**(Job 96283) S01E10 MASTERED**

Before we begin, we’d like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land that we’re recording on, the Wurundjeri-willam clan, and Taungurung people, and give our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging. We encourage everyone listening to consider the Traditional Owners of the land that they’re living and thriving on, and consider the benefits that may come from a Treaty with the First Peoples. This is, was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

**Nic**

Billie Parsons is an Australian artist and sculptor who returned to Naarm after 20 years of living, studying and working across Australia and overseas. More recently, Billie completed a Master of Fine Arts in West Texas, where her research explored landscape, material and identity. Disability is a central theme in Billie’s practice; rather than showing it directly, she explores it through abstract forms and materials, like casting metals, recycled plastics, and even animal intestines. These materials reflect ideas of strength, fragility, and the body, and challenge how we think about usefulness, function and care. Hi, Bille.

**Billie Parsons**

Hey, how’re you going?

**Nic**

Good. Thank you for doing this with me.

**Billie Parsons**

No worries. Thank you, Nic, for inviting me.

**Nic**

Can you tell me about the first time you sculpted something?

**Billie Parsons**

It was at high school; we had ceramics class, and I made a fist. We were using what would probably be now considered highly toxic metallic glazes, and so in fact, became a gold fist. That was the first thing I ever made.

**Nic**

What is it about sculpture that keeps you coming back? Why is it your chosen art form?

**Billie Parsons**

I think people can be either 2D or 3D artists, or both. I’ve grown up seeing things in three dimensions; I see, I always think about the back, the bottom, the top, the sides, all those different aspects are considered when I’m making something. So sometimes I draw, which is okay, but I don’t find that nearly as satisfying as making an object.

**Nic**

How do you know when something’s finished? For you, is it ever finished?

**Billie Parsons**

Yeah, it’s finished. I have the knack of actually not going too far with most of the things I do, which is a very hard trait to develop. I feel like saying “less is always better,” than saying, “a bit too much,” and essentially, artwork isn’t artwork until it is seen by a viewer; that’s the general concept of art, so what you make is not actually art until someone sees it.

**Nic**

That’s interesting. How much thought do you put into your audience when you’re making something?

**Billie Parsons**

I don’t. That’s not a selfish statement; I don’t really consider who’s going to view it, because if you start thinking about that, then you start thinking about, “Is that the right pink, or should it be a brighter pink?” or, “Is that aggressive enough?” “Should I have it moving more than that?” or, “Should it be bigger?” like as a sculptor, everything should always be a bit bigger, I mean that’s pretty standard. But I let the work be seen as it is; I don’t try and style it for a particular viewer.

**Nic**

Was there something that happened, because there’s a bit of a difference between making something in a class and then calling yourself a sculptor? So what was that journey?

**Billie Parsons**

Uncomfortable. [laughs] So I’d had an accident, and recovered, done all the rehab, gone back to work, and nearly finished myself off again, which the work, just worked too hard. So I ended up on the south coast of New South Wales, and there the local TAFE had ceramics classes, and I thought, “That’s really interesting, ceramics.” It was a material I’d never worked with. It had never been something that I thought I should do, until I saw this sign saying, “TAFE courses, sign up here,” basically.

And it took me a couple of months just to get used to the material, and the information, and the technicalities required, and then I was doing wheel work, like making pots, but I found that because of my accident, my left hand doesn’t work as well, so I was having a lot of trouble controlling it like other people were, so I [0:05:12.0] I scraped through that section of making.   
  
And then we came to hand-building, which is essentially just building up something, not on a pottery wheel, but on the bench, basically. That’s when it clicked for me. I thought to myself, “Oh.” We sort of got set these tasks, and the objects we made were up to us, and when I did start making those objects I got partway through the first one and I went, “Hang on a sec,” I realised that I could apply all this knowledge that I’d gained through working in theatre and film, etc, and I could make patterns to cut something out. And I could make patterns, and so I could make multiples of things, and I was off to the races, as we say [laughs].

**Nic**

I think you’ve just caused me to reflect on something which is I have like an internalised ablism where I think, “These are motor skills. I can’t…” basically because of my disability, I can’t be an artist. Did your weakness in your hand, did that ever make you feel like, “I can’t do it,” or were you able to find a way around it?

