

The Wheelchair Activist S3 E6 Transcript

Disability in Relationships

Emma: We are already halfway through the third season of this podcast, and I hope you're having as much fun listening to it as I am creating the episodes. If you'd like to support the podcast, you can find the links to our GoFundMe and BuyMeACoffee in the episode description. Another way that you could show your support that is completely free is by sharing this episode with a friend or posting about it on your social media, as well as rating the podcast on whatever platform you're listening to. This allows us to reach more and more amazing people. This podcast is truly a labor of love so any support that you can show us would be absolutely appreciated.

Welcome to The Wheelchair Activist, a podcast hosted by me, Emma Vogelmann. And every month I interview amazing members and allies of the disabled community who are quite literally changing the [00:01:00] world.

In this episode of The Wheelchair Activist, we are covering disability in relationships. A topic that I've never actually covered before. So first up, you're going to hear from a inter abled couple. That means one member of the couple is disabled and the other one isn't. They are Alex and Chloe, but you may know them as Sticks and Copper on social media.

Then you're going to hear from Carrie and Alex. They are both disabled and we talk about their relationship and how disability does or doesn't play a role in that. I hope you are as excited for this as I am.

Emma: Well, thank you both of you, my two very special guests for joining me on this episode of the Wheelchair Activist. I'm joined by the wonderful Alex and Chloe, or as you may know them from social media as Sticks and Copper. Is that right?

Alex: That is indeed correct. I'm the sticks and Chloe is the copper. A not very well thought out ginger joke.

Emma: I'm so excited to have you both on the podcast. I've done one other episode where I've done multiple people, but you guys are both in the same space. And that is because you guys are in fact a couple. And you guys have a social media presence where you talk about being a couple where one of you is disabled and one of you is not disabled.

Some people would call that interabled couple. But I'm just so excited to talk to you both, and I suppose let's start at the beginning. Let's talk about how you guys met.

Alex: Whenever someone asks us this, it's always quite [00:03:00] amusing, because I started off by saying Chloe slid into my Instagram DMs, which is technically correct,

but she would argue that there's more to it than that. I had a personal trainer that had his own Instagram following due to his disability and he'd been on various daytime chat shows to discuss his journey with his disability and fitness.

He trained me and he would put me on his Instagram story to, you know, promote his business. And Chloe was following him, and at the time, I was going through a fairly rough patch with my mental health, let's say, and I didn't really care for what I put on social media.

I put out a rather, sort of, moody, [00:04:00] late teens, uh, early twenties, "Ugh, I hate being disabled, bleh." Instagram post, and Chloe responded just saying, I hope everything's okay. Uh, you know, I hope your day gets better. Um, you know, I'm rooting for you, kind of thing. And I went, oh my god, pretty female and we just got, we got chatting

Chloe: Such a charmer, aren't you?

Alex: Yeah.

Then one Instagram message turned into lots of Instagram messages, which turned to phone calls most nights. Which then turned to Chloe coming to Leicester, me going down to Brighton, and five and a half years later we're still at it, aren't we?

Chloe: Yeah, so that is pretty much the story

Emma: First of all, like, I think I'd not be doing [00:05:00] myself justice if I didn't say, you know, how impressive I personally think it is for a disabled person to put up a thing on social media saying that they sometimes hate being disabled and on that particular day that was how you felt. And I think that that's so incredibly important because I think as disabled people-- and I'd love to like get your thoughts on this as a couple as well-- but like, I think we can fall into this

toxic positivity, where you know, everything's great, everything's fine, because you either don't want to be seen as like, a burden or a tragedy, or you don't want people to think less of disabled people, and so lot of disabled people I think can be quite guilty of putting out only, you know, that "I'm fully accepting and love my disabled body" when that isn't everyone's reality, and it isn't, I don't think, everyone's [00:06:00] reality every day.

I think everyone goes through ups and downs with their disability and their identity. So I think, like, first of all, that was really brave to put that up. And I'm glad that you responded in the way that you did, Chloe. But I want to ask you, Chloe, before that message and sort of like seeing this disabled person online, what was your experience with disability prior to that?

Chloe: I have personal experience where my mum's got a disability. and I've been a young carer like all my life.

So I suppose in that side of it, I probably never really batted an eyelid with disability, it's always just been the norm for me anyway. So I think that's probably what, I don't know, sparked the interest as such. we just got to know each other. It wasn't, it wasn't an issue at all.

Alex: She likes collecting disabled badges is what she's saying.

Chloe: It I [00:07:00] remember that Alex said, "Oh, well I've got, um, good parking" and I said, "that's all right. My mom's already got it." but I suppose when me and Alex started chatting, we were just having general conversation about how each other's days were, et cetera, and what we're into and what we like and what we don't like.

And disability kind of flowed into it at some points, but It wasn't really a a main topic as such, it wasn't ever-- I never asked Alex, "oh can you do this, can you do that, can you not do this, can you not do that," we're just chatting, you know, because to be honest, to start with especially, I didn't actually think we were gonna ever have a relationship either. It was more just a friendly chat, so I think that helped in a way.

Emma: I think that that's really, huge, sort of, you know, having it in your family and I'm sure I'm going to ask you guys questions you get asked all the time, but I think, you know, people will be so curious, but also I'm really curious, you know, as a single disabled person. But [00:08:00] like, Chloe, from your perspective and like being a young carer as well,

do you think... I don't want to say, would that not have put you off disability? Because of course you've seen the everyday. But for you to still be open where I think, you know, all three of us on this call can attest to that, you know, in romantic dating situations, people are not always the most accepting or the most receptive towards disability. Um, personal stories offline.

Um, but yeah, did you not sort of think, okay, this is something that I know can be very heavy, it can be very big, and I am therefore not wanting it more in my personal life, or did it just really not register with you?

Chloe: I think my mum being the way she is, [00:09:00] she is very much a very strong, person, and she doesn't like relying on me. But I've always kind of taken that lead and kind of just wanted to help because when you love someone you just want to do things to make their life easier.

And then I think when I started chatting to Alex, it was kind of things that, even that, my experiences I can relate to, of how Alex sometimes felt. To be honest with you, I didn't think, I don't think I did really think about it all that much.

Alex: Well, we didn't. I mean, I'm sorry, I'll shut up I don't want to over talk you at all, my love.

Um, but I'm not a proud disabled man in any sense of the word. I don't like my disability. I don't like discussing my disability really, so we didn't. We, we just, became mates. And then we fell in love.

Chloe: Yeah, I think that's the thing, like, I didn't expect it to be the way it was

also, because [00:10:00] we're long distance, was going through a bit of a rough time with my own mental health. So, That's when I first reached out and saw Alex's and obviously I can't relate to the fact that Alex's got a disability and I don't, I don't know what that's like, but I don't pretend that I do know what it's like, but I can empathise that sometimes things are hard and having a relationship with a disabled person, to me it was just... it was, it was a natural thing.

