 'is the baby alright i.e. is there anything wrong with it?'

There are lots of reasons why I don't subscribe to viewing a disability as a tragedy. However, this turned out to be one of those situations where the beliefs you hold are tested when put into a real life situation.

My sister was born to be a mum. She tried for a while to become pregnant with her first child. I felt torn, as I knew how much she wanted to experience motherhood and I knew what a brilliant mum she would be. If truth were told, I was not 100 per cent comfortable when she told us she was pregnant, despite being genuinely delighted for her, as I knew how much it meant to her.

She took the news of my sight loss with difficulty and yet she tried and tried to bring another person into this world that could potentially hear the same news one day.

I distinctively recall being driven to the hospital to meet her new child with my parents. They were naturally excited about meeting their first ever grandchild. I sat in the back and felt very much in the back.

What changed my mind was the newborn in question. She taught me before she could walk or talk that her mum had done the right thing. I am a hard-nosed, not-at-all-spiritual person but I got a sense that the baby sensed I needed converting. I began to feel some sort of faith that she was guiding me. It was not just me who noticed closeness: everyone remarked how she behaved differently with her Auntie Steph. She taught me more in her first year of life than I can put into words. I admit to feeling slightly daft sharing this, but I stand by it. I have come to the conclusion that she was the only one to straighten my head out

over this one at the time. In return, I will always be there to return the favour to her at key times in her life.

I have come full circle on this issue. I know that the priority for all children is to grow up with love and supportive people around them. Of course, I always knew this was the most important thing, but I now know that this alone trumps any disability card that might be dealt.

I still feel no desire to bring more people into this overcrowded world. I feel my sister has had my quota and I love being an Auntie. They don't need a second mum because they have a brilliant first mum, but if they ever do need a second mum they can rely on me. There have been times when my heart has physically ached for my nieces and nephew in a way I can only imagine a parent's heart aches for their children. This is good enough for me and if they ever do become visually impaired I will be the best placed Auntie ever to make sure they get through it and become the best versions of themselves, regardless of sight loss.

### **Sight Loss....What a Relief! Phew!**

I must be the only person ever to hear the news you are going to go blind with relief.

The previous night I had been telling my parents on the phone about my day of going to the eye hospital at the request of the optician. The following morning they unexpectedly turned up on my doorstep looking distraught. My immediate thought was that something dreadful had happened to my sister, who at the time was on honeymoon in Australia. When they broke the news of imminent blindness I felt actual relief.

My sister was my rock and, after the recent celebration of her marriage, I couldn't contemplate bad news. Bad news was, although, what we had to give her when she returned, as it was confirmed that I would lose my central vision in a matter of months.

When we told her at the family home she screamed, ran to the toilet and threw up. She went home and did not speak with me for a number of days. It was awful, but when we next spoke she memorably said, 'I'm sure over the years many people will have thought you couldn't see based on some of the things you wear!' I knew then and there that we

would be all right. What you need more than anything is for everyone to be cool with you and keep it real.

We've shared some teary moments since then. Some when she has been there for me and some when I have been there for her. These moments came to be affectionately known as Leber's Moments. The condition we both carry, but which has developed in me, is called Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy.

When either of us was having a sight-loss-shaped downer, a Lebers Moment, the other would sing the song 'Magic Moments', substituting the word 'magic' for 'Lebers'. We would sing our version of this horribly cheerful song until the other sister would have no choice but to substitute tears of sadness with tears of laughter. Gladly, it's been a good while since either of us has had to break into song!

What I learned is that when life is dealing you lemons, you have got to be prepared to cry and you've got to be up for having a laugh. If you can laugh, you will always be all right.

## **The Reaction of Others**

I had been quite a private person prior to the news of sight loss. I had also been a confident, sociable person. I vowed to maintain the latter two and conceded I would need to let up on the first.

I had a strong sense from the onset that I did not want to lose my identity. I was Steph first and foremost. I knew I wanted to remain known for being Steph and did not want any sight loss to overshadow who I was. Looking back, I now know how significant this was as I now know it takes most people months or years to come to this conclusion. This immediate realisation saved me years of being in what many refer to as their 'wilderness years'. At the time, I did not know I was skipping a process that is often referred to as grieving for the loss of your sight.

I spent many evenings personally calling my friends to tell them of my news. Looking back, I don't know quite how I did it but it was important to me that I did. It was emotionally draining, but their friendship was so important that I had to spread the word in my words. I was conscious to avoid a Chinese whispers version of my news getting out and I wanted my mates to feel like I was open to questions, even though I didn't have any answers.

I can't honestly remember the moment I decided to throw a party, but that is what I decided to do. I loved my job, but I didn't want to spend the remaining few months with full sight looking at the four walls of the office. I decided to go and see a bit more of the world while I still could. I knew I would not lose all my sight but I did not know what central vision loss looked like so I was keen to make the most of full sight. Prior to going I hired a local pub near to my old job and invited everyone I had ever met.

