

Episode 5 - Ona Gritz

Robin Eldridge: You are listening to The Upside of Down with Dan Ariely.

Dan Ariely: Ona. Thanks so much for spending a bit of time with me.

Ona Gritz: Oh, happy to. We're actually outside of the public library where I used to work.

Dan Ariely: We're walking around. We'll go to the library soon. It's hard not to observe that you walk in a slightly non-traditional way.

Ona Gritz: That's a nice way to put it.

Dan Ariely: And what's the cause of this non-traditional way?

Ona Gritz: A birth defect, cerebral palsy. Specifically a form of cerebral palsy, which is right hemiplegia. So only the right side of my body is affected.

Dan Ariely: How does it feel to have one side of your body affected and the other one not?

Ona Gritz: My left side has full sensation and my right side feels as though it's been shot through with Novocain. I can't tell the difference between objects, small objects placed in my palm. You could put a paperclip in my palm or a penny and I wouldn't be able to tell you the difference unless I peeked.

Dan Ariely: OK, you will know that there's something there?

Ona Gritz: Yes.

Dan Ariely: But you would not know what it is?

Ona Gritz: I wouldn't know the specifics of its shape or weight.

Dan Ariely: And what about just them being touched?

Ona Gritz: It feels different but it's still nice.

Dan Ariely: So you know for me with the burns, I feel less but I enjoy it more. So do you know how you can't tickle yourself? Do you know why?

Ona Gritz: No, I never knew why.

Dan Ariely: Because it's about the predictability.

Ona Gritz: Oh, okay. So you can't catch yourself off guard.

Dan Ariely: That's right. Oh, where is it coming from? You basically know all the time.

Ona Gritz: Right.

Dan Ariely: So you don't have this unpredictability which is what creates this uncertainty about it. Where is it going? What is happening?

Ona Gritz: Right. That makes sense.

Dan Ariely: And for me, the burned skin, the way it grew, it's unclear to me exactly where somebody touches. If I touch you here on the shoulder, you know it's exactly the shoulder. If I move my hand to the elbow, you know where it is. On the burned skin, I don't exactly know where it is. Sometimes it feels like it's multiple places at the same time. Sometimes I don't really know. But it basically creates the element of surprise. And when somebody else touches me, everything feels more unknown. It does intensify the pleasure. It's a little bit more tickling all the time.

Ona Gritz: Wow.

Dan Ariely: But in a good way.

Ona Gritz: Mm-hmm.

Dan Ariely: I enjoy it. So...

Ona Gritz: One of the perks.

Dan Ariely: Yes.

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Dan Ariely: Hi, my name is Dan Ariely, and in this show, I talk each time with somebody who's sort of like me, in two ways. They've also been through a difficult time in their lives and yet they're also trying to make specific and interesting meaning and contribution with their lives. I was burned many years ago in about 70% of my body and I spent about three years in hospital and now I'm trying to run all kinds of experiments about all kinds of aspects of human behavior trying to figure out what gets us to behave worse and what gets us to behave better. In this show, we will get to have conversations about what we do with all of this. What do we do with our own challenges and injuries? And how do we find meaning? It's about how we make these challenges into better times.

Ona Gritz: From what my parents tell me, they didn't notice anything right away, except that I was slow to learn things. So I crawled later. I didn't stand or walk until after I was two. And when I first crawled, they noticed it was one hand and one elbow. And they just thought it was just a cute quirk. But then when I stood up, I stood up kind of pigeon-toed, and then they had me assessed. And I had to wear a leg brace briefly.

Dan Ariely: So you had a brace for a few years?

Ona Gritz: Yeah. It's a good part of childhood, but only at night. Which was kind of an interesting thing because my mother, she let me skip it. If I had someone sleeping over at my house or if I was going to somebody else's house or we were going on vacation. And so I actually wound up with a message that this is to be hidden and that it could be hidden. I didn't actually even understand that it was visible for a long time.

