Tell me about yourself

1
00:00:07.900 --> 00:00:08.740
Gabriela Hernandez: Okay.

2
00:00:09.530 --> 00:00:12.469
Gabriela Hernandez: thank you so much for being here with me.

3
00:00:12.876 --> 00:00:26.339
Gabriela Hernandez: So basically, yeah, I I did explain the study. I'm really. But in particular for this interview. I'm really interested in understanding your experiences with disability, math, rock climbing and problem solving. So we're gonna cover a lot of ground.

4
00:00:26.700 --> 00:00:28.599
Gabriela Hernandez: And yeah, so that's it.

5
00:00:29.160 --> 00:00:35.910
Gabriela Hernandez: Alright. Please tell me your name, age, and how long you have been climbing.

Describe your disability

6
00:00:36.210 --> 00:00:42.740
christopher: My name is christopher Nix. I'm 23 years old, and I've been climbing a little less than 2 years.

8
00:00:47.930 --> 00:00:49.789
Gabriela Hernandez: Hey? That's insane.

9
00:00:50.460 --> 00:00:55.269

Gabriela Hernandez: Can you briefly describe your disability and how it affects your daily life?

10
00:00:56.706 --> 00:01:01.733
christopher: So I'm below the knee amputee I do wear a prosthetic. I would say that every day like is different with my disability. like somedays. I go throughout the whole day without thinking about it, and then other days like this, past week, by the end of the day on Sunday I could barely walk, so it is really ever changing and honestly no day is the same.

00:01:32.460 --> 00:01:35.759
Gabriela Hernandez: And when did your amputation happen?

18
00:01:36.070 --> 00:01:37.530
christopher: March eleventh 2022.

When did you start climbing?

00:01:41.310 --> 00:01:48.299
Gabriela Hernandez: And did you start rock climbing after?

christopher: Yeah, I started. Two months after my amputation

22
00:01:50.520 --> 00:01:52.660
Gabriela Hernandez: I saw you when you walked in the gym!

24
00:01:55.810 --> 00:01:58.099
Gabriela Hernandez: did you have any experience before?

25
00:01:58.290 --> 00:02:00.390
christopher: Like every, maybe, like every 2 years, I would come out here with my aunt and uncle and climb in Salt lake, but it. But it was like 5.5, 5.6 outside…

Gabriela Hernandez: Okay, is there anything that else that you want me to know about your disability, or how it impacts your day to day life?

Relationship with math

00:02:29.880 --> 00:02:33.540
Gabriela Hernandez: Alright, let's talk about your relationship with math. What is your relationship with math?

31
00:02:37.492 --> 00:02:40.870
christopher: My mom is a math teacher. I have a good relationship with math. For me, I think the appeal to math, it's just like it makes sense like there's there's some stuff like in my other subjects in school like history or language arts, but like even when you arrive at the answer to me…It doesn't make sense, whereas with math, like each step along the way makes sense, um, almost like a puzzle.

39
00:03:17.980 --> 00:03:19.620
Gabriela Hernandez: Why do you say it's like a puzzle?
40

00:03:20.790 --> 00:03:26.739
christopher: because, like all the all the pieces have to come together for you to arrive to the proper answer and if one part of that is missing, then you won't get the correct answer.

Gabriela Hernandez: can you share any positive experiences related to learning math, like, anything that happened in the classroom a good teacher or an a ha moment.

49
00:03:53.740 --> 00:03:54.680
christopher: So I took AP Calc, my senior year of high school and I had a really good teacher, but it just did not click for me at the time Like, I think I still had an A in the class. But like the concepts did not make sense at all. But then, the next year I was taking… I had to take calc 1 and 2, I think back to back Trimesters in college… and it wasn't a great teacher. But the concept all made sense enough. Just thought it was really cool cause like less than 6 months before that, I was struggling to make the easiest connections in the class.

00:05:00.440 --> 00:05:02.579
Gabriela Hernandez: what do you think was like the difference?

christopher: I think just like being exposed to? Having already having, like the background knowledge.

