

Olivia Hnilicka
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 Olivia Hnilicka -OH

3

4 AJ: Hello, my name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History
5 Project at the University of Minnesota Tretter Collection. Today is January 14, 2016, and I have
6 the pleasure of being here with Liv.

7 OH: Hi!

8 AJ: Olivia, and I am going to ask you to introduce yourself and say your last name because I don't
9 want to butcher it up.

10 OH: Sure, it's complicated.

11 AJ: And also as you're introducing yourself, please state your preferred gender pronouns, your
12 gender identity currently and your gender assigned at birth.

13 OH: Sure. So my name is Olivia Rose Hnilicka, most people call me Liv.

14 AJ: And how do you spell Hnilicka?

15 OH: Hnilicka is H as in Henry, N as in Nancy, i-l-i-c-k-a.

16 AJ: So the H is silent?

17 OH: The H is silent. It's Czech and it means rotten fruit or rotten pear. So my people were known for
18 selling bad produce.

19 AJ: Oh, wow.

20 OH: Right, so I identify as a transgender woman and I was assigned male at birth. Was there another
21 question? Oh, my pronouns. I prefer she and her, they is great if you are not entirely . . . if you
22 don't know what to use for myself. But she or her is preferred, so yeah.

23 AJ: So Liv, tell me about your earliest memory. What is the first thing you remember in life? It
24 doesn't have to be related to your gender identity, though if it is, that's absolutely fine.

25 OH: So my mother was an elementary school teacher before she had me and all of my siblings – I
26 have five brothers.

27 AJ: OK.

28 OH: So she was really great at engaging all of us in entertaining and educational ways. So some of
29 my earliest memories are all of us at home with her sort of leading us in an educational
30 moment. Usually it was surrounding food, which is why I think I love food so much. But I have
31 vivid memories of making popcorn and having that be like . . .

32 AJ: A lesson.

33 OH: A lesson on how it's very scientific and also very delicious. So those are some of my earliest
34 memories – hanging with my two older brothers.

- 1 AJ: Very sweet. About what age would you say?
- 2 OH: That was like three or four.
- 3 AJ: Where did you grow up?
- 4 OH: I was born in Racine, Wisconsin, and then just about a year after I was born, my family moved to
5 Florida, to Dunedin, because my dad got some work out there.
- 6 AJ: Where in Florida?
- 7 OH: Dunedin. I believe it's near Orlando, but I could be wrong. I literally don't remember any of
8 Florida. We moved back to Wisconsin only a year after and so then we lived . . . so I grew up in
9 Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, which is about 10 or 15 minutes north of Milwaukee.
- 10 AJ: OK. How do you spell that?
- 11 OH: Wauwatosa is W-a-u-w-a-t-o-s-a.
- 12 AJ: OK. Wauwatosa.
- 13 OH: Wauwatosa. So yeah . . .
- 14 AJ: What was that community like?
- 15 OH: It's like a white suburban, around 75,000 I believe. So middle-sized suburbia sort of town.
- 16 AJ: Right outside of Milwaukee.
- 17 OH: Yeah, just about 15 minutes outside of Milwaukee.
- 18 AJ: Did you guys spend time in the city at all?
- 19 OH: We did travel to Milwaukee a decent amount. I had an uncle, my mother's brother lived in
20 Milwaukee for a while and also there was just more to do in Milwaukee so we did travel to
21 Milwaukee a decent amount.
- 22 AJ: Chicago?
- 23 OH: We did not go to Chicago that much. I went to Chicago more in my high school years, I went on
24 some trips there, and that's sort of where I got excited about Chicago which is where I ended up
25 during my twenties. So yeah, but didn't really travel to Chicago too much, more so Madison.
26 We did a lot of trips to Madison.
- 27 AJ: The mad city.
- 28 OH: Yeah. Because it was fun and my aunt and uncle lived up there.
- 29 AJ: It was the capital.
- 30 OH: Yeah, exactly. It was the capital and my parents really liked going to, there's a Farmer's Market
31 at the capitol building every Saturday, so we would drive up there early sometimes in the
32 summer and that was fun.

- 1 AJ: Nice. So you went to elementary school in Wauwatosa. What was that experience like?
- 2 OH: It was pretty standard as far as suburban white in the 1980s sort of situation was. There
3 definitely was . . . my family is not affluent by any means, but we weren't living in poverty.
- 4 AJ: You weren't destitute.
- 5 OH: We weren't destitute and that was sort of . . . it was very middle class, it was a middle class sort
6 of suburban lifestyle. So, the standard sort of situation with that as far as . . .
- 7 AJ: Uneventful.
- 8 OH: Sort of uneventful. If you imagine *The Wonder Years* in the 1980s, that was sort of like our life, if
9 that makes sense.
- 10 AJ: I love the analogy – yeah. When is the first time you recognized that you felt different from the
11 gender you were assigned at birth?
- 12 OH: I think that a lot of my gender identity came . . . the realizations came later in life. But there
13 always was sort of this core acknowledgement within myself that I was different from a lot of
14 the other kids that I interacted with and the adults that I interacted with. I definitely remember
15 . . . I think I sort of, it was easier for me to connect it to sexuality, which I think was a little bit
16 more accessible – the world is very sex and sexuality obsessed, so to feel different about who I
17 was attracted to as a young child, or who I was feeling desires for as a young child, that felt
18 more easily connectable as a child. I remember coming home, as a 4th grader . . . 3rd grader or
19 4th grader, and clearly I wouldn't use this language now, but I remember coming home and
20 being really upset and asking my mother, "Am I retarded?" I was acknowledging that there was
21 an other . . . there was something different about me that I couldn't comprehend.
- 22 AJ: Identify.
- 23 OH: Yeah, I didn't have the language for it yet. And so . . . yeah, I think those are some of my earliest
24 memories as far as that goes.
- 25 AJ: So what I kind of hear is that you were attracted to other boys.
- 26 OH: Yeah, I definitely found myself attracted to other boys, and also I think I was just more
27 aggressive sexually as a child. I think that sort of blossomed within me at a younger age. I was
28 very aware of my body and other people's bodies and what those two things could do together
29 and what that looked like.
- 30 AJ: Were you sexually active as a young person?
- 31 OH: I was not sexually active until high school, which was surprising because I definitely . . . I think
32 about when I was blossoming into this, the internet was really accessible to me and so I feel like
33 I put myself in situations where I probably could have had sexual relations with someone as an
34 11-, 12-, 13-year old. But, I sort of followed the path until waiting until high school to do it with
35 my peers.
- 36 AJ: Good . . . I mean, we don't know if that's good or bad.