Dan Ariely: When you say for a long time, until what age?

Ona Gritz: Six.

Dan Ariely: So until age six, you don't know that people can notice that you walk slightly differently and that your hand is...

Ona Gritz: Right. I mean, I knew I had this thing. I just thought it was private.

Dan Ariely: But more than the specific, are there different ways that you relate to the world?

Ona Gritz: It's interesting, I'm a poet and a writer, and I wonder sometimes, you know, you read about left-right brain hemispheres and how the right brain is the creative brain, and that's my undamaged half.

Dan Ariely: Mm-hmm.

Ona Gritz: So is that why I've never been good at math, but I've always been good at language?

Dan Ariely: I see. What was your path to becoming a writer and a poet?

Ona Gritz: There was Mrs. Greenstein in second grade, who, at the end of the school year, gave me a copy, it was a paperback copy of Funny Poems, and inside she wrote "To Ona, who will someday be a fine author." The year before that I had a little poem published in the school journal, and then when I turned 12, I started keeping a poetry notebook, very corny, with rhyming poems on purple pages, and I'd sign it with my middle name, which is Fawn, because I thought it sounded like poetry.

Dan Ariely: What happened later? How did you decide to make this into a profession?

Ona Gritz: It was actually seventh grade when I thought about, well, what do I like and what am I good at? I always loved when we had opportunities to write in class and I thought, oh, I'll be a writer. Simple as that, which of course is not as simple as it sounds. When I went to college, I studied literature. I liked being around visual artists and dancers and painters. I had a very, very good poetry mentor back when I was at SUNY Purchase, a guy named Harry Stessel. I would bring him poems every week. I did independent studies with him and he would circle and say, "That's your poem right there," and carve everything else away from it. He said, "Great poems aren't written, they're carved." And then I went to graduate school at NYU in their creative writing program. One of the poets who taught there, Sharon Olds,

had a writing workshop that she was offering in a chronic care hospital. And she gave students the opportunity to come and be teachers for the patients there. So we would work with them and take dictation and work with them depending on what they could do.

Dan Ariely: So you're at NYU grad school. In addition to writing, participating in this educational teaching in which you go into a hospital, you help people with very difficult disabilities to try and express themselves.

Ona Gritz: And very difficult life experiences. Most of them were healthy at some point and something happened.

Dan Ariely: And of course, you know, life in hospital is so aversive and painful and with so little control and so little safe for the patients. And then you decide to leave academia.

Ona Gritz: Yeah. I got this idea that I wanted to work with the healthy disabled, was how I thought about it at the time. It didn't have the same heartbreak attached to it. And at the same time it was in some ways very resonant to me because I used to have to go to physical therapy as a kid at a United Cerebral Policy. And so it was a way of relating to a part of myself, but baby steps towards it.

Dan Ariely: But you sounded like your whole life you basically did not think of yourself as having CP and all of a sudden you start wanting to be close to other people with...

Ona Gritz: I did and yet I took an able-bodied role.

Dan Ariely: That's right.

Ona Gritz: The role of helper. And teacher, yes. And then I started stalking people.

Dan Ariely: Stalking people?

Ona Gritz: I did. I was living in Greenwich Village and every once in a while I would see a woman who had some kind of physical impairment. And I would just follow her. I would ask myself questions like, "She's nice looking. Is she still attractive even though she walks in this way? And if that's true for her, is it true for me?" And that's the level it started at. But over time, as I kept this up, I started wanting to know, well, what's her life like?

Dan Ariely: Their injuries or their disability was very different from yours.

Ona Gritz: Yeah, even though most of them had CP, it was to a much greater degree and affected them in some cases cognitively so that they needed assistance, not just physically, but in life care skills.

Dan Ariely: And you were trying to figure out how they live, how they manage, how attractive are they.

