

Transcript	Index/code
<p>Ethan [00:00:06] Hi, my name is Ethan Bent spelled E, T, H, A N, and today is November 18 of 2022. I am in the Payson Smith Building on USM's Portland campus with Steven Bridges , whom I will be interviewing today. Could you state and spell your name please?</p> <p>Steven [00:00:22] Sure. Steven Bridges, S, T, E, V, E, B, R, I, D, G E, S.</p> <p>Ethan [00:00:28] and I just want to let you know that you can refuse to answer any question and can end the interview at any point you desire. If we reach approximately the 90 minute mark and you feel as though you need more time to tell your story, we can conclude our interview and I can help you set up a follow up interview in the future. So I just want to go over some background information. How old are you?</p> <p>Steven [00:00:52] I'm 52.</p> <p>Ethan [00:00:54] And how do you identify yourself through terms of sexuality and gender?</p> <p>Steven [00:00:59] Gay male.</p> <p>Ethan [00:01:02] Do you use the term queer or.</p>	<p>Date/location</p>
<p>Steven [00:01:06] No, I think my generation's a little like before that.</p> <p>Ethan [00:01:11] What race or ethnicity do you best identify with?</p> <p>Steven [00:01:15] White, Caucasian, non-Hispanic? There's always a lot of those checkboxes on things, so I always try to remember.</p> <p>Ethan [00:01:24] I would love to learn about your background and your history with your family and friends. Where did you grow up?</p>	<p>Identification , Age, Sexuality</p>
<p>Steven [00:01:33] I grew up in central Maine, in a small town called North Anson with about a thousand people.</p> <p>Ethan [00:01:40] Did you live there throughout your whole childhood?</p> <p>Steven [00:01:44] Mostly. My mom remarried when I was 12, so we moved from an even smaller town to the big one of North Anson. So the same area.</p> <p>Ethan [00:01:56] Why did you prefer living in Portland to Central Maine?</p>	<p>Background, Hometown</p>

Steven [00:02:00] I came down for college and never wanted to leave. Portland has a million more things to offer than it does up there, and it's still the same up there. I go back and you see the same people in the same houses doing the same things, and I just knew that wasn't my life. And that was even before I even thought about the gay thing or anything like that. I just knew I wanted out.

Moving, Living in Portland vs Central Maine

Ethan [00:02:25] And if I could go back to your household real quick. How big was your household? Did you have many siblings?

Steven [00:02:31] Four sisters and a mom. And then when she got remarried, I had another sister or stepsister. So me and five girls total.

Ethan [00:02:41] Were you close to your family growing up?

Steven [00:02:44] Some. I was on the younger side and then there were the three older ones who were sort of out of the house by the time I started to like to get a little older and mature, so close to two of them now and one step sister who had passed away probably 15 years ago. So the house and the family gets smaller and smaller over the years.

Household, Siblings

Ethan [00:03:07] And if you don't mind me asking, was there any sort of fallout to your lack of closeness with those other family members? Or was it just sort of a gradual thing over time?

Steven [00:03:16] A gradual thing and family system sort of. They just split sometimes and had nothing to do with me or sexuality or anything. They just went on with their lives and it was much different than what our lives were.

Ethan [00:03:32] So did you form a lot of lasting friendships and relationships in your childhood, in your hometown, specifically?

Steven [00:03:41] Definitely my two best friends I've had since I was five and 12, and we're still super close to this day and one still lives up there. Never really moved away and the other one is sort of in the middle. So he's actually moved out of state. He's done a few things, came back to Maine and I love him to death.

Childhood Friendships

Ethan [00:04:05] Sorry if I already addressed this, but what age did you move.

Steven [00:04:10] Oh to Portland? 18. 18.

Ethan [00:04:12] And what school did you attend?

Steven [00:04:15] College or high school from? College, yeah. Obviously you

don't care about what? Little high school? I went to Southern Maine. Back then it was Southern Maine Tech. That was Southern Maine Community College.

Ethan [00:04:27] How do you feel about your experience there?

Steven [00:04:29] I loved it. It was, you know, so much bigger than our small town. And I just loved all the people and the opportunities. And I thought it was a great campus right on the water.

Ethan [00:04:41] And I'm just curious, was there like a specific moment you fell in love with the city?

Steven [00:04:46] Oh, I was a kid coming down. Just like coming down the highway. There's like one specific turn where all of a sudden you just kind of see the whole outline of the city and then going back home to, like, dirt roads. I'm like, Oh, man, I have to come back.

Ethan [00:05:03] And if you're okay with moving on. (Yeah.) I'm just curious how old were you when you first came out and to whom did you come out to?

Steven [00:05:12] I was probably 19 and I came out to my two best friends that I still have. And that was really tough. And then a few years later came out to my family, and that wasn't as tough. I think the first time you come out is always tougher, depending on who it is or my experience. It was, and I was a very late in life gay person. I didn't even realize until college. I always had girlfriends in school and didn't think about it. And when I came out, I thought I was going to be the worst thing in the world. And my two best friends that I still have were the most supportive and loving. And my best friend Joe came out last year after being married to a woman for 25 years. And I had no clue at all. I was like the only one that said, wow, everybody else is like, Yeah, we've always known Joe was gay. We're always wondering when he's going to divorce his wife and come out. So I think his journey was a little bit harder than mine because he waited so long until he was like 50. Mine, which was baby steps. And everybody I told was great about it. So I knew it was pretty good.

Ethan [00:06:25] When you came out to your two friends initially, did it kind of stay within that circle? Yes.

Steven [00:06:32] Absolutely. And they knew I mean, that was back in probably 89 or 90 much different times than I mean, 30 years ago. And they just didn't want to tell anybody that they would ask permission if somebody would ask like, hey, this one's asking, like, why aren't you dating anybody? And then when I came out to my family, my friend Tracy was there with me. And, you know, it was great. It was fine.

College  
Education

Reason for  
Moving to  
Portland

First time  
coming out

Ethan [00:07:01] So you kind of just answered the question, but was there no conflict then with your family?

Coming out to family

Steven [00:07:07] Not really. I sat down with my mom and my best friend, Tracy, and she had her friend there. And we just sat at the table and she knew that she wanted to hear it from me. And I told her. And like most mothers, she cried for a minute, wondering if she did something to make that happen. And then she realized, okay, there's no difference. You're still the same guy. And that's been consistent. Like everybody's like, Yeah, you never change. Like when you came out, like some people do. I just have always been me, I, me at work. Me out of work. It's all kind of the same.

Ethan [00:07:46] Were there repercussions from your broader community, be that like the other people you knew around you at school, at work, anything like that extended family?

