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ABILITY



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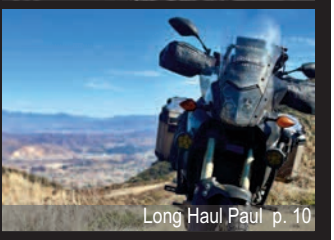
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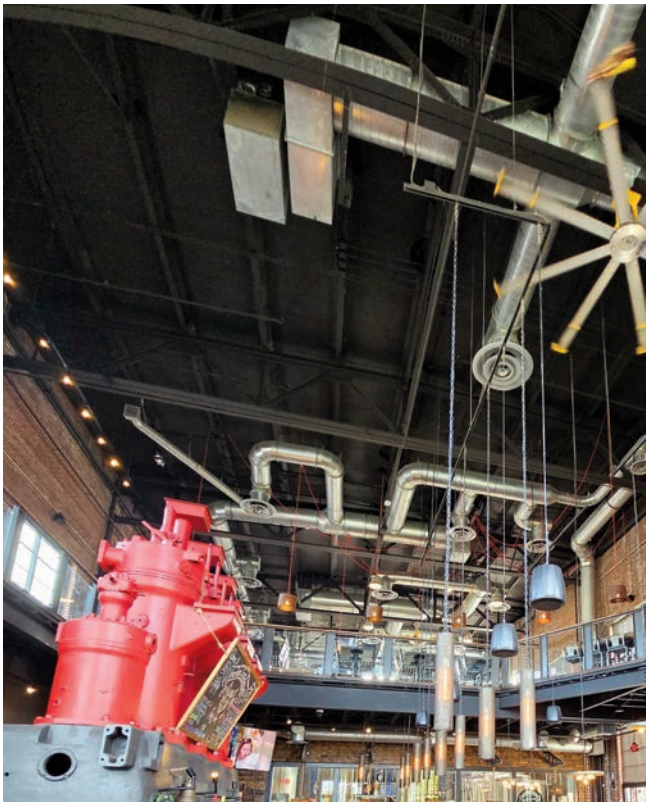


Ashley and Chet riding at Lake Elsinore MX park

My mom has been coming to Michigan to visit my grandma who is sick so it has been nice to see her more often since I live in Grand Rapids, Michigan now. I made her drive down to Florida with me for Thanksgiving and Christmas so I would not have to drive alone! We made a couple of stops on our roadtrip to Florida. First we stopped in Lexington to hang out there for the night.



Next was Asheville for my friends birthday party. My dad flew into Asheville to celebrate my parents anniversary and then we all drove home together. I went to Florida for Thanksgiving and Christmas so I can be with my family. I had an amazing time with everyone. We went on mini adventures and had a few parties at my parents house. After Thanksgiving, my brother and I decided to buy tickets for the Detroit Lions vs Saints in New Orleans and we drove to New Orleans together with his girlfriend too. We had a blast in New Orleans and it was my very first NFL football game! I got to witness Lions win the game too. One of the best experiences ever. We went to Universals' Cabana Bay for my brother's birthday in Orlando and that was a blast!



We got to hit a couple of new bars in Florida with my parents. We even had steamed oysters one night with our friends where we just shucked the oysters and hung out, it was beautiful weather and we had a fire outdoors with my amazing Smudgepot! We always do that whenever I'm in town and catch up with everyone. My parents and I made an impulsive trip to Miami just to hit a couple of breweries and restaurants. That was fun too! I didn't realize how much we've done in one month from Thanksgiving and Christmas.

I have been watching Supercross with my friends and family too it has been a very exciting series so far and I can't wait to start riding again when it is warmer!

■ ABILITY

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Wheelchairs Hiding Their Legs Under a Raggedy Blanket

America used to be a place of freedom. A place where you could call an adult man "stumpy Stewie" because he lost his hand in a factory accident. And a place where you could send neurodivergent women to the hysteria ward just for funsies. Wheelchair users back then had the decency to cover up their legs with some janky fabric so we didn't have to look at them, but now the woke left has taken that away too.

If the differently abled community (can't even call 'em handicapped any more) insists that we treat them respectfully, can't they at least meet us halfway and cover up those lazy leggies? If they want to let them loose in the privacy of their own home, that's their right. But like, children in the grocery store don't need to see that.

Handicapped people — er, "special needs" people need to understand that our nation was built on values, and one of those values is shame. If these roller-chair fellas had even one decent bit of shame, they'd understand those atrophied knees are not for everyone. Blankets aren't even that expensive.

The issue is a slippery slope too. Once we get used to seeing wheelchair users' legs, blind people are going to stop wearing sunglasses, and people with weird scars are going to stop using thickly caked foundation to hide that shit. Is that the future you want, America? ■ ABILITY

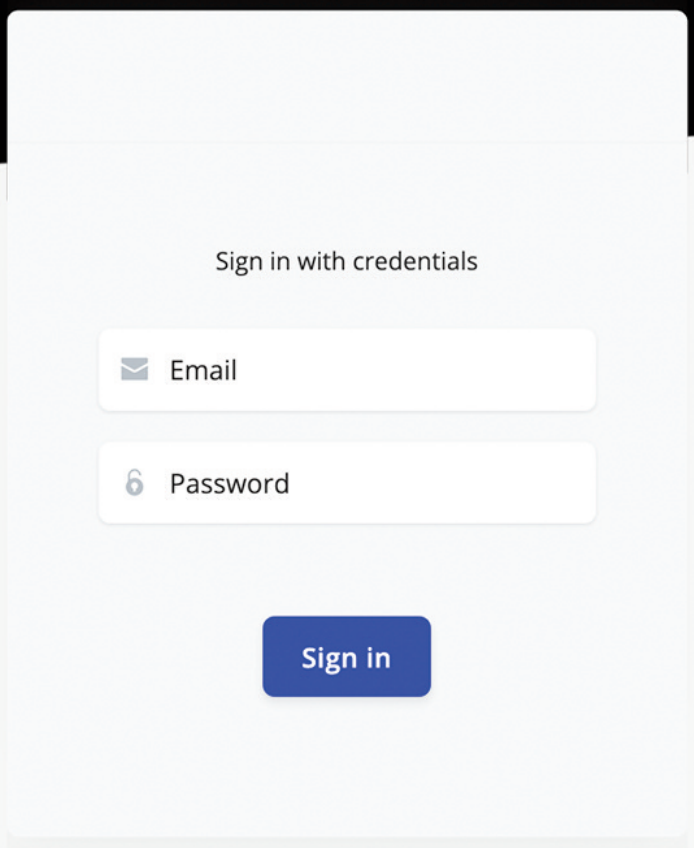


by Steven Verdile

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Yamaha Revs My Heart



My last column was about looking forward to getting some MotoMedicine as I headed out in December for my final road trip of 2023. I was invited to attend Yamaha's media event for the newest version of the bike I am currently riding; the Tenere 700. Yamaha was hosting two small groups of journalists over two separate days of riding. After those few days in Southern California, I was headed to speak at the Yamaha Motorsports headquarters in Atlanta. From Georgia, I was riding back home to New Hampshire to spend the holidays with my wife Elin, my dog Kona and the rest of my family. It was almost 8,000 miles of MotoMedicine and a great way to finish out the year.

I plotted out my route for the trip, looking forward to seeing a few sights along the way as I made my way to Huntington Beach California. As it was the holiday season, I couldn't help but stop in Chickasha Oklahoma to see the giant replica of the leg lamp from the movie Christmas Story! Most of my ride out was cold and one morning I even got to experience freezing fog that blanketed my face shield and headlights with a coat of cloudy ice. I rode along Route 66 through the mining ghost town of Oatman and then through Joshua Tree and around Big Bear Lake.



I had added a few off road trails to the last day of my leg out west, hoping to brush up on my dirt riding skills before meeting up with the pros at the press event the following day. Unfortunately, my skills, overloaded bike and street tires were no match for one of the sandy mountain trails I attempted and I had to turn around and backtrack about 30 miles. It meant nothing to me at the time, but the trail I failed to get across was named, 'Hell's Gate Pass'.

I reached the Pacific Ocean and the hotel where the folks from Yamaha were getting ready for the press. We went to dinner with the other two brand ambassadors that were also invited to the event. (Unlike me, they were both famous motocross racers!)

As I had just ridden 3500 miles in three days getting there and still dealing with limited vision in my left eye, I was a pretty tired. I reminded the staff that I was not really a dirt guy and I was worried I might slow down the others on the group ride the following day. The route planned was about 30 miles through the Cleveland National Forest and would include some technical parts where the experienced journalists could really push the adventure bike to see what it was capable of doing.

I was offered the option of skipping the off road section which would allow me to get some photos by Lake Elsinore and then meet everyone at the lunch spot for the less technical route in the afternoon and that is what I did. Yamaha had hired a Taco truck to feed everyone at the end of the dusty trail and it was excellent grub! After everyone was fed, two local police officers were hired to block off a section of quiet twisty road so the journalists could get video and high quality photos for their magazines. (Spoiler alert: All those irresponsible looking street wheelie photos in magazines are actually shot on closed courses!)

Because we were not taking part in the press photo shoot, I was able to catch up with motocross legends Ryan Villopoto and Damen Bradshaw after lunch. Together, they coaxed me into riding the off road section with the second wave of journalists the following day. They assured me it was pretty easy. I did warn them I would be the slowest guy!

The following day, I was bit reluctant, having little off-road experience and knowing I would be struggling to keep up the pace with a dozen professional off road experts.

Like everyone else, I was riding a brand new 2024 Tenere 700. It was taller than my personal bike and certainly much cleaner! We rode twisty pavement to the canyon and started up the mountain trails. I was in the rear, eating a lot of dust, but sort of keeping up with the rest of the pack. A couple of the Yamaha crew were behind me making sure everyone stayed together and to assist anyone who had an issue on the trail.



At one point the trail became rocky and steep and one of the bikes in front of me ran off the trail a bit. I had to slow down enough behind them that I lost my balance and fell over on some large gravel. I was embarrassed and mad. The Yamaha guy stopped and helped me pick up the bike and I continued on. The second time I dropped the bike, I had ridden into a deep rut on the side of the trail and couldn't get out. I had slowed down too much, lost momentum and fell over. After I got the bike back upright, I bent down and was grasping for breath. I was amazed at how out of shape I seemed to be. My left eye (the bad one) was completely opaque by this point and combined with the dust, I had been struggling to choose the best line to ride the trail on. Coming up behind me, one of the other brand ambassadors stopped and fellow over. He was laughing, "See Paul, I just dropped my bike too!"

They were world renowned motocross champions but today were stuck behind the slow guy on trail they could ride with their eyes closed. They continued to praise and encourage me to continue up the mountain. They said I was doing fine, but I was doing way worse than I expected and the ride was starting to become more work and less fun.

The Yamaha guy picked up my bike from the soft sand and moved it to more solid ground for me. Riding a motorcycle with a 34" seat when you have a 28" inseam was not a problem for me on pavement, but was certainly a bigger issue for me on an uneven trail. I was struggling with the terrain and admitted I had lost my confidence to keep up with the rest of the group. I also felt something was off and I wasn't sure I could make the 12 additional miles to the end of the trail. He offered to give me a lift down the mountain but I decided I would try again on my own. I joked, "This is not the mountain I am going to die on."

It was cool on the mountain, but I was sweating and still out of breath when I caught up to the others. The group had stopped to take photos at a vista overlooking Lake Elsinore. I stopped fine, but my left leg collapsed and the bike and I just toppled over. I was fatigued and felt pressure in my chest which I contributed to anxiety from the embarrassment and my poor riding skills. I decided I would keep going, riding ahead of the group to the end of the trail where the Taco truck and pavement were waiting.

The last 5 or 6 miles of trail seemed like eternity, but I made it to the end without crashing and parked the bike near the two hired patrol cars. I took off my helmet, gloves and Jacket. I was oddly soaked in sweat so I grabbed a water and laid against a cold rock to cool down. By now the pain in my chest seemed tighter and I had a strange pain running up the left side of my neck. I knew it wasn't heartburn and began to doubt it was just anxiety. I had been carrying a tiny bottle of nitroglycerine ever since having a couple stents placed in my arteries 8 years earlier, and for the first time, decided to place one of the little pills under my tongue. I did-



n't wait long before walking towards the two police officers. Half way across the parking lot the pain intensified, I grabbed my chest and collapsed to my knees on the pavement.

"NO." Was the answer to,
"Hey Buddy, are you OK?"

The local fire department arrived in a just a couple minutes and I was able to explain my medical conditions including my history of heart disease. The first responders tried to keep me calm and talking. Getting my personal information and at one point they asked me if I wanted them to call anybody. I said, "How about a Priest a Rabbi and a Minister?" When someone asked, "What about your wife?" There was complete silence after I joked, "I'm not supposed to call my wife at work unless I'm dying."

It was a tough crowd.

My memory of collapsing in the parking lot is a bit cloudy, but I do remember at one point hearing faintly, "Chicken, beef or pork? Chicken, beef or pork?," as the Taco guy began to feed the group of riders.

The ambulance took a while to arrive. They hooked me up to an EKG machine and determined I was having a heart attack. They gave me a bunch of aspirin and another of my own nitro pills. I startled them when I yelled "CLEAR" as they stuck the large red defibrillator pads on my bare chest. As you can imagine, a scared comedian on the edge of death will say some pretty stupid stuff! When they said they were giving me Fentanyl, I asked them how many catalytic converters it was going to cost me.

They kept me talking. "Where do you live?"

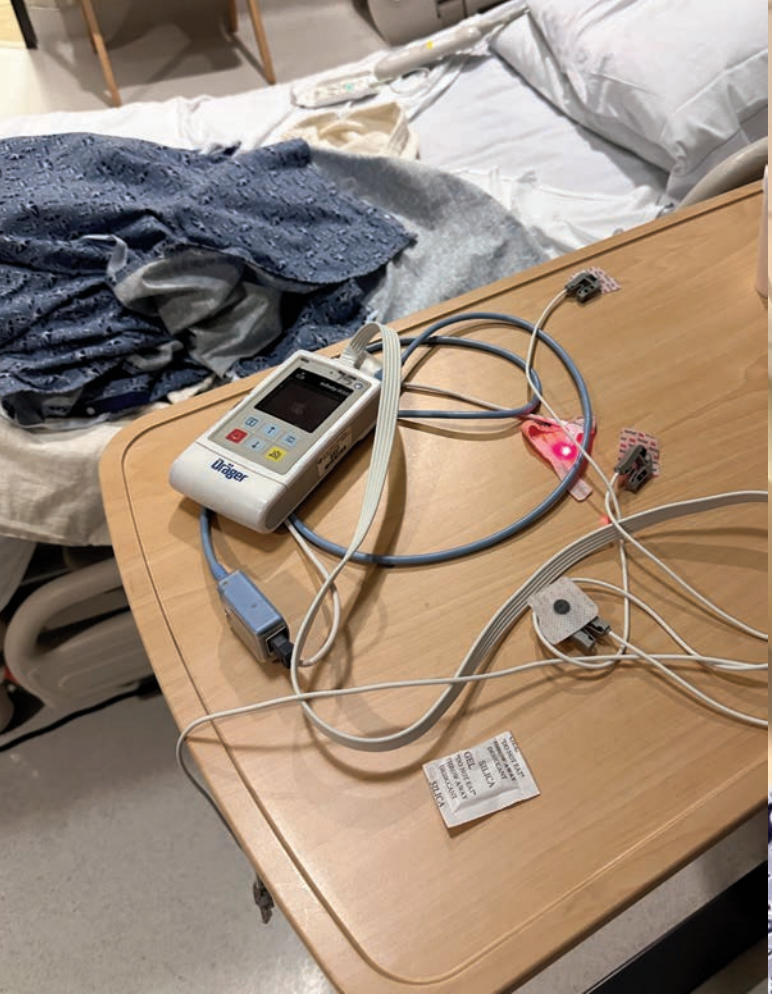
"New Hampshire. Just up the street. Remember where that old church used to be? Take a left there."

When they asked me if I knew what day it was, I replied, "I don't need to know that." "Why not?" they asked. I looked around the ambulance and then called out, "Hey, Alexa, what day is it?"

The ride was fairly long and even with the sirens blaring I faded in and out, but the EMT continued to hold my hand and rub my arm while he just kept repeating, "We are almost there, stay with us Paul, stay with us Paul."

They drove me to a cardiac hospital where I was rushed directly to the operating room. They kept announcing I was a patient having a STEMI (ST-elevation myocardial infarction), which seemed to clear the path through the corridors rather abruptly.

I later learned that a STEMI was a more serious heart attack often called The Widowmaker. It was also the reason I missed the tacos at lunch that afternoon.





The rest of my clothes were cut off me and in preparation for a heart catheterization, my groin was shaved by a nurse who clearly was never certified as a hairdresser or took an art course in expressionism! After the emergency room yellow war paint was smeared over my hairless nether regions, I was rushed into the operating room. The cardio team inserted a third stent into the same artery as my last two and saved my life.

By the next morning, I felt great and wanted to leave. I walked for three hours lapping the hospital floor begging to be released. Less than 48 hours after being rushed to the hospital, the staff had had enough of me and discharged me. My friends at Yamaha had secured my bike and gear and booked a hotel room for me for when I got discharged. They even offered to ship my bike and fly me home.

I wasn't sure what I was going to do next, but after a few hours resting in a real bed and a shower, I pulled on some clean underwear and slowly got on my bike. I rode around the block to see if riding caused any pain. Being back on the motorcycle felt so right, I knew I'd be fine riding and just pointed the handlebars east.

Motomedicine always seems to do the trick for me.

I lost a few days in the hospital, but as I rode, I decided not to cancel my presentation at Yamaha in Georgia realizing I could still get there in time. When I texted them my plans, they just responded with laughing emoji's. Everyone at Yamaha was aware that I had had a heart attack at the event. I had to actually call them and convince them I was serious and indeed on my way. I was doing what I loved, back riding for the cause, albeit slower and a bit more cautious. Because of the help of friends and emergency first responders, I was back on the road and extremely grateful to ride another day.

One of the positive outcomes of having heart attack at an event attended by a dozen journalists is no one will remember me as the guy who dropped his bike three times!

■ ABILITY





The Power of Music in Early Childhood Development

In a recent with a dedicated occupational therapist, I gained valuable insights into the profound impact of music on early childhood development. As an experienced professional working in a school-based program, she shared her expertise and strategies for integrating music into her therapeutic approach. Through our discussion, it became evident that music plays a pivotal role in enhancing children's motor skills, cognitive abilities, and emotional well-being.

The therapist explained how she leverages music to create a calming and structured environment for her young students. By incorporating various types of music, she not only provides a soothing backdrop for daily activities but also uses rhythm and melody to establish a visual schedule, aiding children in understanding and navigating their routines. Additionally, she highlighted the effectiveness of using specific songs to signal transitions, such as the clean-up song, which encourages active participation and engagement.


