

PODCAST Episode 372


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SPEAKERS

Lis Malone, Rob Mineault, Colleen Connor, Ryan Fleury, Steve Barclay


 Rob Mineault 00:09
Hey and welcome to another episode of AT Banter,

 Ryan Fleury 00:24
Banter, banter.

 Rob Mineault 00:26
This is the podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault and joining me today Mr. Ryan Fleury.

 Ryan Fleury 00:44
I'm always here What do you mean joining you today?

 Rob Mineault 00:46
Yeah, well listen there will come the day where you will not be joining us. And then and then it'll all make sense and it will all fall apart. Hey, but hey, look, who else is here. It's Miss Lis Malone.

 Lis Malone 01:02
Assuming I don't end up on the cutting room floor. Hi, Lis Malone here.

R Rob Mineault 01:09
Listen, everything that comes out of your mouth is gold, we keep every every single syllable in the show.

R Ryan Fleury 01:20
Wow.

L Lis Malone 01:20
That's lazy editing on your part for sure.

R Ryan Fleury 01:24
I'll have to start listening to the shows.

R Rob Mineault 01:33
A lot of shenanigans happening when you guys aren't listening. How's everything going with you two?

R Ryan Fleury 01:41
Fantastic.

L Lis Malone 01:43
Beautifully. Yeah, yeah.

R Rob Mineault 01:48
I'm suspicious. Really?

L Lis Malone 01:50
Yeah. You know, what's the the whole thing if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. So I'm not gonna I'm not gonna badmouth certain tech companies right now. But yeah.

R Rob Mineault 02:00

R Rob Mineault 02:06

Well, listen, let's let the audience in on on what's going on? So uh, you got a new computer? Is that the deal?

L Lis Malone 02:12

I had to get a new MacBook Pro. Yeah. And my last one was in 2019. And I just don't remember spending anywhere near this much, five years ago. So congratulations to all those holding Apple stock. You're welcome. That's all I can say. Alright, so I'm really looking forward to having someone from Apple accessibility to join us on the show. That would be really helpful. Yeah. So we won't hold our breaths.

R Rob Mineault 02:50

No, it's yeah, definitely don't hold your breath. Because we need you for next week.

L Lis Malone 02:54

So stay tuned. We'll see.

R Rob Mineault 02:58

Hey, although speaking of the show, we should get this thing going because I'm excited about today's show. So hey, Ryan?

R Ryan Fleury 03:08

Yeah, Rob?

R Rob Mineault 03:10

What the heck are we doing today?

R Ryan Fleury 03:12

Well, making her fifth appearance on AT Banter (yes I checked), her fifth appearance on our show is accessibility consultant, audio description trainer, vlogger podcaster and advocate and I guess honorary co host of at banter, Coleen Connor. Welcome back.

C Colleen Connor 03:34

Yay. I was very tempted to go well, you're in luck because I'm from Apple. But I must, I must

admit to being a Windows all the way person. I've noticed a lot of a lot of times when any of us have updates, we immediately get that like trying to get on social media and like other places, and trying to explain to people - like keep in mind when my technology stops talking to me, I can't use it. So I don't I currently don't have a Braille display or anything. So I am s-o-l when something stops talking to me and it is very frustrating when you're trying to start a new machine. So I feel your pain as far as oh yeah, I have to log back in. Okay. 67 passwords. Which one is this one? Maybe I should invest in something now that I have five email addresses. I need one of those password managers.

R

Ryan Fleury 04:53

Yeah, I keep thinking about it too.

R

Rob Mineault 04:55

Those are great. I actually signed up for One Password and it actually has saved my life on multiple occasions. Very good idea.

C

Colleen Connor 05:03

Not to be a downer at all, but I also have discovered that one of my friends of the family, she had her father pass away very suddenly. And they were saying that the only reason they were able to get into the computer and the phone at all was because they had the, like password thing. One of those services and the, all the kids and the mum had the password to log into the site, you know, the program itself, and then they were able to get in. So something to think about when you're planning those, those practical things like dying. Keep in mind, morbid way that we have a lot of passwords for a lot of stuff. And companies, legal departments do not care. You have to have the passwords or the permissions. And a lot of times if someone passes away, suddenly, they're still, you know, they won't open phones, they won't do stuff.

R

Rob Mineault 06:19

So thank God, that's my worst fear - I drop dead and then I don't want people on my computer after I'm dead.

C


Colleen Connor 06:27


Oh my god, I'm going to cut back from the dead. It'd be like blast my cache! Ctrl, Alt Delete!


R


Rob Mineault 06:38


I'm gonna have to actually write that into the will. Do not check my search history.


 Lis Malone 06:49
You realize now the the the perverse gears are turning?


 Rob Mineault 06:53
Well, of course.


 Lis Malone 06:55
What in the heck are you googling


 Ryan Fleury 06:58
Animal husbandry?

