

Transcript	Indexing
<p><b>Kyle Warnock Interview, Rachel Shanks and Jen Butler, November 30, 2022</b></p> <p><b>Jen</b> [00:00:01] Today is November 30th, 2022. We are in Portland, Maine, on the USM campus. My name is Jen Butler spelled J-E-N B-U-T-L-E-R.</p> <p><b>Rachel</b> [00:00:15] My name is Rachel Shanks, R-A-C-H-E-L S-H-A-N-K-S. And would you please say and spell your name for us?</p> <p><b>Kyle</b> [00:00:22] Sure. My name is Kyle Warnock. Last name spelled or both?</p> <p><b>Rachel</b> [00:00:27] First and last.</p> <p><b>Kyle</b> [00:00:28] First and last. First name. K-Y-L-E. Last name Warnock. W-A-R-N-O-C-K.</p> <p><b>Jen</b> [00:00:35] So you can refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any point. We just wanted to remind you of that.</p> <p><b>Kyle</b> [00:00:43] Okay.</p> <p><b>Jen</b> [00:00:44] Um, do you want to start, or do you want me to?</p> <p><b>Rachel</b> [00:00:46] Yeah, I can start. So, to start, we're just going to go over some background information. So, how old are you?</p> <p><b>Kyle</b> [00:00:53] I am 24, 25 in January.</p> <p><b>Rachel</b> [00:00:57] What pronouns do you use?</p> <p><b>Kyle</b> [00:01:02] He/him.</p> <p><b>Rachel</b> [00:01:03] What terms do you use to describe yourself in terms of sexuality or sexual orientation?</p> <p><b>Kyle</b> [00:01:08] I use the term queer.</p> <p><b>Rachel</b> [00:01:11] Um. Where were you born?</p>	<p>Introductions</p> <p>Age</p> <p>Pronouns</p> <p>Identity</p> <p>Geography</p>

**Kyle** [00:01:13] I was born in Maryland, but I spent most of my life in Minnesota. In South Dakota.

**Rachel** [00:01:18] When did you go to Minnesota?

**Kyle** [00:01:20] I moved to Minnesota when I was two or three. And then I moved to South Dakota when I was ten.

**Rachel** [00:01:25] Wow.

**Kyle** [00:01:26] Yeah.

**Rachel** [00:01:27] And did you grow up specifically in those states and then moved to Maine or was it...

**Kyle** [00:01:33] I grew up in those states until I was 16 and then I moved to Maine. So, depending on what you define as growing up, I spent my childhood in all three places.

**Rachel** [00:01:43] Is there a specific place that you like the best?

**Kyle** [00:01:45] Maine.

**Rachel** [00:01:46] Yeah?

**Kyle** [00:01:47] Yeah.

**Rachel** [00:01:49] Why?

**Kyle** [00:01:49] Maine was a lot more accepting of who I was and how I expressed myself, along with a plethora of other reasons. It was just like a safer, more comfortable place for me to exist. And it kind of has everything you need to.

**Rachel** [00:02:07] Um. So, what was your experience like growing up there as a young queer kid?

**Kyle** [00:02:13] In South Dakota or in Minnesota?

**Rachel** [00:02:15] Any of them.

**Kyle** [00:02:17] I came out in South Dakota when I was 12, um, and was met with not necessarily a lot of backlash, but a lot of confusion. There weren't a lot of folks who had been exposed to LGBTQ folks. I was probably the first out person in my middle

Moving to Maine

Growing up queer

school, and so there was a lot of ignorance there. There were a lot of comments that weren't necessarily appropriate, but folks didn't know any better. There were also forms of discrimination, too, that made it a little bit hard to live there. Um, but I was kind of, I wasn't oblivious to all of it, but I was very much in my own world at the time and had my little circle and it worked out. But my, my home life wasn't great. So, I ended up moving here to Maine pretty unexpectedly. And, uh, despite disliking school, it was definitely like a better quality of life here.

**Rachel** [00:03:20] Could you tell us a little bit about your home life, how that was like?

Home life

**Kyle** [00:03:23] Sure. Both of my parents struggle with mental health issues and drug addiction, so the home was never a super safe place to exist. Um, there was also a lot of abuse and negligence and like food and money scarcity so even though that was so normalized to me growing up, like I still hadn't really come to terms with how irregular it was until I got out of that environment. My extended family, most of them work in social work, and so they were able to identify that there was a problem there. And then once I asked that once I requested that I needed to leave that environment, they were able to kind of pull everything together and get me into a better place, which happened to be Maine and then my other aunt, one of my aunts that lives in Maine adopted me here. Yeah.

**Jen** [00:04:33] Yeah. So you indicated on your background sheet that you wanted to talk about gender identity.

Gender identity

**Kyle** [00:04:39] Sure.

**Jen** [00:04:42] When did you first realize if you did, whether you did or not, you were not strictly cisgender, heterosexual?

