

## **COUNTRY QUEERS SEASON 2 EPISODE 1**

**DESCRIPTION:** In this episode HB Lozito of Out in the Open and Rae Garringer of Country Queers welcome you behind the scenes of our collaboratively produced, rural-lgbtqia+ made Season 2 adventure! Our fellow-travelers and co-producers in this Season, who you'll meet along the way, include: KD Randle, Kū'i'olani Cotchay, Miguel Mendías, Tommy Anderson, Tovi DeGroot, and Zach Henningsen. Our sound designer for the season is Hideo Higashibaba, and our brilliant editorial advisory dream team is Hermelinda Cortés, Lewis Raven Wallace, and Sharon P. Holland! HB & Rae talk about their longstanding dream for collaboration, some nuts and bolts of how this collaboratively produced rural queer season unfolded during the pandemic, and some of the themes ahead that we're so excited for listener's to hear!

**CREDITS:** Host/Editor/Co-Producer: Rae Garringer. Co-producer HB Lozito. Music in order of appearance: written by Sam Gleaves & performed on pedal steel by Rebecca Branson Jones, additional music on acoustic and electric guitar written and performed by Tommy Anderson. Editorial Advisory Dream Team: Hermelinda Cortés, Sharon P. Holland, and Lewis Raven Wallace, special thanks to Hermelinda for feedback on this episode!

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### **TRANSCRIPT**

*[Fade in sound of a metal milk bucket clanging, and then the sounds of milk streaming into the bucket]*

ASH-LEE WOODARD HENDERSON [Intro]:

Hey all of y'all salt of the earth, freedom-fighting, justice seeking country queers! I'm Ash-lee Woodard Henderson, my homies call me Ash. I use she/her/hers pronouns or any said respectfully. From the nearly 200 acre farm in the foothills of the Smokies known as the Highlander Research and Education Center, in New Market Tennessee. And you are listening to the Country Queers podcast.

*[fade in Pedal Steel Song]*

RAE GARRINGER [Host]:

Hey y'all, I'm Rae Garringer, and I'm so excited to welcome you to Season 2 of the Country Queers podcast!

In case you haven't listened to Season 1 - I'm going to do a brief introduction of myself and this project. If you want to learn more, go back and listen to past episodes!

I'm white, queer, and nonbinary and since Season 1 ended, I've moved back home from the coalfields of eastern Kentucky to the mountains of Southern West Virginia, where I was raised. I live on the traditional unceded homelands of the S'atsoyaha, or Yuchi peoples.

*[fade in sound of happy ducks]*

I live with a large crew of goats, dogs, ducks, and a cat in an old trailer on a south facing mountainside above the New River.

*[fade out ducks, fade in sound of running water]*

The New is one of the oldest rivers in the world, and it has been a magnificent source of food, water, travel and trade routes, and magic since long before these lands were colonized. Since long before humans even existed.

In Season 1, we brought you oral history interviews that I've recorded since founding this project, with no idea what I was doing, way back in 2013. I set out to record stories almost a decade ago, not because I thought anyone would listen to or support this project, or that it would actually even turn into anything, much less a podcast. I started recording oral history interviews because I was desperate to meet and learn from other rural queer folks, to fight the isolation that I experience as country queer in central Appalachia, to prove to myself that it wasn't totally insane to try to build a life and a future in this place that I love so much, but that doesn't always love us back as queer and trans people. This project has been a labor of love that I've worked on in my freetime outside of full time work and school and, until recently, has operated on very little funding, and with very limited and inconsistent time and attention.

Even so, there are so many folks whose support has made this project possible, so many volunteers, so many crowdfunding supporters, so many friends and mentors who've spent hours talking with me. This project wouldn't exist without the STAY Project - a central appalachian youth network where I found the community and encouragement to start interviewing rural queer folks, and also the place I first heard the phrase "country queers." And it was inspired in part by a small town huddle at SONG's gaycation in 2013 when Hermelinda Cortés and Suzanne Pharr led a conversation with a multigenerational, muliracial group of Southerners raised in small towns about our relationships to home.