- 1 OH: Oh yeah, it definitely probably kept me in safer positions.
- 2 AJ: And that's what is important.
- 3 OH: Right, as opposed to being with an older person who I was seeking out.
- 4 AJ: So in some ways your sexuality was sort of this pre-cursor to this gender shift.
- 5 OH: Yeah, absolutely.
- 6 AJ: So when did you recognize the gender was wrong?
- 7 OH: I moved to Chicago . . . so, in high school, I think sort of that clear connection to my sexuality
8 and also the fact that my mother and I are really similar sort of all came to a head. I got kicked
9 out my senior year of high school and so I had to figure out . . .
- 10 AJ: Kicked out of your home?
- 11 OH: Yes, kicked out of my home.
- 12 AJ: But not because of your gender identity.
- 13 OH: It wasn't . . . it didn't have anything to do with gender identity. It was more about sexuality and
14 the fact that I was open and . . . I was visible about who I was attracted to, I was a queer person.
- 15 AJ: Queer person and . . .
- 16 OH: As a teenager, like in 1998. So it was like, "What is going on?" It was still a newer concept for
17 suburban America. And my mother . . . my parents are very much like that – well they were, not
18 so much anymore, but they were of that mindset of, "Don't air your dirty laundry." "We're not
19 going to judge you, a lot of people are not going to judge you but don't put it out there." Which
20 I, as a 16-year-old was like, "Fuck you, I'm going to do whatever I want."
- 21 AJ: Exactly.
- 22 OH: So, right. So I got kicked out, I was living with my friend Julia and her family to graduate high
23 school and was like OK, I could keep working at the Gap and continue this life in suburban
24 America, or I could head down to Chicago after I graduated and get some life experience –
25 which is what I did. So I ended up in Chicago in the fall of 2001 as an 18-year-old, and when I
26 got there, one of the first organizations that I connected with was the About Face Youth Theatre
27 Program, which is based on Chicago's north side. So their whole concept is they create a show
28 every year with young people, usually young queer and trans people, and sort of create a
29 dialogue through this art form. It's really similar to what InterMedia does, it's really cool. So,
30 that was . . .
- 31 AJ: I've heard about this a little bit. Was there a woman, Precious Davis, involved with this group at
32 all?
- 33 OH: Precious probably peripherally is involved with About Face Youth Theatre, I don't know if she's
34 ever done specific work with them. I'm trying to think of who . . . what trans person would be
35 an older . . . I'm trying to think. Precious is amazing though, by the way. Right, so working with
36 them as a young person, those were the first sort of conversations that I had about gender

1 identity and sexual orientation being two separate entities and being two separate
2 conversations. And that's when I started to recognize within myself . . . it took me a while but I
3 think that was the first time that I was like, "OK, this is something that I'm recognizing in myself
4 and having a conversation and getting very spirited about trans rights and trans issues." And
5 why am I getting so spirited about it is probably because I have that within myself. And it didn't
6 . . . it took 10 years after that before I started to really sort of answer those questions within
7 myself.

8 AJ: OK, wow. But that recognition sort of happened in Chicago.

9 OH: Yeah, it sparked it.

10 AJ: At the About . . .

11 OH: About Face Youth Program. And also the Howard Brown . . . through Howard Brown was the
12 Broadway Youth Center, so they were just starting to organize and facilitate youth programming
13 and so also a lot of connections and meetings there with other queer and trans people.

14 AJ: That's really quite fascinating though. I mean you sort of came of age in a time when
15 community was creating space for queer and trans youth.

16 OH: Yeah, when it wasn't there earlier.

17 AJ: Yeah, it was just not there. So, talk a little bit about how that felt. You don't have another . . .
18 you don't have an experience like I personally had where when I was 18 or 19-years old, there
19 were no resources so you don't necessarily have that as a . . . but what was it like to be able . . . I
20 mean, you came from Wisconsin where, I'm assuming in your community, that didn't exist.

21 OH: No, yeah – it did not exist.

22 AJ: And then to go to Chicago where there is sort of . . . it sounds like there was this plethora of . . .

23 OH: Yeah, it was an explosion – like all these communities and different people to connect with and
24 really interesting conversations to have and art being made around it. It was really sort of . . . it
25 was a beautiful moment. I sort of . . . sometimes . . . the only thing I can think of is I'll go back
26 and read journal entries and . . .

