**Down to the Struts**

Season 4, Ep. 2: Sitting Pretty

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Guest: Rebekah Taussig

Transcript by Qudsiya Naqui

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**Introduction**

[jazzy piano chords, bass strumming with smooth R&B]

Qudsiya Naqui:

Hi, this is Qudsiya Naqui,. And welcome to another episode of Down to the Struts, the podcast about disability design and intersectionality. Today we're sharing the second of three interviews. The incredible disabled women featured in Grace Bonney's new book, Collective Wisdom. If you haven't already, grab a copy of Collective Wisdom from your favorite bookseller. For a collection of powerful essays about womanhood, coming of age, and friendships, born out of mutual passion and dedication. For this installment, it was my pleasure to interview Rebekah Taussig. Rebekah is a writer and educator and author of the book, Sitting Pretty: The View from My Ordinary, Resilient Disabled Body. Rebekah and I talked about using social media to build a disability community, the birth of her book Sitting Pretty, and the almost simultaneous birth of her child, and what it means to be a disabled parent. Talking to Rebekah was delightful and affirming, and I hope you take as much away from this conversation as I did. Okay, let's get down to it.

Qudsiya Naqui:

Thank you, Rebekah, for joining me on the podcast today. I'm so delighted to have you.

Rebekah Taussig:

I'm so happy to be here. I've like been looking forward to this all week. So I'm jazzed.

Qudsiya Naqui:

so have I so have I The feeling is very mutual. And so maybe we could start if you could just introduce yourself briefly and talk a little bit about What led you to your disability justice, activism and scholarship. And how did you leverage Instagram as a huge part of that? Yeah, can you share a little bit? Yeah,

Rebekah Taussig:

yeah. So I have been disabled as long as I can remember, since I was three, I became paralyzed after childhood cancer, basically. And it was this, I think disability has been sort of like this giant backdrop to my life, but like an entirely unexamined one. So it was informing so much of my life and my experiences in the world. But I had no language, no community no framework for thinking about what it meant to me really, until I was in like my mid to late 20s. And I was in graduate school, and somebody just sent me this article out of the blue that was like, Hey, I think you might be interested in this. And it was a disability studies article. I mean, like, within the first few paragraphs of that reading that like tiny little bit of disability scholarship, I, I I've described this as like, feeling like the physics of the universe were changing around me, like I suddenly was thinking about everything differently. And so at that point, in my life, I had so much to rethink so much, so many, like, intellectual ideas to grapple with. So writing is the space I go to, to process and understand. And so I was doing all of this writing that was like, personal, but also academic, and my brain was just this tornado of chaos. And so I was writing, and I went to Instagram as sort of a place to process to document to hold myself accountable to some sort of like consistency. And to connect with people. I, you know, like I mentioned, I really, I didn't know hardly any disabled people when I was growing up. And also in those early days, I mean, like, part of it was the writing but also with Instagram, there's that visual component. So I was also really interested in the practice of taking photographs that included disability like beautiful photographs, I'd really only ever seen visual representations of disability and like medical pamphlets, or like, at the seating clinic, when I got wheelchair repairs, like it just wasn't like an image that I had in my mind. And I wanted to contribute to those images and those stories, and I wanted those stories to be like nuanced and complicated the way they felt to me. And, as opposed to like the one dimensional stories I felt like I had grown up on I was also really interested in like, hashtags that the beginning like I don't, I'm not as much anymore, but at the beginning, I sort of saw the hashtags as like, this giant cloud. And I wanted to like throw up my image into a cloud that didn't expect disability to be there. So like, cute couple are even like outfit of the day or cat lady. I was like, and disabled cat lady, you know, like, I'm here too. So I don't know. I guess ultimately it was it was about Understanding and processing for myself and wanting to bear witness to a life that I thought was often erased or misrepresented or used as a trope, you know, in other people's stories, but honestly, I feel like when I got there, and the more time that I spent in that space, I really felt like I was changed quite a bit like my thinking just continued to expand as I connected with more people. And as I shared my own writing, I learned from other people who were either responding to my writing or like, as I found their accounts, and I just realized that what I was writing about was so so much bigger than just myself. And I knew that all along, but like really feeling the impact of that of like, connecting with people who had different disabilities than me, or different intersections of disability or, or maybe people who had like very similar disabilities to me, but their, their experiences and perceptions were so different from my own. And I think, over time really just started to surprise me was just how sprawling ableism is, and like all of the different ways that can show up and corners of the world, it's sort of like wriggles into and, and, and I just came to see this push against ableism, as something that we should all be invested in, this is something that we need, we should all feel urgently passionate about dismantling. So I ended up feeling really transformed by just interacting with people in that space. And the writing for myself and about my own story was part of it. But it expanded and grew into something a lot bigger than that. I think

