

COUNTRY QUEERS in collaboration with OUT IN THE OPEN

SEASON 2 EPISODE 3 : Adria Stembridge

DESCRIPTION: Adria Stembridge (she/her) is a goth, neurodivergent, white, queer, trans woman who was born and raised in Georgia where she still lives. She has been in bands like: The Endless, The Girl Pool, Vomit Thrower, Tears for the Dying, and more. Adria loves watching anime, roller skating, changing piston rings on her dirtbike, and operating heavy equipment like hydraulic excavators. In this episode Tommy Anderson interviews Adria about growing up in Athens, coming out as trans in the 90s, and punk and goth music!

For this episode we're asking folks who are able to support The Okra Project. The Okra Project is a collective that seeks to address the global crisis faced by Black Trans people by bringing home cooked, healthy, and culturally specific meals and resources to Black Trans People wherever they can reach them. Find the link to donate on their website: <https://www.theokraproject.com>

CREDITS: Created and produced by Tommy Anderson, with support from HB Lozito from Out in the Open, and Rae Garringer of Country Queers. Sound Design by Hideo Higashibaba. Audio editors: Tommy Anderson and Rae Garringer Editorial advisory dream team: Hermelinda Cortés, Lewis Raven Wallace, and Sharon P. Holland. Music by Adria's band Tears for the Dying and Tommy Anderson!

[sounds of birdsong]

Kenny Bilbrey [Intro]: Kenny here! Standing by the New River in Fries, Virginia. You're listening to Country Queers.

[soft electric guitar music]

TOMMY ANDERSON [Host]

My name is Tommy Anderson. I'm a genderfluid country queer from the sparsely inhabited hills of East Kentucky. I have lived here all 31 years of my life, and it hasn't always been the easiest. Luckily, I have been able to find refuge in music, my friends, and the land. And all that has enabled me to be pretty comfortable and happy in these hills and valleys.

Back in 2019, I traveled 3 hours from home - as one often will do for entertainment when you live in a place as remote as I do - and I saw a show in Asheville, NC. It was a show that was put on and performed by queer folks from all up and down the mountains of Appalachia - from Georgia to Virginia.

[sounds of Tears for the Dying playing fast punk music]

There was this Goth band there, Tears for the Dying, from Georgia, and they drew me in with their lead singer and bassist - Adria. She was dressed all in black, dark as night, singing the words of her songs going between tough hardcore vocals and a ghostly whispery singing that rose perfectly above the mix and just blended with this chilly and grave soundscape of the band.

I had seen Adria on a social media group and always thought they were just really cool. And after seeing their performance and driving the 3 hours back home listening to their music - I decided I wanted to try and make friends with this person, not only because they were making cool music, but because there was something about knowing them that made me feel more at ease in this world.

Over the next two years, I moved away from home and spent about a year and a half in Minneapolis, MN. Removed from all my friends, my music crowd, and the mountains that I loved so much. Oftentimes, when I was feeling low and lonely or homesick, I'd be scrolling through my social media feed and find Adria going live to work on her motorcycle or show off some big caterpillar dozer or excavator she had come across on a walk around her town. I'd be sitting in the little cramped Minneapolis apartment, and these live feeds of Adria's life just made me feel like there was someone with me - someone punk and country, someone that made me feel the way that I did back home among my friends - and it was soothing.

Because there's sometimes this tension that came up in certain situations, between the identities I had outside of being country, or liking "country things." Adria was a reminder to me, that, while I was away from the mountains, trying to make it in a city, that I could

be punk, I could be trans, and yeah, I could *totally* be a little bit country-fied, for lack of a better word. And somewhere in between those identities as well, and be proud of it.

I came back home to Kentucky for a while to help my friend with the first season of Country Queers, and to get away from the months of full time work I had been doing at a major grocery store in downtown Minneapolis in the middle of the pandemic. I discussed interviewing Adria, just for fun, and Rae - the creator of Country Queers encouraged me - but it wasn't until this year that I got the paid opportunity through this podcast to interview Adria.

By the spring of 2021, I was back home in Kentucky for good. And in the middle of August of 2021 I finally sat down in front of my computer to call in and record the interview with Adria that you're about to hear. It meant a lot to me to be able to finally get to know Adria this way, and I hope that hearing our conversation means something to you too.

[sounds of Tears for the Dying playing slower song with electric guitar and drums]

[INTERVIEW]

[Click of record button]

Tommy

My name is Tommy Anderson, my pronouns are they and she. I am interviewing Adria, and I am currently sitting in my little house in Mallie, KY and um...How are you doing today?

Adria

I'm doing well. All things considered. I've got like, birthday coming up tomorrow. That's exciting. So, yeah!

Tommy

So could you just maybe introduce yourself? Your name...where you live...

Adria

Yeah, sure. So my name is Adria Stembridge. And I live in Athens, Georgia, which is in the southeast about an hour east of Atlanta.

