

Faye Seidler  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

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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 Faye Seidler -FS

3

4 AJ: Good afternoon.

5 FS: Good afternoon.

6 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project  
7 at the University of Minnesota. Today is October 15, 2016. I am in Fargo, North Dakota, and I'm  
8 here today with Faye Seidler, is it?

9 FS: Yes, correct.

10 AJ: Seidler. How are you today, Faye?

11 FS: I just got done doing a conference, so I'm a little exhausted but I'm in good spirits and I'm ready  
12 to answer some fun questions.

13 AJ: Wow, yeah, we were in the conference together. It was a great conference.

14 FS: Yeah, it was – a lot of people, a lot of emotion.

15 AJ: What was the conference, can you tell us?

16 FS: The Great Plains Affirming Campus Conference, I believe is the name of it. It was about  
17 dismantling walls and what that kind of entailed was how do we get this education and support  
18 to the students who need it, to the trans individuals who need it, the trans individuals of color  
19 who need it, and how do we get away from the systematic oppression that we've been  
20 experiencing for so long. So, dismantling walls was about inviting these speakers in and inviting  
21 these individuals to empower them to speak about their life events, their concerns, their  
22 educational backgrounds, the backgrounds of the students – all coming together to have a  
23 conversation about creating positive change in our community, both at home and in the places  
24 we come from or go to.

25 AJ: Yeah, no – it was a really wonderful conference. I'm thrilled to have been a part of it. So, Faye,  
26 let's start out by you just stating your name, spell your name, tell me your gender identity today  
27 as you claim it, your gender assigned at birth and the pronouns that you use.

28 FS: OK. My full name is Faye Tengen Seidler. The spelling for the first and last at least is F-a-y-e for  
29 Faye and S-e-i-d-l-e-r for my last name Seidler. I'm used to actually spelling them after I say  
30 them, at least if I'm at a bank or something, so it's just common for me to say, "Seidler, S-e-i-d-l-  
31 e-r." So, it's part of my name. I identify as a trans woman, transgender woman, typically just  
32 trans; as well, as just a woman in component with that – both at once. I prefer she/her/hers at  
33 all times, basically; that's the pronoun that I always feel self-affirmed when I hear, that I always  
34 feel happy when I hear. To this day, even, having been transitioned for so long, when a stranger  
35 says it in passing, like, "She's waiting for you at the counter," it still feels good to hear.

36 AJ: Right. Yeah, I know that feeling. I'm not going to make an assumption, I'm just going to ask you  
37 – what was your gender assigned at birth?

- 1 FS: Oh, yes, my gender assigned at birth was male.
- 2 AJ: OK, cool. Thank you so much.
- 3 FS: Absolutely.
- 4 AJ: You mentioned a middle name.
- 5 FS: Yes, Tengen. T-e-n-g-e-n. I don't know if it's this area thing or if it's a common thing, but a lot of  
6 trans individuals that I know in the Fargo area, the North Dakota area, they seem to pick middle  
7 names that have some deep meaning to them. And, for a lot of the trans individuals I know,  
8 that's the case and it's the case for me. My middle name, Tengen, is actually Japanese which  
9 means, "the center of heaven". It's a Go term that they use in playing Go and it's a . . .
- 10 AJ: Pokémon Go?
- 11 FS: No, it's the black and white stones game where you try to capture stones basically. It's one of  
12 the oldest games known to humans, basically. It was played for a long time and it's a really  
13 fascinating game because the best Go player in the world can still, hands down, beat the best  
14 computer in the world and that's not the same with Chess. And, that's because Go has these  
15 infinite possibilities to it, that there are more Go games than there are stars in the sky is what  
16 they said before.
- 17 AJ: Wow, that's a lot.
- 18 FS: It is. And, it's such a beautiful game too because it constantly changes and adapts and evolves  
19 and no two games are going to be alike. You have to keep on thinking about the big picture as  
20 you play. Tengen is an important concept in there because that's the center of heaven which, in  
21 terms of the game, is the middle of the Go board. So, I kind of picked the name based on that  
22 just because it's something that I really liked, I liked the idea of the symbolism behind it, the  
23 kind of allegory to always looking at the bigger picture, and to kind of being in balance in the  
24 center of this bigger picture that is your life.
- 25 AJ: Do you play the game?
- 26 FS: I used to play it more but it is an intensive game and hard to find people to play with because if  
27 you play a standard . . . it's been a while now, is it 19 X 19? Whatever the full board size is, it  
28 can be a two- to three-hour game.
- 29 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 30 FS: Yeah, it's pretty intensive. I used to play 9 X 9 grids and each grid is going to be a lot less  
31 possibilities and much shorter games with friends. I also read a lot about it at a time and  
32 watched people play it. I did a lot of that when I was younger; I guess I haven't had as much  
33 time for it these days though. But, it still kind of resonates with me.
- 34 AJ: All right. Tengen, I like that. Ten-gen or Tengen?
- 35 FS: Tengen.

- 1 AJ: Tengen. So, can you tell me what is your earliest memory in life? What's the first thing you  
2 remember?
- 3 FS: So, I would say my first memory isn't a definitive point, but maybe a collage of images as a child.
- 4 AJ: Makes sense.
- 5 FS: It would be the first home that I remember my family living in. So, me, myself, my father, my  
6 mother – downtown . . . North Fargo-ish. And there's just this home that I was really young in –  
7 between zero and seven was when I lived there. So, my youngest memories are just kind of  
8 clips and images of that home where I can remember my sister being on the bunk bed – her on  
9 the top and me on the bottom. I was maybe three. I remember screaming here or there, just  
10 temper tantrums, I'm sure. I remember going and playing hide and seek, or actually Dare I think  
11 it was called. And that's where the whole block, all the kids in it, would just go and hide at night  
12 on the block and that would just be this game that we played. Thinking back, and I have before  
13 about that, it's incredible how different our culture is that . . . that was 20 years ago now that  
14 we, then, were completely fine with kids playing together on this block at night. But, those are  
15 the kind of things I think about.
- 16 AJ: Nowadays, somebody might call the police on you if your kids are out . . .
- 17 FS: They will call the police on you – even if you're in the porch watching your kids. Yeah, it's way  
18 different than it used to be. But, that's just kind of what I remember – a bunch of different  
19 collages of that house and kind of different areas where I was in that house was my first  
20 memory.
- 21 AJ: So, you grew up in Fargo.
- 22 FS: I mostly grew up in Fargo. You could say I was here from zero to 11 and then I came back  
23 around 17. And then, there was years between . . . it was one year per town pretty much. So,  
24 around 11 we moved to Ada, then we moved to Davenport, then we moved to Felton – just kind  
25 of like that, we kept moving.
- 26 AJ: All within North Dakota.
- 27 FS: All within a 50-mile area. Just to put it in perspective, we kept on getting groceries in Fargo.
- 28 AJ: Oh, OK.
- 29 FS: Within range.
- 30 AJ: You weren't too far away. So, you went to school in Fargo then?
- 31 FS: Yeah, I went to pre-school, elementary, and then I came back for the end of middle school going  
32 into high school. And since I came back around the age of 14 I want to say, I've been here since  
33 then.
- 34 AJ: What was school like? Were you bullied or harassed in school? Discriminated again?
- 35 FS: No, for me, I didn't suffer as much discrimination only because I became acutely aware of the  
36 harassment you faced for being different. When I was going to . . . well, you can put it this way

1 as well, when you're a new kid at school, you deal with a lot of different things that happen  
2 because of that. You are the center of a lot of attention because you're not the kid these guys  
3 grew up with and because of that, there's that curiosity, there's that tension, there's that  
4 sometimes looking for vulnerability and exploiting it. So, I don't really remember my school in  
5 elementary before I moved because it was just the state of life, it was the status quo – everyday  
6 was kind of the same, building on the last day. So, when I first moved and first went to a  
7 different school system where I didn't know anyone, well that's when I kind of got that people  
8 were looking at me and I didn't really like it thing – and that's where I kind of . . . I don't have a  
9 great memory of it being so long ago, but that's also where . . . I would have to say I was bullied  
10 but only in the sense of being a new student at the time. I was called names, what have you,  
11 but it wasn't with any intention – it was just, "They're a new kid and we're going to harass them  
12 in some way or another." So, I didn't take any personal kind of attack from it, it wasn't about  
13 me, it was about me being new.

