

Ep 39: Second Adolescence w/ Aubri Drake (they/them)

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SPEAKERS

Adam James Cohen (he/him), Aubri Drake (they/them)



Adam James Cohen (he/him) 00:09

Hi there, welcome to the Second Adolescence podcast. Here, we talk about all things queer healing and Second Adolescence. So what is Second Adolescence you might ask? Second adolescence is a sort of developmental life stage queer people navigate in our post-coming out adult years after growing up within an anti queer world. For many, Second Adolescence is about healing the wounds of our younger queer selves, gaining the experiences they missed out on and unlocking what it means for us to exist as our most free and true selves. I am your host, Adam James Cohen, psychotherapist and human who went through his own Second Adolescence. Today on the show is Aubri Drake (they/them). Aubri is a white queer a spectrum transgender and gender queer hiker, backpacker, ultra-runner, writer, researcher and transgender activist in their mid 30s. I loved getting to talk with Aubri and it was just blown away by their story and the work they're doing truly as a trans and non binary ambassador and changemaker in long distance backpacking, hiking and ultra marathon running spaces, which has historically been primarily such a space for white, cis, straight folks. There's so much change that's happening in that outdoor space and I really feel like Aubri is leading such a charge and helping create more inclusivity in the outdoors. Truly, Aubri friggin rocks, I'm so excited to get to introduce them to you if you don't know them and their work. And I just feel so grateful to how Aubri has taken up space in the world and feel so grateful that I got to be in conversation with them. And as with each episode of Second Adolescence, I really want to invite you as listener to listen with open curiosity, knowing that each of our stories are different and unique. You might hear some guest share things that really differ from your experience, whereas other guests might share things 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 secondadolescencepod.com for show notes and more, or you can follow the show on Instagram at [@secondadolescencepod](https://www.instagram.com/secondadolescencepod). Alright. Welcome to the conversation. Thank you so much for being here. Welcome to Second Adolescence. I'm really excited to have you here and eager to

see where we go in this conversation. But before going anywhere. As always, I'd like to invite the person on your end to give a little mini introduction to give listeners a little context to who the person is behind the voice.

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 02:52

Sure. Yeah. I'm Aubri Drake, also known by the trail name 'Data' when I'm hiking on long trails, I use they/them pronouns and I'm a white, queer, acespectrum, genderqueer, and transgender hiker, backpacker, ultra runner, writer, researcher and activist in my mid 30s. I was raised poor and working class and I've hiked a lot of trails and climbed a lot of mountain peaks I've through hiked the Appalachian Trail, Europe's Tour du Mont Blanc, Vermont's Long Trail, the John Muir Trail twice, the Tahoe Rim Trail, the New England Trail, New Hampshire's Cohos Trail, and I'm 85% Done with the Pacific Crest Trail, which I'll finish this summer.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 03:34

Oh, wow. Wow. Okay, wait, okay, first, for listeners who might not be as familiar with hiking, could you explain the concepts of through hiking and also trail names?

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 03:44

Sure. Yeah. So through hiking kind of depends on who you're asking. In some contexts, through hiking is considered hiking an entire long trail from end to end, sometimes leap frogging around to different sections, sometimes one end continuously to the other in one hiking season, which is typically a calendar year or 12 month period. And then for trail names. It's most common on the Appalachian Trail, but it's also present on other trails as well, where people end up with a trail name that is typically given to them by somebody else on trail, and is unique to a specific situation. Like somebody I know her trail name is Sugar, because she eats a lot of candy. And on trail, you'll often be like, well, there's the you know, six mats. How do you know which mat you're talking about? So it's like trail names can help be a little more unique and identifying the actual individual, but also just to kind of circle back - I've also completed in both winter and summer seasons, the Northeast 111 4,000 footers, the New England 67 4,000 footers, the Adirondack 46 high peaks and the New England 100 highest. I've run ultra marathon distances from 50Ks to 100 miles and I've set 16 fastest known times, and I've logged more than 8500 miles on my feet in the last three years.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 05:07

Whoa.

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 05:07

And my writing has been featured in Trail Runner Magazine, Long Trail News Magazine, and in Non Binary, which is an anthology from Columbia University Press.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 05:17

Well, okay, biggest mic drop! Whoa, oh my gosh, that is wild. That is so many steps that is so many miles. How's your body feeling right now?

