



Envisioning Queer Justice Podcast:

Rural Queer Communities & Politics

QueerPolitics & the Law: Ep. 3 | 01:31:06

Britton, Kel, & Rachel with co-host Sam Koltes

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00:09 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Hi everybody, welcome to Envisioning Queer Justice Podcast. I'm one of your host Sam and I use she/her and they/them pronouns. I'm a white, Queer, gender Queer, Leo, femme. I'm passionate about good food, good sleep, good stories and good love. Thanks for being here. Envisioning Queer Justice Podcast is a youth led podcast where our goal is to transform stagnant ideas of justice into something more real, more tangible and much more creative. Through conversation with people in the Queer community, we seek to use firsthand experience to find new ways to disrupt punitive and exclusionary conceptions of justice, and uplifts people in the Queer community who envision justice as healing, creation and transformation. Before we introduce our guests, we're going to give a land and enslavement acknowledgement, which has been shaped by many voices, but we want to specifically name Dr. Raj Sethuraju.

I want to acknowledge that no matter where most of us are currently located in the United States, we, most of us spend today and every day on land stolen from indigenous people, and cultivated by the enslaved community. It is essential to understand the long standing history that has brought us to reside and benefit from this land and to seek to understand our place within the history of genocide, enslavement, settler colonialism and racism. Land and enslavement acknowledgments do not exist in the past tense, or historical context. Settler colonialism and white supremacist ideology is a current, ongoing, and cultural and systemic need, and we need to build the mindfulness of our present participation in the placement of the knee. Also, I want to make very clear that land acknowledgments are not meaningful without intentional action associated with them, so please learn more about how you can constructively help to disrupt ongoing colonization. In the show notes we do offer some indigenous led organizations for you

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to donate to or uplift, including Honor the Earth, the NDN Collective, and the Black Hills Bail and Legal Defense Fund.

Next, today we are in conversation with Rachel, Britton and Kel who live in various communities across Greater Minnesota. Rachel, she/her/hers and sees theirs theirs is a writer, researcher, educator, wikimedian and open access advocate. She has not yet left the classroom. Britton grew up in Nebraska and moved to Minnesota in 2014. And she has spent the last two years in central Minnesota with Take Action Minnesota, building a strong base of politically active Queer people, leaders and community activists. She is one of the founding members of the Queer Peers Table. Kel, they them pronouns, is a BSW and licensed social worker is gender fluid, bisexual and autistic, late 20-something individual who lives and works in rural Minnesota. Now join me on a panel discussion with Rachel Britton and Kel, thank you for joining us.

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03:53 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Why don't we just start with introductions. Um, so this collection of people our common denominator is basically that we are from St. Cloud, and have familiarity and ability to speak from like a rural Queer perspective. So why don't we start with who are you? Share your pronouns if you like. Where do you live in rural Minnesota? And what was your experience growing up as an LGBTQ+ person? So again, who are you, sharing your pronouns if you like, where do you live in rural Minnesota, and what was your experience growing up as an LGBTQ person? So why don't we start with Rachel?

04:41 **Rachel (She/her):** Okay, so my name is Rachel, and my pronouns are she/her/hers, and I live in St. Cloud, Minnesota. I've lived here for 12 years. I'm not originally from Minnesota. I'm originally from Long Island, and I've lived in Connecticut and Southern California. And so um, so I would say that growing up as a, growing up as a Queer person sort of took place on the East Coast during, you know, during my college years. I came out, I don't want to say came out because I was never in the closet. I just figured it out when I was a student at SUNY Stony Brook. But, I only I first experienced discrimination in Norwich, Connecticut. I had my first full-time teaching job and I was basically forced to resign for my sexual orientation, and I had a very anti-semitic supervisor. And that experience helped to spur me on to my current career fields in librarianship and academia, and also helped spur on my, I don't want to call it activist work, I don't like calling myself an activist. Because I've known many activists who really, you know, who have literally sacrificed their lives, who have really, who have literally died, or what they do. And so that's why I don't give myself that name. But, um, I do spend a significant

amount of my time working on our local Human Rights Commission. I'm working on an international level with the Wikimedia Foundation to develop a global online code of conduct so that people from around the world from different countries are in line with groups, different attitudes about LGBTQ+ folks and other marginalized communities can work together in a collegial constructive way, online and offline.

And as I have grown older, because now, now, I'm old enough to be a biological parent, to my students, and to other youth in the community. [laughter from looking at Britton's smiling/expression] But, um, you know, I, I don't have any children of my own, I'm probably not going to have any children of my own. And so, people who are younger and younger generations, either because I meet them in a teaching capacity, or I meet them through the common work that we do in particular causes, particular interests, we get to know each other. And so they, so they may ask me for support, ask me for guidance, but they're doing, they're doing a great job with the things that they're doing right now. Um, because I feel like a lot of what's going on, in rural area, rural areas, as far as activism goes and improving conditions is really being spurred on by the younger generations. They are much more impacted by the instability in our government. They're much more impacted by the economic downturn of our society in this whole country, not just not just rural Minnesota, but nationwide. And they have been, they've been on the forefront for fighting for a lot of these things. And so I provide whatever support I can.

08:50 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Thank you. Britton go ahead

08:55 **Britton (She/her):** Yeah, my name is Britton. I use she/her pronouns. I live in St. Cloud. I've lived here for about, Oh, God, almost like, six years now. I moved here from Lincoln, Nebraska, but I grew up in Fremont, Nebraska a little bit as well.

I would say, like my experience growing up as a Queerwoman, especially as someone who like has kind of flitted between bisexual and pansexual and am I asexual? Do I follow along? greyscale? Like, where do I fit? Um, I feel like my experience was an experience of like, a lot of nuance, like, I always kind of fit in between nothing solid. Because in my community growing up, you either straight or gay, you couldn't be anything in between. You either like cisgender or the other. Like, there wasn't even really a word for trans, it was wrong. Um, so I think in a lot of ways for me, my kind of journey and struggle, my political kind of education, my political values and my political like, just who I am in the world can before I think my sexual and my gender identity really became solid for me. Because, you know, being bisexual, I always felt like I never fit either, so I probably am straight and that was it. Um, so it for me that was really

like, a lot of my youth was kind of figuring out, like, why do I not necessarily fit in either of these categories? And like, Where do I fit? Um, so for me, that was like a big, a big thing.

10:29 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Thank you. Devin, go ahead.

