

AT Banter Podcast Episode 317 – Cruising With Donovan

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SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, Steve Barclay, Lis Malone, Ryan Fleury, Donovan Tildesley

Rob Mineault

Welcome to another episode of AT Banter.

Steve Barclay

Banter, banter. Oh, well struck.

Rob Mineault

Yeah, first cowbell strike of the new year and it was a good one.

Ryan Fleury

Got to start off with a clang.

Rob Mineault

Hey, this is of course the podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault. Oh, and joining me today for the first time in 2023. Mr. Ryan Fleury

Ryan Fleury

Made it through another year.

Rob Mineault

That's right. We've also got Miss Lis Malone.

Lis Malone

Hey, happy New Year, everybody.

Rob Mineault

Happy New Year. And of course, rounding out the roundness. Mr. Steve Barclay.

Steve Barclay

Why, thank you. I'm so flattered to be rounding.

Lis Malone

You're priceless Rob.

Rob Mineault

No, I just I didn't know I didn't know how to finish that. Rounding out .. what is it? Rounding out the team? Whenever I tried to use these sports analogies, I always just go terribly wrong.

Steve Barclay

So let's just let's just pretend that never happened.

Rob Mineault

Sure. Okay. It's fine. We can do that. How? How is everybody? How's everybody recovering from the holidays?

Lis Malone

Everybody still have their have the jingle balls? All thawed out from the deep freeze?

Steve Barclay

Yeah, we actually went from minus 11 here to plus 11 In the space of two days. And and it came along with torrential rain. So we had lots and lots of flooding and all of the snow went away.

Ryan Fleury

Yeah, yeah. Snow gone.

Rob Mineault

Yeah, I mean, that was the upside, it didn't take long to go away. But it was it was really like it was a crappy to walk around.

Steve Barclay

It's just a sheet of ice everywhere. Yeah.

Rob Mineault

Or yeah, it was just terrible. Yeah. But what about you, Lis, how's things going down there in the Carolinas?

Lis Malone

It's actually warm. I mean, that that that cold snap, just like came in and just took off and left its little, you know, trail of havoc behind it.

Steve Barclay

It fired all the way down to Florida.

Lis Malone

I heard on Christmas Day it was warmer in London than it was in Miami.

Rob Mineault

Yeah, man. That's crazy. Yeah. I'm getting really tired of extreme weather events I have to say. And Atmospheric Rivers.

Lis Malone

It's only January. You got some more coming.

Rob Mineault

Oh, well, what was the the new term that I heard this time around? I think it was basically call it a Weather Bomb.

Steve Barclay

The bomb cyclone? That was from a few years ago though.

Rob Mineault

No, this one they I'm sure that I heard them refer to what was coming for us as a Weather Bomb. Or storm bomb or some kind of bomb. Think I did too. It's just ridiculous. I wonder if there's some guy in a room that's just having way too much fun.

Steve Barclay

I did personally witnessed thunder snow this year. Yes. That is cool. That was cool. Great name for a Finnish heavy metal band.

Rob Mineault

I'm still waiting for the Sharknado personally. Yeah, yeah. Sharknado would be cool.

Lis Malone

That would be kind of cool. Yeah.

Rob Mineault

Yeah, well, honestly, like it's got to be next. It's gotta be it's gotta be in the queue.

Lis Malone

Yeah, yeah. So everything I listen to it can't be any crazier than this other nonsense.

Rob Mineault

Yeah, look for it in the spring.

Lis Malone

We got to keep Ian Ziering working. Do we need to commit we need to have him on the show because we need to clear this up?

Rob Mineault

Yeah, well listen you're the you're the world's celebrity wrangler.

Lis Malone

Oh, I'll reach out to his publicist. So this is we just need to have we need to clarify his name and then he can go.

Rob Mineault

You're the LLC you have the weight behind your name. Hey Ryan? Yeah, Rob? Tell Steve what we're doing today.

Ryan Fleury

Well, Steve, today we have former Paralympic athlete, outdoor enthusiast, and the only friend I know who's ever been escorted off of a cruise ship, Donovan Tildesley joining us. Welcome Donovan.

Donovan Tildesley

Hey, thanks guys it's a great resume. And I'm Steve's insurance guy too.

Steve Barclay

And if I ever get the timing right home insurance.

Donovan Tildesley

Yeah, but you're too busy getting fish usually when that comes up for renewal.

Rob Mineault

All right, well, why don't we start by maybe just giving us cuz we got a lot lot to talk about. We have a lot lot to cover. And we are going to talk about this whole cruise ship thing. Not to tease the audience too much with a feather. I screwed that one up too. It's not tease, it's tickle the audience with a feather.

