

Ep 21: Second Adolescence w/ Caleb Irwin (he/him)

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SPEAKERS

Adam James Cohen (he/him), Caleb Irwin (he/him)



Adam James Cohen (he/him) 00:09

Hello, hello and welcome back to the Second Adolescence podcast. I am your host Adam James Cohen. We are back after taking a mini little summer break and we'll be bringing this next set of episodes to you each Thursday featuring a new guest and their own queer journey and story of second adolescence. And we are kicking this off today with such a great conversation. Our guest today is Caleb Irwin. Caleb is someone who came out two years ago at the age of 33, which marked the beginning of his own second adolescence, which he like so many of us is still navigating he so generously let us into his experience growing up in Australia in a very religious community that viewed being gay as a mental health issue that one needed to heal from and shares what his own evolution has been in navigating this belief system and his own identity to eventually get to the place he is at now. I so loved getting to talk with Caleb, particularly because I felt so much personal resonance with his second adolescence experience that really mirrored in a lot of ways my own everything from feeling stunted, in many ways to having this exciting and scary new first experiences to the joys of getting to share such adolescent like excitement about dating with friends that we never got to do when we were teenagers, and just so much more. It was just such a joy on my end. And I was so affected by this conversation and Caleb's story. And I feel so excited and honored that he wants to let all of you into it as well. And as with each episode of second adolescence, I really want to invite you as the listener to listen with open curiosity, knowing that each of our stories are different and unique. There might be something shared on this podcast that really differ from your experience. Whereas there might be other things shared that really speak to what you went through or are currently going through. And I really hope that all of this happens and that together, we can continue growing and expanding our awareness of what life and queerness and healing can be for folks, if after the show you want to connect further, feel free to head on over to secondadolescentspod.com For show notes and more. Or you can follow the show on Instagram at [secondadolescencepod](https://www.instagram.com/secondadolescencepod). Okay, thank you for being here. Welcome to the conversation Welcome to Second Adolescence, I'm so curious and excited to have you on and get to hear more of you and your story. And okay, before going anywhere. I like to invite the person on your end, just to give a little mini introduction to who you are just to help listeners have some context for who the person is behind the voice.

C Caleb Irwin (he/him) 02:50

Well, thank you for having me, I have to say I feel nervous. But I think more than ever is actually feel super validated. It's really interesting having someone ask you about your story in a proper sit down record kind of way. But my name is Caleb, I'm living in Sydney, Australia 35. I am currently at film school, becoming a film producer. And I identify as gay. And that's kind of me at the moment.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 03:15

Great, awesome. I'm sure we'll kind of dive more into your story as we go. And just on your first point, I am really excited that you're feeling that way wanting me to come on and share your story. Because I believe so deeply in the power of people's sharing stories, particularly queer people sharing stories, for the sake of helping ourselves helping the collective and so I'm just so pumped. You're on thanks for being here. And yeah, like, why did you want to come on? Why did you want to share your story?

C Caleb Irwin (he/him) 03:41

I think multiple reasons. I think, firstly, the concept of second adolescence, I really love. And I find myself talking about it to my friends all the time, because when I kind of first heard about it, I think it was a counselor or someone ages ago said are you kind of go through like a mental puberty again now? And I was like, Yeah, okay, I don't really know what that means. And as time has gone on, I've been like, oh, wow, okay, yes, this is very real. Like, this is a very real thing that you have to go through and learning and discovering all these things that I genuinely didn't know that I hadn't discovered kind of thing. And so I think it's just really important. And it's important to be able to hear other people's stories. And I think also just coming out in general, but especially coming out later, you kind of feel like you're crazy. And like, Have I done something wrong or like what's wrong with me kind of thing. And when you hear other people's stories that are similar, it's just so comforting to get okay, I'm not totally insane. Like there's someone else who's experienced a similar thing. They responded in a similar way. And it gives you a sense of hope. Maybe there's a good outcome for me as well. And I guess that's what I want to do. I want to give people that sense of hope.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 04:49

Oh, I'm so touched, just hearing that. Thank you. That's really Oh, I'm so excited. You're here. This is great. Thank you. Thank you. Okay, so let's dive in. You mentioned really connecting with this idea of Have a second adolescence and in your own story, and I guess when would you mark kind of the beginning of your second adolescence? When did that start for you would you say?

C Caleb Irwin (he/him) 05:09

So I'm 35, now. I officially came out in 2020, when I was 33. Towards the end of the year, like

actually posted a video and kind of did like a proper for iron coming out thing, which for me was really important because I guess I felt like I've known so many people and I live in a beautiful community and the city I grew up in and like it was like, I just wanted to be honest with everyone. And I didn't want to suddenly have this whole thing. That's new information for everyone else, but not for me, and just kind of not talk about it. So I officially came out, then I'm just trying to figure it out. I think it was probably around then to be honest. Because I think until I told everyone, I think I didn't actually start dealing stuff. As much as I could have kind of thing.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 05:54

Totally, totally. Okay. Can I ask about that coming out and posting that? Like, what was your thought process coming up saying, okay, yeah, I want to do this now. And I want to share it in this way. And then what was it like both creating kind of the post you need and what you shared and then having it be out in the world.

