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<p>Dale Geist</p> <p>Milewski [00:00:04] It is 1:06 p.m. on November 30th. I am Abby Milewski. That is A-B-B-Y M-I-L-E-W-S-K-I, I'm here with Dale Geist and, we are on the second floor of the Glickman Library and, I am at USM on Portland campus. Hi Dale,</p> <p>Geist [00:00:26] Hi Abby.</p> <p>Milewski [00:00:28] Would you like to start by spelling your name for me?</p> <p>Geist [00:00:30] Sure. Dale. D-A-L-E. Geist. G-E-I-S-T.</p> <p>Milewski [00:00:36] Thank you so much. can you please tell me your pronouns?</p> <p>Geist [00:00:40] He and him.</p> <p>Milewski [00:00:41] Thank you. And how would you describe your identity in terms of gender or sexuality? This can also be gay, bi, gender fluid, non-binary.</p> <p>Geist [00:00:53] Yeah, I'm Bi. Bi is the way, I identify.</p> <p>Milewski [00:00:58] How about in terms of race or ethnicity?</p> <p>Geist [00:01:01] White. Non-Hispanic.</p> <p>Milewski [00:01:05] Okay. Um, Where did you grow up?</p> <p>Geist [00:01:09] In upstate New York. 3 different areas.</p> <p>Milewski [00:01:15] Uh, where were those areas?</p> <p>Geist [00:01:15] Buffalo. Which is in the extreme western New York. Uh, Cortland, which is basically central New York and um,</p>	<p>Time and place: Glickman Library, November 30, 1:06 pm</p> <p>Name</p> <p>Pronouns</p> <p>Self identity (sexuality) Bi</p> <p>Self Identity (race) White</p> <p>Background story (New York)</p> <p>Buffalo Cortland</p>

Plattsburgh, which is very north, not far from Canada.

Milewski [00:01:29] What was it like to grow up in those places?

Geist [00:01:40] I mean, that is the same as asking me like, what was it like to grow up?

Milewski [00:01:45] oh ok ok.

Geist [00:01:45] Which is a broad question. Um, I feel like my childhood in, in Cortland, especially where I lived from age 7 to 13, was kind of a typical maybe small town childhood. Not a tiny town, There was a, there was a state university there, and it was the county seat, but it was a, ya know a town of 20,000. And a inter-cultural area, we lived on a dead end street at the edge of town. So, you know, there were pastures and, and woods, but also, you know, sort of residential streets. And I played baseball with my friends and we go sledding across the street in the wintertime, and, and I think by the time I was in, um, junior high school, um, I recognized that... I, I felt like I was hitting some of the cultural limitations of a town like that. And I hope to remember when, you know, my folks announced that we were moving to Plattsburgh, I hoped that it would be a more broadminded place. And it wasn't. ha ha ha So I spent my high school. Years in another pretty similar town, which is about 20,000. It was the county seat and had a state university there. And um, it was, that was hard for me. I was um, shy and, and um, it was hard for me to make friends. And of course, I was hitting adolescence, you know, and I was also small, which is not a good advantage if you're if you're also shy. Um, I wasn't terribly athletic. Eventually, I - I played enough sports to become not, you know, not completely unpopular. But, you know, at first I was a real kind of social nobody, which is very important if you're, if you're 14 or 15 to, to most kids. Some kids don't give a damn. But I certainly did, did care about being accepted. And I, I really wasn't, um, socially accepted. So I was very, I was very depressed when I was 14 and 15 and sort of gradually as um, as I got more integrated into high school and did more stuff and got better known and I became less unhappy. I think a lot of that was just more social acceptance. Um, and of course, I was also at the same time, maybe, maybe you'll get into this, but I was also sort of becoming a sexual being as I was in my, ya know adolescence. And I was, I was a

Plattsburgh

Childhood
City Demographics

Small town politics

Trying to fit in as a kid

Discovering sexual identity

total loner, like I didn't have you know, I had some, some friends. But I didn't have anybody I was like going out with or anything like that. And there was nobody in town that was openly queer. Like, that just wasn't happening. And I understood my um, sexuality as being, you know, very broad, encompassing girls and boys. And so that was very confusing to me, um, and also shameful because, you know, being called, you know, "fag" or whatever was a horrible, um, insult that was thrown around at school. So you couldn't, you couldn't talk to anybody about that stuff. And so that was that was another hard part for me, in addition to this sort of loneliness, I was also feeling a lot of shame. Um. And so those were some rough years. Um, but, uh so I guess maybe that goes some way to answering your question.