Ona Gritz: Yeah, and what does it say about me? I stalked someone to the point where I actually started a conversation and developed a lifelong friendship. My friend Hope, we met at a poetry event. I was on a panel of readers and she was in the audience and she was

asking really smart questions and I liked her in terms of things she had to say. When I was getting my papers together, I looked up and she was there waiting to talk to me. She told me she liked hearing my poems and I told her I liked hearing what she contributed. We went out for tea and we talked for a really long time and she also has cerebral palsy.

Dan Ariely: And at that point, do you think actively about dating somebody with a disability versus not?

Ona Gritz: Disabled men were not on my radar at that point.

Dan Ariely: On purpose or they were just not on your radar?

Ona Gritz: It was just who I was attracted to was able-bodied, who I was interested, who I was surrounded by. I met my friend Hope right when I was about to marry husband number one. So there was this balance in some ways. I had this world with him where I felt that I had made it in the able-bodied world and then I could kinda visit the disability world.

Dan Ariely: How is it to be a friend with another CP? How much of your discussions are about that? How much do you learn from her about coping?

Ona Gritz: When we first met, it was all we could talk about. It was all we could talk about because neither of us had ever had that conversation before. And so as lucky as I had been in the world of finding my closest friends who could finish my sentences, nobody ever heard those sentences 'cause I didn't speak them out loud. I'd say for a good solid few weeks. It was like, I have a feeling we have other things in common and we'll get there! But, you know, what's your experience with this? And we really were so hungry for that conversation. And then it receded, you know, and now and again, it comes up, but you know, in the potpourri of everything that comes up in a conversation.

Dan Ariely: And was it helpful to help you understand your body and what was going on and what is different?

Ona Gritz: It was helpful not so much about my body as about being in the world socially. Because it gave me a place to think about it. Like with how I felt meeting Dan many years later, I could see right away all there was to like and love about Hope, which gave me a little more permission to think about liking and loving myself. Because I think if you keep something under wraps for a long time, it kind of affects your whole sense of self.

Dan Ariely: And was she also living without thinking about her...?

Ona Gritz: Largely, but she was ahead of me in that once we opened that door, she got very involved in disability politics and building a community. I was still going home to my able husband and pretending like I lived in the real world and I visited the disabled world now and then. My first husband was able-bodied, athletic. He loved mountain biking and snowboarding and skiing.

Dan Ariely: All the things you excel in.

[LAUGHTER]

And your common interests were?

Ona Gritz: Very few common interests. I had always been attracted to artists and creative men. And here was this guy who was actually studying economics at the time. Totally different headspace and yet he was so affectionate and so interested in being with me I felt like here's this guy who if I'd met him in high school guys like him looked right through me so I dove in.

Dan Ariely: From your perspective maybe it was kind of a certification from society saying you're approved by somebody who's highly desirable.

Ona Gritz: Yes.

Dan Ariely: What was it for him? How did he look at you in your disability?

Ona Gritz: Initially he said he didn't notice it at first.

Dan Ariely: Do you believe him?

Ona Gritz: Well, if I was sitting down at the time, yes.

Dan Ariely: OK. For me, when people say I don't notice it, I find it a little bit offensive.

Ona Gritz: You think they're being disingenuous.

Dan Ariely: Yes. What do you mean, like, you expect me to notice when you change your hair color or...

Ona Gritz: Right, right. And it's supposed to be a compliment.

Dan Ariely: And all of a sudden you're not noticing the fact that 70% of my body is covered with scars. Like, you know, how does it exactly work? And, you know, it changed color. I mean, things happen. It's not less changing than getting a haircut.

Ona Gritz: And it's just interesting to me that I think when people say that, they think they're being complementary.

Dan Ariely: Yes.

Ona Gritz: And yet what they're basically doing is negating a big part of your experience.

Dan Ariely: I think I would like for people to say, "I notice it, and over time it doesn't matter." That would be fine. That would be great. You don't want it to be the main character that defines me, but this idea that, "Oh, I don't even notice," that's a very, very strange thing to say. How long did it take you to fall in love and decide to get married?

