



**Season 1 Episode 8:
What are the barriers for Professional Artists?**

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[Upbeat intro music]

Both laughing

Sarah:

Hi, I am Sarah Tuberty

Nicole:

I am Nicole Kelly and this Disarming Disability in case you didn't get that.

Sarah:

That's what we're here for. So great. I we are in April and April spring time and I'm also an April baby. So it's my birthday month. I like to claim the entire month is being my birthday. Just so everyone knows and something that's really beautiful that I've read and all those like zodiac things and personality traits for people being born in April is that it's the springtime. So it's a sort of like Rush of New Life Rush of water just like everything coming to life again after being in the wintertime and I really like that and analogy or image, whatever the right word is where I don't know. I didn't take English. So that's something that I really appreciate with the springtime and why I love spring so much is because it's so much of this like energy and life that's being brought in. So Nikki, do you have I guess I just want to know what are sort of like your thoughts in this space of everything sort of coming to life all this energy restarting after the sort of after the warmth and coziness of the springtime now, we're ready to sort of Take On The World and sends getting out birds are chirping. So I'm just curious to see do you have what are your new thoughts for taking on this year?

Nicole:

Yay. I love I love Springtime and part of it is because my favorite flowers are lilacs, but also yes, I definitely feel like the I'm excited for the for the change into the warmth and into the, yeah into the summertime like there's no there's no place like Chicago actually in the summertime to sit on a rooftop bar and hang out with people and you know, like just to see the city lights out in front of you and the lake. I live literally a block from the lake here in Chicago. So it's the best place and on top of

living a block away from the lake. We live a block away from a puppy beach at the lake. So it's a billion times even better. Um, so yeah, I'm excited. I'm starting to get really excited for there's a few things that are coming up around the bend that I'm excited for. I last year. I did not take a single actual vacation. I used all of my vacation time to do other work and while that other work was very important to me and I wanted to to take my vacation time to do that other work. I also promised myself this year that I would actually take time off and take time to rest and relax. So coming around then actually my boyfriend and I we are going to take a I guess a surprise road trip. I don't know the right terminology but where you show up at the airport and we have a budget in place and we don't know where we're going and we buy a ticket to wherever is cheapest and we rent a car and we just go on an adventure and I do too. And that's so not me. I'm such a like stage manager kid where I love checklists and I love to do list, but at the same time nothing gets me more excited than the thought of just going on an adventure having are having our budget, you know, like being adults about it enough where we're not gonna like get stuck somewhere without a way to get home, but it's going to going to a place where we don't have a specific plan but are able to make a plan and can make it up while we go and it's going to be so much fun. So I'm really looking forward to that and just what, there's no expectation. And so I think going to be that's going to make it that much better is because we don't have an expectation. So it's just going to like crush all other vacations I've ever taken. I think.

Sarah:

When you get to do what you want to do when you want to do it and when you feel like doing it that you're like, oh, this is some cool Museum thing we drove by and we're gonna go check it out because we have time because this is what we're here for because we're planning anything because we don't have a schedule.

Nicole:

Yeah, it'll be great. We did make a couple of ground rules. The ground rules are that so yeah, the rule is that it has to be somewhere far enough that flying makes sense. And we also are not going to go outside the US because we know that when we get there we want to be able to rent a car and have the free to drive around. So somewhere in the United States. I will be in June but I don't know where so stand by for

Sarah:

California! I'm just going to put the stars there saying California,

Nicole:

Do I have a place to stay? Because that means my days can be longer if I have a place to stay

Sarah:

I'm living with my sister this summer which I'm really excited about and she has her house has three rooms and each person who rents a room also has their own living

room. So there are three living rooms. So I will be staying in my sisters living room, but then my sister also has two other roommates who each have their own living rooms and then there's like a kitchen like in a formal dining room like kitchenette area, which I just think is insane. So there's we have the space. I just offered you my sister's place even though I haven't actually asked her but she's going to say yes anyway, so, okay great.

