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**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
ANDY IMLAY
DECEMBER 5, 2016
INTERVIEWER: PHILIP STAFFORD
VIDEOGRAPER: PEGGY HOLTZ
RECORD ID: 052-DO**

PS: PHILIP STAFFORD

PB: ANDY IMLAY

PH: PEGGY HOLTZ

[00:00:10]

PS: Is this alright?

AI: This is fine, yes

PS: Okay

AI: This is great

PS: This interview is by Phil Stafford with Andy Imlay on December 5th, 2016 at the Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities Annual Conference. And so is there something in particular you'd like to start with before we get going or something you want to, anything extra special you'd like to talk about?

AI: Is this the time to plug anything that I've got going on?

PS: Ok we'll start there. First we will have you identify yourself,

AI: Ok.

PS: Your name and where you live

[00:00:50]

AI: Ok.

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[00:00:50]

PS: And what you do and then I'll ask you a bit about your current career.

AI: Ok. My name is Andy Imlay. That's spelled I-m-l-a-y. Currently residing in Evansville, have been since 2006. I'm original from Richland City, Indiana, which is a small town 30 minutes southeast of Evansville. It's only got a population of about 500 people, no stop lights, little post office, little library, that's about it, little bank.

PS: On the river?

AI: No. Really close to a still functioning five screen drive-in that's still.

PS: Five screen drive-in.

AI: Yeah five screen drive-in in Reo, Indiana that is still and they actually show current, like if there's a movie coming out on Friday, they'll show it, you know. Yeah you get in for like \$9 bucks and you get to see two movies. Yeah it's good stuff so. I've been in the IT industry now for over 15 years. Started out working at Holiday World and Splash and Safari in Santa Claus, Indiana. Former president that has now passed, God rest his soul, Will Koch, gave me my first employment opportunity there.

[00:02:09]

PS: How old were you at the time?

AI: I was probably 18 years old so I started taking tickets at the, you know, front gate, sorting tickets, that kind of thing. And then I saw this guy that would come in and out of the, you know, admissions area where I worked at and he would work on the computers and so I questioned it. I was like, you know, what's that guy doing, you know? Oh well he does, you know, he does the computers around here. And I said well you know I've always been interested in that. I've got a Commodore 64 for Christmas back in 1988. I said could I intern here to see if that's something I want to do for a living? Yeah, let's give it a shot. And so they'd never had that internship before. It was created because I asked about it. And to this day they still have people that go in and intern in that position to see if it's something they want to do as a long term career. So currently since 2004 I'm working at PC Quest and Quest for Electronics in Evansville, Indiana, Morgan Avenue.

PS: And what specifically do you do?

[00:03:10]

AI: When I first started working there I was helping build new systems and then I progressed in the company to be the Senior Systems Engineer overseeing all the repairs that happened in house for the residential side of the company as well as some commercial accounts that I took care of. Since probably three, four years ago I had to cut back to kind of part time. I only work about 16 hours a week anymore. I really just front and counter work, sales work. We work really closely with Vocational Rehab. If there's any clients that have disabilities that need any one on one computer training, we'll get the authorization through Vocational Rehab and then I'll sit down with them one on one and provide some training.

Currently I'm training a hearing impaired lady to run a sign language class and she's basically trying to promote this on Facebook.

[00:04:14]

So I'm teaching her about marketing skills on Facebook and how to effectively market her business on Facebook as well as helping her develop a website.

PS: So she's teaching the class

AI: Yes.

PS: Over Facebook.

AI: Well she's basically going to sit down with people one on one at her home and offer this but she wanted a way to get it out to the community to let them know that she was going to be offering this so.

PS: Ok, ok, so you were born with cerebral palsy?

AI: That's correct. I was diagnosed at 18 months.

PH: You want to put that here, his question and your answer so that they know you were diagnosed with it at 18 months.

