

Really Specific Stories: Andrew Leland

Duration: 33:44

SPEAKERS

Martin Feld, Andrew Leland

Martin Feld 00:21

Thank you so much for joining *Really Specific Stories*, Andrew; it's a pleasure to have you on the podcast.

Andrew Leland 00:26

It's great to be here, thanks!

Martin Feld 00:28

Now, the first question that I have for you, as is the case with every guest, is: how did you first get into podcasts?

Andrew Leland 00:36

Mmm... well, that's interesting. Let me think back, back, back to the beginning of podcasting. I think I was definitely an Internet radio listener before I was a podcast listener, is that right? I mean, I was, I was really into college radio...

Martin Feld 00:57

Mmm...

Andrew Leland 00:57

...and I had a radio show in college. And I remember, it was kind of a big deal—this would have been around 2001 or so—it was a big deal when somebody built a live stream for that radio station. You know, and at the time, I remember it feeling a little bit like, 'Why is this necessary?' You know, I mean, I got that you would be able to listen to it all over the world, but I still was just, I was just excited about broadcasting to the community, you know? But then I think shortly around that time, I did start to discover the power of Internet radio, and, and I really loved streaming. And I still to this day, you know, I'm a huge podcast listener, but I still listen to a lot of streaming Internet radio, you know, and I love the liveness of it, and the kind of randomness of it, um, you know, the unpredictability of it.

Andrew Leland 01:41

But... so I'm trying to think of like when podcasting really became a part of my life. you know, and I was, when I started *The Organist*—uh, which is the podcast I produced for KCRW in Los Angeles—in the beginning, it started as a podcast and ended as a podcast, I did it for about 10 years between... oh man, I don't know, it ended around 2019 or '18 and I did it for about eight years. And that whole time at the beginning, we were like, 'Oh, well, we'll start with a podcast but then eventually it'll be a radio show, you know? And like, the best thing that could happen to us would be if KCRW liked it enough to then put us on the air. And then by the end, like, podcasting had sort of hit its inflection point and it was like, 'Why would we want to be on the air?' like, 'Podcasting is the best place for it!'

Andrew Leland 02:26

Um, this is all a very roundabout way of trying to get back to the beginning of podcasting for me, though. I mean, you know, I remember, like, buying a CD of *This American Life*, like, 'Best of' CD that they released. When I was in... oh, I can't remember, I was either in high school or maybe, like, early in college, you know? And it hadn't occurred to me or I don't even know if you could back then (that would have been like around '99 or 2000), like, probably not, right? They weren't releasing it as a podcast back then. So that's all to say that, like, I was definitely in the wheelhouse of like, wanting on-demand, uh, narrative audio in that way, but becoming a consumer, a regular consumer, you know, it probably, it, there's no standout moment for me, really; it was just sort of this like, messy digital ecosystem that I lived in, where I had, like, my old *This American Life* CD and I had my, you know, streaming Internet, and I had like, MP3s that I would download and save on my computer, you know? And I think at a certain point, I just, like, was a relatively late adopter to the iPhone and realised that it was possibly convenient to do things that way, and then like kind of imperceptibly over time that just got added in to my, my consumption.

Martin Feld 03:38

Wow, that's amazing and I love the CDs came up. I don't think that's come up before. Brilliant!

Andrew Leland 03:45

You don't have any elderly guests, such as myself, who can remember the... no, I'm just kidding. I'm sure you do!

Martin Feld 03:51

No, there's a broad spread! Lots of different...

Andrew Leland 03:53

Mm-hmmm.

Martin Feld 03:53

...a lot of different avenues to and through audio in your early experience leading up to today, so maybe a broader question, what is it about audio for you? What do you get out of interacting with audio, whether you're listening or speaking?

Andrew Leland 03:53

Yeah...

Martin Feld 03:53

...histories and experience. It's fantastic, and what I love about that, you mentioned liveness, you mentioned producing and consumption, you mentioned college radio, there's...

