

Lily Newton:

Welcome to Everything You Know About Disability Is Wrong.

Erin Hawley:

A podcast by disabled people for disabled people.

Lily Newton:

But if you're not disabled, stick around. You might learn something new.

Lily Newton:

Hey listeners, today's guest is the very talented actor, comedian and founder of the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge, Nic Novicki. Hi, Nic.

Erin Hawley:

Thank you for being on. We're so excited to have you here talking about love and relationships and marriage and children and all that. So thank you so much.

Nic Novicki:

Yeah, I'm excited. Thanks so much for having me.

Lily Newton:

So as you know, this season on the pod, we're talking about love and dating and relationships. You're married. But before we get into marriage content, we got to rewind a little bit. So can you tell us what your dating experience was like before you met your wife?

Nic Novicki:

Yeah, so for those of you can't see, I'm also a little person. So I'm 3 foot 10. Growing up, I didn't date a ton. I did date a lot of other little people. My wife is also a little person. I would go to little people conventions and we'd kind of hook up and have relationships that would kind of... you meet people and kind of relationships formed. But I've been with my wife now since 2009, so it's almost kind of hard thinking pre my wife because it's been a long time now.

Lily Newton:

That's awesome. So you met your wife in 2009. How did you meet?

Nic Novicki:

It's kind of a funny story. So we met at a little people convention and my wife works in development actually now, behind the camera, as a TV executive working in preschool, but she was an actor at the time also. And so she went to this little people convention looking to meet other little people actors, and she was literally about to walk out the door and be like, look, this isn't for me. And she happened to meet my best friend and she was like, "Yeah, I was here, I was looking for actors, but it just wasn't for me and I'm going to leave. I didn't find any connections," and he was like, "Well this is Nic, he's my best friend, he's an actor."

I guess sparks flew even though we actually just were friends for a bit and kind of did a little bit of long distance. Funny story about that though is how we met is in the end of the movie Marry Me. So if you watch the movie Marry Me with Jennifer Lopez, we told that story of how we met because they had a little end thing of when Harry met Sally and the director of that movie is our friend and she's a judge for

the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge and she knew the story. So our story, how we met now actually has a lot more audience than it had a year ago.

Erin Hawley:

Oh, that's awesome. I love that.

Lily Newton:

That's so cool.

Erin Hawley:

So your story is a real life Hollywood love story. I love [inaudible 00:03:35] romantic comedy. And I know that the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge this year is about that. Do you want to tell us a bit about that?

Nic Novicki:

Yes, well that's funny that you bring that up. When we're talking about romance, I'm getting very excited because each year we have a different genre, so people have to register through [disabilityfilmchallenge.com](http://disabilityfilmchallenge.com), and then everyone that's registered gets emailed the full assignment including genre, themes, props, and locations that have to be incorporated in these one to five minute films. Well, this year, this is the 10th anniversary, so we were like, we need a special genre and the genre this year is romance. So I'm very excited about it and it's something that I don't think we see enough of stories that show disability through romance, through falling in love, through fallen out of love, through the normal mundane things that happen for people with disabilities in relationships, get into fights over eating the last of the cookies or the last bag of popcorn or just other things that don't have to do with disability. So I'm very excited for those of you, if you go to [disabilityfilmchallenge.com](http://disabilityfilmchallenge.com), it'll link you to our social channels. You'll be able to watch these films.

Lily Newton:

And go back and watch all of the previous nine years. There is so much amazing content there and so much representation. I think you're so right there and I'm so excited for the romance season because I love romances and I think that yeah, it's the normalcy that gets left out and when we decided to make this podcast, that's kind of what we were talking about is we want to talk about the mundane aspects of life or the real aspects of life, not just like, oh, so you are disabled. How does your disability affect X? Just talking about real life and I think that obviously being disabled affects my relationship, but finishing the last bag of popcorn affects it a lot more.

Nic Novicki:

I'll tell you what, finishing that last bag of popcorn is a big deal all right.

Erin Hawley:

With dating specifically, a lot of people think that because you're disabled that your relationship is all about that and it does affect it, but at the end of the day, our relationships are not different than non-disabled relationships. And I think a lot of people just don't understand that and I think that stigma leads to people not wanting to date us sometimes.