14 AJ: Right.

15 FS: But, from that I did learn that to be different in a new way was going to target that attention.  
16 So, from a really early age, at least from 4<sup>th</sup> grade, that's when I tried to be very invisible to this.  
17 So, I spent a lot of my time basically hiding, kind of being isolated and doing the most I could not  
18 to draw attention to myself. So, I didn't experience a lot of the face-to-face discrimination but I  
19 experienced the consequences of not participating as myself. So, whereas, I wasn't getting  
20 harassed or bullied or beaten up, I also wasn't really developing friends, I wasn't really getting  
21 out, I wasn't really developing my own sense of self and becoming very depressed in that  
22 isolation. So, kind of the side effects of trying to avoid that bullying, avoid that discrimination.

23 AJ: Created some challenges for you.

24 FS: Yes, quite a few of those.

25 AJ: Oh, wow. What was home like? Your home environment like?

26 FS: Home was actually quite similar to that because I had two, basically, workaholic parents who  
27 were gone all the time. My dad did a lot of construction stuff, my mom did this and that and  
28 ended up working with . . . she did a lot of factory work and things like that, but I basically just  
29 had a lot of absence of memories where my parents could have or should have been. And that's  
30 not to say they're entirely distant, per se, but definitely when I was growing up, I don't have a  
31 lot of memories of just them. I have memories of being in my room, playing by myself, getting a  
32 Nintendo and playing Nintendo games back when that was the best system around – just the  
33 regular NES. So,

34 AJ: ANS?

35 FS: NES – Nintendo Entertainment System, which was that really gray thing back in the 1990s that  
36 got released. But, yeah, it was very similar in the sense that it was really isolating and I mostly  
37 was by myself. And, as I developed . . .

38 AJ: So, no siblings?

- 1 FS: I did have a sibling but she was five years older than me and, in a lot of ways, in a much different  
2 . . . not life space but . . .
- 3 AJ: Social world?
- 4 FS: Social world is probably a good way to say that. Just different people she hung out with,  
5 different concerns and different expectancies and what have you.
- 6 AJ: Sure.
- 7 FS: It was just enough that there wasn't a similarity that we could connect with.
- 8 AJ: Yeah, you were the kid.
- 9 FS: Yes.
- 10 AJ: And she was the teenager and the adult.
- 11 FS: Yeah. That said, she did babysit me and . . . I don't know, we fought like, I guess, at the time as a  
12 sister and little brother could, but I think she did the best she could with the situation – in the  
13 sense of just having somewhat distant parents or at least parents that were dealing with their  
14 own stuff and didn't have time to deal with, let's say, a kid going through trans issues. But,  
15 yeah, she definitely babysat me and probably kept an eye on me when they were both at work  
16 more than anything – though, it was not necessarily hovering over my shoulder, but making sure  
17 I'm not leaving the room to go downstairs and play with knives.
- 18 AJ: Right, she was there.
- 19 FS: Yes.
- 20 AJ: When did you first realize that you were not the gender you were assigned at birth?
- 21 FS: That's a fun question because it's always there. So, it's the really the question of when do you  
22 figure out the Sudoku puzzle. You have to keep on putting those numbers in place until the  
23 puzzle fits itself. So, to answer the question, if I had the language for it . . . if someone were to  
24 tell me you could be trans and that this would be a thing that you could be, that you could  
25 transition and that you could be happy doing this, this is possible, I would say right at the turn of  
26 puberty for me – 11 or 12, because that's when I started exploring with crossdressing and things  
27 like that. That's when my body was doing things I didn't like it to and I was trying to  
28 overcompensate for that.
- 29 AJ: Sure.
- 30 FS: At the time, I didn't really understand it, but I saw a different future for myself. My  
31 neuroanatomy was getting very confused with the changes going through my body with my  
32 endocrine system. So, at that time, I wasn't really aware of it, but this kind of . . . as you'll see  
33 with a lot of stories with gender dysphoria, this gender dissonance, this sense of alarm was kind  
34 of happening and propelling a depression, so that's when it really hit and if someone had  
35 explained it to me I would have understood it at that time. But, it wasn't until I was 19 that I  
36 had a partner who finally told me what the word transgender was. I grew up in an area where

1       you'd never hear that word and I grew up in a time before we had a lot of internet access,  
2       before we had stories of Laverne Cox or Janet Mock, or even Caitlyn Jenner coming out recently  
3       – big profile stories. The only thing you really got was these really sensationalized media clips of  
4       these before/after pictures – like former Marines getting a gender assignment changed. It was  
5       so far from the reality of their lived lives, because they're so sensationalized that it would be  
6       impossible for me to interpret that as my own feelings. So, my first partner brought that word  
7       to my attention and I thought about it and I was like, "That makes a lot of sense." And, at the  
8       time I thought I was just a crossdresser because that's how I engaged with it, that's how I tried  
9       to alleviate the gender dissonance I was feeling. Though, the thing that finally broke for me that  
10      made me realize that I was more than that was, I kept on crossdressing, doing what I did,  
11      coming home, taking the clothes off and thinking, "I still want to be a girl. I still want this to  
12      continue, I don't want to have to wear the clothes to be a girl." So, from there I kind of explored  
13      and I used the Sudoku metaphor before because it's really accurate to me . . . so, I filled out the  
14      numbers as a crossdresser and that didn't quite fit, so from there I tried gender queer because I  
15      wasn't really sure – I didn't know what it meant to feel like you're a girl. How can you construct  
16      that as an idea? How can I say I feel that? How can I make that a true statement? So, I was  
17      really struggling with it for really a long time – like two to three years from crossdressing as an  
18      identity for a year, gender queer as another few years, and then eventually, by the time I was  
19      about 23, I would say, I found just a really amazing trans mentor who is out in Florida,  
20      Gainesville, Florida.

21   AJ:    Who is that?

22   FS:    That is Michelle . . . I'm blanking on the last name off-hand. I can find it.

23   AJ:    Yeah . . . no, Michelle – that's fine.

24   FS:    Her name was Michelle. We didn't necessarily start talking because we're trans; I saw her live  
25       journal profile and I just thought it was a really good profile and then I started talking to her on  
26       Facebook and we made *Futurama* jokes to each other. That was . . .

27   AJ:    Like from the show *Futurama*?

28   FS:    Yes, that was the start of our relationship and that went on for a year before I really started to  
29       talk to her about gender. It's that thing that a lot of trans people go through where, I mean, I  
30       kind of realized I was trans, I tried doing a transition, I tried doing full-time but it was way too  
31       hard – I didn't have support. So, I stopped and figured, "I can't do this; this isn't something I can  
32       do and I just feel like I'm a freak." But, gender dissonance doesn't go away, you can't just hide  
33       that. It's just going to keep on hitting you harder and harder each time you try to deny it and  
34       put it away. So, I went with gender queer, realized I was trans – kind of put it back in the closet  
35       a little bit, just tried to ignore it. I was talking to her and then one day I just got really honest  
36       with her and started asking her questions about, "So, I'm pretty sure I'm trans, can I start talking  
37       to you?" And she was like, "Yeah, absolutely, this is what I do." I'm like, "Hey, so I feel like I'm a  
38       girl." She's like, "Yeah, that makes sense." I'm like, "So, what do you have to be to be a girl?  
39       How will I know if I'm trans?" She was like, "OK, all right, you just have to know that you're . . .  
40       you asking me this question is pretty good proof of it."



