Down to the Struts

Getting Down to It, January 2024

Guest: Qudsiya Naqui

Host: Avery Anapol

Transcript by: Qudsiya Naqui

For more information:[www.downtothestruts.com](http://www.downtothestruts.com)

[Cheerful morning-time beats]

Avery Anapol:

My name is Avery Anapol. I am a journalist, a writer, and an editor, and I help with distribution for the Down to the Struts podcast. I've known Qudsiya for quite a few years now. We met doing adaptive sports in dc. I am a white woman. I am 28 years old. I have brown hair and a round face with green eyes, and I live in London. So, Qudsiya, listeners may have been following along with the podcast for all seven seasons now, , but may not know too much about you. So what I'd like to talk to you about today is who are you, tell me about who you are and, and how did you become a podcaster?

**Qudsiya Naqui:**

That's a big existential question, Avery, and thank you so much for being here.

I should say, we are recording this at 5:30 AM Eastern time, so that it wouldn't be super early for Avery in London. So you may hear me sipping on coffee while we're having this conversation, and I'm definitely in my pajamas.

Avery Anapol:

Hey, it's 10 30 somewhere.

**Qudsiya Naqui:**

Exactly. thank you for the question. I think most of our listeners know me as a podcaster., and I have mentioned at some points the fact that I'm a lawyer, but that was sort of my first career before I started podcasting, which is, you know. Perhaps more than a hobby to me at this point. It's really a passion and something I love. I grew up in New Jersey. I'm the child…I'm a first generation immigrant. I was born in the US and my parents came to this country from India. And for those of you who read our last newsletter from December, my family is Muslim, so I grew up in a Muslim household. And,

my family was affected by the partition, and the, the creation of Pakistan. So I have a lot of family who are from Pakistan, but the family has really had a diaspora all over the world, and I was really fortunate to grow up in a. A very large extended family, many of whom lived, you know, not too far away, nearby to my family in New Jersey.

So I have lots of cousins and aunts and uncles and just grew up in a really amazing support system. And though a lot of, a lot was expected of us when we were young, so, um. You know, that's why I always felt really driven in school and, and really thought it was important to find, you know, a meaningful career.

And, um, I sort of always knew I wanted to be a lawyer from when I was a very young girl. I was really into politics. I loved to argue. Um, and, um, back then, you know, my family, um, is a family of healthcare providers. A lot of my family members are physicians. It's, it's a long history, um, in my family. And as I mentioned, if you're interested in hearing more about that history, please check out our December newsletter, Getting Down to It, which is available on Substack, if you wanna learn more about that.

because of my my low vision, no one ever expected me to be a doctor, and that wasn't something I thought about for myself as a career path. And I'm excited that that concept of, , someone who is disabled, never having a shot in the medical profession is really changing. Because I think, as I've talked about on the podcast in past episodes, it is so important to have disabled people represented in healthcare professions. And, I do feel fortunate that that in part led me to the law and, I very early on was interested in

public service. One of my first internships in law school was at a legal services organization working with people who were at risk of eviction. And that really solidified for me the path I wanted to take and led me to law school and I think has informed so much of what I've done in my life. Service is really important to me. So, I try to embed that in everything that I do, whether it's my work, whether it's this podcast, whether it's volunteering, serving on the board of the sports organization that Avery and I met through. So I, I really try to bring service into my life in a lot of different ways and, and that I feel is something that is like a huge aspect of who I am and everything that I do.

**Avery Anapol:**

Yeah. So, um, obviously being in the legal profession, you have a very strong sense of, of justice and, um, something you talk a lot about on the podcast is this idea of disability justice. I was wondering if you could talk a bit about what that means to you. How do you practice it in your own life and how it's informed you creating this amazing production that is down to the struts.

**Qudsiya Naqui:**

Disability Justice is a concept that is very new to me still, and I feel like I'm still learning about it. And I'm so grateful for all of the people who brought the concept into being. Patty Byrne, Mia Mingus, Eli Claire, all the folks from Sins Invalid, who developed the 10 Principles of Disability Justice, which we've talked about at various points on the podcast. And the folks who have carried it forward, people like Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha, Alice Wong. And it has a very particular meaning and I've spent the last few years really immersing myself in the works of all these folks that I've just named, uh, works that I recommend folks connect with.

