

Queer Roots and Routes — transcript

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Season: 1

Episode: 4

Host: Dale Taylor-Gentles

COLLECTIVE VOICE:

This episode contains stories that include homophobia, biphobia, bereavement and xenophobia.

This episode contains stories that include racism and homophobia.

This is Queer Roots and Routes

Stories of where we come from, and how we move in the world today.

“We” are a group of people living in London, we’re gay or queer, and we’re mostly men, and some non-binary people who were raised as men.

We’re all either migrants to the UK and/or racialised as being from an “ethnic minority” — urgh, that’s just a crappier way of saying ‘global majority’ ;)

We all have different experiences and perspectives on the world, some of us are racialised as Black or brown, some as white. Many of us have experienced racism and xenophobia.

Some of us are gay, and some queer. Some of us moved to the UK by ourselves, and some are from an ancestral line that includes migrants.

We all, every single one of us, knows what it is like to be seen as ‘other’ — that is what brings us together.

We’re part of a community project run by The Love Tank, a not-for-profit community interest company that promotes health and wellbeing of under-served communities through education, capacity building and research.

We wanted to make this podcast to tell our stories of crossing borders: borders of nation-states, of gender and sexuality — as a collective. We don’t have a boss or a Beyoncé. So, every episode of Queer Roots and Routes has a different host and a different set of voices from our group.

Our promise to you is that our podcast is GORGEOUS, FIERCE, SUPERGAY and...
REVOLUTIONARY !

DALE

3, 2, 1... I’m Dale, my pronouns are he/him.

I'm hosting this episode, and I want to talk about community.

This is the fourth episode of Queer Roots and Routes — and four is my favourite number!

What does community mean to me?

Community is my circle. The collective of people I operate around most often. People who make me feel safe, loved... and that's reciprocated.

It's the part of my life that keeps me going outside of work commitments, and having to remember to breathe and eat food.

Growing up, my community wasn't great. I had a lovely group of friends at school but at home things were much different.

My relationship my mum was difficult. So because of that, and other reasons, I stopped living with them when I was 11 and went to live with my grandma. My grandma was the kind of woman who would do big shopping and carry all the bags home in her hands by herself. She was a loving and caring woman. She cooked all the time, was funny and laughed and joked, loved gardening, loved cleaning the house and was Jamaican to their roots. She was from Jamaica, and from a generation that just got on with things. We had a shared dream of me going to university. She was obsessed with buying me a suit for my graduation. But she was elderly.

She was in her 80s, and less than a year into me living with her, she had a stroke. After that, she needed a cane to walk. And she began to suffer from dementia. I was her carer for years, but eventually it was too much.

We got separated: she went to live in a care home, and I had to go back to living with my mum.

But my mum kicked me out, and at 17 I was homeless.

For MY episode of Queers Roots and Routes, I've picked some stories that explore the dark and the light — the loneliness that anyone can find themselves feeling, AND the joy of community, friendship, and solidarity.

Are you ready?

Cos in this episode, we're gonna GO THROUGH IT.

There's a story that RAD tells — of being all alone, of not being supported, of being treated like shit... and it's such a lonely feeling

So I wanted to hear Rad tell that story...

RAD:

Myself and my flatmate, which was also queer, were going back home from a student union bar party. And bear in mind, this isn't like Central London. This is this is Hampstead we're talking about this is a very quiet, very nice, very posh area. And it wasn't that late, would have been like 1am. And we're just walking home. Finchley Road.

And we would look very gay. We were dressed up, like very, very queer. And this man just shouted something else, which I can't even remember what but he said something that I think was quite homophobic to my friend who was a woman. And I think she said something back. And I don't think she said anything mean, I think it was just a case of her being like, What did you say? And he literally punched her in the face. And she just fell right on the floor.

And he just ran away. And we were just both there. I will basically hold the hair in my hands, just unconscious. And I'm just like, What the hell am I supposed to do now? This is like in the middle of the night, but in front of a bank. So you'd think that sort of cameras around, I'm going to call the ambulance and call the police. They arrived within like an hour and the ambulance people were very helpful.

Now, when it comes to police, there was not really much that they were willing to do or they just were kind of like, well, this is you know, this is not very, like big crime. We don't have any witnesses. There's nobody else has reported anything like that in the area. So we're like,

Well, this is exactly what happened is the second time it happened because I called minutes after it happened. And there's a bank upside. There's got to be cameras, and they just got back to us. I think a week later being like, well, we didn't find anything. So we're gonna close this case now. And I was I think, for me, it wasn't even that traumatic. It just changed my attitude towards this country. And I think I didn't think of it as the safe haven as always have.

