

Post-Production FILE

ACCESSABILITY WORKS PODCAST - 002-FINAL SEPTEMBER 30, 2020

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>> Hello and welcome to the AccesAbility Works podcast. A podcast about the possibilities that accessibility brings to people with disabilities. I'm Jonathan Hermus.

>> And I'm Albert Rizzi. Let's get started. Today's episode is going to be focused on dyslexia. Jonathan happens to live with that and he is going to give us some insights into the secrets and the work-arounds and the diagnosis he lives with every day.

But before we do that, we want to touch on some of the current events that are happening around the world. The Coronavirus.

>> And political discourse or just, you know, making it political.

>> Or just discourse in general.

>> Yeah.

>> Right now the numbers of people who have died are 183,000 plus.

>> From politicians alone? Jesus.

[CHUCKLES]

>> You're a nut job. One of the things that we're most concerned about is information getting into the hands of those of us who are blind or print disabled. We started working with this company called AccessPharmacy. And they are a pharmacy for people with disabilities. And we're going to be telling you more about that in maybe the coming episodes that we do. We may be bringing people on from that company, namely, Andy, Alex and Jason.

Anyway, that's something to be looking forward to. It puts the control of your medications into your hand and keeps you up to date and current and all of the wonderful things that go along with getting your medications. They deliver them, drop them off, let you know, all of the great things.

We also are looking at the launch of a Presidential Campaign 2020. Unfortunately. If you've read our blog, we have a blog out there about how inaccessible or how unusable both Presidential Campaign platforms are. The right to vote is a very important privilege. As Americans, we all must exercise it. If we want to see America strong and vibrant and a beacon of hope for all other countries in the world.

So we challenge both the Biden campaign and the Trump campaign to visit our website, myblindspot.org and read the piece we put together about the usability and functionality of their websites and how they have basically ostracized and marginalized and disenfranchised the print disabled community from getting all of the information about their platforms and their

agendas so we can make an informed decision and vote accordingly.

So John, was there anything else we discussed or have to point out before we move into your life's story?

>> Yeah, I want to talk a little bit about something called Neuralink.

>> Oh, yeah.

>> It's an Elon Musk thing. I don't know if he founded that company. But he owns it I guess. Neuralink. It's a project where they are trying to integrate computer chips into the human brain.

>> Yeah.

>> First heard about it on Joe Rogan's podcast.

>> I love Joe.

>> Elon made his second visit I believe to Joe's podcast. And they talked about it for a little while and all of its amazing possibilities.

>> What's Neuralink?

>> Neuralink is -- I think I said it a minute ago, it's a minimally invasive microchip and conductive wires that they put directly into your brain.

>> Okay.

>> But in a press release that Elon Musk did earlier this year, he revealed that they put Neuralink inside the mind of a chimp and the chimp was able to control a cursor on a computer screen. But beyond that, he talked about fixing the optic nerve. And a whole slew of -- well, I think the first thing they want to try to tackle is people who are quadriplegic.

>> Yes.

>> So they can have a way of controlling a computer with just their mind.

>> There's a lot of research being done on that. Being able to control a prosthetic or a wheelchair with your mind. And it's really promising. But one of the things that I really got pumped about with the Elon Musk potential is for people who have lost use of their optic nerve. And there was some promise of skipping the optic nerve and going from the eyeball straight to the brain so the visual cortex can be stimulated. That sounds really promising to me.

>> That's exactly what Elon was talking about was skipping right over the optic nerve and going from the photo center of the brain straight to the eyeball with the Neuralink.

>> Interesting. Science is such a fascinating area. And it's like I just keep thinking about Star Trek and specifically in this stance, Star Trek: The Next Generation when Geordi would use what I would call a hair clip to simulate vision. We're a hop, skip and a jump from some significant advancements for sure.

>> Well, if you're getting really nerdy into it, you'll know Geordi could see in multiple different wavelengths. He could see radio waves. He could see microwaves. He could see infrared. He could see the whole spectrum of wavelengths. Not just light, not just the visual spectral of light.

>> You are much more of a dork, dweeb, nerd than I am. I did not know that. But now I'm updated. Thank you. So John.

>> Uh-huh.

>> You've got dyslexia. Tell me about that. Tell me about you.

>> What an intro.

>> Give us a bit of who Jonathan is.

>> I'm Jonathan Hermus and I'm an alcoholic.

>> Hi. Hi, John.

[CHUCKLES]

>> No offense, we live the 12 steps every day but we still control our consumption.

No, tell us a little bit about who you are. What makes you tick. And then we'll jump into the dyslexia story.

>> Let's talk a little bit about dyslexia as a disorder. It is genetically linked, which means that not only I have it but my brothers, my sister, my father and my mother probably also have it. And I believe the statistic is 3 million new cases every year.

>> I was reading, too, in some of the research you did that depending on who is doing the research and what the statistics are used for, there are potentially anywhere from 15 to 45 million people in the United States today living with dyslexia. Those are huge numbers.

>> It kind of makes it feel like I don't even have a disorder because it's more normal to have dyslexia than it is to not. Which is pretty hard growing up with it. Because there was something wrong. And I was obviously behind. But I couldn't complain about it because it's not like I was blind or something, right?

>> Yeah, no. And growing up, when I was in school, they didn't even have a firm understanding or diagnosis of it. You were just considered stupid. You were learning disabled, challenged, whatever it was. But there was little known about dyslexia and how to address it. How to give the kids the tools they need to succeed. But they have come a long ways since. And I know that your generation, when you were in school, there was some clearer understanding than there was in the '70s when I was in elementary school.

>> Progress I guess.

>> Progress.

>> Progress.

>> Progress. So progress farther. Tell us some more.

>> Dyslexia is a little more complicated than most people might think. There's actually seven different forms of dyslexia. And I think I have almost every form of it.

[CHUCKLES]

>> Maybe.

>> Go large or go home.

>> Something like that.

>> So there's a spectrum of ability, for lack of a better term? Because that's what I like to say, like there's a spectrum of blindness. You can either be completely blind like myself or you could have some usable vision.

>> Yeah.