27 AJ: You journal?

28 OH: Yes. At that point I was really sort of in turmoil and I was really upset about still not being in
29 communication with my family and being alone and having to figure out some hard, adult
30 situations and so I would journal a lot. So I look back on it and it was . . . like most young people
31 it was this formative time that was really difficult but also super rewarding and I just feel really
32 grateful and blessed for the community that I had to support me in Chicago, because I probably
33 wouldn't be here right now if I didn't have that.

34 AJ: Wow.

35 OH: But yeah, it was definitely very different and you could tell that they were . . . the organizers
36 were still figuring out what was the programming surrounding it, what was the language
37 surrounding . . .

- 1 AJ: So it was still new?
- 2 OH: It felt very new for a lot of people involved.
- 3 AJ: But people were trying.
- 4 OH: The effort and the hard work was definitely very much there – the drive, the passion.
- 5 AJ: Wow, that's awesome that that sort of existed for you because . . . even now, it's still in pockets
6 of community. It's not like a widespread kind of thing. One of the questions that your story is
7 sparking for me is growing up in Chicago and sort of being . . . I'm assuming that you were
8 connected to the trans community.
- 9 OH: Not as directly as I was in my older years, in my late twenties, but I definitely was connected to
10 it.
- 11 AJ: So even in your older years . . . I've heard that . . . so I read a post on Facebook a couple weeks
12 ago and it was talking about how the level of sort of violence and cattiness and back stabbing
13 that happens in trans communities of color, that sort of goes untalked about. Did you witness
14 or experience any of that?
- 15 OH: So, as a white person I think my experience is completely different and I probably can't speak to
16 exactly what you're talking about, but I definitely can say that my experience as someone who is
17 peripherally aware of that sort of side of the community is definitely there, I just think that's just
18 sort of unfortunately how . . . that's just how capitalism is based, which is really unfortunate.
19 It's all about how much you have and what you own. And we're talking about passing, how well
20 do you pass, how fishy are you.
- 21 AJ: Fishy . . . what does fishy mean?
- 22 OH: Sure, fishy goes along with passing. Do you pass as a cis gender woman in the daytime? Right?
23 Not just in the club but . . .
- 24 AJ: When it's dark and the lights are low.
- 25 OH: Exactly. You're at the grocery store and you're totally passing. And I think that that definitely is
26 something that I've interacted with, you know, as a non-passing fat trans woman.
- 27 AJ: Self-deprecation.
- 28 OH: That's just a reality. I'm transitioning later in life and certain things . . . I'm just very visibly trans
29 and so, you know, I think that there is sort of this . . .
- 30 AJ: Competition maybe?
- 31 OH: Yes, competition and there's also like a sense of worth in how pretty you are and how desirable
32 you are and stuff like that. And that, I think, is just America as a whole and it's just sort of this
33 smaller subset of how that operates.
- 34 AJ: So it gets intensified.

- 1 OH: Exactly, because there's less of us and we're all sort of under scrutiny of ourselves and you
2 project that onto the people we care about.
- 3 AJ: And the resources seem limited.
- 4 OH: Exactly. So, I definitely can say that there is that side . . .
- 5 AJ: So there is some truth to that sort of assessment.
- 6 OH: Oh absolutely, there is definitely that world, that realm in the trans community. And, you know,
7 I think that I have . . . so I sort of moved into my gender identity through drag. I started
8 performing as an improviser and then I started performing in this show at Annoyance Theatre
9 called Coed Prison Sluts where I was a cross dresser and I did that show every single week. That
10 sort of led into drag.
- 11 AJ: Coed Prison Sluts?
- 12 OH: Coed Prison Sluts. It's a fantastic show.
- 13 AJ: OK. Is it still running?
- 14 OH: It's still running. It's Chicago's longest running show and . . .
- 15 AJ: Where? Well you said Annoyance Theatre.
- 16 OH: It's at Annoyance Theatre. They've moved around, pretty much around the North Side but
17 they're at Belmont and Clark right now.
- 18 AJ: OK.
- 19 OH: So I would do this show where I was this cross dresser every single week and I would get really
20 depressed when I would have to get out of costume. I was like, "Why am I so depressed?" I was
21 like, "Ohh." And the same thing happened when I started doing drag, I was like, "It must be that
22 I like the attention or it's part of being on stage." I realized that it was more of this hyper
23 femininity that I was really connecting to and I had to turn it off, I had to switch it, and that felt
24 really negative to me. So those were sort of my first answering those question moments.
- 25 AJ: As a drag performer?
- 26 OH: Yes.
- 27 AJ: Do you . . . or did you see many drag performers transition to transgender people? What would
28 you say the percentage of that would be?
- 29 OH: You know it's interesting because when you're someone who is doing drag, I think you're
30 definitely on the spectrum as far as . . . yeah, right, like there's some sort of identity within
31 themselves that connects to some sort of trans-ness.
- 32 AJ: Yeah, they're under the umbrella. But I know a lot of drag performers who . . .
- 33 OH: Have transitioned.