My Dad thought this was ridiculous. He did not want to attend and told me as much. He was upset and was not in the mood for celebrating. Understandably, my family were taking it hard. I didn't think through my motivations for the party this strategically, but part of my decision was for everyone to get together and see it was all OK. I was a party girl at the time and this was my natural response. I also wanted my parents to see all the supportive people I had around me and I hoped they would take comfort from it. I told my Dad to be there and reluctantly he attended.

On the night of the party the pub was rammed. I don't think there was a single person who didn't attend. By the end, a number of my mates had drunkenly chewed my Dad's ear off with unconditional and nonsensical declarations of love for me. He was a bit brighter. He had always enjoyed meeting my friends and he admitted that with all those people on my side I would be all right. Result!

Many of the people I now work with tell me they have lost many friends since losing their sight. I can pretty much say I haven't lost anyone along the way for a reason that relates to my sight loss. I think this unconventional approach was pivotal to maintaining my friendships.

## **Hello World! Come And Say Hello Sight Loss!**

I trotted off into the sunset and saw a few 'bucket list' sights. I had been told that my second eye would start to deteriorate within three months but as I got close to this time my second eye remained good and my overall sight was unaffected.

I actually started to will it to happen. Might sound a bit crazy, but there was never any talk of it not happening. I was the other side of the world and I'd stopped having a good time. I had had my fill of beautiful mountains and lakes and what I wanted was to return home and get on with my life, so I came home. My friends thought I was mad. 'Stay as

long as you can Mini', they told me. 'It's same old here; it's cold and dull'. It sounded perfect to me, so I got on a plane.

My good eye remained good and so my overall sight was unaffected. I'd wake up every morning tentatively opening my eyes not knowing quite what to expect, but hoping that it would just hurry up and happen. Everyone else was probably glad my sight was still OK, but I really wished it would happen so I could start to move on.

## **The London Eye Lesson**

Nobody could tell me when my sight would start to be affected so I decided to apply for work. At the time I was a fashion designer so I worked hard on a new portfolio and secured a job with a well-known high street retailer.

It was a great next step for me. The position gave me more opportunities to travel, more money and more responsibility and I relocated back to London with enthusiasm.

I started on the Monday and it was evident by Wednesday that my sight loss had begun. Looking back, I suspect it already had started to deteriorate and I was denying it to myself. I wasn't doing this consciously but I think I was concentrating on what I could see rather than what I couldn't.

Maybe my sight got worse quickly or maybe it was being in a work situation that made it evident. For example, I was given a tiny laptop to work on and I could not see the screen or the keyboard and it wasn't until I was asked to colour match that I realised I couldn't identify colour well. Either way, I did not make it to the end of my first week and reluctantly I went into work knowing I would have to tell my manager. I don't actually remember the conversation, but I left before lunch.

I felt lost on leaving the building so I called a good friend. I told her my sight loss was happening and I had left my new, exciting job. She took the afternoon off with immediate effect (she told her boss she'd see him in the morning)! I met my friend and she told me she was taking me on the London Eye. Bit random, but in hindsight it was a good suggestion.

I had never been on the London Eye before so it was a brilliant opportunity to see the city I love. The timing couldn't have been better as I didn't know how much sight I would be left with.

As we crossed the bridge over the Thames we walked past a man on bended knee proposing to his thrilled girlfriend. I distinctly remember thinking to myself that, while I am having a bad day which I will never forget, this couple is having a fantastic day, which they will always remember.

I looked at them and thought: today is a memorable day for both of us but for totally different reasons. Today is their amazing day, and my amazing day will come. Since then I have never thought, 'there's always someone worse off than me' to make myself feel better. I know people say this to themselves to motivate themselves, but I don't really understand. Why take solace from knowing others are worse off than you? From then on I think, 'while I may be having a bad day, someone else will be having an amazing day and my amazing day will come'. This motivates me and feels like a better way to look at things.

As we got to the London Eye my friend produced a mini bottle of champagne. Looking back, it is questionable what we were celebrating but it seemed a nice gesture. I don't think I wanted tea and sympathy; perhaps she knew a bit of bubbly was the way to go.

We smuggled our bottle past security and onto the capsule and drank it out of paper cups we had scrounged from the café stand. We drank and gossiped the whole way round the circuit.

When we got off I laughed to myself because I hadn't looked out at the view once! There I was with possibly my last chance to take in the famous sights of London and I had not done so.

I realised there and then that friendship was far more important than sight. A view is a view, but if you have no one to share it with (or, in my case, ignore it with) then what good is full sight and beautiful views?

