

Ep 44_ Khalid El Khatib (he_him)

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SPEAKERS

Khalid El Khatib (he/him), Adam James Cohen (he/him)

A

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. On this week's episode we have writer Khalid El Khatib who uses he him pronouns. I originally invited Khalid on to the show after being sent a tweet of his actually that someone thought was super second adolescence see, and I absolutely agreed it really embodied the healing process and second adolescence. And so I was curious to dive more into the story behind the tweet, and then kind of having him on. As you'll see, I kind of realized, wow, there's lots more to cover in this conversation, including me realizing that actually, I had been previously aware of him because of a rather viral experience that happened for him and his mom that I bet some of you out there may remember as well. So listen in for that. And yeah, I just feel so grateful to Khalid for coming on and really inviting us into his own story, his queer journey. And this was just such a lovely conversation. So buckle up, and thanks for being here. 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 her 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). All right. Welcome to the conversation. Thank you so much for being here. When you're in spaces like this, how would you answer the WHO ARE YOU question to start things off?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 02:46

Sure. My name is Khalid El Khatib. I'm based in Brooklyn, New York, though I am infamously at

sure. My name is Khalid El Khatib. I'm based in Brooklyn, New York, though I am immovably at this point from Iowa. So I grew up in a relatively small town in Iowa called to view and here in New York, I wear a couple of hats, one and the Chief Marketing Officer for a technology company. So I've worked in the marketing and advertising space for over 15 years. And then I'm also a writer. So for 10 plus years, I've written for a number of magazines, ranging from Paper Magazine and vice to Hello Mr. To food 52, where I've covered mostly through the lens of personal essays, a lot of LGBTQ topics, LGBTQ issues, and the intersection of our politics, Islam, the Middle East, and then I've also written about food, middle eastern food, Island food. And then finally, there are some people who knows me sort of as like this Christmas character of my mom went viral. My mom and myself went viral for a little Christmas story last year, that got a lot of attention and continues to sort of have legs on Twitter on some social media platforms.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 03:50

Yeah, could you for any listeners who may not be aware of that? Could you share a little bit about what that viral experience was? Sure. Yeah.

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 03:58

So last December, I was flying from New York to San Francisco for work. And just before I got on the plane, or maybe as I sat down my mom every year before we go home to Iowa for the holidays, typically Christmas, my sisters and myself will receive an email from her with this like 4000 word itinerary of everything that she wants us to do what will home she really aims to make it special from the things that she cooks to the places that she takes us that have some sort of sentimental value. And I tweeted a little screenshot of it just saying like, look at this isn't this isn't this wild, and then the plane took off. And as always happens, the Wi Fi wasn't working. And so I landed in San Francisco six and a half hours later to like 50,000 notifications on Twitter. I've first and foremost worried that I had been canceled. But it turns out that people like it really taken a liking to the tweet and wanted to see more about the itinerary and it's really snowballed from there. So last Christmas, if you remember there were sort of a monument The amount of flight cancellations that are cool that swept the country and I think everyone was looking for a positive story. And my mom and I really, I guess, fit into into that need. So we ended up doing a ton of press. And I think most virally, we surprised her. I surprised my mom by coordinating for her to meet Hoda live on the air, her sort of idol she she watches the today show every morning. And so. So we did that. And then he sends Ben bath on the Today Show, which is just like a weird experience. But it's been very sweet. And my mom came to New York in February, to hang out with me, I just moved into a new airport, a new apartment, she wanted to see that. And not once, not twice, but three times. She was recognized at restaurants and on the streets of New York as like the Christmas mom from the Today Show.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 05:48

No way. Whoa, what was it like for her?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 05:51

I mean, it's very sweet and funny. You know, people always say like, your mom could have a youtube cooking show, or your mom could be huge on Instagram. And she has like no desire to be in the digital spotlight has no sort of influence or DNA in her. She just like really loves her kids and genuinely loves Christmas and hosting and hospitality. So it's just, it's very sweet. It's often like she's sort of like camp, and that the sense that it's often like gay men to like the people who are ready to answer I guess, because they've already been following me on Twitter. But yeah, it's very fun. Oh, my

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 06:24

gosh, wild. How was that journey for you?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 06:26

