



The Activist Files Episode 55: On the Ground in Orlando for the National March to Protect Trans Youth and Speakout for Trans Lives

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[00:01:05]

Zee Scout: Hey everyone, this is Zee Scout with the Center for Constitutional Rights, and I'm very excited to be speaking with lots of guests today on The Activist Files. I use she, her pronouns, and I'd love to introduce everyone here.

[00:01:21]

Lindsey Spero: My name is Lindsey Spero. My pronouns are they and he. I'm transgender, non binary, and I'm currently living on unceded Tocobago land,

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also known as St. Petersburg, Florida.

[00:01:31]

Anaïs Kochan: Hi, my name is Anaïs Kochan. I use she, her pronouns, and I'm here today from Boston, Massachusetts. And...

[00:01:40]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: And, good lord, I just got the microphone. I'm Christynne Lili Wrene Wood, a 67 year old grandmother, mother, just all that good stuff, from San Diego, California. Now, with what I've told you, I'm pretty sure you already figured out my pronouns. Let me go ahead and pass that on.

[00:01:59]

Melinda Butterfield: Hi, [00:02:00] I'm Melinda Butterfield. I use she, her pronouns. I'm a trans woman from New York City.

[00:02:07]

Tsukuru Fors: Hi, my name is Tsukuru Fors. I'm based in Los Angeles, California. My pronouns are he, they. I'm a Japanese non binary trans person.

[00:02:18]

Zee Scout: Amazing. Well, it's great to be here with you all.

[00:02:21]

Zee Scout: We're sitting right now in the state of Florida. And what a state to be in right now is trans and gender non conforming and agender non binary people. So, Tsukuru, since you have the mic, I think I'll let you start. I would love if all of you would tell us a little bit about how you came to be involved in one, I think, trans organizing, and two, in organizing this event that you're all here for, which is the National Mark to Support Trans Youth and Speak Out

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[00:02:53]

Zee Scout: So, Tsukuru, you want to take it away first?

[00:02:55]

Tsukuru Fors: Yeah, sure. So, I'm age 52 right now. I started [00:03:00] transitioning quite late in life, at age 50 to be exact. So, that was two years ago. And so, October 2021 was on the bus, actually coming back from some kind of protest, and I heard the news, Marjorie Taylor Greene introducing a bill in the Congress, you know, that bill, to ban trans healthcare, among other things. That was a really hateful, atrocious bill. And previously, I've always been involved in activism like anti nuclear, and also peace and healthcare justice. So when I heard that, it was just really automatic for me. I mean, simply put, I just could not stand being silent.

You know, I just thought... Okay, you know, this is the moment. We really have to fight back. So that was the day I launched National Day of Action, October 1st. That spread to eight cities in the United States. So that was like the start of my triumphs rights activism. And, uh, how I got to be involved in this particular march was back in April 2020, 23, because this year, yeah, 23, I attempted to organize the infamous protest called Trans Day of Vengeance in Washington, D. C., which unfortunately got a lot of right wing media attention, um, And, uh, ended up having to cancel the event because there was a real active shooter threat. So the circumstance was really unfortunate, but thankfully our angel, Melinda Barfield, was actually one of the speakers and she kindly says she was inspired by the Trans Day of Vengeance to organize this event.

[00:04:51]

Zee Scout: So, there you go. Well, then who better to speak next than Melinda?

[00:04:56]

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Melinda Butterfield: Well, actually, Sakura and I have a lot of parallels. We're [00:05:00] the same age. We came out around the same time a couple of years ago. Thank you. I've been an activist for more than 30 years on a wide variety of issues from Black Lives Matter to political prisoners to anti war stuff since I was in high school, really, and always, you know, considered myself an ally. of the LGBTQ struggle, but coming out when I did, in the midst of all these attacks on trans lives, I recognized, first of all, that the courage of trans youth in recent years coming forward and asserting themselves and being themselves and living their lives was something that really inspired me and made it possible for me as an older trans person who had been in the closet most of my life to actually come out.

And find that courage in myself, and that it was so important to take the skills that I have learned as an organizer over the years and try to contribute in some way to my [00:06:00] community, and especially to trans youth who are under fire. So it was early this year that I had some initial discussions with close comrades of mine about the need for a national march, and we all agreed that it was an important thing to do.

We put out a call to action on Trans Day of Visibility earlier this year, this spring, and got such an enormous positive response that we took it and ran with it and started building a coalition that has brought us to this point where we're doing this absolutely unprecedented. March on enemy turf, so to speak, in Florida, where so many trans and queer youths and other communities are just under siege right now. And so it's important not only to hear their voices, but for them to hear our voices. from all around the country coming here to support them. And that's really at the heart of what this march is about for me. So I'm going to hand it over to Chrissy now. [00:07:00]

[00:07:00]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: Thank you. Thank you, sweetie. And so, now here, during one of my rare moments of sobriety, I want to go ahead and catch us up today. I didn't mention earlier that I'm a transgender woman because by my definition, transgender is simply one of my medical conditions. I go ahead and I take care of it. With medication and a couple of surgeries. I guess if they also want to know, I also have type 2 diabetes, I have high blood

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pressure, I have a cholesterol.

But transgenderism, I guess that's the sexy one. So that's what they focus upon. I'm here because it's absolutely positively necessary. Other atrocities that happened in close to the middle part of the 20th century happened by passing laws that made them legal. and passing other philosophies that made it moral. Such things have got to be stopped. We've already had one civil rights movement that began with Freedom Riders and some of them paid for it with their lives. This is simply the second civil rights movement. And this is every bit as atrocious. This is every bit as horrible. And when you consider that the first target, especially here, was transgender children.

Just go ahead and focus on that. The first target was children and their families. Now, of course, it's moved on to adults and anybody who might support them all. But when that's the case, you're dealing with a set of depraved individuals who have given up any hope of moral fortitude. Let's attack the kids first. Let's make it legal to do it. Let's make it right to do it. And let's make it moral to do it. And that's why this is a thing that has to be done. Thank you for your time. And on a happier note, let's send this on to Anais.

[00:08:59]

Anais Kochan: Hi. So I wanted to talk about how I got involved in this movement, as well as the march that's going to occur this weekend. Prior to coming out, I wasn't really politically involved. And even after coming out a few years ago, at the age of 48, I was kind of passive about things. Like, I was fine to go to the Trans Resistance March and the Dyke March during Pride Month. But outside of that, you know, most of my actions and... thoughts were a little more self centered about how things affected me personally and not how it affected the larger trans community, especially trans children. And that changed from a couple of things. First of all, reading Melinda this past summer really admired her from afar for a long time for her activism work and seeing how passionate she was about it.

And she basically just dragged me right in one day to a March meeting and That was like my first involvement with this group and getting involved in activism at all, really. And then the second thing was this year I met a trans family who had fled from North Carolina due to hostile bills, like trans health

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care, and I got bathroom use by the, in schools, and they had moved up here.

They were a trans masc and trans feminine couple who, 12 years ago, somehow had a kid. And as that kid got older, without even realizing, because it was just how she grew up, she was trans. She didn't even know her parents were trans when she came out to them. And I think that's so hilarious, this story. But she's really inspired me because I can see how wonderful she's been being able to be herself, and being openly trans, and how much healthier she is mentally than I was at that age. [00:11:00] Where I was just constantly running from one state of devastation to the next and just brought such protective feelings in me for her and other children like her that I really want to be doing the most I can to help children out and I'm going to pass this to Lindsay.

