[Intro music]

**Molly:** Welcome to *Gender Reveal*, a podcast where we ask intrusive personal questions and hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I’m your host and resident gender detective, Molly Woodstock.

[Music Ends]

**Molly:** This week on the show, I am so excited to share my interview with my friend Kevin. Kevin is better known as Portland’s second most famous drag queen, Poison Waters. Portland’s most famous drag queen is Darcelle, and I want to tell you about her for just a sec.

Walter Cole was born in Portland in 1930. Around 1967 he began performing as Darcelle and soon after that he opened the Darcelle XV Showplace. Darcelle still performs several times a week, and is in the Guinness Book of World Records as the world’s oldest drag queen performer, at around age 86. Darcelle’s XV Showplace is widely considered to be the longest running drag review in the United States. Poison has been performing at Darcelle’s for years and years and years and years, and she’s a very close friend of Darcelle and is really just an integral part in the whole Darcelle community. We don’t get to talk about any of that in the interview because there is honestly so much else to talk about, but I just thought it was an important and fun thing to know so I wanted to throw that in the beginning.

And one more note about the interview, which is that while we were recording, someone decided to do loud yard work outside my window, which is not idea. I didn’t love it. But I didn’t really have any way of stopping it and the interview was going really well so I just sort of kept going. So you’re gonna hear some yard work noise and that’s just how life is when you don’t have a professional recording studio. But I think it will be fine, I just always liked o apologize because I have really high standards for my work and they don’t always get met. But it’s still great, you’re gonna have a great time.

But before we get to all that, I just wanna thank you as always for all of your support. i know that a lot of you all have been sharing the show with your friends and family and co-workers and students, and I just really, really appreciate you helping me spread the word. This really is the only way that I get word out about the show, and you’re helping the show grow and exist, so I really, really appreciate it.

Thank you so much as always to our Patreon supporters for paying our bills. We had a few new folks this week joint us at the $5 level, which means that I will be sending them *Gender Reveal* stickers in the mail. And I just want to remind you that if you donate $7 a month or more I will send you an extra surprise. Also, we got a very generous donation via PayPal this week. If you’re rather make a one time donation than a monthly Patreon donation, you can totally do that at [PayPal.me/mollywoodstock](http://PayPal.me/mollywoodstock). I would be happy to send you some fun goodies for that as well.

This week’s show is brought to you by Babe Wax, our favorites gender affirming, body positive waxing salon here in Portland, Oregon. If you live in Portland or are passing through, I highly suggest booking an appointment with Mads at [BabeWax.net](http://BabeWax.net). But more importantly, even if you don’t live in Portland, you can donate to Wax Fund at [BabeWax.net/waxfund](http://BabeWax.net/waxfund) and 100% of that money goes directly to funding gender affirming waxes for trans women and trans feminine folks., I know I just asked you for money, but honestly it’s probably more important that you donate to wax fund, so like your call. But, it’s [babewax.net/waxfund](http://babewax.net/waxfund).

And with that, it’s time a segment called This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender intro music]

**Molly:** This week in gender, a US Appeals Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act protracts transgender workers against discrimination. Title VII prohibits discrimination based on sex and this court ruled that the law also protects transgender folks from being discriminated against just because they’re trans. The case in question was filed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission on behalf of Aimee Stephens. Aimee had worked at a funeral home for 6 years when she told her boss, Thomas Rost, that she was planning to transition from male to female and Thomas fired her. That seems like pretty clear-cut discrimination, but Thomas argue that he was allowed to fire Aimee due to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. Specifically, he argued that he viewed his work as a religious service and he operated his funeral home as a ministry. And also that it was somehow against his religion to buy a female work uniform for Aimee, because god had made Aimee as a man and God doesn’t make mistakes. But none of that worked and Aimee won the lawsuit, which is really incredible and hopefully sets a precedent for transgender workplace protections going forward. Also I just want to note, like, female work uniform is a problematic phrase but basically Aimee wanted to present more as female and required a different uniform for that and he didn’t want to buy it because of God.

This has been, This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender outro music plays]

[transition music plays]

**Molly:** As I mentioned, I am very excited to share my interview with Kevin Cook — better know as Poison Waters. For three decades, Poison Waters has been having tons of fun entertaining from countless stages in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. Highlights have included appearances with Pink Martini, Storm Large, and recurring role in Oregon Ballet Theater’s *The Nutcracker*. When she’s not enjoying her time hosting events and fundraisers or traveling the globe, she’s the co-hostess at the legendary Darcelle XV Showplace, where she has been wildly popular for my than 25 years.

