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SPEAKERS

Speaker 1, Rob Mineault, Libby Thaw, Steve Barclay



Rob Mineault 00:12

Hey, and welcome to another episode of AT Banter.



Steve Barclay 00:18

Banter, banter.



Rob Mineault 00:21

Hey, this is of course the podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Man, see, it's just like riding a bike-you just get right back into it as soon as you start.



Steve Barclay 00:36

You're killing it.

R

Rob Mineault 00:37

Hey, my name is Rob Mineault and joining me today on this fine podcast episode is Mr. Steve Barclay.

S

Steve Barclay 00:48

It's true.

R

Rob Mineault 00:50

It might be a little bit premature to call it fine. I'm sure it's going to be fine. It's going to be fine. We haven't done this for a while, but I'm sure it's going to be fine. Everything will be fine. Come on, you, Steve, give me, give me, give me reassurance.

S

Steve Barclay 01:03

It's going to be fine.

R

Rob Mineault 01:05

Thank you.

S

Steve Barclay 01:06

Unless it all goes sideways.

R

Rob Mineault 01:10

Who us goes sideways? Never. No, this feels weird. Of course, regular listeners to the show might might recognize that they haven't seen something from us come through their feed for a while. I think this is the first time we've sat down in front of the mics for for about a month, month and a half. I guess we I guess we could just basically say we we took a summer vacation.

S

Steve Barclay 01:33

Good good for Yeah, we got much needed time time off.

R

Rob Mineault 01:39

Yeah, it wasn't necessarily on purpose, but it's just scheduling, and then yeah, we just it just got really I got really attached to just relaxing in the summer. So yeah, but we're back.

S

Steve Barclay 01:54

Yes, indeed.

R

Rob Mineault 01:55

Well, how how have you been? I mean, I'm sort of cheating by asking this because I kind of know because it's not like we haven't talked, but we've actually been very busy working on a project this summer as well. but we'll cheat just for the audience. So so how is how was your summer, Steve?

S

Steve Barclay 02:13

Summer was awesome. I got some camping in with the family. I got some fishing in with the boys. Back in May, I went to Japan. That was pretty cool. Tomorrow, my my wife is having or not tomorrow, Friday, My wife is having her 25th anniversary lunch for her her company Bastion Developments.

R

Rob Mineault 02:41

Wow.

S

Steve Barclay 02:41

And I already know what they've got her for a present.

R

Rob Mineault 02:46

Ooh,

S

Steve Barclay 02:47

They got her a cruise, a Mediterranean cruise, which means I'm going on a Mediterranean cruise.

R

Rob Mineault 02:55

Yeah, she has to work 25 years, and you get a cruise.

S

Steve Barclay 02:59

Yeah, that's right.

R

Rob Mineault 03:00

What a rip! Yeah. Oh no, that's great. That's exciting. A Mediterranean cruise, huh? Have you have you been to the Mediterranean?

S

Steve Barclay 03:10

I've been to. I went to Malta for work one time. For we we donated a bunch of communication aids to an organization in Malta, and they flew us over there to to train them on them, and then we went on a trip with the kids. Probably it's got to be 18 years ago now, I would guess. And we went to visit my family in Northern Ireland, and then went to well, we went to London first, then we went to Northern Ireland, then we went to Paris and Rome. So I've been to Rome before, but this this trip is taking us. I'll have to see if I can find the map again. But it starts in Barcelona, which I'm very excited about, and then it goes to I believe Monaco, and then is it oh Pisa Pisa, Salerno. There's another stop along the way. I can't remember the name, and then and then back to Rome, and they're giving us three days at the beginning and three days at the end as well. And because it's Jackie's boss and he's filthy, stinking rich, it's all apparently going to be first class. So that's pretty amazing. Jackie has been trying to get me on a cruise forever, and she finally convinced me to go on a little one day one day repositioning cruise with where they take took a boat from Vancouver, took it to Seattle, and then we we bust back from Seattle. And after that, I told her, "Well, that's it. I've gone on a cruise now. Can't get me on another one. So she she gets the last laugh.

R

Rob Mineault 05:01

You know, I had a really sort of a bit of a cynical attitude about cruises as well, and then I went on one. And what I will say about them, I mean, it's not a it's it's not a great way to necessarily see other countries. Because it's those excursions are all just tourist traps, and you know you sit at port and for five hours, and then you leave again. And you know, if you're lucky, maybe you get to wander around the dock and you know have locals sell you bits of plastic or something. But you don't really get a sense of the countries. But what it is really nice for is it it really knocks you out of your nine to five schedule. Like if you're just kind of burned out of, like the nine to five Monday to Friday grind. When you're out at sea, it doesn't matter what time it is. You can go wander down and eat when you want to. You just you you don't have to adhere to a schedule. You don't necessarily have to do anything, so there's definitely I think there's a definite demographic that that cruising really appeals to.

S

Steve Barclay 05:47

Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 05:49

So I kind of get that, but I don't know. I would I would go on another one. I've been on exactly one in my life, and it was okay. It was okay. It was it was nice. It was it was a nice break. Just don't watch the Poseidon Adventure before you go.

S

Steve Barclay 06:22

I am totally going to watch the Poseidon Adventure before I go

R

Rob Mineault 06:29

Okay. Anyway, I think we've bantered enough. We should get to the meat of today's show. So, Steve.

S

Steve Barclay 06:37

Yes, Rob?

R Rob Mineault 06:40
What the heck are we doing today?

S Steve Barclay 06:43
We are going to talk to Libby Thaw, the person who created the Checkered Eye symbol, which is a symbol for people to use to indicate that they have low vision. So, welcome to the show, Libby.