- 1 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 2 FS: It's a pretty good indicator. A lot of people who aren't trans or who aren't women don't think to  
3 themselves, 'Am I a woman?'"
- 4 AJ: Yeah, they typically don't.
- 5 FS: So, we started talking and just having this real honest talk where I was able to be honest about  
6 all my hold-ups about gender, all my hold-ups about sexuality, and for the first time, and this  
7 was a pivotal moment for me, for the first time I was able to talk about this with someone else  
8 in a way that they received it, in a way that they positively received it, because the friends I tried  
9 coming out to before in this area back then, 10 years I guess at this point, they didn't have the  
10 vocab, they didn't have the language, they didn't have the understanding of it. So, when I told  
11 that to them, I got the response that said, "What the fuck are you talking about?" Or, "What the  
12 hell are you talking about?" And, that made me feel like a freak. So, I talked to my mentor  
13 about this and I was able to have that honest, authentic heart-to-heart conversation with  
14 someone who actually saw me. That's what changed for me; that's when I could finally see  
15 myself – because someone else could finally see this person, which meant that they existed and  
16 it wasn't just this figment of my imagination. And so, we had that conversation and she basically  
17 said, "OK, so what we need to do is we'll get you into therapy so you can start hormones,"  
18 because I said that that was kind of what I wanted to get into. Basically, I was just very sure of  
19 everything but what will hormones do. I wanted to use that as kind of my . . . if I liked them,  
20 then absolutely; if I don't, maybe I don't know. So, she was like, "OK, here's a number to call." I  
21 was like, "What?" She's in Gainesville, Florida and she gives me a number. I'm like, "What"  
22 How do you have this number?" She was like, "Call that number and make an appointment."  
23 "Who is this?" "It is a leading trans therapist in your area. She has good reviews, call that  
24 number." I'm like, "OK." She was like, "No, do it now." I'm like, "Tomorrow is a good day."  
25 She's like, "Yeah, that's cute, do it now."
- 26 AJ: Right.
- 27 FS: So, I made that appointment that day and then I saw this amazing gender therapist by the name  
28 of Alice Christianson who has done amazing work in our area. She recently retired and I was  
29 able to throw a retirement party for her – at least at the trans community area.
- 30 AJ: Wow, that was sweet.
- 31 FS: She's literally been here for 25 years helping trans-variant individuals. She's been the trusted  
32 name in trans therapy in this area for a really long time. She's also worked alongside Dr. Adler,  
33 Dr. Richard Adler, who wrote the book on transgender voice therapy. So, if you ever have  
34 transgender voice therapy, he's the one who has really pioneered and helped it. It worked at  
35 MSU-M in Minnesota – like, of all places . . . so, I got the benefit of trans voice therapy from his  
36 organization, which is hopefully showing.
- 37 AJ: Yeah, no. It is, absolutely.
- 38 FS: OK, cool. So, the long and short of that is . . .

- 1 AJ: You know, any voice that is coming out of a woman's body is a woman's voice.
- 2 FS: Absolutely. The idea isn't to be cis normative, but to accept all body types and voices.
- 3 AJ: Exactly.
- 4 FS: But, yeah, so 23 was the tipping point where I finally got someone to see me and that's where I  
5 could start to really see myself and accept myself. And then, even then, it's almost erotic to a  
6 point where it's like I'm on hormones and I'm happy and I'm with my girlfriend, now fiancé.
- 7 AJ: Oh, wow – congratulations.
- 8 FS: Thank you. I'm still after a year, "So, am I really trans?" She's like, "Shut up." So, it took me  
9 two years to finally be like, "OK, I'm trans – that's it, I'm fine with it, that's OK. That's good, I  
10 love myself." And then kind of going from there.
- 11 AJ: Nice, wow. So, Faye, what challenges have you experienced since deciding to express your true  
12 gender?
- 13 FS: I would have to say the biggest challenge probably was finding the resources, avenues, and  
14 protocols for being my authentic self. So, finding a therapist – if not for my friend in Florida  
15 being part of a pride center and having a network to get that information, I don't know where I  
16 would have even begun. If we didn't have an endocrinologist here, if I wasn't keenly aware of  
17 the protocols and their standards of care when they told me I needed to do a real-life test, I  
18 would not have known to say no to that – that that is not a necessarily healthy thing to make a  
19 person do prior to them being on hormones or comfortable with themselves in that regards.  
20 The issues with name change, with gender certification change . . . birth certificate change,  
21 things like that – just kind of figuring out the landscape because it's not just figuring it out, it's  
22 dealing with your own baggage as you do that – trying to find and accept yourself, trying to be  
23 accepted but constantly being dead named as you do that, as you try to get your name changed.
- 24 AJ: Explain dead named.
- 25 FS: Oh, OK. Dead name is when you refer to someone by the name that was assigned to them at  
26 birth. By itself . . . I'm stumbling here trying to say it's not always bad, but in a lot of times it is.  
27 I'm trying to differentiate . . .
- 28 AJ: Like if your grandma says it, it's kind of understandable, right?
- 29 FS: If someone is doing it intentionally to diminish or to insult your authentic identity, it's an  
30 incredibly bad problem.
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 FS: When someone does it accidentally, when someone does it in good faith - they've only known  
33 you by that name, you can educate them with that and you have to let people have time to  
34 grow into it at least. The problem comes when your only option is to be dead named and this  
35 happens at hospitals a lot, where your legal name is given precedent over anything you identify  
36 with or any name you identify with – which is problematic, not just for trans individuals but let's  
37 say women who are victims of domestic abuse who don't want their names being called out.

- 1 AJ: Sure.
- 2 FS: Things like that. So, I had a lot of structural issues because there wasn't a lot of resources in our  
3 area. And even though we did have resources, again Alice Christianson is amazing, Dr. Adler is  
4 amazing, it was very hard to find those resources, it was very hard to look them out and actually  
5 find them. I'll take a break from that for a second and talk more about the personal things, at  
6 least. I was pretty lucky in the sense that . . . I would say that everyone who I interacted with,  
7 be that friends or family or assumed family – people who have become my family, responded  
8 very positively to it. I had some of the best compliments too, which my chosen sister by the  
9 name of Shayna or Shawna . . . I never know, I get it wrong all the time. Let's go with Shayna.
- 10 AJ: OK.
- 11 FS: I have a nickname – it's not that. But, anyways, I came out to her and what she told me was,  
12 and the best thing I've probably ever heard with it, "You finally make sense to me." And, that  
13 was . . . I remember the memory vividly because I was in her house and we were in this little  
14 attic cove that they have, just kind of looking out the window and hanging out basically, and she  
15 just gave me a hug and said, "You make sense to me now." This was prior to almost anything. I  
16 came out two months later and I hadn't made any sort of expressive change to myself. My voice  
17 was still quite a bit deeper. If someone wasn't willing, it might have been hard for them to  
18 accept me. So, that was one of the best times for me. I didn't have a lot of negative reaction  
19 from it. In our area, there is a thing called Minnesota Nice and we call it Minnesota Nice, much  
20 like the movie *Fargo*, even though it was shot in Minnesota, it also happens within our state,  
21 within our country, within our city. And that means, if people have a problem with you, they  
22 don't tell you – they're just not on your friends list anymore, they don't return your messages,  
23 they don't return your calls, you suddenly stop seeing them in your life. And, if you are around a  
24 bunch of people who accept you, you can sometimes lose focus if you lose. In that way, it  
25 doesn't necessarily have to be very impactful but a lot of the times people in this state don't see  
26 it upfront. They have the consequence of losing their friends, they have the consequence of not  
27 getting a job because of that internalized trans misogyny or transphobia, but it's very rare that  
28 someone will be shouted out – that you'll hear slurs shouted across the street. It still happens,  
29 of course, but it wasn't my experience. It is some people's experience.
- 30 AJ: I can't imagine it happening to you, period. I mean you . . . you have what they call . . .
- 31 FS: I have a lot of passing privilege.
- 32 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 33 FS: It's something I'm very aware of as well and passing privilege, if you'd like me to talk about?
- 34 AJ: Yeah, absolutely – please.
- 35 FS: So, passing privilege is the idea of how cis normative someone is. So, how likely you are to  
36 assume someone was born as the sex that they were assigned. So, for me, the assumption with  
37 pass ability is that I'm cis normative – to say that I look as though I was born female, as they  
38 were to say, or assigned female as would be the case. But, the way that relates is that the more  
39 of this pass ability . . . the more that people don't think you're trans, the less you're going to

