

E01: INTRO - Podcast Transcription

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

Music Jingle

Marcia: Hello folks, welcome. Welcome all to our first inaugural episode of Disabled Girls Who Lift. Are you ready for us to get up in your shit? I don't know. I don't know if you really are. Anyways, so... Let me introduce myself. My name is Marcia; I'm a powerlifting strongwoman from South Florida. We've got two other bad ass bitches here...

Marybeth: Ay!

Marcia: They're gonna introduce themselves.

Chloe: I'm Chloe, I'm 28. I'm a powerlifter from Iowa.

Marybeth: I'm Marybeth, uh 27. I'm also a powerlifter from the Bay Area of California! [pause] So I started Disabled Girls Who Lift as a community for every one of us who didn't feel included in the workplace, at school, in the gym, mostly based online to find others like myself. For us who are gawked at in public, stared at, followed sometimes, questioned, as if they have a right to know, "what's wrong with your hand?" "Are you sick?" "Here. Let me help you." "You can't do that yourself."

I'm like, fuck off! I can do it myself. I've learned how to adapt for 27 years in this able-bodied world so give me some space, let me continue, treat me like everyone else, don't chastise me. Don't look to me for inspiration.

Anyway, Disabled Girls Who Lift has been a really really great community, uh looking for others like myself, it would showcase all of the different disabilities that we find in other sports--that being strongman, powerlifting, Olympic lifting--we've found so many already. It was created for the disabled community *by* the disabled community and intended for us to share techniques, adaptive tools in training, other federations to compete in--to get others to compete--uh, basically any other questions that a newer lifter or a new athlete might have for the general community, so...

I believe it's important. We're talking super important topics, uncomfortable topics, and including everyone--everyone--else. Uh, that might be people in a wheelchair, crutches, prosthetics, others in the limb-difference community, amputees, paralyzed folks, spoonies, anyone on the autistic spectrum... We've met some strong ass folks who have the Lou Gehrig's disease, so many more, and we're all looking for the ways in which we can be active, healthy, strong, just like everyone else.

Marcia: Exactly, just like anyone else. And I think the best part about this is it's for... anyone that, I mean not even everyone identifies with the word disabled, it means different things to different people, and that's okay, maybe you don't like the word. But either way, it's for people dealing with things visible or invisible because, you know, all of these things affect us. So I mean, looking at me no one's gonna guess that something is up. I mean, they look at you two they're gonna be like oh, well, she's missing an arm, what's up with her hand, kinda deal. So it's really interesting that we can make a community that kind of fits all of us together 'cause we need this.

Marybeth: Most definitely. So Marcia, tell us a little bit about you, and how you found us, and why this is important to you.

Marcia: I think i found you, Marybeth, on Instagram when I was doing my first, um, like searching around... I have a clothing shop, besides my physical therapy stuff I have a clothing shop and I was like.

Marybeth: Oh gosh, you found baby old me?

Marcia: Yeah, I found baby, baby Marybeth. [laughter] Uh, sent you a little shirt, back when you were doing your crazy one-armed deadlift. [laughter] And then kinda just went off from there, and it's pretty awesome because it's not like I found you and I was like, 'oh, this girl has one arm, she'd be great for my shop, check off that checkbox, oh I got a disabled person.' You know, I was just like, she looks cool...

Marybeth: [laughter] Yeah, what shop was that?

Marcia: Uh, Quad Squad. So yeah, @quadsquadshop. But I reached out to a lot of people, just people I thought looked cool, you know just send them a shirt, maybe they'll post it, maybe people would find out about my brand. And you know, you're actually one of the few people that anything came out of it. You know, besides just posting my shirt, I mean that fact that we got to know each other and here we are recording a fucking podcast. So that's pretty nuts.

Marybeth: Dope. And so do you identify as disabled, or do you identify as differently-abled, or what's your sich?

Marcia: Um, usually I just call myself a Spoonie, that's usually what I call myself. But in generic terms, I do, I do identify myself as a disabled person because I don't think... There are things that an able-bodied person can do that I can't really, like, I can't hang. Um, and I know that the word 'disabled' is a heavy one and everybody feels different ways about it but to me if I feel like this world wasn't built for me, I think I'm disabled. I'll take it, you know. If I buy like a, you know, if I buy like a Hello Fresh meal and it says 'Prep Time: 10 minutes to cut vegetables,' like my hands are not good for that, it's gonna take me half an hour.