>> There's a spectrum between legally blind and totally blind. Just like there's a spectrum of dyslexia.

>> Yeah. I really couldn't imagine just having one of these problems without having several other ones. They seem to be all interlinked to me. Let's get into it and talk about the different forms of dyslexia.

>> Okay. The seven forms of dyslexia are.

>> The first one is phonological. Like phonics.

>> Phonological.

>> Like pronouncing the arrangement of letters.

>> The pronunciation.

>> It's an extreme difficulty reading. That is a result of a phonological impairment, meaning the impairment to manipulate the basic sounds of language.

>> And you have that one?

>> Yeah, it's like the sounds become sticky from one word to the next and they stick together. So it's almost like slurring your words a bit.

>> Okay.

>> And you trip over them. If two words stick together, you kind of trip I guess. I don't know.

The next is surface dyslexia. You can't recognize the meaning of a word. You can read the word. But you don't remember what it means right away. It takes a couple of ticks before you, oh, yeah, I remember that one.

And then there's rapid automatic naming dyslexia.

>> Wow, go ahead.

>> Which is -- so rapid naming is basically processing speed. The processing speed of your brain.

>> Okay.

>> So I guess going back to surface dyslexia, you can't recognize the meaning of a word really quick.

>> Right.

>> Really quick would be the processing speed. So it might be that you recognize the meaning of the word but it takes a few seconds for it to register.

>> So it's like the seven-second delay in the newscast these days.

>> Yeah, something like that.

>> Okay. The rapid aspect of it is trying to recall. So there's an issue with the way that you rapidly recall the information?

>> Yeah, it's not like our brains contain less knowledge. It's just --

>> It's organized differently.

>> At least people with dyslexia, the way I understand it, we have a hard time finding things that we know in our brain.

>> Okay.

>> And then the next one is double deficit dyslexia, which basically means that I -- someone with double deficit dyslexia has two or more different kinds of dyslexia.

>> You've got quadruple.

>> I've got a few.

[CHUCKLES]

>> And there is dyscalculia. Which calculia, calculus, means math.

>> Yes.

>> You basically switch numbers around instead of letters. But I switch letters and numbers because why not do both?

>> Okay.

>> And then the last one is right-left confusion. Which I know I notice -- I notice in a lot of people. A lot of people say left and mean right.

>> Oh, please, that happens to me all the time. You know, because they are looking at me, and seeing -- meaning to talk about my right. And they are saying left meaning their left, my right. And I'm going left when I should be going right. It gets confusing. Stage right, stage left. Military right --

>> It's confusing for normal people. But with people with dyslexia, it's like they literally try to concentrate on left and right for a minute and then, all right, I've got this.

>> And by the time you've concentrated on left and right, the opportunity to make that right or that left has gone.

>> Yeah.

>> You know, we dealt with that together when we go kayaking, you use port and starboard instead of left and right.

>> I think I'll credit that to when I was younger, I was in sailing school. Because we lived a couple of blocks from the water here in the port of Great South Bay. That's what you do when you live on an island I guess, you do sailing.

[CHUCKLES]

>> When I was younger, I was taught to sail. And part of sailing is port and starboard. That's kind of like left and right. But there's more to it than that. There's more to than just left and right. It's not just opposites. Because starboard and port have a lot of differences. Starboard is green. Port is red. It has a color coordination. Starboard has a more significant meaning than port in that if another sailboat is coming up on your starboard side and you're going to collide, they have to give you the right-of-way, because they are on your starboard side.

>> Uh-huh.

>> You have the right-of-way. At least in a race. But I think that's common for any sailing.

>> Any sailing. But there was that thing that you taught me about red right return?

>> Yeah the buoys that mark channels are green and red. The rule of thumb is that you're coming back into port through the channel, the red buoys would be on your right side, red right returning.

>> Got it, okay.

>> Which is also port side. No, that's starboard.

>> Starboard.

>> Oh, my brain.

>> Oh, no, you're dyslexic. Figure it out. So seven different types of dyslexia.

>> Uh-huh.

>> And you definitely have a handful of those.

>> I've noticed a struggle with a lot of the aspects of this. And try and fix all of them every day.

>> Well, you know, and I see you do that all the time. And it's interesting. I only recently -- I mean, because we've been reading and doing so many things together at My Blind Spot, I see the struggle. But you do make it look a little seamless.

>> You think.

>> I don't know if saying you look seamless is the right way to phrase it. But you definitely have mastered or figured out the work-arounds you need to make it look seamless. And not have it hinder who you are or how you execute.

>> Growing up with dyslexia actually, you know, I had to just learn how to function with that. Dyslexia, it actually means that a part of my brain does not work. There's a language center of the brain. And yours, when you think about words and languages and speaking.

>> Uh-huh.

>> The synapses in your brain fire in that section.

>> Right.

>> Mine don't. So I just have to work around that. I make different connections in different ways. The brain is a very complicated place. If one section doesn't work, the other parts of the brain will make up for it.

>> Make -- compensate.

>> Yeah.

>> So how are you able to process all of that? Who helped you? Did you have help? There's medications have for kids? Classrooms, anxiety, talk to me.

>> We can start with the genetic background. I actually had a head start a little bit. My older brother was a little bit worse than I was. He didn't speak at all when he was supposed to, I don't know, two years old kids are supposed to speak. And he wasn't.

>> Wow.

>> My parents knew something was wrong obviously. So they took him to the doctor. What the doctor said was, he's probably dyslexic, you should teach him sign language or something I guess. But my parents taught my older borrower sign language to get him to start communicating his wants and needs because my brother was terror apparently.

>> Buddy? No way.

>> Yeah. He would just cry at everything.

>> Your mother, she would say she couldn't leave the house because he would be crying all the time.

>> Uh-huh.

>> I didn't realize your mother taught Buddy sign language, too. Wow.

>> Yeah, they taught him sign language. And once he started picking up sign language, he started picking up speaking, too. So about that time I was -- I started coming around. And you know, it was easier for my parents to start teaching me sign language and I started talking.