In 2014, I took a month-long road trip, funded by Kickstarter, in my summer off from working in rural public schools in WV. I interviewed 30 people in 30 days, drove 7000 miles, slept on couches, and floors, and the ground - and came home so full of stories I felt like the end of my microphone was plugged into a vein in my arm, like an IV of rural queer histories had been pouring into my body for a month. It was inspiring, and so humbling. But I also came home with a lot of questions, a lot of overwhelm, a lot of uncertainty about what to do with all these stories, about how to do it ethically, and especially about who tells what stories, and how.

Fast forward 8 years, and I've spent *a lot* of time with those questions and watching the media ecosystem evolve. More rural and small town queer stories are out there than there were in 2014 but too often they are still told and produced in ways that do not empower many of us and do not invest in our communities long term.

I have been dreaming for years about supporting other rural and small town lgbtqia+ folks in recording their own communities' histories. And this past year that became possible for the first time thanks to an unexpected award from the Southern Power Fund and a grant from the Queer Mobilization Fund that allowed the project to be resourced in ways never possible before. This opened the door to a collaboration with Out in the Open, an organization that connects rural LGBTQ people to build community, visibility, knowledge and power and allowed us to invite 6 community participants to join us in an experimental adventure to co-produce season 2 of this podcast.

Producing this season was unlike anything I've ever experienced.

Over the summer, we hosted a weekend long series of workshops and conversations around oral history, interviewing, and power and ethics in storytelling. As the summer went on and into the fall, we supported the participants on their interview journeys and facilitated a collective editing process with our editorial advisors

*[fade in acoustic guitar song]*

At the end of it all 6 of the nine brilliant episodes that make up this season of Country Queers were created by participants.

We want to give a special shout out to our fellow travelers this season: KD Randle, Ku'i'olani Cotchay, Miguel Mendías, Tommy Anderson, Tovi DeGroot, and Zach Henningsen. And our sound designer Hideo Higashibaba, and our editorial advisory dream team: Hermelinda Cortés, Lewis Raven Wallace, and Sharon P. Holland.

We can't wait for you to hear the episodes to come and we'll be releasing them over the next few months. But first, in today's episode, you'll hear from myself and the director of Out in the Open, HB Lozito, about our long-term dreams of collaboration and the journey of this season.

*[slowly fade out music]*

## **INTERVIEW:**

RAE GARRINGER:

All right. Um, yeah. So, hi. Hey, it feels funny to say hello after an hour of talking, but here we are.

HB LOZITO:

After a lifetime of working on this project.

RAE:

Yeah, like 17 years. When did we start talking about it? Was it like late September? So it's been a year.

HB:

Yeah. A year plus Mm hmm.

RAE:

Well, given that, I wonder if you could, um, introduce yourself?

HB:

Yeah. My name is HB Lozito, and I'm the director of Out in the Open. And I live here in Brattleboro, Vermont on Abenaki land, and I grew up in Central Maine on Penobscot, Passamaquoddy land, and my pronouns are they and them. And yeah, that's a place to start.

RAE:

Yeah, totally. Um, I'm curious if you would want to talk about any - I didn't tell you I was gonna ask you this, - um, like, ways that you identify in the world?

HB:

Yeah, it's so funny. My queer family's kid is now four and a half. And there's other people in our family that use they/them pronouns who are non-binary. And that is not a word I use for myself, but this person was like, "Are you non-binary?" and I was like, "I'm not." And they were, like, very, confounded by this and just were like, "but people who use they/them are non binary." And I was like, "I'm not that! Like, that isn't a word for me." It was a really sweet moment to have that conversation with them. Words I like for myself are trans and queer. And rural, small town. I don't know, I've been a farmer in the past. I have been a woodworker in the past. And I don't know, things like cook and baker are like, not integral to my identity, but feel sort of like they are. So, yeah!

RAE:

I was gonna say baker, even though this was not a question for me -

HB:

feels like pretty core, pretty core to my identity,

RAE:

Some of your description of the things you've made. I'm like, "Oh, this is not just like, 'I made a cake.' This is a different level." [laughter] Well, I was gonna ask you if you could describe the place where you grew up, but I wonder first, if you could describe the place where you live?

HB:

Yeah, so I live here in Brattleboro. I've been here for about 11 years, I think, almost 12 years. In our town, there's about 12,000 people who live here. And there's like four or five surrounding towns that each have about 2000 people in them. It is at the confluence of several different rivers, the Connecticut River flows right through town and is pretty big. And then the Whetstone Brook and the West River flow into the Connecticut River. And this area is also known by Abenaki people as Lost River.

