

Episode 39 | Chelaine McInroy Pt. 1

Bryden Veinot 0:10

Hello and welcome to Discover Stories on Re-Imagine Radio. My name is Bryden Veinot, and I'm the program coordinator with Vancouver Adaptive Music Society. Today, I'm joined by Chelaine McInroy. Hey, Chelaine. How's it going today?

Chelaine McInroy 0:25

It's great, actually enjoying the summer weather.

Bryden Veinot 0:28

Oh yeah, is it? How's it? How warm is it out there?

Chelaine McInroy 0:31

We're hitting mid 30s right now. Next week, it's supposed to hit 40. Oh my gosh. I'm pretty much just living in the lake, any chance I get. Yeah, that's my air conditioning too.

Bryden Veinot 0:45

Yeah, that's out in the Interior, eh?

Chelaine McInroy 0:47

Yes, I'm out in the Okanagan.

Bryden Veinot 0:50

Yeah, that definitely gets, like, way hotter out there than over here.

Chelaine McInroy 0:55

I love it, right? I've got tropical blood in me. I'm made for heat, and it's nice here. We actually truly get all four seasons, so I'm not complaining.

Bryden Veinot 1:04

That's true. Yeah, you actually do get some snow instead of the slush that just, yeah.

Chelaine McInroy 1:08

We usually get two or three months of like, heavy winter, which is great, as long as you've got some winter sports to keep you sane. Otherwise, it's a bit of cabin fever going on. But I keep busy. It's not too bad.

Bryden Veinot 1:21

Nice. So out there, I think you mentioned you have a ranch out there?

Chelaine McInroy 1:27

I do! Yeah, so I got my place out here, training horses, coaching lessons. I'm a team roper.

Bryden Veinot 1:34

Nice.

Chelaine McInroy 1:34

Yeah, keeps you busy.

Bryden Veinot 1:36

Yeah, do you ever do the rodeo?

Chelaine McInroy 1:38

But I'm pretty sure just the definition of being a horse girl makes me crazy, so. [Both laugh]

Bryden Veinot 1:43

Yeah, the internet has kind of ruined that, hasn't it?

Chelaine McInroy 1:46

Yeah? Well, I mean they're not wrong.

Bryden Veinot 1:49

Yeah. I mean, yeah, everyone's a little crazy, I guess that devotes their lives to, yeah.

Chelaine McInroy 1:55

Normal's boring and overrated, yeah.

Bryden Veinot 1:57

Do you ever go to rodeos and all that?

Chelaine McInroy 1:59

Oh yeah. I'm taking a little bit of time off right now in my recovery, which I'm sure we'll cover in a bit here. But yeah, taking this year to just kind of train both the horses and myself, kind of get back in shape, and, yeah, coming back stronger than ever next year.

Bryden Veinot 2:18

How many horses?

Chelaine McInroy 2:20

Um, right now I have my own personal group of horses. Got six right now that, like, I compete on, I train with, I coach lessons with, but then I also have a revolving door of client horses. So, like, right now there's 23 horses on the property.

Bryden Veinot 2:40

Wow, that's [Laughs] and then do you take care of all of them?

Chelaine McInroy 2:44

Yeah, I mean, I definitely have some help, yeah, but I do what I can, and if I can't do it, I pay someone else to. [Laughs]

Bryden Veinot 2:51

[Laughs] Nice, nice. So yeah, and then you also do some work in film and TV.

Chelaine McInroy 2:59

Yeah, so I've been in the movie industry now for about a decade, mostly stunts, some acting. I love it. I absolutely love it. I'd say about 80% plus of what I do is stunt work, which is my absolute favourite. I specialize in anything to do with horses, yeah, so like anything high speed, big battle scenes, like I'll sword fight on the horses.

Bryden Veinot 3:24

Yeah, that's so cool. The nerd in me.

Chelaine McInroy 3:31

Especially those last few years with COVID and having to stick closer to home here in the Interior in the Okanagan, there's still a lot being filmed, but not as much need for the stunt work. Yeah, it's, you know, the smaller Hallmarks and Indies and stuff. So I've been actually exploring the acting side of it. I always have a little bit, but it's definitely more predominant now. So it's kind of nice, you know, exploring these things, always doing something different.

Bryden Veinot 4:00

No, totally. I mean, stunt work. I've always thought this. How does one start that? Like, how did you get into doing stunts? That's such a—it's scary to me.

Chelaine McInroy 4:10

Yeah, I mean, everyone's different. Obviously, I have a background in horses and everything to do with them. I've been riding since I was four years old. I've literally spent more time in the saddle than on my own two feet, at least for waking hours in my life. Um, everyone kind of gets into it differently. Some can go to school for it. I also, oh, I do have a background in a several different martial arts, which really helps, because I do hand to hand combat as well, not as often, but I do. And how I got into it was just being at the right place at the right time, looking like the right person.