Ona Gritz: We dated for about a year and a half, and he was very, "Let's get married." I was a little less sure because I had this sense we weren't doing that well. But I also had this sense that this was my one opportunity somehow. But things shifted over time. We were married for almost ten years, and we live congenially separate social lives. I liked the independence that I could still spend a lot of time with my girlfriends while he was off on a mountain biking trip or a ski trip or something but I, you know, was still me. Six years into our marriage, we had a child.

Dan Ariely: How is the decision to have a child? It's a decision or you just assume that you're going to have a child?

Ona Gritz: I always wanted to be a mother. I always loved kids. He was less sure, which is part of why it took as long as it did. But as soon as he gave me the green light, like, okay, this is something I want to do.

Ona Gritz: And what happened when Ethan is born? When Ethan was born, I had natural childbirth. Everything went well, and then it was time to breastfeed him, and I couldn't hold him properly. You know, if I had him on my left side, his legs weren't supported enough on my right side. The angle wasn't right, and if I had him on my right side, I couldn't get him up high enough. And so the nurses came around, and they said, "Well, we can fix this. We'll put cushions around you." And so they gathered around us, and they tucked cushions this way and that, and they got him to the right position, and they're all thinking, "Okay, problem solved." And I'm thinking, "Oh, my God. Two days from now, I'm going to be home alone, and who's going to put the cushions under us?"

Dan Ariely: But how do you do this alone?

Ona Gritz: While I was in the hospital, the first night, my husband stayed with us, so he was able to be my support. The second night, he went back to our house. We had a dog that needed attending to, and I was in the hospital room alone with Ethan. And he hadn't really been eating enough because he was sleeping through when he should be eating. And so, you know, it was a little bit concerning that he stay hydrated. And so he woke up crying, wanting to eat. And I rang for the nurse, and it was a nurse I'd never met before. And she said, "Nope, says right here on his chart, he's already eaten." Nothing I did would convince this woman to help me. And I tried everything on my own. I tried to set up the cushions and then get between them. I tried different positions on the bed. I could not feed him that night. We both just cried, the two of us, just cried and cried. And I'm just like, if we were on a desert island, he would starve. And there would be nothing I could do. And it was such a heartbreaking experience and such a wake up call that I just took on this physical job. And I better figure out how I was going to do it.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Dan Ariely: This is very different because I clearly did not breastfeed. One of my challenges is fine motoric--

Ona Gritz: On both sides?

Dan Ariely: Both hands, yeah, for different reasons. So I can't use a pencil, for example. But things like changing diapers, washing a kid, lots of those things are actually very, very difficult and very, very painful. And only--

Ona Gritz: Physically painful?

Dan Ariely: Yeah.

Ona Gritz: What about emotionally painful?

Dan Ariely: No, actually the only emotional pain was the recognition, how difficult it is. I think much like you, having kids was a very clear point of demonstrating my disabilities. But when you have a kid, there's all kind of things that you can't not do.

Ona Gritz: There's this person depending on you. For me, it was a wake-up call, and it also was a real lesson in really understanding what disability is, that it wasn't this cosmetic thing that maybe or maybe did or didn't make me less attractive, it was real physical limitations. And I would have to ask for help when I needed it, and I would have to make adaptations. And fortunately, one of the things that a disability like mine teaches you, and I'm sure this is true for you too, is you become a really sort of automatic problem solver.

Dan Ariely: For me, a lot of it is with technology. I have so many tricks around writing. I use voice dictation, I use software,

Ona Gritz: So typing.

Dan Ariely: I use people. Typing is tough. I can type about page a day, after that it becomes painful. And email is very tough. Writing is one thing, but email requires so much. So I have lots of other ways to do things.

Ona Gritz: So how did you meet your wife?