[00:11:18]

Zee Scout: Thank you, Anais

[00:11:20]

Lindsey Spero: I turned 26 this last summer, and I feel in such close proximity and understanding to these trans youth and their sense of self, their sense of identity. And the battle here in Florida is like ages old, but it's also one that really, like, I was built through. I was kicked out of my home when I was, like, just 18, and I came down to Florida with some friends, pretty much the only people who would take me in at the time. And it was a lot of, kind of like, housing insecurity and moving around and jumping around to, like, get to a point of stability where I'm at now, but... I think organizing and advocacy and all of that is really, really important, but at the end of the day, what fuels me and what has given me the most life is community building, and specifically through the ways in which I was embraced by the trans community down here in which I found life here in Florida.

I found medication, I found surgery, I found people who I call my family. And, that obviously is not going to be everyone's experience here, however, there are so many, there are just so many thousands and thousands and thousands of trans people in this state who, and not just trans people, our queer community in general, who love this state, and who love the South, and who

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love, who want to be here, who want to fight for it, and it's really easy to just kind of, Love all of them, and by default, love this work, and love this, like, beautiful journey of liberation, you know?

It's never felt like a chore, and it's never felt hard. It feels necessary and good because I'm uplifted by, like, the people here. I got involved in the march. Through one of my youth who I've been working with in a local program who is also connected to the organizers in the march here. Our community is very interconnected out here, so.

[00:13:15]

Zee Scout: Thanks, Lindsey. Yeah, it's never been hard to love trans people or the trans person. Mm hmm. It's just a matter of getting the rest of the world to come along. So you all mentioned a lot this march. But I think what I would love to hear a little bit more about is the movement leading up to it. And I think from here on out, what we'll do is we'll just pass the microphone to anyone who would like to answer, and anyone who wants to follow up can take it.

So would anyone be inclined to kind of discuss what the movement for trans lives in your experience and in your activism work was like prior to this? And I even have some interesting stories to share, Chrissy.

[00:13:52]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: Let's see if it might relate. Is that a thought? Sure. Some of you, if you've Googled it, you might know that [00:14:00] 2023 began with a bit of a stressor, when after having belonged to a certain YMCA, a certain lie was told by a girl in front of the Santee City Council that she was terrified at the sight of a naked man in the locker room. Naked man in the locker room, even though I am seeing staff assured her pinched child calmed down. That is indeed a woman, not a naked man. It was picked up by right wing media because nothing travels faster than the speed of light but a lie across right wing media. It was picked up and she ended up being the guest on the Tucker Carlson show.

It traveled further. Across the Atlantic Ocean, it was covered in the London

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Mirror. All this wonderful stuff happened. And, I got no knowledge of this. I'd been in Palm Springs visiting somebody. I came back, and one of my sisters showed me this terrible testimony before the Santee City Council. And I thought, what the hell? So I still kept going to my workouts, why wouldn't i? The whole Y staff came out and embraced me, hugged me and said, You know we love you, you're still a member, you see, damn right. I got my cry in, and then I got pissed. I said, now, if they're attacking me, a woman who can take a lot on her shoulders, what are they doing to children? And this is what they did to me in California.

So now we're gonna sneak in how we come to be involved in all this. Eventually it all does tie in together, I swear to heaven. So anyway, I said, I'm going before the Santee City Council. If you know anything about California, you'll know this. San Diego is ginormous. And out in Santee, it's as deep red as it could be. Deeper than Martian sand. But I said, they've listened to her lie, now it's time to tell the truth. I showed up, in groups. Like [unintelligible] org. And Women in Struggle, and a good few others, including real churches, had filled that room with supporters of love and truth, and filled an overflow room with them.

Women from my aquatics group had painted signs, we love Chrissy, and they all held them up. But few had flown in some haters, including an ex- Beauty Queen. I won't tell you how she got re fraught from her crown, but, nonetheless, we got to testify. I got to meet Gloria James, like I said, who got me involved with my little bud, Melinda Butterfield. And then that led to all of this. And my point is, I said, Hey guys, you, you had the will to attack a grown woman. My, God, what are you doing to the truly vulnerable? So the fact is that, something like this, I originally told them. I said, now, we're going to the belly of the beast. You know that, right? Have you hugged your loved ones? Have you gotten your affairs in order? Have we done this? With numbers comes strength. And we're proving that within 30 seconds. Now, Zee, my beloved little sister Zee, did I get anywhere near answering your question?

[00:17:09]

Zee Scout: I think so

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[00:17:10]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: But yeah, thank you. That's where I had to contribute to that. That's what brought upon this particular degree of activism. Okay.

[00:17:19]

Zee Scout: Thank you. Would anyone else like to talk about the trans movement kind of leading up? to this march and in this moment?

[00:17:27]

Melinda Butterfield: Well, I'll just share a couple of observations that informed our decision to move ahead with the idea for the National March to Protect Trans Youth and holding it in Florida. One was the observation that a lot of the struggle character of the LGBTQ movement and the trans movement has been whittled away over the years by dependence on, completely on, sort of a non profit model rather than a grassroots model by dependence on electoral politics exclusively, rather than following in the footsteps of our ancestors, our parents, people like Sylvia Rivera and Leslie Feinberg, who, you know, were always in the streets in the struggle and that looking around what I saw was what was happening around the country, that there was all these amazing struggles happening at the local level.

Whenever one of these horrible bills would be brought before a state legislature, you know, parents, youth, the community would come out, occupy Capitol buildings, try to get on the floor to dispute these awful lies that are being told about trans people. Often get arrested and dragged out. We know there are elected officials like Maury Turner and Zoe Zephyr, who were like, you know, banned from representing their, their constituents for daring to speak out against these laws.

So all this great stuff was happening at the local level, but [00:19:00] no one was trying to sort of bring all these groups together and form a national movement for trans rights as. Chrissy so well describes it really, it's a new civil rights movement, it's an anti fascist movement because we're trying to draw connections with all the different communities, uh, and sectors of the

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population that are under attack from the far right that's been out in the streets as well as increasingly belligerent in elected spaces.

So that, that was really the state of the movement that, That led to conceiving of this. And I should also say, as was mentioned earlier, Sakuru Fors really deserves a lot of credit for sort of starting that process earlier this year. And I very much see what we're doing here as a continuation of that.

[00:19:49]

Zee Scout: Well, thank you to all of you. Tsakuru, you mentioned also being involved in Trans Day of Vengeance a little bit. And I know that you've had a really storied career and lots of work as an activist. Can you tell me a bit about your experience with these spaces being trans inclusive and maybe how that's changed over time due to some of the work that you and other activists have done to raise awareness around trans lives and needs?

[00:20:14]

Tsukuru Fors: Yeah. So I'll just kind of start speaking and tell me if I'm just like going off course. But this is here is like how I understood your question. Yeah. So. I think it's still a work in progress, but as Melinda was saying, and I really would like to, not only, you know, Melinda, but credit Melinda, Women in Struggle, and also like all the organizers who are involved in this march and movement because it's just really, really, really brilliant I think what you guys we have done as she said, it's totally it's completely cross sectional We are bringing a lot of people together and touching a lot of different issues because the Santis and his [00:21:00] government is attacking Asians blacks Latinos immigrants So, yeah, so that's brilliant.

So the reason why I said it's still a work in progress is since like I've come from different movements and different issues. What I've been trying to do in my activism is like, say, you know, when I show up in like Stop Asia, Asian hate. Um, rally, I always talk about queer community and trans community because we are fighting a common enemy and, you know, we must work together, right?

And also like, you know, things like healthcare justice. Absolutely, you know,

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gender affirming care, you know, if we are talking about Medicare for all and healthcare for all and stuff like that, gender affirming care should be, must be included in the conversation because trans healthcare is human right. So it's like showing up in different places, you know, all of us doing that and raising awareness. I think it's happening and I think it's very, very exciting that we are coming together. You know. Thank you,

[00:22:08]

Zee Scout: Thank you, Tsukuru. That was perfect. I really enjoyed the emphasis that all of you have placed on the grassroots movement because I think that is so essential and so important and such a pillar of the work that goes into liberation for communities.

