

AT BANter Podcast Episode 324 - The DateKeepers

📅 Mon, Feb 20, 2023 11:12AM ⏱ 58:45

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

story, people, blind, lis, disability, arkansas, journalist, fulbright scholar, fulbright, friends, technology, disabilities, porn, media, morocco, university, carolinas, ryan, inspiration, north carolina

SPEAKERS

Steve Barclay, Lis Malone, Mekiya Outini, Rob Mineault, Itto Outini, Ryan Fleury

R Ryan Fleury 00:18
Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to AT Banter,

S Steve Barclay 00:24
Banter banter banter banter

R Rob Mineault 00:27
So what is this some sort of a coup? What happened?

L Lis Malone 00:32
Oh my god, I've gone a week and what?

R Ryan Fleury 00:34
That's our new intro. What do you think?

R Rob Mineault 00:37
I don't know, I guess? Clearly Ryan and Steve got together and rehearse that all day. So we're gonna have to leave that in.

S Steve Barclay 00:44
Well, yeah. And you've got to add a little bit of echo to my banter there too.

R Rob Mineault 00:49
Okay, fair. I can do that. I can also do that. Fix it in post.. Hey, this is of course the podcast, where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault, and joining me today, the new voice of the podcast, Mr. Ryan Fleury.

R Ryan Fleury 01:12
Hello, Rob Mineault.

R Rob Mineault 01:13
Oh, and also here in the room. Mr. Steve Barclay.

S Steve Barclay 01:20
That is me,

R Rob Mineault 01:22
Doing a lovely, a lovely pair of banterings. And hey, look who it is. She's back. Lis Malone is here.

L Lis Malone 01:34
On drums!

R Rob Mineault 01:41
Well, we do have a huge action packed show today. But before we get into that, I know we also have a lot to talk about a lot of ground to cover. So let's get right to it. How is everybody?

L Lis Malone 01:57
I can't smell or taste.

R Rob Mineault 02:00

See? That's a loaded question. Yeah, yes, Lis. So are you you're recording this from your bedside? Is that the deal? What stage of the 'Vid are you in?

L Lis Malone 02:14

Um, I can breathe, my fever is gone. My throat is mostly clear. But I'm still in the weight loss phase because I can't smell or taste.

R Rob Mineault 02:27

So is it because, it's no fun to eat anything and you don't bother, or you don't have any appetite? What's what's the deal there?

L Lis Malone 02:35

I think I mean, if you don't, if you can't enjoy your food, you're not going to overeat. You're not going to have seconds. It's just it just becomes a function of survival. Right. So, I told somebody today I said it took me to get COVID to lose COVID pounds, which is kind of funny. So basically, that's kind of what happened. I yeah, I've lost five pounds. Yeah, yeah. Hmm. Not a healthy five.

R Rob Mineault 03:07

Well, excellent. Well, how's everybody else's taste and smell?

R Ryan Fleury 03:14

Fine and dandy.

S Steve Barclay 03:17

People say I still lack taste.

R Rob Mineault 03:20

That's true. Excellent. Well, you know, speaking of taste, and before we get to the main body of the show. We do have some news. Lis. We received your package last week..

L Lis Malone 03:20

L LIS MAIONE 03:39
I heard a little A little birdie told me.

R Rob Mineault 03:43
We did we went through. Yeah, we had a little unboxing. It was very exciting. So we do look forward to digging into a lot of those treats. Oh, Steve still has them.

R Ryan Fleury 03:58
Wait, Steve had them? No, no, he still has them.

S Steve Barclay 04:02
I still have them. Although, although there was an English bulldog who's eyeing them sideways?

R Rob Mineault 04:10
To get there was there before that the dog or the kids get into the box?

L Lis Malone 04:15
Have you ever seen that many cookies outside of the supermarket?

S Steve Barclay 04:22
No, not. Well, actually, hang on. There's been a couple of Christmases where people went hog wild. So maybe.

L Lis Malone 04:29
Or you know, outside of a Girl Scout Cookie stand or something?

S Steve Barclay 04:33
Yeah, yeah, that's that's a whole lot of cookies.

R Rob Mineault 04:35
Yeah, well, I guess we should we should put this a little bit into context. For those people who didn't actually listen last week We got a lovely collection of Oreos and Doritos from our good

didn't actually listen last week. We got a lovely collection of Oreos and Bonitos from our good friend down there in the United States, Ms Lis Malone, and she spent a lot of money on shipping just to make us fat. So we do appreciate that.

L Lis Malone 04:59

My friends up north who can still smell and taste.

R Rob Mineault 05:03

Or to really just show off all the different varieties of Oreos that she has easy access to you that we can't have. Like we get one box of and then we're screwed for the rest of our lives. Take your pack whether she was being altruistic or cruel.