Steven [00:07:56] Not really. Back after I came out to my family and a few more friends. It was around the time of one of the elections and some of the the equal rights amendments and stuff were starting back then and there was the Christian Civic Coalition or whatever they were called horrible people, and they were just like responding to the local paper with all these hate filled, you know, responses saying, you know, gays are dying of AIDS. That's what they should. And all this other stuff, just ridiculous stuff. And I had a friend who was a straight female, in central Maine, who was dying of AIDS, and I just got really mad and kept writing letters against the Christian Coalition League or Christian Civic League. Can't remember what they are anymore. And the final letter in the series that I kept. Every week I would respond and I just said, you know, as a gay male living in Maine and, you know, I just like blasted it and sent this letter and then realized after that I had just come out in the newspaper to most people that didn't have a clue that I was gay, and especially from a small town up in central Maine. And so my stepdad at that point didn't know that I was gay. My mom hadn't really told him. But I think he always knew, and this is totally him, just very calmly. He was reading the morning paper. He got to the the letters column and read the paper and read the letter and took down the paper and said, So Steven's gay and my mom. Like, What are you talking about? He's like, Here, it's in the paper. And I actually get cards and letters from some of my extended families saying, Hey, we read this in the paper. This is amazing. It's way before Facebook or anything like that. So you actually had to write down stuff. And so it was really weirdly touching and I always expected the worst. Like if I came out, that was going to be the end of the world. I think a lot of kids, you know, if they don't have any role models or know anything about gay life or if there's going to be any support. Or you just imagine the absolute worst. It's going to happen. And I was very lucky.

Backlash from coming out

Aids Backlash

Ethan [00:10:14] um, was or is your family religious?

<p>Steven [00:10:16] No. Although my mom, now that she's 82, seems to be getting more religious, which confuses all of us. But I think some people, when they get older in life, that's just what they do. I think they're like getting, you know, closer to the end. So they'll like, Oh, I've got to reach out or something, but I've never been religious.</p>	
<p>Ethan [00:10:37] And you spoke of a Christian or like a hateful Christian organization in your area. Was the backlash of religious groups in your local area something like a real propagator of hate?</p>	<p>Religion and coming out</p>
<p>Steven [00:10:52] Absolutely. They would go up against any referendum, any equal anything and just be out there protesting and just so super hateful, almost like the Bible. What is that church from the Midwest?</p>	
<p>Ethan [00:11:07] Westboro Baptist Church.</p>	
<p>Steven [00:11:08] Yeah, just like them. But a Maine version. They were horrible. I think they sort of dissolved over the years. Once in a while there'll be something on the news, and it's almost like a flashback because it's like, how are they still around? How are they still hating people so bad?</p>	<p>Hateful religious group</p>
<p>Ethan [00:11:25] Oh. If it's okay, we can move on to the questions on HIV and AIDS. Sure. When did you first become aware of the AIDS epidemic?</p>	
<p>Steven [00:11:38] Specifically high school. And I think it was around the time that Rock Hudson was outed for having AIDS and being gay and just the locker room talk and people starting to talk about he and Freddie Mercury and different people. And that was before I even realized that I was gay or bisexual or anything. And just knowing that it was wrong how hateful people were being about these people in their lives. But it was in the mid eighties and nobody knew a lot about HIV and AIDS. So it was a super scary, scary time. And anybody even remotely gay, they would just like assume that you had AIDS, didn't want to touch, you didn't want to be around you. And the first friend that I had, that lost her life to AIDS was the straight married woman in central Maine. And she got it from her first husband. And she went undiagnosed for years because she was a straight white woman in Maine. They didn't test her that she had cancer or lupus or all this other stuff. And by the time they finally figured it out, there wasn't even a lot they could do back then. But she went on to be an AIDS educator, went to all these schools and colleges all over the state, and was a big inspiration. So after that, yeah, many friends unfortunately have passed on, but now people are living with it. So it's so much different. And from about the age of 20, I started volunteering with the Franny Peabody(organization). Actually it was called the AIDS Project way back then, driving people to appointments, making meals for people, all sorts of stuff. So that was ingrained in me very, very early.</p>	<p>HIV/AIDS</p> <p>AIDS Project and Volunteer Work</p>

Ethan [00:13:23] Was that post your personal coming out?

Steven [00:13:28] It was around the same time. I think it all sort of collided together. It seemed like one thing back then, and it's not anymore, but it was very much the gay community was the only one that had it. That's what they seemed to say to everybody. And I'm screaming to everybody like my friend Sue is a straight white woman, not an IV drug user. Not this, not that. And so, yeah, it was a really weird time. It's still not perfect, but it's better. And the testing back then was horrible. The first time I ever got tested for HIV was at City Hall. I think it was through the public health works or whatever. And you go in, you're assigned a number, you don't say your name. It's all like very nobody wanted to be known, even get a test for HIV. And then you had to call back two weeks later and get your results. And I remember so clearly, the guy that did the test was so he shouldn't have been there. His advice to me was, Well, go home, try to calm down because it was such a big thing then to even go in and get tested, nobody wanted to know. And he said, The best advice I can give is just have it in your mind that you have it so that if in two weeks when you get the results, if you're negative, then it will be okay. So he sent this closeted, you know, 20 year old home for two weeks thinking, oh, I've got AIDS, I've got HIV. But then when I went back, I think I went back for the appointment. I don't think I called and gave him my ID number to get my results. And it was negative. You know, it was a great feeling. But those two weeks, you know, very little sleep worrying like crazy. And yeah, it was a much different time back then. Now you can do oral swabs and have instant results. So thankfully for that and the drugs that are out there now and the education and everything is so much better.

Ethan [00:15:36] You spoke on the topic of helping those who are living with AIDS or HIV. Did that experience at that testing facility sort of move you to really get into AIDS work?

Steven [00:15:51] Yes, absolutely. I didn't want other people to have to go through that, even though everybody was whoever was getting tested and most people back then didn't want to get tested, they would rather just, like get sick and go in a hospital and die than have it known that you had AIDS. And they would always try to say, Oh, I've just got cancer, I've got this or I've got that. It was a weird time. Nobody wanted to admit it. You know, you could be fired. People would find out they would discriminate against housing, not only for being gay, but especially having HIV. So, yeah, it kind of kicked my butt to do something about it.

Ethan [00:16:30] You kind of have addressed this, but did those who you knew were affected by AIDS directly receive support from their friends and family, from what you saw? Or were they even ostracized by probably 50/50?

Steven [00:16:52] Because in the gay life you don't always have the family that

Collision of  
Aids  
epidemic and  
coming out

Activism  
related to  
AIDS/HIV

you were born into. You choose your family. So they would have a lot of support from their chosen family, but not their birth family or blood family. And I think it's better today, but it's not always great still, because there is such a stigma. I mean, they used to be selling products that, you know, you would spray in your hands and it said it would kill the AIDS and just crazy stuff back then. But everybody was terrified. And my mom, when I told her about my friend Sue, who had it and was in the hospital dying, and she's like, Oh my God, I hope you've never touched her or hugged her or anything. And I mean, that's the simple minds of Central Maine that I wanted to get away from so badly. I said, I hug her, I touch her, I kiss her. I love her. I can't get AIDS from that. So I've always been a big mouth to people in that respect.

Ostracization  
/Stigma  
related to  
AIDS/HIV

Ethan [00:17:51] Would you like to tell me more about the nature of your work in terms of community work or broader political organizing?

