

Emily: I was going to a wedding back in summer for one of my friends and I knew that one of my exes was going to be there. Not so much an ex but someone that I did have a sexual history with. And she was supposed to be going with her new girlfriend and I felt pretty good about it. I was at a wedding in my favorite dress, I felt gorgeous, I was just ready to handle what was coming for me because we didn't end on super great terms but did want to be cordial with one another in social settings. So about halfway through the wedding, I'm hanging out with a group of our mutual friends and she approaches our group and proceeds to speak to everyone in the group but me trying to avoid eye contact clearly and she has her new girlfriend by her side. And I kind of took it upon myself to say hello and ask how she was doing and ask "oh, who is with you?" and she proceeds to introduce me to her girlfriend, as her girlfriend. And that's when things got a little awkward.

*[music - Sequel by Teammate]*

My original thought on the subject of friends with exes is that you either believe we should be friends with our exes, or we shouldn't. I first became interested in this subject when I realized not everyone is friends with their exes. To me, it often seems like a no-brainer, because well, there aren't that many of us so we might as well stick together. I think that now that I'm in a major metropolitan city and not at small liberal arts college, it's not about numbers of queers in your network. I think it's actually about the friendship and companionship that's imbedded in our sexual relationships and it's losing that part that makes it so hard.

Brene Brown, that researcher whose Ted talks you've probably seen, explains what happened while she was conducting her research. She said "When you ask people about love, they tell you about heartbreak" and I think the same is true here, for us. Because a funny thing happened when we asked people about how they became friends with their exes. Intuitively, people told us about their relationships, from beginning to end and all the stuff that came after. It makes figuring out what is it exactly that helps us get back to friends after a break up, kind of difficult because we realized that there are so many factors both during and after a relationship that help or hinder that process. In these next stories, we'll hear a lot about distance, taking time apart, but also just relationships formed on really solid friendships.

Welcome back to The Queer Public Podcast. This episode is “Friends with Exes” or as it would be, getting back to friendship after a breakup. Today we have three different perspectives on getting back to friends. First, we’ll hear from a group of queer women who find friendship after a difficult breakup. Then we talk to an ex couple who now play in a band together, and third, I talk to an artist about her photography series where she documents exes who are ‘not friends’ while they holding hands.

A word of warning, these first two stories use explicit language that we have not bleeped — and we acknowledge the existence of sex in this episode. We have a clean version up at [soundcloud.com/queerpublic](https://soundcloud.com/queerpublic) where we have those curse words bleeped.

Here’s our first story, out of Toronto, Canada. After her four year long closeted relationship with her college roommate failed, Rachael Kowaleski never thought they’d be able to get back to friends, let alone imagine how close her current girlfriend and ex-girlfriend would be today. Here’s Rachael with her account of how it went down, in a strong Canadian accent.

Rachael: The story begins almost 10 years ago in a university dorm room in 2004. We were seventeen and then we met through a mutual friend and we decide to live together. We were going to the same university, we got along great and neither of us knew anyone else going to that school so it seem like a good fit. Thinking back on it, the whole situation seems a bit cliché, like we were living out with spring fire or some equally tragic 1950s lesbian pulp novel where the young virginal women falls into each other desperate embrace, despite their better judgment. But in like those stories, we don’t die tragically or get sent away, this story has a happy ending.

Emma and I became physically involved seemingly through an old apparent will of our own; both of us were extremely naïve, sexually inexperience and not prepared for the fact that we were raging lesbians. The next 3 years of our relationship was a mixed bag of self-denial, jealousy, confusion and genuinely good times. We would sneak in and out of each other’s room when we thought our other roommates weren’t paying attention, our lives were saturated with loud declaration of “I’m just not

attracted to women” usually, directly followed by sex with each other. While everyone else was off having the best years of their lives, we struggle to stay in a closet that was slowly opening even as we pressed ourselves against the back wall hoping to find a magical Narnia island somewhere behind the coats where we could have sex with a woman and never be consider a lesbian. But at last as with all magical closets of dreams, eventually you get too old to believe anymore and cold hard reality rips the door right off leaving you huddle on the floor with your flashlight feeling quite foolish.

In my story, it was my current girlfriend Courtney who plays the part of cold, hard reality. We met in our field ecology class, we were instantly attracted to each other and proceeded to spend nearly every waking hour either with or talking to each other. But I didn't tell her about my closet relationship and girlfriend of almost 4 years whose graduated and absent. I never cheated on Emma with Courtney but I didn't tell her I was with someone else either. So after months of sexual tension and painfully subtly indication of interest, Courtney found me out and then she proceeded to flip the fuck out. This is when I realize; see relationships are stupid; you have none of the security and satisfaction of being in a long comfortable relationship and none of the feelings of freedom expectancy that being single towards you.

On top of all that, hurting Courtney made me realize that my secret wasn't just affecting me, it was giving me an excuse to lead people on and represent myself as something that I was not. I told Emma I couldn't do it anymore and we needed to start the process of coming out at summer or whatever we were doing couldn't continue. She agreed, so almost after 4 years, Emma and I came clean about our relationship then we broke up. This transition from over emotional, insecure couple to the completely plutonic, openly lesbian friends that we are today, who go on double dates and have breakfast together happen through a series of events and stages.

