

Pigeonhole Episode 23

[bright ambient music]

Introduction

CHORUS OF VOICES: Pigeonholed, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole, pigeonhole.

[theme music fades out to a light, jazzy tune]

THOMAS: I had to start recording in order to come in the closet [laughs] 'cause I keep the laptop out there so you don't get that noise. [thudding, clunking] Oh, wait, hold on. Agh! Crap! [music quickly fades out] Hold on. My audio interface dropped. [sounds of setting up microphone and gear] Hold on one second.... We are experiencing technical difficulties. Please stand by. [lighting clanking as gear gets into place]

[the same light, jazzy tune picks up again]

[loud thumping] Aw, Jesus Christmas. [music quickly fades out] Hold on! Can you hear me?

CHERYL: Mmhmm.

THOMAS: Yeah!

BOTH: [laugh]

THOMAS: This is all on recording. Ah, my gosh.

CHERYL: [still laughing]

THOMAS: This is awful. I'm definitely putting out the bloopers. I always say I'm gonna do a blooper reel.

CHERYL: Yeah! [laughs]

THOMAS: I think I'm comfortable with myself nowadays that I can do this blooper reel. This is gonna be a good one.

CHERYL: [laughs]

THOMAS: I don't know what just happened. My headphones came out, but my audio interface [screen reader starts talking] fell off this little makeshift shelf in my closet here. [clunking, moving gear still going on] Let me explain it now to you. All right. So, the interface is sitting on this little container that I have some clothes socked away in. And the phone, I was like, OK, I gotta keep the phone somewhere so she can hear me. So, it's in a suit jacket that I have [trails off in laughter]....

CHERYL: [laughs ridiculously]

THOMAS: But it was like perfect, at the perfect height. So, I was like, OK, so, this will work. Ah boy, anyway, whatever. [thudding]

CHERYL: I am sitting in the closet myself. And when you said suit jacket, I thought oh, that's a good idea! [laughs]

THOMAS: [laughs] You see? [screen reader starts talking] Oh, look at that. My speech came back on. All right. There we go. Oh, wait. I gotta put this back so you can hear me. Can you hear me?

CHERYL: Uh-huh, yeah!

THOMAS: OK.... You know, I'm just gonna hold the phone. [laughs] I'm sorry. I'm sorry. [whispers] No one will know. [chuckles] [last bit of clunking] Aw, man.

[light, jazzy tune comes back to try again and plays through the next few sentences]

THOMAS: I was really, really early into the idea of podcasts and knew that I wanted to do that, but wasn't equipped at all to do it. I didn't know what my content would be. Didn't feel comfortable at that time really probably telling my own story. I was doing some audio creation on advocacy issues for the Pennsylvania Council of the Blind. They were getting better, and I was just doing more of it, more of it, more of it. And in 2014 was like, hey, let me go for this.

I'd been wanting to go to the Third Coast Festival for quite some time. I'll never forget. It was one Saturday night. I was just kind of sitting there, you know, perusing the Internet. And I went over to the Third Coast Festival site to see what was the itinerary. I saw that they were looking for new voices and people who were representing diversity! The first level of diversity actually that I thought of was the disability. Yes, I'm a Black man, but I was doing more work on the disability side of things, right, talking more about those issues. Based on the questionnaire, I was like, oh, I don't think they're gonna get any new blind people. [laughs] I was like, so I should be the only blind guy, right? [laughing uproariously] I said, I gotta get it! I'm Black, and I'm blind! I said, come on! Come on! You know? And fortunately, I did get it. And I wasn't the only blind person, surprisingly. I was not the only blind person.

And I also had the aspect of I don't know if I belong here, because all of these people have been really creating audio. They've been, you know, on NPR. These guys are Radiotopia and whatever. And I was just like, I was just this, this guy. And I was specific about kind of where I wanted to go. And it was the whole idea of using storytelling to dispel myths and misconceptions about blindness. That was my main goal at that time. So, a lot of people got that.

