MS. WHEELCHAIR TEXAS MORE THAN JUST HER WHEELS

2019 BLIND BBQ FANS TOUR COOK-OFF

THE BOLD, MAGICAL WORLD OF AUTISM EXPRESSED IN GARDEN DESIGN

ANA CALVO
Disclaimer

_last updated: January 17, 2019_

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Image Description: Holly is outside under a white event tent playing a baby grand piano. She is wearing a light print dress and her long hair is draped down her back. Her white cane is propped up in front of the piano.
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Image Description: Stock image of a young volleyball player who has arm limb difference.
Editor's Note

There is nothing so refreshing as renewal. It’s one of the reasons we look forward with great anticipation to spring’s opportunity for revitalization.

April is a busy month for awareness. In case you didn’t know, following are just a few of the important awareness efforts throughout the month of April.

- Autism Month
- Limb Loss Month
- National Donate Life Month
- Occupational Therapy Month
- April 2 World Autism Awareness Day
- April 9-15 Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist Week
- April 21-27 National Infertility Awareness Week
- April 11 Parkinson's International Awareness Day
- April 17 World Hemophilia Day

For this month’s lineup, our featured guests talk openly about their disabilities and their accomplishments. They do this to not only increase our awareness but to break down the invisible barriers that prevent us from making more meaningful connections between us.

In this edition of **CAPTIVATING!** you will meet our beautiful and phenomenal cover model Ana Calvo. Ana, who was the first student with a physical disability to attend the High School for Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice in Houston, Texas was also Miss Wheelchair Texas 2009.
Editor's Note

Other guests will invite us to change the way we view autism, limb loss, and blindness. When we place the focus on abilities, the power and possibilities of inclusion are limitless.

In an ongoing effort to continually improve our publication, we have moved our image descriptions from the back of the magazine to the end of each article. To further improve navigation we are now including hyperlinks to make it easier for you to quickly get to content of interest to you.

We hope you enjoy this issue of \textit{CAPTIVATING!} Magazine. We invite you to submit questions, articles, and ideas to editor@captivatingmagazine.com or through our website at www.captivatingmagazine.com.

\textit{CAPTIVATING!} an inclusive digital magazine about living and thriving with a disability. Is for everyone.
Ask Chelsea & Stephanae

by Chelsea Nguyen & Stephanae McCoy
Q&A | Chelsea

Q: What are 5 things that make you happy right now?

A: 
- Spending quality time with my sons, boyfriend, family, and my puppy.
- Teaching, training, and passing on useful and helpful knowledge and information to others to help improve themselves or their lives.
- Binge watch Marvel movies, nature shows or Shark Tank.
- Listening to my favorite collection of random music while working from home on my laptop by the pool.
- Being able to afford to eat out and try out new kinds of foods and restaurants with my family, friends, and colleagues.

Q: What popular notion do you think the world has most wrong?

A: As a hairstylist one of the things that I hear people say and think wrong all the time is that they say I need to trim my hair and get the dead ends off. The reason this is an incorrect statement is because once your hair grows out of your scalp, at that point it is dead because it is made up of keratin and protein. It has no feeling or nerves like our skin.

Q: Describe 3 significant memories from your childhood.

A: 
- Playing airplane in the pool with my Dad and sisters and him stretching out his arms so we can grab on to both sides of his arms as he stretches out his arms like wings in a plane and we essentially fly through the water as we float in the surface holding onto him.
- Climbing trees and picking sweet delicious dark orange Lo-quats and eating them as I pick them fresh off the tree while I sit in the tree branches looking down at the ground and spit seeds on the ground or at people below. This taught me how much I love being out in nature and eating freshly picked fruit from trees.
- Making mud pies with dirt, water, rocks, leaves and twigs and playing restaurant with my sisters or making my own toys out of wooden sticks or anything I can find around the house. This taught me how to be creative and resourceful and make things that I need or wanted out of nothing. It taught me that we don't have to spend a lot of Money on toys and material things to have fun. We were very poor growing up, but I didn't know it. And I know now as an adult that I don't have to have a lot of money to have a great time. It's all about how you think about it and are truly enjoying the moment with the people you care about around you.

Image Description: Bottom left corner: is a professional profile photo of Chelsea smiling and looking forward with her makeup on, long black hair with copper and caramel highlights, wearing a black silk top with slits on the sleeves and a silver necklace with a circle pendant in the center.
Q: Describe 3 fears you have and explain how they became fears.

A:
- Fear of fear has to be my number one fear. This one I only recognized in recent years as my anxiety became more pronounced. While I know it's not logical, I feel like if I don't respect my fears then the things I'm afraid of will become reality.
- Bridges. I live in Pittsburgh, also known as the city of bridges. When I was a tween, our science class walked across a bridge that spanned a river. The sidewalks were very shabby. Eventually it was torn down and replaced but I was never the same.
- Worms. I just don't get them. No visible eyes or mouths. Never know whether they're coming or going. They creep me out.

Q: Describe your most embarrassing moment.

A: As a natural born clutz I've had more embarrassing moments than I care to think about but I think the funniest was when I fell off my office chair at work and my wig flew off. My colleague was panic-stricken and concerned I injured my head. Me, all I was worried about was someone coming by and seeing me without my hair. The office had glass walls so there was that.

Q: Describe 3 significant memories from your childhood.

- Summers at my grandparent's house with my brother and our two cousins were the best. The four of us were very close to our grandparents and we spent considerable time with them. Their house was on an expansive church property and we would run free with almost reckless abandon.
- My best friend, cousin and I were riding our bikes. We had been told previously not to go down a certain hill. Well, my daredevil cousin (who was always breaking the rules) didn't heed my advice, rode down the hill, fell off her bike and fractured her shoulder. We laugh about it now because I was always such the buzzkill but yet here I am 50 some odd years later and I've yet to break a bone. Now because of question number 1 I will forever be thinking I'm for sure going to break something.
- Fruit flies. There was this very sweet older lady who my friend and I would run errands for and it seemed like every time we went inside her house it was polluted with fruit flies. I'm sure this is a gross over exaggeration but it's stuck in my memory. Just thinking about it now gives me goosebumps and yeah, you could probably add fruit flies to my list of fears but seriously what is their purpose?