- 1 experience the discrimination, the less you're going to experience the structural and  
2 institutional discrimination and every area of your life . . . all those things that impact trans  
3 individual's daily lives are going to be lessened by that in a large way. A best example I can say is I  
4 can go into any bathroom I want to.
- 5 AJ: Yeah.
- 6 FS: Well, I can go into any female bathroom.
- 7 AJ: Actually, you can't go to the men's bathroom because you'll get kicked out.
- 8 FS: Yes, correct. I will change that. I can go into any female restroom I want and it is very unlikely  
9 anyone is going to say anything about that. And, I am very lucky in that pass ability. Before  
10 transitioning, I didn't think I would be lucky . . . before transitioning, I felt like I would always . . .  
11 like people would receive me as a freak because that was the message I was getting from  
12 people. But, I was really lucky and I changed a lot too because before passing . . . or sorry,  
13 before coming out and before being my authentic self, I was sad all the time. Now, I'm smiling  
14 most of the time.
- 15 AJ: Wow.
- 16 FS: And, I look a lot better when I'm smiling and happy and passionate than I do when I'm mopey  
17 and stoic – yay, toxic masculinity. But, when someone doesn't have that passing privilege, that's  
18 when they really experience the hardships that come with being trans and that's one of the  
19 things I take into account with my work because, unfortunately, as it stands, I get invited to  
20 events to speak because of it. They will listen to me because of it because I don't threaten their  
21 views of gender. I try to use that privilege to get that voice out there. What I say . . . I have  
22 educational presentations . . .
- 23 AJ: So, you still identify as trans?
- 24 FS: Yes, yes.
- 25 AJ: You're not stealth, as it were.
- 26 FS: No, no. You can type my name into Google and it shows up quite a bit. No, I'm very open with  
27 being trans. A fun story related to that, tying into the pass ability. I'm a writer, predominantly.  
28 Let's say tomorrow all trans people were accepted; if we could have the social mobility and life  
29 expectancy and ability to be happy within this culture removed from social discrimination, I  
30 would be a writer. If I didn't have to be a trans activist, if I didn't have to fight for the justice,  
31 and if we were all free to be ourselves, I would just be writing. I would be writing fiction. I'd be  
32 someone like Kurt Vonnegut – I'm not that good, but striving towards that.
- 33 AJ: That's the goal though -#squadgoals.
- 34 FS: Yes, that's the dream to reach. So, because of that, I do a lot of writing from activism. I'm not  
35 necessarily a blogger; I kind of am – I just never had the audience to really care about it, but I  
36 have blogged. My first blog entry, my first article I ever wrote, was when I just came out – when  
37 I just started understanding my trans identity. In the article, I asked . . . I kind of summed up a

1 little bit of my own feelings in the trans movement and what we needed. Even back then, even  
2 before it became evident to me, I talked about visibility, I talked about needing visibility,  
3 because without that visibility, people cannot humanize us – we’re only the other, the concept.  
4 So, in my article I said that if a trans person can be out, if they can be out and safe, then they  
5 should – if they can. Because, without people being out, without people normalizing this to  
6 other individuals then it’s going to be very hard to fight for legislation, to fight for discrimination  
7 bills. I asked that when I was stealth because I was just barely starting my transition then. But,  
8 that idea was always something that was relevant to me and it’s a passion I have and that’s why  
9 I always want to be out – so I can always be that trans person someone has met or that trans  
10 person someone has gone to the bathroom with and nothing bad or weird happened.

11 AJ: Right.

12 FS: Just so I can be that trans person that – hey, only 16% of people within the United States know  
13 someone who is trans and everyone I talk to, that number goes up.

14 AJ: Yeah.

15 FS: So, I am out about being trans. I honestly . . . I’m hitting stealth just because it’s becoming so  
16 routine for me. During presentations I get to like the fourth slide and I’m like, “By the way, I’m  
17 trans.” I start to talk about my gender and stuff and then I forget that everyone doesn’t just  
18 know it already.

19 AJ: Right.

20 FS: But, I identify as a woman and a trans woman. I think putting trans in front of my identity is  
21 really important now because of that visibility. I have that pass ability, which means I don’t  
22 experience a lot of the same hardships other people have and other people that I’ve known  
23 personally – a lot of trans people in our area who transitioned in their 40s or 50s or 60s, they  
24 can experience quite a bit of that, whether it be the work place, public accommodations.

25 AJ: Family.

26 FS: Family is a big one too. But, you may be surprised to learn that even though it’s North Dakota  
27 and North Dakota is considered a step up from North Carolina at this point, probably, I’ve heard  
28 a lot of trans people talk about having really accepting family, friends, and workplace.

29 AJ: That’s wonderful.

30 FS: There have been lawsuits and there is a woman in Grand Forks who is after . . . Taco John’s did  
31 some unfortunate actions against her and is facing some questions now. But . . .

32 AJ: Was she an employee or just a customer?

33 FS: She was and they basically . . . she put up some information about trans things in the sense of,  
34 “Use my correct pronouns,” and things like that. “It’s against the law to not use my correct  
35 pronouns.” And they took the flyers down and fired her and gave her a restraining order. So,  
36 they will have a very hard time, I feel, if a lawsuit comes up because that is blatant  
37 discrimination.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, I think they probably will – I hope they will.
- 2 FS: So, that stuff still happens but I'm amazed that 10 years ago, it wasn't a word in people's minds.  
3 Ten years ago, it was just the gays and they didn't refer to them in that way – in a bunch of  
4 different ways. And, just even now talking to GSAs and talking to youth groups and things like  
5 that, the culture has changed so dramatically in this area in 10 years.
- 6 AJ: Yeah, it's almost like gender identity and gender queerness and gender fluidity and gender fuck  
7 is the main thing that the young people are . . . they're not talking in terms of gay and lesbian  
8 and . . .
- 9 FS: So, to actually kind of go on that a little bit, an experience I had when I was just starting to  
10 transition. In a lot of ways sometimes with transition is that they'll . . . for me, they do boy  
11 mode until they can't pass as boy mode anymore, then they are a girl after that. Well, I would  
12 say if people looked at me they wouldn't read me as a female – way back then . . . say three or  
13 four years ago now. I was in this arcade with my girlfriend at the time and I was just playing this  
14 money chumping arcade game, it was just eating the money away. It was just this action  
15 shooting game and I was wearing this sun hat but I was wearing gender-neutral clothes – it  
16 wasn't giving me a female figure, it wasn't shouting, "Oh, this person is a girl." And, I was  
17 playing that game and I was . . . whatever, and this kid came up, these few kids came up, and  
18 they were looking at the game and looking at us play. And then, this 5-year-old boy that was  
19 watching us play was referring to me and they were saying, "Oh, yeah, she's doing really well,"  
20 and I was like, "How are they getting that? What are they picking up on?" And then, the flip to  
21 that story, me and my girlfriend, who is also trans and has more passing privilege than I do, just .  
22 . . we walked into this bank and we were both, at this time I was passing as well – we were both  
23 basically having a lot of passing privilege, and I walked into the bank, she was behind me, we got  
24 up to the receptionist and the receptionist looks at us and she goes, "What would you  
25 gentlemen like to do today?" I looked back at Kat, not offended but dumbfounded – like,  
26 "Where is she getting this?" Myself, maybe I can understand, but Kat? Her? What? I looked  
27 back at Kat, her name is Kat – she shrugs, like, "Whatever." I looked forward and I was like . . . I  
28 was actually going to change my name at the time, for that story, and this person was older in  
29 age – 60 or 65, somewhere around there, and she invites a banker to come out and help me to  
30 change the name at my bank. The banker walks past us because he's looking for two guys, so he  
31 just . . . and, I'm like, "It's us, talk to us." These two experiences really make me think that the  
32 way people were raised – 40s, 50s, and 60s and this idea of a binary notion of gender means  
33 they can actually only see that notion because when that older individual looked at us, she  
34 picked out something – some characteristics within our expressions and she had to read that as  
35 male, and that trumped everything else. The younger generation that we have . . .
- 36 AJ: Even though everybody had on skirts and lipstick and eye shadow and long hair.
- 37 FS: Doesn't matter. Something did it for her where she was like, "These are two gentlemen," and  
38 she said that regardless of the fact that we were advertising otherwise, even if we weren't  
39 necessarily passing. But, so this makes me think that the generation that we have now growing  
40 up, where there is more room for gender fluidity, lets them actually see gender more, that lets  
41 them see someone who is, let's say, a trans woman who doesn't have full pass ability as we

1 consider it and just understand that they are probably a girl, or understand that they might be  
2 androgynous or gender queer or gender fluid, that these things actually become more  
3 observable and seeable as well as knowable and educatable about. And, I kind of relate it to, if  
4 you're familiar with it, the idea of blue.

