

**Samantha** [00:00:00] I want to remind you that you can refuse to answer any question and can end the interview at any point. If you feel near the end of the interview you'd like more time, you can either conclude the interview at the end of the 90 minutes or schedule a follow up interview for the fall or spring

**Samantha** [00:00:16] This is the 20th of November at the Glickman Library in Portland, Maine. My name is Samantha Rouillard. S A M A N T H A R O U I L L A R D. Can you please spell your name?

Portland

**Johannah** [00:00:40] My name is Johannah Burdin, and it's J O H A N N A H . And Burdin is B U R D I N

Johannah Burdin

**Samantha** [00:00:49] Do you have any other name you'd like to use?

**Johannah** [00:00:51] No. Johanna is it.

**Samantha** [00:00:53] Perfect. And how old are you? Or which decade were you born?

**Johannah** [00:00:58] Fifty Three.

**Samantha** [00:01:00] And what are your pronouns?

**Johannah** [00:01:02] She/Her.

<p><b>Samantha</b> [00:01:04] And what's your sexual orientation?</p> <p><b>Johannah</b> [00:01:07] That's a good question. But I would say lesbian or yeah lesbian</p> <p><b>Samantha</b> [00:01:11] Got it.</p> <p><b>Johannah</b> [00:01:11] lesbian? I don't know. anyway, but lesbian.</p> <p><b>Samantha</b> [00:01:15] Oh, it's okay if that's what you're comfortable with and what race or ethnicity, and/or, do you identify with?</p> <p><b>Johannah</b> [00:01:25] White.</p> <p><b>Samantha</b> [00:01:27] Alrighty. Where were you born and where did you grow up?</p> <p><b>Johannah</b> [00:01:29] I was born in Dover, Foxcroft, Maine, and grew up in Sebec Maine. My house was about ten miles out of Dover.</p> <p><b>Samantha</b> [00:01:38] Have you lived in Maine your whole life? Have you ever moved around?</p> <p><b>Johannah</b> [00:01:41] I have not lived elsewhere. I studied in India when I was in college and I travel some, but Maine has always been home base.</p>	<p>Lesbian</p> <p>Dover, Foxcroft, and Sebec Maine</p> <p>India</p>
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**Samantha** [00:01:49] India. I actually would really love to hear more about that if you'd like to share.

**Johannah** [00:01:54] Sure. I studied away with a program with my college, called a term Abroad and spent a semester in Madurai, which is south of Chennai. What was known then as Madras for a semester. And it was a really wonderful experience.

**Samantha** [00:02:11] Wow. What kind of work did you do over there?

**Johannah** [00:02:14] I was studying like, so I was learning languages, learned some Indian history and did a kind of interesting projects around women and birth rituals, which was really cool. I had a great time with friends, but it was really wonderful.

**Samantha** [00:02:31] Do you use anything that you learned in that experience in your educating today?

**Johannah** [00:02:36] I think I learned so much. It's hard to like pick one thing, but I definitely have my love of travel and my comfort with travel and like learning about the people I was born there, so to speak.

**Samantha** [00:02:46] That's wonderful. very cool. Well, I guess we're going to switch up a little bit and start with the big stuff. When did you first come out as a lesbian or as a queer person?

Madurai  
Chennai

Women's Birth Rituals

Coming Out  
Queer  
Lesbian

<p><b>Johannah</b> [00:02:59] I would say I came out I knew in high school that I was attracted to women, but I probably didn't come out until my sophomore year of college.</p>	
<p><b>Samantha</b> [00:03:08] And did you decide to come out to loved ones like family or a chosen family or your friends or both?</p>	<p>Coming Out Family</p>
<p><b>Johannah</b> [00:03:16] I chose to come out to my friends to like, close friends first, but pretty quickly to my mom, who was pretty great. And then and then to an extended family. I've always been pretty out and didn't have struggle with being an out person. I think thanks to the many people before me, that made it easy for me. And I think at the time when I was growing up, it was much harder to be a gay man than a lesbian, but I wasn't trying to pass as straight, but kind of passed as straight so that wasn't just I didn't face as much overt discrimination as a young person, at least.</p>	<p>Chosen Family</p> <p>Passing</p> <p>Discrimination</p>
<p><b>Samantha</b> [00:03:47] And would you say your life drastically changed or not so much?</p>	
<p><b>Johannah</b> [00:03:51] I would not say. It's an interesting question. I would say not drastically changed. I mean, over time, maybe has, but not like not initially.</p>	
<p><b>Samantha</b> [00:04:01] Sure. And who did you feel most supported by during the process of coming out?</p>	<p>Support</p>
<p><b>Johannah</b> [00:04:07] I think my friends at college, many of whom were also queer or wondering if they were gay or lesbian, and then I'd say my mom was very my mom was also very supportive.</p>	<p>Mother Chosen Family</p>