[00:04:59]

AI: Yeah I was born with cerebral palsy and diagnosed at 18 months. That was back in 1979. Spent the first four months of my life in an incubator and at Kosair in Louisville. Had a 40 percent chance of making it and here I am, so.

PS: Did you have enough oxygen at birth?

AI: Not really sure. I believe so. They pumped a lot of oxygen in the incubator whenever I was born so that's why my eyesight's pretty much, you know I have to have the glasses otherwise, you know, if I took the glasses off I couldn't even read your, even your nametag so my eyesight's pretty bad. But you know I'm still able to independently drive on my own. I was able to travel all the way from Indianapolis myself from Evansville so.

PS: What have your folks told you about your early development, your early years?

[00:05:55]

AI: Pretty much that my mom was, if you've ever seen the movie Forest Gump, my mom was kind of like Forest's mom, you know, she wanted me to have the same opportunities that everybody else was going to have. And just because I was born a little different didn't mean that I didn't deserve the same opportunities. So similar to the keynote speaker that we just heard about earlier, they would come in literally probably every year and give me that IQ test to see how I was doing, every year. And I would score the same score every time like 117, 118, you know like really high, like off the charts. The guy's

like are you sure? " We need to do this again. That can't be right, you know." They were trying to segregate me. They really wanted to segregate me.

[00:06:38]

PS: When you say they?

AI: The school system, I mean, the coop back then. I mean this was the '80,s, you know, so the coop would come in and I'm like Dave, are we really doing this again, because that was the guy's name, bald headed guy. I said, "Dave, why are we wasting each other's time? You know this is really, you know, this is, I'm going to score the same again. Why are we doing this?" So I was mainstreamed into school, in the first grade, went all the way from the first grade to the 12th grade. No special ed classes. You know they would pull me out on occasion and do PT and OT therapy, that kind of thing, on a weekly basis. Taught me how to, basically one of the therapists would pull me out and got me hooked on video games because that helped my hand eye coordination. So and then the other therapist got me into playing cards because shuffling cards helped with your hand eye coordination. So video games and gambling, who knew that those two things would really, you know, benefit me so, yeah, and graduated with a, you know, regular diploma just like everybody else in my class.

And it was a big to do, I mean I had my, you know, they had my picture on the county paper, you know, for when I graduated and all that kind of stuff. I won't tell you what year because I don't want to show my age but you know.

[00:07:58]

PS: How did that make you feel at the time?

AI: Well you know it's a big accomplishment. It's a big accomplishment any time anybody graduates from any kind of school but to have a disability on top of that, I mean it's just, you know, it's one of those big things, you know? It's like when I first got mainstreamed into school they, oh this is, you know, this is, I mean in the '80s you didn't hear this stuff so it was all in the paper, you know. In 1988 when all this was kind of you know still in the forefront, they were like Easter Seals, which is down in Evansville that provides therapy services, they're like well we need to pull this guy because we need him to be our child representative. So I was child rep for them back in 88. Got to meet Don Mattingly and got my picture taken with him. And the telethon back then was 37 hours long, you know. I was on TV for a long time, you know. So you know and I still get services from them until this day so, yeah.

PS: And then you went on to college?

[00:09:00]

AI: Yeah, I went on to Vincennes University. I actually didn't finish college there because you know who really knows what they want to do with their life when they're 18 years old? Switched majors I don't know how many times, dropped out, wasn't sure what I wanted to do. Really discerned about it. Almost went to the priesthood, thought that was something I wanted to do with my life. I'm Catholic. My grandfather was a Catholic deacon. I thought that was something I wanted to do so I kind of

dabbled in that a little bit, you know, and then decided that's not the path I wanted to do. So then I took that internship that I talked about earlier with Holiday World. And then Vocational Rehab came into the picture and paid for me to get all this training.

[00:09:44]

AI: And then in 2004 I got the job where I said I work at now.

PS: What's your living situation?