Nicole:

Thanks Madeline what I don't understand how there are three living rooms and maybe you don't need that to me right now. But what are they going to and house?

Sarah:

Um, it's just a really cool old Victorian house in Sacramento. She lives in Midtown, which is like a really fun trendy area and so there's three rooms upstairs and then they have like the front I think it's the formal dining room a living room and then the house I think this I could be totally wrong. So I'm so sorry dear whatever her address is in Sacramento and the people who live there, but I believe that they built a sunroom off the back of it. So it's like a sky light. So there's like the formal living room. I suppose or the formal dining room I guess is one room, but it's a living room. Then there's the living room and then the sunroom and then there's the kitchen eating area where you can fit a full table and chairs like a big table like a grown-up table with six chairs can fit and it has a chandelier and then there's actual kitchen area and then there's a basement. It's beautiful. I'm so excited. It'll be when she lives like and walking distance of all these really fun restaurants. And and also if anyone ever saw Lady Bird, that's based in Sacramento. It wasn't all filmed in Sacramento, but there's this one scene where she's standing in front of this like gorgeous blue mural and she's very like angst away standing with like her. I'm sure she's her backs on the wall like her foot up on the wall too, but it was this shot where it's like I forget what it I think it's like a woman singing or something. It's beautiful blue mural that's like three blocks for my sister is amazing.

Nicole:

Cool. That's so cool. I'm so excited for you. That's going to be awesome. So yeah, if I accidentally end up finding my way there, what's up Madeline? I'm coming to hang out. It'll be so much fun. Oh, I love it. I love it. I love it. I love it. Cool. Well, should we jump into this week's episode?

Sarah:

Yeah.

Nicole:

Yeah. So this week we actually have Christine Bruno who is incredible. I'm so excited for you guys to get to know her and to meet her what we're going to discuss is right. Now, what are the barriers for artists actually entering into the space that is well, the world of the Arts right? There's their actors audition calls going out all of the time but none of those are for us. So what are the barriers that exist and how we started to tear down those barriers and build bridges instead. She's an absolute expert

and that she's done work in this area for forever and I cannot wait for you to meet her. So with no further ado. Let me give you her bio and will welcome, Christine Bruno received her MFA received her MFA in acting and directing from the New School, is a member of The Actors Studio and works nationally and internationally as an actor, director, teaching artist, and disability inclusion consultant for the entertainment industry. She sits on the NY Local Board of SAG-AFTRA, is Chair of the NY SAG-AFTRA Performers with Disabilities (PWD) Committee, serves on the SAG-AFTRA National PWD and Actors' Equity EEOC Committees, and was the Freelance Disability Consultant for the Cultural Plan for the City of New York. Christine served as Disability Advocate for the Tony Honor-winning nonprofit Inclusion in the Arts from 2005 until its closure in December 2017. Her selected theatre credits include The Glass Menagerie; world premieres of Bekah Brunstetter's Public Servant; The Maids (adaptation by Jose Rivera); The Good Daughter; musicals The Ugly Girl and Raspberry (UK tours); and her solo show, Screw You, Jimmy Choo! Selected film and TV credits include Law & Order; Hungry, The Homecoming; iCreep, the award-winning short, Trouble on High; the award-winning independent features Flatbush Luck; This is Where We Live. www.BrunoDisabilityInclusion.com

Nicole:

Hello Christine thank you so much and welcome to disarming disability. How has your day been up and what have you been up to? Oh, well, first of all, thank you for having me Nicole and Sarah.

Christine:

I'm so thrilled that you've started this podcast and thank you so much for having me. My day has been good so far. I've had a couple of conference calls this morning and I'm going to see King Lear on Broadway tonight. So I'm getting ready for the three-and-a-half-hour Extravaganza. I think I'm just super excited because I have to I have more than two friends in the show, but two of my friends in the show our friends who are deaf. So I'm really excited to see them in particular and also to see how, Sam, the director has worked with them and incorporate. It into the show because the main can't one of the main characters whose deaf plays the Duke of Cornwall and he has a character also on stage with him who voices, so I'm just really fascinated to see what that's all about.

