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Interviewee: Dan MacKay

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My class presentation is on 2SLGBTQIA+ activism. I while I will talk a lot about Canada as a whole, as well as some international issues, I would like to talk to you about what it has been like to be boots on the ground locally spanning several decades.

1. An introduction to you and your history.

My literary education was an enclave of literary and professional artist lesbians; one of them, my Aunt Maria, named The Grateful Dead. I was my dad's helper on site at age five. As a mid teen I'd regularly hitchhike to Halifax at 9pm Friday to watch Rocky Horror Picture show, and hike back after at 3am and regularly get sex with my lift both ways. I built the internet in Canada. Now I'm retired and do history work and archiving in the Q community, mostly with Q elders, and also publish Wavyes Magazine which is a full time job.

2. Why are "firsts" important to note? What other barrier breakers have you witnessed in your lifetime?

Well, the big 20,000' view is that I have gotten to witness the switch of Canadian society from where it was OK, normal, to discriminate against Q folk, to where, anyone who does that is a backwoods redneck nutbar to be shunned - if not charged by the police.

I guess the worst first is that... I lived through the AIDS Crisis; I got to have very fabulous funerals for all of my beautiful, young, fun friends.

I was friends with the first openly gay mayor of Atlantic Canada - Bob Stead in Wolfville.

I'm proud to have been part of the creation of the first Q elders group here - the Elderberries.

3. Can you talk about the challenges in organizing Pride events in NS?

First, apathy; everyone wants to have a Pride Parade; very few people want to do the work. For perhaps good reason; if everything goes well, you're largely ignored, if anything fucks up, you're the bad guy in the spotlight.

Second, we work hard to create a Pride *Festival* – 10 days long in recent years – and ... probably... 95% of people only think of the Parade.

And personally, it's seeing fucking banks at the head of the Parade. In the 1990s they were the most craven, homophobic institutions - you would go in and ask for sponsorship and the guy - always a guy, the bank manager - would stand up and walk towards you, backing you out the door, "oh no... if our clients thought we had anything to do with... those kind of people.... I... oh no. Thanks for dropping in."

If I had my druthers, organizations would be arranged in the parade in the order in which they supported the Q community. Quakers, Unitarian Universalist Church and labour unions at the front, fucking backs at the end.

4. What are some examples of activism that hasn't worked and has worked?

Oh we had some brilliant activism. The Paper Bag Pride Parade. [LGRNS](#) had some *brilliant* people - that Jeopardy game that you can see the picture of. An amazing piece of work by Jane Morigan against the evil Rosanne Skoke.

And as an organizer it always seems like *every* event hasn't worked. It always seems like more people could be involved, people are just sitting on their asses watching Friends reruns or playing Call of Duty instead of getting out and making the world a better place. Frankly I'm not very good at remembering things that really failed dramatically. :-)

The ones I need to learn more about are the singing groups - mostly women, that were created as pieces of activism. It's never clicked with me how people get together and singing change the world - and yet people do it, for good reasons that I don't understand.

5. I know you have worked a lot with the 2 Spirit community, I know it's not the same as speaking someone in the Mi'kmaq community but can you speak a bit to the unique challenges and successes in that community?

(off the record piece) This has been *hugely* driven by Tuma Young. However for many reasons likes to stay in the background and make it seem like things were just totally spontaneous, or done by a group of other people. - traditions in dancing, the Eagle Head Staff, the W2SA, tireless work with the youth. God knows it's not modesty; it's another, cleverer thing. [Eagle Head Staff story]

The Mi'kmaq community has kinda backfilled with a culture of acceptance of same sex and queer relationships from other indigenous cultures. Perhaps more than in non-indigenous culture, they not just accept, but celebrate 2S culture. For example, if someone with the Eagle Head Staff is present, they lead the entrance to a powwow. If there are enough 2-spirit folk present, they do their own dance in the widdershins direction.

6. Who were some important historical queer figures in Halifax?

Oh, there are so many! I made a list [here](#)! The people who created GAE in 1972 were strong and brave; the AIDS activists in the 1980s and 1990s.

For me, a guy named Jim DeYoung.

7. Where does the 2SLGBTQIA+ Community intersects with other movements environment/black lives matter etc.

Frankly I haven't had much experience with this. In the conference today a trans person said, "As less than 1% of the population it's a little difficult for us to represent our community at every event." and this is a problem with the other minorities within our community - the Mi'kmaq, the Black community. There are only a few out people in those communities in Halifax, and yet in many meetings of say, six people someone will invariably say, "Why aren't there any people of colour here?"

The big intersection is that we know that transphobes and homophobes aren't just... that, and are otherwise OK with PoC and immigrants: we know that mostly they are generic bigots. So recently I've shifted from focussing on trans/homophobia to just putting them in a box called "bigots."

It is possible that the recent small-ish rise in trans/homophobia is the last sad rallying cry of the rabid right wing and that it really marks a milestone for the progress of all kinds of human rights.

It's also possible that it's the leading edge of a right swinging pendulum.

Strategy suggests that we prepare for the worst, that we imagine what could possibly happen with a tyrannical right wing government.

Notice that I restarted Wayves Magazine a year ago. My personal form of activism is publishing; I feel that getting informed, thoughtful, brave voices out in front of others is important, and telling people about what's going on with the world, good and bad, is important, and I think that IF we are about to deal with tyranny and bigotry, we will need a well organized free press to talk about that and work against it. And, social media won't be that: we can see that it is unreliable at best, and at worst, easily manipulated by hostile forces.... which will get worse as AI progresses - we will have, very soon, hostile organizations or nations manipulating public opinion via social media.

8. How do you feel about the idea of "Pride as protest".

So, two answers:

First, as I've aged I've somewhat honed the nature of what I consider to be "protest." I now think of formal protest as people actually together, on their feet physically, demanding change and proposing a concrete thing that they want different. Hitting the dislike button and sharing a meme that a disliked political leader is physically attractive is a sad excuse for someone to think they're going something. But. Maybe otherwise they would have done absolutely nothing and that's a teeny bit better.

I think there are a lot of ways to "protest." Back in the day that meant coming out to your family, your co-workers, your doctor, and even now that might change the world a little bit.

9. I know you support some men involved in the criminal justice system, what are some of the greatest challenges LGBTQ+ people face when they get involved in this system.

My experience with the Canadian criminal justice system has been that of delight and pride.. I expected homophobia, hatred and rednecked attitudes, and hostility. And I've been... totally wrong; I've encountered exactly the opposite. [story of guard calling about my CPIC] [story about spending an afternoon with Georgina] [spicy story about PFVs]

10. How can straight allies use their own privilege for good?

Well, since I have the microphone, I really feel like we queer folk have... kind of the most powerful privilege there is. First of all, in Canada if you're discriminated against for being queer, you have the power of not only the law but public opinion behind you;

second of all we have decades of experience with activism so the community we operate like a well oiled machine. I was skeptical about this until a few months ago and I saw the amazing organization and pushback from the Q community, against the “Hands Off Our Children” crowd.

But to answer your question, it's to:

- not expect the Q community to be in any way coherent or in agreement with what's important, any more than any community of humans, and
- to be VOCAL in your support of our community. If you see an injustice, if you hear words from a bigoted asshole, name them and what they're doing out loud, tell people about it, and if you can, do something about it.