We'll call the first stage “the buildup,” the unintended downside coming out to the majority of our friends and family about our relationship was that it allowed us both to relax and let ourselves imagine a future. When you assume something will end at any given moment, you tend to restrict

expectations that will lead to painful disappointment. After we came out, I started referring to her as my girlfriend to strangers, we went to a wedding together, it felt normal and legitimate for the first time. Emma got into grad school in England for January and we discuss that I would finish my degree and follow her there in the spring. However one September afternoon, she told me I wasn't going with her. This brings us to stage two, "the letdown." We've decided to stay together until she left, through the emotional exhausting experience of being in a relationship that has a looming expiry date. If you haven't done this sort of thing already, I wouldn't recommend it. It involves crying, yelling, a lot of you never love me's, begging, pleading, anger, feelings of hope, feelings of lost, isolation, depression, I'm not good enough, I'm too good, I could do better, I'll never find anyone as good as you, don't touch me's and never let me goes.

You are torn between wanting to be so well behaved so you can enjoy your final months together and show her how totally wrong she was about you, you are so super composed and doing everything you can to punish and make life hell on earth for the person who let you down. If you are someone like me, this type of trauma makes you volatile. If you are someone like Emma, it makes you withdrawn and unresponsive. Meanwhile, Courtney was working in a different town, an hour and a half away doing her best to forget about me.

Emma always said she wanted to be friends after we broke up but I wouldn't have it, I didn't think it was fair that she could reject me but still have the comfort of my loyalty and support. She left in January 2009 for grad school and we start talking again on the phone in small bits in March. She was having fun and finding perspective in England and I was in a completely open, un-closeted relationship with Courtney. It's hard to stay angry at someone when you know what they did, well it hurt you at the time was the best thing they could have done for you. Cutting me lose was a gift although I didn't see it that way at the time, our relationship wasn't working for a long time. I thought it was because it was a secret, when really we weren't as compatible as I thought we were. Being with Courtney showed me that and I was so happy and satisfy with her that I knew I had no right to be anything but grateful.

Stage three, "letting the dust settle." About three months after she left, we started talking again via instant messenger. I remember the first couple conversation being very emotional and we hash it all out with a clickety-clack of our furiously typing fingers but after that, it also starts to settle. So much in fact that that summer I decided I would stop by England for a few days while I was visiting my aunt in Germany. I have to admit that I had a hard time adjusting to our first reunion than she did. I remember going to a bar where some meat head was drunkenly grinding all over her and being angry, I wanted to go over, cut in but she didn't want me to and I didn't have the right. It's not like I wanted to win her back, I was dating Courtney and I was extremely happy with her. We both just had to completely relearn how we relate to each other, all the traits that made us get along and stayed together for 4 years were still there, we still have been through a lot together, we still cared for each other but we couldn't and didn't want to do the things we did to show that admiration in the past. But every time she would come back and we would see each other for holidays, it got easier and less strange. Even as I say this, I find it hard to believe this all happen, all this drama doesn't seem to fit into the friendship that we have today. We go to bars together, talk on the phone, we laugh about the past, have coffee dates, run errands together, sometimes just the two of us and more often than not, Courtney comes too.

More recently, Emma started dating another woman and all four of us don't seem to have an issue at all. People think this is weird but it doesn't really feel weird to me, it just feels like how it should have been all along. But I suppose by now, you're wondering what Emma has to say about this. Emma and my current girlfriend Courtney for that matter, well first here is Emma. I guess what I want to know is just why did you insist on staying friends? Like what did you think we had gain from this?

Emma: Well I thought we always had a good relationship in terms of communicating with each other and we are obviously compatible in certain ways, just the relationship part didn't work out so well. And I don't know, you're important and we've been through a lot together and I knew that it wouldn't be right away but I wanted to be friends at some point because we get along well.

Rachael: Yeah, well then like I was pretty awful, so what like now.

Emma: You were, yes.

Rachael: What, why did you think it was worth it after that? I probably wouldn't have been my friend.

Emma: Well I knew you were angry and hurt and I knew that I was closing you out and that was just the only way I could do it and move away and separate everything. So I don't know, I thought that with time everything would settle down a little bit and I was just hopeful. I didn't know at that point that we would or could necessarily be friends but I knew you were angry, so I hope that after that passed.

Rachael: Right.

Emma: Things would be better.

Rachael: Yeah, yeah okay. Alright so what do you think, I mean after you came back, what do you think was like the worst time after we broke up and then you move back to Canada?

Emma: Yeah for me it was when I came home for the Christmas holidays after my first year.

Rachael: Yeah I remember that, yeah.

Emma: Yeah, that was when I sort of dealt with the breakup, I was a year delayed.

Rachael: Yeah.

Emma: And sort of dealing with my emotions I guess because I've been away in a different environment, it didn't hit me so much until I came home into familiar surroundings and you had Courtney and I had no one and it was Christmas time and it was just, I don't know, I guess that's when it hit me. But we talked; I remember we talked at the time.

Rachael: Yeah.

Emma: And I told you and you said you know basically, sorry about your

life. And I knew I had to deal with it and I didn't want to put it all on you but I didn't want to talk about it and yeah I went back to England and had more time to sort of deal with it emotionally and think about it and by the time I came home after another year, we were good. I think at that point, we were...

Rachael: Yeah.

Emma: We sort of established our base level of friendship.

Rachael: Right.

Emma: We were passed all the awkwardness and sort of weird delayed feelings. I knew distance was huge.

Rachael: Yeah.

Emma: Because we were able to talk but just sort of generally and I was distracted with my studies.

Rachael: Right.

Emma: And meeting with people and being miles away and you had a new girlfriend and we, yeah I think the distance was a big part. Because I think if we had seen each other...

Rachael: Yeah.

Emma: Regularly like on purpose or just by accident with our mutual friends and stuff, it would have been hard, it would have been...