Milewski [00:05:35] Uh, yes, thank you. Um, Can you tell me a little bit about, uh, like the family you came from in terms of, ah, religion and, uh, other cultural influences that you might have felt?

Geist [00:05:45] Sure. Um, my mom and dad both grew up in upstate New York. She was from a very small town and he was from Buffalo. And, um, they, uh, they were not overly religious. Um, I think he had grown up Presbyterian sort of going to church on Sundays. She had grown up Catholic, and she did, I don't know if she converted, but she stopped being Catholic. And when I was a younger kid, we went to church every Sunday and I went to like, uh, a Presbyterian, um, Church School where they told Bible stories and stuff. When we moved away from, from, from Buffalo, where my dad's family was, um, he stopped going to church. And my mom got into Unitarian, the Unitarian church. Much more, um, in the you know early seventies. Kind of a hippie, kind of a place. Especially for a little town like that. And, um, but there wasn't a great deal of religion or spirituality. You know, it was sort of... Like most of the people that I know or that I knew, you know, religion was just an institution. It didn't reflect anything strong inside of you. haha. Um, and other cultural elements? I mean, you know, I was from, so my, my dad's family was uh, from German immigrants. And so there was a certain amount of, you know, you work hard, you, you live clean and, you know, just be a good citizen. Um, and I think, you know, sort of on my mom's side, too, I mean, her, my, my grandmother was a real, um, go-getter. So there's a little bit more of a, I think a "Individualistic" spirit going on there on my mom's side. But um, you know, like most families in, in that day

Being queer in adolescence

No representation in living areas

First encounter with Homophobic slurs

Religious upbringing/parents religious affiliation

Religion as an institution

German grandma culture

and age, the, the, the roles were still kind of a holdover from, from the fifties where, you know, my dad had the full-time job, and he was making the money, and he was home last, and he was sort of the, you know, the disciplinarian. And my mom had part time jobs most of the time. She was, you know, raising us. But she was the primary caregiver, and, and, you know, it was, if we were going get trouble, it was like, "wait till your dad gets home" kind of thing. Um, you know but it was at the same time, it was the sixties, and they were, you know, educated um, and a little bit, I guess, liberal for, for that milieu. And um, so they weren't immune to um, the opening up that was happening across, you know, society in the, in the late sixties and seventies. Which I think eventually led to their divorce in the mid seventies. Because, you know, my mom was not really content being a housewife. And um, once she was able to get her degree and get a job, she was out of there. That was a pretty common story in the, in the seventies. Um, yeah. So other cultural elements? You know, like I said, it was, these were, you know, a lot of things were, would have been pretty recognizable. In growing up in the seventies in Cortland and Plattsburgh, um, to anybody who had grown up in the fifties. It wasn't you know, there were no, um, there were no riots going on. There were a few people with long hair. But, you know, there was no openly gay people. There was a gay bar in Plattsburgh, but nobody that I knew went to it, or admitted to going to it. Um. So, you know, culturally, I think by today's standards, fairly conservative places.

Milewski [00:09:35] Um, can you tell me when you first knew that you weren't strictly heterosexual?

Geist [00:09:40] Well, you know, it's hard to say. I mean, like I said, as soon as I began having sexual feelings, they were for, for boys and girls. Um, but I don't, I didn't really accept that. There were things that, like, I read everything about sex that I could get my hands on. And, you know, there was a book called "Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Sex", but we're afraid to ask about that, and my parents had in the house, so I grabbed it and I read about it, in some, a lot of the things that, um, that I was reading, it said, well, it's natural for, for, you know, adolescence to experiment with people of their own gender, but usually they grow out of it. So that was what I was thinking was going to happen. And so I didn't really identify as bisexual. Um, you know, I didn't think of myself that way. I just

