

## You First Podcast Episode 43: Disabled Marriage and Parenting - Part 1

**Maddie Crowley:** You're listening to You First -- The Disability Rights Florida Podcast. On this episode, we're talking about marriage inequality, disabled relationships in the media, and disabled parenting.

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**Keith Casebonne:** Hey, everyone. Welcome back to the You First Podcast. I'm Keith.

**Maddie:** I'm Maddie. We've got a great episode for you today about marriage inequality that exists for disabled folks, disabled relationships and kinship, media representation, disabled parenting, and much, much more.

**Keith:** This will be part one of two episodes because you'll know soon this conversation was way too good to trim down, but a little too long to make as one episode.

**Maddie:** Definitely. Let's get to it. On the show today, we have two fantastic guests, Heather Watkins, and Don Evans.

**Keith:** Yeah. For sure. Heather Watkins is a disability advocate, author, blogger, mother, graduate of Emerson College with a BS in mass communications. She was born with muscular dystrophy, loves reading, daydreaming, chocolate, and serves on a handful of disability-related boards. Her blog, *Slow Walkers See More*, includes reflections that insight from her life with disability.

**Maddie:** Don Evans is a director, writer, activist, Twitch streamer, and consultant with a BFA in film. He fights for inclusion in the media, marriage equality, gaming, and reproductive rights. Don founded #filmthis meaning film disability, to better understand disability in the media.

They work in Hollywood to make the industry more inclusive for disabled folks. Needless to say that these two are the guests really to have on this podcast.

**Keith:** We do.

**Maddie:** We were absolutely thrilled to have them on, and have such an engaging and insightful conversation in store for you. We wanted to include a content note for this episode. There are mentions in personal accounts, ableism, familial abuse, homophobia, transphobia, and fatphobia. Please listen and read the episode at your own pace.

**Keith:** Indeed. For sure. We hope you enjoy our conversation with Heather and Don.

**Maddie:** Thank you, Don and Heather. Heather, thank you for being back on the show. We're really excited to have you both on today to talk about disability, marriage, and equality, and disabled parenting.

What I'd love is to have both of y'all introduce yourselves, give us your name, your pronouns, any identifiers that you resonate with or are meaningful to you, and then maybe just tell us a bit about how you got into the work that you do and your background and knowledge on this topic.

**Heather Watkins:** Hi. My name is Heather Watkins. I'm a Boston-based disability rights activist. My pronouns are she/her. I identify as a Black disabled woman born with a form of muscular dystrophy. I didn't always use mobility aids. I do now. For the past 15 or so years, a cane and, on occasion, a manual wheelchair.

I am a mother. I'm a blogger, writer. I serve on a handful of disability-related boards and projects, such as the Disability Policy Consortium, the National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities Advisory Board, and also as a former chairperson for the Boston Commission for Persons with Disabilities Advisory Board.

I bring to the table that experience of my identities. In terms of this topic regarding disabled parenting, I use all of that lens and lived experience to help inform the work that I do. I get together with a wealth of other talented disabled parents who have apparent, non-apparent, and chronic illnesses.

We really just talk about things that are relevant to parenthood. That could be anything regarding how we see life and the biases and stigmas and things associated and all the relevant needs of the parent to support the family and to become a thriving support network for one another. That's my game show intro. [laughs]

**Maddie:** Thank you so much. We're so excited to have you.

**Dom Evans:** My name is Dom Evans. I am trans and non-binary. I use they and he pronouns. I guess, in appearance, I'm a white disabled person. I tend to look trans masculine, but I would say that I kind of bounce between masculinity and femininity, at least in personality.

I think it's also hard, with my disabilities, to always be able to show or reflect my gender expression, due to accessibility and whatnot. It's just often easier to present as trans masculine because testosterone did a really good job when I started taking it.

I am a dad. I have an adult son, who is also disabled. I'm multiply disabled with a physical disability called spinal muscular atrophy. I also have chronic and mental health-based disabilities. I have ADHD, OCD, PTSD.

