

# S2E10 - ANDREW GURZA

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## SPEAKERS

Andrew Gurza, Elle Billing

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### **E** Elle Billing 00:00

Hi, my name is Elle Billing. I am a chronically ill queer femme, and I'm tired. I'm here this episode and every episode to dig at the roots of our collective fatigue, explore ways to direct our care and compassionate and sustainable ways and harness creative expression to heal ourselves and our world. And welcome to Hoarf Radical care in a late capitalist heckscape. Hey there, it's Elle. Before we get into the main content of this episode, I just wanted to make a little note here about the content and the nature of the content of this episode. It gets a little heavy. We're talking about things that are a little dark at times. And I just want to make a note that Andrew and I are not medical, nor are we mental health professionals. We're just two disabled people talking through our feelings of frustration, fear and concern about disability, illness, pain, and the language around death and directed death. So I would like to encourage our listeners to exercise some care for yourself while you're listening to this episode. If it's not for you, it's not for you, and that's okay. If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide, please reach out to local services, a friend, even to us, because we really do want you to stay. My guest today is Andrew Gurza. Andrew Gurza is an award winning disability awareness consultant, and the chief disability officer and co founder of Bump'n a sex toy company for and by disabled people. Andrew uses they/ he pronouns and identifies proudly as disabled. Their work has been featured on BBC, CBC, daily extra, gay times UK, the Huffington Post, the advocate, Everyday Feminism, Mashable, out.com, and several anthologies. He was the subject of an award winning National Film Board of Canada documentary Picture This. Andrew has guested on a number of podcasts, including Dan Savage's Savage Love, and Cameron Esposito's queery. He has spoken all over the world on sex, disability, and what it means to be a queer cripple. Andrew is also the host of Disability After Dark: the podcast shining a bright light on disability stories, which won a Canadian podcast award in 2021, was a Queerty Award nominee, and was chosen as an honoree at the 2020 Webby Awards. The Show is available on all platforms. Andrew is also the creator of the viral hashtag disabled people are hot. I'm so excited to have Andrew on the podcast with me today, again, as he was last season, and welcome, Andrew. Hi, Andrew. Welcome to Hoarf.

### **A** Andrew Gurza 03:14

Thank you for having me

Thank you for having me.

**E** Elle Billing 03:15

Yeah, I should say Welcome back to Hoarf. I had you on last season.

**A** Andrew Gurza 03:19

Right.

**E** Elle Billing 03:20

It's so great to have you back.

**A** Andrew Gurza 03:21

So good to be here again.

**E** Elle Billing 03:23

Yes, it's great to Yes. I'm just happy to see you. We always have a good time. So yeah, I'm really happy to have you here. Our topic is way different than last year.

**A** Andrew Gurza 03:33

Real real dark. It's a little.

**E** Elle Billing 03:36

Yeah, we had a lot of fun last time talking about horny stuff. So for our new listeners, go back and listen to the last time I had Andrew on the podcast, we talked about how disabled people are hot.

**A** Andrew Gurza 03:52

We are. We're still hot.

**E** Elle Billing 03:54

And let's be honest. Before we hit record, we were having the same conversation.

**A** Andrew Gurza 03:59  
We were 100% having the same conversation we were talking about poundtown?

**E** Elle Billing 04:03  
We were talking about poundtown. Yeah, been a long, long, dry winter.

**A** Andrew Gurza 04:11  
Yeah, I get that. Yeah.

**E** Elle Billing 04:13  
Yeah. So but but I think we had to like sort of amp ourselves up to talk about something quite a bit more serious today. And before we get into that, I will ask you my first question, which is how have you received care this week?

**A** Andrew Gurza 04:28  
I just received care. Um, an hour ago, my attendant came with me lunch, so I had lunch with them and I, I got up with them today, and my care has been pretty good. Like my personal attendant care. Now I've received like, you know, other kinds of care. I mean, it's hard because I live by myself and like, but I well. One of the ways I can say that I have received care is I have a Zoom meeting every week with a bunch of disabled friends. And we call ourselves the Symptom Sisters and we watch movies together.

**E** Elle Billing 05:07  
That's amazing.

**A** Andrew Gurza 05:08  
That was really fun. We do that every week. And we all look forward to it. Super lots. That was I really enjoyed that. That was one of the ways I receive care. And I saw my best friend with a disability. She came and stayed with me this past weekend. And we don't usually get to see each other because we both have severe disabilities. And so that was I love that.

**E** Elle Billing 05:26  
Oh, I'm so glad you got to do that.

A Andrew Gurza 05:28  
It was a lot of fun.