10:36 **Kel (They/them):** I am Devin or Kel, I'm trying that out these days, my pronouns are they/them/their. I, growing up everyone was so expected to be straight. Not necessarily because of my family, but because like the schooling and where I lived and everything, it's just, hey, you're gonna be straight, you're gonna marry a woman someday, yada, yada, yada. And of course, you're cisgender da, dida. And it was so intensive that I never really noticed these things that never really added up in my life until college. And even then, it took me a few years and finally hanging out with some of my other Queer friends to realize, Hmm, maybe I'm not straight. Maybe I'm not cisgender. And my political development occurred because I was invited one day to, I was always supportive of the Queer community, politically, I just wasn't that politically involved, and that people invited me to a bail hearing. We have custom shirts and everything. And then I was later on told, hey, you're going to be my, you're going to be my communications chair of this organization, of this political organization. [**Sam** laughter] It's not, hey, do you want to be, it's your going to be. And Britain I still have that shirt, by the way. [**Kel** laughter].

But yeah, it was. That's how I became involved in politics and sort of grew in my political development, it did occur before we even my Queer development. When I first started getting politically involved, I was just an ally in my head. I didn't really realize that I was subliminally doing this for my own liberation.

Did I hit all the goalposts, of the question?

12:51 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** I think you got everything. Did you grow up in St. Cloud?

12:56 **Kel (They/them):** Oh, no, I grew up in bits of Wisconsin, bits in Nebraska, funny enough Lincoln, Nebraska too of what was a brief period of my life. And rural Minnesota, which I've actually moved back to, to that area because of financial constraints. I've moved in with my parents on a farm out in McLeod County, which is where I did a lot of growing up - is McLeod County. And do you want a bit of background on McLeod County?

Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them): Sure, if you want to share it.

Kel (They/them): So it's a very conservative, very red, very religious area like people, like St. Cloud is a golden pillar of safety and warmth compared to McLeod county. It's very ostracized

living here. I'm finding some sanctuary here. But there's still a lot of negative stuff out here that it simply is. It's largely a farming community to, nothing against the farmers, I'm finding some myself this year too, but that's the background of McLeod county.

14:19 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Wow. I wonder how similar that looks like the outer townships of Stearns County, because that's where most of my growing up happened. And I moved away after high school, and so didn't really get I haven't been participating in the development of the Queer community in St. Cloud from this point. So I think this, is really hopeful and exciting and interesting to me to hear that it's like compared to other places, a totally different experience in St. Cloud. Ah, so that makes me super excited.

And, I think it kind of leads into the next question of, people sort of touched on this a little bit already, but how do your identities and the local political climate, shape your personal politics, and then how you connect to and build community in St. Cloud?

Rachel, if you want to go ahead.

15:26 **Rachel (She/her):** So um, you know, so much, I think, and I probably don't speak alone in this, but but so much for Queer folks is about safety. And we learned very early on, we develop a sixth sense on who we feel safe with. And so there are a lot of people who, you know, if I perceive that they have a particular political opinion, or a particular religious perspective, if I perceive that they are racist, it's very uncomfortable for me to be with those people. But of course, you know, I have to do the best that I can to work with them in work environments, you know, or educational environments. And so I'm always in a position where whatever, whatever work that I do with mixed groups of people, I try to listen to their perspective. And give them information about different topics, while validating their experience. Because people have certain experiences that make them believe and see certain things. And so if so, if those people are willing to think and willing to consider and open their minds, we could have a conversation and we can talk. Um, you know, otherwise, this need for safety and feeling that I've been, you know, feeling that I want to be with my people, so to speak, I tend to seek out Queer groups of folks, particularly Queer folks to identify as female. I, you know, I look for racially and ethnically diverse groups of people to interact with, to communicate with, to work with, and I also am a member of my Jewish congregation, which is in the cities.

And because of my own, my own growing up experiences being being Jewish in a non traditional, secular, anti-Zionist Jewish family. And then coming to terms with my Jewish identity. This Jewish congregation is actually the first Jewish congregation I belong to in my whole life where I feel very connected. And so and they're wonderful folks, and we all pretty much share the same politics. We share a lot of the same views, political, you know, views on political

situations, things like that. And they are very active when it comes to human rights, civil rights issues. They do work in one of the soup kitchens in St. Stephen's, do homeless drives, they do tabling at Twin Cities Pride, they do a whole bunch of other stuff. I'm on their Sunday programming committee and they wanted me to organize a presentation and a discussion for the congregation because they wanted to add pronouns to everybody's membership badges. We all were everybody who's a member wears a badge at social events, and this is like a big deal, and they didn't want to impose that on people. And what really surprised me really, really blew me away was that not only was this very well received, but we have our Sunday programming when we have the Jewish cultural school and that's for the children and the teenagers. And the teachers who taught the teenage classes, they wanted them to sit at that presentation and listen and have an opportunity to share and talk and a special debriefing session after. And there was no fight, there was no anything. I was just like, Wow, that is so cool. And I mean, we I didn't ask I didn't you know, I didn't, I was like, I'm not touching the Jewish cultural school, this is not mine, I don't work with the kids this is, but they were just like, completely Go for it, you know, and there's so many other spaces, so many other religious spaces, or social space, or just educational spaces where this would have become like, a huge fight a huge resistance, a huge, you know, people start talking about lawsuits, and you know, just going completely irrational. And I, you know, I was just, I was just really amazed at the openness and the wanting to discuss and sharing it with minors, you know.

So that, made the work very, you know, very valuable to me. And I made and I didn't personally give the presentation. I mean, I had, I had a speaker come from the Jewish Child and Family Services to give that presentation along with a really great author, Noam Sienna, he writes about LGBTQ+ identities in Jewish history, 2000 years, that what he has done, the research he has done is fantastic. And he's a young, I mean, I don't even think he's 30 years old. And he's, you know, and he's just such a lovely, such a lovely human. And the day, you know, the group that didn't want to leave, they wanted to hear Noam's, stories from, you know, what he dug up from the history and they wanted to integrate, you know, they wanted to interact more with Jace here more about what it is to be non-binary and trans and have those conversations. And we have, a lot of the people in this group are older, and older generation people. So seniors, and their heart is in the right place, they mean well, but they don't have all the language all the, all the knowledge to, to know. But they want to know. Because they have family members and friends and they know me, and you know, and they don't have, you know, they're very, very supportive of Queer folks. So, um, you know, so this has been my, my experience. On a local level, though, and St. Cloud on a big hurdle we're trying to face is getting, getting to the point where we could have a conversation with St. Cloud City Council



about conversion therapy, and this has just been very, very difficult. So I'll just I'll just leave it at that, because I think I took a long time here.

