

Ellie Krug
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

December 15, 2015



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 Ellie Krug -EK

3

4 AJ: Well, good afternoon. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the
5 Transgender Oral History Project. Today is December 15, 2015, and I am in downtown
6 Minneapolis and I'm going to be speaking with Ellen Krug, who prefers Ellie. And I'm just going
7 to ask, if you don't mind introducing yourself, telling us what is your preferred gender pronouns,
8 what is your gender . . . how should we say, identity now, and what may have been your gender
9 assigned at birth.

10 EK: Well, yeah, my name is Ellie Krug. I am 58 years old, in two weeks I'll be 59.

11 AJ: Oh wow.

12 EK: I am a transgender woman, although whenever I fill out forms I'm just female. But, in part,
13 because this voice, I can't get past the fact that there's something different about me. Preferred
14 pronouns are she and her, of course, and my gender identity at birth, my assigned gender
15 identity was male.

16 AJ: Well, thanks Ellie. Can you tell me what was your earliest memory in life? It doesn't have to do
17 with your gender identity, although if it . . . if your earliest memory was that, that's fine; but
18 what's the earliest thing you remember?

19 EK: Well, the earliest . . . if we're talking early, early, the earliest memory I have is looking out of my
20 crib onto a city street below in Newark, New Jersey. My mother, at the time, was living with my
21 grandparents and my uncle in a tenement in Newark. I do, I remember climbing up to the side
22 of the crib and looking out the window and seeing the city street below.

23 AJ: Wow, that's a pretty early . . . you were in a crib. How old do you think you might have been?

24 EK: Maybe a year and a half, maybe two at the latest, I would think.

25 AJ: Boy, that's a pretty early memory. So you grew up on the east coast?

26 EK: I did. I was born in Newark, New Jersey. My parents both lived in the tenements of Newark.
27 My father came from a very fractured family. His mother died of sclerosis of the liver when she
28 was in her 40s and my father's father, after she died, placed my aunt and uncle, my father was
29 the oldest – my grandfather, who I never met, placed my aunt and uncle in an orphanage and
30 then he abandoned, he left, and my father essentially never saw him again.

31 AJ: Wow.

32 EK: And then my mother was born in Maryland and her mother divorced in the 1940s, at a time
33 when Catholic women in Maryland, very Catholic hill country, didn't do that. And eventually
34 they moved to New York and then they moved over across the river to New Jersey, to Newark.

35 AJ: Yeah. So, what was your home environment like in Newark?

- 1 EK: Well, so I lived in Newark for a couple, maybe three years. And then my parents moved to a
2 town named Sayreville, which is about 30 miles south of Newark. So, it was kind of a Levittown.
- 3 AJ: In New Jersey?
- 4 EK: In New Jersey. My father . . .
- 5 AJ: I'm not sure what a Levittown is.
- 6 EK: Levittown is named after a fellow named Levitt who began building urban sprawl, suburban
7 sprawl, neighborhoods, beginning, I believe, on Long Island. It's sort of the thing where all of
8 the houses look the same, but it was post-World War II and the ability to give returning GIs the
9 ability to own a home. So, in Sayreville where we lived, I had a brother and a sister. My parents,
10 my father, worked in New York City. He was a tech writer for a company that wrote the repair
11 manuals and the electronics manual for a number of . . . anything that was electronic. My father
12 never went to college, he was in the Navy and he was a radio person, but he understood
13 electronics, and eventually, when I was 11, my father was promoted to open an office for his
14 company in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. At that point I got transported from lower middle class to
15 upper middle class, literally overnight.
- 16 AJ: Wow.
- 17 EK: We went from a neighborhood where the odds of me going to college were probably not good,
18 to a neighborhood of brand new houses where, of course, I would go to college.
- 19 AJ: That's interesting that you equate your geography with your ability to be successful in life. And,
20 I don't . . . you don't hear a lot of people speaking that all the time. I happen to think that there
21 is a lot of reality to that. I'm assuming that your father's income didn't shift that dramatically . .
22 .
- 23 EK: Oh, it did.
- 24 AJ: Oh, it did. OK. All right.
- 25 EK: Yeah, my father's income went up dramatically. We moved into a brand new house, where, for
26 the first time in my life, I had my own bedroom.
- 27 AJ: Wow.
- 28 EK: It was in Cedar Rapids, a city of about 100,000 at the time. It was kind of the new
29 neighborhood, the development to live in. And, I think what was the defining factor in terms of
30 my ability to succeed, was that I got out of a neighborhood where it was very clear to me, even
31 as a 10-year-old, that drugs and alcohol and not even graduating from high school was sort of
32 the norm.
- 33 AJ: The norm, yeah.
- 34 EK: Whereas, in Iowa, with one of the highest high school graduation rates, certainly it was not a
35 neighborhood that was diverse in Iowa, compared to where I was growing up, and so there was
36 that drawback but, of course, at that time I didn't understand the value of diversity.