Nuclear Family

Education:
Being a liberal(ish)
family within a
conservative town

Parents divorced in
the 70s

Cortland, 50
traditional

Discovering sexual
identity

Books on sexuality,
first use of media

thought of myself as having an immature sexuality. Um, but I will say, you know, that, um, and actually, like, and actually the term bisexual wasn't in common use, um, in the early seventies. You know, it was homosexual or heterosexual, you know, gay or straight. And um, but my parents subscribed to Newsweek, and um, there was a, there was an article on David Bowie in, uh, maybe 1975 or 76, when I was about 15, and um, he said he was bisexual. And as soon as I read that word. I was like, That's me! You know? So, I still for, for like ten more years, I thought that I might grow out of it. And, I would say it really wasn't until probably my, my mid-twenties that I was like, I don't think I'm growing out of this. Haha, you know, I think this is part of me. You know, um, so yeah, I mean, that's a long answer to your question, but that's kind of where I was at. I was probably not till I was in my mid-twenties that I admitted to myself that this was me, and it really was even a long haul after that to actually accept that part. You know, so much shame, growing up, um, the way that I did in that.

Milewski [00:12:14] So I'm hearing that your, um, journey to identity and possible, like your coming out story is different? Do you have a coming out story or... (unintelligible)

Geist [00:12:25] Yeah. Um, so, um, you know, when I was in my mid twenties, I think it was the first time. Like I slept with another man. And I had had girlfriends and stuff before that because it was a thing to do. Like that there was no controversy there. And inside of myself, I could, I could do that as well. And um, but when I, when I first slept with a man, I did tell my best friend. And so in a way, that was a coming out to him. And um, I had very good friends over the next, some years, that um, I also came out to, just two or three or whatever. And when I had girlfriends, I also came out to them, I told them. And um, so there's a very small number of people that knew all the way up until, um... Eh, up until my mid-fifties. Um, and I hadn't even come out to anybody in my family. But uh, probably, you know, sometime about 12,10 years ago, maybe in my, my early fifties. This is really hard to do. I, I came out to my sister. Um, and I was already married at the time, too, to that woman. A woman who knew, like, you know, she knew that I was bi going into the whole thing. Um, but I came out to my sister and that was very hard. That was hard. And then um, the Pulse shootings happened in um, maybe 2016. Not terribly long ago. And at that point, I thought, you know, I'm not only, I'm not only, like

Newsweek: second media source

Bisexual Representation

David Bowie

Self-identifying

Sex with men and woman

Coming out to friends

Coming out to girlfriends

Coming out to sister

Pulse Night Club, 2016 shooting

hurting myself by staying closeted. And not telling my friends and community, but I'm actually also enabling a sort of, a culture that, that others queer people by allowing all my friends and everybody that knew me to believe that I was straight. I was I was allowing this, idea to, to perpetuate that, that, that, you know, queer people were not the people that you knew, they were somebody else. So I, I, I thought I had to, and I thought that that kind of thing is what led to the Pulse shootings. And I thought I had a duty to come out at that point. And so I did it on Facebook. I had hundreds of Facebook friends, some of whom, who knew me very well, and some of them who didn't know me well at all. And it just seemed like the, the quickest way to come out to the most people. So, um, yeah, I composed a little Facebook post, haha, and I hovered over that send button for a long time and, um, and then I hit it, you know, and I, I felt a great deal of relief. It was about ten years ago, eight years ago, something like that.

Milewski [00:16:14] Um, that's a really, really interesting story, um, to hear the perspective of, um, someone who is just coming out as an adult, um who's already had, you know, their whole life in front of them. Yeah.

Geist [00:16:28] Yeah. And let me say, you know um, it was purely internal um, shame or internal barriers. Because I was living in Northern California, you know, the most liberal place in the country. And, and there were, you know, with an enormous queer culture, there was no chance that anybody that I knew was going to have a problem with it. None. And yet, it took me decades to, to be able to come out just because I was so, eh, terrified of it. So, yeah.

Milewski [00:17:16] Um, well, ah transitioning a little bit, um, topics here, um you are certainly in the media now. Can we talk a little bit about Country Queer?

Geist [00:17:25] Sure.

Milewski [00:17:26] Um, what drove you to found the magazine?