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 05:28

I've been doing pretty well, I did the Adirondack 46 high peaks in winter, in 30 days, while working full time just cranking every weekend, this between Christmas Eve and January 22nd this year. So the body held up pretty well. There's just I strained my soleus which is like kind of part of my calf doing a mountain called Cliff, which has a gigantic ice cliff in the middle. And, you know, I figured if that was the worst that happened, we're doing great.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 05:57

Oh, wow. Wow. Okay, so when did when did hiking come into your life? Like, when did all of this become such a prominent, I mean, and ultra running and all of that? When did all this start for you?

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 06:09

Yeah. So growing up in - I'm transgender, so I was raised with people assuming that I was a girl. I participated in gymnastics and martial arts, a little bit of softball. I didn't run, I had childhood asthma, my lungs just kind of would close up on me. So I didn't really, I never ran more than not even really a mile until maybe, college when I was on the rugby team for a semester, there's a lot of running, but probably not more than a couple of miles. So it didn't really become part of my life until the very beginning of medical transition for me. I would you know, go to the gym and stuff. But within six months of starting medical transition, when I was 23/24, the gym stopped being a place that I could go, I was getting harassed in either locker room, and they didn't have any gender neutral bathrooms. And I was like, why am I paying you money to not be able to use the bathroom or change at your facility? And I asked them about it multiple times, and they just brushed me off. And then I was at a work conference, and had a number of really bad experiences with other trans people who were presenting, including a very well known activist who treated me really, really badly. And I was in a pretty dark place. And I was alone in a city. I was like, well, I need to do something with my body or I want to go in a really bad direction right now. So I went downstairs to the hotel gym. And I was like, Well, I think running might make me feel a little bit less like, maybe if I can run fast enough, I can get away from my problems. And I had never run more than maybe half a mile in my life. And I ran a 5k going as hard out as I could. And I stepped off the treadmill and my last legs immediately seized. And sure I was probably on the floor for half an hour. And I could barely walk for two weeks. But I was like it didn't kill me. I bet I could do that again. That was kind of cool. I didn't know I could do that. And so I stopped going to the gym, and I started running outside all year round. And that's kind of how I started running. And for quite a long time. I mainly just did you know, some 5k's, I did a 10k, couple of half marathons. But around that same time I had started exploring like short hikes around where I lived in Connecticut at the time, and never went more than eight miles and there's not big mountains in Connecticut. So I think the tallest thing I went

up was maybe 1,000 feet tall or something. But I started getting interested in hiking. And then the fateful weekend that was Labor Day 2013. I was alone for the weekend, not having a partner that I was relatively enmeshed with at the time he was off doing something else. And I was like, Well, I have nothing else to do. And I've been wanting to try backpacking, I'll just backpack across the Massachusetts Appalachian Trail which is 92 miles in like four days. That seems reasonable, right? Like if you're like walking it like three miles an hour. It shouldn't take that long. I can walk for like eight, eight hours a day, right? Like it's fine. I had never done multiday backpacking. I had never carried a pack. I had never slept outside by myself. I had not done any of these things. It was a harbinger of things to come. But I got dropped off at 830 on a Thursday and I had a friend that was going to pick me up on like, what, like Sunday evening or Monday evening and I didn't have any other way that I knew of to get off the trail. I was like, Well, my friend is picking me up at the end. So I have to get to the end. Now I probably would have been like this is too much suffering, I'm gonna figure out how to get off trail. But I was in road running shoes they like didn't have much tread. It was a bright golden rod yellow Jansport backpack. I had a hammock I'd ever used before, I had a 40 degree sleeping bag that I didn't realize you need it even if you're hammocking that you do actually need insulation. And so the first day I did 18 and a half miles and climbed to the high point of Massachusetts, which is almost 4000 feet tall. I also knew nothing about chafing or about anything like that. And I got to learn very quickly. I am a sweaty human being and I was sweating a lot. And packs chafe in weird places and and the first night I almost got hypothermia, because it was oddly cold. It was probably about 40 or 45 degrees. My stomach muscles kept convulsing and waking me up. Wow. And so the next morning I was like, okay, and I like didn't want to get out of my sleeping bag. I had to go to the bathroom. I delayed for too long. There was a whole incident. And then I was like, Alright, I'm supposed to do 26 miles today. 26 and a half. I was gonna do my first marathon.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 11:17

Oh, my gosh. And again, you've never long hiked before at this time, right?

