

Philip D.: Hello inclusion believers and welcome to the Access Champions Podcast. I'm your host, Phil Dallmann for this week's journey into the Galaxies of Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion. We got another great episode for you guys this week, we have Jonathan Elliott, who came to us in sort of an organic way, recommended by one of our previous guests, Bob Carr, formerly of the New Jersey Theater Alliance.

Philip D.: And Jonathan has had a very interesting journey to a world of helping with community support and some advocacy and soon to be published author. And I'm excited for you guys to track his journey. I think it's very indicative of many folks who end up in this kind of work, in that there's no one straight line into the world of inclusion work or advocacy work or what have you. We all get there in our own way and he certainly had a really fascinating journey, and I'm excited to share that with you guys as he is a fellow South Jerseyan in and also a fellow George Mason grad.

Philip D.: Those funny age of social media looked him up real quick and I saw we're mutual friends, and of course, Prof Dr Rick Davis of George Mason was our mutual friend. And we got to chat a little bit about that before we ended up recording, and Rick obviously is one of his professors and one of my professors and a long time mentor while we were both there. Again, very excited to share that conversation with all of you.

Philip D.: As always, if you don't already, go ahead and give us a follow on social media. We're at Access Champion on Instagram and Twitter and the Access Champion Podcast on Facebook. Lots of great content posted by pretty much everybody within the organization right now, which is a good segue to... We are on the hunt for a new associate producer, Ms Kelsey Rose Brown is stepping away for some time, and while she's navigating the world of grad school, and still some of the family are going to join our advisory board and still helping us with some of those amazing images that you guys see every week.

Philip D.: But we are on the hunt, and if you are interested, this is a position that can be done remotely, as Kelsey has done in Boston and I'm in New York. If you are interested, please go ahead and send us a cover letter outlining your interest in the position and the show and you can send that and your resume over to [accesschampion@gmail.com](mailto:accesschampion@gmail.com). Again, that's [accesschampion@gmail.com](mailto:accesschampion@gmail.com). And now a quick word about Patreon.

Olivia J.: Hi, this is Olivia Jones from Episode 76. Did you know that there's even more amazing Access Champion content out there? It's true. For only a dollar a month, you get access to even more exclusive interviews, games and coming soon, a book club, or basically Oprah. All you have to do is go to [www.patreon.com/accesschampions](http://www.patreon.com/accesschampions) to sign up. And not only will you get all of that content, you will also get all sorts of other packs like amazing swag, on-air shout out stickers and more, join our team of Inclusion Warriors for only \$1 a month at [www.patreon.com/accesschampions](http://www.patreon.com/accesschampions). Don't miss out.

Philip D.: Thanks Olivia. And so, we've actually grown our Patreon supporters by a few in the last couple of weeks, which has been really great and we want to really keep that up. We do have hopes of being able to travel a little bit more with the show, 100th episode not too far away. This is Episode 88, so I believe that'll land in April, and there are some big things we'd like to do with that, and some voices that we'd like to bring to the table. So again, [patreon.com/accesschampions](https://patreon.com/accesschampions) if you like to support us. And now without further ado, Access Champion, Jonathan Elliott. All right. And we are here with a fellow South Jerseyan and fellow George Mason alum, Jonathan Elliott. Thanks so much for taking the time to chat.

Jonathan E.: Happy to be here.

Philip D.: You're one of my favorite kinds of guests because you came through a previous guest. I had just yesterday kind of put out... Every now and then, I'll source the folks in the world of social media and say, "Who's doing really dope work?" And one of our previous guests and former New Jersey Theater Alliance member, Bob Carr, immediately chimed in and said, "I'm going to message you right now," and connected us. And so, that stamp of approval is always amazing when a guest is like, "You got to talk to this person." So, very excited this morning to chat, and you're also my favorite kind of guest, because I know very little about you.

Jonathan E.: I generally, I'm of the intent that when Bob Carr recommends me to do something, I do it, his taste is pretty on point.

Philip D.: I would agree. So I'd love to hear a little bit about sort of your journey into the world of Accessibility and Inclusion.

Jonathan E.: I mean, there's couple of like... Well, we all have a couple of different origin stories, I guess. If you told me, if you want to make God laugh, you tell Her your plans and that generally does the job. In 2004, I was pretty sure I was going to be going to grad school for playwriting. I got into three programs and that was going to be the next step. And then I was offered a position at Trader Joe's corporate office in Virginia.