23:11 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** No, that's, that's great. As we hit a lot of different things. I want to maybe hear more about the conversations with the City Council , but maybe another question will address that. Um, I think Britain, you can go ahead.

23:26 **Britton (She/her):** Yeah, I'm just rereading the question because I, I can't hold more, I can't hold things in my brain for more than 30 seconds these days. Um, yeah, I mean, so I, when I came to Minnesota, I actually got involved very quickly with the DFL. Because I was like, lucky enough to sit next to the college democrats president at the time, and he was doing voter reg. And I was like, Well, I know how to do that. So very quickly, I got very active with the DFL and kind of became, in many ways, kind of like one of the few young people that they really, you know, invest in and try and build leadership on. Oftentimes, you know, you use our work to advance kind of progressive movements, especially as youth like, we were always kind of the like, louder side of things. Um, and I think that really shaped my political identity was both kind of being, you know, supported to be part of this political party that was still 10 times more progressive and has a beautiful progressive history than the Nebraska democratic party where I worked before, um, but also kind of still running into this almost old-guard of you know, oftentimes, we don't, intentionally, maybe, but oftentimes, we do we fall into these kind of like, traps of heteronormativity and white supremacy and classism, and I saw that a lot when I was organizing because, you know, college students weren't, for the most part, compensated for their time, some of us were, but a lot of us weren't. And I also saw that in the way that we have like respectability kind of tokens in like partisan politics or like DFL parties. Was it was like, if you speak well, if you look well, if you can dress well, if you can do all these things. So for me, I think really what, at the same time that I was wrestling with, 'okay, I think I am bisexual and what does that mean?' And how do I live in the world with this kind of new understanding of, of who I'm attracted to romantically and physically in, like, what I am looking for, like, what kind of partnership am I looking for, because I knew very early on my political values wouldn't allow me to be in a romantic relationship with someone who didn't support my work. Because my work is very hard, because it can be really, you know, long term, right, I've had 12 hour days, and I need, I knew at the time that that was going to be my future. And I needed not only a partner that understood that, but was willing to, like, support me through that work that I was doing. And then I added on the other layer of like, maybe that partner is a different gender than I previously thought, because I have now come to this realization about my sexuality. So at the time that I was already wrestling with kind of internalized oppressions that we find in all political parties and

all institutions, is also wrestling with my own orientation, and what that meant for the world. And I think like that really shaped my personal politics, because it forced me to say, 'you know, what we have isn't really working for me, right?' I don't like existing in the in a political party that can't hold the nuance of my identity, right, of being a Queer woman in Central Minnesota, right, I was either a woman doing incredibly powerful work in central Minnesota, or I was a Queer person doing powerful work in Central Minnesota, it was really hard, I think, for people to hold the nuance of what that meant. Um, which was also interesting, because the people were very excited that we have more Queer folks and young folks, and I hear that a lot in my work with the Queer Peers, is that people are very excited for our work. Um, but what really shaped my political identity and my personal politics when it came to St. Cloud was, you know, that work is needed, but it wasn't wanted, if that makes sense. Like,

Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them): Can you talk more about that?

Britton (She/her): yeah, like the organizing I was doing with Queer people, just in my own community, saying, Hey, I know a lot about these candidates. Like, let's suss out which ones are better for our community, like, let's figure it out together. And let's, you know, have these conversations and let's build up the power we need to, to actually run a Queer city council candidate and not been by a longshot like that is my ultimate goal is to be able to have a Queer candidate and their queerness is not the thing that makes them a longshot. Um, but anyway, I think what I found was that people were very hungry for it. But in a really transactional way, right? They, like leaders of political parties and institutions and organizations and whoever you decide as the *they* are in this moment. You know, I think they realize that you can't have a campaign strategy, whether it be electoral or issue base. That does not include my community. No, there was kind of this like excitement around that engagement. But at the same time, it wasn't. It wasn't transformational. It wasn't, it wasn't saying, 'okay, you're building something new. Let's invest in that, because we see the importance of you and other Queerpeople in central Minnesota, having a political community, having a community where your identity is not consistently like the talking point, right, your identity is just accepted, understood and like value, right. Other things were the talking point.' So I think like that really shaped my, my political identity, because it made me realize that people see us oftentimes as ways to get to the goal, rather than asking us to be part of building, you know, what we need.

29:01

Like, they want us to vote for their candidates and be part of their elections, so that they can go to Congress and then pass Medicare for all, which is great. We need that. But there's never The

second question, which is, how does your community currently, How is your community currently harmed by our healthcare system? And how can we make sure what we build is including your community in that conversation, so you're not continuing to be locked out? Um, so that really shaped my politics? Was that like, there was never a second ask of how how do you want to be brought in on this? How would you and your people and the Queer Peers, how would they feel powerful in this moment? It was always about how do we get power to other people? And that really kind of like hardened my like, I think commitment to work when it comes to Queerness and politics and where that all intersects. So if that answered your question,

29:55 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** yeah, very much. Thank you. Wow. I want to hear from you. Next.

30:07 **Kel (They/them):** When I first became political, I very much thought I was a heterosexual cisgender man. Both accounts have now been thoroughly proven false. But at the time, that's where I was. Because as I explained earlier, and because of that, I didn't really, my lack of education on things even as a social worker, with a bachelor's in a Bachelors of education, getting education, I didn't really have the tools to always effectively know when I was being slightly oppressive or not. I've needed a lot of call outs against me in my time. And I've been thankful to have some strong people around me who would provide those call outs to me.

But as my Queeridentity developed, I'll get back to political stuff. I ended up engaging in college democrats through funny enough Britain, who is the individual I spoke about earlier, saying you will be this. And I found a lot of power in that because I've never been electorally involved. So I found a lot of power in getting my political voice out there. And I found it liberating. But as my Queer identity did develop, I started realizing, wait a second. The political party I'm working for is tokenizing the identities that I now realize I have, they didn't want us for our unique abilities, for our unique place in society, for our uniqueness. They wanted us because they just wanted votes, they could go there and do their own thing. They weren't building power with us.

And it's still true to the stain. I'm politically, I'm now the vice chair of my counties' DFL. Huh. Hmm. And I now see a lot and I see a lot of I just think they're not educated on us, the local people. For this county, they don't even see queerness on the map. because it's so oppressed in this county and people leave to go, some of them go to St. Cloud, most of them go to the Twin Cities, I think.