Nicole:

Yeah, that's amazing. Well, I mean that's a great jumping-off point until what exactly we want to talk to you about today. When we look at the Arts world when we look at movies, when we look at TV, when we look at theater, you know, we don't see our bodies on stage usually and TV shows and there have been a ton of people in our community who have been working really really hard to bridge bridge gaps and barriers. And so I think to start the question is the general question is what are the big barriers that first were in place for us and then we can hang from there.

Christine:

Well, I mean when I when I talk about these things I usually I put it into three buckets. There are obviously more than 3 and when you dig down into the weeds, but I really feel like three buckets is the important ones first one is the fear and the myths and assumptions that people make about disability in general. I think that you know fear about disability whether it's fear because you don't understand disability. You don't know someone with a disability which I feel like in this day and age since we are, you know going up on 25% of the population. I feel like it's impossible to move through the world and not know someone with a disability but there's that there's also the myths and assumptions about disability the lived experience of disability itself and then carried into the industry when you're talking about disabled artist is the myths and assumptions that are put on disabled artists the second one, which I'm sure we'll get into that more. The second one I think is a lack of professional opportunities and training right? It's just you know, there are a lot of disabled artists out there not as many as you know, like I'm in New York right now and you know, if I were to throw something out my window there would be a likely chance that I would hit one or two actors. It's like, you know, if there was a steady stream of people walking down the street. So yeah, so a lack of access to training and professional opportunities. And the third one is something that I like to say disability in the media is still widely regarded as a technical skill rather than a lived experience or culture and by technical skill, I mean It's something that an actor would have in their bag of tricks as in the fastest way to win an Oscar is to play and you play a disabled character when your non-disabled because people feel like oh, I don't use a wheelchair but I can't just stick myself in one. I'm not deaf or hard of hearing but I can teach myself sign language enough to get by, you know, that sort of thing. I can play a blind person by using a white cane, you know, if I'm not an amputee, you know allah Lieutenant Dan, I can CGI my legs off. So it's that sort of thing. So I think those three buckets for me or are what I see is the biggest barriers.

Nicole:

Sure, and you in particular, I feel like in the work that I am familiar with that you do you have done so much work in that second bucket that you talked about and really working hard to create those opportunities and those bridges and those professional organizations for people. Can you can you share a little bit about what that has looked like and what resources are available?

Christine:

Yeah, well, I will say that, you know, I have been a professional actor for more than 20 years. I am one of the lucky few who has a master's degree in both acting and directing. You know, that landscape is starting to change. There are starting to be the younger generation is now coming up with more opportunities to get training and thus professional opportunities, but when I was starting out there, you know, they're basically was nothing there were a couple of service organizations that added that advocated for a professional artist, you know, professional disabled artists, but the training component wasn't there. One of them was organization that I work for for

12 years Inclusion in the Arts and I served as the Disability Advocate for that organization along with my colleague David Harrell who I know you know. Self-identifies as belonging to the amputee community. So he and I worked really closely with the disabled artists around the country as basically, I like to say like we're were the direct liaisons between the disabled artists and the and the decision makers in the industry. So casting directors, directors producers that sort of thing. And unfortunately the organization closed recently, but I have taken up the mantle part-time in addition to continuing my acting career of a disability inclusion consultant. So I'm basically doing the same work. I was doing at inclusion in the Arts working directly with industry professionals with disabled artists to not necessarily to create opportunities for them but to connect them to opportunities.

Nicole:

When we're talking and using the word do we see those mainstream casting agents still looking for a niche? I specifically need somebody who is an expert in disability or do we see more mainstream agents starting to collect disability artists into their their look book of artists. What are we seeing a change? I guess really is the question. Are we seeing a change into mainstream more?

