

## **StormMiguel Florez: I am a Trans and Queer Filmmaker**

**Announcer:** Hi there. I am Phillip Archer. My pronouns are he, him, his Lip Service, the podcast is about sharing our coming out stories one voice at a time. Give us a listen.

**Pamm Meyers:** Hi, everybody. I am Pamm Myers, the producer of Lip Service: The podcast of our Coming Out Stories. And I am delighted to be back here again with you today, sharing another story.

Today's guest is StormMiguel. Storm is a trans queer Chicana [sic] filmmaker, event producer, actor, and a lifelong musician. He has- they have, excuse me- they have directed the film called The Whistle, which is a documentary that you really need to see. It's a documentary of lesbian youth in Albuquerque in the 1970s and 1980s. I highly recommend it.

And Storm has been born and raised in Albuquerque, now living in San Francisco. So, Storm, welcome to the podcast. Thanks so much for joining us.

**StormMiguel Florez:** Thank you so much. And yeah, you had it right the first time, he/him pronouns are correct. And I'm just so glad to be here. Thank you so much, Pamm. This is a really great thing you're doing. These stories are so important, especially stories in places like New Mexico or places that aren't big cities and places that don't regularly get documented. So, I'm really excited that this podcast exists.

**Pamm:** Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, it's been, it really is an honor to be able to share these stories and put them out there for our community. So, thank you for that.

So how- what will your coming out journey like? How did that happen for you, Storm?

**StormMiguel:** Gosh, you know, it's a lifelong journey. There's so many coming outs. [laughs]

**Pamm:** There are multiple. Right.

**StormMiguel:** The very first coming out was me coming out as queer. So, I'm transgender and- transmasculine. I was assigned female at birth. And so, my first coming out was as queer, as a lesbian in the 80s. I identified as a lesbian or as a dyke. I came out when I was 15 years old. I went to Del Norte high school. And I had a very unique experience coming out there because I actually had a very vibrant community to come out into, and that was in 1987.

So, I met other girls at my school who I found out where were gay. That was the language we mostly used at the time, was gay - it was kind of that umbrella term. And initially I was kind of freaked out about it because I didn't want to deal with some things that I was already feeling. And, you know, had thought about. And then eventually just started to meet more people and started to come to terms with my own feelings, and then came out.

We actually, we had a term for it at the time. There was so much= Okay, so I just wanna say that like there was such a vibrant community that we had code, like just code that we used to protect each other, like language. And we actually had a whistle as well that we used to kind of find each other. And so, the reason I bring that up now is because what we said when somebody came out, or in our case, like the first time a girl kissed a girl, was that they were wrecked. [laughs]

**Pamm:** [laughs] Oh okay, wrecked.

**StormMiguel:** It sounds like uh, kind of like I've that people and they were like, ew that that sounds kind of gnarly. And actually, it was a really celebrated celebratory term.

And so, I was wrecked on May 22nd, 1987, I'll never forget it. And that was the first time I kissed a girl. And I never went back, really to... I never went back to thinking I wasn't queer. Let's just say that. And so, because I'm definitely at this point am pansexual and like all the genders, so and before that, I was definitely dating boys. But once I was wrecked, for the longest time, it was just like girls, girls, girls, girls, girls. And this community that I came out into, which was just other high school students, which was amazing. Like getting to be a teenager during my actual teenage years as a queer person feels like such a lucky and special thing. It's a unique thing. It shouldn't be. But for so many of us it is. So many queer people and trans

