

MAINE SOUND AND STORY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE FIRST COAST

AN INTERVIEW WITH ZACH SMITH FOR THE FIRST COAST JONESPORT/BEALS
COLLECTION

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY GALEN KOCH

JONESPORT, MAINE, OCTOBER 2018

TRANSCRIPT BY GRIFFIN POLLOCK AND GALEN KOCH

Interviewee Name: Zach Smith

Project/Collection Title: Jonesport TFC

Interviewer(s) Name(s) and Affiliation: Galen Koch (The First Coast)

Interview Location: Jonesport, Washington County, ME

Date of Interview: October 2018

Interview Description: Zach Smith, a Jonesport born musician, talks about his life as one of the few openly gay men in the area. Smith talks about how his identity has influenced his music, how he prepares for drag shows, and what community looks like for him in Washington County.

Key Words: Music, homosexuality, community, drag

Collection Description: Audio interviews from The First Coast's residency in Jonesport and Beals Island, October 2018.

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Transcribed By: Griffin Pollock and Galen Koch

GK: Galen Koch

ZS: Zach Smith

GR: Greta Rybus

[START OF ZACHSMITH_JONESPORT_TFC_AUDIO_01]

[0:00:00.0]

[Music is playing in the background throughout. The songs are from the opera 'Porgy and Bess']

ZS: ...We played at the Aphodian

GK: I love the Aphodian!

ZS: Yeah, we've played under a bridge as well in South Portland which was dope.

GR: Do you mean actually under a bridge?

ZS: Yeah, it's called the cosmic bridge, they have a music festival there every year.

GK: Cool!

ZS: We were like, it's a separate thing, but like it's a really cool venue. This is the bathroom laundry room.

GK: Oh my God! I love that the outside is all blue. It's so cute.

ZS: I hope you're not triggered by this [indistinct], but this is like

GK: We're like [makes a stressed noise]

ZS: I don't have any--any, um decorations in here. I sacrificed--this is like my bedroom, like, I sacrificed everything decorating for the rest of the house.

GR: Is that a chalkboard behind your bed though?

ZS: Yeah, yeah yeah.

GR: That's cool.

ZS: I can't draw or anything. Can you draw?

GK: Mmm, not really.

GR: I mean, I could make a shape.

GK: Yeah, I could make a shape!

ZS: Do you want coffee, there's coffee, I made a smoothie if you're hungry.

GL: Oh my god! I'm okay right now, we just snacked, we've been running around. Look at this!

[0:01:03.3]

ZS: Yeah, help yourself to the cookies, they didn't come out very well. Um, this is my favorite room. Yeah, this is like when the band comes over we practice down here, but it gets really cold, so I'm gonna move everything to that room. 'Cause it's just so cold down here.

GK: Is it--you have a heater?

ZS: Yeah, a little heater. Have you been freezing in your camper or...?

GK: Uh, we're doing okay.

GR: I mean, as long as I keep my hands inside the sleeping bag, all is well.

ZS: You saw my RV outside?

GK: Your what?

ZS: My RV. Outside.

GK: Yeah!

ZS: Yeah, I took that thing down to Florida.

GK: Cool!

ZS: So I know about camping in the cold.

GK: Haha, it's really intense.

[0:01:48.5]

ZS: This is the backyard, it's such a nice backyard.

,

GR: You need a dog.

ZS: I think I need a cat.

GR: A kitty!

GK: Oh, this is amazing. So who owned this build--who owned this?

ZS: Oh, do you want me to turn off the music?

GK: Oh yeah, in time. I kinda just--I like it for cool ambience when we're walking around.

GR: What's this little room?

GK: I know, I love that.

ZS: But like, there was a guy who lived here for years and years, and he like, left a camper out in the woods a little bit, and there's like shit everywhere. There was a cauldron over there.

[Gasps]

ZS: It's weird.

GK: A cauldron?

ZS: A little cauldron thing, it's weird.

GK: Do you want to, Greta do you want to get some outside photos before the light fades?

GR: would you let me take a picture of you?

[0:02:47.1]

ZS: Yeah, outside?

GR: I think so actually, it's really beautiful.

GK: I think 'cause of the light.

ZS: Oh this is my drag room.

GK: You have a whole drag room?

ZS: Well yeah, it's a--yeah.

GK: Oh 'cause it's a--your closet?

ZS: Yeah, it's my drag closet. It's--this is--

GR: You're just like Alyssa Edwards with her [indistinct]. Have you seen that show yet?

ZS: No, I haven't, I have Netflix. But yeah, this is neglect and you can see how angry my wigs are at me. Just like, "why did you do this to me?"

GK: 'Cause you need to like, take care of them?

