Maxx LeBlanc

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Lafayette, LA

Interviewed by: Gabrielle Hoffpauir-Rosatto

Transcriber: Gabrielle Hoffpauir-Rosatto

Editor: Zack Stein

Ethnographic Preface:

As part of the ongoing LGBTQ+ Archives Project, Special Collections of Edith Garland Dupré Library and the Guilbeau Center for Public History are collecting oral histories documenting the region’s LGBTQ+ community. Project Co-Director Dr. Zack Stein and Undergraduate Research Assistant Gabrielle Hoffpauir-Rosatto attended Pride Acadiana 2023 and interviewed various attendees for an oral history harvest.

 TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [GH]

Interviewee initials: [ML]

GH: Okay, today is Saturday, June 24, 2023. I am here with Maxx, what's your last name?

ML: LeBlanc.

GH: LeBlanc, okay. All right. So before we get started, I just have to make you aware that you can stop at any point, you can tell us if you want to skip a question.

ML: Okay.

GH: We will send this to you to be approved. And before we put it on the interwebs, and all that stuff. And yeah, we just want make sure you okay with that?

ML: Sounds good.

GH: Okay. All right. So describe what it was like growing up LGBTQ+.

ML: Just in general?

GH: In general.

ML: Well, I mean there's a lot to talk about there. Because I mean, for the most part, I guess what one would call closeted that was basically me growing up for the most part, you know. My immediate family, I guess, like my dad, he was the one that really was not accepting. That's why I just kind of felt obligated to keep it to myself. But what made me okay with myself was the fact that everybody but him was very accepting. And even if I wouldn't openly say who I am, they kind of knew, and almost hinted that, like, there's no judgement.

GH: Good.

ML: So it was very great growing up with just close friends and cousins, families that were all very okay with it. So I knew that when the time was right for me to actually be open with everyone, I wasn't afraid of repercussions.

GH: Yeah, absolutely. So did you notice a difference whenever you came to Louisiana versus being an Arizona with how accepting people were?

ML: Yes.

GH: Really?

ML: So just in general, like not even anything to do with privacy in general, people tend to judge me more here.

GH: Oh, okay yeah.

ML: That's something I've noticed. It's not even with, you know, what you believe in or whatnot, it can be as simple as how you dress, how you talk. You know what I mean? It's a lot more "you do you" in Arizona; be happy, just in general. But yeah, especially earlier years, I do notice was a little bit more, you know, like walking on eggshells around here is what it felt like. That's how it felt like in the beginning, for sure.

GH: What do you think is the best part of being LGBTQ+.

ML: So this is actually my first Pride event. Ever.

GH: Nice.

ML: Because I've never, you know, it's not that long ago when I was open with everybody. I knew I was true to myself, you know, just who I let into my walls is a whole different story. But it's a lot more than just from what I've observed. It's a lot more than just like sexuality and things like that. It's just from what I've observed, Pride just means be yourself. Be happy. Express yourself, be who you want, dress how you want. It is the zone of judgment-free. Be what you want.

GH: Something I've noticed is that there's so there's a lot more allies here than I thought there would be.

ML: Right.

GH: There's a lot of queer people, but there's also a lot of allies. That's very refreshing. So kind of on that topic. What does Pride mean to you? And why do you think it's important here, specifically?

ML: To me, it just means like it says, Pride, to be proud. You're proud of who you are, how you are, how you're born, how you are today, every aspect of yourself. I feel like no one should be ashamed of it, feel embarrassed of it. Be scared of it. Just be proud of who you are deep down. Just express it. Like it's important here because I've been seeing a lot of rapid change. And it's very important that it's growing here. I see the growth and I love it. It's important to spread it everywhere.

GH: Agreed. Do you see a difference in the way LGBTQ+ people live now in Louisiana versus whenever you came out?

ML: Yes, it's just growth. Overall, way more widespread. I'm not as afraid to hold hands with my boyfriend now versus back then. You know what I mean? Definitely.

GH: I think COVID changed a lot.

ML: That too. I feel like a lot of people did a bit of soul searching during COVID.

GH: Yeah (*laughs*), agree!

ML: Take some time to sit down and think about life for a moment, you know.

GH: Why do I hate gay people so much? Oh, I might be gay! (*laughs*) I get that. So, hey.

ML: Somebody over there was hugging his girlfriend. I was like, “aww so nice.”

GH: (*Laughs*) Do you know about like the recent political stuff going on with like the book bans and legislation and the sports bans and all that?

ML: Not too much, I'm gonna be honest.

GH: So um, there's been a lot of stuff in Louisiana of people trying to have like LGBTQ books or like racial books banned, things they identify as LGBTQ or racial.

ML: Okay, gotcha.

GH: They've been having like a lot of trans sports bans and just other legislation like Don't Say Gay and stuff like that, that they're trying to revive. There's a lot of people who are trying to block it. Do you have any thoughts or feelings about like those kinds of things going on?