Image Description: A side angled profile photo of Stephanae McCoy smiling and looking straight at the reader of the magazine. She is wearing a rich red lipstick, black eyeliner and very soft natural makeup. Her rich brown hair is short and stylish and accented with golden copper highlights. She is also wearing a professional black jacket and accessorizing it with a silver chained necklace adorned with white diamonds in the shape of a flower with a blue sapphire center stone in the center of each flower. On that same necklace, there are also round peach colored stones throughout as well.
"The doctors told my parents from a very young age, they said 'the only disability Ana will have is the disability you give her.'"
Interview with Ana Calvo

CHELSEA NGUYEN

This month’s cover model and featured guest is a phenomenal woman. Born without limbs, Ana Calvo, has done some remarkable things in her life and is a living example of a person who can do anything once their mind is set. With April being Limb Loss Awareness Month we asked Ana if she could share with us a few of the common stereotypes about people with limb loss. Off the top of her head she told us people still believe that people with limb loss are:

- unable to work
- unable to care for self independently
- unable to find love
- unable to live without a caretaker

Ana, whose passion is serving people with disabilities, wanted to be an attorney when she was younger. To prepare for this career track, she applied to and was accepted at the High School of Law Enforcement & Criminal Justice in Houston, TX. This made Ana the first person with a physical disability to attend the school right around the time when the Americans With Disabilities Act was signed into law. As was her right, Ana, did not disclose her disability when she applied, because she met all the requirements to gain admission. She was a straight A Honors student, Captain of the Debate Team, and Captain of the Cheerleading Squad.
Ana eventually changed her focus from law to earn a bachelor's in social science and a master's degree in social work.

The passion Ana has for serving people with disabilities is clearly evident. When she was 2009 Ms. Wheelchair Texas her platform was inclusive education. Over the past 8 years Ana has worked as the Program Director of Transition Services for HCC VAST Academy (Houston Community College Vocational Advancement and Social Skill Training). HCC VAST is a transition program between high school or an accredited college.

To be eligible to apply for the VAST program students must meet the primary requirement of having an intellectual disability along with the following criteria:
- 18-25 age limit
- High school graduate
- The ability to independently navigate campus and function in classrooms

Students who attend VAST do so with one of two goals in mind: 1) to prepare for employment after high school or college or 2) to prepare for higher education. Since the program began 28 years ago there have been approximately 200+ students come through every year. With courses like Career Readiness Classes and Business Writing Classes, the curriculum is geared towards building skills for employment.

Ana credits her parents for empowering her to be who and whatever she wanted to be. When asked how she learned to do the many things she does she said some of it comes from many years of occupational and physical therapy and some of it was instinct. She is totally comfortable within her skin and has a great deal of wisdom.

One thing she wanted to share with our readers about her disability is the question of "what happened or what's wrong?" We love her answer: "Nothing's wrong, I'm just different. We all are made a little different."

For our final question to Ana about advice she would give to those about acceptance of a newly acquired disability, she said:

“It's going to be okay. It may seem difficult but as time passes and you figure things out you'll learn your new normal and people will still love you. The people who matter will be there.”

Image Description: Ana is smiling while posing for the camera in her wheelchair in one of the empty classrooms on campus. She looks awesome in a sleeveless black v-neck top with pink flowers and coordinating bottoms. Her smart phone is resting on her left shoulder.

“Universal Design is when you walk into a building or a room and you don't really have to think about turning on the lights opening a door or seeing is counter space is to somebody's height. It's designed with everyone in mind.”

~Ana Calvo
What Is Occupational Therapy?
Occupational therapy helps people across their lifespan to do the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of daily activities. Occupational therapy practitioners enable people of all ages to live life to its fullest by helping them promote health, and prevent—or live better with—injury, illness, or disability.

Occupational Therapists (OTs) work with many kinds of injuries such as orthopedic injuries, stroke, brain injury, low vision, limb loss, mental health and other diagnoses. OTs help people improve their activities of daily living such as showering, getting dressed, cooking or other activities you need to do each day. OTs can provide cognitive training, home safety evaluations, equipment evaluations and school therapy.

Occupational therapy practitioners have a holistic perspective, in which the focus is on adapting the environment and/or task to fit the person, and the person is an integral part of the therapy team. It is an evidence-based practice deeply rooted in science.

Image Description: An "I heart OT Month" with the hashtag #OTMonth and a blue heart with Occupational Therapy in white letters
Holly Lynn Connor Changes Viewpoints On Autism

KATIE SEARS

The Diagnosis
When Holly Lynn Connor was born there weren’t any complications. However, from day one, we noticed she never seemed to look at us and cried nonstop. We were assured by the pediatrician that her eyes were simply developing at a slower rate and not to worry. By four months Holly showed no improvement and was diagnosed with Septo Optic Dysplasia (“SOD”) and Panhypopituitarism (“Hypopit”).

A person with SOD has optic nerves that are small and poorly developed. Instead of having over 1 million nerve fibers from each eye to the brain, there are far fewer connections. Holly is rare in that she was affected in both eyes and could see little to nothing at birth. When Holly was diagnosed, there were minimal online resources and support groups. I felt alone in the world with no answers. To date, there are still no explanations as to what causes SOD.

Besides being blind, at an early age, Holly displayed signs of autism (obsessive-compulsive behaviors, single words...
language, etc.). The combination of being blind and autistic really made for a difficult time, particularly the first 4 years. Until she was three-years-old, she:
- wouldn’t walk outside,
- eat solid foods,
- go anywhere with fluorescent lighting,
- sleep through the night,
- wear shoes or any clothing below the knees or elbows.
- And she cried pretty much nonstop.

**Improvements Achieved Through Treatments**

When she was four-years-old, we took her to China for seven weeks to receive stem cell treatments. The effect was miraculous. While the treatment was geared towards her vision, we saw a nearly 50% improvement in her autism almost immediately. Roughly two years later, her vision improvements also became apparent. Her vision increased from an inch or two to seeing contrast and movement up to 10 feet away.

Due to Holly’s successful treatment in China, we booked another round of stem cell treatment when she was twelve. This time it was to Panama. The trip to Panama was slightly more abbreviated at only 7 days. Since that visit, she has seen additional autism reductions. In addition, her vision, while still being blind, picks up contrast and movement up to 30 feet.

Two clear-cut examples of autism reduction are the reduction in Holly’s anxiety levels and the willingness to expand her diet. Pre-Panama her anxiety levels were nearly debilitating at times. As is common with most kids with autism, Holly would only eat about 5 things prior to Panama. Though she always objects at least once to a new food, now she eats nearly everything we give her.

What makes Holly so unique and special is her musical talent, something we discovered at a very young age. When she was only a month old we played a Winnie The Pooh tape and she immediately stopped crying. After that, our house was filled with music 24 hours a day. It seemed to be the only thing that calmed her.

When Holly was 6 months old, she began playing the piano keys with her hands and her feet.
- At age 1, she could count to 100, sing the alphabet backward, and play simple notes on the piano. It was at this point where we realized she has instant memory.
- By Age 2, Holly could play any song by ear on the piano.
- At 3, we discovered she had perfect pitch, vibrato, and she could tell identify keys of songs on the radio.
- When she was 4 we started piano lessons with a teacher specifically trained for kids with Autism.
- By age 7, she could recognize and play complex chords on the piano. Holly also memorized and played songs on the piano after hearing them just once.
- When she was 8, Holly picked up the harmonica and recorder. This was also around the time she started being ok in public. So we attended live theater and kids’ performances every weekend.

**A Naturally Born Performer**

Holly joined her first choir at her elementary school when she was 9 years old. She also began working with a vocal coach and attended her first vocal/piano classes. The facility worked specifically with kids with
disabilities and paired them with typical kids. This year marked her first performance at a summer camp in which they highlighted her singing. The seed was planted for enrolling Holly in musical theater.

