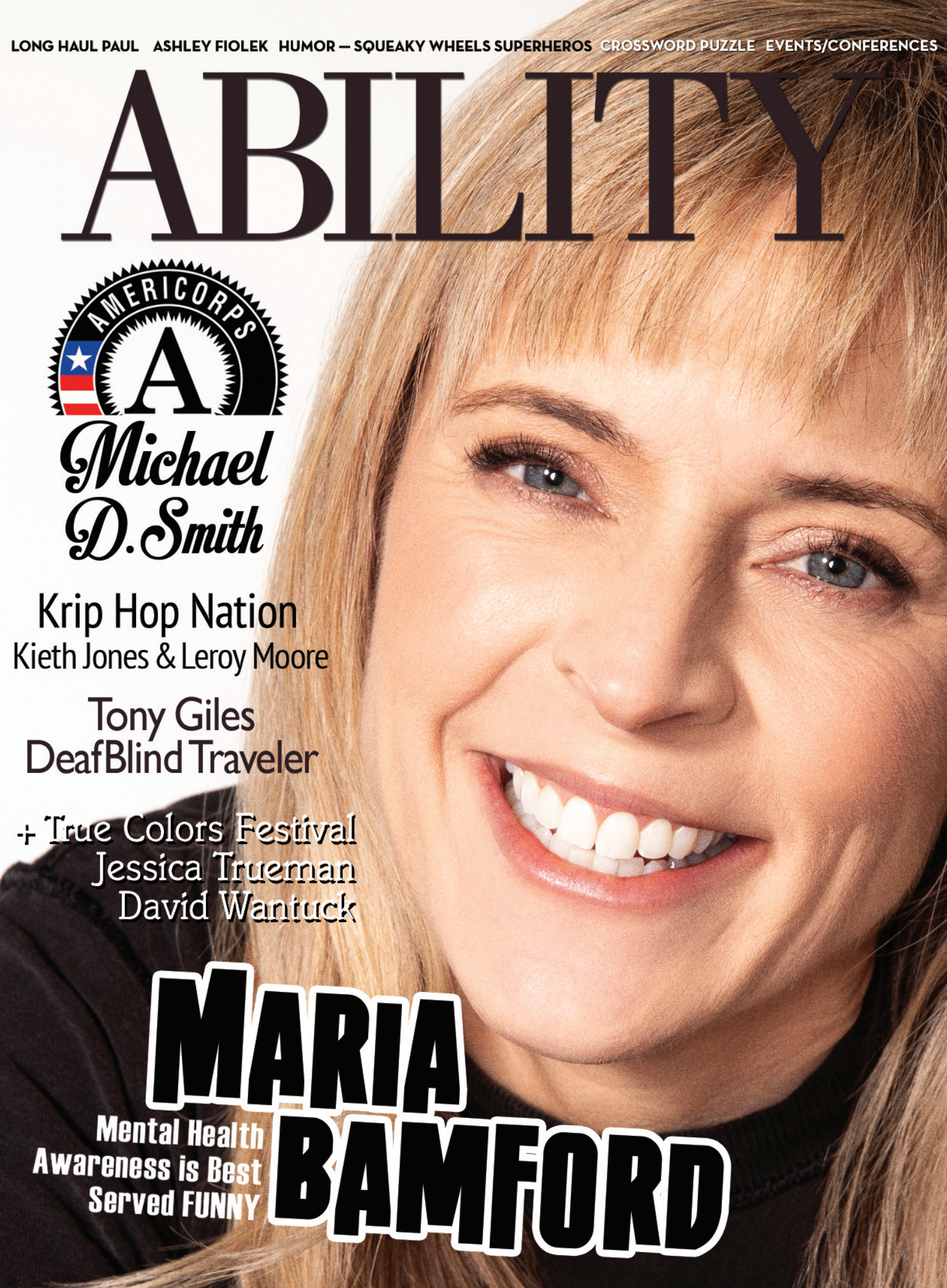
LONG HAUL PAUL ASHLEY FIOLEK HUMOR – SQUEAKY WHEELS SUPERHEROS CROSSWORD PUZZLE EVENTS/CONFERENCES

ABILITY



AMERICORPS

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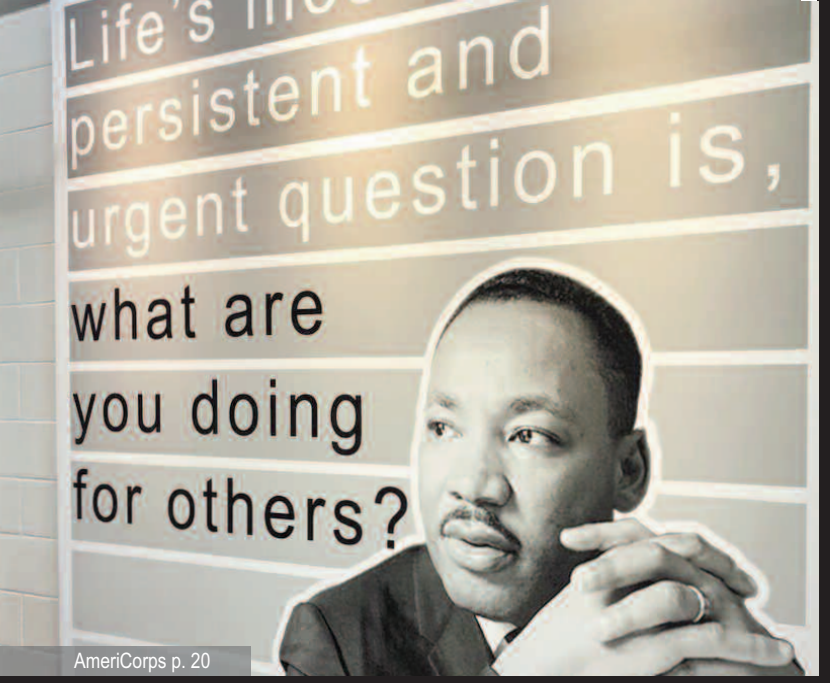
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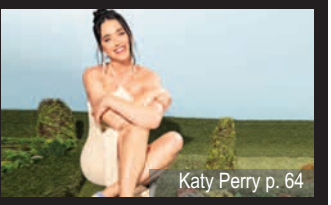
The Arc
California



AmeriCorps p. 20


Krip Hop Nation p. 32


"Lady Dynamite" Maria Bamford p. 44


Katy Perry p. 64

CONTENTS

6 **ASHLEY FIOLEK — Winter Weather**

8 **HUMOR — Squeaky Wheels Superheros**

10 **LONG HAUL PAUL — Doing my Homework**

14 **ACCESSIBLE GOLF — Swinging with Mark Yost**

20 **KRIP HOP NATION — Founders Leroy Moore and Keith Jones**

30 **AMERICORPS — CEO Micheal D. Smith**

38 **JESSICA TRUEMAN — And the Winner Is...**

44 **MARIA BAMFORD — Mental Health is Best Served Funny**

58 **TONY GILES — Couchsurfing While Deafblind**

64 **TRUE COLORS FESTIVAL — Intern. Disability Music Nippon Foundation**

68 **DAVID WANTUCK — Access for the Deaf Community**

72 **CROSSWORD — *ABILITY*'s Puzzle**

76 **MARKETPLACE — Products and Services**

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ABILITY Magazine is published bimonthly
8941 Atlanta Ave. HB, CA 92646 (ISSN 1062-5321) All Rights Reserved

Send address changes to *ABILITY Magazine*, Attention: Subscriptions Manager
PO Box 10878, Costa Mesa, CA 92627; Maria Bamford Issue Dec/Jan 2022-23

Published in USA

DISTRIBUTION
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Library of Congress
Washington D.C. ISSN 1062-5321

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Winter is here! Well for some of us! It has been cold here in Utah but we get to bring out the Smudge-pot and have warm fires and watch football which is always a great time! We were home for a little bit from all of our European travels but I felt like I wanted to hang with my mom and dad. I hadn't seen them since June and I was getting lonely and missing them and they missed me.

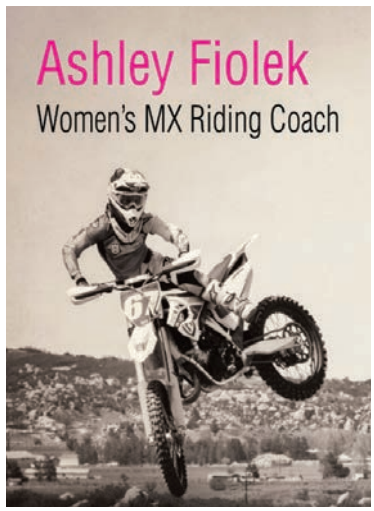


I decided to plan a trip to Denver instead of Utah, it is a shorter flight for my parents and there is a lot of things to do there that we all haven't done before. I tried to keep everything a secret from them so it would be a big surprise! They really like to go to breweries (me not so much!) but I tried to include as many of them as I could for them to try out. My parents were going to land early on a Friday morning so we decided to arrive Thursday night to the hotel so we could grab them from the airport. It should have been a quick 6 hour trip but it started to snow really bad when we got to Vail. There is only one way through Vail to get down to Denver. Things slowed way down and driving got rough. When we were about 20 miles from Denver they literally shut the road down! I started to panic, it was so cold and dangerous out. We had to get off the main road and take a bunch of side roads down to Denver. The traffic was way backed up and everyone had to drive very slow. To go the 20 miles to Denver it took us about 4 hours! Some people just pulled over on the side of the road and went to sleep! I was worried because I had my dog Bambi with us and I was just hoping we could make it thru the snow storm. Luckily, I have four wheel drive in my new truck so that really enabled us to keep going. We finally made it but we got in way later than we planned on and we had to be at the airport by 10 am! Luckily it all worked out and we decked out the hotel room with snacks and lights and coffee and were able to grab my parents on time!

We were in Denver for a long weekend, we also drove up to Breckenridge and Boulder to hang at a couple of breweries and tiki bars. It did start to snow again driving up to Breckenridge but it wasn't too bad! On the way back down the mountain we hit this cool little bar called Bread, it was an old house in the smallest of towns, it was so cool! Only about 20 people could fit in there but a very unique place I'm glad we had the chance to hit it! My mom was upset that we were not going to be home for Thanksgiving or Christmas so we decided to come back to Florida for Thanksgiving and visit. I wanted to bring Bambi and see my brothers new house in Pensacola so we decided to drive there. It took us a couple of days but I got to hang with my brother for 2 days and then head on over to Saint Augustine to be with my parents. My brother came home a few days later and he brought my grandma because she lives close to him so they drove over together. We all had a great time and we even extended our vacation by a day. I was definitely not prepared for how hot it would be there, it was over 80 a couple of days! Luckily the nights cooled down and we were able to have a fire and hang out together!

I hope everyone had a great holiday now it's time for me to head home and ride in my Polaris Razor if there is not snow! Also, need to start getting ready for Loretta Lynns! Whoo hoo…..!

■ ABILITY



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The Real Superheroes: The Mothers of the Mothers of Disabled Children

According to one bitter grandmother, the real unsung heroes aren't the mothers of disabled children — they are, in fact, the mothers of the mothers of those little disability kiddos.

Pamela Grandes, 67, says internet praise of "disability moms" has missed the mark entirely, and she feels that she herself is actually entitled to that praise.

"My 39-year-old daughter Carly has a four-year-old kid with a disability, and she is constantly complaining about all the appointments, the kid crying, all the messes she has to clean up. Guess who's the one who has to listen to all of that complaining?"

The grandmother stressed that, while she does empathize with her daughter's struggles, they aren't as much disability-mom struggles as they are just run-of-the-mill situations every parent deals with.

"Last week she said nobody understands how hard it is to feed a child with dietary restrictions. I had to remind her that for the first eight years of her life she wouldn't eat anything that was sour, salty, too crunchy or 'shaped funny.'"

She elaborated that, while motherhood itself is already a challenge, it isn't all that fun to see your insufferable daughter complaining on Facebook every day either.

"Back in my day we were miserable mothers too, but we knew how to hide it! There's a real pride in that, and I think this new generation of parents has lost it."

Just when we were about to start showering Grandes with long-overdue love and a cute little trophy we bought, another voice chimed in. It was her own mother, Beatrice, 91, and she had some words to share….

■ ABILITY

by Steven Verdile



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Homework

You will never hear me say I don't enjoy what I do for work. I'll never make any money at it, but traveling across the country by motorcycle while making a difference in people's lives is a pretty damn good gig!

Having the highest mileage Tenere 700 in the world on display at dozens of national events across the country certainly offers positive exposure for Yamaha and offers the best opportunity for me to promote my Million Mile Quest for Multiple Sclerosis.

My 2021 motorcycle with over 120,000 miles on it will always receive more attention than I will, but I do enjoy explaining the bike's accessories and the gear I use everyday as I travel across the country. Once in a while, someone's eye's will light up and exclaim,

"Hey, you're Longhaulpaul! I watch your Youtube videos!"

Instantaneously I quip back,

"Oh, so YOU'RE the ONE!"

I am often surprised that anyone finds my videos entertaining or informative as I realize my attempts at producing quality and frequent content falls way short of even amateur level! The fact that I have 9,000 humans that actually have subscribed to see what I will post next is almost scary to me. Producing social media content is hard for me.

Many people believe I never actually go home! In reality, I spend a lot of time OFF the road, working at home. I don't mean all the tires and oil changes on my motorcycle, I actually spend hundreds of hours a week interacting and growing my social media media presence, creating content and actively seeking financial opportunities so I can continue my mission.

Growing subscribers and followers is much harder than one would think, especially when we all hear the stories of creators making thousands of dollars every month with seemingly simple videos. Sure there are a handful of social media influencers who are making it happen, but the odds of making enough money to support yourself are about the same as the kid playing


JUCAR



Pop Warner football making it into the Super Bowl.

It takes some artistic talent to create content and build a storyline. Even more time is needed to edit the content, create an enticing description and media package to even get the video to the right audience. Keywords, hashtags, titles, fonts, search criteria and even the time of day the video is released will have an effect on the amount of views it will get. The rules are always changing and so are the algorithms. It is no wonder to me that companies have a staff of social media gurus just to keep up with the demand for constant content and exposure online. It is a lot of work and I certainly will admit I am way behind on posting new videos. I have content, I just don't have the time or enthusiasm to dedicate seven or eight hours a day for a few weeks to get the clips sorted and into videos that I can post online. Having memory issues doesn't help either, as I often start putting together a video and when I look at it a few days later, I have no idea what message or theme I was heading towards!

When I am on the road, it really is difficult to do any editing, so I tell myself I will get to it in the winter when I will be home for a few weeks or a month straight without any events to travel to.

Each winter I also spend a considerable amount of time planning out the next year's schedule which is usually at least 50,000 miles of travel. I try to incorporate patient educational events between motorcycle rallies and my fundraisers. Getting my photo calendar printed and shipped out is time consuming was well, but important as it is one of the only fundraisers I do for



myself each year. Answering emails and sorting out requests from people who want me to speak at their event are interrupted with friends who taunt me with their ideas for another crazy world record!

Of course, Fall and Winter in New Hampshire also means I need to spend time raking leaves, cleaning gutters, getting the snowblower and generator in running order. There is also the stacking of wood, cleaning the chimney and making sure the heating system and cars are all set for a frigid and snowy few months. I have always done all my own home and vehicle repairs because I can, and well, quite frankly because I don't have the extra financial means to pay others to do it for me!

Winter is also when I schedule my physicals, specialist appointments, annual MRI's and any elective surgeries or dental work I had neglected or postponed. I would be an idiot not to mention that I am married and have a family who put up with my being away much of the year as well, so I attempt to make up for it over the quiet winter months. When I am not traveling, I also enjoy cooking family dinners and taking long walks on the beach with my dog Kona.

Sure, traveling by motorcycle full-time is awesome, but also involves a huge amount of homework! Creating ways to support my road trips while continuing to deliver education, inspiration and hope to others living with chronic illness is my other full-time full time job!

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GETTING INTO THE SWING OF THINGS

Adaptive golf provides a new sport for Mak Yost

Mak Yost only started playing golf in March 2021, so of course he was eager to join some high school friends to form a team for a local charity golf tournament called The Jake. They played their 18 holes under the best-ball format, where everyone in the group hits and the team plays from wherever the best ball was hit. The team used a few of Mak's drives and a few of his putts.

Sounds like the typical golf tournament, but this was a memorable outing for this group of five friends.

"Afterward, the boys were like, 'Mrs. Yost, that was so awesome!'" said Faye Yost, Mak's mother. "They were so excited to have been able to play, and to play with Mak."

It was that day—Sept. 17, 2021—when Mak felt like he was back on the right pathway.

Mak's original pathway seemed pretty clear back in 2018 as a senior at Campbell High School just outside of Atlanta. He was a strong lacrosse player, dedicated to lifting weights and physical fitness. He was accepted to the University of Georgia to study exercise science and athletic training. But in life, pathways change.

About 15 minutes before driving his sister home from their high school, Mak was in the weight room finishing a workout when he collapsed. A tangle of blood vessels ruptured. High school athletic staff assisted and stabilized Mak. They called Faye. The ambulance came. Mak was examined underwent emergency brain surgery to stop a massive bleed and then placed in an intensive care unit.

His pathway changed: Two strokes, and Mak lost use of much of his body and speech.

After time in ICU, Mak checked into Atlanta's Shepherd Center, one of the nation's top brain and spinal cord rehabilitation centers, where he spent five months in rehab and physical therapy. Part of the Shepherd Center's plan for patients is sport involvement, but COVID precautions prevented participation in many of their programs.

Faye kept seeking an option for her son to quench his thirst for competition. He wanted to try wheelchair basketball but there was no classification for brain injury. He wanted to try wheelchair soccer, but slow processing time and limited hand movement became a barrier to navigating the power wheelchair on the court.

And then Mak got invited to an adaptive golf clinic.

"I had no idea if he could do it," Faye said. "We got turned down on some things, so I thought we're just going to go and check it out."

So, on a bright and beautiful March day in Atlanta, Faye and Mak loaded up and went to Bobby Jones Golf Course where Shepherd Center had collaborated with the Georgia State Golf Association's Adaptive Golf Program to host one of its regular clinics.



"We both got out there and were like, wow, this is amazing," Faye said. "We saw all these people in wheelchairs getting up in an adaptive golf cart and being able to stand. I was like, 'Oh my gosh, Mak, they have this cart that you can try!' His eyeballs were humungous. They were excited to see him, and as soon as we got there, they wheeled him right up and he tried two adaptive carts—a SoloRider and a ParaGolfer. I was amazed this was available. I had no idea. That was our first real adaptive sport."

