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Kieryn:

I'm Kieryn.

Eve:

And, I'm Eve. This is Kitchen Table Cult-

Kieryn:

Where two Quiverfull escapees talk about our experiences in the cultish underbelly of the religious rite.
Hi, Eve.

Eve:

Hey, Kieryn. How are you?

Kieryn:

I am exhausted.

Eve:

Me too.

Kieryn:

Yeah. What's going on with you?

Eve:

School is back, and I turned in 300 pages of writing two days ago, and I haven't slept it off yet.

Kieryn:

Oof. That is rough.

Eve:

And, you?

Kieryn:

I'm going through a fun hormone dose change that was very immediate, and not at all tapered, so I am crashing super hard. It is not fun at all, actually. This is happening in the middle of school, so I skipped a bunch of classes yesterday, and I don't know if I'm going to make it today for these classes that I really shouldn't be missing.

Eve:

Oh man, that sucks.

Kieryn:

It's terrible. But, I'm here, so-

Eve:

Glad you're here.

Kieryn:

There's that.

Eve:

We have a guest. We have my classmate, Reagan here.

Reagan:

Hi.

Eve:

Do you want to introduce yourself a little bit?

Reagan:

I'm a first-year student here at Hollins. I don't know, I'm here on the show.

Eve:

Well, thank you for joining us.

Kieryn:

Yeah. We were going to talk about Godly genderhood today, so I thought it would be really cool to have a bunch of queer/trans perspectives on gender. So I'm going to just start off with, Reagan, what was your growing up experience? How was gender explained to you as a kid growing up?

Reagan:

I suppose my earliest memories were being in a Baptist church, and being told how to sit. There is a mixed environment with little boys and little girls, and I think it rose out of some of the girls being rambunctious and having on dresses. So, naturally, they wanted them to close their legs. There's this lecture about how to sit. I remember being told that I had to sit either with my legs open, or ankle crossed at the thigh, and those were the only two options for me, or for any man. So I remember feeling like, "Oh, this is what I must do," spreading my legs super far apart. They were draped over the side of a folding chair.

Eve:

Just man-spreading everywhere.

Reagan:

Yeah.

Kieryn:

Yeah. I remember also being taught those things, have to sit with your legs crossed, or your legs together and knees to the side like a princess in the Princess Diaries.

Eve:

Oh, yeah. Very 1950s demure, parallel legs twisted to the side.

Kieryn:

Yeah. You have to sit like a princess. You can't have your legs crossed, or anything that would show that you have a knee. Eve, what was your experience with gender?

Eve:

I just remember a lot of competitive moments with neighborhood boys, because there were a lot of boys my age in the neighborhood, and there weren't really any girls. So playing with them, it would always be pretty normal until they all started kindergarten. They all came back from the first or second day being like, "Ew, you have cooties. We can't play with you anymore," and me being like, "Yeah? Well, I can still outrun you," and just chasing them down the block. I don't know, it just was a lot of trying to prove that I was as fast or agile as them. Then, by degrees, being more and more restricted.

There was a moment when I was 11, and my mom was like, "Now you can ride your bike to this block and that block," it was a four or five block radius, "but no further. If you were a boy, we really wouldn't care about this. But, because you're a girl, you can't." Because we were living in the Central Valley in California, there's this local community college that had an educational farm center pretty close to my house, it was probably half a mile away. That's where I wanted to go, but it was out outside of that four block radius so she was like, "No, you can't go there on your own." I just definitely went there all the time on my own because I was just like, "No, this is stupid. I can do anything a boy can do. Why would I not do that?"

Kieryn:

Was there a point in either of your childhoods, where your parents started policing more and more about your expression of gender?

Reagan:

Yeah, definitely. That's something I'm writing about right now. I remember being three years old, and putting a towel on my head, and basically telling my mom that I was a girl, and giving myself a female name. My mom played it off as a joke and she said, "No, you're not," and used my male name. That was when I realized that whatever I was feeling wasn't acceptable. I continued on from there, in terms of the ways that I would try to express myself, or the things I'd be interested in, such as my mother's makeup. It's funny, because I don't remember the moment when I was banned from my mother's makeup drawer, but I know it happened because, when I got back into it, I realized that what I was doing was forbidden. So there was that, "Oh, my mother's jewelry." Of course, being in her closet-

Eve:

Literally.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Reagan:

Literally too. But going in there and trying on her shoes, and wanting to walk around in her high heels. So, I remember that was a firm no for me, growing up. So of course, when I was left home alone, the first thing I did was do those things.