- 1 AJ: Sure.
- 2 EK: In many ways I was extremely lucky that that happened and I'm grateful that that occurred.
3 There were a lot of negative and sad things that occurred with the move, but that was . . . I was
4 very lucky.
- 5 AJ: So did your parents stay together all of your childhood?
- 6 EK: Well they did. My father was a very high functioning alcoholic and what the move to Iowa did
7 was meant that he wasn't around his immediate supervisors. He was a person who was in
8 charge of the office in Cedar Rapids and so . . .
- 9 AJ: So he was the boss.
- 10 EK: He was the boss, and my father had a habit of going to lunch at noon and . . .
- 11 AJ: Coming back at 3 after a couple of martinis maybe?
- 12 EK: No, he wouldn't come back until 2am. I mean, my father would leave and we would be waiting
13 dinner for him. Of course, this was before cell phones – we would be waiting dinner to see if he
14 was going to come home and no phone call, no nothing. We would eat finally without him and I
15 would go to bed and I would worry. And that happened a lot and it shaped me in a variety of
16 ways related to who I am as a human and certainly who I ended up becoming in terms of gender
17 and individual.
- 18 AJ: So, elementary school and high school in Iowa?
- 19 EK: For the most part, yes.
- 20 AJ: How was that experience for you? Was it . . . did you experience any bullying around your
21 gender expression at all or was that an issue at that point in time?
- 22 EK: Well, I knew something was up about gender before we moved to Iowa. I didn't fully appreciate
23 or understand it.
- 24 AJ: Sure.
- 25 EK: When we moved to Iowa, I started crossdressing in my sister's underwear for the most part.
- 26 AJ: About how old do you think you were?
- 27 EK: 11.
- 28 AJ: 11, OK.
- 29 EK: Yes. And, of course, I was ashamed of that and it was a big secret that I couldn't tell anyone.
- 30 AJ: Absolutely.
- 31 EK: I think that . . . so, of course, I'm growing up in the late 1960s and early 1970s; I was 11 years old
32 in 1968 when we moved to Iowa. And so, the word transgender hadn't really been invented.
- 33 AJ: There was no language, yeah.

- 1 EK: The word gay really hadn't been utilized and Stonewall hadn't even happened.
- 2 AJ: Right.
- 3 EK: And so, I thought it was . . . I didn't understand exactly what it was and about age 13 I learned
4 how to masturbate so there became a sexual component to it. But I was very much a jock, so 7th
5 grade, 8th grade football, I was a good football player. I became a starter on the front line; I was
6 a guard on the front line. That was the case all the way through high school. So, I was not . . . I
7 lettered when I was a sophomore in high school, I was somebody who . . . I was involved in
8 karate and baseball, I started to date a girl when I was 15 and she was 16. So by all accounts, by
9 the world outside, I was just another of the guys. Now I did get bullied, and I don't know what
10 that was. I was actually picked on quite a bit in 9th and 10th grade, and into 11th. And it was
11 maybe three or four people, and I don't know why. Maybe because I was softer, I certainly
12 didn't have any, I didn't think, any mannerisms, but maybe there was just something about me
13 that made me stand out. And so, I just . . . I mean, there was one time where an upper-class
14 football player and another person held me down on the ground. My hair was longer but, of
15 course, it was the early 1970s.
- 16 AJ: Yes, the 1970s.
- 17 EK: But they took a pen knife and they cut off a lock of my hair.
- 18 AJ: Wow.
- 19 EK: I think that that whole experience, and I don't want to exaggerate because compared to the
20 other bullying that I've heard people experiencing, I'd say mine is . . . on a scale of 1-10, it was
21 probably a 2.
- 22 AJ: Yeah, well there's razzing that happens with young people in general, right?
- 23 EK: Yes. But I know what it means to be singled out.
- 24 AJ: Yeah.
- 25 EK: I think that that helped, in some way, to shape my compassion in the way that I try and
26 approach the world ultimately now.
- 27 AJ: Wonderful. So, when was the first time you realized that you were not quite the gender you
28 were assigned at birth? I know you talked about you started crossdressing around age 11.
- 29 EK: I did, and probably somewhere around 16 or . . . well, 17 or 18, I started having same sex
30 fantasies. And, as I said, when I was 15 I started dating a girl who ended up becoming my soul
31 mate, and in many ways, I was very afraid. My father's missing and my mother was not a very
32 strong person, and my siblings and I are all of the agreement that she should have left my
33 father, but she was afraid. In the end, she put us through . . . her fear allowed us to live in a
34 space that was very traumatic. And so, I ended up – I was very afraid. I had not confidence in
35 myself and I latched on to this girl who, for the purposes of this interview, we'll just call Lydia,
36 and she became my soulmate. Now, at the time that I was dating her and started dating her, I
37 was regularly dressing up in lingerie and standing in front of mirrors, tucking my penis down and
38 pretending that I had a vagina. It was ecstatic, it was so wonderful. But, it was an escape for me

