

## E04: Chasing Gains & Finding Yourself ft. Christy Milan (Transcription)

00:00

**Intro (Marcia):** This is Disabled Girls Who Lift. We are reclaiming what's rightfully ours one podcast at a time. It's Marybeth, Chloe, and Marcia bringing you the thoughts and unpopular topics to you get out of that ableist comfort zone.

00:15

**Music Jingle**

00:24

**Marcia:** Episode four: Disabled Girls Who Lift. Are you ready? On this episode we have our very first guest, she's from Miami like me, and we're talking about chasing gains, chronic illness, finding yourself, being a mom, all the serious heavy shit, but we're gonna have a good time. Again, my name is Marcia I'm coming in from South Florida.

00:44

**Chloe:** I'm Chloe, I'm from Iowa.

00:47

**Marybeth:** Hey, it's Marybeth from California! We are so so excited to bring on our first ever guest on the Disabled Girls Who Lift podcast. Her name is Christy Milan, on Instagram @christypicklesmilan, coming from Miami over with Marcia. She's she's a badass in powerlifting, other strength training, she's also a mother who is a chronic illness warrior herself, so welcome!

01:17

**Christy:** Thank you so much ladies for having me. Hey everyone, this is my first time ever doing a podcast so I'm really really excited. [giggles]

01:25

**Marcia:** So definitely happy to have you on, and I think we could probably just start with our listeners just... I mean everybody kind of starts in the same place right, like, "What the fuck am I doing and who am I," so--when do you--when do you kind of define that moment when you have a chronic illness, 'cause you don't wake up with it right? Marybeth and Chloe--have their--have their issues right and you kind of lived with it and however your childhood went, whatever whatever, when you have a chronic illness you're like, 'Oh I think I'm fine,' and then you're not. Where was that for you?

1:58

**Christy:** Right, right. So for me I didn't actually find out, I wasn't diagnosed with Rheumatoid until I was--I'm sorry so I have rheumatoid arthritis to clarify that--I was diagnosed I was 22. I was diagnosed with Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis which means that I was actually born with it, just, I didn't have enough symptoms and enough complications until I was 22 to really have a doctor look at me and say, "Oh my god yes, this is rheumatoid arthritis and if you were dealing with these problems your whole life then you were definitely born with it." I was born in '84 so my guess is that there wasn't enough information and research done on juvenile rheumatoid arthritis at the time, that it just wasn't common enough of a thing for any pediatrician to look at me and say, "You know I think this child might be at risk of having RA," but by the time I was like age 3 I had developed some deformities in my fingers and in my toes, and then by age 9 I had severely flat feet, collapsed knees, I had a lot of pain when walking, I just at that point wasn't a very active child, had no interest in being active. It was just hard for me; I was constantly really tired, just no motivation to

like live an active normal life like other kids were. Um, in the summer of '94 I had reconstructive arch surgery on both of my feet, um with a bone graft from the hip, so that took up a whole summer. I was very young; that's a very serious procedure to have done at such a young age. Um, the surgeon at that time said that, "I wouldn't, you know, be very active after that." That it was kind of going to limit my future of playing sports, any possibility of playing sports, and of wearing heels as an adult--I remember that like it was yesterday!

4:03

**Marybeth:** That's wild!

4:04

**Christy:** I remember that really sticking out in my mind as a nine-year-old. Like, "Oh no!"

4:05

**Marcia:** 'That's what grown-ups do! I can't be a grown-up?'

4:06

**Christy:** Yeah, right. Um so I don't know if that statement and telling me you know like, "You're not gonna be able to do these things," was like the motivating factor to work really hard and try to live a normal life, but I went on to play sports--like not well I was never really athletic--you know, I played on teams, but I was never like a star player. I always felt like I held the team back because I just wasn't really talented in athletics.

4:40

**Marybeth:** But you definitely did try

4:42

**Christy:** Well absolutely yeah

4:44

**Marybeth:** And when you were younger before you were diagnosed, were you just not interested in sports were you interested more in music or was it because of, like, all of these um [limitations] later on--yeah exactly--and the joint pain and all of that stuff, like, did you limit yourself at first?

5:03

**Christy:** Yeah as a child, I mean I, when you're that age you're not like, "my joints hurt." It's just like, "I hurt," you know. I didn't know what joints were.

5:13

**Marcia:** Yeah

5:14

**Christy:** I just knew that something--I didn't really know. You know, I really couldn't identify with what it was, I just didn't understand what was going on, so I didn't have the motivation to, like, try anymore. Then I found dance; I danced for most of my life when I was younger and then I just became obsessed with it in high school and college, and I kind of like left sports behind. So I continued to dance into college and then when I was 22 is when I started to have a lot of health complications--I'm sorry from like 19 to 22--I was in and out of rheumatologists' office and with my primary, doing blood tests, all the tests came back negative like nothing was wrong... Until like my knee swelled up one day to the size of a grapefruit, and I went and I had a, um, bunch of synovial fluid drained and that was when a

Rheumatologist just clinically diagnosed me and said, “This is Rheumatoid Arthritis, this is why you had surgery when you were nine, to try to fix your feet back then.” There, you know, it was so uncommon that it's just a doctor wouldn't look at you and--a child--and say that. So...

6:07

**Marybeth:** Holy crap

6:08

**Christy:** Right, so then you know, a lot of things looking back on my childhood started to make sense, so it's not that I--you know, there were a lot of factors going into me like, leaving kind of, giving up on sports and pursuing dance. It was you know, it wasn't easy to try and like suck at sports and be around people that were good and feel like you're like holding them back. You know there was like bullying involved when I was a child because people didn't know, and um but you could just tell that there was something like physically wrong. I walk, I walked like a duck as a child and I just I hated running; I didn't want to do it because people would make fun of me constantly, so that was, you know, that was a factor that played into just not feeling welcomed in like an athletic environment. I just didn't like feel like I fit into that world, so I pursued dance.