L Lis Malone 05:24

Well, I guess we'll find out how good they are when when Steve finally decides to stop hoarding.

S Steve Barclay 05:35

They're all gonna go to Ryan's place because I gotta get him away from me.

R Rob Mineault 05:39

Well, you have to you have to decide what you which ones you want. We have to we have I think we kind of did that last week. And we didn't we kind of put dibs on the ones that we wanted.

S Steve Barclay 05:49

And they're all going to you and Rob That's or to Ryan and Rob. I'm not taking any of these.

R Rob Mineault 05:54

Really, I thought you wanted something. There was something in there. And that's why it's going to you're gonna keep one package.

S Steve Barclay 06:04

Not a single one of them

R Rob Mineault 06:06

I commend your willpower, sir.

S Steve Barclay 06:10

Not willpower. If I crack the seal on that thing. They're gone. They're gone.

R Ryan Fleury 06:16

That's me and Doritos.

R Rob Mineault 06:20

Alright, sweet. All right.

R Ryan Fleury 06:23

Bring them over. Bring them over this week because I may be hitting Rob's on Saturday.

S Steve Barclay 06:30

Yeah. can bring them over this week. No problem.

R Ryan Fleury 06:33

Okay. All right. We're all caught up on news.

R Rob Mineault 06:41

Anyways, Hey, Ryan. Yeah, Rob. Why don't you tell us and everybody at home what the heck we're doing today?

R Ryan Fleury 06:51

Well, today, we have two guests joining us, a husband and wife team. They are Itto and Mekiya Outini. Itto has appeared on the BBC podcast Lives Less Ordinary, and as also a human rights activist and founder of Fulbrighters with Disabilities. She and her husband Mekiya are also co founders and independent journalists over at The DateKeepers. Welcome to the show.

I

Itto Outini 07:25

Thank you so much. And then this is Itto. And I would like to thank Ryan for the introduction. So really excited to share a little bit about myself, my background, my story and the things that I have been doing and what I plan to do. And here also, my husband will also share what we do together as we The DateKeepers, and whatever he feels like sharing about himself.

R

Rob Mineault 08:06

Well, that's perfect. Well, listen, why don't we start right there, you know, why don't you tell us a little bit of your background and a little bit about you, and then we'll move on to the hubby.

I

Itto Outini 08:17

Awesome. Again, I'm really excited to share my story and my experience and my knowledge and everything, basically with the community. I am totally blind. I was born and raised in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. That's a northwest Africa, in the middle of nowhere, with no access to technology, electricity or running water. I am a Fulbright Scholar, journalist, human rights advocate and accessibility activist. I am the founder of Fulbrighters with Disabilities, a virtual international chapter that supports and advocates and guides, students and scholars with disabilities like myself across the world. And I am the co founder of The DateKeepers where we share stories of people with disabilities allies, and advocates around the world to everything is global. So I am also an accessibility Outreach Manager for AudioEye, an industry leading digital accessibility company that provides accessibility solution to companies of all shapes and sizes. That's my full time job. The less than one. So I wasn't born to be - well, I think I was born to become all of this. But there was no signs or even resources. Like as I said earlier, I was born in the middle of nowhere. Both of my parents were deceased when I was was very young. And I was shuffled between family members and experienced a lot of abuse neglect and never went to school. When I was a kid, my left eye started to get damaged at some time in my life. I don't know when because again, I had no access to not only electricity, water and technology, but also education. When I was in my early teenage years, I moved from my father's side to my mother's family side. And when I was 17, I was attacked and blinded by a family member, and was left in the hospital was abandoned again, by my family, and I ended up becoming homeless for six years in Morocco. But when really good thing happened that year 2007 I was 17 was that I started school for the first time. It was tough. It was a lot of challenges. I learned braille in one day, and I learned how to read at first in Arabic and French, then later English. See, I didn't know that I was going to be homeless for six years. So I think the fact that I didn't know helped, I also became quickly addicted to reading. So I was reading and I had dreams to go to the US which I have now am in the US. So all of those dreams were accomplished. I also had a dream to work for the UN. And those dreams sustained me during those very hard times when I was homeless. And they graduated high school, went to the University majored in English, literature and then English Applied Linguistics. In 2017, I was awarded the Fulbright scholarship to go to the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, Arkansas in the United States to pursue my master's degree in journalism and strategic Media at the University of Arkansas. That's where I was first introduced to technology. It was overwhelming, but also exciting at the same time. A little bit about the Fulbright. The Fulbright Program is a State Department program. It's an exchange program for students, scholars and researchers across the world, not only for people with disabilities, everyone is welcome to apply. There is that a lot of programs,

