

## **COUNTRY QUEERS SEASON 1 EPISODE 0**

**DESCRIPTION:** In this episode you'll learn more about Rae Garringer and the history of the ongoing multimedia oral history project, Country Queers. When Rae set out to gather rural and small-town LGBTQIA2S+ histories in 2013, they had no formal training in oral history or audio recording. They were motivated by a deep frustration that it was so hard to find rural queer stories, and an intense personal need to connect with other rural queers.

**CREDITS:** Host/Producer/Lead Editor: Rae Garringer. Assistant Editor/Composer-Performer of Acoustic and Electric Guitar Music: Tommie Anderson. Editorial Advisory Dream Team: Hermelinda Cortés, Sharon P. Holland, and Lewis Raven Wallace. Theme Song Composer/Banjo: Sam Gleaves. Theme Song Pedal Steel: Rebecca Branson Jones. Special thanks to Laura Starecheski and AIR Media's mentorship program for additional editorial support on this episode. And to Hideo Higashibaba, Riley Cockrell, Abby Huggins, Deya Terrafranca, Annie Terrafrance, Sam Gleaves, Benny Becker, Sam Hamlin, Beth White, Yasmine Farhang, and my mom, Lynn Creamer, for feedback on the first draft. Big thanks to Jai Arun Ravine and Theresa Smith-Garringer for website work. Thanks also to Brandon Jent for support in research and pronunciation of the names of the Indigenous people whose land I grew up on.

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## **TRANSCRIPT**

*[Theme song]*

RAE GARRINGER [Host]: Hey there, my name is Rae Garringer, and this is Country Queers, a podcast featuring oral history interviews with rural and small-town queer & trans folks in the U.S.

I'm white, queer, middle class, nonbinary—a Gemini/Cancer cusp with a Cancer moon and Leo rising, if you're curious—and I live in the mountains of southeastern Kentucky on Adena, Shawnee, and Cherokee land, next to a little creek.

*[Sound of creek]*

I live with a goofy tiny dog named Quincey and 12 ducks that I refer to as Melba and company.

*[Sound of Quincey barking and ducks]*

I also live with two goats named Thistle and Trillium.

*[Sounds of goats, Rae opening gate and calling for Quincey, feeding animals]*

And of course, I can't leave out Boyfriend, my handsome, 14-year-old, one-eyed blind cat.

*[Sound of Boyfriend purring]*

I grew up in these mountains, and there's nothing I have ever loved so intensely, so unconditionally, as this place. But I've also got a lot of complicated feelings, about how to balance my deep love for these mountains with my rage, at how much racism and transphobia gets swept under the rug there.

I grew up on unceded Moneton and Calicuas territory, in what's known as Pocahontas County, WV. It's a county that's 97% white, and growing up, I was taught that the land we lived on had been "hunting grounds" quote unquote, that no indigenous people had lived there at the time of colonization. Never once in school do I remember white students learning we were uninvited squatters living on stolen land. That our ancestors had carried out genocide against Indigenous people. Or that West Virginia's secession from Virginia during the Civil War did not actually mean our state was made up of abolitionists. That instead people were enslaved in our very own county. White folks barely even talked about the National Alliance, a neo-Nazi compound that's still there today, and that when I was in high school was one of the best organized and most highly-funded white supremacist organizations in the country.

As Elandria Williams, a brilliant southern organizer, said in a Country Queers interview we did together in 2013, "Country is complicated." And during this pride month, amidst a summer of uprisings across the United States in defense of Black lives, uprisings that have been met with increased police militarization and the president's ongoing support of white supremacist violence. And during a pride month, where in the month alone, at least six trans women have been murdered across the country, mostly Black trans women. It's more important than ever that small towns dig into the work of making our rural communities spaces where people of color, queer and trans and non-binary people, can live, can thrive, without threat of violence or humiliation.

*[Music]*

Growing up in West Virginia, in the 90s and early 2000s, I didn't know a single out queer person in the whole state. There were rumors about the softball coach, of course, and the Department of Natural Resources officer. But there wasn't a single out kid in my entire county, and I grew up without TV and mostly pre-internet.

