

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Matthew Riemer & Leighton Brown

**JVN** [00:00:00] Welcome to "Getting Curious". I'm Jonathan Van Ness. And every week I sit down for a 40 minute conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. On today's episode, I'm joined by the co-creators of the Instagram Handle [LGBTHistory](#) and coauthors of "We Are Everywhere: Protest, Power and Pride in the History of Queer Liberation", Matthew Riemer & Leighton Brown, where I asked, "Do we know enough about queer history"? Welcome to "Getting Curious". This is Jonathan Van Ness. I'm so excited for this week's episode, Instagram Icons. Well, I'm actually think your icons in real life too. But I've been following your Instagram for such a long time and it's so important and I'm so excited to meet you in real life finally. welcome to "Getting Curious", Matthew Riemer & Leighton Brown.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:00:44] Thank you very much.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:00:45] Thank you very much.

**JVN** [00:00:45] So can I tell you, this is only the second time in "Getting Curious" his- third time in "Getting Curious" history where I've had two guests.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:00:53] Oh.

**JVN** [00:00:53] Yes. Because usually I don't. But you guys are too important to-, you can't, you know, divide. We've got to have you guys together. If you don't know who these two are, they run the incredible account on Instagram "[LGBT\\_History](#)", which has I think made me a more well-rounded. I got to see you in the eyes. There we go. Which I think has made me a more well-rounded person generally. And I really have to say thank you so much for doing what you do, because I think it is just so moving and so great. And but actually important, I think is the first word that I would say too. It's such an example of like, you know, people say like in the 90s, like TV, like for your brain and whatever. Like, I think Instagram can kind of have that rap now. But it really is such an example. Like what you put into something is what you get out of it. And your knowledge of history and being able to put history into perspective is so deep and so amazing. So all of y'all, you should pause Insta- or, pause Instagram, pause the podcast right now and follow "[LGBT\\_History](#)" if you don't already. And yes, welcome. So, Matthew and Leighton, how did it happen? Like you were just like minding your own business one day and you were like, these people don't know anything about queer history anymore.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:02:00] Well, yes, but we were talking about ourselves. It really was this realization that we knew nothing. And it was just for our own self-satisfaction, self education, really, that we started separately down these paths and started learning, collecting pictures. And, and Instagram followed a couple months later.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:02:23] Yeah, it was in the early, it was about four years ago. So early 2016 that we decided not knowing anything about social media that we, we decided to just share some of what we'd researched on Instagram. And yet it hit a nerve. And as it took off, you know, our research grew more intense and and it's just kind of grown from there. But, but yet, I mean, to your question, we didn't know. We didn't know anything. And, and, you know, as as white, privileged cis able bodied men, both of whom were history majors in undergrad, if we didn't know anything,

well, you know, who did? And, and we had the privilege and the ability to research and to do this. And once we started it, it's kind of consumed, consumed our lives.

**JVN** [00:03:18] So it started four years ago.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:03:20] Yeah.

**JVN** [00:03:20] And that's when, that's when the Instagram started?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:03:22] Right.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:03:23] Yeah.

**JVN** [00:03:23] I think I've followed you for at least-. I feel like I've followed you since before "Queer Eye". Like I feel like I've been following you for years.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:03:29] I remember, well "Gay of Thrones" followed us.

**JVN** [00:03:32] Yeah, that was me before JVN.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:03:33] Yeah, yeah.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:03:34] Yeah.

**JVN** [00:03:35] So I followed you forever. Yay me. That's what I knew. I think I learned a bit from my friend Matthew. Because I had saw, like he had like like re-gram something. And so when you started doing it-. So basically it started because you had an absence of information that you wanted to have more on, which I think is interesting because I read about how you both were undergraduate history majors. And I think it's one thing that I've often kind of well, I hear people talking about it and I feel like, "Oh, yeah, that is true". We don't really learn anything about LGBTQ history in school. Like it's really never talked about.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:04:10] No. And at most levels. I mean, I was a history major. I mean, I will fess up to being closeted at the time. So I didn't seek out what was available. But even then in college 20 years ago, there just was a very small amount of, of course work, if any, depending on the school, I think.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:04:31] Well, and you know, even now, as as we start to see LGBTQ plus history somewhat start to make its way into, especially California and Illinois, couple other states have started to integrate, which is great. We applaud that. But we have to ask what, what stories are being told and, and from what lens. And by large, it's this perspective of, this long march toward equality. How our people have pulled themselves up in order to integrate into the broader culture as opposed to telling our stories, it's. Look, look, you know, look how they've cleaned themselves up. And-.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:05:14] Yeah. And also how what, how society has let us in gradually over time, what the heteronormative dominant society has done for us.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:05:23] Right.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:05:23] Rather than what our community has done to fight for the progress.

**JVN** [00:05:27] So that's the narrative that's been assigned to these to these curriculums in California and Illinois.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:05:32] Well, that's I think that's largely the way that what marginalized histories are told generally, especially in America. Well I say especially I, I just know-.

**JVN** [00:05:39] That's where we know the most. Yeah, of course.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:05:40] Right. Right. That, that it's you know, in order to form a more perfect union, that that's, you know, there's flaws in the system. But it's all been a march toward liberty and equality, all men being created equal when that's just not true. And this, this set up is an oppressive system. And it's been a long-, it's an ongoing fight for basic decency. And too often it's told that, look how nice the oppressor has been by giving us, and I did air quotes there, by giving us these things that are ours. I mean, these rights are ours.

**JVN** [00:06:15] But in reality and the Constitution, you would think that it was like there in the first place.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:06:18] Right absolutely.

**JVN** [00:06:18] Like all men are created equal. But really, like we know, we, we know that that's like only if you were like a white property owner.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:06:23] Right. Exactly.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:06:24] Right.

**JVN** [00:06:25] A white man property owner.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:06:26] I mean, certainly my opinion, the the Supreme Court, especially just one justice, did not give us, for instance, the right to marry. We had that right. It was just recognized by a majority of the Supreme Court a few years ago.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:06:39] Right. And so as, as the integrate, I mean, but let, let's be clear that when we started the instagram account, we very much we're looking at it from the lens of that, that narrative. And it was a look how far we've come account. You know, it was pre, it was pre Trump. I mean, Trump, he was it was a, I guess it was a prime, the primaries had started. He was there. But everyone was a joke. Right. It wasn't gonna happen. And, and. Yeah. So it was it that's that's where we were at. And Pulse happened. And that was a that was kind of a turning point. People flocked to the account. I think looking for kind of an anchor.