I'm hard of hearing and a CODA. My dad was a deaf adult. I was raised in the household. I'm a multigeneration disabled person on both sides. My son is also disabled. Disability has always been around me. It's always been a part of my life.

In my career, my partner and I are a screenwriting and director team. We work in and out of Hollywood. We run a study into disability representation on television. We just released the third version of our study, which has been very exciting.

We also are working on developing television. We consider ourselves experts on disability representation just because we watch so much television. You can't not know about the state of disability with as much as we watch.

When it comes to this issue, I've been talking about marriage equality for years. My partner and I will never be able to get married unless I somehow manage to sell a TV show and become a millionaire because my home care needs are so specific that I'll lose them if we get married. That's really what started my quest to fight for marriage equality.

A lot of people consider me one of the leaders of the movement because when nobody was talking about it, I was. Also being a trans parent, we weren't really welcomed anywhere. We weren't welcomed in disabled spaces. We weren't welcomed in LGBT spaces. We weren't welcomed in mainstream spaces. We had to figure it out on our own.

It was disabled adults with my son's disability -- he's autistic. I'm not autistic -- who got us through because we didn't have support. That's where I come from on the topic of parenting and marriage. Really frustrated that we're still having this talk and this fight for equality. It's been over a decade since I started this work.

**Maddie:** We're definitely glad to have you here. Since you've sort of touched on it a little bit there, let's kick into it, do a crash course on what disability marriage inequality is. What is it? How does it happen? What are some of the realities and impacts for people with disabilities?

**Dom:** I always like to start this discussion off by saying this is not a straightforward thing to understand, and that makes it hard. With LGBT marriage equality, there's a law preventing us. The law is literally saying we can't get married.

For disabled people, that has been the case in the history. There have been laws that have prevented us from getting married. There's still legal precedent for some disabilities.

If you have a guardianship, for example, there may be legal reasons you can't get married, because someone's preventing you. In the broader issue where people don't have guardianships, disabled people still can't get married in many different circumstances.

Because there's so many different circumstances that are impacted, we have to talk about it in parts. The first place I try to start with is social security because what disabled marriage equality is is a series of programs that basically say, "If you want our services, you have to follow certain rules." If you don't follow those rules, then you don't get the services.

Part of those rules include precedences that say you can't be married because then you're living off of the income, or the resources, or the support of your partner. That's part of it.

That's just a risk overview. If we want to get to specifics, when we start with social security, we say the programs that are most easily understood as affected are Social Security Disability and SSI.

There's also Medicaid and Medicare tied in with that, but there are so many different programs that I can't just say, "This universally blocks us from getting married." I have to go into specifics about each program.

For my specific situation, my dad died when I was 20, so I automatically, I got Survivor Benefit, what you get when your dad dies if you're under 18 or if you're disabled and above 18.

You can get benefits that say...This is not the best message in my opinion, but basically, you're so disabled, basically, is what Social Security says, that you can't take care of yourself, so you must rely on your parent for these benefits.

It's a disabling system from the get-go because it's basically saying, "You're messed up, so your dad has to take care of you." That's what it felt like being 20. You need these services because mine are tied to [inaudible 11:23] . When I'm trying to explain these programs, my specific situation is that, like I said, I tap into my father's Survivor Benefit.

I even called Social Security. I was like, "Do have to have these?" At the time, Medicaid was paying for more of my wheelchairs and whatnot, and when you get Social Security Disability, they force you on Medicare. For some disabled people, I know Medicare is great for them.

For me and my needs, it was not great at the time, and they were like, "No. Because your dad's dead, you have to have these benefits, and otherwise you don't qualify for any other services." The one service that I needed to qualify for was payment community-based services. I get those through Medicaid.

I have the Medicare-Medicaid thing. You have to go through the system this way. They make you go through it this way. They don't evaluate your individual situation. That's a part of the problem. Because I depend on the home care and because my dad died, I have to go through SSDI, and then go through the state as Medicaid as a secondary.