Qudsiya Naqui:

I can really identify with that. And I think that in starting this podcast, that's kind of been what's brought me closer to other people in the community of disabled people. And I've learned so much. And, you know, that brings me to sort of something I've been grappling with, that I was hoping you could grapple with, alongside me, which is the question of, you know, there's been so much sort of critique of social media reexamining all the ways in which it perpetuates, you know, for example, the spreading of misinformation and disinformation, and how it can have effects on people's mental health. And, you know, I definitely hear all of those criticisms, and I agree with a lot of them. But at the same time, just in the way you were describing, there's something powerful about the way in which social media has served in particular as a catalyst for disabled activism, because so many of us can't easily gather together and connect and this, these platforms, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, have really created that opportunity in a way that didn't exist really as much or in the same way or in such a vast way as they do now. So how do you kind of wrestle with that? And I know, neither of us really probably has a good answer. But I'd love to hear you kind of talk through, you know, how you've thought about how you use social media and what it means for you.

Rebekah Taussig:

Yeah, oh, my goodness. I mean, it's like the impossible the impossible predicament, the impossible problem, because, like you said, like, social media has been so powerful for the disability community. And I think, for the, for the reasons that you named like just the fact that for a lot of us, it has been difficult to actually meet in person in real life, and to have this space where you can connect and see other people who understand a part of your experience that maybe a lot of people haven't understood before in your life, right. Like, I think there's a lot of isolation for people with disabilities, both because of the inaccessibility and the barriers of an accessible world, but also because a lot of us are born into families that don't share that disability. And so the our families don't necessarily know how or who to connect us with. And so there's almost like this sort of scrambling for community. It's not we're not, we're not automatically born into families that understand us. And so I think that ability to connect has been super powerful, and not just in, like, in these individual ways of like, transforming our individual lives, which in itself, I think, is a magical thing. I mean, like the way we both have talked about it with your podcast with the way I talked about the Instagram, like it's I think that that has made a big difference individually for me. But also there's something just historically I think, that happens when as the disability community is connecting, and people with different disabilities are seeing themselves as part of the same community think that that connection, and that seeing yourself as belonging to something bigger transforms into action, and so that it's not just like this individual piece, but it's like I think that this is transforming the world we live in and conversations about Access and Disability Justice in a way that's impressive. I think that this tool has been like a game changer for us. And not just for the disability community, I think that there's a way in which, like, any community that is used to being shut out from gatekeepers, has this ability to have their voice heard. And it's a game changer. I mean, like, I wouldn't want to take that back. Like, I wouldn't want to undo that I wouldn't want to, you know, I'm thinking of like, my mom, she would say, like, the world was better before. And like, if we could just, if only this had never been invented, if only we could all just, like, get rid of Facebook, which like, I don't know, maybe that would be great. But um, I think that there's something that has been so valuable about what it has given us. And I don't want us to minimize that, as we enter into these conversations about, like, horrible reckoning of the damage that and the power to damage that this tool also has, I don't know, I in some ways, I think that this analogy has probably been made countless times, but thinking about the tool of fire and like, the way that fire destroys, I mean, like, has the power to destroy, and also the ways that that's transformed, and like the gifts and ways that that's transformed us and other positive ways and powerful ways. And so I don't know what, I guess, I guess, in the biggest sense, if I were to think about like, what do we do with the fire of this tool, we have to have some way of checking and harnessing that. And I think that's where it gets tricky. And I don't feel like I don't know what that is like, what are the appropriate checks? What are the harnesses? What are the ways that we can rein this in to be able to hold on to that beauty and limit the damage? And maybe I don't know, like, maybe we've evolved to the point of creating tools that we don't even have the capacity to know how to check them. I hope that's not true, I hope we can find we can work together to find out what the what the right harnesses and how to mitigate that damage. Because as beautiful and good and transformative as I see this tool, I think it's equally equally harmful. I mean, we have, you know, like we could just like dive into a mountain of evidence to look at all the ways that with with misinformation with mental health, especially for teenagers, I feel like I can see that, like, as a teacher, I could see that impact in the damage of that on the kids that I work with, with my nieces and nephews, I can see that. And I want I want them to delete every app on their phone. And also, you know, like, I want them to experience the beauty of it. And I just don't know, I don't know how you do the both of those things. I'm hopeful, but in the same way that we've gotten a better handle on fire. We can do the same thing with social media. I don't know, what do you think