E Elle Billing 05:29  
Are you still getting to go see your your mom a lot?

A Andrew Gurza 05:31  
Yeah, we I just saw her the other day. She's flying to Australia in about a week.

E Elle Billing 05:37  
Okay!

A Andrew Gurza 05:39  
And so I won't see her again till May. So she'll be down there for five weeks, and then she's off to Florida for a month after that. So I won't see her good long time. So I made the point of going there. Two days ago, just to just spend the afternoon it was really nice.

E Elle Billing 05:57  
That's good. That's good. Yeah. I've said before, like a million times on the podcast and you know this, I live with my mom. So I see her all the time.

A Andrew Gurza 06:05  
Yeah,

E Elle Billing 06:06  
I was actually supposed to have a little break. Last week, my parents had a vacation planned. They were going to go to Tennessee to visit one of my mom's sisters. And then I was going to have the week to myself, a friend was going to come stay, we were going to do like our art projects together. My friend's a writer and a photographer, and I'm a painter. And we were going to sort of have like a little retreat here at the at the farm, me, my friend, and my dog. And then my mom got sick and didn't, like barely had the energy to even walk into the doctor from the car.

A Andrew Gurza 06:37  
Oh, no.

E Elle Billing 06:40  
And so my dad was like, Do you think she can even like, go to an airport. I'm like, NOOOO as much as I want, as much as I need a break. Like she can't, she can't travel. And so they stayed home and it turned out, my friend couldn't come either. And then the whole week that was supposed to be everybody's vacation, all of us were sick. I was sick. My mom was sick. My dad got sick. It was the worst week ever.

A Andrew Gurza 07:09  
The hits just keep on coming.

E Elle Billing 07:11  
Yeah. So there was a lot of like mutual caregiving. And no house cleaning was done. Like, I was like, This is what it looks like when none of us are functioning. We all come apart at the seams. The dishes pile up. The dog is just stir crazy because no one can play with her. Like, oh, this is what it looks like what no one can do like our basic tasks. Yeah. When we're like in survival care mode, and just sucking down cough drops and taking cold medicine and

A Andrew Gurza 07:42  
when you wish you were sucking down other stuff.

E Elle Billing 07:46  
Like hot soup?

A Andrew Gurza 07:48  
Sure.

E Elle Billing 07:48  
Which I did not have the energy to make for myself. I make my soup from scratch.

A Andrew Gurza 07:52

**A** Andrew Gurza 07:52  
Are you drinking out of a Stanley Cup?

**E** Elle Billing 07:54  
I am not. You want to know my funny story about Stanley Cups when I saw them going viral on social media. Because I am a little weird about my social media. I'm not like on it all the time. I do it mostly for my business. I didn't see any pictures. I only heard people talking about Stanley Cups. I thought it was a menstrual product.

**A** Andrew Gurza 08:13  
You know, you're probably not the first person who thought it was menstrual product.

**E** Elle Billing 08:18  
No, this is like a cheap knockoff. from TJ Maxx. I just needed a big cup that was brightly colored that I could --

**A** Andrew Gurza 08:26  
remember to to drink out of

**E** Elle Billing 08:27  
no lose and drink. Yeah.

**A** Andrew Gurza 08:32  
smart.

**E** Elle Billing 08:32  
No, I don't usually hop on viral trends. my my mom wanted to go to TJ Maxx one day when we were in Fargo, and I really, really didn't want to go. And she's like, I just need to go look for this one thing. My mom never just buys one thing. And I know that as her driver. I know how my mom shops. And I said okay, fine, but you have to buy me a treat. Like I will take you to TJ Maxx but you have to buy me a treat. She said okay, fine. I didn't find any treats and like the TJ Maxx like food section that I could eat. There wasn't anything I could

**A** Andrew Gurza 09:08

oh Yeah, cuz you can't eat a lot of things.

**E** Elle Billing 09:11

The thing I really wanted wasn't there. And so I got a cup. And it has really boosted my hydration game, which is because my brain has not had a good winter. And I haven't had access to my migraine medication since before Christmas. So I am having to be very judicious about hydration and what I eat, just to kind of keep my brain functioning. So this is not a Stanley Cup. It's just a cheap knockoff. And it's bright pink so I can always find it.

**A** Andrew Gurza 09:49

I love the color. I'm here for it.

**E** Elle Billing 09:51

Thank you. All right, so we've had our fun.

**A** Andrew Gurza 09:56

Yeah, let's get into the heavy shit.

