

Melissa Avery-Weir 0:00

Hello, and welcome to Audacious Compassion: A podcast where we explore how to find compassion in the most difficult places in daily life. I'm Melissa.

Gregory Avery-Weir 0:07

And I'm Gregory.

Melissa Avery-Weir 0:09

And today we'll be talking about "bike shedding," where people focus on an interesting detail of a problem instead of the big picture.

So, Gregory, how are you doing?

Gregory Avery-Weir 0:20

I'm doing pretty well. My life recently... my most recent epiphany has been almost the reverse of what we're talking about. I well, so I often have a tendency to blame some of my systemic difficulties in life, on transient, momentary issues. So like, "Well, as soon as I get done with this project at work, things will be much easier." Or, "Well, you know, we've got this trip coming up.

And that's really stressing me out right now. But I'll be able to calm down a whole lot more when it's done.

Melissa Avery-Weir 0:54

Yep. And very, very common thing to do.

Gregory Avery-Weir 0:57

Yeah, but I've got chronic depression anxiety, like I am, I am absolutely diagnosed. medicated for it. And that's not true. Like, I'm always going to find a thing to stress about. And so if I am going to make changes in order to make my life more pleasant, then they're going to be things that are everyday.

Like, they're going to be stuff about my normal life, not about whatever is happening this month or what's happening this year. And I mean, sure, they're going to be spikes with like, you know, if someone's sick that I care about, or whatever. But in general, it's going to be everyday stuff.

And theunitofcaring is a blog we talked about on this on this podcast before.

Melissa Avery-Weir

Always happy to link to that.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yeah, she does some great stuff. And she did post recently that that resonated with me, where she talked about load bearing circumstances in your life, where, like, there are things that you

do that keep you going, that don't, don't seem unusual, but actually kind of keep you happy, even though they might seem trivial. So stuff like, you walk to work, and walk by a lake where there are ducks every morning, or you're able to play music in the afternoons, or you have a certain amount of time yourself each day.

And those are the things which don't seem like much, but if they go missing, they can really throw off your life. And that made me think about the the general idea of like, if your environment is welcoming, your environment is comfortable, then you're just lowering kind of your general ambient stress. If you're not having to climb over a mess, in order to get to your closet, then that's just a little bit more ease in your day. This is kind of connected to -- we were talking about do easy the discipline of D earlier -- And that's -- an earlier episode.

And that's sort of a similar concept, just like it really is the little things, but it's the constant little things, it's not the thing that is like, Oh, hey, there's this one pet peeve I'm worrying about because I'll always manage to find something and I'm stressed about at work or whatever. And you if I solve one of those, I only solve it for a month, right?

Gregory Avery-Weir 3:21

And then it's on to the next minor crisis, right? But if I put like my coffee preparations stuff in a better organization then I'm just waking each morning and being a little less harried, right? So that's, that's what I've been thinking about lately, is keeping that perspective where I'm making sure to focus on important things rather than dramatic changes in my life.

So how are you doing?

Melissa Avery-Weir 3:50

I'm doing pretty good. We have been playing a game we've talked about in the past called Stardew Valley. Great game. Very chill which is nice. That's a great game to play -- I'll talk about hockey later -- but while the frenetic NHL playoffs are going on, I've got Stardew Valley on one screen and hockey on the other.

But they've recently released a beta with Co Op mode so you can play with your friends. And you all share farm and you can divide up chores if you want to. You can -- It's a it's a fun way to sort of share space and manage energy a little better, and things like that.

One of the common tactics that I see and hear about is to specifically divide the chores. So someone's like, "Oh, I want to be the farmer and I want to make wine and pickles." That's me.

Gregory Avery-Weir

I've been going into the mines and killing stuff and bringing back interesting rocks.

Melissa Avery-Weir

Exactly. And our third friend has been sort of a livestock person and through a mixture of like that hyper focus on what we're interested in and sort of some fluctuation in who's playing at any given time. Like you've played less than...

Gregory Avery-Weir 5:02

Yeah, I tend to find it a little more intimidating, I think to just like, "let's spend a few hours being in quiet, idyllic paradise where I'm worried I might fall asleep." Also, you got VR recently.

Melissa Avery-Weir

Yes.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yeah. Which I will be talking about later. So I've got other things, begging for my attention.

Melissa Avery-Weir

Things that are a little more sensory-intense. But as a result of this, sort of like divided focus, and each of us doing what we each find interesting. We're kind of having some trouble with large scale projects. So you need to, you know, you need.

Gregory Avery-Weir

We've got some large scale projects that we're doing?

Melissa Avery-Weir

Right, exactly. Oh, like that watering can you left at the upgrade...

Gregory Avery-Weir

Look. that wasn't my Watering Can.

Melissa Avery-Weir

I know!

Gregory Avery-Weir

Lucy gave me her watering can to go drop off and... we don't, we don't need to talk about what happened next.