Andrew Leland 04:22

I think, you know, I've always been a reader and I've always loved reading books, but I've also always been interested in radio. And, you know, I remember, I had access to a video camera when I was little and I found—I don't know where it is now—but I found this recording that I made, where I may have even left the lens cap on, you know? And I was just interested in making a little radio show with it. And I was like, 'I guess you could film stuff with this', but like, I just I like the audio-recording part of it. And you know, I think there's something performative about it that appeals to me, but performative not in the visual sense, you know, I like the kind of like verbal performance of it.

Andrew Leland 05:00

And, you know, I come from a family of playwrights. And so, I think certainly there's an aspect of that, where it felt like in line with that kind of like verbal, verbal, dialogic art that I was, you know, I wouldn't say it was steeped in it, because it's not like we were sitting around talking about, Ibsen, or anything like that. But you know, certainly it was just like, a natural fact of like what people in my family did, like my mom and my grandfather and my aunt. And then my dad was, was, was (and still is) very much interested in digital media and was sort of like an early adopter in various digital media innovations, you know, going back to the 70s.

Andrew Leland 05:37

And so, I think that those two interests combined for me, in like, on the one hand, I had this sort of literary interest in audio as like a verbal art form that that was like part and parcel of my interest in literature. And then on the other hand, I had this, like, kind of technical, media-oriented interest that grew out of a lot of my dad's interests were, you know, he was like an early desktop, desktop publishing guy, and like, early cable TV producer, and he also produced, like, radical, underground alternative TV and radio in the '70s, in that, in that movement in the US. So I think, you know, going back to as long as I can remember, my interest in radio kind of connected with all of those parts of my lineage.

Martin Feld 06:19

It sounds like you have a very busy and creative family, at least in uh...

Andrew Leland 06:19

Yeah!

Martin Feld 06:26

...your childhood. And I'm interested in what you just said there about having a family of playwrights, but also this kind of intersection with technology—the fact that you left the lens cap on is super-fascinating.

Andrew Leland 06:39

Yeah...

Martin Feld 06:39

What are some of your earliest personal memories, building on what you just said about the camera just then, with digital technology and writing?

Andrew Leland 06:50

I mean, another memory (fast forwarding a little bit from that), you know, I was probably like, six or seven, maybe, when I was playing with that video camera with the lens cap on; you know, I think the next milestone that I can remember was I bought a four-track tape recorder in high school, or I say I bought it, you know, I think it was like, I agitated for a grant from the 'parental philanthropic fund'. (In other words, I got it as a gift.) Which, that probably would have been like 1996, or thereabouts, maybe '97. And it had a tape (you recorded on tape) but it was like, I think at the time, I remember like the groovy thing about it was you could bounce tracks. So, in other words, you could, like... it was a four-track, but you could bounce all four tracks that you would recorded onto one track and then keep going, so it had that, that kind of infinite capability. And I don't know enough about the history of this stuff, but I think like for that to be in like a relatively cheap consumer device like that was exciting.

Andrew Leland 07:52

You know, I would, like, record music with my friends, but I remember the thing that I really enjoyed doing was again, like, like, we, I remember this one thing I made where it was like, there was a musical bed of you know, I think I was playing drums and my friend playing guitar, but then I, like, spent the most time recording this kind of like spoken-word, like, surrealist, comedic monologue over it. And, so, that to me, certainly, like if you know, I'm sure it would be cringeworthy to hear, but not that far of a distance between that—doing that—like, speaking in a kind of like, I hate the word 'artsy', you know, but I could certainly, I think I was being, I had, this

was self consciously artistic, but also, like, funny and silly over music. You know, it's like what I did with *The Organist*.

Andrew Leland 08:38

You know, and then around that time, I was living in Southern California, I started hearing Joe Frank on KCRW, and, and you know, he... was... any, all the things that I've been saying to you thus far about the sort of, like, interest in radio's possibilities as this sort of, like, literary or like, paraliterary, kind of performative, but also really, unlike anything I'd ever heard, and you know, very much in line with the kind of work I wanted to do, and the thing that really drew me to podcasting was: you know, I think storytelling is... not a euphemism, but it doesn't really capture the experience that I had, listening to it. It was, it was confounding, you know, and sometimes confrontational and sometimes, you know very mysterious and hilarious. And, and there certainly was a narrative to it sometimes, but sometimes it really also just felt like, you know, in the same way that I wouldn't call it, you know, I wouldn't call it conversation storytelling, you know. It was, it was, it was, an even though was a monologue, it felt conversational; it felt, it felt really like it was exploiting the medium in a way that I had never experienced before. You know, it was a... it was radio art. And I think that that, that's what really hooked me more than anything else, even if I had already been sort of primed by these other factors in my life to be receptive to that kind of work.