I don't know. I mean, you did like everything. It has pros and cons. Like, I mean, it's been very fun. And my mother and I have always been close, but I guess it's sort of brought us closer together. And during this today's show, it was just so surreal. Like Elizabeth Tabacky, the actress who plays Princess Diana on the crown was all she was doing the segment before us. We met backstage and she was like, Oh my gosh, I love both of you. And we're like, we love you. So that was very weird. And then I think the thing that is like, it's not bad, it's just a little sometimes odd is like, you know, like everything, I'm sure you in your practice, think about this a lot. But sometimes the more someone tells you about them, the less you actually know. And so you know, I think, you know, through the lens of social media or press coverage. Some people see me as this like, you know, quintessentially Midwestern, like nice guy who loves Christmas and his family and is like, so dateable and cooks, it's fine. But you know, there are times when this sort of like mismatch of reality like for like, the number of times that someone has sort of slid into my DMs to you know, as to Christmas sun on on a date, or like when I'm having a dinner party or something and the food isn't isn't good. I feel like this weird self consciousness that it didn't used to, because now all of us people follow me, you know, for recipes, which is not who I am, or what I do. Wow. Oh,

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 07:48

that is so weird how like this thing outside of your control, like, basically created these expectations about who you are. So you're holding like other people's like, perceptions of who you are with actually who you are. What a confusing place to be. Yeah,

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 08:01

yeah, it's all good. I mean, there are worse places to be for sure. Like, I'd rather I'd rather some of the misconceptions of me be that like I'm a character from a Hallmark movie than the alternative or the opposite.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 08:13

Yeah, totally. Wow. That's cool. And like, what is special and unique experiences you get to

Yeah, totally. Wow. That's cool. And like, what is special and unique experience you get to share with their mom. Whoa. But okay, that's so interesting. I know this whole story. I didn't know you were that person, actually, before? Come on, because I originally wanted you to come on, because I saw a different thing that you shared, that just felt so illustrative of what I talked about here in second adolescence, and like so much of like, the queer healing journey, which was you were mentioning how during pride month, you often think back to your 13 year old self and like the whole evolution and journey that you've traveled. And I'm curious to maybe if we could just even start there. If you could kind of tell me more about that experience. Sure.

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 08:56

Yeah, man. Like I said, I wear a lot of hats. Yeah, my mom is great. And we're very close. And she is like this All American, quintessential Midwest mom. And then my dad is Muslim, and an immigrant. My dad didn't move to America until he was about 30 years old. And so my relationship with my dad Well, good is very different. And so I often write about the juxtaposition of both of those relationships and how it impacted me growing up. And so I think that there's one, you know, that the dichotomy of having a Caucasian Catholic mom, and then an Arab Muslim father, and then it's compounded by the fact that I grew up in, you know, a relatively small town in Iowa in the 90s, for the most part. And so, you know, everyone's journey is very different. And I think all of these things are inputs into how they navigate them. But the one thing that is really interesting as a 38 year old now, is how my teenage years and my 20s don't feel that far away. You know, like the magic of aging is to be perpetually I feel like we're, I don't know, 1822 years old, but just talking to like a younger person like a 24 year old. You know, those sort of like classic questions. I feel like straight people are like, where do you go to college? Where do you grew up? What do you study? And gay people are like, When do you come out? What was it like telling your parents and, you know, I came out to most of my friends and the majority of my family, my freshman and sophomore year of college. And now if you tell the young person that that sounds late, but at the time, I was like one of very few people at my college to be out, because 2003 was just like a completely different time. And we take for granted that it was not that far away, but again, totally different. And so, you know, I spend a lot of time reflecting on that journey from feeling alone and isolated, and like, I'd never be able to come out as a pre teen or young teenager or an Iowa to sort of navigating being one of what I felt to be like the few people who were out in my late teens and early 20s. And now to like, be a 30 something in Brooklyn, New York to be like, surrounded by gay people, sometimes overwhelmingly, so.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 11:10

Yeah, totally. Wow. Well, in that journey, I'm curious to that kind of start going back a little bit. And you kind of like planting some seeds and giving us a bit insight about kind of the context within which you grew up? And I'm curious, like, what messaging around queerness? Or, you know, heteronormativity? Like, what was the messaging that you were kind of exposed within within your kind of micro and macro culture at the time?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 11:32