When Holly was 10, she had her first piano recital and first vocal competition. She sang opera and musical theater pieces and took 1st place for her age group. Shortly after, we moved to St. Louis for my husband’s job.

Holly started playing the cello in the school’s 5th-grade orchestra program and joined her first formal choir (STL Children’s Choirs). She also was in her first musical, Space Pirates. Being a new endeavor for everyone involved, she did her scenes sitting in a chair.

The following year, age 11, Holly started taking voice and musical theater classes. She was also cast in her second ever show, Seussical. This time she was doing limited choreography and even had a speaking line.

At age 12, Holly was cast in 8 consecutive shows with 3 named roles. The roles included Glinda in Wizard of Oz, Fairy Godmother in Cinderella, and Mama Ogre in Shrek. We also started her in ballet lessons.

Singing, Dancing & Acting
By the time Holly turned 13, it was an even busier year. She:
- was cast in 10 consecutive shows with 4 named roles including:
  - Queen Victoria in a Little Princess,
  - Mrs. Darling in Peter Pan,
  - Bird Woman in Mary Poppins,
  - and Cinderella’s Mother in Into the Woods.
- started taking tap lessons,
- joined the school jazz band playing piano,
- started taking tap lessons,
- joined the school jazz band playing piano,
- joined another choir, and
- wrote her first original song.
- That brings us to the present. At age 14, Holly is immersed in the arts 7 days a week when not in school. She is in 3 choirs, 2 jazz bands, acting and dance classes, private lessons for acting, ballet, tap, and piano.

Holly works out every morning on her spin bike. In addition, she also trains weekly with a personal trainer to help with low muscle tone. She is part of a tandem biking club half the year. At any given time she is in 2-3 musical theatre productions. Right now, she’s excited to be playing Medda Larkin in Newsies and Madame Aubert in Titanic.

Holly Continues Blossoming
The last few years of Holly’s development have been life-changing for Holly and for those around her. St. Louis musical theater community has been extremely accepting and inclusive. The directors have all been accommodating and understanding of both her visual and autistic needs. More than that though, the kids she performs with are more accepting than I could have ever imagined. They are always looking out for her and we never worry about her being in a safe space.

Now that she is fully immersed in the arts community in St. Louis and working with such a large number of kids, Holly seems to have friends everywhere she goes. For the first time ever, Holly found a best friend who’s become a huge part of her life. They talk every day, eat lunch together at school, and are in choirs and musicals together regularly. Her friend, Abby, has an effect on Holly which is hard to
Recently, a girl from the local high school approached me. She told me that her twin brother has autism and Holly changed his life. Peers began befriending him as a direct result of Holly’s involvement at school and her social media presence. Holly is showing it’s okay to:

- talk to someone who is blind and autistic
- be friends with someone who is blind and autistic
- be unique and different

Holly is extraordinarily talented and we continuously keep her engaged with the world around her. Remaining involved in musical endeavors will position her for a greater opportunity for future success in life. Through the many ways she interacts with the world, Holly continues to influence and change how people see her. Hopefully, this will translate into how they see, interact with, and accept people with all abilities.

About the Author:
Katie Sears holds a Master of Arts Public Administration, Bachelor of Arts Public Affairs and an Associate of Science Digital Media. When I was a kid I sang in choirs, acted in musicals, and was 1st chair for the saxophone in band. Starting in high school, my focus changed to traditional arts and then in college moved to digital arts. After graduating college with a Digital Media degree, I worked in the entertainment industry in Florida and then moved to LA where I had various internships. Not loving LA, I moved back to Seattle and refocused on degrees in nonprofit management while working as a private house manager, getting married and

Being The Change
On January 1st, 2019 I began an Instagram awareness project, @365withhollyconnor, where I post Holly answering a daily question. Using the book, “Q&A a Day for Kids” by Betsy Franco, followers can learn about Holly’s life. They can also learn how she navigates the world being both blind and autistic.

quantify. Through her friendship with Abby, Holly is learning more of what it means to be a typical teenager. She’s learning how to interact with others on a social level, and how to have empathy. Empathy is very difficult for someone with autism.

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having a baby. The last year of my Masters, I started working at a cancer research center where I had an amazing 10 year career with three years managing contracts and seven years as a fiscal administrator for an immunology clinical trials research program. I continued my job with the cancer research center remotely after we moved to St. Louis for my husband's job. When my contract ended in I decided to refocus my time and energy on Holly as her schedule was becoming more complex. Not working gives me the ability to be available when Holly isn’t in school, is home sick, to manage her medical needs and appointments, have the hours needed to braille everything she does outside of school like scripts/acting sides/music, be backstage for all performances and at any rehearsals when needed, and manage Holly’s social media accounts. Basically, I am Holly’s full-time manager or "momager" as she likes to call me. Outside of Holly, I am on the Board for Different Dynamics, a non-profit in St. Louis that provides special music education for youth. I also try and visit my family and friends in Seattle when I can and I talk to my mom, sister and 4 year old niece in Seattle every day.

Image Descriptions:
- The header image on page 14 is a photo of Holly with her best friend Abby. They are sitting on a pile of gym mats and Abby has her left arm around Holly’s shoulder.
- A professional headshot of Holly is in the upper left corner of page 17. Holly’s long wavy red hair frames her pretty face and she is wearing an emerald green top.
- Small circular author bio photo on page 18 above the waist shots of Katie and her husband at a gala.
- Photo to the right is Katie her husband and Holly posed standing on Thanksgiving.

“The way we look at our children and their limitations is precisely the way they will feel about themselves. We set the examples, and they learn by taking our cue from us,”
~Amalia Starr
What Does Limb Loss Mean To You?

STACY FLYNN

According to the Amputee Coalition, there are 2.1 million people living with limb loss. One hundred eighty-five thousand people have an amputation surgery each year. This is about 507 people losing a limb each day! It is estimated that 3.6 million people will be living with limb loss by 2050. April is Limb Loss Awareness Month. What this means to you probably has a lot to do with how limb loss has affected your life. Do you have limb loss? Are you a caregiver to someone with limb loss? Are you at risk for limb loss? If you are not one of those people, I know you know someone with limb loss. With 2.1 million people out there, you know one of them! Limb Loss Awareness Month is a chance for you to reflect on how limb loss has affected you personally and how you can use the awareness of the month to improve things.

For those with limb loss
Are you new to the world of limb loss? This is a great opportunity to learn more about what to expect. Look for limb loss events in your area. One of the best resources you can find are support groups and peer visitors.
You can find local support groups on the Amputee Coalition website or through your providers such as your PT or your prosthetist. If you can't find a local support group you might think about starting one! Or you could use an online support group such as supportgroups.com or dailystrength.org.