**JVN** [00:07:20] Yeah.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:07:20] Looking to connect their an, their anger and their rage and their grief with history. And then, you know, as the, as the, as the election season went on and after he got elected, something shifted with what we were doing. And it became-, we no longer did the look how far we come, but it's now look what we have to do and that we have the tools to do it and that we've been here before. But if we don't meaningfully connect with our history, which in every sense shows that, you know, when one of us is oppress, all of us are oppressed, we are going to keep doing these same things over and over and over and over again.

**JVN** [00:08:00] So what's been the most eye-opening thing that, I mean, so, so basically what I hear you saying there is that like, you know, a common thread through history has been that like when one of us is oppressed, all of is oppressed, and that is a cycle that continues to repeat itself. So what has been some of the most like eye-opening things that you have come to see that, that, that's something that people don't really think about or that's not commonly widely known? When it comes to queer history?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:08:26] I mean, I think the length of it I mean, going back so well beyond, before Stonewall. Which was just because we happened upon this through Frank Kameny, who had been a D.C. activist. And so I think that's sort of where my focus started with collecting photographs and things like that. And so it was eye opening to see how far back it went.

**JVN** [00:08:51] Because you say that one quote about Lincoln, which is that like you won't say for sure that Lincoln was gay, but you'll fight someone who says that he wasn't.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:09:00] Right. That's what I mean, we from the start. We don't want to assume either way whether it comes to sexuality or gender or-.

**JVN** [00:09:08] Yeah, because someone was not here to say it for themselves, of course.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:09:10] Well I'll say it. Lincoln was gay. Yeah, I mean, but-.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:09:13] But yeah, right. We, but when there are facts that indicate that, say, Lincoln was in fact gay.

**JVN** [00:09:20] What were the facts? Just like gorgeous letters.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:09:22] Well, I mean, it's I mean, yes, those are certainly-. The letters. And so there's this well ok. There's a lot. That, he loved Jo-, Joshua Speed's thighs. Joshua Speed was his lover. I mean, that, you know, we have to prove that. But so, you know, he lived. There's this thing where he. So he li-, when he got to Springfield, he lived, shared the same bed with Speed. And speed, you know, it's everyone says, oh, everybody shared beds. It was the circuit back then. Yes. A lot of people lived on the circuit and they shared beds.

**JVN** [00:09:54] What's the circuit?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:09:55] So it's just, you know, people lived in-.

**JVN** [00:09:57] Oh the campaigning circuit?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:09:58] And rooming houses, especially if you were a lawyer.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:10:00] Well, this was earlier than his.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:10:01] If you were a lawyer and, you know, you go to the circuit courts and that's, a lot, a lot-. So there's a lot of stories of people who just, you know, in rooming houses or otherwise would share beds. Fine. Great. For one thing, just point blank, a lot of those people who or some of those people who are sharing beds were queer. So it doesn't matter that, that's great.

**JVN** [00:10:21] That was like a fun, convenient way to be like, "Oh, we have to share these bed".

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:10:24] Right.

**JVN** [00:10:24] That's like the same thing is like when you're still living with your parents in high school and you're like, "Oh, can I have so and so spend the night"? And you're like "Yay!".

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:10:29] Yeah, exactly. And they'd be like, "No girls".

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:10:31] It'd be uncomfortable.

**JVN** [00:10:33] Yeah.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:10:33] In a sleeping bag on the floor.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:10:35] Right. It just so happened though that Speed was a, ran the general store. He sold beds. So it wasn't a lack of beds. That was the problem. And yeah, in the letters it's, it's the man-. Lincoln loved Speed and he loved him physically and was destroyed when they parted.

**JVN** [00:10:55] Give us examples. I went thig poetry from the 1800s.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:10:59] I mean-.

**JVN** [00:11:00] Do you remember anything? On the top of your tongue.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:11:01] Not-.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:11:02] So but there actually is a Lincoln poem about gay marriage.

**JVN** [00:11:05] There is?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:11:06] Yeah. Yeah there is. That he-.

**JVN** [00:11:08] What does he say?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:11:09] I mean it's just about two men getting married. I mean it's, it. Yeah. No I mean that-.

**JVN** [00:11:14] What does he say? What?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:11:15] It's just a. No. There's not, he doesn't say anything. It's just a lark about you know, about two men getting married.

**JVN** [00:11:20] Did they have names?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:11:21] Yes. I don't. I can't. Like, I can't.

**JVN** [00:11:24] Honey, we need to get a screenshot of that post that on LGBT\_History.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:11:27] Well, those never do very well. But I agree with you.

**JVN** [00:11:29] But, you know. Well, according to Instagram, oh whatever. We'll talk about that later. So. Really?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:11:34] Yeah. This stuff.

**JVN** [00:11:35] So why did they part ways? Because, because he had to go, got elected or he didn't get elected? Because then you lose Congress and lose. Or no, he was a congressman and he lost the Senate and then he did something else or something.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:11:45] You're the, you're the Illinois expert. Right?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:11:49] Yeah. No, us, we're not-.

**JVN** [00:11:50] He's from Kentucky or something. But they do call it the land of Lincoln. So. But what else? What else? So Chris, so he loved his thighs and he said that in a letter.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:12:00] Yes.

**JVN** [00:12:01] What other gay stuff did he say in letters?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:12:03] A lot. I. So I'm going to. I can't. There is a book about Lincoln's queerness, which now I can't even think of the name.

**JVN** [00:12:12] That's ok.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:12:12] I feel like I'm failing at citations.

**JVN** [00:12:13] We're gonna fact check it right now.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:12:13] Pop quizzes.

**JVN** [00:12:16] I do that sometimes. It's like, oh, sorry I didn't prep you for that. Sorry I'm giving you a pop quiz. It just happens.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:12:18] I don't know either

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:12:20] Our focus is-

**JVN** [00:12:20] Contemporary.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:12:23] Yeah.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:12:24] Somewhat.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:12:24] Not contemporary, but more just actual queer liberation. The actual fight for it.

**JVN** [00:12:29] Yes.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:12:30] So not as much.

**JVN** [00:12:30] He wasn't really in that particular.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:12:31] No. So not as much historical figures who are known for other reasons that there is added, at least circumstantial evidence that they were that they were queer. Which-

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:12:43] But that. But that.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:12:44] How we view Lincoln.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:12:45] But that history is extremely important. That's where we started. I mean so we started from with the perspective of, you know, queer history, LGBT history, as the name suggests, being kind of the history of queer people. And of course, that's infinite. Right. That's forever.