Marybeth: Yeah, so tell us a little bit about what a Spoonie is and how it got that name.

Marcia: Definitely, so the Spoonie is based off the ‘Spoon Theory.’ Who made it, I’m not sure, but if you Google it, it’ll pop up, it’s not a big deal. The Spoon Theory is based on anyone that has a chronic illness. So it can be literally anything that affects you over your lifespan. So for me I have like neuropathy, I have dizziness, um like some dysautonomia, and all this other fun stuff and that affects me day-to-day. So for the able-bodied, regular, quote-unquote normal person, you can say they get 100 spoons a day and every day they get to spend their spoons. You know, 10 for work, 10 for the gym, 5 to cook dinner, and it’s very orderly. Every day it makes sense, every day it starts over, every day it’s the same.

For me, that’s not how it goes. One day I might have 10 spoons, another day I might have the full hundred, you know, maybe the next day it rolls over, maybe the next day it doesn’t. Some days I have to choose, like am I gonna do my laundry today, am I staying on the couch? Some days it’s great, I go to work, I hit the gym, I cook dinner, honestly, it just depends. And I can do my best you know, diet, sleep, water, all that good stuff, and it doesn’t always even matter, you know. It’s just kind of a constant state of fluctuating. So that’s where the Spoonie deal comes from.

Marybeth: Yeah, definitely. And obviously, it’s hard for a lot of people who are on social media, who follow you to understand this, because they see, ‘Hey, you’re a personal trainer [physical therapist], you’ve got all these amazing things going on, you manage a shirt company, you, you are still competing in Strongman, like, I don’t understand. How are you sick?’ And that’s why the Spoon Theory, I just looked up, was coined by Christine Miserandino, um, it’s like the most visual aid for non-disabled folks to understand what it is you’re going through. Um, it’s kind of, you know it’s a way to... I think she started it by, when she was asked what it was like to have Lupus, she set out on a table a bunch of spoons and she literally drew it out for her friend. And you have to constantly explain to others that you’re sick and it’s not your responsibility, you know just do what you have to do in your everyday life, and survive.

Marcia: Yeah, basically, I’m just out here trying to exist. That’s it.

Marybeth: We all are, man.

Marcia: So how did you find Marybeth again?

Chloe: Um, I found Marybeth through Instagram. This was back through a previous account, a personal account, that I had, um, she... Somehow I found her because she was posted, I want to say she might’ve been posted on someone else’s page as some kind of inspiration or something...

Everyone: Ugh

Chloe: I think that’s what it was, um, because it was your USAPL days when you were deadlifting with just one arm because...

Marcia: Which was nuts! One arm...

Marybeth: We’ll tell you a little bit about that in a future episode.

Chloe: Um, so I started following her after that and eventually we started talking. Basically, we both just formed a bond because we were both pretty angry about how um, differently-abled bodies were treated in the strength community and honestly just in the world in general.

Marcia: Yeah, it's really interesting that you can find, you know Instagram can be kind of trash, you know there's like Fit Tea, or you know whatever, but um, at the same time you can find somebody. Like, we're in three different time zones right now.

Marybeth: That's incredible.

Marcia: Yeah, and this is because of Instagram, because you know, if you make the effort to look for the people you want to connect with, and have authentic conversations with, you can find people. And this is pretty awesome.

Marybeth: Yeah, and this community would not have gotten started if it weren't for Chloe and Marcia and like the encouragement and the anger that you have built up with me. And top of finding others in our community, yet across the world, you know everybody who's in London who've connected with us, people in Canada who have asked for different resources or tools, this is how it starts. And I hope that this podcast can um help our lives out so we're not constantly pointing to different resources because we are putting this all on a website, I hope it helps everyone just hear our stories.

So Chloe, tell us a little bit about yourself, what do you identify as?

Chloe: Okay so, I don't identify as disabled even though I technically probably am. I was born with macrodactyly, that affects my right upper limb and my hand. Um so I am, I had my index and middle fingers amputated, um, and I'm just gonna kind of give a little bit of background about myself so the listeners get to know me. I'm 28 and as I said earlier I compete in powerlifting, um, I'm in Iowa and right now I own a business. I'm an equine bodyworker. Equine, that's horse, so I work on horses, performance horses, I just do massage type therapy to help them recover and perform better.

