

Pat McKenna Interview transcript Part 1

S = Stephanie Shockley

R = Robyn King

P = Pat McKenna

Part 1 (Episode 4)

R: Welcome to The Accessible Altar, a podcast of conversions at the intersection of faith and disability. I'm Robyn King

S: And I'm Stephanie Shockley

R: And we're your hosts. Today we'll talk with Pat McKenna. Pat is the Assistant Division Director of the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. He is also an attorney and long time guide dog handler who lives with his wife and sons in central New Jersey.

(Musical interlude)

S: So, Pat McKenna, welcome to the podcast.

P: Thank you so much for having me, it's a pleasure to be here.

S: I'm really excited to have you here today, and as you know, our podcast mainly focuses on issues related to religion and disability,

P: Yeah

S: or faith and disability. But we also promised our audience as we've been working through our early episodes, we promised our audience that we would do some "disability 101" to help with some of the education that might be helpful for the general public.

P: Yes.

S: So... that's one of the reasons that we invited you to come speak with us today. And we're really glad to have you.

P: Thank you so much for having me. As was mentioned, I've been a guide dog handler now, it's actually been 20 years this past May. So I've worked with a number of different, different dogs at this point, four in fact, all four of which have been from the Seeing Eye guide dog school in Morristown, New Jersey.

S: Ok, so 20 years, my gosh...

P: Yeah.

S: That's such a long, does it seem like a long time, or?

P: You know, it um, when I really stop and sit and think about it, um, yeah, it does, actually. And, as I mentioned, I'm working with my fourth dog now. I applied for and received my first dog just before beginning law school in 2001. She worked for me for about 6 years or so. My second dog worked for longer than that. And, when, I really sit and think back on it, um, it's amazing to me how much these dogs, although the service they provide for me, what they've been trained to do, to guide me, to enable me to travel independently and safely, all four of them have done that, and done it very well. But, beyond that, their personalities, the way they work, what it is like to live with them... so different. So, so, so different. They're very smart. They're learning all the time; I'm learning from them, they learn from me. And it's just incredible how different each one can be from their predecessor. And, I don't think I ever really appreciated that years ago. When I was on my first dog, of course, I didn't, I mean, how could I, I didn't have any context.

S: Mm hmm... right, so that was the only dog you knew was that first dog

P: Right, that was the only dog I knew, and when I got used to working with her, and she of course was serving as my guide dog, I just sort of assumed that was what all guide dogs were like, and

that was the same kind of experience that all guide dog handlers had. And maybe some had similar experiences, but I mean, they are, as I said, they're very smart and they're all so, so different.

S: So, we've already gotten a little bit of a taste of your personal experience with guide dogs.

P: Yeah

S: I'd like to back up and do a little bit of informational, a little bit of some questions that are informational to give people a little bit of context and understanding about service animals. And, kind of answer some of their common questions.

P: Sure.

S: So, one of the things that people often ask, and we thought it would be really helpful to cover, is can you tell us a bit about the difference between service animals, emotional support animals, and therapy dogs, and maybe give us the sort of lay person's...

P: Yeah

S: legal information that we might want to know, for those of us who are not attorneys, about that.

P: Of course. So a service animal is defined under the law as being a dog that is specifically trained to perform a task for the benefit of a person with a disability. And it's that training component that is extraordinarily... that's the key, that's the important piece. Has the dog been trained to work or perform a task? That's what you want to look for. Now, of course, service animals, these dogs, they can be trained to perform a number of different tasks or different types of work for their handler depending upon what is needed. Now in my case of course, I can't see, so my dogs are guide dogs, and they have been trained to guide me safely, independently. But, other dogs, depending upon the needs, and the disability in question, maybe the dog, um, provides support and assistance for a person who is deaf or

hard of hearing. Or is a wheelchair user. Or maybe an individual who suffers from PTSD. And these dogs then have been trained to perform this task, either as needed or upon command. Of course by case, it would be different. Now, a therapy dog, or I believe emotional support animal, they have not been trained to do work or perform a task for the benefit of an individual with a disability. So that individualized, specialized training piece, that's not there, that's not present. The benefit of an emotional support animal or therapy dog is not what they are doing for you as far as a task is concerned, but their presence. Their presence is the benefit; their presence is the point. Was that helpful? Or did I, I could have gotten too technical.