people through second, sometimes third adolescence because they didn't get to do that at the time that makes the most sense, when we were adolescents, the time that, you know, most straight kids get to do that. And so that was a really special thing to know other people, feel excited, to have my hormones raging and be able to be in an appropriate kind of setting for that and have a place to put that, I guess. And it was a very- it was a vibrant community, and we were all still dealing with the reality of homophobia, too. I don't wanna, you know, [laughs] I don't wanna like minimize that because we were all- Because there were so many of us and we were you know, we had this strong community, I think a lot of folks maybe were found out their parents, because they weren't just in it in isolation. So, parents saw friends come around and maybe sometimes would find notes and would find out about their kids. I personally just had some weird desire to share everything with my parents, as a teenager. I was one of those weird teenagers that was just like, "I really want to be close to my parents!" And unfortunately, it wasn't reciprocated in the same way. So, they weren't as interested in kind of knowing the things that were going on in my life. I think they just had a lot going on in their lives. But I couldn't keep it from them. And I knew that, even thinking back, like they probably would have liked it had kept it from them a little longer. But I was wrecked in May and came out to my parents probably in September. And I just didn't like keeping it from them. And that was really rough because, my mom especially, was really upset about it, really freaked out about it. My dad was kind of more chill about it. Like he was just like, "Well, okay, well this is you know-" he didn't really think, he was like "well it's not natural, but there's nothing wrong with it." My mom was like, "It's a sin!" [laughs] And made me go to therapy and also made me go to- weird thing, made me go to a modeling school. But it didn't really take. [laughs] I had to meet her after school one day. She's like, "You're gonna meet me at this place." And I was just like, "Mom, I'm not gonna meet you at modeling school." I was very butch and was just like, "no way." And I had a car. My dad sold used cars, so we all were lucky enough to have a car as teenagers. You know, basically, that was kind of hung over my head, like, 'You want to keep your car, you're gonna meet me.'

So, we got to the modeling school I was real upset, walked in, they took one look at me and said, "Hey! You know, we have acting classes." [laughter] And I was like, "Awesome! Let's hear about it!" My mom never spoke of it again. I never went back. That was that. [laughs]

**Pamm:** Oh wow. whole. Yeah. So, Mom had a hard time and was trying to make you fit into a mold that she had a perception of, she perceived, yeah.

How did the rest of your family and friends, I mean, everything else was...

**StormMiguel:** Yeah, my siblings were for the most part, okay. You know, I don't think anybody was like, thrilled. But I don't think- At that time, I don't think they all knew gay people, or knew that they knew gay people.

But like, And I got a lot of support, though, from my extended family. My sister actually was very supportive and always has been. Yeah, just overall, like it was kind of mostly a lot of support. My friends, my straight friends, the ones I was close to were great. They were fantastic. Like, I remember coming- I just remember- I can think of so many people that I, at some point came out to and there was just a lot of love and support there. And still very strange for Albuquerque, right, in the 80s.

And but, you know, and the kids at school, the ones who found out were not so great, like the ones that either I was kind of friends with or didn't know very well. So, we did get a lot of... we got a lot of bullying in school, my friends and I did. I know some of my friends got cornered by bullies, I got yelled at in the hallway, which was pretty humiliating, especially not being- like I wasn't trying to be out to people that didn't need to know. Like I wasn't trying to, like, run around school, like we didn't- we weren't running around with rainbow flags. We weren't doing all that. We just [inaudible] yeah, walking down the hallway, you know, with a friend from a class and hearing some jock scream, you know, "Stay away from the straight girls, dyke!" Or, you know, things like that. And those moments are always just like, [groans] I was always so nervous that I was just gonna lose so many friends when those types of things happened. And people didn't necessarily say anything, but they didn't necessarily you know, they weren't necessarily running away from me when those things happened, like the people that I was already friends with.

So, yeah, yeah.

**Pamm:** Now that was when at that time and correct me if I'm wrong, but at that time you came out as a lesbian, right?

**StormMiguel:** Yep.

**Pamm:** And then, I'm gonna to call it your second coming out when you wanted to, when you were ready to transition. How?

**StormMiguel:** Yeah. That might have been my third or fourth coming out at that point. [laughter] Let's see, I came out as a leather dyke at some point, came out as probably bi, [laughs] and then, but the next big coming out was being trans, yeah.

And that was a journey. Gosh, I know that in my early twenties I read Stone Butch Blues and that just really like- by Leslie Feinberg, and that just really like blew my mind. And it got me thinking about myself in ways that made a lot of sense. You know, I always did as a child, I always felt like a boy. And, you know, so my whole life I have been trans in some way, or I've had the trans experience. As a little kid, I was always being told I was in the wrong bathroom whenever I was in the women's room. I was always told by other kids- I was bullied by other kids because I was too masculine. And so, there was something really, just going back a little bit, amazing about being able to come out as a butch dyke because my gender, in a way, was really celebrated, even though I didn't understand that I was trans. But getting to just be masculine and getting- having language for that, and having people be attracted to it or find, you know, like, like being recognized that was really a wonderful thing for me, and it actually was enough at the time. And then I read the book, and I was just like, oh wow, yeah, I do feel like I maybe would go further into my masculinity in that presentation.