[recorded audio from Thomas's podcast, his voice with mellow ambient electronica playing under his voice]

What's up RMM radio family? It's me, T. Reid, host and producer of this here podcast. This is your place to hear stories and profiles of compelling people impacted by all degrees of vision loss and disability. Occasionally, I add some of my own experiences adjusting to becoming blind as an adult, and in each case, pairing words, music, and sound design. [voice very slowly fades away] Today, I wanna jump right into it. We have a lot to cover, so.... [recorded clip ends]

I think my goal has changed. It's still storytelling, but where the idea of dispelling myths and misconceptions, I'm starting to think I don't have as much control of that as I'd like to believe. It's really up to the listener whether or not they're going to change how they think. I can put everything out there, right? But some people are not, they're not gonna change. They're not gonna get it. So, I don't think I should put that pressure on myself to say that this is what I'm trying to do. I don't think I'd ever be able to win trying to change, trying to change the world like

that. Maybe I'm getting to be an old man. [laughing] I don't know! It kinda sounds like that when I say it out loud! But I don't necessarily think of it as a bad thing. I mean, I think I still want to tell the stories that I wanna tell. And I wanna find them, and learn how to tell them better.

[downtempo electronica plays through the next paragraph]

I've always wanted people who are adjusting to blindness or to anything, quite honestly, in their lives. I'm always interested in that part of it. So, what did you do to adjust to your blindness, right, to your vision loss? And how did it turn out? I find that helpful for me, but you know, I wanna learn something from these people. I think we all have something to learn from one another.

So, in the beginning, I was always like, aw! I don't want nobody to put me into this position where, you know, no, it's not just about blindness. It's not just— It's called *Reid My Mind*! It's whatever's on my mind. And then it ended up being yes, it's a lot of things about blindness, it's everything about blindness. But the truth is that it doesn't matter what you want to touch, you can touch it from the disability perspective. And that's sort of where I wanna go: just talk about everything from that perspective.

But the thing that I would really wanna do is to develop a team of people with disabilities who are producing stories about people with disabilities on a high level. So, I wanna get myself up a level. I don't necessarily wanna be sitting in my closet! [laughs] But, you know, just really good stories and real good topics, diving into them and making them accessible to everyone. I don't believe everyone is gonna come and check it out. Because I just think when it's stamped "blind," when it's stamped, "disabled," people just say, oh, that's not me. And they don't listen to it. And I'm OK with that now. At first I was like, oh, you gotta listen! Nah, if you don't wanna listen, you don't listen. But there gonna be some good stories that you missing out on. And they're gonna be told well, you know.

You know, it's funny because thinking about it, I mean, the podcast, I guess it really is kind of following my own progress in my own adjustment. Because that wanting to change the world, when I lost my sight, it was like, OK, now I'm this. This is what I'm told I am. And it's like how people respond to me now so differently. And so, it was like that wanting to change the world, not just for the world, but also change the way the world is viewing me. Now it's like, well, it is what it is. This is who I am. This is a part of me. I know this is just one part of me. And I really don't care what you guys think anymore. This is just what it is. Which is all right with me. I'm good with that. I really I'm good with it. I feel it's a lighter load. [laughs] I'm not keeping that whole I gotta change the world thing on my shoulders. That stuff is heavy. Yeah. [laughs]

[downtempo electronica plays through the last paragraph]

OK. Now, I'm still recording, so I have to break this down. So, let's see. [clunking on and off till the end] Hopefully, I don't literally break down while I'm breaking down my setup. My DIY. Some people like to say "ghetto." I think it's just a DIY thing. I think the ghetto had the negative connotation, and there's nothing negative about setting up a DIY situation. You use what you use, what you have, to get done. All right.

[theme music from *Reid My Mind Radio* plays, a hip hop beat with echoing vocals]

Reid my mind, Reid my mind. [record scratch] Radio....

Wrap-up

[upbeat theme music]

CHERYL: Every episode is transcribed. Links, guest info, and transcripts are all at www.whoamitostopit.com, my disability arts blog. I'm Cheryl, and...

TWO VOICES: this is Pigeonhole.

CHERYL: Pigeonhole: Don't sit where society puts you.

Music in the episode

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