[music ends]

**Molly:** Well thanks so much for having...having me on the show? It’s my show!

[Kevin laughs]

**Molly:** Thanks so much for coming on the show. Sorry, I just guested on like three other podcasts so I don’t remember how to live.

[Molly laughs]

**Kevin:** Oh my, and I, you ask if I’m the host but I easily take over most situations. So, it could very well be my show till the end.

**Molly**: Anyway, um, so the way we always start the show is by asking: in regards to gender, how do you identify?

**Kevin**: I identify as a gay male, and my pronouns are he/him.

**Molly:** Can you tell me who Poison Waters is?

**Kevin:** So Poison Waters is this great, kind of magical combination of Kevin myself, literally my own personality, but just more sparkly And it’s kind of irritating, Poison Waters is kind of irritating, the word professional like it’s all about dates and times and numbers and schedules and fonts on a script and timelines in order, but covered in drag. Which, normally drag queens are just kinda like “wah, whatever,” you know, like it would never occur to me to pick up my clothes off the floor and put them on and take them off the hangar that they’re hanging up on, which is not common in the drag world I’m find being that.

So yeah, I’m kinda irritating ‘cause I’m always like that one that I want to be right, I want to be the one that’s always on time, the one that’s professional. Which seems weird, like that shouldn’t be irritating but it kinda is.

**Molly:** Do you remember the first time you saw a drag queen?

**Kevin:** Yeah, the first time I saw a drag queen it scared the heck out of me and I can literally see it. It was um, the fall of ‘86 at the city nightclub in downtown Portland. I grew up in East County Parkrose. I had only been downtown a handful of times even. The late 80s it was like, the Pioneer Square had just opened and there was lot of punk rockers with leather coats and safety pins and mohawks and it kind of scared me. And there was a McDonald’s, or was it nope it was an Arctic Circle, excuse me but it was an Arctic Circle, but you could sit there and watch and I just felt like I was watching this wild TV show. There was like, pink hair and green hair and all of this, my guess is somewhere in that square, at some point, there was a drag queen.

But the first time I actually saw a drag queen face to face, I went into the city nightclub. It was dark, low ceiling, dark corridor, and coming towards me was the tallest, thinnest, palest women I ever saw with like, acid green hair. But it was a wig and it was a drag queen. And that movie Mars Attacks, where like the alien kinda does that weird thing, they were doing that coming towards me and I was like “oh my gosh!” I was so scared. And it was just like so, not off-putting, it was definitely startling. I mean it wasn’t like a fond memory, I’m just glad I have it so clearly cus I definitely do remember like “holy crap what’s that!” Oh it’s a drag queen okay.

**Molly:** So when was the point when that was something that you were interested in?

**Kevin:** So, I was still there so that was like ‘86. So my first like, “duh nuuuh! I’m an official drag queen with all the support of the world” was in ‘88. So that not, a year and a half, a lot happened. And the city night club was small and DJs spinning record and at midnight all the time, stop the records, pull up the lights, all the kids had to sit on the floor which were like gross and dirty and weird. And we were kids so there was pop and lemonade and chips, you know, it’s all on the floor, it’s gross. But you had to sit on it to watch this show, so I’m like “what the heck is this show” we watched this show. And, it was like, so it was already irritating me cus I wanted to dance and I really loved the music at that time and I wanted to dance. And I was meeting friends and I had new friends and it was just really, like, my own little Alice in Wonderland world. And so, then they would have this show.