Martin Feld 09:54

I love that you bring up the word 'narrative' because this very podcast, in connecting with different participants in the tech fandom or tech podcasting community, it's about surfacing narratives in people's lives and telling that story here, but that's different from what you're describing in terms of literary or artistic audio in that sense. So, how did you feel starting to express yourself through this medium, taking what you had learnt, you know, from playwright relatives and in the practice of using different technologies at home and in your study? What was it like to be expressing yourself through this audio media?

Andrew Leland 10:33

You mean, when I started *The Organist*?

Martin Feld 10:35

Yes.

Andrew Leland 10:35

Yeah, oh and I guess, you know, I guess I would put college radio in that lineage too, even if it was on a much smaller scale. Yeah, I mean, I think, I think it was interesting trying to square radio and podcasting with my interest in literature, because I think radio has a—or whatever, 'audio', let's call it—has a reputation for being conversational, you know, and it's a deserved, it's a well-deserved reputation, you know? I think the unit of radio is, is the voice and speech and, you know, even,

even in the sort of most artificial sense of like a, you know, somebody reading an audiobook, there's a sense of that performance as being conversational—you're talking to someone in a very physical, literal way. But I was intrigued by the kind of grey area in between the conversation and the narrative, I guess. And, which is to say that, you know, it sounded conversational and it sounded musical; you know, there were all these other elements that were part of it but ultimately, it was doing a lot of the same things that the printed word did, in terms of conveying information in terms of, like, trying to hold the reader or listener's attention. And so I think, for me, when I started, I was always in my mind, if not explicitly, you know, doing work around writers and poets and philosophers; you know, I'm like talking to people like that, and doing stories about them, but also just in the, in the work itself, thinking about the tension between the print and audio and between speech and writing.

Martin Feld 12:06

And when it comes to identity, you've mentioned that you write, you've mentioned that you consume and you produce audio; how do you reconcile, or balance or consider all of these different things that you do? How much of your life would you consider writing versus audio? How do you consider yourself?

Andrew Leland 12:24

Yeah, it's interesting. Ahhh... you know, I think, I think if you'd asked me that question, like, you know, five or 10 years ago, I would have a very different answer, but in the last five or 10 years, I've been doing a lot more of my own work, where I'm, I mean, you know, *The Organist*, I consider my own work, but, but also, it was my role there was very much like, as a host, you know, where I would say, 'Today, we're talking to Martin, you know, he's doing this interesting project', and then often, I would just, like, throw to a producer, or, you know, I would sort of wrap, you know? Whereas with the last five years, I've very much been, it's been my voice driving different stories that I've done. And I've done, like two pretty challenging podcasts, radio pieces and then two pretty challenging magazine stories, as well as writing a book. And I've been struck by how, you know, obviously, when I was producing the radio stories, there's like, a whole different set of considerations, a whole different set of tools. I was like, you know, I had my, my shotgun microphone, and I was switching it out with my omni, you know, depending on the situation, you know? It's, I felt like a filmmaker in some ways, you know? It's very documentary and gathering all this tape and logging the tape, you know? It's like, practically speaking, it's different. But then, at bottom, those distinctions did start to blur for me a little bit. And like, when people ask me, or when I think now, like, what I want to do in terms of pitching something, I'm often thinking about the story before, I'm thinking about, like, is this going to be a radio pitch or a magazine pitch?

Andrew Leland 13:56

And I think at a certain point, I have to, obviously, you have to think about those considerations, but I guess I'm like, a little more agnostic now. And I don't know how to answer this question without sounding just like a bundle of contradictions, but it's all to say that, like, I think that there are obvious and significant differences in the approach that you need to take with these, with these different media, but at the same time, I think for me, there's this like core activity of writing, and of thinking and of reporting that really carries over and informs each other. And, you know, there's different affordances and you know, but I think in the same way that like, writing for a literary journal versus writing for a newspaper, you know, there's different affordances like, I think that those distinctions can sometimes be more significant than like, doing a podcast for a... arts-and-culture magazine versus doing an essay for the arts-and-culture magazine, if that makes sense.

