

COUNTRY QUEERS SEASON 1 EPISODE 4

DESCRIPTION: David Rodriguez grew up on Karankawa land in Wharton, TX in a family whose roots reach back to before Texas was a state. At the time of our interview in June 2014, he was 26 and living on Tonkawa and Sana land in Bastrop, TX. In this episode, he shares stories of raising livestock for the FFA as a kid, his mom kicking him out of the house after coming out at age 17 and their journey towards reconnection, his frustration with the marriage equality movement's celebration of assimilation, and his love of farming.

Check out David & Josh's goat farm in Lane City, TX at www.countryqs.com and donate to support them during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has drastically reduced their farmer's market income, on Venmo at @countryqs13.

And, if you have additional funds, we're asking folks to please donate to R.E.S.I.S.T., a campaign led by formerly incarcerated Black womxn, including caregivers, sex workers, and mothers, with the goal of ethically buying land to build a sustainable center in which they can heal, grow, and organize together.

And to support Miguel Mendiás, a queer, trans, artist and activist of Czech, Basque, and Raramúri / Tarahumara (Indigenous Mexican) descent who is in the process of reclaiming his family's 4th generation Mexican-American adobe home in the high desert of Marfa, TX on unceded Jumano-Apache territory. The house, which belonged to his great-grandmother, was threatened with public auction by the county and is in a remote part of Texas that has experienced rapid gentrification.

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. Most importantly, thanks to David Rodriguez for sharing his story so generously with us all.

TRANSCRIPT

[Sound of birds and cicadas]

ALAN RAMIREZ [Intro]: Mi nombre es Alan Ramirez. Yo soy de las montañas de Carolina del Norte—Western North Carolina—y tu estás escuchando el podcast, Country Queers.

[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 and trans folks in the U.S. Each episode features an interview I've recorded since founding this project in 2013. In this episode, you'll meet David Rodriguez.

David grew up on Karankawa land in Wharton, Texas, where his family has lived since before Texas was a state. At the time of our interview in June 2014, David was 26 years old, and he was living on Tonkawa and Sana land in Bastrop, Texas, in a camper on a ten-acre farm with a whole lot of animals and gardens. Our interview took place on Comanche land in Austin, Texas in the wildflower-filled backyard of Laura Freeman.

Laura, a musician and mutual friend of mine and David's, put us in touch when I passed through Austin that summer on a story-gathering trip. I drove 7,000 miles roundtrip and interviewed 30 people in 6 states in 30 days on that trip. It was incredible, and it was exhausting. David's interview popped up as a possibility kind of last minute, and I remember hesitating to take on another interview. I was already so tired, and I was trying to have a day off, without the intense focus required by actively listening to someone's very personal and vulnerable stories, by trying to put basically a total stranger at ease while they tell you some really intimate details about their life...But anyways, I'm so glad that I did interview him. It was truly delightful.

The summer this interview took place, in 2014, Barack Obama was in his first term as president. It would be another year before the Supreme Court ruled that gay marriage was a right in all 50 states, and so marriage equality organizing was happening full force, and you'll hear David reference that in this interview. In the next few months after our interview, both Eric Garner and Michael Brown would be killed by police, and three Black women, two of them queer, would found the Black Lives Matter movement.

On June 22, 2014, David and I sat down at a table in Laura's backyard, surrounded by wildflowers and prickly pear cactus. David's got glasses and a beard, and he's wearing a black T-shirt with pink ink, quoting a George Jones song. It says, "Hotter than a \$2 pistol." It's very cute.

Laura is working around the yard and on the back porch. It's not unbearably hot, despite being summer in Texas, and there's a nice breeze blowing. You'll hear that nice breeze as a horrible sound on this recording occasionally, because I hadn't yet learned the importance of wearing headphones during the whole interview, and the Zoom H4n recorder that I'd bought sat in the middle of the table, with no wind guard.

In this interview, David talks about growing up in a farming community where he participated in the FFA—that's Future Farmers of America, for the city queers listenin'. He also talks about the rocky relationship he had with his mother after he came out and how they healed that rift, his frustration at the stereotypes pushed onto rural queer people, and his dreams of teaching other queer people farming and agricultural skills.

RAE: Um, so, how do you identify?