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 11:22

Nope. Never. Oh my God more than eight miles in a day. Wow. Okay. Okay. And my feet are swelling and I'm getting blisters, and right. It's good. But the trail takes me through a town. And so I get to go to a gas station. And that Styrofoam cup of gas station coffee was the best thing I've ever had. And being like, inside is amazing. I love bathrooms. I got creative. They had petroleum jelly. That worked just fine. Yep, I made it to the end of my 26 and a half mile day. And I think probably the thing that really kept me going back to hiking beyond the sense of accomplishment was that. On the Massachusetts Appalachian Trail, there's a section where I ended up staying, which is called upper Goose Pond cabin where they have a caretaker there for a week at a time during the summer. It's a four sided cabin with propane lights with a stove with it's like very nice with bunks upstairs with foam mattresses. And so I got there and the caretaker made me hot water helped me make my dinner, gave me cookies. The next morning made all of the pancakes I could eat. And I was like, oh, okay, I could do this again. But I think probably like, in some ways, what I have always continued to chase was the feeling that I had on the fourth day, standing on the last mountain before going across the state line into Connecticut. And I could look back and I had enough visibility that day that I could see 76 trail miles to the point, the high point of Mount Greylock and I think I had hiked 12 or 13 miles to get

to the top of that peak from where I started. And looking back and realizing that I had walked that entire distance by myself with what I could carry on my back. It was just groundbreaking for me. And this sense of being powerful, and being able to rely on myself even if I couldn't rely on other people. And so that was about a year into medical transition when I first stepped foot on the Appalachian Trail. And I had no intention of hiking the entire thing. But after that experience, I threw myself in head over heels to hike the 80 as fast as I could. So when I say I thru hike but for me the 80 was a ton of Section hikes. So the longest I went out was just under three weeks, and I would go out and hike very quickly. I think I averaged 22 miles a day across the entire 80. Most people don't get much beyond about 20. The 80 is pretty dynamic. It has a lot of technical terrain. But I spent four years while working full time and also going to school part time working on the AC T and as it happens, I ended up finishing the Appalachian Trail. I arranged it so that I ended my hike on the top of Katahdin in Maine. So I finished at the northern terminus and it so happens that it was exactly four years from the day that I stepped foot on the trail the first time.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 14:35

Wow, wait, what was that moment like?

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 14:38

Honestly, it ended up feeling a little bit hollow. And I think at least for me, that's been my experience a number of different times of having a really, really big project that takes many months or many years and getting to the end of it and you're like this is just one more hike. This isn't different as I've I've kind of experimented here and there and sometimes it helps having other people there who can kind of carry the excitement to be like, This is amazing. You did a thing. And I'm like, Yes, I did do a thing. Let's reminisce about the ways that it took to get us here.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 15:12

Not having this like big grand moment after kind of, quote, unquote, completing the feat, and kind of there being this kind of letdown. And yeah, like this idea of perhaps creating a ritual around that with social support, but like, how do you make sense for you about what was that? What was that about? There wasn't that big grand feeling at the end of it?

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 15:31

I don't know, I've had it happen for a number of different hikes or, or lists that I've worked on. And sometimes I think it's, I don't know, it's like this expectation that you'll feel different after you've done something. Like I've seen the theme occur for a lot of other people who go out and do a thru hike in a single season, where they are expecting the hike to help them figure out what to do with their life or to like, come to the end of a hike with answers. But most of the time, that doesn't happen. And so it can be too hard to try to find exact meaning about this big adventure, where it's like, it doesn't necessarily have to have meaning. It was a big adventure. Yeah. And what was the adventure? What were the people you met along the way? What were

the wacky animal stories that you have? Getting woken up at two in the morning by a Mojave ground squirrel. Like, you know, it's good stuff bumping into a moose in a snowstorm. Like good stuff like that.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 16:25

Whoa, totally, totally. I mean, yeah, I mean, I think that also speaks to like, I think our culture loves the story of like, having the big moment at the end, and like, there can be such this big buildup of expectations that kind of within so many different parts of our lives, we place on that. But like, yeah, oftentimes, we're either maybe we're really exhausted at the end, or like, we're wanting to do something else, or like, we're feeling upset or angry, who knows, but like, why should that overpower all that happen along the way, like, that can be often where the real juices, so hear that being part of that story?

A Aubri Drake (they/them) 16:42

Yeah. And I feel like I don't get to experience it quite as strongly because of the way that I typically hike trails in large sections, where I have a day to day life to come back to, but a lot of people who through hike experienced a post trail depression, where it's like, you've gone out, you've done this big thing, you have all these complicated feelings at the end. And then you don't have that Guiding Light anymore. That all encompassing goal. And it kind of it also kind of, I think I kind of analogue it a little bit over to kind of like postpartum depression, where it's like, your endocrine system is doing a bunch of different things. Because your body is in a really different place, you're supposed to have a certain set of reactions, you might not have all of those reactions, you might not feel the way that you're supposed to feel. And just sitting with the feelings and working through it, and then finding another project is a lot of the time how I manage that.