L Libby Thaw 06:58
Well, thanks for having me.

R Rob Mineault 07:00
It's our pleasure. Thanks for coming on. This is a very special episode. It's our inaugural return, or I guess that's the wrong word, but whatever. It's our our triumphant return episode.

L Libby Thaw 07:11
Well, it's my pleasure. I'm honored to be here on your comeback show.

R Rob Mineault 07:16
Yeah, it's what it's like. It's like the Who coming back, right? It's like our final stadium tour.

L Libby Thaw 07:22
You have to do it like eight or nine times.

R Rob Mineault 07:26
That's right. That's what we should have done, Steve. We should have. We should have said we're retiring.

S

Steve Barclay 07:31

Yeah, in May...

R

Rob Mineault 07:34

Then come back, and we could have had this, come back. Well, next time, surprise. Yeah, next summer we'll do that.

S

Steve Barclay 07:42

Yeah, you're gonna have to edit that part out then. Otherwise, everybody will be expecting it.

R

Rob Mineault 07:49

Nobody's listening, it's okay. Okay, well, let me. Well, you know, I'm really, really excited to talk a little bit about about the Checkered Eye Project and stuff. But before we sort of dive into that. I want to learn a little bit about you, so maybe you could just you know tell us a little bit about yourself, and maybe a little bit about your own vision journey.

L

Libby Thaw 08:13

Okay. Well, I have Stargardt's, so I got diagnosed at about 12, and by the time I was 18, I was legally blind. I didn't use any kind of low vision gear, any adaptive tools or technology at all in high school. I managed to get through. I wasn't a great student. I would not blame my eyes for that. But so I did finish high school just fine, and you know what? I lived in a small town. There was only one traffic light at the time, so I didn't have any trouble at all with navigation. Right? I have lots of great peripheral vision. I safely rode a bike for many years, and then I moved to a city to seek my fortune, and cities have a lot more traffic and a lot of different traffic than here in my little small town, and that's when I started having some scary moments in traffic, and ultimately, I was recommended to get a white cane. And I said, "Oh no, no, I don't need that. I have great peripheral vision. I don't need to feel my way around. And they said, "No, no, no. We have a special kind for folks like you who are legally blind, and you don't need a mobility cane? We have one. It's called an ID cane. In the UK, they call it a symbol cane, and it really is. It's just a symbol. You just carry it. It's white. Everyone can see it, and everyone will know that you can't see well, and you'll be safer in traffic. And I thought, what? I've been legally blind for like three or four years now, and I had no idea. So they said, "No, yeah, yes, you can, you can get a white cane, and just carry it. Everyone will see it. You'll be safer in traffic. So I thought, "Yes, please, and I got one, and I was safer in traffic. But you know what? I think it was just because being a young person, I was a little insecure. I didn't want to look stupid if I was standing at a light that was already green. So I used to, you know, take chances in traffic, guess, or follow the sheep. And I learned never, never follow the sheep. They are reckless fools. So I was safer because I thought, okay, I don't look stupid. I look blind, and I am legally blind, so I'm fine with that. So I was safer just because I wasn't doing stupid, risky things in traffic. And then I recognized that once I was out of the traffic and in a mall or a store, or a office building, whatever. It was sometimes easier to get help if I needed that. But I, I also noticed that an equal amount of time, people either I think just kind of ignored the cane because it wasn't one of those long ones that you feel with, and it wasn't even touching the ground anyway, so they didn't recognize it as a blindness symbol. So I think they just kind of ignored it, and then there were other times where people actually accused me of faking blindness. So the weight came was a good symbol for me sometimes, and other times not very good. So that this like leads right into, of course, the the Checkered Eye origin because a number of years later I moved back to my lovely small town, Port Elgin, Ontario, and I got married and started having a family, and then in the fall of 2000, the youngest of my kids started school full time, so hey, I had a little extra time on my hands. So I went to one of these. The CNIB used to do a thing they called they called it Service Days. I called it the Roadshow, and that was they would take some of their staff and staff and go to the small towns where they didn't have an office. And I went up there one day, and I got in a conversation with some other people who, much like me, had low vision.

L

Libby Thaw 12:32

Sometimes there was problems because the person they were talking to didn't know they had any vision issue, and then other times that they were using their cane and were accused of faking blindness, so one of the staff people actually said, "People have been asking for some sort of a badge, and I thought, "Yes, please, I would like one of those. But there was no such thing at the time, and so since, like I said, I had a little time on my hands. I went home and I thought, "Oh, I'll just design one, and I'll I'll send it off to the powers that be, and ask them to make it work for me and the other people who would like it. And won't that be great?" But you know what? Much like the white cane as a symbol and even Braille, it was not embraced right away. Ultimately, you know, I carried on without support from blindness groups of or for blind people, and then ultimately, as more and more people would find out about it, anytime I get a little bit of press, I was always contacted by people saying, "Hey, where do I get one of those? And so, ultimately, enough people have embraced it, and and now, like the CNIB and the CCB and other groups, we're all on board with it now. Yay!

S

Steve Barclay 13:57

Very nice. So, how how did you how did you deal with people accusing you of faking blindness? Because I've heard this story a bunch of times, and sure, people don't recognize that vision is a spectrum.

L

Libby Thaw 14:12

The most recent one, I was I had actually just gone to vote, and I'm walking across a parking lot. My hubby and I both went together, but then he had to go somewhere else. So I was going to walk home. So I got out my cane, and I'm you know marching across this parking lot, and I hear somebody going, "You don't look blind! Like literally yelling at me across the parking lot, and I thought, "Oh, this has got to be a friend of mine or something who knows that that's a peeve of mine.

S

Steve Barclay 14:39

Yeah.

