

Stories from the brainreels podcast transcript

January, 2014

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Introduction

CHERYL: Welcome to Stories from the brainreels. I'm your host, Cheryl Green, from StoryMinders up in sunny Portland, Oregon. This is a monthly podcast about brain injury and disability with a focus on art, culture, and disability pride. Contact me at info@storyminders.com with questions or topics and guests you want to hear on an upcoming show.

[music]

CHERYL: Spring is here, and that means fundraising! There are some fascinating disability related projects doing online fundraising right now to tell you about. Let's get them tons of momentum and support.

First, the [Disability Art and Culture Project](#), who I've mentioned many times on past episodes because I love them, is on Kickstarter right now through April 22nd. They're already roaring at nearly 20% funded in two days. Fundraising is for the Inclusive Arts Vibe Dance Company's May dance performance. Inclusive Arts Vibe is a youth and young adult professional dance company with disabled and non-disabled dancers. Read more about the group, the Kickstarter for Inclusive Arts Vibe Dance Company, and my work with DACP at my blog at whoamitostopit.com/blog.

Later in March or early April, I'll also be doing a separate blog posts for another project. This is the [GoFundMe fundraiser for Where Is Hope?](#), a documentary about police brutality against people of color with disabilities. I've got lots written about that one; just need to hit publish! Keep your eye on the blog for that, and check out much more about the movie and the producers at whereishope.webs.com.

I also am really excited about the recent presentation Caitlin Wood and I gave at the Lewis & Clark 34th annual Gender Studies Symposium called "[Crippling Capitalism: Disability, Feminism, and the Controversy of Work](#)." I uploaded the audio of that presentation as the last podcast episode. You can watch a Closed Captioned video of it and find the accessible PowerPoint and transcript up at, you guessed it, the Who Am I To Stop It blog! If you're not familiar with the idea of "cripping" something, it's not about talking about physical disability only. That's the association a lot of people have of the word "crippled." Crippling a topic is a deep, critical look at disability culture and identity in the context of where we live. It's not about personal stories of overcoming adversity or medical details about someone's disability or impairment. It's about discussing system failure and social pressures based on ableism, racism, heterosexism, colonialism, and more. It's also about acknowledging that disabled people are placed way down in the heap in U.S. culture. And also acknowledging that when we don't like something, or we want to throw it lower in the heap, we cripple it. Meaning, I can just call politicians insane! or say that movie is just crazy! Using terms like this, I can share the message that I want to insult something or someone. And I do it by associating them with disability when there is no real association. Bottom of the heap, y'all.

Today's podcast, though, is very different in vibe from that. It's centered on taking a proactive stance and creating the change that you want to have in the world. Please enjoy, and if you like what you hear,

you can subscribe on [iTunes](#) or [Stitcher](#) to the Stories from the brainreels podcast. And if you like what you read in the transcripts, you can subscribe to the blog at [WhoAmItoStopIt.com](#) to get automatic updates of the blog posts each time a new podcast episode comes out.

Today, I'm talking to Irene Sutton and Britta Geisler, seniors at the University of Portland. They're working on this great project they created called the BeYou-ty pageant, but it's spelled out so you see the words "be you" and then ty. This beauty pageant will highlight not swimsuits, walking in high heels, or having a nearly fat-free body. Instead, they define beautiful as "one who is happy with who they are and is dedicated to spreading their confidence and knowledge to empower others." I wanted to bring them onto the podcast today because they reached out to the disability community to find a female speaker doing innovative work and showing that male-dominated industries don't need to stay that way. Originally, they contacted Caitlin Wood, but she moved out of the state just a couple days ago. And so they got stuck with me! At first I wondered what I had to offer an event like this, and then I remembered: oh, I own my own business. I direct and produce films. I even operate the video camera and audio recorder. These things aren't common for women or disabled people. So I'm really happy to have a seat at the table with some badass Portland women. I'm going to turn it over now to Irene and Britta now to tell you more about the [BeYouTy pageant](#).

About the guests

BRITTA: My name's Britta. And I am a senior at the University of Portland.

IRENE: I'm Irene Sutton. I'm a little under the weather today. But I'll just keep going. So I'm a senior also, at the University of Portland, studying global business with entrepreneurship.