The first thing that strikes me of having lived in Athens for all, most of my life, is that it's gone through a lot of changes.

like when I grew up here in the 1970s, it was a farming city. And in downtown there were like, there was this thing "farmers hardware," where like my dad used to go to buy like seeds, like okra seeds and corn seeds to plant in the garden. And there's a big country presence and Athens back then. But over the years, you know, like a mall opened up in the early 1980s. Everyone kind of moved out of downtown out to George Square Mall, which is on the west side of town. When that happened, downtown became a bit of a ghost town. And it's like - townies took over downtown. We had multiple bars all over town, and it was a really, really cool, fun time for me. And by the late 90s, more and more people were coming because of Georgia's sports programs, the Bulldogs and attracting more and more students, and they built more and more student housing. And so downtown gradually became less townie and kind of more of a mixture of college kids. And with that, we started getting a lot of new development downtown - And a lot of us, worry that we're going to lose a lot of our historic identity because of the influx of students and it kinda just homogenizes everything

Tommy

Yeah, yeah. Um, This is sort of a weird question, but like, in as many ways as you want to talk about, how do you identify?

Adria

I am a queer trans woman um.... There's a lot of different angles to talk about identity. So it takes a second for me to kind of step through some of it. Yes, so I'm out as queer. I'm gay. So I like ladies or like, in the last year or so I've kind of been doing a lot of self study. I don't like get massively, like sexually turned on from stuff like. I mean, I'm sexual but like, it's not like super super super part of my life. So I would say that like, in addition to being a queer trans lady that is attracted to femme aesthetic, that I find myself somewhere on the asexual spectrum.

So, in addition to like more of the gender, and like, sexual identity, I would also identify as, as a goth. And I've been involved with goth, most of my adult life. I mean, being involved in punk, when I first got moved out of my house and discovered that there was actually such thing as punk. I was sheltered. You know, like, I went through a punk phase for several years and got a lot of anger and pent up shit out. Then I discovered that, you know, there's this awesome, you know, death rock thing, and I kind of, like got involved with that, and I've kind of held to it over the years. So I definitely identify as a goth. And I do use that word, very loosely, cause, I mean, we could get into an hour long debate over what goth is or whatever, but like, not the time for that.

And so, that's kind of where I am with, with like, more of a kind of social identity. I'm also diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. So I'm also autistic, I'm neurodivergent. That is definitely a part of who I am. And I'm - I won't say I'm proud to be autistic, but like, I'm not ashamed to be autistic. I think that's reasonable to say.

I grew up in Athens back in the 70s, like I mentioned, kind of a country town, very sleepy town. We had a house in Athens, but my father bought some property a little bit outside of Athens, bought 13 acres. And he had this lifelong dream of building a farmhouse. So he built a farmhouse for us. So we found ourselves sometimes, you know, living out in that farmhouse for a period, we definitely were out there a lot. My dad had - he was always working in the yard, whether it's at our house in Athens or out the farm, you know, planting gardens. Back then he called them Victory Gardens. And basically you had like a half acre or whatever, like, you know, till the ground up and plant seed directly in the ground and then, you know, fertilize and hoe it and to maintain it and get vegetables which we ate because we were - we were not very wealthy family, and we ate out of a garden regularly. So like I got exposed to a lot of I guess what a lot of people would consider "country lifestyle" early on. We didn't have farm animals, but we had everything but ...

My dad had a little riding lawn mower, it was called a Sears Suburban. And back back in the 60s and 70s, you could buy these little riding lawn mowers, which had like miniature three point hitches and you could attach you know, roto tellers, turn plows, cultivators, you name it, they had every single attachment you could possibly think of and probably 10 others you couldn't think of. So we had one of these things, and you had a dozen different attachments. So you know, I would get the drive that because I could reach the pedals on it. And on the farm, he had a Ford 8N, gasoline powered, farm tractor. And I have fond memories of getting to ride around on the tractor with him. I was a little bit too short legged to reach the controls myself but he would let me steer while sitting on his lap and that was always a pleasant memory of mine being out there, you know, bush hogging the fields and whatnot.

So, um, with having said all that, you know, definitely like that, that exposure to like this country lifestyle has stuck with me as I've grown up. And virtually every place I've lived, I've had a garden. Sometimes that involved just a few square feet of sun and a backyard somewhere. And other times like, my most recent residence, I had a garden that was like 100 feet by 50 feet. And you know, I had to maintain it with my tractor. And there's no way I could have planted a garden that big without equipment. So I've always done that type of work. I'm in fact, last year, I bought chickens and built a chicken coop for them. So definitely, the country lifestyle is very much part of my identity. I don't know

how to like, phrase that like, I don't feel like I identify as like a redneck. But I definitely have some redneck genetics in me.

Tommy

Yeah, um, so. Where were you born, and some other things about your childhood maybe? And like what was your family like?

Adria

Yeah, so I was actually born in Atlanta. Um... my earliest memories are growing up in Athens, Georgia. Family life was strange..... I have three older brothers and the three older brothers I have are all closer in age than they are to me. So they, you know, as I grew up, they had a very tight bond with one another and they would frequently go do projects together. They had a model room in the basement of our little house in Athens And they would build models together. And it was a really fun bonding experience for all of them. I was too young to do that. you know, I just I kind of missed out on a lot of things as they grew older, you know, they kept entering new things that I was not old enough to do so childhood for me it was a bit lonesome. I guess in hindsight, I could say that I felt a little bit isolated.