DALE:

That's such a shame that that happened to Rad and I thank him for sharing that with us. He was new to London when that happened, just a student, moved to London from Poland, slowly making friends, and feeling rejected by his adoptive culture.

This is why we need our people. I know what it's like to feel hurt, rejected, cast aside like that.

When my grandma was in the care home, I lived in a youth hostel. I was chair of the youth parliament, and I started doing campaigns on youth homelessness and mental health.

I made it to university, and I guess I was starting to get to know my sexuality, making sense of being bisexual.

I came out to my mum, not by choice, and she said she wished I was dead. Words like that, trust me, they don't really ever leave you.

I remember visiting my grandma, but she couldn't recognise me anymore. She always looked at me as her son, and I saw her as my mum.

I didn't know how to process that she no longer recognised me.

I look back now and I know that I was grieving —

I was losing my grandma, the only community I'd ever had —

and I was searching for a new community.

I was studying sociology and criminology at the University of East London. Going into my third year, I had to start work on a dissertation.

I decided I wanted to study the experiences of Black queer men in London. What's the difference between our sexual orientation (our feelings) and our stated sexuality?

What influences how we express ourselves?
Such as religion, cultural background, location, etc.

I looked for Black queer men to interview, and one of the ones I found was a guy called Phil. You might know him. He'd written an article online about his experiences, which were similar to mine. I just HAD to meet him.

I interviewed him in his workplace - he was working in sexual health campaigns, reaching out to Black queer men. And he introduced me to Marc Thompson, who set up The Love Tank.....

I had met some Black queer men at just the time I needed a new community.

There's a lot more to this story, but I have to listen to Amar and Saaqib. They are Other members of our group and they kinda come as a pair.

SAAQIB:

My name is Saaqib, 33 years old. And when I was 8 my collarbone popped out. I didn't realize for a very long time.

AMAR:

My name is Amar, I'm 28 and my pronouns are they.them. And a fun fact about me is that when I was 10 years old, I got called into school to apologise for making a white boy feel uncomfortable about imperialism.

DALE:

I wanted to hear from Amar and Saaqib because they make a little community together. I want to listen to how they've done this....

SAAQIB:

Apparently, thanks for that there is an elitism to knowing your culture or being able to have got to the stage where you're familiar with your culture. My experience of British Asian as or

Scottish as it is, is a fractured one. There's not an easy familiarity with the culture, that for a number of reasons, go on, what you're gonna say.

AMAR:

I guess given all of that going to somebody like Green Street was quite significant. I think for both of us maybe in different ways. I mean, how would you how would you explain Green Street to for the gourd out there?

SAAQIB:

There's different concentrations of different communities from different parts of the subcontinent across London. And Green Street is one of those concentrations in East London.

AMAR:

Yeah. Also, loads of brown people and cheap jewelry shops.

SAAQIB:

You wanted the cute stuff.

AMAR:

Why did you ask me to come with you to Green Street?

SAAQIB:

We went to Green Street for my birthday. It was on my actual birthday. We went shopping for some jewelry. For my outfit. We went together because you're my friend. This is true. And we do frivolity quite well together.

AMAR:

I think we're ready to get it frivolity. I think we've nailed it.

SAAQIB:

So Green Street and me buying jewelry and having like an easy fun time is what I needed. And you were a part of that.

AMAR:

I'd never been to Green Street before. And I think what I loved about it was the anonymity. So like, no one who was there would recognize me from like my local Sikh Punjabi community that I grew up in. I could be like, as explicitly faggot as I wanted to be, and also be there, see, and also be in that space, that wasn't a white space, you know, where there were references that I got, and jokes, we could make whatever reactions we were gonna get, it was going to be like, slightly contained, and slightly protected from that community. I find it really liberating to be able to play with that for the first time.

SAAQIB:

I think I've been to Green Street once before, at some point, with my mum, actually, one Christmas for food because she went to London to spend Christmas with me, and everything's closed, obviously, apart from Green Street, yeah, the desi areas. And then we met a couple of friends. And we have some food, and I can eat that much because

everything had nuts in it. And I went full uncle and got the bill to be reduced. So dinner for four people was like 15 quid.