 07:02
Well, I will say as someone who does audio description, I am a I am a very proud person who represents no censorship. So you really never know what you're going to be looking up sometimes for describing and your search history becomes very weird.

 Rob Mineault 07:25
Research and, you know, I'm always growing as a person. So I'm always researching stuff. That's all I'm saying.

 Ryan Fleury 07:32
But anyways, estate planning with Colleen Connor.

 Colleen Connor 07:38
Such a morbid topic, but it did. It struck me recently.

 Rob Mineault 07:43
Well, listen, let's get this back on track before before we go far too far afield. I went back and checked. The last episode you were on was in 2019. So I can't believe it, it's been five years since we actually had you on.

C Colleen Connor 07:59

I know. It's crazy, right?

R Rob Mineault 08:02

It's hard to believe but so maybe we should just give the audience a little bit of a refresher. Just a little bit about yourself, a little bit of your background and what you're up to with the Audio Description Retreats.

C Colleen Connor 08:15

Yeah. Um, it is very strange, because I will say, I was like, I think this was the first podcast I was ever on. I guess I'm Colleen Connor. I use she/they pronouns. I am middle aged and white. And I normally have a pixie haircut that is some sort of color in the pink or purple arena. I am the owner of Audio Description Training Retreats now. So the company that I started in 2015, with a colleague of mine, Jan. Jan has retired, and I have taken over the company and we are all virtual. I was able to start doing virtual Audio Description training. And in one way I miss the physical actual retreats because being with people you know, especially as someone who you know, losing vision and now pretty much no usable vision left, not being around people physically during the entire pandemic experience was I think all of us kind of had a weird worldwide experience with that. But especially as you know, people with disabilities, it's one of those things, especially with blindness where videos great, but everything we do is a glorified phone call. So I can't see you. So I often am reminding people connection can be very important. But I think the good thing that it did was really open up the possibility of much more acceptance of people working from home, and doing remote classes and signing up for remote opportunities, and sort of a different perspective on disabilities. I've found in the last few years that I have moved away from having to build as much awareness. Like a lot more people during the pandemic became aware of Audio Description, because the streaming services became very popular. And I started out in the theater, community, and sort of museum tours, I graduated with a degree in music theater. And so I started out in that space. And then in March of 2020, I moved to Los Angeles. And it was March of 2020 I had these plans for getting more into the film and television and streaming industry and kind of, you know, getting a fresh start in a different place entirely. And found a place with my partner and my guide dog. And promptly we got locked in the one bedroom apartment that we found for, you know, three years. So I was able to still network a ton and being on the Pacific coast timeline, both with Vancouver and LA and Portland, some of the major contributors to audio description. I was able to still do that. I was in LA for about four years. So kind of the chunk of time that I haven't talked to you guys I was in Los Angeles, I did enjoy it quite a lot. But it definitely wasn't the experience that I thought I would have. Because I think a lot of people were like, oh my god, what are you doing in LA? And I was like, the same thing you're doing - going to the doctor's, sitting at home, maybe going to the grocery store and walking around the block. But yeah, in that time, I also inherited Audio Description Training Retreats, and I have hired some contractors who are all former grads, and I'm still developing and teaching classes. And I have really moved hard into the Audio Description space. I was on the Certification Committee for about three and a half years. And then I left the committee for developing the certification, because I just was getting burnt out. And I also really didn't want ADTR to lose momentum, because I feel like we're we're gaining a good reputation and kind of have a solid program that

I'm passionate about bringing audio description to you know, more blind and visually impaired professionals and globally. You know, international teaching all over the world. And that's the good thing about remote learning specifically is that I can collaborate with more international talent. So I wish I could do more than I'm doing. But I'm also trying to recognize the limitations of being one person and kind of the, the limitations we have as humans with human issues and all that jazz. A very business heavy focused few years. Yeah, I'm, I'm happy to be back on the podcast. I was very happy to hear from you.

R

Rob Mineault 14:45

Well, listen, we definitely we definitely missed you for sure. I can't believe that it's been five years. I mean there's nothing like a pandemic to make time fly. But I want to I want to talk a little bit about the retreats. So refresh my memory, how old is the the Audio Description Training Retreat?

C

Colleen Connor 15:04

Yeah, so ADTR started in September of 2015. So we did our first training on Ocracoke Island in North Carolina. And we always did our Retreats in North Carolina because that is where my colleague Jan was from. She worked with Arts Access down there doing live theater description, and live event stuff. And so that's kind of where we started, just because that was what we could kind of afford with renting spaces and, you know, providing that experience to people. Luckily, we built just this remarkable network of individuals. And we've really, really loved doing it. And then when 2020 rolls around, it just became so uncertain. And then of course, the pandemic happened. And so we really just strung it together as fast as possible to, to keep classes going. And we went on Zoom. And I have been teaching on Zoom ever since. We unfortunately didn't go back to, to the trainings in person.