It wasn't, it wasn't a big thing. We, we didn't think we'd have as much in common maybe as we thought we would. It was just a general chat and then I was like, I really need to meet him. I was like, I've never felt like this before with anybody else. Nobody has ever made me laugh as much. I don't like talking.

Believe it or not. I've got better, but especially then I was only 17. I didn't like talking to anybody, wouldn't do a phone call, And then I'd find calling him for like five hours and I'd be like, hang on, who is this person? [00:11:00] Um,

and then with my own experiences with my mum, I was like, okay, you might be disabled, but stay open minded because we really get on. And then as soon as we met, it was, it was no biggie. It was just what it was.

Emma: I mean, first of all, it's very sweet and very cute that, you know, it evolved so naturally, but Alex, you said something really important there about not being a proud disabled person, not wanting to talk about your disability.

I mean, first of all, I feel the need to apologize now for asking you to come on the podcast to talk about it.

Alex: Absolutely not. No, I will... I'm sorry, let me rephrase that. I'll tell you what, as a broadcaster I should have worded that more carefully than I did. Apologies. I will talk disability. I genuinely will.

But, as you covered Emma, this whole notion of constant positivity and, oh, I love [00:12:00] my life, but I can't get a job, and, oh, I love my life. But it takes at least one person to get me out the house. Oh, I love my life. But you know, there's nothing I can do to either get myself into work or really get myself into that many social situations.

That drove me to an incredibly dark place. I'm much more comfortable discussing disability now, but am I incredibly positive about my disability? No. Am I, comfortable discussing where it needs to change in terms of, media coverage, you know, how we see ourselves as disabled people?

Absolutely.

Chloe: And that's why, like, we started Sticks and Copper. He was saying how he feels, like, isolated and that he's never really been able to speak to other disabled people, et cetera, and anybody that actually gets it.

And I said, well, have you ever thought about, like, reaching out to, like, a group or something on [00:13:00] Facebook,

I suggested that and he said, well, what about starting an Instagram? And I went, "oh yeah, go on then, you do that then."

And then he said, "oh, I've created one together." I was like, right. I was like, "well, you're going to post on there then." And Alex came up with a name and everything. And to start with, I thought the name was bloody stupid. But actually I've grown to not mind it.

Emma: Not mine, but not love.

Chloe: Yeah, no, it's okay. I don't mind either or.

Um, I think it's important as well. And it's very important for me that Alex never felt like a burden or never felt, like his disability was ever a problem. And I was always honest. I'd always say, you know, well, do you want to give it a go? Do you not want to give it a go?

Type things. Alex never expected me to do any like personal care or anything to start with. But after meeting a few times, Alex kind of probably gauged that I was like,

Alex: ok with it.

She didn't do any of my personal care for, I want to say, six months to a year.[00:14:00]

Chloe: Was it that long? Maybe six months. It was

Alex: probably six months before she ever did any personal care. There is a certain level of communication and a certain level of closeness that you have to have, in my opinion. Mm. To make that doable.

Chloe: Yeah, I mean, from the get go, when we went out for our first meal, we chatted beforehand and Alex asked me like a silly question, like,

I remember, I remember this so distinctly because it actually really upset me, like, it was impactful in a way, but you didn't even realise. He asked me, is it okay if I use my wheelchair?

Well, Alex actually can't walk long distance, but he can walk, but not unaided either.

I use

Alex: a K Walker.

Chloe: Yeah, but he wouldn't have been able to get from the car park to where we were. He still felt the need to ask whether it was okay to use his chair, and I just found that shocking. I was like, why are you asking me?

Of course it is okay. Then when he actually explained to me why he asked, because other people, like he had one [00:15:00] lady say something about, I dunno, what was it?

Alex: Yeah. I, I, I went into a coffee shop with a lady that I'd met on on Tinder and there was a minibus full of disabled people that had rocked up to my local shopping centre. And I, I will probably remember this until the day I die.

A bloke, uh, zoomed into the Costa. I laughed at him, not because he was in the wheelchair, because he was playing Pokemon Go with a phone mount on his electric chair and I, I giggled at that so much. And the woman that I was having the coffee with turned around to me and went, "I'm so glad you're not like that." And I went, "Oh, okay. Cool." Uh, and then I, um...

made a swift exit. Well, I say swift, [00:16:00] I'm disabled. It wasn't that swift, was it? Realistically. but no, I made my excuses and left.

Chloe: Going back to like, on our first date, I helped Alex cut up some food and, you know, pass him his drink and things like that. And I remember he looked like he was struggling to push his manual chair. And this is a whole other thing because he's now getting a power chair, thank goodness, which has been years in the making. So hopefully that will give him some independence. He was really struggling to push his manual chair and I also am very aware that, you know, I've heard all the stories of people, you know, going and helping a disabled person just when they don't need help and being like, I'll help you.

So I didn't want to do that. But equally, I was like, Do you want some help? and then I think just open communication started from there really, wasn't it? And it was just asking, oh, would you like some help? And if he says no, then no. If he says, oh, if you wouldn't mind, I'm like, of course I don't mind.

I mean, [00:17:00] Alex, I wanted to say I thank you for being so, like, open and honest about your opinion on disability but I'm really curious how you went from that, dark place and having these really difficult feelings towards your

disability to then making an Instagram account talking about being an interabled couple.

Alex: wish my answer for this would be a bit more sort of cut and dry because it isn't. I enjoy sticks and copper. Because I enjoy doing it with Chloe. We could, we could be crocheting, and I would get the same buzz. a lot of the disability content, I enjoy making from a technical level.

Especially the podcasty stuff. I'm a trained sound engineer, I will podcast until I'm blue in the face. it's a couple's project, it's a bit like our, [00:18:00] idea of renovating a house together, even though we're not doing that quite yet. But you know what I mean? I enjoy it for that. Am I particularly proud of my disability? No, I'm not. I don't have a lot of disabled friends. a lot of it was a lot of internalised ableism.

Chloe: Sticks and Copper came out of the thing of just being like, yes one of us is disabled, one of us isn't. But We're just like any other couple. You know, we pick and we argue about the stupid minor things

Emma: But I think that that's so interesting because, of course, like I can only really speak to my own experience, but I went a very long time without seeking peer support from other disabled people because, again, uh, things like internalized ableism and whatnot.

But when I did start to make those connections and, you know, talk to other people about disability, it did feel very helpful and [00:19:00] it made me feel seen and recognized in a way that, you know, like you said at the beginning, Chloe, like you're never going to be able to understand what Alex's like lived experience day to day in his body is going to feel like, you know, obviously only you can. But it's interesting, I think, from other disabled people to talk about disability because they can get it that little bit more and I'm curious with sticks and copper, how did you guys feel and sort of navigate the potential perceptions, I guess, of what an interabled couple is like? You know, people may make assumptions. You know, we've already talked about care, the word burden has come up. mean, did you think about what types of things people might say?

