

AT Banter Podcast Episode 229 - Talk Description To Me

 Sun, 2/28 9:56AM  55:43

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

description, describe, audio, people, jj, visuals, deep dive, describer, thinking, podcast, blind, walking, events, talk, episode, christine, day, watching, parade, sighted

SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, JJ Hunt, Christine Malec, Ryan Fleury



-  Rob Mineault 00:44
Hey, and welcome to a another episode of AT Banter
-  Ryan Fleury 00:50
banter, banter.
-  Rob Mineault 00:54
That's a pretty tired banter, banter.
-  Ryan Fleury 00:56
Well, not so much tired. But I woke up this morning and fought with my Keurig for about half an hour. And I think it's dead. So I had to find our drip coffeemaker and our paper filters, and actually brew a pot of coffee. So I was a little frustrated.

R Rob Mineault 01:12
Yeah I'm afraid my Koenig is starting to go to it doesn't it doesn't make the coffee as hot as it used to.

R Ryan Fleury 01:20
Have you have you done any cleaning or maintenance on it?

R Rob Mineault 01:23
Yeah, yeah, I've bought that scaling stuff before. Like, you know, there's like a way that you pour it in and run it through a few times. I've done that a few times during its life. But

R Ryan Fleury 01:36
we've we've had to replace one in the past as well. You know, I think you can get replacement parts and stuff.

R Rob Mineault 01:41
But why would you bother? You can buy one for 100 plus bucks, or know why you would ever bother pouring money into repairs on one. Yeah. Which is terrible to say because I hate I hate that we live in a disposable society where we just throw everything away immediately instead of trying to extend its life. But I mean, they just they don't make they don't make it make sense economically to do that. No. So that sounds terrible. That's when it's a coffee malfunction first thing in the morning. It's never a good start to the day.

R Ryan Fleury 02:13
And like I said to Linda tea wasn't going to cut it. And there was no way I could get through the day with least without a cup of coffee.

R Rob Mineault 02:21
yeah, teas, definitely not going to cut it in the mornings. Forget that. No. All right, well, then I'm not gonna bother asking how you are because clearly,

R Ryan Fleury 02:32

I'm okay. Now I've had one cup.

R

Rob Mineault 02:36

Hey, before we get too far into things, let's tell the fine folks what we're doing today.

R

Ryan Fleury 02:42

Today we are talking with Christine Malec and JJ hunt from a podcast called "Talk Description To Me."

R

Rob Mineault 02:49

Yeah, I'm excited about this, these guys are doing some really interesting stuff. Really innovative, which in terms of audio description, so you give people a little bit of a rundown of what they're doing over there?

R

Ryan Fleury 03:03

Well, JJ has been doing audio description for over 20 years. And Christine Malec is totally blind and has been since birth and is pretty curious about events going on in the world around us. You know, those of us who are blind, missed so many things in our daily lives. He just walking down the street, we can't see events or signs or, you know, the recent Mars rover landing. And what JJ Christine are doing is describing world events, current trends. Yeah, it's just giving us those of us who are blind or visually impaired, more description of the world around us and the events that are taking place.

R

Rob Mineault 03:46

Yeah. And they're not only doing like stuff like, like big news, news events and stuff, but they're also a lot of pop culture references that yeah, that are so visual that a lot of people, you know, don't pick up on.

R

Ryan Fleury 03:59

Well, and you know, like I mentioned before, you know, when I watch the news or an event happening on TV, it's just a lot of noise, right. And the announcers aren't describing the scene, necessarily in a way that's going to make sense to me. And so they're taking kind of a bit of a deeper dive or a different angle at it. And filling in the gaps.



Rob Mineault 04:22

Yeah. I'm really looking forward to talking to them a bit later. Hey, so you know, I want to talk to you about last week's show that that 80s show that was a lot of fun.



Ryan Fleury 04:33

Yeah, yeah. It was an interesting look back and hearing a little bit about each person's interests or hobbies or, yeah.



Rob Mineault 04:43

Yeah, it was shocking. Some shocking revelations came out of that show. But you know, it's funny, I was I was doing the edit. And I was just realizing, man, we could talk for another two hours, thinking, Oh, I should have talked about this show or that movie or this, there was just so much so much there. But you know, it may also made me wonder, like, I don't know is that just because that was those are formative years, you know, those, those childhood slash teenage years that you're growing up everything that's new and everything, you know everything is just so interesting, or was it really just a really interesting decade?



Ryan Fleury 05:21

Well, I think it's the former, you know, it's the generation or the decade we grew up in, and, you know, had involvement and like you say, it was our formative years, if you talked to somebody who would have been our age in the 60s, you know, those those young teen two teenage years, they would have been talking about Woodstock and tie dye shirts, and they would have been talking about the music of the day. And, you know, some of the shows that were on that meant something to them. So I think every generation has their time, right?



Rob Mineault 05:57

Yeah. I guess so. It'd be, it would be actually interesting. I think we should do the 90s next year.



Ryan Fleury 06:04

I think that would be an interesting conversation. 90s, or we do just pick the 60s 70s. You know, the 50s? Were a big, big year for music as well, you know, a big decade for music.