And, you know, I had friends around, but like...It was also a little bit complicated and weird, because, as my dad, you know, got closer to getting his doctorate degree, homelife started having a little bit of a dark tinge to it. We would often hear like my mom crying for unknown reasons. My dad would sometimes like, and again, I, you know, now I'd call them autistic meltdowns, um, where he would just just explode and throw shit around the shop in the basement there, and like, you didn't want to be around him when it happened because it's tense, you know. It was just a really strange time, he started kind of withdrawing a bit from the family. He took a job in Spartanburg, South Carolina after he got his degree. So he bought a house in Spartanburg, and he moved up there. Yeah, it was just, that was when, you know, my mom and my dad started going further and further apart from each other. My mom got more involved with church, and my dad wanted less and less and less to do with that. And so, you know, it was inevitable that a divorce was going to happen and it did when I was, I think, 11 or 12 years old. And so, my dad eventually did move to Saudi Arabia, he took another job overseas, and so we didn't get to see him that much.

And like, and um I was basically raised by my mom, during teenage years, and my mom has, you know, like, she wasn't used to working and so it was really stressful for her. And, you know, I was having autistic meltdowns, I was doing very poor academically in school. Like, in some of my classes, I would like for this semester, you know, I'd come

home with like, a 50 in English, or like a 30 in English or something. And like, you know, they were like, they were really concerned. So they had testing done, they had counselors talk to me. They suspected that either one- that I was a genius, and I wasn't being challenged enough, or number two- that I was developmentally delayed. And it turns out a little bit of the both. When I was like, around 14 or so, like, I remember, again talking with school counselors. They actually had me in a special education class, where I was in a classroom with other autistic people who were, you know, some of which were barely verbal, and, you know, were having a difficult time. I guess I was having a difficult time too.

[soft electric guitar music by Tommy Anderson]

But, you know, I was told, while I was like 14 years old, I had the mind - emotional mind - of like a nine year old. And, that kind of checked out because, like, back then I didn't like really hanging with people my age. There were people in my peer group, chronological peer group, around where we lived around the farmhouse and whatnot. But, I found myself going down the street to hang out with this little kid, Keith, let's make up a name. And, you know, he was eight years old. And we had fun just riding a go-kart together, we'd like, look at his baseball cards, or watch pro-wrestling on TV with his parents or whatever. And I just felt more at ease hanging out with people that were younger than me.

So um, yeah, um, so basically, you know, growing up autistic, you know, not really having really much family support. My older brothers had all gone to college and my oldest brother, for a time tried to step in and be my dad, and I rejected that, like, heartily. I wanted no part of him. And so that, it was like, you know, childhood was pretty chaotic for me and isolating. And you know, eventually over time, you know, my mom and I did for a bit, kind of patch things over until I came out as trans. And then we kind of just stopped talking. So.

Tommy

Hm.. So when, when did you first know that you were trans, you were gay?

Adria

So yeah, so, like my earliest memories like and like this whole, you know, like you got you always have, yeah. . . . This is an interesting topic.

So like there used to be this thing back in the 90s - you had to like concoct a story that you "Oh yeah, I knew I was trans, at like three years old, I wanted to be a girl at three

years old.” You know, in order to get hormones, you had to concoct a story and lie it through your teeth. -So like, my story wasn't that. I did, like, remember, when I was a child, being very interested in my mom's clothes. And like, when she wasn't around, I would go and try on her shoes. And like, by my teenage years, I was like, more and more into like, “Oh, my God, girls clothes are awesome. I want to wear them.”

But like, a few years before, you know, when I was around eight or nine years old, I went to get a haircut. And we were in the lobby waiting to be called back by the barber, whatever it was back here. And they had these books on the table, you know, like the pictures of different hairstyles, and like, I was looking through the books and all that. And I remember seeing this one picture of this person in the book with long black hair, long, curly black, kind of big, poofy, curly blonde, like...”Mom, I want that hair”. And my mom was like “you know, little boys don't have long hair. That's not what you do.” And, you know, like that kind of shame. I was ashamed. And that taught me from, you know, that early age not to tell people about what I was feeling about my gender identity.

So definitely, like, you know, in my early childhood years, I had some kind of vague knowledge that I was like, interested in by my teenage years and became more and more prominent, I remember seeing a TV show that was on in the early 80s or so, it was just garbage TV, except for this one episode, they had this little segment where they had two trans people on there. And it's the early 80s, right? They had two trans people on there, and they got married as cis people, and then they both realized they were trans, transitioned, and they both had surgeries. And there was a story and they were talking to them about all those changes. And I remember seeing that and I was floored, I'm like, “Wait, people can actually do that?” And it stirred something in me. So definitely in my teenage years. By my early 20s you know, of course, I was still dealing with a lot of anger from the family chaos and the autism was just like, it was bonkers back then. But by my early 20s, I realized that, you know, those interests in femme clothes, and femme identities hadn't gone away.