7:01

**Marybeth:** Yeah! So you found it through dance. What, what type of dance was it?

7:05

**Christy:** I did everything. I mean I even went on to do like point, as a ballerina, which yeah which my orthopedic surgeon would have, you know, never imagined I'm sure.

7:16

**Marcia:** Yeah I know

7:17

**Christy:** I didn't do it for a long time 'cause it was really painful but just to be able to say like you know, “I did that!” I did tap dancing, I really loved hip-hop, I was um, my last, I was actually in college to pursue a degree in Dance Education and Kinesiology until those health complications--in my--in my early 20s started up again. I was dancing on the dance team at FIU--they're called the Golden Dazzlers--and I was on a lot of Prednisone, just tests, doing a lot of tests with doctors, unable to figure out what was going on. I'd gained a lot of weight from the Prednisone because I was cycling like on and off for about two years, so I probably put on like 20 pounds of bloating weight and that was really frowned upon by my dance coach who was a former Miami Dolphins cheerleading captain.

[chuckles]

8:11

**Marcia:** Oh no...

8:13

**Christy:** Yeah. So the weight gain, you know, caused some challenges for me on the team. My coach literally pulled me aside and was like, “It's really sad that you've gained this much weight.” You know from 19 to 20 years old--yeah so those were like her--her words were like, “It's sad that you look like this and you're 20.” So she put me on weight probation. I wasn't allowed to--

[laughter]

8:37

**Marcia:** Weight probation!

8:39

**Christy:** Yeah I, I couldn't dress out in the uniform because I was apparently like too heavy for it, I didn't look good in it, I just... I had become the aesthetic that they didn't want, you know, so like that, dance was my world, it was what I wanted to do for the, you know, better part of my life as a career, so it was like my world came crumbling down. And then after that, shortly after that, like the next year's when I was diagnosed with RA. So you know things are starting to make more sense, but also it was like I felt like my world had just ended because I'm like, 'What am I gonna do with my life now?' You know, I didn't want to be anything but a dance teacher and a choreographer, um...

09:22

**Chloe:** Sorry. Quick question. Did your dance coach know about you being on the medications or was that just kind of something, you took, you kept to yourself?

09:32

**Christy:** No I kept it to myself, um because I, I was also working--so my doctor at the time didn't really warn me about the side effects of the weight gain; I guess, at that, at that age a doctor doesn't want to I guess scare you into like not taking the medication. So I was taking it and I didn't really understand that that was a side effect, and I didn't, I had never seen a problem with my weight until she said that to me, so I was like, "Wait, I'm fat? What?" You know, so then yeah I developed like uh really serious like body image issues and a lot of that time in my life, you know for like the next seven-eight years, I engaged in a lot of like self-sabotaging behaviors as a result of like the denial I was in and the shame you know that comes along with a diagnosis like that. Even though it's totally something against my control, it's not going away, I have to deal with it, but it took about seven-eight years before I actually started to adopt healthier lifestyle habits and started to take charge of things that I know could help treat--at least relieve--symptoms make me feel better, make me feel stronger, you know, but there was a lot--there was a period there--of like some really really dark days where I didn't do anything about dealing with my chronic illness, just pretended like it didn't exist.

11:02

**Marcia:** Yeah. You had to unpack a lot. I mean from start to finish you're the awkward kid, and then you go to, 'Okay dance is my life, okay dance is no longer my life, oh I have what now? And oh oh so now I'm fat? Okay.'

11:15

**Christy:** Yeah

11:16

**Marybeth:** But it does really suck because not all dance is like that. Like there are so many dance genres or dance companies that are more positive in body image. You know modern ballet, nope.

11:29

**Christy:** Nowadays

11:30

**Marybeth:** You are too skinny, I mean, you are too fat, you're too short, you have to be tall and skinny...

11:40

**Christy:** Right, right.

11:41

**Marybeth:** That's like, hip-hop I'm sure you found a little bit of that

11:43

**Christy:** Absolutely. And like nowadays, that was more of what I was into--like hip hop and street dancing--and then like as I grew like older, like burlesque style dancing has a history of very curvy voluptuous women, so like yeah those were the styles that I started to gravitate more towards, but I didn't pursue it as like career-type things because you know it was like someone told me that I wasn't good enough for what I wanted to do and I believed in, and I believed it. And that sucks that I you know was so torn down by that but I let like one person's opinion you know take that away from me...

12:20

**Marcia:** It's really not just that one person's opinion though because you have to start from you know, you went from how many people saying you're not gonna be able to do this, and you in turn have kids saying like, "Well hey by the way, you suck." So like you know that just like pounds on and pounds on and you kind of like stuff it down, you don't unpack, you don't deal with it right, so finally someone just hits you with the hardest one [and] you're like, "Well fuck, I don't know, now what what?" Yeah.

12:48

**Marybeth:** And that's before even like recognizing that you had a chronic illness

12:54

**Marcia:** Exactly

**Christy:** Right

12:55

**Marybeth:** That's people not understanding just the little--you know--the little side effects that came from it. Now imagine would it be like if you were to finally tell them, "Well like I have this, I have that, some symptoms are are bloating like, on top of like the feet and the joints," like as a child like having to explain that like right I wonder like would that have been easier, would they have understood back in those days or not at all?

13:28

**Christy:** I don't even know, I couldn't tell you because that particular team they were so driven on like an aesthetic you know...