Marybeth: It's the coolest thing.

Marcia: How do you get into that?

Marybeth: And I've been saying eh-quin, it's eeh-quine, damnit!

Marcia: Eeh-quine?

Chloe: You can say eeh-quine or eh-quine, you'll hear it.

[laughter]

Marybeth: Holy damn.

Marcia: How'd you get into that?

Chloe: I was, I was that horse girl. Yeah, in elementary school, middle school, so I always loved horses. I used to ride competitively and own my own horses. I don't ride anymore, but I still enjoy being around them. So um, basically I wanted to have a career with horses that didn't involve riding them so I got kind of creative. Um, it is a thing though. Down south, there's plenty of people that do what I do, the equine massage. It is relatively new in Iowa though because Iowa's always behind with things.

Marcia: Way to go Iowa.

Marybeth: Hey, well California doesn't have any equine massagers that I know of so... You're well advanced in that!

Marcia: Yeah that's interesting. Marybeth, what are you up to, how do you make your money, what's going on on your end?

Marybeth: I wouldn't call it money, I work for a non-profit. But I currently manage performing arts venues on the UC Berkeley campus, so um, a lot of what that entails is overseeing the Front of House department at the Greek Theatre, at Zellerbach Hall, so that ranges from super heavy, super deep rock concerts... We just had Lana Del Rey to Yo-Yo Ma, who's a single cellist, or Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, you know, so it's pretty cool. Last week, sorry just a few days ago we had Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Gindburg, yeah, in the flesh. It was pretty amazing.

But um, in the disabled community, and it's really interesting hearing Marcia and Chloe's sides because I, you know as a child, you start to define yourself and put yourself in boxes and compare yourself to others, try to figure out who it is you are and I never had that inspiration, I never looked for that athlete or celebrity that I can identify with, and since then I've never needed that so it's been awesome. But I did always ask my stepdad like, "Hey, do I consider as disabled? Because I don't get a handicap placard..." Uh, I never like...

Marcia: Yeah, like what's the line you have to cross?

Marybeth: Yeah, I knew that I wore prosthetics as a kid so I got some sort of support, but the way that a lot of adults identify as disabled is, 'Do you get social security benefits? Do you have a placard? Do you..' What does it mean to you to be disabled?

And running these performance venues, I get this all the time, because we accommodate for people with disabilities all of the time. But I'm sorry pregnant woman, you do not consider as disabled. A lot of the times we do have to you know, draw the line, and what that means. But also can we accommodate you with your mobility issues, with things like that.

But with this community, I've kind of like reclaimed this word for myself. It's the only way that I can verbally describe myself right now to others. Um, and although it's not an invisible disability, while I'm out in public, or while I'm in a professional setting I don't always show my hand. Because I don't know, is it professional, or is it a conversation that I want to have in the midst of a busy day?

Chloe: Wow

Marybeth: So some people just don't understand it. Like, what do you mean you're disabled? You're able to walk around totally fine.

Marcia: You have a job, you're still making money.

Marybeth: Yeah, so I've been struggling with it just as much as everybody else, you know, it's a constant identity pull. Um, but I love that there are so many different stories to share, and to pull off of because although we're a pretty large community we have such varying, such unique stories that no one can, you know, can fully identify with.

Marcia: Yeah, there's levels. There's levels to everything. I mean I'm sure you guys have been shaped growing up by what you have going on. But on the other hand for me, this is still pretty brand new, I didn't have these issues in childhood, it's not something I had to grow up with. I just grew up as a clumsy kid who played sports but overall I was okay. Until about 5 years ago, I was like oh shit what's going on? So I didn't even have to deal with that even idea of identity and who am I what am I doing until you know, 25.

Marybeth: Yeah, and so did your parents start piecing things together? Like oh yeah, a lot of that happened while you were growing up.

Marcia: Um, no not really. I'm very hypermobile. I'd always, when I did sprain my ankle, I'd always like dislocate things and you know they were just like, "Clumsy her, you know her, doo do doo do." And then that was pretty much it. I would have random little chest pain scares, and just little weird things, and it would just be like 'ah well, doctor said you're fine so, it's whatever. Doo do do.' And that's kind of pretty much, I actually would have to sit here and think about all of those little things that would happen. Like that's how insignificant they were to me. But now I'm like oh I guess something was creeping.

