

EPISODE 2: HURT PEOPLE HURT PEOPLE

Dylan: Josh, you said that you're about to graduate high school, right?

Josh: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dylan: How is high school for you?

Josh: Am I allowed to use the H-E-double-hockey-stick word?

Dylan: Oh, yeah. You're allowed to.

Josh: It was hell. (laughs)

Dylan: Really?

Josh: And it's still hell right now, even though it's only two weeks left.

Dylan: That's awful. I mean, I also just want to let you know, Josh, I was bullied in high school too.
[Instrumental of 'These Dark Times' by Caged Animals begins to play.]

Dylan [VOICEOVER INTRODUCTION]: Hi. I'm Dylan Marron and this is Conversations with People Who Hate Me, an interview series where I have in-depth conversations with some of the strangers who have sent me the most hateful or negative messages online. Why did they send these messages? Well, that's essentially what this podcast is trying to figure out. As a video maker and writer, my work focuses on social justice issues and I've been fortunate enough to find a large audience for that work, but that, of course, means that I've found a lot of detractors too.

Now we released the first episode last week and the response has been wonderful, so thank you so much for listening. But so many people have asked me why I would put myself through this and I totally get (laughs) the curiosity. But I can explain.

I was bullied all throughout middle school and high school. People, especially the other boys, gave me a pretty hard time and I was a soft-spoken, closeted gay kid with zero self-confidence. So I guess my bullies saw me as an easy target. To explain this to me and- and make me feel better, my mom would remind me that these bullies were probably hurt themselves, and that they were taking it out on me. I was kinda frustrated as a seventh-grader when she told me this. I mean, it seemed completely futile. Me knowing that they were hurting too wasn't gonna stop them from making fun of my high voice, or stop them from spreading rumors that I was gay. Spoiler alert. Those weren't just rumors. But as I got older, my mom's advice started to sink in and I started to feel curious about what was hurting my bullies.

Now, this was not to excuse their behavior, but only to kind of humanize them. sharing this with you only because the hate messages I get online, sometimes feel very similar to the bullying I experienced as a kid. The things that my online haters rag on today, things like my sexuality and my voice, are the

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same things that my bullies focused on when I was younger. I'm also sharing this with you because this episode deals with bullying and the idea that hurt people hurt people.

A quick production note before we begin. You'll hear some wind interference on my guest's side of the call. I apologize in advance for the audio quality, but I also felt that the content of what he was saying was so important that the audio quality was ultimately secondary to what was being said.

So today, I'm talking to Josh. And a little while ago, Josh sent me this message: "You're a moron. You're the reason this country is dividing itself. All of your videos are merely opinion and an awful opinion, I must say. Just stop. Plus being gay is a sin." So I am going to call Josh right now.

[Phone rings. Music fades. Guest picks up.]

Dylan: Hey, is this Josh?

Josh: Hey. Yeah, it is.

Dylan: How's your day going so far?

Josh: It's good. How are you?

Dylan: Oh, I'm good. So Josh, what inspired you to send that message to me? What sparked that first message?

Josh: I was just angry about it all. It was just a lot of, it was a build up all your multiple videos you made of stuff and I just got mad. I'm pretty sure that the video's something about police brutality and I have a lot of family from the police force and it just kind of angered me.

Dylan: Can you remember what specific, uh, video I made that, uh, sparked that first message?

Josh: Uh, Police Brutality, Unboxing.

Dylan: Unboxing Police Brutality. Okay. So ...

Dylan [VOICEOVER]: All right. So quick context. Josh is referring to a video from my Unboxing series. And you know the real unboxing videos where popular YouTubers unboxed the latest electronic gadgets? Okay. So I satirized those videos by unboxing intangible ideologies like Islamophobia and rape culture. Now here's a clip from the video that Josh is referring to:

Dylan [CLIP FROM 'UNBOXING POLICE BRUTALITY']: The people who say it doesn't exist are full of (beep). Today I'm unboxing police brutality.

