Tell me about yourself

G: Just tell me a little bit about yourself. Yeah. Just start with your name. How long you've been climbing.

k: My name is Kenneth Lewis. Been climbing for about 8 years. I started climbing in a bouldering gym and got hooked right away. because of the problem solving assets of of rock climbing. And at the time I was working as a software developer. And so I did like feel this embodied experience of problem solving with my body rather than with my just with my brain like it would in programming. And then, now, I work as an adaptive planning facilitator. I run an adaptive planning program. At the climbing gym. Here in San Diego where we create community spaces To make climbing more accessible for people with disabilities. and then I also work as an adaptive climbing guide in the outdoors. I started doing it like 5 years ago, before I moved to San Diego, and then I picked it up again when I moved here.

G: So the outdoor stuff was started when you moved here, or was that also in the Pacific Northwest?

k: I did a little bit of it in the PNW, But it was. It came I I think, facilitating the outdoor experiences became more central to my life since I moved here.

Describe your disability

G: Can you briefly describe your disability?

k: Oh, yeah, I have an amputation below my knee on one side. I had an accident when I was 15 years old. Traumatic accident which resulted in the amputation of my leg. and I wear, I wear a prosthetic to walk around. I also wear a prosthetic to climb.

G: How does it affect your daily life? Loaded question! I know. And i know it changes.

k: Hmm, yeah, you know. Some days it doesn't affect my daily life. And then on other times, I experience pain. I experience discomfort with walking or with doing other activities. I think I also experience like. sometimes I experience like mental barriers to doing physical activity because because

of the way that it can affect my leg and the pain. The pain is random, but also, Yeah, I think, you know, bodies fluctuate in size, and even even those really, really tiny fluctuations that I might not see on a scale due to affect the fit of my limb. I've been a prosthetic user for so long. I don't have a lot of flesh in my leg. So I I basically, I'm not just skin and bone. But I'm like every day I'm closer to skin and bone, so there is left soft tissue to to take that load. G: I suspect that my like high activity days have a time limit ultimately

G: How Does that make you feel?

k: Hmm! I'm not sure that makes me feel.

G: When your accident happened. How long were you in the hospital for?

k: About 3 months. I actually was run over. and I had like complete. I had my pelvis fractured in like 5 different places in also in my hips. and had to lay flat on my back for about 2 months while they, the incremental surgeries to allow me to [inaudible] my hips.

G: Thank you for sharing that. Okay, we're gonna come back to that. But we're gonna switch gears a little bit to math. So yeah, what is your relationship with math. How do you feel about your relationship with math?

Math!?

k: woaaah, loaded question! When you, when you, when you just when you ask me that my mind immediately goes to like being in high school, and I was like a bit of a bad boy in high school, and like definitely not the kid you want in your math and I didn't really learn very much there. Everything was *extremely* abstract. And I was like, why do I need to know this? And then nowadays, Well, okay. And then, I guess, fast forward to. I trained as a software developer. And I took math some math classes to that for The programming. And I absorbed those things very well, because I was being shown the relationship that I had to this other thing that I was learning. Yeah. So I was being shown like, here's this math. And here's how it relates to the programming that you do, Or here's how it relates to the way that a computer works, and, that made sense to me. And it's like, Yeah, this is great.

And I even had like a horrible math teacher like as a person. But I learned a lot.

G: Wow! What made them a horrible math teacher?

k: He's just like an old white guy, and is just really mean to everyone and is racist…any way…and then, now, my relationship to math is maybe comes into play when I'm doing things like Diy projects.

So like, maybe I'm doing some woodworking or building something for my garden. Yeah. And so I need to use math to, you know, calculate some things, measurements, things like that. And it's very, very basic math. But that's what I think of as math in my current life.

G: So to recap high school. You said that you were kind of the kid that you didn't want your math class. Can you say a little bit more about that?

k: Oh, it's not paying attention, distracting other people. Okay. Really annoying.