Yeah, I think very little. I mean, I, one of my more popular essays was for this new site called Food 52. And I write about like, a pre 911 America. And so my dad's name is Osama, which now

is, you know, has a very specific connotation, but But growing up, so many people in my hometown of Iowa, who'd never met an Arab or Muslim had no idea how to pronounce or something. They called him, Sam. He's a doctor. And so he had like a number of patients in the community. And I write about how so many of our preconceived notions today about what it means to be Arab or Muslim, barely existed, then, I mean, they were shaped by some extent, to the media where they were often portrayed as, like terrorists, or what you've seen Aladdin. But for the most part, people were fairly open minded. And so I talked about Hamas, which again, like in the same way that coming out now is just so commonplace. Hamas is literally everywhere we at Trader Joe's, we have Whole Foods, we have, you know, restaurants and salad shops that sell hummus, but at the time, no one really knew what it was. And so, you know, we would often serve it at parties and at dinners at my house. And it became so popular among neighbors and friend groups that we would drive to Chicago to see my dad's family at least once a month. And we would stock up on tahini because you couldn't buy it in the local grocery store and then like distribute it to neighbors so they could make their own hummus. And, you know, that's sort of a long winded way of me, saying that there are parallels between how I grew up is like I just didn't really know. I mean, I knew what it meant to be gay. But there were very few portrayals of it in the media. Internet access was just picking up steam and the context of which you learned about it was often as you know, has been written about and talked about ad nauseam was quite sad, you know, like we watched Philadelphia in high school. And so I knew about being gay through the lens of the AIDS epidemic. I knew about being gay through like sitcoms were often sad stories and families, disowning loved ones. And then everyone from Joe Biden to scholars have talked about, there were an increasing number of media portrayals like willing grace, for example, like the birdcage that sort of normalized what it meant to be gay and showed that you could be happy and be gay, but it was difficult to sort of find those in a place like Iowa.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 13:47

Absolutely. And so then kind of in your story, when queerness became something you were developing more awareness of within you, how do you remember responding to that?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 13:57

It's a good question. I mean, it's something it depends on the year right, totally sort of go through various I'm not a psychologist, I took a number of psychology courses in college. But, you know, I think there are times when you're sort of in denial, and there are times when you wish for the queerness within you to go away. There's bargaining, right? Like, you're like, Oh, I could date this girl, like, I'm semi attracted to her. I could figure this out. She's nice enough, what have you and then there are less nuanced, more reckless ways of coping like drinking, substance abuse, things like that. Again, I was fortunate that although it seemed so traumatic and frenetic, the period with which I coped with my own queerness was like pretty truncated, you know, like, I mostly figured it out by the time I was 1819. And I was really lucky to very early on in college, find a group of friends who are incredibly accepting.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 14:54

Yeah, how was that experience of starting to let people in to knowing who you are, again?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 14:59

At a time that was different than it is today, you know, again, like we see these like media portrayals like heartstopper, and love Victor and all this sort of queer shows that are everywhere today where someone comes out, and everyone's like, amazing. And then like the, you know, the plot sort of continues, it wasn't that it wasn't like, you know, there is sort of this moment of relief. And I think there is like, so much gratitude around the acceptance that you feel. But there was at the time, like, still self loathing and self doubt, and all of those sort of negative things that didn't go away, just because you said the words, I'm gay to a loved one. And I often tell that to people too. So I still like people reach out to me often era folks, either in the Middle East or here in the US, because it's often much more complex to come out. If you're raised Muslim, if you have a Muslim family, if you are not part of a western culture. And you know, I say don't beat yourself up because there wasn't this like epiphany or this, like seamless transition to being gay, or, you know, you told a friend, and you don't feel amazing, because people say like, all you have to do is tell one person, they'll be better. I think, for me, it was like, I was so happy that I came out when I was 19. And things did become easier. But they were still hard for a while. Absolutely.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 16:13

I really appreciate you highlighting that. Because I think that can be true for positive and queer people from different cultural contexts around this hope, maybe even delusionally hopeful, like, once I come out, everything will be different. And I'll feel differently all the sudden, and but yeah, like there's so much that happens, when we're in those pre coming out years that places such wounding obstacles, these things that aren't going to go away magically, in a single instant after sharing this with someone, despite hoping so that was fully true for me in my own experience, which is, you know, different from yours. But I thought everything could be different, or I was hoping that it would change, but really having to then encounter like, Oh, this is when I really have to really deal with the self loathing this internalized anti queerness, these internalized, limiting beliefs that were there didn't have any access to tending to pre coming out. And that's a whole other journey. Right? Yeah. And then just quickly, like you mentioned, a lot of Arab folks who are navigating this are reaching out to you, how is that for you to be in that role of support?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 17:13