**Billie Parsons**

Because I’d gone back to work, I worked on a film up in Sydney, because I’d gone back and done that, essentially I was left-handed, I still consider myself left-handed. But at the time, what happened was I had to change everything I did in the workshop to right-handed, so that was really difficult. And I cut myself a lot. I managed to find a way through it.

I had my own dose of that internalised ablism confront me very early on in that workshop up in Sydney. To my own detriment in some ways I pushed myself a bit too hard, but that internalised dislike for my disabilities and my… Didn’t really get much of a show, because I just had to get on with it.

**Nic**

Yeah. I know you a little bit, and you’re very much a “just get on with it,” sort of attitude. What’s your relationship with your disability, and how has your art impacted your relationship with your disability?

**Billie Parsons**

Coming to art, or art coming to me as well, it was an interesting collision because it almost felt like a smooth process because theatre is considered an art, so the transition from that into what the ceramics initially was pretty easy; once I got, like I said, got going with the hand-building, it was pretty easy.

What it’s done is it’s given me a way to speak to someone, say like yourself, because we have something in common, that we’re interested in that or that, and we can be interested in many things, obviously. And so having that ability to see someone else’s art, or have someone start a conversation and being able to find common ground, I think is a really excellent thing because I’ve found that people can be quite locked into just talking about their disability; being able to guide people into a conversation about art as opposed, and it’s something they’re really just passionate about, doing that helps me and helps them.

**Nic**

I’m really interested in the concept of disability pride when you’ve come to your disability later in life, and how that sits with you. Do you have days of going, “I hate this,” or you kind of just get on with it?

**Billie Parsons**

The way I deal with the days that I might, this is working, is I go, I’ll just put it down for the day. It’s okay to not do it for a day; these are all things I’ve learnt the hard way. Stepping back from something is probably my initial tactic [laughs] with things that I can’t understand, and I think even like discussing it with other people, other artists with disabilities, other [0:09:37.4] artists, I think that really helps, too. I don’t think we do enough discussing amongst ourselves; it’s always dominated by other stuff, and sometimes when you get into, like they’ll be a meeting and you’ll have a chat room, and people, because they’re not heard very often, that’s their chance to be heard. So what happens is you’re hearing about them, but you’re not hearing about their art, and I don’t know how to change that.

**Nic**

Hopefully through things like this podcast.

**Billie Parsons**

Yeah, well the only way to change it is it’s got to be conscious: “Look, I’m having difficulty with making this, and I was thinking about this idea,” and those sort of conversations. I think they’re really useful.

**Nic**

Sometimes I find visual arts a bit like poetry in that it feels like it appeals to some people, and some people just don’t get it; there’s sort of a poshness, or a sort of, “I understand this, and you don’t.” How do you think we can make visual arts more accessible to the masses?

**Billie Parsons**

That’s a good question. I think just dispelling that upper classness, that arrogance that does exist because essentially money’s involved, and that brings a certain type of person to the table. Again, we see a disparity between ourselves and a certain type of ablism is also represented within that attitude to art, and I think that when you talk about internalised ablism, I think there’s an internalised artism; when I say that, I mean people, because they don’t understand something, it’s easier to diss it, to dismiss it. That doesn’t mean that they’re artists themselves, or they know anything about art, but they can flex enough that coming to it for them is it’s very dismissive. Whereas instead of just dissing the art, it’s like actually having some sort of conversation, like myself, educating myself to understand what art means, and what is. It can be really difficult for people who don’t really know what art is, and I was one of them.

The power in realising my own work is when my eyes opened up to other work. And so I think everyone’s an artist in some form; it bears itself in many ways.

**Nic**

I know you’re going through a bit of a difficult time at the moment; do you find when you’re going through that time and you need an outlet, do you go towards art?

**Billie Parsons**

Absolutely, yeah, absolutely. I went and bought myself a pottery wheel a couple of weeks ago, and I haven't really thrown pots for a very long time, but I felt that it’s a bit like when you’re an elite runner, say, and something’s going on, and you think, “I’d better not go too hard at the moment because I’ve got to do other stuff,” but you still go for a jog every day. And that’s what this is for me; it’s like I’m still going for the jog, and I’m still hard on myself, and I’m not doing something that I’m great at, but I’m still engaged.

**Nic**

What does it do for your mind?

**Billie Parsons**

It’s funny, it actually clears it.

**Nic**

You get into like a flow state?

