

Kelly Bron Johnson (00:00):

The intersections on the spectrum podcast is the brainchild of Doug Blecher and Kelly, Brian Johnson created to discuss intersectional issues within the autistic community and give visibility to commonly marginalized, repressed, underrepresented, or erased identities and issues. We aim to introduce you to people and stories you didn't know about, but needed to hear and hope that by seeing yourself represented in the community, allows you to feel seen

Doug Blecher (00:27):

Our guest today is from the fantastic autistically Alex blog. Um, Alex who joins us, uh, Alex is an autistic non-binary person with diagnoses of add, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue. They they blog about their experiences and hopes of connecting with others and they enjoy reading Sci-fi and fantasy writing memoir and fantasy singing, taking pictures of flowers, studying Japanese and spending time with their partner. So, um, what, what, what flowers, uh, are your, are your favorite? Let's start with that.

Alex Earhart (01:11):

Oh gosh, I really enjoy taking pictures of roses. There's just so many different kinds of roses and they have really beautiful shapes. So that's definitely a favorite of mine. Thank you for having me on your podcast.

Doug Blecher (01:26):

Absolutely. Now you, you recently wrote a fantastic article for publication, Buckeye flame called transitioning at 30 injecting testosterone and self-acceptance, um. First I love the, the title of the article. Um, but, but more importantly, how did this article come about?

Alex Earhart (01:49):

Thank you. Uh, thanks for reading that. And, uh, the title is actually by the editor of the book I flamed Ken, uh, he came up with that title and ran it by me and I said, yes, I'm horrible at titles. And you did a good job. Um, so it came about kind of organically. Um, my voice was really starting to deepen and I was thinking, okay, this is getting to the point where people are going to know, and they're going to notice. And I was also learning a lot about myself and about the process. And there's not a whole lot that I can find out there of people going on T that are like me. So I wanted to write about that and I wasn't sure if autistically Alex would be the right place yet, or if I was ready to put it up there. Um, but I saw on my Facebook feed that the buckeye flame was launching and I have friends who are on the board. And so I reached out to Ken, the editor and he was calling for submissions and I basically wrote and said, Hey, do you think people would be interested in something written by someone like me? And he pretty much said, Holy hell. Yes. So I, uh, I started drafting and we kind of went from there.

Kelly Bron Johnson (03:16):

Wow. Did you know that 70% of, of autistic people are actually part of the LGBTQ community?

Alex Earhart (03:23):

I hadn't heard that statistic, but that's, I'm not surprised at all.

Kelly Bron Johnson (03:29):

Yeah. So there's a huge overlap on that. And that's part of the, you know, part of the work I do too, is to, I'm hoping to give parents of autistic kids like to try and to tell them too, you've got to start talking about this. You've got to bring it up with your kids. You've got to give them the terminology that they need to understand this and also their bodies, because guess what? There's a 70% chance, you know, they're not going to be straight. So yeah, like it's, to me it's super important. I'm so glad that they accepted, uh, you're you're writing to try and, and I think it brings a lot of awareness to people.

Alex Earhart (04:00):

Yeah, no, I, I think that that's great to try to reach out more, uh, when the kids are younger, because I, it took me a really long time and there was a lot of uncertainty and fear and feeling like I was the only one feeling these things. And does that make me, you know, I even know, I don't even know where to begin with that. Like how it felt to not know. So anything that a parent can do even just to bring it up and say, if this is ever a thing, it's not a problem and we'll talk about it and it's okay. And there's other people like you, right. Would be huge.

Kelly Bron Johnson (04:37):

Yeah. I know. Even for me, I thought I was bisexual. Um, as a teenager, I didn't have a word for non binary and I just figured, well, if I, if I'm kind of feeling kind of half, half gender-wise, and that must reflect on my sexual interest and it's no, that's, I just didn't have a word. The only word that I knew at the time, I only knew lesbian, gay, bisexual. That's, that's all that was available to me in, in when, uh, when I, when I was growing up. So yeah, it's fun. You have to have the right words and have to like start talking to people and helping people understand. I really relate to that. A few months ago, you started taking a low dose of testosterone. And in your article, you mentioned that it has been a long journey to taking testosterone, but nothing like you imagined. So what have been some of the most important lessons you've learned Along the way?

