

## Episode 2.8 - Giving Junk New Life with Jesse Bumgarner

Judy Warth: Welcome to this episode of Disability Exchange. We are excited because we've got an exciting guest today who's going to talk about his business and his experience. Our episode today is hosted by none other than Laury Scheidler and myself, Judy Warth. We are a collaborative effort with the staff from the Midwest Public Health Training Center at the University of Iowa College of Public Health. Our whole goal is to enrich and uplift the voices of people with disabilities and those who support them. So today we are excited to have Jesse Bumgarner with us. But first, let my co-host introduce herself. Laury.

Laury Scheidler: Thank you, Judy. Hi, I am Laury Scheidler. I work as a social work practicum student at the UCEDD with Judy and others. And I'm excited to be here today and get to know our guest in a new and better way.

Judy Warth: So welcome Jesse. And Jesse, you have someone with you? Who's with you?

Jesse Bumgarner: My mom.

Hope Bumgarner: Hello. I'm Hope.

Judy Warth: Excellent. Will you guys tell us a little bit about... And you're going to see, you guys, we interchange JD and Jesse around. JD, will you tell us a little bit about yourself? How old are you and where do you live?

Jesse Bumgarner: I'm 20 and I live in Spencer, Iowa. I like to be artsy, which means I'd like to draw, work with metal, and make cool sculptures.

Judy Warth: Wow. And I've seen some of your sculptures, Jesse. I first met you at the Iowa Association for Person Supporting Employment First conference this year, and I saw all of the things that you made. And I tell you, you saw us. We almost got into a fight who was going to get the penguin. When you say that you are creative and artsy, can you tell our listeners about what you create?

Jesse Bumgarner: I make metal art and sell it online and at my shop.

Hope Bumgarner: Tell them what your mission statement is. That kind of sums it up too.

Jesse Bumgarner: Inspiring others while giving junk metal new life.

Judy Warth: Inspiring others while giving junk metal new life. That is so cool.

Hope Bumgarner: He came up with that mission statement all on his own. I said, "Here's what a mission statement is. What would you like yours to be?" And he just rattled that off, and it fit, it stuck. It really does say what you do.

Jesse Bumgarner: That it does.

Laury Scheidler: It's very creative.

Judy Warth: JD, how'd you get started doing this?

Jesse Bumgarner: It was kind of through 4-H, an activity, pretty much, that started all of it. It's a bucket of junk where they just give you a bucket of junk and then they show you safety.

Hope Bumgarner: They teach you how to weld.

Jesse Bumgarner: Stuff like that. And they just say, "Make something." No instructions or anything.

Judy Warth: What was the first thing you made?

Jesse Bumgarner: It's like Herky the Hawkeye or Cy the Cyclone. It's a bird-like sculpture with big glasses, if you want to say that.

Hope Bumgarner: It does. It looks like Herky the Hawkeye or Cy the Cyclone. So depending on what school you support, it's...

Jesse Bumgarner: That, or some people have seen ostriches, aliens.

Hope Bumgarner: A lot of things.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Hope Bumgarner: But you did that for the first time when you were in eighth grade and then they helped you weld that first item, didn't they?

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Hope Bumgarner: But it was all your design.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Judy Warth: Neat.

Jesse Bumgarner: And after that, I slowly started welding.

Hope Bumgarner: Yep, You did Bucket of Junk Challenge every year up until you graduated.

Jesse Bumgarner: That's pretty much it.

Laury Scheidler: Wow. Hey, JD, what do you think was the coolest thing you've made?

Jesse Bumgarner: I've made a combine. That was pretty cool. And it's all from scratch.

Hope Bumgarner: All from scrap metal.

Judy Warth: Well, what are some of the things, since our listeners may not be able to see what you create, can you tell us what you use? I've seen horseshoes, springs, spark plugs. What all do you use to create your magic?

Jesse Bumgarner: It's just scrap metal which would've gone to the junkyard or Shines.

Hope Bumgarner: Yeah. The pieces that you used for the combine, those all came from-

Jesse Bumgarner: Came from Demco.

Hope Bumgarner: ... Demco, a company here in Spencer that helps him by giving him scrap metal. And so it's all finely cut, different teardrops. And some of them were... What shapes were they? Do you

remember? Squares and triangles, teardrop stuff. Then he'll get his bucket of junk. And this was the Bucket of Junk Challenge that you made the combine with, wasn't it?

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Hope Bumgarner: So he gets this big, five-gallon bucket, and he dumps out the metal and he says to me, he's only seen it for a few minutes, and he's like, "Mom, this year I'm going to make a combine." I'm like, "Okay, you've looked at the junk metal for two minutes. But okay." And I have learned long ago not to doubt him, that when he says he can make this out of this, he usually does it. And he made a combine.

