

Petrice Jones (00:00):

Just a quick note listeners, this is an uncensored version and there is some swearing in this episode. So if anybody prefers the bleeped version, maybe you're listening with kids, you can find the episode on our website.

Petrice Jones (00:14):

Hello, and welcome to the final episode of season one, 52 Hertz: The Lonely Whale Podcast, I'm your host Petrice Jones. Today on our show. I'm talking to Wyn Wiley, a photographer, activist and creator of the drag queen environmentalist, Pattie Gonia. We'll discuss Wyn's experiences as an environmentalist and an LGBTQIA advocate and how Pattie defines heteronormative concepts of nature and who belongs outdoors.

Wyn Wiley (00:36):

All I want to do is scream from the mountaintops, "Everyone. Everyone belongs out there."

Petrice Jones (00:40):

We'll also discuss what he learned from Pattie, the importance of intersectional environmentalism and why drag is a part of all of our lives.

Wyn Wiley (00:47):

Because let's not forget, the internet is the biggest form of drag we all participate in.

Petrice Jones (00:52):

I'm Petrice Jones, welcome to 52 Hertz: The Lonely Whale Podcast.

Petrice Jones (00:58):

But first, some good news from around the reef. In episode one of 52 Hertz, we introduced 52 Blue, who is thought to be the loneliest of whales, calling out a frequency of 52 hertz, when other whales call out in a range between 10 and 39 hertz, which is why he never gets a reply. Despite our collective fascination, we still don't know very much about him, but here's what we do know, no one has ever seen 52 Blue, but Bill Watkins, a marine mammal researcher at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, who sadly passed away in 2004, dedicated 12 years of his life to tracking and recording 52 Blue. According to declassified Navy hydrophone recordings, 52 Blue moves continuously through the deep waters of the Central and Eastern portion of the North Pacific basin. Every migration season, he made his way South from Alaska to Mexico, never seemingly crossing paths with any other whale. And at one point he disappeared for more than a month, eventually turning up farther out in the Pacific than ever before.

Petrice Jones (02:10):

Some say 52 Blue might even be a hybrid, the product of a romantic

trice between a fin whale and a blue whale. And if 52 is a hybrid, the differences in his body makeup could be the reason for his vocalization being so unusual. The story 52 Blue resonates with so many of us because it's kind of a lot like our own, at some point in our lives we felt lonely, misunderstood and isolated. Activism of any kind can feel like you're calling out and no one's there to hear you or understand you, and like you're the only one in the world who cares about what's happening to our planet and the people on it.

Petrice Jones (02:40):

But there is something else about 52 Blue's story that you should know. In 2010, Dr. John Hildebrand identified recordings from sensors off the coast of California that follow patterns similar to 52 Blue's vocalizations. But the recordings were taken at the same time from two separate sensors spread far apart, which means the song had to come more than one source. More than one source means more than one whale, at least two, possibly whole pods of hybrid whales calling out at the same frequency. 52 Blue might not be alone after all.

Petrice Jones (03:11):

We can't help, but see the similarities between the story of 52 Blue and the stories of our time. Right now, people all over the world who might have felt isolated, alone and unheard are coming together to create change. Look at the School Strike for Climate, Black Lives Matter, Zero Hour, march's for women's rights and the continued importance of the LGBTQ movement. If you've followed along with us since episode one, you've heard some of these voices and you know these people are out there asking the same questions that you are and we're working towards the same goals. This podcast was designed as a sort of response to 52 Blue, the whale and the legend, to help us find community in each other and to create change, not in spite of, but with our unique voices and remind us all that none of us are ever truly alone, not even 52 Blue, and that is some whaley good news.

Petrice Jones (04:04):

So Wyn, thank you so much and welcome to 52 Hertz.

Wyn Wiley (04:07):

Thanks for having me, I'm so stoked.

Petrice Jones (04:09):

Yeah, me too, man, me too. So I'd love it just for you to start off by telling us a little bit about yourself.