I was a singer, I'm a singer, and that was a big, scary thing for me. 'I don't want to lose my singing voice,' you know, I started to learn more about testosterone. I was like, 'I don't want my voice to drop. I don't want to lose my singing voice. I don't know if that's something really, I want, but I never stopped thinking about it for another, I don't know, ten plus years.

And then I came to San Francisco in '96, around there and started meeting trans people, and spent some time like just thinking more about it. And it wasn't until about the year 2000, 2001 that I really started considering would I want to start hormone placement therapy. And I thought about it solidly for a couple of years every day. I'd have to take breaks. Because I would just drive myself nuts every day, 'Do I do it? Do I don't? And there were times I was just like, "Okay, I need two weeks off of this, I'm not going to think about it. If I start thinking about it, I'm going to stop myself and

move on. We can get back to it in two weeks.” Because I was just- it took so much of my brain and my space, and I was so afraid of losing family, of losing community, of losing queer community, dyke community.

Yeah. It was just- that felt like there was a lot more at stake at that point for me in some ways. So yeah, around, gosh when was it? It was 2004. I decided that I was gonna do it. I realized it was taking too much of my energy and I was in this constant state of indecision and that was not allowing me to move forward with my life. And so, I made a decision and waited a while and I was like, I’m gonna give myself nine months. In that time, I’m going to just kind of prepare myself, I’m gonna tell my family, and I’m going to do the things that I feel like I need to do to get ready for that. And I did all those things, I came out to my family, I came out to friends, and start doing research, and then started taking testosterone, and again, like never have once regretted it. It was the right decision for me. My energy freed up, my purpose finally got to, you know, be more aligned outside of just like my gender. And that was a really wonderful gift to, you know, to finally have had the of strength and resolve to make that decision, and move on with my life, basically.

**Pamm:** How did your- how did how did everyone react to that around you?

**StormMiguel:** Well, I would say most of my friends were just great. Like I was in community already with people who got it. And there were some people who- it was at a time when there was a lot of concern, there was a lot of kind of heartache in community. There was this kind of, this sense that people like, ‘Oh! We’re losing all the butches!’ And other butches feeling like they were being abandoned, and me feeling somehow guilty about that. And, you know, looking back, I really- it makes me sad that we were so sad, because really so many of us were like choosing to live. So many of us were choosing to be our full selves. And, you know, for some- Yeah, there wasn’t a loss. Like, it didn’t have to be a loss. I didn’t have to feel like a loss. But it was. And same with family, you know, ‘We’re losing a daughter!’ or whatever. It’s like, no, you are getting a full human. Like you’re getting someone who’s choosing to live. And that’s a really beautiful and exciting thing.

I tried to have a lot of patience around that, as much as I could because I had been thinking about it a lot longer than, say, anyone in my family, of

course. So when I came out to them, I tried to have a lot of patience. You know, there got to a point where I needed to start really insisting that people use the right pronouns with me, and that they use my name. Although I have been going by Storm for a very long time. I go mostly by StormMiguel now. But when I was in my early twenties, I changed my name to Storm. And I think that was part of my gender journey too, and I didn't quite think it, realize it in that way, but I just knew that I did not resonate my very feminine given name. And so when I changed my name to Storm, that felt- that resonated. And with my family I'd say oh, "stage name," because I was a performer- so that they got used to hearing it and knew that I was going by that, and that my friends would call me that or call and ask for me or whatever. I just said is my stage name, that that's what a lot of people call me. But then when I came out, I was like, look, I need you to start calling me Storm. And you know, it was, that one everybody seemed to have a harder time within my immediate family. My extended family, I don't know, they didn't seem to have as much of a hard time. But I think immediate family, if you think about like your closest people, there's a sense of representation, there's a sense of ownership of each other like - You are mine. You are my sister. You are my brother. And there's this- like it's somehow tied to that right, to their identity. So I really tried to have some patience around that.