Peer Visitors are people who have been through a similar situation as you (similar limb loss) that you can talk with you and will have a better understanding of what you are going through. You can find Peer Visitors through the Amputee Coalition website or often times through your local prosthetist or Amputation Care Team. Look online for resources such as the Amputee Coalition or books on limb loss to help you learn more. It is important you understand how to work with your healthcare team to get optimal care, how to manage your pain, what to expect from a prosthesis or other medical devices, and other common problems for people with limb loss. According to the Amputee Coalition 36% of people with limb loss experience depression. It is important you are aware this can happen and know the signs and symptoms of depression and how to address them. If you need more information on this or have other questions, you can find more information in the book Experiencing Life After Limb Loss: A Guide for Patients and Families on kindle or print (written by the author of this article).

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<th>Common Problems People with Limb Loss (LL) Experience</th>
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<td>Back Pain</td>
<td>Difficulties with Activities of Daily Living</td>
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<td>Opposite Knee Pain</td>
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<td>Sweating</td>
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Limb loss is a life-long journey. Your needs and what you can offer will be different depending on where you are on your journey. It is always good to know as much as you can about limb loss. Trying to keep up with all the new information coming out can be overwhelming but use your healthcare team to help. It is normal to feel sad, frustrated and lost at times. Be sure to get help when you need it. When you are further in your journey and you can offer help, consider starting a support group or being a Peer Visitor. Then you can be the one offering support. Know that you have plenty to offer to others with the wisdom you have gained over your journey.

If you are living with limb loss, you know all too well what living with limb loss is like. Limb Loss Awareness month is your chance to tell people to help them understand! Take this chance to do a talk about Limb Loss Awareness in your community such as your church, your local library or school. Tell your story on the Amputee Coalition website (you can even share a picture or video!). Have you ever had trouble getting a prosthesis or getting the right prosthesis? Did you finally get a prosthesis but then you couldn’t get therapy to learn how use it properly? Are you having to deal with that now? Use your frustration and your story to help advocate for the limb loss community. You can go to the Amputee Coalition website to learn how to advocate for people with limb loss. This link will show you what legislation is going to affect you and what can you do about it including legislation about prosthetic limb coverage! This is one page that brings together all the information for you.

"According to the Amputee Coalition, there are 2.1 million people living with limb loss. One hundred eighty-five thousand people have an amputation surgery each year. This is about 507 people losing a limb each day!"

~Stacy Flynn
Prosthetic Vocab Lesson

**Prosthetist** *(noun, person)*-The person who makes prosthetic limbs, can be abbreviated as CP(Certified Prosthetist) or CPO (Certified Prosthetist Orthotist)

**Prosthesis** *(noun, thing)*-The artificial limb made to replace the one lost due to the amputation, also called a prosthetic limb

**Prosthetic** *(adjective)*-This is the word used to describe that something is artificial (i.e. prosthetic leg means artificial leg and prosthetic eye means artificial eye)

According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, those who are more likely to rate physical strain of caregiving as "high" are the following:

- Those providing care for a year or longer
- Caregivers over 65 years old
- Those who have a higher level of burden
- Alzheimer’s or dementia caregivers
- Those who are living with their care recipient

https://www.caregiver.org/caregiver-statistics-health-technology-and-caregiving-resources
For Caregivers

If you are providing care for someone with limb loss, you have seen how it can affect someone’s life. You have seen the changes that must be made to each daily activity and the challenges that can be faced. Limb Loss Awareness month can be a chance for you to learn more about limb loss or attend a support group meeting. There are support groups for those with limb loss and their support team (friends and family) to attend together but there are also support groups for caregivers themselves. No one has to tell you that being a caregiver comes with its own set of challenges that only other caregivers can understand. The Amputee Coalition website has links to local support groups and information for caregivers. You can also go to the Caregiver Alliance for more information and online support groups. This can help you connect with others who can understand your struggles and triumphs caring for someone else. You can get support and learn about resources available to help that others are using. This includes ways to ensure you are taking care of yourself. You can’t take care of anyone else if you are sick or burned out!

You can also use the information shared during April for Limb Loss Awareness month to learn more about limb loss This can help you better understand your loved one and how you can help them, or how they can help you! This can help improve your quality of life and the quality of life of the person you are caring for. If the person you are caring for is unable to get access to the care they need, this may encourage you to advocate for them at your local, state or even at the federal government. You may also choose to use the information you learn to help you advocate for those with limb loss. Unfortunately, access to care is a real real problem for people with limb loss. Many are unable to get a well fitting prosthesis and rehab to learn how to use it. You can learn more about advocacy for limb loss and what you can do [here](#).

For those at risk for limb loss

Are you worried you might be at risk for limb loss?

Having poor circulation decreases the blood (and the nutrition it carries) being taken to your feet or hands. Without the nutrition it needs, the tissue in your feet or hands can start to die. Those with diabetes are prone to having circulation problems and foot ulcers. According to the Amputee Coalition, 85% of lower-limb amputations are preceded by a foot ulcer. You also increase your risk if you participate in risky behaviors that can result in trauma significant to result in limb loss.

What can you do if you are at risk?

If you smoke, quit! The nicotine in cigarettes causes your circulation to decrease for hours after you smoke. Talk to your doctor about options for quitting or go to smokefree.gov. If you have poor circulation, you can do light exercise several times a week. If you have diabetes you can decrease your risk for a foot ulcer by doing daily foot checks and ensuring you wear well fitting shoes. Get regular exercise and get a diet that keeps your glucose (sugar) in the healthy range (80-120 mg/dL). If you do get a foot ulcer, you can improve healing by eating a healthy diet that keeps your glucose (sugar) near 100 mg/dL and provides lean protein needed to build new skin.

You can use Limb Loss Awareness Month and the information easily available to learn more about limb loss and how to prevent it. All of
this can be extremely overwhelming and cause anxiety. This can make it even harder to try and make the changes that are needed. It’s important you take things one step at a time. Change one thing at a time. Take joy in your wins, even the small ones! Seek support from family and friends. If you can’t get support through friends and family, seek support through support groups. You can find local groups through your medical providers or fellow patients or use online groups such as [this one](#) for people with vascular disease or [this one](#) for people with diabetes. Most importantly, don’t let a set-back stop you. We all have bad days, the key is to get up the next day and chose to do better! This can mean making better decisions or reaching out for the help you need. As long as you don’t stop trying then you are still winning!!
Friends/Family/Community
If you are a family or friend of someone with limb loss then use this as a chance to get to know more about what a life with limb loss is. Ask them about their experience and their day to day life. Ask about what they need to make their life better. Help them with activities such as support groups or adaptive sports by volunteering! Learn about healthcare bills and ADA policy issues that are affecting people with limb loss. Contact your legislators on behalf of those with limb loss and advocate for better access and care. Know that your support can make a big difference!

