

[RADIO TUNING]

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SIMON BUEHRER: Welcome to *Inspiring Change* from OCALI, our forum of stories and connections from our ongoing work of inspiring change and promoting access for people with disabilities. I'm Simon Buehrer.

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[PIANO]

KATIE ROBINSON: So, I'm seeing a lot of good in society in that strangers are being friendlier. Some of the things I'm seeing also that make me sad is people talking about it's only 1% to 2% of the population that'll die from this-- it's fine-- when people like me *are* the part of the population who's more likely to die.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

SIMON BUEHRER: We have this cable at our office that we string up every night before we leave. It's a kind of deterrent that prevents cars from parking in our lot overnight. You see, OCALI's offices are in an old school building, and over the years, we've learned that some people, for some reason, like to park in a school parking lot after hours and just hang out or maybe stir up a little mischief.

So we installed this cable in an effort to curb the nonsense, and it's become a running contest among staff members to try and not be the last person to leave at night because if you are, it's your job to put up and lock the cable. And the task ranges from a minor headache or inconvenience to a real annoyance, especially if it's cold and rainy. And so it follows that the converse of this nightly task is the morning one. If you're the first one to arrive at the office, it's your job to take down the cable so that staff and visitors can enter the parking lot.

I'm often the first person to arrive at the office in the morning, so my first task of the day is to unlock the parking cable. And I don't mind. Really. There is a part of me that actually likes the routine, even enjoys it. It feels like I'm unlocking my day, like literally opening my day up to

whatever tasks, meetings, or conversations might follow once I go inside the building.

I actually find that I'm a little disappointed if I'm late or someone gets to the office ahead of me and the cable is already down. Not having that initial, tactile, routine experience can sometimes throw off my whole morning. Since we've been working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, oddly, that's one of the things. And I know it sounds weird, but I miss it.

I miss unlocking the parking lot cable. But more than that, like I'm sure for many of you, I miss my colleagues. Sure, we're still working. We're still connected via email, voice, and video chat, but it's not the same as being there in the office with them sharing time, and space, and words. So as part of our ongoing podcast series that we're calling "Voices, Visions, and Victories," I thought I'd check in periodically with some of my colleagues at OCALI to see how they're working, how they're faring, how they're *doing* during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Katie is one of the first people I thought of because she is often the first person I see each morning. We're both early birds. And even if it's just a passing hello in the kitchen, Katie is also part of my work experience that is now on hold for a while. So I called her up.

[RINGBACK TONE]

KATIE Hi, Simon.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Hey, Katie. How are you?

KATIE Hey, how are you?

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Good. How were the pierogis?

KATIE They were leftovers, so they could have been better. They were better the first time. How are

ROBINSON: you today?

SIMON BUEHRER: I'm OK. I'm-- I don't know about you, but I'm really struggling with time right now.

KATIE The-- you had a consistent schedule of what you did and when, and now it's all just of fluid and

ROBINSON: doesn't make sense. So it's either really slow or really fast and just kind of lost, I guess, what I would say.

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah, yeah.

KATIE Kind of like that.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah.

KATIE Just different words.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: No, I would agree. I mean, I'm trying to live kind of the same way, but mixed results I think. I think it's also hard to live in the space where you work.

KATIE Yeah, that doesn't work for me.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Really?

KATIE Not-- I mean, it gets done, but it's not like in the office.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Do you feel like you're less productive now?

KATIE I wouldn't say less productive. It's just harder to focus. I mean, I had to-- I don't have a

ROBINSON: plethora of resources available, so everybody on email is just suggesting get a desk, have a separate room that you just work in. It's like it doesn't work like that, guys. I'm using my folding craft table as my desk.

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah, so it's been challenging to recreate your workspace at home.

KATIE And additionally, for me to look at a laptop screen with low vision as opposed to my 27-inch

ROBINSON: monitor work is much more difficult to focus on the little laptop screen.

SIMON BUEHRER: So you didn't take your monitor home with you because you--

KATIE No, just lack of space. It would just be another thing on my craft table that I need to move to

ROBINSON: actually work on things or fear of knocking it off the craft table when I'm moving it on and off. So I suppose I could have asked for my monitor to come, but then there's a turning my neck back and forth between the laptop and the monitor. And every low vision person who's ever existed has neck problems and back problems. That would probably make it worse because

there's a lot of twisting and turning using a laptop with a monitor.

SIMON BUEHRER: But is your-- does your setup at work alleviate some of that?

KATIE Yes, I've setup my keyboard is right in front of my monitor, and they're as close as possible to
ROBINSON: me. A lot of people can set their laptop underneath some-- one of those elevated desk things, or set the laptop behind it, or beside it, and they can just glance over and look at it. But my null point, or my focus point, I have to tilt my head to get it. So I'm tilting my head and turning, and there's a lot going on.