Steven [00:18:01] Sure. Right around the time that my whole volunteer sort of life started, there was a protest on the Bush estate down and Kennebunk and Friends said, Hey, do you want to go? And I didn't really know much about it. I just knew that at the time the president would even talk about AIDS was basically pretending it didn't happen, wouldn't fund it, wouldn't say it. And so three of us arrived from central Maine, and there are thousands and thousands and thousands of people getting out of buses from New York and Boston. And it was Act Up and they were scripted and organized and they had a die in. And at one point they had a drum roll and they had this whole procession. And when the music stopped, as many people as possible lay down in front of the estate and were carried away on stretchers. And it was very, very powerful and dramatic and scary for somebody like me. But then I saw how brave everybody was putting their, you know, necks on the line. And there were people circling the estate on horses and rifles, you know, the Secret Service, police, whatever they were. And we got pushed right to the front because we were early and it was like one of the scariest minute moments in my life, but it really kicked it off that I wanted to help people a lot more. So with the AIDS Project and Franny Peabody when they started. Yeah, I would drive people to their appointments to get their meds, to get food, whatever they needed, and just started from there. Just have been a volunteer junkie for 30 something years now with everything from Equality Maine, the Marriage Equality Act, Pride, Portland. We brought that back probably six years ago doing photography for the gay community and not even realizing it. I just love doing it for years. And then, like I said a few minutes ago, donating to the USM archive about 18,000 photos somebody scanned in from real photos. Most of them I had, you know, the digital versions, but I had a friend, Rich Waitzkin, who pushed me into donating them because he's like, you know, you've chronicled life in Portland for 25 years in the gay community, and I didn't even know that I was doing it. So it was just something that I wanted to do. And, you know, being on so many fund raising committees and working with Equality Maine for years, the AIDS project for Peabody, I'm probably forgetting a ton and then trying to take

Volunteer  
work and  
organizing

Die in/Act  
Up

Aids Project

a break from volunteering a few years ago to let other people do it and just have a couple chill years. And then we got an award from Equality Maine for volunteering. So then I knew we really had to slow down a little bit. It's like if we're volunteering so much, they're pulling us up on stage like, you know, as much as it meant to us and still does. Sometimes you just need a little break. And now I work, I do social work. I do housing with Shalom House. And it's the perfect job because it's so much like volunteering, but you get paid for it. And I stepped away from retail management after 20 something years and just knew that I couldn't do that anymore. But I wanted to do more. Something that felt like volunteering in this job just sort of fell in my lap and it's perfect.

Frannie Peabody

Equality Maine

Ethan [00:21:38] Has a lot of your organizing and political work has been kind of a joint effort with your husband.

Steven [00:21:44] Yes, for sure. He moved up here from New Hampshire, and didn't know anybody. I figured the best way to introduce him to a lot of people was to go to a lot of the networking meetings, a lot of the fundraising meetings, Portland, all the stuff that we were doing. And we've gotten to know so many amazing people in the community, you know, straight gay ally by trans everything in between. And it's been great. And he's always loved the way that he was introduced to Maine. And he's been here for eight years now and I can't even imagine how many events and things that we've done. It's just sort of a blur. But then you kind of get in with the same crowd a lot of the time because they're just like core people that want to do good. And you see the same ones over and over and over with some new ones here and there. But, you know, sometimes we look at each other, we're like, Wow, it's just us again at four in the morning cleaning up after an event, you know? No regrets.

Shalom House/volunteering

Work With Husband

Ethan [00:22:44] If you could step back just a minute, I'm really curious. How did you meet and fall in love with your husband? Yeah.

Steven [00:22:52] We met. I think it was on the website gay dot com way before any sort of apps or anything like that. And it was just like a lot of chat rooms and he was moving to Portland and we chatted about him moving to this area and talked online for about six months before he even got here for his new job. And then we were supposed to meet for the first time, which was very nerve wracking. You know, you get to know somebody for six months online and then you have to be the real person in person. And it's a little terrifying. So we did. We went out and just everything clicked. Everything was true that he said and I said and there was no bullshit. There was no like, you know, like a lot of people talk about now, everybody, ghost, everybody. And it's just a lot of stuff and it just wasn't like that with us. And I still have one of the emails from after our first date where he just went into this whole like, I can't believe you're exactly how you were, you know, online. And just we said basically the same thing to each other, you know, which is very unusual when you talk to somebody for a really long time. But then you're behind a computer, not even

Meeting his Husband for the first time



really swapping photos or doing video or anything. It's just like you're just super honest and open with somebody like that. Or at least I was. So he started his new job. He got his condo, and we've been together ever since 18 years. And we got married with the first same sex couple married in Maine in December of 2012, once gay marriage was passed in Maine and that it dates and he's always great at date. So he will probably tell you the date. But I can remember 28, 27, 29, I don't really remember, but it was 90 days after it was voted on by the whole state and passed finally. So there was like a 90 day waiting period. Portland City Hall Mayor Brennan at the time wanted to be the first city to have the first same sex marriage in Maine. So they opened up at midnight, rushed us in. We didn't know we were the first couple. We didn't see anybody else out in city hall. We thought, Oh, this is a big dud. And we brought his two daughters from his marriage and we thought we were just going to go and get our marriage license. And then a few days before we started talking about it, like, well, what if we actually got married that night? And that's when we invited his girls up and we did it? No regrets, except that we didn't have any other family or friends there except for the 500 people waiting outside that we didn't know about. Like everybody gathered because they knew that night was going to be really special and it was freezing, bitter cold. And we're coming down the stairs from city hall, very emotional. There's like 40 cameras behind the desk at city hall taking photos. And it's all over the news already. Before we even left the building, it was really weird. His daughters kept sending us news articles like You're Trending on Portland Press Herald. You're trending on today's Boston Herald. Like it just went all over because Maine was the first state where it was repealed and then voted in by the voters. And we were the 11th state for gay marriage. So it was special, but we didn't know it was going to be like super visible and go sort of viral. Back then it was really weird, but they opened the doors and they said, Are you ready for your grand entrance? We're like, What are you talking about? We're going home. It's 1230 in the morning and there are about 500 people outside. Somebody had an accordion and they were all singing All You Need Is Love by the Beatles. And I am not an emotional person and I am like bawling my eyes out. There's photos of Michael literally dragging me out the front door because I couldn't even walk. And his daughter's right by our side, and it was beautiful. So 18 years, almost ten years married now. But we fell in love instantly, like I would say, our second date, we knew for sure.

Getting Married

Ethan [00:27:15] Yeah. That sounds like it was really special. Was marriage always on the table for you two or did you think of, um, perhaps just like a life partner sort of thing.

Steven [00:27:27] At the time before even 2009, when it was first going up, we had a ceremony just to express our love and have our friends and family there. About 60 people not knowing how close it was going to be to actual marriage, like legal marriage. So then our joke after was, well, why did we spend all that money? And when we just stood at City Hall for almost free, you know, but

now I think because we always thought it was so far in the future for it to actually be real, neither one of us, it wasn't a big priority or a goal. There are so many other things that we wanted to work on. You know, the whole LGBT community, HIV, AIDS, fundraising, you know, elder gays, young gays, trans gays, trans kids, everything in between. We were thinking about that more than ourselves or marriage, and we even spent a lot of money on the attorneys so that we could be each other's legal. I forget the term that they were even using back then. I don't even think it was. I think it was a domestic partner, but it had nothing to back it up. So if we went out of state or we went to France for his daughter was in a year of college over in France traveling, you have no leg to stand on. If somebody gets sick or injured and goes to the hospital, then they're not going to let you in. So we had to go to the attorneys and spend thousands of dollars, get all the paperwork in line that we were, you know, next of kin. And we could make decisions and we had to travel with all that paperwork everywhere we went. And it just felt like we were so much less than everybody else. And that was always my big fight, was we don't want special rights because that's what the Christian Coalition, all those people always kept saying. So it took a long time.

Importance of Marriage/Right to Marriage

Former Ceremony

Ethan [00:29:36] It sounds then was was your marriage and do you consider your marriage to be kind of a joint coalition of both the legal rights as well as a celebration of your love?