R

Rob Mineault 16:31

So previous to the pandemic, was there no online component at all to anything? So this is interesting. I mean, for a lot of people, I know, for the organization that I work for, you know, they had to, they had to pivot to sort of online programming during the pandemic. And we realized the benefit of that was, well, we can expand our reach, we can continue some of this online programming and serve people outside of the the area that we normally constrained to when you're dealing with face to face programming. Have you have you found that adapting a lot of a lot of the material to the online world, that you're actually able to increase the amount of people that you can train?

C

Colleen Connor 17:22

Oh, yeah, for sure. I think it's limited only by the capacity that I have. And then in finding other individuals who are almost all graduates from my program to work with me on developing and training. And like I said I always want to be doing more than I do, because I have so many ideas. There is a lot of interest and word sort of got around about most of the people who are considered some of the best in the industry were trained by ADTR. And so now, what I have

found, is that internationally, I certainly have trained a lot more people around the globe than just in the United States. I think, before we had people from Lebanon, and Brazil, and mostly the States and a couple from Canada. And then when I went online, I have now covered every continent except Antarctica. So lots of countries have joined the list. And we were able to teach more individuals at a time as well. But I still keep class sizes small because that individual attention and the feedback and critique of both peers and people who are professionals in the industry is part of the value of what ADTR offers. And so, yeah, it's just been trying to adapt and sort of grow the business without losing too much of the hands-on care and, you know, passion that that you have in person in these these retreat atmospheres, right?

R

Rob Mineault 19:37

And was it hard to adapt and pivot to sort of online or did the nature of the material make it not so much of a too much of a painful experience?

C

Colleen Connor 19:49

I think that I have found the film and, you know, pre recorded media content was no problem. In fact, it was almost better, because you kind of had to be part of the technology at the same time that you were teaching it. The harder class that I am still working on, and keeps getting kind of pushed down the wayside because I'm trying to keep up with other things is the live theater and events class. And transforming the tactile tour Workshop, and the live theater equipment demo, and stuff like that into an online setting, and how to make that useful and engaging, especially to not only sighted people that consider themselves describers but people - I want everyone to be able to take the classes and for them to be accessible. So, working with deaf blind and blind individuals, you know, a lot of us that live theatre space tends to be, you know, oh well dance, you know, and how do I, how do you describe dance from a completely online perspective? How do you get a sense of equipment and venues and what people really need without visiting their site? And I think that is still presenting a little bit of a challenge, because there's, it's one thing I feel like, you can have the real time feedback and critique of the, you know, web content, or education, or film or television, but trying to have people practice live description, while still being over the Zoom platform, and you can't create that same sense of something, you know, not being able to be there, when they go actually try something out. You know, giving people the inspiration to be like, you just gotta go do it, you know, you just gotta go to the theater, you just got to do it, but not being able to, like go with them. And, you know, so it's a switch that I haven't definitely fully made yet. So that's the piece that's difficult.

R

Rob Mineault 22:34

I'm curious sort of about the material and how the the courses are structured. Now, are there sort of different career paths through, you know, audio description? So for example, is there a writing component for people that just just want to do the writing? And then there's voice talent. And then off of that you've got people who maybe just want to describe things like TV and movies and then there are the live describers? Do people sort of pick a path or are more more people more or less generalists that kind of want to do it all? And are the courses sort of structured to accommodate either or?



