

GENDER SENDER PODCAST #6: Cameryn Moore
24.01.2020

[Morse Code beeping]

Katinka: "Morse code, Kai? Really?"

Kai: *[whispering]* "You know, Katinka, we gotta keep this discreet!"

Katinka: "What?"

Kai: *[whispering]* "The sending of genders..."

[Morse Code beeping]

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.

[Morse Code beeping]

Katinka: *[whispering]* Stories that are personal, political and from the heart.

[Morse Code beeping]

Kai: Our storyteller for this podcast is Cameryn Moore. Cameryn isn't one to shy away from hard questions, or from taking a hard look in the mirror. In this piece, we travel with her back in time for clues to a particularly sticky question: what do you do when you have to betray part of yourself to do something you love? This story was recorded live in Berlin.

[Applause]

Cameryn Moore: My fingers were shaking when I picked up the razor for the sixth time. I had bought it especially for the occasion, didn't feel right in my hand yet. I held it up to the side of my face, looked at myself in the mirror. "I don't think I can do this." I think I said that louder than I meant to, because from the living room my partner called out: "Honey, you don't have to do anything you don't want to do."

I knew this, this was a slogan in my life: You don't have to do anything you don't want to do, I knew this from childhood, it had made for very interesting times in my family when I was growing up. But it got me through, it got me through leaving the Mormon church when I was 14 and coming out to my family as queer when I was 19. Knowing that I didn't have to do what I didn't want to do was great, it has served me well, along with the corollary: Anything I wanted to do, I should go hard on that. Right? But around the age of 28, my go-get-'em mind started to come into conflict with my body that seemed to have other ideas about what it did and didn't want to do.

I have polycystic ovarian syndrome, or PCOS. Lots of people don't know about it, it's a syndrome, which means that not everyone has the same symptoms which vary from irregular or nonexistent periods to very heavy periods, sometimes insulin resistance, what they call male-pattern weight gain in the belly, not the hips, male-pattern balding, also male-pattern hair growth. I think I developed it— it's hard to tell, because it's a syndrome and nobody knows how to test for it— I think I developed this when I was a teenager, when I felt like I was struggling constantly against my stockiness— I was fat, whatever, you know... "stockiness"— and also I had totally irregular periods, which meant that my doctor was able to prescribe me birth control pills, which my mother would have never allowed me to do, which in turn meant that I could experiment with my boyfriend. So I didn't care, that was all I knew, that was all I cared about polycystic ovaries, I didn't give a shit back then or 6 years later when I was 22 living with my partner, with my girlfriend, in St. Petersburg, Russia. Being with a cis-gendered woman, I figured it was safe to go off the birth control pills, I was fine, and consequently my period started coming less and less regularly. We were at 3 or 4 months apart. My girlfriend insisted on taking me to a doctor. It was really cold, I remember that, it was like wintertime and the examining room was like ooh! freezing, so as soon as that doctor pulled her hand out of me and went off to the other room I was like "Ok, put all the clothes back on and a winter coat" and then I sat up back on the examining table. And my girlfriend was standing there awkwardly ready to interpret for me. The doctor did not need any interpretation, she was incredibly blunt: "You have hair on your chin, you should see a specialist."

I took notes, thanked her, thanked her for it, and then when we left the doctor's office, I just looked at my girlfriend and shrugged and laughed. Cuz of course I had seen the hairs on my chin, I had seen them, but I took it as like an extra sign of how butch I was. How butch I was, right? It was extra layer against the patriarchy. I took it as a sign of grace, I took it as a sign that I was touched by gender magic.

This was like a weird time for me generally, like magic and kind of unreality were all around me, we were living in fucking Russia in 1992, '93, it got weird there, really tumultuous. Really tumultuous! And then when we left, when we left to go back to the States after a year and a half, we dove into white-picket-fence living, like we went into domesticity like we were clinging to a fucking life raft. You know? Especially, I mean I just built a fucking patio all by myself, painted the inside of the apartment, I learned how to change the oil on both of our cars. You know, and also I got to do other things, like I started canning vegetables and fruits, I learned how to cook complicated Russian dishes, I learned how to bake from wild yeast in the air. Magic, right? Magic.

And at the same time I was learning to write, like creative writing. This was very exciting for me, I discovered food writing in some books that I found in remote corners of the public library, and I said, this is it, this is what I want to do. And I

said this with the confidence of a woman who was already stomping around a full-ass fucking bearded fucking lady.