Steven [00:29:47] Absolutely. Absolutely. And now people can get married. They don't have to worry about going to the attorneys. It's just a marriage now. It's not a domestic partnership or a civil union or all the millions of other things people called it for years. It's just marriage. And that was the weirdest thing. After we got legally married, people would see us in the stores because their photos were everywhere. Like, it was so weird for us because we weren't super public people, even though we volunteered and did so much. But strangers would come up to us and just start pointing like, you're the gays, you're those gay guys. And really, we didn't expect that. What do you mean? The first same sex couple married or like we're not just those gay guys. It was so odd. There's a lot of reactions that we didn't expect. So yeah, it was definitely to join finances, join legal stuff, and just to be joined like we felt that we were from our first year together.

Domestic Partnership

Christian coalition

Ethan [00:30:56] Is it a real point of personal significance for you, like the value of marriage and the right to marriage?

Steven [00:31:03] The right to marriage for sure. I know a lot of people in the community who don't even agree or don't care about gay marriage, but they wanted the right to do it. And there's a lot of them that will never get married. We know people who've been together 30 years and they're never going to get married. They call each other their. You know, this is my boyfriend or my other half. Like they don't even use the term husband. And we were using it

before we could legally use it because there was no other way to, you know, what am I supposed to do? I'm in my forties saying, Look, this is my boyfriend. You know, I'm not 12 years old and saying partner just seems like, you know, we work together or something. It was such a weird title, so we just used Husband and we had a lot of weird reactions from that. We had times that he would go in for, you know, a day surgery and they would say, Oh, is this your friend? Or They were skirting around the subject. I'm like, No, this is my husband, my partner, whatever you want to call it. And these people would just get so weirded out and we couldn't even understand why we're like, we live in Portland. This is like kind of the gay mecca of Maine. You live in Portland and you can't even accept that I'm calling him my husband or my partner, it's just very weird. So even in that respect, we keep educating people all the time.

Ethan [00:32:27] Thus far you've made a big point of personal transparency. So does being married affect how you feel and how you perceive your own relationship at all?

Steven [00:32:42] I think I can honestly say no. I know some people when they get married, they say, my life changed forever, but our life was already in our life before and sort of on the outside. The only difference was that we wore matching rings and we were legally wed so that if we had a one year anniversary, I have a really warped sense of humor. I said, Hey, our anniversary is coming up. We should announce that we're getting divorced and we could be the first legally divorced couple and same sex couple in Maine. And he doesn't find that humor quite as funny as I do. But I thought it was great because when I was with my ex, we had a domestic partnership reunion or whatever it was called, and we were the first ones to dissolve it. And City Hall, they didn't have a clue how to do it. It was when the first domestic partnerships were able to be gotten in Maine. And so after we broke up, I went in, I'm like, okay, this is what we did. How do we make this go away? Because I didn't know how legally binding it was. And it turns out it really wasn't. It was nothing like basically we both signed a piece of paper saying, Oh, we're dating. Like it had no significance, no legal significance, nothing. So they had to scramble through books and computers and call people saying, How do we dissolve the domestic partnership? And it was like a \$35 fee. They had to send a copy to him and we were done. It was really easy. But now if we were to get divorced, it's a real divorce like anybody else, you know. And I think that scared a lot of people in the community at first because they're like, wow, we can't just like break up and go on to the next one. This is legit now. So for a lot of people, I think it did make it feel a lot more legit than before. They had to really think about it. And if they're in a long term relationship, joining finances and stuff, you know, if they broke up, it's going to be complicated, especially if they got married.

Ethan [00:34:56] You kind of mentioned before they were involved with the marriage equality campaign. Would you like to tell me more about that?

Right to  
Marriage

Steven [00:35:06] Yeah, we kind of stumbled upon that. We had a friend that had worked and done a lot of volunteer work and said, hey, we're having this meeting. I think it was at the Williston Church back then. And they just want to start the conversation about gay marriage some. And we went and we were blown away, how organized they were already. And they were talking about like when it was going to be, you know, up for ballot and all this other stuff. And here we were just living our lives, accepting that we probably could never legally get married. And we went there and we got really fired up and we just started canvassing, making phone calls, doing anything we could to help. And we did a fundraiser and just all sorts of anything that we could, hanging posters, calling people everything and anything that we could. And so we definitely helped a little bit, but so did thousands of others, you know. So it was kind of a full circle moment and I hate that term. But when we stood there on the city hall steps and we were the first ones, it was like a lot of people were so happy that you guys are so normal. We're so glad you were the first, you know? And I didn't know how to take that. I'm like, Well, what do you mean, normal? Like, if I was almost offended, like, did they mean they were glad there weren't some drag queens up there or butch lesbians? Or what did they mean? Like, as nice as it was, it felt like a slap in the face to everybody else. So I had mixed emotions about that because I want everybody equal. I don't want anybody to be like, You're the perfect couple to be the first marriage. It's like, Why? Because we're both white, we're both men, we're both this, we're both that. Like, why are you saying it? Like, that is confusing.

Ethan [00:36:53] That kind of raises another question for me. In your your reflection, on your own life, especially in your younger life, would you think that you say, as a tall, white gay male? Do you think that your presentation aided in how other people treated you?

Steven [00:37:14] Yes. And I actually had this conversation with somebody at work yesterday. Something was said. I work with a lot of different clients with a lot of different either mental disabilities, addictions, there's a million things and sometimes they don't know that I'm gay or they'll ask me how my wife is or whatever because they see a ring. And I always just think it's kind of obvious that I'm gay and. This person at work who's trans, they said, you know, you come off as a straight guy and I laughed at them so bad. What do you mean? I've got a gay tattoo on my leg. I've got. You know, I just don't think that I come across this straight and I've never tried. So it's always been a weird conflict because I see other people who are. I have a friend that's a florist who's a flaming, flaming homosexual. That's the only way to really describe him. And he owns it. And he's never had a problem with anybody. But when he walks down the street, there's no question that he is gay. I've always kind of envied that because he's so comfortable in his skin and I've found myself Butching it up or trying not to act gay in certain situations that can be confrontational. And I can get away with that. And I feel bad because a lot of

Marriage  
Equality  
Campaign in  
Maine

people can't. You know, the trans community right now is getting so much better, but it's so much worse for a lot of people. I mean, there's still people getting killed over being trans and just stuff like that that kills us. So that still motivates us to help as much as possible for sure.

Ethan [00:38:57] In light of that. Have you moved some of your focus on LGBTQ issues to trans issues, or is it still centered around...?

Steven [00:39:08] It's kind of everything and anything that seems to need the help because after marriage got passed, most of the community just said, Oh, we're done fighting. We don't have anything to do. And everybody at Equality Maine and a lot of the different agencies that are you kidding me? We've got, you know, aging gay people in the community. What are they supposed to do? They don't want to, you know, turn out to go into an old age home and be, you know, spend the last couple of years of their lives hiding who they are. And so we just I mean, there's so many other fights to do. It's never just going to be done or I don't think so in my lifetime anyway. It would be it's a great fantasy to think, Oh, everybody can walk around and be who they are. But we know the reality. Too many people still getting killed over being who they are. So. Yeah.

Ethan [00:40:07] Sorry. Jumping around a bit. (No, no.) Raised another question. Is your experience going back to Central Maine versus how you received here? Is that different at all? Even to this day or at points in your life?

