The Power of International Travel Video Transcript

Haben Girma, US Lawyer who is DeafBlind

I would not be the same person I am now if I didn't go to Mali when I was 15 and show myself and show my parents that I can succeed and reach dreams.

[Photo of Haben in front of U.S. Capitol with her guide dog]

The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange Presents “The Power of International Travel”

[Photo of wheelchair users in a group walking along stone castle wall]

The very first time I asked my parents to go abroad, they said no. They were terrified. It took maybe three months for me to convince them that it would be okay.

[Photo of close-up of Haben smiling with two blind friends]

I explained that I would make it work, I would find ways to do it. But I was 15. And so hearing it just for me wasn't enough.

[Photos of Haben following a string guide across an open area, communicating with another participant with earphones in and touching her handshape, and reading a tactile map]

So we sat down and had lunch with my mom and dad and the coordinator. And she assured them that I would be safe. That they would find ways to make sure that I would get to participate in building a school in this tiny village in Mali and that I would have a host family there who would take care of me and make sure I was safe.

[Photos of Mali food market stall, Mali children and babies, Mali woman handwashing laundry in tub]

I think everyone goes through -- different stages in the process of traveling. We have times when we're really, really scared and nervous and not sure how something is going to work.

[Photo of Haben with a group of travelers at the Great Wall of China during cold weather]

Then we have other times when we're really excited and optimistic.

[Photo of Haben in Europe at a tourist site with the town’s rooftops below]

When I came back from Mali, my first trip abroad, my parents noticed a difference in me. They felt that I was more confident and they felt more confident in me going and doing things on my own.

[Video footage of Haben talking to Judy Huemann and group of other people at a reception]

When I asked to go to Oregon for college, they weren't so scared because I had been to Mali. Oregon? Not so far away. They figured I could handle that. And later when I wanted to go to law school, they were ready.

[Photos of Haben sitting around a table talking with other students, and Haben with her guide dog on the White House lawn]

And since Mali, I've traveled to China, to Spain, to Costa Rica, to Ethiopia.

[Photos of Haben touching a bronze vessel in China, arched bridge across a river in Spain, dancing with other participants in Costa Rica, smiling with two Ethiopian friends.]

And each trip, I've done a much better job of ensuring that I had access to information.

[Photo of Haben reading braille signage at a doorway]

Every trip was a time, an opportunity, to test out accommodations. When I realize something doesn't work, I discard it and try new accommodations and build new strategies.

[Video footage of Haben using braille refreshable display with BlueTooth keyboard to communicate with others at a table]

So I strongly encourage parents to give their children the chance to experience going abroad. It will be a growing up experience for the parents just as much as it is for the children.

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