5 AJ: I mean, I know the color but I don't know the idea.

6 FS: So, there's a really interesting anthropological idea that we couldn't see the color blue and they  
7 based it on *The Odyssey* and how they described things in *The Odyssey*. I'm remembering this so  
8 it's not a direct quote or anything, but they describe the sea as being red, basically, they're  
9 comparing it to red colors. And they found as the culture advanced, you started to see blue  
10 show up – that you actually, literally couldn't perceive the color blue until later on in these  
11 societies. Definitely fact check this information, I am not an anthropologist, I don't have a  
12 degree above my name, it's not the History Channel expert, but it's definitely a theory that's . . .

13 AJ: And I've heard similar conversations around this, so go ahead.

14 FS: It's just an interesting idea, that's why, as a writer, I take it as an idea, as a narrative to think  
15 about and educate ourselves with – but I compare that notion to our notion of gender and a  
16 notion of what we can see with gender and what we can perceive with it. I really feel that in the  
17 last 10-15 years, a lot of the shift has been because we can see more than a binary in gender,  
18 than a gender that is classified purely by genitals and nothing else. And, that was my side story  
19 and I forget the 13 tangents I used to get to that. So . . .

20 AJ: Yeah, it's all good, we're just have a free-ranging conversation here. What have been some of  
21 the more positive aspects of expressing your true gender identity?

22 FS: So, to answer that I think I have to talk about toxic masculinity and the damage it did to me.  
23 When you're socialized as a boy, you're socialized to not show emotion, to not feel – to not be  
24 expressive in a sense, and to be really reductionistic in how you express, act, and feel – you're  
25 stoic, basically. And, if you're not, then you're seen, you're criticized, you're discriminated  
26 against, you're bullied, beaten up, or worse. And, as you remember with what I was saying, I  
27 tried to hide as much as I could. So, that meant being stoic, it meant being quiet, it meant not  
28 feeling. And, that meant that I didn't feel for a lot of the time – that when I watched movies I  
29 enjoyed, I didn't feel; when I saw sad scenes, I didn't cry. When a good friend of mine was  
30 breaking down in front of me, I had no way to console them, I had no way to comfort them,  
31 because men could only touch each other in aggressive ways. If you hug someone, you have to  
32 hit them a little bit too.

33 AJ: Right, yeah.

34 FS: And that's the only way you could do that.

35 AJ: That's true.

36 FS: And, that wasn't me. You can be a trans person, you can be a trans woman who is very  
37 masculine – you definitely can. But, I wasn't. When I was able to transition and be myself, I  
38 finally got to be in a space where I could start to feel things, where I could cry, where I could be

- 1 passionate and happy about things, where I could just gush about things forever and ever,  
2 where I could talk about the latest movie I saw or this thing I wrote. As you can see now, I'm  
3 passionate about talking about this passion and stuff, but to know me when I was 12 was to  
4 know a very quiet, little boy as I would be perceived. And, I hated that because I wanted to be  
5 passionate about stuff, I wanted to like cute things.
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 FS: I wanted to just be cute, basically, but I felt like I wasn't allowed in that space.
- 8 AJ: So, now you can be you.
- 9 FS: Yes, and now I can be me. I was kind of worried too because before transitioning I worried that  
10 do I just want to do this because I think that's what a woman is, do I think that's how a woman  
11 has to be – because it is a binary notion, in some regards.
- 12 AJ: Yeah.
- 13 FS: So, as I kind of discovered myself and explored these things and kind of explored to see am I  
14 really all those things that I wanted, or is that just a proxy or a fantasy. I got to see that I was,  
15 that all these things that I had hoped and dreamed for unconsciously and consciously  
16 throughout my life I was able to feel, I was able to express, I was able to authentically be. And  
17 all these projections, they weren't just fantasy, they were just projections into who I was.  
18 Finally, now, I'm able to get out. The happiest ability, the happiest thing for me from  
19 transitioning is finally meeting myself more or less, finally seeing myself and seeing who I am  
20 and what I'm like.
- 21 AJ: That's powerful.
- 22 FS: Yeah, it's been amazing because it's so self-affirming to be yourself, to know yourself. While  
23 transitioning nearly killed me, that whole time of . . . if I didn't transition, if I wasn't trans in  
24 some regards, I would be so much less of a person because I wouldn't have had to question  
25 those things. I wouldn't have had to question gender roles, I wouldn't have had to question the  
26 homophobia that rural schools had been kind of instilling in me, I wouldn't have had to question  
27 myself as a person and what I actually liked. I take so much value from being trans because  
28 while it was hard as shit, I wouldn't . . . well, I would do it again, but it taught me so much, it  
29 taught me things I would never know. Back before I transitioned and lived as someone  
30 perceived female, I was a feminist, I read feminist theory, and I read about women's  
31 perspectives in the sense of how they perceived men, how they perceived rape culture, how  
32 they perceived walking alone at night. And, I thought I understood that. I thought, "No, no, no,  
33 I'm reading this, I've read their words and I get it." So . . .
- 34 AJ: And now you really get it.
- 35 FS: After I transitioned, I was walking downtown - alone in Fargo. Beforehand, I wasn't a big strong  
36 guy or anything, but I mean I was a person, I was indistinct, I did my best not to be a target in  
37 one way or another – people probably weren't going to mess with me, I felt fine. When I was  
38 walking home and I was wearing a dress and I was by myself, I felt so scared. I never thought I



1 would feel that, it wasn't a rational, "Hey, I'm going to probably feel scared when I do that." It  
2 was . . . I usually walk alone and I'm really terrified, I'm really scared right now, I'm really  
3 vulnerable right now. And just that feeling, internalizing and understanding it didn't just let me  
4 know I was completely wrong before, it let me know that I'm going to be wrong if I think I know  
5 what it means to be any other person – no matter what their life situation is. It means I can't  
6 say that I know what it means to be a trans man, because I'm trans and I talk to trans men.

7 AJ: Right.

8 FS: I can't know what it's like to be a person of color because I listen to those. It's because of that  
9 experience that I know basically that I can have an idea about what it's like to be another person  
10 and their perspectives, but that's it – that's all I can have with it.

11 AJ: Wow.

12 FS: That was . . . I am so happy I got that lesson because it's influenced my thinking since then about  
13 how I listen to people, how I perceive them, and . . . yeah. I don't have a concrete ending to  
14 that.

15 AJ: No, that's fine. Talk to me a little bit about your family now. How do you relate to your birth  
16 family? Your sister? Your mom? Your dad? Are you guys close?

17 FS: Not really. So . . . let's see. I was, as I mentioned, a pretty isolated youth and I was a pretty  
18 depressed youth as well and I couldn't communicate why - the words and language weren't  
19 there. And, my parents didn't know what to do with that. They didn't have experience with  
20 mental health issues, they didn't have the income to deal with mental health issues, and they  
21 were working most of their time so they didn't have the time or attention to really deal with it.  
22 On my side, I was not asking for help – part of toxic masculinity, you have to handle your own  
23 problems, and I was just escaping into literature or video games, basically. I didn't really  
24 connect with them growing up, I didn't connect with them or my sister because she was dealing  
25 with the same stuff from a different side. She was dealing with having to kind of raise herself in  
26 one way or another because our parents were working all the time. And then, there was some  
27 violence that I won't really get into, but eventually my parents divorced. It was a bit of a messy  
28 divorce as well and that was kind of put on the kids in one way or another – if not by intention,  
29 by consequence of their actions. So, unfortunately what ended up happening . . . and I will say  
30 as a precursor to this, is that I don't blame my parents for any of that stuff. I know they had  
31 their own things going on and I don't hold them accountable or . . . as I said, blame them, but by  
32 the same token, I have other relationships now. The family relationship we had wasn't really  
33 nurtured in that way, there wasn't much I got from it. And, in that regard, I don't have much to  
34 get from it now. But, what happened, happened, more or less, so by the time I got to high  
35 school, I eventually had to drop out because of attendance and that was depression related. I  
36 couldn't get up anymore, I couldn't stand going to school. School was totally happy with just  
37 letting me . . . what's the word? Not expel . . . drop out, I guess, in one way or another. It turns  
38 out I didn't have to though, they kind of strong armed me apparently, but I was getting relatively  
39 good grades but I wasn't connecting with people, I was isolated, I didn't have a lot of support, so  
40 I just kind of stopped going and kind of retreated within myself. My parents had been divorced  
41 for some time, my dad moved out of the city so I wasn't seeing him much except for birthdays