Steven [00:40:22] I look back on where I grew up, and I'm just really glad I don't live there anymore because the only gay person I knew about was the town lesbian. That's how everybody referred to her. She worked at the gas station. She was a thick she reminded me of John Cougar Mellencamp back in the eighties. She was just like, I thought she was hot. I always had a crush on her. I think I still do. People still think that's weird, but you could just tell that people treated her differently. And it wasn't until years later I actually saw her in a gay bar and she's like Steve, and I'm like, Patty. And it's like, we had this weird reunion, and she never left the town. She loves everybody. And I almost think it was easier for her because sometimes it's easier for lesbians than it is for gay men, because gay men threaten the masculine men in the town. You know, they see somebody skipping or a little light in the loafers or whatever they used to call them. And for some reason, that threatens people so much. But the lesbian at the garage working, they can be her buddy, but they would never talk to or associate with any gay guy. So it was really weird looking back. Yeah, I'm so glad I got out of there and had so few problems down here in Portland. Opposed to what I know would have happened up there for sure.

Ethan [00:41:45] I find what you just said actually so fascinating about the difference between. how gay, gay males and Lesbian women are treated. Yeah. Is that, do you think that persists to this day based on what you've seen?

Presentation and treatment

Treatment of Lesbians vs gay males

Steven [00:41:59] Yes, even when I went to my first gay bar, which was in Augusta, I would walk in and it was such a physical divide in the bar. The lesbians were to the left. The gay men were all around the rest of the bar. And my mind couldn't even figure that out at first because I had so many lesbian friends, I would always go over there and hang out. And that was where I basically was the whole night. And then the gay guys would see me like, What are you doing over there? You know where you're with the lesbians? And I'm like, How can this community (be so) divided that they don't even like each other? You know, the lesbians never seem to have an issue with gay men, but gay men sort of seem to have an issue with lesbians. But then in the straight world, it's almost the opposite. So, I don't know. It's a head scratcher. I'll never be able to figure it out. I wish I could. I don't understand that we go to the date march and we participate probably more in lesbian events and we do gay events just because they've always been amazing to us, even through the AIDS crisis. I've heard stories for decades about how amazing the lesbians were during the eighties. They would hold, they would comfort, they would take care of the gay men dying of AIDS. And that's when all their friends and family would leave them because they didn't want to be associated with anybody with AIDS. But the lesbians stepped up and they were the tough ones. So I have huge respect for them and always will.

Differences between Central Maine and Portland

Ethan [00:43:30] You mentioned briefly your experience at a gay bar. I'm curious, you, is there any specific spots in Portland, be they gay bars or just other I guess, other places of note that you could share about?

Differences in treatment between gay males and lesbian women

Steven [00:43:45] Yeah, actually, I think Blackstones was the first, first one I ever went to. I had moved back to well Augusta for like a year and a half, but I came down to Portland and went to my first gay bar, was scared out of my mind. And then when I get inside, I'm like, Oh, it's just a bar. It's just people. I don't know what my mind was thinking it was going to be, except for everything I ever seen in movies. And TV's like, you know, all the flaming gays running around, mincing around and being whatever. But I'm like, Okay, these are just people sitting here having a beer talking. And it blew my mind. And then when I moved to Augusta, it was Papa Joe's that I went to for about a year and had many friends up there. They were awesome. But yeah, Blackstone's has always been a fun place. We knew the owners for years. We know the new owners. They've definitely changed with the times. It used to be just almost 100% strictly gay men. You know, if a woman walked in, it was it seemed like the oddest thing in the world to everybody. And I thought that was the oddest thing in the world. I'm like, where am I, ladies that you know? So I'm glad that all the bars are coming Around. But then most of the gay bars and the gay clubs and everything have closed down because that's what everybody fought for forever. And now that everybody's more or less accepted, there's not a lot of spaces just for gay people anymore. So the older gays, I want to say, like anybody 40 or over, are having this weird like thought crisis of we don't

Treatment of lesbians in gay male spaces

have a bar we can go to, it's just ours or we don't have meetings anymore. I used to go to the some of the different meetings were in Portland for, you know, different gay events. And my husband used to go to one in Boston for gay fathers would divorce gay fathers like very specific groups. But it was like you didn't have the Internet, you didn't have other people to talk to. And that's just how everybody supported each other. I even went with one of my axes to a gay AA meeting up in Augusta when he would go. And I mean, talk about segregation. It's like, okay, you can't even just go to AA, you have to find a gay AA meeting. Like it just seems so weird to me, but now nobody has to divide quite as much.

Blackstones and Maine's gay bars

Ethan [00:46:10] Do you think that even in a more accepting place as we are now, do you think that there's still importance in having more isolated community spaces?

Papa Joes in Augusta

Steven [00:46:28] Yes, The Equality Community Center seems like a nice, safe place for a lot of people, especially younger people that don't know where to go or what to do, because I don't think there are that many specific resources like there used to be like P flag and stuff which I know is still around, but a lot of parents, they can just Google stuff and learn online. They don't need to go to a meeting and find out how to deal with your gay kid or your queer kid. It's almost like all the gay bar is going away. It seems really sad to the older folks, but to everybody, like I keep saying, 40 and up, 40 and under. But it's great because everybody can just be with everybody. It doesn't matter anymore. So I think I'm literally caught in the middle of the two worlds. And when I was on the Pride Committee, there was a young 18 year old queer kid sitting literally to my left. And a drag queen is probably pushing about 70 using all sorts of terms. It was pissing off the young queer kid, and the queer kid kept yelling at the old drag queen. And I'm literally physically in every way in between the two of them, trying to referee this weird fight going on that I never thought I would even hear about because the older drag queen would say things like, you know, Hey, girl, hey, tranny, all this stuff. Not realizing what it was doing to the young queer kid. And the young queer kid had no idea that that old drag queen has been fighting the fight for 50 plus years. So I'm like, I'm trying to teach each other each one of them about each other. I'm like, You guys just need to talk on your own. I'm going to move to another table. If you don't stop, it got really weird. And I love that everybody's willing to talk, but when they're not, that's when that's a problem. And I see that in the trans community, if somebody we have a relative that is changing their gender, their name, they're starting the transition period and they live in another state and the whole town and the family, nobody is for it. They're all freaking out and they're actually looking to come to Maine because they know that Maine is a little bit more progressive and we're like, Yeah, just stay in southern Maine. You'll probably be okay. But when young queer kids, trans kids, anybody like that, they don't accept that people. It may take them a few times to get their pronouns within their names correct now, because they've always been known as this person,

Isolated community spaces

Equality Community center

this gender, this whatever. It takes people a few minutes to get used to it. So again, I feel like, you know, at my age and I'm so in the middle of so many of these weird fights and I never even thought of before, it's like, okay, you old drag queen, calm down and listen to the young queer kid. You young queer kid, listen to the old drag queen. You guys can learn so much from each other. You know.

Ethan [00:49:23] I think that's a really fascinating perspective. Though it might be confusing.

