**Podcast Episode #3: Autism Pride Day and What it Means to Us**

Nate: My name is Dr. Nate Shanok

Merrick: And my name is Merrick Egber

Merrick: This is the official podcast of the Els for Autism Foundation, Fore Autism!

Nate: We call our Podcast this because it’s a play on our foundation’s name and Merrick and I are terrible golfers

Merrick: But we love how golf has become such a transformative tool to helping people with autism.

Nate: When I’m not part of the podcast, I am part of our growing research team and a tennis coach.

Merrick: When I’m not part of the podcast, I’m an administrative assistant, filling in the gaps of each department, like glue. I am also autistic.

This is our third episode, “Autistic Pride Day and What It Means to Us”

What we hope to do is to present news and updates about our Foundation, interviews, or feature stories that play a big role with us, and with the community as a whole, speaking of which we also have our “Today in the World of Autism” segment where we posit the news and current events reflective of the world we live in today.

Nate can you give us any news and updates about the Foundation?

Nate: We’ve been working very hard to reopen in a limited capacity and have seen our first few clients return to the center for therapy sessions with careful social distancing in line, with CDC recommendations. In other news, we are offering a virtual summer camp program led by our terrific recreational services coordinator Kelly Coutts. There has also been a virtual book club featuring the 1st Harry Potter book which I know Merrick and Kelley have been working on together and the result has been magical. We also continue to offer yoga, music, and adult services classes remotely. We will be sending out a satisfaction survey to families who are participating in these various virtual programs to see how our clients are enjoying these remote services so far. Participation and feedback is very helpful to us!

Nate: June 18th was Autistic Pride Day and to celebrate it, I would like to present a list of individuals who have reached the pinnacle of success in their respective careers ranging from acting to experimental economics. Each of these individuals have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and are vocal and open about their life experiences. These inspirational individuals are excellent examples of the tremendous success that is achievable for people with autism, and how thinking in different ways than your peers is not necessarily a bad thing.

Temple Grandin is a professor at Colorado State University and a prolific, bestselling author that has gained further fame for her series of Ted Talks on “The Autism Brain” and “The world needs all kinds of minds”, which I highly recommend. She has reported that she did not begin speaking until she was nearly four years old. When she was diagnosed with Autism as a child, it was recommended by doctors that she be institutionalized. Fortunately, her parents did not agree with this opinion. In addition to her innovative work on autism, Grandin has also become a leading force in the animal sciences, and advocate for the humane treatment of animals, produced an award-winning biopic about her life, and was even named as one of TIME Magazine’s “100 Most Influential People.”

Sir Anthony Hopkins is in the minds of many, One of the greatest living actors in the world. The actor, who is most famous for his Oscar-winning portrayal of Hannibal Lector in The Silence of the Lambs, has been open about his diagnosis with high-functioning Asperger’s Syndrome, although he has not confirmed at what age he was diagnosed. When talking about the way being on the Autism spectrum has changed his life, Hopkins has commented that although he loves people, he has struggled to attend large parties his entire life and only has a few close friends that he relies on.

Dr. Vernon Smith is a professor of economics at Chapman University. He is widely considered one of the pioneers in the field of experimental economics — an achievement for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 2002. He earned his PhD in Economics from Harvard University in 1955. Dr. Smith is incredibly open and honest about being diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome but gives credit to autism for his success and ability to think outside the box in some regards. He once told MSNBC, “I don’t feel any social pressure to do things the way other people are doing them, professionally. And so I have been more open to different ways of looking at a lot of the problems in economics.”

Comedy legend Dan Aykroyd has starred in iconic films like Ghostbusters, The Blues Brothers, and Trading places. As a child he struggled to behave and fit in at school and he switched schools several times before being diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome. Since his diagnosis, Aykroyd has been vocal about autism rights and his experiences on the Autism Spectrum. According to the Oscar-nominated actor and writer, Asperger’s even helped Aykroyd develop his famous Ghostbusters character. According to Akroyd he was obsessed with ghost hunting and law enforcement, often carrying around a police badge with him.

Adam Young, is a multi-instrumentalist and talented vocalist with Asperger’s Syndrome. He is also the lead singer and songwriter behind the successful band Owl City. Young has referred to himself as deeply introverted and at the peak of his fame preferring to conduct interviews via email. He has used his platform to speak openly about Asperger’s and his religious faith. According to Young his consistent struggles with insomnia was the inspiration to the song “Fireflies,” a billboard number 1 song.

