

Ep. 23: Second Adolescence w/ Christos Papaioannou (he/him)

📅 Wed, 9/21 11:10AM ⌚ 43:15

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

felt, adolescence, friends, people, bit, experience, younger, younger selves, part, queerness, athens, parents, greece, queer, person, remember, gay, story, share, hear

SPEAKERS

Adam James Cohen (he/him), Christos Papaioannou (he/him)



Adam James Cohen (he/him) 00:09

Hello, and welcome to this week's episode of the Second Adolescence podcast. I am your host Adam James Cohen. On this week's episode, we have Christos Papaioannou (he/him). Christos is originally from Athens, Greece. And now he's based in London, UK. On this episode, he shares so many things that I personally resonated with, with regards to my own story, and I really imagine will be true for a lot of you listening to he talks about how his younger self really started feeling a lot of shame growing up in this anti queer world as he was starting to discover this queerness that was within him, and she shares about how he dealt with that shame. Then he goes on to share about, you know, throughout adolescence, some efforts he made to try to turn straight and pursue curls, but ultimately kind of hitting a wall and realizing, yeah, that's not him, and he can't change this part of him. And then he shares with us what his process was of gradually letting this part of him out, he shares about this really important first experience he had with another gay man in his early 20s. That was both filled with all the butterflies we can have, but also so much fear. He goes on to share about the pain and importance of getting to have a first heartbreak and breakup, and second adolescence and the process of finding liberation and freedom in himself and how he exists in the world. There was so many gems in this conversation, I feel so grateful to Christos for sharing his story. And I really am excited to get to invite you into it as well. And as with every episode of second adolescence, I want to invite you as a listener to listen with open curiosity, knowing that each of our stories are different and unique, there's going to be something shared on the show that really differ from your experience. Whereas there might be other things that guest share 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). All right. Thanks for being here. Welcome to second adolescence, I'm really curious to have you on really excited to hear your story. And I'm just so appreciative that you wanted to come on and before going anywhere, I like to invite the person on your end of things to give a little mini introduction to who you are just to help the listeners have a bit more understanding of who the person is behind the voice.

C

Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 02:43

Thank you. Thank you, Adam, for having me. It's a pleasure and an honor to share some of my story. I'll start with the introduction. So my name is Christos Papaioannou, I'm a gay man, and my pronouns are he him. And I live in London, in the UK for the past eight years now, after I spent about 10 years living in different cities in different countries because of my job.

Originally, I come from Athens from Greece, and I am a humanitarian worker. I was working for many years in humanitarian organizations in different countries in Europe and outside Europe. And I'm also for the last few years working as well as career and leadership coach. So that second hat I decided to wear for my career.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 03:33

Oh, wow. Oh, great. Okay, I want to ask a lot of questions about so many aspects of what you just shared. But I guess let's start in kind of you being here. What made you want to come on to this podcast and share your story?

C

Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 03:44

Well, I suppose from the Second Adolescence account and Instagram a few weeks ago, um, a bit embarrassing, I shouldn't be embarrassed actually - as a 40 year old man, I was watching and I really love the TV series "Heartstopper", it's a new TV series. It came out I think, a few months ago in the UK, and I loved it. I loved how it represented the gay, lesbian, queer, trans young people really being happy really exploring their romantic lives. And I love the end, at the same time is so the post from Second Adolescence and what I saw and what I read, it really resonated with me because I've been thinking for years, probably all my life. I've been thinking and I've been feeling this sense of loss, a bit of mourning, if you will, as well, about my adolescent years. I mean, I came out when I was 21, 22 years old, that I grew up in Athens, in Greece in the 90s. Generally, I would say happy childhood and I can talk more about that later. But I realized that I haven't experienced all the things that I could see my trades is friends experiencing when they were, I don't know. 1415 years. extend, you know, the flirting, maybe the drama or the I don't know, the first key is the breakup. It may have executive and so all the stuff that young people do, I hadn't I didn't do them. And I still feel that I would love to have this chance I didn't. And then I realize in your work about second are the lessons that actually yeah, maybe it happened, but it happened a few years later.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 05:24