LIAM
ICE



Furthermore, our conversation shed light on the therapist's innovative use of musical toys and instruments to facilitate hands-on learning experiences. She emphasized the importance of exposing children to diverse sounds and textures, promoting the development of fine and gross motor skills. By engaging children in activities that mimic everyday tasks, such as cooking or cleaning, she fosters an environment where they can explore and learn through play, all while being immersed in musical stimuli.

One aspect that stood out during our discussion was the therapist's emphasis on the sensory benefits of music. She shared how certain sounds and rhythms can help soothe children during moments of distress or overstimulation, providing a form of sensory regulation. This approach not only supports children with diverse needs but also creates a nurturing and inclusive environment that prioritizes each child's unique sensory experiences.

As our conversation drew to a close, I couldn't help but be inspired by the therapist's passion and dedication to leveraging music as a powerful tool in early childhood development. Her innovative methods and holistic approach underscored the profound impact that music can have on children's growth and well-being. Through her commitment to creating a nurturing and stimulating environment, she exemplifies the transformative potential of music in supporting children's overall development

Lia Martirosyan: Can you set up a morning for us? A student walks in and...

Kim Cunningham: Okay, a student will walk into the room. Now, since we're in the age of COVID and everything, we have to have the kids wash their hands or sanitize. Luckily, the space that we're in right now has a sink, so I can do some ADL (Activities of Daily Living) stuff, but typically what I'll do is I'll set the activities up in the room and they're organized by color so that kids know it's a visual schedule for them. Also with the music, it gives an underlying tone of calmness.

Martirosyan: You have music playing at this time?

Cunningham: Yeah.

Martirosyan: And heavily on the music, right? Or is it spread out with other subjects?

Cunningham: It depends on who's coming in the room, how much I can put on and how much they'll tolerate, but they seem to like it. They want something to hum along to. It gives them a rhythm of some sort. I enjoy it.

Martirosyan: What is the choice or do you change it up?

Cunningham: I change it up. I do. With the older kids, it's easy. I want them to pick a little bit, depending on what their mood is. That helps as well. But with the other kids –

Martirosyan: What do they typically lean towards?

Cunningham: Anything that's new, like anything. Today, they didn't even ask me today. I think today, because we were doing fine motor stuff, they didn't really say anything to me. But you name it, they'll ask.

Martirosyan: Do you find yourself going, "What? What is that?"

Cunningham: Yes! Yes. Because you know what it is? It's those movies now, they use the songs from the '70s

and the '80s, and I'm like did you just sing a …? It's funny because I'm like, Oh, my God, you know that! Then I get excited.

Martirosyan: Oh, no.

(both laugh)

Martirosyan: That's funny. Yeah, I've been –because I'm very much into music myself –when I catch the melodies that are pretty identical, it is the melody, and I'm thinking, "What is …what? Wait, what?" There's a lot of sampling.

Cunningham: Yeah.

Martirosyan: And who gets credit.

Cunningham: Yeah. It's all helpful.

Martirosyan: Can you share a little bit of your background, how it all started?

Cunningham: I got my bachelor's from Arizona State University, and my family is in New York, so I came back to the state of New York. I was contemplating what my next move was to get my master's degree. As much as I wanted to go to medical school, I didn't have the scores to get in and whatnot or be able to maintain it. I decided that I was going to choose between OT* and PT*. Then I was thinking also, "Oh, I'll just move to California, get my masters.", and my family was like, "No, you're not going anywhere. You're going to stay right here and we're going to see you finish your masters.". That's what ended up happening. I had to do my masters here–not a bad thing. Then my first job out of school was in Pediatrics, and it was in what they call a center-based program, so it's a lot of swings and adaptive equipment. They didn't use music at the time, but it was very sensory-ish. Because of that, I got more training in auditory music stuff and therapeutic listening and sensory integration and it just helped me become a better therapist.

*OT–Occupational Therapy

*PT–Physical Therapy

Cunningham- Then the next thing that happened was as I got older, I did my yoga training, and that's the next part that I saw all of the chanting and the breathing, how that brought a sense of awareness and calmness via music. That was very helpful.

Martirosyan: Oh, wonderful. Yeah, s feeling it yourself helped you with the kids?

Cunningham: Exactly, and they're very receptive to it, so that's helpful too, as long as they can be able to move as well.

Martirosyan: How do you feel–because, there's an emphasis on classical music being a strong base music-wise if you're trying to help kids focus with learning and all this–how do you feel? Do you agree with that? Or do you feel either way about it?

Cunningham: Yeah, I think it does help for some kids, and then for other kids, I think it's depending on the pitch and how it, I think, vibrates in a room. I think that that could play a hand, because there's some classrooms I go into and they'll have the white noise machines and then they'll have music in the background, and I'm like yeah, you got to just pick one. There are classrooms that you go in to and hear classical and then there's other ones that you can go in and you'll hear pop tunes not in classical, but in a more flute or horn range, which is nice.

Martirosyan: Do you have nap time there?

Cunningham: No, we don't.

Martirosyan: Okay. But do you have an opinion on whether or not it's beneficial when you're going into a nap or when you're going to bed at night, for your child, to play music?

Cunningham: Absolutely, because–and I don't know exactly which wavelength it is, If it's an alpha or a beta–because I remember in the NICU, when I did my rotation, they had a lot of sounds, a lot of different sounds for the babies. Some of them were like the heartbeat, you know the 'boom, ba-boom, ba-boom, ba-boom', and some of them was the echo sound, so I always think of that before bed. You have to have something soothing, something calming. I always think of that with children. That those sounds–again, I apologize. I don't know exactly which one it's called the out for the beta–but it definitely does make a difference. Even when I do it myself, I put my headphones on and I just listen to something that's soothing. It's definitely–you get a better sleep range because your brain is ready for it.

Martirosyan: Is it the whole time you're sleeping or just going to sleep?

Cunningham–Well, I must say there are times when I wake up with the phone on my face because I fall asleep holding it or I'm listening to it and I'll wake up and I'm like…

Martirosyan: Why is it so dark?

(laughing)

Cunningham: Yes, I'll jolt myself.

Martirosyan: Don't you feel it when it falls on your face?

Cunningham: No, at this point now I don't.



Martirosyan: That's great.

Cunningham: Yeah, and I have one of those Kindles that can play the music as well. It'll be like, I'll wake up, or I'll just feel the Kindle –it's not a book, but it feels like a book–on my face.

(laughs)

Martirosyan: That's funny. That's also how you know how tired you are.

Cunningham: Yeah, exactly.

Martirosyan: When did you start your program? When did it all come together for you?

Cunningham: I think starting this program–I think the catalyst from it, I would have to say–probably started maybe 15 years ago. Just because parents were always asking, "What else can I do?", "You send this home, how did you get the child to do this?" or "What can I do to help?" I had all this thinking, "What is it that I'm doing that I can carry–have parents do that they can carry over?" When I started to map it out, that's when it all came together. Then I had to put a visual to it as well. You can read something, but sometimes you have to hear it and see it, so, I ended up having to videotape some of my sessions so that parents could see how to work on fine motor and gross motor.

Martirosyan: That's nice.

Cunningham: So that was my catalyst.

Martirosyan: Have you ever seen or experienced, a child is like mid-tantrum or going through an extreme emotional expression and then using music to calm them?

Cunningham: Right now, I think in a preschool, that is more the ideal because that's what the teachers do, they'll step in and they'll rock and they'll use their intonation to be like, "It's okay. Take a breath. It's okay." even though you're wording it, it is rhythmic in some ways. But in the school I am in now, it's hard to do because the classrooms are big. Right now, there's up to 25 kids in a classroom, so If you have a kindergarten class of one child, just screaming, screaming, screaming, I think they have to first decide if it's should they ignore it because it's the screaming for attention or is it for something else? Then it's with the kids that are the heavy screaming, what I'll do is we'll put the noise canceling headphones on them, so at least it gives them a little bit of a break from it, the hustle and bustle. Kids are smart. They're very intuitive. Sometimes they'll come into the classroom and they'll grab it themselves and put it right on because they know it's overwhelmed.

Martirosyan: Sure.

Cunningham: Because some of the kids, the teachers start out with the "Good morning!!." like the big good morning song, and some of the kids just can't. That's why we always have them there just so it's not too much.

Martirosyan: I love that. I love being in tune with their responses to certain personalities.

Cunningham: Yes. You might find this too, I have to sometimes modulate how I say things because my tone is everything.

Martirosyan: My baby is eight months and she –

Cunningham: That's so yummy.

Martirosyan: Yeah, I can actually hear her. My mom is giving her her first nap and I can hear her just…because I'm usually with her, so she's not used to it…I can hear her kind of fussy, but my point was, when people have come to meet her, there's quite a few people that aggressively approach her with these loud–because they're excited and they're happy, I get that–but also, she's very sensitive to sound and she's very sensitive to their physicalness as they're producing that sound. She doesn't react very well.

Cunningham–Also, she's used to being in the womb you know? Where everything is nice, and now she's still in that transition period.

Martirosyan: I myself, I'm pretty calm. I'm a very subdued personality. I don't like craziness either. I mean, there's a time and place for everything, but I think she's used to that. But on the other hand, I'll ask her, (cheerfully) "what do you want to play today?" and then I'll just play different music, so It's not like she's not used to different sounds. There's usually piano playing at my house, just… It's really fascinating to see how their personalities respond to certain music and sounds and… I mean, people's personalities on one side, the music and the sounds on the other.

Cunningham: Because that's a constant. The songs pretty much don't change. You can just adjust the volume, but higher or lower. But the sound, the melody is always the same.

Martirosyan: Don't they see the four chords?

Cunningham: Yes.

Martirosyan: Always the same.

Cunningham: Now, do you play the piano?

Martirosyan: I used to, but I actually sing classical notes.

Cunningham: Oh, lovely.

Martirosyan: Yeah, but my mom plays piano and she doesn't have that much time anymore, but she taught us and she was a pianist. We had this mega choir, maybe 100 kids. Now she's a nursing professor, but music was her thing.

Cunningham: Was her passion? Oh, that's lovely. Well, it's great she was able to pass that down to you all.

Martirosyan: Yeah, it was really nice. She taught a lot of people.

Cunningham: I still have one thing that stuck with me when I was a child that my parents sent me to out of school. Music was part of the program. When you got to second grade, that's when you got to be able to play the guitar, it was like a big thing, second grade. I remember the second grade and I remember getting my guitar. This is the best thing ever. Then–I forget, but… I don't even think it was a holiday or whatever it was–but because I played the rental one all the time, I was constantly strumming around with it, and I remember one day my dad came home–to me he looked like Paul McCartney, like a guitar case–and he gave me my first guitar and I still have it.

Cunningham: Almost 50 years later and I still have it, and I have taken it to different shops to get the strings adjusted, but I was able to–during COVID–to show students because I was home and they could talk. People kept saying, "Bring it in." and I'm like, "No, I can't do it because it's just my special thing. I can't. Nope, nope, no, no, no.".

Martirosyan: You don't want to move it from its place.

Cunningham: Yes, exactly. The way I learned music was through the chords and your tactile feel of strumming and knowing the finger placement and just practicing, but it's different now. We have a music teacher. She hasn't started yet, but the music teachers in the past, they teach it differently, like how to–It's not all just the tactic thing, It's listening to it. That school of learning, I don't know what happened to it, but I can see sheet music of religious songs. I'm like, A…C… (laughs) I can still do it.

Martirosyan: Are you fluent in any instruments or just basic enough?

Cunningham: No, just that guitar. That's it. I did do a little bit of piano, but that wasn't my thing. I loved my guitar.

Martirosyan: Do you have a favorite genre of music? If you were to pick.

Cunningham: So many. Just like anything else.

Martirosyan: What do you lean towards when you're just in a nice mood and just want to relax? What is it that you'll be playing?

Cunningham: I would say probably like the '70s music.

Martirosyan: What music?

Cunningham: The '70s. Anything from the '70s, whether it's like funk or the elevator music or that–

Martirosyan: (sings instrumental from the song The Girl From Ipanema) Ipanema!

(both laugh)

Cunningham: Yes, all of that stuff, yeah, or disco just to make you happy. That is helpful too.



Martirosyan: Do you find when you're trying to get children to learn or remember things, that there's memory attached to that music that's playing at that time too, is that what you focus on?

Cunningham: Yes. Yes, yes, yes. Because I think now with children, I think having the routine and their sense of trust with COVID and everything that they could have something, the comfort of it I think helps.

Martirosyan: Do you think they would–or too, even maybe you do this–is when it's time to clean you play certain music.

Cunningham: Absolutely, yeah. I tend to do mostly the cleanup song. I don't clap sometimes.

Martirosyan:

Constantly in need of cleaning.

(laughs)

Cunningham: I do ad lib it a little bit. I'll change it, the tone for the older kids, because I'll add it to more of a beatbox theme.

Martirosyan: Oh, a little rhythm.

Cunningham: Yeah, a little bit of something.

Martirosyan: Actually, just as you were speaking, I remembered–and it just came to me–I remembered every once in a while, but in fifth grade, Mrs. Stevens, when we would pass out papers on Friday, she would play The Monkees on her record player.

(both sing some of The Monkees)

Martirosyan: That was fun for me. I enjoyed that. I'm enjoyed doing some mundane passing out papers activity.

Cunningham: Absolutely.

Martirosyan: I wonder if anyone else from that class, if it stuck with them.

Cunningham: It might have. One nice thing with this whole social media thing is that you can, if you're in that realm of like the class of ‘77 at St. Margaret's or whatever school, they might have a little link you could type in and say, “Oh, who remembers this?” You might get a response. But I'm sure, I’m sure.

Martirosyan: Is your family musical?

Cunningham: I think they liked music. I think because my grandparents were Irish and they came through Ellis Island, my parents were inundated with always having Irish folk music on, where they say, ‘tortured’ with the Irish dancing.

Martirosyan: the bagpipe.

Cunningham: Yeah, everything, so when they were raising us, I think they were like, “We're not going to torture them with the step dancing and the Irish music”, but they tortured us with their own kind of –

Martirosyan: That's good. That musical torture is nice.

Cunningham: Musical torture is good. It's very good.

Martirosyan: I have this bouncer for my daughter, and it's like a harness and.she’s bouncing up and down, and anytime we would put her in that, she would do like an Irish gig.

Cunningham: That's so sweet.

Martirosyan: I would play the Irish music. It was the cutest thing ever. When you were saying that, I remembered it. It looked exactly like she was like… she knew what was happening.

Cunningham: One thing I do try to do with the children is I try to get a toy that somewhat resembles an activity of daily life, whether it's a washing machine, a dishwasher, a microwave. This week, I wish I had brought it down with me. It's a griddle. It's very small. Usually, all the pieces are very small, but they're lovely because they have all the pieces like the bacon, the eggs, the steak, the tomatoes, the spatula, and they all–whatever this company is, I can't remember the name of it–but they all have a battery –it's very old-school–and when you turn the button, all these kids know that one color that I have is black and I always have the toy that makes the sounds on black and they're all like, What's in black this week? This week it's the griddle. You have to see them all pressing down the eggs to make the sizzle, and you could hear it and it's just lovely. But I also tried to, like last week it was the sink and, It's like a little small sink that it has dishes and it has a water thing. It does make a sound, but the water doesn't come out, but it makes the sound of the trinkling water. Then I have another–it just rotates –that is a microwave and has little pretend dinners or chicken and they open and shut it. They press the buttons and it makes the sound. Then I have a dishwasher, and then I have a dryer, too. But it's amazing that those sounds, they realize, "Oh, it's done! Okay, it's done. I'll take it out."

Martirosyan: With those activities, you're teaching them what the sounds are like, or is it more of a focusing…

Cunningham: I think it's both. I really do. I think they're trying to make it relatable, but also purposeful. With the griddle on today, they'll say, "Oh, Ms. Cunningham, what do you want?" I'll say, "Okay, I'll take eggs, bacon, and a waffle." I'm like, Okay. Then they'll grill it, they'll do it and then they'll put it on the plate and I'll say, "Okay, remember, I want eggs, bacon, and a waffle" and they'll look at it and I'll say, "Oh!" and they'll go back. It's sweet.

Martirosyan: That's cute. That's really sweet. So. Hands On, is that the name of the school or is –

Cunningham: It's the name of the program. What it is, there's digital downloads that help parents make sure that their child's fine motor and gross motor skills are developmentally intact.

Martirosyan: Their what skills? I'm sorry, I didn't get it.

Cunningham: Their fine motor and gross motor. What I did was I did the first year of life, making sure they're hitting all the developmental milestones. The same thing for when they're one, when they're two, and when they're three, because when a child goes to school, I know you can't imagine it, but one day your daughter is going to be in preschool and they're going to be like, "Oh, does she know how to do this? Or does she know how to do that? Does she know the age? Does she know the address?" It's all this curriculum stuff, but I found that if children don't have the muscular strength and the bodies, they're not going to know how to hold the pencil or write or be able to tie their shoes. So that's where all this came from. This just being brainstorming, thinking, "what's missing?". In the school districts now, there's a lot of curriculum for writing, math, but there's no curriculum for motor skills. That's where it came from. I had big dreams of getting also a speech and language curriculum too.

Martirosyan: Your program is inclusive, right? You have a variety of skills that you're working on?

Cunningham: Yes. The good thing is that parents can also play catch-up. If they don't feel that their child is holding something or head tilting or sitting or rolling or crawling, it can be used just to get the exposure of how to get your child to do rolling or crawling. It's preventative as well.

Martirosyan: That's wonderful. My friend–I was talking to her prior to our connecting–and she has two children with autism, and she's wondering if you know of anybody out in California that is doing what you are doing?

Cunningham: No. When I did my sensory training years and years ago–like 20 years ago –the big center was in California. It was in Torrance, California. I believe it's in the Valley somewhat, between Southern and Northern California. The woman who discovered, you know, came up with the sensory integration. She was from California, and I think she was at USC, or she was at UCLA.

Martirosyan: What's the name of the center?

Cunningham: Google, Sensory Integration International, and the woman's name who started the whole study with the autism and OT and sensory integration was –she's passed–but her name was Dr. Jean Ayres. If you've done your training under the Jean Ayres protocol, they give you opportunity to be in the group to be with the therapists that are in New York or the therapists that are in California, so there is a network there, someone might be able to do that. That would be the best way to find speech therapists or OTs that have that training.

Martirosyan: Thank you. I appreciate it. I hope you have a beautiful rest of the day.

Cunningham: Thank you. You too! ■ ABILITY



Senator Padilla 988 Mental Health

U.S. Senator Alex Padilla was appointed as the first Latino Senator from California, filling Vice President Kamala Harris's seat. Sen. Padilla won the seat in the following election. During his time in the Senate, Sen. Padilla has championed mental health issues, drawing from personal experience and his life in public service. Sen. Padilla, both individually and as co-chair of the Senate's Mental Health Caucus, has been working to pass legislation to advance mental health access and services around the country.

ABILITY Magazine's Chet Cooper joined Sen. Padilla in a virtual interview to discuss mental health challenges within our nation, launching the bipartisan Senate Mental Health Caucus with co-chairs Senator Tina Smith, Senator Thom Tillis, and Senator Joni Ernst, and creating a national support structure to help fight mental health stigma in America.

