

Stories from the brainreels podcast transcript

December 10, 2013

[music]

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.

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CHERYL: I'm very excited for this week's show. I'm joined by blind spoken word artist and musician Rick Hammond. Today, you'll hear some excerpts of a long, hilarious conversation I had with Rick recently. You'll get to hear two of his poems and listen in as Rick and I compete in our interpretation of the Disability Olympics, which he might win. But you'll have to listen to find out for sure. We also talk about disability identity and why it's not a tragedy to have a disability.

Real quick first, some community and art news. And I know I mentioned it on the last episode of this show when I spoke with Jackie Pilgrim, but I really want to encourage people to have a listen to Episode 96 of the Yvonne Pierre Show on BlogTalkRadio.com. Yvonne Pierre's guest is Krip-Hop Nation founder and Sins Invalid co-founder Leroy Moore. They talk about disability profiling, some history in this country around race and disability, what disability culture means, and some divides within communities of color between people with and without disabilities. And coming from a Black man with a disability and a Black woman whose son has a disability, you get some very honest discussion that you will not get in the mainstream media. Please have a listen to Episode 96.

In local art news, tonight, my new short documentary called "Paper Visions" is premiering. It's a glimpse into the artistic life of local paper artist with low vision Lavaun Heaster. She navigates entrepreneurship against the backdrop of a culture unfamiliar with supporting entrepreneurs with disabilities. Her art shares stories of those not typically represented in the arts, showing the richness of an inclusive community. It's screening in the Homegrown Doc Fest, which is a public screening of all of us students in the 10-week DIY Documentary filmmaking classes with Courtney Hermann. 7:00 pm at the Mission Theater, at 1624 NW Glisan Street. There are a few steps at the front door. You can call 503-223-4527 when you arrive or have someone alert staff at the bar. They'll set out ramps for a physically accessible entrance.

Also, I don't think I've talked about the Disability Art and Culture Project on this show. But I've blogged about them. I'm on their Board and have done a lot of things with them over the years from doing a dance performance in one of their festivals to volunteering on committees and at events to going to disability justice reading groups and art classes. What a fabulous arts organization, dedicated to professional level arts opportunities for people of all ages with any type of disability, and without disability. Every other year, they have a week-long Disability Pride Arts and Culture Festival that includes panel discussions, workshops, dance intensives, and blowout performances from the disability community, the queer community, communities of color, and more. It's incredible. And to kick it off, we're having our semi-annual Sex, Love, and Disability Fundraiser soon. This is our third year doing it.

And this year, you can become a sponsor of the event. Go to my blog at WhoAmIToStopIt.com or my Facebook pages (facebook.com/WhoAmIToStopIt or facebook.com/StoryMinders) for information on becoming a sponsor. Check out DACP at DACPHome.org and [Disability Art and Culture Project on Facebook](https://DisabilityArtandCultureProjectonFacebook). Disability Art and Culture Project embraces people from all walks of life. We're exploring the cross-section of sex, love, and life in all its forms.

So now, let's turn to some lively conversation with Portland spoken word artist Rick Hammond. Thank you to Kasa90 and Robinhood76 on freesound.org for the blues improvisations.

The Interview

[music]

CHERYL: You are a spoken word artist.

RICK: Alleged, but yes. That is true.

CHERYL: Can you tell me a little bit about how you got into that?

RICK: As a kid, I was always into like artistic things. I went to a really artistic school: MLC. I don't know how it is now. But back in the day, it was really, really artistic. I had no artistic skills whatsoever. And I always wanted to be an artist. And then eventually, of course I became obsessed with radio, to feed a stereotype. And then, as a lot of teenagers do--to fit another stereotype--I got into a relationship. [giggling] And things did not go so well. And I'm a fan of hip hop. So of course, I had to start writing angry poems.

CHERYL: Ah.

RICK: After school was done, I kept writing. And then, eventually I moved to Kona, Hawaii right after I turned 20. And it just so happened that my uncle's wife hosted a poetry reading. So like the first week I was there, it was like, oh, I'll bring some stuff that I wrote. And then I decided don't bring the angry ex-girlfriend stuff. Bring something personal. And so I did. The audience liked it, kept coming back. We did like a tour around the island. And it wasn't very successful. But it sounds good on paper. And then I just kept sticking with it.

CHERYL: You almost sort of fell into it.

RICK: Almost sorta fell into it.

CHERYL: Yeah, which I guess would be another stereotype.

Protesting at summer camp for blind students through poetry

RICK: So there's a piece called "Silently Listening." So I basically did some work as a summer counselor at this place that specialized in helping blind students, right?

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

RICK: I was the cooking counselor. And the other year, I was the travel counselor. I was much better at the travel counselor part. But that's a whole nother story.

CHERYL: Uh-huh [laughs]. I'm gonna have a cook-off with you. And we're both gonna lose.

RICK: We're both gonna lose.

CHERYL: Yeah. OK, go ahead.

RICK: But the thing that inspired it was I saw how the people who got ahead were the people who maybe wrote the nicer things on the reports, right, who said, "This kid is making so much progress" when you could really see the lack of progress.

CHERYL: Mm!

RICK: And I saw how there was this hierarchy of if you say the right things, you'll move forward in this particular sub-genre society. And I thought wow, we're a part of the disabled community. We should really be holding these kids accountable. And that's not saying that hey, you gotta learn how to climb Mt. Everest by the end of the summer.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

RICK: It's just saying that we've gotta set a good example. We've gotta do things in a certain way. And I thought that they weren't. That poem is sort of a response to the things I saw being a summer counselor.