What types of things people might ask? And were [00:20:00] you prepared for that as much as you can be?

Chloe: Yeah, I think we obviously always prepared that, like with everything, there's always the good and the bad. I was probably more apprehensive than

probably you were, even. Because I had some horrible experiences of people I thought were my friends, shall we say, that would be like, ooh, why are you dating him?

I was in college and people were saying really some horrible things that, I couldn't even believe people even thought like that. People can have their perceptions of what they think about us. People do all the time. I always say this to Alex, sometimes I get a bit of a wobble thinking, oh, people probably think it's me forcing you to do this.

Because Alex does so lovely things. Sometimes I think, maybe people think that I'm sitting there going, you write something nice about me. I don't know. You let the voice in the back of your head go, oh, are people thinking this or that or that? Yeah.

Um... But also I know that it's really improved Alex's [00:21:00] mental health and, perception on disabled people.

Alex: And I, I'm, I'm still very much going through that. I've... I'm very guarded when it comes to disability.

Chloe: I think it's a very personal thing, isn't it? You don't want to, create that pity party but also it's weighing it up with actually talking about the honest truths of living with a disability but equally, you don't want to then, add to the people that think, "Oh, disabled people, then if it's so hard, poor them, blah, blah, blah."

Because actually being disabled, you know, yes, there are the hard bits, like anybody's life, but there are also amazing, funny, hilarious moments that actually we wouldn't have experienced if Alex wasn't disabled.

Alex: No, they are. I got stuck in a boat at a funfair a few days ago, and I was floating around in this funfair boat.

And Chloe had to literally lift me out of said boat.

Emma: Oh my god. But I, yeah, I think it's about having that balance when we [00:22:00] talk about disability. It is really important to acknowledge both, you know, the good and the bad, and like you really rightly say, Chloe, like, everyone's life has the good and the bad, and they will also be part of whatever demographic group you want to talk about, but we shouldn't make assumptions

about people's lives and what they experience based on sort of a very limited portrayal. And I have to ask you guys about media.

I think there are a fair few movies, films, TV shows, etc. that do have interabled couples. Like I think me before you is definitely going to be one I want to talk to you about, but I can watch that as a disabled person and be pissed off with it, right? Because of how I feel it portrays my life.

But this is both of [00:23:00] your lives that that is portraying. And I saw you both physically wince when I mentioned that film title. But let's, let's get into it. Like how do you feel interabled couples are represented?

Alex: We had a fake argument over Me Before You, Emma.

Chloe showed it me, but she did tell me about the ending and I went "no I don't believe you I think you're pulling my leg" and then I got really into it for like 80 percent of the film and then the ending happened and I went "my god you weren't lying" and I went no there's there's got to be a nice ending here there's got to be a there's got

Chloe: to be a happy ever after.

Yeah. I, I don't like the film whatsoever, but I like the way the start with some of it is portrayed, we felt some of it was nice and how he felt, you know, his life was hard and blah blah blah, and then she came and was like, come on, let's go do this, go do that, because we could kind of [00:24:00] relate to that.

Alex: Alex...

yeah, that's what we did.

Chloe: Alex would never, say, for example, stay away from home before he met me, and then when he met me, we were like, let's go on holiday, let's do this, you know. But, with Me Before You, I do think it, and other films that we've ever watched, it's still the portrayal of like a disabled person's life isn't worth living.

Alex: It's pity porn, isn't it?

Chloe: it upsets me that people even have that perception and that movies are allowed to be made like that in this day and age, especially We always say that

disabled characters need to be portrayed as Being disabled but that not being their whole storyline.

Absolutely.

Emma: yeah. Yeah. I'm also thinking about other films like, the, the theory of everything. Of course, you know, Stephen Hawking becomes disabled. And then there are a few other ones as well. I think the most common portrayal of the partner of the disabled person is they're [00:25:00] sort of like this Long, suffering person who don't know what they're getting into.

you know, someone contracts an illness or you know, becomes disabled and then it really tests the whole like in sickness and in health bit. But the way that they portray the partner of the disabled person, often it's, you know, they're overworked, they're tired, they're, sacrificing everything, they're at their wits end. they don't really talk about the happy parts of a relationship and how, like you said, there's good and the hard bits as well, but.

Yes, I'm just curious how that sort of portrayal resonates with you.

Chloe: yeah, no, completely with what you said, really. I I think it is not exactly accurate because with any relationship, you know, you get the times where you're thinking you're a bit fed up and [00:26:00] whenever I feel like that, it's not even a disability thing.

It's just, you know, it could be, for example, stupid things.

And one thing I find shocking is actually, a lot of people ask me, about the fact whether Alex, got his disability, as people put it, but like, got disabled while I was with him.

And then they're actually more shocked that I've almost decided to date him knowing he's disabled, and I find that baffling.

Yeah.

Emma: I mean, Alex, I'm sure you and I have lots of stories of, you know, rejections that we've had romantically because of Our disability.

I mean, I think it was right at the top of the episode, Chloe, you said something like, well, I didn't immediately ask him, like, can you do this?

Can you not do that? And I could have a sum of money for every time a guy is messaged me on a dating app and their first question is, can you have sex or how do you have sex or, you [00:27:00] know, things of that nature. Alex, I'm sure you've had sort of similar experiences, but obviously I'm a woman you know, interested in men, whereas you're interested in women, but I'm wondering, like, what your experience sort of was on, on those sites.

Alex: Um... To be fair, I didn't go on many dates. I just, I didn't. I was, I was too busy being a pretentious art student. I never took it very seriously and a lot of it, I found quite funny. I went on a few dates with disabled people.

And, I was going on dates with a disabled lady.

We courted for about six months. I'd spent an awful lot of money. We were seeing each other most weeks. And she turned around to me and said, "I could never actually date you, Alex." And I went "go on," and she went, [00:28:00] "Because my dad thinks that dating a disabled person would hold me back."

And then I went, "do you want me to help you pick your cane up, love?" And that, that was kind of that. I was okay-- and I shouldn't have been-- but I was okay with romantic rejection from the able bodied, because I expected nothing less.

Emma: That makes complete sense that

peer rejection is Particularly hard because it's... I don't want to say like they should necessarily know better, but kind of. You know, they have a level of understanding of what your life is like, perhaps in a different way than Chloe did initially. So I get why that would hurt more.

Alex: This was about a year and a bit, two years before Chloe. This was 16, 17. 18year old [00:29:00] me gave up. And then I met Chloe, and it was quite funny, I gave Chloe all these questions in the hopes that I'd scare her off, and I didn't, and then it was like, okay, you can't scare her off, right, okay, how am I gonna build myself back up? and she has, she's built me back up. You shouldn't rely on a partner to build you back up. However,

I failed at a lot in my life, and one thing I was not going to fail at, was being a good partner. And, My whole perception of my mental health and my disability and just every aspect of my life is supported by this incredible woman that I found.