If I lose that, then I end up in a nursing home. It's like I can get married and end up in a nursing home. The thing that the system doesn't understand is that what would happen is that it would be cyclical for me.

I would get kicked off the program. I'd end up in the nursing home. I'd have to get divorced. I'd get out of the nursing home, I'd get married again, I'd get kicked off the program. That's what would happen. That's just my situation.

Then, you have SSI, and the situation with that is that if you marry someone with SSI who's also getting SSI, you will get...If you're living apart and not married, you both get 100 percent of what you get. If you get married, one of you gets 100 percent, the other gets 50 percent.

That doesn't make sense to me at all, because as individuals, you need both of those, but then together, it's a system that doesn't make sense. Another thing about the program I'm on is that I get SSDI, which is considered basic Social Security through Survivors Benefits.

You can also get Social Security through work benefit. The difference with that is if you get them through your own work record and not your parents', then you can get married and it's no issue. You can do whatever, you can make whatever money you want.

This is just specific to the Social Security Disability for survivors, which are disabled people usually under the age of 60. They're not getting it on their own work record, so a vulnerable population of people, 18 to 64-year-old disabled people that don't have a lot of, I'm looking for the right word, their own autonomy anyway.

Social Security is even saying, "If you're living together we can count you as married and take away your benefits." Disabled people are not even being able to live together or say, "Hey, I'm in a relationship." I know lots of people that are like, "No, they're just my roommate, they're my caregiver."

They're whatever they can be, because if Social Security finds out they can say, "You're not even legally married. You are living like you are, but that could still mean you're sharing resources." That's what is at the core of all of this. The government not wanting disabled people to "abuse" resources that are not that great anyway.

These are not significant resources. For SSI, some people are getting \$700 a month or less. That's what the fight is over and that's why it's so frustrating. It's not just Social Security. There's not just Medicare, Medicaid. It affects all programs like Section 8, food stamps, everything you qualify.

This is such a broader issue that trying to explain it, I feel like I've taken out so much time trying to explain it, but it's so many different things affected that we even have to argue that it's called marriage equality. I want to give Heather time to also talk about this, but I can explain a little later why I consider it an issue of marriage equality.

That's a scattered, fragmented look at all the programs, because, like I said, this impacts many programs, many different disabled people, and it's not all in the same way. I find people fighting for SSDI who don't understand the SSI side, for example. They try to advocate one-size-fits-all, and we can't do that. That's been the real struggle here.

**Heather:** Thanks, Dom. That was such a good rundown, and even reminder for SSDI, which is something I have.

I'm in partnership and I think about all of the ways that caused me a lot of hesitance in even thinking about that, because it was so much hassle to get that kind of assistance, the paperwork, all the barriers to doctor's appointments, and that, and all the documentation that goes along with it.

You're fraught with anxiety about any sort of thing that might cause an interruption in benefits. I have Medicare Prime, MassHealth secondary, which is Massachusetts' version of Medicaid. I get a DME. I use a ventilator to help assist my breathing when I'm sleeping.

I was just looking at the Medicare summary. It's \$3,500 a month. What they cover is only like \$1,800. I just think about, if that ever got interrupted, how the heck would I cover that ventilator? That's a scary thought. I'm getting married.

Sure, OK, I could probably do that, but then MassHealth looks at your income. If they're going to be looking at my partner's income, then they probably would terminate, and those benefits which also cover my PCA services, personal care assistance services, those would end.

Those are much needed services because PCA comes in and helps with home care management, hygiene, meal prep, housework, escorting you to an appointment. Anything that would be of assistant to your ADLs, activities of daily living.

That is, for me, a very scary thing to consider that. If I wanted to plan for the future, it would be really complicated. I'm really glad that Dom outlined all of the intricacies of what that means in terms of what's a really scary prospect for marriage equality and what that might look like for so many disabled people. That was very helpful.

[music]

**Narrator:** Dating with a disability can be hard. I know that because I'd spend [inaudible 19:32] for years to date successfully with a disability. Having cerebral palsy, I encountered many people not even considering me as a potential partner.