CHERYL: I'm really curious how each of you picked the areas of study that you picked.

IRENE: So for me, I'm currently in global business with entrepreneurship. And before that, I was actually in accounting. And so halfway through junior year, I realized accounting full-time was not for me. And so I had studied abroad in two places in Asia already. And I go back to Thailand every summer. And so I feel like with a global business degree, that can give me the flexibility I may need in my long-term future.

CHERYL: Yeah.

IRENE: Yeah.

BRITTA: And yeah, she's been to some amazing countries. She studied abroad in China and Japan and speaks languages.

IRENE: Yeah.

ALL: [laughs]

IRENE: Well, I speak Thai. So that might help me later on in the future.

CHERYL: Sure. Oh man, being multi-lingual is always a good thing. Yeah.

IRENE: Yeah, and then just entrepreneurship because I just I'm fascinated with how one can turn an intangible idea into something tangible, like we're doing right now. And just that process of creation is just very intriguing to me.

CHERYL: Yeah.

BRITTA: I'm studying marketing. I chose to study marketing mainly because I think I'm just interested in people and in how people make decisions. And a lot of times there are great things that are happening. And we just don't know how to communicate that to the right people. So yeah, I think that's fascinating. I work in market research right now, which is all about just kind of like studying how to make better products and how to tell people that they exist.

CHERYL: Yeah.

Is disability marketable?

CHERYL: I have a marketing story. I listen to this podcast called Talk Nerdy. So it's run by Cara Santa Maria. And Cara Santa Maria's a science communicator. So she studied a lot of science. And now what she does is she's sort of a journalist, multi-media journalist around communicating science in ways that the public can understand. Cuz we don't read science journals unless we are scientists.

BRITTA: Yeah.

CHERYL: She does a lot of podcasting, blogging, videos, TV, appearances. She's all over the place. I heard her advertise, "I have room for sponsors. I'm taking sponsors. Call me." And I was like, yay! I wanna advertise my services on your podcast. And she was gung ho, great. And so the services that I offered were, I make Closed Captioning for streaming video so that Deaf/deaf and Hard-of-hearing people, English-language learners, people like me with traumatic brain injury who pay attention better if we hear it and see it at the same time. I offered some other disability services. But I don't remember what they were. Anyway, but they were around access. I'm trying to get people who create content and media to make their stuff accessible so that disabled audience members and Deaf/deaf and Hard-of-hearing people can access it. And so I didn't think I was gonna get any hits from this ad on her podcast because most people don't care about disability access. Right? How many more customers are you gonna get if you add Closed Captions? That's kinda the bottom line way of thinking a lotta companies have. So I wrote out these bullet points of the different services I offer. And I said things like, "Hey, if you have something awesome to say, and you have a podcast or videos, it will be even more awesome if you let me caption and transcribe them because then more people can access them."

BRITTA: Yeah.

CHERYL: "If it's that awesome, you should want everyone to access them." When I emailed Cara, I said, "You could say 'filmmaker with a disability' if you're not comfortable saying 'disabled.' Either way is fine with me." And she sent me the script a few days before it went to air. And it didn't say anything about disability at all.

IRENE: Oh.

BRITTA: About you being a disabled filmmaker?

CHERYL: About me, yeah.

BRITTA: But it did explain Closed Captioning for all to enjoy.

CHERYL: Yeah, right.

BRITTA: But yeah, she just took it out of your title.

CHERYL: She erased part of my identity that I specifically gave her two options for how to do it.

BRITTA: Cuz she thought you were more sellable without it.

CHERYL: Thank you. That's exactly what I thought she was doing. "Oh, I better improve Cheryl's thing here by getting rid of, surely she wouldn't wanna advertise that." It's interesting. If it was some identity marker around femaleness, she probably wouldn't have erased it because she's a woman. And she's a strong proud woman. I wrote her back. And I said, "I need you to put 'disabilities from traumatic brain injury' or 'peer with traumatic brain injury'. I need to be clear that I am not an outsider coming in and telling people how to do their stuff. I come from within the disability community. And I create access for my peers."

BRITTA: Yeah, mmhmm.

CHERYL: And she just said "OK." And she just put it back in. But she didn't quite acknowledge that she had literally erased part of my identity in this ad.

BRITTA: Yeah.

