

# ABILITY

**Paul Basagoitia**  
Redbull Movie:  
*Anyone of Us*

**China's Blind**  
*Fashion Ladies*

**JACK CHEN**  
His Vision  
for Adventure

+

*Accessible Tourism*  
*NeuroNode*  
*Annette Ross*

**Jing Ge, PhD**  
linguistic, anthropological  
& social overview

Emojis





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Hope everyone's spring/summer is starting off great! It's super hot here in Florida right now, it's weird because it was kind of chilly for a really long time, which is not normal in Saint Aug but this last week was a scorcher! Today it was 95 but "felt like" 102 :-)



So last column I mentioned I was headed out to Babes in the Dirt 5 in California. It's crazy how many girls who attended, actually it was a sold out event! We all met up and rode all day in the desert together, partied at night. Husquvarna provided bikes for the girls to ride that didn't have bikes. I also took everyone around on a little path so they could learn and get used to the bikes. It was actually nice weather which usually doesn't happen because its normally always super windy. There was a food truck there that you could buy food from if you didn't bring your own and everyone was having a good time. My friend Brittany came with me to help interpret and when we were done, before we flew back home, we went down to LA and walked around and had an amazing dinner.

This past weekend my family hung out at my parents house for Memorial Day. My grandma and her husband

came here and we just stayed home and went out to downtown St. Augustine.

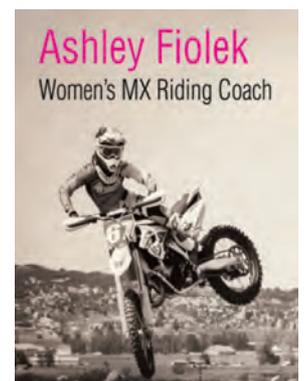
Funny thing, I have lived here for so long but I have never been to the Saturday morning Farmers market that is at our amphitheater. We all went there on Saturday and it was a lot of fun with lots of cool things for sale and a band ( not that I could hear it or anything hahaha)



On Memorial Day my dad got all of our "toy's" ready and we all rode around on pit bikes, go karts and mini bikes. My dad even jumped on one of my bikes ( I was a little worried about him!) We were having so much fun tearing up the yard and hitting parts of my old track. Of course I'm flying around on my little mini bike and a bee or a wasp comes from out of no where and stings me! My mom was laughing and said that could only happen to me :-)

So I'm actually going to be staying home for most of this summer (possibly a class in Canada) and I'm going to have classes in the Fall instead of the summer time. I'm pretty excited that I won't have to travel so much this summer just hang out here, ride and sit at the pool! Enjoy the sun....

■ ABILITY



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## Who Needs People?

We are quickly becoming an anti-socializing world. Talking to each other has now become a major burden. I don't believe it's because we have become boring, people have always been boring. I think it's from becoming distracted. Things have taken the place of people. We can no longer compete with smartphones, Netflix, and drugs.

The smartphone has opened the door to closing people out. The cell phone originally invented for the crazy purpose of calling someone. It was meant to be a tool if you had an emergency say, a flat tire or you need directions, or you were at the grocery store, and you weren't sure if your wife wanted you to get the butter or the margarine. It was more of a convenience in our life. Somewhere down the line, it all changed, and things were put on the phone like texting, internet, and every other app that you could and couldn't think was possible. The device became a handheld entertainment center that you could take anywhere and pulled out on the fly. It quickly became more interesting than a conversation. Why make small talk when you can be browsing the internet? I mean, who wants to hear about your day when Facebook is right in front of you with some cute cat videos? When people meet for lunch, right after they sit down, the first thing they do is take out their cell phone. It's saying that whatever comes in over my phone is more interesting than you. I can ignore what you're saying, but my cell phone, not a chance in hell.

You see, what that has to tell me is important. You... not so much. The crazy thing about two people having lunch, skipping the conversation, and going right to the cell phones is neither one cares. A lunch with a friend is now just nods and smiles.

Another thing preventing us from socializing with each other is that damn Netflix. For about ten bucks a month, you can have thousands of movies and tv shows at your fingertips. Right, there's no reason to leave the house. When your choice is having to get dressed up, drive somewhere, find a parking spot and make small talk for a few hours with someone you may or may not want to be with or stay on the couch, push a button on your remote control and lose yourself in a make-believe world, well, we know what the answer is. We all have a little couch potato gene in us, some more than others. Watching a romantic comedy is a lot easier than living one. Binge watching a show takes less effort than carrying on a conversation. I mean when you're conversing with someone you have to listen, analyze, empathize, think, and pretend to care. It's tedious and difficult. With the binge-watching, you kick back and let the show do the work. The only hard part is following the story or, God forbid, if you happen to get subtitles, you may have to do some reading, which is terrible but still less work than socializing with someone. Perhaps the upside to the Netflix is, if you're out with someone and your phone has died, you can always talk about a "Game of Thrones" episode.



**"It allows me to be a part of the conversation – at eye level."**

– Bill Winchester, Tek RMD & Numotion Customer

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In a similar vein, video games keep many from going out and being part of the world. They are a big distraction, especially with the boys. I say "boys" for a specific purpose because the men are out working a real job. Even if their job sucks they're still most likely interacting with people; a boss chewing them out, a pissed off customer, or a fling with a co-worker. I know many people who would rather stay home and play video hockey then go on a date or meet up with friends. It's not good. You may develop a great slap shot, but you'll be a less rounded person.

The last reason we have escaped from the world is drugs. Once taboo in our culture, they have become as prevalent as, well, smartphones. You don't even have to sneak around anymore or hide it from the kids. Cigarettes are frowned upon more than getting high. You are the scum of the world if you lite up a cancer stick, but if you get high, it's all good. You're one of the cool ones. Besides, it's probably good for your pain anyway. Most of the people I know who smoke marijuana would rather stay home and be alone. They want their own space to space out. The only motivation they have is to get to that refrigerator for some munchies.

Speaking of pain, the pain pills are big these days. Norco, oxy, morphine and fentanyl seem to be making the rounds. Those who abuse them will pop a handful of those and head off to la-la land. There's no need for friends when you have those friends. One leads to two

and two to twenty-six. Instead of going out and socializing, they would rather stay home and overdose. Has socializing become that dire?

You can stay home, smoke a joint, watch Netflix, and text your friend about the great movie you just saw. Technology, entertainment, and drugs are driving us apart from each other; there's something sad about that. There's a loneliness about it. Even when God created us, He knew even He would not be enough for us, so He created another human saying, "It is not good that the man should be alone." Have we said everything we need to say? Have people annoyed us that much? Maybe folks aren't as entertaining as they once were.

The world changes and much gets lost in history; writing thank you notes, saying grace before meals, holding a door open for a woman, family game night... It seems we lose the good things and keep the bad. Perhaps we're downsizing conversations. I'm convinced that socializing with one another may someday become extinct. If people do have lunch with a friend, a smile, and a nod could very well be the standard form of communication. I wonder if people will be talking to each other in twenty years. Maybe we won't even be texting each other. One thing's for sure; people won't be sitting around discussing this article tomorrow. ■ **ABILITY**



by Jeff Charlebois





## The Future of Motorcycles

Having a progressive and often disabling diagnosis certainly makes me wonder about my future. My financial future and retirement, my physical and mental decline and how multiple sclerosis (MS) may affect my relationships with family and friends. As an avid motorcyclist now using my riding passion for a purpose, one of the questions I often get asked as I travel the country sharing my story is, "What will you do if you can no longer ride your motorcycle?"

It is a legitimate question for a man whose disease often presents itself with numbness, weakness and dizziness and creates balance and mobility issues. Canes, walkers and wheelchairs are common devices people with MS often need to rely on after years of disease progression.

My answer usually involves talking about the variety of options out there, such as attaching a sidecar, using trikes or new multi-wheel vehicles that do not require balance. There are a few companies that specialize in customizing vehicle controls for people who have disabilities but still want to enjoy the freedom, excitement and fun of motorcycle travel. Riding for me is medicinal, and whatever happens to my body in the future, I will do everything possible to continue taking my Motomedicine as prescribed.

I used to wonder if there would be motorcycles in heaven, or wherever I might end up. Lately, I have to wonder if motorcycles will still be a form of transportation here in the United States a decade from now. I understand motorcycles are not for everyone, and without the proper



training, gear and frequent practice, they can certainly be a more dangerous way to travel than other means. I would argue though, for those who do learn to ride and ride often, the incredible experience and benefits are unlike anything else.

Motorcycle sales are way down, accessory companies are going out of business, and attendance numbers at big rallies such as Daytona and Sturgis are way down. Millennials are not interested in bikes or even cars when compared to generations past, and no one is buying their grandchildren mini-bikes for holidays or birthdays. Heck, kids today don't even ride bicycles around their neighborhoods anymore. The average age of a motorcyclist is increasing, and as they die off, no one is stepping in to fill their boots. The industry is scrambling to find ways to introduce new and younger riders to motorcycles and to reverse this abrupt decline in interest, but will they be able to save motorcycling in time?

There are lots of reasons for this alarming decline. Riding a motorcycle is not inexpensive. Buying a bike, getting good training, proper gear, garaging, maintaining and finding the time to ride make motorcycles an infrequent, expensive hobby at best for most people who own them.

Some employers and communities view motorcycles as loud and obnoxious toys that disturb the peace. This leads to banning all motorcycles from their property or cities. Loud pipes do nothing but lose rights.

Virtual reality is a cool toy, but when people believe sitting on a couch in 3D with a group of imaginary friends can compare in any way to getting out of the house and experiencing the world by interacting with real people and traveling on incredible adventures, we are indeed in trouble as a society. We work from home, play from home, learn from home and shop from home. Sadly, we have scared ourselves into never venturing out into the world without our survival kits containing sunscreen, sanitizer and a tracking device pre-programmed to dial 911.

I believe one of the biggest reasons interest in riding motorcycles has declined sharply is the public's perception that motorcycles are extremely dangerous and risky machines, only ridden by hell-raisers or people with a death wish. Almost every message they see or hear regarding motorcycles revolves around danger, dismemberment and death. I am alarmed at the number of motorcycle owners themselves who now also share this fear. They themselves now believe taking a ride across the country, or even on the interstate for a few hundred miles in one day, is something scary or dangerous. I'm

saddened to hear so much negativity, especially from fellow riders, people in the industry, dealers, promoters, vendors and even some manufacturers who think riding a motorcycle for daily transportation is too dangerous.

I chuckle when they question why there are no new riders coming into the sport.

We are living in a world where we sanitize everything we touch from door knobs to shopping carts and no longer shake hands for fear of getting the bird flu. We are immune from experiencing fun and excitement, especially if it involves any hint of risk. We are overly cautious and overly disinfecting our kids, raising young quarantined adults who believe all life has to offer is available from YouTube. Fake news!

Transportation has become so blandly safe, automobile drivers need not worry about paying attention. No need to judge the distance between the car ahead or if it is safe to change lanes. We don't even need to remember where we parked or if we put the baby in the back seat. No thinking required, our car will tell us what to do. Our quest to make a safer world over the last 30 years has created a distracted driving epidemic and now the new goal is to take all the responsibilities of driving away from the operator and hand them over to an autonomous vehicle.

I sell T-shirts that say, "Stop Distracted Drivers by Bringing Back Ashtrays and Stick Shifts."

Seriously, it would work. Remember when driving a car was a fun activity representing freedom and exploration? Remember going out for a Sunday drive? Is joyride still in the dictionary?

For most people and municipalities, motorcycles do not fit into this disinfected safety-above-all-else world of transportation. I hear the usual concerns every time I speak to a non-rider audience or even strangers I meet at gas stations. "Do you always wear a helmet?" "How many times have you been hit?" "Aren't you scared to ride by yourself?" "Please be safe", and "We pray every time we see a biker". "Ride safe." "Be careful." "I hope you make it home."

Riders like myself who take motorcycling seriously are constantly defending our choice of daily transportation. We fight against the negative perceptions by listing the safety features of motorcycles, advantages of proper gear and rider training. The manufacturers, motorcycle rights groups and industry think tanks are all doing the same, trying to say motorcycles are not unsafe. This defensive approach doesn't seem to be working very well.

With the dangers being hammered into the head of the general public from every angle, the positive benefits of riding motorcycles, of which there are so many, are rarely publicized.

What happened to promoting the fun, excitement, power, independence and the adventure made possible by two-wheeled travel?

Maybe it is finally time we stop being so defensive about motorcycles and just simply present the world with a few positive benefits of riding motorcycles. Let's start by sharing the #1 reason we love to ride motorcycles: they are incredibly FUN.

Here is my latest, brilliant plan to protect the future of motorcycles.

We have all seen the LOOK TWICE SAVE A LIFE bumper stickers that have been alerting drivers to be aware of motorcycles for many years. The message was strong and simple, if you don't pay attention, you could KILL someone riding a motorcycle.

I created an improved way to say the same thing without having motorcycles and death in the same message.

LOOK TWICE  
Riders Having FUN!

This new slogan reminds drivers to be aware AND promotes motorcycle fun at the same time.

Did I mention this was a brilliant idea that might just save the motorcycle industry?

Bumper stickers, helmet stickers and T-shirts are exclusively available here:

[Longhaulpaul.com/look](http://Longhaulpaul.com/look)

Together, we can take motorcycles off the endangered species list! ■ **ABILITY**

by Longhaulpaul





# Blind Ladies

*We are not here to see, but to be seen*

Statistics show 17.3 million blind people in China, meaning that one out of 100, cannot see or even know what they themselves look like whether they smile, are in tears or totter this way and that. But it doesn't prevent them from embracing beauty as they come to understand it. Among them are three ladies from Chongqing named Lai Pan, Zhu Yanmei, and Hu Qili, who went out for an exclusive photoshoot. Although they could not see the final product, it nevertheless cast their most beautiful reflections in their hearts.

If you couldn't see, would you still go and take studio photos of yourself?

Here is an answer from the three blind ladies: We are not here to see, but to be seen.

In a world without of light and color, these young women in Chongqing opted to shoot "un-seeable" photo albums.

In her album, Lai Pan, a music teacher in Chongqing Special School, turns into a fairy in wonderland. Her

colleague Zhu Yanmei is wearing a white wedding gown, innocent and pristine. Hu Qili, who works in a blind massage shop, radiates with joy and energy.

Three albums came with different styles, all reflecting and presenting the subjects' understanding of beauty. This is the kind of beauty that, though unapproachable with their own eyes, can reach their souls.

**Lai Pan: Tender and delicate on the outside; sensitive and resilient within**

"It's difficult to do eye makeup for me, isn't it? One eye is smaller than the other. Is it possible to make them look the same?" In front of the makeup mirror, Pan asked with caution, her right pupil rolling inside the socket from time to time.

"Yes, of course." The makeup artist said.

"We can't control our pupils. They always roll around involuntarily. If my eyes move during the photoshoot, remind me, please!" Pan went on with her cautious



inquiries during the make-up.

Lai Pan, 24, was born blind in her left eye and with only partial light sensation in her right eye. When she looks at things, she has to tilt her head. For a more accurate perception of objects in front of her, she usually maintains five or six centimeters between her eyes and the object she is trying to see.

When she was younger, Pan's mother always reminded her not to hunch over. Whenever the daughter did, the mother would knuckle her on the back until one day her girl, who had been "fed up" with it, muttered to her: "I just want to see the ground more clearly. If I don't see my way ahead, I feel very insecure." Only then did it dawn on the mother, with a pang of sadness, that her daughter was not as strong as she had thought.

Pan began to study away from her hometown in Sichuan at a young age. Soon she was accustomed to traveling by bus and train alone. "To see" did not seem as important to her at this point, though it was still her extravagant wish to do so.

The first time she really felt different from an able-bodied person was when she started school. At first, Pan was sent to a normal school, where she was a special existence among her classmates because she could not see the blackboard or Chinese characters on the textbook. Although she could most fluently recite every text and solve math problems most quickly and accurately in class, her heart still quivered a little when she heard the teacher's sorry sighs.

Later Pan was transferred to a special school, and her "specialness" was no longer awkwardly prominent. In that blurred world, she became more inclined to express herself through music. Folk, popular, bel canto, no matter what the genre, her natural talent made it easier for her to feel contentment in the world of music.

Since she left mainstream education at a young age, Pan was never able to learn Chinese characters, and that is still a regret for her. "But there are still a million other things in this world I want to know and love. So I can instantly get rid of unrealistic thoughts from my mind."

Never for once did Pan reject photography. Prior to the

photoshoot, sometimes she snapped pictures of flowers and plants and occasionally asked others to take pictures of herself. “Many blind people are afraid to get along with people who can see. They pretend to be lofty and uninterested, but deep down they are vulnerable and need the care and understanding of people who can see.”

