

Transcript

This transcript features a conversation between two people: Lorenda Calvert and Sally Gunhee Kim. Timestamps are included for ease of reference between the audio and text.

Square [...] and curly {...} brackets have been added for clarification to improve this transcript's readability without altering the speakers' original intent. Square brackets show where we corrected grammatical slips and misspoken words to ensure the text makes sense to our readers and listeners. Curly brackets have been used where fillers were used, such as "mm-hmm" and "uh-huh."

Lorenda (00:00)

So would you mind introducing yourself to our listeners?

Sally Kim (00:04)

Yes, so my name is Sally Gunhee Kim, and I'm the object[s] conservator at from the Royal British Columbia Museum in Łəkʷəŋən, also known as Victoria, BC. So I identify as oral deaf because I wear a cochlear implant and a hearing aid and communicate primarily through spoken English and speech reading.

So please excuse my deaf and Korean accent[s] in this podcast. Thank you.

Lorenda (00:33)

You're very welcome. We're happy to have you here. This podcast will have a transcript available as well. So you can read along while listening if you'd like. Part of introducing yourself, Sally, we've got like a whole bunch of questions, like who are you? What do you do? What drew you to museum work? How did you find yourself at the RBCM? So tell, tell us all about you. Okay.

Sally Kim (00:56)

Okay.

So basically, I got into the field of cultural heritage conservation because it was one of the few jobs that actually combined what I love. And when I was a kid, and when I still had not learned how to speak, my mom knew I was a visual learner, so she took me to the museums and galleries.

And also my mom majored in visual art, so she'd introduce me to so many different art materials, which means that I'm a very hands-on person and also majored in visual art and physical chemistry in my undergrad, and that's also where one of our classmates said her father works as a paper conservator.

And she described it as a combination of visual artist and chemistry, and I said it's my job.

Lorenda (01:46)

That, that makes sense, because this is a podcast and you can't see it. When Sally was saying visual artist and chemistry, in I took my hands and put them together as if they were woven because that is, that seems like the perfect thing to be a conservator is to be interested in the visual arts and the science of conservation work. So look perfect. And in your undergrad too.

Sally Kim (02:08)

Yeah, yeah. So the only course I was missing was art history. Yeah, so I have to take a year to take art history classes to actually apply for art conservation.

Lorenda (02:14)

That's okay.

Sally Kim (02:23)

So if you want to get into [an] art conservation program.

The course that most of the potential applicants are missing is chemistry. I finished chemistry, it was just art. It was very interesting.

Lorenda (02:35)

It was

Sally Kim (02:38)

Is the field where

Lorenda (02:40)

I think it's really interesting that you came from this from the visual art and science background, not the art background. Yeah. Like you already had that. Where did you go to school in your undergrad, and where did you do your art conservation program?

Sally Kim (02:51)

So I went to Queen's University because it's the only institution in Canada that offers a master's degree in art conservation, but there are at least five other post-secondary institutions¹ that offer a museum studies degree with some conservation components. So you don't have to have a master's degree.

You can also get museum stud[ies] degrees with more background [in]conservation, depending on which program you go into, such as Fleming College, and I would say at Algonquin College, but unfortunately, they decided to shut down [their] Museum Studies program at the college, so which is a very big loss to our conservation [field] in Canada.

And I did my internships at the McCord Museum in Montreal, Quebec, Museum of Anthropology at UBC in British Columbia. Actually, in Vancouver, British Columbia. And I did my fellowship in Williamstown [Art] Conservation Center in Williamstown, Massachusetts

¹ According to the Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property (CAC), there are 11 post-secondary conservation training programs in Canada.

Source: <https://www.cac-accr.ca/conservation/#training>

and [Andrew] fellowship at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC. So I spent two, I did two internships here in Canada and two fellowships in the States.

Lorenda (04:21)

How did you find yourself at RBCM then? That's a lot of, that's a lot of, different organizations that you could have stayed at, maybe.

Sally Kim (04:27)

I mean, I grew up in Vancouver, BC, so I knew I always wanted to come back to British Columbia. So when I saw there was a job posting for an object[s] conservator at Royal BC Museum, I knew I had to apply and I really want[ed] to come back to Canada, especially when I'[d] been in the States for at least four years. And the thing is, there's a demand for more [of] conservation professionals in our field, but there are not many places that offer permanent full time [jobs] such [that] I've in the museum sector for conservators. So I feel I was lucky that I could come back to my hometown. And do what I love and what I studied for. {Mm-hmm}.

Lorenda (05:13)

That's how I've felt about working in museums. Like I, I feel so lucky to do what I love and what I studied for. Yeah. How long have you been at the RBCM?