Jesse Bumgarner: And another story with the Bucket of Junk Challenge is this was when it was in the school building. I told the instructor I was going to make a tractor.

Hope Bumgarner: I teach in the building. So the guy came to me and he said, "Hope, JD says he is going to make a tractor this year. I don't know." And I looked at him and I said, "Well, if he says he can make it, he'll make it." And sure enough, you made a tractor and you sold it to the neighbor.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah. And the instructor I told that to end up being amazed.

Hope Bumgarner: He was amazed.

Laury Scheidler: That's wonderful. So when I picture a tractor, I picture something big. So what different sizes do you make in your structures?

Jesse Bumgarner: I've made stuff that was small, medium-

Hope Bumgarner: The tractor was maybe like a foot-

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah, I'd say just a foot, maybe more.

Hope Bumgarner: A foot wide and maybe a foot tall. It was like a tabletop tractor, like a kid's toy tractor that they play with that could sit on your tabletop.

Jesse Bumgarner: I've made medium tractors or about that big of a tractor.

Hope Bumgarner: That's how big that combine was.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah. But remember the one tractor someone asked me to make that had the opening?

Hope Bumgarner: Yes. Tell him what you like to do.

Jesse Bumgarner: Sometimes if the pieces still move, I try to leave them movable. Otherwise, I think that adds just a little more character to it.

Hope Bumgarner: Tries to get things so that if there's a-

Jesse Bumgarner: A hinge that moves, I leave it so it moves.

Hope Bumgarner: And he's done tons on dogs and he leaves the hinge so that it flaps up and down.

Laury Scheidler: That was very thoughtful.

Judy Warth: Yeah, I remember seeing some things made with hinges and all kinds of fascinating things. So you get some of your materials from Demco. Where do you get the other ones from? Where do you go seeking all the parts that you use?

Jesse Bumgarner: Auctions, donations, garage sales, yard sales, where I can just find them.

Hope Bumgarner: Yeah. There's been times when we come home to the house and there's boxes or five-gallon buckets full of junk metal that a farmer's dropped off and they'll send me a message, "Dropped off such and such," or, "Do you want such and such?" And then we'll say yes. And sometimes there's people that a relative will pass away and they live on a farm and so they'll have JD out and he'll pick through their junk piles and fill up dad's truck with junk. We've got a couple farmers in Minnesota who go picking for him at different farms. And then we go up there and get metal from them. Tell them what you have done with people's junk metal before.

Jesse Bumgarner: other people's metal that have passed away and turned them into memories for their house, like display pieces. It's like their dad's old tools or stuff like that, which ends up being their dad's old tools-

Hope Bumgarner: Made into something.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Judy Warth: So if I had something special that I wanted to have made, I could send it to you and say, "Hey JD, can you put something together for this?"

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Judy Warth: So you do commission work too?

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah, I have.

Hope Bumgarner: Is that your favorite part?

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Hope Bumgarner: Why is that your favorite part?

Jesse Bumgarner: You get some unique commissioned pieces.

Hope Bumgarner: You like to recreate them.

Jesse Bumgarner: Like the Loch Ness Monster. Loch Ness Monster, that was kind of a tough one. Yeah.

Judy Warth: The Loch Ness Monster?

Hope Bumgarner: Yeah.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Judy Warth: Wow. What did you make it out of? What did you use?

Jesse Bumgarner: Hay forks. Big forks about... I want to say about three feet wide, something like that.

Hope Bumgarner: Well, yeah. When it was finished-

Jesse Bumgarner: Three or four feet wide.

Hope Bumgarner: ... it was probably three feet long and probably two feet wide. And then it'll stand up. They'll put posts.

Jesse Bumgarner: They'll put in the water.

Hope Bumgarner: Yep. It's going to be in the water by their dock up at the lakes.

Laury Scheidler: Wow.

Jesse Bumgarner: The thing with that was is it had to be long enough and sturdy enough.

Hope Bumgarner: But you used hay forks.

Jesse Bumgarner: And reinforced them and stuff.

Hope Bumgarner: With other parts like junk metal parts that you used.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Laury Scheidler: JD, I am fascinated by your talent. The one question I have is when you look at this metal in front of you, are you seeing a picture in your mind before you make it? Or how does that come to you?

Jesse Bumgarner: I would say sometimes it kind of depends on the piece. Sometimes I need to look at a picture just to see something, or I see something a couple times and it's like, "I could try and make that."