But [pause] because there's just there's, you don't need the Queer vote to win in this county. In fact, if you're seeing trying to court the Queer vote, you might lose in this county. So, but they were willing to accept me as a because they know I'm non binary, the DFS thing where

the vice chair has to be a different gender than the chair. And I'm, I'm gender fluid, gender Queer. So that's really where I was able to be that, because of that, so they are aware of what I am. And, you know, my hair was done up in crazy colors by pride flag when they met me. And I have met some really supportive local DFL-ers. They're not in this county, they're in the neighboring county, but they pushed me to run for vice chair, and we're pushing me to run for state house at one stage.

Which I almost did. But they, were they were a supportive individual, but they were just one. And they were seemingly aware of Yeah, you're Queer, and you have a unique voice. But they were also funny enough at one point involved in TakeAction, which is an organization that I'm very familiar with, and Britain's very familiar with, and I believe, I believe everyone here is familiar with them in this particular group in this meeting, but which I think probably helped them gain their understanding.

But it's kind of like an island. I've spoken to candidates here. And they don't really they don't really know too much about Queer people in general. They're not necessarily against Queer people, and they're not against Queer rights. They're just, 'I don't know'. They don't really have the understanding of what they're going to need to fight for. I had a conversation with one and said, 'Yeah, you asked me what issues are important to me. Obviously, Queer rights are very important.' I didn't give them too much of an education on that except that like the educate themselves, but I don't know if they have educated themselves, which means I'm going to have to put in the emotional energy and the emotional work to actually educate them on some, at times very painful issues.

So it's always looked like, with my Queer identity, it's going to mean, I'm going to put an extra legwork out here. It's out here is it's a, it's a different environment than St. Cloud, I will say St. Cloud knows what you are, and knows that they want your vote and they need your community's vote, and they need to not be seen as anti-Queer. But that's the extent of it. They, they, they expect your vote because the other party is so much worse, that you can't really imagine voting for them. But they don't offer us anything in the St. Cloud area. Because I just moved out of St. Cloud this year. And I was still politically involved. I was running for city council up until I had to move. But

Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them): Go on, sorry, I interrupted you.

Kel (They/them): Yeah, my final statement is just to contrast with St. Cloud. The rural area that where I'm at, it's, it's remarkably not seen as an issue. There, they're not. They're thankfully not trying to tokenize me and say, 'hey, look, we have query organizers'. They're not trying to do that, which is, you know, refreshing after a way.

But at the same time, they're they, they still mostly see me as a cis male who is willing to date women, most in most cases, that's what they're generally seeing. They're not seeing my identity. And they're not valuing my identity because of it.

37:03 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Thank you so much.

I think a major thread that I'm seeing in everybody's conversation is this idea of like, depending on where you are, people are either like overtly or quietly, like, aware that Queer people exist, and aware of like the general features of identities and like a heteronormative context, but maybe not literate in what it means. Like how, how different systems impact Queer people specifically what like those characteristics are. And also like being pleasantly surprised in some spaces that there is some literacy, um, but also that it can be really transactional, because like, people are aware that a community of identity has capital. So thank you for sharing about that specifically.

[cool, ambient music fades in]

38:05 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Hi, everybody, I'm Sam Koltes. And I'm your host for the honoring your mentors segment. This is inspired by the podcast Irresistible, formerly known as Healing Justice Podcast, where instead of breaking for messages from sponsors, they give guests an opportunity to shout out projects and related work within the community. Our segment is slightly different. In restorative justice spaces, you'll often hear folks name mentors, elders, and communities, who help form our voices and we bring with us this bit is just an opportunity to pause and have guests and bring those voices in. So to our guests who mentored you and are with us here today.

38:54 **Britton (She/her):** So the funny thing about political organizing in central Minnesota is, there aren't very many people who have done it and have done it in the way that I feel like make me feel excited about the future. I think there's a lot of like, mentors I've had that like, have helped me get my feet under my ground or my ground or my feet or whatever, never get that right. Um, and have helped me kind of orientate technically, like technologically and what are the strategies and things like that? But honestly, I feel like the people who I would consider my mentors in, what allowed me to wrestle with, like, my own sexual identity, and then my own place in the community is when I was in high school, I was part of the science focus program, and I was in this little group of people, whoever I was the only straight person in that group, right? I was like the loud straight ally, and I was with this group and they were my friends and people that cared about and they were constantly changing out language for identity and

pronouns and gender identity and sexual identity. And what it built for me was almost this ability to say, you know, I'm I don't think I'm straight, but I don't think I'm not straight. But I also know that I can figure that out later, right. So I kind of working, being friends and going to school with this group of people, I think allowed me to kick the can down the road in a way that like, helped me be comfortable with my own identity, and helped me navigate it. So I would say those like those few People are my mentors in the way that they gave me permission before. I gave myself permission and I really love that.

Um, I think Another person who I would consider one of my mentors was very early on there was a professor, Dr. Wells, at SCSU. And he like, he was always very like, I think you're a little crazy but like, I really love where you're going. He was he was the advisor for the college Dems that I ran. And every once while he would kind of have this, like, we'd be talking about plans or ideas and he would kind of be like, yeah, let's try that. Like, let's talk about it right like he actually gave me the space to be the crazy ass organizer I was when I was 19. And I think I needed that and I deserved that and so does every other like Queer political person to try on and try out new things. I don't think I've ever like officially shouted him out for that but I think he like definitely deserves that. So yeah, that's what I would add.

41:29 **Kel (They/them):** I think Britain for a brief second thought I was gonna shout myself out but and I and I, you know, I did a bit of thinking on that and it's like I'll lead with myself actually because I have had do a lot of learning. And a lot of the learning I've done some of it was done purely by self-guided, I've had to learn to guide myself. I think everyone fundamentally has to and should be one of their own mentors. But funny enough to Pete, there are two people that I instantly popped in my head and that's Britain and Britain's partner. I don't know if they, that partner, wants their shouted out, name wise, so I'm just going to say Britons partner. and they're like my Queer parents. They've been there for me all the time and I don't even think they realize how much they mean to me per se

and they just [pause]

Britain gave me a space where I could be political for the first time ever and as I say started being Queer, helped me find space for myself. And after graduation continued to provide space through the Queer Peers table and other groups where I could be Queer and have community. And that's just, having that space whether they realized it or not that has been the deeply meaningful to me and deeply impactful of me and my identity.

