

By /u/crabstix11 from reddit

Emily: Hi, I'm Emily Ladau.

Kyle: And I'm Kyle Khachadurian.

Emily: And you're listening to another episode of The Accessible Stall!

Kylie: What are we gonna talk about today, Emily? As if I don't already know, what is it?

Emily: Oh my goodness! We have a story for you! Yes we do, listeners at home. Oh my goodness. This is probably gonna be a combination of venting and also real talk about disability. But isn't that what all these podcasts are?

Kyle: I think so, I think we actually sort of strive for that.

Emily: So, okay. Should I start this story or should you start this story?

Kyle: Oh no, it's all you man, this affects you the most.

Emily: Okay, I'm going to start it but please, feel free to chime in whenever you would like.

Kyle: Oh, I can't wait.

Emily: Okay, so Kyle and I were attempting to get to the Statue of Liberty. Now, despite the fact that we're New Yorkers, neither of us have ever actually been to the little island that houses the Statue of Liberty.

Kyle: That's because we're New Yorkers.

Emily: Yeah actually you know, that is because we're New Yorkers. So we were gonna spend the day doing the Statue of Liberty and then the Ellis Island museum. We were going to meet up with a friend there and everything was great - for like, the first two minutes of our time together. And then everything went downhill from there.

Kyle: Yes, that is entirely accurate.

Emily: So, I don't wanna make this the longest story ever, but let's just say it was a comedy of error. We started off by trying to leave Penn Station so that we could catch our ferry with an hour and a half to spare. So we were like 'Okay, this is totally fine, we can totally make this ferry' but our first obstacle was when the elevator was broken when we tried to get up to street level at Penn. So we had to reroute, go to

Kyle: A different elevator.

Emily: Yeah, on the other side of Penn Station.

Kyle: Yeah, but that was nothing compared to - that was just like, 'Oh, what a mild inconvenience' compared to everything else.

Emily: I feel like that was just a bad omen, is what it was.

Kyle: Yeah.

Emily: So, we get ourselves upstairs, we get ourselves to a bus stop. We're the only two people waiting at the bus stop, which probably should have been our first warning sign. Anyway, we waited, how long?

Kyle: Not too long, maybe seven minutes.

Emily: Yeah, and we're waiting.

Kyle: It's Sunday morning, so it's not too long by the way, for context.

Emily: Yeah, so we're waiting for our bus and suddenly, oh there it is, it's coming and it blows right past us. So, even though we were waiting under the sign for the bus stop, it just completely drove right past us. So, we have a theory that it had something to do with my wheelchair because bus drivers often don't stop for wheelchair users, but anyways we were not to be [disheard] yet so we went to the next bus stop to try to catch the same bus.

Kyle: Which was only like, a four minute walk away so it was actually not that bad

Emily: And we sat and we waited and we waited. Two buses passed by that we didn't need and we were sort of just sitting and talking. All of a sudden, our bus comes...and goes. And there was another bus that totally left us.

Kyle: Yes, and it was the first of many kicks in the teeth.

Emily: So, we get the idea to call for a wheelchair accessible taxi. Now, unlike every other New Yorker, wheelchair users cannot stand on street corners, or sit, as the case may be, and hail a cab, because you need to call for the wheelchair accessible cab.

Kyle: Well, that's not entirely true and I don't mean to correct you but, the problem is they're so rare, but if you happen to see one, then you can try to hail it. But they're so rare that that's basically - it's more improbable than it is any kind of practical, which is why going to the website or calling for one is -

Emily: It's like -

Kyle: Even an option really.

Emily: I had to use such silly comparisons, but literally it feels like you're looking for a leprechaun riding a unicorn. I mean, that is the only possible way I can describe what it is like. Or like -

Kyle: Holding a needle wrapped around the tiniest haystack.

Emily: Yeah.

Kyle: It's really bad. Anyway!

Emily: So, we called for the taxi. We crossed the street so that we can be in front of the building whose address we gave to the dispatcher. We're waiting and waiting and waiting. We see another taxi, just to prove our point, across the street that has the accessible icon on it so we're thinking great, this maybe is ours. Or we can just take this one. But of course we can't, because it was occupied. And again, when you find the mythical unicorn, you can't do anything with it.