Mak was immediately immersed into the environment. The SoloRider and ParaGolfer are adaptive golf carts that allow an individual with limits on standing and range of motion to strap into the seat of the cart, which can move the golfer into a standing position and allow them to swing a golf club. Mak preferred the SoloRider because of a more secure positioning in the seat.

"When he saw how he could play golf, he was like, 'Oh my gosh.' And then he was able to hit the ball because he has excellent hand-eye coordination because of his past athletic abilities," Faye said. "He just picked it up right away as far as being able to contact the ball. He was excited. His whole view on everything changed."

Orlando Rodriguez, Mak's golf instructor at Bobby Jones Golf Course, said he connected with Mak right away.

"When he started, he couldn't sit up in a chair. His ability was limited. So in the beginning, it was hard for Mak to hold a club in his hands," Orlando said. "We started with small exercises to get the club in his hand and get some posture in the chair and get him set up so he could move the club back and forth like a swing."

Then, once all the basics were nailed down, and Mak was secure in the golf cart, and he could grip the club properly … he hit the ball.

"When he hit his first golf ball, I was speechless," Faye said.

Mother and son locked eyes after that first hit, and she knew Mak had found his pathway again.

"The ah-ha moment was that first time he struck the ball," Orlando said. "You could see that he wanted to come back for more and more."

After a few group lessons, Faye approached Orlando about private lessons for her son. The one-on-one time fast-tracked Mak's progression with a golf club and in his recovery.

"His core got stronger and his limitation of his backswing started to improve more and more," Orlando said. "He started with a little chipping, then progressed to a 7-iron, and now he's swinging a driver. Mak has gotten strong enough to where he can get out of his chair and walk 10-20 paces."

"Last week, they sent me a video where he was standing and putting," Orlando continued. "Today, they sent me a video of him driving the SoloRider cart by himself down the golf course to the green. Everybody's helping to get him on the golf course and play the game and enjoy it."

Orlando has been working with Bobby Jones Golf Course and its adaptive golf program since 2018 as an instructor. A military veteran himself who also served 22 years in law enforcement, Orlando first began teaching veterans the game of golf, and for the last two years has been focused on teaching adaptive golf.

He said working with students like Mak has helped him enhance his own teaching approach through better communication and learning alternative methods to striking a golf ball.

"A swing is still a swing, regardless if you're in a chair, using one leg, using one arm, or blind," Orlando said. "It still requires a movement back and forth, so you come up with schemes to try and teach that."

Orlando's first priority with Mak was an exercise he still uses to strengthen his grip—and to get him into an athlete's mindset. Orlando hands a golf club to Mak, who grips it with one hand while they play tug-of-war. It enhances hand and arm strength required to hold and swing a club, but it also gets Mak laser focused on









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transforming into an athlete while they're working.

Orlando said the progress Mak has made in such a quick time has been incredible.

"In the beginning, maybe 5 minutes was the most he could go for and then he would tire out," Orlando said. "Now, it has expanded to 45 minutes or an hour that he's working with me."

The work Mak has put into enhancing his golf game has positively impacted his physical road to recovery.

"It's an alternative to physical therapy," Faye said. "We don't even have PT right now because our insurance ran out. We ran out of therapy options, and golf has fallen in our lap."

Faye said that golf for Mak is more than just a game or therapy. It has allowed Mak to get back to socializing, setting goals, and seeing a future.

"When this injury first happened," Faye said, "I think in his mind, he was like, 'I'm going to have to change my whole life plan. It's not going to be what I wanted to do.'"

Mak planned to enroll in the University of Georgia and study exercise science. He had also gotten accepted into Georgia Southern as a secondary plan. After his injury, Mak slowly accepted the fact that moving to Athens, GA, to attend UGA was not in the pathway. Instead, he took an online math class from Georgia Southern to maintain his acceptance status there. He thought about switching to computer science, a less physical career.

But when he found golf, those dreams of physical activity came back.

"Being able to play golf, for him, is the closest thing that he can get back to doing with his friends athletically," Faye said.

Mak's high school friends come to his lessons all the time. Orlando sets up a hitting bay for Mak's lesson, but he also reserves several others for Mak's crew to use the driving range. One of Mak's former lacrosse teammates had never played golf, but he bought a set of used clubs and shows up to hit with Mak.

"For Mak, being back with his friends doing something other than watching a movie or playing board games was big," Faye said. "He's an active kid, so with golf, it's the first thing he's been able to do with his friends that resembles the old times. It's a social gathering. Seeing him with Orlando and having friends come out makes my heart swell."

Summer 2021 revitalized Mak, physically and socially. When August came, most of Mak's friends left town again for college—and he knows he should have been leaving with them. Mak understands and is happy for them. But golf … golf has re-taught Mak how to establish his own goals again.

Mak, who is 21 now, has gone on multiple outings now with just his friends, while Faye and their family entrusted the young men who have now rallied around Mak. His friends help him when it's needed, from bathroom breaks, wheelchair disassembly, and transferring.

Recently, Mak approached Faye and told her the words many mothers just don't want to hear: "I'm leaving in January."

"Mak yearns to be with his friends at college," Faye said. "His goal is to join his friends who attend Georgia Southern."

This is their final academic year in college, and Mak hopes to take one class on campus in Statesboro, GA, which is 200 miles southeast of his Atlanta home.

Faye and her husband still have their family obligations. They have two children who have graduated high school, and a daughter still in high school. But after almost four long, lonely years of steering Mak back toward a pathway for his life, they know.

"We know this has to happen," Faye said. "We don't know how, but we are trusting that things will fall in place once again. We're going to figure this out."

Figuring out the new pathway is now common for Mak. Golf helped him get there. Mak and his family were unsure about getting back to a life of physical activity, so they tried. They were unsure about Mak going with his friends without Faye, so they tried. They didn't have all the details of how Mak could play in the charity golf tournament, but they tried.

And as Mak has tried, things keep working along his new life's pathway, thanks to golf.

"I haven't asked Mak if he wants to play tournaments at some point or anything," Faye said. "For me, it's not about that. It's about an activity he can really do, enjoy it, and get better. We just keep going along and praying that things will work out, and so far everything has."

■ ABILITY

by Joshua R. Pate, PhD

Georgia State Golf Association Adaptive Golf
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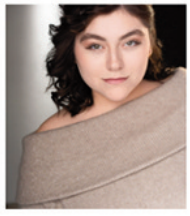
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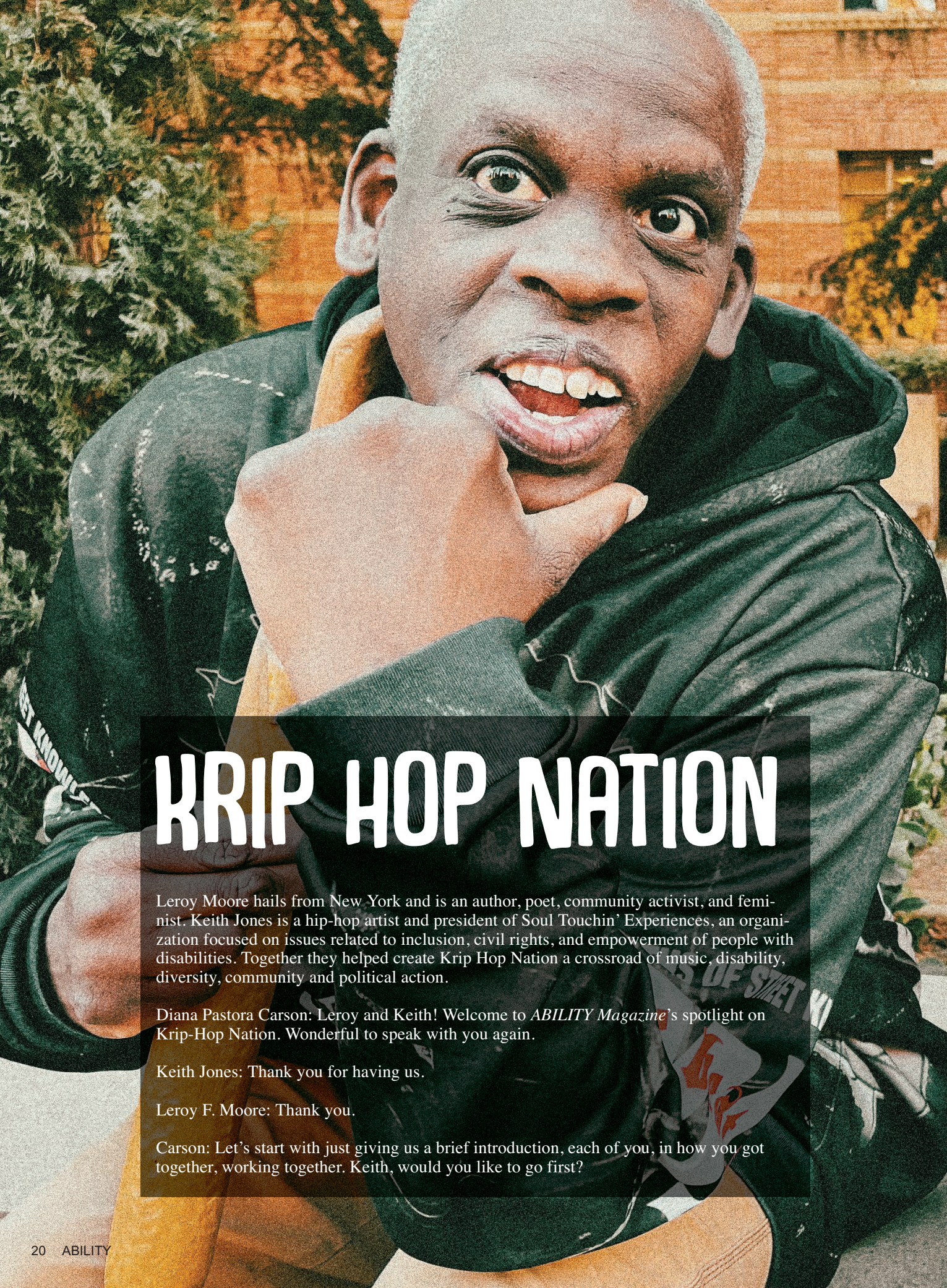




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KRIP HOP NATION

Leroy Moore hails from New York and is an author, poet, community activist, and feminist. Keith Jones is a hip-hop artist and president of Soul Touchin' Experiences, an organization focused on issues related to inclusion, civil rights, and empowerment of people with disabilities. Together they helped create Krip Hop Nation a crossroad of music, disability, diversity, community and political action.

Diana Pastora Carson: Leroy and Keith! Welcome to *ABILITY Magazine*'s spotlight on Krip-Hop Nation. Wonderful to speak with you again.

Keith Jones: Thank you for having us.

Leroy F. Moore: Thank you.

Carson: Let's start with just giving us a brief introduction, each of you, in how you got together, working together. Keith, would you like to go first?


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Jones: Well it started back in nineteen hundred and ninety-nine. Actually, the way we came about is Leroy was looking for artists with disabilities who were doing hip hop at the time, pre-social media explosion. People were using this new thing called MySpace, which is where I started promoting my first solo independent project. He reached out to me, we connected and stayed in contact. And then our first physical face to face meeting happened at the infamous Democratic National Convention in 2004 when Leroy came to Boston. And that's when the actual physical melding of the minds took place. But Krip-Hop had started germinating before that. But that was, that was when wonder krip powers activated. Leroy?

Moore: Yes, that's so true. That's how Krip-Hop started. Before Keith, I met Rob Da Noise Temple in Brooklyn, New York and was in his studio before he got gentrified out. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> and made the first crack of Krip-Hop, called Krip-Hop. Yeah. And after that, that, that's when me and Keith met face to face at the DNC, I was a delegate at the DNC. I don't know how, I don't know why. The California Disability Democratic Club reached out to me and said, Oh, do you want to be a delegate? And I said, well, this is what I'm gonna talk about: police brutality, racism, and they said, ok, yeah, sure, and I was like ok, I told you what I was gonna talk about. So when, I think even before I got there, I told Keith what was happening, I was thinking of us getting together. So we met in a restaurant called Fisheries. Right? (Keith: Yeah.) So we met in the restaurant and we, you know, talked about, you know, Krip-Hop, and we also talked about what we're gonna do at the DNC because we wanted to take over the disability caucus.

Carson: You know, that kind of leads us into the beginning of being Black and disabled in the 70s growing up. So, can you take us back there and tell us about those experiences?

Jones: I think because where we are now, you know, everybody about diversity, equity, and inclusion, you know, people are trying to reach in. But again, they still don't add the A to that, which is ACCESS. But being Black in the seventies, which like being Black now, you know, it's just less, we had less cool technology. Particularly for us as kids with disabilities in the United States. This is pre 504, this is pre IDEA, this is pre ADA. All of those milestones and markers that the ADA generation knows now as their bedrock. And even for the older disability activists who like to point to the implementation. We are that generation. We specifically coming from Missouri in the seventies, you ended the ugly laws and you passed the Handicapped Children's Education Act, but I'm still Black in the northernmost confederate state. So the Black experience has always been complicated, particularly in the United States, but it's even more complicated when you are a person with a disability. Growing up, we were chilling, you know, kids running around drinking Kool-Aid, you know, getting Bum Pops off the ice cream truck. But as the larger American society structure. You were the kids that were supposed to be sheltered and housed, you know, never seen and never heard. But you know, I learned a lot, you know, and we grew.

Moore: Yeah. And I think in my experience, my mom took the East Hartford Connecticut School District to court, because she wanted me to get out of special education. It was back in the 70's. So she took that to court, and got me a teacher's aide and I was quote/unquote mainstreamed with a teacher's aide. This was 74 or 75. And also on the flip side, you know, you know, growing up in New York, I also saw hip hop on the corner. I was like, oh, smack. This is cool. And I saw diversity at that time because you know, hip hop wasn't bling-bling at that time. It was basically on the corner. That's how you saw it. So I used to take my walker because my family friends had their apartment in Manhattan. So get this: a Black little boy, in the seventies, taking his walker, in New York, to the subway, to get to the Bronx to see cyphers. I mean, I can't believe I did that, because, you know, subways in New York are totally not accessible, and back then, oh, no, it was stairs everywhere. So this teenager with this walker is taking the subway to go see hip hop on the corner back then.

Carson: Seeing hip hop performers on the corners how did that change you?

Moore: Oh my God. You know, before hip hop, I was a hardcore rocker. I was like, Ozzie Osbourne, ACDC, so when hip hop came and The Sugar Hill Gang, I was listening to the Sugar Hill Gang and I was like, what is this? So you have to realize it was hard rock, disco, or soul. It was jazz and blues. So, you know, hip hop wasn't, wasn't even in the mix. So, you know, when I heard The Sugar Hill Gang, I was like, wow. Then I realized with my cousins that this was on the corner in the Bronx, and I lived in Manhattan, you know, so I was like, I want to get there, I want to get there. So I embraced it at first. You know, of course, being a hard core rocker, I was like, you know what, what is this hip hop? What is this, you know, boom, boom, boom? I was like where's the guitar? Where's the, you know, the thrashing? But when I saw it on the corner that changed, I was like, okay, this is it. You know. So that changes you, you know? And of course, I kept my other music. I, you know, grew up with blues and jazz, so I kept other music. But hip hop totally changed things, seeing cyphers and seeing women on crutches, you know, blind DJs. I was like, okay, this is, this is my world.

Jones: Yeah. It's funny because I discovered hip hop in Upstate New York around '77, in Ithaca of all places. We were coming outta St. Louis. My mother, my grandmother played piano. So she was a heavy gospel



Keith Jones and Leroy Moore

influence. But my mom would also play a stack of 45s every day or every weekend, and would pop in the 8 track. So we had everything from Bo Diddley all the way down to Paul McCartney and Wings, David Bowie, and Earth Wind & Fire. You had Parliament Funkadelic, you had Coltrane. Like, we had all album covers. And music has always been part of me, I guess. The songwriting, producing, making beats, and things like that, or just making music and with hip hop, Yeah, I remember I was like, what is that?

Jones: Right. And the first record, and I remember, because this was the first time I ever saw a turntable set up. The DJ set up two turntables and a mix. I was like, What's that?! And then they'd put on the record and I was like, what are you doing?! And it was just, I've been hooked ever since. And the evolution of it was never supposed to last. So the better I got at it, it was supposed to be dying. And, and here we are now, and it's turning 50, right? (Laughs) And it was one of the things that you did. I couldn't play basketball, I could, but I had a terrible jump shot. You know, sports weren't necessarily my thing, but to be creative through hip hop was. Cause you didn't need a lot you just needed your brain. You needed your boy beatboxing, or you needed a turn table, and you could do what you needed.

Carson: What led you to you both to start your own organizations and projects?

Moore: Oh God. So I'll tell you a story. My friend Gary Norris Gray, we did an experiment in Berkeley. We had two of our friends both dressed to the tee, one White, one Black male. We wanted our friends to go into this organization and to see what, what comes out of it. So the White guy goes in. He's in there for like an hour and a half. Comes out with all kinds of resources and an offer for a job. I was like, Wow, this is cool. (Laugh). So my Black friend goes in. He's in there for 10 minutes... 10 minutes, came back with nothing. I was like, Wow. I was like, Wow, what's going on here?

You have to realize that I grew up in non-profits. So I started everything at United Cerebral Palsy Association. I started sports there. That's when I got into the Paralympics. I started working at summer camp. I worked at the UCP office. The director at the time was a Black lady with CP. I was like, oh my God, you know, because back then, this is in the eighties, I didn't see Black disabled people, not Black disabled elders. I was like, oh my God. So, and my mom set that up, and my mom's like yeah, you go to UCP Center.

I did volunteer work, and all that stuff. So when I

moved to the San Francisco Bay area, I continued to work in these agencies and my sister's like, Leroy, stop, you've been working at these agencies for decades. And start your own stuff. So with that, and plus the experience, the experiment that we did, I was like, ok, this is it. Plus I came back from UK and I saw a Black disabled woman in the UK. I was like, oh my God, this is heaven! You know, so when I came back, I was like, ok, I can't go back to working with these non-profits. I did that for years. So that's when I started my own organization called Disability Advocates of Minorities Organization. And we did advocacy. We did art. We had an art arm called New Voices, Disabled Poets and Artists of Color. And it lasted for four or five years. I just got sick of doing grants. That's a downfall of doing a non-profit, is that you end up writing grants all the time. You're not doing programs. You're writing grants just to make your organization stable. And I just got tired of it. So that's why I started my own organization.

