

# AT Banter Podcast Episode 329 - Jesse Ruben & The We Can Pro...

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, song, community, called, mackenzie, students, school, lyme disease, guitars, project, play, wrote, singer songwriter, teachers, lis, lyme patients, driving, jesse, british columbia, steve

## SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, Steve Barclay, Jesse Ruben, Ryan Fleury, Lis Malone

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**R** Rob Mineault 00:49  
Hey, and welcome to another episode of AT Banter.

**S** Steve Barclay 02:07  
Banter, banter

**R** Rob Mineault 02:10  
Listen to that's the sweet tones of that banter, banter. Hey, this is of course, the podcast where we talk about advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. A My name is Rob Mineault, and joining me today, Mr. Steve Barclay. Because you know what, he hasn't been in here a while and I think he deserves first spot this week.

**S** Steve Barclay 02:34  
I'm here I'm here.

**R** Rob Mineault 02:36  
Hey, we also have Miss Lis Malone.

**L** Lis Malone 02:41

It's about time. Did I say that right? A boot.

S

Steve Barclay 02:52

Like honestly, trying too hard.

L

Lis Malone 02:57

I can't wait to see how that comes out in the transcripts. Let's try to say about like 50 times.

R

Rob Mineault 03:07

Off the rails already. Hey, and look who else is here Mr. Ryan Fleury.

R

Ryan Fleury 03:11

Hello again.

R

Rob Mineault 03:15

And then that's it. That's all for us. Man. I'm not used to all four of us being here.

L

Lis Malone 03:21

A boot. How's that? I'm trying. I'm gonna practice.

S

Steve Barclay 03:32

Mostly it comes naturally.

R

Rob Mineault 03:34

Yeah. I mean, listen, give it another year. You been doing the show for a year, I sure in another year, you'll you'll just run into people at the grocery store and they'll be like, Why are you talking so funny?

L

Lis Malone 03:48

I already run into that living in North Carolina and being from New York City.

R

Rob Mineault 04:02

Well, okay, well, let's do a little real, real quick catch up since. So, Steve, how you doing?

S

Steve Barclay 04:07

I am doing just fine. What we've been up to? Well, you know, currently I'm sitting here sporting a mask because my my wife has been working in the bedroom here and she's got the Vid.

R

Rob Mineault 04:20

Oh no.

S

Steve Barclay 04:21

Yep. So we're, we're just, you know, waiting that out right now.

R

Rob Mineault 04:25

Right. Did you go to CSUN a couple weeks ago?

S

Steve Barclay 04:29

I did go to CSUN.

R

Rob Mineault 04:31

And how was that?

S

Steve Barclay 04:32

CSUN was good. There were some interesting, interesting new things down there and got to meet a whole bunch of people again, and it was excellent.

R

Rob Mineault 04:41

Oh, yeah. Okay, well, maybe we'll have to have a little bit of an update at some point in the next few weeks. All right. Well, how you Lis?





Lis Malone 04:55

After my running with what RSP followed by COVID followed by pneumonia. Yeah, I'm super immunity now.



Rob Mineault 05:05

Yeah, no doubt.



Lis Malone 05:06

I'm just raging with antibodies.



Rob Mineault 05:08

Yeah. Excellent.



Lis Malone 05:09

Yeah. It's a good thing I'm having with the herd immunity



Rob Mineault 05:23

Well, good, everyone's here. Everyone's healthy.



Lis Malone 05:26

Except for you, Rob.



Rob Mineault 05:27

Oh, yeah, that's right, everyone. No one ever asks how I am. I'm good. Yeah, I'm good. I feel good. I've been taking multivitamins. Actually. I feel a lot more energy.



Lis Malone 05:39

And, yeah, there's nothing better than the power of the placebo. Right?



Ryan Fleury 06:04

Moving on.

**R** Rob Mineault 06:19  
Well, listen, I can't top that. So let's just like we better get on to the meat of the show.

**L** Lis Malone 06:26  
Our guest is gonna bail on us.

**R** Rob Mineault 06:28  
Every week, it's like this. Alright, enough of that. Let's go to Steve. Why don't you tell us since you are back, what the heck we're doing today?

**S** Steve Barclay 06:42  
Well, I was at a SETBC District Partners meeting. And they brought in this weirdo named Jesse to sing a bunch of songs and to get people hoppin, and he did a fantastic job of it. So I thought, hey, here's a guy with a mission to inspire students. He travels all over the place doing that. So let's give them some free press and see if we can drag him to more far flung reaches of Canada. And maybe the States who knows. And we have a listener in Russia. So let's bring on Jesse. Jesse, welcome to the podcast.

**J** Jesse Ruben 07:25  
Thanks, guys. I feel like I'm interrupting a party or something. Should I've gotten hammered before?

**R** Ryan Fleury 07:35  
Or during.

**S** Steve Barclay 07:39  
Honestly, it doesn't hurt.

**L** Lis Malone 07:42  
It's highly recommended.

**J** Jesse Ruben 07:46

J Jesse Ruben 07:40

I think weirdo is an appropriate adjective. So you nailed that one.

R Rob Mineault 07:52

Well, we, we want to thank you for not bailing and for sticking with us, at least for now. I guess I shouldn't get too far ahead of myself. But why don't we just start off, give us a little bit of a snapshot of who the heck you are and you how it came to be that you that you did run into that Mr. Steve there.