Wyn Wiley (04:14):

Yeah, my name is Wyn also, Patricia Gonias, you can call me Pattie. I am a drag queen that loves to intersect her passions of my queer identity with my loves of the environment and of nature, love to play at the intersection and kind of the Venn diagram, like mushy, ooey, gooey, good zone in the middle. So I get to involve my love of

photography, I get to involve my love of makeup, which is this whole new art form I'm learning, meet incredible people, hopefully tell important stories and share what I'm learning and honestly, share my fuck ups.

Wyn Wiley (04:51):

This is a two year new journey and before Pattie I really didn't think that it was possible for me to have an impact or make an impact. So I just didn't. Pattie has definitely been the birth of not only this drag persona in my life, but also a whole new wave of really realizing the role that we all have to ally each other and to ally our queen, Mother Nature.

Petrice Jones (05:12):

Thank you so much. I actually want to dive right in and just talk about how you feel you're breaking down barriers in the environmental space.

Wyn Wiley (05:21):

There have always been queer people in the environmental movement, there have always been marginalized communities at the forefront of the environmental movement, especially our black and brown brothers and sisters, there's always been native people in the environmental movement, we've always been here and no one's been looking. That's what I feel like the consensus is. That's what I feel in my lived experience. I mean, I'm meeting queer people in the outdoors that have been here for 20/30 years, that have been killing it and doing what they do. I just feel like eyes have been pointed at different directions, point blank, I just think we need more of us to show up with all of ourselves and all of our stories. For me, that's meant not just showing up as myself, but showing up with my talents, showing up with my ability to build community, showing up with my presence and my voice and being in a place that is very unlikely for someone like me to be in.

Petrice Jones (06:15):

Do you feel as though there's been a silencing of these different voices in the movement?

Wyn Wiley (06:20):

What I immediately think of as the Intersectional Environmentalist movement that's really been birthed out of the last few months, with my friend, Leah Thomas, and the whole crew of people that are really creating this intersectional space for people to bring their whole story, to bring their whole selves, and all that they are. Because I think so much of the environmental movement leaves out big cultural differences, big lived experience differences, big identity differences. It's kind of crazy how when you don't have a word for something, it's kind of like this weird gray space in your head, but when the term intersectional environmentalist came about, I was like,

"Oh my gosh, that's really what I do, is I'm intersecting my love of drag and my queerness and who I am." And hopefully inspiring other people to do the same with their loves and what they are with environmentalism as well.

Petrice Jones (07:07):

Where was Pattie birthed from, is that from the idea that you couldn't be yourself? Tell me a little bit about that.

Wyn Wiley (07:12):

I come from Nebraska, the middle of nowhere, it's rural America. It's Trump's America. It is an incredibly red state. And I come from a little blue dot called Lincoln, Nebraska. And I think living in that space and growing up in that space and being a closeted queer person, I always felt this like dissonance that I had to be a chameleon. I had to hide away pieces of who I was in order to create environments for other people to succeed. That's what I was taught was the right thing to do was to blend in, was to not stand out, was to do what everyone else was doing. I always tried to do what I needed to do to make other people feel comfortable. And I think that's kind of what a lot of us are doing.

Wyn Wiley (07:52):

And even when I came out of a closet, what I was told was, "Hey, we love you Wyn and we accept you, but..." It was always conditional and it was conditional upon, "But for sure don't do drag. For sure don't have an effeminate voice. For sure don't wear vibrant colors or dress gay. We love you because you're you and because you're a straight passing gay." And I internalized the hell out of that. And I feel like, honestly, when I came out of the closet, I went further into the closet. So Pattie feels like the biggest rewriting of all of that. Pattie is here and she's proud and she is what I hope to be and she's the confidence that I hope to have every day. But the reality is, it's hard to find.