Totally. Yeah. And I guess just to kind of talk about and follow up on you mentioning about your experience of heartstopper. And then that post that we made on second adolescence, since Instagram, it is such a common experience for so many of us queer adults who didn't get to have that adolescent experience to be so affected by TV shows, films, books, showing kind of queer youth getting to have these experiences that we never got to. And so yeah, you say you're 40 year old man, I'm a 35 year old man, and also like crying and having such an experience watching Heartstopper. Because we didn't get that. Yeah, exactly. And it's this interesting process of on one hand, feeling like so much joy and gratitude that these youth are

getting to have this experience and that heartstopper is getting made. But then on the other side, there can be this, like, complicated mix of our own sorrow, or our own jealousy or envy for our own younger selves not getting to have that and yeah, yeah, okay, it sounds like you and I have a similar story there with that, and so, okay, yeah. So tell me about younger you. You mentioned kind of growing up in Athens, and what was that experience like in that first chapter of your life?

C

Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 06:28

So I grew up in Greece, I am the youngest of three boys. And my two older brothers are seven and five years older than me. I think I was quite a spoiled kid was the little prince and protected and really not having most of the things say I wanted, so I could feel the love, of course. But I from quite early on, I think I was feeling was different, I think, well, I don't think I'm sad, actually, that I do. Remember, I remember clearly I think was probably was seven or eight in primary school that I felt attracted by another boy in my class. I mean, I didn't know what exactly was that. But I could feel it I knew then already probably happens in every country when parents project to their kids, and it was totally heteronormative. So of course, parents would say, Oh, yeah. Do you have any girl with you? Like, I was like, yeah, actually, no, but we're seeing in there is a boy in my class, like, so. Yeah, I had this thought and feeling quite early on as a boy as a young boy. And I was growing up. I mean, sometimes I joke. I mean, I haven't told my mother this joke. Maybe I should. But sometimes, I think you know, so if you've seen it. I mean, I was I was not big at sports. I mean, I had both girls and boys as friends. But I like playing with girls. I remember when I was, I don't know, maybe it was around seven or eight years old. My mother bought me My Little Pony house. And I was really happy with that. And I loved it. So yeah, that was a bit my first years, something that happened as well when I was at the fourth grade in primary school. So I was around nine or 10. And I wasn't studying very much at that point. So the teacher actually asked me in front of all the other students in the class asked me to tell my mother to come and speak with him because it wasn't studying enough. So I really felt embarrassed. I felt a bit for me, it was a better day wasn't done in any bad way. But I felt humiliated. So actually, this triggered then made me think that yeah, I would not want others to make me feel embarrassed again. So I started studying excellent. I became one of the men among the top students in my class. And I remained like that. So the outcome was positive. But actually, a few years ago, I reflected that this was part of me really being scared of being a saint. So I had this same and I think this became stronger as I was going towards the lessons because I knew I was different.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 09:06

And so to deal with the shame, you really leaned into, okay, well, I'm going to be a very good student, I'm going to be very smart, I'm going to kind of pick the top there. Gosh, and that happens unconsciously for our younger selves to may we're not aware that it's what's driving us but that is such a common experience I've heard from people about whether it's like they were leaned in to kind of being the best athlete or the best artist or the best student, you kind of leaning into some other role or some other place where you get value or younger selves often did that in response to that shame that was happening under the surface. Okay, so that happened for younger you okay.



C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 09:40

Yeah, it happened it happened that I mean, I realize I mean, part of me is happy because I'm, I had the chance to I don't know yet do a lot of things as I was growing up. I was also active. Yeah, as you said, I mean, I was I wasn't big at sport, but I was active at the environment group. I was active where we had the theater group. So I was so active in many activities at the school community, and it was yeah, it was quite maybe not popular, but I had connections with many different groups. And I was getting along well with most. But I think yeah, I mean, later, as an adult, I went through therapy, I realized that these were also part of my coping mechanisms to deal with the secret and the feeling of not being enough, basically, because I had a lot of strong feelings about not being enough for my parents, because I was a young closeted gay person,

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 10:31

would you share a bit about that, about that experience of feeling? Not enough, I think that's so common for a lot of queer people.