S: No, that's actually, that's really helpful.

R: Sorry, I'm also one of the people who takes a moment to think... No, I think that was a helpful deliniation.

P: So...

R: This is one of the topics I was hoping we would get into because I think there's just a lot of confusion, because some animals are represented as something they may or may not be, with this expectation of access.

P: Oh yeah.

R: That can be dangerous.

P: Yes! So, you've hit, you hit on the key word there, the word of the hour, access, right? So the law provides protection for service animals. That is, again, a dog that has been specifically trained to do work or perform a task for the benefit of a person with a disability. So, that means that I or somebody else who benefits from the services of a service animal can go into public places or places into which the public has access with their service animal. Emotional support animals/therapy dogs, they are not protected by the law. And so, whereas I could be accompanied by my guide dog Finn into a supermarket, a restaurant, a store, an individual

who is accompanied by an emotional support animal would not be protected under the law if they were to do so.

R: How do you, not you, but, how would I as someone who is meeting someone for the first time, how would I be able to sort out what kind of animal they have with them?

P: Right, yes. Um, so, the first thing is, because not all disabilities are immediately apparent, right, and that's a really important point. So, how do tell if it's a service animal, or not? Well the first part is that it has to be a dog, alright? So that's the first piece. Under the ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act, in the States, certification documents, ID verifying that it is a service animal, those may not be asked for, again, they may NOT be asked for. So, how do you know? You're a store owner, you're a conductor on a train, how do you know? Well, the two questions that can be asked are: Is the animal required because of a disability, and what is the nature of the task the dog has been trained to perform. And those are the two questions that may be asked.

R: Thank you, that's helpful.

S: The complication there is whether people know that.

P: Right, so often... so in 20 years, those two questions, those key questions, the only two questions that are to be asked, I've only ever been asked those once. One time, in 20 years. It is more common, um, the individual assumes it is not a service animal, or just a pet, or I have no business bringing my dog inside. And so typically, rather than those questions, I hear something like "Hey you, get that dog out of here!" or "no pets!" or "Can't you read the sign?" That sort of thing. That is 99% of the time. And then, I, or a different service animal handler would have to say "No no, this is, uh, this dog has been trained to perform a task, to assist me in this way." And hopefully then the individual will say "Oh, ok, ok," you know. Or, "no problem, sorry about that." And that happens sometimes. And the opposite happens sometimes too, where they say something unpleasant or indicate well they don't really care, and "get that (expletive) animal out of my place of

business." So, you really don't always know what you're going to get when you go into a public space. Um, service, this whole area, the label it's given is service animal public access challenges. And um they can take many shapes and forms, they're rarely pleasant, sometimes, you can take care of it by just having a pleasant conversation with the individual in question. Or maybe you request to speak to a supervisor, that can be helpful. Um, it's very case by case. Sometimes emotions get pretty intense, and it can get pretty heated pretty quickly. So, it's very... you've gotta keep a cool head, you've got to be patient, you have to be tolerant. After 20 years, I've gotten kind of good at sort of anticipating when I'm gonna get a public access challenge, um... the beach is huge. Public access, service animal public access challenges on the beach I have found to be extraordinarily common. Stores, especially some of the larger franchise kind of stores, big box stores, Walmart's, targets, it never happens. Never, ever happens. So, you've just gotta always... it's always in the back of your mind, which is unfortunate. Because you want to go out for dinner or have a nice day on the beach or go pick up a couple of things from Walmart and you always sort of have to have in the back of your mind that public interaction piece. What if a cashier or a store manager is going to tell us to leave, or they're going to challenge us, in front of a bunch of people, or in front of my kids, you know, and be unpleasant with me and want me to "take my expletive pet out of the store." Or another, a whole other type of access challenge is they will let you in, but with conditions. Like, imagine a hotel, you're going to go and stay somewhere for a couple of nights, and you check in and you find you're getting a \$250 cleaning fee tacked on your hotel stay. That is not permitted, by the way, that is NOT allowed, at all. There are to be no additional conditions or fees. However, especially, in the hotel context, that's really really common. And then you know, you're being allowed to stay there, that's good, but now you have to have this really unpleasant conversation about no, you may not charge me an extra cleaning fee, not \$250, not \$1. It's not acceptable. Or, my personal favorite, ever been to a restaurant where there might be like outdoor dining, and they might have sort of the pet section, where people can eat with their dogs, you know, have the dog under the table?