G: haha! trained as a software developer and that you started to really contextualize it. And that was meaningful. And you were able to really integrate that. And then, now you're kind of using it more in super applicable way with your gardening, and like building things like you built my car out! Cool. Can you share like? Do you have any like positive or like negative experiences related to math. Is there anything that stands out for you that happen like a ha moment or something negative that had happened? Anything.

k: yeah, I think a negative experience that stands out is like, I just have this picture in my mind of like sitting in a math exam and just staring at the paper and being like, what fuck is this shit? (can i swear, is that okay?) So that that's like something that stands out of my mind. This is like looking at a piece of paper and being like, I just don't know what to do this. and feeling maybe like, and maybe that's a slightly like out of body experience. like a bit disassociated. and then a positive? yeah, I mean, I think I I have some recollections of times where somebody might have been like tutoring me, and I had, like an Aha moment with with the piece of learning like I, Oh, I now see how to, how these 2 things relate on each side of the algebra equation, or something like that. but nothing like super specific.

G: Did you have tutoring?

k: So after I had my accident, it was difficult for me to go back to school because my school didn't have an elevator, and I was in a wheelchair. So The government provides like it's for people that do distance learning that like I use the same service. Where they would like, give me the curriculum and books, or whatever, and then they would have a tutor come to my house once a week to work with me. and so I had. That was probably the 1st time I'd ever had, like one on one tutoring or like a really like personalized learning experience for math. And I remember learning a lot in that, because, because it was not a classroom environment. There was no way for me to hide as well. So I have to really engage with it

Climbing?

G: Okay? We've already talked a little bit about climbing to, how often do you climb

k: these days? Sporadically? Yeah, I climb occasionally in the gym, and I go on outdoor trips, you know. Maybe once a month, or sometimes more. I prefer outdoor! Because there are more variables. And so I think there is more complicated problem solving. I feel I also feel as a climber with a disability like I have fewer limitations outside, because in the gym I'm very, very limited to where somebody else decided to put a handful, or foothold versus in the outdoors I can make up my own foothold, and that might make the climb objectively more difficult for someone else. But it makes it easier for me.

G: So it's like easier to problem solve outside, even though there's more variables?

k: I think it's easier to problem solve outside *because* there are more variables because I have more options. I feel limited in the gym. and I also prefer outdoor climbing because of trad climbing and placing gear. And I think that that is a whole different dimensions problem solving that then gets kind of like intertwined with the actual climbing problem.

G: there's different dimensions of problem solving when it comes to placing gear. And then also that inherent problem solving in the climbing side.

k: Yeah. And those 2 things also have crossover when you're trying to figure out maybe a stance for placing gear

G: Oh, my goodness, okay, how did you become interested in climbing.

k: Oh. I don't know. I think I have always been afraid of heights. and I am the kind of person that usually likes to tackle fears head on. So I had a friend who was climbing in the gym. And so I just like asked like if i could go with him. That was basically the interest I had. Rock climbed in the gym a couple times as a kid and been absolutely terrified of it. Yeah.

G: were you hooked when you 1st tried?

k: immediately. yes.

G: I feel like, that's a pretty common reaction. Okay? So we've talked about math. We've talked about climbing. Now we're going to talk about the meat of my study, which is problem solving. So my 1st question and it's it's a challenging one I'm to hear your thoughts is, how do you define problem solving in general?

Define PS in general

k: Well. I guess I would define problem solving as using using the tools that I have that I've gained from my life experiences to create an outcome- to create some specific outcome.

G: It's like life experience... Can you say any more about that? You don't have to? But I would love to hear like…you're talking about your life experiences to create a specific outcome, is there? What makes it problem solving in general?

k: Hmm, okay, so I think what you're getting as there's like, an obstacle that I'm trying to… hm….

G: So, in order for it to be a problem, does it have to be an obstacle?

k: like, why do we want to fix anything? Right? We're we're trying to change things because we want but to be different. which is true for anything. And so like, if we want something to be different. Yeah, it might not be an obstacle exactly, but it might be that we something is suboptimal or something could be better. I think the life experience thing is that I think the way that I approach problem solving is very much based around who I am as a person. And so I think, and that's probably true for for everybody. I can only really draw on the experiences that I have in the skill set that I have to solve a problem. And I think that if I try to approach problem solving in a way that someone else might approach it, or someone says, like, Here's this problem, go solve it like this. That can be difficult for me because I am. I don't have that skill set or that sort of experience

G: that's really great. Thank you.

G: okay. So we talked about problem solving. In general, it sounds like you're drawing upon your lived experiences to come up with a, as you said, optimal way to do something or to overcome an obstacle, maybe. But ultimately, yeah, does that sound correct?

k: Yeah.

