

Stories from the brainreels transcript

April 5, 2013

Introduction

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CHERYL: Welcome to Blog Talk Radio's "Stories from the brainreels." I'm your host, Cheryl Green, from StoryMinders coming to you live from Portland, Oregon, as I do every first Friday and some third Fridays at 1:00 pm Pacific Time to share stories, news, art, comedy, and discussion on brain injury and disability culture.

Hi. Today is April 5th, and thank you so much for joining me for my first episode of Stories from the brainreels. I'm following in the path of some really amazing disability radio programs that got me motivated to do this show. Now, someone recently asked me what this show series is going to be about. And it was a little embarrassing to realize that I couldn't explain it. I don't remember if I hadn't figured this show out yet when he asked, or I did, but I just couldn't remember what I'd already figured out. But it was just like one month ago. So I should have known what my own show would be, a month before it starts, right? You would think. Anyway, when he asked me what this show was about, I thought, isn't this obvious from the title? It's stories from the brainreels! But then I recognized that actually, it's not really obvious because I made up the word "brainreels." A little bit more about that word in a minute.

So what is this show about? It's a place to talk about brain injury culture, disability culture, art, and news, and comedy, because those are my favorite things to talk about. And cats. But we won't really talk about cats here unless they somehow relate to disability and art, which they might. So this show will basically be talking, laughing, news, and interviews, and sometimes some music. And so now you sort of know what the show will be. But why am I doing this show? Well, that's a funny story too. I had offered to help someone at the National Black Disability Coalition set up an internet radio show here on blogtalkradio. They're looking to get more people of color with disabilities to share their stories with the community. And they thought a radio program where they could do interviews would be a great way to do it. So I told them I'd send some no-fail instructions to get them started setting up their own show. And about halfway through making those instructions for them, I realized I really couldn't give them complete instructions for setting up a show since I didn't have a show myself. And I didn't actually know how to do it. I knew I could figure it out and share it with someone; that's why I offered. I like technology. But maybe a little something was missing in my original offer. So quick-like, I set up my own show. And then I sent the instructions based on how I did it. The end. The NBDC's radio show will be starting up in the near future. And I'll let you know when that is. So I created a show. I sent the instructions. And it was only later I realized, hey, I have a show I'm stuck with now. Ugh! This sounds like a really interesting show. I'm glad they thought of it for me.

So I'm here, doing a show. Now, are you starting to notice a pattern in my disorganized, impulsive way of jumping into things? I mean, I do wish I planned better and that I did things in order, like I did in my previous life when I had a whole brain. But there's just so much fun and comedy that comes from being a really poor planner and from being so impulsive. I mean, where would I get my comedy from if I went

back to who I was before my brain injury? Organized, thoughtful, able to stay awake all day, more in control, ugh. That's boring. And that reminds me, sometimes I forget to say why I'm talking about brain injury and disability and art so much. Cuz I do have the first two, and I do make that last one. There. I've confessed: I'm an artist.

So this show will not always be just me talking about the things that I do. It's the first show. I just wanted to sort of talk a little bit randomly about where I came from and how I got to this show. And I can't remember. I think I may have done that. I'll be interviewing guests on each show, local and non-local guests. And you can call in during the show if you wanna talk or ask a question about news and culture. While this show is on from 1:00 to 1:30, you can call me at 347-934-01--Nope! I said it wrong. Let me start over. 347-934-0715. That's the number to call to reach me during the show.

Oh, and before I bring on my first guest, Jeff Black, I wanna quick remember to tell you what "brainreels" is. I think I mentioned that a couple minutes ago. So get ready to lose track of what I'm saying, if you haven't already lost track. Now, I have a business called StoryMinders. And through that business, I make films, I do education and advocacy work, and I do some things around making media accessible. Some of the films that I've made are comedies about living with brain injury. And those films are called the "brainreels" films. It's sort of a play on words with "brain" and old-fashioned film reels, even though I use digital video. But I still really like film reels. So but it's also a play on "reel" as in film reel and "real" as in not fake. So that's why I really like the word "brainreels" cuz I don't hire actors to pretend to have brain injury. And I don't actually make any of the stories up. My actors and I, we all play ourselves. And the scripts all come from our real-life experiences. So that's brainreels. Real stories about real brains. And with that, I would like to introduce Stories from the brainreels' first guest. And that is Jeff Black. And let me bring him on the line.