It's a good, it's a good question. So you know, I used to write a lot more than I do today, I'm slowly working on a book. That's a whole other podcast, yeah, productivity hacks, and, you know, whatever. Yep. But I used to write a lot more. And there was a popular YouTube video about me coming out to my father. And so that was often how people found me and they reached out to me, and people still reach out very movingly over this holiday story with my mom, a lot of people reached out talking about how they lost their mother or they lost a parent and, and the holidays, were really tough. And seeing the holidays through the lens of our families. Love was like very healing for them. And so anytime that happens, anytime I get any sort of feedback or cold outreach, I would say, one, it feels good. But it can be a bit overwhelming. And two, there's so much nuance to everyone's story. I mean, we'll you know, we'll talk for a number of minutes here, and there's still so much I won't know about you, and

you won't know about me, and I'm trying to generalize as much as possible. But every person's relationship is different with their loved ones, but also with themselves. They're like ability to compartmentalize their ability to self reflect their ability to survive. And so too often people will like reach out to a stranger when they connect to them over a press story or a book or an essay. And they'll want I think this happens in therapy probably all the time. It's like, what is wrong with me and to what is the silver bullet to fix me? And it's like, look, I can only tell you about what I've experienced, and how my experience might translate to yours. But I am not in any position to go deep into your life or like, unpack what you're truly going through. And so that was like a very long winded way of me saying like, sometimes it's the conversations are really tough, because there's not much I can sort of give people.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 19:01

That's a lot to hold. And I appreciate you sharing your experience with that. Because, yeah, it's a unique experience to be on the receiving side of so much people asking for support. And you of course, your heart wants to like, give them everything you can but as you're speaking to, there's so much nuance in everyone's story. And it's tricky to give advice and tell people what to do. Because yeah, we don't know all the parts of everyone's story in context. And yeah, but it's also so tender and so powerful that by you sharing your story, like so many people were like feeling such resonance and connection with and seeing themselves in you and I'm sure just even by exposure to your story, even if they didn't reach out, like that's probably been so helpful and healing for folks in their own journey. So thank you for offering your story in that way. And also again, thank you for being here.

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 19:45

Yeah, I mean, I like I will say I feel very fortunate, very blessed if you will, and that I've like mostly seen the good of the internet, like you know, like for as viral as the story about my mom went and for as much attention as some of my essays have gone then people have been genuinely and generally very nice, you know, like, overwhelmingly positive and heartwarming. And like, I know, that's not true of most people who experienced that level of morality. And so I feel very lucky. But also, you know, I do feel a responsibility to like respond to people and keep telling my stories, because clearly, you know, to help some people,

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 20:20

yeah, we'll jump back into your story if that's okay, I'm curious to like pick up at this point where you're starting to beginning of college come out to some friends. And you know, within the work I do with folks around second adolescence, I kind of I really frame you know, the initiation into second adolescence is really at that coming out point, when we start to want to live life, you know, not under the grips of anti queerness, not under the grips of the closet to really start finding who we are as our like, most true and free selves. And it's a rocky road. And oftentimes in that next phase after coming out, it's like this dual tasks of like uncovering and healing these wounds that we have within us. So like, find more liberation, but also start gaining experiences and living and like maybe explore dating and like getting the to this duality of like gaining experiences and healing. And I'm curious, like, Does that resonate with your own story and or what happened after you started sharing with people this?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 21:15

Yeah, yeah, I think so. You know, again, I think like, timing is everything. It was like, well, different time it was like 20 years ago. But I think that I certainly like embraced the life that I hadn't had for like the a couple of years prior. And I think it was sort of compounded by the fact, I went to school at Wash U in St. Louis. So by no means like a massive city, but I don't know, 600 800,000 people, at least 10 times the size of where I grew up. And so I think both the fact that I was able to be out in my late teens or early 20s, there were no gay bars where I grew up in Iowa, and there was no like Drake shows or anything like that. And so I sort of, you know, was able to embrace that life. And I think that, again, I'm glad that I did it. When I was young, sometimes I took it a bit too far. And I think sometimes we see that play out with people who come out later in life, but I, you know, I had fun, and it sort of carried me through to graduation. And then when I graduated in 2007, and I this is like another thing that's such a function of when exactly you grew up, but I say to people, to younger people, now it's like, pre 2008, prior to the Great Recession, you used to actually pick a city before you had a job, you know, you would just assume that you would be able to find a job. And then of course, 2008 changed all of that. But I elected to move to New York after I graduated simply because like most of my friends were moving there. And I just wanted that sort of like quintessential friends the sitcom type of life. And that I think was like a sort of phase two of what you just explained, like it was one thing to be out and feel liberated in St. Louis. It was a whole other beast to be 22 years old in New York City in 2007. Yeah,

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 22:58

I mean, so yeah, what happened in that chapter - 2007, New York City?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 23:01