DAVID RODRIGUEZ: I identify as a male, and as a gay male, who identifies as a person of color. A Hispanic gay male, so.

RAE: So where were you born? Where did you grow up? What was it like where you grew up?

DAVID: I grew up in a small town—it's near a small town. Population of 10,000 people. And it's called Wharton, Texas. It's very agriculturally oriented. When I was growing up, it was all about rice, and corn, and cotton. It's been said that our county produces more rice than the nation of China. But that's changed, because of the water crisis in Texas. So now there isn't any more rice farming where I live, so the industry's almost completely dead.

RAE: Wow. And so, what was your childhood like? Like, what was your family like? What, kind of, I don't know, any childhood memories of—

DAVID: Well, I grew up in a very like, Tejano type home, here in Texas. You know, my family's been in Texas longer than Texas has been the state. So, it was different growing up, 'cause we still had a like, Hispanic upbringing, but not so much of an identifier as being from Mexico, but being Tejano. So like, that's a big part of my growing up and childhood.

And so my childhood, though, was very different. My mother and father split up when I was younger. Then it just became my mother and I and my younger siblings. And my mother and I—she was 18 when she had me, and so we kind of grew up together. It was real interesting. And now my mother is my best friend in the entire world. So it has been fun. And having a younger mom is great because, I mean, you can experience everything together, and we're very open and honest with each other about things.

It used to not be that way, but now we are and have gotten a lot closer. So, I guess my childhood—I just remember growing up in the country 'cause we had a place out of town. We had two acres and, you know, just, a house that we lived in a long time. And we had goats then. I had goats when I was younger, I raised goats and I raised livestock for FFA and for county fairs. Did that whole thing.

RAE: Were they milk goats?

DAVID: No, I didn't raise milk goats, we raised Boer goats. And so, [I] was part of FFA, raised animals for the fairs, sold them every year at auction, and was very much a part of that—like enjoyed it, loved it, wanted that. Raised hogs, raised show pigs for two years I think, and then raised a heifer for one, and that was interesting and fun, never had raised something so large. But that was like, my first experiences with agriculture and the understanding of it and getting in. It was very corporate ag, but, you know, still, nonetheless, it was still part of the culture I grew up in.

I grew up in a small town, but then I went to school in an even smaller town where there was only 500 people. And, I mean I think my graduating class was like 68 people, so it was small. And we all—everyone knew everyone. So it was great, it was great growing up that way.

RAE: And what did your mom—was she, like, a single mom? Did she remarry? What did she do for work, or...?

DAVID: She was a single mom, and then she remarried my senior year, or no, my freshman year in college. But got with her husband my senior year in high school. And he was very religious. Total, very far right, conservative Christian. And then his wife left him for another woman, and so he was really resentful towards gays in general.

RAE: So that's—one of my questions is, well, so when did you first know you were gay?

DAVID: Well, I think I knew I was gay when I hit puberty. Noticing I wasn't attracted to girls at all. Like it wasn't anything that I was attracted to. I wanted to be—I wanted to have a boyfriend or a husband. Like I never thought of having a wife, ever. That has never, ever been a thing that I wanted. So yeah, around puberty.

RAE: And so, then what was your coming out experience like? Did you come out all at once? When did you come out, how did it go?

DAVID: Well, I have two different ways. Like in high school it was pretty much known, you know, it was like, there were like some bullying and I just kinda started to own it, and accepted it and realized, "Hey, yeah, I'm gay, I'm not gonna hide it anymore." So I was open in high school, but it was a small town that I lived in, and so no one ever wanted to say anything to my mother about it. So I was open in public, but not in private, which is [a] very different dynamic for some people.

And then one day my mom asked me if I was gay. It was on Halloween of like, 2005. She asked me if I was gay, and I had promised myself that I would always be honest if she asked me. If she had the nerve to ask me the question, I had the nerve to answer honestly. And so she asked me, and at first she said, "Are you gay?" And I was like, "Um, yes, I'm always happy," and then, *[laughter]* she was like, "That's not the question I'm asking you." And, the next question was, "Are you a homosex—do you like having sex with men?" And my answer was like, "Yes. I do." And, uh, she told me I had 60 seconds to get my shoes on and get out of the house. And, um...

RAE: How old were you?