Kyle: Thinking back to it, we should have known it was occupied, the lights weren't on, the hazard lights were on and it was - but even so, they're so, like Emily just said, they're so rare that you don't think about that in the moment.

Emily: Yeah, we just got so excited to see it.

Kylie: Plus we thought it was ours, just thought they were on the other side of the street.

Emily: So, anyway, we cross the street again after we were all crestfallen because that wasn't our taxi, and we did finally get our taxi. And that was great, we had an amazing taxi driver, who, first of all, came over and asked if we

were the ones waiting for the taxi, was extremely patient and polite, and, I noticed that was really silly but since I was sitting in the back and there was glass between the front and the back, I kind of just assumed I'd be a silent passenger. But the driver tried to make conversation with Kyle and then he turned around and asked me whatever he was asking Kyle. And I was so appreciative of being treated like a human. How sad is that?

Kyle: Well, it's pretty sad but it also, you know, you had the big bullet-proof, thick glass thing with the like the same walkie-talkie system as like, a ticket vendor. So, you know, in addition to the pressure that people have because of the fears they have of saying something wrong to a person in a wheelchair, it certainly wasn't an easy mode of communication for anybody. So the fact that he even did it at all was impressive in it's own right, I think.

Emily: Yeah. So, we made it to the place where we were going to catch our ferry in the nick of time. Or so we thought. So Kyle does this thing that you probably shouldn't do.

Kyle: What's that?

Emily: I'll tell you in a second. If you were anyone else, I would get really annoyed. But I usually only let people I'm very close to do it - riding on the back of my wheelchair.

Kyle: Oh yeah. All the time.

Emily: So, yeah. I mean, when people make jokes and ask for a ride, I don't like that. But if I know you well enough, sure.

Kyle: It's a borderline accessibility thing for me anyway.

Emily: Yeah, basically giving him a ride to give his legs a rest.

Kyle: Although it is really fun.

Emily: I mean, that's just an added bonus. But, Kyle's riding on the back of my chair, he hops on, I take off with full speed, ask the first security guard 'Hey, we're trying to catch the ferry to the Statue of Liberty, can you point us in the direction for the ferry for the Statue of Liberty?' and he points us through these doors so we race through the doors because they have a giant accessible icon on them.

Kyle: That was honestly, I wish more places had the giant wheelchair man because there was no mistaking what that was.

Emily: Yeah, I mean that was like 'Here! You're people, come through here.' Like, it was very helpful. And it wasn't like a segregated door or anything, it just indicated that it was accessible.

Kyle: Yeah.

Emily: So we raced through there and then, another guy who works there scolds us because we were riding too fast. Mind you, other people probably run through there all the time but because I was in my wheelchair of course he had to tell me how fast to drive my chair. And we claimed we were trying to catch our ferry that left in like eight minutes. He's like 'Oh yeah, this guy right here will help you' . So he passes us off to man number 3 and we said again, 'Oh

okay so this is where we wait for the ferry for the Statue of Liberty'. Pay close attention to the fact that we keep saying Statue of Liberty. And I'm a little hazy on how he was responding, I feel like he just kept ignoring us.

Kyle: No, he didn't ignore us, no, no, no. He gave us very, like, he said 'Sure, yes, yes', like he was affirming us in a slightly dismissive way because he was getting annoyed that we kept telling him where we were going, which as will turn out, was very important.

Emily: But I sort of felt that he was ignoring us, in like the sense that he thought he knew what we wanted and he assumed that we didn't know what we wanted and he was being really condescending about it. And he just wasn't listening to us.

Kyle: Oh, yeah. Well, that was an afterthought. It became the truth when the rest of it happened and our suspicions were confirmed.

Emily: So, after we reaffirmed several times that we were going in the right direction, we headed towards the ferry. We go up the - what is it? The plank?

Kyle: I don't know, the wood to the boat.

