

Interviewee Name: Andy Jackson

Interviewer Name: Erin Scudder

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Transcript

Erin: can I kick off by asking you to introduce yourself however you would like to?

Andy: Sure. My name's Andy. I'm a poet, born in 1971, so I guess that kind of makes me middle aged now with Gen X. I was born in Bendigo, in central Victoria, which I think at that time, given the education system, I didn't really know was Dja Dja Wurrung country, which is where I am now. Just contextualising that because I think it's interesting to think of how things have changed over the years and just that awareness of, of history. Yeah my family - both sides of my family kind of arrived in Australia in the 19th century. So from - both from the UK. So that's kind of my background. But mostly I think of myself as a poet.

Erin: Yeah. Yeah. Great. And what experiences in the past have helped you or led to you becoming the creative practitioner you are today?

Andy: It's such a good question, and I think I've kind of - I often tell my kind of origin story as a writer a fair bit. So I've thought about this a lot. I think the main reason I became a poet was because of disability, because of visible difference. So as someone who kind of stood out bodily - I have a condition called Marfan syndrome - and for some people with that condition, yeah, most of us are kind of tall and thin, which is, you know, not that dramatic. But for some of us it means spinal curvature - and it has meant that for me. That makes you very visible as a teenager and as an adult as well. Especially - oh, I don't know, maybe it's in every culture, but certainly in, in Australian culture. So I was very ... what that does, getting a lot of attention and being stared at or, had things shouted at you in public from passing cars or that kind of thing. It makes you ... well, it gives you all sorts of reactions. It can make you very self-conscious, it can make you feel ashamed, make you feel angry. But for a lot of the time, it also made me very

thoughtful, like, why does this happen? So yeah, I think it made me someone who wanted to write about it - wanted to understand it.

Erin: Right.

Andy: And I - then made me want to share that writing with other people. So to make sure that it wasn't just going around in my head, but that it contributed to the culture and got other people to think about that dynamic of how we relate to each other as people based on the assumptions of what's normal and what's not normal.

Erin: Yeah. And what led you to poetry specifically?

Andy: That's a really good question. I, I think - ah, part of it is, I think, like I, I don't have memories of reading a lot of poetry when I was younger, at school or university. It was probably there, but I don't really remember it. I would have written things to myself in a journal or in an exercise book when I was a kid and not really shared it with anyone.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: But I did - a good friend of mine in the nineties was sort of interested in spoken word and poetry, and she wanted to self-publish a book but didn't want to do it by herself. So, kind of knew that I had written some things and sort of recruited me to, to join her in that, which I did and we did - yeah, we went to a few of the poetry readings in Melbourne and, and did some kind of open mic stuff and yeah, she kind of dropped away from that. But I kept going. I think what I found about poetry was I just really enjoyed the - partly the sense of, it's a really condensed art form, really focused. You can fit so much in and it also doesn't - it's more about asking questions rather than resolving everything, and it's also incredibly intimate. So yeah, probably what gave me the opportunity of getting poetry, it was really those fortuitous connections and being in, living in Melbourne at the time when there was a lot of spoken word happening and there were lots of opportunities for me to, to read my work in public and get an immediate reaction. So. Yeah, it became addictive.

Erin: That, that's interesting because it's like you're a writer and poetry appealed to you specifically, but because you sort of entered it through spoken word, there was like a performance aspect to it as well.

Andy: Yeah, yeah, very much, and a kind of, a sense that, that the writing is a, a communal thing and it's a communicative thing. It's not something you do privately off in the distance, but it's always - you know, yeah, there's always a reader when it's in print, but there's always an audience? And yeah, especially live poetry. Yeah, there's something really interesting there in terms of embodiment and, you know, people connecting with each other physically, being in the same space, being visible, I guess, for me? You know, it was, it's quite an empowering thing to, actually ... I guess, you know, when you're on a stage and you're reading your poetry, people are listening to your words and it's the words that are important, but they're also looking at you. And so - but at the same time, I'm still in charge of what the meaning of what I'm saying is. So it's - yeah, I - I've still got a lot more thinking to do about how all that works, but I just found it quite a powerful experience and I think it still is - to kind of be in charge of, yeah, of how you're interpreted or how you're engaged with.