- R** Rob Mineault 06:14
Yeah. I mean, I guess the difference between that is that we wouldn't have a personal connection with with the, you know, the farther back we go, we can certainly talk about it, conceptually, but we wouldn't really have that. Yeah, be interesting. I don't know. We'll have to figure out what we're gonna do next year for retro day, but it's funny now we have another yet another, another special episode out of the year, where we're just gonna be self indulgent, and just talk about whatever the hell we want to because it's our podcast, dammit.
- R** Ryan Fleury 06:42
It's different, right? It's something new. So it's something unexpected, so it can't be bad. If you don't like it ... tune out.
- R** Rob Mineault 06:51
Just for an episode, though, come back for the next topic, right.
- R** Ryan Fleury 06:58
We don't need you listeners. We're doing the show. Anyway.
- R** Rob Mineault 07:04
JK, JK, JK, JK.
- R** Ryan Fleury 07:08
Love you.
- R** Rob Mineault 07:10
So before we do bring JJ and Christine on. I do want to be a little bit self indulgent for a minute and do a little bit of a plug. Blind Beginnings has a trivia night that is coming up on March 6. And it's a great opportunity to come hang out and do some trivia and help support Blind Beginnings as an organization. Full disclaimer, of course, I do work for Blind Beginnings. So I do have a bit of a vested interest in that, but it's a great charity. And we'd love to see people out there. So yeah, if you're interested in trivia, www.blindbeginnings.ca is the website. Just go there and you can buy tickets there.

R Ryan Fleury 07:53
And do you have your tickets?

R Rob Mineault 07:55
I have to work. I have to actually worth work to make it entertaining for you guys. So I don't get to play trivia.

R Ryan Fleury 08:03
Excellent. Joining us now are Christine Malec. and JJ hunt from "Talk Description To Me." Thank you so much, Christine and JJ, for joining us this morning. Yeah, I've been wanting to get you guys on for a little while. You guys have most recently launched a new venture called talk description to me. And so I wanted to have you on to talk about that because it's a very interesting way to approach I think podcasting and audio description. So, welcome.

C Christine Malec 09:24
Thank you.

J JJ Hunt 09:25
Thanks.

R Ryan Fleury 09:26
So why don't we start with where the idea for talk description to me came from?

C Christine Malec 09:32
It was maybe in the in the late spring, I would say of 2020. And the pandemic was was well underway. And I run a few programs, one with the CNIB one with the AMI and I wanted to talk with JJ about the look of the pandemic because it's so bizarre. I mean, we're used to it now. But in the beginning the ideas were just so strange, empty streets, people And masks, closed stores. And so I asked if JJ would be willing to spend some time being sort of interviewed or discussing with me publicly, those those visuals, and we did that. And it was it was well received. And we both felt really good about what we had done there. And we both had an interest in podcasting and in doing something new. And we've been

friends for years and have lots of laughs and it's very easy for us to get along and work together and and have fun. And so, JJ kind of said, you know, that works. So well, what, what do you think of expanding it into a full on podcast, and the more we thought about it, the better we liked it. And as we got into producing episodes, we realized the gap that had always existed, but that no one had really named at least that I'd ever heard, which is the the way things look in the news. And so we're used to talking heads, and we figure okay, we were getting there talking. So that must be as accessible as the news is going to get for the blind community. But as we kept producing episodes and gaining listeners, we we started to realize the the extent of the gap. As we began to try to start to fill it, we realized how significant the gap was. And it's been sort of building steadily ever since then.

R

Ryan Fleury 11:30

And so JJ being in the audio description field for over 20 years, what sort of challenges do you find, describing I guess, the events happening around us day to day, whether it be, you know, the riots at the Capitol Building, or TikTok sea shanties? Like, what, how does it, how does it differ from, you know, your typical audio description?

J

JJ Hunt 11:55

Well, I mean, you start with the same core principles, right, you start with the same idea, describing the visuals means like, you know, just say what you see. But it's so much more nuanced when you're trying to describe things that are emotional, or things that are unfolding in real time. And context is so important when we're when we're describing the visuals of political events or social movements. And so trying to find ways to bring that context into the conversation, while still sticking to the basic principle of like, I'm not the one doing, I'm not the one who should be judging these situations, I should just be interpreting the visuals passing that along, so that the listener can make decisions on their own. And so you know, trying to find the balance, they're trying to make sure that we are placing the descriptions in context, and using the, you know, the benefits of having a podcast and not trying to describe overtop of an existing soundtrack, where your time is really constrained. And, you know, trying to take advantage of a bit of that have the conversation between Christina and I, making sure that I'm listening to Christine, like, these are huge elements of the podcast description, that are that are kind of different from, you know, describing a movie or TV show, or even a piece of art in a gallery. It's it's a smaller, tighter, more focused, accessibility based thing. And the podcast starts there and builds on it and it grows. And that's, you know, we're still finding our paths and still finding new ways to, to adapt audio description to have description rich conversations. It's a fantastic challenge. I'm really enjoying it.