Emily: Boat terminology! So we go up to the ferry, and I'm like 'Kyle, grab the tickets'. And the man there, instead of -  
Kyle: Which is the fourth guy.

Emily: Instead of being a little bit suspicious about the fact that we have tickets instead goes, 'Oh no, this is free, you get right on'. So for like a split second Kyle and I are thinking oh well that's kinda cool, so we don't have to pay for it. So we get on the ferry, it pulls out of the dock and I look over and see that we were not on the ferry to the Statue of Liberty. We were on the ferry to Staten Island, which I know that a lot of people listening are not New Yorkers but suffice is to say we were not -

Kyle: It's nowhere near

Emily: Like we were not going in the right place

Kyle: We did get a beautiful view of the statue we were going to on the way.

Emily: We kind of figured it out because we were like hey, there's the statue ..oh.. We're passing it. Oh boy.

Kyle: Look, look at it go. That's weird.

Emily: I mean, long story short here is that we were directed on the wrong ferry, sent an hour out of our way to try to find where we were going. And we did finally get to where we were going. It was lovely, it was perfectly lovely. We had a really good time, but it was just one of those things, like I don't want to blame it fully on my wheelchair but I really -

Kyle: I do.

Emily: Right, I don't want to because I just, something makes me feel like I always fall back on that as an excuse for why things go wrong but I legitimately think that it had to do with

Kyle: Well the reason I said I do so enthusiastically is I normally agree with you 100%, but the alternative to it not being your wheelchair's fault means that four people, four adult human beings, deliberately didn't listen to us, two other adult human beings, in telling us where we need to go and, not even correcting us, you know, if they really thought we didn't wanna go where we wanted to go, why didn't they say 'oh, what are the tickets for, you don't need those'? No. The alternative to it not being the fault of your wheelchair is that everyone who works in that building is just incomprehensibly stupid. And I refuse to believe that. I would rather it be the fault of your wheelchair.

Emily: I don't know. I mean, I just - It's one of those things where I think you definitely had to be there. I'm not sure that our retelling of our story will ever do it justice, but I think that the line of communication really got messed up with person number 3, who was so dismissive every time we tried to talk to him.

Kyle: Right.

Emily: And I don't know if that was him being fed up with his job or he's just not into it or he's distracted or somewhere else in his brain, I don't know what it was. So sometimes, having been a wheelchair user for the vast majority of my life, and being disabled since birth, I have a sort of radar for when someone is giving me condescending like, wheelchair condescension.

Kyle: Oh that's a new one. We all know what it means but it's actually a pretty good way to describe it.

Emily: Because I notice it in the way that they talk to me versus the way they talk to other people. Example being when we were getting on the ferry, when we finally got to the right ferry, and we were getting on and off to go between islands, I was afraid of going down forward because it was so steep and I kept saying 'No, I need to go backwards, I wanna go backwards'. And on the one hand, you were pointing out to me they're trained.

Kyle: Well I only knew that because like the third person that helped us felt bad for you in the situation and took me aside to tell me that and he probably would have told you if you weren't struggling up the ramp at that point.

Emily: Yeah, so apparently the ferry workers are trained to make you go forward. And on the one hand, yes I assume they know best, but on the other hand, it's just very dismissive, like 'be quiet little girl in the wheelchair, you don't know what you're talking about, we clearly know best'

Kyle: Right. And even if - it's because of the design on your wheelchair that you prefer going down backwards. So even if like, most wheelchair users do go down forward, and prefer it and it works best, whatever, but you would think that the person using the wheelchair, the one that is currently in front of the people, the one that is currently being operated by the person sitting in it, you know, you would think that they would know the exceptions to the rule more than you, the person who read about it in your handbook. And I sort of sympathize, where it's sort of risky for you as the worker to bend the rules in case something goes wrong and I appreciate that. But at the same time I find it difficult to leave the 'you know better than the person in the wheelchair, how to use it' and so I don't know

Emily: Was it a rule though or was it just like suggested training?

