

Stories from the brainreels podcast transcript

August 16, 2013

Introduction

[blogtalkradio signal]

[music]

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.

[music]

Well, I am so excited to be back on the air again today. I have an amazingly awesome guest, the Lady MJ Warrior. Before I bring her on to start chatting, though, I have a quick announcement I wanna make. Now, some of you know that I'm making a feature-length documentary film on artists with brain injury in the Pacific Northwest. That's in the US. That's Oregon and Washington State where I'm focusing. And well, one of the featured artists in my film is doing a really innovative arts project, and she has an online crowdfunding campaign going on right now that I wanna tell you about. So you can make a tax-deductible donation to her project through an organization called United States Artist Projects, and that's the organization I worked with to raise money to start my documentary. So it's very exciting that my friend Kris is using it now because we are even filming her as she works on her campaign, for the documentary. So it's a cool circle. The easiest way to find her is to go to www.USAProjects.org and then just search for Kris Haas. That's spelled K-r-i-s. Her last name is H-a-a-s. The project is called 1 YEAR, 10,000 PIECES, 1 ARTIST. Now, it sounds really huge, and it is. And she did this before, in fact. Several years ago she painted 10,202 pieces in one year. And she's gonna do that whole thing over again, starting this November, creating all original work. But this time, she's gonna have cameras up to live-stream her while she's painting so that people can really see what an artistic process looks like. And also, it's to give her more interaction with people because she's really very isolated after her brain injury, which was nine years ago. And that's super common; it's way too common for a lot of folks with disabilities and with brain injury to become really isolated for a lot of reasons. So she's doing this project, and it will give her a way to reach out and sort of put herself out there to more people and invite more people in, in a way that she doesn't have to leave the studio, and she can be in the comfort of her own home. And you get to see what it's like. You know, she always talks about how we see professional athletes at work. We watch them doing their sport. You never see a professional artist doing their work. You just see the finished product. And she really wants to share with people what that looks like. So I would ask you and encourage you to please support brain injury art by giving to Kris Haas at USAProjects.org. Again, it's K-r-i-s H-a-a-s. That's how to spell her name. And the project is 1 YEAR, 10,000 PIECES, 1 ARTIST. You can also read a little bit more about the project and about Kris on my blog, which is WhoAmItoStopIt.com. That is the name of the documentary. Well, now the dot com part. That's just part of the URL.

So I [giggles]--The Lady MJ Warrior is very timely. I asked her to give me an extra five minutes to do a little introduction before she called in, and she is waiting. So she's not here just yet. I'm looking for her. But I think I can say a little bit by way of introduction. I was listening to the Ouch! talk show, radio show-

-it used to be a podcast, and then they turned it into a radio show, talk show--I was listening to that a while back. And that's where I first came across the Lady MJ Warrior and found out that she is a person who has had a head injury or a brain injury. And she's involved in Krip-Hop Nation. If you listened to my show a couple weeks ago, I interviewed T. Alika Hickman--[Toni Hickman](#)--who is also a Krip-Hop Nation artist. So I'm really excited to get to speak to yet another Krip-Hop artist. I feel really fortunate. And Leroy Moore's the person who recommended I call these folks and ask them to be interviewed. I don't know that I would have thought of that or reached out to them otherwise. So, thank you, Leroy, for pointing me to these very powerful folks who are doing a lot of really amazing artistic work and just really supporting an incredible cause in [Krip-Hop Nation](#) and in giving folks with disabilities a place to be professional musicians and a place to come together. Well, it's not actually a place, it's a global project. But giving people the space to be at the center and get their music out there and really introduce more people, especially folks without disabilities, to the wonderful talent that is in our community. So I am trying to talk and fill the space before the Lady MJ Warrior comes on. But I don't wanna talk too much and talk about her too much. So what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna go ahead and start with a track of hers called "[Nothin' Stops the Warrior](#)." It's super catchy. I'll sometimes be singing it for weeks on end. And so I'm excited to play it for you today because this will be the first time that I get to listen to it and then actually speak to her. So I'll play this song, and she'll be on shortly. And you can listen in to us chat.