**JVN** [00:13:03] Yeah.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:13:04] As it went on and our, and our kind of point, our goal got more focused. It's yeah, it's become about the history of organizing around common identities and a common oppression to, to fight back and, and to to, you know, beat oppression. And how that has manifested and in particular toward this kind of ambiguous goal of liberation, which means a lot of things to a lot of different people. But, but and then, you know, there's always been a tension between liberation and rights. So trying to use traditional means of politicizing to, you know, get representation in the system versus trying to create a new beautiful system.

**JVN** [00:13:54] Well, I think that like for so many people that are in the age box of like, you know, 18 to like 34, 35, maybe 40. It's like, how did we get here? Because the, the, like the, the weaponization of rights and queerness and what happened in the 80s to LGBTQ people and how HIV played into that like fear narrative and played into that sort of further oppression and like fear mongering that like, you know, so much marginalized and oppressed the gay community in the 80s. But how did that come to be? Because, like, you know, you think of-. Ugh. Rude. We're going take-. We're-. I'll finished that question right after a few quick commercials, a few quick little, you

know, breaky-poops, who knows what I'm going to be saying. I don't know. Really quick commercial. And then we'll be right back. ... So basically, I would like to what I was asking before the break is like for people of the ages of like 18 to 40, it's like how did this fight come to be? What set this? What were the kind of factors that set the stage for this gorgeous queer liberation to take place? Which, you know. You guys wrote a book last year that came out that was called, I'm finding it right here. "We Are Everywhere: Protest, Power and Pride in the History of Queer Liberation". So what was the things that kind of set the stage for these to even come to be spoken about?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:15:25] It's countless. It's infinite. And it started really I mean, at the end of the, well about 1865, 1870 in Europe, as, as for the first time, people started to identify as queer, as homosexual.

**JVN** [00:15:45] They did?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:15:45] Yeah. So I mean as opposed to it being something you did, it became something you were. As opposed to being a criminal act or just an abnormal act.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:15:54] So a, sort of yeah. An identity more than just what you did behind closed doors.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:16:00] And it, and then it slowly-. I mean actually relatively quickly built from there and, and making its way into the states and particularly the turn of the 20th century as the United States moved to the cities where queer people found them-, found each other. And then through the wars with soldiers finding each other in particular and just built and built and built. And then we had-, I mean, the years starting around 1948, 1950 with the Manning Foundation and Harry Hay, which is really radical organization that was somewhat linked to the Communist Party. And as it started to get a little bit more successful, it, it was taken over by conservatives, moderates who didn't want to be militant. They didn't want to be-. They didn't want their own special culture. They just wanted to be like everybody else. And that's kind of set the stage for a lot of what's happened since. And there's been this tension, ever. Yeah. Ever since that that, you know, gone back and forth. They set the stage for 15 years. So what we know is, is that Stonewall is not the beginning of anything, it was the result of a great deal of work. But, you know, to answer your question, it does not, there weren't just a few things. And that's what's so, that's what's been so liberating to us. And what we have tried to impart is that, you know, it's not just a few things. It's not just a few people. It's not just-. It's, it's endless. It's, it's and, and they all deserve time and attention. And once you connect with the fact that your history is as big as history, it's really anchoring. It's really life affirming.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:17:48] Right. I think throughout time there are sort of periods of catalysts that that propelled the movement forward to some extent, usually moments of greater oppression, whether it was the Lavender Scare with McCarthy. And then, I mean, well, Stonewall with the raids. And then there-.

**JVN** [00:18:08] What was the Lavender Scare with McCarthy?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:18:10] So the the Red Scare, which is popularly known, was that the attempt to root out communists from the federal government and society at large, really. And so

the Lavender Scare as part of that. Anybody who was queer was considered a deviant. And, and essentially they saw them as blackmail targets. So they were threats to national safety, security.

**JVN** [00:18:37] So backing up a little tiny bit. So the Mattachine Society, I've heard of that before. So that was like the first, was that like the first like LGBT rights group as we know it or something?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:18:49] So technically, the first that we really know of was the Society for Human Rights, which was in, in Chicago in 1924. And there were probably others. That's one thing that we always have to caution with when we're talking about this, is this is undiscovered terrain. It was certainly, Mattachine was certainly the first that that stuck and, and grew. Yeah.

**JVN** [00:19:15] Because I think the thing that was kind of trying to lead in that last question is that like when we think about like the 80s and the Reagan administration and about like the idea of like, you know, pol-, like policing the morality of like queer people and, you know, anyone who had what, you know, an abortion and you think about like Phyllis Schlafly and like that whole era of like really like demonizing queer people and othering queer people. And I was just wondering, like, has that happened in the 20s, in the 30s? Like, has that always been the case?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:19:45] So that start-. So that really does start, and we, and this is a lot of the book. I mean, that, this that really starts with the Lavender Scare that, that, in that, you know, after the Depression. After the war. World War Two. That, that, you know, America kind of started-. Or the United States kind of, was looking for normality, was looking for a home and the domestic sphere and others, they started to blame others. Start to look for any threat, domestic and foreign. And, you know, we were an easy target because we had just started to peek our head out over the whatever and, and the covers. And, and yeah, it starts there. And so with the Lavender Scare, you know, people talk about the Red Scare that we rooted out communists. It was a horrible time, there's no question. But that lasted about four years. The Lavender Scare in a lot a way continues. I mean, the Trans ban in the military is part of the Lavender Scare. Till the mid 70s, there were still banned. They were still banned from hiring queer people in the government. And for a lot of agencies, for the, for the classified agencies, the FBI and CIA, that went up to the 90s. I mean, the Lavender Scare lasted forever. And of course, the way, and that included anybody who contracted with the government. And that is countless and countless companies. So, I mean, it trickled down and. Yeah. So that absolutely set the stage for, for the policing. And Donald Trump is the culmination. That's why we cannot get into the, the kind of pattern that he is some kind of outlier. He is the culmination of what's been happening since at least Barry Goldwater in 64, if not before.

**JVN** [00:21:29] So World War Two is like 1941 to 1945. Then the Cold War, because I think a lot of people I don't even know what that was like-. I mean, right? Like I feel like a lot of people. So what was that?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:21:43] The Cold War?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:21:44] Well, I mean, the Cold War was essentially the two world powers, throughout it, the US and Soviet Union. It's sort of on the brink of war, nuclear war. They would do proxy wars, Korea, Vietnam, various other locations. But they would, they knew it would probably be annihilation to just go head to head. And so it was just this sort of cold standoff as far as just all out war. And that lasted from, I mean, shortly after World War 2, it started I mean, really within a

few years until I guess it was 1989 when the Soviet Union started to crack. That was when the Berlin Wall came down. I think it was more like 91 or so when the Soviet Union completely collapsed.

