AT Banter Podcast Episode 339 - Darla Biccum

Sun, Jun 04, 2023 2:15PM 57:41

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

writing, audio, writer, description, story, project, darla, script, diane, process, watch, ai, piece, podcast, viewer, scene, vocabulary, find, listening, talk

SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, Darla Biccum, Ryan Fleury

R Rob Mineault 00:18

Hey and welcome to another episode AT Banter.

R Ryan Fleury 00:23

Banter, banter.

R Rob Mineault 00:25

Hey, ouch. That was loud, it actually disorientated me. Hey, this is of course the podcast where we talk with our guests and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault and joining me today, Mr. Ryan Fleury.

R Ryan Fleury 00:47

Hello, I'm back.

R Rob Mineault 00:50

You're always here. You have to actually leave.

R Ryan Fleury 00:53

I'm just here week after week.

R Rob Mineault 00:55

Oh, that's true. I'm sure, that's what the audience is saying.

R Ryan Fleury 00:59

Oh, no, me again.

R Rob Mineault 01:02

And no, Lis or Steve today, because they have lives. So it's just us. How are you?

R Ryan Fleury 01:12

I'm good. I had something I was going to talk about today. But I forgot all about it. So I'm not going to talk about it. I'm gonna start writing stuff down.

R Rob Mineault 01:21

Yeah, you do. Everybody knows what's going on in my life. And I don't ever never leave room for you, Ryan.

R Ryan Fleury 01:32

Well, you're busy. You got more going on than I do. The only thing I got going on is this podcast.

R Rob Mineault 01:39

Well, listen, that's that's the thing. Wait, where did you Where did you get the impression that I have a life? I'm here too. Talk to Lis and Steve, they are the ones with lives.

R Ryan Fleury 01:52

It's true.

R Rob Mineault 01:53

Whenever, it's their loss. Hey, so speaking of the podcast, though .. What the heck are we doing today?

R Ryan Fleury 02:01

Well, today we are continuing our discussion with a writer from Descriptive Video works this week. Joining us is Darla Biccum and Darla, I really hope I pronounced your last name correctly. If not, I can be reprimanded.

D Darla Biccum 02:18

You did!

R Ryan Fleury 02:20

Yay. Thanks so much for joining us. We really appreciate it.

D Darla Biccum 02:23

Thanks for having me. It's great to be here.

R Rob Mineault 02:26

Yeah, we love talking about audio description. You know, it's such a great and interesting field. Especially, you know, we talked with Diane Newman last week. And, it's really interesting to sort of hear a little bit of the insight into her sort of her process and how her side of audio description works. So we're, we are really excited to sort of talk to you because I get the feeling it's going to be a very different process for you. So, yeah. We're excited to talk to you.

D Darla Biccum 02:55

Excellent. Yeah, I'm a huge fan of, of audio description. Obviously. It's one of those things I fell into doing in my life and discovered I had a lot of combined experience in different aspects of my life that kind of made me good at the job. So I enjoy the challenge of it and enjoy writing new and different things all the time.

R Rob Mineault 03:19

Well, why don't we why don't we start there? Why don't you give us a little bit of insight and a little bit of background on you, in terms of just how you did actually land as a writer of audio description.

D Darla Biccum 03:31

So I'm an actor by trade. I've done a lot of theater, and film and TV. And many years ago now,

I'd say over 12 years ago, a friend of mine was doing live description, and she was pregnant. And she was her due date was right around a crucial point in the show that she was doing live description on. So I was trained as backup for her. And then I went on to do some live audio description and different events. And from there segwayed into writing. So I've been primarily writing now since 2015. And yeah, so I have a background in theater. I've also had a million other jobs in retail and sales and coaching and facilitating and all those kinds of things. So a lot of the pieces kind of came together for me in a in doing this job that I do, and I love it. It's and at the end of the day, I feel good about helping tell a story or helping include someone in the telling of a story or in the receiving of a story.

R Ryan Fleury 04:50

So were you a writer at all before you became one for for DPW? Because it seems to be quite an art.

D Darla Biccum 04:59

Yeah, I wouldn't have called myself a writer necessarily. I did a lot of writing. And I was often the person that people would come to and say, I'm having trouble writing a letter, can you help me massage it? Can you help me with the words? I was actually working with a life coach, and her first assignment for me was to tell people that I was a writer. This was before I even heard of audio description. So I was like, well, I guess I have to embrace that. I'm a writer. I, you know, I did some creative writing, I wrote a one woman show that I performed, things like that, but I had never really, you know, labeled myself as such as a writer. And then I started to look at patterns in my life. People asking me to write things, people asking me to speak at things. And I thought, hmm, there's something to this, there's something in the, the world of and for me, it's all linked to telling stories. And I started to identify that, that writing stories was something that I was kind of good at, and not only good at, but it was something that I was really passionate about. I love telling stories, and I love helping bring all aspects of the story to life for people in different ways. So audio description was a good fit for that.

