

People don't realise that blind people do cook.

He went to the extreme of being a chef.

But you know, we all have to eat.

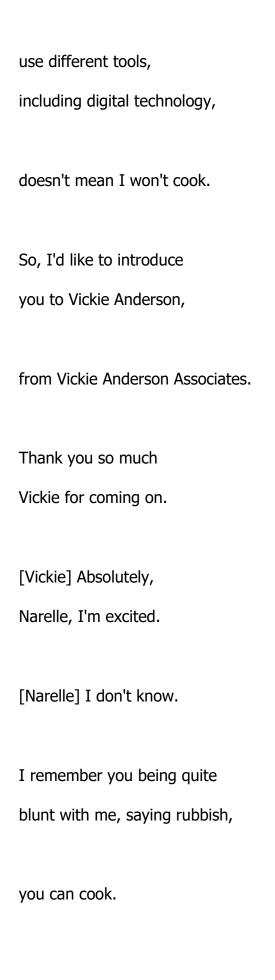
It's just one of those things with people, isn't it?

We all have to eat to survive.

So, this week's guest is someone
I met many, many years ago,

and she actually reminded me that I can cook,

and just because I've gotta change the way I cook,



And so, now I'm still cooking. For those that aren't aware, I have a severe vision impairment. And when I did meet Vickie, she was... the orientation mobility trainer that I had. -[Narelle] Many, many years ago. -[Vickie] Yeah. [Narelle] And that was one of my fears, cause I love cooking. And just a bit of... pull your socks up girl, and get on with it, along with the tools are there,

that you can cook means I still cook. I still make the birthday cakes for my sons. They're all adults now. I still make the Christmas cakes. I still cook the meals, even at... I, like everyone, occasionally stuff up. I did a big, major stuff up on the weekend, and I'm not eating it. Anyone else can, but I'm not.

I don't like sweet food.

So, Vickie, what I wanted to discuss with you is,

as I said, you gave me that get your act into gear, girl.

You can cook.

How do blind people cook?

People with a severe vision impairment?

[Vickie] Yeah. Well, I mean, there's so, so much,

and I think the

best starting place...

would be to talk about organisation,

because that goes across the board and everything. It's not just our pantry, it's not where we put our pans, it's not how we pick out our knives and our utensils, and the food, and the refrigerator. It goes to labelling and knowing your stove top, to labelling and knowing all of your devices, Organisation for the kitchen is one of the most important things

to cut out anxiety,

to cut out frustration. And all those two things alone, I think are why people stop cooking, because the anxiety, and the frustration can become so overwhelming, and really taking away... that power, or you feel like it's taking away that power, because it's winning, the anxiety and the frustration. [Narelle] And I think it's also other people's fears,

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Fears that you're
going to get cut,
you're going to get hurt,
you're going to burn yourself.
All of those things,
and they're, I think,
added to the anxiety
and frustration,
why a lot of people don't cook.
[Vickie] Yeah, 100, 100 percent.
So, yeah.
There's so, so many
facets of cooking,
and so many different things.
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And it's not a one size fits all. Anyone who is learning, learning to cook from the beginning, or learning to cook again without vision, which you know, you've been there yourself, Narelle, it's not one size fits all. It's listening to everybody around you, having therapists that come

in with a toolbox full of ideas,

and finding that right one that fits that individual.

That's one of the worst things that I think can happen,

is going and saying, "Well, this is how you need to do it."

Well, that doesn't work for everybody.

And so, having that flexibility to pivot,

and to think about something else,

or take that and another idea,

and merge them together to make your own,

just knowing that one size does not fit all in anything.

[Narelle] And that's it.

So, if we start at the start,

I remember when I started losing my sight,

and I still had some sight.

Everyone said, "You're going to cut yourself."

I said, Well, I've still gotta cook.

Well, how do you deal with sharp knives?

[Vickie] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

And that, it's such a,

it's the number one conversation that I have with people,

When I go into the kitchen, it's one of the first things I ask,

let me see your knives.

Because people think that dull knives are the way to go,

when actual research and studies show

that there are more accidents with dull knives,

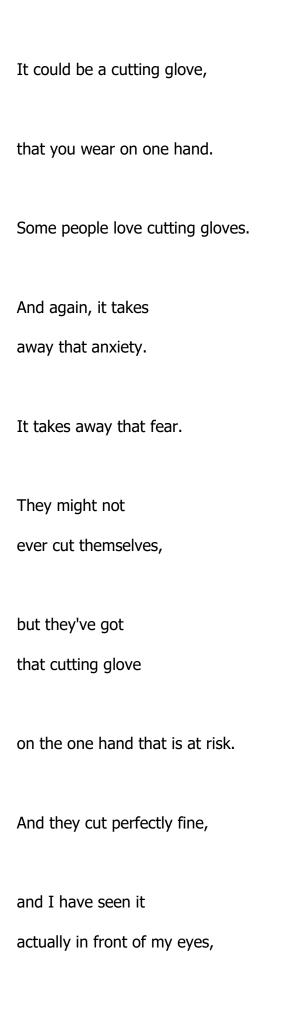
because of the pressure that is being pushed down.

Accidents are going to happen,

regardless of sight or no sight, you are going to cut yourself from time to time, but there are more accidents that happen with a dull knife, due to the... the amount of pressure that is going down on to cut through. So, you should always have nice, sharp knives that you put less pressure when you're pushing down.

And then just other strategies,

which could be anything.



totally blind people when they are cutting without a glove, how they cut, and when they put the glove on, how different they are, how much faster they cut. Like it is insane, just one little addition. There's also cutting guards that go on your fingers. There's techniques that chefs use, where they just keep their fingertips...

folded back,

and it's their knuckles that actually hold everything down.

There are so many different strategies, even a fork,

stabbing a fork into the potato and using that as your guide,

so then your fingers aren't even near the knife.

Again, it's about finding that strategy that works for you,

and what is going to make you feel nice,

safe and comfortable in your own kitchen.

[Narelle] Okay, so how do people recognise the knives?

If you've got sight, you can look at a knife, and say, yeah,

that's the knife I want to use.