Yeah, I just, I love the community of people that are here. And it's in my experience, like a lot of queer people, a lot of trans people. it feels really special and lucky to be in community with a lot of queer and trans people who were interested in living in smaller places.

RAE:

Yeah...Now, I wonder if you could describe the place where you grew up, and wondering sort of, like what it looked like and sounded like and smelled like?

HB:

Um yeah, so I grew up in a town called Hamden, Maine, which people often are like, "Oh, Camden? Camden's so beautiful. It's on the ocean, and it's, like, so amazing and lovely." And I'm always like, "no, no. no, no Hamden with an H." And there's like, you know, a 200 foot landfill on our highway exit when you're getting into town and like, you can tell that it's going to snow because you can smell the paper mill. And like yeah, that's our town.

I grew up in a house that my parents bought that we lived on the first floor of, and we rented out the top half of it. When we moved in, I can remember - I don't know, it was like it was built in the 1700s. And had like, really big gaps in the floorboards that, you know, small children could fall down into the basement between and a huge wood stove. I was actually just talking with my mom about this wood stove last week that you could, you didn't have to chop down the logs into pieces, you could just put like, four foot logs right into this stove, and it would burn one all night. And yeah, it was a really special house, I really loved it. It backed up against all these woods. And I would spend a lot of time walking out there and like, naming the trees and just... people that we talk to spend a lot of time about, connection to land. And I'm like, "Yeah, I had friends that were humans. But like, I also had a lot of friends that were like little trees that I would visit all the time." And yeah, spent a lot of time alone in the woods as a kid behind our house, which was really nice and special.

RAE:

I'm gonna ask you to just talk about Out in the Open, like, what is it? What do you all do?

HB:

Yeah. Cool. Yeah. So Out in the Open. We're based here in Brattleboro. But we work with folks all over the Northeast, and increasingly all over this continent in all kinds of different ways. And yeah, our primary work is building community and power of rural LGBTQ people. And we, let's see, I started here in 2014. And in that first year, we changed like, everything that we were doing. Like mission, vision, values, board, activities, pretty much everything. And I think the way that I work is like, really exploratory and like a lot of the things that we do we've never done before. Sometimes it's very like, "Yeah, let's see if this idea that we have can work or which parts of it will work and which parts of it we need to change for next time." And yeah, I think we apply that to all kinds of different things.

So within that, like, fundamental looking at building of power of rural queer and trans people, we do it in a lot of different ways. So some of that's through media projects, like this work with you all. Some of that is through our Out in the Open Summit, which is like three days of what I've come to call like rural living skills, like chainsaw safety, and nose to tail hog butchery, tofu

making, as well as like movement building work around like, alternatives to policing, anti incarceration, and racial justice, and all that kind of stuff.

So we do those kinds of activities. And then we also do community care, peer support and mutual aid. So we started doing a lot more mutual aid in the pandemic, and just like, giving away tens of thousands of dollars in direct aid to people who've been affected by COVID. And then yeah, like really increasing community care. I feel like isolation is like one of the things that harms and kills so many of our folks. And so even before the pandemic, trying to find a lot of ways to keep people connected, whether that's through phone trees, or pen pals, or peer support.

All of that kind of stuff is things that we do. And all with sort of like a background of organizing and movement building. I think, like you and I talk about this all the time, it's like, there have been rural queer people. forever and ever and ever and ever. And like, we haven't always coalesced around an identity, like as a, as a coherent movement. And so I think a lot of our beginning work was exploring, like, what does that mean? And I think we'll never, like, stop exploring that. But yeah, like, how are people coming together? And like, what do we need? And what do we want? And how is that different from what folks in cities want and need? And then how can we make it happen together?

RAE:

Thank you. Yeah. Um, so we've been working on this for over a year now, this dream of collaborating together on trying to produce a season of the podcast and on inviting other members of our communities and networks to like, join us in this very experimental adventure. Who knows how many, like hundreds of meetings and calls have been involved. But somehow through that, through starting in June with participants, it's now November, the end of November, and the season is still in production.

So everyone completed some really beautiful recordings in their places or virtually across distance. And I'm still honestly like, a little bit in shock that it happened. You don't I mean?