Melissa Avery-Weir 5:54

Days. You know, you need to amass larger amounts of money for things like upgrading your house or buy we're animals and things like that. And if you don't have a clear consensus on what resources need to be gathered, and how much money you need to be piling up, it doesn't tend to happen or it tends to take longer, or you tend to always be asking, wait, can I buy more seeds? Or are we using this is this money already allocated for thing, it's like a bad family budget, or no one knows where the money's going. And so it's fine. Like, it's whatever. It's just a

different kind of game than my solo one, which is very regimented. I might in fact, have a one note page for my Stardew Valley game.

Gregory Avery-Weir 6:33

When you get into a game you --

Melissa Avery-Weir

Fallen London has two whole sections. Because I have two different characters.

Gregory Avery-Weir

-- you make sure that you do the game correctly, even when there is not necessarily a correct way to do the game.

Melissa Avery-Weir

To be fair, though, I am cheating in Stardew Valley in my solo game.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yes, but you're cheating correctly. The most efficient cheating.

Melissa Avery-Weir 6:54

...that is kind of true. So it's fun, but it is a little too organized. And you've just got three people merging their game--two and a half people merging their game style.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Well, that's actually probably statistically true.

Melissa Avery-Weir 7:11

So there's that.

So this month's discussion of bike shedding was sort of brought up by a couple of different discussions that have come up in a D&D game.

Gregory Avery-Weir 7:20

Yeah, so I run a Dungeons and Dragons game every other week here for some friends in my house. And what would it be week and a half ago at this point, if we're only talking about the most recent, the most recent one was week and a half ago, we had some people over and we only had three of the normal six folks. And we didn't end up playing, we ended up just, you know, eating dinner and then chatting for several hours.

Melissa Avery-Weir

And usually political discussions with this group are fascinating. Because one of the people is, I believe, what's a constitutional fundamentalist like--

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yeah, recently, quite conservative, in a principal concern, sort of sense, not falling everything the republican party does sense, right? And libertarian leanings, and you and I are, you know, social justice loving socialists, right.

Melissa Avery-Weir

So, it makes for interesting and nuanced discussion, usually.

Gregory Avery-Weir

because everyone genuinely is that mythical thing you hear about where they seem to be coming from a relatively caring perspective, right?

Melissa Avery-Weir

And how that how that should play out in the terms of government is different.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yeah, genuinely discussing in good faith and all that.

Melissa Avery-Weir 8:31

Yep. So usually that that's interesting. I don't think I would say the last discussion with not interesting,

Gregory Avery-Weir

I mean, I think was interesting, but it was it was one of those were kind of at some point, we just kind of went Oh, okay. Yeah,

Melissa Avery-Weir 8:47

so what happened was, we often talk about things like health care, just as a "what in the world should should American healthcare look like?"

Gregory Avery-Weir 8:55

I guess we talked about things that we can all agree are bad. Broken in some way.

Melissa Avery-Weir 9:01

Exactly. Yeah, we don't tend to talk much about race relations, or LGBTQ,

Gregory Avery-Weir 9:07

in part because I think you and I are the only ones who consider themselves particularly well versed in one of those

Melissa Avery-Weir 9:08

That's true. So as we're talking about health care, we end up down this path of a particular detail of talking about the obesity problem in America, which is significant, specifically type two

diabetes, which again, significant, and the problem of fat people in hospitals eating unhealthy food. Caused specifically by a healthcare professional that is known among by this is a friend of one of them. Yeah, one of the people in the discussion,

Gregory Avery-Weir 9:48

it was one of those things where we, we went rather quickly from how do we organize a health care system that that keeps people alive and doesn't bankrupt the country and drill very quickly down to one what you do about fat people who won't stop eating. Which isn't...

Melissa Avery-Weir 10:06

It was like, the reason we are silent right now is because it was just, it was like, "Okay, here we are, and now we're talking about lifestyle decisions." But smokers are okay, but fat people aren't. and it was it was a difficult conversation.

So I'm fat. I'm very fat. I, in this good faith discussion, I did not want you to perceive myself as targeted.

Gregory Avery-Weir 10:29

I mean, the people involved at least do not think that they are singling people out I think.

Melissa Avery-Weir 10:40

I think so too. But in the moment, that is something I'm having to constantly remind me of, that this person is looking me in the eye and essentially telling me that people should die for being fat or should die if they cannot fix themselves quickly. Poor fat people should die.

Gregory Avery-Weir 10:53

It touched pretty closely to me, too, because I'm trans I, I'm dating a person who has had trans-related surgery. And that's another thing that often is pointed out is like, "Oh, well, this is this elective thing, right?" Like, here's this surgical procedure that, you know, you might commit suicide because you're in a bad position in life, if you don't get but you know, you...

