

Queerology 71

Kashif Andrew Graham is a Librarian

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Matthias: Hey, friends. This is Matthias Roberts, and you're listening to Queerology, a podcast on belief and being. This is Episode 71.

Kashif: Yes, it was worth it because the peace that I feel that I am my authentic self is, it doesn't compare to anything else that I am me.

Matthias: Kashif Andrew Graham is the outreach librarian for religion, and theology at Vanderbilt Divinity Library in Tennessee. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, and Spanish from CUNY Lehman College.

Matthias: He received a Master of Arts in church ministry from the Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tennessee, and he's about to graduate in May from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville with a Master of Science in Information Sciences.

Matthias: I am so excited to have Kashif on the podcast today. Kashif, and I have been friends for several years when he reached out to me with the question that so many of us have when we're first beginning our coming out journeys of, is it okay to be a gay person of faith?

Matthias: From that conversation, we kept in touch. It's been so exciting to watch him go through his coming out journey over the last several years. And when he gets into that story throughout this podcast, he did want me to mention now, he's single so, all you guys out there, check out Kashif.

Matthias: In this episode, we talk about Kashif's journey towards coming out, and what that was like for him. And then, we get into a conversation about the need for diversity within our library systems, especially within our theological libraries, and some of the work that Kashif is doing to make that happen is really cool stuff.

Matthias: I don't have any announcements for today so, let's just go ahead and dive in. Kashif, hi. Welcome.

Kashif: Hi, it's finally happening.

Matthias: It is. I'm so excited.

Kashif: Same here.

Matthias: Thanks for joining me.

Kashif: Absolutely.

Matthias: So, to start with the question I ask everyone, how do you identify? And then, how would you say that your faith has helped form that indeed?

Kashif: So, I identify as, I use the term queer quite often but cisgender, Jamaican American. I am okay with African American, black. It really depends on the scholarship. Okay? Like, I will be anything of those sorts if I need to get a scholarship. But so, it depends.

Kashif: But cisgender, African American, male. I identify as sort of Pentecostal, charismatic. I still embrace those distinctives. And I think that the way that I would say my faith is really informing my identity is, this understanding that gender can be very fluid. And I definitely ... This idea of also gender as on a spectrum, I think that that's something learning that in seminary that's something that really moves me.

Kashif: I guess, I'm sort of also moving towards gender fluidity. That is sort of forthcoming. So, that's how I would say that my faith has really informed my identity.

Matthias: I mean, I know that you have been on a journey over the last few years in coming out. And like figuring all these things out, you came out while you were in seminary.

Kashif: Yes.

Matthias: And I know little bits of that journey, because I feel like we, I don't know if I can say we walked together on that.

Kashif: We did.

Matthias: But.

Kashif: You were there. You were there. I emailed you, and like, yeah, you were there.

Matthias: Okay.

Kashif: Absolutely, claim it. Go ahead.

Matthias: Yeah, but I would love to hear some of that story, and what that experience has been like, and kind of, and then where you are now 'cause it has been a journey.

Kashif: It has been a journey. I left New York in 2014 to go to a seminary, a Pentecostal seminary. And I was on my way to becoming this really great father, a husband. I was driving a Honda CRV that I almost ... I was trying to get the DVD package because I was like, within

a year, I'm going to have kids. Get married, and have kids, settle down and get a pastorate somewhere.

Kashif: And in the middle of my journey, I really felt my seminary journey, I felt that things were falling apart. I remember being in a particular class where the professor started to say, just sort of started preaching in class, which happened a lot. And she was saying, "You feel faithless, you feel that your faith is being deconstructed. My message for you today is stay at the tomb, stay at the tomb."

Kashif: And I took that to heart. It really moved me. So, I stayed there, and I started to ask more questions. Actually, I'll tell you this. This will give you ... You'll get a kick out of this. This will give you the kick.

Kashif: It was actually one night, I was working at the library, and it was very slow, and I was friends with Jonathan Martin on Facebook and I saw ... I was scrolling through my Facebook feed. Of course, he has proximity. Jonathan Martin has proximity to our relationship with some of the church of God churches, and he went to the Pentecostal Theological Seminary, which is where I went.