Erin: So clearly that friend in high school - was it in high school, no, in the nineties -

Andy: Yeah, in, ah - I guess it, yeah, no, it was mid-nineties maybe, so - yeah, I would have been mid-twenties I suppose. Yeah.

Erin: So that was an important person obviously. Are there other people, experiences, or events that, events that stand out as being really formative or influential?

Andy: Yeah, there's sort of lots of little milestones, I think. So, yeah, that was definitely one of them. The second one, I think, was probably making a decision to study professional writing at RMIT, which was around the year 2000. I decided to go from - I was working in the public service full-time, feeling increasingly bored and also increasingly interested in writing. So I decided to go from full-time to part-time and start studying professional writing and doing a bit of everything to see what I could do. So that was really, really important to get a sense that I wanted to keep going and sort of make it more of a - you know, I didn't know if I could make a living out of it, but I really wanted to keep trying. And that was really useful for me to do that. Probably another

one that I thought of was - ah, would've been, oh, maybe 2008, maybe - I applied for a mentorship through the Australian Society of Authors and proposed to work with a poet called Jennifer Harrison. And she worked with me in kind of getting my first published collection ready. And so, yeah, the degree of attention that she brought to my own work and the way that we engaged together was really respectful. And it kind of felt like, yeah, I can, I can do this. And yeah, I kind of picked up on - I learned a lot through that process.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: But each - there's lots of little sort of things that have happened on the way, like getting a grant, or being mentored by other poets or - yeah, little things have just accumulated along, along the way. And each one has been really important.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: That's great. Apart from the positive experiences, has it all been smooth sailing or have there been some barriers, barriers or obstacles along the way?

Andy: Very interesting. This is why - yeah, I think - I thought about this a lot. And because, I think - you know, I've always identified as being physically different, but, probably only used the label of disabled writer in the last, maybe, eight years, or six or eight years. And so, thinking of myself as disabled, I go, well, I have started thinking about what are the hurdles? Because, that's the nature of disability, it's being, you know, having things put in, in the way. And my own experience in terms of writing - I, I really haven't felt any particular hurdles for me. Maybe my own advantages of - counterbalance that. So, you know, I'm, I'm university educated - I got lucky enough to - you know, my family was always poor, but I managed to get to university and I've been able to do that. So that's helped. I'm a bloke, you know, I'm white, so I've had some advantages and I haven't particularly found my own physicality or my impairments haven't been a particular issue. They have been in the broader culture, but I don't think particularly in publishing or in spoken word. I think probably my, the difficulties that have

come up have more been the ones that most writers experience - of precarious income...

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: ... not knowing if you're going to be published. Yeah. When the next invoice or pay cheque is coming from - all that stuff. So. And th-that's, I think, pretty common for, for most writers. Especially poets! You know ...

Erin: Yeah. It's not a blockbuster industry, unfortunately.

Andy: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

Erin: Yeah. What are you currently working on, and what's currently motivating you to write?

Andy: I'm kind of - well, I was going to say I'm taking a break from poetry. That's not quite true. It sort of is true. The last book I put out, *Human Looking*, was a huge, huge project and took a lot of energy out of me. So, yeah, it's a collection of poems and it was written via - through the, a kind of creative PhD. So it was a lot of work, really intensive work for four years. And so after that it was just kind of I kind of - haven't really been able to do much, but I'm starting at the moment to write a collection of essays, so, a working title called *Hunches: Thinking Through a Body*. So this idea, I guess, that we get our values and our - well, I get my values and my priorities and my solidarities through my bodily experience, how I move around in the world. And so, yeah, I'm writing a series of essays that are partly, I guess, they're personal experience, but they're also about ideas and what I think about poetry and visual culture and all sorts of things.

Erin: Yep.