<p><b>Samantha</b> [00:04:18] Well, all kind of spaces did you meet your friends were they in clubs? Classes? Both?</p>	<p>College</p>
<p><b>Johannah</b> [00:04:22] Uh, classes. Just dormitory. And then I did belong to the Gay Lesbian Queer Association at my college and actually went to visit other colleges quite a bit, too, with some friends. So those kinds of things as well.</p>	<p>College Dorms</p>
<p><b>Samantha</b> [00:04:39] Yeah, that sounds important. Did you get to meet a lot of new people that you maybe ended up networking with later in life through that?</p>	<p>Networking Meeting Queers</p>
<p><b>Johannah</b> [00:04:47] Not so much later. Like there were some people that I was already friends with or became friends with because of those two groups, but actually not a lot of like a queer kind of family or just sort of experiences and fun together. Not as much like networking for them for the future.</p>	<p>Fun Nightlife</p>
<p><b>Samantha</b> [00:05:05] And do you think being a part of things like that help shaped your trajectory in life or lead you down certain paths you might not have expected when you were younger?</p>	
<p><b>Johannah</b> [00:05:16] I think it helped me just be more comfortable in my bones that there were a variety of gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, queer, that there were a variety of people and that I could be one of them just as myself. I didn't have to be different than I already was to count as a lesbian count as a queer person. To enjoy my life that way, those were the things I enjoyed the most.</p>	<p>LGBTQ+</p>
<p><b>Samantha</b> [00:05:43] So you went to college. Where did you go to college?</p>	<p>College</p>

**Johannah** [00:05:47] I went to Bowdoin College. What year did you graduate? 1992.

Bowdoin College  
Class of 1992

**Samantha** [00:05:51] 92. What was going on that year when you graduated college? You emerged into the world, and what is it like?

**Johannah** [00:05:57] That's a great question. Um. That I think is exactly what was going on. I think I you know, I actually would have to think back to like what was going on politically to remember. Exactly. I think I mean, I'm concerned about having a job and that kind of thing, rightfully so, like not worrying about my focusing on my relationships and dating relationships and that kind of thing. I also happen to have an accident right after my the week after I graduated college, during which I, as a result of which I lost my arm. So I spent a lot of that summer and fall recovering from that injury. So when I think about the, like when I think about the early 90s, I think about that more than necessarily the exact political context I was in. Although, you know, ACTUP was necessary, right? The AIDS crisis was still happening. There were still a lot of people not being accepted for being from loving people in the same gender. I mean, there were those things were still going on.

Politics  
Job Search

Accident  
Disability  
Trauma

ACTUP  
AIDS

AIDS Crisis

**Samantha** [00:07:04] Yeah. Sounds like a lot of pain and grief, honestly. Would you feel comfortable talking more about your experience losing your arm, or would you like to move on to something else?

**Samantha** [00:07:14] I dont know if that's relevant really for this so much I mean, like it was a traumatic experience, but I'm also very happy to I was very happy to be alive and still felt happy. Happy to be alive. And so I think that's but I just feel very I feel very lucky that things didn't go in different way, you know, for that accident when I was in a good place for good. But yeah.

Trauma  
Losing a Limb

Survived

**Samantha** [00:07:36] That's really important to be able to recognize and experience that. Well, I guess I should have asked, What's your major? I was in college.

**Samantha** [00:07:47] Women's studies. And English literature, so both I double majored, so I've always been interested in what I mean. Women's rights are closely followed by queer rights, disability rights, like just social justice in general.

**Samantha** [00:08:06] And you're a counselor, correct? At Portland High School right now.

**Johannah** [00:08:11] Yep, I'm a school counselor.

**Samantha** [00:08:11] Did you intend on being a counselor when you were in college?

**Johannah** [00:08:16] No, that's not I know I wasn't sure what I wanted to be, but I did not necessarily think I would become a school counselor. Took me a while longer to decide to do that. Yeah.

**Samantha** [00:08:27] Alright, let's see. What kind of other activities did you participate in in college? I know you mentioned that ACTUP would be a significant...