Eve:

She's written a great scene about it too.

Kieryn:

Nice.

Eve:

There's all these essays evolving out of this stuff. For me, it was more about being sexualized, being told, "You have to help mom in the kitchen with this," or, "You have to not sit like that," and, "You can't scratch your butt in public," or any of these things. "That's not ladylike. That's not ladylike." There was this moment where I was eight years old, and we were at this homeschool camp in the mountains. We'd been there for a couple days, and dehydration was making my skin look funny. So, I was very flushed, and my lips were really red and chapped. I remember my mom grabbing me by my shoulder and being like, "Why are you wearing lipstick? You know you're not allowed to wear lipstick."

Kieryn:

Oh, no.

Eve:

"That's immodest." So I was like, "No, my lips just look like that. I didn't do anything." It was this sense of, "I have to make myself not sexual. I have to make myself not stand out. I have to basically not draw attention to the fact that I have a body." So it was never so much about, "You have to behave this way." It was a, "Don't do this."

Kieryn:

Yeah. I was a mix of both of those things. There was definitely a lot of desexualizing. I also wasn't allowed to wear makeup. I wasn't allowed to wear more than lip gloss, unless I was performing or something, until I started courting. Then my parents were suddenly fine with it, because I was supposed to be getting married. So suddenly, I was supposed to know how all this worked and all that. But also-

Eve:

Yeah, that 0 to 60 thing, that's a whole other discussion.

Kieryn:

That's an entirely different episode, dedicated right to that. Yeah. But I remember, when I was 14, I was actually able to get away with it, but there was a bit of side eye, and a lot of reinforcing, "No, but you're not a boy." The only way that I was able to be allowed to vlog on the internet was if I pretended to be a boy, because it was at the height of all the crazy Florida predators talking to Florida teenagers on the internet. There was this whole slew of old men who were caught soliciting children in Florida, and it was

all girls, for the most part. So my parents were like, "Well, you can vlog, but you have to not be a girl on the internet." I was like, "Okay."

Reagan:

Oh, darn.

Eve:

That's interesting. I remember this period where I hated tights.

Kieryn:

Tights sucks.

Eve:

I still hate tights. But, outside of ballet, I wouldn't wear them. So I remember this period where I would try to find the most modest slacks, and all these outfits that were super modest but allowed me to wear pants in the winter, so that I wouldn't have to wear tights to church. I remember, around that same time, I wore overalls for a year straight. I remember my mom just being like, "Here, let me make you these dresses, these jumpers." They have the same top coverage as overalls, but they're dresses, they're more feminine. I remember her wanting to put patterns on them and me being like, "No, super simple." So they were basically the color of homeschool boy navy and khaki pants. That's what they were. They were same fabric, but just dresses.

Kieryn:

Yeah. While I was pretending to be a boy, I wrote all the same ways that people who read Masked tend to write. It was cool because I actually finally had this expression for the more masculine side of myself that my parents were allowing because it was keeping me safe. But as soon as I tried to express more masculine, and take a more leadership role in anything offline, that was immediately slapped down, and I was told that was not my place. I was a woman. I was not supposed to be over men. I was supposed to only ever be under men, and serving them, and helping them fulfill their purpose.

But I did also, at the same time, have this entire other world where I was allowed to express masculinely, and everyone thought I was a dude. I wore cargo pants and camo shirts for a year after we moved to Atlanta, and my parents were somehow okay with that. But then they were judgy about it, so I did a whole skirts only thing for a year also, to get them to chill. Even though they never said anything about it, it was just one of those things that I felt like I needed to in order to get them to stay off my back.

