

## AT&T and Aira Present: A Conversation With Molly Burke

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Speaker 2: AT&T and Aira presents Molly Burke.

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Speaker 2: Part of the #ExperienceMore campaign. [ExperienceMore.att.com](http://ExperienceMore.att.com).

Molly Burke: I believe you're only limited by what you tell yourself. You're only limited by your own thoughts and your own disbelief in yourself. It's an amazing thing that AT&T is doing, and Aira, because it's not often that big commercial companies think about our community.

Speaker 2: Brought to you by AT&T and Aira and produced by the Blind Abilities team. And now, here's your host. Pete Lane and Jeff Thompson.

Jeff Thompson: Welcome to Blind Abilities. I'm Jeff Thompson.

Pete Lane: And I'm Pete Lane. Today we're speaking with Molly Burke. Molly, welcome to Blind Abilities.

Molly Burke: Oh, thank you. Very excited to be chatting with you guys today.

Pete Lane: Glad you could make it. It's our pleasure, believe me. Molly, you're such a public personality. Your story is so widely known. You have almost 200,000 YouTube followers, probably as many over on Facebook and Twitter. Can you review briefly what your story is, your lifetime, how you were diagnosed with your blindness and then bring us up to the present day?

Molly Burke: Absolutely, so, when I was four I was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa. Essentially that caused me to lose the majority of my vision when I was 14 and in grade eight. That was a very, very difficult time to be dealing with this, because I think that age is a really tough age for most people, just because you're dealing with puberty and hormones and discovering who you are, and your own taste in clothes, and music, and all of these things, and all of a sudden, everything that I was discovering changed.

I ended up going from being a pretty outgoing, bubbly, popular kid to losing all of my friends and struggling with really severe depression. So it was quite a journey. I honestly wouldn't change a thing, because it's led me to where I am today, and I'm really happy with where I am.

Pete Lane: That's great. Your story involves some serious bullying, and you have a very heart-wrenching story about a particular episode where you were bullied in high school. Can you share that with our listeners?

Molly Burke: The year that I lost my vision, grade eight, you know, adapting to navigating the world in a new way, I ended up tripping down the stairs and really badly injuring my ankle, and ended up having to use crutches. So, now, I couldn't really use my cane very well, I couldn't use my guide dog, and I had to leave her home.

The school said that they would assign this group of girls to help guide me around school. One day at lunch, when they were supposed to take me to the cafeteria, instead they decided to guide me into a forest. Once we got to the forest, they took my crutches and they started rolling them in the mud, squishing bugs with them, getting them really dirty and then actually ended up breaking one of them and leaving and going back to class without me. I found myself in this forest, couldn't see, couldn't stand on my ankle to walk and I was completely isolated.

Luckily, I had my cellphone in my pocket. They had actually taken my backpack, so thankfully, my cellphone was in my pocket that day, and I was able to call my mom and she immediately came and got me. I ended up deciding that day, with my family, to finish the rest of grade eight from home, because it just didn't seem like a safe environment for me.

Jeff Thompson: What a horrific experience.

Molly Burke: Yeah.

Pete Lane: And then you returned, as I understand it, you returned to another public school, or did you go to a blindness-related school, then?

Molly Burke: I went to a school for the blind for grade nine and 10, to gain the skills that I needed, and then after that I transitioned for grade 11 and 12 to a local high school, that had almost 3,000 students, and I was the only blind one or only visual impaired one. Quite interesting.

You know, we really tried all the systems. I switched school five times. Between bullying and looking for the best accessibility, did the Catholic

system, public system, private system, school for the blind, so we really tried them all.

Pete Lane: Yeah, you did. Molly, you talked about depression and mental illness on one of your videos.

Molly Burke: Yeah. I really struggled with mental illness when I was in grade eight, with depression and self-harm, suicidal ideation, and then later on in my journey I went on to experience generalized anxiety and PTSD.

Pete Lane: Molly, mental illness is not something a lot of people like to talk about, especially their own mental illness, but you seem to come right out and talk about it.

Molly Burke: You know, I'm just a really open person. Some would say I don't have a filter. My friends can easily be embarrassed by me. And I'll say things and people are, like, surprised, and I'm like, "Oh, was that weird to say?" I just don't even know that there's things that people are uncomfortable talking about, because to me I'm just like, "Well, why not talk about it? It's something I live with, and other people live with," you know? One in five people have mental illness, and one in three women have mental illness, so I'm like, "Why not talk about it? What's so embarrassing? What's so uncomfortable?"