Dylan: Okay. So, um, tell me a little about you.

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Josh: Well, my name's Josh. I'm 18 years old. I am currently a senior in high school, graduating in two weeks.

Dylan: Congratulations.

Josh: Thank you very much.

Dylan: Yeah.

Josh: I am going to a local junior college in my, uh, hometown, and I will be, going to be an occupational therapist assistant, which is basically if you get in a car accident or any accident and lose mobility, like any part of your body, I will basically be there to perform everyday activities with you, as little as walking or holding something until you ca- It's basically rehab until you can get the mobility back for yourself.

Dylan: That sounds awesome. So what- what is- what makes you want to go into that field?

Josh: Originally, I was wanting to go into counseling. I love to help people, even though a lot of times I don't show that. I love everyone. I love to help. Like, counseling would take a lot more time in college, a lot more money that I cannot afford myself and neither can my family. And so I just thought it'd be a good idea to go into that.

Dylan: Um, so you were telling me that you responded pretty negatively to my video, uh, against police brutality. And you said it was la- it was largely because you have a lot of police in your family?

Josh: I have a ton of police officers in my family and because of that, any time I walk past a police officer, military person, fireman I just stop to thank 'em because that's, in my mind, every day they put their lives on the line for us. And every day they go out think, uh, knowing that it could be their last. Some person could pull a gun on them. And they do it to protect us.

Dylan: Now, and- and what do you think gave you that sense of respect for law enforcement?

Josh: I've gotten a lot of my mind thinking, a lot of my the- thoughts from my parents. Uh, my family being part of law enforcement. My fam- family being part of military. All that unifying together, I just have a ton of respect for what they do.

Dylan: Do you think criticizing or talking about police brutality is a disrespect to, uh, police officers?

Josh: I don't think it's a direct disrespect, but a lot of times when you see people talking about police brutality, they're encompassing the entire police force, which I think is unfair. Because like I said many times, a lot of other people, there is some bad people out there. There's some bad people that's gonna be on the police force, but I can guarantee you that the majority of officers, policemen, all that, are good. Sometimes they- they have, like, one or two seconds to make a decision on what they need to

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do. If they need to try and stop them or if they to shoot them for protection of others. So it's a very hard place to put in unless you've done it before.

Dylan: Well, I- I agree that, um, it is a challenging job to be a police officer, but I think as- as some data has shown, there's a lot of split-second decisions that is, uh, largely based on, uh, racial bias. Right? A split-second decision that a police officer will make with an unarmed black person is different than a split-second decision that a police officer will make with an unarmed white person. Do you feel like you agree with that or disagree with that?

Josh: That's really a tough one, because all the time on the news when it's about police brutality, it's about an African-American, a black person. You hardly ever see anything on police brutality about white people, I think 'cause the news media wants to keep the Black Lives Matter movement ahead. So whenever there's something that happens to a black person, it a lot larger of news than it is for an white person.

Dylan: Hmm.

Josh: So I feel like the black people, uh, they get more media attention than the white people do because just because they're black.

Dylan: And I would actually disagree with you on that, because I think the media actually does a not-good job of covering instances of police brutality. Um, I feel like there are- are many more instances that we don't cover. Um, you were saying that you feel like the media manipulates the conversation to favor Black Lives Matter. Um, what- what is your take on the media right now?

Josh: Right now I'm not very fond of any media because media seems to only be covering the bad parts of the world right now. It seems to stray away from the good parts because people seem to enjoy watching the negative things happening in this world, because they like to just fight with each other about it. And I don't think that's just America either. That's just everywhere nowadays.

Dylan: Hmm.

Josh: And it's just sad, because there's a lot of good things going on in this world.

Dylan: Well, what do, what do think some of those good things are? Or- or what is, like, the- the beauty you see in the world right now?

Josh: I see a lot of people fighting for the cancer walk.