L

Libby Thaw 14:39

And I just I walked up to. I said, "Ha ha, you're hilarious. Who is it? And he he said his name, and I realized it was not somebody I knew. And actually, I think in this case he he maybe was intellectually challenged because, like, he said a bunch of really awful things. He said maybe I should be on the sidewalk with a tin cup,

R

Rob Mineault 15:02

Wow.

L

Libby Thaw 15:03

So I I schooled him. I told him that's a horrible thing to say. You know, there's lots of blind people who are not just doing okay, but they are running the show. So, and and I always have a Checkered Eye information card on me, so I gave him one of those. They're not not everybody who uses a white cane is completely blind, Mister. And I did not strike him, but yeah, it was it was rather upsetting. I know sometimes I can recall sort of at a place with an overhead menu where I I think it was. I was really tired, and I just said, like, usually I would go if I was going to one of those places. I would only order what I knew they had, and I had enough money for. So this particular day, I thought, I don't want my usual thing. And so I asked the guy, "Can you help me out and just tell me what you have? I can't see very well. I can't remember how I worded that, but so he he did help me. But then then when he handed me my sandwich, he goes, "Well, you saw that."

R

Rob Mineault 16:12

Wow.

L

Libby Thaw 16:15

Like you know, you want to reach around the counter and grab them by the neck.

S

Steve Barclay 16:19

Yeah, no doubt.

L

Libby Thaw 16:20

But I just like like what? What do you think I'm trying to do here? Like, what? Why would I tell you I can't see if I can see just fine?

R

Rob Mineault 16:28

Yeah, it's funny. I've heard so many of these stories, and and the the more I do, the more that I really think that this is a component of of of you know blindness education that we that really needs to start being pushed because I don't think the needle has has moved very far in terms of education in the sense of that that blindness is a spectrum. Like, and it's and it's so weird to think about too, because everybody like nobody has trouble grasping the idea of well, some people need glasses and some people don't need glasses. That you know, the general public has no no problem with that. It's not like they wander around and be like you wearing those those pieces of glass on your face-that's weird, right? So they get that.

L

Libby Thaw 17:25

Yeah, and I'd like to talk about the the the whole the symbols issue because some of the pushback I got in the first place was that if you introduce another symbol, like there already is the white cane, you know, you're gonna you're gonna just confuse the public, and I knew already that the public was already quite confused about the white cane because like so the whole origin of the white cane was back in the the early 1900s. They were still trying to figure out traffic procedures. Like if you if you look at any old footage of city traffic, it's just bananas. There's like they've got these newfangled motor vehicles now, but they still had horses and horse-drawn carriages, and they didn't really have standard procedures and stuff. So, so one of the things they were trying out was traffic cops wearing white gloves and using a white baton. So they thought, okay, yeah, white is a good high visibility color to stand out against any background, right? And then in the 1920s, a fellow named James Biggs in England, he had been a photographer, so he understood light and dark and shadow, and when he lost some sight, he decided to take his cane, which was just a common accessory back then, and he painted it white, just to increase his own visibility and traffic. So I think that's the first historical account of a blind person using a white cane as a traffic safety beacon. So then, in the 40s, or actually in the 30s, two different people-a fellow in the states, George Bonham, I think-and a lady in France named Julie Durbamon. She, they both decided, hey, you know what? Blind people are having a terrible time in this chaotic traffic. Let's take a bunch of canes, paint them white, and we'll give those to blind people, and make sure everybody knows if you see a pedestrian with a white cane, they can't see well, and take a little extra care, and they'll be safer in traffic. So, so it was the white of the cane that meant anything, and then if you if you go ahead to the 40s when soldiers were coming home blinded from World War II, and they'd meet Richard Hoover, some of them did meet a guy named Richard Hoover in the states, and he just thought like, yeah, we don't have the greatest. Ways to get around to teach these blinded men, and so he goes. Well, they're all carrying this white cane anyway. Let's let's see if we can do something with that. So he adapted the canes. You know, it's longer. They put on a golf club handle instead of the hook, or you know, the kind they used to have on just regular walking sticks, and he vastly improved the navigation skills for blind people. But it wasn't kept up the idea that it's the white of the cane that means anything. So then, as we went forward, people recognized that if somebody is using a mobility cane, a long one with the golf club handle, and they're feeling the ground with it, most people would recognize that's a blind person trying to, or you know, making their way around, even if it was like purple, right? But if somebody like me is using an ID cane, or even if someone is using the you know the type that's just shaped like a candy cane and leaning on it, but it's white. People are are not informed that that is a blindness symbol. So the whole thing that I I thought okay well we need to improve that understanding. Let's throw in the Checkered Eye, you know, so that that's a big part of what the Checkered Eye Project does too. We have information about the different types of canes, and that it's the white of the cane that means anything.

S

Steve Barclay 17:25

Yeah, I've I've done sighted guiding for a lot of people, and I can say that when you have somebody who's got a mobility cane out in front of them, and they're doing the the back and forth tapping. People will leap out of the way of of that coming down the street, and it doesn't matter if the cane's white or not. They they seem to recognize it. But the ID canes, I've never had that same experience. I've never seen anybody you know charged to get out of the way when they see somebody just carrying an ID cane.

L

Libby Thaw 21:26

Yeah, or or a support cane. I mean, that's the one that I think is the least understood now, and that's that's the same as the original ones. Like people just used walking sticks anyway, and they just painted a bunch of them white. So, yeah, we we need to inform and remind. If anybody already does know that we gotta remind him, but we gotta inform a lot of people about that.

S

Steve Barclay 22:27

It must get very draining to have to explain it all the time, though.