J Jesse Ruben 08:14

Yeah, so I'm a singer songwriter. I've been a professional musician since I was like 19. And a long time ago, I wrote a song called "We Can" way back in 2010. And I wrote it because I was running the New York City Marathon for the first time. I was running to raise money and awareness for spinal cord injuries and spinal cord research because one of my best friends suffered a spinal cord injury when we were teenagers. And it was a cause I really believed in I loved the work that they did. Over at the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, named after Christopher Reeve, obviously, who used to be Superman. And I wrote the song called "We Can" because I wanted to give people permission to do the scary, wonderful things that they'd always wanted to do. Because when I would share about my experience running the marathon, people would say, that's so lucky - you ran your first marathon. That's so amazing. You ran your first marathon, I've always wanted to run a marathon or here's the thing I've always wanted to do. And so I wrote the song, and I put it out, and I thought it would inspire some people to run and it did. And then a couple months later, I got an email from a teacher in Vancouver Island in Courtney, British Columbia on Vancouver Island. And they asked me if I wanted to come visit their school. And I said, sure, because I didn't have a lot going on at the time. And I went and it was really amazing. I spent like a week at the school with the students. We made a music video, I came back to the States. And people started seeing this video and asked me to come to their school. And at first I would literally be like, I'm just a guy. There's no thing - like you don't want me at your school, which is not a great response to those inquiries. And so after after a couple months of that I sort of started interviewing educators in my life, here's the thing, this thing I'm trying to do. Here's the song that is really working in a classroom setting like what can I do to help you guys as educators, what's missing from education? And so eventually, we created this program called the We Can Project, which is a service learning and growth mindset program, mostly for elementary and middle school students. I do work with high school students as well, but not as much because I find that high school students are very mean. And so I travel all over mostly North America, I've been all over the United States and Canada. And mostly my job when I go to a school is to either introduce the concept of the We Can Project and coming up with goals, and then or just getting everyone excited if they're already doing that. And I actually find that when I go to a school, I have to spend way more time convincing the teachers than the students because if you tell a third grader, that they can do anything they believe you and if you tell their teacher they look at you like they want you to, you know, like fade into the floorboards. So I've been actually doing recently more adult programs and presenting at conferences. And so I did a conference in October for the BCPVA, which was all the principals and vice principals, which was amazing in BC, which was really amazing. And then I got to reconnect with people who I had been working with, like 10 years ago, those very first school visits, and then somebody from SETBC was at that conference and invited me to perform for you guys. And when she told me what SETBC does and their mission and

everything that they're working on. I mean, it's just such a no brainer to me to do something like that. I'm always so blown away by educators, I always have been even when I was in school. And then just from doing this work, I've really gotten to know a lot of teachers and I just I just think they're an incredible group of people that work really hard and, at least in the States, are tragically underpaid. And and I so so for me to play for a roomful of people like at that SETBC event, it's just really special. And I really loved it. So I appreciate it. And here you are, you invited me on just to insult me right to my face here a couple months later.

**S** Steve Barclay 12:25

Well, you know, feel the love.

**J** Jesse Ruben 12:28

I got it. Yeah, that's that's sort of the short answer to that.

**R** Rob Mineault 12:33

Well, so that's really cool. So you, you have like sort of a British Columbia connection right from the start. Yeah, actually, this is an audio medium, so it won't mean anything to people listening to this. But behind me, you guys can see that's like a giant thing that was presented to me from the Comox community because that's where Courtney is in Comox. And so this is the their First Nation symbol. And yeah, I feel I feel like a huge connection with BC. I love it. There's so much. I love the people there. I was just in Vancouver for the first time a couple of weeks ago, I'd never been to downtown Vancouver. I loved it. And then I was up in a tiny town called Mackenzie, British Columbia, where it got it got down to negative 30. That was tough, man. That was really tough. But yeah, I'll go anywhere. Anywhere.

**S** Steve Barclay 13:22

You really got to wonder why anybody would want to have anything to do with a place like Mackenzie, right, Rob?

**R** Rob Mineault 13:27

So yeah, that's wild.

**J** Jesse Ruben 13:29

That where you live?

**R** Rob Mineault 13:30

I'm from Mackenzie. I lived in Mackenzie from like Grade 1 to Grade 12. I flew into Prince George and that it's like, it's like a town. It's cold, but it's a town. And then I drove two hours north. And as I was driving, I was just like, what where am I going? The thermometer in the dashboard on the car was just like going crazy. It's a place you have to plug your cars in overnight so the engine block doesn't freeze it.

**J** Jesse Ruben 13:59

Yeah, I just, I'm out. To visit I loved visiting. Everyone was so sweet. I'm hoping to go back next year, no shade, but also like guys, like what are you doing??

**R** Rob Mineault 14:13

So how does this work? So it's like just any school kind of invites you and you just show up?

**J** Jesse Ruben 14:19

Yeah, I sort of I sort of decided a long time ago that I would just go anywhere, like, like not even for school stuff, but any types of performance. If someone wants me to show up somewhere in play, as long as I don't lose any money, I'll usually do it. And so the school stuff has been really interesting because it allows me to end up in these like small towns I would never go to normally. In the States especially, like a lot of like small towns and small communities in the South. Yeah, so I'll go yeah, if you want me to come to your school and talk to your students and play songs for them, I'll probably show up

**R** Rob Mineault 15:00

No, but seriously, I mean, that is really great, because quite often a lot of these really rural communities, they don't see many, many things going through their town, they don't get a chance to have a lot of guest speakers, or because they're just the resources are spread too thin, especially here in a province like British Columbia, where it's very large, it can be really hard to deliver services and things to some of these really small towns. So that's really cool that, that you do that.

**J** Jesse Ruben 15:33

I think I think it makes it more special actually. Even it's the same thing. Not doing school stuff, but just in my quote, unquote, like regular job of singer songwriter stuff. Like when I play in New York City. Yeah, people are excited. But like, at any given time, there's a million, literally a million things to be doing in New York City. In Mackenzie, British Columbia, there are not that many things happening as there are here in New York. So it's just like, people would just get so excited when you show up where they live. Yeah. And I love that I love having students be excited that I'm there. And then they're excited about the message that I'm delivering and the



songs I'm playing. And it just makes my job easier. But I think, I don't think art and creativity and goal setting and having, like a life that you want, I don't think that should just be limited to major metropolitan areas, you know?