Qudsiya Naqui:

I completely agree with all of what you said, and I can't, I think there needs to be, as you said, some sort of systemic harnessing or checking of this tool. So it is a tool for positive and constructive things as opposed to a tool for destruction. And I think I don't know what that looks like. I don't think any of us does. And hopefully, in the next decade of social media, we will we will figure that out to some degree to mitigate the harm. I don't think we can eliminate the harm but at least mitigate it for people by cabining. And providing some sort of regulatory framework around this. But for my for myself, my personal way of thinking about social media in my life. I'm a reluctant user, I have, you know, very few followers on Twitter and Instagram, really those things I created, you know, because of my podcast, because I felt like it's kind of become part of the infrastructure of doing a podcast or any sort of Media and Culture engagement, like having those connective tools is really, really important to get your message out there. So I reluctantly, hemming and hawing got myself to get an Instagram and Twitter account. And I had a personal Facebook account for a long time that I use sort of sparingly. But I think that for myself, personally, I've cabinet in this sense of personally controlling how much I'm kind of doing scrolling versus active looking active, reading, active, engaging, and thinking about each post that I read or each post that I post. Why am I doing that? What's the goal that I'm hoping to accomplish? And I think your description of how you you sort of leveraged your Instagram into your disability activism is a really really, really good example of how my ideal of how to use this platform and using it to connect with others using it to send a positive message that is not not intentionally harming anyone to the best of my ability. And I take my use of social media just with a really high degree I just I feel like a great sense of responsibility in using the platform, especially for promoting my my podcast and things like that I just, I really don't want to do anything that's going to hurt someone else to the extent I can prevent it. Yeah, that's kind of how I think about it personally.

Rebekah Taussig:

Yeah. And personally, is maybe a more manageable way to approach the question to thinking about how we solve this collectively. How do we rethink our own personal use? I mean, I feel like for me, and maybe this is part of the solution for big picture, too. I don't I don't know at all. But I'm just thinking out loud right now, I have felt that space on Instagram changed for me as it's grown, something about that space getting bigger, in some ways, it feels less life giving than it did when it was smaller. And so I wonder if there's something about creating smaller communities, right, like, so that you can still find each other, you can still connect, but something about having more options, you know, like 1000 versions of Facebook, instead of Facebook, like smaller, smaller little corners, I think that there is something that happens when it gets big enough that we stopped actually, I don't recognize as many people, you know, in those comment sections, it's harder to sustain genuine connection with people when it gets really big. And I think that's when maybe people stopped to feel as much like people to us. And it's easier to just sort of like scream at each other on the Not that that's happening on my on my account. But like, I think that that impulse, or once something gets so huge, it's hard to see an individual face. So there's something about about keeping that smaller. That I think is valuable. But I you know, I don't know how that applies to my personal account, because it is bigger now. And I have to kind of negotiate or think about how to handle that. And for me, a lot of it just has to do with the amount of time that I spend there. And for a long time I grappled with like, oh, I have to post one item a week. And I really let go of that, like, I'm going to post when I have something to say I'm going to go on when I have time, I'm not going to put some sort of some sort of arbitrary expectation on production. And what if I lose my spot in the algorithm? If I don't post enough like, oh, well, you know, just kind of letting go of some of that.