S: mmhmmm

R: Yes.

P: Right, so what's happens is (laughing) we'll go there, and I'll say, ok you know table for, you know, four, and they'll say oh right this way, this is our pet friendly section. I'm like, "no, no, no, actually, I don't have to eat and sit and dine in the pet friendly section. Although you might want me to, and you might think because I travel with a guide dog that this is a good thing. But it's not a good thing and I don't want to and I choose not to." Mostly because what I don't want to do is while I'm enjoying my quesadilla, or whatever, have to put up with the interactions and the barking and the possible ill behavior of the other pet dogs around me under the adjacent tables. Does that make sense?

R: Ooh, total sense. (laughs)

P: Yeah, yeah, and my dog is trained to just lie down, go to sleep, and he's done. And he does not get up until quesadilla done, bill paid, tip left, good to go. But imagine if now I'm getting visited by the corgi off to the left and getting barked at by the daschund off to the right, and the chihuahua, who was never on a leash in the first place, is now under the table chewing on my dog, right? I don't want that. That is not enjoyable for me or him, at all. So that's why I never want to sit in those pet friendly dining areas. Or go to, say, the pet friendly beach, or what have you. If everyone else's dogs were really well behaved and managed, and under control, and on appropriately lengthed leashes, you know, like four feet or less, not those crazy extendable leashes,

S: Uh, they're the worst!

P: Oh, they are the worst!

R: They are the worst!

(all laugh)

P: I'd have no problem with it. But that's not been my experience. I mean, there are really well-behaved, wonderful pet dogs out there, with great owners who take awesome care and have great control over them. And then there's...

R: A lot of dogs who are not in that category

P: Yes, exactly. And it only takes one ill-behaved dog, on one of those crazy long leashes, to really result in me having a bad day, and I don't want that.

S: You know this is a good segue to one of my next questions, but I'm thinking of a story. I remember going out, I guess for dinner, with a bunch of people, there were 8 or 9 of us. You were there and there were 3 or 4 other guide dog handlers there...

P: Yeah, yeah.

S: There were other people with varying vision, me, and some people with "regular" vision. And I remember, we were out somewhere in New Brunswick, which is where Rutgers University is located, it's in central New Jersey. We were all out at this one place. And we'd all been there for a while, we were talking, it was kind of a raucous table, we were talking and whatever...

P: mmmhmmm

S: And eventually... so the tables around us were sort of turning over, you know, there were different people there than when we had gotten there, because maybe they weren't having as good a time as our crew was.

P: (laughs) right

S: Eventually, we all got up to leave. And all the sudden, out from under the table, come like four or five labs, in different colors.

P: Right.

S: And the restaurant, like, everyone just turned,

P: Yeah

S: People were shocked, because they had no idea that there like four or five 65 pound dogs under the table. They've never seen them, they knew nothing, they had no idea; they didn't see us come in. And I thought that was such a good example of what it's like when you have a service animal in public, you know, how service animals operate, you don't even notice that they're there.

P: That's one of the greatest compliments you can give a service animal handler, um, "I had no idea they were there!" You know, that's the point. That's what they want, that's what the dogs are trained to do. That's what I want, that's just... that's how you want it to be. And so when that happens, you get up to leave, you're set to go, you left the tip, and your dog wakes up and comes out from under the table, the people around, you know, that's normal, they should be kind of, surprised and that's nice. That's nice to see, that's nice to hear.

