

Interviewee Name: CB (cubbie) Mako

Interviewer Name: Erin Scudder

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Length of Interview: 54:34 minutes

Transcript

CB (cubbie): Okay. Okay. Where to begin? Well, my first foray into literary publishing was digital. So, my first piece was from a literary magazine called 'The Suburban Review', and they published my first piece online, which is fantastic!

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): Since then - many of my - more of my pieces, whether fiction, nonfiction, short stories, were - are more available digitally than it is in print, which is fantastic.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): But then sometime pre-pandemic, you know, because I was part of a writing community here in the west side of Naarm - oh, by the way, I forgot to mention I am broadcasting from the unceded stolen lands of the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, so this is where I've settled as a first generation migrant. Yep. Sorry I forgot I to mention that from beginning, but yeah. So, this is where we settled. So, I had a writing group and then we would go out after the writing session at Footscray Arts and then I could not hear people. And sometimes when I hear people, say in a pub, we would go out for drinks, I can't hear them. And then even in a, in a high-ceilinged room, I'd ask people, 'Can you tell me again what you just said? Because I can't hear.' They thought I was, they - I was joking. They thought it was sarcasm. I'm like, okay, no, I'm not being sarcastic. I really can't hear.

Erin: Could you please continue with your introduction.

CB (cubbie): Yeah. So that's how I just decided - decided to have my hearing checked. And I realised I'm hard-of-hearing apart from mental health issues. So, a lot of things started popping up before the pandemic.

Erin: Yep.

CB (cubbie): Next thing you know. Can you hear me well? Sor -

Erin: Yep.

CB (cubbie): My ears popped again. Ah - what happened? I got myself formally - ah, tested? - assessed - whether or not I have autism, because even though I am a person of colour, I could not even fit in a group of writers of colour. So, did I realise, is there something wrong with me? My psychologist suggested I could go check this test.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): And then when they, they tested, you know, we clicked on the link and answered a whole lot of questions, and she said, you might be on the spectrum. I invested in a NILS, which is what you call no interest loan scheme for carers. And I was able to get a loan to have myself tested because it's very expensive apparently to have tested for autism. I only got the bare bones summary. I came out in what they call the DSM 5, level one or formally what they call in DSM 4 as Asperger's syndrome. But that's a wrong term now. It's just ASD autism spectrum [disorder].

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): So I'm still learning about it. I found out - right at the beginning of the pandemic. So, that was a bit of a scary thing. I couldn't find the right psychologist and yeah, that's, that's how it all started.

Erin: When was the first, how did you first get interested in writing and how did you get [started ?]-

CB (cubbie): That's a very good question. Would you believe I started in fanfiction.

Erin: Yeah! (Inaudible comment). I did know that because I looked you up!

CB (cubbie): Because, I've got a disabled child and she got cancer. And that took a long time to get well. And when did she got well, the chemotherapy was finished. We were in the middle of winter. I can't go out because I've got an immunocompromised toddler. She's 12 now, so which is good, but when she was a toddler and like, what do I do? Then I discovered fanfiction. And next thing I know, I'm [writing]- I discovered Footscray Arts. They do artwork. "Oh, I'd like to draw fan art!" Then I started learning to draw art, painting, drawing.

Erin: Cool!

CB (cubbie): All, all kinds of mediums. Until I reach oil painting.

Erin: Oh, yeah.

CB (cubbie): Yep. And then, coincidentally, the community centre was also running a literary - a smaller event and recruiting writers from the west side. They were looking for representatives of - because the narrative in 2016 was very white - they were looking for writers of colour.

Erin: Yep.

CB (cubbie): Then I applied. Next thing you know, I was part, in a - how many were we? Like, almost a dozen? Or, or just below twenty [in our batch].

Erin: Yep.

CB (cubbie): Of writers all from the west side [of Naarm]. So that's how it started. It wasn't planned, it just did happen organically, so -

Erin: So you sort of started fan fiction, and then enjoying art and painting, and then came writing.

CB (cubbie): Yep.

Erin: Interesting!

CB (cubbie): Yeah, I know, right? And because I'm most - apparently it runs having autism - I could not for the life of me balance a bike properly. Is it because I've got, I've got a pair of glasses ever since I was a kid or was it because of my autism? For whatever reason,

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): I can't balance a bike. So, what I have is that - what do you call - a cargo bike. It's three wheels. That's how I get to and from -

Erin: Ah, great.