- 1 AJ: Well who have transitioned but I think I know more who consider themselves gay men and this
2 is what I do for a living or hobby, but . . .
- 3 OH: Right, it's not at all the same experience.
- 4 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 5 OH: . . . more like momentum. So I would really say . . . I think it's more now than it has been, I
6 think trans visibility has like sort of blossomed over the last few years. So I would say it's maybe
7 like 15-20% of the queens that I knew. But . . .
- 8 AJ: I love your language, you're bringing in a lot of the sort of street language. Terms like fishy and
9 queens and . . .
- 10 OH: Yeah, I came up as a drag queen, you know what I mean? But what I was going to say is like
11 there was so much of that cattiness, that is what drag queens are supposed to be, right? That
12 cattiness. So that's when I first . . .
- 13 AJ: Drag queens personified.
- 14 OH: Exactly. In the basement of Berlin and this other queen is stealing your tips because you're not
15 locking it up – that sort of experience. And people would give me shit because I had a beard, I
16 was messy, I was totally a crusty girl. That's how I roll, I'm crusty – in all forms, drag and street.
- 17 AJ: What's a crusty girl?
- 18 OH: A crusty girl is the girl that is like I'm totally connected to my femininity, I'm totally connected to
19 who I am in this world and yet I'm totally busted. I eat what I want, I do what I want, I probably
20 look great for like 10 minutes and that's when I take all my selfies, but in two hours I'm crusty
21 and nasty and you love it.
- 22 AJ: So, I don't know . . . steam punk boots and fishnets with holes and . . .
- 23 OH: Yeah, totally. That's it . . . absolutely. Just like a combination of butch and femme that feels
24 really safe for me.
- 25 AJ: I love it.
- 26 OH: In many ways I was raised with five other boys and so I'm very much a tomboy and there are
27 certain parts of myself that feel good when I connect to those sort of boyish qualities. But at the
28 same time I'm so happy that I'm at this point in my life where I can reconcile the both of them
29 together.
- 30 AJ: That's important. Talk more about that.
- 31 OH: Sure. It's something that I work on all the time and came after a lot of self-work. But the
32 concept of letting myself be the fullest possibility of myself was a really hard journey. I think,
33 you know, letting myself be ugly in certain situations – or ugly, leads to a certain strength and
34 then also connecting to sort of beauty standards and feeling good about connecting to what
35 femme beauty aspects I have in my life. That's also really affirming too. I think, honestly, in
36 2012 . . . over the past few years I've been having a lot of issues dating and connecting with

1 people and so in 2012 I made this resolution that I was . . . I'm going to really try to connect with
2 love as much as possible, find out what that means on a larger level. And so I just sort of
3 opened the scope of what love looks like in my life. And it was amazing because I really
4 recognized and took stock of my friends and my family, chosen and given, and the food that I
5 put into my body and the way that I move throughout the world. There were so many beautiful
6 moments of love and affection and desire that were a larger scope of what our world and our
7 society tells us it has to be. So once I found that larger idea of what love looks like, or what it
8 can look like, that's when I was able to reconcile those things within myself. So, I just tried to
9 affirm what I'm feeling in the moment about who I am and what my gender is as a reflection of
10 that self-love.

11 AJ: OK, wow.

12 OH: Does that make sense?

13 AJ: Yeah, absolutely. It totally does. So, what have been some of the positive aspects of expressing
14 your true gender identity?

15 OH: I feel really seen by people, especially the most important people in my life, and that feels really
16 good. So part of . . . one of the larger sparks for my transition, or living authentically, was one of
17 my really good friends, Mark Aguhar, who was a brilliant artist and writer and blogger, she was a
18 trans woman of color and she committed suicide in 2012.

19 AJ: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. How do you spell?

20 OH: Aguhar? It's A-g-u-h-a-r. And she had this amazing online presence, she lived in Chicago and we
21 were really good friends. She just lived really authentically, she lived very beautifully in
22 resistance. And when she died I was obsessed with death for like a year. The biggest conclusion
23 I came to was, "If I died right now, nobody would know who I was." And so that was sort of a
24 large spark for my transition within myself. So, right, that sort of allowing others to see possibly
25 scary parts of myself, that has been really rewarding.

26 AJ: Wow. What has been some of the challenges since you've begun to express your true gender
27 identity?

28 OH: I think one of the hardest parts is just navigating the world. One of my favorite quotes from
29 Buffy is, "One of the hardest things to do in this world is . . ."

30 AJ: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*?

31 OH: *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is, "One of the hardest things to do in this world is to live in it." Right?
32 So, even though I feel like I'm authentic within myself and a lot of the people that are important
33 to me validate that and affirm that, I still have to interact with the rest of the world and not
34 everyone gets that. So that is one of the challenges. I think our society just has very rigid
35 concepts of what gender is and so it's hard to have to explain yourself over and over again to
36 strangers.

