

Avery Wright



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37:54

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SPEAKERS

Avery Wright, Rimsha Syed



Rimsha Syed 00:03

Hi, this is Rimsha Syed with the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life. The date is June 10, 2022, and I'm here on a Zoom call with Avery Wright for the Voices of Change oral history project. How are you today, Avery?



Avery Wright 00:16

I'm doing well. How are you?



Rimsha Syed 00:18

I'm good. Thanks for asking. I'm glad we're getting to chat, and I'm very excited to hear more about your life and your work. And for starters, can you just introduce yourself and tell us where you're joining the call from today?




Avery Wright 00:31

Yeah, my name is Avery Wright. I use he/him pronouns. I am a theatre educator. And I'm calling from San Marcos, Texas.



Rimsha Syed 00:41

Awesome, thank you. So going off of that, I do want to start by sort of jumping way back in time and asking you what you remember about your childhood. Where did you grow up? What formative memories come to mind for you?



A

Avery Wright 00:57

Sure. I was born in Bryan, Texas and grew up in College Station, Texas. I have a nuclear family, so just a mom and dad and a younger sibling. I was raised Methodist, went to church almost on a weekly basis, sometimes several times a week, pretty much up until I was about fifteen years old. Now I consider myself agnostic. I am a transgender man. I discovered that when I was fifteen as well, but I began questioning when I was fourteen. And I eventually came out to my family, my immediate family, when I was fifteen, and then to the rest of my family and to the rest of the world when I was sixteen. I am a very big theater person. I started doing theater when I was about ten years old and did it all the way through middle school and high school. And I went on to Texas State University to study theater education. I actually just graduated with my BFA. I'm currently in the process of searching for a job. But yeah, that's pretty much my life up to this point.



Rimsha Syed 02:24

Yeah, thank you for sharing. So I did want to ask what it was like to grow up in Bryan and College Station, and what the communities were like there, and what you did for fun, and if you have any siblings.

A

Avery Wright 02:41

Yeah, from my experience, Bryan-College Station, it's a nice college town, and I have a lot of really good friends and family who live there. It just wasn't really the space for me. It was a little more conservative than I was comfortable with. So that's what made me want to move over to San Marcos. I have a younger sibling. He is eighteen years old going on nineteen, also going to Texas State. I think that covered the question. I can't remember if that was all the questions.



Rimsha Syed 03:27

Yeah, yeah, definitely. And tell me a little bit about how you discovered your passion for theater and what that was like when you were in grade school?

A

Avery Wright 03:37

Sure. So my parents actually met through theater, and so I got started in theater at a very young age, five, maybe younger than that, but I didn't get super involved until I was ten years old. I started off at a community theater in Bryan called Brazos Valley TROUPE, and I've found a lot of chosen family there, and I'm still really close with a handful of the people that I met there. And as I got into high school, I got more involved in the theater department at my high school, took on some leadership positions there. And I've just had a lot of influential directors and teachers in the area of theater since I was really young, and they've had a huge impact on me. So I feel like I'm obligated to do the same for future generations, which is a huge part of why I want to be a theater teacher.



Rimsha Syed 04:44

Yeah, no, that's great. And I was wondering what your transition to San Marcos was like. Did it end up being any less conservative than College Station?



Avery Wright 04:55

Yeah, I lived on campus in San Marcos for the first couple years of my undergrad, so that's really all that I knew, just campus. I didn't have a car or anything, so I rarely ever left. So it's just that little world that I really grew to love. And it made me realize how conservative Bryan-College Station is. It's getting better over there, but living somewhere else really gives you some perspective about how things are in your hometown. So I'm really glad that I had the opportunity to move over, and since I've moved off campus and gotten a car, I've gone to explore San Marcos a little more, and it really is a great town, and I do plan on staying here for at least the next couple of years.



Rimsha Syed 05:50

Yeah, and if you don't mind me asking, what were some of those examples of conservatism in College Station?



Avery Wright 05:59

It specifically is regarding the culture that A&M has. Both my parents work for A&M. My mom works on campus, and my dad works for the Texas A&M system. And my mom is an ally at A&M, and I know, they have like a really good allyship program there. It's just that there's a lot of institutional conservative ideals there that affect a lot of students that students with more privilege don't really think about. And I've been hearing more and more about that lately. I don't know all the facts on this, but they usually have an annual event called Draggieland, which in the past, I believe, was a campus sponsored event. But this past year, A&M pulled their funding, because their donors weren't happy with where their money was going. So on one hand, you see A&M hosting all of these positive things in support of Pride month right now, but people are still upset that they pulled the funding for that event, and the people running that event had to do all the fundraising on their own. So I don't mean to bash on A&M or anything, it's just not a space I would have felt comfortable in right now.