Ryan Fleury

Your out of practice. It's all right.

Rob Mineault

I am. We have two weeks off and I get to figure out how to do this podcast thing again. But before before we dive into that story, Donovan, why don't you just give us a little maybe a little bit of background on you, who you are, what you're up to and then we'll go from there.

Donovan Tildesley

Well, I am 38 years old, born and raised in Vancouver where I still live currently work full time as an insurance broker general insurance broker at a place called Bunting Insurance. So mostly specialize in

home and auto and I've been completely blind since birth. I was born with a condition known as Leber's Congenital Amaurosis, which is kind of on the same spectrum as RP, basically meant that I was born without the use of my retinas. So I'm one of the few blind people on the blind spectrum who has zero vision like, you know, no light perception not be on telling if you know lights, you know, warm or hot or cold because it's off or on. This will get bleeped out but they asked me how much can you see Donovan? Well, I can't see shit.

Steve Barclay

We can keep that in.

Donovan Tildesley

So as you know and I've been to for Paralympic Games as a swimmer. Did that for 14 years retired from that in 2014. Avid skier I am usually up on the hill got over and over 20 days last year, including a trip into the back country with another I believe AT Banter guest from months ago, Tyson Rettie? When Tyson started Braille Mountain Initiative, I think I was one of the first people he called. And I gave him a bunch of names of people who could, you know, hopefully support them or you know, talk to the right people. And I was on the inaugural trip to Purcell Mountain Lodge, this time last year, last January and had a life changing, incredibly fun experience. So so that's how my my year started. And it was actually the whole event was made into a film documentary called Snowblind which made it to the Banff Film Festival and I think the Whistler one as well, and Vancouver Mountain Festival. So it's great to see a guy like Tyson putting, you know, being newly blind, but putting a big vision of his into action and making the backcountry more accessible to other people. But I'm also a bit of a traveler like I've not only for my Paralympics, swimming career. I traveled, I am also I'm proud to say that I traveled solo to South Africa four years ago for a friend's wedding. Which people might think a little daunting the air travel is certainly is but you you learn that you meet people on the ground who are going to be very helpful. So that's I guess why you have me on today because I've got I had quite a an interesting travel experience from back in November.

Rob Mineault

Yeah. Why don't you tell us about that? Because you actually made national headlines, which is where we caught wind of it. So yeah, like maybe just give the audience a bit of a an overview of exactly what happened here.

Donovan Tildesley

Well, back in the summer, late summer, I knew that I would need some sort of mental break R&R vacation come November, because really, there's no sun anymore and you can't ski so you know, in order to stave off the winter blues I thought you know, should go somewhere warm. Turns out one of the people I work with at one of our insurance companies, his husband is a travel agent. And because I had done three cruises before two of them on on NCL, and one of them on Princess, this guy, Dean recommended Virgin Voyages, which is one of the companies in Richard Branson's empire. And it basically is kind of the idea is, is changing the face of cruise, taking cruises. I gotta be careful to say cruising because my, my younger brother, who's he's gay man and I and I told him well, you know, is cruising is a great activity for blind people. And he said, that means something completely different in certain circles.

Steve Barclay

I do not think that word means what you think it means.