each country has different programs, then some countries have a lot some countries have only few. But if anyone is interested, the best ways to look at the Fulbright office in their country, or the US Consulate or US Embassy. If the country doesn't have a Fulbright office, because that's the case in some countries. I went to the university and that's where I met my best friend and my husband. We were friends with a lot for coffee, and I got sick and had surgery. So he was the friend stuck staying with me, then we fell in love. I completed a six month internship with the United Nations Development Program, worked on disability inclusion at work how people with disabilities like myself can be included in the work, work and within the organizations and how to provide accommodations and basically how to include people with disabilities. Not only that with, like providing technology, but understanding and being supportive and not including only like that one person, we'd win disability represent all people from that disability. I worked as a journalist for an international magazine ABILITY Magazine, contracted for four months where I wrote and published stories of people with disabilities and allies and advocates around the world. And I could share the panel at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. It was a lot of fun. Then in September of last year, I was recruited to serve as an Accessibility Outreach Manager for AudioEye and I've been traveling a lot and I decided to, along with my partner, start our own media organization, so that we can not only share stories of people with disabilities, allies and advocates, but all the stories that have been passed over by the traditional media and also give the platform of writers with Disabilities or the minorities who write and cannot find a platform to publish their work. That's me and over to you.

M

Mekiya Outini 15:34

Yeah. Okay. So I am Mekiya Outini. Her name is Outini, I took her name when we got married. So I was born Mekiya Walters, and I am from North Carolina. Originally in the US, it's in the southeast, and I'm from Asheville, which is a town in the Appalachian Mountains. And just for to take us on a brief detour. About 200 million years ago, the continents of North America and Africa and Europe were all part of the same landmass. And they started to diverge about 200 million years ago. And when they did, there was this mountain range, which would most of it stayed in the north and North American landmass. And part of it broke off and the ended up in Ireland, the northern part, and the other part ended up the bottom corner, ended up in North Africa in became the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. And that mountain chain is the Appalachian Mountain chain. So Itto and I actually are from the same mountains if you go back far enough. We met in Arkansas, like she said, we actually met on her first or second day in the US. I was working. I was a graduate student there studying creative writing. And I was also working for a language school and English Language School, which also ran programs for international students and orientations for Fulbright Scholars. And I happen to be working the dinner that Itto was invited to along with her co worker, and I sat next to her. And I, you know, within five minutes, I heard the highlights of her story. She had been homeless for six years. She's blind, and she's a Fulbright Scholar. And she speaks seven languages. And I thought, oh, that that's a way to make an impression. Immediately after the dinner, I would see her around because she was a journalism student, and I was in the writing program. And so we shared a building. But I didn't go up and bother her because she was always in the middle of something it seemed. And I didn't expect that we would become friends in the future. But two years later, we did. During the intervening two years, we almost got connected several times, I was working for the writing center on campus as well tutoring. And I had a lot of international students as clients. And I was actually trained to work with students who are blind or visually impaired and use screen readers in preparation for Itto coming to the writing center. But then there was an administrative coup at the Writing Center. And I didn't agree with the way the new management was running things until I left right before Itto became a permanent client. And

she stayed there for I think it was a semester. And then that wasn't working out for her either. So she started looking for someone to work with her directly. And we got referred to her a couple of times by a couple of different people. But it didn't actually take until 2019. And I had graduated by that time. And she was working on her thesis, and a mutual friend and Fulbright Scholar connected us. And so I went over to her apartment one afternoon to meet her again and to talk about what she wanted to get out of the tutoring sessions. And and I remembered that we had met, and it turned out that she did not remember. But that was fine because I didn't have anything to you know, to stand up against her impression. So her story is a lot more memorable. So within the first 10 or 15 minutes, instead of talking about her thesis we talked about trauma. And so we ended up in this long, intellectual conversation that was really stimulating for both of us. And so for the next few weeks, we were working together on her thesis, but we were also becoming friends. And we continued to meet for coffee even after her thesis was done and defended. And then as she said in In 2020, she had to have surgery to prepare her eye sockets for her prosthetics. And I stayed with her when she was recovering for that surgery. And that deepened our friendship. We still were not a couple, everybody thought we were at the time, but we actually weren't. And then it was not until 2021 when she moved to another state, and I went to visit her for her birthday, and that was when we started a relationship. And we've been together ever since then, we're coming up on our two year anniversary now. And, as she said, last year, at the very end of last year, we decided to launch our own media platform, The DateKeepers, because both of us - she's a journalist, and I'm a writer, and both of us are storytellers. And both of us are dissatisfied with the ways that media and publishing industries are leaving a lot of like, stories that are worth telling untold, or unpublished. And you would think, with so many organizations, and so many alternative media outlets. Now in existence, you think there would be room for everybody. But there still is a lot of market captured by large organizations, and also by ideologies that kind of focus on telling one type of story over and over instead of telling a plurality of stories. So we want our platform to be a place where a lot of different things can happen at once. The core of what we're doing at this point is, we are telling the stories of advocates and allies and people with disabilities who are doing interesting things all around the world. We are also giving a platform to Writers with Disabilities to submit their work. And we are also publishing our own essays and commentaries. And we can intend to continue branching out from there and just seeing what the future brings and who wants to collaborate and who wants to get involved. But if you'd like a taste of the kinds of stories that we've published, so far, the first piece that we ran was a profile of a man named Vashkar Bhattacharjee. He is Bangladeshi. And he his career is, I would say almost as extraordinary as Itto's. He's a bit older, but he also has a really amazing story. He was one of the I think maybe the first blind person in Bangladesh to gain admission to a university. And he had to fight for that, of course, and there were no resources, there were no materials, he had to do everything on his own. He had to convince the professors that his Braille books were actually books and not not toys, or witchcraft materials or something of that sort. And now he has led a massive effort to make the Bangladeshi Government all all of their digital content accessible for screen reader users. And they have a lot of web pages, I think it's upward of 33,000. And they all run by the Bangladeshi Government, all of that has been made accessible. He's made sure that all of the textbooks available, are in DAISY format, in JSON format, and available as downloadable eBooks and convertible into Braille books. And that's, those are some of the most salient things he's done. But he's got a lot of projects going on.

