

ABILITY



Ryan Dungey
FOUNDATION

Michelle Mary Schaefer
Actress, Deaf Advocate,...

**BREAKING
BARRIERS**

iBOT Journeys

**MISS AMAZING
BUILDING CONFIDENCE
& SELF-ESTEEM**

**+
DISABILITY & ADVERTISING
EDWARD TIMKE, PHD**

**FENGZHAO (LUCAS) XU
LENS OF RESILIENCE**

Interviews with:

Isaac MIZRAHI, accessible fashion on QVC

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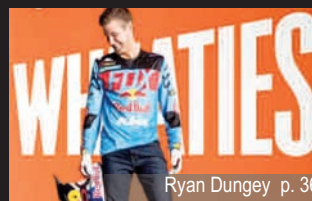
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This publication was financially assisted by the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES)





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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; Selma Blair Issue Oct/Nov 2023

Published in USA

DISTRIBUTION

Faxon-RoweCom Library Services
Ebsco - Library Services
Swets Blackwell

The views expressed in this issue may
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Library of Congress
Washington D.C. ISSN 1062-5321

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Ashley and Chet riding at Lake Elsinore MX park

Fall is rapidly approaching and I must say I am looking forward to it! It has been a long hot summer for me riding outside as I got ready for the Loretta Lynn's Amateur Nationals. My family and friends were all there



Some of my friends also came to cheer me and offer my moral support.

I haven't raced in ten years so my whole goal of competing in this race was mostly just to make it in! Everything is broken up into region's as to how you qualify for this huge race. First you have to make it into an area qualifier (the number they take depends on where the area qualifier is held) If you make it into the area qualifier then you move on to the regional. If you qualify in the regional you move on the Loretta Lynns National race. I was just super happy to make it since it has been so long since I raced. I still rode, but I literally had not raced in 10 years!! Once I knew I was going I was kind of hoping for a top 15 overall. I didn't want to get my hopes up too much since I was riding a 125 and most of the girls were on 250's! I did train pretty hard for an old woman hahaha....

I didn't know what to expect until after my first moto, I got 7th my first moto and I was pretty stoked! I was the only 125 under the tent! Then the rain started to come ugh, it rained and rained and rained! My second race got delayed and kept getting pushed later and later and we were suppose to ride early. We finally wound up being

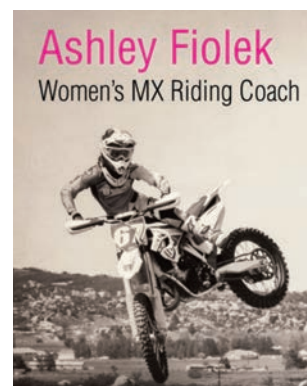
with me for the week when I raced. We had a lot of fun and got to see some great racing. My dad was with me already as he was helping me out with my bike but my mom flew in from Florida to be with us and my brother and his girlfriend drove up from Pensacola. We all just stayed in the motorhome for the week and had some tents set up outside.

the next to last race, I got 10th place and was pretty happy with that! Well the rain just kept coming everything was flooded and all the races were delayed it was quite a mess. I was suppose to race at 8:30 in the morning on Saturday, but didn't race until 3pm!

The track was a mess, but I just wanted to go out and have fun! I fell one time because it was so slippery and then someone ran into me! Oops.... I was next to last, but just kept going. I wound up making it up to 16th place, not great, but I was proud of myself! At the end of the day I wound up getting an overall of 9th place. I'm glad I did the race and I was proud of what I accomplished!



Last weekend I went to PA with some friends there was an event there called 'Over and Out Moto'. It was so much fun, it was girls only. We rode on trails and camped and had a great time, it is for women of all different skill levels. Now me and Bambi (my dog) are just taking it easy. We just moved to Michigan and I'm looking forward to chilling and going to some cider mills! ■ **ABILITY**



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Thanks, Inflation! Man with 3 Disabilities Now Has 4.

Due to the inevitable flow of supply and demand, and also increasing corporate shareholder profits, inflation is everywhere. When local man Thomas Cole visited his primary care physician Dr. Richmen, he found it there too.

“I regret to have to tell you that in addition to your muscular dystrophy, arthritis and ADHD, we also believe you now have a fourth disability, IBS,” Dr. Richmen told Cole.

While Cole had come to terms with his three disabilities, they were a lot to manage already. He didn’t understand how he could handle a fourth.

“I always knew a fourth disability was possible, but I didn’t expect it so soon. My spoons have not inflated one bit,” he told us as he methodically sifted through a

Ziplock baggie filled with various pills.

Dr. Richmen elaborated: “This couldn’t have been prevented, and it’s actually a good thing for me, your doctor, because I now have more things to bill you for.”

This additional illness means Cole will go from six prescriptions to eight, each of which recently had a 10% increase in copay. He will have to see Dr. Richmen twice a month now instead of once, and he will wait an extra 15 minutes in the waiting room before each appointment.

Just when Cole thought inflation was inescapable, he found one area it hadn’t yet impacted — his monthly SSI payment. ■ **ABILITY**



by Steven Verdile

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Inappropriate Medical Advances

I consider myself a fairly simple man with some common sense. Having a life-long autoimmune disease like multiple sclerosis certainly provides me plenty of opportunities to witness dumb and dangerous decisions from our healthcare system. The United States probably has the greatest doctors, medications and treatments in the world. However, rules and regulations too often get directly in the way of what is proper and appropriate, and so much time and money is wasted fighting company policies and corporate profit margins to get the treatments we need.

‘My Million Mile Journey for a Cure’ started a decade ago. After attending a dozen or so patient educational events, I saw an opportunity to give back to the multiple sclerosis community. As a patient advocate, I could hopefully inspire others to not let their diagnosis stop them from doing the activities in life they enjoyed. I began speaking and sharing my story at pharmaceutical sponsored events in the New England area.

Eventually I went on to become one of the top patient speakers for the largest disease modifying drug manufacturer in the country. Getting my message out to thousands of patients in rural communities as well as spending time with newly diagnosed patients was the highlight of every free chicken dinner I was invited to speak at. The FDA regulates the drug industry with an iron fist and I was careful to always follow the rules while telling my story.





Over the first five years, I spoke at over 250 venues, traveling by motorcycle from New Hampshire to every single event regardless if it was in Florida, California or even Alaska! My goal was a million miles and the further away from home I had to travel, the better! I quit my day job. I was making a difference, helping others and getting to ride a motorcycle for a living. I discovered by finding something I love to do and making it more important than my disease, I was slowing it's progression! I'm not saying the disease modifying medications were not helping, but I am saying having a positive outlook and purpose in my life absolutely contributed to my health.

I know I certainly wasn't the first to discover the healing power of positive energy, but it was the first time I actually believed in it, because it worked for me.

Unfortunately, after about five years my positive energy treatment was abruptly halted. My medication which consisted of traveling and speaking to others who shared the same illness ran dry and I was denied refills. I was forced to either stop traveling by motorcycle or stop speaking for the pharmaceutical company.

The legal department felt my method of transportation was somehow a liability for them and were worried how it would look if a patient was injured on the way to one of their events. I argued that riding through NYC in an Uber was just as, if not more dangerous than riding my motorcycle. I had never missed an event, had never been late to an event and my expenses were less costly than flying and picking me up from my hotel in a limo.

Over my lifetime of 25 years and 600,000 motorcycle miles at the time, I had never had a single incident or accident.

As a highly regulated industry, every word of the story I shared publicly at events had to be approved by the compliance and legal departments at the drug company. The entire story I was sharing with other patients was about how I had rediscovering the freedom and excitement of traveling long distances on two wheels and my million mile quest to help others. My love of riding was part of my story, the story the drug company approved and expected me to continue to share!

Even more important, my love of riding long distances was a big part of treating my disease. The pharmaceutical company's change in travel policy hit hard and sent me and my disease back pretty hard. Their decision was based on someone's fear of motorcycles and not the facts. The decision was a detriment to my health as I struggled financially, mentally and physically for a year or two before finding other ways to continue my journey and continue to make a difference in the lives of others.

I was lucky enough to attend and speak at a patient event provided by MS Views and News in recently. Dr. Ann Cabot was a neurologist specializing in MS and we had presented together at dozens of programs years ago. Her presentation was informative and entertaining as always. I realized it had been a while since I attended an event like this because I was amazed at the advances in medications and treatments for slowing the



disease progression. When I was diagnosed in 2005, there were three options and all were injectables. Today newly diagnosed patients have about 25 different disease modifying therapies to choose from!

The pharmaceutical companies sure have been busy creating new and more powerful drugs that can slow the progression to a snail's crawl or even slower. Many folks diagnosed today may never see their disease progress any further if they find the right treatment that works for them. These new medical advancements and treatments sounded great, but.....

After the presentation, the questions from the live and online audiences were all about how to get their health insurance to cover these new, and better class of medications. It is sad and sickening to hear the amount of time, anger and frustration patients spend to get approval for a medication that they need to stop a disease that when progresses, causes disability.

Pencil pushers with no knowledge of the patient's medical history or the qualifications of the prescribing neurologist look at a chart with drug prices and deny the patient the medication they need. "You have to try the old and cheaper drugs first," is the common answer from a phone operator with a fancy calculator and zero medical education.

How is it possible we live in a country that has treatments available that work better than the previous options to slow the progression of an incurable and often disabling disease and yet a phone operator or

accountant at a health insurance company can go against the doctor's orders and decide it's not necessary?

Spending months fighting denial after denial, writing letters or trial and error with inferior, cheaper drugs before getting appropriate treatment from our health insurance companies causes stress, anxiety and can increase the chance of disease progression in any illness.

I may be a simple man, but it is crystal clear to me that the complexity of rules, regulations and profit margins are getting in the way of patients benefiting from great advancements in medications and treatment options and our medical system is really, really broken.

■ ABILITY





Michelle Mary SCHAEFER

In her diverse roles as actress, writer, director, producer, ASL consultant, and intimacy coordinator, Michelle Mary Schaefer is committed to moving forward. After growing up Deaf in a hearing-centric world, navigating through challenging education and life experiences, Schaefer continues to be her authentic self. Using her many talents, Schaefer works tirelessly on her craft while also advocating for authentic representation in entertainment.

Schaefer met virtually with *ABILITY*'s Marge Plasmier with an ASL interpreter. Schaefer discussed how she fell in love with acting, connected with roles she's played and how she continues to forge her own path in writing, directing and producing her own work. She also shares her unique experience of being a contestant on the streaming series, "Coming Out for Love," the first US lesbian dating show.

Editor's note: So that nothing was lost in live translation, Schaefer assisted with edits as it is important to have the correct voice for all our interviews.

Marge Plasmier: I see that you are an actor, plus director, screenwriter, producer, and many other things. Is it safe to assume that acting is your first love?

Michelle Mary Schaefer: Yes, I am an actor, director, screenwriter, producer, and CEO of Annabelle Louise Productions, to allow myself and my passions to be

expanded within the industry; however, my first love is acting. I began writing scripts because my college professor wrote a script and inspired me to tell my own stories. Also, writing scripts empowers me to share my life experiences, and even imaginations in words, which either come alive onstage, onscreen — And some are still waiting for funding to be able to be greenlit. Plus, I find myself writing roles for folks like me, in a life experience as a Deaf person that no hearing person can truly write accurately, which there have been so many mistakes and assumptions in those kinds of stories.

However, I strongly value authentic stories, representation matters, and our voices to be told. I became a director to direct films and theatre, to tell more stories. Later, I have become a producer in theatre and films to bring authentic stories alive on stage and on screen. I find that doing what you love is truly living, and that is what I'm doing, by working in both theatre and films. I'm always working extremely hard every single day as a screenwriter, producer, director, my own manager, to look for acting opportunities. And what keeps me going is the burning passions within me, along with being persistent. Again, yes, I do truly love acting because it allows me to be another character and bring it out alive, along with its story onstage and onscreen. It's just pure magic for me that no words can truly express how I feel...

Plasmier: Okay, so let's go back to acting. How did you





Michelle Mary Schaefer as Billy (Female) in "Tribes"

get into that? Or how did you come upon it and start being passionate about it?

Schaefer: Okay, well, when I was four years old, I was watching "Children of a Lesser God" which starred Marlee Matlin. I was amazed that she is Deaf, just like me and I knew at that moment I wanted to be an actor just like her. She was my role model, growing up in the world of sounds, surrounded by hearing folks. — I will never forget that day, just full of excitement to see someone like me onscreen, which I knew I had to figure out how to navigate in the world, and the industry.

When I was a kid, I was a "Full House" fan, and I even wrote a letter to Jeff Franklin, the creator of the show, to show interest in being on the show. I even once called Aaron Spelling of "7th Heaven" and Joss Whedon of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" on my old TDD (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf) and spoke with their assistants, which led me to fax my headshot and resume. I even faxed my headshot and resume per Aaron Sorkin's request—Still waiting for him to reply back as it has been ages ago! Good old-days, which clearly shows how determined and persistent I am within the career.

Plasmier: Okay, so at four years old, your parents sat you down in front of "Children of a Lesser God"?

Schaefer: Yes, my parents did allow me to watch "Children of a Lesser God."

Plasmier: It's a very intense movie for a four-year-old.

Schaefer: But you have to think about it from the perspective of a Deaf child lost in a hearing world with no Deaf exposure, but Marlee Matlin which made a huge difference even for a four-year-old.

Plasmier: Right.

Schaefer: Growing up, I struggled with my Deaf identity as I was lost. I was considered too Deaf for the hearing world and not Deaf enough for the Deaf world and even Deaf Theatre. I was mocked, bullied, and laughed at my entire life. I felt caught between two worlds, which led me to write one of my earliest scripts, "Caught Between Two Worlds," which did not successfully land in the eyes of the industry, yet. But it could still be an interest, which I would polish them up before we bring these worlds alive onscreen, maybe onstage. Anyway, I did not fully embrace my Deafness until I went to RIT (Rochester Institute of Technology) which has opened my world, and eyes which changed me for the best to be a stronger person and allow me to live authentically. Even-though I am a stronger person, living authentically, I still faced barriers in the hearing world with accessibility, being declined the accessibility of interpreters at events, hospitals, interviews, rejected request for preference of qualified interpreters, and ongoing issues of captions, lack of captions in film festivals, YouTube, social media, movie theatres, videos, commercials etc. And rejected of career opportunities—As myself, I have been looking for a full-time job since 2012, and only had five interviews since then with thousands of applications. Instead of sitting at home, I write scripts, network, research, look for acting opportunities and form my own production company. I truly believe that attending RIT was a huge turning point within my life and career along with embracing my Deaf identity.

Plasmier: So, as a young person, what interaction did you have with the Deaf community? Did you go to Deaf schools? Were you mainstreamed or did you have more support for ASL?

Schaefer: Remember, I was my parent's first Deaf person, well daughter, they ever met. They listened to the medical and early childhood intervention, which I had a hearing aid for and began my speech therapy when I was one, with reinforcement of signing. In elementary

school, I had hearing teachers (Teachers of Deaf) which spoke and signed at the same time, Sim-Com (simultaneous communication). So, I had some Deaf children in my class, too, and some hearing children in my class. At that time, I was signing exact English, not ASL. Then when I was in middle school, I was so bored in the Deaf education program, not learning anything. I was transferred to the mainstream classroom with an ASL interpreter. That was the big starting point within my education because I did not truly realize I was way behind my peers and I knew I had to work extremely hard to catch up, which I proudly did.

Education is very important to me, and I thank my parents for constantly advocating for my education in the school system. There were so many things that happened in the school system that truly should have never happened, and yes, I do have PTSD. However, every child should always have the right to education, a safe place, and the right to take a class they desire to. — School is supposed to be a nurturing space. — Also, I did have a choice to go to the Deaf school. My parents took me there every year for a day to experience it. I, unfortunately, hated it because I was being bullied all day and did not feel accepted. There were even times I thought maybe I should just go and try. Then I was told that my educational level was too high for my peers, so I stopped visiting the school for the Deaf and remained mainstreamed with an ASL interpreter throughout middle, high and college years.

Plasmier: Is it fair to say that your first experience of the deaf community, like, being kind of encompassed by the deaf community was when you went to RIT?

Schaefer: The first time I truly felt embraced and accepted by the Deaf Community was at RIT. I still miss RIT, even as I graduated 10 years ago, my life is on a different journey — And where I am now is due to every step from “Children of a Lesser God,” film to both worlds, the Deaf and Hearing, to RIT and the industry—I’m blessed to be where I am now and to continue to navigate myself and career journey.

I even went to Gallaudet University’s Soccer Summer Camp. It was hell; the kids bullied me and told me I should have died and said the nastiest stuff ever. Then the coach of Gallaudet’s soccer team asked me if I wanted a full scholarship to Gallaudet and play soccer. I immediately turned it down. Even though I was really good at soccer, I just knew I couldn’t do the bullies. Now, thinking back, there are bullies everyday everywhere even adulthood.— Bullies can be stopped if everyone just truly opens their mind, eyes and heart to accept everyone individually.

Plasmier: When did you have your first acting role? When did you really start getting into it and actually doing the acting?

Schaefer: Well, I was eleven and when I got my first acting job.

Plasmier: Was that stage?

Schaefer: Yes, stage.

Plasmier: So, you've done quite a bit of stage.

Schaefer: Yes, as I do both stage and films.

Plasmier: You performed the same role Marlee Matlin performed in "Children of a Lesser God".

Schaefer: Yes, I was in “Children of a Lesser God” seven times when I was portrayed as Sarah Norman six times and Lydia once.

Plasmier: What was that like for you?

Schaefer: I was honored to portray the role of Sarah Norman, just like my role model, Marlee Matlin did. Well, back in 2001, I was a theatre student at CCBC ESSEX (Community College of Baltimore County Essex Campus). My voice and diction teacher, Donald Ray Schwartz, asked me to see him after class. He proposed that CCBC Theatre do “Children of a Lesser God,” and that I would play Sarah Norman. At that time, I thought he was kidding and did not truly know it was a stage play. Donald believed in me and gave me my first leading role. And then rest is history! So, that play and the role will always be close to my heart for numerous reasons. I’m blessed, and even Mark Medoff, the playwright, remained in touch with me until his death.

Plasmier: You also did “Tribes” by Nina Raine, where you played a teenage boy who is Deaf.

Schaefer: Yes, I did portray the role of Billy in “Tribes” by Nina Raine three times in 2016, one time in 2019 and one time in 2021. I’m the first Deaf Female Actor to be cast as Billy.

Plasmier: How did you find that role? What was your experience? Can you talk a little bit about that experience of playing Billy?

Schaefer: Well, I find a lot of acting opportunities via Facebook posts. I always work hard managing my career, even myself as an actor to look for roles in theatre and film. One friend of mine told me that a theatre company in Jackson Hole, Wyoming was looking for a Deaf actor for the role of Billy in “Tribes” by Nina Raine. I told her I can’t audition, as I’m a female. She told me “So what? I dare you to audition as you never know what will happen.” So, I did, and I nailed the role immediately after my audition. And my friend was right; she knew my talent and gift. It was an honor to play the role, break barriers even though I got backlash



Michelle Mary Schaefer as Billy (male) in "Tribes"

from the Deaf male actors, with many nasty comments. But a Deaf actor, who also portrayed Billy in several productions, James Caverly, of "Only Murders in the Building" congratulated me. I will never forget that day, "James, you brighten my day with your comment. Thank you!" It was an honor.

Plasmier: So, a man was accusing you of appropriation because you were not male? I'm confused why they went after you.

Schaefer: That's exactly why, yes. But there are many male roles out there, way more than female roles. But I strongly value the cultural representation of a role, as I'm Deaf. — And it's even more important to have a Deaf actor to play roles accurately—That applies to Sarah Norman in "Children of a Lesser God," I even cringe when a hearing actor play Sarah. It's just so wrong.

There were many hearing actors who have played Billy inaccurately since the role itself is Deaf. In spite of being a female, I'm Deaf and my life is similar to Billy, which I truly understand what he goes through. — You just have to be Deaf to understand and experience our lives. People will always say they do understand, but deep inside they don't because they never experienced it.

Plasmier: What was the character going through that was similar to your life?

Schaefer: Billy and I struggle with our identity, and we both were born in a hearing family, living in the world of sounds. There are so many similarities with me and Billy,

even me and Sarah Norman in "Children of a Lesser God." One thing I have discovered is that Mark Medoff of "Children of a Lesser God" and "Tribes" by Nina Raine both have so many similarities with the stories.

Both Billy and Sarah fall in love, they fight, they find their voice, and both of them ironically have a sister named Ruth. I did not come to this realization until I was Billy, then the familiarity with Sarah in "Children of a Lesser God" was appearing in my mind. I find it very intriguing with both playwrights.

Anyway, in 2016, when I first portrayed Billy three different times. I wore a chest binder, cut my hair, and developed into a male mannerism. At the end of the play in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, the Director, Macey Mott—Her friend was asking her "Where is Michelle, I thought you said she is in the play?" the director replied, "She is and is Billy." The friend was blown away, so were numerous audience members who had seen me as the male version of Billy in 2016, at Ophelia Jump Productions in Claremont, California directed by Beatrice Casagran, and University of Northern Colorado Greeley directed by Matthew Herrick.— Thank you!

