

# PODCAST Episode 461

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Roxie In Color, blind parents, middle-grade novel, tactile markings, Child Protective Services, Guide Dogs, accessibility, discrimination, genetic testing, audiobook, braille, publishing process, lived experience, blind community.

## SPEAKERS

Speaker 1, Rob Mineault, Lis Malone, Steve Barclay, Ryan Fleury, Stacy Cervenka, Diane Dubrovner

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**R** Rob Mineault 00:14  
Hey, and welcome to another episode of AT Banter.

**S** Steve Barclay 00:19  
Banter.

**R** Rob Mineault 00:21  
What, only one banter?

**S** Steve Barclay 00:24  
I said two banter.

**R** Rob Mineault 00:25  
Oh, did you?

**S** Steve Barclay 00:26  
Did it not come through? Are we 50% banter?

**R** Rob Mineault 00:31  
No, we just run with it. We just run with it.

**S** Steve Barclay 00:34  
All right, banter, banter.

**R** Rob Mineault 00:36  
It's ok, a single banter. We can have a single banter one week. It's fine. It's fine.

**S** Steve Barclay 00:41  
I'll triple banter next week.

**R** Rob Mineault 00:42  
Yeah, exactly.

**L** Lis Malone 00:44  
I think we got robbed, Rob.

**R** Ryan Fleury 00:47  
oh.

R Rob Mineault 00:52  
Okay. Anyways, it's give Rob a hard time episode.

S Steve Barclay 01:01  
I love those episodes.

R Rob Mineault 01:02  
Yeah, it's every episode. How's everybody? I feel like we haven't all been together for a while.

S Steve Barclay 01:09  
Yeah, it's been a bit.

R Rob Mineault 01:10  
Yeah, it has. Steve, you went to Japan, so how'd that go?

S Steve Barclay 01:14  
Japan is.. it's a whole thing. It's. it's a lot. It's the the population of Tokyo is the same as the population of Canada.

R Rob Mineault 01:27  
Wow.

S Steve Barclay 01:28  
And it is overwhelming. It really is. You know, I'm a person who doesn't like crowds in the first place, so it was, it was a lot. But after, after about a week, you kind of get desensitized to it to a certain extent, I think, and it became a little bit easier, but yeah, it was, it was a great trip, it was a real eye opener, for sure.

R

Rob Mineault 01:53

Now, we keep hearing stories about how it's a very accessible city. How did you find that?

S

Steve Barclay 02:01

Tactile markings everywhere, like everywhere, all on the sidewalks leading to the the front doors of buildings, and sometimes continuing into the buildings. Tactile markings at every intersection, braille all over the place. It was, it was a very, very accessible city.

R

Rob Mineault 02:23

We could take a lot of lessons from them, I think.

S

Steve Barclay 02:26

Yeah, yeah, it all, all of these tactical markings, they all started with one guy trying to help out his buddy in 1964 and it just ballooned from there. You know, when he, when he initially did it, he set it up around the local blind school, and everybody went, "Oh, this will never take off. And guess what, it did.

R

Rob Mineault 02:46

Yeah, yeah.

L

Lis Malone 02:48

Now all the tactile markings, is it is it braille, or are there other types?

S

Steve Barclay 02:54

No, they're on the ground, so you can follow them with a cane.

L Lis Malone 02:58  
Oh, okay.

S Steve Barclay 02:59  
And they have different textures to indicate different, different things, so like if you're just walking straight, it'll be a long bar. If you get to an intersection, it'll be a bunch of dots, and then, of course, they've also got, you know, dots all along the the edges of train stations, and yeah, I'm not sure what all of the tactile marks are, but, but they're there, they are tact tactically differentiated for different purposes.

R Rob Mineault 03:26  
I thought I heard somebody tell me that once that the bathrooms, as well, they kind of play like almost like a running water sound or something at all the bathrooms.

L Lis Malone 03:35  
That's like multipurpose, it helps you go and it helps you know where to go!

S Steve Barclay 03:42  
Okay, so the Japanese have the toilet game down pat. They, nobody owns toilets like the Japanese. They, they have, you'll walk into a public washroom and they've got a bidet on there with, you know, five or six buttons. You go into like a hotel bathroom and they'll have like 18 buttons on the thing, all labeled in candy, so you know you've got to use Google Translate to figure out what any of them mean, but they'll have like cleaning functions on them, you know, it's like, oh, you know, you flush and clean, and it'll, it'll sanitize the toilet for you, it's just, it's crazy, they, they totally have the toilet game down, they have the vending machine game down. There's vending machines absolutely freaking everywhere. They've got the tactile markings down there. They're an advanced society. They, they, they've done stuff.

S Stacy Cervenka 04:34  
I'm not sure if it's allowed, but is it okay if I share an advanced toilet experience from South Korea?

R

Rob Mineault 04:39

Absolutely.

