

Stories from the brainreels transcript

November 15, 2014

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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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Introduction

CHERYL: This week, folks, it's just me bringing you some updates about this podcast, the blog, and my film work.

If you're new to this podcast, you might be wondering why the episodes show up out of order. That's because this show was originally streaming on blogtalkradio.com when I started. But I wasn't ever happy with the audio quality. Also, I listen to podcasts pretty much daily, and my own streaming radio show wasn't available in iTunes or on Stitcher. So I turned it into a podcast, improved the audio quality where I can, and now Stories from the brainreels is officially a podcast. I've been working for a few months to balance doing new podcasts and uploading old ones. That's why they're out of order. I should be all caught up for the new year. You can subscribe for free [in iTunes](#) or [on Stitcher Radio](#) and get all the episodes as soon as they're released. You can also check out the blog at whoamitostopit.com. Every episode gets its own blog post. You can listen to the podcast right there through the blog. And the posts are there to give you more background about the guests and topics in the show.

Expanding the scope of the podcast

Speaking of guests and topics: I'm expanding a lot more in 2015. Originally, this show was interviews with artists with brain injury. As I got more involved in cross-disability arts and social justice here in Portland, I started to expand to get more perspectives. I really like discussing the politics of disability and identity. For that, it's best to talk to people with a wide range of experiences. I've had some interviews with two brain injury lawyers because dealing with injury, disability benefits, and legal issues is often just a matter of course when you have an acquired disability. But for the most part, it's been artists and activists who come on the show such as Caitlin Wood, Jade Bryan, Toni Hickman, and Craig Sicilia. In 2015, you can look forward to such groups as [OPAL Environmental Justice](#), [Stand Up For Mental Health](#) (yes, that's stand-up comedy!), and [IRCO, the Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization](#). All of the interviews will have a big piece about disability culture. So get ready!

Why make media accessible?

In other news, I want to make sure that folks who listen to my podcast, read my blog, and watch my films know that I do a lot of work toward media access. For instance, all the podcast episodes will have a written transcript up on WhoAmIToStopIt.com. I'm still playing catch-up there, but they're on their way. Also, every film with my name on it has either Closed Captions that you can turn on and off or subtitles that look like Closed Captions. Even 10 second movies I make for fun and post on Facebook have Captions.

Why? Because without Captions or subtitles, the media world excludes people who need them for access. Folks who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, learning English, have difficulty paying attention or following spoken language: these are folks who we exclude. I'm still also playing catch up in terms of including folks who are blind, visually impaired, or non-visual learners in my film work. One thing I've done is that my short documentaries include tons of close ups when people are being interviewed. Filmmakers like to throw in close ups when someone is saying something really emotional or moving. But in my case, I've found that I can include a few more people who need the subject matter to fill the screen to really be able to see and interpret it.

If you're a media maker, and you want to make your work more accessible, you can contact me. I've got all the software to make real Closed Captions for streaming video. I can also make subtitles that look like Closed Captions. I can work with you on pacing your work to include Audio Description. And all this stuff I do for a very reasonable price! Contact me if you want to learn more about accessible media or want to move forward with adding access to your media work. I'm at info@storyminders.com.

Now, I have a new film coming out in January. It doesn't have a title just yet. It's a short film I made for the Portland Commission on Disability about youth and young adults in Portland who are active in social justice and civic engagement. That film has subtitles and Audio Description. Audio Description means that when something changes on the screen, my voice comes on to describe the visual image for folks who don't see it, and then we go back to the action.

I asked someone who doesn't need Audio Description what they thought of this new film as a whole. They said it felt choppy. The narration stops the action. It might be better to have one version with Audio Description and one version in the more familiar documentary style where lots of different images and action come on the screen while someone's talking. Of course, they knew it was silly for me to make two films for the price of one. But really, the reason I didn't want to make a second version is that I'd actually like people to understand that there is a disability aesthetic. I say there's nothing wrong with stopping the action for a narration if that narration is there specifically for inclusion and access. Yes, it might feel choppy, and choppy might be the opposite of artistic. But does choppy have to be seen as less artistic? What if we

redefine what's artistic and aesthetically pleasing? What if folks who don't need access changes and accommodations can become more familiar with access and learn to enjoy films that have extra information?