Geist [00:17:29] Okay, um, I'm going to be very candid with you. Um, I had, eh, created a career for myself in, um, digital media, and I had mostly had jobs that were not, um, that I didn't love. And um, I

Violence against the Queer Community

Coming out as an adult

Coming out on Facebook

The feeling of relief from coming out

Internalized shame from sexuality

Northern California

Country Queer

Founding country Queer

Lack of job satisfaction

really wanted to create a job for myself that I loved. And um, I had had a number of ideas in the past for various businesses, and some of them were um, uh, probably viable from a business perspective, but not very interesting to me. Which meant that I probably didn't have the gumption to stick with them until they became successful, or else they were interesting to me and probably not very viable as business, businesses. So I discarded him for that reason as well, but when I hit on the idea I really was looking for, Well, what can I do? That's both interesting and I think has a decent chance of becoming, you know, a paying job. And I looked at all the things that I was interested in, and, and I had for quite a while that interested in, in queer folks making country, and Americana, and folk music. And I thought there, there must be other people around here that are interested in this. Maybe there are enough, where if I, if I launched, you know, a blog and maybe sell, sold some branded merchandise, I can, I can turn this into something that, that there will be a job. And um, that is really what lay behind it. That's why, that's why I started it. I, I thought this was a good thing, you know, I. Thought, you know, clearly there were progressive intentions of trying to shine the spotlight on marginalized artists. And then there was also the idea of like, you know, hopefully I can turn this into something that will, that will pay my bills. Yeah.

Milewski [00:19:41] What was the process like from starting from an idea of this thing that would eventually become Country Queer to, um, implementing the things that would, like push the project forward?

Geist [00:19:55] Yeah. Um, so I had a, I had a full-time job and um, so I was doing this stuff on the side, but I registered the domain. I knew there's going to be a blog. I had a logo designed. I knew I wanted a really good one, even though I was a designer, I wasn't a great designer and I wanted a really cool logo that would be important for merchandise and so forth. Um, you know, work with that designer to design these hats, were the first things we sold. And I fired up a, a Word press blog. I actually had hired somebody to, to start, um, eh, social media accounts. And this person had come into possession of um, an existing, but dormant, stagnant, um, queer country magazine called Strange Fire. And she said, "Do you want to buy this?" And I was like, "Meh oh, you know, it doesn't have that many readers. I could probably pretty much do this myself" but, um, you know, it's got some content and it'll save me a few hours. And more money and time

Starting your own business

Blog, internet media

Starting up Country Queer

Other Queer media: Stange Fire

at that point, so I bought it for a thousand bucks, and then rebranded it. And by, at that point, which was September 2019, you know, the, the basic structure was in place. There was a blog, and there was an Etsy store. hahaha. Um, so, you know, that's kind of how it went from idea to implementation. I had the idea kicking around for a while, um, and I had registered the domain immediately. I was sort of surprised and happy to find that it was available, um, but I didn't really do much about it because I am... Kind of lazy and I feel like I had a job and I had a family which was taking a lot of my, you know, time and I had a, you know, I'm a songwriter, so I was involved in that. I didn't feel like I had to, but it was an idea that really wouldn't leave me alone. And so after a few months, I um, you know, I contacted the person, Cindy Emch, and I said, "I have this idea, what do you think about it?" That she's like, "I think you should do it" okay. It was the first time I had reached out to anybody else and said, "What do you think of this idea?" I got positive reinforcement. So I moved to heaven. You know, eventually it just wouldn't leave me alone. So I thought, well, I got to try it.

Cindy Emch

Milewski [00:22:17] And I heard a date somewhere in that story. You mentioned 2019? That was right before the pandemic. Um, did that influence, um, how the project rolled out?

Pandemic

Geist [00:22:29] Yeah. So for the first, um, I guess six months or so, um, five or six months, Cindy was the editor in chief, and I would write, you know, one or two pieces a week and she would write one or two a week, and occasionally we'd have other people that contributed. Um, and I still had my full time-job. And then, you know, she said, "Look. I've got an album coming out. I need to I need to step away from this." And I thought, okay, well, what am I going to do? You know? And basically, right at the time that she stepped away, um, lockdown happened. And I, within a couple of weeks, I had been laid off of my job. I'm over it. But, um, so there I was with, with no job, haha, and I didn't have, you know, she had been the person who was finding content and putting it up on the website. I didn't really know how to go about doing that. So the website was basically dead at that point. And I had to make a decision about what to do. Whether to find another job and maybe stop doing Country Queer, or whether to kind of just try and do that, try and make it work. And I was on unemployment, so I didn't have an income. And I remember putting