**Kyle** [00:04:51] That's a good question. It's hard to, it's hard to really come up with a specific date. I think I always kind of knew. I just didn't have the words to describe where I was at. But even before I knew those words, I knew who I was. I existed as those identities. I grew up fairly like non-gendered, I guess. There wasn't any strict gender roles pushed on to me necessarily to the point where it was like oppressive, which I'm grateful for in a lot of ways. And so I guess there was never any pressure to be anyone other than who I was, or at least I wasn't aware of that. And so I kind of tapped into the community online and found out that there were folks who identified in a certain way, whether it

was like non-binary or trans or queer wasn't as popular back then but folks who probably would have identified as queer now online and I like immediately connected. It like really resonated with me. I was like, "Oh, this is what these feelings are that I can't name". And I almost immediately was like, "Okay, I guess this is who I am. I got to tell people now". So like a week later, I was like, "Hey, everyone, like hey, World". Because I thought nothing of it. I thought I wasn't too focused on like, societal view around sexuality or gender. So I thought it was just like, everyone would be like, "cool", but like, that wasn't exactly the case. I came out to my family and then I was out at school as queer for I mean, since then. And yeah, I guess forever is the question or is the answer.

**Jen** [00:06:52] Was there anyone else you knew or knew of who was not conventionally cisgender?

**Kyle** [00:06:57] No. Besides online. Yeah, but those people I didn't know personally, so.

**Jen** [00:07:08] Can you tell me more about how you understand your own gender?

**Kyle** [00:07:12] Yeah. In the simplest of terms, my sexuality is, like, interested or not interested, and my gender is just like, no, thank you. I don't really subscribe to gender. I don't know. Gender doesn't feel any type of way in my body. And so I don't have any way to identify with it. I know that I present it in a very like masculine way, which I recognize the privilege of. But internally I've just I've never felt any type of way. And I feel like even identities within, like the trans and non-binary community acknowledge gender too much for me. Which is why I'd rather just like full stop. Not engage or be involved and just call myself queer because it gives me room to like breathe and just be who I am without trying to fit into any type of box.

**Jen** [00:08:09] Um, and has that changed over the years? Over the years? And if so, how?

**Kyle** [00:08:15] Yeah. Again, I think queerness I mean, queerness as an identity has existed since like the eighties, but it's become more mainstream and more accepted since, I guess like 5 to 10 years ago. Even more recently, it's become much more accepted and commonly used. Before that, I sort of looked into gender nonconforming or fluid, or I've identified as gay and

Understanding gender

by basically any letter for the most part in the community. But queerness felt right. So I said all of that.

**Jen** [00:08:57] Okay.

**Rachel** [00:08:59] Um, so you said that you first came out to your family. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

**Kyle** [00:09:04] Sure. My family was sort of like there was a lot of like um there's a lot of drama there. And it was a very intense environment. And so I think probably of least concern was my sexuality and gender, especially coming from a home that wasn't deeply religious or conservative. I have that flexibility and room to grow in that way. My sister, my eldest sister was the first person I came out to and she's always been the most kind and warm and supportive person. She wasn't living with me at the time, so but it was over a phone call that I was like, "I think I might be bi" like, "what does this mean?" And she was very much like, "Yeah, I got friends that are like that. You're fine". Like, "it's going to be okay". And so it was nice to have that like first coming out experience be so positive. My other sister was a little bit resistant to it was in a group of friends that didn't necessarily support or promote that type of community. And so she had sort of internalized the ideas of being anything other than cis or heterosexual and how that was a wrong thing to be. But she's come around, she came around very quickly. My younger brother was probably the person to just brush it off and like a really casual, like, "Cool, let's play with Nerf guns" way. He's younger and I came out when I was 12, so there wasn't a lot that you could deeply talk about there. My father was worried. Very concerned about my safety and whether I would be lovable or whether I would be able to exist in the world in the same way that he does. And so he led with a lot of concern and like anxiety. And my mother wasn't necessarily present. My mother really struggles with mental health and at that time she happens to have borderline personality disorder. And so at the time, she wasn't mentally present for me to come out to her. I never actually did. But she heard one way or another through the family. And when she did, when she was able to recognize it and like was fully aware of what was happening, I think that she took it pretty well because she was also pansexual. And my four siblings are also in the community. So and then I was the first to come out, but eventually everyone ended up queer, so it worked out.

Coming out to family

**Rachel** [00:12:05] So you said you came out first to your family and then at school. Did you come out to your friends, teachers? How did that happen?