R

Rob Mineault 13:43

So where do you guys sort of get your inspiration in terms of what you talk about on any given week? Is it a community driven? Or do you just sort of whatever's been happening with you guys during the week?

C

Christine Malec 13:59

It's kind of both of those, plus what's going on in the world in a given week. So we have active Twitter and Facebook presences. And we invite people to give us feedback about things they want described in several of our episodes come from requests from listeners, we definitely always have our eye on the news and for things that are current, but also things where description is really wanted or needed. So some events just sort of tell themselves, whereas others have very distinct visuals that are being widely circulated and shared over social media and that our listeners, including me, are going to be left out of if there's no description. And then sometimes we just do follow our own our own interests, and I'm constantly tweeting at JJ Hey, have you seen this? Oh, how about that? And so it's things like from Geographic or NASA or different Twitter feeds that I follow where I read something, oh my god, that's, that's pretty cool. So I'll tweet at him and say, hey, check this out. And sometimes those turn into episodes and, and then sometimes we look ahead in the in the calendar and say like, this week for example, our upcoming episode is on the spring festival that the Chinese New Year because that's on the calendar is coming up so when we know there's an event coming up in in the world that could bear some description, then we look ahead in that way too. So it's a really nice mix, we don't feel constrained to cover topics in a certain way or a certain range of topics, we feel quite free to take suggestions and ideas from from lots of different places,

J

JJ Hunt 15:44

And we try and create a balance you know, like there are some very heavy news items that require some description some important videos and you know, whether they're events that are unfolding on social media like with with the, the mob attack on the on the Capitol Building. That's something that was extremely it was obviously of the moment, but it was very visual because people were posting those videos in real time. So we wanted to get in we needed to describe that. But then there are also fun things that are happening in the same type of way like the like the sea shanties on Tick tock, you know, that was happening in the moment, that's of the moment. And so we wanted to get on top of that. And then there are other things that are not necessarily linked to, you know, what's happening today, like, we've got episodes coming up on the description of flags, or, you know, we've done things on the northern lights, the aurora borealis, you know, those aren't necessarily tied to get to the actions of the day. But we want to make sure we have a mix

of both, you know, extremely topical and other things that are of interest and things that are heavy and, and have social ramifications, and things that are kind of like, you know, we try and mix it up a bit, we try and be a little bit aware of that. But but we don't have any strict formula to speak of.

R

Ryan Fleury 17:10

Christine, I believe you've been visually impaired or blind all of your life. So how much does your curiosity about the world around you play into this?

C

Christine Malec 17:21

It's a huge part. And it's true, I have been blind since birth. And so yeah, curiosity is a big part of my of my whole professional life, actually. But the it plays a part in some of the things we cover because like I said, I follow you know, Nat Geo, or the Canadian Space Agency or entities that are doing science or culture stuff. And there's always things I want to know about, oh, okay, what does that what does that look like? or What does it feel to look at that? And then within episodes, there will be times where JJ will describe something. And there's a part of that, that I want to take a step back and say, oh, let's take a step back. So your fire tornadoes I've talked about before? Because we we did an episode on the climate crisis and talked about fire tornadoes, but then I wanted to take a step back and say, Okay, what is, you know, what does that What does a regular tornado look like? So, curiosity based on the gaps that have always existed for me, in in my world, and I'm thinking of, we did a description of a postal sorting machine. And so, JJ did this very I know, it's an elaborate machine. And it's kind of hard to follow the description and but I was curious about, what does it look what does it feel like to just watch it? And there's often things like that where I want to know, ASL. So we talked about ASL and I have many questions still about ASL, which is a fascinating topic. But again, I wanted to know, so what's it like to watch it is it is a kind of, I imagine it's mesmerizing to watch. Is that true? And JJ? From Yeah, it's really hypnotic to, to watch it and other people the same. So my curiosity is about what things look like, but also, what does it feel like to look at them?

J

JJ Hunt 19:26

And that's really as a describer. So freeing, it's a little bit, you know, makes me a little bit nervous sometimes when Christine asks those questions, because my describer training tells me "Don't, don't talk about how I feel". It's not about me, right? Description is about other people receiving information. So it's not it's not normally about how I feel about a situation or how I feel about a visual, but getting that information. We're learning how important that is to our listeners, right that to have that sense of "What does it feel like?"

How does that? How does your body respond to that? You know, when you're in these visual situations?" So it's exciting to do that as a describer. You know, a little nerve wracking, but but very fun.

R

Rob Mineault 20:18

Yeah, that is really interesting, because, and I and I could see that how it would be very freeing, because it seems to me that, you know, in a way, Christine's is sort of the voice of the audience.

J

JJ Hunt 20:29

Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 20:30

And, and with, with you being able to sort of free yourself from from normal audio description, and to be able to talk about what how you're personally reacting to something that I think I think that adds another layer to this, that you wouldn't get out of normal audio description, I think that can be really valuable. And I think that would, the whole podcast format, I think, really plays into that.