But by my early 20s uh, you know, I was like this, this is definitely not going away. So like when I started getting involved in punk, I used, you know, the band as like, basically as a way for me to start exploring gender, and you know, might start wearing little, kind of some femme clothes on stage. Our very first concert back in February .. February 1992? At this place called Fred's on Baxter Street. We played a show there and I remember going to thrift stores and I found some old military clothes and like “oh this, this might be fun.” So I ripped them up and got them dirty and stuff. I found like, went in my mom's bathroom, I got some makeup of hers, stole some makeup. So I had like

really dark eyes. And I was like, I had no idea what I was doing. I didn't know Goth and death rock existed, I was just like, "I want to be a dead person on stage." And so but it was an opportunity for me to wear makeup on stage. And that was big. That was huge. And later, you know, I'd start wearing like skirts on stage and my bandmates laugh and they thought, "Oh, this is - this will get a rise out of people." And I was like, "No, no, this is like, this is what I want to wear. This is what I want to wear, I'm not doing it for them, I'm doing it for me."

And, you know, eventually, like, I kind of stopped doing the punk band and started joining a goth band, and that allowed me to pretty much get more into like just full on makeup every time we played out. I think back in the mid 90s when I was in The Endless, I would have like identified back then as androgynous, which today would have been identified as non-binary. That was kind of my presentation. And did that band for a couple years. And we started another band, this was a pop band we were in called The Girl Pool. Not to be confused with the girl pool out of San Francisco, we were a lo fi indie band out of Athens, Georgia, we started back in 1995. Um, and, like, there, I like pretty much started wearing full femme clothes and presenting female onstage. And that was kind of my thing.

[soft sounds of Tears for the Dying punk song in background]

It was then that I kind of started to realize that, you know, this is much bigger than just like, wearing a skirt on stage. This is like part of my core identity, and I need to do something with it. So it led me to chasing, chasing around to different counselors and therapists to try and explore, you know, to get to know myself better. And that's when I encountered the gatekeeping and like, you know, the - many counselors that had no idea what to do with it, they were, you know, like, it's, they would never tell you they're concerned about it. But you know, like, you could tell that they weren't comfortable with you talking about gender, like back in the 90s and trans issues back then. Because back then, you know, transgenderism was, it was dirty, and is like, not accepted at all, even by like liberals and, you know, people who thought themselves, you know, above all that. Because literally like, trans representation in media back then was just terrible. You know, like, we were either like the butt of a really bad joke, or we were an axe murderer. Take your pick. So that's, that's basically, you know, all we had back then.

So I eventually did find a therapist who specialized in gender. And I had to drive all the way to Atlanta this year, she was very expensive. I only saw her a few times. But you know, she set me on the right path. She's like, "you know, Adria, you know, you're trans. And the sooner you deal with this, the better off you're going to be." It was really kind of eye opening to hear those words being said about myself. I retreated a bit for a few

years. Like, I remember, like, I moved to Atlanta in the early 2000s. And I was like I wasn't quite sure what to do with like, the knowledge that I had about myself. I was conflicted about where to go"Hey, I'm, I'm an adult now and I'm supposed to be doing something in my life. How do I integrate this? And is this even a real thing? Maybe I've outgrown it."

So I remember like, "Okay, like, I'm going to go cut my hair." And so I went down to the super cuts or whatever and got a very short haircut. Off went all my hair. And I drove home that night and poured a bath and got in the tub and I started crying. I realized how, what a big mistake I had just made. And that also kind of sold to me that like, "yeah, you're like, you're trans, you're gonna have to do something with it." And, you know, within a couple of years, you know, first of all, I met some friends in Atlanta that were very supportive and helped me along my journey. And eventually I did you know, transition at my job. And, uh here I am today. [laughs]

[Tears for the Dying - upbeat electric guitar song]

[BREAK]

HB LOZITO: [Host]: Hey, friends, I'm HB Lozito with Out in the Open. Because we know the impact of colonization on people, land, and resources, we're encouraging our white listeners to engage in an ongoing process of reparations. So, during each episode break, we're asking our white listeners who have extra funds to donate to projects founded and led by, queer & trans, Black and Indigenous folks, and people of color.

Today, Adria is asking you to support the Okra Project. The Okra Project is a collective that seeks to address the global crisis faced by Black Trans people by bringing home cooked, healthy, and culturally specific meals and resources to Black Trans People wherever they can reach them.

The link to their website, where you can donate and learn more about their work is in the episode notes, and over on our websites at countryqueers.com and weareoutintheopen.org.

Now, back to Tommy's interview with Adria.

[END OF BREAK]

Tommy

Yeah, wow Um. you mentioned that whenever you came out to your mom, you were talking about you tried to at one point patch things up with her. And then whenever you came out to her, what was that like...?