Rimsha Syed 07:31

Yeah, thank you for sharing that with me. So I know you talked a little bit about your spiritual upbringing. You grew up Methodist, and you now identify as agnostic, and I was hoping you could share a little bit more about what that journey was like for you.



Avery Wright 07:48

Yeah, so like I said, I grew up Methodist, but I never really felt a strong connection with God or any kind of higher power. And I was just having a conversation about this with my dad a couple

any kind of higher power. And I was just having a conversation about this with my dad a couple months ago, because my dad moved from North Carolina when he was eight years old, I think. So he's always had God in his life, and he has a very Christian family, so that's all he's ever wanted, for me and my brother, and I know that he only wants the best for us. But I was telling him that I just never felt that kind of connection with God or a higher power. And I don't think it's anyone's fault. It has nothing to do with me being queer or trans. It's just I don't really have any reason to believe. I haven't been given reason to believe. So I'm not going to reject any religion. I don't consider myself an atheist. I don't think that there's absolutely nothing out there. I just don't know what is out there, and I just don't see the point and dedicating such a large part of my life to worshipping somebody who I don't even know is there.



Rimsha Syed 09:15

Yep, that makes sense to me. And I guess speaking about your transgender identity, what was that like when you came out to your parents and then to your family? Did you have any particular struggles that you wanted to speak on related to that?



Avery Wright 09:45

I had no idea, because at that age, I had no idea what their views were on queer people. I would hear them say things. I remember my parents were watching an episode of Big Brother or something, and I was sitting in the living room with them, and there was a contestant who my mom apparently thought was obviously trans. And so that was off-putting to me. And I don't think she realized how that sounded on the other end. And also she had no idea about me at the time. So I just had no idea how my parents would react, but looking back, they have engaged in protecting and supporting queer people, that I'm kind of surprised that I was so scared to come out to them. But it was one evening. It felt like a forced coming out, but I don't know when I would have come out to them if it hadn't been that night.




Avery Wright 10:59

My mom had bought some clothes for the school year for my sophomore year of high school, and I was trying them on, and I was telling them, "Y'all, I can't wear these." And I eventually ended up breaking down in front of them, and that's whenever it came out. And it was really difficult for them to hear at first. And my dad took a little while to come around, but they're both super supportive of me now. They love me with all their heart. They are there for me each and every day. And I'm so thankful to have such supportive parents, because I know that a lot of trans people are in much worse situations. So as far as my extended family goes, they're pretty supportive as well. I haven't been attacked by a family member or anything like that. I'm surrounded by friends and family who adore me and support me. So I really couldn't be any more grateful than I am.




Rimsha Syed 12:03


Wow, thank you so much for sharing that with me. I'm glad to hear that there's so much support in your life. And I guess transitioning here, I wanted to ask if you have any hobbies aside from theater or things you enjoy doing in your free time.

 Avery Wright 12:22


I'm a pretty easygoing person. I play video games in my downtime. I have a dog. She is ten years old. My family adopted her when I was going on twelve years old, and then she moved in with me last summer, and she is just my pride and joy, so I spend a lot of time with her. She's definitely a big hobby. Sometimes I get arts and crafty, but theater is just so consuming. And I was the president of a student org at Texas State, so that was pretty time consuming as well. So that's pretty much all I've been doing the past couple semesters.

 Rimsha Syed 13:17


For student org, are you talking about Bobcat PRIDE?

 Avery Wright 13:22


Yes, I am. Would you like me to share about that?

 Rimsha Syed 13:24

Yes, I would love to hear more about that.

 Avery Wright 13:26

Sure. So it is a student organization at Texas State that focuses on providing education and support for LGBTQIA+ students and their allies. We would have weekly meetings where we would present on a specific topic that we had decided on at the beginning of the semester, really just focusing on discussing current events that relate to the queer community and just topics that we feel are important for students at Texas State to know regarding the queer community. I immediately got involved with the student org my freshman year at Texas State, and they needed new officers right off the bat, so I was like, "Okay, I'll do it." And then by the time my fourth semester came around, I ended up being appointed president. So I was the president for five consecutive semesters up until I graduated. It really was a fantastic experience. I made some wonderful connections and friends through it. Yeah, it really is one of the highlights of my college career.