[music]

CHERYL: So that was "Nothin' Stops the Warrior" by the Lady MJ Warrior. And she's not here yet! I wonder what it is that I do to people that they don't show up when the radio show starts. But I know that she knows cuz we were talking about it a little bit earlier today. But it is 9:00 in the UK where she is. She's located, I believe she's in Birmingham, UK. And so I don't know. You know, it's Friday night over there, 9:00. Probably a lot of folks are getting ready to go out and have a night out on the town. So it might be a tough time. But I have this show set up at 1:00 my time because it's just sorta that time of day when it's usually a little bit before my nap. I know that a lot of folks who have--here in the States--who have regular 9-to-5 jobs are not listening right now. But I sort of am on a different schedule since I stopped working full-time and sort of have to do this self-paced kind of stuff. And I picked 1:00. Now I'm not so sure it's the best time to be getting people to call in to talk to me. But I really love that song, and I love how catchy it is. And I like the idea of nothing stops the warrior, just that sort of, I don't know. I just see her hand in the air, raising a flag in the air, and just pushing through no matter what. So I wanna see what else I can say. I don't want to ask and answer too many of the questions for her before she gets here. But I also don't want to lose the audience. But I think what I'm gonna do right now is what I ended up doing last time. And that is, I'm just going to put a little pause. So if you're listening live, you might the radio go blank, the sound go blank for a little while. And what I will do is take the episode offline and cut that out and put it back online for folks to listen to in the archive later. So I apologize. But the sounds gonna go off for just a little while here until I can find her. All right, thank you.

The Interview

CHERYL: Hello! Are you there?

LADY MJ: Yay [laughs]!!

CHERYL: Hello!

LADY MJ: Brilliant. Oh gosh, that was a nightmare.

CHERYL: Did you have trouble getting to call in to the show on Skype?

LADY MJ: I did, yeah.

CHERYL: Oh, I'm sorry!

LADY MJ: I was really worried that it just kept losing the connection.

CHERYL: Oh! I'm so sorry about that. We practiced earlier because she had to call in through Skype because it's an overseas call. And you know, this is not the first time I've tried to do something related to a performance with Skype, and Skype just quits on you. So I'm so glad you stuck it out and you made it on the show. Thank you!

LADY MJ: Thank you very much for having me! It's an honor to be invited to your wonderful show.

CHERYL: Oh, stop now!

BOTH: [chuckle]

CHERYL: So were you listening to the beginning at all through your computer?

LADY MJ: Because I was trying to get through, it kept muting the sound. So I couldn't hear anything what was going on. Are we on the air right now, are we?

CHERYL: We are on the air. You are live on the air.

LADY MJ: OK! Just double-checking. Testing, testing [laughs].

CHERYL: [laughs] Can everybody hear us? I don't know.

LADY MJ: I hope so. If you can hear us, post something on Facebook or Twitter.

CHERYL: There you go, yeah. So what I did was I did a little introduction, and I played your song "Nothin' Stops the Warrior."

LADY MJ: Oh, thank you very much.

CHERYL: Absolutely.

About Lady MJ Warrior and Music

CHERYL: I would love, since you're here, for you to talk a little bit about yourself, where you're located, what kind of music you make.

LADY MJ: OK. Well, I'm located in Birmingham, UK. So I've lived here my whole life. I'm proud to be a Brummie. Brummie's an abbreviation for Birmingham. Yep, that's where I'm from, and that's where we got the famous Zorbing. You can check that out. It's a big, massive ball.

BOTH: [laugh]

LADY MJ: Yeah, in the center of town. So yeah, that's my little hometown. Lots of celebrities from Birmingham: UB40.

CHERYL: Uh-huh.

LADY MJ: So yeah, we got big talent back here [laughs].

CHERYL: [chuckles] Yeah.