Interview with Jeff Black

Hello Jeff, are you there?

JEFF: I'm here. How you doing there, Cheryl?

CHERYL: I'm doing great. How are you?

JEFF: Any better, and there'd be two of me!

CHERYL: [laughs] I'm laughing, but I'm not even sure I get the joke. But I like that. So if you were doing any better, you'd actually sprout a whole new you?

JEFF: Something to that effect, yeah.

CHERYL: And you'd have a twin?

JEFF: Sure!

CHERYL: Lemme ask you: would your twin be identical or fraternal?

JEFF: It would be identical, seeing as I was born with an identical twin. But yeah.

CHERYL: Wait a minute. Ok, now you really lost me. I thought you brother was a different age than you.

JEFF: My brother is a different age. I was born an identical twin, but my twin died three days after birth. He was bigger and stronger than I was.

CHERYL: Oh! Oh, ok. I'm sorry to bring that up here on the radio.

JEFF: [laughs]

CHERYL: Either I didn't know, or I forgot.

JEFF: All right. All good.

CHERYL: What was that?

JEFF: It's all right, goodness. You know me. It's all good.

CHERYL: Ok. I'm glad to hear. I was just thinking of my twin sister. I have a twin sister. And she looks more like you than she looks like me.

JEFF: Well, there you go.

CHERYL: But anyway, let's actually talk about you and your art. And this is why I brought you on today, to talk about brain injury and art and see what stories you wanna share from your brainreel. So I have some questions, as you know. First of all, Jeff, you are an artist with a brain injury, right?

JEFF: Correct.

CHERYL: Excellent. Anything further you wanna say on that?

Being an artist with a brain injury

JEFF: I'm very glad to be an artist. And since my injury, it has allowed me to focus on therapy, visual therapy that way, and multiple therapies. So it's really good all the way around.

CHERYL: Did you do art therapy with an art therapist?

JEFF: No, I just have learned since the accident that when I do my art, I can treat it as therapy, if that makes sense.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah, it does. So it's sort of like some extra rehab that you get to do yourself, your own way, right?

JEFF: Correct.

CHERYL: Excellent. So would you say you're still in rehab then, years later?

JEFF: Well, thing is, TBI is part of life the rest of your life. Yes, I would say that most definitely.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. So tell me a little bit about the kinds of things that you draw. Or tell the audience because I know. But I'd like to share this with others who haven't seen your work.

JEFF: There you go. So most of my work that I've been working on mainly since the accident is pen and ink. And it's done in a style minimalistic, meaning I'll take a subject and blow it up to the size I want. And then I'll reduce out a lot of lines, enough so that a person could still tell the subject, yet enough taken away that they could draw their own conclusions and make their own responses. It becomes, at that point, their own personal view. So if that makes sense.

CHERYL: Yeah, that does make a lot of sense. And you're not telling people what they need to see in your art. You're just giving them these lines and images. And they can run with it.

JEFF: Correct!

CHERYL: And what are the types of things that you draw in that minimalist style?

JEFF: Well, pretty much anything. Anything. The sky's the limit. Mostly, in the last few years, I've applied to the Au Naturel art show down in Astoria. And the theme with that show is nude in the 21st Century. So the focus the last few years, trying to get into that show each year is I do a lot of nudes. So very conservative. I always try to do my nudes in such a way that I do not feel embarrassed to have my wife or children or mother look at it.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

JEFF: So a lot of nudes. But I have ventured out and tried something most differently it would be scenery. So it's way different, but it's a good thing. So if that makes sense.

CHERYL: Yeah, yes, absolutely it makes sense. And you recently showed several pieces of your scenery artwork at Beard's Framing in Vancouver.

JEFF: Correct.

CHERYL: How many pieces sold in that show in the end?

JEFF: I'm sorry?

CHERYL: How many pieces of art did you sell in the end at that show?

JEFF: I had five pieces in the show. But I ended up selling two. And now since you and I have last talked, I'm slated to be in another art show May 18th. And then I'm slating myself up to another art show June 1st. Both, two different venues, two different sections. Everything is gonna be way different on both of them. So I'm really excited.

CHERYL: That is great! Well, next time I see you, which I don't know if it's today or Monday [giggles]--but I'll see you very soon. Make sure one of us remembers--

JEFF: You'll be seeing me tomorrow.