Rachael: Yeah.

Emma: Hard to move passed.

Rachael: When you came back, did you just think that, did you know it was going to be okay or did you think that it would be weird or?

Emma: I was a little hesitant only from Courtney's side of things really thing.

Rachael: Right.

Emma: Because...

Rachael: Because you thought she might be weird about it?

Emma: Yeah and like I met her I think once before I left for England. She didn't know me, I didn't know her and yeah, I think it's kind of weird and awkward and threaten from her point of view if your girlfriend ex...

Rachael: Yeah.

Emma: Suddenly moved back and is around all of a sudden and you know, we had established a basic friendship but to her that was all new and we kind of had to work out that.

Rachael: Right.

Emma: That new dynamics, so I was hesitant from that point of view but I was again just kind of thought and see how it goes and hopeful that she is very understanding and...

Rachael: Yeah.

Emma: She was and she was willing to like me. And it ended up the three of us could be really good friends and I love it. And I mean it might have not have worked if it was a different person but with Courtney, it was yeah, it took a little while but we ended up being great.

Rachael: Yeah because you never seem like you – like I was like I was always we'll never be friends again and all this and you never seem to like think that we wouldn't be.

Emma: Well yeah, I knew you could be a little dramatic.

Rachael: Dramatic.

Emma: And angry and hurt and I mean if we hadn't been able to be friends, I would have understood, I would have been sad that it had ended up that way but...

Rachael: Yeah.



Emma: I could have – I could understand why, you know like you said it was a gradual process.

Rachael: Right.

Emma: And just kind of learning to redefine the relationship with each other as friends and where we stood and incorporating new people in our lives.

Rachael: Yeah, so how do you think that came about, like why do you think we manage from out of this without any overwhelming weirdness? I mean other than you know like the distance from the beginning, like why do you think about maybe our personality or the situation that made it okay when and in most situations it wouldn't be?

Emma: I think part of it might have been because most of our relationship was a secret.

Rachael: Yeah.

Emma: And nobody else knew about it and we relied on each other for everything. Any fights that we had, we had to you know discuss them and fix them between us.

Rachael: Yeah.

Emma: We couldn't go to somebody else.

Rachael: Yeah.

Emma: And you know bitch about each other for a certain amount of time and then I would come back and made it okay. We had to work on it just the two of us and to me I think that was a big part of being able to work through all the stuff after we broke up.

Rachael: Right.

Emma: Because we were used to discussing things openly and we continue to do that and I think that was a big part of it.

Rachael: Like good communication and...

Emma: Yeah, and I'm sure, I mean our personalities and everything would fit into that as well and distance but to me that was one of the key things because we only ever had each other to work it out between.

Rachael: Yeah, no I never thought about it that way that like because we always had to talk about everything, everything to death all the time. I felt it kind of transition us into like okay; our whole relationship was a bit weirdness.

Emma: Yep.

Rachael: And so like...

Emma: We were good at weird.

Rachael: Yeah so we were always, so yeah, exactly. We were always weird, so why would this be any different.

Emma: Yeah.

Rachael: And why like...

Emma: It wasn't normal.

Rachael: It wasn't normal, it wasn't early phases. Yeah I know that's a good point and here is Courtney. How did you feel when you start to figure out this was actually happening like we're going to be friends with Emma, like what were your initial reaction to this?

Courtney: I don't know, because I heard stories about you first and then why, just like why? It seem, no it seem like because no one is friends with their exes, so I thought it was...

Rachael: You thought it was weird?

Courtney: I thought it was weird. But then honestly I met you and Emma and she was a grand friend, like I don't know what the point and then suddenly, it all seem silly.

Rachael: Right, like at first was it weird for you to know the history and all of that?

Courtney: Yeah, what was weird for me was telling people “oh we’re all going out for a movie” and they are like “with whom?” And then “oh Rachael and then you know her ex,” I didn’t want to call Emma her ex but then I was like, well she became my friend but because people would wonder.

Emma: But at the point, you kind of have established being just being just friends again, not again like kind of ?

Courtney: Yeah, yeah.

Emma: Like redefine everything and just being friends but for you is like I’m appearing out of nowhere, I haven’t been there for the past 2 years and like that’s’ weird and I recognize that for you it would be quite uncomfortable.

Courtney: You probably adapt to the like what is normal in the friendship and you guys were so normal that I...

Emma: And I liked you and...

Courtney: Yeah I don’t even feel like I have to explain it to people anymore, before I did.

Emma: Yeah.

Courtney: Because they were wondering but you know what...

Emma: Yeah, fuck them right?

Courtney: Fuck them.

[Music - Sequel by Teammate]

Dani: Hey, I’m Dani

Scott: And I’m Scott

Dani: And we’re Teammate.

Scott: And we’re up next

*[music - Sequel by Teammate]*

Erin: This next story goes beyond friendship and wades into a different territory. The territory of creative collaboration. More specifically, about the formation of a band. A band that tours and plays shows and records EP's and talks to the press together. But get this — they dated for 10 years. Here is Dani Buncher and Scott Simons to tell their story.

Scott: We met in Morgantown, West Virginia at West Virginia University. I had just graduated and Dani was an incoming freshman.

Dani: It was 1998 – 1999.

Scott: Oh yeah, yeah it was 1998. Dani had join the marching band and I had been in the marching band and had all these friends still in the band and we just kept getting introduced to each other because we're the only Jewish kids anyone knew at West Virginia University at the time. And by about the third time, we're both just like yes we've met but we didn't know each other before. Dani was like a rock star when she came in the marching band because she was like badass freshman girl that made sneer line. I pretty much knew right away I had a crush, I don't know if it was the Jewish thing or if it was the badass sneer girl thing or if it's just a combination of everything.