CHERYL: So-

BRITTA: Yeah.

CHERYL: I mean, I know why. But you're kind of a marketing expert, why?

BRITTA: Oh, I'm not an expert [laughs].

CHERYL: OK, so you're studying marketing. So you know way more than I do. And you know about theory. And you know how to put marketing ideas into practice. Why am I more sellable if I don't admit to having a disability?

BRITTA: Because there's still stigmas. And the perception of disability needs to change.

CHERYL: Yeah.

BRITTA: That's why. Because she's thinking that if people hear that, they're gonna perceive that you're gonna be less capable of accomplishing your job. That's why I think.

CHERYL: Oh, it's heartbreaking. But you are so, yep. I could not. I was like, why would she do that? Why? But that's exactly right. Oh, disabled person, ugh. Wouldn't wanna hire her!

BRITTA: Yeah.

CHERYL: But not taking the time to recognize if I'm gonna be that damn confident about my product it's because I have a good product. And I do it well.

BRITTA: Yeah. I think it's just a process of people being more aware and more educated. Cuz she's probably not a bad person.

CHERYL: No, she's not a bad person.

BRITTA: She just didn't understand. And people's perception.

CHERYL: It's interesting to me too, cuz I think women are so well positioned to understand that kind of stigma. Oh, a woman business person? Mm, she's probably not gonna be as good as a male.

BRITTA: Not as confident or as assertive.

IRENE: Yeah.

CHERYL: Or even as competent.

BRITTA: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: Or she's gonna get moody. And she may, you know, get her period and like skip work. Or maybe she's gonna have a kid. And we can't trust her. Women get, there's so much stigma and so much perception from the outside that we're going to be less capable than men. But she, like you said, she's not a bad person. But she's so unaware of how ingrained disability stigma is that she didn't know she did to me what people do to her around being a woman.

BRITTA: Yeah. Yeah. But-

CHERYL: Is there any way to make disability sound marketable?

BRITTA: I think so. I think so. I mean it's just a matter of positively changing the way people perceive and just educating people. And I also think you know, you can great through marketing and advertising. And you can do bad through marketing and advertising, just as we've seen how beauty is portrayed and perceived. And so it's just a process of people taking a stand, just like you take a stand through your films, through your work, through encouraging people to put captions on their films to make things more accessible. I think that there are solutions. It's just like perception. And also, I mean look at mental illness and how we treat that. There are different areas for improvement. And we're human, and we're trying. And I think it just takes more and more people educating, joining, talking about it, making it like not a weird thing to talk about. That would be a good start.

CHERYL: Yes it would. That's a great start, yeah. And so that's one of many reasons I'm so appreciative that y'all want me at your event is because it is an opportunity for me to talk about this. This isn't weird. This is kind of a normal thing: people have disabilities.

BRITTA: Yeah.

CHERYL: It's OK. We're not scary. And people who have more impairments than I do are also still not scary. So yeah, y'all are giving me that opportunity to do that, to talk about it more and show that you don't have to hear "disability" and think "incompetent" the same way you don't have to hear "woman" and think "weak or moody or not a good worker."

BRITTA: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: So I think that we can work on those two movements at the same time.

BRITTA: Mmhmm.

Where the BeYou-ty Pageant came from

CHERYL: The BeYou-ty Pageant.

BRITTA: I think the issue of beauty and the way we see it in the media is still really relevant. And in a lot of ways, women have come so far. But in the media, we're struggling to speed up. And I think really I just most of us are sick of it [giggles]. And that inspired me to get involved.

CHERYL: Great!

IRENE: Yeah, I'm currently taking this social entrepreneurship class. And then when my friend, Britta, was telling me about her idea of this beauty pageant, Be You Ty pageant, I just instantly latched onto the idea. And I was just instantly enamored with this event and the potential that this event holds.

CHERYL: Cool. So it was your idea originally, Britta?

BRITTA: I think it was a combination because I saw a post on Facebook. I follow this group called [Miss Representation](#). I don't know if you've seen the movie. It's spelled m-i-s-s representation. And it's just, I think they have two films now. But the first one I watched was just a great film about you need role models to aspire to. And like a big problem with women in different higher power roles-I think they talked a lot about politics in the movie-is that girls just don't see other girls doing those things. And it's hard to know that that's something that you can be a part of. So I've been following them on Facebook. They always post great articles about women who are making changes in their respective fields as well as posts about areas that need improvement or something that they think is misrepresented. So I saw a post about Miss World getting rid of the bathing suit portion. They posted it on their page. And a lot of times, they just say, "What do you think?" And then everybody posts a discussion.