L

Libby Thaw 22:32

I'd like to just record that little history piece and tell it to, you know, you know. Actually, I kind of do. I years and years ago, I made this very, very amateur-looking little video called "Blindness and Inertia", because Braille was also like like all of those things were rejected at first, Braille included, and even guide dogs. Anyway, so there seems to be inertia. I'm pretty sure it's not exclusive to the blindness community or services for blind people. But a lot of times, even if something is a great idea, it's it's not embraced because just because it's new. Oh no, no, that's not what you do. No, we do this, and we don't need something new. So, the we were we were up against that quite a bit at at the beginnings of the Checkered Eye Project.

R

Rob Mineault 23:28

Yeah, it's interesting going going back to that. I mean, I've I've talked to people who are who are low vision, and you know they've said a lot of the same things. Like a lot of times, nine times out of 10, it's just it's way more complicated to explain to somebody that you have low vision - then you have to explain what you know exactly what that means, and you know where where your vision sits. And i've I've heard I've heard people just say, yeah, usually, I just I just tell people I'm blind. Like I just I I don't even bother with you know having to explain because once you've explained it to like the 10th person, you know, it just it gets really tiring to to have to be like, well, you know, I have peripheral vision, and I can sort of you know if I twist my head this way, I can kind of make things out. And you know, and I've also talked to people who are just like, yeah, they use they use a an ID cane, you know, in in ways that that you mentioned, but they've also said that you know sometimes it it does burn them because they're carrying a cane, and if they do, they feel like they're being scrutinized all the time because if they do something, if they you know they pull out their phone and they're using their periphery vision because they can kind of see or whatever, and somebody sees them with the cane and then doing that, well, then they're getting it tagged as faking it.

L

Libby Thaw 24:42

Absolutely.

R

Rob Mineault 24:43

So people, you know, it's it's really sort of can't win either way, and that's why we just just feel like that's that's why we we really need to get this messaging out there into the general public, so that they they understand these things. So you know, we can at least decrease the the amount of times that that happens to people because you know it's I'm I'm it must get incredibly draining.

L

Libby Thaw 25:07

Yeah, of course, and I think you said the key word there is we can reduce it. I'm pretty sure we can't eliminate it. You know, there's always going to be that idiot, or who like even you know people who have an accessible parking pass. You know a friend of mine, he has one for when he picks up his son who uses a wheelchair. But if he sometimes you know he's he's this big robust man and he gets out of his car and somebody goes, hey, you shouldn't be parking there. You know, do I have to explain? There's always going to be somebody, and it's like they think, "Oh, you're pulling a fast one on me. You can't fool me. Is is that is that what it is? I don't know.

R

Rob Mineault 25:48

Yeah, yeah, I don't know. I don't know what they they expect what what what great perk you're going to get by faking it. I don't quite understand the the reasoning behind that. But you know, we we hear that too. Like we we've talked to plenty of people who, you know, are in chairs and stuff, and and they'll say the same thing. You know, they they might be in a chair because, you know, they've they've limited mobility. They're not, you know, they're not paralyzed. So they'll do something like they'll have their wheelchair and they'll wheel out back out to their car and they'll stand up because they can still stand. They just can't you know walk a long way and they'll pack their their wheelchair in the car, and somebody will see them and immediately like scream at them because they think they're faking it.

L

Libby Thaw 26:27

Yes, well, just like there's there's a spectrum in every kind of condition, right? I I had a friend of mine give me a ride to the grocery store one time, and he pulled into the one of those spots. Now I didn't have a parking pass at that time. I did get one since that, but but he pulled in. I said, "Oh, I don't I don't need that. I I can walk this one. He goes, "I only have a third of a heart.

S

Steve Barclay 26:54

Oh, jeez.

L

Libby Thaw 26:55

So okay, we're not making you walk far today. No, you know. So there's just so many, so many unseen things, and yeah, just the the the psychology behind wanting to call someone out in case they are faking something is a puzzling one for me. But it but it's prevalent. It's it's probably always going to be there.

R

Rob Mineault 27:22

Yeah, yeah, I'm sure. I'm sure. Like that's why you know. Again, reducing would be great, or even just like getting that idea out into the into the mainstream. And we know that that can work because people sure picked up on the fact that autism is a spectrum. You know, that we hear that all the time, and people really sort of, you know, understand what that means. So I think that it's possible. It's just that I think that we need more awareness campaigns. We need more organizations that are talking about these things, so that it really just sort of spills into the general public's mindset.

S

Steve Barclay 28:02

I would disagree. People understand the spectrum of autism because I keep on seeing news articles of bad police interactions with people with with autism. And if anybody should be educated about it, you would think it would be those guys, right?

R

Rob Mineault 28:17

I have opinions. Yeah.

L

Libby Thaw 28:19

Yeah, but it's a it's a buzzword, right? Spectrum. People have heard that.

R

Rob Mineault 28:24

So you mentioned something that that it sort of rang a bell with me because you know I work with I work for an organization out here in BC that we work with children and youth who are blind and low vision, and we hear this a lot, especially you know with with teenagers, and that's the sense. And especially teenagers, like say say you, like you sort of you lost your sight in your teens. We we do hear that a lot, where you know they don't they don't want to pick up a white cane because they don't you know they they don't want to like look uncool, or they're just not ready for it. And I'm sure that it's probably like that for people who lose their vision later in life through some sort of a degenerative eye condition, and maybe they're not immediately ready to pick up that white cane because you know there can be an emotional process behind that too. So I guess my question is: Do you see the the Checkered Eye sort of filling that gap? Like, okay, maybe you're not ready for a white cane, but maybe you're you're ready for a pin or a badge. Or do you kind of see Checkered Eye sort of sliding into that gap?