C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 10:38

yeah, growing up, I didn't have any real life experience of any gay or lesbian or even trans or queer person, my parents neither, like I would say, they're not the most religious people in Greece, or the most conservative people. But certainly, they are quite traditional. So there wasn't any space even to talk about, you know, other people existing out there who are not straight seas, and they have a family in children. And also the images they had growing up on TV. I think the many months I remember, I remember was a gay character, who was who was a bit of a character to who was alone, there was no any discussion about his romantic relationships and popular TV series in Greece in the 90s. I mean, or even in films. I mean, I remember Philadelphia, when it came out in I think, was beginning of the 90s, and was a sad story was a person who was dying. So these were the images, I think that we had, probably everywhere in every country. So yeah, I was feeling that, then I was feeling I was going to disappoint my parents, because I was not going to be the sum they want it to be. I mean, having all these expectations, meaning mainly having a family, finding a wife and having children. So that was quite difficult when I was growing. I mean, that's another lesson. And I think given later, I mean, as a young adult, I continue working without and dealing with that.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 12:09

Totally, gosh, I mean, in this moment, my heart is hurting for younger you and I also get it and relate. I mean, for so many of us, we grew up in a world where the messages we were getting around what it means to be, quote unquote, normal or what's okay, or what it means to be gay. Like, if we saw any representation of queerness, it was so small. And it was like you're saying like a caricature, like either the butt of the joke. Yeah, we just didn't see them as full beings. And there was very much this messaging around, like, as you're saying, heteronormative This is the expectation. And what that does for our little selves is like, we feel so other and we don't see ourselves as like, okay in the world. So of course, like, there's going to be the shame that gets imprinted, of course, we're not going to feel enough. And that's why like, it really speaks to

like the power of we need to keep having culture change, to allow for more space for queerness to be like, a part of it and a celebrated part of it. Ah, but yeah, I'm just feeling for younger you, I so get that.

C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 13:09

Thank you. Thank you, man. It's true. I mean, for me, the biggest fear, and I remember, actually, there was probably it was around 14 or 15. And I had a fight with my mother. And I remember in my room, and I was thinking, I will never come out, I'm gonna be alone for the rest of my life, for the whole of my life actually, will not find true love or love in general, and will not have meaningful relationships with other people is worried because I wouldn't be hiding myself. My true self. So this is what I was thinking. And it was yeah, it was difficult. Those moments, but I think also for the biggest part, I was putting it aside, and I wasn't thinking much about it. And I tried. I mean, I was telling myself, like, especially in the late adolescence, so first years of university, I was telling myself, yeah, maybe like this girl who were normally like, good friends. And I think I went as far as having us kissing a girl. There were two actually different situations. But I'm glad I didn't go further. I couldn't and I'm glad for those girls as well. But they didn't go further. And I could then it was clear for me. So in a way before I came out, I was thinking, Yeah, I mean, I can't lie. I can't be with a girl or a woman. But I can't be with the money there. Because that's very bad thing to do. So this is where I was thinking, Yeah, I was.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 14:37

Again, I'm curious if this keeps happening, but I relate to that part of your story, too. Like I too, had this point of kept trying. I was trying to oh, maybe this friend that I care so much about I liked her a lot. Maybe that could turn that feeling into a romantic feeling into a sexual feeling and trying and then just hitting a wall of like, No, I can't change this. And I think that happens for a lot of our younger selves of really trying to change it and kind of push away kind of this queerness within us and see if we can kind of fit the mold, see if we can change our feelings. But we can hit a wall like you did? Oh, no, I can't. But then it sounds like you were left in a point that a lot of us are left that but I also feel like I can't go after this person that I'm longing for. So what was that like kind of reaching that realization of okay, I can't pursue women, but I feel like I can't pursue them in what's that like,

C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 15:25

I think was mainly what I mentioned a bit earlier. I mean, it was very sad. I felt like very alone, I felt I couldn't share it with anyone because I was still in the closet. And I continued doing other stuff. I continued being good at school or at university or being active. I was from very early on, I was active with social issues, environmental issues, I was volunteering with civil society organization. So I was active in trying to fill in the gap also tried to find value in myself. So I was doing the other stuff. I was feeling alone, I think was 20. And I was on holidays with two very good friends. And they asked me maybe partly joking, maybe partly because they were sensing it, they asked me, Are you gay? And I said, No, of course not. If I was, I would have told you. So it was still very difficult for me to accept it. It felt lonely.



