

This is a transcription of the Yellow Jack Podcast, Episode 3.

<https://podcasthouse.ca/2020/03/25/what-choice-have-i-got/>

ISBN: 978-1-926758-25-1

Release date: March 25, 2020.

Host:
Robert Ouimet

Guests:
Amy Amantea

COPYRIGHT NOTICE:

This transcript is © Bigsnit Media Consulting Inc.
No reproduction in whole or in part is allowed without the written consent of Bigsnit Media Consulting Inc.

Contact info@bigsnit.com

[Music]

[voice over]

Hi, I'm Robert Ouimet.

And this is Episode 3 of the Yellow Jack podcast.

On this podcast, I'm talking to people who are in self-isolation because of the COVID-19 pandemic. They're shutting themselves away for 14 days just to ensure that they are clear of the virus. Basically, they're housebound, quietly doing their thing to control the spread of the virus.

As you can imagine, it's a bit of a challenge. You've got to get supplies. You have to avoid contact. Basically, you're removing yourself from the rest of the world. But if you have any kind of disability, self-isolation presents a whole new range of challenges.

To find out just exactly what that means. I called up Amy Amantea. She's an actor and artist based in Vancouver. She's also an accessibility consultant and advocate for the disability community. And currently she is in self-isolation at her home in North Vancouver.

[music ends]

[00:01:04] [phone ringing – Robert humming while he waits for the phone to pick up]

[Amy] Hello, Amy speaking.

[Robert] Hi, Amy, it's Robert.

[Amu] Good morning, Robert. How are you?

[Robert] I'm good. More importantly, How are you?

[Amy] I'm hanging in there. You know, what choice have I got?

[00:01:14 Robert] Exactly. How did you end up in self-isolation? What was your circumstance?

[00:01:19 Amy] I think a part of it was that the world around me was being canceled left, right and center, right. Which of course, meant that I had no options to work outside of the home. So that in and of itself sort of forces you to reexamine your life and go, well, I guess maybe I should stay at home. And the other thing was, is that because I live with Type 1 diabetes and I have for 30, 32 years, I have a compromised immune system. And so, you know, medical people in my life were saying, yeah, you know, I think I think you should strongly consider this. And that was you know, I've been in self-isolation for 10 days now. So that was really before they were pushing it really hard. So I sort of decided that I would just I would just do it. You know, the time is right. I'll just do it.

[00:02:08 Robert] So is your plan to stay self isolated until things clear up or how's that gonna work for you?

[00:02:13 Amy] Well, I think after the next four days, which would be my my two week period, I would reexamine what's happening. Now, I do know that in my life, I do a lot of things in the disability community, in the arts community. All of that is completely shut down.

And so, you know, I'm not going to be anytime soon going to rehearsals outside of, you know, the four walls of my home. So I will likely be staying inside just like by consequence alone, you know? The other thing I do is I review movies for the blind since I'm also legally blind. So there's no movie theaters that are open for me to go do that kind of stuff. So I think sort of by, you know, by inherent circumstance, I'll end up being isolated or quarantined or whatever, whatever word we're using these days until things start to come back to some sense of normality.

You know, I have great family supports that are making sure that I've got the supplies and the groceries that I need. And so I don't have a need to even leave the home for anything unless something emergent were to happen.

[00:03:20 Robert] Right. And you're kind of in an extraordinary situation in that you are, as you mentioned, you are blind. So when you are actually not confined to your space, you're out in the world. You need to be able to touch things and feel things to see what's going on.

[00:03:34 Amy] It's part of my world is to experience it with my hands. And the other thing, too, is it's very difficult for me to know what proximity I am and to other people.

And, you know, a lot of times I will bump into somebody or I just won't be able to maintain a distance that, you know, they're comfortable with. Yeah, sure. So, yeah. So you're right. So part of it is, is just about the fact that I touch more things than than most people touch. And that also comes with a higher a higher risk factor.