I was irritated at the show, I didn’t understand why these guys were dressed up as girls and they were lip singing and “ok, let’s just get this over with.” And that went on and every now and again I’d find, I would become friends with one of them like “okay well I guess you’re not *that* bad,” but it’s still not my favorite thing. I gotta sit on the floor at midnight and this show is not really doing much for me. Because those were, you know, under-aged kids wearing jeans and flannel shirts and leather jackets. Ya know, it was very pedestrian drag, Goodwill drag I would guess. Well then one night they had a special show and I remember it. And they had professional drag queens and they were from Darcelle’s and the Embers, places I’d only heard of, ya know. I’m like “Oh my gosh.” And they came out and all four of them were black, and all four of them were wearing white gowns. Different white gowns, but white against beautiful black skin. And they were doing a medley of songs from Dream Girls, so it was like a Dream Girls review. Well I didn’t even know what Dream Girls was, but the music I was just like “oh my god this is great and look at they're so gorgeous in the rhinestones and the glitz and the sequins,” and it was really high end, what you would think of as classic drag. And that was the first time I had seen that and it was the first time I saw that on black people, and all the sudden, it’s literally so dumb, like a light bulb went off in my head. I’m like “Oh! There’s somebody like me. I get it now. Drags awesome!” It was like, what was I looking at all those other times? So then one of them was named Rosy Waters and he was kinda like a bigger guy, and he, Oprah was really big back then, the late ‘80s, and she had her show and everything, so he had this great Oprah wig and he would host the shows as Oprah with a blazer and a scarf and great hair and the microphone. And he was funny and quick and everything.

Well then, one weekend, so then those drag queens it was just the one time only and then they were gone. But Rosy kept coming back every now and again. And then one time he’s like “Hey, does anyone wanna learn how to be a drag queen?” and I just show my hand up in the air and I was like “What am I doing?” And then he’s, so me and another guy, both did. And he’s like “okay, lets exchange numbers and whatever,” so then, he met downtown for lunch in a cafe and I just thought *this is it* and we went to Newberry's and got falsies, they sold them, and pantyhose they sold a and then Mrs. C’s wigs. We bought wigs and literally made a kit, then we went to his house, and he would paint one half our face and we would have to paint the other to match, and then wipe it off. And then he’d paint and we’d paint and wipe it off. And it’s a totally, like a crash course in drag, like boot camp. And it was so fun. And it was just really kind of exciting. And then it was gonna be my debut at night. And so my boyfriend at the time, or recently ex, I’m not sure, we were both about the same age. He was a seamstress and he had made like all the gowns for all the girls at prom and everything, so he made me a dress and I loved it. And at that time I had a lot of hair, I had a lot of hair. So I relaxed it, like, chemical relaxer. So it wasn’t like bone straight but it was manageable. So I wore my own hair in this kind of a bouffant way, and I wore this fuchsia dress with a wrap. And the littlest jewelry, when I look at the pictures I just laugh cus that’s the little jewelry I ever saw. But I thought I was like dripping in diamonds. And then I did a song from Dream Girls and it was so fun.

So Rosy Waters, she introduced me to Misty Waters, who was a wonderful trans woman — the firs trans woman I ever met. And she was like Rosy’s drag mom and then Rosy was *my* drag mom and so I was always gonna be a Waters but we didn’t know my first name. And they said “Well, you should just pick a name that can just be by itself.” Like, Misty or Rosy, you don’t have to have Waters. So Christian Dior’s perfume had just come out in the beautiful purple bottle with the green packaging and I loved it, so I said “I’m gonna be poison!” And they’re like: “What? That’s not what we meant.” But I’m like “But I love it!” And so I was Poison Waters. And for the first several years people tried to get me to change the name. And even the first time I went to Darcelle’s he was like “I’m gonna need you to have a different name when you work here. You can be Poison out their but I can’t say Poison Waters.” And then I’m like “I guess I’m not gonna work here” I mean I was so principled back then. Ya know, this, my name. And so its always been Poison Waters. That was like, it was a turning point, and it was literally like flipping on a light switch. Where to me drag was icky and I didn’t get it, to click, drag is all I ever want to do. (laughs) It really was such a “Whoa, what happened.”

