

Pigeonhole Episode 24

[bright ambient music]

Introduction

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

CHERYL: Here comes an experiment. This episode is the audio from my first-ever short film as a film student made in 2013. It's rough around the edges but a favorite. For my film class, I followed legally-blind visual artist Lavaun Benavidez-Heaster as she created and worked to promote her art. Back then, I had heard of Audio Description, but I didn't really know what it was or how to do it. I didn't realize you have to very deliberately and thoughtfully add silence during a film in strategic places to allow the describer room to speak and breathe. Luckily, Lavaun knew about Audio Description, and she did a little bit while I filmed. But that's not enough!

Today's episode is the original audio from the film with some added Audio Description I just wrote for the podcast. It doesn't at all fit in the film since it wasn't planned for. But this is how it would've gone if I'd known then what I know now. If I'd known that content creators can learn about access so that there's no tension at the end between what a filmmaker wants to show (and how much of it) and what an Audio Describer needs to do their job. The original film was seven minutes before I added this audio description, just for some perspective. Here's the film.

Paper Visions

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: The film opens on a close up of a fair-skinned hand holding bright, shimmery yellow construction paper, a strip of the paper being cut through bottom to top. Sunlight pours in through the window. On the table below the paper, glue, blue and green paper, and a bag of shiny adornments.

[scissors slicing paper]

LAVAUN: I'm Lavaun Heaster. Sometimes I will go by Lavaun Benavidez-Sanchez Heaster.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: She focuses intently on paper she's cutting, brown and lightly silvered hair draped over her shoulders.

LAVAUN: I create paper craft by cutting out paper.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Cuts a small black square. On the table beneath, green paper decorated with layers of construction paper to create an outdoor scene: Flowing blue river, bright cherry blossom on a tall tree.

LAVAUN: And then I create cards and calendars from that.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Now, on a city bus, Lavaun tucks away "Lavaun's 2014 Food and Art Calendar" with multicultural holidays into her bag. The calendar's cover shows a print of three dancing women of different ethnicities, wearing butterfly wings. They frolic among flowers as large as they are. Back inside, she cuts folded construction paper along a curvy path, the paper held close to her face, her right eye pinched shut.

LAVAUN: I have 20 degrees of 20/100 vision in my left eye and no vision in my right eye. And I've had a learning disability all my life.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Super close up of scissors traversing the edge of green paper as one hand turns the paper back and forth, creating a jagged edge.

[scissors cutting]

LAVAUN: You just have to keep cutting the sawtooth. I started thinking what do I need to do to develop as an artist?

[mellow acoustic guitar music begins plays through the title image and the beginning of Lavaun's lines]

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: A photo of the finished version of the cherry blossom scene, now with sharp blades of grass added to the page. The layers are apparent, with portions of the tree and cherry blossom floating above the paper. The title appears onscreen in a cutout paper type font, "Paper Visions." Now, sitting outside in the Portland Park Blocks in a heavy, dark coat, speaking to the camera. Her right eye remains half-closed.

LAVAUN: I went to our local organization that serves people with low or no vision and wanted to work on self-employment. I brought up art because I'd started making actually a little tiny bit of money off of my artwork. And then I was told, "No, we don't support hobby businesses."

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: A photo of Lavaun's artworks in frames, lined up along a set of porch stairs with peeling green paint. Images include a dancing couple, two mermaids floating with seaweeds and octopuses, a goddess straddling a crescent moon, Day of the Dead skulls, a mosque, holiday candles and masks.

LAVAUN: A lotta people wanna be artists in this city. I believe that it's really important to figure out what's unique.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: The photo of artworks zooms out to reveal Lavaun sitting on the steps, holding up a giant tulip scene with fireflies.

LAVAUN: I'm not trying to recreate what I see. I'm actually telling a story, and I'm telling a story that nobody else is telling nine out of ten times.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: A series of unframed paper collage images scrolls past as Lavaun talks: animals, landscapes, rivers, multi-generational families showing different genders, ethnicities, disabilities, and traditional and non-traditional clothing.

LAVAUN: Not that many people are telling the story of a brown woman who has two white young girls or someone who uses a sensing cane, not as it's the story of the person who uses the sensing cane. It's more of actually that this person is just part of the picture...of what life is.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Lavaun rides a city bus. The driver is reflected in the window behind Lavaun.

[quiet rumble of the bus engine, rattling sounds as the bus travels over rough patches of road, conversations in the background]

LAVAUN: If you're blind, and you're watching a movie, you can hear the dialogue. But if there's something where you need context, audio describing helps. It gives language for what's happening for people who have low or no vision. The reason why Audio Description would be very important in this film is actually because as part of the blind community, a lot of my friends have no vision or very little vision, and so knowing that I'm on the bus right now is gonna make a huge difference. If not, they're gonna be like, "What the heck is the noise behind her?"

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Now, back at home at the sunlit worktable. Newspaper covers the table, and Lavaun's hands come into view as she works.

LAVAUN: I've got a blue piece of cardstock in the background and swirls of blue with yellow trim. I'm placing them with them all coming together in the center, which is two inches down from the top. And so, I'm just placing them right now just to get a feel.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Now, the swirls have been glued to the blue cardstock lining the edges and all pointing toward the middle. A white rectangle is held down on the page by one of Lavaun's hands. She begins slipping red rectangles partly beneath the white one.