S

Stacy Cervenka 04:41

So, I used to work for a member of the Senate, and I, North and South Korea, were in my portfolio, and this one time I went into a rest, like a restroom at a restaurant, and as you mentioned, all the toilets have like 30 buttons, I mean, the toilets are more technological than my computer. Tutor, and I mean, I couldn't figure out, you know, they didn't have braille on them, and I couldn't figure out which one flushed, so I was leaning over the toilet, like pushing a bunch of buttons, and then all of a sudden the day just sprayed me in the face, and of course I'm wearing, you know, a suit, and I'm at, you know, a business dinner representing this, and I came, I came out of the bathroom, I mean, just soaking wet, and like, yeah, I got the bidet.

S

Steve Barclay 05:28

Hey, we should find out who that is now, right?

R

Rob Mineault 05:31

Yeah, hey, that's it's an excellent segue. Well, then let's do that. Hey Ryan?

R

Ryan Fleury 05:38

Hey Rob,

R

Rob Mineault 05:41

What the heck are we doing today?

R

Ryan Fleury 05:42

Well, you know what, I'm going to change things up, and I don't know if I've ever done this, but if I have, it's been very, very rare. So, because we have two guests joining us today who know way more about each other than I do, I'm going to ask our first guest, Diane, to introduce herself, as well as our other guest, Stacy, so Diane, would you do the introductions, please?

D

Diane Dubrovner 06:06

My name is Diane Dubrovner, and I am a writer and an editor. I live in New York City, and I am the co-author of the new middle-grade novel, 'Roxie In Color', and I am joined by Stacy Cervenka, who is my co-author. She lives in Lincoln, Nebraska, and she is blind, and her husband is blind, and she has two sighted children, and that is very similar to the main characters in our book, and she is also the director of the Iowa Department for the Blind, so she commutes back and forth between Lincoln and Des Moines on a weekly basis.

S

Stacy Cervenka 06:51

And Diane and I met in 2018 when Diane was the deputy editor of Parents Magazine, and I was serving as the chairperson of the Blind Parents Group of the National Federation of the Blind, and Diane had met a blind parent and realized that she didn't know as much about parents who are blind as she wanted to, and so she decided to do a story for the magazine on parents who are blind and low vision, and she interviewed my husband and myself, both of us, as Diane mentioned, who are whom are blind, along with about a dozen other blind parents. And the story was a huge success, and made it on the cover of the magazine, and won some awards, and really got Diane interested in sort of the blind parent community.

R

Rob Mineault 07:39

So maybe for the listeners, then, why don't we just kind of set the stage, and maybe one of you could just give us a little bit of the premise of 'Roxie In Color'.

S

Stacy Cervenka 07:50

Sure. Well, Roxie is a 12 year old girl who's about to start Seventh Grade in a new town and at a new school on Long Island in New York, and at, you know, she's, she's an artist, and you know, rather shy and soft spoken and sensitive. And at her previous school, she has experienced some bullying, partially due to the fact that her family is a little different, and that her parents are both blind, and being just kind of a shy or sensitive person, it was, you know, fairly distressing for her, and she's had a very good childhood. Her parents have, you know, taken her on vacations, and I mean, she's had a very happy childhood. But school has always been sort of difficult for her, and so when she starts at a new school, she decides that she doesn't want the other kids to know that her parents are blind until they get to know her first, so that she's not just thought of as the girl with blind parents. And throughout the book, we learn about different issues that the blind community faces, such as, you know, ride healing service discrimination with Guide Dogs. We learn about, you know, website and accessibility. We learn about the different sort of stereotypes and misconceptions that blind and low vision face, we learn about the over involvement of the Child Protective Services system, and eventually Roxie has to, Roxie and her friends make some unwise decisions, and Roxie has to, and these unwise decisions result in her family being investigated by Child Protective Services, and so Roxie goes from kind of wanting to hide the fact that Mom and Dad are blind to having to stand up to an unfair system and tell the truth, and basically to stand up for the people that she loves, and to tell her truth, and to again just sort of stand up against an unfair system. And I think you know those are really important lessons for kids to learn today, and some other aspects of the book are that Roxie is also navigating the decision about whether to take the genetic test to determine whether she has Retinitis Pigmentosa like her mother and. Is also entering the school's art contest, and she, some of the chapters in the book are narrated by her mother's guide dog, Nash.

R

Rob Mineault 10:10

So, talk to us a little bit about just how this project sort of came about.

D

Diane Dubrovner 10:15

After I finished writing the article, I just couldn't stop thinking about all of the interesting people that I met, and I was already writing middle grade fiction. I hadn't had a book published yet, but I was learning how to write for children, and I started thinking about what it would be like to be a 12 year old girl whose parents were blind, who had experienced some of the unfair treatment that I heard stories about from the parents I spoke to. I was also became fascinated with Guide Dogs and their training, and I fell down a rabbit hole of research about Guide Dogs, and so I just decided to start writing a middle grade novel, and it was from the perspective of Roxie, who is sighted like I am, and Nash the dog, and I got started in a certain point, I realized that I just couldn't tell the story in the way this story deserved to be told by myself, and I needed someone who had the lived experience of being blind, and fortunately for me, Stacy and I had stayed in touch, and I called her, and I asked her if she might be interested in working on this project with me, even though she's incredibly busy, and fortunately for me, she said yes, and so we were, we were off to the races. I live in New York, and she lives in Nebraska, and we did the entire thing together on Google Docs, which was really very helpful.

