

2022-11_Schott-and-Kamenides.MP3

Erin [00:00:01] I see. Right. I'm showing you.

Hailey [00:00:05] You're also saying. All right. I can start now with this. Okay. So we'll be asking you a series of questions. You are not obligated to answer them all. Please feel free to refuse any questions that you do not like. My name is Hailey Kamenides H-A-I-L-E-Y K-A-M-E-N-I-D-E-S.

Erin [00:00:30] My name is Erin Schott. E-R-I-N S-C-H-O-T-T

Hailey [00:00:36] Can you please say and spell your name for us?

Dan [00:00:39] Dan Gifford. D-A-N G-I-F-F-O-R-D.

Hailey [00:00:44] What are your preferred pronouns? He him his. What are some words that you feel best? Describe yourself for example, gay or sexual, queer or so forth.

Dan [00:00:54] I'm gay and queer. Yeah.

Erin [00:00:57] I have two questions here.

Erin [00:01:01] And so where were you born?

Dan [00:01:03] Fort Smith, Arkansas.

Erin [00:01:05] How long did you live there?

Dan [00:01:07] I was there until I returned. That was 30, 30 something. I've lived here for 27 years, so I came here in 96, so I was there until 96.

Erin [00:01:20] And what year were you born?

**Introductions:
(Name)**

(Pronouns)

**Background:
(Arkansas)**

Dan [00:01:22] 1962.

Erin [00:01:25] Did you grow up with siblings?

Dan [00:01:27] One sister.

Erin [00:01:29] Did you have two parents in the house?

Dan [00:01:32] I did.

Erin [00:01:32] What's your relationship like with your parents?

Dan [00:01:34] Very good. Really traditional American Southern family.

Erin [00:01:43] Are you guys close?

Dan [00:01:44] They're passed away. My sister and I are close.

Erin [00:01:45] That's good to hear. And was religion a part of your family at all?

Dan [00:01:50] Good methodist family. Every Sunday church.

Erin [00:01:54] How did it impact your family dynamics and everything?

Dan [00:01:58] Oh, my mother will get up in the morning and put the pot roast in the oven on low and we would get it. I mean, every Sunday and we would go to church and come home and lunch would be ready. Or if we didn't do that, it was grandma and grandpa's house.

Erin [00:02:17] Does it does religion play a role in your life now?

Dan [00:02:20] No.

(Family)

Religion

Erin [00:02:24] And what would you describe as like one really significant moment in your childhood? If you can think of one.

Dan [00:02:37] Christmas. Yeah, yeah, yeah. One specific Christmas, 1976. And then we had in in Arkansas. We don't have a lot of snow. I don't that's that Christmas. We had like six inches of snow. So everything was shut down and it was all candlelight. It was just a really special Christmas for all of us.

Erin [00:03:03] When did you first think of yourself as something other than heterosexual?

Dan [00:03:07] Always from the get go. I can remember when I was probably before first grade wanting to be the bride as opposed to the groom.

Erin [00:03:22] Do you think? Well, that's kind of like answers that question, I was curious if you had like one moment where you kind of, it kind of clicked for you. Do you think that was like a moment where it kind of clicked in your head?

Dan [00:03:32] Well, I just know. I just always knew I was different and I didn't know why I was different until I was probably around ten, eleven or so. My mother's younger brother was gay, but it was never talked about at all. But I knew secrets just. And his friends. And I knew that I could tell. And they all knew I was a sissy. I was a full on sissy.

Hailey [00:04:01] Do you think it was not talked about because of something to do with religion in the family or?

Dan [00:04:06] It just wasn't talked about, period. And then in that time, in the late sixties and seventies, people, especially in the South. I'm sure religion had a part to do with it, but it just wasn't discussed ever.

Erin [00:04:18] Hmm. And did you have any role models? Who are queer growing up, or was that kind of just like you

Childhood:

Identity/coming out:

said, like not really talked about?

Dan [00:04:26] Again, it wasn't talked about. Yeah. To what age did you first come out as gay dad? I was outed in the ninth grade by a classmate, and I told my best friend and she told everybody. And the next day, I was taken to the. To the office because there was a rumor that I was going to jump out of the fourth floor science building because everybody knew. So from then on, they called in my mother. I had to go to see my counselor. They took me to a psychiatrist. And again, this is the South and religion. We went to the office and sat down and introduced us up to my mama and me. And would you all like to have a prayer first? Ope, done. And I stood up and I said on this, no, I would not. And we're not going to do this because there's nothing wrong. And, Mama, come on. And I left the office, and my mother sat there for a minute, and she got up and left and right then I knew everything had changed. And I knew right then that lots and lots of people were not going to like me because of it. But other people would. And there it is. And I am now 60, thinking the exact same way. I don't care because I have people that do like me.

Erin [00:05:50] And who do you think was the hardest person to come out to?

Dan [00:05:54] My dad.

Erin [00:05:56] Why's that?

Dan [00:05:56] It took my dad four years, because my dad was a cowboy and the yeah. And he was not amused that his son was gay. And the line the Gifford line ends with me. But after four years, he finally I can remember vividly. I was going, I forgot where, but I was in drag, and my dad was in the living room watching TV. And I came down the stairs in this beautiful, actually about the color of your jacket taffeta, changeable taffeta evening gown. And my dad looked around and wolf whistled and I'm like, okay, there we go. And from then on, it was not a thing anymore. That was it.

Being outed:

Coming out to his dad:

Erin [00:06:38] Who do you think? Was there like a reaction that really surprised you or was really comforting to you when you came out to somebody?

Dan [00:06:45] That with my dad was pretty cool. But no, you know, I never really had to come out that much because, again, I was I was gay. Very, very gay.