- 1 or holidays or a weekend here or there. They didn't see me, because I wasn't existing then. The  
2 person I wanted to be, the person that was expressive and cute and the person that just wanted  
3 to be all gushful about things and be passionate about things, so that meant I was just a blank  
4 slate then. I was just this stoic person that responded to things but I didn't really provide to  
5 things. So, when I was 17, I ended up getting a cake that said, "Move out," on it. As I confessed  
6 earlier, this is something that was done with probably good intentions, but I got the message  
7 more or less and I felt like I wasn't really getting support there, so I ended up moving out with  
8 my best friend in high school at the time.
- 9 AJ: At 17?
- 10 FS: At 17. And, I ended up getting a GED that was worth way more than my high school diploma  
11 because I was in the top one percentile of the GEDs, so it was actually worth more to drop out  
12 apparently.
- 13 AJ: Is that right? OK.
- 14 FS: So, that aside, I kept in contact with them for a number of years after that, but it was really  
15 superficial contact. It was, "How are you doing?" "How am I doing?" "How's the weather?"  
16 Things like that. And, a lot of the reason was because all of the stuff I was going through I didn't  
17 know how to communicate and it was really obvious I was going through a lot of stuff, but I  
18 couldn't talk about it and that created some of that tension. They couldn't help me even if they  
19 wanted to, and I couldn't get help from them even if I wanted it.
- 20 AJ: Have they met Faye?
- 21 FS: They know about me.
- 22 AJ: OK.
- 23 FS: It's been a thing that I've been kind of debating back and forth. I have my chosen family now. If  
24 I were to meet them and talk to them, it would be purely for their benefit.
- 25 AJ: Would your mom recognize you today?
- 26 FS: Honestly, probably not. My change has been pretty dramatic – not just my physiological  
27 changes but my expressivity, my expression, my voice. I am a completely different person. I  
28 would be one of those sensational before and after things. But, there's actually very, very few  
29 pictures of me before so that would be pretty hard to do. I kept in contact with my sister but  
30 she is going through her own stuff, so I mostly took care of myself for a lot of the time. I would  
31 say that I still talk to my sister from here or there and that she has met me, we've talked. We  
32 went to the Pride in Fargo last year with her friend, who I believe is bi, but I don't know. But,  
33 anyways, we still have a connection. She has her own family, she has two sons she's raising and  
34 that's her full-time job, plus her other full-time job.
- 35 AJ: Pretty much, yeah.
- 36 FS: So, we don't do your traditional family things. I don't go there for Christmas and Thanksgiving  
37 but I stay in touch with my sister and I talk to her every now and then about life and what I'm

- 1           doing. I don't talk to my parents that much but I talk through my sister. She talks to them about  
2           what I do, I talk . . .
- 3   AJ:     And then she tells you what they're doing.
- 4   FS:     Yeah, pretty much. And, aside from that, I didn't make much of a connection with them growing  
5           up, but once I started transitioning, I did find those connections that are my family and all of my  
6           support. Without family, chosen or otherwise, you can't transition. You need someone helping  
7           you, protecting you, giving you direction or feedback or something. Because, like I said, if  
8           someone doesn't see you existing, it's really hard to actually feel like you do. And, I guess, you  
9           can just be a lone wolf but I'd really recommend not doing that – like please don't. Have a good  
10          friend, find a friend – the internet is an amazing place these days. I found my mentor – a  
11          wonderful, awesome person who I make blush, I hope, with how much I praise them, for how  
12          much they helped me.
- 13   AJ:     Oh, wow.
- 14   FS:     But, yeah. I'm actually . . . to go off tangent again, that's kind of what I do in this community  
15           now. I'm a trans mentor here and, as I was saying earlier when I was growing up, I didn't  
16           have any resources here; the ones that existed were hard to find. I make it my job to make sure  
17           it's as easy as it can be for anyone who is trans to . . . "I'm trans, what do I do?" The first thing  
18           they do to find out – like, they ask maybe LGBT stuff in North Dakota, they find the Pride Center  
19           and then they fine me. I can tell them everything about endocrinology, therapists, what have  
20           you. And most of the time, I just talk to people. I don't just sit down and go, "So, you're  
21           transgender, let's talk about that." I sit down with them and I just start a conversation and I let  
22           that come up. That's how it was for me. It wasn't, "I'm OK to talk about this right now – this  
23           really personal deep thing that I don't want to deal with." It was, "Let's talk about *Futurama* for  
24           a little bit and then I'm going to get comfortable and eventually bring this up."
- 25   AJ:     It's hard to lead with, "I'm trans, help me."
- 26   FS:     Yes, so that's what I do in our area, because I don't want anyone here to go through what I did.  
27           I don't want anyone here to feel hopeless and have to try suicide first – which is . . . I'm part of  
28           the numbers, unfortunately. But, I really want to make sure that no one went through what I  
29           did and they have the resources that I didn't – that they have someone they can talk to locally  
30           that they know exactly how to go through all their transition stuff, that they know which  
31           colleges are friendly, they know which businesses are friendly, where you can get a trans-  
32           friendly hairstylist that will empower you as your chosen gender and how to use your  
33           expression. There are so many trans men who try to get haircuts and it's like, "Oh, yeah, I'll give  
34           you a male haircut – here's the female version of it."
- 35   AJ:     Right, yeah.
- 36   FS:     Which is a common complaint. So, finding those resources is one of my passions and everything  
37           I do, if you look at the series of work that I've done, it's always with that message – of saying,  
38           "So no one else has to go through what I did here."
- 39   AJ:     Nice, wow.

- 1 FS: To answer your question about family.
- 2 AJ: Yeah, no – that’s incredible. Let me ask you this, Faye, and to the extent that you feel  
3 comfortable answer the question; if you don’t feel comfortable answering at all, that’s fine too –  
4 we’ll just keep it moving. What medical interventions have you undergone to get to a physical  
5 expression of Faith?
- 6 FS: I would say medically speaking, hormones are the only thing I’ve done so far. I haven’t had any  
7 surgeries done and a lot of that is limitation on finances. I’m working class and the fun thing  
8 about insurance coverage, as I do a lot of research into insurance – basically I do research into  
9 trans things; if there’s a trans aspect of something, I know about it.
- 10 AJ: Right – which there is a trans aspect of everything.
- 11 FS: Yes – yes, there is. But, even if you have trans coverage with health insurance, a lot of times  
12 surgeons who perform trans surgeries need the money upfront because they’re not through  
13 major hospitals. That means you still need to raise \$16,000 for a surgery or . . .
- 14 AJ: Right, and then wait to be reimbursed – a long time.
- 15 FS: Right, exactly. So, a lot of people who – and, of course, where our poverty line is four times the  
16 national average, especially for trans women of color, and where are you going to get that  
17 money? You’re working class and you don’t have the money, you don’t have the collateral to  
18 get that money, so even if insurance covers you, what do you do? That’s the reason why I don’t  
19 have any surgeries is specifically that – is that . . .
- 20 AJ: So, you would pursue more medical interventions if you had the resources.
- 21 FS: Correct. I would just do a gender confirmation surgery given the resources and time to do it, if it  
22 was possible. I wouldn’t do any of the other surgeries. I’m happy with how my body is and  
23 going into transitioning, I was always going to be comfortable with them – in the sense that I  
24 really just wanted my body as it should have been, with the correct hormones.
- 25 AJ: OK.
- 26 FS: I just wanted my body to develop how it should have and that’s really all I wanted from it.  
27 Unfortunately, hormones aren’t completely magic, which means you do need some gender  
28 confirmation surgery if you want to experience that. But, I’ve just had hormones and I’ve been  
29 on them for two years now – maybe three. The first year didn’t count that much – we were  
30 playing with dosages and I had a very feisty testosterone level that would not go down. So, I’m  
31 on quite a bit of spironolactone to reduce that. It took a while to figure that out though. I’ve  
32 been on actual cis normative hormone ranges for about two years now.
- 33 AJ: So, no electrolysis or anything?
- 34 FS: Oh, yes – that. For whatever reason, I wasn’t thinking of that as a medical, but yes.
- 35 AJ: It’s pretty medical.