Christine:

Yeah, I'll just that that question in a couple of ways because I mean the short answer is yes. Yeah alot. I think I think the really exciting work is happening on the casting director front rather than the agent front and I'll explain that the casting directors are really starting to understand and this goes mostly everything I'm saying goes not only with the disability Community, but with other underrepresented communities, excuse me, like the trans Community. They really are are really starting to understand the imperative of inclusion. Right and and I mean that obviously as a moral imperative of story imperative and also as a bottom line monetary imperative, right because people are starting to demand it and companies and producers are starting to starting just starting to understand that disability is an untapped market financially right that we have a lot of discretionary income that they should start targeting, you know, trying to speak to the disability community and an accurate authentic way. So the CSA, you know, because they're not decision makers, but they have access to the acting community to all the actors, you know around world because they're casting projects have really made a push toward greater inclusivity and are starting to these are CSA members, that Casting Society of America members specifically are starting to develop a diversity and inclusion toolkit, which is going to enable them to feel like they have more knowledge of the communities that they're trying to bring into the room and they're bringing all these communities in the disability community and the trans community and communities of color into the room for descript and nondescript roles. So roles that are specifically written for disabled characters and roles that are not specifically written for disabled characters. So I feel like the casting directors are really really where the sea change is happening in terms of Industry professionals and also producers are starting to get on board. The agents are still a little sticky, most disabled a most disabled actors when I say most disabled actors. I mean ones that are actively pursuing careers in the industry

are represented by one or two agents. Like for instance, you've probably heard of her, Jil Williamson who's an agent at KMR heads up the diversity department in Los Angeles specifically she is my agent and she's been my agent for a long time. She has a couple of hundred clients with various disabilities across the board and across the board skill level. So she's got clients on Broadway like, Ali Stroker and John McGinty who's in *King Lear* and then she's got some really young talents or emerging talent with Down Syndrome that she really works, too to try to feed that Pipeline and I'll just give you a recent stat that she just gave it Reel Ability. She spoke on a panel that I moderated Disability on the Small Screen on Sunday at Reel abilities. She said when she first became an agent at KMR in 2013, her clients made a total of \$50,000 that was across all of her disabled clients and in 2018, that figure was five to seven million dollars.

Nicole: That's amazing

Christine:

I don't really think that the agents by and large have caught on to that but that we can actually make them money, which is you know, what they're there for. Right? Right.

Sarah:

I know when we spoke with Lawrence carter-long a couple weeks ago about movies that were coming out specifically and how films that were featuring actors that were not disabled that then we're playing people with disability roles that they weren't grossing as much as they expect it to their first weekend. Yeah, so I think and so I know that we talked then that there is sort of this cultural shift that we as consumers of media to people with disabilities without disabilities just people who are consuming media are tired, I think is the way that he said it like we're tired of hearing the same stories. And and so I feel that there is that cultural shift happening to both from people who are viewing the media and then people who are then producing the media as well. So that is something I'm really excited to live in a world where that's happening.

Christine:

It is really exciting. Yes, and that's very true. Although I will say and that's put a wet blanket on what he was saying because he's absolutely right, but unfortunately I think film is lagging far behind certainly television and and also theater at this at this point in time right now and it's something that we did talk a lot about it Reel Abilities as well is that film is just not doing as good a job as TV and theater. I don't know why that is maybe because TV produces more content, you know, but but I would like to see film, you know move more in that direction and I do think that the more the audience gets involved and vocal about you know, what they want to see and if they're seeing things that they don't like and I'll just use I know he's this example of *The Upside*, you know that the opposition to that was was pretty strong and and You know and Bryan Cranston is a name, but also Kevin Hart is also

named, you know, I would have liked to have seen them cast and a disabled actor in The Bryan Cranston roll and then have Kevin Hart the you know, then the big Financial draw. I think that would have been a much more substantive film. It would have sent me sent a huge message to community and I know that Bryan Cranston, you know, I read all of the blowback about it being acting and does that mean if I'm gay if I'm not gay that I can't play gay and does it mean that if I'm not rich that I can't play a wealthy man. It doesn't mean any of that. It just means we were just talking about you shouldn't appropriate other people's culture. Number one and I started was extra disappointed in Bryan Cranston given his history with disability working with RJ Mitte for six seasons and and you know working under the direction of an executive producer who specifically, you know, wanted authentic representation in his creation. So I that one's done a little more than some of the others plus Bryan Cranston's brilliant and I don't think he's hurting for any opportunities. I think I lost my train of thought. Let me see because I was getting to a point and I don't remember what it is that films lagging behind. I know it's what we were talking about before that the film's lagging behind the things that real abilities-? Yes, I don't if there was something in the thread there with Bryan Cranston and I lost it, but I'll get it back.