A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 16:20

So what happened next in your story?

C

Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 16:24

I don't remember if there was any trigger point or something that happened. But I remember I was volunteering with Greenpeace. I remember hearing about the new volunteer who came who was gay. So we met, we became friends from quite early on. I think we liked each other, we felt attracted to each other. I think the way I remember it is that in a way, it's like I left myself go with the flow. I remember we're talking and probably was him who said yes, shall we go get a drink? And I was like, Yes, let's go to Dubai. So I felt like probably 1 million butterflies in my stomach. I both very excited and happy and terrified and scared. All at the same time. So we went out. And then yeah, we started dating. And I think I was 20 years old when this happened. So this is when I had my first relationship.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 17:17

Wow. Okay, so tell me about when he invites you to kind of go out after you're volunteering together. You're feeling these these butterflies and being terrified. Like, that sounds like at that point, you were still not admitting to other people, you were queer. And yet you're having these feelings, what was that like kind of going with what you were feeling and kind of going out with him that night. And what happened?

C

Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 17:40

I mean, it felt great. I still hadn't admitted to anyone. I mean, at that point, then I realized I hadn't admitted it to myself either. But in a way, like there was another person doing what I was doing, you know, being out romantically with another guy or kissing another guy from the first time, it felt a bit like at the beginning, like it was in me, or maybe that's how I remember it. Now, I think it was fully present in the moment. But that's how I remember it. Now. At the same time, it felt so liberating. I think about it. Now, I'm not sure if this is how I experienced it then, but it felt even a bit rebellious. I was thinking, okay, yeah, I'm going for it, I'm gonna be with a guy, I'm going to experience how it is to be with a guy, even though I knew that, that's something that my parents would improve. So it felt very liberating. And there were moments that it felt quite stressful as well, because we had common friends or common people we knew and he was open, I wasn't. So we're trying to find places like different neighborhoods, or different parts of Athens that I was calculating that would have the least chances to meet someone we knew. Or I remember, we were a big group of friends. We had like a long night out the club, and then a friend of us had invited us, I mean, we had arranged that we ready for a sleepover, because we were going to stay late. And we slept and we were exchanging the sides, and we were looking at each other. And we had their little secret with the same time, it felt romantic and very nice. And it felt a bit like, you know, adolescent life, because maybe this is the stuff you can do when you're a younger person. And they're less than not when you're a young adult. So that had some really nice moments. But also it was difficult. And in the end, I think about four or five months after I realized it was very difficult for me, and I was very sorry for him. But I ended the relationship and it was very difficult. We went back to the closet. I have to say here maybe can take a pause because I'm talking about I mean, I'll name the person

who was my first love and my first relationship. His name was Iakovos with whom I hadn't kept in touch for a long period for I think over 10 years and in September. Unfortunately I learned through Instagram that he had passed away in September last year. He he had cancer, and he fought for about a year and a half. But he didn't make it. I felt very sad. And I felt that yeah, we're still very young to lose our exes. And so I just want to say this because it is important for me to say this story. And I will always remember him as the very caring were kind and smart and funding first boyfriend I have.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 20:22

Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that. I can only imagine what that was like to learn that news because I can really hear how meaningful and important he was in your own story and your own journey. Like that first experience in that relationship, I can only imagine like, opened you up to so much of yourself to so many new experiences. And yes, there were so like, a lot of fear and going back in the closet afterwards, and all of that, but what an incredibly meaningful relationship and person that was in your story.