CHERYL: Tomorrow? No, that's right. It'll be tomorrow. I'll see you tomorrow and Monday. Thank you for reminding me. But one of us needs to try to remember for me to write down these dates and the locations of your art shows so that I can post it on my blog and sort of hype them up. So that's exciting! I didn't know about those shows. Wonderful.

CHERYL: So for folks who are listening who want to see your art, could you share your URL to get to your website?

JEFF: My URL. That would be blackjeffery@comcast.net.

CHERYL: Oh, not that one, not that one. That's your email address. Your URL is the address to your website.

JEFF: Thank you. And I just always forget that. So you're right. I'm sorry.

CHERYL: No worries.

JEFF: It's www.jefferyblack.com.

CHERYL: Sweet. [Jefferyblack.com](http://www.jefferyblack.com). And I know that on that website are a lot of samples of your artwork. And you have some information about your personal story there and links to other people with TBI. It's a really nice site. Really clean and pretty.

JEFF: Thank you.

CHERYL: Yeah, and so folks can go there. Now, lemme ask: is your art for sale through the website too?

JEFF: No, cuz I have not figured out how to do that. I would eventually like to get to that point. But that's always a work in progress.

CHERYL: Well, I'll tell you what. That is one of the kinds of things that I do at my business. So you can hire me to do that for you!

JEFF: That sound like a good process.

CHERYL: No, we'll work on it together. And I'll set you up with the things you need to look into to make that happen. And then you can make that happen. And you can sell even more art, even more ways. Does that sound good?

JEFF: Oh, that sounds wonderful.

CHERYL: Excellent. Ok, so that's another thing you'll need to remind me that I said. [laughs]

JEFF: All right.

CHERYL: Although this radio show will be archived. So the evidence will be there. But I might forget. But if I forget, don't take it personally.

JEFF: No, because I'm gonna have to try to remember myself. And that's the joys of us having brain injuries, the humor.

CHERYL: That's right. And we can be like, "Wasn't I supposed to remember something?" "Yes, but I don't remember what it was!" So.

JEFF: Yeah.

CHERYL: We'll work it out. And I could write a note, of course, but.

JEFF: You might forget where you wrote it.

CHERYL: What's that?

JEFF: I said, like me, you might forget where you wrote the note.

CHERYL: Yes. And I've been doing that a lot lately: writing notes down and putting them in strange places. And then I don't get to them. So lots of fun all around. Every day's an exciting new day [giggles].

JEFF: Yep!

Being part of the documentary film "Who Am I To Stop It"

CHERYL: Yeah, so speaking of exciting, I hear that you are part of a documentary film on artists with brain injuries called "Who Am I To Stop It"! Hmm. Tell me a little bit about what it's like for you to be in that documentary.

JEFF: It's definitely I enjoy it immensely. It is a work in progress. And that's probably the fun part of it because it will always change.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

JEFF: It's very enjoyable. It's boy. As much as it's organized, things are very random when it's happening too. So it's following me and what I do and how I do it and me not knowing what I'm gonna do.

CHERYL: [giggles] Good point, yeah. Now what was it like for you to be interviewed on camera for the documentary?

JEFF: It's definitely different cuz just not a role I play and normally deal with. It was good. It was comfortable. With the background I have a BA as a graphic artist. But my minor was telecommunications. So I used to play in that world, dealing with cameras and every part and aspect about it. So it didn't scare me. It's just it'd been quite a few years to be in that position. So it felt very good to be back that way. And I'm very glad to be part of it.

CHERYL: Oh, excellent! Excellent. So I'm sure you conducted interviews when you were a telecommunications major. Did you get interviewed for programs when you were studying, too?

JEFF: For other students' project, yes, I did. I mean, not that I looked for that opportunity. But I learned to become comfortable in that environment. So definitely different. I enjoyed it.

CHERYL: Yeah, good. Good. Is there anything else that you want to tell us about today about art or brain injury or what you're up to?

Jeff's brain injury humor

JEFF: Well, there's always one thing. And here's where I know that you're rolling your eyes at me. But--

CHERYL: Oh! You can see me rolling my eyes through the phone! I tried to hold them as still as I could. [laughs] Go for it.

JEFF: It just would not be me if I didn't. So--

CHERYL: Go for it!

JEFF: I'll ask this: Cheryl, how do you spell hard water?