Wyn Wiley (08:39):

For me, I'm constantly dealing with, based off of the impact that Pattie makes and also the hate that Patty gets, I feel like this constant going in and out of the closet and this constant reminding myself that it is so important be out of the closet. And I don't think that the concept of coming out of the closet is just for queer people, I think it's for anyone. I really think if anyone wants to truly become someone that's for nature and for our environment, I don't even like the title of environmentalist, but just know what they stand for and that they love nature and they want to protect it. I think that that means coming out of the closet and being who you are, being unapologetic, bringing your love to the space and your excitement and your humor. I mean, y'all, let's be real, this space is so dark, it's so doom and gloom, there's so much opportunity for joy and for art to be a form of activism, for people to bring their culture, their

humanity and their mistakes to each other.

Petrice Jones (09:42):

No, I agree. And I think it's really interesting what you just said about the idea of coming out of the closet has almost has nothing to do with sexuality, it's a case of finding a way to be who you are.

Wyn Wiley (09:51):

Absolutely

Petrice Jones (09:52):

And once you can be who you are, you're able to actually be the most effective and the most serving to our planet and everybody on it. There's one thing I wanted to ask you is, the idea of who belongs outside?

Wyn Wiley (10:05):

That is such a powerful and important question. When you ask the question, "Who belongs outside?" All I want to do is scream from the mountaintops, "Everyone. Everyone belongs out there." But I think the reality is what I'm noticing is that we just disconnect ourselves so much from nature. We are, it's humans in one hand and it's nature and the other. And why can't we realize that we are a part of nature. We are nature, we belong there, everyone belongs there, especially queer people. I mean, look at nature, all around you, a forest is incredibly queer to me, it is so vibrant, it's so diverse, it has fungus's that can grow from miles and be connected together, it is full of every color under the rainbow, and every piece of it relies on each other. So when I look at nature too, I see that Mother Nature knows that diversity is the only way. Why do we as humans, why can we not see that? Why can we not see that we belong in that diversity as well?

Petrice Jones (11:14):

Why do you think that is? Why do you think it is that humans can't see that?

Wyn Wiley (11:18):

I think that we are taught to blend in more than we're taught to stand out, and that we're taught to conform, we're also taught to doubt ourselves. I think that we're also taught based off of monoliths that have been a part of the quote/unquote, "outdoor space" for forever, that unless you're this, that, and the other, the outdoors aren't for you. And I think the outdoors have had incredible privilege wrapped around it and incredible gatekeepers and financial barriers as well.

Wyn Wiley (11:48):

I'm so inspired by everyone in the outdoors that is making community for people that are more unlikely in the outdoors. And I definitely do my work on the shoulder of greats. I think we're seeing more diverse people get outdoors than ever. Even people that are redefining what

the nature experience is. During quarantine, let's get really real, my nature was my little 10 foot by 20 foot backyard, my nature was the park down my street, and that is equal to this big epic national park trip that I did. And I'm learning, why can I not celebrate that nature and that outdoor experience as an equal outdoor experience and define that for me as something that's equally as important. So, it's kind of what I'm going through right now, that's what's helping me feel like I'm a part of nature as well.

Petrice Jones (12:40):

How do we push this forward? How do we get people engaged in the environment? How do we get people engaged, more importantly, in environmentalism? I feel like there's kind of the two stages, they have to be engaged in the environment to become involved with environmentalism, so what's your take on moving from people who don't have a real relationship with the environment to becoming environmentalists?

Wyn Wiley (12:58):

I love that two part question because I see that mirrored in my life all of the time, I'm like, we need to get people outside so they realize how beautiful our world is and how much it deserves to be cared for and loved. What that looks like is not just having people like me in the outdoors, we need to put into leadership positions, people that are way more diverse and way more intersectional than myself. I feel very thankful to be a bridge between many different worlds because out of drag, I'm a straight passing white male, and in drag, I am this queer, weird, odd bird, drag queen floating around the outdoors. My job is always to be a bridge between multiple worlds, bring community together and host it. But I think for anyone, it just looks like getting outdoors and realizing that you deserve to be out there.