C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 20:52

He was he was Yeah. So that's why I wanted to remember him. And really, I will, I will remember, he might think, like that.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 21:00

Absolutely. So then after that first relationship, you mentioned kind of going back into the closet, which can often happen for a lot of us of like, kind of having these first gay experiences, but then like, not feeling ready to fully come out, maybe going backwards, there can be this kind of back and forth. That happens. What happened next after that,

C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 21:21

after that, I remember was thinking, okay, that happened, part of me was also feeling like it could happen to another person, not me. I mean, the relationship I had with Iakovos. And then I was thinking, okay, maybe now it's out of your system, you know, try it, forget about it. So again, it lasted for I think about a year, or maybe just over a year that I again, I wasn't talking to anyone about it, I didn't try to have any other relationship or date any other person in general, actually, not only a man, in date, anyone, and then a very good friend of mine, see served with us. And she was a bit older than me, I think I was around 21, she was 25 or 24 At that point, and she came out as a lesbian. And she came up very like with the big banks, military. I mean, she told her parents or her friends see, very quickly created like a group of I don't know, lesbian, or gay, or queer people and friends, and she was going out to happen very quickly. And I was like, Wow, this can happen. I hadn't realized that it can be or seem so easy. And I'm not saying it was easy for her. I mean, she had some difficulty at the beginning with her parents. But actually, again, it seemed quite natural, let's say in quotation marks. So actually, that helped me a lot. And a few months later, I think it was around June, and I was 22 and 22. And as soon as the first person I came out to everywhere out that million Athens, the

center of Athens in a gay place, and lesbian place, actually, and this is where I'm in the same day, the same night that they came out to this very good friend of mine, I also met my second boyfriend or my first boyfriend as an almost out, man. So that was exciting as well, it lasted only a couple of months. In those two months. Remember, it was also summer months. So we were going out all the time. And I started coming out. I mean, one after the other to my close friends. And if the first experience was the beginning of feeling liberated, that was, for me, kind of total freedom, because I was very open. And I didn't have a single negative reaction from a friend. I mean, they were all very, very open, very accepting to who I was truly. So I remember it was I was gonna say, one of my best summers. Yeah, yeah, it was, it was a great summer, because it was the summer of freedom for me.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 23:44

Yeah. Summer of freedom. Yes, I can feel into what that freedom must have felt like for you, and to have these friends of yours, get to know you. And to be fully you, you mentioned when you were younger, which happens for so many of us like, not only do we shut ourselves off from like the people we're like romantically or sexually attracted to, we can shut ourselves a little bit off even from friends like we can really be ourselves we can't fully let people in. And so oftentimes, on the other side of coming out, and through the process of coming out, we kind of have this first experience of like, fully connecting with people fully being ourselves with people what what was that like for you to have that

C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 24:23

it was, as I said, very liberating, I just felt very happy that I didn't have to hide anymore. I didn't have to lie. I mean, I don't know. I mean, I remember I mean friends would ask men very well meaning way Is there any girl or you know, anyone you like and I was like, not really, you know, haven't found the one yet so I felt very bad that I couldn't say there were there was really feeling so. So he really felt great when I had this and I think the acceptance because that's probably one of the things that we have and often can be very traumatic as we mean by way I mean, all LGBTQ baby that might live in an environment that might not be very open. I think the question is that am I going to be accepted? If I show who I am truly. So yeah, I was very accepted and enjoyed it a lot. And I open up to many friends and they have like straight friends going maybe to gay or lesbian places. And they were very, very welcoming to this part of myself that I was discovering as well, at that time. It was very new to me as well.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 25:31

Wow. Yeah. At what point in your journey, did you because I'm hearing you are having this liberation, this freedom with this group of friends and kind of being yourself and kind of having these experiences? At what point did you decide to invite family members into