But the moment you take away sight,

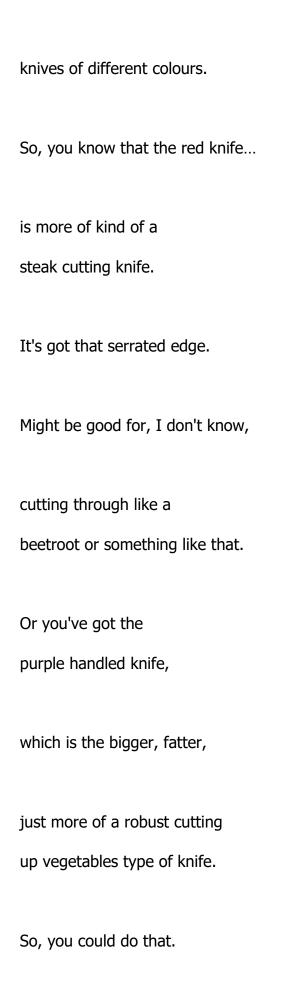
how do people recognise the different knives?

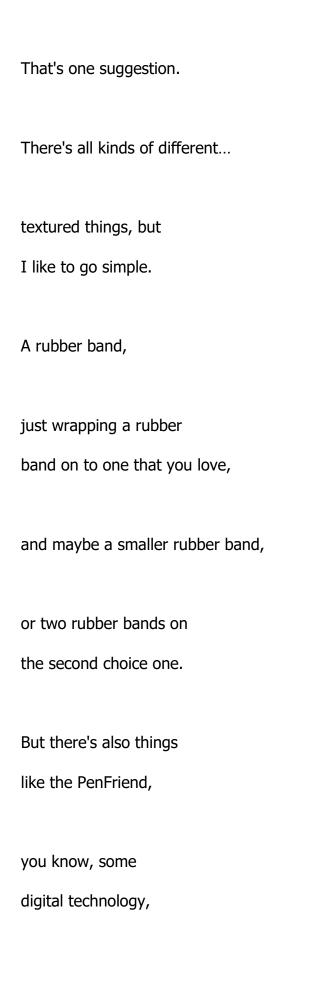
[Vickie] Yeah, well, we've got a few different strategies.

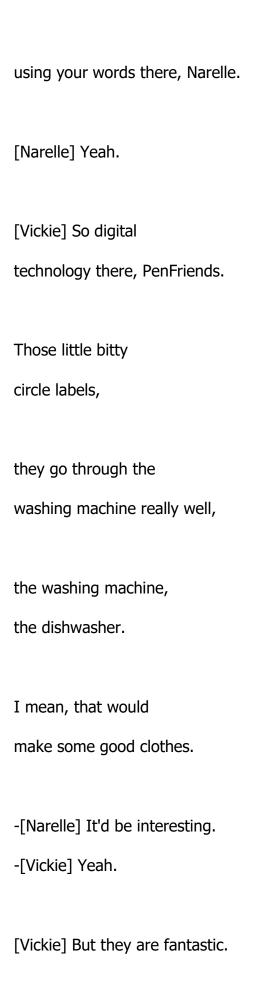
So, if the person still has a little bit of vision,

and if they can see colour,

you can actually purchase







And the PenFriend is probably the best suited for the kitchen,

because it's also transferable.

Not only your knives, but the expiration date on the milk,

and the cheese and the pantry food,

and you've got all your spices labelled with your PenFriend.

It's kind of your one-stop shop in the kitchen,

just having it hooked in the kitchen,

and around your neck when you're actually cooking.

[Narelle] I gotta admit,

I flogged the PenFriend.

I've already worn

one out for exactly that,

because I use a lot of spices.

So for me, the

ability to just hold it,

and say, "Okay, I

know I need cumin."

And there's no way I can

keep it in alphabetical order,

with the amount

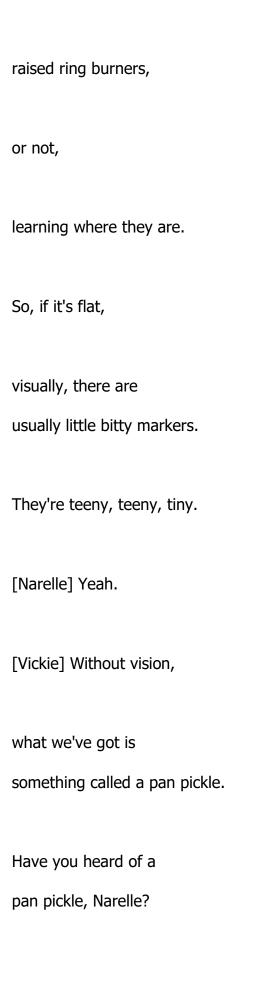
of spices I've got.

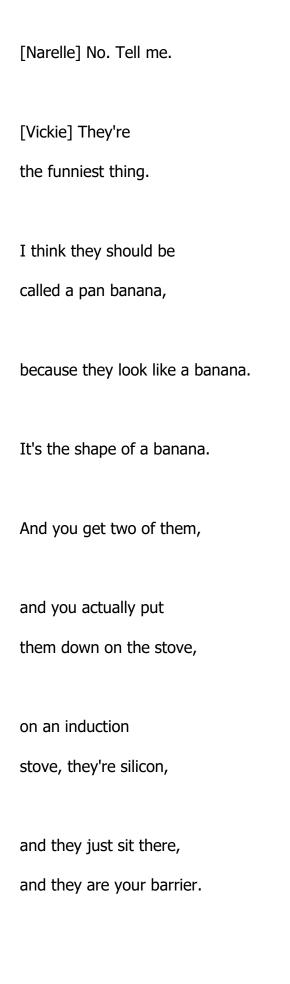
So, it's easy just to

use the PenFriend

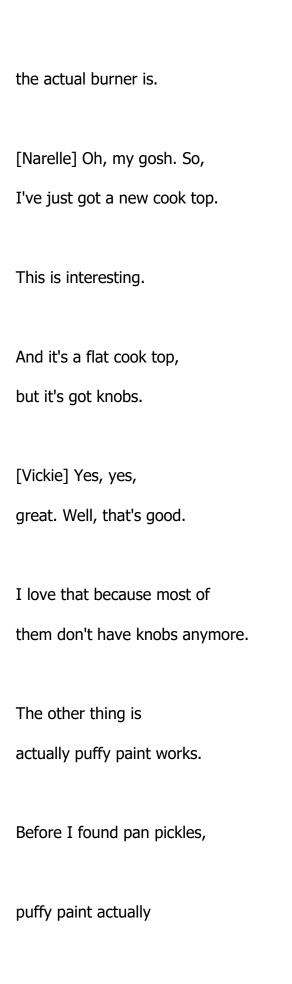
and it's like a bar code reader, is probably the easiest way to describe it. -[Vickie] Yes. -[Narelle] And so I can find... You know, I've got two or three different types of flour, I've got spices, couple of different types of sugar. I mean, and particularly, sugar versus salt, They're a very similar, grain texture, that, you know, you can't stuff up.