 Rimsha Syed 14:50

Right. And so what did that space mean to you on a personal level?

 Avery Wright 14:55

Well when I was in high school, I was part of a GSA, a gay-straight alliance. It always felt like we

were walking on pins and needles, even our sponsors would ask us like about being careful about where we put posters around the school because if an admin sees that a poster is in the wrong place, they can just shut us down. So whenever I got to college, it made me super excited to know that there were spaces like that. When I started at Texas State, there were four queer orgs that I had to choose from. I went to meetings for three of those orgs just to feel it out and see where exactly I would fit in. And getting to know the people in each of the orgs was really nice, and getting to meet new people learn new perspectives. Because if I'm being honest, I was, as far as I know, one of the first openly trans people at my high school. So I was setting the example. I didn't really have somebody to look up to at my high school. So whenever I had the opportunity to meet new people, whenever I moved from my undergrad, it was a really formative experience to see people expressing themselves in ways I had never seen before. So Bobcat PRIDE and all of the other queer orgs at Texas State are - it's absolutely wonderful that they're there for the students.



Rimsha Syed 16:45

Absolutely. And so being president and all, do you feel like you learned a lot about leadership or organizing during those five semesters?



Avery Wright 16:57

Oh, yeah, absolutely. Not always, but I've been a pretty organized person for a lot of my life. So I felt like I was well-suited to work my way up to being the president or just somebody who could lead the org. But it definitely taught me more about time management, and just setting my priorities. So doing that for five semesters, and especially through a pandemic, taught me a lot about taking on leadership, and getting a team together, and being collaborative, especially in the darkest of times.



Rimsha Syed 17:53

Sure, and what sort of events or programs did Bobcat PRIDE have to offer?



Avery Wright 18:02

Our normal events would be game nights, and we would have parties for Valentine's Day and Halloween and all that fun stuff. But by far, the biggest event we would have each year is our Second Chance Prom. And we actually didn't get to have Second Chance Prom in 2020 or 2021 for obvious reasons, but we had had it my freshman year, so I kind of knew how it went. But I was the only officer my senior year who had ever experienced Second Chance Prom who was still in Bobcat PRIDE. So I had to lead everybody into the dark, just trying to get everything together, but we ended up getting it together and had a really successful fundraiser for it. So I'm really hoping that Second Chance Prom is an event that can carry on for the coming years after I'm gone. But that's definitely the the biggest part of the year for Bobcat PRIDE, I think.



Rimsha Syed 19:10



Yeah. And I guess along those lines, can you tell me maybe about a day in the life of being president or being in leadership in Bobcat PRIDE?



Avery Wright 19:23

Sure. It's not a huge organization. It's just a student org that has weekly meetings and then events here and there. So it's not like those tasks would take up my entire day. But I would usually have to keep in touch with advisors. Make sure that everybody, all the other officers, are on the same page for upcoming meetings. Reminding officers when their turn to present is coming up. Staying active on social media and on our Discord server. Yeah, all just all the little things like that.



Rimsha Syed 20:11

Right. Yeah, having those spaces of belonging and solidarity are definitely so important, especially, I think now more than ever, with all these constant, anti-LGBTQ anti-trans bills we're seeing take effect right here in Texas. And I wanted to ask what you think that these attacks on trans youth and the queer community more broadly mean for people living in Texas down the line, people planning on raising families here in Texas down the line?



Avery Wright 20:48

It is definitely a scary time right now for trans people, especially trans youth in Texas. I think there's a huge misconception around what it means to be a young trans person. People who are arguing against trans youth are usually using the argument that these children are going through surgeries before they're even teenagers, which is not the case at all. And I don't know where those facts are coming from. But it was, I think, back in March or late February, that Greg Abbott had written a letter to the Department of Family and Protective Services, I think is what it's called, basically ordering that all teachers and therapists and doctors report parents who are allowing their children, transgender children, to transition. And thankfully, that didn't end up doing anything, but it was really scary to hear about that, especially as a future educator. I'm not going to put a student in harm's way, I'm not going to put their family in harm's way just because they're trying to do what's best for their child.