**Kyle** [00:12:13] I came out to two of my friends at the mall. We were in the food court and I was like, "I think I might be gay" because bi was a very short lived time. It was bi and then it was gay and then it was bi again then it was pan and sort of evolved in that way. But when I came out it was more like strictly gay to friends and they accepted me right away. It turns out that they were also in the community. I feel like we just tend to naturally gravitate towards each other in that way. But then when I came out at school, that was a big issue. Um. Teachers were not happy about how I present my gender. Teachers were not happy about how open I was, about my sexuality. And kids were really confused. They didn't really know what to do with me. I was a part of a couple of different like theater things, and we would go and do like overnights and they'd be like, "Where do we put him?" Like, "do we? We can't put him with the boys because something might happen. We can't put them with the girls because something might happen. So we're just going to isolate him". And so I spent a lot of my time at school being isolated because folks didn't know what to do with me. I also was fairly popular before I came out and then sort of immediately lost most of my friend group when I came out and ended up with two or three friends who stuck around and really accepted me for who I was, which was lovely.

**Rachel** [00:13:40] How did that isolation affect you?

**Kyle** [00:13:44] I think... That's a really good question. Let me think. In a lot of ways I think. Uh, I, I feel as though I am less likely to express myself emotionally or talk about myself in a space with unfamiliar people. I think that throughout high school I adopted the loner lifestyle, but sort of framed it in a way where I was like, "Well, I'm better than everyone anyway". Like, it was very it was a coping mechanism to say, "It's not you who doesn't want to hang out with me. I don't want to hang out with any of you". And I really had to unlearn that. And I think I have I feel as though I'm a very social person now, but mostly with other queer people because there is that commonality just like instantly, you know.

**Rachel** [00:14:48] So have your relationships with your family or friends changed since coming out?

Coming out at school

**Kyle** [00:14:55] I can't say that I have a lot of friends from when I first came out. I don't have any friends from high school. I don't have, I rarely I don't think I have any friends from college. A lot of the friends that I have the strongest relationships now come from my adult life post-graduation through queer connections, whether it's through the nonprofit that I founded or whether it's through friends of friends or events that I've organized, I've really built up a community where I can just unapologetically be myself. So those relationships have gone away, I guess since I've been out. I no longer speak with my parents. I'm pretty close to my siblings still. And this those relationships have remained pretty stable and consistent.

**Rachel** [00:15:48] Um. And the friends you have now, do you surround yourself more with the LGBTQ+ community or do you have more straight friends or...

**Kyle** [00:15:56] I think I roughly spend my time... I spend like 10% of my time with straight people, and most of them are my family. Um, most of my friends, if not all of my friends, are LGBTQ. Um, and I like it that way. So.

**Jen** [00:16:19] Okay, so you already answered a bunch of these.

**Kyle** [00:16:23] I know. I tend to elaborate. I feel like more info is better than less info. So you can pull what you need.

**Jen** [00:16:30] Um, so you did talk about how people in your high school reacted. I guess. Ah, my question is, were there any supportive resources at your school?

**Kyle** [00:16:50] None.

**Jen** [00:16:51] None?

**Kyle** [00:16:52] Well no one knew. I was the first person who had ever come out of my school, so there weren't any resources in place. The LGBTQ folks had hardly entered the mainstream. The only person that I can remember who is out as gay when I was 12 was probably like Chaz Bono. And he put out a book that was very like very much "my experience", but it felt almost like it was written to appeal to straight cis people. And so there wasn't a lot of, like, things that I could relate to there. Yeah, no, there weren't a lot of resources at all.

Queer friendships

School resources

**Jen** [00:17:32] Um, did you attend college? And if so, where?

College years

**Kyle** [00:17:36] Yes. USM.

**Jen** [00:17:39] What did you major in and why?

**Kyle** [00:17:41] I majored in linguistics with an American Sign Language Interpretation Focus and a deaf studies minor. I studied that because when I first moved here, there weren't a lot of classes available at the high school that I transferred to, and one of the classes available was ASL one, and I was like, "Why not?". And since then, it sort of became like my one passion through high school and into college. So naturally it kind of progressed into that. And I guess it worked out because I'm an interpreter now so.

**Jen** [00:18:19] Were you out on campus? And if so, what was that experience like?

**Kyle** [00:18:24] I was out on campus. I was a commuter student though, so I wasn't super emerged in the community here. I didn't have any issues at the college necessarily. I also identified a little bit differently, I think I just identified as like sexually fluid and cis for the most part. Yeah, I didn't. I didn't have any issues. The linguistics department happens to be very queer so it wasn't like I had to hide myself or anything.

**Rachel** [00:18:59] Where did you commute from?

**Kyle** [00:19:01] Portland. I lived in like six or seven different apartments in the four years I was in college so.

**Rachel** [00:19:07] What was that experience like?

**Kyle** [00:19:09] Terrible. I could go on and on about, like, Portland gentrification and the housing crisis and how it even existed, you know, when I was going to college, it was just it was it was so much trouble to find something that was affordable in Portland and somewhere where I felt safe with other roommates who I maybe didn't know, like roommates from Craigslist or something, I had to really filter to make sure that they weren't going to be discriminatory or rude. Um, I ended up just rooming with other queer roommates, so it worked out.

