

About IBD Podcast Episode 84 - Find the Pony With Justin Baker

Episode Transcript:

Amber Tresca 0:05

I'm Amber Tresca. And this is About IBD. It's my mission to educate people living with Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis about their disease, and to bring awareness to the patient journey.

Welcome to Episode 84. My guest is Justin Baker, who lives with Crohn's disease and ankylosing spondylitis. I first met Justin at a patient workshop and I was impressed by his openness and his upbeat attitude towards his illness. Justin is an actor, a comedian, and a photographer and as you can imagine, living with chronic illness complicates his ability to work.

We talk a bit about empathy and how being diagnosed young has an effect on the course of a person's life. Justin and I also discuss how we tend to see fewer men as voices in the chronic illness community and how that has affected his ability to access support.

Our conversation was pretty wide ranging, and I don't mind telling you it turned out to be one of my more difficult editing jobs because I didn't want to cut anything. I know you'll enjoy Justin's take on how IBD has affected his life and his career, as well as his advice for those who are newly diagnosed.

Hey Justin, thanks so much for coming on About IBD!

Justin Baker 1:14

Absolutely. Thanks for having me.

Amber Tresca 1:17

So I'm, I'm also really appreciative that you actually have a soundbooth. This is fantastic. Makes my life so much easier.

Justin Baker 1:26

Yeah, this was this was also, this was a nesting project of moving into my apartment. And it took like, I, the funny thing is, is I set it all up one way for at least took like a whole day to do and then I messaged a buddy of mine who is doing very well in voiceover. And I was like, "What do you think about this?" And he was like, I would do this instead. And so I had to, like remove everything. And then it took another whole day to like, reset it all up. Which now looking back, I'm like, "Oh, I wish I had I had not done it right the second day, because it would give me something to do every day forever."

Amber Tresca 2:03

That's, that's fabulous. I mean, I run my own show. I still don't have a sound booth. So that's, that's where I'm at. We, we fix it in post.

Justin Baker 2:13

This is, this is definitely the most use. It's gotten in the pandemic. So, thank you.

Amber Tresca 2:19

I asked you to speak to me for several reasons. But we met some years ago. Was it two years ago? I, like, time has no meaning anymore.

Justin Baker 2:27

I feel like it was last year. I really do.

Amber Tresca 2:31

Yeah. Which it feels like forever, with no time at all.

Justin Baker 2:34

Yeah, I know, right?

Amber Tresca 2:35

Yeah.

Justin Baker 2:36

We live in pandemic times now. So before pan- BP, we met BP?

Amber Tresca 2:40

We did. Briefly. We were working together in Chicago. It was fantastic to meet you. And I wanted to talk with you ever since then. But first off, I just wonder if you would tell me a little bit about your journey so far.

Justin Baker 2:51

Sure. So I have Crohn's, and I have ankylosing spondylitis or AS for short, I was initially diagnosed, I was misdiagnosed with condra lisis when I was 16, which just means destruction of the cartilage. And it was in my left hip. And then over the summer of that summer, I, my right ankle swelled up, and I got iritis in my left eye, which was misdiagnosed as pinkeye and then was re-misdiagnosed as pinkeye was stronger pinkeye medication, and then finally, went and saw an eye doctor and they were like, "Oh, yeah, it's iritis, here's some steroids." And it was gone, like in an hour. And it was like, "Oh, geez, I haven't been able to see for like two weeks. This is amazing." So then we went back to the doctor, and they were like, "Oh, with this new stuff, we should test you for the HB, you know, 27 gene." And, and they did and they came back.

They're like, "Yeah, so we think you have ankylosing spondylitis." I was like, "Alright." But like, I was, and I've been on and off insurance my whole life. So, you know, being a creative freelancer and in the acting industry, you know, I joined SAG. And some years

I've had the health insurance in some years, I haven't. So when I was 25, I had my left hip replaced. They wanted me to wait till I was 30. And I was just like, "I'm not gonna do another five years like this." Like I understand, like, you're worried about what happens when I'm 50 or 60. And like replacing it again, but I don't know that I'm going to see 50 or 60. So I'm going to enjoy this end before we worry about that.