C

Caleb Irwin (he/him) 06:10

So I grew up in a, like a very Christian family, I grew up an amazing family, I have to say that my parents are so loving, and my family is so loving and wonderful. But you know, essentially, it's the belief that being gay is kind of a mental health issue kind of thing, something that needs to be worked on and fixed. And, and so as a result, you have a whole bunch of people around you, in your community who know that you're struggling with same sex attraction kind of thing. They know it, and they still love you. And they're trying to help you. And so it's this weird thing where to come out is not necessarily a surprise for some of those people. It's telling them actually, I believe a different thing to you now. And so in the past, I'd seen other guys come out, and they tended to just kind of disappear. And you know, leave the church or leave the community or whatever. And it usually looked messy. And from my perspective, now I get it. And I get why they did that. But from the perspective, when I was younger, I kind of was like, why are they just suddenly leaving? And the only people I had to answer my questions were the people that disagreed with them. So you know, it kind of felt a little bit like, okay, they've done the wrong thing. And they're bad. And I remember thinking about it, like, if I'm going to come out, I was just like, What could I do that younger me would would want. And I was like, I just would have wanted somebody to have come out and not disappeared to just come out and say, Hey, everyone, I'm gay. Just let me know. But I'm not running away. Still here, gentlemen. And yeah, you know, at the same time, I still totally did a whole run away and everything. But it's like, you know, I kind of like I just want people to know, I know that I'm still here, no, come talk to me or just know that my family still loves me. I just want something that people can really connect with. Because you know, imagining like a 16 year old who's in church who's thinking about it and trying to figure it out and doesn't have anyone to look up to or talk to that kind of thing. Because I think that would have changed a lot for me if I had seen anybody in my community come out and kind of deal with it within the community.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 08:12

And yeah, like is that you mentioned kind of how it was really treated as a mental health issue. Like, is that also part of it? Like you just weren't seeing anybody being gay and having it not be seen as that might be seen as a mental health issue, you weren't able to not only just see

someone who was gay and kind of them existing? I guess? Yeah, I'm answering my question. Probably, like it wasn't seen as an option or okay, it was maybe still seen as ooh, that's like that person struggling?

C Caleb Irwin (he/him) 08:36

Yeah, definitely. So that's the thing, anyone that had come out, had essentially moved on from the church, because it seemed like that, because it seemed like a mental health issue. So to stick around is to say, Yes, I still think it's a mental health issue. Whereas you know, accepting it as who you are, you kind of have to remove yourself to a certain degree, because you need space to figure out what this means. Now, it makes it quite a weird argument. And that's, that's the other thing I've found is like, it's arguments on two different levels. Because like, sometimes I'm envious of people that grew up, and people were calling them gay and stuff as kids or as teenagers. And you know, that would be horrible for people to be mocking you about that. But it would mean that at a young age, you actually kind of have a common enemy. And you have to go okay, these people bullying me, who am I? And I've got to deal with that. Whereas in my context, it was this sense of like, we all know, and we all love you. And we all want you to be healthy and being healthy as to be straight. And so at the end of it when I kind of accepted my sexuality, it was like, I have no one to be angry at. I kind of have everyone and no one. Yeah, it made it really strange. to kind of manage that anger, I guess. Yeah, I'm tangenting a little bit.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 09:51

No, no, no. Oh, my God. This is fascinating. Thank you so much for sharing this part of your story. Just even that difference between how those still painful to have like a chat I've heard bully like, there's more clarity. Yeah. And like me versus them in a sense, there's more clarity around like where that person stands versus where I stand versus it sounds like you grew up in a very loving community. But there was also this tilt of in Yeah, like we love you so much. This can't be something. So we're going to try to help get you get rid of this part of you. There wasn't a clear enemy. It was a murky. Okay, so then when you finally did decide to come out and put that out there was that you saying, hey, no, I want to be here within my community. I want to be seen within my community, because were you still trying to stay within that community? Or were you at that point more removed?

C Caleb Irwin (he/him) 10:37

In the year before that 2019 I went traveling, thankfully, all year, just before the wild shutdown. So I'd gotten to what was I 32. Still on this hole, I have to be straight. And I personally believed, like I was very assured in and of myself that being gay was wrong, I have to be straight. It was really being gays wrong, because God thinks it's wrong. It's like, it doesn't matter what I think. And it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks. It's only what God thinks. And if God thinks it's wrong, it's wrong. And I'm not going to question it. So I just kept going with that. And then I actually eventually got engaged to a girl. And she knew she knew exactly what I was going through and everything. And we were engaged for a little bit. And then we kind of got to a point where I was just like, I don't think God's going to change me before I get married, and I can't get married. in good conscience as I am. If some magical thing happens, and I suddenly turned