Yeah. And like, since it was an Ap. Class like I didn't really haven't like. I didn't really put pressure on myself and like the stuff that I did understand, I really understood and absorbed it. Whereas in some classes, like my classes now, it's really hard.

74
00:05:30.050 --> 00:05:39.759
Gabriela Hernandez: So you're a student right now. Yeah. And you're saying that right now it's harder to feel like you're retaining the content. Why would you say that?

76
00:05:42.320 --> 00:05:44.619
christopher: It seems like the volume of the material, and like growing up, and even my my first year in college before Covid. everything was in person, and like taking notes on an ipad, wasn't a thing. and now I think even my, besides anatomy, I think in my, in person, classes are still the majority, The majority of the class content is online. And I feel like one, it's such a different learning environment and two, it is more busy work.

Gabriela Hernandez: how many classes are you taking

christopher : 15 credits.

How do you use math in day to day life?

Gabriela Hernandez: Jesus. Okay, so would you say, you use math in your day to day life?

christopher: I would say so. Yeah, But like I would say on more like a subconscious level.

Gabriela Hernandez: How are you using math subconsciously?

christopher: I mean, I would say, like a combination of all, I mean even like something as small, as like with pickle ball, you know, trying to think of how hard I can swing and the angle to go over the net, but land.

Gabriela Hernandez: You were texting me about like when you're clipping like. Can you explain some of that to me. Yeah.

christopher: well, actually, I can go to the obvious. I mean, like with my leg, with like the prosthetic side being on the wall, there's a certain angle that, like you're hips and legs to have to be in relation to the wall for the foot to stay on the wall; it's normal for all climbers but more so for prosthetic climbers.

Gabriela Hernandez: Okay, so hips need to stay out farther to keep the tension?

christopher: Yeah, which means there is a fine balance because you need to weight it to stay on, but there is trusting it too much and I will get thrown off. Even just like clipping like I would say, I think math goes through my mind subconsciously almost every movement when I am climbing cause I am like "oh, my right s really pumped. So I'm gonna like, I think I have 3 more moves until I have to clip, So maybe I'll try to shake out my right arm before I have to climb." Also, "I mean 5 feet above my clip now, I have to make 3 moves like, I guess now rather than later…"

Gabriela Hernandez: yeah, are you like thinking about your fall as well, like another element, 5 feet above my clip?

Resting?

christopher: Yeah, and I think resting as well. I think I have a tendency to rest too much, and it's sometimes it's hard to find that balance between like when you're resting too much versus when you're actually doing something about it…I climb too slow and think too hard, like Sometimes I think too much.

Gabriela Hernandez: What? Okay, so what are the repercussions like? You rest too much on a fine like. How is that going to affect the rest of your climb?

christopher: I mean, it's just like it's longer on the wall. So you get more pumped, especially like in the like, the bottom half of the route, if you rest too much then you will have to pay at the top half off the route. That is something I have been working on.

Context for climbing?

Gabriela Hernandez: Okay. How often do you climb?

christopher: right now? It's like, 3 times a week. Most indoors right now, because of the climbing season and because of school

Gabriela Hernandez: You compete. Can you tell me about your competitions that you engage in?

christopher: There's Nationals that we just did in March, in Maryland. And if you get in the top 3, then you make the Us. National team (Which I made in 2nd). Then if you're on the team, you're able to compete in the World Cup. This year, there's a World Cup here in Salt Lake, There's one in Innsbruck

Gabriela Hernandez: How did you become interested in climbing? You spoke a little bit of like your experience in Salt Lake growing up

Wrestling?

christopher: honestly. It was completely random, like one of my friends from high school was in town, and we went paragliding, for like 2 months then we went climbing, it was super hard, but I immediately felt like balanced on the wall because I had four points of contact. I also think wresting as well gave me a good foundation…

Gabriela Hernandez: you wrestled in high school, right?

christopher: And in College.

Gabriela Hernandez: how does you think your wrestling experience like inform your relationship to climb?

christopher: I mean, like the competitive side of things, obviously. But then also, just like the training: I think it definitely gave me a good foundation for being an amputee and also for climbing. Knowing you have to work really hard to get good at something. I have had to work really hard to improve my climbing, and also just wanting to be the best that I can be. If I wasn't this competitive, I would not be climbing the way I am. Last year, I wanted to be the best of the world. This year, I am so busy with school. I would say the biggest take away [from wrestling] is discipline and work ethic.