Qudsiya Naqui:

Yeah, yeah, I think that's true. It's sort of centering your life versus centering your Instagram presence. Yeah, it's a really good way of thinking about it. But one of the good things that has come out of I think these these tools has been that people like you have gotten sort of lifted out of them. And and because of the message that you're sending and giving an opportunity to broaden your impact. And I think one of the ways in which you've been able to do that is through, as you mentioned, through writing. And so in addition to being a teacher and an activist, you're also an author, and I had the pleasure of just finishing your book, Sitting Pretty. So could you could you tell us a little bit about what you know, what went into creating that book? And and what are the messages you really hope that people walk away with after reading it?

Rebekah Taussig:

Great question. And thank you for reading it. In some ways, I can't even believe that that book exists. It's it's wild to me that it happened because I was teaching high school when I wrote it. So I was like, I'd have like, a few hours after grading a stack of papers. But I was going to scramble to try to meet this deadline or like I took all of Thanksgiving break and just wrote the whole time. And so I squeezed it into the corners, but it's here. I think a lot of the reason I was able to write it at all was that I had already written so much on Instagram, like I think of the posts that I had done up to that point it almost as like little seeds that I had planted and I went back and I was like what happened if I watered this a little bit more and add in, you know, bring some sunlight in and what will grow from that. So it was really a lot of taking the seeds I'd already planted and letting them unfurl in a larger space. So I and ultimately, what i did was i i went back and looked through my writing and just found themes that were coming up over and over again, you know things about romance, and love and relationships and themes about work and this notion of trying to afford to live in a body. That's complicated things about accessibility. What does that actually mean? What does it feel? What is the felt experience of inaccessibility, things like that? So, yeah, the book grew from those early seeds. And in terms of the things that I hope for it are key takeaways. You know, it's really embarrassing, right after the book came out, I did this interview where somebody asked me what I hoped for the book. And all I could think at the time was like, I just can't believe it exists at all. What do you mean, I hope for it, my hope is already here, you know, like I have this exists. But um, but ultimately, I think the more that I've had time to think about like, and interact with people who have read it and responded to it and think about what I hope people take away from it. I mean, there's a few things I I think I wanted people who did have a disability to be able to feel some solidarity, to feel, maybe have some language to process it or understand some of their experience, while recognizing that also, this is one very particular perspective and one very particular set of experiences and does not represent disability in any sort of sweeping way. But just wanting there to be that sense of, you know, like that book I wish I had had when I was younger, but I also wanted to invite people who were really unfamiliar with disability or hadn't spent very much time thinking about it to really be invited into a conversation, and to think really critically about what it means to live in a body at all, to grapple with, you know, the narratives that we have about bodies in our culture, and rethink them and be challenged to rethink them. But I think my favorite thing, really, since the book has come out is just hearing from people who've read it and like listening to them talk about how they've brought those ideas into their little corner of the world. I think one of my favorites was hearing of somebody who decided to create a wheelchair accessible rental property in their town, which was just so specific, but like, so lovely to think about the tangible application of that. But in like, who would get to rent a place that was already wheelchair accessible, it's so rare, or like occupational therapists, or physical therapists, or even like I had a surgeon, send me an email once and talk about how like he was adjusting the way he was interacting with patients around some of the things that he read. So that's my favorite is just like the application of these questions about what it means to live in a body and then using that to, like, bring that reimagining to our structures in the world, like our little corners of the world, rethinking how we could redesign that or reimagine that. So yeah, I think it's a little bit I have, I have some more hopes or aspirations for what I hope people get from the book than just like, I can't believe it exists. Although I do feel that way still, sometimes.