**Jen** [00:19:48] Side question.



<p><b>Kyle</b> [00:19:49] Side question.</p> <p><b>Jen</b> [00:19:51] What year did you graduate from college?</p> <p><b>Kyle</b> [00:19:53] 2020.</p> <p><b>Jen</b> [00:19:54] Okay. Um, were there any LGBTQ groups on campus or in the community? And if so, were you involved?</p> <p><b>Kyle</b> [00:20:04] I'm sure there were. Again, I was a commuter student, so I wasn't involved with any of the dorm room things at in Gorham. I wasn't really involved with any LGBTQ club here, um, but I wish I had been in a way. You know, just wasn't accessible.</p> <p><b>Rachel</b> [00:20:24] How do you think being a commuter affected your college experience?</p> <p><b>Kyle</b> [00:20:27] A lot. I think that commuting, especially if you have a full-time job and then you're doing full time college, makes it really challenging to get involved in the college community. I think that you are kind of looked at differently as someone who isn't always available around like student life. It was hard. I kind of feel as though college was a second job instead of college.</p> <p><b>Jen</b> [00:20:57] You mentioned that you worked and stuff. What did you do for work during college?</p> <p><b>Kyle</b> [00:21:03] So many customer service jobs, so many. I worked in the old port, I worked in kitchens and honestly, mostly like food places, markets. I liked to work at local places as opposed to corporate places because I felt like I had a little bit more control there. But yeah, I mean, dozens and dozens, maybe a dozen jobs.</p> <p><b>Rachel</b> [00:21:35] So when did you find or create a close circle of friends? And can you describe those friendships?</p> <p><b>Kyle</b> [00:21:42] I, after COVID, I guess that's when I really started to invest time into friendships. I think that I was so focused on work during college. I was I was working maybe 12 hours a day for like every day just to make ends meet and get through college. So I didn't really have time for people until afterwards. And I think COVID actually gave me the opportunity to really develop those friendships. Most of my friendships right</p>	<p>Queer resources on campus</p> <p>How commuting affects college experience</p> <p>Establishing friendships after graduation during COVID</p>
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now come from the organization that I developed, QueerlyME, whether it was through the photo shoots that I did with folks or whether it was from community organizing or the board that I constructed. It really is mostly from the organization. And those friendships mean so much to me because I think that it really takes another level of commitment to say, "Hey, we aren't forced into a regular environment every day. We're going to intentionally try and spend time together and learn more about each other because we like each other and making friends as adults is hard". Those, those friendships offer a lot of like mutual understanding and listening. I think when you meet other queer people, there's sort of an automatic connection in a lot of ways where you're able to... You don't necessarily have the same experience, but you can say, "you get it. I don't need to like overexplain myself". We can just like get to know each other beyond identity. Whereas I feel like sometimes with straight people there's a lot of over-explaining and like laying things out and being the educator so much of the time that it is kind of exhausting to maintain those relationships. So I guess it's mostly just that like mutual understanding for me and listening in part.

**Rachel** [00:23:46] Did you sense... Did your sense of yourself as queer affect your relationship with your friends? If so, could you tell me why or not tell me why?

**Kyle** [00:23:55] I think it affects how I make friends. I think I kind of already mentioned about like 90% of my friendships are queer and that is intentional. I relate so much more strongly with folks in the same community as me than folks outside of the community. And so just being innately LGBTQ gives me something that's a little bit more special than regular relationships like out in the world, I guess. Does that answer your question?

**Rachel** [00:24:33] Yes. Yes.

**Kyle** [00:24:33] Okay, cool.

**Jen** [00:24:36] My turn? Yeah. Okay. What has been your experience with doing activism or organizing?

**Kyle** [00:24:44] Organizing has been such an amazing experience. I started QueerlyME because I wanted to fill the gaps that I saw in the community. It's very hard to connect with a community where you don't know your entry point, and a lot of the entry points that exist right now are bars or clubs or nightlife

Experience with organizing

type of activities, which are fantastic and a wonderful way to meet people. For someone who gets very overstimulated, I wanted something different. And so my organizing consisted mostly of community building and outdoor environments. So we've organized different events like outdoor workshops like flower crown making or fairy houses or yoga or foraging Just Walk series. We've done these amazing weekend camping trips where you can truly see how ,how closely queer people are able to bond to each other based solely on mutual identity. I think it's just organizing has taught me that people are important. People are people can make or break you. People can completely change your life and not everything can be on you. Like sometimes when you're the people to get together to, like exist happily. Plus, like information sharing, resources, accessibility, visibility, all of these things add so much enrichment to people's lives. And I think the first step of setting that up is to get people together, so.