**Johannah** [00:08:39] And that was after college. I mean, like I knew about ACTUP during but I really didn't participate in that after so the transition I was kind of like going to the Women's Association and ah, I don't remember what we call ourselves anymore, but the gay and lesbian group I know early on I was part of that kind of for a while the AfroAm which was the African American Students Union, because I was interested as a white person who wanted to be an

Women's Studies  
English Literature

Women's Rights  
Queer Rights  
Disability Rights  
Social Justice

High School Counselor  
Portland High School

Employment

ACTUP

Women's Association  
AfroAm  
African American  
Students Union  
Ally

ally. So even though, like you, you could go to some meetings and be an ally and other meetings, I did go, you know, I did not go to attend that kind of thing.

**Samantha** [00:09:20] Yeah. Learning boundaries. Well, moving into activism, you listed a couple different movements or organizations you are a part of, such as Equal Protection Portland, Outright, Maine Won't Discriminate, and Portland Pride or Maine Pride. Can you tell me about some significant moments you felt during these experiences, or which movement you felt like changed you the most?

**Johannah** [00:09:52] It's a great question. I would say there are a lot of people working on like equal protection portland and Maine won't discriminate and fewer people doing the organizing around ACTUP Portland, although a lot of people joined in, like a lot of people would join for the for the actions or for the protests, but not necessarily, you know, try to help organize from start to finish. So I think I felt really, really positively about sort of making a difference in terms of Aids and HIV awareness, in terms of like discrimination and insurance, in terms of safer sex, access to safer sex information and condoms and that kind of thing for high school students or just for young people in general. There were lots of different. Lots of different protest organizers are kind of contending with other groups. So but I think just trying to be a good ally, short term, mostly men having sex with men that really were in crisis because of AIDS or HIV.

**Samantha** [00:10:59] Absolutely. How did it feel to be a part of these groups and to be with people who care as deeply about these things?

**Johannah** [00:11:09] I think it was really it was fun, honestly, too, and really affirming to me and feeling like you could make a difference or make a splash that might make a difference. So maybe, you know, sometimes it didn't seem like we were making an actual difference, but maybe by calling attention to something, we

Equal Protection  
Portland

Outright

Maine Won't  
Discriminate

Portland Pride

Maine Pride

AIDS

HIV

Awareness

Activism

Safe Sex

Ally



could and would. So I thought that the kind of theater that like sort of the actions themselves to get the attention was a pretty it was creative and fun and I just had a lot of fun. I really enjoyed the people I was around and there were a lot of really great actors with really great ideas about how to do things. And I even belonged to a small group ACTUP Portland, because ACTUP Portland, and ACTUP Maine were two different organizations, and there was a splintering before I came along. So I don't even remember the particulars for that. I just I just happened to join ACTUP Portland. I was really I was proud to be part of that organization. And it was just it was fun. And I do feel like we, you know, we think we made a difference.

Creativity  
Organizing  
ACTUP Portland  
ACTUP Maine

**Samantha** [00:12:12] And so important. Did you make any friendships or relationships that you still maintain today?

**Johannah** [00:12:18] Yes, definitely. People I'm still friends with today for sure.

**Samantha** [00:12:22] Do they happen to be any of the people that you listed? I want to find the names. I know that one of them is Erica Rand.

Erica Rand

**Johannah** [00:12:34] Yeah, definitely. Erica was definitely one of them. And then Jed Bell was another person that was in ACTUP Portland. And Sue Enos, I try to remember there were lots of other people that my Del Wilson, who was part of the group for a while, and there were many people that always came to the events but didn't necessarily help planned if that makes sense. Lots of people came for, you know, came to the action parts.

Sue Enos  
Del Wilson  
Organizing

**Samantha** [00:13:04] Yeah. Funny enough about Erica Rand is she comes into my place of work very frequently and she recently dyed her hair hot pink and it looks amazing. I just thought that was a funny connection. Oh, I wanted to ask you, did you take part? So I

know that civil disobedience was kind of central to things like ACTUP. Did you partake in things like a die-in?

**Johannah** [00:13:29] Yes. We totally partook, is that the right verbiage? Anyway. Yes, definitely. I did participate in die-ins and taking up room on the street and and both and getting trained and helping train others to like what our rights were, what we could do, what we shouldn't do, when and if we ever needed to like notify city or police you know, the where we were or not and like what our lines were and what could happen. And then what would happen if we did get arrested and what we needed to do. So yeah, definitely.

**Samantha** [00:14:01] Yeah. And my research that I was able to do in special collections, I read some newspaper clippings of people having adverse feelings about ACTUP and protesters and what they were doing. How did it feel to read that people were angry that you were trying to help others?