“But there are exceptions,” Pan paused. “There are also blind people who are cheerful, animated, talkative, and knowledgeable, and who are admired and appreciated by all, blind or not. But I am still far from being that.”

**Zhu Yanmei: Rador is my knight and my daughter an angel.**

In the fitting room Zhu Yanmei changes into a long gauzy white dress and says, “I have gained weight.” It’s only been three months since she gave birth to a child, and now she’s counting the days when she will lose weight. Though unable to see, she hopes to look “better.”

This is not Yanmei’s first photoshoot. She took a campus photo-op while in college and wedding photos when she got married. “The three of us were shooting separately. The photographer asked us what type of photography we’d like, romantic or athletic. I always like something pure and romantic.”

Yanmei, 34, is Lai Pan’s colleague teaching vocal music in the same school for the blind. At puberty, children like clothes with many accessories and pendants. A garment would sure look nice with yarn, beads, laces and flounces artistically attached to it; and the ladies can tell the difference by touching. For them, T-shirts would be the last option.

“I hope people can see me as pretty. It has nothing to do with whether I can see or not.” Yanmei can imagine how she looks and dresses up. She was born with a sense of light in her eyes and she was able to see her face until she reached 13. By that time her eye disease had worsened to a point where the optic nerve was oppressed. Her world gradually blurred. “Slowly my eyes lost focus, and finally there was nothing.” As such, she bid farewell to the last ray of light in her life.

Yanmei studied piano all the way to Grade 8 just by memory. Then, she took the national college entrance examination for people with disabilities and, with the highest professional scores in all of China, was admitted to the College of Special Education of Changchun University, majoring in musical performance. Truly a whiz kid she was!

Now in Yanmei’s family lives Rador, the only guide dog in service in Chongqing. From application to adoption, Yanmei waited for 4 years. Before she could take him home, she needed to go through one month of training



with Rador at a Dalian-based guide dog training center. The first time she was introduced to Rador, he rubbed her affectionately. “That feeling cannot be described in words.”

In the past two years, Yanmei no longer troubled someone to send her to work. It’s Rador that chaperons her to and from the school. “Rador protects me with his life. He is not only my eyes but also my family.” In Yanmei’s heart, Rador is her knight and her daughter, a little angel.

Talking about her daughter, Yanmei looks swelled with happiness. “She listened to Mozart when I had her inside me and to happy nursery rhymes when out.” Unfortunately, Yanmei was not be able to milk her directly from her breast. Instead, she needed to use a milk pump and ask her mother to bottle-feed the baby.

Yanmei cannot really see her daughter. “They said my daughter had a chin like mine and the rest like her dad’s. I ran my fingers over her. Her face was round and her hair was fluffy – like that of a little rabbit. Her nose was small and quite tall. Her eyes were small and so were her lips – I think they should be red.”



### Hu Qili: Blind, yes, but not doltish

“I’ll choose the style and the photographer tells me what color my dress is, what makeup and hairstyle it matches. Then we will discuss and make final decisions.”

According to Hu Qili, this is beyond ordinary photographers. “Those who don’t understand what I really mean will make me look really bad in pictures.”

In fact, deep down she very much enjoys taking photos of herself. But an “unfortunate event” she encountered when she was a child affected her more or less in a negative way.

On one birthday, her aunt took her to be photographed at a studio. Despite the young girl’s desperate explanations, the photographer still kept demanding: “Why don’t you look at the camera?” “Look up, to the left!” “It’s obvious that you are rolling your eyes!”

“In fact, most of the time we don’t need instructions; we need understanding,” Qili said.

Qili’s parents like to call her Tian Tian, meaning sweeties in Chinese. Although she was born blind, she created her own version of colors and lines in her heart. She liked to “watch” the Slam Dunk and do handiwork. She once made a little toy – a grass nibbling rabbit. It was a pink bunny, but she put a handful of grass on its face

and beneath its nose. Maybe that was how she came to understand the way rabbits eat.

She attended a boarding school at a very young age, and this had fostered her strong independence. After graduation, she tried all kinds of work – massage, customer hotlines, and even making dumplings in restaurants. These were solid evidence against many people’s doubt that she could do it all. “Later they did not hire me out of sympathy; they did because they thought I was worthy.” Qili said.

Qili’s parents have always encouraged her to explore new possibilities. When she was four or five years old, she was even allowed to make handicrafts with scissors. Their neighbors were aghast, trying to warn them the hidden dangers for a blind child to use the blades. Qili’s father replied, “It doesn’t matter. She is blind, yes, but not doltish.”

Qili always knows that her father is the one who loves her most in this world. “Blind, yes, but not doltish” has become the creed of her life. She has developed skills to live her life more fully, such as texting on WeChat, bungee jumping, rafting and other extreme sports. Apart from swimming and aerobatics, which she enjoys very much, sometimes she also works on bakery recipes and goes out to movies with her husband, who guides her through because he is able see, though highly myopic. On such occasions, the couple would sit close, murmur to each other in a barely audible voice lest they disturb others, and sink themselves in a little enjoyment that only they could appreciate.

When she became a mother, Qili continued to think “about the child’s future almost every day”. She consciously instructs the child to face the fact that “Mommy can’t see” by asking in a cheerful tone, “Son, where is Mommy’s cell phone? Please help me find it.”

In August 2018, Qili sent her resume to Apple Inc. and passed the third round of interviews a month later. “Generally, people may think that it is inconceivable for a blind person to go to Apple. In fact, nowhere I would not dare to go, as long as I have my ‘stick.’ There is nothing wrong to explore.” Qili calls the white cane “stick.”

According to her, it is sometimes difficult to change conventional social cues. A blind person may be regarded as disheveled, begging in the streets or confined to work only as masseuse. In fact, this is not always the case. “I always want to bring new changes to my life. I realized how little time I’ve got to my own when I have a baby. And I found that I’ve played all the roles I could but not myself.” Now Qili wishes to balance her motherhood and achieve more for self-worth.

Public service activist, Miao Miao: “Just be a little nicer to them.”

Miao Miao has designed many non-profit photography campaigns for the disadvantaged, such as photoshoots for sanitation workers on hot summer days, the “care for the elderly” photoshoots on the Chinese Double-Ninth Festival, and family photoshoots for the deaf – a large repertoire of public service photos Mujinji Photography, a studio she founded, has built up over the years.

There was a time when Miao Miao saw an article on a newspaper she was reading, “Blind Journey,” about blind people helping each other and exploring the world in their own ways. “I thought this was beauty by its own. Since travel could be independent of the ability to see, why couldn’t I take photos for the blind?”

Then Miao Miao contacted the Chongqing Association for the Blind and soon was informed that several ladies would like to take photos. “Their first reaction was ‘Is it really free?’ ‘Can we really do it?’ ‘Are you willing to do it for us?’”

After talking with the three ladies, Miao Miao opened up her mind wider. “So what? They can’t see the photos. It’s an expression of beauty.”

To do the job better, Miao Miao asked her team to experience a blind person’s life for one day, starting from the breakfast blindfolded. “In a matter of minutes the first volunteer gave up. I was the second to give up. It was all higgledy-piggledy when we tried to pick up food, and the chopsticks were fighting with each other. There was no way we could enjoy our meal.”

Miao Miao said that originally a 20-minute meal took nearly an hour. With this starting point, Miao Miao and the photographers felt closer to the three ladies on the shooting day, and there was basically no misunderstanding between them.

“These blind ladies impressed us most with the fact that they are more courteous than ordinary people and will be twice as grateful if they feel your understanding.” Miao Miao believes that she was just a little nicer to them than her ordinary clients.

“I used to be too narrow-minded. I always felt that the world for the blind was black and white. In fact, it is not. The world they experience might be better than ours, and their perception of beauty might be purer.”

■ ABILITY



This story is part of a series of articles published as an exclusive editorial exchange between *China Press for People with Disabilities & Spring Breeze* and *ABILITY Magazine*





# JACK CHEN

A lawyer in Google's New York offices in Chelsea, Jack Chen navigates two train stations, the subway and busy sidewalks as his daily workday commute. A graduate of Fordham Law School, Chen started as an associate patent counsel at Google in 2010. In 2014 he became the company's product counsel in charge of Chrome: what he called "the quarterback or the general counsel of the product from a legal perspective."

Chen has degrees in computer science from Harvard and Berkeley. Before law school, Chen interned at AT&T, and worked as a systems engineer at Xanboo Inc., a New York-based startup that produced internet-based home automation and security systems.

He also spent two years as a patent and trademark attorney in the NY office of Kenyon & Kenyon, and three years as an associate at Baker Botts.

Chen has competed in five triathlons, including two Iron Man triathlons, consisting of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bicycle ride, and a 26.2-mile run.

Chen does the swimming and running portions by hooking to another athlete with a length of rope; he rides the biking portion on a tandem bicycle. When Chen was preparing for his most recent triathlon, he said he routinely got up at 3:00 a.m. to train before coming into the office.

Chen climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

Chen underwent an operation to improve his vision, but the surgery damaged the retina.

The precise medical reasons for his blindness are unclear, but there's good reason to think it's genetic: Chen's brother, Richard, was also born with a severe visual impairment, though he's not totally blind.

ABILITY: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Chen: Well, gosh, it's a broad question. I am totally blind. I lost my eyesight when I was 16 years old through an eye operation that did not go according to plan, we should say. However, I was born with very limited eyesight. I would describe it as if I could see light, dark, colors, and large shapes. If I was standing at the bottom of the driveway, I could see that there was a large object with various colors. But I couldn't tell what the shape was, if there was lots of the white and lots of the red, I couldn't tell that it was a door. That kind of thing.

ABILITY: This is pre-16?

Chen: Pre-16. And then when I was 16 I went for a cornea transplant that was supposed to try to replace the cornea in my one functioning eye, there was some hemorrhaging in the operation and I lost my eyesight. Just to put that in context, that was around the time of my sophomore-junior year in high school when you start taking SATS and college entrance exams and those kinds of things. It was a very challenging period in my life, for sure. But taking a step back a little bit and what's relevant to the overall story, I remember very distinctly in fifth grade I had a teacher who said something that was kind of surprising to me at the time. I was always a child who tried to do really well at school, being from an immigrant family. And I used to get quite stressed out over homework and wanting to get everything perfect. And the teacher said, "You know, you don't need to work that hard, because the government is going to take care of you." For a child to hear that at that age, that's quite a—that can leave an impression. And thank God that it did not do that to me. It did not cause me to give up. But it did show me I think at the time that I would need to—if I wanted to do something in my life, it would have to be up to me to have the wherewithal to make it happen, to continue to work hard and to in some sense tune out certain things.

Fast forward many years. I've had a lot of really wonderful opportunities to do many things in life, including going to college at Harvard, which is a story in itself. A lot of athletic things as well.

ABILITY: Let's not go so fast forward yet. Back to high school you're 16 and lost total sight. Did you have to find new ways to adapt or had you been so close it wasn't as big of a transition?

Chen: I had been pretty close to being—not having so much sight, so I did try to do things like read Braille, although I wasn't very good at it. I knew very well that I would have to absorb information in classes without access to lots of textbooks or what was being written on the blackboard, that kind of thing. Those kinds of skills were already being developed at the time. What wasn't well developed or at times something I struggled with

was, going from sight to no sight at all is an enormous transition, no matter how little sight you had had. Realizing that before I could walk down the hallway, I could generally tell I was walking in a straight line. I didn't need to use a cane. But now I needed to. That kind of navigation, that basic, basic aspect of my life, was now totally different. And that kind of affected many things.

For example, if you're standing there talk to somebody. If you have some sight, you can when the person moves away from you. You can tell if you're not facing that person. But when you become totally blind, you don't have the visual cues. It's very challenging to have the confidence to be out there knowing that your information isn't perfect and you're going to make mistakes. And the kinds of mistakes you make are quite awkward in this society. So I think there was a lot of transition in that.

There was a lot of transition also from a personal standpoint. As soon as the eye operation was done, I remember thinking to myself, "Well, what am I going to do then? I'm done. My life is over." Even though I had had limited eyesight my whole life, it felt like all the optics were now shut down. There was a lot of wrestling with self-doubt through that period as well.

ABILITY: This affected your social life,

Chen: Yeah, there was a pretty significant turning point at that particular time. I remember that when I came back from surgery, word had spread what had happened, and I wasn't the most popular kid when I had my sight, but I got along with a lot of people. And after the operation, it was as though I didn't exist. I didn't really have—I don't quite understand, I should actually ask some of my high school friends, but it was pretty depressing for me. I felt like I didn't really have a place in the student body any more, I was much more isolated after that. Even to this day, the first person I connected with, only a couple weeks ago, that was the first time I've connected with anyone from high school, and it's been 25 years, and I hadn't really connected with anybody, because I just didn't feel like I had friends in the student body any more.

ABILITY: Was the technology that was afforded you changing at that time?

Chen: I think at the time, this was in 1991, the technology that was out there was pretty rudimentary. It wasn't the kind of thing that I really gravitated towards, because I didn't see a whole lot of benefit in it. It was things like the very early Braille computers. I was very much more the kind of person who was able to survive through listening and understanding and absorbing information that way, as opposed to doing a lot of reading. I was much more auditory in my learning through audiobooks and various services that are made available to people who are blind. But no, I didn't do the whole



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Chen's last day at Harvard

ABILITY: Where did you go to graduate school?

Chen: I didn't go to graduate school for a number of years. I went to computer science for graduate school at Berkeley from 1998-99, and then I took some time to work and then I went to law school after that.

ABILITY: From computer science to law school.

Chen: (laughs) Yeah.

ABILITY: What do you do now?

Chen: I am currently a corporate counsel for Google, so I'm an attorney working in a legal department for Google. I am product counsel, which means I manage the legal issues for particular products. My focus area is the Chrome browser and Chromebook.

ABILITY: What is the daily makeup of that kind of a title?

Chen: It doesn't have—product counsels are interesting positions because they're not super-deep on any particular topic. We also have specialty legal groups to handle a lot of other things as well, so we have explicitly our litigation group, our patents group, our copyright group. But product counsel are responsible pretty much for knowing everything, being able to versed in and provide advice on all areas of law. It just that when things get very complicated, we have the ability to call on the specialty teams for extra help. We basically have entire large functioning law firm within the legal department as well as specialty groups in it.

ABILITY: How did you get involved in this bike ride?

Chen: I am one of the—I came up with this crazy idea of—my other partner in crime is a gentleman named Dan Berlin based out in Colorado. He and I met because I got his contact information, he's also visually impaired, he's the co-founder of one a successful food company and one of the largest products vanilla extract. For example, if you go to Costco and you buy vanilla,

that's his product. I interviewed him for a podcast I have called "Excellability," [?] and I interview people who have disabilities who are super-successful and try to understand what the attitudes, techniques, practices, and habits are that have enabled them to become super-successful. It's kind of a more NPR-style interview format.

I interviewed him, and we got to talking afterwards and realized that we have a lot in common because he had done the Inca Trail, not together, but he had done that and I had done that \_\_\_ climbing. Now we both climb out in Colorado and we're both triathletes. We've done a lot of very similar things together and love to go out there and try it just for ourselves. And we both also have this knack for trying to really show the world what the capabilities are of the blind and visually impaired. And so we came up with this crazy idea, "What's the hardest thing we can think of doing?" And cycling across the country was right at the top of the list.

ABILITY: (laughs)

Chen: We were originally planning to do it as a project, just take our own time, and then we found out about this thing called Race Across America. It's a real race. It's probably one of the most difficult cycling races in the world, because it's longer than Tour de France without any rest. In Tour de France you ride during the day and you get to sleep at night. No disrespect to Tour de France people, of course, but—

ABILITY: They're wusses!

Chen: (laughs) They're so rested! This race is like 24 hours! There are people who do this race solo. We weren't that crazy. We decided to put together a team to do it, a sort of a kind of—I guess you would kind of call it a relay format.

ABILITY: So you will have rest?

Chen: We will have some. It's a complicated format.

ABILITY: So you're a wuss?

Chen: (laughs) Yeah! This race is supposed to take between seven to eight days. It's about 3,100 miles. The elevation—I mean, the elevation—

ABILITY: Oh, yeah, Pike's Peak!

Chen: It's not quite Pike's Peak—

ABILITY: Oh, you're taking the southern route?

Chen: Southern route. We're going to do the Wolf Creek Pass. It's about 11,000 feet elevation.

ABILITY: Wow.

Chen: At the time—there was never a question about whether we could do this race. And putting together something like this is a massive undertaking. There are 20 other crew members who are coming with us, who are volunteering. They deserve an incredible amount of credit and thanks because they're giving up time and sleep and being thrust into an environment that's extremely challenging. It's like a roving caravan, with two RVs and three to five vans. Putting together something like this is incredibly complex, the funding, the logistics, the bike mechanics, the routes, getting all the vehicles, just everything. And on top of that, we wanted to create a—we thought, "What else can we do with this race that could really make an impact?" We're filming a movie about what we're most passionate about, which was success of people who are blind or visually impaired. We knew that those were two things we wanted to do. We wanted to create a film that would highlight the level of capabilities of people who are blind or visually impaired on the bike, but also off the bike in a social capacity.