Alex Earhart (05:26):

Um, there's quite a few, I would say I'm just over four months now on testosterone. You'd be like a week or two past four months. And one of the biggest ones, uh, is just that there's no size fits all for transition. There's no too late. Try not to compare yourself to other people's journeys. I know that's really incredibly hard, but, but at the same time, know that there are other people out there who do have similar stories to you. I, one of the reasons I wrote the article is I'm chronically ill and I made all these assumptions about what I could and couldn't do in transition only to have specialists say, actually the opposite is true. You would probably improve your health by going on hormones. And, you know, top surgery would help a lot with your back pain. And, you know, so there's all of these things I had in my mind as fact, and they were not facts. So trying to talk with not only people in the community, but also specialists and doctors. And then I guess the last thing would be keeping an open mind because a lot of the things that I thought like a hundred percent, Oh, I don't want that from hormones. I'm scared of that. Like, I'll try this to get this one thing, but the other thing is I don't want, and actually, uh, I ended up loving the most, everything so far. So not making assumptions about that as well. And I guess the last thing would be knowing that you can feel a whole variety of feelings and emotions and thoughts and everything before, during and after transition. And that they're all valid. So if you feel grief, that doesn't mean you're not trans. You can feel grief and excitement at the same time. And change is scary, no matter if it's good or bad or neutral. And like I worried a lot that the grieving process of losing some of my higher range in singing meant that I wasn't actually trans and I was making mistake. And the voice teacher I got to talk with was like, no, you, you can do both at the same time. You can be really happy to be gaining a lower range and also little sad that you're losing the upper range and that's valid. So I mean,

all of those concepts are pretty big, but they are things I keep trying to keep in mind. Um, and it's been really helpful, especially feeling like turbulent emotions and stuff. Going back to those ideas helps a lot

Doug Blecher ([08:12](#)):

Mentioned that change can definitely be, be hard. Uh, I'm wondering what changes have you observed since starting a low dose of testosterone?

Alex Earhart ([08:24](#)):

Yeah. So things might be a little bit different for me because I have PCOS polycystic ovarian syndrome. So my T levels were already pretty high, but I even within the first or second shot, I started to notice my throat felt a little weird, not the best during COVID times, because it's like a frog in the throat or like a gravelly, like phlegm feeling almost, but that's super, super normal. And that was the first thing I noticed. Cause that was like really quick. And then soon after a lot of facial hair, especially under the jawline, I have a lot now I noticed a lessening in my chronic fatigue and my chronic pain for sure. Those have gotten, um, you know, they're not gone, but I have a lot more good days now. Well, acne and oily skin for sure. But you know, I'll pay those prices to feel more like me confidence almost immediately. Confidence went up, social anxiety went down just in the first few weeks.

Kelly Bron Johnson ([09:32](#)):

Wow. On your blog, artistically, Alex, you wrote a piece last January about battling your eating disorder. And I really related to the letter you wrote to your disorder about how hard it was to let go and what would happen afterwards. So how has your progress been on that? And do you feel that transitioning has helped?

Alex Earhart ([09:50](#)):

Yeah, I think if 2020 hadn't been the year that it had been, my answer would probably be very different. I think overall I'm doing better than I think I am. Um, my therapist likes to remind me that I really have come a long way and I have a lot healthier relationship with eating now. I don't feel like I'm in chains anymore. Like food is controlling me. I noticed now when I'm using food as a crutch, um, it might take me a day or two to go back to what I need to be doing.

Alex Earhart ([10:28](#)):

But I, in general and not finding myself like so dizzy or hypoglycemic from not eating, I would say overall, I'm in a fairly good place. There's still some slip ups. Um, but in a lot of ways, unfortunately my eating disorder and my dysphoria going hand in hand because if I gain weight and I'm on several medicines that can make me gain weight, I end up having more dysphoria about like my chest or my hips. And as testosterone is kind of fluctuating my weight and where it's distributed to that can be a little, um, challenging, but I think overall body positivity and fat positivity and just loving my body has come a long way. I don't, I don't ever have like a consistent every single day I'm eating exactly how much I need to. And I don't care about my weight and all that, but more often than not, I'm doing better. A lot better. Yeah.

Doug Blecher ([11:38](#)):

In your article, you mentioned the process of transitioning to a non-binary trans masculine adult. And you talked about phasing out your clothes that made you feel uncomfortable. What clothes are you wearing now that make you feel better, make you feel more like you?