Reagan:

I have this really vivid memory when I was at summer camp. I went to a Baptist summer camp, and we had a dress up your counselor day. So, you can imagine where this is going. My counselor and another counselor both cross-dressed. Well, the campers wanted to cross-dress their counselors. So, I believe it was a female counselor who we borrowed clothes from. My counselor's name was Pedro, this Mexican guy with this buzz cut flat top haircut. So, he wore this floral print skirt and these combat boots. I don't know whose idea this was, but really creative stuff.

Kieryn:

That is extremely my aesthetic.

Reagan:

Yeah. Yeah, totally. So somebody had an atomic fireball candy, and licked it, and then put lipstick on him using that.

Kieryn:

Oh, my god.

Reagan:

He looked great. Then the other counselor took it a step further, and was wearing nail polish and makeup, actual makeup. He may have even shaved his legs.

Eve:

Nice.

Kieryn:

That's amazing.

Reagan:

So, it was a blast. I was like, "Oh, my gosh." Of course, I was doing all these things by then, 'cause I was 14, and we had our thing, and we had our fun. Afterwards, I remember there being these grumblings of, "Oh, the people in charge are really upset about this."

Kieryn:

Oh, yeah.

Reagan:

I started to get really nervous, and wondering what the deal was. I just knew that I was, at this point, disobeying my parents, and their rules about makeup, and clothing and things. I didn't realize where this was all coming from. My girlfriend at the time, we were pen pals, she showed me this passage in the Bible that I had never read before, the Deuteronomy verse. I remember reading that for the first time, and I just felt, I don't have the words even, I'm still working on that. But, I felt so terrible. It was this moment of feeling very exposed, and then very just buried in shame and terror. So, that was this really defining moment, I think.

Eve:

I remember some similar youth group activity. I wasn't allowed to go to youth group, but I remember there was some rumblings after something like that happened in our church youth group when I was pretty small, and my dad deciding to go off on this lecture about, "We don't do that in our house. This is an abomination, and God frowns on this." I think also, maybe what sparked it is, we were playing dress up and we put my brother in a dress. We also put the dog in a dress. But, we were using my brothers as doll. It was around the same time as all that was happening, so my dad had this lecture with my sister and I about cross-dressing, and he kept using the word abomination over and over.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Reagan:

That word.

Kieryn:

I remember, I was at TeenPact for national convention the second year, and Tim Echols sat down the entire student body, and just gave us this lecture about how terrible it is for men to be effeminate. What he was really trying to say is gay or trans, but without using those words. It was an hour and a half, if not longer, of him just yelling at us about how it's sinful, and an abomination, and the most un-Christian, the evil thing to even pretend to be queer, because some boys in camp that year were marginally flamboyant. It wasn't even super gay. It was just slightly less macho than someone wanted them to be. But, for a group of homeschooled nerd boys-

Eve:

Some of them used to put their arms akimbo on their hip or something.

Kieryn:

Right. They danced okay.

Eve:

Wow. White homeschooled boys who dance okay?

Kieryn:

Yeah. Obviously, dangerous threat. Then proceeded to tell us, in no uncertain terms, what godly manhood and godly womanhood looked like. It was like, the women are supposed to be the helpmeets, and they're supposed to find a godly husband, and give them lots of children, and homeschool those children, the whole 200-year plan, and the takeover, and all of the vast right wing conspiracy that we talk so much about, all of that.

Eve:

I have a question on this, actually, as it's occurring to me. So, all of the developments of the signs of the End Times, increasing levels of queer behavior and acceptability of queerness in public, was one of those signs, right?

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Eve:

So, why would they try to tamp it down if they wanted Jesus to come back?

Kieryn:

Right? Right. You'd think they'd be about as ambivalent about it as they are about climate change.

Eve:

Exactly. It's like, "Oh, well, when we all get new bodies, you'll realize what you did wrong."

Kieryn:

Right. But no, instead, even the slightest inkling that someone could be not straight is a death sentence, and you're just called out and spit on for existing, and expressing yourself in any way.

Eve:

Did either of anyone who came out as queer when you were still in conservative Christianity? Someone from that world who came out and got ostracized, or something?

Kieryn:

Yeah, there was one. I think there was one person who came out as gay around the time that I was still there but leaving, and it was this weird hushed silence, like you just never heard of that person again. They just fell off the planet into somewhere.