**E** Elle Billing 09:58

Time to get into the heavy shit. I know a thing or two about heavy shit. I'm a farm girl. I used to, you know, pitchfork, that stuff. That was a really bad segue. I was like, No, whatever. Okay, so I live in the US. You live in Ontario, Canada? Yes.

**A** Andrew Gurza 10:16

Yeah.

**E** Elle Billing 10:16

Okay. And like, I know, I, like I follow a few like disabled activist content creators from the UK. And I know that each of our countries, each of our countries have different, like social support systems for individuals with disabilities.

**A** Andrew Gurza 10:31

Yep.

E

Elle Billing 10:31

And I know that each worked differently. I'm still figuring out how ours works. Partly because I'm still waiting for my disability determination. And I applied in October of '22.

A

Andrew Gurza 10:45

Wow,

E

Elle Billing 10:45

it is now at the date of this recording is February of '24. I have been out of full time work since March of 2021. And our determination process, if you have previously worked, and can no longer work is different than if you have never been able to work. It's like two different streams. And two different income levels, like so you get more money if you used to work than if you've never worked.

A

Andrew Gurza 11:14

Yeah, again, proving that capitalism is the worst,

E

Elle Billing 11:18

the worst. So I'm still waiting. I'm out of money. And there's this whole-- part of our thing is like you up, you apply, and nobody gets it the first time and then you appeal and then you get an attorney. And it's just ridiculous. And my the thing on my determination, and it's like, Well, you haven't demonstrated that you can't adjust to other work. Because I can't do the work I used to do. And they're like, Well, you could do other work. And I'm like, I really can't, like I sleep 14 hours a day. When am I supposed to do other work?

A

Andrew Gurza 11:49

Yeah.

E

Elle Billing 11:51

Like, I can't sit at a computer all day. I can't do work standing because I can't stand that long. Okay, so do work sitting; all sitting workers at a computer. And I can't work on a computer that long because of my light sensitivity. So like, what am I supposed to do? But I need a lawyer to tell them that because they don't believe me.





A Andrew Gurza 12:08

Of course.

E Elle Billing 12:10

So protracted and it's terrible. And then the meantime, like we're supposed to still be trying to survive on no money. While we wait for them to decide if they're gonna give us money.

A Andrew Gurza 12:21

Isn't that the fun part of the whole thing?

E Elle Billing 12:23

And that is how it works in the US.

A Andrew Gurza 12:26

That's brutal.

E Elle Billing 12:27

Yeah. And so can you give us just a very brief synopsis of what, like Canada's or even just Ontario's support system for disabled Canadians looks like, and like how that works for you. Yeah, it's not tied to-- our system in Ontario. It's called Ontario Disability Supports Program, or more readily known as ODSP. Here. And that's what all of us who, who are eligible for it can apply for. The trouble with the program like this, is that similar to yours in the US, you often have to apply a number of times to get approved. I was approved when I was 16. And my mom was the trustee at that point and use the money to care for me, that kind of stuff. And then when I turned 18, they were like, Oh, you got to manage this now. So it's so it's your money. But up until just last year, you could only make \$200 a month before they clawed you back

A Andrew Gurza 13:34

200.

E Elle Billing 13:35

That happened in 1998. And you're at that point, you'd only get a couple hundred dollars. And so the way, the way that I've been living on it is you, every dollar you make you try to find ways for companies to-- companies that I work with to flag it as honorarium, to pay you under the table, to you just don't claim that, you just don't say what you are making because you have to

survive. And just this year, after 25 years of the program, they've upped the rate you're allowed to make before they claw you back to \$1,000 a month. Okay, which is still an improvement, but it's not much.

A

Andrew Gurza 14:18

It's not that great. So so that, you know, that doesn't leave a lot of room for people who can work. I'm privileged in that I can do freelance on occasion, and I get the opportunity to do freelance writing and freelance, you know, I've worked I've done some freelance stuff for you. And so like I get the opportunity to do things like that, but that's the ebb and flow. I never know when then, I never know when that's coming. I never know what the contract is. It's never a regular, continual contract, it's often like one job, and then you won't work for a few weeks. It can be very, very piecemeal, and that makes it very hard to survive. So anybody that can work like that money you get every month is goes immediately to your bills, and then you're broke the next day.

E

Elle Billing 15:07

Yep.

A

Andrew Gurza 15:09

Like that, then that's the kind of system that I'm living under. And I have the privilege of being able to work a little bit. But again, it's really piecemeal.