Alex Earhart ([12:00](#)):

Well, it's not as much as I'd like, it's kind of slowed down with the pandemic I'm at high risk. So normally I would go to a thrift store and pick up a bunch of stuff for really cheap, but so it's kind of had to slow down, unfortunately, but I need ties or bow ties that I can get my hands on. Um, little bit baggier sweaters, they're gender neutral or a little masculine. Um, my feet are tiny, so boys' shoes actually fit super, super well. Anything like boxers or briefs, that kind of thing has actually been huge. Um, comfort wise and identity wise. I think one of the biggest things has been like just permission to let go, because I've had clothes. I have, I even had clothes from like middle school, a few things that I kept for nostalgia and like just holding on like letting go of that stuff felt like a big step.

Alex Earhart ([13:09](#)):

And so I ended up rephrasing things in my head to be like, well, think about like a little trans girl out there who doesn't have this and she would wear this and you can't even fit into it anymore. And it makes you feel horrible when you wear it. So like give it to her. And that helps a lot. And also I've had a really, really hard time differentiating between I really liked that pattern or that top or that color versus I want to wear that top or that color or that pattern. And I don't know if that's just the way my brain is, but I go, Ooh, shiny pretty. But then, and for years as, uh, you know, in my twenties I would buy a thing, love it on the rack think, Oh yeah, I kind of like this on me and then I get it home. And within like a week or two, I'd realize like, no, this, I don't feel good in this. I like it. And I looked good in it, but I don't feel good in it. A lot of what I've been doing during COVID when I can't go out and get more stuff is just weeding through old stuff. And just the process letting go and saying, it's okay, this isn't for you. And that's okay.

Kelly Bron Johnson ([14:22](#)):

Those are, that reminds me of like stuff that I have for my dad. Like my dad died 10 years ago and I've got ties and stuff from him that they're really super seventies. I'm not, I'm not going to wear them. Like, they're, they're really big thick and gold and Brown. And anyway, I've been looking at ways that I can kind of repurpose them like to make there's different things you can do with ties. You can turn them into a rug or a cushion or something. So yeah, just kind of looking at ways to hang on to things that, or get rid of them. But if they're, if they're not

Kelly Bron Johnson ([14:52](#)):

Really useful to somebody else, like, I can't imagine somebody wanting to wear a seventies ties for a job interview right now. Um, but you know, like keeping them in a different format. Yeah. So it could be comforting too.

Alex Earhart ([15:04](#)):

Yeah, definitely. There was a pair of embroidered jeans that I had that I really liked to stim with and like run my hands over the beating and everything. And I actually cut that pair of pants up and I'm hoping to make like a pillow or something that I, or like a bag that I can still stim with it. Um, that's helped you to like shift my mind from, I absolutely can't own this anymore to what can I do with this and still have it. And also just taking pictures of things before I give them away has helped to like, like see, okay, I really like this. What do I like about it? And then try to find one that either fits or is more masculine. Like, do I like the color? Do I want that orange color and maybe like a sweater? Do I want that cut? But like, in my size, like that's helped me to be able to say like, okay, my visual memory is just non-existent. And so I

think that's part of why giving stuff away is scary because I don't remember that I had it. And then, yeah. So taking pictures and then circling back has been helpful too,

Doug Blecher ([16:15](#)):

This is intersections on the spectrum podcast. So we talk not just about the intersections of autistic and non-binary identities, but are there any other important identities that really for you is kind of important to talk about when thinking, thinking about your life and how they may make you happier?

Alex Earhart ([16:43](#)):

I identify as queer. Um, that's definitely a big component. Um, my chronic illness and disability work, um, being an artist and a writer, I'm a nerd. I like scifi and fantasy and video games and board games, reading. Um, Japan has been a big component in my life since I was about 12. And so I speak Japanese fluently and I lived there for, I guess it's like a total of five years over, over the years. So that's definitely a big part of my identity as well. I would say those are like the main, the main components, um, outside of autistic non-binary and, you know, ADHD, neurodiversity stuff.

Kelly Bron Johnson ([17:29](#)):

What types of other stories do you think would be important for us to highlight as we move forward with the intersections on the spectrum podcast?