Chloe: Aww, he gives me far too much credit.

Emma: But, I do think though that while I agree that, you know, one person should never be [00:30:00] one's complete Source of like happiness and whatever,

there's no reason though why a couple can't Support each other and be each other's motivating factor. And if that's how your story played out, then that's a really wonderful thing. but I think it's so interesting that you guys have sort of worked with each other to sort of understand disability and it feels kind of like a shared understanding that you guys have in that, your experience informs Chloe's experience, because you're living that life together, and I I think that that's also incredibly powerful to have that person who has been on that discovery path with you, even though they're not disabled.

Alex: Yeah we also grew up together, [00:31:00] didn't we, really? Yeah,

Chloe: I think we did, we navigated those tough kind of teenage into adulthood years together. And one thing I would like to say is Alex talks highly about how I've improved his life, but everybody that knows me was championing our relationship because they saw how happy Alex makes me and how Alex pushes me out of my comfort zone to do things that are good for me.

and Just everything, in my life has improved and I think that's what being in a relationship should be like. And when people think, oh, a disabled partner-- because, you know, Alex can't do the physical things for me-- that my relationship's lacking.

I would completely disagree with that because for me, I don't need those physical things so I don't mind that Alex can't make me a cup of tea or open a door or pull out a chair or some of those, you know, traditional things that some people get caught up on.

For me, being supportive, being loved. that, that's what matters to me and take out the [00:32:00] disability. I think that that's how relationships should be basically.

Emma: It should be that you're both invested in, each other.

You make each other better and happier people and, you know, figuring out life together. So what if you could envision like, what is the future of sticks and

copper? Is it going to sort of continue as it is now or what do you want it to become or to be?

Chloe: I would say, Sticks and Copper, it can stay exactly how it is. It can grow, it could completely go off the end of the cliff for all as I care personally because I feel like it's opened our eyes, It's got us talking to people. It's got us out there a bit.

we've had messages saying thank you for sharing this. It's been really You know, important for them to hear. And getting those messages and hearing those stories to us, that is [00:33:00] what makes it worth it. Leaving that little bit of positivity somewhere. You know, we understand we're a tiny, tiny, tiny fish in a big pond, you know, but we don't want to be a big fish. We just want to make a slight change. We always try to say, make a slight positive Impact. Impact everywhere we go. So yeah, that's what I would say. What would you say?

Alex: Uh, you know, I want to properly get back into broadcasting. Me and Chloe eventually are gonna get married, we're gonna have kids. You know, I, Rather boringly, I mean, I know I'd quite like a fancy job, but I want a 9 5, I want you know, I want the family, I want marriage, I want loads of things, and if Sticks and Copper can document that, and we can continue that, great.

Sticks and Copper, for me, is great, Emma, because it makes Disabled people are less scary, you know, people like you, that we've now connected with. People that connect with us [00:34:00] and show me that the disabled community does not have to be scary.

Because as I say, learning and unlearning a lot of, sort of, things, disabled fear and internalized ableism. Um, I'm excited to be a bit more comfortable talking about disability. I'm excited to meet more cool disabled people. You know, bring it on. Let's all have a drink. Let's all go to Spoons and get the world's largest bar tab. You know, I don't mind how it comes, just let's all connect, have a chat, be open.

Emma: Yeah. What you guys are doing with Sticks and Copper, I think it's so important because of, you know, like you said, those individuals that you're having an impact on directly, but also for people coming across your page who might be disabled themselves and think, you know, I'm never going to find someone [00:35:00] who's accepting of my disability and people like that don't exist.

And you're showing that they do in fact exist. And then Alex you're also showing, you know, what it means to be the disabled person in that relationship and how disability both is and isn't part of the relationship. So I think it's very exciting to see what is going to come next. But I think the representation that you guys are providing is going to have a bigger impact than you can ever realize. I truly think that.

Alex: Well, thank you Emma. And as I say, it's very much possible to find Uh, fulfilling a disabled relationship, or interabled relationship, or where one person's disabled, one person's not, or you can both be disabled!

What do I care? But, you can't have this one, because this one's mine. Uh,

Chloe: But, yeah, no, this has been really, [00:36:00] really lovely just to chat to you, so And thank

Alex: you, Emma.

Emma: No, it's been an absolute pleasure. Thank you for putting up with all of my questions.

And I also want to challenge anyone who's listening to look at Sticks and Copper on various social media platform and try and convince Alex that there are lots of amazing, great, not scary-- but I am sometimes scary, I guess-- disabled people out there for you to connect with and be friends with if you want to.

Chloe: Thank you. Thank you. That would be lovely. Yeah. And this has been really lovely. Yeah, this

Alex: has been great. Made my evening.

Emma: Well, welcome, both of you. thank you both so, so much for joining me on this episode of The Wheelchair Activist looking at disability in relationships. I know one of you extremely well, the other one less well, but could you guys introduce yourselves to the [00:37:00] lovely listeners, please?

Carrie: I'm Carrie, a sort of blogger, mostly on Instagram these days. Um, but yeah, I've been blogging since 2016. yeah,

Alexander: you're okay. My name's Alex, uh, Alex Jones, unfortunate name, really. Uh, I've got a degree in film studies, and I've got a master's in, uh,

documentary filmmaking. at the moment, I'm kind of in between different things and trying to do little projects. I do little videos kind of access reviews stuff like that. But it's a very very early stages of me doing those kind of videos.

Emma: I've um, seen some of your videos with your tattoo journeys of which if you guys are not watching the video version of this episode you should because there is quite a bit of artwork on display which is very cool indeed.

Um, but, yeah, thank you so much for introducing yourselves. Um, as I alluded to, Carrie, [00:38:00] you and I know each other somewhat well, I think I would say. for one, we've been best friends, really close friends, for maybe ten or so years.

Yes.

It was actually your, blog, um, that started out our friendship because you wrote about your experience as a wheelchair user.

Although we have different types of muscular dystrophy, we sort of met through that. and I, it wasn't creepy at the time, it wasn't the phrase sliding into DMs, but I think I just did slide into your DMs, just like wanted to chat to you. And we have not stopped talking since.

But yeah, so, I would say that you are a fairly well known blogger in the disability space. You've written about so many different aspects to disability, but I know one thing that you have written about quite a [00:39:00] lot is dating and relationships.

Because, of course, everyone assumes that disabled people either don't want to be or aren't in relationships. and we're all trying to sort of break the taboo around that, and part of doing that is this episode. the previous interview I interviewed a couple where one is disabled and the other person isn't, but in your case, you guys are Both disabled.

So, first, I think it'd be really great to learn a little bit about your couple story. How did you guys meet? When did you guys start going out officially? If that's what the kids call it these days. All of that good stuff.