Problem-solving in general ?

Gabriela Hernandez: So now we're shifting gears into problem solving so how do you define problem solving in general. And yeah, think about it. Take your time.

christopher: Word vomit: problem solving is the ability to to come up with a solution, when you're given a problem, but you have multiple setbacks along the way. Does that make sense? It wouldn't be problem solving if you did not have set backs.

Gabriela Hernandez: Can you say more about the multiple setbacks like, do you think that's always part of the process?

christopher: Yeah, I think it is. it's almost like a puzzle, you put pieces together along the way.

Problem-solving in math?

Gabriela Hernandez: And so how would you define problem solving in math? Is that congruent with your definition? Or is there any things you'd like to add?

christopher: In a way there is, there is steps, right? And those steps lead you to get the answer.

Problem-solving and climbing?

Gabriela Hernandez: Okay, so what about problem solving and climbing? Are there any stark differences or things that you think are very similar that you'd like to touch on.

christopher: Yeah, I would say, it's more similar, like, you know, if you make you make errors on the bottom of a route, then you're gonna pay for them later. Getting to the top, or getting to the answer, like, obviously it doesn't always have to be perfect to make it the top. I guess it is the same in math. If you can think about and figure out why your answer doesn't make sense, you can fix it.
If I really mess up at the bottom of the climb, and I'm like overgripping or something like, you usually know that you are getting pumped, so you will rest here longer than I normally would.

Throught process when planning to climb a route?

Gabriela Hernandez: can you describe your thought process when you're planning to climb a route ,like one that might particularly challenge you.

christopher: I would say, the first thing I look for is like any really hard right foot moves, specifically like right foot clips

Gabriela Hernandez: How can you tell when something's going to be a right foot clip?

christopher: I guess this is something that comes with time with route reading

Gabriela Hernandez: Can you explain that, though?

christopher: It's hard to explain.

Gabriela Hernandez: like for me, I feel like I always think right foot right hand. I'm like, oh, if I'm throwing up with my right hand, I should probably have my right foot planted. But then sometimes it's not that simple, because you have to back flag or front flag, right?

christopher: That is when it gets weird, when I have to use flags or drop knees. Flags are only something that I notice when I am on the wall, actually in the movement itself, not something I can anticipate from the ground. But like, heel hooks and drop knees and stuff, I can read those from the ground.
I drop knee a lot on the left side to avoid using the right leg.

Gabriela Hernandez: how does a dropped knee help?

christopher: I mean, I like sometimes it does. It makes me like a little harder. But, it's like sometimes there's like a foot, you know, that typically you'd have to really pull in with to keep your hips into the wall,
whereas for me, if it's like a really high right foot, it can't give you the power to go up.

Gabriela Hernandez: Why, it drop me, though, like why not your hip squared to the wall?

christopher: I think you're able to get more length when you drop your knee out of having your hip to the wall versus having them squared. New climbers, they want to like keep their hips out of the wall---they don't understand how to get length.

Gabriela Hernandez: drop knee is helpful for leveraging. Like to get length, because you're pretty short, right? So you like need, like all the length you can get. How tall are you

christopher: on a windy day? Maybe 5.7

Gabriela Hernandez: Okay, okay. So you're saying for your thought process when climbing around like, first of all, like, what are going to be the righ, the hard right moves and right clips. Is there anything else you are thinking about?

christopher: yeah, I think about crux sections and rests. The first part of the climb is pretty chill, and then the overhang gets spicy. Really, like Where is the crux? And where can i rest after? I try to figure out my pace for the climb… I'm not saying that I follow that every time.

Gabriela Hernandez: How often would you say your plan aligns with llike what actually happens when I climb. Oh, it goes. It's like almost exactly

christopher: Oh, it goes. It's like almost exactly to plan. It works most of the time. Most of the time, It's probably like 80 percent. But there are a lot of different aspects, maybe youre not hydrated, And so you get super pumped.

