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<p>Meghan Horner [00:00:02] That one is recording now and so is this. Okay! So today is November 21st, 2022, and we are here in Portland, Maine at the USM Portland campus. My name is Meghan Horner. M-E-G-H-A-N H-O-R-N-E-R.</p>	<p>Introduction (Names, date, location)</p>
<p>Kendall Garland [00:00:18] My name is Kendall Garland. K-E-N-D-A-L-L G-A-R-L-A-N-D.</p>	
<p>Meghan Horner [00:00:26] And could you please say and spell your name for us?</p>	
<p>Marpheen Chann [00:00:27] My name is Marpheen Chann. That's M-A-R-P-H-E-E-N C-H-A-N-N.</p>	
<p>Meghan Horner [00:00:36] Thank you and how old are you? Or, if you would prefer what decade were you born in?</p>	
<p>Marpheen Chann [00:00:40] I am 31 and I'm a 90s kid.</p>	
<p>Meghan Horner [00:00:45] Mmm. Um and what would you describe- How would you label your, like, race and ethnicity?</p>	<p>Demographic (age, race/ethnicity, pronouns(he/him), and sexual orientation)</p>
<p>Marpheen Chann [00:00:52] I am uhh Asian American, but ethnicity wise, Cambodian.</p>	
<p>Meghan Horner [00:00:55] And what words would you use to talk about your gender and sexual orientation?</p>	
<p>Marpheen Chann [00:01:02] I would use gay. And... Pronouns?</p>	
<p>Meghan Horner [00:01:06] Yes, please.</p>	
<p>Marpheen Chann [00:01:09] Pronouns is he/him.</p>	
<p>Meghan Horner [00:01:12] And so I would want to remind you that at any point in this interview you can end the interview or refuse to answer any questions. Umm and if we're reaching the end and you still have more you would like to talk about we can schedule you a follow up one with Professor Chapkis.</p>	
<p>Marpheen Chann [00:01:26] Okay.</p>	
<p>Kendall Garland [00:01:28] So we're just gonna start out with this</p>	



that was us pretty much for the years 2003-2009/2010, when I graduated high school. But my father, adoptive father, Bob Berry, had two uh girls, two daughters from a previous marriage, but they had already been out of the house by the time we got there.

Kendall Garland [00:05:00] Can you talk to us about what your relationship was like with your adopted family?

Marpheen Chann [00:05:07] It's... fine. Hahaha. Umm it's good. You know, we still talk. We still get together for holiday dinners, as I'm guessing we will be doing for Thanksgiving. Although my sister Saya is and my brother Brandon have moved to Texas during the pandemic and my sister, Tanya, has moved to Florida. And so I think it will be just my parents, myself. And my grandmother, Grammy Nita, who is in her late eighties, and she's from the county, Aroostook County, so most likely will be just the four of us and the two dogs and two cats.

Kendall Garland [00:05:56] Do you at all keep in touch with any of your biological family?

Marpheen Chann [00:06:01] I do. So two of my uncles uh live in... One lives in Westbrook, Maine, has three kids. And the other one lives in Gorham, Maine, with his partner and they both have a husky or two huskies now I think. Um but the rest of my biological family lives in California and San Diego still. And so I keep in touch via, you know, text message, FaceTime. Sometimes they visit here, sometimes. I'll visit there, although I'm pretty overdue for a California trip so.

Kendall Garland [00:06:41] Is your relationship with your adoptive parents influenced your sense of identity at all and vice versa with your biological family as well?

Marpheen Chann [00:06:57] I think it's influenced. My identity because growing up with my adoptive family, I didn't feel... I felt conflicted of whether, of who I should be because I had been adopted out of a bad situation and my adoptive family obviously reunited me with my two younger siblings and offered a home, offered stability, and food. And even though they were white working class, um, sort of at the bottom rung of the working class. My dad was only, only made \$40,000 a year and worked side jobs. And the family was very religious, Evangelical, and we went to church on Sundays, Sunday mornings. We were enrolled in the Christian school, which was about a hundred kids K through 12. My class only had six or seven people at a time and then uh youth group became a big part of my life uh as

Relationship with adoptive family

Current relationship with biological family

Religion (raised Evangelical)

a place to sort of um meet other young people my age and also to get involved. But I think in some ways, as you know, hanging out with my two best friends became later on in high school youth group also became sort of my escape from my family. My parents because, you know, we lived out in the middle of pretty much nowhere in Maine, as in five miles from the center of town and 30 minutes from Windham, which, you know, had Bull Moose and Walmart and those little things that kids find interesting to hang around. And I didn't have a car until very late in high school. And so um and so youth group became the center of how I found an escape from boredom, I guess. But uh in some ways it was, it was nice to grow up in a rural place like that because you have access to open space and things like that. But you know. For, for myself where, you know, I'm a thinker and I like to be open to new things, it was a little suffocating because our reading materials and our books and movies were limited to what fits in the Evangelical worldview. And so Harry Potter, hah, wasn't allowed. I remember bringing Harry Potter books to the house when we first moved in and I had just come back from a Christian youth camp and, you know, at those camps they get you all excited about their belief system and as kids are very moldable, so I came home and super excited about like, you know, God really wants us to like live a certain way and so I think what will make my parents proud is if I decide to burn in my Harry Potter books that have been hiding, kind of, and some of my Pokemon cards. So that sort of gives you a little bit of a... the environment that I grew up in and you know how Harry Potter books and Pokemon cards were treated, imagine how that church community viewed homosexuality. And so it really affected my identity in that I felt constrained and in that the walls were closing in and it wasn't just being in the closet, it was sort of being in a closet where you felt like all four parts of the wall were just closing in on you slowly and you knew it and you felt it and it was suffocating and... and so you live life, you know, not breathing fully and always holding your breath and that definitely, you know, affected my identity because I wasn't allowed to be who I really felt that I was inside and wasn't allowed to develop fully as going through puberty, going to adolescence. You know other kids go on that first movie date or um, you know, awkwardly put a hand over their, their crush's shoulder or sneak a kiss in the school corner and, um or passes a note and the teacher finds out and there's a whole "Ooh. Ahh" by the class like, and taking risks with figuring out who you are as a person. Like I took very little risks in that aspect. And that's what you find in a lot of LGBTQ community member's delayed adolescence. They don't bloom until later in college because in high school, they might have been the only gay kid. You know, you don't have to have a deeply religious background like I had to be stifled. Sometimes it's just, you know, in a rural place or something