**Billie Parsons**

Yeah, I do. I’m too busy fighting with the clay, trying to make it do what I want it to do, and we’ll go 15 rounds sometimes. Yeah, it’s pretty full-on [laughs]. It’s good for me.

**Nic**

I don’t know whether this is true, but it seemed like you have control over the clay when you don’t have control over what’s going on in life. I wonder whether that’s a part of it.

**Billie Parsons**

It can be, depending on what you’re doing. I guess what I’m making at the moment, I’m just… Because of my left-handedness, there’s an awkwardness to what I make, so it’s like it’s almost right, but it’s not. The clay and I go hard at each other, and I’ve finally found a clay that’s got a bit, it’s a bit easier to work with for me; 20 years’ experience dabbling in it and watching other people do stuff on YouTube now, like there’s just you can find videos about ceramic anything, so that helps, too. And I actually find it really calming at night to watch someone throwing on YouTube videos; it’s just really nice.

**Nic**

Like some people watch boxing, and you watch clay.

**Billie Parsons**

[laughs] Yeah, well you know, maybe people can see the artistry in that, I don’t know, but yeah, I certainly, it calms me right down.

**Nic**

Can you tell me about your time in Texas?

**Billie Parsons**

Yeah, okay. What happened was, to contextualise it a little bit, when I was doing the ceramics class down on the south coast, towards the end of the last year I did that, there was a teacher there who was quite knowledgeable, and she said to me, “You should go to university.” I went, “Oh, should I?” because I’d never, ever considered it. I didn’t think that was something I could do. So I go across to ANU for their open day, and have a chat to the person in charge, and they offer me a place on the spot. They look at pictures of my work and they go, “Um…” I said, “Yeah, but what about the audition, whatever?” and they said, “No. You don’t need to come back for it, for that. We’ll just sign you up now.” Like, “Oh, okay. Right.”

I guess that was the dawning of my, “Maybe there’s something here that I just haven't realised.” And in my last year at ANU, fourth year in ANU, there was a chap from the United States. At the end of the month or so that he was there, he said to me, “You should go and study in America.” I said, “Oh, there’s a bloody pattern developing here.” I said, “Oh, okay. That’s really interesting,” because I’d been talked out of doing a six month international studying thing that they had on offer there. I went over to the States; in Australia at that time, a Masters was a year and a half, and I didn’t think a year and a half was enough time to really construct a good, solid body of work to step from.

I went across to the States, I did a residency in Bali and then went across to the states, and I’d lined up a couple of universities to look at, and the first university was LSU in Louisianna state, and I went and had a look there, and the Art School building was the oldest building on campus. The studios, our studios were three storeys up, and it was all walk up. And I thought, “Yeah, righto.” And everything was really old; all the machinery was really old, they’d thrown money at lots of stuff, but not the Art department at that stage, which has changed now, but it wouldn't have meant that they were the conditions in which I would be studying, and there’s no way.

And then I went across to Texas Tech, the university that I ended up studying at, and this university had absolute state of the arts, disability-friendly buildings, lifts, ramps, push buttons to open doors for you; it was magic. And I’m like, “Perfect.” And the equipment they had, and the machinery, and you name it, they had it, and I’m like, “Yeah, that’s what I want to do.” And they offered me a scholarship, so I’m like, “Yeah, well, that’s what I’m doing.”

My experience there though was, it was hard, it was really hard. It was great, it was fun, it was all those things, but it was also really hard. It had a fantastic disabled student program, and so I had everything teed up. But it’s a bit like driving along on a Sunday doing 60, and taking it nice and easy, and you pull onto a freeway and the cars are just going, vroom, vroom, vroom past you. So that was what it was like. I’ve just wandered in there going, “Oh yeah, hey, everyone. How’re you going?” and nearly getting cleaned up by all these things flying past me, which were the other students, because that’s how it is over there; you just like, your eyes are open, you’re working. As much as I like to work hard [laughs], I tell you, that taught me something else.

**Nic**

Did it help you with your work ethic going forward?

**Billie Parsons**

Coming to art, and then working in art, I’ve never thought that my work ethic lacked. I guess I have to be careful not to expect that of others, and then now and then I come across my internalised ablism, and I’m like, “Get up there. What’s wrong with you? You can do that.” But of course, I’m 53 now, and physically, things are a little bit harder, so I just have to be quite aware, and I’m often reminded by my partner about not pushing myself unnecessarily.