Erin [00:07:00] And was there any reaction that you received? I mean, I feel like you've kind of answered this, but was there any reaction that you received that you can think of that was particularly hurtful?

Dan [00:07:12] The hell raisers of 81. When I was in high school at Northside High School, there was a group of jocks that called themselves the hell raisers of 81. And I can remember when we had what was called cruising, and everybody would go up and down this avenue, Grand Avenue, and just drive their cars to one endeavor and back. And we stopped in the drive-ins and everybody did coming and going. So was cruising. And they saw me in a car with a friend and chased us down and they were going to beat me up. And finally my friend got just far enough away and around a corner to try to where I could jump out and hide behind bushes. And then she took off and they followed her. And I was able to get home, to walk home without getting caught.

Erin [00:07:57] I can't imagine. Like having to also fear fear to seek your safety like that. Oh, my goodness. I think one question I also have is like, how did it like being out and how did it affect your life internally and externally?

Dan [00:08:15] It was really hard. I mean, really I mean, there were some mean, mean. I can remember being called faggot for the very first time. I didn't know what that word meant. That was in sixth grade in the lunch line, going to lunch one day. And I knew it was bad just because of the way the kids said or called me. The tone of his voice tell me that that wasn't nice. But again, once I was out, I didn't care. I am what I am and I don't care. And as far as the church, I was at a church as

Discrimination:

well. And my thing to them was, oh, you do realize that God made me this way, right? So you're going to say something bad about it then you're saying that God made a mistake? Oh, no, no, no, no, no. So that always stop that right there, too. But my church was my church was nothing but God is love. God is love. God is love. That's all that that church ever was. So I didn't have a problem at church at all. Even my minister was really cool about it. But he was young. He was in his mid twenties, fresh out of the, and this was his first position as a minister. So it was really it was good, I was fine.

Erin [00:09:31] Yeah, that's good to hear. I know there are definitely a lot of different experiences people can have in churches. And especially with different denominations and that sort of thing. And especially being in the South, that's surprising, but but also good to hear that it wasn't super oppressive because that's not the way it's supposed to be. And what do you think are some of the biggest differences between coming out in in the past and compared to today?

Dan [00:09:56] It's so different. I get a little mean whenever some 20 something talks about how hard it is to be coming out. And I'm like honey no, no, no, no. You have it on TV and you have music and it's everywhere. So don't even try with that, because I know it's easy, quite frankly. I mean, you think it's going to be hard, but it's really not. And in today's world, no. And if you do have people that don't like you, there are 25 that that will be there for you. So, yeah, it's so much easier now.

Hailey [00:10:35] I had a follow up question from when you were talking about previously. Do you think that you portrayed to other people that you didn't care what they thought of you? Oh, yeah. And do you feel that changed, like maybe the hurtful things that they would say to you? Or do you think that it made it like more likely or less likely?

Dan [00:10:56] I think in most cases, yeah, they were right along with. Yeah, it's just as mean as could be. It was a way to be mean.

Church/religion

High school:

Hailey [00:11:13] Um, I feel like we've kind of talked about this, but I guess I just change the question a little bit. Do you think that being outed was a big part of your high school life, or was that just a small bump for you or was that did that take up a majority?

Dan [00:11:27] Yeah. No, because nothing ever changed. I was the exact same person. I acted the same way. It would have eventually. I would have come out on my own eventually, because most of my friends already kind of knew. I can think of one that didn't. She was in a way, this was like a year later and she didn't really know. And we were sitting after a football game in front of the high school on a park bench, and she was talking about some new strawberry lip gloss that she had just bought. And Danny, would you like to see how it tastes? And she puts it on her lips and I'm like, Yes, sir. And took it from her. That's not what she had in mind.

Hailey [00:12:13] Oh, Professor Wendy Chapkis brought a post of yours to our attention when she talked about a paper you wrote in high school and only received a C on it. Would you mind telling us about that? We're interested.

Dan [00:12:25] It was in speech class, and I had I had quit my senior year and gone off with a couple of friends. They talked me into going and moving with them to Tulsa, Oklahoma, to do the gay life. And I stupidly left high school and did that. I got there and I didn't like it, so I decided I was going to come back and finish my senior year and I did in this very, very small town in Oklahoma where my grandparents lived and I was a year older, I had to shave my beard because beards weren't allowed at this high school. The teachers could not even have beards. So it was already kind of weird that I was older and different than these kids, for that matter. So I had to we had to do a speech ourselves, and I did a speech on being gay in a public high school. And once it was all done and said and she gave the paper back and it was a C because it was too personal. And I was just, okay, whatever. But again, I am what I am and I don't, you know.

Receiving a poor grade
in school:

Erin [00:13:29] Is that like a, it seems like almost like a mantra of yours, I like that.

Dan [00:13:33] Yeah. Well, you know, that's weird too, because they had this like about the size of this board with this board behind you and other senior photographs. Mine is the only one that's missing. They didn't fit my photograph. I mean, it's I'm sure it's still blank in that school because. Well, I don't really know why, but I just know that my picture was never put with the other kids. It has my name and a blank oval where my picture would be.

Hailey [00:13:58] Is there something that comes to mind when you say you don't know why, but you have like guesses?

Dan [00:14:04] Oh, I'm sure it's because I was openly gay.

Hailey [00:14:09] And did you go to college?

Dan [00:14:10] I did not.

Hailey [00:14:12] You did not go to college. In high school, well. I feel like we already talked about that. What kind of work have you done in your life?