**Johannah** [00:14:27] I think I was angry and still am about like social injustice anyway. So if anything, I didn't mind. And I was I was kind of appreciated getting a response. Any kind of response was, okay, if that makes sense. But I think that if people are uncomfortable or people are talking about it, that's where you'll get movement anyway. Even if you lose some people, that think you're being too much. Others will start to think about it more and make some more. Not that this was my goal, but it makes it easier for the more moderate people to also help me change many people at the same table if there's someone on the far back on the far side. So I. I wasn't really offended. I kind of enjoyed that if that makes sense i kind of enjoyed that people were a little bit a little bit or a lot of bit uncomfortable and they might have been inconvenienced for a little while.

**Samantha** [00:15:19] Mm Yeah, I love it. Were there any, you know, significant memories or moments that stood out to you during that time that you carry with you?

Civil Disobedience

Die-Ins

Educating

Die-Ins

Organizing

Special Collections

ACTUP

Newspaper

Responses to ACTUP

Offending Behavior

Reactions

**Johannah** [00:15:29] I try to remember because I was telling my friends that I didn't remember like dates or specific actions so much as some of that, some of the friendships, the personal things, like with people in that group of friends in the small group, but also in the that came to the actions of that kind of thing. I remember quite a few die-ins I thought were really good, like well planned and good. I remember a letter from dropping off and giving condoms to High school students were trying to really push like education or education and access to condoms for high school students. So that was pretty fun too. I think protesting some insurance companies policies and in Portland was really great. There were I mean, there were many, many actions we did about really, really enjoying so many of them honestly and maybe not one in particular.

Access to Education  
Protesting  
Insurance Companies and Policies

**Samantha** [00:16:17] Yeah. What do you think about Portland from then? From the ACTUP 90s to Portland now? Do you see a lot of change in things like community engagement and activism?

Community engagement/activism

**Johannah** [00:16:32] It's a good question. I really should have looked at some of these questions before more carefully. I don't let's see. I mean, I think that queer people and gay lesbian people, like I think they're is good insurance and good good care for people with Aids and HIV. There's good education about how to prevent getting HIV. I mean, I think all of those things haven't really wildly changed. I changed. And medication, if you do happen to consider all those things, I think you have changed. And I think there's acceptance on many levels of GLBTQ you or I or all queer people is is really different. And then some things haven't changed as much like I don't, um, I try to be a good ally to bipoc people, to, you know, homeless people, whoever it might be. So I think a lot of things have changed, but we still have a long way to go on having social justice for all as well.

Change  
Portland 1990s  
Medication  
GLBTQ

**Samantha** [00:17:37] Absolutely. What was the 1990s gay culture like? You know, outside of the activism, which was so integral and

Gay Culture

<p>important, but like the fun, you know, the nightlife. Tell me more about that.</p>	<p>1990s</p>
<p><b>Johannah</b> [00:17:53] So I think that it was I, I believe that a lot of gay, lesbian, queer culture was focused on bars, that there weren't as many coffee shops, the Internet didn't exist to have all kinds of, you know, like meet ups and that kind of thing that like people had access to now, so it was a lot of going up to bars and meeting dancing, but meeting people out at bars, whether that was at bars that were focused on gay men or bars that were really focused on lesbians or women loving women, I think that that was a really important that those spaces exist. And and I spent a lot of time with them. And I'm not someone that I'm not judging the people who are drinking but I'm not a big drinker, but culturally, it's like if I wanted to meet people or be around people in my community, that's where I would go.</p>	<p>Bars</p> <p>Gay Bats</p> <p>Women Loving Women</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>Community</p>
<p><b>Samantha</b> [00:18:40] Absolutely. You mentioned Sister's Bar, the Underground or Limelight. There are a couple different names that I found looking for that place. What made these places significant for you?</p>	<p>Sister's Bar</p> <p>Limelight</p> <p>Underground</p>
<p><b>Johannah</b> [00:18:53] I think that just a lot of people that were out and about your identified as queer was important. I think that there are places where people really just support and care about each other. They were just all there dance places, too. So there was a time you could meet people to possibly date so often that was fun as well. I definitely felt a big allyship with with my with gay men and with queer people of all kinds. So that was really fun. And it was really like one of the only places to it was really one of the only places to meet people.</p>	<p>Dancing</p> <p>Allyship</p> <p>Fun</p> <p>Meeting People</p>
<p><b>Samantha</b> [00:19:29] Yeah. What kind of I'm interested in learning more, a little bit more about you as a queer woman. Like what was your scene? And you are you like a queer goth or like a granola queer?</p>	