**Rachel** [00:26:32] You mentioned QueerlyME, your nonprofit. Could you tell us about that, how that came to be, what it's about, all that?

**Kyle** [00:26:42] Yeah, well, it started as a photo documentary in 2020. So everything shut down, I was working 12 hours or whatever, and then my job work kind of reduced to zero. School closed down because USM closed down and I was just sort of sitting at home alone like, I have no hobbies. I'm not a human. I'm just like a machine in this capitalistic society. And so I was thinking about what I could do with my time and I had a camera in my closet that I kept there for like ten years and I had never used. And I said, "Okay. This is a way to meet people" because it's one thing to be like, "Meet up with me, let's be friends", which is not something folks are always open to versus saying, "Look, I have a camera, let's do something together". We have a goal. That was the like facilitator for a connection for me at that time. And so I reached out on Facebook and I was like, "Does anyone want their photo taken? Like, I just want to chat and take your photo. It's just something I'm curious about". And seven people responded and then 40 and then it just kind of exploded. There was a lot of news coverage. There was, friends told friends, and it just grew to the point where I couldn't have ever imagined it growing. And eventually that's when I started to notice this gap. So I was like, "Okay, I'm talking to all these people, and this person wants this thing, but it doesn't exist here. And this person wants this thing but doesn't exist. I can do something about that. I want this thing. It doesn't exist. How can we fill the gaps?". And

QueerlyME

so I began doing camping trips and camping trips were... The response was incredible. Like, so many people wanted to just get together and camp and didn't have the right people in their lives to do it or just wanted to meet new people, didn't know how, and this was a great opportunity. And so we got together and through those camping trips I realized, "Oh, we can do like a lot more with this. We can do different events, we can do outdoor stuff, we can take the community outside of nightlife and like bring them into this like daytime activity through building thing". And so after a couple of different events, I was like, "Okay, this needs to be something more than it is". And that's when the organization was founded. Essentially QueerlyME operates on three fronts. We do queer visibility through photography. So all of our photo documentary is on our website, queerlyme.org, or our Instagram, @\_queerlyme. And that's where you're going to see people like you, they write their own captions and share their story. You can connect and like comment on each other's posts. It's a really good way to see what the community looks like here. We do resource accessibility, so that's through our website. We do a directory online of categorized resources by and for LGBTQ folks. So anything from folks in education that are queer to folks in business or health care or whatever have you. You can find resources there and like create a network for yourself for your most comfortable in and get what you need. And then the last thing that we do is community building, which is achieved through our events and our camping, which is ongoing. We're working with a lot of different land trusts right now and different entities to kind of do different activities and different things like that. But the goal of that is just to strengthen the community as a whole, which is, I think, something we do, especially outside of Portland, where like most of the ,the LGBTQ events are, we want to expand that. Okay. And they kind of all across main thing.

**Jen** [00:30:11] What has been the most rewarding aspect of work you've done for the queer community?

**Kyle** [00:30:18] Seeing people connect. Connection is everything to me. It's the way that I operate my life. It's it's the way that I find the most fulfillment and joy is just connecting with other people. And to see that happen between people I introduce or just within a community setting that I've organized is so uplifting. Um, I don't think we often see human connection happen in person in the moment as much, and it's just something that's really special.

Rewarding aspects of organizing

**Jen** [00:30:53] What is the most useful thing you've learned in regard to organizing?

**Kyle** [00:31:11] Two things. It is not up to the organizer to decide what is a safe space and what isn't. It's up to the individuals who are involved, especially in my position of privilege, where I am this white, cis looking person who is masculine presenting of a certain background. I can't then say, "Oh, you in these other communities you'll be safe. Don't worry". Like I. I can try and create a community space that is welcoming and kind and considerate. But it's ultimately up to those people what their boundaries are. And I think acknowledging that and respecting that has taken a lot of the pressure off. I think the other thing is that you do not have to be, uh, for everyone. Um. QueerlyME is queer centered and queerness to me has a very specific, uh, meaning beyond just an umbrella term for the community. And a lot of folks are saying, "Well, why are you queer centered? Why can't you be centered for this and this and that and valid? We need resources for everything", but ultimately it's okay to be centered around one thing. Um, you can't satisfy everyone, essentially.

**Jen** [00:32:50] So you mentioned that you wanted to talk more about resource accessibility. So how are you working towards this in your life and what do you think other people can do to work towards resource accessibility?