Dylan: Yeah, I mean, it's funny that you bring up, uh, people marching for cancer, because I think you could look at that in two different ways. Um, on the one hand, you could see that cancer is this awful thing that is happening in this world and on the other hand, you could look at police brutality the same way. I think police brutality is an awful reality in our world. And I think something like a Black

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Lives Matter rally, where people are joining together and expressing their opinion that "enough is enough, we're not gonna stand for police brutality anymore," is a beautiful show of human support to say "this group of people who have been routinely marginalized in this country, their lives matter" and we are going to unite our voices and say that. Do you think something like a Black Lives Matter rally is a part of the beauty of the world?

Josh: I'm not gonna say it's not part of the beauty, but all the black people and gays and all the outcasts, all they want is to be equal. So why do they have to have an entire thing for it? Why don't they have an all lives matter and all sexuality matters? Why does it gotta be specific to one?

Dylan: Um, well, do you think something like black pride is anti-white?

Josh: No, but you don't hear us marching about white supremacy or ... Well, actually, there's some people out there that are still doing that. They're ignorant. But it's not like, we're not going out there saying, "Hey, we're white and we're proud." I think everyone's great. I think everything depends on your personality. Like, I don't care if you're black, white, purple, yellow-

Dylan: To be proud of being part of a majority is different than expressing your pride of being part of a minority group. Do you know what I mean?

Josh: I can see your point of view on that.

Dylan: Um, and now in terms of the Gay Pride parade, you know, like, I feel, uh, I- I take part in Gay Pride marches. I think it's a beautiful way to come together. It's saying, like, in a world that in many, many ways does not encourage you to be proud of your sexual orientation or your gender identity or the way you love, um, you are banding together and saying "no, it- it is." So- so to me something like a Pride parade is actually a really beautiful part of this world. And, but you don't see it that way?

Josh: No. Ah! Sorry .It's- it's a little spider fell from the ceiling.

Dylan: Oh, what a, what a dream.

Josh: Yeah, I know. Uh, I'm not saying that it's not a beautiful thing. I'm saying that I don't think we should ...

Josh: Like, answer me this: All gay people, transgender people, all of them, they want to be equal as us, correct? As straight people, like all of the world sees normal.

Dylan: Yeah.

Josh: Right?

Dylan: I- I would love that.

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Josh: So why focus just on them? Why can't there be, uh, take out the word "gay" and just have a Pride parade? Everyone can be happy for who they are. Everyone can feel support for who they are.

Dylan: Well, the-

Josh: Whether you're gay, straight. I don't know the other ones.

Dylan: Uh, gay, straight, bisexual, those are sexual orientations.

Josh: There you, there you go. That's what I was looking for.

Dylan: Yeah. Um, so you said in your message, you said, "Being gay is a sin." Uh, wh- why do you believe that?

Josh: Mainly because it, like I said, it comes back to my religion. I'm not the best Christian out there. I'm working on it. I try and get to church as often as I can and I'm trying to ... I know that you can't follow God's every commandment. You're gonna slip up. But I try my best to follow everything that's in the Bible and being gay is one of the big things in the Bible about, you know, homosexuality is a, an abomination. Those who practice homosexuality is, shall not inherit the kingdom of God. That's not my words. That's, I'm quoting the Bible. I just don't exactly what verse. But I'm, I try my best to follow what the Bible says and I do slip up a lot. Trust me. But I try and do my best that I can.

Dylan: Yeah, so- so what in- in your estimation, what is a good Christian?

Josh: To be honest, I don't know if there is some such thing as a good Christian. We all ... Even in the Bible it says "all shall fall short of the glory of God." When God created us, He created us in the image of Him. And since that fateful day when Eve ate the apple in the garden of Eden, we have been nothing. We've been nothing, compared to what He has been. I think if you want to consider yourself a good Christian, it's just do whatever you can for the God. Give whatever you can to God. Pray to God. Go to church. And when you slip up, all you have to do is ask for forgiveness. But some people are just afraid of admitting that they did something wrong. I used to never think I did anything wrong. But admit, admitting it is one of the major things in being a quote/unquote good Christian.