Qudsiya Naqui:

I bet. I mean, it's such a just the act of of putting down to paper in a cohesive way, your thoughts and having it be like so beautifully written and wonderful is, is something in and of itself. And something I still admire do. I think that's so awesome. I love all of those stories about people who have applied what they learned, I think I was telling you earlier, I want to buy a copy of your book for like every single person I know, because I think it's so instructive. And the book itself is so sort of like, , “accessible” for like, you know, non disabled people and the way that it's written, in addition to sort of the solutions that come out of your book, I really think another important aspect for me was the way in which you articulate the cumulative sort of psychological impact of exclusion based on disability. And that's a feeling I've experienced and continue to experience in my life. And I really identified with that, and I felt so I felt so seen and heard in so many of the circumstances that you described. And really, it was just really a powerful experience to see all of that in one place, touching on so many issues of life, health, housing, you know, things that that are so fundamental to life, and just you turn how we think about those things on their head in this awesome way. So I really, I mean, thank you for your book. I'm so glad it exists. And I can recommend it to people to read.

Rebekah Taussig:

Thank you. Well, I think yeah, I think that's another part of it that has has been important to me is well, in writing, it was processing some of that, right? Like, I hadn't really thought about the cumulative effect I was, I knew that I like wasn't satisfied with the way that people talked about accessibility generally, as if it was just like a ramp, you know, and like, there's something that's inaccessible, and there's been no it is accessible, but like the life like what, what it's like to live a life of inaccessibility, it's important for me to process that too. And then I do think that, like hearing people, like you talk about feeling seen or resonating with whatever you read in the book is like also another really exciting thing to think of all of us being able to like gather around some shared understanding language, it's just so important to me, it feels like to have language to describe these experiences and feelings, to understand them ourselves, and then be able to share them with people. So I'm so glad.

Qudsiya Naqui:

Yeah, and at the end of your book, you leave us with a little sort of surprising twist in the aftermath, which is that you know, in the in the subsequent time since the book was published, there was a pandemic and you found out about your partner's cancer diagnosis. And you also found out you were pregnant, and I'm so interested to hear about that experience and how being a parent has informed changed, transformed further how you think about disability.

Rebekah Taussig:

Oh my gosh, all right. So here we like, let's tuck in for the next seven hours, I have a lot to say I don't, I'm still processing so much of this, and my son is about to be a year and a half old, which is crazy. Yeah, there's so much there's so much. I mean, I think one of the first things that threw me was not feeling prepared for the level of frustration, I would feel with my own physical limitation. I think being disabled my whole life, I had sort of built my life around, being able to do all the things I wanted to do. And also I had done so much processing, to grapple with and feel the things that were frustrating. And I think I felt like I had sort of created some sort of tidy way to be disabled. And I felt like I really had a handle on things. And there was something that really threw me hard, initially, but just sort of like new way, every time we hit a new milestone so far with Otto, our son, that threw me, I wasn't really prepared for that, I think you could call it internalized ableism. It's something that I've continued to have to grapple with. I think a lot of that also is just his age, like, I think there are different ages that require or maybe we're we're bumping into each other's limitations, right now, that makes that hard. And I don't anticipate that lasting forever. But that was something that really threw me for sure. But you know, another thing that surprised me, that's actually a little bit more fun to talk about was just all of the ways that motherhood and parenting was like, shockingly familiar to me, like the rhythms of it, the practice of it, the, the feel of it, not to say that I was like, immediately awesome at being a mom, I don't think that I’ll ever claim that for myself, but just the familiarity of some of those experiences. So things like we get there, I could rattle these off forever, but like immediate access into a community, that instant connection, or solidarity that you feel with someone like I could be on the phone with the bank, and someone would hear Otto crying in the background, and they would be like, “Is he teething?” You know, like, immediately, like, Oh, my little one is, like, there's that immediate, like, now we're part of a club together. And I only ever really had felt that with people in disability community like that immediate understanding and that that connection, which is really special to be able to share with people. But I think also just in terms of this habit of thinking about access, planning ahead, researching to try to picture how I am going to interact with with a space is very similar to like planning ahead for how you're going to do something with a baby or a toddler, you know, like, how are we going to manage this flight? How are we going like, can we go to that park? And then along with that, I think a lot of it is about like finding the right tools and being able to problem solve with how are we going to reconfigure our house so that you know, a child isn't putting like ripping books off the walls, which is something that we still haven't really reconfigured very well, mostly he pulls the books off walls, but the the idea of like problem solving and finding the right tool in order to be able to have ease, adapting a space, adapting the car, all the creativity that goes with with finding accommodations and adaptations, I think also just the unpredictability built into my body made me feel prepared for the unpredictability of a baby and a toddler. But I think maybe I if I were to say the thing that felt the most important to me, that I have relied on the most heavily is more philosophical, is more the idea of having practice, really understanding the both and an experience of like, having grappled with disability, I feel like I my tool of being able to hold on to contradictory ideas at once or my muscle to be able to move back and forth between paradoxes essentially, is hearty. And so you know, as a disabled person, I had already been familiar with thinking about loss, and gain and grief and joy and limitation and access, like how some of these things can can coexist is really true of motherhood, like the moment we brought Otto home from the hospital. And I had this is my cats like came up to us. And I just started bawling because I was so sad that they didn't understand they couldn't understand why we were bringing this like screaming miniature person into our whole our safe and quiet and happy home and there was this like, huge loss. And then there was just this beautiful gain of like, this is our family and we're all together. And both of those things were so true at the same time. And I think if I hadn't already known that, that intimate both and I think that I would have been a lot more thrown by that or ill equipped to process it. Yeah, showing up to motherhood. I felt like strangely equipped in a way I didn't expect and I think I think a huge part of that, for me is just that disability and motherhood disability and parenthood had always just been like planets apart in my mind, I feel like they're they're so rarely intersected in our culture. We think of them as like opposites, even though there's something so well suited about the combination of those two things. There's something that fits and works really exceptionally well, uniquely well, but I don't think we usually think about it that way. I hadn't. I know that I see that so differently now.