Job loss during pandemic

out a tweet saying, you know, here's where I'm at. And some people were like, you got to do this, you got to keep doing it. So I was like, okay. So I started doing it full time and I eventually figured out how to get, you know, content coming in, and, um, how to edit it, and how to do all that stuff. Um, yeah, so the, the, the lockdown really did affect it. And the other part about it was I started putting out on Twitter, "Look, I would love to get writers for this" and I think, and I had some success with that. And I think that was partly because people didn't have, may, they may have lost their job or they didn't have their usual, they were artists, they were artists and they couldn't really tour, or you know record and, in, and were sort of available. So, um, I began to have, you know, volunteers writing for us and, and doing a podcast as well. So that really did help a lot. Um, and that continued for, like, about a year. We continued to grow as a mostly volunteer, uh, organization. And of course, my unemployment ran out, and um, so it's, eh, you know within about a year after lockdown, um, as I knew it must, um, I started transitioning into an, a, a organization where we hopefully would all get paid, including me. Um, I don't know how much detail to go into in terms of like, you know, the, the business stuff and getting, getting revenue flowing in. Um. But, you know, so, so in um, the middle of 2021, we transition from a volunteer, mostly volunteer organization to a, to a paid organization. Um, but I didn't really get paid at that time and that was. Hard.

Social Media: Twitter

Reaching out for help

Milewski [00:26:16] It sounds like it was a, a big passion project and, you know, kind of thing that keeps you going forward, um It sounds like the response you got, pretty immediately, was positive and everyone wanted to be on board. What types of people were on board um, and helped you in the beginning processes? Were they mostly queer and gay people?

Geist [00:26:35] Oh yeah. All I mean, I sort of had a policy of like, you know, I'm not, you know, we're, we're going to have, eh, all of the writers are going to be queer, um, that was, that was mainly it. I was like, "we can cover some straight people" because at first, like, I didn't even know how many artists there were. And I was like, "we're going to have to cover some, some artists that are straight, but are allies" you know, so we did that. But no, the people they showed up were, um, were all queer, um, and interested in, in, for the most part, we interested in the um, social movement aspect of it of. Of like,

Queer employment
Queer representation

Journalism

Social Movements

changing country music. Um, and you know, as you'll recall in this, the starting in the summer of 2020, there was a lot it was a time of great social upheaval. You know, the Black Lives Matter protests were going on, um, and eh, it was also, you wouldn't notice unless you were in that world, but, a time of change for country music as well. And that went all the way through, um, early 2021. So um, the reactionary, insurrectionary, um, wave that was happening between, you know, the election in 2020 and the um, inauguration in, in 2021 were um, cultural. Right? And, and country music fit into some of those cultural, um, aspects in a specific way. Country music is the most conservative genre. I mean, it appeals to the most conservative audience. And we were in there trying to, sort of, change things. And so we, we were, we got a lot of traction from it. We, I did, we were getting interviewed. We were doing Op-eds. There was a time, a, a, a 24-hour period in early February of 2021, um where T.J. Osborne became sort of the first actual charting country star to come out as gay. Ever. That made big news in our little world. And then, um, Morgan Wallen was caught on video using the N-word. He was already a huge country star, and so that was another, sort of like, both of those things happening within 24 hours were like, sort of a watershed cultural, political moment in, c-country. And we were kind of in the middle of that and we were, you know, I was on panels and so forth. So in that period, between the, the things that were driving the volunteers and us having a, staked out a place in this political and cultural landscape, there was a lot of energy within Country Queer. And I had sort of like, flung open the doors and kind of invited, most anybody that wanted to help, to come and help. And there were people that were not doing much, um, except, you know, sort of making a lot of noise and saying "we should be doing more" and "I should be doing more" Um, so there was I did my best to provide leadership, but I, I began to come in for some criticism from, from within the organization. There were people that were, felt like they really had a stake and that if they were going to, um, you know, offer their advice, that I should absolutely take it. Otherwise, I wasn't listening. And, um, I felt an obligation to guide the company, um, in the best way that I saw fit, since I had founded it, and it had my name on it. And I was the only person that was working on it fulltime, and had put my own money into it. And it became clear once we started transitioning into a paid organization. That some people were mad at me. And some, some had left, um, Country Queer, and some people, um, were

Black Lives Matter

2021

Culture shift

Journalism

T.J Osborne

Op-Eds in Country Queer

Morgan Wallen

Political activism

Internal leadership struggles

publicly mad at me. On social media. And um, that, that was, um, and I was accused of things, actually, that, um, were mostly not true, on public media and on social media. And, uh, that, that was, that was hard. It was a hard thing to go through. Um. But we recovered from it, and we became what we probably should have been, which was, you know, a little niche, professional, journal, that where people understood that we had standards, and one the things that people were mad about was that I was like, "We have standards" if people want to write for us, they have to submit a writing sample and show that they can write. There were people that were mad about that, um, but I, I felt like it needed to be a professional organization. So um Yeah.