>> Well, and that reminds me, my cousin, Jackie and Matt, their youngest, Logan, wasn't speaking at an early age. And they introduced sign language to him, too. And it was interesting. Because I took sign language in college myself. And I'm pumped about that for a couple of reasons. That I know as an educator that knowledge is acquired by association. And when you're that young, it's images and pictures that you draw a correlation to or appreciation for prior to verbal communication.

>> Uh-huh. I was frequently called a visual learner.

>> Oh. God, I was a visual learner. It's funny because I remember when I first lost my eyesight, that's some of the things people ask, if you were a visual learner before you lost your eyesight, how do you learn now?

>> You learn a new way to learn.

>> Yeah, no, it's interesting. And the other thing, too, about sign language is if we teach the kids sign language, it's another language. Just like Braille. If we introduce these alternative communication styles in our schools, it will normalize how everybody communicates.

So the style of learning is critically important in any student's success. But how did your learning style, it was impacted by dyslexia, affect you in school?

>> I think the schools and the teachers just said, try all of them. Try every learning style. That was their kind of I guess blanket answer.

>> Throw it at you and see what sticks.

>> But I remember the resource rooms. And I went to private school and public school. Not in that order. But when I was in public school, and this is back in the '90s when I believe the ADA was in 1990, right?

>> Yes, sir.

>> So this is just when they started putting ramps into schools and making them more accessible.

>> They also had IDEA, which is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. So there was a lot more attention given to children with disabilities, as well.

>> Yeah, I remember they were just starting to put those things into schools.

>> Uh-huh.

>> And the resource rooms were like brand-new. And basically what they did was they cleaned out a janitor closet. Put a desk and a couple of kid's desks in there.

>> Yeah.

>> And believe me, I don't think I ever had more than three kids in any resource room that I was in at any time. And the teacher in there just didn't want to be there. I didn't blame him. Because I didn't want to be there, either. I just always felt they stuck the dumb kid in the closet

because they didn't want to look at him.

>> Your friend comes in, oh, you're dumb, too.

>> Yeah, it got better when I went to private school. They were a little more humane I guess you would call it.

>> Organized?

>> Yeah, but they still didn't know what the hell they were doing. They were like, eh, anything you need, a little more time? Cheat on your test? Here. But it did make me feel a little segregated.

>> As an educator, the resource room to me never made sense because you're pulling that child out of the other academic activities that are going on. I'm on the fence about that. Unless you have a severe learning challenge.

>> I think the resource room helps for if you have Attention Deficit Disorder and you have a room full of 20 kids, it's harder to concentrate and look over what Billy and Sally is doing.

But if you're in a room with just you and one teacher, it's easier for that teacher to watch you taking your test and being like, all right, concentrate. Stop looking over there. Concentrate. Think about ADD, that I've noticed, at least about myself, is that if you take away all distractions and you only have the task in front of you, it's easier to concentrate on that task than to be distracted by everything that's going on around you.

>> And you just mentioned ADHD, which seems to be an offshoot of or most people who have dyslexia also have attention deficit issues?

>> I don't know about that. I know I have both.

>> You have both, okay.

>> And I know that some of my friends that I know from school had it worse than I did. And they were medicated because of it. I noticed that when they weren't taking their medication or when they -- sometimes when they were on their medication, their ADHD was way worse than I ever had it. They like could not concentrate. I could, if I tried hard enough, you know.

>> Yeah.

>> So I can't really say much on the subject of ADD.

>> Does dyslexia improve with age? Or does it stay with you your whole life?

>> It's more like you just learn how to deal with it.

>> Okay.

>> I could have taken Ritalin or Adderall.

>> Adderall. That's another one. Here, kid, take a pill.

>> Maybe that would have helped me out. Maybe not. I don't know. Never took it. But I pretty much hated school because of that, all of that.

>> I can see why you hated --

>> It also gave the other kids, you know, like fuel --

>> To make fun of you. I can see how you hated school. But I've never noticed in the years I've known you that you hated learning.

>> I'm getting to that.

>> Good.

>> In my younger years, I hated reading for obvious reasons. I didn't like school for obvious reasons. My mom was determined to -- the way they put it is they wanted me to be smarter than they ever were.

>> Yep.

>> So --

>> Those are good parents.

>> I appreciate it. My mom is a librarian. So she really wanted me to read books. She reads books all the time.

>> She had a vested interest in that.

>> Yeah. So one of the things that she did for me is she must have spent a lot of money on books on tape. I remember summer reading. That homework was the worst thing. Because I'm not in school. Why should I be doing more school?

>> Yeah.

>> And to this day I still think it's not a good idea to give kids homework or summer work --

>> Busy work.

>> Yeah.

>> Yeah.

>> So the one book on tape that sticks out in my mind is -- I was in high school. And a Catholic school. Oh, it was the first year of high school, too, it was 9th grade. It was the summer going into 9th grade. I had to read it to get into this school.

It was a book called "She Said Yes," which is about the Columbine shootings. But how this girl -- one of the shooters came up to the girl and picked her head up off the ground after he had shot her already and said, do you believe in God? And she said yes. So he said, go, be with him, and shot her.

>> Oh, that just gave me chills.

>> Yeah. No disrespect to anyone in the shooting. But I do believe that book was Christian propaganda. Because someone made money off of that book. It was not a fun book to listen to. I couldn't imagine actually reading it.

>> But you started using tape -- books on tape?

>> Yeah, the reason I was able to complete that project because my mom got me the book to listen to.

>> Yeah.

>> And I sat down just for like, I don't know, a half hour every day and listened to the book. So I was able to get it done relatively quickly.

>> And here you are today. That's all you listen to is audio books.

>> Well --

>> And you do read. But you consume that at a ridiculous rate, books that is.

>> Yeah, well, we'll get into how I got into books.

>> Okay.

>> But audio books, yeah, they are a big part of my life now. Especially being -- I used to work in a cabinet shop. Being in a cabinet shop, I would make the same piece about, you know, 50, 60 times in a row. That's what you do, you make 50 of the same pieces. And then you put them altogether and it's a cabinet. So that's kind of mindless work to an extent, making the same piece, same cut over and over and over again.

