

Theresa Stern: Welcome to Central Bark, a podcast from Guide Dogs for the Blind. I'm Theresa Stern and I'm your host.

Well, hello, everyone, and welcome to Central Bark. Today, we have a really interesting guest. Her name is Kate Hano. She's from Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, way up there. She is a GDB client, a mom and she holds a PhD in accessible and inclusive tourism. She also is a triathlete so we're going to learn a lot about Kate, about her life with her guide dog, about the work she does and about her amazing world travel, so welcome, Kate.

Kate Hano: Well, thank you for the introduction. It's wonderful to be here and to talk to all of you about travel. It's one of my favorite activities to do is to pack up and go traveling.

Theresa Stern: That's fantastic. And now we finally can again, kind of, right?

Kate Hano: Yes.

Theresa Stern: So that's great. Yeah. So tell me a little bit about your background, Kate. I know Ginny is your guide dog, he's your fourth one, I believe, but tell me a little bit about your tourism background and how you got into that. I know it sounds like you love travel, but I'd love to learn more.

Kate Hano: It was by chance, so I do have a PhD in accessibility and it was one of the projects that I always wanted to do, but I never had the opportunity to work on it in my undergraduate years in my master's. For my PhD, I just landed a professor who was super enthusiastic about accessibility and looking at that topic, he did not know much about it, but he was very excited to guide me through the process and have us learn together.

So that's kind of how I stumbled upon it and the reason why I really wanted to get into that is because I did travel a lot, I spent a year in Germany when I was in my undergrad with my guide dog and we stumbled on a lot of accessibility issues and I wanted to contribute to making a change and making the world a little bit more accessible place for others to travel and experience as much as I had experienced.

Theresa Stern: It's amazing. I mean, like what a great way to match up two passions that you have, right? Travel and access. So tell me about sort of the work that you do in this field. Are you working with individuals or companies?

Kate Hano: I'm not doing much right now. COVID has taken a lot and right now, things are starting up again. The last thing, I guess, my friend and I, she was the editor of a book. We wrote a sociology textbook for Canadian universities and I was one of the authors, so that was kind of the one last big project that I worked on and the whole project was about disability, accessibility, what's happening and where we still need to change things.

Theresa Stern: Right. Right. Absolutely. So do you have any favorite world adventures that you've done with your guide dog that you can share with us?

Kate Hano: We did a lot. We've traveled to all-inclusive resorts in the Caribbean with guide dogs. I traveled all through Europe with my guide dog as well, both with kids and without kids. I guess my piece of advice or the one thing that I've learned the hard way is I always call ahead to any resort or hotel that we book and just verify that everything is fine, we can come in, we have a guide dog, fully certified guide dog from Guide Dogs for the Blind, I can send in any documentations or letters that they would require.

But the one time we went to St. Martin, I spoke to the manager and I didn't really pay attention to the terminology he was using and we were on the same page in terms of my guide dog coming in with us and everything was fine but as we arrived, everyone was confused because I was saying "guide dog" and they said, "No, no. No dogs allowed. No dogs allowed." And it took a while to the manager come out and say, "It's a medical dog."

Theresa Stern: Oh, okay.

Kate Hano: So for them, if I said, "Oh, it's a medical dog." We wouldn't have any problems whatsoever, but because I was saying "guide dog", they had no idea what I was saying and automatically it was, "No. Guide dogs are not allowed. Dogs are not allowed." But as soon as we said "medical dog", it was fine, so...

Theresa Stern: Right, so you have to be aware of all those sort of cultural differences. Yeah.

Kate Hano: So since then, it was one of those things that we always double-checked, so, "I have a guide dog. What would you like me to say when I arrive? How do I introduce my dog to your staff so they know exactly what I mean when I say it's a guide dog?" So that was one of the lessons that we learned, but at the time, it was hard because we were traveling, we were delayed, the kids were little and on top of that, everyone was very confused.

Theresa Stern: Right, right, right. Well, and I think, yeah, confused and tired and it's like, "Well, I already had permission. We already talked about this." Yeah. Yeah. So that's good. That's really good advice. I'm going to use that one, for sure. So do you always travel with your guide dog or are there times when you just feel like, "Oh, maybe it'd be better to go with my cane on this trip."?

Kate Hano: Yes. I leave my guide dog, on occasions, at home. The one trip that we did before COVID, we went on a river cruise with my family to Europe and we left my guide dog behind for two reasons.

One, it was a small boat, it was very small, it was only, I believe, 200 guests. It had three levels. It was not accessible at all. There's no elevator. There is nothing. And it was a German company, so I decided, since we were going with

the whole family, that it would be better to leave her since it was a small boat, there was no relieving area on the boat. As much as we were going to spend most of the day in port and outside, it was just easier that way.