Gabriela Hernandez: Okay, is there anything else that you would say? Is it part of your thought process when you're planning around? Do you like to go for the on site, or do you like?

christopher: Nah, I am not a good onsighter. I um, yeah I would say I am not the best onsighter.

Gabriela Hernandez: why is that?

christopher: I think, as an amputee, there is so much movement you have to figure out on the wall. Cause sometimes a move just will not work. LIke there is a clip on the 11c, it was on an arete, there was a clip I just could not do. I had to really just toe down on the right side. I had to spend 3 or 4 sessions just one that one clip. I'm projecting 13s, But there's one click on, you know an 11c that shut me down. I ended up figuring it out with a really weird toe hook. I have never been more scared of my life of this clip.

Emotional State?

Gabriela Hernandez: okay, do you ever feel like your emotional state affects like your ability to climb a route?

christopher: ummm, i would say yeah, I Would be lying if i said it didn't, because it affects everything in my life. However, I don't think that it affects my climbing as much as it affects other aspects of my

life, or even other sports. but I think it's also like another appeal climbing for me was in that time of my life, when I started climbing like it was like I had no other worries in the world when I was on the wall. I think it is the only sport that has been that way. Like wrestling was never like that…

Gabriela Hernandez: What do you think it is about climbing that demands--

christopher: I think you have to engage your entire mind, your emotions, everything. It's like everything has to be connected. In wrestling, I could almost wrestle before I knew how to walk, when you do it for so long, you can do it without thinking about it. Um, whereas climbing, climbing as an amputee, I was a student of the sport i guess, whereas with wrestling, I was at a high enough level once I got older that I was not a student any more.

Gabriela Hernandez: what what about in 10 years? Do you feel like you'll always feel like a student.

christopher: I think so, yeah, even if you top a route, there is always things you have done better and there is always harder routes, and maybe it's because I have given, I have had more success in climbing than I have in wrestling and maybe that's part of the reason. whereas wrestling like I always felt like I was like on the edge of being a great wrestler….

Success in Climbing?

Gabriela Hernandez: how are you successful? How are you defining success in climbing?

christopher: Um, it is more on a personal level. Um, because like wrestling my weakest point in my wrestling was that I did not believe in myself, but in climbing, um I genuinely I believe that I can be the best in the world if I want to be, but in wrestling I never felt like that.

Gabriela Hernandez: Great. Thank you.

Breaking beta?

Gabriela Hernandez: Okay: so in what ways do you find yourself like breaking Beta on routes. Or do you?

christopher: I don’t think I do.

Gabriela Hernandez: so I guess. First of all, let's define breaking beta.
How would you define breaking beta?

christopher: doing something in the climb that isnt how it was intended to be climbed. I mean I definitely do sometimes but I feel like I am, I put myself in uncomfortable climbing positions that force me to learn to use my prosthetic. I feel like I use my prosthetic in a way that a lot of amputees cannot. Just because I have forced myself to figure it out.
Like, when I broke my ankle recently, I learned so much from that (learning to use my prosthetic), and it’s all carried over.

Gabriela Hernandez: hmmm. Okay. I mean, like I even feel as a short climber. I break Beta all the time.

christopher: But i’m not---It's just like in my eyes, I don't really see it breaking beta because that is the appeal to climbing, you know, ten people can climb one route and every one does it differently and it might not be noticeable at first. It’s in the subtle differences, even if it is not apparent at first. We can all do it differently

PS in climbing that sticks out to you

Gabriela Hernandez: can you? Okay, so, you kind of touched on this a little bit with your cruxy 11C. But do you have any other examples of like a problem solving experience while climbing that stands out to you?

christopher: Maybe, mostly with bouldering, yeah. I feel like that is bouldering, when you carrying out the movement, espeically indoors, they really try to force one specific movement.
I think it's much more difficult to break beta bouldering than it is on rope climbing. I also feel like I boulder way harder outside than I do inside I think that is because I am an amputee and the setting of boulders inside force a specific movement, whereas climbing outdoors, there is space for adaptation.