Dylan: The reason I'm bringing this up is if we are to follow the Christian doctrine and celebrate what God has created, don't you feel like a Pride parade is a great way to celebrate what God has created?

Josh: But see, I believe God has made everyone, like I said, and even to this day everyone's made in His image. But the Devil gets on to us and gets it. I believe the ... Just like a policeman, uh, police brutality going after a guy. That's a church that that person made based on whatever's in his mind. In my mind, I believe that being gay is a choice.

[BREAK]

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Josh: In my mind, I believe that being gay is a choice.

Dylan: Okay. S- so you think-

Josh: I don't mean to offend you.

Dylan: No. I- I don't, I don't feel offended, only because I- I know that I didn't choose this. Um, and I, it's helpful to just hear what you believe, even if it is, uh, in direct opposition to what I know is true for me. Um, so- so just out of curiosity, why did you tack that to the end of your message? At the very end, uh, you said that being gay is a sin. Wh- why did you want me to hear that?

Josh: Uh, like I said, I was angry. I was- humans tend to type and say things out of anger that they wouldn't normally say. So I was basically, unfortunately, trying to hurt you. And it came back and bit me in the butt.

Dylan: So you feel like you're more right-leaning, more conservative. Right?

Josh: I, yes, sir I feel like I'm conservative.

Dylan: Josh, you said that you're about to graduate high school, right?

Josh: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dylan: How is high school for you?

Josh: Am I allowed to use the H-E-double-hockey-stick word?

Dylan: Oh, yeah. You're allowed to.

Josh: It was hell. (laughs)

Dylan: Really?

Josh: And it's still hell right now, even though it's only two weeks left.

Dylan: How have the last four years been hell?

Josh: When you're different in any shape, form or way, if you're not the quote/unquote popular girl, popular guy, football player, then you're not well-liked. And it's, I'm a little bit chubbier than a lot of people and people seem to judge me before they get to know me. People seem to pick and choose who they like based on what you look like, who you are, rather ... or what you look like rather than who you are. Because when you're in high school, it's all about perfection. If you get your clothes from

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Walmart, you're an outcast. If you don't have the hottest new clothes, you're an outcast. I'm a little bit bigger. I don't like to use the word "fat" but I am a little bit bigger than a lot of my classmates and they seem to judge me before they even got to know me. I've been called a "fat ass." I don't know if I can say that.

Dylan: Yeah. You're- you're allowed to.

Josh: Okay. I've been called "stupid," "idiotic." I've been told nobody cares about me. I've been told to bl- drink bleach. Just yesterday someone told me I was ugly as hell. I don't exactly how ugly hell is but I don't think it's pretty.

Dylan: Well, I mean, that- that's awful of them. I mean, I also just wanna let you know, Josh, I was bullied in high school too. The older guys were always the ones who gave me a really hard time and I will share something with you that happened one time in high school. So this was, um, my best friend at the time, she was a girl. And she was dating this guy who was older than us and he really didn't like me. And I knew he didn't like me from the beginning. Um, and it was on Halloween and we all came to school in our costumes. And I dressed up as Waldo, you know, like "Where's Waldo?"

Josh: Yeah.

Dylan: Um, and he was dressed up as a baseball player and he had a full baseball player's outfit. So, um, he asked to take a picture with me. Suddenly, what he did was right before the picture was taken, uh, he pulled his cup out from his underwear and pressed it on my face. And so, immortalized forever in a picture that then hung in that best friend's room, was a picture of him, uh, holding his cup over my face.

Josh: Did she stay with him?

Dylan: I think they broke up a few months later, but it, that did not break them up.

Josh: Yeah.

Dylan: Um, I feel like I'm about to break into a sweat even telling you about it right now, but just to let you know that I have experienced, um, a really fucked-up form of bullying too.

Josh: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dylan: It's- it's- it's, this conversation is kind of weird for me because I feel like there's so much to you that I relate to. Right?