Colleen Connor 23:13

So I sort of started off with in the middle of this historical kind of transition with audio description, there was a huge technological transition from the 1980s, to where we are now. And so, you know, a lot of the first people who were doing audio description in the 80s you're recording reel to reel or you're doing live description, and there's, you know, 15 of people, and they're training other people. And, you know, it was a lot of sighted individuals ended up training whether it was the live theater space or the television film space. You know, you had simulcasting so you had like the turn the radio to the same station as the TV and then you had the SAP channel. So where you'd be hearing something, you know, dubbed in Spanish, you would, okay, that's got to be, you know, where we put the audio description on here. And then we've moved into this digital space of okay, well, DVDs and you know, Blu ray and streaming. Okay, so now you can turn on and off the audio description. There's all these different features. And we've also progressed a little bit legally in that things started to be mandated differently. You know, people saying you have to have access. You know, something like audio description option is knowledge. And knowledge is power, and education as a whole. You know, I wish I'd had somebody with descriptions of stuff in high school and college, I mean, that would have been great. And there's still this, this transition that audio descriptions not quite as well known as captions, but it's starting to be offered more, and people are starting to hear about it more. So the awareness still needs to be raised. But, you know, it's starting to get up there. So words kind of getting out about audio description, and especially in the film, and television, and internet, as that becomes more accessible to almost everybody. That's what people are hearing. And so I think there are people who have been describing for a long time, and there are the people who consider themselves, they'll often say, I'm a describer, or I'm an audio describer. Because they can kind of do it all, because they were doing some of the film and television scripting, and voicing. And they are the ones watching the performances and writing, you know, pre show notes, and, you know, kind of inventing different processes in all these different places that organically audio description just kind of developed. You know, there's still no current certification or like solid standards there. You know, there's best practices, but as far as North America goes, there's no like solid use of the rules. And it's half art, half science. So somehow, the blind people got left out of the space for a while. And now that we have access to the internet and stuff, blind individuals are coming more into the space as a community saying we need to have, why isn't the software for this accessible? Why aren't we being taught how to do audio description, then audio engineering? And what's the deal? So when I first developed the program, we had two different classes, and one was like the first level of class that you take, and that was kind of getting people to the what is audio description. What is the history of this so far, and then it was all let's practice. And you will describe this entire film by the end of it. And so that was sort of where we started. So we call that sort of the fundamentals or like the, you know, introduction. And then we did a Level Two, which is where we introduce things like the Tactile Tour, and we've had people make like tactile art, and give a presentation, then do art description, as well as, you know, some pre recorded stuff and dance and had people bring examples of something that they had done since, you know, the first training. When we were able to move into the virtual space, I was like, there is too much going on with technology, and the industry is changing. There was writers on strike, and actors on strike, and there was a lot going on, where this process is still different within different companies. But there are definitely distinctive roles. And you can't really say just describe anymore, because it's actually very, it's quite deceiving. Because that leads it to, well, blind people can't do that, because you can't be a describer if you can't see. And it's like, well, that's not the only part of the process here, especially when you're producing, you know, streaming or whatever, you

know, pre recorded ad. And so I've sort of changed to having fundamentals be the basis of, you know, kind of a really broad pyramid base of this is what audio description is, this is the history of it. This is who the audience is and why you might be doing this. This is Disability Justice, and kind of the space you're stepping into. And here is all the different jobs within audio description. And if you find a niche within here, then the next class that I have is called Writing for the Screen. And the class is going to be opposite - it is writing for Live Theater and Events. And then I want to move into like more a Masterclass kind of stuff. We've done some workshops and like some individual things, but really the two classes is that we solidly have offered just because of interest level have been the Fundamentals and Writing for the Screen. And so it's kind of the landscape has changed rather rapidly and blind people are starting to say, hey, we want to be involved in what is happening here. And so you have, you know, people who are considered, again, more describers because they kind of do everything within the live and extemporaneous or you know, improv space. And then you have the process of film and television or pre recorded. And in that process, generally, you have the writer, which is either a team of people or one individual who is watching the material and writing the script. You then have someone who is the narrator, so someone who narrates the script. They could record it themselves, they could also have a Recordist there could also be an engineer or the person recording. Sometimes there's a director in the session that you know, if this is an episodic show, and you're doing episode, you know, six of season whatever, keeping things on track, pronunciations and things like that. They can kind of double check. So you have, you know, possibly a director, sound engineer, and editor. Sometimes somebody wears all those hats, if they can record and edit and place the audio description in between the lines, and submit the track, you know, to whatever company has asked for it. And so these can all be separate roles, sometimes people play more than one. But in general, you have the process of writing, voicing, editing, and production. The role that still missing a lot of the time is quality control. And that is especially where blind and low vision individuals, anybody on the blindness spectrum, can be very useful in quality control. And it's something that, you know, we're sort of fighting before and trying to say to companies like, in order to achieve, you know, more quality audio description in general, you need to start using real people. And you need to start considering that someone should really be quality control once it's been recorded. And they can comment on both the voice artist, the mix of the sound and the final product, and the script. Most often, what happens now within companies is the QC that happens is someone looking at the script before it goes to the narrator. Within larger companies, like Descriptive Video Works in Vancouver, or IDC, International Digital Center in New York, some of the more well known and well run audio description companies you have project managers, and people who are assigning the jobs and dealing with the clients. And clients being you know, Disney, Netflix, all these big places that ask for audio description, it's still outsourced somewhere else. So this, these huge transitions have happened. And in the midst of all this, they're trying to come up with a Certification. But so much has changed so quickly, and people are trying to fight now for what blind people should be more involved. Why can't we be writers too? And so now, this other animal has entered the room of AI and text to speech voicing for audio description. Because the saddest thing that's that's going on since the strike and stuff like that is, as with any capitalist society, there are a lot of clients and big studios and stuff that are saying, how fast and how cheap can we do this? And that's where some of these roles are being cut out, just for the cost factor and the time factor. And it really it really dampens the quality and the development of of what audio description could be in a lot of arenas. So I'm sort of in this process of trying to adapt as fast as the industry is to be what people need. So the only classes I have been able to focus really hard on are the fundamentals and writing for the screen. And I'm still sort of developing all these other ideas and have not completely been able to, like, execute and offer them yet just because, you know, the time money, any number of things.