When they did, there were judgments and attitudes. But, successful dating and finding a healthy, joyful relationship is entirely possible. I finally figured out how to do this. I have been with my husband for over 15 years now.

The key is simply keep trying. Continue to go for what you want, despite the heartbreak and rejection. Believe in your potential as a dating and relationship partner. I know that sounds very simple. It's not.

That's why I created Dating Made Easier, the monthly membership that will teach you how to get the results you want, feel more comfortable and confident dating, and give you consistent support with monthly workshops, brainstorming, and networking. Go to [radiantabilities.com/datingresources](http://radiantabilities.com/datingresources) and join today.

[music]

**Dom:** You know what else, Heather? With us both being on SSDI, the one thing I didn't explain was what would happen to us if we get married. If you or I got married...My partner, she's chronically disabled, but the government doesn't consider her disabled.

She, as a non-disabled person in the government's eyes...I would completely lose SSDI. It'd be gone. That'd be it. As such, I also wouldn't qualify for any other services. I would just lose everything. That would just be it. It'd be over.

If our partners were also on this obscure program where we are SSDI only for survivors' benefits...If they're on Social Security under their own work record for SSDI, then it would still be considered along the lines of the not-disabled person.

If they're on the record, they're getting the same survivor benefits. For example, someone like me and Heather were to get married to each other. Not going to happen. We are friends. Let's say that there were two people like us. We were both on the same program. Then they would let us keep our benefits. It's the only scenario, where it would have to be two of us.

I always like to explain it that, "You're the burden of your dad," when I'm explaining it initially. You get married to a non-disabled person. You're no longer your dad's burden. You're your partner's burden. Congratulations.

If you're disabled and they're also considered the burden of their parent, you can't be burdens on each other because you're already somebody else's burden. Congratulations. You can keep your money. You know what I mean?

There are people that are on this situation. They come to me. They say, "Well, me and my partner kept our money. What are you complaining about?" I'm like, "Your situation is very rare and very specific." We don't pick our partners just based...Are you also on survivor benefits?

There are way more people like Heather and I, who are in situations where we would lose our benefits. We would lose. I hate the word benefit either. That implies that we're getting something that we don't need, that it's extra. My benefits are...I literally want to stay in my house and not end up in a nursing home, which I think is most people on the planet.

**Heather:** Considering the amount of work that disabled persons do and how political our lives are because they're just outlined by policy is just fascinating, just how we navigate our lives on a day-to-day basis and what that entails and how complicated it is.

Success looks very different on a daily basis. Success might look like just being able to sit up in bed, turn over, maybe be pain-free on that day. I just think about how disability has impacted my life in so many ways I had never imagined, in terms of just being a person, a parent, my work, world, and worldview.

As I'm listening to Dom talk about all of these different angles and just all the complicated ways of how people just want to be in partnership, in community, I can't help but think about how tough it is and how, more often than not, a lot of us tend to rise to the occasion, in different ways that aren't commonly seen across the media landscape.

I think that does impact, as well, how disabled people are seen and how it gives rise to more stigma and bias and all of these things. You don't see those representations, in a meaningful way, across the media landscape. I think that also impacts not only the person but further policy measures.

If you can't even see disabled people in families, in different kind of family structures, as parents, as running head of households, and being contributing to community...We never really see that.

At least I never saw that, growing up, in any meaningful way beyond pity and pedestal, being a part of telethons we're throwing money at because we should give something to those poor little souls. I think that all has this impact. Dom and I talk about this all the time, meaningful representation. You studied it. You just talked about that.

It's just so important, I think. It makes its way into the legislature, whether it's going to be supporting quality of life or gut-punching it. I think those are really critical things for all of us to think about, in really consuming what disability looks like in this really comprehensive sense.

**Maddie:** If I can jump in here for a second and just thank you, Dom and Heather, for laying out what the experience looks like for you but what the experience might look like for so many folks.