L

Libby Thaw 29:38

I have definitely heard from people who it has been exactly that, I can recall a fairly recent one where a lady said her husband was 'no way was he going to carry an ID cane', but he wanted one of our - we have a pendant. Checkered Eye, and like he wanted it. So with that, and actually that was requested by men having one on a chain because if if you don't need it on display, you can just tuck it in your shirt. So in a situation where you do want it to be showing, you can just you know take it back out of your shirt and have it hanging, or you know where people can see it. Even like you can you can point it out. I do that sometimes. Like, do you know what this means? And if the person doesn't know, then I can tell them, and it brings up the topic. Yeah, I can't see well. But you're you're absolutely right. Now we are very clear in all of our literature, that we don't want someone who needs traffic safety - if you if you want drivers to know you can't see well, they're not going to notice your badge or your necklace or bracelet, whatever. The white cane is the best option for that. So we try to be really really clear. We don't want somebody to opt for a badge, a symbol that's as small as the Checkered Eye, instead of a safety thing. So we want to make sure nobody does that. But you're you're right. There are definitely people who say, "Well, I'm not quite ready for that, but I think this will be helpful.

R

Rob Mineault 31:17

Yeah,

L

Libby Thaw 31:18

Definitely.

R

Rob Mineault 31:21

And I mean, not only that, just practically, it also kind of frees up your hands if you're whatever you're in the store, yeah, and put your cane away and just you know you can have your your pin or your badge, and yeah,

L

Libby Thaw 32:37

That was one of the original things. Some people I still actually get talking to people who want one for somebody who uses a walker or a wheelchair. We still haven't got the perfect format for that. I've made just some like one-offs for a few people, just having a big one laminated and then punch holes in it and put grommets in it, so it doesn't get worn through right away, and then they can tie wrap it or whatever to their walker. But yeah, there's a few, you know. Also, people, some people who have difficulty speaking, you know, they can just point to the pin. That helps if you've got disabilities in your hands, or using a wheelchair or a walker, or if you got groceries in your hands, or two little kids, or something, right? It's a hands-free communicator.

R

Rob Mineault 33:31

Yeah, low tech too.

L

Libby Thaw 33:33

No password required.

S

Steve Barclay 33:34

Very low tech.

L

Libby Thaw 33:36

Yeah, that's one of my favorite things about it.

L

Libby Thaw 33:41

So I should I should describe what it looks like for for people who who can't see it here. So it's a a white circle. It has a black text. It says LOW VISION, low across the top, and vision across the bottom. And then in the center, it has a simple line drawing of an eye and the part of the eye, the iris, which would normally be colored, it's black and white checkers. So the rationale behind that is that it depicts a grid that's partially blocked. So something's getting through, but not everything. So kind of depicts the idea of partial blindness. So that's what it looks like. Now we only we have one version right now that's black with white on it. It's a silicone bracelet, but I'm not sure if I'm going to make those again. The Checkered Eye on it is really small. It's only like an inch across, but it also has LOW VISION on the band, and actually, I just heard again from a woman talking about her hubby the other day. Her hubby loves the bracelet, and he just puts it on and never takes it off. And he said she said they last three months, and then all the text is worn off. So you know, it's working for him. He says people notice it and it's really working for them. You know, I get a part that that is a mushy thing about this is is hearing from people who you know sometimes it's someone they're caring for who like I I know of one very particularly mushy note I got where a woman was saying, you know, this really changed the quality of life for my Mom in her last years. So, you know, and and then I'll hear about someone who says, you know, I don't use a Checkered Eye, but I I'm with my child actually, you know, or or somebody who I love who wears a Checkered Eye, and I can see the difference in the way people interact with them because they notice the Checkered Eye and they know what it means. So I'm, I'm so gratified whenever I get something like that, and it, I put it in a document called "Don't Quit."

S

Steve Barclay 35:59

Nice.

L

Libby Thaw 36:00

Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 36:01

Well, now, so okay, so let's talk a little bit about the organization because this I am kind of really interested because you know you've been around since you've been doing this since 2000, so it's like 25 years.

L

Libby Thaw 36:12

We just turned 26.

R

Rob Mineault 36:14

Yeah, what I mean, what sort of looking back over that journey. I mean, what's were there were there really rough spots? Like, did that did that DON'T QUIT folder used to be really full of of documents? Has it gotten better? At what point did you sort of feel like you know you're it was finally gaining some traction? And sort of how long did that take?

L

Libby Thaw 36:42

Oh my gosh, yeah, I I bet you it took 20 years, but like I I always knew it it was worth doing. I you know I like any time I would get any press at all, I was contacted by people who wanted it. So yeah, it was actually sometimes lately I go, 'what the hell was I thinking?' Like, 'how did I think I was going to do this?' But yeah, there was there was some really tough times where you know what I used to maybe sell like because the the one the easiest metric of how well it's doing because I can't tell just how many people know what it means, but was so the only metric was how many people would order them, and for lots of years it was less than 30 all year. You know, we didn't make money, that's for sure. I personally paid for everything. You know, not to the point where I was putting my family at risk or anything, you know, but there was no income for many many years. You know, there was a certain actual sort of leap in progress when one year I made a public like a 30 second ad for TV, which qualified for free airtime because it was a public service announcement. It was not trying to sell Checkered Eyes. It was just trying to make sure more people knew what it meant. And I would submit those to Canadian Broadcasters every year. I think they'd just throw them in the garbage after a year or whatever, and I would check up on them. Hey, you still got my spot, and I'd resend it. And one year, I think, like in in the 2020s, I think at least one of the broadcasters. I think probably because of people's viewing habits changing so much. This is a theory. I don't know that this is true, but maybe they didn't have as much purchased airtime, so they had more free airtime, and I got so much airtime that we went from like 30 a year to hundreds. So you know, still not like nobody's making a living from this. It's you know, but but it was an exponential difference in the number of users for sure. And then and also having, gosh, this was quite a while ago too. Some hospital groups because I just wrote letters all the time. That's what I thought. Okay, what can I do? How can I get this going? And hospital groups getting on board and saying, "Yeah, we'd like some literature, and you know, we want to make sure that all our staff and volunteers know about that. And so that happening, and and a Low Vision Center in North Carolina, Duke University reached out to me and said, "Hey, can we have some samples? They never did pay for them, but they get samples every so often. And I'd say, "Yes, please. You know, I don't care. This is we just want them out there. We want people to know what it means. If you're helping us." Tell people what it means. Fantastic. So, that kind of thing would help with the you know don't quit idea because it would when others would reach out to me instead of me forever pounding on people's doors. That was a big indicator for me. And yeah, I I wasn't gonna scrap it, even though it was like really just a lot of work and very very little progress every year. But I thought this is important, and I'm doing it.