[00:04:04 Robert] Have you thought or have you talked to other people in the community who have challenges like you do, who are faced with this new world order we're living in? And what kind of situations does that present for them?

[00:04:18 Amy] Yeah, I mean, I'm pretty connected with with the blind community, with the disability community. And so there's been lots of phone calls back and forth, check ins making sure people are doing okay. We are also utilizing the good old zoom and the Skype and online platforms that are available to us. The blind community is used to doing that anyways, because actually in our community there is a certain level of social isolation already. Then you add a pandemic on top of that and it's compounded exponentially. And so we're already in a space where we end up checking in on people in our community. And so this is just sort of heightened, I guess heightened the need to make sure that seniors with sight loss are getting what they need and other people in the blind community are either connecting through these other online platforms. I mean, in my own life, a lot of what I was doing out in the world was just the transition to my computer. So while I'm at home, in my walls of my home, I am still rather chained to my desk and my computer because certain things have stopped. But other things have gone full force. And then, of course, all the extra curricular check-ins stuff has added to my plate of things to do just because it's the right thing to do. But it is like having a full time job on top of a full time job, because now we're we're in a new world where we have to make sure that people are

doing the best that they can. And if they're not, how, how how do I help them from my four walls?

[00:05:46 Robert] Right. You're already in a world where you have to go to extraordinary circumstances or you have to take extraordinary measures in order just to, you know, walk through life. And now you've got this on top of it. That's another layer of complexity.

[00:05:58 Amy] Yeah. It's certainly. Additional challenges to a person's plate and everybody's circumstance is different. I know some of my friends with who are wheelchair users, for example, one of them said to me the other day, well, now my wheelchair is not working. And so I can't even get somebody to come into my house to fix my wheelchair. And this person uses a wheelchair in their home. And so, you know that the able bodied world looks at that and goes, what does it matter? You're in your home anyways? You don't need you don't need to go anywhere. What do you need the wheelchair for?

[00:06:32] But the person who uses a wheelchair, that's an extension of their body. And so if you need that to make sure you can move from your bed to your kitchen to your bathroom, then you are essentially a prisoner in your own home because you don't have the things that you need. That's not something I can help her with personally. And that's that. So that weighs on my mind, knowing that this individual is going through something that I I can't help her with. And there are no companies that are happy to walk into somebody's home and do the repairs because of the social distancing stuff. So it's you know, everybody's got a different level of challenge that they're trying to meet in these new extraordinary circumstances. And when I hear some of them, I feel quite I feel quite privileged to know that I'm in a safe place. And I know that I have the things that I need. And I know that, you know, a family member with a car is is not far away. Should I need something dropped off or picked up or whatever. So I'm not to have pardon the pun, I'm not blind to that.

[00:07:33 Robert] Right. I know you're also on the board at Reelwheels, and you're in the middle of a production, Realwheels is a theater company. And you were in the middle of a production which you now had to sort of change. How did that work?

[00:07:43 Amy] Yeah, I mean, Realwheels has been a theater company is very close to my heart. And so I'm the vice president's on their board and they specialize in disability. Arts is about engaging their audiences, sharing the lived experience of disability. And they do that in a variety of ways. But in this particular circumstance, we are are putting together a community project, and that is for people with disabilities who identify as being artists or art lovers who want to participate in the devising of a show from scratch. So the last show we did was three years ago with Comedy on Wheels, and it was a fantastic, fantastic sold out. Three night show was great. So, of course, everybody is geared up in anticipation for this year's show because it's been three years since, you know, we've challenged ourselves to do something. This year's theme was music. So we gathered musicians with disabilities and poets and artists and people writing prose and just a whole group of really exciting, talented people. And, you know, it was I guess we started kind of need. Yeah. Mid-February, I would say. We were meeting a G.F. Strong, very accessible space for all of us. And then, of course, G.F. Strong closed their doors. And of course, by proxy, the rest of us didn't have a rehearsal space. And of course, it's the right thing to do. So we're not saying oh darn, we don't have a rehearsal space. But the challenge was how do we meet as a community and still continue to work on creating this piece.