37 AJ: Yeah, it's a big challenge. So what's your relationship with your birth family now?

38 OH: It's really great. So, we didn't speak for about four years – like 18-22.

- 1 AJ: Wow, at all? The four brothers and . . .
- 2 OH: Brothers, no. Well I did speak to Jeffy every once in a while over the phone but that was like
3 once a year, and then my dad was like once a year too. So yeah, that was tough.
- 4 AJ: So you mentioned Jeffy, and I know Jeffy identifies as a queer man. Are any of your other
5 brothers queer identified at all?
- 6 OH: Yeah, so Dan, the youngest brother who is also here in Minneapolis, identifies as queer. And
7 then we have three straight brothers: Pete, Paul, and Sam.
- 8 AJ: And all of you guys get along?
- 9 OH: We get along really fantastically. I think that . . . the lesson of allowing everyone to really be
10 themselves really solidifies our relationships and we're also very different yet similar in certain
11 ways and we all have gone through a lot of similar experiences and that really brings us
12 together. And they're also just . . . all of my brothers are really interesting, funny,
13 compassionate, hard-working people. They're just really good people. I like everyone in my
14 family.
- 15 AJ: Any nieces and nephews? Any sister-in-laws?
- 16 OH: Everyone is coupled in my family, of course – except for me. So my younger brother, Paul, is
17 with this fabulous woman Alissa and she had a son with a former partner, and so he's been a
18 sort of new addition to the family – so that's exciting. And then my other younger brother, Sam,
19 is now expecting with his girlfriend. So that's really exciting – the first grandchild for my
20 parents. So . . . yeah.
- 21 AJ: And you think you're going to be in a relationship with the baby.
- 22 OH: Oh yeah – yeah. I'm super excited too.
- 23 AJ: That's so sweet.
- 24 OH: I know, it's so great.
- 25 AJ: To the extent that you're comfortable, Liv, talk about any medical interventions that you have
26 pursued or plan to pursue or done.
- 27 OH: So I've been on hormone replacement therapy for two years. But also, within those two years I
28 have moved three times so it's been difficult to keep a script. Sometimes it varies what dosage
29 I'm on.
- 30 AJ: Different doctors prescribing . . .
- 31 OH: Different doctors prescribe, also I'm running out so I need to start taking a little bit less so I can
32 ration it out.
- 33 AJ: Oh, OK. It's a struggle.
- 34 OH: It's a struggle, it's been a little hard. But it's also, I think, been . . . for me, as someone who is at
35 a little bit of an older point, or more mature point in their life, I think it's given some perspective

- 1 to my transition because I've done a lot of spiritual work around what my transition means to
2 me. It's like given me the space to do that but also I'm really glad that I'm getting my full
3 prescription now. Let's see, I haven't done . . . I'm pretty pre- as far as any sort of like surgery.
4 I'm hoping to get breast augmentation this year, that sounds pretty exciting. I would love to . . .
5 mostly it's all sort of like a dream. I dream about getting facial feminization surgery, it sounds
6 great. I dream about getting hair transplants and I dream about what the possibility of gender
7 re-assignment surgery could look like. Although that is not so much of a deal breaker for me.
8 The biggest thing for me is I'm trying to get less hairy because I'm Sicilian and that's what's up.
9 I'm also just trying to . . .
- 10 AJ: Did you say, "I'm Sicilian"?
- 11 OH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That Czech/Sicilian/Eastern European hairy moment exists. You've seen Jeffy
12 at the beach.
- 13 AJ: Yes.
- 14 OH: You know what's up. So, yeah. It's interesting to talk about body modifications for myself and
15 what feels good – yeah, I just try to follow what affirms my experience at the time. So I'm
16 working on laser hair removal for my face and a lot of it is just so expensive that I just sort of
17 have to think about it as a large time sequence. And maybe it will happen, I'll start saving now
18 and we'll see.
- 19 AJ: Sure. Looking back over your decision to express your true gender identity, what have been
20 some of the pivotal moments that has defined your new life and would you do anything
21 differently? I know you talked about this pivotal moment when your really close friend passed
22 away. Have there been others?
- 23 OH: Sure. Oh yeah, I think like . . . there's been a lot. In some ways it's the small moments, right?
24 It's every day, right? But as far as bigger moments, I think coming out to my parents was a really
25 big deal for me.
- 26 AJ: How did you come out to your parents?
- 27 OH: I came out to my parents . . . so I was in Chicago for a long time, I lived in Chicago for 13 years
28 and I was like, "I need to leave, I need to leave, I'm over this city, I've been here for too long."
29 And the city essentially pushed me out. I had a sequence of terrible roommate situations and
30 living situations and I was just like, "I can't . . . I need to figure this out right now." And my
31 mother was like, "Move home, stay home for a second." And at this point I had been on
32 hormone replacement therapy for . . . about a year at that point, a little less than a year. So I
33 move home, I'm like still doing my shots, I'm doing my life and I remember having a yoga session
34 with my mom before I came out. She's really honed in on this yoga practice that she does and
35 at the end of this session, I just started balling and sort of let this emotional release go. And she
36 could tell that something was very heavy and weighing on me and I still did not . . . I came out to
37 them like a week after, but it was that sort of moment of seeing how much discomfort I was in
38 because I wasn't able to be as authentic with them as I could be. So right, coming out to them
39 was a big deal and they were super supportive. In that first conversation I remember explaining
40 what gender was on a spectrum to my parents and my dad was just sort of wide-eyed and he