Dani: In the beginning, Scott would ask me to go to Shabbat dinner at the Hello House for the University a lot and I came from a very Jewish neighborhood in Pittsburg called Squirrel Hill and I grew up with a lot of Jewish friends and there was just something, I've never even then been asked to Shabbat dinner by a boy.

Scott: I actually invited you to bagel brunch before Shabbat dinner.

Dani: There was a lot of Hillel inviting. Back then I don't think I recognize that Scott really had any interest in me and that's sort of why it was never an obvious sort of flirtation that was happening. I thought that this order guy was just trying to recruit me to go to the Hillel House and be part of the Jewish community on campus and I really wasn't interested. But he had really long hair and wear a lot of cargo shorts and yeah, but what it really came down too, I don't think that I knew he was really interested and I definitely wasn't interested in any of that. But we did hang out a lot and we would go to the record stores together and just kind of like make sort of random road trips together as friends and then one day he showed up and

pick me up. I don't think you were wearing cargo shorts but you definitely shaved everything off your facing, and your hair was really short and you looked very handsome and you weren't wearing burton socks and that's when I knew okay I'm totally into this.

Scott: And we just started dating and that lasted 10 years, that was like a weird, I don't think we expected that, we just kind of went and got coffee and then 10 years later.

Dani: But we had a lot of fun together, we would see a lot of movies, we take a lot of hikes, we...

Scott: Our families got close.

Dani: Our families got close.

Scott: Like I spent pass over at your family, you come down and hang out with mine.

Dani: I lived about an hour and a half north in Pittsburgh and we would travel a lot to Pittsburgh together and you got really close to my family and my siblings and we would do a lot of used record shopping and CD shopping at the Pittsburgh stores, we just kind of hang out.

Scott: Yeah.

Dani: There was a lot more to do when the internet wasn't really as present.

Scott: You sound old.

Erin: So Dani and Scott's first four years were great. They had a ton of fun together. And what I am about to say next might not seem relevant now, but you'll understand why in a bit. In the first four years of their relationship, Dani and Scott chose not to have sex.

Scott: I mean keep in mind, Dani when we met was 17, we start dating, she was 18.

Dani: Yeah.

Scott: I was 21, yeah.

Dani: Obviously we are intimate in a lot of other ways, it was just strictly I wasn't ready; you know I wasn't ready to do that.

Scott: We dated for 4 years, then we decided that it was time to be intimate. Then literally a week after, Dani moved to New York.

Dani: After school, I moved to New York to pursue some career opportunities and...

Scott: And so then we enter the long-distance phase of our relationship. We packed the car, drove Dani to her apartment in New York. I remember like moving to New York and then staying for a couple days, maybe a week or something and then I don't know if you remember this or not, but do you remember when I left, I called my mom crying, you called your mom and then our moms called each other crying?

Dani: Oh yeah, I don't know that we anticipated what a long distance relationship would look like.

Scott: It just felt like it was something that was going to be temporary; eventually I was going to move to New York but ended up lasting five years long distance. It worked because Dani was in New York for the sole purpose of work and I was staying in West Virginia for the sole purpose of the band and work. So like the relationship was so important to us but it wasn't number one and that's why it works so well probably.

Erin: As time went on, 5, 6, 7, years into their relationship, Dani and Scott were stable and happy. During the long distance phase of their relationship, Dani had time to go out and meet people and have new experiences. It was about that time that Dani made some friends in the New York queer community.

Dani: Yeah in New York I just met all kinds of people and I start building friendships with some people in the queer community and just kind of I don't know, just talking to a close friend of mine in particular and just kind of like learning about you know where she's coming from and talking to her kind of sparked an interest in my brain as to you know, oh this is

interesting. I've never really considered – I've never really thought of that before.

Dani: Our visits become more frequent and we started having some tension in our relationship that we never really experienced, we started to fight, we kind of like get a little more nit-picky with things and our visits just weren't - they didn't feel how they used to feel. We start to notice some sort of problems and I can't remember looking back exactly what the triggers were but I know a lot of it would have to do with we haven't seen each other in six weeks or eight weeks and you wanted to have sex and I didn't want to have sex and a lot of our newer problems has start happening towards the middle and end of our relationship and had to do with just like kind of like this discrepancy I guess and...

Scott: But what was weird was the beginning of you when you first moved to New York, we had a normal relationship, like we were intimate and we were - there were like times that it felt like a normal thing but then as time went...

Dani: I think I became less interested.

Scott: Yeah.

Dani: And that's looking back, yeah it was very clear to me like why I wasn't interested, like it wasn't doing it for me and it wasn't something that I necessarily really enjoyed and that's something that like I don't know, not everybody talks about before they come out. I just thought that I was someone who didn't really enjoy having sex.

Scott: And I thought, I think we're taught somehow like that's a normal progression of a relationship is that you have a lot of sex and then you just become kind of like life partners.

Dani: Yeah.

Scott: That aren't intimate and that's how horrible like lie that's like pushed on people but like when we were eight years in, that's what it just seem like. I was able to chalk it up to that.

Dani: And I think and then I think, I don't know if we even discussed it or

not, but I think it got to the point where that was the one thing that wasn't working in our relationship. Alright like everything else is amazing and perfect but we're not having sex and then it turn into okay we'll maybe like we're the couple – at least for me, I became alright maybe I'm just this girl who doesn't like sex, I'm not getting, I don't understand what the whole fuss is, it's really not that great but okay we'll do this because you have to do this because this is how relationships survive. But then it cause a lot of tension because you'd come in and we would only see each other very briefly and we don't have sex and then it would cause a fight because we both are frustrated about different things.