Sally Kim (05:21)

Almost three years. Three years. Almost. Two years and ten month[s]. Two more months.

Lorenda (05:25)

Almost, okay. That we'll round up we'll round up yeah yeah we'll round up. Thank you, and in your in your three years rounding up in your three years, you worked on some really exciting projects which we will talk about later in the podcast

Sally Kim (05:31)

Thank you.

Lorenda (05:43)

But we'll talk about that that later. Cause that I would have guessed that you were here for like over three years. I would have said like maybe you'd been here for like seven years. Like that's that's fantastic. But before we get to the some projects that you've worked on, I want to talk a little bit more about you and working in the museum sector. When you introduced yourself, you shared that you're deaf. I'd like to ask what it's been like being deaf and working in the museum sector.

Sally Kim (06:09)

So I have to say that there are not many deaf professionals in the museum sector, and I must clarify that I identify as deaf with a lowercase D. I'll expand more on that, so basically, I was born to a hea[r]ing family who immigrated to Canada from South Korea, and I didn't grow up in deaf communities with an uppercase D.

Which means I didn't have access to sign languages and Deaf cultures. So basically, deaf with an uppercase D means a sociolinguist[ic] cultural identity, whereas deaf with a lowercase d means physical and medical condition of hearing loss and it's important to note that Deafness is a spectrum which encompasses diversity of hearing loss[es], cultural identities and communication methods so, that's to say, what [I] experience[d] as a deaf museum professional, it's not necessarily reflective of other so museum professionals.

Lorenda (07:15)

It's not universal.

Sally Kim (07:17)

So I did a survey with the Equity and Inclus[ion] Committee of the American Institute for Conservation in 2021 to collect data from its members of AIC Individual Conservation, and we received 558 complete responses, out of which 29% identified as having disabilities and other dispositions.²

The two most common disabilities were psychological or chronic conditions. {Mm-hmm.} And of this number, only five point four percent [identified] as being deaf or hard of hearing. And it's important to note that this number also includes late deafened respondent[s]. So it [does not] fully capture the experience of what deaf museum professionals experience in the museum sector. So this lack of a deaf museum professor means not many museums work alongside deaf colleagues. {Mm-hmm.}

Which is a problem because you need to have some deaf people or need training to know what your deaf museum public colleagues need, {mhm,} but if you don't work alongside with them, then you don't know what accessibility you need to have implement[ed] at the museum. So it's kinda like a catch-22 where you don't actually hire the deaf museum people 'cause you don't know what they need. {Mhm.} But you need to hire them to actually know what you need. So It's like a [never] ending cycle, {mm-hmm}.

But I feel lucky that I had, I have been able to work with [a] team who often ask me what I need. So they've been, they['ve been] practic[ing] active listening, and by that I mean not just hearing things but also being fully present in the conversation, reading verbal [and] nonverbal cues, and actually implementing actionables that come out of the conversation. So I'm reading to my team, and, the thing is, communication is so important, especially when you are a conservator, you work with different teams, across different departments and different collections. And I think the communication is the hardest part that many deaf museum professionals experience at the museum.

Lorenda (09:30)

I have follow-up questions. Sure. Because it's gonna go in two directions. Before we start to talking about like the the practical about like working in the, the museum, I want you to talk about the definitions. The definitions, because you have a very cool side, not even a side

² AIC Accessibility in Conservation Survey Report can be accessed here: <https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/CONSERVATIONUS/f79adbf7-4737-43c9-82a1-92e0d2cc3c1c/UploadedImages/Documents/Accessibility-in-Conservation-Report.pdf>.

project, you have a very cool project that you're working on. Can you, can you talk a little bit about that?

Sally Kim (09:53)

Yeah. So and also, one of the thing[s] I noticed is that 'cause there are not many deaf conservators and I don't sign. So, but I've always been interested in sign languages. So it took me many years, seven years trying to find a deaf colleague who actual[ly] signs in their everyday life and I was lucky that I was able to meet this paintings conservator from the UK. Her name is Julia Wejnarand she identified as deaf with an uppercase D because she, she grew up in Deaf communities and Deaf families for multiple generations. So she uses British Sign Language, which is very different from American Sign Language. So, and I think she's the only one I've met so far who used British Sign Language to complete her master[']s degrees in paint[ings] conservation. So I knew I had to work with her. If we want to develop a dictionary of sign languages.

American language, it's not international sign language. Each country has their own sign language. And because and so that's what we only did consider English-speaking countries. So, last year in December, we met and we started uploading video dictionaries of signs for special use in our field and you can access it on www.vimeo.com/deafconservators ([link](#)).