And then at 25 was when I was diagnosed with Crohn's and that was like, I want to say that diagnosis took like, probably about a year to like diagnose. Like, I was going through a lot of like, you know, you know, all the tests, all that drinking the disgusting flat spread. Which is not really taste like flat spread at all, but whatever if that's what I have to tell myself to get down. One of the nice things about Crohn's, I'm, "One of the nice things." Are there nice things? About, you know, having multiple chronic illnesses is that a lot of these drugs, luckily, like work across the board, which is nice, I don't have to take a pill for this and a pill for that and a pill for this, like, you know, the problem is, is my body is attacking itself. And so we're trying to stop that from happening, which is cool. It's like, alright, you know. And then.

So then around 30, I want to say 30-31, I, I had a bad experience where I was throwing up blood. And I was not on insurance. And so, I, tried to stay home and not go to the hospital, and my roommates were like, "We should take you to a hospital." And I was like, "No, I'm fine." You know, again, one of the side effects of living with chronic illness for so long is that I, I kind of feel like I'm the opposite of a hypochondriac. So I was just like, I'll just, I'll wait it out. Like I normally, if I had a bad Crohn's flare, I would - this was again, just stupid, me being stupid. So if you're listening, kids, please don't do this. - But I would either like pop like a Vicodin or a Codeine, and try and sleep it off. And if that didn't work, I would literally take a bottle of NyQuil, and I would just chug it. Because I knew if I could sleep through the pain, that it would go away. What I didn't realize is that I was just, you know, prolonging some things that needed to be taken care of.

And so after about 12 hours of throwing up, like every half hour, my roommates finally found a teaching hospital in Sylmar, and they were like, "Hey, dude, we found an emergency room. It's a teaching hospital. We're going to take you there, they take people without insurance." And I was like, "All right, you know what? Sure, let's do it." And I was also like, way too weak to argue at that point. So they took me and they put me I remember, a couple of things that like really stand out to me, for one, they took me straight to the back. And, and subsequent visits. I didn't realize at the time, but like my friends, once we found out about this hospital, multiple friends of mine would go there whenever they had an accident, because it was like, okay, cool, we can go someplace that feels like we can afford to go to which again, it's just, I love the health system in this country. It's just crazy that, you know, my friends were like, "Oh, sweet. Now I feel like I can go someplace, whenever something bad happens, before I would just not." And so subsequent visits, like you'd wait in the waiting room, like three hours, or like four hours. And so the fact that like, we just went straight back is already like, "Okay, well, that was the thing."

And then they put me in a room and they gave me something to like drink to see if I could keep it down. And I remember, I was in this room by myself, and I could see people in the hallway, but like, I couldn't really like yell or anything like that. And I was about to get sick. And so I was just like, "Hey, hey, hey, I'm gonna get sick, somebody, please stop this from happening, okay, alright, you know, it's happening." Uh, you know, little ASMR there for you.

And I just throw up like, all over myself and the end, like on the floor next to me. I was just like, I tried to warn somebody like, I did my best. Like, this is this is not on me. Like Justin, this is not the you know. And then they they ended up admitting me, admitting me overnight. And, you know, there was no, there is no visiting hours there overnight. So I was like, "Alright, well, this kind of sucks, but whatever." And then the next morning they come in, and this doctor comes in with like a group of doctors. And I'm like,

Amber Tresca 9:00

That's a teaching hospital for you.

Justin Baker 9:01

Yeah, right? And I was like, "Oh, hi, welcome. Welcome to my room. Good to know. I'm here for the show."

Amber Tresca 9:07

That's an audience, yeah.

Justin Baker 9:07

Yeah, this is great.

Amber Tresca 9:09

Work out some material in front of them.

Justin Baker 9:11

Yeah. "Oh, hey, while I have your attention, what do you think about this joke? I've been trying to get some doctors and on this one." So so they come in and the doctors like "Hey, so we need to start prepping you for emergency surgery." And I was like, "When?" they're like, "Now, that's, that's, -

Amber Tresca 9:30

- what emergency means.

