Andy Slater - June 25 2021

**SPEAKERS**

Molly Joyce, Andy Slater

**Molly Joyce** 00:00

Okay, first question is, what is resilience for you?

**Andy Slater** 10:46

Resilience for me. It might just be the straight up definition. There's, there's been in my whole life, so many things that would have been a setback, and may have been for a period of time before I realized that I needed to be my strongest advocate. So self-advocacy, I think is sort of the spawn or the sprout of my resilience. I don't, I don't sit down and shut up very often. And it's especially not for the pleasure of, you know, ableist. And so it's kind of the sort of interactions and experience I have with other people telling me, I can't do what I want. And the sort of thing where there's accessibility boundaries to keep me from creating the art that I want, or the life that I want to live or whatever. That really pushes me to continue and be resilient. Even sometimes it burns me out. And might even set me might even set me back a couple of steps because I kind of pushed myself to a limit to a boundary that I need to step away from and kind of get myself more present and take a breather. But like, I think that that's all part of it, I think that I've for so long, especially as a kid didn't know how to really pick myself up and do stuff until I found my voice. And I just kind of take those experiences and those memories of how that stuff happened. And push it towards, I just have to keep going. And there's absolutely no way that any of this sort of stuff is going to stop me whether it's you know, navigating in the weather going out and dealing with people in public that don't think I should be there. People that consider it an inspiration that I actually manage to go to the store to buy a Snickers bar, or a six pack of beer or whatever it may be that across the street and that sort of thing is like That's none of their business and it is an annoyance and insulting and everything but that sort of thing pushes me to not prove them wrong but just to in spite of them. Just live my life and try not to inspire them hope that answers the question. I'm just gonna stop there if I think.

**Molly Joyce** 14:05

No, I love that so much and I forgot to add to I try not to say a lot during the answers or not be too conversational because I don't want my voice if I'm being super quiet No, I love that so much. And the next question is, what is isolation for you?

**Andy Slater** 14:31

Thank you isolation for me, is sort of something that I forced upon myself. When it does happen. When I feel isolated, it's because I kind of chose to be alone with either my thoughts or myself or my art in that kind of thing. It doesn't mean that I'm not at all, you know, my dogs are going nuts. Just gonna start this over in a second here because I don't know if you can hear them, but it's distracting for me.

**Molly Joyce** 15:28

Okay.

**Andy Slater** 15:31

I'll just edit it out. So isolation, for me is often something that I put upon myself. And it's usually voluntary, by default, you know, I choose to that alone with myself and my thoughts and you know, it doesn't mean that I'm not socially in touch with people that I'm not talking to people or even collaborating with people on either work or art or just, you know, friendship and being social and that sort of thing. But it's part of, like, my artistic process, you know, the past year and a half, I've been alone, so much, where, like, my son is upstairs in his room at school, and then I'm downstairs in my room at work, and then my wife is work and that sort of thing. So I spend a lot of time either thinking or procrastinating until I get to a point where there's some sort of like inspiration to continue to move and do stuff. Isolation isn't always a bad thing. There's been so many times in my life where I've had to, like, go it alone and get stuff done on my own, because although I rely on so many people for so many different things, I also love my autonomy and that's part of the reason why I kind of like shut my self in my room and kind of wood shed and hyperfocus and so this sort of isolation is something I bring upon myself. And that's not in any that's that's not any statement to kind of say that I don't get lonely or that I you know, miss being with others and that sort of thing. It's just kind of a thing that I just go through I often feel like there are these boundaries that kind of keep me inside the house that are outside of you know, my own intention of kind of creating and going in erupted in these things are totally a result of my disability where I'm incredibly light sensitive. And so when it's very bright out, although I'm totally capable of navigating and getting around and going places that sun forces me to wear a hat and two pairs of sunglasses and it's honestly the the time where I feel less safe around other people and traffic and that sort of thing and it can physically hurt you know, like my eyes will get bent out. And that will that's something was like well I have to go out today in the sun. So that basically means even if I'm out for an hour I come home my eyes need to rest for 75 hours you know or something like that ridiculous where it's like I can't look at anything and I just feel burnt out and that's kind of like the one time where my resilience kind of takes a hit and that's especially like navigating out in the winter in the weather and the snow. Like the snow blindness is amplified amplifies. You know the snow amplifies my my phone I have a phobia and my my light sensitivity where it's just painful. I love walking in the snow. I love going out out at night and navigating. Because it's only but it means that I can work, I can move at a slow pace and the rest of the world is as well. So a lot of a lot of times people need to kind of keep me. Okay, and have thought on that.

**Molly Joyce** 20:33

That's interesting, especially about the snow. Yeah, yeah.

**Andy Slater** 20:38

I kind of figured I'd bring that in. Since we're talking about winter.

**Molly Joyce** 20:41

Yeah. Can you also talk about snowflakes?

**Andy Slater** 20:47

Yeah. What do they look like? Me? Oh, geez, I just love the snow, I'll send you links to videos that I made me like just navigating and like the snow falls, and I go out with my cane. And if it hasn't been a shoveled, walk or street or anything, I will just draw with my cane. And like perform this act of drawing, which is just my absolute favorite.

**Molly Joyce** 21:22

Great. And the next question, kind of the opposite of the previous one, what is connection for you?