- 1 was like, "What?" But they're great. They're super supportive. I'm trying to think of what other
 2 pivotal moments in my gender expression . . . I'm a really big proponent of selfies, I think selfies
 3 are really great healing self-work, especially for trans people. I think it's sort of like you're able
 4 to present yourself in a way that affirms you and also that you have control over – it's really you
 5 controlling your visual story. And so . . .
- 6 AJ: I love that, I've never really heard that. I have said to someone just earlier this week, "Selfies
 7 are a phenomenon that we will not know the full impact of for quite some time."
- 8 OH: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, it's really strong and powerful to hold your story and also have it be this
 9 readily available process for you – that you can do eight billion times a day. I never ever give
 10 people shit for taking selfies – I'm like, "Take as many selfies as you want, do what feels good."
 11 So right, but I think that sort of ongoing process of taking selfies and then going through and
 12 looking at all of them – it's just an affirmation for myself and so those things feel really good in
 13 an authentic sense.
- 14 AJ: OK. Love, relationships. How has that been impacted by your gender identity? What's your
 15 sexual orientation?
- 16 OH: My sexual orientation is queer. I have a really wide desire spectrum. I'm attracted to a lot of
 17 different people and bodies and identities and personalities. But it's interesting, it totally has
 18 affected my romantic life in a way that I didn't expect. So when I was pre-transition living as a
 19 gay cis male, I was this really cute chubby bearded . . . I'm very aware of the fact that I was a
 20 good looking man.
- 21 AJ: Were you a part of bear culture.
- 22 OH: I was totally . . . yes, absolutely. So in my early . . . when I first moved to Chicago . . . so I have
 23 two slut periods. When I first moved to Chicago and I was like 18, it was just like I was a young
 24 hot 18-year-old. It was 2001 and it was the new 1970s and everyone was just having sex
 25 everywhere. So that was fantastic. And then I got into a relationship at 21 and we were
 26 together for five years, we were engaged for the last year of it. And then when we broke up in
 27 2008, I was 26 or 27 at that point and I was this older cubby bear – cutie, right? And so, sex and
 28 romance was just very easily available to me and I miss that. I feel like it's probably a
 29 combination of that sex and romance . . . well, sex is easily available in gay culture in general, I
 30 think because it defines . . . I think because who you're attracted to sort of defines a lot of that
 31 culture and that identity, it's just more easily and readily available.
- 32 AJ: Sure.
- 33 OH: But also my gender was a lot easily swallowed, right? To use a better term. It was like, "Cool, I
 34 totally get what you're presenting and who you are - you're sexy, I'm sexy, let's have sex."
- 35 AJ: Right.
- 36 OH: I miss that intimacy, right. So then when I started doing drag, that was sort of when people sort
 37 of shifted – it shifted for people. So I remember that I hooked up with this daddy, we had
 38 hooked up a few times, and then he saw pictures of me on Facebook in drag. I was like an out
 39 there queen, I was . . . I'm a John Waters queen, I didn't do it to be pretty, I did it to make a

- 1 statement. I remember him being really turned off by it and he was not interested in sleeping
2 with me anymore. And those were some of the first moments of me being like, "I don't know if
3 this is . . . I think the sexy part of me is going to be affected by this gender journey that I'm on."
4 And truth be told, it's exactly what happened. But I feel like it's probably a combination of
5 things, right? I feel like nothing is created within a bubble, right? And so it's probably a
6 combination of I'm figuring out my body, my body is changing and I'm navigating that. And so
7 being intimate with people is complicated. Also, I think people don't really know how to express
8 their desire for trans folks and what feels right to them and what they think politically feels right
9 for them.
- 10 AJ: And socially.
- 11 OH: And socially. So yeah, it's been tricky.
- 12 AJ: Have you used any sort of online . . . ?
- 13 OH: Of course, I've done it all. I frickin' signed up for Plenty of Fish last week. I've never even heard
14 of this one before.
- 15 AJ: OK.
- 16 OH: What is this?
- 17 AJ: It's actually pretty popular.
- 18 OH: It's getting more popular.
- 19 AJ: Is there space to say, "I'm a trans woman."
- 20 OH: I make it, I don't know if there is but I make it.
- 21 AJ: All right.
- 22 OH: No, I think that there is space because . . . there's space because there is desire there but I just
23 can't connect to that desire at this point. The people that are attracted to me don't know how
24 to communicate with my body. I can tell that even through short messages, even just through
25 online digital messages. I can tell that people want to be comfortable with what I am presenting
26 and being intimate with me but they can't navigate that discomfort within themselves. So . . .
- 27 AJ: Yeah, it's unfortunately a reality for a lot of trans people.
- 28 OH: It is.
- 29 AJ: Has there been times when someone has been really, really helpful or super, super insensitive
30 or downright cruel since you've come out?
- 31 OH: Sure. There's been both, both sides of the spectrum.
- 32 AJ: And think specifically about the medical community or educational institutions or . . . ?
- 33 OH: Oh God, when I was in Milwaukee, I went to this endocrinologist and he was like, "So, just so
34 you know, fat trans girls don't pass." Like he literally said that.

- 1 AJ: No way.
- 2 OH: Yeah, he's like, "You're not going to pass."
- 3 AJ: Because I had someone tell me, "You should gain weight because you would be more passable
4 as a fat girl."
- 5 OH: Exactly. And that's the . . . this is the conversation where it's like, (a) why are we telling anyone
6 what to do with their fucking bodies . . .
- 7 AJ: Exactly.
- 8 OH: And (2), why are you talking about passing? Why is this still the conversation that is still
9 happening?
- 10 AJ: Yes.
- 11 OH: Why can't we take people for face value of who they tell you that they are? People show up as
12 who they are, I accept that as they presented . . . so right. So, that was probably like . . . like
13 medically that's probably one of the more annoying things.
- 14 AJ: Did he do what you went to see him for?
- 15 OH: Oh yeah, I had to keep my mouth shut because I wanted to get my pills.
- 16 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 17 OH: So, he gave me my pills. But then I went to Taco Bell and cried about it, which is fine . . . healing
18 moments, crusty girls.
- 19 AJ: Can I have three taco burritos, please?
- 20 OH: Please, I'm hurting.
- 21 AJ: I'm in pain.
- 22 OH: But no, people have been sort of like the whole spectrum of it – of people really aggressively
23 mis-gendering me or people letting me know that their religious beliefs don't coincide with how
24 I live my life.
- 25 AJ: And . . .
- 26 OH: And . . . so that's fun. But then there's also the other side of it. I try to . . . we were talking
27 about Owen earlier, Owen DMC – a gem of a person, and some of the best advice that he ever
28 gave me was sometimes . . . I was at a job, this is sort of when I was first coming out, and there
29 was a uniform moment and it was a very gendered uniforms and I felt really uncomfortable
30 about it and so I went to him for counsel. He was like, "You know, do what you feel is right,"
31 and the biggest takeaway for me was, he was like, "Sometimes you just have to let people do the
32 right thing. You have to give people the option to do the right thing." And then you respond
33 accordingly. So that's how I try to navigate the world as far as those sort of responses to my
34 gender identity. I'm just going to assume that you're going to affirm my identity or that you're
35 going to be neutral to it, which is preferred for me – as opposed to negatively lashing out. So