Nic Novicki:

Yeah, I think there's truth to that. There's the unknown. I think if somebody doesn't have a disability and they date somebody that does have a disability, I think maybe there is the unknown factor where they

don't know. And I think part of that is because of the lack of representation of people with disabilities being seen in romantic scenarios in the media, in commercials and TV shows, in films.

Erin Hawley:

Right.

Lily Newton:

Definitely. And there's kind of that feeling of the external projection of what relationships for disabled people are, which I'm interested in because I am autistic, which is an invisible disability, so I don't really deal with as much of the external pressure from just being looked at, but I'll see on social media people talking about what it's like to be autistic and date. And if I don't relate to it exactly, I'm kind of like, oh, what does this mean? But I'm interested in what was your experience like in dating your wife that whole time you were together? Did you ever feel that kind of external pressure to only get to talk about being a disabled couple rather than the actual meat of your relationship? The good stuff?

Nic Novicki:

I think because I've always been a little person and I've always lived in this world in cities and I've always kind of just looked at it, yeah, people are going to look or they'll say things or they will stare, but I just kind of live my life and just keep rolling through my lane and sometimes I don't even think about it. So I think for her, she didn't necessarily grow up in a city like that, in a setting, in the East Coast where people are much more abrupt. So certainly we got more attention together than we did by ourselves where people were like, "Hey, look at that. This little people are oh..." They say things and they're just very like... two of us together and this is in New York, but I was used to that. So that was kind of part of... I think geography wise, depending on where you are in the country, people are more vocal about disabilities and I think it's helped me make me the way I am and probably helped define the way I'm able to come up with jokes.

Lily Newton:

Yeah, definitely. I think that's a good point on her being from a different place because where you are really affects how dating works. Before we started recording, I mentioned that I lived in LA for a little bit and dating in LA was so different than dating in Chicago, and I didn't expect that, but it was a totally different experience and I think that's kind of interesting that each city has its own kind of vibe of what the dating scene is.

Nic Novicki:

I always say too though, I feel like I never went on a date, I just ended up in relationships. I don't know, I just talked to my wife about this where I felt like I was like... the process of, "Hey, let's go out to date and we'll go to a movie." I feel like I never really... I don't know, that never really happened.

Lily Newton:

I think you missed a lot of awkward moments, so you didn't miss much. Any moments that I have of going out on date, a lot of them are my most awkward stories. What were you going to say, Erin?

Erin Hawley:

I was going to say you're lucky because dating is just the worst. That was my least favorite part, was that first date. I hated it. I kind of wish that all my relationships immediately just happened.

Nic Novicki:

Yeah, no, there's something fun about that, you're just like, "And now you're together."

Lily Newton:

Yeah, those are the best, I think dating stories when it's like we went on one date and we've been inseparable for 20 years since, it just kind of continued. But I agree that I think you're lucky in that never having to do the dating apps especially. That's awesome.

Erin Hawley:

Yeah, those are rough.

Nic Novicki:

That's how old I am. I'm 40, so I was already with my wife when the majority of the dating apps were out there.

Lily Newton:

Technically never... I've never done that either because I've set up many, but I've always canceled. When I was in LA, there was one date that I somebody was trying to set up with me and for a first date they wanted to drive two hours out of the city, and I was like, you want me to get in your car and drive two hours the first time we meet in person? You clearly don't have any anxiety because I do, and that's not going to work.

Nic Novicki:

Yeah, then you get traffic, you're like, "All right, so this is not working out, but we got two more hours."

Lily Newton:

Yeah, I'm so glad I didn't end up going on that date.

Erin Hawley:

That's a good idea, yeah. That is just very... that's a little creepy to me, that they will even suggest that.

Lily Newton:

Yeah, it definitely shows a lack of understanding, especially asking a woman to get in your car and drive two hours, but I'll say maybe they had the best intention.

Nic Novicki:

Or maybe they just really love tacos two hours away or there's a great burger place, they're like, "You got to come to this place."

Lily Newton:

Maybe I'm the one that missed out.

Nic Novicki:

That's kind of the beauty of life. You pick your own adventure and you end up in a cool path. In terms of I feel like work life and also relationships.