Qudsiya Naqui:

I think that's a lot of ableism. And this is the message that society sends us. You know, we know statistically Disabled Parents are very highly likely to have their children taken away from them solely based on the fact of their disability and a presumption that they can't care for their children and as a disabled woman, myself, you know, who is of childbearing age ish? You know, I have grappled with this question of parenthood more recently, and I, you know, I don't, I can't, I can't figure out where my own desire, so I always thought I would, I wouldn't have kids, I didn't think I wanted them. Where that desire ends and where social sort of assumptions come in. And reading your book was really powerful for me being a someone who's in that space headspace of thinking about and grappling with this question of parenthood, because I had never thought, oh, wow, I'm, I could be really good at this. I could be I could have a certain skill set that's derived from my blindness, the adaptability, the creativity, the problem solving, that could lend itself to parenthood, I hadn't even thought of that, because there's so many social messages that have come to me since childhood of like, you are not capable, there's no way you could take care of a helpless baby.

Rebekah Taussig:

Yeah. And, and also, I think, along with that disability is only a detriment to your ability to parent, like, I think that's the narrative, right? disability can only be a bad thing to your kid, as opposed to like, what is this going to bring to your kid? You know, like, what, what asset Do you have, like, uniquely for this parenting thing? You know, and I do want to add, you know, I mentioned at the front end, that part of I was really thrown by feeling my limitations in a way that I hadn't before. But I also know that I think that that is true for parents in a lot of ways, and that suddenly, our limitations that will maybe wouldn't have bothered us before suddenly feel more important or, or, or, like we're more frustrated by them. But I also think that that, I don't know like, that's, that feels kind of like a normal part of parenting. But I think that because we have these narratives about disability being a detriment, the combination of feeling that limitation in your parenting, and then having this easy, accessible story that, oh, this means I'm a bad parent, like the combination of those two things makes that particularly toxic. I think, if we didn't have if we if, as disabled women, if we had been empowered to see our disabilities as part of a beautiful like, tapestry of what it means to be a parent, I don't think that that would land as hard as it has. For me, I think that it's too easy for me to pick up that narrative that magnifies that this limitation and disability as like a deal breaker, like I shouldn't even I don't even belong in this space of motherhood, as opposed to just like another, you know, what, I wish we had a lot more money too, you know, like, I wish I could send him to the coolest preschool in the world. And I can't do that either. But somehow I don't fixate on that as much as I do on this other thing. And I think it's because of the stories we inherit. And I hope that changes, I hope that we can change that because it's so frustrating, especially in retrospect to look at how absurd that is.