We put together a team of blind professionals who would be the riders, and it was great, who all had a great story to tell about their own impairment and success. The goal was to take on and challenge themselves and impact the 70% joblessness rate of people who are college-educated and who are blind or visually impaired.

Recognizing that Dan and I and others have had an opportunity to become successful despite our visual impairment, we knew that there's incredible talent out there in the blind community. We wanted to highlight success. We want corporate America and people in general to know that there is an enormous talent pool out there that's ready to be tapped. We're standing as examples, if you will, of some success that can be found in the community, and we want people to realize that it's not just us. There are others, too, and there are others who haven't even had a chance to get started yet, and they need to get a chance to get started. That's the way that we're going to be able to help companies realize more of potential. Right now everyone's got talent, and no one's tapping this space, and we think that there's an incredible opportunity in the space.

ABILITY: Did you know we created the first job site for people with disabilities?

Chen: No, I'm not.

ABILITY: We built it in 1995.

Chen: Wow!

ABILITY: It's the largest employment site for people with disabilities. It's called abilityJOBS.com. Back in the day it was called Job Access, but we—

Chen: Oh, I've heard of that.



**ABILITY:** And now we've built the first accessible online career fair, [ABILITYJobFair.org](http://ABILITYJobFair.org). Brings new accessibility to online career fairs with video, sign language interpreters and speech to text.

Can you think of anything else you'd like to talk about?

**Chen:** I think our real main thrust of the project is less about—the race is kind of a metaphor. We feel like it will highlight the unique skill set that people who are blind and visually impaired bring to the table. For example, I'll give you a great example. The pilot I'm riding with, Caroline Gaynor. She's committed her life to riding with people who are blind and visually impaired all over the world. She just finished an event in Texas in April with a blind person. She did Hawaii last year. During her crossing, she did this race as part of another team, a solo bike team, so four solo bike teams a few years ago, they parked their van on the side of the road in Arizona and the grass caught on fire, and the car completely burned out. So they're down one vehicle. Anything like that can happen at a race. And one of the aspects that this race will bring out is the ability to problem-solve and keep going. People who have disabilities, people who are blind or visually impaired, their life is not "normal" every day. Nothing is easy. Everything is difficult. Everything is challenging. Everything needs a

custom solution. This race will truly bring out that aspect, which is unique. It's a distinct advantage, maybe not particularly unique, but a distinct advantage that these people bring to the table.

**ABILITY:** Problem-solving techniques.

**Chen:** And another one is the ability to keep going no matter what happens, no matter how bleak things seem to be. We're just going to make this happen. That's the kind of never-going-to-let-things-get-you-down type of mentality a lot of people with disabilities bring to the table, too. For example, if you were in a company and you had a division that was in deep trouble, what kind of person would you want to run that division? Would you want a person who's never faced hardships to run that division? Or do you want someone who has every day faced hardship and in particular most of their lives had an extreme hardship? You're talking about losing your eyesight at three years old. Who do you want to run that company? People who can see beyond the immediate to the future and little by little get you to the point where your business can be profitable again.

There are things like that that we want to bring out as part of this film, to highlight. We don't know what will happen, but we know for sure that it'll be hard. There's



Chen climbing Kilimanjaro

lots of great lessons that can be drawn out of that. I think that our main goal is to highlight this successful capability, partnering with other organizations like the American Foundation for the Blind and Blind Connectors is another disability talent sourcing group, those are the organizations on the ground that are going to be able to take our message and then translate it into actual jobs in actual companies with people who can be successful and can be the next GM CEO so that we can show America what the full capabilities are of people who are blind or visually impaired. I think that's the broader messages we're trying to convey in doing this. The race is a means to an end. That's the real thing. Emphasizing that aspect is important to the whole team.

The other aspect that's very important and that fits your mandate is that we don't do this alone. Like I said, there are dozens of people who have given their time, talent, and resources to make this happen because they believe in it. Everyone who hears about what we're doing no doubt understands that this is going to change perceptions in the real world. People have jumped behind it. There are drivers, navigators, people cooking the food for us, cleaning the RVs, they're doing laundry, they're doing everything to help us to make this a reality. They deserve an enormous amount of credit and appreciation for what they're doing. They're not getting the spotlight,

and they're not—they're there to enable the whole thing to happen. It's an incredible, incredible gift they're giving to us.

There's a lot of logistics getting on and off the bike, the vans will leapfrog, it's a complex thing. We've practiced twice, and every time the whole crew gets there, it's like a party. Everyone has such a great time. Everyone loves to be together. It's all smiles, all jokes. And the race, a lot of it will be like that. Everyone loves to be together. Everyone gets along. Yes, there will be some rough times, but you know what? Everyone's so behind this project that it's awesome. ■ **ABILITY**



Chen's Wedding Day

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## The Dreamer, the Dream Maker and Life Altering Technology

While interviewing Australian, entrepreneur Peter Shann Ford my memory kept repeating the late Senator Robert Kennedy’s quote, “Many men see things as they are and ask why, I see things as they aren’t and ask why not?”

Resembling comedian Shecky Greene. Ford and Greene share another common trait. They are geniuses in their professions. Greene is revered for his comedic genius. One of his legendary jokes is “I should never eat lox because I can’t find the combination.”

Having discovered in 1989 that damaged muscles still emit electrical signals, Ford, who is also a life time member of the Mensa organization was ready to respond to Kennedy’s dream of, “I see things as they aren’t and ask, why not?” The discovery made Ford well-known.

The Mensa organization is the largest and oldest IQ society in the world. It is a non-profit organization open to people who score at the 98th percentile or higher on a standardized, supervised IQ or other approved intelligence test.

Before entering the neuroscience field—Neuroscience is an interdisciplinary science that works closely with other disciplines, such as mathematics, linguistics, engineering, computer science, chemistry, philosophy, psychology, and medicine—Ford was known as a software developer, author and international reporter and news anchor. He joined Cable News Network (CNN) in 1990 in Atlanta, GA. He reported on new technology, medicine, military affairs and shuttle launches at the John F Kennedy Space Center.

He is a 1972 graduate of Officer Training Unit, Scheyville who completed National Service as an

infantry officer with the Third Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment.

Ford’s military service had awakened a powerful empathy in him for people with severe disabilities. He had watched the struggles of many people with a loss of speech and paralysis unable to tell anyone of their needs, their feelings and their pain. He envisioned an assistive technology communication device that reconnects the voiceless and the paralytic to their family. It was a need that plagued him for years. He knew he had to address it.

While at CNN, he became a computer programmer/analyst. He served on one of the first teams to develop microcomputers for rehabilitation and communications for people with disabilities at the VAMC Rehabilitation R&D Laboratory in Atlanta. Working with principal investigator Gary Wynn Kelly, he wrote JoyWriter 2, an Apple-based program that enabled people with neuromuscular disease and spinal injuries to replace a computer keyboard with a joystick controller. For decades he developed advanced technology communications and control systems for people with profound disabilities, and as a software consultant to rehabilitation researchers and therapists in the United States, England and Australia.

As far back as he can recall, Ford has been fascinated by communications between people and technology. He believed that if you could give speech to the voiceless and the paralytic the ability to communicate you would open up a new world. Ford’s goal was to develop a wearable, universally design, powerful, lightweight, assistive technology communications device. In later years, Ford wanted the NeuroNode to bridge the digital divide. The digital divide is the gulf between those who



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have ready access to computers and the Internet, and those who not. The World Bank estimates there are 1.2 billion disabled people who lack access to computers.

In 2000 Peter founded and became Chairman of Control Bionics, a neural systems technology company. Ford's goal is making Control Bionics the world's leading provider of EMG, the recording of the electrical activity of muscle tissue, or its representation as a visual display or audible signal, using electrodes attached to the skin or inserted into the muscle. Bionics is the study of mechanical system that function like living organisms or parts of living organisms.

One of Control Bionics milestones was developing the Neuroswitch, an EMG based communications and control system for people with profound disabilities. The Neuroswitch was the precursor to the NeuroNode.

In April 2018 Control Bionics was awarded the prestigious Pitch@Palace Innovation Award ahead of 42 competing commonwealth nations. Organized by the Duke of York and held at St. James Place, London, this year's theme was "Human Technology – Benefits for Humanity," an endeavor that certainly rings true for those familiar with the NeuroNode technology. With the NeuroNode, Ford had the product of his dreams. He needed a dream maker: a CEO. Enter Rob Wong.

## Rob Wong : The Dream Maker

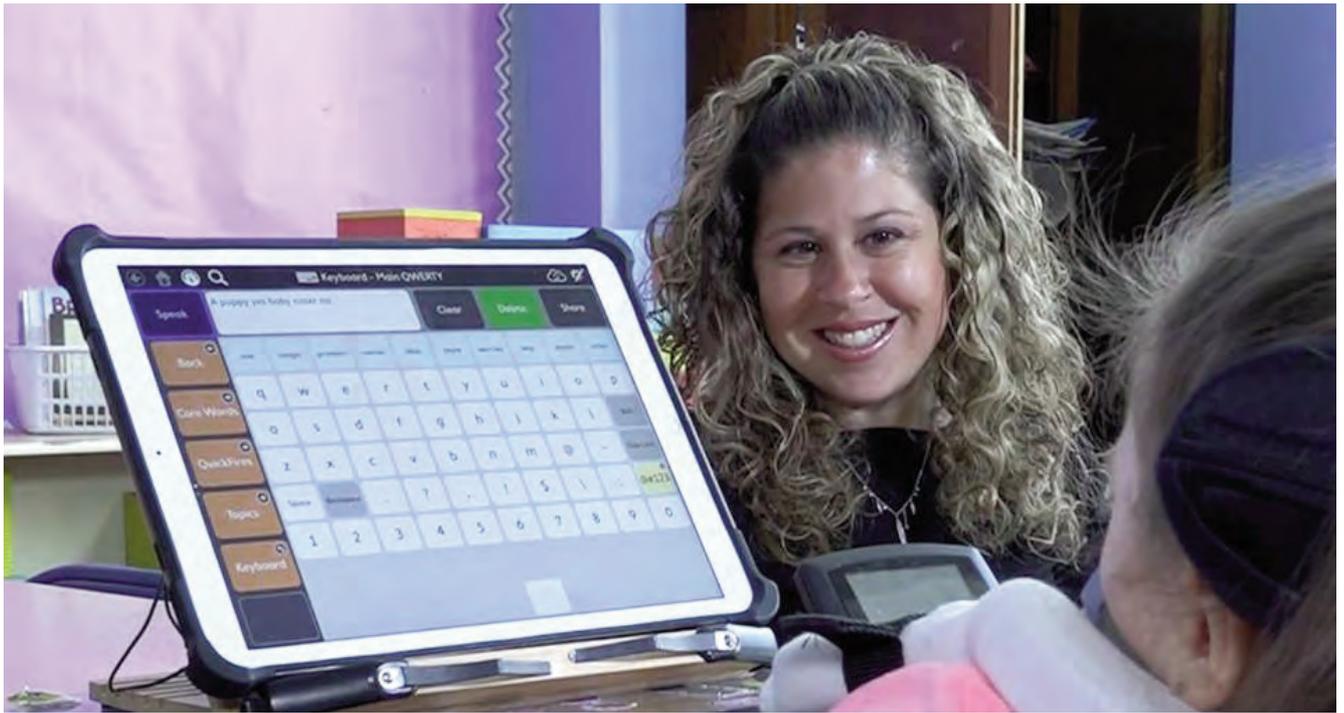
Ford knew he needed a take charge CEO who would be his dream maker. The qualifications were the CEO had to be a world visionary who shared Ford's vision on the

benefits of the NeuroNode. His dream maker had to have a marketing background in technology, strong organizational skills, a long range planner, a self starter, decision maker, a leader, an effective communicator. And a humanitarian.

Enter Rob Wong, who is 1/8<sup>th</sup> Chinese. There is very little Asian appearance in Wong. Wong was introduced to Ford by Lindsey Phillips, an initial investor in Control Bionics Wong's background, manner and accomplishments impressed Ford. Ford says," Rob measured up to all of my expectations." Wong works closely with Peter Ford and reports directly to Ford.

Wong was a founder and CEO of a marketing strategy consultancy Innovat8. Wong had more than 25 years experience in international marketing strategy and operations. He had been a successful start-up entrepreneur having developed and exited a retail digital media business. He was a former CEO of AIMIA Digital Industry of Australia.

One of Wong's first decisions was to name the product. He named it the NeuroNode. Another responsibility is convincing investors to support the NeuroNode. He was successful. Other responsibilities included establishing a headquarters in Milford, Ohio. Next he mastered the NeuroNode. He knows the product better than the developers. When he demonstrates the NeuroNode he does so with authority and conviction. Mindful of his audiences' time, he keeps his demonstrations to 20 minutes and answers questions from 20-to-40 minutes. He keeps his answers short.



Wong and Ford saw the United States as their biggest market. Wong knew he had to develop a year round communications plan. Wong began looking at Assistive Technology conferences where the NeuroNode could be exhibited. He picked CSUN, ATIA, ASHA, Closing the Gap and RESNA.

His staff contacted the national headquarters of ALS, United Cerebral Palsy, Multiple Sclerosis, American Occupational Therapy Association, American Physical Therapy Association, Paralyzed Veterans of America, George Mason University, The ARC, Parkinson's Foundation of Northern Virginia, Endependence Center of Northern VA offering demonstrations. He believes once these organizations have seen what the NeuroNode can do they will tell their members about the NeuroNode.

He has also contacted the disability media, social media and ABC, NBC, CNN, MSNBC, National Public Radio and other media. Wong knows that the more people who know about the NeuroNode the more people will support it. Wong isn't just looking at the United States as his only market. He has exhibited at assistive technology conferences in Asia and Europe. The NeuroNode has been greeted with enthusiasm everywhere in has been exhibited and demonstrated.

"The NeuroNode as with other assistive technologies gives severely disabled people a new life while creating new opportunities for them,' says Aldo Schmidt be used by people who have lost hope," says Emma Schmidt, Rehabilitation consultant, Frankfort, Germany.

Thomas Welding, PhD, Rehabilitation Science, has seen the NeuroNode demonstrated at ATIA and CSUN. He is impressed by its versatility and its ease of use. He says,

"The NeuroNode is the most innovative assistive technology product. I have seen in years. Everything about it—its size, portability, simplicity of use and its ability makes its unique. It is definitely life altering technology."

Rehabilitation Science is an interdisciplinary that focuses on human function and disability.

### **The NeuroNode**

Wong describes the NeuroNode as the world's first wearable, wireless EMG assistive technology product. The technology gives people with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, spinal cord injuries, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, Cerebral Palsy or any disease or any condition causing the loss of speech or paralysis a connection to the world.

How does it work? A NeuroNode sensor is placed on the skin over the muscle to be the switch. When you move that muscle the NeuroNode detects bioelectrical signals. EMG signals are then generated in the body when an individual activates, or attempts to activate, a particular muscle group. The EMG signals, are sent instantly from the brain to the various muscle groups throughout the body.

Public opinion is important in selling any product. NeuroNode users have their opinions on the NeuroNode.

### **Scott Trapp's Story**

Scott Trapp spent 6 years in the US Navy as a mechanic. He worked in the electronics and propulsion fields. He has been married for five years. He has a two-year-

old son. Four years ago, Trapp was told, “You have ALS.”

The prognosis shocked him. He was scared. He knew he had to be strong and to do things that he could do.

ALS is a disease of the nerve cells and the brain that control nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord that control voluntary muscle movement. It is a progressive degenerative disorder.

Despite being unable to move his arms and legs, Trapp is happy doing what he can do with the NeuroNode. With the NeuroNode attached to a bicep above his right elbow, Scott sends signals to his iPad. He also uses the NeuroNode to make phone calls, send text messages, watch movies, play computer games with his two-year-old son and to control his environment. An example of controlling his environment and maintaining his independence is turning lights on and off without having to ask his son or an assistant.

Trapp is waiting for the day when he can be part of conversations on the web with his wife. He sees the NeuroNode is the key that opens the door to this event

Trapp’s opinion of the NeuroNode is, “The NeuroNode is definitely life-altering technology.”

### Jessica Nielsen’s Story

In May 2017 Jessica Nielsen fulfilled one of her lifelong dreams by beginning service as a full-time missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. After three weeks in the Missionary Training Center, she flew to Long Beach, California in June where she anticipated serving for a period of 18 months.