E

Elle Billing 15:18

Right. And then when something happens, like when you ended up in the hospital for emergency surgery, like you're definitely not working, then

A

Andrew Gurza 15:25

yeah, yeah. And so like, the government doesn't give a shit about that. And you're supposed to make \$1,400, when our when our rents in Ontario are increasing consistently, every every year. Even with subsidy I'm paying, with subsidy, I'm paying \$610 a month, and I only get \$1400 from the government. So if I wasn't working under the table, or, you know, making a little bit here and there, I couldn't survive, there's no way I could survive. And so it's just a shame that this is where we are, I think universal basic income is where we need to go. And I don't think that Ontario, or Canada, for that matter has the infrastructure to support that, even though during the pandemic, we saw they could give us relief for 2000 bucks a month. So if you can get people did as maximum for emergency relief, why can't disabled people get that all the time.

E

Elle Billing 16:27

E Elle Billing 16:27

Right. And it's, you know, it's a matter of priorities. Because, I mean, I think about how much money in this country, we dedicate to what we call defense spending, who are we defending ourselves from really, you know, the amount of money that gets put into the military industrial complex. And then the the first things that we cut are like small budget items.

A Andrew Gurza 16:51

Yeah.

E Elle Billing 16:51

Like Social Security and Medicaid. And the arts and education, like that's gonna actually help the budget, when really our big spending items are things like the military, which is huge.

A Andrew Gurza 17:03

Yeah.

E Elle Billing 17:06

So, yeah. Okay, so that's sort of the background of like, what it's like to live as a disabled person in Canada or the U.S. on social support, which is super difficult. It's like--

A Andrew Gurza 17:21

you're constantly poor, you never have enough

E Elle Billing 17:22

forced poverty.

A Andrew Gurza 17:23

Yeah, it's legislated poverty. It's without question legislative poverty. And

E Elle Billing 17:28

do you lose benefits if you get married?

E

A Andrew Gurza 17:31

Yes.

E Elle Billing 17:32

Ok same here in

A Andrew Gurza 17:33

Ontario within, if you even if you don't get married, if I move in with you? We are common law according to the rules of this program. We're roommates.

E Elle Billing 17:43

Yeah. House household? Yeah, yeah. I think for the purposes of the way I live, I'm considered a separate household from my parents, because our finances don't intersect. Like they have their finances. I have my finances.

A Andrew Gurza 17:59

Yeah,

E Elle Billing 17:59

I just live here. I think, like, that's how I'm playing it right now.

A Andrew Gurza 18:05

Fingers crossed. That's true.

E Elle Billing 18:06

Right. And I mean, that that's Medicaid. My health insurance is letting me do it that way. And so far, like, when I've been talking to the attorney, that sounds like that's gonna be okay, like, applying for disability and stuff. They're the ones who know the things. The attorney I have the only cases they take are disability claims. So like, I think they would tell me if there was going to be a problem.

A Andrew Gurza 18:32

I hope they would. But also, the government's so, I would also say like we Oh,

**E** Elle Billing 18:37

well. I mean, the attorney doesn't get paid unless I win my case. So yeah. Like they get paid on contingency. Because they only get paid if I get benefits. So they would probably only take the case if they thought they could get it for me. That's which it is, in itself a whole, like, just the way the system is structured.

**A** Andrew Gurza 19:01

Oh, yeah. This was like designed to fuck you no matter what you do.

**E** Elle Billing 19:06

Yeah. So another layer to all of this, and something you've been very passionately tweeting about

**A** Andrew Gurza 19:14

Passionately, for just talking about and I have some marketing about and on social media, and I get in so much trouble for talking about it, because I don't feel the way that anyone else feels right.

**E** Elle Billing 19:25

Because no I get it! is MAID, which stands for Medical Assistance In Dying, which has been a law in Canada since 2016.

**A** Andrew Gurza 19:34

Yes.

**E** Elle Billing 19:35

Is that correct?

**A** Andrew Gurza 19:36

Yeah.

**E** Elle Billing 19:36

E Elle Billing 19:30  
So it's seeking medical help to end ones

A Andrew Gurza 19:42  
to end your life. Yes.

E Elle Billing 19:45  
The intent of this was, they don't want to prolong the suffering of people who have terminal illnesses, and who want to end their life with dignity is how it is.

A Andrew Gurza 19:55  
defined, yeah.

E Elle Billing 19:56  
defined by the able bodied. he'd non ill, people who wrote the law.

A Andrew Gurza 20:03  
Yes,

E Elle Billing 20:04  
yeah. Okay. What are you seeing happen in Canada? Well,

A Andrew Gurza 20:10  
I put them in a little infographic because I want to read for you like what the original eligibility criteria is?