Lorenda (11:31)

I'll link it in the description.

Sally Kim

Thank you.

Lorenda

You're welcome.

Sally Kim (11:34)

And it just started because it's our first time trying to do recording, caption[ing], and upload[ing] bar. So it's an ongoing project and we're hoping to invite [a] third collaborator in the summer because he uses American sign language. So please stay tuned for more videos on this film account.

Lorenda (11:57)

And you started this project because those signs didn't exist for those definitions for the work that you do?

Sally Kim (12:03)

Yeah, so I've worked with signing interpreters for other webinars that I did. And each signing interpreter has to think of signs for conservation and conservator and they're very different. So I said this is getting very confusing. I want there to be standardized video dictionaries for our field so people know what we do and I really want deaf communities to be interested in what we do. Yeah, because as a conservator I want to help preserve Deaf culture[s] and Deaf histories, but in the way that's accessible and approachable for them too.

Lorenda (12:34)

{Mm-hmm.}

And I think that when you shared that with me, it made me think of your comments about being in a workplace where people aren't hiring deaf conservators. But then if you do work with someone or or just a a a deaf colleague, but then if you work with them, then, they, you know what they need and then you can make the accommodations and that, that's sort of like a chicken and an egg situation. But I I think about the definitions and this is something we've talked about in other podcasts with the BCMA and about the museum sector, that people need to see themselves at our organizations when they are visitors, being able to see themselves in the way that we build our spaces, being able to see themselves in the way that we display our exhibits so that they feel welcome in our organizations. And that's when they're visitors or children coming for field trips. And when you feel welcome and familiar in our space then you might consider us as a career. You might think museums are a place for me and that's what I want to do for my work. And so when you were talking about the definitions, thinking, yeah, like future generations of capital D or lower D deaf conservators will be able to have something to point to and see themselves in, in this work as a definition of what they do.

Which is my bridge to bring us back to being in a workplace. But if you, if you'd like to comment on that, please do. But, that, those are the thoughts that I had when you were sharing that and then I'm happy to bring it back to like you know, being in a workplace and accessibility and working with those teams, but please.

Sally Kim (14:18)

Thank you because that's also a[n] important point that I really want to get back to because I think museums should be active spaces for people to come together because it's not just a place to store and display objects or buildings. It's where people come together, have a discussion and or [share] ideas about what we could do together.

{Mm} and the thing is, I think so many museums forget that it's not just visitors who have disabilities. {Mm-hmm.} They need to think that its staff members or employees can also identify as having disabilities. So there's lots of times when I go see the exhibits {mm} and I'm like, participat[ing] in exhibit programs and I'm like, how did they not think about that accessibility needs in [their] entire life?

I've only seen two exhibits that were real[ly] creative and well-thought out in terms of accessibility and one of them is, please excuse my pronunciation because I don't speak Spanish, it's, [it] was the Molina Family Latino Gallery at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Latino. And I really love how it featured, [how] it incorporated as [much] accessibility on so many levels. Like it was not just about bilingual[ity] like, as in English or Spanish.

But it had a physical accessibility that was easy for people [in] research to navigate field[s], and because they also considered that not everyone will be able to use so many buttons because you may have limited upper body mobility. They had different ways for you to access [their] digital content. So they also had one button in a [virtual space] area that you could keep pushing to navigate the screen[s]. And they also had lots of tactile components

which, for people with blind[ness] or low vision. Of course they also had captions which is very bottom line.

But I think what was [impressive] on a personal level was they had a container for scent because you people forget that visitors can have a scent sensitivity. And if you have a scent [spiking] everywhere, it can, it can lead to sensory overload. So they kept scent in a container so you can just open it when you want to smell [it]. Like it was amazing and it was very interactive and they really though[t] for people with autism. They minimized strong lights and they tr[ie]d to achieve strong colour cont[rast] but not too much that it's overloading. Like I will recommend going if you can, even though it may not be for everyone [content-wise].

And the second exhibit was at the Hirshhorn Museum whe[re] they displayed the exhibit called, "The Weather" by Laurie Anderson. And this artist is known for including videos, sounds, live performance, paintings, installations; it's like one of the most dynamic artists you ever come across. And, and the trick was, sound and visual[s] w[ere] such an important component of her exhibit.

And when I went there, I was so worried that I'[d] not [be] able to enjoy the museum experience in th[at] space and they had something called "accessibility brochure" which included descriptions about sound[s] and visuals and it was really way thoughtfully written but in a concise way. So, I, people think you have to choose just own [captions] for content but if you want to people to have immersive experience it's important to describe sound beyond dialogue so that the info about context, mood and speaker identification is included and that's why I was able to know what atmosphere, process and background noise w[ere] in her exhibit show.