You may hear your friend or family member with limb loss talk about having a below knee or above elbow amputation. Do you really know what that means? Here is a table with information on what each level of amputation is called and what they mean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toe amputation</td>
<td></td>
<td>removal of the toe or toes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transmetatarsal</td>
<td>transmet</td>
<td>cut is made through the metatarsals (bones in the foot) leaving most of the foot intact but removing all of the toes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symes amputation or ankle disarticulation</td>
<td></td>
<td>the foot is removed at the ankle joint (where it “articulates” with the leg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transtibial amputation or below knee</td>
<td>TT or BK or BKA</td>
<td>the cut is made through the tibia bone between the knee and the foot, the hip and the knee are saved and the foot is lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knee disarticulation or through knee</td>
<td>KD or TK</td>
<td>no bone is cut instead the lower leg is removed from the upper leg at the knee joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfemoral or above knee</td>
<td>TF or AK or AKA</td>
<td>the cut is made through the femur bone between the hip and the knee, the hip is saved and the foot and the knee are lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip disarticulation</td>
<td>HD</td>
<td>the leg is removed at the hip joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hemipelveotomy</td>
<td>HP</td>
<td>the leg and part of the hip/pelvis are removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amputation Type</td>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finger amputation or partial hand</td>
<td>removal of the finger or fingers up to part of the hand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrist disarticulation</td>
<td>WD</td>
<td>the hand is removed at the wrist joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transradial amputation or below elbow</td>
<td>TR or BE</td>
<td>the radius is cut between the wrist and the elbow, the shoulder and the elbow are saved but the hand is lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elbow disarticulation</td>
<td>ED</td>
<td>The lower arm is removed from the upper arm at the elbow joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transhumeral amputation or above elbow</td>
<td>TH or AE</td>
<td>the humerus is cut between the elbow and the shoulder, the shoulder is saved but the elbow and the wrist are lost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoulder disarticulation</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>the arm is removed at the shoulder joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scapulo-thoracic or forequarter amputation</td>
<td></td>
<td>the arm and part to the shoulder is removed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References:

https://www.caregiver.org/caregiver-statistics-health-technology-and-caring-resources

About the Author:
Stacy Flynn, PT, DPT, CWS lives in Houston, TX with her 2 ferrets and her Dachshund. For most of her Physical Therapy career she worked at the VA Hospital in Houston and loved working with the Veteran population. She is the author of Experiencing Life After Limb Loss: A Guide for Patients and Families which can be found on Amazon. She currently works as Adjunct Faculty at Texas Woman's University and has her own consulting company Serenity Physical Therapy Education & Consulting. You can contact Dr. Flynn with questions or comments at SerenityPTEC@gmail.com.

Image Description: Professional headshot of Stacy smiling with shoulder-length red hair. She is wearing a gray jacket over a black top.
"You're not as broken as you think you are. You're only as broken as you allow yourself to be."

ROBERT FERGUSON
Hello, my name is Maxwell Ivey, and I'm known around the world as The Blind Blogger. This comes from being someone who is willing to share his life openly, honestly, and authentically with the world. Of course, I also happened to be the only person in my various online forums and groups who is blind.

Recently, I embarked on a public speaking career. I have spoken at several prominent conferences, and in May of last year, I was proud to speak at the Houston chapter of the Foundation Fighting Blindness.

After my talk, *Life is like a River: Overcoming Adversity and Moving Forward*, this vibrant, energetic bubbly woman named Chelsea came up to me to ask about blogging, podcasting and creating a video library of non-visual grooming techniques.

I told her sure, and I gave her my contact info. She called me the next day, and we had a great talk. After answering a lot of her questions, she asked me if I knew what image I was presenting on stage. She went on to tell me that my personal style could be keeping me from receiving even better speaking opportunities. She offered her services, and as someone who always talks about accepting help when offered, I said yes.

I should describe my usual speaking attire and my image at the time.

I had mostly grey hair down to my shoulders that I combed straight back, and my eyebrows probably looked something like Gandalf from the Lord of the Rings. I wore a long-sleeved black shirt, slacks, tennis shoes, and probably didn’t present myself as the professional, successful, powerful, fearless, rock star that I am.
Part of my problem was, as a blind person, I never really knew what I wanted when a barber or stylist asked me how I wanted them to cut my hair. I had no idea what colors looked good on me and as I was over 500 pounds at one time, I was used to buying whatever would fit.

Chelsea changed all that. She started by explaining just how a good personal style and brand would be to my future success as an author, speaker and publicist. She then worked with me to pick out some clothes that looked good which I could afford.

We started with a jacket donated to me by friends at church. Then she found a shirt, a pair of pants, and several ties at Goodwill. Then she performed a minor miracle by finding a pair of dressy shoes that fit my overly wide feet.

She got me to cut my hair short but not too short. She colored it a reddish brown that everyone said looked good. She trimmed my eyebrows, cut my nails and shaved the hair from my ears and neck.

Then she taught me how to maintain my nails with a buffing block, how to style my hair using hair gel, and how to tie a tie.

The hair was a real struggle because she had to teach me to fight against my natural desire to have orderly hair. With continued instruction I now have no problem just messing my hair up with my fingers and the spray bottle of gel.

As for tying the tie, we did that over Zoom, an online meeting/conferencing platform. She spent about an hour with me teaching me the steps. While I didn’t get it during that session, the technique eventually worked. I just needed to practice a lot. I eventually discovered that using two fingers instead of one to hold open the loop that you feed the blade through to finish the knot worked for me.

I recorded this video for my YouTube channel. It’s part of my no excuses series. I not only talk about tying the tie, but I speak to some things I learned about ties in general as part of my learning process.

I need to let you know in my no excuses videos I sing in the intro and outro. Just hang on a minute, and the lesson will start.

Chelsea told me, by looking my best, I am exemplifying my what's your excuse? brand. She says if Max can look this good, then what excuse does anyone else have. And she is right.

Just look at the before and after photos. I’m going to include a photo that was taken at a recent speaking event. You will see the results.

I honestly believe addressing my appearance has made me a more confident powerful speaker. I think there were always people who were surprised by my eloquence or my courage to stand up there and share my story. Now, people are blown away by my physical appearance. They see this blind guy who is so well put together and think wow. Some have asked if I have someone traveling with me who helps me with my hair or clothes. Others comment on my traveling cross-country solo. And this wouldn’t have happened if I hadn’t met Chelsea and been willing to accept her advice and instruction.
I found her because I was thinking of someone like her and praying for someone like her to come into my life. I wanted someone who knew what would look best on me and who would be able to show me how to easily replicate my new look.

It’s called manifestation or the law of attraction. However, too many of us don’t realize it when that person or thing we have been praying for shows up.

There is an expression that when the student is ready the teacher will appear. But that saying doesn’t mention that the teacher might not look like a teacher. Chelsea is a stylist who has taught me the value of looking good in order to reach even more people who can be inspired by my story.

About The Author:
Maxwell Ivey is a totally blind man who grew up in a family of carnival owners in east Texas. He was diagnosed at an early age with RP, retinitis pigmentosa but didn’t let that stop him from enjoying life. He participated in the family’s carnival business, graduated high school and college, and achieved the rank of eagle scout.