**Molly**: That’s awesome. So drag is all about playing with high femininity. What about that appeals to you?

**Kevin:** Well so, ya know, I am a ... Virgo. Growing up, ya know, the lil gay kid. I was, not shy and quiet by any means. I’ve always had a big personality and I love to laugh and to make people laugh. But I was very sensitive and I would cry a lot. And I really, if somebody splashed my with water I would cry. If I fell in the dirt, I was dirt and I would cry. I would hate to have my hands dirty. So, just that rough and tumble rugged masculine thing never. Even like, I don’t like loud noises, I don’t like to be startled. I certainly don’t like anybody to jostle me or whatever. Whether on purpose or unintentionally, it’s just not my thing. And so the complete opposite that is any time I saw on television or a movie, a beautiful woman who was so fragile and no one would push or touch or, just like wouldn’t be dirty ever. And would not “whoops I got wet,” that just, you know, what I kind of think of isn’t think of. But even on TV, the women with their hair all done up and the make up and just the stuff. In real life I got it from going to church or school and like if a teacher or the choir director at the choice or whatever had perfume on, or like, was made up, I can smell the powder on their face and that’s just like “oh my god,” that’s the complete opposite of what turns me off. I love that, it’s fresh and light and clean and airy. And so that whole femininity in visual is so, was so appealing to me. And I guess it always was and I didn’t realize it. All my favorite teachers were the female teachers and all my favorite adults were the women. And the women even in my family I would always gravitate towards the women and some cousins and what not, over the guys. It just was like “I don’t want to play with guns and play football and play on the ground. I don’t even want to be outside.” Like, my sister would be outside doing outside stuff and I’d be inside helping my mom make dinner, and I like that. Of course, if you really think too much about gender roles, then if I have to choose I want to be *this* role. I’ll be the clean tidy one. I don’t want to be outside and the dirty one.

And so in drag, you know there’s so many kinds of drag, that to be able to pick and choose what I want to put on me, I’m gonna pick the prettiest, the most glitziest, the most flamboyant, the most over the top, the most feminine, but even uber feminine, because some of the stuff I wear, no women would put that on. (both laughing) But it works for me.

**Molly:** Has drag changed the way you see gender, just because you’re really putting it on and off in a way?

**Kevin**: Yeah, that’s true. Actually, I used to feel like, and I’m sure a lot of people did and unfortunately some still do, that the men were the throng men and the women were weak. Well putting drag on to me is like putting on armor, it’s a super hero costume. And I’m just like I’m gonna wear this — and not for nothing, some of that shit is really heavy. And it’s really uncomfortable and I could literally take a direct hit with some of that stuff in with all of the boning and the coursing(?). It really has changed that. Sensuality, sexuality, visual imagery, and the strength of what growing up I though femininity was, or because I was the young gay kid, people used to call me queer and faggot and I was too feminine. And I used to literally try to walk with my hands balled, just straight and not like move when I walked. And now it’s just like there’s so much power in my femininity and there’s so much power in the drag and what I do with it. It’s just, it never, I used to believe that was a weakness or a bad thing.

**Molly:** Yeah, I love that story. I like the ending, anyway, (both laughing) not the beginning. So, you’ve been performing for thirty years.

**Kevin:** This is my thirtieth anniversary in 2018.

**Molly:** That’s wild, congrats.

**Kevin:** I’m working with people that weren’t even born when I started, which blows my mind.

**Molly:** So, in that time LGBTQ rights and visibility has come so, so far. What has that been like to watch?

**Kevin**: That’s been, it’s been a privilege. It’s been such a. privilege for me to be able to see all of that. And it really makes me appreciate everything so much more. I remember when I very first was out, there wasn’t even like a gay newspaper. But in the back of a weekly street paper there was tiny little ads that, not even it was all about sex, it was just about gay people come to meet. Or I wanted to volunteer with Cascade AIDs project because I thought that would be a way, first of all I was overwhelmed with all the news coming out at that time about AIDs about what it was and who it was and all that. And so I was like: okay well, clearly I need to do something. What do I do, how can I do that? And also I thought that’s also a way to meet more gay people, because I only knew the gay kids from the underage club. So to find information was crazy, I mean I had to look in these tiny little ads in the backs of papers and duh-duhduh-duhduh. And so that sort of thing, and just to even like now, like it would never occur to me back then that I was gonna get in drag at home or a club and then go to the next place. Like, I had all my drag in a duffel bag or even a grocery sack, take the bus or walk to wherever I was going, put all my drag on, do what I was there to do, take it all of, and then back. And now it’s like are you kidding me? I’m in drag every single where. Public transportation and the street and every, you know, I would never take a cab for fear of whatever. And it’s just the difference in thirty years is overwhelming. It’s almost like I think of those times back then like it’s a movie or watching it going “wow is that really how it was back then?” I’m thinking. I remind myself yeah, I was there. Not even so much in the drag stuff, walking down the street, two boys holding hands. Back then people would do it and they would do it kind of as like an f-you to the world, we’re gonna do it. Whereas now people just do it, they’re not even thinking about it. They are making a statement without realizing they’re making a statement. And same sex people kissing or again, just, I feel like so many of my trans friends now get to, they’re just out, they’re living their lives. Where before it was such a drag, gay, trans all of that was so underground and you had to really think about it and purposeful with your actions and your movements and even in your travel. Like okay I’m gonna go to Nordstrom to get something but how do I do this. I want to get these gloves from this case, but how do I do that? And how many times did I pretend I had a sister, well I mean I have a sister, but I mean I would pretend—