**JVN** [00:22:35] But that just reminds me of like how in the way that Islamophobia was really popularized. And, you know, disseminated after 9/11 and even through the 90s, after the first Iraq war, it seems like the idea of a communist and the idea of communism was the really chic thing to scare middle America into voting for Republicans in like the 60s and 70s. Like that was the kergle that like Republicans used to like really stoke fear.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:23:02] Yeah, I know. I mean, I am old enough embarrassingly to remember that. I mean, I wasn't in the hide under your desk era. I'm not that old, but I mean it was still. Well. Well, you know, Hollywood, you certainly saw it throughout the 80s. I mean, the stereotypical bad guy was this large Russian who was out to get us all.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:23:23] Right.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:23:24] But there was-.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:23:26] What, what sometimes get lost in the discussion is that so during the Red Scare, there were two different things. There was loyalty and security risks. So loyalty risks were communists. They were people who wanted, who, who didn't believe in the American system. They wanted to betray the government. Security risk were people who were likely to be taken advantage of because of their lifestyles and people contemporarily, were contemporaneously? One of those two. Would have known the difference. We very often overlook it when they when people were talking about loyalty, no security risks, they were talking mainly about queer people. That they, that was a code word. So when you go back and read papers from the newspapers from that time and you see the word loyalty risk, security risk, sorry. You see the word security risk. They're talking about queer people. And so it wasn't just the big bad communists boogey person. It was queer people. They were talking about. And that starts, that builds toward the, and then there were a series in the mid 50s and early 60s of heinous crimes by, you know, psychopaths against children that were linked to homosexuals. I mean, they weren't, they were pedophiles. And that was propagated ironically or horribly, both by J. Edgar Hoover of the FBI, himself, a homosexual. And that really shaped the narrative of the sexual psychopath.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:24:48] I think I think it's really important to remember that this so-called security risk. It wasn't in any way they they wanted harm upon the U.S. or its citizens. It's that they had they could be blackmailed. And why could they be blackmailed? Because of their deviant behavior that society shunned and even outlawed. And then they turned that on them and saying that was what made you a security risk.

**JVN** [00:25:15] So homosexual acts like were on the books as illegal through like the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:25:21] Yes. So up until. Up until. Oh, God. Hardwick, up until Bowers v. Hardwick. Well, actually, no. That that was what, Lawrence v. Texas. Which was what?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:25:31] Yeah, Lawrence.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:25:31] 04? 01? Early 2000s. It was still legal for us. It was still constitutional for a state to criminalize sodomy. And and by that point, I mean, I think we're still 20 plus states that that did. And, you know, in 1986 or 87 in the, at the height. Right as the epidemic took hold. When, when a lot of queer people still wanted to believe that the government was going to help. There was still some reason to believe the Supreme Court announced *Bowers v. Hardwick* which affirmed the constitutionality of, of, of anti-sodomy law basically.

**JVN** [00:26:13] It did?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:26:13] Yeah. Basically saying-.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:26:14] In the mid 80s, that was.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:26:15] That you can criminalize and that, that is-.

**JVN** [00:26:18] And what was the reason? But it was the precedent states rights or something?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:26:22] Well, no, they they say no. That was that was what was even most offensive. I mean, they basically said, morality. They basically said that they I mean, it's just it's gross. There's no way that the constitutional right to privacy would possibly include. And, and that the constitutional protection of family never would think of family as being queer people.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:26:40] And that's what I mentioned, how there were throughout time they're catalyst's, that sort of thing.

**JVN** [00:26:45] So what was that Supreme-? I've never heard of that case before. *Bowers*. *Bowers*.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:26:47] *Bowers v. Hardwick*. Yeah.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:26:49] And it really was the turning.

**JVN** [00:26:50] What was that case about? Who was *Bowers* and who was *Hardwick*?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:26:53] Well so *Hardwick*. I'm going to get this confused. One of them was the was an official in Georgia who was getting sued. One of them was somebody who was arrested under or charged under these anti-sodomy laws. I think it was. The details I'm not by our.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:27:14] *Bowers* was the defended, the, the gay guy.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:27:18] Ok. And, and. Yeah. And it was a, it was a test case.

**JVN** [00:27:21] So was he, was he having sex or something? Where was he?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:27:24] It was oral.

**JVN** [00:27:26] He was?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:27:28] Because sodomy was broad enough to include oral and, and-. Right. And so they, they-.

**JVN** [00:27:36] So they were in a park sucking dick.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:27:37] No no, they were in their bedroom.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:27:38] No. Home.

**JVN** [00:27:39] In their home?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:27:41] In the bedroom, in their home.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:27:41] It was illegal.

**JVN** [00:27:42] Sucking dick at home?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:27:44] It was illegal.

**JVN** [00:27:45] And the cops showed up to their house?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:27:46] For something unrelated.

**JVN** [00:27:48] And he found-, and the cop found him having sex. And so he fucking arrested him for sodomy? In 1980?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:27:55] Start-.

**JVN** [00:27:57] And then the Supreme Court sided with the cop?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:28:00] Yeah, with the state. I mean-

**JVN** [00:28:00] Oh my god!

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:28:02] And, and it's, so it's one of those moments. And-.

**JVN** [00:28:06] Get out of my bedroom. I'm sucking dick.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:28:08] Right. Right. It's one of those moments where, you know, both of you all were saying that to read the, to read the response is remarkable from the community. Someone describe it is as. That's when rage set over.

**JVN** [00:28:24] So what happened?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:28:25] We took to the streets and we, it's not fair to say that, like it was that moment we had taken to the streets. To a certain extent. But that is when things snapped.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:28:33] Right. That was part of the turning point in the-.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:28:37] Within days. I mean, because it, I'm sorry, they announced, the decision was announced 24 hours after Pride 1986. It was so June 30th or June or July 1st, 1986.

**JVN** [00:28:47] Which isn't that a lot of times when the big Supreme Court decisions come out?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:28:50] Right. Yeah. So just after Pride that, this came out and yeah-.

**JVN** [00:28:53] And people were dying at that point? Hundreds of thousands of people were like.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:28:58] Yeah, I mean, they did really not that they weren't already. But I mean, it was real. I mean, it was it had set in the epidemic. And, and that was the government's way of saying, "Fuck you". Like we don't care. And not only do we not care.