On September 15, 2017, Jessica fainted after showering. She lost her pulse, and stopped breathing. MRI scans showed large areas of infection in her skull. Over the next several days, she lost all sensation and ability to move—first in her arms and then in her legs. Subsequent scans showed that extensive damage had developed over a few days to the neural tissue in the spinal cord at the base of her brain (most likely a spinal cord stroke). Although the doctors aren’t entirely sure how it happened she is paralyzed from the neck down.

In November she was transferred to the Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore where she did physical therapy. She was sent home in early 2018 where she is under 24 hour care. She can’t breathe, eat or swallow on her own.

Medicare approved funding for the NeuroNode. The Control Bionics funding team provides support throughout the process, helping those in need to navigate the path to obtaining durable medical equipment (DME). “We’re incredibly excited to announce this additional

funding option. Our goal and mantra is ‘life-changing connections,’ and this new resource provides us the ability to facilitate even more of those moments,” states Wong.

### Maeve’s Story

Maeve is 8-years old. When she was 1-year-old, she was diagnosed as having spinal muscular atrophy. SMA robs people of physical strength by affecting the motor nerve cells in her spinal cord, taking away the ability to walk, eat, or breathe. It is the number one genetic cause of death for infants.

To get around Maeve uses a motorized wheelchair. She attends a school in New York City. Her special education teachers considered Maeve amazing, funny, observant and highly intelligent. Early in 2018 the school brought Maeve a NeuroNode. Her teachers were surprised at how quickly she learned to use it.

One of Maeve’s teachers says this about Maeve’s relationship with the NeuroNode, “They were made for one another.”

Another teacher said this about Maeve and the NeuroNode, “The NeuroNode has given Maeve a renewed feeling of independence and self worth.”

Using the NeuroNode that is linked to her iPad, Maeve writes her own sentences and does her own research.

Maeve’s teachers and parents praise Maeve’s sense of humor. Soon after receiving a the NeuroNode her teachers and parents were gathered around her. One of the teacher asked Maeve, “if you were granted a single wish what would it be?”

Maeve’s answer stunned everyone while simultaneously producing a laugh.

Maeve’s answer was, “I want a baby brother and a dog.”

Maeve’s parents are elated over the positive impact the NeuroNode has had on her.

“The NeuroNode has given Maeve a future. Ten years from now she could be the top student in her class and getting ready for college,” a smiling father said.

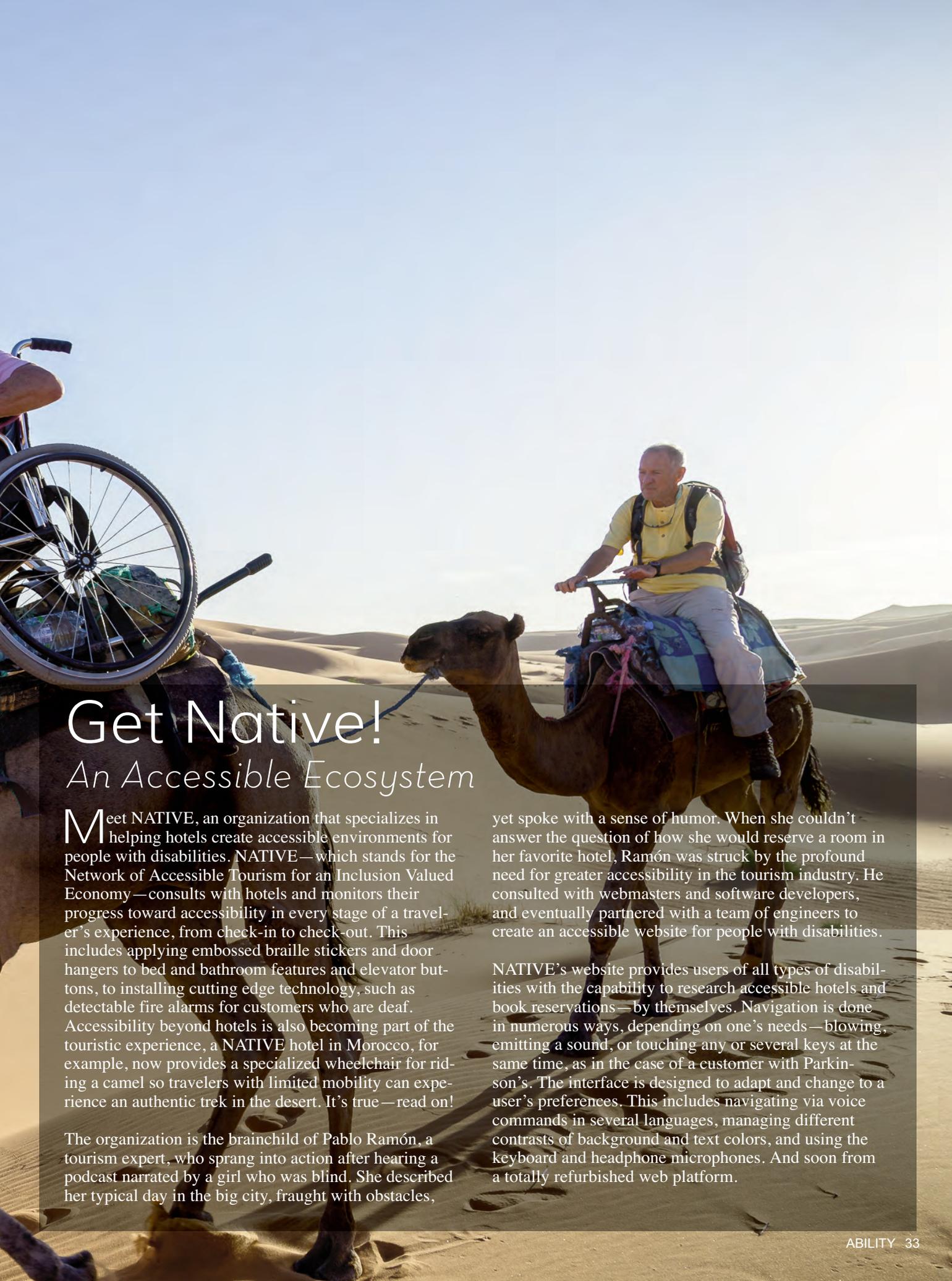
Anne Horton is a physical therapy nurse. In 20 years, she has used scores of different AT products with her patients. On the NeuroNode she says, “The NeuroNode lives up to everything the manufacturer says it does. It is a miracle technology. I can’t say that about most technologies.” ■ **ABILITY**

by John M. Williams

atechnews.com

Williams writes about disability issues — he coined the phrase assistive technology





# Get Native!

## *An Accessible Ecosystem*

Meet NATIVE, an organization that specializes in helping hotels create accessible environments for people with disabilities. NATIVE—which stands for the Network of Accessible Tourism for an Inclusion Valued Economy—consults with hotels and monitors their progress toward accessibility in every stage of a traveler’s experience, from check-in to check-out. This includes applying embossed braille stickers and door hangers to bed and bathroom features and elevator buttons, to installing cutting edge technology, such as detectable fire alarms for customers who are deaf. Accessibility beyond hotels is also becoming part of the touristic experience, a NATIVE hotel in Morocco, for example, now provides a specialized wheelchair for riding a camel so travelers with limited mobility can experience an authentic trek in the desert. It’s true—read on!

The organization is the brainchild of Pablo Ramón, a tourism expert, who sprang into action after hearing a podcast narrated by a girl who was blind. She described her typical day in the big city, fraught with obstacles,

yet spoke with a sense of humor. When she couldn’t answer the question of how she would reserve a room in her favorite hotel, Ramón was struck by the profound need for greater accessibility in the tourism industry. He consulted with webmasters and software developers, and eventually partnered with a team of engineers to create an accessible website for people with disabilities.

NATIVE’s website provides users of all types of disabilities with the capability to research accessible hotels and book reservations—by themselves. Navigation is done in numerous ways, depending on one’s needs—blowing, emitting a sound, or touching any or several keys at the same time, as in the case of a customer with Parkinson’s. The interface is designed to adapt and change to a user’s preferences. This includes navigating via voice commands in several languages, managing different contrasts of background and text colors, and using the keyboard and headphone microphones. And soon from a totally refurbished web platform.



Braille map of hotel property created by Native Hotel

NATIVE has captured global attention. They've been awarded and recognized by the World Travel Market, the World Travel and Tourism Council, the Ministry of Tourism of Morocco and many others. The organization was chosen by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as one of six projects to be promoted and expanded globally before 2022. It was also selected as one of the main projects of the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Programme, with the objective to enhance the impact of sustainable development in the tourism sector by 2030.

ABILITY chatted with Ramón to discuss NATIVE, how its interface works and the hotel industry's overall progress toward greater accessibility.

*ABILITY: What level of accessibility is offered by the*

*hotels in NATIVE's network?*

Pablo Ramón: The website, of course, is designed to encourage users to research hotels and tourism locations that offer accessible hotel options. For example, a customer who is deaf might use the website to find a hotel that offers the latest technology used to awaken people who are hard of hearing in the event of a fire alarm at night.

In fact, customers who are deaf are sometimes the most forgotten by the tourism industry. For them it's unfortunately common to be dining with family or friends but not being able to laugh at the jokes like everyone else at the table. This situation is easily avoidable using an induction loop, which is put in the middle of the table. It allows customers who are deaf to turn the hearing device on and enables them to hear the sound two



# independence

Bringing the benefits of advanced digital technology to everyone.

At Panasonic we work hard to develop products and services to bring freedom and independence to people with disabilities.

**Panasonic ideas for life**

Additional information is accessible online at [www.panasonic.com/accessibility](http://www.panasonic.com/accessibility)





ABILITY Magazine has become a main partner of this unique accessible platform

meters away yet filters out the ambient restaurant noise.

*ABILITY: Do you think the hotel industry has reached acceptable levels of accessibility?*

Ramón: To be honest with you, not at all. There are countries with more committed regulations. Maybe the United States with its American's with Disabilities Act is a reference. At NATIVE, we have developed 144 parameters of accessibility and each hotel has their own available options for each need. But in countries like Spain, with 17 regional regulations that apply different measures, I assure you that not even 1 in 10 hoteliers knows that there's a national law—the LIONDAU—which requires accessibility details but are met by only one percent of the country's establishments. Most of

them put a wheelchair toilet in a room and believe that they're done with the topic. The accessibility market is the size of the Chinese population. But it is not a broadly known fact. On a general basis our hotel members have experienced very good feedback from their PMR clients after joining NATIVE, ranging from very loyal clients to even life-changing experiences for the hoteliers themselves, as they suddenly get to know what possibilities exist and encounter people with abilities that they couldn't imagine before. For example, there was a woman who was blind who said to one of our hoteliers that he had a beautiful building.

*ABILITY: If we talk about the first link of the travel chain—online reservations—what do you think is the main barrier?*



Ramón: First of all, without an accessible website there is no information for millions of people who want to look for a hotel, even if they're dealing with Parkinson's, low vision, blindness or arthritis in their hands. It is shocking to see non-accessible websites on accessible tourism platforms. Who do they communicate to? Do your family and friends have to search for you? With our partners we offer a website that becomes hyper accessible by choosing the option that suits you. If you don't need to the different navigation options, then it can also serve as a conventional website, in six languages. But if you're someone who needs an accessible website, you can navigate by blowing, making sounds or playing any key, which substitutes for mouse click. It offers personal autonomy and freedom.

Nevertheless, what every hotel should know is that by making its website accessible it will be easily found by the public that needs it most. It's in a hotels best interest to be part of an accessibility network such as NATIVE. Also, Google and other meta searchers will promote your hotel in the rankings and with NATIVE you can be ranked amongst the first ones for accessible tourism.

Unfortunately, ignorance on these issues is still widespread. But there are signs of an awakening. Often in conversations with hoteliers, and with students of tourism, I ask them questions such as "How do you wake up a customer who is deaf and sleeping on the fifth floor when the hotel is in flames at 4 a.m.?" Or, "Can a client in a wheelchair do a camel trek?" And we would continue to list solutions that we already use for any limitation. And the faces of our attendees speak for themselves.

*ABILITY: What does NATIVE Hotels offer hoteliers?*

Ramón: In addition to including their hotel as part of the

accessible web platform in six languages, we deliver a pack of adhesive signage in Braille and relief, with all kinds of signage for bathroom amenities, door numbers, door hangers and more, including custom ones to fit any solution. There are additional options such as a hotel map in relief and Braille, and many more. Everything is amortized because there are more customers than you might think looking for these accessories. The hotels are also put in contact with a network of agencies who specialize in accessible trips. They also receive major press promotion as well as other benefits.

Accessibility in tourism is a market for the future and is growing exponentially. Moreover, the invoices generated by customers seeking accessibility are between 30 percent and 70 percent higher than those of standard ones. This is one of the key points shown by an EU study in 2014 with Surrey University. Customers with reduced mobility often travel with their friends or relatives and consume more hotel services.

We also will put hotels in contact with the suppliers of accessibility products near their hotels to create better solutions together.

But NATIVE hoteliers are often very committed to finding solutions to accessibility. For example, Paco Irizar, owner of Ruralsuite Hotel Apartamentos in Spain, designed special furniture to make each apartment's kitchen wheelchair accessible. A piece under the glass top is removable so those in wheelchair can cook and wash their dishes.

We also worked with Jean-Pierre Datcharry who owns the Kasbah Dar Daïf in Morocco, which led to the creation of a wheelchair adaptable to fit on a camel's hump. This allows customers with low mobility to enjoy a trek in the desert. Even tents come equipped with adaptive

toilets, and NATIVE is currently working on a new model of chair with improved stabilization.

*ABILITY: So taking into account that UNWTO itself has recognized the importance of your platform and is asking for its global expansion, what are NATIVE's immediate plans?*

Ramón: NATIVE is one of the six projects to be developed globally before 2022 by the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Program of the United Nations World Tourism Organization. We are designing that expansion plan with a team of almost 50 people in Spain, the United States, France, India and the Netherlands, with a broad spectrum of specialties ranging from software engineers, lawyers, accessibility consultants, specialized developers, and marketing and media experts. We prioritize working with people with disabilities because we believe that our team has to defend what we believe, in addition to being great professionals in their fields. We also test all of our new products and services, thanks to our partner associations and volunteers. The community around us is very helpful and committed to always pushing us further.

*ABILITY: And speaking of customers who need attention or accessibility services, what do these travelers think of the measures available to them to enjoy their stay?*

Ramón: In most of the hotels, you arrive at the breakfast buffet and, if you're a person who is blind, you do not know what is in each tray; if you're a person who is deaf, you do not laugh at the joke that someone just said at the table; and as someone in a wheelchair, you do not get to serve half of them articles. All these problems have a solution if your hotel is a member of NATIVE. The user would find Braille signage on all amenities and tables would have enough room for a wheelchair user, and so on.

Italy's largest association of people with disabilities gave us the results of a survey of 15,000 accessible tourism users. What 95 percent of the survey participants valued most were not the accessories that made them most comfortable, but the personal treatment received!

From our experience, we have seen this play out in countries who are warm and welcoming and who place a great emphasis on social values; people with disabilities feel more comfortable in terms of respect and approach. For example, Morocco is a frequent destination, and everyone we have spoken to agrees that the people there have treated them better than in other places. We need to have a mind shift and be truly kind in our industry. Hospitality is about giving attention and the care is in the details. And no one should be a hotelier and forget about 15 percent of the world's population.

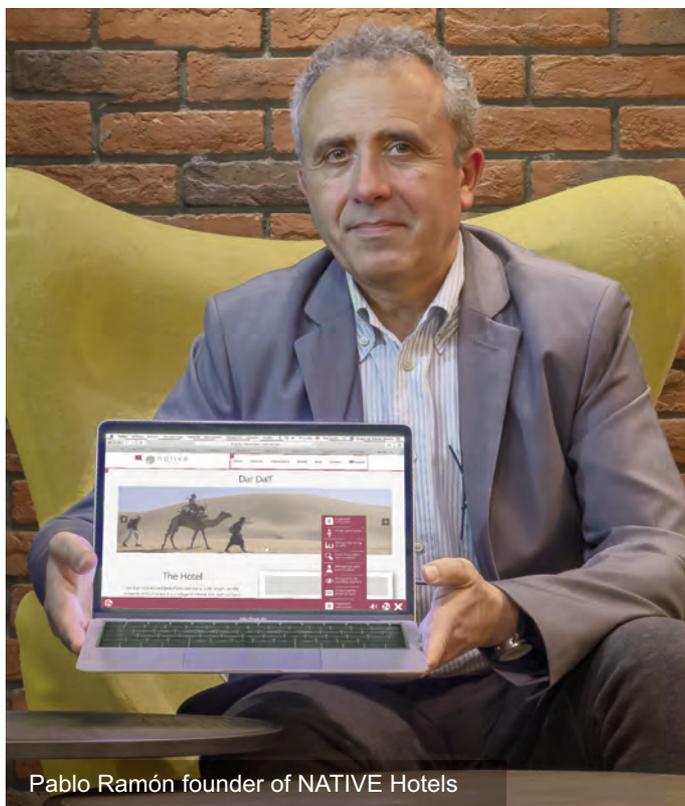
Also, as social actors, we need to stop thinking of disability as a disgrace or something technically negative. And entrepreneurs need to see that accessibility is a potential sales argument with a huge and growing market. If there is no room with an adapted bathroom for a member of the group who needs it, then we look for another hotel! And the hotel without the adapted bathroom has just lost four rooms and extra services such as spa, restaurant and others. In addition, the cost of an accessible hotel structure is practically the same as a non-accessible hotel. What increases costs is doing a posteriori work. So an important lesson is to collaborate with consultants and accessibility specialists before the construction of a hotel. NATIVE is here to help the industry professionals make a better and accessible establishment for tourists.

