

00:00:05 SPK\_1

Billy worked with a partner opposite of two other people, and his partner left the hospital, and so they moved me directly from the nursery to labor and delivery.

00:00:15 SPK\_1

And so I was his partner, and it took him a while before he even came out.

00:00:21 SPK\_1

Like, when I first went to work there, he wasn't out.

00:00:24 SPK\_1

I mean, you know, if you're gay, you know, other people are gay.

00:00:28 SPK\_1

Like, you just pick up on those signs.

00:00:30 SPK\_1

You just know, for the most part, there are a few people that will trick you.

00:00:34 SPK\_1

But I think, for the most part, the gay dart thing is very real.

00:00:40 SPK\_1

And he would say that he'd had a new girlfriend and that he was dating, but you never saw the girlfriend, and it was actually just guys.

00:00:47 SPK\_1

But he didn't want to tell anybody that it was guys.

00:00:50 SPK\_1

And he finally came out.

00:00:52 SPK\_1

I don't even remember when exactly, but once he came out, he was very comfortable with himself.

00:01:00 SPK\_1

And the girl that was living with him at the time, she was a lesbian.

00:01:04 SPK\_1

Her name is Julie, and she'd been out her whole life.

00:01:08 SPK\_1

I don't think Julie ever dated guys or proclaimed to be anything other than just lesbian the whole time I knew her, but she worked in respiratory.

00:01:18 SPK\_1

And then Tracy, who ended up being my best friend, she also was out and open at the time, but she didn't come out as early as Julie, even though they graduated high school together just from conservative christian parents and not want.

00:01:39 SPK\_1

But just the same reason most people don't come out is because you don't want to disappoint your parents and these conservative Christian.

00:01:46 SPK\_1

So I had three, and there was actually another girl that worked in x ray at the hospital.

00:01:51 SPK\_1

It just sounds like our hospital is a plethora of gay people, doesn't it?

00:01:54 SPK\_1

But for it to be a small town.

00:01:56 SPK\_1

But there was another girl that worked in x ray, and she was also a lesbian, and we would just kind of hang out.

00:02:02 SPK\_1

And they really helped bring me out because I didn't profess to be a lesbian at that time either, but they knew.

00:02:11 SPK\_1

So it was.

00:02:16 SPK\_1

You at least have a support system.

00:02:17 SPK\_1

I think most people don't come out until they find a good support system.

00:02:22 SPK\_2

Sorry, I'm just trying to set this up.

00:02:29 SPK\_2

Got to find, like, the right stack of books.

00:02:34 SPK\_1

I don't think we got a gorilla thing.

00:02:39 SPK\_1

No.

00:02:42 SPK\_2

Let'S try that.

00:02:46 SPK\_2

I know I have a phone stand.

00:02:48 SPK\_2

I would have brought it.

00:02:49 SPK\_2

I'd known I had tested out my camera at home, and then I had cleared out space on the SD card, but I guess that one's just too small.

00:03:01 SPK\_1

Can I block the camera.

00:03:04 SPK\_1

Oh, Lord.

00:03:05 SPK\_1

That's going to be down there.

00:03:07 SPK\_1

Yeah, it is.

00:03:09 SPK\_2

That's all right.

00:03:10 SPK\_1

It was a thought.

00:03:15 SPK\_2

We'll just roll with it.

00:03:17 SPK\_2

So there was still, like a little bit of stigma on coming out and being gay in the south at the time.

00:03:22 SPK\_2

I mean, there's stigma now.

00:03:23 SPK\_1

I was going to say there's a hundred percent.

00:03:25 SPK\_1

I think it's gotten better through the years, but it's still very much a thing.

00:03:31 SPK\_1

And I think it's hard to find.

00:03:37 SPK\_1

This is going to sound really bad.

00:03:39 SPK\_1

I don't mean for it to, but there's still just different types of people in the gay community.

00:03:45 SPK\_1

Just like there's different types of people in the regular general population of heterosexuals.

00:03:53 SPK\_1

You have the gay people who are bi because they are just kind of on the down low sort of thing.

00:04:04 SPK\_1

How that whole term gets phrased.

00:04:07 SPK\_1

Then you have people that are not monogamous, that they fit that bill of they would just have sex with anybody.

00:04:17 SPK\_1

And then it's very rare.

00:04:20 SPK\_1

And we've had people tell us this, too.

00:04:22 SPK\_1

Like, there was Brady's challenge teacher at school, and she was like, I was the head of his little boy scout group, and I did a lot with his little boy scout group, but the troupe itself was sponsored by the First Baptist church.

00:04:40 SPK\_1

And for, like, I guess the first year of it, year and a half or so, my little group of boys were getting their badges.

00:04:50 SPK\_1

We were following the books.

00:04:51 SPK\_1

We were doing everything.

00:04:52 SPK\_1

And the others, they just were kind of like laissez fair.

00:04:56 SPK\_1

They just sort of winged it and didn't really do a whole lot.

00:04:59 SPK\_1

Well, apparently the deacons at the first Baptist church found out that a lesbian was leading the Boy scout.

00:05:06 SPK\_1

Well, they were cub scouts at the time troop, and so they said that I could not do that.

00:05:11 SPK\_1

So I was really surprised that his challenge teacher, her and her husband were like the troop leaders.

00:05:20 SPK\_1

They actually wrote a letter and tried to go to bat for us.

00:05:24 SPK\_1

And she said, before I met you guys, me and Sam, there was just this idea in their head about gay people, that they don't hold down jobs, they can't be responsible, productive members of society.