R

Rob Mineault 35:44

Right. Well, now I'm curious to talk a little bit about the certification. That's something that actually I was thinking about today, with it being such a new field. And I guess I when I say new, I don't mean literally new but new in the sense of a lot of these companies are starting to take it seriously and realizing that audio description needs to be attached to new content. But really, in terms of training in and in terms of certification, it's sort of the Wild West. Do you feel like this is something that we need legitimate certification, and training needs to be developed, and money needs to be sunk into these things in order to really create this quality baseline, when it comes to to Disney or Netflix wanting this, this content produced?

C

Colleen Connor 36:47

Yeah, in a way I again, I was in the room, or the, you know, virtual room for three and a half years of the Certification development. And we had a couple of community forum meetings and tried to, you know, hear more from the blind community who were interested, as developments are being made. And I think, I think that everyone's intentions are very good. I think that no one has like, you know, horrible, or, like, you know, malicious ideas of this certification thing. But I think, in a way, it's almost too soon because there is not currently a solid training or recognition within media programs within colleges and arts, schools and things like that. Not every teacher teaches accessibility in the arts. I've supported a few of my students in, you know, teaching for a semester undergrads, you know, accessibility and media classes, where you cover audio description, and captioning, and, you know, different pieces of accessibility. And so, I myself am trying to contact, you know, schools and universities and saying, again, I can't be everywhere at once, but hey, people should be aware of this. Because what happens ultimately, is that, sure, you have people who went to Screenwriting School and went to Directing School, and but no one's ever heard of accessibility stuff. They don't know that they need to have this stuff. Half, you know, more than half - 90% of people who are producers or whatever, they don't even know their stuff has audio description. And some directors I'm sure would have things to say about how their audio descriptions themselves if they knew what it was. So getting into the education space was more important to me. I said, I need to be teaching. I need to be in the community. I need to be trying to talk to producers and people who can make changes to increase representation within the industry, culturally competent audio description. And so that's a whole other thing that just again affects the quality and the authenticity of of something that could be different. And it could be added to different communities and stuff, but people aren't aware of these things. It's just in the hands of these higher up people who sort of just want to check a box. And I think if we're still in this 50/50 place of, you know, well, we'd like to check a box so that we can say, yeah, it has audio description, I don't know, it's for blind people, like captions was for the Deaf. So just do that, check, check, check, now I can do my movie. We still have that, and you have the cutting corners mentality, of, you know, cheaper, faster. And then you have this small group of people, I being in this community of people who are legitimately trying to say, hey, I train individuals on this and let's make my students aware of this so they can go make other people aware and other people they work for. And I think that right now, the Certification just fell at a time where this may not be the most helpful thing. And it may actually end up being a further barrier, especially for people who are, you know, on the blindness spectrum, wanting to get into audio description. Again, I don't think the intentions are bad. But I think that, you know, ACVRIP is the organization who is doing the certification development. And they are a rehab, and blindness service focused organization for certifications, that's what they do. And so if you want to get

certified in assistive technology, or O&M, or they're working on like, deaf blind intervenors, you go to them, and you take their certification. So our committee was developed, and the committee is still still ongoing. They have worked so hard on on this Audio Description Certification. But it is very, very difficult to consider something with no assessment based, you know, for an art. For having no assessment based testing for it, all you can do is have recommendation letters or letters of attestation. How high of an education level do we need to say people need to have how much practical experience? And I do encourage people by the way, to go and look at the certification draft, because we can send them comments through the 31st of this month. So if you are someone who is interested in reviewing their first draft of the handbook for it, it is really, really good to go. And I think the email address, I don't want to be wrong, but I believe it's comments@acvrp.org. But regardless, if people are interested, please go comment to the actual committee, about what you think about this draft document that they've posted on ACVRIP. Because again, I think a lot of it is unintentionally prohibitive. You know, just with the even just the high level of language within the document, and people in an art/science community and kind of a creative space, not really understanding maybe something more like a practical certification. Like someone who's a CPA or someone who's an engineer, you, you might understand that, yeah, you have to pay for the testing material study material, then you have to go to a testing site, you have to take a multiple choice or multiple select test, and you have to submit whatever requirements they say, and then you pass or fail, and you get your Certification. But that's a big process. And people thinking, you know, maybe they might have to go in a room and, you know, write a script for a movie and then be yeah, you're really good here. You're certified. Like, that's not what this is. So I think there's a lot of misunderstanding of what it is. And I think the fact that it's coming through a rehab lens may be what, what is going to be not the downfall, like, I don't want to be pessimistic about it. But I think that, again, just this current space that we're in, I don't know that the Certification is going to have the impact that people want it to have. I know that people would love to be certified, and would love to be certified in quality control, or, you know, as an audio description specialist, because it gives you the letters behind your name if you want a job and stuff, you know, you can put it on your resume. And it can be very helpful, But is it going to get off the ground? There's just so much. That is, like I said, I don't know if it's the wrong space or the wrong time. But I think that there is going to have to be a lot that changes about what they're what they're asking at the moment.