The importance of professionalization

Milewski [00:32:02] Uh, you mentioned that, ah, there's some ties between, eh, the founding of the magazine within social movements and, um. For you what, where does ah, Country Queer fall for you? Is it, ah, part of, um, activism? Is it art expression, is it digital representation?

Geist [00:32:27] Yeah, I would say at this point it's not activism. And we did engage in some of that. Like I, you know, I published an op-ed on January 6th or January 7th saying, you know, Trump has to go. haha. And it tied that to, uh, my convictions about, um, American culture and the place that this kind of music has, and the quest for human liberation. And I felt that this is a guy who was really directly threatening that. So I published that, I meant it at the time, but we don't do that stuff right now. Our mission is much more about lifting up the artists that are making great music, the queer country artists whose voices should be heard and deserve to be heard. Really, we're much more about that. We're much more about shining a light on deserving, um, artists who are doing great stuff. And, and not getting, and not, not getting represented. And that has a follow-on effect on the fans, who have a chance now to see themselves represented and have a chance to feel a sense of community where there have been queer country fans that just have felt alone until they discovered us. And I feel like that's a really important part of our mission. And, you know, in doing so, we have an influence on the country music establishment. They, they can't ignore great queer artists and they can't ignore an audience that's, that's sizable.

Activism

January 6th

Queer Representation in Country and American Music

The music establishment reacting to Queer country artists and fans

Milewski [00:33:58] What, uh, what do you think that you are most

proud of, um, with Country Queer?

Geist [00:34:23] We have made a difference. It's a brand that's known to, tens of thousands of people, that has a vibe of, um positive, um, representation of queer folks. In a cultural realm where we were mostly invisible before. And that's got a lot of great ramifications. We've covered over 500 queer artists. I don't think anybody knew there were over 500 queer country artists before we started. I sure didn't know it. Um, and, I think, that's probably what, I'm most proud of is we have managed to, to shine a light on a lot of great music and a lot of great artists. And bring it to a lot of people.

Milewski [00:35:36] Do you remember, um, the moment you first listened to country music that was specifically labeled as queer?

Geist [00:35:48] Well, I mean, I think the first time that I knew I was listening to a queer artist that was making Americana music, I really came from the Americana, you know, realm. Which is basically just country for Liberals. Um, I was working for, um, a little, eh, roots music publication called No Depression, and, um, we were covering Brandi Carlile. So, you know, who is, who is known to be queer. So that, that to me was like the first time that I really, you know, felt like, okay, well, here is somebody whose career is making this kind of music. And, you know, in retrospect, there was clear predecessors in, in like Indigo Girls, for instance. But Indigo Girls were like, you know, pop, rock, country. They were like part of Americana by the, you know, by the time that I was really paying attention to that stuff. And, and so I'd say, Brandi Carlile, it's probably the first time. Yeah.

Milewski [00:36:53] Um, they're not necessarily the same genre, but earlier you mentioned, ah, the importance of David Bowie to you, do you want to expand a little bit more on how, eh, he influenced your life?.

Geist [00:37:06] Well, look, you know, um, I can talk a lot about David Bowie. Hahaha, um, and a lot of people, a lot of people, could. A lot of people of my generation, especially, you know, none of us had seen anything like that, especially we were, you know, like maybe if you were a teenager in New York City or London, you had seen something like it. But if you were a teenager, in in Plattsburgh or

Positive change in music industry

Americana

No Depression
Brandi Carlile

Indigo Girls

David Bowie

Generational Icons
New York, London
Plattsburgh

Cortland or any, any, you know, most any place in the world, you had never seen anything like David Bowie. You saw Elton John, right? Elton John was really popular. He was sort of admitting that he was maybe bisexual. But, you know, he was obviously sort of colorful and stuff. But David Bowie was like... And John was not really sexual... David Bowie was really sexual. And, you know. And he really led with, iconoclasm and being different. Um, and, and it was electrifying! You know? Haha! Um, to have somebody, like, out, like that. That was out there, you know, and, and he made great music, you know, like the music was really cool. And some of it was like, you have a song called "John I'm Only Dancing" where it's pretty clearly that, that, you know, that, that the, the guy who singing, the male who is singing and singing to a person named John. And, and he's saying, I'm, you know, yeah, I'm dancing with this girl, but I'm only dancing. Like it's a very bisexual song. And this is like in 1976 or something, you know? And it was, it was, it was a big deal to, to me. Um, and I, you know, I mean like I said, yeah after that, I just became like a really huge fan of his music, and and got way into it for many years.