00:05:43 SPK\_1

They can't be good family members.

00:05:47 SPK\_1

And before they met us, they thought all of that stigmatism was true.

00:05:51 SPK\_1

But they both said, after we met y'all and realized how hardworking you are, how committed you are, how much you love Brody, how involved you are in his life.

00:06:00 SPK\_1

And we, I think, have been one of those rare couples in this town.

00:06:07 SPK\_1

I think you see it more in larger towns, but in smaller towns, you don't have a lot of good gay role models, if there's a better term.

00:06:16 SPK\_1

Because people have all this ideas and thoughts about how bad gay is and how it's just people, I guess, having orgies all the time.

00:06:26 SPK\_1

I don't know what they think exactly, but I think that we have shown a lot of people in our small town that, yes, you can be professionals at work, and, yes, you can be monogamous and

committed and still loving parents and contribute to the community in a positive way.

00:06:44 SPK\_1

And I think that we've been able to take down a lot of those walls.

00:06:49 SPK\_1

And the whole back street thing, for me, sort of empowered me to feel like that there were so many more people that were like me, not really the bar scene.

00:07:03 SPK\_1

And people were like, why are you going to the bar scene?

00:07:05 SPK\_1

You don't drink.

00:07:05 SPK\_1

Because I don't drink.

00:07:06 SPK\_1

I don't smoke.

00:07:07 SPK\_1

I don't have, like you have said yourself that I'm the most conservative gay person you've ever met.

00:07:12 SPK\_1

That's very true.

00:07:13 SPK\_1

I think I'm extremely conservative when it comes to the only thing that's not about me is that I'm in a same sex marriage.

00:07:22 SPK\_1

But when you go to places like Backstreet, where there is a community of people, you start seeing that they are happy, they are in relationships, they do get along.

00:07:36 SPK\_1

It just creates an area where people who are both out and still closeted could go and just be themselves.

00:07:43 SPK\_1

And there were a lot of heterosexual people that went to Backstreet as well.

00:07:48 SPK\_1

You would be surprised at the number of heterosexual because they just wanted to party with the gay people, because that's with the fun people.

00:07:55 SPK\_1

And it was a big thing when the bar got changed to having to close early and losing its 24 hours status because they changed the law in Atlanta.

00:08:06 SPK\_1

And that pretty much took a big hit to the cabaret and to the bar itself.

00:08:11 SPK\_1

And I think that was the first thing that contributed to it.

00:08:15 SPK\_1

Closing down was just the laws.

00:08:17 SPK\_1

And basically the city wanted to use that area for condominiums.

00:08:22 SPK\_1

And there have been so many condominiums that have popped up now in that mid street area, that midtown area.

00:08:28 SPK\_1

That's the driving force between doing that.

00:08:32 SPK\_1

But then all the gays are the ones that are renting the condos.

00:08:34 SPK\_1

So I don't know that it was their goal to necessarily get rid of gay in Atlanta, because Atlanta is still considered one of the more gay friendly big cities in the United States.

00:08:47 SPK\_1

But they wanted to get rid of the bar scene and have money that came into the city through the condos and the rent and that kind of stuff.

00:08:56 SPK\_2

Yeah.

00:08:57 SPK\_2

What was it about going to back street?

00:09:01 SPK\_2

Kind of that first time.

00:09:03 SPK\_2

Was there a shift in your perspective?

00:09:05 SPK\_1

Kind of how you mentioned, I'm not somebody that's scared.

00:09:09 SPK\_1

And I wouldn't say that I was scared, but I just didn't know what to think that it was as massive as it was and that there were as many people that were there.

00:09:22 SPK\_1

Like I said, the one little drag show that I went to in Macon, it was like a lot of the gay bars or clubs or whatever, just small in a corner in a kind of shady part of town.

00:09:37 SPK\_1

But here's back street right there on Peach Tree kind of on the corner, and a plethora of people, tons of people.

00:09:48 SPK\_1

I never felt unsafe.

00:09:50 SPK\_1

I think my mom worried a good bit about me being at back street.

00:09:54 SPK\_1

But they had security that was always there and they were pretty big guys.

00:10:01 SPK\_1

They had bouncers up in the cabaret so that if anybody was causing a problem, they got escorted right on out.

00:10:13 SPK\_1

I think I was surprised.

00:10:15 SPK\_1

But when I went that first night, I ended up going, I think the second night, like, I think we went on the Saturday, was probably the Cinco de Mayo that year.

00:10:25 SPK\_1

And then I think I went back Sunday and I just ended up finding a home because a lot of the people who went were regulars.

00:10:35 SPK\_1

They went all the time.

00:10:36 SPK\_1

So you were constantly running into familiar faces and, hey, how are you?



00:10:41 SPK\_1  
That kind of stuff.

00:10:43 SPK\_1  
But there was a totally different feel between the cabaret and the dance floor and the bar downstairs.

00:10:50 SPK\_2  
Yeah.

00:10:50 SPK\_2  
Can you explain the layout to me?

00:10:53 SPK\_2  
So it was a big place.

00:10:57 SPK\_1  
And it was just your typical square building.

00:11:01 SPK\_1  
When you first went in the door, they had like a coat check if you wanted to use that.

00:11:08 SPK\_1  
They had a little store area where they sold t shirts or if you needed visine or chapstick or whatever they wanted to use over there.

00:11:22 SPK\_1  
And then they had just a walk around bar in the middle and in the back.