R

Rob Mineault 11:47

Can you kind of step us through what the, what the writing process was like then? You know, sort of translating your own lived experience very closely to the book?

S

Stacy Cervenka 11:59

Well, I mean, a lot of it just came very naturally from stories from either my own family or, as I mentioned earlier, I was the chairperson of the Blind Parents Group of the National Federation of the Blind, and so I had, you know, worked alongside blind parents from all over the country and had heard, you know, a very wide variety of experiences and anecdotes. And of course, we camouflage the anecdotes and experiences, unless they were my own, but we did definitely did use a lot of sort of grist from my real life. For example, Roxy's parents are friends with another blind couple who have children, and we learn about one, the mother, Grace's experiences with employment discrimination, and I pretty much based her job search off of my husband's looking for a job in the Parks and Recreation field, and I mean, certainly there were lots of techniques that my husband and I both use, there were some elements of my son when he was that age that made it into the little brother Theo. We definitely used some of, you know, experiences that I've had personally, things that have been said to me personally, things that have been said to people I know personally, and then, of course, a lot of the experiences are kind of a, you know, a hodgepodge of experiences that I've heard of, or, you know, that people I know have had.

R

Rob Mineault 13:30

Yeah, and it sounds like there is, like, there's a lot packed into this, you know, you were sort of going down the list of, of all the things that, that you know, you've included in the book, and so many issues and things that that come up in the lived experience, was it hard to sort of pare it down to just the ones that you included in the book?

S

Stacy Cervenka 13:52

Oh, well, no, well, of course it was definitely difficult, but obviously whatever Roxie encountered or her parents encountered had to make sense for the story, so you know, I mean, obviously there is definitely a long list of sort of systemic and interpersonal issues that blind and low vision people face, but we really only could include the ones that it would make sense for Roxie's family to encounter in this three week period, as far as if we'd like to include a sequel, make a write a sequel. I mean, that kind of is yet to be determined based on, you know, how people like the first book, but I personally would definitely love to write a book that depicts someone who is, you know, Roxie's age, or maybe a little older, going off to a summer program for blind and low vision kids, and I think that would be a great way to examine the diversity in the blind community, you know, you'd see a lot of different kids, and you'd see a lot of different counselors who are blind, and all these characters obviously. Having different journeys and different ways of thinking about their blindness, and different ways of, you know, just different life experiences, and I think that would be a great way, just kind of write that classic, you know, summer camp, middle grade, young adult novel, where they all go off to summer camp, but it just so happens that the people in this novel, the campers, and most of the counselors are blind, and just kind of see that there is no one type of blind person. One thing that I always tell people, I say a lot, is that blind people are a cross section of society. We represent, I mean, we are, we represent every element of society, every race, every gender, every religion, every political persuasion, and I think that might be a good way of kind of showcasing that.

L

Lis Malone 14:42

Well, when I was reading the book, what, what I'd liked, well, first of all, just to remind the people who are listening, is that this is written for 9 to 12 year olds, that middle grade reader group. So, but I think that the book, you know, you ladies did this really great job of telling the story from her point of view at that age, that insecure, awkward, trying to still find your way in that ridiculously horrible time in a young woman, young girl's life, and as Rob had asked you about the amount of information that you packed into this story, it's done in some cases, it's just like a subtle mention, like it doesn't feel like you're reading like a study guide of like this is what it means to be blind, it's it was woven very well into the story, into the dialog into the observations and the thought processes of the characters, in my opinion, like one that really stood out was like even that little mention about how inefficient paratransit is. I myself have RP, so I know the pitfalls and the perils of the, you know, of the paratransit system, and how it's always late or unreliable, and stuff. So it just, it was a very good, easy read to absorb a lot of information about the low vision and blind community without feeling like it was just something that you were reading that was like a textbook that you had to, like, learn about, it does that, if that makes any sense.

S

Stacy Cervenka 17:24

Oh, I'm glad to hear you felt that way. And, honestly, some of those little nuggets, I kind of, for me, when a blind or low vision person reads the book, I hope that they, as they're reading it, they're like, you know what, I think this might be an inside job. I think a blind person might have written this. Some of the just the little nuggets, like the paratransit, like the fact that blind people hate being asked, you know, why don't you have a dog, you know, and why does a person choose to use a cane or a dog, like sort of that inside baseball type stuff, and I, you know, to me that's when a blind person reads it, I feel like when a sighted person writes a book about blindness, it often really focuses on, like, the sensory aspect, like, oh, she walked outside, and you know, it's almost like every, every sensory sensation is just so overwhelming, or something, and where this, instead of focusing on sort of the sensory aspects of blindness, more focusing on sort of the interpersonal and systemic and lifestyle aspects.

L

Lis Malone 18:27

Yeah, and I think that there's a, there's a place for both in certain cases in different situations. I think that this was a really pleasant tone for this age group, and the other thing that I really enjoyed about this, about this read, is that it is not just for people to learn about, you know, living in a blind family, because I think that it's so relatable to be in that age group and just be embarrassed about your family, regardless of what it is, whether it's real or perceived or whatnot, so I think that has like this overarching message that can go way beyond the disability community, just in terms of some of the things that you can take away from this kind of story.

D

Diane Dubrovner 19:23

Well, thank you. That means that means a lot to us, you know. I think 9 to 12 year old middle grade readers don't like to be lectured to about anything, you know? They, they come to a book because they're curious and they want to read an interesting story, and I think we're successful if we're able to weave in information that would be helpful for them or interesting for them to know without them feeling like we're being didactic, and to just. Welcome them if they are sighted and are not familiar with a blind community into a world that they may not know that much about, and to identify with Roxie, because so much of what she goes through is, as you say, so common at that age, whether it's just being awkward and self-conscious and wanting to be liked for who you are, and having your parents embarrass you sometimes, and just wanting friends to stick by you. All of those things hopefully will ring true with with readers, and I think sighted readers will realize that families whose parents are blind have a lot more similarities with them than differences, you know. In Children's Literature, we talk about books being both windows and mirrors, right? So you can empathize and see into someone else's experience in someone else's head that's different than you, but you can also see your life reflected in the pages of a book, and certainly representation, as you know, and feeling represented is so important.

R

Rob Mineault 21:05

I want to go back and talk a little bit about something you mentioned earlier. So, a few of the chapters are actually take take place from the perspective of a Guide Dog. How, what was that like to write, and yeah, how fun was that?

D

Diane Dubrovner 21:22

It was really fun. My dog is sitting right here, so if he barks, I apologize. I, there were a few reasons why we chose to have the chapters from his perspective. One, he has more objectivity than Roxie might at certain times. She's an emotional 7th grader, and I think his, he gives us a different viewpoint of the situations that she's in, and having him as a narrator also gives us a way to see different situations when Roxie is not there. So if if Nash goes to the store with Roxie's Mom and there's a situation where Roxie's Mom runs into one of Roxie's friends, and it's sort of a, an interesting interaction. We would never have the opportunity as a reader to know about that if Roxie was the only one telling the story. So that was that was another advantage of having him as, as a narrator. And from my perspective, I, one of the things that I first learned when I was talking to blind people who had guide dogs was that Guide Dogs are working when their harness is on and when they're home and their partner doesn't need them to guide them around their home, they're just a regular pet, and that they have a dual persona in a way that they're a working dog and they're a home dog. I thought that that was just an interesting experience psychologically, and so I was I found that intriguing and I thought that that might be interesting for kids to know about too.

R

Ryan Fleury 22:57

Well I just wanted to ask Diane, you know, you wrote your article about 'what blind parents want you to see'. What is your background when it comes to blindness or vision impairment? Because, as you mentioned, you don't have that lived experience. So, where does that curiosity come from?

D

Diane Dubrovner 23:15

I was an editor of Parents magazine for 26 years, and a lot of my job was writing about families with all different types of experiences, families whose children had certain health issues, families whose living situation was unique to help all parents have more respect and understanding for people who are different than they are. I was in charge of our coverage of health and child development, and so I spent a lot of time thinking about why kids of certain ages do what they do. I didn't have a lot of experience with the blind community before that story. Since then, in 2022 the print version of Parents stopped being printed, and so I haven't been there for a few years. And I am now working as a grant writer and a consultant to nonprofit organizations that I care about, and one of them is one of the few music schools in the country that specializes in teaching students of all ages who are blind or low vision, and so I've spent a lot of time talking about the blind experience in my, my other work now, which, which has dovetailed nicely with with the author work that I do. Coming to this, I was a journalist my whole life, and as when you're a journalist, you write about what you don't know, what you want to know, what you hope to understand more, and so I definitely brought that perspective to this process and have learned a lot from Stacy. I learned from her every day and from the other people who I spoke to originally for the story.

R

Rob Mineault 25:07

So, can you talk a little bit about what the, what the collaboration process was, was like? I'm just curious, you know, seeing that you guys are in different parts of the country, and you just kind of used a shared Google Doc to write it, what was it like?