[00:09:17 Robert] So it's not just being able to connect everybody on the phone or through Zoom or they can talk. You're actually in the creative mode. You're you're brainstorming your, you know, ad libbing, you're improvising. You're trying stuff right together. And typically you do that together into a room.

[00:09:32 Amy] Yeah, that's right. This is a it's a very intimate process because you're sharing stories that are very personal. And of course, not every story gets used in production and sometimes they get changed or manipulated and somebody likes the idea and they take it on. But it's a very, very intimate, very personal, very.

[00:09:51] I don't wanna use the word private, because at the end of the day, you know, we share these stories from sort of an anonymous or community perspective...

[Robert] But there's some sensitivity there as you're exploring.

[Amy] Yeah. Yeah. There's a certain there's a certain level of gravitas that's needed and trust that's needed with the group and that usually requires people to be in person. So we did do several in-person rehearsals and then we did one at rehearsal right before we decided to move to the online platform, which was our social distancing rehearsal, which was interesting because instead of sitting in our traditional circle where we're almost hip to hip with each other, we were, you know, two, two meters apart from each other in this huge circle around the room. And it it didn't really work either, because you just you just didn't feel connected with the group. And so we have turned to to an online platform with the help of the Centre for Digital Media, which turns out that they were working on a project anyways with this production before we even knew that cozied was a thing.

[00:10:54 Robert] So so this is this is kind of a weird little connection because on the podcast episode before this one. Richard Smith, who runs that center, was the guest. And he's in self-isolation on Bowen Island,

[Amy] six degrees of separation. Isn't that interesting?

[00:11:07 Robert] Anyway, so I interrupted you. Why did they put together for you?

[00:11:12 Amy] So the students of the CDM were were working with us from day one in order to see about creating an online platform so that people with disabilities, for example, who were not able to leave their homes could participate in, you know, in the creation process for creating content. Or let's say you live in Prince George and you want to participate in disability theatre, and that's not available in your community. So we had already thought about this being a really exciting opportunity to connect people with disabilities who don't get out or who can't get out or who are in different, you know, areas of proximity. And so we had had certain people in the rehearsal space where many of us were were in person and then a few people were in remotely experimenting this platform. And then, of course, the secondary part of the platform was archiving all of the stuff that we were talking about, all the written pieces, you know, taping stuff, so that if, for example, I missed a Saturday rehearsal, I could go back. Right. And I could spend time on the platform and go through what had happened at the day so that I didn't miss anything. And so we already had this, you know, in place to an extent where it was working fairly well. And then we had to transition. The biggest part of it was how do we do this now with a large group of people instead of a small group of people. And that just really takes some trial and error. We had rehearsal Wednesday night and Saturday afternoon and you just make it work. We had an open call. We were all muted. And what is happening were little

groups of people were meeting, but we were all able to listen in on the call and then, you know, the schedule would change, "Oh it's Amy's turn at 3:15 to talk with the director". OK, I get a half hour block to talk about my pieces with the director. And then but we all we all maintained on the call muting ourselves so that we could understand what was happening in the in the virtual space. Right. And knowing what was happening in the virtual space. But at the same time, because I'm sure you can understand, you know, when you've got 20 people on a call, there is no time and no real tolerance for. Oh, I have a suggestion. Oh, no, no. It's my turn. I have a suggestion. Oh, no, it's me over here. I have a suggestion.

[00:13:19 Robert] Yeah, it's really difficult when you got that many people in that even in a regular space, because you can sort of police it a bit more when you're there in person. You know, there's eye contact and people can there's body language that you go, oh, maybe I should shut up now because there's twelve people acting. As you say, it's very difficult in the online when you're all on the on the screen. There's like twenty little thumbnail pictures of people. It's really tricky.

[00:13:39 Amy] That's right. And so we're just we're just doing the trial and error thing to figure out how this works. But so far it's been really, really creative. We've we've come together with a lot of great content. So we're not seeing it as a detriment. We're seeing it as you know, there are few kinks that we need to work out as we move forward. And we're gonna continue with this process.

