

## TAS Ep 55

### Expectations and Smoking

E: Hi, I'm Emily Ladau

K: And I'm Kyle Khachadurian

E: And you're listening to another episode of *The Accessible Stall*

K: Emily, this is definitely not the seventh time we're recording this episode, what are we gonna talk about today?

E: It's gotta be a surprise for you because it's not like I've said it before, right?

K: It's true actually. What are we gonna talk about today, Emily?

E: I have a story for you

K: Cool. I love storytime on *The Accessible Stall*

E: Me too! Everybody get a cup of hot chocolate, and a bowl of popcorn and put on your footie pajamas

K: I'm way ahead of ya!

*(Emily laughs)*

E: So anyway, a couple days ago I went to a photoshoot at a studio and so I was you know roaming around looking for an accessible bathroom and suddenly a man stops me and he says, "Do you smoke?" And I was so confused because I thought he was just like a random guy in the studio who was just trying to bum a cigarette off me or something. Which I've never had anybody do that before. So I was like, "No" and I kinda looked at him a little funny. And he was like, "Oh well I'm just asking cause I wanted you to know there's a wheelchair accessible way to get to the deck outside if you wanna go smoke. And then he was like, "I'm the facilities manager, by the way!" And I was like, "Ohhh this makes sense now!" So then I said, "You know nobody's ever asked me if I needed access to go have a cigarette before!" And then I said, "I prefer access to fresh air rather than access to lung cancer but I appreciate you asking me!" And then I was like, "What's your name?" And he was like, "Johnny!" And I was like, "Johnny, you're a good egg." And I meant it because it just felt like a very considerate question to ask and it lacked an air of assumption, it was just very straightforward. And also I- I don't know how to say this without it sounding weird. You know how there's this like assumption that Disabled

people can't do anything? So I think that people must assume that we don't like smoke or drink or do drugs or do anything other than like, sit like a vegetable all day.

K: Absolutely

E: So I guess I was just sort of surprised that the question was asked of me in the first place. I know how silly that sounds.

K: I mean I get it because...I don't smoke but a friend of mine does and it's always a trip it's like, "You? You? You? Really, you? You have enough problems and you don't need to do that too!" It's like....

E: I mean I know that people make those assumptions but the truth is that is actually why I don't smoke or drink or do drugs is I do have enough problems!

K: Oh, i just don't do it.

E: I just have no interest. And I should also say like, I'm not judging anybody who does that but I'm not a substance person. But anyway, I'm getting off topic. The point is that I really appreciated the way that Accessibility was offered to me. And that doesn't happen very often. I feel like there was something so casual and genuine about it, and I appreciated it because I don't expect it. I'm so used to encountering inaccessibility wherever I go that when I suddenly encounter not only accessibility but an outright offer of accessibility, this is shocking to me.

K: I find that interesting, right? Because people like you always champion the need and the want for more accessibility and yet when you find it, and even when it's shoved in your face instead of thinking, "Oh look my work is paying off, even if not directly..." It's like, "Oh look, someone actually cares, is this even real?" And I find that not humorous but it's like how do you wish for more accessibility and then continue to be completely shocked when you find it? And also shocked when you don't too? It's just a strange like thought process is all. Not saying it's bad.

E: You made a good point to me when I told you the story of the air though. Because I admit, I did tell Kyle the story.... About how we need to start expecting stuff like ths as a sign of progress.

K: I mean yeah, right? Because I mean it's always gonna be an uphill battle. I don't think, at least in our lifetime that there's going to be a Utopia for people with disabilities for people in this country. But you know, that's not to say that huge amounts of progress won't be made. And I think as much as we should expect progress to be made, we can also start accepting maybe that progress has been made. You know? And I understand that the reason that people with disabilities who use wheelchairs tend not to think that is because very often it isn't thought of. But I think a step in the right direction may be to not be so impressed or enamored when it is there.

E: I guess the reason that I am is because in the very few times that I've just expected or assumed accessibility it often ends up happening that I encounter inaccessibility. And so, when I find myself completely and utterly shut out of something that I wasn't even giving a second thought to, I'm immediately jolted back to the reality that most things are not accessible. And so, when something is not only accessible but somebody goes above and beyond to offer me access, I find myself wanting to praise them, praise the situation and just generally celebrate it because it's such a relief to me to have access available to me. It's just--it's still is surprising. I mean...in the same way when I find out something is not wheelchair accessible, I have a sinking feeling in my stomach. When I find something is wheelchair accessible, and I wasn't expecting it to be, I get this like, floating feeling. I know everyone must be either rolling their eyes at me or nodding along but ya know...