Alexander: it's quite funny really, it's kind of a similar story to how you two met. So I would say maybe a decade ago now, we started speaking on Facebook and it was just as friends, like um, there was [00:40:00] never anything romantic between us. I enjoyed her blogs, you know, um, I was in the Trailblazers group,

I'm not sure if you've heard of Trailblazers, yeah. And we would get into like little debates, on the groups about different issues and, um, you know, we would talk privately because we would be in, in line with each other on certain issues that other people would necessarily like maybe disagree with us.

Um, and yeah, we just became good friends, you know, 10 years ago. Uh, and then, I would just say maybe two, three years ago now, she messaged me asking me if I wanted to meet up with her.

Carrie: It was during COVID. We were going to meet up during COVID. I had planned to meet up when it was COVID and COVID happened, so obviously we didn't meet up.

so then that was put forward to a couple of years ago.

Alexander: Yeah, and, um, when she asked me about meeting up, I just wanted to clarify whether she meant a date or whether she just meant to meet up as friends. I think it's a fair question, to be fair to myself. And [00:41:00] then once we had that clarification, it kind of escalated from there, really.

Never looked back, I would say, from there. So, you know, we met up and it was more of a dating thing than a friendship thing once we got to actually know each other rather than through a screen we actually, you know, found out we had more of a connection romantically than we did, you know, just as mates.

Emma: Well, that is a very cute story. as Carrie knows, I was part of the Trailblazers group as well, but I don't remember. You particularly getting involved in any of the, let's say, like, sort of heated discussions at the time. I'm really glad that you guys found that way to connect and think that that's, super exciting.

And I think so many couples now are meeting online, but like not necessarily like on the apps and everything. I think, you know, like shared interest groups, and if you happen to be following the same people [00:42:00] feels ever so slightly more organic, I guess, then, you know, swiping.

Alexander: Yeah, it feels like a forced thing, I think, if you go on a dating app.

Yeah.

It's a bit awkward because you're just making conversation for the sake of trying to see if there's a romantic connection. I like the way me and Carrie-- I mean, it

took a while for us to get to this point. Maybe if we could go back it wouldn't have taken us this long, but, you know, when we were talking just as mates there's no ulterior motive, you're just having normal conversations and then

you create a baseline of actual friendship, you know what I mean, rather than just romantic interest.

Emma: Yeah, absolutely. And obviously you guys both knew that the other person was disabled because of course the group was for young disabled people and I'm wondering what role, if any, would you guys say disability sort of plays in your relationship, given that you're both [00:43:00] disabled?

Has there been like a greater understanding of each other? Would you say it's made things more difficult? Like, how do you sort of feel like that's manifested?

Carrie: I think it's easier in a lot of ways because I mean, you know, I've been on dates with able bodied people and there is that awkwardness. You know, you have to sort of explain everything, put it on the table. Before you even get to know the person,

you have to sort of say, these are my limitations, this is what I can do, this is what I can't do. And a lot of the times they're like, nah, I'm not really, not really feeling that. We didn't have that, did we? We didn't have to have that conversation.

Yeah, it's not official. You just get it, you know, if the other person is in a very similar situation, you just, you just get it and you can just chill and relax and crack on.

Alexander: Yeah, no, I agree with you. I think, um, when you're dating with disabilities, there's always like that initial stage of, what does this person think of my disability? Do they see me as a [00:44:00] romantic interest because of my disability? me and Carrie, when we first started dating, that, that, that's kind of removed really.

You, like, you remove that whole aspect of it and then you can just appreciate the person for like who they are. Rather than, you know, all the other aspects that come with that initial worry of will they like me because of my situation and disability.

Emma: I mean, there's so much in there that I think is so, so interesting.

I will say, Alex, though, for the record, when Carrie was doing-- I'm just airing all of your dirty laundry in this episode, I apologize. But I remember when you, um, matched with a non disabled guy, the only one who impressed me in terms of their response to your disability was someone who said something like, "Oh, we'll be able to skip the queues at theme parks."

Or something like that. I thought that's, sweet. I like that. But I know far too well, you know, the assumptions and some of [00:45:00] the shitty messages and comments you can get on online dating when you do have a disability and whether or not you're showing it, not showing it. It's just a bit of a minefield.

so Carrie, you mentioned that you've dated non disabled people in the past, but have either of you dated disabled people before each other?

Carrie: Yes. Yeah, well, yeah, well, yeah. Yeah, yeah, I mean, to me, it's never really mattered. It's just people are people, aren't we? You know, you either get on or you, you don't. You either have things in common or you don't.

I don't think it really... well, not at my age, it doesn't. I think when, when I was younger, I wasn't interested in dating somebody with a disability because I just thought... I know

Alexander: you don't like this.

Carrie: But I didn't want to, you know, I didn't entertain it because I just thought it would be too hard, you know, life's hard enough as it is.

I just thought I just don't need the extra [00:46:00] burden. But you know.

What you're saying is you wouldn't dated me 10 years ago? Probably not.

Emma: No.

Alexander: That's terrible. That's awful.

Emma: But Alex, what about you? Like what sort of your experience of dating before Carrie?

Alexander: Uh, to be honest with you, uh, Carrie is the first relationship I've ever had.

You know, when I was younger, I, I, I tried to date, I mean, you know, I, I went out in uni. I lived in a uni building not far from going out. So I was going out every night. I was, you know, doing whatever. But, you know, in terms of dating, it, it was really difficult because there's always

that worry for me, especially when I was younger, is, do they like me because of my disability, or do they just want to be friends? And for me it was always an awkward situation, was I'm kind of a relaxed guy, so I never would push that.

And to me, it was like, I'm going to wait until somebody approaches me romantically rather than [00:47:00] be too forceful with my pursuits.

So that was my approach and, you know, that, that led me being single til I was about 27 and I, you know, I fell in love with Carrie. Not instantly.

Emma: I think that that's really interesting though. And I think a lot of disabled people probably resonate with that. You know, that sort of apprehension, that fear, that anxiety over, well, is my disability going to play a part in how they feel about me, so I should wait for someone else to show interest first.

To me, that makes a huge amount of sense because if they show interest in you, then you already know if the disability has or hasn't been that deal breaker, if that makes sense, not that disability should be, but it makes a lot of sense why you felt that way.

Alexander: I think for me as well, because some people mistaken it, I've always felt like I'm a [00:48:00] confident person.

So it's not about confidence in terms of dating. I think if the opportunity arised when I was younger, I'd have happily gone on dates and, you know, met people. I've had female friends who were able bodied themselves. It's like, I don't want them to be in a situation where I'm making them feel uncomfortable, whether that's because they don't--

and that's the thing, you don't know if they're not interested because of your personality, or your looks, or your disability. Those are the three things. And for me, if I could eliminate one of those things and know that my disability wasn't an issue, then it would have been a different story. But you know, it's, it's hard to know which one was the issue.