{Mm-hmm.} Yeah, and because I really enjoyed these two exhibits.

I sent an email to the museum staff: Thank you for proving these accessible exhibit[s] and programs and who designed them. And I was actually not surprised that they incorporate all of these creative accessible solutions because they had employees with disabilities on the team. Yeah.

Lorenda (18:54)

Yes, let's go.

Sally Kim (18:56)

Yeah. Yeah. So the thing is people say think about access and accessibilities. {Mm} it's like a hindrance, but actually you should think it, [think] of it as a[n] opportunity for creative ideas. Like you could think about t[actile] swatches, sound description[s]. It will make you think more about how everyone can enjoy the experience at the museum more, not just a[s] someone [who is able-bodied] because when you go to museums or galleries, it's meant to be [an] active space. Not where you don't just observe the info passively, but you go there, we know what that sounds like and you observe them into your body experience and you go away with new ideas that maybe you can incorporate in your everyday life.

Lorenda (19:49)

I was gonna ask what barriers or I was gonna ask, do you think our sector is built with accessibility in mind? But I feel like you sort of already answered that when you have two two exhibits where you're like, these are great, these are examples. Yeah. and and your comments about about the the survey and the percentage of of people and that sort of chicken and the egg situation. But when we think about our museum sector.

So I think the answer is do you think our sector is built with accessibility in mind? Yeah, yeah. May, maybe sometimes, but generally no. So if our sector is not built with accessibility in mind, what are those barriers? either visible or invisible, that deaf professionals, or if you feel comfortable speaking a little wider than just deaf professionals, what are those barriers that you face working in

Sally Kim (20:18)

No.

Lorenda (20:42)

This museum space. Like you said, your team here is really great at working with you. What are some of those things that they had to like learn about and and like, yeah, figure out with you. It's a big question. I'm I'm I'm

Sally Kim (20:53)

Yeah, it's a big question.

So as I said before, {mm} communication was the biggest challenge because everything is so fast paced and we have so many things happening at the same time. So something gets lost in communication and I'm glad of that there are some people who take notes so that everybody is on the same page, not just for me, because I think taking notes, like meeting notes, actually helpful for everyone to actually because they have info that they can go back and say, what we did we discuss and you have to be in we have to know who to include in the conversation so that every department is involved in [the] important decision making of some big project[s] happening.

And the thing I think the most common thing the deaf museum professionals have faced, the problem that many deaf people face is that people make assumptions and they don't re-ask. Like, I think the most common question I get is, "do you sign?" and, or, "how can you speak?" And I'm like, it took me years and years to figure out [how] to make sound so that I can communicate with you.

Lorenda (22:10)

Yeah.

Sally Kim (22:11)

Yeah. And, but, the thing is [I] actually cannot make phone calls. {Mm-hmm.}

Yeah. But many people have underst[oo]d that so they send me text messages.

Lorenda (22:20)

Yeah, you're a very good texter.

Sally Kim

Thank you.

Lorenda

You're welcome.

Sally Kim (22:23)

I'm, I'm will[ing] to be really prompt because that's the only way to catch up. Yeah. I kinda wish people would kind of slow down and learn what each person actually needs to be able to, [to] be [able] do their job efficiently in the workplace because it's not just people with disabilities that need accommodations. And I think people keep forgetting that accessibility actually benefits everyone. If you need a ramp it's not just for people with mobility aides [but also for] people who're carrying babies, [they] also need to use it because it's easier. And if you have, if [you're] carrying a dolly with heavy object[s], it also has to move up and down with the ramp.

So it's a trickle-down effect, like and the thing I find interesting is that people think the caption is just for people like me [who is deaf], but people whose English is not their first language also benefit from having captions. But the thing is, I know many museums, cultural centers, and galleries have been getting better at including captions but I know that there are also problems like it's not edited. And I'm still frustrated a bit when it comes to non-English words, like Indigenous names.

Lorenda (23:47)

Even my name.

Sally Kim

Really?

Lorenda

Yeah, yeah. We had to, we had to teach our transcript program. Like I had to enter in my name because it's not a common name so it would constantly guess at what Lorenda might have been. So it [is] not like only Indigenous names, like we you know, when we do, when I host webinars, we do a territory acknowledgement. So we had to enter that into our transcript program, but my name, it wouldn't catch.

Sally Kim (24:12)

I'm, my middle name is very Korean. So, like **Gunhee**, it keeps that mistranscribed. {Mm-hmm.} Like they think "Sally Can Do Kim"? I'm like no.