*ABILITY: What's next for NATIVE?*

Ramón: In the coming months, we will launch a new platform that offers new incorporations by a team of designers in Spain, the United States, the Netherlands, India and Colombia.

NATIVE is also working with the standards criteria when classifying the accessibility of each establishment. The most important thing for us is to be precise and trustworthy when describing the facilities of each hotel. That's why we collaborate with consultants and advisors in the field, certifying that every detail on our website is true. ■ **ABILITY**

[nativehotels.org](http://nativehotels.org)



Pablo Ramón founder of NATIVE Hotels

# PAUL BASAGOITIA

Professional mountain biker Paul Basagoitia was at the pinnacle of his profession. He competed with the best in the world, flying down steep terrains and pitching off cliffs in harrowing aerial maneuvers. He traveled widely and is a two-time winner of the prestigious Crankworx competition for slopestyle. But all of this would end in a devastating crash in 2015, leaving the young athlete paralyzed from the waist down.

“It’s absolutely the hardest thing that I have ever faced in my life,” says Basagoitia of his spinal cord injury (SCI). Even though doctors had little hope of him walking again let alone riding a bike, Basagoitia threw himself into recovery, applying the same rigorous athletic discipline he used for training. Today, he’s back on two wheels—not competitively, but recreationally. “I’m very blessed to be able to pedal a bike once again after being paralyzed from the waist down,” says the Nevada native.

His grueling journey, along with others who have spinal cord injuries, is the focal point of a new feature-length documentary—*Any One Of Us*—which premiered this year at the SXSW Film Festival. Before a recent screening of the film by Red Bull Media House at the Newport Beach Film Festival, Basagoitia, along with his fiancée Nicole Munk, spoke with *ABILITY* about his injury, the





Paul Basagoitia was set to win just before crashing

making of the film, and his new position with footwear company Ride Concepts.

*Chad Cooper: Do you know the people with spinal cord injuries who were interviewed in the film?*

Paul Basagoitia: No. At the time I did not know any of them. But after the film was released I got to meet a few of them, and some of them will be at the screening. I'm looking forward to hanging out with them.

*Cooper: Who will be here, do you know?*

Basagoitia: I do. Mike, Nate and Toby will be here.

*Cooper: Toby and I go way back. Same with surfer Jesse Billauer.*

Basagoitia: I've met the majority of them, but at the time the film was shot, I didn't know any of them. But since we had a big premier at SXSW, Mike came down for that, so I got to hang out with him for a few days. And then before that, Red Bull did a private screening at their headquarters, and some of the people came out to watch it and I got to meet them there.

*Cooper: Where are their headquarters?*

Basagoitia: Santa Monica.

*Cooper: Oh, right. A lot of those guys are local. Where do you live?*

Basagoitia: We both live in Reno, Nevada.

*Cooper: How long have you two been together?*

Basagoitia: We've been together for almost nine years?

Nicole Munk: Yeah, eight years, nine years.

*Cooper: Eight and a half?*

Munk: (laughs) Yeah, we don't know!

*Cooper: What do you do?*

Munk: I'm a medical assistant and an aesthetician.

*Cooper: At what point did you realize that there was going to be something produced beyond your home footage that you made?*

Basagoitia: It wasn't until about a year out. I was documenting the whole progress with my camera. I bought this camera literally the week before I got injured, and then here I was in the ICU, and I see my brand new camera. I didn't think it was ever going to be a feature film until about a year after the injury. I started documenting my whole progress and the struggle in the ICU.

To answer your question, I didn't know that it would become a feature film until about a year out.

*Cooper: How did you come together with Red Bull?*

Basagoitia: I've always had a good relationship with Red Bull. I was a brand athlete for many years. One of the athlete marketing guys would visit me at the hospital and he would see me document my whole situation. He pitched it to the guys at the Red Bull Media House that, "Hey, Paul's shooting something, and I think we could come on board and help tell the story and bring a wider awareness to the situation."

*Cooper: Had you known people who had had spinal cord injuries prior?*

Basagoitia: I did. But I did not know what they had to go through. I had a lot of friends who had spinal cord injuries, but I never knew what went on behind closed doors. I just knew that obviously you can't move and you can't feel, but I never knew the other things that go into a spinal cord injury.

*Cooper: Now that you have a disability, what was the biggest surprise for you beyond the therapy?*

Basagoitia: What was the biggest surprise about this injury? Losing the control of your bowels and your bladder. I had no idea that that was even possible with this injury. When I was living in that moment, I was so surprised. I had no idea. I remember calling one of my buddies who had a spinal cord injury, and I was like, "This is what you have to go through on a daily basis?" and he was like, "Yeah, man, this is what I go through." I felt so guilty, so bad about it, because I'd known this guy for 14 years and never knew that that's what he had to go through.

*Cooper: So proceeds from the movie are helping to raise funds for SCI research?*

Basagoitia: Right, through Wings for Life, a not-for-profit spinal cord research foundation.

*Cooper: Beyond that, what are you thinking about doing connected to—*

Basagoitia: —the spinal cord injury community?

*Cooper: Yes—volunteerism or anything connected to disabilities?*

Basagoitia: My whole goal, obviously, is to raise as much funds as possible with the film and having those funds go directly back to research. It'd be pretty amazing to say I was in charge of funding a clinical trial to find a cure for paralysis. Other than that, on the weekly, I'm always going to the hospital visiting people in the ICU center and talking about spinal cord injuries and



letting them know where I was at. And maybe there's a good chance they can recover as well. Obviously every spinal cord injury is different, but I was so lost, so confused in the beginning that I wish I had had somebody come into the ICU and explain the status and the situation. There's really no goodness with this injury. I know one of the people who works at the ICU center in my local town, and every time there's a spinal cord injury person, I'll go in and chat with them and give them some encouragement and hopefully some words they can feed off of.

*Cooper: Nice. I think some of the folks you now know from the film do some of that. I know some of them do. Do you surf?*

Basagoitia: No surfing for me.

*Cooper: Jesse has a program for people who surf and a foundation called Life Rolls One. You might want to try that out.*

Basagoitia: Yeah, I've seen some of the videos that Jesse had done in the surfing community, and they're pretty awesome.

*Cooper: You should try it.*

Basagoitia: Maybe.

Munk: Not too many waves in Reno.

Basagoitia: Yeah, there's not too much surfing. I kind of just stay on the trails. I just go on pedals these days. I keep it kind of mellow and low-key.

*Cooper: They have events literally around the world. They're fundraisers, too. So you're biking again?*

Basagoitia: It's a lot more of casual biking. I ride motorized e-bikes—they have a little motor below the cranks, and it helps you pedal when you're struggling. So anything that has a hill climb, this motor kicks in and helps, which for me is awesome, because I don't have any strength below the knees. I don't have the calf muscles, the dorsiflexion. So to have that device on the bike is a huge blessing for me.

*Cooper: Do you have drop foot?*

Basagoitia: I do, yeah. I still have paralysis on the right side. My glutes are not firing on the right side; my dorsiflexion in my calves are still asleep.

*Cooper: I have an e-bike that has the power on the handle bar—*

Basagoitia: —a throttle?

*Cooper: —it's like a motorcycle.*

Basagoitia: No, mine is a pedal assist. You still have to work for it. You still pedal. But when you're struggling,

it senses it and kicks in and helps you.

*Cooper: That is such a game changer.*

Basagoitia: Yup, absolutely.

*Cooper: (laughs) I cheat constantly.*

Basagoitia: That's OK!

*Cooper: Do you know Kurt Yeager?*

Basagoitia: I don't.

*Cooper: He has a prosthetic from a motorcycle accident, and he can do backflips on his BMX.*

Basagoitia: Oh, wow. Awesome!

*Cooper: He was in the X Games. He's an actor as well. Do you know Ricky James?*

Basagoitia: That name sounds familiar—a motocross guy?

*Cooper: Right. We went out to the track—I ride motocross a little bit—and he kicked my butt.*

Basagoitia: Yeah!

Munk: (laughs)

*Cooper: He has a spinal cord injury. They put him on the bike, strap him in—*

Basagoitia: I know Doug Henry has a setup like that. He sustained a spinal cord injury many years ago, and he built a dirt bike with a cage around it.

*Cooper: His Yamaha.*

Basagoitia: Yeah, that guys a savage.

*Cooper: He's so fast. I raced Day in the Dirt and he was in the race, but in the Pro lineup.*

Basagoitia: Yeah, he's rad.

*Cooper: You know him from—?*

Basagoitia: I don't. We have a lot of mutual friends. I'm always watching his videos. It's pretty amazing what he's doing on the motorcycle and the bucket bike.

*Cooper: I don't know about the bucket bike.*

Basagoitia: It's a downhill mountain bike. He put a ski bucket bike on it, and he's able to ride two wheels down the mountain bike courses. It's pretty amazing.

*Cooper: Going downhill on a mountain bike feels similar to motocross. The only thing I can do on a mountain bike is go downhill. When you were training did you have a pit to jump into? How did you learn to do the maneuvers?*

Basagoitia: In the early days, before there were foam pits, I would go to my local river spot and build a ramp into the water. I would learn all my tricks in the water and then over time the foam pits became a thing and I started learning all the tricks in the foam pit. And then when you feel comfortable doing those tricks in the foam pit, you're able to go to the Resi-pad, which is a masonite landing with a little bit of padding below it. And when you feel comfortable going from there, then you transition to dirt.

*Cooper: There's a film with Kurt Yeager, and he's on that pad you were talking about. They showed the film where he kept crashing—*

Basagoitia: And you just slide.

*Cooper: Which is weird, because he has a prosthetic, so it was an odd thing to watch him crash. I was wondering if the prosthetic might cause more injury.*

Basagoitia: I can't imagine. I would never want to have been thrown off the bike, that's for sure. I don't put myself in those situations. I know it's a blessing that I'm able to pedal a bike again, and I would hate to lose that, so every time I ride, I always make sure I understand the trail and know my situation.

*Cooper: When you were first learning how to do these tricks, did you have some gymnastic capabilities? How did you know you'd be able to do things in the air?*

Basagoitia: I think it was just feeling so comfortable on the bike. I felt more comfortable being on the bike than I did on land. It was just practice, like jumping in the river all the time. I used to go to the local swim center and jump off the diving boards. I'm sure that helped out quite a bit. I think that transitioned over to my bike riding.

*Cooper: When you land in the water, the water has to give a little bit of a shock. It's not like foam.*

Basagoitia: Oh, yeah, it still stings, for sure, but it's a lot better to do a back flop onto water than it is onto dirt, right? It's still not the best situation, but it's a lot better than landing on dirt.

*Cooper: You've done SXSW. Tell me about that experience.*

Basagoitia: The world premier for *Any One of Us* was at SXSW. It was the first time we were able to show the film. It was a little stressful going to that festival, because thousands of people were there, it was a ten day event,



Paul Basagoitia viewing the place of his accident

and I was a little nervous because it was the first time the public got to see the film. You're always wondering what the reactions will be with the crowd. It was nothing but positive. People loved the film. It was awesome to hear people's stories after the film. I think we sent the best messaging we possibly could with spinal cord injuries. I'm really satisfied how everything came out.

*Cooper: So this is the second festival?*

Basagoitia: Yup.

*Cooper: Where do you go from here?*

Basagoitia: We've got a few film festivals we're doing this year. The next one is in Bentonville and then Telluride. We've got three other ones, I believe. I'm just going one by one. Bentonville in Arkansas is the Geena Davis one. It's a big mountain bike hub in the South.

*Cooper: Geena Davis is the one who puts them on?*

Basagoitia: Yes, it's a big mountain bike community with the theme of inclusion.

*Cooper: A theme of inclusion? Most of the time the general term forgets to include disability—have you been learning the nuances?*

Basagoitia: What do you mean?

*Cooper: When I hear "inclusion," I think disability, but the general population doesn't. It's gender and/or other minorities. Are you seeing this issue?*

Basagoitia: I think my life is still the same. Things are a lot harder, it takes a lot more time to get to my car, to go grocery shopping, to do the little things in life. But I don't feel like I have a disability, even though I can't do a lot of things I used to be able to. I do the stuff I know I can do, and I enjoy that as much as possible. I don't know if I answered your question.

*Cooper: You're in a unique position because within your sport you had celebrity status, and now you've got this film. But it usually becomes difficult for other people who have acquired an injury to get back into society. They see society and employers look at them sometimes as different. I don't know if you're experiencing that yet.*

Basagoitia: Absolutely. I was a paid athlete for mountain biking. I was paid to go to these events and compete and do well. Obviously, I can't do that any more. I had to find another route to make income, and I just recently got a new position at a new shoe company called Ride Concepts. I'm dealing with all global athletes, so I was able to develop the mountain bike program for them. Don't get me wrong, when I go to these events, I wish I was out there competing, but it brings me joy to still help athletes and still be involved with the mountain bike community, maybe not on the competitive side of

things, but it's a blessing that I've found another way to make things work.

*Cooper: Have you done any modeling?*

Basagoitia: Modeling? No. No modeling for me.

*Cooper: You're a handsome guy.*

Munk: (laughs) Yes he is!

*Cooper: You should think about that. There is a push to have "inclusion" in models.*

Basagoitia: I never even considered it. I've got a lot of scars on my body. I don't know if that's attractive. You see my back, and it's like, "Whoa! What happened to that guy?"

*Cooper: Can you talk about your injury?*

Basagoitia: I got hurt at St. George, Utah, at the Red Bull Rampage, which is in Zion Park, 30 minutes from St. George, Utah. I was CARE-flighted to St. George, had a 10-and-a-half-hour operation. I was in the ICU for a week, and then I was in the rehab center there for another week, and then I got transferred over to Craig Hospital. I was there for three months doing my whole rehab. From there I went home and built a whole training facility at the house and now I work out at the house an hour and a half every day.

*Cooper: How about health insurance?*

Basagoitia: I had insurance. The problem with my insurance is that once you meet your deductible, you're kind of on your own. After I met my deductible, the mountain bike community rallied, we did some fundraisers to take care of the other costs, but for the most part my insurance took care of everything.

*Cooper: So if you don't have a backstop like you had—celebrities and you were able to get people to step up and crowdfund—people who don't have that are out of luck?*

Basagoitia: I think insurance took care of the majority of the costs, but we weren't able to compete at these events unless we had our own self-insurance. I can't imagine getting injured like this without having insurance.

*Cooper: With your new job, do you travel?*

Basagoitia: Yes, a little traveling here and there. I go to a lot of mountain bike events, overseeing the athletes, seeing how they're doing, making sure they have the product, helping out with the social media side of things, just trying to represent the brand the best way we can. It's a brand-new company, a small company, there are only five people working for this brand, so I do a lit-

tle bit of everything. I'm in charge of athletes, dealing with social media, helping out with the product development side of things, and I'm an ambassador for the brand as well.

*Cooper: What is the brand?*

Basagoitia: It's a new shoe company called Ride Concepts. It's based out of Truckee, CA.

*Cooper: What are they making exactly?*

Basagoitia: It's a mountain bike shoe. We do have some clips shoes coming out next month. The shoe is designed for mountain bikers. It's very stiff. It has a sole that's really grippy, that has great direct contact to the pedal. It's a great product.

*Cooper: Can they be bought online or in stores?*

Basagoitia: You can go online and purchase the shoes, and we just opened up our global distribution, so we're now selling in 35 countries.

*Cooper: When you were competing, did you travel around the world for different events?*

Basagoitia: I did, yeah. When I was a professional athlete, I would travel overseas about five or six times a year. I would go to Canada and all around the world. I was very blessed to see the world because of the bicycle, for sure.