Wyn Wiley (13:48):

I think that we need more people to think about, it's not just about reducing our plastic use, which by the way is so freaking hard to do nowadays with COVID, but it's thinking about, okay, well, if I can't do that, if I can't control that, what can I control? What is the work that's available to me and only to me? For me that looks like bringing my art form of drag into the outdoors. For another person that might mean, "Hey, I am a Latinx cook or chef, maybe I can start creating more zero waste of recipes." That feels so cool and that feels like such a fun and engaging thing to create community around. I mean, hell I'd be there for that. If you want to teach me to create some zero waste tacos, I'm there, teach me please. So I think we just need people to realize that the environmental movement is going to be a million and one unique, radically human solutions.

Petrice Jones (14:39):

You're going out, you're wearing six inch heels on rocky landscape, it

feels as though you're almost redefining how we should be looking at activism. Do you feel that, do you feel the activism shouldn't look a certain way or is there something that that does need to be done in order to be an effective activist?

Wyn Wiley (14:53):

We need to celebrate the feminine way more in nature and in the environmental movement, because, hello, we are in Mother Nature's house, can we not realize we are in the house of the feminine? Can we not realize how actually beautifully feminine it is to hike a mountain or to climb a wall or to just enjoy the sound of birds? So that's what I feel like I'm trying to figure out in my life, every time I'm out there in heels, it's an experiment, and it is me really being at kind of this inner dissonance with my masculine self and my feminine self and really finding the stride in that.

Petrice Jones (15:32):

What does drag mean to you?

Wyn Wiley (15:33):

Drag to me is freedom, it's permission it is anything is possible. Drag is just this art form that I feel like I have no idea how I'd live my life without it. I mean, on the most LOL level, it is just fucking hilarious, and it's like Halloween any day I want it to be. And I'm like, "I'm here for this." And right now I'm sitting in this interview, I'm wearing a bra made of two fanny packs that my friend sewed together. So it's like, this is great, I can keep my snacks in my bra and the more snacks, the bigger my boobs get, great.

Wyn Wiley (16:07):

But also it is this totally surreal experience, to look in the mirror and see something that on the daily you are not, but yet you so are. And it's powerful. I want the feeling of drag for everyone. And I feel like there is a drag queen inside of everyone and we need to tap into this more because everybody has a little inner freak and the more that we can let our freak fly and realize that we're all just weirdos, the better I feel like the world is going to be.

Petrice Jones (16:40):

And how has that gone? You putting this character out there, how has the queer community and the drag queen community responded to Pattie?

Wyn Wiley (16:49):

I am a drag queen that operates very much so out of traditional drag culture. I mean, obviously I'm in the outdoors, but most of my audience, surprisingly, isn't other queer people, but is straight people, are allies in progress, are people that have never followed or seen a drag queen before in their life. So it's been a really beautiful group of people and community that's gathered around.

Petrice Jones (17:14):

Pattie in one sense, helps bring the feminine energy of the planet to the every person, but also brings people who are in the queer community or in the drag community to the idea of the planet itself and being part of that. So it feels like there's two sides to the way you're creating community.

Wyn Wiley (17:31):

Absolutely.

Petrice Jones (17:33):

I think that's great. And is there a minimalistic or sustainable drag?

Wyn Wiley (17:37):

Listen, drag is an inherently, I wouldn't say wasteful, but very thing intensive process, right? You have your makeup, you have your outfits, you have your wigs, and I've really tried to lean into how can I upcycle different things? How can I outfit repeat and not feel shame, but celebrate that? One of my favorite wigs is made of trash from quarantine. So we took all the trash I used in quarantine and made a wig out of it. And so it's literally this trash wig and it looks very like Marie Antoinette, it's very extra, but it's this beautiful thing where I feel like I want to move Pattie in more that direction. I want to think about how can I even new this old clothing items of mine from my life as Wyn, and upcycle them into new outfits.