Additional famous individuals who are outspoken about their autism include: Singer Susan Boyle, Actress Daryl Hannah, America’s next top model contestant Heather Kuzmich, Pianist Tony DeBlois, Surfer Clay Marzo, and Writer John Elder Robison.

Nate: Because it was Merrick’s birthday on June 19th, and he happens to have ASD, I’ve decided that it would be appropriate to ask him a few questions related to his experiences and interests as an individual with autism.

**Interview Questions**

1. Merrick I spoke about a few prolific celebrities with autism, but I think I can safely speak for everyone at the foundation and beyond in saying that you are a champion of autism and an incredibly inspirational individual. You are an accomplished writer, musician, and administrative worker at the Els For Autism Foundation. Can you start by telling our listeners about yourself and your story?
2. What does it mean to you to see a Pride Day for Autism that has garnered so much international support and Celebration?
3. For individuals with autism who are tuning in right now; what is your message and advice to them as they navigate through life’s typical challenges as well as experiencing the world in a unique way?

Merrick:

As always, it is time to go over

“Today In The World of Autism”

Starting with my co-host Dr. Nate Shanok

**Nate: Amazon Orders Comedic Drama Starring Actors with Autism**

The creator of the popular show“Parenthood” Jason Katims is bringing a new series to amazon prime focused on the experiences of three young adults with autism

Amazon Studios reported this week that it has ordered a “coming-of-age comedic drama” from Jason Katims that is based on an Israeli series called “on the spectrum”.

The show is centered on “three 20-something year old roommates who are on the autism spectrum, trying to traverse through goals that we can all relate to: To get a job, keep a job, make friends, fall in love and navigate a world that eludes them.”

The roommates are to be played by actors Rick Glassman, Sue Ann Pien and Albert Rutecki, all of whom are on the autism spectrum

Katims the creator and executive producer for the show has a 23-year-old son who is on the autism spectrum and cited this as the prime inspiration for him to create a series about autism.

Katims previously was behind the NBC series “Parenthood,” which chronicled the life of a family that included a boy with Asperger’s syndrome.

Merrick: While we’ve talked about celebrities with autism, it would also be nice to talk about local personalities with autism, who deserve to be as celebrated as many of the personalities we’ve spoken of today. These are two of our Advisory Board Members, Rachel Barcellona and Haley Moss, and Spectrum Award Winners. I’ll go through the brief bios of each, and I’ll link to the web sites, for each, in our shownotes

Rachel Barcellona:

Rachel Barcellona received her A A. degree from St. Petersburg College and is currently attending the University of South Florida studying interdisciplinary social science with a concentration in international and women’s studies. Rachel is also studying languages and will be auditioning for vocal performance in opera this spring at the University of South Florida. Rachel won the Els for autism award in 2017 and is a spokesperson for the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) at the University of South Florida, and also is on their advocacy board. Rachel was named an ambassador for Unicorn Children’s Foundation, a board member of Safe Minds Inc. and has traveled with the global autism project internationally. Rachel is a member of the international thespian Honor Society and an opera singer and author. Rachel also has competed in pageantry and has won local, state and national titles. She has been working on her platform Ability Beyond Disability for the past 8 years.

Haley Moss:

Haley Moss was diagnosed with autism at age 3. She received her Juris Doctor from the University of Miami School of Law in 2018 and graduated from the University of Florida in 2015 with Bachelor’s degrees in Psychology and Criminology.

She is a renowned visual pop artist and the author of “Middle School: The Stuff Nobody Tells You About” and “A Freshman Survival Guide for College Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders: The Stuff Nobody Tells You About.” She also illustrated and contributed to the anthology “What Every Autistic Girl Wishes Her Parents Knew.” Her writing has been featured in publications such as HuffPost, Teen Vogue, Bustle, Elite Daily, and The Mighty. Haley also co-hosts the “Spectrumly Speaking” podcast, which is dedicated to women on the autism spectrum.

Haley currently serves on the constituency board for the University of Miami – Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities and the Board of Directors for Different Brains. She previously served on the board of Unicorn Village Academy.

Web sites:

Rachel Barcellona: <https://rachelbarcellona.com/>

Haley Moss: <https://haleymoss.net/>

Merrick Egber:

Before we go, we want to thank the Foundation for believing in us to be able to do a podcast for any willing listeners, and because of that we will be seeing you again, in July, with some more coverage on us and the autistic community, in general.

Forrrrrrreeeeeee!!!!