

The word maker I think is probably my favorite term to describe how I kind of see myself in this world. I think people often will ask me if I would see myself as an entertainer or as an artist or as an academic and none of those labels have really fit perfectly on who I see myself. But the term maker I think is actually really interesting because it describes my actual embodied experience of what I'm doing. Because what I do see myself as being is someone who creates, someone who is building things -- whether it be building stories, whether it be building podcasts, whether it be building web comics or even building lectures within the university to give a certain type of experience, a certain type of learning and a certain type of understanding between different people. I think a lot about representation of disability, I think about the ways that we tell stories about disability in popular culture and the ways in which those stories inform our understanding of disability, how we think about, how we understand, even how we imagine and perhaps even fantasize about disability. I think it's good when people are able to to laugh, to have fun, and to understand that disability is not just about the doom and gloom type stories that we're usually interested in hearing but uh it can also be silly and weird and different.

So I absolutely would define myself as a nerd and so my relationship with technology is a love story that has been written for a very long time. I will never forget when I was very very young my parents got me my first computer and it was a Commodore 64. Uh so this is like an old like, text-based computer. And when I got that computer I suddenly had this world that was completely different than the other world that I was inhabiting, because in the other world I was often asked to sit at the sidelines, but within this computer world I was suddenly Indiana Jones, or I was Pac-Man, or I was the paper boy throwing the paper as I'm going down the road. There were these experiences that had otherwise been either completely inaccessible to me or that had been so heavily modified that I didn't feel like I was really being included. So immediately I was drawn to computers and that evolved of course then with the creation of the internet and I found yet another digital world that I was able to inhabit beyond the typical labels and expectations that were placed upon me. Part of me says I want to be a part of building disability community, and therefore my audience is other disabled people. That's who I want to talk to, that's who I want to engage with, that's what I want to interact with. I want to have that shared experience that we can build something maybe a little different than the normative world that we're kind of constantly being asked to wedge ourselves into. But at the same time, I also have had lots of really good success in talking to people who don't identify as disabled, people that see themselves as "normal". And in some ways I think that there's actually some real power in challenging those understandings of normalcy. And I started using the internet as a tool to educate people about disability and more specifically to try to tell a different story than the typical biomedical ideas that we see represented in most popular culture. So I wanted to tell stories about inaccessibility, I wanted to tell stories about resilience, I wanted to tell stories about the amazing things that people do, and I wanted to make a space where people could be, whether or not they had a disability. That we could see our shared humanity. Um and so without digital technologies, particularly without web connected technology, none of that would be possible. I wouldn't be able to do half the things that I've done. So I would say I'm in love with digital technology and I hope that it loves me back.

When you get into things like uh video for instance, uh there's a real physicality to producing video that I don't think people realized until TikTok existed. So it wasn't a creator of one but rather I had to see myself as a member of a broader team. My life is not one of independence but rather about codependence and about interrelationships. My relation, my life is really built upon all of the people around me that provide things that I need to live, and all the things that I'm able to provide for them to make that this is not just a one-way experience rather but rather we're actually cohabitating, co-facilitating, co-working. And so when I started to think about creating and about getting involved in media production, one of the big things that I had to step back from is to say art isn't necessarily something that has to be created in isolation. In fact some of the best art is created by lots of different people bringing lots of different ideas together to make something that's far more interesting than just the voice of one white guy in Southwestern Ontario. And so I think one of the ways to get over some of the barriers that I've faced in creating has been about expanding the creative process. I'm trying to put together into a cohesive full picture which often requires really dense language and how do I turn that into something that is not just uh accessible in terms of like transcripts for people that physically cannot hear it, but also how can I produce content that's accessible to lots of different types of listeners, different types of people who have different backgrounds at different education levels, who have different ways of processing information. How do I make that content accessible for everyone else? That was a really difficult question and one that I'm still definitely definitely working on today.

So I had some political reasons why I didn't really like TikTok, at least at the early at the early phases of the platform where they were basically de-platforming people that didn't look the way they wanted them to look. So, disabled people or poor people for instance. However TikTok has since been kind of like taken over and corrupted by disability rights activists in the last eight to 12 months, especially during COVID. And so I'm like well, the platform itself might have some questionable politics but the beautiful disability justice community has sort of infiltrated it and said you know what we're going to use the masters tools here to be able to get our message out and that's actually really exciting. And so maybe it's not a platform I got in at the ground floor but I've definitely had my finger like hovered over the install button of TikTok more than a few times in the last few weeks.

If you start to produce content and you're talking about disability issues, you're advocating for yourself and others, people will also find you. Uh so if you find someone that's really cool and you're like "whoa I love what this person is talking about," go to their follower list and see who's following them, see who they're following and you can start to build these sort of asynchronous networks. Don't go after the audience. Make some amazing stuff and let the audience that loves that come and find you. The most important thing is to actually start to put one foot in front of the other. So if you want to do podcasting, start making the worst podcast in the world. Make an absolute garbage podcast and then make another one, and then make another one, and look back on the things that worked and improve and improve and improve. Art is I think an iterative process, creativity I think is an iterative process, so don't try to make the podcast that changes the world on your first episode, try to make the podcast that starts the conversation and then go from there.