Adria

Yeah, so my mom and I like this, it's like the early 2000s. Coincidentally, like, when we started patching things up was like, after I cut my hair short, my mom got, I guess she kind of warmed up to me then. She thought I was getting on the right path. And, I remember, like, about this time, I was really into dirt bikes. I raced motocross a bunch, and I wound up hurting my back somehow. I'm not sure if it was a motocross accident or not, but like, I had to have surgery, and my mom volunteered to come over and be with me during that surgery. And, you know, my mom volunteered to come over and be with me. I lived in Atlanta at that time. She drove over from Athens. And she cared for me that whole time. And like, during that time, that was a bonding time for us, like we never ever fully got super connected with one another because she was like this evangelical Christian, and I was everything *but* that. So we kind of couldn't talk about politics. We tried a couple times, but it just never, never really worked. But we did talk about relationships. And like I was dating someone at a time, and we talked about that some and...

And I remember this one night, like, it was around 2004 or five. And we were around Christmas time, my mom, she loved Christmas time. And so we got in my truck. And we drove around Athens one night just looking at lights together. And.....[crying]..... I felt a connection with my mom. I was like, "I wish I could have had this relationship with her all along." I felt like there was like a mother-daughter thing going on. And she would not have seen it. But I certainly did. It was you know, we were talking more and just led up to, you know, my transition and my job. And we didn't talk about anything with regards to gender at all, ever. Other than she used to kind of randomly tell me, yeah, like, she was a florist, on the part time. She worked at the University during secretarial stuff full time. And, and she like, um, told me that "Yeah, I've worked with these gay guys at flower land." And she would tell stories, she would just like, randomly tell me stories about how kind and how just awesome they were to her, and that she enjoyed working with them. And this got this idea in my head, "Okay, mom, there may be an opportunity, there may be a chance that she will accept me." And it took a lot of courage and, or maybe stupidity, I don't know what but like, I finally did, like.... I sent her, I think an email or maybe a handwritten letter. And like I said, "Hey, Mom, this is what's going on with me. And, still love you."

And so next time we saw each other, you know, she was kind of a little awkward. And I remember her saying that, you know, "Hey, like, I don't know what to think about what your email, your letter told to me. I'm not sure what to think about this, but like, what are you gonna wear to school?" It was just this very innocent, like response to it. And I was like, "I don't know, I'll probably just wear like, what everybody else wears, you know, jeans and T shirts and stuff like." So, you know, I went home and like a couple weeks later on, went back over to visit and like, it was like, you know, like in Nightmare Before Christmas, the mayor that's a smiley face and spins around and then like the frowny face. It was kind of like that change of attitude to me. And she sat down and she told me that what I was doing with my life was not right in the eyes of God. She talked to her minister...

A few weeks after that, I received a seven page handwritten treatise of how that, you know, I was gonna burn in hell that was an abomination. And it just went on and on and on! And, you know, it was a brother that I used to look up to a lot. And, you know, like, my brother introduced me to some cool Athens bands back in the late 80s. You know, like, I wanted to, I really wanted to have a relationship. And so I talked to him on the phone for hours at a time about this, and like, there was just no budging. And so like, that was it. Like, um, from that point forward. My relationship with my mom was strained. Unbeknownst to us, she was also having some major health issues. And she expressed them to us in some really weird ways. And like, she said, like, "I can't wait to go home, be home with Jesus." And like, it was almost like, it was almost kind of like being suicidal, but like, in a godly kind of way? I was like, "Mom, why do you want to not be here anymore?" I never could ask her that. But like, I was like, why?

But it was really dark. It was like she, was a Christian. And she was trying to say it was really good thing, but it was dark. But she was saying, it turns out, you know, we found out Well, after the fact that, you know, she was basically having major heart attacks, a lot of them. She finally had a massive coronary in 2010 and died. So my mom and I died. We didn't get to patch things up [both crying]

But that's just the way it goes, you know... um, I also, you know, it was kind of freeing in a way that I didn't have to, like, I didn't have to hide anymore. You know, like, I still had my brothers, I was still talking to them, cause I felt like I needed to have family. And they deadnamed and misgendered and like I was expected to appear, you know, in masculine clothing around them. And I did. And It was fucking horrible. . .

My dad moved back to the States in the late 90s, and I'd go down and visit like once, maybe once every five or six months or so like, very strange relationship. My dad didn't

accept me, I never came out to my dad. But like, you know, like, over time, he was the only parent I had left and like was like, "I need to go visit him more." And so I started visiting him more often.

And I just tried to focus on the things that we had in common with each other that we liked to do like he loved to work around the yard. And one time he's like, he wants to get all the pine stumps out of his yard and he cut down a bunch of pine trees and they were just stumped everywhere. I'm like "Dad I can pull this out for you. Like, I do that in my side business." So I rented a caterpillar, it was a 320 excavator and yanked out all the stumps out of the yard, got his yard all cleaned up. And that was kind of a fun thing for us to do together.

My dad had started to show signs of dementia by that time. It was just starting to kind of creep in. So over the next, this is back around 2011 or so and over the next eight years or so, I mean, he just went down, down down. And fortunately for us, he was in that subset of people who are just goofy. So he would be silly with us. Which you know, that was okay, you know, I could handle that. But he finally passed away in 2018. And that was, like again, kind of a liberating thing for me, like, you know, it was like, time to move on. And when he died my interactions with my siblings greatly reduced. I realized that you know, I'd given them far too much of my life. I gave them so many years of my life that I could have been myself and I had to be something for them that I'm not. And for what? They're not doing a damn thing other than like, requiring that I be somebody I'm not for them.

So. I just kind of gradually just had to cut them out of my life. They message me randomly here and there. one actually sent the letter to me and I didn't read it. I actually had another relative read it for me cause I was afraid it was going to be another seven page diatribe. It wasn't. It was just "Hey, I'm giving you this Dalia - a plant - here's how to care for it." I guess he was trying to patch things up. So I don't really talk to my family anymore. And until which time I know that they're good with me, I think I'm good to leave it like that.

Tommy

Wow. That's, that's so intense. Uh. Whew. I'm sorry that you've had to deal with all that. Shew. [crying]

Adria

Some of my friends who have gotten really close to, like, will comment that like, I've got a pretty substantial fear of abandonment and like, yeah. I carry with me like feelings of

isolation, you know, and like it's... I hope one day I'll find a family of my own. I don't know that I will, but I'll try.

Tommy

Yeah, sometimes that feels like, you know, the best we can hope for.

Adria

Yeah

Tommy

I'm sorry I'm gonna have to wipe my nose and my eyes.

[sniffles]

Adria

Yeah, yeah, no, take care of yourself.

[soft electric guitar by Tommy Anderson]

Tommy

Ok I think I'm, I think I'm decently cleaned up here. Um, yeah, yeah so, when did you realize the part of your identity that was like punk, or beyond that, like goth?

Adria

Hmmm. My older brothers had some records laying around. I didn't really care much for the Yellow Submarine, Beatles and whatever. I didn't really get that but like there was one record in particular one of them had. It was...this song called "Fire" by The Crazy World of Arthur Brown. And I heard that song, and I thought it was the coolest thing ever, like my seven or eight year old self did. And I remember my mom getting mad when we played it, she didn't want us to play it, which probably made it even cooler. And I also listened to some stuff like Gary Newman, like the Cars record that came out back then. Flip side of that record, there was a song called Metal. It's got this almost industrial rhythmic beat.

And it so happened, coincidentally that Gary Newman was talking about the lyrics to "Metal" in an interview. And he was like, "Yeah, like pulling the wires from the wall was a reference to trans people." And it was like him trying to get inside and feel what that would be like. And Gary Newman actually is autistic as well. So like that, that song just kind of was really awesome to me. But I did not get exposed to anything beyond you know, the fringes of anything cool beyond like Gary Newman, and the Go Gos and stuff.

I remember seeing little bits on like MTV News of like this band from the UK called Alien Sex Fiends and I was like, "Holy shit, this looks so fucking sick. I love it!" I didn't say that when I was a kid. I'm saying it now. That's how I felt. It was pretty cool.

Late 80s rolled around. And I was just starting to kind of get out on my own and starting to, you know, experience the world, for myself. My older brother kind of got me into some like 80s alternative bands like REM, Pylon here in Athens, Indigo Girls. This band from, I think, Raleigh, North Carolina called Fetching Bones. So I started getting some alternative music exposure then and then like on our local College Station around 1988 or so is when The Cure's Disintegration came out.

But it wasn't until like, I was driving around Athens and listening to 90.5 day and they had a promo. And in the background of the promo was this dude singing high pitched and angry and screaming sounding really weird and it's really fast drums behind it. And screeching guitars. And I'm like, "What is this!? Why haven't I heard this before?" So I remember driving home, you know, we didn't have cell phones back then. Drive home, immediately, you know 502-4567. And I was like "DJ, what was that? What was that music in there?" And he says, "Oh, that was Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables by Dead Kennedys." And like I wrote it down and I went straight up to the mall, Camelot Music, and I bought Fresh Fruit for Rotting Vegetables. And that was like this opening door for me of like "Wow, What is this music?" And you know, I had a word for it: punk. And we didn't have internet back then. So you're basically going off of what you can find on record stores. And I would look for anything that looked like Fresh Fruit - anything with like a police car or like, you know, a politician like Reagan, like making fun of Reagan, or anything like that. I would buy the tape. I bought shit like by Exploited by the Subhumans, like anything that looked cool. You know, so I bought some shit that was garbage.

And then I found myself wanting to know more and more about this, this music. So I'd go up to the UGA library, and I would like, you know, go into their - they had this old fashioned computer, you could type in keywords, it was a real pain to use. And I would find books that talked about punk and I would go and check them out of the library and read them. And that's when I got a little bit background knowledge of, you know, the Ramones and the Sex Pistols and McLaren and Suzy and all that, you know, so I learned a lot about that stuff. And I was just completely enamored with it. I just loved it so much.

