North Stars with Bonnie Prestridge

Ep 3: Hardwired to Adapt

Guest: Amber

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Amber: I think sometimes people focus so much on the disability that they lose sight of the beauty. The beauty is in the adaptation, whether you have a physical disability like mine or whether you have a chronic illness.

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Bonnie: Hello, I'm Bonnie Prestridge, and this is the North Star Podcast. I'm a life coach for young people in their teens, twenties and thirties, plus their families, who feel stranded or lost in life. If that sounds like you, this show is here to be a guiding light. To help you expand the horizons of what's possible for your life, and build the practical skills to get there. In this show, we ditch the try harder and think positive mindsets of the mainstream self-improvement world for an approach to life that's more authentic, more effective and way more fun. If you're ready, let's get going.

Our guest and North Star today is Amber, who's here to talk about life when you've had an amputation since birth. She's a fellow redhead born and raised in the southern Appalachians of North Georgia and currently works as the ADA coordinator for a large university. I'm excited for you to meet Amber. We had a funny and irreverent conversation that includes DIYing mobility aids, what movies get wrong about bullying, Appalachian culture and finding true disabled love.

Also just wanted to give you a heads up, we do have a brief conversation about voluntary or corrective amputations. It's nothing graphic or disturbing, just might be a surprising concept if you've never heard about it before. Okay, enjoy.

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B: Thanks for being here, Amber. I'm so excited to have you on the show.

A: Thanks for having me.

B: We start every show with the same three questions, which I will now pose to you. The first one is about our theme. So the theme of this podcast season is brains and bodies. And what's your connection to the theme?

A: Well, I am a congenital amputee. I've had an amputation since I was a couple weeks old. And so I've lived my whole life with a disability, as opposed to someone who gets their disability later in life. And I think that's kind of an interesting strange perspective.

B: It is. And what's the best part of having your disability?

A: Well, I talk all the time about how kind of the magic and the joy and the fun of disability is in creativity. It's in adaptation and how we adapt to our disabilities in lots of interesting ways that vary from person to person. And I think that that's really the best part of having a disability is being a part of a community that's infinitely adaptable. And just the creativity of people with disabilities never ceases to amaze me.

B: I couldn't agree more. I was just listening to a podcast with a couple folks with disabilities on it, and they were just listing the number of adaptations related to COVID-19, like these homemade air purifiers and all of these inventions that have come out of the pandemic that came from people with disabilities. We are just, we're amazing.

A: I have a friend who's deaf who is always reminding people, "And texting was invented for deaf people. You're welcome."

B: Is that for real?

A: No, for real. Texting was invented for deaf people, and the rest of us just adopted it. And so we owe a debt of gratitude for a lot of our technology, from texting to dictation, all of that, to people with disabilities.

B: That's so cool. I can't wait to learn more about that. And what would you say is the worst or the hardest part of having a disability?

A: Well, one of the fundamental parts of having a disability is people making assumptions about what you can and cannot do based on movies, based on people they know who might have similar disabilities but function and have adapted in a completely different way than you. And so I think that's probably the hardest part is constantly having to pull back the layers of other people's assumptions and make sure that things are correct. And it's been interesting.

B: Oh, yeah. Well, I'm excited to talk about both of those things more in our conversation. Last intro question: who or what have been your North Stars?

A: Well, stereotypically, I could say my parents, but I think I am always going back to the fact that I'm Appalachian. My accent will come out at various times. My accent has been beaten out of me throughout my life because people outside of Appalachia

don't really like the accent and comment on it. And so over time, a lot of us lose our accent. But when I tell stories from my childhood, which I probably will tell, it does come back

and it comes and goes. But I think being Appalachian, I just culturally, we have a different perspective than a lot

of other folks. We aren't really taught that life is going to be smooth. We're kind of taught that life is a battle and it's your job to survive. And I don't think that's necessarily a good thing. But the positive outgrowth of that is I was taught from a very early age, yeah, having a disability is going to be hard, but you are hardwired to adapt and survive. You can survive and thrive in any environment. And that's just a part of, I think, Appalachian culture that I'm grateful for and I've carried

forward with me.