Kashif: And I was scrolling through my Facebook feed, and I saw that someone had tagged him in something that I thought looked, it didn't fit the image of the people that I thought he associated with. Again, you have to remember that at that point in my journey, I was still not really thinking in a very broad way. Still what I call, I'm still claiming some sort of deliverance from "Homosexuality." So that's kind of where I was.

Kashif: And I saw this picture of someone who was thanking him for staying with them through their coming out journey. And I looked at this person, and I'm like, who is Trey Pearson? Who is this? I didn't know who that was. I had listened to Caleb, those things in a while, and there was CCM music in a while.

Kashif: And I clicked on Trey Pearson's page, and I'm reading this post, and I was horrified 'cause I thought, this is the worst thing ever. How could you? And I'm reading through, and reading some of his story, and I actually saw your picture as one of his friends, and I clicked on your page.

Kashif: I was looking through. I made it to your website, and my heart is racing at this point. Okay, because I'm thinking it was like looking at explicit material at work or something. Because I was thinking somebody is going to walk by, and ask me, what is on level ground?

Kashif: Like, what are these things? And probably try to pick a fight with me, and say, it's impossible to be both queer, and like it was these things were all brand new to me. And I remember reading through, and thinking, how could this be possible?

Kashif: I didn't know that they were people who sort of had formed a community like this. But it was through that, through your website and watching the interview with Garrett Conley going to read Boy Erased. Then, I read that in four nights, and sobbed. And I read it in my office at Lee, and just, I mean it was really pulling things apart for me.

- Kashif: Because even though I hadn't gone to conversion therapy formally, a lot of the rhetoric that people used in my church to try to "help me". That was the language of conversion therapy.
- Kashif: So, getting to listening to the podcast, listening to interviews, and reading really brought me to a place where I started to ask a lot more questions, and I was still going to a counselor at the time in Chattanooga.
- Kashif: And he pushed things into this very usual narrative that I had lacked contact with my male counterparts in developmental years, and now this desire had become sexualized, and yada, yada. He didn't really listen to me, but he told me what I felt like I needed to hear at the time.
- Kashif: It was actually my pastor who was pastoring a very small church in Cleveland that is more liturgical. Just it was him who, when I told him that I was going to this counselor, he was trying to get me to see someone else, and he was saying, "This person doesn't have to be a person of faith. Let's not be too quick to put a label on things." Because I had come up to him afterwards and said, "I'm healed. I'm healed. I'm good to go. I'm ready. I'm ready to get married."
- Kashif: And he was like, "Let's hold on. Let's not put a label on this. Let's press into things." And he was one of the first people that actually was engaging me, and encouraging me to keep seeking the answer to my question, is it possible to be both queer and a Christian? That was the sort of prevailing question for me about 2015-2016.
- Kashif: So, I kept doing more reading, and trying to find people to converse with. You were actually one of the few, because there was no one in my community. I mean, I didn't know who those ... I didn't know where to find them. I was in a very conservative southern town, and just, I didn't know.
- Kashif: And getting to talk to my pastor who was sort of like, secretly affirming. There was another faculty member, and they were the first people that I came out to when I sort of said, "I think I'm ready. I think that this is it for me, and this is my identity."
- Kashif: And I'll tell you this too. I remember going to dinner at this restaurant in Cleveland, where a lot happened, and maybe we'll touch on that in our conversation today. But I had dinner with him, and I couldn't say the words to him. I wanted desperately to say, "This is what I'm dealing with." Because I was struggling, Matthias with such a great depression.
- Kashif: There was so much that I didn't know, what would this look like? Could I have a successful life? I mean, there were no examples. Like I just, I had nothing really. And I sat there across from him at that table, and it's like the words were in my mouth, but they couldn't escape. And he said them. He said, "You said it. You're trying to navigate, and figure out what to do. You want to do the right thing."
- Kashif: And he said to me, "There are a bounds, but the bounds are not nearly as narrow as we have defined them." And he was the second person in Cleveland that I came out to. So, I

then started coming out very slowly to some of my dearest friends. One of my friends in Cleveland, who is an engineer. I came out to her at breakfast, and she was so supportive.