K: I'm doing both so it's all good.

*(Emily laughs)*

K: I don't think that such a thing... I don't want you to hear what I said as me saying that you shouldn't praise access when it's there. Because let's face it we've all been in situation where we have expected access. Especially from people who *should* know better, and it's led to nothing but disappointment. So I think the praise is warranted, the expectation is what I'm stuck. Although, you raise a good point where if you don't have any expectations you can't be disappointed when it's not there. Although still... I don't know.

E: It's always a disappointment to find out about inaccessibility but it's not a surprise. Finding out about accessibility actually being there is what's a surprise to me. And I guess I wonder how to even get to a point where it's reasonable to have the expectation of accessibility. I just feel like we've had the Americans with Disabilities Act in place for my entire life and none of it instills any confidence in me that I can actually expect that disabled people are actually welcome in this society.

K: You say that...But you say that having been born pretty much after the passage of it. I don't know if you would say that had you been born twenty years before the passage of it when you wouldn't have been able to get on to a bus. All I'm saying is it's very easy to say it's not good enough when you don't know a world without it. I happen to agree with you, I don't think it's good enough at all. But I'm also blessed to have been born after the ADA so I don't know any better. I don't know, ask your mom.

E: Pffff. My mom always compares our lives in the sense that she thinks that her entire life experience would've been different if she grew up in my generation, in our generation. And it's true!

K: That's what I'm saying. It makes you wonder though because like, what is Disability Activism in a world where we have federal protection. I mean, even if it's not great, it's there. Not saying there's not room for improvement, I mean that's what this show is all about. It's just an interesting though because if our existing law isn't good enough, what's the next step now?

E: What do you do? You know what? I know what you do. You protest, and you post angry tweets and you write a Facebook status and...

*(Kyle snickers)*

E: You laugh, but you know it's true! What else can we do?

K: I laughed at angry tweets and Facebook statuses. Protesting has its own merit, I don't know. On the inside I am an angry old man who yells at clouds. I don't think that complaining over social media does anything good, usually. I mean that's not saying that it never gets anything good done because of course it does but I don't know

E: So yeah, I just, I don't expect accessibility but that doesn't make me any less angry any time I encounter inaccessibility. And so, I just wanna get real excited when I do encounter accessibility.

K: Oh no, of course.....I just I'm trying to imagine it and it's like...

*(Emily laughs)*

K: "I never thought I'd have this opportunity!" I don't know.

E: And then I just produce the pack of cigarettes that I've been keeping for this exact moment  
*(laughs)*

K: Right, you bought it the day you turned eighteen and you were like, "In case of access, break glass!" *(Both laugh)* And then the guy says that to you and it's like, "My time has come!" I have never smoked a cigarette in my life, ever!

E: You know, I think I left out the part where he was like, "Do you smoke? I hope you don't! But if you do..." And I was like, "You somehow sound if like the facilities manager was my grandpa."  
*(Chuckles)* You know what I mean?

K: Yes I do. And you know that's funny too, because I don't know if you would go up to able-bodied...Well maybe you would. Maybe some people are this guy, right? I'm not. Of course you shouldn't smoke but I'm never gonna go up to someone who does smoke and rub it in their face. So I would never say like, I just can't see myself saying that to an able bodied person. I don't know if he like...maybe he does! But I feel like the, "I hope you don't, might could have been maybe because you were in a wheelchair...perhaps.

E: See I would, it's so funny that you're reading into it that way because normally I feel like and I'm sure our listeners would agree that I'm the one who would say that, but I didn't get that vibe at all! I .literally just thought it was more like the, "Ya know, I'm gonna offer you the opportunity to give yourself lung cancer but I'd prefer that you not give yourself lung cancer."

K: Oh maybe, you know I wasn't there but I just can't see. People do that though. People do do that where they go up to somebody smoking and be like, "This is everybody's air Sir, you shouldn't do that!" It's like "Yes but I'm an addict you see! And if I had it my way..."