DAVID: I was 17 at the time? And she said, "You have 60 seconds to get out of the house, and if you don't, I'm going to hit you with this baseball bat." And she went and got a baseball bat. So, there wasn't any option of staying at home, so I left and walked, and I have never felt freer than I did that very moment that I walked out of that house and felt completely free and honest with myself. And I made a promise to myself that

day walking to the gas station that I would never hide who I am for any one ever again. And, I've stayed true to that. Like, I don't—I'm very honest and open about who I am and what I do, and what I believe in.

And my mother and I had a horrible relationship after that. Like, for six months we hated each other and were just argumentative with each other and fighting all the time, and I didn't live with her anymore, and was living with whoever I could live with, that kind of thing. Almost didn't graduate high school, and finally graduated and got all that stuff done, got done with school, got outta there and then went to college. And, uh, left and, uh, that was—it was [a] pretty rough time that year, like was pretty rough, dealing with all of that and, uh, my mom finally has come around and now it's not even an issue. At all.

RAE: So you, where...you stayed—you just hopped around kinda?

DAVID: I just hopped around houses. Stayed with my uncle sometimes or my grandparents or other people. My dad's. Uh, just kinda hopped around [*yawns*].

RAE: And so how long, like what was the process of your mom sort of coming around? Did she just do it on her own? Did you guys have a lot of tense arguments? How did that happen?

DAVID: She just kind of started coming along on her own, I think kinda started realizing that the things being taught at church weren't necessarily how she—what she agreed with or how she felt? Um, and it's real funny, like recently I asked her about that. And how she felt that day, and did she hate me? Did she have hate in her heart or was it anger? And she said it was neither of them, it was disappointment. And, it was the first time that I've ever asked her how she felt about it, and to hear that it was disappointment, and it wasn't anger and it wasn't hate, it was just driven by religious fanatics that said she needed to do whatever she had to do to get her son out of—to protect her other children. So, it was growing and like her realizing that I'm still the same person, it just doesn't matter anymore. And she's just relaxed a lot in life, realized that she doesn't need to take things so hard and so personal.

RAE: Yeah. So, in your eyes, what do you think is the largest sort of, this is a big question. [*Laughs*] What do you think's sort of the largest struggling facing queer people in the U.S. today, as the biggest obstacle or the most pressing issue? And then what do you think the largest issues, struggles, obstacles facing rural or country queers are? And do you think it's the same or different? Are there like mainstream issues for the queer community that are different in rural places, or is it all the same, or...?

DAVID: The biggest issue I think facing, like queers or gays in general right now, I think is this whole idea of, like normalization. Like, I think there is this idea of wanting to live this heteronormative lifestyle? Where people want to be like straight people. I've heard it so much, like the lingo, and I think, the marriage equality movement has really taken up

that “we want to be like everyone else” kind of thing. And to me that's not what being gay is about.

I know that I'm different. I know that gay people are different and should accept and embrace that difference, and not go into this like assimilation process. And so, I think that's a big problem facing like the gay community as a whole, is assimilation, because we have our own cultural identity as gays, our own struggle, and to embrace this normal, or this idea of normality is detrimental.

RAE: Do you think that, like, rural queers have, I don't know, other issues too or different issues? You know what I me—

DAVID: I think the issue, one of the biggest ones that I face as someone that is a rural queer is that we get this, this stereotype because of what gay people in the city are like, that we all need to be like that. And I can tell you, I can butcher a hog and a deer and process those animals faster than any heterosexual person out there. But when people see me doing those things, they're like, “Oh, you're so straight acting, or you're so straight.” And it's like, “No, I am me! I am David! I like to process animals. Like I know how to cut them up, I am not some—I'm not gonna go shopping with you, I will help you process your deer. Like, I'm not.” *[Laughter]*

You know, that's not the kind of gay person that I am. I'm not that. I think country people get pigeonholed into that. Where it's like, no, we're just like you, like, we wanna grow vegetables in our garden and we wanna kill animals and raise animals and just do all those things, but we get pigeonholed into being, like these urban queer folk who are...or, we just get pigeonholed into stereotypes even more so out in the country because it's what the media portrays gays to be, and that is not what we're like in rural communities. There are some—there are definitely very—there's a large group, there are people that are flamboyant and that's fine, but to be pigeonholed into saying all of us are flamboyant, all of us want to focus on material things or the idea of materialism that is portrayed by the media is wrong. Like we aren't like that.