And so follow up with I left New York to take a job in Pittsburgh, Scott was still living in Morgantown and so the plan was at this time if I was going to move back to Pittsburgh, Scott was going to move from Morgantown to Pittsburgh and we're going to...

Scott: Which is an hour, Pittsburgh was always my big city so that was my next logical move.

Dani: Yeah it's very close and we were going to live together and at this point, we've been together like 9 years, this was like the end of the relationship here.

Scott: It doesn't feel like that.

Dani: Doesn't feel like it but just like this is like the last year of our relationship was just us moving in together in Pittsburgh because we thought alright we spend a long time and if we are going to do this, this is the next step. And we never really talked about marriage, we never really talked about anything beyond that, like we always was just very present with each other and we never really needed anything beyond just being at whatever level we were. And so...

Scott: In my mind I was like we're finally doing this, we're going to live together; I'm going to get laid all the time.

Dani: Didn't happen.

Scott: I didn't think that.



Dani: I moved back to Pittsburgh and we are looking for apartments and we found a really cute like three-story house, one bedroom house with a little patio backyard situation and...

Scott: And a little attic for like...

Dani: Little studio.

Scott: Home studio.

Dani: It was like the perfect house for us, everything we needed. I can put my drums upstairs, everything looks great except there was somebody else interested in this house and we kind of showed interest at the same time, so the landlord said whoever will sign a 2 year lease, gets the house. He didn't want to like add money to the price, he didn't want to do any of that, we wanted to make it very fair, whoever could stay the longest would get the house.

And so I remember Scott telling me we have to sign a 2 year lease if we want this house.

Scott: Which is a no brainer after 9 years, to me it was just like yeah of course.

Dani: And so for me you know looking back when people say, when did you know which is always a really silly question to ask somebody because you don't always know and there isn't always a route. But for me a big moment looking back, that's the moment where I think it really came crashing in that this is what was going on was when we had to sign this 2 year lease, I was just hit with a lot of anxiety and I didn't know where it was coming from and I really had to kind of search within myself to figure out like why does this feel like a sudden in a lot of ways.

Scott: And out of context, I wasn't sympathetic at all. I was hurt and I was like, why wouldn't you want to sign a 2 year lease? This is ridiculous, this is what we both have been working towards and waiting for.

Dani: It was weird.

Scott: I was like pissed.

Dani: You were really mad and I'm just like okay fine, let's just do it, whatever and inside I'm just starting to figure things out.

Scott: By the way, when you ask your girlfriend to move in with you and she said, let's just do it, whatever, that's like never the responds you want to hear.

Dani: Oh yeah I know, well I know that now. I mean that was a very real feeling for me.

Scott: Yeah I think this is when like hit me like this isn't right, this isn't what I thought the end result was going to be. Like this was supposed to be the beginning of everything and it just feels like, I feel like I'm not wanted around here or we're not getting along, we're fighting way more than we ever have, we never fought.

Dani: There was a lot of tension and I couldn't communicate what I was feeling because I didn't know what I was feeling and I was very confuse about what I was feeling and I didn't want to upset you but at the same time, I was just making it way more worse. These fights that we typically had in these moments, a lot of it came down to Scott feeling very unwanted and unattractive and I felt like a horrible girlfriend because I didn't want to be with my boyfriend in that way and I didn't want to touch him in that way and it felt like shit for me and I know it probably felt like way more horrible for you to have this person who didn't want to be with you in the way that you want to be with them.

Scott: I reached had reached like just a point where I was like this isn't right, like I'm going to lose my mind if we don't start being intimate again. Like I thought we were going to be when we moved in together and I think I just remembered pushing it to a fight on purpose. I remember like just getting it to a point where I can get Dani to like express something, that's when it just came out, where you came out, everything came out.

Dani: Talking this over with you and with Scott right now, it's interesting because I remember things differently and I'm not exactly sure that what I'm remembering is real life or if it's just kind of this memory that I've been adding to and interpreting differently I guess all these years. But yeah I'm sure I don't remember much the day, I'm sure it was a typical day for us

where we're just having a great time and typical Dani and Scott stuff. I remember being in bed and getting that normal and anxious feeling and I don't remember what you said, I know that you are pushing a fight but I don't remember.

Scott: I remember it so vividly, I could like paint the picture. I remember it being this close to the wall where you were.

Dani: It's funny what you took from it and what I took from it because the biggest thing that I took from that conversation was I came out and how good I felt afterwards. At this point, everything leading up is kind of blurry still. I don't know, I think I didn't know what to say anymore and I just at this point I just start putting the pieces together and so I just got really tired of saying it's not you, it's not you, you know and that's always bullshit whenever you hear that but in this case it was absolutely true but I needed a reason for that to be true when I needed him to understand why that was true. When I think back, I remember saying I think that I'm gay.

Scott: Yeah, I think you said I might be gay or I think I'm gay.

Dani: That's the moment were like I just immediately just felt amazing and I knew that as soon as I said it, like I knew it was right because this tension is just – I mean a ton of bricks gone. It was crazy, it was so crazy.

Scott: I don't remember being emotional about it, I just remember being like is that who you are, a part of who you are because in my mind at the time, whatever information I had as a twenty something straight guy, I was just, is that something you need in your life or is that who you are, you know I think like so many various, I don't know. Just at the time, I didn't know what it meant, I didn't think it spelled the end of anything for us, it just felt like alright well this is just something we're going to work through because obviously we're going to be together, we're going to grow old you know. You didn't know for sure right?