Kashif: My pastor, and this faculty member, but they could only be secretly supportive otherwise, they would lose their jobs. So, I came out to them. And then as you saw in December, of 2017, I wrote on my blog. That's the most controversial post or thing I had ever posted on social media, which was, "Yes, I'm gay." That was the title of the post, and I posted that at night.

Kashif: So, it took a while. I felt like it was the time to do it. I felt like it was the next right move. And so, I posted, and I went to bed. And I got up the next morning, and it was a mixed review. Mind you at this point in time, all of the people from my childhood Jamaican church, from the church that I left in 2014, were all still on my Facebook. So, they all saw the post, and many of them decided to write very divisive things.

Kashif: And people showed it to my parents. I had written by the way to my parents about two weeks earlier, and told them, and my mom decided not to respond, which that didn't really surprise me, but it was a very painful journey I think for them. But everybody saw it from my church, but I wanted them to because this was now my declaration that this is who I am, and I believe that God, not only ...

Kashif: I moved from this sense of, do you approve of me God? To, I am made in your image, and I am fearfully and wonderfully made. If we can sort of take that evangelical motto. But taking that, and I think moving to a place of self affirmation, that I'm made in God's image, I think that that was key for me. So, that's why I posted that for everybody to see.

Kashif: There were many people, the episode where you were talking to Jennifer Knapp, and she was saying that she couldn't suffer the people that she had been with before. She just couldn't suffer them. I understood that, and I felt like that was what I went through. I couldn't suffer some of the people so, some of the people that were around me when I made my coming out post. They never said anything, and silence ended up being their statement.

Kashif: That they were not affirming, but didn't really know how to say, didn't really know how to tell me or opted not to, or maybe felt that somehow it would never come up. But in my inner circle, I didn't need silence. I needed my community to rush towards me and say, "We love you. We celebrate you. We celebrate all of you."

Matthias: Yeah. Goodness. Like first, congratulations. That's, I mean ...

Kashif: Thank you. Thank you.

Matthias: ... I think coming out, anytime someone comes out is worth celebrating, and celebrating again, and again, and again, because ...

Kashif: Yes.

Matthias: ... it is such a huge thing to say to the world that this is me.

Kashif: Yes.

Matthias: This is who I am, and it's a beautiful thing. So, yeah, congratulations, and you mentioned there's a need to have community rush toward us, and say, "We affirm you. We love you. We want you here."

Matthias: When we were talking a little bit earlier before we started recording, you also mentioned some of the challenges in finding a community living in the south, being a black man and coming out as gay. Like that all presents some challenges.

Kashif: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Matthias: How was that? Did you have a community who came rushing towards you?

Kashif: I didn't, which was pretty tough. For a while I felt like it was just me even though it wasn't. There were people. There were some people, a few. So, I'd like to, let me just highlight that. My younger sister has been one of the most supportive.

Kashif: I mean, I remember where I was. I was cleaning my bathroom in Cleveland when I sort of, this is before my post when I told her, and I was ready to sort of say goodbye. I honestly was because that is the culture that I come from.

Kashif: A very Jamaican, West African culture where Caribbean West African culture, where it's people leave. It's, you forsake family, and follow Christ. That is the doctrine. So, I was very much prepared for my sister, my younger sister to reject me, and that would be it for us. And she shocked me by being so supportive.

Kashif: And so really, I felt like I was so thankful to have her in my camp. So, all of the professor that I told you about, the pastor, my dearest engineering friend. That was wonderful that they were already. There were a few people so, I felt like if anything I would have them.

Kashif: But after my coming out post, the people that had been my community, were all very conservative, non affirming, and they still, I think wanted to be in my life, but I kind of had to say, "You can be here but you're not going to be in my inner circle, because just this is not what I need right now."

Kashif: I don't need people to tell me, we see beyond, we see all of you, we see beyond this. No, I need you to see this. I need you to see my sexuality, and love, and not only accept, but celebrate it with me. I don't need you see [inaudible 00:18:25], I need to see this. People try to use that as a cop out.

Kashif: Always, I see you beyond. I see you in your home but no, you don't. No, you don't. See this, look at this. This is what I'm telling you. Look at this.