C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 25:48

it happened gradually. And it's still happening, because well, I had actually served before that I had another thought that I wanted to share. And it resonated a bit with the second of the lessons because I spoke about this relationship I had with the man I met in the night. I came

lessons because I spoke about this relationship I had with the man I met in the night, I came out and we broke up. And that was something that really experienced fully the breaking up, I think I was pressed for like three months. And I am saying this because in a way, I almost had the need to experience it like that, you know, almost the way an adolescent would experience it, you know that they would spend days and nights in the room and you know, not doing much or listening to sad music. So I experienced that. And I remember the evening, we broke up, but we were out and was late, I think was like 3am, we parted and I was alone in the center of Athens, one of my favorite spots in offense. And they called the friend of mine straight friend to whom I had come out maybe a month earlier. And I called him at 3am. And I told him sorry, I'm very sad, could you come and because I need someone to talk. And he came. And I'm saying this because I thought about it from taking the ideas from the secondary lessons. This is what I would have loved to have experienced when I was 16, you know, to call your friend and cry because you broke up. And it happened when I was 2122. And I'm grateful it happened even if it happened a bit later.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 27:15

Oh, I'm so glad you brought this point up in this part of your story up because I think so far on this podcast, I hear a lot about the side of second adolescence of everyone getting kind of these new experiences, these experiences they missed out on the positive end of getting to feel all these positive feelings. But you're right in that a big part of second adolescence is also having in this experience that we missed out on of what our first heartbreak is getting to both feel the depths of what that heartbreak feels like, you know, for in my own experience, it was when I finally understood a lot of the songs I heard on the radio about heartbreak, I never fully got it until my first heartbreak, which I experienced when I was 26. And it's so painful it is us getting to be a part of this collective experience of when our heart is breaking that our younger selves didn't get to have that, like you're saying, like, maybe at 16 You saw other people like dealing with the heartbreak and getting that support from their friends and kind of processing those feelings. And you got to have that experience just a little bit later. And I can hear how you talk about it that you feel so much gratitude for having that experience again, though painful.

C

Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 28:21

It's so meaningful and important. Yeah, yeah. This living life. And that was it for me. Yeah.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 28:29

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Thank you again, for bringing that up. I think that's such a significant part of this all for us.

C

Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 28:35

Yes. And then maybe, to your question, remember coming out to my family, I remember was a few years past, like, after two years, I think I mean, I graduated from university and I went to the Masters in the Netherlands. And I remember actually, the Masters I was doing was starting with like a 10 day intensive course in Spain. And in the last night, I said the hotel room with

another student who was at that time a woman, we became good friends. And I remember she asked me so do you have any girlfriend or boyfriend and I'm saying this because that was the first time that someone had asked me that hadn't made any assumptions. And he helped me. It helped me a lot. It helped me also this is when I would meet people that became friends after for the first time and didn't have to come out. I was out already. So that helped me a bit in my own journey in how I would see coming out to my parents and my family. But I went back to Greece in a break for myself in the Netherlands and I shared it first with one of my two brothers. And I think a bit later I said it with the wife of my older brother and later with him as well with the older brother. I mean the reaction was very positive in the biggest part. I remember actually the first brother, I chose to say I was the one that I was thinking was probably a bit more open minded. I remember he called me I mean, I was in Brussels in Belgium. And he called me for my birthday a few months after I had come out to him. And he asked me, has anything changed? I felt very sad. I said, no, nothing is changing, and nothing is gonna change. I mean, he was clear, he was referring to my sexuality. And then I remember I spoke with a very good friend of mine who were studying together, she was a psychologist, as well, I mean, I'm sick have this background, maybe it helped and she told me something very important to me. Think about how long it took you to come to terms to accept to process all your feelings around your sexuality. It's okay, if he takes some time. And if he needs time to process, then maybe he finds it a bit difficult to accept it. So that helped me a lot, then he helped me, in a way, understand that you have the coming out process, talking to other people that maybe know you knew you before. It's not always easy, but it's something I wanted to do. And fast forward. It's in the last few years, actually. And I had some therapy again, I wanted to process actually, because I still haven't talked to neither of my parents, and I wanted to process it because it was seen, okay. I mean, it's the fear that probably many of us have, and it's probably unfounded. But it's the fear that if I tell my parents, I'm gonna kill them, metaphorically, or in reality, so I processed that. I was prompted by the mother, but they came to my two nephews who by the time they were 12, and 16 years old, and they were totally cool. And they actually the the oldest one who was in high school at that moment, he said, Oh, yeah, that's okay. I also have a friend who's by you know, and I realized, I think it's, fortunately, time is changing. And it's not the same for the younger generation. And a few months later, it came out my mother and it took her some time to accept it. But I remember some months after that, I had the main operation, and I had to stay in bed to recover for a few days, and I live in London with my partner have more than eight years now. And my mother knew that he was cooking for me, he was taking care of me as I was recovering. So she told me, she said, say thank you, to your partner on my behalf, because he was taking care of you. And that's when I felt a bit, okay, maybe see things a bit better and she realizes, which is the most important and she told me that actually very open, you see, realize that I'm happy to realize that I'm, I'm okay, I'm fine. And she's accepting that. And as I said, it's an ongoing process. And I think I still am negotiating the ways I would speak with my father, we might be a bit more difficult for him to process it. Maybe not maths, but I'm still negotiating with myself from that. Yeah, totally.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 33:00