E Elle Billing 20:16  
Okay.

A Andrew Gurza 20:17  
So in 2016, when it came into law, the eligibility criteria for medical assistance and dying was that a person had to have "a grievous and irredeemable medical condition. And natural death

must be reasonably foreseeable." And then they would have safeguards such as, you know, you would talk to, you talk to medical professionals, you go see a psychologist, you would get it looked at to determine if you were eligible for this or if there was support they could offer you. And then in 2021, they repealed the "irredeemable and grievous" part of it in something called Bill C7, where they opened it up for anybody who wanted to apply to MAID could apply.

**E** Elle Billing 21:04  
Holy shit.

**A** Andrew Gurza 21:05  
Yeah, we were-- we, me in the community was not happy about this. It's --

**E** Elle Billing 21:12  
great. because like, okay, my mind is spinning. Yes. Okay. You and the community were concerned and upset. Tell me more.

**A** Andrew Gurza 21:20  
Basically, if you could totally have a natural life as a disabled person, and you chose to do this program, they would accept you. And that just boggles my mind. Because why wouldn't you-- Why isn't the government looking in providing safeguards for disabled people like social supports, housing, medicine, all the things you would expect them to do? Instead, they're opening the floodgates to people who, to people that want to just don't want to end their lives, which, which, again, I believe that everybody has the right to do that if they want to. But I feel like the way the government is-- the government just kind of opened the floodgates on March 17 of '21 really was a slap in the face to disabled folks.

**E** Elle Billing 22:14  
Yeah,

**A** Andrew Gurza 22:15  
it's a hard thing we'll talk about because I have a friend that I just spoke to on my podcast, back in back a few months ago now. And she has applied for a MAID. And when I started the episode with her, we were talking, and she was like, I'm in so much pain every day, people don't realize, I made this decision myself. I went and saw the medical professionals, they did all the, they did all this stuff. And I've been cleared to, to go for MAID. And it was really hard to do that interview. But it made me think about, it made me rethink my kind of my thoughts on it. Because I think the government needs to be very fucking careful how they talk about this thing,

and very fucking careful how they bring it about. But on the other side of that, if someone's had so much pain every day, and my friend hadn't left her apartment, hasn't left her apartment in a year, because of the pain she in

**E** Elle Billing 23:10  
right.

**A** Andrew Gurza 23:12  
If she wants to go, and she wants to end her life on her terms, she should be allowed to, I think the way that it's being is being we can we constantly see it in the news up here. Disabled people deciding to end their lives because they couldn't get housing, or they couldn't get support, or they couldn't and that kind of media spin on it. That's hard to that's hard to see.

**E** Elle Billing 23:40  
Right. And that's the that's the part I'm seeing down here. Like those are the stories that are making it down here to the states within the disability community that I'm seeing are, you know, people who the government programs have failed them.

**A** Andrew Gurza 23:57  
Yeah.

**E** Elle Billing 23:58  
The social supports have failed them. But the one program that they can access is the one that allows them to die. Yeah, they wouldn't need medical assistance in dying, or they wouldn't think they needed medical assistance in dying. You know, they wouldn't feel like their illness is irredeemable, which even that word in the original law, like the choice of that word, I have feelings about, like, holy cow. There's just so much baggage attached to

**A** Andrew Gurza 24:27  
Yeah.

**E** Elle Billing 24:30  
People don't get to that point without a massive failure at multiple, multiple levels of infrastructure and support.



A Andrew Gurza 24:39  
Yeah.

E Elle Billing 24:40  
And I think I mean, I think of your friend to who's in pain every day. And I think about my own experience with pain, which I'm not trying to compare to hers because I don't know your friend's pain. I know it's not the pain Olympics either.

A Andrew Gurza 24:57  
Yeah.

E Elle Billing 24:59  
But like being misunderstood by doctors who don't understand chronic pain and they-- I just think about how little has done-- in as far as like the understanding and treatment of chronic pain, and how little empathy we could get we often get when we seek help, and I mean, adding in the layers of like, opioid epidemic and how people who truly need pain management are now cast as drug addicts. And

A Andrew Gurza 25:31  
yeah, there's just so many layers,

E Elle Billing 25:35  
I'm having a hard time stripping my thoughts together, because there's so many layers to the medical ableism and the dismissal of disabled, disabled bodies and disabled lives. Yeah. That made it way too easy for them to say, Oh, we could just get rid of this

A Andrew Gurza 25:54  
and it was kind of gross that they would enact this in March of '21, which is right in the height of the pandemic.