And I was reading just these comments saying, "Axe the whole pageant. The whole thing is stupid. This is 2014." And I thought like hey, you know, the idea of women from around the world getting together, beautiful women, and having a conversation is so cool. But just the way we're doing beauty pageants is not working out. It's just not what we think beauty is anymore, you know? So I think the definition of beauty is outdated, not necessarily the idea of bringing beautiful women together. And Irene and I had just gone to a talk about education about the world, from a group called Chick Tech, which is improving women in technology and getting girls involved in tech. And I was just telling her about how I'd seen the post and how events like this, this is cool. Like, these are beautiful women, women who are impacting their community, the women at [Chick Tech](#) who are changing the way we see girls and being role models for those girls to look up to. And that is what I think beauty pageants should be about. And I think that's what's beautiful. So we totally like connected on it together. I don't think it was just my idea. I had seen the post. And then it was the discussion we had on that car ride that really made it happen.

IRENE: Yeah, and then you were creating your website already for your marketing class. So I had thought that-

BRITTA: Oh, I had bought the URL. I didn't know what I was gonna do with it. But I bought the URL beoutypageant and was like I don't know what to do with this either! [giggles] I wanted to hold this event. But it was scary for being one person. So I was gonna just turn it into like a blog of beautiful women.

IRENE: Yeah.

BRITTA: And I was just gonna write about them.

IRENE: And then she was spit-balling with me. And so I was just like well, I have a history of writing. And so I can help you out with the blog. But I'm also looking for a social impact venture for my class. And so I think this would be really cool. And we can definitely put this on together. I know we could do it!

BRITTA: And I'm so happy to have you on my team, not to have a bonding moment over this! But it's pretty cool because I think I would've been too scared. Like, it's senior year, last semester. And Irene, you've been so essential in terms of connecting with people and making it come together.

CHERYL: So Irene, you're getting class credit out of this. You needed to do something.

IRENE: Yeah.

CHERYL: And then you-

BRITTA: I have a blog for a digital marketing class, which I do need credit. I have to build a website for a class.

CHERYL: So this is great. You're getting this practical project. But it's something that you already wanted to do. That's a really impressive story. And I love that you just went out and bought a domain.

BRITTA: Yes! [giggles]

CHERYL: I'm just gonna do this. I'm just gonna take charge. I have this idea. And then Irene came along. And now the idea is sort of fleshing itself out.

BRITTA: Yep. Exactly.

CHERYL: That's so cool. And you talked about it's not that you need to get rid of beauty or stop celebrating beauty. But you need to redefine it. And you do redefine it for the project.

BRITTA: Yeah. We read the slogan for Miss World was "beauty with a purpose." And so kind of our argument is that beauty is purpose.

What will happen at the BeYou-ty Pageant?

CHERYL: Talk to me about what's actually going to happen at this event. We know there's no swimsuit competition.

BRITTA: [chuckles]

CHERYL: But what is gonna be there?

IRENE: So we are going to have a panel discussion. But first we'll introduce our concept and the event itself. And then we'll go and focus on our four speakers. And so each speaker will have some time to introduce themselves, tell the audience about their backgrounds. And then we'll also have some moderator-guided questions for each of the speakers. And then afterwards, a Q and A with the audience. And then lastly, just some networking or mingling for people who don't wanna ask a question to a roomful of people and just wanna go up and talk to the speakers individually. So it's more going to

be more of a conversation and not just people talking at you. And so it'll be pretty inclusive and lots of fun.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. And much more participatory than a standard pageant. We already know [one of the panelists](#). [chuckles] But who are the other three panelists?

IRENE: Yeah, so first there's Danielle Knot who is working on [Render, the feminist food quarterly magazine](#). And then there is Lynn Le, who is the CEO and Founder of [Society Nine](#), the boxing and MMA gear for super badass women. And they just finished their Kickstarter campaign and raised over \$50,000. So that is very impressive. And then finally, there's also [Skate Like A Girl](#), which Britta works with. And she can tell you more about Brandy.