Reagan:

Yeah. This guy that was a bit younger than me eventually came out as gay. I don't know that he did that when I was in contact with him. But I do remember, at camp, there was this guy that was skinny. I wouldn't call him quite effeminate, but definitely not masculine or macho in any way, kind of nerdy. There was a rumor that he was bi, and that was-

Eve:

I'm surprised they even knew what that was.

Kieryn:

Yeah.

Reagan:

I know. Well, I don't think anybody really knew, but some people apparently knew. Then there was like, "Oh, his door swings both ways." That's what they said.

Eve:

Oh.

Reagan:

You know what I mean? Then it's like, "Okay. Well, we kind of understand what you're talking about." So, he got picked on. I do remember him being picked on. The next year he was a little bit taller, and he went into this goth mode. So, I guess he reinvented himself a little bit.

Eve:

Did he get left alone more the second [inaudible 00:23:42]?

Reagan:

I think so. I think he did. I think he found his place a little bit more. But it's interesting what you say, Kieryn, about the intensity that the curriculum, or the organized material that you had been indoctrinated with, I didn't really experience that so much. I think it was part of the culture more. Everything was very gendered and divided. We had a Flower Committee and it was just-

Eve:

At church?

Reagan:

Yeah, at church. It was unspoken that, that was the women's domain. Same with Kitchen Committee.

Eve:

You didn't have any women elders-

Reagan:

No.

Eve:

On the leadership team at all? It was the thing that-

Reagan:

Not at all.

Eve:

This was the one way they were allowed to be in charge of something?

Reagan:

Yes. It was very patriarchal, of course. I do remember a few things that happened, where there were remarks about gender variance. At camp one year, one of the guest speakers told this little anecdote about some trans women that were walking in, of course he didn't use that word, the door at a restaurant that he was going to. Apparently, they stopped and, in his words, waited for him to open the door for them. He was making a big deal about how he wasn't going to do that, and they can open the door themselves, and they're really men, et cetera.

Eve:

Wow.

Kieryn:

Wow.

Reagan:

So, that was a little tangent.

Eve:

Oh yeah, door opening is a big deal.

Kieryn:

Oh, my God.

Eve:

I forgot about this.

Kieryn:

Yeah, door opening.

Eve:

Okay. Yeah. I remember at Grove City, at my college, there's these huge heavy doors in the Student Union, in the SAC. That's what we called at, the Student Activity Center was what it was called when I was there. The SAC. These doors are really heavy, and most people of any gender would have to lean into yanking them open to get them to budge. I remember, there were all these moments where guys would run ahead of groups of girls to-

Kieryn:

Oh, my God.

Eve:

Hold them open, and throw their entire body weight up against the door to hold it open. They'd stand there in the freezing cold for minutes on end while more and more people kept coming through 'cause they just didn't know when to stop, or when the queue was to stop.

Kieryn:

Yeah, I remember that too. That was a huge part of all of the churches that I went to, in every community that I was involved in, was the door opening thing. I remember this weird, subversive, liberating feeling that I got when I opened the door for people, like I was breaking some law by holding the door open-

Eve:

See, I-

Kieryn:

Because I was a girl.

Eve:

I got that feeling from when I would use the chivalry to make guys do things that they wouldn't necessarily have done, to make them pay attention to someone else, and be more generous or kind. I used it in a backhanded way to make them do emotional labor that they weren't interested in doing.

Kieryn:

Nice.

Eve:

That always made me feel really powerful.

Kieryn:

That's great.

Eve:

If any of my friends from college are listening to this, they'll just be like, "Yeah, that was a thing." I think with having someone come out in our community, one of the interesting things for my upbringing is that both of my aunts have had same-sex relationships. I'm using it in air quotes because the whole struggling with the same-sex attraction, SSA. It was the Christianese term for being queer.

My dad's sister brought a woman to my parents' wedding, and that was one of the least dramatic things about that day because my dad's parents were divorced, and had not been in the same room with each other in a decade, so that was the most dramatic thing about that day, rather than the two women in the front row. Then my mom's sister is a lesbian, and she's always been very open about that.