Marybeth: Yeah and it's so interesting too because like a lot of these things will go unnoticed but we have to also realize that as women, we are told to fight, and move on, and not feel a thing. Like, they say that women have way less heart attacks or way less strokes because they just continued pushing through work and acting like it's okay. Because we go through periods every month, you know, why not go through another heart issue and deal with it. We have shit to do, we have kids to raise, I don't have kids but you know, we're taught to fight.

Marcia: Yeah, you just keep on going and you don't ever think of yourself or take care of yourself or anything like that. So that definitely plays into it. It wasn't a concern or a problem and even when I first started having issues, you know, going to doctors it's like 'so uh, you look okay.' You know I'd tell a doctor, "You know, my memory's kind of shitty lately, like I feel kinda, I was like really anxious, I've got some weird shit going on." And you know, they would look me straight in the face and say, 'It's not like you have dementia or anything, you're young.'

Marybeth: You're too young to, oh my god... That is, I hate that...

Marcia: Yeah, I'm sorry I don't look a certain way, and like do you want me to not, do you want me to look sicker? I don't understand. What was that like for you guys growing up? Did people tell you how you should feel or act?

Chloe: Um, I'm trying to think of different experiences. I know my parents, I know my dad especially was always like, 'cause I always wanted to hide my hand under let's say, a sweatshirt or something I was carrying and he'd pull me aside and say "Don't you ever do that." Which was, and he had good intentions but it also kind of scared the shit out of me. I was like, I still left feeling conflicted after that um, it was just hard. What about you, Marybeth?

Marybeth: Yeah well, we go through so many phases in life like, I was taught at a young age to love it, and I was considered the lucky one, I always chose lottery numbers because, just like Finding Nemo, called it a lucky fin or something--they actually called my hand Monkey-Monkey--so it had some sort of a cool identity when I was a kid, its own little personality, my little hand. But as I started getting older, and you know started wanting to impress the guys or other classmates, I wanted to look and feel like everyone else, so I started hiding it in middle school, high school, and it kinda didn't stop from there. It's a little disheartening, like we have this online identity, and we have all of this pride when we're in our sport, but when it comes to everywhere else in social settings I just can't do it. Um. You know like [pause], I don't know, it's a little weird.

Chloe: I get it.

Marcia: No, I get it, I get it. 'Cause I mean, I have a heat intolerance and I would have no trouble posting about a Strongman competition and mentioning that I felt like shit, like I'd have no trouble, you know. But in person when I'm like dying somewhere and I'm at work and somebody's like trying to talk to me, I'm not gonna be like, "Listen man, I need to go sit down and take a nap for an hour, I don't feel great, this is what's going on, I'm not gonna say that." I'm just gonna be like, "Okay, I gotta go..."

Marybeth: Yeah

Marcia: I'm not gonna go there

Marybeth: It's also... A lot of the times it's conversations you don't feel like having and that's totally okay.

Marcia: Yeah, because you know it's not gonna just end there. It's not gonna just be like, "Oh Marybeth has her arm out, that's cool." Like no, it's gonna be, "Oh my god, what happened to you, do you wear an arm? Was there a surgery? Did you get in a motorcycle accident?" Like, you know it's not gonna be simple.

Chloe: Right. Yeah, those reactions like when people, 'cause I've had people be like, "Oh my god!" Like, when they see me, that's actually like I laugh about it now, but it's actually really hurtful when people respond to me like my... This is how I look and when you respond to my image that way, it's like uh, that shit hurts.

Marybeth: Yeah, and it's just funny that people don't understand when we say, when we use, the word ableism because that shit exists in real life and constantly it's not addressed, like there are so many aggressors or so many offensive words and conversations that are had without taking us into account. Like it's so easy to understand what racism is, and sexism, and while all of those are important in our intersectionality, it's just so much harder for us to describe with other people... Unless they had you know, a cousin or a friend who is autistic, or a cousin or a friend who's paralyzed, they will not understand, and even then we're just they're token disabled friend. Fuck that! Understand who I am as a person, we're all so different.