CB (cubbie): - to get around: school drops, to and from the writing group back in 2016. And then, once I got diagnosed, my writing shifted into Disability Arts. My advocacy is digital, which is - I've been asking authors, authors of colour. Where are your ebook and [audiobook] all of your book formats?

Erin: Right!

CB (cubbie): Because not everyone can read text on, on paper or print.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): Because in, in ebooks, you could expand the size of the font. Or if you have no capacity -

Erin: Yep, or use a screen reader.

CB (cubbie): Yep. Or if you have no capacity to read because you're also a carer, you have to be around, you know, always on your feet, an audiobook is the best way to read.

Erin: That's a really good point.

CB (cubbie): Again, the platform for accessibility for books in the literary arts was very limited and mostly for white authors, which I don't know why - so this is ongoing advocacy, so -

Erin: Yep.

CB (cubbie): Disability in the Arts is a very new thing for me as a person of colour, because I've yet to find more disabled BIPOC - Black, Indigenous people of colour -

Erin: Yep.

CB (cubbie): - that's the acronym that the United States, my coloniser uses, or AAPI. That's another. There's so many acronyms.

Erin: There's a lot of acronyms, yeah.

CB (cubbie): So this, in - to be part of this, this project is fantastic because it would add representation ...

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie):... for us and also for First Nations who are now coming out and starting their zines - somebody published a zine - they're all Blak, disabled CI (chronic illness / with chronic illness) during this pandemic, and they're Blak - young Blak writers and that's fantastic!

Erin: It's fantastic that you're seeing that.

CB (cubbie): Yes.

Erin: That amplification.

CB (cubbie): Yes. And we'd like, you know, them to - to encourage them to like to go to literary festivals and invite them to other events.

Erin: Apart from yourself, who would you say is like an unsung star in that group or someone who should be on our radar?

CB (cubbie): We actually, apart from myself, we organically found each other. We have a group called the Disabled QBIPOC Collective.

Erin: Yep.

CB (cubbie): Because none of us could fit in our respective circles / communities of, whether literary, music, performance, poetry. So, we decided - then we just met up organically and next thing you know, we performed just before the pandemic hit at this Arts Centre Melbourne inaugural event called "Arts Future" - I hope I'm getting it right - and we performed as a group and they even included a ramp for my friend, Pauline Vetuna, who is a wheelchair user. And the venue was a relaxed venue as well, so that won't stress us, neurodivergent. So, we're four of us, Pauline Vetuna, Gemma Mahadeo, and Hannah Morphy-Walsh, or also known as Nayook. Among the four of us, we have yet to emerge out of this pandemic because it's very difficult for disabled artists to come out, especially - you know this because you're immunocompromised - no one's masking.

Erin: Yeah. It's harder.

CB (cubbie): It's not part of our culture.

Erin: Sometimes - sometimes it feels harder now than ever.

CB (cubbie): Absolutely. And the mandates were taken out. So I, I really wish that we were like Japan or Korea, that it's intrinsic in their culture that when you are going out and you don't feel well, you would mask automatically to care for the community. I don't know if you could see this - I got a very - my favourite artist is Judy Kuo. And - I don't know if you can see this because I've got my background - there you go. Can you see it?

Erin: A little bit - what does it say?

CB (cubbie): We - what does it say? Because a background, it's all because I put the background. It says wearing a mask is community care. So it's my favourite [artwork].

Erin: Yeah!

CB (cubbie): There you go!

Erin: Yes, there, I can see it. Beautiful.

CB (cubbie): Yeah. All right. So unfortunately, many of us as a group have yet to meet face-to-face because of the pandemic. It's still ongoing for us. It's not the end, no. 'Oh, it's post-pandemic already!' No, it's not. We just got COVID. There's a second surge.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): And that affects disabled people. We are left behind. Sometime in 2020 I was invited to join this group called from Queen Victoria Women's Centre. So, they did a Time Machine where they buried a capsule about the pandemic. And my theme was no one should be left behind.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): So with this, because 2022 is an election year, the disabled, the immunocompromised, those with chronic illness are left behind. So, a lot of us are still in lockdowns.

Erin: Yes.