E: I mean, when I was younger I used to like, go out of my way to cough in front of people who smoked.

K: I don't do that. Not unless....I mean, cause they know it's bad! No one doesn't know it's bad!

E: You know what I find really obnoxious? And I know we're way off track here. But I try to keep a distance from people who smoke because it really does bother me. I have mild Asthma, and it gives me a headache, it makes my eyes itch, it makes me nauseous, I just don't like the smell of cigarettes. And so I try to keep a safe distance between me and a smoker, and ever time I move, they'll like reposition themselves to move closer to me or they'll like bow their smoke in my direction and I'm like, "But I don't want to share my cigarette with you!"

K: No well that's rude though! There's ways to be a polite smoker, that's not it.

E: Yeah don't smoke, that's polite.

K: I mean you can smoke and not be a dick about it

E: I mean, well clearly on the side of not ingesting toxic substances into your body. But anyway, again...

K: I'm not either I've never ever smoked a cigarette in my life.

E: No I know you are!

K: But you know it's funny, I don't hate the smell because my mom has smoked her whole life and I associate the smell of cigarette smoke with her, so I don't hate it. Which is weird.

E: So my grandpa was a heavy smoker and he always had this faint smell of cigarettes but he also just smelled like grandpa so...I don't know man, I miss that guy.

K: Cigarettes and grandpa that's a very nostalgic cocktail. I don't know, my family used to smoke like all of them, and then when me and my sister were born my dad's half quit and my

mom's half still does. So we definitely have the tobacco gene in the Khachadurian genes but I just never had an interest in it. Ever.

E: Yeah it just...it's icky to me. But anyway, back to the subject at hand...This has been a PSA

K: Smoking is bad, okay?

E: Yeah this has been a PSA for making smart, healthy choices. And so how can we reach a point where access becomes an expectation or when we feel safe in expecting something. Is that point even reachable in our lifetime? I mean. seriously!

K: Um...The optimist in me wants to say of course. Of course it is. The realist in me uh....probably in our children's lifetime I would say.

E: You think so?

K: Yeah. Because here's the thing. A lot of access problems like simpler solutions than we think. I think a lot of the reason people don't implement accessibility things like ramps and slightly wider doors or whatever it is. Most of that I really do believe is the lack of education, the lack of knowledge that we are part of the economy and would like to buy things at your establishment, the severe overestimation of your cost to your business.

E: Mhmm

K: The total lack of repercussions in the actual law let alone *all* the extensions you get as a business owner and not to mention the underlying societal fear of disabled people. And I think that's going to be the hardest one to deal with, but I think the other three things I said are a lot more easier dealt with than you think. Like honestly I really do think that if you like went door to door to your Mom and Pop Shops that you'd have a decent result if you like made a PowerPoint presentation for em. I'm not saying you should. But like, I'm serious. I think lot of people just generally don't know how cheap it is to install a ramp. It's a one time access fee.

E: That's the whole point of the ADA Education and Reform Act that people were trying... Not the whole point, but it was basically placing the impetus on people to educate businesses instead of you know, litigating them for not following a law that's been in place for nearly thirty years. It becomes your job to educate them. Basically ro literally do a PowerPoint to explain to them why they need to make their business accessible. And on the one hand, like I get that it's important to educate people. On the other hand, why are you as a business owner not understanding and in full compliance with a law that applies to business owners. Why?

K: Yeah no, like I'm with you there like I think that whole thing is a....is a...a fecal fiesta.

E: I think you momentarily render me speechless!

*(Both laughing)*

E: Oh my God, "A fecal fiesta!"

K: Well I don't like cursing because when I edit these episodes it makes it just a little bit harder so I try not to.

E: Well there's the catchphrase of the century, I'm gonna make freakin' T-Shirts with that!

K: No I mean really, I'm not saying that business owners can't be better at being receptive to the needs of the Disability Community of course they can like, we live in New York City where everything has a step out front because it's built on top of a vast body of water that was once sinking. Like you know...But you've been to other cities that have better access and it's like, "Look, this is what the whole country could be if the whole country cared."