And the second reason was she was going through allergy seasons and I felt that she would be better off being close to her own vet and so she stayed with my parents that she knew very well and she was very happy to be there instead of with us running around Europe while having allergies, so yeah, so there are times that it's just too much, to deal with the kids, the dog and trying to find out where the best relieving areas are, especially in foreign cities, and during those times we kind of make an executive decision and she always, or the dogs always stay with a family member that they know very well so they're very happy.

Theresa Stern: Happy they get their own little vacation, right?

Kate Hano: Yeah.

Theresa Stern: Yeah. No, I recently did a trip finally after the COVID lockdown of everything to Italy and we did it with a tour company on a bus so I left my guide dog and I think that was a good idea because it would've been a lot on and off the bus and we were going a different place every day and yeah, so that makes sense, yeah. So do you have a favorite trip that you've taken with your guide dog?

Kate Hano: I guess my favorite place, which I honestly have to say it was a shock to me that they were so accessible and so wonderful to us. I was traveling while I was studying in Europe with my guide dog. We were constantly on the move. We went to Prague and I thought, "Oh, this is going to be a city that's going to be a problem upon problem and I'm going to constantly speak to everybody, explain." It was the opposite. Everyone was absolutely amazing. Going through the castle in Prague, any kind of restaurant, everyone was not only knowledgeable, but they would never give my dog water or talk to him. They always asked if they can give him water, if it's okay that they can speak to him, if we need more room to sit down. I was blown away how wonderful it was. It just made the whole trip so amazing and we ended up spending two extra days in Prague because of that because we were just having so much fun, we were doing guided tours, we were doing stuff on our own and it was absolutely amazing.

Theresa Stern: Wow. That sounds great. And Prague is kind of on my bucket list so now I'm like, "Okay, I definitely have to go. That sounds great." Because it is, I think, one of the cool things, I don't for you, anyway, for me, the travel is sort of meeting people, right? And having a good relationship with the people that you meet along the way.

Kate Hano: Yeah.

Theresa Stern: Yeah. Very cool. Do you have a bucket list of places that you want to go or what's your wishlist?

Kate Hano: I have a very long list. I pretty much would love to travel the world. Whether we can, one thing that I would love to do is maybe when we retire is go on a 60-day cruise from New York to Australia and then travel through Australia, go diving in Great Barrier Reef, go to New Zealand, Japan, and then come back on the boat back home.

Theresa Stern: Oh, so you dive, you do scuba diving? Oh, tell me about that. Now, how did you do the certification and deal with all the red tape there?

Kate Hano: I got into it by accident. We were in Mexico for two weeks and we were with my guide dog and so we were kind of the celebrity family at the resort because no one had a dog and so everyone was very conscientious about the guide dog and everyone was excited to have him around and he usually just lay around the pool and I swam a lot and the scuba divers were always right by the pool, they were giving out free lessons in the pool.

Theresa Stern: Oh, okay. Yeah.

Kate Hano: And one day, one of them comes up to me and is like, "Hey, you know how to swim really well since you've been doing this for almost two weeks now. Do you want to go diving? Because there's this couple, they paid for diving but they left the resort. Like, they left for good." I'm like, "Okay." I'm like, "Well, what do I need to know? Because I don't know anything about diving." They're like, "Don't worry. Just breathe and you'll be fine."

Theresa Stern: That's great. Oh, my gosh. Okay.

Kate Hano: So I was like, "Okay." So I told my parents, I'm like, "I'm going scuba diving into the ocean after just being in the pool for an hour with the scuba tank." And they're like, "Do you think it's a good idea?" I'm like, "I think it's a brilliant idea." I went, it was the most amazing experience. It's so quiet down there and they left me just crawl around on the bottom of the ocean looking for shells and they brought stuff over to look at, different shells, crabs and different things, since normally, they tell you not to touch anything, but once the dive masters find out that you can't see, they really make it special.

But yeah, these guys really made it so much fun that once I returned home, I said to my parents, "I did once with really amazing people, maybe I should know how to actually do this properly." So our university had a 10-week course and...

Theresa Stern: Really?

Kate Hano: Yeah. So I did the 10-week course, it was three and a half hours once a week, an hour and a half in the classroom, two hours in the pool. My dive master, who

was teaching me, his dad was a diver and he lost his vision later on in his life but he still wanted to dive so he was in the process of trying to figure out how he can get his dad to dive and so we kind of worked together to figure out a system that would work both for me, the dive master, and also for his dad. I got certified in the early 2000s and been diving ever since.