Jones: Similarly to Leroy. My goal was to go to college was to be an aeronautical engineer, turned into a sociologist wanted to be a teacher, ran into ableism, very heavy. Basically being told crippled people can't teach. And then ended up in, and that's how I got to this, ended up in an independent living center. The story is I went in to cuss somebody out and came out with a job. So I guess I was really good at whatever I said when I was cussing people out. They were like, you need to be an advocate. And then worked at an Independent Living Center for a couple of years and then worked at a cultural access organization that used to be VSA Arts. But what led me to start Soul Touchin' Experiences was that there were gaps.

There weren't just gaps. There were chasms in terms of what people need and what people were receiving. And so how do we, how do we bridge that gap? We're doing policy. You know, everybody's standing outside the state house's chanting our homes, not nursing homes. But nobody is bridging the cultural gap. Nobody is bridging the linguistic gap. Nobody is bridging that technological gap between you know. And to be quite frank, nobody's bridging the racism gap that exists within the disability movement. And so, I mean essentially that, and plus I had two toxic supervisors and I was like, look, I could do bad by my damn self. And so if I'm gonna work, I'm gonna work for myself. And Soul Touchin' Experiences started with the tagline, "everything has a soul." And so we really take that focus, which carries into Krip Hop Nation. And because we're not here for shiny stuff. We're here to get the work done. And so that kind of was the impetus of seeing where people were not getting what they needed by people who are in this space, saying that they want to do the work, but they're only here to perform. So that's sort of what led me to starting my own organization.

Carson: So Krip Hop Nation is now 17 years old and grown into chapters. Give us a short picture of the work going on in the world.

Moore: So, Keith, you wanna start with the US?

Jones: Of course, he throws me under the bus. Fine!

Moore: I'll talk about Africa and international.

Jones: Okay, it's all intertwined. But locally in the United States, it really is focusing on laying the foundation for the international work to have a place to center itself. Our long vision, the Krip Hop Nation Institute having a physical building or space where essentially all things humanity with a Krip Hop lens: mentoring, teaching, connection, art, creativity. And that's being underpinned with our forays into the virtual world space, the metaverse space we're dealing with. We have a couple partnerships with some organizations, including the Chaos Collective, as well as UCLA, working on bridging the divide between technology and the disability community, which underpins the other work as well as what we're gonna be launching in about a month which is our streaming service Da CHNL.

Jones: And that's Da, D-A-C-H-N-L culture, history, news and lifestyle. But it's really sort of like the plate that the rest of Krip Hop rests on. It is the vision of being able to have Rob Da' Noize Temple scholarship funds. We can teach young kids how to advocate, how to be mentees, or how to mentor. And there's a lot of much more nuanced acts that are going on in partnering with other organizations to bring sports into the community, bring literacy, bring art, and culture, poetry. And we'll be over the next year or two, rolling out a few more things. And now that we're 17, wow. I guess we gotta get a driver's license (laughs). But those are just some of the things that we're focusing on. But we really are focusing on the Krip Hop Metaverse, the Krip Hop Institute and working in VR spaces and technology.

Moore: Yeah. And I can jump on about the international, like you said, it all comes together, so it's not separate, but you know, Krip Hop Africa is blowing up. It just amazes me how much Krip Hop chapters are up in Africa, from Uganda to Tanzania, to South Africa, to Kenya. We have to realize in the US, people with disabilities have so many services. They might get a monthly SSI check, which is nothing especially in California, right? Rents are so high. But just put your feet in shoes of Krip Hop chapters in Africa where they don't get any kind of income. So because of that, Krip Hop has really stepped up. I mean we have international groups that invite people with disabilities to the US and say, look at the US. Look at the ADA, look at this, look at that.

Moore: Okay, now go home. Right? That's a setup.



And you know, there's no support. Krip Hop with our SSI dollars, tries to support our chapters with monthly stipends. It's not a lot. But at least we know that Krip Hop chapters in Africa need more than inspiration to make it work. And that's what we're doing. In Tanzania, one of our our artists is Archie. Archie's been down with Krip Hop for four years. And now Archie's been in the US three or four times, you know, making connections beyond Krip Hop. You know, because of his work, Archie has cycles in Tanzania, bicycles. Archie wants to build a school back in Tanzania. He wants to do a radio show. And he's like, I wanna do this under Krip Hop. We have goals of buying land in Tanzania, supporting him with the school.

Jones: Of course, he wants Krip Hop to be in the curriculum. He wants to start a radio station. So that's only in Tanzania. There's other chapters that wanna do what Tanzania is doing. And they have. I have been to South Africa, in 2016, with Simon Mandela. And we decided to do a tour around South Africa. We raised the funds. We visited 10 or 12 artists in one week. We went to Cape Town, Johannesburg, all other cities. I didn't realize that a lot of Black disabled artists get no support compared to White disabled artists. Because of that tour, we came back home and Krip Hop did an all African Bay Area Disabled Musicians tour, which we had artists from Tanzania, South Africa, Uganda and all over. They came to the Bay Area, and did a tour around the Bay Area.

And we did that on SSI dollars. It wasn't a Ford Foundation grant. It wasn't the UN. It was my pocket and it was Keith pocket. And we did. That's why we wanna get in meet with Stevie Wonder, because since I was a little kid, I heard Stevie Wonder talk about South Africa. He was a part of apartheid, trying to stop that. So I think Krip Hop vision would go good together. So those are only a little part of what we're doing in Africa. And that's only Africa. We have chapters in Brazil, the UK.

Carson: And last year Krip Hop Nation won an Emmy for a theme song for a Netflix sports documentary on the Paralympics. And you are continuing to move in the area of sports. So tell us a little bit more about that.

Jones: The Emmy for Rising Phoenix which is still surreal. But it's tied to sports. So what we are planning to do, and what we are actually in the process of doing is the, which goes to what Leroy was talking about with our international work as well as our partnership with UCLA, and is using sports as an entree into social justice, arts, and community. So it is partnering with certain organizations to bring soccer, accessible soccer to the hood, basically, or to Tanzania, to Kenya, to South America, to Brazil, to the places where we have chapters and show that the accessibility is, the limitation is



Keith Jones

not the youth, the limitation are the peoples who are running it, who have no imagination on how to help this child live their life. And not just maybe quote unquote in actually being an athlete, but being the manager, being the coach, being the trainer, being the lawyer, being the owner, right?

Jones: There's so many facets to this. So part of the way that we've been and it's funny because we have gotten some notoriety, I guess. I mean, I can, I always laugh with Leroy. I'm like Leroy, we've been in papers before, but in this time where people are elevating the discussion about disability, particularly now with the John Fetterman issue and how access needs are being challenged, how we are still too Black for a lot of people, still too radical, for a lot of disabled people still not. We're not squishy enough in the mainstream to get onto a Nightline or to get a Nightline, to get on to MSNBC or CNN or Fox or..., Because there's a particular kind of way that if you have an ethnicity and a disability and you want to use your talent, sports or whatever, there's still that hurdle that we're trying to get over.

So a lot of this is coming through, using sports and using partnerships, to give non-traditional outlets for youth with disabilities. Because getting an IEP is nice, but if you're graduating at a 13% rate compared to your peers, and then there's only a 2.3% graduation rate at a four-year college with your peers, then there's a lot of kids left out. So this is a way to give them a new onramp into chasing their independence, pursuing their dreams, and also using technology. You know, like you said with Stevie Wonder, Stevie Wonder had a keyboard. Technology was driving what he did and how he does it. Technology is how he started, and it's driving what we do and how we done it. And using our metaverse, our, our spaces, teaching kids how to program games. You know, e-sports is a thing now. And you, and showing a depth of controllers and all of these things. So that youth who have been told that they have to sit on the sidelines can actually now get into the game.

Carson: So let's take it back to music for a minute, knowing that you two are both activists and musicians, and I think I know the answer to this because you've brought up Stevie Wonder now twice, but I was gonna ask you, who in music might come close to being musicians or activists? And if you had your way, who would

you like to work with? And what influences or models from your disabled musician ancestors do you think Krip Hop Nation has built itself on?

Moore: Oh my God. Can, can I take this, Keith?

Jones: Yeah, absolutely.

Moore: Alright. So of course, you mentioned Stevie Wonder. I mean being an activist and being a musician is two different things. But once you blend them together, you really stand on your principles. It's hard to do that in the music industry. I always saw Stevie Wonder doing that, you know, with apartheid, with Martin Luther King, Jr. People don't know that we got that birthday because of Stevie Wonder, you know. You know, all that. You know, when he was at the Grammys a couple of years ago and he did a joke about his acceptance as he was getting an award and what he read on was in braille. He was like, ha ha, only I can read this. But he also said that you know, that accessibility should be everywhere and everything. You know, people laughed at the joke, but people didn't get that Stevie Wonder was speaking in unequivocal terms at the freakin' Grammys! You know, that was incredible. So, of course, you know, Stevie Wonder is number one for me. But beyond Stevie Wonder, and how can you go beyond Stevie Wonder? But you know, Krip Hop and the Sugar Hill Gang...The Sugar Hill Gang was one of the first and only bling-bling hip hop artists that really supported us because the Sugar Hill Gang had Rob Da' Noize Temple as a keyboardist. And Rob Da' Noize Temple, you know, passed away a couple years ago, rest in peace.

Moore: But he was the co-founder of Krip Hop. So he made those connections to the Sugar Hill Gang. And that's what we need. We don't need charity. And Hip hop is all over this charity model of disability. It's just so outdated. It's like, please, you know. We want hip hop artists to come be with Krip Hop and say, alright, let's do the work. We have so much to do. We have this Krip Hop Institute, and it needs to be up before the Olympics come to LA. It's like in four years or three years or something like that. There's so much work to be done on that side, you know, there's so much work to be done in the music industry about ableism. And I know, you know, RAMP is doing their thing. But there's so much room for other collectives to do. You know, it's not only Krip Hop. Other people can do it. But we need people to do the work.

And that means going against the mainstream or going against your funders. And, you know, we need to do it. But here in LA, I'm telling you, we have this Krip Hop Institute that needs to go up, you know. There's been talks and panels, and as a matter of fact, I'm gonna be on a panel about, you know, the Olympics and Paralympics in LA and what that means. Cause we don't want...because the Olympics always has this reputation of coming into places, going yeah, yeah, and leaving. And there's a hole, you know. So Krip Hop wants to, you know, be that hole and make that hole complete with the Krip Hop Institute. So once the Olympics go away, we have the Krip Hop Institute. So yeah, there's a lot of work to be done. And Stevie Wonder, I know you have a radio station in LA. Let's get it done. So I know Keith has more artists that he would love to work for.

Jones: Me? No. Actually, I think the question about who we wanna work with is, is actually the, the community. Because if I had stars that had names on them, it would be any star that has an intersection with disability, particularly if you're in the music business. I think what we talked about is that, you know, when people come to disability, they come to it at their own intersection point. Like they found it because they had a child, or they've had a family member, or they've had their own personal, but it's very myopic and it's very focused on what they've experienced and how they can move in that street. You know, that's why autism is a sexy disability, because it has a brand versus understanding that Black and Brown kids are over-diagnosed and overrepresented.

So if we're going to be musicians supporting places like Autism Speaks, or whoever, understand that, you know, there's a nonprofit industry I would love to work with. You know, whether it be a Dr. Dre, Snoop, or Puff Daddy, I don't care. I mean, the only distinction between them and us is that they're industry. And we are artistry. And they, that has to be real clear. If you, you're going to the industry allowed you the economic means to survive off your artistry, but we need to be able to translate that into Compton, into Inglewood, into San Diego, into New Orleans, into Detroit, into Nairobi, into Calcutta, and be able to just make that transition and say, okay, there is no industry without the artistry. And so I'll work with anybody. I'm, you know, as long as you cool, we cool. But if you're not about the larger mission and the larger work, understanding the power of art, then I can give a damn who you are.

Moore: Yeah. I wanna mention too that Keith had been working with SIGA. SIGA is the one largest sports company. And I just award from the Global Sports Foundation. So it, you know, we are talking to people on that's, you know, on this level, and then they can make things dance. So I know Keith is doing great work with SIGA.

Jones: Yes.

Carson: Well, thank you and congratulations to you both on that. And you know, when you talk about industry, let's talk about the entertainment industry in particular. Today we see that there's a push to make Hollywood more inclusive, but you two are working, taking it on a different level as you've been describing



Leroy Moore

here, and you are using what you call Da CHNL. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

Jones: I will tell you this, yes. I will tell you this before I run and go be in the community. Da CHNL is something that has been percolating in the back of my mind for a little bit. And I just totally, really had no choice. Keith has to go with it. It really is, it's a streaming platform to reflect everything you just talked about. So you could go find this interview with you on a place and not have to go say, Find me on YouTube. No, you can, $5 a month, you'll be able to subscribe, and you will, the community will see itself in all of its granular glory, in all of its, I call, we are intricate mosaic of humanity. So this, I mean, granted, and plus we doing it with EBT cards and Cheese Whiz, but we gonna get it up and running. But it really is a reflection of the passion, the commitment, and kids want to see themselves. It's nice to see yourself on the TikTok, but wanting to see yourself in a feature length film. It's not to see yourself on an Instagram post. What is it like to see a Black disabled woman hosting her talk show or, or an indigenous mother of a child with autism talking about their cultural intersectionality or, you know, all of these things and talking about the fullness of their humanity from the intimacy of your relationships to the difficulties navigating society. So that's the channel. Da and C-H-N-L the channel, using the colloquialisms. But it really is to give ultimately the goal is to have a platform where people can get quality entertainment and, you know, see these amazing artists that solely because of how their humanity showed up, have been marginalized.

And now even if we can offer them a sliver of an onramp to see what, you know, the potential that they have, that's really the guiding principle and the mission. And on the back end of just Da CHNL is teaching, is the mentor part, teaching how to put the show together. How do you run a channel? How do you program? How do you write a script? How do you write a scene? It's really giving that, and that's, you know, we launch on 11/11 and, you know, I don't, we got one thing going up and we'll slowly build it out over the year, and hopefully by the end of 2023, we'll have a broad enough category to show the world that yes, it's nice, but you know, what happens when Netflix does a disability show, then everybody and their mama get up in arms.

You can't, well, you won't be able to say that with us because we are the writers, producers, stars, directors, you know. It comes from us, you know. So if you're mad at your reflection, that's not my problem. But that's, you know, but that's the kinda thing. So we're excited about it. It's a necessary step. We'll be around trying to do it. It's not a YouTube channel. This is not, Go find me on YouTube. This is when you turn on your Roku TV, you'll see us. And every month you'll come back, you'll have movies, you'll have discussions about what it's like to be a mother of a child with a disability who is now experiencing gender identity issues and wants to go through those discussions. Those are not, you know, topics that you'll find unless you go down the rabbit hole of a particular YouTube or, you know, you go to a very specific place. We will put those things front and center. So you will have your culture. You will have your history. You will have your news. You will have your lifestyle. You'll get to listen to good music, see crazy science fiction, and listen to some crazy music all at the same time. But really, just be able to embrace and enjoy your humanity.

Carson: So how can people support your work? How can they support Krip Hop Nation, Soul Touching Experiences, LLC? How can they support Da CHNL? And is there a website that they should know about? How can people contact you?

Jones: Yes, you can contact us through the website. You can book Krip Hop Nation through there. You can get to our store and buy the merchandise. We will be launching something called The Writeup, where you'll now get to see Leroy's thoughts in real time. Then you'll get to experience the beautiful stream of consciousness that is Leroy's writings, as well as opening it up to other writers.

Moore: Yeah, yeah. I wanna say you know, to get involved, we, we, we definitely need the assistance. We want to do This Hop Institute, you know, and it's gonna take support, it's gonna take money, it'll take sponsorships, you know. We would love to have Apple come and do the tech part of it. We'd love to have Nike. Can you picture a Krip Hop sneaker? That'd be cool. But, you know, we want these partners to come in and really work with us, not for us, but with us, about the Krip Hop Institute. You know this, I mean this institute, in the vision, we want this institute to be an educational space for other cultural spaces, especially Black spaces that don't have disability in it. I was interviewing with Charlie Braxton, one of the major down south hip hop journalists has CP like me, and he was saying that even in Blues museums down there and they don't talk about disability.

I said, how can that be? Blues was started by a lot of disabled, blind blues artists. So, you know, these places need the Hip-Hop Institute so they can come and learn about how they put disability in their spaces. So we don't get another Washington with the Washington Museum on Black Civil Rights or you know, Black Museum in Washington. They just opened it a couple years ago. And I went through it and didn't, you didn't have Braille. I was like, so how can a blind, you know, participant coming into this multimillion dollar museum, how can he or she or they enjoy it if there's no Braille, and there's no guide person to guide them? So these are the issues that we're trying to be a catalyst when the Krip Hop Institute is out. But, you know, we need assistance and we need money, and we need strong support from the community.

Jones: Right. And so specifically, if people are looking to support, you know, whether they wanna partner financially or financially, because everybody got money, but contact us. If you reach out to us, we will talk about sponsorships. We will have sponsorship packages, partnership packages that offer people the ability to do it. I mean, you can always go to PayPal, but this is, this is a global vision for us. This, you know, the low hanging fruit, is to buy a t-shirt, book a gig, subscribe to Da CHNL. All of these things will revert back into building that, that frame that, you know, you don't have to worry about whether or not you send your kid to a museum and they can't participate because the access needs are not met. Or if you have an event in your, the community, you don't know where to go, you can come to us and we can help you get interpreters, captioning, things like that. We can talk to you about performance spaces. We can talk about the cultural differences that disability has, whether in North America, Central America, South America, or on the continent, Asia. What it's like to be disabled in Russia. What is it like to be a Uyghur in China and have a disability? What is it like to be, you know, in a different caste in India and have a disability? These things, you know, you talk about the nuances, but the commonality in our humanity.

Carson: Thank you. Keith Jones, Leroy Moore, all the best to you both. ■ ABILITY

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Michael D. Smith

SERVICE TO OTHERS IS AT HIS CORPS

Michael D. Smith, CEO of AmeriCorps, is no stranger to public service. He credits the local chapter of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America for keeping him out of trouble and teaching him the value of community service when he was young. Appointed by President Biden and approved by the Senate, Smith took over as the eighth CEO of AmeriCorps in December 2021.

AmeriCorps is the federal agency focused on national service and volunteerism. Formerly known as the "Corporation for National and Community Service" (CNCS), it was recently re-branded to better reflect its mission. The agency was created to replicate the success of the Peace Corps, by providing citizens with a way to serve their country through domestic volunteer programs and civic engagement.

Recently Mr. Smith met via Zoom with Chet Cooper of *ABILITY Magazine* to share the AmeriCorps mission and elaborate on Public Health AmeriCorps, a new program developed in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) after the success of the AmeriCorps



interventions and outreach during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chet Cooper: You're relatively new to being CEO of AmeriCorps, can you tell us about your background?