I Itto Outini 23:26

So yeah, they also have smartphones that he set up, you know, with screen reader and distributed them for blind and visually impaired students around the country. So it's, it's

amazing what they're doing. We also did a story on a guy from Palestine, his name is Osama Shamallah, who invented an elevator that is accessible by voice, and also for people with wheelchair and needs an external elevator, in case of emergencies, like fire or other illnesses. Yeah, those are type of stories that we have a lot of stories I've done a lot of interviews last year, this year to a lot of people are reaching out, of course, you know, like it's sometimes slow to reply, because as they said, we have other work. And they have my memoir. Yeah. So we have we have really interesting stories that we've been sharing.

R

Rob Mineault 24:30

Talk to me a little bit about, what that was, like moving from Morocco to the US initially, and how you kind of were able to balance - because you're you were I'm sure that there were a lot of things going on you were probably learning new assistive technology devices you were learning about, you know, orientation mobility, but at the same time, you were also there must have also been a bit of culture shock, as well. What were those early years kind of like for you?

I

Itto Outini 25:04

Oh, I'm not gonna lie, they were tough. I made it. I got all A's in my grad school. But, I never had technology back in Morocco. So I never had a screen reader, I read about it through using using a personal assistant, like someone reading out loud, or me having in Boston reading in Braille, I mainly use the Braille. So for example, my first day, I had no idea who was going to meet me at the airport, and my friend, back in Morocco, used the Facebook account under my name and join the University of Arkansas Fulbright group. And that's how he was connected in my name, or under my name with my American host father. And they like he gave him my description, and I think picture and said, you know, she's gonna lend in Fayetteville or in Northwest Arkansas. On Monday, at whatever time I forgot. And when I landed, I had a personal assistant, and he's like, we're, where are you going? And I said, I have no idea. They was just there at the airport. And the, if, after a few minutes of walking, a person stopped and says, Are you Itto? And I said, yeah, and he's like, I'm here to pick you up. And I'm like, Well, yeah, let's go. You know, I didn't know what where I was going, but I was so exhausted, I. As I said, they came from not poor background, but basically from nothing and not having parents or any one to support me. So I came to the US, I published an article in the Chicago Tribune, where I literally started penniless and stateless. So I landed in New York, and then Atlanta. And I remember, I was so hungry, and I didn't even have the money to buy food on my way to my host state, which was Arkansas. When my American host father brought me on the way he took me to the store, AT&T and got me an iPhone, and I touched it. And I said, There's no way I can use this. It has no Braille buttons, and I don't really think I can use it, I am blind. I stood against the wall, and I burst into tears. And he said, you're a graduate student, and you're a Fulbright Scholar. You have to learn how to use this. And when they got me the computer, I had no idea how to use a computer when I touched the keyboard again, they said, well find A and I'm like, well, I thought it's escape like you start A, B, C, D and count. But then when it counted, they found a bunch of buttons. And I'm like, huh, that doesn't make sense. So I was very, very, very ignorant when it comes to technology. But my Fulbright advisor, flew from Washington, DC to Arkansas, and introduced me to my professors to the university, talked to them about me and I received a lot of support. People from the city started coming to read out loud to me. While I was learning how to use technology, I mainly benefited from listening to YouTube channel, the Hadley Institute for the Blind, to learn about iPhone and iPad. And then when they learned those, it was easy for me to learn the computer. It took me a whole semester. And after that I