straight, great, we can get back. But I was like, it feels wrong this time. Like she deserves better, as do I. And so I just went away for a year. And during that year, I basically was by myself a lot of the time and just spent a lot of time trying to figure stuff out and trying to figure out what to do and what to think. Basically, I came back home, and I thought I was away for a year. And I came home and I thought I don't want to stay here, I want to keep traveling, I want to move away. I don't want to live at home. Because it's hard to deal with what I'm dealing with at home. And I came out to my parents, and then the world shut down. And I was kind of stuck. And so I was kind of thinking, well, maybe this is a good thing. Maybe I'm supposed to be stuck with my parents after I've just told them this, my parents actually already knew. But I kind of came out to them saying I'm okay with being gay now. So suddenly, I find myself dealing with living at home in a lockdown. And my mom's a pastor. So we had to take Church Online. And suddenly she was like, Do you want a job? I was like, okay, so suddenly, I found myself working at church again, which I used to do. And I was like, I've just accepted that I'm gay. And suddenly I'm on church staff. And it was kind of like, this is weird, and not exactly the plan that I had. But she obviously knew and other staff members knew. And it wasn't an issue that I was employed there. So I basically find myself back at home, back in the same community, back at church, just doing a whole bunch of stuff with people and kind of in a way back into my old life. And I think that was the thing that I was like, Okay, this is not at all what I wanted, what I wanted was to go and escape and figure out what it is to be gay and figure myself out. But I found myself back here. And so I need to actually utilize this time and say, This is who I am as hard as it's going to be. This is who I am now. This is who I want people to see me as this is the truth. And even though it was really hard, I thought, well, I'm stuck. So let's just do it. So I ended up telling my parents first and then later on the year, I ended up telling the whole church staff in a staff meeting one day, which was really scary. And then a few months later, I posted a video online. And it was really interesting, because the response I got was, I would say 99% positive from everyone. You know, some people don't know what to say, some surprising people come up to one of my friends. Dad's just like, very manly and gruff. And he just walked up to me give me a big handshake. He's like, Well done. Well done. He was like, Oh, no. It means so much coming from some people. Wow. But yeah, the response was really good overall. And I think the biggest thing that I wanted was, you know, people that I probably will never talk to, to be able to watch it and connect with it. And I think almost in a weird way, going back to the common enemy thing. I was actually a little bit like, because so many people were so like, hey, that's so fine. I was like, if it's so fine. Why have I had to keep this in for so long? Why is this something that I've been sitting on? And why have I been so scared and stressed and worried when most people are cool with it? Like most of the church seem to be cool with it. So I was a little bit like, well, if we're mostly cool with it, why is it an issue or why do our official policies say things that they shouldn't, but I guess it's also it's the time that we live in, in the sense that even five years ago, I think I would have got a very different response. Then I think people are changing quite rapidly and realizing things quickly at the moment.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 14:53

Wow. So then what happened after coming out?

C

Caleb Irwin (he/him) 14:56

So I came out on Coming Out Day Which was kind of fun because I was about to do it. I was like, I'll do it in like three weeks. And then I was like, Wait, when's Coming Out Day? Like, I've never noticed when it was that I Googled it, and it was like four weeks away. And I was like, Ah,

okay, well, that's the day I'm doing. So I think it's in like October. So I did that. And then, whilst I've been away the year before, I had started to have this dream of like, I really want to work in the film industry somewhere, but I never had, and I'm a videographer. That's what I've always done. So I've always made videos. And I used to have a few different media jobs. And I've kind of always done that kind of thing. But the actual film industry is something that I've never stepped into. And whilst I was away, I realized that most all of my 20s and part of my 30s, I'd kind of trapped myself back in my hometown. And I remember having these thoughts when I was younger thinking, like, if I ever moved away, like move to London or something, I'd probably turn gay. Like he was tireless, like being in my head, like, don't leave, don't leave your hometown, because if you leave your hometown, you won't be able to keep yourself straight. And I don't think it was ever a full Cognizant thought, there's consciousness more like underlyings or so when I was away, kind of figuring out my stuff. That was one of the things that I realized is that like, this isn't just me hindering my sexuality, and you know, not dealing with my sexuality. There's actually life dreams and goals that I have, that I'm also hindering, and also putting blocks to, and this has been such a big part of the second adolescence thing as well is like going, Oh, okay. I'm gay. But also, what else have I been stunting? Yes. So I realized I was like, Well, I want to be in the film industry. Like, I don't know if I can, I don't know if I'm any good. But I want to. And so after I came out, the next thing I thought was like, I need to do something about that. And I know, we're still on lockdown. But I was like, I gotta do something. And so one of my friends chatted to me about it. And he was like, why don't you just apply for film school? Because at least if you get in, it gives you an opportunity, but it also gives you a reason to move away somewhere. And I was like, perfect. That sounds great. So I like Google, the film schools. It's kind of one of those things like I get what's the best one in Australia, I get that one looks good. And I looked up the dates and the closing date for the application was the next day. Well, I was like, crap, so I just like, threw together an application. I was like, I'm never gonna get in. But this is fine. And submitted that and then a few months later, they rang me and I got in, and I was like, Ah, great, good. I can move. So I kind of got out and move to Sydney. And now I'm in my second year now film school, it's just been so eye opening, realizing I've wanted to do this for ages, but I just never let myself even if nothing comes of it. If I'm terrible at this, it's like, it's so fine, because I'm trying to figure it out. And I'm finally allowed to now try and figure it out. I haven't allowed myself to, you know, I think I've been my biggest enemy in life, to be honest, which is a really weird concept to grapple with.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 17:56

Oh, my goodness, yeah, this idea that there's perhaps so many other parts of ourselves that gets shut off and get stunted, in addition to our romantic or sexual selves, or whatever this self that our queerness is connected to. But you're right, there can be so much more space that that opens up once, kind of that fear or shame or whatever was kind of blocking us before coming out, gets lifted. That's wild, like in my own personal story, like, that's what led me to this path to becoming a therapist. I too, was like, pre coming out, I was going in a whole other direction, working in a job that like, I just thought it was kind of the one I should be doing. Just kind of going through the motions and like, and then on the other side of coming out, like, it just created more space for me to realize, oh, wait a minute. I feel so alive now in this one way. Where else? Am I not feeling alive? Where else? Am I not being true to myself? Where else? Am I not doing something? Because I'm afraid, or I have self doubt or whatever. And yeah, so I just so appreciate you sharing that part of it. That's such an important part of it. And so interesting. Wow. Ah, yes. Cool.