Andy: That's the idea. So there's, there's that. The other thing I've been working on this year, which has been really exciting, is a collaborative writing project. I was "Writing The Future of Health" Fellow at RMIT, so that was the first one that they put out. And the idea of that was for a writer to come in and think about health systems and social systems in a creative way. So not from a medical or a scientific or a technological way,

but through a creative lens. And my idea was to write creatively, collaboratively, with other disabled writers and neurodiverse writers as well. So, we would - we had a couple of workshops, and we also basically paired off with each other - multiple different permutations, everyone writing poems together based on our own experience. And it was just, it's been really fascinating. The project is still going and hopefully there'll be an anthology next year.

Erin: Wow.

Andy: But it just reminded me so much of - kind of the power of people sharing experience. And so when you get in a room together or if you email each other, you already know there's a lot that you can take for granted, and there's a lot that you can just put to the side - you don't need to explain. You just get straight to the heart of it. And so it's been really powerful project and really interesting, yeah.

Erin: That sounds amazing. I'm very much looking forward to reading it.

Andy: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, hopefully the word will be out when it, when it really happens.

Erin: Yeah!

Andy: There've been some poems published here and there and a few essays, so - well, yeah, the word will be out next year, I hope.

Erin: It's a lovely project because I always think like - you know, that - the job or the task of being someone with an illness or a disability is very narrative in nature.

Andy: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, and can be kind of isolating.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: So you can feel like you're just having to deal with it yourself and to actually realise that there are people going through, not the same thing, but some kind of parallel -

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: - yeah, it's incredibly powerful. Yeah. Yeah. Really interesting too. And just creatively, it's fascinating to see people's voices kind of, either, sort of not, not merge, but sort of move towards each other or be in contrast with each other. It's really interesting.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: So, you talked a bit about what motivates your work and what motivates your work specifically in the Disability Arts space. Has your motivation, or the content of what you write about, or the motivation for writing about it changed over time?

Andy: Yeah, I, I used to think that it had changed, but, you know, having a handful of books now and I look back at them and actually realise I've been pretty consistent. So I've written autobiographical pieces about deformity and physical difference, and I've written stuff that is kind of biographical about other people's lives and trying to, you know, make those connections between different people. But yeah, the - so all that stuff's been really consistent over time. The meaning of the body within society is, is totally what I've always done. Probably what's evolved has been more of an interest in forms, poetic forms, and that's probably natural. You know, you - the more you write, the more you start thinking about the different things that you can do with form that reflect the forms of the body. So all, all that stuff's really interesting to me, and it's become probably more interesting as the years have gone on.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: So, yeah, some things have changed, some things are exactly the same.

Erin: Yeah, yeah. And what kind of content do - like do you feel like there's any limitations placed on the kind of work that you're supported or encouraged to create?

And also as a sort of extension to that, do you feel like you're present or published in the places where you want to be?

Andy: Ah, that's a good one. I think - yeah, I, I think probably because I've been writing and publishing for, you know, 20 years now, there's a sense in which people - I guess people have a sense of the sort of thing that I do. And I think that probably is what I do. So, and it's probably what I will continue to do on some degree. There'll be other things I will write about, but I think there will be the, that consistent thread of what I'm interested in. And so - yeah, occasionally I think, oh, it's an expectation, but, you know, it's probably an accurate expectation because that's the kind of thing that I, I'll want to be doing. In terms of where I might be published or appear, I - yeah, I've been lucky enough, I think, to be published in a lot of the major journals and literary journals, and that's been really affirming and encouraging.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: I'm always keen for poetry in general to have more of a profile, and I - so I love when poetry appears in more mainstream or newspapers or, you know, in television, or - it's like, great, but, but that's not so much about me, it's just sort of this, the form in general, which I'm really passionate about, and I think it's got huge potential to really, to have a bigger readership than it currently does.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: It just doesn't quite have that profile. So, you know, I'd like to be one among many, many people who can attract more interest in ...

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: ... the poetic form I think. Yeah.

Erin: Are there any - this doesn't necessarily need to be a disabled artist, but are there any contemporaries or artists you see around you who you'd like to see more recognition of or to see them on a bigger stage?