B: That's really beautiful. I mean, it's dark and beautiful at the same time.

A: Just like the Appalachians.

B: Dark and stormy. Yes, on the one hand, the expecting life to be hard doesn't necessarily cultivate joy per se, but then on the other hand, this deep belief and trust in your own resilience. Yeah, that's good stuff. It's powerful stuff.

A: I think it's useful.

B: Useful. Yeah. Okay. So your parents and your Appalachian culture has been a big guiding force for you in your life.

A: Mmhm

B: Okay. Thanks for sharing all that. Jumping in, I would love to hear more about what it was like for you growing up, both with the amputation you have and growing up where you grew up, because I think that is something just interesting and special. And I imagine that there are listeners out there who have a disability and are also living in a rural setting who don't have very many role models who they can relate to. So that's something I'm excited to hear you talk more about.

A: Yeah. So I got my amputation very young. Like I mentioned, I was a few weeks old. I was born with a rare blood clotting disorder. I was born at 26 weeks, so I was vastly underbaked. As my father says, I was underbaked.

B: Little doughy in the center.

A: Little doughy in the center. I spent three months in the hospital at the Egleston Center in Atlanta. And during that time, they discovered that I had this really rare blood clotting disorder. And when I was born, premature babies, it's complicated putting IVs into very premature babies. I weighed two pounds and six ounces and I lost down to one pound and seven ounces. At a certain point, I weighed one pound and seven ounces. And when you put IVs in someone that small, veins collapse. And so some of my veins collapsed and I had this blood clotting disorder. And by the time they figured out what was going on, I had a very serious blood clot in my right foot, which resulted in them ending up amputating the foot just below the ankle. So I have a little bit, I have my heel, but I don't have much ahead of that. And one of the things of my life is having a strange amputation. So I have always wanted just the standard below the knee amputation. And sometimes I freak people out because I'm like, damn it, I wish I could just take it off below the knee and one day I might. And my husband's like, okay, we can do that. He's very resilient to this. But I have a very strange amputation, which makes prosthetics more complicated. And a lot of us who have congenital amputations, as opposed to amputations that happen as a part of accidents, have just strange, strange amputations that aren't the standard one you're

used to seeing in the commercials with the veterans, which is the below the knee carbon fiber running leg. So, yeah.

B: And is that because when people have an amputation that results from like an injury or an infection, the doctors can choose how and where to most strategically make that amputation?

A: Yes. And this is always the kind of interesting element of it is inevitably the doctor will always choose to preserve as much of the natural limb as possible. And that's always been how it is. But in actuality, from the perspective of the amputee, it's much better to have a strategically placed amputation right below the knee or right below the ankle than to preserve at all costs. And so in retrospect, if I could go back in time, I would say just take it off below the knee, please. But again, that's something that probably would have terrified my parents.

B: Yeah. Especially on like to do that on a tiny itty bitty baby. There wasn't that much tissue to preserve at all. Okay. One other thing that has always stood out to me about your story and makes me even more grateful to have you as a friend and that you're here is that you were one of only four people in that time period who had ever survived that congenital blood coddling disorder.

A: Yeah, I was I was born in 1987. And in 1986, they invented the treatment that I had, which is involving lots of plasma injections, plasma transfusions, and several other treatments, but primarily plasma transfusions. And so before that was invented, every baby who had this blood disorder just died.

B: Wow.

A: Eventually.

B: And not long before that was the case only a year before you were born. And then something else you've mentioned is that you had this life saving plasma transfusions, but this was again 1987. And they couldn't test for HIV.

A: Yeah, this was before and this is what I've been told. The doctor listening to this podcast might be like, actually, there were tests. But my parents, my parents were told at a major medical center that that was a risk they had to accept that I could end up with HIV because at the time there was no way to test blood plasma for HIV. It was such a new thing.

B: Our miracle baby, Miracle Amber.

A: Oy.

B: All right. So you've set the stage for us. This is how it all came about. What was it like growing up as a kid with this amputation and this unusual amputation?