**JVN** [00:29:10] But people are going to harass you

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:29:11] It's criminal.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:29:12] Yeah. And it definitely helped. There was definitely a big part of the sort of the despair that was setting in. And I think some of the-

**JVN** [00:29:20] But Reagan would go on to win reelection two years later.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:29:24] No, that was his second term.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:29:24] That was his second term then.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:29:26] Bush won. Bush won.

**JVN** [00:29:27] Oh, but the original arrest was in 82?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:29:29] Right. Right.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:29:30] And the decision wasn't until 86. I think it was.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:29:32] Right.

**JVN** [00:29:33] Got it. Ugh, we're going to take a really quick break and then we will be right back with more Matthew and Leighton after the break. ... Welcome back to "Getting Curious". So. So that decision comes down in 86 and people were pissed.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:29:45] Yeah. No, and it's really, it's really amazing. And, that, that the rage that we allowed because for so long, so much of the activism in, in, well, in marginalized communities generally, but in particular within our community has been checking rage and really unwisely in our estimation, that because people you know, people access to power, generally white middle class men. Run the organizations that, that, that, you know, are our main talking organizations, main talking organ-, our main advocacy groups. And they push out the radical voices. They push down marginalized people because we don't want that face forward. After

Bower's it, they just kind of step back because what do you do? I mean, they are criminalizing us when we're, when we're trying to be visible.

**JVN** [00:30:42] So essentially, OK, so we need to put that timeline in perspective. So basically because. Because before it was like what were the things that kind of set up the 80s? And you were basically saying like, honey, this shit's been fuckin getting set up for like hundreds of years, like all the way back to the 1860s. It's like a whole thing. So then your thing with the Mattachine Society from the 50s into this, like for like 15 years, it was more like I'm paraphrasing here, but like, yes, queen, let's be like, let's be who we are. Like, we are fierce, we are progressive, we are slaying it. And then after like fifteen years, like some more like essentially the tarps in Britain, we're like no no no no. Stop all that queer stuff, we need to like button up and not scare the children. So that they'll accept us?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:31:22] There's only a couple of years before they they came, they came around. It was only a couple of years and then for a longer period. So Mattachine-

**JVN** [00:31:29] So the people were there for like?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:31:30] A couple years. They, they were they did. They got big because they took on, they took well, they went to the public and they got a bunch of new members. A bunch of the new members were more moderate conservative. That's when everyone got buttoned up, forced out the radicals. That was in L.A. and up and down the coast. Then the next decade, Frank Kameny in DC came along. He really, he and Barbara Gltings from Philadelphia kind of led the movement to the streets.

**JVN** [00:31:56] Is that 60s?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:31:57] Yeah.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:31:57] Yeah.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:31:58] Following, you know, absolutely building and then, on the shoulders of the black civil rights movement and working course with black queer people, they took the movement to the streets. It was old photos of people outside the White House, outside the Pentagon, outside Independence Hall.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:32:13] Which that, the first White House picket was 65.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:32:18] Yeah. Which today look very conservative. You know, they're all very properly dressed. But at the time, I mean, they were holding signs that identified them as homosexuals. It was. They could have been killed. It's extremely radical what they were doing. And slowly but surely.

**JVN** [00:32:31] But those are the more buttoned up radicals?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:32:34] Well, yeah, I mean. Yes.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:32:36] Yeah. But I mean, it was a factor of their time.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:32:39] So then-

**JVN** [00:32:39] I get it.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:32:39] We went from the Mattachine Foundation radicals. Harry Hay and others. And then the other the conservative wing sort of took that over, became Mattachine Society. And then but-

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:32:52] They did not want to picket.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:32:53] But the East Coast and the West Coast Mattachine were, I mean, affiliated, but not the same organization. So if, for instance, Frank Kameny was sort of the face of the Mattachine.

**JVN** [00:33:04] The East Cost.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:33:04] In DC at least.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:33:05] Yeah.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:33:05] And he wasn't really beholden to the rules or the people or anything else out in the West Coast.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:33:11] Yeah. The national Mattachine had broken out by that point. They were just using the name because it was known and, and slowly, I mean, it's a lot here and that's why it's hard to tell. It's not just a series of moments, but one of the people that was involved in those early pickets outside the White House was a guy named Craig Rodwell. Craig Rodwell was addicted to picketing. He loved it. He was also involved with the annual reminders outside of Independence Hall on July 4th. A few days after Stonewall July 4th, 1969. He's doing Independence Day annual reminder. The old guard, Frank Kameny, at that point, the old guard and then these younger people, a lot of whom had just been rioting, kind of had a clash about all this button down stuff. Rodwell and others realized they need something new. A few months later, they make this presentation at a convention of homophiles saying, we have an idea. We're going to commemorate Stonewall every year with a thing in June. At the end of June. And it's gonna be open to everyone. And we're gonna call Christopher Street Liberation Day and we're gonna show our pride and we need other cities to do it. So they reach out to L.A. and they reach out to other cities. And this thing's called Gay Pride. And that's how, you know, it's all connected. And that's what we have found over and over so.

**JVN** [00:34:17] And that happens the year after Stonewall?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:34:19] Yes, the first year. So this is, so Stonewall 50 now it was was 19, 2019. 2020 is Pride 50. like the first that, nobody would have known about Stonewall if it weren't for Pride.

**JVN** [00:34:30] Right.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:34:30] Stonewall is that's the most important thing about Stonewall. And like when we talk about you know, whether it's Compton's cafeteria or Cooper Donuts or just riots that we don't know about, certainly there were other times. Stonewall was not the first time that we fought back. Why we know about it is because there was a huge infrastructure. Huge. There was a big enough infrastructure that had been built for decades around the country that it activated this network to build this commemorative event, Gay Pride, and that's why it's become, you know, the high holy day.

**JVN** [00:35:06] So Stonewall was 69 and then the first pride was 70?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:35:09] Right.

**JVN** [00:35:09] How fierce. So if you all had been living under a rock or you maybe were living under a rock, which you don't really like understand, like the, the meteorological events that led up to, to Stonewall. So it's 1969. People have been having some protests here and there. But it's a little bit more buttoned up protest still. Right? Like there was like the Democratic convention, wasn't there like a little baby queer protest there? In like 60 something.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:35:36] Well, I mean, that that that was just a huge, that was the Democrat National riots. I mean, when-

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:35:41] 68 was a tumultuous year in this country, but not.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:35:45] Queers were there, it wasn't.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:35:46] Right.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:35:46] We weren't.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:35:47] Now that did-.

