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Harley Maxbauer, Interview, 2023

Elizabeth Allen

Eastern Michigan University Archives, Oral histories

Interview with Harley Maxbauer (HM), conducted by EMU graduate student Elizabeth Allen (EA), on November 15, 2023, at the LGBT Resource Center on EMU's campus, for the LGBTRC's "Queer Stories" series.

Transcribed by Kat Hacanyan

EA:

So today is Wednesday, November 15, 2023. This is Eastern Michigan University graduate student, Elizabeth Allen, and I'm here in the LGBT resource center on EMU's campus with Harley Maxbauer. Harley's a student here at EMU, here to share his story about being queer and trans for the LGBTRC's "Queer Stories" series. He has already done this interview, and I failed to hit the right button. So, we're going to ask him the questions again. Welcome, and thank you so much for joining me twice. So, back to the top. What were some of the childhood memories you had of being trans?

HM:

Well, the earliest one was assuming I was a boy and that everybody else had made a mistake, simply from the drawing my mother showed me differentiating boys between girls. Obviously, it didn't make a whole lot of sense to me at probably like three, four. So I just kind of figured, "Well, I feel like a boy, so that must be the right one." And that was a feeling that continued my whole life, was that just something had gone wrong, and I wasn't what I was supposed to be.

EA:

Okay, yeah. What brought you to Eastern?

HM:

Well, it was something I'd planned on in high school. I went to a community college instead because I wanted to stay near my home. And then after that, I was like, "Well, I'll go to UofM [University of Michigan] I didn't get into UofM. And I was like, "Alright, there's EMU!" So I tried EMU and I got in.

EA:

And you did some research on EMU before coming here?

HM:

Sorta, I had what I learned in high school from the, I guess table, you'd call it that was hosted at a college fair, which was whatever literature they handed out.

EA:

How involved have you been with the queer community here on campus?

HM:

I'd like to say pretty involved. I've tried to make an effort to go to each and every on campus and sometimes off campus event. Whether it was through the queer club, Crystal Queers, or through the LGBTRC. I am part of the discord, for the club Crystal Queers.

EA:

Yeah. And you had mentioned before, kind of hoping to see them do some more events, and things like that?

HM:

Yeah, just more in, in person kind of things. Because, I mean, anybody who's not part of the discord, will obviously not know what's going on, which can limit students involvement. I know from the few times that people have done something in person or put something out there saying, "This is something we do," we have more people join because, they can go out on their own looking for the club.

EA:

What are some of the events that they've had in the past?

HM:

Well, the very first one was the barbecue, the BBQueer which I think was through the RC [Resource Center]. And there were a few small events from the Crystal Queer club, usually here in the student center, like, "make your own pride flag," and get togethers, really low-key stuff.

EA:

So obviously, you're aware of the kind of anti-trans and anti-queer legislation that's been introduced? How have you been practicing self care in this time?

HM:

The most self-care I really get when I'm in these kinds of scenarios where trans hate seems inescapable, is being around other queer and trans people, because I mean, community's one of those things where—it's easy to get defeated, and when you're around a bunch of people who are like you, it's a much safer feeling. You're just reminded that you're not alone. And there's power in groups and all that.

EA:

Yeah. Can you describe what trans joy means to you?

HM:

Well, trans joy to me. I mean, I know the term "euphoria," trans-euphoria, so I'm assuming that's kind of the same idea. I mean, I guess they're a little different, but anyway. Just gender affirming stuff was the main thing in my earliest stages that brought me a lot of joy, other than the acceptance I got from my family that I mean, obviously, that was good. As I'm further into my transition, I still get gender affirming joy but not as I did when the changes were dramatic is with the community, it's being around other queer and trans people and, talking to them, hanging out with them, just sharing, and expressing together. Just knowing that there are other people like you and that you're not alone, and that we all have this thing that connects us.

EA:

And you had mentioned, kind of some of those specific moments of euphoria earlier in your transition. Can you talk a little bit about that?

HM:

Yes. I was 17 when my mom gifted me a trip to San Francisco for top surgery. And not only was it exciting to be in the Castro District, which you know, is the gay Mecca, basically. But just the top surgery was an incredible feeling. I mean, any qualms I had beforehand about what kind of results I may get. They did not hold up afterward. I didn't worry about scars afterward; I was just so overjoyed to have the flat feeling and not feel like my body was morphed into something I wasn't agreed to. That brought an incredible amount of joy, and it still brings a lot of joy.

EA:

What would you like to leave on the record for future generations?

HM:

It's okay to be scared. And I would expect anybody to be scared. But continue to do things scared. You'll, you'll never improve, you'll never get anywhere if you let fear stop you completely. You can do things and still be afraid. I mean, look at haunted houses, people go to those and they're scared of those. But they come out the other end, and they're like, "that was great! I had a lot of fun." Or maybe they didn't have a lot of fun, but either way they had the experience. And that's kind of applicable to anything is to go out there and experience things because you don't know what might happen. You don't want to be in a spot where you say, "I really wished I had done XYZ."

EA:

Okay, well, thank you so much for doing this twice. So sorry, again, but it was great both times.

HM:

I hope the second try was a little more verbose.

EA:

You did a great job on both. So yeah, thank you so much.