A: Yeah. So people always, and we've talked about this before, Bonnie, people always think of it as like the movies where the other kids are picking on the kid with a disability. And I'm sure I was picked on, but I think I was picked on more for being very tiny, looking like I was two grades younger up until the fifth grade than for my disability. And I have always said that I think that movies misportray childhood with disability in that, at least in my experience, which is just my experience, I didn't get bullied. I was just kind of invisible. You know, people's eyes just pass over you, and they try not to look because being around you is uncomfortable. And so there's a couple of outgrowths of this. And one is that you learn to be funny. That's a part of disability culture is we learn to be funny, or at least attempt to be funny. I can't guarantee that I am funny, but I try.

B: I think you're hilarious for the record.

A: Because it helps people be more comfortable around us. It breaks the ice. When I was a little kid, I would describe it, and I already was reading too much science fiction, I described it as a force field coming up between me and other people. When people would meet me if I was wearing pants, because I can pass, you know, we talk about passing, I can pass. If I was wearing pants, people might notice I had a limp, but they wouldn't think about it. But if I was wearing a dress, I would go home that day and tell my mom, I don't want to wear dresses anymore because the second someone sees my prosthetic, it's like a force field goes up between them and me, and they can't talk to me like I'm just a normal kid. And so all my through my childhood, I refused to wear dresses because, and I up until, gosh, into my 20s, I was jeans, t-shirt, tennis shoes. That was my uniform because I wanted to hide.

But one of the funniest stories and as I was getting ready for this conversation, I remembered it and it came to me all at once and I'd completely forgotten about it. When I was in the fifth grade, you know, that end of year assembly where they give out awards and stuff. So in the fifth grade, they announced, "And we have a most inspirational kid award."

B: Oh, no.

A: And I remember when they called me down from the bleacher, I looked up at my parents and they just shrugged at me. They're like, "We don't think you're very inspirational. We have no idea what's going on." And so I go down and it's the PE teacher and the PE teacher is talking about how it's just so inspirational, how even though I'm an amputee, I participate in PE and I never give up. And what's funny and the reason why I was, first of all, I was mortified. I'm a redhead for those, it's the podcast, you can't see me, I'm a redhead. I blush like you've never seen in your life. Like I can turn as red as my hair, if not more red. And so I was like red.

And then, but the funny part of this, the best part of this is that 95% of the time I snuck out of PE.

B: Oh that's so funny.

A: I went to PE. So we're in the Appalachians, it's good weather most of the year, other than it rains a lot. And we got, we're very resilient to rain as little kids growing up in the Appalachians. It's a temperate rainforest. And so I would hide books in the honeysuckle bushes next to the track. And I would sneak away during PE, go get like my Chronicles of Narnia, my Susan Cooper, The Dark is Rising series. I would go get my fantasy book out of the honeysuckle bush, go up in the woods and sit up on a bank overlooking all the other kids doing PE so I could like observe when it ended. And I would just be reading the entire time. And so the funniest part of this is her ideas about disability were so overblown and dramatic and maudlin, that the woman didn't even notice I wasn't even there. I wasn't even there.

B: Which is, which just goes

A: To the invisibility.

B: There's so much to unpack here, right? To your point about the invisibility is you were so invisible that she literally did not notice that you were not there.

A: But they were looking for something inspirational and heartwarming to do. And so they found it. And it was just so funny because I like probably that year I only attended a handful of classes or I'd like pretend to walk around and then just run up the bank.

B: They just needed to manufacture something heartwarming and you were just a tool for that. I also, that's the most Amber thing ever of hiding fantasy books in a honeysuckle bush. I mean,

A: Oh yeah. I spent my PE reading.

B: And then the fact that they have now disclosed your disability, and I know it's a small town so maybe everybody already.

A: Everybody knew and all of us had known each other from from pre-k or even daycare.

B: But they just put you on the spot in front of everybody and you're clearly blushing red, not enjoying this quote unquote recognition. It's just, and for anybody who knows Amber, you are smart. You are creative. You are kind. There are so many real things to give you an award for besides your fake PE performance.