Youth Group

Secular Media

Lack of Traditional Dating Experience

Delayed Adolescence

like that, you don't, you feel like you're the only gay kid. And that in itself can signal to you that you need to put off coming out or being yourself. And so, you know, I didn't bloom until later in college and we'll probably talk about that later. But identity-wise, I think that it was very delayed and part of them for survival. Part of it, you know, I would have probably if I'd come out, I probably would have been encouraged to go to conversion therapy camp and thinking back now, I probably would have put up a fight a little bit if I, you know, decided I was brave enough to come out, but I think I eventually would have given them because of, you know, threats such as, well, if you want to live in this house, you have to follow our rules or get out, things like that.

Kendall Garland [00:13:47] Did you want to touch on question 3?

Meghan Horner [00:13:51] Yeah. Um so as you were sort of figuring out your own identity, did you feel that your relationship with the religion was changing over the course of your life? As like, things were, starting to be figured out. Maybe you're maybe starting to come to terms more with um your sexuality.

Marpheen Chann [00:14:12] Um, particularly in high school or after I came out?

Meghan Horner [00:14:14] Um either one.

Marpheen Chann [00:14:14] Um, you know, I think in high school it got a little harder because, you know, you're a full-blown teenager and your hormones and your post-puberty and, um, and I had two, two best friends in high school, Brandon and Travis, and one of them I, you know, was pretty cute haha. Um, he played, you know, soccer, he played, he ran track and was sort of an athlete. Um. And he, I remember he wore American Eagle all the time and, and then the sort of mark of... not popularity, but that you had some sort of income or your parents or some sort of was when he started wearing a lot of Abercrombie. And it was a little awkward how we first met. We, I think his mom called my house, so he lived in Gorham and that was like 40 minutes away from Naples. But we went to the same church and his family went to the same church. And so his mom called randomly and was like, "Hey, can your kid hang out with my kid?" And I remember my parents dropping me off at his house and I had this these assumptions about him as being like this popular kid and I was just like this awkward, middle of everything kind of in between your kid. He didn't really fit into any sort of group. And so it was a little awkward at first, you know, a forced, apparent forced sleepover. But that turned into a deep friendship. Um, you know, he, you know,

Introduction to Religion

Childhood Bestfriends  
(Brandon and Travis)

Gorham, Maine

Naples, Maine

I don't know, him and I just bonded in a way that he understood that I was a little on the quieter side and awkward side. And, you know, he just never it never bothered him and and in some ways, I opened up in certain ways where I was a little bit more expressive than would be in other settings at house, you know, you know teenagers. They like to scream at the top of their lungs and shrill and voice cracks. And so, you know, we got to do what is it called? Guitar Hero. Halo video games are really unhealthy habits of playing until 4 a.m. in the morning. Waking up at seven and going to church and making his dad mad for yelling in the middle of the night. And then um once we got licenses, once he got licenses you know, drive around doing crazy stuff, burnouts in parking lots, hanging out in the Walmart parking lot, just like talking and wasting hours. I don't know how we did it, because now if I was to do that, I would get so bored. But he, you know, I developed a pretty deep relationship with him and that was when as we went on, that was when I was like, okay, I'm really attracted to him, not just physically but emotionally. And, but I obviously was too afraid to like, you know, initiate anything because it was such a troublesome atmosphere. And that was all happening while I was involved in the church, you know, became a youth group music leader, which is sort of a big thing for Christian kids, is the music theater. You know, I wasn't like a rock star, but I could play the piano and sing a little bit. So in small-town church life, that's cutting it close haha. But after I came out, you know, leading up to when I was coming out, when I- my first year was a Bible college in Valley Forge Christian College, which was not in Valley Forge it was a Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. But I still like to joke that it was my Winter Valley Forge for all those history nerds. And just having a separation from my family gave me the space to kind of even though I was in a Christian setting still. To question the beliefs outside of my family structure and slowly I started to find ways to separate myself from the Christian beliefs of my family. And what helped was in the spring of 2010, a group called SoulForce was driving around to Christian campuses and protesting, and they parked their bus at the entrance of Valley Forge, and it wasn't necessarily them that convinced me to separate myself from the Evangelical faith, but it was the reaction of all the Christian students, professors and chaplains and Christian school administrators. Their reaction to these people that had showed up on their doorstep and we had chapels every morning and while they were out there picketing and protesting. The school was all of a sudden in these chapels and sort of like, "The Devil's at our gate, Temptation has come." and. "We're on ground zero of a holy war in America for the soul and spiritual purity of America." And, and I don't know, it's just sort of like, what these folks are doing at the entrance is not that bad, like they're asking for- they handed out pamphlets and I happen to have had one

Relationship with  
Childhood Bestfriend  
(Tyler)