Andy: Yeah. Yeah, look, I've been - well, there's plenty of people that I've been collaborating with who are just fantastic writers who I'd love to see have, you know, their first collection out. So people like Gaelle Sobott, who's a Sydney writer. Alex Creece, who's an emerging poet from Geelong, is wonderful. Hoping Robin Eames will have a collection out - they're from Sydney, I think. Yeah, there's, there's so many writers I think, coming up. Yeah. Yes, so, so many! I also recently just read the thesis of emerging writer Beau Windon, who's ...

Erin: Oh okay.

Andy: ... really wonderful. So I'm hoping he manages to get some - I think, I think it's to do with a memoir, so he's hopefully going to put together a book. But there's just lots of poets around at the moment who I really love and I think will get more attention as the years go on. Hopefully publishers are there for them.

Erin: Yeah, yeah. I interviewed Alex for this project as well.

Andy: Great. Yeah, wonderful.

Erin: In terms of the wider Disability Arts scene, what degree of awareness do you think the public at large have of Disability Arts in Australia?

Andy: Oh, it's a great question. I think the average person on the street or the average person who perhaps engages with, you know, culture in some way - or books - I think their awareness would be pretty low. Like, I, I don't think people think of disability literature or poetry or arts in a coherent kind of - as a movement or as a thing.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: I could be wrong. But yeah, my, my feeling is that it's still kind of emerging as a sense of awareness for people.

Erin: Mm hmm.

Andy: Yeah. I don't think it's a particularly clear sense of what people in the public would know about.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: And when you think about it yourself - having, you know, having made the point that this is a contested umbrella term -

Andy: Yeah, yep.

Erin: - and there's a lot of different ideas around whether it's a thing or not. But if you, you know, if I were to ask you the question, like what would the main - what do you think the major milestones have been in the last 50 years for Disability Arts? How would you ans - respond to that?

Andy: Yeah, the - probably two things come to mind. One of them is in the sort of field of arts generally. I keep thinking of Back to Back theatre company being really important, partly because I mean they're just incredibly original and have been recognised sort of internationally as being really original and, and the role of disability in their work is central, but it's, it's more than that as well - it's, there's something very human about it that's - yeah. The work is just really, really impressive. So I, like I, I think - they're to me, one indicator of what Disability Arts in Australia can be and i-, and already is.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: The other thought that comes to mind is more about writing and poetry, which is what I'm always thinking about. And when I was first starting out, it, there wasn't really a, a kind of public acknowledgement of the role of disability in writing and poets. So things like anthologies, like the one that Heather Taylor-Johnson put out, or edited - hmm, probably getting close to five / eight years ago now - "Shaping the Fractured Self." I think even though that was focused on chronic ill-, chronic illness, particularly, it did have a role in bringing forward the body in terms of poetry. Yeah. So it's that and I

think there'll be, I imagine there'll be more anthologies around the corner. I've co-edited some literary journals in that space, and hopefully that's been part of building a bit of momentum for that.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: But yeah, in, in lit-, in literary terms, I feel like it's - there's some big stuff around the corner 'cause I feel like there's a lot of really good emerging poets coming up. Yeah.

Erin: Yeah. And good projects like the one you talked about.

Andy: Yeah, I think so, yeah.

Erin: Yeah, some good interdisciplinary stuff.

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: The next question is a yes / no question, but with a follow up. So would you consider your art political?

Andy: Yes, definitely.

Erin: Okay. And in what ways?

Andy: Look I think, well the, the kind of, the kind of cop-out answer is that I think every poem is political, because I think any time you, you publish something or you make something public, you're kind of voting for the value of whatever you're writing about. You're saying this is important. And so, yeah, I think everything is kind of political. But in terms of what I do, I think, yeah, my work, I think, is about interrogating how we see each other and how we see people that are physically different or - just different. And "see" as in literally how we visually, you know, assess people, but also how we conceptualise them and how we, yeah, how we look at each other. So, you know, it's not overtly political in terms of government policy usually, but it is definitely about that public communal space of how we treat each other and what the meaning of our, our life together is. So yeah, yeah, I think of it as political.

Erin: For me, this question always raises, raises the second question of what does "political" mean? 'Cause it's a term that people throw around so much and yet there's a lot of different ways of defining it and understanding it.