RAE: Mm. So then, sometimes I like to ask people, what do you think is the largest issue facing your community and what do you think—who do you think is your community? Like is your community the queer community? Is your community the local community where you live...you know?

DAVID: I think—I'm a huge environmentalist and very involved in environmental activism, and I think the biggest thing facing communities in Texas specifically is environmental problems because the state level, state government is allowing industries to come in and completely destroy our communities. They're bringing in fracking industries, they're bringing in petroleum processing facilities, they're bringing in pipe building, I mean all of the things that are needed for the fracking industry, they're bringing those industries in that provide the materials needed for the fracking industry. So, they're increasing jobs, and that's what they sell to all of us, is that they're increasing jobs and wealth, but in actuality we're losing the things that we love the most

out in the country and in rural life. We're losing those things. We're losing our resources. Our aquifers are drying up, our rivers are drying up, you know. I come from a county where we have 13% unemployment, and not only that, our—an entire industry has been destroyed, rice farming, because there isn't enough water for everyone to do things. So, a county that's subsisted on rice farming is now within three years having to completely shift its economy, yet they're allowing fracking industry to come in and use up all the water that it wants. So that's a huge problem facing our community, it doesn't matter whether you're gay, black, straight, white, anything.... we're all going to be needing water, we're all going to be needing food, and when these industries come in and completely destroy the places where we live, it doesn't...we're all equal. We're all equal when the end result is extinction. *[Laughs]*

RAE: Yeah. *[Laughs]*

DAVID: Like...

[BREAK]

[Music]

Hey, friends. Because we know the impact of colonization on people, land, and resources in the U.S, we're encouraging our white listeners to engage in an ongoing process of land-based reparations. So during each episode break, we're asking our white listeners who have extra funds to donate to land projects founded and led by queer & trans, Black and Indigenous folks, and people of color. Today, we're asking you to donate to two GoFundMe campaigns.

The first is the R.E.S.I.S.T. Campaign, a vision led by formerly incarcerated Black womxn in the South. Their goal is to ethically find and steward Indigenous land, to build a green and sustainable nest, ultimately creating a space for formerly incarcerated Black womxn, who include caregivers, sex workers, and mothers, to hold, nurture, and heal themselves and their sisters in experience & struggle. Please donate to their GoFundMe today. Like right now. They have a deadline coming up real soon and they're trying to meet their goal.

And secondly, because this episode features an interview recorded in Texas, we wanted to uplift a GoFundMe campaign in support of a person who led a takeover on our Instagram account last year.

Miguel Mendías is an interdisciplinary artist of reclaiming his family's 4th generation Mexican-American adobe home in the high desert of Marfa, Texas (unceded Jumano-Apache territory). The 680-square foot house which belonged to his great-grandmother was threatened with public auction by the county and is in a remote part of Texas that has experienced rapid gentrification. Miguel is a queer, trans artist and activist of Czech, Basque, and Raramúri Tarahumara (indigenous Mexican) descent. He is co-founder of a local grassroots organization that fights discriminatory housing policy and encourages

the traditional use of adobe and earth-based plasters. He's raising funds to support the reclamation and repair of his family's house and to continue in this work.

The links to both of these GoFundMe campaigns can be found in the episode notes, and also over on our website at www.countryqueers.com. Please, please, please support, if you've got extra funds.

Now, back to my 2014 interview with David Rodriguez.

[END OF BREAK]

RAE: Ok, so how do you feel about bein' queer and country?

DAVID: For a long time I felt like I was the only person out there, like the only person that embraced rural life that wanted that. That's like, "Oh, I wanna live on a farm and I wanna have these things." And then I started finding out about the Faeries, and then I started finding about places like Ida, and these different places that embraced rural life like it wasn't this identity that was based on urbanization, but it was based on rural principles, and I loved that because it's so, it's so connected for me. It's something that resonates with me, because of my background and because of my childhood that I can be like, "Oh that's me, that's how I feel." Very simple, very basic.