**Nic**

You can be as private or as open about this as you want, but just to give people a bit of context, everyone that’s on this podcast identifies as having a disability, so could you describe a bit about what you struggle with?

**Billie Parsons**

I was in a car accident when I was 29, I was hit by a car, and I’ve always been someone that’s been busy, even when I’m not doing anything I’m like working, in my head’s going about what’s next. What I came to realise that I needed to work within myself as opposed to expecting something to happen, like myself to do something, was working within my own, not only abilities, but like energy and which part of the day is best for me. I didn’t just have a broken leg that gave me a bit of a limp [laughs]. I got a brain injury, and a stroke, and on and on that list goes. People say, “Oh, you do so well,” and I’m like, I don’t like when people say that because I don’t think it’s a very considered thing to say, “Oh, you’re just well. It doesn’t look like there’s anything wrong with you.”

One of the things about having the sort of disabilities that I have is that they’re not visible, and so you do double down on yourself a bit. Life gets a bit judgy when you do and do things and people are like, “Oh, why are you sitting down?” or, “Why are you this?” or, “Why aren’t you doing that?”

**Nic**

I’m guessing there’s a bit of gaslighting involved. You can’t really be that sick because you don’t look sick.

**Billie Parsons**

Well, yeah, and internal gaslighting, you see, because you go, “Oh, come on. You can do that. Your legs work. You’ll be all right,” [laughs] all round.

**Nic**

Where that comes to art, do you have anything that you wouldn't explore through art, like any parts of your life or boundaries emotionally for you that you wouldn't explore through your art? Or is everything there to be dealt with?

**Billie Parsons**

Everything’s up for grabs as far as myself. I mean no one can make me make art about something I don’t want to make it about; that’s like no one can make you read something, or do something. I think my limits would be that I can only really talk about things that I know about, so I have no right to cross cultural lines and talk about someone else’s, or try and talk about someone else’s experiences or stories when I only have a second-hand at best idea of what that’s about.

**Nic**

Did you always have that in you, or did you come to that realisation when you became disabled?

**Billie Parsons**

Culturally, I mean you’ve got disability culture as well, which again, there’s parts of that culture that I don’t have any right to speak about. I can collaborate with someone, at best; that’s what I would do. But otherwise, I don’t feel like I should just decide that I should speak about someone else’s position, so that goes for culturally, for people in different places, like Indigenous Australians, other countries; it’s not my story to tell.

**Nic**

I feel like the world would be better if everybody took that view. [laughs]

**Billie Parsons**

It would be handy, yes. [laughs]

**Nic**

Yes. I met you when we were doing specials with Cath Duncan, because one of the places where we rehearsed and did the workshops was at a place that you were looking after, the North Preston Lifesaving Club. Can you tell me how that came about?

**Billie Parsons**

That came about when I was in the States, actually, and I thought about places where artists with a disability can go to either exhibit, create work, working with other artists with a disability, or [crip 0:23:40.4] artists, and there just wasn’t anything. There were sort of things, but there wasn’t anything specifically like what North Preston has been. So it was a multifunctional space, and that was always the intention, so it could be used as a gallery, a rehearsal space, a yoga studio. In that way, it ticked all the boxes, what we were and what we did.

Learning a lot about what artists require, disabled artists, artists with disability require, I think that’s really an unexplored area, and I don’t necessarily mean just artists as in visual artists, but in this case, that’s what I’m referring to. But knowing what they require from an internal perspective, like a disabled perspective, not an observed perspective, is incredibly valuable, and I think the information is really valuable. I don’t want to put it in a box and forget about it though; I think that it’s information that should… It would help other people going forward in hiring galleries, setting up shows.

I know exactly what’s needed to put on a professional show, like an exhibition, and what I found was that there were things that I had to let go of for the show to happen in the capacity that it could, but still be an excellent show, and so I found myself drawing because I didn’t have time to do my sculpture, because a lot of my time was taken up helping artists put on their shows. And that’s okay.

**Nic**

So when you say that you had to let go of things, was that that you had to do what you could in the time that was allotted, or were there other things that you had to let go of?

**Billie Parsons**

It was more about when an artist comes to a gallery, they have information about themselves, their works, each work, and that’s already all prepared, and basically you print them, you stick them on the walls, put the artwork up, and off you go. But that wasn’t the case, and that’s okay. A lot of people were exhibiting for the first time, and so I’ve got a Masters, how can I expect someone who has none of that experience to know that? I just had to check in with myself and say, “All right, that’s good, but this is how we’re going to have to do it,” and it worked really well.