Dan [00:14:26] When I was right out of high school, I. My father was a carpenter. So from work, even summers and stuff as a kid, he always had me out with him roofing and doing all this kind of stuff and sheetrocking and stuff. And then as soon as I got out of high school, my Uncle Gene, the one that was gay, said, Come work with me. I have this great guy. And it was a house painter. And I did that for probably five or six years. And then I was a dry cleaner and did that and almost all right up until I moved to Maine. And then when I moved to Maine, I got a job at Skylands greenhouses and I kept talking about them watching, hanging around the floral design. And somebody mentioned and a florist here in town and she called me and said, Would you like to be my apprentice? And so. Rhoads Flowers and plants on Forest Avenue. And so I met

Work/career:

with her and she goes, Yeah, I would like to start fresh with you and just teach you everything I know. So I did that and I went into the flower business. I had my own shop until eight years ago and I had lost the lease twice and was gonna have to move and I wasn't having a good time anymore. It just was gone. Wasn't as fun as it used to be, and the prices kept changing too. I could go to Whole Foods and Trader Joe's and buy floral products less expensive there than I could at my wholesaler. So I thought, no, I'm just going to do something different. So I sold the business and had a part time job and a friend called and said, Dude why you want to come with me to the Portland Museum of Art there's a part time opening I think you'll like it. So I did that and I had quit the part time job and I was going to go back and open another flower shop and my partner said, No, you weren't happy, and I don't want you. And I said, I'm going to. So I found a place I went to go. I was going to rent it the day that I was going. He kept begging me not to do it, so I relented and I didn't do it. And the next day the museum called me back and said, Would you like to come on full time? And I've been there eight years and I've never been happier. Yeah.

Hailey [00:16:47] So your current job is at the museum?

Dan [00:16:49] It is.

Hailey [00:16:51] Can you talk a little bit about how people in your current workplace feel about your sexual orientation?

Dan [00:16:56] Well, first of all, you're not allowed to talk about it at all. I mean, you don't you don't talk about you know, I would never. You don't you don't question. But of course, it's not a big deal. And again, you're just yourself there. But it's you know, I guess it's the PC thing, you just don't question people. But again, I'm quite obvious. Like I when I first started there, the very first show had this big swath of blue butterflies outside the entrance to the special exhibit galleries. And I went on eBay. EBay, I guess it was a Sunday. Anyway, I found the exact same shade of blue butterflies, and I searched for weeks and I found the exact one. And at the time, I maybe

Sexual orientation in
the workplace:

had about 25 brooches like crowns, rhinestone crowns that I would wear to parties and stuff. So I started with that one at work. And in the eight years that I've been there, I'm just under or maybe I've reached 700 by now. And the young lady that stopped was downstairs and chatted with, and she gave me this one last year back in the summer. So I every single Sunday on Facebook and Instagram is new week new brooch. So every single Sunday, I bring out a new brooch because people just keep giving them to me. It was one Sunday a few years ago with that little convenience store Broadway variety in South Portland, and a woman passed me and she looked at me and said "you're the brooch guard". And I said, "Excuse me?" And she was like you're the brooch guard. and I'm like "What?" And she said, "do you not work at the museum?" And I said, I do. Yeah, she points because "you're the brooch guard" and I'm like "Oh, okay".

Hailey [00:18:52] I know you have done drag in the pride parades. Can you tell us what drag means to you and why you enjoy doing it?

Dan [00:19:02] My mother wore a size five shoe. My mother lived in high heels. My mother mopped the kitchen floor in high heels. Okay. So I was always sneaking and wearing her shoes as a little kid. I can remember before first grade sitting on the living room sofa with my mother and the landlady came by and I was sitting, playing with my mother's compact. And the lady. Lois, you should take that away from him, because little boys shouldn't play. You'll be sorry. Little does she know. So I was always in my mother's clothes and stuff. And my mother did this in the. In the early mid-seventies. My mother wore wigs all the time, so I was always sneaking my mother. So I was a drag queen from the get go. And then the uncle that I told you about, my Uncle Jean. Some of his friends were drag queens, and by this time in the seventies, things were changed. In the mid-seventies, things were changing a little bit. And so I got to know his friends somewhat. I was still the chicken and chicken the term back then for someone that's underage. And so I was always around these queens, too. And I started going at the gay bar in town. You could it was a beer bar, just beer

Pride parade/drag:

and wine, and it was L-shaped. And you could go in at 18, but you couldn't drink until you were 21. And they had in the long part of the L in the back, they had sectioned off with chicken wire and made it the chicken coop. So we everybody was underage could go back there. You couldn't go up around the bar, but you could stay back there and have coats and you could get onto the dance floor. So I started going to the bar in drag when I was 18.

Hailey [00:21:00] Do you still do that?

Dan [00:21:01] I still do that. I was doing drag at Halloween at the museum.

Hailey [00:21:06] So is your work in the museum related to a special interest in art?

Dan [00:21:12] Yeah, I um. My parents thought I was going to be an artist and I was full. I was crazy about art. And then I guess it was in Senior High, but the art teacher there wasn't very nice. And she drove the art out of me. And I didn't do anything with art on my own until just a couple of years ago. I picked it back up and started painting again. But I've always been art. I've always loved art and everything about art. And so that's when my friends like, Dude, come to the museum, you'll fit in and. Yeah.

Hailey [00:21:51] Do you ever regret letting that art teacher ruin it for you?

Dan [00:21:54] I do, yeah.

Hailey [00:21:59] Do you? Can you tell us a little bit about your relationship to art like why you think that. Like you said that you went back to it. Why do you think, is your relationship to art important to you?

Dan [00:22:09] It is. And a lot of it had to do with some of the shows at the museum. And like again, just recently, this past summer, we had Kathy Bradford and she really her stuff

Art/ history of his interest in art:

because she would look at somebody else's and do her own take of some other famous piece of art. And it ended up being like, I don't want to say copying, but in a way it was a copy, but it was her version. And there it is now, hanging in a museum. And I'm like, That's really cool. So you can do whatever you want.