R: It very... it's not a direct comparison, and I want to acknowledge that, but I had a 90 pound dog, and for most of his life we lived in apartments. And I always loved it when a new neighbor moved in and after a few weeks they'd see me with the dog and be like "I had no idea that dog was in there!"

P: Yeah, yeah.

R: But yeah, and I loved it, because it meant he was behaving himself when I was away.

P: Yes. That's great, that's great. And there are plenty of pet dogs out there, I don't want anyone to think I'm being tough on pet owners, but there's also a bunch that are, you know, not as great. You know, we would all know they're in there, to use your example.

R: (Laughs) yeah.

S: So, I think the conversation about, the pet friendly section of, you know, I'm thinking of a fancy New York restaurant

P: mmmhmm

S: that might give someone with a service dog a hard time. The conversation about the pet friendly section leads me to the question about interference

P: Yeah

S: I think that's the, the sort of technical term

P: It is

S: And I was hoping you would talk a bit about service animal interference and the general public needs to know about that, and how they can prevent being part of the problem.

P: Yeah, yeah. So, what we're basically talking about is conduct or behavior that is encountered, that the service animal partnership encounters that is disruptive to what it is they are doing. That's really what we are talking about. And it can take many shapes and forms. Um, it might be somebody petting your dog. You're waiting at a crosswalk and the person next to you who's also waiting for the light to change is just sort of petting your dog. And the reason that is so harmful and so dangerous is these dogs are trained to do their task. And they are trained to ignore other people, other, you know, maybe food that's on the ground, other distractions. Other dogs. And if somebody is petting your dog, and a lot of times I don't know about it because I can't see and I might not be aware, and especially if I'm in a crowd, I mean, it would not be difficult for someone to do, and I don't know. Well, that's going to be distracting to him. And do I want him to be focused on that person who is touching him or petting his ears or whatever, or watching for cars that are turning and judging traffic? Because, I want his attention on that traffic,

on that intersection. Watching for someone maybe running a red, or turning when they're not supposed to, what have you. Um, what if we are waiting in line at, well, I mentioned Walmart before, so I'll still with that. We're waiting in line at Walmart and we've got our cart full of stuff and there's a couple of people ahead of us, and the people ahead of me in line begins to touch and interact with my dog? We don't have a crossing busy traffic situation here, so you might be thinking well, what could be the harm in that? Well the harm is, these dogs are smart. And they want acknowledgement and attention and affection. And if they learn that they can receive these things from other people as well, there is a good chance they might then seek that out. And so if while we're waiting in that line, in front of the rack of Reese's peanut butter products, and he's being touched and interacted with by the person ahead of us in line, well there's a good chance he's going to look for that same type of positive reinforcement, that same sort of interaction, when we are in a different, and potentially dangerous situation, such as we're getting ready to cross four lanes of traffic. So, touching, interacting, talking to, someone's service animal is really really a negative thing to do. It is harmful, it is dangerous, it must be stopped. It has to not happen. Now that, that's definitely a type of interference. Now again, it's well intended, I mean, they're typically dog lovers doing it, you know, and they, you know, "he reminds me so much of my dog" or "oh, he must smell my cats" or, my favorite is, "oh, I can see he's working, I know I'm not supposed to touch, but..." and they're doing it anyway. It is extraordinarily common, extraordinarily common. Um, less common are, well I think most human distractions like that are of that more positive nature. Every once in a while you'll run into a situation where there are like little kids, you know, maybe too rambunctious, and they're kind of jumping around and barking at the dog, or what have you. I usually try to give kids a little bit more leeway and benefit of the doubt, and turn it into an educational moment, if I can. You can't always, you don't always have the opportunity or energy to do that. Um, but sometimes the rambunctious kid can be quite the distraction as well. And then we have other dogs. And other dogs can provide a tremendous range of interference. Barking at, or coming over to sniff or pester my dog. You know, the owner