**JVN** [00:35:47] Because what happened in 68? That's when Nixon-.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:35:52] MLK was assassinated.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:35:54] Kennedy was.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:35:55] Bobby Kennedy was killed.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:35:57] In Chicago.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:35:58] The DNC, right? In Chicago.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:36:00] Yeah. I mean, that's those are those famous images of of downtown Chicago. The cops just letting loose on, on protesters and which was considered a cultural like turning point. When why? One of the main reasons why it's considered a cultural turning point is because it was white kids. I mean, the you know, of course, there've been riots with cops beating the shit out of black kids for for 10, 15, 20 years. But this one was a real game changer because for

the first time it was long hair, radical white kids that were that were getting the shit beat out of them. And so but that's it to-. It brings up a good point that because. Rad-. Because what we need to remember is riots were a part of the cultural response during the late 60s. We, people rioted. It was, and so like we often talked talk about Stonewall as if it was this out of nowhere thing. It was.

**JVN** [00:36:49] It had been brewing.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:36:50] Yeah. Rioting. Rioting. It was an option.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:36:51] And. Right. For not not in the queer liberation movement, but the year before.

**JVN** [00:36:55] But that's what I want to explain and set the stage for people because like I don't even know and so many people don't know. So like 1968. And that's what were talking about. MLK happens. Bobby Kennedy happens. Then the, then the Chicago Democratic Convention happens. And so at this point, it's like in Chicago, in L.A., in New York, in San Francisco, it is legal for police to fully arrest you for wearing women's clothes if you're a male. And if you're holding hands at the man, if you're coming out of a gay bar, is like as we saw in that 1986 decision. So but that stuff was going on as commonplace because no one had just sued for it yet. Up until that 1986 decision. With what we had just been talking about. It's like then in the 60s and 70s and like it's full game on for like really well, not the 70s as much, but in the 60s, that's full game on for like fully discriminating against, fucking with.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:37:43] Yeah.

**JVN** [00:37:44] You know.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:37:44] I mean killing. Oppressing

**JVN** [00:37:45] Yes.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:37:46] Yeah. Not just discriminating, I mean not just discriminating against. I mean it was, it was, it was awful. It was, it was imp-, it was-.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:37:52] Right. There wasn't always a basis and a specific law for the cops to, I mean raid a gay bar and beat up all it's patrons or whatever else took place.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:38:03] And it's not entirely gotten that much better. I mean, like it's gotten somewhat better. I just wanna throw that that out there. Like the raids are less now, but I mean that. Yeah. It was just more blatant that the harassment and, and-.

**JVN** [00:38:16] So you knew if you went to a queer bar in like 1968 there is a chance like police could come shut it down.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:38:21] Absolutely.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:38:22] Oh yeah. I mean that's Stonewall. That wasn't the first night. It had been raided.

**JVN** [00:38:26] Right.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:38:26] But they had had enough that night. Or at least some people did it and it just-.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:38:30] I did some I did some research about raids in, in Quincy, Illinois and at-.

**JVN** [00:38:36] Irene's Cabaret.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:38:37] At Irene's Cabaret, at the State Street Bar, at, at the, I, yeah, I have notes at the Hotel Newcomb.

**JVN** [00:38:44] So Quincy is where I'm from, if you don't know. So tell me about that. So you. And so I wanted to ask about that, too. What does research look like for you when you're like putting together a poster where you're like covering something on LGBT history? Like what does it look like when you start to research something?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:38:56] Chaos.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:38:58] Yeah. I think, the way. I mean, because we really just did this for our own self education to start. It is we just let the history take us. So we weren't really researching specific people or events or organizations. I mean, maybe we'd start with one, but I really would just let it. If I saw somebody else in a photo, I would, I would allow that path to really just take me. I took my hands off the wheel often and would just let, and I mean, I'd end up with just hundreds of tabs open on my computer because I would just keep letting-.

**JVN** [00:39:37] You're pedaling the bike.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:39:38] Yeah. But no hands. Yeah. Just letting it go.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:39:42] And one of the great things about trial by fire on Instagram is, is that, you know, going with the hands on the wheel. When our hand, when it was clear that our hands got on the wheel, meaning our implicit or explicit bias, people would call us on it. And we call it we call each other on it. And and, you know. So we're guided on Instagram, these by our calendar we have this day in calendar, but, but in terms of the actual stories and the research, yeah, it really we just kind of get down rabbit holes. I mean, so Quincy is. So I knew you were from Quincy. I did a search about gay bars in Quincy. And, you know, we have a number. There's a great deal of information online, not just on a Google search, but through the One archives, through New York public library. You can start looking through periodicals to see where people went, to see people communicating with each other. And, and, and all of a sudden the world will just kind of open up and, and, you know, this starts to sound creepy. But like you. In your book, it talked about how Quincy doesn't have. You know, it never felt like Quincy had a history. Right?

**JVN** [00:40:48] Yeah.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:40:49] But that, we all feel like that because it doesn't, it doesn't feel like it has a queer history. But once you dig a little bit, it does. I mean, there is a queer history there. There were queer people there existing. there were queer people forever.

**JVN** [00:41:00] Tell me about it.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:41:01] So I mean, what the hotel-.

**JVN** [00:41:03] Quincy?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:41:04] No, the Hotel Newcomb, which I guess was demolished in 2013. It was right at 4th and Main, which is now the History Center. And it's very near the Herald.

**JVN** [00:41:12] I know exactly where it is.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:41:14] Yeah, that that was the cruising spot like for gay men in the 1940s, 50s and 60s and 70s. That was the, the place to go. State Street Bar, which is now a pizzeria.

**JVN** [00:41:27] Yeah.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:41:27] And Mexican food.

**JVN** [00:41:27] Yeah yeah yeah.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:41:29] Alright. Pizzeria and Mexican food. Love that.

**JVN** [00:41:30] Yeah. It's very common.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:41:32] Yeah. And then Irene's.

**JVN** [00:41:33] Yeah.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:41:34] Was that right?

**JVN** [00:41:34] Yeah. We love Irene's Cabaret. Yes

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:41:36] Which is now back. Yeah. Those. And then we also. So if I can't-. So one magazine was this the first like real nationally syndicated, syndicated is not, distributed Queer magazine started in 53, went for about 20 years. So this is from July 1960. If I could just read this. "Gentlemen, I would like to become a pen pal. If and when you decide to allow it. I have been rather lonely in the past year as I went with one person for nine years, but due to my being in an accident and his being tied to his mother's apron strings, we called it a day. Since then, life hasn't any meaning. I don't know how to go about meeting anyone new and hope from day to day someone will come along. Mr. W. Quincy, Illinois".

