

Access Granted CC

(soft piano melody playing)

STEVE SAYLOR: All my life, I've been telling myself that I sucked at video games, but in reality, it was that video games sucked for me. I grew up with a condition, essentially, called Nystagmus. It's an involuntary eye movement where my eye moves back and forth, and I don't control it. I find that blindless is more of a spectrum than it is an on/off switch. A lot of people have the misconception that blindless is where you have completely no vision whatsoever. Because yes, I look like I have regular vision as everyone else, but it's sort of an invisible disability, and I've always been considered, essentially, legally blind. Back in 2013, we were at the beginning of brand-new consoles, and we had, essentially, games that didn't even have subtitles. I often say the first Assassin's Creed game didn't have subtitles at all.

GAME CHARACTER: It's our ability to adapt that makes us who we are.

ANNE ZBITNEW: Gaming isn't just playing a game; it's actually creating a

community. It's creating a way for people to communicate. I think accessibility has been less emphasized until recently. The idea is to make things as inclusive for as many people as possible. Everyone has the right to be included. Everyone has the right to communicate and the right to be heard. The more that we can make it accessible, the bigger the community.

SAYLOR: Accessibility is very human and is important. Essentially, it's a certain group of settings, or at least ability within a game for disabled players to be able to play video games. Whether you have a visual disability, deaf or hard of hearing disability or motor disability.

ZBITNEW: The earlier that you decide to include access into the projects that you make, it just becomes the typical. It means you work to create something that as many people as possible can access.

SAYLOR: When Naughty Dog first approached me to work on a game, I was running a panel for a game accessibility conference. After the panel was done, they came up to me, introduced themselves. A couple of months later, they flew me out to Santa Monica, and I got to spend a couple of days there at the studio and I got to play a game and I

didn't think that it was possible.

(soft piano melody playing)

So the type of work I do whenever I'm consulting with a studio for accessibility kind of comes in different sort of forms. There's either the accessibility report side and the ability to be able to do play testing where I would go to a studio for a couple of days and essentially get to test out a bunch of their accessibility settings or just test out the game and provide feedback on what they're working on. So some of the stuff I really love is the text-to-speech option and the fact that every single piece of text that's in the game is read out.

NARRATOR: We wanted to end suffering. We wanted to restore humanity.

SAYLOR: Is there stuff like auto-aim where your reaction time is key to be able to be successful in the game? It opens up and removes some of those barriers for those players to actually be able to enjoy the game as those who are not disabled. High Contrast mode was actually developed as a feature in Uncharted 4. It was called Thief Mode because it's something that you unlock at the end of the game when you beat it. When disabled players were able to play it, they took

that feedback and they turned that same feature into High Contrast mode in The Last of Us.

(groaning and slicing sounds)

And the last option that I felt in a way was almost made for me... And it was the ability to be able to zoom in on the screen, and it actually utilizes the touchpad on the DualShock 4 controller, and I use that a lot. So I would double tap zoom in, go to that section on the screen, know I'm okay, and it was the first time I was able to lean back and play and I didn't have to worry about not being able to see anything. The Last of Us Part II means... It means a lot. Not only is it sort of a time capsule of the fact that I got to work on it, but it also means that when done right, when done the right way for the right reasons, accessibility is attainable in video games. We're now getting to a point where I hope in the future, I'll be able to discuss and review games on what accessibility options there are instead of just wishing a game would have some. I'm constantly having to validate my own disability on a daily basis, and it's hard. I've never known what 20/20 vision is like, and as a kid, I always actually wanted to find some way

to get that vision, get normal 20/20 vision. I even resorted to prayer at times just to kind of get normal vision again. What I realized was, 30 years later, it feels like I have a purpose, and whatever you believe in, fate, faith, or whichever, I feel like this is sort of what I was put on this planet to do. I'm sorry. I don't even know what to say. This is why I do what I do. This is why I work so hard to promote accessibility. We together are helping to change video games forever. There's no going back.

(soft piano melody playing)

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