### **Watch Your Language!**

One of the most important things I have learned over the last ten years is that the language we use can have a massive impact on how we feel and what we subsequently go on to achieve. You will never hear me refer to myself as having a sight problem. The reason is simple: I am not willing to let the word 'problem' into my vocabulary when referring to my impairment. I believe the language we use influences how we are perceived and how we perceive ourselves. If I call it a problem,

then guess what..... I will start to think of it as a problem, and there will never be an instance where this will be helpful.

I have never asked 'why me?'. I told myself it was OK that it was me from the onset and vowed to concentrate on how to get back on my feet. Wondering 'why me?' felt futile. Having got back on my feet and considering this question again, all I can conclude is that it is futile. Seeking an answer to a question like this, which has no answer, ties people in horrible knots that it can take years to untangle. The very best path is to create a vision for your future and look for solutions.

The vision I am talking about here has nothing to do with sight loss, as it's about what you see when you close your eyes. It's about what you visualise yourself doing and being. It's about the vision for how you want to feel and how you want others to feel about you. These kinds of visions are open to you whether you are blind, partially sighted or sighted. It has been my personal experience, and my professional experience as a coach since, that being clear about what you want, and focusing on your vision, makes achieving it easier and quicker.

As you would expect, I do not suffer from sight loss, I am not afflicted by sight loss and I am not a victim of sight loss. You might be thinking that the odd word here and there can't be all that important in the grand scheme of things, but trust me this is compelling stuff.

Enough negative language gets banded about relating to disability without you using it about yourself. Using positive language is paramount to the vision you create for yourself, so eliminate negative language from your vocabulary when talking to yourself, and about yourself. Take it from me: you will start to notice the difference in yourself and in others.

### **The Million-Dollar Question**

This year, my tenth year of living with sight loss, I learn that this condition that I mostly consider a gift, and that we were led to believe had no chance of being reversed, has made significant medical progress.

Understandably many will be pleased, but I find this a difficult gift to unwrap. I will try and explain, but bear with me as it is hard to articulate.

Generally, I feel happy and fulfilled. Just as retaining my identity was important at the time of diagnosis, so it remains important at the time of potential cure. There is nothing wrong with me. I don't see well, but I see this as part of me rather than a fault. It is an integral part of me and it has made me who I am today. All well and good, but the pragmatic part of me says.....'that's fine Steph, I get it, but if you were able to see again you would not lose what you have gained'. 'True enough', the conformist part of me says, 'but people will not understand a decision to actively avoid a cure. People won't get you'

'So, if they think I need fixing then they must think there is something wrong with me' says the doubting part of me. 'I don't feel like I need fixing, but if others do then they must see me as inadequate. Is this a true reflection of how I am seen by others? Do they all think I am not OK as I am?' says a fast-developing, insecure part of me.

An angrier part of me starts to speak up and says, 'well, who the hell are they to think that? Why do I care what they think?' A little-known self-pitying part of me, that rarely rears its head, pipes up, 'perhaps there's an unspoken pity that exists around me and that more people than I realise think I am a bit inadequate. The political side of me gets on its soapbox and refuses to sell my soul. It shouts, 'choosing the cure is tantamount to complying with the medical model of disability that I have spent much of the last ten years persuading people away from.'

I find myself back where I started from and the blunt part of me tells me how it sees it, 'Steph, you could drive again. Your relationships and business would be easier. You could read your post and would never have to struggle on-line again. Imagine getting around without the issues you often encounter'. The weary organised part of me says, 'give yourself a break, this is a no-brainer'.

The part which is the current front-runner is the confident-in-your-own-skin part. It says with self-assurance, 'you don't need to be fixed to fit in with what others consider normal'. A part, hot on the heels in second place, says with conviction, 'you would be jumping ship and abandoning your principles and the disabled people you have stood up for and told they are OK as they are'. But a part of me that is fast approaching on the nearside says, 'think how much easier things would be and what a difference it would undoubtedly make'.

All I can say with clarity on this one is that this is to be continued.....!

## **Your Comfort Zone is a Circle**

I don't know who it was who said it is good to scare yourself from time to time, but he or she had the right idea.

One of the first realisations I had when I found myself living back in my old bedroom at my parents' house was that sitting at home was never going to help me learn to live with sight loss. What was going to help me live with sight loss was getting out and about and doing all the things I had done previously. This was a daunting prospect, as catching a bus or train without full sight was significantly harder. I have a non-visible disability and so I had to learn to find ways to successfully seek assistance and to resort to my white cane at times.

These presented practical and emotional challenges, which initially were super hard.

My comfort zone at the time was the familiarity of my family home surrounded by supportive people. I knew where my comfort zone was and I knew that I couldn't get too comfortable, or I'd find expanding beyond it all the harder the longer I stayed there.