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:42:17] 1960.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:42:19] That's July 1960. Like these are people who,, who who existed, who, who had lives. And we've just been taught not to look for them and not to find them and.

**JVN** [00:42:28] Oh, my God, tell me other stories.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:42:31] I mean, it's just so there is this view that everything pre-Stonewall was just terrible life. But I mean, while he was sad in that letter, he had just come out of a nine year relationship with somebody. There was queer life out there.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:42:47] Yeah.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:42:47] And-.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:42:48] In Quincy, Illinois.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:42:48] Right. Yeah.

**JVN** [00:42:50] Was there any other letters from Quincy in there?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:42:52] No, but from some of the smaller towns around.

**JVN** [00:42:54] Lake Nauvoo? Ursa? Mendon.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:42:57] I don't know. I think Ursa there might have been. That was the best one.

**JVN** [00:43:01] Ursa has a gym. Oh my god..

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:43:03] Ok. There's also a person named Albert Cashier. Albert Cashier was a trans man who served in the Civil War in the Army. The Union Army's 95th Illinois. 95th regiment. Who ended up. I mean, he, he lived his life. And at the end, near the end of his life, was transferred to the sailor and soldiers home in Quincy, Illinois.

**JVN** [00:43:29] Quincy.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:43:29] Yeah. And and unfortunately, disgustingly, when dementia set in at the very end of life, he got transferred to a state mental hospital where for the first time in 80, however many years, they made him wear female clothing. He actually ended up tripping on the hem of a garment. And that's what killed him. But yes, in Quincy, it's there. It's there. And what we need and what we try to help people understand is, is that we get out there and find it. Like it's not, it's, it's, it's there and it doesn't have the same. I'm going back to Lincoln. It doesn't have the same language. Like it's very coded and it's very hard to find. It's not going to just there's not going to be pictures. If there are, send them in. There's not going to be. It's not going to be as obvious. But learn the language and, and find it. And don't tell it through the view that we've been taught to tell it, which is love is love and you know, everything. We're all going to be part of this great society. It's really sad, sometimes really hard sometimes. It's not easy. And there's also stories. We need to make sure that we're telling the whole story. We need to make sure that we, it's not fair not to tell the stories. People say, talk about like an inclusive history. That is kind of a

copout because it makes it sound like the storyteller is doing somebody a favor. Inclusive history, especially when it comes to queer people, is inaccurate history. There have always been trans women of color. There have always been disabled queer people. There have always been bisexuals. We just have, their stories are harder to find because there are, they are more marginalized. We have to find them. If you are going to do this work, you have to do the work. And, and to do it half assed is, is unfair. And we take a lot of shit on Instagram. We take, I mean, we we are constantly called on our shit. Always. Always. And that's hard. But sometimes it's really well done. And and one of the things that's great about this experience has been that we every day continuously have these moments of I'm never going to think about that again they same. I'm never gonna think the same way about that.

**JVN** [00:45:40] Can you give us some examples of those?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:45:43] Yeah, I mean, I, I. You know. Well like one that pops into my head is just the the book. Sending the book to this incredible legendary bisexual activist who I, we wanted to get a blurb from.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:45:59] Yes. So that's pretty preprint. And, and she ends up reading the book, which blurbers don't usually do. And we got an e-mail back. And she's a hero. She's one of my heroes, one of our heroes saying I can't, I won't, I'm not gonna blurb for this because, you know, the way that you, you ignore and right out bi, bisexual people is terrible. And, and not only will I not do blurb, but I'm not. If this gets published this way, I will actively tell people not to buy this. And then she went through and of course, it went through and told me, told us where we'd gone wrong. And at first, as always, the reaction is, you know, that I consciously tried. You know, and and it just kind of write it off as overreaction. Give it a few hours before the day, look back and just like, oh, she's absolutely right. And, you know, just talking about when we talk about the AIDS epidemic, we talk about the peak year. We talk of how many gay men died. OK, queer people died. It wasn't just and not to mention Haitians and hemophiliacs like people died. When we talk about gay men, yes, we can talk about the inordinate number of gay men. But we have written off bisexuals entirely in, in that equation. And that matters a lot, which is little. Just things like, it's not little. It's just things like that that will forever change our language. And it doesn't take much for us, but it means a world in terms of the platform that we have and the stories that we're telling.

**JVN** [00:47:34] But I do think that there is an interesting thing there, because, yes, like we should not erase people stories. But I do think that that is an interesting story of like someone who's your hero, someone who is within the community, who, you know, you're trying to get a blue from, but it's like, I think sometimes because we have been marginalized and people have been written out and maybe not acknowledged when someone who is well-meaning and is actually on your side comes along and tries to do something and they fucking jump down your throat. And I just think that that is this cycle of abuse that like when I was an assistant, like I think I always like remember telling myself, like, I'm going to try to like never be this much of a nightmare to my assistants because people are like, you know, can be a nightmare to you and you don't want to perpetuate that cycle. But it's like you know it. And I'm glad that you had a teachable moment and that you learned and whatever. But I just wish sometimes when people were, you know, giving you a teachable moment that they didn't have to, like, hike up their skirt and fucking tell you that they're going to actively tell people not to buy your fucking life's work. It's like, can you not take a huge steaming dump on all of my hard work please?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:48:36] Right.

**JVN** [00:48:36] I understand I missed a beat, comma, if you could just take a little off the fast ball, you know?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:48:42] She was, she was right. I don't know if she was right the way she approached it, but we didn't have a personal relationship with her. And some people require a kick to the face to sort of get it. We would, we would have been mortified with a far gentler tone, and would have gotten it but-

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:48:59] She spent a career and a lifetime not being listened to. And if that's what it took to get listened to. Right. I mean, she she had no way of knowing that we were going to listen to her, even if she had just said. "Um, can we do this"?