So I was just happy just to live a chill life basically, and just be happy with the things that I do and not necessarily pursue romantic, because there's other things

to life rather than romantic pursuits. And I think that's what's great about me and Carrie is that it happened organically. Yeah. It was kind of just--

I was not looking at the time.

Yeah she was not looking for anything. [00:49:00] Definitely not. I wouldn't say that I had given up on romance, but I had kind of just accepted I'm happy with my life the way it was, you know what I mean? So, you know, it kind of just happened very naturally between me and you.

Emma: My mother is going to listen to this and think, see, Emma see?

Because, you know, I'm sort of very similar to you in that, you know, I'm happy with the way things are right now, but I know for you, you'd probably say it wasn't really, like, fear or, you know, anxiety based things like that around, you know, why you weren't putting yourself out there, but I do really hear you when it's, you know, well, which part of me are you rejecting specifically? You know, in those situations, so I do really, really understand what you mean.

So, this is something that comes up a little bit in work that I do, but we know that the world is [00:50:00] certainly not designed for disabled people in absolutely no way, shape, or form. But a lot of the times I'm thinking on things like public transport or venues, you know, things sort of like that.

How difficult do you find it going out and about as a couple, because am I right that you're both predominantly wheelchair users most of the time?

Alexander: Yeah, neither one of us can walk. What's the actual term for it?

Carrie: Um, well I'm, I'm completely non ambulant. I mean, you can sort of scoot around on your, uh, on your knees.

Yeah.

And you can sort of transfer in and out of your chair and that.

Yeah.

Which I can't do. I mean, where I live, we're, we're screwed really, because it's, it's very, uh, rural, rugged. so it's, it's absolute crap, isn't it really?

Alexander: Yeah, where Carrie live is quite difficult because there's no, um, local public transport for us to both get on.

And even if there was, I mean, as you know, we're [00:51:00] two wheelchair users trying to get on a bus.

I mean, just getting on a bus a joke, so never mind trying to get two. But the thing is, and I'm not sure if you agree with this, but I like coming down to see you even though we can't do anything.

Because we're in a long distance relationship I feel like we do what couples do. We have like a week inside and we cuddle and watch films and we chill out together.

Carrie: Yeah. Talk, chill. Yeah.

Alexander: Just spending time together is, you know, makes me happy, so. when she comes up to where I'm from on, um, Merseyside, we do, we can do quite a lot of things.

Yeah, we just plan it out. There's quite a few things we can do. It just takes a bit more foresight and planning on our part. We went on the new train. New trains on Merseyside are boss, they're really good. Four car trains, so they're completely accessible. So me and her, you know, can just get on together and get off together.

No issue whatsoever.

Carrie: You don't need a ramp, you don't need anything [00:52:00] to help roll on.

Emma: That's really great. I know from, you know, working within transport that that is very rare, that, you know, wheelchair users can travel easily together, particularly, you know, step free and level boarding and all that.

It's absolutely incredible. But one thing I'm really interested in is like any sort of public perceptions that you guys have noticed about the two of you of, you know, being out and about as a couple where you are both disabled.

I mean, do you feel like there are any sort of assumptions or any looks, sort of anything from other people that makes you sort of feel, I don't know, noticed in a way that maybe another couple wouldn't be?

Alexander: I don't think we have, have we? I don't, honestly, I don't think we have.

I'm quite an oblivious person, to be honest with you.

Yeah.

I'm not like, bothered what people are looking and saying. So, I just probably don't know. It could happen. But, like, I haven't [00:53:00] personally noticed that. I mean,

Carrie: where we go, it's predominantly around Liverpool.

Alexander: Yeah. The people there are quite liberal anyway.

Yeah, it's quite a big city and there's a lot of colourful characters, so I think the least weird thing is probably two wheelchair users going on together. Not saying that it doesn't happen, it probably does happen, you know, in our experiences anyway.

Emma: And I know that you guys have kept your relationship pretty private until somewhat recently. well, I should have said at the beginning that you guys are engaged and you know, you're planning to spend the rest of your lives together, of course, as two disabled people where I'm thinking particularly about your families.

I mean, were there any questions about like, well, have you thought about this? How is that going to work? I think with the nicest intention in the world. You know, I know for a lot of us, our parents and our family members can be a bit more involved in our lives than say non disabled people [00:54:00] of our age. And I know that, you know, it is something that you might potentially Think about, you know, when you're thinking about what your child with a disability's life is going to look like.

Carrie: Nobody's really said anything, have they, or questioned it? I think the biggest thing is housing. Obviously we want to live together, and that means, you know, bidding on, what is it, Property Pool Plus?

Alexander: They're on Property Pool Plus, which is a social housing platform on Merseyside. But it's been a bit of a nightmare, to be honest with you.

They put us in the lowest banding, so we're in banding C. Uh, which means that we're obviously lower down on the list when we bid for properties. So the issues are kind of twofold really. First of all it's hard to find a property that's appropriate for both of us, uh, as well as the location. And when I have found properties like, oh this is, this is boss, this is a good location, uh, the property is accessible, uh, we're so low down on the landing tier that when [00:55:00] we bid we have no opportunities to get this house.

Neither one of us can afford, you know, together to buy our own property. So unfortunately at the moment we have to go through the social housing route. So that's probably been one of the biggest challenges for us both.

Emma: I think that most people would potentially be surprised to hear that a couple who are both disabled would be towards the lower end of the priority for housing, particularly as you guys are in a relationship. You guys are engaged. Is that something that surprised you? Or is that typical? I know, of course, there's a huge housing crisis.

Carrie: because we're deemed as suitably housed. I mean, we both live with parents. So as far as they're concerned, you know, we've got a roof over our heads, we're in, you know, reasonably accessible properties at present. So, you know, as far as they're concerned, there's no reason for us to [00:56:00] be rehoused or relocated.

Um, I don't think they really care whether we're engaged, married

Alexander: Yeah. They don't give a shit about that. They don't care.

You know, even we made arguments like, uh, Carrie's parents are getting on a bit, you know. They're in their 70s. My, my mum and dad, you know, are in their 70s, my mum's just had a heart attack. So even though the arguments that we've made to them, you know, that it's not suitable for us to live with our elderly parents who are struggling more and more to care for us, it doesn't matter to them that we've got a suitable home.

So even though we want to live together, it's such a big, big challenge. It's, it's really difficult.

Emma: I mean, yeah, I... it's incredibly frustrating, and I can't even imagine, you know, for the two of you that, you know, are trying to plan your future and aren't sure when you're going to have that

that property available that suits both of your needs as well. [00:57:00] So, in terms of your relationship, with you guys both being disabled, I'm just, yeah, really curious if you guys feel that it's potentially made you closer? Because if you, I know you guys started out with a really solid friendship and already an understanding of each other's disability, but do you think on the day to day that that shared understanding of what each other is experiencing all the time makes you potentially stronger or closer as a couple?