J

JJ Hunt 20:58

Yeah, I think you're right. Having having the opportunity to do this having the time to do it. And, and, frankly, people can tune in or not, right, like, if it's an episode that they're not that into, they're not missing out on, you know, an episode in a series in a TV show that they, you know, it doesn't have to work for everyone all the time. And that's great. That's totally cool. I, you know, as the describer, as you say, Christine is acting as the, the voice of the audience often, right. And so I generally try and wait for her to enquire. And when Christina asks about those, how it feels, then I'm willing to step in, because I feel like I've had an invitation to do. So I've been told that it's important for this conversation to talk about that. So I will talk about that. But it's amazing that different people who have a different relationship to visual memory, who have different experiences being blind or low vision, or being fully sighted different people have, are finding different ways to use the show, and to use the description, and to, and to participate in our conversations that Christina and I are having. And so sometimes the emotional content is important to them. Sometimes the pure description is what's really key. And, you know, we want to make sure that we're, we're putting all of that forward so that the community who's listening can, you know, can take and find what they need from it.



Rob Mineault 22:29

It seems to me that the the other really important aspect of this, though, is that you're you guys are driving the conversation about audio description forward.



Christine Malec 22:40

Yeah, I, I've always loved that about JJ that he's always kind of looking, peering around the edges of conventional audio description. And so the way we met was when JJ was doing described walks in Toronto, and so this would be sort of like a touristy kind of, let's walk around a neighborhood. And we'll talk about the history but along with really well researched, talking about the places, JJ would give audio description geared for a blind and low vision audience. And this was super innovative, and I'd never heard of it being done before. And so I think the whole industry is kind of shifting this way, and thinking more creatively and more broadly, about audio description and where and how we, we can look for it unexpected. And I think it's Roy Samuelson who says that he like he wants us to be audio description snobs. And so the meaning there is that it used to be that we just be so abstractly grateful to have any audio description on anything. And now it's become more mainstream. And we, we expect to have audio description, and then we expect to have really good audio description. So it's part of an evolving industry where things are, are changing in many different directions. But I think I feel like JJ has really been an innovator in thinking outside of the boundaries of what's normally done. And what what else can we do that hasn't been done yet?



Ryan Fleury 24:18

Yeah.



JJ Hunt 24:19

I remember, years ago, I had the opportunity to describe the the Para Pan Am and the Pan Am Games when they came to Toronto, and I described goalball one of the sports and I also describe the opening and closing ceremonies in venue, so this wasn't broadcast on TV or anything. This was for guests who were at the SkyDome, watching the opening ceremonies that we had headsets set up and there was a whole team of us doing audio description and it was interpreted into four different languages. It was it was wild, it was a great night. It was an amazing evening. It was amazing event and trying to describe all of the like the entire scene, the fireworks, the crowd, the ceremony, the dancing, the lights, it was, it was just massive. And I remember when it was done, I was wired, right? Like, what to describe an event like that. I always feel like I'm dilated, my eyes are dilated, my mind is

dilated. I'm like, I'm just absorbing everything, trying to process it quickly and come up with a stream of descriptive information that is cohesive in some way. So when I left the event, you know, I'm walking around downtown Toronto, it's night, and I'm wired. There's no way I'm going home and going to bed. And I'm walking around the city thinking with the same dilated mind, right. And I'm looking at like a bunch of guys getting hot dogs from a hotdog cart. And I think I could describe that. And then there's, you know, there's a, you know, an all night noodle place in Chinatown, and you know, people standing in the windows eating their, their, their noodles, I'm thinking, I could describe that. And I just walked around the city thinking I could describe that I could describe that. And that's kind of how some of the early ideas of this started to form like, wait a minute, everything really, if it's got a visual element, it can be described, and some of it maybe isn't high priority. But some of its really interesting. And it's also, you know, Christina, and I talk about this a lot, sometimes it's the little things it's the people watching, it's the it's the little elements of daily life that are missing from from audio description. So if we can find a venue and this podcast is a great way to do it, if we can find a venue to kind of put some of those descriptions forward and make not only big picture events, more interesting and dynamic, but like the little bits of daily life more interesting and dynamic. Like, Hey, I'm all for it. That's fantastic. Let's like let's bully on.



Christine Malec 26:54

My dream gig for JJ is people watching. And so we haven't figured out how to manage this because you can't just sit and describe people like sit on a bench and describe people as they go by that's gonna have some bad consequences. Work out the logistics, but there is so much scope there. And I remember one of the early walks that I went on with JD he was talking about something completely other. I don't even remember what that thing was, but it happened to be Mother's Day, and he just kind of slipped in. Oh, and there's a gentleman walking by with an enormous bouquet of flowers. Oh, man, like how much you know. And of course living in a big city, you know that you're missing all sorts of interesting visuals of just people watching. But when he just slipped in that one little details like okay, I want a whole hour of that. JJ actually came up with a brilliant one. I don't know that we'll ever do it but as as a bonus, maybe for like Patreon subscribers or something. What did you call it? description after dark? sketchy. Did you see walking around you know at one on the morning



Ryan Fleury 28:01

Description of the red light district.