G: Now, how would you define problem solving in math?

k: I would also probably add to that. I'd say, like to create, to create an outcome that *I* want.
I feel like that's distinct from overcoming an obstacle and creating an alternate solution.
G: So why that distinction?

k: Because I think that a lot of the things that we do in life, They only have meaning like to us. And so it's very much like a lot of the a lot of times when I'm trying to solve the problem is that like I, I want

something to be different. *I* want something. And so I I just it feels like an important distinction. It's like it has to have personal significance to you. Otherwise you might not really want to solve that problem. Yeah, or yeah, or I might just not be even trying to solve that problem. I didn't. Yeah, about it. Yeah. And I remember, I remember, like in the classroom, it being it was math. And then I remember doing an accounting class and We were like balancing a budget. And, and I remember thinking like, Oh, I can totally see how this would be useful. And I was engaged with that.

PS in Math

G: Okay, thank you. It's a lot of really good stuff in there. Okay, so we have this definition of problem solving in general. Is that a little in alignment with like problem solving and math. would you say, or how would you define problem solving in that manner.

k: Can you give me, maybe, like an example of problem solving in math that I can frame your question around?z

G: Yeah, I mean, I think there's different flavors. I would say traditional math that, like I'm teaching sat right now. So a problem would just be like, here's a series of equations. What are different ways to represent them? Something like that? like, let's say, the traditional solving for X….

k: it does in a way, because you need to have, like the experience and skill set to know how to solve for x but in terms of it being, you know, maybe suboptimal or an obstacle that feels a little bit more blurry to me. unless solving for X is something that I need to do, because I'm trying to figure out how to build a garden bid to be in some specific space. And then it's like, Okay, I can see I can see my needs to overcome this obstacle a little bit.

G: I think another way that we think about problem solving. But the low hanging fruit is like in the math classroom when you give a word problem. So would that help you like? When does that make it feel more?

k: Oh, like the, you know, like down the street with 2 kittens in their bag, or whatever. Yeah, yeah. *laughs* I think it still just doesn't really matter to me. I think it helps a *little bit*. but i i i sometimes feel that those things like they border the realm of like riddle.

G: How? What are your thoughts and riddles?

k: I've never been very good at it. My brain has trouble thinking really laterally, like like that for sure. Yeah.

Thinking laterally

G: alright. Well, now, you know, you're gonna have to tell me what you mean by thinking laterally, yeah,

k: drawing connections between things like that, you know, like that word game we played so like i i i think I struggle a little bit with with that kind of thing, or maybe like reading a news article, and then thinking about thinking about how that news article might affect some other piece of the world.

G: why do you think you struggle with that?

k: I don't know. I, Probably it's probably something I've it's not like a muscle that's been exercised. Maybe I was never really like taught to think in that way. I've never naturally explored thinking in that way.

G: Do You think that's like a valuable skill set.?

k: *Yeah, yeah,* huge, huge, valuable.

G: There's a lot. Okay, you're gonna have to keep going. Okay. So we've talked about problem solving. In general. You know, there's definitely this piece of sub optimal optimal,ved experience, how those coalesce around each other. We've talked about problem solving and math more decontextualized. What about problem solving and climbing? Let's talk about. : I'm guess I just want to hear your answer. In general, we can get more fine-grained with that? What about problem solving and climbing?

PS in Climbing

k: I'm drawing on experiences and skill set. An obstacle might be: 'm trying to get to the top of something.

G: Is that the obstacle? Or is that the goal?

k: Well… Yeah, I guess the goal might be to get at the top. The obstacles are what's in the way of getting to the top and then creating some kind of desired outcome. Yeah, I think that fits into that, too, because even if you're getting to the top in one way, there might be enough, another like more efficient or a more fun way that you could get to the top, or a more fun way to get to the top. But yeah, I think it actually fits my definition very well.

G: because we talked about suboptimal. So what would a suboptimal solution look like?

k: maybe like for me? As a person that climb with my legs, campusing. Because I'm going to use so much more energy to get to where i want to be. That could be an example. Another example could be. oh, maybe like, if there is a a route that I'm climbing that has multiple kind of paths that I can take up the route. maybe I'm thinking of like an Alpine climb. We have to do some route finding just like choosing which direction to go when you're climbing. That can be much harder and longer, or much shorter and easier, depending on on what you choose and wha : what you can desire. You might prefer to go the harder way on purpose so a sub, a sub optimal outcome might be okay. My goal today is just to get to the top as fast as possible. So taking that longer, harder way would be suboptimal. It's *PERSONAL.* It's not right or wrong.