C

Caleb Irwin (he/him) 19:02

Well, it's crazy. Because you feel like kid that's the whole thing. Like I honestly, and I used to talk to people about this not knowing, I would say, I always feel like a 12 year old, I feel like I'm stuck as a 12 year old and everyone else gets to move on. And I don't. And even just the other day, I was changed one of my lectures, and I'd made a mistake I fully stuffed up. And she was kind of saying, like, you know, in the real world, when you have a job, like if you did this, this would be really bad. We're gonna sort it out. This is a good lesson for you. But the way she talked to me was like, in the real world when you have like, it was kind of like, I was like, I realized in my head, I'm thinking, I won't really ever get a real job. Like, I'm not really capable of holding down a real job and like doing real adult things. And I kind of caught myself thinking that being like, why am I thinking this? My lecturer who I think is absolutely amazing, thinks I'm capable. So who am I to think that I'm not like, what is she not seeing? Or like, what do I think that is being covered up? She's like, Caleb is really good. And what she doesn't know is that I'm Tara What it's like, but she knows she sees what I do. And she thinks it's great. It's like, where am I getting this information from? And it's so weird kind of realizing how much you get stuck in this mentality of, I don't know, I'm a kid, I need help. Everyone knows better than me. Everyone's wise, everyone's older. And it's because I think it's so often because people are talking about things that your brain literally has not been allowed to develop. And you're just stuck. Like, I remember being friends when I was like, early 20s, having friends that were like 18-19, and kind of still kind of feeling like, it's a bit weird that I connect with people younger than me more than my own age. And then they would grow up and get to like, 21. And suddenly, I'd be like, they seem old now. And I'd kind of like fun, some new younger friends to hang out with, because it was like, I don't know why my friends keep getting older than me. And I keep staying the same age, and could never figure it out. Like I've always had the sense of embarrassment, when I'm with people younger than me telling them how old I am. Because I feel like they're gonna look at me and be like, Why have you only done this much with your life? Like, why haven't you done more, which is crazy, because I actually get the opposite response. When I talk about my life and the things I've done. A lot of people like, wow, you've done a lot with your life. Like, that's really cool. But in my head, I'm constantly feeling like they're going to be judging me. And I think it's because there's all this other stuff. I haven't been able to deal with my sexuality or live the film dreams that I want to live all these other things. It's like, that's what I'm looking at in my head going. I haven't done anything like no one knows, I haven't done anything.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 21:28

Right, and it's so second adolescence, this idea where like, despite how old we are, biologically, our inner self feels underdeveloped, our inner self feels younger. And that kind of fuels our unconscious perception and lens through which we see ourselves in relation to other people. Yeah, like this idea of like a real job or adult i So connect with that I am still working through this idea of seeing myself as an adult, still seeing kind of people my age, or even below me and seeing them as Oh, yeah, those are adults. And like, Adam, almost 35, come on, you're an adult. But it is like such a stunting of self that happens growing up in an anti queer world, where we to shut off parts of ourselves more parts of ourselves from development than we might even realize. And now so much of the work of second adolescence is creating more space to start to see, hey, wait, no, like, there are these parts that I can kind of grow with me now that I can kind of start to see myself as this adult start to see myself as this person who's maturing. And I mean, there's so many layers in that because there's also this idea of like, deserving of things being enough. Like there's a lot in there. But I just so appreciate you

bringing up this point. And I'm really curious about our listeners response, because I think a lot of people can relate to that. So I so appreciate your naming that Yeah. What's that been like? Kind of just bringing more awareness to that part of your experience? Like, oh, well, yeah. I have been kind of seeing myself as more stunted or experiencing myself as more stunted. How has that been for you feel?

C Caleb Irwin (he/him) 22:51

It's very recent. It's only been the last few months, honestly, that I've started to clock it. Yeah, well, like last year, for instance. So I'm doing producing at film school, which is producing is kind of a thankless job, because you basically pull the whole thing together and make everything happen. And then you put the director's name and that lead actors name on the poster and disappear. And it's also super rewarding. And I got to just before we were shooting our first films last year, I couldn't believe I was doing this, I probably had this moment where I was like, I can't do this. I don't want to do this. I think I'm a terrible producer. I don't want to do this at all. And I rang my lecture like the head lecture, not the usual actually like the one that I barely see, charged her for, like a whole hour where I was like, I shouldn't be doing this, like, put me in a different course I should do directing or something else. Like, I literally can't do this. I'm going to ruin everything. And I'm terrible. And we had this really long chat. And then one of my other lecturers rang me and another long tat, and basically, she was great. She actually just pulled me out and goes general, I think he just scared I don't think you'd need to sleep on it. And tomorrow, you'll be fine. And I was like, Yeah, and I did. And then I did the films and they went really well. And it was just such this weird moment of like, I couldn't believe that I got to a point where I couldn't believe in myself that much. Like I was that afraid of myself. And this is what I found. So we I was cognizant of the fact that I was like, it's probably going to be fine, like, you know, just press through finish the degree, you'll be okay. But my response was like, I can't do this. And I don't want to and I can't believe I'm actually responding like this. I can't believe I'm actually this frayed. And I think that's what started to clue me into it. Because I was like, why am I so afraid if this doesn't actually make any sense? Like, I'm not even doing a real job. I'm just studying. It's like, who cares? If I stuffed it all up, it really doesn't matter. And that's I think, when it started to talk to me, like, I'm clearly believing something about who I am and what I'm capable of. That's a lot less than what I'm actually capable of, and I don't know why that is and then kind of start to realize that it's this. It's like I'm 15 and trying to do a master's degree and kind of being like, Guys, you don't know that I'm actually 15 Like, I shouldn't be.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 25:02

Okay, so that's a part of your story. You're working through that. Has dating been a part of your story in the second adolescence? Like, what has that been? Like kind of starting to if you're someone who's seeking out relationship or any type of relationship dynamics with other men, what has that been like starting to have those experiences?