managed to as I said, graduate high school. There were some, like Mekiya mentioned earlier, health issues, went through a bunch of surgeries, got benign tumors, had another surgery, and ended up when I wanted to look for employment. I found out that I had to go through extensive assistive technology training at alpha point in Kansas City, Missouri. I did and I completed all of that. As for the culture, I was fine. I knew Americans back in Morocco, and they went to the American Language Center. So it wasn't as much cultural shock as much as the technology and the academic warmth that I had to navigate. That was tough. they different from the university and like using Braille and someone read out loud, was not something that is encouraged here in the States and they had to learn. But yeah, after, like, as I said, after a semester, I learned how to basically do not everything. As we all know, the web is not accessible. 97% of it is not accessible. So I still even today, sometimes that meeting forms or with the Captcha, as we all know, and all of those things, it's, you know, we're still, it's what it is, we are blind living in the sight of the world. Yes. So there's still a lot to be done. And that's what I do with advocacy is raising awareness and make people understand that if I have been able to accomplish all of this, there are other people if given opportunities and resources, they will accomplish more than this.

R

Rob Mineault 31:03

Um, okay, well, why don't we talk a little bit about the the blog, I want to talk a little bit about The DateKeepers and explore a little bit more about what you're talking about being sort of dissatisfied with, with the media. Because, honestly, I think that that's a frustration that, that we all have, and that we can all agree on.

I

Itto Outini 31:24

Well, um, you know, as we all know, and call it inspiration, porn is wet. Most I wouldn't say all because I haven't read all the traditional media have been doing is like, telling the story of a person with disability, if it's if it fits that narrative of inspiration porn, for example, when I was homeless for six years, and when I needed the support, I tried going to the media back in Morocco over and over, and I couldn't get them to tell my story, I'm sure if they did, there would be a lot of people who were interested in supporting me, because you know, a blind student wanting to improve her life by, you know, going to school and learning and becoming independent. But the media are stuck in, like trying to activate negative emotions. And, you know, because if, if you have a positive story, like what we shared earlier, like someone inventing a very amazing elevator that can help people with disabilities in disasters, or someone making the whole country accessible, or, you know, someone advocated for people with disabilities through their job, or whatever the case is, those stories will not, as we all know, activate not only algorithms, because algorithms are fed with the stories that they are used to, but they would not make people emotional as much to react. So that was the source for me, I've always loved. Like, I've loved being a journalist, it was a dream. And when I applied to the Fulbright scholarship, I actually wrote in my statement that if given a scholarship, I will start my own international media platform. And here we are. Here we are. Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 33:33

So with the creation of the blog, who is sort of the intended audience? Is it the disability community? Or is it the mainstream community? Or is it a combination of both?

I

Itto Outini 33:45

It's a combination of both.

M

Mekiya Outini 33:46

We're still finding the audience. But what we're trying to do is tell stories that have complexity to them stories, that have nuances and stories that don't fit into the ideological categories that people are used to. So I think that it presents a challenge, because the easy path to an audience is to decide which ideological narrative you're going to appeal to and then find who is tuned into that narrative, and then connect the dots. But that's not what we're trying to do. We are trying to reach a broader audience, is probably going to be a very disparate audience. And, you know, one or two or three people from the audience may have very little in common, but it takes time to build that kind of readership. But it also I think it's going to be more stable in the long run. Because if we were appealing to a certain ideological narrative, and then we accidentally or deliberately failed to uphold that narrative, we would lose a lot of our readers. But we're trying to give people something that I think a lot of people are yearning for, which is complexity and in the story, that is that has enough depth and enough range to capture some thing of the essence of human experience as opposed to an argument that is supporting a certain policy and or a certain outlook on the world or something of that nature. So yeah. And I love that, but I also feel like you know you guys have your work cut out for you you know fighting against this algorithm because you know, that's you know, it definitely is a problem. This is a you know, a problem a societal problem that far goes beyond you know, disability it's just you know, everybody gets in these echo chambers and is fed new stories and opinions that already aligned with with their own so you know, the idea of of you know, consuming content that is going to make you actually think outside the box is is a little bit foreign these days. It's a challenge but people love Itto is one thing we realized people love Itto and people love Itto's stories. And we are, we're working on telling bits and pieces of Itto's story, but also using that to build a platform where we can bring in a plurality of other voices as well.

R

Rob Mineault 36:08

Well, and I love that too, that you guys are sort of fighting this idea of inspiration porn, because that's another really big problem. You know, it's it's either inspiration porn, or if it's anything, that's, that's extraordinary, that's going to catch people's attention, that these are the stories that that seem to make it into the mainstream. And, you know, like, like your example that you used, you know, the stories of somebody who, you know, creates a really great elevator, you know, nobody hears about those stories.