[Recorded poem plays]

Reflecting is feeding regrets

Related to silently listening

As awful strategies and lazy hypocrites inspired applause

Right after ungrateful commentary

Described wonderful folks

Saying nothing or lying felt safe

In older times, slow snobs chastised my opposition

I adapted by promoting a dishonest act

However, I've often neglected the fraudulent approach

When talking with associates I thought had common sense

It's foolish, assuming I'm actually bonding

with magnificent con artists who play supportive to extract information

I'm positive they daydream of using confessions to torture me later

Although I usually ignore those worries

While privately congratulating myself for the selective greed with dissent

It does seem brilliant when reminiscing about getting extra headaches
for verbalizing an unpopular philosophy
Plus, the tragedies, my authentic perspective worked to prevent
still always happen
And major corporations, like governments, hold onto followers
by surprising insight
But in retrospect, I notice how the constant editing caused me
to exist situations which may have been pleasant
If cynicism hadn't discouraged genuine expression
I'll never influence anyone
Until I deny my destructive infatuation with giving up!
Most future reactions to opinions of mine won't fail
to revive aggravation
However, announcing those underrated theories might expose
some intellectuals to ideas they'll learn from
but wouldn't have considered
Companies thrive with propaganda, but it's misguided
to admire executives who devastate tribes while bragging
about their morality to poor consumers
I finally wannabe a truthful outcast instead of simply tolerated
for not denouncing fiction

[End of recorded poem]

RICK: If you have a choice between listening to me saying, "Hey, this kid needs these particular services" or listening to a guy who you know is gonna tell you what you want to hear, you're probably gonna say, "Well, Rick seems more rational. Let's at least listen to what Rick has to say." But other people do not have that response.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah.

RICK: So yeah. So that's a story behind that poem. Some people will be able to read through the lines. And if they agree with me, great. And if they don't, go listen to another podcast. [chuckles] Oh, oh! Don't listen to another podcast!

CHERYL: No, don't! I do wanna point out, I mean, you and I have agreed on many things,

RICK: Yes.

CHERYL: in the two times that we've spoken. I think that disagreement, when expressed respectfully, is totally fine.

RICK: Exactly.

CHERYL: So if people disagree with your perspective, they should still keep listening to this show.

RICK: Keep listening. Don't listen to this episode. But go back; listen to the archives, guys.

CHERYL: [laughs]

RICK: Or I can be the person you love to hate, and just keep playing this episode back and forth and back and back and back.

CHERYL: You know, if anybody writes in and requests, I will also post this episode in reverse.

RICK: In reverse, yeah.

CHERYL: Do you wanna tell a story about another piece?

"Psychological Traps" spoken word piece

RICK: So one of the other ones I sent you was called "Psychological Traps."

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

RICK: There was multiple inspirations. One, I had a deadline because I was performing at this gig. And they were paying me money!

CHERYL: All right.

RICK: And also a friend had recommended me. So I wanted to do a good job for my friend.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

RICK: And I didn't have anything that I felt was appropriate at the time, that you know, also represented how I was feeling at the time.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

RICK: And so I went over to see a couple friend of mine, right? And the couple was breaking up. [chuckles] And so it was an intense weekend.

CHERYL: Yeah.

RICK: I was talking to my friend's now-ex-wife. And she said, "You know, I saw this lecture from this lady who survived Darfur. She overcame all of these tragedies in her life. And it was just so, so incredible." And I told her, I'm like, "OK. I wonder if she woulda been so inspirational if you saw her earlier that morning. Would she have been somebody who had overcome the tragedies at that point? Or would she have been somebody who was getting ready for a speech," you know?

CHERYL: Uh-huh.

RICK: And I was trying to explain to her that you don't know; she might've had years of therapy before you saw her.

CHERYL: Oh! Mmhmm.

RICK: And she still might have moment after you saw her when she's like, "Fu--" Sorry.

CHERYL: [laughs]

RICK: "Shoot! I saw all these tragedies. And my life is just not as together as it could be." But you saw her at a particular moment. So I was basically trying to explain to her that we all wear masks in society. And just because somebody appears to have overcome something doesn't mean that they have.

CHERYL: Yeah.

RICK: The other side of that, just because somebody appears to you, maybe somebody with a disability, that they haven't come over something, because maybe I'm walking down the street, but my cane's broken--or you know, something to that effect--doesn't mean that they haven't overcome that too. So I was trying to show both sides of that. So that was sort of the inspiration behind that.

[Recorded poem plays]

Psychological traps remain dominant

Life is happier, even though pain hasn't collapsed

But acknowledging hurt somehow undermines your faith

in escaping from adversity

You've met members of each gender with calm, firsthand descriptions

of worse experiences

It's confusing listening to survivors verbalize such a healthy attitude

Emotions you hold only appear juvenile since they're mostly compared

to narrators who insist they feel amazing

With zero harsh wishes for harmful villains who forced starvation upon them,

broke up their families, or caused body parts on your heroes to fail

But homo sapiens rarely articulate the struggles forgiveness presents
Maybe additional time with citizens defined as righteous inside your diary
would lead to knowing that before revoking misery,
tragedies likely overwhelm them too
Early on, those mentors were probably subconsciously devoted
to offering enemies' credibility
Perhaps genuine friendships were shattered, changes to make currency got ruined,
or old habits drove away soul mates
So eventually, realizing regrets wouldn't shrink enhanced and interest in defeating history
You felt guilty for briefly thinking their recovery is imaginary
But doesn't society love mythology about living beyond drama?
Plus, suppressing stress seems easier
than risking facing their character flaws by examining actions that shape them
Please, don't rely on distractions like idolizing people with bad luck,
acknowledging sadness, instead of bashing yourself for recognizing disaster
might actually help you move past them.

[End of recorded poem]

[music]

Wearing a metaphorical mask in public

CHERYL: You talked about we all wear masks. And I can easily believe that everybody does.

RICK: Sure.

CHERYL: But I know that I certainly do since the brain injury. I do certain things in public to hide the brain injury because I know people are just not gonna like that.

RICK: Yeah.

CHERYL: So I don't know. I certainly put up the TBI mask of I'm fine, and nothing's really hard for me to do. I think there are some things I don't do well. And people might think oh, that's her brain injury. And it is. But there are other things I do do well--Notice that pause between do and do? So it wasn't doo-doo.

RICK: Yes.

CHERYL: There are things I do do well [chuckles]. But I'm working overtime. And so people can't see that internal effort and struggle. And usually, if I'm doing a lot of that, then I will break down later and have a problem. But what about you? I mean, do you wear a mask in public?

RICK: I think we all wear a mask in public, everybody. I mean not just people in the disabled community. But there's always the you wanna be the person who has it together.

CHERYL: Oh yeah [giggles].

RICK: You wanna be the person with the clever joke. And sometimes it can be kinda fun, right? Like sometimes you can wake up in the morning and be like do I wanna be like serious, tortured artist Rick today? And I'm gonna strum my guitar on the street corner and quote Lord Byron? Or do I wanna be like the hero figure who goes out and helps somebody? So it's not necessarily a bad thing.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

RICK: But we all, we all wear a mask in public. We live in a society that seems very afraid of non-fiction, to me.