Michael D. Smith: Sure. For this job, I think the most important thing to know is that I was born to teenaged parents and grew up in an under-served community in western Massachusetts. But the local Boys and Girls Club had my back and introduced me to service early on. That experience opened my eyes to so many possibilities which was so important for a kid like me. So, this work that I do at AmeriCorps is deeply personal.

Prior to joining the team here, I worked for President Obama for almost eight years. I was part of the team that created his My Brother's Keeper initiative. I became director of that initiative in the White House and Special Assistant to the President. Then I worked at the Obama Foundation, a Chicago-based non-profit created by the 44th President, where I lead efforts related to youth opportunity.

I also worked here at AmeriCorps (then known as CNCS) as a political appointee in the Obama administration running the Social Innovation Fund, which was a program helping to bring resources to evidence-based organizations that were making a real difference in low-income communities.

Cooper: Great background. I'm a little confused, though, I don't hear a Massachusetts accent.

Smith: (laughs) There is a small radius around Boston that has that really great accent, but as you start moving out west, it doesn't hang on.

Cooper: Right. I grew up in New Jersey, and I know what you mean about the accent. There are different sections that have different accents. I don't think I have an accent it's been so many years.

Smith: I can hear it! I can do a good "paark yer car in Haarvaard Yaard."

Cooper: (laughs)

Smith: I can do the accent, but it's not natural. (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs) That was really good! I was trying to do some homework on AmeriCorps but was having a problem searching Corporation for National Community Service. I always thought that was a strange name. I



think that "corporation," threw people off. Especially those who didn't know about the service. So, I'm delighted to know the name has been changed.

Smith: At the end of the last administration the brand was officially changed to AmeriCorps. Our staff and field people were grateful for the name change. Because outside of DC, no one had any idea what the Corporation for National Service was. It would lead to questions like, "You're a corporation? What's your business?" So, AmeriCorps is what the agency is most known for, and it's our largest program. Like the Peace Corps, we are now just AmeriCorps.

Cooper: I guess people aren't typing in Corporation for National Community Service much in their search engine anyway.

Smith: (laughs) No, no, they aren't. I guess our branding exercise is working. (laughs)

Cooper: Tell me about what you're doing connected to the CDC?

Smith: Sure. Today, we have about 250,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers who are serving in about 40,000 locations across the country. The great thing about AmeriCorps is that any nonprofit, any city government can apply to us for help. They might say, "We have this great idea on how we can use the power of national service in a corps kind of way to make a difference on a challenge." And AmeriCorps responds to those needs.

We've got 65,000 AmeriCorps members in schools, 15,000 AmeriCorps members working on climate, folks who are doing a lot of work around food insecurity. You name it, if there's a challenge in a community, AmeriCorps members are likely doing something about it.

Coming out of COVID, AmeriCorps members across the country were doing quite a bit of work to respond to the disproportionate way the pandemic affected underserved communities. I think we touched about 12 million people during the pandemic in all sorts of different ways. So, the CDC came to us and said, "You know, we like what we're seeing here. We can see how AmeriCorps members are having a real impact on all sorts of public health issues, whether it's the mundane, like managing the testing and vaccination lines, or the really transformative work as goodwill ambassadors helping to encourage folks to get vaccinated and breaking through some of the stigma that might exist." The CDC



said, "Is there a way we can team up to ensure we do more to meet urgent healthcare needs, and also build bridges for individuals into public health careers?"

So, we came together and launched Public Health AmeriCorps, which is a $400 million, five-year program in which we are looking to move thousands of AmeriCorps members to work on public health in communities across the country.

Cooper: I watched the PSA that you have. Like you just said, the Public Health AmeriCorps program is going beyond just volunteering. It's also introducing people in underserved communities to the health care environment and providing them with resources to maybe move them into public health careers. Great idea. Where does it stand now? Where do you see it going in the future?

Smith: We are in the early stages. We did our first round of funding. We now have about 82 grantees. Local communities apply to us and tell us where members are needed most. So, we now have about 82 nonprofits, local governments etc. that received grant funding. Those grantees are actively recruiting and training members.

I just attended a swearing-in ceremony of a program that's launching in Baltimore with BaltimoreCorps. I was in Milwaukee at a community health center that launched a program with AmeriCorps grant funds. We're in the early stage right now, getting the members on board, and they're just starting to get their training and getting to work.

Cooper: Who's doing the training? Where does the curriculum come from?

Smith: It is a mix. AmeriCorps knows how to put folks to work in a corps model to make a difference, so we're doing a lot of the training in that area. The CDC is doing the bulk of the training, to create pathways into public health careers. They're setting that up right now. And then there's quite a bit of training being done by the local partner. In some cases, folks are working on substance abuse. Some are working on mental health. some are working on various other aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Baltimore we have some who are interested in going into nursing and supporting hospitals and some that are doing Certified Nursing Assistant (CAN) training. So many of the organizations on the ground are using their expertise for that kind of training. We want to make



sure our Public Health AmeriCorps members are prepared for the jobs they're working for.

Cooper: I guess the number of grant recipients will grow in the coming years. But do all of the current 82 recipient organizations get the same funding package? Is it modified according to the local organization, where they think their needs are greatest?

Smith: The experience is designed to be hyper-local. It will probably look different in Oakland than it does in Baltimore. But the call to action is the same for everyone. All Public Health AmeriCorps members receive a stipend. They all receive the Eli Segal Education Award that they can use to pay off loans, pay for college or other secondary education. They all receive training.

They all receive help with their pathway, because we are very deliberate and up front that this will not just be a one-off experience. If we have anything to say about it, this will lead you into a career in public health. So, they all get that training as well. Each individual experience might be different based on the community, the kind of job they're doing, etc. But the overarching benefits and goals will be the same.

Cooper: Is there an age limit for AmeriCorps members?

Smith: No! AmeriCorps members can range from 18 to 80+! I just recently met someone who was 82 years old in Maine. But the vast majority of folks who are filling these AmeriCorps slots are in that 18-26-year-old range. Or some high school or college age members join during a gap year between high school and college or right after college. But we have 150,000 AmeriCorps Seniors members and volunteers who are doing foster grandparents and senior companions and our retired seniors volunteer program. So, our members' ages run the gamut. When I was in Baltimore, I was really, really excited to see a great range of age diversity.

Cooper: You mentioned that part of AmeriCorps's package is connected to education. What happens with the seniors in that realm?

Smith: It depends on what program they enroll in. AmeriCorps runs four major programs. We have AmeriCorps State and National, which are corps programs usually doing a minimum of about 500 hours of service every year all the way up to 1,700 hours of service a year. Those are programs that you might be familiar with: Public Allies, Reading Partners, those sorts of corps that are doing specific projects.

We have AmeriCorps NCCC, which stands for the



National Civilian Community Corps, and has its roots in FDR's CCC. That is a residential learning and service program where we deploy teams to respond to all sorts of urgent issues. Right now, we have NCCC teams in Puerto Rico and Florida, in Missouri, where there was flooding. In any given year, members go to six or seven different placements. For four to six weeks, you might be helping to build a house, then for your next placement you might be running a COVID testing and vaccination line at a hospital.

We also have our AmeriCorps VISTA program, which goes back to the Johnson administration. Those are AmeriCorps members who are working with nonprofits and city governments, helping to build capacity for poverty-related programs.

Our AmeriCorps Senior program is made up of foster grandparents, which are low-income mostly women working in early childhood settings. We have our Senior Companions program, which is senior helping seniors to stay healthy and engaged, and we have our Retired Seniors Volunteer program, which includes many different volunteer experiences. In this program, seniors decide where they want to volunteer.

If they want to be a member of Reading Partners and you're 55 years old and you've decided you're done working the job you were doing and you instead want to go work in schools, you can do that. Or you can decide, "I want to be a foster grandparent. I want to be—" and that's a means-tested program— "I want to work with little kids. I want to be that extra support for them." So, depending on the program you decide, that depends on the types of benefits. Reading Partners, for instance, if you're an AmeriCorps State and National member, you can get that award. Foster grandparents, for instance, don't get an education award, because we know that that is geared more specifically to seniors who don't need it.

Cooper: And there are stipends for all of them?

Smith: Yeah. The stipends vary. The foster grandparents and senior companions are not full-service experiences, so their stipends are intended to provide just a little extra cash in their pockets. Our State and National, NCCC and VISTA members get a little bit more because they often have to house and feed themselves while doing what looks like a full-time job of service.

Cooper: The organization is doing so much, and there

are so many levels to it. In your position as CEO is there anything that stands out to you from your new vantage point?

Smith: I love that AmeriCorps is whatever a community needs. I love that about us. I can visit a town and we could have two AmeriCorps members helping a local church with their community gardening program. Or we could have a cadre of AmeriCorps members running all sorts of important programs for youth and seniors in partnership with their city.

AmeriCorps really takes on the character and the needs of the local community, and I love that rich diversity. I also love that we can turn on a dime. During the pandemic, all of a sudden, people asked me what happened to AmeriCorps members during the pandemic? Nothing happened to them. We were there. We stayed in communities. When teachers had to learn how to do their work remotely, AmeriCorps members had to do it as well. When a local community center had to decide, "Will we create a learning pod for the children of frontline workers?" AmeriCorps members were right there alongside them. I just love being able to watch how diverse, how local, how responsive the work is on the ground in communities across the countries in 40,000 locations.

I would say, often your strengths are also your challenges. The diversity of AmeriCorps makes it challenging for people to understand what it is. Because the agency is not one thing; it is hundreds of things, depending on the need. From a branding perspective, it is sometime hard getting people to support our recruitment efforts and to grasp what AmeriCorps is, what it looks like—because it looks like so many different things.

Cooper: Did you know Harris Wofford?

Smith: Of course. I've been in this space for a long time. You could not do this work without knowing Harris and admiring and loving and respecting Harris. But when I was at the Case Foundation, Harris was a senior fellow. So, I got to kind of be at the knew of Harris in some really interesting ways. When he left that senior fellowship, I took his office.

Cooper: Oh, that's great!

Smith: Harris and I stayed in touch up until he passed.

Cooper: I first met Harris through our partnership with Millard Fuller, did you ever meet Millard?

Smith: Who started Habitat for Humanity?

Cooper: Yeah.

Smith: I don't know if we ever met, but of course I know of him.

Cooper: We started building what's called the ABILITY House, homes for low-income families with disabilities, built with accessibility. And we accessed volunteers with disabilities to build the homes.

Smith: Ah!

Cooper: Millard invited me to a major home project in Alabama where I first met Harris. The three of us were driving across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and they were describing the Selma March as we drove. Harris was describing his time with Martin Luther King. He said, "There's where the dogs attacked." It was an incredible story. Millard was sharing his story, and I'm sitting in the middle of these two icons. And all I could add as I pointed to the right and said, "That's where I was born." They looked at me with interest. My father was in the Air Force. there used to be a base. Harris replied he was stationed there as well. Small world.

Smith: Oh!

Cooper: We did work with the Corporation for National Community Service many years ago. We had VISTA volunteers as we built homes. Anything else you would want to add?

Smith: Public Health AmeriCorps is an unprecedented, historic relationship between two federal agencies, so we just need people to answer the call. I was with President Biden a couple of weeks ago at the United We Stand summit, where he announced a United We Serve campaign. The President really sees service as a way to help bring the country together—bring people together.

Now we need people to answer the call. No matter your age and current situation, we need folks to consider signing up to become a Public Health AmeriCorps member, becoming a grantee to run important projects, supporting our Public Health AmeriCorps members in your community? Now that we have the resources, we need people to answer the call to service, and we're ready to go! ■ ABILITY

americorps.gov





AND THE WINNER IS
Jessica Trueman

What does it really mean to make a bold choice? Australian actor and director Jessica Trueman is not afraid to poke fun at the way we use language in her short film thusly dubbed "A Bold Choice". Her performance earned her Best Actor at the 2022 Focus on Ability Short Film Festival. Fresh off the heels of Trueman's win, *ABILITY*'s George Kaplan spoke with the passionate filmmaker on her beginnings, her role models and process.

George Kaplan: What led you to becoming an actor?

Jessica Trueman: I started when I was a kid. I remember my first classes, when I was eight. I remember loving it. I did many plays and independent short films as well. I think it's a combination of everything. And seeing stuff in so many different genres, in film and television, I was like, I could live such a big life portraying characters in all these worlds





just in my singular life. To me, that's always something that's appealed to me about acting. That's why I still love it, why I still do it. It's something I've never stopped wanting to do.

Kaplan: Can you tell us about the process of producing your short film "A Bold Choice"? Was this the first short film you produced?

Trueman: No, it wasn't. I did a short film—I did a film-making course, a Bachelor at film school. I produced a film there. This film is a little different because I wrote the script, I starred in it, I directed it and I wrote it. That's because I had a really distinct vision. Producing it was hard in the sense that I was doing everything at the same time, but when I look back now, I'm like, it wasn't that difficult. It was a really simple film, really short. It was not that difficult in the grand scheme of things. I just used a lot of what I had to make this. That's what helped the process go a lot more quickly, I think.

Kaplan: What is the major takeaway you want when people see your film?

Trueman: I think—well, being autistic, language and understanding language was always a thing I had to put a lot of extra effort in. And specifically, things like idioms. As an actor, I knew for sure they would say, "Oh, just make 'a bold choice'," and I was like, what does that mean? People say a lot of things, and they don't really carry a specific weight, which isn't helpful. I want people to realize that sometimes you've got to be specific, don't be broad. Get to the point, is what I would say. It also is a bit of a satire. When I speak to other actors who watch the film, they're like, "Yeah, I experience this, too. This is the same conundrum I go through." And it kind of is poking fun at that a little bit. Maybe not in the most obvious way, but when I was writing it, that definitely was what I thought. And performing it, too. There is a bit of a satirical undertone to it. If that makes sense. (laughs)

Kaplan: That totally makes sense to me. How did it feel when you received recognition for your acting at Focus on Ability Short Film Festival?

Trueman: I was so shocked! I don't believe in awards, and that's fine. For me, I always feel like making the film, getting to do it, having the film submitted in the festival, to me, that felt like winning. And that's cheesy, I know, but when I was announced at the awards ceremony, I was like, "What?" (laughs) I knew the film was good, I knew I had a chance just like everybody else. It was a bit of a shock. It really is a blur, because when your name is announced to win an award, all the attention becomes on you, and it's sort of overwhelming, almost, but in a good way. You're just like, "Wow, I don't know what to do!" Everyone's like, "Go up there! Go up to the stage!" "OK, I'll do that." It was such a great feeling. The first award. I've got a trophy in my room here. It reminded me that I am on the right track with what I want to do in life. It's not just me who thinks I'm a good actor, you know? (laughs)



Kaplan: Absolutely. It's great to have that kind of validation, for sure.

Trueman: I agree.

Kaplan: In your short, your character has to do a self-tape. Do you have any fun stories of self-tapes gone wrong or any audition stories?

Trueman: Oh, many, so many! (laughs) There's always the classic where I forget to plug in the microphone on my camera and I have no sound and I have to do everything again. It's like I've just pressed "Start" and I didn't even check! Now I always check, because that broke my heart that one time. A lot of commercial auditions, they get you to do some really funky stuff. One I had recently was, I had to be an unruly neighbor, making noise, using a jackhammer. And I live in an apartment building, I had just moved in, and I did not want to be the unruly neighbor, but I was like, "I have to do this tape! I hope they don't come and knock on my door and be like, 'Shut up!'" That was toeing the line of that, it was really hard. There more horror stories like, "Uh oh, this could go really wrong really fast!" (laughs)

Kaplan: Going back to your short, you directed it. You started as an actor first. How do you feel about also becoming a director?

Trueman: Becoming a director, the idea of it in the past was intimidating to me. I was like, "I'm not sure I can do it. I'm not sure I have that creative control." But I feel it's a lot easier to direct when you've written a piece, just from my experience. When I am writing my own stuff and performing, I have a very distinct idea of what things should look like, so stepping in the director's shoes wasn't as tricky as I thought it would be, because it's easy when you know what you want. When you don't know what you want, that's not really direction, is it? When I did direct, I was surprised that I knew what I wanted. It kind of came naturally to me when I had that vision. Potentially I will do it in the future. I have a tendency to bite off more than can chew, do more than I probably could handle. So, I probably will do it in the future. I get protective over the work I create, because I'm like, it has to be specifically like this. I don't know if I can put that trust in someone else. It's like my baby, my child.

Kaplan: I figured also it would be challenging because you're having to manage your performance and also watch out for your scene partner's performance, and I imagine doing both, having both those roles happen simultaneously must be challenging.

Trueman: It's pretty easy to watch the other actors perform, because I know what it's like in their shoes and I'm always standing in the eyeline next to them and watching them perform. I feel like directing actors is easy because I've had that experience as an actor, so I know what language to use to help them. For me, that was definitely one of the challenges I had. As I said, I think it helped writing my own material because I knew



the character and had done the work to know what I wanted. When I did perform, I would always watch it back, and I would keep notes. I would also ask my fellow actors and the crew what they thought as well, because sometimes taking on more than you can chew distorts how you think, so I would always ask for a second opinion if I'm overthinking things. Which I often do. That was definitely helpful as well. And of course, once I got the right take and I was like, "Yes, this is it!" I was like, "We can move on now." (laughs)

Kaplan: How long a shoot day was that?

Trueman: It was one day, eight hours, in my house at the time.

Kaplan: Do you have any role models you look up to in the industry?

Trueman: Oh, so many, so many! I have a long list, and for different reasons, too. I really love people like Phoebe Waller-Bridge.

Kaplan: Oh, yes!

Trueman: She's incredible. Even someone like Donald Glover, he's someone who's always got his hands in different pies. I think the work he does is pretty cool, too. For actors, I love people like Toni Collette and Jodie Comer. They're two of my favorites. I watch them and I'm like, I want to be that, you know? I love Viola Davis as well. She's—oh, my God, mate! She's a force, in my opinion. I think from a producing respective, someone like Reese Witherspoon, what she's done with "Hello, Sunshine," I'm just like, "Damn!" I follow her book club as well and the way they adapt books into projects is amazing. So many. They're definitely the first ones who come to mind for who I look up to.

Kaplan: That's great, those are a lot of great ones. I love Phoebe Waller-Bridge, Toni Collette I love. She's been in so many movies in America that I feel like so many Americans wouldn't even know that she's Aussie.

Trueman: Yeah, she is!

Kaplan: What's next for you? Are there any other projects you've dreamt of that you would like to work on?

Trueman: Yeah, definitely. There are so many that I have problems choosing what I want to do next. There is a short that I would love to make. I've written it, I'm starring in it. There's no argument about that on my end. I would love to make that. I have an idea to adapt that short into a feature. I have the basic idea, and I want to flesh it out when I can. I think it's a great idea, and where I want to take it makes me excited. That's why I'm like, I really want to do this! Which is when you know you're on the right track. I've got a few others I've dreamt up and I think about all the time. But again, when you've got so many ideas, it's so hard to concentrate on just the one, and then you do nothing. And I feel bad, I make myself feel bad about it, so it's like, ugh!