Philip D.: Okay.

Jonathan E.: And I was going to do that for a while, take some time off and learn how to work. That was going to be the next step. And I got a job as publicity director at Princeton Universities, Princeton Summers Theater, where I was going to be serving as PR director and directing a production of Noel Coward's Private Lives. And among other things, performing in a couple of children's theater productions as a Little John, and The Somewhat True Tale of Robin Hood, which was a disturbing amount of fun and I kind of just... The [inaudible 00:07:33] for me, in terms of Arts Management.

Philip D.: Okay.

Jonathan E.: And in August, I was reached out to by someone George Mason, who was founding a first cohort of an Arts Management Program at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. And I got my application in the last week of July, and I was accepted August 10th, and moved down there August 23rd, and that was the beginning of Arts Management for me.

Philip D.: Well, you couldn't have begun at a greater institution.

Jonathan E.: I fell sharply in love with Arts Management and with the Arts Management and burgeoning art scene in DC.

Philip D.: [crosstalk 00:08:20]. It's a really interesting area down there. It's different.

Jonathan E.: It is. It's politicized in a weird way, in that, the entire town of young people turns over every two or three years.

Philip D.: Yes. That's a really a smart assessment of why I think it is the way it is sometimes down there artistically, because it does feel like, it's consistently evolving in a way that it doesn't in other cities.

Jonathan E.: A lot had turned around very rapidly. I'd fallen in love with the man, I thought I was going to marry in Southwest Philly. And it was just a good time to kind of stay put and take a pathway that everything seem to kind of wind up, and based on how well, we as a company had done in 2004, the entire managing board was invited back for 2005, which had never happened before at Princeton Summer Theater. So, we had the opportunity to kind of... The continuity of two seasons, and everything kind of just lined up when that happen.

Jonathan E.: So, just everything seemed to fit. So, that was the plan. I did my first year of grad school down there and we started planning our second season, where I would be coming back as business managers/managing director and I'd be directing Godspell, which as you know, mostly Jewish kid growing up, mostly atheist on the mainstream. So, Princeton was a weird move, because all that meant to be said, ironically, I don't know how much [inaudible 00:09:56] it was.

Jonathan E.: But we put together a season where we wanted to kind of do the greatest hits that would appeal to a Princeton audience. So, we did Dial M for Murder. We did Picasso at the Lapin Agile by Steve Martin, which is one of those kind of slam dunk in a university town shows, where it's Picasso and Einstein throwing down in Paris in the early aughts of the 1900s. I mean, it's just a lovely little play in 75 minutes. It's kind of perfect for university town. We had God's one, there was musical and then we did ... John V Handwritten played the voice of the turtle, which is a ...

Jonathan E.: I really loved little treaties on war and postwar environments, that at one point was the longest running show on Broadway and then we ... This has really been talked about a lot, but we decided to save money on the children's show by writing our own ... We did a play called Tales of Wonder, which was a four oddly, liberal, fairy tales from around the world, where we kind of did a little bit of research and didn't realize that we were writing some super politicized plays that didn't end up starting to be that way. Like one which was a play about a flamingo from Argentina who was great to begin with, and something inside him just had to be pink and he just needed to get comfortable coming out with that. And we use [inaudible 00:11:24] six or seven times, I'm like, "We accidentally written a coming out story. I'll make sure in the morning, okay."

Jonathan E.: There was a piece on racial profiling about badgers from Japan. It was one of those things where we have a lot of fun putting this play together, but at the end we were like, we weren't quite sure what we had done. But kids seem to really adore it and we had a good time and that was the summer of 2005, and I went back to DC to finish my master's degree and then I ended up in West Virginia for a year, which was a interesting sidestep, as the associate managing director of the Contemporary American Theater Festival.

Philip D.: Okay.

Jonathan E.: It was a really interesting, if you told me that I was going to sidestep to West Virginia, that was not going to list that by tape, but there was. Then I moved to Southern Virginia, Petersburg, Virginia with a contract at a theater called Sycamore Rouge, which was a cabaret space in a town that had a real need for the arts and for uplifting the arts. It's a town that was 64% illiterate, 88% had major problems with homelessness, major problems with gangs, and we were sort of the assigned artistic venue with three kids gathered from above the Mason-Dixon line to put together this theater.