Justin Baker 9:31

- how emergency surgery works. And I was like "Oh, I guess that makes sense." So my buddy, my best friend at the time, Mike Frujei was on his way back to seeing me and I I handed in my phone and I was like, "Hey, I was in." So I was in tech for a show at the time. The, the day I threw up blood, I actually did that in a bathroom in between on audition. Like I, I, did that right before I went into the audition, by the way, nailed it got a callback. And then I handed him the phone.

And I was like, hey, so here's what you need to do, you need to call, you know, call my director and let them know, I'm not coming into rehearsal today. You need to call my work and let them know, I'm probably not coming into work today or anytime relatively soon. And then you need to call my parents and let them know what's going on. Because as of now, nobody really knows what's going on.

And then I think I made a very vague Facebook status that was like, "Hey, guys, no big deal. I got a little bit of surgery that's happening today. But you know, as usual, would love any positivity and light you want to send my way. Anyways, thanks, bye!" like that kind of a thing. And then, yeah, and then, the doctor was like, "So here's the deal." He's like, "You have some kind of blockage in your stomach." He's like, "These are the three, basically options of what's going to happen. We're going to cut you open. It might just be twisted, in which case, we just untwist it." He's like, "There might be blockages that we have to cut out. If we do that, then we'll just kind of show you back together. And that'll be that."

And then he's like, "And then there might be the blockages might be too bad to sew back together. So we might have to give you a colostomy bag." And as a performer, that one really scared me. Like, you know, it's, it is not an easy industry at all. And so having anything is, is tough. So I was like, Okay, I was like, Well, I mean, I sure do your thing. I don't know, what do you want to Thanks for the advice or the info, but like, let's just do it. So they do the surgery, and I wake up, and he was like, "So you had four blockages and your lower intestine. And so we cut out 13 inches." And then they stapled me back up. And then they put me back. I was, I stayed in the hospital for seven days. And I was on no food or drink for, all seven days.

The first day afterwards, the insides aren't working. So they put an NG tube in me, which, you know, I it's I was talking to some friends the other day, and I was like, that is probably the worst thing I've ever been through. I think. Like the NG tube was probably the worst thing I've ever been through. And like I was like, if you get one, I'm not gonna sugarcoat it. It's, it's not pleasant. Like, it's it sucks. You'll survive, like, I did, but like, it's not fun. And I remember they told me what the NG tube they said, you know, once you start passing gas, we'll take it out. I was like, okay, and I remembered, unfortunately, because of how much I've been through.

And I also didn't know how horrible NG tube to really was going to be that I had like a morphine drip attached. And I knew that morphine would keep me sedated, which would make it longer for everything to wake back up with the anesthesia. So I decided not to use my morphine. So I just didn't use it for 24 hours, which was really unplug this and I started to panic, like I called the doctor and I was like, I have to take this out, I have to take this out, I will pull this out myself if somebody doesn't take this out. And they were like, this doctor came in who had the worst bedside manner I have ever met, in any doctor, and I hope she's doing well these days, but she just comes in and she just goes "No." And I was like, "What?" She's like, "We're not taking it out, deal with it." And like, left, and I was just like, like, I was like, this is it. This is like this is the scariest, most painful, like loneliest place I can be. But I got through it. And they took it out in the

morning and then you know, survived and, and got out and, you know, kept going. And so then at 35 I got my right hip replaced.

I'm now on Humira and I take I take a shot every two weeks. And then I stopped. I think one of the greatest things, you know, for me, luckily is living in California as I stopped taking like pain pills, and I switched over to marijuana. And that has been a lifesaver like that. That definitely I, I have not had I still had you know, some bad Crohn's days and I've still had some bad AS days but I don't know that I've ever had anything up as bad as bad. Again.

Amber Tresca 14:44

Anyone's story has twists and turns but you know, yours kind of makes some hard writes and hard lefts. So...

Justin Baker 14:52

It's been fun. It's been interesting.

Amber Tresca 14:55

It's, yes. You know, I laughed or cried. It was better than *Cats*.

[MUSIC: About IBD Transition]

Amber Tresca

You are a performer.