AMAR:

That's the, that's British Asian culture.

SAAQIB:

Absolutely proud of it. But I think I don't, I don't have fear of going to places like that, because I don't know anybody. I don't really have a fear of going there. Because I didn't grow up here. And they're not from my immediate community, or extended family. And I want the people that I know. But one of the barriers to me going to places like that is having somebody to enjoy it with ultimately I would feel a little bit like an outsider going into that space and vaguely connecting with a doctor.

AMAR:

I think that's really important that about like, our experiences of community and not just about going into a space where there are brown people like so much of why Green Street mattered to me and was important to me was like experiencing community that was like going there with like, you and with our other friends and experiencing it like, as a group of like, queer South Asians, rather than just kind of being in the street where there were brown people that community is about more than just demographic, right.

SAAQIB:

Yeah. The favorite thing about that day is the frivolity and how it was accepted immediately by the people in the shops. So the Aunties behind the counters are the people who told me my size in a jacket, which I thought was kind of rude. Because they said you needed a bigger size. And I said, No, I was, I was wearing a puffy jacket. You've seen how big my jacket okay, like—

AMAR:

it was a big jacket. We couldn't afford anything in that shop anyway.

SAAQIB:

It's before I pay my taxes.

AMAR:

I don't pay taxes. Don't say that. And then that's also British Asian culture. Okay, right. My favourite moment... was when we were looking at that fucking peacock like brocade, and the poles and the headpiece and aunties I had, what did she say? She said, they just said they both look on the... shop lady, she was like, we get a lot of your sort in here for their photo shoot. So we knew exactly what she meant by like your thought. And I love that because she's obviously clocked at us. And it wasn't new to her either. And I felt a sense of connectedness that it wasn't necessarily a surprise to her. She was aware of the existence of queer people and, you know, queer South Asians, and it's fine, as long as she made a sale.

SAAQIB:

Yeah, I didn't get that from that comment. I kind of just, I often just think that maybe they're referring to like I was not being from the area, like only with you there do I recognize it as

some acknowledgement of the queers in the house. I also don't know if that person would have said something like that. If it was just me by myself.

AMAR:

We were cackling, we were fully shrieking. We were completely making, like, a campy spectacle of it. And I loved that. But also, you've got that, like, you've got that xxx that like street smart and the attitudes like the I don't have when I'm speaking in English, but I do have when I'm speaking in Punjabi, and so for that, we struck a really nice balance. So we went in with the awkward with that kind of like, we weren't quiet, we weren't quiet at all. And it felt amazing to be able to be loud

SAAQIB:

and demanding. Wanting to see everything from the top shelf. But not that one because it's too expensive. And not that one because it's got a fabric string....

AMAR:

I don't want that. And not that one cuz I don't like the shade of that gold. No different one, please.

SAAQIB:

And while I think making a sale is one of the main reasons of engagement. They'll spend us like, people chose to go beyond that limit, because they really enjoyed us having in that space. So where they were egging us on, to look at more stuff that we hadn't looked at before. Or like an auntie trying to get a sense of my aesthetic and then bringing out more stuff because I guess she wants me to feel something. Maybe like language is a bit limited here. But it feels like a like an unspoken acceptance.

AMAR:

Yeah, yeah, definitely.

SAAQIB:

You're gonna say the wig thing.

AMAR:

You say the wig thing, or you're better. Oh, go on. I think I really love the another favorite moment was when the auntie was trying to convince you to buy this headpiece, and she's trying to convince you to buy it and you were like,

SAAQIB:

I look at her and I say, I don't have any hair. That needs hair.

AMAR:

And she said, what does she say?

SAAQIB:

I think she said something like, it's okay. You can get away. Lots of my friends do it.

AMAR:

All the girls, we get a wig.

SAAQIB:

I think I just said thank you for your support.

AMAR:

That was that was definitely a back and forth. She was like really insistent you can just get away.

SAAQIB:

So normal for me to get away. Yeah, she thought it'd be fine. God bless. There.

AMAR:

She is. That is what I mean by allyship. You know, you got that woman at Pride in London.

SAAQIB:

With wigs for everyone.