Yeah, because as I was growing, as my sense of self was growing, so too was my beard. So too was my beard. It was kind of a light brown or dark blonde mist around my chin, underneath it and along my sideburns, that glinted kind of red-dish gold in the sunlight and got thicker with every passing year. I also got thicker with every passing year, I was gaining weight thanks to PCOS, but I went into it with the fierce indifference that had been forged in the crucible of fat politics, fat acceptance, body politics. This was all politics, you know, this was what my body wanted to do, I told myself. This was what it wanted. I hadn't touched a razor to my body in any way since I was 19. My face was my body, it's the same thing, right? I juggled the arguments in my head, but it all kind of came down to: This is what my body wants. Who am I to say nay?

In 1996 my partner and I, the same woman I had been with in Russia, we went to our first ever San Francisco Pride celebration. First and last, that shit is terrifying, it was so huge, it was so huge, it was so big. And you know they had like chain-link fences up, presumably to like guide the foot traffic, but from the inside it felt like kettling, it found like rounding up the queers, except with like palm trees and lots of music and glitter. You know? Terrifying. There was one moment of serendipity in the chaos. One moment that I remember, when I came face to face with another bearded dyke. I don't actually know what their gender was, but they were right in the middle of the Dyke March with a rack that was nearly as conspicuous as mine and a beard that was Santa-esque in its scope. ZZ Top, right? Yeah. "How do you do it?" I asked. I remember asking this, clearly I was not as secure in my sense of self, I could not, I didn't know how to be that strong against this world that didn't want me that way. I wanted to be better. I don't remember what she told me, or they told me, but I did go back home that day feeling less alone and feeling fortified, somehow. I could do this. I could do this. This was a hill that I was willing to be hairy on.

Actually, like, thinking back, I could have gone on for a long time after that, I could on for a very long time after that, who the fuck wants their period anyway? I wasn't into it, you know like, no, I can do without that. And to be honest, like the longer you grow a beard, the more luxurious it felt. Like a pelt. My day job didn't seem to care, it was an academic library, they don't care as long as the data entry is accurate and the books are going back on the shelf. They don't care! My writing classes that I was going to, avidly, the workshops, they didn't seem to care. They didn't care. The writing did not care. I learned however, or I realised, perhaps is the better word, that maybe the writing doesn't care but the people who buy the writing might care. See, I got a job offer, or an interview offer I should say, scheduled with an alternative newspaper. And awww, at first I was just thrilled, I was thrilled! This was my chance to break in, this was like entry level, it was entry level, but entry was the key word, right? It was my entry point, into writing, to be paid for my writing. I was so excited, this was it, this was it! And

then... and then... I remembered the interview part. This was like my first time going for an interview with a stranger since I applied for Dairy Queen when I was 16. They were going to be looking at me. First impressions. My heart sank. I was not the same person that I was when I was 16.

It was a real quandary of capitalism, right? My body wanted to keep doing it, my body was fine as it was, but in order to keep being that, I had to make money, and in order to make money I might have to not be that anymore. I did not know how to resolve that. There is no way to know in advance, there is no way to know in advance whether that person conducting that interview with me for my dream job, whether they would be cool with my beard or grossed out, "Thanks for applying, don't call us we'll call you." I couldn't run that risk. I couldn't.

Which is what brought me to that day in the bathroom, gripping the edge of the sink, and watching while the steam from the hot water that was filling the basin, watching that steam kind of float up and cloud the glass. I didn't know what I was doing at all. Everything that I had ever seen about men shaving in movies or barbershops always seemed to involve steam, right? I splashed the hot water on my face, and it kinda slopped down on my shirt and got cold really fast and stuck to my skin. And then I kind of patted menthol-scented shaving cream on my face and picked up the razor for the seventh time.

I thought it would be easier, I mean I bought this razor brand new, but it just skipped and stuttered across my skin, pulling away clumps of hair that looked like the stuff you find on mussels or clams, you know, limp and wet and dead. I was freaked out, I kind of shook it around in the hot water, trying to get it off, but there was so much of it, it was so thick that I had to get in there and pick it out with my fingers, rinse it off again and scrape at my face over and over.

I felt like a traitor. To what, I don't know. That other bearded dyke out there? To the fight against the patriarchy? To my own body, that I had trusted so long and couldn't any longer? In the end I was crying. Not because it hurt. Just because.

[Applause]

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

Katinka: And we hope you listen again in the future. You can find all our of podcasts and media on

Kai: www.gendersender.org

Kai and Katinka: Bye!