

Gradylee Shapiro
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

The Transgender Oral History Project
Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies
University of Minnesota

March 11, 2016



The Transgender Oral History Project of the Upper Midwest will empower individuals to tell their story, while providing students, historians, and the public with a more rich foundation of primary source material about the transgender community. The project is part of the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. The archive provides a record of GLBT thought, knowledge and culture for current and future generations and is available to students, researchers and members of the public.

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by

Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

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- 1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
 2 Gradylee Shapiro -GS
 3
- 4 AJ: Good morning. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral
 5 History Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is March 11,
 6 2016. I'm in south Minneapolis and I have the pleasure of chatting with Grady Shapiro. And so,
 7 Grady, I'm just going to ask you, if you don't mind introducing yourself, maybe spell your name
 8 for our transcriber so we make sure we have all of that information accurately. State your
 9 gender today, as you identify yourself today, your gender assigned at birth, and what pronouns
 10 do you like to go by.
- 11 GS: Where should I look?
- 12 AJ: You should look right here at the camera. You can look anywhere, but I'm going to be right
 13 behind the camera – but feel comfortable.
- 14 GS: Oh, OK. Well, my full name is Gradylee Shapiro. My first name is spelled G-r-a-d-y-l-e-e; my last
 15 name is spelled S-h-a-p-i-r-o. My gender identity today?
- 16 AJ: Sure.
- 17 GS: I was just saying to somebody last night that if there was a box that I could check it would be
 18 butch – along that spectrum, that's sort of probably the closest to my identity.
- 19 AJ: Yeah?
- 20 GS: Yeah, I think so. I mean, that's who I always was – before.
- 21 AJ: How do you define butch?
- 22 GS: Well, I always say it's always like scrappy and swagger. I came out, initially, into a group of just
 23 wonderful butch lesbians as a young person and that's sort of who raised me up and they taught
 24 me a lot of things about integrity and kindness and self-assurance and feeling brave, and all of
 25 those values are still things that I hold really dear and that's sort of the identity that has always
 26 made the most sense to me.
- 27 AJ: Do you . . . what was your identity assigned at birth?
- 28 GS: Female.
- 29 AJ: OK. Where did you grow up, Grady?
- 30 GS: I grew up a lot of places, but primarily Missouri is the state that I would call home. But we
 31 moved just about 42 times before I was 14.
- 32 AJ: Four-two?
- 33 GS: Yeah, four-two.
- 34 AJ: Wow, that's a lot of motion.

- 1 GS: Yes, we moved a lot.
- 2 AJ: In the United States?
- 3 GS: Yes.
- 4 AJ: Did you ever live beyond the United States?
- 5 GS: No, but my dad was a professional con artist, which is why we moved all the time. Sometimes
- 6 we'd go to Canada, buy Tylenol 3 with codeine, and then bring it back to the United States, but
- 7 that's the closest to international travel we ever got. And, it wasn't on the up and up.
- 8 AJ: Well, OK. I'd be interested in hearing a little bit more about this. So, you call Missouri home?
- 9 GS: For sure.
- 10 AJ: Where were you born?
- 11 GS: Detroit, Michigan.
- 12 AJ: Is that right?
- 13 GS: Yes.
- 14 AJ: Grady, what's your earliest memory in life?
- 15 GS: I think my earliest . . . well, my grandma raised my brother and I, a lot. We lived with our
- 16 parents too, but . . . it's like maybe not a specific memory, but just sort of a sense – like I can
- 17 remember . . . or maybe it's a memory, we would always . . . my grandma and I would always lay
- 18 in bed together and as I was falling asleep we would watch shows like *Murder, She Wrote* and
- 19 *Matlock* and all of these shows – *Love Boat*. And she would rub her feet on top of my feet and I
- 20 would play with her hairnet and she smelled like . . . it was called Youth Dew perfume. To me,
- 21 that's like the earliest . . .
- 22 AJ: Is that like Jean Nate?
- 23 GS: Maybe. I don't know, but we got her more every year. When we cleaned out her apartment
- 24 there was hundreds of bottles of Youth Dew perfume.
- 25 AJ: Wow, that's a funny story. So, your earliest memory is more of a sensory-type memory?
- 26 GS: Yes.
- 27 AJ: The feel of the foot on your foot and this sort of aromatic memory of the Youth Dew.
- 28 GS: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: The tactile feeling of your grandma's hairnet.
- 30 GS: Yeah.
- 31 AJ: Yeah, and the visuals of sort of old, well old now, TV.
- 32 GS: Yeah, a lot of early 1980s television happening at my grandma's house.

- 1 AJ: That was pretty much the television . . . it wasn't like you guys were watching re-runs.
- 2 GS: No, no, no.
- 3 AJ: They were in production at that time.
- 4 GS: That's right. Sunday night, *Murder, She Wrote*.
- 5 AJ: Yeah. How old do you think you were – sort of generally?
- 6 GS: Oh, probably anywhere between 3-10.
- 7 AJ: Oh, wow, that's a pretty big range.
- 8 GS: Yeah. We spent . . . we weren't with her all the time, by any means, but we spent a good deal of
9 time together.
- 10 AJ: So, during those years that was . . . and grandma lived in Detroit?
- 11 GS: Grandma lived in . . . we all lived in Detroit, and then grandma moved home to Hannibal,
12 Missouri.
- 13 AJ: OK.
- 14 GS: Which is where my mom had grown up, and then when she moved, we followed her – so we
15 moved to Missouri sort of in her trail.
- 16 AJ: OK. Yeah, so I want to ask about elementary school but you went to 42 of them, huh?
- 17 GS: I went to . . . yeah, 14 different elementary schools.
- 18 AJ: Is that right? Where did you spend the most time in elementary school?
- 19 GS: You know, we never spent much time anywhere. I always joked that I got real good at the
20 beginning of things, but the middle of things is still kind of a mystery to me. But, you know, it's
21 funny, because most of those schools were all in the same town.
- 22 AJ: Oh, OK.
- 23 GS: So, every time we would move, I would make up a story as to why we were moving that wasn't
24 like, "Oh, we didn't pay our rent, so we're just moving." So, it was always like, "Oh, my dad is in
25 the Air Force," or, "We're moving to Hawaii," but I didn't account for the fact that we would all
26 funnel into the same junior high school. So, then we got there and all these kids were like, "I
27 thought you moved to Spain," or whatever.
- 28 AJ: Wow. But you guys were never homeless or . . .?
- 29 GS: No, we were – for sure. Yeah, for sure. We spent some time in the Salvation Army and we lived
30 out of a car for quite a while. I moved out . . . I stopped living with my parents when I was 14, so
31 then I had my own sort of experience with houseless and homelessness.
- 32 AJ: But your parents were sort of like a two-parent household, right? They stayed together?