might be saying "oh, you know, he's just coming over to say hello, they're just saying hi." That sounds very nice, and I can tell we're all dog lovers here, and that's very well intended, but that is also extremely difficult, and you're complicating the partnership's work tremendously. You might be putting it at risk as well. Because if we're trying to judge traffic, or navigate down a sidewalk past a construction site, and your dog is coming over to say hi, that is not appropriate. And can really do some serious harm. And then the next layer on that would be dog attacks. And that would be whether it's a dog on leash, or off leash, or kind of in that gray zone, right, like they're on leash, but the leash goes out to like 45 feet so they're on kind leash in name only. And they will rush, or charge, or snap at or even bite and make contact with your service animal. And that is, that can be spectacularly tragic, even if there is no, no medical damage, no impact, no blood, no actual physical bite that takes place. It is not uncommon for service animals after being in a situation like that, where they are rushed or charged or nearly bitten or what have you, where their work is negatively impacted afterwards, or worse, they have to be retired and replaced, because they no longer, because they are too shaken and rattled by the experience. Imagine if you would, you're going to cross an intersection. It's a no big deal intersection, right? There's very few cars, it's a piece of cake. And while you're waiting to cross this little, you know, suburban, no big deal intersection, a daschund comes rushing out of nowhere, small little dog, and he comes flying around a corner, making a huge amount of noise, and my dog is badly startled by this. So, these dogs, as I said, they're really smart, and my dog is now going to remember that, and they will react negatively if they see, when they see the next daschund. Or maybe, next time they see that intersection. Or perhaps, next time they see any dog or any intersection that looks at least somewhat like what they recall from that day. And now, while I'm trying to navigate around, to work, or shopping, or my home community, the work is being negatively impacted because my dog is suffering trauma from that experience, that could have been avoided, if the person had their own dog under better control. I don't mean to pick on daschunds by the way, it was just sort of randomly chosen. If anyone's a daschund owner,

I love daschunds fine; it's just the name I reached for first. So dog attacks, they can be terrible even if no contact is made.

R: I mean, that makes so much sense to me just from like, a dog behavior understanding.

P: Yeah.

R: They're great at, I mean they're terrible at cause and affect, except when they think it will benefit them or protect them. My dog for a long time became convinced that any time I put Chapstick on it meant I was leaving, and he would self-crate, because he had a little bit of separation anxiety. So I spent like three weeks putting Chapstick on all the time to get him to stop doing that.

P: Yeah.

R: Because he'd get all wound up for something that was not going to happen.

P: Isn't that interesting though, I mean, think about what's going on there, how observant they are, right, like that small innocuous thing, we're going to put on the Chapstick or what have you before going out. But your dog noticed and picked up on the that and also knew exactly what comes next. And they did the next step, and he put himself in the crate as you indicated. Um, they are always thinking, they are always thinking. And since service animals are typically bred for certain traits, such as intelligence, and medical soundness, and so forth, they learn to watch and to study, and they get to know and learn their handler extremely well, just as we get to learn and understand our dogs extremely well. I want to give you kind of a variant on the dog going after your service animal on a corner situation. Imagine that this all happens and the service animal was not bit, and was fine. Completely unfazed, just, you know, no big deal, what was that dog's problem, just you know, let it go. But imagine, what if the handler was rattled by it, really rattled by it. You're navigating your hometown and you don't know at what point around the

next corner some crazy dog on a flexi-lead is going to come bounding out and go after your own dog. And I will tell you from personal experience, that is terrifying. Because there's a lot of noise, and activity, and they're all over the place, and there's barking, and you don't know what's happening. And you don't know how to stop it. And the other owner is probably not going to be very helpful. That's assuming the other owner is there. If the dog is off leash or a stray, then, there is not another owner there. You feel helpless, and powerless, and you're partner is getting possibly hurt, possibly badly hurt, and you can hear all of this, and you don't know how to stop it, you don't know what to do. But let's imagine that it's just really loud, and the other dog gets dragged off, and the service animal in this hypothetical is completely fine. That handler is probably going to be a nervous anxious wreck moving forward, when they come to that intersection or other ones like it. And the service animal is going to pick up on it. Because that's how it works. I pick up on his vibes, he picks up on my vibes. Service animal partnerships are all like that. And so you can end up making your dog nervous and anxious because you're nervous and anxious. So yeah, the dog attack thing is really, is really terrible. And being mindful of your own stress, and your own anxiety, and what you might be projecting, is extraordinarily important.