So my brain is just not working. It's all muscle memory. My hands can just go. And I'm thinking about whatever I want.

So doing that, audio books really helped me just get through that job. Day to day. Because I could listen to -- I could be off in Fantasyland. Or listening to historical readings and stuff while I'm chopping away at wood.

>> I never thought of that.

>> Uh-huh.

>> I can't work and listen to things at the same time.

>> Another part of school that I really hated was getting up at talking in front of the class, like an English class, when we were reading a book as part of the class. A few of my teachers I guess would have us go around and read the book.

>> Yeah.

>> I remember like frantically reading ahead like counting the kid before it got to me. Like this paragraph. Let me read this one. And sometimes I would read the wrong one and be like, ah, shit.

>> I practiced the wrong --

>> Reading outloud is very difficult for me.

>> Oh, my God, I can't imagine the anxiety you had to endure.

>> Yeah, it was some serious stuff. Gave me some really good stage fright.

>> So reading created such anxiety. What got you into reading to the point that you enjoyed it? I mean, what was the motivation there?

>> Nerdy girls.

>> Nerdy girls.

>> Nerdy girls.

>> Nerdy girls have always been an inspiration.

>> I love nerdy girls. I think that started actually in 3rd grade.

[CHUCKLES]

>> It didn't really carry through high school.

>> Third grade?

>> Yeah, there was this girl, she was all into Star Wars. I was like, yeah, Star Wars, pretty cool.

>> It's always cool.

>> She introduced me to Spaceballs. Which is even better.

>> Great movie.

>> Yeah. That got me into like science fiction and fantasy. And actually in the resource

room I was introduced to a lot of mythology and science fiction, too.

>> I love that stuff.

>> I remember they gave me the choice to research things that I wanted. Someone gave me the choice. I don't remember who it was. But we had just done -- some of the local Native Americans came by and showed us a bunch of cool stuff from the Native Americas, using every part of the buffalo and all of that stuff. And I was really into it because they had a whole bunch of craft type stuff. They had like spears and hunting stuff, something crazy like that.

>> Yeah. You're really versed again in the Native Americans. You're very versed in the Iroquois and the stuff like that.

>> Yeah, I am from New York. I'm a native of Long Island.

>> Yeah.

>> Shinnecock Indians.

>> Shinnecock Indians.

>> The place where we live is actually called Achobomic [phonetic], which means the place across from the fishing spot.

>> I never associate Native Americans with Long Island. But then all of our -- a lot of our towns like Patchogue, Shinnecock --

>> They are all Indian names. Almost all of the towns are Indian names.

>> I never knew that.

>> Bellport is one of the exceptions.

>> No, there are a lot of exceptions but you even broke down and there was a map, the Native American map, the way it was broken down. The different names of the areas. And I was like, wow, is that what that means.

>> Uh-huh.

>> Yeah, no. There's a lot of rich history here from Native Americans.

>> The Montaukett, the Shinnecock.

>> The Montaukett Indians, the Shinnecoaks. You said the Patchogue. The Bronkema. There was also stuff out in Queens that you were pointing out to me.

>> Sachem; you went to Sachem High School, right?

>> Yes, I did.

>> Sachems.

>> Go Arrows. Flaming Arrows.

No, that I knew --

>> Actually Sachem is a term for the leader or the --

>> Sachem is the chief.

>> Or the spiritual mother of the Iroquois.

>> The Iroquois?

>> Yeah, I think. I'm not sure on that. But yeah, a lot of the names -- a lot of the town names around here and even Upstate are all Indian names.

>> Yeah, inspiration. Inspiration you drew from this 3rd grade girl that has morphed into --

>> The 3rd grade girl got me into Star Wars.

>> Star Wars. And then from there --

>> And Harry Potter, too.

>> Then you ran with it.

>> But I still wasn't really big into reading. And the movies were coming out anyway. I was of the mind that I would just wait for the movies.

>> Yeah, Harry Potter, that's what I did. Now you got me reading the books.

>> There was another girl when I started going to high school who got me to read the Twilight books.

>> I don't like Twilight. I never did.

>> And then after that, probably one of my best friends Phoenix --

>> Phoenix.

>> -- and his sister, Haley, they were reading this book called "Eragon."

>> Love that book.

>> And that book got me into everything. Thank you, Christopher Paolini.

>> Christopher Paolini was a fantastic author. I mean, everything he wrote -- all of those, that series, there's four books that he wrote. They are just -- I think I sat down and read all of those in like five weeks. It was like back to back to back.

But you know --

>> I actually had to wait for them to come out.

>> Oh, no.

>> When I started reading them, he had had the first two.

>> And then you introduced me to Game of Thrones and I just after "Eragon," I couldn't even get Game of Thrones. It's arduous.

>> It's different.

>> Oh, it is different.

>> It's different.

>> Yeah, "Eragon" is more -- it's more D&D. It's more --

>> Well, I think "Eragon" is a little less R rated.

>> Yeah.

>> It's less gringy. It's less upsetting. Everybody kills every character.

>> I know, my God.

>> Oh, like this one. He's dead.

[CHUCKLES]

>> What the hell.

>> So you and Phoenix got into all of the mythical stuff.

>> Not only that, but he also got me to start writing fan fiction for Star Wars, which was really fun.

>> Now, you know, writing, how does dyslexia impact your writing? Because your writing style is -- I happen to think it's fantastic.

>> I think it's the same thing with math.

>> Yeah.

>> Is that I have to take my equations and go over them three or four times before I'm satisfied with it. So I have to write one sentence, two sentence, three sentence -- I usually write a paragraph. And then I'll go back and read that whole paragraph. Make sure everything is cool with me.

>> I can't edit my own work. I write so much, I throw everything in there. And then you rip it apart. You Hermaphy it.

[CHUCKLES]

>> No, I dislexify it.

>> You dislexify it.

>> I actually use my dyslexia to my advantage there. Because if I'm reading what you're writing and it's confusing in any way to me, then I have to fix it. Because if it's not confusing to me, it's not confusing to anyone.

>> Not to use this cliché, but keep it simple, stupid.

>> Yeah.