AMAR:

I mean, okay, I guess like, Green Street was really important for me because I never been shopping for femme Indian clothing or jewelry before. I've never felt safe enough. I've never felt brave enough. I've never felt strong enough. And, you know, like, I get like abuse and stuff like on the street, like all the time for dressing fan. But when it comes from our people, there's something about it, that cuts deeper. So I never felt strong enough in myself all by myself to go into these spaces and navigate them. But I could do that when I went with you. And I think that's why that's what I mean, when I say that the real experience of community was the feeling that we had each other's backs that we understood each other, and that other people that were of relating to us kind of as like a crew, you know, which we didn't have either of us, when we met at pride.

SAAQIB:

There's something here that I want to try to articulate. I don't think I've done before in such a conscious way. Like while it's fun to talk about policy, or like practicing culture, I suppose. When I look back at every other opportunity, there has been to practice culture and do culture. It's been shut down immediately, in like, sometimes aggressive ways and sometimes in like quite innocuous ways. Where it doesn't feel that important for us to get excited about earrings and get excited for each other to have earrings or try things on. That feels quite maybe superficial or silly, or light. But I think that's the point that lightness is stuff that we've never, I sorry have never had before. Because the aunties would usually stop me from looking at stuff that wasn't supposed to be looking at. Or when I reach a certain age I stopped Being able to access the xxx. Yeah, I like shiny things and nice fabrics. And that's part of how I want to do culture.

AMAR:

I know exactly what you mean, like, one memory that always stands out to me now is I remember, like, I remember my mum being out of the house, and me being maybe like seven years old. And kind of sneaking into the cupboard and getting her dupatta highlight veil and kind of dancing around like a Bollywood heroine. But knowing enough at that age,

kind of carefully fold it and put it back and never mention it to anyone. And so that's the kind of fun we've been calling it for quality, but like, what it also is, is gender expression through a different cultural language that we've been shut out from. And like, you know, it was frivolous, it was joyful. It was playful what we were doing, but that play is itself like gender expression that we haven't had access to. And having access to it felt so genuinely incredible, like it just felt completely. In fact, like a whole world. It felt like a whole way of seeing my culture as this backwards thing, or this. This quite a stayed or kind of like calcified thing that that hasn't moved forward. Part of that kind of evaporated because I was like, I can just play with this or like, we can just play with this. And suddenly it felt like all of that that was kind of shut away and only for the women or only for you know, other people were sending something it was also for me. So yeah, maybe frivolity isn't quite the right word for it, because like, the reason that we haven't been able to play around with it in that way is because the cost of it is not like it's not frivolous, the cost of it is being ostracized from the community, it can be violence, you know, whether it's here or like back in the bend, like there's the cost is very, very real. Just have that lightness and so it took a lot of strength and it meant so much for us to then be able to experience it right.

SAAQIB:

You and I talk about the word community, frequently. But what I really loved about our experience on Green Street, is that it felt like we were doing the practice of community in a really beautiful way. The community experience with you and some other people that we love is and can be as simple as me wanting to get some earrings, but not being sure if it was worth 1099 And you're just buying it from me without me knowing what's the word like on sugar daddy there is nothing sugar or daddy about you. ...

What's the word for like nothing holding you back like liberated like you weren't even you weren't even it's not like either of us like rich right? You weren't even worried about spending 25 pounds on that necklace for me because it was my birthday. And it's we didn't hesitate. There was no hesitation about embracing that joy.

AMAR:

"There's no bookkeeping, there's no accounting. Oh, it's just love."

SAAQIB:

was a really nice saying. I don't know what.

AMAR:

I say all the time you listen to me.

SAAQIB:

It's true.

DALE:

Those two make such a lovely pair, don't they? I found their conversation really cute, insightful and inspiring.

I know what they mean about finding friendship – creating community with a person who you click with. It's your found family.

I remember thinking that when I was interviewing Black queer men as part of my dissertation project.

I felt good about myself, Uni was challenging but I enjoyed the learning, and I felt that parts of who I was were starting to fall into place. The project was really helping me to process my sexuality and who I was.

I hadn't been able to visit my grandma since I realised that she didn't recognise me. It was too hard to.

I remember doing the final interview for my dissertation and going to sleep that night - literally putting my head on the pillow - and thinking: once I've finished this dissertation I'm going to go and see her again.

But I woke up the next morning to a call from my sister. My Grandma had passed.

I couldn't finish my dissertation. I couldn't finish university. I just had to take a break. Going to university had all been tied to my feelings towards my Grandma, it was our dream and I was so conflicted about leaving but I had to go. I wanted to achieve our dream, but I... just... couldn't.