Andy: Yeah. Yeah, that's right. And probably for a lot of, well, for some writers and artists, there's a conception that political means certain topics or -

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: - and, yeah, I, I think in a way it's just hard to narrow it down like that.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yep.

Erin: You talked a bit about your work being about how we see each other, how we identify each other and ourselves. As a creative practitioner, how do you identify? You touched on this a bit - you said that it's only been kind of within the last decade? Five to eight years maybe?

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: That you've begun referring to yourself as a disabled writer. How, how do you identify or want to be identified and how has that evolved or changed for you?

Andy: Yeah, look, it's interesting. A long time ago I think I thought - like a lot of people, do - you think, oh I'm not really disabled. You know, like, I might have this genetic condition. But, you know, I, I did, I kind of thought of disability as impairment. And so when I thought about, well, I'm not really impaired, not particularly, cause I can do most things, then, oh I'm not really disabled. But I think what, what I reflected on was that, that process of being othered and being marginalised for your appearance, that's a disabling kind of dynamic. So, I had to kind of acknowledge that and go, well, that is something that's important, and it's important to kind of - because this stuff, because what we might call ableism is everywhere, but not talked about much - I think it's really

important for those of us who do recognise that dynamic, to actually say, well, I'm, I've been affected by this and to talk about it. So, yeah, it became important for me to kind of put my hand up, I suppose.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: I mean I've always done it anyway. It's - I've always been doing that stuff - but I might as well use that language. And so the, I think the more people who are, kind of, honest about it - not that everyone has to have the same label at all, but I think it's useful as a - it's such a huge field, I mean, I think you mentioned that before, it's so diverse, so there's no way that I could even understand the complexity of experience under that umbrella. But yeah, the more people talk about it, the more likely it is that people understand the complexity of it and the fact that it is actually just essentially in, in the nature of being human that we are liable to disability in many ways.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: I love that point you made about just the power in identity in able - in a world where I think the assumption is often that there's nobody disabled in the room, or that there's -

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: - you know, I, and it is a very broad and vast field, like you say. But I guess the more people who speak up, the better the chances are that we'll get an idea of that diversity.

Andy: Yeah, yeah, that's right. And I think it's this sense too that, yeah, actually talking about it creates the conversations that might have an influence on reducing some of the barriers that are out there.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yeah. But that's the goal, you know, to -

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yeah. It's an ongoing, huge, complex struggle. But yeah, that's the idea.

Erin: Yeah. What do you think the field looks like in terms of people's thoughts around how they identify, around disability pride, around whether or not to identify. Do you think there's a degree of agreement or is it very contested?

Andy: I think. Yeah, look, it's - it is still - it's sort of contested slash complicated. So, you know, it's hard to say which. Even in this project that I'm working on now, I had assumed that, you know, I would describe the project as being - working with other disabled writers. There are at least one, maybe others who actually don't want to be described as disabled writers, but as writers with a disability.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Which is different. So there's even that distinction, you know, to say, well, I'm not disabled, I have a disability. So there's a - and, and a lot of the complexity does come down to language and, you know, how do you identify and yet not be - have another layer of feeling limited or feeling like you're being seen as being constrained by a label. So yeah, it's, it's incredibly complicated. Partly why I like poetry, because you can start to undermine binaries about, you know, disabled / non-disabled, you can start to question it a bit.

Erin: Yep.

Andy: I mean, I still, I think the label is super important and it will continue to be that. But yeah, I, I think it's, it's really complicated and it's going to evolve and continue to evolve.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yeah, definitely.

Erin: What do you think the - I don't know if you can speak to this, but what are, are the additional challenges involved when identities are intersectional or there's multiple competing levels of marginalisation?

Andy: Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, that's a, it's a great question. I don't think I can contribute much to it, apart from a sense of what other people go through and what I know that they go through based on my connection with them.

Erin: Yep.

Andy: So, the women that I know, especially those with chronic illness or with disability can have huge problems with the health system, not being believed, or - or even, you know, not having the right supports available because all the research has been done on male bodies, so - there's all that stuff I'm really aware of. There are people in the - this collaborative project I'm working on too who - well, there's a couple of Indigenous writers, there's also some people from, you know, non-European backgrounds who - yeah, are very much aware of the kind of impact of racism on their, their lives as well, which I have no experience of, but I'm aware that is out there.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yeah, I think it's a great question to have, and I think it'll be really fascinating to see the sweep of responses to that. I've been aware, I think, at times, in my own, I guess, career as a poet, that I've been lucky, in terms of the - so I don't have some of those hurdles, and - but at the same time I'm also disabled. So there's a - maybe other people can come through the door behind me, that kind of thing. Yeah, so hopefully - and that's part of what I think of my own - my role at the moment is to, yeah, to keep doing my own work, but also to mentor other writers and to shine the spotlight on them as well. That's hopefully what's ahead as well for me.

Erin: Yeah, that's wonderful. And very much sounds like something you're already doing.

Andy: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, and partly cause I love it, but also because I've had people come to me and kind of go, "can you have a look at these poems?" You know, so, you know, it's just sort of happened organically, which is probably the way it should be.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: Great. It's only 1:40, but I think we've got through most of the questions. Except for the last question, which is the most important, which is, is there anything that you think I should have asked you that I haven't touched on.

Andy: Oh. Oh, that's a good one. I was - when, when you gave me the questions, I thought, oh, okay, I'll have to really think about that one. And I - yeah, look, there's actually, there's so much in terms of - yeah, when I've thought about that journey from kind of mid- to late nineties to now it's a real span, and a lot has changed I think in that time - like when I first started writing, I wasn't really aware of any other writers, not just in Australia, but anywhere who were talking about bodily difference or disability in a really nuanced way, or in a way that was, you know, poetic. So that's changed hugely now, and there are, you know, anthologies from around the world in different countries that have come out and lots of amazing writers and essayists. So it's, it's a hugely different field and I think it's mostly been just in the last five or ten years that that's really started to tick off. And that's beginning to happen here too.

Erin: [Semi inaudible]: Why do you think that is?

Andy: I j- I'm not entirely sure. Like, I think - maybe, but - maybe even part of it is - a small part perhaps is the online world, and people have been able to connect with each other and form communities and start conversations with each other. So disabled people connecting. I've seen, you know, some journals starting up. So that's the other thing we talk about, there's been a coup-, there's a couple of literary journals that have just started recently, specifically for disability-focused work. So that's really exciting. That's - and that's happened in other countries too. So there have been specific journals that are set up -

Erin: Right.

Andy: - and that's probably given a bunch of writers an outlet and a place to start developing their, their career, so.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: It's part of that too, I think.

Erin: Do you know what the names of those journ - they might be good for us to reach out to even -

Andy: Yeah, absolutely.

Erin: - if they're recently established.

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: It might be interesting to see what's brought them about and ...

Andy: Yeah yeah yeah. One is called Sunder, which is S-U-N-D-E-R.

Erin: Oh yeah.

Andy: The other one I have to remind myself of, just, because I have - the - ah, Bramble. That's right.

Erin: Bramble.

Andy: Bramble, yep. So if you look both those up, with disability, then I'm sure you'll find them. But Bramble just launched the first issue, and Sunder I think is, probably, next year they'll do a call out. So they're very they're both really new.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yep.

Erin: It'll be interesting to reach out to them and maybe say like, did these come out of nowhere or is there a build up?

Andy: Oh, sure!

Erin: Like who are the people behind it, what's the history there?

Andy: Yeah, absolutely.

Erin: It's really great that those changes are coming into place.

Andy: Absolutely. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it's really exciting. And certainly there's lots of - you know, there are lots of new, young, emerging writers, but there's also writers who have been doing their work for, for a fair while and are now, you know, parallel to my own experience saying, "well, yeah, this is a community that I belong to." So that's the really interesting thing. So it's almost like suddenly you have not just all these bunch of new writers, but also some older ones or more experienced ones who can mentor and ...

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yeah. It's really, it's an interesting time.

Erin: And maybe even people, based on what you're saying, like maybe even people who have come up writing in isolation but are now saying, "oh, I actually am part of this."

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: "Of this group."

Andy: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And that's, it's - yeah. Really, really interesting. Yeah.

Erin: What would you like to see happen? This is a really big question -

Andy: Yep.

Erin: - off the top of my head! But what would your wishlist in this space for the next 50 years -

Andy: Yeah, look, I think almost like - I think there used to be a - it used to be seen as this either / or scenario where, okay, you, you have a separate disability literature where people get published in that and they - everything is about disability and you, you're talking to each other and it's like a communal space for the - for this subculture. And on the other hand it's like, no, no, we want to break into the mainstream and be well read and popular and, you know, and you can write about anything, you can do whatever you like.

Erin: Yep.

Andy: But I sort of think we need both, and I think there will be people who will go between both and some will stay within one and not the other. And - so I guess what I'm - what I'd love to see is - yeah, disability-specific journals and publishers, even, happen, where there's a specific place that is, you know, like a publishing company run by people with disability would be amazing. And seeing that become an established influential part of the scene will be wonderful.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: At the same time, also, it would just be great that, that plenty of disabled writers are published and are out there and are well paid, you know. In all sorts of fields where it's not just, you know, memoir or, you know - it, it's any kind of subject or field. So that's what I think I'd like to see, this kind of - both. Both options at once.

Erin: Yeah. And / both.

Andy: Yeah. Definitely, yeah.

Erin: Yeah, there's so much room in the middle, isn't there? Because it's like your disability or your physical, your physicality, your health is always going to be a factor ...

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: ... you know, in what you do and in what you're able to. But, but you also want to have total creative freedom within the scope of your own interests.

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: So it's hard to be at either end of the spectrum where either your disability is out of the picture or ...

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: ... or that's the only thing you can write about. And there's - I think, like you say, there's so much more room in the middle for a combination - various permutations of those things to be.

Andy: Yeah. Yeah, indeed. And for this sort of - because when you are a person who is affected by, kind of, disabling systems or however you want to put it, do - it shapes you, you know. It's huge. It actually does affect who you are. So that, that's, you know, it's unavoidable. But also there's, ah, there's things that you learn through that process and the kind of insights that you gain and the ingenuity that you develop and the, the connections you make with other people. Those things are about your experience as a disabled person, but they're also sort of just human skills that can be a knowledge that can be translated to other fields as well. So yeah, that stuff is sort of really interesting to me. That's yeah, it's, it's both.

Erin: Yeah. I had a great conversation with someone a few weeks ago who said they thought disabled people could be really great allies in the decolonising space.

Andy: Ahh.

Erin: Because disabled people are really good at identifying systems that don't work.

Andy: Yeah.

Erin: You know, it's like those transferable skills.

Andy: And - yeah, absolutely. And, and this sense that, like the current system is very much non-stop work and almost a kind of, punishing - you just keep going and going and going. And yeah, for those of us who can't do that, Why would you, you know, this isn't working. So people who are sick or impaired or neurodiverse, there is a kind of sense of "well no, there are other ways of doing it. There have to be."

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yep.

Erin: Yeah, yeah.

Andy: Definitely.

Erin: I think that's about it. I don't want to take up too much more of your time.

Andy: Yeah, no, it's fine.

Erin: It's been really, really great speaking with you.

Andy: Yeah. Yeah. But, and - great questions.

Erin: Oh good!

Andy: And, yeah - yeah I thought, ah, it's too, these are broad - which maybe can capture anyone. But also, yeah, it did make me think a lot about -

Erin: Oh, that's good.

Andy: - travel that I've gone on.

Erin: Yeah.

Andy: Yeah, really interesting.

Erin: Yeah. Yeah, it's been fascinating. They are so broad and, and yet what I really like is every interview ends up being so completely different.

Andy: Oh, great.

Erin: So, so, so different. So the broadness has its - has its advantages. Yeah. And then people -

Andy: Yeah, absolutely.

Erin: - have a chance to really speak to their own experiences.

Andy: Yeah. Great. Wonderful.

Erin: Okay, thank you!

Andy: Thanks, Erin. Okay, bye.