13:37

**Marcia:** Yeah, honestly I doubt it

13:39

**Christy:** Yeah I doubt it too, you know... Right. In that culture no, no. So you know in a way like um that was a blessing that I was able to just rid myself of that kind of culture because now the kinds of activities I want to get involved in and the people I want to be around are not that. I know that. You know, I don't want to be around people where, you know, you have to look a certain way to be accepted. So it's kind of like where I'm at now I'm trying to like find myself like where do I stand now with all this experience of not knowing what was wrong but knowing something was wrong and then finding out and like making all this sense out of it, like and then having seven eight years of my

life where I just completely put everything--my health, my goals--on the back burner because I just didn't know how to deal with it, you know.

14:38

**Marybeth:** And so barbell sports, like how did you how did you find that, was that in in high school, was that later on in life, or you just went to the gym one day and you were like, "I want to do that." Was it a big challenge for you?

14:53

**Christy:** So um--barbell sports--I had my first experience with a barbell actually when I was in middle school. My stepfather is a football coach, yeah, my stepdad is a football coach and he also used to teach weight training, strength, 'Bigger Faster Stronger,' was like a big program back in the day for football athletes, and so I I was not interested in football ever but weight training was appealing to me. He used to take me to the gym. One summer in seventh grade he taught me how to squat... On a smith machine.

[laughter]

15:30

**Marcia:** Asterisks

15:31

**Christy:** And yeah, and um you know after that I didn't really pursue it because at the time girls--I was in middle school, I was like 13, yeah 13--girls were not in the weight room. Um so it just wasn't a socially acceptable like sport to pick up for myself, so I just did that with him that one summer, and then I didn't pick up a barbell again until 2016. I was living in Chicago, I had just picked up like commercial gym membership, I was starting to eat better I had finally found a medication that I was treating my Rheumatoid Arthritis with, which is an injectable called Enbrel that completely changed my life. I was just adopting that our lifestyle changes to kind of take me in that direction to be healthier, and I had some friends that were working out like at a different kind of gym--it like looked like a dungeon in like a warehouse of, or like a basement of, like this whatever in Chicago. But they were like squatting and using like chains and it just looked really hardcore and I was like, "Woah."

16:41

**Marcia:** Just metal music playing in your head when you think of those.

16:46

**Christy:** It literally like was what they were listening to. And is just like, I just it it appealed to me because I had nothing going on in my life but working as a bartender in bars and sleeping. Like that's literally all I did for those seven-eight years, so you know you can imagine like the lifestyle that that is. It's being in bars all the time, seeing my friends, partying, drinking, like that got old, you know as you get older. That shit gets old, and I was just feeling like I I needed to do something else with my life, so that was really interesting to me. I hit up one of my friends who was a personal trainer at Rockwell Barbell, which was the gym in Chicago that I started, yeah, that I started training in powerlifting at, and I I don't know after my first session... My first session I squatted maybe like 95 pounds you know, but it was my first time squatting with like a free-standing rack, and you know I did like three sets of ten reps! And I was just like, "Man, that's 95 pounds!" Like I didn't I didn't know looking at the weights like how much it was; he didn't tell me 'til after. No, I felt really good about that. I was like, "I never, I don't know. I've never had 95 pounds on my back."

18:05

**Marybeth:** Like first of all though, I love that like you weren't intimidated by all of that. Like I'm and I'm pretty sure that gym that you went into didn't have very many women, just like in middle school, or they probably did but like seeing the chains and all the bars around you.

18:22

**Christy:** Yeah. I'm sorry, so let me go back. So after middle school I didn't pursue anymore like weight training. When I joined Rockwell Barbell this was like 2016.

18:33

**Marybeth:** Right. 3 years ago

18:34

**Christy:** Yeah so that was where like all the trainers were in the gym with like like pow- that was the first time I've seen powerlifting. With like chains and like that many plates on a bar, I was like, "What are these guys doing, like they're gonna hurt themselves." So I was just interested in like...

18:50

**Marybeth:** You were like, "I want that."

18:52

**Christy:** Kind of

18:53

**Marcia:** 'That's the shit I like, Yeah...'

18:56

**Christy:** Yeah, at my own pace. You know, I knew realistically that I probably would not like reach a goal like that you know. But I I knew that I had squatted before in a Smith Machine and I really enjoyed it and I didn't hurt myself, so I was like, 'Let me see what I can do with this.'

19:14

**Marcia:** But I can relate to what you were saying about middle school and the weight room because I used to play sports, I did soccer, you know like the football and all of that, and I mean the football team got to go to the weight room as a class. That was a class for them; in the middle of the day they lifted weights. Nobody ever said, "Oh girls soccer should be in there." You know how fucking amazing I would have been if I was squatting? No. The girls basketball, soccer, whatever...

19:43

**Christy:** Exactly. Exactly. Like we weren't even allowed in there.

19:45

**Marcia:** Not a thought in anyone's mind whatsoever.

19:48

**Christy:** No. No, not at all.

19:50

**Marcia:** So when you kind of come from that where you just like even as a kid you're like, "Oh yeah, you could play sports, but no no this room? This room's not for you." So I could definitely relate to that feeling.

19:59

**Christy:** Right, right, right. Yeah it helped that um I had known like a couple of the guys at the gym for a while, and I was just comfortable because of the people that were there really, and you know that's why I really am a firm believer that like the people you surround yourself with in your environment is really really imperative to like your you know your success in dealing with chronic illness because the people around you have a big impact on your mental health. They should.