Melissa Avery-Weir 11:14

"Lifestyle." So that's, that's one thing that's happened. And then previously, we've had same group, different person, someone who I think just a minutes talking about - rather apropos of nothing but maybe talking about sort of general social issues will bring up -- there's a Chappelle, Dave Chappelle stand up routine I have not watched because of this this in which he goes down some road of bashing on trans people who do not politely enough request that their pronouns be used.

And so this person is in your house, that trans persons house, does not use your pronoun,

Gregory Avery-Weir

Knows that I am "They."

Melissa Avery-Weir

Right, and brings this routine up repeatedly in a discussion about other social issues. And again, as well as things where it's like, hard not to feel targeted, and maybe we all... I don't know.

Gregory Avery-Weir

I think at the least we probably remind them of these things.

Melissa Avery-Weir 12:22

Even though not every fat person has diabetes! And so it's one of those things where, like, what do you do when you're in this discussion? And you're like, yeah, let's talk about how we should be allocating money for keeping people alive. How do we help poor people in West Virginia, in a very rural setting, and also help poor urban people and also appropriately tax people who make a lot of money for varying values of "a lot of money", let's, you know, like, what, what is that number?

Gregory Avery-Weir

What is "a lot of money?" What is an appropriate amount of money to start taxing people, exorbitantly?

Melissa Avery-Weir 13:01

Right. And these are all broad things that we perhaps all have anecdotal evidence of things also, right. Like, we know, people who live in all of these various scenarios. And so parts of those things resonate this individually. But we're also all geeks interested in the politics of the larger system. We read stuff, we read things, we listen to podcasts, right? So we're really interested in this stuff. And so how do you not get angry? How do you not feel targeted? How do you how do you have that interesting discussion when someone is interested in a very specific part of that discussion all of a sudden?

Gregory Avery-Weir 13:38

Yeah, and you see this in gun control. People talk about, oh, people don't understand guns, or, you know, we need to be able to defend ourselves in case we need to do an armed revolution against the against the totalitarian governments. I understand that perspective. On the other hand, that's such a unlikely and small part of the whole discussion.

Melissa Avery-Weir

And folks would also say that like focusing on school shootings is also hyperfocused.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Right, because, you know, in terms of total number of even total number of deaths by guns, school shootings are tiny.

Melissa Avery-Weir 14:06

And this happens, this happens all the time. And this happens in technical conversations, when you're talking with colleagues at work, right? Like, you'll be like, okay, let's talk about this broad architectural question.

Gregory Avery-Weir

And they're like, "two spaces per tab, not four spaces per tab."

Melissa Avery-Weir 14:21

And you just want to be like, "Uh, okay. *Later.*" Not when we're in the weeds.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Focus on everything else and this is a thing that has a name in a technical context, which is "bike shedding." The idea is that if you're discussing about, like, the major architectural concerns of designing a new office complex, if everyone wants to talk about the color that you paint the where you park your bikes, that's because that's an easy thing. And that's the thing that's interesting and would kind of affect them, they can imagine themselves parking their bike or walking past a shed of bikes, like, "that's ugly," or "that's pretty."

Whereas really, what you need to carry about care about is like the proper pitch of the ground for proper drainage.

Melissa Avery-Weir 15:06

And how many bathrooms do you have?

Gregory Avery-Weir 15:11

Yeah, and I think there's this human tendency to, to, especially when you're dealing with a complicated problem. That does not have an easy solution. We want to focus on oh, well, I know this part. And then we tend to drill down and say, Well, I know that this aspect of it should work this way, like, people shouldn't be able to eat BoJangles in a hospital and then get treated for obesity that same day, and then, like, extract that back out and extrapolate into the whole system as if the whole decision should be based on this one little detail.

Melissa Avery-Weir 15:53

Exactly. Except that what often happens is the conversation never manages to zoom out, in part because that is a broken way to try and solve it like, like, the welfare main idea is exactly that they are like, Oh, how do we provide social services for the country? Well, there are people who are going to abuse it.

Gregory Avery-Weir

And in even if you believe the, the fiction that that there is that sort of abuse going on? It's such a small... would be such a small percentage.

Melissa Avery-Weir 16:14

And so once you have, like, solved for this hyper specific case, it's almost impossible to re-generalize that.

Gregory Avery-Weir

You constrain the whole discussion based on some weird outlier.

Melissa Avery-Weir

And then you're talking about people who have interesting lifestyles die.

And then you're like, well, who decides that you're saying insurance companies get to say that because I drive a car instead of taking public transit that if I get in a car accident, right, like, it just doesn't work?

And so the conversation stalls, and you often... it's easy to end up feeling misunderstood.

It's often easy to end up feeling targeted, it's easy to end up feeling like everybody else is foolish. I know that that person who said those things... One? Pretty empathetic person in general, but more importantly, they're a smart person who thinks about systems, right?

Gregory Avery-Weir

And I think a person who respects you personally.