Matthias: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kashif: And so, I kind of had to really, had to challenge people. I feel like in the south, I live in Nashville now, which is, it's a burgeoning city. It seems like everybody and their mom is moving to Nashville. But things still really fall along racial lines here.

Kashif: And I remember writing this post or posting this on Instagram that it was like being in a house, or being outside of a house, and looking in through the window and seeing all of

the queers, if you will, all of the gay folk. Seeing people that I should be with, maybe. Seeing them in the house. I knew where they were, but I didn't know how to find them. That was the way that I put it.

Kashif: I didn't know how to reach them. I didn't know how to touch them. How do you make connection? And I remember even posting on, there was this sort of secret Facebook page that I was a part of that many people from a previous organization that I belonged to were on that page as well.

Kashif: And whenever people move to new cities they post and say, "Hey, I'm in Seattle. Are there any people here?" Just to get and start to get to know people. So, I'd seen other people do it, and I did it as well. When I moved to Nashville, I thought this is great. I'm going to at least get to connect with some people.

Kashif: It was kind of a challenge for me to see, I could see how many people had seen my post, and didn't respond that lived in Nashville. So that was a big challenge for me, because I was trying to reach out, and make connections. And I know sort of looking at things now, I think that many of those people have experienced or are experiencing the same thing that I am, and are not yet at the place to be able to reach out and invite others. That they're still looking for a community, a community of their own. Maybe that's it. I don't know.

Kashif: So, it's definitely, it has been a very, very challenging experience, and I didn't really have that community rush towards me. I would say that I have sort of friends in pockets, which I really celebrate that I'm finally meeting people in different places, whether it's at the Vanderbilt Divinity School where there are so many great people that I'm getting to connect with finally.

Kashif: At church, which I don't go regularly because it's the church that I've been sparingly attending, is it's a progressive church, but it isn't very diverse. And so, that's been a challenge for me. But there are people there that I know as well.

Kashif: And then, on campus. At Vanderbilt, there is the KC Potter Center, which was a great resource to me because I didn't know where else to find people. So, I just walked in there. That the KC Potter center is the Office of LGBTQI plus Life.

Kashif: So, walking in there and getting just sitting down with one or two people, the director, the assistant director and just talking to them. That was also very, very helpful when I moved here. Just to talk about like anxieties. But I think I'm at a much better place now going to different socials, and ...

Kashif: But a large part of the challenge has been, I am not someone who frequents clubs so, there is play, there are other gay clubs and bars in Nashville. I'll go, but that's not my home. I don't feel at home there. So, that sometimes presents an additional challenge, because you kind of go, "Where am I supposed to meet queer folks, otherwise?"

Kashif: So that's kind of been my challenge. A part of, I think my calling is to pioneer a community. My name also Kashif means discover, it means revealer, it means the one

who knows about things that other people do not know, and I particularly like that definition.

Kashif: But it also means pioneer, and I think perhaps that's something that I will do, is to pioneer a community of sorts. I don't know quite what that will look like, but that I think is definitely in the horizon for me.

Matthias: I mean, you just started a new job as a librarian, as a theological librarian.

Kashif: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Matthias: And another thing that we were talking about a little bit was this quest that you're kind of on to start creating more diversity within theological libraries, and then the challenges that you ran into with that. Could you talk about that a little bit?

Kashif: Absolutely. So, I think that, and I can answer that sort of in a two fold way. I'll say, I'll just speak to diversity and librarianship is particularly challenging. What comes to mind? What is that ... ? I don't know what your experience has been like with librarians with libraries, but for many people ...

Matthias: I used to work in a library.

Kashif: Oh, wonderful. Okay, you can gold star, gold star.

Matthias: [crosstalk 00:24:13].

Kashif: okay, great. Excellent. I did not know that so, this is wonderful. So, it's just okay. So, you have a little bit of a leg up, at least and looked at this, but librarianship, libraries, especially academic librarianship is still almost 90% white.

Kashif: And libraries are dominated by, in terms of staffing, middle aged white females. And it presents a challenge when we're trying to serve a student body, and there's really only one demographic of people.

Kashif: And so, of course, there's the American Library Association, the ACRL American college and research libraries. Like they have their initiatives, diversity initiatives that some of them are problematic, that's fine, but there are efforts being made to diversify Library and Information Sciences.