A colleague of mine at the pizza place I worked, you know, offered to sell me this cheap Decca guitar that he had. It was probably this thing that you get in a Sears catalog, a really old guitar. And the bridge posts, were these screws that stuck out of the guitar

and like the bridge kind of sat down on them. So you had these little tips of screws sticking out, right? As I started playing with my my band back then, I would play and I would cut myself on these things all the time. And like the guitar just got blood soaked so many times.

Yeah, so I mean, I just started playing music with three other, I guess four other people that also were brand new to playing music. We didn't know how to play our instruments, and we sounded terrible. The band I'm talking about for people if you want to go dig it up on - I believe it's bandcamp is Vomit Thrower. And you can hear some of that early stuff from 1991 that I wrote. It's just terrible. It's awful. Vomit Thrower, was terrible band, but it served its purpose. [laughs]

Tommy

Tell me about like the bands that you've been in...

Adria

Yeah, sure. Sure. Sure. So Vomit Thrower was the first. We were together off and on for 14 years. We took some time off. By the time we started getting into punk, punk pretty much settled down in Athens. And so when we came out, we were playing this really snotty shitty music, like the local music magazine, "Flagpole" the editors, they just they just tore us to pieces. Like all these, "They're just trying to do what John mine did. And they're like, you know, they're, they're, like, one of them's got freckles and pimples on their face." They were terrible to us. They were just terrible.

We took that stuff and we loved it. We loved it, because we were being talked about and that meant something to us. By like, I guess, mid 90s or so like, I kind of got a little bit of experience with the guitar and started writing songs I actually weren't completely shit. And one of the players in my band he was like, "Adria, have you listened to Bauhaus?" I'm like, "What? "Boo-hoos" What?" Because like, you know, I was playing this riff on the guitar and he said "that sounds like Bauhaus." I'm like, "I don't know who -that is." And he's like, "Alright, we're having record night." And so he brought me over and got some wine. He pulled out some records and the first thing he played for me was this band called "45 Grave" and I was like, "Whoa. And I was like this really fucking good stuff here." And he played Bauhaus and I was like, "Whoa, this is sick! I really really like this Bauhaus." And he put on Only Theater of Pain. And my life changed. I could not believe what it was I was hearing. It was just mind blowing.

[Tears for the Dying slow song in background with Adria singing]

I was like "Holy shit this music exists?" And so that was my first introduction to Goth music proper. And I really, really liked it. So um, so yeah, and then basically, you know, within another year or two, I joined this band called "The Endless" My third band was a band I mentioned before, called The Girl Pool, three separate words, we released a handful of like, local, like, kind of four track recordings. It was all lo-fi. But going back and listening to the records, you know, the recordings that we made back then it's like, if we had been in New York City, like I've no doubts that we would have just blown up. Like cause that lofi indie stuff that came around the late 90s and all that was like really big in New York, "the Sixteens" or whatever, like, we were basically doing that music. But yeah, the local press didn't really take to us that well. And so whatever. [laughs]

And so we did "the Girl Pool" for a number of years. And in the late 90s I started you know, coming out and realizing that I'm trans and started writing lyrics, poetry. Around the early 2000s, I started writing music for Tears. And "Time" was the very first song that the lyrics I put to music and that was the very first song I did. That was my first EP recorded in Athens. And when I was listening back to it, it was like, "holy shit, that's, that's me!" Like, up into that point, I had done some vocals and Vomit Thrower, and I did some vocals in The Girl Pool. And it was all like, dude vocals, like really lower pitch stuff. I just *hated* my voice back then. I could not stand it. I hated it.

So like, between "The Girl Pool" kind of phased out in the 19 1998 or so. Around 2002 or so. I started doing a lot of work in my voice and like, I just ride around my car and I would find like female singers and sing to them. And even though it sounded terrible, I just made myself do it over and over and over again. I sang to Madonna, to Pylon. You name it. I just I just tried to get my voice up as high as I could and just keep it there and do it. And persistence. I didn't have any vocal coaches. I guess they were around but I couldn't afford them, whatever. Um, and so like when I finally recorded that, that record that first E.P. of "time" and "disease" like I was like how was so so happy. Like, it wasn't perfect, but like, my voice was finally like acceptable to me. And I'm not sure if I've improved anything since then or not like, like, I don't feel like massively dysphoric when I sing anymore. In fact so much that like, now in fact one of our songs called "Monochopsis" I basically dropped down into my old register and that's the way I'm singing the song and I'm okay doing that now.

Tears happened in the early 2000s through around 2006 or so. And we played some shows around in Georgia, and we all were broke as shit, and couldn't afford the practice space, and the band broke up. I kept writing a little bit in the background here and there. Around 2015 or so we got approached by some folks who are writing an Athens history, music history book, and got back in touch with my old bandmates. And "Hey, y'all want to be in this book?" "Sure." We got some pictures together, we wrote some copy. And

turned out that like, "Hey, would y'all want to do music again?" So we got this project going together, we didn't do "The Girl Pool" again. We did this project called "Strange Dreams." And it was basically Girl Pool with us 20 years later.