20:32

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21:07

**Christy:** A good impact.

21:09

**Marybeth:** And I feel like a lot of people that go into powerlifting that are women go through that exact same mindset like because I discovered it in college, but our weight room up to this day like it's still intimidating to women. But right back in--when was that 2009-2010--100% like bros, 100% guys, just like not even not talking to each other, just breathing, and like like weird grunting, and that's all that like the girls talked about. "Like yeah, I don't I don't ever want to go in there." And everything outside of that were pools, ellipticals, whatever, so that's all that the women did unless they were in a sport that required strength training, until like until one of those bros are one of those like guy friends like brings you along to show you how to squat. So I also did start on a smith machine... There's no like raw genuine from that. Yeah well also like missing a hand I was like, 'No there's no way that I could actually use a barbell in a squat rack, like it'll fall off, like something's gonna happen.' The smith machine was just so like comforting to me until we realize like this isn't the proper movement. Yeah but definitely that that huge gain in self-esteem that you can squat 95 pounds.

22:48

**Marcia:** Yeah, it's a huge difference. But I was, I don't know if we talked about--Chloe, how did you find your gym or get into your gym because it seems like most of us have pretty similar stories. Like you knew someone that was there and you kind of got eased into it and you're like, "All right, this is some shit. I'm cool here?"

23:07



**Chloe:** Um it was... I was about to--I knew I was gonna no longer have access to our community college gym. That's where I was lifting, I didn't really know what I was doing, I would just go in and kind of lift, play around with the barbells. Um, so I found the Anvil Gym like a Google search one night, and I was like, 'okay,' so I called the owner and I ended up having to do like a phone interview because he doesn't let anyone come in...

23:39

**Marcia:** What! Pretty cool

23:42

**Marybeth:** Yeah, it seems pretty private

**Chloe:** Yeah. Yeah, pretty specific... So um, I guess I passed the phone interview. I was welcome to come in--that was back in, oh, like August or September 2013 so that's how I started powerlifting. In the original--like originally--I just wanted to lift and get bigger, but the owner of the Anvil Gym, Ken at that time, he had said, "Well, you're actually kind of strong, like you should consider competing," and I was like, "Oh god, no. Never." But yeah, eventually he convinced me to compete and- but, yeah.

24:26

**Marcia:** Here we are

24:27

**Christy:** That's awesome

**Chloe:** 6 years later

24:28

**Marybeth:** But I love that you said, Chloe, that you just like went into- went into like the general fitness gym and just started playing around with bars like, people just don't do that.

[Laughter]

24:41

**Marcia:** No, people don't do that.

24:43

**Chloe:** I wish I had videos because I bet it was like really cringe-worthy. I'm sure it was terrible.

[Laughter]

24:49

**Marcia:** I'm sure it was

**Marybeth:** But what made you decide like, 'Hey, I wanna try and squat'?

24:55

**Chloe:** Sorry, what was that?

24:58

**Marybeth:** What helped you decide like, 'Hey, I wanna try and squat'?

25:01

**Chloe:** Um, I wanna- I don't remember like the exact moment, but I want to say this was around when... Like I was using social media more, I was- I was running at that time--I hated running--and I started seeing pictures of CrossFit women and I was like, "That's what I want to look like. How can I look like that?" And I learned that they were lifting like with barbells, dumbbells, so I was like, "Okay, I'm gonna start doing that."

25:33

**Marcia:** Yeah. That's awesome. Um I think it's- I don't think I even started as like bare bones as you 'cause you just went in. 'Cause I still like I still had a safety net you know, I was with oh well my husband, but boyfriend at the time, and like my best friend and they're both men, so I had like my little like installation; like I didn't go by myself.

25:55

**Chloe:** Oh yeah, yeah I was by myself. I guess that is kind of weird looking back on it but I don't know...

26:03

**Marcia:** Well I'm glad you did it, good for you. It's possible. We'll be okay. Yeah well, since we heard the baby crying let's talk-

26:11

**Christy:** I'm sorry-

26:12

**Marcia:** Whose baby is that! [laughter] Who baby?

26:15

**Christy:** That, that is um, that's- Yeah my um... Sorry about that, I'm in a room locked up and I guess she knows, she's found out that I'm in here. That's my daughter, Mia, she'll be two in December--December 12th--she'll be two. So that is another like recent development in my life that is very very challenging to take on but it is honestly the best thing I've ever done in my life. She's the best; she's really awesome.

26:43

**Marcia:** That is awesome. And were you able to- because you were lifting before you had her...

26:50

**Christy:** Yeah, so 2016 was when I discovered powerlifting in Chicago at Rockwell Barbell. I really got into it; I was also not training with the intention of competing because I never wanted to bench press. I was like, "Nope, that? I'm not doing. I don't want to do it." I only wanted to squat and deadlift, so I was doing that and then I got pregnant in 2017 and I have started learning how to bench...

27:17

**Marybeth:** That's funny

27:18

**Christy:** Yeah. Yeah so it got to a point where once I couldn't lay flat I had to stop benching, so I continued to powerlift throughout my pregnancy up until I was eight months pregnant, not with a coach just on my own so I didn't do anything crazy. I didn't try to like hit any PRs or anything--I just wanted to--I just wanted to move and feel like not

lazy and fat. So I was doing yeah just like high-volume work still, just like 95 pounds, but it's pretty funny being like eight months pregnant at a gym in Boca and having like, you know, men walk up like, "Are you like, do you need any help? Are you okay? Like you're good, okay." Like it was cool, that was a good feeling. My OB actually told me during my pregnancy that my hormones--pregnancy hormones--might even clear up the RA, and miraculously it did. I felt really really good my whole pregnancy, which I'm not sure if that is for everyone. I believe that happens-

28:21

**Marcia:** It's--the more common--the more common thing is that when you have an autoimmune or that sort of issue during your pregnancy you're kind- usually you feel way better, but then after the pregnancy you crash again.