G: so now that we're kind of getting this like granularity when it comes to problem solving and climbing. I'm loving this contextual and personal. No, right or wrong. Do you feel like that aligns with your overall definition of problem solving like?

k: *laughs* yes and no, I think for some problems there is a more agreeable, correct answer. And that's not to say that is, it is the only answer. But if you were to poll 100 people and ask them which of these 2 answers is correct, and most people would say. A versus B But I've used my building a garden bed example … Now I can do some math and take some measurements and build this garden a bit, and it could be really square, could fit the space exactly right. could be the height that I want it to be. or I could not do that. And I could just like throw a bunch of pieces of wood together. and then just kind of like, create something that works, and that's not wrong. But it's suboptimal and depending on what the original goal was that : you know, you could maybe view it as wrong. But I don't think you could completely argue that it was an incorrect concept.

G: okay, contextual and personal. No, right or wrong. So is that something that I was gonna ask you about problem solving and climbing. And then I literally created a different question for you just in the Alpine which you already touched on. So I guess when it comes to like rock climbing in a gym versus I don't know like there's a gradient obviously gym outdoor Holcomb and Alpine. But I guess the question is like. how does problem solving in the Alpine differ than say, in a more controlled environment like a gym.

Alpine versus gym

k: I think the problems on the Alpine is more like it carries a heavier weight in terms of consequence. So you you make a poor decision in that environment. You Your consequence could be life and death. It could be cold and warm. It could be type one. This is type 2 fun. and I think that usually the decisions we make and make : in a more controlled environment, like the climbing gym is. there are fewer decisions to make, especially with regards to safety. yeah, I mean, that's that's the big

difference that comes to mind consequence. The…it's just like more gravity to the decisions that you make.

How do you plan a route?

G. Okay, so let's say you're about to climb a route, and we're gonna have to bring it back into the gym, because that's the place of the study due to accessibility. So a whole study could be done on Alpine. Can you describe your thought process when you're planning on climbing a route? You're at the base. What's your thought process?

k: am I lead climbing or top or boulder? Okay, lead climbing.
My thought process is, typically, I'm gonna look up at the 1st clip and the second clip. and think about Where I, what holds I would use to clip those first two. And the reason for that is, I'm like, those are the. Those are the places that I know that if I was fall there, the consequence is the most high.
and so I'm generally focusing on that. And then the rest of it. I'm just fine. I'm not. I'm not like reading a whole route, because I'm not a comp climber.

G: yeah, you're the 1st non comp climber I've interviewed!

G: So you're just focusing on the 1st 2 clips. What's your game plan? After that?

k: *without a beat* HAVE FUN. also, just the experience.

G: Can You say more about experience.

Mind body flow

k: especially if it's a route I haven't climbed before. I find the experience of of being on that route the 1st time, and moving through the holds and figuring out the sequences and clipping stances to be very engaging and… Yeah, it's kind of like a a body, mind, flow, sort of a thing that I'm trying to achieve.

G: Say more about body, mind, flow.

k: What is it that? when the the difficulty perfectly Intersects with my ability. I can. You know, the the most optimal way for me to move through. It is to not think about anything, and to just like, let my :

subconscious take over and do the climbing for me, and I just flow through the moves. But if it's too easy. That doesn't happen if it's too difficult. That also doesn't happen. It has to be exactly right

G: when you say subconscious takeover, what does that mean?

k: I'm not. I'm not consciously thinking about moving, moving. Put my foot here, put my hand here. There's my next hold. I'm just climbing.

G: What role does your body cause? I'm hearing a lot of like conscious language or mind language. But what role does your body play with that? The subconscious takeover? You're not thinking about it.

subconscious?

k: I don't know. My body is just moving. And that's why I think about subconscious. I think of my subconscious controlling my body and maybe like subconscious. Maybe *my* definition of subconscious is not is not limited to the brain.

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G: Okay, what's your definition of subconcious? Well, let's try and unpack that .welcome to an interview with a philosopher.

G: so so far we have. It's not limited to the brain.

k: I'm like…decision making and problem solving, using, using using my body, but without conscious thought. without active control.

G: And that's kind of the goal for you when it comes to climbing is like to get to that place where you're just moving subconsciously.

k: Yeah, I would say, so, I would say, so. Yeah.

G: Okay, so our definition of subconscious moving forward..

k: Oh boy!