Nicole:

Sure.

Christine:

Did I answer that question? Yeah, the question you asked.

Nicole:

Okay, great. Yeah totally. So if we are somebody then who is looking and to get active? How do we get active? What are the organizations that exist who are the people we can connect with? What resources exist right?

Christine:

When you say active are you talking about as consumers as artists both went?

Nicole:

Well, I would say specifically first or start out with in the Arts world where you are the expert one of the places and resources you use but then yes, if we want to take us part two, which I think we should as a consumer. How do we smartly consume things?

Christine:

Yes. Yeah. Okay. Well, there are a lot of limit. Can I jump back and talk about some of the cuz I think this is where I was going is some of the work that's being done in television that that is particularly exciting and also on the in theater and I'll just I'll just throw out some examples. You know in television and that this was a banner week now for disability. I think it television because we had an episode of NCIS New Orleans, which I don't know. If you saw there were six disabled principal actors

including my dear friends up. Actually, they're all my friends which is interesting Kurt Yaeger who's been put forth for any consideration for that for his betrayal and that episode. So if there are any Academy voters out there, please cast your ballot for Kurt. Um, and my of course my friend series regular Daryl Chill Mitchell who's been killing it for years, Teal Sherer and Summer Curbutio and 30 background actors with disabilities on that show that aired this week and the writer has a disability and she she Catherine Beedy. She has a Mobility disability. So I would say it's really important to get writers in the writers room more writers with the lived experience of disability in the writers room, because it allows us to create have more nuanced conversations that actually reflect the accurate portrayal of disability in the accurate experience of disability. So definitely we need more writers out there other examples are New Amsterdam is continually hiring disabled artists for descript and nondescript roles. That's a very popular show, also on TV this week was my friend Summer Carbuccio on a in a huge role on Grey's Anatomy. Then of course, there's shows like Speechless and Louder Mount Loudermilk have series regulars with disabilities on Friday a new Netflix show. Called Special drops that stars disabled actor with CP name's Ryan O'Donnell based on his book and he also is gay. So I'm really looking forward to that. Although I do wish they had not called it Special and stuck to the title of his book the title of his book is Special and Other Lies We Tell Ourselves.

Nicole:

Oh, yeah, very very different.

Christine:

You know a different lens. Yeah. Yeah, you know, I'm sure he fought for that and up the food chain. It didn't it didn't fly but you know, that's the deal and then there are people, you know creating their own content like Maysoon Zayid ad has two shows in development now. Which is amazing Abel. There's a pod a web series coming out called Able it a series of interviews with disabled artists by allegory and Kalyn Blair and another series called Hot Flash starring Amy Ruderman and executive produced and written by Amy and her husband Danny Woodburn as some people know is Nikki from Seinfeld and amazing little person actor and activist. So there's a lot happening in television. On stage just quickly, we've got *Oklahoma!* currently starring Ali Stroker as Ado Annie and a totally non-disabled nondescript rural just burning up the stage.

Nicole:

I'm freaking love everything about it. I'm obsessed that it's amazing.

Christine:

Then there's obviously the *Cost of Living* which just won the Pulitzer. And featured two award-winning disabled actresses actors in it. And it's had for I think it's on its fourth production. It started at Williamstown a 20-minute theater club and it just finished up a run in London.