Gabriela Hernandez: Seems like a big thing that keeps coming up for you is like adaptation. And like what spaces afford adaptation.

Working with others

Gabriela Hernandez: but when you're on the wall. It's like just you, right. But there is this dimension of like working with others. Can you share that process a little bit?

christopher: Yeah. I mean, I think yeah, I think it comes out really trusting who is belaing me, because if I am climbing at my limit, I would rather have someone I trust, and that is impacts my climbing and I may overgrip or just not be as fluid… whereas you are climbing with someone you trust, you do not even have to think about

Gabriela Hernandez: do you feel like when you're in the process of trying to flash a route like, do you talk to people about that?

christopher: *nods no*

Gabriela Hernandez: okay, so that's more of like a solo process for you.

Gabriela Hernandez: Do you ask for Beta when you're on the wall, or is it something you like to figure out yourself?

christopher: No, because, like it's honestly hard, it's it's hard for anybody to like, If there's a Big right hard move, it takes only a ride leg amputee to know how to handle that.

Gabriela Hernandez: Have you found anyone with the right amputation that can help you like Ronnie, is he left? And so is Jono. Okay, okay, yeah

christopher: I don't think so. Yeah. it is really hard-- there is a lot of new amputees here that are right leg-- it's hard to-- i mean the fundamentals and the movements are the same-- but it is hard for me to help with their many questions about how to do certain movements, but there is such a big gap in their skills and abilities. I mean you would understand if I was like yeah you have to get your left hip into the wall to keep your balance, but they don't understand what that means.

Gabriela Hernandez: Is that specific to them being amputees are being new climbers? Or a combination?

christopher: yeah, I think a combination.

Do you feel disabled?

Gabriela Hernandez: we spent lot of time with problem solving, which makes complete sense. Because that's literally what my studies about now, we're just gonna talk a little bit about like inclusivity and rock

climbing so like would you? I guess first and foremost, do you? In what ways. Do you feel supported in the climbing gym , and in what ways do you not?

christopher: I mean, I would say my disability is the most adaptable, I mean I can like-- there are some routes that tanner just cannot climb. Whereas I feel like, there is not a lot of routes that I can't figure out, I guess except for slab. I don't feel disabled on a regular basis, but then like, on Tuesday for example i was walking back from pickball class and like, I felt really disabled. I would say for amputees like Jono and me that are super active, we don't really feel disabled, we just carry on like normal. But there are bad days that we do feel disabled.

Gabriela Hernandez: How do you define disability…you're like, I only feel disabled when it like, when it hurts…Can we generalize that notion a little bit?

christopher: something that affects your ability to live day to day life, I want to say, like in a negative way.

Gabriela Hernandez: when could disability be positive?

christopher: I guess I in that way, like I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for my disability. I wouldn't have this community.

Gabriela Hernandez: So something that affects your ability to live day to day live. And it can be. It does feel to you mostly negative. But it's hard for you to say that because of the positive outcomes of the community.

Empowerment

christopher: To that positive part, I also think, especially when it comes to traumatic disability, it is empowering for me to get to the top of a climb and sometimes I think back to my thoughts and feelings when I first became an amputee, um specifically those first two months when I was just so up and down. I thought like, I can get right up and start walking, then I couldnt… like I felt genuinely broken. So when I top out on a climb and give it all I can, its powerful to see how far I have come.

Gabriela Hernandez: in what ways has climbing impacted your life?

Impacts of climbing

christopher: I mean, like, it's what got me the year in the san diego following my amputation. It was my safe space, my community, yeah if it was not for climbing-- I wouldn't say it saved my life-- but I definitly wouldn't be doing as well as I am. Like, it was like go to the climbing gym or go sit in your room in an old hospital.
Gabriela Hernandez: okay? I feel like we've kind of touched on this. We're almost done. By the way.

Disability impact PS in day to day life?

Gabriela Hernandez: How do you feel like your disability may affect your problem, solving abilities in your day to day life?

christopher: I think it makes it better. It makes me more creative in my problem solving abilities, And honestly, I think a lot of this because of Jono. having someone to show you the answer to your problems, specifially an amputee… Jono showed me to put business cards when you sink in your socket, it works beautifully cause it takes up space and keeps you from bottoming out on your socket.