AI: I am currently, I've been living independently since 2006 in Evansville. I'm currently living with my fiancée. We're getting married next year. She is able bodied and she's a drug dealer, I'm kidding, she's a pharmacy tech. So I love pulling that joke on people. [laughter] They're like what? I'm like no, she actually, when I first met her she was a CNA so that, you know, that helped out because she kind of already knew the ins and outs of stuff, you know? And you know we joke around about that a lot. But then she decided well, you know, that's tough work. You know if you know what those people do day in and day out it's tough work, you know.

PS: Absolutely.

[00:10:35]

AI: So she's like I want out of there. So she decided to do the cashier thing at Walmart for a little bit. And then the pharmacy tech job opened up and she was like well I want to know more about the medication that you take and what it does, you know. So the program with Walmart she can basically do all of her classes online so it doesn't really, you know she can do everything right there. So it's really helpful. So yeah, I live with her and I have a dog and a cat that I've been able to keep alive for six years. So I think at this point we're about to graduate to a kid because I can keep a dog and a cat alive for six years, you know. [laughter] Yeah and they're the best of friends, believe it or not.

PS: Oh really?

AI: Yeah, yeah, I have a dog named Max and a cat named Gizmo. And the dog is a pugapoo, a cross between a pug and a poodle. It's got the little under bite, got the poodle hair. Intelligent, this dog is just so smart. And I have a black cat, so, yeah, yeah. So two things people don't normally want, I have so. [laughter] So it works out.

PS: So tell me a little bit about your comedy, you're dabbling into comedy.

[00:11:51]

AI: Yeah it was funny how that started, you know. I went to a comedy club back in 2005 when they still had the Funny Bone back in Evansville and was able to see a comedian by the name of Chris Fonseca, if you know who that is. He has cerebral palsy. He's been in the comedy scene for probably 30 years. He's performed on David Letterman and he's been on some big shows and stuff. You know I kind of thought about it and didn't really do anything with it. Then years later Josh Blue, if you've ever heard of him, he also has cerebral palsy, won Last Comic Standing, I believe 2005 - 2006. You know saw him, met with

him, got my picture taken. And then my friend's like hey, I got these free tickets to this comedy club in town, you need to go check it out. So I went and checked it out. They had an open mic so I thought yeah, I'll get up there and I'll do some stuff and you know if it's good, it's good. If it's not, it's not. You know the old adage if you don't try, you don't know kind of thing. So I got up there and started doing some stuff and noticed that I was, I was pretty quick on my feet, I guess you'd say, mentally, not physically, of course, but mentally, I was you know quick on my feet.

[00:13:03]

And I was kind of good at it. So a friend of mine, actually he wasn't a friend of mine at the time, but saw me you know doing this stuff and he had a startup comedy business so he's been booking me on shows and stuff like that. So any time there's a new venue that we've got that we're really wanting to promote and get, he throws me in there to MC the show to kind of test the waters to see, ok, what kind of crowd do we have here. And we've actually been able to book regular shows at Legends Bar and Grill in French Lick, which is right across the street from the casino. Yeah it actually popped up in my timeline. We actually did two sold out shows a year ago so.

PS: That's interesting.

[00:13:45]

AI: Yeah, so I basically perform all around southern Indiana. I've been to Bloomington. I've done some stuff in Fort Wayne for Camp Possibility which is a camp for high functioning adults with disabilities. They serve age 18 to 35, 36, somewhere around in there. Brand new camp, only been around for like two years. So I've done some stuff for them. You know just any, you know the Alley Cat Lounge, I did an open mic Sunday night when I got in town because I found out, my friend from Evansville was like well they're doing some stuff at the Alley Cat on Sunday. Message this guy, tell him you know me and I'll vouch for you so you can get on the show. And the guy that runs the show is a writer for the Bob & Tom Show so, yeah.

PS: Make a little money doing that sort of thing?