ZS: Well, yeah.

GK: Uh, is that your beach trash wig? Cause it looks a little bit like beach trash

ZS: The thing is, the trashier, the worse my wigs look, it all fits into the brand, you know. Trash.

GK: Yeah.

GR: I--would you have a favorite wig?

ZS: The black one.

GR: Oh my gosh.

GK: Yeah, that's the one that he was wearing when--

ZS: Yeah, it's my staple, it's my go-to.

GR: I kind of like this one too, these beachy waves.

ZS: Oh yeah.

GR: Oh, but this color?

GK: I know, this color's really nice.

ZS: Yeah.

GK: Greta has the cool old lady colored hair.

[0:03:58.3]

GR: Yeah, my boyfriend always thinks that he's like--whenever he's trying to find me in a crowd, he would be like, "An--Oh, no, that's a woman in her, like, in her 80s."

ZS: It's in.

GK: It's totally in! It's totally in.

GR: I wanna see pictures of your--of you in drag.

GK: I have--well I have video of it.

ZS: My instagram has all the pictures of me in drag.

GR: What's your drag name?

ZS: Sandy River Bitch. Have you been to Sandy River Beach?

[0:04:35.0]

GK: It's down here (GR: what? That's perfect.) I don't think that I showed you.

ZS: Yeah, it's like a mile away.

GR: That's perfect! Sandy River--Sandy River Bitch.

ZS: It's fun.

GR: Do you have any friends up here that do drag as well?

ZS: No.

GR: So I had a feeling that was gonna be the case.

ZS: It's a little isolating, a little lonely for sure. But it's also cool because I'm the only person doing it, so like, it's kinda cool you know, some pros and cons.

GR: It's like a niche. You're it.

ZS: Yeah.

GR: There was a friend of mine, I mean like a loose friend, a person I met once, that um, a photographer, and he was like, "there's no drag scene that shows the outdoors at all." So now he like, hikes in full drag.

ZS: Oh cool!

GR: And he puts on these huge heels, and will like pose on top of a mountain.

ZS: That's a good idea!

GR: I know! That's okay, there could be two.

GK: The more the merrier.

ZS: That's so funny, I love that.

GR: I'm gonna actually go grab my second camera real quick.

GK: Wait, there could totally be two, it could be a movement.

GR: Yes! I'm gonna grab--well, I wanna take your picture in the backyard, but I just wanted to get my second camera really fast.

[0:05:59.1]

GK: Okay. This is like the craziest couple of days, 'cause I am--I like, come and stay for like a while in Jonesport, and then Greta comes and we do these massive, (ZS: Intense) days of like, non-stop (ZS: Shooting and shooting) shooting. And we're both kind of like, (laughs)

ZS: I bet.

GK: Woo, tired!

ZS: I bet, but you're leaving Wednesday, right?

GK: Yeah, gotta pack it all in.

ZS: So what is this whole video series about?

GK: Well, they're not videos.

ZS: Sorry, photo series.

GK: Uh, it's photo and audio. I go to a town for a month and I stay in the town, and they're just stories about the town and the people who live there. And then I'll come back with an exhibit here. And it's called "The First Coast."

ZS: Cool.

[0:06:50.9]

GK: So that's basically it, it's pretty simple. And then maybe we'll do--we both freelance and sell stories, but I'm not really doing that for this, but we probably will end up doing some stuff. I'm gonna get out of the way so Greta can get this photo.

GR: Well... come, come...

GK: Where do you want me.

GR: Actually, that's kinda cool when you were in the--kinda far away... Ooh, I love it, stand right there. Could you move towards the lens?

GK: I'm bad, 'cause I'll make you laugh.

GR: [Indistinct directions]

GK: You have posing--so natural.

[0:07:44.7]

ZS: I watched a lot of America's Next Top Model.

GR: You know your angles. I can tell.

GK: It's very natural.

GR: I feel like if you watched America's next top model, you'd be doing something really like, "make it big!"

ZS: "bigger!"

GK: It's beautiful, looking out to the sunset. The glow.

GR: I love it! Oh my god, best ever!

GK: (Laughing) I love this blue house.

GR: I do too. Let's go in the backyard for just a second.

GK: Who--was it blue when you got it?

ZS: Yeah.

GK: do you like that it's blue?

[0:08:25.8]

ZS: Um, it's, it's alright. You know, this is more of a temporary thing right now. My parents actually own this house, and they rented it for like five years, and then the renters moved away and they were like, "We don't really wanna rent anymore," so they like, offered me to stay here. And so that's what I'm doing.

GR: Alright, so what I'm seeing here is I like this little green patch.

ZS: So there's a cauldron there, there's also like a cauldron there I think?