28:34

**Christy:** Oh yeah. It's yeah... So I was able to get off my medication, I was still lifting up until you know I gave birth. I took off--I took off--a year. So yeah, I didn't take up powerlifting again until last year in December 2018. I hired a coach--Trevor Jaffe is my coach. So I've worked with him- yeah I wasn't ready until like one year postpartum, like building up even the core strength to put a barbell on my back. I mean it's crazy what pregnancy does to your body like I- just after even walking I just felt like--oh my god I don't even know how to explain it--like a noodle walking. Like my core strength was just- I was so wobbly, it was...

29:19

**Marcia:** I mean your body like was literally spread apart and then got put back together again. No way you could feel the same.

29:24

**Christy:** Yeah. Yeah. Right, right. So I took the first year more of like a postpartum fitness approach, just to like lose weight and build up core strength. I really took my time and then yeah hired a coach in 2018. I didn't, again, I had no intentions of competing, but like four weeks into my training I just kind of- I I just kind of changed my mind, and I was like, 'You know what, fuck it. I want to do- I want to do a competition next year, and I want to go back to Chicago and do it where I started powerlifting.' It was the Rockwell Barbell Midwest Challenge that that gym was putting on. You know, I want to see my friends and I want them to see me as like this new person. I just- becoming a mother, I was almost like I feel like I gained like this superpower and the pregnancy was a surprise, she wasn't planned, you know so this is- I wasn't ready to be a mom, but I you know I had to prepare myself and get ready so I felt like if I could, you know, overcome something like that and not only like get through it but also like be a badass mom, you know, like why can't I train as an athlete and do a competition? So that like becoming a mother kind of like changed my mindset and like like my ability to just like take on challenges and and-

30:49

**Marcia:** That's awesome

30:50

**Christy:** And do really well at them, so that is...

30:53

**Marybeth:** Let me just stop and applaud you because like like...

30:56

**Marcia:** Literally, literally

[applause]

**Marybeth:** We're kind of just like so in- desensitized to like women- women's pregnancy throughout a nine-month period, and then postpartum, and the postpartum depression that comes along that, but like, your being able to balance not just post-pregnancy but babies... I mean taking care of your child and on top of like getting back into strength training all at once with your chronic illness--with rheumatoid arthritis--you you like found your your world, you found your priority which is your child, and you didn't drop any of your hobbies, you know...

31:42

**Christy:** Yeah, that was really important to me because getting pregnant and having to give up, you know, a past lifestyle and you know I was traveling for work at the time as a bartender working like music festivals all over the country... I needed something to identify with that I wanted to do because I had to reinvent myself you know as a mother, so the the programming and the strength training for me was also a really nice shift in the mindset of like well, 'I'm training as an athlete now, so rather than you know eating well, you know, training and trying to make myself stronger, my recovery, my rest, my physical therapy, my mobility, like rather than doing all those things as a response to feeling like my body hated me now, I'm doing these things because I'm I want to love my body and I want to make it last and for my daughter. I want to show my daughter-' Hi! We can see you now, Chloe.

32:53

**Marcia:** Yeah! Chloe has appeared, a wild Chloe has appeared.

32:57

**Chloe:** I'm embarrassed to tell you guys that I realized I didn't turn the webcam on, so I was...

[laughter]

33:04

**Marcia:** Well done

33:06

**Christy:** Funny. Um so yeah, so now another thing about becoming a mother and training myself as an athlete and to to live, you know, and adopt habits as an athlete does, it helps me to view this intense health regimen as something that I do because I I love my body. You know, I've spent so many years hating myself and hating my body and hating parts of my body that, you know, I'm done thinking that way. I'm going to make the best of what I've got, and you know there are parts of my body that I hate, yes, but there are parts of my body that I absolutely love, and like thanks to powerlifting too, and like living in that context allows me like to choose those strategies. And it really like--it's really been--it's really brought my mind a lot of peace in dealing with with chronic illness.

34:01

**Marcia:** And how many people can even say- like I know that I've grown up with my mom hating her body--diet culture--she was always trying some new shit, she always wants bigger boobs, she always wanted to be smaller. Like, can you imagine what my life would be like if I grew up with a mom that's like, "I'm a boss ass bitch and you can be one too." Like that, that by itself is-

34:21

**Christy:** Right.

34:22

**Marybeth:** Yeah, Mia's a lucky child.

34:25

**Chloe:** [inaudible] for your daughter...

**Marcia:** Yeah, you and your, you and your lucky--what was it called, what did they call your lucky? I forgot what they called-

34:30

**Marybeth:** Oh. Wait, mine?

34:31

**Marcia:** Yeah

34:32

**Marybeth:** My lucky fin? Oh they called it monkey monkey. But I was talking about her baby! Mia... [laughter]

34:37

**Marcia:** Oh! Thought you said...

34:39

**Marybeth:** She's a lucky daughter. Not talking-

34:41

**Christy:** Thank you. And that means a lot to me because-

34:47

**Marybeth:** That's some real ass inspiration.

34:48

**Christy:** It is, and it's like when you're when your child is so young--I've also been a stay-at-home mom for the two years and working on the weekends when she's away with her dad--so I mean it's really, at first being a mother is kind of like it doesn't feel that rewarding because your child can't communicate to you in the ways that you're impacting their lives, you know, but now that she's getting older you know I take her out to her little--she's got a gym membership at a baby gym.

35:17

**Marybeth:** Oh my god!

35:18

**Christy:** Oh yeah, yeah

**Marybeth:** What is this called?

35:19

**Christy:** It's called Gymboree. She's been there for a year and yeah she does really well there, the teachers love her and like people- I got a lot of comments on her, like how you know some people are like, "Wow, like your child wow she's intense," you know but some people are like, "She's strong. She's bold. She's fearless." And it's like, yeah motherhood

is intense, but man but to hear that about my child like I wasn't I didn't feel like I was those things when I was a child, you know so like even just that in itself is really rewarding to see that like the I'm able to pass down those ideas of strength and of confidence to her even though like I'm still working on building strength and confidence in myself, you know.