Then in 2019 with Thunder River Theatre Company in Carbondale, Colorado, I portrayed Billy in a new perspective, and this time was as non-binary. The director, Corey Simpson, strongly values the story rather than the gender focus. But most important is Deaf authenticity. In 2021, my fifth and farewell to the role of Billy was at Tacoma Arts Live in Tacoma, Washington directed by the Broadway's "Next to Normal's" Louis Hobson!

Louis and I chatted about life, and theatre and the meaning of “Tribes” which I loved the path we went into having me as a feminine Billy. The final performance hit me hard, as if it was yesterday. I cried so hard in one of my scenes when Billy signs to the family wanting them to learn sign, and understand Billy because it was also a personal experience. And the final bow, November 21, 2021, none of my family has seen “Tribes.”

Plasmier: I'm sure you consider yourself an advocate for authentic representation in entertainment.

Schaefer: Yes, I'm an advocate in arts, theatre, and films when it comes to representation, as representations matters.

Plasmier: Do you have any memorable roles in film that have been impactful for you?

Schaefer: Well, every film I do makes an impact, an opportunity. However, in one film, I did, a horror, “Made of These,” the role of Ashlinn was written for a person who can hear, a hearing person, but again— hearing roles—I prefer to use the term of “human role” because a Deaf person can play Ashlinn. I even played Hamlet in Hamlet.— And it was a human role, a non-Deaf and/or non-specific role.

When I saw the post on Facebook, I decided to audition. I blew everyone away and was cast. We only made a few changes, for example, instead of talking on the phone, we could Facetime. Simple changes. And it was the best experience working with the talented folks, Ven Scott, Tracee Beebe, Josh Wolfer, Sam Howard, and Brandon Lee Torres who all saw me equally as an artist! I was also recently nominated for best actor in two different Film Festivals for my role of Ashlinn in “Made of These.” In other words, we need more folks in theatre and films like them to open their mind, eyes, and heart to all possibilities when it comes to diversity, Deaf, disabled and art!

Also, my web series, “REAL,” has impacted me as an artist to see the audience enjoying the story and wanting to see more.

Plasmier: That's something you wrote and produced?

Schaefer: Yes. And I starred in it.

Plasmier: Can you talk more about that? I see that it won many awards and has been nominated several times. That's pretty exciting.

Schaefer: Yes, I'm really proud of that project and have many fans in the United States and Internationally. Both loved “REAL,” and have been asking me to make more episodes—But the pandemic happened which led to alternative plans, even better.

Plasmier: Why did you make it?

Schaefer: Well, I wrote many scripts, and then “REAL” was born. I decided to film it with a group of friends in Austin, Texas. I wanted to show something authentic, that there was nothing like “REAL” out on screen. And I wanted to create a role for me to act in because, as an artist, sometimes you have to create your own projects and roll your sleeves up instead of waiting for folks to be ready. — They are never going to be ready. You just have to keep going— And I wanted to share with the world what it's truly like to be Deaf, in my own life experience---

Plasmier: What is it about?

Schaefer: A tiny film web series exploring Deafness, love and the lengths we go to find it. This tiny film follows Lauren as she navigates relationships and connections in a world of complex communication.

Plasmier: Is that available to stream or where can people find that?

Schaefer: Right now, “REAL” has been optioned and developed into a full-fledged series with Thomas Gidlow with Skyphire Entertainment.

Plasmier: A series like a TV or a streaming series?

Schaefer: We are working together to bring “REAL” out.

Schaefer: I also have another very large project, a feature film, “Destiny.” Back in 2021, I wrote the script for “Destiny,” and am currently working with the producers, Brandon Lee Torres and Elran Ofir to move this project forward looking for film funding and then green light this precious film.

Plasmier: Can you share a quick summary?

Schaefer: The film “Destiny” is inspired by my real-life friendship with an older lesbian friend, whom I consider as my dear Aunt from Cornwall. Life, love and friendship between two continents, despite language and cultural differences, brings two souls together. — It's Destiny.

Plasmier: That sounds like a great film. You have to keep us up-to-date on how that goes.

Schaefer: It certainly is a profoundly moving film, which will be an award-winning, never-before-done film. It's going to impact everyone. Unfortunately, I have been turned down by a lot of lesbian filmmakers on “Destiny”—

Plasmier: You've been turned down by lesbian filmmakers?



Michelle Mary Schaefer as Sarahin in "Children of a Lesser God"

Schaefer: Yeah, a lot of my projects, pitch decks, ideas, proposals, all have been turned down. They even turned down my completed TV series, "Always Natalie". However, I do not allow it to stop me, just keep going.

Plasmier: Since you brought up lesbian culture, you were just involved with a large project, "Coming out for Love."

Schaefer: Yes.

Plasmier: So, it's a big dating show, dating competition?

Schaefer: Yes. I always wanted to work with Nicole Conn since I watched one of her films, "Elena Undone." Nicole—The two of us became friends through social media. One day, she asked me to audition for "Coming out for Love." And I said "Yes, sure" with a sense of excitement of the possibilities in being in a feature film written and directed by Nicole Conn.

Then later, I discovered it was not a feature film, it was a reality dating competition, which I did not know.

Plasmier: (laughs) That's great!

Schaefer: When Nicole asked me to audition, I looked "Coming Out for Love" up and thought to myself "Oh jeez. It's a TV show! It's a reality TV show!" I was scared.

So, remember, when I mentioned about a friend from Cornwall that "Destiny" was inspired by, well Nicole asked her to tell me to audition for "Coming Out for Love." At that time, I knew I had to just give my best, not thinking I would be selected to appear on the show.

Fast forward to July, 2021 when I was directing and starring in "Children of a Lesser God," Nicole reached out to me that I had a lot of votes! Right before walking to the theatre, I was freaking out and couldn't talk to anyone about it.

Plasmier: (laughs)

Schaefer: August comes, and Nicole contacts me to inform me that I was selected to be part of the first US lesbian reality dating competition show, and I turned it down.

Plasmier: And then?

Schaefer: I was terrified, I can play any-kinds of roles onstage, and in films, but in real life, I'm introverted, well can be ambivert. Anyway, we kind of went back and forth. And I finally said, "Okay, yes, let's do it."

Plasmier: That's cool. The show had so much representation, intersectionality.

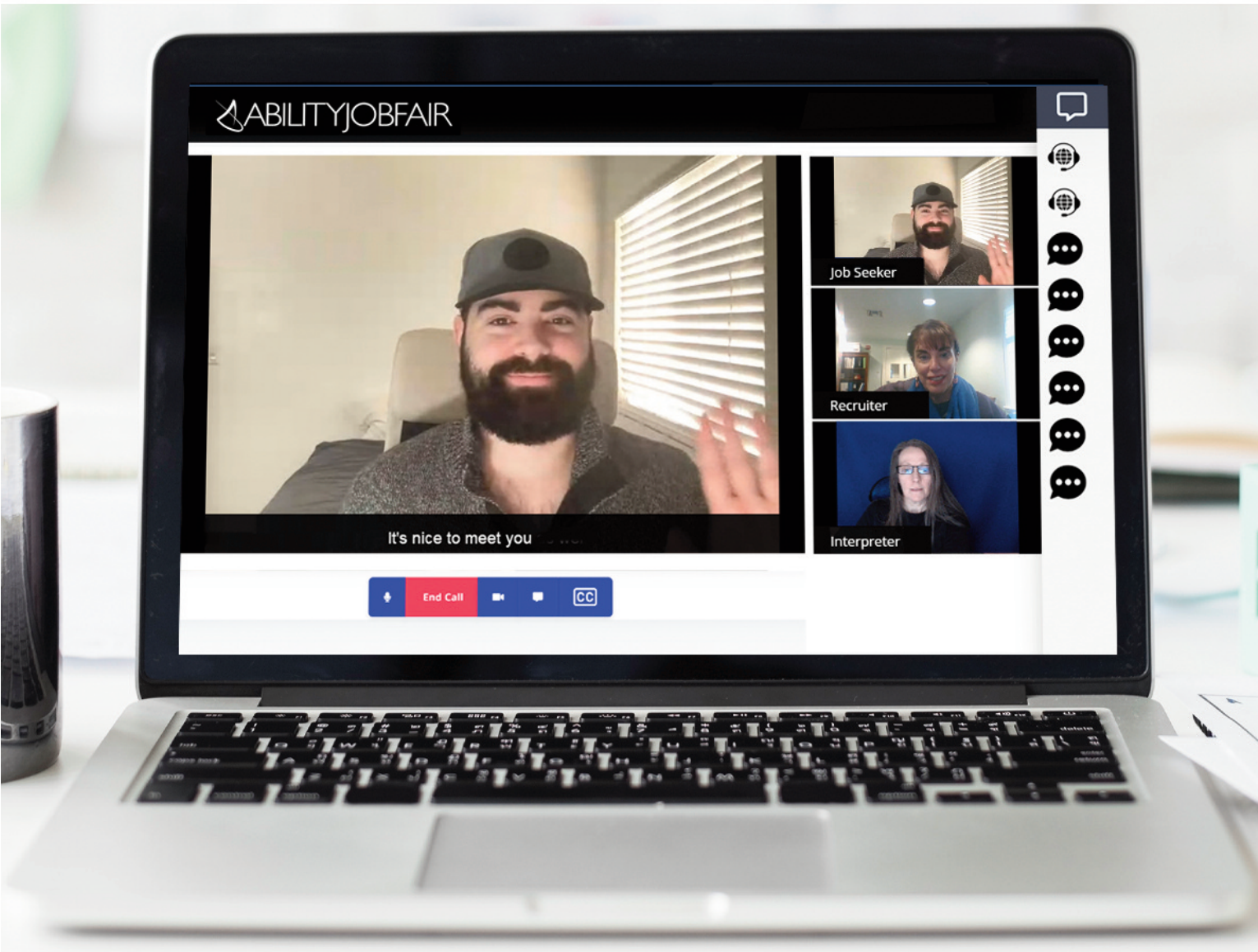
Schaefer: Yes. A lot of important themes.

Plasmier: So, how did the whole thing work out for you? How was it to interact with everyone? Because there's a lot going on at the same time with 16 of you interacting. And then it's a competition, right?

Schaefer: When I first got on the set in Palm Springs, California, of course, I was thrilled to see Nicole and finally meet Nicole. I was really nervous because I felt like an outcast. But I knew inside my heart that I would make a difference. I'd make an impact being me and just being authentic.



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Plasmier: What led you to feel like an outcast? Was it the crowd? I know when I'm in a crowd of people and everyone is talking, I have no idea what's going on.

Schaefer: There were many different layers. Remember, at the beginning of the pandemic, everyone was isolated. I was isolated. I had no communication. I had no access to people. I didn't have ASL. Nothing. So, going to the show, that was what really made me nervous.

I wasn't sure if the other girls would accept me because I hadn't been social due to the pandemic. And prior to the pandemic, I was working back to back, non-stop since 2016 in theatre. Prior to filming "Coming Out for Love," I was doing my first pandemic live theatrical production, "Children of a Lesser God" which had strict equity rules to keep everyone safe. Anyway, when I meet lesbians at the bar, coffee shop or dating apps, when I once had it, they ghost as soon as I said "I'm Deaf." Wait, I said "Deaf," not "Death" which genuinely shows that they are intimidated and afraid to communicate with me. That exact same fear I had, about "Coming Out for Love." So, I overcame that fear, and say just be me---

Plasmier: So, did that happen on the show? How were you received?

Schaefer: During "Coming Out for Love," they did accept me but often forgot to "include" me. They would forget that I'm Deaf, so they would leave me out. — Society would always ask me where is your interpreter? Why didn't you bring one? Well, for a fact, I don't have an interpreter 24/7 and did not want to perceive any assumptions on the girls and Amber thinking that's my actual life. I wanted the other girls and Amber to learn to communicate with me because that's real life. I don't have an interpreter with me 24/7. I don't. I mean, do you see anyone here with me? No.

Plasmier: Do you lip read?

Schaefer: Yes, I do lip read and speak.

I remembered that one night I truly was left out by all the gals. I went to bed and was very restless and couldn't sleep. I cried. And then the next day, I went to make coffee, brought my coffee to the bathroom, crying in the shower. As I got out of the shower the production assistant, Natalie, called me to the sofa, which was the "place" for all the girls. I asked her if I could talk to Nicole Conn privately. She came into my room with concern. I was wrapped in a towel dripping wet, crying and sharing everything with Nicole which led to the big moment in one of the episodes of "Coming Out for Love." Very vulnerable moment ever!

Plasmier: Okay, so is that the point where the show changed for you?

Schaefer: Yeah, that was a big turning point.

Plasmier: So you're glad you did the show?

Schaefer: Somewhat, yes. I remember that day like it was yesterday. Honestly. So, it's a continuous trigger for me, unfortunately. It's finished. The show is done. There were only two people that actually learned ASL. One was the producer, and the other one who is currently learning, a contestant, Sofia.

The others wanted to learn. That's what they always said. But, hopefully one day, they'll take it up or continue with it. Maybe we'll have a reunion, and they'll be motivated to learn ASL. I haven't seen any of them for two years now. I'm excited to see them again.

Plasmier: So this was filmed two years ago?

Schaefer: Yes.

Plasmier: One of your other talents, you studied to be an intimacy coordinator?

Schaefer: Yes.

Plasmier: I have to ask, did that come in handy for this series?

Schaefer: Well, for the show, I'm not thinking about intimacy or being an intimacy coordinator. I'm just a contestant. However, I did observe others, watched their body languages and did see some informed consents happening on the show. And the others— I cannot answer as I was not there at that moment. You just have to watch the show!

Plasmier: Okay, so that's something that you do.

Schaefer: Yes, I am Intimacy Coordinator for Films and Intimacy Director for Theatre.

Plasmier: You also are DASL (Director of Artistic Sign Language.)?

Schaefer: Yes, I would like to change that to more appropriate verbiage. I would prefer to use an ASL consultant rather than DASL.

Plasmier: What does that mean to you, if you can explain that?

Schaefer: Well, in theatre, I would break down the script and analyze it, the story, the scenes, and dialogues. Then translate it from English to ASL to ensure the signing is clear and accurate. Now, if I do a Shakespeare production, for instance, I would have to translate Shakespeare to English to ASL and go back and forth and then analyze the story as well. Now, for films, it will be the same method with script analyzing, the story and the dia-

logues. But I will also work with Actors to ensure their signings are clear and accurate and also would work with actors who do not know ASL, to help them learn their lines/signs. I also work with Directors and Writers, too. Basically, it's a whole teamwork in process in both theatre and films.

Plasmier: What do you see in the industry right now? Are the people who need to use ASL in their roles Deaf? Are they playing a Deaf person?

Schaefer: I work with Deaf actors to ensure that their signing is clear when delivering lines. I also work with hearing actors or even some Deaf Actors who do not know ASL and/or just learning ASL. Like, I have helped actors who have played James Leeds in "Children of a Lesser God" with their signed lines, and even Cesario/Viola in "Twelfth Night" with her signed lines etc.

I will not work with hearing actors who are portraying Deaf roles. I just won't.

Plasmier: Do you see any of that? Or do you see the representation in the industry getting better?

Schaefer: Representation within the industry has not changed. It is still the same, and, unfortunately, there are still hearing actors still auditioning and/or portraying a Deaf role. I still do not understand why it is still happening. I even once had an audition for a Deaf role, but the script said BASL, which is Black American Sign Language. I told my agent that I cannot audition for the role because I'm white, so I passed the opportunity. I just could not comprehend why couldn't a hearing actor do the same for Deaf roles.

And also, if you think about it, studies show that seven major studios released 77 films in 2021 and out of that only 16 had LGBTQ characters: 11 gay, four lesbian, two bi and one trans. And in 2020 .05% screenwriting jobs went to disabled writers. But all that doesn't include Deaf Lesbian. So, representation is not there yet which is why I created "Always Natalie," my TV series; "Destiny," my feature film; "REAL," the series, and many more scripts I have already written.

Plasmier: One more question. I see you have a photo with Marlee Matlin. You met her?

Schaefer: Yes, I have met Marlee Matlin four times in person. And recently in March, 2023 she finally met my famous dog, Annabelle, whom I named my Production Company after—Annabelle Louise Productions. I have a logo of my production company with her. Everyone falls in love with her. She has been in two stage plays and several films with me.

Plasmier: Your famous dog, she's adorable. How long have you had her?

Schaefer: She's 13. I've had her since she was three months old. Annabelle has been with me and my journey in college, life, theatre, films and made an appearance on "Coming Out for Love." She is my world, daughter, traveling buddy, costar, my love and my everything. There have been times when I wanted to give up a project, my career or whatever. I look at her, and her love and encouragement is enough for me to continue. And that is why I named my production company after her.

Plasmier: Is there anything else that you'd like to share with us? Anything up and coming or something we should look for?

Schaefer: I wrote a spontaneous suspense horror thriller short, "It's a Match," which I directed along with the fabulous director of photography, Ralph Scherer, bringing the story alive to the screen. Working with Ralph was pure magical, with tons of visions, communications, and laughs.— I cannot wait to share this film with all of you!

I'm also working on and will star in an award-winning script, "I Love You So Much" with Tasha Hardy. It's a silent film or TV proof of concept about a female musician who has recently lost her hearing and discovers hope in her new life.

And there is one thing I wanted to emphasize. Captions. Captions are so important for everyone. Not just for the Deaf but for hearing people too. I just want to emphasize that. I don't want to feel like a broken record, but again and again, people don't listen. There is no DEI without folks that are Deaf, Disabled, and a full equal access for all. ■ **ABILITY**

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Exhibiting seamless talent in his latest project, *Rye Above the Sea*, Fengzhao (Lucas) Xu shares his journey as a Chinese immigrant in the United States, evocative of his psychological disorientation and emotional transitions, and as a form of representation for his community during the process. For Lucas, photography isn't just his passion, but a form of communication, stemming from the inner self as a reflection of his journey and the world through his work. While his photographic style is authentic and individual, Lucas uses photography as a means of representation for those who resonate with the duality, and experiences that accompany it, as an immigrant. The unique perspective Lucas brings to the visual arts world is moving in itself, inspiring not only who and what his photography represents, but those who aspire to their creative outlets as a means of a greater understanding of their message and purpose. ABILITY's Amaris Medley interviewed Lucas about his latest exhibit and his life's influence on his work.

Fengzhao (Lucas) Xu: I came to the U.S in 2013 as a foreign student from China. I first came to the Midwest, Iowa, for college. I first studied psychology...you know, I thought it was something I wanted to dive into because there are a lot of people these days experiencing all kinds of mental struggles because of the social environment, or maybe family causes. One of my family members is one of them, so that's why I started in psychology. Then after I finished, I thought, you know, it's probably better to show something for them. Psychology is something you learn, you study, and then you cure, but visual studies, like photography, or visual arts, it's something you present. Like how these people are, or how you are inside of your mind, and I think that was when I switched my emphasis from psychology to visual arts. I spent almost two years in college to study art history and photo history after psychology, and then I went to grad school at Columbia College Chicago for Photo MFA. After that, I moved to L.A. last year to start my own projects and life here. That is how my photo career, or I would say the journey of my photography goes in an academic way.





Medley: What was your ‘aha’ moment in realizing photography was your calling?

Xu: I think, psychology provides all kinds of approaches to whoever is suffering from their mental illness, it provides the way to cure them...but I think it’s more like aftermath. To me, I think visual arts, or photography, is the only way to provide my vision to the people, or what I think about the world or society before things happen, you know. That was one of the main reasons, but I was a foreign student studying in this country, and I also went through a lot of psychological dislocation and physical displacement, so I think visual language is the best way for me to document, to present, or make my voice out to the world. That was also one of the reasons I moved from traditional college studies to the art field.

Medley: In what way do you consider photography to be an outlet for you?

Xu: Yea, I think that’s a really good question, and I think yea, of course. For me, photography is definitely

an outlet for myself, and I always think photography is a unique emotional, or personal visual language. I don’t see it as a serious art type, I see it as a language, as a way to express myself. You can make a photograph yourself, and people can make photographs with their phones, and anything these days especially. You can make a picture with any kind of tool. You take this picture because you want to make this moment documented or recorded. For me, I definitely think photography is my own visual language and emotional outlet.

Medley: It seems that you view photography as a unique form of self-expression, as well as communication to the public. Could you elaborate more about this dual perspective?

Xu: Yea, you know, when you see a photograph, taken by photographers from Asia, or like South Africa, you don’t need to learn about the person, you don’t need to learn about the photographer or anything, you just learn about their world through the picture. That’s how people, especially after the pandemic, we are more connect-

ed than ever before, the world is more connected than ever before. One of the most convenient ways to make us more connected is the internet, we are able to see pictures and videos on the internet every day. They might've been taken in the past couple of years, or by someone just randomly capturing their life. That's how we learn about the world these days.

Medley: One piece of your work, 'Rye Above the Sea', is different from your previous work, such as its style and composition. What are some experiences or anecdotes that inspired you to focus this exhibit on your immigration journey?

Xu: So, I started this project many years ago when I was first arriving to this country. It was a big, I would say exploration and journey for me, at the beginning, and I thought using photography is my approach to document my emotional transition, or whatever is the best way for me to look back, or maybe for others to look at the people, or community like us. So, that was why I think I started this. Also, during this process, during the whole past ten years being here as a Chinese student, there was a lot of confusion...especially when I'm here for this long, I've realized there are different parts of me, existing inside of me. There's western culture background and influence, but I was born in China, and lived there for almost 20 years, so these two cultural backgrounds collapse inside of me. So, the project Rye Above the Sea was more like a visual journal of myself. I used to write down all of these emotional moments or texts when I first came here and I wrote a lot of like diaries, or journals, like every teenager would do.