[Both laugh]

**Kevin:** I didn’t forget!

**Kevin:** —that I was buying this for my sister. She just happens to be my size, and just that kind of stuff. And now it’s just like “Hey girl, can I try these gowns on? Great.” It’s so different. And it’s sad and heartbreaking in some ways. It’s so empowering and so, just, it’s such a gift. But then it also feels funny to say gift cus why is something that should just be, what does it say about me that I’m appreciative and thanks for letting me be me. It’s kind of that internal struggle, like I don’t want to be that person but at the same time I’m like yeah, why am I thanking you again? For letting me try on these dresses without looking at me crazy? It’s so frustrating. So yeah, it’s totally, it just can be, on and on and on. And it’s so tough to see young folks that they can’t even comprehend that time. They can’t even comprehend that time. To see grade school children coming out to their families and, whether or not, or just not identifying as a gender or saying maybe “I’m not this, maybe I’m this, let’s work it out together” and the families have gotten to meet and worked with it. It just fills your heart. Like my gosh, no matter what’s going on in the world this household has got it figured out, and it’s just so great.

**Molly:** Yeah. As trans visibility has increased, I’m wondering if it’s changed how people see drag and if they have questions on the difference between folks who are drag queens and folks who are transgender women? And I know that there are transgender women who are drag queens, so I was wondering if you could talk a little about that.

**Kevin**: Yeah. The increased visibility, which again is so fabulous and unfortunately took so long to be able to be and it’s still not where it needs to be, but it does naturally bring questions to drag queens about the difference between a drag queen and a trans women. And there are instances where a drag queen has been offended because somebody assumed they were trans, or a trans person offended because somebody called them a drag queen. They’re two different things. When people as me at my shows, first of all people are very curious and in a positive. They think they’ve gotten so comfortable that now they can just like “we’re gonna ask,” which is so great. I’d rather people ask questions like that. And I always have to say I’m speaking from me, Kevin the drag queen. I can’t speak for all drag queens and I also say, I can tell them what I feel the differences are but if they want to know a trans persons point of view, they should ask a trans person. Because I can’t even pretend to know what my trans friends, I can’t speak for them. I can only speak for myself. And I definitely, read an article a couple years ago and there was a quote that said for drag queens, gender is the least serious issue, where a trans women, that’s the most serious issue is the gender. Like for a drag queen, people can call me he, she, they, if they call me Kevin and I’m Poison or Poison when I’m Kevin I don’t care. Because I’m a drag queen, it’s just something I put on and take off. I do hold that inside me, after 30 years, there’s no way to get around that. But, because I identify as a man and I live my life as a man and just put on drag when it’s time to go work, or play, that I can just tell people I play with gender. I’m wearing masculine clothes in drag or feminine clothes as a boy, I get to do that. And it’s fun for me. For a trans woman, she is living her truth. She’s living her life out who she is. And it’s not something she’s just putting on that then also she can take off or would want to take off.

And so I do know there are, there’s been instances, just for example, of a pride parade, where a drag queen needed to be with a group, there was a drag queen who had been left behind, and “oh well here hop in with he trans group,” but the trans group, that wasn’t, they don’t want that. And I don’t mean to say they. It make’s perfect sense. Trans women are women and trans women are their own selves. And then to just say, to lump in, “oh hey, just throw the drag queen there too cus you’re all the same,” that’s just so offensive and it’s not. For the drag queen, drag queens a re like “Eh,” gender and we’re whatever. And especially again, another difference between drag queens is we’re just there for the spotlight and the cheers. It’s not as serious for us just because, it’s a hobby its fun it’s a job. So to be like “Sure, I’m gonna hop in this car,” that’s great but that’s not without thinking of whose space you're, I don’t want to say “invading,” but whose space you’re getting in to. They’re very serious about their gender and they want to be represented as who they are, which is respectful and should not be questioned. So, there are a lot of differences and I think when people ask me specific questions I can answer them specifically to them and I always preface it with “this is me saying,” I can’t speak on behalf of all the drag queens.