Ultimately, of course, in addition to that, you all were a part of a case, too. Women in Struggle versus Bain and other defendants here in Florida who, we alleged, had and still have an obligation to enforce the bathroom ban under Florida law. So, I'm curious from your perspectives what it's been like to be part of this case and if you could talk about it a little bit. And anyone is welcome to take first grasp on it.

[00:22:55]

Lindsey Spero: I think this case has felt like a [00:23:00] welcome resistance to a consequence a lot of trans people in this state are already feeling. The retaliation that comes from a bill like this. And as y'all have been mentioning, It's not just bathroom ban. I, honestly, I think a movement like this offers a lot of hope, and going into a legal case like this, offering any kind of challenge offers hope, because a lot of folks are wondering who that challenger is gonna be, and who's gonna kind of step up to plate, and, and unfortunately for so many people, because of the intersections of marginalization specifically, racism, classism, you know, in my city alone, in St. Pete and Tampa alone, where inflation has gone up, you know, almost 200 percent in the last two years, folks are hardly unable to advocate for themselves because they're hardly unable to get their next meal. And so, actions like these feel important, and the participation in our judicial system, and the willing, the willingness for each of [00:24:00] you to be here from a place that isn't Florida, and to come here, and to, risk yourself and risk your safety, I think, encourages those

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of us here that we aren't alone as well and that there are others willing to have our backs and, you know, sometimes that's, that's all the hope that somebody needs, so.

[00:24:18]

Zee Scout: Yeah, hope is a valid part of resistance. I'm curious, have any of you been plaintiffs in lawsuits before? And if not, what's this experience been like?

[00:24:29]

Anaïs Kochan: I've never been involved in a lawsuit as a plaintiff. So, I've actually learned quite a lot during this whole process. I always felt somewhat close to the law, in that I do work in the legal industry, but this is the first time I've been involved personally, and not just as an outside party working on things. So, it was really interesting to see the direction that the court took this case, and to see, you know, how the different laws work with this procedure.

[00:25:02]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: Good question, by the way. Oh, yeah. 2017, the ACLU helped me file a discrimination lawsuit against a nationwide chain of gymnasiums. Well, Gym Health Club, whatever you call them. But, because they denied me access to the proper locker room. Yeah, that did end up in the settlement, so we can't go into great detail about it. Bottom line, I got access to the right locker room after all. And it might have cost him a nickel or two in the process, but we're here because every now and then someone has to stand up and fight against absurdity.

Especially when that absurdity could be leading to someone getting violently hurt, if not killed. This is out of a Mel Brooks movie. Can you imagine being in prison, say Orange is the New Black, and somebody says, [00:26:00] What you doing in here old lady? I went to the bathroom. What did you do in the bathroom? Sat in a stall and relieved my bladder and bowels. And I said, well, damn, I've been in here a while, but is that illegal now? Well apparently in

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Florida.

That's what I did that broke the law that put me in there. I relieved myself in the bathroom. I think I'm just going to leave it. So there are certain ones where I say, well, I think I'll just sign on to that. Yeah, what'd you do? Were you a monster? You ought to be hanged. So, yeah, I've considered it an honor to be a part of that litigation thing. Felt it was like going to the water fountain and it says, that one says colored. Is the other one broke?

[00:26:42]

Zee Scout: Thank you. I think that leads to my next point, which I'm excited to hear a lot of your answers to, but... What's been different or even, or even special about doing trans led movement work here in Florida? Some of you touched on it a bit earlier, but I'd just love to hear from your perspectives what it's been like. I know, at least in mine, a lot of spaces I've been in there are not trans people, let alone trans people leading it. So, I'm just curious how that's felt for some of you being involved in this with members of our community. We really need it.

[00:27:16]

Lindsey Spero: Well, living here, what I can tell you is that this space is full of incredible organizers, incredible leaders, and activists, and community members, and folks who want to participate, and also, it's also just full of folks who want to be involved in whatever way they can, sharing a meal, you know, sharing their home, etc.

What we do down here is very grassroots, so it's very much built on the emotions that we all share as human beings, like love, hope, a need for home, a need for safety, a want to be able to lay your head down at the end of the night kind of a thing and know how to do so, and because of the intersectionality of the fight here in the South, because it's never just trans rights, we're battling on all fronts here for housing and for education, for food, for... Our folks, our neighbors living without homes, you know, there's every impact here. I think what it means and like what, what it looks like organizing with trans people is that you've got like the most compassion, the most empathy, and people who are really, really willing to just like get down

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and dirty with you and do it at whatever cost. People who aren't scared and they're willing to like do what it takes. And I hope, I don't know, I hope that y'all get to see that a little bit tomorrow too.

[00:28:28]

Melinda Butterfield: So, you know, it's, it's unfortunately a reality still decades after Stonewall that in a lot of queer spaces, trans people are still invisible or sort of at the bottom of the pecking order when it comes to access and visibility and organizing who's sort of calling the shots and organizing different things.

Our goal with the, with the march setting out was to, you know, really center and elevate trans voices first and foremost. We have a wonderful, wonderful group of cis allies who are making invaluable contributions to this work and to tomorrow's demonstration. But, you know, they understand also that this is an opportunity for trans people to speak and give voice to. what we need right now, being on the front line of this attack, and you know, those are the voices we're going to hear at the demonstration. Those are the voices that are front and center at our press conferences, and that are really making the decisions about how to move forward with this movement.

Because that's the right thing to do, and those are the voices that have to be centered in this struggle. So, I'm really proud of that. This week, a number of us have been here. In Orlando this week from all over the country. And from throughout Florida, we've been learning to work together, spending time together, hanging out. Going out and canvassing in lots of different situations, and it's just been amazing to feel the community and the joy and the strength that comes with trans people organizing together.

[00:30:12]

Zee Scout: Beautiful answer. And maybe that's a perfect segue. A lot of times... These movements feel serious, right? They're life threatening. Huge stakes are involved. How do you, and how have you, found joy throughout some of this process, when you realize that you're fighting a much larger battle? What have you all done down here to find joy? What's it been like

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finding that joy with other trans folks?

[00:30:39]

Lindsey Spero: We're around one another. I mean, this is like the most joyful experience, despite the lawsuit despite the week, despite even hearing about people showing up to this march and all that, who don't like us. I think I felt so much joy being in the company of, of trans giants, of people who are actively wanting to participate and build a better world together and like, I don't know, there's something, there's just something about trans magic.

[00:31:06]

Anaïs Kochan: Yeah, what is it? I think this week especially, because I'm new to activism, And there's so many veteran activists here and amazing people that it just made me weep for joy sometimes knowing that there's all these other people in the community that are doing so much, you know, sacrificing so much of themselves.

And it just gets me really emotional and makes me really just feel it right through my body, how amazing our community is and how it's based on love, not hate, you know, our community isn't. Built on disliking the other side, our community is built on loving each other.

[00:31:44]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: That magic feel is that love we generate when we're in each other's proximity. And I promise you right now, the Giants, Martin Luther King, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Ross Abagnale, Harvey Milf, all those who were beaten at Stonewall. All those who stood before us are all smiling down, saying look at our children making good trouble and supporting each other. And what I, as a trans elder, are particularly enraptured about is the youth.