But then, I realized, you know, it would be easier, or quicker for me to document, or make the photograph exist, maybe in my hard drive. Or, some of them are film, so when I look at them physically, the memory is clear, but also more vague, because every time you think about a piece of memory, it wouldn't be that clear, you know, vagueness and clearness are coexisting in my photographs, and that's how I feel about being here as a foreign student, immigrant student, for the past ten years.

Medley: On your website, you said, "a passage of overly clear words can be as powerless as a textbook concept, while overly vague communication is like a faint emotion." Is that what you are speaking to?

Xu: Yea, you know, there's always a sudden emotion you have towards something in your life, but when you recall, or, when this part of the memory reoccurs in your mind, would that be the same kind of emotion, or the same kind of feeling you had before? It's probably going to be not-so true. The emotion you have in the present, it's true, but for the past, it might not be true. So, the truthfulness and the fakeness between now and before, or now and the past, and probably in the future, would always collapse and conflict with each other.

That's like how my work exists, from all this chaos, you know.

Medley: What are certain aspects of your cultural identity you would say that influence, and are incorporated into your photography?

Xu: I am Chinese, and I'm here in this country for 10 years, and you can't deny... I mean in this country, there are a lot of immigrants. Also, a part of my family moved here 30 years ago, and I visit them every once in a while. So, when I talk to their kids, I realize how confused they feel for their cultural identity. We call them second-generation immigrants, there are a lot of these communities in this country. So, I know there are people who are confused, and they need this attention. People recognize them as American, but they have the other part of their identity that cannot be denied one way or another. So, that was what triggered my interest, or attention, to photograph them, and also myself, because after being here these years I realized that, even if one day I may go back to my home country, or some other country, being here as an immigrant student, I can't deny all this. I have to accept myself for my previous cultural background, and I'm also accepting cultural influence from this country, and that's why I'm here you know (laughs). I'm trying to accept and learn, and fit in to this cultural background here, and when these two emerge with each other, that's how... I mean, when you grow up in a different cultural background, there's always something rooted inside of you, and when this part of you interacts with the new cultural background, you know, the new stuff just comes out, and that's my photograph.

Medley: What are certain aspects that you hope, from this exhibit, will resonate with people who have gone through similar experiences of immigration, physical and psychological displacement, resilience, and things related to that?

Xu: Yea, I mean that's my ultimate goal, for my work. I don't know how people would react to a body of work done by a Chinese student who studied in the states, but, for me, I think it's necessary to make this voice for my community. There are a lot of students, international students, they decide to stay here and work really hard to maintain their status and everything, and I think, everyone has their own reason, but there are some real difficulties that people who are not in this community cannot see. That's why I think it's necessary and really important for me as a photo artist to draw attention from society and others to this community. like, yea, (laughs) we are here! People can't deny it, and that's why we have to say it out loud, like I did in my photographs.

Medley: How does that link to the narrative you want to speak on, regarding your cultural identity, or the immigrant experience, to your audience who haven't gone through the same experiences?



Xu: There's still people, or students, or kids from all over the world who want to come to this country to see what it is really like in America compared to Hollywood films, the movies. How I learned about this country when I was a kid, I watched all those Hollywood films and movies, and books, with my parents, and I learned a lot of culture and history about this country. When I was a kid, I wanted to one day see it in person, so I can really learn about it. I think there are still a lot of people like me, now, and they are probably going to go through all of this psychological displacement, yea, one day when they are here.

Medley: How would you say your work can have an impact in a greater understanding of the experiences of the disability community?

Xu: That's a really good question because I made this whole body of work, I would say during my darkest time here in the states, right before the pandemic started, and everything went wild, and after the pandemic.

One of my photographs in this project is my hand, trying to reach something in the darkness. It is always my purpose in the photograph that I'm trying to show people, there's always darkness in the world, there's always hopelessness, and always something you can't expect in your life, but there's always light. You have to try hard and reach it, and that's my purpose in making these photographs. Also, one of my other projects, it's about my grandmother. It's about my grandmother's generation, and they're getting old and, I mean, everyone has their grandma and grandpa in their life. So, when they're getting old, they started to lose hope, they started to feel like life is just like this, it's getting close to its end. Through that project, I was trying to go deep into her heart, into this generation's heart. You know, they had been doing a lot to make everything possible in their life for the past 80 or 90 years. I don't want them to worry about anything or be anxious about anything in the last several years of their life. That's why I think my photographs always try to tell people, there might be something gone in your life, there might be something lost in



your life. It happens everyday to everybody. I can't represent you, and you can't represent anyone else, but there's always light and hope in some other way, and that's what my project is trying to say.

Medley: How do you see your work evolving in the future?

Xu: I always say to my friends who ask what photography is to me, it's more like drinking water, or eating, or like taking a walk for me. So, photography is a part of my life. I've never thought anything before making a project. A lot of photographers have a very specific plan, or like what they're going to do in the next couple of months, what kind of pictures they're going to make. For me, because I just moved to L.A. last year, I think the city is a big stage for visual artists like me, and for photographers like me. I think I will still keep doing the projects I was working on before, as long as I'm here in the states, in this country, I will still make photographs as an immigrant student. I'm not originally from here,

or born in this country, so there's definitely a lot more to explore and to put myself into as a foreign student. There's a famous photographer, Robert Frank, when he first came to the U.S. he documented all these people in the street, in his own perspective, and I think everyone is able to look at others in a unique way, but it's in a good way because we all need attention from others. That's what I'm going to do in the future, just keep doing what I'm doing right now. Photography is a part of my life. Yea, it's going to keep going as long as I'm here in this country.

When I'm walking down the street just taking all these photographs, the scene just like, flows to my camera autonomously, and I capture it. I just can't help thinking of Bruce Lee's quote (laughs). Like, it's true, that the world is like liquid, I just try to fit it differently into the camera with my own mind, so yea. It's just part of me, and part of my life. ■ **ABILITY**

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Ryan Dungey Foundation

After a successful motocross career, winning nine AMA Supercross and Pro Motocross Championships, Ryan Dungey is riding with purpose. Dungey founded the Ryan Dungey Foundation that connects his love of motocross and biking with supporting the health and wellbeing of children. So, instead of racing, Dungey spends his time giving back to the community and supporting causes that are near to his heart, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital and All Kids Bike.

ABILITY's Chet Cooper spoke with Dungey and Lauren Kennedy, Executive Director of the Ryan Dungey Foundation, at their annual motocross community event and fundraiser in Southern California, Opportunity Awaits. Dungey spoke about his motivations and the affect his growing foundation has on the lives of children. He also shares the impact motocross has had in his life. Kennedy shares her experience with the foundation and details the great work All Kids Bike, including its newly launched adaptability program.

Chet Cooper: Lauren, how long have you been working with the Foundation?

Lauren Kennedy: Since its inception in 2021. We launched in June of 2021, when we kicked off. I helped Ryan to start it up.

Cooper: That's based on your background or friendship?

Kennedy: I met Ryan through St. Jude. I've been a long-time volunteer of St. Jude. I used to run events in the Twin Cities, and Ryan had an event there following Millville benefit cycling event. St. Jude asked me to help out at his event. We did that for a couple of years, and then just wanted to continue to do more. Ryan and I really worked well together.

Cooper: That's not what he says!

Kennedy: Oh, shoot! (laughter) We think we work well together. I saw an opportunity to continue to engage the moto community. I wanted to bring more people around the power of platform, and there's so much social media today. How do we get kids and the next generation to help the next?

Cooper: Did you have any background in motorcycles?

Kennedy: I didn't. I actually knew nothing about motorcycles.

Cooper: Let me try this: there's two wheels. (laughter)

Kennedy: I know, and sometimes there's a throttle and there's some brakes. My introduction to this world of motorcycles and moto and supercross has been through Ryan. I met Ryan in the last year of his racing career, that's when I took over his event. I've become a fan and learned a lot. I couldn't be learning from a better mentor at all.

Cooper: Oh, absolutely. Plus, he's a nice guy!

Kennedy: Nice guy, yeah. I enjoyed the unique focus and a large part of what we do with the All Kids Bike program, which is our ability to put Learn to Ride programs in elementary schools is all centered around the love of two wheels. I like to bike, I do more trail recreational riding, but I can specifically remember learning to ride a two-wheel. The first time we took off the training wheels, I remember screaming down the big hill next to my house growing up. I think regardless of whether you know about moto or not, there's a connection in this community. It's a family sport. While it's individual, it's family. That's what I've loved the most about getting to know this community and engaging more people.



Ryan Dungey and Chet Cooper

Cooper: How do you choose where to put the monies when you raise them?

Kennedy: We, right from the get-go, decided that there are two organizations that were really important to Ryan and his legacy. The first is St. Jude Children's Research Hospital out of Memphis, Tennessee, and Ryan can share his story, but this is an organization that Ryan has been giving back to since he was young. The other is All Kids Bike, which was founded by the gentleman who created the Strider bike. He started a foundation, All Kids Bike, that supports Learn to Ride programs in elementary school. When we fund an elementary school, the school will get an eight-week program, eight weeks of curriculum for the teachers. They get 24 kids bikes that are all balanced to pedal, helmets, and a teacher bike.

Cooper: Tell us about the Strider.

Kennedy: It's a small 12-inch wheel bike. The kids will start with just walking, learning to balance. And then as they progress, they have the ability to add pedals and a chain. The goal is that in eight weeks of that program, they'll go from walking with the bike to pedaling. And even better is, the life cycle of a program is over a thousand kids.

Cooper: You say life cycle, you mean bicycle?

Kennedy: Yeah, you're good! (laughter) The bicycles with stay in the school for years, and it'll serve over a thousand kids.

Cooper: So, sort of in perpetuity, and the program hopefully stays?

Kennedy: Yeah.

Cooper: Even if they have to get some new equipment?

Kennedy: Some new bikes, yeah. And they get a storage unit. The goal is giving kids who might not have had the opportunity to learn how to ride a bike to learn how to ride a bike.

Cooper: In that program, is there any ability for that community to provide bikes for the kids after the fact? You're teaching them to ride for the fun of it, and then they go home and they don't have one.

Kennedy: Not yet. I imagine a day—

Cooper: That's why I'm here, to push that. (laughs)

Kennedy: Yeah, I love that! Actually, All Kids Bike did just launch a new program in the last few weeks, an adaptability program for those with mobility issues. They've found that it's a great therapy tool. They have a new program they're launching throughout the U.S. to support those who might need it through therapy or adaptability. It's pretty neat that they continue to expand.

When we bring people together for this event, we call it "Opportunity Awaits, a Ride Day for Everyone." And we are centralized on a ride day for everyone. We want people to come out here and maybe try two wheels for the first time. We hope some day that the kid who learns how to ride a bike in an elementary school shows up at one of our Ride Days or maybe is the next Ryan Dungey on the supercross track. What's neat is leaving here today, all the entry fees and donations raised will sup-

port both St. Jude as well as the All Kids Bike program. So, the legacy of everyone riding continues.

(Dungey joins)

Ryan Dungey: I think we had close to 270 riders, which was amazing, biggest one yet. I can't thank everybody enough for coming out and enjoying the day. We had a lot of fun, obviously raised good money for the foundation. It will be put to some good causes with St. Jude and All Kids Bike. Man, I love it! I look forward to this event the most out of any of them. I can't wait for next year already. It'll be fun!

Cooper: What made you decide to start the Foundation?

Dungey: The root of it was I lost my grandmother to cancer when I was 15, back in 2005. I guess from that point forward, I always wanted to do something to give back. At the time I was big into Lance Armstrong, obviously, he, having cancer and starting his foundation, as a young kid looking up to role models and how they're using their platform for the greater good. Obviously, I didn't have cancer, but I lost my grandmother to cancer, and it affected my life, wanting to start a foundation one day.

It took some years. Obviously, I was able to turn pro. We had a cycling event in Minnesota that we put on, where we raised money one day out of the year. We raised good money, and that money went to St. Jude. That became one of St. Jude's main events in Minnesota. COVID stopped a lot of things. It reshuffled a lot of things. They had to shut a lot of the events down, ours being one of them. That opened up the idea of "You always wanted to start a foundation. We can raise money in multiple different ways. We can still support St. Jude and have other beneficiaries."

Dungey: So, we started the foundation two years ago, with St. Jude as a beneficiary. And I wanted to do one more specifically because of my background with racing and two wheels and dirt bikes. And what's cooler than to support an organization that would get kids on two wheels or introduce little kids to two wheels? For me, people invested in me. How can we do that for these younger kids, the next generation?

That's when I started looking around. I didn't know who we were going to support. It was funny. I got an email from the All Kids Bike organization, and they said, "Hey, we'd love you to be an ambassador." I thought, this is interesting. Instead of being an ambassador, why don't we raise money through the foundation and put these programs in these schools that they do. They do all the heavy lifting, cull out the right schools, tier one schools, low-income, poverty.

Cooper: Boots on the ground?

Dungey: Yes.

Cooper: Oh, no, wheels on the ground.

Dungey: (laughs) Yeah, yeah! Long story short, long story long, (laughs) we started the foundation and St. Jude and All Kids were our beneficiaries. And two years ago today, we had our first event, Opportunity Awaits. And that kicked off the beginning for us. Now we have multiple other events, but this was kind of our main one, our cornerstone. It's pretty cool.

Cooper: Are you always going to do power [?]?

Dungey: When we were looking for founding partners, a lot of the partners that I raced with, KTM, Oakley, Fox. They were the first ones we talked to about what we were doing. Since 2009, I've been with Fox, and Fox, basically, runs and operates this land, and it's their track. As Fox came on as a partner to support us, they opened up the door. We said, "Could we have a riding event at Fox Raceway?" They said, "Absolutely. We'll pull out all the stops. We'll make sure that the track's ready, and, basically, donate everything," which is super-generous. It would have been a huge cost if we had to pay for that. So, it was a no-brainer to do it here, being that Fox was our partner in the foundation. They run and operate this track here.

Cooper: You said, "The way people supported me when I was growing into the sport." Can you explain what that meant?

Dungey: My parents, for sure. My parents got me a bicycle. My dad rode dirt bikes growing up. So, when I could balance, I was ready for my first dirt bike; me and my brother got a dirt bike that we shared. It's just where it all led to, the freedom, the excitement, the opportunities, going to the local races, riding dirt bikes. I thought dirt bikes were so unique. I get to push how fast I want to go. It's me and the throttle, and I just thought it was so cool. Not a lot of people did it. The excitement and the freedom that it brought.

The number of kids who will never get introduced to a bicycle is staggering. It's well over 50%, which is crazy to think, right?

Cooper: Yes.

Dungey: I thought, man, with video games these days, they need something to get them out of the house. We want to be the ones to provide that opportunity by putting these two-wheel programs in schools and introducing these kids, giving them that chance, that opportunity to explore that. It's a moment that they'll—I shouldn't say it's a moment because it's in the school, and they can experience it every day that they go to school in the PE class. They'll have the chance to understand it and get introduced to it, and who knows? Maybe biking down the road, getting them out of the house, maybe the freedom that it brought me, it'll bring



Ryan Dungey and Lauren Kennedy

them. Maybe they'll want to be a dirt bike rider. Maybe they'll want to do street bike racing. The possibilities are endless, and it's healthy. That's our mission for the foundation, to create opportunity for kids and help them live healthy and active lifestyles. That's what we're trying to do here.

Cooper: It's interesting that you've used the word "freedom" a few times now, and when people ask me why I ride, I use the word "freedom." It was something growing up as a kid, I used to ride with my friends in the woods. We were just out there having fun! Do you know Ashley Fiolek?

Dungey: Oh, yeah!

Cooper: She's been writing for us for about a decade now. She writes a column for the magazine.

Dungey: I didn't know that.

Cooper: I saw you out there on the track, and it was so cool how you were mentoring some of these little kids. Think about what they just went through. They get to say they rode with you on a track. That's going to change their lives.

Dungey: A hundred percent. I want to make sure I'm using my platform for the greater good and help the Foundation and help these kids. Maybe there's an expe-

rience I've been through where I can help a young kid coming up as well. Always being ready and willing to help in those areas.

Cooper: What are the other things you do? Do you coach, teach classes?

Dungey: No, I don't coach or teach classes. I'm still very much with KTM, the team I race for, whether it's representing the brand or helping the amateurs or the pros. Whether it be a phone call, a question, it could be at the track, just a moment that I can help them. It's not full-time. I think there were always little nuggets that, as I was coming up, where I would ask the guys who were better than me, who were pros, and almost done with their career, and I was just coming in. How do you do this? What do you do for training, for riding? How can I recover better? Just little bits of advice.

Cooper: You're still training, right?

Dungey: I work out.

Cooper: You look in shape. Is your jersey tight!

Dungey: A little too tight! (laughter) The gear is more slim-fitted these days.

Cooper: Your exercise routine is pretty much the same as before except maybe less intense before a race?

Dungey: Yeah. I work out, but the volume, the amount I do is much less and the intensity is a little less. In this day and age, it's just staying healthy and active and not so much trying to stay in the fittest shape I need to be because I don't have to go racing any more. When you're in racing season, you're pushing yourself all the time to the point where you've got to take naps every day. You're recovering. If you're not riding and training, you're resting and vice versa. It's a very routine career. You try to have fun and keep a balance. But you know how it is, when you put in a hard workout, you don't really want to go golfing. You just want to recover and relax. That makes the body stronger, all this stuff.

Cooper: What other things do you do? Do you golf, is that why you mentioned it?

Dungey: I like to golf. I've been flying a little bit, trying that out, which has been fun.

Cooper: Flying? You're getting your pilot's license?

Dungey: Yeah, I'm working on that.

Cooper: How about surfing? Where do you live?

Dungey: Minnesota.

Cooper: OK, so probably not much surfing.

Dungey: No. Wake surfing, behind those boats.

Cooper: (laughs) Have you ever thought of partnering with other nonprofits?

Dungey: Yeah, of course. We've had multiple discussions with other foundations. A lot of times it's, "How can we do things better?" They're doing something, how can we apply that to ours, that they've already been successful in? We haven't done any partnerships necessarily, but how can we open—We're not against a partnership, but how can we do it and be effective with a bigger impact? We're only two years into this. It's early and it's young. We're always looking for opportunity, for sure.

Cooper: How do you deal with the stress of all of that? How do you mentally prepare?

Dungey: It's a very mentally grueling sport, for sure. Physically it's tough. Mentally, when you're competing and you expect a lot of yourself and people are expecting a lot of you, the demons are telling you you're not good enough. You've got to block that out and believe in yourself and trust it and have faith. You're constantly trying to reassure yourself that you can do it, believe in yourself. Every week, back-to-back to back-to-back, it starts to add up and your body will quit way before your mind will.

Cooper: Hopefully. Because if the mind quits earlier, your body might be okay, but you have these mental blocks.

Dungey: There is that, too. There are fears. You don't want to think about it. You try to focus on what you want to happen, not what you don't want to happen. It's safer to ride a track being in the moment with instinct and having fun than riding a track in fear. You're kind of attracting that. You're like, "I hope I don't crash," and you're probably going to crash. You're not fully a hundred percent focused. There's that. But it gets tiring. The championship, you're trying to race 17 races in a row and be consistent and be there every single day. You can't afford a hiccup. That starts to build.

Cooper: So, how did you get on the Wheaties box?

Dungey: There was a deal where Wheaties picked five athletes, us being one of them. It was a whole voting thing. Social media was just coming in at that time and people had to vote, and whoever had the most votes got on the box. Well, we lost that. A couple of years later, Mark Irvin, my manager at the time, reached out and said, "Hey, let's make this happen. Are you guys open?" They were like, "Yeah, let's do it." It was a mix of a little bit of both. So that's how it started.

Cooper: Do kids know that you're on a Wheaties box? Were they too young when it happened? (laughs)

Dungey: Nowadays, it's been so long that a lot of the kids who are six, seven, and eight who are riding, they were infants when I was racing during that time. It's probably more your teenagers now.

Cooper: Lauren, did you know it?

Kennedy: I didn't know him at the time he was on the Wheaties box.

Cooper: But you knew who he was?

Kennedy: I did after, yeah.

Cooper: Did you know he was on the Wheaties box?

Kennedy: He told me that the second time I met him. (laughs)

Dungey: Oh, no, that can't be right!

(laughter) ■ ABILITY

ryandungeyfoundation.com







BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

iBOT® Stories Across the World

Independence with iBOT

Ronda Jones wears many important hats: she is a mother, a grandmother, an Army veteran, a para-athlete, and an advocate and mentor for people with limb loss. She is also a motivational speaker, an author, and now, an inspiring iBOT user.

Ronda, who lives in Virginia, discovered the iBOT at the Abilities Expo, where she saw the device being demonstrated. She was instantly impressed, and knew she had to have her own.”

The iBOT Personal Mobility Device (PMD) is a multi-modal power wheelchair in which users can climb stairs or curbs and drive through rough terrain like sand, snow, and gravel; the iBOT can also balance on two wheels, elevating the user to eye level with their peers.