**Johannah** [00:19:46] Sure where I fit exactly, but more granola queer than goth for sure.

**Samantha** [00:19:49] Sure. I mean, boxes are silly.

**Johannah** [00:19:52] More granola and more political, I would say. Um. Um. Yeah. Not as into the party scene, although I attended the party scene, but I think more hoping, hoping to change the world and more interested in people that were hoping to change the world but also spent a ton of time with people that were really honestly that were really into the party scene and drinking and everything and that kind of thing, too, which was also really powerful. So I was aware and yet less of a partier. But was there that sense and more and more into the political scene and like I said, changing the world, but also had a lot of fun with a lot of people that were just dancing and hanging out and just being out and loud and that kind of things really fun. It's hard to yeah, maybe have been a little resistant to boxes in that way, but more for granola-y political. You know, if we had to pick an area.

**Samantha** [00:20:54] Yeah, I'm just curious, like, did you make any music or art did you work on changing the world in ways beyond just and I guess for lack of a better word, obvious activism?

**Johannah** [00:21:14] I didn't really I mean. Like we did some cool kind of art and like theater kind of staging things for the sake of, you know, for the sake of a protest. But I didn't necessarily yeah, I didn't really make music or otherwise. I was more of the more social or more more activist oriented than, say, although I would go to the art music type things for sure.

**Samantha** [00:21:34] Yeah. I want to go back to Sisters Bar because I realize I had a question. I'd like to see if you had an

Political Queer

Art

Creativity

answer for it. I learned that it was only open for ten years. Did you see it changed much over this decade?

**Johannah** [00:21:49] I saw a change from actually two of my friends who are sisters, owner Marianne Brown and our sister Sue Pierce. They opened the bar together and I wasn't friends with Marianne when it opened, but I'm still good friends with both now and they they started it really they wanted to make money selling lesbians booze. Really, like on let's be honest, right? Like they want to have fun and they wanted to have community, but they were. I still remember when I was like, Oh, I think we should have coffee. And then one of the owners was like, We're going to have drinks. I mean, you can have coffee too, but we're we're trying to make money here it's a business. So I watched it change a lot. And I think that. I think my friends would agree with us, but I think lesbians as a group don't tend to support drinking establishments enough for them to be sustained. So for them to exist for the long term. And so a lot of the people that worked in Sisters worked just for tips or something, hoping for the community that over time people would show up on a Saturday, Friday night or Saturday night, but would not show up during the week and did not necessarily drink enough or drink enough to like to support the bar. So I think that you should interview one of them or both of them because I bet that would be pretty interesting that they are. I think that they they were really committed to making sure that Sisters existed in that space for people, for women to be together and meet each other and dance together and play they always had live music. That became kind of harder and harder for them, for them to sustain and through no through no lack of effort, but just sort of I think culturally where people in southern Maine were, that there wasn't there weren't enough people are enough interested people to keep to make the bar sustainable long term. But there were lots of wonderful things that happened there, lots of great people that worked there and frequented there, but gay men are much better at supporting bars and making sure that they exist than lesbians are.

**Samantha** [00:24:03] Fantastic. Were there other queer owned or queer supporting businesses, you know, whether it was a bar or some place else that stood out to you.

Sister's Bar

Marianne Brown

Sue Pierce

**Johannah** [00:24:15] I would say that that's the thing at the time. Like now I think there are like gay, lesbian or queer owned, lots of different queer businesses that people supported, but at the time it was really the Underground, which at some point was named the Limelight. We used to call the Slimelight, but it was always at the limelight or the Underground. And for Sisters, and then before Sisters there was another, I can't think of the name it's in other archive information. There were other bars before that, but not a lot of other kinds of like not coffee shops, not, I don't know, printmaking businesses, whatever it might be, that things that that do exist now did not really exist there. So it was like a sort of main way to meet people other than by word of mouth or getting about into somebody's house or attending an activist or whatever it might be.

Commerce  
Queer Owned  
Businesses  
"Slimelight"

Word of Mouth

**Samantha** [00:25:02] Yeah, that sounds kind of difficult, but I guess when you found those places, like everyone was finding those places.

**Johannah** [00:25:12] And lots of different kinds of people went because of that, if that makes sense, now people might splinter off to certain kinds of, if there were certain kinds of queer people or had certain inclinations. But then, like, even if it was mostly a gay men's bar, lesbians went, and just it was way different than it is now.