00:11:30 SPK\_1  
This way was the huge dance floor.

00:11:32 SPK\_1  
And it was like a two story.

00:11:33 SPK\_1  
Like, you could climb up to it and it had like a little balcony area to it and it have a stage and a huge dance ball.

00:11:41 SPK\_1  
Disco ball.

00:11:43 SPK\_1  
And then over here on this side was the steps up to the cabaret.

00:11:47 SPK\_1

The cabaret had a lady that sat there and would play cards with people.

00:11:55 SPK\_1

There were bathrooms up there and they also had, like a full bar service as far as food and snacks.

00:12:01 SPK\_1

Like, you could get snack foods up there, too.

00:12:06 SPK\_1

The cabaret itself had a small stage, the dressing room was behind where the lady was playing cards.

00:12:14 SPK\_1

And the performers would come straight out kind of at an angle and go behind some curtains where they could go to get ready to come out on stage.

00:12:24 SPK\_1

And the cabaret itself had a smaller bar and then a bunch of tables and chairs just kind of circled around it.

00:12:32 SPK\_1

And then there was a patio that you could go out on the door up there, and there was a patio that people could go out and get some fresh air or whatever.

00:12:40 SPK\_1

They always had a sound booth that was kind of at the back before you went out on the patio.

00:12:45 SPK\_1

And a DJ, that's where the DJ and the lights and all that sort of stuff was sort of sitting at the back.

00:12:52 SPK\_1

But it was always dark.

00:12:59 SPK\_1

I think I remember the first time I saw back street with the lights on.

00:13:03 SPK\_1

It looked totally different.

00:13:05 SPK\_1

Like, you know how when you, you're used to learning a layout when it's dark and there's flashing lights and crowds of people and then the lights are on and you're like, I didn't know that was that color.

00:13:15 SPK\_1

I didn't know that was sitting over there in the corner.

00:13:18 SPK\_1

But that was usually like 08:00 in the morning, 09:00 in the morning.

00:13:23 SPK\_1

We would come back from maybe a show out of town and one of the performers would go by there and either pick up their clothes or drop off their clothes or whatever.

00:13:32 SPK\_1

And it was always just kind of, just weird with the lights on.

00:13:37 SPK\_2

So how did you get connected into the drag performers?

00:13:42 SPK\_2

And you did a little bit of traveling and stuff with them too.

00:13:49 SPK\_1

Basically just being supportive of the show and the performance, showing up, tipping, respecting, smiling, laughing.

00:14:02 SPK\_1

And they were always very friendly as far as, like, would come over and talk to you if you became a familiar face.

00:14:09 SPK\_1

And going to where they did shows outside of back street as a.

00:14:18 SPK\_1

What is that doll that was right next across from them at the time?

00:14:22 SPK\_1

I don't remember, but Heather would do a show over there and Ashley would do a show over there and sometimes Laura would do a show over there.

00:14:29 SPK\_1

So I would go to that like every night of the week.

00:14:32 SPK\_1

If I was off, I knew where there was a drag show and I would go to Burke carts.

00:14:39 SPK\_1

But Burke Harts was another place they did a drag show at.

00:14:42 SPK\_1

Burke Harts?

00:14:43 SPK\_1

Burke Harts is more known for campy drag.

00:14:46 SPK\_1

I like campy drag.

00:14:48 SPK\_1

Okay.

00:14:48 SPK\_1

It's not my preferred type of drag, but it's really weird.

00:14:55 SPK\_1

Like, Mary Edith Pitts is one of the nicest people that you would ever meet.

00:15:01 SPK\_1

And she has some of the raunchiest drag there is.

00:15:04 SPK\_1

But as far as, like, the person such a super nice guy.

00:15:09 SPK\_1

And then you have, like, bubba delicious.

00:15:12 SPK\_1

They used to do drag show and dinner at Nikki Moto's, which was an asian restaurant.

00:15:21 SPK\_1

And that you would just sit and eat and they would just come around and perform for you.

00:15:26 SPK\_1

And that was about half camp, half glam drag.

00:15:31 SPK\_1

That was actually Brody's first drag show.

00:15:33 SPK\_1

We took him when he was probably three months old or so.

00:15:38 SPK\_1

They actually would perform at somewhere called cow tippers.

00:15:42 SPK\_1

And one time did we take you to cowtippers?

00:15:44 SPK\_2

I've been there before, before they closed.

00:15:46 SPK\_1

I think we took.

00:15:47 SPK\_1

Wasn't gage there with us?

00:15:49 SPK\_1

And Gage and Jordan.

00:15:50 SPK\_1

I mean, I felt like there was a plethora of us.

00:15:52 SPK\_1

But Brody was there and he was probably.

00:15:56 SPK\_1

I don't know what, like one or two, something like that.

00:16:00 SPK\_1

And some patrons there called the police because the drag performers were performing in front of a small child.

00:16:11 SPK\_1

And Charlie was there, and he was like.

00:16:14 SPK\_1

They brought him to see the mean.

00:16:16 SPK\_1

That's why we were there, was just to see them.

00:16:20 SPK\_1

And I had no problem with them seeing my kid because they were my friends.

00:16:26 SPK\_1

So they would come over and sit at the table and talk to us.

00:16:29 SPK\_1

And in between whatever little performances they did.

00:16:33 SPK\_1

But I just thought that was so weird.

00:16:34 SPK\_1

Even though cow tippers, you don't have to be gay to eat there.

00:16:38 SPK\_1

It's not like a gay people only restaurant.