Theresa Stern: I love that. It's something that intrigues me. It kind of scares me. The whole breathing underwater thing.

Kate Hano: Yeah.

Theresa Stern: But the idea, like you said of just that so peaceful and then to actually be able to feel what the coral and the shells and all that stuff feels like would be pretty amazing. I might have to try it. Yeah. Wow. You are quite adventurous. So you're also doing triathlons. Tell me a little bit about that.

Kate Hano: That kind of came about by complete fluke. A friend of mine that I met at the gym, she was pregnant at the time with her son and she's like, "Hey, you run. Do you want to run together?" I'm like, "Sure. Of course." She's like, "I have a double running stroller so it's really, really hard to push by myself, but if it's the two of us, then it's much easier." So that's how we started running together is pushing a double stroller.

Theresa Stern: Okay. That's perfect. Yeah.

Kate Hano: And then she's like, "Hey, do you want to do triathlons?" I'm like, "I've never done one and I don't have a tandem bike." She's like, "Well, we'll start a GoFundMe page, get some money so we can buy a tandem bike and do triathlons." I'm like, "Okay." She's like, "You swim, I swim, we both run. We'll be good." So I think it was five, six years ago that we started doing them on a regular basis and we've had so much fun that we just did our first one after COVID about a month ago, so that was amazing.

Theresa Stern: Yeah. That is amazing. So for those of us who are a little more, maybe a little shyer about getting out in the world, a little nervous about travel, that kind of thing, maybe somebody who's sort of just starting out on their travel adventures, what would you say would be sort of a good way to start into becoming sort of a world traveler? How would you kind of dip your toe?

Kate Hano: I would say start locally. Go not too far away from home, like, for instance, in six weeks or so, we're going to Muskoka, which is about three hours away from us just for three days just to get away, and so starting locally, just starting with some resorts or hotels close to home, so you're in the same country, you're in the same province or state and so it's a little bit easier, you know the law, you know the regulations, it's a little bit easier, but you're still going somewhere new, somewhere different.

So I would honestly start there, maybe start with a little resort and branch out before you start exploring Toronto or some big cities on your own, just start with a little resort where you just go to the beach, go to the pool, restaurant and just see how it feels, see how you feel about it. I honestly love it, especially when I travel by myself without my guide dog, I feel like I have someone with me. It's not just a cane, so even if we get lost or we take a wrong turn, there's that puppy with me who gives me a lick or wag and I'm like, "Oh, I'm not by myself. We can do this together." So it feels so much better to me to be on my own with a guide dog versus a cane. But yeah, I would definitely start locally and branch out.

Theresa Stern: Right. And then you mentioned, if you do start expanding a little bit, to do your research ahead of time and how would you suggest folks do that?

Kate Hano: I know Guide Dogs for the Blind has amazing people who have a lot of experience and I've called in a few times to check in, especially about law and regulations in different countries. I've definitely done that. I've called hotels before just to verify and check with them. Museums, same thing. And just to know what's happening? What's the procedure? Is there a special door? Do we have discounts? How does it work?

So once we plan a destination that we want to go to, then the research begins. Where do we want to go? And what do we want to visit? And just calling those places and just asking and letting them know, and sometimes they want to see some documentation that this is a legitimate guide dog, it's not just some dog that poses as a guide dog so they need a letter or just a copy of the ID that we got and it's usually good, and I found that most places, people are amazing, like we were at the Louvre for one day, there's a huge lineup and the security people came to us and said, "Don't stand here, just come with us. Go straight in." I was like, "Oh, okay." And then they told us, "Did you know that on Tuesday evenings, we close the whole museum and blind people can come in for free and it's just for them so they can touch everything and..."

Theresa Stern: No way. That's so cool.

Kate Hano: So it's all those little things that when you call, you find out all these things once you let them know because they're super happy to share those kind of programs with you.

Theresa Stern: Oh, that's awesome. Very cool. That's great advice. That is great advice. Well, thank you so much for joining us, Kate. It's been really fun talking to you and you've got me sort of inspired. Gosh, I want to go all kinds of places now. Prague, for sure. For sure, that's on the list. And then just talking about sitting on the beach, that sounds pretty good too, so... I don't know about the scuba diving, we'll see, but thank you so much for coming by and telling us a little bit about your life, about travel and thank you for helping make the world more

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accessible and inclusive to all of us who want to get out of our house and do something fun, so thank you so much for what you do.

Kate Hano: Well, thank you so much for having me, this was amazing and safe travels to everyone.

Theresa Stern: For more information about Guide Dogs for the Blind, please visit guidedogs.com.