Now, at the end of the day, our show dates were May 28, 29, 30, and we have no idea whether our venue, which is the Roundhouse, will be open or not. Right. So we're gonna continue with the process one, because the community wants it. It's also part of community engagement because most of these people are also isolated. And so it's a thing to do. Yeah. And there's value in that, too.

[00:14:23 Robert] Well, I also think that as we're sort of grinding to a halt in a variety of ways because of the circumstance, I think it's really important for people to remember that, you know, we will move on and we will continue to do stuff. We just need to figure out how to do it in this new environment. So that's right. So in a way, this was like this is quite serendipitous that you were playing with this technology before that you actually had to.

[00:14:44] Yeah, the stars did align for us, it is quite interesting when you think about the progression of how how this whole covered thing had come about, because, of course, to engage somebody like the Centre for Digital Media. This goes back, you know, six, eight months, right. Where you have to apply for grants and have initial conversations. And how is this going to work? And in consultation with people disabilities on making the platform accessible. And so there's all these pieces that had to go into place before you could even bring a tripod with an iPad on it on day one to have somebody remote in to the session. So, you know that obviously this was all in place before before we even knew there was any kind of virus on the horizon.

[00:15:24 Robert] I mean, it's kind of great in a way that you're at the forefront of experimenting with figuring out how to manage this. Right. Your you know, I know it's frustrating and probably really scary in some ways, but in a way, it's also wow, you're pushing the boundaries now and trying to figure out how do we manage in this new environment.

[00:15:42 Amy] Yeah, it's I think it's in some ways it's going to end up being a bit of a legacy for Realwheels theatre, this because the timing is so apropos. But it's something that's been thought about from the community perspective, from the company's perspective, from their board's perspective, in terms of how we engage the community of people with disabilities. And is it unfair to leave people with disabilities who cannot get out of their homes, for whatever reason, out of the arts and how we make that inclusive for everybody, even if his show doesn't culminate in the end of that process in itself, has has great value.

[00:16:21 Robert] I agree. And I think, though, too, that, you know, this idea of it culminating in a presentation on stage. You know, I think over the next few months we're going to be redefining what on-stage actually is.

[00:16:30 Amy] I already know some theatre companies who were who were livestreaming some of their some of their content. And it's also something that the disability community has been thinking about, because, again, if you're one of those people who who doesn't or can't get out of their homes, you're not going to any stage productions because they're not accessible to you. And, you know, the I guess the the barriers to entry for that are certainly there's a cost involved in in setting up the equipment in a space that's appropriate to livestream a live performance. But then, you know, how do you keep people from recording that, or do you need to? And it's not you know, most people who attended theater live know that the experience is not the same. So it doesn't, you know, will it translate through that medium? And I think all of those questions are answerable and navigable. And the person who is on the other end of the screen who might be participating in watching a live streamed live stage production. We'll just have to understand those pieces that, yes, you can't record.

[00:17:36] And yes, you may not be getting the same experience that somebody in the seat would, but you're able to, you know, watch your best friend on stage. Or however that work.

[00:17:45 Robert] Yeah, I think maybe we're talking about - is there going to be a development of a new art form?

[Amy] Very possible.

[Robert] Because, you know, I don't know. Is it possible that that in the near future, the foreseeable future, we're not all going to be getting in a theater together? I mean, theaters are built to sit, you know, side by side. I'm touching the person next to me, every time I go to a theater or I go to a show or I go to a concert or anywhere, I go out, I'm even in restaurants. Right. So if the concept of that is off the table for however long, I'm pretty sure some, you know, ingenious, smart artists and technologists and and creators will come up with some alternatives to that so that we can still somehow collectively share an experience.