**Nic**

So it’s a place, like you were saying, that’s really needed for artists with disability, so is there any plans to do something at a different venue?

**Billie Parsons**

What had been spoken about was keeping the North Preston Lifesaving Club as a body, of sorts, and applying for shows at venues, exhibition venues, and because we have a stable of artists that we can draw from, we can set themes or not. Most of the organisation is already done by the time the artist gets to the venue with their work and goes, “Here you go,” and we go, “Yeah, no worries.” The work required to get an exhibition happening is done, and it’s more realistic to do something like that, say twice a year maybe, not this year, but I need a break [laughs], I need to make some bad pots. But that is something that we’ve got something that is there that people know about. People know about it in England, people know about it in New Zealand, all over people know about it. I don’t know if it’s just because it’s a fun name that people go, “Oh, yeah, that sounds great.”

Moving forward, I can see it existing like that. Yes.

**Nic**

From the conversation today, and what I already know about you, it feels like you’ve had two lives, almost.

**Billie Parsons**

I do feel like that. It’s almost about the same amount of time in both industries. I think when I was younger, I was speaking to people that were older, and they would be able to tell you so much about what they had done much younger, but what they were doing now that was like, it was a bit hard. So I find making art is good in that respect for me, but you ask me something about technical theatre, and I will know the answer to that question [laughs], and it’s so easy.

**Nic**   
Can you tell me about your background in theatre? How did that come about?

**Billie Parsons**

Work experience. So we had a theatre at high school, and there was a backstage crew, and I just went, I did drumming and I did the backstage crew. If that doesn’t tell you I like to be out the back, I don’t know what else. I did it for work experience, and luckily for me, when I was in Year 12 I also threw javelin at that stage, and I’d just been overseas representing Australia. The week after I came back, I went in to see the careers person, and they said, “What do you want to do?” and I said, “I want to work in theatre,” and they threw the phonebook at me and said, “Well, there you go.” So I threw the phonebook back at them and walked out, and it just so happened that the Malthouse was being built, being renovated at that stage. And I rang them up and they were like, “Yeah, come in. Yeah, sure.” So I did my time there, like my weeks [0:29:21.6], and then they said, “You’ve got holidays now,” it was like September holidays or something, and they said, “You want to come in?” I said, “Yeah, absolutely.”

The general manager of the company, Jill Smith at the time, she rings me up one day and she goes, “Would you be interested if we applied for you to the Australia Council for a trainee carpenter mechanist?” which mechanist is a stagehand, but in Australia they’re called “mechanists.” And I said, “My word, I would.” She goes, “Look, just keep doing what you’re doing. We’ll put the application in and we’ll see how we go.” I said, “Okay.”

So I applied to the College of the Arts production, and I got in there, and I was there a week and a half; one of the teachers comes out and says, “There’s a phone call for you.” This was before mobile phones. Anyway, so I go in the office and it’s this woman, Jill Smith saying, “We’ve got the grant. Are you still interested in doing it, haven't taken the traineeship?” And I said, “I’ll see you in ten minutes,” [laughs] because that’s how long it was going to take me to walk from the College of the Arts to the Malthouse. I couldn't wait to get out of an institution and into the real thing. I’d had 13 years of institutionalisation in high school and primary school, etc, so that’s essentially dumb luck, good luck, hard work, not so hard work. And so I was there when John Beckett, who designed the Malthouse, he passed way two weeks ago, I was out with him out in the laneway at the Malthouse there laying bricks with him [laughs], like there was just a really interesting start. And I did do building then; I got picked up by the VSO had just started a workshop, and after I’d finished my time at the Malthouse, and I ended up, right place, right time yet again.

**Nic**   
I’m sure it wasn’t this linear, but the way that you tell these stories, it’s almost like you just were in the right place at the right time, and you had the nerve, if that’s the word, to ask the questions that needed to be asked, and then people gave you a shot.

**Billie Parsons**

Yeah, I think I posited myself, so I put myself in a position… Like I never thought that the Malthouse was going to… Someone’s gone, “There’s a young woman who is really keen. We can get her for a good price if we get this traineeship thing.” A full price for someone who has no experience is difficult. My pay certainly dropped when I went from working for them during the holidays to working as a trainee, so essentially, I was on a first year apprentice’s wages, but I didn’t care because I was doing it.