CHERYL: Mmm! Well said. Well said. Well, then, from that point, let's only speak in fiction for the rest of this.

RICK: That's right. I love my entire family. I do not feel like [giggles]....

CHERYL: [laughs]

The Disability Olympics

[regal horns]

CHERYL: [cracking up] So I wanna know if you would like to go to the Disability Olympics with me.

RICK: Absolutely, yes.

CHERYL: OK. Would you like to describe for the listeners what disability olympics actually means?

RICK: I would defer to the host.

CHERYL: OK. The disability olympics is different from the paralympics. And it's also different from the Special Olympics. Because those things are both real competitions.

RICK: Yeah, you actually get exercise.

CHERYL: That's another distinct difference. The disability olympics refers to this strange competition that individuals and communities have where everybody tries to be the most oppressed or have it the worst. Well, so you're blind. Yeah, well, I have a seizure disorder, and it gives me visual hallucinations!

RICK: Well, that's like being on mushrooms!

CHERYL: [chuckles] Yeah, except I didn't choose it. And so it's much harder because you don't expect to see something there when you close your eyes. When I close my eyes, and there is something. So basically, in the disability olympics, you try to one-up somebody else by having it worse off.

Unfortunately, what it does is it reinforces sort of the dominant culture view that some people are better than others, some disabilities are cooler or more disgusting or more hateful. Autism is pretty cool right now. Down Syndrome often is really cool.

RICK: Making a comeback, Down Syndrome.

CHERYL: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Blind has always been cool. TBI, no. Not very cool. Not very cool. Very new. We don't really have our footing yet. And also, we're dizzy, and it's hard for us to get our footing.

RICK: If you were like a rapper, this would be the part in the movie where TBI is working on that demo tape. They haven't got their record deal yet.

CHERYL: That's right. OK. So then, the disability olympics, it's just a ludicrous thing the way we one-up each other and one-down each other. You know, instead of working together actively to find solutions to social difficulties and social problems, we just try to have it worse. So Rick and I today are gonna re-interpret the disability olympics by actually doing some events. And I don't know who's on the scheduling crew. But today's events are all blind versus TBI.

RICK: Yes.

CHERYL: So I guess we'll be in all of the events today. OK. So [laughing] I'm trying to remember what all the events were!

Tying your shoes

CHERYL: Oh! The first event, the first event in blind versus TBI is tying your shoes. So Rick, could you let the listeners know today, are you wearing Velcro shoes?

RICK: I am not wearing. I am wearing Nikes that I got when I was dumpster diving. But I actually took them off because I didn't wanna ruin your floor. So I'm gonna run and get my shoes.

CHERYL: Oh, OK. Wait. Lemme go get some shoes too. Pause. All right. So I'm already out of breath, just getting my shoes.

RICK: I think I'm gonna do well, guys.

CHERYL: OK. No, and I'm gonna do really well.

RICK: How about ladies first.

CHERYL: OK. So here's the timer. [timer beeps] TBI, putting on my shoes. I have hear four shoes. It's a shoe-tying competition, right?

RICK: Yes.

CHERYL: OK. So thinking I should pick the shoes that have the ties.

RICK: Uh probably, yes.

CHERYL: OK. Oh shoot. I just put on the clog [thump]. Wait a minute. OK. Take that off, OK [thumps]. So what I've got here are some Nike high-tops.

RICK: Nice!

CHERYL: Oh, did I tell you about what my cat was doing when we got home from Chicago?

RICK: No.

CHERYL: Oh wait, sorry, no wait. Lemme do this first. OK. I can't see where this lace is, the lace is wrapped around the heel. Wait a minute. It's like going in the same....OK, now this was tucked in there. I don't know who laced these shoes up cuz it's like the part that you tie is all going in the shoe.

RICK: Ew!

CHERYL: I know. It's. Oh, not it wasn't. I just needed to pull them. OK, here we go. One shoe on. I'm uh, I don't really think I can keep track. I'm gonna stop here. It was a minute, five [timer beeps], a minute, six. I got one shoe on. It's not tied yet [thumps]. What um. Yeah man, I'm really out of it. Why don't you go ahead and do your shoes?

RICK: OK.

CHERYL: OK, wait. Lemme set the timer. [timer clicks] Why is this shoe on the table? Oh.

RICK: That's your shoe [thuds].

CHERYL: [timer clicks] Ready? OK, Rick, blind versus TBI tying your shoes: go! [timer beeps]

RICK: OK guys, so basically I have some Nike high-tops here.

CHERYL: Me too!

RICK: Wow [chuckles]! They did not have laces when I got them. So I had to lace them myself as a blind person. And so, I'm throwing on--

CHERYL: Oh, no, no, no! You gotta comment on what just happened there [giggles].

RICK: OK, guys. So I almost put my [giggles], I almost put my left foot in my right show. So now I will put my shoe on the proper foot. And I--

CHERYL: Oh my gawd. He's tying.

RICK: Pull my laces together.

CHERYL: That's exactly how I learned to tie shows.

RICK: Really?

CHERYL: You're doing it exactly the same way I do it!

RICK: Nice.

CHERYL: Except that I didn't tie this. Oh my gawd!! I did tie them [laughs]!!

RICK: Oh no!

CHERYL: I don't remember tying these shoes. Oh man, you're so gonna win this round. [timer beeps] You have busted the myth that blind people can't tie their own shoes. I'm gonna have to call that you won. I thought I was gonna win that one. But I totally, you know, these aren't even my shoes. OK.

RICK: It was a bit of a disadvantage, guys.

CHERYL: A bit of a disadvantage.

RICK: A bit of a disadvantage, yeah.

CHERYL: I think also I should try to stay on topic.

Knocking over your glass of water

CHERYL: The next, what was the next event? Oh! Knocking over your glass of water!

RICK: Knocking over your glass of water, yes.

CHERYL: OK. So I'll set the timer here. Who can go the longest before they knock over their glass of water?

RICK: Oh, oh, OK.

CHERYL: Yeah. So and this is inspired by my friend Lavaun, who can knock over a glass of water faster than anyone.

RICK: Hmm.

CHERYL: Ever! Because she doesn't know it's there.

RICK: Oh!

CHERYL: Yeah. Unless she's looking right at it, it doesn't even exist. It's like the fabric of reality is like-- OK, so now I'm gonna set the timer. [hits timer, anxious tapping] I haven't knocked my glass over.