There's a couple other people but, the situation with them is weird, I'm going to leave their names out just because I'm going to say some kind of two sides of things here. When I was first developing a quick meet a lot of the Queer community around St. Cloud state is where I ended up I in the resource centered. Funny enough the head of the resource center, I didn't actually

like learn to much from. But it was some of the people there, that were the students there, that I learned from and gave me some of my first face as well. I mean, this is also the same community that later ostracized me. But they were for time mentors. Now there's some people that I'm still sort of friends with, I don't know the extent to which they were involved in ostracizing me or not, but because I have a lot of trauma around the act, so I can't see things clearly about what happened at that time. So I can't clearly identify who was doing what. At the same time, there's people that if they weren't involved, they were absolutely my mentors. Because they helped me and they say I say like, I remember I was hanging out in somebody's living room when they were just like, I was like, like, 'yeah, I think everyone here's Queer well except for Devin, maybe' I was like, and I that was like the first time I ever said anything to anyone was 'well, I actually kind of questioning if I'm bisexual.' That was the first time I'd ever outed myself to anyone And they were like 'ohh Cool' and they helped me, gave me space. I know a lot of people won't think of mentors as people who provide you space per se just the be you. But in terms of My queerness and mentors in that way. Those are the people that have most impacted me and my identity.

45:08 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Thank you. I do think people who hold space are mentors for other people sometimes. It's like character development that happens when you feel safe or comfortable. Rachel would you like to shout out mentors?

45:27 **Rachel (She/her):** Sure, There were so many people who whether they realized it or not, you know, were people who mentored me to I guess to be the best Queer person I could be, to be a leader, to be a leader in my professional field now, academic field. And I know, we don't have a lot of time and to name them all would tell the story about each one would take a very long time. So I'm just going to name two of my contemporary mentors right now.

One of them is Bharat Mara. And he is an out, Gay, South Asian man who is a library school professor, and activist in his own right; teaching people not only just library school students, but people in the feild about social justice librarianship. Serving the marginalized and active strategic planning and one of the things he always tells me when I'm working on a publication, is 'that's great but so what? What is the plan? What are you gonna do about it? And what are you going to tell people? What are you going to have people do about it? What are you going to make people do?' And so I've been, even though I do a lot of publishing in my field and a lot of writing, I'm learning how to use that writing and to us on that information and the trends that that I bring up, the phenomena that I bring up, to spur people to action.

There's another person who I can't name. Sadly, because it would not be safe to do so. I just want to say that this person is a young, gay, medical student. He's almost a doctor. And this

person organizes Wikipedia edit-a-thons for the most marginalized folks. He organizes special edit-a-thons for sex workers and refugees. Who need immediate information in order for them to find asylum or services that they can't find easily through a Google search. And so he helps them create the Wikipedia articles online with this information so that if they do a Google search and look for it, it automatically comes up and they don't have to do a ton of searching. And that's valuable if you need quick information in an emergency because he's so he's also dealing with people that are not safe. And he is so wise, and so empathic beyond his years. And he's, he's a lovely, lovely communicator and he gets down to the bottom of what the problem is, tries to solve the problem which is useful if you're a doctor of course but to see this in somebody's who's so young, is phenomenal. Because if people who, you know, are suppose to be knowledgeable know how to do this and it just shows that this is, some that something that is very difficult to teach people. But if you see it and you're mindful of it, and you're engaging with people like this, you can learn through example. And so this is what I'm trying to absorb and practice in my own path to leadership and community engagement. It's not, it's not easy for me because I live, I live in an academic bubble. But I'm trying. And those are the two right now, one formal because Bharat Mara is on my dissertation committee and And he's a professional colleague of mine. And one not formal at all. He doesn't, he might not realize that he's teaching me or what he's teaching me. But I'm learning a lot from him. I wish I could share his name and tell his story but I, but I can't do that.

51:23 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Thank you Thanks for talking about it. Hopefully I mean, hopefully he can share and speak for himself at some point is safe to do that. Be the most beautiful outcome.

The last questions kind of a big one, but I wanna see if we can do it in like a paragraph. Yeah. The last question is the Queer Justice question. So, what does Queer justice in rural Minnesota mean to you, or what does Queer justice mean to you? How does that look?

Rachel, do you want to go ahead?

52:05 **Rachel (She/her):** Sure. I think Queer justice in Central Minnesota in some ways has parallels with the anti-racist work that is happening. You know, we still, there's many people who, you know, in the work that they do, and services that they provide, automatically default to center things on a more white, cisgender, hetronormative model. And that's not the model for everybody. And in some cases I shouldn't even say white because there's in the communities of color many times they also default to a cisgender, heterosexual model. Um, one of the things that's interesting to me, is when I had the opportunity to travel to different European countries for academic LGBTQ+ conferences. I have met out, Queer Somali folks, particularly out, Queer,

Somali women. Who often spoke for their community and they would tell me about small communities of Queer Somali folks that they had been able to organize in Amsterdam and London, and you know, Berlin. And we have a very large Somali population here. And I have no idea who or where the Queer folks are. And we know, I mean, anybody knows that in any community, even if you go to the Amish community, you're going to find some Queer folks. And so, you know, where are these people? And what happens to them? Um, you know, this is, this is a question I often have. Um, it's something that is always hidden. And sometimes when we have these conversations, it's like, well, it's not directly said, and but I always wonder, you know, do people from other from other communities see Queer identity as white? And I think that's a that's a conversation that also has to be had, in this intersection of seeking Queer justice and Queer liberation and anti-racist work is to address intersectionality of identities. Because we're not just one thing. And in our communities as, as divided and diverse as they are they intersect. Sometimes they intersect within the experience of individuals. And so we have to have more conversations about those connections and the way people connect communities, I think, to advance Queer justice here.

55:35 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Absolutely, thank you, thanks for talking about the intersection of multiple identities. It's like a, it's worth like saying that all of the people on this call, I believe are white, you're Jewish, as well. But there's whiteness within this conversation. And I think there's an assumption that like rural Minnesota is like Central Minnesota even is quite white. And while that's partly true, there's just such a huge part of the community that's not white and centering Queerness in whiteness is a, is a big conversation, maybe that's a it's a 2.0 conversation. Part of the time, I'm, but Devin, how about you?

56:24 **Kel (They/them):**

I'm gonna be speaking on what Queer justice should look like a bit better rather than what it looks like now, because we don't have it. But I think, at least in my mind, Queer justice looks like safety and body in mind, as the first tenant of it, where people are visible and present. We are not hidden, where they're like 'oh, yep, I can go out shopping. And there's a few Queer people I bump into, they're not hiding, they're living their best lives, whatever'. And that we would be represented in institutions and ways that we can shape them. That would be just a second, there'll be Queer representation on the Supreme Court, that would be Queer representation in Congress that is more significant than than it is now. That would be representative, but we are in the population. That representation, safety, visibility, are the three main parts that I identify of what Queer justice should look like.

[cool, ambient music fades in]

57:32 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Thank you for bringing your mentors into the space with us. Now, let's go back to our previous conversation and continue.