Kaplan: (laughs) Yeah, one step at a time!

Trueman: Yeah, and I'm not good at that! (laughs) That's a lesson that I've got to learn. But to answer your question, yes there is something I wish to do in the future. I think I know what the next one is. It's got a lot more planning than "A Bold Choice," and I need help to do it. It's a lot more ambitious. Watch this space! (laughs)

Kaplan: Aside from that, just to harp on that, do you have—and it's OK if you don't have an answer for this one, is there a dream role, maybe a character that's out that that you would like to take a stab at?

Trueman: Um, for me—this is hard because there are so many things I've—I think more in terms of genre and time periods. I love period pieces like the old stuff, and I also love things from the '90s and the '80s and the '70s. I'd love to do stuff that's set in the past, whether that's 10, 20, a hundred, or a thousand years ago. I kind of want to keep my toe in all genres, to be honest. They all have something unique about them that I'd love to enter. In terms of doing roles, if they ever made, like, a Kate Bush biopic, I'd want to be in that. I'd want to be Kate Bush. I'd love to even before Running Up That Hill. What an avant garde queen I adore.

Kaplan: Absolutely.

Trueman: So that's definitely something that's out there, out there as in, it's totally outlandish, but if it ever happened I wouldn't say no. In fact, it would be resoundingly, "Yes." I would do this. Or Cher. Someone like that. I'd love to play someone who's a real person in a biopic, and definitely a different challenge as well, when you've already got the material laid out for you. And bringing them to life.

Kaplan: I'll definitely keep my fingers crossed for that Cher biopic.

Trueman: (laughs loudly) Let's speak it into existence!

Kaplan: Yeah, this is your opportunity to speak it into existence. Do you have any advice for any other actors who are maybe up and coming or wanting to start?

Trueman: That's a good question. I would just say, just try to act as much as you can. Go to classes. Try fun ways to be creative outside. I think that's really important. Don't let that be your only creative outlet, whether you do it as a hobby or as a job. I feel like I would get stuck in just performing. Broaden your horizon. You'll be happier and you'll be a better actor, I think. That's what I would say.

Kaplan: Sometimes they want actors who can water ski, and you can say, "I know how to water ski."

Trueman: And I've never done it, but I'd love to water ski, jet ski.

Kaplan: Again, speak it into existence. It's happening.

Trueman: Yeah, we're going to water ski! Do all the water sports, yeah.

Kaplan: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Trueman: If you have ideas and if you want to make your own content, I say do it. If you're not getting the work you want, create it, make it. It can be definitely challenging, I won't sugar-coat that, but it's ultimately rewarding when you have your own stories and ideas that you want to share based on your life or anything you've dreamt up in your imagination. As long as you've got that vision and you'd like to do it, go for it! I held back for so long. Try to pursue those things and make them happen. You're much happier. It gives you a chance to practice your skills. And you learn a lot. I would say that.

Kaplan: I think that's great advice!

Trueman: Thank you! I do, too! (laughs) Of course I would, it's my own advice! ■ ABILITY

focusonability.com.au

"A Bold Choice" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHzdgHEa_OM

MARIA BAMFO

Mental Health Awareness is Best Served FUNNY



It's hard to find a more authentic actress and comedian than Maria Bamford, who weaves her own experience with mental illness into her candid and hilarious stand-up comedy. Among numerous acting roles, Bamford is known for her Netflix show, "Lady Dynamite," in which she writes, produces and stars. Also starring: Fred Melamed, Mary Kay Place, Ana Gasteyer, and Ed Begley Jr. The comedy is loosely based on Bamford's life and reveals the scope of her humor and creativity A Rotten Tomatoes rating of 97%. A prolific voice-over artist, Ms. Bamford has voiced characters in countless animated TV shows, including Netflix's "BoJack Horseman."

ABILITY Magazine's Chet Cooper spoke with Bamford (between bouts of laughter) via Zoom while she took a break from her comedy tour. Bamford shared much about the highs and lows of her mental health journey and how good mental health care can be hard to find. She discussed her views on different treatments and how medicine can be the best medicine.

Chet Cooper: So, you like being on the road?

Maria Bamford: That is a great question—yeah. Well, I'm not sure. My family is very much a family of "doers." I almost feel bad somehow. Like I should be working all the time. Stand-up allows for that because it's an hour at night. (laughs) It's not like I'm working full days. But I think I've been traveling a little too much. I've been feeling it lately. I had a show a couple months ago where—I'm on Depakote (an anti-convulsant), and—We are talking about disability stuff, too, right?

Cooper: Actually, we're a fishing magazine, so it's a—

Bamford: Oh! Well, I caught my first— (laughs)



Cooper: (laughs)

Bamford: I'm on Depakote, which is a mood stabilizer. It makes me kind of tremor. And as I've gotten older, my tremors have gotten a little bit worse, especially if I'm under stress. I got to this Rhode Island show at the last minute; I was tremoring so hard that I fell offstage into the audience!! (laughs). I said to myself, "Hmm, you know what, kid? Maybe you ought to step back for a sec". Now I'm taking Propranolol, which lowers your blood pressure to stop the shakes a bit. But then that feels kind of weird. I already have low blood pressure, so it's like I'm very cool and calm before shows now. (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs) So rather than having a standing ovation, you had a falling ovation?

Bamford: (laughs) Exactly! Yay!

Cooper: And the audience loved it so much you have to keep it in the routine now? (laughs)

Bamford: I was so glad that people felt positive enough about the show to catch me, you know? (laughs)

Cooper: Oh! What's that called when you jump into the audience, into their arms?

Bamford: Crowd surf?

Cooper: Yeah. So, you're starting it in the night club scene, knocking over tables, drinks are flying—

Bamford: Yeah, comedy mosh!

Cooper: (laughs) Yes, I like that!

Bamford: (laughs)

Cooper: Even though you said a minute ago that you're only working an hour per set, there's so much other stuff that goes on, especially in travel, from hotels to planes to TSA, baggage, etc. How much to pack or not pack?

Bamford: Yeah. And then I'm sure everybody else has this.—There's the mental part. I feel like travel is stressful with all the ongoing news and the scary stuff on the Internet. I think everyone is feeling stressed. I mean, the thing is that you're not alone if you have any anxiety. Everyone's anxious now. It's a lot, it's just a lot.

But it's lovely to talk to you. That's something that helps me on the road to calm down, to—

Cooper: —talk to Chet?

Bamford: I talk to you, Chet. I tried to call you before, and it's weird. Do you travel for work? It looked from your picture that you're a public speaker.

Cooper: That's one of the few times that somebody took a picture of me as a public speaker. So, I thought—let me turn on my video so you can see how I really look. Just a second.

Bamford: Oh, wow! There you go!

Cooper: I don't like myself. (laughs)

Bamford: (laughs)

Cooper: I'm turning it off!

Bamford: Oh, no!

Cooper: Do you want it back on?

Bamford: Yes, I love seeing your face.

Cooper: I don't.

Bamford: I think you can take your own face off if that bothers you.

Cooper: It's like, right now you are larger than my face, which is great. I appreciate looking at people when I'm talking to them, but typically I'm behind the curtain, a Wizard of Oz type of thing.

Bamford: If you ever want to hide, there's the Hide, if you put your cursor over your face, it'll give the option to hide Self View, and you can just see your full face.

Cooper: I put my cursor over my nose, and now it looks like I've got an arrow on my nose.

Bamford: Oh, boy!

Cooper: I've seen several things you've produced. That's the reason I pushed really hard to get an interview with you. Your comedy, your Netflix show from a few years ago that I didn't even know about. I thought it was brilliant. Not only was it interesting with the mental health component, but funnier than all get-out. I'm not one to praise comedy that much, but you get it.

Bamford: I appreciate that because you're very funny yourself, my friend, Chet. You're very funny. I appreciate that; thank you very much.

Cooper: I don't know if you know my history. I did some work with National Lampoon, so we had lots of comedy writers around. They were brilliant. Most of them were introverts, some of them tried stand-up. It was always fun to watch them on open mic nights.

Bamford: (laughs) Yes!

Cooper: As you know, that's so different than just writing comedy. So, I have a taste of what really is brilliant



and funny and quirky and bright at the same time. You've got that in spades.

Bamford: Oh, thanks! I'm embarrassed, I should have Googled you.

Cooper: We could take a minute...?

Bamford: (laughs) Much respect! I give you much respect, Chet. I am a lazy layabout.

Cooper: (laughs) That's so funny! Are you actually going to look me up?

Bamford: Yes, of course, I'm doing it right now, oh, my God!

Cooper: I notice your eyes are moving around the screen. It comes up with my disability-related background. I don't think it talks much of my time with the Lampoon.

Bamford: Oh, awesome! Wow! That's super-cool! Wow! Wait, do you—are you the publisher of ABILITY Magazine?

Cooper: Let's get back to you. In all the work that you're doing, you're writing, you've got animation voiceover, and you're doing this extended stand-up tour. I felt like it was wrong for all the work that I see on your portfolio.

Bamford: I wonder about it. Chet, do you ever have a boring story that you find yourself telling over and over about your life? My story is, God, I work a lot! Why am I working so much? I'm the one who says yes to it. But oh, why am I working so much? It's such a tedious story. I'm boring myself with this. I think it's some sort of low self-esteem where I think that I've got to say yes to everything. And I enjoy work, but there's some—I felt sad—the meds that I'm on can make me very sleepy. So, when I am sentient, I like to make up for all the time that I sleep, which is about 12 hours a night, and somehow be a better person. It's kind of crazy. I don't practice what I preach in terms of, like, it's OK to do nothing! Give 20%! Sit around! I try to do that, but I'm always hustling.

Cooper: Have you always been like that? Or do you think it might be the way that you are counterbalancing the medications you take, knowing that the meds drop you, so you're drinking more caffeine or whatever it might be, and then you've got such a creative brain, you'll say, "I'll run with this"?



Bamford: For sure. I am drinking a nitro cold brew as we speak. I know I have that fear. If I've missed a day of Depakote, I'll have a flurry of ideas, and it'll be like, "God damn it!" (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs)

Bamford: I was out of town, and I ran out of meds. I was off of meds for two days, and I just remember feeling so energized! And then realizing, "Oh, I'm so mad! I miss the surge of ideas." Eventually it becomes a surge that's a combination of horror, anxiety, and rage. But the first day off meds is good! (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs) The reality that you can't get it all done, you've got so much—is that part of the sliding down, the reality of, "I'm not going to be able to do all of this"?

Bamford: Yeah, even with making the TV show, I had talked with some friends who are differently abled. I don't know if you know Gaelynn Lea? She's a singer-songwriter. She won the NPR Tiny Desk Concerts.

Cooper: Oh, yes.

Bamford: She's from Duluth, Minnesota. Oh, my God, talk about a person who is not depressed! She's a light, just—yeah, everything I wish I could be, an extrovert. She has a wheelchair, and she'll have people invite her to come perform, and there will be no wheelchair access. That was, I mean, a little bit offensive.

For the ("Lady Dynamite") TV show, which was all about mental illness, there was a lot of talk of, [in a low voice] "Yes, we're definitely going to have you get enough rest, Maria," But as soon as the show starts happening, I don't know if you've ever worked on a TV show, but it's insane. The hours for a lot of shows at the very least are 12 hours a day. But a lot of times it's 16, 18 hours a day. And even if it's union, there are penalties unless you come back in 6 hours. You don't get sleep.

That started to happen to me on the first day of shooting. It was like, "Oh, Maria, you've got to come back 10 hours after this 12-hour day because we're starting to fall behind." And I'm like, "Oh, you see, if I don't get 10 or 12 hours of sleep" —because I would sleep the whole 12 hours— I was gone. I would fall asleep in the car and then I'd go to sleep as soon as I got into bed. And as soon as I woke up, I'd get in a car and go back to the set. And even that was on the edge of being enough sleep for me.

So, every day for at least the first month I had to tell them, "You guys, I've got to go. I'm leaving now" And even though I was one of the executive producers of the show, I still had to fight for the time I needed. And that was hilarious. Everyone wants to be the person who makes things accessible or makes things more diverse or have more women or whatever, but when it comes to

actually making the changes—Well, change is uncomfortable. That was interesting. And despite how everyone was just lovely on that show, because of the meds I'm on, I barely remember parts of it. I don't remember a lot of it because I was so tired.

Cooper: I think it's on Netflix, you could watch it if you forgot.

Bamford: (laughs) Yeah, I know, I should watch it again. I wasn't sure if I should watch it.

Cooper: Be careful, there are some adult scenes, there's a naked woman.

Bamford: (laughs) I do remember that day! I was like, I always thought it would be funny. Because women are always naked on film in sexy ways, but not in funny ways. And I remember seeing Borat and I just loved the scene of the man running nude.

Cooper: Was it the Armenian?

Bamford: Yeah, the big guy running nude everywhere, and I was like, "That's great." I wanted to bring that joy to my own production.

Cooper: You didn't have any modesty issues with doing it?

Bamford: No, I mean, I'm old! And that's the thing. It wasn't a sexual thing. It was kind of just like a ridiculous goofy thing. It wasn't like I was—maybe somebody could see it as sexual. I was more seeing it as the human body is ridiculous.

Cooper: (laughs)

Bamford: And one thing with TV, too—at least every time I've played someone on a show¬— they always give me huge breasts, like, that's a part of the character. (laughs) You've got to be a C-cup! (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs) That's not in your contract, that's them?

Bamford: Yeah, it's really strange. Anyway, it was meaningful to me. I'm sure everyone else was horrified. My husband was on set. That made me feel good because he thought it was hilarious.

Cooper: Whenever I see people who are able to do that, especially knowing how a set is. With so many people on the set, I always think I just couldn't do that. I still wear my underwear in the shower.

Bamford: What if you see something?

Cooper: I've taken the mirrors down in the bathroom.

Bamford: (laughs)

Cooper: I think it was brilliant. The reality is, like you said, the human body, we're just so bizarrely conditioned.

Bamford: Yes. In the second season (of "Lady Dynamite"), because I was so exhausted, they had a little tent set up for me. Between takes, for the five minutes they take resetting cameras, I could lie down with a sleeping bag. That made a huge difference for me, even if it was just 10 or 15 minutes. I didn't have to socialize or be sitting and staring. I could just close my eyes and lie down. That was a wonderful thing, and it was very helpful during the second season.

Cooper: Essentially, they provided accommodations then.

Bamford: Yeah. That was really great. They also picked me up from my home so I wouldn't have to drive, which could be seen as a fancy thing. But, for me, it would not have been good for me to drive.

Cooper: No, "fancy" would have been if you stayed in the bed, and they just carried the bed into a van. That would have been fancy.

Bamford: I would not mind that. What was interesting, and I'm sure people talk about this—People went out of their way to mention to me, "Yeah, I only had six hours of sleep. Man, I've worked in this industry for 40 years. You just don't sleep sometimes." And I'm like, "Mm-hmm, I hear you, Marty, I hear you." (laughs) Because I look OK—but I was asking for more sleep. Which I would think could be seen as lazy or not being a team player or being a princess. That was my fear. No one said that outright. But I just—some of the Teamsters, when they were driving me, they'd be like, "So you're goin' home already?" (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs) Are you able to just jump right into REM when you do those naps?

Bamford: Pretty much, yeah. Seroquel, which is the anti-psychotic I'm on, is pretty powerful. Even when I take it at night, the residual effects of it kind of stick a little bit through the day. So, if I lie down in the late afternoon, I will conk out immediately. I don't know. I know my case of bipolar or whatever it'll be called next year—straw hat disease, maybe—isn't as severe as many people experience. I feel embarrassed. I subscribe to bp Magazine for bipolar. One of the main complaints in the letters to the editor is why do they keep doing features about celebrities or people in show business who have bipolar? Why don't they have a 'regular' person who's living their life?" And I'm like—

Cooper: Oh, a real person!



Ana Gasteyer as Karen Grisham, Maria's agent in Lady Dynamite

Bamford: A real person. And that's their point. Because show business is very laissez-faire in terms of—

Cooper: I get what they're saying, but yeah.

Bamford: When I called my manager and said, "I'm going into the psych ward," he said, "Oh, yeah, I have a couple of clients who are bipolar. Just call me when you get out."

Cooper: (laughs)

Bamford: Like, it was not an issue at all on some level. I totally get that my 'beacon of hope' abilities are limited. (laughs).

Cooper: Can you talk about the experience of going into the psych ward? I don't think I have ever asked anybody that question before.

Bamford: Oh, well, like all healthcare, it's not as great as you'd hope. (laughs)
I've seen breast cancer wards where it's all pink, and I go, "Well, that looks nice!" I have been hospitalized when I did not have insurance before, and that's rough. Hospitalization can retraumatize you, especially if you're having behaviors. There's a great lawyer and professor of law, Elyn Saks, who experiences schizophrenia. She's written a lot about mental health, the law and how people should be treated when they are brought in '5150' (or against their will). Because often people can still be belted down and all the stuff…

Cooper: Restrained.

Bamford: Yeah. The bummer part of it is that it feels bad. It feels like it increases your feeling of isolation in terms of there's something wrong with you. They're understaffed. It's not great. One thing that was great about it for me is it provided a sense of safety for my family and friends that I was being watched by somebody, and they could be off 24-hour duty of, "Hey, I wonder if Maria's gonna kill herself tonight." That was a great relief. And I think it is also a good thing to acknowledge that something is really wrong, that I'm genuinely feeling that this level of health is unacceptable. That was good. And then it got me in touch with an outpatient treatment program, Glendale Adventist, a hospital that took my insurance.

But hospitalization is definitely not the end all-be all for many people. Some people try to avoid it, especially because of the cost. I got mine paid for by insurance. But man, if you end up getting the $30,000 bill, which would be terrifying. Inpatient stays are usually very depressing. They are hilariously depressing hospital wards.

Cooper: I love that term. "Hilariously depressing."

Bamford: Like the puzzle doesn't have all the pieces (laughs) The magazines are stacked up and they're from 1977. Come on, guys! This is like an addict saying, "I know I'm crazy," but the TV. There's no mute mode and it's playing Ultimate Fighting Championships. It's like a reminder of how bad a state you're in. (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs)

Bamford: Gray rubber curtains around your bed, I guess in case you fling your own feces somewhere. Actually, I'm not sure exactly what those are for. That's the issue. And I feel for the mental healthcare workers; I'm sure they're exhausted. And then—because you're mental and the hospital staff, I'm sure, are burnt out on their jobs, there's a sense that even if you ask for something —if you say, "Hey, when is my psychiatrist coming? Hey, could I have a packet of graham crackers?" It's like, (pause) "OK. Cuckoo!" When I was in one facility, they took away my purse, which, OK, all right. But I had to get the purse back because the in-house psychiatrist would not see me unless I gave him cash.