00:16:41 SPK\_1

But I guess the heterosexual people that were there were just appalled by it.

00:16:44 SPK\_1

So they actually called the cops because the performers were performing in front of children?

00:16:53 SPK\_1

Yes, that's exactly what they're doing.

00:16:55 SPK\_1

Because Charlie's was x rated.

00:16:58 SPK\_1

He could say whatever he wanted to say.

00:17:01 SPK\_1

They could perform whatever songs they could dress however they wanted to.

00:17:05 SPK\_1

And anytime they performed at other places, like cow tippers, it wasn't an x rated.

00:17:10 SPK\_1

It might have had some little bit of raunchiness to it or a little bit of cuffing, but wasn't like the cabaret for sure.

00:17:17 SPK\_2

So I've seen that a lot.

00:17:19 SPK\_2

Like a lot of advertisements for Charlie's x rated cabaret.

00:17:23 SPK\_2

What exactly made it x rated?

00:17:26 SPK\_2

Like, what was the show like?

00:17:28 SPK\_1

He could say anything he wanted to.

00:17:31 SPK\_1

He could cuss.

00:17:32 SPK\_1

He could use profanity, sexual profanity.

00:17:37 SPK\_1

The performers could wear anything they wanted.

00:17:40 SPK\_1

Know Heather could come out in pasties and a g string.

00:17:44 SPK\_1

And it just was the fact that if you're there, know that it's going to have some raunchiness to it.

00:17:53 SPK\_1

But again, if there were people there that would.

00:17:59 SPK\_1

It was bridesmaids.

00:18:01 SPK\_1

Oh, my God.

00:18:02 SPK\_1

They loved to come to the cabaret and Charlie would just let them have know go at them and they liked know.

00:18:11 SPK\_1

Sometimes the patrons would push it too far, but the performers never did.

00:18:15 SPK\_1

Like Charlie had this line, if you're going to be there, you're going to be respectful and you're not going to disrespect the gay people.

00:18:21 SPK\_1

You're not going to try to make the show about you.

00:18:24 SPK\_1

Because a lot of them would come up there and they'd be drunk and they'd try to dance and security would come and get them and move them because you're not going to dance in front of the show.

00:18:33 SPK\_1

Everybody else is here to see the drag performers.

00:18:36 SPK\_1

They're not here to see Susie over here drunk with her little Tierra and her ribbon across her chest.

00:18:44 SPK\_1

But that's what made it x ray, is that they could pick any kind of music that they wanted to joke.

00:18:54 SPK\_1

Yeah, but there was no nudity.

00:18:58 SPK\_2

Got you right.

00:18:59 SPK\_1

No nudity.

00:19:01 SPK\_1

Pasties is about as in like bikini type, whatever you would see on a bikini.

00:19:07 SPK\_1

But that was only certain performers and certain songs that they did.

00:19:12 SPK\_1

There was also evening gowns and costumes.

00:19:17 SPK\_1

Know, Lena would come out and do Tina Turner.

00:19:20 SPK\_1

So she would come out, wear what you would see Tina Turner perform on stage.

00:19:25 SPK\_1

Most of the performers at Backstreet were their own.

00:19:30 SPK\_1

Know a lot of people in drag.

00:19:31 SPK\_1

They'll try to.

00:19:32 SPK\_1

I know there was this girl in Savannah that did a lot of Reba McIntyre, and so she would look a lot like reba, have the wig and the outfits and do a lot of reba music and stuff.



00:19:44 SPK\_1

And there are people that do share.

00:19:46 SPK\_1

There are people that do Whitney Houston, that kind of stuff.

00:19:49 SPK\_1

But all of the performers at Backstreet were themselves.

00:19:53 SPK\_1

Like Raven was did.

00:19:56 SPK\_1

She had a wonder woman performance that she would do for pageants and stuff and she would perform it there, but it was just for that show.

00:20:06 SPK\_1

It wasn't like an imitation kind of thing.

00:20:10 SPK\_1

But any of those performers, they were the nicest, kindest people once you got to know them.

00:20:17 SPK\_1

And that's what made me stay, is that I liked the show, but I really wanted to get to know the people because I like to know people.

00:20:27 SPK\_1

And so I guess the first time I drove somewhere crazy was to Birmingham to see Heather.

00:20:34 SPK\_1

100% sure that's what I did was drove to Birmingham to see Heather.

00:20:38 SPK\_1

And then after we got to know each other and she trusted me and knew that I wasn't like a lot of the people that were there at the bar.

00:20:50 SPK\_1

Because a lot of the people that are there, they're promiscuous.

00:20:52 SPK\_1

They're trying to use them.

00:20:55 SPK\_1

I don't really want to say use them, maybe not the right term, but just spread rumors about them, I guess they could.

00:21:02 SPK\_1

Or tell their secrets to their private life and that kind of stuff.

00:21:08 SPK\_1

And that's just not me.

00:21:09 SPK\_1

I wanted to know them as people.

00:21:12 SPK\_1

That was my goal, was to know them as people.

00:21:14 SPK\_1

So I drove Heather for a long time to Birmingham because she did a Birmingham show every Sunday.

00:21:20 SPK\_1

And we would drive to Birmingham, drive back every Sunday.

00:21:26 SPK\_1

They worked in Savannah a lot, Tracy and I.

00:21:31 SPK\_1

The first time we heard that there was a pageant and it was entertainer of the year, and it was in Lexington, Kentucky.

00:21:37 SPK\_1

And we were like, they got pageants for this shit.