Jonathan E.: And it was an eye-opening, real strong learning experience for a year contract. And then when that finished up, I took an opening at McCarter Theater and came back up North to manage the marketing department for two years, and then took a gig with ... I contracted for just under six months instead of a couple of theaters and theater events in the Highland Park, neighborhood of Chicago, outside Chicago. And then did works for the ArtPride New Jersey Foundation and ran to Discover Jersey Arts.

Jonathan E.: I managed the marketing edge of Discover Jersey Arts program for a couple of years, then took my ... We all have a little bit of time outside the arts, I guess. I took a stint where I was the communications director for the American Board of Ophthalmology, which was the greatest, what am I doing experience with my life? It was a program that let me understand that my entire job was finding ways to game the Affordable Care Act, to make it more useful and as a fundraising opportunity for eye doctors.

Philip D.: Okay.

Jonathan E.: And if there's one thing I'm not put on this planet to do, it's that.

Philip D.: And you know what? It's good that you know that now.

Jonathan E.: Yes. And then I reopened my consultancy with a couple of friends, the Good Guys Art Solutions, which led to me doing a lot of grassroots for profit, not for profit, mostly not for profit, with a little bit for profit work here and there. Arts work, I worked on the Auto Night Program in Trenton as PR director. I had a lot of fun. And that very quickly led to me getting snapped up by the Episcopal Diocese in New Jersey, which was... I think I joked about this, my dad is an episcopalian from Boston. My mom's a nice Jewish girl from Tulsa. I was raised confused.

Jonathan E.: My parents kind of just respected my privacy as a kid and there was no real strong religious practice or evidence in my life as a young person. And I was hired for this job because I think they expected me to be the kind of seeker who would ask the stupid questions. At that point, I was aged 32 year old, 41 year old rather, openly gay man who was curious about religion and had some interesting and often weird thoughts about it.

Jonathan E.: I'd be the kind of guy who would ask the stupid questions and raise a hand. And a year and a half into the job, I realized I'd fallen in love with being an Episcopalian and they were the kind of Christianity, they were the kind of awesome openly-minded Nerdfighters that I'd always wanted to find [inaudible 00:15:52] because was never a good enough answer. And I sort of found my way in through the collective works with John Green, like the Fault in Our Stars led me to [inaudible 00:16:03] church. And I realized about a year and a half in that I wanted to be baptized. And that was a weird experience in and of itself. I think I'm a pretty good PR person, regardless of whether or not the religion and I stuck.

Jonathan E.: If you understand PR, you can handle it or just anything. But for a while, I really strongly came in wanting to believe, and walk the walk and talk the talk. And the interesting thing about suddenly becoming baptized, so it was this weird coming out story of I've been openly gay my entire life but it's never been a problem. But when I came out as a liberal Christian, I suddenly lost a bunch of friends.

Philip D.: Oh, interesting.

Jonathan E.: That wasn't how it was supposed to work. And the Guardian picked up on that story and I got a million hits off of that. And that led to a whole ... I got some interest from HuffPost [inaudible 00:17:01] and a million people read that story and then a bunch of Nigerians called for my death. So that was a weird fun experience.

Philip D.: Yeah. That sounds good.

Jonathan E.: That was, to date [inaudible 00:17:12], most read thing I've put out there. So, the part of me joining the Accessibility Advocacy Community comes a little bit later. I was on what just starts in, little kind of starts in November of 2015, where I was on a hike at Camp Kanuga, which is near Asheville, North Carolina, and it's a beautiful area, say Episcopal-owned retreat center. I was on a hike down there and stub my toe and didn't pay attention to it.

Philip D.: Okay.

Jonathan E.: And eight days later my big toe and my right foot is getting amputated. One of those things that as a diabetic you have to pay attention to.

Philip D.: Right.

Jonathan E.: Well, my sugars were reasonably controlled. I was working 80 hours a week and wasn't paying attention when I got a bad deal. So, I ended up losing two toes on my right foot by the end of that whole structure. That was one of those real moments of kind of understanding that you're at that point of ... I was 33 at that point that, "Oh mortality is going to send me pretty earlier."