You know, for me, I'm just an open book. I have no filter. I am just very comfortable in talking about these things. I don't see a reason in not being, because I think it's important.

Jeff Thompson: Yes it is.

Pete Lane: Good for you. So, Molly, you are a completely different person, well, maybe you're not a different person, but that little girl who lacked confidence, who fell deeply into the depression and suffered from the bullying and what-not, that does not seem to be your persona today. How do you think you overcame it, or did you overcome it, and are we seeing the true Molly now?

Molly Burke: You know, there's things that blindness changed in me, and there's things that it could never take from me. I have always been a very bubbly, outgoing, high-energy type of person. Very friendly, I love meeting new people, I love going on adventures and trying new things. I love makeup and I love fashion and glitter and all these things. Going blind, it temporarily pulled me down, but I don't think it could take away who I am.

You know, I always tell people, especially people who are newly diagnosed and facing the vision loss ahead of them, is blindness doesn't change who you are, it just changes how you do some things. You know, a lot of people, especially on my YouTube videos where I talk about makeup and fashion, are really confused that, how I love something that's seen as such a visual thing, as a blind person, and I'm like, "Because it's who I am."

This is who I would be if I were still sighted, so it's who I am now. It's not going to change me. It's just going to, maybe, temporarily pull me down, but you have to find a way to rise above those challenges, because the reality is if you can't change something in your life, the way I can't change that I'm blind, your only option is to accept it and move on. Living can't be done when you're wallowing and you're depressed, and you're living with regret and an anger. You can't live life that way. So, I want to live. I want to be myself and to move on and find passion and happiness.

It was a long journey. There's no quick, easy fix. There's no magic button to push and be recovered. Recovery is a journey, and it's ongoing, and there's so many things that contributed to my healing, but I think at the end of the day, I am who I am, and blindness just, it tried to hold me back for a little bit, but I was going to beat it.

Pete Lane: And it looks like you did a really great job. Now, Molly, you talked about glitter. Glitter's good. Makeup. Makeup is always an interesting topic from a blindness perspective. Can you give us a little bit of Molly perspective on makeup?

Molly Burke: Yeah. I love makeup. I love fashion. So as soon as I started wanting to get into wearing makeup, my mom took me to a MAC cosmetics store and had them pick out the right colors and products for me and teach me what goes where. From then on, I was 12 years old at the time, and it's just been a love ever since. I have a disgusting amount of makeup at this point, really.

Now, I pick out most of my own products. I still have somebody at the store help pick out foundation and concealer shades, to make sure that I'm matched correctly, but other than that, I'll buy my own eyeshadows, I research online, I watch reviews on YouTube and listen to what the girls have to say before I make my decisions on which colors I should buy of lipstick or what products I should try.

I've developed my own way of putting on makeup, and I think a lot of blind girls figure out their own different techniques that work, but I've

figured out my way. It's not foolproof, I still sometimes end up with eyeshadow fallout under my eyes or mascara blobs on my nose, but my mom helps with that, which is great.

Makeup is like art to me, it's art that I can put on my face. It's accessible art, because I don't have to see the canvas, I can feel my face and that's my canvas.

Jeff Thompson: There you go. Well, tell us some of the mechanics, I think our listeners would very much be interested in how you apply the makeup. How do you coordinate the colors, not only of the makeup but of the clothes and things like that, do you have particular techniques, or tricks that you use?

Molly Burke: For my makeup, anything, like eyeshadows, if I have multiple eyeshadows that are the exact same container, I Braille label them so I know which is which. So, that's how I pick. In terms of actually matching, my blush, my eyeshadow, my lipstick, making sure tone-wise they all coordinate, that's where watching the reviews to hear when people are like, "Oh, sable eyeshadow from MAC is a brown with plum undertones, so it's cool toned," and then, "[Mulch 00:09:54] by MAC is the exact same color brown but it's red undertones, so it's warm."