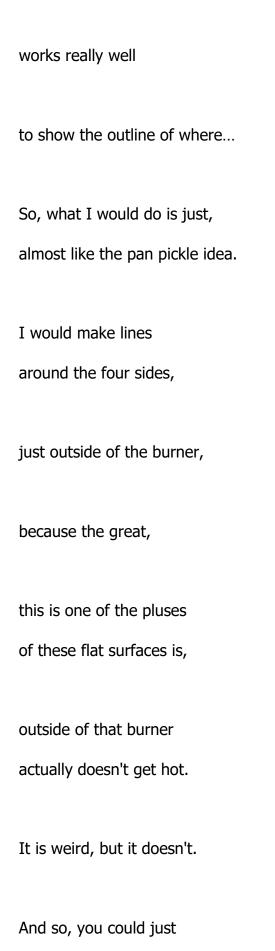
What about the stove? Gas? Electric? [Vickie] Yeah. Yeah. The stove, and they keep getting trickier with these flat surfaces. It's good because they've got so many pluses, and minuses with these flat surfaces. So, the first thing is learning where the burners are. So regardless of whether it's flat, it's gas, it's got the actual

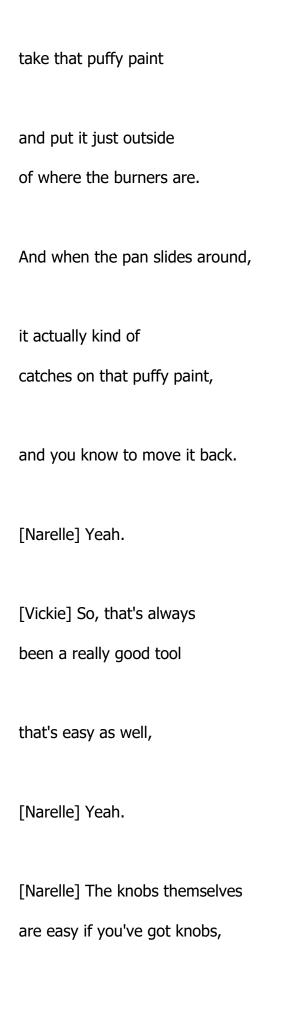


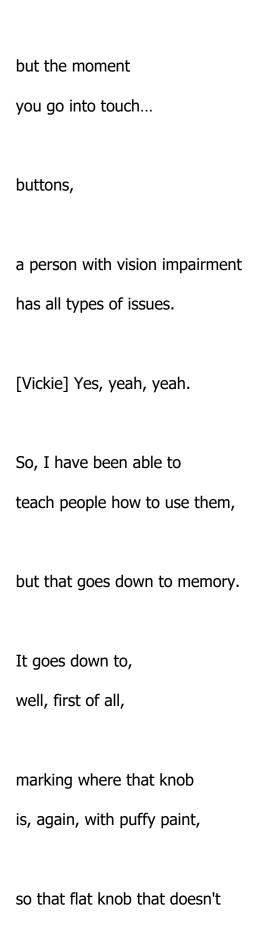


They are your, like, outline of where the pan goes. It also keeps the pan from moving. So, you literally put these two pan pickles down, either front to back or left to right. You get your pan set down and it locks it in. And even when you mix something, the pan goes right back. You find where your pan pickles are, and so you always know your orientation of where...









even exist and you don't see it,

a little bit of puffy paint to show where you put your finger.

And most of them are just turning in a circle,

like you move your finger in a circle,

to actually turn the temperature up or down.

And so, knowing where to put your finger,

to hold it there, they generally all have a beep.

And then listening for the very slowly turning your finger,

to go, beep, beep, beep,

to hear that beep as it turns up and turns down.

It is trickier, definitely trickier.

And my advice to everyone is even if you get a flat surface,

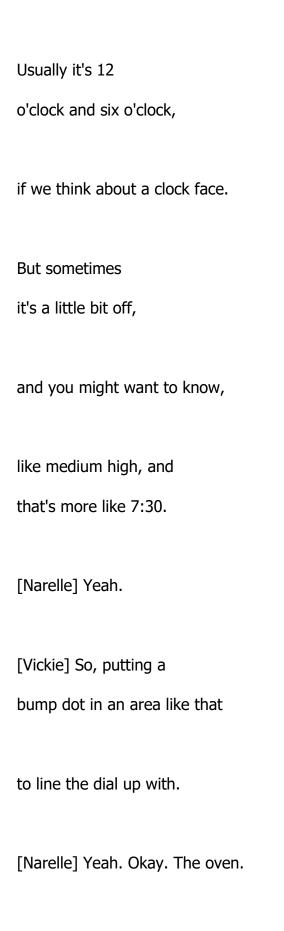
exactly like your new one,

to try and get ones that have a dial on it,

because then we can just put,

you know, like a bump dot to show medium heat,

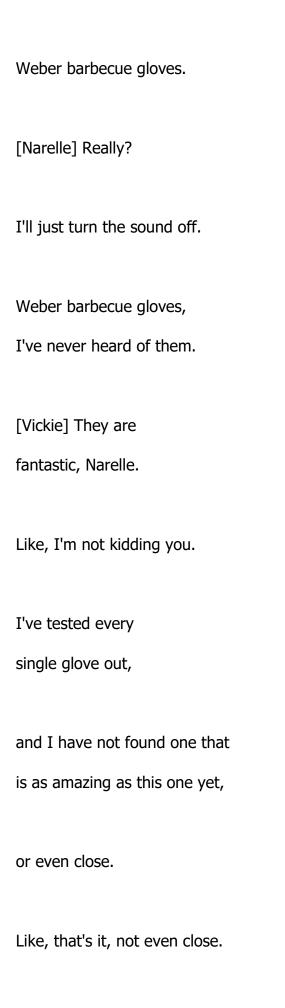
or medium high, whatever it is that you needed to know.