R Rob Mineault 06:21

Well, I find it really interesting that you sort of cut your teeth on live description, because I would assume that that's a lot more of a challenge to describe a live event, as opposed to when you're you're crafting sort of the script for for a canned show.

D Darla Biccum 06:40

Yeah, absolutely. Live is really, truly flying by the seat of your pants. And I think my performance background helped me with that. And then it also helped me understand the thing I took away from live description that I still think of when I'm writing is, you know, I was taught with live description to imagine that you're sitting next to someone who's blind or low vision, and you're sitting next to them on the couch, and you want to keep it conversational, you don't want to interrupt their experience of the show, you want to augment it, you want to stay out as much as you can, but you want to give them the information, you need to keep the story

moving forward. And so I've always, I've always kept that notion of, of keeping it familiar, keeping it sometimes conversational, or, or matching the tone of the piece. If it's something with more flour, flowery language, then my descriptions can lean that way. If it's a fast and furious pace, show that I try to, you know, keep the language and the energy and the flow the same to match that. So I've I've always kind of taken that first introduction into what audio description was that kind of sitting next to someone on the couch and helping them, you know, map out a story. I've always kind of kept that in the back of my head when I'm writing.

R Rob Mineault 08:08

One and I think that that's really the key to really effective audio description. I mean, it's interesting that you talk about being conversational, because I also think that audio description is one of these things that it's in a way it's kind of a thankless job, because if it's working properly, the way that you want it to be, it's almost invisible. The audio descriptive script is, is almost like another character, it's it has a specific relationship with the viewer that you don't want it to stand out. You don't want it to become the focus of attention. You're just trying to sort of supplement everything else that's going on in in the piece.

D Darla Biccum 08:52

Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's always, you know, I've often said that too. If you don't notice I'm there then I'm doing my job well, because I do want it to be I want to be part of the story just as much as the sound effects are and the music is and and you know, the visual pieces for the people who can see that i i want to blend into the wallpaper of the story, not make it all about my writing.

R Rob Mineault 09:18

I'm really curious to sort of hear about a little bit about your, your own process, then. There's so many different variables. I would think when you're when you're writing a script like this, because you've got you've got things like okay, well what is the tone of the piece? What is even what's the tone of this particular scene? Is it a sad scene? Is it a tense scene? Is it full of drama? And not only that, then you've also got to juggle things like okay, well, where can I fit in the description, because you can't step on dialogue, you can't step on even I'm sure that sound effects at times. So there must be a real economy of words in language where it's like, I've got to, I've got to evoke a certain tone in a certain way in a certain time. Like to me, as a sort of a novice, like that just sounds incredibly difficult.

D Darla Biccum 10:13

Well, yes, it certainly has its challenges. And definitely, you know, all genres present all kinds of, of challenges to overcome. In terms of my process. I think, you know, I really kind of lean on training I had in back in my theater days of doing script analysis. And one of the things that we would do in script analysis is we would read the play, and then we would make a list of first impressions. Because inside of building a play, an audience sees that play one time, and I want them to walk away with the same impressions that I had when I first read it, you know, so it's

that map through things. So applying that to audio description, I would say 90% of the things I write I watch ahead of time. And that, for me, does a lot of things it first of all, gives me the first impression about what what is the tone, what does this make me feel? What was I surprised by, what did I need to know in order to get through the story? And then the other thing it does is I bring in my technical mind, and I go, oh, this is important, I'm going to have to make sure I set this up. I never used to watch something before I wrote it, but it was actually I wrote The Adventures of Puss in Boots, which is an animated series. And I started watching that ahead of time, because I would get two thirds of the way through an episode and think, where did that come from? He's got something hidden on his little swashbuckling belt next to his sword, and I don't know where that came from. And then I'd have to backtrack and find it in the episode. This is silly. I'm just gonna watch it. So I know what happens all the way through, and then I can set things up properly. So for me, you know, the process starts there. Understanding what is the story being told, the tone, and then also looking for the technical pitfalls. Where am I going to run out of time, where am I going to be pressed for time, where am I going to be most challenging trying to fit something in? So then I, you know, try to be creative without, you know, manipulating the story. You know, if there's a busy scene with a lot of dialogue, I will try to set up as much as I can before the scene starts, so that the viewer has a foothold, and they're, they're ready for what comes up. And then the things that happen in the scene will flesh out the details. So that's, you know, that's a big part of my process, watching it first. And then when I come to the end of the process of writing something, I like to I like to have a bit of separation, I usually like to try to finish a project, and then the next day, proofread it, because what that does is give me a bit of separation. And then I then I proofread my script, and I want to be able to recall watching it. So I kind of want that full circle experience. When I take when I take a step back from my writing and then read it - do I evoke the same kind of first impressions and details and story, you know, beautiful story, plotlines that when I watched it, I was aware of and wanted to convey. So that's, that's kind of the, you know, and of course, every project is different. And every project brings its own set of challenges. But by and large, that's the that's the full circle thing I try to achieve. What did I feel when I watched it? And what is important to know, and how do I convey that for the viewer?