BRITTA: Sure, yeah, so Brandy Machado from Skate Like A Girl will be coming. And Skate Like A Girl is a program that teaches girls confidence and leadership through skateboarding. To just create a more inclusive environment, you need to see other girls in those roles. So we're just sharing with girls that skateboarding is something that they're included in and trying to teach them positive lessons as well and have a lot of fun.

CHERYL: Awesome.

IRENE: Yeah, and we believe that each of the speakers is just redefining a field where it was traditionally dominated by male participants. So it'll be very exciting to see and hear.

CHERYL: Yeah, that really is. Skateboarding, technology, media,

BRITTA: Food.

CHERYL: food.

BRITTA: She's talking about like redefining how we see women in the kitchen and she also talking a lot about female chefs. I think you'll love her.

IRENE: And she just graduated last spring.

BRITTA: Yeah.

Is there pressure for girls and women to be beautiful?

CHERYL: You feel like there's a lot of pressure on girls and women to be beautiful?

BRITTA: Yes.

IRENE: Yeah, I think so. Like especially with my, I go back to Asia every summer. And so in Asia, there's a lot of emphasis on the appearance and like taking care of your weight and just the cosmetics industry is super big there. And so just keeping a very fresh looking, well-toned appearance is pretty still in high regard over in Asia.

BRITTA: I think it's still in high regard here.

IRENE: Yeah, here too.

CHERYL: Do you feel or do you observe that pressure more when you go back home?

IRENE: Yeah. I mean, it feels more pronounced in Asia because my family's always just nagging me about my weight and like, "Hey, stay off the carbs." [giggles] And I'm just like, well, I don't really care what I look like. It's what I'm doing that matters. So just let me eat this food. And let me be happy.

CHERYL: Yeah. Do you feel like it's a political statement when you're like, "I don't care what I look like. I wanna be happy and eat some food that gives me the energy to do my stuff?"

IRENE: In a way that could be a little political. And it's just for personal fulfillment too and personal satisfaction.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. And you observe that pressure too here as well?

BRITTA: Here? Oh, I think so. Absolutely. And sometimes it's hard to pinpoint it because it's like I've grown up with it. You know, it's hard for me to identify how it's affected me because this has been like fully engrossed. All, I mean everybody on television, everybody, all of my little girl role models have looked a certain way. And you know, I dreamed of having blond hair for so long.

CHERYL: Me too.

BRITTA: [giggles] It never happened.

CHERYL: I still want blond hair. I still want blond hair!

BRITTA: And even now, I mean I think the fact that I'm embarrassed when I walk out the house without makeup on is still like a sign, like even now I'm trying really hard to separate and feel confident and feel strong. But I still find myself buying into those things, you know? It's an active, uphill battle. And it's just all around you. It's all around you.

CHERYL: It really is.

BRITTA: And not to say that like I don't like beautiful, blond girls.

CHERYL: Oh, sure.

BRITTA: They're great too. [giggles]

CHERYL: And I have nothing against blond people. There's nothing against them.

BRITTA: I think it's just--

CHERYL: It's that they're the standard.

BRITTA: Yeah. You know in the beer commercials how it's always like a sexy woman. And then sometimes they're like, "Oh, well we're just honoring the female form." And it's like, great! But you're honoring a female form, one of them and only one of them, always, only one of them.

CHERYL: Yep.

BRITTA: And that's what bothers me.

CHERYL: Right, right. I don't think anyone here looks at someone who is classically or traditionally beautiful and is like, "Well, I hate that you live." But I think the point really is what you said is that-

BRITTA: Honor all of the forms.

CHERYL: All of the forms of beauty.

BRITTA: All of them.

CHERYL: And redefine it and stretch this definition so that it is more inclusive and so that you don't have to be like pushing yourself in one direction so that you fit into it. It could be a broader definition.

BRITTA: Yeah. And if we look more like into what those people are doing. I mean, those are the people that I usually end up being like that is a beautiful person is what their purpose and what they're doing in their life. I mean, you can honor the form. But honor all of the forms and value them for more than just being a form. [giggles] I don't know.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. We are saturated with media. I'm not gonna say all commercials should go away. I mean, I think commercials should go away. But they're not going to. And so in the meantime, we oughta have commercials and movies and ads and all these things and billboards be more inclusive of different forms.