G: not limited to the brain. It's this decision making and problem solving, using your body without conscious thought, without active control. Does that sound good? Okay, you're like that sounds really good. Who said that? Okay. So, I think something that I find interesting, Not talking to a Conp climber is your emphasis of fun that you're the 1st person to bring it up. : what role does that play in your problem? Solving like, what role does fun, play in your problem, solving

Play in PS

k: Oh, that's a really interesting question.

k: like, maybe not being so attached to optimal. So, if you bring fun into it. It's kind of like that example of like, you know, you can take the easiest way to the top, or you can take whatever what you want to take to the top. And so it's like some some way of climbing the route feels more fun to you. Maybe the example of like campus climbing. It's like, if you feel like campus climbing today. And that's fun, like we should just do that like, why are you here if it's not fun. Cost money to be here. It takes a lot of time to be here. to climb at the level that a lot of people are planning, that they have to invest like hundreds and thousands of hours, you would hope that it's fun. Yeah.

G: is that why you never competed?

k: yeah, I think so. I just have never had a real interest in competing. It just doesn't feel like something that I need from climbing

G: Why do you think some people compete. Then?

k: In the disability space. Yeah, it's like a really big thing. Yeah, I think that it's a. It's a common, a common thing for people to have felt like if they've lived with a disability for a long time that felt like they weren't good at things compared to other people. And so maybe they're comparing themselves to nondisabled counterparts in the sport. And I think thathaving a place where they can : go and compete with other disabled athletes and feel competitive and feel like they're You know. in the top 10 in the whole world. That's something, I think, is a pretty meaningful thing.

Disability in PS

G: does your disability play a role in how you problem solve

k: In climbing, it certainly does. So? It's it's an extra variable. I have to account for. you know, physically a limitation. I don't have an ankle, so I'm not able to use my feet in the way that I might read if I was to read a a textbook about climbing. I can't do all of the things that are in there. So need to account for that as as a whole, variable.

G: What about in general? Yeah, I like zooming in and out. So climbing is the context. But what about problem solving and just your day to day life, the way that you move through the world? : your leg is hurting. So you put a credit card or a business card in it.

k: Yeah, sure, I mean, I it definitely. It definitely plays a role. Maybe even if it's like I'm going to., I don't know. I'm going somewhere. I'm going to the beach with a friend and I want to think about like oh, how, how close can I park my car : because so don't Have to walk as far. Something like that, or what extra things do I need to take to the beach because there's a bunch of sand, but I don't want to get in my prosthetic things like that. Oh, maybe I don't want to wear my prosthetic and take my crutches. yeah, I think it probably does play pretty significant role, in problem solving.

G: If we're going back, the definition of problem solving which I love doing. what is it you have some? It's suboptimal. You're using experience? Yeah. create a certain outcome. So how do? What role does your disability play with that definition?

k: Oh, so I'd say, like I've been in situations where where my leg has affected my enjoyment of of a previous experience that I can draw on then I might approach approach that in a different way the next time, so it might be like. Oh, I oh, I went to the movies. and I was wearing pants. And because I was wearing pants I couldn't take my leg off in the movies, and I'm sitting at this like uncomfortable angle for my leg for 2 h. So next time I go to movies I'm always short, so I can take that leg off.

G: So in general, when we're talking about just disability and problem solving, thinking, you work with so many disabled individuals, with varying disabilities. What role do you think. like? Do you see them being better problem solvers like do like, I guess that's my 1st question. And if so, howe. like Brian? Sarah Tanner, yeah.

Better PSers?

k: And like you saying, do I see them being better problem solvers outside of climbing?

G: yeah, or in climbing, like, in climbing out whatever. However, you want to interpret that question.

k:certainly within climbing. Yeah, you can. I can see the progression of people from from their 1st time climbing, you know, through to like one years, 2 years down the line---their problem solving is is very much improved. in terms of the rest of their life, you know. it's hard to measure that, because, especially because a lot of people, maybe, that are being introduced like younger people. And so like hey're like learning and growing and adapting any way.

Confidence

Sarah is like in school. She's studying problem solving in school, right? So like, of course, she's going to be improving in that. I think the biggest thing that I have seen across all of the people that i have seen introduced in climbing is the increase in confidence outside of climbing. I've very, very noticeable. Yeah. I think experiencing success builds confidence. Overcoming obstacles (Problem solving) and just practicing that in the climbing context gives people confidence that they can do the same in the rest of their lives. I think having access to community is a huge factor and happiness. it's easier to be confident when you're happy. There's like so many ways that it all ties together.