Wyn Wiley (18:23):

And listen, it is not a waste free process, I, in the room right next to me, have my 70 to 100 pieces of makeup that I use on the regular. But it's really interesting that that is one tenth of what maybe the average drag queen has makeup wise. So I do not mean that other drag queens are doing it wrong or doing it differently, it's just a fun experimental zone for me to practice sustainability and upcycling and recycling as well and to live out my ethics through my art form.

Petrice Jones (18:56):

Particularly in America, there's going to be a process that has to be taken to start moving towards a minimalist lifestyle in some capacity or a low impact lifestyle.

Wyn Wiley (19:03):

Absolutely.

Petrice Jones (19:04):

And it's going to look very different for very different people, and it's going to be more difficult for some people, but a change just kind of has to come.

Wyn Wiley (19:11):

Absolutely. And a huge, just to be really real with you, a huge thing

for my life is realizing, all right, I have so many privileges, this allows me to live a sustainable life in this way. So it's extra responsibility on me.

Wyn Wiley (19:28):

Yeah, it's really interesting, when I released my film I did last year about the plastics crisis in Hawaii. All the comments were, "Don't tell this to us Americans, tell this to everyone in Thailand that's just dumping their trash in the ocean. Tell this to China." And I'm like, "Bitch, hold up."

Petrice Jones (19:44):

If only they knew.

Wyn Wiley (19:46):

Like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. This is not that, this is everyone for their individual impact. This is, can you wake up tomorrow and be 1% better, waste 1% less? Awesome, that feels attainable to me. Can you focus on your work rather than judging or calling out others? Can you realize that shame has never worked as a motivator and that community and inviting people in and learning and being a lifelong learner is the most important part of this process? So why don't you not make this comment and instead go pick up the street outside of your house because I guarantee you that a candy wrapper of yours is sitting on a beach in Hawaii right now.

Petrice Jones (20:32):

A hundred percent.

Wyn Wiley (20:32):

Because, that is the truth. So, I just-

Petrice Jones (20:35):

Was it 170,000 containers in 2018 were shipped abroad just by America?

Wyn Wiley (20:42):

Yeah, I cannot even think about the number, it's absolutely absurd. And I think that's the thing, right, I'm not a scientist, I do not come at this as an expert in this space, my human experience and the experience that I see from other people is, that we love to put the onus on others rather than cleaning up our own shit and doing our own thing and being responsible for our own impact. So, that's what I'm trying to remind myself in the process is, even especially when I want to say something, I want to be like, you know what, what can I do in my life that I can 100% control? Does that make sense?

Petrice Jones (21:18):

It does for sure. A few times in this conversation, you've said the word, your privilege, do you consider yourself privileged? What do you do with that? How do you feel about that?

Wyn Wiley (21:27):

There's not a doubt in my mind that my privilege has had a role in every single opportunity with my career as Pattie, that's just the truth. Because I am weird, and quirky, and queer, and I hold the diversity card, and I am a part of a marginalized community and I face hate all the time, but I also am a straight passing white male. And especially in the outdoor space, to recognize my own privilege as a part of the work I do, is so important. What are the tools I have to build, right? I have the ability of my photography talent, I have the ability of my talent with drag, you have the ability of your talent with acting and with hosting and your amazing, delicious accent. So I think that we can take an inventory, we can know how much we have tools in our tool belt and we can build beautiful things.

Petrice Jones (22:17):

I couldn't agree more. That's very kind of you to say that. I think the most important thing is to acknowledge you go, "Okay, cool, I've got these assets and it's great, I've been fortunate enough." And I'm going to use the famous Spider-man line, "With great power comes great responsibility." If you're fortunate enough to have more assets, then great. At the end of the day, it's all about how we serve the common goal, which is how do we make this land beautiful and fruitful for generations and generations to come. As long as we have the same goal in mind, like you said, we can take ourselves out of it and we can kill that ego and just start using our assets, not as self service, but service to the whole collective.