R

Ryan Fleury 46:20

Well, let me ask you this question. Are BMI, and IDC and Descriptive Video Works and everybody else, are they asking for certification? Are they looking for a certifying body?

C

Colleen Connor 46:33

They are not. I know that audio description organizations in general, mostly, I think what they're looking for is a good training program, a good training that they can do either internally, or that, you know, especially with writers, they need writers, they need good audio description writers, there's a lot of voice artists. And so I think what narrators are worried about is text to speech. And, you know, AI, what writers are worried about is the AI coming into the writing space. So that's a huge worry. And the larger organizations, I think, are trying to sort of grapple with that, and the budgets that they're given, and the opportunities that they're given. They're kind of having to bid for stuff now. Which is ridiculous.

R

Ryan Fleury 47:38

You know, there's so much content out there.

C

Colleen Connor 47:45

Exactly. And so these larger companies, I mean, again, it's almost like we don't have time to think about something like a Certification. I think they're looking for people where they're asking their for project managers who are, you know, dealing with 20 writers and 10 freelance writers, you know? Hey, so who do you think is really good and where to okay, we're picking up 10 more shows, we need two more writers, audition these people. I think it's just so much necessity for the companies that do things well, that they're looking for, you know, people who can come in and be good writers and know about the process. And that's why I train people the way I do, from the ground up. The more you know about audio description, and the process, and where it is right now, the better off you are, if you've practiced narration, you're going to be a better writer. You know, if you're, if you're a writer, if you're a narrator, and you've written some stuff, you're going to be a better narrator. It's just like, knowing more about the industry as a whole can be very helpful, especially as all these departments start to divide, and conquer. You might never meet the writer who wrote your script ever, you know? You're not getting to pick your narrator, right much less Descriptive Video Works. I will say I applaud them on a lot of their initiatives, such as having a blind and diverse group of advisers, trying to say, hey, where are we messing up in cultural competency? They're bringing them things like, what do you guys think of this? You know, and so I think there are people who are starting to talk to the blind community. IDC and DVW certainly come to mind. Deluxe, as well, you know, trying to consult the blind community and really talk to the patrons and listeners of audio description, rather than just producing this thing and throwing it out there. Again, wanting to be something more than checking a box. Will it change the hiring process? Right now? I would say I don't think so. You know, if you were choosing between a bunch of resumes and somebody was certified, maybe, but what's the impact right now? They're coming up with another draft and, you know, go comment and see if we can get something that that ends up helping, but you know, it's in a weird place.

R

Ryan Fleury 50:31

Well, and meanwhile, we've got more and more stuff that is being described. This year, all the movies nominated for Best Picture for the first time ever had audio description. So everybody is looking at providing more and more audio description. It's just what that's going to look like, whether it's the synthetic speech, human narration, you know, that's, that's the dilemma. And I think, ultimately, if, if you can speak multiple languages, pretty much got it made as an audio describer. And probably a scriptwriter as well.

C

Colleen Connor 51:06

Yeah, the international scene is blowing up in a big way. If you are bilingual, if you are someone who can write in French and English, if you can translate, if you can do audio description in another language, and you're from another country, but you can interface with, you know, the

larger American Hollywood kind of companies. And they're still, you know, the advocacy going on, they did have, you know, the Oscars were also described live, the Country Music Television Awards are going to be described, the Olympics... Roy Samuelsson was instrumental in saying, hey, Emmys, we need to describe this. And that means that anyone who can judge the Emmys, if someone's blind, they should be able to be part of the voting for the Emmys, which means all of these Emmy things need to have audio description. And so kind of using that Awards show piece of it as well to say, hey, what if we said that you can't have your show considered for an Oscar, unless you have description?

R

Ryan Fleury 52:21

Because the problem with that, though, is for example, Breaking Bad. I think it was like, six years after that had that series had finished, is when it became provided with audio description. So I know we're getting more day in date stuff now, but, you know, I still think we're not, we're not where we need to be.

C

Colleen Connor 52:45

And I think there's, there's so many reasons for that. And some of them are problems that I still am like, who do you need to put me in front of? Who do I need to talk to? Because for instance, things like one audio description track not going with something when it goes to another service? Why did this person describe Downton Abbey three times? Why? Why? Because it went from this channel to the streaming service to the streaming service. Yet the audio description doesn't go with it. That's just dumb.

R

Ryan Fleury 53:29

That's stupid. Absolutely.

C

Colleen Connor 53:31

So and just reinventing the wheel on things, because of lack of communication and egos is the dumbest.

R

Ryan Fleury 53:47

Well even like Harry Potter was audio described - the book anyway - I think was audio described by two different narrators, right. There's a UK version and the US version, by Jim Dale and Steve Fry, you know, like, I don't know if accents can definitely help bring you into an episode or a book. But do we need 2,3,4 separate audio describe tracks because this one's going to Paramount or this one's going to Netflix? Or this one's going to Crave?