Dan Ariely: So this was in grad school. We were on some committee together. We do have a slightly different story about the time we really met each other. And my version of the story is that she was teaching a class on developmental psychology. We were both PhD students. And somehow the VCR didn't work, and my office was next to the class she was teaching. So she knocked on the door, and she asked me if I could help. I got to the class, and I saw that the video cassette player was beta, and the cassette was VHS. It was kind of clear. And as she walked to change video, the students were there waiting because it was class time. So I decided to teach them.

[LAUGHTER]

So I said, "What are you studying?" "Developmental psychology." So I, you know, I don't know much about developmental psychology, so I start teaching them about the visual cortex and Hubel and Wiesel and the experiments they did early on on development. And then I showed them how it led to Chomsky and kind of ideas about generic grammar. But then she found a tape, she walked into the class, and her recollection is that the students

were unbelievably relieved that she's coming back and this guy is talking about stuff they have no idea how it relates to anything. My memory was that they were deeply disappointed. There was interesting lecture that had to come to an abrupt end. That was our first meeting and then we--

Ona Gritz: Then you were on the committee after that.

Dan Ariely: We were on the committee and then we continued being together. We got married 19 years ago.

Ona Gritz: When you and your wife met, what was her reaction to your condition? Was it an issue between you at all or was, what was that like?

Dan Ariely: So I think she saw it as a strength of personality that I managed to overcome lots of tough things. Maybe she thought it prepared me for married life.

(both laughing)

Dan Ariely: If I could be in three years in hospital, maybe I could manage 10 years of marriage. I think there was a positive signal there. And in terms of the disability, in terms of the things that I can do and I can't do, I think she looked at it much like you're looking at Dan as a whole. It's a downside, right? Being with somebody who can't use a pencil or fold laundry or do all kinds of things. But the other thing is I don't think she really thought long term. One of the challenges, of course, that disabilities are likely to play a more difficult role down the line. Thirty-some surgeries, lots of transplants. I mean, the odds that at maturity, at old age, I'll be healthy is not very high. There's a hidden cost of disability that can grow with age. When we're young and in love, we don't think about it. Maybe it's a good thing.

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Ona Gritz: I met my current husband in a poetry-writing workshop. We both traveled from different ends to Cape May, New Jersey, to study specifically with Stephen Dunn, who's a poet whose work I love and Dan in his world loved as well. I got to the workshop table first, and I was feeling kind of groupie-ish and was hoping I could sit next to Stephen and have him on my left so I could hear him well. And much to my disappointment, when Stephen got there, he chose the opposite end of the table to sit in. And then the classroom filled up, and the only chair that was empty was the one next to me. And then this guy came in kind of rushing with a guide dog, and sat down in the only seat available next to me. And I later learned, was very disappointed, that he didn't get to sit next to Stephen because he records workshops because that's how he takes notes. But he also takes notes using a braille laptop, so he took that out of his backpack and started fiddling with that, and I thought, "How much noise is that going to make?" And then the workshop started and Stephen said, "Well, you know, I like to have people read each poem twice and that's especially good now since Dan's here." And Dan said, "Oh, good." And there was just something in his demeanor that made me kind of do a double-take. There's just a gentleness and an openness and I loved the way he talked to the other writers about their poems and he said he felt the same way hearing me talk to them.

Dan Ariely: So he sits next to you, do you ask him for coffee?

Ona Gritz: At the end of the workshop we worked, we walked together to the next event, we talked for a while, and then we'd run into each other kind of always rushing to one thing or another because it's only a weekend long event. And every time I turned around he was surrounded by people. He had this entourage, mostly women, always around him, so he was kind of hard to approach. But at the end of the workshop, he asked me to give him my contact information. And about a week later, I sent him an email just saying, "Nice to meet you. Hope we can stay in touch." He didn't check his email that day, but he called me that night. So I thought he was responding to my email with a phone call, but he was just calling on his own. And we talked for four hours, and it was really hard to get off the phone. It was just such a natural conversation. It had this feeling of familiarity. I kind of recognized him as the person that I'd always imagined myself with somehow. And as far as the disability piece was, I really found I wanted to talk about it.