**R** Rob Mineault 16:25

Yeah. I mean, the last thing is last exciting thing that happened in Mackenzie from what I heard was that they got a Subway. Like not, not a subway, like a Subway sandwich franchise.

**J** Jesse Ruben 16:38

I missed that, I wish I had known.

**R** Rob Mineault 16:40

Yeah, you could have, you could have got a sub.

**J** Jesse Ruben 16:42

My favorite part of going to Mackenzie was before like, before I go into any district, I'll email the principal, or whoever's bringing me in like a month before, two months before, like, hey, just send me a list of hotels in the area so I can figure out where I'm gonna stay. And this time the principal was like, this is a short list because we have one hotel. That's where I stayed.

**R** Rob Mineault 17:03

Yeah, that's right. Good old Alexander Mackenzie Hotel.

**J** Jesse Ruben 17:07

That's right. Right.

**L** Lis Malone 17:10

Jesse, where's home for you?

**J** Jesse Ruben 17:12

I actually live in Brooklyn. I live in Williamsburg.



L Lis Malone 17:15  
Wow. Oh, Billy bird.

J Jesse Ruben 17:18  
So when you said you were in, you're from New York, and then you're in North Carolina, which I would love to get into that why you made that life choice. But yeah, so I'm in my currently in, my recording studio that my wife and I share because she's an actress, and she does a lot of voiceover work.

L Lis Malone 17:34  
So do I get that it's like the the the perfect New York couple, you know, musician and actress?

J Jesse Ruben 17:40  
Is it though?

L Lis Malone 17:42  
Well, let's just say you're a couple. It's not that well, not necessarily perfect for the paycheck because I know a lot of people.

J Jesse Ruben 17:48  
It's like, it's like a normal couple with no emotional or financial stability.

L Lis Malone 17:53  
It's very, it's very Williamsburg for sure.

J Jesse Ruben 17:56  
Yeah. But I'm even I'm already like too old and not cool enough to live here. I've been in this neighborhood 12 years. So now I'm like, now I'm seeing all the young kids come in with their--

L Lis Malone 18:07  
It was hipster when I left. I can't even imagine what it's like now.

**J** Jesse Ruben 18:10  
Where did you live in the city?

**L** Lis Malone 18:12  
All over Manhattan and then Queens and then I just got tired of the rent going up and up and up. And I just bought a one way ticket bought a condo sight unseen in person and just I was like, peace out.

**J** Jesse Ruben 18:24  
Where in North Carolina do you live?

**L** Lis Malone 18:25  
Charlotte.

**J** Jesse Ruben 18:27  
Charlotte? Yeah, there's a lot of scary stuff happening in North Carolina these days.

**R** Rob Mineault 18:31  
That's what I was saying.

**L** Lis Malone 18:33  
Oh, my God, you guys are such wussies.

**R** Ryan Fleury 18:36  
You left New York.

**L** Lis Malone 18:41  
It is sort of funny when people do get nervous about things. I'm like, Oh my gosh, this is nothing compares to go through things that used to happen outside of my apartment on Third Street.

**J** Jesse Ruben 18:42

**J** Jesse Ruben 18:52  
Where did you live? Third and what?

**L** Lis Malone 18:54  
Up between first and second. Right across from the Hells Angels.

**J** Jesse Ruben 18:57  
Oh my God. What a great block. I used to party so much right down the street from your old apartment. Yes, yes. Anyway, anyways, let's talk about me some more guys.

**L** Lis Malone 19:13  
No more New York City.

**J** Jesse Ruben 19:14  
Let's bring it back.

**R** Rob Mineault 19:16  
Absolutely. So okay, so can you kind of break down the We Can Project and sort of explain a little bit about just what what sort of the mandate is and what the message is and just what you kind of mean by when you when you talk about a service learning initiative?

**J** Jesse Ruben 19:37  
Yeah, so originally, that's all the We Can Project was was a service learning initiative. So the song that's based on is called "We Can" and the first verse is all about 'I can' the second verse is all about 'you can' and then the third verse is of course, all about 'we can'. And the original idea was how can we how can we find out what is of interest to young people in terms of like the difference that they want to make in their communities. Because it's not often that second, third, fourth, fifth graders get asked, like, like what changes they would want to make in the communities where they live. And so the original idea of the We Can Project was, let's have all the students come up with something that they want to change something they want to work on, maybe if they have the same goal, they can work together. And over the course of the school year, they can raise money or awareness, and it will teach them problem solving, and leadership and communication. What to do in the face of know what, how to come up with an action plan, all of these really great things that that you would want young people to learn. It also, by the way, teaches them from a young age that they can make a positive difference in somebody else's life, which is something that I didn't learn until I was much older than that. So that was the original idea. And then when I started going into schools, and talking to the students and listening to them about what it was like for them. So much of what I was hearing