Cooper: Just quick background, what got you into politics?

Padilla: My training is actually in engineering. I graduated with my bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from MIT. When I came home from college–this was the early '90s–the politics of California were very different than what it is today. Most specifically impactful for me was seeing the campaign for what we call Proposition 187. Back in 1994, at the time Governor Pete Wilson was up for re-election; the economy wasn't doing so well. There was a measure on the ballot that was very anti-immigrant. It would have disqualified immigrants and their children from benefiting from what they call social or public services, depending on who you talk to. What would that mean at a minimum? If you didn't have health insurance and your only opportunity to see a doctor, if you were sick or for your kids to see a doctor, was to go to a county clinic. You wouldn't be able to do that anymore. There was an element of that measure that would require school


SENATE MENTAL HEALTH CAUCUS
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Senator Padilla and family

personnel, teachers and administrators, to report to the authorities anybody they suspected of being in the country undocumented. It was very cruel, very harsh the way it was written.

The measure passed in California by a big margin, including in Los Angeles. My parents were immigrants to the United States. They were hardworking folks trying to achieve the American dream. A lot of the families in the community that I knew were struggling the same way to achieve their American dream. I realized, if I wanted to see a change in the political direction of my state, I needed to get involved. The engineering degree still looks nice on the wall, but I dedicated myself to the public service back then, mid '90s.

Cooper: Did you ever create anything that you were able to patent?

Padilla: No, not as an inventor, no. A little programming–All this CAD/CAM work in the mechanical design lab once upon a time.–But once I jumped into politics, it was with both feet–managing campaigns, working as a staffer and, eventually, running for office in 1999. I've been in the public for a long time.

Cooper: What was the trajectory? What did you first get elected for?

Padilla: The Los Angeles City Council in 1999, seven and a half years there, including four and a half years as council president. In 2006, I was elected to the State Senate. I served there for two, four-year terms, so a total of eight years. In 2014, I was elected California Secretary of State. Then I was in the middle of my second term when I got a call asking if I'd be willing to fill the vacancy created by Vice President Harris when she was inaugurated. So, initially appointed to the Senate, January 2021, re-elected in November 2022 for a full six-year term, and here we are.

Cooper: So, from knowing and watching TV and seeing how everything runs in the house, what is the most surprising thing you've experienced so far in this reality that you're in, compared to someone who is viewing it from the outside?

Padilla: I used to say how bitter and partisan and divisive that Congress comes across in the news, that it's not quite that bad behind the scenes. It's still not the way it should be in terms of people trying to work together, trying to find common grounds, particularly reaching out across the aisle. I certainly try to do that a lot. The times we're living in are very bleak. There's the work of Congress, and then there's campaign trail. It's another election year, including the presidential election. Political rhetoric, just more and more intense, more and more negative. That in and of itself has a harsh

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Senators Alex Padilla (D-CA) and Thom Tillis (R-NC)

mental health impact on individuals and, I think, the country as a whole. To me, it's just a reminder, whether it's at work or on the campaign trail, to be mindful and responsible with how we're discussing issues.

Cooper: It's funny you say be mindful, and we're talking about mental health. We've had discussions around here about depression and suicide and all the things that come around potential mental health issues, and it's a challenge, but, the more people like yourself that are pushing to bring more awareness, the better it is.

What got you into a lot of the work you're doing around mental health?

Padilla: I'll get to the policy urgency in a minute, but I think, with a lot of issues that we care about and are active in, there's absolutely a personal connection. It's personal. From my very first date with my wife, Angela, she shared with me her experiences growing up as not just a daughter to a single mother, but as her mother's caretaker and advocate. Her diagnosis is bipolar 1 with schizoaffective disorder; so a pretty severe diagnosis. Just having learned and been inspired by Angela's experience over the years and her family rallying around the support of my mother-in-law, it drove home the lesson. She's doing well. We say she's thriving. So, if there's hope for her, there's hope for almost anybody. We know that there's certainly significant need around the country for improved mental health support. The need for better access to mental health services and care by the numbers. It was an epidemic before the COVID-19 pandemic, but COVID really put a spotlight on the need and exacerbated the crisis. It was with a sense of urgency that we wanted to raise the conversation, the priority level, in Congress and not particularly here in the Senate.

Cooper: Tell us about the work you've been doing with the bipartisan caucus that you helped put together.

Padilla: Sure. A lot of credit, frankly, goes to not just my colleague, Senator Tina Smith on the Democratic side, but my Republican colleagues, Senator Tillis and Senator Ernst. The four of us are the founding co-chairs of this caucus. It was important to make it bipartisan. Far too often, issues become very partisan very quickly, and it makes it harder to make progress as a result. Mental health challenges have no boundaries. It's not a red state issue; it's not a blue state issue. It's a people issue. I give them credit for recognizing that. It was interesting, as soon as we broached the conversation about the idea, the first part of my response was not statistics and position papers, but personal stories, personal connections. Senator Tillis shared his with me. Senator Ernst shares hers. It's become one of the first priorities of this caucus. How do we use this as a platform for people to share their stories, and, in so doing, both deliver the message and maybe a little inspiration for anybody out there to share theirs? One of the big challenges that we have in improving mental health in America is overcoming stigma.

There's still far too many people that are either too embarrassed or shy or reluctant to come forward and ask for help when they need help because of the stigma

around mental health. This is something I learned first from my wife, Angela: If somebody hurts their leg, we don't hesitate to go get it checked out by a doctor. Maybe you need an X ray. If you're suffering from a heart attack, there's no shame in going to a doctor, to a hospital, and the care that you need. But when it comes to what something may be wrong with the brain, a very precious organ, there's still that stigma. We need to overcome that stigma. A lot of that is by leading by example and willing to share our stories and being very public about experiences. That's one of the first goals of the caucus.

Cooper: What practical things have you been able to put together to actually support someone that may be looking for some help connected to mental health?

Padilla: The first thing I'll point to is the first bill that we've introduced as a caucus. Recently, the country rolled out a 988 system, similar to 911, but a dedicated number, easy to remember, that anybody can call if you need somebody to speak to, if you're in a crisis or observe somebody in a crisis. There's somebody available to talk 24/7 in English or in Spanish, or to text with 24/7 in English or in Spanish to help walk you through a situation, whether it's a crisis or not. When the number was rolled out, unlike 911, it didn't come with the geolocation feature. Somebody calling to be connected with somebody based on the area code of your phone number. While for most people, that may not be an issue, increasingly, people are traveling or moving these days. My cell phone that I use in Washington, DC, still has my area code back in Los Angeles. If I needed the support or somebody to respond quickly, it's better if I'm connected with somebody that's more local to where I am. As a caucus, we knew this was an important improvement to make the 988 sooner rather than later.

Other priorities for the caucus are—Number one, the Safer Communities Act that was passed and signed into law a couple of years ago now–almost two years ago now–included a huge amount of funding for mental health services across the country. This is the bill that came after the shooting in Uvalde, Texas. This investment in mental health programs is hugely significant, so why not make sure that those dollars are moving quickly, appropriately, strategically and responsibly because of the need that's out there? Then the last piece I'll just mention right now is our bipartisan recognition of the need to have a plan when it comes to workforce. If we're encouraging more people to seek help when they need it and to overcome the stigma and reluctance to seek help, then we need to make sure that there's enough psychiatrists, psychologists, and counselors, therapists, and all the folks who work in the mental health space to be able to provide that support and to provide that level of service. Having a plan with some incentives for a workforce development is another priority.

Cooper: Can we dig into that a little bit? How would that actually play out?

Padilla: The funding will eventually be actually invested through state and local governments. So, it's federal funding that's moving to states and to communities. Each state may have different needs, so their plans and priorities are being worked on literally as we speak. That's how it would happen.

Cooper: So, it will be the way the states might roll out the funding to allow employees to access that service?

Padilla: Correct. Making that money available. I'm blessed and fortunate to represent California, that's been a thought leader when it comes to mental health. There's a lot of infrastructure in place, a lot of good policy modernization happening in California, but not every state can say the same. So, knowing that this funding is available can also lead state and local leaders to recognize, "No, this is a priority". Whether you recognize it or not, now there's some resources available to develop your plans as a state or as a region and put better support systems in place.

Cooper: Anything connected to the work you've been doing that helps with additional funding for mental health for the homeless?

Padilla: Definitely. One of the things that we recognize is not every person with a mental illness is homeless, and not every person experiencing homelessness, has a mental illness, but there's significant, significant overlap. A lot of the strategies at the grassroots level will reflect that. For all the emphasis there is on additional need for housing, particularly, affordable housing and transitional shelters. That is important, but it's really hard to bring somebody in from the outdoors, sustainably, if we're not also providing the mental support. They go hand in hand.

Cooper: How do you see it planned out? Are you just helping with the funding and again back to the states to figure those things out?

Padilla: So, funding will go to the states. We'll work with the states to recognize what are the priority areas. In California, not just Los Angeles, not just San Francisco, but from San Diego to Sacramento to Fresno. I don't know a medium to large size city that doesn't have this challenge of utilizing mental health services as a core strategy in supporting the unhoused population that come into an affordable housing. It'll be a lot of community grants.

Cooper: I feel there's a real need for more support–people trained. Someone in our team is a psychiatrist, and she worked with a program that would to an alley and work with people with mental health issues because they were not going to go into a clinic. They were not



Padilla family and Vice President Kamala Harris

going to come in to visit a physician.

Padilla: I'm from Los Angeles where there are these on the street outreach programs and programs to move people from an unhoused situation to transitional shelters to eventually longer-term housing. It's not new. We know the strategies that are proven to work, but they need to be scaled up much more significantly, and hopefully quickly, to address the numbers that we're seeing, not just in Los Angeles, but in communities throughout the state and throughout the country.

Cooper: So, I noticed that you were talking about the stigma within the Hispanic community. Can you address that?

Padilla: Sure. On the one hand, 988 is not just in English, but available for people seeking to speak with somebody or text with somebody in Spanish. That goes a long way of better serving the diverse population, not just of California, this is a very diverse country as a whole. Separate from the caucus, I have my own piece of legislation that would seek to advance, through investments, a culturally competent and linguistically competent workforce. As I mentioned earlier, encouraging more people to seek help. When more people seek help, we need to make sure that we have the capacity to provide that support and not just more doctors and counselors, therapists, et cetera, but the workforce that has the language and cultural competency to best serve that diverse population.

Cooper: It's great that you have 988 going. Has there been thoughts about how someone who is deaf can access 988? Have you put that message out there?

Padilla: That's one of the other pieces that they're working on–sooner rather than later. That's why the text messaging component is so important, so someone deaf or hard of hearing can still have that ability.

Cooper: You were also doing something with schools and behavioral health. Can you address that?

Padilla: Yes. The funding approved through the Safer Communities Act has significant amounts of the mental health dollars dedicated to schools. It's been a long-time effort to try to maintain a nurse in every school, whether it's to administering medications or putting band aids on cuts. This is the father of three boys speaking. It'd be a dream scenario to have a counselor or a therapist at every school or, ideally, even a wellness center on every campus. Relatively new concepts in the United States, but those that are proven to be very helpful to students and communities. With the resources, we can expand that model much sooner rather than later.

Cooper: Great meeting you. Let's stay connected and your team as well to keep this message going through *ABILITY Magazine* and it's channels.

Padilla: Yes, I'll chat with the team and see how we–the other founding co-chairs–can help. Have a great day.

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SAVING ABEL

Jared Weeks

Jared Weeks is a musician best known for founding the rock band Saving Abel in 2004 with bandmate Jason Null. Their first single "Addicted" was released in March of 2008 and quickly rose to popularity, landing on the Billboard Hot 100 and Top 40 charts. Saving Abel went on to tour with the band Nickelback before Jared Weeks left in 2013 to pursue a solo career.

In an interview with *ABILITY Magazine*'s George Kaplan, Jared speaks on rejoining Saving Abel, overcoming addiction, the impact of fame at a young age, the uncomfortable work of introspection and the lifechanging outcome of spreading positivity and self-love.

Jared Weeks: I always wanted to know someone named Mr. Kaplan. I watched this show called Blacklist, the James Spader show, and the person that comes and cleans up all his murders and messes – it's a woman, but her name is Mr. Kaplan. So when they were like, his name's George Kaplan, I was like, Mr. Kaplan? I thought that was cool.

(laughs)

George Kaplan: I don't know if you saw the movie North by Northwest – t's like this classic Hitchcock film – but they're searching for a George Kaplan. I just ironically got a film name and I ended up studying film.

Weeks: Oh, really?

Kaplan: Yeah. It's kind of funny. I would have teachers that would approach me for that and be like, "Oh, that's a cool film name!"

Weeks: So in the '80s, there was a show called The Big Valley, and the two characters in the show were Jared and Heath, and my name is Jared Heath Weeks, and I was born in 1982. So, my mom says that she didn't get my names from that show, but I like to tease her.

Kaplan: That's funny. So, I know you left Saving Able in 2013 and you returned in 2021. How would you describe those eight years away from the band?

Weeks: A lot of learning, really. I quit Saving Able – I had to come home, you know, I didn't have the tools to live my life at that kind of volume. Anything I wanted at any point. I developed some habits and brought them home with me, but it was a point where I needed to quit, step out, and I came home trying to get my solo career started. Obviously, if I didn't have the mental tools to deal with Saving Abel, my own career obviously needed some help as well. But, it didn't take off very well, so depression sort of sat there for a while and I thought, "Well, what's one thing that I haven't overdone yet?" and alcohol became the answer. So I kind of sat there on that black couch, as I call it – depression, that negative circle of habitual behaviors, I call that the black couch –





so, I became addicted to alcohol. I was always I felt like searching for something, you know something, and then it became one point when my wife kind of just sat me down one morning and she's like, "don't you think it's time?" and I was like, "yes, let's just go". So, I went into a treatment center and detoxed off of alcohol.

Weeks: Then I went to a four-week outpatient class from the same facility, and I relapsed during that four weeks, because it comes with relapses, but immediately came in the next day, was honest about it, spoke to my peoples about it, and they were like, well, maybe because of this, you need to stay another couple of weeks. So I did. So I did six weeks of outpatient classes, which, between that and going to therapy, I ended up learning a lot of tools. I've rolled the tape forward plenty of times in my life – should I say – and it's sort of what directed me into the journey where I'm at now., After isolation happened, it was a weird time for all of us. I just bought a house, and the day we closed on it was stay at home order. So, I had all this time to think about myself and what I wanted out of my life and my career and who I wanted to be. Being an addict and an alcoholic, isolation doesn't always serve us well, if you know what I mean.

Weeks: For me, being isolated is when I was drinking the most. But, it was a time period in my life that I was searching for something, and it was one little quote, "be the change you want to see in the world". When people said that to me, I was always like, "Ahhhh get out of here. What do you mean?" But now, the journey that I'm on and the path that I've chosen, I'm one of those people now. So, I sort of took that serious during the isolation time, I started working on myself. The only way to be the change you want to see in the world is to change from the inside out. That's when I started doing my shadow work, looking at those things in my life that I wasn't happy or proud of or guilty of or ashamed of. I kind of sat down with those things and through therapy and just hard work every single day, I healed with those things. Which brought me to loving myself more, being comfortable who I am in my own skin. One of the things I've learned recently, a lot of the times, I was always straddling the line in my life.

Weeks: The reason for that was I was never committed to myself. With that commitment and the hard work that I've put in, I love myself now more than ever, and I'm more in alignment with myself now more than ever. Because of that, the more in alignment I am, the stronger the signal I put out. I'm really just in it nowadays to help folks, because I feel like I've been on both sides. So that's my mission these days. That's what I'm doing with my music and my life and my family and my career and mental health is just one of the things that I preach about a lot.

Kaplan: That's great to hear. So, you talked about having a toolkit, receiving kind of tools through therapy, through your experiences. What can you give advice to people about staying sober or getting sober?

Weeks: I've had someone recently tell me they said they got sober and they quit everything just like that, their own way. They didn't seek help. Some people can do that, and I applaud that and I support it, but this person told me that only 2% of people can do that, and if you

can do that, great. It made me think about why I went in for help. I don't think I could do it like that. For me, part of the whole process of becoming sober is, first self-awareness and self-reflect, and I claim responsibility for who I am. But, the thing I think that helps keep me sober the most is the shadow work that I did throughout that time period of becoming sober. I went to those classes, I learned the tools, like rolling the tape forward – because I always reacted more than I responded – so, the pause method, really, as another tool, worked very well for me. I had to put it into use, though, and the only way to do that is in life experiences.

Weeks: You have to create natural habits to this. The habitual behaviors we have as people that have given us the reality that we have. So, I've taken those old habitual behaviors and kind of replaced them with the new ones as I'm speaking about now. It made me think about when this person said that it would just be too hard for me because I needed the work. You know what I'm saying? I think I would miss the work if it was gone because I've dedicated my life so much to it in every situation. The pause method and rolling the tape forward and do you have a plan B? I used to work on a casino boat, and I'd always have a plan B, like when I got triggered and my buddy Big Vinny always helped me with it. He was there with me. Surrounding yourself with supportive people is also a part of the foundation. Admitting you have a problem going in is the first step. As you're going through that, if you're just honest with yourself, with the therapist or while you're going through this process, that's when those things start peeking their head like, "Why do I react rather than respond? What am I ashamed of? What causes that behavior? Do I feel guilty about something? Is this coming from somewhere else?"

Weeks: That's what I mean by being honest with yourself. That's when I started noticing these things peeking up, and I would bring them up and I would sit down with them. Even those things that we're ashamed of and guilty of, you sit down with these things and you figure out what habitual behaviors that you've had that's placed you here. Talking about those things and being honest about them really took the power that they had over my life, it sort of took it away and allowed me to sit down with it and have a good talk and figure things out and heal from those things. That's what I say. It's hard for anybody, I imagine, to just quit something. I have to use it in everyday life experiences. And I feel as if going to therapy – I'm a big advocate for that – going to therapy allowed me to discover those things and heal with those things as I needed to. The more that I did that, the more I figured out who I really was in my heart, like in my center, I fell more in love with myself.

Weeks: I don't mean that in a cocky way, but there's a lot of things in my life that I needed to heal from. I feel as if going through that process and being honest with myself and claiming responsibility for the things that I'd done and said and my actions, it really helped me heal from that. And from that point, that's where I started noticing the peace in my life. Healing from those things brought the peace that I'd been looking for my entire life. And from there I learned, especially my mission now, how I want to help folks. I see it every night, people forget their value in life and they forget their worth. I feel as if I've had the best of life and the worst of life by my own conditions, and I feel like I could be a light worker, a good bridge between those two worlds to let people realize that they are valuable and they're very powerful and they can do the things that they want to do in life. This is what helped me. Therapy is a really big thing for me.

Weeks: I still go to therapy. In fact, next Thursday I have an appointment. But it's remaining committed to those things that really has shown me that life can still come from broken things and some of the most beautiful things in life on the other side of fear. So, yeah, there you have it.