Lily Newton:

Definitely. And even meeting people through work, just following that path, I'm so glad we're having you on this podcast because we did the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge watch party recently, so that's when I got to meet you and it's like, oh, now we're doing a podcast, just continuing this and things all work out.

Nic Novicki:

They do, and that was an awesome thing. So all of our films, again, if you go to [disabilityfilmchallenge.com](http://disabilityfilmchallenge.com), it'll link you to the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge YouTube page where we have all of our winning films. Also, we have workshops and events and all that kind of stuff. And we did such a cool holiday theme watch party for Easterseals associates around the country. I think we had some holiday swag and it was a good time and just were able to spotlight these talented filmmakers and just have fun.

Lily Newton:

Yes, absolutely. While we're on the topic of Easterseals, I think this is a great time too. Go to break.

Erin Hawley:

This podcast is brought to you by Easterseals.

Lily Newton:

We work for Easterseals, but maybe our listeners don't know what that is.

Erin Hawley:

Easterseals is leading the way to full access, equity and inclusion for disabled people and their families.

Lily Newton:

And we've been doing this for more than a century.

Erin Hawley:

This includes helping disabled people find meaningful employment and addressing healthcare needs for all ages.

Lily Newton:

We're proud to serve communities across the country and ready for the next hundred years. For more, check us out at [easterseals.com](http://easterseals.com). And we're back. So Nic, you have been married for how many years?

Nic Novicki:

I have been married for eight years.

Lily Newton:

What is your best advice for making marriage work?

Nic Novicki:

In my wedding vows, I think I said [inaudible 00:13:53] is always right, always. So it was a compromise with different things. I think typically we're always wrong too. You're not going to hit home runs all the time so it's just that process to kind of analyze it and also sometimes be like, you know what? I was wrong about that. By the way. I should have told you I'm going out of town. And for me, I'm on the road a lot as a comedian and an actor and through the film challenge, we do workshops all over the country. So my wife is just incredibly supportive with our French bulldog, our baby. I said the frenchie's the first baby, but it's balance and I think is owning it when you're wrong, but also to show that appreciation and love and respect.

Lily Newton:

Yeah, there's some deep humility in it. I'm living with my boyfriend for the first time. We're about to hit a year of living together, and it is that kind of like, oh, understanding of wow, when we're in each other's space all the time, we are not going to be perfect all the time. There's going to be mistakes and there is

a level of... I feel like every time we... I call it leveling up, where when we'll have... maybe it's a hard conversation or we'll learn something new about each other, especially my boyfriend's not autistic, so getting to know my brain and living with someone, you get to know them on a much deeper level. And there is definitely those levels of like, okay, we're leveling up here. We learn something new but we did that through admitting that we were maybe wrong. I appreciate that advice a lot, and I think that while still being kind of new in this living together, I'll remember that and I'll hope he listens and remembers that your wife is always right.

Erin Hawley:

I know in my relationship we've never had a fight, which is weird, and we actually, because we're very chill, both of us. So if we disagree, we'll just talk about it and then at the end we'll jokingly say, "Did we just have a fight?" And it was the chilliest conversation, but it really took me a long time to find somebody that matched my level of chillness.

Lily Newton:

That makes total sense to me because you're so chill. You're one of the chilliest people I know Erin. Erin and I obviously work together all the time and I'll like start to freak out about projects getting done or doing stuff, and Erin's just my absolute calming force. So that makes complete sense and I am so glad you found someone as chill as you.

Erin Hawley:

Yeah, it's just like it takes more energy to fight and we just don't have the energy. We're both like 40 years old, we're just done. The fights, the drama and so that is really a great way to be in a relationship, I think.

Nic Novicki:

That sounds perfect to be in that kind of relationship too, where you both have the same kind of mindset and you're just chill.

Lily Newton:

So Nic, with you being on the road and obviously your wife being supportive, is there anything that you kind of do to try to maintain, keep that level alive while you're gone?