E Elle Billing 26:01  
Uh, huh. Yeah, that, that was-- Yeah, I was getting to that, too



**A** Andrew Gurza 26:05  
that sends a message to disabled people during the pandemic, when they're trying hard to fight for their lives, quite literally, that oh, you can just die. Go ahead, yours. Here's an option. I mean, not just the

**E** Elle Billing 26:18  
disabled people who already like who pre existed the pandemic, but all of the new ones who were created by the mishandling of the pandemic.

**A** Andrew Gurza 26:27  
Yeah, yeah.

**E** Elle Billing 26:29  
When I think of my friends who have long COVID, or who developed ME/CFS, so chronic fatigue, or I actually know that know it

**A** Andrew Gurza 26:40  
I do too and just can't remember now myo-- ME/CFS will go with that. Yeah.

**E** Elle Billing 26:45  
Have you seen that? It bothers me that

**A** Andrew Gurza 26:49  
the Googs. do it.

**E** Elle Billing 26:50  
Myalgic encephalomyelitis?

**A** Andrew Gurza 26:53  
Thank you. Yes,

**E** Elle Billing 26:54

E Elle Billing 20:54

yes. It was gonna bother me if I didn't say it, which is the more accepted medical term for what used to more commonly be called chronic fatigue syndrome. Like I know, people who've developed that, as a post-viral complication from COVID, and other illnesses and long COVID complications, and it's like, oh, well, we don't really want to deal with you. So here, we're going to change this law in 2021. That's just, it's so blatant.

A Andrew Gurza 27:26

And it's not long ago, it was literally three years ago, like it's not a long time at all, but and you know, they, they put a pause on it, they put a pause, they were going to do another one, this past year, they paused, opening it up for people with mental health conditions, because they were going to open it up for people with mental health conditions to apply for MAID. A then they put a pause, because they want to take more time to see what the safeguard needs to be, what the what the benefits are, we know how people are responding. But it's just, it's just really scary. And we warned them, we all said, This is gonna be a slippery slope. And you know, for my friend that chose it, and as actively made the choice. I support her because that's the choice she made. Not going to, I'm not going to take that away from her. That's hers, and you know, listening to her on my podcast Episode 341, if you really want to listen to it,

E Elle Billing 27:47

NUH-UH! yep, I'll link it

A Andrew Gurza 28:23

to disability afterdark where it's on there. She goes into all that she had to do to make that assessment. And when you listen to her story, you're like, you know what, it makes sense for you. This is really truly what you want, I can tell this is where you want support you. Still it breaks my heart to know that my friend is going to end her life. But it's her choice. And that I'll support, I won't support the government using it as a free for all for disabled people to die again. And so I'm of two minds of it in that way. Because I support people's right to choose that for themselves. I don't support people being pushed into a corner, because it's easier. And I've heard stories of there was a story of an Olympian here, let me see if I can find this right, because it was important. I'll see if I can, yeah, he was an Olympian. And a couple of weeks ago, I saw it on my newsfeed come up. Who was offered MAID, like Canadian Paralympian, like, what are you even doing? She's an Olympian. Like, of course, she doesn't want to die. And the way it's being so callously offered, not that people who aren't Olympians,

E Elle Billing 29:37

right I was just gonna say like, I'm not an Olympian. I don't want to die. Although there have been days, you know, when my pain was uncontrolled and unmanaged where I didn't want to be left home alone.



A Andrew Gurza 29:50

Yeah,

E Elle Billing 29:50

because not because I was actively ideating but because I was scared I would do something to make the pain stop,

A Andrew Gurza 30:01

yep,

E Elle Billing 30:02

that would put me in jeopardy.

A Andrew Gurza 30:04

I found the story. But the story says a Paralympian trying to get a wheelchair ramp says she was offered assisted dying instead.

E Elle Billing 30:16

Oh, instead of accessibility?

A Andrew Gurza 30:18

Yeah, yeah. And this is what we're doing to people. And I've seen stories where people who are in hospitals will have the nurses go into the room and be like, well, have you considered MAID. And it's like that, that part of it is just, it's anger inducing, because it's not, it's not something for able bodied folks to throw around like candy. It's a really serious, it's the end of your life. And if we're going to talk about it, we need to talk about it with with grace, and dignity, and like, exhaust every fucking option before you give somebody that option.

E Elle Billing 30:57

grace and dignity but also gravity.

A Andrew Gurza 31:01

Yeah, yeah.

E Elle Billing 31:05  
Wow.