I don't do rideshare, lyft or uber. I've had a number of situations now where I was denied access to the car when it pulled up, and sometimes it just pulls away, and I'm left standing out there, because I did not realize that they just ghosted me. So that's happened a bunch of times. So Uber and Lyft I find very frustrating. So I was taking an uber once with a friend, and the car pulls up, and I noticed my dog was exhibiting all of this stress. I was like, what's wrong with my dog, right? Like, he's looking back up at me, his ears are down, he just seems... kind of tense. And then I realized he's tense because I'm tense. I'm a mess because I've had so many uber and lyft situations I'm just ready for the next one you know? And I was like wow, it's not him, it's me, I made him like that, because I'm this nervous, anxious mess. Because I'm ready for my next uber disaster. Now, in that case the uber ride went off perfectly fine, and so on. But you need to be really mindful and sensitive to how much they

pick up on, you know, whether it's your Chapstick before you go out, or something else.

S: So... I want to just say, just for those who might not know that much about this, who are listening, that issue with uber and lyft is, I would call it endemic, I guess, to use a disease phrase

P: Yes

S: Endemic to uber and lyft. It has gone on and on and on. They have been sued, they have been threatened, people have received, theoretically, relief in court over it, and it doesn't matter.

P: It doesn't matter. Yeah.

S: It doesn't matter. They don't care. It's an ongoing major access challenge.

P: Yeah.

S: And it's particularly upsetting when you think about the people who are having this issue can't drive, that's why they're using uber and lyft. You know?

P: (laughs) yep.

S: It's, there's not always a good alternative.

P: Because, I'll tell ya, an uber, or lyft, kind of a rideshare situation like that, or getting rushed by another dog on a corner, or having somebody who just is insisting on petting your dog, or on feeding your dog. I mean, these are all really good ways to ruin your day. To really ruin it. And they're all avoidable. They're all so easy to avoid. But they're so common, so, so common.

S: The comment I want to make about all that, as someone who has observed a lot, who is not somebody who has ever had a service dog but has observed a lot in action, and has been a lot

places, walking with people who have service dogs or whatever, um, the comment that I want to say about that is I think that people really need to watch their sense of entitlement. And when people are somebody... when somebody who has a service animal is out in the world, doing whatever they're doing, like living their life, they don't necessarily owe you anything. They don't owe you stopping their day with their family to let you pet their dog. Or they're running late to work. You're not owed petting a dog. You know, I've seen you be nice enough to take the harness off, and let somebody pet Finn, or, well, I knew a couple of your other dogs as well. But, that's not required, and you don't owe anybody, I think. I just think that's such an important thing to say.

P: Yeah, that's a great point. Because I might be out there and maybe it's 65 degrees and a beautiful sunny day in May and I'm just out, you know, going nowhere in particular with all the time in the world. And I might be more inclined at that point, I might be more patient or tolerant, I might say "oh sure, we'll take the harness off, you can say hi to him, this is his name, you know, he was trained at this particular school, he's this many pounds..." and make it a real educational moment. But the opposite could also be true. Maybe it's 8 o'clock on a Friday night and I've just worked a killer week, and it's pouring rain, and 33 degrees, and I'm just trying to get home, because you know, my umbrella's dead and I'm soaked to the bone and someone's like "hey, can I say hi to your dog?" I'm probably not going to say yes at that point, you know. I'll probably have to reach deep just to find the patience and tolerance to just, you know, say something at least remotely pleasant, because I'll probably be pretty grumpy and in a bad mood at that point. But, we're all like that, right? We all have those good moments, we all have those bad moments. I do try to reach as deep as I can to make it an educational moment if kids are involved. I think that's really important. I give kids a little bit more leeway, and I try to find that extra minute in the busy schedule to take the harness off and really sit and talk with them if I can. I can't always, but I do, I do try. You mentioned education when we started this conversation today. And I am a

huge believer in that, but it doesn't mean I've always got the time, or the energy, or patience for it.