LADY MJ: So music-wise, I've been working on a wide different--Let me start again. Put my teeth back in [giggles]. A large amount of genres. So I'm really enjoying that from things like classical music to rapping, hip hop, drum and bass, electro, working with live bands and reggae. So it's just quite eclectic taste I've got. So I'm just enjoying rolling with it and seeing what creatives I can work with along the way.

CHERYL: Mmhmm. That's wonderful. And I know you just passed your exams, right, was it for classical singing?

LADY MJ: Yes, it was. I passed my classical singing exam with a distinction. So that was a bit of a shock, but I'm really pleased about that. So you just never know.

CHERYL: Right, right.

LADY MJ: They had a straight face. So I had no clue. Yeah, he had a very good poker face.

CHERYL: Mm, that's hard. Now, I actually heard you talking about your classical singing exam on another radio interview that you did some time ago. Of course, I don't remember what this interview was or who did it. I was trying to find it online. But I just can't even remember. I don't even know what to look up to find it. But so yeah, I heard about your singing exam right before it was coming up on this other interview. So you are famous and all over the radio airwaves doing interviews.

LADY MJ: [chuckles] Aw, don't know about that, but I'm trying to do something. You know, everybody's trying to make a buck in the world.

CHERYL: Yeah.

LADY MJ: Spread positive, beautiful vibes. That's what it's all about.

CHERYL: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

Krip-Hop Nation

CHERYL: Yeah, I wanna ask you--You mentioned a lot of different genres of music that you do. I wanna ask you specifically about [Krip-Hop Nation](#). How did you get involved with them?

LADY MJ: I found Leroy Moore, who's the sort of creator of Krip-Hop Nation. He's a spoken word poet, activist. He's based in America. I found him about six, seven years ago just through the internet. Thank God for technology. And we also discovered [Binki, who's from Germany](#), and he's our Producer and rapper. And now we actually have many different members all over the world. So we're international. So we just started out individual artists trying to find creatives, disabled musician, and we discovered each other. And now we sort of have our little base. I sort of look after things in the UK and Binki does Germany and Leroy does America. But we've got different artists. [We've got Swayne](#); he's American. [Ronnie, who's from Uganda](#), so quite, quite far away. [Rob Da' Noize](#), who's original creator of Kip Hop alongside Leroy Moore. Yeah, so we've got quite a lot. We're looking out for female, disabled female musicians and talent. So please come forward or feel free to message me if anybody's interested in anything.

CHERYL: Oh, that's wonderful. Yes, all you female, disabled musicians out there, get on Facebook and message the Lady MJ Warrior, absolutely! It's a musician page. So it's public, and flood her inbox with messages [laughs].

LADY MJ: Please do. I will reply as fast as I can!

CHERYL: Yeah.

LADY MJ: Yeah.

CHERYL: So can you tell me why you think that the work that Krip-Hop Nation does is so important?

LADY MJ: Oh, well, we've basically created a sister project called MCEES with Disabilities. And then furthermore to that, we created [Disability + Positivity = Creativity](#), which is aimed at not only MC rappers. It's aimed at all disabled creatives. So to test the water on this, we put on an event which we did in London, an event called 93 Faces East. So that was a massive success. It was a very educating day, with very powerful life experiences shared, and heartfelt music performed live. You could just see people's confidence growing throughout the day. It was just such an amazing experience with high energy. Like one sort of a big family, really. And despite me having quite a lot of seizures throughout the day, nothing can take away those wonderful experiences. And sort of looking back on it now, I can see how far I've come as an artist with Krip-Hop Nation and my progress on my health. So it's really nice to reflect back on it. And one of the amazing things I took with me is the fact that seeing people who've never had the opportunity to perform live onstage and express themselves, whether it was music or spoken word. We had acrobats come, which was amazing. Disabled charities came and attended, such as Heart and Soul, Need Trust, Deaf Rave. We also had a medical student who was collating information regarding disabilities. We had a sort of separate table where you could put information and leaflets regarding your disability. So it's not only giving people a platform to perform; it was giving them a chance to explain about disability and their personal experiences and suffering. So it was all around really, open mic, a lot of joy, tears, raising awareness. It's a wonderful experience. And from that, that 110% gives me the confidence to move forward with Krip Hop. And I've seen with my own eyes the positive experience you have on disabled musicians and artists. So that's why I do what I do [giggles].