CHERYL: H-a-r-d w-a-t-e-r?

JEFF: Well, that would be one way. I think I prefer to spell it i-c-e.

CHERYL: [laughs] Oh, stop. Ok, so lemme just say--Goodness gracious. Lemme just say that one of the really fun things that you do with your memory--and I know you have trouble with your memory from the brain injury--but you memorize these jokes. And then you're actually able to keep track of who you've already told these jokes to. So that you make sure and you tell them to people who haven't them before. And I love that so much. It's a great exercise. And you always tell me a new joke. And I love it.

JEFF: I try. It's definitely a work in progress. But I try, and I enjoy it.

CHERYL: I love that joke.

JEFF: I more enjoy the fact that you roll with it, though.

CHERYL: [laughs] Well, I love the humor. I love the humor. And I love the short one-liner jokes. I don't ever remember them. And you go out of your way to make sure to find pretty hilarious ones and one with word plays. And I love it. So that's great. So I have one last question for you that's more abstract than what we've been talking about. And you know, you and I talk a lot about the brain injury community. And we do with the other folks in BIRRDsong. But I wanna ask your opinion on something.

JEFF: All right.

Is there a brain injury culture?

CHERYL: Do you think that there's a brain injury culture?

JEFF: Before I answer that--because I'm kinda sure. I think I know what I'm gonna answer. But could you explain that to me? Cuz as much as I know it's not culture like a petri dish, and that kind of thing.

CHERYL: [giggles] No, I do mean petri dishes full of brains.

JEFF: Yeah.

CHERYL: What I mean--

JEFF: Well, define it a little further so I know that I'm gonna answer it the way that I'm thinking I wanna answer it, please.

CHERYL: You bet. So, and it's really abstract. But any time we meet somebody new and find out that they have had a brain injury or they're a family member or friend or other type of care partner, we just say, "Hey! You're in the brain injury community. We're all in this community together." But I'm wondering what you think. Is there something else that we all share in this community that turns into something that's like a brain injury culture?

JEFF: Wow. Um. You know, other than life experiences. Cuz as far as brain injury people--I could be way wrong--but we all similarly walk different roads in life, but we walk in the same footsteps at times. If that makes sense.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

JEFF: So I'm hoping I answered it. But I just don't know for sure. I mean, we're all different. But we're the same.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. There's no right or wrong answer. It just was something that's been on my mind lately when I think about a lot of people are able to define what disability culture is. And so I have started looking around, well, can anybody say is there a brain injury culture? And if so, what is the culture like? So it's a brand new question that I've just started thinking about. So you were the first person for me to ask that question to. And thank you for answering it.

JEFF: I will definitely think on that more because that does invoke some thoughts, for sure.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we'll try to remember to talk about it again because I think it's the kind of thing you, it's so abstract you have to come back to it and think about it again. But those are the questions that I had for you, Jeff. And I have one little tidbit of news about brain injury. Do you wanna stay on the line and chat with me about that?

JEFF: Throw it to me.

CHERYL: All right. I'm gonna throw it to you. Excellent. Be sure to catch it. I don't wanna hit you in the head with this news, Ok?

JEFF: Aha!

Oregon Senate Bill 721 on protecting youth from sports concussions

CHERYL: So the news is, here in Oregon in the Oregon Senate is this new bill: Senate Bill 721. And basically, the history is--Jeff, I hesitated cuz I forgot your name for a second. Jeff. I'm sure you know this part of the story. But some years ago there was a high school student named Max Conradt who had a mild brain injury. And then he was returning to play too soon. And so he had a second mild brain injury, which put him in a coma for four months. And he has permanent, severe brain injury from that. And a lot of people don't consider a concussion to be a serious injury. But in this case, because he had two right in a row, before the first one had healed, it just became this one huge injury, severe injury. Because he just hadn't healed from the first one. So he still had swelling in his brain. So Max's father, at the time they were called the Brain Injury Association of Oregon, doctors, lawyers like David Kracke, athletic administrators, a whole bunch of people worked on legislation that would require all high school athletic coaches in the public schools to receive concussion recognition training. And then main goal is to keep kids out of play until they're healed. And that passed in the House and the Senate unanimously in Oregon. And there are now 43 states, plus Washington D.C., that have their own concussion legislation, which is great! I think that's wonderful because--

JEFF: Oh yeah.