Kashif: But you can imagine then, I mean, I've read a wealth of articles of people of color that work in libraries, and they talk about the micro aggressions, the challenges in that they feel that things are more about a cultural currency in the same way that Austin Channing Brown talks about this in "I'm still here." That everybody, and most people in the room can relate to one thing, and the other people who don't get that are left out and people just assume that their experience is universal. That's definitely a big challenge in libraries.

Kashif: But speaking to theological librarianship, I think and even in this collection, this is what I'm going to spend this year, and the rest of this year doing is building a collection of

homiletics, and pastoral care and pastoral practical theology resources for queer people who are preparing to minister to other queer people.

Kashif: And let me just say, I also, I use the term queer to sort of encompass everyone or many people in the community. So, I hope that's not offensive to anyone but that's how I use it. So, let me just, I'll phrase it like this also, resources for LGBTQI plus people who are preparing to minister to LGBTQI plus people, and beyond really.

Kashif: And we need more marriage and family therapy, relationship resources for us, for our community. We don't have enough. A lot of what you'll find in theological libraries are apologetics writing queer readings of other sermons, and scriptures, and the scriptures and things like this, writings in defense of. But we needed more tools, I would say, to enrich as we go out into the field and work.

Kashif: So, I'm going to be building that collection at Vanderbilt. And I'll tell you from my few days of having started and looking, it's going to present. There's going to be quite a challenge, but it definitely can be done. So, this message is also to everyone that's listening. More people need to be writing on this.

Kashif: I mean, we just don't have enough, and it's a burgeoning field. Of course, we have works like modern kinship, which just came out. I'm very excited about that. So, we need more. We need more, and I look forward to the furtherance of this year. That's what I'll be working on, and doing more things like this, podcast and interviews. So ...

Matthias: Yeah.

Kashif: ... yeah.

Matthias: This is so exciting to even know like there's just even one seminary out there where someone is doing this work.

Kashif: Yes.

Matthias: I'm sure there are others too, but it highlights that, the truth that we don't have enough of those resources. Like, I think that's something that we've spent so long on as you said, like the apologetics conversations, which obviously has been needed.

Kashif: Right. Right, because that was that, this is how we got to where we are today.

Matthias: Right, and like, I think there's so many queer people who are starting to realize like, wait a second, like the apologetics maybe aren't changing things as much as we want them to. But I feel like some of my work has shifted to, well, we need to minister to each other.

Kashif: Yes.

Matthias: Like we are our people.

Kashif: Yeah.

- Matthias: And so, all that to say, I don't know what I'm trying to say. But like, yes.
- Kashif: Yeah. Well, I look forward to, I mean, I may have to sort of toss my hat in because it's, we really need it. I mean, this brings me also to the conversation about the theological librarian.
- Kashif: I view theological librarianship as ministry 'cause I'll tell you, when I left seminary, I was devastated. And I remember Matthias standing outside at the back of the library, and it was summer. I remember it being very hot, and I was on the phone with my mother at the time and telling her that I was thinking about becoming a librarian. And she was like, "Are you sure you want to do that?"
- Kashif: I was like, "Yes, I feel like this is the next, maybe the next right move." But I will say I was devastated, because there had been a whole community of people that were really, "Rooting for me, rooting for what they wanted from me, and were expecting me to return and take up some sort of leadership position in that church".
- Kashif: So, when I was leaving seminary, I thought, well, I'm done. I can't get credentials, because before my coming out posts, and sort of jumping back a little bit. But before my coming out post, I had posted some things on Instagram with the hashtag faithfully LGBT, and some people saw it. So then, rumors started to circulate and people were talking. That was sort of feature statement of, I think of 2017. People are talking.
- Kashif: So, I knew that I was not going to be able to get credentials in that denomination. That was sort of over for me, and I didn't know what to do. I mean, imagine spending so much time preparing for ministry, and then basically, it's like, you can't minister here.
- Kashif: So, moving into theological librarianship for me, it has been, it is an active moving into ministry. And the way that I look at it is because I remember how heavy the texts were, how heavy the conversations were, how weighty, if you will. I almost view my calling as being ubiquitous to the research and writing process.
- Kashif: So, I will help you find, and give you the resources, but I'm there, I want to be there, and I'm there with you in the middle as you navigate and figure out, what does this mean? As you stand at the tomb, as you struggle and maybe something will be rebuilt. Maybe something will be revived. Maybe it won't. But as you wrestle with the text, I want to be there.
- Kashif: I feel like my job as a minister is to carry, to be there. And then, as of course, in the process, the end game, which is not the end game but which maybe is a new beginning, but the process of writing of course, and offering I mean, basic things like soterio, and citation help, and all of those things, and helping people with style, and clarity and yada, yada. But being ubiquitous to the research process.
- Kashif: That, that so, I definitely view my job as, or what I do every day as ministry. To me, that's critical, and this is a way of reconciling my deep sense of being called into ministry, being called into some sort of pastoral ministry.
- Kashif: I almost see myself as sort of pastor of the students, and the books. But that is how I'm living out. That is how I'm living out my calling. So, I'm sort of putting out the