I think that's can be true for a lot of us. There's still those relationships that we're still trying to navigate how to bring this part of our experience into those relationships. Yeah, yes,

C

Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 33:10

exactly. Yeah. Yeah, I think, because in my family, we don't speak months about relationships.

So I don't feel much the pressure. I'm not sure if this is a good or a bad thing. Maybe it doesn't have to be any of them. But I don't feel much the pressure. But a big part of me wants to be open to be true. So keep navigating, as you said.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 33:32

Yeah. And yeah, this idea of kind of being open and being free. It sounds like that's been such a theme for your second adolescence is kind of finding that liberation, finding that freedom kind of training, that openness and kind of letting people into that. And you also mentioned, part of your second adolescence has been Yeah, like in those first relationships, like getting kind of have all those first experiences and including the heartbreak and the breakup, that anything else comes to mind when you think about your own experience of second adolescence, your own experience of kind of, on the other side of coming out. What has been a part of that, like what's been a kind of an important part of this chapter.

C

Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 34:09

Probably that's another common theme. But it's the wider community, the LGBTQ community. And I mean, soon after I came out to my friends, I mean, I had already few friends who were active with the LGBTQ movement and rights in Greece. So I became active as well. I remember probably was 23 when I went to my first Pride and Bootsy camera, so you know, the media taking photos, and part of me was a bit worried because I was thinking, what if my parents see me? On the other hand, I was thinking, yeah, that's okay. I mean, that's part of pride. I mean, you know, marching with pride is actually being open and whoever sees you. So I think that's really helped and me being active as well as mastercode. And I was volunteering for an exhibit the Q rights organization, I was volume During even before I came out, actually, with an organization that supported people with HIV, which, of course is not only about the LGBT community, but there were quite a few gay men there. So again, being more in contact, realizing that actually there are so many people out there that they have similar experiences. And this was really, really important. And I think learning as well. Another part is learning a bit about the history and identity rights movement from the 70s. In many countries in Greece, it was a bit later, although I mean, it started from the 80s. And then 90s, again, in 2000. There were when they're still big moments, and there's still a lot to fight for in many countries, in most countries, I think. But they, knowing the history again, made me feel proud that I'm thinking now at this age, and even earlier, maybe when I was probably answered the same way, if you asked me when I was 25 or 30 years old, I would say I wouldn't change it right now. I mean, if I had the chance to be born again and be a straight man, I would say no, I'm very happy that I am again, man. And I had this experience. And I had this learning as I was growing up.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 36:19

Yeah. Yeah, like exclamation points to that. Yes, yes. I want to chat with you all day, I gotta wind down let you go in a second. But was there anything that hasn't been a part of this conversation yet that wanting to be a part of it?