Dani: I knew, I don't know. It was weird; it never occurred to me that Scott and I would ever break up. I knew deep down that it wasn't going to work but I think on the surface, we're both trying to figure out a way.

Scott: The year after my dad passed away, aside from that, this was like the hardest, that was like – it just felt like another loss.

Dani: Scott and I spent the next year, we remain together under the title of “boyfriend and girlfriend” and we try to support each other as best as we possibly could and figuring out what the next step was but within that time, there was a lot of struggle of jealousy and you know we open up our relationship a little bit to see what everything meant I guess. There was a lot of miscommunication in that time and there was a little bit of lying in that time on both ends and was a really difficult test for us, it was a struggle but the whole time we were committed still to each other and into the outcome and I think deep down even though it was really rough and we had some really horrible exchanges in those moment, I think deep down we knew if we could just get through this, we can redefine who we are. And that was kind of our goal the whole time, let’s just support each other, figure out what this is and let’s redefine who Dani and Scott you know really are.

Scott: It was a shit show for the next two years and just the worst, the worst time. At this point, it was the first time in my life I had a chance to make the move that I have been wanting to make which was supposed to be New York but the way work was going for me, I needed to be in LA which is completely foreign to me at the time. And I started take some trips and we had this shit show year trying to figure things out and then finally at the end of the summer you know I think we had our talk like in October or something and then that following summer was the like I got to go, I’m going to go to LA and it always felt like I’ll go first and then eventually Dani will come out to LA.

Dani: Once Scott made the decision that he was moving, I think the dust started to settle for us.

Scott: I think at that point we both went we should put a bow on this in the proper way, like we needed to tie this up and we owed it to each other and we deserve as a couple to do this the right way. Come take the drive with me to LA and then the whole focus became not about how or what does this mean for us but it just became more about a celebration of what we were and what we had. And it was scary; it was scary as shit and it was really painful because we both knew that once I moved, that was it.

Dani: And you also knew how hard it was going to be for me to like go through this whole you know process of like self-discovery essentially.

Scott: I just felt like I was abandoning everything, like I was just – I mean I probably was but it was also the timing I had to go then.

Dani: One of the hardest parts of the break up was not being able to tell our family and our friends. We had friends who had known us this whole time and to not be able to tell them like what the hell happen with Dani and Scott, why did he leave, why did you know?

Scott: Yeah, the funny side effect of that is that my mom sort of figures it out without saying so many words.

Dani: We also joke that we thought Scott's mom was going to think that Scott was the gay one.

Scott: Well she did.

Dani: Yeah.

Scott: I had to like come out straight to my mom.

Dani: She was so sad.

Scott: Like mom straight it's not a choice, this is just who I am.

Dani: Get out of here.

Scott: The underlying foundation never went away even though...

Dani: It was very full circle.

Scott: Yeah.

Dani: And I think at the end of it all, I think we had a very beautiful break up.

Scott: Yeah, we had a nice...

Dani: Not a lot of people – it's very rare I think that a lot of people can experience that sort of things, so I feel very lucky.

Scott: Well yeah, we had a unique and hard in a lot of ways but like when there's like a defined boundary, like there is never a chance that this is going to get back together again, it makes moving on initially harder but way easier in the long run. Finally we have the call, it was brutal and then we just kind of took a year or so of space. First year was trying to figure shit out; the second year was like alright now we're really on our own, like those were really tough years.

Dani: I think something to point out is we were very unstable with ourselves and our personal lives and our social lives, everything was just unstable those two years. But when you moved and then and I was still in Pittsburgh, we both kind of settled into these new lives and then once we both kind of found our focus again, that seems to be when we started to find our old selves back.

Scott: Yeah.

Dani: You know that's when it kind of start to make sense again and the communication start to pick up and things felt good because we both felt comfortable with where we were.

Scott: Yeah, I think we just needed like decompression time.

Dani: Yeah.

Scott: And I think we went from like speaking to somehow like ever few weeks to every week to back to every couple days to everyday texting.

Dani: Yeah.

Scott: And then it just became a thing like, oh right like this is, this was the missing piece in my life, like this you know I don't want to be without this thing like Dani grounds me, still does and I don't want to be without it. I had a show in New York that's being promoted; it was like bigger than usual show for me at the time.

Dani: It was the big time.

Scott: It was pretty much big time. So I asked Dani to play this show with me and there was a bunch of songs I have written about the break up.

They weren't bitter songs, they were just different angles on different parts of where I was and so I write these song about the break up and I don't think I really caught the dynamic, I don't think you really caught the dynamic at the time that I was singing about the person that was next to me.

Dani: I was just trying not to fuck the drum parts.

Scott: Right.

Dani: That was our first time playing together and it was a big deal, it's like oh my god, Scott is trusting me to play drums with him, holy crap.

Scott: You know I'm doing this singer-songwriter thing which I don't do well, I hate being the only person on stage and I just was like having a meltdown every time I perform. Hated it and then I think the idea was floated like maybe we should just really do a band thing and write songs for that, that was like the first time before we named it.

Dani: Yeah and also when it all starts to make sense, I think I was going through a horrible breakup, it was my first lesbian breakup and it was brutal for me.

Scott: It was not my first lesbian breakup.

Dani: No, Scott already had his.