was young people are really, really scared to give themselves permission to try new things. Because on the internet, on social media, mostly it looks like everyone is perfect at everything, no one has to try very hard. And so it's really been tough for young people to to like have confidence. And so we added this growth mindset piece, which was really for them, like, why not? I started playing guitar when I was 16. I knew I wanted to play guitar when I was nine, eight, probably. And it took me eight years to build up the courage to start. Whereas if someone that wasn't my parents or my teachers, if someone had asked me like, what are the things that you want to be doing that you're kind of like scared to try that I would have totally said that. So we added that piece in because I wanted not only to have young people have an ability to make a difference in the communities where they live, I wanted to give young people an opportunity and really give them give themselves permission to try new things. Because like so often, when I talk to students, like they're not even told that being a creative person for a job is even like a viable option. So even just me showing up at their school, and saying like, hi, I write songs and perform them for people, and that's my life. And it's cool. Like even for some students, like even that is just like blows their mind for some students seeing and seeing a person. Because popular music right now, there's not a ton of acoustic music. So for some young people, just seeing someone play an instrument and sing at the same time, that is the thing that like, totally makes it worth it for them. So for me, having done this now for about 10 years, when schools buy in to the We Can Project and do it and the teachers come up with their own goals, and the students come up with their own goals. The teachers are way tougher, like I said earlier, because they're so jaded and beat down by the world. Like so little kids are just like, yeah, I'll do this, this, this, this, this, this, this, this, this, and this, this. And literally I'll have I'll say to the teacher, like what's something you've been wanting to do, since you were a little kid, and they they've literally like more than half the time, they cannot come up with an answer. Because being an adult is so whatever, and we're busy and exhausted and all these different things. Like a lot of the adults can't even can't even give an answer of like a dream or a goal that they've had. And for a lot of them, it's like, I want them to reconnect with why they became teachers. And I want them to reconnect with the things that they love and that they're passionate about, so that they're not waking up, overwhelmed and stressed out and over it. I want them to be excited because then they'll do a better job for their students. So so I've seen like communities transformed where students are coming up with goals. Maybe the big part of the We Can Project is, especially for we can goals. The goals have to be student driven. So it's one thing for a school to say to their students, we're gonna collect cans of food to give them to people who in need for Thanksgiving or Christmas or something. It's an entirely different thing for a third grader to go, hey, you know, we should collect cans of food and give them out to people who need them in the community. And to see the that student take ownership of that and how excited they are by that and how amazing it is that they can go from having this idea to making a difference for people. So to me, it's like a really wonderful way to change attitudes to change the way students relate to school, especially in communities where maybe they're underserved. And they might not have as many resources as other communities like some of the feedback I've gotten is like, this is the first time anyone has ever asked me what my goals are. This is the first time anyone's ever asked me what kind of a difference I want to make in my community. So it really gives schools an opportunity to provide a structure to support their students.

R

Rob Mineault 25:08

Yeah, that's amazing. And that's such an important age to to really drive home this idea of advocacy because honestly, this is the next generation that's coming. And we definitely we need more advocates, we need more people who are willing to be allies. And I feel like, you

know, getting them comfortable and in that mindset, at that age is really crucial. And that's just that one component. I didn't even consider all of these other components that you don't have like getting the teachers involved.

**J** Jesse Ruben 25:41

So that's what's been cool about it is like it's evolved over time. So for the first couple years, it was just the students. And then it was like, why is this not working as well as I want it to. And it's because the students would be doing these cool, new things and being really excited. And the teachers weren't doing any of it. They were just like, totally checked out. And so it was like more work to them. So it was like, how can I get it so that teachers are just as excited as the students are? Well, let's have them come up with their own goals. And one of my favorite examples of like a community shift was, there was a community in Mississauga outside of Toronto, that I used to go to every year. And over the summer, one of the houses in the community burned down. And it was a single mom with two or three kids. And one of their kids, one of the kid's classmates the first time the We Can Project was introduced to their school, the first thing out of his mouth was like, well, we should build them a house, because they don't have a house. And so every month, they would have different fundraisers, that the students would decide. They were going on weekends to literally build the home with Habitat for Humanity, the teachers and students and community members. There would be like restaurants in the community would bring like food and drinks for people working on the house, it was a whole school year thing, they raised all this money. And at the end of the school year, like in May, I went to the school, we had a big concert, we had a big celebration, the we handed Habitat for Humanity a check for like \$50,000 and Habitat for Humanity handed this family the keys to their house that they're still live in, like seven years later.

**R** Rob Mineault 27:21

Amazing.

**J** Jesse Ruben 27:22

And they get to have that experience those that kid who had that idea, and all those students that helped with that, and all those people in the community that helped with that. Like they get to have that forever. And to me that that's like the epitome of the We Can Project is it takes people who live near each other and it turns them into a community with a common goal.

**R** Rob Mineault 27:41

This must be like a crazy 10 year journey that you've been on. Because, you know, you said you wrote the song in 2010. Running this marathon and then being able to tell that story and knowing that you were instrumental in that whole process. And that you're you're out there really making a difference. I mean, does that kind of blow your mind when you really sit down and think about it?

**J****Jesse Ruben 28:05**

It does and it doesn't. It does in that. I mean, for the first couple years, like my first time visiting a school was January of 2012. And for years after that, people would be like, what's this like, school thing you're doing? And I was like, oh, I don't know. It's like nothing. I just like go sing for kids. It's like, whatever. And then I really I think it was my now my wife but she was my girlfriend at the time. And she was like, why are you talking down on on all the school stuff you're doing? And I was like, well, cuz, you know, I want to be selling out stadiums. And I want to be touring on a tour bus. And this is like driving to remote little towns and singing for third graders. You know, that was never my dream. But I always said I got into writing songs and performing because I wanted to make a difference for people. And that's something I really try and bring to my songwriting. And so this just feels like a total extension of all of that. Like it totally fits my brand. It totally fits my identity. It totally fits like how I want to spend time on this planet traveling all over the place, meeting new people being surrounded by different cultures and communities and being interested in like what people's goals are. I love it. I always love it. I mean, I think when you decide to go into a creative job, there are things that you miss out on, like stability and you know, whatever working for a corporation and all that stuff. But the that's the downside. But the upside is like, yeah, I've had I've had some unbelievable experiences. You know, I was in one of my favorite ones that I'll never forget was I was in Westmont Row, Louisiana, which was the second, I don't know if it is now, but it was the second poorest county in the United States at the time. A huge percentage of homes experienced gun violence. They were driving me around with a with a gun in the truck just in case. I was like, you know, we're not in Kansas anymore. And I was I was playing for a group of students. And they were sitting in a big circle. And there was a kid to my right, like all the way on the end, who was really quiet and he was singing along, and people saw him singing along and everyone started crying. All the adults started crying. And I was like, okay, something's going on here that they're not telling me about. So afterwards, I pulled the principal aside, and I was like, hey, I noticed everyone got really emotional during the singalong, during the concert part when one of the kids started singing. And he told me that that student was non-verbal. And they had never heard him speak until they heard him sing my song with all the other students in this class. They had never heard him speak. I think he was probably a fourth grader. And they'd had him since kindergarten, he had never made a sound. They'd never heard him say a word. And then all of a sudden, he was like singing along. And so that kind of stuff. Yeah, it's, it's amazing. It's amazing that it's been 10 years with that there's an asterisk in there, because for three of those years, from about 2013, the end of 2013 to 2016. I was very, very sick with Lyme disease. So I was basically a vegetable, then I was just at the doctor every day. But besides that, yeah, for seven of the last 10 years, like a huge part of my life has been traveling, driving around showing up at some ungodly hour and singing for young people. And it's been really special.