A: It wasn't even she tried hard in PE. She participated in PE.

B: She participated, yeah. And I love the idea of your parents just being like, we don't think you're particularly inspirational. You're just a normal kid.

A: Yeah, like what's happening? We don't know.

B: Oh, that is such a great story. So going back to your unusual amputation, can you tell us a little bit more about the prosthetics that you used in your childhood?

A: Well, that was a bit of a mixed bag. And if we line them up on a table, people might be very confused because true to being

Appalachian, my dad made my prosthetics for a good part of my childhood.

B: Heck yeah.

A: Just created them out of really high top boots. And then we would just go around everywhere, finding things that were cushy and like materials that had spring. And we would just kind of cobble together prosthetics because when you're a little kid, well first of all, back then definitely a pre-existing condition. Definitely something that made insurance much more expensive for us.

B: Okay.

A: My parents are factory workers. We didn't have great insurance to begin with. And the closest prosthetics was an hour away and would require taking a full day off work. And my parents between them normally only had four or five days a year they could take. And so add to that the fact that kids outgrow prosthetics in like five minutes.

B: Yeah.

A: And it was so funny because there were even congressional hearings back in the 2000s where insurance companies were saying amputees should get a new prosthetic every five years. And I'm like, not even for adults every five years, for kids, every nine months you need a different prosthetic. And so again, it's like, well, we're not going to do that. We don't have the ability to do that. So let's get creative. And so we made prosthetics out of boots and conveniently my parents both worked at the boot factory at the time.

B: Very convenient.

A: And so we scavenged, we had materials, we had know how, my parents knew how to work with leather. And so we made my prosthetics up until, God, I think at a certain point we started needing help from a local cobbler, like an old school cobbler around the middle school. But it wasn't until I didn't get the kind of prosthetic I have now until I was, until I was 18. Okay. Actually, until I was 19.

B: So these are homemade prosthetics for the first 18 years of your life, arguably the most critical ones to your development.

A: I went away to college with a homemade prosthetic.

B: Yeah. That's legit.

A: Life is weird, body life is weird.

B: Well and that dovetails nicely with what you were saying at the beginning about what you love most about your disability is just the creativity, the adaptability and just, yeah, make things that wouldn't have existed and we survive in situations. Yeah, it's so beautiful. Do you want to say more about that?

A: Yeah. I mean, I think that's the empowering part of having a disability is I think sometimes people focus so much on the disability that they lose sight of the beauty. The beauty is in the adaptation, whether you have a physical disability like mine or whether you have a chronic illness and you learn that napping is a wonderful thing that you need to incorporate into your life strategically. Because dear God, I think that's wonderful. If you have a vision disability, I have a coworker who has a vision disability and wears a magnifier, a beautiful magnifier around her neck that as a necklace that she can just pull up at any point.

I think that, I mean, think about it, Bonnie. We are homo sapiens. The nature of humanity is adaptability and resilience.

We've been to the moon, we've lived in the North Pole, we live in the desert, humans, we're hardwired to adapt. And so I am always just fascinated and kind of like shocked by people who think that a human being can't adapt to losing their vision, losing a limb, getting diagnosed with a chronic illness. It's part of who we are as a species.

B: It's a really good point.

A: It's not easy. It's not easy. But you know, I'm Appalachian, so I'll be like, life is never easy.

B: It's not supposed to be easy.

A: I have actually been told it's our job to survive, Amber. And so I do think that, I don't know, I think that that's the magic and that's the fun. I think if we focus more on that, then we focus on what's missing or what's abnormal, we're going to, that's how we change society and shift people's perspectives.

B: In other words, would you say that we, people with disabilities are a tremendous asset to society?

A: Hell yeah. Hell yeah.

B: The rest of you need us.