- 1 FS: It is, it slipped my mind - you wouldn't think so with how painful it is too. Maybe that's why I  
2 forgot, I blocked it out.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, you blocked it out.
- 4 FS: Anyways, no – I have had laser hair removal because I'm fortunate enough, even though I am  
5 pretending to be at least a little blonde, I have quite a bit of dark hair, as my eyebrows give me  
6 away. So, a laser is a good option for me. I had to do laser for about a year and a half. I didn't  
7 have what you would call a big bushy beard; I had a disgusting nick beard. And regardless of  
8 gender identity and expression, that had to go. No one needs that – sorry if you like that, it just  
9 wasn't for me.
- 10 AJ: No apologies necessary.
- 11 FS: Honestly, that was one of the things that really, really gave me confidence in my pass ability. In  
12 terms of just people . . . my own confidence in being female, just because when we look at  
13 gender – just when we look at someone, the presence of facial hair or not is the strongest  
14 indicator, for most people, about that gender – about their sex assigned at birth, if anything.  
15 When I started getting laser . . .
- 16 AJ: Even though genetic women have facial hair.
- 17 FS: Yes, that is why I'm fine with the whiskers I still have. They bleach and take a lot of maintenance  
18 on it, typically. But . . . where was I going with this? Yeah, so when I first started getting laser, I  
19 was just a porcupine of red dots – it's painful. It's pretty quick, I do it about once a month. But,  
20 I had a really bad blue shadow, blue beard shadow. So, I felt like every time I was in a dress I  
21 had this and people were looking at it and thinking like, "Oh, I know what you are," or  
22 something like that.
- 23 AJ: Right.
- 24 FS: It made me not feel safe, it made me feel like I wasn't being accepted by people – at least ones  
25 that wouldn't see me as a person, wouldn't see me as Faye and interact with me, but just as a  
26 person sitting there.
- 27 AJ: Right.
- 28 FS: So, after I got about six months to a year of that, it started to mostly clear away and make me  
29 feel a lot better about myself. It's really weird, honestly – I just thought about this about a  
30 month ago, but it's such a weird artifact to have a memory of what facial hair is like now  
31 because that was actually a huge part of my gender dissonance and gender dysphoria – that  
32 facial hair. Just feeling it . . . just these big clumpy amounts just felt wrong to be there. I don't  
33 physically remember what that's like. I can consciously know it happened and I remembered it .  
34 . . I know it was a thing, but I can't connect those thoughts anymore.
- 35 AJ: Wow.
- 36 FS: So, yeah – I had laser as well for a while.
- 37 AJ: So, you talked a little bit about your relationship – your fiancé, as it were. Trans-identified?

- 1 FS: Yes, it's actually fiancés, which are trans-identified polyamorous relationships.
- 2 AJ: OK, so you have two fiancés.
- 3 FS: I do.
- 4 AJ: Polyamory. And, you're going to marry both of them?
- 5 FS: Not legally, of course.
- 6 AJ: OK. All right.
- 7 FS: Unfortunately, with polyamory it's not likely that would be anything legalized unless they  
8 abolish marriage entirely – though, you can still do what people who were engaged and gay  
9 marriage did before legalization and that's making sure you have each other's rights for  
10 visitation for hospitals, making sure you have the rights of the state and things like that. But, for  
11 me, polyamory made sense to me before it was a word because to me . . .
- 12 AJ: Well, it's been a word for quite some time.
- 13 FS: Yeah, yeah. So, yeah . . . I also sort of invented Buddhism but . . .
- 14 AJ: I think in the Bible they were talking about polyamory.
- 15 FS: So, it existed before me and my notions and understandings, obviously, but I came across it  
16 before I really heard it was a thing – before I heard it was a known word. And that's because to  
17 me, for relationships I don't like arbitrarily limiting a relationship because of conceived notions  
18 of what a friend can do, what a girlfriend can do. I am gray ace, which for now we'll just say  
19 asexual, and the way my polyamory works out is not because I want to have sex with a bunch of  
20 different people, it's because I want to intimately connect with a bunch of different people. If  
21 it's someone that I want to intimately connect with, if it's someone that I dig that is saying stuff  
22 that I like to listen to that is a really interesting person, I want that conversation to go as far as it  
23 can. A lot of times we set up barriers to say that we're only intimate about those feelings with  
24 our best friends or our partner, but for me, I really want to be able to . . . if I like someone or if I  
25 want to explore them or if I want to just cuddle with them and talk about things, that's what I  
26 would like to be able to do and that's always been my notion going forward until I understood it  
27 was a thing – that polyamory was a thing for people. So, when I met my now fiancé three years  
28 ago, as I often like to say I had to do a lot of work for that because it was through OK Cupid,  
29 which is a dating profile. I saw her profile and I thought it was really cool. She was a writer like I  
30 was, she liked the things I did. I looked at her books and they were similar to the ones I liked, so  
31 I invited her out to eat and talk about stuff, not because I was trying to find a girlfriend but just  
32 because they were cool. So, I sent that message – no reply after two weeks. So, I sent another  
33 message and said, basically . . . I don't normally do this – if somebody doesn't respond to me  
34 that that's a pretty good message that they don't want to talk to me but you seem like an  
35 awesome person so I just wanted to say, "Hey, I'd really like to talk to you, if not, that's cool."  
36 And then, she messaged me saying, "Oh, I was going to message you but I got distracted," and  
37 then I went and talked to her and within a week, we were spending full days together. I never  
38 connected so intimately, so closely and so quickly with someone. I didn't think it was possible

- 1           until I met my partner – just the way we got each other, the way we interacted, the way we  
2           played with each other. It was just so organic and authentic to both of ourselves – and really  
3           affirming to myself. She was fully transitioned and all that fun stuff at the time and she helped  
4           me through my transition, helped support me and guide me to the stuff that we did have in  
5           town.
- 6    AJ:     Wow.
- 7    FS:     And then a year or two later, I met my other fiancé, who I met at a support group and again, it  
8           was for no reason other than I wanted to talk to her and when I started to talk to her and she  
9           talked to me, we saw all these things in common – all these things that we were afraid of and  
10          that we liked in common with each other, whether it be books or movies or anime or what have  
11          you.
- 12   AJ:     Is she trans-identified as well?
- 13   FS:     Yes, she is.
- 14   AJ:     OK.
- 15   FS:     It turns out you date your co-workers because that's the people you interact with all the time.
- 16   AJ:     Yeah – or your classmates or people you go to church with or whatever.
- 17   FS:     So, she's another person that I met who is just amazing. Again, I never . . . as an asexual, I never  
18          really think about relationships in that regard. I always think of them as . . . I always just like to  
19          talk to people, that's usually just it – and then if I get close to them that could be cuddling them,  
20          that could be hugging them, that could be spending time with them, holding hands, things like  
21          that. So, it's not that intense thing someone with a sexual attraction may have to someone. So,  
22          I started talking to her and hanging out and learning her story and just how noble and beautiful  
23          she was without knowing it – she talked about all these self-sacrificing things she did and how  
24          much she helped people, and she just couldn't see herself as being noble, she couldn't see  
25          herself as being someone who was sacrificing herself for the benefit of others, who would say  
26          good things about people who had been mean to her – and say, "It's OK because they've been  
27          through this," or something – just a really beautiful person. I invited her over one night just to  
28          hang out and then my girlfriend talked to her and got a similar message and then we started  
29          kind of having a relationship together.
- 30   AJ:     Nice.
- 31   FS:     Which got closer and closer over the years – it's been about a year . . . it's been three years from  
32          my first girlfriend/fiancé and about a year and a half for my other one.
- 33   AJ:     So, are you going to have an official sort of marriage with either one of them, or they'll be more  
34          like civil commitments.
- 35   FS:     Civil commitment, and it will be more of an informal . . . just having a civil commitment and  
36          having an informal ceremony to kind of showcase that these are the people that we love, these  
37          are the people . . .