*Cooper: Were those events similar to Rampage? Or is that one unique?*

Basagoitia: Rampage is its own event. There's nothing like the Red Bull Rampage. These other events I was going to were more slope-style events. Red Bull Rampage is itself. Rampage only happens once a year and there's no other big mountain events.

*Cooper: It's so extreme. When I watched—I don't understand how people can practice that.*

Basagoitia: It's as extreme as you want it to be. The thing with Red Bull Rampage is, you are out there to design what you want to ride. Nobody else is telling you how to ride. You have full control. "I'm going to go down this ridge line, down this chute. Hey, I think I can do that drop." It's the way you want to incorporate your riding style on that terrain. You can design something that's absolutely insane, or you can play the same route. There are safe ways down that, believe it or not, but obviously it's not going to get judged well.

*Cooper: So that's how it works? The judges make a determination of the extreme nature and the technical skills of a particular path?*

Basagoitia: Exactly. We're out there a week before the finals, working on our trails, finding unique lines, and hopefully being able to ride at our best ability.

*Cooper: When I watched you do that, I thought, Who would tell people to do that? But you told yourself.*

Basagoitia: I told myself, felt it, worked on it, visualized it, rode it the year before, and I wasn't too stressed out on it, believe it or not. The most I was stressed out about that whole Rampage line was at the top when I back-flipped over the canyon. That was the only thing I was really stressed out about. And my crash happened on something that I wasn't even thinking twice about.

*Cooper: Interesting. So you remember everything?*

Basagoitia: Yeah, I wish I had blacked out. Unfortunately I was wide awake. I remember word by word, second by second. Still, today, I can describe that crash like it happened yesterday. It's still in the back of my mind, absolutely.

*Cooper: Have you talked to any psychologists or psychiatrists about PTSD?*

Basagoitia: No, I don't think I sustained that as much. Once in a while, every time I see a video of the Red Bull Rampage or if I see that type of terrain or when I watched the documentary, it obviously brings me back to that moment.

*Cooper: Just remember, that could be an issue in the future. I had a hard time watching it. I hit a deer on a motorcycle when I was young, going really fast, and I still get haunted, even though I ride street and dirt bikes. I still have this thing for a while as I get on the bike, once I'm on the bike I'm good, but getting on I know it's PTSD. Not that you're going to go that route.*

Basagoitia: Thanks for bringing that to my attention.

*Cooper: Can you think of anything else you want to mention?*

Basagoitia: The film will come out in September 2019. All proceeds are going straight to Wings for Life. Hopefully we can fund a nice clinical trial and find a cure one day. I think it's possible; it's just a matter of time.

*Cooper: Have you talked to any doctors or researchers who are working in this area?*

Basagoitia: I spoke to Hans Keirstead, he's in the film, but other than Hans, I haven't really spoken to anybody outside the film. I know Wings for Life has contacted every single one that's going on around the world.

*Cooper: Have you talked to anyone at Wings for Life? Aren't they based in Austria?*

Basagoitia: Yes, they are, and we have people here in the US as well. Wagner, he's in charge of all USA Wings for Life. They do events, like the World Run, and they did a scavenger hunt last year.

*Cooper: Do you ride motorcycles?*

Basagoitia: No, a motorcycle's too dangerous for me.

*Cooper: But you get to wear safety gear. I interviewed Dr. Chris Leatt.*

Basagoitia: Oh, yeah, the neurosurgeon from S. Africa.

*Cooper: Right. I don't see people doing what you're doing on the bikes wearing equipment.*

Basagoitia: There are a lot of people who wear neck braces. I was wearing a back brace when I got hurt. There's only so much you can do to save the back when you compress it at the angle I did, even wearing the back brace doesn't do anything.

*Cooper: It might have mitigated some trauma.*

Basagoitia: I don't think so. I've talked to the company that made the back brace and they said the same thing. It's not so much trying to support the spine laterally, it's about road rash and all that. He said, "We don't design the back brace to support the spine, it's for road rash."

*Cooper: Did you know that when you were wearing it?*

Basagoitia: No. I wore it just because it's another piece of protection that I don't mind wearing.

*Cooper: The idea of having too much on you, limiting your mobility.*

Basagoitia: The back brace I had was super slim and very comfortable. It felt like a life jacket. It wasn't too bad.

*Cooper: I wear so much safety equipment I can barely move. Right now you're doing your own rehab with your exercise?*

Basagoitia: Yeah. I'm doing an hour and a half at the house, always trying to get better. They say two years is the most you get back with this injury, but I want to experience the difference. I'm going to continue to try to get better, whether it will happen or not. It's my lifestyle now. I wake up, put in the hours and try to get better. There's not a day that goes by when I'm not trying to improve with this injury.

*Cooper: Nicole, tell me about your role in the film.*

Munk: I think my role for Paul and for this film was to be the support system, to just being there in tough times and great times.

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Basagoitia: With this injury, you definitely can't do it alone. I think a support system is very, very important. Without having her on the side and the mountain bike community and friends being involved, I don't know if I would have made the progress that I have.

Cooper: *Had you thought about suicide?*

Basagoitia: Not necessarily suicide, but there were times like, "Man, do I want to live like this for the rest of my life?" I don't know if it was suicide. I didn't think of a way to do it.

Cooper: *With injuries like that, it usually goes through the mind, "What am I going to do now?"*

Basagoitia: When I started having those moments, I pushed all that energy into the rehab. Now it helps me clear my mind. Every time I'm working out, riding the bike, whatever, it helps me. I think when I started thinking those moments was when I was by myself, lonely, on the couch. I think that's when those moments occur. But as long as I stay busy and active and keep a focused mind on recovery, that helps a lot.

Cooper: *You're a competitive person to begin with, so you set a goal and then—*

Basagoitia: I think so. I've been competing at some level since I was six years old, and still today I'm really competitive. Maybe not necessarily on the biking side

of things, but with this injury and recovery and putting in the hours I would be doing if I were doing a competition, but instead into my recovery.

Cooper: *Your engaged?*

Munk: We're engaged. We plan on hopefully tying the knot on 2/20/20. That's the date we've been eyeballing.

Cooper: *So you have some medical background? Has that helped?*

Munk: Yeah, a medical background is a blessing and a curse when something devastating happens to family or friends or anyone you love. I think I knew more than I wanted to in the first couple hours of the crash, but it ended up working pretty well, being able to ask the right questions and seeing a little bit of the inpatient side and knowing what was going to happen in terms of depression and anxiety, being scared. Being in that setting was not that foreign to me. I'm grateful for that.

Cooper: *Is that why you started dating, just in case—*

Basagoitia: No, that was definitely not the reason. But one of the reasons. (laughter)

Munk: He's smart! (laughs) ■ ABILITY

[rideconcepts.com](http://rideconcepts.com)  
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# JING GE, PhD

How do you feel? What are you doing? Where are you?

Emojis, tiny images people use instead of words when texting on smart phones and social media, are the answer. But what do they really say? How do we know? Why are they used when it sometimes takes longer to find the emoji than to type its meaning?

The answers to these questions (and many more) are the topics of Dr. Jing Ge's work at UC Berkeley and her passion.

Emojis are more than an image on social media telling the world how someone feels. Emojis, when used together, can become a complete thought like an actual language. Dr. Ge studies the ways emojis are used around the world and how emojis are used to communicate.

Emojis tend to be visually universal, but each can have a unique cultural meaning. A positive emoji in China could be a negative one in the United States.

Some think using emojis is going backwards in communications, going back to using symbols instead of words in language.

Dr. Ge explores the expanding uses for emojis, for instance, in the medical field when a patient has a difficulty expressing themselves. Emojis can bridge the communication gap. Similarly, people with trauma can benefit from emojis since emojis can reveal much more than feelings, possibly even revealing crisis or medical needs.

We recently sat down with Dr. Ge, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow and Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at UC Berkeley, to talk emojis. We met up with her at the Web Conference in San Francisco, where she presented her research with emojis.

Editor's note: Not only is Dr. Ge cool because she studies emojis, but she also has an exciting life. You may find her in a race car in Laguna Seca or in her art studio, working on her newest piece.



Dr. Ge donates the proceeds from the sale of her art to an orphanage in China.

Chet Cooper: Can you talk about the presentation that you gave at the Web Conference?

Ge: The topic was emoji sequence use to enact personal identity. We talk a lot about emojis, but one thing I want to argue is the use of a single emoji to express sentiments and emotions. Yet, there's one thing they're missing which is the phenomenon of people who use two or more than two emojis to express different semantic meanings. This idea is huge.

Celebrities and politicians all use emoji sequences to convey an idea or tell a story. If you think this doesn't matter, or you don't care, that's fine. But, if you really look at its history and growth there is even an emoji writing class, an elementary teacher helping her children communicate, and how children can write emoji as part of their education.

Cooper: Do you think it's going to change in the way we communicate, that we're using symbols—are we kind of going backward?

Ge: This is the discussion, is emoji a new language or an old language? I won't say it's really fully changed.

Formal language is always there. But I would say it is a digitally mediated graphical language. There are no grammar properties, so you can't say it's a formal language. But it is evolving into a digitally mediated graphical language. It can substitute for words and phrases and convey a complete idea. So based on this argument, I have looked at the pragmatic and communicative functions of emojis. Now I look at the grammar-like patterns.

What are the patterns? When they string the different emoji together, it looks pretty crazy, like nonsense, but there are certain patterns that they string together. I won't call it grammar, but there's a grammatical pattern.

Cooper: What they're doing is creating a string as a sequence to communicate?

Ge: Yeah. In order to make it more understandable. Otherwise there are no patterns and you won't understand. It is not randomly put together.

Cooper: But an author understands the language of their emojis, where maybe an outsider would look at it and say it's nonsense?

Ge: Yes.

Cooper: It's both sides of reading these symbols. But maybe the general population hasn't caught up to that.

Ge: A few of these emoji sequences are really something (used by) millennials and teenagers; they put them together for having fun. A student shared a story that really, really touched my heart.

She volunteered working in a care home. The people have dementia, and there were two people who had dementia who couldn't speak. They couldn't type because they didn't know how to spell things. They couldn't communicate. They felt frustrated, that is, until my student signed up for my emoji course. She taught (residents) how to use an emoji to communicate to text back and forth.

People who have dementia use emojis to talk. And, they talk more. And, they are happier. They have really bonded with my student because they can communicate. In the beginning, they use one emoji, like hearts. My student asked, "Do you like ice cream?" And, the response would be "heart ice."

Cooper: They taught them emoji language?

Ge: Yes. They're more and more confident, and these two ladies just put up two or three emoji to convey the idea. Like "love ice cream." or "arm cry," like, "My arm feels pain." When we look at this real-life example, can you say that these are nonsense? They're not. They're not nonsense.



In 1997 SoftBank emoji set released earlier than the first known date of the Docomo emoji set (in "1998 or 1999"), one of the most iconic emoji characters now encoded as U+1F4A9 PILE OF POO in the Unicode Standard, originated in this release



Apple working with American Council of the Blind, the Cerebral Palsy Foundation and the National Association of the Deaf, Apple's submission to Unicode: New proposed emojis. Person in Manual Wheelchair; Deaf Sign; Person with White Cane; Prosthetic Leg; Service Dog with Vest and Leash. Person in Power Wheelchair; Ear with Hearing Aid; Guide Dog with Harness; Prosthetic Arm





Cooper: It's also not nonsense for people who have dyslexia and have a hard time writing something, where the emoji can easily represent the thought process without having to write something that an emoji can convey with one symbol.

Ge: In my talk this morning, I specifically looked at how (people) use emojis. Every time we talk about things, when we talk in public, we try to express ourselves and try to establish our own personal identity—who we are. So this morning, I talked about how users use emoji sequences to express who they are—to establish their own personal identity. That's the basic topic that I delivered this morning. I looked at the linguistic elements.

When we talk about things from the linguistic perspective, we use different linguistic elements to enact our personal identity. We can express our stance as a first-person pronoun, or use an attitude marker, like "I." You use the first-person pronoun to express your personal stance. I look at what type of linguistic elements are embedded in emoji sequences that are used to express themselves and establish their personal identity.

Cooper: Can you give an example?

Ge: An example, the first emoji is green tea. The second emoji is sad face or disappointed face. The third emoji is a fox, an animal emoji that means fox. In this sentence, the user establishes or enacts their personal identity through the second emoji, disappointed face. That's her attitudinal marker. And also through self-mention, because that fox is the emoji to represent herself as a first-person pronoun.

Cooper: So she can't have tea with her friend?

Ge: This is nonlinear. This is also the beautiful part. They don't have a subjective verb and object. It's completely opposite. They say, "For green tea, this like I." Basically, "I dislike green tea." The user uses the fox emoji to represent herself, that is the first-person pronoun I.

Cooper: But that's going left to right?

Ge: Yes. It's nonlinear. That's the beautiful part of emoji sequences.

Cooper: Nonlinear? I thought it had to be linear.

Ge: There are a lot of nonlinear looking at the patterns. They don't follow subject-verb-object. The order is

object-verb-subject. It's amazing. It's more pragmatic. They put the word they want to emphasize in the front.

Cooper: So she was saying she doesn't like the tea. So she shows the tea first, she's not happy about the tea, and then her avatar is the fox.

Ge: Exactly. There are two linguistic elements. It's attitudinal marker—



Cooper: But how do the people know she's the fox?

Ge: This is because I collect data from celebrities. That fox is her name in the TV show, so that's more well-recognized. And again, it needs a lot of contextual clues to analyze. It's more like discourse analogies, when you look at the whole context.

Cooper: So linguistically, it makes sense for you to study this?

Ge: I want to apply this in a different context, to make a greater impact. In the next phase I want to apply emoji research on students mental health and disabilities.

Cooper: Can you expand on what that means to you?

Ge: For example, with students right now, we know, specifically at Berkeley, depression rates are increasing. Students get more depressed. What are their problems? But, if we interview them and say, "Hey, what's your problem?" they don't want to tell you.

I want to use emojis with different emotions and sentiments—this is one direction I can pursue, more straightforward—that help them acknowledge their feelings and become more aware of their emotions. Whether they're depressed or angry or frustrated, it can be expressed.

This is straightforward. And even better, they can generate an emoji and use the emoji to write something. And I can use the emoji to know their thoughts, their insights about their courses, their lives, their campus life, their opinion of their professors and so on. This is a way to know students' insights, their needs, their wants, their problems, and their emotions.

We know they're not happy, but "happy" is too abstract. Why aren't they happy?

Cooper: And, to what degree of unhappiness, and what degree concerning mental health issues that are severe.

Ge: Yes, and after this course I'm working on a kind of

self-reflection article, student engagement through happiness. It's more like a blog post that will be published by UC Berkeley. I want to see how to engage students through happiness.

Cooper: Is that still emoji-based? Is that separate?

Ge: Separate. Happiness, because I'm really interested in students' mental health?

Cooper: You don't care about anybody else's happiness?

Ge: (laughs) Of course I care about everybody's health! That's why I study emojis.

Cooper: When you say that, you're supposed to put a happy face.

Ge: Yeah, I should! Do you use emojis, by the way?

Cooper: Do I? I did one just this morning. We had a conference call before I came here. Our side was having a difficult time understanding another company's proposal. I emailed our team, "Let's talk on the phone before the meeting," my emojis were a head blowing up and then a happy face.

Ge: (laughs) Nice! I like it! Perfect!

Cooper: Sometimes I'll hit an emoji on the phone that I see, but when it goes into text, it changes.

Ge: Yeah, that's one thing they have to fix. Sometimes I send one emoji, like "I'd enjoy sauna," my emoji clipboard shows that. And when my friend receives it, it's "A guy enjoys sauna!" Google, Microsoft, Apple have their own emoji keyboards, so that's why it renders differently on different platforms and different devices. This is a problem.

Cooper: I sent a thumbs-up, and they got a middle finger.

Ge: Oh, that's impossible! (laughs)

Cooper: You mentioned doing some work on disabilities.

Ge: I'm really interested in digital anthropology. Have you heard of the nonprofit organization Design Justice? Today we talked about AI (artificial intelligence) technology. It's pretty fancy, which is good. One thing I realized is how these fancy technologies can facilitate people from different groups like disabilities, people who have dementia, people who have hearing difficulties, and any group of vulnerable people. To what extent can they benefit from these fancy technologies—AI?

Cooper: What country are you from?

Ge: Originally, I'm from China, but I'm half-Japanese and half-Chinese.

Cooper: Is there a difference in cultural use of emojis?

Ge: Yeah, definitely, especially the sentiment. Smiling face in a Western cultural context means you are happy, but in an Asian context, especially in China, the smiling face is to be polite. If you send me something, then I send you a smiling face, it doesn't mean I'm happy. I just try to avoid the silence, to be polite, just like "Got it." It doesn't mean that I'm happy. It's more the cultural context, and also the emoji that's smiling, you cover your mouth.