Hailey [00:22:44] Is there a particular kind of art that you are particularly fond of?

Dan [00:22:49] It used to be when I was a kid, it was all about to Lautrec. Everything about Lautrec was just everything for as long as I can remember and impressionist. And I wasn't really one for contemporary art until I started work at the museum. And when you were in a gallery for 2 hours at a time, looking at it and reading it, you just learn and appreciate. And now I have. Yeah, I go for certain things, just for contemporary art. So yeah, you never stop learning. So, you know.

Hailey [00:23:21] So I know you talked a little bit about your brooch collection and how people come up to you and when you buy that. But what does it mean to you?

Dan [00:23:33] I am a compartmentalist type person, so everything I'm a list maker. So they all have different meanings, different things. I use them for different things. Like my acorns, they're going to give this is it Thanksgiving. This will be tucked away until next fall. You know, I'll go right into Christmas and stuff. But a lot of it, too, it's who gives it to you and why. Some of them I just have this little demon and it's actually more of a piece of art than a brooch. And a friend gave it to me for a specific reason and he passed away a couple of years ago. So that's always going to be, you know, my Tom piece. But it's yeah, a lot of it there specifically for me from friends and they know you know a lot of people just here I have these brooches but some of them are extremely specific and very, very sentimental to me.

Erin [00:24:27] I was also curious just. About what the Portland museum art does for the Pride Parade every year. I

Types of art:

Brooch collection:

know they were involved in that, so what does that look like?

Dan [00:24:33] Actually they haven't been. They only marched in the parade for the first time this the summer before COVID came along. So this is this was only the second time this year was the second time that they participated and done anything. So I'm quite happy that they have finally come around and are marching.

Erin [00:25:02] It's fitting being right downtown, too.

Dan [00:25:04] It is.

Erin [00:25:07] And so when did you first move to Maine and why? What brought you here?

Dan [00:25:12] I moved here in 1996 and my partner my partner had lived in Maine and he's from my hometown as well. And his parents were failing health wise. So he came back to Arkansas to take care of them. And a friend introduced us he's like, okay, I found you someone Dan. Or Danny, I was Danny in Arkansas. And so James and I hit it right off. I mean, it was, like, instantaneous. And when we knew that we were going to be partners, he said, okay, there's two rules. You can't cheat on me and you have to live in Maine. Okay, that seems easy enough. And I knew where Maine was on the map. And I grew up with my parents and my grandparents saying, as Maine goes, so goes the nation. That is all I knew about Maine. So after we've been together for maybe four years, he said, Let's go see now. I want you to see Maine. So we spent a week in Portland, and a week in Boston, and I was home as soon as I got here. I just thought like, I'm home. And so we were going to move here. And then we kept putting it off and putting it off and I guess like maybe four years had passed and a tornado came through and it was really, really bad tornado. I'm talking like if you're going up Munjoy hill everything on the sea side of the of Congress street was gone everything is gone completely wiped. And I said, this is it. We're done. We're leaving now. And so the next day he went to he was a real estate broker, put the house up for sale, told them we were

Pride parade:

Moving to Maine:

leaving. That was in April. And we were here by the 1st of May, just left. And now I could never be anywhere. This is my home.

Erin [00:26:59] That's like I don't know if you believe in signs, but I feel like that's a pretty clear sign, like it's time. And I feel like this is, in a way an obvious question, but I still feel like I want to ask it. Do you think it is easier to live as an out gay man in Maine as opposed to Arkansas?

Dan [00:27:16] Oh, gosh, yes.

Erin [00:27:18] Like, how so?

Dan [00:27:19] Oh, yeah. Well, it's funny because James and I were just talking about that recently, that it was because we just had to move the house that we lived in, this little tiny cape, that we were going to live there for a year and then buy a house. And James fell in love with that little strange cape, and he kept trying to buy it and the people would never sell. So we lived there for 20, well from 9 almost 27 years. And in August the property sold and we got papers saying, you have 30 days. So after living there all that time, we have just moved. And so we were talking about it and he's like, you know, coming here I bet, I brought you to safety because of what it's like there. And it is. Things there don't change. That's my hometown Fort Smith is pretty much the same size as Portland. And they don't do they have no gay pride parade. They have nothing like that whatsoever. So things just don't change there. And I would have been miserable there. So and I have I have another friend that's been here that I've convinced to move here from there. He's been here for 12 years now, and my very best friend was having a bad time because of COVID. And I actually went to try to commit suicide and was found and I talked to him when he got to the hospital and said, "Dude this is it, come to Maine". You can have the same kind of life that I had. So he's living with us now. He's been here since January, and I have him at the museum. So he's experiencing what Maine can do for you, too. I'm sorry about this..

Gay life in Maine vs.
Arkansas:

Erin [00:29:09] No that's amazing. Yeah. Yeah. And that was one of my questions, too, is what the queer community was like in Arkansas, what it sounds like, because there's not really a queer community there.

Dan [00:29:22] In Fayetteville, Arkansas, where the University of Arkansas, there is there. There's this little pocket of this small Arkansas town in the mountains that there is, that's fine. In the capital, Little Rock, there is. But Fort Smith is the second largest city in the state. And it's you know, I mean, it's literally it's like the same size as Portland. And I think they have one teeny, tiny, little, itsy bitsy gay bar, and that is it. But they are, too. I've talked to it's been about five years ago when a friend was going to try and have them have a march and I can't get over how many of them. Well, what if we get shot? What if somebody does something? And I'm like, Well, honey, that's the entire world. You get up and you do it. You can't be afraid. But they still they don't do it. And I find that very sad.