- 1 and I believed that I would grow out of it, I believed that it would go away. And as I've talked to
2 other trans people who are what I call gender correctors . . .
- 3 AJ: Gender correctors, I like that term.
- 4 EK: People who shift in mid-stream, the story is the same. We believed that it would go away, that
5 it was just a phase. One of the things about me is that I have an extremely hard . . . extremely
6 good work ethic. And, I just believed that if I just tried harder to put it out of my mind, that it
7 would go away. And there were times where it would go away. It would go away for months
8 and oh well . . .
- 9 AJ: Years maybe sometimes. I don't know about your . . . but in my experience, yeah.
- 10 EK: "We're past that – thank goodness". But it would always come back.
- 11 AJ: Yeah.
- 12 EK: I tried to tell . . . when I was 16 and Lydia was 17, I tried to tell her and she started to freak and it
13 was really clear to me that if I really persisted in telling her that, she would leave me. And that
14 was just unacceptable to me and the idea of being alone to make my way through the world
15 without Lydia at my side was unfathomable. So, I stuff it and I stuffed it for close to 30 years.
- 16 AJ: So you, in the beginning of the interview, described yourself as a transgender woman who when
17 filling out forms and things, identify as female. But, how has that identity changed over time?
- 18 EK: You mean since I've transitioned or beforehand?
- 19 AJ: I think the whole journey. So at some point when you were hanging out with Lydia, you had a
20 self-concept of yourself.
- 21 EK: But remember, again, we're back into . . . at that point, the 1970s. The idea, other than
22 Christine Jorgensen, I knew of no one who had ever had a, at that time, called sex change
23 operation.
- 24 AJ: Yes.
- 25 EK: The idea that I would trade penis scrotum glob for vagina was just way out of bounds, it was too,
26 too huge. And it was, as I said, I just thought it was a phase. At some point I realized that
27 maybe I was bisexual.
- 28 AJ: OK.
- 29 EK: But again, I thought I could choose. In terms of my gender identity, it really wasn't until I was in
30 my 30s that I started really considering that this really isn't going to go away and even after that
31 . . . what I would say to myself every birthday was, "You need to deal with this." And every
32 birthday I would say, "Oh go away, I'll deal with you next year." And it would go away but then
33 it would come back. On top of all of that was this – on January 31, 1990, I received a call from
34 my mother down in Dallas, she and my father were living down there, and my mother was
35 hysterical. She had found my father in the bath tub, he had committed suicide by gunshot.
36 Immediately, along with my sister who was living in Cedar Rapids, we flew down to Dallas, and
37 then my brother joined us eventually. After we had . . . after that very bad night and a couple of