>> I sometimes don't keep it simple --

>> Less is more.

>> Less is more. I don't believe in that at all. More is more.

>> I believe in less is more.

>> More is a lot more. I like more.

>> It's all in moderation, even moderation.

>> Everything in moderation, even moderation, exactly.

It's interesting to hear you draw inspiration from kids you went to school with. And school was the last place you wanted to be because of dyslexia. And --

>> Yeah, it wasn't the schools that got me to be interested in learning. It was my friends.

>> Yeah.

>> It was the amazing stories that they made me find. And now I'm crazy into D&D and trying to make my own crazy universe.

>> Oh, my God.

>> Yeah.

>> My dungeon master, campaign master, freak master.

Now, but all of that, the imagination, I mean, that's one of the things that I appreciate about reading. And really is important. It takes us away, the imagination. And you've also introduced gaming. And that's another form of -- I won't call it reading. But the gaming is a way for people --

>> Well, I don't just listen to audio books. I like to actually read, too.

>> Yeah, no. Yeah, no. But that's totally different -- the reading -- and we started doing some reading. You and I have been reading -- we read books at night. It's then that I can really hear the dyslexia.

>> Because I'm actually practicing my weaknesses by reading outloud to you.

>> Yeah; yeah.

>> Back in the day when I was a kid, before I started getting into audio books at work, I was one of those nerds who was like, no, you can't -- you just got to get the feel of the pages in your hand.

[CHUCKLES]

>> You know.

>> Every publisher and printing house in the world wants you to say that again, Johnny.

Yeah, no.

>> Publish me.

>> Publish me.

>> Publish my work.

[CHUCKLES]

>> But no, there is something satisfying, satiating, about being able to turn the page. The other day, you're doing the coursework to be a yoga instructor. And you picked the number of pages. And we're trying to figure out, okay, am I a third of the way through? Two-thirds -- You can't tell with an audio book how far you are through I guess unless you --

>> They name the chapters sometimes.

>> Huh?

>> It depends on the book and the person who is reading it.

>> Yeah.

>> I think Game of Thrones, the reason why it was so confusing or you didn't like it so much is because every chapter was someone's name. And they were not numbered or sequenced in any way.

>> Yeah, the continuity, there was a great --

>> They said someone's name and that was the next chapter. So if you wanted to go back to Arya's chapter, it was like, okay, there's 15 of them. Which one?

>> Oh, no. But "Eragon" can't -- I mean, and Christopher Paolini.

>> Panini.

>> Panini. That's a press. That's food. I'm hungry. Can we eat?

>> Paolini? I went to school with Paolela, Jennifer Paolela. I love his writing style. I like the topic. I love the caricatures. I love the elves, I love the dragons. It was just, good.

>> Uh-huh.

>> So you took that with you throughout your school and some things you and Phoenix did

--

>> Yeah. Even the stage fright thing was fixed by my lust for a girl.

[CHUCKLES]

>> Because one of these girls I wanted to date was in the Drama Club and she wanted me to be a part in the play because there were no boys in Drama Club. So she was like -- so I immediately got a role. I didn't have to be good at it.

>> You didn't have to do anything. You just stood up and added a pair of testicles.

>> Pretty much. You're tall and you have a deep voice.

>> Yes, you can do this.

>> Sold.

>> How did you manage memorizing lines and shit like that?

>> Just repetition. That's just the way you do lines. On stage -- everyone was doing it the same way. They just kept reading. I guess I had to take a little bit longer. But I did it.

>> I always forgot my lines.

>> I think there was one line in a song that -- a song and dance that I had to do, there was one word that I either skipped over that word or replaced it with a different word. That was it.

>> Nobody noticed it but you. But boy, when you miss something, you're carrying it with you for at least the rest of the scene.

>> The theater troop was pretty supportive. And challenging.

>> Yeah.

>> I had all of the words down. But that one. But they always reminded me.

>> You know, and it's interesting. So you have this ability to memorize and you know you recall the information and what have you. And I'm impressed --

>> The problem isn't memory. My brain is full of stuff. It's just getting back to the specific memory.

>> Okay. Stay with that for one -- the specific memory. And then there was that type of dyslexia recalling it.

>> Rapid automated naming.

>> Rapid recall, whatever. But you can sit out and break out a beat and rap. How do you do that as somebody with dyslexia? Because a lot of the way they lay out words in a rap song aren't even words as much as sounds that sound like words once you play it all fast.

>> How do you teach kids the alphabet.

>> Music. Sing it. Yeah, A, B, C -- yeah. The ABC song.

>> Putting a rhythm to something.

>> Uh-huh.

>> It helps your memory.

>> That's one of the ways I taught in kindergarten. But a lot of things to song. So if it has --

>> If it has a rhythm to it, it also helps -- like my ring tone on my phone is Scatman. And for a reason. Because part of that song is like, hey, Scatman Joe, how come you stutter when you talk but when you sing you don't stutter? He's like, ah, because the rhythm of the beat. And then I get to scat. And that's kind of the way I stutter.

>> That's one thing. I want to stop and totally take a left turn. So please, make your dyslexic note and we're going to come back to that. The kid, Brandon, during the Democratic Convention. I give that boy props. He spoke coherently and more clearly and no double talk. Better than some politicians. And you know, again, we're not stumping for Biden or promoting any one candidate over another.

But Biden, also, overcame a severe stutter. And I half wonder sometimes if that's why he has these gaps or these issues with communicating and/or people perceive him as being confused. Because I would assume, much like dyslexia, you've got to think extra hard when you pronounce or enunciate your words.

>> It's a bad look. But you can overcome it.

>> Yeah, no.

>> Speaking about stutters, I have to mention, also, Samuel L. Jackson. The way that he overcomes his stutter is by saying the word mother fucker every five seconds.

[CHUCKLES]

>> I never knew that until you told me that. Because we were doing the research on the different people around the world --

>> I love that.

>> -- in history. And people with dyslexia that have helped shape the world and improved the human condition range from actors to politicians.

>> Einstein was dyslexic.