Gay Bars

**Samantha** [00:25:36] For sure. I wanted to shift gears a little bit since we've been talking about going out and having fun. I'm sure you met lots of friends going out. But I want to talk about like those special moments with Chosen Family where you found people that you connected really deeply with. Or some of the first experiences or the first people you remember.

Chosen Family

**Johannah** [00:26:07] I moved to town with two people that identify as one person that I believe would say that she's bisexual and the other that identifies as a gay man from college. So we came together. So that was the start for me. And then between us all

Moving

dating. Like met other people that way through activism or volunteering for or that kind of thing and met other people. So for me, I kind of started with those two people and then and just over time became, you know, became other people as I met them. So, I mean, I feel like I have a really lovely extended family that are almost all, almost all queer identifying people that have been like, you know, aunties and uncles to my kid who's 19 years old, has just been a wonderful support to me. And have been really wonderful support to each other. And I think that even though my family was pretty supportive about me being a lesbian, that, you know, that not that was not the case for all my friends and my chosen family, but that chosen family is in a lot of ways been - more important than my blood family. Certainly more important day to day, no disrespect to my blood family.

**Samantha** [00:27:28] Yeah. I think lots of queer people can absolutely relate to that. Tell me about your chosen family today, or if you'd like, we can talk about your relationship, your child. I'd love to hear more about that.

**Johannah** [00:27:47] A lot of those, like the people that I've been able to count on, are still considered part of my children's family. They're still like my daughters aunts and uncles now and then. I think we just sort of extended from there. So I guess that's one thing I'd say is that those some of those things have stayed like really steady and wonderful even as we've all grown and changed and, you know, make different choices about where to live or, that kind of thing. So, I mean, I don't know, like I live next door to my best friend and her like her husband, actually, and child live next door. But we're she's queer identifying and I don't even know how to explain it. It's lots of I guess for me, like some of my extended family, are exes, which lesbians are really good at gay men don't do as much about. Lesbians are really good at some of lots of my extended family are exes of mine, but not only our like or our partners or friends of we know of those people. So I guess that's one thing. There are a lot of great gay men in my daughter's life too. I just. What was the question again about them?

Bisexuality  
 Dating  
 Extended Family  
 Child  
 Support  
 Family  
 Living next door to best friend  
 Extended Family as Queer Exes and Friends  
 Gay Men  
 Daughter



**Samantha** [00:29:02] Well, I would kind of be interested to hear about how your daughter came into your life.

**Johannah** [00:29:09] So I. I broke up with a girlfriend. Who is like became a wonderful aunt to my child, but I decided I wanted to parent alone or I didn't want to parent in that partnership. And and then that didn't - we came by my child through artificial insemination. So just paying for sperm basically. And then we've been just really lucky that our my extended chosen family that really been her people like she I think she would tell you about like her favorite people in the world are our chosen family and she's always felt really well-loved and supported and understood and does not identify as queer which is kind of funny because most of the people in our lives identify as queer so we like to tease her, like "are you sure honey?"

**Samantha** [00:30:00] There's still time. What was your first romantic experience? Queer or Not?

**Johannah** [00:30:11] First romantic experiences were probably in high school in terms of being interested in my close friends, which is I guess you still have lots of lesbians are all or lots of a lot of people or all. And then I dated a couple of men, both of whom were bisexual and decided to be gay men later in college and then started dating just women exclusively at that point. And that was during college and right after college. So I have like my first my first, I guess what I would call real relationship was with like a friend of mine from college. And we didn't last very long at all, like just a few months. But she's still one of Ella's one of my daughters aunts to this day we're still really good friends. So we were able to maintain, you know, we were able to maintain a friendship despite it all.

**Samantha** [00:31:10] Women.

Single Parenting

Artificial Insemination

Chosen Family

Child is not queer identifying

First Romantic Experience

High School

Dating Gay/Bisexual Men

College

Dating Women

Maintaining Friendships

**Johannah** [00:31:11] Right? Exactly, Yeah, yeah.

**Samantha** [00:31:13] Oh So what was this like first, I guess, long term queer relationship like for you? Like, what did you learn about yourself?

**Johannah** [00:31:24] Um, I mean, I think that first real relationship, I think it's hard, right? Like you're trying to figure out things about yourself. You're trying to figure out things about the person. You're trying to figure out who you want to be in the world. And especially that I think, dealing with how families felt about us each being queer or all like I think was certainly an issue. So, I mean, there are lots of wonderful things, you know, about that relationship, too. But I think that trying to manage all of those, and the expectations but all those expectations/roles, trying to figure out who I wanted to be in a relationship. It was just it was a great time. It was also a confusing time, and I didn't know myself right, as well as I might now.