M

Mekiya Outini 36:42

Well, and we could have told that story to other ways, as opposed to how we told it, we could have told it as the story of an inspiration porn story about a man who invents an elevator against all odds, or we could in spite of having a disability in spite of being from a poor country, in spite of being in worse, and etc. Or we could have told it as the story of a man who lost his

leg because he happened to live in a war zone, he was not involved in any of the armed groups, and he was caught in the crossfire one day on his way to see an English tutor. And he that was how he lost his legacy. He was shot at point blank range by an armed in a member of an armed militia group. So we could have pulled that story through either of those lenses. And we included all of that information in the story. But the story is, it's bigger than that, because it's his life. It's how he incorporates those two dimensions of experience. And hopefully, people will, I think people do respond to that. It's just, it's hard to get past that initial expectation.

L Lis Malone 37:48

I want to just ask about the that, finding that balance between inspiration porn and, and sharing a story of inspiration. Because on one hand, I absolutely understand that you you're treading that line, because you don't want it to come across as just purely inspiration porn, but at the same time, you need to also have a inspirational voice for maybe people in the in the disability community who are seeking stories of others, facing some of the things that they that they face on a daily challenge. And we'll use that as inspiration. So it's sort of like, how do you define who gets to get inspiration? And that's always been the, the tricky part of inspiration. The quote unquote, inspiration point in general is like, when is it considered inspiration porn? And when is it considered inspirational? It's just based on the person who consumes it, and the way they take it away.

I Itto Outini 38:42

Well, I faced that challenge every night, single day, not single hour, not single minute. It's single second. Every breath of me is literally that every thought. I faced that every day because I share my story, right? I was basically, you know, I was neglected homeless, orphaned, all of it, and then became a Fulbright Scholar, international scholar, successful woman. So I think personally, the way I do it, is, I have media platforms. When they reach out to me, they say, let's talk about the Fulbright. Well, Fulbright is a prestigious scholarship. Everyone knows that. But at least three that I'm thinking about now at the top of my head of the media that media outlets, they reached out to me I literally had my own my own rules that I said, if you are not allowing me to talk about my past, I am not going to just say you know, oh life is awesome. I mean I'm successful and all of that. I said, no, I have to say everything like, one of you guys asked earlier - how was it when I came to the US? I'm like, it wasn't easy. I'm not gonna lie and say, hey, blind people just go out there to the University or college and you know, you're gonna find a party waiting for you. There's challenges, and they always highlight those challenges. And I always say, like, anyone can look it up. When I was in grad school, I was hit by a giant literally, they call them giant tumors. But when I got that, I was preparing to defend my thesis. And I ended up in a cancer hospital alone. I didn't know anyone. And the hospital told me to leave. I think it was like around seven or 9pm. And it was on a wheelchair blind on a wheelchair and it was a hospital wheelchair, they weren't going to take their wheelchair back and gave me this little cane that wasn't even as strong as my cane, and I had nowhere to go. And they still defended my thesis on the wheelchair and I had to fight to get everything I got. And I think that's where, again, inspiration porn comes in, is if I come here to the show and be like, yeah, you just need to work hard. Yes, I had to work hard. But but it was, it was tough.

R Rob Mineault 41:54

You know, it's, that was was gonna be a question that I did ask because I did kind of feel like, you know that even the way that we discovered you, I think we first heard you on the BBC. Podcast. And you know, it's an amazing story. But does it ever feel sort of, like the word is cringy? Yeah, sure, well use cringy. Like, do you ever sort of listen to that back and you realize that they kind of lean into one aspect of the story or one aspect of your personality, and that and they don't really paint you as a full fleshed out three dimensional human being that has good days, and there has been you have bad days. And sometimes your attitude is great. And I don't know, maybe some days your attitude sucks. And you just feel like just going back to bed? Does it ever sort of get frustrating the way that sort of your you have been portrayed in those media outlets?