36:08

**Marybeth:** Yeah. And although she's not, you know, vocal about how much he like looks up to you right now, I promise you that you know come 15/16/17 she will she will start that because like I grew up with a single mother. Um I think I was five when my parents divorced, and like the shit that I saw her go through I never talked about. Like I I kind of like hugged her when she cried about all the guys that she was dating, you know, after after the divorce and I like I just sat there and and I tried to you know be there with her while we like moved around to different houses, and I understood that she worked three jobs for me, but I never said like, "Thank you for working three jobs, mom."

36:59

**Christy:** Right

37:02

**Marybeth:** But like she is my biggest inspiration and she doesn't know that. Like I try and tell her as a 27 year-old everyday like how how much she fought for us and and for the family that she's built now too. And she wasn't a powerlifter like what the hell!

[Laughter]

She did all the other shit, but like you know, everything that you you've upheld since then, with and while living with rheumatoid arthritis is just fucking awesome.

37:33

**Christy:** Thank you, thank you. That's so sweet.

37:36

**Marybeth:** And so what do you- so what are you doing now? That's crazy that you were like a traveling bartender but uh you've made some career changes...

37:44

**Christy:** Yeah, so right now... You know at the beginning of this year like I I was just so unsure about what I wanted to do. I know, I knew I didn't want to stay like bartending and having to work like long nights, you know like, late nights, and you know 12-15 hour shifts on the weekends so that I could be with my daughter during the week, so I actually, I'm waiting it for a gym to open down here called Miami Strong. I'm gonna be working there full-time and I'm actually studying to certify as a personal trainer, so that is like a big step for me because... [sigh]

38:25

**Marybeth:** Dang

38:26

**Christy:** I don't, I don't have a life-long background in athletics or in strength. Like this is something that's still really new to me, but I think that in the time that I've had I've learned enough that I can help people like myself that just want to adopt different habits to just take steps slowly to like to like achieving success in managing a chronic illness. A lot goes into it, but you know I've learned a lot about managing the American healthcare system--navigating the healthcare system--and health insurance. I learned a lot about pain management, and I've learned a lot about nutrition and exercise

as you know, a supplement, as a form of medicine. I want, I just want to pass along the information and like the experiences that I've had, and if it impacts even one person to like feel some kind of like freedom in their bodies then for me like that is a really like purpose-filled life. I- I'm just looking for bigger purpose and how I can like put like this energy that I've put into myself and healing myself, I just want to put that energy back into the world to help other people. My goal is not to be like a powerlifting coach at all, powerlifting is just kind of like my thing that I want to do for myself, but I am looking into more like mobility, training, and functional- functional fitness to help people just like kind of you know that deal with chronic pain just to live their best lives daily and get through a- get through a day, you know. Like if somebody just wants to be able to like bend down and tie their shoes comfortably, like and I can help you know facilitate that like that that would mean a lot to me. I'm looking into pila- to train to be a Pilates instructor. Um with my...

40:27

**Marybeth:** Ooh..

40:28

**Christy:** Yeah. With my background in dance, I used to do a lot of Pilates. [It was] something that came like naturally for me and you'd be pretty surprised at how much strength you can develop in Pilates, and it's a lot of like body awareness and control, so I feel like going that route to help people that manage chronic pain and chronic illness is a little more- it's less intimidating than me pursuing- like trying to coach somebody in powerlifting. I'm still so new to it that I need a coach still, you know. But I'm really excited-

41:02

**Marcia:** But the gym that you go to has a Pilates or that's separate?

41:06

**Christy:** Sorry, what was that?

41:08

**Marcia:** The gym that you're gonna work at has a like a reformer and all that stuff or you have to go somewhere else?

41:14

**Christy:** No--they are going--they have plans to build out a Pilates room...

41:18

**Marcia:** Oh shit

41:19

**Christy:** Yeah, I kind of just have my sights like set on on that. And I've yeah, I've told them that I'm that that's my plan for next year I'm gonna work on a like continued education and Pilates and so, yeah they're like, "Well when you're certified, like let's talk."

41:33

**Marybeth:** What a lot of people don't realize too is our coaches, our personal trainers, they are life coaches. Like a lot of the times people come and hire personal trainers because they want to do like a major weight loss or life change or they saw somebody lifting, you know, a barbell and they want to do the same thing and get get stronger, but like a lot of that comes with like life shit going on. Say you can't come into the gym three to five times a week anymore; you have to break it down to two or three days a week because of childcare, because of you know, hospital visits, whatever it is

that we need to do. And those coaches--those personal trainers--have to understand that and say like, "Hey, I went through that. I'm still going through that," and you're spreading awareness and educating, you know, your future clients already I can tell will be-

42:30

**Marcia:** Yeah, that's why it's so important that the people out there in the fitness world aren't just, you know, like your FIU dancing instructor, like everybody should be tiny and cute and like you know like that's not what we're here for. We're training because we just want to be healthy and strong, and healthy and strong could look different.

42:48

**Christy:** Exactly. Exactly, that's a big thing.

42:52

**Marcia:** So we need we need more personal trainers with chronic illnesses, we [need] more with curves, you know, we need more from different backgrounds and all of that because that's that's the only way that we will show people that like you deserve to be here.

43:05

**Christy:** Exactly yeah

43:06

**Marcia:** People don't feel like they deserve to be here they don't see themselves.

43:09

**Christy:** Right. Yeah the representation is really important and that's why like moving forward in this like career change I'm just trying to find my people and help people like me deal with this stuff. It's yeah...