**Kyle** [00:33:02] I think Information Gatekeeping is a huge problem trying to keep things within a certain community or like a very loose environment. Information that might be useful elsewhere, I think is, is very harmful, especially for folks who are looking and looking for one resource and can't find it. But it is somewhere it's just not shared. And so I try and emphasize transparency and information sharing through the organization, whether it's the directory that we run or whether it is the, the highlight that we have in our Instagram profile. You can go onto our profile and click events and it will show you every single advertised event in Maine, not just under us, because we're not trying to compete with other organizations. We're trying to share information. Because people need this. They need to feel like they belong. They need to feel like they're connected. So both things are kind of how we try and achieve resource accessibility is through community event sharing. And whenever someone reaches out, sending them as many resources as they can and trying to get the word out and be like, "Hey, there's these. You

Resource  
accessibility

can, you can check out health care. You can check out education. Like you can check out if you need like a barber who is LGBTQ". Just sharing that and spreading word is super helpful.

**Rachel** [00:34:31] How has QueerlyME affected your life? Positive and if negative, negatively.

**Kyle** [00:34:39] Mostly positive, if not all positive. I think I would be in a very different place if I didn't start QueerlyME. I think that I would be a lot more lost and like not sure of what my passions are. I think I've evolved in the last two years. I think everyone has with COVID like it's really changed us in a way where our, our values and responsibilities are shifting. And I think my value is less in working to become successful and more in supporting and being involved in my community. And I think that is largely due to clearly me and its influence on me.

**Jen** [00:35:25] So before we were talking about the outdoors. What are ways that the outdoors can be made more LGBTQ friendly?

**Kyle** [00:35:34] Good question. I think that the outdoors have historically been a unsafe place for LGBTQ folks. There's a lot of associations with the outdoors of it being a more rural, conservative place with not a lot of ways to ask for help. You don't have to signal on your phone, what are you supposed to do if you run into someone who doesn't agree with how you look? I think that making the outdoors more friendly starts with community. It starts with being able to tap into resources where you can get together with a group and experience camping or experience canoeing or kayaking with folks who you know are, are like minded and understanding and accepting. I think it also is about making it more financially accessible for folks, whether it's through gear share libraries or waivers for national park fees. If a person happens to be Bipoc or Indigenous, they ask for these land acknowledgments that we hear about how indigenous people own this land that is their land, making sure that we're making that accessible to them in a way that includes acknowledgment of, "Oh, we've taken this land that is incredibly important". And I think also the Bipoc and Indigenous community overlap so much with the LGBTQ community that to support one is to support both or all. So yeah, making it more financially accessible, making it more socially accessible.

**Jen** [00:37:10] Why is this important to you?

Effect of QueerlyME

Making the outdoors more LGBTQ+ friendly

**Kyle** [00:37:16] I didn't grow up with community. I was I felt very alone for a long time and I hadn't seen LGBTQ folks growing up. And so I hadn't made the assumption pretty early on that if you are queer, your life is short because there's no other reason why I wouldn't be seeing LGBTQ folks. Obviously, they're all just dying in horrible ways. And I mean, part of that is due to the AIDS and HIV crisis. There were a lot of older LGBTQ folks who died. And so there isn't a lot of representation in that way. But part of it, too, is visibility. I think that the reason why this work is so important to me is because I didn't have these things. I didn't have visibility growing up. I didn't have access to resources at all. I didn't have a community. If I can make that change for someone else in rural Maine or anywhere in Maine so they feel less alone. That makes a huge difference to me.

**Rachel** [00:38:31] So what are you passionate about in terms of culture and the arts?

**Kyle** [00:38:36] In general?

**Rachel** [00:38:38] Yeah.

**Kyle** [00:38:44] Oh. Funnily enough, I'm not super into photography. I think a lot of people think that the driving force of the organization is photography, but it's more of a facilitator to just be able to document folks. I think the arts, for me at least my passions extend to like documentation and archiving of moments and people in whatever form that takes. And culturally, it's more of a social thing for me. I love queer culture. I like that there are certain aspects of queer culture that are super unique and specific that could only be really understood between queer people. Yeah, I guess it's more socially for me in the sort of archival things.

**Rachel** [00:39:38] So you've said that during COVID you found a camera and a closet and that's how you got back into photography. How did... How did you get that camera? How did that start?

**Kyle** [00:39:50] I got it for Christmas when I was like 11 or 12 because I wanted one. I don't think I fully understood what I wanted to do with it. I think I was like, "That's cool" and really wanted it and I asked for it for Christmas and I fortunately got it. But I think at the time so much was going on, I never really got to explore it. And so it just kind of like sat around forever. Yeah.

Culture and the arts

Photography

**Rachel** [00:40:24] And then you found it in your closet, and that's how it...

**Kyle** [00:40:26] Yeah, I mean, I brought it with me because I always had the intention to use it. I feel like I... the idea of photography was appealing to me. But I never got around to it. But I brought it with me everywhere. So obviously there was something inside happening that was like, "You're going to use this someday". And I guess it worked out.