A: No, and in no uncertain terms, like I won't give all kinds of details, but in a previous life when I worked in DC and I helped run an employment program for college students with disabilities. I had a person from the Department of Defense talk to me about hiring college students with disabilities and we had a conversation. And this person said, I can take a group of your interns, Amber, the interns with disabilities, put them in a conference room, give them a difficult problem to solve, take a group of other interns, put them in a different conference room, give them the same problem. Conference room one, the students with, the college students with disabilities come up with vastly more creative problems. Like a life with a disability is a life lived with creative problem solving. And I think that that is honestly what the world needs the most.

B: It's so true. So Amber and I met in our former lives in DC, and I remember my first night in DC when I was starting my internship program. I was out walking around with the other interns and there was one of us who knew DC really well and was in a wheelchair, a manual wheelchair. And there was somebody who couldn't read, but had a really good sense of direction. And then there was somebody who was really good at reading maps and like under, you know, reading things on the phone. And it was just amazing. And like, here I am, I can't help with any of this. And it was amazing to see the four people sort of combine their skills to make this super city navigating crew. Whereas like none of us would have been able, cause I think maybe there was somebody who was helping the person in a wheelchair cause there was some uneven, there's some random places in DC, they're like cobbled like the sidewalk. And it was just really beautiful to see how creative we were able to get to solve this problem of we need to get somewhere. We don't know where it is. The terrain is rough. It's the middle of the night. And yeah, I just, that's my experience. Every time I'm with disabled people, we come up with solutions faster than other people and usually like more creative.

A: Yeah, for sure.

B: Okay. Another topic I wanted to touch on with you is dating with a disability. Yeah. I just feel like so many disability workshops, classes, focus on getting a job, advocating for yourself. And this is one of those things that I don't hear talked about enough with young people, but is arguably the thing that's most on everyone's minds.

A: Oh yeah. I, a couple of years back, I was invited to speak to a group of like high schoolers with disabilities about disability. And they just kind of threw me in a room with them with completely unstructured time and no teachers, which I liked. Take out the teachers. And I was starting to ask, "Do you want to talk about employment?" Cause that's kind of my thing. My thing is employment. And one of the, one of the girls in the group noticed that I was wearing an engagement ring.

And she was like, "You're engaged."

I was like, "Yeah, I'm engaged to a great man. His name's Joel."

And she said, "How did you meet? How did you date? How did you tell him that you have a disability? I need to know this." Like very direct. And then it was like, they like leaned in, they literally started scooting their chairs closer. Like everyone, I was like, I did not sign up for this. I did not sign up to be a dating coach for people with disabilities, especially people with disabilities a decade younger than me. This is weird. But,

B: Like, am I allowed to talk about this?

A: I was like, "All right, let's, let's talk about this." So I think dating can be complicated when you have a disability and I do not have the answers. I don't know what's, what's the best approach. And for many years I was very self-conscious. I had very low self-esteem. I don't think you can grow up in modern society without a little bit of that, you know?

B: Sure.

A: But, I think that the best way for me to describe it is: when you meet the right person, things will come together. And I don't think it's, "Disability won't matter. Someone will love you despite your disability." No, that's a bunch of bullshit. I think that the right person will see you as a whole person, including the disability. The story that I've told, and I've told this damn story so many times because I have so many college students and I work at a university, so many college students in my office crying like all the time over boyfriends. And so, and so I tell this story to them.

So I met Joel when I was 30. I told folks growing up, "I don't care about boys. I don't care about ever dating or getting married. I'm not even going to think about being married until I'm 30." And then two weeks after I turned 30, like there's Joel, which is kind of just one of those funny things in life that actually happens. And so I met Joel and it was a very much, it was very much a: hey, there you are. There you are. It was completely natural. We just immediately hit it off. I won't tell you the whole story, but we immediately hit it off in a way that I felt like I had known him all my life. And we ended up having an extended first date that lasted for like eight hours. I ended up meeting one of his childhood friends during this time because he was going to meet him afterwards. And the childhood friend and his wife both thought that Joel had been keeping me a secret for months. They didn't realize that we had met that day. They thought we'd been dating for months.