CHERYL: Yeah! That is wonderful! Oh, I would love to go to an event like that. Although, anybody who knows me is probably rolling their eyes. You wouldn't go to that event! I would go, but I would stand in the corner with dark glasses and earplugs and headphones on, and I would just be crying cuz there'd be too many people. But I would love to go to something like that. And I really like how you had all those different angles on disability, from the performers to the information. And it's wonderful because disability is not really part of mainstream music and mainstream movies and TV. Or if it is, it's all just stereotypes.

LADY MJ: You're right. It is. It is sort of cliché. You have to be in a wheelchair to have a disability. It's a massive stigma attached. And there is still quite a lot of disability hate crime. Leroy's very good at raising awareness regarding that issue and trying to abolish the impact it's having on people's lives.

CHERYL: Absolutely, yeah. And before your head injury, before you became part of Krip-Hop Nation, did your music have a message the way it does now?

LADY MJ: No, I'd definitely having this trauma has changed my life, and obviously there's pros and cons in everything. But I've taken the good parts and sort of make it into my music. So before, I just used to

MC in the raves and the clubs. But now, there's a deeper meaning behind my lyrics and the work that I'm actually doing with my lyrics.

CHERYL: That's fantastic, yeah. The person I interviewed a couple weeks ago, T. Alika Hickman--Toni Hickman--from hearing the US, she basically had a similar response to her having a couple of aneurysms and a stroke. She sort of reacted in a similar way to you: OK, I have to get out there, and I have to do something. I have to make this music mean something, and I have to speak up. It's just really exciting to hear how something so traumatic and so unexpected and difficult can almost become your artistic muse and get you out there to be more active.

LADY MJ: Yeah, tragedy can lead to--You can either take two roads. You either sort of embrace disability and the suffering, or you embrace the positive effects and the things that you can do. And that's something that I try and focus on, the things that I can do instead of the things I can't do.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

Changing perspective after head injury

CHERYL: Did you have a period of time right after your head injury where you were more focused on what you couldn't do?

LADY MJ: Oh, of course. I think you go through those stages, and you battle every single day. That's what makes a true warrior in my opinion [laughs]. It's having that sort of finding strategies to overcome the problems and trying to find inner peace and being strong and fearless. You have to just face the battles because they're not gonna go away. Accept who you are and move on.

CHERYL: Well said. Yes, indeed. And that is part of it because you can't be active and out there working for social justice if you're at home just feeling very sad about what happened to you. I mean of course, like me, I stay home most of the time, but I try to get out there online and here on the phone or on Skype and not be too focused on what I can't do anymore. Although, it makes great comedy when you do think about some of the things you can't do well anymore. I don't music; I do comedy stuff. So you did say just now sort of what it takes to be a warrior. Did you have the name Lady MJ Warrior before your head injury?

LADY MJ: No, I was just Lady MJ. So it's been upgraded [giggles].

CHERYL: [laughs] Ah, yes! Yes! An upgrade. I love it!

LADY MJ: Yeah. And I've got my warrior helmet as well now, which I don't know if you've seen any photos.

CHERYL: Oh, I have, yeah.

LADY MJ: Yeah. It's just a little joke. It's like you say, comedy myself, cuz obviously I had a head injury. So it's like that little protection. So it's got allegorical meaning, you know?

CHERYL: Oh, OK! And that picture of you, it's the military helmet with Lady MJ in pink and black, right?

LADY MJ: Yeah, that was specially made.

CHERYL: Yeah, so anybody who's listening to this radio show online is actually gonna see a picture of you wearing that helmet, and I have it up on my blog too. I love the helmet.

LADY MJ: Thank you.