Dan Ariely: And you wanted to talk about it with somebody who...

Ona Gritz: Got it from the inside out.

Dan Ariely: Who understood disability.

Ona Gritz: Yeah. That there's something I knew that I wouldn't have to explain and that he would get. When Dan and I first got together, I approached this literary journal called Literary Mama who had published some of my poetry and I said, "I want to write a column about what it's been like for me to raise an able-bodied child." And they took me on. And I wasn't sure at first whether the story was going to be universal enough that anybody was going to care because it was so specific to my experiences. But I got emails from women telling me that they could so relate to my experience. It wasn't primarily disabled women. It was a new mother who had twins, and so she didn't have access to both her hands, or just people facing what their limitations are or the ways that they saw themselves as lesser. And I started to realize that my experience was, in fact, universal. It was maybe more acute for me than it would be for an able-bodied person. But it sort of allowed me to think about the bigger world and that we as people with disabilities actually have something to teach because we face something everybody either faces or will face.

Dan Ariely: Any kind of experience of difficulty or trauma is kind of a magnifying glass.

Ona Gritz: Exactly.

Dan Ariely: So, you know, if I have to deal with a great amount of pain, everybody has to deal with pain. This just might be more focal and I might spend more time and attention and thought about this. So I do think that disability and difficulty are good magnifying glasses.

Ona Gritz: Yes.

Dan Ariely: Both for what we experience and also for what we should be doing. It's kind of very interesting to kind of figure out what are the benefits of being with somebody who

understands you better? And not just one person, like an environment that understands you better.

Ona Gritz: Community.

Dan Ariely: Versus fighting in the real world. And you started by trying to fight in the real world.

Ona Gritz: Yeah, I was mainstreamed. I didn't know anybody. I didn't know at first that people could see my disability because, you know, to me, this was my body. I didn't know other people had more sensation on one side until a little girl said to me, "Let's walk around like people who limp." So I was like, "Oh, okay." I tried to copy her, and she said, "Just walk like you always do." So that was kind of a startling thing to discover. And then I had a gym teacher who said to me, I was trying to run, or I thought I was running, "Oh, you don't run. It's more like a skip. Don't worry, just go sit down." So I learned that there was something visible, but I would quickly forget about it or put it in the back of my mind. But I learned later that I wanted that community, at least to some extent, not to be my whole world, but to be part of my world.

Dan Ariely: For many years, you did not think of yourself as having a disability. With Dan, do you feel more disabled or less disabled?

Ona Gritz: It's not that I feel more disabled, it's that I've invited it in. I've opened the door. If you love somebody with a disability, that disability, it's just a part of them. And he moves around in the world with such confidence and agility. I think it invited me to feel the same way.

Dan Ariely: And you've been together for how long?

Ona Gritz: Twelve years.

Dan Ariely: Twelve years.

Ona Gritz: Yeah, and we've only been living together three of those years. We mostly took turns who would do the traveling on a given weekend. And there was some real benefits and some real hard things about having that distance. And the benefit was so much conversation. So much of the relationship happened on the phone. What each of us did before we went to bed at night was get into bed and talk to each other. And also when we would visit each other, the to-do list for the most part could stay 100 miles away. So whoever was in the other's home got to kind of take a breath, relax.

Dan Ariely: And then you decided to spoil all of it and move together.

Ona Gritz: It's been wonderful. I guess we were ripe and ready for it. It's really nice not to have to say goodbye. I did not like the departure part of it.

Dan Ariely: I am wondering about kind of two ways of living. One is a way of living in which you say, "I have a disability, but I don't want to keep on thinking about this. I don't want to define me." I'm just wondering what happens when you marry somebody with a disability,

and now you have to deal with disability-related stuff many more hours of the day. It's hard for me to think about wanting purposefully to increase its role in my life. And you seem to have done the opposite in a very happy, calm, productive, and creative way, even in your writing.