When his father’s death lead to the closure of the family’s small traveling show, he turned his hands to starting an online site to help people buy and sell surplus amusement park and carnival equipment. He had to learn so much including how to hand-code html, recruit clients, set fees, write copy, manage images.
and videos, build an email list, use social media, record videos, and much more.

People were inspired by his willingness to take on difficult challenges and encouraged him to share more of what it's like to be an entrepreneur that happens to be blind. That led to a second website as The Blind Blogger, a moniker that had been given to him by the many online groups he was active in.

Since then he has written three books, done dozens of podcast and radio interviews, traveled cross-country solo, spoken at prestigious conferences, sung in public, and started his own podcast called What's Your Excuse?

Once a coach to people needing help achieving their goals and dreams he now works as an online media marketing director helping authors, speakers, coaches, and podcaster to gain exposure through the many online platforms he used to build his own brand as The Blind Blogger and Mr. What's Your Excuse?

He especially loves working with new authors and creatives helping them understand the value of their story and helping them to share it. If you have any questions, just ask. Max would always rather answer an awkward question than to have people guess.

He looks forward to hearing from you, getting to know you, connecting with you online or in person, then seeing how he can help you.

Image Descriptions:
- The header photo on the left margin is of Max at a speaking engagement. He looks very professional in a suite and tie holding the microphone his left hand and his white cane in his right. He is standing to the right of a podium at the front of the room.
- Before & After photos of Max in the upper left corner. In the before photo he is dressed in black pants and shirt with sneakers and shoulder-length hair. In the after photo he looks sharp in black dress pants, dress shoes, jacket and black tie with a white shirt. His hair has been cut, colored and styled. The overall appearance is fresh.
- Small circular author bio photo of Max seated facing the camera. He’s wearing a red tie in this photo with a white shirt and dark jacket.
- The photo in the lower right corner is Max and Chelsea. Chelsea is standing next to Max who is seated. Chelsea is wearing her signature a black ensemble with silver accents.

"Chelsea told me, by looking my best, I am exemplifying my what’s your excuse? brand. She says if Max can look this good, then what excuse does anyone else have. And she is right."
3 Blind Mice Are Stylish Mice With A Purpose

GRACIE BENEDITH-CANE

Editor's Note: One of the most pervasive and persistent misconceptions about blindness is the theory that we cannot appreciate beauty. What many people don't understand about blindness is that it is not a matter of seeing vs not seeing. Blindness is a vast spectrum where the majority of people who are blind have some residual vision.

I've been following Gracie and her son Wani on Instagram for quite some time and what immediately caught my attention was her charming logo.

The three blind mice who also happen to be the characters in Gracie's children's book "What's Cool About Braille Code School? are very stylish looking images. And of course they look quite cool with their white canes. The book was "written to inspire, uplift and give confidence to children who are visually impaired as well as inform sighted children about braille and special needs awareness."
Braille Code was created to instill a sense of dignity and pride within the young individuals with blind/visual impairments. Through the use of ingenuity of one parent, Mrs. Gracie Benedith-Cane, Braille Code was started as a method of facilitating an ease with daily routine of getting dressed in the morning. While those of us whom have had vision all of our lives, we may not realize how difficult it is for someone who is blind/visually impaired to get dressed.Parents and children with visual impairments often suffer in silence and frustration because of the difficulty they encounter when getting dressed. It leaves them to just make due with what they have because there is no other solution. Braille Code has made a solution utilizing patches and wants to fill a necessary need in the blind/visually impaired world. Our mission is create patches that will make our customers to get dressed by themselves and to make them smile as they do so.

About the Author:
Gracie Benedith-Cane is a wife, mother, and author born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. In 2007, her son was diagnosed with Septic-Optic Nerve Dysplasia, leaving him legally blind.

In 2014, Gracie decided to shine a light on individuals who are blind and visually impaired by creating patches to assist the blind and by writing a children’s book released in 2018. The goal is to merge the relationship between sighted and blind children.

Image Descriptions:
- The header image is a photo of Wani and his mom Gracie. Wani is wearing a royal blue tee shirt that says “Braille Code Inc.” on it in white letters. Gracie is wearing a white tee that has the 3 blind mice on it and above them is the title of the book. She is wearing a black leather jacket over her tee.
- The image in the lower right corner of this page is Wani reading a braille copy of the book his mom wrote. He’s wearing a red tee shirt with the 3 blind mice on it with a navy blue hoodie over the tee.
- A small circular author bio photo is of Gracie wearing a red jacket over a black top and Wani is wearing a white tee with a black jacket. They are both smiling broadly.
Life-Saving Amputee Soccer Re-ignites Passion for the Game

STEPHANAE MCCOY

Military vet Robert Ferguson comes from a long line of family members who served in the armed forces. After 16 years and surviving two tours of duty overseas, Robert was critically injured and nearly lost his life after losing his right leg in a horrific accident during a training exercise stateside.

From a physical aspect, once he was back on his feet Robert kept forging ahead. However, psychologically speaking, the recovery was a longer and much more complicated process. As an avid soccer player who began playing the sport when he was 4 years old, not being able to play the game after his injury was devastating to Robert. No longer able to pursue his passion, he couldn't even watch the game because it was so painful for him.

A fellow soccer lover herself, Jennifer, the love of his life, encouraged Robert to gradually begin watching the sport. Intuitively, once she saw the spark come
back into his eyes she convinced him to go to a soccer field as a spectator. In his own words, Robert said “she must have known what she was doing because as soon as we got there I couldn’t stay off the field.” since Robert was right-footed, there was only one snag: "I went to kick the ball and it just so happened that the little hook that makes the running blade was just the perfect size that the ball got caught in it.” As a result of this, Jennifer went back to the truck to get Robert’s regular leg.

On seeing Jennifer “walking back from the truck with a leg under her arm,” Robert’s future Lone Star Coach, and goalie for the US Paralympic team, Keith Johnson, asked her “what’s going on here?” “They start talking and since I’m still in my ‘angry at the world stage' I'm just standing there and got fed up because I felt it was one of those, awe, look at the cripple guy trying to do normal things type thing." Jennifer encouraged Robert to calm down and just talk to Keith so he did.

Keith, "asked me if I ever heard of amputee soccer" and then put me in touch with the President of the US Amputee Soccer Federation. Six months later Robert was playing in his first international competition and in October 2018 he played in the Amputee World Cup in Mexico.

In addition to soccer, Robert also:

- participates in hand cycling marathons,
- is completing his bachelors and will begin his master's in a year,
- and is finishing up his LCDC (Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor)

Once Robert gets his LCDC his goal is to work within the veteran community. It’s his hope that he can help ease the transition of those who’ve experienced traumatic injuries get to the place of acceptance sooner in their personal journeys.

If this weren’t enough, Robert is also the founder of the Lone Star Amputee Soccer Association an organization for kids to get them involved in the sport.

Ampsoccer.org always looking for people willing to give it a try. Takes a lot of strength not only physical but mental to do what we do.

If there is one key message Robert wants to convey to our readers it that differently-abled people are just as capable and competent as those who society considers 'normal'.