Alexander: I think it does.

Yeah.

I think it definitely does. all my friends pretty much are able bodied, all my family are able bodied. And obviously I love my friends and family, but there's an understanding and a connection that me and Carrie have, that, um, you know... it's hard to describe, really.

I mean, even like I don't want to say the term microaggressions but there's a lot of [00:58:00] things as disabled people that we experience that other people just don't understand. Whether that's like the way you're treated when you're buying, you know, a product and say if you're buying a product but they'll speak to your able bodied friend instead of you.

And I'll say to somebody I know, oh did you see what happened there? And they won't even realise.

They don't notice. Me and Carrie kind of understand that and I feel like we're in tune with each other because of our shared experiences through disability.

We don't have the same disability but I feel like we have empathy and understanding because we both lived a similar type of life really.

Emma: Yeah, I mean, I think that's a huge reason why I always say that having disabled friends is so important because there are things that they will be able to understand that other people just absolutely won't. And I definitely hear what you mean about microaggressions and sort of just these little annoyances

Alexander: that [00:59:00] happen.

Emma: And, you know, having someone who understands, A, that it's wrong, but then B, how that makes you feel. Because I think, you know, you're non disabled friends, carer, family member may be annoyed on your behalf or angry

on your behalf, but they don't know what it feels like to be talked over, whereas you guys have both unfortunately experienced that, so you will understand how the other person is feeling in a way that others just, just really can't.

Alexander: Yeah, I agree, I agree. Like, I'm constantly texting you and, like, am I crazy? This thing happened today, am I overreacting? And she'd be like, oh no, this is a typical thing. Yeah, she's more like, she's more in tune with the disabled community than me. I haven't really been involved in many disabled communities and I've only just started growing my Instagram making disabled related content.

You know, it's good when you hear stories and it's similar to the ones that you've experienced. You feel [01:00:00] like you're not crazy and you feel like you haven't made it up in your own mind.

Carrie: Yeah, for me it's more of a health thing. I mean, my health is absolutely dire.

He's stuck. you know, fatigue, chronic fatigue. Other people just don't get it, do they? Even you. You think I get it? Yeah, you do. I mean, the first time we stayed over, I was sick as a dog. You were. You know, the sickest I've ever been in my life. I don't get sickness bugs, but for whatever reason that day I got a sickness bug.

And literally every five minutes I was throwing up. And I thought, well, I'm never going to see him again. Quite obviously, he's not going to stick around, is he? But, um, for some reason he did.

Alexander: No, because I remember like the next day, you're like, you didn't say just leave, but you were like--

Basically just leave.

Yeah. Yeah. You basically like, "you know, you're gonna leave me anyway."

Yes.

I was confused because I don't think it was a big deal. Like people get sick, it's not a big deal. I have [01:01:00] different experiences because we have different disabilities, but I try my best to be as understanding as possible towards your needs and stuff,

frustrations with PAs, etc. Mm. Yeah.

Emma: Were you surprised when he didn't leave at that point?

Carrie: I was yeah. I thought he'd left during the night because he stayed two nights didn't you? And I'm literally every five minutes I was throwing up. It was like a scene from the exorcist and I thought he'd gone during the night

Alexander: I'm not just saying this as a line to make myself look good but I just was worried about you. Yeah. I wasn't, you know, bothered that you were being sick.

Carrie: I don't know anybody else who would have stuck around.

Alexander: They're all dickheads, then.

Carrie: I even said to my carer, when you did, you know, eventually have to go home, I said, "oh, I won't see him again." And she said, "oh, you don't know." And I was like, "no, I won't. I guarantee I won't see him again." And she sort of went, "I think you [01:02:00] will."

Emma: I, I feel such like the burning need to say like that's so sweet or that's really cute and I think how your reaction Alex is is how it should be because say you know neither of you were disabled but you still had a sickness bug, that's just life, isn't it?

And, what I wanted to talk to you guys about is you know, you are engaged, you are going to get married and what's coming to my head a lot is, you know, the whole in sickness and in health, traditional marriage vows. And I think that, you know, you hear stories about couples where say one person becomes disabled,

and then the other person either steps up and follows through on that, "actually, I did mean in sickness and in health," or "I didn't think it was going to happen. And [01:03:00] now it's something that I don't think I can deal with." But when it comes to getting married, and the two of you, we know as disabled people that we can get ill easier, we can get ill in different ways, but I'm just, that's just really coming to mind.

I don't know resonates with either of you?

Carrie: It does, it does with me. I mean, I never wanted to get married. I've never had any desire to get married at all. Your ring says that. No, but I, I, you

know, I was never that kid that sort of imagined a big white wedding. It's just, you know, I've been to friends weddings, relatives weddings, and I just thought, "Nah, this is not me."

They're quite boring, weddings, as well.

But yeah, the in health and sickness part was that, that was the thing that always rang in my head. And we did have a lot of conversations, didn't we?

Alexander: Yeah, we

Carrie: did.

Yeah, many months in the making, really.

It wasn't a spontaneous [01:04:00] proposal, it was, um... there was a lot of thinking and talking and, "but what if this happens, or what if that happens" and I think, you know, you have to, really. Don't you? In our position.

Alexander: Yeah, we talk about everything, don't we, and it's very like... Secrets, like... as much as I'd like to say the proposal to you was romantic, it wasn't that romantic, like, she already knew for weeks.

Like, I even texted her when I was looking for rings, just because I can't keep a secret, I can't, I'm not... like, I feel awkward lying to you. I know if I lie to her she's going to find out anyway, so I'll just always just tell her the truth. So, we always just have an open relationship and talk about different aspects.

I,

Carrie: I, I tried to put you off a lot.

Alexander: You did.

Carrie: Early on you did try and put me off, yeah. I did push him away and I was like, this isn't going to work, just, you know, buzzer off basically.

Alexander: My whole thing was trying to figure out whether she was pushing me away because of her health issues, or whether she was pushing [01:05:00] me away because she didn't want to be with me.

Now, if it was the latter, then I would have happily just rolled away from the relationship. All I wanted was s for you to be happy. So if you didn't wanna be with me, I was happy just to end things.

But because you were pushing me away because of your concerns, that's when I was like, "no, look, I'm, I'm ready to step up and be the person that you deserve in your life."

Emma: Knowing you, I know that that was probably really difficult to accept, but I think it would also make sense to a lot of other disabled people who... I know that we talk about Like being a burden a huge amount as disabled people and you know the last thing you really want is to be that for the person that you love. At what point did you sort of go okay I'm going to stop pushing this person away who clearly does want to be to be with me, you wanting [01:06:00] to be with him, and he knew what he was getting himself into, you knew what you were getting into. But was there a point when you were like, okay, I'm gonna not fight this anymore.