Then I know, okay, I'm going to pick up sable today because I want to go for a cool tone look, and then I pick up a cool tone blush that I know is cool toned and I continue to build like that for a look. So I guess I kind of combine watching a lot of reviews and reading a lot of blog posts about different makeup products, Braille labeling things, and always, like, my entire makeup collection is organized. Everything sits in the same spot in the case all the time. I never move anything. When I pick it up, it goes right back to the same spot.

Then, just combining my knowledge and understanding of makeup. What looks good, what doesn't, what colors go together, what doesn't, and it's the same for fashion. I don't label any of my clothes, but what I do is when I buy new clothes I memorize something that's defining about that piece. So, with jeans, I might memorize the pattern of the stitching of the back pockets. I know that that pattern means they're my dark wash skinny jeans. Or, I might know that the ones with the rips on the knees are my light wash skinny jeans. That kind of thing.

Then, again, just based on my knowledge and understanding of fashion and trends, I'm able to pull pieces from my wardrobe based on the tactile feedback they give me, and memorization.

Pete Lane: I see it's more than just green, red, yellow, blue, then.

Molly Burke: Yes. I have a stupid amount of clothes and makeup, such a girl. I'll go shopping any day I can. So it's a lot of clothes to sort through to find outfits, but I love it.

Jeff Thompson: Well, you seem to have your system down. Molly, can you tell us a little bit about your hosting career, up there at AMI, on television.

Molly Burke: Yeah, I used to host two of their television shows. I hosted AMI this week, an ATW weekend edition. I left hosting back at the end of March, but they didn't make any kind of official announcement so people will still tweet me and be like, "When are you going to be on the show again?" I'm like, "I'm not." But, like, I'll always step in if they need me. If they need somebody to step in hosting. But, my schedule was just getting way too busy, with speaking and YouTube and the show.

You know, the show was two full days of my week, and for all of January, February and March, I was working seven days a week with no days off for three months straight and I, as a result, was extremely sick and could not get better. Whatever we did, I couldn't get healthy, because I continued to work seven days a week and not giving myself any rest. So I knew that something in my schedule had to give, and unfortunately because AMI was taking up two full days, I felt like that was the thing that needed to give.

So I'm not hosting for them anymore, but as I mentioned, if they ever need me, they know I will step in. I really loved working with them, they were great. You know, I'm happy that now my career is going well and I can help provide a job for another blind person to take that position. You know, I don't want to hog all the jobs, obviously, now there's not that many. There's unfortunately a lot of blind people unemployed, so if somebody else can take that position, I'm happy that they have it.

Jeff Thompson: Great. Your public speaking, how often do you speak and what types of messages do you convey?

Molly Burke: You know, it totally depends on the month. There's really really busy months and there's really quiet months. You know, when it rains it pours, and then there's a drought. That tends to be how it goes in this industry.

I speak at all sorts of different events. I speak to a lot of middle schools, high schools, universities, corporate conferences and events, leadership stuff, diversity conferences. I speak a lot, I basically use my story to send

different messages. So, it depends what the event is about, what my client wants the audience to take away from it.

I can use my story and create a message of overcoming obstacles or accepting yourself or believing in yourself or finding support, reaching out for help, whatever the event is about and what they want from me, I can just take my story and pull certain messages or certain themes out of it. But one thing that's definitely a huge part of my story and every presentation I give, is the idea of hope. We all have hope inside of us, and no matter how dark your situation feels, you can find that hope.

I know when you have nothing else, hope can get you through, because it has for me on multiple occasions. You know, there's things that helped on my journey like seeking therapy and working on my nutrition and physical health and fitness, and spirituality, and all these things helped me, but when I had nothing hope was it. That was it. So, I really want to share that because that's something that anybody, anywhere, in any background can find in themselves, is the hope. Hope to carry on.

Jeff Thompson: That's great. Molly, you are a guide dog user as well.

Molly Burke: I am. I've been a guide dog user for more than 10 years, which is so crazy.

Jeff Thompson: 10 years.

Molly Burke: 10 years.

Jeff Thompson: Wow.

Molly Burke: I know.

Jeff Thompson: Does this dog still weigh more than you?

Molly Burke: He does. He's a very big man. He's half Burmese Mountain Dog, so I promise he's not fat, he's actually very fit and very slim, but he's just a very massive dog.

Pete Lane: This is Gallop, right?