She got married when she was in the military to get better housing with her fake husband, this gay guy. They had their own lives, and it was this perfectly happy arrangement. This is something that she's like, "I don't really talk about that because it wasn't real." My mom never really got much into judging the sexuality stuff, she just was sad that her sister was lonely, and thought that being a Christian would fix that. It didn't really take much more specific shape than, "I wish my sister didn't drink. I wish my sister wasn't alone." That's about all it came down to.

My father, however, was a lot more strict about these things. His best friend from college was in the military, and was married and had four kids with his wife. I babysat for the family, and was very involved with them. When I was in college, or newly married, actually, whenever 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' got overturned, this guy came out. His wife flipped her lid and left him, and was really bitter about it.

The way he tells it is, "I told her this before we got married. I told her that I was gay. I told her what we were she was getting into, but she still wanted to do it." He had gone through conversion therapy, so he was really trying hard to keep a lid on it too. So I think it was on both sides, they were trying to ignore it.

But my father wrote him a bunch of letters about how he was in sin, and refused to fellowship with him anymore. They were best friends, this was like a 30-year friendship that got destroyed because this guy came out. I'm friends with this guy now, ironically. He's like, "The funny thing is, I came out to your dad before his wedding. I came out to your dad when we were in college."

Kieryn:

Oh, my God.

Eve:

Apparently my father almost uninvited him from the wedding because of it.

Kieryn:

Whoa.

Eve:

So, there's these double standards. For the non-Christians in our family, my parents would look the other way on and be like, "Well, they just don't know any better." Then the people of faith in our community, it would be like, "We're going to take this really hard line with you, because you should know better."

Kieryn:

Right. Because, being gay is a choice.

Eve:

Absolutely.

Kieryn:

Obviously-

Eve:

Obviously.

Kieryn:

You're choosing this.

Reagan:

I think there's a huge double standard in terms of what would be considered hetero sin and homo sin, so-

Eve:

You should define those terms. That's a really interesting.

Reagan:

It's a heteronormative sin. So-

Eve:

So, cheating on your wife-

Reagan:

Cheating-

Eve:

With the secretary.

Reagan:

Or even living with your girlfriend/boyfriend, any of these things. It's pretty much pretty par for the course now to have a girl and a boyfriend living together, and not much is said about that anymore. Cheating, divorce, et cetera, keep going. Any sexual behavior, it's not condoned but it's overlooked.

Eve:

It's not irreparable. There's a way to come back from it. There's a way to a clear set path of how to repent-

Reagan:

Reconcile.

Eve:

Reconcile and fix it.

Kieryn:

It can be sad enough, and repented enough, and it's fine.

Eve:

Yeah. Being queer-

Kieryn:

But, you can't come back from being gay.

Reagan:

No. You can't even come out from being gay.

Eve:

It always has to be a secret. You can't use it as your cute testimony at church to be, "Once I was in sin and then I got saved."

Reagan:

Right. Even the act of speaking about your same-sex attraction means that somehow, to people, you're condemned and in sin. It makes no matter of what you're actually doing.

Eve:

So, I have a question for both of you, and this is your classic outsider's perspective on being trans. But within your experience of realizing that something was different, and realizing that you weren't fitting in all these binary spaces, was the possibility of being trans something that you realized even existed? How did you come to realize what options were available to you? Because I think one of the things I struggled with a lot, as I was leaving fundamentalism, was the lack of imagination for what was possible for me, because so many things had been just turned off and I was in the dark about so many ways of living, that I wasn't aware of what my options were. So, I just didn't have the imagination to picture different futures.

Kieryn:

Yeah. I had no idea. I thought I was just broken. I thought, not that God makes mistakes but, "What the fuck?" I felt like there was something irreparably damaged because I wasn't living up to everything that I was told I should be. I got along way better with boys than I did with girls, because I didn't share the interests of cooking, or curriculum, or whatever it was that we talked about. I recently discovered this in therapy actually, when people thank me for my leadership, that's a trigger because whenever I was thanked for my leadership growing up, it was always in a backhanded manner that meant I need to step back and let a boy do it.

Eve:

Right. "Oh, you're taking too much initiatives. Chill out."