And so around 2017 or so. Like, I've been doing Strange Dreams. It felt like it was kind of like, "Okay, are we going to do another record? And why is it taking so long to write songs." And like, about this time, Eva Oh, from the early 80s Death rock band "Superheroines" was touring. And we got invited to play and open up for her as Strange Dreams, and got to the club that night, and turns out that Eva needed a ride to the venue from hotel. And so we got to actually go pick up you Eva Oh, and we got to ride, you know, from the hotel to The Club. And, you know, we got to talk with her for about 20 minutes in the car together. And she was just cool as shit.

I remember that night, we played our show. And I'm like, we're playing all these pop songs and I was just like, "This sucks. Like, this should be Tears for the Dying up here." And that was kind of the moment I was like, "You know, I really want to do Tears again." And so I started working on a set of Tears music. And it was initially just going to be like - basically a solo project of just me. And I played as a solo musician as Tears for the Dying. I played multiple shows around Athens, and also Atlanta even in the fall of 2017. And I eventually then met my last lineup, Debbie and Kandi, I met them in Atlanta at a Trans Day of Remembrance event. And we agreed to play in each other's bands. And we worked together for a few years and earlier this year, I moved back to Athens, and you know, we couldn't do music together anymore. So I've got some new musicians for Tears. This will be the third lineup I've had. We're gonna play our very first show together tomorrow, here in Athens at Flicker Board? So...

Tommy

When do you experience the most joy? Like, when are you the happiest in your life?

Adria

Performing live in front of people... on the nights where things go nicely, and you have a good mix in the monitors, there's like there's good energy in a venue like that. That's like definitely, that's, you know, one of my favorite things to do, and it makes me really happy. I just love playing music. I love writing music. I love just coming up and sitting down in front of the daw. And just coming up with stuff. I just am getting into my happy zone. Like I don't think they're really happy. It's just like, it's just like I just really feel comfortable and at ease doing that.

I love watching anime. Like, I'm super, super stoked for the new Evangelion movie coming out tomorrow, On my fucking birthday, what a great birthday present that's gonna be for me!

Other things that make me super happy are like, like working on shit in my shop, like, you know, when I'm not crunched for time when I'm just able to casually go out and like, I don't know, like, do a top end on my dirt bike. Taking apart the engine, you know, just carefully putting stuff neatly in as I go and cleaning up. And I love working with my hands. And I love working with tools.

[soft slow electric guitar and drums from Tears from the Dying]

Also just love like operating equipment. I learned how to operate heavy equipment on my own and go to school for it. From farm tractors, and then eventually I learned how to do a backhoe. I basically self taught myself how to run a trackhoe on the job. I found I really liked that a lot and started doing more of that kind of work. I just love operating equipment. It's like the best. I love the clunky industrial noise that the tracks make when you're you know, traveling it. It's like It's so fucking awesome. It's like so powerful knowing you've got so much like destruction right at your fingertips. And it's cool.

Um, I love getting dressed up. I mean, I love getting dressed up and looking slutty and going out and having a drink. That's like awesome. That makes me happy.

[music fades up with Adria singing]

TOMMY ANDERSON [Host]

Adria and I said our goodbyes and I settled down for a quiet evening after our chat. I was glad to be back home in among the sounds of summer night critters songs in the pitch darkness of the east kentucky hills, I was thankful that i was alive in a time when something like the Country Queers podcast could thrive, I felt connection and comfort, I was excited that the Adria and I's conversation would be able to be shared with people who needed to hear it. Thanks for listening. This has been Tommy Anderson For Country Queers - Rock on.

[Fast punk song "Go Die" by Tears for the Dying]

RAE GARRINGER [Host]

Hey y'all, I'm Rae Garringer, and next time on Country Queers you'll hear my 2013 interview with Sam Gleaves. Sam is a white gay man who was born and raised in VA and now lives in KY. He's a musician who plays traditional music and writes some of the sweetest gay country songs you've ever heard, in my honest opinion. He also works to share this music with young folks, as an educator. Here's a clip of our convo from back in 2013:

I want to tell the story somehow of queer people making country music, because, this is an arguable statement, but I think you can say that there are more queer people in the arts than there are straight people. I mean, when you're marginalized in some way I think you turn to the arts. And if you're marginalized as an Appalachian and you're marginalized as a queer person, how can you not turn to art in some way? I mean, it's no wonder that so many of the country singers and musicians I admire are queer, because how could they not turn to it? It's such a comforting music, it's such a healing music.

This episode was created and produced by Tommy Anderson, with support from HB Lozito from Out in the Open, and myself. Our fabulous sound designer for all of Season 2 is Hideo Higashibaba. Audio editing in this episode by Tommy Anderson and myself.

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Music on this episode by... Adria's band! Tears for the Dying! And also Tommy Anderson!

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You can also find this episode on the website of Out in the Open, our co-facilitators of this collaborative Season 2 adventure, at www.weareoutintheopen.org. While you're

there, check out and connect with their rad work building power of rural LGBTQ+ folks in the northeast!

Until next time...stay queer out there, friends!

[END]