Kaplan: So does that change now how you approach touring?

Weeks: Yeah, absolutely. Alcohol was a bad thing for me. It ended up not serving me anymore. I'm a bad drunk, let's just say that. So going into work at bars and places that sell alcohol every single night, and you never know when you're going to be triggered. But the thing is, you keep that commitment to yourself. When I am triggered, if I walk into the dressing room and there's a bottle of Tito's vodka there, anyone immediately gets that flutter, but it's what you do next is what keeps that commitment. I've had situations where I've stutter stepped on that, but eventually I always do the next right thing. If you don't know what to do, like, "Oh my God, I'm frozen in time", always do the next right thing. That is the very first step there. I've been in places where I've made them take the vodka out, and I've requested a puppy to be replaced by it. I do love a puppy, but just things like that has really kept me on this side of sober. I'm really grateful for that, because being sober allows me to be more present in my life.

Weeks: That's where I find most of my concentrated joy, is by helping others. It's really led me to a new path in life and a new mission, and with the peace that I said that I found, it's allowed me to branch out and discover who I really am as a person. I'm really confident that I am who I am, and when all those other people are gone and I'm just by myself alone, some people are scared of that. That was one of my biggest fears I learned in therapy, was ending up alone, being completely alone. I don't know why. Maybe it was something from childhood trauma or childhood that gave me that feeling. Being more on this journey, it's no longer my biggest fear. I mean, I've been to two separate countries. I've had to replace guitar players and Saving Abel for vaccinated reasons and stuff like that. I've been to two separate



countries with different band members, and it was really scary for me, but I noticed that fear, as I said earlier, some of the greatest things are on the other side of that. You should use fear as a tool.

Weeks: You shouldn't run from fear your entire life. That's what makes it so scary. It'll teach you things about yourself you didn't know. What it'll also teach you is that anything that's worth anything is on the other side of it. So, if you can start using it more as a tool and lean into it more and sit down and have tea with it, and – "Why are you scared?" "Well, where does that come from?" "Why do you feel that way?" – If you can just be honest with yourself, I'm telling you, the journey becomes so much more pleasurable. It becomes so much more worth, more so much more valuable. It makes you feel your worth. It's worth it, I'm telling you.

Kaplan: So are there any other benefits that you find from being sober? Like do you have more energy?

Weeks: I'll tell you what, I sleep better, I know that. I'm getting older in my years, so I still take my old man naps. I don't think that ever changed. I will say this, since I have been sober –and I said this when you asked the last question – being more present in my life, it's made me notice the more beautiful things in life that I missed when I was either high or drunk. I think it's real important in life to see those moments for truly what they are. I had my son on stage with me a few months back and he just kind of came out and waved, but he was in front of thousands of people, and I remember doing that with my daughter Coda back in the day when I wasn't sober. Of course, I had a father's love and it was joyous during that time period with Coda, but I noticed when I brought Scout out there and he waved and just so innocently, I wonder what he was experiencing at that moment, but the thing that I didn't regret or the thing that I didn't feel was missing was me. I got to see that moment.

Weeks: I'm a big sap, man. I'll probably cry at the end of this story, but I was so glad that I was there for it. Seeing it for what it was, and for me, it made it even more beautiful. It inspired me, and it was also an answer. You always wonder if you're doing the right things. Well, that was the universe telling me "yeah, yeah you are". It was a very good reminder of how precious time is and how important it is. I've wasted a lot of it. I feel as if being sober, for me, obviously I sleep better, but I'm just better at life. I do put in the work every single day, but I don't question myself anymore. I trust myself. These are things that you'll all earn back just by doing the work. Nobody likes to do the work because it's uncomfortable, and it is for the first year – for me –I mean, I didn't go to 99 meetings in 99 days, but I went to 107 meetings in, I think, 120 days. Sometimes I would just go there twice a day because some of those things you need to hear just as a reminder.

Weeks: People don't like to do the work because it's uncomfortable. And that's fine. But I'm telling you, on the other side of that hard work is the person that you've been praying for, the person that you've been wanting to show up. The truth of the matter is, if you want to change in your life, you physically have to get up and do something different. Even if it's just walk a mile, I'm telling you, that'll cure depression. It's like you're depressed? Do an activity. "Dang it, I'm lazy. How am I supposed to do this?" I used to be scared to face days. I used to be scared to get out of bed. I used to be scared of the responsibility of what a leader…how he had to live his life. For the longest, I lost myself there in the world of anything you want at any time, you can have it. I was handed the keys to the kingdom at a pretty young age. I just didn't have the tools to deal with it, but I wouldn't change a single thing. I know you hear people say that, but I absolutely mean that because I love the person that I am today.

Weeks: I think that all those wrong decisions in my life and all those choices and the consequences, they've led me up to right here at this exact moment, speaking with you about mental health and about how important it is and how I hate the stigma that we're not supposed to talk about it. I'm a really big fan, and I'm telling you that it saved my life. I'm right here talking to you about it, and I'm totally grateful for that. It's just like a new shoe. When you put on a new shoe, it doesn't fit your foot. It's uncomfortable, but the more you walk in it, it folds and fits to your foot. That's kind of like the joy of life. What is done to me by the work that I've done and the love that I've put into myself, it's important that you love you. If you can't love yourself, you can't love anybody else. So that's the first thing. I'm just happy.

Weeks: I'm happier now than I've ever been. I'm loving the journey on I'm on. The problems that life throws at



me these days, I don't look at them as problems. I look at them as opportunities to show the world that I am exactly who I say I am. You'll get stronger. The more you dig into yourself, you're going to get stronger. I don't know, words of wisdom. (laughs)

I feel like I should be an old man peeling an apple and eating it off blade like as I'm talking here.

Kaplan: Oh, no, it's great. You have a lot of lessons that you're willing to share, and that's great. And open up. Now you're busy releasing new music and touring. How do you approach the new music? Can you tell me more about the new music?

Weeks: Absolutely. The music nowadays, I try to write to inspire. I try to write to motivate. I try to write to allow people to be aware that we are very powerful beings in this universe and we have the power. We write our own stories. So, you can be your own hero and don't forget that. That's what I try to write. My music these days, it's not really about egos and BJs anymore, like back in the day, it's more important for me to help people through my music and the message that it brings than it used to be. Hooking back up with Jason and Skid in the studio and rediscovering that passion that I had when I was young. Now I have a platform and a message to bring. It's been really awesome, rediscovering that. I've never really written a song this way before, but when I came back, we wanted to title this album that we've been recording From the Damage. I know when you first hear that in your head, you see a picture of a city that's burnt down and there's smoke and smolder and the highways are empty.

Weeks: But that's not the message that I wanted to bring from From the Damage, the message was that life can still come from broken things, as I mentioned earlier. So, I tried to write a song called "From the Damage", and we did. We wrote it, and it had like a Van Halen type vibe, but I just didn't feel that it was – that's not what I'm trying to say. So, then I thought about making it a ballad – that didn't work out. One night, I was laying in bed –exhausted –my wife was in the bathroom taking off her makeup, putting on her pajamas, and I kind of just doze off. About 30 minutes later, I wake up and I wrote these lyrics down. This has never happened to me before, but it says, "redemption came under my wings and lifted me up so I could see all the other things that made it harder for me to fly above the wreckage, but look what came from the damage" and I immediately was like, "that's exactly what I'm trying to say', that's the message from "From the Damage" – what I want people to realize.

Weeks: I went in the studio and I recorded it on my birthday. It's one of my favorite Saving Able songs right now, because it's one that first of all, I've never written a song like that where I've just woke up and written down the lyrics. I didn't even have to change a cadence,



a word or anything, so I felt like it was given to me. It's one of my favorite songs, called "From the Damage". But, that's what I try to promote and produce these days. Like hope, like Shinedown says, "hope's not a four-letter word", I think hope is a huge word, man. Sometimes I think the word hope is the difference between life and death. Mainly with my platform and where I'm at in my journey, I just want people to realize that they are very valuable and worthy of living a happy life. You don't have to live unhappy. Some people settle, but you don't have to. You're very a capable human being of being the change you want to see in the world. (laughs) Oh, I told you how I felt about that.

Kaplan: Comes back to that.

Weeks: I know, right?

Kaplan: Well, I would be remiss to not mention you have the music video for "Fire" out, and in that music video, you're facing different versions of yourself. Could you tell me more about that video and the inspiration behind the song?

Weeks: Yeah, that was one of the first songs that I wrote when coming back to Saving Abel. It was during the George Floyd thing that was going on during isolation. It was one of those moments where I was like, "What the hell is going on? What is wrong with us? What is happening right now?" and it made me turn inward, that's what that situation did for me. But, as I continued writing it, that whole thing of hope – I just hold on to that because it's powerful too. But, the lyrics say, "don't play stupid anymore, had everything you needed all along", just meaning that we're capable human beings of changing our life. As the video started coming out, I mentioned, what would you do talking to younger versions of yourself, you know what I'm saying? The little version of myself in the video that's my son Scout, and I like to sit down – and I've done this in therapy – what would you say to a younger version of yourself? That's hard question for us to answer sometimes, knowing where you were at that point in your life.

Weeks: My eleven or twelve year old self, he was about to go through some life changing stuff. I got diabetes when I was eleven, so that was a big moment in my life, but what would I have said to myself during that moment? Or even the years before, or even myself when I was in my teenage years? The main thing I would say is, "You're going to be okay. You're my hero. You're my hero. It's because of you I am who I am." That was what we're trying to follow in the video. I wanted people to think about what would you say to your younger versions of yourself? How would you motivate them? How would you make them feel safe? Because we're just adults. We're just older versions of our kid selves of our younger selves. People need to realize that those things that we've done, they don't define us anymore. There is no past. It doesn't exist anymore. There is no future. It hasn't happened yet. So, what's the only thing that we ever have? That is the infinite here and now. Where you sit in that moment is what defines you, not the past or even the future.

Weeks: People might sit there and they think, "well, I'm a horrible person right now, and I've done this and I've done that". Well, the truth of the matter is you're also a very beautiful person, and you're very kind and loving and you're successful in your own way. That's what you've got to think about. The here and now is, I want to be this person. You've stated it. You are that person from here on out. I just think it's important for people to realize that they're not alone. I'm here, you're here, we're all here, and I think we should start helping each other more.

Kaplan: And it's like how they say every seven years, you're basically a completely different person because your cells and your body have completely changed and they're all new by that time. So, it's like you are constantly reinventing yourself and being able to move forward.

Weeks: You're the creator of that. You tell your cells what you're doing. If you say "I'm stupid", you just told a trillion cells in your body that you're stupid. Words are powerful. Perception is everything. Gratitude is the first ingredient. We do change over time, and the whole point for me in life is emotionally growing and learning into the highest version of ourselves that we could be.

We all know that that person is love. It's kindness. It's helping others out. It's being loyal, it's understanding. It's hard to come from an unconditional love type of place because we're humans and we all have conditions. But, I love you. I love all you guys, and I'm here for you all. And I think that if we all could be more less about ourselves and more about helping other people, I think that in return, that we would all be blessed and happier a little more. We don't understand how simple it really is yet complicated, but plant the seeds of joy.

Kaplan: Nice. So how does it feel to be touring with this new music because you got some new songs out?

Weeks: I think it's awesome that it hasn't been out that long and I hold the mic out and people are literally singing it back. First of all, that tells me that it's an earworm. The music catches them, which is awesome because I'm a musician. Second of all, it lets me know that people are listening and they're hearing the words that are in the songs, and those words are definitely right from my heart, and they're positive. It's a positive energy. I want people to feel better about themselves after hearing my music or talking to me as a person, that's the kind of ripple I want to leave in life. I think it's awesome that we've got two singles out and people are literally singing them to the top of their lungs, which, back in the day, was a normal thing. Sing "Addicted", sing "18 Days", sing "Drowning", but these days, when the status has sort of bottomed out and here we are rebuilding and doing our new thing, it lets me know that people are still hearing what we have to say and what we're representing. What we're representing is 'you are the most awesome person in your life' You're not happy? You're the only one that can change it, but we support you. Love, kindness, everywhere we go – I just find that my life is happier when I promote things like that.

Kaplan: That's great. What do your kids think of the new music?

Weeks: I'll tell what, Dave Grohl said it best. Someone asked him "what do your kids think when you come home and being a rock star and all that?", and he says, "They don't think anything. They tell me to go make a bowl of oatmeal.", because we're 'Dad'. I have a story. We have that song called "Sex is Good", it came out on the second album, and I don't play that song anymore simply because I'm not that person anymore. Obviously, I've changed, but I came downstairs one evening and I saw both of my daughters on YouTube singing that song at the top of their lungs, and I had a dad moment, and I was just like, "I can't do that anymore". So that's why I never play that song.

Weeks: What I've noticed on this go round is they've heard songs that you guys haven't heard. They've heard "Gravity", they've heard "From the Damage", they've heard all these songs, and they already know them word for word. That's not because all I do is listen to them – which I do – but it's because they request it. When we're riding down the road, 'Hey Dad, play that…" and it really fills my heart as a dad and as a musician, that my kids are retaining these words and this message – whether they know it or not – they're retaining it. If anything, I feel as if I'm doing my job as a dad to let them know how powerful they are and how important they are and how valuable they are. So, it just fills my heart to be just riding around with them and just have them singing one of my songs. It's top of their lungs, man. It almost makes me cry sometimes, being completely transparent.

Kaplan: Do you have any goals? Like, what can we expect next? Is it the single coming up?

Weeks: Well, we released "Fire". It's actually done well on the charts. Doing shows now, we're kind of just going to let this ride out to the end of the year. Being my own boss, now, I get to spend time with my family on Thanksgiving and Christmas instead of being out on the road. I think next year when it comes around, we've also got a song called "Love You to Death" that we just finished recording. It's kind of got a Lincoln Park vibe that came out of nowhere, and I was like, "Wait, what? That's us?" We're pretty excited. I do believe that we're going to sort of ride the year out with these shows and this last single "Fire" that we released, and we're going to hit it hard next year with new music, new tours, new shows, maybe even a new haircut. Maybe even a new tattoo. Yeah, we're pretty excited, man.

Kaplan: Awesome. Well, is there anything I might have missed? Anything else you'd like to talk about?

Weeks: Man, I feel as if you've given me the opportunity to talk about everything that's important to me as far as mental health and people's worth and their value in their own lives and how powerful they are. I feel as if we've covered pretty much the basis of it, man. People know where I'm coming from now. Like I said, it's not about egos and BJs anymore. It's more about being your own hero.

Kaplan: That's awesome. That's awesome to hear. Well, it was great meeting you. Great talking with you. Good luck out there. I'm glad you got to enjoy Thanksgiving, Christmas with your family. That sounds great.

Weeks: Well, man, it was wonderful meeting you, brother. It was a great interview. Thanks, man. And I wish you well in life, my friend.

Kaplan: Thank you. Same to you.

Weeks: All right. See you, buddy. ■ ABILITY

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emily KORIR

Let's Bet on Disability

After a severe stroke left her on life support, Emily Korir fought to regain her independence through a rigorous rehabilitation program. Post-rehab, Korir was faced with a new challenge–finding accessible housing. Recognizing an enormous deficit in accessibility and disability support, Korir founded BET Group Global, a company dedicated to supporting persons with disabilities with accessible housing and services that provide opportunities to live well and thrive.

Emily Korir joined *ABILITY Magazine*'s Anne Njoroge in a virtual interview to discuss her life-changing stroke, overcoming the odds to achieve her dreams, advocating for accessibility and equity in communities where persons with disabilities are frequently ignored, and supporting outreach on a global scale.

Anne Njoroge: Tell me a little bit about yourself.

Emily Korir: Ok. I am a stroke survivor. I am a disability advocate. I am a CEO. I am a mother. I am a wife. I am a woman.

Njoroge: How do you balance that?

Korir: I know, right? I asked myself, too. This morning, I was up at 5 AM to take my son to tennis, and then back to the office to that meeting. And then, I go back to get him. But life goes on and work goes on.

Njoroge: You grew up in Nakuru (Kenya)?

Korir: Yes.

Njoroge: Tell me more about the stroke, how it all started, and how you overcame all the challenges.

Korir: In 2012, I had just had Bradley. He was a few months old, and we were getting ready to go. It was a Saturday afternoon. I was not sick at all. I was breastfeeding. We were getting ready to go to my friend's 40th birthday. It was a surprise 40th birthday. My husband,



Emily Korir, President Obama and Bernard Tanui BET Global Managing Director

her husband and a few friends of ours had been organizing it. I was going to be the MC because she was very close to me, and there were going to be 150 people there. I just finished cleaning the house and I thought, "Okay, let me be ready so I can get the kids prepared." I'm going to the shower, I get this sharp headache on my left side, and I thought, "Hm, let me take a Panadol so that by the time we get to the party, I'm ready to go." I go to the kitchen to get my two tablets and I'm walking back to my room, and the two tablets fall from my hand. I didn't think anything of it. I bent, I picked it up, and I kept walking to my room. It fell again. Brittany was behind me. Our daughter was six years old at that time.

She was like, "Mom, stop playing with your medicine." I said, "I'm not." She said, "I'll pick it up for you." As she goes to pick it up.–She's coming up.– I'm falling. So, she screams, "Dad, something's wrong with mom!" My husband comes running and picks me up. I was quite chubby because I just had the baby. My husband's not small, but he couldn't carry me. He pulled me and put me on the bed in our room and he asked me, "Honey, are you okay?" I said, "Yes, please get the Mercedes ready. We'll take it to the party." He knew then something was wrong because we didn't have a Mercedes. We had a Mercedes when we lived in America 10 years ago.

Njoroge: Oh, wow.

Korir: He knew then something was wrong and he called the ambulance. He called triple zero. My husband kept monitoring my heartbeat. In five minutes, he said the first ambulance arrived, but it was a country ambulance. They probably checked me, and they told my husband, "We think it's a stroke, but this ambulance is not stroke-equipped, but we've called another one." My husband said that in two minutes, another one was there. Straight away, they started treatment for me because a stroke-equipped ambulance can start working on you.

Another small car arrived which was the cardiologist and a neurologist, who then confirmed to my husband that it was a severe stroke. My husband said, "No, it cannot be a stroke because she's only young." I was in my late 30s. To my husband, a stroke is a senior citizen event. It's not for young people. The doctors kept telling him, "Yes, it is. What we're going to do now is we'll take over Emily, and you just look after your children." because now my daughter is screaming. She's crying. My son is crying because my daughter is crying. They told my husband, "You prepare the children. Get someone to look after the children, and then you can come to Queen Elizabeth's hospital and just come to the emergency room, and they will direct you where Emily is." I was actually taken to Royal Adelaide Hospital which was closer to home because if they drove all the way to Queen Elizabeth's hospital, they would have lost me.