JJ Hunt 28:05

I think that came after I've been walking down. And I saw three people in a row with outrageous lewd t shirts, right? Like t shirts, like amazingly graphic images. And I think I sent a tweet like okay, t shirt number one t shirt number two t shirt number three, because they're just so fantastic. And I thought, this is one of those things that comes and goes I walk by it. And as a sighted person, I see those three shirts. It brings a smile to my face. It's something that I get to carry through my day. It's a laugh that I have. It's a bit of cheekiness. And I think if I'm walking beside Christine, she doesn't get that moment. That's something that that she doesn't get to participate in, she doesn't get that in her day. She's got others that I don't have, but that's one that I would like to be able to share. And so in that moment that would, you know, came out as a as a text to Chris, but, you know, maybe after dark would be something.



Christine Malec 29:00

And when you asked about how the podcast got started, that was part of it for me was that being friends with an audio describer? You know, JJ is an awesome guy. And he's an audio describer. So I get these, I would get these tidbits where he describes something, and I think that's gold. And it's just me who gets to enjoy it. And so the idea of the podcast appealed to me so much because I wanted I wanted all of the community to have access to these gems. And so both of us, I guess, share that that desire to make things you know, more available to everybody and not just to to certain people.



Ryan Fleury 29:35

So in, you know, JJ you describing, you know, these lead lewd t shirts that you're seeing and the different scenes at night. Are there any topics that you guys will steer away from?



JJ Hunt 29:49

Oh, that's a good question. I don't think we have had had any like full topics that we've steered away from but there have been moments where You have to take a step back and say, what's the value in this? What am I willing to do as an individual? Like, you know, we have to think of our own mental health. You know, we did the 9/11 episode, right. And it was important to do it, we had listeners who had requested it, we thought it was a, it was a positive thing to do. But when it was done, we both we hung up, and we needed to go on our separate walks and have some quiet time, it's hard to dive into some of that stuff. Sure. And so, you know, I remember when we did the, we did an episode on political cartoons. And, and there was a, I wanted to make sure that I was describing a range of ideas that didn't just come from the political right or left, right, I, you know, I've got my

own take on the world. I've got my own politics. But if I'm describing political cartoons, I want to make sure that that everyone gets offended, right. And there was a certain side of that, where, you know, when I moved too far, frankly, to the right, some of the political cartoons were just so ignorant, so racist, that I didn't want to look at him. I didn't want to promote them. And as much as I feel like there is some theoretical value in making sure that that material is available to people who are visually impaired in the same way that it's available to people who are sighted. I didn't want anything to do with it. Right. So so we stated that, you know, we made sure that that was clear to the audience, but but we didn't go there.

R Ryan Fleury 31:40
Right.

C Christine Malec 31:41
I remember when the Proud Boys were first mentioned publicly, there was a video circulating.

J JJ Hunt 31:47
Yeah, yeah

C Christine Malec 31:48
I messaged JJ, I said, What do we do with this? And he looked at it, and we talked about it, and we just kind of went, No, no, I just, I can't go there. And so you know, if we were employed by CNN, or they said, Okay, here cover this, then I guess we would cover it. But this is our podcast, and we have some, you know, discretion, and they are hard. Those things are hard to, to talk about, and they're hard to listen to. And when you have to talk about them and ask questions and edit for a few hours and really immerse yourself. Those are hard. I remember as well. In the episode on the Beirut explosion, there's a piece of Mr. Rogers wisdom that I always come back to, which is, in any terrible situation. One way to cope is to look for the helpers. And that piece just stuck with me. And so I, I sort of said that in the episode and then we kind of paused and said, are we gonna talk about the horrible visuals of aid workers and injured people and the medics and the the graphic consequences to human bodies when not then personal stories? Yeah. And we kind of didn't, we decided that that was too harrowing. And again, well, yeah, I don't know. I think that those ended up just being personal boundaries that we have to have for ourselves. And we we make those choices. We talk about them and are sensitive to each other's

boundaries around that stuff. And we know, I don't think we've ever had a course we've never had a dispute about it. We're very, you have similar values. But those are, yeah, so it's not so much issues that we won't cover it certain aspects of issues that we just find too difficult. Sure.