[laughter]

Yeah. I mean, it was challenging. I don't think it was, I don't think that...It was complicated. Like, we basically went from last season, me and Tommy, who is my friend, who also lived in a camper in my yard, doing all of the editing, and one editorial advisor per episode to having like four people on each episode and wrangling together schedules between the interviewer, you, me, an editorial advisor, sometimes the interviewee also on calls and trying to really

collaboratively work together through the full transcript to sort of shape a final episode that everyone felt good about, right?

And I think like, the pandemic and the reality of things needing to be virtual, just made it a lot more complicated, I think for everyone, right? I think there were times along the way where it felt like, just a lot! Like people have jobs, people have lives, it's a pandemic, it was hurricane season, people are farming in the heat, people don't have internet. You were having chronic pain stuff, I was having chronic illness stuff. It has been kind of an intense seven months.

And I am so amazed that everyone recorded these really beautiful conversations. Yeah. And I think that combined, it's gonna be a really interesting season. There's some really beautiful sort of like, overlap and through lines across episodes that wasn't necessarily planned or even talked about. And then I also think there's a lot of like, variety, and a lot of this sort of - some of what you said, around like rural doesn't mean, it doesn't in some ways mean anything, right? Like, it's such a broad category. And it means so many different things to so many people. And if you say that word or if you say the word 'country,' the associations that come to mind in a room of 20 people is going to be likely different for every one of those people. And so I think that this season, really, all of these pieces together, will really get into that, right? Of like, how varied experiences are across geography, across race, across gender, across class, across so many different pieces. And so, yeah, I think we could set up for listener some of the themes that they can expect in this season.

HB:

Yeah. I want to say one more thing about our process with the word that keeps coming to my mind is also like vulnerability. And I think like, I feel like I myself have gotten, like, learned about myself as an interviewer through doing many interviews. And a lot of these interviews are folks first interviews they've ever done! And like, just yeah, just like the vulnerability of putting that out, like publicly into the world is like, amazing. That like folks have -

RAE:

And really brave!

HB:

Yeah, totally!

RAE:

Yeah. Like stories generally are really vulnerable, like what we share and then who we share them with and how - and then thinking about them going out to a wider audience. That's a really good, a good point. Right. And so some of the audio I think people will hear like, if you're



used to listening to NPR will not be that. This is recorded often over the phone or over zoom.  
Um

HB:

Yeah it's also - This is what it has meant to make rural queer media in a collaborative way in a pandemic. And like, this is how it sounds and this is what it's like for people working together for the first time. There are not many stories of our folks and people who are in this season, and just the like weight of feeling like you need to tell every single thing in 45 minutes. It's like really intense. And so I think like, yeah, vulnerability in the interviewing, vulnerability in the storytelling and just like, it doesn't sound like NPR and like, it sounds amazing.

RAE:

Well, I wonder what are some of the themes that you've kind of like heard and are excited about in this season?

HB:

Yeah, I mean, I feel like land and connection to land feels like a big theme. And I think something that's so special about I mean, something that drew me to Country Queers before, you know we really started working together on this project is just like, that feels like a theme throughout. But also that people are in so many different landscapes and places and ecosystems and, like, all of the ecological and human history that comes with all those places is different. But it seems like most of the people that we're talking to are expressing some kind of connection to land.

I feel like, there's definitely some joy magic stuff in here. Which, yeah, feels really special to me. And I'm glad that those things came out in this season. I feel like that's a big part of my life and work. And yeah, just like there's a lot of laughter and like funny moments and like connection! Which is also, I feel like this time for me and for a lot of us has been so isolating. And even as we were just talking about, like, the season was made over distance, but there is deep connection in these conversations. And that feels really special as well.

RAE:

Mm hmm. Yeah, definitely. All of those. I think also, there's like, there's a lot of talk about ancestry in the season, in a way that's really, I think, beautiful, and shows up in, in a lot of the different episodes in really different ways. There's a lot of talk about music in this season. And there's a lot of really different sounds of music in this season. Both music produced by some of the people who were interviewed, but then also, we've been working on really gathering some really different sounds for the season.

Another theme that just, in some ways feels like it comes up in almost every conversation I've ever had about rural queerness is conversations around belonging. And when we do and when we don't feel a sense of belonging, as rural queer and trans people. So those are some of the themes, I think, in Season Two that are really, really interesting. Um, I guess, to try to sort of wrap us up, we were like "Let's talk shortly! And it's 50 minutes later."