Donovan Tildesley

But, ironically, Virgin is, you know, catering to you to a younger crowd. A lot of their clients would be LGBTQ+, they basically everything's included, so you, you get on the boat. And you're, you know, you don't have to pay extra for your meals. You don't have to buy unlimited drink packages, like, you know, buy alcohol at cost. Although they included a \$300 drink package in my fare, which is great. And so I thought I'll give this a try. Seems like, you know, a great brand. Seems like it would be a fun group of people. And so I decided on a six day cruise out of Miami, Western Caribbean. So Miami, Ro Atón, in Honduras, Costa Maya, and then Bimini in the Bahamas, and then back to Miami. Yeah, and you know, perfect gets sun, get some more weather, maybe, you know, swim in the ocean. And my travel agent, let the people at the ship know, on my reservation that I was a blind solo traveler. We didn't ask for a specific, blind accessible cabin, because it was a lot of the bells and whistles I probably didn't need. I fly in Miami, I took the red eye and basically spent about a day there before going to the ship the next day takes me for whatever reason they're having it issues. And so they're having issues getting me on board, I later learned is because my file has been flagged as a traveler with a disability. So out of that I was able to talk my way into some upgrades just because you know, it's a lot when everybody's on the ship having their first drink, and you're still sitting in the, in the terminal like this. So I get on, get, you know, find my cabin, which they're kind enough to put in the you know, move to the midship to make it more accessible, and sort some things out and get a kind of a verbal description of where things are on the ship. And I say, Well, it's time to start the vacation. So take me to the nearest bar. And I'm sitting at the bar, got my air pods in, listening to music, finishing up my second drink and looking at the - oh, and I'd also you know had to watch listen to the safety video. Which very well done but almost a bit too tongue in cheek, if you don't, you know, they're trying to make everything into a big Broadway style production. And so I'm about to ask somebody to take me to the next bar when these two people from Sailor Services come up to me. They came up to me like it's very serious. Can we talk to you? Like yeah, here is fine. It's not too loud. They basically say, well, we've got some unfortunate news. We've determined that we don't have the ability to support you as a solo blind traveler safely. So we're going to have to take you off the cruise. And we will of course give you a refund and we'll put you up in a hotel and then fly you back to back home. My first thought was this is seems like a bit of a joke. Yeah, like is this is actually happening? Like, I can't get on it. They they've deemed it unsafe for me. Hey, you realize them I'm a Paralympian. I've traveled the world. I've been to South Africa by myself. I'm taking a cruise by myself before. Any way we can get a second opinion talk to somebody? And they get the GM of the ship and he said well, no, it's this has come down from Virgin Legal. What legal is doing working on a Sunday, I have no idea. I of course make a couple of calls including my travel agent. He starts the wheels turning. But it all happened so fast. Basically, they let me know this 30 minutes before the ship was supposed to sail so I had to be off that ship in 20 minutes. So I am carted off, luckily, I hadn't unpacked they got my bags from my cabin and brought everything out. When I got back on to the port, this really kind woman who had been helping me earlier in the day, you could tell she was shaken up, she was on the verge of tears. And she told me later that she was had to keep it together for professional purposes. And I, you know, kept my cool during the whole time I said, you know, I'd like to find out exactly, you know, in writing what happened and what the situation is, and I even questioned

like, did I somehow look maybe, you know, sometimes if you're a blind person you don't know maybe that necessarily what's on around you and I would have had my earphones in and maybe bobbing to music, having a drink. And you know, I think like, did my behavior, was something wrong with that? And they said no, no, nothing like that. And I did say to them kind of quietly while you realize this is likely going to be in the media, just so you know. Because all my years of swimming, and plus I've had a passion for radio all my life, including co owning a radio station up in in Whistler BC for the some time. I have contacts, so I first waiting in the in the port to for the the van to come take them to the hotel, where I had basically convinced them that I'd like to stay in Miami till Wednesday, because I'm still on vacation. And I put it out on Facebook. I tweet my friend, or I messaged my friend Drax, who's the morning guy on Jack FM in Vancouver and say, Hey, this is what's this is what happened. And he was flabbergasted. And he put it on his Twitter feed. They get me to the hotel. There, you know, they talked about arranging to fly me out on Wednesday and I said nope. Let's hold off on that for now. I just needed some time to kind of figure out what my next steps are gonna be. I talked to a good friend of mine, who's an ophthalmologist who's helped me in the past. And you know, we're just talking about you know, do you need a lawyer? What do you do here? Called my mom, she was she couldn't believe it either. I fast forward about three and a half hours later. And I've had dinner at the hotel, and I'm talking to my uncle, who's a lawyer just to get some legal advice when I get a incoming call from a number that I don't recognize. And I immediately call them back. And it's actually the Senior Vice President of fleets at Virgin Voyages, Frank Webber, who was calling me from his vacation in Mexico, where he was with his wife that weekend. And basically apologized for what happened. And if I can fast forward, he explained it to me the following night over dinner, that the somehow the ground crew on shore knew I was coming. But some of the ship wasn't alerted. And so they went into panic mode, thinking they didn't have people in place, who were trained to support a blind person. And I actually believe them. The Virgin story is a fairly new one. The brand's been around for a while but the cruise ship line, the cruise line only started on March 1 of 2020. And then of course, we had a little thing called the pandemic that shut that down for over a year. And so for me to be the first solo blind traveler in the history of that company, definitely seemed plausible. So they backtrack to the Sunday night call from the VP. He says, can we make this right? Like, could we maybe fly you to Honduras to row a time to meet the ship at its first protocol, which would be on the Tuesday, and then you finish the voyage? And I said, yeah, that seems reasonable. But let me let me think about it. Let me sleep on it. I didn't want to jump to any decisions. But I, the one thing was clear to me in my head is was that I didn't want this to jeopardize my vacation. I didn't want to turn this week into some sort of battle, especially if they were willing to try and make things right. So sure enough, the next morning they put the wheels in motion. And then, of course, the media got ahold of the story. And in the meantime, I'm talking to a couple of different friends. One of whom I've you know, I've known for years, an old family friend, and she said, Well, maybe you could make this into an opportunity. Because one of the other things that I do and haven't done as much since COVID, is inspirational, motivational speaking. Back then it was, you know, especially as an athlete was about to, you know, making it to the Paralympics and carrying the flag for Canada and Beijing and you know, winning my medals. But she thought, here's an opportunity that you could maybe to harness this passion, and maybe teach others along the way. And even my travel agent had said, well, you know this, this is very much of a coachable moment. And so I, when Frank Webber invited me for dinner on the night in Miami the next night, I basically had three asks. I want to get this cruise for free. Done. I'd like to have a second cruise credit. He said, Yeah, I think that can be arranged. And I said, the other thing I'd really like to do is figure out a way to help you guys. So that