[cool, ambient music fades out]

Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them): I think the next part that I'm really interested in is, kind of what let, What does Queercommunity specifically look like in St. Cloud and in rural spaces? so like a collection of Queer people, what does a Queerspace look like? Are there unique characteristics, benefits and barriers that you run into and getting space? Um, and yeah, let's just start there. So Rachel, go ahead. This is my question clear?

58:20 **Rachel (She/her):** So in St. Cloud, which I don't really consider rural Minnesota, but that's where I live, so that's what I'm going to speak to. We actually have a diversity of those LGBTQ+ communities. And they are more divided than united. They are divided by generation, they are divided by career path. They're divided by social class, they're divided by rural versus urban. They're divided by cis versus trans. They're divided by male versus female. Divided by, you know, center or even center-right to more progressive, university community versus non university community. And so. So when we talk about diversity, we have the diversity, we don't have a lot of unity and broad base community support within our LGBTQ+ community here. And it's very difficult to bring people together, even when we have something that you would think would bring the community together like St. Cloud pride. Although it is one of the best attended events in the city of St. Cloud, I would say it's the majority of people who attend or probably cis straight folks. And that there are also people from the Queer community who do not go to St. Cloud pride because they either do not like the people who organize it, or they find it very boring, but it's like in a small town, if you want something more, and you care about it and aggravates you, then you have to step up and get involved too. And so, so these are some, these are some struggles that we have,

1:00:35

with with Queer unity, in St. Cloud. Um, I will say, though, that probably the group that is showing some unity in St. Cloud is our trans community. Um, many of them have sort of, I don't want to say broken away, they're still, you know, engaged in a lot of things, but they, but they

sort of have created a community in a group of support of their own. And, you know, that's, that's been very, very good for them.

And, I think, now, and this may be also the case outside of St. Cloud and other communities across the country. But in the United States, I'm really seeing a trend toward you know, when people are introducing LGBTQ+ identities and concepts of coming out and things like that to cisgender heterosexual folks or just mixed audiences, they are focusing more on trans and non-binary identities, and they're talking about trans and non-binary people and centering their experience, centering this conversation around gender identity, rather than 'when I was there', in high school and college and you know, things were centered around coming out process and sexual orientation. And now sexual orientation is not, I don't want to say not so important, but it's but the I think maybe because trans and non binary folks, especially trans and non binary folks of color, they're most at risk for harm. They're, they're in some ways, in many ways, the least safe of us. I think, these conversations, educational piece has been centering has been centering trans and non binary communities much more to understand there needs to have conversations about pronouns to have conversations about appropriate health care. The fact that we do have what they call what is the gender clinic here in St. Cloud, I mean, that's me considering what we are, that's pretty huge. Um, and CentraCare has made a very big deal of it. Promoting those health care employees in CentraCare, who are, you know, LGBTQ+ friendly as such, if they may or may not have ties to that clinic. Um, and there are a lot of trans folks who come to st cloud for care, not just a CentraCare but we have, you know, many mental health care providers, social service providers that are trans and non binary friendly. And so there's folks who come to st cloud, because they can, they can get care, which is, which is very important. Um, they may or may not be political, they may or may not be looking for community, but they, but there's a modicum of safety and needs met here, which, you know, which is important for me.

For me, I have a partner, I'm not single, I'm going to very, very long term relationship decades long, old buddy couple, but, you know, I don't even want to know what it's like now, being single, and being single in a pandemic. Where and how do single Queer folks find each other. It is, it is a hot mess. And so you know, and so when I when I talk a lot about these you know, Queer spaces and Queer justice, yes, you can organize around a common cause but, but that really only works successfully when you have community built. And part of community built is, you know, going old school on and having those spaces for social and intimacy and dancing. And we don't have that here. We don't have that here because we don't have enough dollars in our economy to support something like that. We don't have enough trust in one another, to do that. And now we have a pandemic, where even if we had a and b, we can't have c because we don't we don't have a vaccine. So it's, you know, so I mean, it's, it's, it's very sad, it's very

terrible, actually, it's, it's that, that I actually think, is the least healthy part of our community and people in our community right now. And has been getting worse for some time with the advent of social media and online spaces, which is helpful, you need those to feel connected, you need those that feel supported, but that's becoming a replacement, that's become a replacement for so many other aspects of who we are as humans. So you have a sea of a lot of folks to, you know, they think they think they may be one way or another, but they never really get to find out, you know, appropriately because the only way you're going to find out a lot of things about yourself, not just reading books and reading blog posts and reading other people's social media figure, you gotta you, got to do the field research, you got to you got to, you know, physically figure it out. It's not, you know, it's not friendly and nice. It's all the time and you make people cry, and it's you know, but that's that's how people find out who they are.

Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them): Yeah.

1:07:26 **Rachel (She/her):** And so, um, you know, that's something that I don't know if we're ever going to have. So, this is a this is a problem.

Now on the global stage, because I work with LGBT+ communities from other countries. Situations in different countries are very different, and even different parts of the country are very different. And what I'm finding is that those Queer communities that are experiencing more oppression and more lack of safety, they are actually more likely to have those physical spaces and more likely to have the community where everybody knows each other everybody slept with each other. Oh, let me introduce you. I mean, it's I mean, it's a really, and it's a really under the table thing. And so if you're introduced to people in this community or you get to know people it's very special. And you have to be very mindful and very cautious, you know about their realities, to not out anybody. You know because there are some people whose social media is being monitored by the government. And so on. So you can't just say anything you want about anybody. But, you know, a lot of the work that I do is, is close work because it's tied with the media foundation and is clear with these meetings who are from all over the world, professionally, and academically, they do all sorts of things. And some of these folks are from the most marginalized of the marginalized and I get to meet them through this work. And it helps me become, helps me develop a perspective for what I'm seeing, um, you know in my own space and helps me also become more mindful of people's needs. To ask more questions, to hear from people before decide, before we make decisions. What do people really want? What do people really need? I had a, oh god this House of Representatives candidate called me because I was on a list that somebody had given her. This person really made me mad. I don't want to say who this person is. This person really made me mad just with their naive. I would

say and you know, even though they had been engaged in different social justice organizations in the state that you know, it's like you were engaged but you were asleep. It's like you're not you're not telling me the things that would really make me excited about you running for the house right? You know? There's a lot of people like that and that's why I don't want to call myself an activist because you have people like that. You know, they may be in the circles, but they're asleep. They're not really directly impacted by any of this work that they're doing. They're doing it because they want to go to heaven and you know that's not that's not why you do this work. So,