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 17:55

Okay, there's so many places I want to go with this, but I guess maybe to kind of land back on this idea of Second Adolescence and kind of talking before you came on to the show. You were really kind of naming how like your Second Adolescence really took place a lot on trail. And I'm curious if you could share more, and I'm hearing the beginnings of the story of it. Can you hear more about kind of what does that mean for you that your Second Adolescence occurred for you on trail?

A Aubri Drake (they/them) 18:20

Yeah, it was very interesting. So I through hiked section hiked the Appalachian Trail between 2013 and 2017. So for me, that was one year into medical transition out to six years, where I felt like a very naturally different person, but like I was finally I felt more integrated. For me, it was about finding a similar feeling that I had of being myself before puberty happened. I felt like a really substantial disconnect with myself and everyone's reactions to me and my body, and just how my body felt to me once I hit puberty, and I hit puberty very early. And so it was very interesting coming of age on a trail, because gender norms on trail are different than

gender norms, other places. So a more masculine aesthetic for women is more acceptable, it's less gender transgression, on trail to not shave your legs to cut your hair short to dress in baggy or clothes, maybe not wear as bright clothing, to not have makeup or nails. So it's it's easier, I think, for people who are presenting as more masculine women or queer women or that's like the way they walk through the world to blend in because the gender transgression doesn't stand out. So at the beginning of my time on trail for the first year or so that I was on trail, people would frequently read me as a masculine woman and didn't care. They were fairly broadly with me. They were very friendly. Most people were fine and then then, as I started being read as a man more, I have to work really hard to be read as a straight man, even, you know dressed in schlubby clothing having not showered in five days, I am too expressive in the way that I talk most of the time, and I am interested in talking, most people would read me as a feminine man, and they would assume that I was gay. And on trail for men, it often seems a little bit of a gender intensification process, where they grow their beards long, they're kind of caveman back to nature. And some people have that flavor of kind of the good old days and how things used to be. And so what I unfortunately have found is that I had people who would act very aggressively towards me, because they read me as a gay man, to the point where I had people tell me that I would try to I would try to not talk very much. And my partner learned very quickly that if we were talking on the phone, and I'd be like, suddenly go like monotone and like, monosyllabic. He's like, Oh, are there other people there? And I'm like, yo, it's like, I had men in shelters be like, Are you gay or something in this way? That was like, there is one correct answer. And I had people tell me that the shelter was full, and that I should go find somewhere else to stay for the night, when it was an eight person shelter, and there were three people. So it was it's been very interesting to go from being read as a masculine woman and having that not be a problem to being read as a feminine man. And having that be a problem and also have to be something that I have to factor into the equation for my safety. Whether that's hitchhiking, whether that's going to hostels where it's shared sleeping quarters, going on the 80, are often in very isolated, very rural, very conservative sections of Southern Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Pennsylvania, I was harassed by a hostile owner. And he followed me to the first road crossing, and was waiting in his pickup truck for me. So it's, it's interesting, because you're trying to always figure out how people are reading you. Because the way they react is going to be different. Right? And like, I was going through North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, in 2016. I was there in September, October of 2016. I saw the official Trump touring bus when I went to town to get groceries. Wow. Like, why are there people open carrying with this big bus? And I was like, what is it? That's Trump's bus, okay, and everybody was very eager to talk about Trump and politics. And I was like, I'll just go back to trail now. I'm good. I'll opt out of this conversation. And, whoa, and trying to decide when you say something, when you don't, is always a little bit challenging. But at the same time, while all those challenges also happen, I have also met a good number of queer folks and other trans folks out on trail. And sometimes it's that it feels a little bit probably like, you know, I imagine the 60s and 70s, where where you're trying to do this dance of like, friend of Dorothy, like, Do you know the same people I know, like, Do you love Laverne Cox is pretty cool. Trying to find a way to indicate in a way that isn't going to make either of you unsafe. Yeah. And since my time on the ATF spent a fair amount of time on the West Coast. And it's so hard to know whether its proximity to larger cities, West Coast versus East Coast, passage of time, because it's been in a couple of years. But in my time on the PCT, the Tahoe Rim Trail, the John Muir Trail, especially in the last few years, I've started seeing a lot more queer and trans people and non binary people out hiking, and sometimes they're like, very, very open about it. And other people are a little more quiet about it, but at the same time, like finding people that you can connect with.