A Andrew Gurza 31:07  
Like exactly the truth.

E Elle Billing 31:08  
I don't understand. How Anyone, anyone, especially somebody who is in the medical or helping professions can see assisted dying as like the same level of choice as a wheelchair ramp.

A Andrew Gurza 31:29  
Yeah. No, pain is a completely different monster give you really are. And my friend really is. She's really in pain all the time. And so you know what, like I said, do what you need to do, I love you and respect you. I'll miss some miss, I'll miss her. But it's what she needs for herself. I respect that. I don't respect governments, who don't have the lived experience making this decision and avoiding responsibility of social support when they should be offering that first. Oh, and I, you know, I've had people online when I talk about that people say like, well, everybody has the right to choose. Yes, they do. But is it a choice? If you're not given the full picture? No, it's not.

E Elle Billing 32:17  
like, that is such an excellent point, because I'm going to this is, maybe this comparison is a little off. But like, in the U.S., they've referred to the military, like, because it's volunteer right?, but they refer to it as the poverty draft. Because for a lot of people who live below the poverty line, the only way they can afford higher education join is to join the military, and then the military pays for their education.

A Andrew Gurza 32:46  
Yeah,

E Elle Billing 32:47  
like, that's not a choice at that point. Because our brains are still not fully developed when we're teenagers. And based on life circumstances, and like, where our families come from, and all of these factors that play into the decision to enlist in the military. It is, in many cases, a false choice.

A Andrew Gurza 33:12  
Yeah.

E Elle Billing 33:12  
It's the only way for some people to change the trajectory of their life.

A Andrew Gurza 33:18  
Yeah,

E Elle Billing 33:19  
for something to be a choice. There has to be more than one option.

A Andrew Gurza 33:25  
That's what a choice is. Yep.

E Elle Billing 33:27  
And there has to be

A Andrew Gurza 33:29  
informed consent around

E Elle Billing 33:32  
enough information, there has to be access to that information.

A Andrew Gurza 33:38  
Yeah, there needs to be access to all of this. Yeah. And so again, I stand at this weird place where I'm straddling both worlds. Yeah. And I support people that want to do it, do like, do what you feel is right. But part of me is like if you were given all of the support in the world, would you make this choice. And I think I come from a lot of privilege, too, because I'm in pain every day, also. But when I was born, I fought like hell to live. And so part of me is like, why would I take my life in that way? But I mean, that's a whole other can of fish there. But like, you know,

but that's not for me to say why somebody else would, I think they should have the option to, I think the government needs to hire, hire, not just consult with, hire disabled people to be paid to do studies on this. And I read somewhere recently, I think that our medical assistance in dying in Canada is one of the highest in the world. Our numbers are the highest in the world.

E

Elle Billing 34:46

That should tell us something.

A

Andrew Gurza 34:49

I'm pretty sure it is. Let me just Google that and see if that's true. Let me pull up the CBC News article and just just pull some stats from that directly a New Health Canada report says the number of medically assisted death in '22 was more than 30% higher than the year previous.

E

Elle Billing 35:06

Wow.

A

Andrew Gurza 35:07

Experts and advocates, you spoke with CBC News question whether may growth rate and the percentage of death should be cause for concern. I think they should be a cause for concern for sure they should. And so many advocates are calling the growth rate alarming and terrifying. Because

E

Elle Billing 35:21

those are great words.

A

Andrew Gurza 35:23

Yeah, really, it's scary. You know, they're saying things like, I'm quoting this person here. They're saying things like, we should be ensuring that we never get to the point, because we have better care available. I mean, I'm definitely not a scientist, I'm not a doctor, I am a disabled person. And like, those numbers scare me. I don't. We shouldn't be. We need to fix our social nets. We need to enact universal basic income so that this doesn't happen. If we can show that throughout the pandemic, for the first two years, people were given \$2000 a month. Great, why can't we just translate that into every day? Or every month? You will get that because, but it's because our, our systems are not designed for that?

E

Elle Billing 36:16

Yeah, we're seen as disposable.

A

Andrew Gurza 36:18

Yeah. And that's why when they enacted this idea, Bill C7, which is the repeal of the "irredeemable and grievous" need, when they enacted this part of the law, on March 17 2021, that was only a year after the pandemic hit. Basically, what your while you're reminding disabled folks is that we don't matter. But again, I don't know how to feel about it, because I stand by the people that want to do it, and have made the choice and have been medically cleared. And like, psychologically clear, to make that choice. I stand by you. But I'm also glaringly concerned about what that means for the rest of us.