Melissa Avery-Weir

Sure, there's just sort of this cognitive dissonance in this conversation, right, of having like, this person that I know, can think about systems get stuck in this, well, we all do this. Yeah, we all like how do you extract yourself from that.

Gregory Avery-Weir

And from the other side, if you've got this, this thing you're focused on is the small aspect of it, it feels like this is the: "Well if you ask a seven year old they'll tell you you have to deal with this problem." And if you can't deal with this simple, small part of it then your whole system is bad.

And we don't like accepting that solutions that apply to an entire large system won't explain every situation. There will be efficiencies, there will be places which they fall by the wayside, and it's not so much how do you deal with this, and this and this, it's, "which of these things is it okay, if someone one gets to get away with a thing?"

Melissa Avery-Weir

Or if someone gets to die?

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yeah, I mean, no, no health care system is going to keep 100% of the people alive, right? Someone is going to be in some situation where they don't get treated. And that's awful. But it's going to happen, there is no system that will handle everyone. And so the question is, at what point do you say, this is good enough? For now? Like, maybe you get better in the future?

Melissa Avery-Weir 18:28

And that is the that is usually the part where philosophy, various philosophies and perspectives, make the conversation stop. Yeah, someone who believes in a very literal reading of the Constitution, and that government should be small what to do about healthcare. At some point, a socialist and that person are going to hit an impasse and they're going to part ways friendly, because we're human beings and we understand that there are differences...

Gregory Avery-Weir 18:47

Unless you're going to other someone dramatically, at some point, you're like, "Oh, well, I guess we are coming from different premises.

Melissa Avery-Weir

"And thank you for in for teaching me something, right?" Like there's usually education there. I learn something all the time, anyway.

Gregory Avery-Weir

But often what you learn is why someone thinks something that you think is wrong.

Melissa Avery-Weir 19:18

...sometimes. So I often don't understand... So I understand the theory of a lot of these stances. Because I took a civics class or two in high school, but I don't, those don't always teach you exactly how that plays out in a real world scenario, right? Healthcare now is not what it was in mumble-something when I was in high school. Yeah. So now we have Obamacare. Okay, now we're living it. We're living with \$500 per month.

Gregory Avery-Weir 19:39

Yeah, we're never discussing what is the ideal situation; we're always discussing, "Here's what we have. Now, what's the next step."

Melissa Avery-Weir 19:52

Right. And to hear that through the voice of someone who has chosen that as their philosophy is different. It's like religion is different when you talk to a person who lives it rather than examining the sort of generics of whatever that religious...

Gregory Avery-Weir

The good old stereotypes versus specifics thing.

Melissa Avery-Weir

Right. And, you know, you take it with a grain of salt, because it is one person, but those are hard conversations to have. I found myself, with the obesity thing in particular, I think I did a good job of sticking with arguing the broad point of, "How does this scale out?" What about smokers, especially since this person's parent is a smoker? What about... right? Like, like, what does this look like? Are you actually saying you're okay, with these people dying... potentially, right? Like we're talking lost limbs, all the diabetes things that are just heinous. And trying to frame that as "These people are human, these people have made choices that made sense to them at the time, or they perhaps did not have as many choices as we like to think I did." And I think it's an okay job in that situation but it was definitely something I had to kind of pause some of the arguments I wanted to make or not say, "Are you effing kidding me right now?!"

Gregory Avery-Weir 20:53

And one of the gross things about those sorts of discussions is very often the groups that are singled out are groups that lack power in society. It's only in a few of these sort of political discussions where you're like, "Well, you know, the people who have power the real problem here." Almost always, it's this specific group who is...

Melissa Avery-Weir 21:23

And I will say that, I mean, we do talk about the rich or the powerful. They're not often at the table!

Melissa Avery-Weir 21:30

And so it is easier to get consensus on that standpoint, than it is about people who are more likely to be. Minorities or whatever groups. But with regards to the trans stuff, I'm not going to be able to convince that person that rudeness or perceived politeness is a power dynamic that they are participating in. I'm just not.

Gregory Avery-Weir 21:52

Especially since some people's personalities are such that they are fine being callous. And I think you and I are not that way. Sometimes. I think. I mean, I think we certainly have impulses to be rude or mean. But I think that we have strong impulses to go the other way.

Unknown 22:14

Melissa Avery-Weir 22:17

Learned impulses, I think. Both ways. And so as far as, like, I'm trying to think of like, in the moment, right. I tried to stay calm, I tried to distract myself, I use some of the tactics we've talked about before, right. Like having something to fidget with, or I think when we talked about the temper, we talked about, like, get up and walk around if it doesn't seem threatening, or

Gregory Avery-Weir 22:40

Definitely this the self empathy of like, "oh, what am I feeling? Why am I feeling this way? Okay. It's perfectly like, yeah, it's a perfectly justified feeling I'm having, right, I don't need to let it rule me."