I think it's very telling that, as someone who has some knowledge on this topic, it was still a little bit difficult to stay understanding all these different facets. That's the point. It's supposed to be

confusing. It's supposed to be difficult. It's supposed to be hard. It's not supposed to be easy for disabled folks to get what they need.

I really liked what you said, Dom, that these aren't benefits. What people are getting to survive is below the bare minimum. You can't really survive on \$700 a month. That's not how the world works anymore. It's not how the world has worked for a really long time.

This perspective that benefits are this great thing or this stressor on the government, when in reality, it's not much at all. The public perspective on benefits and when people talk about disability, marriage, inequality, and things like that, they're like, "You have the benefits. What more could you want?"

It's like, "Livelihood, joy, love, and care. How dare we want these things?" as someone who also has a form of muscular dystrophy and variety of different disabilities as well.

How all of these crucial needs and supports that are so important for everyday living, like how Heather was talking about her PCA supports coming and helping with household tasks and things like that, that those things are not benefits.

Those are necessities to allow us to live the lives that we deserve to live. Heather started dipping into this, as we continue this conversation, about what other things are contributing to disability, marriage inequality. I know Heather named policy, but also media and media representation, and bias, and stigma, and things like that.

I wanted to throw this back at you all and see if you had more thoughts on this. I know you both definitely do. Dom, you literally work in the industry, and Heather works in the industry with blogging, and interviewing, and things like that.

As I was thinking about out this question in preparation for our conversation today, I was reminded by a sad core memory that I have when I watched the movie "Me Before You" and how I had watched the whole movie got to the end, where...Those who don't want to be spoiled by the end of that movie, maybe fast-forward.

I don't know, we might talk about this for a minute, a few minutes. The individual in the movie chooses assisted suicide rather than to live potentially with this wonderful person that has come into his life, or potentially get married, or whatever it might have been, have a life together of some kind or a friendship of some kind.

I remember being so distraught because I saw myself, I saw my friends, I saw my community in that person. Yet, the lack of disabled folks either in actual actor himself, that's one thing, but the actual people directing, producing that show, how that's such a nondisabled view of this whole experience.

Anyways, I had those feelings bubble up as I was listening to you all talk and reminded of this sad moment in my life that I realized that I have started finally to see some disability representation. As a younger version of me, that was the first time I had seen something like that.

Anyways, throwing it back at you all, seeing what other aspects you think contribute to disability marriage inequality, and if we can chat about that a bit.

**Dom:** I'm glad that Heather brought up the media. It's my favorite topic to talk on. I don't just love to talk about the media in general. As I said, we just released a study of the disability representation on television.

My partner and I watch 250 television shows per year. 125 of these, we know so much about representation. We spent a month writing a paper on this. I think the messages in our paper resonate with what's being said here.

This was our third study through our organization, FilmDis. You can check out our paper at [filmdis.com](http://filmdis.com) if you're interested. We have multiple versions so disabled people can check them out with accessible PDF and Google. We have an easy language version. We have a fact sheet. We have 160-plus papers.

Our finger is on the pulse on this issue. The issue is that I don't know that disabled people have ever seen themselves represented in a positive way to where they recognize what good and positive representation is.

A lot of times, we just get these little crumbs of representation and we're so desperate for them. My message has been we can't do that, because when we watch these, when we watch the *Me Before You*, you mentioned that film, I was literally one of the leaders of the *Me Before You* protest.

I was the head of the US leg of the protest with Carrie Ann Lucas, who, sadly, has passed away. Fantastic activist. If you don't know her work, please look Carrie Ann up. She's done a lot of work in the parenting movement. She was a lawyer. She did a lot to fight for parents' rights there.

She and I led the US leg of the *Me Before You* protest because better dead than disabled has been a stereotype and message of disability since before I was even involved in this work. We had "*Million Dollar Baby*" just a generation before.

It seems like every generation, there's a new film that does this, that basically says, "Your life is better as a disabled person if you're dead." A lot of times, it's physically disabled people like *Million Dollar Baby*, Hillary Swank becomes a paraplegic.