- 1 days later, my brother and I, after my mother had gone back to Cedar Rapids with my sister
2 because she was, at that point, didn't want to live in Dallas ever again, my brother and I went to
3 where my father worked at that time. He had shifted several employers since the Cedar Rapids
4 jobs, got his personal effects from work. They met us outside the building – three people,
5 holding a box. It was if we were piranhas, they didn't want us to come into the building. My
6 brother and I went back to the condo and we were looking for some answer, and in the process
7 we found calendars . . . just sort of kind of ordinary black calendars that you might get from a
8 vendor, that might have the name of the company on . . .
- 9 AJ: An insurance company or attorney's office or something.
- 10 EK: Joe Schmoe Acme Printing, you know. We started looking at the calendars and we saw that . . .
11 we're talking calendars for many years, and each calendar had a different color, date – red, blue,
12 and yellow, three colors, and each date had a different color to it, and at the back of the
13 calendars there were summaries with the names of people. On the first summary calendar,
14 there were names of women and there was a chart that my father had created. My brother and
15 I, and next to the women were numbers, and my brother and I figured out that that was my
16 father's list of women that he had had affairs with. And then there were another set of
17 calendars that had men's names on them – same kind of chart and numbers, and then cities.
- 18 AJ: Oh boy.
- 19 EK: My brother and I figured out that my father had also had sex with men, all while married to my
20 mother. This was, to say the least, very disturbing. And so you have to understand, in 1990, I
21 was at that point 33 years old, I was married, I had at that point one daughter, and we were in
22 the process of adopting another daughter.
- 23 AJ: OK.
- 24 EK: I discovered that not only had my father been unfaithful to my mother, and to us, but that he
25 was bisexual, just like me – although I had never acted on it. And so, I had gone to law school in
26 Boston and my gender issues had come up when I was practicing law in Boston and we moved
27 back to Iowa for me to get away from that. Lydia thought that we were moving back to Iowa for
28 a simpler life, and we were in part, but she didn't understand that there were too many
29 temptations in Boston and if we stayed there, I would end up cheating on her. So we're back in
30 Iowa, and this is when my father kills himself.
- 31 AJ: Committed suicide.
- 32 EK: And I realized that I had the same pulls as my father, I have no idea about whether he had a
33 gender issue, but he certainly had sexuality issues, like I did. I realized that my father had
34 succumbed to all those pulls and that cheapened him in my view as a human. And as I sat there
35 with my brother and realizing this, I said to myself that I would never ever be like my father –
36 that I would never cheat on Lydia, that I would never hurt her by being unfaithful, and I would
37 certainly never hurt my children by being unfaithful. That revelation about my father shaped
38 me, it's shaped me to this day.
- 39 AJ: Boy, that's a pretty incredible story.

- 1 EK: That's why I wrote a book.
- 2 AJ: What's the book called?
- 3 EK: The book is *Getting to Ellen*. Can I show it?
- 4 AJ: Sure, absolutely. You're the author.
- 5 EK: I'm the author.
- 6 AJ: Let's get a tight shot of that. It's a beautiful book.
- 7 EK: Thank you.
- 8 AJ: What's it about?
- 9 EK: Well, it's a memoir. The title of the book is *Getting to Ellen*. The subtitle is *A Memoir About*
10 *Love, Honesty, and Gender Change*. The book is about what I've talked about already – about
11 struggling to find honesty with myself and authenticity. In the end, it was a struggle about how
12 in the world could I ever love myself more than I could love my wife and children – how could I
13 ever put myself above them? Because eventually those gut tugs, they kept coming back and
14 they became more ferocious. And then something happened to make me realize that if I didn't
15 deal with my gender identity issues, that I would die and I would die a coward. And that thing
16 was 9/11. On the night of 9/11 I was in church and, as you may recall, two of the planes were
17 out of Boston, were out of Logan Airport.
- 18 AJ: I was scheduled to fly into Logan Airport on September 12th, and it was closed for the next three
19 months or so.
- 20 EK: And the planes were cross country flights because they would be loaded with fuel. I had, when I
21 lived in Boston, taken early morning flights out of Logan across the country and so on the night
22 of 9/11 I was in church with my family, the church was packed – the whole city was there and
23 people were crying and I was crying, but I could not get out of my head the idea that I was on
24 one of those planes. As I imagined it in my mind's eye, I saw the towers up ahead and I knew
25 that in the next minute I would die and I sat in church imagining that I was in a window seat on
26 an American Airlines flight and going through what would be my last thoughts. And, of course, I
27 imagined that my last thoughts would, of course, be about Lydia and my daughters and my
28 brother and sister who I'm close to, and my best friend – I've been best friends with somebody
29 since 8th grade football.
- 30 AJ: Oh wow.
- 31 EK: But then, right before . . . right before American Airlines aluminum hit Trade Center steel, right
32 before that, the very last thought, and that thought was, "Coward – coward, you are a coward,
33 you're going to die a coward because you never . . . you were too afraid to be who you are, to
34 deal with whatever it is or wherever it will lead you." And, up until then, up until 9/11, I had
35 gone through therapy with multiple therapists. I had tried all kinds of strategies, I had drank a
36 whole lot to stay as even keeled as I could, to think that I would be able to sacrifice me for my
37 wife and family. But on 9/11, after I had that moment of truth, after that I said there to myself
38 in the church, that I was done. I was done fighting myself, I was done lying to myself, and that I