>> To every day people. But Samuel Jackson, his stutter, the way he dealt with it, I don't know if we could give that to a kid to use in school.

[CHUCKLES]

>> Hey, Einstein was dyslexic and he came up with $E=MC^2$.

>> Please, Einstein. And Richard Branson that's another one who I really respect tremendously. I read up on his life a little bit. He was ostracized, made fun of by the kids, made fun of by teachers, by colleagues. Because his dyslexia was a very severe one. But again, he was a tremendous thinker. He's thinking outside the box. He's a problem solver. And look at where he is now. I wonder who is laughing at him or are they looking in the mirror and saying, I wish I had dyslexia. Ridiculous.

So managing the stage fright and being able to put things to a syncopated rhythm or something definitely helps you work your disability or work your dyslexia in a successful manner.

>> Yeah. And if it wasn't for my friends in high school who got me to -- they got me into really enjoying learning and wanting to seek out knowledge, if it wasn't from them, I probably wouldn't have gone to college. Not that I did too well in college. But --

>> Were your friends forgiving and supportive and understanding?

[CHUCKLES]

>> No.

[CHUCKLES]

>> No, we had this thing called the betrayal 5.

>> The what?

>> The betrayal 5.

>> Go ahead.

>> I'll do it to you some time.

>> All right.

>> Where we would meet up in the hallway and go, hey, man, high 5.

>> Okay.

>> And then one of my friends would scream, betrayal 5 and smack you in the center of the chest.

[CHUCKLES]

>> As hard as they could. It was great. That's the kind of friends that I had.

>> You're warped.

So how did you manage to build up the confidence and the interest to take your hatred for school and look at college?

>> I still hate school.

>> See, I love school.

>> I think the tipping point of that is I talked to the guidance counselor and he was talking about some things I could do in college. And I would have all of the choices I would ever want. And one of the choices he had for me was, in choosing my 12th grade classes, he said, you can also take an AP class for marine biography or oceanography. And I said, okay, that's something I am very interested in. In 11th grade I started to excel in biology and math. Really well.

I was in precalculus in 11th grade, which I passed sleeping. And --

>> I don't see -- calculus and you have dyscalculia, too. How the hell?

>> I don't know.

>> I'm sorry; I just had to say that.

>> I'm not sure.

>> No, so --

>> The class didn't get it. And the teacher would explain it once. I would try it a couple of times and get it. And everyone else would be asking questions for the rest of class so I would sleep.

>> Crazy. So this AP course?

>> This AP course, oceanography. So I -- in the summer between 11th and 12th grade I actually went to Stony Brook Southampton to take a college course, college credits, for an AP class in high school for oceanography. And I loved it.

>> Wow.

>> I couldn't get enough of it. I wanted to go back and do more of that. Unfortunately when I got to college, I had a whole bunch of prerequisites before I could get to any of the good classes, you know?

>> Yes, good Liberal Arts education.

>> I didn't have like a job that I wanted to do. I just knew I wanted to learn about stuff.

>> You lacked focus?

>> Yeah. So I didn't have an end goal in sight.

>> How are you supposed to have a goal -- I went into college --

>> Yeah, I changed my major like six times.

>> Oh, see, I had theology --

>> I ultimately failed out before I did that. Taken with the spirit of Drama Club and facing my weaknesses and making them my strengths, I took a class on public speaking.

>> Oh.

>> Because it worked in my prerequisites and I was like, this is a problem area of mine. I should probably work on this.

>> Cool.

>> So that class gave me the tools that I use today. None of this is written down. Or if I needed to do a speech, I would write the whole speech, right?

[CHUCKLES]

>> And then I would turn that into bullet points, keywords to hit on. And then I would throw the speech away and use that and ad-lib in between and that's how we did your TEDTalk.

>> I am laughing. That's exactly what I'm laughing about. Because last year we did a TEDTalk. And John took a lot of the presentations I've given. And wove them together in a coherent manner that they flowed really naturally. And you know, we get to DC. And we get unpacked and we're going to do some sightseeing and kick out the slats instead of getting ready to get anxious about the presentation and he just says to me, you practiced, right? And I'm like, practice what? And I swear, John, if I had vision, I would have seen you look like deer in the headlights.

>> The color drained from my face.

>> You totally created this empathetic anxiety for you and for me. I'm like, what do you mean I've got to practice? You cleared our calendar, we're not doing anything. We sat down. And you just beat into me the repetitiousness of how you did it. And we had these keywords, these key phrases, that I said without an issue. But they were triggers in my mind to say, okay, transition to the next thought.

>> Yes, which you start every next thought with that keyword. And then you just have a list of keywords. That even if you have a bad moment on stage, you can just -- I would just shout the word to you and you would get it.

>> Yeah, then also what I wasn't taking into consideration because I didn't have the visual appreciation for it was the PowerPoint you put together. Because all of the phraseology and the transition words were cues for you to change --

>> Change the slides.

>> -- the slides. It was just remarkable. And if anybody is interested in suffering through --

>> That's probably why I had so much anxiety over it. Because I had to change the slides.

>> Yeah.

>> And if I didn't know where you were going, I couldn't change the slides.

>> No. And that's one of the things, too. I think that's why we mesh so well together. Is because we both have this unwritten weird empathy for the other. And it's one of the few things I'm tremendously proud of in my life that I've done. And if anybody would care to take a look, you can see our TEDTalk by going to My Blind Spot. We have it at links to take a look at

that. That was a great accomplishment that we both --

>> It's also on our YouTube page, right?

>> Oh, and it's also on our YouTube page, yes.

>> The whole video?

>> Yeah, but you were able to take this public speaking course and deal with one of your fears?

>> Oh, I think every class we had to stand up and do a presentation. Every class. So the first like three classes, I was like, oh, this is terrible. Why did I take this class?

[CHUCKLES]

>> And then by the end of the class, I was extremely confident.

>> Oh, my God. I just --

>> One of the things I did is you had to do like a hands-on presentation. You had to show people something. So I did a bug-out bag. So I put together a whole bug-out bag. And that's what made it click to me that the talking points could be one word. Because I just bring out something from inside. I literally just had a bag and I just reached into it and grabbed something and talked about how it's useful in a survival situation.