RICK: You haven't knocked your glass over yet.

CHERYL: No. Oh, my hands are in my lap.

RICK: That might be a--

CHERYL: You're blind. How come you haven't knocked over your water yet?

RICK: I don't know.

CHERYL: Do you know where it is?

RICK: I know it is right here.

CHERYL: OK, well.

RICK: Lemme put it down. Lemme close my eyes and move it around a little bit [glass scraping on table.]

CHERYL: See if you can lose it?

RICK: See if I can lose it.

CHERYL: You kept your hand on the glass the whole time! But you thought you could lose it [laughing] even while you were holding it! You should be on the TBI team.

RICK: Mm. You didn't knock that over yet.

CHERYL: No, I haven't knocked mine over.

RICK: OK.

CHERYL: Neither have you.

RICK: Neither have I.

CHERYL: I think what happens to Lavaun is she does a lot of gesturing with her hands, and then the [glass scraping on table] glass gets. [Sound of swallowing water, setting down glass.] OK, I think I'm gonna have to be disqualified, Rick, because I drank all my water. And technically, if I knocked my glass over, I wouldn't be knocking over a glass of water.

RICK: Mm.

CHERYL: Shoot! [hits timer]

RICK: Shoot. Damn it.

CHERYL: You won again.

RICK: Damn it, again.

CHERYL: So so far, it's two out of two: blind is better than TBI. OK. All right.

Giving directions from your house to the #44 bus stop

CHERYL: Next event: giving directions from your house to the #44 bus stop.

RICK: Ooh, OK. And then you're gonna do from your house. OK.

CHERYL: And then I'm gonna do from my house. I wanna know how is it [timer clicking] that you would give directions from your house. OK, so blind directions: go! [hits timer]

RICK: OK, so you wanna leave the front door, go down the flight of stairs, go outside the building, turn to your right, go to the end of the parking lot, make another right, keep going. Eventually, you'll run into an intersection. There will be a Burgerville to your left. And if you keep going to your right, there's gonna be a Safeway. You're gonna go a little bit diagonally to your right, go up to Lombard, make a left, cross the street, and you will be at the bus stop for the 44 bus.

CHERYL: [hits timer] The timer was going backwards. So I don't actually know how long that took you [laughing]. But that was really good! You ready for directions from my house?

RICK: Yes.

CHERYL: And then I guess we'll have to judge each other to see who wins.

RICK: Yes.

CHERYL: OK. So you go out, and you turn left, and you keep going. And then you're gonna see the house with the fluffy orange cat. But she doesn't really come off the porch to say hi, unless she's already out on the sidewalk. And then you can definitely pet her. But like, don't waste your time if she's on the porch. She's more like she'll like walk in circles around you. You could pet her. Oh, I didn't set the timer [hits timer]. OK. You can pet her. But it's more like you just hold your hand there, and she just sort of pets herself against your hand. So that's like that house. [timer beeps] Oh, wrong direction again. OK. So whatever. So maybe you pet her, maybe you don't. But you're trying to get to the bus. So maybe you. Anyway, so you're gonna cross the street right there. And that's Inspector Clouseau's house. You don't have to cross right there cuz that's like not in a crosswalk. So you can go to the crosswalk if that feels safer. But I just usually go right from Tiffany's house to Inspector Clouseau's house. But he's not usually out. So you just, I don't know, just keep walking.

RICK: Yes, yes.

CHERYL: And then you're gonna go past the Clown House.

RICK: Otherwise known as the Gacey Household, yes.

CHERYL: Oh, I don't know that. Wait, now I'm distracted. OK, wait wait. At the Clown House. And it's autumn. So the three of them are not gonna be out anyway. So that will make it go faster. Cuz when they're out, you just, then you're lying on the sidewalk petting the cats. So you're gonna cross there. Oh shoot! No, there's construction. They're doing construction right now. OK, so just go back.

RICK: OK.

CHERYL: OK. Um, yeah. Never mind, you can't get to Vancouver from there. So go back like you're, OK, so go back to like you're just leaving the house. And then go right and then cross that cross street. And then you can't miss it because it's just right there. Right there. You like just boom! You don't even have to go. And you go up until you get to Vancouver. And it's pretty easy to walk that route cuz there's not any kitties on that street to distract you. So you get to Vancouver, and you cross both ways. I mean like you cross the street and then you cross it the other way too. And the stop is just totally right there. And it's got the shelter and everything. So you see it right there. OK.

RICK: Nice.

CHERYL: [hits timer]

RICK: All right.

CHERYL: OK. Who gave better? Who won that round?

RICK: Mm. I mean--

CHERYL: Was that "mm" for me?

RICK: I like my explanation better. But I am partial towards me. Should we have the listeners vote on it.

CHERYL: [laughing] Yes. Yes, we are pre-recording this episode. So we're gonna wait for a while while the listeners dial in. No, I think um...uh...I guess, I guess one of those mighta worked a little bit better than the other one in terms of directions. I think you probably swept this one, Rick.

RICK: Nice, nice, nice!

CHERYL: I think blind is better than TBI.

RICK: For now. For now it is, yes.

How can Team TBI win against Team Blind next time?

CHERYL: For now! So what can I do to overtake the blind team next time?

RICK: Next time, you should have a book-reading contest. But what you need to do is you need to make sure that you have salt in front of you.

CHERYL: There's some salt right here! Here.

RICK: OK, good. So when the person goes to read their Braille, make sure that they're not looking or that they don't have any vision. And just pour some salt over the Braille. And then you know, it'll be like a portion. And then you'd two would describe what you both read.

CHERYL: [laughs] So you said, "Make sure they're not looking or they can't see" [laughs].

RICK: Or they can't see completely. Some blind people can see.

CHERYL: So what's a good test for that? Let's say secretly I wanna know if you can't see at all. What would be the most socially appropriate way for me to check?

RICK: Pretend like you're about to punch somebody and go really, really, really, really fast.

CHERYL: [gasps]

RICK: And if the person flinches, then they might have some vision.

CHERYL: What about someone like me who's got issues with depth perception based on my TBI? And let's say I were to actually punch said person. Then they would flinch. And would I suspect that was vision or being punched?

RICK: Hmm. That's a good question. At that point, I would run like hell.

CHERYL: [laughs] Thank goodness I tied my shoelaces so I won't trip on them! Thank you for participating.