R Ryan Fleury 14:01

So if you get sent a film or a TV show, and I'm assume like you just mentioned, you watch it, and start taking your notes. After you're done that project? Do you take a second watch to see if you actually caught everything? Or are you pretty much satisfied that you did the first pass?

D Darla Biccum 14:21

Um, no, I don't usually watch it again at the end because I've, by that time, I've gone through the thing frame by frame. I've looked at all the details. And you know, often when I'm writing, I have to go back over something, you know, action sequences for example, I've developed a little technique for myself that I you know, if I've got an action sequence that say two and a half minutes long, I will watch it over and over, over and over and over again. And what I'll try to do often I try to describe it live, because that tells usually those instincts with live tells to me what's most important. And then after I watch it and watch it a few times, I'll close my eyes and, and I'll just write out what I can remember. Because usually what I remember are the things that are most important. The things that stand out are the things that are visually

captivating work. And so, you know, there's there's certainly different techniques inside of that process. But usually, once I'm done writing and proofreading, I know it inside and out. So I don't generally watch it again.

R Ryan Fleury 15:32

Do you ever get notes from a director or a studio, you know, specifying that these are critical, these need to be mentioned or not mentioned or anything like that?

D Darla Biccum 15:46

There have been a few projects, I would say, like independent projects. Recently, I can think of a movie I did, where I didn't have any guidelines necessarily beforehand. But they reviewed my script after I wrote it. And, you know, there were things that they wanted to maybe mention, and actually, there was a bit of back and forth. There was a dynamic of, I want you to explain this, and then I would have to say, well, we it's not our job to explain. I write what I see, you know, so trying to because it is a real nuance, I feel with audio description in not spoon feeding it. I really want to be, it's impossible to be completely subjective. But I want to strive for, you know, objectivity so that people can have their own interpretation based on the visual cues that I'm inputting. Sometimes there is a back and forth, like I say, it depends on the project. Other times, we're doing things for networks, and the QC process is, you know, typos or things mispronounced or suggestions, things like that. So, more often than not, my participation after writing is with a QC team. But there are certainly projects where I'm working with a producer or a writer or director, that, you know, they are sometimes a bit more enmeshed in the story and have trouble understanding that we don't want to explain, you know, things like that. But, you know, other times I've gotten feedback that they're really surprised at how the process, you know, how the process works, and how amazing it is to the visuals that they didn't know, were compelling. that stood out to me. So I wrote about them. And I do try to match the language to the tone of the piece. And, you know, I've gotten good feedback over the years of things that I was like, wow, you know, you really captured what we were trying to do there visually.

R Ryan Fleury 17:58

So when you're when you're writing the language for or trying to match the tone of a piece, how difficult is that? Because I'm assuming that by the time you get an episode, or a movie, you don't have a whole lot of time to do your research. So if you're doing a period piece, or, you know, a horror film, or, you know, even there was a show on Netflix called sex education, where, you know, there was a non binary person in there. So learning the vocabulary that's related to that. What is that process? How does that work?

D Darla Biccum 18:35

You know, certainly, again, it varies project to project and a lot of, you know, watching something ahead of time for me, is the inventory session that where I have to take stock of what do I know? And what do I don't know? What do I don't know? What do I not know? So

yeah, there's a lot of googling. There's a lot. Speaking of Diane Newman, she narrated Breaking Bad and I wrote Breaking Bad. And I, when I was writing, Breaking Bad, I was doing it in Mexico and the things I was googling, I really thought I was going to end up on a watch list.

R Ryan Fleury 19:16

That's understandable.

D Darla Biccum 19:19

In fact, there was there was one time that I was googling meth and all these things and I got I had a little dialog box pop up on the bottom of my screen and said if you need help call 1-800.... So yeah, certainly there's a lot of research and oftentimes, you can do a lot of research and maybe use a fraction of it, right. But I always like to believe that whatever research I do, you know, and this goes back to my work as an actor too. There's a lot of research you do for a character that you don't necessarily play, or you can't necessarily play. But what it does is it feeds into the experience. My experience of this of this piece or this work, so that hopefully, that experience feeds into the vocabulary that I build and things like that. I just did a series about about sharks. So I don't know a lot about sharks, but you get to know a lot about sharks and you start to see common vocabulary words that come up. And so you want to try to, again also from the the dialogue itself in the piece, you you're pulling your vocabulary from that as well. It's all about being part of that seamless, making it a seamless addition to the thing, not something that's jarring.