You do understand, Lindsay, you're only about ten years older than my granddaughter. And what was the name of that beautiful child in black standing next to us at the rally today? Samira! She is the age of my granddaughter. So now this old broad can just go right ahead and enjoy her

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retirement. And do what I do. Knowing that the next generation and the next generation has got this. You see what I'm saying? You were obviously paying attention when I thought you was playing with the Gameboys. They don't care. They ain't paying it. Yes, you were. And you're proving it right now. And that just fills me with love. How the hell can I not find joy in that?

[00:33:08]

Tsukuru Fors: Can I say something? Okay, first of all, I mean, it's really hard not to find joy when you're with Christynne, right? Ah, sure. But last December, I had an opportunity to go to Japan. And, uh, interact with the trans people in Japan, and I was asked this one very, very curious question, which was, and this was after, like, I talked about what's happening in this country, you know, attacks against trans community, and so the question was, Okay, how do you find positivity in that?

And I kind of stared at them, like, blankly, because To me, us existing, there's nothing more positive than that. You know, us, like, being ourselves and existing and thriving, uh, despite all that we go through, you know, despite all that's thrown at us. Our community is strong and loving and caring and I had, you know, privilege to learn that at age 50. You know, so my life, despite all the struggles that we may go through, it's a joyful one.

[00:34:17]

Zee Scout: Yeah, I feel full, and it feels great. I know this spring. I sat in this very interesting role of watching day in and day out. These bills file in, right? And then, having to go to meetings where we discuss legal strategies to attack them.

And trying to talk about what we can do on the ground to support people. And then talking to my people in my local community. And realizing there was very little I could do, even as a lawyer at times, to effect concrete change in their daily life. I remember I had to tell one friend. who had recently started HRT, who was working with children, that perhaps maybe it wasn't a good idea to come out. And I immediately felt like vomiting after saying that out loud. And I just share this story to say that it can happen to any of us, right? That like, this struggle can become so overwhelming, and it has been so just

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invigorating to be around y'all's joy and to get to be myself. And... I'm grateful for you all, and it's been a really lovely experience.

I think maybe the next question I had was... curious, what are some of the successes that you all have found organizing under a DeSantis administration in Florida? And perhaps that's just talking about the march, perhaps it's something from the press conference today. I'm just curious if there's a moment that you feel really signifies some, some victory or some generation of progress.

So, Lindsey, this might be a question for you. I'm curious, what are some successes that you found organizing or that, you know, your friends in your community have [00:36:00] found organizing under a DeSantis administration in Florida?

[00:36:04]

Lindsey Spero: To be perfectly real with you, we're trying to just use a lot of the same techniques as have been perfected by our ancestors and our elders and the community members who come before us. There are so many trans and queer people in Florida that it's impossible to, to not find us and not find community. And a huge way that we found success is through basic mutual aid steps. Ways in which we are providing care for our community at a very local, neighborhood based level. And right now, there are mutual aid organizations providing that kind of care in every single major city in Florida and, like, spreading outside to the suburban areas outside of that.

With the non profits that I'm involved in that have began out of mutual aid efforts and all that, we have almost doubled and tripled our caseload for all of our trans youth. We've consistently had multiple successful years of summer camp. We're continuing to, like, [00:37:00] pour into youth, pour into programs, and I'd like to think that In this state, folks know that there are other trans folks because we're loud and we're bold and we're joyful, and that's something they can't stop.

[00:37:10]

Zee Scout: Can I ask you two follow up questions? One... I feel there's

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probably a difference between what people hear in the news and then what the reality and the lived reality is for folks on the ground, so I'd be curious if you can address some of that. And two, you brought up mutual aid, which is such a vital part of a lot of grassroots organizing and a lot of work that tries to exist outside of sheer, Non profit industrial complex impact litigation type models, but I don't think I am bringing a surprise bomb into the room when I mentioned that over in Atlanta, for instance, with Cop City. And that indictment that recently came down, they bring mutual aid right into the forefront and put it under the gun of a RICO indictment. So I'm just curious what impact that's had on folks and what the real lived reality is in Florida right now.

[00:38:02]

Lindsey Spero: Something that is talked about by a lot of northeastern states, a lot of western states, a lot of states that are often liberal, and a lot of terms that I hear folks using all the time is like, What a shame about Florida. You know, it sucks. I'm so sorry. I hear, I'm so sorry all the time when I tell people I'm from Florida, and it always kind of takes me back a little bit. But then, I remember that I was once someone who lived in the Northeast as well, and I used to have a lot of misconceptions about the South and about what happens down here.

But the reality is, is that the South and Florida especially is the site of great resistance and great struggle and intersectional struggle, and it always has been. Generations of fight for just basic human rights and that has successfully happened and we've built so much of the movement that we have through kind of what your next question was is mutual aid and you're right then what happened in Atlanta is a scary concept to to gnaw on and process as organizers as folks who are working in advocacy because In my personal opinion, to try and summarize mutual aid under the context of what they are within this indictment, It's like trying to summarize gender, because mutual aid is such an expansive, growing, changing, beautiful process that there's no real one way to define it.

It's really just a term for, for tools that we use as communities to build and better one another, because we're filling in the gaps for programs that have been supposed to have been provided for us by our elected officials using the

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money that we give them year after year, when that doesn't happen.

The most consistent way that we are able to heal our communities is through this process of mutual aid. I think it's natural to fear the outcome, but we're no strangers to this battle, you know? And I think Atlanta sets a precedent, but I also think the people of Atlanta are pissed. I think the people of Georgia are pissed. I think the states [00:40:00] around are pissed. I don't think Cop City is gonna happen without a real fight, to be truly honest with you. And I think that that sets its own precedent for us as leaders, as organizers, because we're not letting this happen, so.

[00:40:15]

Zee Scout: On this topic, what are some ways that people, that allies can help in this struggle for trans, for queer, for intersex, and for gender non forming and non binary rights?

[00:40:30]

Melinda Butterfield: I think one of the things that has become really clear to me Since I came out, having worked in a lot of different social justice movements, and that often, I think, in good faith, say that they're inclusive and for trans rights, for LGBTQ rights, for Black and Latinx rights, and so on, is that it amounts to lip service in real life, and In trying to get various organizations and [00:41:00] movements involved in this demonstration, you know, it's definitely been a struggle in many cases to get their attention, or to have them take it seriously.

Uh, and I think that folks out there who maybe are not LGBTQ, are not trans, But who care about these issues and who are part of these other movements, whether it's around police brutality, whether it's the anti war movement, you know, all kinds of different struggles, take it to your organizations and tell them they need to take this seriously, because at the end of the day, all these struggles are connected.

We're all fighting the same enemy, which is capitalism and white supremacy. And patriarchy, right? All closely tied together and oppressing all of us and attacking all of us in different ways all over the world. And so our movements

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need to be in conversation with each other and be in solidarity with each other. That's the most important thing. And I think we need more conscientious activists and organizers in various movements to really take the trans struggle right now seriously and make sure that their organizations Take it seriously when people put out the call for solidarity.

[00:42:14]

Zee Scout: Well said. Yes, I was gonna say something similar, which is just, even on a macro scale, I think I would go on a micro scale. When trans, intersex, queer people tell you who they are. Believe them and recognize that every single day they're having to convince the world to believe them too, and that we need all the help we can get right now in tilting the world back towards that arc of justice.

So these are all the questions that I had for you all today. I'm really looking forward to sharing lifelong relationships with all of you and continuing this dialogue and this struggle and this work. And. Just want to thank you so much for your time, your energy, your effort, your bravery, your vulnerability. It always is noticed and we appreciate it.

[00:43:12]

Host: We hope you enjoyed this episode of The Activist Files, the Center for Constitutional Rights podcast. Just a reminder to subscribe and rate us on iTunes, Spotify, and SoundCloud. And if you want to find out more about our work, visit our website at ccrjustice.org. That's all until next time on the activist files.