Adam James Cohen (@he/him) 24:09

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 24:00

I mean, pause. I'm just like, I'm feeling so many things, listening to your story and feeling so many things for you, in your experience on trail, I mean, and it's so complicated because on this one hand like it sounds like it's been a space of such like discovery and reintegration with kind of yourself with your childhood self. There's been such power that's happened for you on trail and then the other hand, you've had to just deal with so much and there's been so much laboring, needing to be done on trail to make sure to keep to monitor your safety constantly. You've had to deal with so much shit. Oh my gosh, wow. Thank you for letting us all into that part of your experience. So you know, the real realities that you've had to face and, and it is interesting. Yeah, like whether it is location or time the fact that that you had a different experience on the west? I would say I'm glad to hear that. That's What you've been noticing out there and gosh, I just want that to be true everywhere.

A Aubri Drake (they/them) 25:05

And at the same time, like I've had really lovely experiences, like there was one. My very first hitchhike ever that I had in Vermont, the man was very, very friendly and chatting. But he was he was older and older white fellow, and I was like, Okay, how is he reading me? And at a certain point, he goes, Oh, so do you have a girlfriend? And I was like, Okay, I'm assuming he thinks I'm a guy. And then it's like, well, how do I answer? Do I lie? Do I not? And then that particular moment was like, alright, we're in Vermont, he seems pretty friendly. Like, we'll try. I was like, no, actually, I actually have a boyfriend. And he's like, Love is so hard to find, wherever you can find it. I'm so glad you have someone. And he tells me all about his family. And like, that was really lovely. And another time I was in, I was in Southern Virginia. And it was a very rural area. And I was hiking with a friend of mine. And she is a trans woman and was earlier on in her transition where she wouldn't be read as a sis woman, but she also wouldn't be read as a sis man, and she had hurt her knee. And she needed to get home. And I was really worried about getting her home safely. And we found this hostel and long story short, the person who shows up to pick us up, I'm like, I'm pretty sure she's trans. And my friends like now, like, I'm pretty sure. And so by the next morning, it turns out that the woman who had picked us up, she's trans, the person who lives with her is her wife. And there were three trans people, and this queer woman all just hanging out having great conversations, supporting and loving on each other. It was just wonderful. And unexpected, you know?

A Adam James Cohen (he/him) 26:45

Yeah. Wow. Oh, that's beautiful. Okay, so what was happening for you, then whenever you would get off trail, and like, while so much again, this idea of second adolescence in your own journey, being on trail was such a space for kind of imagine there was so much introspection happening so much kind of deep work, even without intentionally doing deep work was it was occurring, like, what then happened in your life off trail at that time.

A Aubri Drake (they/them) 27:09

I mean, I started running more in the offseason, from hiking to keep myself in shape. Because I wanted to make as much mileage as possible. When I did hit the trail and take time off of work, relationships ended relationships began, I did a lot of work for myself around attachment and

kind of processing my own childhood, and all of the different gender roles that I had been taught growing up. So I was raised by incredibly conservative Christians. I grew up in Connecticut, for everybody who's like, were down south Did you grow up and I was like, I was homeschooled K through 12th grade, and I grew up in Connecticut. And so, you know, like finding queer community, finding trans community, it's always hard for me to balance that in some cases, it almost feels like two different worlds, or it's like being out on trail, it's almost like getting to just be feral and exist in nature in this way that feels natural, and right. And being reminded that I am part of a natural variation, that sex is not binary, like biological sex is not binary, there are at least four different elements of biological sex, which I think is just such a terrible term anyway. But nonetheless, that like, even even within our limited understanding of nature, nature is so variable, and the ways that nature exists, like we are natural in our variation, and being reminded of that, that I am just part of the landscape is so freeing, it's a similar feeling that I sometimes get when you like, sit and watch the the stars and the ocean, where it reminds you how small you are. And that that's okay. And that, like, any mistake I make, it's just one person. And in the grand scheme of things, it's going to even out and it's okay. And also just remembering that like I'm connected to other creatures in this world, even if it doesn't always feel like that. I often find that I'm less lonely in nature by myself than I am in a crowded space where I don't feel understood. Yeah, wow. And like the storm trying to blow me off the mound and it's not personal. It just is what it is. It would be there if I was there, or if I wasn't, and then I get to be the one to decide what I want to do with myself and my own decisions. I feel like it's it kind of has helped me both on trail and off trail like work on my own sense of boundaries versus ultimatums, right, like controlling myself versus controlling other people.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 29:44

Whoa will say more about that boundaries versus ultimatums that feels really interesting.