- 1 yeah, so leaving space for someone to do the right thing, I have found leads to a higher rate of
2 success as opposed to aggressively navigating the world – if that makes sense. As far as like,
3 “You’re going to fuck up right now in my shit and I’m going to call you on it.” Which is fine,
4 definitely that sort of identity is within myself. I’m a Tumblr girl, I’m an internet girl, and so I like
5 to call people out. But also, it just is less . . . sometimes I just don’t have the capacity to get into
6 that argument.
- 7 AJ: Or the energy.
- 8 OH: Exactly. I don’t have the energy to get into that fight and so it’s just easier to be like, “Here we
9 are in this world together.”
- 10 AJ: Yeah. Move around.
- 11 OH: Exactly.
- 12 AJ: What do you think the relationship is between the L, the G, the B, and the T?
- 13 OH: That’s a great question. I try to now flip the script when I talk about who I am in the community.
14 I’m like, “Oh, I’m an advocate for TBLG communities.”
- 15 AJ: Exactly.
- 16 OH: Yeah. I’m just going to flip it, because that’s who my alliance is with. Having come from a queer
17 origin story, I definitely have to . . .
- 18 AJ: Liv Begins.
- 19 OH: Liv Begins as a Queer. I have to be aware that I want to support those communities. I definitely
20 think that a lot of them are very . . . what’s the word I’m looking for? Disjointed and not in as
21 much solidarity as they could be.
- 22 AJ: Sure.
- 23 OH: I think it’s a constant struggle for us to be working towards solidarity between those
24 communities. And so . . .
- 25 AJ: Because the first three are sexual orientation identities and trans is a gender identity.
- 26 OH: Exactly.
- 27 AJ: Although many trans people . . . well, all trans people either identify as hetero, lesbian, gay or bi.
- 28 OH: Right, we all have a sexuality, we’re all there. It’s just like what . . . this alternative, non-
29 normative identity that was grouped with it, right?
- 30 AJ: Yes.
- 31 OH: Yeah, I try to focus on how I can give voice or give space to people who don’t have access to it.
32 So who are the TBLG people in my life that don’t necessarily have a connection to that voice?
33 And so that’s why Intermedia is really important to me, I love that space because it provides
34 that.

- 1 AJ: Intermedia Arts?
- 2 OH: Yes, Intermedia Arts – and also, I try to do that personally in my life if people are talking about . . .
3 . . . if I'm talking to a bunch of cis hetero people and the topic of something TBLG comes up. You
4 know, that's when I can do the work. I try to think about that as far as intersectionality in
5 general. If I'm standing around with a bunch of white people and they're talking about a topic
6 that involves . . . that's about people of color, and something is being said that is maybe racist in
7 nature or we're talking . . . or I'm standing around talking with a bunch of people who are
8 people not living with disabilities and something about someone living with a disability comes
9 up – it's those moments, that's when I have to do the work personally for those people, to have
10 those difficult conversations because it's not that person's job, it's not those people's jobs to do
11 that work. That's what is important to me, to have those difficult conversations, because that's
12 the only way that we'll bridge that in solidarity and bridge those gaps. That's my hope at least.
- 13 AJ: Yeah, awesome. Do you think there's an agenda for the trans community going forward?
- 14 OH: To survive, to live. I'm always trying to focus on what thriving looks like for the trans
15 community, right?
- 16 AJ: What does that look like, in your mind?
- 17 OH: I think it looks like a lot of different things, but I think being fully supported trans people with
18 access to health care, access to housing, access to stable jobs, these core basic human
19 necessities and rights are really important. When we achieve those that's when the thriving can
20 happen, that's when people can step into who they can become and who we can all become
21 together. Right?
- 22 AJ: Yes.
- 23 OH: So that is what thriving looks like for me. It is super important, I feel. It's really kind of
24 important.
- 25 AJ: Ding, right answer. Have you ever worked for or volunteered with a LGBT or trans-specific
26 organization?
- 27 OH: Sure. I feel like . . . I guess a lot of it goes back to Chicago, so I did volunteer at About Face Youth
28 Theatre, I did volunteer at Howard Brown, and at Broadway Youth Center. I have done some
29 volunteering here in Minneapolis with Youthlink and so that's sort of what my volunteer work
30 looks like. It's always hard to navigate that because I try to make space for it in my life and my
31 life . . . you do what you can.
- 32 AJ: Yeah, well you've got to eat, right?
- 33 OH: Exactly.
- 34 AJ: You talked a little earlier about trans visibility. Probably one of the most visible trans people in
35 the world right now is Caitlin Jenner. What are your thoughts?
- 36 OH: That I should probably watch her show. I haven't watched one episode.
- 37 AJ: You haven't seen *I am Cait*.