**Rachel** [00:40:51] We talked about your nonprofit, Queerly Maine. So why did you decide to start QueerlyME?

[00:40:59] I kind of, I think I already answered this, but so I'll keep it short. But essentially, the photo doc was becoming much more than a photo doc. It was becoming like an event organizing entity and directory and so many other things. And at some point in time it was like, "This has to be more than a photo doc". I also acknowledged and came to the realization that it wasn't sustainable to do it alone, especially with the lack of funding. But it was receiving at the time. It was wearing me out. I was doing everything by myself. And so part of it was sustainability and part of it was just the natural growth of it as a nonprofit will be able to eventually hopefully achieve 501C3 status, which essentially gives us access to federal grants and state grants, which is going to be massively helpful in developing our our programs and our organizations so much more than just me now. So I think I needed to be that way to continue to exist.

**Rachel** [00:42:09] So what have been the responses to your nonprofit?

**Kyle** [00:42:14] Folks seem to really enjoy it. I think that queer, as a word, is still very divisive, and I think the few folks have reached out to say, "Well, I don't like the use of the word queer", and I think that's valid in its own right. I think there's a lot of history of queerness being used as a derogatory term, and a lot of folks still have that, that association with the word. But what I try to convey and remember is that queerness isn't just a word anymore. It's an identity. And identity can be separate from community. So when we say "I don't like the word queer", what we're ultimately saying is, "I don't like queer people" because identity is integral to who you are. And I think that conversation is ongoing. But right now, we're trying to, to be the organization that is this part of leading that conversation. We're trying to say

Why QueerlyME was started



"queerness is important" and is in and of itself an identity that people have to solely describe themselves. And that is valid. But overall, the response has been incredibly positive. Folks have made really strong connections. People who go on these camping trips come back and a year later are still hanging out with the same people they met on the camping trip. So you see these long lasting connections and you see folks really get the resources they need. It seems to be useful and beneficial for people, and that's why we keep doing it.

**Jen** [00:43:49] Okay. What are some of your favorite queer businesses in Maine?

**Kyle** [00:43:53] Oh. Good question. I could, like, pull up my list, I think, off the top of my head. Businesses, not organizations. Businesses?

**Jen** [00:44:07] Whatever.

**Kyle** [00:44:10] I really enjoy the smaller businesses. We're working with Little Chair Printing, which is a queer owned screen printing business. They do fantastic work and a lot of social activism is embedded in their business model, which is fantastic. Um. Oh gosh. Can I pull up a list? I got to like remember. Oh, Lucky Fox bookshop is lovely. That's a queer-owned bookshop that's like roaming and like rotates different fairs and Ash, the owner, is a fantastic person and has a lot of accessibility to LGBTQ centric books that aren't necessarily focused around like identity itself, but just like people who are LGBTQ existing, which is so important to have access to. There's a lot of different organizing groups that are fantastic. Sapphic Saturday is lovely. It's a good space. It's like a pop up bar that focuses on gender non-conforming, non-binary and lesbian individuals getting together. And there's like such a lack of lesbian bars across the US that just having that space is so, so important. Queers on Quads is a roller skating group that organizes around roller skating. They're fantastic. It's just volunteer work. So the fact that they're able to keep it going, it's like really impressive. There are a lot of great youth organizations right now. There's Portland Out Right, there's Out Maine, there's Camp Fire Institute, Maine Transnet is lovely. I could I could keep going. But like, this is, like Queer Craft Maine is like all about artists. They get together. There's so many different organizations. And that's the thing is I feel like the this information isn't shared enough. Like, there has to be a place where you can just access all these social groups and really get to know people. I'm just going to make sure I'm

Favorite queer business and organizations

not missing anyone. There's quite a lot, there's Kindling Collective, which is a super new one, which is a queer old gear library that's opening up for folks who want to access camping gear or hiking gear. I think that's fantastic. There's Plant Office which is a plant shop. There's a lot of things. There's lots, yeah.

**Rachel** [00:46:55] How do you think the queer community has changed since when you first moved to Maine versus now?

**Kyle** [00:47:00] It's changed in a lot of good ways, I think. I think that it's hard for me to say objectively because the queer community works in a very interesting way here. It is simultaneously so, so small. Everyone knows each other and at the same time we operate in bubbles. But you know your queer people, but then there's 100 other bubbles or you don't know anyone. But they're all a part of the same community. It's just not your social bubble. And so my social bubble, when I first entered the queer community, was like very party centric, older, cis, white, gay men. And I think I've deviated from that community slightly into a more queer community. I think that I've just been naturally exposed to a lot more people who have always been here. But I think what's really positive that's changing specifically in Portland is that the folks who are moving up here that are queer are, there's more Bipoc queer people. There's folks from different backgrounds that aren't just Mainers coming up here and offering so much insight and perspective in a community that has historically been pretty, what's the word? Monotonous. So we're seeing a lot more diversity and really positive, awesomely as because I feel like as soon as we get more diversity, we start to see the community change in a way where it's more welcoming, more accepting, more open and more easily accessible for folks.