**R****Rob Mineault 31:43**

So it must have been like a really sort of transformative experience for you. Because, you know, you've sort of gone from, you know, a singer songwriter, to I mean, you're essentially, you know, an advocate, as well. Now, whether you whether you like it or not,

**J****Jesse Ruben 32:02**

I'll take it. Yeah, I mean, there's a world in which I dropped everything else and just fully focused on the We Can Project. And I have thought about that because there are pieces of it

focused on the we Can Project. And I have thought about that, because there are pieces of it that I really love. No one asks me when I show up to a school in Mackenzie, British Columbia how many Instagram followers I have, or how many tickets I sold, or any of that stuff. But at the same time, there's a piece of being a singer songwriter, and being on tour that I just absolutely love, that just totally fulfills me. So for me, it's like, it's just balancing both. And I, at some point, I would love to have employees and other people that can focus on the We Can Project so I can just show up at schools and not deal with all of the negotiating and outreach and advertising and all the stuff that comes with trying to have run an educational program. But they mostly don't get in each other's way. And they really complement each other really well. My ultimate goal, like if I had to design the perfect life, would be like Monday to Thursday or Monday to Wednesday, I would do school visits. And then Thursday, Friday, Saturday, I would do like regular venue concerts. That feels like a pretty great life to me. But with education, it's so hard because there's no central place where everyone goes to look for a program. And even here in the States, like every State is different. And there are just so many schools, I mean, 1000s and 1000s and 1000s of schools. So just figuring out how to get in touch with them and and connect with people who are interested in this kind of stuff. It's a pretty unique challenge. And I definitely feel like an imposter a lot of the time as far as being in the Educational world as someone who didn't go to school for Education. But I've been doing it long enough now where I feel like I can speak pretty confidently about at least the stuff that I do. But yeah, as far as like choosing one over the other, I just want to do all of it, all the time.

S

Steve Barclay 34:04

Yeah, I hear you there about the the not feeling like the imposter because I go around with a group called the Children's Low Vision Project in British Columbia and everybody in that group, other than me, pretty much has a doctorate. So they go from, you know, doctor, this doctor that and they come to me and they go, are you Dr. Steve? It's like, nooo, I'm not a doctor. I'm the least educated guy in the room.

J

Jesse Ruben 34:29

But you can call me Dr. Steve. But as far as as just to just to address the advocacy part of your question. I think since that first marathon, advocacy has always been a big thing for me. One because I think it's really it's really good for me and it's good for my one mental well being to have something to focus on that isn't just my career. So to have something bigger to focus on like raising money and training for a cause, and running a marathon is really good for me because it gets me outside of my own head and reminds me that there are more important things than just like how many Spotify streams I got that day. But I also, like I was really sick for a long time, Lyme disease is really misunderstood. The medical community is decades behind on where they should be. I had to go to 15 doctors before I got a diagnosis, I spent, I don't know \$75,000 on treatment and a two year period where I was really sick. I do a ton of advocacy work for Lyme disease research and, and awareness and helping Lyme disease patients get connected with other patients and doctors. And I think the way that we treat chronically ill people here, at least here in the States is criminal. And there's a lot of victim blaming, and a lot of like, we just sort of tell people that they're on their own. And so for as far as advocacy, I like being an advocate. I've been in remission from Lyme since 2016. I still talk to Lyme patients almost every day, I helped run a nonprofit that hosts online Zoom meetups for Lyme patients almost every day. We've had about, I don't know, between 10 and 15,000 participants since we started. So for me having something else to focus on besides my career is



really helpful. Because also, what else would I want to spend my time on? Like, what am I going to do, like watch more TV? No, I don't need to watch more TV. So so to have something besides writing songs and performing, it's just really helpful. But I also just, I don't feel called to do a ton of different things. But the things that I am I'm really drawn towards to - I feel like I'm talking a lot. I'm going to try and make my answer shorter.

**R** Rob Mineault 36:55  
It's perfect. We love it.

**S** Steve Barclay 36:59  
You're kind of the guest here.

**J** Jesse Ruben 37:01  
I know. But I also really liked the sound of my own voice.

**L** Lis Malone 37:06  
He's got a good microphone, too. We always appreciate that.

**J** Jesse Ruben 37:09  
Oh, sure. For you only for you. Oh, yeah.

**L** Lis Malone 37:14  
I need to fit in with the podcast group and show that I got I got my own podcast thing going on. Speaking of which I want to hear about your podcast project.