JJ Hunt 33:41

Yeah. And I do remember one this is this wasn't about the podcast specifically. But it was a moment of to describe or not to describe. This was at the Pride Parade a few years back. And Chris, I think you were in the audience for this one. This was the one where Justin Trudeau was going to be in the parade for the first time and black lives matter where the honored guests that they lead that they lead the parade. And so we have a description tent and accessibility 10th it's right, you know, right up on the parade route. So I can be up close and I'm leaning over and I've got a microphone with speakers. So every it's it's being broadcast locally through speakers. So lots of people can hear the description of whatever's passing by and so the Black Lives Matter start the parade. And it's really powerful men and women in high heels and wearing All Blacks like Stone Cold expressions, fists in the air really, really proud. And that's how the parade begins. They marched down the street, and then just a few minutes after that, the parade kind of grinds to a halt every everything stops. And you know, I describe what's going on around us and you know, the people leaning off the balconies and you know, I think dykes on bikes were there. And they were kind of a little bit of playfulness there. So I described all that. But after a while, it's like nothing's going on. Why is the parade stopped? and someone says, oh, I've just heard word on on Twitter that the Black Lives Matter group has stopped the parade. They've completely halted the parade. And I said, Well, does anyone have any visuals. So someone pulled up some photos on their phone showed me the phone, I described those visuals, but it kept going on and on and on. And then I glanced up just looking for things to describe. And I saw on the tops of the buildings all around us, were members of the SWAT team peeking over the edge. And I'm like, Oh, my God, they've got snipers, snipers on the rooftop. So these buildings, and I thought to myself, now I'm describing everything I see. I'm actively looking for interesting things. As a sighted person, I can see that, but I got a microphone. Am I really going to yell fire? gonna say their snipers on the roof. And it was the first time that I've ever had this experience. And I thought, you know, what, if the description users had had personal headsets, and there were only a half dozen, maybe I would have said, folks, nothing, nothing alarming going on. But here's what I'm seeing. I might have done that. But with speakers facing the crowd, there's no way I could, you know, say, our snipers on the rooftop. So it was that would be that'd be madness. And I remember talking to Christina about that afterwards. Like, dude, this is the here's something I didn't say.



Christine Malec 36:32

Sorry, haunts me. It just haunts me for so many reasons. And I think like, if there's such a thing as audio describer school you should start, you should lead with that. Classic dilemma.



JJ Hunt 36:43

It's a wild one.



Christine Malec 36:44

Yeah.



Rob Mineault 36:47

So on that note, like, I just I'm curious, JJ, just about the audio describer mindset, you know, and after you've been trained? I don't know, do you spend your day, do you just kind of walk around and do like in your head? Do you just kind of practice, like, just describe everything as you're walking through your living room to yourself?



JJ Hunt 37:05

I do for better and worse. Like, so, when I first started, I was having a hard time watching TV or movies on my own, because I started with describing movies and TV. And I'd be watching a TV show and, and, and flipping through everything in my head. How would I describe that? How would I describe that I was like, Oh my god, this is like, this is just a Three's Company rerun. You don't have to do this. And you know, and then when I started getting into the walks, it was exactly the same, right? Like, I'd go around, and everything I'd see around me is, is like that. And I do a fair bit of traveling, when I can when the universe allows that to happen. And one of the things I'd really like to do is get into the audio description of travel and audio describing different scenes, like I was in, I was in Morocco, going through the bazaars and you know, going through the markets as thinking, oh my god, this is a this is a fairly inaccessible space, it is so packed. It's so chaotic. I mean, the smells are fantastic. The sounds are wonderful, but it's a very, very tight space. It's it's an awkward position to be in and I remember thinking this would be a great opportunity to do some kind of live description walk that was broadcast and just talk about the sights and and discuss the smells and making sure that all those other senses are, you know, are discussed as well, because you're absolutely right. I do. I can't I can't turn it off sometimes. Yeah, you know, it's just always going my poor family. Oh my

god.



Christine Malec 38:41

You want to know how to really discombobulate JJ though, ask him to describe you -- he hates that.



JJ Hunt 38:51

The only time I ever had fun doing that was at that Pride Parade when Justin Trudeau walked by, because I got to describe the Prime Minister while the Prime Minister was in earshot. That was pretty good. That was pretty good otherwise it's like torture is no don't make me describe you.



Christine Malec 39:07

I found this out because we're doing an interview once I think it was maybe our very first and and I said you know completely not thinking it through and what I what I meant was not physical it was but I thought, oh, wouldn't it be fun if we introduced each other and JJ's, like, I thought he was gonna read the whole enterprise right there and what's wrong with this idea? And it I only meant career and professional wise, but he's got such a I totally get it once I thought, Oh, yeah. Who would want to do that? Oh, my God, that's, ya know,



JJ Hunt 39:36

it's like the it's like the equivalent of a you know, you meet a doctor and you're like, hey, Doctor, does this mole look healthy to you?



Ryan Fleury 39:42

Yeah, like at a cocktail party.



Rob Mineault 39:48

We've been real real advocates for audio description for a while and I think that after talking to you guys, I can see that there's there's sort of a few different prongs here that and I think it's is a natural progression, you know. On the one hand, we have to really push that audio description is just there, like we need to really fight the battle to get audio description, you know, ubiquitous, but then there's also sort of the prong of but it also

needs to be good. Because you know, we've all heard bad audio description. And then I think that there's you guys which is and we need to innovate a little bit and we need to see where where we can insert audio description that maybe isn't intuitive. And you know, I think back to even like say ASL like, you see all those those videos of of ASL people on the stage with rappers and at music concerts, who are who, you know, who are adding that extra layer for people who are deaf or hard of hearing at these concerts, which is great, you know, that's innovation. And so you guys are kind of I see you guys doing the same thing for audio description, because some of this stuff isn't something that we would think of. And, you know, here we have in town, we have a, an organization called vocal eye that does audio description for live theater events, but also like doing things like describing fireworks, which Yeah, you know, to somebody who's sighted, you think like, well, how the hell are you going to do that? But so it's this sense of innovation that I think is also really important to drive audio description, to the next level?