Youth Group Music  
Leader

Valley Forge Christian  
College

Questioning Beliefs

Soulforce

<p>still to this day in my bookcase. And the pamphlet was like, you know, god actually doesn't really say a lot about homosexuality in the New Testament and I was just like you're saying, that's the devil's at our gate but, you know what these people are asking for is acceptance and to be allowed to come as they are. Christian reference. And so the reaction to that was sort of like, you know a lot of the hype about, and twisting of those people's views, in humanity to basically fit a narrative that everything else- the world was against us. And I was like, you know you're kind of taking it too far because even in scriptures it says that "if God is for us that he can be against us?" And here you are you're just, basically casting yourself as a victim of this huge spiritual war that's threatening to wipe you out. I don't think that. I think scripture teaches you a lot of different things about how, you know, just to love your neighbor and if you live right, putting aside morality, and live according to the teachings, then nothing's gonna threaten you. But here you are. You feel like you're threatened by this whole host of demons that you feel like are coming after you. And, the thing about that belief system was that in high school and middle school, I felt very much that it twisted my anxiety and my brain and my mood in my beliefs about what was happening to me because I was in the closet, you know, and because my world around me denied it, denied me my sort of fully living myself. It built up a lot of anxiety and terror and night terrors to the point where I thought, you know, demons tempting me to be gay were lurking around the corner in my bedroom at night. You know, I had sleep paralysis where I felt like things- something was laying on top of me and suffocating me and in the middle of the night. And, and so the belief system in that world, Evangelical world had an impact on me psychologically and so when I started to come out, I knew that I had to cut out the religious part. And so the next four years, as I was attending USM, you know, I became very unchurched and, and was in the process of sort of detoxifying myself from Evangelical Christianity. And, um, and so that was very important. I think I had to do that to get rid of it because even the little bit of good of the goods sort of spirituality, things like meditation, prayer, things that came with Christianity that were good, but they were tainted by the other beliefs. And so totally detoxifying, cutting myself off from the church was important for me to venture out on my own and to figure out who I was, apart from the church and my family's beliefs. And so nowadays, um, post age 24/25, you know, I've met a lot of open and affirming churches. I met a lot of LGBTQ Christians, spiritualists, um, of all different faiths. And, um, there's a big movement among the LGBTQ community to reclaim spirituality and religion. Um, because there are aspects of religion and spirituality that are fulfilling a human need for some sort of connection beyond the temporal, or the physical or, you know, just a moral human existence, I guess you</p>	<p>New Testament</p> <p>Demons</p> <p>Anxiety about Sexuailtiy</p> <p>Sleep Paralysis</p> <p>USM</p> <p>Detoxifying from Evangelical Christianity</p> <p>LGBTQ Christians</p> <p>Reclaiming Spirituality</p>
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could call it. And so today, like I spoke yesterday at Brunswick First Parish since five years ago, I would never have stepped into a church. But, you know, here I am stepping into a church, telling my story. And low and behold, I haven't been- I didn't catch fire. And so spirituality, I think, has become very important to me as a way to connect to others, connect to nature, connect to existence, collective existence. I don't, you know, I think that there are some things that um, you know, it can't be explained yet by things like science or whatnot. I think someday science will be able to explain it, especially with the weird things that happen in quantum physics and entanglement and all that type of stuff. There, there was one article where, you know, the soul might be something quantum related. And so I think that right now the journey is coming full circle to reclaiming a spirituality that I think every human desires. And it doesn't have to be religious. Spirituality can be its own thing. So I think I got around to the answer haha.

Brunswick First Parish

Connecting To The World Through Spirituality

Kendall Garland [00:27:54] Perfect, thank you. Um I want to talk a little bit about more narrowing down your coming out process. So at what time in your life you begin to have an understanding that you were not heterosexual and how did you feel about that experience?

Start of Coming out Process

[00:28:13] I think in... so my, my best friends Brandon and Travis were in the grade ahead of me. Travis had skipped a grade sometime in elementary school. So, um you don't really know what you have until it's about to leave or be gone. And so when their graduation time came I was a junior and I felt myself slip into a malaise, a blue blueness, at losing- because by this time we- me and Brandon were over at Travis's house pretty much every weekend, Saturday night, staying up, eating his mom's brownies and spaghetti, and then going to church the next day and then going to his house and then going to youth group. It was like a weekly ritual for me and Brandon and going to Travis House. And it hit me that when they were graduating that was gonna all go away. And that's when I realized, oh, I really like love this guy, like even slightly more than a brother type of love. It's sort of like, you know, over the seven years we have built something to the point where we're just completely comfortable and close and could talk, you know. And that was really when it got hard to continue to want to hide my being gay and multiple times during my late junior year, my senior year of high school. I was like, what if I just came out? What if- what if what if I just did something that looks so bad in the eyes of the Christian school that they would kick me out so I could go to public school and then just be a gay person? That was a thought that literally went through my head because intrinsically I felt like public school would allow me to be who I was more than Christian school. And there were many times I had that

Brandon and Travis

In love with his best friend

Questioning Coming Out

Christian School



thought and I just like, I just needed just to do something like write the f-word on the front of the school and sign my initials and have them kick me out. So, senior year was hard cause we, you know, I didn't have those two to hang out with every weekend anymore and I didn't have a car or gas money because 2008/2009 gas was like the price now and without, you know, people making what I was making a little bit of money for a grocery store, but um. It was my year at Bible college where... I was driving home for a winter break, Christmas break. Maybe it was Christmas break? Yeah, it was Christmas break. And, I was getting excited to go home because that means, meant I would be able to hang out with Brandon and Travis and, especially, see Travis again. And so him and I were texting I was like, "Hey, headed home. I can't wait to see you all." Like, and he texted back, "Yeah, same here. I love you." And for me I was on the New Jersey Turnpike and, I don't know, this is something, I was struggling at that point, having gone through a full semester, Christian Bible college starting to really, really questioning things. And that was just something I needed to hear from my best friend from high school and middle school. And I like my eyes started watering and I literally had to pull over into the rest stop because I was starting to cry a little bit and um I think that was probably one of the moments where I was just like, you know, man can have a deep love for another man, well at that time 20- 18-year-old, 19-year-old. So, youngin haha. That is deeper than just sort of brotherhood and he loved me like a brother, but I probably- I loved him a lot more than a brother. So, once I got home, we hung out and, you know, this kind of awkward feeling because you all haven't seen each other for three months, four months. But uh I went home and I did something small, but, it was meaningful in that I remember in our household we weren't allowed to watch TV shows, movies, books or anything that was outside of what my parents allowed. And I had a MacBook from college and my own Netflix account at this time, and I scrolled over to the LGBTQ movie section. Which, if you can believe it, up until that point was sort of like taboo, like I dared not touch unless my fingers burst fire. And I was just like looking up LGBT movies and I saw one called Shortbus, highly recommended it, blew my mind. And it was based in New York City and it's the stories of queer people in New York City going to a speakeasy lounge where they were drag shows, orgies. Which in my mind was like, definitely not allowed. Um, and in that movie, um, Christian people would look at it as like all smoking, drugs, sex, like horrible things, but a shift in my mind was these are just humans being humans, regardless of sexuality. They're experiencing life, they're experiencing heartbreak. They're experiencing joy and happiness and sadness and very human things. And, the part that I have never felt romantic heartbreak because I never taken the risk. I did have pretend boyfriend/girlfriend