Molly Burke: Yeah, Gallop like a horse. His head's so ridiculously big, everywhere we go people be like, "Wow, that's a horse, not a dog," and I'm like, "His name is Gallop, so yes, he is my horse." And I always wanted a guide horse, a miniature guide horse when I was growing up because I thought that was

so cool, so when I got Gallop, my parents were like, "Oh, be careful what you wish for." A guide horse.

Pete Lane: And you're so tiny, that probably amplifies the size of Gallop, right?

Molly Burke: Yeah, I'm tiny. I'm 4' 10.5". I'm the size of the average Canadian 11 year-old.

Jeff Thompson: Molly, can you tell the listeners, there's probably a lot of people out there who are cane users and good cane users, but they're always questioning that idea about getting a guide dog. What process did you go through and what advice would you have for someone?

Molly Burke: Getting a guide dog was my entire motivation to become a good cane user. As soon as I started taking O&M, I was about eight years old when I started doing O&M, seven or eight, and was a full-time cane user a year later.

The only way they could get me to commit to taking O&M lessons and working on using my cane was to tell me that, you know, "You can get a guide dog as young as 13." And I was like, "All right, you've planted that seed, I'm getting a dog at 13." And I did. That was my whole motivation.

I went to the MIRA Foundation, which at the time was the only school training guide dogs for children. It was more of an intensive application process through MIRA than it is through most schools because they're giving dogs to children. They really need to make sure that your O&M, you know, on-point, that you're very good, that your auditory skills are there, that you're mature, you're independent, your lifestyle suits it.

So, I went through a big process with them of different evaluations and whatnot up at the school, and then at the end of a four day evaluation, they told me that I was approved to go back in July and get my first dog. So, I did, and what I love about MIRA is they don't pre-match. Which, I believe they're the only guide dog school I've ever heard of that does not pre-match, so I actually got to be a part of the decision process of picking both of my dogs, which I loved.

Jeff Thompson: Oh, that's quite different. Yeah, that is quite different.

Molly Burke: Yeah. So with Gypsy, my first dog, I worked with three different dogs before I decided on Gypsy. With Gallop, I worked with five different dogs before I decided on Gallop.

Pete Lane: Really? Wow.

Molly Burke: And at any point you can switch. So, with Gallop, when I went to get Gallop I had actually originally picked a dog who I called Milo, and Milo wasn't working out after about two days so we switched and I took Gallop.

Jeff Thompson: Well, I've heard you say your height. You're 4' 10.5", and that half inch does matter. And now, especially, when you've got a dog the size of Gallop.

Molly Burke: He is a big guy and a lot of people can't believe that they gave such a small girl a big dog, but, I mean, I really don't think it's just about our height matching up. There's so much that goes into the perfect match. It's personality, it's lifestyle, it's walking speed, it's temperament. All of these things play such a huge role, far more than his height versus my height. It just means I have a short harness handle, and I actually love it because when I walk with him, you know, most guide dog users, when they're holding the handle and they're walking, there's a gap between the dog's back and where they're holding the handle. My hand actually just rests on Gallop's back when we walk.

Pete Lane: Oh, wow.

Molly Burke: Which also means that if he's not on harness, but I put my hand on the part of his back where his harness lays, he'll guide me.

Jeff Thompson: Oh, cool.

Molly Burke: Because he knows the sensation of me resting my hand there means I need him to help me. Yeah, I think it's the perfect match, and I honestly, I would never want a small dog. I see some of my friends with these tiny Labradors, as guide dogs, and I'm like, "Oh, my God, I could never," because both my dogs, you know, Gallop's half Burmese Mountain Dog, half black lab, and Gypsy was three-quarters Burmese Mountain Dog, one-quarter lab, so she was also very big. So that's what I'm used to, now, and I feel very safe. As a petite woman, living and traveling in cities, I like feeling so safe with my big dog.

Pete Lane: And I would imagine that personality and temperament was absolutely critical, because your lifestyle involves constant traveling, right? And constant public speaking and being in large crowds, and I would think that being a calm moderate kind of a personality would be very important for a dog.

Molly Burke: Exactly what they looked for. They knew my life is crazy and so they really looked for a dog that's up for anything, super easy going, very calm, very gentle, and because of my personality, I need a dog that's going to respond to correction really easily because I'm really soft on the dogs. I'm really, I'm a very gentle, loving person, and I needed a dog that was very snuggly and very loving and really sweet. And that's exactly what they found.