Cooper: He's out of pocket, yeah.

Bamford: And I was like, isn't spending irrational amounts of money on something that's useless a warning sign of mania? (laughs) Anyway, I had to argue with the nursing staff to get my purse back. I wasn't very cognizant; I wasn't speaking very clearly at that point.—I don't know if I am now. (laughs)—But I finally got it. I was like, "The doctor wants—he needs money," and they're like, "Oh, OK!" (laughs)

And another funny thing about facilities, sometimes they'll have in the advertising or somewhere in the facility itself, there will be a list of activities, like yoga at 5:00pm, breathing at 2:00pm, Jerry comes and sings a song at 1:00 p.m. None of that happens. None of it. This happened at a couple of places I was. I thought "Why do you have this up here? Why is it on the website that you have Caring Gentleness at 7:00 a.m. every morning, 12-Step groups?" And they say, "Oh, yeah, we don't do that anymore." So, take it down! Just take it down! (laughs)

Cooper: So, they keep it for PR purposes for marketing and then they say it's been cut when you ask?

Bamford: Yeah, it's an interesting gaslighting that's very funny.

Cooper: And that's been in more than one facility?

Bamford: More than one facility has done that. And then when I said, "Oh, gosh, OK." And again, I am agitated and a big weirdo, and I'm sure I'm not giving the best impression, but I'm like, "Oh, oh, oh, OK, OK." And then the nursing staff was like, "This is a hospital." And I'm like, "Yeah, I know, it's just that you guys have the poster up. But, OK, I'm the asshole? OK, I'm sorry!" (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs) "But I'm here for the yoga!"

Bamford: (laughs) [calmly] "I thought this was a yoga retreat."—with a lot of Tater Tots. That's another thing, there's always a lot of carbs at mental health facilities. Lots of greasy carbs to calm you down.

Cooper: You think carbs have a calming tendency?

Bamford: Oh, my God! I'd assume so. I went to an outpatient program twice, and after lunch every day they'd come out with a big tray of yellow cake, with thick frosting, and we'd all have a giant slice of it and then go into the afternoon groups. (laughs)

Cooper: Huh! The food is not the same as in a regular hospital?

Bamford: Yeah, I mean, I think you could make healthier choices, but there were a lot of chicken tenders that were well lit. (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs)

Bamford: I don't know. It was very helpful for me to go into a psychiatric facility, but I also want to acknowledge that it can be a harrowing experience as well. And if you're black or brown and you call for an ambulance, sometimes the cops show up. That is an experience I have not had, but I've had friends who have had that experience. If you are in a major city, they sometimes have mental health emergency units that will come out instead of the cops or an ambulance, which I think can be more helpful.

Cooper: So maybe instead of calling 911 trying to find a direct line to mental health?

Bamford: Yes. I have a friend who, after calling 911, had all these cops show up, they drew guns and shot at their dog. Oh, no. It's often not the greatest experience.

A friend of mine was having a psychotic break, and I drove them to a psychiatric emergency clinic in LA. My friend is black, and on the big-screen TV in the waiting room, the George Floyd news was just breaking. It was basically a snuff film of someone being killed in real time over and over and over again, showing in the waiting room of a mental health facility. And I was like, "You guys! You guys! Can we change it to the Cartoon Network? Can we just turn this frickin' thing off?" My friend did get help there and was hooked up with meds. And it did eventually work out, but the staff is just overworked. It can be a little crazy, the whole situation.

Cooper: The waiting room was not reading the room.

Bamford: (laughs) Yeah! Yes!

Cooper: My question about your hospital experience is—were you on your meds or did you get off your meds before? And then you just knew you needed to go in?

Bamford: What had happened is that for a number of years my psychiatrist kept saying, "Hey, you should go

on mood stabilizers. Hey, you're talking a little fast." And I was like, [fast] "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." (laughs) "You don't get it. I'm funny."

So then at one point, I was starting to feel bad. A friend did an intervention on me, saying, "Hey, sometimes you're not totally making sense. You seem a bit obsessed." At the time, I was doing commercials for the Target Christmas campaign. And although it was a mental illness issue--there's always some basis for it in reality. I didn't want to do commercials is what the reality was. It was going well, but I started to get obsessed that it was a bad thing to do and that I was a bad person. Anyway, I did all this stuff that was rather obsessive to try to figure it out ethically.

Bamford: That's when I went into the hospital the first time, to switch meds, to take some time to switch meds because I wasn't feeling good. And then everything fell apart.

Cooper: That's clever of you, knowing that when you switch meds things could get bad or spiral. I'm aware of situations where psychiatrists are constantly trying to make those tweaks to help the patient. It's still not a perfect science, as you know.

Bamford: Oh, God!

Cooper: I understand no one can fully know each person 100%, and that's why they keep tweaking the meds for each individual patient. That's clever of you, knowing that you're iffy anyway and you're going to change—but that's an expensive process. It's good that you have family support around you, but like you said, you also don't want them to have the burden of watching you 24/7.

Bamford: And for me, it was very much a pride-control thing, too. "Oh, I'm just going to take care of this, and then it'll be done." You know? Yeah, meds are a huge part of it. You don't know how they'll affect you. The first ones they tried for me were not good, and then it ended up creating a crisis because I went back to work so quickly. I was on a medicine called Lamictal. One of its side effects can be cognitive. It can make it difficult to talk or think. I was supposed to do some shows in Chicago, and I just wasn't able to talk or think clearly. So, I had to cancel the shows at the last minute because I was just not able to go on. I kept thinking muscle memory was going to kick in, but that did not happen. That's when I went into the hospital the second time.

I went through an outpatient program after that, a second time. Then finally I agreed to try Depakote, which my psychiatrist had been suggesting for me. It's an older drug prescribed for manic depression, and it had worked for my mom. My mom had bipolar. I didn't want to take it because—and this is going to be gross, heads up—because one of the primary side effects is weight gain. Miss Prissy Pants didn't want to do that, but I finally was willing to take it.

Cooper: Had your mother gained weight with it when she took it?

Bamford: I don't know. She took it for so long. She was on it for, like, 40 years, so I don't know. The third time I checked myself in—No, I didn't. I was like, "I'm OK." Anyway, somebody took me in. Then I got on the Depakote, finally. And although I didn't feel better, I was supposed to just be there for 72 hours. But then—and this is something very funny about psychiatry—you are asked to tell some doctor your medical history. I told the staff psychiatrist my medical history, and I'm sure I was a little speedy and mental. But I was telling him everything. I told him about the specific type of OCD I have, which is Intrusive Thoughts OCD. It's something I got help for. So, I was over it at that point, but I was just telling him because he asked my medical history. The staff psychiatrist was an older man. And he was like, "I don't know what that is." And so, I tried to explain it again, probably in a maniacal, pressured speech way. And he was like, "Well, it sounds like you're a danger to society."

Cooper: Wow.

Bamford: He admitted me to the psych ward for 10 days. And he signed a thing holding me for 7 more days. And that's what the psych ward is like in terms of the powerlessness it can cause.

"OK" (laughs).

Just because this older doctor doesn't know about this certain type of new development in mental health, you can't get out. Not everybody knows about the different OCD variants, but you can't explain it to them. That was very funny—in retrospect. (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs)

Bamford: I don't know what the equivalent in physical health would be. Maybe, "And then I did my knee in, but it's fine now."

Cooper: "Is it? Is your knee fine? Does it hurt when I do this?"

Bamford: Yeah, exactly. "We're going to have to keep that in a cast. You cannot leave the facility."

Cooper: That's the problem with psychiatry. It's saved so many people's lives, but the history of treatment also has a dark side.

Bamford: I think it's interesting to read about people who are now choosing to live with their symptoms asking, "Why is psychosis a side effect of my illness? And



From left, Maria Bamford, Dagmar (Bridget Everett) and Larissa (Lennon Parham) in Lady Dynamite

why do I have to be medicated for that?" I read a powerful article about ayahuasca, a plant-based drink used by the indigenous people of South America. Shamans there use it to heal people during religious ceremonies.

Cooper: Is it psychedelic? Mushrooms or something?

Bamford: Yeah, it's like that. I think it lasts for about 24 hours. I guess they're saying it helps with PTSD, addiction and depression. I guess when a person has gotten ECT (electro convulsive therapy) or meds and nothing's worked, some people say ayahuasca sometimes works for at least a short time.

Cooper: That's still a form of meds. It's still a chemical.

Bamford: Just a minute. I'm going to pour more coffee into my coffee cup, even though it probably seems like I don't need any more.

Cooper: (laughs) You know what it says on the bottom of your cup? It says, "Help me, I'm being held captive."

Bamford: (laughs) No, I'm at the delightful Hampton Inn. It's so wonderful.

Cooper: Do you have a range of places you typically stay? Do you ever get to stay at the Ritz Carltons of the world?

Bamford: At this point in my career, things can change at any moment. I never know when the gravy will begin or end. I am paid well enough right now that I will cover the cost of my own hotel stays. I always go with Hampton Inn. At fancier hotels, you usually pay extra for wi-fi, breakfast, coffee, etc. Hampton Inn has free coffee! You've always got a pool. It's always accessible. They always have a dipper. They always have a gym and the "pour a cup-o-waffle breakfast" too.

Cooper: Free parking too!

Bamford: Yes. That's what I like to do. Anyway, you were talking youth.

Cooper: When did you realize that you were having some mental health issues?

Bamford: I had a little notebook, and I called them "The fears." I would write down things that I was thinking. I stopped being able to sleep at night at around 8 or 9 years old because I started having the Intrusive Thoughts OCD fear that I was going to harm people. That's called harm OCD. It's a thing. You can get help for it though. There are many different types of OCD. There's POCD, pedophile OCD, fear that you're a pedophile. People who start avoiding things, you avoid your own children because you're afraid. There's sexual orientation OCD, where you fear that you're not the sexual identity you say you are. Whatever humans worry about, there's a type of OCD for it.

It started to really affect me. I was also able to ameliorate fears and also depression, just feeling down. I think when I was around 10, I developed bulimia. On some level I think the eating disorder behaviors medicated me. It helped me to manage my mood. I think back, and I remember the first time I told my mom, "I can't sleep at night because I'm afraid I'm going to hurt you



guys." She was like, "OK, all right."

Cooper: (laughs) I shouldn't laugh, I'm sorry.

Bamford: No, no. It was hilarious. She goes, "It's OK if you're gay." I thought, "Is that what that means?" Anyway, she sent me to a Christian therapist. Which was, again, so funny. I would just fall asleep on the therapist's couch because that was the only time that I was able to sleep. But she gave me one of the most disturbing books I have ever read in my life. It was an allegory. It was popular in the '70s. "Hinds Feet on High Places." The main character was a little girl called "Much-Afraid." And guess what? Much-Afraid is "crippled", she's unattractive, her family hates her, and no one will help her. — What!?!

And then the local shepherd comes in, guess who that is? Jesus Christ. He comes in and says, "Hey Much-Afraid, if you do everything I tell you to do, I'll make you beautiful, abled and we'll get to go to this place where you won't have to see your family ever again." It's such a bizarre book. I cannot even—It was like a V.C. Andrews book, but with none of the plot.

Cooper: (laughs)

Bamford: I think the next mental health thing happened when I was 16 and very depressed. My parents got calls from school saying, "Hey, your daughter's sleeping all day at school." So, my dad did something that helped me. He enrolled me in Dale Carnegie training courses on how to win friends and influence people. I think I must have gotten into some sort of hypo-manic phase because that really flipped a switch. They have little games on how to talk to people. You learn to use their names and complement people like, "Chet, I love that shirt on you. God, that's a cool color.

Cooper: Nice of you to notice.

Bamford: I learned all these, sort of systems of how to create—not actual intimacy—but it's kind of the same. It was kind of like playing a video game. And I did that for the rest of high school, and I was able to keep it together. But then it all—Well, I called a suicide hotline after my second year of college, I think. And then I got into 12-steps groups, and that helped me stop the bulimia. That helped a lot to stop that behavior. And then I got on meds for the first time.

Cooper: So, your grades were, OK? Once you went through Dale Carnegie you weren't sleeping as much in class?

Bamford: It was kind of like surges where I'd be like, "I'm a great student." At artsy things, I got better grades. I wasn't a terrible student, but I also wasn't a great student. I liked public speaking. I always ran for office. I liked being a brain-dead megaphone.

Cooper: "More nap time! More nap time!"

Bamford: (laughs) Yeah! I think my campaign speech for one year was, "I've been here the whole time!" (laughs) And I had been. (laughs)

Cooper: What did you take?

Bamford: Mostly literature classes. I just liked to read. That's something I could do. I took rhetoric, but that meant disagreeing with people, which is uncomfortable.

Cooper: I don't agree with that.

Bamford: Well, exactly, and that's OK. (laughs) I ended up getting a degree in creative writing from the University of Minnesota. I went through treatment for mental health as well as eating disorder issues in an outpatient thing when I was 19. That was a funny insurance story.

I was still under my parents' insurance. At the time, my dad worked at a clinic. A fellow doctor there, a friend of our family, was the insurance administrator. He called me at college and said, "So I hear you want to do this outpatient treatment thing. You looked great at Christmas! You looked great!" I thought to myself, "Is that a new diagnosis, looking great at Christmas?"

Cooper: (laughs) Some things people say or maybe even what they think, who knows? I did read that your father was a dermatologist, and your mother was a therapist. What kind of therapist?

Bamford: Marriage and family therapist. She studied to do that after we left the house. Would have been great to get some of those details earlier. But no. And she really learned a lot and really changed. You know when somebody's able to change, she was able to. She had never been able to apologize when we were younger. She had episodes of—it wasn't straight-out—it definitely wasn't mania, but it was this hyper-cleanliness around the house. Like, the idea that you've got to have the sheet between yourself and the quilt. So, while you're sleeping, make sure the sheet stays there because your skin has oils, Chet. Your skin has oils. That level of—should I not come home? (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs) You can come home, but leave your oils behind?

Bamford: Am I leaving a slick everywhere? It was really wonderful that later, after going through school, she was able to say, whenever she did something that somebody was hurt by, she'd go, [sighs] "Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry." It's a hilarious way to apologize, but it is an apology, so that's good.

Cooper: I remember that one of my grandparents in New York, on my father's side, all of the furniture was sealed in plastic. Do you remember those?

Bamford: Of course.

Cooper: Did your mother go through that stage?

Bamford: She didn't do that, but I had this feeling, a sense I got, that I was kind of a grime. Like, my presence was dirty. Like she was saying, "So if you could just sit over there?" (laughs). I don't know how true that was, and that was probably only in my own mind. She had a certain standard for cleanliness, and she had eating disorder stuff too. Like, she monitored our bodies and her own body weight. My mom wrote down her weight I think every day of her life. I think even when she was dying, which was very strange.

Cooper: I don't know how to put it, but you seem to have a self-awareness in that you know that there's something odd and you're going to take some positive action. Where other people would just spiral in the oddness and not seek some other form of reality.

Bamford: If you mean—I don't know. You mean self-absorbed?

Cooper: (laughs) Self-awareness. I was wondering if you've done any work where you are evaluating your thought processes?

Bamford: Oh, for sure. But I almost feel like therapy and stuff can have a religious bent to it, in terms of people saying, "Oh, have you done the real work?" Sometimes people can get judgmental, thinking if you had more self-knowledge you'd feel better. I live in LA, where it's like, "Well, you're feeling bad. Have you really ironed out the resentments you have towards your grandfather?" I love emotional sudoku. I love the "Dungeons and Dragons" that is a 12-step program. I love all that shit, where it's like, "Oh! Maybe I'm changing myself." Probably not. I'm probably the same person. (laughs)

Cooper: So, you said you did 12-step?

Bamford: I've had experiences with people who are spiritual or who have emotional intelligence and sometimes it becomes, like, competitive. (laughs) Or there's a feeling I get from some that that's the only answer to overcoming an illness. An actual mental health thing. I do tons of that stuff. I love that stuff. Yay!

But I also think those therapeutic needs can be met in many other ways too. If you have good people in your life, you're getting feedback from them, and you're feeling supported, that counts. It's all good. I think sometimes it's like, "You've got to go to a mental health provider or a NAMI [National Alliance for the Mentally Ill] group." I don't know if that's for everybody.



Cooper: I think the reason I started thinking about your self-awareness was because you mentioned that your mother got a degree in family therapy & counseling and she did grow and was able to say, "I'm sorry." I was thinking about how we can sometimes look into ourselves.

Bamford: And change it, for sure. That was amazing. I didn't think my mother would ever change on that front. It's difficult for people to change. For example, I still illegally park. I love to do it. I've done some writing about parking habits. It's that gambling feeling, a sense of excitement, of entitlement. Why shouldn't I be able to park here? Because there's a fire hydrant, Maria. Or it's because I'm a sloth. I don't want to find parking. Or it's being miserly, I don't want to pay for parking. I do pay for it I guess, through tickets. (laughs) I'm OK with that.

I haven't been able to get myself to change. So, it's amazing to me that anybody is able to change their perspectives.

Cooper: How did you get involved with voiceover and animation?

Bamford: I don't know. I worked as a secretary at an animation studio, and that's how I got my first voiceover job. I think because I do different voices in my stand-up. I think stand-up can help in terms of having a good sense of humor and having the ability to improvise or add something. I think that's why I've gotten voiceover roles. It's my favorite. You are alone in a booth. There's just a voice telling you what to say. They're usually very kind and complimentary because it is Los Angeles, and it is show business. So, they're like, "Great, Maria! Can we do that again?" (laughs)

Cooper: (laughs) "Perfect! One more take."

Bamford: "Perfect. Seventeen more takes. We love it. Again, could you pace it up?" I love it. ■ ABILITY

mariabamford.com

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Salto Hacha waterfall, Canaima National Park, Venezuela, 2012

Couchsurfing While Deafblind

The season was summer, the year was 2000, and Tony Giles stood on the sidewalk outside his hotel in New Orleans, Louisiana. The sidewalk, like those he'd encountered in Massachusetts and South Carolina, was substantially wider than those in his native England. The weather was hotter, too, pushing 100 degrees with humidity. "I remember standing there, covered in sweat," he said, "and thinking, 'What am I doing? I'm mostly deaf, I'm totally blind, I've never been in this city before, I'm completely alone.' I started to feel a bit panicky."