Kyle: Well, I don't know but the way the guy said it to me was like 'Look, this is how we have to do it'

Emily: So their solution was like, two grown men put their big old hands on my chest and held me against my wheelchair so that I wouldn't fall out of it while I was going down forward and I feel like that would be your first clue that's not safe.

Kyle: Yeah, if you have to physically restrain a person from letting gravity take over that's probably not the right way to do it.

Emily: So I got fed up at one point and said 'Oh sure, because you know best' and the guy actually didn't even pick up on my sarcasm. He was like 'That's right sweetie, we do' and I was just like, wow I hate you old able-bodied men. I was just so angry.

Kyle: Well, to be fair, all the other old able-bodied people, except for that one, or those two (there was a pair of them), but everybody else, to their credit, was astoundingly helpful.

Emily: Yeah I know, we can not focus on the negative here.

Kyle: Well the only reason I'm even bringing up the positive is, aside from the trip there and the one, the pair of idiots, everyone else - like it was just a delight to be honest, like wow this is very pleasant.

Emily: Yeah because everybody else was like actively telling us how they would accommodate us.

Kyle: And they were done in a way that made complete sense without hindering anyone else

Emily: And I also think without overly giving us special privilege either.

Kyle: No, the most we got was cutting the line, which you know what, honestly you would have done the same, that line went on for miles.

Emily: But that, in the scheme of wheelchair perks, that really was more of an access thing because I'm not even sure how I would have navigated that mass.

Kyle: Yeah. Well the thing is, even if you could, by the time you got to the front, you would have had to wait for one and a half more boats so they just probably wanted to get you out of there so that everyone - seriously, think about it. Wheelchairs take up more space right, so that the quicker, you know, that you sail off, the more streamlined the process will be for the rest of the people, so yeah.

Emily: Whatever it was, I honestly don't really have any complaints about the actual access of the ferries or the museum or the grounds of the Statue of Liberty. I mean, it was a perfectly lovely and touristy day.

Kyle: I think our one thing was that we couldn't get into the crown, but I mean, what can you do right? I mean, because it's a hollowed out statue.

Emily: Okay so yeah, the crown of the Statue of Liberty - it would be nice to get up there, sure. But at the same time, where are you gonna put an elevator that's going to get you up to the Statue of Liberty?

Kyle: Without ruining the Statue of Liberty

Emily: Right, so I'm gonna give you a pass on that one, America, because I don't want you to wreck your Statue of Liberty, I get you. And also I can look at it from afar and it's very pretty and I don't need to be at the top to know how pretty it is.

Kyle: Oh by the way, for those of you who want to go to the Statue of Liberty, don't even bother with Liberty Island. Sail right to Ellis Island, go into the museum and look out any window. Or go to Ellis Island, don't go to the museum and sit on the benches and look up. The views you get there are so much better than anything that you'll get on Liberty Island.

Emily: I mean that, I suppose, is a matter of our opinion but like -

Kyle: Is it?

Emily: Yeah, kinda!

Kyle: Is it?

Emily: I don't know

Kyle: Well, I don't know, you're right

Emily: I mean, we're also, nothing about this was really a novelty to us.

Kyle: That's why, I don't know man. For me, like as a child, I didn't see any of this.

Emily: No it was beautiful, but I mean we know that its there if we want it again.

Kyle: That's true, that's true.

Emily: We're not coming from a completely different country or the other side of this country

Kyle: As it turns out, everyone else on the boat seemed to have been doing just that.

Emily: Which is cool!

Kyle: Oh yeah but it was just funny being the only people that like live here.

Emily: Yeah like the New Yorkers doing the cliché New York things. But anyways I guess that leads me to my actual favorite part of the day, speaking of other tourists who were in the museum.

Kyle: Oh right!