I just, I think now I'm starting to realize that I'm not the only person, that there are others that embrace that and I'm really into like the homesteading movement also, like wanting to homestead and do all the things, and I've not found very many queers that are moving from urban areas into rural areas, and finding all of them moving from rural areas to urban areas, and so there's an opposite effect happening.

And so, it's challenging sometimes because you feel like you're the only one, and there is so much, like in terms of home dynamic, family dynamic and wanting to have a family. It's hard to relate with people who are straight, um, because they just don't get it. Like they don't have a point of reference, because what works in a straight relationship isn't necessarily going to work in a queer relationship, at all. So that's what I have the most struggle with, in terms of being gay or being queer and country, is the fact that, like, it's a hard dynamic because you can feel isolated.

RAE: Yeah, that's interesting. So, I'm sort of hopping around in my questions but I feel like this is a good time to talk about, like... do you wanna have a family? What do you want that family to look like? Do you have kids, do you want to have kids? What do you think it would be like to have a queer family, in whatever way you imagine that in a rural place? And what do you think would be great about it? Like, do you worry about it? Are you excited about it? Is it something you want at all?

DAVID: Well, I've thought about it a lot. Like really long and hard, and the current boyfriend that I have now, we've both decided at this point that children is not something

we see in our future, 'cause I really don't like kids. I only like kids that I'm related to, and it's only because they can go back home. *[Laughter]*

Um so, I really don't like children and I don't want them. I just want to focus on building a relationship with my partner that's amazing.

And then what I do want to do though, in building a family, is establishing a facility or a place out in the country where people that are wanting to learn rural skills, that wanna learn about wood working or that wanna learn about farming or want to do that in a queer safe space, that that's what we focus on. We're focusing on rural living, we're not focusing on finding out who you are or your gender identity or any of those kinds of things, or "Come out here and let's have lots of sex at this festival," and like that kind of thing.

No, it's based on learning homesteading skills, or, you know, that kind of thing. And that's really what I've talked about wanting to do, and my boyfriend has decided that that's—not so much decided, but agrees that that's something he would really like. Because I think there's a lot of loss in skill learning in the gay community and the queer community because we have become so service oriented in this country, but specifically in our counterculture, we've become super service oriented. And not so much on the hands-on application of things, like wood working or farming or any of the like major things that are out there. There are people that do those things, but I know so many of my friends who don't know how to change their oil, who don't know how to butcher an animal, who don't know how to cook a meal from scratch. I mean, there's so much being lost, and I think the queer community can just, gain so much in knowledge from that.

And I think youth that are growing up also that are coming from homes where they aren't accepted, or they're having trouble at home, I think working on a farm for them would be a way to really gain balance in their life, and especially in a place that is safe in terms of sexual orientation, would be a way for them to really help grasp their identity.

RAE: Man. I wish, Texas and West Virginia weren't so far apart *[laughter]* 'cause that sounds amazing and I'm never leaving West Virginia. Anyways, I'll come visit and help in any way I can.

DAVID: *[Laughs]*

RAE: That's amazing. *[Laughs]* So how do you feel like your community sort of interacts with you as a person there? With you as a queer person, you know? With you as queer person of color?

DAVID: I think I didn't have like any jolting realization about being a person of color until I moved to Bastrop, and then really was like, "Wait a minute, people aren't looking at me so much different because I'm gay, people are looking at me different because I'm Hispanic," and then adding the gay aspect into it. I mean there was a time when I was

called a faggot at the gas station, and I'm so used to being in such a safe space with my friends that my response back to them was like, "Is like that your way of asking me if I suck dick? Because if that's the way, then my answer is, 'Yes, I do!'"

And I thought about it after I got in the car and was like, that could have really gotten me in a lot of trouble. So, I realized then that I really live in a close-minded place. My friends create a really safe environment and a safe space, but that doesn't mean that where I live is safe. And I realized that when I was at the gas station was that where I live in a rural setting is not safe for me. I get stared at. I get looked at a lot. And when I notice that people are looking at me, I gay it up even more, just because of that. Yeah, so, it's different, the way that the community is there.

RAE: So, another question is about safety. Like, do you feel safe where you live, and do you feel like rural places are safe for queer people, and...?