Senior Year

2008/2009

Christmas Break

Brandon and Travis

Deep Love for Another Man

Young Brotherhood

LGBTQ Movies

Shortbus Movie

NYC

Experiencing Life

Never Experiencing Heartbreak

High School Girlfriends

things in middle school. Like two... two of my male school friends at time, hitched me up with another girl via texts, and literally, all it was was texting back and forth like "How was your day?" And then showing up at school like "I guess we'll sit at the same table because I guess we are a couple." And that was it. And in high school, there's a little bit of the same thing, but it was all pretend. But no heartbreak. And so I was just like, I missed that part where you're allowed to have heartbreak. And so, um, that movie just kind of helped me shift my thinking about, you know, these gay people aren't just off in another world. You know, having tons of sex and doing all a bunch of immoral things, they're just human. And I think that was an important distinction to make. And so when I got home from college, got back from college, I started to question more Christianity and I had the help of, ironically, a Christian philosopher who basically told us there are some things that Christianity believes in America that isn't really right, you know, they went and showed us things, movies, popular culture, all those types of things. And he just opened the doorway that allowed me to be like, I can think on my own, I can research my own. And so the paper was on the Trinity. We had to write a ten-page Christian philosophy paper, and I decided to do the Trinity. And the more I looked into it, you know, the more I dug into how Christianity is taught. We're taught that Christianity is its own religion, its own thing. It was a new thing then, like the idea that anyone can go to heaven and not just purgatory, all those types of things that. But that something that Christianity did well was appropriate other religions and borrowed from other religions to clump it together and sure Christianity had its foundations in Judaism, but then when it expanded beyond Peter, the Apostle Peter, and when the Apostle Paul wanted to take it to the quote-unquote Gentiles, that's when you start seeing that Christianity spreads and is pulling in Greek philosophy, Zoroastrianism, and different things like that, and that the virgin birth isn't anything new to a religion. But the Egyptians had a version of virgin birth. And then the importance of blood in religion like Dionysius, which is the son of Zeus or something, is the god of wine and which is a symbol of blood. And so I just dug in all these things and I was like hold on, I was told that Christianity was its own new thing that was so different from every other religion and here I am reading that it's pretty much appropriated, stolen from so many other religions. And then when Constantine got around to establishing the Council of Nicaea, Nicaea? I think that's how you say it. That that's when they created all these, uh, fake holidays like Christmas, we're told that Christmas is when Jesus is born, but it happens to be around the same time as like with, what the solstice and the Pagan holidays. And that was on purpose because they wanted something to compete with Pagan holidays so that Pagans could be easily converted that um... And so

Missed Heartbreak

Back Home from College

Christian Philosopher

Christianity Appropriate  
Other Religions

Foundations in Judaism

Christianity Competing  
with Pagan Holidays

February Break

those things kind of shook my faith that I had at the time, because then I really felt like I had been lied to. And then allowing that separation then february break, I decided to stay on campus by myself. And, you know, there are a lot of nights where I just laid in bed and just stare at the ceiling and just kind of arguing with God and asking the question over and over again if God is loved then why can't I love, you know, another man in the same way that my parents love each other, to the best they can ha? And I was walking around alone on the campus, you know, I remember there's a snowstorm, a light one night, not a Maine one. And, you know, I texted, called one of my friends and just like, "Hey, I'm gay." And she says, "It's okay it'll be fine. I'm here for you." And then that's when I decided that in Spring that I would transfer to USM. And that summer I was going to start coming out to my family and I had a whole plan. You know, I came home that May I told my best friend Brandon. I wasn't going to tell Travis anytime soon. And Brandon and I worked at the Hannaford Supermarkets, and I walked into work the next day, and, you know, people were looking at me funny and smiling and being extra happy. And I was like, "What's going on?" He's like "Oh we find out you were gay." And I was like, "Oh f-." Um and even though they were, like, supportive and smiling, you know, I lost the narrative. It wasn't on my own terms. And so my anxiety brain kicked in, you know, like the funny looks. Some of the guys were not into it. Just like it was a whole day of anxiety and, you know, at the time punched out of work I was like on the verge of tears and I was like trying to run out. And I got in my car and just started crying and drove home on the back- back way to my house and got home. My parents weren't there, my siblings weren't there, they were away on an errand or something. And so I called my parents like, "Hey uh, something happened at work and you know, I need to tell you all something." And they were like, "Okay, we'll be home soon." They were literally on our- just turned onto our road. And so they pulled in some time later they walk up and I told them what happened. I was like, "Bradon told everyone at work that I was gay." And then my dad was like, "Oh, it's okay, it's okay." And like gives me hugs and like, "You're not gay." And and I was like, "Wait, I didn't say that. I said, I am, you know, I said that he- he told everyone that I was gay because I told him I was gay. I am gay." He was like, "No, you're not you're just confused." And at that point, I just didn't want to fight it. So, I went into my basement bedroom and my three siblings knocked on my door, asked me if I was okay, and told me that they loved me. And I just like, kind of cr- I just cried. And I fell asleep. And then over the summer, it was just like constant, almost constant arguing with my parents. They were always wondering where I was. If I was hooking up with anyone. And beforehand, before they knew I was gay, or before I told them I was gay because they didn't know I was

Coming Out to a Friend

Transferring to USM

Hannaford Supermarkets

Support

Anxiety

Coming Out to parents

Dad Denying Sexuality

Supportive Siblings

gay. They didn't believe I was gay. They just thought it was a phase. Um, no girls were allowed at the house in middle school or high school. Which was fine with me because I didn't have any issue with that. But then now it was like no guys or girls at the house, um, and I didn't and that's when I stopped going to church and all that stuff. And so that was my coming out. It wasn't like we didn't. Really bridge that conflict until years and years later. And USM allowed me the dorm room and the space to be away from that house, 40 minutes away, but still away from the family so I could be involved with the LGBTQ community here.