R

Rob Mineault 40:35

Yeah, well, I mean, awareness campaigns like that—they're they're very slow. They can it can really feel really glacial in terms of change and and and getting the word out there.

L

Libby Thaw 40:47

Yeah I would love to know how they did it in the '30s when you know they launched the white cane scheme. Is how they I've read it in historical bits. I don't know who it was, how it was that they made sure people knew newspaper, I guess.

R

Rob Mineault 41:05

Maybe, maybe, maybe they're just like less distractions back then. Yeah, now people are inundated, inundated with information. So, you know, getting cramming cramming new information into people's heads, I think, is a lot more challenging these days than it used to be.

L

Libby Thaw 41:22

I think you're right about that.

S

Steve Barclay 41:24

Get get Molly Burke on it. Yeah,

L

Libby Thaw 41:27

I would love to. I I can't I can't reach her.

S

Steve Barclay 41:30

Yeah, yeah, yeah. We tried getting her on the podcast one time. We couldn't. Yeah, a few times I think we couldn't get her.

R Rob Mineault 41:35
Nope.

L Libby Thaw 41:36
Well, Sam Seavey interviewed me a couple of times. You know him? Great guy. Yeah,

R Rob Mineault 41:41
Yeah, we've had him on. He's awesome.

S Steve Barclay 41:43
Yes, indeed.

R Rob Mineault 41:44
And a great person to have on because he also has a real following. I know a lot of people, you know, check him out quite often. Going after these influencers, that's sort of the new media these days.

L Libby Thaw 42:03
Yeah, I did a video many many years ago again, just goofing around with my camera, and at the end of it, it says, "If you're really too busy, can you help me get a hold of Oprah? Nobody did, but no,

R Rob Mineault 42:19
Damn.

S Steve Barclay 42:19
Have you ever gone to the the CSUN conference?

L Libby Thaw 42:26
What's it called?

S Steve Barclay 42:27
CSUN. It's California. What is it? State University Northridge. They do a disability conference every year in California around March, I believe, it's it's one of the biggest conferences for for low vision and blindness technology by far. There's there's that one, and there's ATIA in Florida. Those are the two the two biggies. Every year at CSUN I see Stevie Wonder's there.

L Libby Thaw 42:53
You met him?

L Libby Thaw 42:59
Oh, so I have a photo of him with a an acquaintance of mine, not a friend, but acquaintance who who does a podcast for the AFB. There's a picture of her with Stevie Wonder. I kept that. Yeah. Boy, would I love to meet him.

S Steve Barclay 43:20
Yeah.

R Rob Mineault 43:21
Oh, Steve did.

S Steve Barclay 43:21
Yeah, I did meet him. Yeah.

R

Rob Mineault 43:24

Tell the story, Steve.

S

Steve Barclay 43:27

Oh, it's silly, but I I was at a Freedom Scientific meeting. The guys who do Jaws and now Zoom Text, and back in the old days, manufacturers used to used to throw these big room parties at at CSUN and ATIA, and they you know booze it up. So I'm I'm standing out by the the window of of this big hotel room when when Stevie Wonder walks in with an entourage, and he's got probably he's probably got 10 or 15 people with him. I don't remember exactly, but it was a bunch of people, and they they came in and they moved right into the center of the room. So they were between me and the bar. So when I went to get another drink, I had to go past Stevie Wonder, and he sort of backed up a little bit as I was coming past. I just sort of patted him on the shoulder. I said, "Excuse me, Stevie, I'm you're between me and the bar. It's not a safe place to be." and he stopped me. He stopped me and demanded to know who I was, and I told him my name was Steve, and he thought that was a great name. We had a little chit chat. Just a super nice, engaging guy, very down to earth. The thing that really impresses me about him is he'll be wandering around the show floor of CSUN, and you know he'll be he'll be there to look at you know what's the latest in the technology. Wants to know what's what you know is there anything here that I can use, and and he gets stopped constantly, just constantly by people, you know wanting to take a selfie or you know wanting his autograph or you know wanting to talk to him, and. And he, I've never seen him get even slightly perturbed at at the attention. Like he's just he's just so nice.

L

Libby Thaw 45:10

I love that.

R

Rob Mineault 45:14

Maybe that's our maybe that's our year 12 goal, Steve. Maybe we can get Stevie Wonder on the show.

S

Steve Barclay 45:21

Oh, wouldn't that be something there? Actually, yeah, I have a connection to him.

R Rob Mineault 45:24
Yeah, you'd be like, "Hey, you remember me? Remember the bar? I'm Bar Steve.