My husband was confused because I was not sick. There were no symptoms at all. I was taken into the ICU and was now on life support. My husband said people kept running in and out of this room, but nobody talked to them. After four hours, the doctor came and said, "She's actually not stabilizing, so there's no need for you to sit here because we are not going to allow you to see her

anyway. Just go, we'll call you." My husband said, "Can I just pray for her? Can I go and just touch her and pray for her?"

My husband did not prepare himself. When he walked in, he was in shock because it was just machines. He could find my fingers and he touched them and he prayed. He said he asked God to preserve me for the children. He said to God, "Even if she's coming back in a wheelchair, that's fine, but just preserve her." He said when he prayed, he felt it okay in his heart. Another challenge was that, at the moment, my son who was fully breastfeeding. My husband found out that he was anaphylactic to dairy, so he couldn't even have powdered milk. We didn't know because he was fully breastfed.

The next day, they took him to the women's and children's hospital and they made some milk for him to be able to drink. Then they started making that milk for him and ordering it from America.

Njoroge: Wow, that is a touching story.

Korir: Yes, even now, he's still anaphylactic to dairy, eggs, and nuts. But he's such a good kid and such an athletic kid. He's playing tennis. The next few months were terrible because now I was on life support for seven days. I was in the ICU for a month, and then I was in the stroke ward, which is the HDU, for three months. Then in Australia, when you get a stroke, automatically your husband becomes your caregiver. With a stroke, I had no choice. I was discharged to rehab. That is the rule in Australia.

Njoroge: The caregiver cannot take care of you in the house you mean?

Korir: No. When I was on life support, they told my husband, "The wife you knew is not coming back. You have to prepare for that. She will never walk, talk, read, or write again.." I was discharged to rehab, which is attached to the hospital. I was there for 18 months to relearn everything.

Njoroge: Oh, my Gosh. That was devastating, I can't imagine how that felt to the whole family.

Korir: Yes. My husband said that shocked him, but he was ready. He was okay. He had to see a psychologist when I was in rehab. My daughter had to see a psychologist as well. That was provided by the rehab, to understand how to support me. Our friends and family members were also trained on how to deal with me. It was really hard. Rehab was hard. I lost my memory. I couldn't remember my children; I couldn't remember my husband. I had to learn to do everything–walking, talking. In my sixth month, my speech pathologist started to teach me how to count. I could count to three, and I was so excited, but she said, "Oh, Emily, you know with stroke, there's short-term goals and long-term goals." Because I told her, "Now that I can count, I'm going to go back to university and do my MBA." but she didn't believe me. I was so sad. The next day, I'm seeing a psychologist, and she says, "Oh, what has been happening?" and I'm telling her, "I can count three. I can remember. That means I can go back to university and do my MBA."

You could tell that the psychologist has been told to prepare to talk to me because she started with the same thing with stroke, the attack of the brain, and doing an MBA is a long-term goal. So, I knew, God and me, we were going to show them. It became my drive to do that.

Njoroge: I think that gave you a lot of drive because you did it, and here you are, doing great.

Korir: After 18 months in rehab, it was time for me to be discharged, but to be cleared, an occupational therapist (OT) had to come to the house to make sure that I was being discharged to a safe environment. The OT came and looked at the house and gave recommendations to my husband. It was like $40,000. Remember now my husband is a single parent. No job now because he's looking after the children. We didn't have $40,000. My husband thought, "You know what, honey? Let's just rent this house, and we go and rent an accessible house, and when you get better, we will come back." He started to look for an accessible house to rent, but he couldn't find one. Then he thought, "Okay, honey, maybe then we can sell this house, and then we buy an accessible house."

He started looking for an accessible house to buy, but there was none. That became the drive, and that's how the business was born. We started BET. We build accessible housing for people with disabilities here in Australia, and we are building our first one in Kenya, so we are quite excited. We're building apartments in Kenya, and we've dedicated the ground floor to be accessible. It's going to be the first one in Kenya, and we are so excited.

In Australia, we've partnered with the government, we build the houses, they give us the clients, and we provide the staff 24/7. We look at very complex clients. We have over 300 staff, and we operate in four states in South Australia, which is our head office. Then we have Victoria, New South Wales, and Western Australia. We are so grateful for the lives that we have managed to impact and the positive difference that this is making. We are grateful.

I ended up doing my MBA and I graduated, and I couldn't find a job. I thought after, "I've overcome a stroke. I still have the disability–yes, but I'm resilient. I can do this. I can manage a team." I couldn't find a job. I was so frustrated. I went back and did a master's in disability policy and practice because I wanted to understand





where policy and practice comes in because I saw so much discrimination.

I was seeing people with disabilities go through this every day. Somebody judges you. That became my drive, and that's what I do now, fighting for inclusion. The fight for inclusion goes on.

Njoroge: I know. That's great. I can see the drive, what you're doing right now and having come from a stroke, trying to read again and write and doing an MBA. That is so incredible! How is the project in Kenya? Is it a partnership?

Korir: It's currently being built. It's just me and my husband because we realized a lot of people don't want to enter this space. We decided if we want something done, let's do it first and show that it can be done. We hoped that we could meet the President in Kenya and ask him "With social housing, are you considering people with disabilities? Are any of these apartments actually accessible?", but we didn't meet him. In Kenya, people don't even know what that is. We need to continue advocating and showing change and what living in an accessible house can do for someone with a disability because I believe that people with disabilities truly deserve to live in nice houses just like everyone else. It needs to be stylish. We just don't build and just leave it there. We go above and beyond and make sure that it's built for purpose. We don't look at the disability just now, we look at your disability 70 years from now. So, people with disability don't have to go to a nursing home, they can age in an accessible house that has been built for them.

Njoroge: I can resonate with that because I remember one of my friends who has a disability, a former finance manager, who lives in an apartment in Nairobi that is not accessible. She told me about the challenges she faces getting in and out of her house. And it's not just her; many people with disabilities are facing the same.

Korir: It's such a task. People have to carry you to go up, carry you down. Having an accessible house can change somebody's life. It will change people's lives. When we got into it and started doing it and started researching, it's not just an Australian issue. It's a global issue.

Njoroge: That's true, it's a global issue.

Korir: The sad part is–for Kenya, for Africa, for developing countries–it's a conversation that nobody's having. It's a conversation that needs to be heard. It's a conversation that I will continue to drum into politicians and policymakers until one day they get it.

Njoroge: Do you think it's a cost issue or it's just that they don't want to buy in because this is an area they don't want to explore?

Korir: They don't know anything about it and they don't want to try. Some politicians in Kenya, I know for sure they know, but they choose to ignore this issue. They choose to ignore this question, but it's a conversation that we must continue to have wherever we're invited in Kenya. Wherever I'm on television, wherever I'm given any media platform, I just want to talk about accessible housing because it's so important. Hopefully, one day somebody will hear and give it some attention.

Njoroge: Absolutely, it deserves a lot of attention. I agree with you 100%. Wow. That's been an amazing story. Just hearing from you.

Korir: Thank you. Thank you for even considering our story. I met with the National Council for Persons with Disability Kenya (NCPWD). We've opened a foundation in Kenya. We currently support young girls with disabilities and fighting FGM (female genital mutilation) for young girls with disabilities because that's still happening in remote areas. We have been doing this since 2019.

We've partnered now with NCPWD. Our foundation from 2024 is going to sponsor girls with disabilities who finished year eight to go to high school and pay school fees. We will also go to the schools and see where they will be sleeping, and we will make it accessible for the young girls. Hopefully, then they will see that it's not hard. That if we just go one little step to make the bathroom a little bit wider, that if we make this door a little bit wider, then this girl will be able to have a life just



like everyone else in the school. In January 2024, we'll have our first intake, and we want to have a big launch so other companies can also see it. If we can change one child's life, that life will change other lives.

Njoroge: That's so commendable. I don't remember if we had that kind of inclusion in high school. Most parents in the past preferred to hide children with disabilities in the house and not take them to school.

Korir: I keep telling them when I go to schools and I keep asking teachers, "Who do you think benefits from having a child with a disability? In the school, who do you think benefits?" They all say it's the child with a disability, and I say, "Absolutely not! It is the child without the disability that benefits." because it's the child without the disability that will learn from a very young age that people with disabilities are just like me. They're just abled differently because this person with a disability will come out and work in offices with these people. But if these people understood from a young age that we're all the same, then having a job or hiring someone with a disability would not be different. In Kenya, we don't meet the 5% threshold, private or public. We don't give employment to people with disabilities because we don't know how to treat them.

Njoroge: Yeah, sure. I agree with you. That's an eye-opening question. This conversation must continue. As you said, it's a global issue. Companies brand themselves as disability inclusive, but don't walk the walk– we don't see the numbers.

Korir: Because nobody wants to commit to it.

Njoroge: Very true. Before you started advocating, what were you doing before then?

Korir: It is so funny. You know God sometimes does things his way. I was a human resource strategist, but my job was to hire people to go work with people with disabilities. The way I look at it now, I'm like, "What was I even doing?" because I don't even think I was hiring the right people. Then my mom said, "God was preparing you for this. He needed you to see from that angle and now from your own experience."

Njoroge: That's very true.

Korir: Yes, because at BET, our purpose is to support people with disabilities to live well and thrive. If you don't know that, we won't hire you.

Njoroge: Do you have persons with disabilities as part of your team?

Korir: Yes, absolutely. Not just clients, but as staff. We have people with disabilities and we make a lot of accommodations for them so they're able to work here. They're able actually to show our other teams as well that this is how we do this and this is how we like things done for us by us.

Njoroge: Have you done any work with the CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) at the UN (United Nations)?

Korir: No, I would love to because I think it's time, especially about accessible housing. I would like to do some work with them.

Njoroge: Kenya did sign?

Korir: They have! They're ratified, but they have not been implemented at all.

Njoroge: The worst is the implication. Many countries are in the same position. They sign, they're ratified, but to produce change within a government structure seems difficult.

Korir: It is.

Njoroge: Are you familiar with Focus on Ability or Nova Employment in Australia?

Korir: No, are they in Sydney or Melbourne?

Njoroge: They have several locations. *ABILITY Magazine* spoke with Jess Orcsik, who runs the Focus on Ability program in Australia. They have short films of people with disabilities and documentaries and it's international.

I'm sure you don't know all the things that we do. Since 1999, the ABILITY House Project has been building homes for families with disabilities of low income that are accessible with a universal design built into them.

Korir: Wow, I love you already.

Njoroge: Maybe we can collaborate with housing in Australia and in Kenya?

Korir: Please, any collaboration would be amazing. Let's continue this conversation. It's exciting. Sounds wonderful. ■ ABILITY

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BROADWAY's ALI STROKER

Actress, Author, Advocate, New Mother

Ali Stroker is an American actress and singer who made history as the first actor in a wheelchair to appear on Broadway in Deaf West's acclaimed 2015 revival of *Spring Awakening*. Ali is also the first person with a disability to be nominated for and win a Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Musical for her role as 'Ado Annie' in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* In addition to her acting and music appearances, Ali is a published author and co-author of children's literature, including the titles *The Chance to Fly* and *Cut Loose*.

In a virtual interview with *ABILITY Magazine*'s Lia Martirosyan, Stroker speaks on navigating accessibility as a new mother, performing as an outlet she used to her express herself and creating children's literature to support those who may feel lost.

Lia Martirosyan: How are you doing?

Ali Stroker: My son turned one and so we've been doing a lot of that, a lot of birthdays.

Martirosyan: Happy birthday!

Stroker: Yeah, it was so sweet. It was so special. And then my mom is here taking care of him today.

Martirosyan: One? It's been a wild year?



Stroker: So sweet. He's so amazing, and this year has been so intense and so good. Like both. (laughs)

Martirosyan: Yeah.

Stroker: But it's been wonderful.

Martirosyan: It's your first baby?

Stroker: Yeah. So, he's my first and only. So, it's like a lot of – a lot of firsts. A lot of like – "oh, this is what it feels like to not sleep." and "this is what it feels like to have transitions and different changes all the time."

Martirosyan: But is he sleeping through the night now? How's his sleep?

Stroker: Yeah, for the most part he just gets up really early. He gets up at anywhere between 4:30 and 5:00.

Martirosyan: So, no matter what time he goes to bed, that's what time he wakes up?

Stroker: Yes, and that is what is maddening to me because I'm like, I'll be fine at eleven as long as I can sleep past like five. Then last night – so funny – the monitor was off for some reason, so I didn't hear him until like 6:00 and I was like, "He slept in!" and I went in and he was standing in his crib awake for like a half hour. (laughter) But it's fine. It's all good. He's such a good boy.

Martirosyan: Oh, that's nice. You're living in New York right now? Yes.

Stroker: Yeah, I'm up in Westchester.

Martirosyan: Oh, okay.

Stroker: Yeah, we love it. It's so good. Where are you living?

Martirosyan: I'm in LA.

Stroker: Amazing. How is it?

Martirosyan: Weather wise? Or everything?

(laughter)

Stroker: Everything! Do you love it?

Martirosyan: This is all really what I know. I mean, I wasn't born here, but it's what I know. I grew up here, so I'm okay with it.

Stroker: Awesome, where in LA are you?

Martirosyan: Glendale. Are you familiar with it?

Stroker: Yeah! So, I lived in LA for a total of four years. Two years one time, and then two and a half another time, and I loved it. But of course, I grew up in New Jersey, so it always felt a little like 'not home.' Even though I was there for a certain amount of time, I felt like at some point I was like – well, actually, what brought me back to New York was *Spring Awakening*.

Martirosyan: Okay.

Stroker: And then I ended up staying.

Martirosyan: But you came here (LA) for the acting, right? You came here for auditions?

Stroker: Yeah! So, I came there the first time – I had just graduated from NYU and wanted to –I had always been curious about LA, and then the second time I went out there was after the *Glee* project, after *Glee*, when I just wanted to do more.

Martirosyan: Have you always been interested in performing and all that? Has it always been in your veins?

Stroker: Yeah. I was introduced to theater when I was seven, and so I just have loved it. Loved it, loved it. Loved performing, loved singing, loved acting, loved dancing since then. I knew pretty early on that I wanted to be on the stage, and acting. TV and film came a little bit later because I think there's more opportunity for kids to do theater, so that was where I put my attention and my time. I took voice lessons growing up. I always loved music, even before I knew about musical theater. The story behind being introduced to theater was that my family had just bought a house on the Jersey Shore, and our next-door neighbors had three kids, and their oldest daughter, who was twelve at the time, decided to direct a production of Annie, and she cast me as Annie, and the rest is history.

Martirosyan: How cute. I was going to ask, anything in your family performance wise or music wise?

Stroker: Yeah, there's a lot of music on both sides, both my mom and my dad. My mom and dad are not in the industry in any way; my dad was a teacher and my mom was a stay-at-home mom. So, in many ways, it sounds like it's sort of by chance, but what was so unique for me about theater was that it came at a time in my life when I was seven. I was injured when I was two. When I found theater, I found myself and I found an outlet. So, it was more than just a passion. It was a place where I could express myself, and it felt safe to connect to my feelings. Before that, I think the trauma of the car accident and my new life and my injury and my new body– I was so little, I didn't really have words for it, but I definitely had big feelings around it. So I had a lot to get off my chest, but to have something that was so artistic and a place where I could play characters that weren't



Ali in *Glee*

me and have feelings that I was feeling felt so good and it was such a release. Then when I learned that I could sing, singing for me was where I felt like ultimate freedom. Having a disability, being paralyzed, I definitely felt my limitations in my body so I wasn't really able to express myself fully physically, but my voice I could express myself in. There were no limits, and it just felt– It was healing. It was exciting. It was dangerous. It was all the things that I wanted to test and explore in my life that I couldn't do physically, but I could do vocally.

Martirosyan: Oh, that's beautiful. That really is beautiful. What an opportunity. I think it's a blessing to be able to have that kind of an outlet. Not everybody gets that.

Stroker: Yeah! I do think that through my life I have needed theater and singing and acting and dance so that I could express myself because I think there's a lot to express living with a disability.

Martirosyan: Did you get an agent almost immediately or manager or did that come way later?

Stroker: No, I was working with an agent when I was a kid, around when I was eleven, but it wasn't anything super serious. I was called for auditions occasionally, but I got an agent and managers when I graduated from college; and I was so excited. I actually am with the same agent that I was with since I graduated college, which is a really incredible, beautiful relationship. I had one manager when I moved to LA who I met, and then now I have different managers who I met after Spring Awakening.

Martirosyan: That's great. Did you ever feel like you had trouble tapping into the world of agents and managers?

Stroker: Yes. It was like one of the places where I did feel like the industry was sort of unsure about how they were going to work with somebody with a disability. So, when I was looking for representation at one point, I was not able to get any meetings. I think that especially in the early 2000s and then after I graduated college in 2009, and in the theater world, there were very few people with disabilities working. I think there was a lot of hesitance and sort of fear around "how do we do this?" And also with commercial agents, they would always say, "oh, we only get auditions, like once or twice a year for somebody in a wheelchair." It was more this diversity revolution where diversity was what people wanted. I get the impression now that that is – or at least that's my experience – that people are more interested in diversity now than they were. I'm so grateful that the world has changed, and I hope that I have been a little part of that.

Martirosyan: Well, you definitely have been, so good for you!

(laughter)

Stroker: Thank you.

Martirosyan: That's fantastic. Do you want to talk a little bit about your books?

Stroker: I'd love to. So, my most recent book is called *Cut Loose*, and it's a middle grade sequel to our first middle grade novel, T*he Chance to Fly. Cut Loose* is about our main character, Nat Beacon, who uses a wheelchair. She is starting middle school at a new school in New Jersey – 8th grade – and she is obsessed with musical theater and had just done a musical this past summer. She wants to audition, and her school is doing *Footloose*, which is a really dance heavy show.

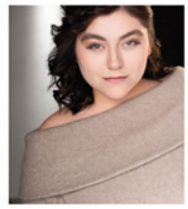
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She auditions and she ends up getting the lead, but she ends up getting sort of – she has some issues with some of the new girls that are at the school. The show – her show, Footloose, is entered into a competition called the Timmies, which is like a middle school theater competition. Her show ends up getting chosen, and she has the opportunity to perform on a Broadway stage. And of course, a bunch of things go wrong. And I'm not going to give away the end, but it is a really heartwarming, authentic and exciting book about, I think, a young person coming into their power and friendship.

So, that's sort of my synopsis of *Cut Loose*. But kind of on a side note, the reason that I wanted to write what *Cut Loose* is about, which is like, the dancing side of theater and friendships, is that when I was in middle school, it was something I really struggled with. "We're friends, I'm just not feeling like I fit in". It was also accessibility within my school, and I just didn't have the words for it then. So, I just felt really tight and really kind of nervous all the time and just so wanting to fit in. It's just so exciting and healing and wonderful to write about middle school because it was one of the hardest parts of my life. So, a lot of Nat's feelings and experiences are my own, but we also made sure that it was not exactly my own. We wanted her to have her own journey and her own experiences as well.

Martirosyan: Have you always wanted to write a children's book, or was it inspired by having a baby yourself?