Ronda first tried to get her iBOT through the Veterans Administration, which offers iBOTs to qualified veterans at no charge to them. However, Ronda was denied by the VA. She then worked with the Mobius Mobility team to find another path to freedom: receiving an iBOT through non-profit support. Mobius Mobility encouraged Ronda to apply for a grant through the Robert Irvine Foundation, a non-profit founded by Robert Irvine that works to support the physical and mental well-being of veterans and service members. Ronda applied, and a few months later, she became the first female recipient of the award. She received her iBOT through the Robert Irvine Foundation in May of 2023.



Ronda was injured while serving in the military during Desert Storm. After her amputation, Ronda used a manual chair and a Quantum power chair for her mobility needs – but she quickly found that she was very limited in the terrains and the parts of her community that she could access.

To Ronda, her iBOT represents the ability to be spontaneous, independent, and free. “The iBOT is definitely a game changer. For me, it has changed all the things I don’t like about being in a wheelchair. Water is not an issue – snow is not an issue. Neither is gravel, and other obstacles,” Ronda said.

Some of Ronda’s favorite features of her iBOT are its long battery life, 4-Wheel Mode’s ability to get over curbs and rough terrain, and the ability to hose down the powerbase after taking it outside. “The iBOT is a change in the right direction for technology.”

In her previous devices, Ronda used to worry about every step of her travels. Anywhere she went, she used to have to call ahead and ask “a million and one questions” about accessibility. “Now, the iBOT has made me more spontaneous. I have found so much confidence to be able to say, ‘yes I can, I can do this.’” Whether it’s a sporting event, the mall, a family outing, or her garden, Ronda is able to partake in parts of life she couldn’t

before. “The iBOT has boosted my morale and increased my energy. My will to want to do has tripled!”

An important part of the process in becoming an iBOT user is training: users must first learn to use the modes of the device and all safety precautions. Ronda enjoyed her training at the Mobius Mobility headquarters: “the training was very thorough. The Mobius Mobility team was very patient and kind – they did over and beyond to make sure that I was trained and comfortable,” she said.

Training, which usually takes 2-3 days, was an immersive and exciting process for Ronda – an experience that resulted in her ability to use her device almost anywhere that she wanted to go.

“I don’t need to ask my husband to go out to the garden to get the strawberries – I can go myself,” Ronda added.

The iBOT Backstory: Where It’s Been and Where It’s Going

The iBOT has come a long way since its original introduction by Johnson & Johnson in the early 2000s. The previous generations of the iBOT PMD, the 3000 and 4000, came with fewer features and no options for customization – more of a “one size fits all” device. Johnson & Johnson was unable to secure insurance coverage of the iBOT.



Max Burt

Fast forward to 2019, and Mobius Mobility launched the next generation iBOT PMD. Since its inception, 250+ users (and counting!) have been welcomed to the iBOT community. In 2023 Mobius Mobility was able to achieve what J&J could not: secure insurance coverage and reimbursement for the iBOT. The news represents a meaningful next step for potential iBOT users in the United States: greater financial accessibility.

Lucas Merrow, CEO of Mobius Mobility, gave some details on the Mobius Mobility mission and where the company is headed.

“Funding mobility equipment is often a challenge. To simplify things and keep costs as low as possible, Mobius Mobility has taken a direct approach. We manufacture the iBOT right here in Manchester, New Hampshire, and provide distribution, training, and service, all in house,” Lucas said.

Reimbursement for iBOTs is also available through vocational rehabilitation for those looking to return to or maintain employment and through federal workers compensation. In addition, Mobius Mobility has partnered with two non-profit credit unions to provide financing for the amounts that insurance does not cover, and with non-profit foundations to provide additional financial assistance. By providing as many routes to freedom as

possible, Mobius Mobility’s reimbursement team is getting iBOT users the insurance coverage and funding options they are entitled to.

Rising Above Limits

Max Burt is the founder of WheelEasy, a non-profit information organization created to help people find accessible resources while traveling. Max, who is based in Australia, is an avid traveler. Max also enjoys going to the theater and participating in adaptive sports – such as tandem skydiving.

In 1999, while driving home from work one day, Max got into a car accident. He spent the next 10 months in the hospital recovering. While his broken bones eventually mended, he was left with a traumatic brain injury causing difficulty balancing, which requires him to use a wheelchair.

Max initially heard of the first generation iBOT in 2002, a few years after his accident, in a newspaper ad in the Sunday Times. At the time, Max was living in Europe, and he became one of the first European users to receive an original-generation iBOT. When Max heard that Johnson & Johnson was discontinuing the first generation iBOTs, he created the “Save the iBOT” Facebook group page so that iBOT users across the world could



Max Burt

come together and join a community of people touched by the iBOT's technology.

"If you were lucky enough to become [an iBOT user], most users wouldn't want to see it die. Because they appreciated how life changing it could be," Max said.

In October of 2022, Max self-funded and received the new generation iBOT PMD from Mobius Mobility. He became an iBOT PMD user because he recognized that the device was "infinitely more flexible" than any other mobility aid he had tried, he said.

Max compared owning and using a wheelchair to wearing shoes – most people have multiple different pairs for different occasions and uses. One for personal time, one for work, one for running around or going to the beach. "Obviously as a wheelchair user, it is pretty difficult to own upwards of four or five different wheelchairs for different occasions. The iBOT in a way does many different things, but in one chair. It is very flexible – it can elevate you in social situations or in meetings. I have yet to come across a wheelchair that does anywhere near the kind of things that the iBOT can do," Max said.

With Balance Mode, the iBOT uses advanced technologies like gyroscopes and sensors to keep the person level and raised while balancing on two wheels. This way, the device mimics standing, in that the powerbase and wheels stay under the person as they move in the device. "[The iBOT] mimics the natural body movements of someone standing up – it is more natural and human," Max explained.

Balance Mode allows Max to talk one-on-one with someone on a totally equal level. "Being up on two wheels is immensely important to me. It lends me an air of credibility as I run the charity – I do work in the world of business, and it is absolutely essential to me that people believe me and take seriously what comes out of my mouth," Max said.

"I cannot stress the difference it has on the perceptions other people have of you and your own perceptions. It really has an impact on how you feel about yourself – not just your relationship with other people, but also your relationship that you have with yourself," Max added.

Finding Freedom in the EU

Carla Mense purchased her iBOT through 2KERR in the summer of 2022. 2KERR is a European distributor of self-balancing mobility devices for people with disabilities. Located in the Netherlands, 2KERR sells and markets the iBOT PMD for users in the European Union. The company has an experience center where new users can train in the device, just like Mobius Mobility in the United States.

Already a user of a different 2KERR-distributed mobility device, the Bi-Go Seated Segway, Carla found it increasingly difficult to use this primary device, as her progressive multiple sclerosis worsened.

After receiving an email announcing the introduction of the iBOT in the Netherlands, Carla scheduled a test drive of the iBOT; she purchased her iBOT immediately after her second test drive. She then patiently waited as all the parts were put together and shipped. "What a long wait that is when you look forward to something so much!" Carla said.

Reimbursement for the iBOT PMD varies from country to country in the EU, and in some countries even from municipality to municipality. This is the case in the Netherlands, where the municipalities are responsible for care for residents with disabilities through the Social Support Act (WMO).

A positive in many European countries is that, when available, reimbursement is not subject to the "in the home" limitation imposed by Medicare and most private U.S. insurers. Most European governments recognize



Carla Mense

the importance of having their citizens with disabilities fully engaged in their communities – something the US needs to make a priority.

2KERR was a helpful resource for Carla throughout her process of getting her iBOT. “2KERR explained a lot to me during the test drive about the process of the municipality. In addition, they gave me the tip to apply for a personal budget from the municipality. 2KERR can help and support you in applying for an assistive device through the WMO or a personal budget through the municipality,” she said.

For Carla, the iBOT was the perfect replacement for the Bi-Go wheelchair. “It gives me more support, a comfortable seating position, and I can easily ride over rough terrain. In addition, the iBOT gives me even more freedom through the different driving modes,” she said.

For Carla, the most important thing is that she can look someone in the eye again when she wants to. “This makes me feel like an equal again,” she said. In Balance Mode, while shopping, she can reach almost everything, even on the top shelf.

Life has changed for Carla since getting her iBOT, and the device helps keep her active. “The various driving modes allow me to get anywhere I want without having to think in advance about whether it is possible,” she said. But Balance is the mode that has been the most impactful for Carla. “I feel like an ordinary person again among my fellow human beings,” she said.

Other iBOT users have called the iBOT “game changing,” “a Transformer,” and “more of an Iron Man suit.” When asked to describe her own iBOT in just a few words, Carla said, “The iBOT is a wheelchair with the capabilities to live life as normal as possible.” ■ **ABILITY**

If you are interested in beginning your iBOT journey, Mobius Mobility would love to speak with you – call 833-346-4268 email info@mobiusmobility.com

The iBOT PMD is available to veterans FULLY COVERED under the federal supply schedule: VA FSS #36F79721D0202

If you are in Europe, contact 2KERR email info@meetibot.com





ISAAC MIZRAHI LIVE!™

S E L M A ♥ B L A I R

Acclaimed actress, best-selling author and disability advocate, Selma Blair is teaming up with renowned fashion designer, Isaac Mizrahi, to launch a line of accessible fashion on QVC. Blair, who has been actively working to build awareness about MS since her own revelation in 2018, is bringing her advocacy to stylish apparel. This new collaboration brings together Mizrahi's creative vision with Blair's experience, as well as that of the disability community, to create beautiful, adaptive clothing that's also easy to maintain.

In a virtual interview with *ABILITY*'s Chet Cooper and Paul Pelland, the man behind Million Miles for MS, Blair and Mizrahi share their passion for adaptive fashion and how they came to collaborate on QVC. Blair also discusses her experience with MS and how that intersects with fashion.

Chet Cooper: Before we get started, I want to introduce you to Long Haul Paul. Paul also has MS, his challenge has been raising funds and awareness for MS. He's riding a motorcycle for a million miles. I know, it's shocking. He's already won numerous awards for what he's been able to do.

Selma Blair: My gosh, congratulations! That's really scary. What if you have rainy days? Do you do it every day? I know, sorry, I got off-topic, but that's so amazing. Do you do it every day, rain or shine?



Selma, Isaac and Alex modeling adaptive clothing on QVC

Paul Pelland: I do. This weekend I was in—uh, where was I? South Carolina. I rode home through that little hurricane or whatever it was that was on the East Coast.

Blair: Were you kind of frightened at all? I really like hearing about people's insecurities. (laughter) Sorry, sorry, don't worry, off-topic!

Pelland: I'm afraid to drive a car. I don't really have the fear of motorcycling. I ride so much. To me it's just second nature. I do feel safer on a motorcycle than I do in a car. I just don't spend as much time in a car.

Isaac Mizrahi: That's amazing. I feel not safe in a car, too. Maybe I should try a motorcycle. I once was on the back of a motorcycle with this gorgeous French guy I dated. (laughter) Holding this gorgeous guy made me feel very secure in the back.

Blair: That's what I'm here for.

Cooper: If you want to read some stories about Paul, he's been writing a column, writing not riding, a column in the magazine for—it's been a decade now, probably, at least, Paul?

Pelland: No, I think it's only been ten years. (laughter)

Cooper: While we have everybody together, tell us about the origin of how you two came together to create the line and do what you're doing now with adaptive clothing and QVC?

Blair: I'm going to start. Obviously, I know and think Isaac is the great American designer. I've been in love with him since back in the House of Style days, where I had little bit parts, and he was always the goal. It was always just a fan thing. And then when I got to know Isaac years ago when he had the show and I was acting and at premiers, I was lucky enough to have my most favorite dresses made by Isaac. One was an incredible

pink and orange color blocking. It was so gorgeous, so memorable to me. After I was diagnosed and realized I was having a lot of problems at the time with my dexterity, lifting my hands, getting clothes on. I had just gone back to work, and the seamstresses, everyone, had to dress me every day for work, which is not something I was used to. It was just too hard to even get my foot in things. It was a very different experience for me.

There were only very few clothes I could find that didn't cause me to have a breakdown in the morning, of exhaustion and sweating, just trying to figure out something that was simple to me. I ran into Isaac at a beautiful cocktail hour somewhere. I said, "God, one day, maybe we could do something together." I just love Isaac so much! He knows this, that I get too excited.

And now it's happened. It's been in my mind and heart to raise this visibility in the fashion space. Now that I know better, I can do better and disrupt in ways that make me happy for the people I hear from in the disability community, or otherwise, how to make things easier. And Isaac already had this amazing setup at QVC.

Cooper: Isaac, did you know about this before, that Selma had this love of your fashion sense?

Mizrahi: I have to say, she's kind of coming at me going, "Oh, I always looked at him and thought wow, wow, wow!" And I, in reverse, always looked at her and thought that she was kind of a style icon. And when I got a chance to dress her, it was a kind of a goal, like a moment for me. And then we saw each other at Majorelle, which is a really famous—Selma, I think you were staying in that hotel?— And we saw each other, and she expressed this interest. The thing about my brand is that more than anything over the years, if you've studied, if you look at it, it's really about the kind of democratization, this outreach to all kinds of different communities. And QVC, I always felt, was such an incredible vehicle. Not only are they accessible, not only do they make things that are usually incredibly well-priced and very accessible in that way, but also there is more communication with QVC than I think any other outlet. You call into QVC and you talk to the people on air.

Blair: It's instant feedback. If they didn't understand any of the adaptable features, and they're like, "What is that? Why did they do that?" It's immediately a great kind of feedback.

Mizrahi: That's what drew me and that's what drew us together to try to get this collaboration to occur.

Cooper: This is off-topic just because I'm staring it so much. Do you ever play music together? I see a guitar and a piano.

Blair: That's so funny. I need to. I'm learning. My neu-

rologist said I need to learn an instrument because I've been forgetting, like, I have little ulcers in my ears. She said immediately, "You have to start piano." I've never touched a piano except to play "Chariots of Fire" in third grade because a neighbor taught me. And if you don't think I get on a piano every time and play "Chariots of Fire," that's way off. But no, I need to. Maybe Isaac can.

Mizrahi: I know some incredible musicians, and our failings as musicians will be filled in by them.

Blair: You're not. You're a piano player!

Mizrahi: I know, but I don't play, I only sing. I play in private, but I sing in public. You and I could get together, you could play the piano.

Blair: Thank you. I'll have this as a goal. I mean, everything's been changing. There's so much I realize now about neurology and making things easier in life. Music is a goal.

Cooper: Nice. One of the things that I think Paul will ask is if you can design something for motorcycle wearing. (laughs)

Mizrahi: Aside from a motorcycle jacket, which is something I'm always riffing on. I think it's one of the most beautiful, iconic, world—I was going to say American, but I think throughout the world a motorcycle jacket is an aspiration.

Blair: Great fashion, sexy. There are already accessible. You did motorcycle pants with the padding and all that. When I was falling a lot, those were things I was wearing. It's not in this particular collection or something I've heard people want, but it was for me. I needed that. I went through periods, temporarily, where my balance was so off, I was falling everywhere and bruising. I asked my son's father, who rides motorcycles, "Let me see those! Tailor them to me." He makes clothes. So, there are so many things I find out in this process, through myself or through people with more radical disabilities, just the whole community that's lived it so long, learning what they need. This is a really rewarding process.

Cooper: Do you have any issues with your body temperature?

Blair: Oh, yes, I do. That's another reason—Not to get back to about things we were talking about—I overheat so much. It's much worse in actual sunshine rather than in just heat. I can endure heat more than I can handle ultraviolet rays, and then I get the dystonia, really horrifically. But I do get overheated. When I do, I have to sometimes, honestly, rip my clothes off, like how they did it for Errol Flynn in the studios when he'd get so drunk and pass out. His clothes were like breakaway.



President Biden and Selma Blair at White House celebration of 50 year anniversary of the 1973 Rehab Act

You know that, Isaac, right? Errol Flynn's clothes were all breakaway because he was so drunk at the end of the night, the wardrobers had to get them off? It's like these features, this shirt is one of Isaac's. The buttons are all magnetic. I won't do like Magic Mike Show. (laughter) It's super sexy.

It's magnetic because that was one of my problems. And some clothes, if there was something like this, look a little infantile. I love that these clothes have more adaptable, accessible features and also can come off really quickly. Because when I need to disrobe or clean up or do something, you don't have to be disabled to feel like you need things more stress-free. This is one of my favorite shirts and it does help. These things all have that in mind to cover that. I do get the sun effects. I lose speech and movement.

Cooper: Paul could speak to that about his clothing because of the regulation of his body temperature.

Blair: I wear Polar products. Do you ever wear an ice vest? You might want to when you're riding. I wear and ice vest when I go to get on my horse. I bring a packet. It's Polar products.

Pelland: Yeah, I've had different vests over the years. I've even had one of the first tests from a prototype that was basically pumping full of water.

Blair: I've used that on movies when we're overheating in extensive wardrobe. It has a coil system for heating and for cooling. You have to be close to a like a power source to get it going.

Pelland: We melted the alternator with one of those, but the heatness worked really well.

Blair: Exactly. It can get really cumbersome trying to make things work for us. I've found the ice packs are the most practical. When the packs warm up, you can just put a new set in the pocket so it doesn't have as much equipment. But it is a problem with a lot of people, these temperature changes. And now—menopause, boys! (laughter) So there's that on top of it. There's always some form of needing a little extra care. You're lucky enough to get over it.

Pelland: I've found that driving faster helps, too. (laughs)

Blair: Haha! I bet!

Pelland: That's my excuse to drive fast.

Blair: I get it, I know. There are things people don't think of and don't think of how clothes and different things make such a huge difference, truly, in allowing you to have more scenes in a day, as they say, in that scene theory thing.

Mizrahi: Apropos of what we're doing, I think great clothes should be accessible.

Blair: That's right. I do have very expensive taste, but I would only buy a few things, and they last for 20 years. And then as I started evolving into this grown woman and had some different needs, then I also said, "Oh God, these things that I cherish, I'm ruining." or I can't put it in the washer or things like that. There really was such an answer already there with Isaac and QVC, at least in the sensory and the comfort in the washable and in the price point for quality. It really answered the need for me. And also wanting to have this chic, feel like I'm being dressed by a designer, which it is, with Isaac and

have some really chic, more accessible pieces for more people. I don't know where I went. I just kept talking. Sorry.

Mizrahi: You were absolutely saying what I was thinking, which is that the style is really important to everybody. If you have a pulse, you like the idea. Now, like with Selma, we've collaborated. And of course, if you want to know more about the actual accessibility things, we can speak about a few of them.

Cooper: Can we go there now? That was going to be the next question. Can you talk about that?

Mizrahi: I was thinking about, like, magnets.

Blair: For example, of course, one of the more obvious ones is getting on a shirt. You know how long it can take, maybe, if you have a prosthetic or arthritis or older, in a rush, whatever. But to have the magnetic buttons that are also washable, that there's things that have been sourced with this technology to bring things to be chic and to be for anyone.

And the first that I've seen—I know there must be— but the seated pants for wheelchair users. There's a standing version and then some have the seated version. I have the seated version, which has so many design features like you could actually sit on it. There are no pockets on the bottom. They're not just a standing jean that you're putting on. So, they have a higher rise in the back for being seated. What else?

Mizrahi: There's a long zip or pull. Also loops that help you pull them on from a longer distance. You don't have to go all the way down. You can pull the pants on easier. There are all kinds of little functioning things that were researched.

Blair: And one of the models, Alex, whom I become friends with, who's so great at QVC, she is a wheelchair user. Even then it was so helpful, things that people don't tell you, there's not a roadmap, like, "Oh, wait, these have to be in the back so I could maybe fit it and seat myself." So it's inside. We're learning as we go. It's incredible. I get such grateful feedback from people. "This is a dream come true. Someone's asking me how can I get my pants on more easily with limited mobility?" That is the most rewarding thing, when they're going, "Of course, right, right! Putting it on yourself!"

And for caregivers. When my mom became more fragile and couldn't walk as she got older, caregivers, dressing people. We don't think of how hard this is for us, to get things on and off other people. I'm really proud that there are these beautiful pieces that I legitimately wear and love. And they're made with so many more people in mind. Other features, wider legs, bottoms shorter, allowing for any differences or maybe prosthetics, things that are easier, catching on things, wider bottoms

to legs options.

Pockets on the front of the legs for the seated pants, so there's somewhere, some accessible place. It won't be the same as finding a pocket when you're sitting on it. It's just different thoughtful things.

Cooper: Is this women or both women and men?

Mizrahi: Right now it's just women.

Blair: But if you tune into the QVC and want to be a male customer, you know, you'll start making a petition.

Cooper: (laughs) I ride motorcycles as well. I'm waiting for that jacket.

Pelland: The materials you use would be helpful for someone, whether it's a washing issue or ironing, heat would dissipate through.

Mizrahi: You'd be surprised how widespread that idea is. The easier it is to care for something, usually, I think the more it's pleasing to the end user. We are hopefully applying some of the things that we already know to that. But of course, here and there, like Selma was saying, some of the blends that we use, some of the natural fibers that we use are more adaptable to temperature and to those kinds of uses like washing, like you said

Blair: Now I'm so grateful. It was really helpful. I didn't have any washable stuff in my wardrobe before besides denim and t-shirts. I just didn't have washable things, unless they were hand washed. But everything was cracking. It was just too much.