Kendall Garland [00:44:42] How would you say your relationship is with your parents now after that experience?

Marpheen Chann [00:44:51] Um... It's, it's not back to normal, but it's, it's still warm there. We had a Cold War when I was at USM. Where we argued that first summer. We argued a little bit my first year at USM. But then, but then things just kind of went quiet and we just decided not to talk about the gaping anymore. And so I'd come home for Thanksgiving or Christmas and just, you know, there was at first there was like tension, but then things kind of cooled down and it just became normal not to talk about it and to ignore it. But then in 2014, um my first year in law school in Maine, Maine Law, I was just home for Easter, I think because we were having a ham lunch dinner, and you know, I just remember my mom sort of stepping in and like, "Hey," you know, I was leaning against the counter just watching my dad cook and she walks up at me and, you know, it's she's an- she's an introvert. She's kind of like a little bit of a tough, thin-framed, woman from the county who are picking potatoes. Her father was abusive and divorced her mother when they were children. And she had her own issues. And so it's hard for her to say things sometimes. And so she- she stepped in and she was like, "Hey, Marpheen, you know, how is your boyfriend?" And this was like three or four years after... three or four years of a Cold War of not talking about it. Of things being frozen over and I recognize that the ice is breaking. Not that they were, like, accepting of people being gay, but that they were willing to connect to my life in a way beyond just like skirting around the issue and talking and gossiping about my brothers and sisters. And so since 2014, things have been sort of on a warm track, you know, not full acceptance, but still like still we can kind of sometimes joke about it. You know, I go home nowadays and my grandmother is in her late eighties again from the county and old school. She'll be like, "Hey, can you show me a picture of your roommate?" And I live with two straight, two straight roommates. And this is so funny for an old lady in her eighties, to bug me and say like, "Hey, show me a picture of your roommate." And I was like my

Involvement with the LGBTQ Community

Current Relationship with Parents

“Cold War” with Parents

Christmas/Thanksgiving

Maine Law

Mother’s Childhood

Grandmother

straight roommate? Like why do you want to see a picture of my straight roommate? He's not even that good-looking. Hopefully, he doesn't listen to this haha. And, um, and so it's just funny, like the funny things that they'll do to kind of like- because I think they're curious, but I think that there's- they don't know how to fully embrace it yet. And and the only way they're going to fully embrace it, if I, you know, show them that what they believe about gay people in the LGBTQ community is actually a lot of it's sort of hyperbole and blown up and twisted out of, um, twisted into contortions and sort of false narratives. And so I'm their only window to this world that they have been taught to sort of hate and despise and to cover up with the whole phrase, you know, "love the sinner but hate the sin" type thing so.

False Narratives

"Love the Sinner but Hate the Sin"

Meghan Horner [00:49:11] I want to jump back before you said when you were talking about coming that you had come out to your friend Brandon, but you wanted to hold off on coming out to Travis. Did you ever end up coming out to him? And like, how did that go if you did it?

Coming out to Travis

Marpheen Chann [00:49:22] Mmm. Oh, gosh um... So I was always a good Christian kid up until I came out. When I came out I wanted to experience everything that I had not experienced at high school, like parties and alcohol and all that type of stuff. And so. After I came out, there was a party that weekend and I had been invited before to these things work/colleague parties at least the younger kids. But this is the first time I said yes. So, you know, I went over there and, you know, was having a good time. And me and my friend Catie Paranzi, who also worked at Hannaford. We were quite drunk off wine haha. And this place, this, um, cabin was being house-sitted by one of our colleagues or sorry, we're coworkers. And so it was on the lake in Bridgeton and it had a dock. And I remember me and Catie stumbled down the little hill towards dock and then we were pretty, pretty tipsy. So this dock was probably as wide as this table and it's kind of amazing when you fall into the water. But we made it to the very end of the dock, and her and I are just laying at the end of the dock, just like, a rolling around in like drunken stupor, laughing at the sound of the landing on a lake or something. And I flipped out my phone and I typed in his name and I started text messaging- haha and I sent out a text um, "Hey Travis can I suck your di-" He didn't say anything. But I went home that night and I woke up and I was really over. And he texted back in the morning using all caps, "Marpheen WTF!" Like... And we argued over texts and then that's how he found out. But by that time, at that time, I thought I was had just come out and I wasn't- I kind of wanted to, like, give him the thought that, oh, this is cool, this is alright, like, I don't need to be