Here is my favourite description of how this all works. Your comfort zone is where you feel the happiest, the most settled and the most confident. Think about what it looks and feels like and draw an imaginary circle around you that encompasses those things and people. To step outside that circle will require courage, as you feel less settled and less confident outside it.

Back in the day, leaving the house took some courage. Making myself travel independently and doing other, everyday things were part of my tough induction to my new world of partial sight.

Crossing the circle you have drawn will be difficult and you may run back to your comfort circle. This is fine, but it is only fine providing you venture out on another occasion shortly after. What happens is that the more you venture beyond your circle, the less scared you will feel. In time you will become increasingly comfortable outside the first circle you drew. When you reach this point then you can draw another circle with a bigger circumference than the previous circle. The new circle includes the old things you were always comfortable with and the new things that don't scare you anymore.

You know what is coming next..... you set your vision on the next thing you want to feel more confident about and dare once again to step outside the newly-drawn, wider circle. Thing is, it is easier this time round because you know you can do it, because you have done it before.

I didn't know about this comfort circle thing at the time I was self-rehabilitating, but I can relate to it totally now. It is definitely true that the more I dared to do things I was scared to do at first, the easier they became - and my circles kept widening. It is also true that there were plenty of Leber's Moments along the way and plenty of U-turns back to the safety of my circle.

The reality was, however, that my first circle was too small a circle to thrive in. It limited my opportunities to work, socialise and learn and develop. With each new circle the world slowly started to literally open out to me again and, along side it, my confidence grew. It grew exponentially, as I began to feel that if I could achieve these things with sight loss, then I could do anything.

It's not called a comfort circle for nothing. By definition it is comfortable, but the reality is that it is often comfortable and frustrating, or comfortable and limiting, or comfortable and miserable. Stepping out is uncomfortable and scary, but soon becomes comfortable and empowering and comfortable and fulfilling.

If there is one thing I would look back and be glad about it is that I pushed the boundaries of my circles so early on when I first learned to live with sight loss. Things could have been so very different.

## **You Always Have A Choice**

One thing is for sure and that is: you can't always choose what life deals you, but I have come to believe you can choose how you react to it. I learned this through becoming partially sighted, but it now very much influences my work as a coach.

I choose to view my sight loss as a gift. I believe this because it has given me so much. I truly believe it has been a gift, but I admit that there are times I wish it were a gift that came with the receipt so I could take it back!

There are times when being visually impaired is no fun. It makes life difficult and presents challenges I could do without. That said, I would not be in the position I am in without having received the gift of sight loss. I would not have met the many incredible people I have since met. I would not have my business and so have the opportunity to raise other people's awareness of the important issues that I have, myself, become aware of. I would not be sharing my gift with others who have the potential and just need a lift to achieve their vision.

Acquiring sight loss was life changing, but as per my six-word memoir - I chose to believe it changed for the better. I chose to step out my comfort circle and I choose to see it as a gift.

I feel fortunate that I have some useful sight and my sight is stable. I like to think I would choose to manage with less sight and a condition where my sight would deteriorate, but I am glad I don't have to. It has become clear to me that the level of sight loss is not the greatest barrier to fulfillment: your attitude and the choices you take far exceed a medical condition.

Let me explain. I know some people who live with total sight loss and they are successful in their pursuits, happy in themselves, contribute to their communities and have fun.

I have met some people who have lost a small amount of sight and they maintain it is the end of their world and they do nothing because they are slightly partially sighted and life is unfair.

I know some fully sighted people who do a lot of talking about how they would like things to be but they are always full of excuses and they never do anything.

The over-riding thing influencing the lives of these people is how they choose to view their circumstances. If you choose to see your lot as doomed, either blind or sighted your life will likely be doomed. If you choose to seek opportunities, contribute your skills and enjoy your lot then guess what.....

What I am stating is that the choices you make will determine how you feel and what you do. Life will deal you lemons, you may even have more than your fair share, but it is your choice whether you accept your lemons or decide to turn them into lemonade. If you choose to buy into this then you will likely, like me, find it empowering, as you know you will always be all right.

## About the Author

Steph Cutler has won acclaim in several national awards for her approach and commitment to diversity as a trainer, writer, professional speaker and role model to other disabled people.

She works predominantly, but not exclusively, with disabled people, many of whom have experienced sight loss. She provides life coaching and personal development workshops to people who want to move forward and improve their prospects. This is regularly to people who are looking to get back on their feet having acquired a disability, are seeking employment or looking to develop their careers. She is a memorable motivational speaker and disability equality trainer.

Whichever hat she is wearing, the lemonade way is always to inspire positive change, raise awareness and increase confidence.

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- Drop me a line at mail to: [steph@making-lemonade.co.uk](mailto:steph@making-lemonade.co.uk)

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