Nicole:

Which Nicole's Alma Maters are Williamstown and Manhattan theater Club. So I personally go. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Christine:

So there's a lot going on. There's some great directors who are committed to disability, you know in their work including Sam Gold director of *King Lear* and Rachel Chapman who directed the *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and the Shakespeare Theater DC had their last two Productions *Vanity Fair* featured my friend Anthony Lopez who's an amputee and their production and he leaves for San Francisco tomorrow to do it there and *Richard the III* I had my friend Sophia Cheyenne, who's a little person in that production. So yeah, I mean there's so much going on one of the things that Lawrence and I were involved in last summer is an upcoming film called the *Homecoming* which is was made by Zeno Mountain Farm and I'm bringing it up not just because we're in it, but because it's really groundbreaking because it's is the to our knowledge is the first-ever sag-aftra film that has more disability representation on-screen and off-screen. There were over 60% of the crew was/ is disabled. So and it really is showing disability in a positive light. The disability on screen has nothing to do with the storyline and it's really subversive and a lot of ways of that should hopefully that'll be coming out in the summer. So that's so sorry. I just like a complete brain dump. So.

Nicole:

that's exactly what we want. And those are the things that we should be as a community paying attention to and celebrating and I think that many of us are however, if you know the people who are joining us on this podcast are learning their pride and trying to figure out the world that's the exact kind of brain dump that I would be looking for. So thank you. Thank you for that.

Christine:

You're welcome. And I just realized I circled back and didn't answer the actual question. You asked that's okay. Where can we go to find community? And you know, what? Can you do? I mean, I think within the Arts that there are now increasingly more places to find community and there's sorry, excuse me. I don't know if you guys know about the Disability Film Challenge, which was this weekend, which is a film towns that's in its six-year. It's a 55 hour film challenge to make your own five-minute film over the 55 hour period and it has to have something to do with disability, whether written by a disabled person, crew disabled actors, most of them have, you know, disability representation in all of those areas and it's really doing well. I think the first year they had about 12 entries and this year it's over 60, I know. So and thanks for films have gone on to win Awards and a lot of people have gotten jobs from the film challenge a couple of my friends have gotten recurring roles on TV series directly from the film challenge. So that's a place where people can go to find Community. Then there are you know, disability-specific theater companies like Appetite a here in New York and the National Disability Theater, which is sort of countrywide that's Mickey and Talleri's company. So Tyler, he's episode just aired last week seven. Yes. Yeah talked about a lot about it. There's

Phamaly Theater Company in Denver, which my friend wonderful disabled actors and artistic director Reagan Linton is the artistic director of Phamaly. There's TB TB, which is Theater Breaking Through Barriers here in New York, which is about to celebrate its 40th year and I'm going to be doing a play Up Coming this summer and an Off-Broadway World premiere by Becca Branstetter who writes for this TV TV.

Nicole:

Becca did stuff at Williamstown Theater Festival the year that I was there. So yeah.

Christine:

Yeah, and she's supportive and Allied to the disability Community, which is something I think that doesn't get a lot of AirPlay is the need for our community specifically to have allies because our community is so fractured in terms of cross section disability. I think you were alluding to it earlier, you know, you and Sarah belong to the amputee Community or the limb difference community and often disability communities tend to get siloed because you know for lots of reasons because we're concerned with our own needs, but I think in order for us to really move forward in the entertainment industry, we need to come together as a community, but we also need our allies from like-minded under representative communities to have our backs as well.

Nicole:

Yes, totally agreed totally totally agreed. And that's yet again I know we shared with you that's part of our hope for this podcast is to get kind of all people on board to listen to the wide message the general message and just expose people to the fact that this community and culture is outside of whatever silo in which they specifically live in and that's a beautiful thing and that we can want be on each other's team. And that know that doesn't always mean that we have exactly the same needs or have experienced stigma in the exact same way. But but that's okay too.

Christine:

Exactly.

Nicole:

Yeah, so is there anything else in which you feel like you'd like to share feel like we didn't get to cover with you.

Christine:

Um, yeah, I'm just looking at my notes for you know,

Nicole:

There's so much we could have.