And you know, it's always it's been mostly- I never got disowned, you know, like there's the basics, you know, [laughs] the base is there, the foundation of continuing to have family and be close is there. And then we've struggled sense in a lot of ways to just- when I've had to assert myself or when I've had to assert that being trans is not something to tolerate, like I'm not here to be tolerated. And when I insist that I am respected, that is not a- you can't compare that to anything else in life. I'm saying this is a thing I need. You can't say that "well, we've you know, we've accepted you for being trans, so what else do you want" You know, actually, that can't be a thing. That can never be the thing that gets brought into argument. And it happens sometimes. And so just learning how to assert myself and- I'm the youngest, so that's always like a challenge to just like, take up that space and be like, you know, and I've had to and I've had to be real loud. And I think sometimes that gets looked at as being overdramatic or sensitive or, you know, but it's just like no when you're- when you're not heard or seen for so many years, you have to work really hard to be, and make a lot of noise, I think, yeah.

**Pamm:** Yeah, right. In order to be acknowledged for who you feel like you are, which is the only important thing, right? For you to be your true self. How do you how do you feel about- I mean there's- to kind of go back and touch upon what you said when there were a group of your friends who felt like, we're losing all the butches- that we don't- There's so much controversy, right? And- for lack of a better word at the moment, that even within our own community, we don't fully accept all aspects, all members of our community fully. And that's sad, I think. Hopefully someday we'll get beyond that. Hopefully someday we'll get beyond even needing to use pronouns or terminologies to define each other, other than we're just freakin human. Right? But how do you feel about all of that in your daily life now?

**StormMiguel:** [chuckles] I have less and less patience for it. I feel like, as, you know, people in this society during this time, we are really programed to be binary. And so even within LGBTQ community, we are, you know, it was gay and lesbian, right? And even within that there was still this patriarchal kind of system happening, and like whose voice was heard, who had, you know, who got access to resources and things like that. And you start to bring in, you know, things like race and ethnicity, and class, and that even gets further kind of less equally divided. And so, I do feel like we are- over time that binary continues to be- that that binary myth continues to be kind of busted. It's like- it is not binary. We are not binary. We have so much more than two things to choose from and to be. And so I feel like, you know- and there's a lot of people who are like, "Well, I'm stuck in my ways, and that's not how I grew up. And, you know, we have been asking our straight parents accept us outside of how they were brought up, and we have to be able to do that for the people who are younger than us.

I am learning constantly from youth. And I am learning constantly from my own, often initial resistance and rigidity because I inevitably have my kind of ways of thinking. And I'm constantly being challenged to expand that. And it's such a gift when it comes to like language and getting pronouns right, even outside of pronouns, I have, you know, come up with like or grew up with. And also, ways of identifying, like I constantly have to expand my way of thinking, and my way of responding in the world, and my way of addressing people according to how they want to be addressed.

And so, you know- and that is something I'm committed to for my life and to examine the places where I have resistance around that. So, you know, I

do feel like there- younger people are always gonna show us better- like more expansive ways to be. And in community when there's that non-acceptance, I think specifically around trans people in the LG- you know, in the gay and lesbian community, that we are all under the same umbrella and not just because there's- It's not even like- To me, it's like, what is that umbrella? What that umbrella is, is being people who are stepping out of the binary and what it's what is expected of us based on our gender. All LGBTQ people are pushing back against how we're supposed to be in a heteronormative world. Right?

**Pamm:** Right.

**StormMiguel:** Boys are supposed to act a certain way, look a certain way and like girls. Girls are supposed to act a certain way, look a certain way and like boys. They're going outside- They're being gender non-conforming. We're all being gender non-conforming when we are going against that narrative. So even if you're not trans, the thing we have in common is that we are going against that and we have experienced oppression and discrimination based on going outside of what is expected of us based on our gender. And so that's a thing that I wish people would understand more, that it doesn't matter even how you, if you identify as a heterosexual trans person, even right, you are still going outside of- And so people say, well, you know, those people don't belong under this either. But no, it's not just about our orientation, it's not just about who we are attracted to. It's about what we are- what's expected of us and what we're not doing.

**Pamm:** Right, exactly. Yeah. Do you have anything that you want to mention or say while we are here that we've not had a chance to talk about yet? You've talked about your multiple coming out journeys, which as we know it happens every time you meet somebody new, technically, you're coming out right? Is there anything else that you'd like to touch upon?