R Rob Mineault 20:45

Yeah, it's, it's interesting, too, because I can sort of imagine how how incredibly handy it is to have that theater background and to have like, some some film background, because, you know, if you really think about it, there's a whole visual vocabulary that a filmmaker goes through in order to say set up a scene. So for example, when a horror movie, you know, might have a Dutch Angle, which is just kind of like, you know, the cameras tilted slightly, in a way that it's just, it's supposed to kind of unsettle the viewer, or a particular type of lighting that's like, purple infused with blue, and, you know, these all these colors going on that are specifically part of that filmmakers, intention to sort of create a specific emotion, I guess. So it must be really handy for you, you can sort of recognize those things and go, okay, this scene is supposed to be unsettling so you can kind of build that into your description. Am I kind of reading that right?

D Darla Biccum 21:53

Yeah, absolutely. You know, like, there's, there's certainly, we don't talk about camera angles, but oftentimes, I look at something and go, what are they trying to do with this technique? And yeah, is it they're trying to make the viewer unsettled? Is it a soft focus, all those types of things? So I'm not I'm not actively describing the camera angle, or what the technical aspects are. But I asked myself, what is the intention behind this? And you know, and quite often, like, for example, oftentimes, there's flash cuts, you know, one scene goes to the next there's no

time to explain, or there's an end. Oftentimes I think, gee, my transition is too abrupt here. But then I look at what the filmmakers doing. And I think, well, that was abrupt for me seeing it. So then I go, okay, then it's okay for my transition to be abrupt when you hear it. You know, so trying to dig into what the intentions are. I'm never going to get it entirely right, but, yeah, it certainly helps to try to break down what the intentions of things are. And that's where, you know, as much the more material we have, you know, if we can get a script, if we can get you know, any information from the people who have made the project, it certainly goes a long way into helping us, you know, tie into what the intention of the piece is, and what the what the vision of the piece is.

R Ryan Fleury 23:25

Wait, wait, is that a show?

R Rob Mineault 23:25

Well, and I guess, in a way, and not to throw any filmmakers under the bus, but, you know, like, sometimes filmmakers tried to do things and they just don't quite succeed. So does that ever play into it? Like, I don't know, you're, you're writing a script for Planet of the Vampire Squirrels, and you know -- Trademark! I came up with it for anybody out there wants to make that. But but you know, does that ever kind of factor into it? Where you're just like, well, I'm doing the best I can with what I've got, but you're only limited to the filmmakers vision.

D Darla Biccum 24:10

Yeah, and not to throw any of my fellow actors under the bus but sometimes I'm not entirely clear what their intention is behind the scene, but the script might give me a bit of a nudge in what they were trying to achieve. So you know, maybe sometimes my description might augment the performance, I'm not sure. But I would say maybe on some long running shows you know in the certain style it's like ... he's brooding again. That's that's all I can say, he broods. So you know, you you try to be as as clear and concise with what you see and try not to augment. But sometimes it's tempting so...

R Rob Mineault 24:55

Well something else that I'm that I'm super curious about, because we talked to Diane last week, one of the things that she that she mentioned that I really was surprised with was that she doesn't even see the script beforehand, she walks in, she does most of it cold, she hasn't seen the show, she doesn't even necessarily she doesn't have the show on while she's recording it. She's kind of removed from it. And it sounds like you know, she can do an hour show in about an hour. So for you, it's completely different. So I'm kind of curious to hear about what your process is kind of, like from whatever when you get the script, or, or do you get like a script first, and then you get the the actual film or TV show? How does it all work?

D Darla Biccum 25:48

Every project is different. That's that's the blanket answer. But you know, for Breaking Bad, for example, all I ever got was a video. This and we were writing the show well after it had aired. So I could certainly go on the internet and find, you know, Fandom pages are always really interesting, or recaps that people write. Things like that. I'd also watch the series. So you know, quite often we get nothing but the video. So I watch it and I work through and I write it. Certainly like a 45 minute show probably takes me six to eight hours to write depending on the genre. So there's certainly more of an investment of time with the writing process. And there's certainly more of the research side of things that come into play. So it's, it's one of those things, I may have a lot of information to go on, or I may have nothing to go on, except what I can see on the screen. So it's always different challenges. Sometimes we get videos that are heavily watermarked, so it's challenging, because we can't quite see exactly what's going on. So I'm trying to communicate to people that was like, we actually need a really clear copy of this, because I'm describing what I see, and if I can't see it ... but, you know, there's, there's sometimes that communication breakdown that we have to rectify in order to produce a better product, quite frankly.

R Ryan Fleury 27:38

So I have to ask the question, do you prefer 68 hours of writing for a project, or 20 to 25 minutes to do a Hallmark Hall of Fame movie?