Emily: Yeah, lest you think that on the Accessible Stall, all we do is talk about negative things, just you wait! Because I have the most heartwarming story you have ever heard in your life and I am so amped about it oh my God. So, like literally I was thinking about it earlier today and smiling to myself like a complete dope because it just makes me that happy. So for some reason, we kind of ended up following the same path as another family that had assorted disabilities. At least visibly. There was a man who was a left leg amputee and then there was a gentleman who was using a wheelchair, a power wheelchair. And they were kind of roaming around, minding their own business and all of a sudden this little boy comes up to me and he's like 'Hi! You use a power wheelchair just like my grandpa' and I was like oh, that's your grandpa. Um, so then, anyways, I was like aw man, that's so cool, your grandpa uses a power chair too. And he was like 'Yeah yours is probably a little more high-tech than my grandpa's'. And I was like yeah but

his is still cool though, right? And he goes 'Yeah I drive it sometimes, I'm really good at it.' And like, it was so cute. And then he sort of kept walking and trailed off and I was just like oh, okay bye! Nice to meet you! So then, you encouraged me to go up and tell the grandpa what happened, right?

Kyle: I mean yeah, we encouraged you but it was your idea. I wouldn't have told you to do that if you weren't already thinking about it.

Emily: Well, I wanted to go up to the grandfather, the guy who was using the wheelchair, because I felt like, with all of the negativity that exists in the world, sometimes its really nice to pay a compliment to someone. So I went up to him and I was like 'Your grandson was just the sweetest thing and it was really nice to hear him talk about wheelchairs, you know, in a very mater-of-fact way' or whatever I said. We were wandering through the museum, minding our own business, and we got to another exhibit -

Kyle: And who do we see?

Emily: Our little friend! So Kyle and I turn around and he says hello again! And we were like hi. And um, then he said my grandpa told me about the compliment you gave me. And I said, well awesome kids deserve to be complimented. And then he was like, wanna see a magic trick? So he tried to pull a quarter out from behind my ear but he dropped it on the floor and he goes Darn it usually works! But he was just so friendly and wonderful and proof that humanity is not doomed . And then you engaged with him in something that I can't remember.

Kyle: Minecraft?

Emily: Right. I don't play that at all.

Kyle: Well it was clearly his favorite video game because he talked to me for five minutes about, what was it, I don't know, how to properly excavate a pyramid?

Emily: Oh something about explosions, I don't know

Kyle: And his mother looked at me like I just said his trigger word that makes him never shut up and it was really funny, but it was cute, he was cute, his family was nice and everything was great.

Emily: And his name is Vaydon and we love him. Hashtag team Vaydon.

Kyle: Yes.

Emily: But I have a legitimate point I wanna make about this.

Kyle: Sure.

Emily: So a while ago, I was gonna say like two years ago or so, for the Huffington Post, I wrote an article called 'Dear Parents, I won't run your child over with my wheelchair'. And I was writing about an incident in which a mother saw me and literally yanked her son away from me because he had approached me and was trying to learn more about my wheelchair and ask questions. And it was in the middle of Penn Station, a very public place, you know, and so I was indulging his curiosities as much as I could and then his mother made some joke about like 'careful, she's gonna run you down and hurt you' and she yanked him away. You know, I just didn't wanna be made out to be the



monster, I wanted to be the friendly person who was extending, you know, a smile and an explanation of this strange machine that they may not have seen before. And so when I posted that, somebody actually wrote a response called 'Dear Emily, wheelchair or not you're still a stranger'. And I was thinking about this a lot after this encounter with this little kid whose grandfather was using a wheelchair and I feel like there's a really a big difference between stranger danger and sort of [?] kid's curiosities.

Kyle: Most what you learn after you get out of second grade and people stop yelling stranger danger at you is that most adults are actually very good people who are very helpful, most of whom love kids, you know. And while I think such a response to your piece is one of those technically correct things, I don't know if I'd call it warranted. But what do I know, I walk around so no one ever talks to me but really like, that's silly to me.

Emily: It was just one of those things that was like, I understand where you're coming from, yes I'm a stranger, but if you're in a crowded and public place, I mean, teach your child how to interact.