Erin [00:30:13] Yeah, there's a lot of bravery. It seems like that it takes to, to make a make a change like that and be able to just fully embrace who you are. And I think it's amazing that in Maine you're able to do that, and particularly Portland, Maine, feel like it's really great. And do you have a close circle of friends here in Portland?

Dan [00:30:33] I do, yeah. Very close. Yeah. They're my yeah.

Erin [00:30:36] Are they also like a part of the queer community or how, how did you meet all them? I guess.

Dan [00:30:42] It's, it's 50/50. I mean I have, you know, I have a wonderful circle of friends. Um, I like to throw parties. I throw parties all the time. I mean, seriously, I throw parties all the time. And I have some friends, like, why do you do all these, well girl I'm going to fall over dead some day you can't do it anymore, so you might as well do it now. So I'm having my Yuletide party early. This is going to be the the fourth. So I'm having to I'm already getting ready for that. So but it's I

Queer community in Arkansas:

Friend group/parties:

met it's really strange because we had one circle through James's friends because his best friends lived here. And actually we stayed with them for a week when we moved here because of the tornado, we did, we just left. We called a moving company and we just left. And we stayed with them for a week trying to find a place to live. And we ended up in that little house. So we had a circle through them. And then the friend that had me start at the museum started have he's like, "I've gotten away from the gay community and all of my old gay friends, so I'm going to start having parties. Would you guys like to come?" So it's intertwined. So yeah.

Erin [00:31:55] Yeah. That's awesome. Let's see. Oh, can you tell us about your relationship with your partner?

Dan [00:32:07] This December 22nd, we will have been together for 32 years. When we met, I don't know if you're familiar with Anne Rice the Author, she just passed away this past year. The interview with the vampire and the witching hour, all of this. So I had this group of friends at the time this novel came out called The Witching Hour, about a family of witches in New Orleans. And every single party you went to that season, everybody was talking about the witching hour, the witching hour, the witch and the main thing in the story was the Mayfair Emerald. Which very designee from the 1600s to 1990, whatever the first female, and that would be the witch of that generation. And so she would inherit the Mayfair Emerald. So our very first anniversary, we're sitting on the sofa and he hands me a box and he goes, And there's your Mayfair emerald so he gives me my own Mayfair Emerald. So I have always called this my engagement ring. And then we were at a Christmas party that year was called. It was a progressive dinner. Which do you know what a progressive dinner is?

Erin [00:33:19] A bunch of courses or you go to different houses? Yeah.

Dan [00:33:22] Exactly yeah. So at the last one with dessert and all that, everybody had a slumber party. So it's all these Gay men having this big. So he and I camped out under the

Relationship with partner:

Christmas tree and in the middle of the night he rolls over and asks me to marry him. And at the time, of course, there was no marriage and nobody even dreamed that there would be. And so then now it's here, and I'm still engaged and don't have a wedding ring because he. I don't know. But still, so 32 years.

Erin [00:33:53] Do you have, is there a part of you that wants to get married?

Dan [00:33:56] Oh, it's me. It's. It's it's all about me, he's I don't know why. So I make fun of it all the time. My friends all make fun of it and. Yeah.

Hailey [00:34:05] What does he say?

Dan [00:34:06] He he keeps saying that he doesn't want me to be burdened with his medical bills and things. And my reply is prenup. But I don't know his his my his 13 years older. Than me, so I don't think that's going to happen.

Erin [00:34:24] Well, you have a partner, regardless.

Dan [00:34:25] I do, yes.

Erin [00:34:29] Do you think there's any there any area that the Portland queer community needs to improve on?

Dan [00:34:40] It's odd because we've had such a I've been so proud of gay pride here. We have a brilliant gay pride here. And the old guard was replaced by some much younger people, took it and just threw out all the old things. And it was it was like it wasn't going to happen the year that they did. And then COVID came along and it didn't happen. So this past year they had to get with some of the old guard again and talk to them. So, yeah, don't don't throw away the old people, kids, because that's that's not very smart. So that right there. Yeah.

Erin [00:35:24] I've heard that a lot like and especially since some of the older queer members of our community are the ones that fought for them to have the rights. That they're just

Marriage:

Portland queer community:

taking for, you know taking for granted.

Dan [00:35:37] Granted. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Erin [00:35:39] Definitely. I totally agree. Well, I feel like, I feel like you answered that. But aside from that, how do you think the queer community has changed over the years? Like particularly in Maine, how have you watched it kind of evolve?

Dan [00:35:57] Well just for me because I've only been here for now 20 something years, but it's changed a lot. I mean, I mean, it's the world too. But I see that they help each other quite a bit. I mean, there's there's things that happened. But overall, these shootings that, you know, that brings us all together. And I think that that makes, you know, these kids around that easy peasy. Well, honey, it's not it's still happening. And the laws are still changing, too. And there are lots and lots and lots of folks out there that want to take those away from us. So and it's called I've stopped complaining because it's not a parade, it's a march. It's a civil rights march. I finally gave up because everybody calls it a parade. So if you can't beat 'em join 'em. So I say parades. But it is it's a civil it's not a parade. It's a march. It's a civil rights march. And it's very important for that to continue because it ain't about floats and having, you know, it's it's about your. Your your rights.

Hailey [00:37:15] When were you first aware of HIV or AIDS?

Dan [00:37:21] My very best. I mean, you know, we had it was called the the cancer the Gay Cancer at First. And I was living with my parents and my mother was saying that she was absolutely petrified. And I guess I just I was 21 or maybe just turned 22. And my best friend lived literally right around the corner from us. And he was 20 he was 21 at the time. And that started happening. James started his nails started flaking, just others, just like, you know, flake like a flaky biscuit kind of flake like that. And he went to his doctor and yeah, he was infected. He was the very first one in town, and he died at 22.