**Nic**

And you actually loved getting in and getting your hands dirty, and helping out. Like you weren’t precious about what they asked you to do.

**Billie Parsons**

No, I did everything from laying bricks, once the theatres were open I used to go in there and work as part of the team, the crew setting up for different shows, especially at the Merlin Theatre, the bigger of the two theatres; that requires, like it was all clever engineering at the time, but it made it very clunky to deal with, having to move things around, big metal things around in that space.

I could drive an eight tonne crane before I could drive a car [laughs]. It’s just ridiculous.

**Nic**

Your life would make a very good book.

**Billie Parsons**

Lots of people could say that. Yeah, there’d be some interesting pages in there.

**Nic**

People will be interested after listening to this to see some of your art; is your art anywhere that people can go and have a look at, or see online or something?

**Billie Parsons**

At the moment, there’s my website, which is billieparsonsart.com, and I guess it’s watch this space.

**Nic**

Yeah, you need a break for a while.

**Billie Parsons**

Yeah, I’ve moved out to the Dandenong Ranges in a place called Olinda, and looking at the gum trees at the moment, and these gum trees are like 40, 50 metres tall; they’re massive. And ferns, we saw a couple of lyre birds hanging out the other day, which is like very rare to see lyre birds. And I was driving home the other night, a wallaby sitting in the middle of the road as I come around the corner, and my dog, Toohey, she’s loving it.

**Nic**

I miss Toohey.

**Billie Parsons**

Yeah. [laughs] She loves it out here.

**Nic**

I always end with this sort of question, which is art, and especially when you add disability onto that, isn’t the most financially rewarding of careers, shall we say. First of all, what could the government, or people do to support disabled artists?

**Billie Parsons**

We have available to us periodically through the main arts organisations in say, Victoria and Australia, decent grants, like five, ten, 15, $20,000. I think that it would help if those grants were split up a little bit more, so say, if five people got $1,000 grant, I mean that’s a body of work. Arts access to as much as they can, but an individual body that operates like North Preston that says, “Okay, we offer some artists, and we open it to everyone else, and so we’re going to have a show here. We’ve got the funding from…” whatever the body might be, and that means all the artists get paid, and we get to do a show. And we do it consistently. That’s the thing; people need consistency. We’re still in the days of pop-ups, and pop-ups, I don’t mean, I mean that term’s not that old, but that sort of thing is old; it’s not something that’s new, and it limits the amount of people that can actually see the work. I believe that even if it’s only one more person that gets to come in and see that work over the time that it shows, that could be the person that might make the difference to someone else’s life, be it the artist, or be it somewhere else. So having the ability to go forward with it is really important.

So splitting up the grant system a bit more, like have your $20,000 lifetime achievement, etc, but make things a bit smaller, and people think, “Oh…” people have these attitude of, and I’ve heard them, “Oh, well, so and so will get that. They always get the awards.” I’m like, “That person works really bloody hard to get those things. They aren’t just given out; you have to earn them.”

The best way to learn often is to fail: Apply for things; if you don’t get it, like there’s people around like me, say, “Oh, really? Look, I didn’t get it, but I don’t know why, so here’s my statement that I sent to them. Can you read it for me and just maybe you can make it a bit tighter or something?” I’m, “Absolutely.” And if I don’t know, then I’ll go, “Oh well, hang on. Well, let’s talk to so and so.”

Creating art has an importance to it that also involves helping others.

**Nic**

Is there an artist that supported you, or changed your life?

**Billie Parsons**

I had an art teacher at high school. Various people, I don’t see them very often, but when I do they say to me, “Mr Kemp really helped you, didn’t he?” Still, like 35 years later, and I’m like, “Yes. Yes, he did.” And he also ran the backstage crew, so not only was it art that I learnt, but also the backstage, and he ran it like a real thing, so I knew everything was what I’d learnt, and I could apply going forward.

I can’t exclude spending time at the North Preston with Jeremy Hawks; we had some really interesting conversations, and things that I don’t think people talk about with disability, they don’t talk about, like I said earlier; they talk about maybe what’s wrong with them, or what’s going on for them, and what they find hard because it’s their only opportunity to just really speak to more than one person, or the same person. When you can give people an opportunity to be heard artistically, I think that is amazing.

