

Gender Sender Podcast #3: Wayne Yung

Doorbell

Door opens

Katinka: "Ah... I've got a gender here for delivery?"

Kai: "A gender?"

Katinka: "Uh yes, could you just sign here?"

Kai: "For my gender? Uh... ok".

Sound of Kai writing his signature

Door closes

Katinka: We are Kai and Katinka and this is the Gender Sender.

Kai: Gender Sender is part of the anti-discrimination project Trans*Visible, from Trans*Inter*Queer e.V.

Katinka: Funded by Demokratie Leben!, a federal program of the Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

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

Katinka: Stories that are personal, political and from the heart.

Doorbell

Katinka: Our storyteller for this podcast is Wayne Yung, a queer Asian Canadian video artist who has been living in Germany since 2001. With the long and graceful leap of a ballerina, he jumps out of the gender norms of his childhood into fatherhood. In cinematic vignettes, Wayne shares his adventures of trail mix and pink kimonos, and the importance of remembering to turn your child towards the sun like a plant. This story was recorded live in Berlin.

Wayne: So I can't say that I ever wanted to be a father. It was never a dream of mine, and as a gay man, I never thought it would happen. But when this lesbian friend of mine asked if I would help her out, I thought it over, and I thought: Why not? It's not like my parents knew what they were doing. You just have to make it up as you go along.

But when I first met my kid, I can't say that I found him all that interesting. I mean, he was cute and all, but you couldn't do all that much with him. You had to feed him, you had to water him, turn him to the sunlight like a plant. But he didn't really get interesting until he could start expressing his own desires.

So there was this time, when he was two, two and a half, and I hadn't seen him in about ten days. But when I finally did see him, he turned his back to me. And he wouldn't look at me. And he wouldn't talk to me. And although he didn't say a word, his message came through loud and clear:

"Where were you?"

So ever since then, I've been really conscious that I have to be there. I have to show up for my kid.

My own parents divorced when I was five. And after that, my father and I moved into this little basement suite, and he set up a home just for the two of us. Now, it wasn't a very big basement. But it had this one long clear line, from one end to the other. And I had a lot of energy, so I loved to leap through the air, with the long graceful legs of a ballet dancer.

One two three four fiiiive! One two three four fiiiive!

But I didn't ever do this in front of my father. I kind of knew that boys don't do this. You don't go leaping through the air, with the long graceful legs of a ballet dancer. But I couldn't help it. There was something inside me, something that wanted to fly. But I didn't know what it was, and I didn't know how to talk about it.

When my kid was really small, he decided that his favourite colour was pink. And we all said: Sure, why not? His favourite colour's pink.

And then one day, his grandma bought him a present. It was this really cute little kimono, in pink, his favourite colour. And so he tried it on, and his mother took a photo, and he looked at the photo, and the first thing he said was: "Wow! I look like a princess!" And we all said: Sure! Why not? If he wants to be a princess, let him be a princess.

Of course, we all want to protect our kids from trauma. It's just natural. But when I think about the traumas from my own childhood, I kind of realize that these are the things that made me what I am today.

So when I was about three or four, my parents were running this Chinese restaurant all by themselves. And my father was the only cook, and my mother was the only waitress. So they didn't have time to take care of me. And they paid this white family to take me in, from Monday to Friday.

Now, this white family had a kid of their own, a little boy, about the same age as me. But I somehow knew that we weren't allowed to talk to each other. And I wasn't allowed in the living room, so I couldn't watch TV. And we didn't have any toys.

So I would lie there in bed, staring at the ceiling. And the ceiling was covered in these plain white tiles. And I would lie there, counting them:

One, two, three, four, five across.

One, two, three, four, five down.

And now diagonal. And now down. And now across.

One, two, three, four, five.

Whenever I see my kid, we always have a snack break. And lately it's been trail mix, so with different nuts and dried berries. But it's a fairly structured affair, where we sit next to each other, and we pour the food in a dish, and we talk exactly about what we're eating. So, let's start with a nut. It could be an almond, maybe a cashew. It's up to you, whatever you like. And now how about a berry: maybe a dried cherry or a dried cranberry.

And now a nut. And now a berry. And now a nut. And now a berry.

OK, let's try some combinations. Let's have one nut and one berry. Mmmm! Maybe one nut and two berries. Mmmm! Oh yeah, let's go crazy: let's have three nuts all together, one two three! Mmmm! The point is, you don't always have to choose between a nut and a berry. You can try different things. You can make a different choice every time. You can just make it up as you go along.

Now when I was a kid, my father had this big collection of vinyl records. And my favourite ones were the ones by ABBA. I could listen to them all day long.

Now, in this little basement suite of ours, the windows were very small, and very high up on the wall. And you couldn't really see very much, yeah? I had to get up on this chair to look outside. And all I saw was this tall green grass, growing up against the window. And beyond that, the blue, blue sky, with the sunlight streaming down into the basement. And I stood there, looking outside, and suddenly I had this yearning. This ache, deep in my heart. And I didn't know why. I just had this feeling that somewhere, something wonderful was happening. And I didn't know what it was.

Now, I knew I could go outside. The back door was open, the weather was fine. But I knew that going outside wasn't going to fix this feeling. Because I was just a kid. And I was scared that I'd never find this place. This wonderful place that was somehow connected to these ABBA songs.

"If you change your mind I'm the first in line Honey I'm still free Take a chance on me."

So, last summer, I was in the park with my kid, and I happened to use the word "dream" in a sentence. And he suddenly stopped me, and asked: "What's a dream?"

Now, I've never had to explain the fact of dreaming to anyone before, so it took me a while to figure this one out. But after a moment, I said to him:

"When you close your eyes at night, and you're falling asleep, there's these pictures that form in front of your eyes. And these pictures tell a story. Sometimes it's a happy story, and sometimes it's a sad story. But it doesn't matter, because it's just a story. And when you wake up in the morning, and you open your eyes, these stories just go away."

My son listened, quietly, as he always does. And then he asked me one more question: "Why do they have to go away?"

Thank you.

Kai: So Katinka, that was it for today's podcast.

Katinka: And we hope you listen again. All of our media and podcasts are available on our website.

Kai: www.gendersender.org