And so naturally having hit it off so easily with a person and we met in the fall, so I was wearing jeans and shoes that hid my disability, having hit it off so easily with a person, I think a part of me was a little worried once I told him about the disability. But on our second date, I deliberately wore sandals and I was like, "Hey, I'm just going

to go."

B: Just see if he says anything.

A: Well, yeah. But also like, I'm 30. This does not need to be a thing. I'm fine. If he doesn't like my disability, screw him.

That was very much my impulse. And so I show up, we're walking to go someplace and he's like, Joel hates that he said this,

especially now that I've told the story, he's like, "Oh, you have a hitch and you're giddy up just like I do." Because he walks with a limp too for a different reason.

And I was like, "Yeah, I'm an amputee."

And he was like, "Really? That's so awesome."

And he like in the middle of the sidewalk, got down on his hands and knees, was like, "This is so cool. Can I see your prosthetic?"

And I was like, "I want to marry this man. This is great." And so it isn't like the person for you will love you despite your disability. Hell no. The person for you will see you as a whole person and actually will not carry, I don't know how to describe it.

B: They'll like connect with it. They'll be interested.

A: Yeah. And this is kind of a personal moment, but I'll say it because I think it's probably, when I was 20, I would have aspired to hear someone say this. I remember at one point, I would always kind of hide the amputee. You know, amputees, sometimes we like to hide the amputation. We put socks on, we do everything. And he was like, we were just laying on the couch together and he was just like, "Let me massage your feet."

And I was like, "Noooooooo."

And he was like, "Your amputation is a part of you and it's beautiful."

B: Oh, Joel, he's the best.

A: Literally, some of the college students are like, "One day I will find my Joel." And sometimes five years later they call me, it's like, "I found my Joel, Amber, I found my Joel." And so it's just like, I feel like sometimes we overthink dating as a disability. And to the extent, and this is a little bit subversive and controversial, I think the disability is actually turning the disability into something useful is kind of my motto. The disability is a useful screening factor.

B: I would agree with that.

A: If someone isn't willing to embrace your disability, they're probably not worth your time. You should not be like, how can I tie myself in knots trying to get this person to like me? No, bullshit. You should seek out the people who connect in a deeper way.

B: Well, it's a really interesting point because I think especially as women, there can be, at least I'll say this for myself, there can be a fear of like, will this person still like me when I'm older? Will they still like me when my body changes? What if something happens to me? And when you already have something that's quote unquote wrong with you in society's view, or you have something that makes you different, or that means that sometimes you need help and somebody already embraces that, likes that, sees that as either outright like an asset or is just neutral about it. It's just like your amputation is just part of you.

A: Yeah.

B: Yeah, I think that lends a lot of, that for me has helped me feel a lot of trust in people because I already know. Does that make sense? I already know how you're going to act. I'm not as afraid of what if something happens to me in the future and you won't love me anymore.

A: Yeah. Because that's the nature of disability is anyone can have a disability anytime. It's a part of the human condition. It's a normal, natural part of being human. And you want to date people who see disability as a normal, natural part of being human. And if they do not, good, because they probably wouldn't be good at a lot of the other parts of marriage either.

B: Yeah. And I know that can be hard, like that can feel maybe like a platitude for somebody who is really struggling in dating. "But nobody is messaging me on the app and nobody wants to go out with me." And we get like, you know, you and I obviously get that, that it's not easy. But yeah, you definitely don't want to be with somebody who doesn't see disability as natural or isn't like open to learning that. And I do think that you said having a disability is a great screening factor and it shows you who somebody is sooner and can build intimacy, deeper intimacy earlier.

A: Yeah.

B: Yeah. Your and Joel's story is so beautiful. Joel is such an amazing human being. You two are wonderful together and I just hope, yeah, everybody out there, I hope that you find your Joel.

Before meeting Joel.

A: Oh, I'm so happy you reminded me about this. I'm sorry, I forgot to tell the story. It's going to make us go over time.

B: It's fine.