RICK: No worries.

CHERYL: I'm holding up a really amazingly incredible trophy right in front of you. You can't see, right?

RICK: Oh no, no.

CHERYL: OK, excellent, excellent.

RICK: Oh, I'm a blind guy.

CHERYL: OK.

[music]

What words do you use to identify yourself?

CHERYL: I have a two-part question.

RICK: Go ahead.

CHERYL: What are your preferred terms, like "I am disabled" or "I'm a person with a disability."

RICK: Just say "I'm blind." That's fine because I can't drive. And so I like that. As far as "I'm a disabled person" versus "I'm a person with a disability," I'll accept both. I ain't mad at you, people, if you say the opposite. But personally, I prefer the term, "I am a person with a disability" because I feel when you say you are a disabled person, you're sort of giving credence to the idea that the disability is greater than the person. And yes, I have a disability, but I would like to think that I'm more than just my disability.

CHERYL: Mmhmm. And when you do your spoken word poetry, you're not up there doing numbers about blindness.

RICK: Sure. It could come up. But it's also the artist in me. I know that that's the predictable thing: if you see a guy walking onstage with a white cane, you think he's gonna talk about what it's like to be blind. And you don't wanna be too predictable. But also, it's because if I'm cooking dinner for myself, I'm not thinking oh, I'm overcoming my blindness because I'm making a meal.

CHERYL: [chuckles]

RICK: I'm thinking not I'm overcoming the fact that I'm a blind guy. I'm trying to overcome the fact that I'm a hungry guy.

CHERYL: It can be really easy in society to forget that we're more than whatever label or whatever impairment. There's so much more going on to our lives and our personalities. What do you think about "differently-abled, alternatively-abled"?

RICK: Those, I mean...whatever gets you through the day. If other people like them, that's fine. But I mean, it seems like something that they came up with on NPR, which I love NPR. But it seems like an NPR type of quote. Yeah.

CHERYL: Uh-huh, uh-huh. It's sort of like it's trying to soften the blow.

RICK: Exactly.

CHERYL: But at the same time, I mean, would you say that your life is mm, tragic because your blind?

RICK: No.

CHERYL: Exactly. So why is there a blow that needs to be softened?

RICK: Exactly.

CHERYL: It's not a tragedy.

RICK: It's not a tragedy.

CHERYL: It's part of your life.

RICK: Not only are we fortunate to be born in America and all that stuff--not to sound Republican--but it's like we're also fortunate in the time we're born. We have so many advantages now. 1000 years ago, you couldn't read books because there wasn't the printing press. You certainly didn't have access to the medical care we have today, even 100 years ago.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

RICK: There was a time in this country where it was legal to own people. There was a time when it was legal to burn somebody at the stake for being a witch.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

RICK: So I feel understanding that type of a history of oppression a little bit, to be upset because I'm blind? OK, that's nice if I wanna have a pity party for myself on a Sunday night when I've listened to all the podcasts I can listen to. But as a day to day thing, it's not gonna help my life; it's gonna make it worse.

CHERYL: I don't like "alternatively-abled" and "differently-abled" because those are only used when someone is identifying someone they believe has a disability.

RICK: Yeah.

CHERYL: So when you say, "I don't have a disability! I'm differently-abled!" I think, well, but you wouldn't say that if you didn't have a disability.

RICK: Exactly.

CHERYL: People without disabilities don't talk about themselves as being different.

RICK: Different, yeah.

CHERYL: They're sort of the norm; they're the standard. So when you say "different," but I understand that disabled and disability are words with very a negative connotation.

RICK: Yep.

CHERYL: Then we have social structures in place that keep them sounding really negative. I like the term "crip."

RICK: Mm.

CHERYL: Cuz it's reclaiming the word and saying you know, you're not gonna insult me. A lotta people with brain injury don't like the word "crip" cuz they think it belongs only to people with messed up legs and stuff.

RICK: But isn't that kind of a good thing that you like something that not everybody in the brain injury community likes? Because it shows that there is diversity. People like to have their certain way. And regardless of if it's the most effective way, it's just the way that they know, yeah.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. So is that what you do when you're in power?

Goodwill and the politics of paying disabled people for work

RICK: You'll get this \$14 but you're gonna have to labor for about, most people do seven years, but I'm nice: I'll do 5. Five years, \$14.

CHERYL: OK, lemme do the math. So \$14 over the course of 5 years, right?

RICK: Yes.

CHERYL: So you're talking about a regular staff person at Goodwill.

RICK: Exactly, exactly. Yeah. You have to keep them in line and use words like "goodwill" to make people think that they're helping a good corporation if they buy from you, yeah.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. It's very goodwill. And I mean, I know you love this. The folks in your population, the blind community, you guys get, I think, the lowest pat at Goodwill.

RICK: I've heard rumors as low as 3 cents, which made me really happy to know that I could suffer so much for 3 cents. But then somebody told me it was only 22 cents.

CHERYL: Yeah, see 22's the lowest I've ever heard.

RICK: OK. I might've gotten erroneous information then.

CHERYL: Yeah.

RICK: We're on our way up in the world.

CHERYL: Yeah, absolutely.

RICK: And you know, in 100 years, we might actually be up to a dollar.

CHERYL: Well, but don't you think that 22 cents an hour is OK? Because otherwise, you would just be volunteering.

RICK: [chuckles] Yes, it's pretty much just volunteering at that point. One of the things that drives me crazy is this idea that if you're on SSI--I'm on SSI--but if you're on SSI, sort of the idea is you're living off the dole, man. You need to contribute back, which I get and at a certain level really do appreciate, which is why I try to do volunteer work and whatnot. But the flip side to that is if you want to make minimum wage, it's like wow, you really think you deserve minimum wage. You know?

CHERYL: Uh-huh.

RICK: They can't be both true! I don't wanna live on the sidewalk. I want a roof over my head.

CHERYL: Yeah.

RICK: Yeah.

CHERYL: And you deserve a roof over your head simply by, I don't know, being a person?

RICK: Human, yes.

CHERYL: A human? Yeah. But there is this weird catch where you're considered to be just a lazy moocher if you don't get a job.

RICK: Right, right.

CHERYL: But Goodwill's not a good alternative.

RICK: Right, exactly.

CHERYL: Right? Because you're gonna get that 22 cents. Pardon me anyone who loves Goodwill who's listening: I do admit that wages are somewhat regional. And there may be stores where everyone is making more than 22 cents.