**Nic**

I feel like as my last question, it would be remiss of me not to ask you about your jams, and your lemon butter, and your awards at the country fairs. You used to do a lot of the catering when we would have specials workshops, and it was some of the best food I’ve ever tasted in my life. And then you told me that some of it was award-winning. Can you talk to me a bit about your culinary pursuits?

**Billie Parsons**

Yeah. Well, I think that that, essentially worked hand-in-hand with, when I started doing ceramics, and Aunty Lucy, God bless her, not with us for a long time now, Aunty Lucy had this recipe for tomato relish; she gave it to my mum who was her niece, and she made Mum swear that she would never tell anyone. That sort of went out the window, only a little bit. What happened was I had gone back to work, and I went up to Sydney to work, went down the south coast, and of all things joined the CWA because I thought that I should know about things about the CWA. I was only like probably 30 years younger than the youngest of them, and covered in tattoos, and I really didn’t look like I fit in, but I quite loved it. They had little things like they had a jam, a plum jam competition.

Anyway, this woman, Doris, took me under her wing. Doris was 83 at the time; she was five foot on a phone book. She was tiny, but feisty. Anyway, Doris taught me how to make jam, slightly different to the relish. I got third. I think they gave me third because they wanted to encourage me. I don’t think it deserved anything, but that’s okay.

Show season up there is sort of January, February. I put the relish in the local show and it won. I didn’t quite know what to do with myself. Bloody hell, I’m ringing everyone. It was pre-Facebook, so I’m like, “Oh, this is all right.” And then I started to learn how to make other things, and I’ve got chooks, so lemon butter and all these sort of things. I guess we ended up having a family reunion of sorts. Dad moved up and lived with me, and then Mum would come and go, and we’d do the relish. We used to go in all the shows, and then the Royal Sydney Show comes up; I think it was about 2007 or ’08. Anyway, this is Mum and I, we just won first prize at the Royal Easter Show with our tomato relish, and that was front page of the local newspaper.

Anyway, we took that out twice so far; I just took out third, actually, at the Royal Easter with the tomato relish.

**Nic**

Just recently?

**Billie Parsons**

Yeah, this year. It was the first year I’ve gone back into it, and I pulled a third, and I’m like, “Well, when you get third it’s like there’s not much difference between first and third.” So I’m competitive, it’s okay, as in it’s good enough to compete with. At the moment, it’s strawberry jam because at this time of year the strawberries have a smell about them that they have no other time of the year; that’s when they make the best jam. I’ve just been buying them, cutting them up and putting them in the freezer [laughs], so when I have time I can make up a couple of different lots of it to see which one will go in the show this year.

**Nic**

I might have to come visit in Olinda.

**Billie Parsons**

You might have to, mate, you might have to. Yes.

**Nic**

Thank you so much for your time talking to me today.

**Billie Parsons**

My pleasure.

**Nic**

I know we talked about your website a bit, but if somebody wants to talk to you about an idea they have in terms of disability arts, is there somewhere that they can contact you or follow what you’re doing?

**Billie Parsons**

Probably my email address would probably be the easiest to start with.

**Nic**

We can put it in the show notes for people, if that’s okay.

**Billie Parsons**

Yeah, that’s fine. If I can do anything, someone’s got an idea and I can do anything, I will, or I’ll help them out how I can. Yeah.

**Nic**

In the meantime, enjoy your break.

**Billie Parsons**

I am [laughs].

**Nic**

Thank you so much.

**Billie Parsons**

All right, mate.

**Nic**

Thank you so much. So good to see you.

**Billie Parsons**

You too, mate. I’ll catch you around.

**Nic**

Bye.

**Billie Parsons**

See you later.

**Nic**

Thank you so much to Billie Parsons.

Hi everyone. I just wanted to jump in at the end of this episode and let you know that this is the tenth guest interview, which means that the funding from Creative Australia has now sadly come to an end. I hope you’ve enjoyed Create and Amplify as much as I’ve enjoyed making it. Thank you to the guests for sharing their stories so generously, so vulnerably, and with humour. Thank you to Creative Australia and the Australian government for your belief in this project. Thank you to Writers Victoria, VCR, and the Office of politician Andrew Giles, and a very big thank you to producer, Russell, audio engineer, Greg for your dedication, hard work, time, and for helping me bring my vision to life.

Thank you so much, everyone. I hope to bring you more episodes in the future. If you’d like to hear more, please follow us on socials, or write to me and let me know who you’d like to hear from.

Thank you.