I rode the bus for four hours a day in high school. It was fucking awful. I remember one morning amidst the never-ending drive when a boy said, "We should put all the faggots on an island and drop a bomb on them." In my memory, everyone laughed, except for me and the friend I shared a seat with. I didn't even know I was queer yet, but I remember just wanting to go as far away from West Virginia as I could.

*[Music faintly in background]*

I did leave. I spent 10 years away from home, first discovering and exploring my queerness in college in Western Massachusetts, and then finding a sense of belonging two-stepping with other rural queers in gay country bars in Austin, TX.

I had a lot of fun in those places, but I never stopped aching for the mountains back home. I didn't think I could go home, though. I believed this long-standing narrative within queer spaces, that small towns aren't safe for us—that I couldn't have these mountains that raised me, and my queerness too.

I finally did move home, in 2011, I found myself happier and healthier than I'd been in years. I started to notice queer folks around town. At the Walmart, we'd give each other a knowing, but subtle glance. At the West Virginia State Fair, we'd more boldly check one another out, maybe even brave a smile. But we never talked.

I found myself frustrated. Why was it so hard to meet each other here? Why were there no easily accessible rural queer stories, other than those of the famous violent murders of country queers like Mathew Shepard and Brandon Teena? Why were we invisible in both our local community histories and in national queer histories and media?

So, I decided I was going to start an oral history project, to try to meet and learn from other rural and small-town queer people, all over the United States. I had *no* idea what I was doing. No formal training in oral history or audio recording. I had three part time jobs in two counties and no money saved up. But I had a whole lot of stubborn determination to find and document rural queer histories. Since then, I've interviewed 65 people in 15 states. I've ended up with more questions than answers, and with a deep respect and admiration for those who've shared their stories with me. And also, for the ones who came before us, who quietly navigated the joys and struggles of rural queer life in eras past. Because the thing is, we have always been here. We have always existed in every rural county and every small town. Since before the colonization of this continent, and ever after. Our histories just move differently in these places, sound a little different, take a little longer to unroll.

*[Music]*

There's a whole lot more rural queer visibility on the internet these days than there was in 2013. But we're still lacking first narratives by, and for, rural and small-town queer and trans folks. In Season One of the Country Queers podcast, that's exactly what you'll hear.

We're starting this season with some Indigenous histories and perspectives on gender and sexuality. In episode 1, you'll hear my 2014 interview with Crisosto Apache. Crisosto is a Two-Spirit writer and advocate, who was raised on the Mescalero Apache Reservation in New Mexico, and now calls Denver, Colorado home.

CRISOSTO APACHE: In all the political rhetoric that I hear, especially in the LGBTQI community, I think Stonewall is their benchmark. But I think our benchmark is our people, our communities, and those elders and those community members that remember that we exist.

RAE [Host]: Subscribe to the Country Queers podcast today on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#), or [Stitcher](#). And head on over to our website, [www.countryqueers.com](http://www.countryqueers.com), to sign up for our mailing list and to become a sustaining supporter of this work on [Patreon](#). This episode was created and produced by me, Rae Garringer. Huge thanks to our brilliant editorial advisors: Hermelinda Cortés, Sharon P. Holland, and Lewis Raven Wallace. Special thanks to Laura Starecheski and AIR Media's mentorship program for additional editorial support on this episode. And to Hideo Higashibaba, Riley Cockrell, Abby Huggins, Deya Terrafranca, Annie Terrafranca, Sam Gleaves, Benny Becker, Sam Hamlin, Beth White, Yasmine Farhang, and my mom, Lynn Creamer, for feedback on the first draft. Thanks also to Brandon Jent for support in research & pronunciation of the names of the Indigenous people whose land I grew up on. Our theme song was written and performed on banjo by the sweetest singing country queer, Sam Gleaves. Pedal steel versions of the theme song were performed by Rebecca Jones.

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

*[Theme Song]*

[END]