Jonathan E.: And there were periods, there were balance issues. I was in a wheelchair for about four months. And I learned a lot about other things that were wrong with my body too. I joked about this with my family a lot on both sides. I have a little brother who's six years younger than I am, and it's like the movie twins, he got all the really solid sterling jeans and he's in the military and he's super smart and angular and I got all the diseases like killed everybody a couple of generations back, including one thing I've got is a bone disease that is often comes in line with diabetes but isn't solid linked to it. Solid link to it called a Charcot deformity.

Jonathan E.: And I was diagnosed with that. And there were some issues with what it creates as a sort of pancaking of hardwoods and soft tissues in lower extremities. And there was some examples of that in my right foot. If I was to keep an eye on it, everything would be okay. Well, we weren't paying attention to the left foot. I was officiating a bunch of weddings for my theater friends, starting with some of the folks at Princeton Summer Theater, and my 20th wedding, which was the first weekend of November in 2016-

Philip D.: Hold on, sweet Jesus. You had officiated 20 weddings? That's amazing.

Jonathan E.: It started out as something where like, "Where do we put Jonathan in this wedding? He can talk, we can make him officiate gay." And that's what [inaudible 00:19:54] a good New York Time story on me, where I'm the lead and Bobby Burke from Queer Eye is like the fifth story in there. So I'm like, "yes, I am better at this than Bobby Burke." That's not how it was at all, but that's just how my weird, terrible fantasy ever worked.

Jonathan E.: But I officiated a bunch of weddings for [inaudible 00:20:12], but this was the moment where God kind of told me to sit down, because this was in South Jersey at the Stockton Conference Center, so way South Jersey. And I've been for the wedding. I stand up to get ready to deliver what's kind of homily at the beginning of the efficiency [inaudible 00:20:31] and my left leg shatters in seven places.

Philip D.: Oh wow.

Jonathan E.: So you look at all the pictures of me right before my face is bright, like cherry balloon red. As I'm sitting there, holding on for dear life to the mic stand to balance me out, while Greg and Caroline was like Kennedy's are gorgeous. Ready to go. Their wedding is perfect except the fact that their officiant is inflated and bright red. So the plan was at that point was to ... I was confined to a wheelchair. I was from temporary disability. The plan was for me to get some plates and screws put in and go on with my [inaudible 00:21:14].

Jonathan E.: I didn't make it January 1st, we'd missed a bone infection in my left leg and I went into the hospital at Pennsylvania Presbyterian with a fever of 105 degrees and a gigantic abscess in my left leg. And a couple of hours into my 35th birthday, January 10th of 2017, I lost my left leg below the knee. Not a great birthday gift.

Philip D.: No, I have heard of better.

Jonathan E.: Yes. For my 36th birthday, my friends gave me a big cake and the shape of a foot.

Philip D.: Oh men.

Jonathan E.: The toes are pull apart cupcakes. My friends get it, that this is a big part of me surviving, this was living on a razor thin line between tickling about what happened and having days where I just want to die. And I mean that's kind of the darkest part of this that no one talks about is, one in six amputees makes an attempt for a better life within six months of it happening. I immediately became very active in amputee support groups because I had to.

Jonathan E.: I knew cognitive therapy and various sorts really works with me because I'm verbal. I've always been verbal my entire life and me learning to talk to and connect with people who had been through stuff that I had was going to be essential. When initially I was connecting with people who were kind of a lot of diabetic amputees, which is where I got thrown into for various reasons, which wasn't quite my story, tend to be 20 or 30 years older than that.

Philip D.: Okay, yes.

Jonathan E.: So now I have a lot of close friends who are diabetic amputees, who are 20 or 30 years older than I am and weirdly a lot of military amputees who are my age or younger. And then I've got a couple Charcot friends who have like [inaudible 00:23:08] diseases that they've lost it to. A couple of friends who are cancer survivors, lost a limb, usually they're above knee amputees for one reason or another, but there's a lot who's out there.

Jonathan E.: And right now I'm in a place where, the kind of the double down on it was, I was walking again by late summer of 2017 again with a prosthetic. And then I got my second round prosthetic, which is great. And then in October of 2018, we discovered a gigantic abscess in the left leg again. So for about a year I was back in a wheelchair, which led to me ... And at this point now I'm walking with my third round prosthetic to rebalance. So I'm about half of my time right now, I'm in a wheelchair, half not.

Jonathan E.: And that was a big learning experience. How life really treats you differently when you're in a chair. Everything, from the way people use bathrooms differently, the number of times that I've had to wait for someone who may or may not need a bathroom. I need the accessible stall, is using one, to the odd accessible issue of, when someone I knew from my formerly able vice before I lost the drumstick, which I refer to my left leg mostly to try and throw people off, the first time they encounter me in this new incarnation, the first thing they do when they don't know how to deal with me, is almost to a man what they do is they lean over and shout to begin the conversation. It's like, "Dude, nothing's wrong with me about my leg." But it's really funny, that's the way when people encounter someone in a wheelchair, that is the first instinct just to bend over and increase [inaudible 00:25:00]. It's hilarious once you realize that, that's the way it's going to go.

Philip D.: Yes.

Jonathan E.: I mean, the number of times where I've been in situations where I've flown or something, there's also this weird ... I almost want to call it a guilt reaction. I was flying out to Texas for a wedding. This was last summer, and the TSA investigating my prosthetic broke it. They broke the pin off that connected it to my body and in me kind of just walking through what needed to happen. There was this tremendous guilt reaction that somehow I was making their lives more difficult.

Jonathan E.: And what I was feeling, my dad used to joke that like, "When you were a little kid, you had a cocker spaniel named Snoopy." And they could always tell when the basement had flooded, when the family had been on vacations, because they'd come home and Snoopy would try and bite dad because he'd found like a leak in the basement. And he's like, "My humans are going to think I peed in the basement? Oh God, I've got to bite them."

Jonathan E.: And that's generally how I find reflections kind of hit me again and again, is that people were afraid of me having a reaction out of anger or that they've done

something wrong. So they pushed back to kind of preempt that. And on some level, that makes me ... I'm not here to shame anybody, although I think they might. But what I've learnt again and again is that the ADA is often without teeth and that sugar takes you a lot further than flies. And that all we want a simple conversation that will get us to get what we need.

Jonathan E.: When I worked for the church again and again, one of the least accessible places in American culture is the church, because churches campaign to be exempt from the Affordable Care Act and [inaudible 00:27:00]. The American with Disabilities Act, even though I've worked in two different industries [inaudible 00:27:03]. With the ADA, they're completely exempt from First Amendment Rights.

Jonathan E.: And so, the number of churches, of the 146 churches I served in New Jersey, maybe 30 of them were fully accessible, maybe. And that's just how it was. But then there are things like one of my dearest friends is in a wheelchair. He has spina bifida, he lives down in Alabama and he would constantly go into situations where he's super strong. On Easter services, he would arm lift himself into a chair, a first chair into a pew, and then again and again, this would happen.

Jonathan E.: An usher would think that the chair that his wife would put on the back of his pew looked unseemly, [inaudible 00:27:53] rode off in a closet somewhere and then we'd go home after the service and then he'd be looking for his wheelchair for an hour after the service. I mean, we're one don't touch someone's wheelchair, but people don't think that way. Again and again, they don't make the connection between, that's an assistive device that lets this person navigate through the world.

Philip D.: Yes.

Jonathan E.: They look at it as furniture. So, a lot of my goal right now is two fold. I want people who live their lives using assistive devices to connect with the world, to feel as beautiful and as comfortable as they can, connecting in any way they possibly can. And I want people who are lucky enough, for the moment, to be completely able-bodied to recognize that for all of us at some point or another, we're going to need help. We're going to need an assistive device. We're going to have a moment of vulnerability or disability. And that means that we need to have our eyes open and to show some compassion and connect as deeply as we can with people of all needs investors on this world.

Philip D.: Yes, sir.

Jonathan E.: That's the big goal for me. I find that it's incredibly hard sometimes. There are days where I feel like where the pain of it gets the best of me or the simple shame of being a guy who uses a wheelchair gets the best of me and I don't leave the house. So, those are the days when I lose, and I don't go out, and they

suck. And then there're a lot of days I win. When I'm able to go out and that I don't feel like I've lost anything, that every part of me that I used to find charming is given a lens to shine through by this.

Jonathan E.: There are days I really do feel that, "I'm not going to pretend that life is better because I'm down to drumstick." But there are days where I do feel that I spend a long time really searching for exactly what my purpose might be and I have a special set of skills. So, this kind of touch too well and gives me a real opportunity to use those skills to make people feel better about themselves. If I can do that, I'm going to do that.