**StormMiguel:** Two things. One, I kind of wanna touch back on the kind of- I mentioned coming out as a leather dyke in the early 90s. And I also want to say it was a very similar thing to coming out as trans in community. Some of the pushback was very similar in that, you know, there was kind of a second wave feminism that was not happy with, you know, a group of young women who were, you know, having kinky experiences. And sometimes you know, bringing those into public- bringing that

presentation into public spaces, and talking about it, and being really out and queer about it. And there was this idea of, 'well that's just abuse.' And not understanding that- for me, within that world, I learned more about consent and negotiating and communication and safe sex than I learned just being queer, just being a dyke, just being- Before I entered that community, there was no talk of safe sex. There was no talk of what is consent really mean and how do you negotiate things and how do you find out what it is your partner wants and how do you express the things that you want? And so again, there was so much expansiveness happening right there that it felt very sad to me that- that there were so many people were shut down to it, because they just saw- in their minds it was just a bunch of people hitting each other. [laughs] And you know, in our minds were like- we are engaging in sexual activity and play that is really thought out, really careful, really loving, and really helping people to have their needs met and their desires met. And we're not just randomly smacking each other. We're like learning technique and doing things really safely. And so, you know, there's just yeah, there's just so much- there's so many aspects of our community that I feel like we could really learn and expand from and that would enrich all of our lives if we understood, took the time to understand, and learn about each other.

**Pamm:** Yeah, and listen.

**StormMiguel:** Yeah. That's important to say about my coming out journey as well. And other than that, I would love to be able to just briefly talk about my film, *The Whistle*.

**Pamm:** Yes, please do. Thank you. Because it's on topic. *The Whistle* is about lesbian culture in the 70s and 80s in Albuquerque. It is about a time in my life when I got to be- when I got to come out in Albuquerque and the whistle itself was code we used to find each other. It was a thing you had to learn. It was a technique of whistling that you- it was a rite of passage to learn it. And it was a way we could find each other. If you heard the whistle- was very high pitched so people weren't listening for it. I don't even know if you can hear this, but [whistles a high-pitched sound]. Maybe that'll come across.

**Pamm:** Yeah!

**StormMiguel:** But you know, that wasn't a thing that- if I made that sound, most people aren't gonna hear it unless their ear is kind of trained to it. So that's kind of the premise- that was like the overall premise of why I started to make the film. I was like, 'let's go and see if we can find out who brought the whistle into community.' But it ended up being so much more. I ended up talking to all these people who- all these young- all these people who were young women at the time, or who were teenagers at the time, and got to hear their journeys and got to hear all of the ways that our stories connected and all of the things that we were going through that maybe we weren't talking to each other about at the time, but that we were all experiencing.

There was a thing that happened where a lot of- like a handful of us were going- our parents made us go to therapy, and this is in the 80s, and each of us had the same positive response from our therapist, which just seems unheard of for that time. But there was the way that we were being supported in that world and in mental health that I don't think is a very common story for teenagers at that time for anything in mental health. Right? So like that wasn't something I went in expecting to know about. We talk about queer- other queer family members, we talk about the ways we partied, the ways we met each other, places we went, what we had to deal with our families, what we had to deal with at school. I actually interviewed a teacher who was out at the time, Havens Levitt, and we got to hear what her experience was, and then her relationships with the students at Del Norte at the time - for other folks that were in the film. And so, it's just a really wonderful, wonderful experience getting to talk to everybody, reconnect with folks, and meet folks that I hadn't met before who were older than me, who were the people who helped me come out that I didn't even know them at the time. But because of who they were and everything that they went through, I got to have the experience that I had coming out as a student, high school student in the 80s. And The Whistle is available to watch on PBS.org for free. So, if you want to check it out, go online, pbs.org, and just look for The Whistle, my name: StormMiguel Florez, and I would love for you to see it. It's an hour long, it's a quick watch and it features Albuquerque queers.

**Pamm:** Awesome. Thank you so much for mentioning that, Storm. Thank you so much for sharing your story and sharing your information. And thanks, everybody, for listening.

**StormMiguel:** Thank you so much Pamm!

**Pamm:** You're welcome. Thank you.

**Phillip Archer:** Thanks for listening to our coming out stories. Please support us by making a donation on our website, [LipService.media](http://LipService.media) and please follow us on iTunes, Spotify, or wherever you find your favorite podcasts. And don't forget to share us with all your friends.