Avery Wright 22:16

And I think it was maybe back in October when it was signed into law that children in Texas were not allowed to compete in UIL [University Interscholastic League] athletics. They weren't allowed to compete as the gender that they identified as, so they would have to be on the men's team if it said "male" on their birth certificate, which is for absolutely ridiculous reasons. The argument is usually that trans women are taking over women's sports, but that is just not the case. You don't see it anywhere. It's a made up argument that conservative people are using to turn transgender people into a boogeyman. And I know I'm on my soapbox right now, but that's what happens whenever it comes to election seasons. They got to pick somebody to beat the crap out of in order to win an election. And right now, it's trans people. We're the ones

suffering, because Greg wants to win another round. But yeah, it's definitely a scary time, and it can snowball into something much, much worse. I believe there's legislation in other states, not sure about Texas yet, that transgender minors aren't allowed to go on any gender affirming care, which is not exclusive to surgeries. It could just be hormone blockers, which is not irreversible. So I feel like I've heard people saying that if they keep going with this, eventually they're going to ban gender affirming care for everybody, not just for children. We don't know where the line is going to be drawn.



Rimsha Syed 24:30

Yeah, totally. And I think I recently saw something, I'm not sure if this was in Texas or elsewhere, about some sort of gender verification process, if there's any inkling that somebody might be trans, and that seemed just very draconian and very far-fetched, and it's a scary time for sure. I definitely agree with that. How do you think people can get involved in making Texas a more inclusive space, or more broadly speaking, how can people fight this or change what's happening?



Avery Wright 25:09

Really just spreading the word and contacting your officials in your area. People say that they're allies, and it's not a badge of honor that you can wear as an ally if you're not actually doing anything. Being an ally does not just mean, "Hey, you're my friend, and you're gay, and I don't hate you. I am an ally." It means you are actively doing something to support queer people. So going out to protest. There have been a lot of protests since the letter that Greg Abbott wrote a few months ago. And sharing information on social media, correcting people. If you're out with a group of friends, and one of them says something that's transphobic or homophobic, call them out on it. Just the smallest of things can do so much, especially contacting those officials and going to protests.



Rimsha Syed 26:15

Yeah. Are you currently involved with any trans or queer advocacy spaces?



Avery Wright 26:23

I'm not at the moment. I'm still assisting Bobcat PRIDE with their transition of power, because I was the president for five semesters, and we have a new president, and he is super, he is amazing. But I am having to ease that transition to him becoming president and welcoming new members. So as far as queer advocacy goes and being involved in the queer community, that's where I'm in that right now. I haven't been able to go to protests in the past couple of weeks, because I was traveling, and then I got sick because I traveled. So I'm sure there will be more opportunities as the summer goes on, especially with Pride month happening right now. But yeah, to answer your question, not super, super involved right now.



Rimsha Syed 27:18



Yeah, sure. And going back to theater, I wanted to ask on a more tangible level for you, what does making an inclusive space look like?



Averly Wright 27:35

Really just off the bat, as an educator, making sure that your classroom is welcoming and a safe space for all of your students. And if you see one student picking on another for something that they can't control, calling it out and having a conversation about it. This is a question that I get in job interviews all the time, and I'm always talking about how you have to set those expectations at the beginning of the year and make sure that everybody is held accountable. And not just what I expect of my students, but what my students expect of me. So just setting those expectations in the classroom, but as a first year teacher, I only have so much control over what happens in the school and even in my own classroom. So I'm hoping as time goes on, and I become a more seasoned teacher, I can find where my power lies and use my voice to support those groups of students at a higher level, to administration if I need to.



Rimsha Syed 28:51

Right, right. And are there any organizers or historical figures that you look up to or that you draw inspiration from?



Averly Wright 29:05

I guess I have to say Marsha P Johnson, and the wonderful trans women of color who started all of this with the Stonewall Riots. There aren't a lot of queer historical figures to look up to because queer people have been around since the dawn of time, but you constantly see them erased in history. And there aren't a lot of older queer people now because of the AIDS epidemic. So there's only so many people you can look up to, but I'd be lying if the main person I look up to wasn't Marsha P Johnson, because she paved the road for us, because she threw that first brick, we're able to have the protests we have today. So yeah, she's definitely the trendsetter to end all trendsetters.