- 1 would leave Lydia. It took three years to do that, it took three incredibly sad and difficult years
2 to leave.
- 3 AJ: So you said early on that Lydia became your soul mate. Lydia, also became your wife.
- 4 EK: She did.
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 EK: We were together for 32 years before it ended, before it fell apart.
- 7 AJ: Wow, that is a fascinating story. You were talking about *Getting to Ellen*, which is a memoir, and
8 was produced as a stage play last year, or in 2015, and was just recently named the best queer
9 show of the year, of 2015, by *Lavender* magazine. How does that make you feel?
- 10 EK: Oh, it made me feel really, really great – it really did. I had very little to do with that play. Yes, I
11 wrote the book but David Ahlvers was the screenwriter, the playwright, and Patrick Kozicky was
12 the director. They were together, they're the architects of Boom! Theatre, and I was just
13 extremely honored that they would pick my book to do the play.
- 14 AJ: How did that happen? Did you pitch your book to various playwrights or . . .
- 15 EK: No.
- 16 AJ: They just sent you an email out of the clear blue sky, "Hey, we'd like to turn your book into a
17 play."
- 18 EK: David Ahlvers knew me and so when my book came out, he bought it. I didn't direct it towards
19 him, he just bought it. He was touched by the book. He worked, at the time, at Target. He's
20 also a lawyer and I had collaborated with him on some diversity things for the bar.
- 21 AJ: Sure.
- 22 EK: But he was a lawyer at Target and he ended up asking me to come to Target and speak about
23 my story. I did that and I was very well received and shortly after that he said that they planned
24 to do my book as a play in the next year. I was honored, but I've had several people tell me
25 that, "Oh, I'm going to send your book to a screenwriter in California." I've had several . . . quite
26 a few people say, "Your book should be a movie," those types of things. So at that point, I just
27 sort of was like, "Well, that's fine, thank you," but I didn't have any expectation. And then I saw
28 David in the spring, March of this year, and he said, "I have it just about done." And I'm like,
29 "Really?" And a couple of days later, I looked in my inbox and there was 48 pages of single-
30 spaced screenplay.
- 31 AJ: Wow.
- 32 EK: Or . . .
- 33 AJ: Stage play.
- 34 EK: Stage play – thank you, sorry. And, so I looked at it, I had some commentary for them and some
35 thoughts. I met with them. They took my thoughts to heart and then I was present when they

- 1 did a run-through for the play and I had some commentary about that. They did a great job but
2 I had a couple of things to tweak. We have cis gendered people who were trying to do a play
3 about somebody who is trans . . .
- 4 AJ: Yeah, right – they need lots of . . . who played you?
- 5 EK: Well there were two people. Catherine Heigl and Joe . . . I’m sorry, I’m blanking on Joe’s last
6 name. The way the play worked is that there were only three characters and they interchanged
7 parts. And so, a man and a woman played me alternately.
- 8 AJ: OK. So a cis gender man and a cis gender woman?
- 9 EK: Yes.
- 10 AJ: So, you know, that’s a big controversy in Hollywood right now that cis gender actors are playing
11 transgender characters. So, for example, Jared Leto in, I think, the *Dallas Buyer’s Club*.
- 12 EK: *Dallas Buyer’s Club*, right.
- 13 AJ: And there’s a new film out now about a young woman, Lily . . . I can’t think of her name but it’s
14 a biography, a biopic, about the . . .
- 15 EK: *The Danish Girl*.
- 16 AJ: *The Danish Girl* is the name of the film.
- 17 EK: Right.
- 18 AJ: And so, that also is being played by a cis gender, or non-trans actor. What were your thoughts
19 about that for your play and then more broadly in the community?
- 20 EK: I was all right with it because the play is *Getting to Ellen*, so it’s about the struggle. And the play
21 ends with me transitioning, so I was . . . I think it being played by a cis gendered man struggling
22 with gender identity, I think that that was very . . .
- 23 AJ: Appropriate.
- 24 EK: Very appropriate, I did. And, so I had no issue with it. Where we are today in terms of television
25 or cinema, with transgender characters and cis gender people playing those roles, I think that a
26 lot of it depends on the storyline. *The Danish Girl* is about a cis gender . . . somebody moving
27 from boy to girl.
- 28 AJ: Right.
- 29 EK: And I . . . you know, I get . . . unless you have somebody who is actually transitioning right before
30 your eyes . . .
- 31 AJ: And they have the acting chops – you gotta have that too.
- 32 EK: I think that it depends on the story. Now if you have . . . we have very few stories yet, but that
33 will change.
- 34 AJ: That will change.