Catie Paranzi

Brideton, Maine

afraid of, because by saying that, you know, you know, I'm not gay and bi. As if that was somehow better to him. And what he said was, "No, that doesn't- even worse cause that just means you can't make up your mind." And I was like aw fu- I'm messing this whole thing up. But I think that that brought into both our reminds all the time that we had spent like, even without Brandon, like alone in the dark just staring up at the ceiling, talking about things and how we were going to live on the same street with our own wives and kids and they're all going to get to know each other and grown up together. And in my mind, in all those weird little conversations about Christian young men growing up and starting their own families. In my mind, I was like, I wish it could be you and me on the same street with kids. And then those little, those intimate moments of that two young men can have with each other to talk about girlfriends, you know, he was always talking about how he couldn't get a girlfriend. And I was like, "Why is that? Like you're a perfectly good looking, play sports, all those type of things." He's a little desperate with the girls. But I think that all those things came back to mind as like, for him it was probably like, "Oh is Marpheen just trying to, like, hit on me and get close to me." And so we didn't speak for three, four, five years. And it's kind of funny, he joined a fraternity at UMO. I helped start a fraternity at USM. And so we kind of like mirrored each other's lives even though we didn't have contact with each other. And so we just didn't talk for forever. And then in law school. I don't know how it happened. He had gotten married and it was just really random where he was going out with friends in the Old Port and him and his wife were like, "Hey, you should come and hang out with us." And I got to know his wife at the time, now ex-wife. [Maintenance people enter the room to access the maintenance closet] And... That's cool, I've never seen that before. Um and I got to know his ex-wife at the time and she grew up Christian as well, but had a very different view of it. And we had a really good time with him and his other friends. And then they dropped me off later that night and he texted me. He's like, "Hey, I just want you to know that, you know, my views have changed, and it's not because of my wife. She didn't convince me that in his case, I kind of grew up and changed and I wanted to- I personally wanted to reconnect with my best friend that I spent a good seven years with in middle school/high school." And so, that's how we reconnected. Yeah. But, definitely, the way it came out definitely was not haha. Was not great. But would make a good movie, so.

Kendall Garland [00:56:46] Um, so totally shift gears I just wanted to touch a little bit on how being adopted by this white, Evangelical family has impacted your relationship as being Asian American, as being Cambodian. Can you just touch on that for a bit?

Intimate Moments

Started a Fraternity at USM

Old Port

Reconnecting with Travis

Relationship to Cambodian Culture

<p>Marpheen Chann [00:57:05] Yeah, I- when I got placed in the foster care system and at age 8 about to turn 9, that was really the death knell of me sort of slowly losing the language speaking Khmer, Khmer was the first language I learned because it's the language my mom and grandparents spoke. And so, even though I was born in America, I grew up knowing another language and was considered uh, English as a second language. And so, during foster care they realize that, you know, they try to keep you connected to your biological family. We did visits with my mom on somewhat of a regular basis. But then at some point, they said it needed to stop because when me and my sister Tonya, you know, they did some of these visits where we'd spend the day with her. You know, I remember one of the days we just went around in a taxi doing errands or something and hanging at her house with her boyfriend at the time. But they found out that when we would come back from this, that my sister would just, like, shut down and was like catatonic and we would just be sort of in shock for like a day or two. And so they had to stop those because we were dealing with a lot of trauma when we were seeing her and being exposed to her boyfriends, all the sex and things all over again. And so, by the time we got moved into our adoptive family, you know, we- my mom and my grandma had all moved to California, and we had lost touch. And they tried to keep us in contact. We have phone interviews, but um, you know, I just felt like, you know, I'm in this new life. I don't even speak Khmer anymore, Cambodian. Like, how can I speak to my mom? And why should I have an interpreter just to speak to my mom? So there's a lot of issues that were circulating. And like one, like I was trying to find my way in this new white world community, small town, rural man. How do I fit in? I'm obviously never going to be white, unless I pull a Michael Jackson. Um, and so, you know, our school had uniforms. Polos and khakis and so [maintenance enter and leave the room again] And so uh, you know, polos and khakis were sort of like a symbol of my new life, I guess. And, uh, when I became friends with Travis and Brandon man we loved to go into American eagle it was kind of stupid haha. And American Eagle and Abercrombie became sort of our status symbol in a way, but also a reflection that I was moving and shifting into this new way of life. And, and so, didn't speak Khmer, new community, new school, new friends. Then the third thing, I was completely resistant to having someone interpret for me between me and and and I think that was the shame of not being able to talk to my own mother, which was a lot. And so we just ended up not being able to do that. To stay connected to my grandmother until I reunited with them later. And so I, you know, I became like a quintessential adopted brown kid, you know. In Maine and did my best to fit in. And it wasn't until after I came out until</p>	<p>Khmer</p> <p>English as Second Language as a Child</p> <p>Sister (Tonya)</p> <p>Trauma</p> <p>Doesn't Speak Khmer Anymore</p> <p>American Eagle and Abercrombie</p> <p>Biological Grandmother</p> <p>Came out in 2012</p>
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2012, my sophomore year- after my sophomore year at USM, when I reconnected with my godparents, who at that point lived in Texas, they had me in their home as a kid quite frequently within my toddler years, and they knew my mom pretty well. And so I went and found them on Facebook and was like, "Hey, like, I want to reconnect." And next thing you know, they bought plane tickets for me to Fort Worth, Texas to see them and plane tickets from Fort Worth, Texas, to San Diego to see my family. And that summer in July- June, sorry June. I visited from June, early June to July 4th. Two weeks in Texas for my 21st birthday and then the last two weeks of June and up until July 4th at San Diego visiting my family. And I didn't have really, I just wanted to spend two weeks each, which is kind of a long time hah, but uh it was kind of unintentional to end my visit with my family on July 4th as I flew out July 5th or 6th. And so I ended- ended my visit with my biological family in San Diego, you know, watching fireworks at the Mission SeaWorld beach area. We didn't- we weren't in SeaWorld, but near the water there. And, in my book, I wrote that, you know, it's just so interesting to be celebrating July 4th with hearing Spanish, hearing Vietnamese, hearing Thai and I'm there with my family, because it was something that was totally opposite of what I had grown up with, with my adoptive family. And, and so I came back home, you know, with more questions than answers, but knowing that it was possible to kind of merge my two families together in my mind and in my heart. And so part of what I'm doing today as a leader in the Cambodian community, even though I do not speak a lot of Khmer, I started to learn a little bit more and immersing in the community and helping to lift the community up and build developed leaders and help youth. You know, it's sort of my way of reconnecting to the Cambodian community that I wish I had growing up. And so all the while still maintaining connection to my adoptive family and still being connected with my first foster family, so.