And I've recommended some of those specific books and articles on the podcast at various points. Particularly the sins invalid Disability Justice Primer. For me, what was so revelatory about the concept of disability justice is the fact that it's, it's not about, really at its core, not about policy or law. it's really a way of life. It's a way that we can all exist in community together, uh, and. In service to one another. And it creates a framework for that. It creates a framework for how to have empathy, how to listen to one another, how to really maximize and celebrate the gifts that everyone brings to the table. How to share resources when there is scarcity. So I just feel like it's taught me so much about life and even my own personal life, with my friends and family. I feel that I think so differently about those interactions because I understand the disability justice framework. So for instance, I interviewed Jennifer Natalya Fink about her book, All Our Families, and she talks in that book about how we have disability in our families and oftentimes when you're disabled and oftentimes when you're the only sort of openly disabled person in your family, you feel very alone. I mean, I'm the only person in my family who has low vision, but if I think about my family history, I'm not the only person in my family who has a disability. We have family members who have, progressive hearing loss. We have family members who have mobility issues, but we don't talk about those experiences in that framework of disability. And, after reading Jennifer's book and, you know, connecting it to the principles of disability justice, it really changed how I approach thinking about my own, my interactions with people in my own family, how I think about the effects of aging and, and how much kinder we need to be to each other in that process. Disability justice to me, like I said, is just, it's a framework for having much better, uh, much kinder, uh, much more thoughtful and constructive and generative relationships with people because we are, we meet their, everyone meets each other's bodies and minds, kind of where they are and, Of course there's conflict and there's push and pull. But, when you have that framework and understanding in mind that our bodies and our minds are incredibly fallible, I feel like it, it makes us better able to collaborate, to share resources, to help one another, to create care Webs as Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha has coined that term. And that is something that I find so valuable in that concept of disability justice.

**Avery Anapol:**

What you mentioned about kindness really hits home for me. I think this, this idea of being kind to ourselves as our bodies change, but also, to each other and, just reminds me of something that has come up on the podcast a lot. The idea of access is love in a way to, to show love to other people and to our world is to make things more accessible and more just and, uh, just more inclusive in general.

Qudsia Naqui:

Yeah, absolutely.

Avery Anapol:

You've mentioned quite a few names there, and of course, going back to your family and how much they've impacted you, even your ancestors who you haven't been able to meet in person. But I was just wondering if there's anyone you haven't mentioned maybe who hasn't been on the podcast who really inspires you in your, in your day-to-Day work or, or in your work on the podcast?

**Qudsiya Naqui:**

That is a very hard question because I feel like there are so many people that ow

I think that someone who has had an incredible influence on me in so many ways is my mother, as cheesy as it sounds, I really have admiration for her because she is a very tenacious woman and she doesn't take no for an answer. And that's a quality I, I struggle with actually. And I look to her, um, because she, you know, is extremely assertive and always made sure I had what I needed, but also like beyond that, equipped me with the tools to advocate and fight for what I needed, but at the same time. She never pushed me into that until I was ready and kind of understood when it wasn't the right moment to push me to advocate for myself or, um, and she's really like, been on this journey with me and we've gone through the difficulty and the, and the pain and the struggle I feel that I often don't give her enough credit for her strength. And there's something, she always says that, I say to myself nan adult, she always used to say, when there's a will, there's a way. And I have found that to be. A very simple but powerful truth for me. I have encountered so many obstacles in my life, whether that's discrimination in the workplace, whether that's, problems with test taking, whether that's all manner of things. And, uh, coping with my vision loss. And the thing that has always kept me going is that idea of, you know, just. You know, don't lose the hope. Keep if you, if you have a will to do something, you will find a way. It might not be the way that you think and you might not get to the exact, exact outcome that you expected, but there's a way for you. And I just really respect her for always having that belief and instilling that in all others around her.