D Darla Biccum 27:52

Those Hallmarks can be tricky, man. Well, you know, it's funny, there's so many projects that I've worked on, and then I've done that I never would have chosen to watch. It just wouldn't have been on my radar, it wouldn't have been something that I wanted to see. But then going through the process of of writing and describing it and doing the research, it's like, oh, that was actually really interesting. Different views or things that I wouldn't have otherwise known about. So it's interesting how invested you get when you start to, you know, dive into it, and figure out how you're going to convey this story for your audience. You know, and I take that seriously, I always say that, I wish I could do a crappy job and just blast it out. But I can't, I'm always really invested in something and, and whether it's whether it's a silly movie that I'll never get the time back from watching or it's something that's really in depth and involved. I always find myself committing to it and getting invested in the storytelling of it. So it's, and some of those take longer than others, you know?

R Ryan Fleury 29:15

Well, and I was saying to Diane last week, and she did mention a website, and I'll have to go back and track it down. But, you know, as someone who's totally blind myself, I had asked her or mentioned that it would be great if there was a place to find out who described what, because, you know, a lot of people have commented on Diane's delivery. And if there was a directory of shows that she's done, those of us who are fans of hers could find those shows and just keep following her process. And same with the writers you know, not all writers are whatever agreed upon by by other people, you know, Rob and I probably have different tastes and genres. So if we had a directory of writers like yourself that we knew you did Breaking Bad

that you did ABC, we could follow that work as well. And I know Diane had mentioned that DVW, I think in the last year or so, has started mentioning who the describer is, in the credits, at the end of the shows. Are the writers listed as well?

D Darla Biccum 30:20

We have started listing credits for the writers. That's been a very recent move. And, you know, for me, as a writer, it was never, it didn't really matter to me to be, you know, fully transparent. But I think that comes from kind of working in a vacuum, you know, you you, I write these things, and I put them out there. And I assume someone's listening to it. Facebook's been great --there's that audio description discussion group on Facebook, and you know, following that, and, hey, they're talking about my writing. And so that's nice to be recognized. It's nice to hear how how the project landed with people what they liked what they didn't like. But I think I, you know, I wrote for so many years without that feedback that, it is very much like working in a vacuum. So I didn't even consider that. And a lot of people don't know that there's often a writer and a narrator, that there's two separate people involved in it. Often they think the narrator is just making up the words. And so, yeah, it's always nice to be recognized. But, you know, for me, it's, it's not vital. If people know that I wrote it, there is a database that I know that, you know, work is tracked, because I was asked if I would mind, you know, listing shows that I've written. I'm like, no, absolutely not go for it. I can't find it off the top of my head here. But I can certainly pass that along to you, because it's a great resource in terms of laying out the different shows that I've written, and that sort of thing. And, yeah, if people are interested in following in that sense, then sure, it should be. As far as me, you know, being recognized for it doesn't really matter to me, in one way or the other. Though, the feedback is certainly nice when I hear that people enjoyed something.

R Ryan Fleury 32:22

Well, and I think you would agree, and I think you've already mentioned it earlier that there's good writing, there's bad writing, and there's good audio describers and there's bad audio describers. I'm listening to a show right now on Netflix, and this guy, just it makes me cringe. But I'm enjoying the show. So I'm gonna, get through it. I think you guys deserve to be recognized for doing great work. So, yeah, if you can share that link with us, we'd definitely put it in the show notes.

D Darla Biccum 32:47

Yeah, absolutely. I'll go back in my emails and track it down.

R Rob Mineault 32:50

So in sort of, from your perspective, the field itself - is it beginning to really gain some credibility? Because from the outside, it seems to me that it is we're hearing more people talk about it, it seems to be more of a of a conversation. And especially since that you do occasionally get notes from say, producers or, you know, the studio, I would think that that's kind of in a way, it's a good sign, because it means that they're actually paying attention to

that aspect of the creative process. And they're interested in making that better, which seems to me as much of a pain in the butt it probably can be to have so many cooks in the kitchen, I would think that it is kind of a good sign because people are paying attention. What's your sort of perspective on all that? Have you have you noticed any sort of growth in credibility in that sense?

D Darla Biccum 33:51

Yeah, I think certainly, if, in terms of gauging that I would probably look to when people ask what I do, you know, there were certainly times when I first started doing this work they say, what do you do? And I say I write audio description. What's that? They had no idea. And then say, oh, you must be able to type really fast. Captioning. That's for people who can't hear - I'm working with for people that are blind and can't see. Okay, so we'll get that straight. So certainly now, that has definitely changed over the last decade. Now when I say that I write for audio description they say oh, yeah, that's cool. You know, people understand it more. At the same time, I would also say that I'm surprised that people are still finding out about it. You know, the team that I work with at Descriptive Video Works, we share stories. I was at a friend's house the other day and her mom is blind. So I was telling her about what I do and she had no idea that audio description existed. And I think, oh, what? We've come a long way, baby. But so yeah, you know, as much I think what has the best thing that has made the leaps and bounds and strides of moving audio scription ahead is consumers getting more demanding or more having higher expectations for the quality that's there. You know, I think for a lot of people, it was ticking a box, oh, we have to make this accessible. Okay, check, it's done. But then there are people that are really interested in telling their story to all of their viewers, you know, sighted or otherwise. So there are some people that really understand, I see it as a real craft, you know, and I think there are people that understand that and want to support that. And then there are others that are maybe still ticking a box. So we're certainly further down the road of, I don't know if mainstream is the right word, but I'm certainly having the it more recognizable in terms of service that's available. But I think there's still a long way to go to.