E

Elle Billing 36:58

Right. And I think being able to hold multiple truths at the same time is an important part of the conversation, of any difficult conversation.

A

Andrew Gurza 37:08

And my conversation with a friend, April, again, Episode 341 of my show,

E

Elle Billing 37:14

we get in the show notes,

A

Andrew Gurza 37:17

was one of the hardest ones that I've ever had to do. Because I'm looking at my friend, and I know she's gonna die quite soon, within a year or so. And it was like, how am I talking to you right now so casually, and like, you're going to agree to do this, what I can't, you're not even 40 Yet, like what you haven't even what and I, I just was heartbroken the whole time. But I love and respect her so much that I was like, Thank you for sharing your story. And I felt it was so important to let her just share her story and not judge her for, and it changed my views on the whole thing. But I'm still extremely wary of government intervention in the way it's being. The way the language like one of the questions you're gonna ask me today is what are the language I'm seeing? irredeemable and Grievous is terrifying. But at least that language, set a benchmark for what they were looking for. Now that the bench mark is gone. Anyone can apply. And I've seen people, I've seen Canadians with Disabilities on TikTok, talking about how they've applied for made like, it's not a trend, friends, it's the end of your life. Like, can we --? Can we get to be like, I get it? I get the more than we talk about it. But it's not like a cool thing we're all doing. It's the end of your life. And that's the part that scares me is that like young, disabled Canadians? Who? I'm not speaking about my friend, like, like the general public. Yep. young disabled Canadians who haven't done the research, who haven't thought about it? Who haven't? who are who are young enough that they might still have a chance they just got social support.



E Elle Billing 39:02  
Yeah,

A Andrew Gurza 39:03  
that's the part that breaks my heart. Because you know, you're, you know, you're doing when you apply for MAID, do you understand? Like, to me, I could never be like, Yeah, I'm gonna sign - I'm gonna sign my death. Now, if I was in the same pain as my other friend, it might be different. And I might have privilege there around pain. And I definitely do actually, there's no might there. I do have privilege. But I just think like the, the, the safety nets to have to actually save you and right now they're letting you fall through the cracks. It makes, breaks my heart.

E Elle Billing 39:42  
Well, thank you very much for being here and sharing all of this with us. I really appreciate your perspective and the time you took to explain all this.

A Andrew Gurza 39:53  
It's a lot

E Elle Billing 39:54  
it is a lot.

A Andrew Gurza 39:55  
But I'm, I am grateful that I get to share my perspective. And I just want to let you know that my perspective is not the only one. There are my other people who, who think MAID this great, necessary and important. And so I think we need to listen to them too.

E Elle Billing 40:09  
Right? We are just to two very many disabled people. Yeah,

A Andrew Gurza 40:14  
very many. And we are two in different ways, we are privileged disabled folks talking about this stuff. So like, yes, yes, we are. So remember that

**E** Elle Billing 40:22  
and it impacts us differently than it would impact somebody else.

**A** Andrew Gurza 40:25  
Yeah, exactly.

**E** Elle Billing 40:27  
Thank you for adding that. I really appreciate that perspective as well. It's so great to have you here.

**A** Andrew Gurza 40:32  
It's it's always so fun to be here.

**E** Elle Billing 40:35  
Yes. I appreciate you so much, Andrew. It's amazing.

**A** Andrew Gurza 40:38  
I would love to come back. Anytime you want me?

**E** Elle Billing 40:41  
Yeah, we'll do maybe a little different something next time.

**A** Andrew Gurza 40:44  
Yeah, like a much lighter topic. Yeah,

**E** Elle Billing 40:49  
we'll pick something a little lighter next time.

**A** Andrew Gurza 40:51  
Awesome

AWESOME.

**E** Elle Billing 40:52  
Thank you so much.

**A** Andrew Gurza 40:53  
Do you want me to plug myself.

**E** Elle Billing 40:55  
Ah, sure. Yeah.

**A** Andrew Gurza 40:57  
So if you want to follow my work, you can go to Andrew, [Andrewgurza.com](http://Andrewgurza.com). You can donate to my work there. You can follow my social media, you can book me for talks there. Please book me for talks. I do give great talks to organizations. So if your organization and you want to hire a disabled person, cool, you can follow me on Instagram and Twitter @AndrewGurza6 is what else I do. You can listen to disability afterdark new episodes every Sunday. And yeah, thank you. That's it.

**E** Elle Billing 41:30  
Thanks for being here,

**A** Andrew Gurza 41:32  
anytime.

**E** Elle Billing 41:36  
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