Christine:

Yeah, I mean this is why you guys started this podcast because yes

Nicole:

we do want to just so you know after this first season our hope is that our first season is just kind of laying groundwork, but we want to really get into the nitty-gritty specifics in the future. So just greatly please be on standby and we may call you up and be like we specifically want to talk to you about what seen *King Lear* was like and and how it worked with actually, you know, like really really get into negative conversation. Wow that we can grow into that. But we really want to make sure that we're bringing the audience along with us and that they're ready for. That so that's kind of where we're treading right now is just trying to do enough overview that everybody feels included if they're just getting into it.

Christine:

Of course. Yeah, I think they're I think I might have said a couple of these things before but I do I do think there are things that there are substantive things that we should be doing as artists but also also as consumers, I mean, I think the main thing right now, you know, most often were not allowed to play ourselves not even you know, as we know so I want to see more more disabled actors in disabled character roles, but I also want to see disabled actors playing nondescript roles like Ali as a to an ER ruffle is Duke of Cornwall. So that's great. I want us to continuing that trend so we don't have to keep having the same conversation all the time right

Nicole:

agree.

Christine:

I think we need to have table. I feel like we must have a seat at every table every time for every conversation. I know Lawrence brought up the concept of nothing without us as opposed to nothing about us without us. There should never be an about us. It's it doesn't matter if it's about us or not. We should be in the room. Otherwise, we're not you know, but I really think that what can what can we do as consumers as audience members and this might be a little service but I don't care. I just don't support us inauthentic portrayals of disability. You know, I don't think anyone should support it. Certainly we as disabled people should not support an inauthentic for *Trails*, but we need to use our voices and our money as a protest when we have a lot of money. We've got 500 billion dollars in discretionary income. That's a lot of money. If we don't go see these things then you know, they're going to start getting the message. I do think again, we need to be constantly in search of allies allies allies allies, you know, so that's a constant education process. We need to pressure the film industry to do better to look to their colleagues and TV and theater to say why can't we you know, and as I said quickly before we need to get more disabled writers and producers in the room so that they really understand the lived experience of disability. Yeah, and we should understand that there are I feel like sometimes people try to reinvent the wheel because they don't reach out and they don't use the community that just *Community* is fast again, A lot of people are doing a lot of things we have our hands in a lot of Pies, but there are those of us who have been doing this work for a long time I'm and and we should all reach out to each other

because if we if we stopped trying to reinvent the wheel or be proprietary about anything we are going to make progress much faster than we have.

Nicole:

Yes. I would love to give an amen to that.

Christine:

Yes, what else we can do is we can look to our educational institutions to really be more inclusive in terms of training programs. There are things happening. I mean in terms of Professional Training, there's Yale has just admitted its first disabled wheelchair using student at first Disabled Student in the the MFA The Graduate acting program and the Ruderman Family Foundation has granted Jesse with a sizable a sizeable scholarship so that she can you can train at Yale. Also, there's UCSD but then there because, like I said lack of access to training is a huge problem and we really need to feed the pipeline. So organizations like Queens Theater has started a program called Theater for All and comprehensive training program for disabled artists. We just had a two-week pilot program last September of which I was a teaching artist and it was a great success and they've gotten a grants to continue that so I just want to point educational institutions in the direction of of really being inclusive and not being afraid to you know to admit students disabled students into your conservatory programs or your training programs and really to let the disabled students be their own advocates to give them agency and don't assume that, you know everything that they need because will tell you what we need and we want you to communication is key particularly in educational settings. I know most of my friends who've gone through professional training programs myself included things were imposed upon us without our consent and without you know speaking to us first so we weren't getting the the access to all of the opportunities even within those programs that are non-disabled counterparts were getting so I would just encourage, you know, the more trained actors we have out there the more we're going to see the pipeline and and the more choices will give the decision makers so we won't have to hear. Oh, well, we saw some disabled actors, but they weren't talented enough.

Sarah:

I do have I do have a follow-up question for that to do do Christine. Do you know how? Disability is being taught in programs like that are training both actors and writers and getting into theater and film do we know if that's like a section that they cover or how to work with people with disabilities. Like I don't I'm this is not the world that I was trained in. What is that? Like is that anything?