Qudsiya Naqui:

Yeah, and I think part of the way in which it could change is just, you know, our conversation right now and my having seen your perspective and heard your perspective, and I think those, those connections between disabled women, disabled people, women in particular, and those relationships are so important, because then you you can see yourself in other people's stories, and they can see you in yours. And that's just so helpful and powerful, and you feel like you're not in it, you know, alone and so that that kind of leads me to what brought us together originally, which was your contribution to Grace Bonney's book, Collective Wisdom, where you talk in conversation with your friend Bhavna Mehta and I would love to hear more about how you two met and what that's been like for you to have other disabled women in your life through you know, that you just create community you created through social media, what effect that has had for you in your life.

Rebekah Taussig:

A Game changer. I love Grace so much a lot. I'm so honored to be a part of her book I want to be a part of every project she does honestly, she just brings so much goodness and beauty to the world and Bhavna also has been such a grounding piece giving life giving presence in my life. So I met Bhavna online, she is this gorgeous, she has this gorgeous art with paper and scissors is a huge part of her medium. She does a lot of embroidery and installations, all kinds of things. She's a thoughtful artist. And she started by just like commenting on a lot of my posts in the early days. And I pretty immediately like, Oh, this is someone I want to know. But even now, we've never actually been in the same room together, which is interesting. I like forget about that sometimes, because we've been on like been on committees together, we've we've like, started a number of plans for different projects that we want to do together that have never actually come to fruition one day, but like we want dreamt of doing a podcast together are like a live event, she was actually a big important part of my virtual book launch. We've gotten to do a lot of life together, but all of it has been online. But in the midst of all of that she has this way of slicing through the chaos in my brain like detangling it very swiftly and helping me clarify my thinking. I think part of that is having someone who understands your experience and is also a little bit further down the road. So it's like I'm getting to be seen, I'm seen and understood in a way that's rare for me, or has been really rare throughout my life I value really highly. But she also has this wisdom that I don't have that this force or this clarity, this perspective that I can kind of get lost in in the weeds and she she can like look over all of it and just sort of have that clarifying moment or idea I've said for a long time that like Bhavna is somebody that studies my breathing like she she grounds me. And yeah, she she has this clarity of mind. And this really sharp insight and this artists perspective that I just can't I just can't have her around me enough. And we don't we don't even talk like regularly we have we go long stretches in between our conversations, but every time we reconnect, I feel grateful and grateful for a friendship and grateful that I was able to meet her and grateful for the clarity and insight that she shares with me.

Qudsiya Naqui :

I also love I really cherish my you know, relationships often do defy age, but and I very much value my friendships with my younger friends too. But there's something about that. That older sister that isn't your sister. I know you have a lot of siblings. You know that older sister, that's the sister in the family that you built for yourself versus your family of origin, I think is there's something really special about that.

Rebekah Taussig:

Yeah, yeah, it that's a really good way to describe it. Because like I said earlier, like so often, people with disabilities are born into families that don't share them. And so you have that, like, I do have sisters that I'm really close to but like as I've gotten older, both all of us I have two sisters, we've all kind of grappled with their limitation and being able to understand me and my experience. And yeah, there's something about like having a sister that does get it that's like, oh, the greatest gift. Yeah,

Qudsiya Naqui:

I when I first moved to Washington from New York, I was connected with this woman. Her name is Karla and she is blind. She's also a lawyer. I'm a lawyer, we met at some lawyer event and I was really we were both actually discovered later on, we were really irritated because we thought we were being introduced because like, Oh, she's blind, you're blind. But in reality, I think the person who was introducing us really thought we would click which Yeah, she was completely correct. And, you know, Karla has been she's just, she's like my beacon, you know, I feel like she's she's slightly older than me, not by too much. But she is old and wise and in the in the blind community. And she's done, you know, disability advocacy. And she dragged me into her Sports Group, because we bonded over the fact that we were both very sporty. And so I you know, I I love that she pushed me into adaptive sports, which is something I hadn't been doing really before. And, yeah, it's just it's a really special. She's like a really special person in my life. I think she's a really special person in a lot of people's lives, but I feel fortunate to be among them. So I totally I totally know I totally identify with that. Bhavna sounds super lovely. I hope I get to speak with her one day too.