E: Yeah! You know what really gets me? And I'm sorry to the people who are listening to us in Washington D.C, but oh my gosh people complain all the time in DC, "Oh the elevators are always broken!" Hello! Come to New York City for two seconds! Come to New York City for *two seconds*, and try to use our Subway system and then come back and complain to me about the Washington D.C. Metro

K: Ugh! It's the exact same thing here though. You have people who are like, "Oh my God the subway price is rising a quarter!" It's like, "Yeah dude. \$2.75 a flat fee Metro is like so good! You've never been outside New York City. And I know that because if you'd been to other major city you would have a pay-per-ride, pay -per- distance fare and you wouldn't even think to say that \$2.75 is expensive!"

E: That's the flip side of my argument, but yes

K: I'm not for it. I really. And I know if you live in New York which you probably do, you're probably gonna wanna crucify me but I really do believe that New York has to not do that anymore. 100%. Sorry.

E: No. Well I really don't know if I have feelings either way but that's a story for another way. And I also wanna go back to what you were saying about educating the Mom and Pop shops. I don't know if I told this story on the podcast before. There's a coffee shop in my town. I was actually there today, on the day we're recording this. And they are in a building that has a step leading up to it. And I really wanted to be able to go there because I was so excited that there was a new coffee shop in the town near me. And so I called them right after they opened and so I called them right after they opened and I let them know that I'm a wheelchair user and that I would really like to access their coffee shop and would they please consider getting a ramp? So I don't hear anything for a year. I'm not even kidding, a year! And so one day I get a voicemail and it's this woman who says she's the owner of the coffee shop and they held onto my phone

number and they got a ramp and they wanted to let me know. And so on the one hand do I get annoyed that it took them a year to get something that should have really been in place to begin with? Or do I just think, “Hey, gee willikers! Like it’s amazing somebody actually decided to make something accessible and it was a complete surprise cause I wasn’t expecting it.

K: I mean, I don’t think you should say, “Gee willikers” about anything

*(Emily giggles)*

K: But...I think in that sort of specific situation you're sort of justifying a little bit of Column A and a little bit of Column B. It's like, "I'm glad it's here but did it really have to take a year?" I mean, maybe it did, maybe it did! You know maybe they had better things to do than install a ramp, like build their brand, who knows? But that still seems to me like a much too long time. You know? I don't know. But do you make it a point to like go there now? I know you said you were just there but...

E: Absolutely! Absolutely I do! And so first of all, the owner knows my name. He's very friendly and second of all, I went out of my way to thank him for getting the ramp, and also I brought my mom there too. And you know, she's also a wheelchair user which I'm sure a lot of listeners know but I just wanted to make the point that this is going to benefit more than one person! And he's told me, the owner's told me that other people use that ramp. So it's clearly come in handy they leave it's right by the front door. It's not always outside, somebody has to put it down for me, but if I was to go by myself all I would have to do is wave at them or call and they would come and put it down for me. So it's not a perfect solution but I just think it shows that it doesn't take that much effort. But the thing is I don't take stuff like that. Stuff like that...It's feels above and beyond to me, which is ridiculous!

K: Go on! Why is ridiculous I mean I know, I know, I know but...

E: Because...

K: It's worth expanding on! I'm not disagreeing with you I just want to hear your reasoning!

E: Because that should've been one of the first things they did. It should've been part of opening a business, that's literally how that should work. And that's not how that works.

K: I agree *(sighs)* I just don't think access should be optional...

E: Well there's the most obvious statement in the world!

K: I mean it sounds obvious, right? But the excuse that you hear is like, "This building is 150,000 years old." *That* building, who cares about it? No one goes in there, it's 150,000 years old. Going forward though, you know what I mean?



E: I just had that happen to me actually, I was at this hotel up in Lake George New York for a conference. The hotel's called the Sagamore and it's a historic building. And so it does have elevators but there's still...You can take elevators that lead you to stairs up to different rooms. And it's so annoying!

K: That's like at my church. You gotta take stairs to get to the chairlift.

E: But why? It's infuriating. And so long story short, while I was at this conference the only way that I could get to some of the rooms where the workshops were taking place was to go through this long staff hallway that's like in the basement and guests aren't supposed to be in there. So I was going past people who had dishes and towels and cleaning supplies and I was like, "I'm sorry I shouldn't be here...I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" And then also they have this really nice shop in the hotel and there's steps in the middle of the shop so I can't even get to the cashier. And it's just little things like that that I think are so completely avoidable. Or you know, there's only one wheelchair accessible bathroom available to guests and it's in the back of the restaurant in the hotel. Is it that hard? Is it?