He's a giant, he's a huge black dog that looks scary, but oh my God, he doesn't bark, he doesn't jump, his paws have never left the ground. I've had him for over three years. He doesn't bark, he doesn't jump, he just wants to sleep and snuggle all the time. He is cool with every situation I have thrown him into. He literally, anything I put him in, he just falls asleep. He just like, "Ugh, okay, Mom, wake me when you need me." He's just so chilled. They totally nailed the personality for what my life needs.

Pete Lane: I've seen some videos in the recent weeks and months of how you handle your dog while traveling, while flying on a plane, constant traveling and everything from how do you handle the dog poop to how do you prepare your dog for long flights and things like that. Is that kind of a new experience for you, the constant traveling?

Molly Burke: No, I've been traveling like this for about five years now, so I'm very used to it, and Gallop, it's really all he's known with me from the time I got him three years ago, this has been his life. But I really started wanting to share that with people more, you know, videos, like how I pick up my dog's poop is something I never thought I'd make, but so many people asked, so many people are curious, and they know that I'm a very honest, open book and I'm a safe person to ask.

So, I always feel like I might be the only blind person that they ever meet, or that's ever going to be willing to answer this for them, and so I'm going to do it because I would rather people know the facts than assume and be wrong.

Jeff Thompson: And that's really great, because my wife has a guide dog and I experience the airports all the time. For people who are, for students, let's say high school students who are faced with the challenges of vision loss, transition to college or transitioning to the workplace, what advice would you have for them?

Molly Burke: Well, I never went to college or university. I transitioned straight to the workplace. When I was 18 I moved out on my own into downtown Toronto, got my own apartment with Gypsy, my guide dog, and started

work as a motivational speaker, traveling the world. So, my experience is kind of unique, because my job is very unique.

I think advocating for yourself is number one, and making yourself your biggest priority. You should care about you more than anybody else cares about you, and you should know what you need better than anybody else knows what you need. You need to speak up for yourself, you need to advocate and you need to be good to yourself and do what you need, to be healthy and safe and successful.

Jeff Thompson: Now, getting your own place, now that's a big step for even people who are going to college or university, about to go into the workplace or breaking away from their home. What was it like when you first got your own place?

Molly Burke: You know, I'm very much a dive in deep person. I don't halfway anything. I decided that in 10 days I want to run a 5K marathon and I don't run. So, I [inaudible 00:22:37] in 10 days will be running, but that's kind of my personality. I just decide I want to do something and I jump right into it. So, yeah, for me at 18, four years after most of my vision loss occurred, I was like, "Why not get a bachelorette pad downtown Toronto, in a big city, and move out on my own with a dog and start a brand new, hectic career? That sounds really fun!"

Now, I'm actually getting an apartment in Los Angeles, in West Hollywood, and I'm going to be moving from Toronto all the way, six hour flight away from any family and living out there on my own.

Pete Lane: And your folks are going to stay in Toronto?

Molly Burke: They will, yeah. My mom will probably come out for the first month or so and help me settle in and get, you know, do some O&M, get some safe walking routes, find my different places that I need around me, and then she'll probably, my mom and dad will just go back and forth to visit me. But yeah, I'll be living out in LA on my own.

Jeff Thompson: So, Molly, I'm from Minnesota, so when you're in Los Angeles and get settled in there I'll send you down some snow this winter.

Molly Burke: Oh, no thanks. That's why I'm leaving. I don't need any snow. I've had 23 years of it.

Pete Lane: What are you going to do in LA?

Molly Burke: You know, I figured my job can be done from anywhere in the world, so why not do it from the city I've always dreamed of living in? I told my parents, when I was five years old, I was going to live in LA, and it took me 18 years, but I'm doing it. I'm the type of person, I always want to prove, not to others but to myself, that blindness has not stopped me from achieving the goals that I set out for myself.

That five-year-old Molly, she needs to achieve this dream. She needs to do it. So I'm doing it. I'm just going to go and diving in. Hopefully going to be out there by December, January.

Pete Lane: Fantastic.

Jeff Thompson: Molly, Pete gave me a call and said, "Hey, I think Molly Burke's on a Dove commercial."

Molly Burke: Yeah.