Scott: And I can like sense something is weird but she's not liking being very forthcoming and I said "you sure everything is alright?" and she said, "everything's fine" and I said "if you need to talk, just let me know," And she was like "I'm fine," I was like well "just remember that I have been dating lesbian way longer than you have." And I think that she didn't even laugh, she just went, "You're a dick."

Dani: Yeah.

Scott: And then you started laughing. But I think that was like a breakthrough moment for us.

Dani: That was a breakthrough moment and...

Scott: That was the first time we both could like joke about like...

Dani: But the point of the story that I'm bringing up, is that Scott because of who he is and being amazing and sensitive and caring, he wrote a breakup song for me.

Scott: Oh right.

Dani: And you were working on a new EP, you were working on a new record for yourself or solo project and I think he suggested why don't you track drum on the song while we record the song. And so we went to the studio and I have this break up song about my first lesbian breakup that my ex-boyfriend wrote for me.

Scott: That you're playing drums on.

Dani: That I'm playing drums on and there was this bizarre real experience. But after we record the song together about the breakup, we kind of made our first decision alright maybe we should do this together and that's kind of how the band started.

Erin: After that show in New York, friends and family approached them blown away by their dynamic on stage, where they had performed songs Scott had written about their breakup, next to the person those songs were about.

And then, like their relationship had changed so many times before, from friends, to girlfriend and boyfriend, to long distance, to live in, their relationship changed again. This time, they started collaborating creatively together. The thing was, they were collaborating because of the existence and dissolution of that relationship in the first place.

Scott: As our like relationship grows now as close friends and now that we probably tell each other more than we ever did when we were dating and we're like so close and so open about everything in the conversation.

Dani: And this is like Scott said, we are closer than we ever been and this is almost what our relationship should have always have been and so I'm very proud of this relationship and it feels so normal and so perfect and I'm just happy that we really stuck with it and fought to keep it in both of our lives.



Scott: I mean every once in a while, we zoom out and we catch ourselves and we say “I’m really proud of us, I’m really proud of this you know and I can’t think of anything else in my life than I’m more proud of than the fact that we have been able to maintain this and it continues to grow and develop into like an awesome friendship even beyond awesome and yeah that we made it through.” For me, that’s my proudest accomplishment in life I think is this relationship.

Dani: Hey guys, thanks for listening. This is our new song *Until you Find Me*.

Scott: I hope you like it.

Dani: I don’t.

*[music - Until you find me, Teammate]*

Erin: This next piece is one of the first recordings I ever did for Queer Public back in 2013.

Originally from Trinidad, Michèle Pearson Clarke is a photographer based in Toronto, Canada. Michèle photographs queers who used to date, who don’t consider each other friends, in a series called *It’s Good to Be Needed*.

MPC: The project is called “It’s Good to be Needed” and it’s part performance and part photography, so I am working with pairs of ex-partners, queer identify women and queer at each stage of their life so I’m always working with people who formally identify as queer but not identify as some other way. But basically it’s bringing together people who used to be in a relationship and are currently good friends and I photograph them holding hands.

Erin: Where did the project come from?

MPC: It grew out of my you know as I was saying my personal experience, it was the event of the loss of my mom and that grieve, that pain, made me re-experience some previous lost in life and my current partner, her ex-partner was a man and they are quite close and my ex-partner and I,

we are not. And so there was something about the dichotomy of that in my own life which is in our cultural norm, lesbians are always friends with their exes and so we just judge, and so I was just examining that, I was just thinking about the attempt that I have made to be friends with my ex and I was wondering what happen if processing doesn't work? Could performing intimacy allow you to shed something that the processing couldn't.

Part of what this refers to I think as a small community, we need us to be friends you know I think that all of our community lies across boundaries so many and so the people that we play with are the people that we fight with, the people that we work with and so there is a way that when a particular couple has been together for some time, you merge friends, you merge your lives, you probably so much with your community, if you live in that way as most of us do. And so when one couples breaks up, there is a ripple affects that affects so many other people like there is this internal sort of cultural pressure to keep harmony because it allows for harmony to be maintain within our community.

Erin: Yah, I feel like community can be so important to queers. Did you do this project because you think we should be friends with our exes?

MPC: My project is that we are not trying to say that's like an idealize need to be, I see the benefits of it for so many and I see the benefits community wide but this is the main reason why people break up. And sometimes not being friends is taking care of yourself and sometimes not being friends is really necessary and it's god boundary maintain and even what happens. You know but pertain to my relationships, when people hurt each other, which is what we do as human beings and time passes, there is guilt and there is shame and we don't get taught, we don't get thought how to make a change you know, two, three years passes and who picks up their phone and go, "hey you know how you doing?" like we just don't do that and more time passes and it feels even more awkward. So it's more about trying to create opportunity for people in that situation, people who are not friends even if they want to be but they couldn't because there was too much pain, there was too much jokes and on both sides we just thought we should have communication skills and capacity to just you hurt me, I hurt you and

we can live with that.

Erin: What has the impact been for participants of your project?

MPC: I only worked with four sets of ex-partner so far that in itself is a bit of a surprise, I knew I was asking people to do something very difficult and I didn't expect it to be a lot line up at my door but I also didn't think that would have so few participants. But out of the four sets, everybody who has participated has all had to say and its I mean two of these sets of women that I worked with were in Montreal and outside of big communities, so I don't have an ongoing knowledge where they are at but certainly people in Toronto I would say that they have all communicated in some way that it has good things and a lot of some type of ongoing communication and that looks different. And I also had one set from Montreal who didn't take the photograph because one of them change her mind, she decided that it brought up too much emotion but then, you know six or seven weeks later, she allowed me to see that she had dinner with her ex the night before and that it was the project that started them on that path. So even though I wanted to take their photos, I think you should probably twenty or twenty-five sets of participants and it doesn't always result in a photo but you start with and it doesn't end in a photo for number of reasons. But in all those cases, there have been some questions, some shifts, some something.