43:24

**Marybeth:** Yeah. And even if they don't have RA, like someone could be suffering from anxiety and depression, someone could be suffering from fatphobia still, or you know just everything that comes along with it, or what is it bulimia and anorexia-

43:41

**Marcia:** Yeah. Eating disorders and all that. There's definitely a lot going on. And I definitely do see that there's some changes, I mean when you if you find yourself in the right circles online you could find you know you know inspiring people and people that look like you, you know like we exist now. Disabled Girls Who Lift is a thing, but like you know when I leave my house today and I go to my gym like, you guys aren't there. So it's like still...

44:08

**Marybeth:** I'm always in your heart, Marcia

44:10

**Marcia:** Oh my god

44:13

**Marybeth:** Carry us around everywhere in a little pocket.



[laughter]

44:19

**Marcia:** That's what-

**Marybeth:** Are we crying on this episode? Is that what we're doing?

44:22

**Marcia:** Stop. I don't have any Kleenex. Now we're starting to be okay with being you know vulnerable, and also the fact that that's not mutually exclusive. You could be vulnerable and still be like a badass at the same time.

44:38

**Christy:** Yeah, yeah. True, I agree with strength and softness, it's the ultimate badassery. Um I I just hate the idea that you have to be cold and closed off--can you see me?

44:53

**Chloe:** I can see you now; I haven't been able to see anyone except myself.

44:58

**Christy:** Um, I hate the idea that you have to be cold and closed off and with your emotions and vulnerability in order to be perceived as strong. I feel like when you are open about your struggles and what you're going through and how it impacts you, I feel that there's a lot of strength in addressing those uncomfortable parts of yourself, and you know, coming to terms and saying like, "God, I'm not perfect but you know I'm--"

45:27

**Marcia:** "I'm here!"

45:29

**Christy:** Yeah. Like the first step is addressing- is addressing it and like accepting it.

45:34

**Marybeth:** And what we were talking about was that like some of the generational differences that we've noticed was--and this obviously doesn't happen with all folks over 60 that have a chronic illness--but what I've noticed in my family or friends' family is that they start seeing themselves as a completely different person from when they were 40, and like they're starting to notice changes in their, you know, their build or how how they, you know, see their family and they start pushing everyone else away regardless of how much they try to help them. And it it creates this barrier, you know, this chronic illness is to blame for the change in this person, and not everybody has control over that strength or over that confidence that they can move- that they can move forward with their same hobbies, that they can move forward with the family that that they love and is close to them. Instead it's like this this looming gray cloud that constantly follows them and they just want to die, you know, it's really disheartening but...

46:48

**Christy:** It is, it is. And I hope I get the chance to work in the future with people that have reached like that that point in their lives where they're looking back and just kind of like resentful on all the years lost. You know I I really want to advocate to people that you know, "Life doesn't stop with an illness, and an illness doesn't stop you know shouldn't stop you living your life." Like I feel like sick people are some of the strongest, like most positive, and hopeful people that I've ever met in my life, and I I just I want to encourage people to like live with all they've got. You know it's like, this is a time to not play safe and just like risk everything you have on on your goals in your dreams because life doesn't have to stop. It doesn't have to be this big looming cloud of sadness that follows us and consumes our life, you know,

like when you start to view your life as something beautiful and like find the beautiful parts in life and start to prioritize the positive outcomes that those things can bring, like, that's when- that's when we really start living.

48:04

**Marcia:** Yeah, perception is everything because you're gonna have the chronic illness, you're gonna have this disability visible or not, whether you're doing something or you're not doing something, so you might as well fucking do it. It's gonna be there either way.

**Christy:** Right

**Chloe:** Full send

48:20

**Marybeth:** These, these... Oh God, like and we have to just reiterate like these types of conversations are so necessary still because the stigma that we get as disabled folks or disabled children like it's still happening--Oh, hi Mia!

48:37

**Marcia:** Yeah, does Mia wanna say hi or she doesn't care about us?

**Chloe:** She just wants her mom

**Marcia:** Yeah she doesn't care about us, she wants to know what mommy's doing.

48:48

**Marybeth:** Oh hello...

**Christy:** Sorry guys

**Marybeth:** Our listeners won't be able to see her, but they can hear...

**Marcia:** You can go on her Instagram for tons of cuteness.

48:58

**Marybeth:** But yeah these types of conversations are still having in like birth control, like if you discover that your child has a chronic illness or has autism, like, they decide before you know their first trimester that they want to to end their life, you know. Like these conversations about disability are happening before the disabled child is born and the decisions are made by--and everybody has that that freedom, you know everybody has 100% control over their body--but it's just- it's just sad to me. Like stigma starts before you're even born.

49:39

**Marcia:** It does, yeah! They do some genetic tests, they do those chromosomal whatever, or you have a high-risk pregnancy, and the doctor pulls you aside, "Oh I don't know..." And and remember I work with with with with sick kids, and I met these parents and these kids--I mean there's levels--some of them walk, some of them don't, some of them talk, some of them don't, but they all have the same story. "Oh my doctor told me she'd never laugh or smile, "My doctor told me that she'd passed away by the time she was one," "My doctor told me..." and this kid doesn't even exist yet, and you already put that negative cloud over them, like it's nuts.

50:12

**Christy:** Yeah, yeah, that's another thing like with my past experiences as like a child, you know, hearing from my orthopedic that I would not play sports or be an active child, you know, live a normal life... It's like, 'Where's the hope here?' Like so yeah I'd also like to advocate to future doctors of the world, you know, "We're not- our life doesn't end when when this diagnosis comes, like, give us some hope, you know?" I just feel like a lot of people will- a lot of doctors in my past experiences will just like write you a prescription for pain pills, and just tell you to get as much rest as you can, it's like, that's it?