I think Dove asked me to try out this body wash because I'm so attuned with my hands and how things feel to me. I really navigate the world by touch. When I pumped it out, I was like, "Oh, this is different." The foam was really light, fluffy, weightless, and it feels really moisturizing. Not sticky. I've never tried anything like this as a body wash before.

Pete Lane: How about that?

Jeff Thompson: Yeah.

Molly Burke: That was an amazing experience. It's actually so funny, my aunt was just telling me that she somehow, because I don't know if you guys have seen some controversy about the Dove ad right now?

Pete Lane: No.

Molly Burke: The new Dove ad, not mine, but their newest one? It's silly, but people are freaking out about it, and so, my aunt was reading people's opinions, and then somebody brought up, "Did anybody see how Dove was taking advantage of the blind community and disabled people by using this poor blind girl in their ad?" And there was like 100 comments of people being like, "I know, the poor girl," and then somebody commented, was like, "For those who might not know, Molly Burke is a very successful motivational speaker and YouTuber and if she's in this commercial, I assure you, she willingly chose to do it."

Pete Lane: "She is not being taken advantage of. That's correct."

Molly Burke: "Is not being taken advantage of." I'm like, "Do people realize I was paid? This was work. I was paid. I auditioned. I did five auditions, signed a lot of contracts, did three 13 hour filming days and got paid for my work. I wasn't being taken advantage of. This was a part of my job."

Jeff Thompson: That doesn't sound like a poor blind girl.

Molly Burke: Right? I'm like, it was so funny to me that anybody would even think that.

Pete Lane: You go girl. That's right.

Molly Burke: And we need more representation of disability by people who are actually disabled, you know, the few disabled characters you'll see on TV from now and then have usually been played by able-bodied actors, and therefore promoting the stereotypes and misconceptions, and perpetuating those.

Now, finally in the past few years we're starting to see a little bit of a shift and seeing more disabled people being portrayed on television and being played by disabled people, which is great.

Pete Lane: Now, are you think that maybe, maybe some of that might come your way while you're in LA?

Molly Burke: I mean, I would love it to. I took acting classes for 10 years. I took stage performance and improv for 10 years, from five to 15, and did a little bit of television acting courses in between there, as well, so acting has always been a love of mine, and so I would never say no. I mean, I work in the entertainment industry now. I perform in front of a camera that then videos get posted online, and I perform on stages as a speaker, so I would like to think that maybe I'd get to be able to do the more traditional media.

Pete Lane: Yeah, well, good luck on that. That's the place to do it. That is definitely the place to do it.

Molly Burke: For sure.

Jeff Thompson: Molly, it just seems that your lifestyle fits the #ExperienceMore.

Molly Burke: Yeah, pretty much. That's exactly how I like to live. Do what I can't. You know? Do what everybody has ever told me I can't do.

Pete Lane: AT&T and Aira have joined together as partners to promote the #ExperienceMore campaign, and as you know, Molly, this interview is being brought to everyone by ATT Experience More and Aira. So, what's your concept, what's your feelings about the principle of ExperienceMore? Talk a little bit about that.

Molly Burke: First off, I want to say I think it's an amazing thing that AT&T is doing, and Aira, because it's not often that big commercial companies, like an AT&T, thinks about our community. I think it's amazing that they're doing that, and I'm honored to get to be a part of this campaign and work with them. I think it's important for everybody, blind or not, to experience more, but I think, unfortunately, oftentimes blind people do feel like they are limited.

I believe you're only limited by what you tell yourself. You're only limited by your own thoughts and your own disbelief in yourself. But if you believe in yourself and you want to do it, you can go out there and do it. You can experience it all.

Jeff Thompson: That's well put. Very well put.

Pete Lane: Absolutely. Well, and AT&T and Aira are joining together and they're visiting a number of cities across the United States to talk about their Experience More campaign, and their products and the accessibility of those products, so you can check on the website, which is, ExperienceMore.att.com and you'll find a schedule of those cities and when they'll be there and what personalities they'll be bringing along. So, be sure to go to that website and check it out.

Molly Burke: Definitely worth attending if you can, I think.

Jeff Thompson: You can find that link in the show notes as well as the one Molly's going to tell us right now on where to find her YouTube videos.