people in the company are more aware of how to work with somebody with a visual impairment. And I love to speak I love to motivate others, and maybe we could turn this into an experience. And he thought that was a great idea as well.

Steve Barclay

It's the same company owns Virgin Galactic, you left a suborbital flight off the off the table?

Donovan Tildesley

I know. That's coming. I had a couple of friends suggest to me when that happened, like, you got to ask Richard Branson to take you into space now. Right? So I think I think I think that could be a future ask potentially. I think it's a chance I'll meet Richard Branson, we'll see. Anyway, they fly me to the cruise to meet the cruise ship two days later, they weren't able to upgrade my room to the Rockstar suite because there is no inventory left, which I believe them. But they, they did give me access to the VIP bar, which is referred to as Richards Rooftop. Personally, I think it'd be more catchy to call it Dick's Deck. So I got to meet some cool people there, got to sing along with the band while on the ship. One afternoon, I got a tour of the bridge, like how they drive and operate the ship. And basically, people treated me incredibly well. If anything, I would say the experience was a bit isolating only because other cruises I've been on have been a lot more saturated with passengers. So usually, you'd be sitting with people where I found myself and this particular one. While people were friendly, I did end up sitting alone quite a bit. And I think that's just a combination of COVID it being a new company. And the fact that people don't usually want to travel the week before American Thanksgiving. So there's a few factors there. Yeah, but food was great. And it also wasn't particularly restful, like as a, you know, Ryan, you could probably attest to this. And when you're blind and traveling, it takes a little bit more energy to get a sense of your surroundings. And it's a lot easier to be in one place for an extended period of time rather than jumping from one hotel to another than somewhere else than here. So that made it a little less restful, but honestly, it was a pretty profound experience to realize that, hey, people do mess up from time to time. And it says a lot about a company who does mess up royally in this case, too, to repair the mistake the way virgin did. And I knew they were sincere about it. Frank Webber said that, you know, there was two things that were missing. He said, that's hospitality, we got to make people feel welcome. And the other piece is that, you know, if you're dealing with somebody with with any kind of disability, you ask them what they need, rather than just assuming. And absolutely, right there.

Steve Barclay

And yeah, that's probably the most galling part about it. Because, you know, when they when they're telling you that you're a danger how they and they can't enunciate why you're a danger. That's got to be incredibly frustrating.

Donovan Tildesley

Well, yeah, it's like, you know, I there's railings on this ship. It's not like there's open decks or I could tumble overboard. I'm a good swimmer anyway. So that's not a big deal there's more staff, you know, the staff to passenger ratio is pretty high. Yeah, they're, you know, if I can go out into the backcountry and ski in places, most people sighted people wouldn't go there's no reason I can't be on a on a cruise ship. And I think yeah, they just basically weren't sure how to handle the situation. And perhaps the

leadership team on that particular ship, you know, took a bit of a leap rather than, you know, coming to me and asking, how can we make this a better trip for you? The other piece that I came out of this is, I think all too often advocacy is done or can and infer to have negative undertones like, you're not going to make this right for me so I'm going to sue you. I did speak with a an advocacy Disability lawyer who explained the process, and basically said, he's like, I'm not going to be the one to pressure you into litigation. Here's how it works, we basically use your story, as an example, in a court case. I not only don't I don't think is very positive, but I'm not sure if it really goes towards making long lasting change, as opposed to just keep creating resentment. And what was even cool is that after the trip, I guess a week or two later, I had a conference call with a few folks from Virgin. And they basically agreed to bring me on as a as a consultant to help them create some video content, in order to teach their staff more about how to support a person with a visual impairment. And so it speaks to something that I've wanted to do for a while putting myself out there, and, you know, speaking in front of others, and hopefully, it will help others. Because really, they pick the right and the wrong blind guy to kick off the ship. Wrong blind guy, because I'm gonna, you know, I've got my connections in the media, it's gonna come up and, you know, they're gonna hear about it. But the right blind guy, I, I would have hated for this to happen to somebody who was not a seasoned traveler, or had other physical or even worse mental disabilities. And, you know, maybe in their night in Miami, when they've been kicked off the ship, they go out and and inadvertently put themselves in harm's way. Yes. So I think overall, it's, it was a huge learning experience for them. And it makes me think that, why can't more advocacy work, be done collaboratively and with a sense of humor? And with a shared goal in mind, as opposed to, you know, I'm just gonna sue you, because you can't make this work for me.