The message of that is, again, spoilers, give you a second to fast-forward, she literally has the plug pulled on her because she would rather be dead than live a life as a disabled person. That was Clint Eastwood's message about disability back in, what was it, the late '90s, early 2000? Then, we have *Me Before You* 10 years later.

We have these films over and over again that tell wheelchair users and other physically disabled people, "Your lives are better if you're dead. You want romance, you want family? Forget that. You don't get that."

The biggest croc of *Me Before You* is that Heather and I know so many disabled men, and they would be like, "Yes, please, Emelia Clarke." She's basically like, "I want to have sex with you. I love you," and he's like, "No, thanks."

Everybody in our community was like, "No, this would never happen. This is not what we have seen." Instead, what ends up happening is a lot of physically disabled men can't get girlfriends, and that's a part of their problem. It can even become toxic to where...Men still get the message.

Cis men still get the message that they're entitled to female bodies, and female labor, and female presence. I see a toxic environment where there's cis disabled men who are like, "Why am I not getting romance, because society says, I'm a man, I deserve this?"

There's all kinds of these conflicting messages that disabled people are getting anyway. If you don't see yourself represented at all, the message is you don't deserve a relationship. You don't deserve a place in the world. That's where we get in a very dangerous territory.

For me, that was my story. I didn't see myself, and I was picked on, and all the messages I got were just at my face, "you're worthless," you're even at the point of, "Go kill yourself."

I spend a lot of time with suicidal-like shit because I didn't see myself represented. Heather's right. Representation impacts literally everything. That's why we do this study we do, because it impacts our legislation. It impacts how we're treated. It impacts our mental health and our self-worth.

If you don't see yourself anywhere, where do you belong in this world? That was what I thought the whole time. I don't belong here because...

You also sometimes get the message for me. I got so many mixed messages of, "You can have everything." That's a false promise to disabled people, too. Being told, "You can get married." It was a real eye-opener for me when I learned I couldn't get married because so long people saying, "Yeah, you can have a wedding."

Of course, they infantilize disabled people and our relationships. It's always, "Oh, you'd be so cute in your little wedding outfit," but it's not a reality. It's a false reality we're promising disabled kids. It shouldn't be a false reality at all.

The media impacting it is definitely one of the ways that I think that marriage equality is affected because we don't see relationships. We don't see parenting, like Heather said.

We found that less than 10 percent of the actors we knew were actually disabled playing themselves. Even when they do tell our stories and we do...Most representations are bit roles, which means you're one and done. You're on one episode. They kind of know you. You might not get a backstory.

The majority of people are either heterosexual disabled characters or have unknown sexuality. We have way more people with unknown sexuality than LGBT disabled people, which is interesting because LGBT and disability, there's a lot of overlap there.

We even write about statistics in our paper how there's such a huge overlap but there's more unknown disabled people because they're not...You're either not getting to know the characters or there's this infantilization, as I said, where you don't get relationships in these portrayals.

When the government says we want to make policies, they are also impacted by the lack of representation because they've never seen disabled people in relationships, either. There's this misconception of out of sight, out of mind. Why would you want to...?

I've been told that. "You have a relationship for real?" Why would I want companionship, and love, and all of that stuff? It's all very dependent on these messages we're getting. It influences everything relating to disability.

They're all related, as well. Explaining this is like if we're going in circles here, I think. That's how the system is designed. It's designed to confuse us. It's designed to make disabled people give up and say, "I'm either going to stay on these services or whatever or I'm just not going to get services at all and I'm going to suffer and maybe end up in a nursing home anyway."

**Heather:** I think that's so true. I had so many thoughts while you were talking about how so much of our cessation of disabled persons living in a fully actualized way. Is that supported, us opting for assisted is supported rather than our dreams. We can't even get the dreaming if we don't have a particular set of policy in place to support our day to day quality of life.

Since we, as disabled persons, have always been here. We're in every facet of life. We are big community contributors, which a lot of people don't think about.