Alex Earhart ([17:38](#)):

minorities and marginalized communities, for sure. Trans and gender expansive, queer, intersex, asexual, uh, black and Brown folks, people of color people, indigenous people.

Alex Earhart ([17:50](#)):

I would love to see more inclusion of people who use alternative forms of communication, screenwriters aac, if there's any, you know, hard of hearing or deaf folks that are able to access a podcast format, anybody with DID, um, you know,

Kelly Bron Johnson ([18:13](#)):

um, I'm kind of biased.

Alex Earhart ([18:15](#)):

There you go. See. So, I mean any of those intersections and, and identities, and I just there's too many of the same voices they're out there and we need more variety of people who have their voices listened to you and lifted up.

Kelly Bron Johnson ([18:37](#)):

Yeah, for sure. A hundred percent. That's why we do this, but yeah, it does part of it when Doug approached me and said, Hey, do you want to do this intersectional podcast? I was like, well, it has to have a transcript because I don't listen to podcasts.

Kelly Bron Johnson ([18:55](#)):

I'm like, well, how do I do this? Because I don't listen to podcasts. How am I supposed to run a podcast? But, um, but yeah, like as long as there's a transcript, I'm cool. And I, I, now that I started doing this, I

kind of started pushing back against other people when they, especially, if they share their podcasts with me directly, and then they're like, Hey, I want your feedback. And I'm like, well, if there's no transcripts, I'm not even going to give you the time of day. So you've got something and then we'll talk.

Alex Earhart ([19:22](#)):

So definitely yes, I totally agree. Anything accessibility related. Like we just like, people fight me tooth and nail on image descriptions. And so I interviewed my friends about why it's so important to have image descriptions and text and, um, accessibility for screen readers. And there are still people who are like, eh it's too hard. And like, it's not, it's not though. It's not. And if it, if you find it difficult, have someone help you, like, it's, there's just so much more that we can do that are pretty basic things that can make things accessible to people.

Kelly Bron Johnson ([20:03](#)):

No, for real. And it does take effort. I mean, even for me, sometimes I'll be lazy. I'm on Instagram and I'm like, I don't feel like writing one today. And I'm like, no, I have to, I have like, that's just not right. Like, you know, for me just to be like, Oh, well I don't feel like it. So I'm not going to do it. No, no, that's not cool. Well, yeah.

Alex Earhart ([20:20](#)):

And there, there are legitimate, you know, executive functioning and, um, even physical things where you can't type as much or whatever, but I try my best to, you know, nine times out of 10 even is better than zero. Right. Yep. Totally agree,

Doug Blecher ([20:41](#)):

Alex, before letting you go, um, I facilitate a group called spectrum Saturdays. It's an online group and connected with you in that group. So I just, you know, for people listening, it's a, it's a group for, uh, the intersections of autistic and, um, LGBT identities. Most of the people have, are trans or nonbinary. So I'm just wondering from you other than me being so-so of a facilitator, um, how is, how has the group been, um, like impactful to you when thinking about these intersection of identities?

Alex Earhart ([21:21](#)):

Well, first of all, you're a great facilitator. So I think it's been a huge part of my acceptance as an autistic person and non binary trans and chronically ill because there's so many of us, you know, who intersected all three of those junctures and being in a group where a lot of the people think like me, or have the same needs as me, or just know the, know the rules of engagement, I guess, as an autistic is really nice. Like I had a day where I was having a hard time verbalizing. And so I just used the screen reader on my phone at the mic and no one batted an eye at that. They're like, okay, are you still typing no worry. You know, like you don't have to explain yourself, you can just state your needs and people roll with it. So I think it's been one of the most helpful things in my, um, acceptance journey to have a group like that, where, and then it's easy to make friends with people too. And then you don't have to explain stuff to that friend because they just get it. That's not really something I've had often in my life. So having a whole group like that, especially meeting monthly is great and it's set and I know when it's going to be, and it's predictable, it's been incredible.

Doug Blecher ([22:48](#)):

Well, it's definitely been great having you as part of the group and, um, you sharing your wisdom. Um, and it, it was, it was great. Um, you know, having you, uh, here today and, um, talking with you and, um, getting a chance for Kelly to get to know you a little bit as well.

Alex Earhart ([23:07](#)):

It was great. Thank you for having me and this podcast sounds great. I can't wait to follow along and see who you talk to.