Ep 55_Florida Bathroom Ban_OCT

[00:00:00]

Host: Welcome to the Activist Files, the Center for Constitutional Rights podcast, where we feature the stories of activists, lawyers, and storytellers on the front lines fighting for justice and liberation. If you want to know more about the Center for Constitutional Rights and our work, visit our website at

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[00:01:05]

Zee Scout: Hey everyone, this is Zee Scout with the Center for Constitutional Rights, and I'm very excited to be speaking with lots of guests today on The Activist Files. I use she, her pronouns, and I'd love to introduce everyone here.

[00:01:21]

Lindsey Spero: My name is Lindsey Spero. My pronouns are they and he. I'm transgender, non binary, and I'm currently living on unceded Tocobago land, also known as St. Petersburg, Florida.

[00:01:31]

Anaïs Kochan: Hi, my name is Anaïs Kochan. I use she, her pronouns, and I'm here today from Boston, Massachusetts. And...

[00:01:40]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: And, good lord, I just got the microphone. I'm Christynne Lili Wrene Wood, a 67 year old grandmother, mother, just all that good stuff, from San Diego, California. Now, with what I've told you, I'm pretty sure you already figured out my pronouns. Let me go ahead and pass that on.

[00:01:59]

Melinda Butterfield: Hi, [00:02:00] I'm Melinda Butterfield. I use she, her pronouns. I'm a trans woman from New York City.

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[00:02:07]

Tsukuru Fors: Hi, my name is Tsukuru Fors. I'm based in Los Angeles, California. My pronouns are he, they. I'm a Japanese non binary trans person.

[00:02:18]

Zee Scout: Amazing. Well, it's great to be here with you all.

[00:02:21]

Zee Scout: We're sitting right now in the state of Florida. And what a state to be in right now is trans and gender non conforming and agender non binary people. So, Tsukuru, since you have the mic, I think I'll let you start. I would love if all of you would tell us a little bit about how you came to be involved in one, I think, trans organizing, and two, in organizing this event that you're all here for, which is the National Mark to Support Trans Youth and Speak Out for Trans Lives in Orlando, Florida.

[00:02:53]

Zee Scout: So, Tsukuru, you want to take it away first?

[00:02:55]

Tsukuru Fors: Yeah, sure. So, I'm age 52 right now. I started [00:03:00] transitioning quite late in life, at age 50 to be exact. So, that was two years ago. And so, October 2021 was on the bus, actually coming back from some kind of protest, and I heard the news, Marjorie Taylor Greene introducing a bill in the Congress, you know, that bill, to ban trans healthcare, among other things. That was a really hateful, atrocious bill. And previously, I've always been involved in activism like anti nuclear, and also peace and healthcare justice. So when I heard that, it was just really automatic for me. I mean, simply put, I just could not stand being silent.

You know, I just thought... Okay, you know, this is the moment. We really have to fight back. So that was the day I launched National Day of Action, October 1st. That spread to eight cities in the United States. So that was like the start

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of my triumphs rights activism. And, uh, how I got to be involved in this particular march was back in April 2020, 23, because this year, yeah, 23, I attempted to organize the infamous protest called Trans Day of Vengeance in Washington, D. C., which unfortunately got a lot of right wing media attention, um, And, uh, ended up having to cancel the event because there was a real active shooter threat. So the circumstance was really unfortunate, but thankfully our angel, Melinda Barfield, was actually one of the speakers and she kindly says she was inspired by the Trans Day of Vengeance to organize this event.

[00:04:51]

Zee Scout: So, there you go. Well, then who better to speak next than Melinda?

[00:04:56]

Melinda Butterfield: Well, actually, Sakura and I have a lot of parallels. We're [00:05:00] the same age. We came out around the same time a couple of years ago. Thank you. I've been an activist for more than 30 years on a wide variety of issues from Black Lives Matter to political prisoners to anti war stuff since I was in high school, really, and always, you know, considered myself an ally. of the LGBTQ struggle, but coming out when I did, in the midst of all these attacks on trans lives, I recognized, first of all, that the courage of trans youth in recent years coming forward and asserting themselves and being themselves and living their lives was something that really inspired me and made it possible for me as an older trans person who had been in the closet most of my life to actually come out.

And find that courage in myself, and that it was so important to take the skills that I have learned as an organizer over the years and try to contribute in some way to my [00:06:00] community, and especially to trans youth who are under fire. So it was early this year that I had some initial discussions with close comrades of mine about the need for a national march, and we all agreed that it was an important thing to do.

We put out a call to action on Trans Day of Visibility earlier this year, this spring, and got such an enormous positive response that we took it and ran

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with it and started building a coalition that has brought us to this point where we're doing this absolutely unprecedented. March on enemy turf, so to speak, in Florida, where so many trans and queer youths and other communities are just under siege right now. And so it's important not only to hear their voices, but for them to hear our voices. from all around the country coming here to support them. And that's really at the heart of what this march is about for me. So I'm going to hand it over to Chrissy now. [00:07:00]

[00:07:00]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: Thank you. Thank you, sweetie. And so, now here, during one of my rare moments of sobriety, I want to go ahead and catch us up today. I didn't mention earlier that I'm a transgender woman because by my definition, transgender is simply one of my medical conditions. I go ahead and I take care of it. With medication and a couple of surgeries. I guess if they also want to know, I also have type 2 diabetes, I have high blood pressure, I have a cholesterol.

But transgenderism, I guess that's the sexy one. So that's what they focus upon. I'm here because it's absolutely positively necessary. Other atrocities that happened in close to the middle part of the 20th century happened by passing laws that made them legal. and passing other philosophies that made it moral. Such things have got to be stopped. We've already had one civil rights movement that began with Freedom Riders and some of them paid for it with their lives. This is simply the second civil rights movement. And this is every bit as atrocious. This is every bit as horrible. And when you consider that the first target, especially here, was transgender children.

Just go ahead and focus on that. The first target was children and their families. Now, of course, it's moved on to adults and anybody who might support them all. But when that's the case, you're dealing with a set of depraved individuals who have given up any hope of moral fortitude. Let's attack the kids first. Let's make it legal to do it. Let's make it right to do it. And let's make it moral to do it. And that's why this is a thing that has to be done. Thank you for your time. And on a happier note, let's send this on to Anais.

[00:08:59]

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Anaïs Kochan: Hi. So I wanted to talk about how I got involved in this movement, as well as the march that's going to occur this weekend. Prior to coming out, I wasn't really politically involved. And even after coming out a few years ago, at the age of 48, I was kind of passive about things. Like, I was fine to go to the Trans Resistance March and the Dyke March during Pride Month. But outside of that, you know, most of my actions and... thoughts were a little more self centered about how things affected me personally and not how it affected the larger trans community, especially trans children. And that changed from a couple of things. First of all, reading Melinda this past summer really admired her from afar for a long time for her activism work and seeing how passionate she was about it.

And she basically just dragged me right in one day to a March meeting and That was like my first involvement with this group and getting involved in activism at all, really. And then the second thing was this year I met a trans family who had fled from North Carolina due to hostile bills, like trans health care, and I got bathroom use by the, in schools, and they had moved up here.

They were a trans masc and trans feminine couple who, 12 years ago, somehow had a kid. And as that kid got older, without even realizing, because it was just how she grew up, she was trans. She didn't even know her parents were trans when she came out to them. And I think that's so hilarious, this story. But she's really inspired me because I can see how wonderful she's been being able to be herself, and being openly trans, and how much healthier she is mentally than I was at that age. [00:11:00] Where I was just constantly running from one state of devastation to the next and just brought such protective feelings in me for her and other children like her that I really want to be doing the most I can to help children out and I'm going to pass this to Lindsay.