BRITTA: And maybe I'm crazy, like being a marketing major and saying this, but I genuinely think that marketing and advertising doesn't have to be bad. It's a great way to send positive messages to a lot of people.

CHERYL: But I am wondering if maybe some people just don't bother to ask, "Is this actually positive? Or is this just for our gain cuz we got this hot chick here. And that's gonna sell."

BRITTA: Yeah.

CHERYL: But it's not always a positive experience for the viewer.

Being oversaturated with beauty magazines as a pre-teen

CHERYL: When I first met you, Irene, I admitted to you that I spent way too much of my pre-teen years looking at Seventeen Magazine and wishing that I knew how to do my makeup as amazingly as those models did. I didn't even know back then they didn't do their own makeup. But it looked great. And I just read those things cover to cover. And I believed every word. Like you were saying before, I don't remember if we even had the recorder on yet, Britta, but you were talking about media literacy. And I had no media literacy. I had no ability at that time to look at those things and say, "Oh, that's one form of beauty. Oh, that's one message. Here's a magazine. It's printed. So it's true. But at the same time that we were all-my sisters and I were-fighting over this magazine, my mom didn't raise us that way. I'm not sure why she bought us that magazine. She raised my sisters and me to not shape our appearances by the male gaze and to not find our value in physical beauty. So it's almost 30 years since I last looked at those magazines. But I still see these exact same images and values all around us that women are supposed to be beautiful and that there's only one or two real ways to be able to qualify as beautiful. And this is exactly what you were saying a few minutes ago, Britta. So I'm wondering if the two of you were plagued by these magazines. I don't even know if Seventeen's still around. Is it?

IRENE: Yeah.

BRITTA: Seventeen is.

CHERYL: It is? Oh, that's an ancient magazine, y'all. OK. But I mean, when you were pre-teens and younger, were you plagued by them too? and media images when you were younger too?

BRITTA: Absolutely. I begged my mom for Britney Spears, my first Britney Spears CD. Begged her. And she gave in for the first one. And bless her soul, she didn't let me buy anymore after that. I really tried. But I mean yeah, I mean even though I wasn't buying it, I wanted it. I don't know. Yeah, it would like hit me at such a young age. I think I got that first Britney Spears CD when I was six or so. We adored her, you know? There were Britney Spears Barbie dolls. Yeah, I mean it's so hard to say exactly you know, to give examples because I just think every single thing that I saw was all about just fitting that ideal role. And throughout high school, I definitely read, I read Cosmo Girl. Yeah, I wanted more than anything to be one of them.

CHERYL: Yeah, cuz that's what was presented to you. So you're like, OK, this looks great. I'll be this.

BRITTA: Yeah. I was pretty good about being active in the community and trying to, you know, I had some other role models. But I mean, if you grow up with Christina Aguilera being your example of a successful woman-not to say that she hasn't achieved some great things. But if you only see those types of success, women who are successful for showing their body and for being attractive and for sexualizing themselves, then you grow up thinking that that's what a successful woman looks like.

CHERYL: Yeah, what about you?

IRENE: Yeah, I was actually a little different. I mean I was mostly just a tomboy growing up. And I read a lot of books. And so my mind was just into books and Japanese cartoons and just watching random TV and hanging out with friends and my brother. I was pretty close with my brother. And so we didn't really have any of those girly magazines in the home. And we subscribed to Readers Digest and Time.

BRITTA: Oh, that's awesome.

IRENE: So [chuckles] those didn't have that much influence on me. And I grew up not necessarily realizing that Cosmo or Glamour or any of those types of magazines were so influential on young teen girls. And yeah, I mean I was sort of against the mainstream too [giggles]. I just didn't want to be into what everyone else was into [giggles]. So yeah, I was more of the alternative teen, so to speak.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. There is so much time, either spent trying to achieve those ideals, or trying to fight the urge to achieve those ideals.

BRITTA: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: Or and then there's the berating yourself for not being those ideals. But it sounds like you were protected from some of that by simply not consuming those products when you were younger. So phew.

Who is the event for?

CHERYL: So the audience, is the audience just University of Portland students?