Rimsha Syed 30:15

Yeah, definitely. And what would you say are some of the biggest challenges that you have faced so far?



Averly Wright 30:26

So like I said, I have a pretty supportive circle, and I've surrounded myself with people who love me and care for me. Mainly just those normal trials and tribulations trans people go through as they're transitioning. I said I had come out when I was fifteen years old, and it took me basically a full two years to be able to start my medical transition, which was really a struggle and took an emotional toll on me. I was living in College Station, and I was only fifteen, sixteen years old.

The doctors in our area refused to prescribe me testosterone. They said that they didn't provide transgender affirming care. So I had to travel a few hours outside of College Station just to get that prescription. And so just those things that should seem so easy, just to get a prescription. Any cisgender person searching for just a regular prescription to treat something normal, they would get it just like that. And so I don't think people really realize, although they're trying to fight against transgender people going on gender-affirming care, it's so difficult to get in the first place. But I'm really in a state of privilege to be saying that that's one of my biggest struggles. Because some people can't afford to go on that gender-affirming care. So I'm definitely grateful for the experience that I've had and a successful transition. I've had top surgery. I got it a few years ago. So I'm really privileged, and having gone through all that much struggle other than the occasional bigot coming across calling me an "it," shouting Bible verses at me, but that's pretty much it.



Rimsha Syed 32:44

Yeah. Where did you end up having to travel to, to receive the care that you needed?



Avery Wright 32:51

I ended up traveling to Temple. There is a children's hospital over there, and I had a wonderful endocrinologist who finally prescribed me testosterone. Unfortunately, she resigned from there in last summer, so I had to transfer my prescription over to the Student Health Center at Texas State. And now because I'm graduating, I'm gonna have to find somewhere else to take my prescription, so jumping through those hoops again. But yeah, I had to travel from College Station to Temple once every four to six months for the first couple of years. So that was for the first couple years I was on testosterone.



Rimsha Syed 33:37

Right. Yeah, those can definitely be some trying times. And I guess speaking about challenges and opposition in your life, one thing that I like to ask in these interviews, is what do you find healing, and what do you go to when things get overwhelming?



Avery Wright 34:01

Well, I've been in a committed relationship with my partner now for a little over four years. So he's definitely my rock, and just sitting in the same room with him gives me a sense of comfort and ease. And definitely having the support system that I have, my family and then my friends who are in town. And at the moment I'm really scared about finding a job, because teaching theater - teachers are always needed, it's just difficult finding a job as a theater teacher, because each school usually only has one or two of those positions, so that's some thing that I'm going through right now. But I have my support system, I have my partner, I have my dog who brings me comfort every day. So I'm definitely well supported and have those means to find a comfort.



Rimsha Syed 35:20

Yeah. And are you planning on staying in Texas for a while? Is your job search limited to San Marcos?



Avery Wright 35:29

I'm mostly searching between Austin and San Antonio. So like I said, I'm hoping to live in San Marcos for the next couple of years, mainly because my partner has another year of his undergrad. And then he's also doing his master's at Texas State. So we're gonna be here for a little while. But yeah, mainly looking between Austin and San Antonio. There are a lot of wonderful districts here, so I'm sure I'll find some. It's just the stress started, and I just want to know if I have a job.



Rimsha Syed 36:07

Yeah, totally valid. Well I want to be mindful of your time today. I have one last question. It's a bit more open-ended. Seeing as this is an oral history interview that will be archived, and the hope is that people way down the line years from now will be listening to the insight that you've provided today, do you have any words of wisdom or last pieces of advice that you want to put out there?



Avery Wright 36:36

I guess just, I feel like we are moving into some dark times as far as equal rights for queer and trans people go. So for young trans people, for any trans people, but primarily for young trans people, there are people looking out for you every single day, doing everything in their power to boost positive legislation and make positive change. So you may feel alone, but you're not alone. I was there four years ago. I'm still very young. But [inaudible] on the change that I [inaudible] the means and the privilege to use your voice, please do. But yeah, there's always somebody looking out for you.



Rimsha Syed 37:41

Yeah. Well, thank you so much. This was wonderful.



Avery Wright 37:45

Yes, thank you so much for having me. This was great.



Rimsha Syed 37:48

Yeah. I'm gonna go ahead and stop the recording now.



Avery Wright 37:51

Okay.