LAVAUN: I'm gonna put down two red candles. The center white candle is kinda big and fat. The edge candles are longer and thinner. My red candle's a little bit behind the white candle, and then the other red candle is off to the side. And that's happening on both sides.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Next to the candle scene, many strips of the green paper with sawtooth edges. Now, a stop motion creation of an artwork. Black card stock over an orange background. One by one, paper cutouts appear as Lavaun talks: orange crabs fade in at the corners, then a hermit crab, a lion's face, mane wide and waving in the wind.

LAVAUN: I wanna create art that people run their fingers on, and they can actually feel, for my friends with low or no vision, but also—really important to me—is for the people who do have full vision to see that people who are blind or low vision can enjoy art.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Now, the animal collage melts into Lavaun at an arts fair. She holds up a greeting card with the animal collage printed on it and smiles broadly. A close up of her face as someone paints a brown and white cat on her cheek.

[cheery acoustic guitar music]

Now, at a Portland city bus stop on a busy residential street, cars passing. It's gray out. Trees with yellowing leaves, brown leaves scattered on the wet sidewalk. Lavaun walks slowly to the bus stop wearing her heavy, dark coat, a backpack and shoulder bag slung over her shoulders. Text onscreen: "Lavaun heads to the Regional Arts & Culture Council to sell her work to the public arts collection." She grabs the bus shelter wall and sets down her bags, then looks down the street.

Now, she walks into the Regional Arts & Culture Council office through tall glass doors.

LAVAUN: I need to figure out something where I can earn enough money to pay my mortgage and eat.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Inside a conference room, Lavaun facing a fair-skinned man across the table. They both hold pens. Lavaun's blouse is decorated with patterns of gold beads along the front.

KEITH: RACC oversees the public art collections for the City of Portland and for Multnomah County. The principle opportunity is, I think, to bring work into that collection.

LAVAUN: Having worked for Multnomah County for years, I never saw art around disability subject matter or by people who are identified as artists with disabilities.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Lavaun's white sensing cane folded and lying on the table beside her.

KEITH: Coming in and talking to us is a step that I wish a lot more artists would take.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Keith holds greeting cards with prints of Lavaun's multicultural family artworks: a brown woman lying in the grass with her white daughters, surrounded by flowers tall enough to reach the heavens. A group of Black and brown people with and without disabilities standing together. Lavaun looks intently at Keith.

KEITH: You were saying you wanna be an advocate for bringing people with disabilities into the public art world.

LAVAUN: Mmhmm.

KEITH: We are always looking for ways to bring artists period into the public art world. You want the collection that you have to represent all of Portland.

LAVAUN: Yeah.

KEITH: And I think this'll be a great bridge for us to be able to build.

LAVAUN: I'm really excited about this.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Back at home, Lavaun at her laptop. Facebook is open to her page, "Lavaun Heaster's Art." The banner image is a collage of her works. The profile picture is Lavaun beaming next to a display of her art at an exhibition. She leans in extremely close to the screen, then leans back to look at the keyboard, then leaning into the screen, eyes squinting.

LAVAUN: The first year, I didn't make any money. But that's 'cause I'm having to do everything on my own, and it's costing me. I've had medical bills. I've had a lot of stuff go on.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: She looks off in the distance, smiles, looks back to the laptop with her chin resting in her hand.

LAVAUN: I'm just kind of pulling it together on my own, but this year, things are taking off.

Facebook has changed again, which I hate. So, I have to figure out a new way to create an event. Oh! It's over here.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: She begins to type in "The Arbor Lodge" into the event page. Name: Lavaun's Calendar Release Party." Details: "FUN! FUN! FUN!" The Arbor Lodge Coffee & Community Space appears for her to add without finishing typing.

LAVAUN: Aha! Here it is. I just get to click on it now. Yay. I like that. I should join. [clicks mouse]

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Event details displayed on the page. Navigates to the "Invite Friends" button.

LAVAUN: There we go. [clicks mouse] Let's go ahead and invite a bunch of people.

[a sweet song begins to play on a bell-like instrument, sounds of traffic and people talking fill the space]

AUDIO DESCRIPTION: Outside of The Arbor Lodge, a chalkboard by a brick wall on a dark evening. "Tonight, 6-8 PM, Lavaun Heaster's Calendar Release Party. Live music! Fun for all ages!"

Inside, a fair-skinned blind woman with bells and a butterfly around her neck is playing glockenspiel. The room is filled with people of different genders and ethnicities. Friends help hang Lavaun's framed art and set out the calendars, each open to a different month. Cards, prints, and original tactile collages are arranged neatly on a table. Lavaun socializes. People look at the art. A hand strokes the green sawtooth-edged paper that is now a garland as part of the red and white candle piece. People cuddle and enjoy the music. Lavaun is overcome with a smile as a friend reaches to hug her. Cut to black. Credits roll.

[mellow music plays during credits]

Made at NW Documentary. The film was made in memory of Lavaun's sister, Pamela Heaster, who had a great entrepreneurial spirit.

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 film

Original music by Lee Rice and Caitlin Wood.

"[Acceptance](#)" and "[Twelve Diseases](#)" by Welcome Wizard. (Source: FreeMusicArchive.org. Licensed under a [Attribution 3.0 United States License](#).)