Melissa Avery-Weir 22:43

And sort of reminding myself of the context in which this conversation is happening, which is one of a certain amount of trust one in which I'm going to see these people again in two weeks. So it's not time to burn bridges

Gregory Avery-Weir 22:55

One in which you can easily escape and get to a safe place,

Melissa Avery-Weir

I could have, I also could have put up a boundary. And said, I think I could have said, Okay, I think we're done with this.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yeah. And I think that just knowing that you can say, let's stop talking about this now, right? And everyone be like, okay...

Melissa Avery-Weir

It would have been awkward, but then it would have been just fine.

Gregory Avery-Weir

But knowing that that is true, means that you can be more okay with continuing because you... you're not being coerced into this as strongly.

Melissa Avery-Weir

And I could have put in just a really bad segue to something else, like...

Gregory Avery-Weir

"Speaking of diabetes, have any of you tried those new...?"

Melissa Avery-Weir 23:39

That would have been a bad segue. I can tell you as a fat person, when you're trying to escape a conversation about fatness, bringing up anything about food or caloric intake or exercise: not the way to do it.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Fair enough.

Melissa Avery-Weir 23:51

So, yes, trying to stay calm. Trying to stay in the moment. I'm not on the internet, right? Like, there's no screen of anonymity here that is protecting that person from my judgment. And vice versa. So if you choose to lash out, you are looking someone in the eye and doing so.

So those all helped me in that scenario. How are you handling, like...

This whole pronoun thing is very interesting to me.

So you if I can talk about your coming out a little bit, you came out in 2014 or 2015?

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yeah, I think I declared my pronouns first, and then called myself trans later.

Melissa Avery-Weir

So it has been four years. All but one of the people in this game have been in this game for all four of those years. You have made two mentions of it at the table.

Gregory Avery-Weir

I often wear a skirt.

Melissa Avery-Weir 24:55

You often wear skirt, I always call you they, I sometimes subtly correct people on it.

Gregory Avery-Weir 24:59

We very frequently have pronoun discussions about fictional d&d characters, right? "Oh, well, do they have a gender? Yeah, okay. They're a they..."

Melissa Avery-Weir 25:11

Right. So it's, it's, it's an environment in which, by and large, to either not be observant or to not address you the way you want to be addressed. There's some choice there.

Gregory Avery-Weir

I think that's a situation where... I guess is, is actually the inverse of this, where there's this detail that I consider important. And I think if you consider someone's feelings important, this would theoretically be important to you. But which is uncomfortable, which is unfamiliar, it's not something that comes easily to a lot of folks who haven't been around a lot of trans folks. And so the easy path in this case, is to not look at that detail, right? And to just, you know, treat this like a "normal conversation" where you look at a person and know what their pronoun is.

And which, of course, is is not the normal situation, right? You never know; that's part of the whole thing about gender being weirdly constructed, and very recently constructed in the way that we think of it. It's just easier to not pay attention to that.

Melissa Avery-Weir

Except that then they bring up that routine!

Gregory Avery-Weir

Because they've got this frisson, and they've got this... this thing, this tension that they're holding as part of this conversation where they know this is going on and, and are probably constantly a little on edge of being like, "Am I am I gonna get yelled at?" in the case of the person who really doesn't want people to be rude about having him treat them with common human decency?

Melissa Avery-Weir 26:45

We should do an episode on common sense and how it's not common? Because it's incredibly cultural.

Gregory Avery-Weir 26:52

Since that is sort of in the air... It's this this topic that they are consciously or subconsciously avoiding? I think that will go come up more.

And I think that it's probably actually a good impulse to want to air the room. To want to talk about the things that are bugging you? I don't know that that the right way to do it, is to bring up an oddly coincidental thing that just happens to be about the suspect group that you're not admitting verbally the person in the room is, but...

Melissa Avery-Weir

Uh huh. And to do so multiple times.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Right. I think that impulse is, is something that kind of can be teased out and encouraged. And unfortunately, it's often the case of the kind of the person being targeted... using "targeted" as a value neutral term. Or I'm trying to use it as a value-neutral term.

Melissa Avery-Weir

It's not a value-neutral term.

Gregory Avery-Weir

The person, the person that's, that's sort of...

Melissa Avery-Weir

Under the lens?

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yeah, under the lens. They're, unfortunately, often in the position of doing the meta-conversation shift and being like, Hey, you mentioning fat people a lot... You know...

Melissa Avery-Weir 28:11

I don't think there's a way for me to have dropped in that conversation, "You know, fat people don't have diabetes, right?"

Gregory Avery-Weir 28:17

I mean, I think you made a noble effort of calling out the fact that you were talking about fat people as if there wasn't a fat person right there.

I mean, it's, it's gonna, this sort of thing is going to happen.

Melissa Avery-Weir 28:29

Oh, totally. I certainly cannot say it is the way our brains work -- I'm not any sort of psychologist or neuroscientist -- but it seems a very common pattern of behavior, and we have to be able to adapt. Sometimes it can just be listening, letting them vent about that.