I mean, I was wild. I was wild. I was going out like four times a week. And like, everything was clear, which was so different than what I was used to, you know, like happy hours in college would be with everyone on campus on a Thursday, happy hours. When I was 22. In New York, we would go to Hell's Kitchen to a bar called therapy. And it would be like gay people everywhere in a Drake show. And then on the week, we would go out, there were Sunday parties, and either still Sunday parties, but I'm old now. We would go out on Sunday, we would go out on Tuesday, and you know, constant dating and all types of people to date, as opposed to it being like a little more one note. Yeah. So it was new and exciting.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 23:42

Yeah. I mean, what was that like for you to be now immersed within the city where there's just so much access to queerness and queer community and access to I mean, maybe it sounds like you were starting to kind of get more energy to this part of your experience in college. But it sounds like the dial was able to be turned up to a different level in New York. And I can imagine it was like a lot of things at once. How was that to be so immersed in that world?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 24:06

The thing that's so interesting about New York, and you know, anyone who lives here certainly knows it. And I think many people who visit to it's like you almost take it for granted the fact that like there are so many gay queer people everywhere, especially in certain neighborhoods, like in the West Village, and Chelsea and Hell's Kitchen. It's like, you'll get off the subway and I'm like, Oh, my gosh, like there are no straight people anywhere. You sort of fall into it right away, you know, and in some ways, I think that's why New York sure has its share of problems, certainly, but can feel like Utopia to a queer person, because there is very little judgment, and you can find your community however, Nisha may be so that was certainly interesting. And I think like everything, you know, that level of liberation, especially when you're 22 years old, is a double edged sword. Like I learned a lot about myself in my early 20s. And I learned a lot of it the hard way, you know, I've partied too hard, but again, like I don't regret any of it. And I'm glad I got it out of my system when I was in my early 20s. But I do think, you know, I was fortunate for all the times I partied too hard still be mostly under control. I've seen people sort of burn the candle out too fast when they first moved to New York or, or something like that.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 25:15

Well, I'm curious, like, even in that idea of, you know, quote, unquote, partying too hard. How do you today make sense and meaning out of what was kind of underneath that? It sounds like there was a function of in some way? Yeah.

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 25:25

You know, some of it is the nature of like moving to a city with millions of people, when you grew up in a small town, that some of it is certainly like the continued process of coming out and embracing fairness, and then some of it is just being 22 years old. Sure, you know, I might think, like, I'll talk to young people, whether they're colleagues or friends or friends, and it's like, it doesn't sound it doesn't, you know, 15 years younger than me doesn't sound that crazy. And then I have a conversation and I'm like, wow, you know, like, I've lived a lot since then. I think more than anything, I very much embrace the concept of self care, even when it's not like, truly, it doesn't feel like self care. It's like, maybe I want to go to dinner every night this week, and see friends, like, I recognize that I'm, like, tired. I was in Europe last week. I'm away next week, like, I need some time to myself, I was supposed to go away this weekend, I eat healthier, you know, all those sorts of things that are sort of part of the process of both aging and knowing yourself. Were maybe like very devoid in that era. Totally.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 26:27

Yeah. And so what followed that era before getting to this era, you're in what followed that? 22 Like, what was would you say, March? Like, what's the next chapter there in your own story?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 26:38

Yeah, I so I think the other thing that's pretty interesting, as I moved to New York to want to be a writer. I thought. Okav. I'll live in New York for one year. and I'll apply for MFA programs. And

then I'll like, go to some college and get my MFA and be a writing professor somewhere. And, you know, it's like the Carrie Bradshaw quintessential New York dream. After three months of working retail, I said, Okay, that's not for me, like I need a more of a nine to five, which was started to become challenging to get given the recession was accelerating. And I didn't get into any of the MFA programs I applied to, you know, again, I was like partying too hard a half assed the applications I submitted us is that I really mean college as opposed to creating fresh content. And that was sort of a wake up call. And then I think, when I was, you know, just turned 23, I both recognized that I wanted to live in the city more permanently. I liked it, despite all the challenges that it brought in to I recognized that I needed to lean a little more heavily into my career. And so that's when I got a desk job. And that kicked off a fairly laser focus on my career, I then invested pretty heavily in this sort of professional side of things. For a couple of reasons. The surface answer is like, I'm pretty good at working and like fairly smart. And that has been pretty successful at a fairly young age. And New York, there's so much opportunity, like it's, I've had incredible queer bosses. I've had amazing opportunities from a really young age and in the writing lens to like, I started writing for paper magazine, because I met the editor at a fashion week party, on some Tuesday night at midnight, I went up to him at the party and said, I love your magazine, I'd love to write for you sometime. And he said, Sure, let's do it. And then, you know, like, bias reached out to me, book editors reached out to me and it's so amazing to take advantage of the city and to feel more whole through the lens of work and life. And then I think the other this sort of darker, more psychologically nuanced version of it is I do think that growing up closeted, and like very insecure and bullied to some extent, we have this like lifelong feeling of less and less self consciousness of how people perceive us. And so I think that's sort of the dark side of my relentless pursuit of success is like all show that even though it's like, who am I showing that like, 20 years later, there was a little bit of that.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 29:01

