

GENDER SENDER PODCAST

27.12.2019

with Hinemoana Baker

Katinka: We are Kai and Katinka [*ding!*] and this is Gender [*swoosh*] Sender. Gender Sender is part of the anti discrimination project Trans* [*swoosh*] Visible, from Trans inter queer [*ding!*] e.V. funded by Demokratie Leben! federal program of the Ministry for Family Affairs, [*ding!*] Senior Citizens, [*swoosh*] Women and Youth. Kai, could you turn off your ringer?

Kai: Hold on a sec, I'm just trying to send this gender. [*Ding!*]

Katinka: Gender Sender is a storytelling podcast that explores the ways gender norms affect all of us.

Kai: Stories that are personal, political and from the heart. [*Ding!*]

Katinka: Our storyteller for this podcast is Hinemoana Baker. Hinemoana is a poet, singer, and writer from Aoteaora, New Zealand, who has lived in Berlin for four years. Her ancestry extends from Bavaria to England and from four different Maori tribes around the north and south islands of her home country. This story begins in a bar where football is the religion, moves through the vulnerabilities of age, dating, falling in love with charismatic unstable guitarists and growing up as a one-woman bisexual SWAT team. This story was recorded live in Berlin.

[*Applause*]

Hinemoana Baker:

Kia ora, kia ora.

Now, I just want you to imagine if you can, you're in a pub, you're in a bar here in Berlin, it's in Neukölln, it's a football bar, so football is the religion, and it smells like stale beer and cigarettes and tangy, sweaty hope. Hope because there's a game on tonight. There's like five television screens and from where you're standing you can see three of them, right? And you can also see someone walks in the door, takes your attention, a guy, young guy, maybe 25, 30, very smiley, obviously very popular here. And the thing you notice most is that he is super tall, I mean even for Germany he's super tall, so like at least 200 cm, which is 6 foot 7 in the old dialect. So he walks towards the bar, he strikes up a conversation with the woman next to you, so you're just kind of listening, and she says to him, "So how come you're so crazy about football?" He's dressed in the club colours, there are scarves all over the walls, everything is the club colours here. And he goes, "Oh it's my mother. Yeah, it was my mother who started me off on this heaven and hell, you know, this rollercoaster of triumph and disappointment." And she says, "Oh yeah your mum, yeah, that's right. I think I met your mum, she was here with you one night. That's right, she was wearing this really cool green dress and these old cowboy boots, black cowboy boots." And Felix, that's the name of this guy, he was still laughing about this when he came home three hours later, staggered in the door, staggered out of his clothes and into bed beside me. And he was like, "She thought you were my mother!" and I was like, "Yeah. Hilarious. Lol."

Yeah, so Felix was 26 when I first met him, I was 47. I was in Berlin because I came over here on a writing fellowship. Huge honour, amazing, but I was a bit of a wreck when I landed. My elderly mum was in hospital back home, I got sick, really sick on the way over, like Lufthansa weren't going fly me the last leg maybe, and also like my ten-year relationship back at home with my girlfriend Christine had just disintegrated along with six years of trying to have a baby. I left her and my dog like literally on a windswept Karpiti Coast beach, like sobbing "Bye...." It was like that. So I arrive, it's a huge privilege to be here, but I'm a bit of a wreck. Collapse a little bit. But the thing is, just for a bit of context, I have a really high libido, right? I've known this since I was a kid, it's always been really compelling, there's been a real drive for me about sex and things to do with sex, I knew that I was queer when I was probably about 10, I came out as bisexual in my early twenties in a national magazine... my dad's colleague found it and read the article to him in the staff room of the school they both worked at. Yeah, that's one way to do it, children. Love-life-wise I've had the usual trail of unrequited love and really messy threesomes and what could only be called a series of musicians. And in fact, at one point I thought my sexuality is less to do with gender and more to do with charismatic unstable guitarists. It's just like, it's like that meme, you know? Cigarettes have got warnings all over them, because they're dangerous, they're bad for your health, they're very addictive, and they destroy lives, but guitarists are out there like roaming free.

So yeah. A bit more context. I was at university in New Zealand in the 90s. Ah yes, the 90s, those heady days when if you were a woman in a relationship with a woman, you might have been allowed to use a dildo, but it needed to be purple and hand-held. Right? None of this male... and it needed to be totally not penis-y in any way. And I was like... I'm not really that kind of person, I'm not really that orthodox, no matter where the orthodoxy is coming from. In the Women's Studies Department at the university I was like a one-woman bisexual SWAT team, they'd be talking about gay and lesbian this and gay and lesbian that and I'd be like, "And the bisexuals! Don't forget the bisexuals!" And this carried on through my life and I was like, "Trans women are women, you fuckin' asshole!" and I was like, "So, so I'm not Maori enough because I've got fair skin and I grew up in the city? Oh?"... Gets traditional chin tattoo... "How about now?" So it's literally been decades of this basically becoming quite good at giving the middle finger to shame and other people's prejudices and judgements.