Marcia: Yeah, it's absolutely so true and it's funny because you mention how people respond to your appearance, Chloe, it made me think of um... So besides my clinic where I work with athletes, I also work at a medical daycare and these kids are like totally along the spectrum. Some of them you can't anything's wrong with them, some of them have like trach's, g-tubes, like all of that. And there's this one little boy who's like 5, he has SMA so his muscles are like atrophy, he's in a chair, he wheels around, he's very weak, but mentally he's 100%. And then we have another girl, I'm gonna murder the name, but basically you're born with like contractures and like your joints are the wrong way so you have like a club foot, and like her wrists are turned the wrong way, you know her shoulders are stuck in, it's like arthrogryposis, something like that. And this is a kid in a wheelchair, and he looks at her and he's like, "Why does she look like that?"

Marybeth: Oh my god

Marcia: So if he doesn't get it, how is anybody gonna get it? And I had to explain to him, "She was born like that and sometimes people look different than you." And the look of absolute shock in his eyes, and he's like, "What?!"

Marybeth: Yeah, it's neurogenic arthrogryposis

Marcia: Yeah it's hard to say. Yeah so if even he can't understand, how is the regular, normal person gonna understand?

Marybeth: Yeah, totally, and I hear it actually all the time that the most ableist comments and the most offensive things we hear are from other disabled folks. Because they see themselves as this way, and they define themselves as disabled. Like I've seen fights in the parking lot in the handicap section people looking at each other or waiting to see if that person is disabled enough to park there, it's really ridiculous. "Is that person disabled enough?" is asked so often. Even in my venue, "Oh, why are you sitting that person down in a normal chair? Whereas you know, my back hurts when I sit on the cement." It happens way too often where we're comparing each other to others.

Marcia: And there's people who are not wheelchair users 100% of the time, that's a thing, you know. There are people that sometimes they use a wheelchair, sometimes they use crutches, sometimes they're okay, that's real life. If you are the person that's always walking or always in a chair, you just can't conceptualize that other people outside of me exist. I mean, that's kind of like the main idea. Other people that aren't like you exist. That's it. If you get that, that's it.

Marybeth: [laughter] Alright, end of our podcast, no more

Marcia: That's pretty much the main idea. [laughter] Gosh. Anyways...

Marybeth: Yeah and jumping off of what Chloe said, and people's reactions toward you and how hurtful it is, especially as a kid. Like, I was so juiced to be a part of the Girl Scouts um for less than an hour. [laughter] Because sometimes there're these activities that, and they do it still in high school and college, where they stand you around in a circle and you're forced to hold each other's hand. And as a kid, I'm like "Oh yeah, everybody holds my hand, you know my family, they hold my hand very often," but when outsiders or other children or other individuals see it for the first time or touch it for the first time they yell.

Marcia: Oh my gosh, no.

Marybeth: So that happened, and it happened quite a few times in my life where they look at it and they don't want to hold my hand and they scream, and actually this one caused a girl to cry. And I was like, "Oh no, it's okay." I have to be the one telling her it's okay, you know, whereas as a kid it fucked up my self-esteem five times more than it's already. So going back, unfortunately, luckily Girl Scouts was not something that I wanted to go into once I found out that all I wanted to do was sell cookies. I wanted to learn how to tie a knot! I want to be outdoors! Yeah, luckily for me, it just wasn't my route but for others like how many times are our disabled folks just discouraged to join something because they were looked at a certain way or even told that they couldn't do this. Like, we're gonna talk about other federations and other sports in future podcasts but we're constantly told that we can't do this because of our disability. And it's so frustrating! That's why this is important, for those able-bodied coaches, able-bodied federations, other communities that just don't understand and write the rules in an able-bodied mind.

Marcia: Yeah. And the people that do exist, that are making modifications, and that are being adaptive and whatever, like take everyone with you. You know? Like take everyone with you, we have to, like nobody's gonna do this for us. We have to bring each other up, and I don't think there should be any lines

or boundaries, like we just bring everybody up. If I'm coming up, if the Spoonie's coming up, you're coming up too. That's like, that's it.

Chloe: Yes

Marybeth: Just like when you know, we're in a conference meeting and nobody hears the woman or nobody hears the woman of color and the white male says the exact same thing, they're listening to him so... In these times, the people who are making the change are able-bodied folks who are listening to the disabled community.

Marcia: Yeah, that's true too. That's pretty true.

Marybeth: So on that note, thank you all for listening.

Marcia: Yes, welcome to the podcast

Chloe: We're coming

Marcia: And uh, stick around, disabled girls out.

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