My work computer is setup everything is right there and as close as possible, and I turn to the left for my CCTV, which is sort of my better side to look at that. But I can turn, and my chair turns. I'm not turning my head.

SIMON BUEHRER: I gotcha.

KATIE And I have a roly chair here. It's not quite as able to do that. And this is a folding craft table. I
ROBINSON: only have so much room as opposed to my big L-shaped or U-shaped desk.

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah, that you have at the office, right.

KATIE Yeah, so I'm making do pretty good, but it's not ideal.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Can you talk a little bit about what you do at OCALI, Katie, like your job and your duties?

KATIE So I'm classified as a materials production specialist, and what that translates to is I run the
ROBINSON: Braille and large print production center at OCALI. So we make textbooks and materials within OCALI into specialized alternative formats, such as Braille and large print. We have our own proprietary template and macros set that we make all different sizes of large print for paper, or for digital iPad, or computer use.

SIMON BUEHRER: And you do all of those different formats, right?

KATIE Yes.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: And you've been doing this for a while, right? How many years have you been doing this?

KATIE I think it'll be 11 years in June.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Wow.

KATIE Yeah.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: We're at the start of week three now. It's still kind of weird, and it's still maybe not an ideal situation.

KATIE Yeah, I would say I am establishing a pretty healthy routine within it.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Good.

KATIE Just it's not ideal. I don't like it. And not liking it does not motivate me to do what I need to do

ROBINSON: obviously.

SIMON BUEHRER: Well, and it sounds like it's maybe a little more difficult. It's a little more taxing to do what you need to do because you don't have all the equipment.

KATIE Yeah, and, I mean, they offered to bring just about anything over here. And that's all well and
ROBINSON: good, but then it's the responsibility of having it and moving it around to be able to use my house and just my own limitations. I have to work harder anyway, and my life is about adapting because you don't really have a choice.

But I am establishing. This is what I do. I still listen to my same radio station. I'm just using it on the Echo instead of through my computer. Still taking-- having lunch at the same time. Still finishing about the same time I do every day. Nearly every day, I've gone out for a walk. That definitely is helpful, and we all need the exercise because, I mean, even with my needs, stress eating is a thing.

SIMON BUEHRER: Meaning that when you're stressed out, you tend to eat more.

KATIE I want to, yeah.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah, sure. Yeah, what do you miss most about the office right now?

KATIE It's familiar. It's familiar territory, and it's where I go to work. This is where I work. This is what I
ROBINSON: do here. I miss the social interaction, seeing other people, talking to other people. Yeah, even some of my Mainstream drivers. You get regulars. I miss some of those people too, just the interaction.

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah, sure. And Mainstream is the--

KATIE It's a paratransit-- it's to help cover the Americans with Disabilities Act for public transit for
ROBINSON: people whose disabilities impact them enough that the regular bus cannot cover all their needs. You qualify for a paratransit, and it's a door-to-door prearranged bus service. Because we're under the emergency, regular COTA is free. And anything that-- any statement they make for that-- so for regular COTA buses it's free. Mainstream is also free right now.

SIMON BUEHRER: Have you been taking advantage of it?

KATIE No.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: No.

KATIE No, I haven't.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah.

KATIE I haven't gone. I've had a medical appointment, but that's it.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah, well, so you mentioned going for walks every day. Is that-- has that been the extent of getting out of the house at this point?

KATIE I went once to Kroger's vulnerable people hours.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Those are the-- is that what they call them, vulnerable people hours? Or is that your--

KATIE I guess, that's what I'm calling it. They're calling it hours for seniors and vulnerable

ROBINSON: populations.

SIMON BUEHRER: So these are-- this is a set time. Isn't it just like an hour or so at the-- in the early--

KATIE Yeah, early in the day.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Early in the day. You start your day, and you have vulnerable people hour at the grocery store.

KATIE Yes.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah, so you went once?

KATIE I did.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah, how was it?

KATIE Mostly just to get out of the house, just the monotony of being in the house all day. The same

ROBINSON: thing day after day this is killer on the mental health. And I had and old lady try to take some Clorox wipes out of my cart.

SIMON BUEHRER: Wait, you were getting into a fight over Clorox wipes?

KATIE Well, grandma came looking for a fight. I didn't go looking for one.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: So, wait. You put them in your cart, and she tried to take them out of your cart?

KATIE Yeah.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Wow.

