

Pigeonhole Episode 37

[bright ambient music]

Introduction

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

[ambient music fades into cute, bouncy music]

I screwed up my hand. I really, really screwed up my hand. This is not going to be a story where I pretend like I know what it's like to have a lifelong disability that affects my hand. Yes, I've been in a series of splints, braces, and casts for over three months. So, I know what that experience is like. But that's about it.

When you have something like an injury and suddenly have to get some modifications and use accessibility features that you haven't before, you don't always invest in the top dollar stuff. For instance, I'm writing this entire thing using Microsoft Word dictate. I expect my hand to get better eventually, so I'm not going to spring for some fancy software like Dragon NaturallySpeaking.

Here's the deal. I'm not the most polite person. I want you to hear what Microsoft Word dictate does to me when I'm trying to compose something in this software so that I can copy and paste it into my email. I'm doing emails this way so my hand therapist doesn't get mad at me for typing. But here's what happens when I get mad. [music fades out]

TEXT TO SPEECH VOICE: I can't believe this ****.

This is ***** software.

**** this.

[cute, bouncy music returns for one sentence, then stops abruptly] CHERYL: In case you're only reading this, please allow me to give you the punchline. The text to speech feature literally says the word "asterisk." In fact, it will say "asterisk" three times even when there are more than three for the longer, more choice cuss words that I spoke to my computer. I suppose I could praise the software for not saying eight asterisks when I say the word ***** for example. That would just drag on and make you forget what I said before it. [cute, bouncy music returns]

When I type with my hands, Microsoft Word allows me to express myself any way I want using any words I want. I can even use a semicolon in the place where most reasonable people would use an em dash. But for some reason, with this temporary disability in my hand and needing to use this accessibility feature, the software acts like I don't have the emotions that I have. The software is literally censoring me. I feel like the software thinks that now, because I need access, I've become some kind of child. That just feels like *****.

[cute, bouncy music winds down into chill lounge music]

I expect this from humans sometimes, the way some non-disabled people think that disabled people are [permanent children](#) or [use baby talk with adults](#) who have a developmental or learning disability or are autistic. Or the way that YouTube's [auto-generated subtitles](#) can censor cuss words, or [cuss words are "softened" in real captions](#), like "shit" turning into "crap." I had to

use a wheelchair once at the airport, and it was really hard to stay calm while a TSA agent bent down, got right in my face, and spoke in an extra loud, sing-songy voice asking me if I knew how to go through the security check. Sure, I could've been a 35-year-old who had never been through a security check at an airport before. But what is it about the wheelchair that made her talk so loudly and so boisterously as if I was getting ready for a fun game? The dozens of times that I've walked through the security check, nobody ever came over and asked to make sure I knew how to walk through the security check.

I got that a total of one time while using the wheelchair. So, it's super important to remember that just like the hand injury, I know extraordinarily little about what it's like to face this on a daily basis and for years on end. While I laugh to myself and with my friends about this issue with cussing in Microsoft Word's dictate, in the end, it's not actually funny.

TEXT TO SPEECH VOICE: It's irritating as ****.

[chill lounge music fades out, and bright ambient theme music returns]

Wrap-up

Every episode is transcribed. Links, guest info, and transcripts are all at 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: George Street Shuffle by Kevin MacLeod. Link: <https://incompetech.filmmusic.io/song/3800-george-street-shuffle>. License: <https://filmmusic.io/standard-license>. and Sneaky Snitch by Kevin MacLeod. Link: <https://incompetech.filmmusic.io/song/4384-sneaky-snitch>. License: <https://filmmusic.io/standard-license>.