R: Well, and I think one of the things I've noticed, and I've not been surprised by, but as you describe being a service dog handler, it just... there's a higher assumed output of energy and patience that you need because you don't know who you're going to come across and how they're going to interact with you and your dog. And I hope this helps increase the number of people who know how to keep from making your day worse, if not actually make it better.

P: Oh, I love opportunities like this because, um, you know, it's not like there's a lot of service animals out there, right? And it's a different sort of thing. You know, you're out there, and you're doing your daily activities, and lo and behold you encounter this incredible thing. And it is incredible. I've been working with them for 20 years, and that doesn't mean I've become sort of numb to it. If anything I'm more in awe of what they do now than I was 20 years ago. And you encounter a dog that has been trained to perform a task for the benefit of a person with a disability, and they're out there, whatever that task is. And, um, it's okay to sort of be just, impressed by that. It is different, it is not every day that that is encountered. But, at the same time, it doesn't mean either that that person wants to take time to talk to you about it. Or to let you interact with their dog either. So, I think that there's this line to walk where you know, on one side it's okay to really be, to take note and be impressed by it. But to also give space, and let the person, let the partnership, let them do their thing. And don't become the worst part of their day. Don't do it.

R: Thank you for joining us for this conversation about faith and disability. We encourage you to find local conversation partners to talk about your experiences, and other people's experiences, of faith and disability.

Stephanie, you have known Pat for a long time. He's really, sort of your friend...

S: We actually met as children. In Episode 2 I talked about going to a camp for blind and visually impaired children. So we've known each other since, I believe the mid to late 80s. We're not entirely sure what year we met...

R: Because it was the 80s, and no one had cellphones!

S: Well, right, and there are stories about me yelling at him in a canoe when he was 14 and I was 13. So you know, we have a little bit of a history. And then there's a big gap. But I've known him for a long time as an adult as well.

R: I really enjoyed this interview. It both answered a lot of questions I had about how to help facilitate good guide dog experiences for people in church, both for guide dog handlers and for people who don't know what they're doing, because no one have had this conversation with them.

S: Yeah, I think he did such a wonderful job of going over all the basics, and, obviously this is something he, he's done in a number of venues. I know he teaches attorneys, other attorneys, this, all the different aspects of the law around this. And the general tips that he gave, you know, he's talking about guide dogs, because, as he kept saying, that's what he knows, but the tips that he gave could be used for a service dog for any different kind of disability. And I think there's a lot in what he said that comes down to, you know, have a conversation, check in with that person, find out what might be helpful.

R: Yeah, every experience and every set of needs can be very individual.

S: So, I hope that this interview is helpful for people in some very practical ways. We have another section of this interview – this wound up being a very long interview –

R: But it was so good!

S: It was really good. I feel like I'm a little biased because, obviously this is someone I'm friends with, but there's another section of the interview that's going to get into some other issues, some deeper issues about the relationship between humans and service dogs. And that'll be in our next episode. And I want to just encourage everybody to listen to that episode as well because it's going to give some really good information that might be helpful particularly to those who provide pastoral care to people who have service animals.

R: Yeah.

S: Or if there are people in your life who have services animals. There are ups and downs to that relationship. So you'll... In Episode 5 we're going to talk some more about that and... it was a very long interview, but there was just so much we wanted you all to hear that we decided to split it into two pieces to make sure you got a chance to hear all of it.

R: Yeah, so please do come back because that, that second part, it is very good. My heart is just like... aw...

(brief musical interlude)

R: You have been listening to The Accessible Altar, a podcast at the intersection of faith and disability, hosted by Robyn King and Stephanie Shockley. We record on the traditional land of the Leni Lenape and Treaty 6 Territory.

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(Music)