CHERYL: --yeah, it works to protect young people. So Senate Bill 721, basically is similar to Max's Law. But it applies to non-public school sports. And it requires the coaches and trainers and others to have training in how to recognize concussion and how to advise the players to maybe go seek medical attention, and most importantly--well, they're all important--but lastly, it keeps players off the field and out of practice until they don't have any more symptoms. And it's currently being looked at right now. And the recommendation in the Senate is to pass it. They've changed and made some amendments. But it looks like it's gonna pass. So, that's the news tidbit. What do you think about that kind of law?

JEFF: Life is as it goes. And I think it's a good law, long overdue. But life happens as it goes. So I'm glad it's happening. And it's gonna be a work in progress. I'm sure there's gonna be a lotta hurdles in there, trying to get clarification. But I think it's a really good thing.

CHERYL: Yeah. Now I know you have kids who are school-aged. And what would you do if one of your kids was playing an organized sport and had a concussion, which is a mild traumatic brain injury. Let's say they had a concussion. And the coach really wanted to put them back in because your kid is sure to win this big game here at the end of the season. I mean, what would you say to a coach who wanted to put your kid back into play?

JEFF: Oh, I would definitely stop. My wife would most definitely, she would push me out of the way to get there to stop that action from happening. We'd most definitely jump in there.

CHERYL: Yeah. Go ahead.

JEFF: Oh, but I was saying that if a person is available and understood. I mean, this is a work in progress. So I hope people learn that and know that. My kids are smart enough after my experience that they would recognize and understand that and stop if they were told. But there's a lot of parents as well as

students that don't understand that. And I think it's gonna require a lot of education on multiple fronts to multiple people.

CHERYL: Yeah. And you make a really good point. Your kids and your wife and you have all gotten a lot of first-hand education about the importance of working to not get a brain injury, or if you do, taking care of yourself. And so that work has already been done. And like you said, your kids might be likely to step off the field and stay off because they don't wanna get hurt further. But we have to figure out how, as a community, to reach the parents and the educators and the kids and get them that education without the first-hand experience of a severe traumatic brain injury.

JEFF: Yeah.

CHERYL: So, which I think we're doing. Because we are part of a Speakers Panel through BIRRDsong. And that is some of the stuff that we're gonna be talking about when we go give presentations in the schools. So we're almost out of time. So I am going to switch gears and say thank you so much for being on the show, Jeff. It was sort of a short one cuz I talked a lot at the beginning. But we'll have you back on the show again, all right?

JEFF: I look forward to it. And thank you very much, Cheryl.

CHERYL: All right. Thanks for joining. Take care, Jeff.

JEFF: All right. Bye.

Local disability arts news

CHERYL: Bye bye. So with that, I just have a couple of announcements, which I don't have time to give all of them. But first, I wanna say that I am on the Board for Oregon Cultural Access. And one of our programs is the Disability Art and Culture Project. And I have been an ongoing volunteer with the Disability Art and Culture Project for quite some time and performed in their festival once many years ago. And it's really a great group. And I wanna let everyone know that on April 14th, there is going to be a fundraiser here in Portland to raise money to support the upcoming Spring performance by the Inclusive Arts Vibe Dance Company. They are part of the Disability Art and Culture Project. And Inclusive Arts Vibe Dance Company is a professional dance company for youth and young adults with and without disabilities. And it is run by folks with disabilities. So it's wonderful opportunities for everyone. The fundraiser's April 14th, 2:00 - 5:00 pm at Mt. Scott Community Center in Portland. Details are at DACPHome.org. And the Spring performance it is benefitting is May 4th through 6th in Portland. Also find info at DACPHome.org. I'm rushing because I'm almost out of time. And I just have a moment to let you know that next month on Friday, April 3rd at 1:00 pm, Hip Hop artist Toni Alicka Hickman will be on the show. After having two aneurysms and a stroke by the time she was 32, she has written a book, recorded an album called "Crippled Pretty," become a speaker, started a website called GiveBackBuyBlack.com, she does poetry, and she's doing a documentary. So join me May 3rd for that. Thank you so much for listening.

Join us the 1st and 3rd Friday of the month at 1:00 pm and find us online at blogtalkradio.com/brainreels. This has been Cheryl Green of StoryMinders. Email me at info@storyminders.com if you've got topics you'd like to hear on an upcoming show.

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