RICK: And guys, we should say that Cheryl is playing a character here because I'm here.

CHERYL: [laughing] No, I'm not!

RICK: Cheryl who's not on the podcast loves Goodwill and shops there all the time.

CHERYL: No, I don't [laughs]!

RICK: Just kidding. Just kidding, guys.

CHERYL: In fact, I did used to love Goodwill. And I did shop there all the time, and I donated there all the time since childhood. Once I finally was exposed to the truth of the way these wages are tiered and that non-disabled workers can make minimum wage or higher, and disabled workers essentially can't, at least for the most part, I did stop shopping there.

RICK: Yep.

CHERYL: Well, I have no goodwill. I'm basically a miser and a misanthrope.

RICK: You have alternatives like you could shop locally. There's this great thing called Google. And so you could go on there, and you could research thrift shops in your area and support a local company.

CHERYL: A lotta places have tons of local thrift stores, and they're small. I believe our regional Goodwill manager gets \$500,000 a year or \$400,000. It's in the hundreds of thousands. And I'm trying to think how many hours that person works at 22 cents an hour to earn that wage.

RICK: Several, several lifetimes.

CHERYL: Several.

RICK: It's like the Michael Keaton movie "Multiplicity." There's like four of her. And they're constantly working. It was one of those movies that didn't do really well when it came out. It's basically this guy who is a workaholic, but he loves his family. And so he goes to this guy, and they clone him. And it's a comedy. And I thought it was pretty enjoyable. But I was a kid when I saw it, so.

Disability identity and speaking up

CHERYL: Oh, OK. So if you had the opportunity to be cloned, would you take it?

RICK: Yes, I would. So that way, there would be more blind people than sighted people.

CHERYL: [laughs] See! You're just trying to take over. You're collecting that massive SSI check so that you can clone yourself.

RICK: I'd have them do the work. And I'd collect their SSI checks and mine. We are joking. But it is one of those things to where there are so many things that the man does to keep the disabled population down, like paying us less than minimum wage. But are you familiar with Carl Sagan?

CHERYL: I know the name.

RICK: He did some TV work. But I love his books. He wrote a lot of great essays. But I was watching and interview he did a couple nights ago, and it was with Ted Turner, of all people. It was on YouTube. I'm not the hugest Ted Turner fan. But he asked Carl Sagan, what are some of the things that people can do to change their situation. The one thing I liked about Carl Sagan is he always gave proactive answers like you can go on protests, you can talk to your neighbor more. You know, there's so many different things you can do to change the world and put it in a better direction.

CHERYL: Yeah, that's a good point. Now, just because I'm ornery--

RICK: Sure, sure go ahead.

CHERYL: I'll throw this one out there. I wonder about how effective that actually is when you're coming from a marginalized perspective. So for instance, I recently wrote a blog post, and someone didn't like it.

RICK: What was it on?

CHERYL: I was critiquing the trailer for a movie. The movie's called "CinemAbility."

RICK: Not heard of it.

CHERYL: OK, yeah. That's all right.

RICK: I'm joking, of course!

CHERYL: Oh, you have heard of "CinemAbility."

RICK: Of course.

CHERYL: OK. So I've not seen the movie. I never claimed that I'd seen the movie. I wrote a critique of the trailer. And I said, here are the parts of the trailer that upset me. And a reader wrote in a comment that was essentially, "Wow. You missed the boat. And it's people like you that are gonna hold the revolution back."

RICK: Oh, wow.

CHERYL: Which is interesting cuz my whole point was I believe too many non-disabled people were talking for our community in this trailer.

RICK: Yep, yep.

CHERYL: That was my main concern.

RICK: Sure.

CHERYL: So I thought, how am I holding back the revolution? I'm saying we need more disabled people on the screen.

RICK: Yeah.

CHERYL: This person didn't identify what their relationship to disability was. One thing that this person said was you know essentially, you shouldn't complain about this because this movie is sort of positive toward disability. And the alternative would be a bunch of angry cripples complaining.

RICK: Wow, that's extreme.

CHERYL: It is. I thought, hold, go get your horse and hold it, please. Number one, there are not only two options: non-disabled people speaking for us versus angry crippled people. Number two, why is it that when someone from a marginalized community wants to speak up, they are so often called "angry"?

RICK: Yup.

CHERYL: Even if there's no anger in their tone of voice, even if it's just "excuse me, I'm gonna request this accommodation." Oh, you angry, angry!

RICK: Yeah.

CHERYL: Why?

RICK: Why? I mean, it goes back to the idea of we're taught from such an early age to believe fiction that when you see somebody presents you with reality, and it's sort of in your face, right, that it's so much of a shock that they consider that person the trouble-maker.

CHERYL: You said that so well without ever using the word "privilege." Cuz it's so hard to get away from that word: Oh, your privilege is showing! But when we're confronted with our privilege, we, as they say in the business, "turn a blind eye."

RICK: Yes, yes.

CHERYL: What do you think of phrases like that?

RICK: I don't like it. And one thing too is, I'd say nine times out of ten when I'm at a poetry reading, somebody will use a term like "I was blind in this case" or "that blind person," and it's like I know it's not being done intentionally. But it is a way to sort of discount somebody who has an experience, who is

blind. One, I wouldn't say this to you because I don't feel this way. So I'm speaking in parody now. I wouldn't say, "Oh, I was such a girl this morning."

CHERYL: [laughs]

RICK: "When I was getting ready, I was afraid or what not," because one, it's not the way I feel. But two, it sort of devalues the person. You wanna not devalue people. You wanna be as nice to people as possible. And it is one of those things where I've thought to myself sometimes, do I wanna talk to this person about it. But they're an artist. And I wouldn't want somebody telling me how to do my art. Terms like that, they upset me more and more as I get older.

CHERYL: Yeah, they upset me more and more. The more I learn about disability, and the more friends I have with different impairments and different disabilities, the more upset I get.

RICK: Yeah.

CHERYL: I didn't used to be irritated by terms like, "turn a blind eye; oh, blinded by the truth" and all. Well, I didn't have any blind friends. And I just wasn't conscious of that. There was a time that I didn't know how hurtful those things were. And bit by bit, I learned them. And the more of them I learn, the more irritated I am to still hear them.

RICK: Yep.