Not even just me, but so many people.

Avery Anapol:

I love that answer. And it's an interesting way to think about inspiration. It's, you know, it's not just, uh, being a role model, but it's, uh, someone who has influenced you and been a real support structure, a strutt, if you will, in your life.

**Qudsiya Naqui:**

Exactly. That's a great way to put it.

Avery Anapol:

you have an audience now of several hundred people who are listening to your work and reading, um, reading what you're writing and your newsletter. What, kind of impact do you want to have on people? What are three words that you hope other people would use to describe you?

**Qudsiya Naqui:**

I hope when people listen to the podcast, I hope that they are able to think of the work as you know, educational and also motivating. So giving information, but also I hope they feel motivated by the conversations that we have on the podcast to make a change in their life or explore an issue more deeply. So, so education and learning motivation. And also I really hope that folks walk away with a greater sense of awareness, just awareness of themselves. I hope the podcast helps people learn about themselves, learn about their families, learn about other people around them, and the systems and structures that have been built that have perpetuated ableism and, and come away with ideas about how to sort of break that down or to contribute to the breakdown of ableism. So those are some of the things that I hope people get out of the podcast. And I also hope that folks are genuinely entertained. Our guests are really interesting. I get so much out of every conversation that I have, um, just with these incredibly dynamic smart folks doing really, really cool things. And, and I just, I hope that that, you know, sparks joy and excitement, curiosity. Um, so that's really what I hope people get from the podcast.

**Avery Anapol:**

Curiosity is really a, a theme throughout and your work on the podcast where should someone start if they wanna listen to, down to the struts and they haven't yet?

**Qudsiya Naqui:**

I think that beginning at the beginning at first is a great place to start. I think Arielle Silverman, who was my very first guest, her episode about disability wisdom really is very foundational. If you wanna learn. Just some of the most core concepts and she explains them so beautifully. And following right after that, the second episode of the first season, uh, with Sara Acevedo about the language of disability is also, I think, a really foundational episode. I think that she really introduces a lot of the concepts and themes that thread throughout.

All of the seasons, including disability justice, if you want to learn more about that term and its origin story. Um, so I think those two, uh, episodes in particular are really great places to start if you want history, the episode that I did with Judy Heumann before she passed away is a really great way to learn more about the history of the disability rights movement, which is such an important aspect of this conversation about disability. You can't really talk about it without talking about that movement and Judy, so that's a great one to listen to. Of course, my interview with Alice Wong. Uh. Which is also delightful. And, uh, another really foundational episode in terms of, you know, kind of learning about the core concepts. And the last one I'll sort of flag for folks is the episode with Jennifer Natalya Fink, All Our Families.

That was, that was one of my favorites as well.

**Avery Anapol:**

I remember when we first started working on the podcast, Judy Heumann and Alice Wong were both on your list of Dream podcast guests and here we are seven seasons later and you've gotten to speak to both of them.

Qudsiya Naqui:

I still can't believe that.

Avery Anapol:

Great conversations and, and all the episodes you mentioned, there are excellent listens. Do you have anyone remaining on your Dream podcast guest list? Who would you love to come on to Down to the Struts and talk about their work and their life experience?

Qudsiya Naqui:

There are several people I think I would love to speak with. Mia Mingus and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha. Those two folks are absolutely on my list. I would love to have on also Telila Lewis who is, um.

Works at the intersection of disability and the criminal justice system. I have been a huge, huge admirer of their work. So I would love to have them on as well.

Avery Anapol:

And then on the flip side, who should be listening to Down to the Struts? Who do you want to reach as an audience member that you maybe haven't reached yet?

Qudsiya Naqui:

I really would love for disabled young people to listen to the podcast. So folks who are in high school and college, or maybe even middle school. I would love for the podcast to be a place they go to begin exploring their disability identities. And sort of the foil of that would also be maybe people who are older who are experiencing disability in one way or another.

who can come to the podcast to reimagine, you know. Whatever experience it is that they're facing and see, perhaps see it in a new light. So those are, those are two different audiences, but audiences that I would love to, to listen to the podcast and draw meaning from it just people who are on all. The disability spectrum and particularly those who also have other, um, other identities that sort of intersect with their disability identity, whether that's their race or their culture or, uh, being multiply disabled.