AI: Yeah I mean ever once in a while, yeah, every once in a while you'll get a paid gig where you know you can get some money. If anything right now, I've only been doing it you know two and a half, three years, so more than anything right now it's just enough to really cover gas money and that kind of thing. But anything's nice, you know, so.

PS: Sounds like fun.

AI: But I enjoy doing it so, yeah, breaking down the barriers, you know.

[00:15:02]

PS: Yeah so there's a social message

[00:15:05]

AI: Yeah.

PS: That you're passing along.

AI: Yeah.

PS: Which is what, would you say?

AI: Just because I have a disability doesn't mean I can't be funny, you know. And the preconceived notions that people have about disabilities, those are hilarious. They really are. And people need to realize that what they say, no matter how stupid it might be, it's hilarious to me. And if you say it to me, guess what? I might use it on stage so be careful, you know.

PS: So you make a little fun of yourself but you're also making fun of some of the stereotypes?

AI: Yeah, like for instance, I kid you not, this happened to me at the place I work at, guy comes in and says wow, you didn't sound handicap over the phone. [laughter]

PS: That's great.

[00:15:45]

AI: I mean you know, who says that to somebody. So my response was wow, you didn't sound short either. Are you trying out for the new Hobbit movie, you know? He's like five foot tall. And you know what he thought it was so funny he's bought thousands of dollars of equipment from us since then. So I found out the trick to the trade. If you can make them laugh, they're going to open their wallet and they're going to spend money with you. Because you know if you can get them to like you, they'll trust you, which means if they trust you they'll believe in your product and they'll buy from you.

PS: Great. Good [inaudible]

AI: Yeah so that's good stuff.

PS: I had another question. I forgot where I was. Something about comedy that I, I mean it's just gone.

AI: That happens.

PS: So how old are you now?

[00:16:40]

AI: I just turned 37, had a birthday last month and just turned 37 so. Yeah actually the cerebral palsy causes me to age in slow motion so I really don't look as old as I appear to be, yeah, it's quite nice.

[00:16:54]

PS: What transitions are ahead of you? Do you plan for something like that or are you kind of a grasshopper type person?

AI: Yeah I mean I just kind of take every day as it comes, you know, because you never know, because believe it or not the weather really triggers a lot of stuff anymore as I age. Like I'm having a lot of trouble with my shoulders now because of not only do I wheel in the chair but I've got forearm crutches that I use as well. And your body's really not designed to do that so I'm having some trouble with my shoulders now. I actually got a call from Easter Seals to get an appointment on Wednesday when I get back in town to have an evaluation done to see what they can do about my shoulder because I really don't want to have surgery if I don't have to.

PS: Is that from using crutches for a long period?

AI: Yeah 30 years.

PS: Is it arthritis, an arthritic type of change or?

AI: Don't know. The only thing the doctor has done at this point is did an x-ray to find out it wasn't anything bone wise and suggested some therapy to see if you know we could work it out kind of thing so.

[00:17:59]

PS: Yeah, yeah.

AI: And some pain medication and that kind of thing so.

PS: Yeah, yeah.

AI: Yeah.

PS: Crutches when you think about it have been, haven't changed much in a thousand years.

[00:18:08]

AI: Well the ones that I have that I found out from a company in Utah called In-Motion, they've actually got a spring loaded tip on them so it kind of tries to take a lot of the stress off your shoulder that way because it takes a lot of that impact and absorbs it when the spring comes into play. And it has an articulating tip also so it makes it easy to grip onto uneven ground and that kind of thing. You can find a lot of stuff on the internet if you just look for it. Yeah, I'm actually demoing a new product on Thursday, this company out of Wisconsin called Rowheels. And they've actually developed a wheel for the wheelchair where you actually use a rowing motion where you pull back on the wheels to cause it to go forward, which takes a lot of the stress off your shoulder. Causes you to use your back muscles back here, yeah, use your muscles back here on the back of your arm and your back and all that kind of stuff.