Mizrahi: I think that would have been so expensive

Blair: They became too precious, and then you don't love the pieces because you're not seeing them and wearing them. So, to have a little riff on a Chanel jacket that I love, and to have these in the collection with color, and to be able to also go, "Oh, this could just be washed here." It's great. It's great for the plane. It's great for me, for everything. I didn't really think of clothes like that before because I didn't need to. Now it's the only thing that I do because I really do care about ease of use and being able to wash things with traveling and not wanting to pack too much stuff. I like to keep things the tight ship. And one of my favorites I have is an oversized, poplin shirt that has pockets in the side of the actual shirt. I'm just finding; we're seeing as we go, but I'm always finding. Because my hands have sometimes a bit of dystonia, will flail around, and I like to sometimes remember to keep them quiet and just have them in a pocket, but not some big jacket all the time. There are just things that I'm really excited about that I've found to really help me throughout my day feel more comfortable.

Cooper: A little bit off-track here, but not really. The models you mentioned, you said Alex? How many models are you using that have different disabilities?

Blair: The most important was the wheelchair user because that's something I have no experience with. It's just a very new thing to design those things. But I don't know. I know QVC has a roster of everyone. I have a friend who was in a car accident and lost her arm, so I can find out things just through my own friends.

Mizrahi: When we present on QVC in any particular hour or two-hour period, there's usually two or three models, so I'm guessing—in the publicity we did there was one, but I'm pretty sure on the show there will be maybe two.

Blair: There's some size, inclusivity and things that aren't always on the mainstream marketplace as much. You really see it on the people. What I thought was interesting about QVC, in the pictures we take, you don't alter your clothes like you do in a normal photo shoot, so they can really see what they're getting. I was like, "Oh, my God!" That's terrifying!

Mizrahi: It comes from the factory, it doesn't come from the sampling. It's actually the merchandise. That's the great thing. That was the actual thing that you're going to buy. It comes from the top of the inventory.

Blair: I'm just not used to being a shorter person. I'm not used to just getting to put on clothes. How they look in the actual thing, for better or for worse, or if there's a certain thing, you can really see that on QVC. It's so cool. Like, oh, that's a regular person, and they didn't pin it and all these things.—You guys don't know, you know motorcycles.—But when we're on shoot, I have clothes pins in my back and stuff because they're just made for someone else. But these are real transparent at QVC.

Cooper: Is the Q-ball for spasms?

Blair: It is. I hold something so that I'm aware of my hand because I don't have proprioception. If I'm concentrating on something else, my arms will go away and it's having something to hold onto.

Cooper: I thought you would ask it a question.

Blair: It can get really distracting. I just happen to like an eight-ball. I was in a movie with Nicholas Cage, and it just wound up being one of those things, that I wound up always holding something.

Cooper: I think it's a cool little hack, if you will. If you go the other way it's infinity.

Blair: Exactly! I love it! It's my number. I mean, don't try to call it, you won't reach me.

Cooper: (laughs) I called and it was busy! Before we go, I wanted to share with you a bit about the magazine. That's who you're talking to right now. On our home page, we have Reels from people saying, "You can find me on AbilityE." Ability Entertainment is a place where you tell your friends who might have disabilities that if they want to get into the entertainment industry, which includes modeling, QVC, if you will, this is a resource with thousands of people.

Pelland: Oh, that's great!

Blair: This is incredible. I was looking at it, I hadn't done a real dive into your site. I'm so happy now. This is the most incredible thing. I was always wondering if something like this was done. I'm amazed at what a resource this is.

Cooper: This happened because Netflix came to us, trying to find a talent. We used our resources.

Blair: It's incredible. Anything that can reduce stigma and have people understand in general the things they don't and how to find the people they don't see every day in their community, which is the way our world is built, is just a godsend.

Cooper: Thank you. And you're supporting, stepping up to doing what you're doing, it's so important

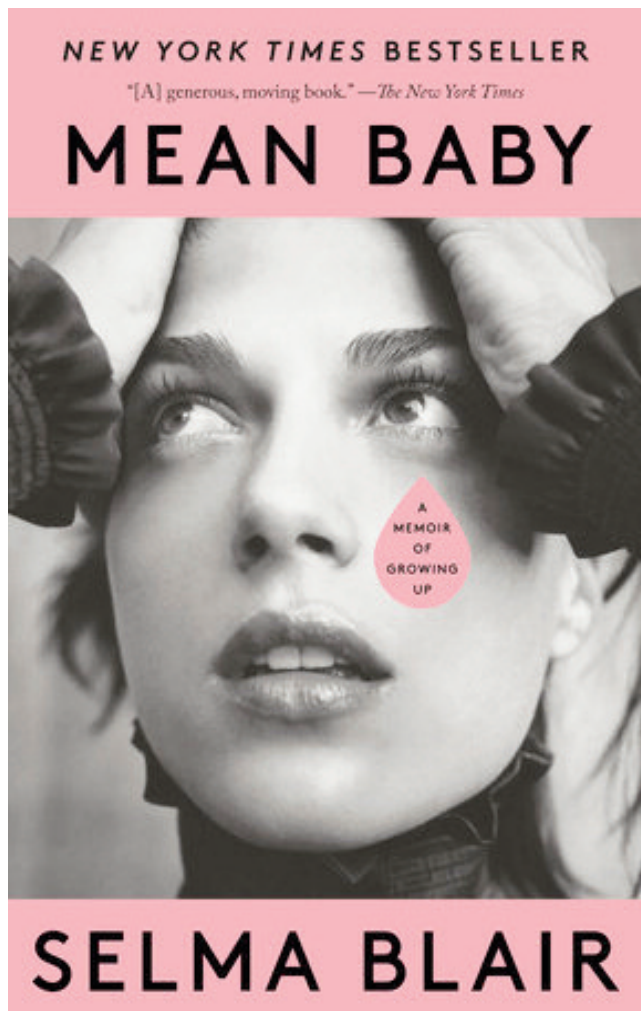
Blair: And people have really stepped up, QVC and Isaac, to have this caliber of collaboration, to have this support is hugely meaningful to friends of mine in the disability community and just to people in general to know that this is another option.

Mizrahi: It is our opportunity, really. That's how we see it. We enjoy the idea of being included in this conversation and being in your life, really.

Cooper: As we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to share?

Blair: I love this experience. I love this collection for people. It's everything that I've fallen in love with in the last few years, brighter, a different vibe. I'm typically always at home in a uniform of black and white always. I've saved everything else for occasions, But now that my wardrobe is filled with these colors, and I go out, it really does set a whole different tone for me out and about. I wanted to thank you, Isaac because I get some love. I get to share this also accessible, there are points that are really different. It's honestly exciting. I'm really over the moon that it's coming.

Mizrahi: Everything she said. (laughs) I really feel lucky and blessed to be a part of this and to be in people's lives. It's the greatest opportunity. Thank you. ■



Selma is also a best selling author.

Here book *Mean Baby* was racked up it's share of praised:

"Elegantly expressed... Evocative... This generous, moving book... roams intuitively, assuredly, between past and present... For years Blair looked to astrologers, mediums, and healers to tell her story... She herself is the right person."

—Susan Burton, *The New York Times*

"Blair engages with her MS starkly and movingly... [She] puts it all out there."

—Joanne Kaufman, *The Wall Street Journal*

"Selma Blair is not afraid to go there when it comes to sharing the ups and downs of her personal life — particularly in the wake of her 2018 Multiple Sclerosis diagnosis — but never before has she shared such shocking details from her past."

—Kara Warner, *People Magazine*

"In Mean Baby, an intensely self-aware and cheerfully self-revealing Blair explores the abundant darkness arising from her fraught relationships with her mother,

men, alcohol and, ultimately, multiple sclerosis. In different hands, this might make for a more painful read. But throughout her breezy narrative, Blair's wry humor and her chatty, confiding tone make you feel that you're spending 300 pages with a smart and, yes, slightly bratty new friend... Blair's memoir... is funny and frank, a chance to spend time with a brave and big-hearted woman who's grown up to be not so mean, after all."

—Jennifer LaRue, *The Washington Post*

"A beautiful tale about how this person learned to love a new version of herself."

—Rachel Martin, NPR's *Morning Edition*

Excerpt of *Mean Baby*

I'm not sure how to harness my meandering thoughts into words and sentences that make sense. So I'll start with what I know.

We are all in search of a story that explains who we are.

As Joan Didion wrote, "We tell ourselves stories in order to live." We are made not only by the stories we tell ourselves but by the tales of others—the stories they tell us, and the stories they tell about us.

The first story I was told about myself—other than the one about how my mother watched as the doctor pulled me out from her insides—is that I was a mean, mean baby.

I came into this world with my mouth pulled into a perpetual snarl. I was born with a glower, my face defined by a heavy brow that adults coveted. But on a child—an infant, no less—my face looked judgmental, scrutinizing. No one knew quite what to make of it.

When I arrived home from the hospital, only one of my three sisters, Katie, who was five, was waiting in our driveway. Mimi, aged twelve, and Lizzie, almost two, were elsewhere. Katie rushed out to meet me, my mother holding me on her lap. Katie asked if I was a baby doll for her. No, I wasn't, my expression said. A few days later, some of the neighborhood kids came over to meet the new Beitner child. Within minutes, they left screaming, warning any-one who would listen, "Do not go over there. The Beitners have a mean baby." Can you imagine! Have you ever heard an infant described in this way? What could I have done? I was just days old! An infant with a snarl. I only wanted someone to pick me up, I think. Or put me down! But instead they all went and gossiped. From the very beginning, I was misunderstood.

Nevertheless, the label stuck, as labels are wont to do. What people call you does matter. The words we use hold weight. We say this sometimes, as lip service, but it's true. It's like having a sticker affixed to your back that the rest of the world can read but you can't. Before

I could even speak, I was told who and what I was. I was mean.

In my defense, I did not have a proper name for the first few years of my life. My birth certificate reads, simply, “Baby Girl Beit-ner.” In babyhood, I was given the nickname Baby Bear. My mom said they called me Bear because I had such a furry head that they would have to rub it to make way for my forehead. (I used to feel bad about this bit of my history, until I read that Rene Russo was born with the same affliction.)

Eventually, my family started calling me Blair—after Blair Moody, my mother told me. A U.S. senator and circuit court judge from Michigan whom she admired. This was funny, because I was so moody. (To this I say: Be careful what you name your kid!) I remember being a Blair, because they would all spell it out when-ever they talked about me, as though I wouldn’t piece it together. “B- L- A- I- R was mean,” or “B- L- A- I- R wants to come.”

This continued until I was three, when I went to preschool and needed a legal name. My mother decided to name me Selma, after her much-adored friend who died around the time I was born. In the Jewish tradition, babies are never named after a living person, and this seemed like a fitting tribute. The other names in contention were Ethel, Gretel—which I would have liked—Marta, Mar-tha, and Gwyneth. (Gwyneth! To think, I could have been one, too!) There came a point where I loudly proclaimed, “When am I going to get one of those names?” referring to my sisters’ nicknames of Ducky, Precious, and Princess. I wanted a pretty name. But it was not to be. From this point forward, I was Selma Blaire Bear Beitner, though my mother eventually removed the e from “Blaire,” because she said it was “too pretentious.” And there you have it.

For my entire life, I have been both. Selma and Blair. My two names would come to define me, as much as the stories around them.

As a child, I never took to the name Selma. It seemed to me an old lady’s name, not a name befitting a little girl. When given a choice, I always asked to be called Blair, but I got a real boatload of “Selma” in elementary school. Whenever the teacher did roll call, I was too shy to ask, “Can you call me Blair?” So all day long I was Selma, or Bat Sheva, the Hebrew name used by the teachers at my Jewish day school, and at home I was Blair. Mom was always sorry I didn’t like Selma. A feminine of Saint Anselm, the Benedictine monk. Or a reference to Selma, Alabama. It was a good name, she often reminded me.

When I was five years old, Mom, Dad, and I went on a weekend trip where I struck up a friendship with a family with a baby. As we lounged poolside, the mother

asked my name, and I casually replied that it was Lisa—a nice, normal name. As Lisa, I played with that baby for three hours, helping her navigate the hotel pool in her floaties. When the afternoon sun sank low in the sky, the woman approached my mother and told her that her daughter Lisa had been so helpful.

“Lisa!” My mother let out a wail. “Her name’s not Lisa! What a crock! What a liar!”

The woman looked at me as though she were seeing me for the first time. My lovely afternoon had been erased. I was no longer Lisa, and now I was a liar as well.

My mother nicknamed me Saintly, but it was tongue in cheek. I was no saint. I could sometimes be saintly to my mother, but to everyone else I was a mean baby.

Growing up, I shared a bedroom with my sister Lizzie, since we were closest in age. Our parents let us choose the wallpaper, and since Lizzie didn’t care, I picked a pattern with little pink and blue flowers floating against white. I chose it because it looked similar to what Jessica Lange describes as her childhood wallpaper in the movie Tootsie. Movies, even then, were what gave me ideas and hope.

Our room had two twin beds and those vinyl shades you needed to tug in order to pull them up or down. Every morning, I got out of bed very, very quickly. I had never been one to linger. (Can you believe it?) I rushed to pull the shade down, so it would snap to attention and rip-roll up loudly, sending the diffused morning sun straight into Lizzie’s eyes.

“Yehi or!” I’d yell at the top of my lungs, quoting from the first lines of Genesis, the Hebrew words for “Let there be light!”

“Blair!” she would croak, rubbing her eyes. “Why do you do this?”

Next I made my way around the room, throwing open the door, turning on the television atop Mom’s childhood maple dresser, her mother’s before her, and flicking on the lights. I needed life, immediately. I needed every bit of everything, every bit of help, anything I could reach in order to cheerlead myself into embracing my day. Even then, I did this.

This was how our days began. I made Lizzie crazy. But she put up with me. Every night, we said good night back and forth until one of us fell asleep. She was always there with me. ■ ABILITY

Excerpted from “Mean Baby” by Selma Blair

penguinrandomhouse.com/books/646493/mean-baby-by-selma-blair/

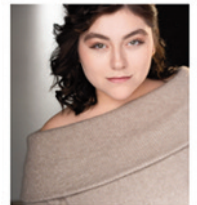
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MISS *Amazing*

Building Confidence & Self-Esteem Through a *Miss Amazing* Experience

“Miss Amazing” is a nonprofit organization with chapters in more than 30 states and a goal to have 10,000 girls and women with disabilities participate in its programs by 2030. Founded by Jordan Somer in 2007, the organization’s mission is to build self-esteem in girls and women with disabilities, helping master key life skills, and creating pathways to advocacy and leadership.

The motivation for the organization can be traced back to Jordan’s volunteer work at the Special Olympics, where she was inspired to provide the female athletes with the same empowering experience that she gained through her own involvement in pageant competitions.

The “Miss Amazing” commitment to empowering girls and women with disabilities aligns with its founder’s

vision of providing a platform for self-expression, personal growth, and sisterhood, ultimately fostering self-esteem and confidence in this community of girls and women with disabilities.

Both the “Miss Amazing” state-level AMPLIFY events and the national ADVOCATE event focus on three key skill areas for girls and women starting at age 5 through adulthood. Winners at the state level are invited to the national summit where they compete to be crowned the national winner in their respective age division.

The first “Miss Amazing” skill area is the **Introduction** which involves having the girls and women take the stage and give a brief speech about themselves in front of an audience. This helps develop important public





speaking skills and self-confidence. Then, there is the **Interview** skill area, where each participant sits down for a conversation with panel of judges. This helps them gain experience that may prepare them for a future job interview.

The third skill area is the **Passion Presentation**. Here, participants share a short presentation about a hobby or passion. While many participants showcase talents like singing or dancing in their presentation, the program has evolved to embrace a wide variety of talents and interests, including unique passions like caring for chickens. This Passion Presentation allows participants to express their strengths and interests in a supportive environment.

This year's "Miss Amazing" national summit was held in Chicago. When not presenting, the girls and women are encouraged to make new friends thanks to a buddy system, which pairs girls and women together, providing a more structured way to meet and make friends with someone new. The summit also included personal development workshops, a 'glam' session with hair & makeup tips, a PJ party with games and crafts and other enrichment activities. The three-day event culminates with a gala and closing ceremony where national "Miss Amazing" representatives are announced.

Among the winners at this year's "Miss Amazing" national summit, was Nori Rose Barnes, a 31-year-old college student from Illinois, who identifies as non-binary. Along with their studies, Nori is a disability advocate who speaks on behalf of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities for the Special Olympics and other organizations.

ABILITY Magazine's Jennifer Goga met with Nori via Zoom to learn how "Miss Amazing" has helped them master important social skills, gain confidence and become a disability advocate for themselves and others.

Jennifer Goga: Hi Nori, how are you?

Nori Rose Barnes: Hi. I'm good. I'm actually here at school today because I have a DEI neurodiversity symposium. Then I'll go home for an hour and get ready for the Homecoming dance tonight.

Goga: That's a busy day, thanks for squeezing me in.

Barnes: (laughs) Well, thank you. I'm really excited to talk to you.

Goga: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, your background.

Barnes: My name is Nori, and I am 31 years old. I live and thrive with autism spectrum disorder. I am deaf, hard of hearing, and I have Tourette syndrome.

Goga: And you mentioned you're going to school?

Barnes: I am at a community college called Rock Valley College. I am a freshman. This is my first semester.

Goga: Do you know what you plan to study or what your career goals are?

Barnes: I'm working toward an Associate of Arts degree, majoring in Humanities, and then I plan to transfer to a four-year college. I'm still deciding about which four-year college.

Goga: Well, you have some time to pick one.

Barnes: I am planning to eventually get my doctorate degree in Humanities with a specialization in education and special education. I want to come back here to Rock Valley College and work as a humanities professor.

Goga: That's a good plan. Okay, so Humanities, remind me what sorts of things you'll be learning and then someday teaching?

Barnes: Humanities is the study of all things human. It's ancient languages, current languages, religion, music, art. The study of everything that is part of the human race. We just got done learning about ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt. We're currently studying ancient Greece and ancient Rome.

Goga: Very interesting.

Barnes: In my current class, I'm studying more about Western humanities, but we do touch lightly on the Prophet Muhammad and stuff like that. We do a little non-Western culture, but not as much as some of the classes that I'll take later.

Goga: How did you first learn about "Miss Amazing?"

Barnes: I learned about "Miss Amazing" back in 2018.

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I was in a really bad depression. One of my friends' moms reached out to me, and she said, "Hey, Nori, have you ever thought about participating in a pageant?" I was like, 'Oh I don't know about all that.' She explained it to me, and I'll admit that it took a lot of convincing. But I decided that I was going to try it, and I really enjoyed it. It boosted my confidence and my self-esteem. It helped me to be able to see my own self-worth.

Goga: That's great. What was that experience like?

Barnes: I live in Illinois, so I participated at the Illinois Chapter of "Miss Amazing" and I actually ended up winning at the state level. Then I attended nationals, and I actually won Nationals in my division that year.

Goga: You're a star!

Barnes: (laughs) Thanks. Then, my hearing declined significantly after that, and I had to take a step back from pageantry and "Miss Amazing." I had to take a step back from Special Olympics as well because my physical health hit a really low point. I ended up getting diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS).

Goga: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Would you mind sharing a little about EDS and how it affects you?

Barnes: It's a genetic connective tissue disorder. I have a form called hypermobility. It's a rare condition, rare meaning that it's just not widely diagnosed. In my case, it affects my joints and muscles and my organs will slowly begin to deteriorate and shut down. But I tend to

fall a lot. It's like having really, really elastic joints and muscles, but the problem with that is when normally people would break a bone or something, I don't. Instead, I hyper-extend everything and I stretch my muscles out.

Goga: Would you share your "Miss Amazing" experience? If I have this correct, there are three different parts to it—an introduction, interview and passion presentation, right?

Barnes: Yes, that's right. In 2018 when I first participated in the state level, you signed up for a two-day pageant. Back then, they called it a talent portion that you did on Friday night, and then on Saturday you would do the actual pageant portion. But now the state level is just one day, and the talent is called a passion presentation now.

Goga: What do you typically do for your passion presentation?

Barnes: I usually sing, but this year I did speeches because that's what I do for my job.

Goga: That's interesting. What kind of job involves giving speeches?

Barnes: I am an internationally recognized self-advocate for myself and others with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Goga: That's great. Are you associated with a particular organization or do you independently speak at various events?

Barnes: I'm associated with the Special Olympics, and other organizations.

Goga: Have you traveled a lot doing that type of work?

Barnes: Yes. Actually, next month I will be in Chicago for a week. I am one of the keynote speakers for the International Conference for Law Enforcement, Torch Run, benefiting Special Olympics.

Goga: You are a very busy person. I wonder if you could share how your involvement with "Miss Amazing" has helped you get to where you are now? How has it helped with your self-esteem and your confidence?

Barnes: Things for me really got a lot better this year. Because of COVID, I regressed in the progress that I had made, being almost three years stuck in your home with no interaction outside of your immediate family. I struggled with communicating. I struggled with being around new people. When I got the opportunity to do "Miss Amazing" again and I signed up, I was excited, but I was really anxious too.. When I went to the state level, it was like being thrown into the fire, essentially. I went with my pageant coach and Special Olympic speech coach Mama Katie. One of the big things about "Miss Amazing" is that they have a buddy system. They want the girls to spend time with their buddies to prac-



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tice how to socialize with people that maybe they don't know very well.

When Mama Katie and I got there. She said to me, 'Okay, you're going to be with your buddy and I'm going to go do some work.' And I was like, 'Oh, no, I'm going to die.'