HIV/AIDS:

And the uncle that I talked about, I stood at his bedside and he passed away. We were in Portland, it was the same way, was stricken horribly. I had what I called my funeral suit, which was this black suit and just, you know, this is passed in one day. And I reached in, I pulled out and I had 32 memorial cards. This was stick to me for all of my life. That's that's a lot of, you know, friends that are that are gone. And I can think, like with my Uncle Gene's friends, he had this core group of friends. There were like ten of them, this one that made it. And he has lived all these years with AIDS, but only one of them made it through. And so now when I hear, you know, guys talking with like, you know, younger guys talking, being like, honey, no, you have no idea of what you know. It's okay now. Although I was surprised, too, that a friend of mine, his partner, passed away like six years ago. And yeah, you still can die of AIDS and that too. But so I went through the hardest part of it all and I can, you know, back then drag queens didn't work for tips back then, every drag queen was making money for AIDS back in the day to help somebody or the cause or, you know. Yeah, it was scary. I can I know if you think about you have that weight on your tongue after you've been out partying on a Saturday night when you get to brush your teeth. And, you know, I was petrified once that it was thrush. Thrush was that thing that everybody was talking about then. And I was so scared that I'm just like and it wasn't I was I was very lucky. Very, very lucky.

Hailey [00:40:03] So you say that it was scary. How else did it affect your life? Having people so close to you be affected from it?

Dan [00:40:10] Watching your friends die is not fun in the least bit. Watching them waste away and die is horrible. Seriously horrible.

Hailey [00:40:23] Were you aware of any kind of hatred or discrimination facing those people you knew who were living with AIDS?

Dan [00:40:31] In my I don't want to say I don't want to say

hatred, but when my uncle came home from the hospital with it to my grandparents house and were there, they washed everything that he touched and dishes, everything with bleach because people just didn't know at the time. But they were mean just because you were gay. And I said, I knew a restaurant, it was called fat and happy. This Italian restaurant went out of business because of a gay waiter that the entire town just came up and decided that he's got AIDS and he didn't. And the restaurant went out of business because of that.

Hailey [00:41:10] Were you involved in AIDS activism or support work? Other than, like you said, like the tips?

Dan [00:41:16] You know, it was really there wasn't that much because again, where I come from, they did the hatred there and it was hard to do it. There was no real activism there because everybody was afraid.

Hailey [00:41:33] Do you think that if you were in Portland during that period, you would have been?

Dan [00:41:37] You know, no, I think it was pretty much the same here. I mean, Franny Peabody stood up and basically when she found out, she gave up, she was the historic preservationist for Portland. And she gave up everything that she had dedicated her life to to AIDS because of her grandson. So she that woman was the one that taught all these guys back then. Stand up. Do it for your friends, if not for yourself.

Hailey [00:42:07] Did the AIDS epidemic affect you personally in any other ways that we haven't discussed?

Dan [00:42:15] No, I don't think so. Just because, you know, you. I remember I had a friend that had moved away to Detroit and we would call every couple of weeks. So whenever so and so died, so and so died. And he's like, Danny, I'm not going to call you anymore because every time I call you, each month, somebody has died and you know, there's nothing you can do. But it was yeah.

AIDS activism:

Erin [00:42:40] You know, it seems almost.

Dan [00:42:42] Like it seems a million years ago now.

Erin [00:42:45] It seems like that seems like a form of trauma. And the only thing I guess, that I can compare it to is COVID. Yeah, the fear and the misinformation.

Dan [00:42:55] At the beginning, we James and I started watching Pose and we had to quit watching it because at the beginning, you know, whenever the AIDS stuff started, we would sit in and just start crying because it all came rushing back. And then as the series got more and James couldn't deal with it, so we just stopped watching it because it hurt him too much. But just yeah, just watching that. It all came just vividly back.

Erin [00:43:25] That's what I was curious about too. There are things now that are like triggers to that time.

Dan [00:43:28] Yeah, yeah.

Erin [00:43:30] We're right back there and so hard. And what is one thing you wish you could tell your younger self?

Dan [00:43:44] Go to college. Don't look is my thing was that I was too busy running off to be the queer in a big city and being with my friends instead of doing what I should have been doing. And that was a mistake on my part. And again, it's because of where I came from. I was scared. So many of my friends didn't go to college because of being gay, because there were you know, you were ostracized back then unless you were closeted. And I know so many it was so weird that I can think of so many people back then that were closeted all through college, and then once they got out, they would come out. And so, yeah, that's yeah, I should have gone to school.

Erin [00:44:26] How do you think your life would have looked different if you had gone to college?

Message to younger self:

Dan [00:44:32] You know, I really I can't answer that because I don't know, because I've had a really, really good life and I really enjoy my life.

Erin [00:44:41] And so this is a similar question. But what would you tell a young person today who is perhaps questioning coming out and or being their true self?

Dan [00:44:53] Be your true self always, no matter what it is, be who you are and what you believe, and stand up for what you believe. And this is what I'm telling you two right here. Whatever it is in your life, do it. Yeah.

Dan [00:45:10] And I did have I remembered my follow up question from before we've learning in our class a little bit about the gay bars here in town and how we now we think we only have one.

Dan [00:45:21] Yeah.

Erin [00:45:22] And what do you think contributed to the loss of the Gay bars? And do you think that's an important aspect of the community that should be brought back, or do you think it's not necessary anymore?