CHERYL: I have to say, I'm really excited to hear that adding the name "Warrior," it was a response to the head injury and the disability. I love that that's an upgrade because too many people without disabilities think that it's all negative, and it's all downgrading. But it's really not. You can really have disability pride.

LADY MJ: Yes, that is true. And I think life is definitely what you make it. And if you don't put 110% into everything, you're not gonna succeed. You're not gonna fell 100% as a person.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. It takes a lot of effort.

LADY MJ: Yes, it does. And people just have ideas of what they think is happiness. So everyone knows what will truly make them happy, and you have to just focus on that path. And any negative has to just be removed from your life because you won't gain anything, absorbing that negative situation.

CHERYL: Mmhmm, mmhmm. I should have learned that yesterday when I was in an 8-hour fight with somebody over email, and I just could not let go of the negativity. But then I slept on it last night and realized oh my gosh, what did I do to that person? I ruined her day, and it ruined my day. So it's a temper problem that I've had since my head injury. So if you're out there, and you know who you are, I'm really sorry I was yelling at you for eight hours over email. I won't say her name because I don't remember her name [giggles].

LADY MJ: We're very sorry! We get crazy and quirky with the head injury. Be proud [laughs]!

CHERYL: That's right, that's right. And so I mean, since we are talking about my favorite topic right now, what are the things that you want people to understand about head injury and brain injury, and also about people who have had a head injury? What do you need people to know and understand?

LADY MJ: Ah, that's a very, very tough question. I mean, you could sort of again dwell on the negative and say, "Well, I want you to understand what I can't do," which I think is very good to make people aware. Because if people don't understand, it's hard for them to empathize.

CHERYL: Yeah.

LADY MJ: So I guess you have to share the suffering as well as the positives. But with a head injury and a brain injury, obviously once the initial injury's healed, it's all internal. And that's where I believe a lot of problems happen to people functionally because not just the physical element may have gone, but they've got the functional disorder to deal with due to their brain injury or head injury along with any sort of physical elements, for example, seizures, black outs, migraines, outburst, like you say, angry, sort of short fuse. Those sort of things you have to learn coping mechanisms. Something I'm putting together at the moment is just basic short statements and pictures together of things that I've worked on personally to try and overcome what happened to me, my traumatic head injury. I need to learn how to rearrange cuz your whole life will completely change when something happens like this to you. Your life will change overnight very dramatically, and it's learning how to cope with that and like I said, focusing on the things that you can do instead of what you can't do. And looking at what you can't do is not being able to do it, but doing things differently and training your brain to learn coping mechanisms and

enabling recovery. Because the brain is constantly developing and growing. It's got pathways leading, and if we train our brain continuously to believe something, I believe you can overcome it because we are what we think. Descartes is one of the first philosophers. He said, "I think. Therefore, I am." Which is what I believe because whatever you think--negative vibes--that will come back to you. So if you can project positive, happy emotions, then I believe you will get more happier experiences and overcome any sort of functional disorders due to your head injury or brain injury.

CHERYL: Mmhmm. Yeah, thank you for sharing all that.

LADY MJ: Thank you.

Music to connect people

CHERYL: One thing I would say in addition to what you said is that for some folks in our community--and including me--a lot of that has come from being connected to other people who can either help me when I'm not doing something well or can help me step back and think about the situation and decide should you really be crying right now, or can you laugh about this? And I know that one of the things you want to do with your music is to make people feel connected.

LADY MJ: Yes.

CHERYL: And working together instead of separate. So has working with other people and making music, are those things that have played a role in recovering?

LADY MJ: Of course. Sharing experiences with like-minded, creative people is essential in recovery. Again, this is all just my personal experiences, and I'm not a doctor or professor or anything. This is just personal things that I've done to help myself recover, and perhaps it can help somebody else, or one element of it, just different aspects, which one is definitely the music. The music, self-expression, channeling negative thoughts and projecting them into a positive outlet is a wonderful ability to have. And I believe we all have the ability to self-express creatively, but we don't actually understand the mechanisms in our brains. So it's learning those mechanisms which are already within us and channeling them, projecting them in a positive way.