Molly Burke: Yes, you can check out my YouTube videos at YouTube.com/MollyBurkeOfficial, or just search Molly Burke on YouTube, in the search bar. That's just M-O-L-L-Y B-U-R-K-E, official, and there's over 200 videos, so lots of binge watching if you're ever bored.

Pete Lane: Yes, and you have the choice to select between videos, favorites and channels, and I went right to the channel. You have your own channel, with, as I said earlier, almost 200,000 followers. I have a question, Molly. Do you know the composition of your following on YouTube, Facebook

and Twitter? Are they predominantly sighted folks, do you know, or predominantly blind viewers? What would you think?

Molly Burke: Unfortunately it doesn't give you a breakdown and analytics of that, but I do know I have a very strong following of blind, visually impaired people or their friends and family members, parents have babies who have been diagnosed, that kind of thing. I have a lot of teachers, doctors, nurses. I have a lot of people within the disability community in general, a lot of mental health people, a lot of people with mental illness follow me.

But then, I also just have a lot of people in general who want to learn, who want to be open-minded, who have always been curious about blindness. I'm their token blind person, here to answer all the questions. It's really a huge mix of people that follow me, and that's what I think is so cool. I think a lot of people with their YouTube channels can get boxed in to being a beauty channel, and ages 13-24 females watch them. Whereas with me, when you look at my analytics, it's so diverse, the age groups, the gender breakdown, everything is really wide.

I like being able to build a really open community of an assorted group of people.

Jeff Thompson: Molly, there's one video I remember I watched, and this was a while ago, and it was really, really cool. There was a person that took your sounds of your Braille typing and all that stuff and made it into a song.

Molly Burke: Yes. Amazing. He's so talented. His name is Andrew Huang and he is a musician. He makes YouTube videos where he makes music out of everyday objects. We teamed up together back around Christmas time, and basically made music out of different accessibility products for the blind, like my guide dog's harness, a Braille, a liquid level indicator and then some other things.

Andrew Huang: I think that I could probably take that tone and pitch shift it much further down. Probably could use it in a few different notes and create the melody out of that.

Molly Burke: Yeah.

Jeff Thompson: That was awesome. I really enjoyed that.

Molly Burke: I'm glad you enjoyed it. I'll let him know. He's very talented.

Pete Lane: I also saw a recent YouTube video where you met with two blind brothers from New York City.

Molly Burke: Yeah. AT&T was able to help me meet up with Brian and Bradford, in New York City who are the co-founders of Two Blind Brothers clothing line. You might have seen them on the Ellen show. What they're doing is super amazing. They work with AT&T as well on the Experience More campaign. I was so excited to get to meet them. They're super cool guys, and what they're doing is really, really important, and really unique. So it was pretty fun hanging out with them.

Jeff Thompson: That must have been a surprise, because you're fanatic over the Ellen show.

Molly Burke: I am a fanatic. I love Ellen so much. She is my idol and has been for 10 years now. I was a little bit jealous that they got to meet her. What they're doing definitely deserved the shout-out.

Hello, you guys, I am here in New York City at the Blind, Two Blind Brothers?

Bradford: Two Blind Brothers.

Brian: Two Blind Brothers.

Molly Burke: Two Blind Brothers headquarters, with Brian and Bradford, or Brad for short, and I want you guys to give a brief synopsis of your story. And me telling somebody to be brief is kind of like a little hypocritical, because my brief is 20 minutes.

Bradford: Basically, Brian and I are brothers. We're about six years apart. We were diagnosed with this eye disease about a year and a half ago. We wanted to do something charitable for the research related to these eye conditions. Part-time, we started a small clothing company called Two Blind Brothers. The story behind that is Brian and I were shopping for a shirt here in Bloomingdale's, New York City. We accidentally walked out with the same exact shirt, and the reason is because when we go shopping, if you're blind or visually impaired, you focus so much on touch.

Molly Burke: Everything. I'm walking around feeling everything, like the five-year-old in the store, knocking stuff over, touching everything.

Bradford: You know what's so funny?

Molly Burke: The hands are the eyes.

Bradford: Every time I mention that story to somebody and I say, "You feel everything," everybody does this like a pantomime. I'm not sure. I guess it's like the universal sign for just touching everything.

Molly Burke: Wait, waving hands [crosstalk 00:34:14]

Bradford: Yeah, waving hands, yeah.

Brian: [crosstalk 00:34:14]

Molly Burke: ... what I was just doing?