DAVID: I feel safe where I live. Unfortunately, I don't think everyone does, in a rural setting, and if they do feel safe it's because they've created a false sense of security, because they either think they pass as being straight or they don't talk about being gay. And if you cannot talk about it and you cannot be yourself, then it's not a safe space. And I've come to the realization that I can be myself regardless of where I'm at, that doesn't mean the space is safe. So yes, I think there are places that we can create in rural environments that are safe, and not so hostile, but I can't speak for everyone else. I don't know if all places are safe. I would like to think that everywhere is safe, but it's not.

RAE: So, when do you feel the most proud to be queer? And when do you feel—or proud to be country, or happy? Proud is not the right word, and is it ever at the same time, or do those feel like separate things?

DAVID: Um, I am really happy when I am in a dress and harvesting vegetables in the garden.

RAE: *[Laughs]*

DAVID: Like, I think that that is the most amazing feeling, is to know that I can be in a dress, in the garden, picking vegetables, and that, I mean, I'm happy and proud at the same time because I'm proud when I'm harvesting things because I know all of the work it has taken to get to the point where something can be put on the table. I'm also the most proud after I butcher an animal and I can see all of the meat in front of me, and it's packaged and it looks just like it came from a professional butcher. And knowing that I can make cuts and I can do things, if someone says, "I want it cut this way," then I can pretty much do the same exact cut. So yeah...that's one of the most proudest, and I think that they intersect, being queer and rural both intersect at those points for me.

RAE: So how do you find, like as a queer person in a rural place—it sounds like you're in a relationship now, which as you know, people have different types of relationships—but how do you find people to date, how do you find people to hook up with, how do you

find queer community or friends, as a queer—like in a rural place, how do you find other queers, if, do you want to find other queers?

DAVID: I mean, honestly, like the big joke in the gay community is like Growler and Scruff and Grindr, and things, like the apps on your phone to locate people, and that's what I use. That's what I used, and that's how I found my current boyfriend, Josh. And before then, like, I didn't think I was gonna be able to find anyone because my profile is like very "farmer oriented." Like, "Wanna live on land out in the country," and like, very much "into counterculture" and that kind of thing, and so it was hard, like hard. It was easy to get laid, it's hard to get a relationship. And so I just had to open my eyes too in terms of like, "Ok, well, you know, I don't need someone that's like, into permaculture." I mean, that's gonna be hard, but I want someone who's willing to learn about permaculture and someone who's willing to live in the country, who doesn't want to live in the city, and I found that!

But it is harder because there aren't very many of us that are older and, you know, being in the age range that I'm in...I'm at the age range where people are wanting to live in urban environments and not really live in rural environments, so it's even harder to find people my age. So, it's hard.

RAE: Um, how bout in terms of like...something that's super interesting to me is queer history, or the lack of it kind of, right? And that sometimes in rural places you can actually find these little glimpses of, like, "Oh my god, there have been queer people here, kind of for a long time." Like just—

DAVID: Yeah.

RAE: —you just stumble upon it, but a lot of times we don't actually know that, and do you feel like—maybe either, if you wanna talk about where you live now or where you grew up. like, do you feel like you knew of other queer people who had lived there before you, do you know of any local queer history in any of the rural places that you've lived and how do you find it? Is that information passed down, and how?

DAVID: I think like, I find it, and that has happened in places where I've lived, and in where I grew up, there were old rich gay couples that lived in town that had big houses, but they were always "friends." Is how it was always played, like you know they were "friends" for forty years. And so you know what was going on and you know what was happening and, in rural towns, like that's the way people accept being gay, is like, "Oh, that's his friend!"

I refuse to live that way, I refuse to identify that way as anyone that I'm with. But yeah, I think it's out there, it exists, it's just so like, hidden. Like you have to listen to the hidden, to the clues and the indications of like, "Oh ok, they were friends for how long? Oh, for forty yea—ok, I—ok, they were "friends."

RAE: They were "roommates."

DAVID: Yes!

RAE: For a really long time.

DAVID: They lived for a long time, yeah! That was "his room," all that time—ok.
[Laughter]

But I think like we need to uncover those things and find them out there because they're there in our communities, we just have to look for them and draw strength from those people. Because, chances are, if they were living that way and they made impacts in the community, then, I mean, that's a big deal at the time that they were out. Because it in a lot of states, especially in the south, it wasn't legal. So, it's definitely something, I mean I think that that gets lost too in rumor. and in small towns, [people] make vicious rumors about them. And, one, we need to not spread those rumors. Two, we need to meet those people and embrace them, and get their stories and find out what they've done, what did they do? To learn and listen from them.