Martin Feld 14:50

No, that definitely makes sense and I'm really intrigued by what you said about how it's merging in your mind or it's really the story that comes first and then it might take the form of the medium that you decide and you consider those affordances down the line.

Andrew Leland 15:03

Mmm...

Martin Feld 15:03

Now, I'm aware of your book and I think that's a very interesting thing to ask you about, if you don't mind...

Andrew Leland 15:08

Sure!

Martin Feld 15:08

Writing a book is quite an undertaking. It's, it's a huge effort. It's, I mean, putting together a podcast with any kind of storytelling elements is a feat in itself, you know, if you consider soundscapes or different participants that might be involved, but can you tell me about the experience of writing a book, putting your writing skills and your history and experience into a project like that? What was the experience like?

Andrew Leland 15:31

I mean, it's interesting, just to stay on this theme of like, comparing it to audio, because I was having a conversation with a friend of mine, who is a very accomplished radio producer, who's done, like, you know, serialised work that has, you know, been the equivalent of, like, a six-hour radio documentary about, you know, a very narrative, you know, hundreds of hours of tape, you know, like, really involved and he was like, 'Oh, I can't imagine writing a book!'

Andrew Leland 15:56

And I was like, 'Really?' because, like, your six-hour radio documentary, like, surely you did, at least as much reporting as I did, and like, you know, processing and writing and rewriting. And he was kind of demure, but, but I really, I wasn't like blowing smoke, like, I think that they are both, you know, I think there's like a cultural weight that gets put on the printed book that is, in some ways, arbitrary, you know? And I think if you think about like a cultural object, like any cultural object, they're all equally capable of putting the same amount of kind of thought and rigour and care and, and writing into, into something like a podcast.

Andrew Leland 16:36

And for me, like, I think I took lessons that I learned from making radio and applied them to the book, in a lot of different ways. I mean, one way was just the reporting process of the kind of like, 'OK, like, I have an idea, like, there's sort of a question that's dogging me', and I'm going to think of a structure to put, you know, that will sort of accommodate that idea to allow me to pursue it, and like, how, and also, what's the structure that will allow me to, to kind of narrate it in a way that will be compelling to a reader, and sort of pull them through so that we're getting the, like, 'thinky' stuff, but, but then there's also the kind of like, scenes and narrative, and, you know, who are the characters and all those questions, you know, and including that, like, 'OK, like, what are the books I have to read and then what do I do with the notes on that book? And it's the same way as going through tape, you know, I interviewed this person, and I'm, if I have an interview with someone that I'm going to try to include in a narrative audio project, usually the process is: I interview them, and then I write down like the parts of the interview immediately afterwards that felt the most exciting to me. And then I go back through and pull those selects, column and then basically, those sit there, you know, and then those aren't always the things that I use, and sometimes later, I might need something else. But like, generally speaking, like, then I write around those selects, right? And it's like, 'OK, these are, like, the four great quotes that in person, just sounds great', and they're saying something that is, you know, either in the service of what I'm trying to write about or uh, surprising, and then that, there's a kind of like structure that builds up around them.

Andrew Leland 18:17

And I didn't write the book like that exactly but certainly, there were, you know, you read a book, and there's like, maybe four sentences from that 300-page book that are like the things that, that are going to be useful to you and how you're using it, or, you know, you interview somebody for an hour or two and they say one thing, and that's the thing, you know? So it's that same process of like metabolising a tremendous amount of information, some of which you're generating through interviews and some of which you're finding and research. And then you have to, for the processing of it is sort of happening at these multiple registers, where you're, like, literally processing it, right? Like, you're like, kind of like, editing a transcript and pulling selects and making notes. but then you're also, like, writing drafts and trying things out and then rewriting drafts and moving things around. And you know, that, those, those, that process felt very familiar to me, even if it was new at the same time.

Martin Feld 19:03

So there was a lot of research evidently, in that book, but how much of yourself do you put into your writing—the book as an example or other articles that you've written?