Brian: Yeah.

Molly Burke: Touching.

Pete Lane: Well, you know, right after that show, which I had seen, I went to their website to check them out. We were going to contact and reach out and see if we could set up a podcast with them. Their website had crashed. Not ten minutes after their show on, appearance on-

Molly Burke: Not surprised. Well, you should definitely reach out to them and get them on the podcast. I can connect you if you'd like.

Pete Lane: Appreciate that. I think we'll take you up on that. And their company was formed to make clothes that are sensitive to the touch, to feel. They're made especially comfortable tactilely, because they're made from soft materials and things like that. But, also, the proceeds go towards the funding of Stargardt's research, which I thought was really cool.

Molly Burke: 100% of the proceeds go towards funding research for cures, and all of their clothes actually have Braille tags on them, so you can read the Braille on them, which is kind of cool. And, actually, a lot of the pieces are even made by blind people.

Jeff Thompson: Yeah, the Dallas Lighthouse down there in Texas, where 70% of the employers working on the material are visually impaired. Great stuff. Now, Molly, you were talking about hook ups and we were thinking, what about the singer named Ed?

Molly Burke: Oh my God, I would die if I could get Ed Sheeran.

Pete Lane: Oh yeah.

Molly Burke: Him and Ellen, you're bringing up my two favorite people in the world. Those are my two, my people.

Pete Lane: Well, we could do a four-way, five-way conversation with them.

Jeff Thompson: Yeah. If we ever get Ed on here, we'll give you a jingle.

Molly Burke: Yeah. Seriously. Call me up.

Pete Lane: Molly, thanks so much for joining us today. Jeff, did you have anything additional to ask Molly?

Jeff Thompson: Sure. First of all, Molly, thanks a lot for taking the time to come on the Blind Abilities and sharing your story with our listeners, being part of the Experience More campaign. Is there any message that you would like someone to take away from this podcast?

Molly Burke: To just believe in yourself, and to know that going blind isn't the end of the world, it's just the start of a new chapter. And there's amazing companies out there doing amazing things for our community, like AT&T and Aira, so definitely go out, check out what they're doing, and head over to my YouTube channel. There's a lot of educational videos, a lot of resources, a lot of support you can find over there, so hopefully something there helps, hopefully something I've said here in this interview helps. I'm always here for you, so, if you need somebody, hit me up.

Pete Lane: That's great.

Jeff Thompson: Thank you very much.

Pete Lane: We appreciate that. I'll vouch for that. There are so many interesting YouTube videos, and you have your own website as well, which I believe is MollyBurkeOfficial.

Molly Burke: MollyBurkeOfficial.com, that's right.

Pete Lane: There you go. Well, Molly, please come back and chat with us again, particularly after you land those acting roles when you move to LA. Okay?

Molly Burke: Will do.

Pete Lane: Thanks again, Molly. Appreciate you talking to us.

Jeff Thompson: It was a real pleasure to talk to Molly Burke, and be sure to check her out on the web at [MollyBurkeOfficial.com](http://MollyBurkeOfficial.com). This has been brought to you by AT&T and Aira. #ExperienceMore, check them out on the web at [ExperienceMore.att.com](http://ExperienceMore.att.com) and check out Aira, at [aira.io](http://aira.io). And a big, big shout-out to [Chi Chao 00:37:26] for his beautiful music used in this production, and you can find him on Twitter, [[@elchichao](https://twitter.com/elchichao) 00:37:31]. This has been a Blind Abilities production. Thanks for listening.

Speaker 8: When we share-

Speaker 9: What we see-

Speaker 10: Through each other's eyes-

Speaker 11: Through each other's eyes, we can then begin to bridge the gap-

Speaker 10: ... we can then begin to bridge the gap between unlimited expectations-

Speaker 8: Between unlimited expectations and the realities-

Speaker 10: ... and the realities-

Speaker 8: ... of blind abilities.

Speaker 11: ... and the realities of blind abilities.

Speaker 2: For more podcasts with the blindness perspective, check us out on the web at [www.blindabilities.com](http://www.blindabilities.com), on Twitter, @BlindAbilities, download our app from the app store, Blind Abilities, that's two words, or send us an email at [info@blindabilities.com](mailto:info@blindabilities.com). Thanks for listening.