Philip D.: Absolutely. And I want to hear a little bit more about that, but we need to take just a brief moment to hear from our sponsor. We are sponsored this week by the Amateur Detective Club. The podcasts where three friends, Melissa Meli, Tyler Riley and Tristan Miller, read the works of Agatha Christie or others, summarize, discuss and rate the novels, films, TV episodes, or short stories they've chosen. Say Kelsey, what's your favorite mystery?

Kelsey Rose B.: Well, my favorite mystery is a Gillian Flynn. What's yours?

Philip D.: Scooby-Doo.

Kelsey Rose B.: Any specific Scooby-Doo?

Philip D.: Any of the ones where they say jinkies or zoinks.

Kelsey Rose B.: So all of them? Well, Amateur Detective Club is a little more specific than that, and listeners you're in luck because episodes come out every other Monday on all major podcasters. So, you can dive into a mystery on Monday and then head on over to the Galaxies of Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion on Tuesday.

Philip D.: Jinkies.

Kelsey Rose B.: Thanks for Amateur Detective Club, wherever you listen to podcasts and join the mystery today.

Philip D.: And we're back. As we are talking about where Jonathan is right now and how he hopes to be a resource for folks and to be helpful for folks. I'd love to hear a little bit about the work that is going on in your world right now. I know in our previous messages, you mentioned a book and some other things, so I'd love to hear what's going on right now.

Jonathan E.: Thanks. I've been working with an editor for about a year on a book that is a kind of condensed version of the story. It takes the last three years and kind of squeezes them into one year. When I was talking to my editor about this, it's way that my entire life around; my entry into being a man with a disability, centered around weddings. My life fell apart at a wedding and then my best

friend got married in October of that year. And a big part of my training to get back up onto the leg on an accelerated schedules, getting ready to be his best man, especially she kind of pointed directions, "That's not a coincidence there." So, it's kind of a voyage between those two weddings. So, and that's not the time when it was a little fuzzy with Matt, whatever.

Jonathan E.: But it's about that. It's about how amputees kind of loose themselves and let the body just morph of it. It's something that's never really talked about. It's about the weird things that happens when you lose your leg that you don't think about. That there are days where I'll wake up and I'll be in a good mood and my body will forget that I'm down a leg, and I'll just leap out of bed, I'm like, "I feel great." And then it's like I'm a cartoon character, I slowly tilt to the left and fall over.

Jonathan E.: If I'm in a good mood, I'll yell timber, and if I'm in a bad mood, I'll start crying. But it's definitely doing how it works. You forget about this stuff if you're not into it in the moment. But there's a really strong community of amputees, the Amputee Coalition of America. It's a great civil rights organization. It's a great access organization that really does a great job of ... They do a great job. I'm using this as a positive term of inspiration point. They're really great at finding amputees that have done incredible things after their loss.

Jonathan E.: The story that so many of us need to hear more of, and I wish we could all collaborate more on [inaudible 00:34:23] see support groups in various ways, is that no matter what, it's going to suck mightily when you lose a limb. And that doesn't become the tip of the spear as often as it needs to. But I'm participating actively in two in person support groups every month and one online support group every month. So, three weeks out of a month, I'm leading support groups and that's one way that I make sure the conversation is open and we're talking about it, and that feels pretty good [inaudible 00:34:59].

Jonathan E.: Then, like I said, sort of there is a book where I have attended. I don't know how much I'm allowed to talk about, so I'm going to be careful on this. I have tentative contract on it and I'm working with an editor who is pretty feisty on that. But we went through a bunch of really bad titles including, I think I mentioned Drumstick, that was a title for a while and I would just sort of smiling, cringe through that. Walk it Off was the title for a while. That was a rough one.

Philip D.: That's a hard swing and a miss.

Jonathan E.: Yes. I really don't seem to really like it and I'm like, "Oh God, we're really going to do this [inaudible 00:35:37] thing. Oh no." So, we're not going with that. The title that we're working with now that I really like is something my physical therapist says a lot to me, is that, there really is no elevator on the really cruddy days when I'm stuck in this and my balance is terrible and I can't get my breath caught and I feel like my heart is going to explode because I can't, nothing is lining up right.