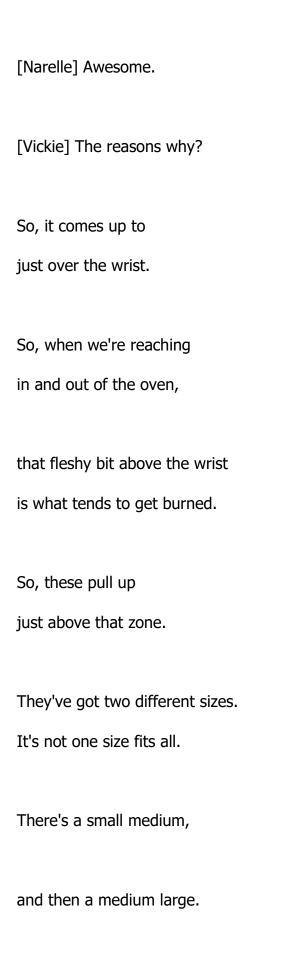


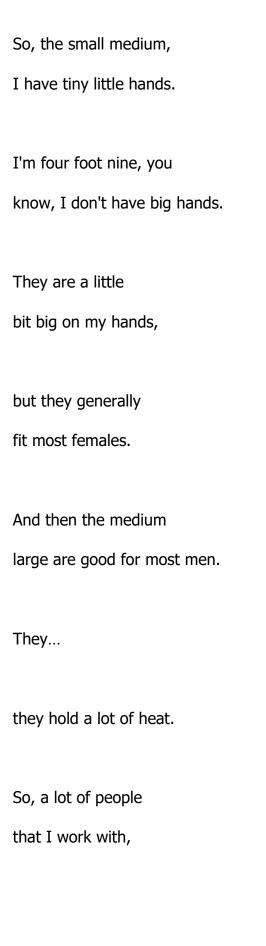
A lot of ovens today are touch screen as well. I'm lucky. I've got a new oven as well, and it's got knobs, but I had to go and look for it. But an oven, there's another issue, because an oven, in some ways, is very, it's very safe to use, for a person with vision impairment. [Vickie] Yeah, definitely, definitely. Yeah. I love to hear you say that,

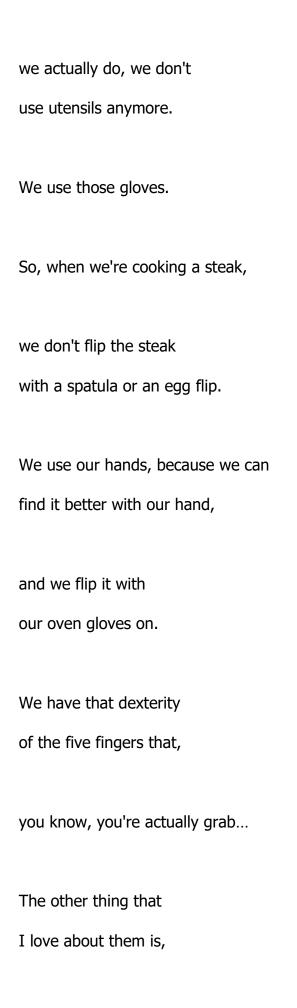
because there are so many people

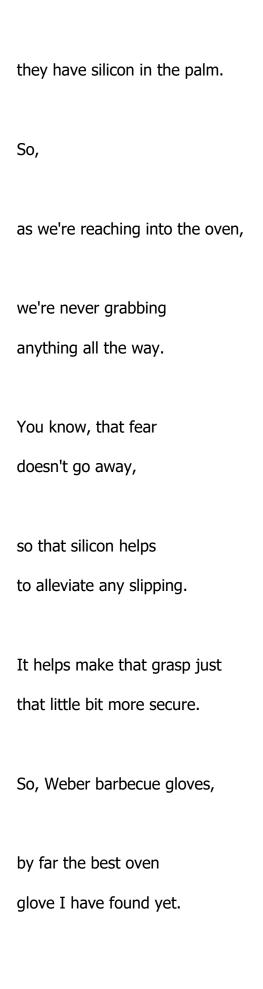
who are afraid of using the oven, simply because of that reaching in and reaching out. It's, you know? I, first of all, love oven gloves, and I will tell you, I have tested... all of them that are out on the market, and there's only one that I recommend to everyone, and I'm telling you guys all of this information for free.

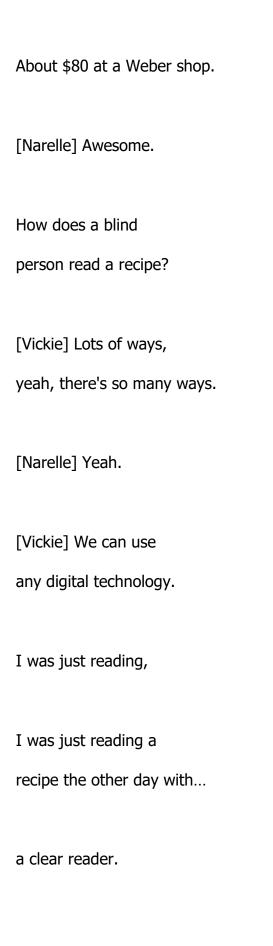


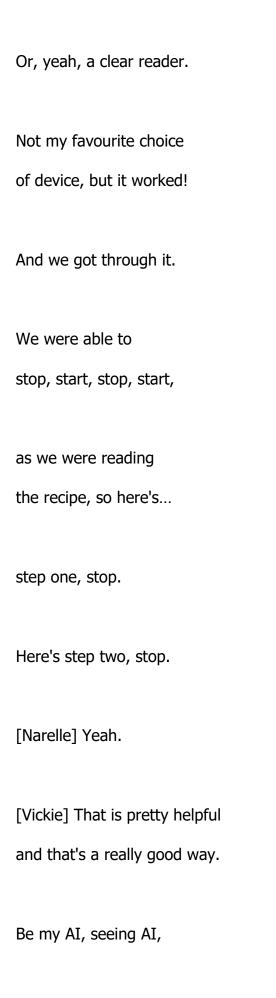






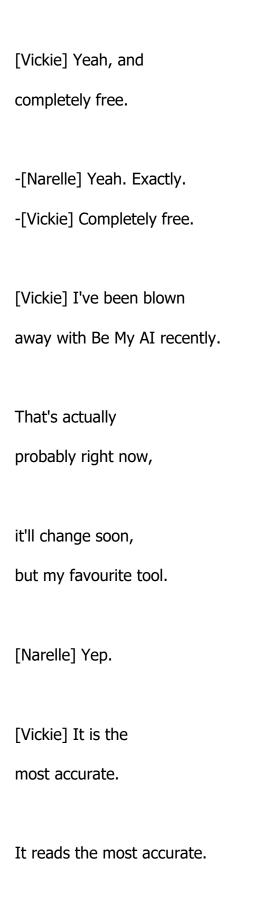


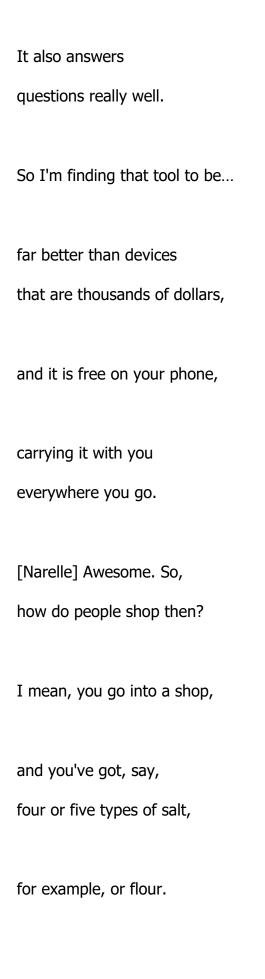




all of those type of things now, especially because they've added in the question bits. You know, like, so with Be My AI, you can actually, you can read step one, and it says, add the flour and the milk. Well, crap. I forgot how much flour and milk there's supposed to be. So, you ask it. How much flour was in this?