Lorenda (24:23)

Yeah.

I can also see a transcript getting confused with Sally and Kim and because those could be two first names. Yeah. And then like a, not a transcript isn't, you know, it's not living. It's not getting confused. We're very clear on that in our AI podcast. But yeah, like it[s] transcription.

I, when I host workshops or events in person, I am uncomfortable using a microphone, but I also know that there are people in the room who benefit from when I use a microphone. And that's one of the things I see most often is that people will be speaking in a, a group and they will say, I don't need to use the microphone because I can project or they feel uncomfortable with the microphone so they don't use it.

And I recognize when I'm hosting conferences or workshops or things like that, if I say the same thing, then the people who speak after me might be more willing to not use the microphone as well. So even though it makes me uncomfortable because I feel weird having something in my hands and I feel weird hearing my amplified voice. If I do it and I don't make a fuss about it, more times than not, the people after will also use it. And I do know that if we shared that there's people in the room who need[ed] the microphone to be used, people would use it. But I don't want to have to say that. I don't want those people to feel that we're doing it just for them. But that like that's

A transcript I'm totally fine integrating that. But that personally though that's one of the things that I'm like, Well get over yourself also, you know? Yeah. Like it's not for using the microphone isn't for me [to] get over yourself. It's to be inclusive and accessible for others.

Sally Kim (25:51)

Yeah.

Yeah,

I, yeah, I mean, I know I even when I'm, [I] am speaking, I feel weird having [a] microphone right in my face. Yeah, I mean it's right even [if] it's at my nose level. Yeah. For people who can't see it. Yeah, but then I know, [for] people, it's better for people who really are on [the] FM system, if the meeting is hybrid, {mm-hmm}. If you're not using microphone, then people

Lorenda (26:05)

I know, as we do right now.

Sally Kim (26:23)

Who are attending for sure is gonna miss the content.

I mean there's already all this fancy technology out there but ultimately it's up to people to actually know what they need from one another and try to find ways [of] asking. Yeah. Yeah. Don't assume, ask. Yeah. Like, "what do you need?" "What makes you feel uncomfortable?" {Mm-hmm.} And that's why I wish people would invest more in time to

Lorenda (26:37)

Asking. That's it.

Sally Kim (26:49)

So that they can learn more about one another and figure out what's the best that works for as many people as possible. {Mm-hmm.} Yeah, because I remember going to an event where I completely missed what the speaker was saying, {mm,} because he refused to use the microphone.

I said, some stuff in the museum sector are getting better at, including captions, but they need to be readable. And there was this museum in BC, I will not say the name, who is promoting their diversity and inclusion programs as a YouTube video clip? And the captions were white against the white background, against the white table. So I was like, it says, it has caption[s].

Lorenda (27:32)

Very helpful.

Can't we read the a can't see it. Nope.

Sally Kim (27:38)

Yeah, and I know the people hate captioning, it ruins the visual experience. And I'm like okay, but this is a shared space, you need to communicate.

Lorenda (27:48)

That's not true. I like captions. I like captions because background noise distracts me. So I like being able to see the captions and read it. because sometimes people will be speaking and a background noise means that I'm listening to the background noise and not them. But when I see the captions, then I am reading and paying attention, even if the background noise is distracting me.

I would be very happy going to the cinemas and having captions for all cinema movies because people have stopped being silent in movies and they talk in the movie theater and sometimes they're too far away for me to shush. So I'm distracted by their chatter. And if there was just close captioning, I would enjoy the film and they could, although they shouldn't, they could talk the entire film and I could leave it alone. So I am pro close captioning.

Sally Kim (28:31)

Thank you. Actually, the funny thing I heard, like I went to a movie theater with my friend recently and it was like a very sad moment, dramatic moment, in the, in the movie. And I was like, this is so sad because I, I knew what they were saying because it was captioned. But my friend, she couldn't enjoy the sad moment because she got

Lorenda (28:45)

Yes.

Sally Kim (28:57)

Distracted by people eating popcorn loudly behind the seat. So I'm like crying, but my friend is just like sighing, "I can't get absorbed in the moment."

Lorenda (29:09)

Yeah.

This is [what] I'm saying. I want to talk about accessibility. Like, what does meaningful accessibility look like beyond just compliance or accommodation? So like, using

microphones, having closed captioning, good closed captioning, having ramps. Like, I feel like there are things that if people sat down and you asked them to make a list of what does accessibility look like, they could start listing things off. But what does that look like when it's when it's bigger than that? Yeah. And that might be too big a question, I don't know.

Sally Kim (29:40)

No, it's a good question.