>> So it does seem to me based upon your lived experiences that having an avid interest or being invested in or having skin in a game definitely guides you and empowers you to take that extra effort needed to digest the information or present the information.

>> Yeah, like I wanted to sail so I learned how to sail. I wanted to hunt so I learned how to hunt.

>> I wanted to read so I learned how to read.

>> I wanted to read so I learned how to read.

>> Wow.

>> I think the last thing I want to talk about is there was -- I did a little research on treatments. And this is mostly for children because that's where it's most important is early.

>> Early intervention. Diagnosis.

>> In fact, the first thing they say is early identification and early --

>> Intervention.

>> Intervention, yeah, I guess intervention is the word, the second you notice your child has some dyslexic tendencies, jump on that and start helping them with it.

>> And I'm sure as they go and Google what are some of the indicators or what are some of the symptoms and signs, they could get information --

>> That's how I got all of this.

>> Yeah, so Google it. Google it.

>> Google it.

>> Google it.

>> One of the most important things is finding out which aspect of dyslexia is the most challenging for your child. If it's one thing they have a problem with, that one thing you have to work on, great. If not, maybe something else is a little worse. Maybe something else is a little

better.

>> By understanding which of the challenges your child has, you're able to create those tools that are going to allow them to improve their ability in reading.

>> Yeah, I think this information was out in the '90s. And one of the things my mom stressed was like -- the doctor said I was more dyscalculia than anything else. So my mom really harped on my math. And I'm really good at math.

>> Well, that paid off. I know that.

[CHUCKLES]

>> Thank you, Patty Hermus.

>> Thank you, pythagorean.

>> Thank you, pythagorean. We have a theorem going in there. So there's that. So one of the other things we discussed, too, was the sign language as a solution to --

>> Yeah, if you address the problem very early. If your child doesn't speak right when they should, start teaching them sign language. And like I said, teaching kids sign language regardless of their cognitive ability.

>> Is a good thing.

>> It's helpful in a multitude of ways. It kicks starts their brain faster than you would --

>> Trying to mouth words.

>> Because they can make hand signals faster than they can make words come out of their mouth. Because those things develop slower.

>> And then maybe their first word won't be no.

[CHUCKLES]

>> Actually I think my brother's first sign was no.

[CHUCKLES]

>> That makes sense. Buddy.

>> Actually you can -- kids in diapers, they indicate poo.

>> Yeah, change my diaper.

>> They are signing the word poo.

>> Which is then a transition they don't want to have poop in their diaper, they go in the potty.

>> Yeah, I poop.

>> I poop.

[CHUCKLES]

>> Yeah, so addressing it early is key. Some things you can do is read along with your child when they start to read. As early as six months I guess.

>> Yeah, you read to your child.

>> You read to them.

>> That's one of the things I espouse. Yep. Every one of my nieces and nephews has had their parents reading to them or somebody reading to them since they were old enough to be held in their arms.

>> And having a book for them when they start to read.

>> Yeah.

>> And reading the book to them.

>> Yeah.

>> But having them read along with you.

>> Along with you.

>> And follow your finger.

>> I think -- as an educator I love that. Because you're modeling the behavior. And then they are able to follow along with their finger and then they can look at the word. And you know, it will take a while.

>> One of the things on this list is having an encouraging environment.

>> Yep.

>> Like if you don't read, your child is probably not going to want to read.

>> Yeah.

>> But if you read, oh, look, Mom is reading. I want to try and read.

>> As an educator, everything we taught a child is undone in 15 minutes when they go home if their parents don't encourage and promote a healthy respect for education.

>> Yeah, something I learned in college actually, one of the first things I learned is they had the Stony Brook shirts, Stony Brook Southampton shirts.

>> Yeah.

>> I don't know if anybody knows about LEED buildings, L-E-E-D.

>> You do.

>> I do.

[CHUCKLES]

>> They are run on sustainability. Green buildings. Low impact to the environment. But also a healthy work environment for the people working there. You know, they got yoga centers and lunchrooms that are nice and all of that. But the shirt said LEED by example. And that was a big, oh, yeah, moment. Is like one of the things my father used to say frequently is, do as I say. Not as I do.

>> He still says that.

>> That's ass backwards.

[CHUCKLES]

>> No. You took that LEED environmental stuff so seriously. You noticed that when we walked into Canon U.S.A.'s corporate office as one of our clients.

>> Oh, they had a plaque on their door.

>> Yeah, that was wild.

>> It said LEED.

>> They are a LEED building. I'm like what?

>> That stuck with me, yeah.

[CHUCKLES]

>> And I think one of the most important things is encouragement.

>> Absolutely.

>> No matter how hard it gets, you always have to say, it's important, you need to do it.

>> That's exactly how -- regardless of ability, that's how I got through school. And that's how my -- when you listen to the TEDTalk, you know, my dad was like the word can't doesn't exist in your vocabulary. It sucks to be blind. But you've got to go out there and do it now.

I think if we get encouragement, just having people around us that love us to believe in us is 90% of what we need to succeed.

>> Uh-huh. And the last, last thing I want to talk about.

>> Last, last thing.

>> Is this guy Jim Kwik. I'm pretty sure he's dyslexic. And on top of that I think he had some brain damage as a child. He developed methods of working around that. He does a podcast actually. It's -- just search Jim Kwik on any podcast and you'll find him. He has a website and all of that stuff. He's quite reputable, if you look him up.

But he has a lot of techniques, little thought experiments, that go a long way actually in helping to combat adult dyslexia. Changing the way you think about things. And things like learning things twice or teaching someone, you get to learn it once and then when you teach it, you learn it a second time. Stuff like that. It's just little things that add up to a great power in helping you to overcome your dyslexia.

>> That's what you were saying before about the -- about Jim Kwik talks about is the repetition. And what some of us consider checking our work or proving our answer is just another way for people with dyslexia to reinforce that information. Solidify that information. And really become these -- I would say not walking encyclopedias but a breadth of knowledge that they carry in their heads all the time.