Justin Baker 15:06

Yes.

Amber Tresca 15:07

And you have been for a long time.

Justin Baker 15:09

Yes.

Amber Tresca 15:10

And you've but you've also had AS since you were 16.

Justin Baker 15:14

Yeah.

Amber Tresca 15:15

How did you work that all in together? Because as you said, it's not an easy industry to be in for a healthy person. Yeah. Let alone someone who lives with anything. And I know that there are people that don't disclose their health problems, because they want to keep working. Absolutely. So, you know, how do you put that all together?

Justin Baker 15:37

Uh, well, yeah. I mean, so, you know, I started performing like, in, in church plays and skits, like when I was like, young, like, you know, probably like eight or nine, I, I was a very depressed kid growing up, and I didn't have a lot of friends. And I remember, I didn't have a lot of friends because I was depressed. And I was depressed, cause I'm a lot of friends. And I was like, well, this sucks. How do I get out of this?

And I remember, like, around fourth or fifth grade, I feel like I made somebody laugh. And I just remember going, oh, oh, man, what is that, that I want more of that, that was delicious. And I say all the time. I'm like, man, if you could, if I could bottle up the the feeling of like performing like, whoo, I would be a trillion- I would own the world. And so yeah, so I started, you know, performing.

And then when I got AS I was pretty quiet about it, honestly, I didn't really talk about my disease. I mean, some people knew, and you know, it, it got brought up on the fact that like, you know, I was limping, you know, and people were like, hey, you're limping, and I'd be like, I'm fine. And they're like, you know what's going on, like, I have this thing. It's no big deal. Don't worry about it. And I brushed it off all the time, and I didn't want to talk about it. So I went, I got a BFA in theater. Because I was told I needed to go to college. And, you know, like the rest of us in that generation. Looking back now, I mean, luckily, I'm very, I'm very fortunate, I went to school on a full ride, I had a pretty good ACT score. I didn't even take the SATs because I stayed in state. And I had a full academic scholarship, and I got a little stipend from theater. And then I also had a job. And I worked and I paid for my apartment, and you know, did the thing you have to do to make things work.

And so I was very quiet about it. And then after college, I moved to LA, I sold everything I had just packed up the car and headed west because I was like, I always knew this is what I wanted to do. I was like, I want to be an actor. And I'd like to be able to live as an actor. And then when I got out here, I reached out to the Arthritis Foundation. And I was like, Hey, this is probably a weird question like, but do you have like, a thing for people my age? And they were like, actually, we do we have something called the young adult network. And I was like, Okay, and so I started going to these meetings and meeting all these awesome, wonderful people who, you know, had chronic illness, and most of them were RA and 90% of them were women. So still very isolating. You know, in fact, most of the people I know have that I talked about chronic illness with are women.

And so it, you know, it was very, it was good, and it was still you know, I still wasn't able to find everything. And then I ended up being a, through that, I ended up being a camp counselor at Camp Esperanza, which is up in Big Bear, and it's a camp for kids with chronic illness. And that was just that was amazing. I was just like, this is so cool. Like, this is a thing. Like I wish I'd known about this when I was 16. Like, this is so awesome.

And because of that I've been very outspoken since then, you know, I talked about on my social media all the time. I you know, talk about with friends. You know, when I've got my handicap placard in my car, it's right there. So, you know, first date, I usually am

like, hey, just a heads up. I'm part robot. I have two metal hips, and I got this going on. So if you're afraid of, you know, robotics, feel free to stop the date. But, but yeah, so I'm very open about it.

But it's weird, because, you know, you talk about like, I don't know that like casting directors know about it. Like I think some do, because I'm friends with some of them. But in general, like when you see me, you know, I don't look sick. So it's really interesting because there's, you know, there's such a, there's a big push for disability visibility in film and television right now.

But I also don't feel like I belong to that group either. Like, that's the hardest part is I don't feel like you know, I don't feel like I belong to any group. And that's tough. And chronic illness, you don't beat. You just survive. I have now lived longer with chronic pain than I've lived without chronic pain. And I don't remember what it's like to not be in pain.