[00:19:11]

It takes the stress off the shoulders. So I've been trying to meet with this dealer for like the last two months. Supposed to meet with them on Thursday to see if this is a product I'm going to be interested in so.

PS: That is interesting. Kind of like [inaudible] cars when we had, you know,

AI: Yeah they just debuted these on the market in November, October so yeah, they're out of Wisconsin.

PS: So you try to stay on top of that stuff?

AI: Yeah, yeah I try to stay on top of anything new coming out. And you know if I'm able to be the guinea pig to try it out, why not? So.

PS: Well there's a good reason for having computer skills right there.

AI: Yeah, yeah, so.

[00:19:50]

PH: So where did the Superman all come from, how long?

AI: Since about 2004, October 25, 2004 is when Christopher Reeve died. And it came across the news, ladies and gentlemen, we've lost Superman. So at that time I was like, ok, well what was this guy all about, you know? I didn't really follow it up until then, unfortunately. So I bought both his books, "Still Me" and "Anything is Impossible" or I don't remember the exact verbiage on the second book but read both those books. Decided it was a mantra that I wanted to get behind. Found out about Metropolis, Illinois and their annual Superman celebrations they hold every year the first full week in June from Thursday until Sunday where they celebrate anything and everything Superman. They have a 15 foot high Superman statue in the town square as well as the largest collection of Superman memorabilia on the planet.

PS: Where's this?

AI: Metropolis, Illinois, it's right across the river.

PS: There is a Metropolis?

AI: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

[00:20:56]

PH: I think I've seen the statue.

[00:20:58]

AI: Yes right across the river from Paducah, Kentucky.

PS: Oh ok.

AI: So yeah they have a casino there. Jim Hambrick runs the Super museum and he has the largest collection of Superman memorabilia on the planet, everything from George Reeves, back in the 50's. You probably remember that.

PS: I sure do, yeah.

AI: Yeah and the whole controversy surrounding his death.

PS: Yeah, which presumably, I was told it was suicide.

AI: Yeah but you know there's, if you watch the Hollywood Land movie with Ben Affleck there's a lot of conspiracy there.

PS: I didn't know that.

[00:21:32]

AI: Yeah. So there's memorabilia in there from that. There's memorabilia from Kirk Alyn even before that, before you know the cereal days when the movies would come on and that kind of thing. Kirk Alyn played Superman then. And then Christopher Reeve, you know when he did his thing. He's got some stuff from the, he's actually got the flying horse they used in the movies in the museum. You know Dean Cain in the 90's when he did his stuff. I actually met Dean Cain a couple of years ago.

PS: You went down to the festival?

PS: Does it also attract other people with chairs?

AI: Well I see a few other people in chairs but you can't tell now by the long sleeves I'm wearing but I have about six or seven Superman related tattoos. So you know I've basically been given the nickname Superman by a lot of my colleagues, kids in the neighborhood, you know. I drive a Chrysler 300C with a Hemi in it. It says faster than a speeding bullet on the trunk with the Superman symbol on the back windshield. I've only got pulled over once. So yeah I mean you know and yeah I've got an actual quote that I tattooed from Christopher Reeve on my inner forearm that really, you know, if I'm having a bad day I'll kind of look at this. It really gives me strength and it says, a hero is an ordinary individual who finds the strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles. And then it's got his birth year and his death year so yeah.

[00:23:12]

PS: Interesting.

[00:23:13]

AI: Because that is the truth. I mean he did a lot for spinal cord research and advocacy for people with disabilities, you know, after he had his horseback riding accident. So and believe it or not he was actually allergic to horses and was only doing the whole horse thing for a movie role.

PS: Oh really? I didn't know that.

AI: Yeah, yeah. College roommates with Robin Williams at Julliard.

PS: I had no idea.

AI: So yeah.

PS: Well this has been great.

PH: Yeah it's been fun.

PS: We certainly appreciate it.

[00:23:47]

AI: Well I appreciate your time.

[End of interview]