How much milk was in it? It tells you so you don't have to go all the way back to the top of the recipe, Go back down and read step one. [Narelle] For people that aren't aware, these are actually digital technology tools. The Be My Eyes, the Be the AI. It is all digital technology tools that we carry with us everywhere on our mobile phones





How does a person with a severe vision impairment,

dyslexia, any of those vision processing issues,

work out what ingredients they need?

What food they wanna buy?

[Vickie] Well, definitely, again, that organisation.

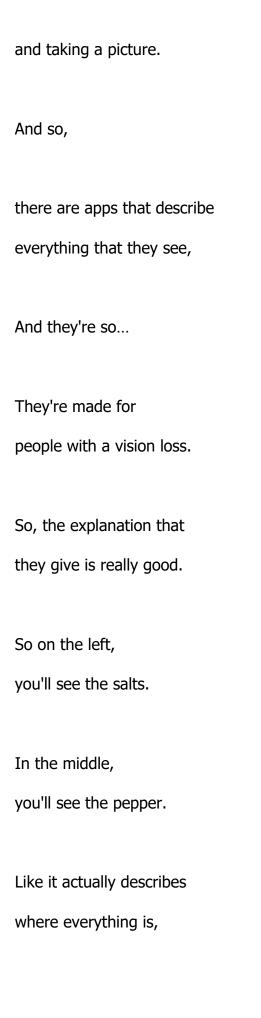
Being prepared, knowing exactly what you want when you go in.

And again, here is where one size doesn't fit all.

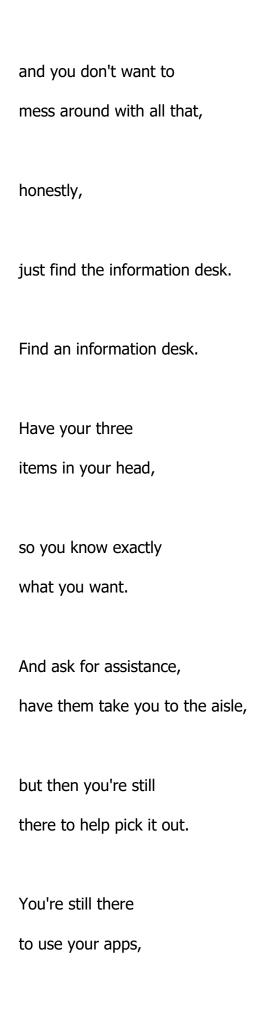
I have people that

I work with who...

really want to do it on their own. And so we've actually... practised using different apps, again, on the phone, to find the aisle first that we want, and then use different programs that read instantly, as you're walking down the aisle, till you find the area that you're looking for. Then turning and facing that area that you're looking for,



So, finding your area, and then start pulling things out and looking at it. So, that's for some people. That's for some people who have the time. They want to be able to, because it's time consuming to do that. That is not easy. It's also fatiguing. So if you have just finished work, and you need to go get three items,



to say, Yep, this is exactly the one that I want.

I've heard lots of horror stories of people going shopping,

even with support workers,
people who know them really well,

and because they didn't double-check...

the item that was put into the cart,

they got something they didn't want,

and it might have been almost the same.

And so, the support

worker thought, Oh, I'll save them money by getting them this brand, and this type of chip, when it's actually not one that they wanted, and they didn't want it for a reason. So, I always recommend double-check what's being put in, just so that you know yourself that it is exactly what you want. You don't get home and open it up and go, wait a minute.

That is not the corn chip that I wanted.

And then you look at it, and it's CC's, it's not Doritos.

And they've got

a different flavour.

[Narelle] That's it.

And to be honest,

being a person with vision impairment with these tools,

we actually can read where it's made,

the ingredients, all the other information much more easily,

than a normal person,

because we've got the tools to do it. And people forget that. [Vickie] Yes, yeah, 100 percent. Again, all of those free apps that we were just talking about, they read those things so well. [Narelle] Exactly. [Vickie] You know, and even if you didn't want them to read, didn't want the app to read it, hand it to the person helping you and have them read it.

And actually talk, that you're still a part of that shop.

Don't be a passive shopper.

You know, be a part of the experience.

Make sure that you are there actually getting what you need,

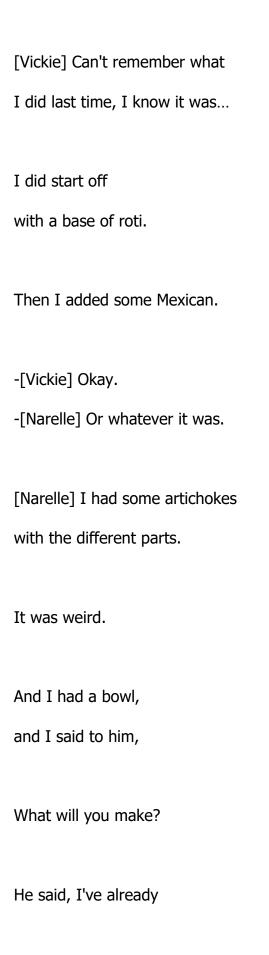
instead of just passing over a list to someone else,

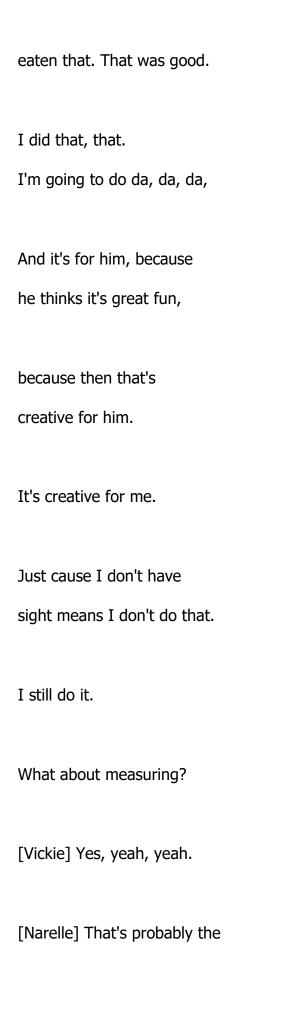
and letting them get what they think you need.