Bryden Veinot 4:43

Really?

Chelaine McInroy 4:43

Yeah. So it was kind of lucky, and in my first, you know, kind of venture into it, and then from there, it's just, you know, making connections and well, you have to do a good job at what you're doing, or you're never going to get hired again.

Bryden Veinot 4:56

Of course. Yeah.

Chelaine McInroy 4:57

But once they realize what I could do, and I started meeting kind of people higher up in the chain, you know, making a name for myself, and it's turned into quite the career now.

Bryden Veinot 5:11

Cool, wow. And then, when did you start that?

Chelaine McInroy 5:16

About 11 years ago now, I think.

Bryden Veinot 5:18

11. Okay. So then we'll cover this topic, now, the whole incident in 2016 just maybe want to take us through that and then also how that affected your life, especially doing stunts.

Chelaine McInroy 5:34

Yeah well, stunts is one thing that has carried on. Actually, the biggest thing that stopped was prior to the incident, in 2016, I skied for Team Canada, World Cup Circuit and stuff, and then, so back in 2016 early 2016 I was down in Mexico for a family vacation. I cut my foot. It was a tiny cut. Put a band aid on it. It's just because, you know, I was walking around barefoot and dancing and stuff, sliced open my foot. And

Bryden Veinot 6:02

It's happened to a lot of people in Mexico.

Chelaine McInroy 6:03

Yeah, somehow I ended up picking up this bacteria. We don't know if it's what I cut my foot on, or maybe from swimming in the ocean later with an open wound on my foot. Hey, here's a hint, don't do that. But yeah, the infection—I was already back home at this point, and I was skiing, or I was training with my ski team, and all of a sudden my heart failed, and yeah, and I got rushed into the hospital while we while we were dealing with the heart failure, my kidneys and liver started crapping out. It ended up being osteomyelitis and bone infection and then sepsis. I was multi organ failure. I was dying. So it became a choice of life for limb. Obviously, I chose life. So yeah. June 2, 2016 they did an amputation below the knee to save my life. And for the past, well, five and a half years, I was doing fairly well. I mean, obviously having to adjust to this new life my ski career was over. Took me a while to get back into the movies, right? And then, although that is one thing that did come back. Skiing came back too, just in a different way, I didn't go back to competing, but now I do mentor and coach the up and coming Paralympians, all the adaptive skiers at the local program.

Bryden Veinot 7:21

Cool.

Chelaine McInroy 7:22

So that's been really nice to kind of be able to give back and connect with people that way. Yeah. And then for the past five and a half years, I've been doing fairly well. And then at the beginning of this year, I caught COVID. I actually was fairly asymptomatic. I was doing well, you know, compared to some people anyway, yeah, pretty lucky, except they figure the original infection from, or the original surgery from six years ago, they obviously missed some of the bacteria and it had just been laying dormant there in the bone. Well, when I caught COVID, they figured it distracted my immune system enough for that bacteria to

start spreading again, wreaking havoc. It had moved up into my knee. I was getting sick again. It became life threatening once again. So that's when March 23 of this year, 2020 they ended up amputating above the knee again to save my life. They have bigger clean margins this time, so they're hoping they got it all. I mean, I guess we don't know for sure, that's saying there aren't really any scans or anything that can show it, unless it's actively trying to kill me. If it's just laying there dormant, it can lay there for, well, as we've seen already, it laid there for almost six years without causing any issues. So we're just kind of fingers crossed, hoping, and I'm living my life in the meantime, I'm not here waiting and wondering and worrying.

Bryden Veinot 8:49

Yeah, no point in slowing down. Yeah, and I think you mentioned, like, it's so rare that this bacteria doesn't even have like, a real name. It just has its regular, common Latin name.

Chelaine McInroy 9:01

Yeah, it's super rare. When I was diagnosed, they were saying I was only one of nine cases in the world diagnosed, and six of them were dead. So they figure there are a lot more cases just undiagnosed, because they did pick it up in a third world country that doesn't have the best medical care. And honestly, even with me, they had a hard time pinpointing exactly what it was and what was happening to me. So there's probably a lot of people that have had it that they just weren't diagnosed in time. Um, so yeah, I'm one of literally almost one in a billion.

Bryden Veinot 9:36

Yeah, that's true, I guess stats wise, yeah.

Chelaine McInroy 9:39

Yeah, I've always said if I didn't have bad luck in life, I wouldn't have any luck at all, yeah? But I mean, you could look at it a different way, though I'm alive, right? And I'm thriving with the life that I do have totally so I guess that, in its own way, is lucky, right? I'm making my own luck.

Bryden Veinot 9:58

Yeah. So what was like transitioning to using a prosthetic?