[I] think the first easiest action that many museum[s], people in museums could easily do is to please list down what's accessible and what's not accessible in your museum spaces and so, because people say that we are accessible in a very vague way.

And they only think about physical accessibility. So I can't really see that if you have a[n] exhibit or [something] happen[ing] in your institution, rather than that there's some loud sound that and that some some place[s] provide noise cancellation headphones, if there's a ramp, and I think about the[y] just thinking about the ramp is I think because some museums are still built from old buildings, {mm-hmm,} which usually means people, visitors or staff members have to enter through the ex[it] and do the museum building from the back, not from the front like other visitors. {Mm-hmm.}

And when they actually have to get to the ticket center, they actually have to go through the back, [at] the end of the exhibit. So it ruins the experience. {Mm-hmm.} So obviously the people I mean you can't change what's already built but you could put up the signs or think of alternatives and make a list of what is accessible and not accessible about your exhibits so that the visitors do not have to spend hours and hours calling the customer service or everything, trying to figure out what's accessible and not so that they don't have to be over prepared or under prepared about coming to the museum sector.

Lorenda (31:22)

Do you think that some organizations feel, maybe, like ashamed that they don't that they're not as accessible as they could be, so they're not as transparent? Or do you think it's just not something that they're thinking about?

Sally Kim (31:35)

I would appreciate being more transparent because I went to see an exhibit with my friend, my conservator friend. We actually had to start from the garbage pickup area. Park[ing] with [an] elevator just ruins the view, [when we're] seeing garbage cans.

Lorenda (31:38)

Yes, yeah. No.

Sally Kim (32:01)

If the garbage can is the first thing you see when you go to the museum {mm} and you have you get shuffled into the elevator. That's actually meant for taking out the garbage. The smell was awful. {Mm.} Yeah.

Lorenda (32:13)

We talk a lot at the BCMA about progress, not perfection. So if you're out there and you're a museum and your elevator is near the garbage, it's great you have an elevator. Yeah. Maybe there's a privacy screen. Yeah. Maybe a privacy screen we could get that we could put up just to hide the, the garbage a little bit.

Sally Kim (32:29)

Everyone had equal opportunities for I'm not, every, not everyone will have the same experience, but I wish it was more transparent and that everybody could share similar event[s] in the similar way so that they can have a conversation about [them] because you, if you come to the museum, it's about shared memories and shared experience. {Mm-hmm.}

Lorenda (32:57)

Museums often view themselves or talk about themselves as being inclusive spaces. And I think we've talked about how we do fall short of being inclusive spaces, both for visitors but also for our colleagues, for people that can be working with us.

I think when we say meaningful accessibility, that's not just ramps. It's, it's asking. It's curiosity. It's listening. When you ask for what people might need, like it, when people need microphones for workshops, it's not making it a big deal about using the microphone. It's normalizing doing that. You know, if you have that ramp by the garbage and hopefully you're thinking about how we can do it, how [can you] change that, but like maybe it's a staff person coming back to the back where the elevator is and chatting with you as they're getting you set up in the elevator. You know, like if, if it's, it's making it not that it is a problem that we're solving, but just something where we're working together. Is that, would that be a good way to summarize what meaningful accessibility looks like beyond just compliance?

Sally Kim (33:53)

Yeah, because ultimately if you want to normalize what these needs for accessibility and knowing what to look for and what to communicate, it all starts with human beings. Yeah, like you know to have all accessibl[ity] in the training, again, it all starts with people. {Mm-hmm.} And yeah. Yeah.

Lorenda (34:16)

Yeah, which is my favorite part of the job. It truly, truly is the people, which okay, I'm gonna use that as a bridge because I wanna talk about you and people. And that those people are, well, that person in particular is Elroy, who will be joining us for a podcast. If you're listening to this in order, he would likely be next, but maybe you've listened to Elroy's first. I wanna talk about the repatriation project that you did, that the RBCM did in partnership with Elroy White.

Before we do that though, like cause we know we're kind of transitioning from who you are and equity and accessibility. Are there any other thoughts that you want to bring up about equity and accessibility before we move into that people part working with people?

Sally Kim (34:57)

Maybe I just thr[e]w it out there because it, it's something [I] kind of want to bring up. I know that when people go to the museums, galler[ies] and cultural centers, I mean most of the

obvious it's behind the glass screens and stuff. And people say, "Why is everything behind the screen?"