>> He doesn't owe me anything. I don't owe him anything. It's just I listen to some of his stuff. And it makes sense to me so I need to give him a throw.

>> Yeah, you got to find what works. And Jim Kwik does work for you.

>> Yeah.

>> You know, there was also some other research that you had done about a doctor -- a woman -- a PhD who had a really --

>> Yeah, she was --

>> Tell us about that --

>> Sally E. Shaywitz.

>> Shaywitz.

>> S-h-a-y-w-i-t-z.

>> Shaywitz.

>> She's an MD at learning -- professor in learning development at Yale School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics. She has this quote that I really like. And it says, high-performing dyslexics are very intelligent, often out-of-the-box thinkers and problem solvers.

>> And just because a child has dyslexia doesn't mean they are of lower intelligence. Just

the opposite. Highly intelligent people. Albert Einstein had dyslexia. It doesn't mean you're stupid. It just means you learn different. And that statement is fantastic.

>> Going back to Jim Kwik a little bit, he says if you have dyslexia, you have to learn something once. And maybe you don't get it. So you have to learn it again. The more time you spend learning that one thing, the more time you spend on anything, the better you're going to be at it. Right?

>> Absolutely. The power of three. You and I discuss that about numerology all the time. If you read it, speak it and hear it, you lock it in. And that's one of the things I would do with the kids. I would ask the kids, when it was something very important for a five-year-old to retain, I would ask the question three times. And get three different answers. And then I would have them -- they were done. You know, and again, like you, I don't believe in homework. I think homework is a teacher's way of avoiding doing what they need to do in time management. And don't get me wrong, teachers have a shitload on their shoulders today and every day.

>> Actually --

>> Go ahead.

>> One of the funny things I like to do is if someone says what to me twice, if I've said something, and they didn't hear me and I've said something and they didn't hear me again --

>> It has nothing to do with the fact that you and your father mumble.

>> I don't know if I'm saying it wrong. Or if they are not hearing me right. But I'll just sing it the next time. The third time I sing it. And that usually gets peoples' attention. Or it helps me to speak correctly.

>> You mumble.

>> Yeah.

>> You speak lowly. He speaks softly and carry a big stick just like Teddy Roosevelt. Your father does the same thing. But, yeah, no. What? I'm sorry; I didn't hear you. There's such a wonderful, wonderful wealth of information here. And I've learned things that I didn't know about you before. I didn't know Buddy had dyslexia. I didn't know Buddy learned sign language. I knew he was slow to talking and a whinny little brat every time Mommy left the house.

>> I think my sister should have taught Cole how to do sign language. It probably would have helped a lot.

>> Cole is the youngest child of John's sister, Mel. We have Gianna and Cole. And Cole really is such a good boy. Oh, my God, remember when we were at the house, he was helping Grandma set the table.

>> He's getting better.

>> He's a terrible two.

>> He has the terrible twos, yeah.

>> No, you get stuck with one of those. I was the terrible child in my family. My brother was quiet and laid back.

>> I was a perfect child.

>> Huh?

>> I didn't cry.

>> Who, you?

>> Yeah. I took two naps a day.

>> No, the biggest problem was you were 12 pounds when you were born or something.

You were a huge animal.

>> Massive.

>> Massive. My God.

>> Absolute unit.

[CHUCKLES]

>> Yeah, so in short, I just want to recap a little bit. We've got different types of dyslexia that you need to be aware of. And if your child exhibits any of them, there are tools and work-arounds and there are different ways to attack it to make sure that their ability is accentuated so they can create infinite possibilities in their lives. And there are people out there living their lives every day who are dyslexic and that's what we do at My Blind Spot. We work to make sure digital platforms take into consideration an individual of ability. People with dyslexia, we look at different types of font sizes. We would look at the different colorations, different spacings. There's a lot of ways that technology can level the playing field. And another tool that we had out there that I haven't really touched on and we really need to do more with them is Capti Voice. Capti Voice is a reading assistant that helps people with dyslexia, people who are blind, even English as second language learners, it translates things into their native language. It helps you look up words on the fly. And I don't know about you, but I believe --

>> Oh, yeah, I wouldn't have been able to do anything in life if I didn't have word processors. They were a saving grace.

>> Exactly. And you know, we are a technological age. The 21st Century our lives are inextricably tied to digital communications, technologies. And we need to start, you know, harnessing them in a more positive way to minimize and help us maximize our abilities. And I think that I picked the right time to go blind. Because there are things that I'm able to do that people were not able to do just 25 years ago, 30 years ago.

So technologies are what it's all about. A healthy balance of what they need to do physically and what they can do virtually is critical for their personal growth. Their mental well-being. And I believe their success in life.

So where else are we going with this, John, are we good?

>> That's pretty much it.

>> Great. Well, just to recap, you are listening to the AccessAbility Works podcast from My Blind Spot. If you want to download our podcast or tell your friends to download our podcast, we would love that. Please have them go to their favorite place to get their podcasts. We're on Spotify and Apple and a few others. And you can also go to our website, MyBlindSpot.org. I'm Albert Rizzi.

>> And I'm John Hermus.

>> Ya'll have a great day. See you soon.

[MUSIC]

>> I want to take this time to sing a song.

>> Okay.

>> Because we were talking about rhythm and --

>> Oh, that's right; that's right; that's right. Okay. So I'm going to set this up. It's the gorilla group, right?

>> Yeah.

>> Yeah.

>> That's the song.

>> It's the band Gorillaz, the song Clint Eastwood.

>> I'm not -- Clint Eastwood.

>> Clint Eastwood by the Gorillaz.

>> By the Gorillaz.

>> Finally someone let me out of my cage. Now, time for me is nothing, 'cause I'm countin' no age. Nah, I couldn't be there. Now, you shouldn't be scared. I'm good at repairs, and I'm under each snare. Intangible, bet you didn't think, so I command you to. Panoramic view, look, I'll make it all manageable. Pick and choose, sit and lose, all you different crews. Chicks and dudes, who you think is really catchin' tunes?

>> You kill me. I don't understand how you do that.

>> It's rhythm.

>> Rhythm. The rhythm is gonna get ya.