JJ Hunt 41:29

Yeah, totally. And I think, I mean, we're, we're ready for it as an industry, because describers have been around long enough, we have new ideas, and we can start moving forward with them. We're at that, we're at a good place, with technology, with podcasts being where they are, and the sharing of audio content and the sharing of video content that's making that a genuine possibility. But I think the key is that the audience description users have been using description long enough that we all have a, we know we have we have a baseline, right, we all share a common description language. And so in the same way that film has this sped up continuity now where, you know, if you watch a TV show from the 1950s, it is so painfully slow compared to a TV show now, because the audience has gotten used to the tropes, they've gotten used to the editing style, and it can get faster and more complex. Audio description is exactly the same. The audience has been around a long time, they've heard the audio description, they know what's good, they know what's bad, we have some shorthand. And so we can start from there. And now build, we've been around long enough all of us describers description users, we can grow this and, and people are starting to do that. You talked about the description of fireworks, have you seen the technique where people draw on your back, it's awesome. Instead of just describing the fireworks, you simultaneously, it's a one on one experience, have a describer standing behind you. And using finger patterns, they draw on your back to say, here's the fireworks, it's streaking up and exploding. And then you tap on the back with little, you know, little kind of butterfly taps so that you get a physical representation of that, you know, of the firework, as well as the description of the color, and you also have the sound. And so it's a very personal experience that's rooted in audio description, but not limited to, you know, I think what I'm, I'm totally with you, I think we're ready for it.



Christine Malec 43:30

I think there's an innovation. And another innovation that JJ has been part of, if not, I don't know if you started it, but the deep dive idea. And so JJ has done a deep dive the James Bond files and so it's taking a movie franchise and making a series of podcasts about a deep dive. So not just the action that you can fit into the movie, but then really break down the sets and the way more subtle stuff like what did a kiss look like in the first James Bond movies versus later on. And so that's another innovation that I really love. And when when you present that to audio description, users they drool because everyone's got the movie or the TV show that they would love to get the deep dive into so I feel like I'm hoping that that's the next the next frontier in audio description.



Ryan Fleury 44:25

Well it's interesting you know, because we've had director's cuts and extended cuts for quite some time now and I actually never thought about having an audio described you know, Extended Cut a director's cut like a deep dive like you're talking about that'd be very cool. Yeah, yeah.



JJ Hunt 44:39

It's really fun. I did I started with the the James Bond for AMI and, and it was fascinating. I really enjoyed it. I done some tests work with it before I've been shopping the idea around. But when you take something like James Bond, which spans you know, decades, and you take a look at the way the film history has evolved, the stories have evolved, it's important to you know, when you have the opportunity with a deep dive to, you know, do in depth description of character and in depth description of vehicles and settings and locations, but also to talk about how those sets and locations tie into the morals of the day or the designer, you know, the design principles of the day. And, and the evolution of things like the evolution of those kisses, or the speed of editing, and how fast things the fast pace of new content versus how slow the editing was in earlier days, and how that is how you might hear that when you're listening to the audio description of the film. These are companion pieces. And I really enjoyed doing that first deep dive series. I'm currently looking chopping it around to find a good home for it. Because as Chris says, like there are how many different franchises different TV shows, game of throne, the crown like anything can can get this kind of deep dive treatment. And there's stuff to talk about, you know, if you put the right goggles on as a describer, there's a lot to talk about here. So I'm just looking for a home for it, you know?

R

Rob Mineault 46:16

So I guess we I can't let you guys get away without asking you a little bit about the industry itself? Because I'm always curious to know, are we seeing growth right now? Are there? Are there more schools? Are there more people entering into the field of audio description? What's going on out there?

J

JJ Hunt 46:35

So there's, there's a lot more audio description, I think a lot of different many different jurisdictions are have increased quotas, right? You, Canada, the US, Australia now has minimum numbers of hours of description that are required for major broadcasters every week or month or whatever it's different from from place to place. That's fantastic. I'm totally with you guys, like describe everything as the base. That's the starting point, everything should be described, and we're getting closer and closer to that, that's great. There are a couple of different outfits that do training, like of the practical sort training for entry level audio describers. And that's fantastic. Those describers are filling the roles of, you know, describing for TV networks. And, you know, there's some movie description in theater to pick up on that hasn't been 100% from the theater standpoint, but it's really good for streaming services, there's some fights, you know, that still need to be had with some of the streaming services, but others are very good at producing a lot of description and pretty high quality description. And there's now audio description is being taught in universities, you know, you can take university courses on this and and there are people writing academic papers about description, and thinking about it in an academic way, which is phenomenal. I mean, when I started 20 years ago, I literally like rode my bicycle to the studio and picked up a videotape. That was like, description, and you and that's how I taught myself was like on a videotape. So we have come an awfully long way. And that's all good. And you know, I think if we can keep that up. The other thing, the other thing that I'm loving seeing that is gaining a lot of traction is the idea that audio description isn't just something that sighted people do for blind people, that we've kind of gotten too far in that direction. And part of it's by necessity, right, like we are describing, we have to be able to see. So therefore, it's done by sighted people for the benefit of people who are visually impaired. But there are so many roles within the industry that can be filled by people who are blind or low vision, right? There's no reason for it to be as totally dominated by sighted people. And and we're getting there there have been producers in the field, long enough who have been who are blind or low vision, they're moving up the, you know, the ladder in the, you know, in various companies and organizations. So they're in the place where they are making decisions and hiring people. There are consultants, there are collaborations, which is the best like this, what Christine and I've and I have, this is a collaboration. This is a two person project. This is not a describers project. It's a collaboration. And that's I think the most exciting part of of

industry growth for me is is the proper inclusion of people who are blind and low vision in the creation of audio description. That's that's the best thing for me.