S

Stacy Cervenka 25:23

Well, Diane had the idea, sort of the bare bones idea for the story, and when I came into it, we often would take different chapters or different parts of the book, and we would know what we needed to do in that part, like, okay - in this chapter, we're going to meet Lena, or in this chapter, Roxie's going to a roller skating birthday party. Or, you know, I might take a chapter and say, okay, in this chapter, Roxie is going to meet, or meet up with another family that has blind parents, and we're going to meet characters who feel differently than Roxie does right now, and we're going to see a family that's, you know, slightly different than Roxie's family, and we're going to experience some of the things that blind people experience when they're out in the world, when they're at a restaurant. So then I had a lot of freedom to then write those chapters, and then Diane would look at them and, you know, say, hey, you know, here are ways you could make them stronger, or you know, here's how we could change the voice a little bit, so that it aligns with the rest of the chapter, or the rest of the chapters, and then Diane would do the same. You know, she might write a scene at the lunch table with Roxie's friends, and we would kind of know the work that needed to be done during that scene, but you know, then Diane would write the scene, and I would read it, and give, you know, my feedback, and so often again we would kind of know, like, what work the chapter needed to do, and where it needed to get us, like Roxie is coming home from the roller skating party, you know, she has an interaction with Mom or something, she, we learn a little bit more about Dad's rock climbing hobby, and then she has a conversation with Charlie about the possibility that she might also lose her sight. So, I would go into that chapter knowing that those are the things I needed to hit, and then how I ended up hitting them kind of, you know, just morph naturally.

L

Lis Malone 27:18

So, Diane, what was your experience like, and Stacy also, obviously, when you were in the process of seeking a publisher? Did you find that the publishing community was receptive? I mean, obviously, you, you landed with a great, great publisher, but were you, was there any resistance that you were, you were getting in the process that you know they didn't think that there would be a market for this or anything along those lines?

D

Diane Dubrovner 27:45

No, I definitely don't think we got resistance. In fact, we actually had four publishers who were initially interested in the book, and that we met with, and kind of heard their vision for, and I mean, there were times, you know, as you go through the publishing process, you get sent editorial letters from your editor at the publishing house, and they make suggestions, and of course, our publisher was amazing, Kaylin Adair, and you know, she gave us lots of different ideas and lots of different feedback on things she was thinking as she read the book, but she always gave us the opportunity to, you know, take her advice or leave it, or take her suggestions, or leave them. And you know, if something that she said resonated with us, we would make that change, and if something just didn't quite feel right, we'd say, you know what, no, we like the way it is, or no, that's not quite right. I mean, there were, there was one thing in particular with Nash, I won't, I won't spoil it, but there was one element of Nash's story where she was wondering, is that realistic, is that like really how it would happen? You know, this like I'm left with questions, and so we were able to say no, that that's exactly how that that process would happen, that's exactly how it would happen, and we don't want to change it, because it already is quite, quite accurate and realistic. But maybe we need to explain a little bit more what's happening and explain why some things are happening, so that if, if she's confused, or she has questions about why this is happening, then other readers will too, so maybe we need to give the reader more information. We want to keep what's happened happened, but maybe we need to put in some more, some more information for the average reader.

L

Lis Malone 29:32

Yeah, and I like that you, you had it set out on Long Island, and I'm originally from the New York area, and Long Island is extremely inaccessible, and so, so I thought it was, it was kind of good. You know it's almost like too easy to just put it like in the heart of New York City, where you know everyone can get around and there's, you know, beeping things and everything, and and whatnot, so I thought that it was extremely realistic, even the mention of the Guide Dog School. I believe I think I know who you were talking about, but I believe you changed the name of the Guide Dog School, if I'm not mistaken.

S

Speaker 1 30:11

No, I think we used that.

L

Lis Malone 30:12

Did you use the actual name?

D Diane Dubrovner 30:15  
Didn't we use Guide Dog Foundation?

S Stacy Cervenka 30:16  
We did. No, that's in Smithtown.

D Diane Dubrovner 30:19  
Yep.

L Lis Malone 30:19  
Okay, so you did use, okay, because I couldn't, I couldn't remember if you actually used the right, the actual name of the school,

S Stacy Cervenka 30:26  
The names of the towns in Long Island were not real towns. Diane and I really struggled to come up with a name for the rock climbing gym, I think we landed on Greenview Peaks, but we were like, what do you call a rock climbing gym that's not just like Greenview Rock Climbing?

L Lis Malone 30:44  
No, but it, for anyone listening, it's a very accurate depiction. like there wasn't anything that I read that I felt like, oh, well, that's kind of a stretch, and we've, we've read a number of books written about the either the blind community or, you know, and then you kind of feel like, well, that's a very specific lived experience. But I felt like this was a very well documented account from a fictional point of view of the actual, you know, the real deal, especially, like, at least in the, in the United States,

D

Diane Dubrovner 31:23

Lis, you asked about the publisher, and we were very, we were very grateful. I think that the CandleWick, our publisher, and the other other publisher, we had an auction for the book. They were really excited about the opportunity to publish a book that was different from what was out there, and they were really committed to accessibility from the very beginning, and making sure that it was available in all the formats that it needed to be available in, in digital, and the audiobook came out on the same day as the hardcover, and to make sure that it was available through through BARD. And the font that's used in the hardcover is called Atkinson Hyperlegible, which was developed by the Braille Institute to be more easy to read for people who have low vision. And they were committed every step of the way and wanted to learn whatever they needed to learn from Stacy about how to, how to make the process work work in the way that it needed to work, and to be very sensitive to anything that was in the book that needed to be covered in the right way.