C Caleb Irwin (he/him) 25:18

Yes, it's been weird!



A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 25:22

That is the sentence totally, totally, totally. Yes.

C

Caleb Irwin (he/him) 25:27

For so many reasons. Yeah, I think as well, like, and I think, and I really started to realize this recently is like, I don't really know who I'm attracted to. That sounds silly, because I'm like, Well, I obviously do, but I haven't tested it. Like, you know, it's like, when you're a teenager, you get to kind of like, tell someone you like them, and they reject you, or like, someone tells you that they like you. And you kind of start to monitor the ground and be like, Okay, these are the people that find me attractive. And this is what's going on here. And, and kind of realizing that it's not just about who do I think is attractive? It's kind of like, where do I fit in this? And who should I approach and all that kind of stuff. And so I think I very much kind of jumped straight into, like, I guess I started going on a few dates. I mean, I didn't go on dates at all, until I started traveling. And I was like, this is safe, I can do it overseas. So I think doing that was interesting, because it was kind of like, well, it's obviously not really gonna go anywhere. It was kind of like, I just want to see what it's like to go on dates with guys. And it was good. But it was kind of weird. Because I think I'd spent my whole life being like, one day, I'm just going to meet someone, that's going to be great. And that's that. And it was like, I don't want to go on dates, I don't want to have to meet random people. And also, I'm very much like a fate kind of person. Like, I just think things happen. And those are the coolest things. And like all of my best friends and stuff, I didn't plan to meet them, they just suddenly appear somehow and in the mess of life. And you're like, Oh, I'm so glad you just arrived. It's always felt weird to me, like set up a date, and go out on a date. And like intentionally kind of wonder if this person is someone you should be with, because it's like so much support on it. And so I've done that. And I think it was helpful. But at the same time, I think I didn't I kind of didn't really get me anywhere. In a way. I kind of felt like I was kind of forcing myself to be older than I was again. And I started to realize that when I started to notice it's like, especially, you know, in gay culture, it's like very much like you can have sex on a first date kind of vibe. It's not like you go out on five dates first. And everyone's like, you know, maybe we'll wait. And then I think for me, it was actually just a bit too much. Because for me, I was like, I just want to like someone enough that they want to hold my hand. That's like it. That's as far as I want to go. Yes, yeah. And so it's been so weird, like, trying to be like, well, how to how to do that? How do I get that to happen? And, you know, it's like, when I really like someone, it's like sex is like the last thing on my mind. You know, we'll get there one day, but like, I just want to, like talk to you and get to know like, I'm just like, that's, that's my biggest thing. I was like, Oh my gosh, yes. But I had some really cool experiences recently. I met a guy randomly, Montana. Yeah, we're just like, through friends and you know, hanging out with friends and stuff. And we got along super well. And it was great. And then we started flirting. And I was like, oh, okay, this is this is what that's like. And then in the end, nothing came of it. But I thought it'd be heartbreak because I was like, I feel like he's dating someone else. But he's still kind of flooding with me. And then we ended up having a conversation, we're actually sat down, I was like, I have a massive crush on you. He basically was like, I do have a crush on you as well. And I kind of have been flooding, but I'm actually in a relationship. So I'm kind of leaning you on a car shouldn't do that kind of thing. And it was all like it was all aboveboard, like, it was nothing, nothing bad, but it was just kind of like, you know, just bantering with each other and, and just being good friends. And the thing was, I was so terrified all week. So I was like, it's just gonna be the thing again, where I'll, I like a boy, and he's straight or something. And he's just, like, doesn't care and doesn't even know that I liked him kind of thing. And suddenly, it was like, I'm having this conversation with this guy who's

like, no, no, I like totally wouldn't be into you. But I'm not and I was like, okay, so hang on. A, I just hold a guy like in which I've never done before. B He actually was flirting with me. And he's kind of into me and I was like, that's all I wanted. He was kind of like a guy called golf is your relationship. I'm fine now. Like, all I wanted was to kind of be like, okay, so someone would someone actually wouldn't flirt with me someone actually does. Does kind of want to do that. Like it was so weird. Because I was so ready to be heartbroken and it was the total opposite I was just like, I feel fantastic because I have suddenly discovered that desire of all and yeah, flirt with someone and and it was funny to tell you some of my friends they were like, Why like they communist and why there's such a shock because they They're kind of like, but you're an attractive nice guy. Like why would not why would someone not want to flirt with you? And I'm like, I'm not like, No, I'm like a weird 12 year old no one wants to flirt with. Like this is we kind of thing going Yeah, okay.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 30:13