Macedonian call that we need more resources, because they're going to be more of us that are ministering as we minister to each other.

Kashif: And let's face it, mainstream culture is just now getting on board with us being here, and we have to provide, we need to create the resources that we need. I mean, that's what we need to do. We have to take care of each other.

Kashif: So this, I see writing a book on that is some sort of resource for LGBTi and plus people that are going into ministry. I see that as caring for your brother, and your sister and your non binary sibling, if you will.

Kashif: So yeah, I think we definitely need more of those resources.

Matthias: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. I feel like something that I see you doing often on Instagram is your poetry. I feel like we'll be [inaudible 00:33:16] and not talk about ...

Kashif: My poetry.

Matthias: ... your poetry.

Kashif: Wow.

Matthias: 'Cause that's, I don't know. I don't know if we can describe poetry as a resource per se, but it certainly is a capturing of an experience in ways that I don't think almost anything else can do.

Kashif: Yes.

Matthias: Your poetry is stunning, and I'd love to maybe hear more about how that art form, I guess, I don't really know how to finish that question. I'd love to hear more about that art form.

Kashif: Well, you know what? I think I will tell you how it developed for me, and why it has stayed with me. I think that, first of all the typewriters. I collect typewriters, and that's a story in and out of itself in that, my ... Hey, you probably will want to hear this story. Everybody, to everyone listening across the globe.

Kashif: So basically, I was having a Kirk Cameron in a fine fireproof moment. Did you see the movie fireproof?

Matthias: Oh, yeah, unfortunately.

Kashif: When he broke his computer, because he didn't want to look at porn anymore.

Matthias: Yeah.

Kashif: Hello, I'm raising my hand. Is there anybody else in the room today? Yeah, that was me. So, I have my little ... I had a little netbook, a little HP netbook. It was navy blue, and I broke it because I thought, this is my act of defiance to Satan, like, I will not be bound by these things anymore.

Kashif: And so, I threw it away, and I went to church the next week, and I made an announcement that if anyone had any typewriters, that I wanted to use a typewriter and they should let me know. And of course, everyone laughed at me, all of the Jamaicans with their sarcasm. Like, they thought it was ridiculous and laughed.

Kashif: So that was that for a few hours, and then I was at work later, and something, I don't know, just came back to me to call my godmother. So, I called her, and she sure enough had a typewriter in her closet. And so, she gave it to me a 1971 Olympia SM9. It's a sort of a beige, creamy color. And that was the first typewriter that I had.

Kashif: And I started to write the poems that I had been handwriting for a number of years that when I would sit in class, and something would just sort of come to me, I just would write it.

Kashif: The poetry, what it developed into so, I guess my computer breaking thing ended up being not so bad after all. Of course, I have a Mac Book today that I will not break. That's not gonna happen. No, no, no, fireproof.

Kashif: So, that's how I started collecting typewriters. And when I moved to Cleveland and to Tennessee, I started collecting, just driving to these little sort of country city, little back cities on Sweet water, and Lenore city, and all along east Tennessee. And I would find these typewriters, and I would just purchased them for not that much, and clean them up, and learned how to do that and I started to write poetry that I would post on Instagram.