**J** Jesse Ruben 37:22  
Oh, yeah. So. So the group that I co founded and I'm on the board is called Generation Lyme. And so we have meetups for anyone impacted by Lyme disease. So patients, but also supporters, people in relationships with Lyme patients, parents of Lyme disease patients. We have a men's meet up, a women's meet up, BIPoC meet up, and LGBTQ meet up. We have a meet up for college age students, we've got a late night meet up, we've got an international meet up, we've got all these meetups. And so we do a we do a couple podcasts a month where we either tell somebody's story or talk about a different monthly topic and how it relates to Lyme disease. And it's really, it's really just we try to provide services for if there was someone who was newly diagnosed and didn't know anything and was very overwhelmed. If if those people find us we want them to feel like thank god, this is what I needed. You know, so we're

just trying to - we're not doctors, we're just young people (youngish people, I should say) that really care a lot. And so yeah, so tonight, we're recording an episode of that podcast. But I also have, like, I wrote a musical, I have a We Can children's book, I've got a record coming out in the spring and I've got another one coming out probably six months, I got a lot, I got a lot of plates in the air, you know.

**L** Lis Malone 38:46

You're gonna have to tell me about your, your children's book, offline.

**J** Jesse Ruben 38:50

It's called a We Can with an exclamation point and it rhymes. And it's awesome! I submitted it through to Scholastic right before the pandemic, actually. And it got all the way up to like the last phase before they were gonna publish it. And then they said no, unfortunately. So now I'm trying to find a home for it. But I also have, like year long lesson plans for K - 2 and 3 - 5 because I want I just want to, like, make it easier for schools to bring the messages of the program. So you know, it's stuff like, even something as simple as like, what is a goal. Because a lot of times young people say like, I can go to like fly to the moon! And it's like, cool, but what's like something you can actually do that you can measure and so you can decide whether you completed it or not. So there's stuff like that. That like seems really obvious, but is really necessary all the way up to like, what is something you could do that would be like way outside of your comfort zone that would help spread the word about all this cool stuff you're doing. We've had people kids like be on the news or write a letter to the mayor or you know, any of that kind of stuff. So Oh, there's a lot going on. I got a lot of feelings Lis, Liz, Liz.

**L** Lis Malone 40:08

Got it right the first time. Yeah.

**J** Jesse Ruben 40:09

Lis LLC over there.

**R** Ryan Fleury 40:13

Don't get her started on the LLC.

**L** Lis Malone 40:15

The guests like to plug me, I can't help it. You know, the other comment I just wanted to make is that we got to we, as a group minus our beloved Steve, we listened to your music last week after we recorded and I really liked that your music. It is it is very singer songwriter, it doesn't

feel like it's playing to kids. It doesn't feel like you've watered it down or tried to cut corners on the musicianship of what you put out there. So I mean, it's very, very listenable.

**J** Jesse Ruben 40:53  
Thank you.

**L** Lis Malone 40:55  
I'm wondering how to do the kids like that, that it's not it doesn't feel like you're you're pandering to children, like you're just really just writing good music?

**J** Jesse Ruben 41:01  
Well, I appreciate that. I think I decided a long time ago, like I was not going to change, like dumb anything down for whatever audience I was playing, too. So I even I was surprised. Like, all of the songs that I play when I go to like an elementary school, those are all songs that I play in my normal concerts for adults. I talk to kids exactly the way I would talk to adults. I actually did my first corporate event, I was flown to Germany to present the We Can Project to this, this tech company. And they were really so concerned, there were all these meetings about like, well, we know you're used to talking to young people, and this will be way different. I gave the same presentation at this conference word for word as I would to a third grade class, and it went over exactly the same. And I think part of that is because no matter your age, like we're all we all kind of have, we all want to make a difference. We all want to try things. It's a pretty universal thing. I also don't know how to write songs like quote, unquote, for kids. So I just I just play. When I go to schools, I just play the songs that are age appropriate. Like as far as language and theme, you know, I'm not like dropping F bombs in front of second graders. But although I have before, don't do that. But I made a choice. I think I've told this story before on a podcast, I can't remember. But I remember doing a show when I was starting out I was probably 22 or 23. And the show went really well. It was in my hometown, I made a lot of money, a lot of people came and all of the songs that I played and everything I said on stage was all about how horrible my ex girlfriend was. And I because that was that was what I was writing about at the time because I had broken up with my college girlfriend and I was madly in love and heartbroken and all this stuff. And I got home that night and I was laying in bed and I was thinking I provided nothing for those people. They got babysitters, they bought tickets, they they drove from, you know, God knows how far they drove, they showed up on time. And I complained about my ex girlfriend for an hour and a half. I provided them nothing except convincing them that a person who's actually pretty great, I convinced them that person was awful. So if I'm going to do this for a living, and if I'm going to do this for a long time, I better make sure that what I'm writing about and what I'm saying and what I'm talking about when I'm on stage is worth people listening to, and really respecting. Not taking for granted people's attention, which is something that drives me crazy when performers do like when they act bored or uninterested or too cool. That stuff just drives me nuts. So I really tried that that sort of philosophy is through everything that I everything I work on.

**S** Steve Barclay 43:53

Can you tell us more about your music and where you perform? What's going on with you, musically.

**J** Jesse Ruben 43:58

Yeah, so I've got a record coming out in the fall. It's called *Belong*, I actually finished it during COVID. The next single will probably be out in early May, which is which will be the title track which is called *Belong*. And then I'll put out a couple singles and then the album will come out in the fall. I'm touring in the East Coast and the Midwest in May I'm going to be in BC, all over BC in April doing school stuff on the island. But like I said, I will play anywhere. So if you're listening to this and you want me to come play for your kids or private concerts or any of that stuff, I will do it. I'm pretty easy to get in touch with and I've been I've performed in some pretty hilarious places. So you know, hit me up see what happens but yeah, I'm releasing music, music video, the whole nine yards. All the things.

**S** Steve Barclay 44:54

Okay, you can't just throw out that you performed in hilarious places and not share some details.