I don't know what that feels like, and like to explain that to somebody, like I was on another buddy's podcast a couple years ago. And he was like, you know, you've brought up a couple of times in our conversations, that you're in pain. 24 /7. And I'm like, Yeah, he's like, what does that mean? I'm like, I felt like it was pretty clear. It's like, blue is blue. Pain 24/7 means I'm in pain 24/7. And he's like, but like, so you're in pain right now. Like, yeah, like, I I know. It's like, it's, I get it. Like, I've adapted. Like, I'm, like, I can point to three parts of my body right now that are like flaring. Like my lower back, just like doing this podcast is like, Oh, hi. I'm like, Yeah, I hear you. It's cool dude, I know you're there. Like, my stomach's made a couple of rumbling. So far, we've been to and I'm like, Alright, I wonder if the mics picking that up? I don't know.

But like, you know, so being a performer. Like, you know, it's tough. And then you've got the side with like insurance, you know, health insurance, and like, I need meds. And they're very expensive. You know, I've definitely had years where I didn't take meds and just tried to force my way through it. And I know, I could do other like, I need to be need, I should, whenever I hate the word should, I would like to do more yoga, I would like to eat healthier, you know, these are things that I know won't fix the problem, but could alleviate some of it. I'm pretty good about stress. I try and like release a lot of stress.

I'm because like I would work basically like Thursdays through Sunday, like non stop. And then like Monday was like my day off. And I'm not gonna feel bad about it or guilty. Because I know that if I don't do this today, then by Wednesday, my body is going to go Okay, well, now I'm going to make you do it. And I would rather have agency over whether or not I'm down for a day, especially considering I don't know what, you know, what Wednesday's gonna hold, you know, if I have an audition or something, you know, and, and being sick and like, like I said, like, throwing up blood before an audition.

Like that's, like, I, I can't tell you how many times I've gone to auditions, just an excruciating pain and just been like, I gotta do it. Gotta keep going forward. And like, my biggest one of my biggest fears is like being on set, like getting cast in something, and

then not being able to, like, come out of the dressing room because I'm incapacitated and being like, they're gonna fire me like, and it's my fault. You know, I definitely don't put that on my resume. Like, it's not something I talk about. in that aspect. I guess that's that's an answer.

Amber Tresca 23:02

In acting, though, there's a lot to be said for lived experience, or, and bringing that into a performance. Do you think that there is a case to be made, that your lived experience is something that you could bring to a role?

Justin Baker 23:18

For sure, for sure. I mean, I, it's tough. I wish I was a better writer. Like, that's something I wish I was better at. Because I, you know, I would like to write, like my story into something I often talk about.

There's a phrase a friend gave me called find the pony. And it goes, you know, some people walk in a room full of [bleep]. And they go, Oh, my God, look at all this [bleep]. And some people walk in a room full of [bleep]. And they go, Oh, my God, where's the pony?

You know, and so, I will say one of the things that I am truly grateful about about having two chronic illnesses is that I think I have a better perspective, sometimes on life, or I try to, you know, I've had days where I had to crawl to the bathroom. Once you have that day, if you have a day where you can get out of bed, even if you're in pain, it's still better than that day, you know. And so, you know, I can definitely pull from that stuff. If they ever have a show with a character that, you know, has RA or AS I, I'm sure I could play that, you know, but I also like, I'm not, I'm not a method actor.

So I think, you know, I've been very fortunate that I'm very observant, I think, you know, it's helped me make me the person I am. I don't know if I needed the experience to purvey that, I guess, although I also talk all the time to friends and I'm like, you'll never know what it's like to have chronic pain. Like it's just I can't explain it. It's it's something that's indescribable. So, maybe, that's a long answer for that.

Amber Tresca 24:57

No, I agree with what you said there.

[MUSIC: IBD Transition]

Amber Tresca

Do you think you're an empathic person?

Justin Baker 25:02

Oh, I know. I'm empathic. Yeah. Which has been really hard. So like in being empathic, like, you know, it's not bad feelings or bad feelings, whether or not they're correct or not. So I just feel a lot.