C

Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 36:34

Probably what it comes down to. And if I think like a thread that might connect many parts of my story and my journey, and probably it's common for everyone, it's not unique, but is the communities the sharing is not feeling alone, but actually feeling you belong, feeling you're part of something bigger. I think that's important. And I think that's what I try to encourage as well, if I speak with younger preplaced, is what I tried to support. I mean, I'm supporting an organization here in London that the organization supports young adolescents, Exhibit D in queer person, and especially ones that might come from more disadvantaged backgrounds or more marginalized groups. I think we all and especially the adults in the room, I think we have a bit of duty to make it even easier for the ones that are coming after us. So that's important for me.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 37:28

Wow. Yeah. I mean, as I was hearing you share that I couldn't help but also go back to picturing kind of who you were as a teenager, and getting to kind of have this experience where you're helping these other queer teenagers now, and just Yeah, I mean, what's it like to kind of think about what's happened in your life, particularly since kind of 20s Till now, and then thinking about kind of what younger you didn't get to have and was going through? Like, for me, I mean, a lot of my story has been thinking like, what would younger me think to see me now? And, and also, how do I feel younger, meet with me now, and I'm having these experiences. But curious, like when you think about younger you, and then thinking about the rest of your story, what comes up,

C

Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 38:10

that's actually very nice seamless, because if I imagine my younger me by being here with me now and seeing who I am or what my journey has been, I think probably he would have been a bit less worried. He would feel a bit less alone and more hopeful for the future. And probably he would be very proud as well, for the surname, maybe I would that as well. And they realize maybe I see this now. But even some difficulties, or difficult moments are difficult feelings. Again, they had also some positive impact on me, I think the fact that I am, I don't know generally. And that's part also of that led me to a big extent to have the career I had my urge to change things mired to be active and kind of bring the change I want to see or support others. I think my queerness and being a young gay adolescent in the closet probably helped have this result in my other life. So at this moment, I'm grateful even for some difficulties. I mean, yeah, I still wish it was a bit easier. And I still wish I had, let's say, my first romantic experience when I was 14 or 15. But I also see some positive things that came out down the line from those difficult experiences at the beginning.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 39:35

Absolutely, yeah. Really. It's like a mix of feelings and reactions to that of both. Yeah, of course, there's some grief and like, Oh, I wish I would have had this experience when I was 14 1516. And there's been a lot of meaning and a lot of value and a lot that has been gained from kind of traveling the journey. You've traveled, we've traveled and dealing with, though challenging, there's been some real gifts that have come out of that as well. And so it's kind of it's Altru

totally, totally. Well, gosh, I feel so affected by this conversation, I feel so much gratitude to you for coming on to share your story with me to share your story with the listeners of this community. And I just so appreciate you. What was it like going back and telling your story? How was that for you?

C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 40:19

He was, I also feel gratitude because he goes, although I might have said, parts of the story, different parts of the story, probably more than once, I think was the first time that I had the chance to reflect a bit and said the whole story. So I'm very grateful to you for them. And I really enjoyed it. I think it helped me as well. And you said it too. It helped me make a bit more meaning of my journey and my story, and I loved it. So thank you.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 40:54

Awesome. And then are you open to if people who are listening, wanting to connect with you afterwards? If they want to follow up? Or if they want to reach out? Are you open to that in any way? Oh, of course.

C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 41:05

Yes. Yes. Someone on though, writes me on LinkedIn and wants to discuss something I don't know, for the career or anything. I'm always happy to talk with people and connect. Yes.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 41:15

Okay, great. So LinkedIn would be the best place to find you.

C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 41:18

LinkedIn would be the best or the other way, because I'm a coach. And people who want to contact me, they don't have to be my clients. I'm not her for that. But they could also contact me through my website, we'd see is coaching-labs.com.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 41:40

Great, great. And I'll link to all of that. So people have access to that. Because, yeah, I can imagine there'll be folks who will be affected by this conversation, want to reach out and so thank you again, and ah, yeah, I just feel again, so much gratitude to you. And this was fantastic. Thank you for contributing your story to this.

C Christos Papaioannou (he/him) 41:58

No, thank you. And thank you as well, Adam, and I'm grateful you're doing this and you're kind of collecting the different stories. It is lovely. It's really nice and really needed as well. So thank you

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 42:18

hey, thanks for joining us for today's conversation. Feel free to head on over to secondadolescencepod.com for show notes and more. And you can connect further by following the show on Instagram at [@secondadolescencepod](https://www.instagram.com/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 [secondadolescence pod.com/be A guest](https://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. All right. Take good care.