**Avery Anapol:**

And then turning the mirror back onto you. Looking back at your life as a young person, if you had had something like Down to the Struts to listen to, what do you wish that you had known?

**Qudsiya Naqui:**

Everything? I wish I had known all these people that, you know, we interview on the podcast. They've certainly been role models to me even now. But as a young person, I could imagine that understanding the universe of possibility, by talking to all these people and learning about their experiences, whether that's leading a movement or being a scientist or a journalist or an artist, I think, uh, or a lawyer. Recognizing that there are disabled people from all walks of life doing all kinds of things and feeling a part of a community in that sense like that has been the most, I think I've talked about it on the podcast before, like the, one of the most powerful things for me in coming into disability identity is this notion of having community and I think if I had felt like I was part of a community rather than like a single person dealing with a specific medical problem, that would've been so valuable to me as a young person.

Avery Anapol:

Do you have any tips for those young people and, and how to build that community?

Qudsiya Naqui:

I think that number one, be kind to yourself. You're not, if you're coming into disability or it's something new to your life. You may not be ready for that right away, and that's okay. That's really okay. Um, but just know that that community is there for you. It's all over Twitter. Uh, it's all over the internet.

Um, it's very accessible in that sense. And, you know, seek it out when you're ready and don't be afraid to connect. I. You know, it's so, things are so different from when I was young and it makes me so happy. I actually had a first meeting, uh, with a. Mentee of mine that I was just connected with through an organization called the National Association of Disabled Legal Professionals.

And that organization was born out of another organization called the National Association of Disabled Law Students. And these types of groups are so important, I can't overemphasize their value. I've been paired with a young, uh, first year law student who is also has low vision and I, I, I, I personally get inspiration from her just from our first conversation about how much she knows, how much she's connected, and I'm so happy to be a part of that for her to add another connection and another person who can give advice or, um.

Be, be a sounding board for her. So I think that, you know, seeking out those types of experiences when you're a young person is really helpful. I really wish that I had had, um, I. Sort of a, a disability doula, which is a, a term that some, some folks in the disability justice community have coined to, to guide me through. So I would just say my biggest piece of advice is seek that out and people are a lot kinder than you think they are. And, um, responsive and, and open and happy to help.

Avery Anapol:

Great. Well, I'd like to wrap this up by learning a bit more about Qudsiya outside of being a podcast host. I know you're a reader, you're an athlete, you travel a lot, you've recently gotten married. You have great taste in music, and you have so much else to talk about other than the podcast, of course. But, uh, if you had to describe your perfect day from beginning to end the moment you wake up, hopefully not at five 30 in the morning, although maybe, um, what would it, what would it look like?

Qudsiya Naqui:

It's true. I do like to get up at five o'clock in the morning, as you are well aware. Um, oh, my perfect day. I think my perfect day would involve being in some. New place I've never been to, um, abroad because I love to travel, as you mentioned, and I think my perfect day would involve some combination of being in the outdoors. experiencing beautiful, accessible art or culture of some kind, whether that's a museum or a theater performance or something like that. Having a really, some lovely meals like just. Eating is a thing I enjoy very much and I love trying new dishes and new cuisines. So that's something I would want to experience in that day. that, and time and doing all of that with people I care about and having good conversation about it all. So that would be my perfect day.

Avery Anapol:

wild card question to end. If you could have five beverages coming out of each of your fingers, what beverages would they be?

Qudsiya Naqui:

Beverages, coffee, water. Strange but true. Um, wine. Uh. Boba tea and, uh, number five, what would Number five. Oh, fresh squeezed juice.

Avery Anapol:

thank you so much for sharing all that with me. I feel like I learned a lot about you and what drives you to create Down to the Struts and I hope people are listening and really looking forward to the next season. I know I am.

[Cheerful morning-time beats]