Meghan Horner [01:04:48] Well, you briefly mentioned about your book that you wrote and the book is called Moon In Full, correct?

Marpheen Chann [01:04:53] Yes.

[01:04:55] And I was wondering what your motivation was writing a book like this?

Marpheen Chann [01:04:59] The motivation was simply to find some way to piece it all together. You know, there's so many fragments, so many memories, so many transitions. And part of it was just to make it easy also for people to just pick it up and read it because I'm a little bit of a slow burner kind of friend like, you know, friends um my

Texas

San Diego, California

Mission SeaWorld

Diversity of Languages

Leader in Cambodian Community

Helping Youth

"Moon in Full"

Motivation for writing "Moon in Full"

Memories



close group of friends, they they all recollected that they they became friends with me, but then they didn't find out that I was adopted until like a year into the friendship. And not that I was withholding on purpose, it's just like, this story is so complex and complicated that for me, I can't just say like, "Hey, we're friends, by the way, I'm adopted." Because when they ask me about my family, I, I personally , always start from the beginning and go through the whole history. And so that's a lot for people sometimes. And so, for me, part of it was connecting all of the different things in my life leading up to age 21, but also giving people something that they could read on their own and get to know me without listening to go on and on and on and on about all the different complexities and transitions because that would take, I don't know, a week worth of lectures haha.

Collecting Stories

Kendall Garland [01:06:40] I want to touch on your activism within the LGBT community as well as the Asian American community. So what was your first motivation to get involved with activism?

Activism with Asian American Community

Advocate not Activist

Marpheen Chann [01:06:53] I've never considered myself an activist because... I've always considered myself an advocate and activists, I think, activists do things a little bit differently than I would do it. You know, protests, marches, you know, uh verbally holding people accountable. And for me, I've always had a softer approach. You know, I- the reason why I have always been interested in community organizing and politics is the relational aspect of it, of getting to know people over time and building some level of trust where we can work on things together. And throughout the years, you know, half of the activists like that of them, half of the activists don't like that about me. They see that as, you know, it can be perceived as being cozy with people that they generally disagree with. But um it's informed by my upbringing is that so many people are, including in my Evangelical family, are so used to staking out their own ground and painting things in black and white and saying, either you're for us or against us, either you're holy or you're not holy. You're a sinner or you're not a sinner. You're going to heaven, you're going to hell type of thing that I don't want to live in that kind of world anymore. I think humans are more deeply complex and there's a lot of gray area and intersectionality in there. And when we try to dilute human existence to two binary decisions and existences, I think that does a disservice to the stories we all have and the experiences we all have. So, I take that into how I advocate and understanding that I might not know enough about the other person to make a judgment about them and what they believe in and why they're pushing a certain thing.

Community Organizing

Building Trust

Intersectionality

Student Senator at USM

And for me, I found that works for me because, you know, I remember as a student senator in USM, such an illustrious position, I

Political Ideology

had a simple idea to take the student government constitution and to make it all gender neutral. And in that mindset I thought like oh the student government was then becoming a little politicized. Like there were predominantly Democrats, Independents, but then there were like six Republicans, like college Republicans on there. And they made- they always made a big fuss about like spending, like we shouldn't be spending this money on, you know, students ha like it's our money? But, you know, I thought that they would oppose it. And low and behold, you know, I just- me and my case of why this was important and all that and if you go back into the records of that vote on making the student constitution gender neutral, all six college Republicans voted yes on it. And, and for me, that is the power of genuine connection, relationships, even though it's tough to have relationships with them because they had a different worldview. I didn't write them off. I didn't say like, "Oh, you're just a bunch of boys pretending to be men." Um and what I found was that they were willing to disagree with me on on a lot of things, but they actually agreed with me on things that I never thought they would agree on. And I think that, that's why I call myself more of an advocate is because, you know, I have beliefs, values and ideals, but I also know that. To create change and to realize change that you need more than one person and you need more than one side. You need to convince people that, you know, you shouldn't just assume that they're going to disagree with you. And even if they disagree, there might be a reason why. And once you figure out a reason why they disagree with you, then there could be an opportunity to convince them otherwise. But that doesn't happen unless you actually sit down to talk to something and have a difficult conversation. And for me, you know, that's how I approach things and do things and I remember USM- #USMFuture, when a lot of budget cuts were being proposed for humanities and budget cuts for USM, we went up and lobbied a bunch of legislators in Augusta. Because for me, it wasn't just that the president of the university at the time just wanted to cut things left and right. For me, I saw the systemic issue that the state had just went from funding 70% of education, higher education in Maine in the nineties to 2011, 2012-13, only subsidizing 30% of it. The rest was paid by student tuition. That's a total polar switch. And, and so my argument during the protest were the state is to blame for part of this. And so that's why we ended up in Augusta saying, hey, you need to stop these budget cuts, you need to be funding us more. And I remember in that in those lobbying sessions, we talked to both Democrats and Republicans. And there was this one guy, Mike McClellan from Raymond, state rep. Republican, definitely had some views on. During our lobbying session day with Maine Education Association, I stopped him in the hallway before walking to the legislature and said, "Hey, can I just talk to you about the budget cuts for USM?"