Yes. I mean, right there like that experience that I think many of us can have have, particularly when we spend so much of our lives up until like, whenever it is that we're starting to pursue dating or flirting with people of the gender we authentically long for like, we don't know how to be that person. We don't know how to be in that role of someone who's flirting with this other person, right? Like, that's never been at least I'll speak from my experience. Like, before starting to date men. That was not a role. I knew how to be like that my role was not the one who was like, the guy on Date Guy flirting with Guy guy holding guys hate like I was, in my beginning, my second adolescence, I was consistently learning how to be this role, be this person be this adult man, on a date with another adult man, like, at first, it very much felt like I was playing a part. I was like, I like oh, is this what I'm supposed to be? Do? There was such a discrepancy between how what I was presenting on the outside and how I was feeling on the inside. I too, was feeling like, Yeah, I'm this 15 year old who has no idea what I'm doing. Yeah. And so much of the work has been learning to kind of see myself as this person who can flirt. Who can be desired by someone else. Yeah. Who can be in a relationship? Who can do whatever these things are? Who can't have sex? Who can all of it? Yeah, right. So similar to Italy?

C

Caleb Irwin (he/him) 31:33

Totally. Yeah, I always remember the sense of feeling like, particularly with like, my straight guy, friends, like having conversations with them. And as soon as it gets to sex, it's kind of like, there's a wall there. It's like, there's this barrier of like, you're allowed to talk about that. Think about that, do that, whatever I'm not allowed in. And I'm not allowed in myself, like, I'm not allowed in my own brain to do that. But I'm also not allowed in your world. It's like, you're straight, you're never gonna sleep with me or anything. I always just felt super disconnected when I hit that point, because it was like, not only is that a part of your life that you don't want me in, it's also a part of my life that I'm not allowed in of myself. And so it's kind of this like, I never knew what to do there. It was kind of like, let's just, let's avoid that one. Totally. But it is so hard to take yourself seriously in like a flirting context. I think that's what I enjoyed so much about this reason, experience was like, Oh, I'm just doing this literally naturally. Like, this is just natural, because I want to because I'm feeling it. That's great.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 32:31

Yeah, yeah. Okay, so like, what else comes to mind when you think about how you make sense of your recent chapter and this idea of second adolescence, what else has been a part of it?

C

Caleb Irwin (he/him) 32:41

I think the whole like slowing myself down a little bit. And realizing like, I'm a kid who just wants to hold someone's hand at the moment is really important. And I think having good people around you, it's really helped me. So like, moving here. And having a group of friends who have only just met me, has been really helpful. Like, I remember, last year sitting down with a whole bunch of the guys, and something came up about dates. And they're all talking about different date stories. And at one point, I just threw in like a Yeah, I went on a date with this dude once and blah, blah, blah. And no one said anything. Like everyone was just like, Yeah, that's a valid part of our conversation. And I was like, oh, okay, I'm allowed to just talk about that with these straight guys. And no one cares. But then more than that, I had, like, I had a date earlier this year, there was just really cute. It was really, really this really nice day. I was kind of really excited about it. So I was like, Oh, that actually was a date that felt like, actually enjoyed that. That was really nice. And I think it was because it just felt queues. It's like, went for a walk kind of vibes. And I came home, and one of my mates came over. And I just remember just being like, Okay, I have to tell you about the date. I went out yesterday. And he literally, like, picked up a blanket, and covered himself up and spun around on the lounge and just was like, Oh, my God, I can't like tell me everything. And he was just like, it was always like, it was like, so gay as well. And he's like, very straight. But it was, it was also very 16. Like, it was kind of like, this is this is what I need right now. I need someone who's going to be like, OMG tell me all the gas kind of vibes. It was just so fulfilling to kind of not only have this date felt really nice, but to kind of have someone come home and validate it and validate the excitement and the little kiddie feelings and all that kind of stuff. And it was just, and then and I had a few other experiences where some friends, you know, I told some friends I like to guy and then they're all coming back to me like have you talked to him? Like what's happening? Like, they all want to know and they're all stoked on it. But they're all acting like teenagers about it, and they're all not teenagers. And it just I think that's the thing. It was like, Ah, my friends, it's so good because they're recognizing that this is what I need. They're not coming to me saying, Yeah, Caleb obviously, you know, blah, blah, blah. We've all been through this. They see where I'm at, and actually had this great chat the other day with some When my friends were there, we're talking about how teenage boys, for instance, you know, will be in a group and they'll be walking down the street and they'll like, see a girl and be like, oh, yeah, I totally sleep with her, like, maybe not not yelling slightest at her. But like, within the group kind of making jokes, or it's like, it's inappropriate, and it's a bit too far. It's like, obviously, yelling at someone is way too far. But I mean, in the groove, kind of just kind of bantering about that. And they were talking about how it's like when you're a teenager that feels it's naughty. It's kind of like, oh, I shouldn't want to sleep with someone, I shouldn't want to have sex with her. That's naughty. That's bad. And they brought it up, because they were like, Caleb, this is how you're talking. Like you're talking about guys. Like, I totally sleep with him. But you're kind of making as a joke, because you're scared because it's naughty. And then when you actually like someone, you don't talk about it. Because you're like, that's bad. I shouldn't think about that. And so I was like, okay, and then the whole, like, yeah, so teenagers will do that, because it feels naughty. And then you start to normalize and start to realize it's okay for you to have these feelings for someone that you become in your 20s. And you're totally fine with seeing a pretty girl and thinking, I'm gonna go ask her out on a date. You know, I'm attracted. And I was honestly like, want No, I had no idea.