Andrew Leland 19:11

Ahhh... I mean, there's no rule about that, you know, and that's something that I, that I've been thinking a lot about lately, you know, because um, there's this funny thing that's happened, where, you know, I've had a career in media for... I don't know, since 2003 and it's really only the last sort of 10 years or five years that I've been writing full-time, I guess. And that's coincided with my kind of becoming comfortable identifying as a blind person or as a disabled person. And that reality means that my own experience is relevant, or it can be and the book was the sort of like, you know, supercharged version of that, where it was, you know, it's, it's a memoir, but It's a memoir that that does go pretty deep into history and into, you know, reported lands and, uh, you know, talking to lots of other people who have nothing to do with me, besides, you know, something about their experience might offer me some guidance as I figure out my place in the world of blindness.

Andrew Leland 20:19

So, you know, so that's a specific answer for that book, but like, you know, I did a piece for *The New Yorker* about deaf-blind communication and an emerging tactile language called Protactile. And I remember talking to my editor about that, about, like, how much of myself should be in that piece. And he was, he, I can't remember the exact numbers he used, but he sort of like had a funny speculative percentage, you know, he's like, 'Well, if this other piece you did, it was like 60/40, or 70/30, like this would maybe be like, 90/10 or something'. In other words, 90 per cent reporting on this new language and this deaf-blind community, but like, the reality is like, there is some shared experience, because the folks that I was talking about, that I was writing about, they were born deaf, but they have the same eye condition that I have, in addition to that, so like, it's a

radically different experience. But there were, there were a couple of moments where, like, I had a funny interaction with one of them, who was sort of like, 'I know what you're doing, you know? Like, 'Take that hat off', like, you know, 'Don't don't wear hats like that. I tried that, too, to, like, you know...?' You know, so it was worth including that, but the there was no point in making the focus be on myself. So it's really like a, you know, I think any writer has to make that call, if you're in a genre that allows for writing about yourself, sometimes it makes a lot of sense, sometimes it feels useful, just as like a tool, and sometimes you want to leave out yourself completely.

Martin Feld 21:40

Thank you very much for sharing that personal element as well, and I think it's actually really interesting in the context of podcasting as a medium. You mentioned there, the world of blindness or low vision—different conditions or experiences that people have. When it comes to podcasting, I think there would be an assumption out there that for people who do live with blindness or with low vision that, 'Oh podcasting would be all well and good, because it's audio!' but...

Andrew Leland 22:06

Yeah...

Martin Feld 22:06

...can you shed some light on that experience? Or like, what would you say about the experience of podcasts as a medium (in terms of accessibility) for people who are living with blindness or low vision?

Andrew Leland 22:18

And uh, so that's one thing that's changed, I would say, but yeah, like, it's sort of like, there's like a little bit of a flattening of media for me as a screen-reader user, where, like, I've got my phone and like, I want to know, I want to read the news, and there's some situations where, like listening to an hour-long podcast it to 2x or even faster is like the way to do that. And sometimes I'm just like listening to my screen-reader read the newspaper, that, you know, probably like 3- or 4x, you know, it doesn't have the same measures, so, I don't know exactly how to compare the speed. But um, I don't always pay attention to that difference, like I'm obviously aware of, I'm in control, making the choice, but like, it feels a little bit like opening the fridge and being like, 'Do I want scrambled eggs or hard-boiled eggs?' You know, and like, sure, they taste different than that? They're basically the same thing.

Andrew Leland 22:18

it's interesting, just thinking about sort of the original part of our conversation, talking about the sort of slippage between text and sound. And you know, as I've become a screen-reader user, where I listen to most of the (if not all of) the books I read—I still, I still have vision that I use to read with magnification, but almost always, uh, if I'm going to read for any, you know, any with any seriousness, you know, anything beyond, like, just looking at a text message or something, I'm listening to it. And I've noticed that in the past, where I would really kind of be a little more precious about it, like I'm listening to a podcast at 1x, and I'm gonna think about how it's produced, you know, I still do that, I still care about that, but I have gotten very fast in my listening, you know? Like, it's, it takes a lot for me to slow it down. That's like a real badge of honour if I'm, if I'm bringing you down to 1x.