R Ryan Fleury 36:19

Yeah, I was just gonna say we're not quite where we need to be like, closed captioning is everywhere, but we're getting there.

R Rob Mineault 36:27

So at the top of the show, we talked a little bit about AI. And we, we talked a little bit to Diane about this too. So I'm curious to get your take on it.Do you see that that could potentially eventually have a role in all of this, whether it be in the writing process or the the, the voice part of it?

D Darla Biccum 37:00

Well, I gotta say, it's probably it's really loaded. For me as an actor, you know, there's, there's a lot of elements of AI, that are going a long way to try to eliminate the job of an actor. There are, there are things at work to take your likeness. And then once they have your likeness, whether

there are things at work to take your likeness. And then once they have your likeness, whether it's your voice or your likeness, now they're gonna run with it, and you sign the dot sign on the dotted line, and they can do whatever they want. So as a performer, I break out into hives when I think about AI. And so certainly that, I think that colors my perception of it. But you know, that there's text to speech, there's, there's things now that try to automate the process. And by and large, the process, the feedback I've heard is people don't like it. So I don't know if it will, you know, keep improving to the point where people like it, and it's something that's beneficial. I think it it takes away from the artistry of it, the craft of it, and it tries to kind of slough off off this responsibility of accessibility by handing it over to AI. And, you know, it's artificial intelligence, in the name. And to me, it it, it goes against everything that I try to inject in the work, which is, you know, blood sweat, tears, research, vocabulary, attention to detail all of those things, right? And no, I don't believe a machine can do it better. And I'm gonna drag my heels and say, say that confidently and could be wrong, but that's where I come from with it to me. I am a storyteller, whether I'm writing it, whether I'm speaking it performing it, and I think losing a connection to that very core thing of sharing stories with people. In a personal sense, I think it's dangerous to try to cheat that.

R Rob Mineault 39:17

Well. And especially just to make the process cheaper, which is at the end of the day, that's where the companies would would land in terms of using it. They would just be like, well, this we can, we can produce a lot more content if we if we just use AI because we don't have to pay.

D Darla Biccum 39:34

And often those those bottom line that people that are dealing with those bottom lines are making billions of dollars so I don't have a lot of sympathy for them.

R Ryan Fleury 39:44

And the community wants good audio description. You know, most of us are on the bandwagon of go away with text to speech, even the old you know, Star Trek series and stuff on the old internet archives, you know, sure some of that would be great. Hate for it to be done with text to speech, but at the same time, if it can be done by human that's get it done by a human. Right? Because we all prefer that, or most of us prefer that.

D Darla Biccum 40:11

Right? And, and why should it be a fight? You know? Just because someone absorbs a story in a different way, why should it be diminished?

R Rob Mineault 40:23

Yeah, well, you know, and the the old archives was, was what we were talking kind of talking about amongst ourselves last week, in terms of, oh, maybe that is, could be a place for it.

Because really, nobody's clamoring for, you know, old episodes of like, the Andy Griffith Show. Nobody, you know, nobody cares about that, or Happy Days or Taxi or like, their shows, but at the same time, but maybe, maybe we should be like, maybe that would create a bit of a second life for them. Because if we did create really engaging audio description for their shows, maybe a whole new segment of people would be interested in them again.

D Darla Biccum 41:09

Absolutely. You know, like I said, when we did Breaking Bad it was well, after the series ended. And the number of times I read feedback that someone said that they had already been through the entire series, then found out it was audio described and went and did the whole series again, you know, and I mean, the longer this writer strike goes on, we may need to go through through archives, and get back catalogs and stuff. And you know, that certainly work that we do at Descriptive Video Works is, you know, series of older series that are already on streamers and things like that. I can't see any reason not to do that.

R Ryan Fleury 41:54

And I'll jump in real quick and say, I lost my sight later in life. I have visual memory of Happy Days, and Taxi and all those shows. So if we could go back and have them described, I'd be able to relive those now that I can't see them through audio description.

D Darla Biccum 42:10

Yeah, absolutely. And why should Why should you have to listen to it with a robot voice?

R Rob Mineault 42:16

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Written by somebody who doesn't understand the context of this scene, right, which is something that an AI will never be able to do. You know, yes, it can. It can maybe one day, you know, describe all the technical aspects of any given scene, but it's, it's not you doesn't understand the context of it like a human does.