1:10:58 **Britton (She/her):** So first I think like this, this question is lovely and I want to start off with this story that Connor asked that I share. Just because it's one of my favorite stories about my community. And actually kind of shows a little bit about what Queer organizing can mean in St. Cloud. But we have this beautiful Pride festival every year as Rachel mentioned. It's like a little bit more catered to not out community like it's a little bit more catered to like families that are trying to like encourage their children to like, broaden their horizons and learn more. it's a little bit like a Queer friendly book fair Pride fest. And it has a lot of value in our community. But as Rachel said, there's also a lot of people who don't find like that as our community, if that makes sense. And it's great to be able to hold that nuance of like, 'yes, this is our community' and 'this is not my community' and 'I find the community elsewhere and here's how I find it'. Anyway, so this year, I was tabling with a Queer Peers leader of mine, and we were tabling and talking about, I don't remember what exactly, but we were mostly talking about the Queer Peers meetings every month and conversion therapy and just like how that conversation could impact the election. And this whole entire day it's just raining, like off and on. And we're outside in this beautiful park. And slowly but surely the park is like flooding. And thankfully, Ray and I were under this kind of like tent canopy thing. And I remember very clearly as the as the pride in the park was kind of wrapping up, the storms were getting worse. So it'd be like 45 minutes of just like muggy, grossness, you're about like a few inches of water, and then suddenly, it's pouring. And then another 20 minutes of like, muggy, grossness and suddenly it's pouring. And this whole time we were actually sitting next to the St. Cloud police and I remember kind of holding this frustration in my heart around it because it was like, 'Well, what do you, what do you guys do for our community?' because most of people, most of my community, most of people that I care about, don't actually trust you to treat them well, right. They may trust you to show up when there's a crime, but they also know that that would not be the time to talk about how they might be not straight, not cis, not in a cis or straight relationship. So there's a lot of animosity our community holds towards police because they actively and continue to be oppressors in our community and of our community or to our community. Um, so I remember just kind of being

irritated by that right? And so suddenly starts pouring and Ray and I are like okay, we have to get the heck out of here right like it's pouring the park is flooding like all of our stuff is getting wet. Like this is not good. And we look over and the police have their little tent down over them. So like they're kind of hiding under the tent. And at that point we were like okay, we, there's a bunch of people who are by themselves right their volunteers have dipped out because it's pouring rain and it's gross out. So they're just left with you know a bunch of boxes trying to get everything in a tent and it's pouring. About two minutes before my partner gets they're to help us load stuff in his car. A tornado drill or tornado warning goes off. So suddenly I, myself and Ray, we get these notifications on our phone like a tornado touchdown like three miles outside of St. Cloud. And I just remember having this very clear moment like 'oh my god, we are actually in danger' and I come from Nebraska right? So I'm not afraid of tornadoes. I was like we can get through this. I've been through this. Let's go. I remember looking around and it's pouring rain in the park is flooding, and there's tornado sirens going off and everyone's trying to run into the shelters like the bathroom, like the buildings and I remember the police driving through the park on their little like car, speakerphone saying 'there's a tornado warning, you need to leave the park, get out of the park, get out of the park'. And I just remember looking around and seeing all these people trying to struggle to get their tents down because if that tornado hits that park now we have like 35 tents that are all projectiles flying around. And we have 50 people shoved into a bathroom like that's not going to go well. So I just remember this moment where I was like, Okay, this is going to go probably dangerous and I just like get Ray into the car. Get Owen to the car. And they actually ended up going in the shelters later but I remember running back out and just like helping people take down their tents. Just like we're not even planning it anymore. We're just throwing shit in boxes. We're trying to get you to a point where your stuff is safe and you are safe and can be safe. And I think that like has a lot of parallels to how organizing the the Queer community is here in St. Cloud is like, we have these moments where we come together and we're like oh My God like we are actually, we need to get through this together, right? We're either going to get through this apart or together, like if we can just figure out what will be good enough. If we can just figure out what we'll save our asses until this tornado passes. Then we can like move on. Right, then we can start kind of find some other places where we may disagree but we can fight for each other and build solidarity, right? Like I think at the same time, the state was absolutely failing us. Our elected officials were hiding in, hiding in the shelters as well. The police didn't get out of their car to help people. Like the people who stood up to help, put their lives in danger by facing off a fucking tornado. We're Queer people in our community. That saw a need and filled it. And I think that is very similar to how organizing has been is like, at the same time that we are all dealing with separate crises, we're all dealing with separate problems right myself is a cisgender bisexual woman, in a straight passing relationship, is

incredibly different than someone who does not fit those characteristics. Someone who is not in a straight passing relationship, someone who is not cis gender and someone who is lesbian or gay and we're not bisexual and can't like hide behind this I don't know like societal expectation of straightness. Like I hide under that a lot and a lot of people do. And so in our community, you know, there are things that we each benefit from and things that divide us and at the same time we're being very much failed by the state we're being very much failed by the people who are supposed to advocate for us. But I think also in the way that brings us together a little bit.

Being Queer in Central Minnesota is vastly different than being Queer in the Twin Cities and being able to like hold two truths of like, I am Queer and my identities and my humanness is valued, but at the same time I experience a different perspective that other people especially because of where I am geographically. I think it has really helped us in our organizing. I think a lot about some of our arts community. Like we have a beautiful burlesque drag community that I usually table at their events and I have just a blast at and I think that there's another moment where like, where people are edging out little crevices for themselves and places where they gather but by looking at it, you wouldn't notice it. So I think that was something else Rachel talked about is like there's a lot of like this disconnection kind of disassembled in our community, but there's also a lot of hidden spaces where we're building community.

But then I also want a second what she said is we don't have a lot of physical spaces where we're building community. We don't have a Queer coffee shop. We don't really have a Queer space for people that are not college students, like all of these things. So I don't know if that answered your question, but I think like the thing that's beautiful, I think about central Minnesota and St. Cloud organizing, is that like, we are here, we are building our communities, and when we start to realize we are not the only Queer people here, building our communities we end up finding a lot more common and like a lot more solidarity with each other and that's just pretty damn beautiful in my opinion.

Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them): I like that a lot and I think you addressed something that I see as like common thread between St. Cloud Queer community and like historic maybe more Metro or like Twin Cities metro community is that like the spaces are there, you can't see them. And that's maybe on purpose, safety wise, but also there's a lot of division between different identities. We're definitely working through our stuff as a community. Devon, do you feel ready to address this one?

1:19:41 **Kel (They/them):** Yeah Queer organizing to me looks very much like coming together of rapid, very different people. And I know that it doesn't always look that way because there may be one subset doing one thing and another subset doing another thing.