- 1 OH: I haven't, I haven't seen *I am Cait*. My mom has seen *I am Cait*. I think that that's what my
2 reflection of Caitlin Jenner is . . . that's what feels good for me. People like my mother has an
3 access, who watches E all the time, to this transgender person who they have this history with –
4 they were this . . . or they are this winning Olympic athlete and there's this story, there's this
5 back story. I personally don't think that she's a voice for all of the community, but I also don't
6 think anyone is the voice for all of the community. So I don't want to negatively put that on her,
7 I don't want to be like, "You're the voice," because she's like, "I don't want to be the voice." I'm
8 sure that's what she's saying. But I wish I had access to that much things in the world. Again,
9 that's what we were talking about earlier. How much do you have, what can you afford, what
10 can you get? These are these self-worth issues.
- 11 AJ: The things that you have sort of described as this journey to achieve, she was able to achieve in
12 a matter of months. Facial feminization, implants, hair laser . . .
- 13 OH: Right, right. It sounds great.
- 14 AJ: Like bam – she just did it.
- 15 OH: It sounds wonderful.
- 16 AJ: And went and purchased a brand new wardrobe.
- 17 OH: I whole new wardrobe and stylists and hair and . . .
- 18 AJ: On the cover of *Vogue* or whatever magazine she was on the cover of.
- 19 OH: Right, right. All of that sounds great and the concept of also . . . there are a lot of other
20 celebrities in the world that have access to all those things and I would love that access, that
21 sounds great. But also, that's just not a reality for myself and so I think the conversation about
22 Caitlin Jenner for me is this: we make space for Caitlin, we make space for everyone, right?
23 That's my hope is that it widens the circle for a lot of different other people who are not
24 necessarily in the circle right now.
- 25 AJ: It's interesting what you said, though, because I was interviewing someone and they told me
26 that their mother, who had been sort of really hostile about their transition, called them up out
27 of the clear blue sky and said, "I've been watching *I am Cait* and I totally get it now."
- 28 OH: Right. That's beautiful, that's a conversation that wouldn't have happened had that show not
29 happened. And right, that mother is widening the circle for their child – that's beautiful.
- 30 AJ: Exactly. Well, last question, Liv. Where do you see the trans community 50 years from now?
- 31 OH: Oh God. So in 50 years I will be 80-something.
- 32 AJ: OK.
- 33 OH: And, I hope I'm still trucking. Where do I see the trans community in 50 years? So it's
34 interesting to think about where the GLB community has moved in 50 years, not that it's the
35 same community but it's interesting to parallel them.
- 36 AJ: Yes.

- 1 OH: But if you think about 50 years ago, now it was the 1970s . . . is that how math works? 1960s,
2 1970s.
- 3 AJ: Yes – more like probably . . . yeah, the 1970s - late 1960s, 1970s.
- 4 OH: Right. So that was sort of a burgeoning moment for queer people, right? It was Stonewall and
5 San Francisco and this sort of like . . .
- 6 AJ: The Compton Riots.
- 7 OH: Exactly, right. These sort of huge moments for those queer communities that now, 50 years
8 later, we've moved past this sort of archetypal one-dimensional queer representation to full-
9 bodied, full spectrums of queer people in representation in media and in politics and in art and
10 in so many different aspects of our worlds in culture. So I'm hoping that that's the same thing
11 that happens with trans people.
- 12 AJ: OK.
- 13 OH: But mostly I just really hope that in 50 years that that's same sort of . . . OK, so here's a little
14 parallel. My uncle, who is queer and has a partner and they've been together since they met in
15 the 1970s in Chicago . . .
- 16 AJ: Wow, you've just got a queer family.
- 17 OH: We just have a queer-ass family, it's as queer as hell.
- 18 AJ: Queer-ass folks.
- 19 OH: So, you know, when I was coming of age in the late 1990s and early 000s, they were super
20 supportive and it was based around my sexuality at that time.
- 21 AJ: Sure.
- 22 OH: And we would often talk about what their coming out process was like in the late 1960s and
23 1970s. And, you know, it was a struggle, it was really hard. There was a lot of social and cultural
24 persecution and we talked a lot about the AIDS crisis and I felt connected to, and influenced by
25 these queer elders. So my hope is that in 50 years I will be having a similar conversation with
26 some little trans baby and I'll be like, "Hey, listen to this Ashanti song." Remember Ashanti?
27 And they'll be like, "Who's Ashanti?" And then I'll be like, "It was so hard for us." And they'll be
28 like, "It was no big deal for me." That's what I'm hoping, that it just gets easier.
- 29 AJ: Yes, yes, yes. Liv, thank you so much for just sharing a little bit of your journey. I know that
30 telling a life story can take a lifetime, but your generosity and openness is deeply appreciated.
- 31 OH: I'm happy to oblige and I'm happy to hear everyone's stories – that's what gets me excited
32 about this project is hearing everyone's story. Storytelling is so powerful, it's one of the most
33 powerful tools we have.
- 34 AJ: Absolutely. Thank you.
- 35 OH: Thank you.

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