Cooper: I see that in Asia all the time. They constantly put their hands up over their mouths. So there's an emoji for that?

Ge: There's an emoji for that. I'm thinking of Western context of my students and some of my colleagues. I don't know what scenario you use emoji with mouth covered. How do you interpret it if I send you an emoji with my hand covering my mouth?

Cooper: When I've made a joke and they laugh I thought they were thinking, "Maybe I shouldn't be laughing about this."

Ge: OK, but in Chinese and also Japanese context, as women, we're supposed to laugh without showing our teeth.

Cooper: It's a cultural thing about teeth showing?

Ge: Yes, in the Japanese or Chinese culture, it's not nice smiling with our teeth exposed. We wish to be more elegant.

Cooper: But I don't see men doing that. They don't seem to mind showing their teeth.

Ge: That's just for females, to be more elegant, more well-educated and you're not supposed to show your teeth. If you watch the old movies that go back to the Asian times, you'll see, it's just like that.

Cooper: Never knew it was about the teeth. I thought it was about the concept of not laughing or not showing that they found humor in something.

Ge: That's also a deeply culture-related emoji. So in this class we cover social uses of emoji, social functions of emoji, and then emojis used in different cultural contexts, emoji and gender, and emoji and race.

Cooper: Can you give me some samples of those last ones?

Ge: This is really interesting. I didn't study this, but

there are some studies on why the people don't use the white skin tone color emoji online. I asked my students, and they said they won't, either. In emojis, we have a different skin color. You have black, yellow, white. You're supposed to use the white emoji skin color because you're white, right?

This study shows that white people don't use the white skin tone color to indicate their real race. And in some scenarios, white people use black skin tone color when they use emojis. You know why? First of all, they don't want to show their white privilege. That's why—for example, say, black people or people of color post something to gather support from somebody, white people don't want to say, "Yeah, I support you, and by the way, I'm white." They don't want to overemphasize—I think color and race is really overemphasized in the West, especially North America, in this context.

So people try to de-emphasize, downplay their race online, so they don't use it. And for the people who use black skin tone color, they try to create this affiliation with the black community because the black community is huge here in the U.S. So the white people use black skin tone color. They try to have this affiliation to build this intimacy with this community.

Cooper: And you're picking up this data from Twitter?

Ge: Yes, Twitter. And also, white people use black emoji because their skin is dark, not necessarily to express their race. So there are some ambiguities there, but there are some motivations why they don't use white skin.

Cooper: Picking up these analytics, the metrics of whoever has done that study, do you know if they talked to some of these white privileged people to see if that's the purpose of them doing that?

Ge: In this class I have a lot of white students, and I just asked them. And it's the same answer from them. It's quite interesting. They said, "We don't want to overemphasize our skin tone color online and exclude ourselves from this online community." They just don't want to do that. "Hey, I'm white, I'm so awesome!"

Cooper: And when you're using emojis, do you identify your background?

Ge: Because I'm Asian, we just use the default, the yellow skin tone color.

Cooper: I'm using the default. But these people are specifically grabbing skin tone emoji that are beyond what they are, purposely? They're not defaults?

Ge: Not default. They can choose black, yellow, or white to indicate their race. This is part of emojis, gender and race. In this whole course, it's really about

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Jing Ge, PhD

emoji from anthropological perspective, how people from different communities, different cultures, different societies use emojis to interact with each other and to form the communities. It's quite interesting, a quite interesting course.

Cooper: Tell me about your class at Berkeley.

Ge: The name of my course is "Anthropology of Social Media: The Study of the Emoji." This course looks at how emojis have been used in the different social and cultural contexts and how emojis are integrated by people from different groups and communities. We have also looked at emoji and gender, how female and male emoji users use emojis differently.

Cooper: Can you give me an example?

Ge: For example, females use much more emojis than males. Females use more face-related emoji to express their emotions, versus guys use the heart emoji more.

Cooper: Guys use heart more than women?

Ge: Yeah, but women use more face-related emojis.

Cooper: So they're showing more specific emotional connection with the emoji because the faces have different

expressions, where the male is just more general?

Ge: That makes sense when we think about language and gender. Women tend to express more emotions than guys. This is not surprising, but I think the most surprising part we have talked about in class is when females talk to females, they use more polite and intimate emojis like hearts or the face-related emoji, like the smiling face. But when we put a female in the mixed gender group, when females talk in this online group, there's males and females. When females use emojis in this scenario, they use the winking face more. They express humor and flirt with somebody else and try to express that they have a sense of humor.

Cooper: So a person uses humor, and they consider that flirting? Or is that just a general concept?

Ge: That's a general concept. So definitely, females use more emojis than guys. And guys use a different type of emoji, and the pattern's different. Females use more emojis dispersed in different locations in one sentence, versus the guys who use a string of emojis. The guys use repetitive emojis as a sequence or a sequence of repetitive emojis, but the females use many emojis in one sentence, but they disperse emojis in different locations in one sentence.

Cooper: How are you gathering data? Are you using some form of AI?

Ge: There's some Twitter data that's public, and also I look at Chinese Weibo that's also public data. I just collect the data that's open to the public domain.

Cooper: Is there such a thing as an emoji community?

Ge: This morning, this conference, this emoji workshop, is a community. I was there last year at Stanford, the first International Emoji Workshop. And this year it's the same. We meet and stay in touch and we share our work. We do a lot of collaboration with each other. So yes, it is a community.

Cooper: Have you heard of anyone starting a community purposely only to use emojis, no regular text?

Ge: Yes. There is an app. This guy, he presented his work, I just now talked to him. He built this app called "Emoji First." You're not allowed to put text. You share where you are and you share your thoughts, your opinions about the service at the restaurant, whatever. You only use emojis. There's a platform. Now they have 3,000 users. And I would say that's a community.

Cooper: What was the most surprising thing you found out about emojis?

Ge: I would say it's really an eye-opening experience. As a researcher, I focused on my own topic, quite a narrow one. I focused on one or two perspectives, that's it. But during this process, I expanded the horizon of my understanding about emojis, because I have read a lot of articles about this emoji research community, what's going on there, how emojis have been studied from different perspectives and also different angles. This is the first thing.

The second, I think, personally is—the intellectual capacity. Emojis are emojis. In order to teach students, I have to answer one question: to what extent, or how can an emoji course contribute the anthropology. Otherwise my course cannot be passed.

I gave myself the space—this surprised me. I confronted the huge theoretical foundation. And also, by studying emojis, I can advance some of the communication theories, anthropology-related theories and methodologies. This is the contribution. I never thought an emoji course could make such a contribution.

These theories are old, and they're used to study texts or photographs or visual communication. But by applying these theories to study emoji, it surprised me how this type of research can advance different types of communication and cultural theories. That is an encouragement because I see the impact of my research, not only the practical impact, but also the

theoretical impact. This also surprised me.

Cooper: How would you say to a layman that you've gone from A to B?

Ge: Whatever we do, whatever we say, we can categorize our speech, our words, into different categories. This is direct if I ask you a question.

We have one assertive category, where you make an announcement or give factual information. That's assertive.

And then when you make a compliment on my boots, that's expressive. You express your emotion, opinion, attitude.

When you ask me—do you have time later, that's directive, or if I ask you something or ask you to do something.

There are five categories of speech act. When I study emojis' differences, I want to apply these different categories. What category can be categorized by using these different categories? Some emoji sequences just cannot fit into these categories. What to do? I have to expand; I have to create new categories.

Traditionally, speech acts only have five categories. But these five categories cannot be really fully used to categorize emoji sequences. I have leftover data. I have some emojis with nowhere to go. They're like orphans. What to do? I create a new category.

Cooper: So you adopted them?

Ge: Yeah, I adopted them. (laughs) I gave them a new name—

Cooper: —and purpose.

Ge: Yeah, and now they're family.

Cooper: How are you describing the sixth or seventh categories?

Ge: I look at their features. When you want to describe something, this cell phone, there are some characteristics, some features, and I use these features to come up with a name. Does that make sense?

Cooper: Dealing with objects, descriptive? Did you come up with a name?

Ge: Yes, I did.

Cooper: What were the orphans' names?

Ge: It's still in the process. Just like, you have your Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday dress code. And then if all of a sudden you need to go to another

occasion or another social event, and then you realize that your traditional dress code categories cannot be used with that occasion, what to do? You create another category of dress code. You need to bring in new things. That's the theoretical contribution.

Cooper: Let's go back about the disenfranchised groups you mentioned before. You were talking about people who are blind, deaf, etc. How are you envisioning the emojis support them, if that's where you're going?

Ge: I think first is the categories from the design perspective, there's an LGBTQ group. Again, we want to use emojis to represent ourselves. I talked to people from transgender and LGBTQ community and asked them, "Can you find an emoji to describe or express yourself?" The answer is, "No."

People with differences, and there are a lot of—even people who have, let's say, mental health issues or feel depressed. Can you see an emoji to indicate, "I feel depressed?" If I send this to you, you know you probably need to give me more support. This knowledge will most likely translate to your action. If you know, you probably will change the way you talk to this person, you'll be more careful or more attentive.

Cooper: Are you saying there should be something more serious in the emojis that are developed that can express depression?

Ge: Mm-hmm. And, also for people with eating disorders. I did some data mining, but I didn't finish. But the preliminary finding is that a lot of millennials and teenagers use the pig head emoji to express when they have an eating disorder on Twitter.

Cooper: Are they saying they have an eating disorder, or someone else?

Ge: They have. If I have an eating disorder—

Cooper: They've chosen the face of a pig?

Ge: Yeah. They use this pig emoji a lot either in a text or beside my user name.

Cooper: So it's the only thing they could find that they felt like they could use?

Ge: Yeah, they are not satisfied with their body shape and they have an eating disorder. And this is one thing I realized.

Cooper: That's interesting. They really aren't pigs, just the opposite.

Ge: Exactly. This is the research I presented in California at the Academy of Science. This year is the Year of the Pig.

Cooper: For China.

Ge: Right. So my topic is how the pig from China meets the pig from North America because in China the pig is really cute, humble. It's a nice symbol. But in North America it's negative. People use this to convey information regarding corruption, bankruptcy, eating disorder, mental health.

Cooper: That's a real difference. So you've always thought of the pig as being adorable and cute and not anything in a negative context?

Ge: Yeah. I looked at the data from Twitter and it was pretty amazing. The emoji can really help people to—I don't know, express their problems. This is huge. We really want to predict something, that this person has the intention to commit suicide. If we can extract some information to help us to predict something, we can save people's lives!

Cooper: Do you know of anyone who's talking to psychiatrists about this, looking into any way to gather some data about this, usage, clinical trials?

Ge: No. This is my next step because I'm really interested in mental health, especially students' mental health.

Cooper: Do you know any psychiatrists to work with?

Ge: I'm still working on—I'm approaching professors from public health at UC Berkeley. I'm really interested in students' mental health. If I can put emojis in this context, I could make a little contribution. I think that's a great idea. It's another unknown path to pursue to make a bigger impact.

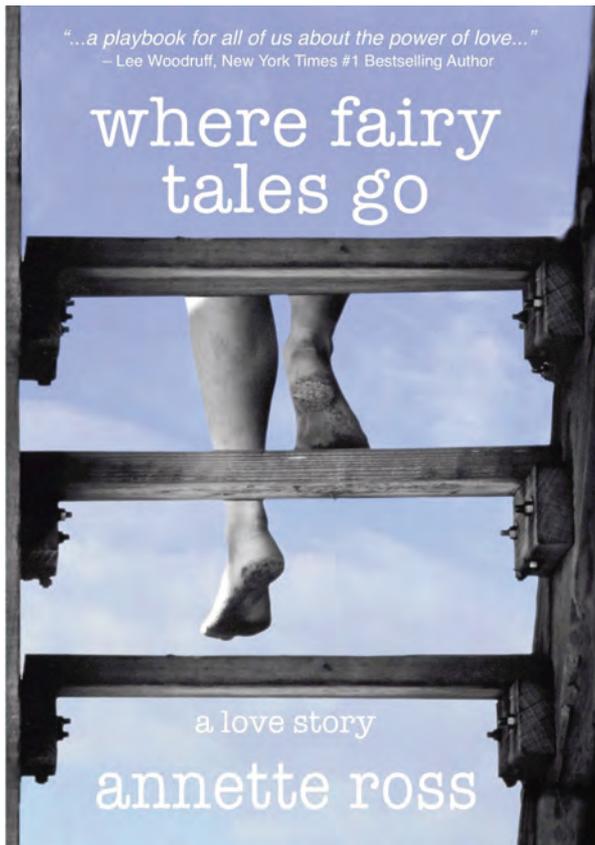
Globally, you don't have to have learned grammar rules and spelling. I looked at some other papers, about rural China where a lot of farmers don't have a higher education, people with lower literacy use emojis a lot. They don't have to think about grammar and how to make sentences. They just express their ideas. If that works, why not?

Cooper: If you have dyslexia, an emoji is a quick answer without taking time to check spelling and sentence structure. Emoji with a purpose. That's your new presentation.

Ge: (laughs) Yes, emojis can be much more than cute symbols. ■ ABILITY



[anthropology.berkeley.edu/jing-ge](http://anthropology.berkeley.edu/jing-ge)  
[emojipedia.org](http://emojipedia.org)



## EXCERPT: 'where fairy tales go'

January 2000

"Do you know what has happened to you?" he asked, as if he was anxious to deliver the bad news. "Not fully," I replied. "You may never walk again," he said somberly.

"Do you know what a spinal cord injury is?" he asked. I didn't, but knew instinctively it wasn't good. He explained that the injury was not reversible, there was no going back, and it would be a long road. "That can't be true," I said, as I looked down at my legs. I started to touch them, rub them, almost hug them with my hands. They belonged to me, and I depended on them to move. I had no faith in this doctor's words. He didn't know me. I didn't believe for a moment that my body would betray me. I would heal.

I felt a flicker of hope each morning when the team of neurologists arrived at my bedside, armed with a coffee cups, clipboards, and pens. After a spinal cord injury, it's a positive sign if you can begin to move a toe—and the sooner the better. The residents would pull back my sheets and instruct me, "Wiggle your toes." I tried. I mean to say I really tried. My toes did not cooperate. My brain sent the signal. I could think the thought, but my body remained perfectly still. The young doctors jotted notes and looked at one another ominously. They'd never heard of an epidural causing paralysis before.

After the residents left, their leader, Dr. Stephen Strittmatter, would often stay behind. A specialist with a lengthy list of impressive credentials, he was soft spoken and reserved, but also deeply compassionate. He spoke to me as a big brother would, and I felt that I was more than a diagnosis to him. He confided that having me there was a reminder that a real person would one day benefit from their sustained efforts. He described in simple, layman's terms what he saw on the films. He drew many pictures. He brought the MRI images to show me exactly where my spinal cord had narrowed.

"That's my problem? You must be joking!" I thought that whatever was inhibiting my use of half my body would show up as something more obvious. But no. In the lower portion of my back, there was a place where the cord was a hair's-width thinner than the rest, and that was it. A nonevent if you ask me.

"There are no cures?" I pleaded. He was patient with me. I asked the same question every time I saw him, and each time he responded evenly, without the slightest hint of frustration. "We have made progress, and you might make some strides through therapy, but as of now, no, there are no cures." He looked to see if I understood him. I did; we did. Not knowing what else to say he squeezed my hand and left the room.

•••

Three weeks earlier, Bill and I had known exactly what lay ahead for us—life with a toddler and her newborn sister, a wonderful new home, a successful business, exceptional friends, and the excitement (and exhaustion) of balancing motherhood and graduate school. I'd picked out a light-blue checkered fabric for the chair in Anna's room. Her changing table was stocked with diapers, wipes, and pastel-colored onesies. The musical mobile hung quietly over the crib waiting to sing to its new arrival. We were all ready, including Natalie, who talked non-stop about her plans to care for her baby sister. We were truly blessed.

Now, my baby and I were both in diapers. I'd pictured rocking her in the early morning light, gazing out at the white pines beside our house. Instead, we shared a sterile, brightly lit hospital room. How was I going to care for her? Or for my little Natalie, waiting at home? The hospital made arrangements for Anna to come stay with me in the special-care-maternity wing. She arrived the day after my transfer. Natalie was being well looked after by my parents. Because I was being pumped full of steroids and other toxic chemicals, my breast milk was tainted, and Anna was not allowed to nurse. Once things improved and the doctors decreased my meds, I tried to pump—the nursing staff understood my desire to bond with Anna—but the milk never came in successfully. I felt such contempt for my body.