And, and it's tough like I am, like I was making it. I've been making jokes about and I've been keeping a list of all the things I've cried out during pandemic like shows I watch and then I was just like, it's really just everything I've watched, like it yet this point, anything I cried five times watching Mulan on the other night, I was like, Sure, sure. I mean, I don't know. I guess I relate to this, you know, Asian woman trying to be a fighter. I don't know. Whatever. Like, you got some pretty colors and some beautiful music like, Yeah, get me. So at this point, you put relationships into it like queens Gambit. You know, I cried. I mean, like, I think I cried. Yeah, I cried at Huey, Halloween, or whatever, which was like an Adam Sandler movie. I was like, I'm crying at a Sandler Halloween goof movie. Alright. Yeah, this is, this is where I live now. That's, that's fine.

Amber Tresca 26:12

Do you, Do you get any kind of a release from that? Do you feel better? Because I've read things that have said that. It doesn't always necessarily make you feel better to get those feelings out?

Justin Baker 26:23

Yeah, I don't know. I mean, for me, like, I definitely, like I said, I feel like it, I feel like, it hurts my heart. Like I can, like it's a literal, like a physical pain, like, I can feel it in my chest. And sometimes crying, you know, wears me out. And then, you know, I go to sleep. And maybe that helps. I'm very big on talking to people about the fact that it's okay to feel emotions, though. Like, I think whether or not it helps, I think stifling it is probably worse.

I think bottling up emotions, which is kind of something I had to, like, learn not to do growing up, I think, you know, I grew up in the 80s and 90s in Oklahoma as a guy. So, I mean, I think that, that says everything you need to say, but you know, like, walk it off, don't cry, I'll give you something to cry about, like, you know, like, all that stuff. And, you know, I was beat up for being in theater and, and stuff like that. So it's just like, Alright, but I'm, I am who I am. And I'm okay with it now, but it took a while to get there.

Amber Tresca 27:34

As an actor, though, does this make your life easier? Being able to be in touch with your emotions in that way? Absolutely.

Justin Baker 27:41

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, the irony being, of course, that most of the stuff I do is comedy. So you know, I Wow. It helps even with comedy because I love playing the straight man, which is one of my favorite, like, position plays to play in comedy.

But, you know, it's, I don't, I rarely go to to depths with it, you know, emotionally. Although, you know, I talk about improv a lot. And a buddy of mine has this quote that he got from somebody else. And I don't know who originally said at this point. But it was the the worst thing that ever happened to improv was putting the word comedy on it.

And so I love doing like dramatic improv. I like you know, I one of my favorite scenes I did last year was like a father son scene and an improv show. And it was just like, a touching scene about a father trying to connect with his son. And it you know, they both neither of them knew how to talk to each other because the mom had passed away the year before. But it was about a to- like it was it was a it was a serial killer, like, show, and you know, about a town and we were taffy makers. So like, you know, it's like, it's absurd, but it's cool to be able to put real emotions into it. Because that to me is really what it's about.

Amber Tresca 28:57

Yeah. And to your point, you're right. We think of improv as comedy. We always think of it as comedy.

Justin Baker 29:02

Yeah. And most people even like, you know, to a degree, I would say, a good portion of the population think of improv they think of like, Whose Line Is It Anyway? Yes. And it's like, cool. I love short form. I think short form is an amazing art. And it's super fun. But I didn't learn about long form really, until I came to Los Angeles and long form is just like, I love it. I, you know, I could talk about, I could do an entire series of podcasts on improv, like, I just love it so much. It's so much fun.

Amber Tresca 29:30

Some of my favorite podcasts that I listened to are run by comedians, actors, hosts who have pretty significant and deep background in improv. Yeah. And it just really lends itself to having a great conversation.

Justin Baker 29:45

Yeah, absolutely. And I think improv is I think it's a tool that everybody should learn. Like, I really do. I think it helps in every single aspect of life. You know, it's it's, it's basically you know, like what we were supposed to be learning in school like critical thinking. That's really all it is, like it's listening to somebody and reacting to what they're saying, on the fly versus, you know, trying to premeditate everything you're going to do.