00:21:40 SPK\_1

Oh, my God, they got pageants.

00:21:42 SPK\_1

And so we realized that there's pageants.

00:21:44 SPK\_1

Well, Tracy and I went to Kentucky for the pageant and for the entertainer of the year because Raven and Ashley were performing.

00:21:55 SPK\_1

She adored Raven.

00:21:56 SPK\_1

I love Raven myself, but Tracy's was raven and mine was Ashley.

00:22:01 SPK\_1

And that was just the two people that we adored the most, I guess.

00:22:08 SPK\_1

And while we were up there, unfortunately, Julie ended up being in a car accident and broke her neck, like, at c three.

00:22:17 SPK\_1

So she was on a ventilator and ended up dying about six months later.

00:22:22 SPK\_1

So that was kind of a bittersweet know.

00:22:26 SPK\_1

It was our first time going and actually seeing what a pageant is and how it happens and all the stuff with then, you know, knowing that we couldn't just come back because Julie was in the car accident.

00:22:40 SPK\_1

So when we came back, we stopped at the hospital to see her.

00:22:45 SPK\_1

That was our first stop back, and she ended up dying.

00:22:48 SPK\_1

That was in September, I guess, of 2001.

00:22:52 SPK\_1

And she died, like, right around January, February of 2002.

00:22:59 SPK\_2

Can you tell me a bit more about Ashley and y'all's friendship?

00:23:07 SPK\_1

Ashley was probably one of the most private people, I guess I can say.

00:23:14 SPK\_1

She was not somebody that was very.

00:23:20 SPK\_1

Just look at me, look at me, look at me.

00:23:23 SPK\_1

And Gary, that Johnson, who was Ashley Cruz.

00:23:30 SPK\_1

Very shy, very to himself, very sweet.

00:23:39 SPK\_1  
But Ashley Cruz.

00:23:41 SPK\_1  
I could hardly look in the eye.

00:23:43 SPK\_1  
And I know that sounds weird.

00:23:45 SPK\_1  
Like I could carry on a better conversation with Gary than I could Ashley.

00:23:50 SPK\_1  
Once he became Ashley and in the paint, sometimes I couldn't even look him in the eye.

00:23:56 SPK\_1  
It was just so intimidating to me.

00:23:58 SPK\_1  
I guess he created this person that, not for me, but the person that he was was just so overwhelmingly attractive to me that I had a hard time maintaining eye contact.

00:24:13 SPK\_1  
And I can maintain eye contact with a lot of people.

00:24:15 SPK\_1  
But Ashley made it very difficult for me to maintain eye contact.

00:24:21 SPK\_1  
And I think he knew that sometimes, too, because he would be just like, look.

00:24:27 SPK\_1  
And I'd be like, I can't.

00:24:29 SPK\_1  
Can't.

00:24:30 SPK\_1  
It's weird.

00:24:32 SPK\_1  
I don't know.

00:24:33 SPK\_1  
It's weird.

00:24:34 SPK\_1

But he was the glamour.

00:24:38 SPK\_1

Ashley was always the glamour person.

00:24:41 SPK\_1

Pageant queen probably has held more titles and participated in more pageants than anybody else.

00:24:49 SPK\_1

She could be feisty sometimes, too.

00:24:56 SPK\_1

I don't really sweet.

00:24:59 SPK\_1

That's who we went to Texas for two times, was to support Ashley.

00:25:03 SPK\_1

So Tracy and I made two trips to Dallas to miss gay us of a pageant that was in Dallas, Texas.

00:25:12 SPK\_1

And both times I had a minivan at the time, because that's what every single white female needs, is minivan.

00:25:20 SPK\_1

It was left over from my children days.

00:25:23 SPK\_1

And we loaded that damn thing up with drag queens that were her, like, dancers and stuff.

00:25:31 SPK\_1

So we'd be loaded up with.

00:25:34 SPK\_1

One of them went and Jade Daniels.

00:25:37 SPK\_1

And she sat there with, like, a sewing machine, I think, in her lap.

00:25:42 SPK\_1

The whole damn twelve hour trip to.

00:25:44 SPK\_1

I mean, that minivan was packed with feathers, glitter, makeup, props, everything we could put in that minivan.

00:25:53 SPK\_1

And it takes exactly 12 hours from Atlanta to Dallas.

00:25:57 SPK\_1

And those were quite fun trips because there's just a lot of life in a lot of gay people.

00:26:09 SPK\_1

They are fun, but a lot of them, they cover up pain, too.

00:26:15 SPK\_1

So there's a lot of little clicks within the gay community, just like there is the other.

00:26:24 SPK\_1

You have some that are quiet, normal, your hairdresser that you don't know does drag, but then there's some that you're like, oh, yeah, this person does drag because they always act like they're on stage.

00:26:36 SPK\_1

And I was usually more drawn to the ones that were quieter and just ordinary people.

00:26:44 SPK\_1

I actually met RuPaul one time through Ashley, but he was at a bar that she was performing at, and he was completely out of drag.

00:26:54 SPK\_1

And, like, most people had no idea who that was.

00:26:57 SPK\_1

And I didn't even at the time, really, because that was before RuPaul became a big television kind of thing.

00:27:04 SPK\_1

He was very big in the gay community, but that was way before RuPaul's drag.

00:27:10 SPK\_1

So that was just kind of nice to have that sort of as a memory.

00:27:17 SPK\_1

Most people that do drag when they're not in drag, they're very incognito, almost like a celebrity, but not really, like, obnoxious like a celebrity, because they don't want to bring a lot of attention to themselves.