CHERYL: Mmhmm. And what role has--Oh, this question, it got stuck. Sometimes I feel it. I feel the words just jam up in there. But...working with other people or having people help you or support your or do things with you, is that part of a way that some of us can recover more after a head injury?

LADY MJ: I definitely would think that. If I hadn't met the people that I've met, I wouldn't be in the position I am now. There's been such wonderful people that have supported me; talking about friends as well as supporters and musicians and filmmakers. I've just made a music video with Ivan Richies, who's a very wonderful, wonderful director to work with, very easy to get along with and great at giving me directions and instructions and making me feel comfortable. So I have my music video, which is supported by Drake Music, and they're a charity that raises awareness of people with disabilities here in UK, based in London. So we're doing some stuff with them. I went on to London in March, actually, the day after my exam. So that a lot. Yeah, it was the same day as my exam. So that was busy, very busy day from exams doing classical to doing some rapping.

CHERYL: Mmhmm!

LADY MJ: And they put myself and about 15 other disabled artists and musicians into a room, left us to our own devices for a couple of hours, and we just created a jam session. We had some disabled charities come down and see what we was doing. It was amazing. There was some artists playing the guitar with their iPad, and it was just amazing. Like, people with their disabilities but using technology to enable them to still be creative. It was just such wonderful talent there. So we went from all the genres. We went for a mixture, doing a rendition of Annie Lennox's "Sweet Dreams." That was fun, a reggae version. So we took it out, mixed it up. And of course, we ended up on drum and bass. So 180-190 beats a minute going fast.

CHERYL: [chuckles] Oh, wow!

LADY MJ: [laughs] Yeah! It was a brilliant day, and I look forward to working with those wonderful people again, so.

CHERYL: Yeah, that sounds exciting. Is there something about that on your Facebook page?

LADY MJ: There isn't, actually. Drake Music did film the event. So I'm hoping I'll be able to get some footage soon.

CHERYL: Yeah, that is great!

LADY MJ: It was a brilliant, brilliant day, so.

CHERYL: I'm writing it down so I can remember to look it up. But then, it's anyone's guess whether I [laughs] can look at that note again and know what it's referring to. Wait. Lemme write, "Look up online" otherwise I'll just see it, and I'll think it's the name of someone I'm supposed to call. And I'll just throw it away. I can't keep track of notes very well.

LADY MJ: Notes. You write notes about writing notes, don't you?

CHERYL: [laughs] Yes, I do! I do. Or I will call and leave myself a message, "Remember to write yourself a note, blah blah blah." Then I get home, and I hear the message and think, what? That was me! And I delete it [laughs].

LADY MJ: Yeah, it sounds like [inaudible].

CHERYL: Yeah [laughs].

Mental health and invisible disabilities

CHERYL: So I wonder if we can talk about stuff that's a little bit heavier right now. Are you comfortable talking about stuff around mental health?

LADY MJ: Yeah, I'm quite interested. I've touched lightly on the subject a moment ago saying regarding people's coping functionally as well as with their organic causes of their condition. So yeah. I think it's a bit of a taboo, isn't it, mental health?

CHERYL: Yup.

LADY MJ: It's such a strong word as well: "Mental".

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

LADY MJ: I think it's 1 in 10 people suffering from mental illnesses. Yeah, it's quite common. I mean, I can relate to sort of things in my life that have made me feel anxious or very low, and we're all human. We all feel those emotions. I don't think it's anything to be ashamed of, but once again, it's finding the balance of absorbing too much bad energy and then projecting it, or just relieving yourself of that and finding a comfortable place within yourself.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

LADY MJ: And I think being very honest with yourself is definitely a healing process.

CHERYL: Mmhmm. That's a very good point. You have to really be able to look at yourself and say, "This is who I am. This is what I'm doing." Because if you are blocking that from yourself, you will get stuck where you are. And I'm interested in the mental health part myself because I definitely did not understand mental health or mental illness before my brain injury.

LADY MJ: I agree.