Kashif: So, my poems are really ... I look at it in a sort of flash poach, and then it's just a very quick, emotionally heavy scene that is related to something that people could read and go, Oh my god, I get that. I get that.

Kashif: In the same way that, when you're podcasting, when you're interviewing people, there are people that are listening and going, yes, that is exactly, that was my experience. Yes. That there's someone else in the world that understands, at the very least, what I'm going through.

Kashif: And so, my reason for writing is that, I write about the spiritual journeys. There was a poem that I wrote, I will always drive the back roads for there I met the Lord. That's what happened.

Kashif: I was driving on the back roads from Cleveland to Knoxville, and with the tears streaming down my face, God, will you still love me? What's the next right move? Should I tell people or are you okay with this? Those were all the questions in my mind.

Kashif: And I felt on the back roads, the love of God, the assurance that I would be okay. Even though there was still great anxiety, that somehow if I made a move forward for truth, that the universe would respond to me, and that I would be okay. And I discovered that on the back roads.

Kashif: For me, this idea, I don't even talk in terms of being saved, and so on, and so forth but that was a self ethic experience, I dare to say driving on the back roads. So, all my poetry is all about that.

Kashif: My process of coming out I think, yes, I wrote. I had my post that everybody saw, but I think it was really creeping out, because I was talking to people, my emailing you. And I have to say this really publicly before your audience today. Thank you, for responding to my email. Look at where we are a number of years later, 2019, and now I'm here as an influencer in a different capacity.

Kashif: But imagine you responded, and I shall never, never forget that, because I was at a place where I was looking and there was nobody. That I didn't know. I mean, I didn't know where to turn. There was, I mean, this was just something that nobody was talking about, and no one in my general area was really helpful to me.

Kashif: So, when I talk about my process of coming out, it was definitely creeping out. I emailed you, which was really me admitting to myself that I was not in a good place, and that I really, that I needed to ask myself some pretty tough questions.

Kashif: And all of the poems that I was posting, that was also my coming out. That's the reason that I use the hashtag, faithfully LGBT, because I knew that people would see it. That there will be people, the nosy people. I knew that they would see it, and that they would go and you know. I didn't anticipate that as many people as I found out would, but that's fine. So, it was definitely a process of me, I think creeping out.

Kashif: The other thing I would say too, it demonstrates growth. I mean, there's a poem that I archived that basically I was talking about, and I used the term the transgendered God, because I didn't know. I thought that that was the thing that I thought that that was correct, so to speak.

Kashif: And when I learned, which was a long time later, I went back and of course, archived. But it really marks my growth. Learning and beginning to talk to people. I will also say that, it was a remarkable journey the way in which I feel that the universe, that God is always placed, if you will, that people. And when I finally, even when it seems like it's sparse, there's somebody.

Kashif: Getting to talk to Laura Beth. You know Laura Beth?

Matthias: Yes.

Kashif: And you connected us, and that in Cleveland, that was it and I just remember sitting at Starbucks, and going, is this really happening? Because the year before, I was down at the altar speaking in tongues, and laying hands on people, okay, and there was not a question of, I would go, what gay and a Christian? How is that possible? Well, that was a different.

Kashif: So, I just remember sitting there, and having such an amazing conversation with Laura. That was, and just knowing, I think at that point, okay, that if anything happens, there is at least one person that I know.

Kashif: So, my poetry really does also reflect the journey, but I am writing poems about feeling lonely, because I know that other people like us feel the same thing. And they're just trying to find community, and find a place. And even though on the outside, they may

look like they're all happy, or that there's many, many, they're still looking, and I think that that's okay.

Kashif: So, I write about that to say, "Hey, I am also looking. I am also seeking. I'm not there yet." And I think that people, at least if we're going to base things on the likes, many people kind of appreciate it.

Matthias: Yeah.

Kashif: The last poem that I wrote was talking about challenges with my family just being transparent there. A mother, I said in the beginning. A mother once forked me from the river of her fluid and called me Kashif. Kashif, discoverer of hearts.

Kashif: I mean, just the way things sort of happened that I had never anticipated, that when I would come out, Mathias. That when I would make a stand, and say, "This is who I am. I love myself. I'm at a place where I love myself, I love who I am, I am not ashamed." I never anticipated that people in my community would look at my parents, and say, "You are bad parents, that's why."