[00:11:18]

Zee Scout: Thank you, Anaïs

[00:11:20]

Lindsey Spero: I turned 26 this last summer, and I feel in such close proximity and understanding to these trans youth and their sense of self, their sense of

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identity. And the battle here in Florida is like ages old, but it's also one that really, like, I was built through. I was kicked out of my home when I was, like, just 18, and I came down to Florida with some friends, pretty much the only people who would take me in at the time. And it was a lot of, kind of like, housing insecurity and moving around and jumping around to, like, get to a point of stability where I'm at now, but... I think organizing and advocacy and all of that is really, really important, but at the end of the day, what fuels me and what has given me the most life is community building, and specifically through the ways in which I was embraced by the trans community down here in which I found life here in Florida.

I found medication, I found surgery, I found people who I call my family. And, that obviously is not going to be everyone's experience here, however, there are so many, there are just so many thousands and thousands and thousands of trans people in this state who, and not just trans people, our queer community in general, who love this state, and who love the South, and who love, who want to be here, who want to fight for it, and it's really easy to just kind of, Love all of them, and by default, love this work, and love this, like, beautiful journey of liberation, you know?

It's never felt like a chore, and it's never felt hard. It feels necessary and good because I'm uplifted by, like, the people here. I got involved in the march. Through one of my youth who I've been working with in a local program who is also connected to the organizers in the march here. Our community is very interconnected out here, so.

[00:13:15]

Zee Scout: Thanks, Lindsey. Yeah, it's never been hard to love trans people or the trans person. Mm hmm. It's just a matter of getting the rest of the world to come along. So you all mentioned a lot this march. But I think what I would love to hear a little bit more about is the movement leading up to it. And I think from here on out, what we'll do is we'll just pass the microphone to anyone who would like to answer, and anyone who wants to follow up can take it.

So would anyone be inclined to kind of discuss what the movement for trans lives in your experience and in your activism work was like prior to this? And I

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even have some interesting stories to share, Chrissy.

[00:13:52]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: Let's see if it might relate. Is that a thought? Sure. Some of you, if you've Googled it, you might know that [00:14:00] 2023 began with a bit of a stressor, when after having belonged to a certain YMCA, a certain lie was told by a girl in front of the Santee City Council that she was terrified at the sight of a naked man in the locker room. Naked man in the locker room, even though I am seeing staff assured her pinched child calmed down. That is indeed a woman, not a naked man. It was picked up by right wing media because nothing travels faster than the speed of light but a lie across right wing media. It was picked up and she ended up being the guest on the Tucker Carlson show.

It traveled further. Across the Atlantic Ocean, it was covered in the London Mirror. All this wonderful stuff happened. And, I got no knowledge of this. I'd been in Palm Springs visiting somebody. I came back, and one of my sisters showed me this terrible testimony before the Santee City Council. And I thought, what the hell? So I still kept going to my workouts, why wouldn't i? The whole Y staff came out and embraced me, hugged me and said, You know we love you, you're still a member, you see, damn right. I got my cry in, and then I got pissed. I said, now, if they're attacking me, a woman who can take a lot on her shoulders, what are they doing to children? And this is what they did to me in California.

So now we're gonna sneak in how we come to be involved in all this. Eventually it all does tie in together, I swear to heaven. So anyway, I said, I'm going before the Santee City Council. If you know anything about California, you'll know this. San Diego is ginormous. And out in Santee, it's as deep red as it could be. Deeper than Martian sand. But I said, they've listened to her lie, now it's time to tell the truth. I showed up, in groups. Like [unintelligible] org. And Women in Struggle, and a good few others, including real churches, had filled that room with supporters of love and truth, and filled an overflow room with them.

Women from my aquatics group had painted signs, we love Chrissy, and they all held them up. But few had flown in some haters, including an ex- Beauty

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Queen. I won't tell you how she got re fraught from her crown, but, nonetheless, we got to testify. I got to meet Gloria James, like I said, who got me involved with my little bud, Melinda Butterfield. And then that led to all of this. And my point is, I said, Hey guys, you, you had the will to attack a grown woman. My, God, what are you doing to the truly vulnerable? So the fact is that, something like this, I originally told them. I said, now, we're going to the belly of the beast. You know that, right? Have you hugged your loved ones? Have you gotten your affairs in order? Have we done this? With numbers comes strength. And we're proving that within 30 seconds. Now, Zee, my beloved little sister Zee, did I get anywhere near answering your question?

[00:17:09]

Zee Scout: I think so

[00:17:10]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: But yeah, thank you. That's where I had to contribute to that. That's what brought upon this particular degree of activism. Okay.

[00:17:19]

Zee Scout: Thank you. Would anyone else like to talk about the trans movement kind of leading up? to this march and in this moment?

[00:17:27]

Melinda Butterfield: Well, I'll just share a couple of observations that informed our decision to move ahead with the idea for the National March to Protect Trans Youth and holding it in Florida. One was the observation that a lot of the struggle character of the LGBTQ movement and the trans movement has been whittled away over the years by dependence on, completely on, sort of a non profit model rather than a grassroots model by dependence on electoral politics exclusively, rather than following in the footsteps of our ancestors, our parents, people like Sylvia Rivera and Leslie Feinberg, who, you know, were always in the streets in the struggle and that looking around what I saw was what was happening around the country, that

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there was all these amazing struggles happening at the local level.

Whenever one of these horrible bills would be brought before a state legislature, you know, parents, youth, the community would come out, occupy Capitol buildings, try to get on the floor to dispute these awful lies that are being told about trans people. Often get arrested and dragged out. We know there are elected officials like Maury Turner and Zoe Zephyr, who were like, you know, banned from representing their, their constituents for daring to speak out against these laws.

So all this great stuff was happening at the local level, but [00:19:00] no one was trying to sort of bring all these groups together and form a national movement for trans rights as. Chrissy so well describes it really, it's a new civil rights movement, it's an anti fascist movement because we're trying to draw connections with all the different communities, uh, and sectors of the population that are under attack from the far right that's been out in the streets as well as increasingly belligerent in elected spaces.

So that, that was really the state of the movement that, That led to conceiving of this. And I should also say, as was mentioned earlier, Sakuru Fors really deserves a lot of credit for sort of starting that process earlier this year. And I very much see what we're doing here as a continuation of that.

[00:19:49]

Zee Scout: Well, thank you to all of you. Tsakuru, you mentioned also being involved in Trans Day of Vengeance a little bit. And I know that you've had a really storied career and lots of work as an activist. Can you tell me a bit about your experience with these spaces being trans inclusive and maybe how that's changed over time due to some of the work that you and other activists have done to raise awareness around trans lives and needs?

[00:20:14]

Tsukuru Fors: Yeah. So I'll just kind of start speaking and tell me if I'm just like going off course. But this is here is like how I understood your question. Yeah. So. I think it's still a work in progress, but as Melinda was saying, and I really would like to, not only, you know, Melinda, but credit Melinda, Women in

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Struggle, and also like all the organizers who are involved in this march and movement because it's just really, really, really brilliant I think what you guys we have done as she said, it's totally it's completely cross sectional We are bringing a lot of people together and touching a lot of different issues because the Santis and his [00:21:00] government is attacking Asians blacks Latinos immigrants So, yeah, so that's brilliant.

So the reason why I said it's still a work in progress is since like I've come from different movements and different issues. What I've been trying to do in my activism is like, say, you know, when I show up in like Stop Asia, Asian hate. Um, rally, I always talk about queer community and trans community because we are fighting a common enemy and, you know, we must work together, right?