**Samantha** [00:32:19] Makes a lot of sense. Well, speaking of now you are 53, you said, you're a counselor in Portland. Do you have queer youth or trans youth that you work with?

**Johannah** [00:32:37] Definitely. There is like a gender sexuality alliance at our school that I did advice for you, but other awesome queer people are doing something else, so I do not. And that we have a lot and I feel like I'm out at school. It's one of those things that's interesting because my coming out process is continual, so you feel like you're out and then you're like, oh, I'm not out to you, it's just a mistake it's just it's not, it's not like I remember in college it was really important to me that my, the queer staff members were out and now I much better understand, and did pretty quickly after. I'm like, well, that's a continual process. And if I'm trying to talk to you about maybe college or your algebra classes. Not super relevant. Rightly so, I guess. All right. Because that's actually they want to talk about the other thing. Right. So but yeah, so I think that I do really enjoy working with queer youth and, and trans youth and definitely have a special, special place in my heart for queer and

First Queer Relationship

Expectations

Family

Confused

Working with Trans and Queer Youth

Gender Sexuality Alliance

Coming Out at Work

trans youth. It has gotten a lot. It's still hard, but it has gotten a lot easier in a lot of ways. I guess for in terms of sexuality, I still think it's very hard to be a trans person in this world. So a lot of compassion for our our trans youth who are so vulnerable in this world right now.

Sexuality

Trans Youth

Vulnerability

**Samantha** [00:34:03] Yes, very true. Now, that's a heavy thing to sit with. There's a lot going on right now. When did you pursue becoming a guidance counselor?

Career

**Johannah** [00:34:19] I graduate from college in 92, and I had my school counseling degree ten years later. And so I worked for an educational opportunity program called Upper Bound here at USM for that sort of those years. For most of those from 96 until 2006 or so from that interim time. So I didn't decide to be a school counselor until I stopped working for Upward Bound

Upper Bound

1990s

2006

University of Southern  
Maine

**Samantha** [00:34:46] Tell me a little bit more about that. I've heard of it. I'm not that familiar.

**Johannah** [00:34:50] It's an educational opportunity program for students who are low income and first in their families or first generation college. So maybe not first in their families, but a sibling has gone, but like parents didn't graduate from four year college, so I did that as an assistant director and a director here and then ended up moving over to become a school counselor after that.

Educational  
Opportunity

Assistant  
Director/Director of  
Upward Bound

**Samantha** [00:35:16] When did you decide to make that shift, or what made you decide?

**Johannah** [00:35:20] A few different things. I think that the biggest one was just being a parent and I was working kind of I was working too much at the Education Opportunity program Upward Bound, I

Education Opportunity  
Program

was not really in a sustainable spots for me to be a good parent and to be able to do that. So I was looking for something that would have more that was more like a school schedule and more like school timing wise, even if I worked in the evenings and that kind of thing. So it was definitely choosing based on choosing, based on being a parent. And again, we had lots of amazing support, but I just wanted to hang out with my kid and be a parent that wasn't working all the time.

Parenting

**Samantha** [00:36:04] How old was your daughter when you made the switch?

**Johannah** [00:36:08] She was probably, I'm trying to think. She was probably she wasn't very old. She might not have been. in - she was in school. She probably she went out when she was in elementary school. I don't know if I switched over, which was in first or second or third grade, which was an elementary school.

**Samantha** [00:36:36] Was being a guidance counselor your dream job or did you have a dream job at some point?

**Johannah** [00:36:41] I don't know what I thought my dream job was. I mean, I think as a young person, I thought I wanted to be uh I like arguing. And so people are like, you should be a lawyer. And I was a decent student. So then they thought I should be a doctor. I said, I really do love the I like educational opportunity work. So I really did love that work and helping individuals get access to college and that kind of thing. I really loved being a school counselor, too, and I think as someone that has an activist bent by choosing to work inside a system instead of outside of the system, it's like a conscious, conscious choice that like you change, you're from the inside, or you try to change it from the out. And at some point I decided to change it, you know, change it from the in, change it from the inside, and try to be a positive, positive influence for like a wide variety of people. Being an out queer person is a piece of that. I wanted to have a piece of that. I love being a school counselor. I never know what my students are gonna say or what they can come in and I think they're

Job Search

Lawyer

Doctor

Changing Systems

going to talk about wanting to go to SMCC or Orono care and it could be something totally, completely different. So I love that. It's never dull, always interesting.