- 1 EK: But very few stories . . .
- 2 AJ: You're making that change right now, Ellie.
- 3 EK: Thank you. But we have very few stories about just transgender men or women just living their
4 lives, where maybe their gender identity has some role in what they're contemporary present
5 story is, but it's not the whole . . .
- 6 AJ: It's not central.
- 7 EK: It's not central. In those situations, by all means we need to have trans people playing those
8 roles because they happen to be trans and it's a story about a trans person but not about the
9 process of transitioning. I think that . . . I mean, for a long time just go to the Ls and the Gs and
10 their communities. We had straight actors playing Ls and Gs and that's all changed, that's
11 changing now as well. What I have learned is that all change is incremental, it is extremely rare
12 that we go from black and white overnight. We go from black to less black to less black to less
13 black to gray, more gray, more gray and then to white. Less gray and white, more white, as we
14 go along. And, so I'm willing to accept that.
- 15 AJ: Thank you for sharing. I don't have any . . . I feel like actors . . . that's kind of their job to play
16 various . . .
- 17 EK: Various roles, sure.
- 18 AJ: . . . characters and roles. So my thoughts about it, not that that matters in your interview here,
19 Ellie, but I just think that people . . . the best actors should get the job.
- 20 EK: Sure.
- 21 AJ: What challenges have you faced since you began expressing your true gender identity?
- 22 EK: Well, I came out in May 2009. At the time, I was a trial lawyer. I had my own law firm in a small
23 town outside of Cedar Rapids, where I employed another lawyer and a couple . . . three or four
24 support staff. I had a client ask me why it was that I was wearing women's eye make-up . . . it's
25 a long story, but at some point because I needed to have something, I started wearing mascara
26 every day. I didn't think that it would be all that noticeable but apparently it was. It wasn't
27 eyeliner or eye shadow, it was just mascara, but apparently that was noticeable enough.
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 EK: And that triggered . . . that conversation happened on a Thursday and by Monday morning, I had
30 composed and then transmitted a letter about coming out to 200 clients, fellow lawyers and
31 judges, telling them that I was trans, that I had been struggling with it all my life – by this time I
32 was divorced, and explaining a little bit about what it meant to be trans and then saying that
33 from then on I would no longer be known by my boy name and that from then on, I would only
34 present as a woman. Within two months of that, I ended up trying a jury case in Cedar Rapids.
35 A husband and wife were being sued over the sale of their very expensive house in Cedar
36 Rapids. They had hired me when I was a man; after I transitioned I talked to them and I gave
37 them the choice to go get a different lawyer and they said they wanted me. I gave them the
38 choice that I would wear a man's suit and pull, at that point my hair was growing out, that I