And also like, you know, things like healthcare justice. Absolutely, you know, gender affirming care, you know, if we are talking about Medicare for all and healthcare for all and stuff like that, gender affirming care should be, must be included in the conversation because trans healthcare is human right. So it's like showing up in different places, you know, all of us doing that and raising awareness. I think it's happening and I think it's very, very exciting that we are coming together. You know. Thank you,

[00:22:08]

Zee Scout: Thank you, Tsukuru. That was perfect. I really enjoyed the emphasis that all of you have placed on the grassroots movement because I think that is so essential and so important and such a pillar of the work that goes into liberation for communities.

Ultimately, of course, in addition to that, you all were a part of a case, too. Women in Struggle versus Bain and other defendants here in Florida who, we alleged, had and still have an obligation to enforce the bathroom ban under Florida law. So, I'm curious from your perspectives what it's been like to be part of this case and if you could talk about it a little bit. And anyone is welcome to take first grasp on it.

[00:22:55]

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Lindsey Spero: I think this case has felt like a [00:23:00] welcome resistance to a consequence a lot of trans people in this state are already feeling. The retaliation that comes from a bill like this. And as y'all have been mentioning, It's not just bathroom ban. I, honestly, I think a movement like this offers a lot of hope, and going into a legal case like this, offering any kind of challenge offers hope, because a lot of folks are wondering who that challenger is gonna be, and who's gonna kind of step up to plate, and, and unfortunately for so many people, because of the intersections of marginalization specifically, racism, classism, you know, in my city alone, in St. Pete and Tampa alone, where inflation has gone up, you know, almost 200 percent in the last two years, folks are hardly unable to advocate for themselves because they're hardly unable to get their next meal. And so, actions like these feel important, and the participation in our judicial system, and the willing, the willingness for each of [00:24:00] you to be here from a place that isn't Florida, and to come here, and to, risk yourself and risk your safety, I think, encourages those of us here that we aren't alone as well and that there are others willing to have our backs and, you know, sometimes that's, that's all the hope that somebody needs, so.

[00:24:18]

Zee Scout: Yeah, hope is a valid part of resistance. I'm curious, have any of you been plaintiffs in lawsuits before? And if not, what's this experience been like?

[00:24:29]

Anaïs Kochan: I've never been involved in a lawsuit as a plaintiff. So, I've actually learned quite a lot during this whole process. I always felt somewhat close to the law, in that I do work in the legal industry, but this is the first time I've been involved personally, and not just as an outside party working on things. So, it was really interesting to see the direction that the court took this case, and to see, you know, how the different laws work with this procedure.

[00:25:02]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: Good question, by the way. Oh, yeah. 2017, the

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ACLU helped me file a discrimination lawsuit against a nationwide chain of gymnasiums. Well, Gym Health Club, whatever you call them. But, because they denied me access to the proper locker room. Yeah, that did end up in the settlement, so we can't go into great detail about it. Bottom line, I got access to the right locker room after all. And it might have cost him a nickel or two in the process, but we're here because every now and then someone has to stand up and fight against absurdity.

Especially when that absurdity could be leading to someone getting violently hurt, if not killed. This is out of a Mel Brooks movie. Can you imagine being in prison, say Orange is the New Black, and somebody says, [00:26:00] What you doing in here old lady? I went to the bathroom. What did you do in the bathroom? Sat in a stall and relieved my bladder and bowels. And I said, well, damn, I've been in here a while, but is that illegal now? Well apparently in Florida.

That's what I did that broke the law that put me in there. I relieved myself in the bathroom. I think I'm just going to leave it. So there are certain ones where I say, well, I think I'll just sign on to that. Yeah, what'd you do? Were you a monster? You ought to be hanged. So, yeah, I've considered it an honor to be a part of that litigation thing. Felt it was like going to the water fountain and it says, that one says colored. Is the other one broke?

[00:26:42]

Zee Scout: Thank you. I think that leads to my next point, which I'm excited to hear a lot of your answers to, but... What's been different or even, or even special about doing trans led movement work here in Florida? Some of you touched on it a bit earlier, but I'd just love to hear from your perspectives what it's been like. I know, at least in mine, a lot of spaces I've been in there are not trans people, let alone trans people leading it. So, I'm just curious how that's felt for some of you being involved in this with members of our community. We really need it.

[00:27:16]

Lindsey Spero: Well, living here, what I can tell you is that this space is full of incredible organizers, incredible leaders, and activists, and community

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members, and folks who want to participate, and also, it's also just full of folks who want to be involved in whatever way they can, sharing a meal, you know, sharing their home, etc.

What we do down here is very grassroots, so it's very much built on the emotions that we all share as human beings, like love, hope, a need for home, a need for safety, a want to be able to lay your head down at the end of the night kind of a thing and know how to do so, and because of the intersectionality of the fight here in the South, because it's never just trans rights, we're battling on all fronts here for housing and for education, for food, for... Our folks, our neighbors living without homes, you know, there's every impact here. I think what it means and like what, what it looks like organizing with trans people is that you've got like the most compassion, the most empathy, and people who are really, really willing to just like get down and dirty with you and do it at whatever cost. People who aren't scared and they're willing to like do what it takes. And I hope, I don't know, I hope that y'all get to see that a little bit tomorrow too.

[00:28:28]

Melinda Butterfield: So, you know, it's, it's unfortunately a reality still decades after Stonewall that in a lot of queer spaces, trans people are still invisible or sort of at the bottom of the pecking order when it comes to access and visibility and organizing who's sort of calling the shots and organizing different things.

Our goal with the, with the march setting out was to, you know, really center and elevate trans voices first and foremost. We have a wonderful, wonderful group of cis allies who are making invaluable contributions to this work and to tomorrow's demonstration. But, you know, they understand also that this is an opportunity for trans people to speak and give voice to. what we need right now, being on the front line of this attack, and you know, those are the voices we're going to hear at the demonstration. Those are the voices that are front and center at our press conferences, and that are really making the decisions about how to move forward with this movement.

Because that's the right thing to do, and those are the voices that have to be centered in this struggle. So, I'm really proud of that. This week, a number of

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us have been here. In Orlando this week from all over the country. And from throughout Florida, we've been learning to work together, spending time together, hanging out. Going out and canvassing in lots of different situations, and it's just been amazing to feel the community and the joy and the strength that comes with trans people organizing together.

[00:30:12]

Zee Scout: Beautiful answer. And maybe that's a perfect segue. A lot of times... These movements feel serious, right? They're life threatening. Huge stakes are involved. How do you, and how have you, found joy throughout some of this process, when you realize that you're fighting a much larger battle? What have you all done down here to find joy? What's it been like finding that joy with other trans folks?

[00:30:39]

Lindsey Spero: We're around one another. I mean, this is like the most joyful experience, despite the lawsuit despite the week, despite even hearing about people showing up to this march and all that, who don't like us. I think I felt so much joy being in the company of, of trans giants, of people who are actively wanting to participate and build a better world together and like, I don't know, there's something, there's just something about trans magic.

[00:31:06]

Anaïs Kochan: Yeah, what is it? I think this week especially, because I'm new to activism, And there's so many veteran activists here and amazing people that it just made me weep for joy sometimes knowing that there's all these other people in the community that are doing so much, you know, sacrificing so much of themselves.

And it just gets me really emotional and makes me really just feel it right through my body, how amazing our community is and how it's based on love, not hate, you know, our community isn't. Built on disliking the other side, our community is built on loving each other.

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[00:31:44]

Christynne Lili Wrene Wood: That magic feel is that love we generate when we're in each other's proximity. And I promise you right now, the Giants, Martin Luther King, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Ross Abagnale, Harvey Milf, all those who were beaten at Stonewall. All those who stood before us are all smiling down, saying look at our children making good trouble and supporting each other. And what I, as a trans elder, are particularly enraptured about is the youth.