00:27:32 SPK\_1

They're kind of quiet people, so you usually see them in hats in the corner.

00:27:37 SPK\_1

So wouldn't you agree with that, Sam, that you wouldn't know that they were this flamboyant, on stage kind of person?

00:27:44 SPK\_1

Because they're so quiet when they're not?

00:27:47 SPK\_1

They're so opposite of.

00:27:49 SPK\_1

It's just like any other, I'm sure actors, if you spend time with actors, that the person that you see on screen is not anything like the person that's not on screen.

00:28:00 SPK\_1

So they had stage personalities and off stage personalities.

00:28:04 SPK\_1

And for me, it was wanting to get to know the off stage personalities.

00:28:08 SPK\_1

As much as anything, I wanted to connect with them.

00:28:12 SPK\_1

And probably one of my proudest moments, like, gay pride used to be a huge thing in Atlanta.

00:28:17 SPK\_1

It kind of still is.

00:28:18 SPK\_1

But Raven used to host the cabaret that they had at the park right there where they had the huge stage.

00:28:27 SPK\_1

And everybody in Atlanta would come, and they'd have the parade during the day, Piedmont park.

00:28:32 SPK\_1

And that very first year, they were like, y'all want to be on the back street float?

00:28:40 SPK\_1

And so me and Tracy and Billy and Julie and her girlfriend, we were actually on the back of a flatbed pickup truck with the pride stuff, and they took off at going, like, up a hill.

00:28:58 SPK\_1

Like the truck jerked.

00:29:00 SPK\_1

You know how when you're changing gears and big trucks, it jumps.

00:29:03 SPK\_1

Me and Tracy fell off the back of it.

00:29:05 SPK\_1

We had to walk the whole rest of the talking about two fat girls, girl walking in that parade.

00:29:10 SPK\_1

I'm like, I ain't walking that parade no more.

00:29:12 SPK\_1

I mean, that was it for me.

00:29:13 SPK\_1

But at the end of the parade that night, they would have, like, the big cabaret show at the park, and then everybody would come over to back street and party, know, five or 06:00 in the morning.

00:29:25 SPK\_1

And Heather's stunt that she did, I guess I shouldn't say stunt, but her performance.

00:29:31 SPK\_1

Heather was always the body, because that's her thing.

00:29:39 SPK\_1

She's a transgendered person, very private person, but she's got the body, and she was the one that you would see with no clothes on more than anybody else.

00:29:51 SPK\_1

But I prefer Heather with clothes on, which is like.

00:29:53 SPK\_1

I mean, I know you're like, well, she's a lesbian.

00:29:55 SPK\_1

But my favorite performance that she does at all, ever is a purple rain by Leanne Rhimes.

00:30:04 SPK\_1

And she has this purple gown that would get \$20 out of me every time, because, I mean, she just walk out of stage, and I just hand her 20.



00:30:14 SPK\_1

And I've seen Tracy do that with Raven, she go over to the ATM machine, just stand, like, literally after you're there a while and you're comfortable enough.

00:30:24 SPK\_1

She has literally sat in a chair at the beginning of the stage.

00:30:28 SPK\_1

But they weren't going to make Tracy move because they knew that this is Tracy's thing and it would be.

00:30:33 SPK\_1

And Raven would come out and do some Jessica Simpson song in a bikini looking outfit, and Tracy would just sit there and just throw \$100, just throw it on the stage, throw it.

00:30:46 SPK\_1

And we got to the point, like, where we would pick up the money for them because we would always sit at the same table every time that we went.

00:30:53 SPK\_1

And afterwards, we pick up the money off the floor and go over there and hand it to them.

00:30:58 SPK\_1

And they're okay with that because they knew we weren't going to hell.

00:31:00 SPK\_1

Half the money was ours.

00:31:03 SPK\_1

Not really, but, I mean, sometimes it was.

00:31:08 SPK\_1

But one night, Heather, I had always wanted to see her do share.

00:31:14 SPK\_1

What song was it that she, you know, the half breed song.

00:31:20 SPK\_1

And she had performed it in her early years, and I had never seen her do it before.

00:31:25 SPK\_1

And I was like, man, I hate that.

00:31:27 SPK\_1

I miss that.

00:31:28 SPK\_1

And one night after pride on a Sunday night, Charlie came out and announced and said, richard, I just want you to know this one is for you.

00:31:36 SPK\_1

And she came out in her share, like, a full indian headdress and that turquoise looking outfit.

00:31:44 SPK\_1

And she did half breed.

00:31:46 SPK\_1

And it was like the best gift, which, I mean, I know that sounds stupid, but I have a picture somewhere, I think, at my mama's house of me and Heather in her little indian outfit for half breed.

00:31:58 SPK\_1

So it was just stuff like that that they sometimes would do something special if they knew we were there.

00:32:05 SPK\_1

And that that was something that we liked.

00:32:07 SPK\_1

And I always appreciated the effort that they put towards doing something.

00:32:12 SPK\_1

Ashley's was her performance where she went from Patsy Klein into Britney Spears and Annie Lennox and went in from sweet dreams, from Patsy Klein to sweet dreams with Annie Lennox into usually some Britney Spears song.

00:32:37 SPK\_1

And that, for me, was like, my love, love that.

00:32:42 SPK\_1

And she did that the first night I was there.

00:32:45 SPK\_1

And I think that's what hooked me, was because I think she was fixing to go into a pageant.