S Speaker 1 45:28
Yeah,

S Steve Barclay 45:29
I'm sure he wouldn't remember me, but but I do know I do know a guy who's who's a good friend of his.

R Rob Mineault 45:36
That would be that would be nerve wracking for us to to. It was nerve wracking enough talking to Rick Hanson.

L Libby Thaw 45:44
You had him? So cool

R Rob Mineault 45:46
Yeah he was he was again what a nice guy holy cow.

S Steve Barclay 45:51
Yeah

R Rob Mineault 45:51
What a sweet guy. Anyways we got off topic.g

S

Steve Barclay 45:56

Anyway, well no sorry that that I wasn't entirely off topic because what I was going to suggest to Libby is that if you got down to that conference and you started handing out some stuff down there, you'd probably get a bit of a following out of it.

L

Libby Thaw 46:11

I did to try and get some press one time. Do you guys you guys know about Orbis? They have a Flying Eye hospital.

R

Rob Mineault 46:23

No, no.

L

Libby Thaw 46:24

Yeah, and they they fly around the world and go to resource poor parts of the world and do simple surgeries and teach the local doctors and and healthcare system about you know ways to save eyesight and stuff. Actually, the Checkered Eye Project supports them. We give them a donation of part of our income every year because I just I love the whole thing. So their fundraiser is they they call it a Plane pull, and there's a I can't remember a 40 ton or 60 ton jet, and teams of people sign up to go see if they can pull the plane. There's a big rope attached to the plane, and you get your team of whatever, and you have to raise money to go. And if you raise a certain amount, you can go and try to pull the plane. So one year, I thought oh for sure I'll get some press doing this. I I sent out press releases saying "60 year old granny going to single handedly pull a 40 ton jet" for you know Blindness awareness, and so I I paid the amount you had to have raised, and but it was just me. And I went down there, and the whole the whole time before my scheduled time to go up and try to move the jet, I talked to everybody in the crowd. I had a crazy outfit with a you know really wild hat that had little a formation of white canes and Checkered Eyes sticking way up, and of course it was a windy day, so it kept getting knocked over. But so I talked to everybody and I told them I'm going to get up there and I'm going to pull that plane all by myself on the off chance I can't move it .. "Will you help me?" And the only people who did not say yes were people who said, "Oh, we we have to leave before that. So everybody was so wonderful. It was it was a very moving day for me, literally, I guess. No pun. So when when it was my turn, I got up there and I got on the mic for a second, did my spiel about the spectrum of blindness and the Checkered Eye and stuff, and of course I go over to pull, and of course I couldn't move it by myself. Then this huge crowd of people comes up, and they all get on the rope, and we move that plane probably faster than any other team. It was just wonderful, but I didn't get any press.

R Rob Mineault 49:01
No?

S Steve Barclay 49:02
it is so hard to get press for any kind of of disability related information.

L Libby Thaw 49:09
You know, we yeah.

L Libby Thaw 49:10
Well, I thought it was such a ridiculous thing. Like Granny's going to pull the 40 tons by herself, but no. And you know, I wore just crazy wild outfit, and but no, but it was fun.

S Steve Barclay 49:23
We opened the biggest low vision and blindness showroom in Western Canada, and we we did a big Open House. I invited the press. Nothing, not a thing.

L Libby Thaw 49:34
What do you have to do??

R Rob Mineault 49:37
Yeah. I don't know.

S Steve Barclay 49:37
I get lots of offers to go on the what is it the Mark and Mindy show or something, but they want you to pay a bunch of money to do that.

L Libby Thaw 49:47

Yeah, I managed to get on a couple of morning shows on CTV, but it wasn't until I actually purchased some airtime.

R Rob Mineault 49:59

Yeah. Yeah,

L Libby Thaw 50:02

Yeah. I've been writing press releases to any every magazine show and morning show for you know decades.

R Rob Mineault 50:14

Well, that's you know what that is a great segue because my next question was for our listeners out there, then what what's the best way that that they can help? Like, how can we help move the needle for this project?

S Steve Barclay 50:31

Now, keep in mind, Libby, that you're going to be talking here to at least 10 or 12, people.

R Rob Mineault 50:35

Yeah, that's right. One in Russia.

L

Libby Thaw 50:40

Just call me. So if they could share any any of our social media, I I have a volunteer helping me with that. It's uh we have Instagram and TikTok and Facebook, and it's probably just called the Checkered Eye or Checkered Eye Project. If you share any of that, or if they write write to me through the website, which is www.checkeredeye.com, I will send out anybody who wants some pamphlets or a poster. And actually, we're just working on a brochure right now that we're going to get into ophthalmologists' offices and stuff like that. It's the awareness thing. So just tell a friend or share it on social media. So that's a fun thing. But yeah, really, just sharing the information with people.

R

Rob Mineault 51:30

Yeah, I think that it's important for people to recognize that you know just just by going out and just by wearing one of these things, you're you're spreading awareness. You're you know because people are going to ask you about it, and people because that's really the you know the other component of that is that the more people that are wearing it, the more more of the general public are going to recognize what that symbol means, and and really that's the needle we need to move.

L

Libby Thaw 51:57

Yeah, it was something I couldn't do one before the other, I had to do them at the same time. You know, get them to people with low vision and get the awareness out. It just wasn't, you know, possible to do one first. Or like, well, if you had people wearing it and nobody knew what it was, that wouldn't help much. But we could have done the awareness, even though there wasn't anybody using it yet. But again, that wouldn't make as much sense.

R

Rob Mineault 52:27

Right.

L

Libby Thaw 52:27

We've got the needle moving a little bit.