**Samantha** [00:38:05] Anything happened recently that in your career that made you that made you take pause about? Maybe something. Kind of the losing the question might just move on. Would you be okay if I ask you some questions about your disability?

**Johannah** [00:38:33] Sure

**Samantha** [00:38:35] So you gave me a little bit of background, and I'm kind of curious to hear what you've learned about the world through living with a disability.

**Johannah** [00:38:46] I think as someone living with a visible disability, because I think it is different for people that have mental health or other disabilities that are not visible tat, there is there are a lot of overt things initially with people that might be tough, but once they i get to know them and they get to know me. It's actually something that kind of goes away and people kind of forget or they say they forget. And I don't forget. But then they say they forget. But. So I think in terms of just learning about. I mean, I don't know. Like I think any kind of difference people are either really intrigued by or don't like. There are like people are on all sides of that. So. What do I say about that? I don't know. I think it was at first it was hard physically to, like, be physically different from other people. I really felt from the beginning, like I was so lucky to be alive that, like, it might have been hard, but, you know, the alternative was way harder.

Southern Maine  
Community  
College/SMCC

University of Maine at  
Orono

Disability

Experience

Perspective

Mental Health

Visible/Invisible  
Disability

**Samantha** [00:39:53] So how, if it has impacted parenting, especially if and I understand you have a community, but are you technically a single parent? Some people might consider that.

Single Parenting

**Johannah** [00:40:11] Yes, I think I was a single parent for the majority of my daughter's upbringing. Yes. And I think we just were lucky to have like a great village as they say. So we had a great village. So I don't think it's impacted my having one arm. It's not necessarily impacted my daughter negatively. I mean, we joke about how she held her head up inordinately early compared to other children were having to pick her up by her clothing when she was an infant or that kind of thing. But in terms of the real, you know, changing her I had to be more creative about that but I could totally do it on my own. And then we would ask for things to get dressed or all those things that we would ask for help if we needed help so it wasn't as - There were few things that were harder, but it wasn't, it wasn't impossible. And I guess that's one of the many things that it wasn't things that I could do, things that I thought I couldn't or that I realized I was more creative than I thought. I maybe I wouldn't consider myself a creative person. But then I think it was like, oh, yeah, I'm plenty creative and could solve problems have been different kinds of different kinds of ways. Yeah.

Village

Raising a Child as a Single Parent with a Disability

Getting Creative

**Samantha** [00:41:21] Yeah. What would be, you know, let's say a young queer person who's disabled is listening. Is there anything you'd like to say to that person, some wisdom or advice?

Advice

**Johannah** [00:41:34] Well, that's a great question, and I don't have a great answer, but it's a great question. I think just to believe in themselves, go for their dreams, believe that their lives don't have to be qualitatively different than their peers. And if there's lots to look forward to, even if there are obstacles, and then most people face obstacles. And so and then the older you get, the more you can see, I think the obstacles people are facing, even if they don't technically have a disability. But I think that there's something yeah, I mean, there's a lot to look forward to and I think a good long, hopefully will be a good long life.

Obstacles

Pursuing Dreams/Goals

**Samantha** [00:42:16] That's beautiful. Is there anything, any final thoughts you'd like to share and pieces of your story you want heard?

**Johannah** [00:42:25] Not that I can think of in particular, I mean, you ask. I think that I think like when Wendy thought it it should be, I think it was especially about ACTUP and I think it wasn't about like being a young out person in the 90s either. I don't know. I guess I feel a lot of gratitude to the people before me that like opened open doors so that it was I don't know what to compare it to, but relatively easy for me to be out as a queer person in southern Maine and you know in the 90s and beyond, so I'm very grateful to those people. And there were many, many of them and many people have been interviewed and I'm kind of proud of just how how much things have changed. I mean, there's still work to be done, for sure, but I'm really proud of the work queer community has done to make things, to make more positive experiences for for queer people in Maine and beyond. And, um, I think to celebrate and have fun. And I think that's one of the many things queer people are really good at, is kind of loving each other, but also having finding a way to have a lot of fun.

**Samantha** [00:43:36] Yeah, which is critical right now we are in the pits, I would say we're in some dark times.

**Johannah** [00:43:45] Certainly politically we are right.

**Samantha** [00:43:47] For sure. Well, I really thank you for your time. This was wonderful, and I'm sure we're going to be really grateful to have this a part of our Querying the Past collection.

**Johannah** [00:44:00] Awesome. Thank you so much.

ACTUP

1990s

Out Person

Gratitude

Queer Community

Querying the Past

<b>Samantha</b> [00:44:01] Thank you so much.	
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