Hope Bumgarner: One thing that happened is he was asked to make a waving flag. The person wanted a flag that would stick in the ground and then it would be waving like it was in the wind. Well, he knew it immediately. The man asked and he's like, "Oh, I know." And you went and got...

Jesse Bumgarner: Pitchforks.

Hope Bumgarner: Yep, pitchforks. And then he put two together so that they were opposites. And then it looked like a waving flag.

Jesse Bumgarner: And I've done the same with hay forks with a blue stripe for an officer.

Hope Bumgarner: For the police. So sometimes you see it in a piece and sometimes you look at a picture of an animal and then you create it out of metal.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah. A example for that is someone asked me to make a dragon. They sent me a couple pictures and I had to look one up myself.

Judy Warth: And if you don't mind sharing with us, I know that you worked with some of the guys at Hope Haven, with Ryan and team.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah, I do.

Judy Warth: And can you tell us a little bit about one, who are these people I just bring up? Who are the folks at Hope Haven and how do they help you?

Hope Bumgarner: I'll answer that one for JD. So we worked with Ryan Jenness through Choice Employment. And so Ryan goes to the high schools. And so he met JD as I think a freshman or a sophomore. And he was at the IEP with us. And he kind of helped guided JD into the working world because JD works at the country club washing dishes. But then Ryan also worked with us as a family. And when COVID happened, Ryan really helped encourage us to set up-

Jesse Bumgarner: A Facebook page.

Hope Bumgarner: ... a Facebook page for JD's Creations. And then Ryan encouraged us to write a business plan. And then he encouraged us to do a business card. And he helped you. You and him did that together. And then we wrote a paper about how your business got started. And then he also helped us come up with a mission statement or he said, "Come up with a mission statement," and then you did that. So he kind of guided us along the path while JD was in high school.

Judy Warth: So he was kind of a teacher and kind of an inspiration both?

Jesse Bumgarner: You could say that. Yeah.

Judy Warth: Or did you teach him?

Jesse Bumgarner: Also a little bit of a friend.

Hope Bumgarner: And a friend.

Judy Warth: And a friend. And for our listeners, Ryan and Choice Employment Services are a service provider that helps people who experience disabilities in learning about jobs and getting jobs. And Ryan is a transition specialist with My Choice Employment Services with Hope Haven in Rock Valley and Spencer and that whole area up there. And sounds like he was kind of instrumental in helping you move from washing dishes at the country club to doing something you really love.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Hope Bumgarner: Darren, his dad, and I were kind of hesitant and fearful of, can we pull this off? And then when COVID happened and school shut down, I taught from home. And so we would do schoolwork in the morning. Online learning is a very hard for students with special needs. So then I said, "Well, enough of that, let's go out to our shop." And then we worked out in the shop that we added to the back of our garage and we had just gotten JD a welder that Christmas. And so we went out and he started to make things. I didn't know anything about welding. So Ryan would come and wear a mask and kind of help JD get started beyond what you already knew. And then you taught yourself a lot through just trial and error.

Jesse Bumgarner: Trial and error is a big thing on how I learned and sometimes combining information from my dad and Ryan.

Judy Warth: That is so awesome. So JD was school hard for you?

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah, it was.

Judy Warth: I really appreciate you saying that because I want some of our listeners to know that even if school is hard, if you have a passion and you have a heart, you can be successful like JD.

Hope Bumgarner: Yeah. That's why your mission statement is...

Jesse Bumgarner: Inspiring others while giving junk metal new life.

Hope Bumgarner: He wants people to be... Well, you say it. What do you want?

Jesse Bumgarner: Inspired.

Hope Bumgarner: You want to inspire other people, don't you?

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah. And just let them know anything's possible if you have something you really enjoy in life.

Hope Bumgarner: And I remember you telling me, it's like working with the junk metal because you're saving the junk metal from what?

Jesse Bumgarner: Wherever it goes.

Hope Bumgarner: Into the dump or the junkyard, by making it into something neat. It's a creation.

Judy Warth: That's very cool. I love it.

Laury Scheidler: JD, if someone wants to buy or is curious, any of our listeners want to see some of the wonderful things you've made, what is your website address?

Jesse Bumgarner: I'd say Facebook is one of the spots they could see at the metal art.

Hope Bumgarner: And then it's JD's Creations.

Jesse Bumgarner: JD's Metal Art.

Hope Bumgarner: Oh, it's [jdsmetalart.com](http://jdsmetalart.com). That's right.

Judy Warth: And we'll have a link to that with the podcast that people can get out and take a look at that. Now, JD, you just got an award this year, didn't you?

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah, I did.