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 29:48

Well, it's just one of the things I've noticed in like my own relationships, in relationships with other people and when I say relationships, I don't really hold to like the big our capital our relationship like We all have relationships, we all have dyadic relationships with people that we are connected with in some way. And I noticed both in myself, and then in other people looking back on my childhood and looking at the ways that my parents raised me and interacted with me and my siblings and, and looking at when we're feeling insecure, or unstable or unsure of ourselves, that it can be easy to try and control other people to make ourselves feel better to be like, Well, I'm really nervous about this thing. So you can't do that thing. Rather than being like, Oh, this thing is really hard for me, I need to take a step back, I'm not going to engage in that making decisions for myself, rather than trying to make other people do what I want them to do to avoid the conflict for myself. Love it. Yes. And I feel like hiking with my partner has probably that has been one of the areas. I somewhat ironically call it being a hiking top. I was not very good at the beginning. And I was I had no idea what I was doing. And yeah, my current partner, I took him up a trail in the White Mountains having not much experience in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. And I took him as it turns out, it is literally the steepest climb on the entire Appalachian Trail. I did not know that. And he didn't really have a lot of hiking experience. And it started raining halfway up. He then got an ocular migraine where he lost vision and one of his eyes. It was a very wild experience. And I was some I was half convinced

he was just going to break up with me when we got to the car. Because it was in the first like six months of us dating and I was like I have made a grievous error. And I am so sorry. But we managed to kind of, you know, come back from that. But similarly, like, there's definitely been a lot of times where we have to go back and forth about like, what is the goal of what we are doing? Right. And I think this applies to a lot of things in life where it's like, What's my goal of doing this thing? Is it to make a lot of miles? Is it to enjoy our time together? Is it to see a mountain top? Like what is the goal? And are we all on the same page about what the goal is?

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 32:17

Yeah. So today, what is your relationship like with thru hiking and ultra running? Like where where do things stand today for you?

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 32:28

I feel like for thru hiking, that will always be my first love that will always take precedent over running more Ultra running, I enjoy those things. But if forced to choose, it would definitely be hiking, I hope to be as sustainable as I can. And that being in my mid 30s. Now I'm like Oh right. bodies can only get hurt so many times. And it accumulates over time. And I have to make decisions about what I can do with my body and trying to not get sucked into the idea that more faster is better. And that it's sometimes okay to slow down and have recovery time. And to remember that winter has a purpose for nature and for humans, that some like built in rest time is really important. And I also made a conscious decision maybe three years ago, to be more public about being trans and being queer, and being a hiker and kind of integrating those two pieces, because I had kept them separate for a little while. Because I didn't want I didn't want to be a token. And I didn't want to forever be asked inappropriate questions. And I just wanted to be able to hike and do my own thing and not have people looking at me. Sometimes I like the trans agenda is to have the privilege to be left alone. Along with you know, trans agenda is average life expectancy. But I decided that I wanted to integrate all of those pieces while kind of maintaining some boundaries about how much I would share and in what spaces but at the end of the day, for me, it's been about wanting to provide more visibility to people who are in the same kind of position. I was in 2013 and 2013. I didn't know anybody who was queer or trans and through hiking. And because I couldn't ask anyone, I was left to figure out everything by myself. And that's kind of a rough learning curve. And so I decided that I wanted to be more out for other trans folks so that they could see that it is possible. It is something that we can do, and also have somebody that they could talk to or ask questions of. And I think through the last couple of years with Instagram and Facebook and kind of different groups that I've been a part of online, I've been able to make a lot more connections with people across the US who are queer, non binary, trans and through hiking or doing long sections and particularly on long trails, I think more so than other in some other sports, it feels like it almost feels a little bit like being in like a fraternity or something like that where you could meet somebody for five minutes or hike with them for a day on a long trail. And you're gonna be willing to be like, Oh, you're in the area did you want to meet up and like, go for a hike? Oh, you're hiking through, I'll bring you trail magic. I'll totally meet you on trail and bring you all these snacks. And that connectedness can feel really wonderful to kind of bring full circle both pieces of like your day to day life. And that through hiking experience to kind of bring it to one place. Like I had a really wonderful experience. The first time like the John Muir Trail, like did it in 10 and a half days, which it's not normally done that fast. And it's 210 or 220. Wow. Okay, yeah. And that's in