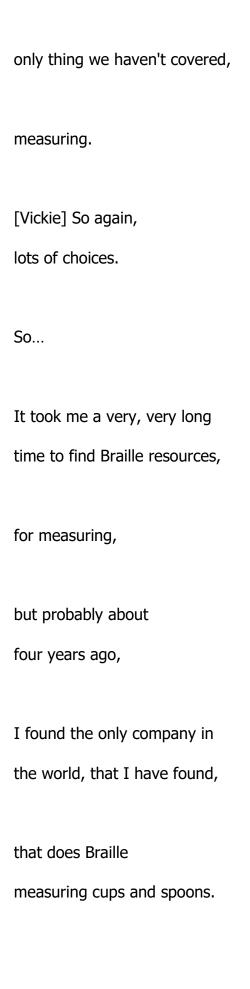
[Narelle] Yeah, that applies to everything in food shopping.

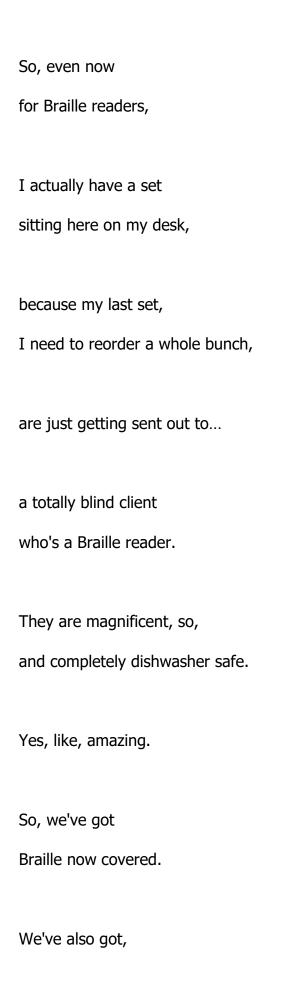
One of the games I do with one of my sons, who is a chef,

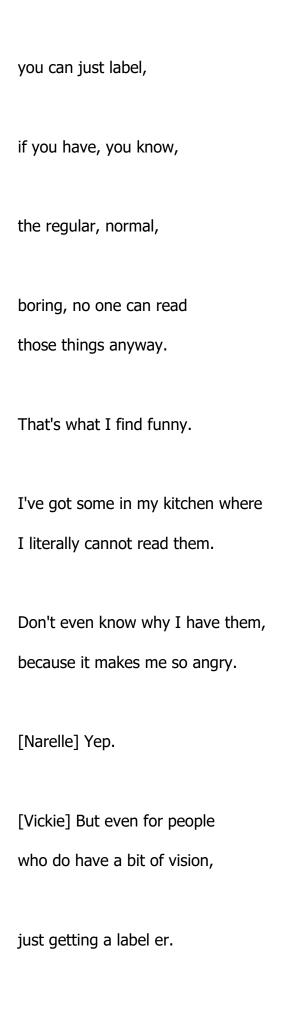
is I find the weird ingredients every Christmas, and I'll give him a bag with five weird ingredients. And I do that, when I'm really tired, I do get someone to help me, and she thinks it's great fun, it's a weird ingredient time. But when I can do it myself, I have so much fun doing it, because I will find... just weird stuff. [Vickie] Like what? Tell me. Give me an example.











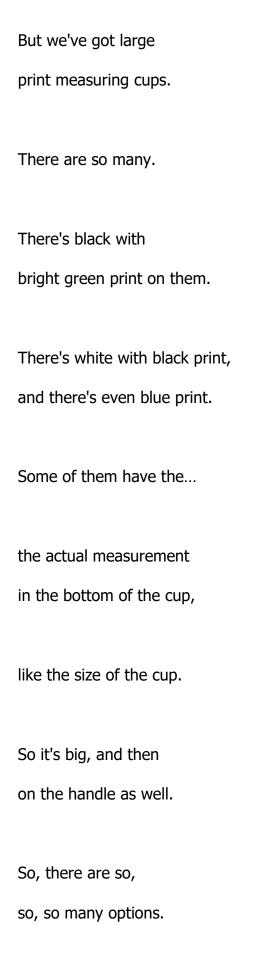
Just getting a labeller, and white tape with big, bold, black writing, and writing the measurement on it. Again, those labels are pretty good in the dishwasher. They do come off over time, but they're pretty darn good. And then you might

be missing one of them

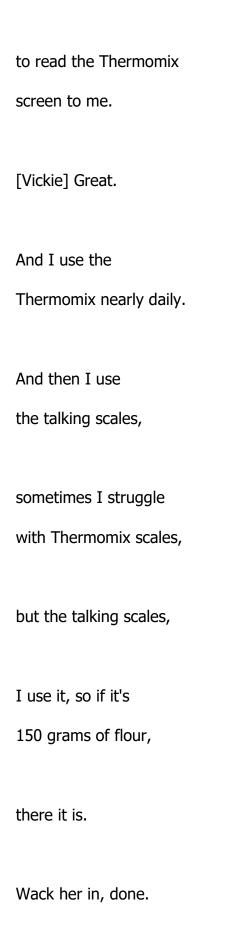
but then you start to

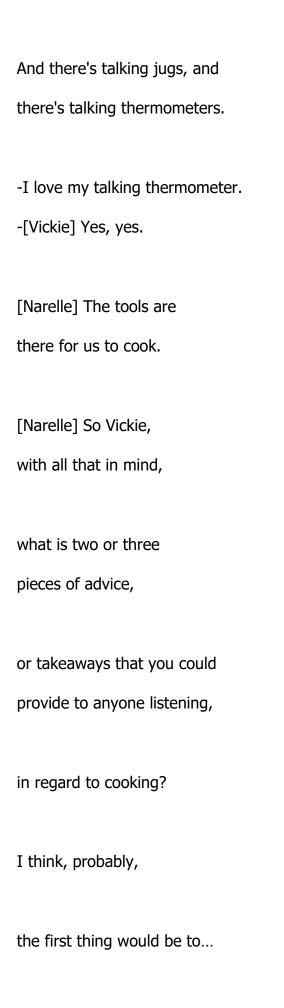
learn, that's the quarter cup,

because that was on the label.