Ona Gritz: It wasn't an entirely conscious decision though, in terms of, you know, choosing to be with somebody with a disability. It was this specific person and all the ways in which we resonated with each other. I think there's something about being able to be entirely myself at all times. I used to think of myself as an able-bodied person who was clumsy. And how much better is it to be a person with a disability who does pretty well? I guess I like having disability as a friend rather than as a...

Dan Ariely: Yeah, enemy.

Ona Gritz: Yeah, or an annoying sibling.

Dan Ariely: One thing that I've been thinking about in terms of moving to a community that has more disability is what is called counterfactual thinking. The idea is that it's very hard for us not to think about other possible states of the world of the world and to compare our happiness to those other states of the world, and that's a driver of happiness. So for example, imagine that you're missing your flight by two minutes or two hours.

Ona Gritz: It's worse if it's two minutes.

Dan Ariely: Why?

Ona Gritz: Because it came so close.

Dan Ariely: That's right. And the idea is that in the two minutes, you can imagine you would have been there.

Ona Gritz: Yes.

Dan Ariely: So you run toward the plane and you see it leaving the gate, and you see 7C, and you say, "I could have been there."

Ona Gritz: Right.

Dan Ariely: And you say, if the person in front of me in the line understood what no liquid is, if the Delta person had one more IQ point, you basically have all these stories about how you could have made it. If you're two hours late, you don't have that story. So what this suggests is that our happiness is not really about where we are, stuck in O'Hare until the next flight. It's about how easy it is for us to imagine other states. And if the other states are better, I would have made it, we're miserable. And if the other states are miserable, we're happy. But our happiness is driven by this comparison. There's a beautiful study showing that when you look at how happy people are when they win medals in the Olympics, you would expect the gold people to smile the most, silver less and bronze the least. But that's

not the case. The gold people smile the most, the second are the bronze, and the silver medalist smiled the least.

Ona Gritz: Because they missed the plane by two minutes.

Dan Ariely: That's right. The idea is that, you know, if for four years you woke up extra early every morning to do whatever activity, to do, to run, to exercise and so on, and 90 seconds ago you got second place, you can't help but think that Wednesday, two weeks ago, when I cut the training a little short, that sneakers I should, you know, whatever you think. But if you got bronze, you're not thinking about two steps ahead. You're saying, "Look at all the people who got nothing." So this whole literature is really about the fact that we are comparative animals in principle, right? And our happiness is very much driven by contrast. And I'm kind of wondering, when you go into a community of people with disability, whether it helps you set up your standards at some level for happiness. I wonder whether living in a community that has more disabled people across the range gets you to focus a little bit, taking less things for granted, appreciating things to a higher degree and using this relative judgment in all kinds of ways in a way that actually creates higher happiness.

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Ona Gritz: It's interesting. I know that when I first approached UCP and Goldwater, I could see how able I was and how lucky I was. Whereas I think now, I don't even think about, you know, who's better and who's worse or who's struggling more.

Dan Ariely: It doesn't have to be who's better and worse. It's about maybe not taking too many things for granted.

Ona Gritz: Yeah. I see the world as more textured than I used to. And I recognize more the variety of the human condition. It does change and can change on a dime.

Robin Eldridge: "The Upside of Down" is hosted and executive produced by Dan Ariely. The episodes are produced and edited by DDC International and Newfruit Media, especially Luis Dechtar and Colby Gottert. Sound mixing by Ross Nelson, additional sound mixing, editing, and producing by Daniel Rinaldi. The theme song is "A Okay" by Kayjez. Additional music provided by Musicbed and Marie-Claire Saindon. I'm Robin Eldridge, and I created, produced, and directed the series. If you like what you heard, please pass it on.