Amber Tresca 30:10

The listening part, I think that's the part that's truly missing in a lot of cases.

Justin Baker 30:16

Yeah. It's, it's tough like you, you see it a lot with with, you know, in bad improv, it's just like, oh, you're not, you're not listening to your partner at all. Like that's, and it's, it's funny, because like, once you get to the point that it's like, once you lock that down, it makes it super easy, honestly, like, especially if you're playing with somebody who's, you know, who also knows what they're doing, like you, you just walk out on stage and you connect eyes, and you're both like, Oh, this is where we're going. Okay, cool. How are we gonna get there? All right, fine, let's do it. And then they say something, and you respond to that, but you both know where the end goal is. Because you just understand, like, my favorite thing about comedy.

And I think this is one of the interesting things about how my brain works, at least. And I think, you know, it's, it's not unique in any sense. But like, I'm very mathematical as well. I loved math growing up. And, and I love the fact that, you know, comedy is math, you know, it's like, this plus, this equals funny. And there are so many, you know, guidelines out there, and there's so many different math equations, you know, you can do this or this, and it can still be funny, depending on what kind of funny you're trying to get. But at the end of the day, it's formulaic. And so my brain is always just kind of like walking around, like, you know, beautiful, minding the world, in comedy instead of numbers, you know, like, oh, if that person did this right now, that would be funny. Like, you know.

Amber Tresca 31:50

What would you tell a person who has been recently diagnosed with a chronic illness,

Justin Baker 31:53

You can do it. Like, we're such amazing creatures, humans, like we're resilient. And I know, it doesn't feel like it sometimes. And I know, it sucks. But, you know, the reason we're at the top of the food chain is because we would literally just walk after animals until they got too tired to keep walking. And we would just club them and be like, Man, I'm gonna eat you now, because we just don't give up.

Like, we adapt. we survive, you know, and if you, you don't know somebody that's going through what you're going through, find somebody and reach out. It's absolutely okay to have a bad day. It is absolutely 100% okay to cry and vent and yell and ask why me and like, get it out because you need to. But if you live every day in that place, it'll destroy you way faster than this disease. Well, the scariest part of this disease is not the pain. It's, it's the mental game. And it's a long haul. So you gotta you gotta pace yourself.

Amber Tresca 32:53

Justin, thank you so much for being on my show. And for being so available.

Justin Baker 32:57

Of course, Thank you for having me. I really appreciate it.

Amber Tresca 33:04

Hey, super listener! Special thanks to Justin for taking the time to tell me his story and for all he does to support and uplift others as we all make our way through this pandemic.

I'll let you in on some of the secret sauce of my recording process. I try to remain quiet while my guests are speaking. After all, it's their voice and their story that is important. But I laughed continuously during this interview. You heard some of it, but I honestly muted much of it because it would be so distracting to listen to me snort in the background. My face hurt from laughing when we ended the session, that's how much fun Justin and I had, even while talking about his journey with multiple chronic illnesses.

You can follow Justin on social media. On Instagram and Twitter he is acts4food, that's a-c-t-s the number 4 f-o-o-d. He has another Instagram for his photography, photobakerla, which is all one word. I'll tell you, I missed the opportunity to ask Justin about the tattoo on his leg, but you can see it on his Instagram. You can also find him at photo dash baker dot com, and acts4food.com

You can also support an upcoming docuseries in which Justin is participating that's called "You Don't Look Sick." The Instagram page is y-d-l-s-documentary and the Facebook page is youdontlooksickdocumentary. I will put all this information and more in the show notes and on the Episode 84 page on my site, about IBD.com.

Thanks for listening, and remember, until next time, I want you to know more about IBD.

Amber Tresca

You can swear but I will bleep you.

Justin Baker

Okay?

Amber Tresca

Which actually is funnier.

Justin Baker 35:08

The heck if you want you can just throw in random bleeps on me you just hear like that, that sentence didn't make any sense. But did it? It probably did if you heard the word [bleep] but you know because that words very versatile it can, it can be used in a lot of ways. So.