I Itto Outini 42:58

I think, actually, BBC was the best. I was respected during the interview. They were very serious about asking, you know, really, like hard questions about trauma. They were very, very nice. I never had any media platform that was interested or interviewed me and there were a lot that I had to turn down because of that, because of them coming straight with, like a story in mind. For example, when I had tumors in Fayetteville, Arkansas, a journalist came to me and wanted to interview me about, you know, poor blind you on a wheelchair, and it really, you know, it's not fun, you're going through hell and this and that. And he said, no, I am grateful. I have a community, I have friends, my friends are here, supporting me. 24/7 you know, like, as I said, when I ended up in a cancer hospital, like three hours far from where I was living, I was alone, but I spent four years in Fayetteville, Arkansas, with people I can say they're not only best friends, but family. And I am now married to one of them. So, you know, yes, media. That's, that's one of the things as I said earlier, sometimes they come to report in about a certain part of the story. But again, I find that every day so thankfully, I am a well trained journalist. So you know, if, if someone has knows the same trick like the other, I don't think they can trick them. So I think that's what I do in journalism. So I am a journalist and I am not afraid of fellow journalists. Of course I can't control at the end what's been edited. Most of the time I say I have to look at it before it gets published for those reasons. Like, again, one time I was interviewed on media platform that they even screwed my story. They said, I lost my sight at the age of 27. I actually lost it at 17. And they don't know how they calculate it. And I think at that time, I think it was 2017 when they published the story, I think I was, like, 57 or 58 years old. And guess where we are in 2023 and I am 34.

R Rob Mineault 45:42

English majors are notoriously bad at math.

I Itto Outini 45:48

Yeah, I guess that's journalism, too.

L Lis Malone 45:51

Well, that's the thing is I've also with stories, especially if they're, um, when they're printed. There's two reasons because there aren't any humans that are editing stories anymore

There's typos galore, because there aren't any humans that are editing stories anymore.

R Rob Mineault 46:01

Yeah, well, listen, just be glad it was a human I mean, soon ChatGPT will be writing everything.

L Lis Malone 46:10

Yeah, yeah. And very, very few outlets have fact checkers anymore. Also, after the piece gets submitted that you actually get the phone call where they they, I mean, in some of the big ones still do. But it's still a very, it's like a very luxurious thing to have a fact checker on staff, I think for a lot of media.

R Ryan Fleury 46:33

That's right, follow AT Banter's example, our research team is top notch.

R Rob Mineault 46:39

Right? Well, you know, and again, you know, I think that what you guys are doing it kind of heartens me, because I do feel like, you know, 10/20 years ago, is that anybody in the disability community will just be happy to get any sort of coverage. And I think that it's important that we're getting to the stage now that we can start actually saying no, you know, what, it's not just about being covered, it's about being covered the right way. It's about representation. It's about inclusion. These These factors are important. It's not just about, you know, throwing the odd story up there to garner clicks that's going to make you know, some able bodied person feel good about their day. Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you guys would like to talk about before we start wrapping up?

I Itto Outini 47:28

I don't think so. So, if anyone wants to reach out to us, that's thedatakeepers.com. It's one word. And you can find contact us with the email keepers@gmail.com. Yeah, we look forward to hearing from you and connecting.

M Mekiya Outini 47:48

But we should also add the DateKeepers. The name comes from Outini, from the family name. It's a literal translation. And it refers to the fruit of the date palm tree, like the one who keeps the date fruits.

R Rob Mineault 48:03

Now that makes sense

now that makes sense.

M Mekiya Outini 48:08
We maybe should have led with that. I'm sorry.

R Rob Mineault 48:10
No, no, it's good. It's good.

R Ryan Fleury 48:13
It's not a dating site for journalists.

M Mekiya Outini 48:16
Sadly how we figured out we need to make income.

S Steve Barclay 48:27
That'll be the next site. Well informed hookups.com.

R Rob Mineault 48:33
I love it. Well, listen, guys. Thank you so much for coming on and talking with us. It's a fascinating story. And I love what you guys are doing. Best of luck with the site. And please feel free to come back anytime and chat with us whenever you're up to something else.

R Ryan Fleury 48:51
I have one more question. Okay, you said you were from North Carolina, correct? Yes. So is Lis our co host here. So are you familiar with Frugal MacDoogal?

M Mekiya Outini 49:04
Oh, no, no, I'm not.

R Ryan Fleury 49:12
I had to ask.

L Lis Malone 49:13
Listen, I don't I don't know what years you're living in Ashville because I'm in Charlotte. But Ashville is like the mack daddy home of all these kick ass breweries by the way. So if you want some really good beer on tap, that's where you want to go.

M Mekiya Outini 49:33
Yep, yep. Well, then I moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas, and there is a much, much, much smaller version, but they're kind of trying to do the same thing.

L Lis Malone 49:41
They're trying to be like a little bougie beer town.

M Mekiya Outini 49:45
Yeah, yeah. Like they haven't really decided if you're doing beer or arts. There's been a university town for a long time, but they're kind of trying to pick their lane now because they're there. They're growing, and they're trying to figure out what they're going to be now.

L Lis Malone 49:57
Well, Ashville is kind of has done a pretty nice job of it. I have to say I have to give them some props.

M Mekiya Outini 50:04
Yeah, the river arts district especially is really nice.