Goga: But you didn't die, I guess? (laughs)

Barnes: No, I didn't, and I didn't cry this year either. The first year, I cried like somebody was killing me.

Goga: But now you can look back and laugh about that, right?

Barnes: (laughs) I do because it's like I remember clinging to Momma Katie when they said that the parents were going to go into a different room, and I was like, 'Oh no, you're not leaving me.'

Goga: Katie has worked with you through the Special Olympics, and she joined you for "Miss Amazing" too. So you knew her already, but your 'buddy' was a stranger to you at first?

Barnes: Yeah, that's correct. My "Miss Amazing" buddy was really nice, but it was difficult to talk and stuff because I didn't know her. I had to overcome this really deep social anxiety that had remanifested because of COVID. I ended up being able to talk to her. A lot of the girls that I participated with back in 2018 are no longer doing "Miss Amazing." There were a lot of new faces. Learning again how to interact with people who I don't know was definitely a learning experience.

For the Illinois state-level event, it's pretty unstructured during that first interaction. Like me, I didn't really interact or socialize. With nationals, it's a lot more structured with getting everybody to socialize and communicate. They have different little workshops that we do.

This year they did a group buddy system where you had a group of girls that were with a buddy. I got really close to a group of girls that shared the same buddy. We were also all in the same age division, so that allowed me to succeed at interpersonal relationships with those girls. Then they had friends that they knew, and so I ended up getting introduced to them. It was this really cool, big group of new friends. I made more friends than I realized I was going to make.

Goga: Terrific. Now, will you keep in touch with them through social media or texting after you get back home?

Barnes: I have business cards with a QR code that has all of my social media channels. I usually try to hand those out, especially the people that I made connections with. I gave my phone number out to a few of the girls that I got really close to.

It can be a surreal experience for me being a deaf, hard-of-hearing person, but it turns out that the former Nation-

al Senior Miss Queen, her name is Autumn, is actually deaf as well. It was this really beautiful moment to be able to get to know her and to share that experience and have somebody that you have that commonality with.

Goga: Oh, that's so nice that you and Autumn were able to meet and share your experiences. I assume the "Miss Amazing" organizers make arrangements for you with captioning and things like that.

Barnes: Yes, that did. At school, I use captioning and I use a live interpreter. They have that at "Miss Amazing." They have live-captioning and an interpreter. It's like with anything, sometimes it's hard to follow everything that's going on. So being able to have the close relationship that I ended up building with Autumn and us being able to sign during the weekend was really nice.

Goga: Do you think you've learned skills that will help you change some of those perceptions that people sometimes have?

Barnes: Yes. I actually do that in my everyday life, and "Miss Amazing" has definitely given me a platform to do that even more than ever. Here at college, I started a club called "Students Promoting An Inclusive Community." Part of what our club does is try to show people that our differences are what make us who we are. Our differences are what make us unique, whether that be disabilities, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, race.

As a person with disabilities, I get to really show everybody first-hand that if people with disabilities are given the time, tools, and support that we can accomplish really anything that anybody else can do.

I never in a million years thought I would be going to college. Yesterday I was working on my plan for my college classes and how they'll lead me on my career path, and I cried because it was this overwhelming realization that I'm actually in college and I'm going to get an Associate of Arts degree in May of 2026, my goodness gracious.

Goga: That's great. Do you have any other ambitions, something else you'd like to pursue?

Barnes: My big dream is to come back to this college and teach as a professor. I want to be able to show them that you can do anything with a disability. Don't ever let somebody limit you. I grew up being told that I'd never have a quality of life, that I'd never accomplish anything, that the only thing I would ever do is graduate from high school, and that would be the only thing I'd ever do. Sadly, I believed it. I heard it for so long that I started believing it and I never had somebody in my corner that told me that I could succeed. When I started looking at Rock Valley College and was told that they were set up to help me succeed, it was this earthshattering moment. It was the first time that anyone ever said, "You can do this and we're going to help you succeed."

I want to be that voice for people in the future, and “Miss Amazing” has given me the opportunity and the tools to be able to be that. That’s great.

Goga: Very well said, Nori. Is there anything else you want to convey about your the role “Miss Amazing” has played in getting to where you are now?

Barnes: I think if I would tell people one thing “Miss Amazing” has instilled in me, it would probably be to never let somebody judge you and don’t judge other people based on stereotypes. I would highly encourage everyone to attend events like “Miss Amazing” and Special Olympics, because you will see the most amazing things—you will see people succeeding.

Goga: Which event do you compete in with Special Olympics?

Barnes: I compete in track and field, bocce, volleyball, basketball, snowshoe, softball, bowling. I think I covered it all.

Goga: Oh, my gosh. I don’t know how you have time to go to school, your advocacy work and all these other things you’re involved with.

Barnes: Well, when I describe my job, I explain it this way: “I yell at politicians in my best Walmart customer service voice— because that’s what advocacy is.” And I have to do that mainly because I do not have the privilege of old white men in politics. If I don’t get my way, I can’t yell and scream and cry and whoop and holler, because if I do that, then I’m promoting the stigma of disability, and doing that will only validate their belief that people with disability should not be involved in politics.

Goga: That’s why you use your nice Walmart greeters voice, when you’re trying to get politicians to support funding for organizations that help people with disabilities.

Barnes: Yeah, exactly. There have been times that I’ve had to excuse myself from a meeting to be able to just keep my own emotions in check. I’ve had to ask for a bathroom break just to go to the bathroom to cry because I don’t want to cry in front of politicians. I don’t want to fuel their falso belief that people with disabilities can’t emotionally regulate. But its ironic, because if you’ve ever watched any political debate, I think its clear they’re the ones who can’t regulate.

Goga: You make some good points there.

Barnes: Thank you.

Goga: Now, I want to confirm that you use “they/them” pronouns, is that right?

Barnes: Yes. I’m nonbinary. Part of what I advocate for is the disability voice in the LGBTQIA+ community because unfortunately, there’s a lot of gatekeeping that happens in that community because people have this

idea that because we have intellectual and developmental disabilities that we can’t understand or comprehend our sexuality or our gender identity, and that certainly we must be confused. I make sure to advocate that that’s not the case. I advocate that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can have healthy, safe, romantic, and sexual relationships. How ever that looks for them. I try to make sure that people are aware of what condoms are, what contraceptives are and things like that, because personally, I didn’t grow up knowing about that stuff. I now live with my mom and my adoptive dad, and they have a very open dialogue with me. If I ever have questions about anything, they answer questions. I try to give that to other people because I’ve had people come to me and were assaulted and didn’t even know the own parts of their body. Because they didn’t know the actual name of that part of their body, people didn’t take them seriously. A lot of times what happens is people see people with down syndrome and they’ll say, ‘Oh, somebody touched me, and people just think that they’re confused.

I try to teach people to, in that sense even, advocate for themselves. I want them to know that they can say, “Hey, I don’t want you to touch me there, or, Hey, somebody touched me here and I was not okay with it.” Unfortunately, being a survivor myself of situations like that, I understand that you really have to push people to listen to you. I want to share that its OK to say, “No, I need this. This happened to me, and I was not okay with it, and I need you to listen. I need you to help me.” And it’s so important to be persistent and make people listen to you.

Goga: Well, what you’re doing is very important. Have a great time at the Homecoming Dance. Thank you for sharing your story.

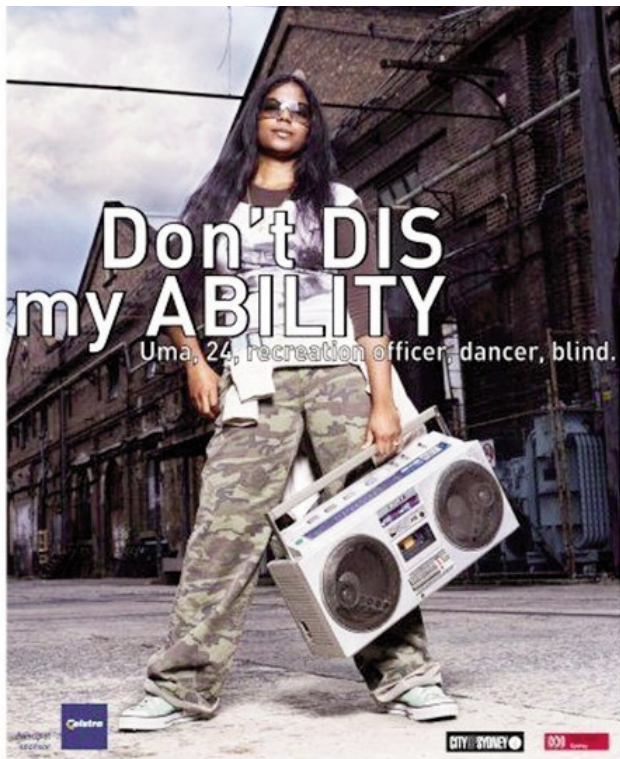
Barnes: Thank you so much. ■ ABILITY

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DISABILITY & ADVERTISING

Advertisements have tended to show non-disabled perfection. This excerpt from ADText, a major open-access advertising textbook, covers common representations of disability in advertising. There are positive signs of change, but the advertising industry still needs to present more positive and fair treatments of people with disabilities.



INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY
3 DECEMBER 2004
Visit www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au for events across NSW

This Australian Public Service Announcement Asks Readers to Question Their Pre-Concepted Notions about People with Disabilities. In It a Young Woman of Color Wears Hip Hop Clothes and Holds a Boom Box. The Tag Line Says "Don't DIS My ABILITY," and Identifies Her as "Uma, 24, Recreation Officer, Dancer, Blind."

People would be sorely disappointed if they hoped to look to advertising for a complete snapshot of a society's people at a given moment in time. Advertising tends to present a very limited sample of the human population. Rather than being a perfect reflection of society, advertising historian Roland Marchand commented that advertising could be seen as a funhouse mirror. It is selective in who it represents. It often distorts who is represented. And it has historically been delayed in representing changes in society and culture for fear of "rocking the

boat" too much and thus alienating consumers. In his BBC television series *Ways of Seeing*, British art historian and critic John Berger agrees and reminds that advertising "proposes to each of us that we transform ourselves, or our lives, by buying something more. . . [It] persuades us of such a transformation by showing us people who have apparently been transformed and are, as a result, enviable." Therefore, when it comes to looking at the types of people included in advertising representations, a trend emerges: mostly attractive people with flawless bodies populate the world of advertising.

Given advertisers' wish to manufacture envy among consumers to become like those represented in their images, it should come as no surprise that advertising has tended to use people of a particular body type found attractive at a given moment in time. Such desirability builds agreeable associations with the product, service, or idea they are selling. Many critiques of advertising often center on the use of images of unattainable human physical perfection (often made through photo manipulation), but the fact that advertising's default ideal body is non-disabled is often not discussed as much, especially outside the field of disability studies. Physical features and abilities that differ from "the norm" are typically not represented in advertising and have been left out regularly in discussions of advertising's problematic representations of people. Although they are tremendously important, there is a tendency to focus on limited and troubling representations based on class, gender, ethnicity, race, and sexuality. Advertising's focus on non-disabled people is therefore taken for granted because it is the image being normalized. As British nursing researcher Alex McClimens notes in an article in the journal *Learning Disability Practice*, non-disabled bodies are taken for granted in the world of advertising: "In its portrayals of the human species, advertising tends to approximate physical perfection, with the implicit promise that you too can look like this if only you would buy product X. It is a lie of course but, like all the best lies, it is generally accepted as true."

People's physicality and abilities are an important part of their identity that is worthy of examination in advertising. As American communication studies scholar Beth Haller explains in her 2010 book *Representing Disability in an Ableist World: Essays on Mass Media*, Media depictions help us understand the media's role in "constructing" people with disabilities as different and their role in framing many types of people who may not fit with "mainstream" constructions. These media images affect society as a whole, but they also have implications for the self-concept of people with disabilities themselves.

As will be discussed in detail in this article, when disabilities or physical "limitations" do appear in advertising, they are often done in a way that tries to invoke pity, exaggerated heroic inspiration, or a humorous

curiosity bordering on fetishization. Rarely are people with disabilities showcased with many dimensions beyond their disability; further, they are usually not presented as sexually desirable beings.

Therefore, to denaturalize advertising's tendency to sell physical perfection and able-embodiment as the ideal, this article presents common representations of disability in advertising as well as the ways in which advertisers and marketers can and should consider disability more carefully in their work. The article concludes by offering positive signs of change in representing and including people with disabilities in advertising in fair and more respectful ways. It should be noted that because of the diversity of various abilities, an analysis of how all disabilities are represented in advertising was not possible in this article. However, many efforts were made to represent as many abilities as possible.

Disability's Absence in Advertising and Media
According to the Pew Research Institute in 2017, about 12.6% of the American population reports being disabled, but the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2019 that the proportion of Americans with disabilities is closer to 26%. Although definitions and measures of disability are difficult to standardize, the World Health Organization estimated in 2019 that about 15.3% of the world's population is disabled. In a 2012 content analysis of primetime US television commercials in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, only 1.7% of advertisements integrated disabled characters. In the Ford Foundation's broader study of representations of disability in American media, similar statistics were found by other sources: GLAAD observed that only 2.1% of primetime broadcast TV series had regular characters with disabilities and an Annenberg study found that only 2.5% of the 100 top-grossing movies between 2006 and 2016 depicted characters with disabilities. Such a dearth of representations of disability would lead one to wonder why advertising and media representations present people with disabilities much less than the actual proportion of people with disabilities in everyday life. Some disability scholars have found that media and advertising producers have historically claimed that images of disability make people feel uncomfortable or are not profitable. However, others have debunked these assumptions. In one experimental study in 2001 in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, people responded in the same way to disability and non-disability ads, so the small number of depictions of people with disabilities in advertising could be more of a question of institutional will on the part of advertisers and media producers, as well as a limited number of people with disabilities working in the advertising and media industries.

So when disability is represented in advertising, what has been the nature of these representations? What do they say about people with disabilities? As British

media studies scholar Shani Orgad notes in her book *Media Representation and the Global Imagination*, today is an age of new media visibility where representation in media equals an acknowledgment of existence of the people who are represented. With so few people with disabilities showing up in advertising, and the power of advertising to impact who and what is seen as desirable, the ways advertising has represented disability provide insights into society's thoughts about, concern for, and inclusion of people with disabilities.

Representing Disability in Advertising

In the United States, before the 1980s, there were limited representations of disability in advertising beyond often pity-laden calls for charitable donations, such as appeals by wounded soldiers to support US War Bonds during World War II, the March of Dimes' fight against polio, and American actor Jerry Lewis' annual telethon raising money for muscular dystrophy.

"You've got to give up something"

★

Before I ever saw action—how long ago that seems—I remember discussing with the rest of the boys the cost of each shell and gripping about it.

"Then came the Japs, and we wisd up. They're tough fighters, hard to stop. And when you realize that stopping them is the one important thing, price no longer matters.

"It cost me a foot. But I don't mind. You've got to give up something, you know."

War Bonds are investments, you know, not sacrifice! How many of them is a foot worth?

REVERE COPPER AND BRASS INCORPORATED is working now to analyze every job which men with physical disabilities could perform, so that these jobs can be made available first to returning wounded service men.

★

We have reprinted this series of messages from wounded Americans to you in a brochure which gives far more complete details of the interviews they gave. We also have reprints of this advertisement suitable for posters. Write to REVERE COPPER AND BRASS INCORPORATED, Executive Offices, 230 Park Avenue, N. Y. 17, N. Y.

This is Cassius Anthony Joseph Hall, of Lodi, Calif., when an American sent to do our fighting with our feet in the Pacific.

This 1944 Revere Copper and Brass, Inc., Ad Uses Pity toward a Soldier to Represent Disability and Encourage People to Buy War Bonds Supporting the United States' Efforts in World War II. The Tagline Reads "You've Got to Give Up Something" and Next to the Photo of a Soldier on Crutches, His Right Foot Amputated, Is Text from His Point of View that Shells Are Expensive, the "Japs" are Tough and Stopping Them is Worth Any Price, in His Case, His Foot.



A Muscular Dystrophy Association of America Ad (circa Late 1960s) Uses Pity, Fear, and the Language of Victimization to Encourage Donations for the Foundation Tied to Popular American Actor Jerry Lewis. Animated Spot Shows an Egg Falling from a Nest to Hit a Caveman on the Head. The Egg Hatches into a Bird. The Caveman Attempts to Fly Like the Bird, Unsuccessfully, by Flapping His Arms. Modern Man Proceeds to Develop Technology in Stages: First the Hot Air Balloon, then the Biplane, the Jet, the Rocket, and even the Submarine. Muscular Dystrophy Is Illustrated Invading the Body and Damaging Muscles. Scientific Beakers and Laboratory Equipment Appear with the Word "Hope" Getting Increasingly Larger on the Screen. A Doorbell and the Badge Worn by Door-To-Door Volunteers Are Shown. The Doorbell Morphs into a Dollar Bill. Shapes Transform into a Wagon Wheel, Which Turns into the Wheel on a Wheelchair with the Words "Muscular Dystrophy Associations of America." Children's Games Such as Hopscotch Are Shown. The Blocks Are Shown Crashing Down, as the Spinning Wheel of the Wheelchair Appears Again.

Ads more favorably representing the disabled emerged in the 1980s. A 1984 Levi's 501 Jeans ad is often cited as the first televised ad with a disabled man using a wheelchair popping a "wheelie" as he goes down a boardwalk with an able-bodied woman. In 1986, McDonald's aired its "Silent Persuasion" ad showcasing a deaf man convincing his deaf woman friend to go to McDonald's using sign language.



A 1984 Levi's 501 Blues Television Ad Shows a Disabled Man Popping a "Wheelie" While Going Down a Boardwalk with a Jogging Woman. The Ad Shows a Montage of People of Different Genders and Races Expressing Their Individuality While Playing Basketball, Jumping Rope, Playing and Socializing in Different Ways; Meanwhile a Jingle Extols 501 Blue Jeans, Which Shrink to Provide a Unique Fit for Each Wearer.



In A 1986 McDonald's Ad, One Deaf Friend "Silently" Convinces His Other Deaf Friend to Go Enjoy a Burger on the Beach. A Young Woman Studies Outdoors on a School Campus. A Young Man Signs to Her That They Should Go to the Beach Instead of Studying for Exams. She Relents When He Mentions That They Could Stop at McDonald's on the Way. The Two Are Then Shown Riding Their Bikes with McDonald's Takeout, and Enjoying a Picnic at the Shore. The Conversation Takes Place Entirely in Sign Language with Written Subtitles. The Jingle "It's A Good Time for the Great Taste of McDonald's" is Heard as Instrumental Only, without Lyrics.

When these ads appeared in the mid-1980s, Tony Robinson of the Los Angeles Times acknowledged their importance in an article on December 15, 1986: "And more and more often, the nation's disabled are being seen [leading active, vital lives], not just on telethons and late-night public service ads but through the high-production, high-stakes world of television commercials." As one advertiser notes, casting people with disabilities in ads was a significant sign because "advertising 'has a very big role to play in setting social norms.'" However, as Robert Lins, creative director for McDonald's at the time commented, the industry worried about exploitation: "We always took a cautious position because either we were afraid we would portray them incorrectly or that people would say we were using them to sell hamburgers. But we talked to people, and people said: 'Why don't you give it a try?'"

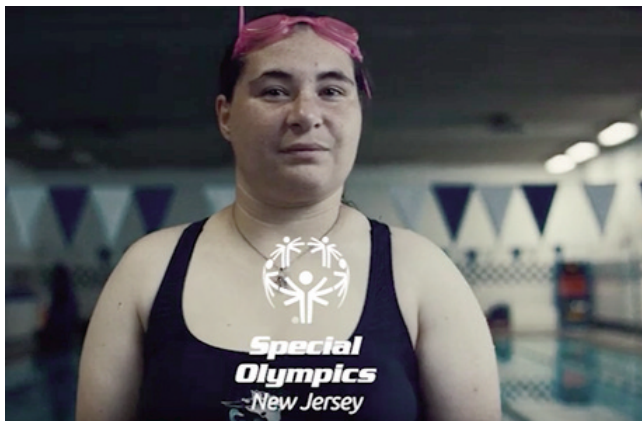
Like some disability advocates during and since that time, advertising scholar Richard Pollay was not so optimistic about the sudden emergence of disability in advertising in the 1980s. Pollay explained that advertisers tend to be averse to using images that "take the world as it is." He worried that the celebration of a few ads' inclusion of disabled people for a second or two in a thirty-second spot did not do enough to build empathy for and understanding of the true disabled experience. Further, for him, such short and passing inclusion did little to overcome stereotypes and change public opinion about disabilities. Representing people with disabilities as isolated from others, as was done in the case of McDonald's "Silent Persuasion" ad, or passively including people with disabilities without making them central actors, as was done with the Levi's ad, minimizes the presence of and contributions of the disabled in society. Still, some at the time saw this as a step in a positive

direction. Certainly, there was a burden in having a small number of representations of disability stand in as the reality for all people with disabilities, but some would argue that some positive representation of disability was better than none at all.

After the initial increase in representing disability in the 1980s, the advertising industry made efforts to show “realistic, positive, more varied, and even humorous depictions of the disabled.” Despite these efforts, though, people with disabilities have tended to be represented in a fleeting manner. When they have been central characters in ads, three main stereotypes have persisted: the disabled as victims to pity, the disabled as inspirational “super crips,” and the disabled as a source of humor or the butt of jokes.