Gregory Avery-Weir

I think naming what's going on is useful. Just being like, "Well, you know, as a trans person, as a fat person, I think this." You can at least make everyone know that, you know, that this conversation is relevant to you. And that can change how people talk or at least be considerate and less hurtful.

Yeah, people do that. People want to focus on a specific thing that's nagging at them when they're dealing with a big systemic issue.

You see that with trans bathroom things, with gun debates with...

Melissa Avery-Weir 29:35

...my old boss who said that fire departments should be abolished? Because it doesn't work in some counties that don't have enough money to have one around regularly? Like, okay... like, okay.

Gregory Avery-Weir 29:39

I don't like the term human nature.

Melissa Avery-Weir 29:41

No, that doesn't mean anything.

Gregory Avery-Weir 29:42

But it's one of those things where in my experience is very common.

And something you have to be able to deal with, rather than within the next decade, being able to abolish society wide.

So what have you been inspired by lately?

Melissa Avery-Weir 30:00

I have been watching a lot of hockey, NHL hockey, specifically. It is the playoffs for the Stanley Cup. The first Stanley Cup Series game is the 28.th So I normally watch hockey during the regular season.

Gregory Avery-Weir 30:17

Which is interesting because you're a kid from relatively southern states.

Melissa Avery-Weir 30:22

I am, and I'm not I'm not one for team sports as an individual.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Was it was just that you worked a place where you could get cheap box seats at a hockey game?

Melissa Avery-Weir

Yes, for our AHL -- American Hockey League, like the minors -- here in Charlotte. And yeah, we'd get like, \$5 tickets. So a friend and I went decently regularly.

Gregory Avery-Weir 30:44

Because you know, you could pay \$5, and get like, the VIP treatment. Like elevator operators and all that that are weird and creepy.

Melissa Avery-Weir 30:48

...and classist and Oh, God. Anyway, so yeah, I like the sport. Quite a lot. This might feed in from like, my, I used to watch a lot of figure skating.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yeah, I mean, it's a cool mode of locomotion.

Melissa Avery-Weir

So the playoffs are going on right now. I didn't watch much in the beginning of 2018, because we were finishing up Majesty of Colors. Huge product, really stressful, and hockey... It was not the right kind of background noise to have, which sometimes it is sometimes it isn't. It wasn't in January, February, so on. So I'm kind of catching back up. But this also means I let a lot of my podcasts about hockey slide, which I guess I will confess here that I listened to podcasts about hockey.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Even I did not know that. That is a dramatic confession.

Melissa Avery-Weir

And some of them were fan casts, like they're teams that I don't even particularly follow. But I enjoyed hearing the details and catching the names and things like this. And there's general excitement and enthusiasm. And so one of the things that's interesting about it is the amount of random-ass punditry. So you look at these teams, and you say, why is this team succeeding? It's like horse betting! Like no one knows, like is it the three star players? Is it the goalie, is it the new coach, what is it? And whichever way the wind is blowing it's going to be a different reason.

Gregory Avery-Weir 32:07

I mean, I think that group that we've mentioned here before, 538 people, were became real well known for kind of thing in baseball being like, "Well, here's statistically what actually matters." And it was not what the typical consensus was.

Melissa Avery-Weir

Yep, they only cover hockey, very little. They did talk about the Vegas Knights. Like, is it really that remarkable, making it this far?

Anyway, there's this hyper focus on details to the point that nothing that these people say means anything, it's just this noise! And if you if you track it over the course of the season, you're like, "Oh, what is... how are the Washington Capitals doing?" I listened to Russian Machine Never Breaks, it's a podcast, it's pretty good. They're total fanboys and it's like, first is this, and then they suck, and then they're good. And then they suck. And it's, oh, it's this person. And it's just like, where's the trending?

Gregory Avery-Weir 33:07

Like they don't seem to have any sort of consistency over the course of the season and don't even seem to realize that?

Melissa Avery-Weir 33:12

Yeah, they're starting to kind of catch like, now that they're in the playoffs and stuff like, "Oh, I guess we were wrong," but it's -- I don't know! It's just this weird, hyper focused thing.

And I'm not involved in any other sports. But I think this happens everywhere. When I see the bobbing heads on ESPN in the break room at work, they're talking about draft picks and should have been 23rd or 13th or whatever. I don't understand.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yeah, about the closest I can come to being useful in this discussion is talking about the Overwatch Professional League, so...

Melissa Avery-Weir

Oh, my god. I mean, I think video games journalism suffers from this a lot.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Oh, sure. Yeah, like business trends. And stuff like that.

Melissa Avery-Weir

Yeah, what will E3 be like this year? No one's gonna show up. Everybody's gonna show up. As far as inspiration goes, I generally find hockey to be fun and very competent. And like, while people are like, "Oh, this player isn't doing well this year," I'm like, "Ah, this is a professional hockey player, right?" Like these people set their bar on what a good hockey player is so high that they can critique everybody whereas I am still -- and I mean, this is naive -- I am still just like, "Holy crap. Look at these people play, look at their athleticism."