Jonathan E.: She's like, "Your only option here is you've got to take the stairs. Right now we're going with, you have to take the stairs as the general option." And those are the days that really felt bad, when I'm able to grab a railing and just like, it's really now since I had the access, but there was a time in early 2018, when I was having a really good day, I'd be on my headset talking to someone and I would forget and I'd grab the iron railing in my home, and I would take four steps in and then I'd have this moment where I'd look down and not recognize that I had climbed four steps to get into my house.

Jonathan E.: I'd do that, when you've worked on hard enough, you forget what you've lost because you've trained so hard to regain stuff. Those are the moments that really sing. I really hope I got more of those, but the long story, I want to tell people the story of, there's nothing I'm kind of a pudgy dude. I'm not going to be a marathon runner at any part of my life unless something goes very wrong with me, I'm like, "I'm not an Ironman triathlon. There's nothing about me that's ... I have lots of friends who are military survivors and my brother serves in the military and they are amazing people. But that's not my story.

Jonathan E.: I'm an ordinary guy who had something genetically kind of crazy happened, and I'm lucky enough to still be here a couple of years later, and my intent is to hold on and be able to say that many, many moons from now. If I'm able to beat this, so many other people are going to be able to do as well. And we're going to be here and be able to cheer each other on. That's my own goal. To make sure that we all know what resources are available to us and to know that this is going to be terrible sometimes, but we have to do it anyway because it's also going to be kind of awesome sometimes.

Philip D.: Absolutely. And I think that's a tremendous perspective to be putting out into the universe and to be sharing with that community, with the amputee community.

Jonathan E.: I have a couple of other things that are just sort of, I don't want to call them, [inaudible 00:38:21] but I think that one thing that I really hope that people in various segments of the disabled community, who have strong voices are able to come together and talk about. I think one problem we kind of have is with representation in performances in different ways. We often see those roles to able-bodied people, either as, and this is again coming as almost as an attack on this kind of show, but I really would love us to reach a place where we're more comfortable claiming roles that we can play actively.

Jonathan E.: The number of times I will see an able-body actor play amputee role, it makes me want to tear out what's left with my hair. We are able to claim those roles in so many ways, it's something that we have to really talk more about. Again and again, I'm seeing the deaf and hard of hearing community get much stronger about claiming their space and we're about to get a second, the quiet place where we'll take it this year, which makes me want to cheer it on [inaudible 00:39:26] just that. Does that create a beautiful space for a talented actor who happens to be deaf?

Philip D.: Yeah. [crosstalk 00:39:34] I mean, we just had it on Broadway. We had a Russell Harvard as the first deaf actor playing a role on Broadway that was not written as a character who is deaf.

Jonathan E.: That's what I wanted. [crosstalk 00:39:46].

Philip D.: Which is that nice evolution.

Jonathan E.: Exactly, I would love to see it not become without [inaudible 00:39:54] chatting. I would love to hear it become much more about what that additional permutation adds to the color and flavors of that part.

Philip D.: Yeah, absolutely. And I think that I'm excited or we'll call it tentatively excited, about the movement that has happened within the last couple of years in that direction, and specifically with things like the National Disability Theater, beginning their current residency down at La Hoya, with an entire creative team of designers with disabilities and farmers with disabilities and the disabled writers.

Philip D.: And so, I think it's never at the speed that I want, but I was reflecting upon this, as we all are ought to do at the top of a new year, of the change. Since I've been in this industry and since I've lived in this city it truly has been dramatic. And I think you're right. I think more the subsets within the sort of larger disability community, sort of staking their claim over these roles and over these casting decisions. And who's in the room writing these stories? Who's directing these stories?

Philip D.: And I tend to think of Inclusion just by nature of the show in very large scale, across very different communities beyond disability. And I've watched now, I think, the black community is really taking charge of how their stories are being told and who's telling them. And I look over and I think the same thing needs to ... We need to make sure that is happening within, again these stories of disability with characters who have disabilities, make sure that-

Jonathan E.: I look it like the atomic weapon, that is how stroke ... [inaudible 00:42:14] girl. It's amazing and that her disability [crosstalk 00:42:19].

Philip D.: Former podcast guest.

Jonathan E.: Yes. She amazes me, and her vibrancy has nothing to do with her method of mobility.

Philip D.: No. I mean, she's an outstanding performer through and through. And that has nothing to do with how she navigates this terribly inaccessible city.