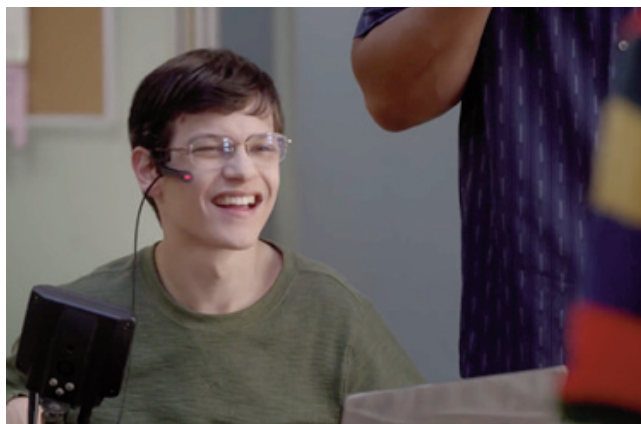
The first trope is that the disabled are victims to pity and often in need of an able-bodied savior. This stereotype has played out significantly in the past, as seen through the earlier examples from the March of Dimes, US War Bonds, and the Jerry Lewis telethon, but it has more recently taken on more subtle forms.

Advertisements for the Special Olympics, a sports organization founded in 1968 for children and adults with intellectual and physical disabilities, have used messages that provoke sympathy within the viewer to garner support for its cause. Although the organization’s mission is to empower and include people with intellectual and physical disabilities, some of its advertisements may unintentionally treat the intellectually disabled as passive and only being able to do what they dream if the able-bodied can support them through financial and other means.



This Special Olympics Ad Asks Those without Disabilities to “Help Bring the Game” through Donations; Otherwise, the Dreams of the Disabled Will Never Be Possible. A Gymnast Walks across Empty Bleachers instead of a Balance Beam; a Basketball Player Watches Others Play from behind a Fence; a Swimmer Looks at a Pool That’s Been Covered Over for the Winter; a Skater in Her Sock Feet Slides across a Wood Floor; a Weight Lifter Hoists Packages in a Warehouse instead of Barbells. These are Examples of Athletes Who, the Ad Imagines, Will Be Held Back without Donations from the Able-Bodied.

The second major trope is the inspirational “super crip,” which idealizes people with disabilities as somehow being superhuman in their “victories” over their disabilities. Such depictions turn people with disabilities into inspirational heroes, often for doing ordinary things in their everyday life. In addition to turning a disabled person’s life into a form of “inspiration porn,” this stereotype reinforces the notion of disability as being something to overcome. Moreover, able-bodied people implicitly come to feel better about their able-bodiedness as they watch and listen to the disabled’s abilities to defeat all of the “barriers” put in their way by their differently abled bodies. Facing such a representation, a person who sees her disability as a regular part of her life might ask some important questions: “Am I only defined by my disability? Would I be inspirational in this context if I did not have a disability?” Like ads using pity and sympathy, ads with an inspirational “super crip” narrative treat the disabled as one-dimensional people (i.e. disability is the most important thing about them) who make able-bodied people feel better about themselves.



In the ABC Sitcom *Speechless*, Two Characters Explain the Concept of “Inspiration Porn,” or the Creation of a One-Dimensional Image of Disabled People as Always Being Inspirational to Make Able-Bodied People Feel Better about Themselves.



In a popular and humorous TED Talk, Australian comedian and disability rights activist Stella Young explains why she should not be seen as inspiring just because she is disabled.

The idea of “inspiration porn” has found its way in advertising in often-subtle ways. Public Service Announcements (PSAs) regularly feature famous stars talking about important societal topics because people look up to them. When disabled stars are called upon to appear in PSAs, not only do the PSAs use their stardom to encourage audience members to think differently about a topic, but their status as disabled stars lends even more inspirational credence to their messages given their place among the few disabled stars visible in the media. Two examples include blind American musician Ray Charles and American deaf actress Marlee Matlin. Charles asks Americans to allow people with disabilities to participate and contribute to society in various ways. He mentions accessibility, inclusion, signage, and other issues that impact the disabled. Matlin encourages people to use non-violent means to deal with anger. Unlike most ads that many people see, Matlin’s PSA is notable because it uses sign language with captions.



In A 1987 PSA, Blind Musician Ray Charles Provides an Inspiring Message of Ways to Support People with Disabilities. Charles Plays Piano and Speaks to Camera about the 35 Million Americans with Disabilities, Who Want the Same Things as Anyone Else “to Participate.” He Encourages Viewers to Help Address These Issues in Their Own Communities. In A NBC “The More Your Know” PSA, Deaf Actor Marlee Matlin Tells Viewers Not to Use Violence to Manage Their Anger. She Signs while Perched on a Park Bench in a White Studio Setting, and Soft Piano Music Provides the Only Sound.

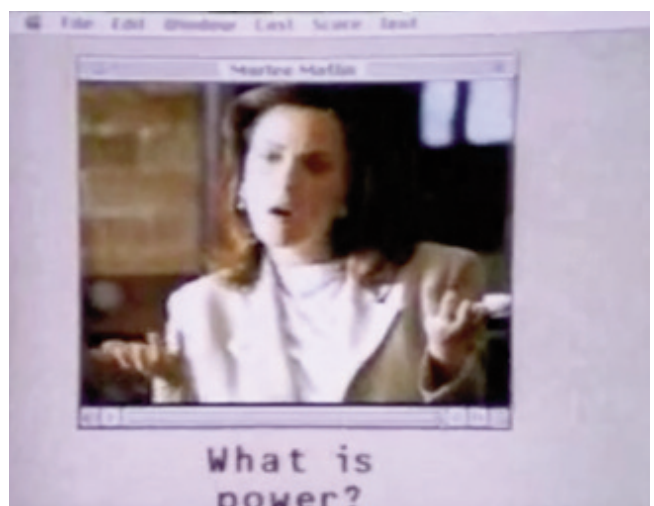


Some brands have tried to make themselves appear aspirational by using famous disabled people. In a 1985 ad, Stevie Wonder associates Hansen Soda with his accom-

plishments as a blind musician and songwriter by telling viewers that “some things in life are inspirational.” In a similar way, an early Apple PowerBook commercial has Marlee Matlin sign and type her answers for what “power” means: no limits, no barriers, no restrictions, fighting stereotypes, proving others wrong, independence, confidence, and freedom of expression. Ultimately, power comes through the use of Apple’s laptop, but the message is delivered by a well-known disabled actress at the time, which the audience would most likely say embodies the same qualities. In other words, Matlin’s story of being strong and powerful as a disabled person aligns with the power and strength that could come through the use of Apple’s new, innovative technology.



Stevie Wonder Associates Hansen Soda with His Accomplishments as a Blind Musician and Songwriter by Telling Viewers That “Some Things in Life are Inspirational.” While Delivering the Line, He Sings and Plays a Jingle about the Natural Taste of Hansen’s and of Life. He Sits among Many Keyboards, and Shots of Wet Cold Soda Cans Are Interspersed with Shots of His Fingers Masterfully Finding Each Key on the Keyboard.



Apple Aligns the Power That Comes with Using Its Newest Laptop with Marlee Matlin, a Famous and Powerful Deaf Actress in Hollywood. She Sits in a Living Room Using a Laptop and Makes Declarations in ASL about Power: “Power is the Freedom of Expression. Power is Macintosh.” There Is No Music Playing, but the Audience Hears Some Typing and a Clap.

A more controversial example of a company trying to affiliate itself with an inspirational disabled actor came in 2000 when Nuveen Investments ran an ad during the Super Bowl featuring the Superman actor Christopher Reeve, who became paralyzed five years earlier when he injured his spinal cord while riding a horse. The ad shows Reeve in a fictionalized future revealing that he could walk after investments were made into spinal cord regeneration research. The ad invokes sympathy toward Reeve but also plays upon his status as the actor having starred as the character Superman. Not only is Reeve's personal life inspirational, but the fictional character associated with him makes him extraordinary. Ultimately, the ad creates an inspirational story of a well-known disabled "superman" being able to "beat the odds" with the help of a company's investments in medical research. What might have been intended to be a progressive message about the need to invest in new therapies led to anger and confusion. Some people thought that the ad actually showed Christopher Reeve cured from his condition. Others were worried about the digitally manipulated image of Reeve raising false hopes among paralyzed people that a quick cure was imminent. Beyond the veracity of what could be done with Reeve's condition, the ad underscored society's preference for able-bodiedness and the tendency to draw extra special attention to inspirational stories of the disabled overcoming the odds of their conditions.



This Controversial 2000 Super Bowl Spot for Nuveen Investments Puts Superman Actor Christopher Reeve in the Role of "Super Crip." At a Gala Set in the Future, Reeve Is Introduced as a Breakthrough in Spinal Cord Injury and Walks onto the Stage (His Face is Digitally Placed on an Able-Bodied Actor). There Are Reaction Shots of the Attendees and the Rest of the World Watches the Coverage Via TV. The Tagline Says "What Amazing Things Can You Make Happen?"

The inspirational "super crip" is a prominent figure found frequently in advertisements for sport competitions for people with a range of disabilities like the Paralympic Games, which are international sports

competitions that have been organized alongside the Olympic Games since 1960. One prominent example is British Channel 4's trailer "We're the Superhumans" for the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Paralympic Games. Although this ad was intended to garner attention for and interest in the Paralympic Games as well as respect for Paralympic athletes' hard work, its equation of the disabled with "superhumans" falls well within the super crip trope. Various athletes are not necessarily presented for their athletic talents. Rather, they are presented as entertaining extreme sports stars hellbent on victory because they are "beyond human" in their ability to overcome their disabilities.



Britain's Channel 4 Trailer for the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games Uses the "Super Crip" Trope by Presenting Disabled Athletes as Superhuman. The Long Spot Features the Expected Montages of Athletes in Various Sports Such as Track and Field, Fencing, Swimming, etc., but Also Features a Large Jazz Band with Differently Abled Musicians to Perform the Upbeat Soundtrack Proclaiming, "Yes I Can!" There Are Also Daily and Domestic Scenes Such as Eating Breakfast or Teeth Brushing.

The "super crip" is regularly used in sports apparel advertising, too. Nike has been known to present sports as an inspirational activity that all members of society can enjoy. The brand has regularly included people with disabilities as an explicit subject of an ad, or as a part of broader messages about athletes overcoming the odds or facing adversity. In one example, Nike's "No Excuses" ad has paraplegic basketball player Matt Scott listing off a series of excuses that people use to not exercise or practice a sport. As the ad unfolds, the viewer comes to realize that the man is dribbling two basketballs while sitting in a wheelchair. The implied message is that if he can go out and play basketball in his condition, no one else has an excuse to not go out and practice or play. Matt Scott is used to inspire others to not give up on their sport and goals for the game. The idea is that if a disabled man can face his challenges and still get out and practice, so should an able-bodied person.



Nike Ads Often Try to Inspire People to Achieve and Do Their Best through Exercise and Sports, Especially as Seen through This “No Excuses” Ad Featuring Paraplegic Basketball Athlete Matt Scott. We See Only Scott’s Head and Upper Body as He Recites a Litany of Common Excuses People Give for Not Exercising. On the Last Excuse—“My Feet Hurt”—the Camera Cuts to a Full Shot of Scott, Revealing His Wheelchair, as He Slams Two Basketballs Down on the Court. The Nike Motto Appears: “JUST DO IT.”

In 2018, Nike’s controversial “Dream Crazy” ad featuring NFL football player Colin Kaepernick includes people with disabilities, among many others, fighting against “crazy” odds to do what they love. When looking closely at this ad, though, it is apparent that Nike continues to focus only on certain types of well-recognized forms of disability like those in wheelchairs. For example, in one scene featuring a disabled person, one is struck by how the ad follows the same formula as the “No Excuses” ad: a paraplegic basketball player dribbles two basketballs on the exact same court. The key difference is that the basketball player in this ad is a White woman.



Nike’s “Dream Crazy” Ad Features People with Disabilities, but Relies on a Similar Formula the Company Used in the Past for Its “No Excuses” Ad. A Voiceover by Colin Kaepernick Celebrates Athletes with “Crazy” Dreams, Including Transgender Skateboarder Nyjah Huston as He Crashes Many Times to Learn a Trick, Fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad as the First US Olympian to Wear a Hijab, Basketball Legend LeBron James as He Opens a School, the US Women’s Soccer Team as They Become

World Cup Champions, and NFL Player and Amputee Shaqem Griffin Making a Winning Play. We See a Shot of Kaepernick from Behind with an American Flag in the Background, and as He Slowly Turns to Camera, Hear the Words: “Believe in Something, Even If It Means Sacrificing Everything.”

The third and final trope in representing disability is advertisements using people’s disabilities as a source of humor and the butt of jokes. In some cases, it could be a disabled person using self-disparaging humor to poke fun at her disability to make able-bodied people feel more comfortable. It could also be a case of the “innocent fool” where people with disabilities, especially those with intellectual disabilities, are “portrayed as childlike” and “presented as unavoidably constrained by their circumstances and often are seen as people to laugh at, or as the butt of jokes.” This is not to say that people with disabilities cannot be humorous and crack a joke, but the question is if a disability is the basis of the joke and whether such a basis is fairly treating the person and her disability.

There are some notable examples involving blindness. In a 1984 ad for Pioneer LaserDisc, Ray Charles talks about new technology featuring music videos. Although Charles admits that he cannot see the videos that play, he can hear their fine quality. Others tell him the LaserDisc video “blows videotape away” in image quality, for which he responds, “Now who am I to argue?” In a Peugeot car ad, Charles is first shown feeling the body of a 306 Cabriolet before he drives around a deserted Utah landscape, then he stops and addresses the viewer. A tagline then appears in French: “When you see it you want it.”



Ray Charles Jokes about His Inability to Determine the Quality of the Images for LaserDisc Music Videos; He Can Only Assume It Is True Because the Experts Say It Is So. In This Spot, Charles Emphasizes the High Quality of the Audio on Music Videos, Movies, and Concert Recordings Viewed with LaserDisc. The Branding Message Appears Onscreen: “The Pioneer LaserDisc Brand. Video for Those Who Really Care About Audio.” Charles Then Brings Out Another Blind Pianist, Jazz Legend George Shearing, for a Silent, Walk-On Cameo.



Although Not Explicitly a Joke, One Might Wonder about Peugeot's Intentions in Having a Blind Man Drive Its Car on the Salt Flats of Utah. The Spot Opens with Closeups of Ray Charles' Hands Following the Curves of a Sleek, Red Car Body. Aerial Views Zoom in to Show Us It Is the Peugeot 306 Cabriolet. Ray Charles Sings "Georgia," and We See That He Is in the Driver's Seat. Sun Illuminates Charles' Smiling Face as His Hands Guide the Steering Wheel. Charles Parks for a Moment and Speaks a Brand Message in French. The Spot Ends with Ray Charles' Happy Expression, Superimposed over the Peugeot Driving Away, for a Double Exposure Effect.

A 1990 Levi's 501 Jeans spot provides a humorous story involving disability and a woman bank robber sneaking into a men's public restroom. As she enters the restroom and is about to change into her getaway clothes, she realizes a man is sitting in the restroom with her. However, she presumes that he is blind because he is wearing sunglasses and has a white cane. Thinking that the man cannot see her, she continues to undress down to her underwear, puts on her new clothes, and then provocatively buttons up the front of her Levi's jeans within inches of his face. Only after she leaves do the viewers realize that the man is not blind (he was holding the cane for his blind companion in a nearby stall). Although this ad with an ironic twist was intended for a laugh, it implies that blind people cannot sense what is around them, it represents people with disabilities as passive, and it questions disabled people's ability to be sexually attracted or aroused.



A 1990 Levi's 501 Jeans Ad Uses Humor to Present Blind People as Passive and Unaware of Their Surroundings.

During the 2010 Super Bowl, Stevie Wonder appeared with comedian Tracy Morgan in a Volkswagen spot showing various people playing Punch Bug or Slug Bug—a game in which someone slugs someone else, and calls out the paint color, every time a Volkswagen car passes by. Toward the end of the ad, Wonder punches Morgan on the shoulder and proclaims, "Red one!" as a red Volkswagen sedan pulls away from the curb. Morgan asks dumbfoundedly, "How do you do that?!" Wonder's only response is "Ha!" Before the ad ends, Morgan is shown waving his hands in front of Wonder's sunglasses. Like the case of the Levi's ad as well as Ray Charles in the LaserDisc and Peugeot ads, what is intended as ironic humor involving blindness ultimately treats a disabled condition as the source of a joke. This is not to say that people with disabilities cannot use their disability as a source of humor for themselves, but one should ask how making one's disability a joke for the presumed able-bodied viewer might impact how the disabled see themselves and their value in a world predominantly designed for the able-bodied.



This 2010 Super Bowl Ad for Volkswagen Cracks a Joke Using the "Slug Bug" Game, but It Also Insinuates That People with Disabilities Might Be Faking It. The Ad Attempts to Playfully Show Many Unlikely People Delivering Punches When They Spot a Volkswagen, Including a Paramedic, a Pregnant Woman, a Waitress, and an Amish Man Riding in a Horsedrawn Buggy. Finally, Stevie Wonder Punches Tracy Morgan, Who Displays Confusion and Waves His Hand in front of Wonder's Face. The Tagline Explains That with 13 Different Car Models, "It's a Whole New Game."

Perhaps one of the most troubling examples of an advertisement using disability to tell a "joke" came in a 2017 Zuma Juice online ad featuring three women, as Pacific Standard writer David M. Perry describes: "a perky hyper-enthusiastic spokeswoman, a super-fit woman trying to juice her own fruits and vegetables, and a slovenly woman in a wheelchair." Contrary to the two able-bodied women talking about their love of juicing and the healthy benefits that come with it, the woman in the wheelchair is depicted as heavier set and uncaring of her health and body. She frantically and goofily eats a container of cheese puffs and sips from an oversized soda container. Moreover, toward the end of the spot, there is the insinuation that she is faking her disability so she can

ride around in an electric wheelchair. For Perry, this ad used questionable humor to perpetuate commonly held stereotypes in society about people with disabilities:

‘This ad trades on two of the most pervasive stereotypes facing disabled folks. First, that their disability is attributable to poor lifestyle choices—i.e. drinking soda and eating junk food. Second, that lots of them are faking and are just lazy. The choices in this ad reflect deeply held stigmas about bodies, health, and disability.’

After receiving significant backlash, Zuma Juice pulled the ad, but not without much criticism, especially from members of the disability rights community. Zuma Juice’s response was sharply criticized on social media, too. As complaints flooded Zuma Juice’s social media feeds, the company tried to justify its representational choices, did not acknowledge that the ad treated disability unfairly, and told social media users that the company was sorry people were offended, which only enraged viewers even more. The case marks the power of social media to help consumers call for immediate and fair treatment of people with disabilities in advertising. As Perry reflects on what happened, the Zuma Juice ad and how it was handled signal the need to address society’s broader ignorance of how people with disabilities have been mistreated and misunderstood in advertising and media messages:

‘In the end, this is just one ad, and I believe Zuma Juice when they express their contrition and chalk the bad ad up to ignorance, rather than malice. Unfortunately, that ignorance is widespread, a symptom of the big problems about how we talk about and represent disability. Companies, organizations, and even politicians too often casually stigmatize people with disabilities—often to get a cheap laugh or sell some product and policy. Internet outrage might be able to get us less stigmatizing juice, but we’ve a whole lot more work to do to [sic] address the way we talk about health, wheelchairs, and disability.’



A Screenshot from the 2017 Zuma Juice Online Ad Represented a Disabled Woman in an Electric Wheelchair as Intentionally Unhealthy and Lazy. She Is in a Kitchen with an Oversize Container of Snacks in One Hand and an Oversize Drink in the Other.



Another Screenshot from the Zuma Ad Shows a Skirmish When a Woman with a Healthy Lifestyle Tries to Rip a Juice Shaker from a Disabled Woman’s Hands. The Juicing Women Stand Behind a Kitchen Island, One of Them Wrestling an Object from the Snack Food Woman. The Ad Used Questionable Humor to Make Able-Bodied Women Seem More Aware of Healthy Eating Than Their Disabled Counterpart Eating Cheese Puffs.

Signs of Positive Change

There are signs of positive change within the advertising industry even though disabled people are not regularly found in ads, and when they are, representations may fall into the trap of using various stereotypes. Some disabled advertising practitioners like Josh Loebner (as well as their allies) have become increasingly vocal about their concerns about disability’s treatment in advertising messages and within the advertising workplace, which has gained attention in the advertising trade press. As part of his efforts, Loebner authors the blog *Advertising & Disability*, which provides commentary about trends in advertising and disability. He also provides advice to the industry on how to better reach people with disabilities. In addition to reminding advertisers about the lucrative possibilities presented by the market segment of people with disabilities, he offers practical tips on how to make advertising design and messages more inclusive and accessible. Loebner’s advice reminds advertisers of the need to think in non-ableist ways, consider the possibilities of engaging different senses, and find new modes of communicating, especially through the affordances of digital technologies. Moreover, his work encourages advertisers to think about how they incorporate people with disabilities in their messages and the advertising workplace.