To me, my Grandma was the sun and I was a planet orbiting her. She was my whole world. My whole life. With the sun gone, I was just floating off. I didn't know who I was.

It was a dark time. And I tried to redefine myself. I really had to.

I went back to my community. To Phil, to Marc. The Love Tank hired me to run a project called Black Health Matters. And since I was used to being an activist, joining this organisation just made sense to me. It gave me a job. But it was much more than a job. It was community.

Whilst I worked there I returned to university to finish my dissertation and my degree. Marc and my tutor at uni helped me to fit it around my work

I remember re-reading my initial dissertation proposal and thinking FUCKING HELL, THIS GUY IS GOING THROUGH A LOT.

I'd literally put everything on the page. It was so personal.

It didn't feel academic at all - it felt like I was dumping my trauma on the page. To try and make sense of myself. And I guess I was?

But I graduated though. I had the big ceremony. The gown and the hat.

59.01

My sisters came to the ceremony. And so did Phil and Marc, who by now I considered my big brother and my uncle.

Phil and Marc were a big part of getting me to where I am now. It felt symbolic?

My dissertation was how I met them - so having them as part of the ending was important. They were the transition.

Later, my sisters and I went to my Grandma's grave. I'd hired the gown and hat for some extra time so I could wear them there, and we took some pictures with me next to her.

Finally I had achieved our dream and, although she couldn't be there with me in person, she was there with me in spirit. And that's what was important.

So... community, friendship, solidarity...

I'd graduated, I had a job, and I had started making more and more Black queer friends.

The power of this can't be under-estimated, it was healing and it was comforting. And I can't hear enough about people finding their communities.

Two people who have a similar story are friends Chase and Tokyo. I asked them to record a conversation about this, on a day that is very special to their friendship...

CHASE:

Happy anniversary,

TOKYO:

happy anniversary.

CHASE:

When you're on one year or another you imagine we met each other a year ago today.

TOKYO:

I am Tokyo. I am 31, going on 32. Very shortly. I am from South Africa. And something interesting about me. I'm a chronic over thinker. And overdoer. Yeah, and it took a lot.

CHASE:

Well, I'm Chase, I'm 27 I'm from London. My pronouns are he/him. Interesting fact about me is I blagged my way on to the mainstage at best of all with Diplo and Major Lazer in 2014, and got to party with them, and felt like a rockstar for 20 minutes. It's nice. So you're from South Africa, initially. And you've lived in London for how long now?

TOKYO:

It's coming up to it'll be two years in September. Yeah. And why did you move to London? I feel like there were a number of reasons, a part of me felt like I was running away, but not running away. It was a decision. It was just a lot. I think COVID made me realize that I can just do whatever I want with my life. And like nothing is actually that deep before no move somewhere it can move somewhere on a moon back, I can move back. And I also just at the time, I mean, London has a lot. I mean, when you're visiting you think this place is amazing. But now that I live here, I'm like, I don't know, but the lack of sunshine. But it was primarily that if I feel if I'm like really into my feelings, I'm just like, I think a part of me felt like I was

just making a decision to like, run away a little bit from what? I'm not sure, but I just felt like I needed something new. I need a change of environment. And I feel like at the time, London felt like a place where I could be myself. That was my reason.

CHASE:

How've you found that since you've since you've moved here

TOKYO:

Somewhat somewhat London is a lonely place as well. Yeah, I thought I was going to move here. And it was gonna be so easy to make friends make unexcited don't think I valued how much of an important thing community is before I moved here. And I think I took it for granted that you can just move somewhere and then get to know people and everything is going to be fine. And I think it's difficult in most places. But I think it's especially difficult in London. What do you think it is about London that

CHASE:

makes it more challenging?

TOKYO:

I think it's just such a big city. And also the fact that like, life is so hard. Yeah, people just don't have the time like to build those kinds of connections. I think just having to survive living here on its own is like really challenging. I don't think people have a lot left after just haven't done what they need to do. And I think also people are already in the circles of friends and especially like, as a queer person, it's especially difficult because of the cultural issues around making friends. Like it's a little bit more complex. And I think I took that for granted.

CHASE:

Is there anything distinctive about the queer scene in London that you appreciate or don't appreciate?