CHERYL: But yeah, I've become very interested in it now because I feel like we have--these two groups--might really have a lot in common. And one thing we have in common is that on the outside, nobody can see what's going on in your mind and the things that you're struggling with and the ways that people are sometimes they mean it, but sometimes they don't. But they sort of get in your way and sort of make things harder for you. So I think that our two populations share that. People look at us funny. You told me a story about you were out in public with a friend, and you went to use the disabled, the accessible toilet.

LADY MJ: Yes, that's correct.

CHERYL: And the looks that people gave you!

LADY MJ: Aw gosh, yeah. I mean, people thought, "Oh, that's a good idea." And I was like, "No." Cuz I was saying, if I haven't got one of my female friends with me, and if I've had quite a poorly day and I've not been feeling too good, then I'll tend to go in a disabled toilet if I'm out. But obviously, people look at me like what are you doing going in there?

CHERYL: Right.

LADY MJ: But it's obvious because they've got a red cord in there. And that's again from experiences because I've been, you know just went to the normal Ladies'. And next thing I know, I was being--an ambulance was called, and I was being taken to the hospital because I'd collapsed in the toilet.

CHERYL: Oh.

LADY MJ: But I wasn't aware of anything that was going on, but luckily people came into the toilet.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

LADY MJ: Yeah.

CHERYL: So that's why, when you're out, you spend time with other people so that if you do collapse and have a seizure and black out, that somebody is there to help out quickly.

LADY MJ: Yeah.

CHERYL: You look fine! You don't look disabled!

LADY MJ: No, I'd rather not label myself. I mean, the only label I want is a record label!

BOTH: [laugh]

CHERYL: Well said! I love it! I love it [laughs]! That is an excellent label to aspire to have, yeah. And that label means something. These labels of brain-injured or head-injured or mentally ill, I don't even know what those labels mean, and they don't always help. And when people think of disability, they think of a wheelchair or a cane or a guide dog. And they forget about all of us who may need to use that accessible toilet for very real reasons.

LADY MJ: Yeah.

CHERYL: And they judge us for wanting to go in there. So that is an interesting one. So I have another-- are you still up for more chatting.

LADY MJ: I could probably do a little bit more, yeah. Just a little bit.

CHERYL: OK. Just a little bit? OK. I'm looking over my notes. So this is my problem, is we're talking and talking, and now I look back to my notes to see if I even asked all of my questions. Well, here's one question.

Disability experience before your own head injury

CHERYL: Did you know about disability before you had a head injury?

LADY MJ: I did, yes. My little brother's got cerebral palsy. So I've been brought up from 7, 8, being aware of disabilities and the impact it can have on somebody who has to take care of somebody's life, and somebody who you love suffering that experience. It is a big shock, but you either deal with it, or you dwell on it. So my little brother, Luke, he's a trooper. He's definitely a little warrior [chuckles].

CHERYL: Yes [laughs]! And that probably helped a lot too. I know a lot of people who have a head injury as an adult, they never knew about disability before because people with disabilities are kept away. People are often locked up, or they're in a separate classroom, they're in a separate workspace. And so then when someone has a head injury or a brain injury, suddenly, they're experiencing disability, but they've never heard of it before, and they don't know what to do. So that probably helped that you grew up with a close family member who was experiencing disability his whole life.

LADY MJ: Yeah. Yeah, I suppose it was. But on the other hand, nothing can prepare you for the experiences your body's gonna feel because you've never experienced that pain. Your body doesn't know how to cope with this endurance initially. But just saying, "Oh, I've had X amount of seizures today," that's like a normal thing in my life. It's not fazed, where if Joe Blow's walking down the street, and they have a seizure the first time, it would be a very sort of scary experience, and they wouldn't know how to cope with it. And hopefully, they'd never experience one again, or initially. But yeah, because for ourselves with head injuries and brain injuries, you just get used to it, don't you, adapt. I'm actually reading quite an interesting book right now. It's called "The Brain That Changes Itself."