RAE: Um, is there somethin' you would want to say to other rural or small-town LGBTQ folks? Either people who are struggling or just...not? People just, "Hey, what's up?" You know? *[Laughs]*

DAVID: I think what I want to say, and because this is something I've thought for a long time, and it would be great to hear is, "You are not alone. There are others of us. There are other people that are just like you that are out there. Like, we are all out there together. You are not alone." And I think that's the biggest thing, is, because so many times people feel like they're the only one, and they're not. There are other people that want to live out in the country, who are rural, who are queer, and that's what you need to know, is that you are not the only one. There are others of us.

RAE: So those are all my questions, but I always like to ask people, what should I have asked you, but didn't? What would you wanna know from other people that I interview on the trip? Are there stories, or things you wanted to talk about, but I didn't ask you?

DAVID: Um...the things I wanna know is how, are they wanting to network with other queers? Are they wanting to build a network of people who live out in the country? I wanna know, like, how many queers are out there that are like, farming-oriented, that are homesteaders, that are, you know, what are they doing? That kind of thing.

RAE: Yeah.

DAVID: So...

RAE: And how to, how to find 'em, maybe.

DAVID: Yeah, how to find them.

RAE: I want to know that too *[laughs]*.

DAVID: Yeah, like, "Where do you live?!!!"

RAE: "Where are you?" *[Laughs]* You know, like, how do we find people? Yeah. Alright. Anything else you wanna add?

DAVID: No.

RAE: Ok. *[Laughter]* Well, thank you. Thank you, a lot, that was awesome.

DAVID: Thank you.

RAE: Yeah.

[Music]

RAE [Host]: Since the time of our interview in June 2014, David and his then-boyfriend Josh got married and moved back to the area where David grew up. They now run a farm in Lane City, Texas called...Country Qs! They raise dairy goats and make goat milk soap and other products to sell.

David did let me know that due to COVID-19, farmers markets, where they do most of their sales, have been super slow and so their income is greatly reduced in these times. They welcome donations to support updates to the goat barns and goat pens. You can find their farm on Facebook at Country Qs and at their website www.countryqs.com. And you can donate directly to their Venmo, @Countryqs13.

Next time on Country Queers, we'll hear my 2013 interview with Elandria Williams. Elandria is a Southern organizer who was raised on Yuchin & Cherokee in Powell and Knoxville, Tennessee, where they still make their home.

ELANDRIA WILLIAMS: Here's, actually, I realized how I feel. I feel like because of it I'm able to straddle everything, and I am just as comfortable going into the country bar and doing the thing and just having a good ass time, as I am sitting at the football game, as I am being at the gay bar in the city. Like all of it is fine. *[Laughs]* I think that that is what it means for me to be country queer, is that like you don't—you can't leave your folk at the door. You can't act like you grew up with people that weren't like the people that are acting all kinds of crazy in all kinds of ways. Um, and it's different!

[Music]

RAE [Host]: That's it for this episode, which was created and produced by me, Rae Garringer, with audio editing support from Tommie Anderson. Our theme song was written and performed on banjo by Sam Gleaves. Pedal steel versions were arranged

and performed by Rebecca Branson Jones. Additional music on electric and acoustic guitar was written and performed by Tommie Anderson.

Endless thanks to our brilliant editorial advisory dream team: Hermelinda Cortés, Lewis Raven Wallace, and Sharon P. Holland. Thanks most of all to David for sharing his story so generously with us all.

If you liked what you heard, please subscribe, rate, and review the Country Queers podcast on [Apple Podcasts](#). Kinda figuring it out as we go over here, but they tell us that for some reason that helps a lot in terms of getting more people to be able to hear it, so we appreciate that. You can find all our episodes and more about the project at www.countryqueers.com. And while you're there, you can also sign up for our mailing list and sign up to be a sustaining supporter of Country Queers on our [Patreon](#) page. And don't forget to donate to the GoFundMe's that we mentioned in the break - those links are also over on our website. please give generously if you're able.

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

[Music]

[END]