Nicole:

I can tell you my personal experience?

Christine:

Did you say no??

Nicole:

in particular in directing and theater management. Because I did not even consider acting because I'd never saw anyone want not even once it on stage in a movie that looks like me. So I thought it was quite literally impossible. So therefore I took all of the acting classes but my degree is in directing and theater management So my answer because I was in every single one of those acting classes was that it was not taught. No, there was no it was not celebrated. It was in fact the opposite where Nikki was making the "smart decision." I was making the smart decision to be in the management side of things because there were not opportunities for me. So I sprays bird for choosing the alternative route and I don't want you.

Christine:

I hope that you put that in the in the podcast because that's very important because I think that that's most people's experience. There are those of us who did not I don't know. I don't know if it was a good decision or a bad decision, but I had that same experience but I was not dissuaded, I just barreled through but but during my training certainly during my undergrad training but and also during my MFA training my disability was not celebrated in any way shape or form. In fact, I was not allowed to take the dance classes. Hmm, and I was told that you know because our dance classes were taught by a professional Dance Company here in New York that I won't name. Although I should call out they refused to teach teach me that breaks my heart and I was and I said, you know, well, what am I going to do about the movement requirement because I have to fulfill movement requirement and they said, "oh it's okay well waive that" and I said, "wait a minute, you know, I'm paying all this money. I want to get an education." So yes my way of getting around that was I became a double major. I was in acting and directing major. So I technically have a double degree. I think those things are changing a little bit but super super slowly. I know that Ali I know the folks at Yale reached out to Ali and Ali not a Ali gosh Jesse after they admitted her they hired a team to sort of help them figure out how to best serve Jesse's needs and and fully integrated her into the classes. And and so that's amazing that that you know that they had that for thought and that's one of the things that Queen's Theater going forward in their program is wanted to be really mindful about teaching the teaching artist how to you know, work with all different kinds of disabilities because you know, none of us had had real experience, even though I'm a teaching artist and I have a disability. I had deaf students in my class. I had blind students in my class. I had students with invisible disabilities in my class. And this was all in the same class. It wasn't it was it was one class and so it was really trial by fire for me and the students really helped me when I screwed up. They told me when I didn't know something I asked them and so I think you know, I think really education for teachers is just as important as education for students fully agree.

Sarah:

There's this quote that I absolutely love and it seems so silly when you say it out loud, but it was so ground shattering for me. Is that "everything we know is something that we were taught" of course, right? Yes, duh. Yes, but it's like everything that I know and perceived to be true or the way that I see the world is something that at some point someone or something taught me and so I just keep

coming back to just how important education is and that like we need to be working to teach everyone to teach ourselves to teach our teachers and how we write in disability how the words that were using the language that we're using the perspective that we're using to help teach and educate everyone is so important and just so powerful because then that shapes what people see what people understand so just highlighting the importance importance it just importance to that whether or not

Some of the disabilities including the program disability itself needs to be included in the program. I mean people of course with disabilities need be including program, but just disability needs to be there. We need it. Yes.

Christie:

It's like yeah and also and also to go back to an even simpler quote is we don't know what we don't know right? Yeah to we just we don't know what we don't know. So keep your keep your mind open in your heart open and you know embrace that and also embrace the concept of like Lawrence says, you know, most people look at something and they they asked "why" he said I look at things and I ask "why not, you know" and my equivalent to that to the why not is "yes and" right so it's why not just say yes and all of the time because you don't know where it's going to take you you might fall on your face, but you know in the industry particularly in the theater world, we know that falling on your face is often, you know, and I use that case literally and metaphorically that that's often where the real gold is. Yeah, when then when the happy Accident Happens, that's where we find the the real, you know nuggets of truth.

Sarah:

I like so yeah, it's beautiful cool.

Nicole:

Well yet again. Thank you. So so so so so much for taking time to be with us and sharing the expertise with us. It's been it's been a blast having you here and and I've learned so much. So, thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Take care.

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