Rebekah Taussig:

I hope that for both of your sakes, yeah.

Qudsiya Naqui :

I was wondering if you could leave us with this. So we've had the disability rights movement. And you know, in the last 10 years, the Disability Justice Movement has really picked up where the disability rights movement left off in many ways And I just wonder being situated in that space and being a millennial as I am. You know, what is your vision? What is your hope for disability access and inclusion in the future?

Rebekah Taussig:

Yeah. I mean, this is a huge question. It's just why it's good that we're this is this is a good one. I think this is evolved for me over time, and I assume it will continue to. But I think where I am now is that I'm hoping for a world that intuitively automatically asks, who is not here? And why? And what are the barriers keeping people out of this space or this conversation? I want that question to be built into our values as a culture. So we don't even have to remind each other to ask it like that is just what we ask what we're looking for. And I know that's really broad. But I, I want all the inclusion that comes with those kind of questions like the intersections that come with those questions, right? Like the built in understanding that disability is going to intersect with all every other marginalized group and the importance of paying attention to that, like who is not here. I also want the smart design that comes from those questions, like the kind of design that is going to pay attention to the unique needs and the ever changing needs of human beings that is, is tuned into that. And isn't just assuming that all humans have the same basic standard need, and that's it, but that there's like nuance there, and that we're looking for that we're seeking that out instead of assuming and flattening. And then I also I want the tenderness and care that comes from those questions. That is thinking of other people's experiences, isn't barreling through without that consideration, but is is tender and thoughtful in thinking of other people's experiences, and wanting to build spaces and, and, and build spaces and relationships that are sustaining and, and life giving and inclusive. So you know, that's all that that's all but I want, you know, just something simple.

Qudsiya Naqui:

Absolutely. The listeners can't see me, but I was nodding vigorously as you're speaking. And I wholeheartedly agree with everything you said. And you can't know unless you ask the questions, I think yes, that is so true.

Rebekah Taussig:

And listen, yeah, yeah,

Qudsiya Naqui:

yep. Ask and listen. Yes, absolutely. Well, this has been such a pleasure, Rebekah. I really, I'm so grateful for your time today. And thank you for sharing your wisdom here. And I'm really excited to share this episode with my listeners.

[jazzy piano chords, bass strumming with smooth R&B]

Qudsiya Naqui:

Thanks for joining us for this episode of down to the struts. This podcast would not be possible without the energy and creativity of our audio producer Elana Nevins and our social media manager Avery Anapol. If you'd like to become a patron, and support the incredible team that brings this podcast to life, you can visit www.patreon.com/downtothestruts. You can also join our Facebook group, Down to the Struts Podcast to become part of our growing community. You can find us on Twitter and Instagram at Down to the Struts. And finally, don't forget to review rate, and subscribe to the podcast on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, or wherever you love to listen, or you can do none of that and simply enjoy the conversations that you find here. Thank you for listening and supporting this project. As we head into the holiday season and the new year ahead. I feel incredibly fortunate to be able to create this podcast alongside an incredibly talented team and for the opportunity to share it with you, the listeners. If you found the podcast to be meaningful so far, please consider sharing it with a friend or loved one this holiday season. Thank you so much again for your support. And stay tuned for the third and final installment of my interviews with contributors to Grace Bonney's book, Collective Wisdom. Next, we'll hear from scholar and activist Sandy Ho about her journey to founding the Disability and Intersectionality Summit and the relationships that helped guide her along the way. I can't wait to get back down to it with you all in 2022. Until then, have a safe and restful turning of the year.