Erin: I wonder how you facilitated those conversations, because your role kind of becomes of that of therapist

I mean I thought a lot of a long time of most projects how best to do it but I see myself as a facilitator of an experience that women are deciding to have and my project is giving them that opportunity and yes it's an art project but my art project but I also see it as I'm collaborating to create this experience for them and they are waiting for me to document it. And I think the people who process it, understands the importance of the documentation in terms of what it has to offer other people who many not themselves be able to be in that situation. But there is a built in dynamic in the sense that there is always one person who initiates this so usually a

person contact me and say I would like to do this with my ex and either they contact their ex directly or in some cases, I contact the ex on their behalf. And what happens, is the ex kind of responded in a number of ways, some people already moved but they don't like the public nature of having their photograph taken, some people feel that it's just not something they want to do and they don't offer an explanation for them and some people feel that they are already friends, so that's a different type of oh well this is a project that is involving not being friends, I thought we were friends, so that's another in terms of what that would pick up for people. So it's risky in so many ways and everybody who asked, has the risk and they don't even know and what does that rejection feel like you know when you asked if they did they same with you and they say no. So it goes in a number of ways and I think some are private issues and some are people who just don't want to put themselves. Sometimes you are in a current relationship and they just feel like that's just a lot of emotions, so potentially negotiate you know.

Erin: Can you discuss the function of vulnerability in the project? Because it seems like participants are forced to be vulnerable at different in the project, I just want to know your take on that.

MCP: They are contacting me and sort of saying, I'm going to ask this person to do this, that person holds the bigger vulnerability. The person then who has sort of this power to say yes or no, is this thing going to happen or not, based on what my response is. And if one person hears what the project is move to doing, clearly they see something that they want get out of it, I think in some cases, it's all very mutual and just what people see it as and what they are able to get out of it. And in some cases it felt like I'm doing this for you because I still care about you, you know that this is not a process I feel I need to shift something but I'm going to do it because you want me to do it. Which is a different type of vulnerability to admit to as well and you know the physical vulnerability is very important because I think holding hands, you know how many of us are going home with somebody at a bar without even knowing their names, but if you want to touch somebody in the bar, hold their hand, it would feel very sort of a

violation of intimacy, it's one of the most intimate things and I also feel that it's one of those things. So people who may feel that the move through the world and they are not identify clear, when they hold their partners hand, they are capital Q queer in the world. So this is also a side of visibility for who we are out there in the world and so it was really important to me in terms of the photography project, that people might not be looking at the camera and are making this because to me it's a larger statement about queer women relationships and to be honest, I feel like nobody would do this project if we didn't really all care about each other like we have so much drama, and it's one of those lesbians drama and god knows we do but to me, what I have experience as a queer woman in so many different communities, is a tremendous amount of tenderness for each other. And sometimes it's that simple things of like I don't know, being in a custom line and sometimes it's the custom officer who try to give you that nod right, it's just we do, we look for out each other. And we have this tenderness for each other because we know what we all have to go through to be who we are. And we hurt each other in a relationship, I still love people that I have loved, that doesn't come to an end and I think the project is an attempt to honor that love because on that level, that's a very real meaningful thing. You know they might show successful in relationship that I lost forever and I don't know if that's the only measure of success we should be considering or the only measure of value or worth.

Erin: To our listeners, if you've been imagining yourself in the same situation, holding hands with your ex with a photographer, you're not alone.

MPC: And there is also been this interesting process that I realize we will do which is, it seems like everybody participates in their head, you know everybody kind of goes to that particular ex if they have a particular ex and so imagine what that would feel like. So part of the point of the project is to get people to respect on, even hold the hand of an ex but also reconciliation or shifting or leg or could you have in your life because that's the part I find myself very much and agree like I was just so much that I look back on, so much loss is unnecessary you know, we hurt each other and there is a stand, there is a shame and my own personal experience is

what made this place, I just let it go you know. And I think what my project is trying to do is I'm not saying that these women will become friends but I think if you should whatever that pain is enough, that you can come to that event and just be like hey you don't need to become best buds but it's just about shifting that thing, I think just becomes that we hurt each other, we cause each other pain and that's okay.

Erin: Relationships are ever changing, in the same way that we change. When we go from dating, to lovers, to exes, we acknowledge that change exists in motion, and will probably change again. So getting back to friends after a breakup, means wading through the awkward bits and chance encounters with someone you used to date, well, that's just another part of the process. And that too will probably change.

This episode was produced by myself, Erin McGregor and Andy Alseri. Engineering and mixing also by Andy. Mastering by Arturo Brisindi.

Music in this episode was provided by TeamMate. You can hear more at [teammateband.com](http://teammateband.com). We also used music from [incompetech.com](http://incompetech.com).

Carly Clayton does our Social Media. BRAVEKIND is responsible for our online creative direction.

If you want to learn more about us, visit [queerpublic.org](http://queerpublic.org). And if you haven't yet, subscribe to us on iTunes. You also can help us out by rating the show. Share us with your friends, like us on Facebook, follow us on twitter and Instagram. Our Next episode — Rural

Yahkeema: My name is Yahkeema, I was born in a town with one stoplight and I was the scandal baby of a preacher and his secretary

Erin: Thanks for listening.