the Sierra, and it's all at altitude. Wow. And by day five, I was and there's also no cell service after day three, there was no cell service until I got to town on day 11, which did get my partner to buy me a Garmin inReach so that I could tell him I wasn't dead. So it was very valid. But on day five, I was like, at the lowest place feeling so awful, and feeling so lonely. And I saw these two young women go past and I was like, I want to be friends with you. Because a lot of the other people I've been seeing are like older white guys in groups of like, six of them. And I'm like, we're not going to be friends. And I ended up catching up to them. And we chatted and it turns out that we all worked in like medicine and research. They've been friends. Since high school, we hiked together for the day, we camped at the same place, we had dinner together. And towards the tail end of dinner, you know, I'd said that like, you know, I had a boyfriend and I like let them assume that I was like a gay guy. Because I was like, I'm not dealing. And towards the tail end of dinner. One of them looks at me and goes, Oh, hey, like, what pronouns do you use. And it was the first time that anybody on Trailhead ever asked me that. And it was this moment of feeling like two halves of me coming together, and actually being seen on trail in a way that I had never felt seen before. And it was just, it was just so precious to me in that moment, especially feeling so so I was feeling terrible at that time. And they were supposed to summit the same day I was and we didn't see each other again, we followed each other on social media. And one of them was through hiking the Appalachian Trail last year. And it had been what, like three years since we saw each other. And I was like, When are you coming through Massachusetts, I will bring you trail magic, and totally made it happen. And it was like no time had passed at all. And I wrote an article that ended up in trail runner, which included talking about that part of my experience, and she was like I was so I was so surprised to see like that I got included in your story and I it just I'm so happy that that made you feel so seen. And it doesn't it doesn't always take a lot.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 38:02

I feel so touched just listening. I mean, this whole conversation like I'm feel like I'm just constantly feeling so many things. But yeah, that last bit like how powerful oh my gosh, and gosh, like I'm just so also touched by your decision to I'm going to be visible with my experience. I'm going to take up space here to allow for more people to feel more safe and okay to take up space to be out in nature to be on trail, like how has that been for you to be on the other side of that decision to be more visible?

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 38:34

So far, it seems like the balance has been pretty good. I don't get a lot of online hate I don't have enough visibility for that yet. I'm hoping to avoid that level of publicity. But I try to walk that line of recognizing the privileges that I do have of often walking in the world and being read as a white man with also balancing that my male privilege only is conditional on me passing as a sis man. And then I'm also have a punishment that is meted out for appearing gay and being feminine, when that's not something that toxic masculinity allows for. And I found that people are more volatile around gender transgression when they read you as a man than as a woman. And I tried to also add my voice to try and bring people some degree of awareness of how their behavior can impact other people. Like I wrote a piece for the long trail magazine talking about my experience with there's a very specific experience I had on the long trail with a child who was 10 years old, who was old enough to know better who came at me in front of his parents trying to start a fight and being very, very rude to me about my gender. And the

way I wrote the article. I was like, here are all of the things that went through my mind and here's why this was a problem. Here are the practical steps that you can take in your day to day life to change As your behavior so that you can be a little bit more aware of how you impact other people. At the same time, I do think visibility is a little bit of a trap in that believing that by being visible that will bring change. And I don't know that that's always true, right? I mean, we were talking about this earlier, there's more than 350 Anti trans bills proposed to the US since January one this year. And it's hard to know, right? Like, it feels so many ways that being visible, makes people more aware, and people being aware doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to react favorably. But I think for me, at the end of the day, I focus on what I bring for other trans people, I do advocacy work in my workplace as well. And I tried to find the balance of not setting myself on fire to keep somebody else warm, and like what's sustainable, because if I burned myself out, I can't keep doing the work. So trying to find the balance of being public, but also being private enough to give myself time to recharge, making Instagram work for me rather than me working for Instagram. I also tried to kind of lean into the things that I'm good at and that I enjoy. And so often that means writing, I somewhat tongue in cheek Lee refer to it as keyboard activism. I love that I write a mean email, like, I'm very proud. I've somewhat ironically said that I want to make a chapbook of just all of my emails, that are all the advocacy emails I have sent. I have written so many researchers, I love taking surveys, and I've written so many researchers telling them that their gender questions are bad, and that they are not using the gold standard and that they need to do a two step gender question and that their data actually isn't measuring what they think it is. And, and at the end of the day, I think I'm just most focused on and find most rewarding to focus on giving back and giving internally to trans people, to non binary people to queer people, and to lifting them up and supporting them. And creating, you know, informal networks, where it's like, you know who to ask, like, you don't know that, oh, let me connect you with my friend Aubrey. They can get you what you need. They have a bunch of materials, they can help you out or Aubrey hikes a lot. They'll totally want to talk to you about hiking and get you connected. And and I think that's what I love most is helping bring about queer and trans joy, and helping people navigate the world so that they can feel that same sense of euphoria that I feel sometimes when it's like, I'm out in the desert, and the wind is whipping at 70 miles an hour. And I'm by myself. And I'm not sure if water is going to be there in 10 miles and I really hope it is. But it's also still so magical that I get to be out there and just interacting the same way with the world s like the deer that like to come to my campsite to see if they can get food from me. Or the Mojave ground squirrel that wakes me up at two in the morning shuffling around at night. Looking at me with its big beady eyes. Or something just wonderfully peaceful about that to just be there's a series of books that i i also read a lot audiobooks are my best friend. If you don't know about Libby app, you should know about Libby. That's how I don't go broke reading all these books. Becky Chambers is a queer author, and she writes sci fi. And she wrote two novellas that I would call Apocalypse averted rather than post apocalyptic. And the main character is a non binary T monk. And one of the things that I really loved about there was a conversation in this book between a human and a robot. This talking about why do we have to have a purpose? Are we not animals? are we different than animals? Because animals don't have a purpose. They simply are. And why is simply being not enough. And that sometimes we don't have to have a purpose other than being and there's something really freeing about that.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 43:55