Carrie: I don't know when the--

Alexander: I never, I never got a sense there was like a finite point in time. Yeah, there

Carrie: wasn't like anything that

Alexander: happened or--

I, I, I, I don't know like a particular point but early on-- I hope you don't mind me saying this-- you would text me and stuff, like, push away text.

Yeah. and it became less and less, and that's how I knew that she was getting a bit more sound of mind with me in the relationship, when she would stop pushing me away. It would happen like every week, then it would happen once a month.

And then, and then now it happens maybe once every four months. And now I don't think you've done it in quite a long time.

No.

Not since you've been engaged anyway, so.

Carrie: No, but I think for me, especially when you have been in relationships and it's all gone to shit and people have made it very clear that [01:07:00] they're not up for, you know, the in health and sickness part, you know, it stays in your head.

Certain things stick with you and you think, "well, if, it didn't work with them, why would it work with him?" That's, that was, that's how I felt.

Alexander: I understand that, and I was always empathetic to that. I think I got a bit annoyed early on because I felt like you were comparing me to people that, like, I didn't know these guys, you know what I mean?

They're not me. So I felt like it was a bit unfair but then, in a way, I kind of accepted the matter. It was like, well, I've got to prove that I'm different. you know--

Carrie: You are different.

Alexander: I am different, yes.

Emma: So, as a couple that are engaged, have you guys thought about the big wedding day at all and sort of what you guys want? I know that you said you didn't grow up thinking about weddings and being married and all of that, but are there any aspects of a traditional wedding that you think your [01:08:00] disability is going to impact and does that bother you or are you more just like, I want this to be completely unique and represent us?

Carrie: Well, it's not going to be traditional. No, 100%. We're not into sort of the formal ceremony or prayers and speeches and all that.

No, it'll be very chill, informal. Relaxed.

Alexander: Yeah, yeah, definitely. I think we're on the right page.

We want it to be small, intimate. We want it to be a little bit different. We had a few out of the box ideas initially. I was thinking of maybe like a zoo wedding at one point. Yeah. I think that might be too expensive, but we are looking into a zoo wedding. Uh, just something fun, like.

Yeah, a bit different.

I think weddings, as I said before, I think weddings can be really boring.

Yeah.

Really boring. Um, so I, I wanted to keep it nice, chill, and I, I didn't want the day to be a stress where we do timings. Like Carrie has to be up at 10am to get her makeup done, 12: [01:09:00] 15, we have the big photo shoots. In fact, we're thinking of doing two separate things, aren't we, having the actual ceremony and then having like a venue where friends and family can come on a different day, so Carrie and me as well don't get exhausted. And I don't like the idea of packing

all of it in one day.

It's a lot, yeah. It's a lot, isn't it?

Emma: Has that ruined my dream of being-- I don't know if you've seen the episode of Friends at Phoebe's wedding where Monica like has a little earpiece, a clipboard, and you know, is like yelling at everyone like, "go, go, go", and you know, "do this, now, do that, that." Was that my dream for you guys?

Yes, but that's fine. We could do a chilled version instead. But I think it should be, you know, fun and unique and I think, you know, there are so many Ideas and, like, traditions with weddings, I think they're becoming so much more and more [01:10:00] outdated.

Alexander: Mhm.

Emma: I mean, this is going a bit, like, feminist of me, but, like, one thing I always think about with weddings is the whole, like, you know, the father giving the bride away.

And I always think it's literally, like, a property exchange, and that bit I really don't like. And, you know, but there are so many traditions that I think people place too much importance on. But when you look at, well, what is this actually about? It's a day to celebrate the two of you in whatever way you guys want with whoever you want to be there.

So I think it sounds incredibly exciting. And I think that there needs to be far more, like, representation of disabled people in the wedding industry because I think there are so many, you know, places, uh, for, like, wedding dresses or

wedding favors or whatever it is that [01:11:00] don't sort of cater towards Disabled people. Or accessible venues, accessible experiences, and all of that.

So I will be very excited to see whatever you guys do come up with. The zoo does sound fun though, if I get a vote.

Alexander: No it's too expensive.

Emma: So is there anything that

you would want to say to disabled people who may have that worry and a fear of dating another disabled person?

Alexander: I respect people have different points of views and perspectives.

I think if you're disabled and don't want to date somebody else with a disability... how do I say it?

You don't like it.

I think it's a bit hypocritical to be honest with you. I don't think you can have your disability and be annoyed at the world or whatever your own circumstances because you're struggling to [01:12:00] find dates or whatever and then say "but I'm not going to date this person because of their disability."

It doesn't track to me. It's like you've got to be consistent with that logic and I would say just look at the person and, uh, and whether you connect on a personal level rather than their disability. I think that's more important to me.

Carrie: I get it.

I know you get it.

That was me you know, however many years ago.

Yeah, I was quite against it. Just because I just couldn't see--

Do you not think it's hypocritical a little bit?

Apparently not. A little bit. I just couldn't see how it would work practically. All I could see was the barriers and this is going to be stressful. And I just didn't want that, I just wanted to have fun.

Alexander: Yeah, but we've done that haven't we? Because we've faced barriers like, um... so when you're booking for like a concert, it can be quite difficult trying to get two disabled bays. Like I'll ring up and I'll try and book for both of us. And what I do is [01:13:00] like, if I find a venue, I'll just make a mental note

that they'll let us take the two seats out, and it's like, okay, that venue there. So, it's just going out there, having experiences, finding out which things are accessible to you as a couple. You know, we went to Strictly together.

We had a brilliant view. We were holding hands during the whole-- you know, I don't like Strictly, you know. But I enjoyed it because you were smiling the whole evening. You know, at first when I rang up they were a bit confused because they're so used to disabled and PAs coming together.

And I said two wheelchair bays, I did have to clarify to them. But once you clarify and they could do it, we had a brilliant time, just sitting next to each other.

Emma: Well, I think, I understand sort of the worry about dating another disabled person, so I do get that. But I do hear what you said, Alex, about if you're advocating for disabled people in sort of different areas of life,

perhaps you should be [01:14:00] considering dating a disabled person, or at least being a bit more open to it. Because I think there could be internalized ableism that kind of goes into all of that, but I really see Both ways of looking at it. But I just want to say a huge, huge thank you to both of you for giving up so much of your time to talk to me about your relationship and all of your history and all of that.

It's been incredibly interesting to hear how you guys navigate the world as a couple together both with the disability. And so, yeah, just a huge, huge thank you.

Alexander: Yeah, thank you. It's very nice. It's very nice meeting you. Carrie's always talking about you, so it's very nice to meet you.

Thank you so much for listening to this episode of The Wheelchair Activist. If you want to stay up to date and catch all of our [01:15:00] previous episodes, you can find them all on my website, the wheelchair activist.com. You can also follow me on social media at Emma dot Vogelmann on most platforms, and if you'd like to support the podcast, our links to the

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