Image Description: Robert and his teammates (third from the left in the front row) are holding up the American flag in front of a soccer net. In the photo on this page Robert is taking a full length mirror selfie. He’s wearing a USA red, white & blue soccer uniform and has shade atop his dark hair.
I want to share my journey of acceptance with my long cane. This used to be my nemesis for 20 years and the bullet I was constantly dodging!

In 1994 at age 19, I was first diagnosed with the progressive sight loss disease RP and registered partially sighted. At this stage, I was still able to navigate my world without any assistance, at least during the day.

At night, however, I was completely blind. My solution to this became a 20-year resolve of never going out alone at night; however, as the years ticked by and the deterioration of my sight continued, I had to make sure I was not caught out as the sun went down. The light level at that time of day became a blind situation for me too. I used to call it my “Pumpkin Time,” like when the clock struck 12, Cinderella’s carriage turns back into a pumpkin!

There have been many times in the past where I have been caught short and basically had to run home whilst the light of the day was fading. This often happened on my walk home from work. Sometimes, I got caught up and left just that little bit too late.
After over 20 years of struggling without assistance and an awful lot of accidents due to the progression of my sight loss which was now becoming very severe. I finally gave in to the nemesis. In Autumn 2016, I began my long cane training, after initially applying for a guide dog and having to stop that application because my Westie would never allow another dog into the home. I was left with only one option, the long cane.

It was soon identified by my trainer that although it was useful to be trained during the day, it was going to be even more effective to be trained at night. As soon as this happened, I had my breakthrough. For so many years, I had hidden my visual impairment, I didn’t look blind. I didn’t use anything that identified me as being blind; however, I was registered blind back in 2002.

In the past, various people in organizations tried to introduce me to using a white cane. The first time I was introduced to a cane was in the early days. I was a 20-year-old, and I just had to leave my dream university studying figurative sculpture. This was because I was newly diagnosed with RP, and I had no independent living skills as a young visually impaired woman, I had also lost my fiancée and my driver’s license, so as you can imagine, 3 very big losses in concession left me in a very bad place.

Being introduced to using a symbol cane at the time was never ever going to end well. I think my mobility rehab worker realized this quickly! She left me the symbol cane; it made a very good stick for holding up my rubber plant in the years that followed!
For me it was the limiting belief that I used to have of people judging me, I was more bothered about what other people thought of me than of my own safety.

When using the cane during the day whilst training, I felt so disconnected from it, I couldn’t get used to using the cane as my eyes, I believe that was due to the fact that at that time I was still hanging on to every last piece of residual vision as if my life depended on it. I would try to look whilst training, this was only keeping the cane as a separate identity. I also had no idea how to put my trust into a completely inanimate object. However, once I began training with the cane at night, everything changed. I had no option other than to allow my inner trust to pass through that cane and find my way around. The more I did this, the more I began to connect with my own inner trust, and the cane started to become part of me. It was like learning to accept something that was very obviously not part of my body to do the job as a part of my body.

I now never go out alone without my trusty long cane. It truly has become an extension of myself. For those of you that read the March edition of CAPTIVATING!, you will know that I even use my cane to go skateboarding. From the woman that loathed the idea of having to use a long cane, I now proudly display 4 long canes on my wall. I have a slimline black one. This is for my public speaking and engagement work, the original white long cane that I trained with, my everyday go to purple cane and last year, I turned my creative sculptural skills to creating a bamboo long cane. This cane was part of my London exhibition Fly, Freedom In Acceptance, it is a fully functioning, folding long cane. It has the words Freedom In Acceptance written in Chinese symbols down the top shaft of the cane.

So I guess the reason why I share this particular experience with you is to show that no matter what the adversity may be, from being blind to being an amputee and all that lies in between, we must allow ourselves the time to accept the assistive aids that are available, be that a long cane, a guide dog, a prosthetic limb, a wheel chair, a hearing aid, whatever the disability may be. If we accept and become one with that aid, we open ourselves up to independence and freedom. As an example of how to accept these aids and become one with them, I like to use a colored cane. I believe that we should have the freedom of choice with whatever the aid is that helps us, we should not be limited by historic views, in my case the view that a cane should only be white for the blind. I advocate personalization to whatever helps you, if you want a bright yellow wheelchair with black stripes and if that helps you connect with that chair, then I say do it; after all, we all get to choose what shoes we like, our hairstyles and what clothes we wear, so why should our aids be any different? To connect on a personal level with our aids will help us to embrace our individuality and be able to live our lives however we choose and become the limitless advocates, inspiring others to be open to all possibilities.
About the Author:
Victoria Claire is a registered blind Professional Artist in Contemporary Sculpture, Public Speaker, Retina UK Ambassador, Writer, Musician, Sight loss Mentor, and Advocate. Based in the UK her artistic career spans 25 years, her work is owned all over the world and she has had many solo exhibitions in the UK including Central London. Speaking as an inspirational speaker all around the world, she shares her journey of sight loss and the beauty within blindness, proving that with a positive mindset, an openness to adaptivity and accessibility a wonderful life is there for the taking, full of success, achievement, and joy.

To find out more about Victoria please visit: www.victoriaclaire-beyondvision.com or www.victoriaclairesculpture.com

"I believe that we should have the freedom of choice with whatever the aid is that helps us, we should not be limited by historic views, in my case the view that a cane should only be white for the blind. I advocate personalization to whatever helps you."

Image Descriptions: The image on the right margin is a full-length shot of Victoria wearing a lacy ivory colored dress and she’s holding her bamboo cane in front of her. The two images on page 36 are close up shots of the bamboo cane that Victoria created. The photo on this page is the wall display of 4 long canes. A slimline black one (this is for my public speaking and engagement work), a bamboo long cane (I turned my creative sculptural skills to creating last year), the original white long cane that I trained with, and my everyday go to purple cane. The final photo on the upper left corner is The smaller circular bio photo shows Victoria sitting, leaning forward, looking directly at the camera. Her straight blond hair parted in the middle frames her face. Wearing minimal makeup she is stunning with pink frosted lip color and is wearing a sleeveless black dress with a keyhole neckline.
Alan Gardner is A. Gardner. He points out that this indeed is his name and profession. He is the host of a fascinating garden design show on the Inside Out app on Amazon Prime. The A. Gardener could also stand for “Autistic Gardener” as he is that as well. Gardner became interested in gardening as a teen. He was well into his career as an award-winning garden designer when he was diagnosed with Asperger’s, a high-functioning form of autism, that some of his eccentricities started to make sense. He started to see autism as a gift that helped him be a good designer. He speaks about how he takes in sensory information in a very instant and broad way. Then he focuses in on a few details to make that the particular theme of a garden. Alan shows us examples of this as he explains his design concepts to his clients while he reveals their new gardens.

Gardner thought that maybe other people with autism might use their gifts to work in garden design too. The first season of “The Autistic Gardener” is based on the idea that Alan takes on four apprentices with autism and has each of them contribute something to the garden design. This is a risky idea because these apprentices don’t have formal
garden design training, they have never worked together before, and they are working for real clients with real projects for real money.