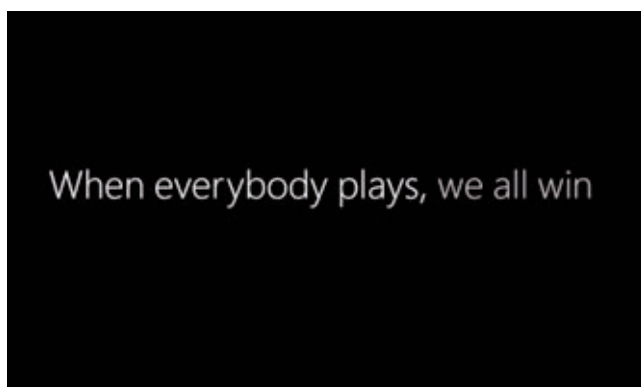
Advertisers and brands have caught on to concerns like Loebner’s. More companies are trying to find ways to develop products that suit the needs and preferences of all of its customers, especially people with disabilities, which they have featured in their ads. As an example, Tommy Hilfiger offers adaptive jeans that have been designed with and for people with disabilities. In its advertising, Hilfiger presents disability not as a burden, but as a source of pride that should not be hidden.

TOMMY HILFIGER ADAPTIVE

DESIGNED WITH AND FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Tommy Hilfiger's Adaptive Jeans Signal a Change among Major Brands to Include the Perspectives, Needs, and Preferences of People with Disabilities. In the Ad, a Montage of People of Differing Abilities and Ages Use the Features of the Clothing such as Magnetic Closures, and Enjoy Varieties of Leisure Time, such as Surfing or Creating Art. The Text of This Ad Reads: "Tommy Hilfiger Adaptive. Designed with and for People with Disabilities. Shop Now at Tommy.com."

Microsoft Xbox provides another example of a company realizing its important place in the lives of disabled people. As part of a 2019 Super Bowl ad, Microsoft shows how its adaptive controller helps ensure that everyone can play, which can bring people of many abilities together in their enjoyment and love for gaming. To show a more progressive way of representing disability, the ad has young disabled users sharing their experiences with using adaptive controllers. It also showcases disabled users playing with other disabled users as well as non-disabled users. Although the focal point of the ad is on disabilities, its final tagline emphasizes how adaptive technologies can create a world of inclusivity and equal participation of all, regardless of ability: "When everybody plays, we all win."

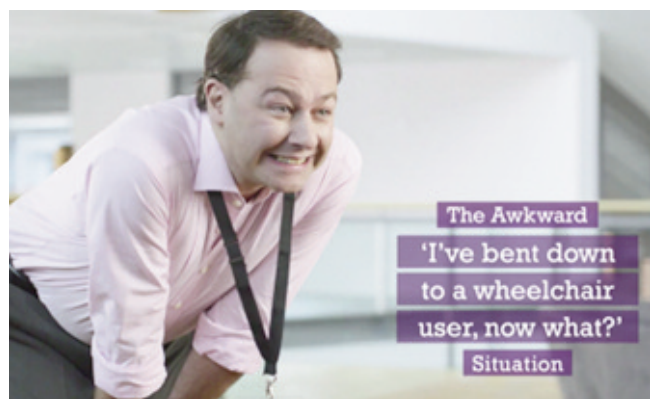


Microsoft Xbox's 2019 Super Bowl Spot Shows How Adaptive Technologies Can Bring People Together, Regardless of Ability. The Ad Shows Children Who Play Xbox Introducing Themselves, and Describing Who They Are in Terms Other Than Their Disability, such as Their Ages and How Much They Love to Play Video Games. The Children Then Reveal Their Disability and Describe How It Affects Play. Kids and Their Parents Discuss the Advantages of the Adaptive Controller, and Describe How Xbox Gaming Is a Leveler for Kids with Disabilities to Interact with Anyone. "No Matter How Your Body Is, You Can Play," Says One Gamer about the Adaptive Controller.

In the realm of Public Service Announcements, efforts have been made to help the able-bodied understand the perspectives of the disabled, as seen in innovative campaigns in the UK and Australia. In 2013 and 2014, Grey Agency's London office teamed up with Scope, a UK-based disability charity, to develop a series of three TV spots called "End the Awkward." The campaign's goal was to help the non-disabled rethink the ways in which they interact with the disabled. Each clip asks a question related to one awkward situation depicted in the video: How do I shake a hand that isn't there? I've bent down to a wheelchair user, now what? Is this another crushing rejection or is she deaf? Disabled British comedian Alex Brooker narrates each video in a humorous way by asking the audience whether or not it would be better to go the awkward or non-awkward route. Each video then models an understanding response that treats a person with disability respectfully and in such a way that does not make her feel awkward or bizarre.



UK-Based Disability Charity Scope Designed This PSA to Show People How to Be Less Awkward When Talking with Others Who Might Be Missing a Limb. Booker Sits among Frozen Office Workers to Narrate the Pending Possibly Awkward Interaction. He Ponders Three Actions that the Woman Might Take, the Actors Unfreeze, and the Woman Uses Her Left Hand to Shake the Arriving Man's Left Hand. They Are Unaware of Booker's Presence through Movie Magic.



UK-Based Disability Charity Scope Designed This PSA to Show People-How Not to Talk Down to Someone in Wheelchair. As If He Is Invisible, Booker Walks around Frozen Actors to Narrate the Situation, and Points Out Three Courses of Action a Bent Over Man Could Take to Make a Chat with a Co-worker in a Wheelchair Less Awkward. The Man Straightens by Standing Up and the Scenario Becomes Two People Speaking Comfortably.



UK-Based Disability Charity Scope Designed This PSA to Show People How Someone with a Hearing Impairment Might Not Initially Catch on That You're Trying to Get Her Attention. Again Booker Plays an Invisible Narrator (but Visible to the Viewer) to Suggest Three Ways a Man at a Bar Might Recover from His Initial Misunderstanding that He Was Being Ignored by a Woman Wearing a Hearing Aid that He Didn't Notice. The Actors Are Frozen Until It's Time to See the Resolution; The Man Taps Her on the Arm and Asks If She Needs a Fresh Drink. She Says She Does, Smiling Warmly and Booker Approves by Saying "Smooth!" to the Camera.

In 2015, Scope developed another television PSA that mimics a "candid camera" format. A woman manicurist who has cerebral palsy has a loud conversation with an actor playing an ignorant able-bodied customer asking many rude questions that people with cerebral palsy might be asked. In addition to pointing out how people often turn the disabled into inspiring heroes for doing ordinary things, the fake customer makes many assumptions about what it means for a woman to live with cerebral palsy. As the conversation unfolds, Alex Brooker observes remotely and provides commentary for the viewers about the inappropriate and awkward statements the misinformed nail salon client makes. Real customers in the nail salon, who are unaware of the fact that both the rude customer and the manicurist are actors, listen to the conversation with shock and disgust.



This British PSA Fights against the Ways in Which Able-Bodied People Pity and Make False Assumptions about the Everyday Lives of People with Disabilities. A Manicurist in a Wheelchair Deals Humorously with a Barrage of Patronizing Remarks Made by Her Able-Bodied Customer. For Example, the Customer Expresses Surprise That the Manicurist Is Able to Scuba Dive on Vacation. She Imagines the Manicurist Doesn't Need a Couch, Thereby Saving Money, and Suggests She Try Remedies for Her Cerebral Palsy such as Green Tea and Acupuncture. Throughout, We Observe Booker Monitoring the Set-Up Through His Laptop and Making Comedic Commentary about the Shocked Reactions of the other Customers in the Nail Salon.

Similar to Scope's work in the UK, the Family and Community Services office in the Australian state of New South Wales started a campaign in 2004 called "Don't DIS my ABILITY." In an annual series of videos, print ads, and events, the campaign sought to celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (December 3) and provide multidimensional portrayals of people with disabilities. Rather than focusing on pity or a disability being a disabled person's most important attribute, the campaign shifts attention to the personalities, occupations, hobbies, interests, and dreams of the people with disabilities who were depicted. The campaign's separation of the prefix dis- from the word ability was done for important purposes. Separating out dis- plays on the word disrespect. By asking people not to dis the represented person's ability, the campaign tells people not to judge, criticize, or ridicule one's differing abilities. Moreover, the ad implies that one form of ability is not better than any other. All forms of ability should be respected, and one's disability should not be seen as a disability at all. It is an ability.



As Part of the "Don't DIS My ABILITY" Campaign in Australia, This Image Presents Australian Paralympian Tracy Barrell's Interest in Skateboarding. In an Artistic Photoshoot She Sits on a French Baroque Upholstered Chair but Rests Her Hand on an Upended Board, and We See that Her Disability Involves Her Legs. She Wears Makeup and Clothing Showing that She's Part of Skate Culture.

Maltesers, a popular British brand of malted milk ball candies, provides a notable commercial ad campaign showcasing people with disabilities in a more multidimensional way. Rather than avoiding representing disabled people as sexually attractive beings, two of the campaign's ads present disabled people telling humorous stories about sexual exploits with a new boyfriend or snagging a phone number at a wedding. In another instance, a hearing impaired woman signs a funny, but messy story about how she lost and found her hearing aid.



A Maltesers 2016 “Light Side of Disability” Campaign Shares a Disabled Woman’s Sexual Experiences, Contrary to Advertising and Media’s Tendency to De-Sexualize People with Disabilities. In the Spot, Three Friends Are Chatting at a Picnic Table Area by a River and Snacking as They Catch Up. Using a Bag of Maltesers as a Prop, a Young Woman with Cerebral Palsy Demonstrates to The Other Two How Her Spasm During a Petting Session Contributed to Her Boyfriend’s Mood.



In This 2016 Maltesers Ad, a Woman Uses Humorous Signs and Maltesers to Tell and Show a Story about How Her Hearing Aid Was Knocked Out and Eaten by Her Boyfriend’s Dog. She Relates with Chagrin That He Promised to Return It To her Sometime the Next Day.



This 2016 Maltesers Ad Shows a Cheeky Disabled Woman. Three People Sit at a Table in an Office Lunchroom. Using Maltesers The Woman Illustrates How She Accidentally Smashed the Bride’s Foot Under Her Wheel at a Wedding. Her Friends Appear Horrified, Until She Admits She Also Scored the Best Man’s Phone Number.

In a behind-the-scenes look at Maltesers’ “Light Side of Advertising” campaign, produced for the 2016 Paralympic as a collaboration between Maltesers, Scope, and the ad agency BBDO, viewers learn that the ad campaign’s primary goal was to represent “the reality of disabled people’s lives.” Disabled actor Storme Toolis said she enjoyed bringing “openness and warmth” to her quirky, down-to-earth character. Samantha Renke, the disabled actor in the funny wedding ad, found the spot gave her an opportunity to show her own personality as “a feisty young person” who has fun and is quite cheeky. Deaf actor Genevieve Barr appreciated the chance to tell a story that was “inherently funny because of the sign language that was being used and because of the animation in the story that was being told.” These three disabled actor’s experiences show how advertise-

ments can be more inclusive and fair when people with disabilities are not only cast in the roles of disabled characters, but also when the roles are multidimensional and resonate with their lived experiences. Moreover, the spots use humor in a way that does not treat disabled people as the butt of someone else’s joke. As Michele Oliver, Mars Chocolate UK’s Vice President of Marketing, states about her company’s place in representing disabilities: “. . . we feel very responsible for ensuring that we do embrace diversity. Are we perfect? No. Can we get better? Definitely. And we are looking at ways to improve.” Maltesers “Light Side of Disability” campaign was noted to be one of its most successful campaigns, and the company has gone on to make more advertisements that showcase other forms of diversity.



Actors and Producers Talk about Their Work to Show a More Realistic Representation of Disability through Maltesers’ 2016 “Light Side of Disability” Campaign.

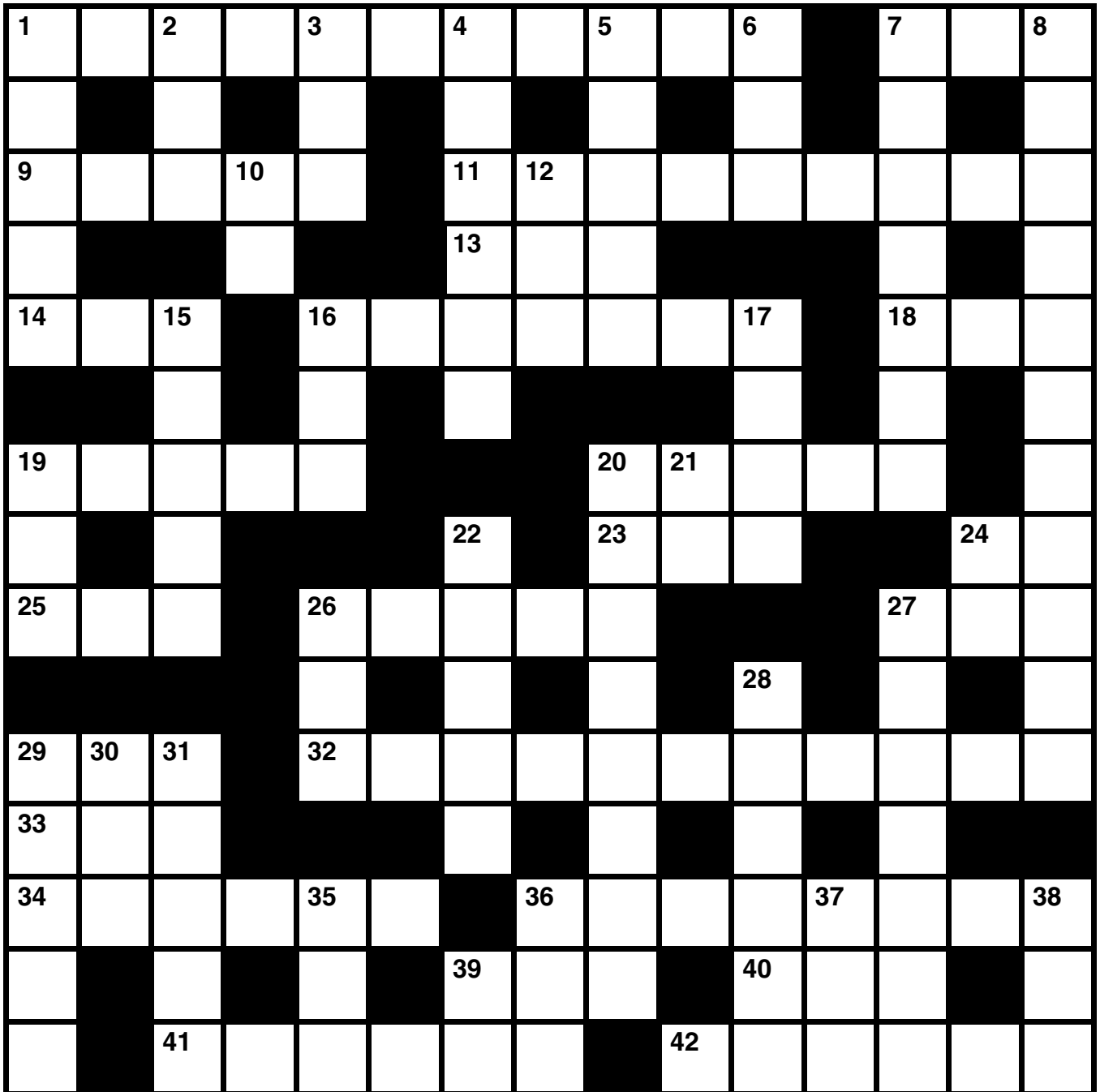
In their quantitative study of representations of disabilities in American advertising, communication professors Dennis J. Ganahl and Mark Arbuckle make an important statement that should be remembered by students, teachers, and practitioners of advertising: “If commercials practice inclusion of persons with disabilities so will the American culture.” Kate Magee makes a similar argument when assessing the situation in the UK for the trade magazine Campaign on September 9, 2016: “The key, as with other diversity issues, is seeing people as individuals and without labels. And the media, marketing and advertising industries have an opportunity to help break down social stigmas around disability by making it more visible.” These important points certainly apply to other parts of the world, too. By acknowledging past and current stereotypes of disability and seeing the success of more positive efforts take root, more steps can be taken in the future to make advertising more inclusive of people of all abilities, which will only contribute to more acceptance and understanding of disability in broader culture and society. ■ **ABILITY**

by Dr. Edward Timke

Full version of the chapter, which includes various multimedia examples:
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/736400>

Edward Timke, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Advertising + Public Relations and a core faculty member in the Center for Gender in Global Contexts and the Communication Solutions for a Diverse Society Consortium at Michigan State University. Edward has lived with a permanent hearing disability since birth and is a proud user of bone-anchored hearing aids.

ABILITY'S



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A C R O S S

1. "Blue Bloods" actress who recently played a supporting role in "Daruma" - 2 words
7. In favor of
9. Word after belly or last
11. Have a wild time at a party, 3 words
13. Friend of Frodo
14. Where you can get a new license
16. Cheerful
18. Home away from home
19. One of the stars in "Champions" _____ Harrelson
20. American disability advocate, actor and athlete who has down syndrome, _____ Stephens
23. Have a goal for
24. Roman 6
25. Evidence in "CSI"
26. One of the greatest comedians of all time who battled MS for many years, Richard _____
27. Bottom line
29. Skater Babilonia
32. One of the fastest men in both the Paralympics and the word, 2 words
33. Baby docs, briefly
34. Company supplying lightweight and usable prosthetics for people with limb difference
36. Beautiful blue flower
39. Very important
40. CD _____
41. Star in "Born on the 4th of July"
42. First person with disability to be cast in a prime time series, Geri _____

D O W N

1. Starting word in the title of a new documentary about the life of Blake Leeper
2. Debt letters
3. "What a relief!"
4. Actor who plays a grouchy neighbor who is a double-handed amputee in "Daruma" - Robert _____
5. Pizzeria attraction
6. Olympic-champion Keino
7. Toby Forrest role as a paraplegic in "Daruma"
8. Epic biographical film about the development of the A- bomb
10. Depart
12. Make _____ while the sun shines
15. "The Help" actress, first name
16. Chesapeake, for example
17. Group of people with a common purpose
19. Married
20. Director who authentically represents people with disabilities in his films, Peter _____
21. Newport state
22. "Lay lady lay" singer
24. Deja _____
26. Brit's watering hole
27. Diana Ross, for one
28. Long Haul Paul's adventure bike, Yamaha _____ 700
29. Capital of Japan
30. _____ system (blood classification)
31. "Shaft" singer, _____ Hayes
35. Tempe inst., abbr.
36. Spelling contest
37. Curtain call response
38. Internet laughter symbol
39. Topeka's state

answers on page 74

SEE BETTER

AT ANY AGE

AUTHOR

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

VOTED BEST

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

DOCTOR'S

DOCTOR

- Surgeons & Physicians
 - Chiropractors & Dentists

SURGEON

TO STARS

- Actors & Celebrities
- Olympic Athletes

FOR PATIENTS

18-45

- Thin Flap Lasik
- ICL

FOR PATIENTS

45-65

- Superlasik
- Pi in Eye

FOR PATIENTS

ABOVE 65

- Pi in Eye
- Laser Cataract Surgery

OTHER THAN

LASIK

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



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www.khannainstitute.com

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O		M	O	H		Y	E	K		S		A		Y
L	L	E	B	E	U	L	B	A	A	L	A	O	K	
		R		N		L		N			S	B	O	
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H		C		E				N		A		I		
N	N	I		T	N	A	Y	O	U	B		V	M	D
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P		A		I		R	A		A		O		B	
O	R	P		K	W	A	H	L	A	I	G	B	I	A

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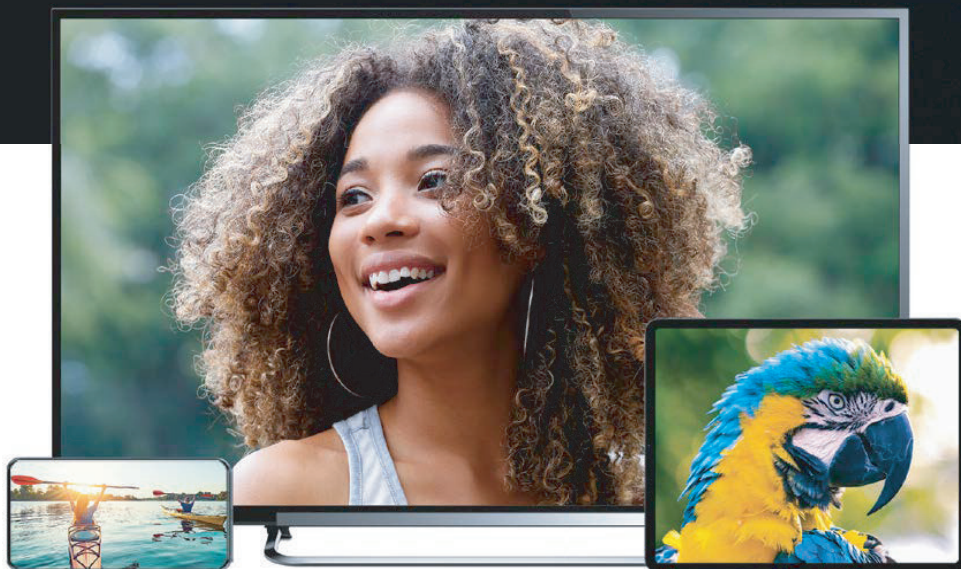
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