You mentioned earlier, and I do know several trans women who still perform, and that’s like a whole other thing that I’m just surprised that people even question it. It’s like, if you played gold and then you transitioned, why wouldn’t you still play gold? Cus you like it and it’s your hobby and it’s fun. So I do see people scratch their head on that one, but I just look at it as it’s a hobby and it’s fun and if you transitioned you’re still you, you’re just the most authentic, fantastic version of you. Why would you all the sudden not do the things that made you happy? So that’s, sometimes you just kinda look at people and you’re like “really?”

[Both laugh]

**Kevin:** And epically when it comes from within our community...

**Molly:** Like RuPaul. (laughs)

**Kevin:** I didn’t wanna say it! I didn’t wanna say it!

**Molly:** You led me right to it!

**Kevin:** I didn’t want to say it! It’s just like come on, ya know? And again, that’s such a different thing. A life, who you are, who you believe yourself to be and know yourself to be has nothing to do with this extra curricular thing. And to me that’s how I see it, and back to where I can be irritating cus I’m a virgo, I always think I’m right. And I’m like why doesn’t everybody think like I do? It’s so crystal clear. It makes perfect sense. Why are we even questioning this. It’s exhausting.

**Molly:** Well thank you for all of that. You mentioned being Poison and Kevin and he and she and they. And I did notice because we have a lot of mutual friends and a lot of times someone will say “I miss Poison.” And someone else will say, “Yeah, I miss kevin too.” Like they use it completely interchangeably. Do you see that as completely interchangeably? Does it make sense to you that they would sort of use both at the same time?

**Kevin:** Yes, and only in that, like when I first started drag no, it made me crazy. I’m like “I’m Poison Waters how dare you call me Kevin!” And I’m at the mall working my retail job and somebody goes “Hey Poison,” I’m like “Shut up I’m at my job what are you trying to do to me?” Cus I was new and I didn’t know. Then, I remember one time i was so offended. A friend said about me doing drag, that it was a lifestyle. And then I kind of, even in my mind kind of thought, well no I don’t live in drag that’s not a lifestyle. Now thirty years later, drag is my lifestyle. I mean, that’s how I make the majority of my income and that’s how I spend the majority of my non-home time. That’s how I met the majority of the people I work with. Any of my travel, any excitement in my life is from drag. And so now it really has, I kind of think like, before it was Kevin and then it was Poison, because I had known Kevin for most of my life. Well now, I’ve known Poison longer than being just Kevin. So they really are, it’s like Kevin was there, Poison came and took on, they were both kind of doing the same thing. And Poison’s like older, older, getting more, doing more, saying more. It’s like come on Kevin you in for the ride or what (Molly laughs loudly), you’re getting left behind. And I always knew, I never questioned my gender. I never questioned, I never knew, and a lot of people assume “oh a drag queen is the next step to being a trans woman,” which could not be further from the truth. And so I never, it never was that oh I’m gonna be full time Poison. But for work and I’m full time voice and it’s great. So when the interchangeable call-me-Kevin, call-me-Poison, and some people do it in the same sentence and some people just say he or she, depending on what I’m wearing, it’s fine with me. I’ve totally eased in with it. And it is a lifestyle and that’s just who I am. Like whose a celebrity that has a real name and they have a pretend name? So if a celebrity has their regular name that everyone calls them, but then when they’re on stage and in the movies they go by this name, that’s kind of how it’s turned in to be. And now we’re kind of the same person. Before I definitely wanted to keep them separate and now I’m just like, literally I’ll be like “Oh my god am I in drag? No I’m not in drag.” Or like, I’ll be walking down the street like “where’s my wig? It’s feel too cold. Oh yeah, I’m a boy, I don’t have any drag on.” (Molly laughing in background) It’s so bizarre, I’ll realize oh my gosh I’m not wearing nails. It’s like wait, todays a boy day, I don’t have to get in drag. I don’t even have to shave! Hell, I don’t even shower. Although I need a shower today. So it’s really morphed into each other in the best ways, I mean it doesn't bother me in the least. Even for myself, who am I today?