Chelaine McInroy 10:04

Um, it sucked. I was clumsy, even when I had two legs. And then you take one of those away. I face plant, a lot. The below knee amputation, obviously, was a lot easier. Um, you

know, having that control of my knee made a huge difference. There was also a lot less pain going trans tibia and fibula. Um, there's a lot less that they're kind of cutting through, um, whereas the above knee amputation is transfer moral, you know, it's literally hacks on through my femur. It hurts, yeah. You know, not having control of my knee, right? I kind of thought I'd have more of an advantage having been a below knee amputee for the past six years. And then being an above knee, I thought it's like, oh, well, other than learning how to go without the knee, it'll be fine. I was wrong.

Bryden Veinot 10:55

It was totally different, eh?

Chelaine McInroy 10:58

It was so different not having that knee. I can't believe how much of a difference it does make, and honestly, a lot more pain. Yeah, it's not great. Also, you know, on the financial end of things, PharmaCare only covers so much. Covers the super basic stuff. So what I need, like the prosthetic, the prosthetic I have kind of narrowed down to what I need to go back to, living my life to the fullest. It's \$82,000.

Bryden Veinot 11:29

Oh my gosh, really?

Chelaine McInroy 11:31

You know, back when I was a below knee amputee, my prosthetics, like the good prosthetics that I needed, were between 25 and \$30,000 which is, that's even ridiculous, and I complained about it a lot back then, but now I see the price tag on what I need now, and I'm like, "Oh, can you please give me back the \$30,000 price tag?"

Bryden Veinot 11:55

That's crazy. That's so much.

Chelaine McInroy 11:57

Yeah, it puts things into perspective, for sure.

Bryden Veinot 12:00

Yeah, wow. So then let's kind of talk about music a bit, then. It's been kind of a part of your entire life, right?

Chelaine McInroy 12:11

Yeah. I mean, I've been singing since I could talk. I've been writing since I knew how to write and sound words out. Yeah, I come from a family of musicians. My dad was quite the famous rock drummer back in the 70s and 80s. My mom had been playing piano her whole life. I'm a singer-songwriter. I play piano. I've been playing piano since I was seven. I've been playing guitar on and off the past five or six years. And then my youngest brother is also a bit of a drummer. He's a singer-songwriter, so I was kind of raised with the musical influence of my family. It's been a way for me to kind of cope through everything. Yeah, I haven't had the easiest life, and I'm sure there's people that have had it harder, but yeah, you know, through the trials and stuff that I've gone through in my life. It's kind of been the one thing that no matter what I'm doing, no matter what I'm going through, no matter how healthy I am physically or mentally, music's the one thing that has always been there. So I really kind of held on to that with a white knuckle grip.

Bryden Veinot 13:14

Yeah. Did you kind of dive into a lot more music after getting your leg amputated?

Chelaine McInroy 13:21

Yeah. I mean, it's always been there, for sure, but once my leg was amputated, it was kind of my way of coping. And also it's kind of funny, because everyone in my family is into different genres of music. I have always been drawn to country, especially with, you know, the rodeo upbringing and stuff. Um, so after my amputation, there was definitely a lot of sad, depressing songs. [Laughs] I mean, I never, like specifically wrote about losing my leg, but yeah, I could pull on the emotions about just loss in general and grieving and stuff, right? Because that's really what it was, I lost the life I thought I was going to have. I was grieving, you know, what I had lost, right? So I was able to pull on that. You know, I also went through some very big personal life changes these past few years, you know, abusive relationships and a divorce and stuff like that. So it really allowed me, in a productive way, to get those emotions out there without, you know, hurting anyone or myself or anything that, right? You know, it's kind of cool, when you look through my lyric books where I write my music, it's almost like a diary of my life experiences, right? And you can see, you know, the I have shelves of books that I've written music in, yeah? And you can see like, "Oh, she was going to a really good time in her life, then." When you look at the music that I've written and it's, "Ooh, that was a dark time." But it can make for the best music, right? And I think a lot of people can relate to it. Maybe not directly with exactly what happened, but they can still relate to it. I think everyone can relate to music on a personal level.

Bryden Veinot 15:10

Oh, for sure. And I think one of those cool things about music, and I think I have this thought a lot working with VAMS, is that, especially with disability, it doesn't matter, like, yeah, you close your eyes and it doesn't you'd never know that Chelaine has her leg amputated. Or someone's in a wheelchair.

Chelaine McInroy 15:32

Yeah you listen to a song on the radio. You have no idea. You know their age, race, religion. Okay, maybe a little, you can get little hints.

Bryden Veinot 15:43

Yeah, especially with country music.

Chelaine McInroy 15:45

Yeah, you would hear one of my songs on the radio, and you have no idea, you know, who I am or what my life story is, right? And it's, it's kind of that unconditional appreciation, I guess, because great music can be created by absolutely anyone. You just have to have kind of lived life worth living. And honestly, some people that have gone through a really hard life have the most to say.