Gabriela Hernandez: This is great! So I guess, more generally like, in what ways do you feel like You are more creative in your day-to-day life, due to your disability?

christopher: I guess it's like knowing that there is a solution. To pretty much all your problems like, whereas before, like sometimes, I might just like settle. That's like not being perfect, whereas, like now i feel like i convinced myself that there is always a solution.

Gabriela Hernandez: what is it about your disability that would make you change that mindset about there always being a solution?

christopher: I think I want to go back to the first two months, I kept thinking it's not getting better, I am not going to walk. And then with time, everything worked itself out. It taught me resilience, but (and?) so did the wrestling and being a recon marine.

Creativity?

Gabriela Hernandez: I want to get more at this creative part, because I feel like this is good, like not even specific examples. So, Because you know that there's a solution that you're gonna be more open minded to the creative ways of getting there?

christopher: Yah, And I feel like in a way that's also made me more like connected with myself. So like--something that just popped into my head--I don't get phantom pain a lot. The only time i get phantom pain is like if my socket is not fitting well or something, and i am hitting a certain spot and I think that is a connection i would not have made before, a creative problem solving skill.
Like before, it would just be like oh I am getting phantom pain but I wouldn't know why, but then I started to notice these things that contribute to issues that I was having, be it or diet or water consumption. yeah, there's a lot of or like, you know, like me telling you like my socket isn't fitting well because i have lost a couple pounds… you start to notice things and are more connected to your body

Gabriela Hernandez: Would you say it makes you more embodied?

christopher: for sure.

Embodiment?

Gabriela Hernandez: your disability has made you more embodied?

christopher: yeah.

Gabriela Hernandez: do you think that's always the caser for everyone who's disabled? Do you think they are more embodied, or like, are there certain conditions?

christopher: I would say there are exceptions, But I think overall? Yeah, because it forces you to slow down and think about the things that truly have a deep meaning within you, I guess the things that make you happy and things that make you sad…

Gabriela Hernandez: If you're not disabled like, what's the opposite of that? So if you're not, if you're able bodied, are we not slowing down to like build that connection? Or is it harder to cause like

christopher: I feel like before I lost my legs it was easy to get in the flow of life and be complacent in a way in all aspects off life. I guess, it forces you to slow down. But also I was in the limb salvage for a year. I like had my accident and had surgery and they tried to save my leg for a year, doing different surgeries, a lot of time in the hospital, injections, pretty much trying everything to save my leg. It is

very disheartening, the whole process because they don't wanna give up on it but i knew, i knew my body,
I knew none of the treatments would work, but it was like protocol, and they had to try for certain amount before cutting it off. During that time, i gained a lot of perspective of my life because i was in the hospital all day every day, it made me more embodied?

Gabriela Hernandez: How do you define embodiment? To reword what you said, having an understanding of like a deep meaning within you. Is that congruent with it, or is like something else you would like to add?

christopher: yeah, I feel like, I guess that's probably what makes you a little bit…Knowing what makes you feel fulfilled as a person. When are you in touch with your body….It's about thinking about the connections between. Knowing the solutions to your problems, sometimes you feel lost, why am i in school right now, why i am in this anatomy class that is kicking my ass, where it is like if you are in touch with your body, you know it sucks right now but you know it is worth it to achieve your goal. If we were both prosthetics and had the same degree, you would want someone who was also an amputee because they know that I've been through the same thing and that i understand how much having a good fitting leg can change your entire life.

What has disability taught you?

Gabriela Hernandez: okay, last questions. And I know we've touched on this a lot. But like, what are a few words that would describe the lessons that disability has taught you?

christopher: confidence that it will get better. Patience. And some of that is just having perspective of the entire disabled community… Knowing that someone always has it worse so you have to be grateful for what you do have

What has climbing taught you?

christopher: it is hard because my relationship with climbing with congruent with my relationship with disability, so a lot those go hand and hand together. Cause like, in most ways, when i have grown as a climber i have grown as a person with disability.