Like, I was like, hang on, are you telling me no, I've never connected this in my brain. I was like, hang on. So you're saying that like, every time someone's like doing that as a joke, it's kind of like on a progression to slowly get more used to the fact that this is actually what they desire. Hence, if I'm making jokes, it's actually because I'm trying to figure out how to be okay with it. And it was like, honestly, it was like sitting down. And both my friends were standing up kind of towering over me. And I was like, Guys, I feel like I'm 15. And you guys are your age, like late 20s. Just telling me this stuff. And I was like, You have no idea how weird it is for a 35 year old brain to be comprehending this, and have never understood some of this stuff. I just didn't think I would have thoughts like this. I didn't understand things that I literally hadn't. I thought I would kind of be like, oh, yeah, okay, see how that fits together? Or like, I've imagined what this is like, and now now I'm living it. But I'm genuinely feeling like I'm going through stuff. I'm like, Oh, my gosh, I've never put that together. My brain has never been allowed to process that properly. And now it can. And it's like, very mind blowing. It's very strange.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 37:27

Wow. Yeah, I mean, and like, I'm just thinking about how special it is to have this group of friends who, in different ways have given you this insight that you weren't even aware of like really sparked your own kind of understanding about what your experience is now and kind of why you're having that experience. And also validating kind of why you're having a different experience than they are. I also just love how they've also sounds like gifted you this experience that so many of us miss out on in our own adolescence, when we're feeling a crush, or having a date of getting to like, share with our friends and like kind of like gossip and storytel about like, well, I'm having this Crusher, oh my god, he kissed me, you're like the excitement, that adolescent joy, that so many of us don't get to have an adolescence, you are getting to have as an adult and your friends, whether intentionally or kind of intuitively, like we're mirroring that same adolescent joy and energy, the visual of your friend on the lounge turning around and just being like, tell me everything. And then also like this group of friends, I'm just seeing them as like, offering this experience that your younger self never gotten to have in this way with regards to like you pursuing a man. And just how special those moments are, and how healing those moments are, again, like giving our younger selves this experience that they never got to have. Oh, yeah. I love it.

C

Caleb Irwin (he/him) 38:43

Yeah, it's funny because it feels so like silly teenage. But it's like, so healing at the same time. Like one of my mates said, Yeah, I was like, and then on this day, like we I kissed him, and it was really good, but I'm telling him about the date. And he goes, Did you get a boner? And I was like, yes. And he's like, oh, yeah, I was like, I was like, why? It's so good.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 39:08

But that's so adolescent. Right?

C

Caleb Irwin (he/him) 39:12

That was the thing that I was kind of like, oh, I guess that is exactly what a teenager would kind

That was the thing that I was kind of like, oh, I guess that is exactly what a teenager would kind of be like, did you get a bonus? Yes. That's awesome. Like, that means you're into the right kind of thing. It's like, okay,

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 39:24

yeah, totally. Yeah. I mean, those types of conversations we get to have with our communities now are so fun and playful, but also that underneath that is so much healing is happening. It's so important. That's that's so cool to hear. That's been part of your experience so far. And like, what has it felt like because it sounds like I don't know if the group of friends you were speaking to are the ones you've met kind of sense. This more recent chapter if they knew you before, but like, I'm just thinking about both like having this experience of having friends get to know you as gay from the get go, what that's like, but then also, how has that been if there's any friendships or relationships from your priek Coming out if what is that, like now having those relationships,

C

Caleb Irwin (he/him) 40:05

it's kind of different for every relationship. One thing I've found weed is a lot of my guy friends, I kind of just found myself unsure how to relate to them. Now, I haven't had any negative responses kind of thing. Like, they all love me, and they all care about me. And I know that, but I think what I've found is, it's not necessarily their response that's affected me, it's the fact that I have been somebody else in their presence, you know, I've tried to quell who I am and be a different person. And it's really, I guess, kind of confusing trying to figure out myself around friends that I know so well, because you just kind of become the old self, you become just the person that you've always been. I don't know, it's hard, because it's like, I don't want to put distance between me and my friends, especially friends I've had for years. And I want to make sure I maintain those friendships. But then it's also that sense of like, I actually do need to give myself some space to figure some stuff out. And trying to figure out how to do that has been interesting. But some of my friends are very, very supportive. And I think that's actually meant a lot to me to see people actively like this. If you're listening to this, and you're straight, and you know, someone's come out, it's like, I would encourage you, because this has encouraged me so much like people that actually take the initiative to tell you that they love you and tell you that they're here for you and ask you about it. It's the sort of thing that you're not sure if you should talk about or ask too many questions. But you know, I feel like I'm comfortable enough to say I don't want to talk about it. I had an older brother who died when I was 21, which is also a whole massive part of my story. But when that happened, all I ever wanted to talk about was him. It didn't matter what. And I'd probably burst into tears if someone brought him up. But that's literally all everyone's talking about. And so it was like, if someone recognize that, you know, I'm going through grief that someone would come up and say something about my brother, I'd be like, obviously, that's what I want to talk about. I miss him heaps. And so in a similar way, I feel like it's the sort of thing where it's like, people don't know if they should bring it up or talk to you about it. It's like, this is literally all I'm thinking about. All I'm thinking about is being gay right now and trying to figure myself out and you coming up to me and saying, Have you been on any dates? Or I don't know, like, how did people respond to you coming up here, like anything, or just like, hey, I just want to tell you that, like, I support that you are gay kind of thing, like just blatantly stating it. It's like, thank you. Because I don't know what anyone's thinking. And I don't know, if people support me or not, unless you tell me. And it's like, that's what I need to hear. And it might sound really simple, but it's like, it's so important.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 42:44

First off, this hour has gone by so fast. I can't believe it's an hour. Yeah. And so I know, I gotta get to a point of winding down and let me go soon. And I know that we're not going to get to every part of your story. But I guess in part of this conversation, does it feel like there's anything else from your experience your story that wants to be a part of this conversation?