Gregory Avery-Weir

Part of it probably comes from you coming in at in the minor leagues where your average player (I assume) in the pro NHL league is a top notch star player from a minor league perspective.

Melissa Avery-Weir 34:40

Yes. And there's this weird feeding team system that's exploitive. Yeah, but so I don't know. It's just it's really fun to watch. It's something that like... I don't have a large circle of friends that partaken it. We've had one get together. We're watching one playoff game. We're gonna watch one of the Stanley Cup games next week. So it's fun. I like it. What's been inspiring you?

Gregory Avery-Weir 35:06

Well, so I become lost on the virtual zone.

Melissa Avery-Weir

You have! I see things pop up on Steam. It's like "Weirga is... whatever."

Gregory Avery-Weir 35:14

Yeah, so I bought an HTC Vive, which is one of the major powerhouse virtual reality systems. It's expensive. I am lucky to be able to afford it. Yeah, because it's not just the hundreds of dollars of hardware, but it's also the stuff you need to support the virtual reality system.

Melissa Avery-Weir

So faster CPU or memory, better video card.

Gregory Avery-Weir

But it really is a fascinating thing. It's an experience that... I don't like the idea of getting excited about the latest trend and getting into hype and stuff. But this there really is something different about virtual reality that makes it feel different in video games, or in other experiences, then, then a kind of a flat screen experience.

Melissa Avery-Weir 36:00

Which makes sense, right? Like, if the sensory input is different, your interactions are different.

Gregory Avery-Weir 36:04

And one of the things that I've noticed, especially as a game designer, is how little people seem to be taking advantage of what is different about this system. And part of it is just that because it's expensive. There's a very small customer base. Very few people have VR systems. So VR games have to be expensive, relatively. A game, that would be \$5, if it were on Steam as a regular flat screen game would be \$20 as a VR game.

Melissa Avery-Weir 36:38

And I would say, if I had just spent over \$1,000, or something, getting everything rigged up for VR, I'm going to be stingy about how much I spent on games, because I just expended a lot of money.

Gregory Avery-Weir 36:43

Yeah. And so there's that weird thing. And so people are going to tend to be very risk averse. And...

Melissa Avery-Weir

You mean game developers.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Game developers. ...and game players! Everyone going to want to be like, "Well, this seems like a good, reliable, safe bet." Which is weirdly... if you were in this thing that if you have adopted this early, you're surely thinking it's this dramatic new way. And yet, you're being like, "I'm going to make sure to make and play the same old games."

There's so many games, which are about shooting things with guns. And not even like the fancy plot-driven spectacle games that tend to be popular these days. But like, "We're a bunch of

people who get in a room and try and shoot each other with guns." Or "I'm going to stand in one place, and a bunch of enemies are going to show up and I'm going to shoot them with guns."

Melissa Avery-Weir

Like a shooting gallery.

Gregory Avery-Weir

A shooting gallery! Exactly! Shooting galleries are an enormous part of these games. And it's especially weird to me, because the things that seem so different about VR to me are: A) the presence, the sense of presence, the sense that you are in a space like you're being surrounded...

Melissa Avery-Weir

Your eyes can track things.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Yeah, you can look around, you can pay attention to details. I can, I can spend 15 minutes just looking around a space in virtual reality that, in a normal flat screen game, I just walk past. Because it's like, "Oh, hey, the pattern of these leaves is more interesting." And the other thing is just that you're depending on so much about the, the human body and the human life sensory processing system that isn't engaged in a flat screen game.

So I've been playing a lot of a game called Beat Saber, which is a... it's a rhythm game. It's a Dance Dance Revolution, the sort of game where you've got two "really they're not lightsabers don't sue us" weapons. And you're trying to slice through blocks in rhythm with a song.

Melissa Avery-Weir

We will link to a video.

Gregory Avery-Weir 38:54

Yeah, it's, beautiful. It's a lot of fun. I really like it. It's getting me exercising, which is cool. But one of the things about it that is just this weirdly novel experience is seeing a block pass by that you didn't get in time and doing a wild swing behind your back and cutting it in half, and not missing it. And the ability to to just depend on the human body's proprioception to just slice something that's out of view, to know where things are around you? That's a thing you just can't do in flat-screen games. Like, you have to be really, really, really good at video games to be able to spin around and target something that's out of your view.

Whereas that's, like, trivial. That's common nature -- really actually human nature. Like, if you have a typical limbic system, you can do this.

And so few games seem to be taking advantage of that sort of thing. Taking advantage of these things that your body understands how to do, your senses understand how to proceed and

putting those in a situation where you feel like you're part of a room. And instead they're doing things like shooting galleries where... lining up the sights on a gun...