IRENE: I think it'd be especially important for college students since we're often so focused on our studies and just the world of academia that we don't necessarily have time to focus and be aware of

what is still happening in the real world, so to speak. So just to bring some speakers from off campus and those who are professors. And we just want the students to realize that things still need to be improved and that not only should you be focusing on your own studies but just focused on the actual world and real events that are happening too, and what society's view is on a fluid concept like beauty where it's changing, but it's not necessarily evolving enough to be fully positive yet.

BRITTA: And I think we're wanting to do it in a positive way. Like a lot of times, I think, it's easier to kind of rip on people for not, like rip on the media. But I think rather, instead of us get together and talk about how it's not working, we're just bringing in examples of how it is working.

CHERYL: Absolutely.

IRENE: It'll be open to everyone. But I think since we're having it on campus in one of our bigger lecture halls, it'll be most accessible to the immediate students. But we're definitely gonna publicize it to sources off campus too.

Respecting privacy and not prying about TBI stories

CHERYL: When we first met, Irene, you did a little mini-interview of me. You know, cuz you didn't know me. And I was offering to be in your event. So you wanted to make sure I'm not like some kind of "everybody should get permanent makeup and wear high heels" kind of person. Anyway, but I totally noticed that you didn't ask me how I got my traumatic brain injury. You didn't ask me to list out for you all my impairments or tell you all the things that are hard for me. And this stands out because it's extremely rare for me to meet a new person, and admit I have a history of traumatic brain injury, and then be able to talk about any other topic at all ever. I mean, it almost never happens. I've been practicing in my head that the next time a stranger asks me how I got my injury, you know the first time we meet, I'm gonna say, "Oh! Well, I charge \$50 to listen to your intrusive questions." I'm not gonna tell them how much I charge to answer it. But anyway. So it's kind of a weird question, but I wanna know what it is that made you not feel the need to ask questions about my disability or tell you all the gross details of how it happened. Cuz I'm so happy that you didn't. Why didn't you?

IRENE: I just feel like if I were to do that, I would've been just so nosy. And it's just not my place to ask you about that. And it was just our first meeting. And so I just wanted to get to know you for the woman business owner that you are. And I feel like whatever injury you had in the past doesn't matter. I mean, it shaped who you are today. But what happened in the past, if you didn't wanna disclose that to me, I wasn't going to pry. And I just wanted to respect your privacy and just get to know you as who you are now, today. And so I just thought that detail wasn't important to what we were going to talk about. So yeah.

CHERYL: Yeah, wow. I was about to say, "I wish I could record you saying that. [laughing] I am recording you saying that!"

ALL: [laugh]

CHERYL: And the reason I was going to say that was I wanna put that on a little mini tape player. Well, I guess I could put it on my iPod. We don't need tape players anymore. I just wanna play that back to people when they ask. I cannot tell you how many people demand this information when they first me. And that, like you said, it has nothing to do with what we're talking about. It's a brain injury support group? By all means! But you know, I've shown up to gigs to film something for someone. And the actors ask me. I'm like, whoa. I'm actually here to work. I'm on the clock. And you're really distracting me. And

also, how is that in any way useful? And how is that in any way fair or equitable? And so I'm gonna play back for people what you just said. [Ch-ch!] Listen to this! This has nothing to do with it!

BRITTA and IRENE: [giggle]

CHERYL: Your answer is just so heart-warming. And I'm not sure why so few people think it through in that way. But I'm really excited that that's the reason you didn't ask. I'm very unaccustomed to not having people pry into my personal business. So I can't thank you enough! It's just like, thank you.

Who are your role models?

CHERYL: You've talked a lot about women role models. So who are your role models or your inspirations or motivational people?

IRENE: Yeah, so for me, I have to say my mom and my aunts because my mom, she got divorced when I was super young. And so she was just a single mom working as an RN. And she still does like 12 hour shifts. And so she's been doing that for decades now. And I'm just so in awe of her work ethic and how she provides for my brother and me. And she had her two older sisters come and take care of us when we were younger because she was out working. And so they just kept drilling into me that it doesn't matter who you are. If you just work hard, you'll achieve your dreams. And so I feel like my mom would probably have to be my top role model.