When she entered the world, Anna should have been



Top: Anna and Ingrid; bottom, Annette, Natalie, Mia and Georgia

center stage. Instead, she became the opening act and then the backdrop to the drama of my legs. During the day, a multitude of doctors and nurses cared for me, commanding much of my attention. It seemed that, any time I tried to focus on Anna, someone would enter the room to draw a vial of blood or administer a heparin shot. She was such a great baby. It was as though she understood at the tender age of 1 week old what we needed from her. She slept well, rarely cried, and sweetly cooed for anyone who gave her the attention she deserved.

•••

### September 2012

I sat in the bathroom staring at another positive pregnancy test. It was the night of Natalie's first high-school homecoming dance and her friends were at our house, wearing short dresses and high heels and looking gorgeous. There was general excitement in the air, but I was locked behind the door, panicked. Should I scream? Cry? Risk telling an already miserable husband? Once Nat left with her friends, I broke the news. "Bill, I need to tell you something, but please do not be upset." He always hated when I said that. And, to be sure, Bill was shocked, maybe too shocked to be upset.

"Show me the test." He went right out to buy another test so we could be sure. The results were consistent. He shook his head, hugged me, but said very little. A few minutes into his disbelief he asked, "How do you feel?" His concerns always centered around me. "Do you think this will be okay for you?"

I shrugged my shoulders. How could I know? Always somewhat fearful of my post-injury pregnancies, I admitted, "I am scared, Bill. I can only think this will

not end well." But he would never say no to life. Despite the precariousness of our situation, Bill was not going to try to sway me one way or another. Like he has done throughout our long relationship, he lets me be me. I can't say I always do the same. This latest pregnancy made me feel as if we were being tested again, and I asked him what he thought.

"I don't think of it that way, Annette. I only know I would not change any aspect of our life if it meant we would not have the girls." But he did not have the worry of a pregnancy. Could I do it? Endure nine months of worry at a time when so many things were uncertain? The miscarriages of 2007, 2008, and 2009 were not at the forefront of my thoughts any longer. I did not miss the sorrow. The raw feelings I had finally compartmentalized soon resurfaced. Our entire household was too fragile to take this on, I thought. It was not a good time to have a baby.

A friend of mine had recently given birth to a delightful baby girl. Whenever I saw them at church, I longed to squeeze those sweet baby cheeks but when she would start to fuss, I was relieved that our kids were past the stage of diapers, nursing, and sleepless nights. That said, if someone were to drop a baby at our door, would we not take it in? The short answer was yes. It wasn't that I did or didn't want a baby. I was 45-years-old and the thought had not seriously crossed my mind in years. My heart said yes. ■ ABILITY

"where the fairy tales go" can be found here: [amzn.to/2XsnnEY](http://amzn.to/2XsnnEY)



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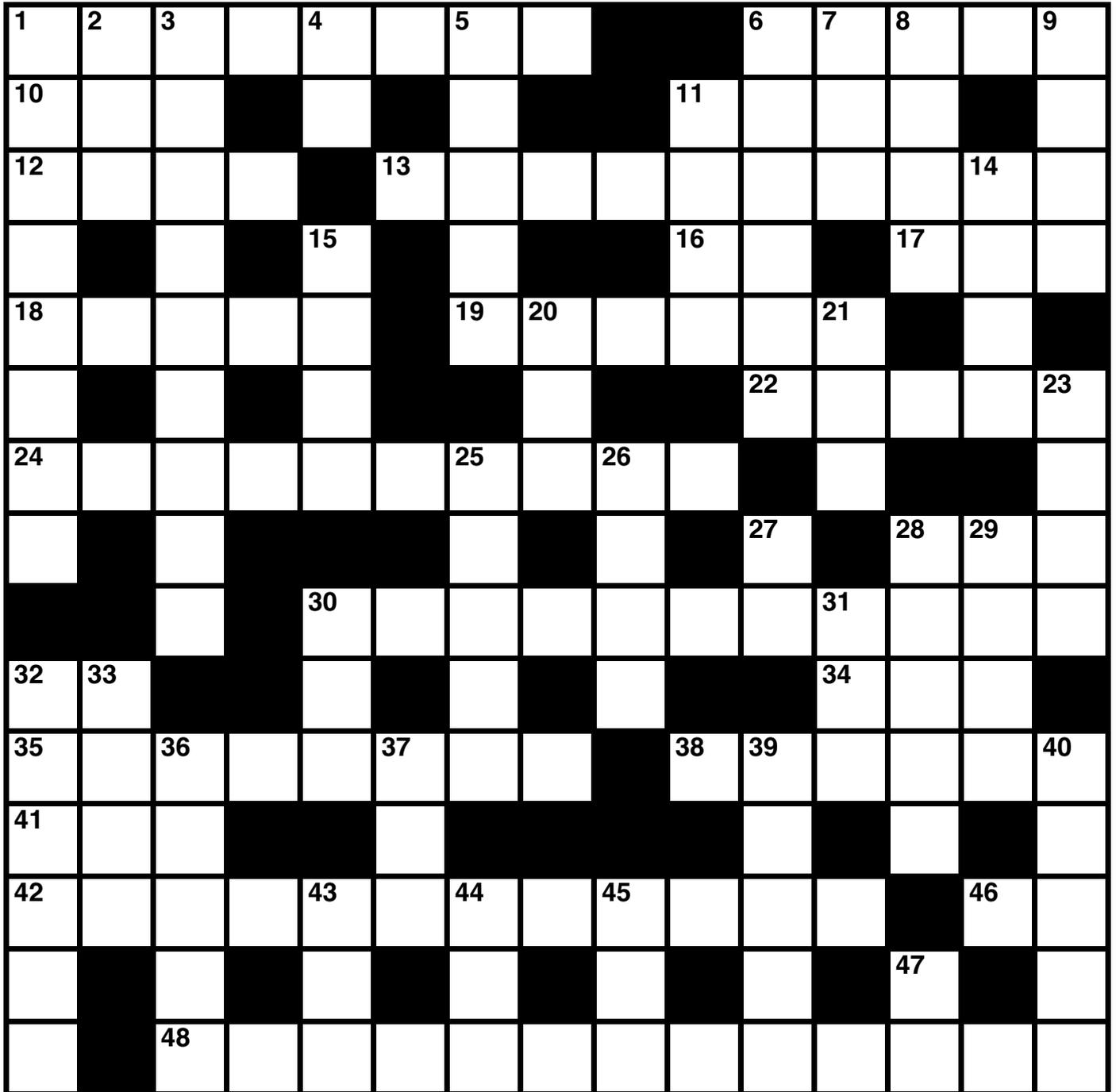
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# ABILITY'S



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### ACROSS

1. Location of the 2019 Special Olympics, 2 words
6. Director of the famous documentary about wheelchair rugby in the 2004 Paralympics ("Murderball")
10. 60 secs.
11. Mexican coin
12. Jedi guru
13. First Indian women athlete to win a medal at the Paralympic games, 2 words
16. \_\_\_ and behold!
17. Rap music's Dr. \_\_\_
18. Bar order, with "the"
19. She plays the daughter of Sam in "I am Sam," \_\_\_ Fanning
22. Donovan of "Clueless"
24. Resolute
28. Place to chill
30. Film about the life of Richard Pimental, whose hearing disability from the Vietnam War led him to become an activist for the ADA, 2 words
32. Radio band
34. Paintings, sculpture, etc.
35. Spreads out, as in happiness
38. Positive
41. Onetime White House nickname
42. He set a new world record riding a Dyno and raising money for MS patients, 3 words
46. Deja \_\_\_
48. Film that tells the story of Anne Sullivan, the blind tutor to Helen Keller, "The \_\_\_"

### DOWN

1. Paralympian snowboard medalist & bacterial meningitis, 2 words
2. Life summary
3. Not discouraged
4. Maui state (abbr.)
5. Mix
6. Surfer's gadget
7. Dream Team letters
8. Gutsy
9. "Just do it" company
11. \_\_\_ Alto
14. Eye section for color
15. Cloud
20. Massachusetts peninsula
21. IPA part
23. Charlie's brother, on "Two and a Half Men"
25. Emerge
26. Sear
27. "Life of \_\_\_" (2012 movie)
28. Friendly ogre in film
29. Kind of bread
30. Business degree
31. Bar bill that can be picked up
32. Extras
33. Shark
36. Biker's fabric
37. Chamomile
39. Mickey's dog or former planet
40. More faithful
43. "Love \_\_\_ Madly": Doors hit
44. California University
45. Pizza
47. Anchorage state

answers on page 66

# SEE BETTER

# AT ANY AGE

## AUTHOR

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

## FOR PATIENTS

### 18-45

- Thin Flap Lasik
- ICL

## VOTED BEST

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

## FOR PATIENTS

### 45-65

- Superlasik
- Pi in Eye

## DOCTOR'S

### DOCTOR

- Surgeons & Physicians
- Chiropractors & Dentists

## FOR PATIENTS

### ABOVE 65

- Pi in Eye
- Laser Cataract Surgery

## SURGEON

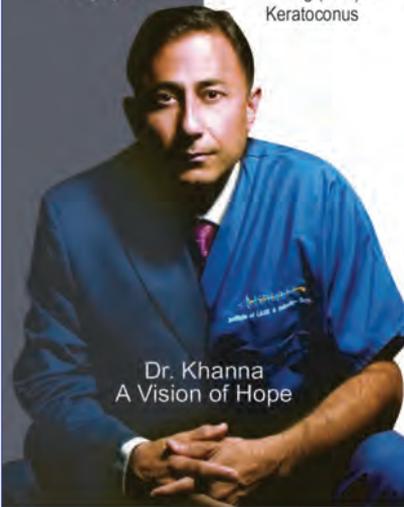
### TO STARS

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- Olympic Athletes

## OTHER THAN

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- Pterygium
- Intacs & Cross-linking (CXL) for Keratoconus



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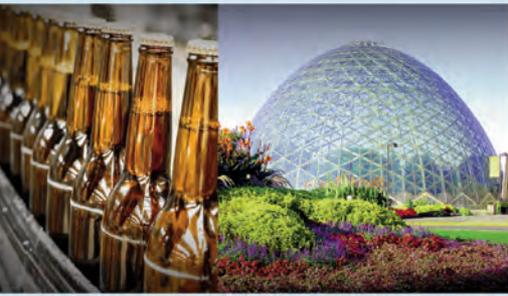
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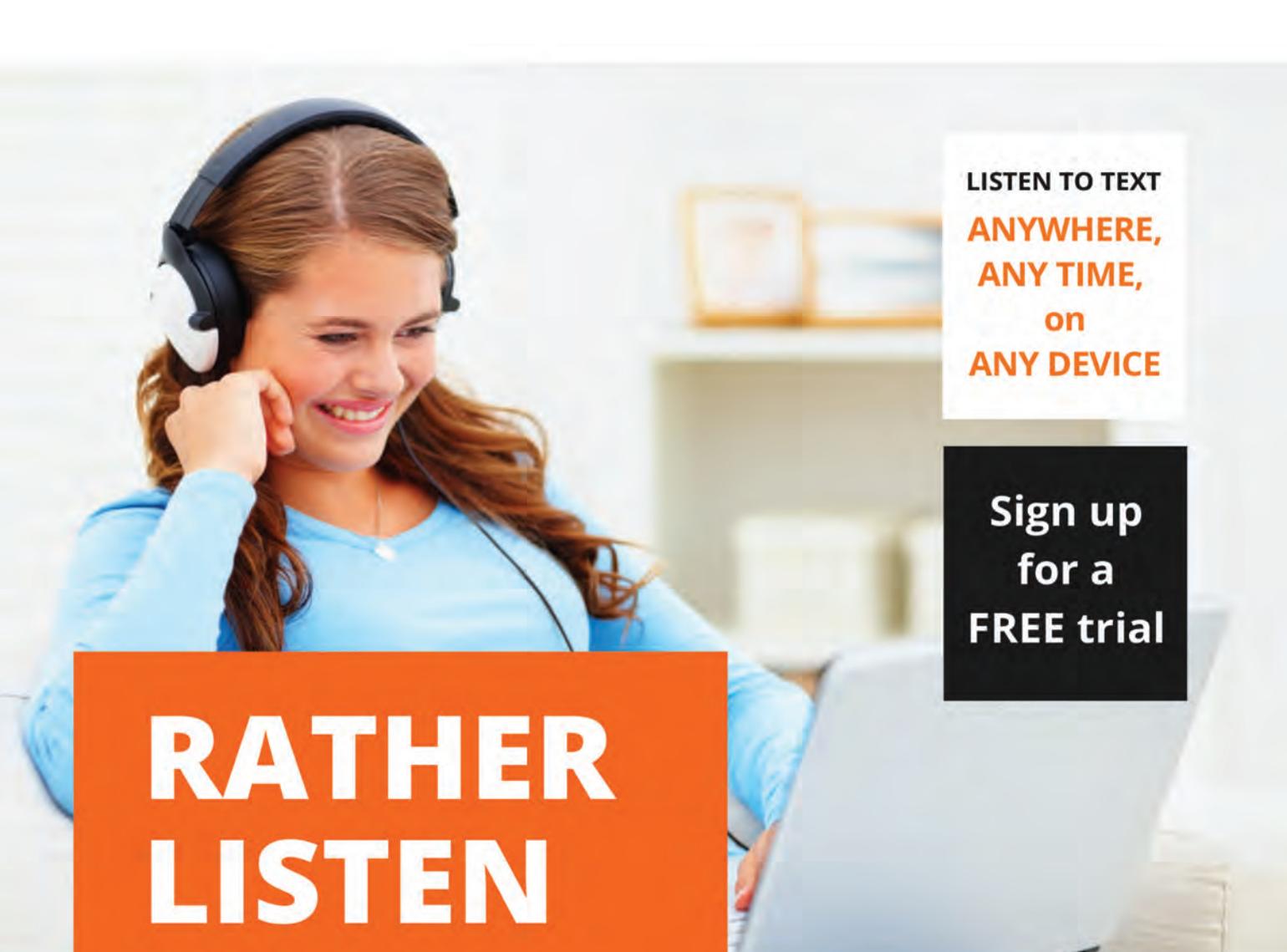
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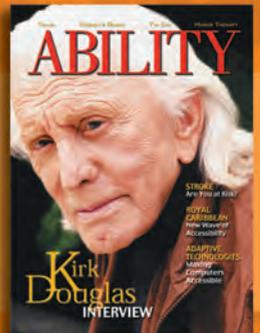
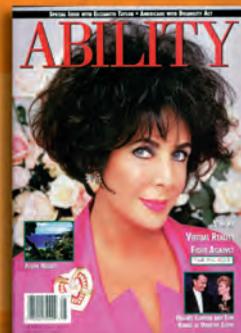
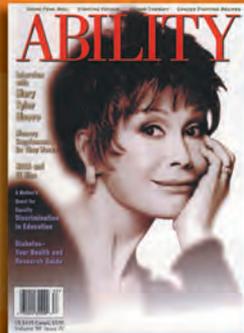
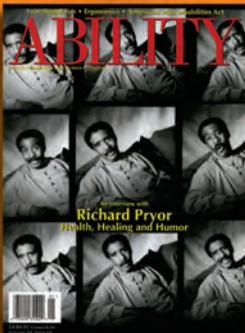
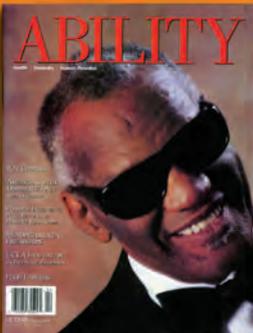
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# Welcome everyone



Since 2010 we work with clients, hoteliers and engineers to provide better experiences for all. Your accessible journey begins on an accessible website, perhaps as accessible as NATIVE's, where you can browse the Internet without looking at the screen, without touching the keyboard and without talking to the computer. Simply by blowing, touching any key or emitting a sound. It's not magic, it's technology for everyone.

We would like to offer our revolutionary solutions to hotels and any kind of accommodation worldwide. NATIVE is a nonprofit entity, an NGO, and we look for global hospitality brands ready to go forward with the comfort and safety of millions of customers. Thanks to our alert wristwatch, deaf customers in the event of fire during the night should not be in danger of dying. Deaf customers should also be able to laugh at a joke cracked at table thanks to a portable loop. Blind customers should not use body lotion instead of shampoo. Our Hotel Signage Pack is a great help. The QR code of Chef's Voice system in 12 languages helps blind customers and everyone to choose a menu. It also filters allergens avoiding surprises in the restaurant.

And ... how about enjoying a trek riding a camel with your wheelchair in the desert?

[nativehotels.org](http://nativehotels.org)



native



Hotels & Accessible Tourism



# We make getting there easier. Where *there* is, is up to you.



With mobility options like wheelchair and scooter lifts, hand controls, wheelchair-accessible vehicles and other adaptive equipment, as well as an industry-first factory-installed Auto Access Seat, Toyota and our aftermarket partners offer quality solutions to suit most any need. And any passion.



Let's  
Go  
Places