Rob Mineault 49:58

Well, hey, listen guys, we want to thank you so much for taking the time out and talking to us today. I absolutely love the podcast. It's called "Talk description to me", and we highly recommend everybody go check it out. We will include, of course a link in the show notes. Where else can people find you guys, anything else to plug?



Christine Malec 50:20

Our well our website is talkdescriptiontome.com. Our email address is talkdescriptiontome@gmail.com. We are on Twitter @talkdescription. And we have a Facebook page with a very complicated URL. So if you just did a talk description to me in a Facebook search, our Facebook page will come up so we love socially social media interaction and we we love replying to people and having conversations. So feel free to follow us ask questions, make comments. We love it all.



Rob Mineault 50:53

Awesome. All right. Well, listen. Thanks, guys. And let's let's do this again.



Ryan Fleury 50:58

Yeah.



JJ Hunt 50:59

Thanks for having us on, guys.



Ryan Fleury 51:01

All right. Thanks, guys. Take care.



Rob Mineault 51:04

Wow, yeah, that is so cool. So cool, what they're doing.



Ryan Fleury 51:09

Yeah, you know, they've done the Mars rover landing. They've done the storming of the Capitol Building sea shanties, on TikTok. There's I think, 38 episodes now that they've done, so definitely check them out. There's a lot of things there. That, you know, you may have had questions about when you heard about it on the news or whatever media you saw something on and check him out. Because it's it's definitely filling in gaps to those of us who are blind and partially sighted that may be lacking information.



Rob Mineault 51:40

I love it, though. I, you know, it makes me actually want to think about training to do to be an audio describer? Because I really do you think it's a it's a growing field, it's an evolving field. And I think that there's going to be a big call for audio describers in the future, because I think this is this is all going to just continue to, to grow. And I think eventually take off, because I think that a lot of streaming services, a lot of even networks are really going to step up the audio description, their audio description game, and start, you know, doing a lot more than they're doing now.



Ryan Fleury 52:22

Yeah, and I really hope that you know, the quality comes up with some companies, you know, we know descriptive video works does some pretty high quality audio description. And it's funny because I was watching TV the other day. And notice that my audio description was actually turned off. And so I went back into the menus and turned it on, and I forget what program was watching. There's just like, Oh, this is so annoying. And I turned it off. So it has to be well done. But yeah, you're right. There's definitely a growing industry with audio description. And so hopefully, we'll keep the quality high. Yeah, it makes a big difference.



Rob Mineault 53:03

I just think it would be fun. Like it would be a great skill to have. Because



Ryan Fleury 53:07

Yeah, can you imagine doing animation and you know, that'd be that'd be a hoot.



Rob Mineault 53:11

I mean, I just think it would be great to see more podcasts like theirs. Because just think of all the stuff out there that that you could be describing. That's just fun. And I mean, it may seem innocuous to some people, but you know, for people who are who are locked out of that content, be great to have it like a whole episode of just like walking around and like describing different funny t shirts that you see on a daily basis would be great.



Ryan Fleury 53:36

Yep. Yep. You know, and, and more walking tours, museum tours, gallery tours,



Rob Mineault 53:42

Memes, you could describe memes. Great. Now there's no shortage, that's for sure. And that way, all the blind and partially sighted people could lose brain cells along with the rest of us.



Ryan Fleury 53:54

But I don't know if I'm actually missing too much. You know, I kept hearing about Bernie and his mitts, but didn't really mean much to me. So that's true. That was pretty funny.



Rob Mineault 54:07

Bernie in his mitts, or describing cat videos, there you go. There you go. That's a whole podcast. That's what I'll do. Huh?



Ryan Fleury 54:18

There you go. Interesting.



Rob Mineault 54:20

Yeah. Hey, Ryan.



Ryan Fleury 54:22

Rob,

R Rob Mineault 54:23
where can people find us?

R Ryan Fleury 54:26
They can find us at@banter.com

R Rob Mineault 54:29
Hey, they can also drop us an email if they so desire. cowbell@atbanter.com

R Ryan Fleury 54:38
And we're on Facebook and Instagram and Twitter and all that jazz.

R Rob Mineault 54:43
All right. Well, I think then that is going to do it for us this week. Thanks, everybody for listening in. Big thanks to JJ and Christine. Make sure you check out their podcast Talk Description to Me. And we will see everybody next week.