Tony had visited Boston on a school trip at the age of 16 and traveled the UK with his peers, but this was his first solo venture. His college friends in South Carolina, where he was studying, had all gone to Florida and failed to invite him, presumably thinking he wouldn't be able to keep up, so he'd struck out on his own. Earlier that day, he'd disembarked at the Louis Armstrong International Airport, booked a taxi, and checked into the hotel on his own. The staff had showed him around his room, and he'd asked for directions to Bourbon Street. "Go down the steps," they'd told him, "turn left, walk four blocks, and you'll find a tram stop that'll take you to Bourbon." Simple.

"I made myself take a deep breath," he recalled, "and reminded myself that this was what I'd come here to do, and if I didn't want to, I could just go home. Of course, I wasn't about to go home." He took a few more breaths, and then he started walking. Soon, he found someone to show him to the tram stop. His new friend went with him to Bourbon Street, and they spent the night barhopping, listening to jazz and blues, eating spicy food and meeting "loads of crazy people."

Now 43 years old, Tony's made a name for himself as a world traveler and self-published author of three memoirs. He's visited 127 recognized countries--"Only 66 more to go," he added offhandedly, "plus some unrecognized ones, like Taiwan"--and all 50 states in the US. "I didn't even do that on purpose; I just kept going back to visit my American friends, and after six years, I realized I'd done about 30. I thought I might as well just go ahead and do the rest."

Tony's thirst for adventure began at a young age. Just



Feeding an elephant at the ElephantCafe, Livingstone, Zambia, 2020

before turning 11, he enrolled at a boarding school, which proved a safe environment in which to explore. "There was some traffic," he recalled, "but not a lot. It was a good jumping-off point."

He learned to use a white cane and soon achieved his first major mobility goal: making the journey from the boarding school back to his family home, 300 miles away. He also practiced navigating nearby towns, crossing streets and shopping at local stores. By the age of 16, he'd started going to rock concerts all around the UK with his friends.

Though he'd been to London, Boston still delivered a heavy dose of culture shock. "Everyone was talking in funny voices," Tony remembered. "The cars were going in the wrong direction. Everything was bigger! The sidewalks, especially." The biggest difference, though, was the social conventions. "In England, everyone's rather shy," he said. "They might want to help you, but they don't really know how to show it. In America, people will come right up to you and ask, 'Are you blind? Do you need help with anything?' I was like, 'Oh! I want more of this!'"

The internet hadn't yet emerged as an accessible source of information, so Tony relied on his mother to read him travel guides so he could plan. At school, he'd learned geography using tactile maps and globes. His early trips took him to the US, Australia and New Zealand, countries where the culture, infrastructure and natural landscape were somewhat familiar. "New Zealand might still be my favorite, even now," said Tony. "It really reminds me of England. The weather's cold and wet, and there's lots of lakes and rivers and only about four million people, so it's very peaceful and easy to get away from the cities."

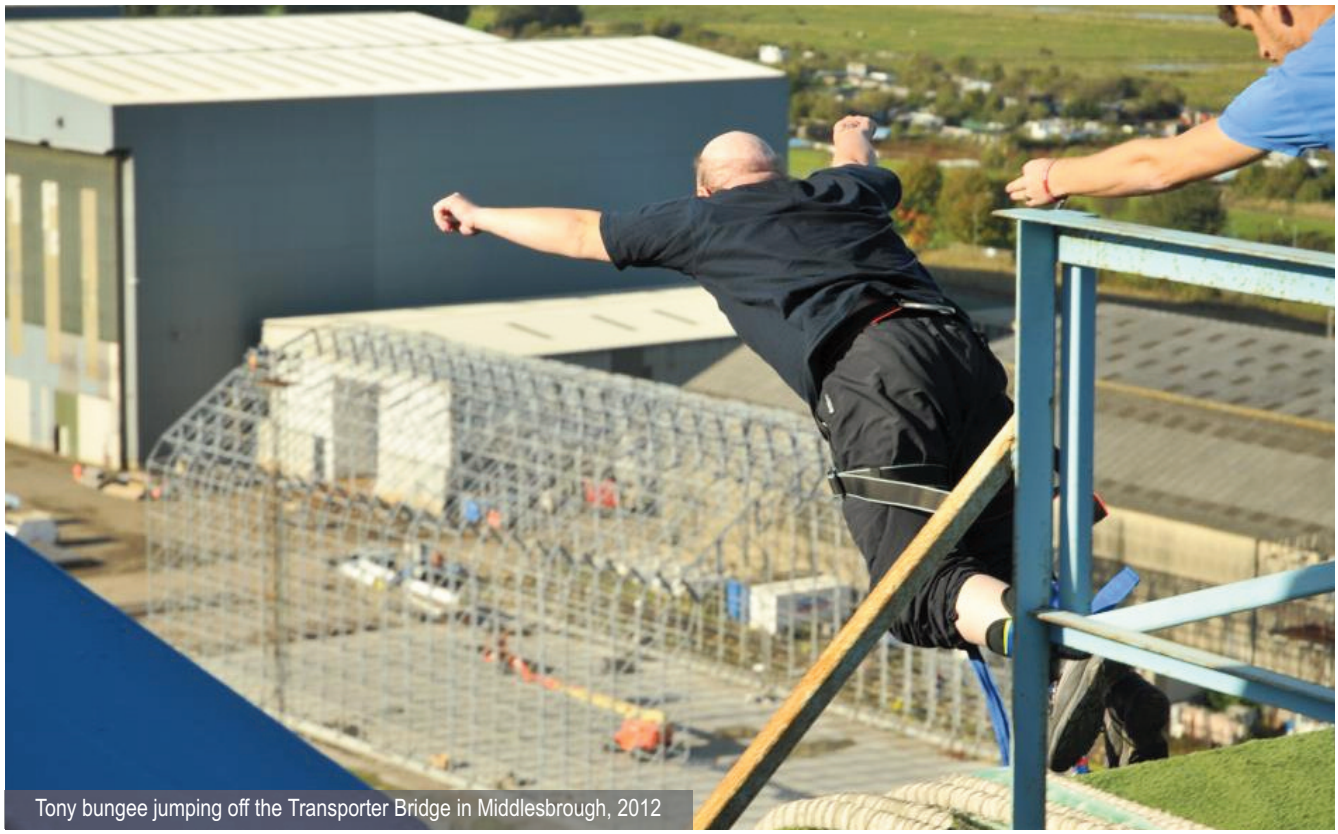
New Zealand was also the site of Tony's first experience with bungee-jumping. "As someone who can't see, I quite enjoyed that," he recalled, "as I had no idea when the bounce would come."

Another reason that New Zealand, Australia and the US proved navigable for Tony in the beginning was the relatively low language barrier. "I really struggle with languages because of my deafness," he said. "If it's quiet and I've got my hearing aids in, that gets me to about 75 percent hearing, but I almost always miss the sounds at the beginnings of the words, and sometimes in the middles, too. The letters M and N sound the same to me. So do B, T, and D. And of course I can't lipread! That makes it really hard to learn."

"The thing about blindness," he added, "which actually makes it easier to navigate, is that it's consistent. I can never see anything, whereas my deafness changes if there's wind or lots of noise around me--if I'm in a social situation, for instance--or if I get an ear infection. That makes it more complicated."

Still, Tony always goes out of his way to pick up a few words in the local language--"You know, the basics: 'Hello,' 'Thank you,' 'Toilet'"--wherever he's traveling.

His girlfriend, who's also blind, speaks several lan-



Tony bungee jumping off the Transporter Bridge in Middlesbrough, 2012

guages, and they sometimes travel together when she gets time off from the hospital call center where she works in Greece. "We've been to the States a few times," he said, "as well as Japan, Russia and about half of Europe. We visited Egypt together in 2019."

Nevertheless, Tony tends to prefer solo travel. "I've lived alone since I was 20," he said. "I'm used to having my own space and my independence. I love her, but I don't mind that we're living apart. It's great to travel with her and make those memories together, but it also means a lot of compromising and coordinating every little thing. Traveling on my own comes with a sense of freedom, which I think I'll always need."

The internet's grown more accessible and user-friendly since 2000, and though Tony emphasized the importance of preparation, he no longer relies on others to help him research his destinations. Using JAWS, he books tickets and accommodations, teaches himself how to handle new currencies, learns the rules of ridesharing, taxi-hailing and public transportation, applies for visas, identifies medical facilities in case of emergencies, and builds detailed, accessible itineraries.

"If I go to New York, for example," he said, "I might go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art because it's got a fantastic audio guide. Or I might sign up for a guided walking tour where I can listen to the guide and remember everything because I'm not distracted by the sights. I try to find statues I can touch and waterfalls or fountains I can hear. Sometimes, I'll just walk around a city and soak up the atmosphere: the markets or music or whatever."

Depending on the country, money can cause complications. In the UK, different notes are different sizes, and all are printed with Braille. Banks are even starting to roll out talking ATMs. In the US, however, and throughout Latin America, Africa and Asia, many currencies are all the same size regardless of denomination and lack Braille or other distinguishing physical marks. "I have to find people I can trust," said Tony. "I'll listen to them talking until I get a sense of their energy, and if I decide I can trust them, I'll ask for help at the cash machine."

He's also developed strategies for keeping track of change: "In the US, for example, if you take out $100, you'll get five 20-dollar bills. If you go to a store and buy something for $5, you should get back a five and a 10, or a 10 and five ones. Something like that." He then memorizes what he's carrying and asks people periodically to make sure he doesn't lose track.

At restaurants, he sometimes asks waitstaff or people at nearby tables to read him the menu, but in countries where he doesn't speak the language, he'll simply memorize the national dishes and try his luck reciting them. Buffets bring unexpected challenges as well as opportunities. In Brazil, for example, where patrons often serve themselves and pay according to the weight of the plate, he learned about a few new vegetables the hard way. "I had no idea what was going on my plate," he said. "My friends tried to explain what was there, but I'd never heard of cassava, I'd never heard of okra…I just told



Sand Boarding, Cerro Negro volcano, Nicaragua, 2016

them I'd eat anything except for salad!"

"Cassava, he added, "turned out to be like a potato, but without any of the qualities that make potatoes appetizing."

Though he's sworn off alcohol since a kidney transplant in 2008 and avoids easily contaminated foods like ice and salads, Tony's open to trying almost any new food. "I've been pretty lucky," he said. "I've never gotten really sick from anything I've eaten." The worst illness he's picked up abroad was most likely airborne--"A bit like COVID, actually, but that was back in 2016." While couch-surfing in Indonesia, he had to cancel his plans to visit an historical site when a mysterious virus laid him up in bed for weeks. "All I could eat were these little cakes my host's wife made," he recalled. "I couldn't keep anything else down. I couldn't taste anything. It took me a month to completely recover."

Thanks to these experiences, Tony's views his fellow human beings with optimism. "For me," he explained,

"trust comes naturally. Since I was very young, I've had to trust people to help me with money and crossing the road. Maybe it's a bit naïve, but I think most people are basically kind. They just want to live a simple life and put food on the table. I've met people from a lot of different cultures, and in my experience, the good outweighs the bad."

That's not to say he's never met with treachery. Once, in Bulgaria, a man agreed to take a photo of him in a church, then walked off with the camera. In a hotel in a country in West Africa, his laptop was stolen. "But that's just life," he said. "I've met people who've been shot and stabbed--people who can see and hear perfectly well. Nothing like that's ever happened to me. I'm positive and love to chat with people, and I think that makes people want to help me."

"There's different levels of trust, too," he added. "You might trust someone to help you cross the road or go from the bus station to where you're staying, but that doesn't mean you'll trust them with your feelings or your whole life story. Sometimes you make mistakes and trust the wrong people, but again, that's life. You just have to learn as you go."

After a dozen years of hostels and hotels, Tony discovered couchsurfing.com, which revolutionized his lifestyle. These days, instead of booking accommodations, he reaches out to strangers in foreign cities who might be willing to host him for free. "I let them know I'm deaf and blind," he said, "and that I'm independent. I send them my website. Usually, they're willing to host me."

His books, website and YouTube channel have lent him international legitimacy and opened many doors, both figurative and literal. "It wasn't actually my idea to write a book," he said. "It was my mom's." He'd have preferred to go bungee-jumping, but instead, he forced himself to sit down for a year and draft a massive manuscript: "All the good stuff that's happened to me, all the bad stuff, everything." After another 18 months spent editing, he set the project aside for a while, until a friend mentioned an article he'd read about a new publishing company. Tony submitted the manuscript, and they took it. It was first published in print in 2010.

A few years later, Tony decided to republish the memoir himself, this time as a trilogy of e-books. The first volume, Seeing the World My Way, "is about why a blind guy would want to go and see the world in the first place." The second, Seeing the Americas My Way, documents his travels to every Latin American country. The latest, Seeing a Slice of Southern Africa My Way, is equally self-explanatory. All three are now available on Kindle, Apple Books and Amazon.

Needless to say, the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a blow to Tony's lifestyle. "I was in Africa when it hit," he said,

SEEING A SLICE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA MY WAY



TONY GILES

"and I had to come home right away because all the borders were closing." He landed in the UK on April 1 and didn't leave the country again for 18 months. "It was quite stressful at times," he recalled, "especially with my partner living in Greece. We Zoomed and messaged every day, but still." When he wasn't on a call with his girlfriend, Tony kept himself busy as best he could, promoting his books, ambling around outdoors, planning future trips abroad and talking with family and friends.

"I'm really grateful for technology," said Tony. "One of the biggest problems when you're deafblind, even when there's no pandemic, is being isolated." Though it's not always easy for Tony to hear on the phone, he's had more success with email, messaging apps and Zoom. Technology's also enabled him to live 70 miles from his family, cooking his own meals, scanning his own mail and planning his own adventures.

Even as COVID lingers on, Tony's pleased to report that he's now resumed traveling. "I couldn't stay at home and have a good life," he said. "Even with my audiobooks and music, I'd be bored in 30 minutes. I'm an adrenaline junky. I just need more." ■ ABILITY

by Mekiya Walters

tonythetraveller.com


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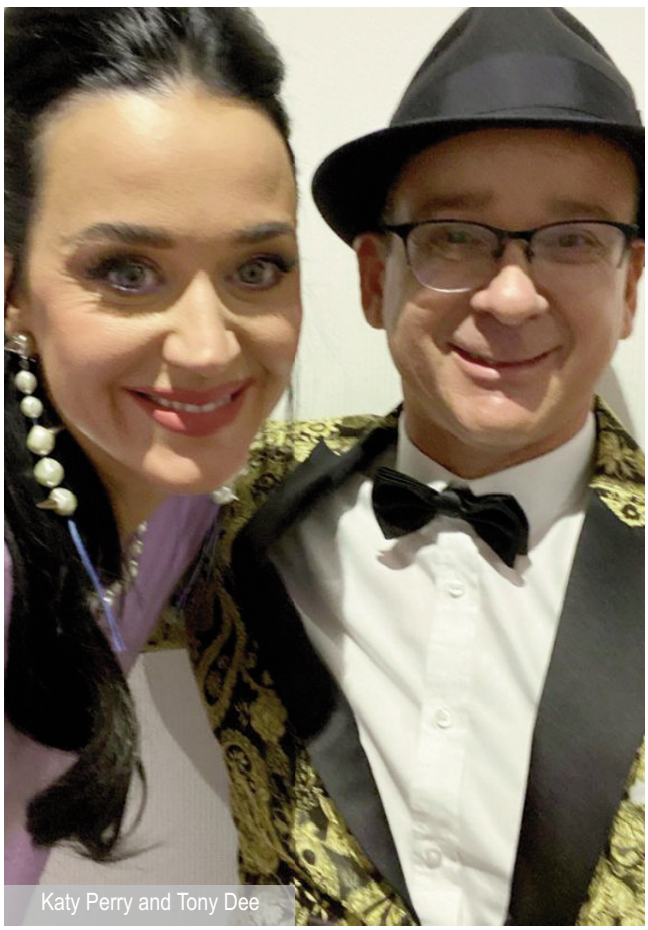


When Bono said, “Music can change the world because it can change people,” he could have been talking about the True Colors Festival (TCF) and its message of inspiration and inclusion. TCF is an international performing arts festival that puts the spotlight on differently-abled artists. Since its inception in 2006, the festival has showcased the extraordinary talents of singers, dancers and musicians who just happen to have a disability through concerts, documentaries, film festivals, music videos, workshops, and musicals. All with the aim to change the world by changing perceptions.



We Are One

In 2018, I was lucky enough to be sitting in the audience of the True Colors Concert which took place at Singapore Indoor Stadium, co-presented by UNESCO and the Nippon Foundation. It was an event that brought me to tears as one artist after another blew me away with their talent and tenacity.



Katy Perry and Tony Dee

I wasn't the only one reacting like this. I saw many in the audience, and speaking with some of them after the show, the tears were from complex emotions, questions and realisations that surfaced as they watched: That could have been me, my sibling, my own child. Would I have had the courage to let my child follow their passion in spite of all the extra challenges? What am I complaining about, in the face of such grit and determination to excel? Who cares about the disability when the talent is so real and defining? How shallow are we, that we judge people based on their 'packaging'? And many more.

From the powerful vocals of France Got Talent alumnus Alienette Coldfire's to the adrenaline rush of Ill-Abilities tightly choreographed street dance, from the power of Singapore's Wheelsmith rapping, to the balletic poetry of dancers Ma Li and Zhai Xiaowei, both missing a limb but transcending the stage as though flying, I was truly in awe of the talent on display.

Singaporean audiences tend to be rather quiet, but the hollering of the crowd, and the buzz of the stadium was testament to how much the concert touched us all. It certainly changed my own perception of people with a disability and since then has changed the way I think about diversity and inclusion.

The energy, electricity, and enthusiasm of the audience – which included Singapore President Halimah Yacob - was more moving than any concert I had seen before or since. I must admit I had not expected the calibre of the performances to be so high, to the point that I almost forgot the artists were disabled at all and was able to focus purely on their talent.

Taking the festival to new heights, this year's concert



Viktoria Modesta

was headlined by global superstar Katy Perry, who jumped at the chance to put a spotlight on these amazing artists.

"Music has the power to be the great connector and equalizer across all differences. And I'm excited for us to use our voices to celebrate diversity and inclusion. What moved me to join True Colors Festival was the spirit and uniqueness of the festival's message and the opportunity to share the stage with all of these diverse artists," said Katy Perry.

"I'm excited to be back in Tokyo to perform at this inspiring event and with the concert livestreamed all across the world, everybody can come together and celebrate."

This year was the powerhouse line-up of almost 100 musicians, singers, and dancers from 12 countries, with music genres ranging from classical to pop, dance to rap, hip hop to rock, in a multimedia extravaganza that also features vignettes of the artists in their everyday lives.