ML: So, yes. Okay, the most neutral feeling I have is just let everybody do what they want and be happy. Because there's so many books about different topics and politics and things like that. But when it comes to Pride, they want to like, shut it down? No. Because we're not all going to agree. Even if they're not allies. You don't have to be an ally. The way I see it is, you don't have to be an ally for us. But you also don't have to be... I'm trying to say a PG word, you know. You have to be, you don't have to come against us either. You don't have to come at us, attack us, you don't have to shut us down. Because we're here. It's way more common than people think. And if it's not, if they're not in Pride, from what I experienced, a lot of them are hidden in the closet. So it's a lot more common than people think, and people should just let people do what they want to do. Express what they want to express. We do have freedom of speech, and that includes books, that includes everything. Absolutely against those bans. Just if it's not affecting you personally in your life, don't go out of your way to try and harm others. Like why do you care. If you're not in Pride, if you're not an ally, if it's not affecting you, just stay out of it. It's almost like that old saying, "If you've got nothing nice to say, don't say nothing at all." It's a similar concept with this.

GH: You can also use slang and if you need to swear, like that's okay.

ML: Okay. (*Laughs*)

GH: (*Laughs*) So have you been to any like queer places in Lafayette? Like Bolt, or I know there's a couple places like that. What is your experience of places like that in Louisiana?

ML: Bolt? I have been to Bolt for the first time this year, actually, in like January. IT was my first time ever going to something in Lafayette like that. And the vibes there were similar to Pride events. It's like as soon as you walk through his doors, it's like all judgments drops. No room for judgment here. You know what I mean? Like, that's the vibes I get in like Bolt, and things like that. But it’s like a little safe haven for people, you know what I mean, just go do what you want to do. Be who you want to be. Laugh. Good vibes.

GH: Yeah, absolutely. Have you gone to school here at all?

ML: Like College?

GH: I know, you've only been here a couple of years. But like, have you gone to any kind of…

ML: …yes…

GH: … technical school, or anything like that?

ML: After high school? No.

GH: After high school no? Nothing here?

ML: No.

GH: But you went to high school here?

ML: For a short period.

GH: Okay. What support have you seen from schools and educational institutions here? Anything?

ML: So I actually went to school in Abbeville.

GH: Okay. No that’s fine.

ML: And none.

GH: None.

ML: I'm gonna be honest, none. That wasn't even a concept, that wasn't even a thing to talk about. And, in fact, it was more like bullied to be honest, as from like, authorities there. And it was never something that was enforced. The fact that that was never brought up. To be honest, it was like a hidden thing. At least for the school I went to, and I was only there for like a year. But yeah, definitely.

GH: What's your hope for the future of the LGBTQ+ community in Lafayette?

ML: Keep doing what we're doing. Keep spreading. Keep being you, keep being happy. Because ultimately, it's kind of like I said earlier, it's not really to win everybody on our side, it's just to understand our point of view, which is just that we want to live the way we want to live without fear of judgment. I want to be able to be with my boyfriend without feeling like eyes are on us. We are different than other people. I don't feel different because it's just as common, in my opinion, from what I've experienced. Because I travel a lot; it's way more common than people realize. I just hate the feeling of like, "Oh, you should we be holding hands right now? Should we not be?" The feeling of, I don’t know, having to live an alternative way just because of who I am?

GH: Exactly.

ML: I don't like that. It puts a lot of pressure on relationships as well, especially in the public eye. I mean, of course, if you're strong enough, that won't affect you. But it's still just a fact that you can expect something that come at you in public, and it's unfortunate. But I want us to spread so far that it's not a with us or against us, it's like you’re with us or let's just live side by side.

GH: Right.

ML: There's no reason to be against us.

GH: Agreed.

ML: Just like we're not against them. We're not against straight people. Great for you.

GH: Yeah, I had somebody earlier say, "We don't want the world to be painted in rainbows. We just want to be on the same playing field."

ML: Exactly. That's a good way to put it. That’s exactly what I was getting at.

GH: Do you think that there's like a certain kind of like strength that you have to have in order to be LGBTQ+, whether you're out or still closeted?

ML: Yes, you definitely have to learn how to swallow things. Don't mean that (*both start laughing*) … I meant like, verbally, things will be coming at you, you gotta learn how swallow it, and just deal with it. Don't let nothing affect you personally, and don't let nobody change your perception of yourself. And if you're with somebody, beautiful, just definitely don't let words and things affect your relationship either. You basically got to have the stomach for it. You got to have the confidence in yourself, and gotta be headstrong to be able to just push all those negative thoughts aside until this is the new norm. I feel like it is already, but when it's widespread enough to where we're like, same playing field.

GH: Yeah. Did I ask this? Yes, I did. So, I’m trying to think of what I was thinking … Do you think events like Pride are furthering that in the community, like that acceptance? Do you think like--obviously, they're important, but why do you think they're important? Like, what about it do you think is … is it like the visibility?

ML: From what I've noticed today, for example, Pride events attract more than people in the community. People just passing through, and just kind of witnessing the smiles everywhere. No one's here frustrated, no one's here fighting, no one's here judging; you don't even have to be in the community to realize that aspect of life of just stop judging others regardless of sexuality, regardless of communities, just the general aspect of life: just learn to be happy. And you really see that a lot in these communities and these events, and people who are just casually wandering through, but like they pick up those vibes. They see that to be honest, whether they're in it or not. And I think it's important to spread that positivity because this is all just a positive festival.

GH: People are scared of what they don't know.

ML: Exactly. And this is a very good eye opening for everybody. Even for me, because it's my first Pride event. Just seeing everybody is ... It's what I expected, but not at the same time. It's great; definitely want to attend more.

GH: Yeah, me too. All right. Okay, that's all I have for you.