Ryan Fleury

I think you handled it really, really well, you could have, like you said, taken the low road, and got lawyers involved, and you know, fought the company, but you made it a teachable moment. And it's only going to benefit people going forward. So kudos to you for maintaining your composure and going through the process.

Donovan Tildesley

Well, thank you. Thanks for it, I, I would have taken the other route, had they not pivoted the way they did? If they had stood their ground, then it would have been a different outcome. But, you know, sometimes you gotta give people the benefit of the doubt.

Rob Mineault

Yeah, you know, it's funny, the interesting thing that I find about all of this is that if you look at the, at the Virgin website, the Virgin Voyages website, I mean, they have an entire accessibility page is they seem to make a fairly big deal out of the fact that, you know, they've, they've gone to great lengths to make much of the ship, you know, accessible. They talk about all the Braille signage that they have. So it's, it's kind of surprising that they did drop the ball, because if you look at outward appearances, it really seems like Virgin Voyages is kind of ahead of the curve, in terms of wanting to be inclusive.

Lis Malone

Rob, I just want to jump in on what you're saying. And that really goes to that idea where businesses feel that if you just create the environment, and you don't have to, it's not a, oh, we can just put this

here and put that there. And it's there isn't a human element to it, where we actually have to take a human responsibility and interact with these people and show empathy. And, you know, and have that interaction, just like Donovan was saying that nobody engaged him and said, What is it that we would need to do to help make this a successful experience for you? And that, it's just like, well, if you well, we put the Braille here and we put a railing there.

Ryan Fleury

And unfortunately to a lot of organizations, we hear about it all the time with air travel, especially and you know, voting, you know, people who are looking after the polling stations, get a five minute training video and then boom, have to go, you know, that's not training that's not helping those with accessibility needs. There needs to be engagement and involvement with that community.

Donovan Tildesley

Absolutely. And I think, now kind of post major pandemic is the time to do it. Because we've got new blood coming into the travel industry, there's been a turnaround of staff who may have exited and pivoted into another career. So as I've said to the news folks, the day after everything happened is like, you got to do more than just walk the walk, having the Braille signage and the speech output and an app that works. You've got to, you know, understand what that really means being put into practice.

Rob Mineault

Obviously, there's a part of that. That's all just kind of marketing copy. They're not walking the walk.

Lis Malone

It's accessibility boilerplate.

Rob Mineault

so it's kind of good that this happens, because it did kind of rattle their cages to realize, okay, well, we got to do more than just having text on a website. Because, you know, the the example that I'm kind of reminded of, it's very different, but it's kind of the same thing is that you have movie theaters, right? The audio description technology that supposedly, you know, a lot of the movie theaters have, that are nine times out of 10, either broken or the staff don't really know how to even use it or set it up. And I think that this is probably indicative of the travel industry, across the board.

Ryan Fleury

Well, I think we saw a story when after Donovan's made the news of a blind couple trying to travel on a plane with their with their child, and they were escorted off the plane or they weren't allowed to board the plane because they were blind. Like, what? What is it going to take when are people going to change these attitudes? Because these aren't new stories.

Donovan Tildesley

Yeah, come on. It's 2022. already. I thought we were you know, well ahead of this.

Rob Mineault

So now, Donovan, you mentioned that you've gone on other cruises? On other other cruise lines. What were those experiences like? Are they comparable? I mean, did your experience outside of all of this nonsense on on the actual cruise ship? Did you find that it was more accessible than say some of the other cruises that you took

Donovan Tildesley

I thought it was in some senses more accessible. It was definitely more modern in just the the size of the room was wasn't like a small little closet. The ships were well set up, you know, good showers, good water pressure. The food I'd say was a step above some of the other ships I've been on. In terms of the social aspect, Virgin definitely needs to work on that. I'll tell you my all time best cruise was NCL on Norwegian up to Alaska, and my first solo cruise. And right away as I when I'm getting on one of the cruise directors comes up to me and says you're part of the cool kids club. Welcome. The cool kids club was that and it was basically the group of for solo travelers that they would arrange meetings and socials every night for them to you know, either meet for dinner or trivia or karaoke. And so you know, they went out of their way to make sure that people who were on their own, could connect with other people. Virgin tried that a little bit, but it was still very cliquey on board. So I'd say the overall sociality of the cruise, maybe not as good as others I've been on in terms of the amenities definitely better. Internet was reasonably fast, although I still couldn't. I was hoping to get a bit of work done and the, the terminal server I log into was, was too much for the cruise ship Wi Fi, which is still run by satellite. So I, you know, pluses and minuses to all of the above, I think and it's really hard to judge, cruise travel, post pandemic, as opposed to pre pandemic because there has been such a turnover in staff. And I think a lot of people are reluctant to get on a boat with you know, 2800 of your close friends.