GK: What?

ZS: Yeah, it's like a little...

GK: Mini-cauldrons, I see it. You want him to stand over there G? It's so pretty.

GR: I don't know, I'm like intrigued by this green.

ZS: That's the well. The well cover.

GK: Oh cool. I know, I like that section.

GR: Will you just come stand next to this for a second. You can put your hands on it, you can lean on it, you can do whatever you want. Whatever feels natural. Oh that's cool.

GK: That's very cool.

GR: With this green, this neon green behind you.

[Camera shutter clicks several times]

GK: And I like the color of that jacket.

GR: Me too.

[0:09:32.1]

GK: Why am I getting some feedback here? Not feedback, but I'm getting...

GR: [Indistinct]

GK: Yeah it's probably because there's spirits in the woods.

GR: That's exactly what I was thinking!

GK: Greta and I love ghost stories, do you have any ghost stories?

ZS: My life is a ghost story.

[0:09:57.5]

[Laughter]

GR: Wait, this means you are a ghost, right?

ZS: Sometimes I wonder, you know.

GR: We were just interviewing somebody and we're like "Okay, time to go!" And they were like "Do you like ghost stories?" And we're like "Uh, excuse me? Uh, yes!"

GK: And we got caught up.

ZS: I don't have any ghost stories, but I'm just like, afraid of the dark, and I feel like sometimes it's like, I feel like there's something. But um, I think it's also all bullshit, you know?

GR: I'm switch between being like "It's 100% real or 100% fake."

ZS: It's just never been like, actually proven to be real?

GK: But it's never been disproven.

ZS: There's been so much, like bullshit though, like so much fake shit.

GK: I know, haha, I know.

GR: Do you like Halloween?

ZS: Um, yeah, it's fun yeah. I don't like, dress-up for it, I like--I treat it as like, a day off, I dress up all year round, you know it's like--

GR: That's true.

ZS: It's not as exciting.

GR: Could you look right at me please? Ooh, I love it.

[Camera shutter clicks continuously]

[0:11:08.8]

GK: it's so pretty out here right now, the light.

ZS: I know.

GK: It's like, finally, it's been so bright all day.

[No voices in the recording as interviewer walks to car and returns]

[0:12:52.9]

GR: Nice.

ZS:... And like I love like, the privacy of this place [indistinct]

GR: Can I see what happens when I turn that light on? Is it right inside?

ZS: Yeah.

GK: Which one G?

ZS: It's on the wall, like behind the record player.

GR: Okay, is it okay if I wear these in for just a second? Oh wait, we locked this door!

ZS: Oh shit.

GR: Don't worry about it, ooh ooh wait, stay right there.

GK: (Laughs) Why did you lock it, why did we lock the door?

GR: I don't know!

GK: Aah!

GR: Perfect.

GK: Am I in your shot?

[0:13:32.3]

GR: No. Nope. Nope. Oh my gosh, I could photograph you all day.

ZS: God... My skin looks like shit right now, so.

GK: It's a relief after photographing elderly people.

(All laugh)

GK: Not that that isn't also fun.

GR: What?

GK: Photographing elderly people, it's just different.

GR: Also, your skin looks beautiful, but I know how you feel.

ZS: No you don't. Your skin's perfect.

GR: I always feel like everybody else's is [indistinct]

GK: She's like getting--

GR: I'm like putting potions on my face.

GK: Yeah, Greta's got like blue lights on her face at night.

[0:14:20.9]

GR: Oh yeah, I've got [indistinct] blue light that--mirrors--it's like--you zap--it kills bacteria

ZS: Yeah there's a bunch of like, new-fangled shit [indistinct] that you can do.

GR: I have this skin whisperer lady that I always message, being like "I have this blister on my face!" It'll be like "okay, here's this is what you need." And it'll be everything from like--

ZS: "Cover your entire face in honey and baking soda"

GR: She always told me spearmint tea.

ZS: Oh, like over the face?

[Conversation is blocked by a door opening]

GR: ...These weird potions that she makes.

ZS: I love hippy potion shit

GR: Me too!

ZS: And there's so much of that around here.

GR: Is there really?

ZS: Yeah, oh yeah.

GR: Wait, what do you mean?

[0:15:05.9]

GK: Okay, we need to turn the music off now.

ZS: People will just give me, like stuff that they made that's like natural, you know? People are definitely really conscious about that here, at least my friends.

GR: Like, kinda health?

ZS: Yeah, like no aluminum in the deoderant, yadda yadda yadda.

GK: Hippies.

ZS: Love it. Self-care is everything!

[music cuts out.]

ZS: Self care is everything.

GK: Self care *is* everything. Perfect, ahh. Where should we sit? Where's comfortable for you?