Andrew Leland 22:52

In terms of accessibility, I mean, there's a, it's yeah, I mean, that's real, that there's a real advantage, I would say, like... I mean, I don't know if there's an advantage, I guess, I gue-... hmm, let me think. I mean, I think you've just know what you're getting, like, there's always a chance that a website is going to be, is going to be inaccessible, you know, or that like a... article is not going to have headings, or it's going to, you know, the focus is going to jump, like the, an annoy-, an annoying thing that screen readers tend to do is that the focus will jump without warning. So like, you'll be, you'll be reading one sentence and then suddenly, like, focus will jump to like a dynamically-inserted ad somewhere else on the page, and it'll take some work to, like, get back to where you were.

Andrew Leland 24:44

You know, generally speaking, podcast apps can crash but, like, you know, that you're going to be able to navigate it in a reliable way and that, you know, it's audio-first so there's not going to be, you know, your screen reader is not going to crash, it's just, it's, there's a certain stability to it that I do think it is appealing to a blind or low-vision, that is in, um, there's always a chance reading a newspaper with a screen reader, even if it is reliable that like, the text is there and you can get it, you know, they might, there might be a infographic, there might be a photo spread, and you know, it might have alt text and that's fine, and the alt text might be good, you know, you might get a description of the photo, but like a podcast, you know, as a hearing blind person, you know, you're gonna get everything that the mainstream consumer is gonna get. And I think that that is an important affordance and an important component to the experience that I mean, it's sort of obvious, but also, I think, bears mentioning.

Martin Feld 25:38

Linking to the case studies within this project, I heard your work (or your guest appearance) on *Parallel* with Shelly Brisbin, which was fantastic and shed a lot of light on your experiences in uh, writing and in audio production. I'm interested in your experience as a guest. Obviously, you're being a guest participant on this podcast right now, but appearing on a tech podcast specifically, I'd be interested to know about your experience on that, because you have a great background and experience in audio and writing, but that was a tech-specific show. And I'd like to know a little bit: what's your experience with digital technology broadly, since that time that you mentioned in your childhood? And can you speak a little bit about what you enjoy or like about digital technology?

Andrew Leland 26:25

There's a chapter in my book that is about the unique relationship between disability and technology. And so, my conversation with Shelly on *Parallels* [sic] was really centred around that research that I had done. And, you know, and I think a lot of the thinking that I've been doing my whole life around media, in terms of the stuff that we discussed, like about the sort of ways to tell stories in sound versus in print, you know, and, you know, just even just working as a, as a magazine editor, I did a lot of print production, and so, you know, I'm very familiar with technical details of that world. And then I became familiar with the technical details of podcasts, radio production, you know, and so, and then when I entered the world of disability, I was sort of delighted to find that technological geekery is a really important component of disability culture, and a sort of natural one. And I guess, to put a finer point on it, it's this idea that if the world isn't built for you, as a disabled person, you know, if your average device or tool might not wor-... be designed for somebody who's missing a limb, or who, you know, has a sensory disability, you have to, in essence, become a hacker of sorts in order to DIY the world to be accessible to you.

Andrew Leland 27:51

And so the chapter that I wrote in the book is a lot about the sort of, it talks about a lot of disabilities, but it's really specifically about the sort of 'grand tradition of blind hackery' that begins, you know, going back, you know, I would argue that Louis Braille was a hacker, uh, in a way, you know, like, the tinkering with tools to create a way of blind literacy—Braille was a technology. And going back even further than that, you know, all the way up to, you know, people, something I'm trying to write about right now is, like, what blind and disabled people are doing in the XR, you know, like, augmented-reality/mixed-reality/virtual-reality space.

Martin Feld 28:28

Mmm...