Steve Barclay

It's so true. You know, and when you talk about staffing issues, post pandemic, even on land, you know, you go to places where there's, there's new staff, they've lost their traditional staff who might have been with them for decades, and now they're scrambling to train new people, so of course it's happening across the waters as well.

Donovan Tildesley

Yeah, like I am gonna go on this, you know, especially they gotta give me a free a free cruise. I'm definitely gonna go with them again. But I think next time I'll be bring a friend along and even if we don't do everything together and do our own activities, I'll at least have somebody to check in with and share the share the experience with

Steve Barclay

Oooo Pick Me Pick Me.

Lis Malone

No, no, you need another you need another blind person to get a given more practice!

Donovan Tildesley

Well, I, I have been thinking one of my good friends is a researcher in the states and she's an ex blind Paralympic skier. And she's a guide dog user, whereas I'm a cane user and I'm thinking well, if they

can, if they want to bring me on board to do some training videos, I'm if I can bring Stacey into the mix and offer the perspective of somebody with a with a dog as opposed to a white cane.

Steve Barclay

Okay, if that does happen, I want a weigh in on that dog at the beginning of the cruise and at the end.

Rob Mineault

Well, I mean, listen, I I have to say that I'm at least what impresses the most about Virgin is their willingness to actually learn from the event and be better about it. And the fact that they are, they're willing to bring you on as a consultant, because any cruise line can they can just throw a free cruise at you. But at least these guys looks like they're actually serious to actually improve the accessibility of the experience. So good for you. Richard Branson.

Donovan Tildesley

He, he actually wrote me a note. Well, he actually sent an email to the ship, and somebody hand wrote it for me, you know, apologizing. And here's what I find very amusing is that I posted that on my Instagram, and I thought it was a nice touch. But of course, you get a backlash from so many people saying just goes to show how ignorant he is. Why didn't he write it in Braille?

Steve Barclay

Okay, fair. I think I was one of those people. I apologize.

Ryan Fleury

Steve will reach out to Richard get him on the podcast, we'll discuss Braille and assistive tech. Yeah, sure. Yeah,

Lis Malone

It also needs to be said not all blind people read

Ryan Fleury

That's true. That's true.

Donovan Tildesley

Most true. An audio message would have I don't know why he could have just sent me an. You know, maybe get an actor if he doesn't want to do you know, with a British accent.

Steve Barclay

You would have fallen for it completely. But later when the lawsuit happened, you know, you would have done voice prints and falling apart.

Lis Malone

Read it to me in British Siri, please.

Steve Barclay

What occurred to me when you were talking about the early parts of this story was how fast it went from ship to legal from legal back to ship and legal made entirely the wrong call.

Donovan Tildesley

Exactly. I still would love to see what they what they had if they had anything in writing. I think even the VP didn't have anything like something was the whole thing at the beginning was like, the right hands not talking to the left hand here. Because, hey, what's legal doing working on a Sunday afternoon? And be there's got to be some other something else going on behind the scenes that we didn't know about.

Rob Mineault

Yeah, I mean, it sounds like it was sort of a cascade of errors, right? Like, well, for whatever reason that that flag didn't get, you didn't get to the right people. And then somebody just panicked, called legal and legal panicked. And then yeah, just everybody sort of panicked.

Steve Barclay

I pictured a big red klaxon in the middle of a legal office going off. We've got a blind guy!!

Donovan Tildesley

With let's 2023 be the year of more blind travelers and more people in the travel industry realizing that just because you can't see you can still fully experience traveling the world.

Rob Mineault

You know, I totally agree, I think that I think travel really is sort of something that that we need to take a really hard look at in terms of improving the accessibility of it. A lot of travel is still really inaccessible when it doesn't really need to be and I know that you know, airports certainly are doing doing some good work in terms of trying to make that experience more accessible. But stuff like the air carriers and cruise ships and you know, trains and, you know, whatever. I don't know that they are. And to be honest, I'm not really optimistic about them picking up that ball because it sounds like they're deteriorating across the board in terms of services. I mean, he only have to look at the news stories around this the travel chaos of the holiday season, both in the US and Canada and all the horror stories that you're hearing from, from a lot of the air carriers and stuff. They aren't treating any of their passengers very well these days.