**Molly:** You mentioned working with Cascade AIDS project awhile ago. So I wanted to make sure to ask you about that and all the work that you’ve done. Do you want to talk about?

**Kevin**: Sure. So like you said, it was 1988 when I very first joined Cascade’s Project. They had a little ad I saw in the paper and it was called, for the health program, Professional Active Listener. And that was for people that came and did this intense tow day training. And it was because there were more clients than they had staff. And these pals, the PAL program. they would match a person who would do the training with a person with HIV or AIDS who was a client, but living on their own or out in the, at home. And then you would just socialize with them. You’re go grocery shopping, you‘re gonna go see a movie, you’re gonna go out for lunch, just somebody to talk to and engage because a lot of the folks back then would go into isolation just being on their own. Their families disowned them, they didn't have a job, their friends would kind of, out of ignorance and being scared, they would kind of back of too. So a lot of these folks in the early days were just kind of on their own. So the PAL program assigned people to match them up and it was really, really fun and I met the greatest guy and actually then ended up meeting his family. He had been brought out from Virginia to be with his family because he was sick. And it was just really great and it was such a growing experience for me and I got to do so much great work with CAP in the early days. And then just continued on, it just was natural that Poison would be at the AIDS walk or part of the art auction. I was on the board of directors and actually was employed there for a small time in fundraising. CAP was always there in my schedule on some level.

And then HIV-Affected Children's Camp, that was with another organization, it went to a second organization, and then ended up at CAP. And so that’s where I [?] my work, so this will be my 18th year at the kids camp. And so working with those families all this time, it’s so funny, back to the drag and the gender, they thought, so it was called Women’s Intercommunity AIDS Resource, the original group of the camp. And they knew I was coming to camp and I met them through a fundraiser that we did for them with Darcelle’s and I had not heard of them. And I found out later, so I had such a great time at camp, and then I found out later that they were all, they had like meetings going, “Is he coming in drag? What are the kids gonna say?” cus they didn’t know, ya know. And then they realized “oh, you only do drag for work,” and that “you wouldn’t do that for them,” and I don’t. Well then it was just kind of like, well we don’t really talk, adults at the camp don’t tell the kids “Oh you know at home I work at Pizza Hut,” you know it’s all about the kids. So it never occurred to me. Well then of course somebody would say something. Pretty sure the kids were like “Are you a drag queen?” And they were so funny and our camp, our cabins, are near each other and one of the little friends set up one of the little boys who was like 6, and he was like “Mrs. Waters can we come on over to play,” and I was like “Oh my,” I was mortified, I’m like “Shut up!” And so then it just turned in, Poison became more visible and doing more with CAP and more with the fundraising. Then camp and Poison are just kind of like, go hand in hand now. And AIDS walk, you know, our auction benefit, Camp Casey Kids Connection. Me being in drag now, the kids have seen me, their families have seen me and now they’re “Are you gonna come in drag?” and I’m like “No, I’m not coming in drag.” And so it’s kind of fun. There are times, like the first time you see the kids, they’re like “Wait, that’s Kevin? What’s going on?” But it’s fine and it’s fun and it actually, at camp, which surprised the heck out of me, there’s a costume closet and it’s just there all week long and we have a dance and drama and a skit night and talent show and stuff. So that’s most of what that’s for. But kids just put on their costume and jut wear them all day everyday. And the boys wear girls’ clothes, the girls wear boys’ clothes, there’s somebody dresses up as a mouse or somebody is a frog and okay, these kids are just totally interacting the clothes. I loved it, I was like “Oh this is awesome.” So now, when people come into our camp it’s just like, “Did you put these kids in drag,” and I’m like, “NO, they’re doing it themselves! I never had anything to do with it at all and I am envious!”

[Molly laughing]

So that’s what goes on at camp. It’s really fun; it’s great. And now I campers, some of the campers are campers of the children of the campers I had originally. So it’s like the ... on in the family says “Kevin help raise my family.” And I’m like yeah cus now you’re 20-something, you have these kids that are at the camp. It’s really great, it’s really good, and I’m glad that Poison was able to find a way into it.

**Molly**: I have one more question for you, but before that, do you have anything that you want to make sure we talk about?