Wow, oh my gosh, I can't wait to re-listen to this conversation. There are so many moments of just like, I just want to like slow down, press rewind and hear you say it again. I'm so appreciative that you're on here sharing all of this whenever I feel I say this all the time. And

it's a little maybe a little annoying for listeners, but whenever I feel so strongly, I often like ramble because I can't get the right words out in time. I'm such an internal processor. But I just I'm feeling so strongly throughout this conversation right now, kind of hearing not only your story, but also your perspective. And kind of I'm also hearing a lot of invitations for people listening to this conversation. Just subtle invitations for kind of new ways to perhaps hold and look at things. So gosh, Aubri, I'm so grateful that you decided to want to come on and I know I got to wind down and let you go. Was there anything that wanted to be a part of this conversation that hasn't yet or does that feel like an okay place to wind down?

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 44:51

Yeah, I mean, I guess I would just say you know, to everybody listening that not everyone is gonna find happiness or euphoria in the same places. as I do, but whatever those things are, it's always worthwhile, whether that's art, whether that's reading, whether that's hiking, or running or swimming. There's something wonderfully precious to me about being a trans person that can find movement in my body that makes my body feel more like mine, for me running and hiking particularly early in my transition, when everything just felt wrong, and it was getting closer to being right. But sometimes being able to identify what was wrong made it worse. Because I was like, well, it was it's just me, I'm just weird. And then I was like, Oh, it's a thing. There's something I could do about it. Oh, god. No, this is so much work. But sometimes just going outside, I hate the treadmill. Because to me running and hiking, it's about being outside and being part of nature, it would remind me that my body was good at something, not just causing me pain and discomfort, but that it was kind of magical. And it could take me so many places, and it could bring me joy, and it could bring me to beautiful places that made me feel even more joy. And kind of going back to that purpose, right, it made me feel like my body had a purpose, and that it could be good, and especially earlier on, that was just game changing to have those moments where everything felt okay, and I could feel hope that things, maybe this could last longer. And it would give me the energy to keep pushing on even when things weren't going well. And even now, like it gives me a time and a place to center myself to let me continue on even in the midst of all the anti trans legislation, which is just psychologically emotionally and logistically devastating for me and for so many people that I love and care about. And it can be hard to find energy and desire to keep going when things are looking that dire. And so sometimes it's really powerful to just put my phone in airplane mode and put on a queer or trans authors audiobook. And just go in the woods. And remember that I am natural, and I am good. And I am exactly the person that I am supposed to be.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 47:23

Gosh, Aubri, thank you again, this has been so special. And are you someone who would folks listening want to connect with the reach out to after listening? Do you offer that? If so, what's a good place for people to stay connected and follow what you're up to?

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 47:39

Definitely yeah, so I have a website Transcending Mountains, I can send you the link for show notes. And I'm also on Instagram, at @genderqueer_hiker. And I post there my stories are often a lot about trans legislation right now but also sometimes cute Capybara videos or flying

trapeze videos because I also do flying trapeze. Yes, and people can totally, totally reach out Instagram is probably the quickest way but there's also a contact form if they want to do email on my website.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 48:13

Awesome. Awesome. Well, I'll link to all of that. And again, thank you so much. This was so special.

A

Aubri Drake (they/them) 48:20

Thank you for having me. I really, it's been a really fun time.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 48:32

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 guest on the show and you want to come on and share about your own Second Adolescence visit secondadolescencepod.com/beaguest 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.