- 1 AJ: And they're OK with this polyamorous set-up too?
- 2 FS: Yes. The thing with polyamory is that communication and trust in polyamorous relationships  
3 are . . . those two aspects are important in any relationship, but when you include a second or  
4 third person, or more than that, they become infinitely more important because you have to  
5 constantly check-in, you have to have constant consent if things are OK – whether what you can  
6 do physically, what you can do emotionally, the time you spend together at least when you're  
7 dating and things like that. So, within polyamory, to make it work out you really have to have  
8 that communication, you have to have that trust, and you have to know that what you're doing  
9 is what everyone wants to do or it's going to quickly fall apart. Luckily, I'm in a relationship that  
10 it is . . . it sounds weird to say it's going to work, but I'm in a relationship that I love with people  
11 that I love and when I was 12 and 13, I never thought I could be happy, I never thought I could  
12 be with someone I loved, and I never thought I could be with two people who I loved in a  
13 relationship where we all draw strength from each other. And, the interesting thing about  
14 polyamory is it's actually harder for me to come out as polyamorous than trans because trans  
15 has context to it – I can talk about trans pretty easily, I can refer to our public figures; polyamory  
16 doesn't – it doesn't have the same visibility. So, when I come out as polyamorous, people  
17 usually get the . . . if they're not aware, they get the notion of a guy marrying a bunch of wives  
18 or they get the notion of swingers and they don't really see the really honest relationship that  
19 involves a lot of communication, trust, intimacy and openness. And, going from that really  
20 depressed boy, at the time, to becoming an incredibly self-affirmed and happy woman that I am,  
21 was just . . . I never thought it could happen. And, that's a lot of times my message to people  
22 that I talk to is that there is always hope and there is always a future no matter where you are in  
23 your life – that's my message.
- 24 AJ: Wow, that is awesome. You know, you are very, very articulate and I don't mean that in any  
25 kind of demeaning way.
- 26 FS: I'm a writer.
- 27 AJ: Last question, you talked about the visibility of the trans community, you named some amazing  
28 women who have been sort of at the forefront of that – Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, Caitlyn  
29 Jenner, who my use of fabulous women may or may not apply, depending on what audience  
30 you're in, but where do you see the trans community going in the next 50 years?
- 31 FS: Fifty years. All right, so the trans movement in 50 years . . . right now we're looking at a lot of  
32 inclusion and anti-discrimination legislation but, as you may know, policy doesn't mean  
33 protection. Just because there is policy on the books doesn't mean you're not going to  
34 experience harassment and discrimination and a lot of what we heard about in the conference  
35 was just that – that we need education to back it up and we need to change people's minds, we  
36 need to change their hearts about these issues. The latest pole of trans visibility puts it at 16%,  
37 and I have a little joke about that that says that our national poll for people who have seen a  
38 ghost is 20%, which means our visibility is less than ghosts.
- 39 AJ: Wow, that is a good joke – I like that. Wow.



- 1 FS: So, if you look at the GLAD website, they'll tell you that 90% of people know someone who is  
2 gay, lesbian, or bi.
- 3 AJ: Yes.
- 4 FS: And, they use that as kind of an idea of why the gay rights movement has moved so quickly so  
5 rapidly – because someone knows someone who is gay – uncle, cousin, friend, partner . . . that  
6 probably means their gay too.
- 7 AJ: Co-worker.
- 8 FS: Yeah. But, with trans issues 16%. However, it was 8% just five years ago, which means it's  
9 doubled in five years. So, it's probably going to increase dramatically because with more  
10 awareness means more potential for awareness, with more education and visibility means more  
11 potential for people to come out – to be themselves and to be fluid, understanding, and  
12 accepting with their own identity, so you don't see as much internalized transphobia inside  
13 themselves where they see themselves as gender variant, but they're scared of that because  
14 they've heard those people are freaks or something like that. When we create more visibility  
15 and acceptance, it gives more people that avenue to be comfortable and safe coming out. So,  
16 my hope is that within the next 50 years that we will dramatically increase that visibility – that  
17 everyone will know someone or know someone who knows someone who is trans. The visibility  
18 is going to increase our numbers as well; it's going to give more people that person to be able to  
19 see. I also hope that health care and anti-discrimination laws go up in the sense that we treat  
20 gender identity as an amenable trait, that someone cannot be discriminated against for their  
21 gender identity, that hospitals will, as a routine service, treat trans individuals, that we'll put a  
22 lot more work into the HIV and AIDS for trans individuals as well. Kind of battling that and  
23 making a lot of strides there. I really want to see it where we can get a lot more detection at  
24 earlier ages – where when someone is 3 or 4 and telling their mommy that, "Hey, I'm not  
25 actually a boy," right? Or, "I'm not actually a girl," for them to actually have the avenues to  
26 socially transition, which is what you do when you're a youth, and to have more information  
27 about the medication for that. I would like insurance companies to be better about covering it  
28 and I hope in 50 years that's the case. I think we'll also see . . . those are kind of hopes. I think  
29 we'll see a lot more expansive ideas of gender in that time. I think that we won't just . . .  
30 honestly, there is still privilege within privilege – or privilege within oppression as it were to be.  
31 Within the trans movement, there is still the binary of trans people sometimes. Some trans  
32 people think that there is man and woman and I'm a man or I'm a woman, but there is less the  
33 visibility for, let's say, agender, gender queer, gender non-binary, or any of these expansive  
34 genders that if you onto Tumblr you can get a wide array of them. But, the way I kind of  
35 describe that is we have seven primary colors – our six, kind of. And, from those colors, we  
36 relate all other colors – that sheet, to me, is white; this floor is kind of a gray, but there is an  
37 infinite amount of colors beneath that, there's an infinite amount of hues, saturation, luminosity  
38 that changes those colors slightly. What I think is we have those prime labels in non-binary. We  
39 have non-binary, transgender, agender, but within each of those primary colors that we kind of  
40 attribute it, we have those infinite amount of ways you can dress that, ways you can express  
41 that – just like you have an infinite amount of ways to say red or salmon or . . . I'm not good at  
42 the actual color names, per se, but I think we'll see a lot more expanse than that.

- 1 AJ: Periwinkle is a color that comes to mind.
- 2 FS: What's that, periwinkle?
- 3 AJ: Yeah.
- 4 FS: I used apricot peach in a presentation I gave, which is kind of like a tannish color, I guess. I once  
5 failed a color test so I'm really bad at talking about that, specifically. My girlfriend accused me  
6 of not trying. She was like, "Take this color test." She was like, "You got 30 out of 50 wrong." "I  
7 tried, the variance of color is hard for me." But anyways, I really hope that . . . 50 years is a long  
8 time. We've seen an insane amount of change in five years, we've seen an insane amount of  
9 change in 10 years and it feels like its an exponential curve from the Stonewall riots, from . . . is  
10 it Sylvia Rivers?
- 11 AJ: Sylvia Rivera?
- 12 FS: Rivera, thank you – Rivera. From that activism, even going back to Christine Jorgensen, just to  
13 that visibility, we've just kept on exponentially getting higher, better, more visibility, better  
14 understanding. Fifty years is a long time, so assuming we have a good run of presidents that  
15 don't turn the clock back any, I really think in 50 years that if you're trans, if you were born 30  
16 years from now and you're trans, there's no reason you shouldn't be happy.
- 17 AJ: Yeah.
- 18 FS: There's no reason you should experience discrimination. And, the idea of discrimination, by that  
19 point, should almost be removed from our heads – in the sense that we shouldn't expect it –  
20 because right now we do. Right now, we expect going into any place to experience something,  
21 but in the future, I don't think that will be the expectation anymore. I think that people will be a  
22 lot more affirmed in their identities, a lot more accepted about them and I'll think we'll see  
23 some absolutely amazing creative work from gender-varying people. I think we will see them  
24 have just the wings to destroy our notions of gender and just create beautiful murals, stories, so  
25 we have a lot more fiction of these stories in relationships – just kind of, I guess, my hope,  
26 projection, and fantasy that the future is that – that we just have that room to grow and be from  
27 in the future, in 50 years, and that the work that you do, the amazing work that the Trans Oral  
28 History Project, the amazing work that you guys do, the work the National Center for  
29 Transgender Equality – the thousands of people that are independent activists that are part of  
30 organizations – the organizations that care that all of our work is just going to matter to that;  
31 that we're going to keep on working on the work that started in the 20s and in 50 years from  
32 now, we're going to have a place where you can be trans and happy without any question.
- 33 AJ: Wow. I want to thank you for the work that you are individually doing to bring that into fruition.  
34 And, I want to thank you for being willing to be a part of this amazing conversation today and  
35 this broader project, which is the Transgender Oral History Project. So, until we meet again, my  
36 friend.
- 37 FS: Yeah, absolutely.
- 38 AJ: Thank you.

- 1 FS: Thank you so much for having me.
- 2 AJ: Thank you.