Melissa Avery-Weir
Or chat rooms.

Gregory Avery-Weir
Or chat rooms, right! Like a chat room is a thing. Discord servers exist. You can chat with people regardless.

Melissa Avery-Weir
It's not like Second Life.

Gregory Avery-Weir
Yeah, the fact you can puppet around an avatar really isn't all that interesting to me. And likewise, lining up the sights of a and shooting someone isn't a natural action. It is a learned behavior. It means that you're not taking advantage of the instinctual stuff that you can.

Melissa Avery-Weir 40:46
And you will have a much more interesting experience if you go do that physically, by far. The wizard thing where I was trying to line up crossbows? My hand was way too high...

Gregory Avery-Weir 40:58
There's not a sense of weight, there's not a physical feedback of the weapon pushing you back or anything like that.

Melissa Avery-Weir 41:08
So it lacks physicality in specific ways that make it bad for just porting things over... certain kinds of things.

Gregory Avery-Weir 41:16
And I mean, beat saber is not actually about swords. It's about dancing. And the swords are just a way to guide that dance.

Melissa Avery-Weir 41:23
And by being light sabers -- laser sabers, they avoid... you would not expect a lightsaber to be heavy.

Gregory Avery-Weir 41:33
You're not depending on any existing sense of, "This is how this should feel and it doesn't." So that's a thing where like, people are presented with this, at least in my pie-in-the-sky view, this amazing new opportunity to make art and they're focusing on, "Well, people like games about guns!"

Melissa Avery-Weir

So we're making that game, right?

Gregory Avery-Weir

Oh, yeah. Yeah. Lissa has a very good concept for a game that would work really well in VR.

Melissa Avery-Weir

A sentence I would like written on the ceiling somewhere, on the sky. Because I do not have as many game ideas as you have.

Gregory Avery-Weir

It's fortunate; you can focus on some of them instead of trying to make every single one of them.

So yeah, it's fascinating. I'm interested to see how it turns out. I hope that it doesn't turn out to be a flash in the pan thing that just kind of goes away after a few years.

Melissa Avery-Weir 42:20

It's already been around for a few years. So let's see.

So we've been talking about bike shedding. been talking about hyper-focus on details, the inability to solve system problems.

Gregory Avery-Weir 42:29

When the system is tricky. It's almost comforting to go down and go into a space that seems familiar and emotionally resonant and simple.

And I mean, systems aren't simple. People aren't simple.

And I think to a certain extent, we have to break things down into digestible portions.

Melissa Avery-Weir 43:01

There's a lot of, certainly in software engineering, and presumably it cribbed it from actual engineering, almost everything about architecture is do you start at the top and drill down? Or do you start at the bottom and build up? All of architecture is philosophies around how to solve these problems in which direction.

Gregory Avery-Weir

But in order to do that the right way that takes practice.

Melissa Avery-Weir 43:24

Yep, it takes practice, it takes skill, it takes messing up, it takes being wrong, you know.

Gregory Avery-Weir 43:27

Yeah. And I think that I will try to focus on my own behavior and see where I am maybe making a pet topic of mine what this whole system is about, even though it's much more complicated than that. And I guess hopefully (this one seems a little trickier to me) I will remember that other people doing that sort of thing too.

Melissa Avery-Weir

Well, Gregory, thank you for talking to me today.

Gregory Avery-Weir

And thank you for talking to me!

Melissa Avery-Weir 44:02

And thank you all for listening. This has been Audacious Compassion. If you have a question or prompt for discussion, please submit it to us@avery-weir.net. That's A-V-E-R-Y-dash-W-E-I-R dot net. You can find the show on Twitter and Facebook @audaciouscast. And we greatly appreciate your likes and follows. Please take a moment to rate us on iTunes or Stitcher or wherever you get your podcasts. You spreading the word is the best way for us to expand our audience.

I have a personal question to toss here at the end.

Gregory Avery-Weir

Oh, no!

Melissa Avery-Weir

So I am going to Germany at the end of this year, shortly before Christmas.

Gregory Avery-Weir

That's exciting.

Melissa Avery-Weir

I'm so excited. This is my younger sibling's first time leaving the country. And so if any of our listeners have suggestions for Christmas market time, things that one should do in Nuremberg...

This could be anything from food, to museums, to... just things that -- I don't know -- Americans who have never been to Germany should do, let us know in the comments or find me on social media or something like that. I would love to hear ideas.

I'm Melissa Avery-Weir and I can be found at: MelissaAveryWeir@mastadon.social

Gregory Avery-Weir 45:20

And I'm Gregory Avery-Weir and I can be found on twitter: @GregoryWeir

Melissa Avery-Weir 45:24

And together we run a video game studio called Future Proof Games, which you can visit at futureproofgames.com. Our theme music is "Invisible Light" by Josh Woodward, available under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 license.

Talk to you later!