And people often bring up it's because of conservators. Let's say it's more than that. {Mm-hmm.} You have to really look at how the museum started. Like museums are based on the idea of cabinets of curiosities from the sixteenth century. And that's when lots of white people and the merchant[s] would collect all different kind[s] of stuff from all over around the world and displayed it in the way that boast[ed] their knowledge, we[alth], {mm-hmm} and power. And that's why museums have colonial roots, because it was based on this idea of true cabinets of curiosities. And in the seventeenth century and eight[teen]th century visitors could actually touch, shake, and smell the object because they were not behind the screens. I mean there are records. It's very fascinating. I would recommend Googling it. So people could and I don't recommend doing, but there's a record where some people pick up the object and lick it [in] or[der to] try to figure out what the object is. So, because you even people back then knew that

Lorenda (36:30)

Whoa.

Sally Kim (36:36)

Just seeing things is never enough. You have to touch [and] listen to the sound it makes to actually learn more about the object because as a conservator, we need to touch the object to actually inspect its physical integrity. The working [conditions] it is [in]. But when the museum start[ed] becoming more open to the public and getting damage[d] and stuff, they started, "Okay, let's put it in the cabinets or in the cases so that the public can't touch it."

So it means there's no connection between you and the object. So I mean there'[re] some museums that actually started this program where you learn how to handle and approach the object in a safe way under supervision so that you can connect with it. And the thing is it's not just for people with blindness or low vision. It's actually open to everyone.

So I think we're kind of going back to what the museum was actually meant to be in its early phase, but in a more diverse and inclusive way, so that we are not only telling stories about these objects from one person, but from different perspectives.

Lorenda (37:55)

You're weaving us directly to, to Elroy and to the research. What a beautiful transition. Beautiful. And, and so speaking of that, speaking about the people and, and touching and these, these things that used to be behind glass but now get to live the life that they were perhaps created for. And, and, strangely the thought that I have while you've been talking is that we talk about accessibility. And often when we say accessibility, people are thinking about disability.

Sally Kim (38:01)

No, that's why I kinda wanted to mention that.

Lorenda (38:24)

And how to make them accessible. But accessibility includes also people feeling welcome in our spaces, people interacting with their family's history. Accessibility is for people to to access.

Sally Kim (38:38)

Yeah, and people learn in different ways. {Mhm.} You can't just come in, look and just leave because it's real[ly] hard to learn about what's going on in the exhibits or programs, what they have to do if we are not actually given multiple venues to enter into it. And there's two concepts I want to introduce. One called Universal Design.

Lorenda (39:05)

Universal Design. {Mm-hmm.}

Sally Kim (39:06)

Which means, you, that there's no one size fits all because everybody has their own different needs, preferences and learning ways. And Universal [Design] means, you, you are not reacting to individual persons, but you actually start from a proactive way that actual[ly] considers as many people's needs as possible, which actually make[s] it less costly than being reactive and giving individualized accommodations to systematic barriers.

And the second thing is called Disability Justice. It others that it's not just one issue but actually intersect with new multiple identities, like from culture[s] like because disability, intersects people from different genders, sexual identities and skin colours and your family background[s]. Disability Justice is one of the, one of the more recent framework[s] that altered how everything happened in the major [ways when the] communit[ies] [are] all intersected.

Lorenda (40:10)

Yeah, we, we've got resources that I can link in the description about universal design, but also about the intersectionality of disability justice.

Sally Kim (40:17)

That just means, you, you respect one another as a human being.

Lorenda (40:21)

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah! Tell me tell me about your repatriation work Elroy.

Sally Kim (40:24)

Okay, so I worked with Elroy White and Ian Reid from the Hal̓tzaqv Nation for the repatriation of this beautiful chief['s] seat made by Captain Carpenter, which was at the Royal BC Museum. The history is a little [messy], but I try to keep it simple and this repatriation project was one of my first thing[s] I worked on with the Indigenous Collections and Repatriation Department.

And the thing is, what initially started as a just a simple condition reporting actually grew into something bigger because {yeah} when I was told I was to do a conditional report on this seat, nobody told me it was disassembled in four pieces and it was stored in the collection storage separately.

So, and if we look at this photograph in the museum archive[s] you can see that the seat was actually in one piece when it was owned by its rightful owner and carver, Captain Carpenter. And when it came to the museum, it's not really exactly known why it was disassembled. It was disassembled by an unidentified conservator in nineteen seventy six and it was reassembled at some point for exhibit, and then it got disassembled again at an unidentified date.