Steven [00:49:28] It is very confusing. And I never, ever thought I would think of it that way, but I do. Yeah, it's weird. It's like if people learned their history and watched shows on Stonewall and everything that, you know, the old drag queens went through, got beaten, got killed, got everything, you know, evicted, fired, discriminated against all over the place. The young queer kids don't really know the history or most of them. I shouldn't say all, but a lot of them don't. And when I was on the Pride Committee, we would have LGBT. Events at the library about HIV in the past. Gay rights in the past Maine gay rights in the past. And it was almost all attended by people 40 or 50 and over. Nobody young wanted to go and learn about our past. And we're all sitting there knowing the past, listening to it, appreciating it. But we're like, Where are all the younger kids? And it's like a double edged sword. We're so happy that they don't need that anymore, but we're like, Damn, you need to learn your history. There are a lot of great, important people. And there was a great miniseries called Pride a couple of years ago that delved into stuff and people that I'd never heard of before my dam. Everybody needs to see this. And my best friend who was just coming out at the time, I had him watch it. I was like, okay, when your wife is at work, you need to watch the series and learn some gay history. He's like, But what if she sees that? I was watching it and I'm like, Oh man, I don't even know how to answer that. It's like, Well, you're watching TV, like, as she is monitoring you. Like, it was just weird, but I just wish everybody would learn their history a little bit better. And I still have a lot to learn. I'm not saying that I know everything. That's for damn sure.

Ethan [00:51:26] You've mentioned this. You mentioned that you were a part of the committee organizing pride events?

Steven [00:51:32] Yes.

Ethan [00:51:33] What was that like?

Steven [00:51:36] I used to be involved with Southern Maine Pride years ago. And the last year that they were in charge of pride, everything went to hell. It was the year after gay marriage went through. So it would have been the spring of 2013 because they wanted us in the parade, because we were the first same sex couple married, and then the end of the whole thing. We had a big pride

Culture and age gap

Pride Committee and LGBT event attendance



party back at our place, probably 40 or 50 people and people started coming back, telling all these stories about how hateful they were and how they were. Using horrible words to describe all the lesbians and all the women and not. I had known both of them for years, and I didn't know how like anti-woman they were until I started seeing them post online and people were doing screenshots of what they were saying and different groups. They were saying it in it very publicly. So they kind of just put their tails between their legs and went away. And then the next spring, probably around February, the people from Equality Maine and a few other groups said, Hey, are we letting Pride die or should we do something about this? And the other people that were in charge of southern Maine pride never would accept help from anybody. Nobody ever knew where the money was going, what was happening. It was just sort of like a two day event and it was over. But everyone's like, Well, why don't you have people help you? And they reached out at one point and had a meeting and everybody that came wanted to help, and they just shot down every every person. They didn't want to help. They didn't want people to know their finances, their business. It all seemed a little shady. So then as of February that year, we're like, okay, we have until June to get this together. How can we do this? Because they wouldn't release their funds, their books, the list of vendors, the list of participants from the parade or anything. So we had to physically go back through photos and our memories, trying to figure out who were vendors who used to always sponsor the parade and do all that. So in just a few months we had to come up with about, I think it was around \$10,000 or so to pull off the first Pride Portland back in 2014. And we did it. It was very challenging, to say the least. We did. The first year we had ten days of pride. I don't know what we were thinking and we had, I think, 31 or 32 events leading up to the Pride Parade fundraising. Anything we could, any bar, any, any building that said, hey, have a fundraiser here. There were some that were like three and four things in one night going on. So we were all spread really thin, but we did it and we were happy that we were so much more inclusive. It wasn't just two men making all the calls and hiding all the money and doing whatever they were doing. I won't say their names in case like they get pissed but everybody knows who they are. And I don't really. I don't hold a grudge. I used to like them a lot and they just disappeared. But yeah, the hateful stuff they were saying against women and lesbians were. And you know, so we helped with the dike march make sure that the continued pride is still going on even through COVID they were trying to do is as best as they could. We're on the committee for like three or four years and then turned out and let other people run it and do whatever they needed to. We were like, please keep this going no matter what you do. And the first or second year, the event in the park had over 10,000 people, and it was just amazing. So obviously it's still needed in the community. People still want it. We had a children's area on the opposite side of the park. We had a beer garden and everything in between, and it was so inclusive. Like probably half the people there were streets with their families and just wanted to come down and see it and they knew it wasn't going to be a freak show. That was always the I think the fear with a lot of families. They

Organizing  
Pride Events

Southern  
Maine pride

thought it would be naked people running around and gay men up there having sex and whatever they thought. Cause we had people come to the meetings that would say these outrageous things. This one old guy that came and he said, Well, I would never bring my family. I don't want to see you like dick swinging around and, you know, women's tits swinging around and people having sex on floats. I'm like, what are you, what are you talking about? That's never, ever been in Portland. Pride I don't know what pride you're thinking of or you're sick imaginations going to, but that's not what it is. We had the Portland Public School in there with buses. We had Senior Piper Shores, I think it was from Cape Elizabeth. It's an old folks home. They had a bus in the parade and some of these people in their eighties were walking the entire parade route, you know, the whole mile. So there was so much love and support once we opened it up to everybody, instead of it being just a male dominated pride event.

Fundraising  
for pride

Ethan [00:57:01] What would you tell families or people who might be considering bringing their children to pride? What would you tell them? What pride is about to encourage them to go.

Former Pride  
Organizers

Steven [00:57:10] I've had this conversation with a lot of people. I tell them about who's in the parade. There's a lot of religious groups. There's Portland Public Schools. Like I said, at the park, we used to have a bouncy house and arts and crafts, and Portland Public Library brought their mobile library van. And there's something for everybody. You know, if you don't want to go in the beer garden, you have to be 21 or over to go through the gate anyway. So it's not like kids are going to be drinking in there. It's very stationed off. There's, you know, a little bit of everything and word of mouth spread. And by the second and third year that it was so much bigger and bigger and bigger is crazy. And we have friends up in Augusta who used to work for Blackstones, who did the River of Pride Flag, and they started out with a 100 foot section and then they kept adding every year. So it was just about, I think, 900 or 1000 feet by the time that Pride Portland started and we had them donate for the day, their flag for everybody to carry. And that was one of the most amazing things to see. Almost a thousand feet of flag with thousands of people helping to carry it and jumping under it and, you know, just bring everybody together. And, you know, it definitely wasn't just people in the community who's everybody, straight people. There were homeless people there. It was anybody that wanted to grab the flag and walk down to Deering Oaks with it. So that was pretty amazing.

Fear of  
sexuality at  
pride

Ethan [00:58:43] Is that something you had a role like photographing?

Pride as a  
family event

Steven [00:58:47] I was up on our jeep. Oh, it was when it was still Southern Maine Pride, actually, because they were using part of the flag but not the whole thing. And they had what they called the Pride Cannon, and they needed a vehicle to strap this on. So it was one of those like cement pylon tubes. I

don't even know what you call them. It's probably like ten feet tall and probably the size of a hula hoop around. And they painted it pink for some reason and strapped into our jeep. And we had the flag in the jeep feeding it through the cannon and then looking at the pictures. The first year, it just looked like a big pink penis on the top of our jeep in the rainbow coming out of the penis. So the next year we covered it in silver glitter material and realized what we had done. But I would stand up there feeding the flag through taking photos of the crowd from on the top of our jeep. And it was just amazing. But I had been going to Pride for years, taking photos and just always thought it was just a fun hobby or whatever. But to be out in the parade and up on the parade and taking photos from that vantage point was amazing. It was so, so cool. And you would see the side streets where it would turn and you just see the flag. There were some people that took some from the top of some of the buildings in Portland. And you got an aerial shot of this flag and it was just super moving. yeah.