R Ryan Fleury 50:08
Road trip

I Itto Outini 50:14
Self driving car, my friend.

R Rob Mineault 50:17
It's coming. It's coming and ChatGPT will be driving. Okay guys, all right

it's coming. it's coming and crater I will be driving. Okay, guys, all right.

R Ryan Fleury 50:26

Thanks so much. Nice to meet you guys. Take care. Bye bye.

R Rob Mineault 50:31

You know, speaking of cultural exchanges, I was thinking about this. You know, I've learned more about North Carolina in the last year ever. And honestly, like, every time, it just seems like anything that I see in the news now it's like, oh, that happened in North Carolina. Because then they shot down the Chinese spy balloon over North Carolina.

L Lis Malone 50:56

No, it was off the coast of South Carolina.

R Rob Mineault 50:58

Oh, I'm still getting them mixed up.

L Lis Malone 51:01

But of course, we're bordering states and it's it's very It's not far. Yeah. Off the coast of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

R Rob Mineault 51:11

Oh, I see. We'll see. I think that's just part of being in North Carolina is that you guys get the blame or the credit for anything that happened in either because it's a Carolina.

L Lis Malone 51:22

Well, they are called the Carolinas.

R Rob Mineault 51:25

So take credit for that. Wear it like a badge of honor.

L Lis Malone 51:28

You know what, though? It did go over Charlotte because I they were saying that people there were sightings for sure. I was in the throes of COVID so there was nothing - I mean, a spaceship with aliens would not have gotten me out of bed. Yeah, I was like, okay, great. Balloon overhead spy balloon. Oh, it's fine. As long as it doesn't crash into my house. I'm fine.

R Rob Mineault 52:01

Such a weird story.

L Lis Malone 52:03

But what I mean I will say though that for years to come, I pictured you know those people we call them like they're like Land Pirates. They're looking for the last the poor last engagement ring on the beach stuff like they're gonna they're gonna be maybe finding pieces of this. You're gonna see parts of it being sold on eBay.

S Steve Barclay 52:36

I would buy that. I found this on the web. They talk about how stealth bombers look like, you know a flock of geese to radar. You know granted a flock of geese going Mach Two, but maybe that was maybe that was the same same problem. Maybe this just looks like a flock of geese that was flying very, very slowly.

R Ryan Fleury 53:14

Three buses tall. That's a lot of geese. You know,

S Steve Barclay 53:16

Every everybody in Canada knows how suspicious geese are to begin with. I think the rest of the world needs to wake up.

R Rob Mineault 53:23

We don't need. We don't need spy cams. We don't we don't need anything fancy. We've got Ryan Reynolds for God's sakes. I mean, he can probably get anywhere. That's true. He gets invited to the White House all the time. You see him scribbling notes.

L Lis Malone 54:22

Ryan Reynolds. The owner of Mint Mobile? Yeah.

R Rob Mineault 54:28
What? Mint mobile?

S Steve Barclay 54:30
Yeah, he owns Mint Mobile.

R Rob Mineault 54:32
Does he?

L Lis Malone 54:32
Yeah. He stars in all their commercials. Like Yeah. Hi. I'm Ryan Reynolds. I'm the owner of Mint Mobile.

R Rob Mineault 54:42
You guys love him.

L Lis Malone 54:43
What are you talking about? We do?

R Rob Mineault 54:46
I thought. Clearly not big in the Carolinas.

L Lis Malone 54:52
I can't say that I'm a fan. I don't hate him. I can't name a movie.

R Rob Mineault 55:48
Anything else to say about any of that?

S Steve Barclay 55:50
Nope. Not anything.

R Rob Mineault 55:53
Okay. Well, then let's I vote we get out of here.

R Ryan Fleury 55:58
Let's go wrap it up. Okay.

L Lis Malone 56:00
All right. Come on in for a landing or crash landing.

R Ryan Fleury 56:13
She's not funny.

R Rob Mineault 56:19
Hey Lis. Where can people find us?

L Lis Malone 56:25
They can find us on the web www.atbanter.com.

R Rob Mineault 56:29
They can also drop us a email if they so desire at cowbell@atbanter.com.

S Steve Barclay 56:41
And if they want, they can find us on social media. We're at that twits thing. We're at that face thing. We're at that Insta thing you know?

R Rob Mineault 56:49
And stay tuned for the AT Banter balloon that's going to be flying over your town soon. We're gonna brand and send one over. That'd be good marketing. Great exposure. Put the Frugal MacDoogal logo on it and crash it in the Carolinas. Right. Put a bunch of coupons in there so

when it gets shot down they all just kind of flutter down. It's raining deals. Deals on vodka. That is going to about do it for us this week. Big thanks of course the Itto and Mekiya and we will see everybody next next week.