KATIE Yeah, and there was a limit of three per customer. And, I mean, I can't really tell what she had,

ROBINSON: but she seemed to think what I had was hers. I had two containers. One for upstairs. One for downstairs. And she's-- she came along and was-- she originally was just standing really close, and that got my attention anyway. And I was just-- I turned around. I'm like, what? And she had her hand in my cart--

SIMON BUEHRER: Whoa.

KATIE --and she just dropped it, and she's like, "oh, honey, I was just looking at something." I'm like,
ROBINSON: yeah, uh-huh. Aside from that, it was very pleasant. I mean, people were-- I was one of the fewer younger people there. But people were saying their distance. It was quiet. There wasn't a bunch of music on yet.

SIMON BUEHRER: Oh, that sounds nice.

KATIE Yeah, there was-- it sort of put me in mind of our-- on the fairgrounds where we had all the
ROBINSON: sensory-friendly time.

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah, at the fair last year, yeah.

KATIE Yeah, they didn't have the music on, and it was quieter. People were just kind of going about
ROBINSON: their business. I'm fortunate I drink lactose-free milk, so that's never been out. People haven't gotten desperate enough to try it yet.

SIMON BUEHRER: [LAUGHS]

KATIE And I eat turkey bacon, which, again, people don't like. All the regular bacon is gone. Plenty of
ROBINSON: turkey bacon, so I'm good there. So the key to--

SIMON BUEHRER: A couple of wins, yeah.

KATIE The key to that is needing or liking stuff that the general populace does not.
ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: You're going to be better off.

KATIE Yeah. I mean, aside from that I'm fine. I mean, I've mostly been getting things through
ROBINSON: Amazon.

SIMON BUEHRER: You have?

KATIE Yeah.
ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Do you find yourself ordering more stuff through Amazon than you normally would?

KATIE Yeah, some of the stuff I would generally go to the store for. I like to make trips to Meijer
ROBINSON: every-- at least once a month, and Kroger, usually Aldi. I'll usually go to Aldi on Sundays. My

friends and I used to go to Target in the evening at least once a week just because it's Target.

And I mean, I go to Jo-Ann Fabrics for craft stuff and occasionally Michaels if I need to. But that doesn't sound like a lot of trips, but it was enough. And now that there's-- it's just kind of like the monotony of not doing this. I'm not doing this. I'm not doing this is-- can be-- like I enjoyed that trip to Kroger. And usually, I wouldn't even think about enjoying a trip to Kroger.

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah, but because of the circumstances, it kind of changes your view and appreciation of stuff.

KATIE Yes. And, yeah, the one medical appointment I still had to go to was like, oh my god, yes, hi,
ROBINSON: people.

SIMON BUEHRER: [LAUGHS]

KATIE I have talked to some of my neighbors from the distance of the yard.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Have you?

KATIE Yeah, I will say when I'm out walking, people are saying "hi" to each other and talking from a
ROBINSON: distance. Like people-- generally, I'm like, oh my god, stranger danger. And now it's like, oh, wow, people, hi, talk to me. So standing at a distance, we will talk to each other.

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah, and it does seem like people-- it's this weird social dynamic of-- maybe previously, if you had gone on a walk-- I mean, I've seen this in our neighborhood, like people I usually just walk by, or don't even acknowledge, or talk to, you don't do that anymore. Now it's, "hey, how's it going?" "How are you?" And it feels like meaningful interactions. It's not--

KATIE Yeah, it's not just pleasantries being exchanged. It's actual people wanting to talk to each
ROBINSON: other.

SIMON BUEHRER: Exactly, yeah.

KATIE Like people are definitely-- we are social creatures by nature, even if you're a little more
ROBINSON: reserved, then you still desire that human contact.

SIMON BUEHRER: Have you had any epiphanies, or have you learned anything either about yourself, or your community, or society in general just for over the last few weeks?

KATIE See, I'm seeing a lot of good in society in that strangers are being friendlier. Some of the

ROBINSON: things I'm seeing also that make me sad is people talking about it's only 1% to 2% of the population that will die from this-- it's fine-- when people like me are the part of the population who's more likely to die and the people--

SIMON BUEHRER: You're at a higher risk.

KATIE Yes, I have asthma. And if I were to get it, I am more likely to die. And hearing people say
ROBINSON: things like that really does remind you that the vulnerable populations are sometimes not as valued as members of society. When it's inaccurate, this thing is killing healthy people.

So I saw something online that really spoke to me, and I just keep repeating it because people need to hear it. You talk about 1% to 2% of the population, it's like, OK, take one or two people that are in your close circle. Name one or two people that you're OK with dying to this. Say their names out loud as you-- since it's only-- it's OK, right? You said it's OK, so name these people out loud that you're OK with dying.

The devaluing I see of people who are more compromised, disabled people, and older people, like it is 2020. I would think we would be more valued than sometimes what I'm seeing, than what we are.