It's funny because even people who can filter out noise and conversation so they can read on the bus or MAX will find Audio Description distracting. Many people have told me that my Closed Captions and subtitles are annoying. I truly think this isn't an issue of distraction and annoyance in all cases. I do believe that disability inclusion and equity are so far from non-disability cultural norms that people don't even know what to do when they encounter new access pieces. Sure, lots of people will walk up a ramp instead of stairs, and that's not strange. But we've been putting access into the built environment longer than we've been putting it in the media. And I do whole-heartedly believe that most media makers ignore the disability communities when they make their media. They don't even consider disability communities as potential audiences they should cater their material to. This is why you get terrible, cardboard cut-out, flat, boring, obnoxious, and offensive disabled characters in the media. Oh yes, and they're played by non-disabled people. This is why you almost never see a disabled actor or character onscreen who's just a person doing a thing. It nearly always has to be that disability is the main storyline for that person. Which totally blows my mind, because our dominant culture loves to uplift people who "aren't defined by their disability." But then, we get media characters who are. What is that? I mean really. Someone email me at info@storyminders.com and tell me why it is that our culture wants people to overcome and move on from disability in real life. But then the media shows people who don't do that. And we love that and don't question it. I know tons of disabled people who would be beyond thrilled to have some disabled actors onscreen who don't have to go on about disability at every turn. They could just be people who do things, say things, get involved with other people and with stuff. You know, like the non-disabled characters. They're characters where no one grimaces and says, "What happened to you?" the first time they meet. No one does that to non-disabled characters when they first meet. Why do they do it to us onscreen and in real life? Especially when society basically demands we move on and overcome our disability? Eek! That's all I can say at this point is, "Eek!"

So yes, media access. Part of media access is things like Captions and Descriptions. But media access is also about putting performers, characters, and situations onscreen that disabled people want to engage with. People have told me that I should be more patient with shows like "Glee," because maybe the disability representations improve after the first season. If you saw a character from your own community who was written poorly, performed poorly, and generally disliked by many of the other characters in the show, would you ask yourself to be so patient? Would you really wait 22 episodes, take the summer off, and come back for Season Two? What if you could never hear the words or see the action, but you got enough

information to tell that the representation wasn't good? Come back for Season Two of more potentially bad representation AND no way to access the full story? I'm thinking not.

So there's my rant. For today. Stay tuned to this podcast and the blog. I'll let you know when the new film has a title and how you can find it and give it a watch and listen.

Supporting "Who Am I To Stop It" documentary film

The last bit for today is to give a huge, heartfelt thank you to everyone who supported our recent "Who Am I To Stop It" Kickstarter campaign. We exceeded our goal, which feels amazing. People showed support by sharing the link to the campaign, writing notes on Facebook, emailing, and having conversations with others, and by pledging donations. The money we raised there all goes toward editing and color correcting the film as well as working on and sweetening the audio. Of course, there is still much work to be done and many more things to pay for. If you're interested in donating as an individual or in becoming a corporate or business sponsor, or you have a Foundation that might like to support this independent film made from within the brain injury community, drop me a line. I have lots of great info I can share with you about sponsoring the film and how we will very gladly advertise and signal boost you and your organization or work in return. Any donation \$250 and above is tax-deductible through our fiscal sponsor, the lovely and historic Hollywood Theatre. Visit whoamitostopit.com/supporters to see our current sponsors and to get more info. Or contact me anytime at info@storyminders.com or through the Contact page on the website.

You can sign up on the blog to get an email each time something new is posted. It's free. So is subscribing to this podcast. Be in touch anytime through email, comments on the blog, comments on the podcast, LinkedIn, or Facebook. I'm always around and always looking for great conversations and stories about disability art, culture, identity, and the ways our various identities and lives intersect.

So that's it for today. Next month, you'll hear some great interviews and conversations with folks like Vince Diorio of [The Creativity Expo](#), Taylor (Harris) Dann, Bittin Duggan of [Growing Through It](#), and more!

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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, <http://WhoAmIToStopIt.com>.

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