C

Caleb Irwin (he/him) 43:02

Because any one of the things that I was thinking about that I had written down, which was Yeah, I think what I've realized is that other people experienced the same thing in other ways, as well. And I think that's what really led me to talking about it a lot, talking about the idea of second adolescence, I have ADHD as well. And I have, I'm a little bit dyslexic. And I find myself talking about having ADHD a lot. Because I think if someone else has it, and they can recognize it, then they might be able to get help kind of thing and do things better and easier, and etc. And I find the same with second adolescence. And I have another friend who's straight and for all normal purposes, just be like, has a good normal life. But she kind of did a very similar thing to me. And we're the same age got to the same age and kind of was just like, I'm not living the life that I want to be living because of like society pressures and things and just kind of like, you know, I'm not in a relationship, and I'm doing the right thing. And, you know, essentially, she was doing the right thing, like she was trying to live the right life. And she kind of got to a point where it's just like, there's so many things in my life that I feel like I've never done, and I've just protected myself. And so she kind of, you know, uprooted and has kind of like started a whole new thing. And she's loving it. And I love hearing her talk about it. I've just found it so intriguing that it's like she hasn't gone through a whole sexuality thing. But she's still going through a whole second adolescence in a lot of ways and discovering that there's other things. It's like, for me, it's like, I can't get a job. But for her, it's like she's had jobs and like, she's so cool with that. But it's like for her it's like, you know, she goes out on a date. And she's like, I went on a date. And it's like such a big thing. And you know, and then we can talk about it. And I think for me, it's like finding these things and talking about them in such a way where we actually get to move on and get to grow and not identifying myself as like, well now I'm a second adolescence person and that's what I'll forever be. It's like I actually talking about with your friends and getting to seeing your stages of growth, because then they can also, you know, come back to you and be like, that's so cool that this has happened. That's the second time that's happened to you and I kind of like, Oh, it is. That's so cool. Yeah. So they can see you growing as well. And I think that's, yeah, really important. Because I think the biggest thing that I feel is like, I don't want to get stuck, I was stuck for so long. And I just don't want to be stuck again, like, I want to make sure I'm continuously growing. And, and because it's good. It's like the things that I'm experiencing feeling now. Amazing. I thought I'd experienced amazing things 10 years ago, and I had and now there's more amazing things. So if you stop, you miss out.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 45:45

Often when I feel so much I like fumble over my words. I feel so damn appreciative that you came on to share your story and share kind of your experience and perspective, from everything from the beginning to this last bit about kind of getting unstuck and not getting being stuck and kind of the freedom there like, Oh, I feel so selfishly invigorated by this

conversation. I feel like my emoji is just like arms up just like yes. I just feel so appreciative to you coming on and sharing the story. And I personally am taking so much that I want to keep chewing on and thinking about and I have imagined it's going to be the case for those listening. What was it like spending the last hour talking about all this?

C Caleb Irwin (he/him) 46:31

No, I feel like credibly appreciative. Like, I don't know, it's very validating, I think, no, I'm just super grateful. So thank you. It's a cool experience, but it's also it's just good. I'm just grateful. Now I'm fumbling my words.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 46:46

Okay, cool. Well, are you someone if folks who are listening want to follow up or share their experience of listening to your story or asking a question or whatnot? Are you someone who is open to that? Yeah, totally. Yeah. What's a good way for folks to connect with you?

C Caleb Irwin (he/him) 47:00

Probably the best way is Instagram on there way too much. Obviously. My Instagram is [young_master_irwin](#).

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 47:11

Yeah, I'll definitely put in the show notes. Absolutely. I'll link to that

C Caleb Irwin (he/him) 47:14

it all comes from when I went on a flight when I was a kid and that flight ticket says master if you're a kid and Mister if you're an adult, and I was always like Master sounds way better. And so it gets stuck. Actually it's ironic now because totally connects this whole thing of like, I tried to stay a child because I wanted to stay master not Mr. Weird Okay, now maybe I changed my Instagram.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 47:38

Oh, that's wild. Yeah. Wow. Totally. Okay, maybe unpack that later. Yeah. Cool. Well, Caleb, again, I so thank you for doing this. This has been such a treat and I thank you so much. Hey, thanks for joining us for today's conversation. Feel free to head on over to [secondadolescentspod.com](#) For show notes and more. And you can connect further by following the show on Instagram at [secondadolescencepod](#). If you're interested in being a future guests on the show and you want to come on and share about your own second adolescence visit [secondadolescencepod.com/be](#) A guest and you can submit your interest there. Alright, that's it for

me for now. Whether it's morning, afternoon, night, wherever we're finding you and your day go on out there and keep doing things that would make younger you absolutely thrilled. That is what it's all about. Alright, take good care.