Reasons to bring family to pride

River of pride Flag

Ethan [01:00:19] Sounds as though you've participated. Like in every way, you've organized it, you've watched it, you photographed and participated in it. Is it something that's, like, really meaningful to your life?

Steven [01:00:32] It definitely was. And now that we've stepped back from volunteering a little bit and letting other people do it, it's like a great memory. And we still attend pride. But it's kind of nice not to have to do it all because it's literally a year round job and people have no idea. We had no idea what we were getting into as an organization and especially the first couple of years, we still did The Ten Days of Pride every year. Way too much. Nobody needs ten days of pride. How about a year full of pride? No, let's not do something every month and every week, you know, let's make it special. Let's just do pride weekend. But yeah, I still love it. I'm glad that it's still going on. They've had a few bumps in the road here and there and but no grudges. I'm glad they're still doing it.

Photography and pride

Ethan [01:01:22] I probably should have asked at the very beginning. But what does pride mean to you in terms of something that goes beyond, I guess, just a parade?

Steven [01:01:36] For me, it's just being able to walk down the street and be yourself and maybe someday not fearing that you'll get somebody screaming out of the car window or throwing something at you. My husband and I, when we lived in the West End, we'd go for walks like a couple of times a week around town, and we weren't even holding hands at this one point. And we're just walking, we're talking. It was after work. We're having like an hour long walk and this car pulls up and just start screaming, you know, you fucking faggots and all this. And I'm like, Well, hey, like, I was really confused by that. I'm like, Here we are in Portland. I think it was even on Congress Street. Like, How is this happening? And I get really, really upset quick about that stuff. I

have a very long fuze like nothing bothers me but that stuff. So also sudden they go to speed off and they were stuck at a red light. So Michael's still standing there. I'm darting for the vehicle, ready to smash in the windshield, and he's like, Please stop. Don't, don't, don't, don't do that. I get a little bit more short tempered with people like that, definitely. And after the police shooting in Florida, the year anniversary of that, they were holding a vigil at the church on Congress Street the same weekend as the Old Port Festival, which we used to always call straight pride. And we hated because it was really a terrifying weekend. But they were having this candlelight vigil at this church, and people are bringing their flags and all sorts of stuff to be really visible. And, you know, because everybody is really, really hurt by that. I mean, it was only the one year anniversary. It is still really tough. And this one car stops almost like the other one and starts screaming shit out the window at me because I'm holding a rolled up flag, a flag on a pole, and they saw the colors and like fucking faggots and all this other stuff. And again, they get stuck in traffic because of the old port festival. And I have the flag pole with me with the flag, and I start running out of the car and I just hear Michael screaming from behind like, don't, don't. And they start rolling up the windows. And they were terrified because they saw how big I was and I'm coming at them with a flag pole and he's like, You were going to smash out their window, weren't you? And I was like, Maybe, but I didn't. I just went up and screamed some things back at them and just walked away. I'm like, This is not the time or the place. But everybody was super emotionally like delicate at that point. Still, I know I was. And we were all on edge because we had to have pride. The pulse shooting happened and we still had to do the ten days of pride and before most people don't even know it, the parade and the festival. We had to have police, police dogs, secret undercover police and stuff everywhere watching because they were terrified of copycat shootings. So we were a little on edge that year. A lot on edge that year, you know. And we were getting there at six in the morning, setting up. So nobody saw that the police dogs were doing the whole route, going all over the Congress street, all over the park, looking for bombs, snipers, whatever you want to call it. We didn't even know the extent of what they were doing until after. But Portland police had our backs for sure. Made us feel very secure, even if people didn't know they're there. Because most of them were not in uniform. But they stepped it up. As much as so many people hate the police. They were amazing.

Participation in pride

Importance of pride

Experience hatred

Ethan [01:05:26] Was the Pulse shooting something of a binding moment for the community?

Steven [01:05:32] Yeah, because we were at Wow, I forgot that we were at the old port festival is the first year that Pride ever had a table. We were giving out stickers and, you know, handing out fliers about the upcoming pride. And it was a Saturday night when the pulse shooting happened. It was so late at night and we got there so early. Most of us didn't even know. And people started coming by. We're so sorry. We're so sorry. We're like, what are you sorry for?

The like the big shooting in Florida. And so we're all trying to scroll on our phones, trying to figure out what happened. And as the day progressed and they found out, more and more and more people had died, the numbers kept going up. It was so weird. Our team got so close that weekend because we all like we're hearing about it and experiencing it all at the same time. And we had a friend that was part of the Pride team. The second year she had ovarian cancer for the second time, and then she passed. And as a group, we got so close, it was it was crazy. We actually went when she was in hospice and sat by her bed and held her hand. And so every year from pride, after that, we would always have sunflowers everywhere because that was like her thing. And we did a Wizard of Oz movie on the top of one of the other buildings, which is a parking garage. And we did an outside movie. Free movie that year was Wizard of Oz. Everybody dressed up as she went one step further and dressed up as a sunflower coming out of a pot. She was a little short thing, like 411. So she was holding up the pot, walking around and she was like the sunflower. She had this amazing costume. So Sunflower was always special for all of us and the community that knew her. And so it's kind of yeah, we all got really close that year for so many things. Yeah. I ramble a lot, too. So cut me off any time.

Pulse  
Shooting

Ethan [01:07:34] No, it's excellent. In fact, I was curious about your work in photography of the LGBTQ community. Did that start off as an intentional thing? Were you doing photography prior to your other forms of activism, or was it just kind of everything meshed together?

Steven [01:07:53] I've always loved doing photography. I used to grab my mom's camera all the time and like to be the family photographer and just always did that and took classes in high school and had done it for years, especially for free for people who would do like weddings or anything. Anybody would ask me. And then my husband probably ten years ago said, you know, you can actually charge people and not like kill yourself doing all this stuff for free. And it just seemed so weird. But any pride that I went to, I always have my camera and it just sort of the person I was like, any event, I would bring my camera. But then once I started going to pride and seeing what it was and how important it was, I was just taking the pictures for me. And then it became people would reach out and like, You're going to be here, you're going to be there. You can you do this? Can you help us out with this? And I can't say no. That's like one of those things you just I can't do it. So, yeah, after we saw the lady from us who does the archiving, our friend Rich just kept insisting, you've got to reach out to her. You've got to reach out to her. And then he reached out to her and emailed the two of us and was like, Here, I'm putting you two together. Talked to her then COVID hit and it was like the first few months after COVID. So I had a lot of extra time to go through all my life. I like I think it started out with like over 50,000 photos and I whittle the down to 18,004 and we met in my work parking lot fully mask fully away from each other and I'm like reaching out like, here, here's the bag with the, the,

Community  
coming  
together

photos in it on the big external memory drive. And, and I just love to somebody like wanted to see it and I never thought about it. And he was so insistent. He was like, No, you didn't even know what you were doing all those years. And I'm like, No, I didn't. I just did it because I wanted to take pictures, you know, friends and family and everybody I knew in the community. So now it's weird because like memories will come up on Facebook and I look back and it's like, I'll be scrolling through different albums and it's like, Oh, that one's dead, that one's passed, that one's moved out of state. And it's just like a weird reminder, but it's a great reminder of all the people that has been involved for years. And I actually found a few photos from some of the events where I had to put like blue dots over faces from people that weren't out and didn't want their photos online. I forgot about that until like two days ago. A Facebook memory came up scrolling through photos and what the hell hell's that blue dot on their face for? And it was somebody who reached out and said, You cannot post any pictures of me at these events. So weird and weird, but good.