- 1 GS: They did, they stayed together for 28 years. They only got divorced . . . they got divorced when I
2 was 14, which is when I moved out. But, it was sort of like a no-parent household with two
3 adults there. My dad, you know, was sort of constantly on the run from the law and he would
4 disappear for a month at a time or was in and out of jail. My mom was really profoundly
5 mentally ill – she had a profound mental health issue. My brother and I probably did a lot more
6 caring for her than sort of vice versa.
- 7 AJ: What's your brother like?
- 8 GS: He's the best person who ever lived. He's my best friend in the entire world. He's four years
9 older and he just worked his butt off to take care of us – he just did. And our joke is, because
10 he's super quiet and I never stop talking, so the joke is that when he's 90 he's going to call me
11 and say, "And that's why I bought those pants," and we're going to know that that's the same
12 story he's been trying to finish for the past 60 years. But, he's good – he's got a little baby
13 named Rachel, and a wife, and they moved to Michigan, so he lives in Kalamazoo now.
- 14 AJ: Oh, cool.
- 15 GS: Yeah, he's really one of a kind – he's my favorite.
- 16 AJ: Awesome. So, you guys got along as kids, for the most part?
- 17 GS: Oh, yeah. I think we had tussles but I feel like we really understood that we needed each other.
- 18 AJ: So, I'm curious in knowing . . . you guys were kind of bouncing around to all of these schools,
19 were kids like mean or bullying or . . .?
- 20 GS: You know, it really depended on the school.
- 21 AJ: Or, you guys were tough guys?
- 22 GS: I learned right away to be engaging. It was like a super learned skill to be the funny guy . . . not
23 that it wasn't also who I was, but . . .
- 24 AJ: Right, but there was sort of a . . . the way I hear you describing it, it was also like a defense
25 mechanism or coping mechanism.
- 26 GS: Yeah, for sure. I knew that we would probably only know some of these people for two or
27 three, four months. So, I mean certainly it wasn't always easy but I feel like both Ryan and I kind
28 of figured out – Ryan is my brother. He sort of became the opposite; he became like a tough
29 guy, who was also really, really sweet – he just never talked.
- 30 AJ: Right.
- 31 GS: And then I became sort of like the, "Let me tell you this story I heard the other day . . ." So, I feel
32 like as I got older and it was more and more apparent that I was different in some way, I think I
33 amped up my efforts to be even more sort of engaging. But no, we got picked on a lot for being
34 poor.
- 35 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 GS: But, if we were lucky, we went to school with other kids who were poor. There was only a few
2 times that we went to schools that weren't just us poor kids.
- 3 AJ: So, no sort of drama or trauma around your gender and/or sexuality?
- 4 GS: You know, I would often . . . my brother reminded me of this recently. I would often just start a
5 new school telling people I was a boy.
- 6 AJ: Really?
- 7 GS: Yeah, I always kept really short hair – you know, starting around 6 or 7, I insisted on just having
8 really short hair, my grandma would make me clothes . . . she made all my clothes and they
9 were often sort of generic boy clothes and . . . yeah, because I knew we weren't going to stay.
- 10 AJ: So, you could kind of get away with it, huh?
- 11 GS: Yes. And then when I didn't get away with it, adults were OK that I was a tomboy – like that was
12 appropriate up until a certain age. And kids, kids would pick it out but I also feel like because I
13 had this thing about, "I'm going to be the funnest friend you ever had," that it somehow kind of
14 protected me. Now, adults often – educators at schools would often have really big issues, like,
15 "She needs to wear a dress," or, "She's too old to be blah, blah, blah." That would come up
16 quite a bit, but then we would move. It would never last very long.
- 17 AJ: I'm thrilled with this idea that you would go to a school and sort of introduce yourself as a boy.
- 18 GS: Yeah. My birth name was Shannon, which is sort of like the trans lottery if I'd have wanted to
19 keep my name – it could have gone . . . actually while I was growing up, there were a lot of
20 Shannons that were boys, I didn't know very many girls. People often just assumed I was a boy,
21 so there were times I didn't have to correct . . . I just didn't correct people, it made it easy on
22 me.
- 23 AJ: You were proclaiming, "I'm a boy," but people were labeling you as such.
- 24 GS: Now, I remember the anxiety that it caused – like when is everyone going to find out?
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 GS: But, like I said, we often didn't stick around anywhere long enough.
- 27 AJ: So, OK, when you were 6th grade, did you have feelings that the gender you felt was not quite
28 the gender you were assigned at birth?
- 29 GS: For sure. I feel like there was never a day . . . I can't remember not feeling that way. I can
30 remember praying at night that I would wake up and be a boy in the morning.
- 31 AJ: As early as when? Learning how to pray?
- 32 GS: Yeah, learning how to think. I think that there was that time period that we all have where we
33 don't really know whether we're a boy or a girl or whatever, but as soon as the distinction was
34 set in front of me, and who knows what it was – it could have been commercials or toys or
35 whatever, but whatever tells you that distinction.

- 1 AJ: Playing house.
- 2 GS: That's right, yeah – running around without your shirt outside and having somebody finally
3 saying, "That's not OK, you need to put a shirt on," or whatever. Whenever that time period
4 was, I knew immediately that what was happening for me wasn't right. I also had no context, or
5 concept, as a lot of us didn't, that there was ever anything else except to just pray as hard as you
6 could and hope for a miracle. It never even occurred to me that I would find a place later in life
7 that said, "No, actually, you're OK." And the stories I knew, like Rocky the trans . . . the butch
8 who lived next door who everyone called manly, you learned really early on, "Well, that's not
9 who I want to be."
- 10 AJ: Right.
- 11 GS: Even though now, I'm like, "Yeah, that's who I want to be." And later in life I wanted to find
12 Rocky and be like, "Thanks."
- 13 AJ: So, was Rocky the first trans or sort of masculine of center female person that you ever saw?
- 14 GS: For sure, and will forever be . . .
- 15
- 16 END OF RECORDING #1
- 17
- 18 AJ: OK, so we are back and we were talking about the next-door neighbor, Rocky, and just to be
19 clear, I'm here with Grady, Gradylee Shapiro, and we're talking about the first trans or maybe . .
20 . and maybe that wasn't the language at the time, but . . .
- 21 GS: Right.
- 22 AJ: But masculine-identified woman who clearly was gender shifting.
- 23 GS: Yes.
- 24 AJ: Did you ever interact with Rocky?
- 25 GS: Yeah, Rocky would interact with me when I was outside. I tried to be anywhere they were. I can
26 remember, we were in a side-by-side duplex so I could kind of watch the comings and goings.
27 But, I remember hearing adults talk about Rocky and that's probably one of the more formative
28 memories of he/she and bulldagger. I remember it, clear as day, hearing the phrase bulldagger
29 and not being able to figure out what it meant. In retrospect, I think I also felt a little excited by
30 it. It sounded so tough, but I knew people were negative – not necessarily my parents but I
31 knew right away that it wasn't safe for this neighbor, particularly as to . . . I don't know how they
32 identified, but people would probably have perceived them to be a lesbian couple and, you
33 know, in small-town Missouri . . .
- 34 AJ: So, Rocky was partnered?

- 1 GS: Yeah, Rocky's partner lived next to her and she was high femme. I had such a crush. I
2 remember being like, "Whoa, that's a thing," because they were affectionate – I saw them be
3 affectionate with one another. It's interesting, because of all their faults, of all the faults of my
4 parents, I was never raised to believe there was anything wrong with my gender identity or
5 sexuality. I was raised in a relatively liberal home – some of it was they were just too busy
6 dealing with themselves to really pay too close of attention; but also . . .
- 7 AJ: They were accepting.
- 8 GS: Very accepting, and they taught us to be accepting. So, they never said things like the neighbors
9 or whatever, so that wasn't my story of them. But I saw the way that the rest of the world
10 interacted and that was pretty potent.
- 11 AJ: Yeah, I would imagine. I mean, I know people are cruel to people who sort of disrupt gender
12 norms – from personal experience even. So, you realized sort of really early on that there was
13 something going on with gender. What terms did you use to identify yourself early on and what
14 terms do you use today and how has that changed over time?
- 15 GS: Well, you know, I came out as a lesbian pretty young. Well, actually I came out as bisexual and
16 then I came out as lesbian – this was junior high school.
- 17 AJ: So, 12 . . . ?
- 18 GS: Yeah, 12, 13. And, I used to kind of do a schtick thing joking around about coming out to your
19 family, because I'd be like, "First, I'm bisexual and then I was, 'Well, actually I'm a lesbian,' and
20 then I was like, 'Well, really I'm a dyke,' and then I was like, 'Well, really I'm queer,' and then it
21 was, 'Well, really, I'm a man.'" And then I was married for 11 years to another trans-identified
22 male.
- 23 AJ: OK.
- 24 GS: And so, then I was like, "Well, maybe I'm a gay man."
- 25 AJ: Maybe . . . I've just been in this relationship for 11 years, maybe I'm a gay man.
- 26 GS: Maybe I'm a gay man – and then, of course, when my marriage ended, I started to date folks
27 who identified as female and then I was like, "Oh, my God, am I a straight man?"
- 28 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 29 GS: Things just got really crazy. And so, the way that I identify primarily now is just queer. It's the
30 word that resonates the most, that, I think, holds the most parts of me together. Yeah, because
31 I can honestly say I never felt like lesbian fit; certainly, dyke felt like a solid leather jacket – it felt
32 like armor. Identifying as a gay male never really resonated with me, it's not a community I was
33 brought up in – and honestly, I was raised by so many butch lesbians that actually the gay male
34 community was really difficult for me.
- 35 AJ: Yeah?

- 1 GS: Because it was just a culture shift – I mean, not to over generalize, but sort of in that
2 overarching identity piece. Queer has always been as close as it gets. Like I said earlier, if I got
3 to choose I would say butch and butch, sort of across the board – scrappy and swagger, that’s
4 just sort of . . . or I like to tell people I identify as tough and pretty. Because, you know, none of
5 it really fits so we make up a language and hope that it resonates so that other people see us as
6 clearly as any of us see each other.
- 7 AJ: Right, or as we see ourselves. Right?
- 8 GS: Right, which is more often the long-term goal.
- 9 AJ: That’s an interesting sort of journey through labels.
- 10 GS: Anything is possible – who knows what is going to happen next.
- 11 AJ: It could be different tomorrow, right? What challenges have you faced since expressing your
12 true gender identity?
- 13 GS: I think . . . well, I guess the first would be that it was a real . . . it was a big deal for people . . . it
14 was shocking to me how many of my lesbian and dyke, butch community, really had reactions.
15 At the time that I . . . the initial time that I really started to come out, I was still in Missouri and
16 there was actually . . . do you know Kylar?
- 17 AJ: Kylar Broadus?
- 18 GS: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: I do.
- 20 GS: So, Kylar was from my hometown . . .
- 21 AJ: Oh, really.
- 22 GS: And was the first person . . . we were in the same community, he was the first person at the
23 beginning of their experience and I remember just being like, “That’s happening.” I was so
24 excited.
- 25 AJ: I interviewed Kylar for this project.
- 26 GS: Oh, my God, that’s amazing. Yeah, so I’ve known Kylar since I was 14 or 15 years old.
- 27 AJ: Wow.
- 28 GS: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: An amazing trans activist.
- 30 GS: Just amazing, yeah. And, you know, a really early . . .
- 31 AJ: Pioneer, right.
- 32 GS: Yeah, an influence in my life. I remember them talking a little bit about this too, like my home
33 community sort of feeling maybe a little betrayed or scared. And these are folks that are still my

- 1 people, but at the time I felt like I lost a lot – or like I had to make a choice. I would say . . . and
2 then there have been challenges around healthcare and bathroom use, all of these things that
3 came from standing out. Now, the interesting piece now is that I don't stand out at all. So, I
4 went from being seen constantly – like, "There's that giant lesbian wandering around." There
5 was no question about it, right? So, everywhere that I would go, people would call me he or
6 then they'd call me he-she. There was a lot of confusion for people about my gender identity,
7 and now there is no confusion for people about my gender identity and, in fact, I transitioned
8 into being one of the most privileged people in the world.
- 9 AJ: You are a white male.
- 10 GS: I'm a white man, yeah – and nobody sees me. So, when I'm in the airport and there come my
11 people, right, and I see all these amazing, beautiful queers walking down the . . . I can't be like,
12 "Me, I'm you – I'm you too." There used to be that sort of like amazing dyke head nod in public,
13 you'd be like, "I see you."
- 14 AJ: Right, that doesn't happen to you anymore.
- 15 GS: That doesn't happen and as a result, I compulsively talk about my vagina – compulsively.
- 16 AJ: Really.
- 17 GS: Oh, I come out in the first five minutes of every conversation.
- 18 AJ: Is that right?
- 19 GS: Because it's . . . because this isn't all and I feel like it precludes learning the ropes of being a
20 white man, some of those things involve white men don't hug each other – just in greeting.
- 21 AJ: Is that right?
- 22 GS: No, and I'm a hugger and a toucher. I have a lot of terms of endearment and I'd gotten to the
23 point where I'm just . . . I'm going to be myself in the world, I've worked really hard on that. But
24 there are all of these little queues that I would have never guessed. I would never purposely go
25 into an elevator where it was just somebody that I presume is female and myself; right away I
26 could feel that shift if it was just me – and that moment of yeah, we're in a small enclosed space
27 and all you know of me, all you can see is this bearded white guy.
- 28 AJ: Right.
- 29 GS: It's not on me to cause that discomfort for you, I would never want that to be your experience.
30 A little more fear, people have a little bit more fear about me in the world.
- 31 AJ: Yeah.
- 32 GS: Which isn't the fear of, "You look different," it's the fear of, "You look the same."
- 33 AJ: It's all those other sort of . . . I don't know. I don't want to say predatory white guys but there is
34 some predatory-ness that happens . . .

- 1 GS: And a presumption of the way that I might have been raised to take up space, and that's not
2 how I was raised because I was raised as a . . .
- 3 AJ: Socialized . . .
- 4 GS: Yeah, socialized as female in a tiny, tiny town. But, I try to pay attention to all of those little
5 things because it would be easy to assume that I was socialized to believe that I got to take up
6 all the space that I want in the world.
- 7 AJ: How does that affect you . . . would you call yourself a feminist?
- 8 GS: Oh, for sure – yeah, yeah. Yup, I'm a feminist – without a doubt.
- 9 AJ: And so, you come out and you talk about your vagina, do you challenge yourself in other sort of
10 male-identified people around their interaction with female-bodied people?
- 11 GS: Yeah, you know, it's interesting. There's a lot of really . . . there's a lot of unexpected privilege
12 that I inherited, one of which is men will talk to me and listen to me if I have a point to make.
13 It's that same skill that I use . . .
- 14 AJ: Which I suspect was not always the case.
- 15 GS: Oh, God – no. No, no, no. No, and I think that that skill that I learned as a young person, which
16 was to be like, "I'm going to make you really comfortable with me so that you're not mean to
17 me," has also translated into my adult life where, you know, right now I work at a place where
18 folks have a lot of different . . . they're coming in from a lot of different understandings of
19 community and culture and queerness and we're all working really hard to learn how to do that
20 together. But, as a result, I do work with a lot of cis men who have not spent a ton of time
21 thinking about . . . at a very base level, just how to treat women. And so, I do try to spend a lot
22 of time being really aware of what influence do I have, how can I use this privilege to the best of
23 my ability, and it's never been scary to me to call somebody out. It's also never been scary to
24 me to be called out. I feel like that's part of this process that has been more interesting. Also,
25 letting myself be called out. And I think that's just our growing edge – the more I participate, say
26 in the Black Lives Matter movement, the more I learn about things like the intersectionality of
27 oppression and a lot of things that I think people may be studied in college – like a lot of people
28 got an experience of being . . . of intellectualizing oppression in college.
- 29 AJ: Sure, that's why I'm kind of chuckling . . . the . . .
- 30 GS: The academic kind of . . .
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 GS: And I didn't have that, I haven't been to school since I was 14. All my friends went to college
33 and I had some access around that, but the more that I spend time even more critically looking
34 at the way we interact in the world, it's like we all have so much to learn about experiences that
35 aren't our own. And as somebody who is seen as white, male, who is sort of afforded a large
36 amount of privilege that I never expected to inherit, I'm constantly thinking about what is the
37 most responsible way to use that privilege.

- 1 AJ: Wow, that's awesome.
- 2 GS: Thanks.
- 3 AJ: Now, you've led me to another question, which is because of this white male identity, do people
4 automatically assume that you are college educated?
- 5 GS: Yes, yup. I think there's a certain amount of people in our community often just assume
6 everybody is college educated.
- 7 AJ: That's true.
- 8 GS: But yeah, I've managed to get jobs in the world that would make it seem like I've been to college
9 and, I think people just in general assume that if they don't know me or they're not part of my
10 community, that yeah I went to college. I drive a nice car, I have a good house, wife, two kids.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 GS: I never, ever thought that I would be perceived as average because I was always perceived as
13 other.
- 14 AJ: Wow.
- 15 GS: And so, that's been the part that's been the most shocking – is not what people's reactions are
16 to my trans identity, it's people's reactions to this sort of . . . I know this isn't a popular term, but
17 it's one I choose, this sort of passing identity.
- 18 AJ: Yeah.
- 19 GS: Passing as straight white male, no matter how hard I try sometimes not to.
- 20 AJ: I feel like the language passing, and the concept – certainly it's problematic, there's challenges
21 with it, but it's like really the only language we have. And, it's . . . passing is about safety.
- 22 GS: Right.
- 23 AJ: One of the poignant things you said earlier was that, you know, sort of prior to transitioning, you
24 stood out frequently and post-transition, if there is such a thing as post-transition – I'm not
25 quite sure if that really is a reality . . .
- 26 GS: There's death maybe, I don't know.
- 27 AJ: But sort of post-that, you have become "invisible" and you attribute that to passing, which, in
28 my mind, is about safety, and particularly for . . . I think for all trans-identified people, but for
29 women it is deeply a . . . for transgender-identified women and female identities, it's a really big
30 thing. So, I don't begrudge people that term or the desire to pass because you talk about
31 passing, but you also say that you lead with your vagina. Right? So, now you have put people in
32 a whole different mind space, whereas, I think there are some people that "pass" and never,
33 ever talk about their true or assigned or first gender identity – ever. And, I don't begrudge
34 people that – not everybody has to be on the front lines – like Andrea and rah, rah!

- 1 GS: No, I think . . . and, I think, honestly it goes back to that thing about how do I best use my
2 privilege. Why do I lead with, “Hey, did you hear about my vagina?” It’s because I can because
3 my life is often not at stake because I have a certain . . . because of sexism, because I’m not a
4 trans woman, because people understand why you would want to become a man. But nobody
5 understands why you want to become a woman.
- 6 AJ: Yeah.
- 7 GS: And it’s safer for me – it just is, I’m not as threatening, particularly to cis men.
- 8 AJ: Wow. What are some of the more positive things that you’ve experienced since coming out?
9 You’ve talked about some of it, like this whole white male privilege thing, which is kind of nice.
- 10 GS: Oh, yeah – no, it really is. It’s awkward as hell and I still don’t . . . it’s unwieldy, you know. “Oh,
11 me – you’re talking about me.” I say a lot . . . like I remember coming out to somebody a few
12 years ago at work, who just had no concept, but was really good about it and was really
13 interested. I often will tell people, “Ask me all that shit I don’t want you to say to other people,
14 because I’m OK with it – you have my permission to ask me weird shit.”
- 15 AJ: Wow, OK. I’m going to ask, I’m going to ask, Grady – I’m telling you.
- 16 GS: No, seriously, because I don’t want you going to some person you meet on the street and being
17 like, “You seem to be a transgendered person, you educate me now.” But she was like, “Well,
18 wasn’t that hard?” I wanted to give a really honest answer because I don’t . . . yes, I don’t want
19 to negate the difficulty of any of our experiences when we are not gender normative.
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 GS: But the flip side of that for me is I wouldn’t give up being queer for anything in the world. I’m
22 alive because I’m queer, and not just blood pumping through my veins, but literally . . . I have
23 the best people in the world. I had like a fricking nervous breakdown a couple of years ago and
24 went into the mental institution and this whole thing. In the hospital, you could only eat in the
25 main room if you have visitors. I had people lined up to come in for their 10 minutes – I was
26 never alone; I wasn’t alone one second. And there were all of these people who never had a
27 visitor; we were trying to figure out how to share visitors so people could eat in the front. When
28 I left the nurse there, who had been like my primary nurse, was like, “You all need to give
29 lessons on how to show up for people.” And that’s what I know of my community. I know not
30 everybody has that privilege either, but I feel like homos show up for each other and I wouldn’t
31 give that up . . . the knowing myself, the radical self-reflection and . . . being raised by butch
32 lesbians, I wouldn’t give up any of it. So, in some ways sure, it’s hard because it’s different, but
33 then I look at the rest of the world right now and I think, “God, I wish I could give you a little of
34 what I’ve got – this perspective and this . . . yeah.” Because I think when you have to work a
35 little bit harder, you appreciate what you have a little bit more. So, I think that’s the positive
36 thing. I get to be queer.
- 37 AJ: Wow, I love that – I love that. That is so real. What’s your current relationship like with your
38 birth family?

- 1 GS: My mom died about a year and a half ago.
- 2 AJ: Oh, I'm so sorry.
- 3 GS: You know, it's complicated. She wasn't very nice because she was so sick, she was sick my
4 whole life. I think she's far better off now. And then my dad died . . . mmm, 19 years ago. And
5 so, my dad, my mom and my grandma – my grandma passed several years ago. So, my brother,
6 really – it's just me and my brother, and it's kind of like full circle because it was always just kind
7 of me and my brother.
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 GS: I have an uncle somewhere but . . . you know, my favorite thing that happened is my grandma
10 and I, my grandma's name was Johnnie Jo.
- 11 AJ: Johnnie Jo.
- 12 GS: Johnnie Jo.
- 13 AJ: OK.
- 14 GS: She was the love of my life. She had a bunch of sisters and one of them was Nellie. Nellie
15 recently just passed away – 99 years old, lived in her own home by herself until the day she
16 died. And, at my grandma's funeral, this was right around the time I had started the physical
17 process of transition, but you couldn't tell.
- 18 AJ: You knew, but other people . . . yeah.
- 19 GS: Right, other people didn't. And so, I saw my Aunt Nellie then and then I never saw her again for
20 years because, as time went on, she didn't recognize my voice on the phone. I didn't know how
21 to come out to her. So, then my mom passed away and we went home to do everything we
22 needed to do for that, and I was going to see my Aunt Nellie and I didn't know how to explain to
23 her who I was. And so, my mom's brother, who has been good – we have a relationship now,
24 but I called him and I said, "Well, what are we going to do?" He said, "I'll handle it." So, he
25 went down there and I don't know what he said to her, but when I got there she walked over
26 and kind of slapped me on the face and said, "Well, you're just still sweet anyway." And that
27 was that, that was the whole story. I was like I gave up nine or 10 years of a relationship with
28 this amazing woman because I just didn't know.
- 29 AJ: it's a challenge, just the language. I don't know, I see people from my past and they don't quite
30 know who I am and it's like how do you say, "I'm Ezell's child." That doesn't quite ring . . . you
31 need to put a gender marker on it, right? And if I say, for example, "I'm Ezell's daughter,"
32 they're like, "Oh, I didn't realize Ezell had two daughters."
- 33 GS: Yeah, I was just saying to a friend the other day that I went home years ago and was sitting in
34 front of a coffee shop and this guy who I'd known, he was a friend of my brother's – I'd known
35 him for years, was sitting there and he goes, "You look really familiar," and I was like, "Well,
36 yeah, I'm Ryan Shapiro's brother." And he goes, "Oh, yeah, do you know his sister?" And there
37 was just this moment – there was so many answers and finally I was like, "I do, I am his sister."

1 AJ: Really? So, you came out?

2 GS: Yeah, and then the guy was like, "Well, oh, OK." But, it's just easier to get it out of the way.
3 That always tickled me.

4 AJ: That is funny. Grady, to the extent that you feel comfortable, and I suspect you feel pretty
5 comfortable since you lead with your vagina . . .

6 GS: I lead with my vagina.

7 AJ: Tell me about any medical interventions you have undergone or considered or may be thinking
8 about in the future, as it relates to transition and gender identity.

9 GS: Sure. Well, I had what's called an oophorectomy and a hysterectomy.

10 AJ: So, you're going to have to spell oophorectomy, I think.

11 GS: I'd have to look it up on the internet.

12 AJ: OK, all right.

13 GS: It's where they just take out your ovaries.

14 AJ: My transcriber can look that up.

15 GS: Yup, look up the surgery where you just remove your ovaries. So, I have always struggled . . . I
16 had always struggled with really irregular periods and it turned out, I had teeth in my ovaries.

17 AJ: No way.

18 GS: Which is an actual thing.

19 AJ: No way.

20 GS: It is, your ovaries can produce all sorts of body parts, apparently.

21 AJ: Really?

22 GS: So, anyways, they took out my ovaries.

23 AJ: There's a lot of humor in that.

24 GS: Oh, I know.

25 AJ: I mean, I would imagine there is a lot of pain in that.

26 GS: I didn't know they were there. I mean, I honestly fell down the stairs, went to the emergency
27 room, was like all black and blue and the doctor walked in and goes, "Well, it looks like you've
28 got teeth in your ovaries." And I was like, "Awesome, did I break my back? Can we start with
29 my injury?" So, they took those out and at the time I really asked . . . I'd advocated to just get a
30 full hysterectomy and the doctor actually said, "I don't do trans surgeries." Which was
31 interesting. So, I went through this horrible surgery and then three years later still had to get a
32 hysterectomy. So, then I had a hysterectomy, I had chest reconstruction surgery – which I think

- 1 now people get through insurance, but when I got it that was not an option. And, that's it as far
2 as surgical procedures. I've considered . . . I've sometimes considered bottom surgery, but it's so
3 unrealistically expensive and then the people I know who have had it, both love the outcome
4 and love what that offers them as far as freedom in the world and how they feel about
5 themselves. But, I've also heard that it's a pretty long arduous procedure that involves grafting
6 and all of these things.
- 7 AJ: Yeah.
- 8 GS: I like my vag. I feel like I've got parts I can put in and out of drawers if I need them.
- 9 AJ: Sure.
- 10 GS: You've got a pretty prodigious beard going on there.
- 11 AJ: Yeah, you like that?
- 12 GS: Yeah, so obviously, I take testosterone. I lost all of this hair, but I got all of this hair – which
13 grew in red and none of us expected that.
- 14 AJ: You're not a redhead?
- 15 GS: No, no, no – my brother and I, both jet black hair. And my brother's beard grew in red right
16 here, and then mine grew in red. But yeah, jet black hair our whole lives.
- 17 AJ: Wow.
- 18 GS: I know, who knows. So, yeah, I take testosterone – which then, you know, is the ongoing . . . that
19 I'll do forever.
- 20 AJ: Yeah. Is that a comfortable thing? I hear some people talk about accessing the hormones and
21 getting to really feel like, "I am myself now."
- 22 GS: Well, I know . . . so, I basically kind of went through transition, puberty, and menopause at the
23 same time.
- 24 AJ: Wow.
- 25 GS: Which nobody liked me for like three years, it was awful. I was emotional and sweaty and
26 smelled like a gym locker room – and angry. I know, it was rough. I was having hot flashes and
27 peach fuzz.
- 28 AJ: Acne.
- 29 GS: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, one of the things actually that I think isn't always that great is at this point
30 I've been on testosterone for so long and feel so . . . just like this makes so much sense, that
31 sometimes I'll skip doses because it just doesn't even occur to me . . . I get a shot, so I have to go
32 find someone to give me the shot and it's a process. It's interesting to me – I take meds for
33 depression too and I'll have this moment where I'm like, "But I feel better." So, then I don't do
34 it. It's just the kind of irritation of having something you have to do, but then also realizing it's

- 1 still a privilege, it's still a privilege that I have access to these drugs and that I've figured out a
2 way to navigate away from my life so that I could live the way I wanted to.
- 3 AJ: I think you've already answered this question, but I'm just going to throw it out there. Looking
4 back over your decision to express your true gender identity, what were some of the pivotal
5 moments that defined your new life and would you have done anything differently?
- 6 GS: I mean, you know, hindsight being 20/20, as they say, I think I would have been less defensive.
7 You know, I had that feeling of nobody is getting this as fast as I am – like, I'm finally ready to do
8 the scariest thing I've ever done and I need everybody to meet me exactly where I am.
- 9 AJ: Right.
- 10 GS: Which meant that I didn't give a lot of people a chance to do it well. I was almost ready for
11 them to mess it up so I could justify being scared and angry all the time.
- 12 AJ: Yeah.
- 13 GS: So, I wish I would have let myself be in the process and be with people a little bit more. And, I
14 had a lot of justifiable anger, but I wish it hadn't been the driving force behind a lot of the ways I
15 handled relationships and how people responded. But I think that we have that – I had that too
16 when I was younger and just coming out in general as queer, dyke – just waiting for people to
17 kind of mess up so I could be justified that the world is fucked up around our identities.
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 GS: And it's not just that one person who said the wrong thing, in that moment, is my enemy. I
20 think that there was . . . it took a while for me to come around and that was probably the
21 process I needed but I wish . . . in retrospect, I wish I had some softer edges around it.
- 22 AJ: Yeah, that's very insightful. Yeah. Tell me about . . . so you talked about this specific person,
23 Rocky.
- 24 GS: Rocky.
- 25 AJ: Who was this gender non-conforming male-identified person who was your neighbor. Were
26 there any organizations that had a significant impact on you related to your gender identity?
27 And also, Kylar had a pretty . . . you said Kylar was a very significant influence as a person.
- 28 GS: Oh, for sure.
- 29 AJ: How about organizationally?
- 30 GS: You know, when I still lived in Missouri, I actually started a GLBT youth organization when I was
31 21.
- 32 AJ: Wonderful, cool. What was it called?
- 33 GS: Prism, which, in retrospect, sounded a little too much like prison, but we didn't think ahead.
34 And, at the time, I was the adult founder, which was really funny because I was 21 years old.
- 35 AJ: But prism is also a way of seeing the world.

- 1 GS: That's right, that's right – and that's why we chose that name. But, it was interesting to go out
2 and be like, "Have you heard about Prism?" "Yeah, it's where they keep people confined."
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 GS: And, so this was the connection piece, is that I discovered the internet, which is another reason I
5 think so many people aren't dead in the way that they could be.
- 6 AJ: Yes.
- 7 GS: I think the internet has saved a lot of lives, even if it's slowly depleting our brain cells. On the
8 internet, I found District 202, a GLBT youth organization. So, I wrote and Lee Combs worked
9 there at the time and she sent me all of this really amazing information.
- 10 AJ: Really? And you were in Missouri?
- 11 GS: Columbia, Missouri.
- 12 AJ: Columbia, Missouri.
- 13 GS: And that's the information we used to start this organization – sort of loosely based on the buy-
14 in for youth model of District 202.
- 15 AJ: What?
- 16 GS: Yeah. One of the reasons I chose to move here is I just wanted to get a job there so bad because
17 they'd been so instrumental in this organization, and as an organization we did amazing things.
18 We changed the policy of the city school board to have gender-inclusive language and we did a
19 lot of stuff in the press; we hosted a city-wide GLBT prom – stuff to be proud of. I feel really
20 proud of that time in my life.
- 21 AJ: Oh, my goodness. Do you have any of the . . . sort of quote, organizational papers from that
22 time period?
- 23 GS: Oh, yeah.
- 24 AJ: Really?
- 25 GS: Yeah, I have a lot of clippings of our old stuff from when we were in the newspaper.
- 26 AJ: I would love to be able to include that stuff in the archives at the Tretter Collection if you are
27 willing to have it preserved for posterity.
- 28 GS: Oh, sure. Yeah, I would totally bring that to you. Yeah, oh my God, I would love that. Yeah,
29 yeah – it's amazing stuff. So, as an organization, even though I was sort of on front end of it, it
30 also was a way for me . . . because if I was 21 years old and I would have lived here, I would have
31 been a youth at 202.
- 32 AJ: Right.
- 33 GS: But I lived in a teeny tiny town where there were no organizations so I had to be the adult for
34 this other youth group. And so . . . but yeah, it really changed . . . it was empowering, because

- 1 up until that point I'd sort of been this scrappy kid making my way. And here I was, I felt like I
2 got to do this thing – this really cool thing and it still exists, the organization still exists.
- 3 AJ: Prism still is a going concern?
- 4 GS: Yeah, it's going strong – it's been 16 years.
- 5 AJ: That you founded.
- 6 GS: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: That is an amazing story.
- 8 GS: Isn't that cool? Yeah.
- 9 AJ: Absolutely. And it was based on the District 202 model?
- 10 GS: Yeah. I typed in GLBT youth center and District 202 popped up. So, when I was trying to figure
11 out where I wanted to move to, that was my motivating factors in moving here. I waited six or
12 seven years and finally they hired me.
- 13 AJ: What did you do at District 202?
- 14 GS: I started off, ironically, as the Tobacco Prevention Coordinator, because I was an avid smoker,
15 and then I moved into the role of Program Manager.
- 16 AJ: OK.
- 17 GS: So, I went from one to the next. I wasn't there . . . man, people have such a rich history with
18 that organization. I really had about three years at District and then when I left, I think District
19 really only had a couple of years left before it changed.
- 20 AJ: Yeah. So, District 202 is really . . . it's certainly no longer physically in existence.
- 21 GS: Correct.
- 22 AJ: And I know there was a time period where there was sort of some digital space that was
23 created. Is that still happening? Are you aware?
- 24 GS: I don't think so. I know right after I left one of the things that the Board did was when they
25 actually left the space, and it was a large space. I know you remember this, and a lot of it was
26 not that usable, so I think it was like it meant a lot to everybody but the space was part of what
27 dragged us down because it was very expensive. So, they got rid of the space and then yeah,
28 they had sort of salons and groups and yeah, like a digital presence.
- 29 AJ: Or virtual.
- 30 GS: Yeah, and it met a lot of different places, but I think that the young people who had really used
31 the center, who would be qualified as maybe our most . . . at-risk is such a weird phrase, but . . .
- 32 AJ: Most marginalized maybe?

- 1 GS: Yeah, thank you – that’s the language, then they didn’t have access to it. And it stopped serving
2 . . . you know, in the beginning I don’t think its intention was to become to sort of a social
3 services agency, but by the time I got there that’s what it was – in all honesty.
- 4 AJ: Full-blown social service.
- 5 GS: Full blown, with this great youth center additive, but we were primarily serving young folks who
6 weren’t housed or who were engaged in any number of things that made it difficult to move
7 through the world. And then as the GSAs became . . .
- 8 AJ: And struggling with their sexual . . .
- 9 GS: Sexual orientation, gender identity, and the GSAs, the Gay Straight Alliances in schools started to
10 serve the purpose that, I think, 202 had initially set out to serve.
- 11 AJ: Sure.
- 12 GS: So, we started to see a lot of young people who were much more in need and we were all
13 scrappy youth workers and had no professional training, and providing social services to young
14 people at risk. We just kind of made it all up as we went along. I certainly inherited the amazing
15 work of others who were smarter and made up way more stuff than I did, including yourself.
- 16 AJ: Wow, thank you.
- 17 GS: I came in at an interesting time, because I came in toward the end.
- 18 AJ: Yeah. It’s sad that District is no longer around, but it influenced groups like Prism, which is still
19 around.
- 20 GS: That’s right – yeah, absolutely.
- 21 AJ: It’s really interesting to me that many of the people who were engaged in District 202 are still
22 engaged in activism. So, like the Shot Clinic that’s at the Minnesota Transgender Health
23 Coalition is sort of a direct decedent of District 202.
- 24 GS: That’s right.
- 25 AJ: I know my good friend Ryan Li Dahlstrom is doing amazing work and then TYSN sort of grew out
26 of the youth and young people who were involved in District 202.
- 27 GS: Oh, my God, yeah. It’s amazing – there’s very little it didn’t touch. Even as I think of like . . . the
28 youth that I had the privilege of spending just incredible time with and the people that I worked
29 with. It was a phenomenal organization and I think it ran its course for what it had the capacity
30 for. I think the Shot Clinic is an amazing example of . . . you know, when I first started to
31 transition, I didn’t even know if anybody would ever give me a letter for hormones and now I
32 can go down the street and these amazing volunteers will give me a shot in my butt for free.
33 And not only that, they’re like, “Do you need a Sharp’s Kit?” “Do you need some Band-Aids?”
34 Because somebody said, “Look at this need, it’s not out there, people are being incredibly
35 unsafe and sharing needles.” It just is amazing. The folks who founded that were youth at
36 District 202. I have youth that were in Prism, this group in Missouri, who are doing advocacy

1 work in DC now. I think . . . you just never know who's going to be the next amazing . . . or what
 2 group or organization . . . I think about Gender Blur. I have people come up now and say things
 3 like, "Oh, my God, I went to one of those when I came in from out of town and it was the first
 4 [fill in the blank]." It was always the first [fill in the blank] for so many people. That was just a
 5 group of us who were like, "We want to put on a show." But, it turned into a full community . . .

6 AJ: Where did Gender Blur happen, for those who may not know?

7 GS: Oh, Gender Blur was a collective of folks that was really initiated by Ryan Li Dahlstrom, Max
 8 Gries, and a lot of people I hope I don't offend by not naming, but they were real instigators.
 9 Ethan Laubach was actually . . . and the idea was just to have a cabaret and that cabaret would
 10 be a sober space, it would be a space that was primarily focused on folks who were gender non-
 11 conforming in some way, and it was hosted at Patrick's Cabaret. So, every Gender Blur
 12 happened at Patrick's, which, for a while, made you feel like you were part of Patrick's because
 13 you were there every month laying out that horrible floor, pulling the floor back up again.

14 AJ: Yeah, the risers and all that stuff. Yeah, Gender Blur was really an amazing organization, I think,
 15 because it sort of . . . for me, it shifted the focus of trans-identified people are always in need to
 16 trans-identified people can celebrate and can be creative and make art. It became this next
 17 level kind of thing.

18 GS: I love that, that's so right – that's super true. That we're not always in need; as a matter of fact,
 19 we're the lighting and set designers and your poets and your singers and your . . . I baked these
 20 cookies. Like this is the gift. For me, being trans is a gift, it's a privilege, it's an honor, "What can
 21 I offer you that can get you as close to that feeling as possible? Because maybe you don't get to
 22 have it and I do, that's my privilege."

23 AJ: Yeah, that's awesome. I'm so glad that you mentioned all of these amazing organizations and
 24 people. Ethan Laubach L-a-u-b-a-c-h. I think – yeah.

25 GS: I mean, here's the thing about Minneapolis is that its queer community is unlike anything I've
 26 ever experienced before. And, I know, these big cities – San Francisco, New York, I'm sure
 27 they've got a good thing going on, but I don't think they can touch us. I mean, I feel like . . . I
 28 feel like moving here saved my life.

29 AJ: Wow.

30 GS: Yeah, I feel like . . . because it's just, I call it a small farming community – Minneapolis,
 31 particularly Powderhorn. I feel like the small town that I lived in, the most amazing people – my
 32 oldest and dearest friends, but I wasn't going to be able to survive there because there wasn't
 33 resources. I feel like moving to Minneapolis saved my life.

34 AJ: Oh, boy – wow.

35 GS: I feel like this community is . . .

36 AJ: That's a huge statement, Grady. Love, romance, relationships – yeah, I know for a lot of trans-
 37 identified or gender, sort of, defying people, that can be a challenge. What's your story around
 38 that?

- 1 GS: Well, you know, I always dated cis women for a long time early in life and I was butchy. I dated
2 a lot of femme-y folks. I would say my first real true love was somebody who identified as a
3 trans female.
- 4 AJ: OK.
- 5 GS: And she has since passed away.
- 6 AJ: Oh, no.
- 7 GS: It was interesting . . . it was difficult for both of us because we kind of we didn't know what to
8 do with each other. I had come out as lesbian and been lesbian for a long time; she had initially
9 come out and kind of identifying as sort of gay, as a gay male. And we found each other and we
10 were like, "Hmm." And it shouldn't have been hard but we just didn't know, we were young and
11 we didn't know anyone else like us and then yeah . . . so I continued to . . .
- 12 AJ: How long did that relationship last?
- 13 GS: It was . . . as a being in love relationship, not terribly long. We just ultimately became the
14 closest friends. And then she passed away three weeks before I moved to Minneapolis.
- 15 AJ: Oh, boy.
- 16 GS: And then, yeah, always sort of dated cis-identified women and then when I started the process
17 of physical transition is when I met my ex, who also was in the process of physical transition
18 from female to male. We both identified primarily as gender queer at the time and we were
19 together for 13 years. So, between 24 and now, I'm 38 – and a half, tomorrow.
- 20 AJ: Oh, wow. Happy birthday.
- 21 GS: Half birthday.
- 22 AJ: Oh, half birthday.
- 23 GS: I'm a Leo so I need a lot of attention. I was with this partner and we were sort of identified in
24 the world as gay men and it's interesting for me because it doesn't tend to be my primary
25 attraction. So, now that I'm single again there's this new thing, which is I've never dated like
26 this – I've never . . . I'm on OKCupid and there's just not a lot of boxes.
- 27 AJ: OK.
- 28 GS: So, it's always like . . . like who do you think you're asking out? There's this whole . . . and I don't
29 know who dates trans men. I know it seems so silly but when I was a dyke, I knew who dated
30 dykes.
- 31 AJ: Yeah.
- 32 GS: And this is like a whole different ballgame.
- 33 AJ: OK, I'm just going to say this.
- 34 GS: Just say it.

- 1 AJ: There have been times in my life when I've been really jealous, but it seems like trans men have
2 and have been, and sort of continue to be, sort of like this hot commodity. All the hip queer
3 women want to date a trans man. Is that my imagination?
- 4 GS: It maybe is not your imagination but, you know, I was . . .
- 5 AJ: It's not your experience though?
- 6 GS: I was in a marriage for 13 year so I didn't leave the house too terribly much.
- 7 AJ: OK.
- 8 GS: It's not my experience right now, but again . . . I don't know. I also have never felt like, aside
9 from gender stuff, it is not my natural state of being to be like, "People want to date me."
10 That's not . . . I have a little cognitive dissonance between how people see me and how I see
11 myself.
- 12 AJ: Yeah.
- 13 GS: That's gender related, it's abuse related – it's all that shit. So, there's already this thing for me
14 out in the world which is like, "Well, you know, people think I'm real funny." Everybody's funny,
15 nice friend. So, I don't always notice . . . I have really bad skills around noticing if I'm being
16 flirted with. So, maybe trans guys are the hot commodity – I don't know. I don't know – nobody
17 has told me that yet, I haven't found that out yet. I know other trans guys who have definitely
18 found sweetness in partnerships, so I know that it's a possibility.
- 19 AJ: It's a possibility. Are you hopeful?
- 20 GS: I think so. I've been lucky, I've had a little kissing here and there. I think this is also a really,
21 really good time for me to think about myself and . . .
- 22 AJ: So, this is a recent single . . .
- 23 GS: We split up last June after 13 years together. So, yeah, this is totally . . . I did not anticipate
24 being single. I thought I'd be married forever. I didn't know that this was going to happen. I
25 think we made a very smart choice but if you would have asked me . . .
- 26 AJ: It wasn't your idea.
- 27 GS: Yeah, right. So, I have these funny jokes about, "I'm going to die single and childless," because
28 all of my friends are having babies. But, we were the first to get married out of everyone we
29 knew. We were 24 years old – just a couple little trans guys having some kind of weirdo-
30 revolutionary wedding in Stillwater.
- 31 AJ: Yeah.
- 32 GS: I don't regret one second of my marriage. But, it's a different thing now.
- 33 AJ: Have there been times when people have been sort of insensitive around bathrooms or the
34 criminal justice system or educational institutions? What's your relationship to institutional
35 structures in our society?

- 1 GS: Well, I think that my bathroom stories are probably not terribly unique. There is this
2 phenomenon in men's restrooms where there will be stalls without doors, which I've never
3 experienced before. And so, definitely that moment where you're like, "Well, this is my worst
4 fucking nightmare, there's no door on this stall." Or, just learning things like if there's one urinal
5 and one stall and the stall is taken up and you're just the guy standing there.
- 6 AJ: I'm sorry.
- 7 GS: And it's amazing, men in bathrooms make these sounds that are like "Ughhh," when they're
8 going to the bathroom and it's super startling. And then before I sort of passed this way, when I
9 was binding and doing the whole thing, I would go into the bathroom just terrified and I
10 remember telling my brother, "It's awful." He was like, "Just remember, homophobia is so
11 rampant, no one in the men's bathroom is looking at each other."
- 12 AJ: Right, they do not look.
- 13 GS: They're not looking, they don't care, you get in, you get out. Because the worst place is the
14 women's restroom.
- 15 AJ: Women talk to each other.
- 16 GS: And they all stop and they want to know who is coming in . . . so, yeah, bathrooms were never
17 easy. My primary story, when I lived in Missouri, I got run over by a car.
- 18 AJ: Oh, no.
- 19 GS: So, I was in a crosswalk and this drunk teenager ran a red light – and it was a bad accident. I
20 went through the windshield, then I fell to the ground, then she ran over me – it was a
21 nightmare. In fact, the kid who called . . . you know, there weren't cell phones so he ran to a
22 payphone, he came to see me at the hospital and said, "I have to tell you – that was the most
23 terrifying/hilarious thing I've ever seen, let me tell you why." He said, "You scooted yourself,
24 like in shock and shouldn't have been able to move any of those body parts, and the drunk girl
25 came out and was like, 'I hit him, I hit him.'" And apparently, I said . . . oh, and shaking me, and
26 apparently, I said, "Excuse me, miss, but I've seen a lot of television and I don't think you're
27 supposed to shake my body like that."
- 28 AJ: Oh, that is hilarious.
- 29 GS: And this whole thing went on, but what happened was the EMTs came and they had to cut my
30 clothes off me in the middle of the road.
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 GS: At this point in my life, I had started binding and people in passing would gender me as male, if I
33 was stopping to buy something at the gas station or whatever, but anybody who spent any
34 amount of time with me – 5 or 10 minutes or more would not choose that way to gender me.
35 So, I'm in the road, I'm gnarly, covered in blood – just a bad scene, and they cut my clothes off
36 of me, and one of the EMTs kicked me right here, which is the shattered collar bone that I had,
37 and said, "Oh, I thought that was a dude." And then another one said, "I don't want to get

- 1 AIDS,” and waited until a whole other ambulance arrived to take me to the hospital. I think that
2 . . . that was the moment where I was like, “This is the most terrifying, vulnerable moment in my
3 life.” I’m literally naked in the middle of the road, it’s raining on me, and I’m covered in blood
4 and road rash and glass and that was their response. Their response wasn’t, “Get this guy on a
5 gurney really fast and stop the bleeding and get him to the hospital.” So, I have this memory
6 that I was in the ambulance, because I was sort of blacking out – because I was sort of coming
7 to, but I was in the ambulance and this super bulldagger EMT was holding my hand and patting
8 my hand and telling me it was going to be OK. I got out of the hospital several days later and
9 had called because I wanted to thank that EMT, and was like, “Can you give me information?”
10 They’re like, “We don’t know anybody by that description who works here.” So, I think maybe in
11 my total hallucinatory mind, I invented a fairy butch godmother or something because she was
12 never located again.
- 13 AJ: Oh, boy. You probably did have a guardian angel descend upon you.
- 14 GS: Yeah, I think I must have because . . . I don’t remember a tremendous amount, but this kid who
15 had called the police and came to see me, luckily had also seen the whole thing. So, later I was
16 able to get some affirmation – because there’s nothing worse than feeling crazy when you feel
17 crazy.
- 18 AJ: Yeah. What do you think the relationship is between the L, the G, the B and the trans
19 community – the T? In your experience.
- 20 GS: Yeah, you know – I just . . . it’s so interesting to me because I think that for many folks . . . I
21 mean, for me, for sure, my queerness and my gender identity have always been really
22 intertwined.
- 23 AJ: Yes.
- 24 GS: I don’t think that’s true for all folks, which can make the T tricky, but I think all the letters are
25 tricky. But yeah, I mean – for me, the only way that I knew that I could identify was as a butch
26 lesbian and I didn’t understand there were these other options. So, I think that the T is an
27 umbrella . . . oh my gosh, Andrea, it’s so complicated – I don’t know. There’s so many ways to
28 think about it because I know plenty of trans folks who don’t identify as queer at all, who don’t
29 identify as trans – and good on them. You know, that’s their piece of work.
- 30 AJ: So, sort of . . . people who have transitioned from one gender to another and now consider
31 themselves heteronormative – is that what you’re referring to?
- 32 GS: Yeah, heteronormative – and, you know, folks who have . . . wow, I don’t want to say this in a
33 way that sounds dismissive, but folks who now their story of their young life is represented in
34 the gender they now participate as – or that they . . .
- 35 AJ: Got it.
- 36 GS: So, you know, for those folks, I don’t know that the T has anything to do with the GLB.
- 37 AJ: Right.

- 1 GS: For me, the T has everything to do with all the other letters because it's all sort of this amazing
2 bouquet of being a homo – or being different, or having to think a little bit more about who I am
3 and who I want to be in the world than if I just sort of came out fitting in.
- 4 AJ: So, you know, there is this petition that is going around on the internet suggesting that the T
5 should be dropped from the . . .
- 6 GS: From the GLB?
- 7 AJ: Yeah, from the GLB.
- 8 GS: Wait, whose petition is it?
- 9 AJ: It's some gay white man . . .
- 10 GS: The HRC.
- 11 AJ: Actually, it's really a guy who was one of the attorneys on the gay marriage and his theory is
12 that, you know, trans issues are too complicated and they're separate issues and we needed all
13 the manpower we could muster when we were fighting for gay marriage but now we have gay
14 marriage and we don't necessarily need that community any more – because their issues are
15 different from ours.
- 16 GS: Well, definitely homophobia is fixed because of the marriage thing.
- 17 AJ: Oh, yeah.
- 18 GS: That's so fascinating – so if they get enough signatures does the world just agree to drop the T?
19 How does that work?
- 20 AJ: Oh, I don't know.
- 21 GS: Or, maybe it's a legal thing. I don't know – that's very odd. Somebody's job is going to be going
22 to every sign and painting over the T.
- 23 AJ: Right, putting an X over the T.
- 24 GS: I'm going to start a petition just that people can't eat ice cream on Tuesdays – we'll definitely be
25 able to enforce that too.
- 26 AJ: Ahhh. Do you think there is an agenda for the trans community?
- 27 GS: Well, you know, it's interesting because, you know, watching the sort of trajectory of
28 gay/lesbian activism, I didn't ever think . . . I was sort of raised up by folks who were in the "act
29 up" time, so it never occurred to me that our big fight would be gay marriage. And again, I've
30 always said this, if that is important to you, I'm so glad that you worked hard for something that
31 you believe in – it's never been my fight when I see all this other shit going down. So, you know,
32 I often become worried that the trans community agenda is going to become something like . . .
33 I don't know, we can all have pretty wallpaper or something. But, if there was an agenda, I
34 would hope that it would involve primarily justice for trans women of color, freedom from
35 violence addressing the profound issues involving race and class and the way that it's ignored in

- 1 our community, and hopefully getting people access to hormones that aren't bought off the
2 street.
- 3 AJ: Yeah.
- 4 GS: I just think that there's so many things that go on in any marginalized community that leave you
5 prey to any number of things and, to me, when we fight for something like marriage equality
6 we're saying, "Actually, we only care about some people and those people present well." It's
7 too uncomfortable to look at . . .
- 8 AJ: Andrea.
- 9 GS: Yeah. I mean, I'm enjoying looking at you right now, but . . .
- 10 AJ: Oh, you're so sweet.
- 11 GS: It is, it's one of those . . . I used to always say . . . I grew up in a lot, a lot, a lot of violence – my
12 parents were very violent. When I was married, my brother-in-law was Iranian and experienced
13 some really profound . . . his family moved here during the revolution and we would always joke
14 because my in-laws, my mother-in-law and father-in-law, who I love dearly, were relentless for
15 information about Moni's past.
- 16 AJ: Whose past?
- 17 GS: Moni, my brother-in-law. It was intriguing to them, you know, he had to escape this country
18 and he came over before his family and it was this whole . . . and they'd just listen rapt and
19 never did they ask me a question about my childhood because I was a poor kid who got beat in
20 the United States by my own parents and it was so uncomfortable for them to think . . . it was
21 just too close to home. So, this sort of horrible thing my brother-in-law went through was
22 exotic, but I almost felt dirty at times – you don't talk about being poor and being beat and
23 being Black and being trans. It's so important to make people feel comfortable. So, I hope
24 that's our agenda – is to make people a little less comfortable.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, I like that. I really like that. Last question.
- 26 GS: Yeah.
- 27 AJ: Well, maybe . . . I'm just interested in this question. I rarely ask this question, but what has been
28 the impact of your trans identity on your professional life? I think you have an interesting sort
29 of perspective around that question.
- 30 GS: Yeah. So, you know, I started physical transition when I worked at District 202. So, certainly it
31 was an incredibly safe environment to physically transition in and I really deliberately waited
32 until I found a job with benefits and a queer community to make that choice.
- 33 AJ: Yeah, smart.
- 34 GS: Yeah, yeah – well, I had a lot of smart people around me that helped me figure that shit out
35 because . . .
- 36 AJ: Yeah, that's incredibly brilliant, actually.

- 1 GS: No, I actually credit Max and Tyler. Max and Tyler, I think . . . I think so many of us figured some
2 shit out because Max and Tyler helped us figure that shit out. And so, then I switched to
3 another agency where I worked in mental health, but by that point, I was fully perceived as
4 male. I came out to every single one of my co-workers, in the suburbs – many of them
5 fundamentalist Christians, because it's a compulsion, Andrea. I don't know how to not come out
6 to people. I need a lot of attention so I think that's part of it.
- 7 AJ: But . . . I'm interrupting you, which is not a good thing for an interviewer to do . . . so, you would
8 come out but I'm assuming, based on some of our other conversation, that probably because of
9 this perceived white male identity, it never was a problem.
- 10 GS: That's right, that's right. White men are normal.
- 11 AJ: Yeah.
- 12 GS: And I joked about this all the time – social services. I could have walked into my job, taken a
13 poop on the floor, smeared it on the walls, flipped everyone the bird and they would have said,
14 "It's so good that he came here today," because you don't expect anything like . . . when a white
15 dude shows up in a social services job, everybody is just like, "It's just good that he's here." I
16 literally could have done nothing and I still would have made more money, got promoted and
17 been treated like a prince. It's so upsetting. It's like being on the inside of something you wish
18 you had never seen.
- 19 AJ: But it's good for you, Grady – I'm happy for you. I'm not, in any way . . . I just feel like you
20 deserve that.
- 21 GS: That's so nice. And, it's pretty exciting when you can be . . . the truth is, Andrea, I'm not scared
22 anymore.
- 23 AJ: Yeah.
- 24 GS: The amount of privilege that comes with not being scared all the time, means that I can show up
25 in the world in a way that some of the people I love the most aren't afforded that, because they
26 couldn't do it safely.
- 27 AJ: Yeah.
- 28 GS: And there's a lot of responsibility in that and I love having that – so, it's like both I feel more
29 comfortable in my body, you know, I spent a lot of years in really shitty, horrible circumstances
30 and now I get to feel good and free – and, I get to hold this other piece which is how do I give
31 back so much of what I've gotten to get here. And some of that is just in loving my people really
32 well, and some of that is compulsively coming out so that I can be the barrier between the next
33 person who isn't ready or doesn't feel safe or who doesn't have that experience. And, yeah. I
34 think . . . I don't remember the original question.
- 35 AJ: Yeah, I guess would it be safe to say that there has not been a significantly negative impact on
36 your professional life based on your trans identity.

- 1 GS: No, there's been no . . . no, none at all – none at all, with the exception of paperwork in the
2 early days but – no. But, I think about some of my friends who never come out and I worry
3 about things like, "What if they fall and hit their head at work?" Just these little things. So, I've
4 not had a negative experience but I also have always been out. I can't imagine what it would be
5 like to not have that.
- 6 AJ: To be stealth and then have something come up.
- 7 GS: Yeah – thank you, I couldn't think of the word. But, yeah.
- 8 AJ: OK, last question.
- 9 GS: Yeah.
- 10 AJ: Fifty years from now, what's the world's relationship to gender? What is our societal
11 relationship to gender and transgender? Where will transgender be in 50 years?
- 12 GS: Well, it's so interesting because 50 years is not that long from now in the grander scheme of
13 things.
- 14 AJ: In the grand scheme of things, no.
- 15 GS: Yeah. But then I think about how fucking fast it moved – like from when I was a kid and I would
16 see images of gay people on TV and think, "I will get killed if I come out," to now when young
17 people in high school have organizations.
- 18 AJ: Jazz Jennings has a reality TV show at 15.
- 19 GS: Yeah, I can get . . . yeah, testosterone. So, that moved so fast. In fact, I was talking . . . I was
20 doing one of those U classes where I was talking to students, and they were asking me so many
21 questions that I realize I can no longer answer. My experience is just far out enough from . . . so
22 things are moving really fast. I mean, ideally, and I believe we can kind of manifest the future if
23 we make decisions about where we want to go, so my manifestation would look a little
24 something like we would have so much more energy to focus on sort of basic . . . like that
25 difference between justice and equality. We would stop focusing on giving everybody the exact
26 same thing and start focusing on giving people the things they need the most.
- 27 AJ: Right.
- 28 GS: But, we can't really do that if we are absolutely refusing to identify that there are some people
29 who aren't getting their needs met. So, where is gender going to be in 50 years? Well, I kind of
30 hope it's just not a thing. I mean, I hope it's always a thing because it's a beautiful spectrum of
31 ways to engage the world. But, I feel like when we have the ability, particularly with GLBT stuff,
32 to stop sort of fighting as much around identity politics and actually have the discussion about
33 systematic oppression and why are we losing people at such a rapid pace. And it's not
34 necessarily anymore because of homophobia. So, I would hope if everybody is kind of like, "I
35 love my boobs and my penis," "I'm having so much fun with all of these different parts and this
36 whole expression," then we would see all of this extra space for us to actually make systems
37 change because we wouldn't be so busy being vigilant and trying to make sure one another is

1 safe all the time. I think that the amount of emotional, physical energy that that takes to keep
2 each other safe prevents us from being able to do . . . and, I think that that's the point. I think
3 that those one or two people who are pulling the strings of the world, want us to be so terrified
4 and so protective of one another that we're not trying to change the systems that they're
5 building. So, that would be my hope – that we dismantle this whole story and just get our freak
6 on and love on each other – be so radically in love with one other that the rest of the world just
7 wants it. Do you know what I mean? And then, we can talk about shit like why don't people
8 have enough to eat. Like we'll have more energy because maybe we won't be scared to walk
9 down the street every day – that's where I hope it is in 50 years.

10 AJ: Thank you, Grady.

11 GS: Yeah.

12 AJ: So insightful, so present, and so raw – thank you.

13 GS: Thank you, hon.

14 AJ: Peace.

15 GS: Peace.