SIMON BUEHRER: Expendable, yeah,

KATIE Yeah.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Right.

KATIE We hold just as much value as anyone else. But some of the things I'm seeing expressed,
ROBINSON: people think less of us or that we are-- we're not useful anyway. Being one of those people that a lot of people are viewing as expendable hurts. I--

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah.

KATIE I don't know how else to sugarcoat it because I'm not going to because we need to be heard.

ROBINSON: We need to be valued.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

SIMON BUEHRER: So this podcast series we're calling "Voices, Visions, and Victories." And so we've heard your voice, and I think you've definitely given us a vision of how you view and experience the world, which I really appreciate. But what would you say is one of your victories right now these last few weeks?

KATIE I would say my victories is I can still find the joy and the happiness in new things or in existing
ROBINSON: things that I'm looking at differently.

SIMON BUEHRER: How are you looking at things differently?

KATIE When I go out for a walk, I can't see very much. I've made a point-- I'm still playing Pokemon
ROBINSON: GO. But looking at-- I looked at some purple wildflowers the other day that I might have just seen the color of but not really paid attention to. But I took the time to stop and take a picture, so I could actually look at them later when I got home, so I could look at the picture.

SIMON BUEHRER: Do you think that's part of because we're-- because you're being forced to sort of condense yourself into your apartment, and that's where you're spending most of your time that when you get out of that, you're more aware of-- alive to the world outside, more interested in it, curious?

KATIE I think so because I don't have my quote, "work world" right now. Most of nature makes me
ROBINSON: itch, so I don't want to touch it. But I do want to appreciate it.

SIMON BUEHRER: [LAUGHS] So how are the crows?

KATIE I'm pretty sure they figured out where I live.
ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: OK, so let's tell this story for-- I don't know how-- how many years have you been doing this?

KATIE About two now.
ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: OK, so you have established your own murder of crows at the office, right?

KATIE Yes.
ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: You feed them regularly, daily maybe.

KATIE Oh, yeah, daily. Sometimes a couple times a day.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: And how many-- so these crows are outside. I should explain that we work in an old school building. These crows congregate outside the window to your office, right?

KATIE Yes.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: And so you throw food to them out the window?

KATIE Mm-hmm. Sometimes I'll go out at lunch and toss food out as well. Walk around outside.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: And it's the same crows as far as you can tell?

KATIE Yeah, I can tell it is because there's one that's got a white tip on his wing, and he's always

ROBINSON: there. He's the most bold one.

SIMON BUEHRER: Maybe the leader.

KATIE My guess. He's the one that's the most indifferent to me standing right there--

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Wow.

KATIE --while they eat. So him, even I can identify because I see the white on his wing.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: You can see it that well, yeah.

KATIE Yeah, yeah.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: And so you told me the other day that you were going to walk over there and see them.

KATIE Mm-hmm.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Were they there?

KATIE I could hear them in the trees, so I put food out. And I kept hearing them as I've walked back
ROBINSON: because I've walked there a couple times now. Now I can open my back door, and I hear them.

SIMON BUEHRER: Do you think they followed you to your apartment?

KATIE I think so.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Yeah.

KATIE I think so.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: They knew where you are.

KATIE So I started throwing food out the back door now.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: But don't--

KATIE But I--

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: --dig into your reserves. We don't know how long this is going to last.

KATIE I can't eat peanuts.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: So why do you have them?

KATIE For the crows.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: You buy peanuts just to give to the crows?

KATIE Yes, yes, I do.

ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: That's pretty great.

KATIE In my walking, one of my destinations will still be work, just the parking lot at work where I feed
ROBINSON: them just to make sure they have gotten the memo that I'm over here, that I haven't just left them. Because in all of this, that was a concern of mine, that these birds thought I left them because, as dumb as it sounds, these birds are important to me. It's a normal part of my day. I will feed the birds.

SIMON BUEHRER: I don't think that sounds dumb at all.

KATIE I can just hear some of our co-workers right now shaking their head.
ROBINSON:

SIMON BUEHRER: Eh, we can't see them.

[LAUGHTER]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

That was my colleague, Katie Robinson. She is an accessible education materials production specialist in the Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials Center at OCALI. She's also our resident CrowMaster.

You can learn more about the services and resources provided by the AT&AEM Center at OCALI. Simply go to our main website, OCALI.org. Once you're there, scroll down, and click on the link to the Assistive Technology and Accessible Educational Materials Center. For those of you who might navigate using visual cues, look for the circle icon with the universal human with open arms and a key.

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Thanks again for listening to *Inspiring Change* because the need for change is everywhere, and inspiration can come from anywhere. I'm Simon Buehrer. See you soon.

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