A: Okay. Before meeting Joel. Okay. So some people are going to think this is funny. Other people are going to be like, wow, she's really mean. Okay, so I think it's funny, obviously. So before meeting Joel, I would regularly go on dates and either the first or the second day I would bring up my amputation or I would wear a dress. I would make it visible or I would bring it up. So one thing that happens a lot to amputees is, "Oh my God, you're an amputee. How did it happen?" Do you know? And they get really like sad on your behalf. You know, and they and like, and they just.

B: It becomes this solemn moment.

A: Oh yeah, like I'm solemnly asking you how this happened. And because I think this is really serious. And so whenever that would happen, I would.

B: This person's assuming that you had like a horrific car crash or something traumatic.

A: And also that I'm sad. And also that I'm sad about my disability. That's the other big assumption here. You got to pull back all the assumptions. But a big assumption is that I'm sad and it's a tragedy. "Oh, you poor thing."

I naturally have, maybe it's my Appalachian-ness. I naturally have a very negative reaction to that kind of sympathy. And so I would say, "Well, you know, there was this one time my family and I, we went to the beach and I was swimming in the ocean."

Now I didn't even see the ocean until I was 15 and I can't swim. A lot of Appalachian people don't swim, by the way, all you people who go out in the ocean, I think you're all crazy. But I would say, "Well, I was out in the ocean with my family and then like I felt this nudge against my leg."

And like you can see like their faces start to be like, "Oh my God, it's a

shark attack."

And so I keep going until I either tell a fake story and then start laughing or they realize that I'm pulling their leg. This is useful because one, it's a test of sense of humor, which is critical. Two, it's a test of how bright they are as well because, because once I get deep into the story, I'm already knowing that you are not going to get a second date. If you haven't figured out yet that I am just messing with you. And then I tell them that I'm messing with them and if they don't laugh, I have just been like, "It was wonderful to meet you. I'm going to head out" and I've just left. Like left them there.

B: Just bounce. Shark story, bounce.

A: No, it's an excellent test. And what's funny is Joel didn't even need the shark story.

B: He didn't even need the shark story. I love that so much. I just love the image of you just trolling all of these people.

A: Like their faces, Bonnie. Their faces, Bonnie. And then, and then, and then some of them would get really upset when they realized I was joking with them. And I'm like, "Well, you know, you were taking it so seriously. Actually, I've been an amputee since I was a kid. It's just a part of who I am." And then if they were very confused by that, again, not a second date, no second date.

B: Yeah. Peace out, dude.

A: Yeah.

B: Thank you for that. Yeah, that's one of my favorite Amber stories. So we got to wrap up unfortunately. I wish we could talk for 45 million more hours. Is there anything else you want to share that we haven't discussed that you feel like it's important to put out there?

A: No, I feel like we've we've definitely got over a lot of the stories. I would just say, again, disability is a normal, natural part of being human. Adapting to it is a normal, natural part of being human. It's hard. I will never diminish how hard it is. It's hard. But we, we're human beings we're hardwired to adapt and survive and make make something good out of what other people think is difficult. And that's our strengths. And that's that's the beauty of disability is in the creativity and the adaptation.

B: Hmm. Solid. I love that. Well, thank you so much for coming on and sharing your stories, your wisdom, your not cheesy, uplifting perspectives on disability. And I'm just so grateful.

I think that our listeners are going to find a lot to connect with in the story. So thank you so much.

A: No, Thank you.

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B: That's it for now. I hope there was something in this episode that helps illuminate your path. In the meantime, we'd love to hear from you. To send us your thoughts, questions or topic

suggestions. You can go to my website, bonnieprestridge.com and message us through the general contact form. That web address is spelled B O N N I E P R E S T R I D G E dot com. That's also where you can learn more about my coaching services. And you can follow me on Instagram at bonnie.prestridge. This podcast is co-created and produced by Sarah Williams. You can find her on Instagram at Sarah Mikaela. That's S A R A H M I K A E L A A.

Links to all of the above contact info can also be found in our show notes. Follow or subscribe to the show wherever you get your podcasts. And if there's anyone you know who could use a guiding light, we'd love it if you shared our show with them.

Until next time, we're wishing you fair winds and following seas.