Kieryn:

Right. Yeah, exactly. "You're a woman, you have to stand back and let men handle things." So I didn't even have language for what I was feeling gender-wise until I had been out for several years. It wasn't until I came out as bi and realized that there's a huge fluid spectrum of everything, and nothing is just one or the other. After figuring that out, I realized, "Oh, well, it's not just in my sexuality that I feel attraction to whomever, and is very fluid." It's also, the way I feel as a person is not one or the other. Then I went down some Tumblr rabbit holes, as you do.

Eve:

Tumblr's the great educator for our generation, truly.

Reagan:

I guess for me, I also felt very lost and uncertain of who I was for the longest time, not having words, and just feeling like I was the only one, and there's something wrong with me. For sure, I relate to all that. However, when I was eight years old, we were on our way back from church and we stopped at a gas station, and my mother went, "Oh, look. It's so-and-so from my work, who's now a woman." I was sitting in the back seat, and I jumped up and I said, "What do you mean living? What do you mean a woman?" She said something about sex change. I was just all-

Eve:

You were all ears.

Reagan:

All ears. I was standing up, and my mom turned around and pushed me down into my seat, and it was the end of the conversation. But, at that moment, I knew that it was possible. I didn't know how. I didn't know any details, of course I wanted to know them all at that moment. But-

Eve:

Tell me everything.

Reagan:

I knew that it was somehow possible. Then throughout my youth, it was putting these little pieces together, little scraps. Seeing in the Nashville Enquirer, "Man burned his penis off, and sex changed." I'm grabbing the Enquirer and, "Should I cut this out? Should I cut this article? Maybe it'll give me some-

Eve:

The article, right?

Reagan:

Yeah. The article. Then, one time we were in a car lot, again, it was after church. My mother seems to be the one that spots the trans people. She's said to my father, "I think that's a transvestite." That was the first time I heard that word. In this case, this person was going from female to male. I was like, "Where? Where?" She's like, "Sit down, sit down." Of course, then I took out my parents' big unabridged Webster's Dictionary that's two feet thick.

Kieryn:

Yes. I had one.

Reagan:

Opened it up, and I read what transvestite meant. I'm thinking, "This is not quite it, but it's somewhere closer."

Eve:

Do you think your mom knew? Do you think your mom knew that you were trans, and was just trying to prevent you from figuring it out, but she was hyper aware of it in the world around her?"

Reagan:

I don't know. It's funny because there was another thing that I remember, actually now, that happened with my father. My brother and I, I don't know how old we were, were going to this wrestling event, and we were in his truck, and he was listening to a classic rock radio station. Lou Reed's Wild Side song came on, and it was on for a little bit. Then the part that starts to talk about the trans woman plucking her eyebrows and shaving her legs, that he was a she, and then take a walk on the wild side. I remember my dad stopping, and hurrying up, and turning the radio off at that point. So, I do think that my parents were aware of that. I don't know if it was particularly because of me.

Eve:

They were just hypersensitive to it.

Reagan:

Yeah, they were sensitive to it. Yeah.

Kieryn:

That reminds me a little bit, when I was in high school and I was learning about genetics, I learned about being intersex, and intersex conditions, and Klinefelter Syndrome. It blew my mind because I was like, "That feels like me." I had no way to explain it or learn more about it because my parents believed

doctors were evil. So, I was really cut off. But ever since I'd gone through that book, every time people kept talking about how gender was binary, I would always, always, always be like, "No, intersex people exist. There's science to it. There is actual conditions that mean that you can be something that isn't one or the other." I held onto that nugget of truth until I was able to get out. But, it was this weird secret truth that I just had, and I held onto, because that explained so many things.

Eve:

That was always in the back of my mind too, with all the John Piper, godly manhood and womanhood nonsense, all these situations where you're like, "Well, a woman can be a boss in this circumstance, but not if she's making the man do this thing or that thing." I always remember thinking, "Yeah, but there's whole other cultures that don't do that, and there's kinds of people that don't fit into this. I don't know if this is the way the Bible interpreted things."

Kieryn:

Right.

Eve:

Well, thank you for joining us, Reagan.

Reagan:

Yeah, thank you for having me.

Eve:

We look forward to talking to you next time.

Kieryn:

Bye.

Eve:

Bye.

Reagan:

Bye.