C

Colleen Connor 54:17

The other thing is, if you're going to do it, then I want access to all four and I want to listen to the one that I like best. I want to choose between all of them. Also, I want to know who wrote it and who voiced it.

R

Ryan Fleury 54:34

They're starting to do that. Descriptive Video Works are starting to do that I noticed. I don't know if others are.

L

Lis Malone 54:40

Are you sort of crossing between description and audio book narration? Because you were talking about Harry Potter. You said the audio book - are you talking about the the description of the movie or you're talking about the actual reading of the book?

R

Ryan Fleury 54:56

The audio narration of the book was two different people, Jim Dale and Steve Fry. One was UK, British and one was the US. But it translates to movies, TV and film as well. We can have different narrators on tracks that are going with the same program, but two different services.

L

Lis Malone 55:17

But what I will say, working very closely in the publishing sphere is that the authors and the publishers have a lot of say in terms of the voice acting, and how you're taking the the written word of the author. They have a lot of input in terms of that voice actor and the style in which it's done.

R

Ryan Fleury 55:37

Oh, it's the same as it's the same as audio description. You know, we've got the Roy Samuelson's, and the Diane Newman's who, you know, every time I turn on a show, I hear their voices. They've been doing this for 10, 15 years. You know, Scott Brick, who I think did Jack Reacher series of audiobooks. I'm sure publishers say so and so wrote a book, get Scott on here because it's a best seller if Scott narrates it. So yeah, they've got their premium describers as well.

L

Lis Malone 56:03

Yeah, no, but what I'm but I'm just saying that also the author, aside from the publisher have a lot have a lot of input, and sometimes the author who may not necessarily be the best to pick and has a lot of has a lot of influence in it. So it's not just the producers, there's a lot more layers of decision makers that go into it. Some authors are reading their own. Which is a whole other bag of worms.

C

Colleen Connor 56:32

Yeah, I will say though, that, that the audiobook production has become a huge piece, and podcasting and the audio medium, has come forward a lot. And it has benefitted audio description in that people are like, oh, it turns my show into an audio book. People use it as kind of a comparison. But as I said, the, the division between the roles is, is often what happens. So you were saying that, you know, with audio books, the authors and stuff, they have a say in that. That's fantastic. Because like I said, with cultural competency, if you have a show that is all about the meaning, and the history of black women's hair, why do you have an older white lady narrating? Why do you have TTS on a fantasy series that is really gritty. And it no one taught the voice talent the correct pronunciations to put in for the screen reader. Like, there are so many pieces where you know, people are terrified, like, please don't take away real voice acting from video games with audio descriptions moving into the video game space. And so do you let AI all of this, you do TTS all of that. And so I think narrator's are now at least trying, people are trying to say, okay, we need to start having professional and culturally competent description, you can't use the same 10 people anymore. And some of some of that is scary for those people who've done it for a long time to say, wait, but I don't want to give up my job. But if you know something isn't right for you, if you can suggest someone else, you know, that's awesome. I think that diversity of narration could really, again, add quality to matching the acuity of the piece that you're watching or listening to. It is so crucial to description and the mix and everything really matters. You can not like what you're listening to because of the voice actor, not like what you're listening to because the writing is bad. You can not like what you're listening to because clearly an AI did the mix because it slams the audio, so you can hear the AD is terrible. There are reasons that we all know why this is bad, you know, what's bad audio description. We all know these things. But making something part of the process part of production, I think is is where AD falls short. Again, it's that lack of awareness. So whereas the author's but people are aware, oh, this is going to become an audiobook or oh, people are going to dramatize my play. I'm going to have say Steven Spielberg doesn't know what audio description is guarantee it. You know, people who you want to get to these directors and screenwriters and people before, you know and say, hey, this is a thing that is an art. It's part of your piece. Certainly things in other languages. No, I don't want audio description. No, this is not going to be in English, I want people to hear it in my language. It's filmed in my language, and trying to explain - yes, absolutely. But this isn't about translation and losing your art, it's about access. There's a lot of people who can't hear your film, because they can't see, and they don't speak your language. So the audio description here is the need that you need to dub this film. And trying to explain that to someone you know, there's, there's every project is different, because every film is different, because every piece of art is different. And there's no like, wrong way to describe, but there are bad ways. And it almost sounds like we need standards more than anything. I'll turn a show on Netflix. And it'll say audio description. And I look and it's got French audio description, but no English audio describe track. So like, how did that how did that pass out in that get through? Yeah, it's interesting. Each company has style guides. And so they're all different. And the company you work for might also have a style guide. So let's say, you know, from beginning process, to the end, where you're listening to AD, you have Disney that has something that's directed. And they're, that's a wrap guys on the film. Then in post production, which is sometimes like you only got like a week or two weeks before this is going into the theater, you have to do captions, you have to do AD. And captions is a legit thing. But it is like translating or transcribing, whereas AD someone is coming up with a script that fits in between the dialogue and the lines. And especially for film and television, they don't have something like a pre show that a live