Josh: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Dylan: There's, um, I relate to the fact that you're bullied. Um, I relate to the fact that people kind of give you a hard time for who you are. And yet there are such fundamental things that we disagree on.

Josh: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dylan: Do you feel that we're similar or do you like that's- that's an unfair assertion?

Josh: I think we're similar, but like you said, we have very different ... We have similar lives but very different beliefs. You're bullied. I'm bullied. But it's not for the same reason.

Dylan: Right. But I would actually argue and say that it is for a similar reason. I- I think people, um, are very, are very cruel to what they don't understand. Right?

Josh: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dylan: And, uh, just to point out the irony of this, you- you wrote me a message that was pretty mean and it seems like it is a way that both you and I have been spoken to in high school. It, how did you feel writing this message to me?

Josh: I just wanted to make you as mad or sad as possible, and like I said, it bit me in the butt.

Dylan: Well, you know, Josh, there's this phrase, um, "hurt people hurt people." And, um, I ... Something that would happen in high school is I would take all of this shit that people were throwing on me and I would just get into huge fights with my parents. I didn't know why I was so mad at them, why I was so angry at them. But I think a large part of it is that I was absorbing all the shit that was thrown on at me in high school and directing it at people who would listen. Do you feel like there was maybe something similar that was happening with the message you sent to me?

Josh: Uh, yeah, yeah. I'm not gonna disagree on that.

Dylan: Yeah. Um, so Josh, um, I know we don't see the world in the exact same way, but like I said, I think there are key similarities that we have. Um, how do you feel that people like you and me can have productive conversations?

Josh: I think that if you're trying to have a conversation with someone that's completely different than you, then take everything away that makes us different and just have a conversation. Like, I could have a conversation with you right now and if you never said anything, I wouldn't know you were gay.

Dylan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Josh: So just, I guess instead of trying to be ... You'd be Dylan, I'd be Josh. We'd just be humans.

Dylan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Josh: And be able to just talk to each other like humans instead of like a straight guy to a gay guy or-

Dylan: Right.

Josh: ... just hide the differences.

Dylan: Right. I mean-

Josh: And I'm not, I'm not saying to you to hide who you are.

Dylan: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Josh: I'm saying to, if you're trying to have a conversation and get along with someone, don't just, like, stick on to that one subject. Like, I'm not gonna go around saying, "Hey, I'm straight."

Dylan: Right. I mean, but the world assumes that we are all straight, which is why coming out, coming out of the closet even exists, right? Because we have to assert like, "Oh, no. I'm not what you expect me to be." Um, and the only thing I would argue is that you said, "Put differences aside." And I would disagree with that, because I think the way to talk to each other is to embrace differences. Um, to say, "You were raised very differently than I was and you believe very different things and those differences are going to, they're part of who we are." So the way ... You know, being gay, it's not just something I can ignore. It's, in fact, I think a part of who I am, just as the way, as the things you believe are a part of who you are. Um, and I think we can still achieve conversation through that. Do you agree?

Josh: For certain people. But there's certain people out there that are not gonna be as easygoing with someone being gay or someone being different, a minority. I feel like having, trying to not just be the same, but trying to stay as similar as you can to each other just to get through a conversation. If that makes sense.

Dylan: So Josh, do you, um, do you have any questions for me?

Josh: No, but I do have a comment.

Dylan: Yeah.

Josh: Don't change based on what other people say. There are people out there who don't accept people, anyone who's different. They don't accept the fact that you're fat. They don't accept the fact that you're gay. That doesn't mean you stink, but ... Ow, I stepped on a Lego.

Dylan: Oh, no. (laughs) Josh, are you okay?

Josh: Ach! Yeah, that was my little brother's.

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Dylan: Oh, I'm sorry, Josh.