TOKYO:

It started with things that don't appreciate spicy person. What I don't appreciate. I think there's like, a level of like superficiality if I can call it that like this. It's more of like, a you worth knowing? Are you someone that I'm interested in knowing rather than, like, do we get along, I get that kind of a vibe. Maybe I'm reading into it. But I got a lot of that. That's the vibe I was getting. Like, I'm not saying every single person. I've met this like that. But that's the general vibe. Anything that you appreciate about the oh, what I appreciate. There are so many hidden gems of people in London, because like, I think as much as I said, what I said just now, when you find amazing people really amazing. And you're like, oh my god, surely like this person? Where have they been? Oh, my entire life. Like, it's just really amazing. That's what I like about London. So many interesting people. Really interesting people, kind people. So it's almost like, you really have to like, find your people. Does the joy of finding the make it worth the stress of the negative experiences? It does? It really does. Because once I started finding my people, it was so amazing. I don't know if you'd like I can't even I don't have the English to describe the feeling. It's like, it's almost like you're seeing like a mirror of you, but like reflected in other people. And not I don't mean that in a vain way. You just feel understood. And you feel seen. London is really nice when you have your people.

And in the two years since you've been here, what would you say have been to it events or days

CHASE:

that have just stood out to you as a notable highlights.

TOKYO:

I think the day we met was really cool, because I wasn't expecting that. I mean, we're not going to get into how we met. However, I understand that was the last person last place excuse me, that I was expecting to make a friend. And I think when cuz I actually approached Chase. He looked like a friendly face. And also like really good looking as well. So I was like, what was that? If I'm being honest, in that moment, I think I was also doing it out of a sense of like, I don't like the word desperation. It sounds very, doesn't sound like very desperate. This. Yeah, it's about Yeah, I was, it was more it was so innocent and like so like, Okay, I was having like this internal conversation made. I'm like, Okay, you're in this place. You don't know anyone here. You're feeling like you're by yourself. Okay, the solution is go and speak to someone. And that's literally what I did. And here we are now like it was actually like, so I didn't actually think that like things like that were possible. So it's sort of like emboldened me to be a lot more open, willing to actually like, go up to people and like, open my mouth. And you were like, so nice. And I'll never forget that. Like, it was really amazing. Because I think in that moment, it really came at a good time because I was starting to doubt why I came here because I'm just like, I've been I'd been in London since I think for like almost six months before that. And I just was not like making friends or like building connections that way. I thought I would like nothing was working. So I was just like, oh my god, this is awful. Like, the sun isn't shining. I don't know anyone here and it's just, this is like not really working out like me. Or, you know, and I think it's really true when they say that. If you want to make friends go to places where people do what you enjoy you know, when we met because it's so true. Because I'm like, oh, like, you know, we are really good friends and we met somewhere where I don't think mutual interest, mutual interest, mutual interest.

CHASE:

So it's funny you say that though because I I feel like since we've become friends when we've been out in social situations, I see you approach people and start conversations with people and I just love it. I just think it's so admirable and And

TOKYO:

it's nice to see and I think, yeah, that's a quality you knew that I really appreciate. And I really have to answer that, honestly. It's really a case of fake it till you make it once I'm gonna do it again. And like, I'm like, this is a new thing I'm trying now. Yeah, like, I never used to be like that before I was very much. Only speak if someone's like, if I feel like the body language is looking a bit warm, but now I'm just like, even if it doesn't work out, it's okay. Like we try. And if it doesn't work, it doesn't record we move on. So definitely, I think you are like quite pivotal in that change.

CHASE:

Like, literally you are the cause. I will send you my invoice details and we can get that

TOKYO:

invoice. It's really changed a lot for me. I was I mean, I'm still quite shy. In recent years. I—

CHASE:

I don't see that.