Nic Novicki:

Well, I got to say her parents have been amazing. They've come out a lot to help out with the baby, also my parents do. So we have been getting that extra support and our daughter's in daycare. It's like we have a little army of people helping us raise this year and a half year old, she'll be two actually next month. So beyond that, I try to be as engaged as I can while I'm here. And sometimes that's hard because I'm doing a show late at night or I have something else going on, or I'm writing a speech or I'm filming something or I'm writing things for a speech and you know, you got to wake up, that baby's waking up in the morning either way. So you got to tag in.

Erin Hawley:

What's your favorite part about being a dad?

Nic Novicki:

I've always loved kids. It's just such an amazing thing to just be together. And now that she's saying, "Dada," it just really gets me. She'll say, "Dada," when I come in or when she comes in and there's nothing that feels better honestly in my life ever.

Erin Hawley:

That's amazing. I'm so happy for you.

Nic Novicki:

Thank you.

Lily Newton:

Yeah, you have such a sweet love story. Obviously, it made it into a movie. It's such a sweet love story and then all the way, it's cool to get to see where you are now having a child, that's a big goal. That's awesome. How has your relationship changed since having a kid?

Nic Novicki:

I think my wife has been incredibly supportive, our whole relationship with me, in terms of being an actor, you're acting in TV or you're doing other stuff, touring, you could be gone for long periods of time. So right after we got married, I went to Europe in the Middle East and did a one-month tour for the troops all over the world, really. Two days after we were married. So she was so supportive and she was like, "Go do it and you want to do it, and I'm with you now." Now it's much harder to just get away for long periods of time. I have to be more selective of when I go, where I go.

And honestly, it's everything, having kids too also costs a lot of money, and so you need to prioritize when we're going to do different things. So I would say a big thing that, in a good way, has been prioritizing schedules more for me specifically because I travel so much that there's times where I've had to say, "Hey, I can't do this gig, just maybe we could do this remote or I'd like to do it another time." And that's hard because I like to say yes to everything by nature.

Lily Newton:

Leaving two days after marriage, that is a supportive wife right there.

Nic Novicki:

Yeah.

Lily Newton:

I imagine that that's one of the foundations that your relationship is built on is that feeling of extreme support and that encouragement to go be you. And now that you allowed yourself to do that for so many years, I would hope that it would be a little easier to have to prioritize being home more at this point.

Nic Novicki:

No, it certainly is, but now it's completely changed because we're responsible for someone else's life. So that's a whole other thing where we're like, we really just got to check in with each other.

Lily Newton:

Yeah, definitely. I think that's probably the key to a lot of success in relationships, is checking in with one another. So we kind of mentioned it at the beginning of the podcast we talked about a little bit, but speaking of the entertainment industry and representation in the industry, do you feel the tide moving? Do you think that we are going to have a more representative Hollywood in the next few years?

Nic Novicki:

I think we already are. I've been an actor and a comedian for over 20 years. I've seen so many different landscapes in terms of shifts from the early 2000s where I was only auditioning for roles very specific to my height. I started to produce my own content and that's what motivated me to create the disability film challenge. And then I wanted to help other people with disabilities create their films and that's grown. And certainly partnering with Easterseals, Southern California where I'm on the board of directors really took it to the next level. But now to date, we've had 500 films that have been created for the film challenge over the years. So all those stories, and it's leading to jobs and we're sponsored by the networks in the studios. And I got to say that they are actively coming to us and literally saying, "We saw this film challenge film, and how amazing is this actor? How amazing is the writing on this?" And it's somebody with a disability and they're getting that opportunity.

So I think it's twofold, it's been us as people with disabilities taking our career in our own hands and sort of moving towards the table. But I think the entertainment industry is seeing the value of the disability community and just the sheer numbers. One in four Americans identify as having a disability so I think that the direction has shifted so much from when I started to where we're at now, and I think we're just getting going. I'm very optimistic about the way it's going to continue to go, but also I feel very proud of the changes that have been made since when I started. And I can't take all the credit, there's so many advocates that have been doing this work for so long and so many talented people with disabilities that work so hard in their careers and they're really the ones that are making such great strides.

Lily Newton:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think that one of my favorite parts about the disability film challenge is that aspect of it's not just having a disabled character, there are also disabled writers. You're getting people in front and behind the camera and I think that's so important because sometimes in any attempt to have better representation of any marginalized group, you kind of tend to see, okay, they'll put the one character on screen, but there's more to it. It's having people who are on all aspects of creating. So I think that's really cool. And I think that there's just such incredible writers, producers, directors coming out of the disability film challenge.