[00:18:29 Amy] Yeah, well, it's a phrase where there's a will, there's a way people who are artists to their core are going to start to get bored truly because there aren't any things really happening and they're going to turn their attention to how I can how I can make an online artists platform. What does that look like? How do we do that? And that will fill the gap. And then it will it will spill over the gap because people will discover that this is kind of cool. And how do we develop this further? And I think you're right. I think we're going to be

looking at a whole new genre, a whole new aesthetic for arts, which is really quite exciting when you think about it.

[00:19:08 Robert] Yeah. I mean, if you you know, once you get past that, well, my God, you know, it's the end of the world. Yeah. But when you start to get past that fear and and that's a natural fear, I'm afraid of it every day because I hear new stuff every day. But then, you know, I think we have to also remember that these are things that are being put in front of us and we need to figure out a way to work through them and work around them and figure out how we're going to now operate in this new world. And, you know, this is across every sector. It's not - we're talking about the arts - but if you go to downtown Vancouver, there's nobody in the offices - those are all regular business people who now suddenly have found themselves in a world where they can't meet with their clients, they can't meet with each other. But how are they going to operate? They need to figure this out as well.

[00:19:47 my] You know, they keep saying we're all in this together. And I keep I keep trying to drink that Kool-Aid as opposed to the other Kool-Aid that's being served.

[00:19:55 Robert] Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Amy, thank you so much. And good luck with your isolation.

[Amy] And thanks, Robert.

[Robert] You know, as you count down the days, you can sort of think about, you know, well, maybe, you know, in fifteen in five or seven or eight days, I'll be in to do X and we'll see what that X turns out to be in five or seven days.

[00:20:12 Amy] Yeah. I mean, who knows how much longer this could possibly move forward in our lives. I don't think any of us really know what the outcome is going to be and how long it's going to take. But you know, I can expect from the disability perspective, one of the things that I could that I would share just as food for thought for people who are also in this environment is that, you know, I've been talking to a lot of people with disabilities, a lot of people in the blind community, and remembering that these people are typically transit users, so don't have access to vehicles and rely on things like grocery deliveries. And when they go online to get their groceries and it's a four or five week wait for a delivery spot, because there are people who are are using those spots who are able bodied in good health. Have vehicles. And so for them to go and pick up groceries is not a big deal. You do have to make space for other people that that can't do that. And the hoarding situation has gotten so bad. You know, when people who live on disability cheques get their cheque at the end of the month, by the time they get their cheque, everything is gone. And so we do a disservice to our most vulnerable people by getting caught up in the whole whole paranoia of everything. So take a breath. You know, only get what you need to get. We need to respect that there are there are people and 25 percent of Canadians identify with disability so that, you know, there's a whole quarter of our population of people who may not be able to get out. I mean, you know, people, disabilities, they're talking about the fact that, Save-on-Foods is opened an hour earlier just for seniors and people with disabilities. And you're like, well, great, I'm the quadriplegic who has no health care worker to come in and get me dressed in the morning. And if I did, they wouldn't be coming in at 4:00 in the morning so I could get out for eight hours.

[Robert] Right. Right.

[Amy] So, you know, that person needs to be able to have their groceries delivered to their door. So allow them space to do that. And that's, you know, those those of us that have privilege to be able to do the opposite. You know, take advantage of that privilege and, you know, to help your neighbors, that kind of thing. So that's how we get through this together, Robert. That's my part, my parting words.

[00:22:22 Robert] It's a really, really good point is I think a lot of people just don't think about that at all.

[00:22:26 Amy] I don't think I would have thought about it until it was on my radar either now.

[00:22:30] Thank you so much, Amy.

[Amy] Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity. Bye.
[closing music]

[00:22:35 Voice over] Amy Amantea who has another four days of self-isolation to go from her home in North Vancouver.

[music up and then down for]

Head over to the Web site. There you'll find some show notes. A full transcript of this podcast and other resources that you might find helpful. And if you or someone you know is in self-isolation and you'd like to share your story, you'll find a form there to get in touch with me.

That's on the Web site at www.podcasthouse.ca/YellowJack.

I'm Robert Ouimet. Thanks for listening.