TOKYO:

I'm very shy. Really? Yeah, I just have a good poker face. Okay. Yeah, like, really good. Maybe so yeah. But I have a lot of opinions in my head. And they very spicy so comes across. Like, I like to be very, like confrontational. But I really like her. Yeah. I was going to see that a part of when I knew that. I didn't actually understand how deeply I was craving the kind of like, connection with people. And I think it manifested I'll never forget, I remember after meeting you that day, and then we kept in touch. And I was like, Oh, wow, he's actually responding like people actually lately. I was like, Oh, this is going well. And I think I got a little bit too excited. And I had the best intentions, but I know it can start feeling a little bit creepy. And I and I, when I got off the phone after that conversation, I will remind you what the conversation was. I was like, Okay, I definitely like screwed that up. He's definitely not going to speak to me now. Like he doesn't really, what was it? I remember it was I think it was either my birthday or your birthday. I can't remember. But I was like, let's go to but I was just so like, you know, like, skipping like five stages. And I was just like, let's just do this. Let's go some way. I think that's when I thought about it. Like after you politely declined in what like not now. I actually was like, You know what, I know, maybe needed to hear that because I also used to struggle a lot while I still do with like setting boundaries. And I was like that's a healthy boundary. That's actually agreement like, this is not bad. Like, why are you wanting to like go somewhere with someone that you literally just met anyway, I think I was just like, so eager to seal the deal. Because I'd like to also believe that I have a good eye for things. I feel like when I recognize something that's great. I just want to like, you know, seal the deal.

CHASE:

do you remember why I said no. I think I was just focusing so much on like dealing with the rejection that I don't remember exactly how I was broke. I just had like no money and I was just like had a lot on like it was nothing to do with like you or a boundary crossed it or anything like that. It wasn't it wasn't anything to do with you at all. I didn't feel like that was inappropriate. But I thought it was very, like, kind and exciting. And you don't meet someone very often and like have a connection with them. And then they're like, let's go on holiday. Like it's random. And that's beautiful. Like, like I would say, yes, understand boundaries and assess situations respectfully. But now I'm so sure. I was like Nah, I'm just broke right now. Like, I can't make it. It wasn't a boundary crossed to me. I wasn't like, that's a bit weird. Like he's a weirdo. Like, no, not at all

TOKYO:

that is do you know, I've been feeling this whole time I really hope premature. I literally don't know you like I was like, yeah, it actually makes sense that you to come down. And then we went to Berlin. Yeah. And then we actually did it later. Yeah, it was great. Yeah, it was amazing. Yeah.

CHASE:

We got any questions for me?

TOKYO:

Do I have any questions for you? Are you? What is your experience been? Because obviously, like you are born and raised in London, so you've had like, all of these, like, transitions throughout your life and like, coming into yourself becoming an adult, all of those. How have you viewed like, how was your view of London? Sort of like shaped you? Like what do you think like those same questions you asked me? Do you think the answers have changed throughout different phases of your life? And

CHASE:

so I was born and raised in London in North London, Islington, to be more specific. North London's also the home of Adele, you know, one of the biggest stars. I like to say that because I feel like there's a lot of North London slander. Everyone's out here. So it's a great spot to yours, okay. But yes, I'm born and raised in London.

And then I went to Grenada when I was 10 and came back when I was 17. And I've been back since apart from two He is in Manchester. And I overall I do love London. I love the how big it is how many different characters there are, I feel like when I want to feel like a small fish in a big pond, I can feel that in London, but when I want to feel like a big fish in a small pond that can just stay in my area and where I know and bump into people that I know. But I, I can empathize with you, with London feeling very lonely. When I came back at 17, it was not easy. My living situation wasn't stable. It was just the it was really, really hard and really, really lonely. And I feel like I'm only now at 27... Finding a level of stability and understanding the importance of community and friendships and making time for friendships, similar to what you said about people not having time to invest in relationships and because of feeling because of dealing with life and because of

TOKYO:

capitalism, capitalists.

CHASE:

Yeah, exactly. talk a lot about that. Yeah. I'm now realizing how important it is to prioritize relationships to prioritize rest to prioritize connection, because those things just feel so good. When I look back on last year, and I think of all the things that felt really, really good, it was hanging out with my friends, it was being black pride, it was being in in the in the venue in the party, you know, those things felt really, really good conversations. So I'm really learning how to prioritize those better. But overall, I do, I do feel really grateful to live in London, we just have access to so many different things. Even this project that we're a part of, you know, we went to the workshops the other day that Dale put on, I just remember going home to think I'm so lucky to be a part of this and, and have these these spaces and these networks, especially being coming from Grenada, where, you know, being gay, being queer is just so undercover, because you know, it's legal out there. I just feel so lucky and fortunate to be able to live my life openly and have my relationships be open and not have that fear of you know, is anyone gonna find out and all that kind of stuff? So yeah, I think overall, I just feel lucky and grateful. I'm just learning how to maximize it, whilst being in London while existing in London, and prioritize love while being in London. But I love London,

TOKYO:

I feel grateful for London. I'm learning to love it. Yeah.