Nic Novicki:

Editors too. I think there's so many other positions besides just being an actor.

Erin Hawley:

And even if we have people with disabilities behind the camera, in front of the camera, it ensures that we're telling our own stories and not somebody else's idea of our stories.

Nic Novicki:

Yeah, no, I think that's truly the way that you get most authentic is not just that representation in front of the camera, but someone behind the camera. And I always say this too, as a little person, I know funny things like I can add to a scene. If you're writing about me and my life, well, I've been a little person my whole life, so I know these what happens? In my standup, like when I get trapped in an elevator because I can't reach a button. It's funny and it's funnier when it's coming from my point of view, I think because I know how to make it real.



And I think audiences want to see real now. They don't want to see sort of watered down interpretations of something and not just for people with disabilities, for all underrepresented groups. I think the more authentic you can get in terms of having writers, directors, editors within that underrepresented group, the more authentic it is and the more it translates because audiences now there's so much content. So you want to see something that feels fresh and something you've never seen. And I think the more representation and authenticity helps that.

Erin Hawley:

And it even helps the authenticity because films impact culture and everyday people's opinions and thoughts and having that authenticity is what's going to help us make change outside of film.

Nic Novicki:

Absolutely. It also puts something in your head where you're like, when you see a wheelchair user as a lawyer, then when other people are going through a law firm, boom, they're already in their head subconsciously. You're just now thinking about, oh yeah, I love that show. And usually it won't even be about the wheelchair, it's something else about the character. You're like, yeah, Joanne, the way she's funny around the coffee thing. I like that character, but subconsciously the disability goes away because of that exposure. I'm proud to be a little person and to be in the disability community, but I just don't want that to be the only thing that people talk about.

Lily Newton:

Yeah, that's where the authenticity is really necessary there because I think that is how you culturally shift people to understand that there is a beautiful middle ground between, oh, I don't even see disability and actually not seeing disability, there is a middle ground where you can be seen but seen as a full human as well. And I definitely think that authentic content is helping that. I even think about disabled content creators in spaces like TikTok and Instagram and other social media where you are seeing public perception change. And even this, we're talking about dating and marriage advice that changes perception because there's definitely some people out there who think, "Oh, disabled people get married? I didn't know that." And we want to change that because yeah, we're humans, we get married, we do things.

Nic Novicki:

And sometimes marriages don't work too so I think that's the human thing too, where it's like not everything's a fairytale too. So where it's like every ending... I think that that's something that I've said with the film challenge too, with the romance films. I said that when we announced it at Sundance, these films, whatever your interpretation is, did you fall in love? Did you fall out of love? And a lot of these times it has nothing to do with the disability, it's just life or different things or because you could be two little people and be completely opposite or not for each other or two wheelchair users. So I think it's interesting and the more layers of it, is where we get the true inclusion I think when you can show not just the one side. But with that being said, I do know so many people with disabilities in happy marriages, relationships, so I think that it's been a blessing to be a part of that and witness it.

Lily Newton:

Yeah, that's such a good point that the true representation is not just the happy endings, it's everything and that there's so many different forms of romance and love. I'm so excited for this film challenge. We actually recorded an episode with Jennifer Msumba and ended up spending some time talking about the

deep love in disabled friendships as well. There's love everywhere. It's not just in the way you think of a normal relationship.

Nic Novicki:

I love that. And I'll tell you what, Jennifer Msumba, big shout out, she's so talented. Please go to our website or YouTube channel and type in The Fish Don't Care When It Rains. It won the 2020 Film Challenge and it's a documentary short about her and her acceptance and coming to terms with autism and it's so funny and beautiful and she's such a great talented person and I love that too because I do think that romances like... it's like friendships and all that stuff. I tour with these comedians, it's like we're a family, we're with each other all the time. It's like summer camp and we love each other.

Lily Newton:

I love that. I'm so glad you have that. I'm glad that your life seems filled with love. That's beautiful.

Nic Novicki:

You got me on a good day. Sometimes I'm like, man, I got a parking ticket and my dog went to the bathroom over there.