Jonathan E.: Yes, I hope she's able to talk about it. Forces people's eyes open in a way that ... I saw Hamilton, this was summer of 2018 and I had a friend of mine who said to

me at one point that everyone has bad things happen to them. This is just your lot. And I'm like, "I want to punch you in the face right now, but instead I'm going to let you be my guest at Hamilton." We bought tickets a couple of weeks before, so I made him take the elevator up to Penn Station with me and that was about it. And if you've ever taken the elevator to ground level from Penn station-

Philip D.: Oh, I have.

Jonathan E.: [inaudible 00:43:20] not do that.

Philip D.: Yeah. My friend Christina Trevino, also former Podcast guests and Podcast advisory board member. She wrote an article a while back, but it still hasn't really changed. Something along lines of stop assaulting my nose. And it was about, honestly, the elevators across New York when she and I have traveled together going anywhere. I think the kind way to put it is, it's an adventure, but-

Jonathan E.: [inaudible 00:44:00].

Philip D.: Yes, exactly. All right, well, I'm going to get you out of here on this. I like to let folks dream their dreams a little bit. Those of us who, as we work in these types of fields, we're often not necessarily asked to do that or allowed to do it without constraints of a budget. So, I'd love to hear from you briefly, what do you hope for, I guess your work in the future and what you'd like to see at large with the work being done as it relates to Accessibility and Inclusion.

Jonathan E.: I've learned that I am happiest when I'm prepared to be surprised and delighted. My entire life is negotiated in metaphors from parks and recreation, which is a good thing and a bad thing. Leslie Knope is my hero, and that's been usually wildly gratifying, and occasionally [inaudible 00:45:06], but I would love to be part of a group of storytellers who all approach their worlds from such different and elastic perspectives, that they could come together and do so quickly and compassionately, and that I want it to feel less [inaudible 00:45:26] special.

Jonathan E.: When a person with a disability is raised up in their perspective is part of a cloud like this. I would love to see ... Again, I know how many people are in wheelchairs and people with altered mobility, self-select out of participating in public life, in ways that kind of break my heart. Sometimes when I complain at a restaurant, I'm told I'm the first person to complain that a restaurant has a bathroom stall with isn't the right size. And then I realized that they hadn't got a complaint because the disabled community has self-selected out and people just don't come there anymore. And that's the way it's going to be from now on.

Jonathan E.: I don't necessarily know what form it takes, but I would love for there to be a diverse, weird, uppity, loud, talented, occasionally angry community of people, who include a multitude of disabilities and perspectives, who are able to come

together quickly and tell these stories, in a way that is about amplification without shame. So that all of us can reach up and say, and rise and say, "This isn't right. We can and will do better, we can."

Jonathan E.: When that happens, it can happen quickly. But to make it, it's so often, it feels like it's just on the backs of the people with disabilities to raise up their stories. And as long as that's going to be the concern, it's not going to happen on its own. Again, I keep saying, you wait long enough, every member of our population in this country and beyond will encounter life as a disabled person, and we have a real opportunity right now to tell these stories and raise one another up and include it. And I would really love to see that happen sooner and louder in the next couple of years.

Philip D.: You and me both. You and me both. Well, thank you so much for taking out the time to chat today. Thank you for all the work that you've done and you continue to do and thank you for being in Access Champion.

Jonathan E.: Have a great day.

Philip D.: Thanks again to Jonathan for taking the time to chat and helping it come together so quickly. Really, really appreciate it. A reminder, if you enjoyed today's episode or any of our episodes, you can support us in two ways. One of course as previously mentioned at the top of the episode, [patreon.com/accesschampion](https://patreon.com/accesschampion) for as little as \$1 a month you get access to additional content and stickers and swag and all of the things, or you can also, and or I should say, you can also rate and review us wherever you listen to podcasts. Give us five stars.

Philip D.: Thank you as always to our executive producer, Matt Kerstetter, for making the sound great each and every single week. Thank you to our associate producer, Ms Kelsey Rose Brown, for everything she does and has done and continues to do as we search for a new associate producer. If you're interested, email us [accesschampion@gmail.com](mailto:accesschampion@gmail.com). Thank you to our Champion intern, Savannah Cooper. Thank you to Tommy Carr, for all of the Access Champion logos and images. Thank you to Austin and Eric, for all of the music. We'll be back again next week and remember, Inclusion believers never stop running through that brick wall.