Dan [00:45:33] It's really weird because when I moved here, I think there were four and it was strange because I was looking in the phone book and I don't even know how I knew it was the "sisters" and I was like, "Oh, this sounds like the bar for us. Sisters". And it was a lesbian bar. We were the only two men there, and I think we had one or two drinks. And James, we ran into some old friends that he knew and stuff too, but otherwise we always went to Blackstones because there was an older at the time though, it was a Levi leather bar, which is not my thing, but it was an older crowd. It was a nice little neighborhood bar, so that's where we always tended to go. Occasionally we would go to drag shows and stuff. At what was it called before the underground, I guess is what it was way back then. But at the time there had I think there were four bars because what is now flask has pretty much in that's

Message to current generation:

Gay bars in Portland:

kind of sort of the gay bar now ish. But it's been pretty much a gay bar of some kind ever since I've lived here. I people have said Grinder, that's not why, because people don't go to Grinder for drinks and a good time for me. When I was in my twenties and even into my thirties, I never went to clubs to go looking for sex or whatever. I'm out with my friends to go dancing and have a good time, so that has nothing to do with that. And it's funny that that now Blackstone's is it's not really a gay bar anymore because if you go to a drag show there, there's going to be more college girls there than gay men. So but yeah, it's it's gay bars are need to be there because it's it's a place just I don't know it's kind of hard to describe the campiness I guess as a good way of. Yeah. The campiness and camaraderie. Well it's funny because Portland. You could get in 1996, you could go to any bar in town and dance with the guy or girl and nobody would bat an eye you like. We used to go to Bubba's back and nobody thought twice about it. So Portland's always been a really cool town that way.

Erin [00:48:05] I wonder if that's why, if that's part of why the gay bars aren't needed.

Dan [00:48:07] And I think so, yeah.

Erin [00:48:10] Because it is more welcome in other places.

Dan [00:48:10] Yeah

Hailey [00:48:12] I was just curious, I understand the personal question. You don't have to answer, but I was just curious like you said, that you were having parties at your house. Like do you usually have a good crowd? Like fun time? Like, what do you guys do?

Dan [00:48:32] You know, whenever we get through, I'll send you an email. I'm going to invite you to my party.

Hailey [00:48:46] I was curious when you were talking about going to the bars and how you like going there and having a good time. I just was curious kind of as to like I mean,

House parties:

everybody likes a good party, but I just didn't know if you have a good turnout.

Dan [00:48:55] I do.

Hailey [00:48:57] If you had like music, like, I don't know.

Dan [00:48:59] My parties are always very successful because I have everything from 18 to 99 and I have wealthy and poor. I have just a one male and female and everything in between. Doctor, Professor Chapkis and her and Gabe will be there. So it's no, I have a good mix and I have really, really good food really like for our every year back in the day my partner was a real estate broker, and he would spend all this crazy amount of money on food and blah blah blah. And then once he retired, like, we can't have them, we don't we don't want to spend this money, us or our friends don't care. So what we started doing, we met Gumbo. So it's become a tradition at our house every Christmas for I have a year, I earn it's gumbo. And then I like ivory started. I made sausage balls the other night. They're in the freezer tonight I'm going to go home and I'm going to make the meatballs and freeze those. This morning I got up, I made spiced nuts. Those are ready to go. So, yeah, it's good food really. You know, we're southern. So that.

Hailey [00:50:13] Yeah it's the preparation. You already have stuff in the freezer.

Dan [00:50:17] Well, I'm a crazy lady that likes to have my list on me and my friends back in the day "you're the list queen" I'm the list queen. Because I'll make a list to make lists. And then, I guess it was about eight or nine years ago. It was my birthday and I wanted to do something different. So I was thinking about this uncle, my uncle, that he would have these great parties and he would invite me to these party. And they were really fun and it was strict back then, it was just all gay guys. It was just gay men. It's the bar that I was taught. It was called the Villains Landing. The Village Landing had to close at midnight on Saturdays, and the other nights were 1:00. And every single Wednesday, Saturday, our Friday and Saturday

night, it was packed. I mean, it was packed. And once the bar closed, if you weren't, you know, everybody would they would have bar parties, so somebody would have a party. And it was, you know, bring your own whatever. And so they would have a party after the bar close. So that's how that goes. So Gene would have these parties and I decided that I was going to have this birthday party like one of my Uncle Gene's. So I called it the He-Man back then we call it the He-Man Woman Haters Club Party. Are you familiar with He-Man women haters? It's from a it's called The Little Rascals from the Thirties. It was the TV show. And so they had this club. These boys had the He-Man Woman Haters Club. So we did that until that Orange Man got into office. And I said, okay, you know, we can't do that. I can't. So we just cost extra to the He-Man Club. So I had this He-Man party, so it was just a bunch of gay men. And so we've been doing that for, you know, in some of the He-Man, He-Man parties as well. So we just have these, you know, every couple of months there'll be a party at a He-Man party. But so yeah, my parties are really, really, really good. So I will, so I will.

Hailey [00:52:24] I was second guessing myself.

Dan [00:52:26] I was already planning on it. By the time this is over, I was going to invite y'all so.

Erin [00:52:34] Oh, I was. I was curious about, you made me think of something that and another thing I learned in this class is actually I guess I've been surprised by it throughout, throughout, you know, the fight for equal rights and everything like that. There seems to be a bit of a separation between gays and lesbians. Did you how did you notice that or did you just feel like that it was altogether?