CB (cubbie): Even though there's no mandates. There's no, isolation rules anymore. So that's really affected the Arts sector for those who are disabled, immunocompromised and with chronic illness, either as a performer or as an audience. So, we've always asked for access, whether digital - like, not face-to-face - if I could perform via Zoom? And some have accommodated that request. Others do not. And surprisingly, it is of the people of colour who do not advocate accessibility in the Arts. It's a bit shocking and it's been a difficult journey for me because as a person who is hard of hearing with a child who also is -has bilateral hearing loss - both of us speak, our second language is Auslan. So, when I asked for an Auslan interpreter in a literary performance, my producer, who is usually a person of colour, would ask, 'Would you like just your piece that you're going to read, interpreted?' Like, no!

Erin: That doesn't make any sense!

CB (cubbie): And this is what - Melbourne Writers Festival? - like no, the whole thing! Like, no - have the whole Auslan interpreter sign the whole thing. Don't wait for some - a person - disabled person to be there. The baseline of any programming should be, whether a person of - you know, event of, of created by a person of colour or, or mainstream, white mainstream should be - the baseline is always have access now because we are still in a pandemic.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): And that's part of my advocacy still, whether, yeah, whether online or - where is that, in Twitter? hashtag accessibility. I use any trending hashtag just to amplify.

Erin: Recently in the Virtual Disability conference, I listened to a talk where someone said build things right in the first place. You know, as in the b- like you said, the baseline, the baseline should always -

CB (cubbie): Should always be.

Erin: I want to, I want to pick up on something you were saying -.

CB (cubbie): Okay.

Erin: - and I'm kind of jumping ahead in the questions here.

CB (cubbie): Go ahead.

Erin: But I want to ask you – what do you think - because you've spoken to this a bit already - what are the challenges for, for disabled people who identify intersectionally? So who might also be queer, who might also be people of colour. What are the unique challenges you see in that space particularly?

CB (cubbie): Okay, that's a very good question because our intersectionality as a collective is three intersections. One, I consider myself non-binary. Two, I'm a person of colour. And three, I'm disabled. So, when we perform, it's the first thing they notice is not my disability but my colour. So, is it racism? The intersections of racism and ableism. And so there - there's actually a gap. For example, when we are in a queer group, we're faced with racism and ableism. But when we are in a group with people of colour, we're faced with ableism, not racism. So, there is that gap in between when groups don't merge or if—

Erin: Like you're saying - like there's always - you - there's always like maybe one way in which you're seen or understood.

CB (cubbie): Yes.

Erin: But there's always some other bias at play.

CB (cubbie): Yes.

Erin: You haven't found a space where you feel -

CB (cubbie): Safe. Completely safe. No, No.

Erin: In all of your layers of identity.

CB (cubbie): Yes. Intersectionality is such a new thing, well as late as 2017. But then when you cross it with disability, it's still a hashtag, 'disability so white.' Because they'd rather, say, in the literary arts, publish the more camera-friendly, photogenic white person, the pretty ones, the good-looking ones. And there is also a stigma among the people of colour communities not to shame their families or community. Some would reach to me and say, I know, I'm a person of colour, I've got this, this [disability], but I can't say it out loud. I can't -

Erin: Identify?

CB (cubbie): - identify, yeah. Because yeah, our, my community or my family doesn't want to be shamed. So, there's that problem.

Erin: So there's still like an association between disability and shame.

CB (cubbie): Yes, in, among people of, of community - people of colour. Communities of colour? Communities of colour. Yep. So that's, that's the problem. Until recently, until the pandemic happened. So, I think that was -

Erin: What, what do you think changed during the pandemic?

CB (cubbie): The accessibility that we've been asking long, long ago suddenly become available. So, Zoom happened. Like, oh, wow! We can meet up now and you can study online or you don't, you know, because these - this - these institutions where you guys are making this study are all ableist design works like infrastructure and, and stairs, and -

Erin: 100%.

CB (cubbie): - and the lecture room has no accessibility. You have to go downstairs like, oh no, but then pandemic happened. You can now study online. So that opened a lot of doors for those are, who are disabled and cannot or do not have even the capacity to, to travel. So that's covered a lot of help during one step that is, is - and technology has improved and keeps improving and evolving. Right now, you reminded me, the captions. When the pandemic started in 2020 - there were no captions, like somebody has to manually type captions.

Erin: Yeah. And in terms of change you were talking before about attitudes towards disability in communities, your communities of colour. Has that changed at all during the pandemic? Has there been any movement there?

CB (cubbie): That is a very good question. It depends on the community. I still have to call out, say, for example, my community of colour say, when they have access, ask whether they have access or not. And there don't - or, for example, just in the Asian diaspora, it's shocking. Like, okay, I'm in one of the anthologies and the, the - what, not producer - one of the main editors asked, do you want just your piece to be read as an audio book? What are you talking about? This is, this is a book. This is an anthology. Why don't you include everyone? As, you know, I've yet to see, except for 'Growing up Disabled in Australia,' which I'm also included, many anthologies don't have digital access.

Erin: Yeah, that's an interesting, that's an interesting aspect.

CB (cubbie): Point, yeah.

Erin: And it's not just lack of accessibility, it's the impact on your mental health of that.

CB (cubbie): Of asking. Yes, it's difficult to ask. And then when you do get the courage to ask. We usually are turned down. So like, sometimes [why] bother of asking?

Erin: Right.

CB (cubbie): But we persist. We annoy people. Many publishers are probably so annoyed with me every time they post a book on Instagram and I ask.

Erin: They can be annoyed.

CB (cubbie): [Laughs].

Erin: So cubbie, in your practice and in your publishing and in your experiences as a multifaceted artist.

CB (cubbie): Yes.

Erin: Who or what experiences have stood out as positive, you know, maybe as some favourites or as really helping you along the way become the creative practitioner you are today?

CB (cubbie): Okay. The best thing ever was the knowledge that arts grants are accessible now, and there is a separate category for Deaf and Disabled artists. And if we don't know how to write them - because there is a jargon in writing arts grants - I can have it, ah, what is the word? Ah, auspiced. So, someone else can help me write or, you know, make it, improve it. And I've, I've been to two auspicing organisations and helped me make my arts grant, you know, reach the, the standard to get it approved. And surprisingly, I've, I've been approved - what - to, to three or four arts grants.

Erin: You've done amazingly.

CB (cubbie): Ah, you think so? Because they're all auspiced, so, I've got help. So that's I think that's the astounding thing, that, there is now a separate category, even in - the latest one is the Lord Mayor's Creative Writing - Awards 2022.

Erin: Yeah!

CB (cubbie): They made a new category, which is for the Disabled community. So, I was shortlisted in that one.

Erin: Great!

CB (cubbie): So just fantastic! Somebody out there is actually listening despite my annoying tweets and Instagram. But yeah, being - living in, in the UNESCO city of literature - that's one of my, yeah, points to them like, 'come on! Make this accessible', I reckon.

Erin: Yeah! And thank you, thank you for doing that advocacy. Have you had any favourite projects or - of your own or -with a group that you've worked on?

CB (cubbie): Oh, wow. That's a very good question. Well, anything that the Collective and I have made online, which we had published at Footscray Arts, we were invited as a collective and we have published our first set of pieces there through Footscray Arts. I think that's the best collaborative discussion we had and it's amazing. And after that we got invitations, say for example, in Midsumma. Midsumma has a program called Pathways [for] queer, Disabled, young artists. We were invited to join them and speak in one of their workshops about intersectionality.

Erin: Oh, great.

CB (cubbie): Yeah. So, I think, anything that, when we had the capacity to come together as a group or Disabled QBIPOC collective, that's the best experience ever, because it's so difficult for us to get the capacity to have the energy. And being in year three of the pandemic is really taking a toll for our mental, on our mental health.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): On our health.

Erin: Yep.

CB (cubbie): Lots of things. Our capacity to get even the most basic help, especially now with COVID - I just caught COVID – that was so difficult because I'm a carer. I [have] a disabled child, and we both have COVID. That was the only reason we were able to access free rapid antigen tests. So other than that, if you were not disabled, how would you be able to have capacity with - these things are so expensive! But we're lucky in that aspect because we needed to test constantly because - are we out of it yet or do we still, like, are we double lining because the kids had school, had exams. Being, both a carer with invisible disabilities - and carer [to] a disabled child I've got... I see things two ways, so - and add that with my not being white, not being mainstream.

CB (cubbie): We have a different set of lens when it comes to the arts. Probably another collaboration I had was - in the pandemic - was with my child and I. She did all these drawings on her own and I juxtaposed the letters [of the word] 'Inclusion'. I think that was in Together Victoria website. We did an art together while we were in lockdown in 2021. So that's us. I'd love an inclusion, a very inclusive society while we go through this pandemic.

Erin: You've talked about several of the barriers and the obstacles and the frustrating limits to accessibility that you've come up against. Is there anything else you want to say along those lines about, you know, times and ways in which it hasn't been smooth sailing, in which it's been really difficult for you to create art or to be an artist?

CB (cubbie): That's a very good question. There are [arts] fundings, there are out there requiring output. How do you make output while being one: Disabled, two: in a pandemic? That is very challenging! And catching COVID! My problem is now, after catching COVID, my output will change if I'm required to have a manuscript by the end of the project.

Erin: Right.

CB (cubbie): Catching COVID in a pandemic that doesn't want to acknowledge you're in a pandemic, how does that affect a project? So -

Erin: So it's difficult to have outcome-based funding ...

CB (cubbie): Yeah, funding.

Erin:... especially when your circumstances change during the period of that funding, yeah.

CB (cubbie): Yeah. So I usually look for creative development funding.

Erin: Right.

CB (cubbie): That's a very new funding strategy.

Erin: Yep.

CB (cubbie): Which is only for creative development. You don't need an output. If you need to do research, if you need materials, resources, that's creative funding. But then there's a limit versus, say, an output-based arts funding. And the decentralisation of arts funding now includes LGAs. So local government areas like mine in Brimbank and Maribyrnong, where I live between the two councils here in Naarm, they're always output-based despite, despite the pandemic. So that's a bit of a challenge. The first thing I need to look, if I do want to continue creating art, is it - can we [do] my [slow / crip time] pace?

Erin: Yes.

CB (cubbie): Yes. Like, is there an extension? Because they work within the council's year, like their funding year. So yeah, that's, that's the question now.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): Accessibility goes beyond not just, you know, having ebooks, audio books, Zoom. The question is also funding accessibility.

Erin: Yeah, and the conditions upon which the funding is awarded. Are you able to work at the moment and if so, is there anything that you're - special that you're currently working on?

CB (cubbie): Yes, I'm currently working on a manuscript. I finally have a mentor, which is fantastic. This is called Found Works Funding by the Maribyrnong Council. It's an inaugural arts funding which funds not just the artist, but as well as a mentor, because I kept on applying for funding and, without a mentor, and, and I feel so lost. I'm working on a manuscript about fangirling and being autistic because although, apparently autism includes obsessions. So, when we love something, we really love something.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): Like nonstop. So I love, ever since I was like 12 [years old], so I love this particular robot called Voltron.

Erin: Amazing!

CB (cubbie): It is. You know Voltron?

Erin: No, but I think it sounds really cool.

CB (cubbie): It is! And then I still fangirl it to this very day.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): So, I did not discover until I was, you know, a certain age - ah, I don't want to be - I was born AFAB, but I don't want to be identified as a woman, I'm non-binary. I've always loved robots.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): But, you know, I grew up in a, in a generation where - '...no, no, robots are not for you! They're for boys. You go watch your, you know, girly stuff.'

Erin: Like, no! 'I'm also into robots!' So what - does that feed into, like, writing about that? Or maybe, like, in [inaudible] thing -

CB (cubbie): We have - yeah.

Erin: [Inaudible]. Is that one of the motivations for your work, or are there other things that motivate your work these days?

CB (cubbie): The concept of fangirling is very new in Australia. Meanwhile, in my original coloniser, the United States, I have older books about fandom, fangirling, like where [are] the books in in Australia?

Erin: Yeah!

CB (cubbie): So I'm hoping I'll be one of the first people of colour to have, to write or be published about fangirling or fandom and autism. Because again, even in autism, it's also too white. Like where are the authors of colour with autism? I only found a handful.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): Only found a handful. Yeah, my latest post in Instagram is, ah, was for my author [mentor] who suggested Naoki Higashida -

Erin: Okay.

CB (cubbie): - Higashida. So I think that was one of the first books I've ever read who has autism and a person of colour

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): So it's hard to find them, [autistic authors of colour].

Erin: It sounds like there's still a lot of work to be done.

CB (cubbie): Lot of work. It's just the tip of the iceberg. We're just starting.

Erin: There's a question here about what degree of awareness do you think the public have of Disability Arts in Australia? But I would add to that, to say, what degree of awareness do you think the public have of Disability Arts amongst artists of colour in Australia?

CB (cubbie): That's a very good question. You, you're throwing me really good questions!

Erin: Well, thank you! I'm trying to get better at this whole interview gig.

CB (cubbie): Oh, well. I would love to encourage those who are artists of colour to come out and admit - to destigmatise disability. It's just - a few days ago was International Day of People with Disability.

Erin: Yes.

CB (cubbie): I would love to see artists, including - no, led by First Nations disabled Blak artists to lead the way for Disability Arts. It is already starting by the, from the younger generation, which is fantastic. I will cheer for them, fangirl them and support them in all the ways I can.

Erin: What a great statement to have on record as part of this archive, you know, people will see this and, yeah.

CB (cubbie): Ah, well let's face it. Please: okay, for authors of colour, please include ebooks and audio books. We don't want to disappear in the future in 100 years from now when someone checks writing in Australia - in so-called Australia - where is your work? If it's not available in digital, you will be left [behind], it will disappear.

Erin: Yep.

CB (cubbie): That's, that's my message because that's one of my main advocacies. Authors of colour are not very proactive in terms of having their contracts include digital. So that's my, that's my [plea], probably - please listen to us! That's my fangirling mode moment. To my favourite authors, please include - especially First Nations authors - please include digital access.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): Yes.

Erin: When you're speaking about digital spaces and print spaces and just thinking about like other venues for presenting your work or being published, where is your work showcased or visible? Are you where you want to be or are there places where you want your work to be that it, that it isn't included in yet?

CB (cubbie): Oh, yeah. It's, it's half and half. So, if my piece is available online and as an essay, then yeah, it's there. Wherever it is, it's in the Internet, it's in the World Wide Web. But if it's just in print, it will disappear in time. So, unless the government, the latest government, the new government federal makes it into a law that, to include digital deal – digital lending rights – so if, make it mandatory to have digital access on literary arts ... that'll be fantastic.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): Yeah. Because each state has different ways how they handle disability. Somebody told me that. So, yeah, we're just lucky – I mean, in Victoria because that's where the NDIS was born. So, we've got a lot of opportunities to promote accessibility. But, yeah, I would love if people of colour would listen. Let's say, for example, 3C, our community radio, they would include in International Day of People with Disabilities, not just audio, because that's, that's radio, but then also have a transcript. So, something like that, as simple as that.

Erin: Yeah. So I guess it, it sounds almost like you're saying, like, it's not so much a question of, like, who's publishing you or what publication, but the forms in which it's offered.

CB (cubbie): Yes. I don't want to ask any more. Make it [art] available. This is like -probably OzCo,- Australia Council? - would, would do it. I'm actually reading their digital strategy,

Erin: Oh yeah.

CB (cubbie):... the Digital Cultural strategy. So I'd love that. It's the baseline. Have - whatever Arts practice you have - everything across the line in five, ten years from now would have a digital platform.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): Yeah. That's the future. Because ... we don't know how long this pandemic will go.

Erin: No, we don't. You're right.

CB (cubbie): I don't see the end. We're still having a surge.

Erin: Yeah. Across the, across the time that you've been practicing and also, you know, just what you've witnessed and seen in, on the scene, the Disability Arts scene, what do you think are the key milestones or big major happenings in the history of Disability Arts in Australia?

CB (cubbie): Oh, I'd say ... Alter state. It's an inaugural 2021 [festival] - right smack middle of the Melbourne lockdown - they made everything accessible online. Even a workshop; even providing me a camera and a microphone from the Arts Centre Melbourne, and made it possible to broadcast in that format - in high quality format - because the microphone and the camera that they lent us was just top of the line! When I sl-, when I googled [the equipment] it was like, oh my God, they're expensive! Can I keep it? No, I'm kidding (laughs). But we did return it. But I replicated the, the digital accessibility. Not as expensive as theirs, but something a little less. But, yeah, it was just so high-end, it was fantastic. I think that was a breakthrough. It happened in the middle of the pandemic - of the lockdowns - and we still were able to do a program online.

Erin: Yeah. Amazing.

CB (cubbie): I know. It was a great ...

Erin: What about -

CB (cubbie):... it was a collaboration between Arts Access Victoria and Arts Centre Melbourne leading the way. Making it possible.

Erin: Yeah. What about outside of disabled communities? What do you think the mainstream public - I know that's a fraught term - but the mainstream public, what would they say are the major milestones or happenings in Disability Arts in Australia?

CB (cubbie): That's a very cool question because my community is mostly disabled people, so. We don't know. We don't know.

Erin: Yeah, yep.

CB (cubbie): I'm probably out of the radar. You know, most of the people I follow are either disabled or people of colour. So aside from that, I don't know what's there. But I do want to raise - I don't know if this is going to be included, but - for editors and publishers. If you're going to do digital, please stop using ableist slurs. We are already in 2022 and you just published a book and then shortlisted in a major literary award full of ableist slurs like, oh my gosh, I was like - that was unbelievable! But yeah, we don't want to see that in the future.

Erin: No.

CB (cubbie): No.

Erin: I guess that sort of is a way of leading into the next question. It's a two part question.

CB (cubbie): Okay.

Erin: First part is, do you consider your art political? And, you know, if so, in which ways? And then to what extent do you think art should be political?

CB (cubbie): Okay. Someone did say, whoever did - I'm so sorry, I don't remember who said it - but your personal is political.

Erin: Yeah. I've heard that too.

CB (cubbie): Yeah. Because whatever hashtag I do on social media, it is political because it's in my advocacy, I am paving the way for my disabled child that when she grows up, there are access - there is - I'm paving the way for the next generation that there is accessibility. She doesn't need to fight for it. There is inclusion already. So, I'm doing this for her.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): So that - and as the generation ages, as well, one in five is, what, disabled? What was that statistics they have? There will be some form of disability coming out of this pandemic. Make it mainstream, whatever access, make it mainstream, make it available, make it right there. So that's why I still continue to do all these hashtags on on art and make it accessible. And that in one hundred years, we're still there! You know, you see it, it's all archived. So that [when] they check the next pandemic. "Oh, look! They were doing art, disabled art, while they were in lockdown!" So, we exist! To have it [art] in 100 years when the next pandemic comes in.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): Because they say it's one in a lifetime. We, we exist. And your research would also prove that we exist. There are disabled people of colour inside white mainstream Australia.

Erin: Yes. Yeah, it's a political -

CB (cubbie): It is. I hope I answer your question.

Erin: You did! We're running out of time. So we just talked about the importance of advocacy and political advocacy in your work. How do you define artistic success?

CB (cubbie): Ah, wow ...

Erin: What do you think goes into success?

CB (cubbie): Oh, I don't think I'm in that, even, a point of success yet. As an artist, I'm still considered by the mainstream as 'emerging' because I have not been published. But I guess being personal, the political, success means somebody actually listened to what I've been nagging on social media and, next thing you know, they include disability in their, 1) funding, 2) writing competition, 3) art competition - like, okay, somebody would actually listen! So again, just - just now the, in Melbourne, the Lord Mayor's Creative Writing Awards - they included a disabled category. So, I guess that's, that's success for me.

Erin: I love that.

CB (cubbie): That somebody - yeah - that somebody listened - it's not on me, but somebody listened. Reaching out and -

Erin: You're seeing the result.

CB (cubbie): Yeah, for those with power, privilege, and position, they listened. And for me that's success. And they listened and they acted on it. And there's an outcome of including us that's, that's success for me.

Erin: Fantastic definition. Yeah, we touched on this already, but just in case you want to summarise or add anything. In terms of how you identify or want to be identified, how would you describe yourself as a creative practitioner and what kind of terms come first and which, which terms come first in your bio?

CB (cubbie): Okay. I actually use a pen name. CB Mako is a pen name because I knew I'd be writing very interesting, controversial topics in, in literary, in my literary career. cubbie is my real street name, nickname. My pronouns are cubbie, they/them.

Erin: Yep.

CB (cubbie): Yep.

Erin: All right. There's just one last question -

CB (cubbie): Okay.

Erin: - which is the most important, which is, is there anything you'd like to add or anything I haven't asked you that I should, for the purposes of the archive.

CB (cubbie): Okay. To the people of colour who are not disabled: please, when you make a funding proposal, please include access. Don't let me ask.

Erin: 'Don't make me keep asking!'

CB (cubbie): And get - I don't want to make enemies, you know! Just put it in there already. Don't let me ask. I don't want to make you angry. And I've already burned a lot of bridges because I asked this. I asked for a simple access, and people get angry. Why? Just stop it already. Stop being ableist - just include access. Because the future is accessible. That's, that's my end, that's my, that's my key. I even have a t-shirt of that: 'the future is accessible.' We're in the future now.

Erin: Yeah.

CB (cubbie): Make it accessible.

Erin: Thank you so much, cubbie.

CB (cubbie): Thank you Erin.