S

Stacy Cervenka 32:09

In the book, Roxie's mom is a psychologist who just recently published a book about how to have a stronger marriage, and in the book we're like, Mom is really excited that the book is coming out in Braille at the same time, and I thought, man, we can't have our book not come out at the same time after we literally write that in the book, so we were very fortunate that we partnered with the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, and the Perkins Library, and the braille and audio versions were available to National Library Service patrons on the exact same day as it was available in print. It was also available on, you know, as a, you know, commercial audio book on the same day as a Kindle commercial large print version is coming out in a few months, but we were very pleased that on the same day patrons of NLS had access to the book right away.

L

Lis Malone 33:35

So, well, that's one way of getting what you want, just, you know, pressure your publisher, be like, "Hey, listen, we're putting it in our story, so if you guys don't do that..."

R

Rob Mineault 33:46

I'm really heartened to hear about your experience, because it does kind of sound like the mainstream publishing industry is becoming a lot more open to publishing books that are by people with, with lived experience.

D

Diane Dubrovner 34:03

I think I think the publishing world is very open to it. I think the challenge is making sure that blind and low vision writers know the process and know how and have access to getting it a literary agent and have access to the publishing that you know, the traditional publishing space. I mean, there's certainly a lot of great blind and low vision writers, and I think there are a lot of publishers who would be very interested in their stories, but the challenge always is that how do you learn the process, how do you find a literary agent that is going to, that has good relationships with publishers, and that, how do you pitch your book to literary agents, the right literary agents, so that you have a chance, and I think that's kind of the challenge. How do you navigate that process as someone who might not be familiar with the publishing industry? I think, and I think that's true of lots of communities. So, I mean, I definitely think that publishers are interested in stories. I definitely think there are lots of very good blind and low vision writers. I think, as always, you know, a lot of the publishing industry is in New York, in Boston, and you know, how does just someone blind or sighted from a small town in Wisconsin - it's harder to know who, what to do, and what the process actually is. So, I mean, I think that's more the challenge than them not, you know, being interested in our stories.

L

Lis Malone 35:41

Yeah, we had, we had LK Bowen on our show, and she wrote a thriller book called For Worse, and it was, was it features a blind protagonist, and and it's published by by Blackstone, and yeah, I mean, having my experience in publishing, it's just a matter of the same thing. It has to be a good story, the writing has to be solid, and then, yes, you have to go through, through the labyrinth of the, of getting agented, and you know, doing the querying and everything, and all the, all these, all the steps that are involved in that. So it's, I mean, I hear from writers all the time, and they're like, well, I have this great story, or whatever, or I have this great idea, and, and the big thing is, you know, you, you can't just have the idea, you have to write it, you know, put the goods on paper, and then you've got to do all the legwork that every aspiring author has to do. Unfortunately, there's, there's like no shortcuts in this business, but I agree, I think that there is a hunger for different types of stories from different types of authors, but yeah, but there is, there is a process that everyone has to go through.

S

Stacy Cervenka 37:08

It's hard for everybody. I mean, there are 1000s and 1000s of people who want to write a book and are trying to read a book, and I think it's a combination of persistence and timing and luck, and certainly talent, but you just have, you have to keep trying, and there's a lot of information out there now online about the process. You can do a lot of research about agents and write how to write a query letter, and all the steps you need to take, but it's, it's tough. It's tough for anyone to get a novel published. We were very fortunate.

R

Ryan Fleury 37:47

Did you consider self-publishing?

D

Diane Dubrovner 37:51

No, that wasn't something we considered. We, I mean, we knew the challenges with self-publishing is that it's hard, it's harder when you're writing a children's book to self-publish. To be totally honest with you, for a middle-grade audience, that the way that kids 9 to 12 year olds find books are usually because their teachers or their librarians or their parents introduce them to the book. So, there's more - they're even more gates to get to those children, right?

S

Stacy Cervenka 38:21

I think, if you're even a teenager to be able to find self-published books, but for middle grade, if you really want to reach readers, traditional publishing is really the way to go.

R

Ryan Fleury 38:33

How did you pick your narrator for your audio book?