Thank you for sharing that. I think that is such an experience so many people have, and it's so important to bring awareness to it and and it's nuanced to like, on one hand, it really has served you to have like your response to this, whether conscious or unconscious, internal stuff that you're maybe trying to distance yourself from feeling less than or feeling not enough for others propels you to want to succeed in a lot of ways and bring a lot of probably great things into your life. But then Yeah, but there's there is a need to address kind of this other underlying force behind it. And I guess I'm curious if you brought up for sharing, like, what has that been like for you to really address the underlying pieces there to that more of the psychological side here?

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Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 29:43

I would say I'm working on it.

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Adam James Cohen (he/him) 29:45

Oh, yeah, we're all a work in progress.

K

Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 29:47

I continue to work on it. I think one it's like, you know, the most important step is acknowledgement. It's I think the last several years in particular is when I really like came to terms the factor that that plays in my continued sort of mobility and focus on work. And I think that it is also getting older, you know, you see your parents age and how they live their lives and start to evaluate your own through the lens of them. And so you start to ask yourself, like, is this what I want? Is this what I want to focus my time on? Like, why am I doing this? And I think another sort of factor of getting older is that you start to realize that like, life isn't as cookie cutter, as you once thought, we moved to New York or we moved to a city, we get a job, we try to pursue our first relationship or a serious relationship. Maybe you want kids, maybe you don't you buy a home. And I think those sort of older you get are the deeper into maybe one of those paths, you get your realize that there is not this sort of perfect linearity that you once thought, you know, someone said something that wasn't at all profound to me, like five, six years ago, but I think about it all the time, it was through the lens of a performance review. It was like an executive at a company that I knew, she told me, she was taking a pay cut to, like, take a step back, or like work less hours. And she just said, like, look, at some point in life, you realize you don't need to make more money, you'd probably need other things. Especially growing up with an immigrant parent, it was like work harder and harder and get more and more. And I think New York has that. And I think you know, being queer or being gay. There's a lot of that in this culture as well. Whether it's working out or going out increasingly lavish vacations are expanding your friend group exponentially. I think this more and more mentality can be like really gluttonous, but also exhausting. Totally.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 31:39

And like pulls us perhaps farther away from like, who am I really what is most joyful? For me really kind of what is most meaningful for me really?

K

Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 31:46

Yeah, so I was in Europe last week for work. I was in Berlin, and the week I went in, you know, summer Berlin is amazing. It's so much fun. It's so many queer people, such an incredible party and DJ scene, which I'm not super into, but I can get into it. And so I extended for the weekend thinking that I would like go out with some friends that I have there and like, go to some clubs that I went to 10 years ago. And I ended up doing the exact opposite like being in bed at 1030 every night. But spending the day like having long lunches a couple of them solo, walking through parks for six or eight hours like leafing through magazines and books and doing a little bit of writing. It's certainly not what I would have expected. But I'm so glad that I did it. It was like the weekend that I didn't know I needed.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 32:29

Awesome is anything else come to mind, examples like that, where you're like, Well, let me like choose to spend my time how I actually want what feels good for me, like anything else comes to mind, we think about the healing journey of this last kind of chapter.

K

Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 32:45

I think self reflection is so important. So there's that example, I think when it comes to work, you know, I always coach people like, Do what makes you happy if working really hard, and making a lot of money truly makes you happy, go for it. If not, don't feel like you have to keep going up and up and getting more and more than I think the other bucket or the other example, is dating most of my friends or my age, you know, we're in our late 30s. And some people feel a certain pressure to be in a relationship, I would say like more people are than or not. And it can be isolating or like a little challenging to be single. And I think that sometimes that manifests in this, like, especially now with the proliferation of dating apps, this like I need to swipe an hour a day, I need to you know, I need 10 matches a week so that I can go on at least one or two dates. And then I need to go on at least one day a week if I'm going to be in a relationship by the time I'm 40. And like maybe you meet someone and you feel no chemistry with them. But they're a doctor and they own their apartment. And so you're going to make it work the same way that people pursue more. And this like linear life often manifests in dating, especially queer in online or app based dating, that can be really tricky. Totally.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 33:58

I feel like just like dating as a whole is such a tough- I feel like we could talk for hours even just about that. And that within like the lens of like our own queer healing and growth. And I'm curious, yeah, just anything else come to mind about since even 22 since being in New York within like the lens of dating and exploring relationships, yeah, what has been helpful or what? Where have you noticed, like, Ooh, that was a really poignant, either moment, or experience that really propelled me more either towards growth or towards myself, or also just was fun.