**J** Jesse Ruben 45:05

One time this, this woman hired me to play her third anniversary with her boyfriend. But the way that she did it was I thought there was going to be like a big party at their house. But when I got there, she met me in the driveway outside and it was just her and her boyfriend in the house. And I just sat at their kitchen table and played for the two of them while they were about three feet away from me, which was one of the worst experiences of my entire life. Yeah, I've played in kitchens. I've played in basements. I've played in attics. I've played on boats. I've played - I'm trying to think what where else I've played that was like really - I've played like I did a half marathon where talk about getting ignored. People are just like running by you for hours. Yeah, I've you know, if you can think of it I've probably done it. The only thing I won't do is like wear like some weird costume or something or like jump out of a cake or a box or something. I probably wouldn't do that. Although for that matter, I don't know for the right price maybe. But no one's no one's asked. Luckily but yeah, I mean I use a lot of people think like oh, singer songwriter, or you're thinking like coffee shops, folk clubs. Yeah, totally. But also like, on top of a grocery store. On the back of a truck. Oh, where was I did one on a beach. But in there was a generator for power that they thought would be good to have right next to where I was standing. So I did my whole set but no one heard me.

**R** Rob Mineault 46:47

That's the worst autotune I've ever heard.

**J** Jesse Ruben 46:50

But, but that being said, I have also I've also been called to like, perform at someone's 50th wedding anniversary with everyone that they've ever loved who's still alive. I have I got a call once because this woman was in hospice care in a hospital room here in New York. And one of her the last things she wanted to do before she passed away was to have me play songs for her and sing them with me. And so I've you know, I've gotten to have some really special amazing experiences that most people never get to have. So it's it's a balance for sure. And it in it doing stuff like visiting schools and working with young people it really makes all the other stuff worth it because the other stuff is brutal. The way that we treat creative people in the States especially - Canada, you guys are better especially with musicians I don't know about other creative fields but the way we treat musicians is horrible here. And so there's got to be stuff that makes it worth it because there's a lot that's really tough. I mean I know all jobs are tough but yeah, like rejection and disappointment and all that kind of stuff. So so being able to have these like really special human connections is really what makes it worth it.

L Lis Malone 48:08

You know last week we debuted a song thatour very own Ryan wrote. Glitter and Spangles.

S Steve Barclay 48:18

Written for Lis herself.

J Jesse Ruben 48:21

What's a spangle?

L Lis Malone 48:23

I don't even know if we know what a Spangle is.

R Rob Mineault 48:27

Isn't it like a fringe? I don't even know why where we got that term from. We don't even remember our our own Podcast references.

J Jesse Ruben 48:41

Oh, I was just about to grab my guitar and make up a song called glitter and spangles but I won't. We'll see.

R Rob Mineault 48:51

You'll be getting an email from Lis demanding that you write her several songs.

**L** Lis Malone 48:58  
The song challenge was the he write a song called Glitter and Spangles and this went on for like the year. But he came through.

**J** Jesse Ruben 49:07  
I didn't know that I was talking to like a real musician. I would have been way more nervous.

**R** Ryan Fleury 49:12  
I've got 11 guitars sitting here and my Guitar Dungeon . Come and jam with me Jesse.

**J** Jesse Ruben 49:17  
Who needs 11 guitars? I have three and it's my job.

**R** Ryan Fleury 49:20  
Yeah, you need you need different guitars for different styles.

**J** Jesse Ruben 49:29  
That guy with the sunglasses he needs 11 guitars.

**R** Ryan Fleury 49:35  
Come on over.

**R** Rob Mineault 49:37  
Well, listen,

**L** Lis Malone 49:38  
You didn't know you were in the presence of greatness. Ryan. I love it.

**R** Rob Mineault 49:43

Rob Mineault 49:15

Anyone who can rhyme something with Spangle...

L

Lis Malone 49:46

For sure throughout the whole song.

J

Jesse Ruben 49:49

Yeah, ankle, rankle, wrangle...

L

Lis Malone 49:54

It was wrangle. Also not a song for children. You don't want to do you don't want to do a cover of Glitter and Spangles.

J

Jesse Ruben 50:11

I mean, I've definitely I've definitely had like kids, like when I would I would visit a school. And then I like if I'm coming back to a town or somewhere nearby, like six months later, and you know, like a bunch of third graders come with their parents, and then they're just like, horrified by what's what they're hearing. I've definitely had that before, and I'm like, sorry, guys. We're not at your school today. We're in the we're in the world. But

R

Rob Mineault 50:41

Listen, Jesse, I know we have to let you go because you have other commitments.

L

Lis Malone 50:48

Like actual important commitments.

R

Rob Mineault 50:49

Exactly. Listen, please come back and talk to us because you have so much going on, we didn't even crack the surface. So let's do a part two.

J

Jesse Ruben 51:02

Absolutely 100%

**R** Rob Mineault 51:03  
In fact, we'll we'll invite you over to our anniversary show. That's where things get really wild.

**J** Jesse Ruben 51:08  
I don't know about about Lis, though.

**L** Lis Malone 51:11  
There are lots of there are drinking games and everything.

**R** Rob Mineault 51:14  
Right. But in the meantime, if people are interested in finding out more about you, booking you to go to who god knows where ..

**J** Jesse Ruben 51:27  
Yeah, so if you if you're interested in the We Can Project, you can find a bunch of information and cool videos and behind the scenes stuff at [www.wecanwecanwecan.com](http://www.wecanwecanwecan.com). That was the best website I could find. Trust me, I tried. And then for my actual non school related stuff. [www.jesserubin.com](http://www.jesserubin.com). You can find me and the We Can Project on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. I'm very easy to find.

**R** Rob Mineault 51:57  
So yeah, we'll have everything in our show notes as well, for anyone who's interested.

**J** Jesse Ruben 52:02  
Awesome. Thank you so much for having me, guys. This was really fun.

**L** Lis Malone 52:06  
Thank you for coming. Thanks, Jesse.

**J** Jesse Ruben 52:09  
Yeah, of course. I need to buy like eight more guitars.



R Ryan Fleury 52:11  
Yeah, we'll talk. We'll talk offline.