CHERYL: If you were to go to a poet and say, "Great poem, beautiful concepts, a little bit offensive when you just flippantly use the word 'blind,'" is that telling that artist how to do their art? If somebody came up to you and said, "Great poem, but too racist for my taste," would you?

RICK: I hear what you're saying.

CHERYL: Go ahead and disagree. I love it.

RICK: So here's the thing. So sometimes I get from people--and I get this less and less as I get older--is that when I was younger, I used to write poems that were very, very angry, right? And I had a friend tell me once, he was like, "You know, I love your poetry. But it kinda makes me sad when you write these things about what you used to go through." I understood this person's point. And I was like, I still love this person. But that kinda makes me write a poem that's even angrier, you know what I mean? It is one of those things of where I always feel that an artist's place is to challenge people to think. And I feel like if I did that to a person, I wouldn't want them to always have in the back of my head if they did something else, well, is Rick gonna come up to me? I don't use the term "blind," but I talk about so and so. And I know Rick likes this thing, you know what I mean?

CHERYL: OK, OK.

RICK: I always feel really, really on the edge about talking about approaching artists on how to do their work.

[music]

Non-disabled people playing disabled characters in the media

CHERYL: So what's your take on crip drag? I'm referring to non-disabled people portraying disabled people in the media? For instance, I was watching the Michael J. Fox show the other day. The disability humor in there is pretty awesome.

RICK: OK.

CHERYL: Michael J. Fox plays himself, a guy with Parkinson's. And so there's a lotta Parkinson's jokes that are really hilarious. Well, they had a blind guy on, played by Jason Jones. Who's not blind! Why? Why? Why did you not just hire? And then it turns out--here's the big controversy.

RICK: Go ahead.

CHERYL: He's only "legally blind."

RICK: Oh gawd.

CHERYL: He can see shapes. He's not actually blind. So that just makes him into a villain cuz he's trying to pass himself off as blind.

RICK: Could I play the devil's advocate for a moment?

CHERYL: [sadly] Yes.

RICK: And I do have feelings about this. But just so both sides are represented: this is a gray area for me. So I am very conflicted about this.

CHERYL: Well, I wanna hear what your clones have to say after you, OK.

RICK: OK. But if somebody might make the argument that maybe there were no blind actors that went to audition. Maybe the blind actors who came to audition just weren't good actors?

CHERYL: Hmm.

RICK: You know what I mean?

CHERYL: OK, maybe.

RICK: Maybe. That might not be the case. To quote the great Tavis Smiley: "Having said that, let me now say this."

CHERYL: [chuckles]

RICK: Is that I would appreciate if people in the media in these positions of power would try to seek out blind actors because there are great disabled actors out there that don't necessarily get the shine that their able-bodied counter--And I don't like the word "able-bodied," but for lack of a better term--their able-bodied counterparts get because it's harder to get noticed. Because if you go to get a part, if you were play director, and I come to you. And you say, "Well Rick, we'd really like to hire you. But there's a lotta walking around onstage." My point is you get a lotta discouragement if you're a disabled actor.

CHERYL: Yep, yep.

RICK: And it's harder for you to be noticed. So I think it would've been a better choice for the producers to try to seek out disabled actors. In this day of internet, it's not too hard to do. There are forums online for disabled actors. Giving the abbreviated answer, I would have preferred the producers of television series and movies and all this stuff, if they would make more of an attempt to seek out the disabled community if they're hiring for a disabled part.

CHERYL: Yeah, yeah. I can't remember who Jason Jones played, but the blind guy cut in line in front of Michael J. Fox. And so the humor is, "Oh, oh! He didn't see the short guy there! Wah wah!"

RICK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CHERYL: All right. Whatever. But Michael J. Fox calls out, "Hey! Excuse me." And Jason Jones turns his entire body, not his head. So I'm like, you know, his character maybe can't see. But his neck isn't broken. Like, why is it? You know, he adopted this ludicrous posture where he never turned his head; he always turned his whole body. And I'm like, but I've seen blind people. And they can move their necks. Actors pick the weirdest physical or vocal quirks to try to represent an entire disability. Like you were saying earlier, they miss the experience around disability.

RICK: Yeah. And well, think about this: you know that Jason Jones isn't blind because you did your research. But imagine you're a mom. You have a blind kid. Horrible tragedy.

CHERYL: I know! Ugh!

RICK: But imagine that for a second. And because you're a mom, you're busy running around all the time, and you have a blind kid who's maybe a small kid, maybe like six or seven, right? And so you think oh wow, there's a representation of a blind adult in the media. I can show my kid this. Not even knowing if this person is really blind or not, and you know that Michael J. Fox really has Parkinson's. So maybe this guy really is blind. And so you teach your kid to sort of look up to somebody who's doing things incorrectly, which very well could be going on in this particular situation with other people.

CHERYL: Yeah.

RICK: And so that's why I'm always wary about how disabled people are portrayed in the media. It's not us we have to be concerned about; it's the kids who are coming up now and seeing this. And it's the people who interact with those kids: if you're a teacher of a blind student, or if you're a teacher of somebody with Parkinson's. We're assuming Michael J. Fox is comfortable with his Parkinson's, and we're assuming that it's portrayed correctly on TV. But neither of us have Parkinson's.

CHERYL: Right.

RICK: So it could be the worst portrayal of Parkinson's ever. He could be seeming to be dealing with it well because he's Michael J. Fox, and he's made tens of millions of dollars.

CHERYL: Right. Oh yeah, well, that access to resources plays a big role. But what if this mom--OK, this time you be the mom. I was the mom last time. And you have the blind kid, and you're watching this show. And you see Jason Jones not turn his neck, and you think, "Oh my gawd. When my kid grows up, he's not gonna be able to turn his neck."

RICK: Mm.

CHERYL: Turn your neck for me. Do you mind? Oh my gawd. It doesn't turn.

RICK: Does it?

CHERYL: It doesn't turn, no. You can't see that, but I could see that your neck wasn't turning.

RICK: Really [laughs]?!

CHERYL: [laughs]

RICK: Does it really not turn?

CHERYL: No, it's turning [laughs].

RICK: Oh. I felt like it was turning [laughs]!

CHERYL: And the reason you can't see it is because it's your neck.

RICK: Sure, sure.

CHERYL: People really can't see their own necks. I can't see my neck, and I'm looking. But the harder I look for it, the less neck there is [chuckles].