So basically, I worked with Elroy and Ian to discuss how we could reassemble these four subpanels into one piece in time for its Repatriation Blessing ceremony at, in Wawadit'la also known as Mungo Martin House and family dinner event in Bella Bella and it was so fun because when I do conditional reporting as a conservator, I only do visual inspections and I only check is it physically stable or unstable? {Mm-hmm.}

So we don't actually get an opportunity [to] learn why it's carved in that way, what's the meaning behind these form lines. So when Ian came, he's a, he's a very amazing carver, he explained how this paint pigment would have been prepared, what kind of wood was used to construct and the seat was actually made using two different cedar trees, red and, and yellow, and he knew that by tapping against the wood panels like, "This feels more hollow but the other feels solid," and "You can feel the weight," and he also smelled them.

And so Ian lifted, touched and tapped against all this and we discuss[ed] how we could reassemble the seat together. {Mm-hmm.} Like even some way how we thought of non invasive way to assume just temporarily at the Repatriation Ceremony and then we hope Elroy will expand more on [these]two ceremon[ies] because you, these like seeing the seat come together and being reactivated at these two ceremonies was like really emotional[ly] powerful moment. Like it's actually how the seat was meant to be used and handled. {Mm-hmm.}

And the thing is, after Ian did lots of tapping on the seat panel and I just took a note and he said, "You should tap and listen to what the seat [is] telling you." And now as I said, I was like, "Okay, but you know I can't hear." Yeah, but I mean, yeah, I mean I know Ian meant. Feel the moment. I just was being, I joked because he, he was doing so much tapping. He said, "Can you hear that?"

Lorenda (44:12)
Listen in your heart.

Sally Kim (44:24)
{Mm mm.} It's very hollow. Its very sound [is] very heavy. But, but, the thing is, you just want to let you know sound is not just about hearing, {mm-hmm}. You can also feel vibrations, {mm-hmm,} which also are [a] kind of sound, the fun of tapping against the seat. {Mm-hmm.} Yeah, it's so it was [a] very multisensory moment and I think I've never had so much fun with the condition reporting. It was very dynamic. {Mm-hmm.}

And Ian had very fascinating stories about the [seat] and I think one of my favorite quotes from him is [not one but] two actually. Ian said two something that I really feel strong[ly] about is, "All the universe is in this seat. And I can feel that because the seat was made from

the cedar trees, which actually grew out of salmon that were left behind by bears, or wolves who caught them, this salmon, from the water. But, and, everyone needs water, sun to actually grow and become nourish[ed from] it.” And Ian ended his story by saying that “We are all connected” and that's true. And he said that we all came together because of this seat And that's true.

Lorenda (45:45)

And that's also how we found ourselves on this podcast too. Yeah.

Sally Kim (45:50)

Yeah, so, and Elroy is a singer, a dancer, and he explained the importance of eagle down {Mm-hmm.} Which I've come across several times, but then nobody will explain the importance of this eagle down being spread over the belongings. So again I will hope and look at spend[ing] more [time] but I felt really, it felt really powerful to see [the seat] with ash from the fire and sand and eagle down falling gently on the seat because it's where it belongs, {mm-hmm} back with its own family and its community.

Lorenda (46:34)

I, I wanted to bring up the repatriation project because I feel like to me, it's very clear in my brain the overlap of equitable spaces, accessible spaces, making spaces welcome for everyone. And if you make them welcome and accessible for everyone, then everyone feels comfortable in those spaces. They feel comfortable coming and being a visitor. They feel comfortable potentially working at our spaces, but also it's a recognizing of making yeah, like making these these places that started as curio cabinets where we stole items and belongings from people's communities, and put them in our our buildings to learn and gawk at, that it's part of making making right that wrong and making our sector and our spaces those accessible beyond just physical accessibility that it it's making it's in talking to our points about justice. It's what's right, it's what's just and especially delight in hearing from because my experience with the conservators have been like, don't touch that. So to to yeah hear from a conservator to talk about watching the eagle down, watching the ash and watching the sand brush upon an item as it should be, as it was intended, is a delight to hear. If you're listening out there, conservators.

Sally Kim (47:53)

Yeah and I actually want, okay, just to say it's my own opinion.

Lorenda

Sure.

Sally Kim

No[t] with th[ose] other peoples. I actually think people should learn how to touch the object and you can only do that by touching it and practicing it. Yeah. And it's the same with knowing if you want to communicate better, we have to meet and talk with people and learn from them. And the thing about, and the thing why I want to emphasize collaborative storytelling is because you need to ask the community what they need you to make assumptions.

Lorenda (48:36)

That's a perfect conclusion. You did a way better job than my wrap up. That's perfect.

Sally Kim (48:40)

Yeah, and this is why I want us to invest it in future generations. We need a more diverse workforce to actually know what we need in the museum sector and you can only do it if we invest in the skill set for future generations. Ask. Yeah.

Lorenda (48:49)

Yes.

Yeah.

And ask. Ask.