- 1 would pull my hair back to a ponytail and that we'd just pretend that I was still a man. I'll never
2 forget that the woman asked me, she said, "Would you be comfortable doing that?" By then I
3 had said that I was going to be done lying both to myself and to other people, and so I said, "No,
4 I would be very uncomfortable," and she looked at her husband, who is a nice man, and she
5 looked back at me and she said, "Well, that settles it, you'll try the case as Ellen Krug." I told the
6 jury at the trial that I was transgender and I asked them not to hold it against my clients. We
7 tried the case for four days and then we won it. I was so incredibly thrilled because I thought,
8 "OK, this is hard." I was starting to lose some clients but I felt like well now I can tell my clients
9 that even though I look different and have started to dress different . . .
- 10 AJ: I still litigate with the best of them.
- 11 EK: I still have it.
- 12 AJ: Yeah.
- 13 EK: But unfortunately I represented railroads and trucking companies in very high exposure
14 personal injury and death cases, you know – where millions of dollars were at issue, and most of
15 my clients got afraid and they left. And so, I ended up having to close my law firm in March of
16 2010, and then I moved up here to the Twin Cities. So one of the challenges was that this
17 caused me to lose my business.
- 18 AJ: Sure.
- 19 EK: I think I could have very well have resurrected the business and it would have taken a different
20 direction, but at that point I was ready for a change. I wanted to come here to Minneapolis and
21 start fresh where no one knew me, where I didn't have to worry about pronouns and people
22 tripping over my boy name. And where I had the goal of coming here to do three things: one
23 was to have some surgeries, the second was to take time off to write a book, and the third was
24 to become the Executive Director of a non-profit. I had no idea what non-profit it would be but .
25 . . I'm very naïve at times and I just said, "Well, I'm going to run a non-profit." And, I am so
26 incredibly grateful that, actually, all three of those things happened.
- 27 AJ: Yeah, and in quite grand fashion at that.
- 28 EK: Well, I don't know about grand but I was just really very grateful.
- 29 AJ: Well, the book is successful.
- 30 EK: Yes, it is.
- 31 AJ: The non-profit is located in downtown Minneapolis, which is no light feat I would say.
- 32 EK: I was hired to start the non-profit from scratch and within three years we earned an American
33 Bar Association award.
- 34 AJ: What's it called?
- 35 EK: The non-profit is named Call for Justice and we help low-income people connect with legal
36 resources in the Twin Cities and Minnesota.

- 1 AJ: So it's not specific to the transgender community?
- 2 EK: No.
- 3 AJ: Are there transgender clients at all?
- 4 EK: Some, not very many. What I take private pride in is that a board of, as far as I know, all cis
5 gender, white, relatively well off to well off people, were willing to take a chance on me to start
6 a brand new non-profit. I was just so . . . even to this day, I'm still amazed that they did that.
- 7 AJ: OK.
- 8 EK: But I have private pride in the fact that I got hired to run a non-profit that is not focused on
9 LGBTQ people, not that I don't want to help LGBTQ people because I do that in a lot of other
10 ways . . .
- 11 AJ: Absolutely.
- 12 EK: But what I love is that when I show up to do Call for Justice work, I show up as Ellen Krug,
13 human, and I don't talk about being transgender, I just show up and I do my work. Now some
14 people obviously, with my voice, figure it out – although I will tell you, there's probably a half a
15 dozen women up in Bemidji who believe that I smoked five packs of cigarettes for 20 years . . .
- 16 AJ: Just like them, right?
- 17 EK: And they're just saying to themselves, "That poor Ellie Krug."
- 18 AJ: Yeah, I mean – I don't know, a voice is as individual as each person who owns that voice.
- 19 EK: I know, but it is a challenge for me. A lot of work I do on the telephone, so I'm doing a lot of
20 explaining. And, you know . . . and it's proven to be a problem for me relative to being able to
21 form romantic relationships. I mean, I've gone out with a couple of men who really had a
22 problem with my voice. One man said, "I really, really like you, but your voice means that we'll
23 never have a relationship." And really what he was saying is he's attracted to me, he found me,
24 hopefully, appealing, but he would never, ever introduce me to his friends or his family because
25 of the judgment that he would encounter as a result of dating me.
- 26 AJ: Wow, yeah. That's sad, that's a phenomenon that a lot of activists are dealing with . . . I think
27 the term is trans-attracted males.
- 28 EK: Right.
- 29 AJ: And how do you engage them in building community within themselves to be able . . . I think
30 that takes the same level of courage that . . .
- 31 EK: I agree.
- 32 AJ: . . . that we as trans people go through in order to come out and be our full selves. I have very
33 little sympathy for those guys. It's like – hey, you know, if you're attracted to Ellie, stand up and
34 say that. That is not a bad thing.