Stroker: So, I co-wrote this book with a woman named Stacey Davidowitz, and she wanted to interview me back, like, five years ago. She wanted to write a character who was in a wheelchair who did theater. I met up with her, and I was like, "you can totally interview me, or what if we wrote a book about that character?" And she was like, "would you really want to do that?" And I was like, "yeah." So that's how this kind of came about, and Stacey writes, middle grade. I never imagined that I could write a book because it's not what I do, but, you know, writing with somebody who does write books is really awesome because you learn very quickly how it works. *The Chance to Fly* was a success, and people really loved it, so our publishers came to us and asked

us if we wanted to create a sequel and write a sequel. So, that's what *Cut Loose* is, a sequel.

Martirosyan: Oh, that's nice.

Stroker: Oh! One other thing about this is that one of the reasons that I really wanted to do this, when she brought it up, was that, number one, I kept being asked about, "what was it like growing up being in a chair and doing theater?" So many people were asking me this question, whether it be in an interview or just in my life. The other part of it was that I didn't have any books when I was in middle school that I felt like I saw myself or there was any representation that I saw in books or movies or on stage, and I really needed that. I really needed to know that I was going to be okay and that I wasn't alone in my thoughts and my feelings and my struggles in my experience. So, this is for any kid who feels really different, who doesn't feel like they fit in, who really wants something and, you know, might be a little clumsy at times about getting it, and who also struggles socially because I did.

Martirosyan: Yeah. Great. Are there more on the horizon?

Stroker: I don't know yet. Since it just came out, we're not sure. I also have a children's book called Ali and the Sea Stars, which came out a few years ago, and I love it, but it's for a younger group, more like babies and kids.

Martirosyan: Oh, I love that. Do you read it to your baby?

Stroker: Yeah, we read it. My nephew loves it. My other nephews love it. I have friends whose kids read it and they send me pictures. It's so sweet.

Martirosyan: What a fun adventure you're on.

Stroker: Yeah, the book thing has been so cool.

Martirosyan: What's on the path next?

Stroker: Well, the strike ended yesterday.

Martirosyan: Yes.

Stroker: So that's great news. I have some projects that I'm writing right now, so I'm really happy about being able to work again and pitch some stuff. I do a lot of voiceover work, which I love. And it's also really amazing being a new mom and being able – I actually have a studio in my house.

Martirosyan: Oh, great.

Stroker: So, I can do it from home, which is amazing because I really want to be here to take care of my son right now. He's still really little and not in school yet, so the opportunities that are coming my way are just really wonderful. I can't really talk about a whole lot else, but some new writing projects, some new projects that– Thank goodness the strike has been resolved and able to move forward.

Martirosyan: Are you writing parts for yourself or are you pitching to as a director?

Stroker: Yeah, I mean, writing things. Not all of the roles are for me, but some of them are. So, yeah, there's one project where I am writing for me and another project where writing for a younger person in a chair and that kind of thing.

Martirosyan: Is anything going to bring you out to LA?

Stroker: I hope so! I love LA. I love LA so much, and I love to work there. But we'll see. You know they shoot now everywhere. It's amazing. I've shot in Atlanta. I've shot in Montreal and in Canada – where else have I been? – LA, New York. So, you know, we'll see. I'm not sure.

Martirosyan: How fun! Do you want to take anything international?

Stroker: I mean, that would be amazing. I don't have any plans at the moment.

Martirosyan: Have you traveled anywhere in particular?

Stroker: Have I ever?

Martirosyan: Yeah, did you ever go outside of the States?

Stroker: Yeah. So, I've been to South Africa three times because I was a part of a group that did an arts program, like a teaching program, at this home called Nkosi's Haven. We did like a two-week arts program for this entire community of people, like probably over 100 people. It was amazing. So, I've been there. I studied abroad one summer in Amsterdam, which is amazing. I love Amsterdam so much. Then I've traveled to the Czech Republic, I've traveled to London, I've traveled to Mexico for just vacation and weddings.

Martirosyan: How do you find accessibility in these different places? Have you run into anything where you're like, "oh, man"?

Stroker: Where? In the States or –?

Martirosyan: Outside, internationally? Have you?

Stroker: Oh, it's definitely a lot spottier than it is in the States. In South Africa, there was not a lot of accessibil-



Ali and husband David with Jesse

ity. I think – Well, Europe is hard just because it's so old. Certain parts of it, the streets are just really difficult. The cobblestone is not great being there, but I dream of doing more traveling, for sure. I mean, it's hard with a little baby. He had one flight in his first year, but we'll see if we're going to do –

Martirosyan: You said you've been on a flight with

him?
Stroker: Yeah, I took him to San Francisco.

Martirosyan: Oh, my gosh. How was that?

Stroker: It was amazing! It was like a long flight, definitely, and I was really nervous, but he did so great. He slept. I brought my mom with me to help me, and he was amazing. Like, he slept and he was really good, and he was very excited and loved looking out the window. I mean, he was adorable and did not scream, which was really my only hope.

(laughter)

Martirosyan: No, I think the biggest thing is when they get the pain in their ears from the altitude.

Stroker: He didn't have any of that.

Martirosyan: That's so great. That's nice.

Stroker: I know. I was so relieved. And if he did, he didn't seem to mind.
(laughter)

Martirosyan: He was singing through it.

Stroker: Yeah, exactly.

Martirosyan: So, do you think he's going to enter the world of performance?

Stroker: We'll see. I have no idea. I mean, he loves music, and it seems like he's really vocal, and it seems like sometimes he's singing so – He's still so little, but I'm just so excited for him to find what he loves and to support him in all of the exploration of figuring out what he wants to do or what are his passions, and I just think that's one of the coolest parts of becoming a parent.

Martirosyan: I know, it's such a beautiful thing to watch.

Stroker: Do you have any children?

Martirosyan: I do, I do. She's nine months.

Stroker: Really? Oh, my gosh. Congratulations! How are you doing?

Martirosyan: I'm…I'm okay. (laughs)

Stroker: (laughs) You're like "I'm hanging in." Yeah. Are you sleeping?

Martirosyan: Oh, no…no.

Stroker: No, why would you sleep? Why? Why? (laughs)

Martirosyan: What is sleep?

Stroker: Yeah, exactly. I know. I feel the exact same. Is it a little boy or a little girl?

Martirosyan: It's a girl.

Stroker: What's her name?

Martirosyan: Soli.

Stroker: Oh, beautiful. Oh, my gosh! How exciting! I know this is not usually my job, but how have you found accessibility, being as a parent?

Martirosyan: Oh, you kind of have to create it yourself, I think.

Stroker: Yeah, I felt the same thing.

Martirosyan: I haven't had much of even anything from the crib to –

Stroker: Oh, I know

Martirosyan: Everything I do. I do just exactly what I need to do. There's nothing really out there, too, and if there is, it's super expensive to get it super custom –

Stroker: Thank you! I know that crib online is like, $8,000.

Martirosyan: Yeah. Do you know what I'm talking about? (laughs)

Stroker: Yes! I looked at it because I was, like, great to be able to open it. So, I ended up getting a crib and taking the legs off – like, the legs didn't come attached – so I reach in. I can reach in. But now we've dropped the mattress, so it's harder.

Martirosyan: So, you know what I do? I have a low-profile bed, so I got the crib that converts into a toddler bed. I left one side of it out and then pressed it against my bed, because recently the doctor said she's too tall to be in a double mattress. So, I took a mattress out – that actually makes it a lot safer – so she won't just roll over onto my bed, which she does at night, and I hold her. I'm a very light sleeper anyway. I take one mattress out and there's kind of a step, and she has fun with that, so it's easier for me to handle her through the night. It's very easy to do with her in that situation.

Stroker: Yeah, that's incredible.

Martirosyan: It's kind of like a co-sleeping thing, which

people are against, but I don't –

Stroker: Look, whatever you do, whatever you need to do.

Martirosyan: She's safe, she's fine.

Stroker: Yeah, she's fine. That's amazing.

Martirosyan: My mom's feeding her now, she's calling out for me.

Stroker: Oh! She says "Ma!"

Martirosyan: She's saying "Mama" … I'm hearing what I want to hear. (laughs)

Stroker: (laughs) Yeah, exactly, exactly.

Martirosyan: Is there anything you want to share – to put out there? Anything from what you're doing or how you want people to go about their lives or anything?

Stroker: I think just kind of piggybacking on this conversation about accessibility, I think it's just so important for our generation now to be creating our own accessibility because I think the groundwork was laid with the ADA and that was, what, like, 34 or 5 years ago? So now we have the opportunity to kind of take it to the next level. So I'm just so excited to see what – I think also, we're in sort of a time of creation, whether it be content or inventions and electric cars. So, I'm just so excited to see what is going to become available for people with disabilities because I feel like we've kind of hit a ceiling. I really hope that – I hope people with disabilities continue to make really amazing things because I see that there are a lot of new things out, and I'm just always looking for new cool things that are going to make my life easier. Especially with a kid, I think there's a huge market for parents, and I think more and more people in chairs are having kids, whether they're giving birth or adopting or are dads or whatever, or their partner.

I think that there is a demand now because we are the ADA generation. It's not like we're blown away by accessibility, right? That is something that's been a part of our lives, but now I think that we have an opportunity to create. I'm really excited by all the social media that I see about all the new things that are out there and also just like, community. It's a time where you can reach more and more people than ever, so I just hope that as a community, as the disabled community, we continue to really expand on that and there's just so many different ways to do it. I don't even want to say specifically how because everyone has a different version of that, but I'm just really excited about our community coming together.

Martirosyan: Yeah, absolutely. It's wonderful to see it unravel.

Stroker: Yeah, exactly.

Martirosyan: Be a part of it in little ways.

Stroker: 100%.

Martirosyan: And be a part of it a big way.

Stroker: Yes! And this is totally on a side note, but if you ever are looking for support or help around mom stuff, please reach out to me anytime. I'm obviously trying to figure it out still, too, but if you ever want to connect.

Martirosyan: I would love that!

Stroker: Yeah. I always feel like if there's any moms out there in chairs, like, I want to talk to them!

Martirosyan: Yeah, actually, now that you mention it, I don't know anybody.

Stroker: Please, if you ever want to reach out, if you ever want to chat, I'm on Instagram, or I can give you my email or whatever, but I'd love to connect on some stuff if you want. I also had this dream – of course, I haven't had the time yet – but I really want to create a mom's group. On Facebook there's a Broadway moms' group – and maybe there is one – but you can always start another one, and you could always reach out to other people.

Martirosyan: There's always a need for more. I'll send you a message on Instagram.

Stroker: Please do. Please do. I'm so excited that you have a little one, too.

Martirosyan: It seems like that took the lead in the conversation.

Stroker: Yes. Well, it's a part –

Martirosyan: It's the biggest part of our lives right now.

Stroker: Yeah, literally. The books have been amazing because it's so nice to have a work outlet, but I am eating, breathing and sleeping.

Martirosyan: I know. I'm like "how are we going to make this work?"

Stroker: 100%. So please reach out to me, I'd love to connect on Insta.

Martirosyan: I'd love to. I'll definitely send you a message. ■ ABILITY

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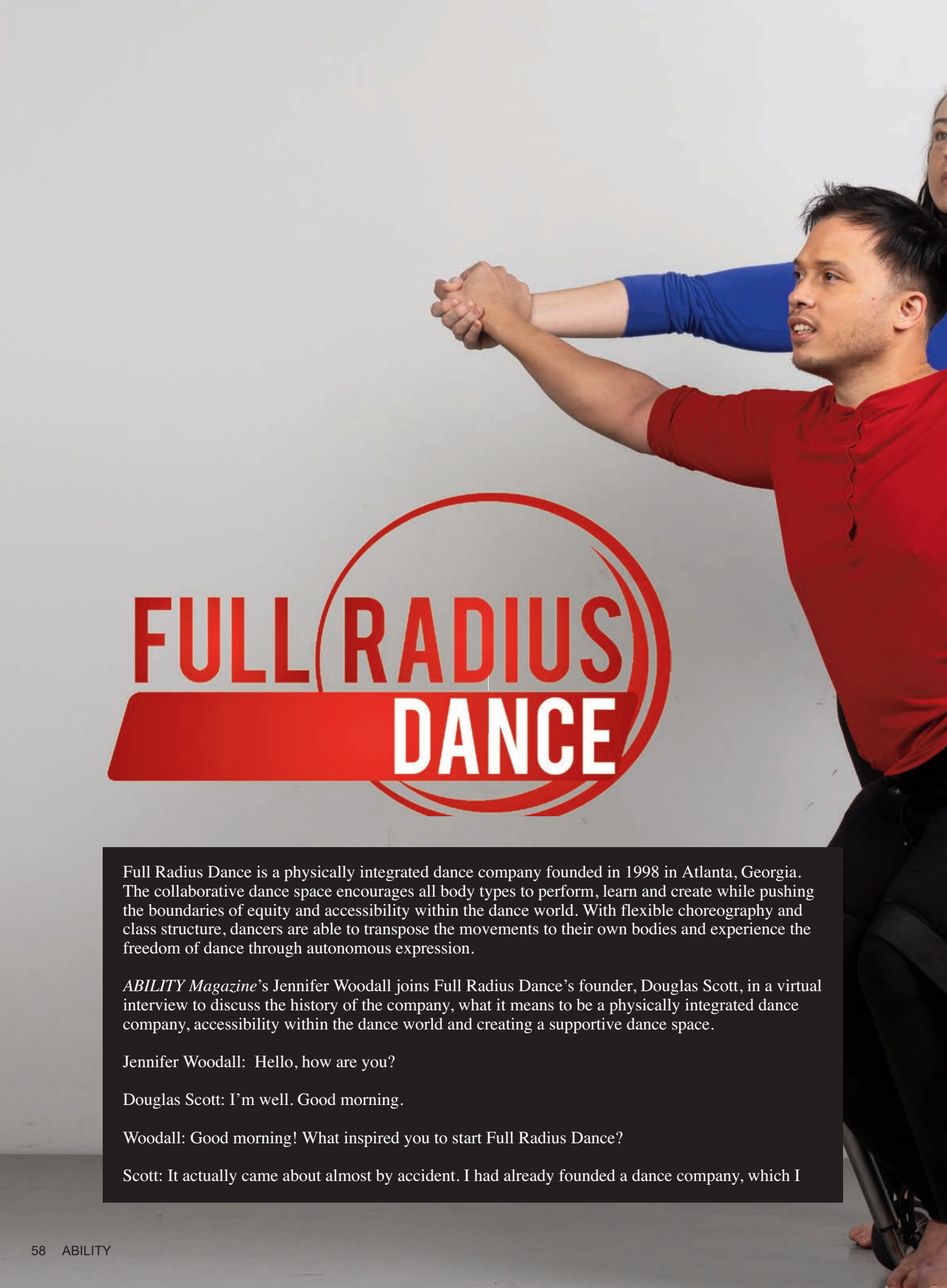
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Full Radius Dance is a physically integrated dance company founded in 1998 in Atlanta, Georgia. The collaborative dance space encourages all body types to perform, learn and create while pushing the boundaries of equity and accessibility within the dance world. With flexible choreography and class structure, dancers are able to transpose the movements to their own bodies and experience the freedom of dance through autonomous expression.

ABILITY Magazine's Jennifer Woodall joins Full Radius Dance's founder, Douglas Scott, in a virtual interview to discuss the history of the company, what it means to be a physically integrated dance company, accessibility within the dance world and creating a supportive dance space.

Jennifer Woodall: Hello, how are you?

Douglas Scott: I'm well. Good morning.

Woodall: Good morning! What inspired you to start Full Radius Dance?

Scott: It actually came about almost by accident. I had already founded a dance company, which I


The Natural-Fit



describe as your traditional dance company. They were all professional dancers without disabilities. I wanted the company to get more involved in the local community. Back in—I guess it was 1990, there was a two-day workshop here in Atlanta about bringing the arts to different populations, and part of that was for people with mental illness, for people who are incarcerated or at-risk youth.

One of the sessions was dance for people with disabilities. And, of course, as a dancer, I gravitated towards that. That was my very first exposure to physically integrated dance. I was immediately struck and intrigued because here was bodies that didn't look like mine and didn't fit society's conception of the dancing body. So, I left that session deep in thought.

Not long after that, I was contacted by what was then called Very Special Arts Georgia — which VS Arts of Georgia no longer exist— but they wanted to start launching dance classes for dancers of all abilities here in Atlanta. I was invited to a two-day workshop.— Which in retrospect is quite humorous, that they thought anybody could learn all this in two days. And out of that, I was asked to start teaching classes once a week here in Atlanta at the Shepherd Center gymnasium alongside two other teachers.

At the end of that first year, I was the only teacher left for various reasons. But every class I went in, I was challenged as a teacher. I had wonderful students that were willing to learn alongside of me. It really almost reinvigorated my career. It gave me a focus and a pas-

sion that I didn't know I possessed. So, from then on—I think it was like in '95.— The class got a chance to perform in a professional setting. The response was so great. After that, we just kept on. I operated two different companies for a while, my traditional company and my physically integrated company until it was like, "Well, why am I doing this? My passion is in physically integrated dance." So, we combined the two companies. In 1998, they combined and became Full Radius Dance.

Woodall: That's awesome. Can you tell me a little bit about the Art of Disability?

Scott: The Art of Disability is our community engagement program where we get out in front of the public. It is exactly what it says; it shows that there's art lying within the disabled body, and there's art that lies within the combination of the non-disabled and disabled body. The Art of Disability, in particular, launched at the High Museum of Art pre-pandemic, where I went to the High alongside members of the Emory University Disability Studies program.

We just went through the High Museum's permanent collection and found artwork by artists who identify as disabled, found artwork that depicts a disabled body or the artwork in which we could infer disability was existing in because we were looking for it. I think 20 different artworks. Out of that, I chose four, and the company created a dance work based on that. We have a partnership coming up with Atlanta History Center, which we're going to be doing the same thing, going through the archives and the exhibits at the Atlantic History Center to find those people with disabilities that are represented or inferred in the collection.

Woodall: Now, when you choreograph the dances around these artworks, are you performing the dances in the art space by the artworks then?

Scott: We had wanted to do that, but with the exhibit space, particularly at the High, it just wouldn't work out, particularly with, I'm sure, insurance and all that. Getting the audience in the gallery space as well. So, we performed it in the Atrium.

Woodall: The Atrium at the High Museum?

Scott: Yes, the Atrium at the High Museum.

Woodall: Okay, that's super cool. Do you have a group that's in charge of doing the choreography? Do you have one specific choreographer, or do you all work on it together?

Scott: I describe myself as the leading choreographic voice in Full Radius Dance, but the very nature of our work is highly collaborative. I have a myriad of approaches that we do. I may bring in a poem, it may be a short story, it may be just a picture, or it may just be my ideas. And I ask them to go create movement that is authentic to their own bodies. Then they bring it back, and then I start manipulating it. Other times I bring in set movement. We have just so many approaches that we use, but it always stays very collaborative. I may think that someone in a manual chair can execute this turn in two counts, but sometimes no; maybe they need four counts. We're very well known for our partnering work. A lot of that, I just can't work out by myself. Then I have to have the bodies there, as you know, because bodies are so different. Bodies without disabilities are different. Bodies with disabilities are different. How I might partner one dancer in a move when I take that move over to another dancer, it's completely different because of, maybe, the turn radius of the chair, the range of motion that we both have in the movement.