R Rob Mineault 52:15  
Listen, if there's any you don't want, plenty of room on this wall over here.

R Ryan Fleury 52:21  
Excellent.

J Jesse Ruben 52:23  
But anyway, thank you so much for having me. I love what you guys are doing. I think it's really important. And I really appreciate being a part of this. So thank you for having me.

R Rob Mineault 52:30  
Awesome. Thanks, Jesse. And thanks for all the work you're doing.

J Jesse Ruben 52:33  
Thanks so much, guys.

R Rob Mineault 52:37  
What a cool guy.

S Steve Barclay 52:39  
Yeah.

R Rob Mineault 52:41  
So it was he he was presenting to the teachers conference, is that is that right, Steve?

S Steve Barclay 52:49  
The SETBC district partners meeting. So SETBC for those who don't know, it is our provincial

agency that deals with technology for kids in the K to 12 system for low vision, blindness, physical disabilities, augmentative communication, whole the whole shooting match. And all over the Province, they have partners and districts who interface with the classroom teachers and you know, help direct to technology that's going to go into the into the district. So they were all together for a planning meeting. And you know, as he said, one of the principals in charge of SETBC, found him at the at the Principal's conference. And yeah, dragged him, dragged him into the district partners meeting and he sang some songs and talked about the We Can Project a bit and yeah, it was a fantastic experience. He's he's a super talented singer, songwriter, and I just, I knew I wanted him on the podcast.

R

Rob Mineault 53:51

Yeah, it is amazing. It's amazing that he goes to places like Mackenzie, like I'm blown away by that. In my entire time I was there, they never brought anybody in for like an assembly or anything like that. We had nothing. So that's it's it's really great that you know, communities like that can actually get somebody like Jesse who you know is not only spreading a really positive message through the We Can stuff. His energy is kind of contagious.

S

Steve Barclay 55:13

Our favorite listener to the show Shan called me up a couple of days ago, and pointed out a rebrand that a Canadian city has been doing to promote tourism. They've thrown out a bunch of new slogans and they've run into some hot water for it. For example, one of the slogans is "we're the city that rhymes with fun". Now, based on that, can you guess what the city is? That rhymes with fun?

R

Rob Mineault 55:44

Yes, we are the city that rhymes with fun wow, I'm drawing a blank. What city rhymes with fun? I don't know.

S

Steve Barclay 56:03

Okay, well, I'll give it away.

L

Lis Malone 56:05

This is in Canada?

S

Steve Barclay 56:12

I'll give it away with the second slogan here. "Show us your Regina".

R Rob Mineault 56:23

What, really?

S Steve Barclay 56:25

Yeah. Regina's Tourism industry or agency posted these out on social media accounts and yeah they got they got slaughtered for it.

R Ryan Fleury 56:37

We rhyme with fun? Oh my goodness

R Rob Mineault 56:41

Wow that's some college students in in charge of their marketing.

L Lis Malone 56:49

Good and I got called out because I said I thought it was a funny name.

R Ryan Fleury 56:53

Yeah, yes.

L Lis Malone 56:57

Apparently I'm not the only one. Their own marketing people.

R Rob Mineault 57:12

See, man she never forgets.

L Lis Malone 57:14

I don't and I yeah, I know. I'm a grudge whore for sure.

R Rob Mineault 57:22

There you go. Ryan, there's the next song.

R Ryan Fleury 57:27  
Maybe I'll reach out to Jesse after we collaborate.

L Lis Malone 57:30  
Another song not for children. I'm gonna I'm gonna start getting these bizarre emails from Ryan. Lis, can you answer a couple questions ...

R Ryan Fleury 57:47  
That's right. How many bumps on your ass?

L Lis Malone 57:51  
What material is your preferred panty?

R Ryan Fleury 57:58  
Fishnet or nylon?

S Steve Barclay 58:02  
We'd better wrap this up.

R Rob Mineault 58:04  
We started this show very wholesome.

R Ryan Fleury 58:08  
And then I'm getting words coming to my mind for this Grudge Whore song. Fishnets, nylon, stockings, fun...

R Rob Mineault 58:18  
Yeah. All right. Well, see this is a genius at work, right? This is what happens. It's how the magic happens, folks. Hey Lis.

L Lis Malone 58:33

Hey, Rob.

R Rob Mineault 58:35

Did I go to the right person? Is that right? We haven't talked together for so long that I don't even know who I'm going to. Where can people find us?

L Lis Malone 58:44

They can find us [www.atbanter.com](http://www.atbanter.com).

R Rob Mineault 58:47

Hey, they can also drop us an email if they so desire at [cowbell@atbanter.com](mailto:cowbell@atbanter.com)

S Steve Barclay 58:58

And much like our guest, Jesse, we can also be found on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter. Now what?

R Rob Mineault 59:05

Oh, so okay. Yeah, we have some news. Apparently, we lost the password to the Instagram account.

R Ryan Fleury 59:12

Well, yes, we've lost the password. And Instagram will not let us reset it. So when you click the Reset Password like they send you an email, click here to reset your password. You click there and you get a page not found. So Instagram has fucked us over.

R Rob Mineault 59:29

Yeah. So we've lost that picture of Ryan eating pancakes forever to the sands of time. Yeah.

R Ryan Fleury 59:39

No Instagram for now. Anyway.

**S** Steve Barclay 59:44  
So how about Facebook and Twitter? We still got those right?

**R** Ryan Fleury 59:47  
We do. Yep. Yeah. All right.

**R** Rob Mineault 59:49  
That's it?

**S** Steve Barclay 59:54  
Yeah, that's, that's all there is to it.

**R** Rob Mineault 59:58  
Well, then I think that is going to do about do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course to Jesse for joining us, and we will see everybody next week.