**Jen** [00:48:43] So you mentioned queer nightlife a little bit. Do you go to queer bars?

**Kyle** [00:48:53] Well, there's one queer bar. There's actually a couple, but there are kind of dispersed. There's one in Bangor. There's one in Hallowell. There's like there's a couple of, like, quiet queer bars. I don't go to queer bars as much as I go to queer events. So like pop up at Gino's Club, Gino's, Gino's. That's becoming a big hub for burlesque and drag in those communities emerging pretty consistently, which is so cool. You're seeing like Curbside Queens do drag shows, but it's mostly revolving events that I'm seeing as opposed to like brick and mortar places to go like a bar. I moved out of Portland this

How queer community in Maine has evolved

Queer nightlife

summer to Brunswick, and that's made it exponentially more hard to get involved in the community here because everything is very late at night, sometimes on weekdays, which is an interesting choice and just nothing comes outside of Portland. So I guess less so I've been involved, but historically I've, I've gone to events mostly.

**Jen** [00:49:56] And why are those spaces important for you?

**Kyle** [00:50:00] Community. I, I still feel uncomfortable and unsafe in a lot of environments that aren't like explicitly queer. I still have to judge whether or not I can like show affection towards my partner or how I can interact with the bartender or how I interact with people around me because there's, there's a certain code switching that happens. I think I don't need a code switch when I'm in a queer space. I can instead just be myself as opposed to being like, "Hi, I am straight, give me a drink or whatever". Like it's. I don't do that. And it's less exhausting.

**Rachel** [00:50:45] So you mentioned your partner. Do you mind telling us a little bit about that?

**Kyle** [00:50:48] Yeah. They are the, the best person in the entire world. Like, hands down. He is a deeply compassionate, thoughtful, intelligent, kind person, and I am incredibly lucky to have him. I don't think I would have ever found anyone as good as him in the time that I've been alive.

**Rachel** [00:51:18] So how did you guys meet?

**Kyle** [00:51:21] Tinder You know, it happens, which is like super surprising because I feel like Tinder is a bit of a wasteland sometimes. It's like real rough. And I've had a couple of not so great Tinder experiences. I think we all have had bad dates before. That's common. But yeah, in an unexpected place, we, we connected. It was during COVID. So we've been together for a little bit over two years, but we met in September 2020. But we had talked a month prior, just like over the phone. And so we hadn't met each other until a month later. And yeah, no, he's like he's perfect. So.

**Rachel** [00:52:06] How do you think apps like Tinder dating apps affect the queer community?

**Kyle** [00:52:13] I think that the apps, apps very great way to connect with the community when COVID is happening. When

Relationship with partner

Meeting his partner

it's hard to get in-person. I think it's also a way for folks to meet when they wouldn't typically meet, like just as they go different ways in life, you know? So it's a great connective resource. I think that sometimes when apps are overused, we have a tendency to dehumanize people. Not necessarily like an oppressive way, but in a way where it's just another photo that you see on the screen or, you know, it's a conversation you have once and you never really follow up or consider that other person. I think we have a way of disconnecting with online folks that is different from how we can talk in person. I think that also with dating apps, especially during COVID, folks in the queer community were more apt to give it more time before like meeting in person or solidifying a relationship. You know, the term is U-Hauling. We tend to do it pretty fast. The queer stereotype, which is true in a lot of cases, is that we move really fast in relationships. And I think that dating apps during the time of COVID gave us time to say, "Okay, let me actually get to know this person" which I think benefited us in a way. So there's pros and cons.

**Rachel** [00:54:01] Is your partner as involved in the queer community as you are or is that more of your thing and they have their own thing?

**Kyle** [00:54:07] He is the president of the board for QueerlyME, so he operates in similar spaces to me. He's also a fantastic assistant. He carries my camera. He helps me with like photo design, whatever I need. So he is incredibly helpful in that way, but I don't think he is as involved in the LGBT community as me.

**Jen** [00:54:33] Is there anything we haven't asked you about that you would like to share before we end the interview?

**Kyle** [00:54:45] I don't think so. I think we covered a lot of bases.

**Jen** [00:54:54] Do you have more questions?

**Rachel** [00:54:55] Let me just look through real quick.

**Kyle** [00:54:57] Yeah, take your time.

**Rachel** [00:55:13] I don't think so.

**Jen** [00:55:15] Okay.

How dating apps have transformed queer dating

Partner's involvement in queer community

Closing and thank you

**Rachel** [00:55:16] All right.

**Kyle** [00:55:17] Okay.

**Rachel** [00:55:17] Thank you for doing this interview with us.

**Jen** [00:55:18] Yeah, thank you so much.

**Kyle** [00:55:20] Thank you. Yeah, of course. Any time.