Donovan Tildesley

Like the kid who couldn't couldn't get the their insulin pump insulin pump that was supposed to be loaded in first priority. That story and then another blind let's related story, I think. I think she's a paralympic swimmer in Singapore. And someone ordered her off the train because they were scared of the guide dog.

Rob Mineault

Oh, she's one and there was also another story. I think last summer I think of somebody with a power wheelchair with a the airline completely trashed it. And they didn't they just were like, well, sorry. Yeah, that's right.

Donovan Tildesley

Yeah, no, I think the person who wrote the article for the about me for daily hive did the story on the woman who had to crawl off the plane because they wouldn't get it to her to the wheelchair.

Steve Barclay

I saw that on online and wow, my goodness. Like, how how does that even happen? How? Because that that doesn't just that doesn't just speak to incompetence said that in speak. That speaks to just an absolutely uncaring attitude.

Ryan Fleury

Yep. Yep. immortalizing insensitive. Attitude. Yeah, it's awful. Awful. That's why they litigate in the US.

Steve Barclay

But but as Donovan said, he might have got at the end of the day, a whopping two grant. So is that effective?

Donovan Tildesley

So yeah, I'd like to see some the the NFB or one of those go go after the dating apps. Like, why anybody hasn't made Bumble or Tinder more accessible is beyond me.

Steve Barclay

Well, all right. Let's let's start a groundswell right now. Because we've got an audience here, Donovan, we can do this for you.

Donovan Tildesley

Okay. Yeah. Completely different subject. But it's, it's something to be considered that, you know, maybe they don't think that blind people use those apps. Regardless, there's no reason why they couldn't be made a little bit more user friendly.

Ryan Fleury

The store owner saying I don't get people with wheelchairs coming into my store, while they can't get to your store, because there's a curb. Put in a ramp, and they'll come back.

Rob Mineault

Just put in alt text in the picture. it's not hard, "shirtless man holds a fish".

Lis Malone

Then then then you'll get all texts of people writing their own descriptions of themselves. Yeah, I'm like a hot blonde my cleavage goes to from here to all the way out there.

Donovan Tildesley

Well, what I actually do with with the dating apps, and I maybe wouldn't recommend this to certain people, especially to blind women. But I put my phone number on Bumble, and I say, if you really want to talk to me, text me, because that's, that's the best way you'll get a response. And I've actually got

some great response from people. Yeah. So. And yeah, some people you can tell pretty quickly if they're interesting or not, you know, but usually people who will go that extra effort, you know, maybe are a bit more understanding, have a bit more empathy, or are just, you know, curious about how you know, meaning a blind person, which is, you know, all I think, relative valid reasons.

Rob Mineault

Sure. Well, hey, listen, like Steve said, we got an audience. So feel free to put out number out there.

Donovan Tildesley

My tagline there is Ever date a blind person before? Well, now's your chance to find out.

Rob Mineault

Well, I feel like we've we've learned a lot today.

Steve Barclay

Yeah. Donovan. I just want to give you kudos for turning what could have been just a horrific experience into a tremendous one. I I'm so impressed that you did that. And that's why I really wanted John to talk about it. Because positivity dammit, we need more of it.

Donovan Tildesley

Yeah. 100% Yep. And I think I think that's the way to move forward. Positive advocacy. Somebody's got to trademark that. Cuz there's a new way of doing things, I think. Honestly, it's one reason I've shied away from referring to myself as advocate in the past because I always saw - not always - but there's a lot more people around who were blind advocates who came across with a with an attitude or or not necessary superiority but proud and stridently independent and wanting to prove something to others. We're, I think it's really only about opening a dialog. And and I've often found in life if you, you express to people what you need and what you want, in a, you know, kind, succinct manner you usually get maybe not exactly, but most of what you asked for.

Rob Mineault

Yeah. Agreed. Agreed. And I think we have to give kudos to good old Virgin as well.

Donovan Tildesley

That the article got into the Australian and New Zealand news a week after like that, that amazed me.

Steve Barclay

Anybody can get in the Australian news.

Rob Mineault

All right, well, anything to plug anything before we let you go?