Woodall: No, that makes sense, it's great that you're so open to all of the different bodies and how they can move, and are able to adjust that by being flexible with the choreography.

Scott: Really, where I've grown —I came up through the ballet world, where there's one type of body. There was one way to do the movement right.— It really became freeing and opened up so many more artistic possibilities when I got rid of that strict standard that this is what a dancer's body looks like, and that there's only one way, there's only one right way to complete a dance movement. I now realize it's great, it works for ballet, but it doesn't work for my artistic process. The way I believe the majority of us move and think about dance.

Woodall: I'm sure it's different from performance to performance, but just generally, what work goes into planning and preparing a performance in a public space?

Scott: First consideration is always what the public space is. For instance, we were at Children's Museum of Atlanta for the past couple of years on a very small stage. We had to think about the piece we were doing and make it fit to that space. If we just limited ourselves to a 30' x 50' stage, we would not be out there in the community as much as we want to be. It's very important for us to be able to adapt and transpose our movement to fit all these spaces. We find out about the space. For the Children's Museum, it was the winter solstice, so we already had a piece that was based on that, so we adapted to that. For other places, it's like, "Is there a theme? Is there not a theme?". Most of the time, we just adapt pieces that we already have in the repertory, which enables us to be out there more. If we had to choreograph something new for every place we went, we wouldn't be out there as much at all. That was part of me getting over the fact that, "Okay, we can do this piece again. The same people aren't going to see it".

Woodall: It's just like a touring art show, too. The photos or the paintings are the same at all of the showings,



but the impact is going to be different based on the space and who's viewing it.

Scott: Exactly

Woodall: Can you tell me about the MAD Festival? What is that?

Scott: Oh, wow. The MAD Festival, it's in it's 30 plus years now, I think. Way back in the day, there was another dance festival here in town sponsored by an organization, which is no longer with us, called Dancers Collective. It was an opportunity for the various companies and artists to come together and perform sharing the same stage. They lost funding for it. I was like, "Okay, I think this is really valuable, so what can I do to make it continue?" At that time, I was an Adjunct Assistant at Agnes Scott College, so I traded my teaching for space. I got a theater space in return for teaching. We launched the Mad Festival in about 1995 — I don't know. It's all a blur to me anymore.

(laughs)

Scott: Several years after that, people thought it was an adjudicated festival. At the time, it wasn't. So, I made the conscious choice to switch to a festival that people submit to. I have a panel of adjudicators who do not reside in the state of Georgia. It was very important to remove, get some distance away, and they rank and select who's going to be in the festival each year.

Woodall: Choosing them to not be in the state of Georgia, is that to get rid of any bias towards one dancer to make it fairer?

Scott: Yes. I didn't want to have a thing where someone had to recuse themselves because they were good friends with this person. Also, I wanted a really outside eye because the adjudicators do provide feedback to each of the applicants, whether they're successful or not. I just thought having that from around the country would be very valuable for the applicants.

Woodall: Does your dance company host classes?

Scott: We do. We just recently reopened our company

classes; they are on Wednesday mornings. We do have a stock pile of virtual classes available on YouTube, but they're currently linked as private, so we do ask people to register for those. We'll be happy to send out those links. During the height of the pandemic, our virtual classes were super popular. And now that the world mistakenly has thought it's over COVID, they're not as popular. Previously, we had people coming from India, from Spain to attend classes. We also offer a Summer Intensive, which is the first week in August, which is attended by dancers from all over the world.

Woodall: What do you cover in the classes? Is it for all dance levels or is it for more experienced dancers?

Scott: It is for all levels. So much of dance technique assumes a set of paradigms that are applicable to only people without disabilities. I'm very proud that Full Radius Dance has created this full body technique that can be done by all bodies. We use the word transpose a lot, that we realize that everybody's range of motion is different, and we encourage you and show you how to transpose the movement into your own body without losing the intent of the movement or the difficulty of the movement.

Woodall: Can you tell me what is the difference between the classes that you hold and then the Summer Intensive? What sets that apart?

Scott: Summer Intensive is a much deeper dive. We're assuming someone's going to be there for a full week. So, we get more into the background, the philosophy of the Full Radius Dance technique. We do a lot of choreography, teaching rep that we've already done and having people then transpose it onto their own bodies so they get to learn how we work and how to put this into practice. We also get, sometimes, into a little bit of improvisation and different techniques. The Summer Intensive is a much deeper dive, much more of a chance to have a dialog with me and the dancers themselves about the whole technique and the practice. So, the classes are basically you're there with us for like an hour. You come in, we run through our exercises, and then you're gone. The Summer Intensive is that chance for a deep dive.

Woodall: How long are you typically with the dancers during the Intensive for the day?

Scott: It starts in the morning and goes to about two o'clock, with a regularly schedule breaks. The breaks are sacred to us, both as a company and in the Intensive, that we know that, "Okay, this It's time we're stopping." We offer that in the Intensive as well. There's a lunch break every day.

Woodall: That sounds super hands-on, and also a collaborative space, which is really cool.

Scott: We also—which is different from regular classes— If you need to sit out on the side and just watch, we make no judgments about that. You need to go out to do some self-care, I do not get offended when you leave my class. The power of your body remains with you the entire time you're with Full Radius Dance.

Woodall: I love that. There's so much pressure to feel like you have to act a certain way, and I'm sure that dancers have experienced that, too, within the rigidity of the dance world. I'm sure it's really refreshing to have a space where you can just be like, "I'm going to go for a second" and then come back and not be judged about it.

Woodall: You mentioned earlier that you're a dancer, right?

Scott: I am retired from the stage, but yes, I trained as a dancer, came up as a dancer. It was primarily ballet, but my hips just don't have that turn out. Then I started doing more modern dance and found out, well, this is where I belong. This is where my heart belongs. This is where my body belongs.

Woodall: We have this site called ability Entertainment or abilityE, and it's a place where people who identify with having a disability that are within the entertainment industry can come. It's a place where they can find jobs within the entertainment industry or if productions want to hire a person identifying as having a disability, they can reach out to them. It would be a cool thing for the dancers to get involved in.

Scott: I'm going to let them know about that. I often get casting calls that come across my virtual desk, and I didn't realize abilityE existed.

Woodall: It's an awesome network. It would be a cool resource for your dancers.

Scott: I will let them know.

Woodall: Is there anything that you want to talk about that we haven't covered yet?

Scott: I just always note that I identify as non-disabled. My good friend Alice Sheppard, who's the Director of Kinetic Light, helped me come up with "I'm a non-disabled knowledge bearer of disability in physically integrated dance". I work in physically integrated dance, which cannot exist without both the non-disabled and the disabled body. We're very much committed to making sure there's equity within the studio, equity on stage. We're very conscious of power dynamics and how they might manifest and subjugating those. It's a great way to work. It's a really exciting way to work. I think the physically integrated rehearsal space and performance space could teach a lot to the mainstream dance world.

■ ABILITY

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HOWARD ROMANS' TI'TAINS

Multi-Use Flexible Card Holder/Display/Stand - Table-top Board, Card, and Dice Game Component

Mid-lockdown in December 2020, Howie Romans was inspired to create TI'TAINS, an interlocking construction toy that focuses on sustainability and accessibility. Made with biodegradable materials, TI'TAINS supports gameplay for blind or low vision players in a multitude of settings including table top role-playing games such as Dungeons & Dragons. TI'TAINS further supports accessibility in a learning setting as a potential therapeutic tool utilized by Occupational Therapists, Art Therapists, Counselors and more.

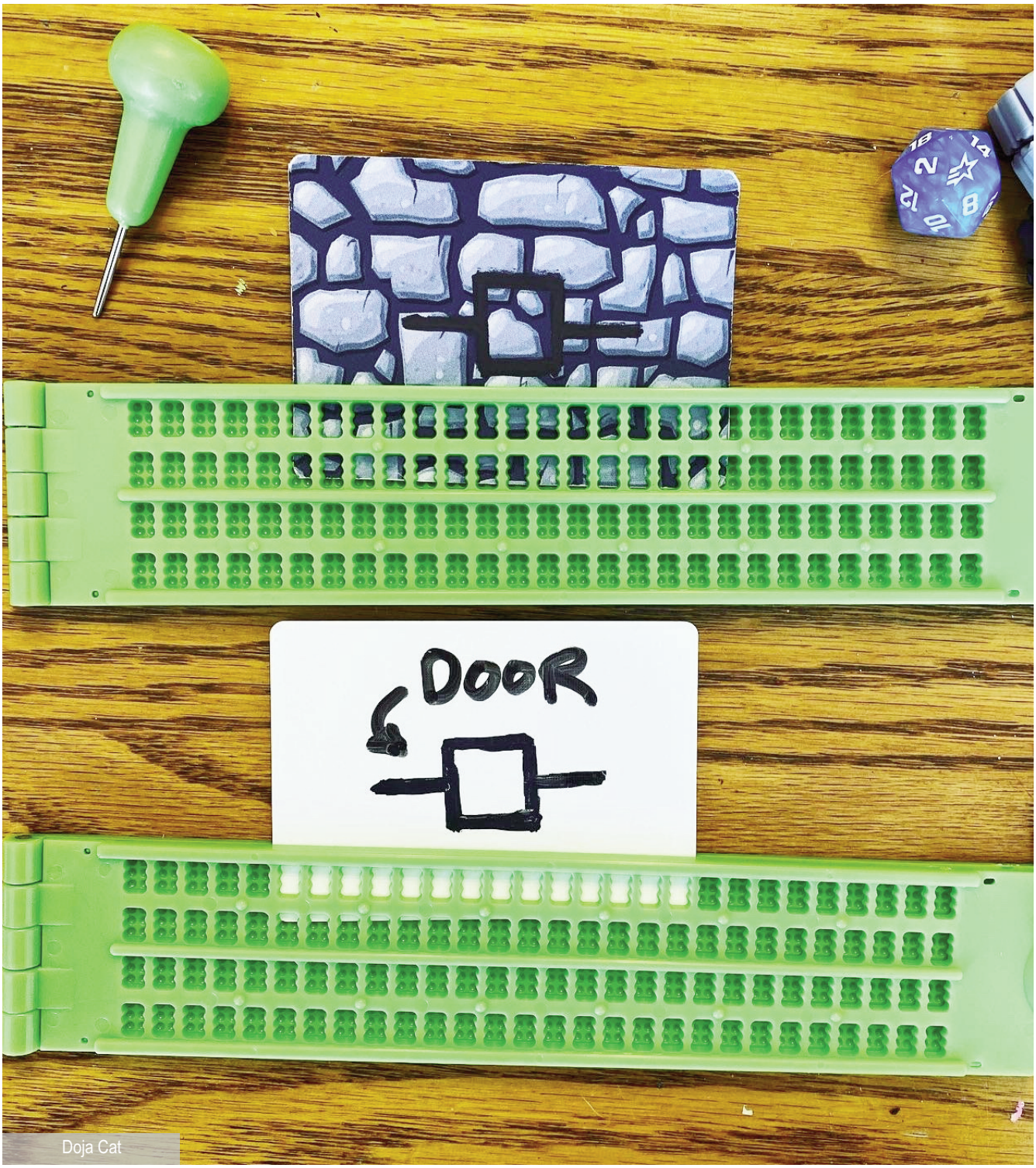
ABILITY Magazine's Jennifer Woodall met with creator Howie Romans in a virtual interview to discuss accessibility in the toy world, being a homegrown start up in a multi-billion-dollar industry, limitless potentials and advocating for inclusive play for all ages.

Woodall: . Can you give me a little bit of an explanation of what TI'TAINS are?

Romans: So, it's really innovative and versatile. I had the idea for it in December 2020, so the height of the COVID quarantine. Everyone's on lockdown, and we're playing with all types of different building instruction toy products. Pretty much everything that a lot of people are familiar with like your Magna-Tiles, your Lincoln Logs, your LEGOs, and with our three kids, I'm like, "Hey, what else can we build?" So, we went down this exciting journey of designing and developing. It is really a 'LEGO-like' building and construction toy, and the reason I say 'LEGO-like', whenever trying to communicate the idea to other people, the closest, most similar thing that people know is LEGO. All of the outreach I've done, talking to different professionals, occupational therapists, art therapists—Boy, it's really a laundry list. —From what I'm seeing, it's more than just a toy and more of a therapeutic tool or device or aid. I, by no means, want to make any claims, but there definitely seems to be that from the impressions and feedback and input that we've received from people.

So, as far as its capabilities, you can build spectacular structures. It really evolved from this idea of card stacking. With TI'TAINS, I've been able to create some pretty cool structures and towers of cards. That's the base concept around it. It really exists at the intersection of several different play patterns. The idea of a building and construction toy product like LEGO or K'nex, but then also like





Doja Cat

a Crayola-type product utilizing blank white playing cards where really your imagination is the limit, where you can draw, color, and paint, and you can create mixtures that apply different textures to the card.

Then, it's this idea of accessibility and applying Braille to cards as well. I have been in touch with the Braille Institute teacher of the year 2012, and it's a very exciting path that we're going on right now with this idea of starting to explore accessibility. I see it as being at the forefront of a lot of toy trends, being potentially culturally significant, and leading the way with the idea of applying Braille and really starting to explore this idea of creating a tactile Braille literacy training system or program.

It's very exciting. There are a lot of different use cases for it. Almost every day, I get an email from somebody saying, "Hey, I used it to create Dungeons for TTRPG." So tabletop role-playing games. We took a trip out to Lake Geneva, WI because every year there is the world's leading TTRPG —so like Dungeons & Drag-

ons—conference.

Woodall: I didn't know that was up there. I love Dungeons & Dragons.

Romans: Oh, really?

Woodall: Yeah, I play every week with my brother and some friends. I love it.

Romans: I had this epiphany, and I started to go down this route because I found there's definitely an underserved population of people that have very strong accessibility needs and requirements. I think people are just not really thinking about these things sometimes. The convention is Gary Con, and I networked with a few people, and I had that epiphany that, "Hey, this can make TTRPGs, board games, and even more broadly than that, games or play and fun more accessible with applying Braille to the cards. That's also going down this route of reaching out to these underserved populations. Richard, for example, is a fully blind gentleman with Knights of the Braille. It's a group of fully blind, partially blind, and a community that's really become quite near and dear to my heart because I've had my own personal struggles with my eyesight. I said, "Hey, if I send you some TI'TAINS and some cards, can you give me some feedback?" I think it's exciting to see the emergence of accessibility consultants as well, where these individuals can actually earn a living from providing consulting services to companies.

Romans: I think it's pretty exciting to see this accessibility start to permeate in the popular culture. I did reach out to him and he gave me a lot of very valuable insights about writing Braille on the cards to signify doors or windows. Things that would exist in a dungeon, but not just confined to a dungeon, also building out different terrain. One very insightful thing that he brought up was this idea of anchoring using TI'TAINS to anchor, whether it's pieces or miniatures. This is something that I think those who are able-bodied, who have sight, might take for granted. When you reach across the game table and you knock over a piece, whether that's your miniature or it's your dungeon walls, that's actually a huge thing to those with blindness or low vision. It sounds very simple when you talk about it, but no one really thinks about these things until somebody starts to invent something like this. I'm starting to explore that idea of using tape or other adhesives to anchor it to a gameplay table.

Woodall: So, when you talk about it being 'LEGO-like', do you mean the pieces can interconnect into each other? Also, when you put the cards in it, you're putting the cards into these slots. So, can you make all sorts of different shapes and three-dimensional structures if you want to?

Romans: That's exactly right. We are venturing into the unknown, but there's a lot of discussion I've had with consultants. We're actually consulting with a gentleman who was with the Mattel Toy Company. He was in the toy industry for over 20 years. I did ask him one day, "Have you ever seen anything that proposes anything like what we're proposing to do here?" and he flat out said, "No, I have not seen this.". It's a building and construction toy, but it's also very different from LEGO in the sense that it's not the same movements or play patterns. What we're trying to do with TI'TAINS is this more of a radical breakthrough, really trying to create something new and different existing really at the intersection of those different play patterns.

The accessibility side really excites me because it's something that, here we are in 2024, and it wasn't until fairly recently, the 2020s, where companies have really even started to think in this way. You can see evidence in the fact that it was also in September that Lego officially released their Braille bricks. This is a company that's been around for decades, and I will give them credit for the fact that this has been a project they've been working on for maybe three or four years. I think maybe they started in 2019, and they did send a lot of Braille bricks to various institutions that serve those with blindness or low vision. By no means am I putting them down. I do admire what they're doing, but I think just in general, the toy industry is a very slow. It's built in bureaucracy of these billion-dollar companies like Mattel or Hasbro. I think Hasbro actually owns Wizards of the Coast, which owns Dungeons and Dragons. Related to D&D, I was coming across some accessibility individuals online who are talking about, "Hey, we need to make these games more accessible so that everyone can benefit from them and enjoy them."

Woodall: I feel like, especially with games like D&D, where so much of it is imagination-based, there's a lot of ground that you can cover really quickly by making just a few aspects of it more accessible. Getting an electronic dice roller that would read out the number to you, or something like TI'TAINS, where you have these Braille structures that you can build with. It's a few changes that can open up a huge world to a lot of people.

Romans: I came across the work of an individual named Jennifer Kretchmer. She is a Dungeon Master, and she has disabilities, and she's been a very vocal advocate for this. On the same token, you do have this other side that says, "Hey, maybe not everyone should be invited to the table." There is that tension. I think that by taking a stance like this, that it's the right thing to do. You don't want to exclude; you want to include people.

Woodall: Yeah, for sure. With Braille on the cards, are you thinking about putting multiple identifiers on the card so you can say 'pink wall' or something like that, and have it laid out where there's more than one identifier for the card?