G: so when it disability and problem solving in general, you're saying it's kind of hard to gauge that, especially when it comes to the people that you spend time with, because they are so young, like they are learning, they are adapting. So it's kind of hard to make that statement.

World is not designed for us

k: I think so, and I think also people with disabilities are usually already quite good at problem solving, because they, because they have to figured out how to move themselves through the world because the world is not designed for them. Maybe a blind climber of that comes in here for the 1st time. Like has already done so much problem solving. To get into the building. They had to figure out how to get here because they to take the bus or The bus dropped them one mile away from the gym or you know, there wasn't like an easily navigatable route to use. They can And so they walk into the gym, like already, a very accomplished problem solving and so now it's just like teaching them to do it in a slightly different context.

G: do you think that could apply to math?

k: yeah it must, someone should study that.

Disabled PS >> abled PS?!?! NO!

G: Okay, so would you say that disabled individuals may be better problem solvers than non disabled individuals.

k: No, I would say that they have, They are forced to problem solve more.

G: Hmm, does that not make you a better problem solver?

k: Some people are just better at things than like, like. Okay, I'm disabled. Right? Like, am I going to be better at Math and Albert Einstein. He's just better at math than me. It's like some people are just on a different level. We're not all good at the same thing. You think if I had spent the same amount of time studying math as Albert Einstein is that would would I be as good at math as him!?!?

G: I would say he was mentally he was neurodivergent, certainly, nonetheless. Yes.

G: so, your claim is not that disabled individuals are better problem solvers. They just have to do it more. Could that be the preconditions for them to be better? Problem solvers because they have more exposure, like you're saying it's a muscle, right?

k: *It could be.* Take a hundred people and you put them through Olympic sprint training. we might not find the same (bulk??) in that group. just because you expose them, and they did all that training doesn't mean that they will necessarily be the best at it. And then you might just find some kid that has never been through that training, who is just faster than others.

G: And so so do you think, like some people are just like good at math like like you, just like there's like this innateness to it. And no matter how much training there's just like gonna be that Einstein that's like wakes up. And he's like cool. I'm good at math.

k: Not necessarily that they wake up, and they're like cool and good math, but like their their brain is just more wired to accept the thinking that comes around math. And it's it's just like they yeah, they are able to learn it easier.. It makes sense to them more easily.

How do you define intelligence?

G: How do you define intelligence?

k: hmmmm I think my definition for intelligence would be very broad. Yeah, I think intelligence looks, intelligence can look very different. for example, there's like someone like you who is like, very, very good at math and: building information. And then there's like someone like my brother who is like dropped out of high school, and he's like 14, and it's like, really, really, not a book person at all on paper. He's not an intelligent person, but like he can He can like build 4 wheel drives from nothing and engines from nothing. And you can learn complicated machine tooling that requires math. : and he can also, like he can also have a conversation with literally anybody. And I feel like that's that's a different type of intelligence that maybe we don't always like, This is maybe not exactly what we think of when we when we say, intelligence

G: okay, I need to hone in. I think what's really unique about your positionality here is that you're a coach. You're a coach for disabled individuals. And so I guess I'm just interested to know, like, maybe, like your methodology, or just like some keystones that you use for coaching like, and I know that every like you work with nuero divergent. You work with people from varying physical disabilities to. Is there any like methodology that you use? Or is every single person different?

Fuck around and find out

k: everyone is different, But I'd say that a commonality you know, it's a little bit of a like fuck around to find out mentality which I might better define as being flexible, and in the approach being flexible with the outcome. being flexible. With what climbing, looks like the different people. it might not even look like leaving the ground, you know. yeah, fluid being fluid with expectations and outcomes.

G: You just said like that might not. In leaving the ground. You say a little bit more about that, like experience.

k: so yeah, it’s common for a child with autism to come into the gym for the first time. And like it's a very overwhelming space. There's a lot of bright lights and colors and people and sounds and then. you know, putting on a harness might just be like even too much for the 1st for the 1st session. But we might try to just like touch a yellow hold-- walk around and touch a yellow hold. And that might the climb that day.