00:32:51 SPK\_1

And so she was using that night to kind of practice or run through a rehearsal with just her come out.

00:32:56 SPK\_1

And she came out as Patsy Klein, and I was like, oh, my God.

00:32:59 SPK\_1

Because, you know, my little country 1950s heart was like, oh, my God.

00:33:04 SPK\_1

And then she went into sweet dreams, and I was just hooked, hooked, line and sinker.

00:33:09 SPK\_1

I think that's really what made me just want know do it.

00:33:13 SPK\_1

And there have been different people know they would switch hosting.

00:33:17 SPK\_1

Like, charlie would sometimes always do the first of the show, and then Heather or Raven would mc the second half of the show.

00:33:30 SPK\_1

They would take turns so that Charlie wasn't having to be out there all the time, and he would have guest performances from time to time from Savannah.

00:33:38 SPK\_1

Lily White is very raunchy, kind of campy drag, and she's passed away not too long ago.

00:33:48 SPK\_1

She would come and do a lot of stuff there.

00:33:49 SPK\_1

So I feel like I kind of came into it late in the game because Backstreet didn't stay open that long after I stopped going.

00:34:00 SPK\_1

It closed not too long after then, but we still, from time to time, would go and see, like, my very first date with mean.

00:34:09 SPK\_1

It was based on the fact that, oh, Heather's going to be in Macon.

00:34:12 SPK\_1

So I guess if we're going to go out on a date, hey, you want to go out on a date on this Saturday night?

00:34:17 SPK\_1

And we're going to go to a drag show afterwards.

00:34:21 SPK\_1

And so that was what our first date was.

00:34:24 SPK\_1

We had mexican, went to the movies, and went and saw Heather performing in Macon.

00:34:28 SPK\_1

And then we went out to eat at Waffle House afterwards with her and her boyfriend at the.

00:34:34 SPK\_1

That was the important time to me, was at the Waffle house.

00:34:39 SPK\_1

I love to watch the performances, but after a while, you just enjoy the time that you get to spend with the people.

00:34:45 SPK\_2

Yeah.

00:34:46 SPK\_2

What was kind of the reaction, like, when y'all found out that Backstreet was going to close?

00:34:53 SPK\_1

Well, at the time, Sam and I were already in a relationship, so it didn't really affect me because I didn't go anymore, because once I'm a family person, I am 100,000% family.

00:35:09 SPK\_1

I mean, it's all about my family.

00:35:12 SPK\_1

And I wasn't devastated by it, but I was very sad for the performers because that was a means of income for them.

00:35:24 SPK\_1

And so my friends were all going to have to try to find new places of employment, and that had been their full time job for years and years.

00:35:34 SPK\_1

And I think it was very sad for me, for the community, because I knew that such a large, prominent place that would house a lot of people because there are other places, but there just were not the capacity that Backstreet had.

00:35:52 SPK\_1

It had a huge capacity.

00:35:54 SPK\_1

And the only thing you can compare it to is club one in Savannah, where Chablis performed.

00:35:59 SPK\_1

And I actually got to meet Lady Chablis through Heather because I would go to know, drive Heather to Savannah, and she would perform with Chevrolet when she was in town.

00:36:12 SPK\_1

So I met her probably two times.

00:36:15 SPK\_1

I think, that she was there.

00:36:16 SPK\_1

So that was kind of nice, too.

00:36:20 SPK\_1

And then one of the performers, Bianca, that worked down there, came to Atlanta, and since then, she's gone to some national status.

00:36:30 SPK\_1

And her and her husband, they're both transgendered.

00:36:37 SPK\_1

Like, her husband was female to male, and she's male to female.

00:36:42 SPK\_1

And they're married couple, and they have two, you know, meeting her.

00:36:47 SPK\_1

I knew her from Savannah coming to.

00:36:51 SPK\_1

Yeah, I mean, I think that's the biggest thing with Backstreet closing, is that it's just like hearing know, the hospital's closing, and, okay, me and Sam's got to find new jobs.

00:37:02 SPK\_1

It sort of makes it hard for people who have very unique career set.

00:37:10 SPK\_1

There's not a lot for drag if drag is what you do.

00:37:13 SPK\_1

And everybody at Charlie's, that's what they did for a living.

00:37:16 SPK\_1

That wasn't just their little side hustle, was they were professional and had done it for so many years that it was their primary source of income.

00:37:26 SPK\_1

And that was the case with a lot of people.

00:37:28 SPK\_1

The lady that played the cards, she'd been there for a while.

00:37:32 SPK\_1

Security had been there for a while.

00:37:33 SPK\_1

The guy that ran the store down.

00:37:35 SPK\_1

So they had all known each other for years and years and years, because back street had been open for decades at that point.

00:37:42 SPK\_1

And so you're looking at decades worth of people that are all of a sudden out of a job.

00:37:47 SPK\_2

Yeah, I think that's a really important thing that doesn't get talked a lot or talked about a lot.

00:37:53 SPK\_2

When people talk about Backstreet and how it closed, the stories of the people afterwards really get lost because they were.

00:38:02 SPK\_1

Scattered, I mean, all of a sudden, because Backstreet could maintain a certain level of income, and luckily, all of them had other connections where they did additional jobs besides backstreet.

00:38:18 SPK\_1

And traveling was a big part of the income, but, like, a lot of them didn't travel that much.

00:38:24 SPK\_1

Shauna Brooks hardly ever went anywhere.

00:38:27 SPK\_1

She earned all of her money and still earns all of her money right there in midtown.