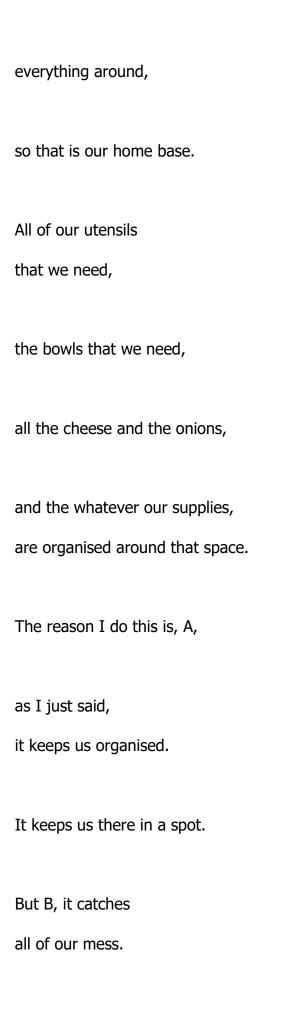
If you've got vision, if you prefer talking, and now Braille even as well. So... yeah, lots of options out there for measuring. [Narelle] That's it. I mean, I flog the talking scales. I use it for everything. And I joined that with the Thermomix, because I use Be My Eyes and the Seeing AI

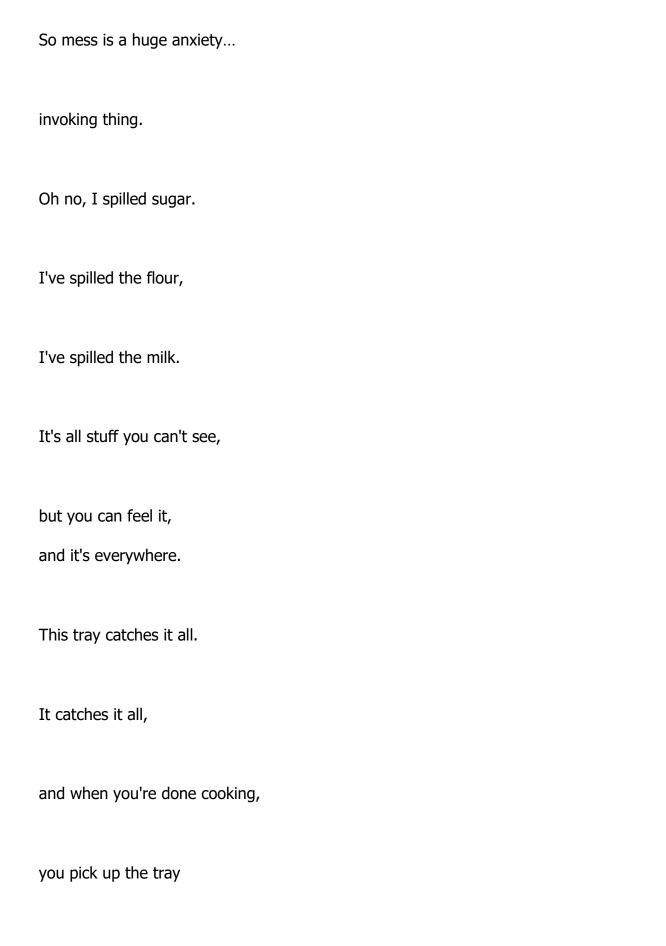




make a workspace every time you're cooking. So, the way that I do it with everybody that I work with, is I have a tray. So like a cafeteria tray, that old school cafeteria tray, they're 10 bucks. Put a non-slip mat underneath, and we do everything in that tray, all of our mixing, all of our cutting, everything.