S

Stacy Cervenka 38:37

Well, we actually, we, you know, something I wanted to do is I wanted to make sure that this book wasn't just about blind people, but that blind people were involved throughout the process, and we had this idea, we had watched All the Light You Cannot See on Netflix, and the blind actress who was the star of that mini series, Aria Mia Loberti. We kind of wondered if there would be a possibility that she might be interested. She was in lots of different, I mean, she, you know, was in All the Light We Cannot See, she was in Grey's Anatomy, she was on a variety of different sort of shows, and we reached out to her agent, and she was interested. And then for Nash's voice, we kind of let our publishing house, or Penguin Random House, find the narrator, and they suggested to us Jeff Ebner, who has won several Audi awards. Audies are audio book awards, and you know they said we're thinking about Jeff Ebner. They had us listen to a few samples of his work, and we loved it, and thought absolutely, like this is a Nash, and he did a great job.

R

Ryan Fleury 39:56

Yeah, I look forward to listening to it.

R

Rob Mineault 39:58

I just want to step back and talk a little bit about one of the plot points, because I noticed that Child Protective Services shows up at one point, and you know we've talked about this on the podcast, and about about how that can be a real threat in the blind community, in terms of parents who are blind. How important was that to bring that into the story for you guys?

S

Stacy Cervenka 40:28

I think it was very important because we wanted to show some of the discrimination and some of, sort of, the more systemic issues that blind and low vision people face, and obviously, anytime you have a group of blind parents together, luckily, fewer and fewer of us actually have personal interactions with the Child Protective Services system, but it's still pretty common. When I was doing a lot of work with blind parents, I noticed that CPS tended to get involved most often when, when a child was born, or when a parent was adopting or fostering a child for the first time, or when there was a separation or divorce, and one parent was using the other parent's blindness, you know, for custody. Thankfully, in the United States, a few years ago the US Department of Health and Human Services passed regulations that require Child Protective Services and sort of any federal, federally funded program that, that does, you know, CPS or foster care or adoption not to discriminate on the basis of disability, however, even though it's the law that does still happen. I'm thankful to say that fewer and fewer parents have these types of experiences, but far too many still do. And we all know, I mean, if you're in a group of blind parents, there's always at least somebody who's had some sort of interaction with the child protective services or a social worker or some sort of that that system.

D

Diane Dubrovner 42:05

There are lots of situations in which Child Protective Services could get involved. In Roxie In Color we had the situation be the result of a mistake that Roxie made that she and her friends did something that was not a smart decision, and so it was because of what she did that sort of reflected poorly on her parents that got them into trouble, and I think we could have made a lot of different choices about the plot, but one of the things that we wanted to show was that all kids make mistakes, right? Kids make mistakes, and kids whose parents are blind shouldn't be held to a higher standard than than any other kid, and because it's a middle grade novel, she really needs to be moving the plot forward with her own actions and her choices. We don't want things to be happening to her, so that sort of was important for the the arc of the of the story, and so she had to play a part in helping the situation turn out for the best.

R

Rob Mineault 43:23

I also find it really interesting that you included the part about Roxie sort of being worried about developing RP later in life. What, what kind of prompted the choice to include that? What message sort of do you hope that that sends to readers?

S

Stacy Cervenka 43:45

Well, I mean, as you know, there are a lot of conditions that cause blindness that are genetic and a lot that aren't, and a lot that are hereditary and a lot that aren't, and we thought it would just be an interesting sort of an interesting subplot that Roxy is not only a sighted child, you know, with blind parents, but she also has sort of her own vision loss plotline as well. We don't want to get into how, you know, the plotline too much, or it would, it would kind of be a spoiler, but I think I can say that what we want, what we think that plotline will show is that even if you do know that it's, it's likely that you might lose your vision, or it's possible that you might lose your vision, you can still have a bright future full of possibility, and that, of course, there's always going to be something scary about the unknown. No one is like, "Yay, I hope I lose my vision, but that you can still say, "You know what, I might lose my vision with someday, but it's going to be just fine. Like I am strong enough to handle whatever happens, and I have people around me who are going to support me and make sure that I learn everything I need to learn, so that if this does happen, I can handle it, and I'm still going to be able to live the life that I want to live.

R

Rob Mineault 45:16

Yeah, I think that, you know, everything we've talked about, I mean, I think that just the book really just illustrates the power, how powerful it is when you have somebody with with lived experience writing about a particular disability.

S

Stacy Cervenka 45:31

Well, and I think, it's hard to talk about it without giving spoilers. I don't want to do that, but I think you know we didn't want the message to be necessarily, oh, don't worry, that'll never happen happily ever after, you know. So, so we wanted the message to be a little bit more, to be honest, realistic and empowering to a lot of the readers that we know who will read the book, who either have blind family members or are blind themselves, and that you know what, whatever, whatever happens, like your future is bright with promise, and it's going to be okay.

R

Rob Mineault 46:07

Well, listen, we want to thank you both for joining us.

R Ryan Fleury 46:11  
Where can we find the book?