Andrew Leland 28:29

So yeah, like, even if I'm not like, necessarily, like a subject-matter expert, you know, and it's not, you know, most of the podcasts I'm going on are the sort of, like, more book podcasts or, uh, you know, like, I've definitely done the rounds in the last year, uh, six months promoting the book, but you know, it was a delight to talk to Shelly, not just because of the tech orientation, but also, I think, 'cause she occupies a really unique space, like, I think the subhead or the uh, like the tagline for her show is, like, 'a tech podcast with accessibility sprinkles', or something like that, which is very much in line with, like, the way that I kind of see my work too—where, I am not writing for a blind audience alone. I'm interested in, you know, in the same way that her tech podcast is interested in tech writ large, it's not like assistive tech, but I got the you got the sprinkles in there, 'cause it's, you know, that does happen to be where my attention is, for a lot of time and, and because of interesting things that, that the mainstream world can sort of learn from, and benefit from an engagement with that more narrow, niche idea.

Martin Feld 29:30

Now, thank you for explaining that. And I'm interested in picking up on the point of that word, 'memoir', because memoirs are written at a certain time of your life and they draw on all that experience leading up to a point but what comes after that memoir? What are you still hoping to do or to learn or to achieve, or where do you see your audio, and writing and production going from here?

Andrew Leland 29:52

Yeah, I mean, it's a memoir with an asterisk, for sure, because, like, yeah, I am not just in terms of what I've done with my life, but even if it's a memoir of blindness, you know, I'm still going blind. And so, I didn't feel like I had the experience that I would want to write a sort of full stop, like: 'This is what it's like to lose your sight'. And the memoir is very much a memoir of being in that liminal space. And as we've discussed, it's also a memoir that does a tremendous amount of other kinds of work and includes a lot of other kinds of writing, that's, that's, that are very carefully woven together with a memoir, you know? So it is, it is journalism, and it is criticism and history, as well. And, you know, and that, that mode, accounting for some calibration of, you know, a little bit more from column A, a little bit left in column B, you know, is a mode that I find really productive. And, you know, I think it's really exciting.

Andrew Leland 30:44

You know, and I think a lot of writers take a similar approach where, whether it's like, every story of yours has to be about that—maybe not, but like, you know, I think Shelly's idea of accessibility sprinkles or, you know, there's another blind writer I like, named Ryan Knighton and who talked about blindness being not necessarily always a subject for him, but it's a perspective. And, you know, I think you can take, I think a lot of writers and audio producers have a similar approach (right?) where like, you might have a different part of your identity, you know, you might, you

know, have a particular religious background, or be from a particular community or ethnicity, or, you know, immigration status or whatever, you know? It's not like every story you do has to be about immigration, but like that, that and to some degree, that experience might inform your reporting and writing and, you know, give you access to certain communities that you want to write about, or give you a perspective on certain stories, like different angles that somebody without that experience wouldn't have.

Andrew Leland 31:38

And so that's the sort of approach that I'm, I want to take, where I don't want to only ever write disability stories, produce disability stories for the rest of my life, but at the moment, I feel like there's not, you know, and there are a lot of disabled reporters doing really great work, but, you know, on balance, I think there's definitely room for more, you know? So I feel like there's a place for me there, you know, as opposed to, like, if I just want to write about books or something, I just, you know, that, that's a lot, much more crowded field, right? If I just wanted to be a tech reporter, that's a much more crowded field, but like this, these stories aren't being pitched as much, you know? And I think they're not being told as much, and I think they're really, really important. And, you know, I do think I have access in a way that feels really exciting. And it feels like a, feels like a gift that I can do this kind of work and get people interested in it, who might not think that they have any interest in this, in this realm. So yeah, so going forward, I want to continue to do that kind of work, you know, whether it's, whether the first-person element is 70 per cent or 2 per cent, you know, I think that'll have to depend on what the story is, but that's my path at the moment.

Martin Feld 31:40

I think it's fantastic the way you frame it as a perspective, and it is that point in your life that you're sharing. Now, I'm aware that you've been very generous with your time. So is there anything that I haven't asked you or that we haven't been able to cover that you would like to talk about from your career or your experience, before we end this episode?

Andrew Leland 33:04

Um... let me think.... I think we hit it all. Yeah, I think, I think we can leave it there.

Martin Feld 33:10

Well, I really appreciate your time in joining me for this podcast episode today and sharing so much of your personal experience and thoughts on audio, writing and all of your creative production. Thank you for spending time on *Really Specific Stories* today.

Andrew Leland 33:25

Oh, my pleasure! Yeah, I'm excited to see what comes of your research; it sounds fascinating.