Ethan [01:10:42] Have you thought about contacting a museum or anything?

Steven [01:10:49] No. I was happy that USM wanted them. I don't know what you guys will ever do with them, but you know, I signed over everything and I said, please use these. And even in the first year of the COVID pandemic, I was having this weird feeling of, like, total emptiness because nothing was going to happen for pride because nobody could get together. And so I did this little collective of pride during COVID. And actually, I actually got I talked to Amy Paradise, who works for the Portland Press Herald, and she had reached out something, some event that I had done. She wanted a few of my photos, and I told her what I was doing and she's like, We would love to run something like that during Pride weekend. She says, if you can submit photos of people during Pride or during COVID, and Dr. Chapkis was one of them that did my photo and she was holding a sign. She did her fist, and it was just like, I love those pictures so much that even during a lockdown, people can still celebrate pride in their own way. And, you know, some people were hanging out of their second story buildings and taking pictures because they didn't want anywhere near anybody. They were so freaked out by COVID. As I'm sitting there two stories down and trying to take photos of people, you know, waving, literally waving their flags and stuff. It was kind of an awesome experience.

Ethan [01:12:23] That's a really cool way to, you know, make it work. Yeah. Right. Yeah. Coming off of the photography thing, do you have a favorite subject? Anything in particular that you just love to photograph?

Steven [01:12:41] It ebbs and flows. There's a lot of days during the summer and even the winter that I'll get up an hour and a half before the sun comes up and go find a beach or a ledge or somewhere to watch the sunrise. And I've gone out when it's been minus 20 to catch the sea smoke or the sea fog,

Activism and  
Photography

Giving  
Photograph  
collection to  
USM

because it's such a rare thing to see. And I'm standing there literally in -25 degrees and like 12 layers hoping my camera doesn't freeze, trying to get these photos. And then a couple of years ago, I went through a phase where I just wanted to get nature and bees, and I went crazy with that. I actually gave friends and family calendars of that, and I've done that with different stuff. So it really depends. I love doing weddings straight and gay and everything in between. I've done senior portraits, I've done family portraits. It just kind of depends on what people want and what I feel like doing. And if I get a willing participant, I haven't started right before COVID trying to chronicle this one friend's journey because he's always been a bodybuilder. He used to be like £130 weakling, as he would put it, and now he's this like huge built Jacked guy, but he still doesn't see himself. So he wanted to, like, lose a little bit of weight, tone up and kind of try to get like a six or eight pack. So we started doing photos of the beginning period before he got really bad of his progression and then COVID hit. And we haven't. But I've done every sort of photography under the sun. I love it. And if I don't know how to do it, I YouTube it, I do classes and I'll learn how to do it. That's definitely my passion other than my work. My work. I love six years so far.

Covid and  
Pride

Ethan [01:14:43] That's really all. I think that just about wraps up everything I had prepared to ask. But if there's anything at all you'd like to share, we'd love to hear.

Steven [01:15:00] Just talking about the photography thing. The only thing that pops into my mind was after Governor Mills got into office, she wanted to host a Pride event at the Blaine House through Equality Maine. And I think there was one or two other organizations that helped organize it. I was able to go up and do photos of this event and be part of the event and not to brag, but I had actually met her a few other times because I was there. I've done a lot of work with the immigrant community through Catholic Charities, and we've done a calendar outlining people in the community that are from all these different countries. And every month was a different country and a different family highlighted, and they would give a little description of the family, but then educational information about the country. And they put one of those calendars in every single school in Maine for like three years in a row. It was really awesome to be part of that. So when Janet Mills got in office, Governor Janet Mills woops, they did the first Iftar dinner up there with the Muslim community. And they asked me up there, so like I've been it like three or four events with her. And even as small as the Irish, the St Patrick's Day parade in Portland, she was in that last year. And then she and I were just kind of hanging out at the Irish Center on State Street. I think it is waiting for everybody to come back. And she's like sampling the food and we're just having this like talk about my work and stuff and I'm just like, I can't love you anymore. You're such a neat person. And at the Iftar dinner with all the Muslim people, there's probably 125 people there and almost everyone she's met before she would go. She's like, How's your mom? Blah, blah, blah. Like,

Favorite  
subject in  
Photography

she knows everybody, remembers everybody and wants to do the best for people. And I get to see that like I'm behind the camera. I blend in. People usually say, Wow, I didn't even notice you all night. But then here's 500 photos. Like, that's the best compliment. But I get to listen and see her interact with all types of different people throughout the years. So that really tickles me. And she loves the gay community.

Governor  
Mills and  
Equality  
Maine

Ethan [01:17:16] That's really cool. That's a really, like, unique insight. Not something you hear a lot about politicians. (Yeah. So) has she done anything in particular for the gay community that you would share, even if it's like just words of support?

Steven [01:17:29] She has gone to so many events. She has gone to the Halloween pumpkin ball at the state theater like two or three times at least. And the first time was when she was first running for governor, and she showed up on stage in a Wonder Woman T-shirt holding a sword. And it was just like such a moment. And I didn't have my camera with me. But other people got the photo because I was working the event too. So you can't always do what you want. And we missed it this year, but I guess she went back and did the same thing up on stage and her hosting that Pride event at the Blaine house and she's gone to the Equality Maine Balls every year and done speeches. I've seen her at a lot of other events, too, not just the LGBTQ community, but she definitely has a good place in her heart for us. And it's not fake and it's not for photos. And you know, I even reached out to Amy Paradise at Portland Press Herald after the Pride event of the Blaine House. And I said, Would you guys want these photos of this event? And she's like, Well, you know, we don't really want to get too, you know, political about it. And, you know, she didn't really necessarily want the press there. And, you know, it was just kind of neat, like her team didn't want it public just to be public. And she did it just because she wanted to do it and have the first Pride event at the Blaine house. So we overtook that place, let me tell you. Yeah, but I think that I can think of so.

Ethan [01:19:09] Seriously, Thank you so much.

Steven [01:19:10] Yeah, this is fun. This is part of a ton of memories. Things that I want to remember. The things that I forgot that I should probably forget. But all in the best of ways.

Ethan [01:19:22] Really fascinating story. You do a great job, just chronology marking down everything. And it really felt like I was living through it really great. Oh, I will send you a recording of both of these. Oh, yeah, I'll send you a recording. And then once I transcribe it, which is probably a little process of, (Oh yeah,) I'll get that to you as soon as I can as well.

Steven [01:19:51] Trust me, I've been there with my ex and I started this small



group in Central Maine years and years ago, probably in the early nineties, Central Maine Gay Men Support Group or something, they called it. And we had a speaker there one time. He's an author and I can't remember his name, John Preston, I think. And we recorded it and then we were trying to figure out how to transcribe it all. That takes forever.

Steven [01:20:18] He talked for a couple hours and we recorded everything before, during and after what a nightmare. So good luck. I know it's not going to be easy. You made this super easy. It was just like a conversation. It was like, Oh, this is easy.

Ethan [01:20:31] This is my first time interviewing.

Steven [01:20:38] No kidding, Well, you did a great job.

Central  
Maine Gay  
Men Support  
Group

Wrapping Up