S Stacy Cervenka 46:13  
So, if you live in the United States, you know the print book, you can find pretty much wherever print books are sold. You can buy it on Amazon. You can, you know, buy it at Barnes and noble.com or bookshop.com or anywhere where you might otherwise buy books. You can find it on Kindle via Amazon, or on Audible, or anywhere else where you buy commercial audio books. Of course, it's also available through the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled. So, if you are a patron of NLS, you can get, you know, the hard copy braille version, you can get it on BARD, you can get the audio on BARD. In Canada, I am not quite as certain if you guys have, if you guys are able to buy books from the United States. I would imagine that you are on Amazon and Audible.

R Rob Mineault 47:05  
Okay. Well, listen. Thanks again so much for joining us.

S Stacy Cervenka 47:08  
Thank you so much for having us.

D Diane Dubrovner 47:10  
Thank you so much for having us. It was a lot of fun.

L Lis Malone 47:12  
Thank you, and congratulations.

D Diane Dubrovner 47:14  
Thanks, Lis.

R Rob Mineault 47:17  
There you go.

R Ryan Fleury 47:19  
Indeed,

R Rob Mineault 47:20  
More authors.

R Ryan Fleury 47:23  
Well, it's interesting, you know, because in the 10 years we've been doing this show, it's very rare that we've had the tables turned and had something presented in this fashion, where the child is with the blind parents, you know, the only, the only thing that springs to my mind is the gang over at Babies Down Bottles Up, right? Blind parents, sighted kids. It's very, it's very interesting, but it's also, I guess, eye-opening, because we don't hear a lot of those stories.

R Rob Mineault 48:00  
Yeah, I think that's why it's, it's such a great idea for a book, because I think you're right. I think that it's, it's unusual enough to be different and to really stand out that way, but it also, it's just rife with examples of lived experience and lessons to be learned, right?

R Ryan Fleury 48:20  
Yeah, and Roxie has a different lived experience, right? Living with blind parents that we just don't hear enough about.

R Rob Mineault 48:29  
Yeah. So I'm looking forward to listening to the audiobook, actually.

L Lis Malone 48:36  
Rob, you get to tap into your inner 7th grade girl.

R Rob Mineault 48:40  
Nice, it's been awhile.

S Steve Barclay 48:43  
He'll have to grow up a little.

R Rob Mineault 48:47  
Wow,

L Lis Malone 48:51  
So funny.

R Rob Mineault 48:51  
Not that funny.

L Lis Malone 48:55  
No, that was pretty funny.

R Rob Mineault 49:01  
Who lined those, those guys up for us?

R Ryan Fleury 49:03  
They reached out to us.

R Rob Mineault 49:04  
Oh, did they? Yeah. Oh, cool. Okay.

L Lis Malone 49:07  
Yes, that is the, that is the public relations powerhouse of a big five publisher.

R Rob Mineault 49:15  
Yeah, yeah. Are you familiar with that publisher, Lis?

L Lis Malone 49:18  
Yes, yes. But look at that. Check us out. We're on the list, right?

R Rob Mineault 49:24  
That's what happens after 10 years.

R Ryan Fleury 49:28  
Finally taking notice.

R Rob Mineault 49:33  
Okay. Well, anything else to say about anything else?

S Steve Barclay 49:35  
Not a thing. Nope.

R Rob Mineault 49:37  
Cool. What was I gonna say goodbye? I forgot.

S Steve Barclay 49:43  
Probably something starting with, 'hey'.

R Rob Mineault 49:49  
hey, wow, come on. Really, two, three burns in one show?

S Steve Barclay 49:56  
I know, right? I'm on a roll.

R Rob Mineault 49:57  
You are. Wow, what did I do? It's. It all right, let's get out of here.

R Ryan Fleury 50:14  
We're trying.

L Lis Malone 50:15  
yeah, hey,

**R** Rob Mineault 50:15  
hey Lis, where can people find us?

**L** Lis Malone 50:17  
They can find us at [www.atbanter.com](http://www.atbanter.com)

**R** Rob Mineault 50:17  
They can also drop an email if they so desire at [cowbell@atbanter.com](mailto:cowbell@atbanter.com)

**S** Steve Barclay 50:24  
And of course we've got the socials, we're so social, look at all our socials, Facebook, Instagram, Mastodon, Trump Social - no, we're not on that one, no, we're also not on X, because you know, yeah, Elon's a jerk,

**R** Rob Mineault 50:44  
And we're not on Threads, because we don't know what it is, or Blue Sky,

**R** Ryan Fleury 50:48  
Or Only Fans, or any of the other stuff.

**R** Rob Mineault 50:51  
No, you can find me on Only Fans.

**R** Ryan Fleury 50:52  
Oh, okay,

S

Steve Barclay 50:56

I don't want to find you on there.

R

Rob Mineault 51:03

Ok, fine.

R

Ryan Fleury 51:04

Just a guy eating Chef Boyardee.

R

Rob Mineault 51:06

Yeah, that's right. Listen, there's something for everybody. Gotta find your niche. Okay, let's get the heck out of here. That's gonna go do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course, to Diane and Stacy for joining us. And we will see everybody next week.

S

Steve Barclay 51:27

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