Milewski [00:39:06] Um, ah, throughout you've mentioned different places that you've lived, um in Plattsburg and, um Cortland, and now in Maine and, ah, in California. Where do you, what, what place do you feel the most belonging within the sense of your Identity?

Geist [00:39:27] And I gather it's so hard, you know, I mean, in my in my bones and my blood, you know, like I grew up in the Northeast, you know, I grew up with the changing of the seasons. I think I grew up with the particular way that the sun slants when it's above, you know, 48th parallel or whatever, you know. So that's really, sort of, baked deep within me. But I lived in Northern California for 36 years, you know, within the same, you know, 30 mile span or whatever. And um, I went back there a couple of times this past summer and it was like, you know, it definitely felt like home. So. And those other places I haven't really been back to. And I'm new to Maine.

Milewski [00:40:19] Well, welcome!

Geist [00:40:21] Thank you.

Milewski [00:40:31] Um, earlier you mentioned a little bit about

Elton John

Sexual representation

Out and Proud Musicians

Bisexual Music

Belonging

mental health in relation to the places that you grew up, um, that possibly one of the reasons why you didn't go back?

Geist [00:40:43] Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, climate is one thing, right? And, and that actually tied into mental health. When I was in high school, I started noticing that every February I would just get really antsy and want to just get the hell out of there, even though I had never really been anywhere else. And, um, again, thanks to my parents subscription to Newsweek, that was right around when they began to label a, a syndrome called "Seasonal Affective Disorder" And I was like, once again, that's me! You know! So, um you know, I, uh, I went to college in, in Chicago for a couple of years. I dropped out and I lived in Colorado for a couple of years, which is a very sunny place, gets a lot of snow, but very sunny. Then I went back and finished college in western Massachusetts, but once I was done with that. I went back west again. I went to Colorado and then, then right over to California. And climate was part of that, um, but also the cultural openness. I was living in Boulder when I went to Colorado. I wasn't somewhere in, you know, the flats or I wasn't a heavily Christian. I was in Boulder, major hippie town, especially in the, in the eighties. And um, then I moved to Northern California with that cultural legacy of, you know, the beats and hippies and, and all the bohemians that came before that. So, you know, I was always attracted to this project of human liberation in whatever form it took, whether it was art, uh, progressive politics, um, drugs. Haha. And, you know, sex. So, um, it was natural for me to, to tend to gravitate towards, towards Northern California. Towards, you know, Boulder and then Northern California

Milewski [00:42:36] Um, and the places that you went, did you always gravitate towards the like gay or queer community?

Geist [00:42:40] No, not. Really at all. Again, I mean, a lot of that was I didn't identify as as gay or queer or bi um, publicly until fairly later. And often I had girlfriends and, and then, you know, like I had a whole family. I had, you know, a wife and kids. So I wasn't going to gay bars or, or, you know, taking part in, in LGBTQ organizations. I had a lot of other stuff going on after I had kids! You know, like, like I said I was into music, um, I did do some progressive, um, political things, but mostly around immigrant rights. Which were kind of a big

Newsweek

Mental Health:
Seasonal Affective
Disorder

Chicago
Boulder, Colorado

Massachusetts

Colorado in the 80s
Northern California

Politics, sex, drugs

Participating in
LGBTQ+ projects,
organizations, or
communities

Immigrant Rights

deal to me and in and in California. um, and, and frankly, because they needed it more than gay folks in Northern California needed it by the time that, you know, the 2000 rolled around, things were looking pretty good with marriage equality and AIDS, more or less behind us, and that stuff. Um. So, no, I was, it really almost wasn't until Country Queer that I became involved in the gay or queer community for the most part. Uh, which is really weird. I know it's weird. Um, and it feels, it feels weird, but you know, it's my story. hahaha.