I know for myself and my experience as a disabled person and as a parent, as a caregiver for my dad for 11 years until his passing, and a community builder, that was my experience. I know so many disabled persons, especially women, especially Black women and other women of color, who exist in that continuum.

I think about that impact, and I like to envision it as a Fibonacci scroll where it extends from the personal to those in proximity and then out to the wider greater community.

When you think about who's in your community, who makes up that community, I need for, not only individuals, but leadership that have a more expansive vision and not think about when they're enacting policy.

That it be fully informed by the most impacted and who their policies are targeted because it doesn't just stay static to that particular group as if that's viral enough, especially if it's not supporting it, but it impacts those around us because we affect people around us, and then they go on and impact other people that they come into contact with.

If we could envision that and think about our own individual power and how we contribute to the world at large, maybe, just maybe, that is something that people could really consider and how disabled people live and work and socialize and then contribute to the community.

I also think about how learning about disabled people in history would be so beneficial. How I might have learned that in grade school, or as a young adult about people like Harriet Tubman, about Fannie Lou Hamer, Brad Lomax, Sojourner Truth, and I think about how that might have contributed to my butting self-awareness. I know it might have impacted my advocacy skills much sooner.

Also, for people who are newly disabled because we acquire disabilities in one of four ways, by birth, accident, illness, and it being age-related, so it impacts a wide variety of folks. We have to keep talking about that. We need to have that represented in so many different ways and formats. We don't really think about disabilities.

We're talking about beauty and kink and pleasure and sexuality and sensuality. I didn't see any of that growing up in beauty magazines and on TV. Like Dom said, if that's not represented in that way, you feel invisible. Where are you? If it's not being shown, it's assumed to not exist.

If it doesn't exist, you're never going to be either thought up or you're going to be an afterthought. That's never good for us. We see that play out in terms of accessibility in a wide variety of areas, whether it's structural, or whether it's system-wide.

These conversations, unfortunately, have to be talked about still 32-plus years after the Americans with Disabilities Act has been passed. It'll be newsworthy until it's not, until it's normalized practice. That's really the goal.

Let it be normalized practice so that we don't have to keep talking about this stuff and sounding like we're in our own echo chambers. It is disheartening. We have hope because we do have joy among us at least. It's not just all doom and gloom. It's a lot of innovation that is happening.

Honestly, we don't really get the credit for all of that. It's like look to the most marginalized because we have a lot of skill sets that people don't even think about. A lot of us have higher sensitivity levels. We have adaptive skills, analytical skills. Dom was just talking about that. We know logistics like nobody's business.

These are all transferable skills that can be applicable to many settings. You want disabled people on your planning committees, your event committees, or part of your communities, your classrooms, your corporations, because there is just an untapped resource and only one thing people think about. It's that media representation again. That's really important.

That's probably why a lot of us stick our own media presence in our hands with writing and blogging, with what Dom does in filmmaking because we get to steer the ship that way and tell the story in a more meaningful and better-informed way. Because if not, you got to keep getting these trash representations.

**Keith:** Thanks so much, Heather and Dom, for being our guests on today's episode. It was so interesting and insightful to hear from both you about your experiences and knowledge on this topic.

**Maddie:** Definitely. If you liked today's episode, stay tuned for part two. In the meantime, please help us be found by more listeners by sharing this episode with a friend, giving us a like, review, or rating wherever you're listening.

We definitely want to keep making content that you enjoy. That will help us do so.

**Keith:** Yeah. Stay tuned for new episodes real soon. The best way to be notified when new episodes drop is to subscribe. We are on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, YouTube, Google, Amazon, and almost anywhere you get podcasts.

**Maddie:** Yep. For more information and transcripts of each episode, visit [disabilityrightsflorida.org/podcast](http://disabilityrightsflorida.org/podcast).

[background music]

**Maddie:** The "You First" podcast is produced by Disability Rights Florida, a not-for-profit corporation working to protect and advance the rights of Floridians with disabilities through advocacy and education. If you or a family member has a disability and feel that your rights have been violated in any way, please contact Disability Rights Florida.

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