Especially in the St. Cloud area with how divided it is because I've felt that divide. I've had an entire community decide that I was *persona non grata* when I was in college. That was an extremely damaging thing. Because I was still grappling with my gender identity at that time. But, as far as being like, we don't have like, we talked about how St. Cloud doesn't have spaces for Queer people really. There's a few small ones that are hidden. But, if you're in got involved with drag or burlesque shows for example, you're not going to find the Queer space that's hidden there, even if you're Queer. I was lucky enough to attend a few shows and I was able to be able to see Hey, I know them, I can talk to them, I can get along with them or I know them. I know that. I was able to have that small community moment where I was able to meet people. And that was entirely by surprise because I just happened to go there because my mom likes them and I would occasionally pay for us to go to them. But I'd spend like half my time sitting at another table with these other Queer people that I knew. I know that's not political organizing but the where communities kind of organize and where I am now. The only way I can find other Queer people and this chance bumped into them in public - Grindr literally. Yeah and similar apps are the only way you can identify other Queer people because the Queer people out here we're not broadcasting. Because we don't know who's got a shotgun in their pickup truck. And might have a bone to pick that day.

Like, you can go through the app and you know, I noticed the sightings when people say, if they can be you know, host or not host, are there safe or not safe to be. And everyone out here, they're clearly marking themselves as not safe. Hey, this I'm purely closeted, I'm hidden, I'm doing this but I don't want to be known and I don't want and I want you to be discreet about it kind of stuff. So I had the idea while we were here, maybe like how Facebook Page of trying to get Queer people in this area about but I have no way to market that. I have no way to spread that throughout the community, there's no GSAs in schools. There's no nothing. There's no efficacious way to build that community to even begin to look at what do we need to organize around, because in this committee, where I'm at now, we need to organize. There's harmful church practices out here that are worse than then the St. Cloud area. There's about a whole bunch of need of support and Queer organizing needs to look supporting one another. And right now where I'm at there's no organizing that can support one another. So I mean there's some. I heard from my cousin who was going to school recently that there is those small subgroups in the school of Queer kids that are kind of grouped together. That's their only community.

1:23:36

That's the extent of it and what happens when they go to college if they don't go to the same college that's gone but I do know that a lot of them organized to go to the same school

now. You know what, that's powerful organizing. That's keeping your community together even if you're not staying in the same geographic location, as you were, that's powerful organizing to just have. Be able to stay together. It may not look like you're talking to candidates. It may not look like you're doing it you're hoping toward that tornado. But it's it's small, subtle things like that, that are the only things currently possible in this county. And I could try and you know there's a couple community pages of Hey, this is Life and Glen Co, life in Hutchinson for example, and I could if I wanted to make a page for McLeod County Queers, McLeod county Queer community, whatever. I could advertise on there. That puts a target on my back though. But I want to make this kind of space. And as far as like more political oriented organizing, I'm trying to be visibly Queer while working with DFL. I'm trying to be, I'm trying to be visibly. 'Haha. I'm different. You can be different too and it's okay'. I'm trying to be a beacon or something so people can look and they can say like maybe one of these people in the McLeod county DFL has a Queer kid and they don't know it, but they say huh. That new gender fluid person who's vice chair they're not so bad. Maybe, Maybe I can make it difference that way. But that's not really organizing with multiple people. That's just doing what I can by myself.

And I just, in this area of rural Minnesota, It's incredibly isolating to be an out Queer person. There's a house I know which has a gay couple in it, in Glen Co. . I know that much because I was told that from my cousin, I don't know the validity of it either. There is somebody who is supposedly gay who works at a local store. I again can't verify it because I haven't I've had a couple conversations with them but I haven't had been like, Hey, are you part of the same community as me 'cuz to me that still feels you might be able to get away with asking that in St. Cloud. You can get away with it in the Twin Cities, for sure. As long as you know you're being a respectful person about how you're asking. Asking that here? You're asking people to spotlight themselves. And when I'm asked what to say when I'm talking safety. I don't just mean you know, someone's going to come with a gun to shoot you. There's also social safety. Because you can be ostracized from your family. I'm a social worker. I know the kind of damage being isolated from your family can do. It's incredibly damaging to the psyche. And leads to death. Just assure someone with a gun coming out at you. And so organizing where I'm at is difficult and I'm lucky to have a supportive family who's also has a few Queer people in it. That I now live with but you know, when I went when I worked for I briefly had a job, it was a horrible job. The training materials were extremely religious propaganda. But coming from someone who's orientation and gender identity that that religion doesn't like, I was still out in that office because I was never going to not be out and who I am. I dyed my Hair specifically to work there. Mm hmm. Because it was it was a chiropractic office. But if you can be visibly Queer in a public space like that, then people can see you know that they're safe. like that's... I think I'm talking

circles at the stage, so I'm going to stop but I was gonna say like out here, being visible is enough to sometimes do something because you can let people know that it's possible.

1:28:29 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):** Yeah.

1:28:30 **Kel (They/them):** It's not a great world we live in but it's possible to live as yourself.

1:28:39 **Sam Koltes (Co-Host, She/her & They/them):**

Thanks so much. I think you really address the features of like finding community and online spaces and like community being different than then necessarily like public organizing, um and i think something that I have found so interesting is that I came out in 2012 and then moved away right away. And my sister is graduating from high school this spring and her friends who have been Queer have all kept tabs on me. And then, have been wanting to, I'm like an elder in Avon even though I'm not nearby, and so every time I come home, there's always a handful of people who have a handful of questions and want to connect about it and it's very funny what the community looks like in the little pockets that it exists in.

[cool, ambient music fades in]

You just listened to a conversation but between Britain, Rachel and Kel who are Queer folks living in rural Minnesota. Thank you so much for all of them for joining us today on Envisioning Queer Justice. We are grateful for your voices, your vision, and your values. Thank you also to the Hamline University Center for Justice and Law and Peace First, for their fiscal support of this project. The opinions expressed in this podcast solely reflect the individual speaker. The Envisioning Queer Justice Collaborative is a digital platform that seeks to disrupt punitive and exclusionary conceptions of justice and uplift people in the Queer community who envisioned justice as healing, creation and transformation. Through research, storytelling and content curation creation, we offer resources to bring people together for safer, more inclusive and liberated communities. To read our research findings from the LGBTQ+ youth justice circles, community toolkit, or curated resources, please go to our website, www.envisioningqueerjustice.org and check us out on social media by searching Envisioning Queer Justice Collaborative. Thank you so much for joining us today.

[cool, ambient music fades out]