RICK: I see [laughs]. Can I get back to all the serious points, something you were saying. In the blind community, there are these things called kernel books. Basically, what it is, it's blind people telling stories of their lives, right?

CHERYL: Oh, yeah.

RICK: I went to a training center back when I was six. Long story. But I was reading a story from one of these kernel books, and it was about a lady. And one of the things she was saying is she was a baby when it was discovered that she was blind. This goes back to sort of the blind mother thing. I don't know: maybe she was three months or six months, but somewhere around that age. They discovered she was blind. The mom already had other kids. So it wasn't like this was her only child; not that that makes this any more right. She said that her mom told her that she almost gave her up for adoption when she found out that she was blind. And the only reason she didn't give her up for adoption was because she knew one blind person who was like a normal person in society.

CHERYL: Mm!

RICK: Now, imagine this: imagine that instead of knowing a normal blind person--quote-unquote normal--she knew somebody who had no control over their lives, who was basically a shut-in or who always said inappropriate things, like I do.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

RICK: And then she would've given her daughter up for adoption, her own daughter, based on her daughter not being able to see right.

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

RICK: I guess the way it comes around is that the betrayal of not just blind people--and I know I'm being very blind specific--but the betrayal of all disabled people in the media could have a similar impact. And it's really, really shocking to think that OK, this story is about 50 years old. But in the course of human history, 50 years ain't nothing.

CHERYL: It's nothing. And this weekend I was at a conference. Right after my session was a session "Media Portrayals of Communication Disorders: From Mockery to Advocacy." Beautiful title, and a very engaging, engaging presentation. It was co-presented by a speech therapist and a film studies professor. At the very beginning of the presentation, one of them said, "You have to keep in mind that film and television portrayals might be someone's first exposure to someone who's different from them. And so it's critical that we make some really big strides in accurate portrayals, accurate representations." And yeah, it's what you said. This mom knew one blind person whose life was sort of integrated in the fabric of society. And that's what allowed her daughter to remain in the family. That was the impetus for keeping her daughter.

RICK: Keeping her own daughter in the family.

CHERYL: Her own daughter, yeah. We still have Special Ed classrooms that are in the basement or in a separate wing. Or I was just telling a friend earlier today, I don't remember what part of the school the Special Ed classrooms were when I was in any of my public schools.

RICK: Mm.

CHERYL: We didn't intermingle, and so I'm not getting exposed to people. I'm not seeing anything of them or what they can accomplish or anything.

RICK: Or can't accomplish.

CHERYL: Or can't.

Disability stereotypes and cultural norms

RICK: The other side is you don't wanna be portrayed as somebody who has super human hearing or something too because then you're gonna be a disappointment.

CHERYL: Well, but don't you have super human hearing, as a blind person?

RICK: I do. But the FBI doesn't really want me to talk about that too much.

CHERYL: OK, well then, talk about your extra sense of smell. You have an extra sense of smell, right?

RICK: No, no. You know. You know how we do it in the blind community?

CHERYL: No, I don't! I'm just finding it out now.

RICK: Yeah.

CHERYL: This is good cuz before, I didn't know how I would ever be able to live if I were blind.

RICK: Right.

CHERYL: But now I know how. I would just listen really hard [giggles].

RICK: Yeah, you listen. You spend all your day listening to audio books and talking about how great it is that you're blind and reading Braille when you're not listening to audio books.

CHERYL: I listen to a lot of audio books.

RICK: I actually do listen to a lot of audio books too.

CHERYL: [laughs] It's totally cool to go up to someone and ask them if they have a brain injury. Oh, yeah! Do you? And you share your story of how you got your brain injury. It's totally fine to do that in the brain injury community: first time you meet someone, ask them how they got injured, when it was, were you in a coma. And so sometimes in my community will ask someone, "Do you have a brain injury?" and they have a different kind of disability, and they're very offended by the question cuz it feels too invasive.

RICK: Yeah.

CHERYL: But it's the cultural norm in the brain injury community to do that, to find this out.

RICK: Wow, wow.

CHERYL: And so one of us might go up to someone who uses a wheelchair and be like, "What happened to you?" and it's not meant to be rude or gawking.

RICK: Yeah, it's kinda like you wanna connect with a person.

CHERYL: It's a form of connecting, absolutely. Other groups of people do find that invasive and intrusive and none of your business. But when your disability and your impairments are diagnosed as part of a traumatic event, and you receive your disability status in the hospital, it's a very different experience from say if you had a disability your whole life.

RICK: Sure, sure.

CHERYL: Or something that sort of came on, and over the years you were incorporating it into yourself. So many of us get thrust into this totally new universe, and it's a weird one. And so we're constantly asking other people, "Are you in a weird place?" And I recognize how deeply offensive that is in other groups. Well, and the other thing is, it's not just people with brain injuries who do it. Almost everyone I meet for the first time, non-disabled people, when they find out I have a brain injury, "Oh, how did it happen?" Strangers. First time we've ever met. Totally irrelevant. It's not gonna make any difference what type of brain injury I had and when I got it. And yet, people feel completely entitled to this information, and they just ask it. But I don't ever say, "What's the worst thing that ever happened to you?"

RICK: "Have you been divorced?"

CHERYL: "Have you been divorced?"

RICK: "Why did your partner cheat on you? You seem like a nice person, but what did you do wrong to make them cheat?"

CHERYL: Exactly. I don't ask people their private, personal, vulnerable information the first time I meet them. And yet people feel totally entitled and totally in the right to ask. People will be like, "Was it

traumatic?" And I'll be like, "This conversation is." But so I'm trying to encourage the community to quit expecting that that's OK. If you ask me, and it is OK with me to tell them, great.

RICK: Sure. You love yourself, right? I mean not like an egotistical. But you love yourself.

CHERYL: Sure.

RICK: And it's like, you wouldn't be you without--You'd be Cheryl Green, but you'd be a different Cheryl Green had you not gone through the experiences, good and bad, that you've had to go through. And it's like if I didn't have my disability, I'd be some version of Rick. But I'd be like the evil Captain Kirk on Star Trek.

CHERYL: Ooh!

RICK: I'd be like a version of Rick, but I wouldn't be the same me that I am.

CHERYL: Yeah.

RICK: Because we're a product of our experiences.

CHERYL: And that includes your gender and your age and your economics and your disability and your ethnicity. I mean, it's all just wrapped up in there.

Wrap-up

[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.

[music]