In addition to Katy Perry, audiences were entertained and inspired by performances from the likes of bionic popstar Viktoria Modesta; Grammy-nominated vocalist/guitarist Raul Midon; The Voice Italy runner-up Frederico Martello; Australian crooner Tony Dee; Alvin Law who plays drums with his feet; and Singaporean rapper Wheelsmith.

Originally scheduled to take place alongside the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the concert had been delayed several times due to Covid, but as they say, the show must go.

For the first time, it was also livestreamed globally, so that people watched it from the comfort of their homes, no matter where they were. As part of a commitment to being accessible, TCF also feature a suite of accessibility features including Japanese and International Sign, real-time subtitles, audio description, and personnel on standby at the venue for all guests in need of assistance.

Executive Producer Audrey Perera says, "True Colors Festival uses the arts to showcase artists with disabilities so they will be seen as performers first and foremost. We know that music and the arts have the power to break down barriers between people and we promise that everyone who sees the concert will be changed forever. It is about respecting our unique differences and allowing people to show their true colors in all their brilliant glory."

Sometimes referred to as the Paralympics of the Performing Arts, TCF is all about showcasing some of the finest performers in the world, many of whom have overcome enormous challenges to achieve their dreams. It is a celebration of diversity and inclusion and embraces the One World, One Family motto through the arts.

Executive Director of The Nippon Foundation and Senior Executive Producer of the concert, Ichiro Kabasawa, had said: "You will be surprised, you will laugh and cry, but at the end you will be able to go home with a full heart."

What I have learned from my involvement in True Colors is that we are all the same underneath our different shells and we all deserve to be recognised and respected. ■ ABILITY

truecolorsfestival.com

The Ball's in Our Court Now:

David Wantuck on Sports and COVID-Era Access for the Deaf Community

As a young man, David Wantuck wanted to achieve two things: become a sports agent, and advocate for better access for the Deaf community. "Those weren't really separate goals," he told ABILITY Magazine. "Professional athletes who are Deaf or hard of hearing face a lot of barriers. I've always wanted that to change."

Born and raised in Buffalo, New York, David comes from a large Deaf family. He graduated from St. Mary's School for the Deaf and earned a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and sports management from Medaille College.

As an athlete and sports fan, he encountered no shortage of barriers. "I've played basketball on an all-Deaf team against all-hearing teams," he said, "and we did just fine. But when there're one or two Deaf athletes on a mostly hearing team, you run into problems." When he played baseball, some of his coaches seemed reluctant to put him in certain positions, possibly fearing communication breakdowns. He also witnessed coaches bench Deaf athletes at critical moments during games, perhaps concerned that miscommunications would jeopardize their chances of victory.

This may stem more from misunderstanding than malice, but that hardly lessens the sting. "If you think about it," David pointed out, "there are lots of ways to communicate. You can use gestures or signal calling. Children seem to get that more than grownups do. Kids will let anyone play and just figure things out as they go, but with adults, especially when the pressure's on, some coaches seem to just revert to what they know. And that means we don't get to play."

Under the ADA, athletes on high school and college teams are entitled to interpreters upon request, but that doesn't apply at the professional level. Professional players may request interpreters, but their provision isn't guaranteed. "It can be even worse for athletes from other countries," added David, "since they might not even be guaranteed accommodations in high school and college. At the end of the day, though, we all get older and face the same barriers at the professional level."

"That's reality," he went on. "Is it a fair reality? No. But I think it's something we can change if we show the world that Deaf athletes help their teams win games."

Though his passion for sports persists, David discovered after graduation just how insular the sports agenting world can be. "The hotspots are LA and Chicago," he said, "and it can be really tough to start a career when you're not in one of those cities, or when you're not in the right social networks. It can be hard to get your foot in the door." Currently, this life goal's on hold, and David's putting his energy toward other forms of advocacy.

In 2019, he became the Community Engagement Specialist for Deaf Access Services (DAS Inc.) "We're now an affiliate of People Inc., a nonprofit based in western New York," he said. In this role, he conducts community training sessions and educates community members on issues such as accessibility and American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation. He also helps organize community events, fundraisers, public and private ASL classes and more.

"It's really fulfilling work," he said, "but it comes with plenty of challenges." One of these, predictably, is outsiders' tendency to homogenize diverse experiences into monoliths. "In my family, for example, we're all different," said David. "Some of us talk, some of us don't. I learned to sign before I learned to speak. That's pretty common, especially when you come from a Deaf family, but that doesn't mean it's universal." After 18 years of classes and speech therapy, he's become an adept English speaker--"But I always tell people," he added, "'Don't assume the next Deaf person who you meet will be like me.' I'm not that good at reading lips, for instance. Some people can't speak at all, but they're amazing lip readers. Everyone's different."

Language barriers pose an additional challenge, and not just with hearing people. "There are over 300 sign languages in the world," said David, "and I only know ASL. Sometimes, I'm able to communicate with people from other countries using gestures, but not always." This can make it difficult for DAS to work with clients who're unfamiliar with ASL. "When a new American who's deaf or hard of hearing comes to our country and settles in Buffalo," he said, "it usually takes a while for them to get connected with us. Someone has to introduce them to us, or maybe an organization that's supporting their family refers them."



Left: David Wantuck shaking hands with Yann Spindler congratulating on him winning the Community Award from Deaf Access Services

In such cases, the first step is to assess how much language, if any, the new client already has. "That's harder than it might sound," David said. "Even if we know their country of origin, that might not tell us their language. Multiple languages are signed and spoken in any given country." Some clients from abroad have never had access to language at all. Others are fluent in languages that are underrepresented, colonized or dying, making it difficult to locate interpreters. "When you're trying to find someone who can interpret between, for example, Farsi Sign Language and ASL" said David, "there might be, I don't know, one or two people in the world who can do that. And they might not be here in New York."

For this reason, when working with a client from abroad, DAS sometimes has to start from square one. "We usually get a Deaf interpreter as well as a hearing interpreter," said David, "since they tend to be more attuned to gestures and body language." Using gestures and simplified signs, DAS affiliates and interpreters teach basic vocabulary: "You know, 'Here's an apple, here's how you say apple in English, here's how you sign apple in ASL.' Hopefully, the person gets what we're communicating and is able to respond."

"Is it the best method?" David went on. "Honestly, I'm not sure. It's a tricky situation, and we're learning as we go."

Even with these obstacles, they've had some notable successes. "We've been working with a guy who's been here for about 10 years," David recalled. "Recently, we finally figured out his language background and found an interpreter. That was a huge breakthrough! There was joy on his face by the end of that first conversation. Outcomes like that make me want to keep going."

COVID-19 has raised additional barriers, but has created opportunities, too. "The first few months of the pandemic were really hard for us," David said. "We rely on facial expressions when communicating since we can't hear vocal intonations, and when everyone's wearing masks, there's no way for us to know if the other person's angry, happy, tired, sad.… Sometimes, people think we're ignoring them, but we're not; we might not even know they're talking to us if we can't see their lips moving."

As on the ballfield, there're many modes of communication, but in the early days of the pandemic, people were often reluctant to exchange pens and paper or smartphones with strangers, fearing surface transmission. After months of chaos, misunderstandings and marginalization, many people in the Deaf and hard of hearing community reached the conclusion that they'd just have to figure things out for themselves.

As time's gone on, however, positive trends have begun to emerge, somewhat offsetting, if not making up for, the initial trauma and confusion. "I think we've started finding ways to turn these problems on their heads,"



Deaf community group at City Hall with the Mayor of Buffalo presenting the Deaf Awareness International Flag for Deaf Awareness Week

said David. "In New York, for example, we managed to get ASL interpreters on television." Despite having one of the largest Deaf and hard of hearing populations in the US, New York State was one of the last in the Union to mandate ASL interpreters during COVID briefings. "In 2020, four Deaf advocates sued Andrew Cuomo," said David. "Now, they've got interpreters at all the governor's press conferences, and even on the news!"

Likewise, the normalization of remote work and video-conferencing have, over time, proven beneficial. "It's given us a lot more flexibility when we're looking for interpreters," David observed. "If someone cancels at the last minute, it's a lot easier these days to find a replacement since we don't have to factor in travel time. We don't love last minute requests, but at least when there's an emergency, we can usually find someone."

This has enabled collaboration with interpreters in other countries, too. "There may still be just a couple of people in the world who can interpret between Farsi Sign Language and ASL," said David, "but now we might actually be able to find them and hire them when we need their services." This arrangement's good for the interpreters as well as the clients: it creates job opportunities that wouldn't otherwise exist, especially for those whose services aren't needed in their countries, but are in demand abroad.

"We're still getting used to all this," David acknowledged. "But we're learning as we go. I feel like we're only just starting to explore these new potential opportunities."

According to David, many longtime allies are becoming more active now that they've personally experienced barriers to access and communication. "Organizers seem to be asking themselves more and more what should be done to make events accessible," he said. "That's a great start, but you can't just stop there. You have to reach out to the right people and ask the right questions. If you do that, you'll get good information; and if you use that information, you'll get good feedback, which will bolster your reputation." By David's lights, support for accessibility and inclusion's reached an all-time high--though, as he noted, "It's a bit ridiculous that it's taken a global pandemic to get us here."

"We've been patient for a really long time," he went on, "but nowadays, with all the technology that's available, there's really no excuse for anyone not to have access. I think we're getting more aggressive with our advocacy, and that's a good thing. Not aggressive as in violent or angry, but aggressive as in we're not taking 'No' for an answer anymore. We're insisting on accessibility everyone. We're not willing to leave anyone behind." ■ ABILITY



by Mekiya Walters

linkedin.com/in/david-wantuck

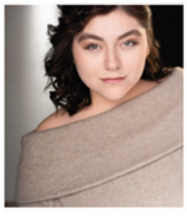
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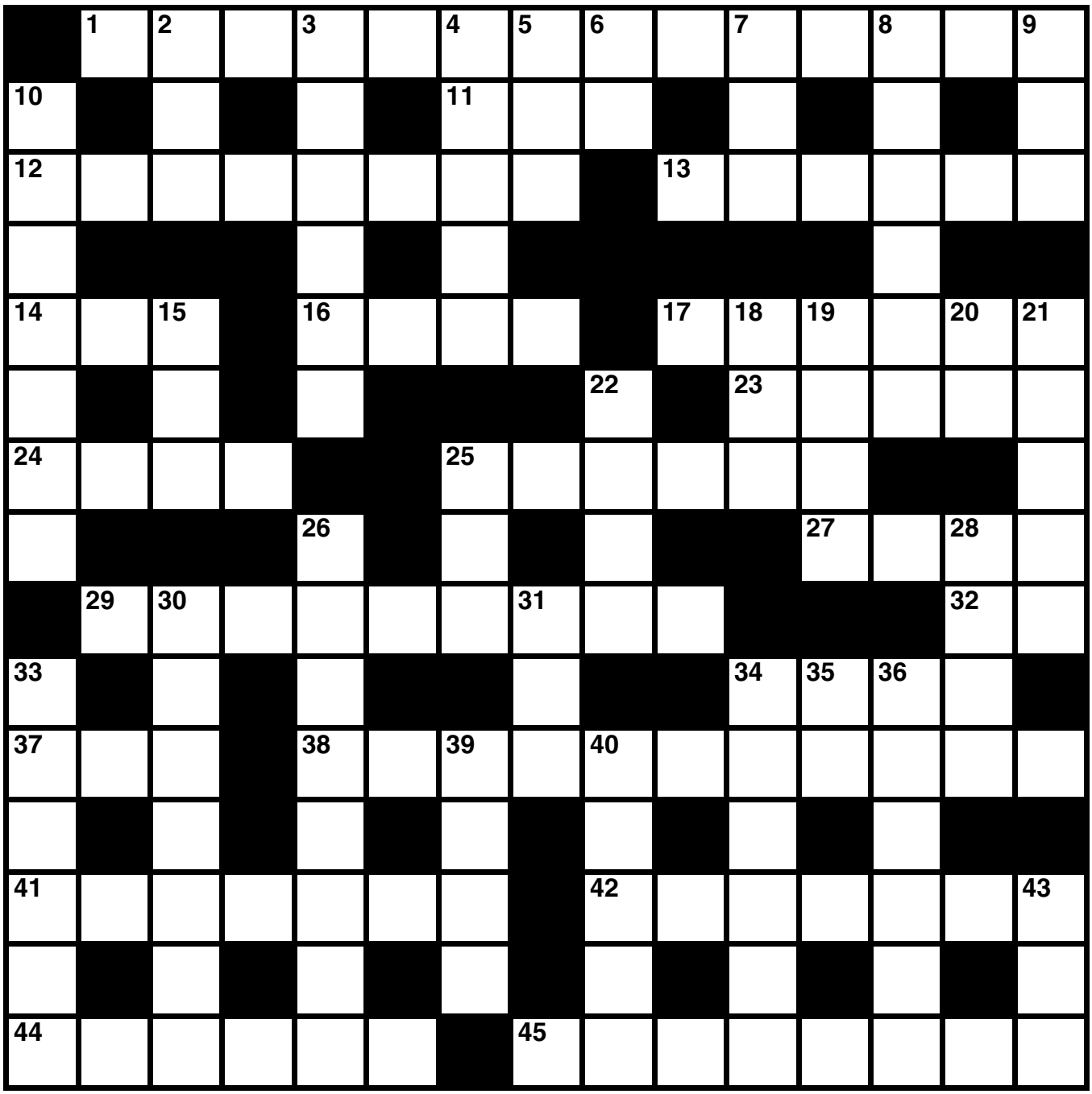


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Crossword Puzzle

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ACROSS

1. First woman with a disability to be elected to the US House of Representatives, 2 words
11. See ___ (get mad)
12. Chief Accessibility Advocate to the Department of Transport of Victoria, Australia, Tricia _____, who overcame polio to empower other people with disabilities
13. Useful device
14. School of Buddhism
16. Garnish for many a drink
17. Professor who has been fighting against the institutionalization of persons with disabilities for many years, Arlene ____
23. Don't use
24. Chicken part that's good for soup
25. Former professional motocross racer and stunt rider who is culturally deaf and communicates via ASL, ____ Fiolek
27. Harmonize, for short
29. Christmas missiles
32. What?
34. Anglers fish from it
37. Cleaning essential
38. Multidisciplinary artist whose work is powered by ASL, Brandon ____ ____ (2 words)
41. British actress diagnosed with dyslexia who is starring in "The Hunting of the Snark" , _____ Furman
42. Receives as income, 2 words
44. Tiers for cheers
45. It's now possible to play this wind instrument single handed thanks to a UK instrument maker called Pete Worrell

DOWN

1. Language used by deaf people, abbr.
3. The "man-cub" in "Jungle Book"
4. Fantasize
5. 180° turn, slangily
6. Music storage disc
7. Org. for boxers, abbr.
8. The R in The United Nations CRPD (Convention)
9. Sombrero, for example
10. Astounding
15. "30 Rock" network
18. Wonder
19. Some floor votes
20. Gentle alien, in film
21. "____ out and touch somebody's hand..." Diana Ross
22. Indian dish made with stewed legumes
25. Menu catchphrase, 2 words
26. Roused from sleep
28. Notorious Roman emperor
30. African nation that passed the Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act in 2018
31. Stretch out
33. Early spring flower
34. He created the world's first real-time voice-to-text mobile application for the hearing-impaired, Greg _____
35. Driver's license, for example
36. Electricity founder who was deaf in both ears
39. Sleep, slangily
40. Birth related
43. Earn after expenses

Crossword Puzzle

answers on page 74

Crossword Puzzle

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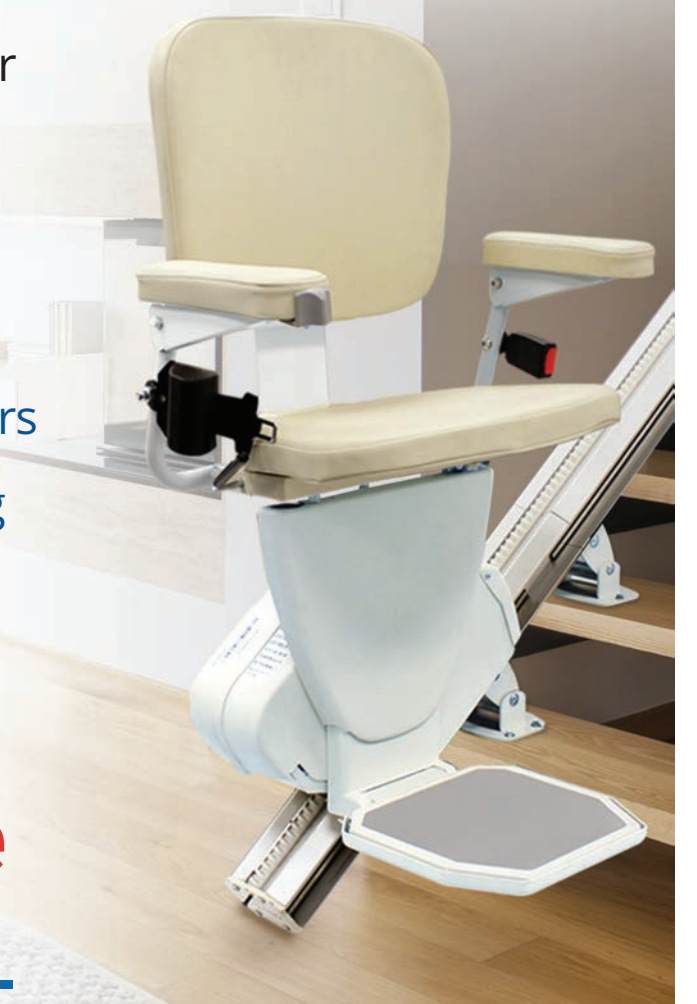
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- For the tenth consecutive year, readers of ***CAREERS & the disABLED*** magazine recognized Wells Fargo as one of 2021's Top 50 Employers of people with disabilities.
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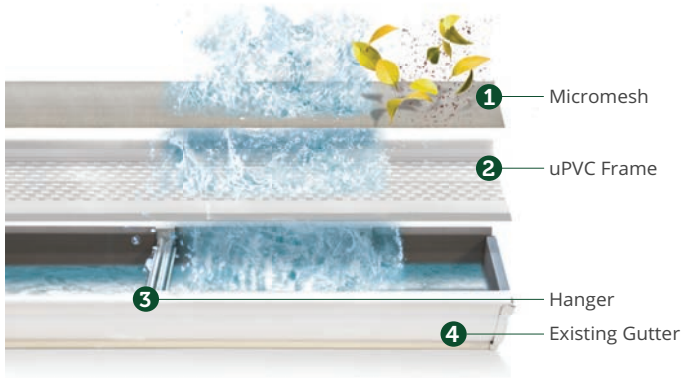
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