00:38:33 SPK\_1

Because a lot of people that live in Atlanta don't have cars that they drive and use.

00:38:38 SPK\_1

They don't move.

00:38:39 SPK\_1

I've always found it interesting, like, people who live in Atlanta, they can tell you how to get to the things that they frequent often, but they can't tell you how to get to things that sometimes people outside of Atlanta know more about because they have to drive to it, whereas there, they just kind of stay in their own little community.

00:38:56 SPK\_1

And this is the restaurant I eat at.

00:38:58 SPK\_1

This is the place that I get groceries.

00:39:00 SPK\_1

They don't know the whole Atlanta area, and a lot of them rely on public transportation because their little apartments or houses or whatever don't really have space for cars, or they just never had a use for it.

00:39:12 SPK\_1

But, yeah, one time, Tracy and I drove to Tallahassee to, let's see, Gainesville is which.

00:39:25 SPK\_1

The University of Florida.

00:39:27 SPK\_1

What is that?

00:39:27 SPK\_1

The one that's in Gainesville is the Gators, and the Tallahassee is the Indians.

00:39:34 SPK\_1

I just remember that.

00:39:35 SPK\_2

I don't know.

00:39:36 SPK\_1

Okay.

00:39:36 SPK\_1

Yeah.

00:39:37 SPK\_1

It's not a sports thing for you and me, either one.

00:39:39 SPK\_1

But anyway, the college had invited them to come down and do a show, and that was the first time that Shauna had ever traveled with me.

00:39:46 SPK\_1

We drove down there, and that was just weird having her in the car, because she just didn't.

00:39:54 SPK\_1

So I knew Heather where she likes to eat, where we want to stop, kind of what the whole routine is, because I had traveled with her so much.

00:40:03 SPK\_1

That's who I traveled with more than anybody.

00:40:05 SPK\_1

Savannah, South Carolina, Birmingham, that place in Florida, Valdosta.

00:40:13 SPK\_1

I mean, if she had some little thing that she knew of that she was going to, I would drive.

00:40:19 SPK\_2

Yeah.

00:40:20 SPK\_1

But a lot of know, after Backstreet, they still had their connections, but a lot of those little jobs couldn't pay what Backstreet could pay, because Backstreet was pulling in the money.

00:40:32 SPK\_1

It was a huge business, and they could pay full time employment, whereas if you went to somewhere, they had to really advertise you and you had to really make a name for yourself or it wouldn't be worth it.

00:40:46 SPK\_1

Because even though you get a certain amount of money, you also sort of rely on a certain amount of tips, too.

00:40:52 SPK\_1

And if there's not a decent crowd there, it's not going to be worth your effort.

00:40:57 SPK\_1

And that was kind of one way where I felt like I could help contribute to that, too, because if I drove, Heather didn't have to spend her gas money and put mileage on her car.

00:41:05 SPK\_1

So that was kind of a way for me to give, to know as a person.

00:41:10 SPK\_1

Same thing with Ashley.



00:41:11 SPK\_1

If we drove to South Carolina, it was saving him money that he didn't have to put on his vehicle and drive there.

00:41:20 SPK\_1

So I enjoyed doing it for them, lugging their stuff in, so they didn't have to necessarily lug stuff in.

00:41:27 SPK\_1

And I don't know this for sure, but I would hope that they would feel like that they could trust me because I wasn't going to get drunk.

00:41:37 SPK\_1

I wasn't going to have some random hookup with somebody there.

00:41:41 SPK\_1

I wasn't going to have drugs on me.

00:41:43 SPK\_1

I wasn't going to be over in the corner doing something illegal that I wasn't supposed to.

00:41:48 SPK\_1

I was my same mature, responsible person that works hard.

00:41:54 SPK\_1

I worked hard to help them as much as I could.

00:41:59 SPK\_1

It wasn't a job for me, but I looked at it like a job.

00:42:02 SPK\_1

That this is my responsibility is to make sure that everything they need is there for mean.

00:42:10 SPK\_1

When we left Birmingham, we'd stop at Arby's a lot because know stays open later sometimes or crystals or.

00:42:19 SPK\_1

So I buy them dinner or whatever and that know part of my contribution to their career wasn't much, but if you looked at it over a period of three years, it was thousands and thousands of dollars.

00:42:35 SPK\_2

Yeah, I imagine.

00:42:36 SPK\_1

But I did it because they kind of helped me out of a time when I was, like I said, in a bad spot from just the family that I had been with, I wasn't with anymore.

00:42:49 SPK\_1

I had just lost the two kids that I was taking care of and raising as my own.

00:42:56 SPK\_1

The daddy got custody of one, the other one moved off to New York.

00:43:00 SPK\_1

And it was hard to lose kids and to just sort of be by yourself for the first time.

00:43:07 SPK\_1

And that's what Backstreet provided me, was a place to go and feel like I belonged.

00:43:13 SPK\_1

And everybody there knew I was a lesbian.

00:43:16 SPK\_1

Like, I didn't even have to come out myself because they all knew just looking at me, oh, that's a lesbian.

00:43:22 SPK\_1

It's that whole gay dar thing.

00:43:24 SPK\_1

They know you don't have to come out.

00:43:29 SPK\_1

It's nice to find a community of people that they don't care that you're gay.

00:43:35 SPK\_1

You're supposed to be gay.

00:43:37 SPK\_1

You're here, you're part of the crowd.

00:43:40 SPK\_1

Cool.

00:43:41 SPK\_2

Well, I think we'll end it there.