**Kevin**: Oh my gosh, that I should be paid more to do drag.

[Molly laughs]

**Kevin:** No I’m just kidding, I’m okay. No not really, I just, I love the opportunity obviously to talk. But especially around the topic of gender and drag and for people to realize it’s not the same thing and it is offensive to trans women to say “Oh you’re a man in drag.” No, that’s actually not true. And for people to now, the world has allowed people to feel comfortable asking these questions and I want people to feel encouraged to ask questions. It’s easier to ask a question and get the answer than for both sides to be questioning what’s the other one thinking about, or who, what. And I think most, especially again, not for me personally, but my trans friends. They wish people would ask themself. Who want’s to just be stared out across the room with someone going “what is, are, an?” Just ask! No one would be offended. They’re more offended, just, they’re approachable. My trans friends are approachable. Trans people are just like, we’re all people. If I had a question, I would walk up and say, “Hey, can I ask you a question?” And I would be respectful. I just think open communication first of all is always the root, but especially around gender issues. And another thing. We were talking about children. It’s changed so much in such a great way that people are allowing children to speak and to listen to what they have to say, and not be so quick to dismiss it. And as a parent I can see where it would be hard to take that in, and you want to protect your child and be like “no actually this is the way it’s gonna go.” Well that’s not helping either. I just love that families are now being able to live there own truths and their lives and kind of, you know, navigate it together. Too many kids for too many years were so isolated and alone in their bedroom trying to figure it all out because they didn’t feel they could tell their family or they told their family and their family shut them down. And now the conversation seems to have come out of the closet, out in the open. It’s just so, it’s so encouraging for me as a 50 year old. (laughs) The world is getting better, it’s cool.

**Molly:** Well the question we always end the show with is: what do you think the future of gender is? Or in your perfect world what would the future of gender be?

**Kevin:** Oh I think that word would just be gone, and people would just be people. And I would be Kevin and you would be Molly and it wouldn’t even matter. A little kid, one time when I was at the pool, said “You’re wearing girls shoes!” I said, “These aren’t girls shoes, these are my shoes.” We’re wearing, I’m wearing my clothes. It doesn’t matter if there’s a skirt involved or pants involved. There’s so much. To me, gender is an issue and gender gets clouded with things like what you’re wearing and who you’re sleeping with. And that’s not, that’s a whole other section. That’s a whole other podcast. Who I am inside my brain and my heart and my never and my body, who I am has nothing to do with who I’m having sex with, who I love, and what I’m gonna put on that day. I thing it’s making it too easy. That’s simplifying it and it’s bigger than that. While people say...so like, sexually which has nothing to do with gender, they say from 1-10 gay, straight, and then a lot of people are in the middle. Well, when you think about gender, if you’re male or female, I think most people are all in the middle too. I’m definitely. There’s so much about being, again, masculine that I like and feminine that I like. Who I’m attracted to, how I want to live, how I want to present myself, it’s not cut and dry, it’s not black and white, it’s not in a box. It’s so challenging for people to grasp that concept.

**Molly:** Yeah. Thank you so much for coming on the show, I had such a great time

**Kevin:** Oh my pleasure!

**Molly:** despite wall of the yard wok for some reason.

**Kevin:** Listen, spring is arriving and we are getting ready.

(both laugh a lot).

**Kevin**: Gotta get those bushes whacked.

[Outro Music Plays]

**Molly:** That's gonna do it for this week's show! If you had a good time please share this episode with a friend, or write a review, or donate a few bucks to [patreon.com/gender](http://patreon.com/gender). It really helps us so much. I’m going to be out of town next week, hanging out with a couple good friends of the show, so my plan is to release a special bonus episode instead of our regular content, but we’ll see what happens. Stay tuned, I’ll definitely release something because, uh, I love you and want you to be happy. If you have questions or feedback or thoughts and feelings, please get in touch at gendereveal@gmail.com or @gendereveal on Twitter. That’s gender reveal with one R.

We recently received a sweet email from a listen who pointed out the fact that we had erased agender folks in the gender 102 episode, which is extra wild because the person speaking is also actually agender. We apologize fully for saying that everyone has a gender. Agender folks obviously don’t have a gender by definition. Thank you for calling us in.

This show was edited by me, Molly Woodstock.

Our logo is by the talented Michelle Leigh, and our theme music is by the legendary Breakmaster Cylinder.

We'll be back next week with something that includes feelings about gender.

[music ends]