**Andy Slater** 21:36

Connection for me is the ultimate knowing, the the best feeling when I can connect with somebody else, either in collaboration, or conversation, or friendship or whatever. That's what really motivates me motivates my mental health and, you know, inspires me to think and create and problem solve and that sort of thing. And say, like, maybe in 2015, when I had a formal introduction to the Chicago disability, sort of arts scene, went to grips. That's when I felt this connection with other artists and people kind of, you know, on this, you know, I level for the first time because I realize that even though as a blind person, I have this lived experience that sighted people may not be able to really relate to people with other disabilities, we have so many like strains and connections that are similar, where there is this solidarity and empathy that is just kind of built in. And so when I'll say something like, man, this happened to me, I don't know if you can relate, but, you know, this was shitty, and I'm still trying to unpack this or whatever, somebody else who may be uses a wheelchair is like, "Oh, I totally know what that is, you know," I've met that body, I've met that person. And here's how I excelled over it, or ignored it or laughed at it and that sort of thing. And so, you know, there's that sort of, like, social aspect of connecting especially with, with, with disabled people. And then with, you know, disable and grip artists in connection through collaboration, I I'll go and say that working with disabled artists is, is where I'm most comfortable I, there there is a level of trust when collaborating with another disabled person, whether they're an artist or a writer, or you know, don't even identify as a creative person of any sort. There's a trust because of that sort of, you know, that experience of, you know, enduring ableism and so and so it's it helps in the conversation when I have ideas that I can speak plainly about stuff like presenting and communicating my ideas. I can do so more clearly when, you know, there's that trust or at least feeling of reliability or just understanding. There's no time or point in these sort of relationships and these connections where I have to stop and have this like history or explanation of accessibility or ableism, or all these kinds of things. I don't have to put a whole lot of time into educating somebody on the accommodations I may need, or understanding what accommodations they may need, you know, it's just kind of you just bounce right in and get right down to it. And I think that sort of connection builds this bond, and allows people to and allows me to feel successful and you know, realize these ideas and, and moments in time without without regret, I'm not waking up in the middle of the night feeling like "Oh, shit, I just fucked up with this person, I don't get anxiety because my temperament and my overall being is just cool." You know, you have this sort of, you know, this, this, when you have a strong connection with somebody and their art. It's just the ultimate feeling. I think I said that already. But so, you know, connections. It's you know, having a connection with somebody in this kind of relatability with them does build trust and historically for me, and with my art and friendships have you know, motivated me to realize the things that I want to do. Okay, I'm gonna end there because I feel like I'm just repeating myself and kind of looping in and out.

**Molly Joyce** 27:22

And last question, kind of a darker one to end on, but what is darkness for you?

**Andy Slater** 28:07

This is so funny to ask a blind person darkness for me is not necessarily the absence of light. Although I prefer being in a dark space because of my light sensitivity and the fact that I can navigate a very dark space without injuring myself or without feeling safe because it's something I've done for so long in my life. It doesn't have any real negative it doesn't really have a negative persuasion. me emotionally darkness missing and thinking like you know, there's a physical darkness and then there's like the sort of there's that emotion. And I'm not really sure how to address it, because I acknowledge that the emotion of darkness exists. But since my relationship with light and dark is different than sighted person, and then definitely different than what could be the experience of a another blind person difference.

**Molly Joyce** 30:08

Yeah, and I think just that, really whatever it is to you in a way, it's your choice. Or all the above?

**Andy Slater** 30:15

Yeah, I mean, I don't want to I'm thinking right now is like how to try to compare it to how other people perceive it. But that's not important. Darkness to me, can be very inviting. And I speak of that in this sort of physical sense where there's an absence of light. Because darkness is something, darkness is an environment that I feel very comfortable in. Because of my light sensitivity. I feel safe in the dark. And this was not something I've always felt as a child, I had severe night blindness. And then over the years, it kind of reversed itself. I walk at night, I navigate dark spaces all the time. And so there may be this sort of presence in the world negativity with the analogy, or metaphor, whatever it may be of like a dark cloud hanging over society. You know, guides people to make decisions that are based on fear, or negativity. And don't necessarily perceive that as such, and think that has everything to do with my own relationship with darkness. Now? Yeah, I don't want to say that darkness is anything that keeps me from doing anything, I don't think that it, you know, affects me. And I don't connect it in any way to my mental health. Or to anybody else's mental health. I feel like darkness being a negative is something that stems from religious values, and the Bible and stuff like that. And I don't get any of that. That stuff does not at all influence my life and never has a bucket, no bucket analogy. So yeah, I mean, I think that is really a question to really kind of digested and think about, no, or early, but like, that would take a lot of searching. It's definitely harder to answer, then weakness.

**Molly Joyce** 33:16

Questions just keep getting harder with each iteration. You know, that's, you know, the, the, you know, darkness in an environment can be more influential, and inspiring to me than an environment that is light. Like upside, when I like to go out in the snow, it's always at night, it's always in the dark. And I have no fear of the dark, because I'm blind. There may be this sort of fear of going completely blind, where the whole world goes dark. But that is not really something that I think about, because it's not necessarily something I'm afraid to think or talk about, out of fear. But it's just projecting. It's trying to kind of predict what the rest of my life would be like if I had absolutely no sight. And I don't see any value in thinking about that. And I'm really going to stop talking about it. Like, that's truly my end of thought.