Kyle: I think that one of the things that I see most parents do, I don't wanna say most, but in my time with you it is most of them, you know sometimes I tend to wonder why we as people tend to view people with disabilities and avoid them. I don't say we because I am one of us but I mean others, other human beings that are able-bodied and you know, when I'm with you and I see a parent do that, it sort of makes me wonder, does the kid - because the parents in their head, all their doing is keeping the kid safe from this giant machine, right. And that's like fine, they don't know that you know how to use it, right? I mean you do obviously, but if you do that enough times, the kid may start to associate the wheelchair and the people in them as scary and things to avoid. You know, this is a complete guess, there's no science behind this but its something that I notice almost every time we're out together. And I'm genuinely curious if fear is one of those things that gets in your head and makes you grow up to be a person who, while you don't hate people with disabilities, you know, you sort of avoid them at all costs because what if XYZ? And it's all because, at least partly because, of when you were a kid your mom sort of inadvertently taught you to do that. Or your dad. Just food for thought, there was no basis for that whatsoever, I just thought of it here.

Emily: Yeah, I am actually reading the post again. It was interesting because I see the world from my perspective where everyone is making negative assumptions about the wheelchair and treating me negatively because of the wheelchair and I'm willing to admit that sometimes that's not the case and it's just the parent being protective of their child or a parent trying to get their kid out of the way for me. And I feel like every time I go out in public is a learning experience for me. Because I'm constant realizing that every situation is unique and there is no general rule for how people are going to interact with me.

Kyle: Yeah.

Emily: I don't know, I'm getting very self-reflective now.

Kyle: that's what we do here.

Emily: On the Accessible Stall. In the Accessible Stall?

Kyle: Both. Maybe, I don't know. It's a radio show so we're on it, but in Accessible stalls I think you go in so..

Emily: One day we're gonna bring you a podcast live from in a literal bathroom

Kyle: One that is empty that won't be occupied for at least an hour and we'll wear hazmat suits and gas masks and it'll just be a grand old time, really

Emily: So I wouldn't say there was really a moral to this episode, so much so we just wanted to talk about things

Kyle: Believe it or not, what we told you was the nutshell version, the (?) version. The full version involves, I don't know, about an actual hours worth of explanation if you play them back to back and multiple plans to destroy humanity

Emily: Profanity, so much profanity

Kyle: Oh my god

Emily: So much anger, lots of sweating

Kyle: Yeah, it was bad.

Emily: We finally made it though, we finally made it and we saw Ellis Island and I'm sure if you think about it long enough, there's probably something in there about going back to where we came from or something like that.

Kyle: Yeah, sure

Emily: Going back to our roots? I don't know, what am I talking about?

Kyle: That's better. That's a lot better.

Emily: Oh Lord. Okay, so yeah. Thanks for letting us tell our story.

Kyle: Yeah.

Emily: It was mostly my story. Sorry for making you listen to me incessantly.

Kyle: It's okay that's what we do on this show too!

Emily: We talk a lot.

Kyle: It's the whole purpose of the medium really. If we don't talk a lot, we're doing it wrong.

Emily: But it's okay because I'm sure Kyle has shared a story or two.

Kyle: Yeah. But not today! Yeah I don't really have a final takeaway for this episode here, mostly because I was there and lived it. I guess if I had to say something, try not to be afraid of wheelchairs unless they're coming at you at full speed and they can't see you because you're a tiny little kid or something and if that is the case, get out of the way.

Emily: And maybe don't be condescending?

Kyle: Oh yeah, definitely don't be condescending. That's definitely more important

Emily: And also know that I'm understanding and not understanding humans just as much as you are, so I'll cut you some slack if you cut me some slack.

Kyle: What does slack look like?

Emily: Uh..

Kyle: Just kidding, I know what slack is, I just wanted to see you do this for a second. Extra bits of rope!

Emily: Yup.

Kyle: Now you know that everybody and Emily, mostly Emily.

Emily: That is -

Kyle: Anyways

Emily: A fact that I feel better for knowing.

Kyle: There you go!

Emily: Alright before we go off the rails, I think we're going to wrap up this episode!

Kyle: This has been an episode of the Accessible Stall.

Emily: Another one, thank you so much for listening!

Kyle: Goodnight!

Emily: Bye, see you next time.