Dan [00:52:59] You see it was where I came from. It wasn't because the gay bar was a mix. It was it was lesbian gay men. When I came out out, I mean, I was outed in the ninth grade, but then once I was out in public, as it were, being 18 and I could go to the gay bar, my best friend was a lesbian and she and I, she waited because she was a year older than me. So she

Gays vs Lesbians
throughout history:

waited a year until I turned 18 so we could go together. And my first year out, the entire first year, maybe a year and a half, I was only out with the girl. I hung around with the lesbians. I would, you know, sneak off you know with the guys. Yeah, but as far as parties and stuff, I was with the lesbians and so no I've always in my hometown. It was yeah, it was 5050. There was no. And it was weird that you come here and the bars were different. I found that kind of odd that that was the way it was here. But that's I even think that's kind of changed somewhat because like I said, with sisters, we were the only guys there. And at Blackstones then they probably wouldn't have served you two. They would have given you looks. And if you had, you know, or if you were with me or something, they would have asked me and I would have ordered for you, but they would have pretended you weren't there, which was a really lousy thing to do. I wasn't going to say lousy, but. But that's changed, too. And it's changing dramatically with the new manager that's there now. So yeah, yeah.

Erin [00:54:36] We got to listen to both of the previous managers and to their oral history. So that's really cool. That's cool. Yeah, it was really cool to learn about the history of blackstones and both of their experiences with it, you know, and also some of that's the hate that they, you know, that they've received and even like, even having to to, you know, do something to the windows, you know, they.

Dan [00:55:01] Yeah the just uncovered the windows for the first time since because people get breaking the windows. And and you know what I found out many, many, many the guys that will say fagot and all that kind of stuff. So, you know sweetly, just come out. We know it's inside you and you're covering up for but you'll be happy if you just come out because there's something inside them. Because you're not hating it. Because you're hating something in yourself. Yeah. And I'm the most horrible person to go right up to you now and say, honey, because I ain't scared I was that Bo's one night ten, 15 years ago, I smoked at the time of that smoking and there was a guy standing next to smoking. You're gay? Yeah. Do you know how I can tell you gay? Know what kind of by

Blackstones:

the way you're dressed. But I can tell you're gay by the way you hold your cigarette. And I'm like: "okay, well, don't let it fool you, sweetheart, because my favorite thing on weekends is going out straight there." Oh, no, no, no, no. I didn't mean anything! Like I'm just fucking with you. I put my cigarette on inside. So why did you take this class, if you don't mind my asking you a question?

Erin [00:56:28] Well, it's a requirement.

Dan [00:56:31] Oh okay.

Erin [00:56:32] It is a requirement for sociology majors. So yeah I'm a Soc Major. But yeah, I mean, it's this is qualitative research methods. Learning, I did quantitative last semester. So learning things like ethnographies and you know, sitting down and having a conversation like this is an experience I haven't really had yet, at least not at USM. So yeah, I really, I really enjoyed it. I mean, pretty much the whole class I've learned about like gay history, which is something I'm not I'm not too familiar with. I mean, I knew Stonewall, I knew that sort of thing. But aside from that, I'm learning a lot and I'm like, wow, this is not taught in school. I didn't learn this in high school. You know, yeah it's been fascinating.

Hailey [00:57:15] Yeah, I also took it because it was a requirement. I am taking quantitative next semester, so I haven't taken quantitative yet. But no I definitely feel like having the whole semester in general. Like not just this class is flying by. Like the fact that Thanksgiving is in three days is absurd to me. But other than that, no. I really do like the class and experiencing something like this is something I've never done or would have thought I would be doing or would have to do. But I like it is different and.

Erin [00:57:44] I like I just like. Hearing people's stories is something I've always enjoyed.

Dan [00:57:52] That's funny, cause when I was a kid, I was a paper boy and old ladies God I loved hanging out with old

ladies. They had the most wonderful stories to tell. And I was just this this sissy boy again. And I would just hanging out with these old ladies in the neighborhood. They would make me, you know, tea and whatever and cookies and stuff. And one, I have very, very few regrets in my life. And one of them is from one of those old ladies. Mrs. Lambiet had never had pizza, and that's one of my she ended up going to a nursing home and I regret never taking that old woman pizza that's yeah.

Erin [00:58:40] Maybe she had some at the nursing home. Well, yes. I used to work in a nursing home. We did have pizza night about once a week so. It's possible. That's awesome. And I also like the fact that it seems like when you associate with people like just talking about your friends and everything, there is no there's no barriers of like, oh, you have to be around my age. You have to be the same sexual orientation. It's just people.

Dan [00:59:08] Life must be interesting.

Erin [00:59:11] Yeah, I'm sure your parties are interesting.

Hailey [00:59:13] We're not all the same for a reason.

Dan [00:59:16] Right? Yeah. Yeah, because when I work, we. When I started, we had to wear black shoes, black pants, blue shirt, a tie. You didn't have to wear checks, but you had to wear the rest of it. And in the past few years, they dropped the dress code and you can wear whatever you want. So I got bored of men's clothing about four years ago. So I sat down one day and just Googled Fancy Pants and now I have several. I'm plain Jane today, but I have all kinds of fabulous fancy pants and I wear whatever I want to work and I do because it's an art museum and I can wear florals and whatever. So. Yeah.

Erin [01:00:04] Is there anything you wanted to talk about that we didn't get to?

Dan [01:00:07] I don't think so. We covered quite a bit and I

got the. The aids and all that. Yeah, that's. Yeah, that needs to be talked about.

Erin [01:00:15] Yeah. And did we cover everything you wanted to talk about on that front?

Dan [01:00:19] Yes. Yeah, yeah.

Erin [01:00:21] I meant to do this at the beginning too, but I didn't get the "we are at the Glickman library. And it is it is November 21st 2022 and it is at 4:38 p.m." We were supposed to do that at the beginning, but I forgot about that part, so.

Hailey [01:00:40] Better late than never.

Erin [01:00:43] Better late than never. It is on the record now. So well thank you so so much and.

Hailey [01:00:50] Thank you for your time and patience, I appreciate it.

Wrapping up/thank you: