

401 Counterculture Hangs Out with Mister Sister



An Interview with Devin Mayim-Daviau

I have been in my fair share of sex toy shops and porn stores in my 30 years on this planet. Some were amazing, some were terrifying and some I'd rather not discuss. Experiences will always vary when you choose to patronize the wonderful world of sleaze for sale.

On a recent beautiful morning, I had the pleasure of sitting down with Devioune Mayim-Daviau, the owner of Mister Sister Erotica, the popular local favorite erotic boutique in Fox Point. We sat on two chairs outside her storefront, her bulldog curled at her feet, enjoying the long awaited warmth of the New England spring sun. Devioune, Devin to her friends, invited me to sit with her and discuss just what it means to be a "Queer owned boutique that understands the need to not only celebrate the diversity of all sexualities and sexual expressions, but also to actively honor and cultivate them."

Adam J Schirling: Tell me a bit about yourself. How did you end up running a high-end sex toy boutique on Wickenden Street?

Devin Mayim-Daviau: Well, prior to this store, I had two stores in Provincetown. I guess what originally got me into this was that there wasn't really anything out there for women. There were probably, like, a dozen women-owned erotica stores across the United States and I think we have a different hit on sexuality. I really wanted a comfortable place for women to come and it surprised me how uncomfortable men are going to one of the big chains. So I wanted a place where gay people could go and it not be "gay friendly" and just be gay. I carry a lot of stuff geared toward our community, but also for heterosexuals, trans... That was the main reason though, because I personally couldn't go somewhere and be comfortable.

AJS: What made you make the move from Provincetown to Providence?

DM: The economy, really. In Provincetown, you've got five months to make your money. The trickle down effect took a while to hit there, and the rent just kept going up. You see the writing on the wall

eventually.

AJS: How was your reception on Wickenden Street when you first arrived?

DM: Ah, I loved it. I mean, immediately, folks up from all up, down, and across the street came over and introduced themselves. The shopkeepers here are really tight with each other and with the neighborhood.

AJS: Did you have any negative experiences?

DM: Just from one person and she's no longer on the street.

AJS: How do you feel about the modern day reception of erotica, considering how much more mainstream it is compared to the past?

DM: Everybody has sex, you know? I don't think I'm seeing more customers, but people are much more willing to explore their sexuality now. There are gynecologists and sex therapists who send people to my stores and it's really surprising. Sometimes there is a woman or a gentleman in their '70s and they come here to get educated. It makes me feel like I'm giving back to my community. I think what really differentiates us is that none of us consider ourselves sales people. We want to help figure out what works for you, rather than sell you the next best thing. It's a blessing to be able to help someone who's never had an orgasm.

AJS: And how is business doing?

DM: It's good. We have a great reputation. Five years in a row we've received the highest customer satisfaction rating online and two years ago, the best erotic boutique in the United States (independent) at the AVN Awards. I'm always asking how people hear about us and it's either from word of mouth or they find us online.

AJS: People will always have misconceptions about different groups of people and different sexualities. One of the points of my column is to help dispel these. What would you want people to know about either you personally or as a business owner?

DM: I would think that the biggest misconception that people have is that you are a sex whore or something.

AJS: Just by being in the erotic industry?

DM: Yes, I'm actually fairly conservative in my private life. I get hit on a lot by women and sometimes men, though that's rare. I think it's worse for the gay men who work here. Everyone who works here is gay, which is nice for our community. It provides a sense of comfort to our customers.

AJS: In what ways are you active in the gay community in Providence?

DM: We are yearly sponsors of gay bingo, they raise funds monthly for AIDS and supporting families living with HIV. We do tons of donations for gay pride and auction baskets for fundraisers in the community. And if the students from Brown or RISD or wherever have fundraisers, we always help out.

After our chat, Devin gave me a tour of her wonderful store and we discussed the ins and outs, no pun

intended, of the vast assortment of toys and clothing for almost any and all sexual identification, fetish and appetite. She happily greets customers as they come in, quick to put them at ease and ensure them she is there for all their questions. I purchased a wonderful book of erotic photography from local artist Greg Easton, said goodbye to Devin and headed back into the midday bustle of the street. My last glimpse through the front windows saw Devin happily perched behind the counter, surrounded by products made for the sole purpose of increasing someone's happiness, and customers looking to make their sex lives just that much happier. We are living in dark times; open and free sexuality is one of the last redeeming features of humanity. We should value this industry of happiness, and the merchants of happiness like Devin who strive to make Rhode Island a place where more people are getting their rocks off in more wonderful ways.