D Darla Biccum 42:36

Yeah, absolutely. And I think, you know, hopefully, that's that, I think it still matters now. And hopefully, that will still matter, it or will matter more in the future in terms of trying to defend this notion of artistry of, you know, of what we do is, is not data entry, it is far more than that. And we're trying to be a part of the storytelling process just as much as the director and the actors and the producers and all of that. So, to me, it's ridiculous to suggest that one aspect or one segment of an audience should get a diminished return on their investment of their time into a story. Because it's cheaper. Yeah.

R Rob Mineault 43:25

Rob Mineault 43:25

Well put. We're so dumb as humans, I mean, artificial intelligence and the first thing we go after is stuff that we actually like to do like creativity in the arts and performing and all that stuff music like we just that's the first thing that we try to replace. That's like, that's crap that we like to do as humans.

D Darla Biccum 43:48

Exactly. I saw a tweet or something a meme I don't know saying saying just that, that now the people are doing menial dead end jobs for minimum wage, and we have aI painting and creating visual stories. What Where did wait a minute, we screwed that one up. Let's go back.

R Rob Mineault 44:10

If we replace anybody, like, replace politicians. Oh, wouldn't that be great? Yeah, President Chat GPT would solve climate change overnight.

D Darla Biccum 44:21

There would be no ego involved.

R Rob Mineault 44:24

Yeah, exactly. Really easy fix.

D Darla Biccum 44:27

Chat-GPT for Pres.

R Ryan Fleury 44:30

Ethics, no corruption.

R Rob Mineault 44:40

We wouldn't even need a plug in. Ethical plug in.

R Ryan Fleury 44:46

Are there any particular genres you enjoy writing for more than others?

D Darla Biccum 44:53

I've said in the past that the next favorite thing to write is the thing I haven't written yet. It makes me a better writer, you know, when I have to, when I have to kind of put myself in a place of, okay, someone's gonna find this enjoyable, even if it's not my thing. So how do I, how do I tell this do this story justice? However, I draw the line at horror because I do a form that is well known it is documented in my file at work.

R Ryan Fleury 45:28

Well, that was my next question, what makes you uncomfortable writing?

D Darla Biccum 45:32

I don't like being scared. I don't understand the appeal of being scared. Someone else can write the horror movies, because I don't I don't like it.

R Rob Mineault 45:40

Well, and that's it. So I now it's just thought of another. So do you I mean, it must be really fun to do all this learning. Because I would imagine, especially in the case of like, say, period pieces where you have to go in and you're describing things that, you know, are very specific to a specific time period that you maybe don't know anything about? Do you do run into that? It must be like, a lot of research for certain types of content?

D Darla Biccum 46:15

Oh, absolutely. That's, you know, and certainly some projects more than others, there's certainly some shows that require a lot of research makes me really great at cocktail parties, because I have, you know, a small amount of knowledge about a whole lot of things. Because I've absorbed a lot of information. The interesting thing, too, is when you you know, when you do a project, you've invested the time and the energy and, and, and amassed this knowledge. And our project managers at DPW are great about going Hey, Darla did this project before, let's give her this one too, because they're similar, or they're linked, or they have a common thread. So then, you know, you can you can develop a bit of an expert approach to it, because it's like, oh, yeah, this is like, the fourth project I've done about ASL. So I've kind of developed a vocabulary, I have an understanding of what's important to talk about, and that sort of thing. So, you know, certainly as you go along, and as you do more and more projects, and that's why I say, I like to do the thing I haven't done yet, because it it makes me a better writer. And it's, and it keeps me interested. You know, it's it's exciting to try to describe things that like I say that I wouldn't normally watch. Because it's a challenge. And it makes me a better writer, I think.

R Rob Mineault 47:41

Well, Darla, we want to really thank you so much for joining us. Love the work that you're doing, do anything to plug at all?

D Darla Biccum 47:52

Nothing really to plug. I recently moved to Manitoba and I planting a garden. So I can use any and all expertise in that realm. Yeah, I just I love what I do. And I love being you know, part of a team and descriptive video works that, you know, we're a new, full time team, that for the last year, we've been full time writers and it's been great to have, I would say that's been an amazing thing that's really augmented my writing too is having a team that we can talk about things and hey, how would you handle this and you get different perspectives. And, you know, we we meet with an advisory council quarterly and talk about, you know, we get feedback from blind and low vision people talk and their opinions can be just as diverse and wide ranging as how we as writers would approach something something. So it's, it's all really interesting to hear the different perspectives and how it all goes together.

R Rob Mineault 49:06

So that actually might be something good to plug. So if there are people out there that that do want to sort of throw in their input somewhere, where would they go to sort of the submit that?