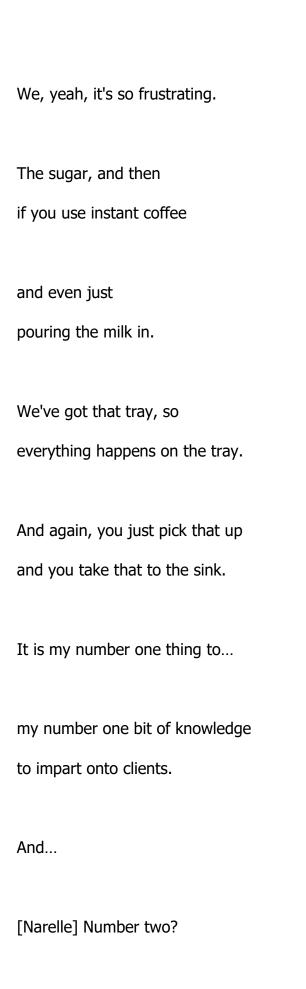
And then we also organise

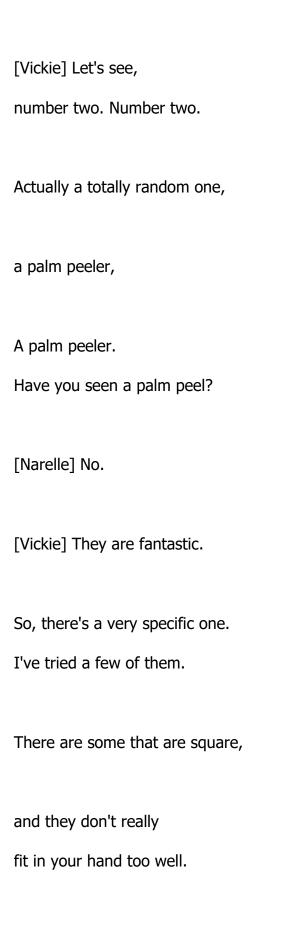


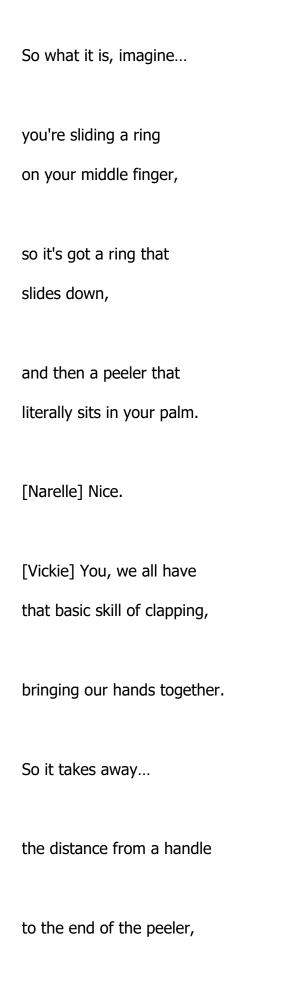


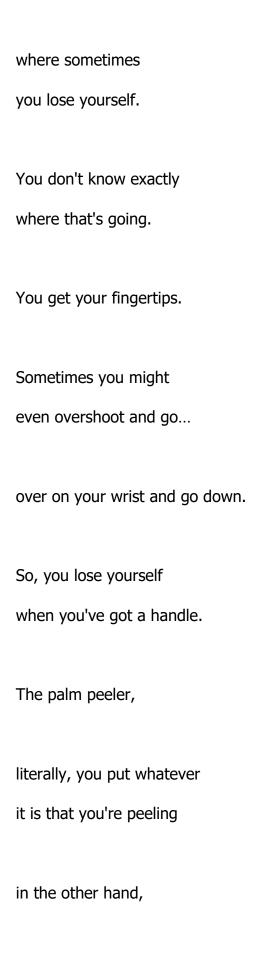
You have a feel around the bench then. But I'd say 95 percent of the time, everything is in the tray, So, it relieves that anxiety. I've had clients now have started putting a tray, so they've got one that they do all of their cooking in. They've got one, that's where their coffee station is. Coffee is one of the biggest spillers.

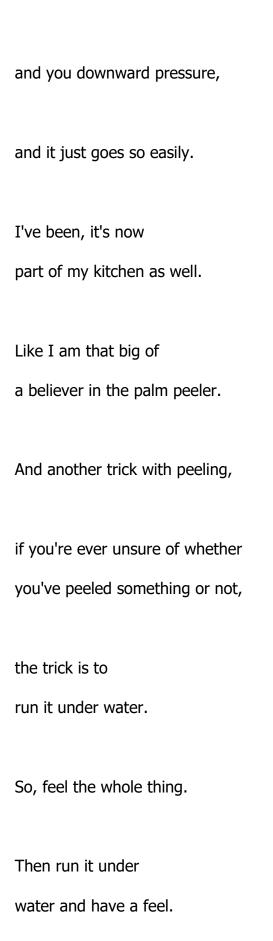
and you take that to the sink.



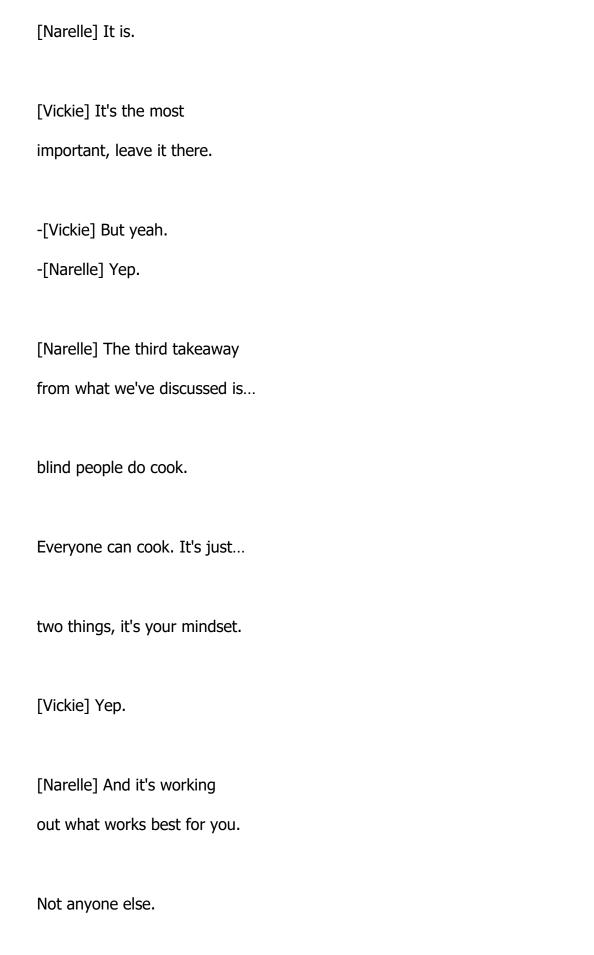








You will feel every peel. So when you don't run it under water, you might not actually feel that peel's roughness, but as soon as you put it under water, take it out and feel around it, you can find every single little spot that hasn't been peeled. I'm like you, I think leave the peels on. That's where all the good stuff is.



[Vickie] Yes,

100 percent. 100 percent.

Yeah, thanks for sharing

Narelle, that, you know,

that you went through those

struggles yourself, because--

[Narelle] I did.

[Vickie] It does take confidence to state that.

So, you know, and for other people to know that, it's great.

[Narelle] Look, I've had, I've had three cooking disasters.

Three days ago, I actually put lentils in my porridge,

thinking it was something else, lentils and porridge don't work.

And then two days before that,

I got a new bag of icing sugar and I spilt it,

from the cupboard all the way across the kitchen.

When you've got a vision impairment, let me tell you.

Cleaning up icing sugar is not a good idea.

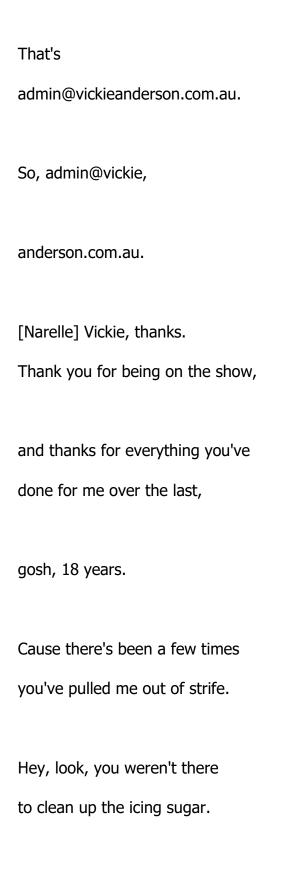
[Vickie] That's not great.

Yeah, that's a tough one.

[Narelle] We worked it out.

Vickie, thank you. How can people keep in contact with you, Vickie? To find out more about this? It could be something out of left field for them. And they might think you have a solution for them, even if they're not blind. [Vickie] Yep, yep. I'm a firm believer that there's a solution for everything. I won't say the one thing that I didn't find a solution for,





I'll forgive you for that one.

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[Vickie] Yes!
[Narelle] Thank you.
And again if you do like
what we're doing on the podcast,
which is talking about
digital accessibility,
communication, accessibility,
and yes, cooking does
involve digital accessibility.
Not to a huge extent
but we still need it.
Like, share, subscribe, review.
And we'll see you next
week on The Digital Access Show.
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Have a good night.

[music playing]