Power of Genuine Connection

Creating Change

USMFuture

Lobbying in Augusta

Funding Education

Mike McClellan

Maine Education Association

Budget Cuts

And he turns to me and he says, "Marpheen, like, you know, we may disagree on some things, but I will always stop and talk to you because, you know, um, because you approach me softly and all those types of things." And even though he walked away not necessarily agreeing to stop the budget cuts, you know, we walked away having some common ground of trust. And the fact that he stood there and listened to me and actively listened to me while I was talking about what USM meant to me, I think is, is what I think we should strive for in advocacy and even in activism. Because I think, I think today because of the political industrial complex and the world of the duopoly of Democrats and Republicans fighting against each other I think we want to split hairs and split each other into two different camps so that it's easier to know where people stand. Which can be helpful, but then you have to find out that the moments in times where you do need to establish some sort of relationship with someone in order to convince them that your cause is true, just, and right. And I think part of the reason why people are afraid to do that is because the perception of it might appear as if they're compromising their own morality or their own belief systems by stepping into the middle zone and you know, there's a risk in that, but if your if your cause is just and right and what you believe is, you know, in the grand scheme of the moral universe is just and equitable, then you don't have anything to be afraid of. And so that's how I approach advocacy and that's how I do the work I do. And some people like it, some people don't like it, but I'm getting to the age where I don't care haha.

Political Industrial Complex

Belief Systems

Advice to Younger Generations about Advocacy

Kendall Garland [01:16:43] When you- what is a piece of advice you would give to younger generations about getting involved with the advocacy work? Are there like specific events that really shaped your- shape or changed your perspective?

City Hall  
Capitol

Marpheen Chann [01:17:11] I think um don't go halfway when you're when you want to see change. And that's really what I was talking about before. Activism takes you halfway. Calling out for change takes you halfway. Standing on the steps of City Hall or standing on the steps of the Capitol. Going on social media and yelling your heart and your beliefs out and um. And go to the legislature or board meetings or are having and saying things only takes you halfway. The hard work then is to sustain movement, any movement, to sustain it, to grow it, to achieve the goals, goes beyond standing up with a megaphone and making your voice heard in the world. The harder work is the human work of it is to engage the people that you want to change their minds. You want to bring them to your side. You want to convince them that your cause is just and true and right. Which is the harder work of any movement. And if you look through

Engage the People

Marches and Protests

history, if you look through recent movements, older movements. That yes, marches, protests, and those sorts of things are good at bringing attention to issues. But it's a people who build relationships who, you know, sit down one on ones and have hard conversations, who ultimately convince people in power, people in positions of power, to change. You know Lyndon B. Johnson s one of those people who, you know, kind of had it was getting there on the whole civil rights issue, but needed consistent nudging from Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. Martin Luther King and a lot of people look at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr and see him giving speeches, giving them marching in protest, but what they don't talk about is how he met in private with Lyndon Johnson and Congress and senators and did the relational part of advocacy work. Those were the moments. Those are the moments that can get people in power to change their positions and their ideas. Otherwise, if you just stuck to protests and marches, you know, it's like it's a spark that lights the movement, but it is not the fan that keeps the flame alive. And so the second part of your question was, I forgot.

Lyndon B. Johnson  
 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.  
 Congress

Kendall Garland [01:20:38] Um Actually, I- Do you want to talk a little bit more about his book?

Wrapping up Interview  
 Embracing Identity

Meghan Horner [01:20:47] I think we're all good.

Kendall Garland [01:20:47] We are coming up on our ninety minutes, but I want to end this by asking what would you tell your younger self about embracing each part of your identity?

Take Risks

Marpheen Chann [01:21:03] I would tell myself, you know, it's do what you have to do to survive and to not get- become homeless or put in a conversion therapy camp. But there are other ways that you could also embrace your identity. Like, take risks. You know, love a person, even if it has to be in secret. When you're lying next to your best friend, you know, do the thing and try to hold his hand or, you know, sneak a kiss maybe. And even though he might reject it, and what not then you wouldn't have had a dumb moment on the dock haha. And you know, even though your parents were all over the place, like, you know, and didn't allow you to hang out with certain people like there were certain people that in middle school and high school that, you know, made advances and you push them away. Don't push them away, like experiment. And if your parents don't want you to go to a certain person's house, climb through the window and run ten miles. Naples, Maine, everything's five miles, ten miles apart. And so do what you need to do to survive, to fly under the radar, but, you know, as a teenager, you're allowed to make mistakes and experiment and take risks and, you know, there are ways to do

Experiment  
 Fly Under the Radar  
 Identity was Stuck

things without getting caught. And that's what I would tell my younger self is I was so afraid of getting caught or getting perceived as gay that, you know, I didn't do anything. I was stuck. I was immobile. Not physically, but sort of like my identity was stuck in the gear and just wouldn't move forward. And so today, it's easier for young people to be who they are and discover who they are and there are still challenges, even if they still may have difficult families. But, there are more resources available. So even though your family might not be accepting, you know, you can find resources at school. You can find resources in the community. There are hotlines, there are online resources, ways to hide those searches haha if you need to look up GLSEN or Trevor Project or whatever, you need to look up. I think that, you know, I was bound by the technology of our day, which is MySpace and things like that that was hard to imagine driving 50 minutes to Portland to go to a youth- LGBTQ youth meeting. And so I think that my advice to my younger self and any users: Take risks and there is no reward without risk. And building out who you are and your identity it never stops. It is always growing because our brains are elastic. Oh, and don't get stuck in one mode of being don't get stuck in here. I know no one drives a shift car these days, but, you know, being human is about always moving forward and progressing. And so never deny yourself that. It's like sports, video games, hobbies, you know, you get better the more you do it. And the same thing with living is you get better at living by living. And, so that would be my advice.

Kendall Garland [01:25:33] Thank you so much for being with us today. We really appreciate you telling your story. Um.. do you wanna-?

Meghan Horner [01:25:40] Yeah. Um is there anything else that we haven't talked about here that you would like to bring up in the last few minutes?

Marpheen Chann [01:25:52] Umm, no, I think that covered most of it so. S.

Meghan Horner [01:25:55] Awesome. So, we will be sending you an electronic copy of the audio file by email and the transcription when we have transcribed it. And so again, thank you so much for meeting with us and telling your story. We really appreciate you for coming here.

Marpheen Chann [01:26:09] Thank you.

[01:26:11] So now I will turn these off.

GLSEN and Trevor Project

LGBTQ youth meeting

“Building your Identity never Stops”

“Get Better at Living by Living”

End of Interview

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