Yeah, I'm curious, like, what you're excited about, and what you hope people will take away from this season?

HB:

it sounds so cheesy to be like, I've been really moved by this season. But I have, I think there is some really powerful open storytelling, some conversations that really go to some dream spaces that I don't often get taken to in radio and media like this. And so I'm excited for other people to get to experience that and to get to know some of the folks who we've been working with over the past, I know, like how long? Seven months, eight months, million months? Rae's counting on their fingers?

RAE:

I guess just five? It feels like 17!

HB:

I know. I just I feel excited for people to get to know these folks. And also, like, everyone is also doing really interesting work, in addition to these interviews that they did. And so I'm excited for folks to get to learn more about both the interviewers and the people that they're talking to and learn more about how they can support their work that's not on this podcast. A thing I hope people take away that is not content related is like, try a thing and do it. You know, if like, you have a phone you can record your own story about the place that you are and what it is that you're doing. And like, is it going to be perfect? No way! Nothing I've ever done is perfect. But like like you too can make a thing that is like this and have that as a means for connection and breaking isolation.

RAE:

Yeah, I feel I feel... You know, I mean, I think like [sigh] I feel really strongly about, about people like, particularly people from marginalized communities, reclaiming narratives about ourselves and our places, right? And I think there are so many communities that have been studied and documented and reported on, from the outside, for so long. And there's so many barriers to creating media, if you exist outside of coastal cities with a lot of media infrastructure and wealth. And I think that my whole motivation in the world for trying to work in stories is that

like, I really believe that... that stories that communities produce, together collectively by ourselves, but also for ourselves, have really powerful potential.

And that like, that potential for change is really about us, right? It's not about anybody else. It's not about what anybody else thinks or hears in it. It's about like, what we can do together? And so I really do feel excited about this, like very, very first draft, messy adventure in trying to see what it would mean for us to be like, "All right, all of us come from communities that are misrepresented. All of us feel like we see stories told about our people and places that are damaging, and like, let's try it." You know what I mean? Like, you don't have to have a fucking degree to do oral history! You don't have to live in New York to make a podcast! Like fuck that shit, we're trying to figure it out!

HB:

Yeah!!! [laughter]

Rae:

Is that a good takeaway?

HB :

Yes, but the like for us part feels so important to me to you know? It's like, it isn't performative for anyone else. This is for our communities to listen to and take what it is away from it that we're going to and like, Yeah, I'm like, "straight people can listen if they want to, but like, they don't have to.?"

Rae

Well, I feel that way about city queers. So we probably should stop recording before...

HB

[laughter] Yeah we should cut this part out

*[fade out laughter, fade in electric guitar]*

RAE GARRINGER [Host]:

No but for real, we're happy for literally anyone who wants to, to listen to these stories, we really hope you will. But this season was made by rural lgbtqia+ people, and with other rural and smalltown queer and trans folks in our minds, memories, and hearts. I am SO excited for you to meet the folks who are featured in this season. And we are SO grateful to KD Randle,

Kū'īolani Cotchay, Miguel Mendías, Tommy Anderson. Tovi DeGroot, and Zach Henningsen. for joining us in this very rough draft, imperfect, exploratory adventure.

This episode was created and produced by myself, with support from HB Lozito from Out in the Open. Endless thanks to our brilliant editorial advisory dream team: Hermelinda Cortés, Lewis Raven Wallace, and Sharon P. Holland. Hermelinda was the editorial advisor for this episode, thank you so much. And thanks you HB for tolerating my awkward interviewing-you-as-if-we-hadnt-just-spent-an-hour-on-the-phone-before-we-started-recording.

Music in this episode, in the order you heard it was written by Sam Gleaves & performed on pedal steel by Rebecca Branson Jones, Additional music on electric and acoustic guitar was written and performed by Tommy Anderson.

If you liked what you heard, please subscribe, rate, and review the Country Queers podcast, it helps other listeners find us. You can find all of our episodes and more about the project at [www.countryqueers.com](http://www.countryqueers.com). While you're there, you can also sign up for our mailing list and please consider signing up to be a sustaining supporter of Country Queers on our [Patreon](https://www.patreon.com/countryqueers) page. This project would not exist without the contributions of our listeners and supporters.

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](http://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!

*[fade out music]*

**END**