K: You forgot the part where like, a mother and her five children are in it with their luggage.

E: Oh yeah, that happens all the time! I mean, don't get me started on my bathroom rant because if I get on my bathroom rant I'm never getting off it.

K: You know, I love how they do it in the UK and they should really do it that way here. Where you have to apply to get a key from the government that unlocks the Disabled toilets.

E: I mean, I had an elevator key in high school.

K: Same thing but for bathrooms. Well for everywhere there is one.

E: I really don't know how that would work. Is that like the "Please Offer Me a Seat" buttons? Also can't people make copies of the key?

K: That's illegal. I mean, you could but you'd get fined for it. And it's not like the, "Please Offer Me a Seat" button, this is like a sanctioned program from a government that actually cares a little bit about it's Disabled citizens. And not a pilot program that was really just a cute photo op for the City.

E: Nobody cares about Disabled People. ...That's not true, I'm just being dramatic. But yeah all of the various anecdotes that I've told are the reasons why I can't expect accessibility because it's just always going to be a disaster. It just always is.

K: If you had a key to the elevators in the New York City Subway. I mean, even let's pretend it's only the 24% that are accessible now.

E: We're still on keys?

K: Yeah but the like the odds of them failing are so much lower because there's fewer people who use them and I'm sorry, I just think it's a good idea.

E: Forget failing, the odds of there being urine in them are so much lower.

K: That is a bonus!

E: I mean, have you ever seen something as under maintained as the New York City Subway elevators? You have not. The New York City Subway

K: I've never seen something so filthy. I'm pretty sure you can open a manhole in the middle of Fifth Avenue and walk into a sewer and it will be slightly cleaner than the inside of a subway elevator. Like, truly...But all that to Accessibility is important. But it's so funny because you brought up the little things where it's, "Oh, your entrance is accessible but there's two stairs in your hallway." You know, and I'm not a wheelchair user so I'm gonna ask you, is that more or less soul crushing than not being able to get in somewhere in the first place?

E: Wait, say that again?

K: Like the example you gave before, "Oh there's two steps in the middle of your hallway but your front door I can get inside of. So you have that false hope that the place is accessible, is that more or less disappointing than when you're flat out you just can't get in, period?"

E: I guess the false hope is more disappointing, or when someone tells me somewhere is accessible and I don't really have much else to go on so I just kind of have to believe them. Like I've probably told this story too, all my stories must be getting old. But when I had planned a date with a guy to do a paint night. And they told me the place was accessible, and it's true! But the paint night was upstairs in the restaurant! So I was able to eat dinner there but not paint there. So that is a horrible feeling because I think that I did what I needed to do, I did my due diligence to find out if the place was accessible and then I get there and I find out, "Surprise!"

K: "Oops we forgot to tell you, we installed this staircase while you were on your way!" I mean I don't know, It's important, Access is important says the people on the disability podcast show thing! Anyway...any final takeaways before we repeat everything we've ever told on this show?

E: They've gotta be fresh to somebody

K: Is that your Final Takeaway? Cause I actually agree with that

E: No silly! I guess my final takeaway is it's okay to not expect access if it's for the sake of putting your own best interest first. Meaning you don't have the expectation of access because you want to make sure that Accessibility is available, so you check. And I think it's okay to appreciate the moments where Access was provided or offered to you and you weren't expecting it. Embrace those moments because they're little breaths of fresh air in the midst of a fecal fiesta of inaccessibility (*Giggles*).

K: I wanted to go with "Crap Circus" but that doesn't

E: Oh I like that too though!

K: Yeah but it's not as alliterative so (*Sighs*) or a "Poop Parade" With all that though...

E: Ooh the alliteration!

K: With all that said though my Final Takeaway is don't smoke! Cause it's bad for ya!

E: That's actually the best Final Takeaway there is. Don't do drugs. Don't drink, don't smoke, take care of yourselves, eat your vegetables, get eight hours of sleep, take a shower for goodness sake!

K: And clean your room!

(*Emily laughs*)

K: And call your mother!

E: She's been worried sick about you

K: She definitely has. Anyway, goodnight everybody! See ya next time

E: Thanks for listening