K

Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 34:28

Yeah, maybe a couple of one. I think though I'm like, I work in tech, and I'm a marketer. I like I think of myself as a writer, first and foremost, totally. And I guess like an artist through that lens. And I think it's so important not to discount the significance of like a singular experience, even if it's very brief. And so if I think about, like, you know, 16 years in New York and all the people I've dated and the jobs I've had, and the friendships I've had, some of the most meaningful and enduring moments here have been like a guy I had lunch with one Time or like a visitor that I spent a single weekend left that I connected on, like a really profound level, or who like I didn't connect with. But that said something that really moved me or had a story that really moved me. And so I think about this in my writing all the time, like in the past year, I can narrow it down to like two dates that I went on, that we're just like, so meaningful to me and so profound, because the conversation that we had in that like fleeting moment was so significant. So I think that that's something that I think about a lot, which is that we, you know, we're all sort of person in enduring friendships and lasting relationships, but especially in a city with 8 million people, you should not discount the person, you'll only meet once. And that's something I think about a lot.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 35:48

I love that. Wow. And yeah, and I also mentioned your writing, I bet that has also been just such a profound space as he sounds like you talk a lot about your own experience in your writing.

a profound space as he sounds like you talk a lot about your own experience in your writing, and what a tool and container within which probably so much like of your own life processing and exploration has occurred. In addition, just artistic expression?

K

Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 36:06

First of all, I think when it's good, when it's good, it's good. You know, I think there's nothing I love more than finishing a piece. The process of writing is not easy for me, like I said, I've been working on a book for a very long time, and like a classic procrastinator, but also, it's really hard to sort of unpack your own life and write about yourself. So that's tough. But I do think, you know, as I'm sure you've recommended to folks, like journaling can be like really profound. I have this friend who's a bit, maybe 20 years older than me. And he works for magazines and like met celebrities and had all these crazy experiences. And he was reminiscing with someone recently, and they said like, Hey, do you remember this crazy thing that happened with like, Mariah Carey in 1998? And he's like, No, I have no idea. I don't remember that at all. They're like, Are you kidding me? Like it was Mariah Carey, and this crazy thing happened. And he's like, and then I thought, wow, like, there's so many experiences I had that I don't remember. And if I had just written down like one sentence a day or jotted down, like, you know, once a week, the most profound thing that happened, there's so much I'm leaving behind. And so I do try to do that. Anytime something is new, even if it's on my notes app on my iPhone, just try to like capture things memorialize them, however I can.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 37:18

Totally cool. Well, it sounds like you mentioned New York. And it's been such the container for this last, like, what 15 plus years of your story. And it sounds like it's been such a place where you've come more and more into yourself and found kind of more and more of like the way of being in the world that you want to exist within. And in a similar way, like I'm on the other side of the coast, San Francisco has been that chapter for me, I feel like I found myself as a queer person here has been the container within which so much of my own growth and healing has happened. Whenever I talk with people who have since done the queer migration to like the big queer city or like the big city where they maybe have more access to feeling more space to find themselves. I'm always curious, like what each of our relationships are with our hometowns, and kind of where we grew up. And I'm curious, what is it like for you to go home?

K

Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 38:03

One, I don't think all queer people should move to San Francisco or New York or even Atlanta or Chicago. It's not for everyone. I think the thing that's great about New York is I live in like a very quiet part of Brooklyn. And I am like fairly introverted, and I do my friends choke them, like a grandma. Like I hate late dinners, I like don't go out that often. I think the great thing about New York is like you can do all that if you want. But you can also live a very quiet life. And I've had so many friends who lived here and moved to North Carolina or Des Moines, Iowa or places like that, to have a quieter life. So I just want to put out there that I'm in New York is great, but it's not everything that said I love going home. It's like very special to me. I think all of the things that made me uncomfortable about being an AI alive, I've made peace with over time, I feel very grateful to have such a strong connection to my childhood home to my mother, Iowa culture, you know, like talking to the neighbors and drinking on lawn chairs and barbecues

and things like that. One of the strange things about being from a small town or being from somewhere like Ireland and moving to a big city, is people ask all the time, like, do you think you're going to move back there? Which one is like an odd sort of question to ask, but to like, No, you know, I love Iowa. I do think, however, that the politics are really problematic to me, that it can be very isolating, like at various times in the pandemic. I was there for two or three weeks at a time. And you know, there are not that many queer people around or not queer spaces. And I do think that for everything that's great about it, and there's so much that's great. It can feel really claustrophobic, even if like I could go two months in New York without going to a gay bar or going on a date, but I like to have the option and that claustrophobia is I think the only real sort of challenging aspects of of Iowa and home that process.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 39:53