Wyn Wiley (22:52):

Yes. Privilege used to be a thing that made me feel really guilty in life and now privilege is such a motivator for me to do work.

Petrice Jones (23:01):

I love that.

Wyn Wiley (23:03):

And to put my fucking boots on and to keep on strutting.

Petrice Jones (23:08):

I love that. You're quite a prolific on social media. I want to talk about you as a quote/unquote, "influencer." Do you see yourself as an influencer? What's your take on this social media world and your sort of place in it?

Wyn Wiley (23:20):

Any title that anyone wants to put to Pattie, if they define that as that, that's great, including influencer. What's really interesting is because social media is such an optically visible thing, we only see what we see. I feel like I have this extreme love/hate relationship with the internet and with social media, it's such a valuable tool,

but I have to remind myself that I can do all the work that I need to do without this tool. What I really want to open people's eyes too as well, if you want to take on the environment or nature as a career, one, it is 100% possible, but two, it looks like 10,000 more hours than what is seen on social media. And I think we see the pretty, we see the glitz, we see the glam, because let's not forget the internet is the biggest form of drag we all participate in.

Petrice Jones (24:04):
Or make-belief.

Wyn Wiley (24:05):
We are all prettier, and better and have more life figured out, and it is all drag. It is pixels, it is drag. So it's easy to get wrapped up in, right? It's easy to let the ego shine. It's really easy for me to operate out of my ego and me, me, me, me, me. With Pattie I'm trying to put a death to the ego all the time.

Petrice Jones (24:29):
I want to hear more about that, just that idea of putting a death to the ego. Why do we need to do this in environmental work? And how do we go about that process?

Wyn Wiley (24:38):
Because it's not about us. It really is not about me. Yes, it feels so fucking good to be patted on the back, to get those likes, to get that dopamine hit, to do it to be the champion. But what I'm realizing is I am not the shero or hero here. I hopefully am here to inspire other people to realize that they are sheroes and heroes. It is about doing what I can do and making my impact. But it's really hard because we have all these things that make us want to center ourselves, right? I mean, that's what social media does. It makes us want to make us feel like we are the center of the world, and we are not that, I am a glittering speck on earth. I just hope we all can encourage each other to be more of ourselves and to know how actually attainable it is for us to have an impact in the environmental space. That would be my greatest dream, is if we can all just realize we can do this.

Petrice Jones (25:33):
A real pleasure to just hear you speak on these subjects, so thank you for taking the time to be here with us on 52 Hertz.

Wyn Wiley (25:39):
Right back at you all. Thank you so much for having me.

Petrice Jones (25:42):
Hey listeners, just before you go, here's a quick ocean saving tip for you from our guest.

Wyn Wiley (25:47):

Put on your boots, we have work to do.

Petrice Jones (25:49):

Hey listeners, this is the 12th and final episode of season one, I hope you've enjoyed listening. I've had such an incredible experience hosting 52 Hertz. You've given me so much hope about what our ability is to rectify some of the problems that we face today. One of the main things that I've learned is that change-making comes in all different shapes, sizes, colors, and all that really matters is what is in a person's heart. So thank you to all of you and thank you to Lonely Whale. Please subscribe so you can stay up to date on new episodes and future seasons. I'm your host, Petrice Jones, thank you for listening to 52 Hertz: The Lonely Whale Podcast.

Petrice Jones (26:27):

52 Hertz is a podcast from Lonely Whale. Our show is produced by Emma Riley and Mindy Ramaker, with the writing from Kyrsten Stringer and audio engineering by James Riley. Special thanks to young hero, Emy Kane, Kendall Starkman, and Danny Witte. Subscribe to 52 Hertz wherever you get your podcasts, I've been your host Petrice Jones. Thanks for listening, until next time, tune into 52 Hertz and tune out plastic.