Milewski [00:44:08] Um, What I'm finding really compelling about, um, the stories to share is how influential, uh, media like magazines were, uh, music, uh, music artists...

Geist [00:44:17] Albums. Yeah.

Milewski [00:44:18] Albums! Uh, And now you are someone who is, uh actually putting out media, um, for, you know, people to listen to and to read, um and for representation. And that's really amazing.

Geist [00:44:29] Yeah! Um, you know, I am a real, um, you know, sort of the, you know, the more I live, the more I realize that, um, stories are important. And there's something in the way that our minds work, that when we hear a story about a person we can really get engaged, and our hearts can become engaged. You know, um, and I was always a big reader as well as, you know, I love listening to, to music and lyrics, and an enormous Bob Dylan fan and, and, um, I've always written as well, although I haven't written for publication much until I started Country Queer, but I've always been attracted to, to media and um, you know, creating, creating things that, that can be seen and heard and read. That was my whole career. And once I started Country Queer, I was able to really package those into, um into a way to tell stories. You know, um, absolutely my favorite part of a Country Queer is that I get to interview artists. And I get to find out what their stories are. And one of the things that I really discovered, eh, mmm usually we ask about people's, often we ask about people's coming out story or it comes up. It's a thing that comes up. And one of the things that I realized is that every coming out story is inspiring. They're all, every one of them is, is a compelling, eh, story of somebody overcoming something. It's just great. You know, that's the kind of stuff that inspires us, it's, you know, you, you, you take in a

Marriage Equality
AIDS

Influence of media

Importance of stories

Bob Dylan

Storytelling

Coming out stories

story like that and you're like, you just you feel like you can, you can, you can do more. You can face the challenges of life better because you've taken in this story.

Milewski [00:46:52] Um, Are there any questions that I should be asking? Um, anything that I might have missed from... (unintelligible) would've have asked already?

Geist [00:47:03] Well, I will say this. Um. There is a subset of, um, you know, LGBTQ+ people, that are cis and partnered with somebody who is also cis of the, of the other gender. A lot of them are, you know, maybe bi people who are, you know, a bi a man married to a woman or a bi woman married to a man partner. And we're pretty invisible. We are invisible within the queer community. You have to keep coming out! You've got to keep coming out, all the time, if you are, if you are queer and you are partnered with somebody who is, ah, you know, another gender. It's, it's a whole thing. And when we see each other, we recognize each other, you know, we have something special in common.

Milewski [00:48:07] Mm hmm. Yeah. You mentioned previously that you would come out to girlfriends pretty regularly when you were younger. Is that the same situation for the woman who became your wife?

Geist [00:48:20] Did I come out here before? Yeah. As soon as we were, uh, I just knew, you know, certainly by then it was important to just, you know, right away to say, hey, man, this is, this is who I am. And, you know, either that's okay or it's not ok.

Milewski [00:48:34] Do you feel supported in your, ah, immediate family, um, unit? By... I guess I'm trying to ask do you feel, um I'm sorry. I lost my train of thought. umm.

Geist [00:49:03] I do. Like, nobody. In my, in my family has, uh, an issue with my identification and, yeah, I mean, of course my mom has fairly advanced dementia. And I've never come out to her, but if I did, she would forget it. So it's sort of a moot point, you know. And at some point I guess I miss that opportunity to have that conversation with her. And, and that would have been hard, um, because even

Bisexual erasure

Marriage of bisexual people in heteronormative relationships

Bisexual representation among each other

Coming out to partners

Belonging

Dementia

though I know she would have been accepting, you know, she, this was not something that she expected to have in a child. It was quite clear. You know, I just heard her general, you know, statements and so forth. Um, my dad's been, uh, you know, he passed away, uh, many years ago and I didn't come out to him either. I had, I had come out to almost nobody at that point. But, um you know, my sister and my gro- you know, adult niece and nephew. Nieces and nephews and, you know, my wife, my kids, they're all fine with it. Yeah, it's great, you know, I mean, eh, it's, it's one of those things you can point to in the world that's gotten better. People are more accepting of queer folks.

Milewski [00:50:36] Um, that, those are all the questions that, um, I have today. Thank you so much for joining me on this rainy afternoon. And if you have any questions, you can email me or Wendy Chapkis. Thank you so much.

Geist [00:50:51] Thank you, Abby. I really. Appreciate it. Great questions.

Thank you's and goodbyes

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