50:52

**Marcia:** That's not good enough

50:54

**Christy:** No!

50:56

**Marybeth:** Well a lot of the times these doctors are to blame for the like the high suicide rate that we have in the disabled community or in the chronic illness community because we're told that we just can't move on after this, you know. Like, "Oh I can't play baseball anymore? I can't- I can't do dance anymore because of this new diagnosis? I feel the same. I've always felt this, so why now? Or what if people have lived with this all their lives, like Chloe and I have lived with our disabilities for our lives, and we can probably go go into this at a later time but like, I am a survivor of of suicide, you know. I I tried taking my own life in middle school--or no sorry early high school--and the shit is real because we feel as though we don't fit in or all this other shit that comes with it, and it starts in Western medicine. They're making millions of dollars off of us.

51:58

**Marcia:** Yeah, yeah it starts with Western medicine, it starts with, you know, "Women aren't- women aren't shit but baby makers and, you know, like casserole cookers," like it starts with all of that. All of that just gets wrapped up and fed to you and like you come into this world and you're like, "Well what? Okay I guess." Like, no fuck that.

52:22

**Marybeth:** I love you guys

52:23

**Christy:** I love you too!

52:27

**Marcia:** I know we just met but oh my god  
[laughter]

52:30

**Christy:** Yeah you know the conversation is important because it's easy to feel like isolated from the rest of the world. You know, it can be a hard thing to pull yourself out of. It's hard to- it's easy to get caught up in like that- that victim mentality and feeling alone and isolated. It's hard to to reach out to people and say, "Man, like I've got this heavy shit that I deal with, it makes me feel like not normal, and I just I want to be a normal person and be able to like talk about my struggles like everyone else and overcome them," and it's like there's also shame in opening up, right, and being vulnerable, like yeah, like feeling like we're asking for pity, and it's like it's not pity. This is just like this is such a big part of my life and who I am. It's not who I am but it is a big part, and I- you know we can't just try to avoid...

53:20

**Marcia:** Yeah, not just gonna sweep it under a rug.

53:21

**Marybeth:** Or we can't just shut it off when we're with like others, when we're with people who don't experience the same thing, like I'm not going to act like I'm totally fine. I'm I'm comfortable enough in my body to just be able to talk

about it and not have you like pity me. That's the biggest thing- like you look at me and you like feel so bad. And I'm like, "Well actually, I'm thriving."

[laughter]

53:46

**Christy:** Better than ever, thanks.

53:49

**Marcia:** We don't want to be Chloe's favorite word--we're not inspiration either.

**All:** Yeah

53:57

**Marybeth:** So Christy, to conclude, um if there's a word of advice that you can give to folks that are following your path or that have struggled with similar things that you have--that could be, you know rheumatoid arthritis, it could be being a- being a mother to a child with a chronic illness--like how, what are your words of advice to them?

54:21

**Christy:** Um my- I guess biggest words of advice are to- you're gonna have to be your strongest advocate, you know, never give up hope on yourself. Noone's gonna do the work for you, no doctor is gonna give you the solution and say like, "Here, these pills and rest, are gonna make you feel better." You're gonna have to like take matters into your own hands and really take charge of your life and you know do the things that make you feel happy within your illness, within your boundaries. You know, if it's going out for a walk every day that makes you happy, if it's spending time with your family, like if you do want to get strong, like commit to yourself and really believe in yourself that you can do these things. And I just feel like our bodies are so much stronger--we are so much stronger--than we give ourselves credit for, and when you have a chronic illness it's just scary to take that step and to take the risk, but it's like the reward is so much better when you do.

**Marcia:** It's worth it.

**Christy:** You know, because like the amount of work that goes into moving forward and staying in the same spot--the amount of work mentally is the same. Okay? It's just that staying in the same place and staying stagnant is is is torture. It's torture, and that's work, you know, so why not do- put the work in to to make yourself feel a whole lot better and and confident about yourself and, you know, then put that energy back into the world to help other people.

55:46

**Marybeth:** Yeah, can you say that sometimes it's okay if they have like one very like depressive day and they don't feel as though they can go out into the world? Like, a nice balance of the two?

55:57

**Christy:** Oh, absolutely. That's- that's part of like a big thing of acceptance of dealing with a chronic illness is that not every day is going to be good; you're gonna have bad days. And that's why I have surrounded myself with people that--in powerlifting especially--that will show that their regressions too. Like, progress is not linear, it's not you know it's not going to stay on the same on the same scale, it's not going to keep going up, you're gonna have a bad day and you're gonna have to regress and take some weight off the bar, and yeah that's really frustrating at times but like that just makes the good days even better. You know, I have a bad day that I need to stay in bed and just like recover and rest, but then in my mind I'm saying, 'God I can't wait to get back in the gym and kill my next squat day.' And then usually it is. It's a really good workout because I listen to myself. I honor my body and I give it rest when it needs to rest because if I don't my body will shut down on me and it'll decide for me that I'm not doing this anymore.

57:01

**Marybeth:** Totally. #honoryourbody. It's our new shirt.

57:06

**Marcia:** That should be our new shirt. Yeah. Everything she said times two. Agreed. Do we have anything else to add to this already awesome episode? Alright disabled girls out.

57:20

**Outro 1 (Marybeth):** Thanks for listening to Disabled Girls Who Lift!

**Outro 2 (Chloe):** Don't forget to follow, rate, and like us on Spotify, iTunes, and Player FM. You can also find us on Instagram @disabledgirlswholift