BRITTA: My role models are quite local and people that are close to me personally. I would definitely say, I think someone who kind of set me in motion, actually probably got me more involved in skateboarding and Skate Like A Girl was one of my past bosses, Lindsay Holmes. She was, or is, a female woodworker, skateboarder, and business owner. She makes jewelry out of recycled skateboards. And just watching someone like her, who she's like, I'm not even sure if she's 5 feet tall and how motivated and strong she is, and just working in realms that like there's not a whole lot of women involved in. You know, yeah, entering a woodshop and starting from scratch at 20 years old is hard [giggles]. So she's a big role model. My friend, Erica Lynn Rodman is just a phenomenal person. She's so positive. And she works in real estate. But she also, for a while, kind of had her own catering business. I guess I just had these women that are, I don't know, older than me and positive influences. And I've kind of drawn my strength from them. And so I think that the BeYou-ty pageant, my hope is to kind of highlight some of these women who are role models to me and hopefully give people some future role models as well.

Sponsoring and participating in the event

CHERYL: OK, so some nitty-gritty stuff about the event. Are you still looking for sponsors?

IRENE: We would still be looking for food to provide at the event for attendees.

BRITTA: I just think that we're open. It's not essential that we have food. But we're open. We'd love for more people to join if they're excited about what we're doing and if they wanna be a part.

IRENE: Yeah, and then we might be able to get some tables to set up in the hallway right outside the event space too, just for anyone who would want to showcase their products or some other student groups were interested in selling some baked goods for proceeds going to charity. So that is a potential too.

CHERYL: If people who are listening to this or reading the transcript are interested in having a table or being a sponsor, like making some kinda in-kind donation, can they contact one of you about how that works?

BRITTA: Yeah. The only drawback is that we're not a non-profit. So I don't know how to, it would be kinda like out of the goodness of your heart. We don't have a tax write-off number or anything like that.

CHERYL: No problem.

IRENE: I think we'd be surprised at how many people might be willing to give, though, so.

BRITTA: Really?

IRENE: Yeah.

BRITTA: That's be awesome.

CHERYL: Yep. OK, so you can't offer a tax deduction. But you can offer community involvement. And that's a nice thing too.

Where to find BeYou-ty Pageant online

CHERYL: So where will folks be able to find information about the event online?

BRITTA: Our website is BeYouTyPageant.com. But it's spelled beyoutypageant.com.

IRENE: And then our emails will be listed on the contact information page of the website too.

CHERYL: Great. What kind of disability access is going to be available at the event?

IRENE: Yeah, so in that event space in Shiley 301, there is an elevator. And there are desks that are wheelchair accessible.

BRITTA: As well as a wheelchair-friendly entrance, I think, just to get into the building.

IRENE: Yep.

BRITTA: And then the elevator takes you right up to the room.

CHERYL: And bathrooms nearby?

IRENE: Yeah, uh-huh.

What's next?

CHERYL: Is there anything else that I didn't ask you about or that you just want to talk about?

BRITTA: I just would encourage anyone to come. And if they like what's happening-we haven't quite made a game plan for what we wanna do with BeYouTyPageant.com afterwards. But I would definitely like to have a call to action for people to host their own. And if they need help or advice in organizing their own, we definitely would love to share. I think that this is something that's very doable for other college students on different campuses. So if they like our marketing material or just need help on how do you go about talking to a stranger, you know, to see if they can come speak at an event, I would

definitely love to help. I think it'd be really neat if this was something that other people hosted and helped continue on across the country, really.

CHERYL: Absolutely.

IRENE: Yeah, I think for us, this event might be our final official school event. But the website will still be its own entity and will still be active online.

CHERYL: Yeah. And it'd be cool if that website becomes multi-media too.

IRENE: Yeah, exactly.

BRITTA: Mmhmm. We'd like to be like a running blog, too. Cuz my original, I was just gonna do a blog. And it was gonna be like, if I was to have a beauty pageant, these are the women that I would have at my beauty pageant. But now we actually are having one. So we'll just have also like a running blog that continues to post, with an emphasis of like positivity, positive examples of women who are just doing amazing things and who are beautiful people.

CHERYL: Yay.

[music]

CHERYL: Thanks for joining me for another episode of Stories from the brainreels. Find more handy info on brain injury and disability art and culture on my disability arts blog, WhoAmIToStopIt.com.

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