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(54) **CONSTRUCTION SUPPORT DEVICE**

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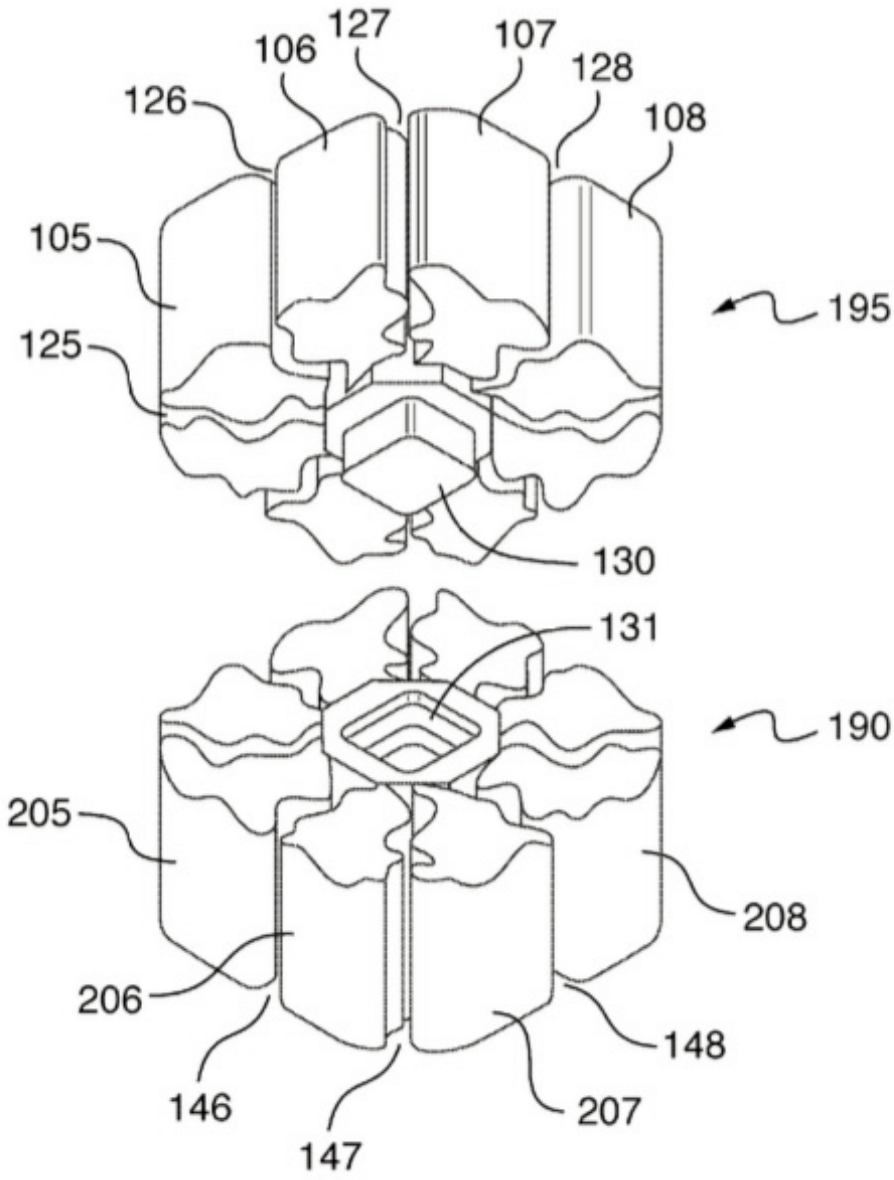
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A construction support device is disclosed for support and assembly of planar members into complex structures. A construction support device can comprise a first and second unit that are separable where each support unit comprises a plurality of sinuate grooves between a plurality of sections with sinuate edges. The sections are flexible about a center to increase the width of the sinuate grooves to receive greater thickness of planar members. A cubic embodiment with flat outer surfaces and a spheric embodiment with round outer surfaces are disclosed.



Romans: Yeah, the sky is the limit, I think. It actually makes a very compelling case from a sustainability vantage point. There's just something to this idea of blending TI'TAINS with the blank playing cards, but then also offering the cards with Braille. I'm really excited because I don't think I've actually seen it in retail. Maybe it's just starting to come out, more accessibility. In my mind, why wouldn't you want play and fun, the most core aspect of being a human, to be something that is accessible for everyone to enjoy.

Woodall: Yeah. There're a lot of features; there's a lot of potential and possibility for sure, but if you had to pick a favorite, what do you think your favorite feature of TI'TAINS is?

Romans: I created a bit of a science project around it of mixing baking soda with paint. I used little bottles of white or different-colored acrylic paint. I put them in a little bowl. I mix them around to create a bit of a solution, I apply it, paint it onto the cards, and it creates a hardened texture. It is a feature in the sense that I think it's also lending to this accessibility of now you can actually create the bumps and the rough texture that could otherwise be snowy avalanche, like arctic terrain. There is definitely something to mixing that play pattern, that building and construction, also with that art, creativity and expression. In this case, we have three kiddos and they're all playing with it together, engaging in different playback patterns together.

I think therein also lies a lot of potential for the tactile and the Braille literacy system. Right now, speaking to that, I've been basically recreating and reimagining the LEGO Braille bricks. They have pre-braille and braille activities on their website, and they're really great. This goes also to submitting this project to the NBP, the National Braille Press. Every year, they have an annual Louis Braille Prize for Innovation. It was probably 2-3 months of assembling all the letters of recommendation supporting the project. I actually did just hear back from them confirming that they had received everything. I definitely see an opportunity to create a LEGO Braille bricks alternative. It would be more of a homegrown solution, whereas Lego is Denmark headquartered. Now, they did break ground in a facility in Virginia, and I think that's going to open next year, I believe. But in the spirit of good-hearted competition and just striving to best serve people, I'm really excited that it's possible that as a small startup that we could actually possibly compete with a multibillion-dollar international company.

Woodall: Yeah, for sure. So, you could mix potentially all sorts of things into the paint and make miniature scenes and experiences that expand more outside of the 'kid' range and into the 'adult' range as well. It seems like this covers a broad age range.

Romans: Well, and I'm glad you mentioned that because I've been obsessed with reading and watching YouTube videos about toy trends. For the last 2-3 years, it's been a very interesting trend towards what they call the 'kidult'. The 13 years or older. I'm at the tail end. I'm like a geriatric millennial.

Woodall: I am, too. (laughs)

Romans: I think there is definitely something to that idea. What I've noticed, too, in sales and customer reviews, is it seems to be predominantly used by older individuals, which is exciting because we're living longer. As you live longer, you're also starting to encounter visual challenges. It is very interesting to think that this could very well be at the forefront of a potentially culturally significant thing. I can't even begin to skim the surface of the possibilities. I envision one day having packs or sets or kits made that are like Dungeons and Dragons, but they include that play pattern of painting and coloring—even one day having color by number. It's not an exaggeration to say I've done probably hundreds of hours of research now. I would say, TI'TAINS has a very versatile aspect to it as far as how you can connect the cards together, how you can slide them, how you can layer them and build them up and insert them. I think the biggest thing is showing that desire and that awareness to do something like this. The actual use and adoption of it has been very positive.

Woodall: You can make a standard rectangle, but also the TI'TAINS pieces have the capability of doing the things at an angle or at a curve right? It doesn't just have to be a square?

Romans: That was one of the thought processes. I had reached out and I had engaged a third party. It was actually a UK-based consultancy firm and we did a number of video calls throughout the pandemic. Where I was very lacking in the design capabilities, I brought this idea and this vision for the product. We did, probably, 5-10 different video calls over six months to a year, and we designed and we developed the product. Speaking to that point was this idea of creating a more versatile product. You can see that there's a number of slots, and around it, but you can also separate it. I've thought long and hard about it, and it actually graduates inherently who can use the product by virtue of just how it's designed. It can create more complex and elaborate structures. You're disassembling them and you're connecting cards in different manners. But, then it can also be used to make very, very basic – literally just inserting the cards and making walls. It's been an exciting journey with this.

Woodall: That's super cool. If people want to purchase TI'TAINS, how do they do that?

Romans: Right now, we do have them available on Etsy. We would love to get them on to Amazon. I would love to one day be able to get them into Target or Walmart.



Actually, I think we've made a pretty compelling case. It just takes some convincing that there is something there. Then, again, we're talking about a toy industry that is a multi-billion-dollar industry. In my research, some of these companies are not the most nimble when it comes to innovation. Perhaps there are stories out there of the person at the bottom who has this genius idea, but it's got to go through 15 levels of bureaucracy before it gets approval.

Woodall: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you would like to mention about TI'TAINS?

Romans: I am planning to move forward with more of a multi-sensory approach to tactile and Braille literacy. On my YouTube channel, I'm really starting to explore this idea of creating activities – so pre-Braille and Braille activities – that also integrate the sense of smell and playing around with the idea of the paint and baking soda and the textures. I just think there is so much potential to create something that provides and serves that population. ■ ABILITY

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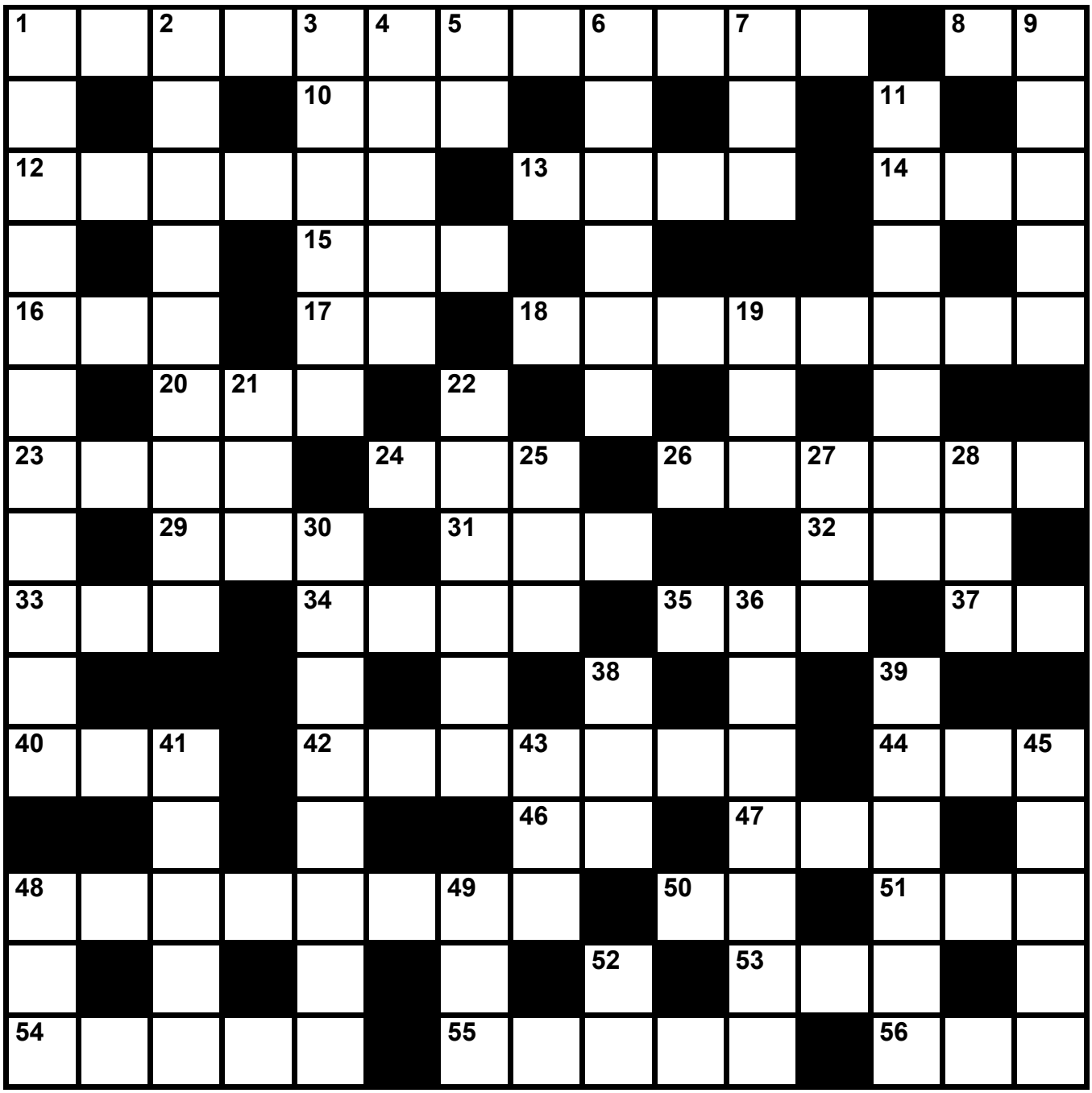
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ACROSS

1. Non-profit that gets PwDs and injured out on dirt bikes
8. Joan __ Arcadia
10. Ancient
12. ___ Oriol, Haiti's former Sec. of State
13. American journalist with spinal cord injury, ____ Hockenberry
14. Three on a sundial
15. Stan who created Spider-Man
16. "Red Sparrow" movie character's code name
17. Accounts receivable, abbr.
18. _____ Scorsone, "Grey's Anatomy" actress
20. Credit card payment terms, abbr.
23. Leaf gathering tool
24. Emeril Lagasse shout
26. First graduate with deaf-blindness in the world, Helen _____
29. Company ending, abbr.
31. Mellow jazz instrument
32. ___ Lingus (Irish airline)
33. Trademarks, abbr.
34. Formula 1 & cycling paralympic gold medalist, ____ Zanardi
35. "Lucy in the ___ with diamonds" (Beatle song)
37. Dawn time, abbr.
40. One ___ million, 2 words
42. Impart
44. Peacock network
46. Buddhist sound
47. Energy saving light, abbr.
48. Ability to move around
50. Circle ratio
51. Brazilian city
53. Gorilla, for one
54. City's green oases
55. Created first accessible van with hand controls, Ralph _____
56. Inspiratio

DOWN

1. Lady from Switzerland who is a disability actiivist and deals with the challenge of the sight disease, Retinitis Pigmentosa, Berenice _____
2. Japanese meat dishes
3. "I Need a ____ " singer, Aloe Blacc
4. Forefather
5. Doctor's title, abbr.
6. Writer of "Free to Be... You and Me", Marlo ____
7. Oprah's network
9. Renowned artist who overcame being disabled by polio, ____ Kahlo
11. Clearly observable
19. Time just before an event
21. It's "mightier than the sword"
22. They support paintings
25. Streaming service from HBO
27. Place
28. Notable period
30. Celebrity makeup artist who overcame the challenge of being a gay person with hearing loss, Earnest _____
36. Fayetteville student who overcame epilepsy and autism barriers to excel in karate, Matthew ____
38. Object
39. Globally appreciated blind singer, ____ Bocelli
41. Trailblazer in music sign language interpretation, ____ Galloway-Gallego
43. Plaything
45. "A Beautiful Mind" star, Russell ____
48. GPS is the modern version
49. Bar check
52. Leonardo __ Vinci

Crossword Puzzle

answers on page 74

SEE BETTER AT ANY AGE

AUTHOR
- The Miracle of Pi in Eye
- LASIK in the 21st Century
- Cure for Keratoconus

VOTED BEST
- Newsweek Showcase Top Doctor
- LA Daily News Readers
- VC Star Readers
- Consumer Research Council

DOCTOR'S DOCTOR
- Surgeons & Physicians
- Chiropractors & Dentists

SURGEON TO STARS
- Actors & Celebrities
- Olympic Athletes

FOR PATIENTS 18-45
- Thin Flap Lasik
- ICL

FOR PATIENTS 45-65
- Superlasik
- Pi in Eye

FOR PATIENTS ABOVE 65
- Pi in Eye
- Laser Cataract Surgery

OTHER THAN LASIK
- Pterygium
- Intacs & Cross-linking (CXL) for Keratoconus

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1 M	O	2 T	O	3 D	4 E	5 M	P	6 T	I	7 O	N		8 O	9 F
A		E			L	D		H		W		11 V		R
12 G	E	R	A	L	D		13 J	O	H	N		14 I	I	I
I		I		15 L	E	E		M				S		D
16 S	P	Y		17 A	R		18 C	A	T	19 E	R	I	N	A
T		20 A	21 P	R		22 E		S		V		B		
23 R	A	K	E		24 B	A	25 M		26 K	E	27 L	L	28 E	R
E		29 I	N	30 C		31 S	A	X			32 A	E	R	
33 T	M	S		34 A	L	E	X		35 S	36 K	Y		37 A	M
T				S		L		38 A		I		39 A		
40 I	N	41 A		42 I	N	S	43 T	I	L	L		44 N	B	45 C
		M		L			46 O	M		47 L	E	D		R
48 M	O	B	I	L	I	49 T	Y		50 P	I		51 R	I	O
A		E		A		A		52 D		53 A	P	E		W
54 P	A	R	K	S		55 B	R	A	U	N		56 A	W	E



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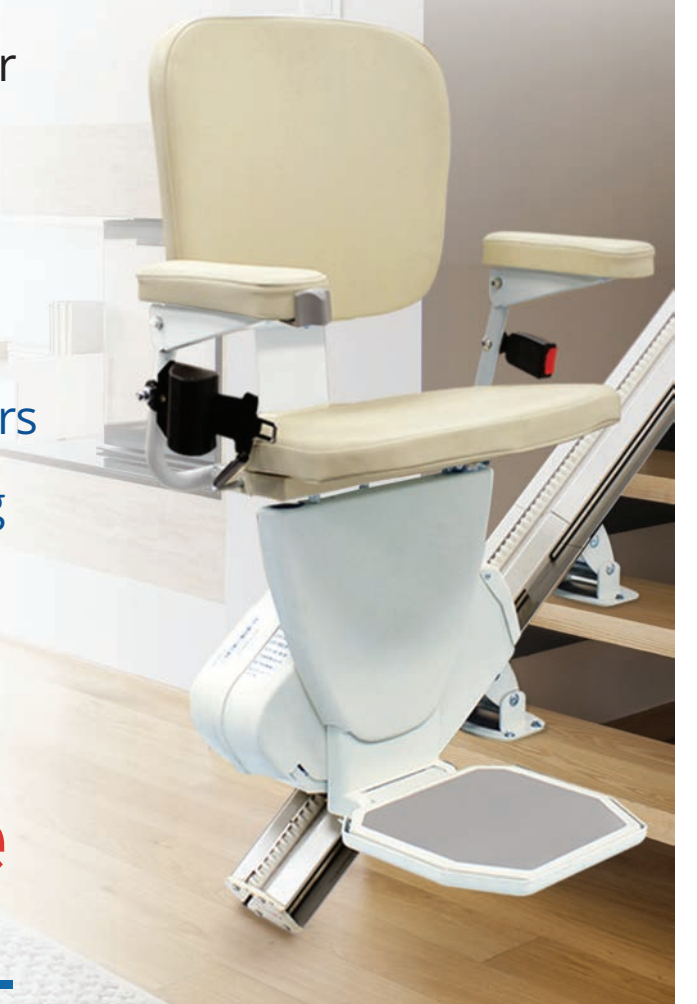
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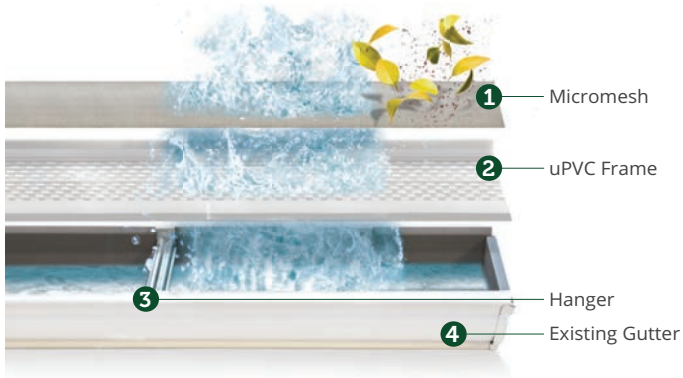
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