**JVN** [00:49:12] But I do think that by writing bisexual people off and bisexuals voices not being heard and acknowledged on the same, not being acknowledged, I think is, is wrong. And I know that bisexual people have been an integral part of moving the conversation forward and. And, you know. Absolutely. Yes.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:49:28] I mean by is erasures everywhere still.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:49:29] Yeah, it's a joke. It's. People just make, we constantly make jokes that just off the cuff, like, you know, someone some young person or older person comes out as bisexual. It's just a pit stop or whatever. And it's really. Can you imagine? Well, of course, we can't. We can to a certain extent, all imagine, like just your identity is discounted immediately. And as soon as if you partner off, you are then heterosexual or you are then homosexual. You're not. But no, they are bisexual and they are you know, you have a much different opposite sex or opposite gender partner, you know, that looks they get at pride for be-, like they're queer people. And this, of course, is just bisexual. Don't start with transgender folks. I mean, it is we have a, and what a lot of the focus of our work is not about the oppression from outside, because Lord knows that's there. It's a, it's, it's about our community. What our approach is, is about queer history. So often marginalized history is told like this lens of when we when the marginalized group did something that got on the oppressors' radar, either when we died enough or when we cleaned up enough or whatever we did to get their attention. We tell this, we have a history. It's our history. Every once in a while, the cis heads get our attention in our story, we have an internal 24-

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:50:52] But it's also I mean, a lot of that is how our own community has sort of prepackaged our, the history that has made it out there, because that didn't they didn't want to include any sort of internal strife, the fighting that has gone on for decades between the radicals and the assimilationists, for example. I mean, that continues to today clearly.

**JVN** [00:51:13] Which is like the mask for mask gay like it versus like "not all of us are fem and talk like you and wear heels and stuff".

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:51:20] Right. You know, I am just like you. I but I happen to like boys in every other way, and that doesn't actually effect anything else of me. My world view, my anything.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:51:32] Right.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:51:33] I just have that one little thing that's different than you.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:51:36] It's a lie. It's a lie. And, and especially for white cisgender gay men who are promised the keys to the castle and United States without the gay thing. You know, white cisgender men are, are told in this world that they can do whatever. They can go wherever they can be, whatever. But for gay men, they had this one thing. Right, that makes them different. And, and we so many of us do everything in our power to push that away. And we grow up both saying shit like it makes no difference. It's just the same old Matthew. Like, I'm just I just happen to like guys, I don't need gay bars. I don't need gay places. I don't need gay friends. And our community more and more and more is OK with that. People saying that we don't have spaces, we don't have places where people are saying, what? Like, no, honey, you need gay spaces. You need queer people like. And and that's why we were those. I certainly was. We were those guys. Like, we didn't need those places. We didn't need those sources. And once we discovered history, it was like. Like all of a sudden we were people. We were real boys. Like it was it. We had a story to tell. We had an anchor. And it was, you know, we can't just, we don't have the-. It's a privilege to connect yourself to the stories of heroes, of women of color, of lesbians of color, trans women. But you don't just get to say that you actually have to connect yourself to the struggle. You actually have to. You have to. You have to figure out how that connection goes on.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:53:04] And why it's been harmful for decades. Is that it, it, it sort of plucks out those who traditionally have the most influence in our society to these places of comfort. And then the rest of the community is left behind. And we've seen that again and again, really over the years. And-.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:53:26] Yeah, I mean, you know, I mean, they want they want us to be the effervescent like a certain kind of gay. But as soon as it gets political, it's like Jesus, you know. I mean, you guys can get married. What's with the? And Pete Buttigieg? Like it's just they will rattle off these things that they think they've given us. And, and a lot of our community continues to buy into it. Or at least say they buy into it. I mean, there is there are so many epidemics that continue to rage in our community. Bullying, suicide, trans women of color, lack of access to health care. HIV.

**JVN** [00:54:02] Homelessness.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:54:03] Homelessness. HIV among people of color. It goes on and on and on. And. And-.

**JVN** [00:54:08] Addiction.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:54:09] Addiction. Right. It just. Right. And let me be-. That is not an exhaustive list. It goes on and on and on.

**JVN** [00:54:15] Yeah.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:54:15] And that, you know, we people who talk like that are like "God, you so-". But it's, it's that we have so much work to do. And, and that should excite people. That should we have meaning. We have, we have fights to fight and we have the history that shows that we can win these fights. And there were incredible people who have been fighting these fights. But

we have got to get going. Well, there are already tons of people who are doing this work. We have got to get more people involved with those incredible organizations of those incredible individuals who are doing that work.

**JVN** [00:54:47] So as we're wrapping up. What's your suggestion to people who don't feel like they have an anchor and they are part of the queer community and they feel very isolated, they feel very low, and they feel like they're the first gay person in their town that they've ever heard of? How do you tell someone to start to get it to connect with this work? After they follow LGBT\_History?

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:55:06] And buy "We Are Everywhere".

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:55:07] Yes.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:55:08] It's a big book, though.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:55:10] I would. Well, you know, I don't know. Be safe. Just do whatever you can. And then. Yeah. History would, I wish that I'd had history when I was younger because that was a way just going-.

**JVN** [00:55:21] But like what sites do you used to go find that, like find that?

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:55:23] So One, One, the One archives at USC, University Southern California, Lesbian Herstory Archives, the NYPL or. Yeah. Email us.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:55:35] Yeah.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:55:36] This and that story that will get us every time.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:55:38] While it's not an immediate answer. I mean to the extent people otherwise are able to. I mean. Go into these studies, even if it's not going to be your career. You might have an opportunity in your academic pursuits to advance this, to uncover more history, to make spaces that are more accessible for others to learn.

**JVN** [00:55:55] It's like anthropology, but with like cultural history anthropology.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:55:58] Right because there is an amazing amount of material out there.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:56:01] That we haven't touched.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:56:02] Yeah, I mean, periodicals and photographs and everything else. But it is. I mean, there are people that spend so much time and are so busy just collecting and cataloging. And I mean, we need more, we need more people to, to come in and go through it and digest it and make it accessible.

**MATTHEW RIEMER** [00:56:19] Out of the bars and into the archives. And remember, there are over 200 just in the U.S. alone, there are over 200 LGBTQ community centers. If you, if you don't think that your town has a community center, just check again. And I know that it might be hard to

get there or to, to walk in. But the first time, I swear, the first time you walk into a community center, it is, it will lift every weight like, it is incredible place. Just do whatever you can to find queer people because you, it's okay to need them.

**JVN** [00:56:45] Never a better way to end the podcast, ever. Thank you so much, Matthew and Leighton. I really appreciate your time. I love you both so much.

**LEIGHTON BROWN** [00:56:53] Thank you.

**JVN** [00:56:53] You've been listening to "Getting Curious" with me, Jonathan Van Ness. My guests this week were Leighton Brown and Matthew Riemer. You'll find links to their work in the episode description of wherever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quin. Thank you so much to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend and show them how to subscribe. Si vous voulez. That means, "if you will", in French, I'm pretty sure. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter at CuriousWithJVN. Our socials are run and curated by Emily Bossak. "Getting Curious" is produced by me, Julie Carrillo, Rae Ellis, Chelsea Jacobson, Colin Anderson and Emily Bossak.