You mentioned like it sounds like it's been an evolution of being in relationship with Iowa and Iowa culture in your hometown. Now All versus how maybe you were at other points in your story, like what has been helpful for you to basically read negotiate this relationship or get to this point?

K

Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 40:08

Well, I think the passage of time is helpful. And I think that for a long time, you know, when I was in Iowa, I felt like I was missing things in New York, like I was missing parties or dates that I could have been on or friends that I shouldn't be seeing. And life has slowed down. I think the pandemic was certainly an accelerator for how we think about that. And now when I'm in Iowa, like I said, I was there for 10 days, which was a little, maybe a little too long. But I was there for 10 days this summer. I had a great time I relaxed, I slept more in those 10 days, and I probably did it a month prior in New York. I used it for some introspection, I got some writing done, I did some reading and went through late childhood photos with my mom and my family. That's sort of how things have changed being present when I'm home and not, you know, wishing I was somewhere else.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 40:57

I feel like there's so many more places we could go in this conversation. I want to be sensitive your time. So we got to wind down let you go. But I'm curious was any did anything else feel like you wanted to include it in this conversation? Today? That feels like it hasn't been shared yet?

K

Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 41:11

No. I mean, I think this has been my very, sort of follow the flow of the conversation to lots of different places. So I'm happy to cover anything else you'd like. But I feel like we've covered a lot of ground.

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 41:21

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 41:22

Yeah, awesome. And I'm thinking about maybe just because it was how I first came across you thinking about 13 year old you and this this this thing you shared about thinking about 13 worldview. How are you feeling 13 year old you today, even in this moment? Before we wind down?

K

Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 41:37

Yeah, yeah, that's a theme or a thread through this conversation has been around like being present, and like finding stillness and appreciating moments. And that's something I still have to bring myself to do. Like the frenetic pace of New York. And my own work sometimes overtakes me, and I'm constantly moving forward. You know, I can talk on a podcast about taking a step back and introspecting. But like, the reality is, most of the time I'm going going going. And there are times and I think in that tweet I mentioned like where it feels very surreal, the place that I'm in, like, there have been so many moments in the last year alone. Like I say this every pride, like every time it's pride in New York, I tried to take at least one moment where I'm like, in the thick of it. I can't do it for too long, too many crowds too hot, but it's like, wow, 13 year old me would be shocked that like you made it here. And I feel similarly like when I was on the Today Show, like I grew up watching the Today show when I was 12 years old. I came to New York for the first time. And we were you know, my family and I like held up that little sign and tried to get Al Roker to shake our hands. And then we met Al Roker backstage. And those sort of moments were like even writing something, you know, like, I wanted to be a writer for so long. I was so singularly obsessed with getting into a good school and following like a very traditional path to publishing a book. And now, you know, people will email me about articles that I wrote 10 years ago that they're right, and it's really overwhelming at times, but I try to appreciate it as best I can. And like recognize my privilege and sort of bask in it. Hell,

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 43:09

yeah. Well, this has been so special, I so appreciate you having this be a space where you're also kind of sharing your story and letting other people in and kind of using your own story as an offering and you're not telling anybody, here's the top five things you can do to like, fix yourself heal and all that. But by sharing your story, it's just so powerfully helpful for other folks on their own journey. You mean I myself took a lot from this conversation that I really appreciate my own 13 year old self took a lot from this conversation. So I just really appreciate you coming on. It's been really nice to be able to be in conversation course.

K

Khalid El Khatib (he/him) 43:42

Of course. Yeah, the one thing I say to people oftentimes like you're the only person you have to live with for your whole life. So listen to yourself above all else like that me not you know some TV show another partner or another parent, like listen to yourself. Hell

A

Adam James Cohen (he/him) 43:57

yeah. Awesome. Hey, thanks for joining us for today's conversation, feel free to head on over to secondadolescencepod.com for show notes and more then you can connect further by following

the show on Instagram at [@secondadolescencepod](#). If you're interested in being a future guests on the show, and you want to come on and share about your own Second Adolescence, visit secondadolescencepod.com/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. All right. Take good care.