Kashif: I never imagined that my parents would hang their heads at church. I don't know why they still choose to go there, but they do. That was something that I would have never wanted, because everything that I had done was really ... I did all the right things. They never asked us whether or not we would go to college.

Kashif: I mean, they just went, okay, where are the applications? What schedule the SATs? Where in every, like it was just assumed. We did all ... I did all the right things, my sisters and I. I mean, that we just, we "Did all the right things".

Kashif: I never did anything. I never. I tried hard never to do anything to embarrass my parents, but my stand for truth was perceived as their bad parenting. And so, someone asked me in Cleveland, "Was it worth it?" Can you believe that? Someone actually asked me that. After everything, they said, "Was it worth it?"

Kashif: And I looked at them and said, "You to ask me this question?" I wondered whether the person who was asking ever had to go through anything, or share anything that they would potentially be shunned for. I mean, and I said to her, "Yes. Yes, it was worth it, because the piece that I feel that I am my authentic self is, it doesn't compare to anything else that I am me."

Kashif: And I know now that when there are people that are in my life that when they receive me, it's, they're receiving me. They're not receiving a sort of trumped up, or I probably shouldn't use that word now. They're not receiving some sort of porcelain image of me.

Kashif: They're receiving me, because I'm upfront with who I am. It's like [inaudible 00:44:27] Brown said, "You let people into your house. They're looking at the house, and if they decide that that's not what they want, they don't have to stay, and that's fine."

Kashif: So, I do feel the peace that I feel is absolutely worth it, and I can reach out, and touch lives, and connect with people from a place of authenticity and nothing beats that. I mean, you know. Nothing beats that. Nothing beats that.

Matthias: That's so true. Kashif, thank you, so much for joining me.

Kashif: Absolutely.

Matthias: This has been such a treat, and I promised I didn't like to have you on a podcast to talk of me.

Kashif: Well, listen, that's what ended up happening but people need to know 'cause sometimes you like, should I do the Patreon of things, should I not? Yes, do it. Do the Patreon thing.

Kashif: Listen, I have more. Listen, no. This is when you invited me, I told my sister 'cause she remembers all the talking when I was driving in my little convertible, which, by the way, don't drive 12 hours in a little convertible 'cause you're back will hurt. My back was hurting.

Kashif: By the time I got to like the Virginia's, I was sitting sideways in the seat. But I drove up to New York from Cleveland, 12 hours to tell my sister, to come out to her, and my older sister, to come out there and to come out to some others.

Kashif: I mean, and I was listening to your podcast, I was listening to a tiny revolution. I mean, this is real for me. These really helped me. So, yes, and you didn't invite me here to talk you, but I will accept the Starbucks gift card which I expect in the mail. No, I'm just kidding. But yes, but this is really, this has been a pleasure.

Matthias: How can people find your work?

Kashif: Well, you can find my work. I have a website, which is kashifandrewgraham, or let me ... Excuse me. You can visit me on the web at www.kashifandrewgraham.com. And of course, there's my Instagram, Kashif Andrew Graham.

Kashif: I have a Twitter, and it's like defunct so, like, no. I mean, you can follow me but I'm really not likely to post anything there. So, my website, and my Instagram are going to be the places where you can see my work.

Matthias: Well, thank you, again, so much for joining.

Kashif: Absolutely. Thank you, for having me. I really appreciate it. Thank you, Mathias. Thank you, for everything. Really, thank you.

Matthias: You can find out more about Kashif on his website, kashifandrewgraham.com. He's on Instagram @Kashifandrewgraham. A lot of the people that Kashif mentioned in this interview, have their own interviews on Queerology such as Laura Beth Taylor and Trey Pearson. So, go check out those episodes.

Matthias: Queerology is on Twitter, and Instagram @queerologypod or you can tweet me directly @matthiasroberts. Queerology is produced with support from over 230 Patreon supporters. To find out how you can help keep Queerology on the air, head over to matthiasrobbbers.com/support.

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Matthias: As always, I'd love to hear from you. If you have ideas of what you want to hear on the podcast or you just want to say hi, reach out. I'll get back to you. Till next week y'all. Bye.