This is a great experiment to try to harness the gifts of detail and obsession that sometimes come with autism in an effort to design bold beautiful gardens. Getting them to communicate and work with each other often feels awkward and strained. As I learned in leading art classes for an autism social club, autists don’t exactly socialize very well, let alone with each other. In the third episode, Alan says “If you like uncomfortable silence, then this will be your favorite bit.”

The first season is all about trying to convey concepts of what it might be like to be autistic with image and sound montages. When the apprentice Victoria is designing a wildlife skyscraper, she says, “My, my, my ideas don’t get listened to much and I’m glad that someone’s taken the time to listen to my ideas. I feel like I’m close to crying.” This also gives an indication of how it often feels to have autism -- you are constantly ignored, belittled, and underestimated. The first season does show the end results with completed projects and happy clients. The gardens are very unique, bold, creative, and magical. The magic rubs off on the apprentices, too. It is clear that they feel great pride in their accomplishments.

There are no apprentices in the second season of “The Autistic Gardener.” There is no mention of why there is a change in format. Instead, we get more one-on-one time with Alan exploring his creative process and following him on tours of modern bold gardens that he uses for inspiration. He explains what details stand out and why they appeal to him as a gardener and an autist. He visits the High Line in Manhattan, which is a garden environment built on an elevated abandon railway. It is a tranquil urban oasis of nature in the middle of the bustle of New York City. Alan finds this experience so moving that he tears up. I myself love visiting gardens so much that I also find them to be very moving emotional sensory experiences.

The second season’s design aesthetic is also very elevated. Alan is no longer constrained by having to design a garden with a committee of apprentices. As a result, he can really show what he is capable of and these designs will absolutely amaze you. He creates a human-size maze to meld two neighboring gardens together as one. He creates this maze by recontextualizing simple scaffolding poles. Then he creates spiral garden beds out of concrete culvert sections. When it’s time for the clients to see their gardens their jaws fall open and their faces light up with delight and many express wonderment that this can’t be their garden. Alan Gardner transforms bland and derelict suburban patches of land into gardens that are true living art environments. I know that this just might not be everyone’s “cup of tea”. Even if you don’t care for gardening to see Alan Gardner explain the forming of ideas through the perspective of autism is fascinating.

I am the EXACT audience for this show. I am neurodiverse in that I have congenital brain formation called hydrocephalus and a learning disability. I have literally been
studying design all of my life and have worked with school and community gardens to help design therapeutic, accessible gardens. However, you don't have to have a weirdly-functioning brain or have attended art school to enjoy this show. Even my husband who is my very reluctant but faithful gardening assistant couldn't help but be impressed with the bold, dynamic gardens that Alan Gardner designs, as well as how bold and dynamic Alan is himself.

I am thrilled that this show even exists. It is very professional with high production values. Alan has a very postmodern take on narration, often explaining the dynamics of what goes into show production such as artificially building tension. My only complaint about this show is that the seasons are too short and that I want more and more episodes to watch. “The Autistic Gardener” accomplishes its goal extremely well. It is helping to familiarize and dissect the world of autism through the lens of an autistic world-class garden designer. We are shown that disability is not a devastating and dehumanizing state but just another form of being and that having a disability has gifts and advantages that are very rarely as celebrated as they are in this format. We are being wooed into accepting autism through the beauty of transcendent gardens. I could offer no better way to observe Autism Awareness Month that to sit down with a cup of tea and indulge in watching “The Autistic Gardener” do his thing.

About the Author:
Catherine Boldt has spent her adult life being a disability advocate. She is a designer and works in the Education Outreach Department and provides accessible tours at Taliesin, Frank Lloyd Wright's Estate. She is a past President of The Canadian Research Institute For The Advancement of Women, where she presided over an International Conference on Women with Disabilities and initiated a national essay contest and book called "That Body Image Thing".

Image Descriptions:
- Header image on page 39: Alan Gardner is surrounded by what appear to be varying sizes of silver pipes. He’s smiling and leaning his forearm four of the pipes in front of him. He has shocking bright red hair and nail polish to match. He’s wearing a black short sleeved shirt and his tattoos can be seen on both arms and his fingers.
- A circular bio photo of Author, Catherine Boldt. Catherine looks fabulous in a geometric print dress in varying shades of purple and topped with a pink cropped cardigan. Her red hair is shoulder length with bangs and her lip color coordinates perfectly with her outfit. She is posing with color coordinated canes.
This isn't Chelsea Nguyen's first rodeo, but for a few cook-off attendees, today was definitely theirs.

Four years ago, Nguyen met up with WCBBQ Contest Publicity Committee members to figure out a way to safely allow individuals who are visually impaired or disabled, to enjoy the World's Championship Barbecue Contest.

After a plan was in place, she started organizing the 5 Sense Tour. Through the help of volunteers, they guide up to 10 people in the group through cook-off grounds. Taking them tent to tent, they get to experience everything from the sounds, smells, tastes and more.

Both Nguyen and the volunteers describe everything in detail to the group as they walk along.

"Everything I see, I try to be as descriptive as I can to tell them what I see," Nguyen told Eyewitness News. "When you add that, with tasting barbecue or feeling the hides on the wall and all of that, it takes it to another level."

Nguyen is a local small business owner and avid advocate for the visually impaired and disabled community. The group visited five tents Friday afternoon and was treated to a barbecue lunch. The experience was wonderful for everyone involved, and they're already looking forward to next year's cook-off.

For more information on Nguyen's efforts to aid the visually impaired, visit CN Vision Image.

**Image Description:** Credit Houston Chronicle-JoAnn Caliva has a close encounter with horses during the fourth annual "5 Sense Tour" on Friday, February 22, 2019. The tour is an event for the blind and visually impaired to experience the smells, tastes and atmosphere of the World's Championship Bar-B-Que Contest.
Closing Remarks
CHELSEA NGUYEN & STEPHANAE MCCOY

We hope you enjoyed meeting April’s featured guests and reading their stories. Sharing our experiences is one of many steps required to break down barriers and move us closer to a more inclusive world. Every one of the individuals featured in CAPTIVATING! are phenomenal people who are doing amazing things to change the way we perceive one another.

The purpose of CAPTIVATING! is to highlight those who are living and thriving with a disability. One of our other goals is to help people understand that no matter how we who have disabilities define them, it’s a personal choice for each of us, having one does not mean we are broken or abnormal. As a matter of fact we are some of the most ingenious people around and have remarkable skills in adaptation. We are able to do most anything able-bodied people can do, we just do it a little differently.

So the next time you happen to bump into a person with a physical disability instead of staring, turning away, or being uncomfortable why not say hello? Just a little kindness can help break the ice and you never know who you might meet.

We invite you to submit questions, and ideas to editor@captivatingmagazine.com.

Image Description: In recognition of National Donate Life Month a pair of open hands extended palms up are on a black background.