You do understand, Lindsay, you're only about ten years older than my granddaughter. And what was the name of that beautiful child in black standing next to us at the rally today? Samira! She is the age of my granddaughter. So now this old broad can just go right ahead and enjoy her retirement. And do what I do. Knowing that the next generation and the next generation has got this. You see what I'm saying? You were obviously paying attention when I thought you was playing with the Gameboys. They don't care. They ain't paying it. Yes, you were. And you're proving it right now. And that just fills me with love. How the hell can I not find joy in that?

[00:33:08]

Tsukuru Fors: Can I say something? Okay, first of all, I mean, it's really hard not to find joy when you're with Christynne, right? Ah, sure. But last December, I had an opportunity to go to Japan. And, uh, interact with the trans people in Japan, and I was asked this one very, very curious question, which was, and this was after, like, I talked about what's happening in this country, you know, attacks against trans community, and so the question was, Okay, how do you find positivity in that?

And I kind of stared at them, like, blankly, because To me, us existing, there's nothing more positive than that. You know, us, like, being ourselves and existing and thriving, uh, despite all that we go through, you know, despite all that's thrown at us. Our community is strong and loving and caring and I had, you know, privilege to learn that at age 50. You know, so my life, despite all the struggles that we may go through, it's a joyful one.

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[00:34:17]

Zee Scout: Yeah, I feel full, and it feels great. I know this spring. I sat in this very interesting role of watching day in and day out. These bills file in, right? And then, having to go to meetings where we discuss legal strategies to attack them.

And trying to talk about what we can do on the ground to support people. And then talking to my people in my local community. And realizing there was very little I could do, even as a lawyer at times, to effect concrete change in their daily life. I remember I had to tell one friend, who had recently started HRT, who was working with children, that perhaps maybe it wasn't a good idea to come out. And I immediately felt like vomiting after saying that out loud. And I just share this story to say that it can happen to any of us, right? That like, this struggle can become so overwhelming, and it has been so just invigorating to be around y'all's joy and to get to be myself. And... I'm grateful for you all, and it's been a really lovely experience.

I think maybe the next question I had was... curious, what are some of the successes that you all have found organizing under a DeSantis administration in Florida? And perhaps that's just talking about the march, perhaps it's something from the press conference today. I'm just curious if there's a moment that you feel really signifies some, some victory or some generation of progress.

So, Lindsey, this might be a question for you. I'm curious, what are some successes that you found organizing or that, you know, your friends in your community have [00:36:00] found organizing under a DeSantis administration in Florida?

[00:36:04]

Lindsey Spero: To be perfectly real with you, we're trying to just use a lot of the same techniques as have been perfected by our ancestors and our elders and the community members who come before us. There are so many trans and queer people in Florida that it's impossible to, to not find us and not find community. And a huge way that we found success is through basic mutual aid steps. Ways in which we are providing care for our community at a very

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local, neighborhood based level. And right now, there are mutual aid organizations providing that kind of care in every single major city in Florida and, like, spreading outside to the suburban areas outside of that.

With the non profits that I'm involved in that have began out of mutual aid efforts and all that, we have almost doubled and tripled our caseload for all of our trans youth. We've consistently had multiple successful years of summer camp. We're continuing to, like, [00:37:00] pour into youth, pour into programs, and I'd like to think that In this state, folks know that there are other trans folks because we're loud and we're bold and we're joyful, and that's something they can't stop.

[00:37:10]

Zee Scout: Can I ask you two follow up questions? One... I feel there's probably a difference between what people hear in the news and then what the reality and the lived reality is for folks on the ground, so I'd be curious if you can address some of that. And two, you brought up mutual aid, which is such a vital part of a lot of grassroots organizing and a lot of work that tries to exist outside of sheer, Non profit industrial complex impact litigation type models, but I don't think I am bringing a surprise bomb into the room when I mentioned that over in Atlanta, for instance, with Cop City. And that indictment that recently came down, they bring mutual aid right into the forefront and put it under the gun of a RICO indictment. So I'm just curious what impact that's had on folks and what the real lived reality is in Florida right now.

[00:38:02]

Lindsey Spero: Something that is talked about by a lot of northeastern states, a lot of western states, a lot of states that are often liberal, and a lot of terms that I hear folks using all the time is like, What a shame about Florida. You know, it sucks. I'm so sorry. I hear, I'm so sorry all the time when I tell people I'm from Florida, and it always kind of takes me back a little bit. But then, I remember that I was once someone who lived in the Northeast as well, and I used to have a lot of misconceptions about the South and about what happens down here.

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But the reality is, is that the South and Florida especially is the site of great resistance and great struggle and intersectional struggle, and it always has been. Generations of fight for just basic human rights and that has successfully happened and we've built so much of the movement that we have through kind of what your next question was is mutual aid and you're right then what happened in Atlanta is a scary concept to to gnaw on and process as organizers as folks who are working in advocacy because In my personal opinion, to try and summarize mutual aid under the context of what they are within this indictment, It's like trying to summarize gender, because mutual aid is such an expansive, growing, changing, beautiful process that there's no real one way to define it.

It's really just a term for, for tools that we use as communities to build and better one another, because we're filling in the gaps for programs that have been supposed to have been provided for us by our elected officials using the money that we give them year after year, when that doesn't happen.

The most consistent way that we are able to heal our communities is through this process of mutual aid. I think it's natural to fear the outcome, but we're no strangers to this battle, you know? And I think Atlanta sets a precedent, but I also think the people of Atlanta are pissed. I think the people of Georgia are pissed. I think the states [00:40:00] around are pissed. I don't think Cop City is gonna happen without a real fight, to be truly honest with you. And I think that that sets its own precedent for us as leaders, as organizers, because we're not letting this happen, so.

[00:40:15]

Zee Scout: On this topic, what are some ways that people, that allies can help in this struggle for trans, for queer, for intersex, and for gender non forming and non binary rights?

[00:40:30]

Melinda Butterfield: I think one of the things that has become really clear to me Since I came out, having worked in a lot of different social justice movements, and that often, I think, in good faith, say that they're inclusive and for trans rights, for LGBTQ rights, for Black and Latinx rights, and so on, is

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that it amounts to lip service in real life, and In trying to get various organizations and [00:41:00] movements involved in this demonstration, you know, it's definitely been a struggle in many cases to get their attention, or to have them take it seriously.

Uh, and I think that folks out there who maybe are not LGBTQ, are not trans, But who care about these issues and who are part of these other movements, whether it's around police brutality, whether it's the anti war movement, you know, all kinds of different struggles, take it to your organizations and tell them they need to take this seriously, because at the end of the day, all these struggles are connected.

We're all fighting the same enemy, which is capitalism and white supremacy. And patriarchy, right? All closely tied together and oppressing all of us and attacking all of us in different ways all over the world. And so our movements need to be in conversation with each other and be in solidarity with each other. That's the most important thing. And I think we need more conscientious activists and organizers in various movements to really take the trans struggle right now seriously and make sure that their organizations Take it seriously when people put out the call for solidarity.

[00:42:14]

Zee Scout: Well said. Yes, I was gonna say something similar, which is just, even on a macro scale, I think I would go on a micro scale. When trans, intersex, queer people tell you who they are. Believe them and recognize that every single day they're having to convince the world to believe them too, and that we need all the help we can get right now in tilting the world back towards that arc of justice.

So these are all the questions that I had for you all today. I'm really looking forward to sharing lifelong relationships with all of you and continuing this dialogue and this struggle and this work. And. Just want to thank you so much for your time, your energy, your effort, your bravery, your vulnerability. It always is noticed and we appreciate it.

[00:43:12]

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