ZS: Umm, do you want like--oh, well...

GK: Well you could sit on one of these and I could sit in front of you.

ZS: Okay.

GK: Or G could...

GR: I'm pretty happy here. I'd rather just stretch my-- (ZS: Do you want a chair?) I'm gonna stretch my back.

[0:16:06.6]

GK: Okay. So because, you know, the project is like about these towns that I stay in for a while, but it's also about fishing, and it's also about people who live year round, so there's like so many different facets.

ZS: I've lobster fished for three years.

GK: I know, you told me that. So first, just tell me, for the record for this, just your first and last name.

ZS: My first--my name is Zachary Smith, Zach Smith.

GK: And Zach, what's your history in Jonesport?

[00:16:42.28]

ZS: I grew up here born and raised, I went to high school here, elementary school and high school and then I went to college, I moved away for college and then I came back after college because I ran out of money.

GK: As does seem to happen.

ZS: I majored in theater, nobody was knocking on my door offering me jobs, but my father offered me a lobstering position and so it's good money so I took it and I got trapped in that for like 3 years.

GK: Is he a lobsterman?

ZS: Yeah like 4th generation, hardcore, like 800 traps, like offshore iles and miles, it's a tough profession, it's rough, it's a rough lifestyle. you know.

[00:17:45.23]

GK: Did you go with him when you were a kid or is that kind of a new thing?

ZS: I avoided it at like all costs and yeah but yeah.

GK: Tell me more.

ZS: I avoided it so I got other jobs in high school but I went out with him sometimes.

[00:18:29.15]

ZS: Well the funny thing is I dressed up when I was young like 3 or 4 years old and that sort of like freaked out my parents a little bit. You know, because like they just weren't prepared to have, like, a gay child. No 5th generation lobsterman from Jonesport is ready to have a gay son, he was expecting me to be like macho man. But it like... I was living here after college and I started to work on music and I was like "I want to do something that nobody's ever seen." So what could I do? I was like, "Why don't I..." I was just getting into drag as an art form, I was just discovering it and I was like, why don't I combine drag and music?

[00:19:28.25]

And that's what I did and sort of when I dress up in drag now it's like I'm connecting with my younger self and giving a voice and a space for that younger self.

[00:20:09.10]

ZS: My parents are really cool, too, I have their full support. Which, I'm lucky to be from Jonesport and have a family that supports me, I never forget how lucky I am.

GK: Even thinking about the legacy of wanting to have a legacy of a son who was a lobsterman.

[00:21:01.29]

[00:21:26.09]

ZS: It was a feeling like, I should try that, I should just try it and then when I did the reaction I got from people was very positive and I was like, "This is probably something I should continue doing."

GR: What about when you tried it, what did you feel like?

ZS: It just fills me with this feeling of confidence and strength and it's just so fun, it's like fun to do.

GK: I like hardly recognize because when I met you you already had your makeup on - you weren't totally dressed up but your face was, it was contoured, when does that transformation happen when you're getting dressed up?

[00:22:36.23]

ZS: I don't know if there's really much of a transformation, it's really just me.

GK: Well, of course, yeah.

ZS: Obviously I'm acting very different because I have heels on, I have a big wig on, I'm very much aware that - when I perform I'm usually in a bar with a ton of straight people and I'm very aware of that relationship and it's also like, i just, I try to put on a performer sort of facade when I'm performing but it is very vulnerable, it's very scary to be up in drag in front of like people that have never seen a drag queen before, it's scary.

GK: And you play - Beach Trash sometimes plays at Skywalkers.

[00:23:50.07]

ZS: I think it's so important for visibility in places like that, people that have never seen a drag queen, places that have never seen a drag queen. The fact that I can be there, it's like, it's good. It's good.

GK: DOo you feel supported in that space?

ZS: Yeah, all of my friends come out, all of my family comes out, my mom and my dad come to like every gig. Every show. And I haven't experience any negativity from anyone, actually. Everyone's kept it to themselves at the very least, I've never been checked or harassed or anything like that. I think because all of my friends are there.

[00:24:47.12]

GK:And in the community of Jonesport have you felt safe in this community.

ZS: Yeah, well when I was lobstering I kind of worried about that because I had been a drag queen for 2 years, or a year with Beach Trash, and I was kind of worried that people would find out about that and maybe start to harrass me or whatever but nobody cares, really.

GK: The beauty of Maine...

ZS: People very much keep to themselves, and as long as you don't mess with them, they won't mess with you. And I try to come from a place of respect and love for people and hopes that it will be returned.

[00:25:40.11]

GK: Break

[END OF ZACHSMITH_JONESPORT_TFC_AUDIO_01]