Donovan Tildesley

If you want to follow me on Facebook, Donovan Tildesley, I'm on Instagram as the blind guy under score, because somebody already took the blind guy. And, you know, I tried to look that up as a

website, but people who are doing window shutters took that on the blind guy. That would be another opportunity for advertising, you know, be the blind guy advertising for the blind shop. And I'm on Twitter as Donovan Speaks. So yeah, feel free to reach out if I'm always up for you know, coming to speak to an event and tell my story and speak to your company, figure out how we can make it more accessible or even speak to any of you as want to be blind travelers and give you the confidence and the tools to get out take on the world.

Lis Malone

All you got to do is take Donovan with you.

Rob Mineault

All right. Well, Donovan. Sir, thank you so much for coming on and chatting with us. Best of luck on the cruise .And definitely keep us keep us posted in terms of the consulting thing and feel free to come back on if you want to give us an update.

Donovan Tildesley

I absolutely will. Really appreciate you guys having me on the show today. And thank you for all the great work you've done for access technology. So for over 20 plus years, like I can't believe I've known Steve since 96 Since I was an annoying little 11 year old kid.

Ryan Fleury

Oh my god..

Rob Mineault

He was eleven? Oh my god, Steve. You're old. Wow.

Steve Barclay

And now he sells me insurance.

Donovan Tildesley

Exactly. That's great. Thanks, guys. Thanks

Ryan Fleury

I do have one more piece of news that you know, I think the other two guys in the room have totally not even thought about. But it has been one year since we announced Lis Malone was joining our podcast.

Steve Barclay

Wow. It's our anniversary! (Sings)

Lis Malone

I didn't hear Rob singing

Steve Barclay

We haven't gotten enough tequila for that.

Rob Mineault

I don't want to ruin that beautiful moment.

Ryan Fleury

So congratulations for putting up with this for a year.

Lis Malone

Well, thank you.

Rob Mineault

Yeah, exactly.

Lis Malone

Cuz it's been a long year

Rob Mineault

Whatever. Wow, you missed about I think she's only missed like four four or five shows. Yeah, a couple but yeah, not many.

Ryan Fleury

She's a keeper.

Rob Mineault

Yeah, you know that me and Steve got on our one year anniversary from Ryan? Nothing. There you go.

Ryan Fleury

There you go.

Rob Mineault

No, it's been it's been fun. It's been a fun year. Looking forward to another year. I mean, in general this is the first episode of a new year.

Lis Malone

Well, if Richard Branson wants to send all of us on a cruise, you know, all of us in a plus one, I mean, that would be great.

Steve Barclay

Or suborder orbital flight with Donovan.

Lis Malone

We could record from the cruise ship, we could be I mean, and we could just let the whole blind community know how awesome there they are for accessibility and just helping out the blind, blind passengers and well, maybe..

Ryan Fleury

Maybe they'll be more receptive to you than Frugal McDoogal is.

Rob Mineault

We will send we'll send Virgin a copy of the link to this podcast when it's published.

Lis Malone

Listen, we're patting them on the back. You know, being ambassadors of true accessibility and travel. Yep. Yes. And plus ones on a damn cruise..

Rob Mineault

How long are generally cruises? Yeah, they probably put us on the same cabin.

Steve Barclay

No, I'm great with the ocean and I'm like Donovan, I'm a terrific swimmer. Also scuba diver. And I love the ocean. I don't like being enclosed in small spaces. Oh, yeah.

Rob Mineault

Those cabins are pretty small. Right? Yeah, that's a good point.

Lis Malone

Well thought of it said that these are spacious for a cruise.

Ryan Fleury

Yeah, get the Rockstar suite.

Rob Mineault

Yeah, but spacious for like usually it's a closet. Like cruise ship cabins like range from anywhere from like a closet to a big cruise room is probably like a very small bedroom.

Lis Malone

Well, isn't the whole point that you're really not in your cabin? True? You sit the bar and stuff in your face. And yeah, pretty much drink and playing shuffleboard and all that other stupid shit. I've never been on a cruise. I'm just saying like, I imagine that's the kind of weird shit that goes on.

Ryan Fleury

Speaking of, it's dinnertime.

Steve Barclay

Oh, dinnertime. Okay.

Rob Mineault

All right. I got that hint. Hint hint. Okay, well, I think that's enough nonsense for one day for one week. Let's get out of here. What do you say?

Lis Malone

All right.

Rob Mineault

Hey Lis?

Lis Malone

Yeah Rob?

Rob Mineault

Happy Anniversary! Where can people find us?

Lis Malone

Yeah, they can find us at atbanter.com

Rob Mineault

Hey, they can also drop us an email if they so desire at cowbell@atbanter.com

Steve Barclay

Yeah, and if they're, you know, really still addicted to that stupid social media. They can find us on Twitter and Facebook.

Rob Mineault

Yes, they can. That is going to do about do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course to Donovan for joining us and we will see everybody next week.