So it's 2015, I find myself in Berlin, I've landed a bit of a wreck as I say, but libido in full swing. On Tinder I'm getting lots of these responses from young cis guys mainly. Now I should be like, "Yay! I'm gonna get some action," but I'm feeling really weird, I'm like, "Is this a MILFy-thing? If it is, how do I feel about that?" I started feeling shame, I started feeling age shame and body shame, just straight out ol' toxic fuckin' shame and I couldn't understand it because after literal decades of doing this [*gives middle finger*] to shame, here it is, it's a sneaky bastard, it's right in here and it's saying a woman of 47 should not be with a man of 26. This is also in spite of the fact that if it was a man who was older and a woman who was... no one would even bat an eye, right? So it did not make sense to me, but nevertheless in my cells I felt this kind of ickiness.

Felix's message or messages really stood out amongst all of the others. Sadly, because he was friendly and polite. Make a note of that, guys. Our first date was in a wine bar just down the road from where I lived. We had a lot of port, it was a lot of fun. Turns out he's not a guitarist but he could quite Monty Python like a pro, he had really beautiful lips and this gorgeous deep resonant voice and a really inappropriate sense of humor and he just seemed really kind. This voice in my head was screaming "AGE DIFFERENCE!" but I had

just enough port and I was kind of just able to say back to it, “Well, you know, does it really count if a person is 21 years younger than you when they’re like, really tall? Doesn’t that like balance it out?” So I got up my courage and I said, “I’d really like you to come back to my apartment with me.” And he said, “Only if you let me have the honour of holding your hand while we walk back there.” [Audience: “Awww!”]. Right? So that’s what happened. We walked hand in hand, he’s really tall, you know, so I was a little over-refreshed, I was kind of dodging those metal bars that they put in the pavement here for some reason and he was just smiling down at me and stepping over them.

And when we got back to the apartment that voice came back, really loud: “AGE DIFFERENCE!” And we were making out and it was great, but I had to stop. And Felix said, “What’s wrong?” And I said, “Well, I’m just, I’m just really nervous, I’m just a bit nervous.” And he said “Oh. Why?” And I said, “Oh, you know, the age thing, you know.” And he’s like, “What do you mean?” And I said, “Well, you know, the age... difference.” And he said, “Oh well, what about it?” And I said, “Well, you know...” And he really didn’t understand, he was really puzzled. And so I just had to say, “Well, look, Felix, I’m self-conscious, you know? I’m self-conscious about my body next to your body. I’m self-conscious about probably the last person you were in bed with wasn’t 47, you know?” And he said, “Oh, ok, why didn’t you say so, maybe this will make you feel a bit better.” And he took off his T-shirt.

And I could see his chest and on his chest were scars. Now Felix is a cis guy, so these weren’t reassignment surgery scars. They were different scars. He had one large scar running right down the center of his sternum, very wide, white, you could also see the dots either side of it where the sewing had happened, and also a couple of other scars off to the side. And the chest itself, his chest, was very concave, a sunken chest. And he said, “You know, I used to have a problem with this, I got bullied about it, it affects my health, but I accept it now, you know? It’s all good.”

And I felt like an idiot, really. I was kind of thinking, “Who am I to make any kind of assumption about anybody else’s body and their relationship to it? You know, even a young, white, 6 foot 7 German guy.” We got talking and I told him about this film by this New Zealand filmmaker called Florian Habicht and he also has this condition and there’s this scene in the film where they’re both in bed, he and his girlfriend, and then she goes to the kitchen, comes back with cornflakes and milk and puts the cornflakes in here [*points to center of chest*] and milk, and they just both eat their breakfast out of that sunken part of his chest.

That was the beginning of two years, actually, of shame-smashing with Felix, age shame but also kink-shame, every kind of shame pretty much. It was fantastic. And his family were amazing to me, they really soothed my homesick heart, they gave me amazing Christmas feasts, him and I would have showers together for hours, singing, [*sings*] “Always look on the bright side of life!” and get out and we’d just spend days naked. Gotta love an Ozzie. And you know, eat instant noodles and gummy bears because that’s the only thing he had in his cupboards.

But it came to an end, our relationship came to an end. I mean, there’s only so much football a poet can take. So when I was thinking about writing this story, I thought I’ll call him, you know, just to get his ok. And I said, “You know, I’m going to do this story, and it’s going to be about you and me and you know, is that ok?” And he said, “Yeah, fuck yeah, tell it!” I was like, “Are you sure, it’s going to have the bit about the chest, and a bit about

maybe sex and stuff.” And he’s like, “Tell the whole story. You and I, neither of us, have anything to be ashamed of.”

Applause

Katinka: And that was it, another story on the Gender Sender podcast.

Kai: Recorded live in Berlin. You can listen to the rest of the podcasts and see media from Gender Sender on our website

Katinka: www.gendersender.org

Kai and Katinka: Bye!