CHASE:

I think as well. Being in Grenada was out there for seven years. And I hated also many years ago. And I look back now and I just really wish that I had found moments of appreciation more, I think no matter where you are, I think you really have to make some effort to appreciate something about it while you're here. Because realistically, I think from the conversations that we have, I don't think you're going to be here forever. I don't think I'm gonna be here forever in London. So I think while we're here, we got to make the most out of it. You got to go to all the theater shows, you've got to go to all the parts. Yeah, eat all the food, you know?

TOKYO:

Yeah, that is true. I couldn't agree more. If I think about the fact of where I'm from, I'm from South Africa. As I said earlier on. If I'm being honest, I just feel like the social infrastructure isn't there. It's not there, because I think legality is one issue. And I'm not downplaying that at all. Because I know a lot of people, it's literally a case of it's a matter of life and death. But I feel like socially, people are progressive, but are they don't feel like I experienced them to be as progressive and I just feel like this whole process of like identity, and accepting identity and UK enjoying identity. It needs to be something where you feel like there's a firm foundation being enabled to exist. That was a big part. And I'm glad you said that. Because as much as I said, London is a lonely place. In terms of like making you feel like you're not abnormal, or I think like something's wrong with you. It doesn't do that London is one of those places where you can like, enjoy so many parts of your identity without it being a big deal. I've noticed like small changes, like I used to always cut my hair now. Like I'm experimenting with different hairstyles, and I don't think you have blonde hair or blonde some of them. Yeah, I would never have done that. Back home. Yeah, and not because people don't do it. I just feel like it's just like I said, like, the social infrastructure is just not there for me and maybe it is for other people, but like, I just didn't experience it like that. So yeah, like I'm happy to be here and I'm learning to enjoy it. Myself.

CHASE:

We're happy to have you. Happy anniversary. I love you.

TOKYO:

Happy anniversary. Love you too

DALE:

I like Tokyo talking about finding people who make you feel understood and seen. And Chase talking about prioritising connection. And expressing love and pouring into each other. It's so cute.

We have to find each other. Community building, particularly as Black queer people, needs to be intentional.

It doesn't happen by chance - you need to make the effort to form bonds like Tokyo and Chase's and Amar's and Saaqib's.

In many ways we are denied conventional community because of our marginalised identities.

I remember it was 2019, after my Grandma passed, when I started to make more Jamaican friends, and more Jamaican queer friends.

So I was meeting more Black queer men, it led me to Black Twitter - and we all know what Black Twitter's like — and Black Queer Twitter —and we all know what that's like.

Someone made a Twitter group for Black queer men in London and I thought: fuck it, I'll join that.

Four years later and the groupchat is still going strong.

It was through a snowball effect of joining that group that I made some of my closest friends. Shoutout to Markus and Shemar! Love you guys.

This episode is a bit like me, a bit of trauma and a bit of joy.

Hearing how bleak the world can be — like Rad's story — and also how much we can love and support each other... well, it's all quite a lot.

I'm dragging myself through therapy right now - I've been in and out since I was 17 - and I re-started recently.

This round is particularly challenging - cos I'm looking at parts of my experience that I never look at. It's been shaky recently, unpacking heavy stuff. But I'm getting through it. I know it's worth it in the long run.

I'm doing quite well. I have a successful work life. I am a proud Black and queer man. I have community.

And in finding my own orbit, after losing my grandma, I'm reconnecting with my own childhood dream..... of becoming an author.

I'm writing poetry — but no, I will NOT be sharing it on the podcast but it's on my Instagram, @dale_tg04

Poetry is what I do to help with my mental health. When I was going through a difficult patch, and off work for a while, my writing literally saved my life.

It was how I processed what I was going through in my mind.

It gave me something to wake up for every day - and it was part of my spiritual wellbeing.

I'm in a writing group with some friends now. And... I'm working on a novel.

I'm Dale Taylor-Gentles.

Thank you for listening to my episode of Queer Roots and Routes.

Stories of where we come from, and how we move in the world today.

If you're aged 16-25 and experiencing homelessness of any kind, there's a charity called [Centrepoint](#). They have a helpline where you can get confidential advice and support. And they provide homeless young people with accommodation, health support and life skills in order to get them back into education, training and employment.

A link will be in the show notes.

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