Lily Newton:

See, this is true disability representation on the podcast. Good days and bad days. Well thank you so much for joining us today. This has been such a wonderful conversation. And to all of our listeners, check out the Disability Film Challenge. It is one of the coolest projects I've ever seen, and I think that this 10th year is going to be absolutely incredible. Any closing thoughts on love, relationships, or this wonderful conversation we just got to have?

Nic Novicki:

I just want to say thank you so much for having me on. I want to give a shout-out and I love you to my wife. I brought up some stuff now I got to play a little bit of defense and be like, hey, by the way, I told a little story about us over here. No, she's amazing and I feel very lucky. If you want to know more about me, if I'm coming to your city to do standup or for a screening of the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge, you could follow me @NicNovicki, no K in Nick, and that links to the film challenge page. And I really hope you watch these films, there's so much talent that is part of the film challenge, but just talent within the disability community. So thank you so much. I feel the love. I got to text my wife and be like, "I love you." She's going to be like, "What's going on here?" Because we're just talking so many stories here.

Lily Newton:

I was just thinking the same thing. I was like, I'm going to text my boyfriend, "I love you so much." All of our partners are going to get the most mushy texts right after this.

Nic Novicki:

I'm going to send her, "I love you. By the way, I ate the last of the popcorn too."

Lily Newton:

Oh yeah, I forgot about that whole episode I got to tell him about. Awesome. Well thank you so much.

Erin Hawley:

Thank you.

Nic Novicki:

That was awesome and thank you for having me out.

Lily Newton:

Welcome to you the Ask Us Anything where you can ask us anything.

Erin Hawley:

And [inaudible 00:31:44] anything that you email us at [everythingyouknow@easterseals.com](mailto:everythingyouknow@easterseals.com).

Lily Newton:

Erin, today's ask us anything says, "My partner is not disabled and said something ableist recently." Ooh, I'm sorry. "Normally they are very supportive and this doesn't seem intentional. How do I talk to them?"

Yeah, very sorry. Your partner said something ableist.

Erin Hawley:

Yeah, it happens.

Lily Newton:

It does. How do you handle it?

Erin Hawley:

What I do is I sit down with them and talk to them and make sure I'm not accusing them of anything because I know that they didn't mean it maliciously and just explain it from my point of view and really talk about how it makes me feel rather than, "You did this. How dare you?"

Lily Newton:

That's good advice. I agree. And I think that you're already in the right line of thinking, saying that it doesn't seem intentional, but I do want to honor that just because something isn't intentional doesn't mean that you don't need to take time to care for yourself. Being disabled means facing a lot of ableism. And I think that when it's someone you love that says something ableist, it can feel like that's the time that you really want to sweep it under the rug but that's when you really should dig in because your safe people should continue to be safe. I definitely think that what Erin said is exactly right, going from this is how you made me feel, and this is why this is an important thing to me rather than you messed up and here's why. I know for me personally, I would have to spend some time alone before having that conversation.

I think if I tried to react immediately, I would probably end up being harsher or not having as productive of a conversation because I'm in my feels. So I say my biggest advice is to honor the feelings that you're feeling. And if whatever was said made you feel really sad or really mad, let yourself just be really sad or really mad for a little bit and then address it. Because I do think that oftentimes we are asked to let ableism go and that can be really strenuous. And so take care of yourself, honor your feelings, and then work it out because it seems like your partner's coming from a good place and you're just trying to make your relationship even better.

Erin Hawley:

[inaudible 00:34:15] from a good place, then that's something you'll have to evaluate and really like say, is this relationship working for not just both of us, but for me specifically, and know that your feelings are totally valid and just ensuring that your partner understands how you feel. And if they don't care how you feel, then that's an issue.

Lily Newton:

Yeah. If they don't care how you feel, then dump them.

Erin Hawley:

Dump them.

Lily Newton:

Dump them. So that's our advice. Feel your feelings, be kind, lead with intention. And if none of that works, dump them.

Erin Hawley:

Dump them. Thanks for listening to our podcast.

Lily Newton:

If you liked what you heard, be sure to write a review, like and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.

Erin Hawley:

Join us next time [inaudible 00:35:09] more reasons why everything you know about disability is wrong.