D Darla Biccum 49:17

Well, I certainly Descriptive Video Works, you know, contacting through the website, we love getting feedback, we love knowing if something bothered you. We have made corrections to projects, you know, after the fact because something was revealed to us that we didn't know or you know, that sort of thing. On the Facebook audio description, discussion page. I follow that my whole team follows that because we like to know you know, what's what's being said what is the feedback out there? You know, I I work from home, I work in my office. I stare at my garden. I take my breaks from writing I go plant thing So, I've really kind of work in a vacuum. So the more I can understand how my work lands with people, again just makes the work better. And I think by making the work better and making writer stronger and Narrator stronger, it, it solidifies the case for this is how the work should be done. It should not be done by a machine, it should not be done by AI, it should not be done by text to speech, it should be done by living and breathing individuals who are passionate about the work. So I think the more we work with our audience, the more we work with the people who consume what we do, the stronger we become as as as an accessibility service for sure.

R Rob Mineault 50:46

Thank you again, so much, and best of luck with with the garden.

D Darla Biccum 50:54

Thank you.

R Ryan Fleury 50:54

Thanks, Darla, take care. Bye, bye, bye. Yeah, another inside look at descriptive audio.

R Rob Mineault 51:01

Yeah, it's interesting how it's a very different process for the writer, as opposed to the voice talent, which I suspected was the case. But you know, it's, it's fascinating to hear just how it all works, and how it all gets put together to result in this project that is so meaningful to a lot of people.

R Ryan Fleury 51:23

One, you have to think about the passion that these writers must have, because Breaking Bad was like five seasons, five or six seasons, and, you know, 10 or 11 episodes per season. So if she's spending six to eight hours writing, yeah, you know, think of the hours that are being sunk into horrible one show.

R Rob Mineault 51:45

I know, Breaking Bad. How many seasons was that? That's that that was like five or six? It's like five or six seasons? And there's what like, I don't know, 1314 episode? Like, I can't even do the math on that. But how many hours did she spend? Immersed in the world of Breaking Bad to write on a script? So you know, it's, that's, you know, it's a lot of hard work?

R Ryan Fleury 52:07

Yeah, absolutely. And you can tell when you watch Breaking Bad, because the audio description that Diane provides, flows naturally through, you know, she becomes another character almost in the series. And you don't even think about the writing. But now after we've spoken to Darla, you know, part of me is tempted to go back and at least watch the first or first or second season or a few episodes anyway. And just really listen to the words Diane is speaking now knowing who wrote it. Yeah. Right. Because it would give you a different appreciation, I think of the art form that is the writing.

R Rob Mineault 52:46

Yeah, for sure. It is a really sort of fascinating process. And I'm glad to hear that they're starting to get credit for it. Because even though Darla was kind of like, oh, whatever, I don't really mind, I think that they do they deserve full credit. So they They people Should should really be aware and be rewarded for creating really engaging content, that's, that's going to be valuable

to viewers, it's just as important as any of the other elements, you know, visual effects camera people, like all the everybody in those credits of that, of the, of the show that you're watching, they should be included in those.

R Ryan Fleury 53:22

Absolutely. Well, and that's why I brought it up today. And because, you know, I watch a lot of Netflix, a lot of Netflix, and everything has to have audio description, or I pretty much won't watch it unless it's something I'm really curious about. But, you know, there's so many different companies now like, and one of the companies international digital center out of the UK, I think, does audio Descriptive Video audio description. And that's where I first heard the describer, you know, announced his name in the credits. And I was like, huh, I've never heard that before. And so that's why I wanted to ask Diane, so I was actually kind of shocked when she said they've been doing it for just about a year, just over a year. It's like, wow, it's been that long. Yeah. And maybe I'm just not listening to enough of the credits, because a lot of times Netflix when an episode ends, it just jumps you to the next episode. It doesn't play the entire credit role. But you know, we've heard repeatedly from Descriptive Video works that they want feedback, they have an advisory committee, they're listening to the community, you know, at some point, I'd love to have, you know, a couple other audio described studios on our podcast, and just kind of find out, you know, their processes or their workflow. Because, you know, we've we've been in the DPW camp for years. And the way it works at IDC in the UK or BMI or whoever, you know, they may have different opinions and different processes and, you know, different thoughts. So it'd be interesting to get a different perspective. Yep. We're in Canada. We branch out a little bit more. Like I said, I'm hearing more and more all the time when I watch Netflix. So if you have a favorite audio describer let us know who it is. If you know who it is,

R Rob Mineault 55:18

All right, it's time. Hey, Ryan,

R Ryan Fleury 55:24

Yeah, Rob?

R Rob Mineault 55:25

Where can people find this?

R Ryan Fleury 55:27

They can find us watching Netflix and Amazon Prime and Crave and CBC Gem but not Paramount. I'm not paying for another subscription. Nope, sorry. Paramount got too many already. But yeah, they can find us atbanter.com

R Rob Mineault 55:44

Hey, they can also drop us an email if they so desire at all. cowbell at@atbanter.com? They can also find us on the old social media stuff. Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

R Ryan Fleury 56:09

Indeed. And that's it. That is going to about do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course to Darla for joining us and we will see everybody next week.