performance might have, where we're going to give notes on the costumes and the plot and the sets and stuff before the show even starts to give you kind of a leg up as to the appearance and the artistic point of this and what they were going for and stuff. So they just have to fit between the dialog. And so you have people doing writing gymnastics, where everything nowadays is very fast paced, and so there isn't a whole lot of room and they got to do their craft. So first of all, you then have somebody, the project manager gets a note from Disney that says, We have xx film, and we need this described, and we need it by next week. And so that project manager then goes, okay, I have 20 people on staff who can write fast and good, because this is a high profile project. Okay, so I'm going to ask this person, but they're getting married, so they're not available. Let me ask the next person, okay, they're going to do it. That means that we need someone to QC their script, I'll have this other writer do that. And then that needs to go to the voice artist. So the writer needs a week. And then we have two days to record it, edit it, and mix it and deliver that audio description track with the movie to the client. Then the client listens to it, and says, we don't like this, this and this because you actually named the character. And so in our legal department, as it says in our style guide, you can't say names of characters that we don't have the rights to say. And you come back with well, the sighted people are seeing Skeletor and He-Man, they're seeing them. So we're yes, but we don't have the right to say it out loud. So you have to just describe them. You can't name the characters in the audio description. So then the voice artist has to come back in to do pickups which is, you know, rerecord things. And someone then has to QC and make sure that they're following not only the guidelines of the company that they're working for, but then also the guidelines of Disney, who have their own style guide. And so you're looking at two sets of standards for writing, voicing and mixing. And if you don't have the time to QC something, it might just go out. And that's when we, as the audience get crap. And we get to write back saying, wow, you said this character's names straight up incorrectly. And wow, this sucks, blah, blah, blah. And at those companies, I tell people all the time, if something's really good, say something about it. Or if something's really bad, say something on social media. It is the only recourse we have to, to ask these companies and say, hey, this was really bad, and here's why. And sometimes they'll correct it. Sometimes they won't. I think some people are starting to clue in. But getting people to care is the hardest part of any of our society, you know? I just hope it doesn't go in too much of an auto direction. I think that AI is here, and it could be helpful in a lot of different processes of AD, you know, certainly helping you with time codes, and the exactness of placing something in a silence. But writing the AD or, you know, solely voicing it. Without someone going back and teaching the TTS, actually how to pronounce this because it's not there yet. And I think having humans involved and having real humans have the nuance of a vocal performance matters. And I'd hate to see that go away. And a lot of people are really afraid right now.

R

Rob Mineault 1:07:07

Now listen, we're all afraid of AI. It's true. We could talk about this for another hour. Honestly, I didn't even get through all my questions. So which means we just have to have part two. Come back next week, same time, which we'll do, because I'm sure we have some holes in the schedule. I do think we should have you back on because I think there's still more to discuss here.

C

Colleen Connor 1:07:32

So it's a big topic right now. There's a lot to talk about AD.

R Rob Mineault 1:07:38
I've got some fun questions, too. But we'll save that for next time.

C Colleen Connor 1:07:45
I always feel so bad when I tell people like yeah, you want to really hear about the industry.

R Rob Mineault 1:07:50
Oh, no, no, this is good. This is good. It's really good to get inside insider view and just get a good sense of kind of what's going on.

C Colleen Connor 1:07:59
I just believe in, you know, I'm under lots of different NDAs. But I try to finagle my way around where I'm like, hey, you know what? This isn't damning to anyone. I'm just saying facts.

R Rob Mineault 1:08:13
It's even better. You can maybe get you to accidentally break an NDA, we can get an exclusive.

C Colleen Connor 1:08:21
Dude, I love talking to you guys. And sorry, this was like a catch up thing where I just rambled a lot.

L Lis Malone 1:08:30
I feel I feel caught up now. So I'll have all my questions ready for next time.

R Ryan Fleury 1:08:38
There you go. Perfect.

R Rob Mineault 1:08:39
This is just a warm up. This is a dress rehearsal. All right. Well, we better get out of here because there's a long show. All right. Hey, Lis? Hey, Rob. Where can people find us?

L Lis Malone 1:08:54
They can find us at www.atbanter.com

R Rob Mineault 1:08:59
They can also drop us an email if they so desire at cowbell@atbanter.com

R Ryan Fleury 1:09:07
And they can find us on Facebook and x and sorry, folks, there was no Steve's dad joke of the week this week.

R Rob Mineault 1:09:20
I know you're probably already on that button too.

R Ryan Fleury 1:09:22
No I didn't have it ready today.

R Rob Mineault 1:09:26
So that's gonna do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course to Colleen for joining us and we will see everybody next week.

S Steve Barclay 1:09:55
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