CHERYL: Oh!

LADY MJ: I just started it, and it does touch--what I've read about so far--it does make points about people having brain injuries and brain disease, the brain retraining itself. So it's a quite interesting read so far. But I'll keep you posted on that.

CHERYL: Yes, please do. And I wrote it down, and I wrote down the note that it's a book. So I will look it up and not think it's a song or something. I'll definitely look that up. And I have got to train myself to take better notes and to actually read the notes that I write down [chuckles]. But I know that I can. It's gonna take tremendous work and energy, but I know I can.

Wrap up

CHERYL: So you know, with that, we could say good evening, and I could pass you along to your Friday evening in the UK. And we can close out by playing "Dark Shades." Does that sound good to you?

LADY MJ: Yeah, it's been a lovely pleasure speaking to you. I hope you have a lovely, is it morning for you, isn't it?

CHERYL: It's the middle of the afternoon.

LADY MJ: OK.

CHERYL: So, getting ready for naptime.

LADY MJ: Yeah, siesta!

CHERYL: It is siesta time. It is.

LADY MJ: Have a wonderful afternoon.

CHERYL: I'm so grateful. Thank you so much for spending time with me today.

LADY MJ: You have a nice chill, and I hope you get your notes sorted out.

CHERYL: [giggles]

LADY MJ: Thank you so much for having me represent my hometown, Birmingham, representing the UK, all the way to Texas. Big up your homies in Texas.

CHERYL: [laughs] Awesome. Thank you so much.

LADY MJ: Thank you!

CHERYL: And I will let you go now, and we'll close out with this song. Thank you!

LADY MJ: Peace.

CHERYL: So here is "Dark Shades." And after "Dark Shades," there will be just a quick little closing.

[music]

CHERYL: So that was "Dark Shades" by Lady MJ Warrior, and I would encourage anybody who's interested in her to go. She has a YouTube page, just [LadyMJWarrior](#), the letters MJ. And she has a

[public Facebook page](#) where you can check out just things that she's up to, where she's got shows, and she shares a lot of art and things that inspire her and just make her feel good, things that she'd like to share with other folks to keep in mind. And lots of great pictures of her and folks dancing at her shows. So check that out on Facebook. Check her out on YouTube. And if you can find that radio interview that I heard with her--I don't know who did it or where it was--but if you can find another radio interview, have a listen cuz it's really good. And you really, she's very open, and you really feel like you get to know a lot about her very quickly. And I appreciate that. So just in closing, thank you so much, Lady MJ Warrior, for being on this show and talking about your head injury and talking about Krip Hop and talking about how folks can really get more awareness and understanding of head injuries so we can have less stigma, and we can collaborate more like y'all do in Krip Hop Nation.

And in closing, I wanna remind everybody about Kris Haas's art project. You can find her at www.USAProjects.org. Search for Kris Haas--that's Kr-i-s H-a-a-s--if you would like to make a tax-deductible donation to support her project called "1 YEAR, 10,000 PIECES, 1 ARTIST." That is a live-streaming video feed for an entire year, watching her as she creates 10,000 paintings. This is something she did before, after her traumatic brain injury, and she's doing it again, this time inviting you in. She is one of the featured artists in my documentary film. And so we will be filming this. It'll be a really cool sort of interactive thing with her project and my documentary. So USAProjects.org, Kris Haas is the artist. Please do have a look at her page and read more about her. She's also at KrisHaas.com. And if you go to my blog at www.WhoAmIToStopIt.com, you can see a lot more posts about Kris and find links to her work and see stuff from many, many other artists with brain injuries, head injuries, and disabilities who are sharing their work and their thoughts and their perceptions and their identities up on that blog. And if you are a person who wants to contribute to the blog, you can contact me. Contact information is there on the blog. And you can always reach me at info@storyminders.com. And with that, I thank you so much for listening. And we will be seeing you the first Friday of June. I'm looking up when that is. I don't know when that is, but it'll come around, and I will be here.

CHERYL: Join us the first and third 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.

[music]