Judy Warth: The Iowa Association of Persons Supporting Employment First this year awarded JD Employee of the Year, for somebody who has shown the importance in the abilities that workers who have lived experience with disability can bring to the workplace and to the world in general. And JD, your mission statement is just beautiful. It describes what I think everyone hopes is that we take something that looks like it's a wreck and we show just how beautiful and amazing it is. And all it takes is some creativity, a decent welder, and maybe a little bit of magic. And it's a pretty big honor of whole. Of everyone in the state of Iowa, you were chosen.

Laury Scheidler: What is your favorite part about being your own boss?

Jesse Bumgarner: I don't really think about it that way at all. I just kind of like what I do. I just like to see people happy and enjoy my art.

Hope Bumgarner: I would say that JD, the money doesn't really mean much to JD. School's hard, and so reading and math and understanding the financial aspect, that's not what brings him happiness. He likes to see people, like when Judy bought the penguin and they argued over the penguin and people were enjoying his art, and that's when he really gets excited. Or when you see him shine is when he sees people happy about his art or enjoying it.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Hope Bumgarner: Did I say that right?

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah. It's more about the enjoyment and the fun making it, in my opinion.

Hope Bumgarner: You don't really look at it as a job.

Jesse Bumgarner: Not really.

Laury Scheidler: I have to say that your character is inspirational. Your work is, but your character stands above all to be an inspiration to others of how humble you are and how excited you get about other people's happiness. A true in inspiration for sure.

Judy Warth: Wow, those are big praises there. JD, we like this question to kind of wrap things up, but what's your superpower?

Jesse Bumgarner: The way I see things in a 3D way and can puzzle-piece them together.

Hope Bumgarner: Do you remember when you would lay things out on the ground and say, "Hey mom, hey dad, come look. This is what I'm going to make." And you would try to tell us.

Jesse Bumgarner: They wouldn't understand it at all.

Hope Bumgarner: We couldn't see what he could see in it.

Judy Warth: Was that something when he was really little too? Did you see that?

Hope Bumgarner: Oh yes. Yeah. His dad was putting together his toddler bed. JD came to live with us as a foster child when he was 27 months. And we didn't have anything for children, Darren and I. So we got JD a toddler bed that needed to be put together. Darren's reading the direction and-

Jesse Bumgarner: I went in there, I just started putting it together.

Hope Bumgarner: He's like, "It goes here, it goes here." Darren looked at me and I'm like, "Just let him help."

Jesse Bumgarner: And after that, dad was like, "Go away. I don't need you showing me off."

Hope Bumgarner: But then when Dad has to put things together for us now still, he comes to you to help out because you see it differently than we can. You may not be able to read the directions, but you can still put it together because you see it in your head.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Judy Warth: Wow. So JD or Hope, do you have anything else you'd like to share with us today?

Hope Bumgarner: Well, I was just going to kind of put a little plug in too for JD. He's been participating in Special Olympics basketball, and Spencer just got a three-on-three team, and JD's been playing that this winter, and his team gets to go to Iowa City for the Spring Classic. So he's excited about that. And that's been something kind of fun for you to do besides just your welding.

Jesse Bumgarner: I do enjoy that.

Judy Warth: JD, you mean there's life beyond work?

Hope Bumgarner: You would say so. Yes. Right?

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Judy Warth: What do you do for fun?

Jesse Bumgarner: I like to draw for fun, play games.

Judy Warth: Video games?

Jesse Bumgarner: Watch TV

Hope Bumgarner: Video games.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Judy Warth: Very cool.

Laury Scheidler: What's your favorite video game? I'm curious.

Jesse Bumgarner: I have a variety of games I have. I don't really usually like one game. I like a multiple. Yeah.

Judy Warth: You like an array of things. Keeps life interesting.

Jesse Bumgarner: Yeah.

Judy Warth: Well, as we wrap this up, one, I want to thank you both for taking time to talk with us and sharing your passion and your inspiration that I think all of our listeners will enjoy hearing about. Laury, any parting comments from you?

Laury Scheidler: I am so excited to have gotten the opportunity to meet both of you, Jesse and Hope. And I have to say I am leaving truly inspired by who you are and why you do your work, and I'm excited to see what things you bring for the future as well.

Judy Warth: Thank you.

Jesse Bumgarner: Thank you.

Judy Warth: This is Disability Exchange, a podcast from Iowa's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. Our focus is on centering and elevating the voices of people with disabilities through meaningful conversations and connections. And today we were blessed to spend some time with JD Bumgarner and his mom, Hope. Thank you and we'll see you next time.

Caitlin Owens: Thank you for joining us today on Disability Exchange. Disability Exchange is produced by the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, which is housed at the Center for Disabilities and Development at the University of Iowa. Special thanks to Kyle Delveau for the music contribution.