Josh: Ow! Okay. Yeah. But, like, the comment I was just trying to let you know is, uh, don't change who you are just because someone wants you to. Like, I think you're a great guy. You're pretty cool. But just because I don't agree with the choices you make or the choices you're born with, whichever way you look at it, doesn't mean I don't agree with you. Because I can hate, as God says, I can hate the sin. Doesn't mean I have to hate the sinner. So don't let some stupid comment, like the one I made or the one I'll, pretty sure a lot of people make to a lot of gay guys, different people ... Just because people will not accept you because you're fat, you're different, you're a minority, you're transgender, it doesn't mean you should change. If you're not willing to be who you are, then nothing will ever change. If I'm not willing to show you who I am, nothing will change. If you're not willing to be gay, you're not willing to be the true Dylan Marron, then nothing's gonna change for you. You're just gonna live in this hellhole forever. But if don't let people get to you, if you don't change based off what people say, you'll make the world a l- hell of a lot better.

Dylan: Well, Josh, thank you for saying that. I mean, do you feel like this conversation has been productive?

Josh: I think it has. I know a lot of gay guys at my school who are just like you but they're afraid to come out. And that is what's hurting them, because if they would just be who they are, if they don't let bigots like me keep them in the closet, this world could be hell of a lot better. It could be amazing.

Dylan: Well-

Josh: But people like me, people like the bullies that bullied you, that bully me, is those people who are ruining this world by now. Not y'all.

Dylan: Well, Josh, do you feel like this conversation is going to encourage you to offer them, those kids who might be in the closet or might be trying to come out of the closet, do you think that this conversation might, uh, inspire you offer them a helping hand, even if you don't fully agree with, um, as you say, their sin?

Josh: I can't tell you for sure what the future holds for me and my beliefs and going out there but I can tell ya, it's gonna be a lot to think about. [coughs] It's shown me a different light than I ... It's like I was in one room and I barred myself off from the rest of the world and now I'm out and I can see someone else's point of view.

Dylan: And- and you're saying you- you got that from this conversation?

Josh: A lot of it, yeah. I'm gonna try to see points of views from other people, not just the views that I've been taught throughout my life. It's time for me to stop listening ... Not stop listening, but stop taking in everything my parents believe and make my own decisions.

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Dylan: Well, cool. Um, well, I- I wish you luck on that journey. It is a difficult journey that I think, uh, many of us have- have gone down and, uh, I wish you a lot of luck for it. Um, Josh-

Josh: Thank you.

Dylan: ... it was, uh, it was a total pleasure talking to you today.

Josh: The pleasure is all mine.

Dylan: Um, well, I hope I'll talk to you soon, okay?

Josh: Yes, sir. You have a great day.

Dylan: All right. Well, bye, Josh. It was-

Josh: (laughs)

Dylan: ... it was great to talk to you.

Josh: Bye. You too.

[Phone call ends with a hangup sound. The drumbeat from 'These Dark Times' by Caged Animals kicks in.]

Dylan [VOICEOVER CLOSING CREDITS]: Conversations with People Who Hate Me is a production of Night Vale Presents. Christy Gressman is the executive producer. Vincent Cacchione is the sound engineer and mixer. Alen Rahimic is the production manager. The theme song is These Dark Times by Caged Animals. The logo was designed by Rob Wilson and this podcast was created, produced and hosted by me, Dylan Marron.

Special thanks to Night Vale Presents Director of Marketing, Adam Cecil, our publicist, Christine Ragasa and also Dustin Flannery-McCoy, Rob Silcox, Mark Maloney and production assistants Alison Goldberger and Emily Moler. Thank you to all of those who gave encouragement throughout this process and also thank you to those who warned me against doing this project. I did it anyway. And yes, thank you to those who wrote the hateful messages, comments and posts that inspired me to turn one-way negativity into productive two-way conversations.

Thank you so much for listening and we will be back with another conversation next week. If you loved this show, tell all of your friends about it and if you hated this show, maybe write to me and tell me why you hated it and who knows, maybe you'll be a guest on the show.

Just remember, there is a human on the other side of the screen.

[Chorus of 'These Dark Times' by Caged Animals plays.]