R

Rob Mineault 52:30

We got lots of time. We had lots of time before the AI apocalypse.

L

Libby Thaw 52:33

I keep saying I'd like to retire. My husband retired like 16 years ago or something. I wouldn't quit at all completely. But I'd like to hand off the admin stuff. I'm not not a big fan of that. But I like the going out and doing speeches and stuff. But I also love talking to the people who call, you know, I there's a they're they're very often new to living with any kind of blindness, and so you know I end up talking way too long with them, giving them all the tips that I can share or think of sharing at the time. That that's something I I quite enjoy.

R

Rob Mineault 53:18

Yeah, yeah, for sure. Well, and we will make sure that we we leave the link to the site in the Show Notes. So I encourage everybody to go check it out and drop Libby a line or a like. Well, Libby, thanks so much for coming on and chatting with us. It's been an absolute delight. Best of luck with the project going forward, and you know, and thank you for all the hard work that you've put in on this because I really do think that it's it's something that's that's really important and it's that's it's very much needed.

L

Libby Thaw 53:52

Well, thank you. It's really been my pleasure entirely. Okay, take care, guys. Okay, take care.

R

Rob Mineault 54:00

You too.

S

Steve Barclay 54:01

Bye bye.

L

Libby Thaw 54:03

See ya.

S

Steve Barclay 54:03

So interesting little project, right?

R

Rob Mineault 54:05

Yeah, very very interesting. I really love talking about low vision. For everyone I've talked to, they always tell me that they they feel like they have you know a foot in both worlds. I mean there was a time, you know, you know, I've certainly been involved in assistive technology and the disability community for for many moons, but it wasn't, you know, it probably took me three or four years of of you know sort of working alongside the industry and getting to know people who are who are blind or or low vision to even understand the concept of a mobility cane. I didn't know there were different styles and and that they had you know radically different uses. I had no idea, so I. I know that the general public doesn't understand that. And we know through doing this podcast and interacting with people that you know the whole blindness is a spectrum thing is so hard to drill into people's heads. So I love talking anything low vision, and yeah, I think that I was incredibly happy when we came across Libby and Checkered Eye because I really do think that grassroots organizations like this and advocacy campaigns like this can be really hard to spin up and get traction on. So you know anytime that we can help out to move the needle, I'm always excited.

S

Steve Barclay 55:38

I can remember back when when we were with Aroga on Joyce Street in the CNIB building, I remember somebody coming by with the Checkered Eye symbol, and maybe it was Libby. Maybe Libby was in Vancouver. It was a long time ago. I don't remember, but but I remember people from the CNIB, employees of the CNIB, being real naysayers about it because they were they were insistent that it should be a white cane. It shouldn't be doing something different. Everybody should have a white cane, and you know, it's a so so. It's not just you know ignorance from outside the community, but it's resistance from inside the community too. Sometimes that you've got to overcome, and it's nice to see that it's you know gain some traction. I think it's a it's a good a good option for for people, and you know when when I get people into our into our showroom who are who are coming in for the first time, you know, a lot of them are recently diagnosed people with usually it's macular degeneration. It's very common, but they don't want a cane.

R

Rob Mineault 56:51

Yeah.

S

Steve Barclay 56:51

You know, they they they might do something like the Checkered Eye symbol, and now I'm going to have to order a bunch of Libby's stuff just to have it in the have it in front. It's a great idea, and it it does fill a a niche for awareness that's you know previously unfilled.

R

Rob Mineault 57:15

Yeah, I agree. Hey, Steve, where can where can people find us?

S

Steve Barclay 57:21

Well, they can find us at cowbell@atbanter.com

R

Rob Mineault 57:33

You can also find us - No, they can also email us if they if they want to at cowbell -

S

Steve Barclay 57:39

That that was what I literally just said,

R

Rob Mineault 57:41

"Oh shit! See, I told you, I'm rusty at this. Yeah, wait. So then they can also find us online. Then, wait, did you already do that part too?

S

Steve Barclay 57:49

No, I did. I was, I was going to, but, but then you, you jumped in and then totally fluffed the line.

R

Rob Mineault 57:54

Podcasts at the end of the day kill me. Okay, so then they can also find us online at atbanter.

S

Steve Barclay 58:03

www.atbanter.com.

R Rob Mineault 58:06
Did I not say .com either?

S Steve Barclay 58:13
You didn't say .com

R Rob Mineault 58:13
Jesus Christ. Okay, wow.

R Rob Mineault 58:13
They can find us online if they so desire at www.atbanter.com.

R Rob Mineault 58:40
You can find us on social media too. We go to Facebook, but no, the really exciting part:
Canadian assistive technology has a new website.

S Steve Barclay 58:51
That's right. It is brand spanking new. It is shiny and beautiful. And congratulations on a job
well done there, Rob.

R Rob Mineault 59:01
Well, thank you, thank you.

S Steve Barclay 59:02
Yeah, it looks lovely.

R

Rob Mineault 59:03

The paint is still wet on this sucker, so go check it out. It's it's yeah, new and improved.

S

Steve Barclay 59:11

We are accepting feedback from people right now because we want to know if stuff's broke. The idea is that it's going to be easier to navigate than our previous site and have a lot more wealth of information about about some of the products and also well with all the stuff we did over the summer a crap ton of more products.

R

Rob Mineault 59:37

No kidding, yeah, for sure. But yeah, go check it out, and yeah, let us know what you think.

S

Steve Barclay 1:00:07

And you can find that website@www.canasstech.com

R

Rob Mineault 1:00:09

There you go. Hey, I think that is going to do it for us this week. Big thanks, of course, to Libby for joining us, and we will see everybody next time.

S

Steve Barclay 1:00:21

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