G: really seems like you ground into this idea of like no expectations when it comes to that. And maybe with your own climbing as well….

k: Yeah, I think so. And it's like being really open to like what who is a climber and what does climbing look like? Because I think it can just be very different to different people. And the non disabled climbing community, I would say that we have a big emphasis on like, Oh, you're not a climber unless you are lead climbing, or you're not a climber cause you didn't really climb that route because you're on top rope. Comments like "that boulder is so easy it's not even graded." and framing things in this very rigid way. So yeah, the definition of climbing can be so much bigger than that.

G: The definition of climbing is---

k: Oh god, don't make me define that.

Inclusive gym

G: If you could create like an inclusive rock climbing gym like you just have any resources like anything like, what does that look like? Have you thought about this? Or like maybe using this as a baseline, but things that you wish that you had more of, more resources.

k: I haven't thought about it in great detail. I would say. if it was unlimited resources. Well, the gym would be free. And it would have outdoor spaces for climbing, not just indoor spaces for climbing. Obviously we would want all of the areas to be wheelchair accessible, and work out equipment to be I don't know more more varied, I guess. For people with disabilities.. And even like, I don't have a lot of experience with that, so I can't totally… . So I would say, like I would love to have like a like a really slabby wall.. like like a like, almost like a ramp, like a little steeper. Maybe so like maybe like a graduated ramp. So it's like less steeper. But like, but like, you know, something that you could walk up and of course nice overhanging walls.

G: In what ways do you feel supported at Mesa?

k: Hmm! I think MESA is very supportive with like allowing me to create the spaces that I want to see. and like they provide financial support, like to pay me to do it. But they also like provide. They're pretty open at like providing : access to the gym. I think, like the culture generally, is like very accepting. You know, even at the corporate level the culture is very accepting and interested in growing diversity, And and disability being like a key pillar of that.

G: Are there ways that you feel like you could be more supported?

k: Oh, always! it's almost what you could always have more, have more. more money and and more equipment, and maybe like more resources for training probably, especially in the neurodivergent realm. Where, like, I, I do that stuff. But I'm not an expert. Yeah….

What has climbing taught you?

G: what are a few words, or whatever you could just say, like. Just yeah, what are a few words that describe the lessons that climbing has taught you.

k: I think I think I've learned a lot of problem solving. Or maybe the the ability to apply my problem solving skills in in different: in different settings. And so like. yeah, and I think that's a that's a a big one. and maybe improve my confidence in my ability to solve problems and ability to, Yeah. Solve problems and situations that I'm unfamiliar with or even like topics, I'm unfamiliar with just having this really big like deep experience base of of having solved a lot of problems

G: So it's like climbing is a space where you get to like, explore problems and solve them, and then use the skills that you learn there to apply in other contexts.

k: Yeah, for example, like I did so many bicep curls, now i can lift anything I want.

G: So it it's like problem solving is like a muscle. Right? When you talk about thinking laterally, do you feel like, I just want your definition with that from the beginning. It's like it feels like, that's a type of problem solving. But you think that climbing doesn't train that specifically?

Progressive vs lateral

k: No, it must, it must do somewhat. But I I don't feel like I have seen for me the like a big increase in that lateral problem solving.

G: what do you think would help you with the lateral problem solving.

k: probably studying something.

G: when you're talking about lateral problem solving. It sounds like your definition of that is like, making connections across seemingly disparate domains. Okay? And maybe climbing is actually, that's a limitation of it. I wonder if there's any activities that like, I wonder if it's like surfing or like, I just think about like different activities that we can engage in ---

k: running?

G: Do you think Running could help with thinking laterally?

k: I don't know, Because I have to think laterally to think about this question!

G: we're talking about these different layers of problem solving, like lateral.. What do you think like climbing trains you in? So we have lateral thinking, what is, what kind of thinking does climbing help you with?

k: *without a beat* Progressive. I do this. And then I do this. And then I do this.
And then I did this.

G: Okay? So I like that definition. This, then this, then this, what is lateral?
And can you come up with a simplified way of saying it, even though it's requiring you to think laterally, I think you think laterally better than you think. you always push my thinking.

k: Maybe I have trouble thinking laterally about myself. I have a hard time thinking about my situation objectively um, simplified definition of the lateral thinking. I mean for progressive… I think, like it's more like you're looking up. And you're seeing: Here are my 3 options. Which one do I want to take first, versus laterally, it's like, draw upon everything in your brain to think about what could connect to this thing sideways. And it's more creative. It's not a multi-choice question. It's a, it's an open, ended question.

G: Sounds like Alpine is kind of open-ended.

k: Yes, true.yes.