- 1 EK: I think some of it is certainly age-based as well, and so . . . the men, and the women, who are in
2 their 30s and early 40s are of a different era and different acceptance level, but my
3 contemporaries, say 50-65, are from a time where this is extremely unusual and I think it is very
4 difficult for them to wrap their arms around. I get that and I understand that. For the most part
5 . . . I mean, I have fairly well resigned myself to the fact that I will be alone.
- 6 AJ: So you're not dating now?
- 7 EK: No. And for the most part, I'm most . . .
- 8 AJ: You're a beautiful woman.
- 9 EK: Thank you, but for the most part on most days, I'm OK with that. But I do have my moments –
10 like we're coming up on the holidays and it's just a time where you want to have somebody
11 where you can say, "I love you," or spend some time with somebody other than just simply a
12 friend.
- 13 AJ: Yes.
- 14 EK: But what I tell myself, when I have those moments, is I say I do have someone incredibly
15 important – I have me, and I didn't have me.
- 16 AJ: Yes.
- 17 EK: And yes, it is the most important thing and yes, I needed to do that – to leave Lydia in order to
18 find me, to have me, and while . . . and, you know – I talk about this when I speak, I've learned
19 the difference between loss and regret. Now when I was cis, and I don't think even until I
20 started writing my book in 2010, I don't think I understood the difference because I always
21 believe that if I had a loss and I was responsible for it, well of course I would regret it – who
22 wouldn't regret having caused a loss to themselves. But now, no. I understand that the two are
23 very different and while loss will, over time, dissipate – it will go away, it will get less difficult.
24 Regret, oh my God, burns hotter. It burns so much hotter over time and so, yes, I've
25 encountered a lot of loss – for sure, but not for a second have I ever, ever regretted the
26 decisions that led to that loss.
- 27 AJ: Wow, that's powerful – that's really powerful. See, I told you that you would answer a lot of the
28 questions that I have listed here within the context of other questions. So you're doing that, I
29 just want to let you know that, Ellen.
- 30 EK: Well, thanks.
- 31 AJ: So, no regrets – that's a beautiful thing. You mentioned this a little bit, but what medical
32 interventions have you undergone relative to your gender confirmation?
- 33 EK: Well, I've had . . . so, I've had facial feminization with a doctor outside of Chicago, which I like to
34 say was a super-duper-duper-duper-duper facelift, but also some nose reconstruction and chin
35 reconstruction and a tracheal shave, which, unfortunately, did something to my voice because
36 at one time I could get the pitch up higher, after a year of speech therapy the pitch was much
37 higher. And then I had re-assignment surgery with Dr. Meltzer in Scottsdale and he has a
38 process that's two-stage, two-step, and I went through both steps with him.

- 1 AJ: OK.
- 2 EK: So all of that was . . . I transitioned socially in May of 2009 and then I had three major surgeries
3 between of June 2010 and January of 2011.
- 4 AJ: Are you pleased with the results?
- 5 EK: Quite pleased.
- 6 AJ: Quite pleased. Just a little bit more about the relationships, have you engaged yourself in . . .
7 like online dating or . . .? That's a place where, you know, people know who you are, you're able
8 to fully disclose and . . . because there are people who are very attracted to transgender-
9 identified people.
- 10 EK: Well, yes – I've dated online. I'm online to social sites . . .
- 11 AJ: Sure.
- 12 EK: But what I have found is, as one woman wrote to me, "I don't know why you're on this site
13 because you're not real." And, as I found with men, even though . . . literally, even though in
14 the very first paragraph of my profile I disclose that I'm transgender, I get, time and again, a man
15 writing to me saying, "I love your profile, I love your picture, would you like to get together?"
16 And, at first, I didn't understand this and we would go back and forth for several times and then
17 I would say, at some point – like the fourth or fifth email, I'd mention that I'm transgender and
18 then I would get an email back saying, "What? I didn't see that in your profile." Well, that's
19 because I finally learned that men don't look at the profiles.
- 20 AJ: Yes, exactly.
- 21 EK: So even now with it mentioned in the beginning of my profile, I still get emails and flirts, or
22 whatever you want to call them, from men and I've now learned as soon as I do to ask them,
23 "Please confirm you've read my entire profile and you understand that I'm transgender." And
24 just about every time, the man either writes back and says, "Oh, I didn't know that, that's not
25 for me. Good luck." Or, the man . . . I never hear from again.
- 26 AJ: So, I guess, Ellie, I'm just going to ask and if you don't want to answer please tell me to . . .
- 27 EK: That's fine.
- 28 AJ: . . . jump in the river or whatever. Is it . . . I think it's a valid question. Is it really important for
29 you to be in full disclosure about your past gender history in a future relationship? I mean,
30 gender confirmation surgery . . . I mean, for all intents and purposes, you're female.
- 31 EK: That raises . . . well, yes . . . well, there's a lot of answers to that question but the answer is yes,
32 it's important, and I'll tell you some of why that's important.
- 33 AJ: Sure.
- 34 EK: One is from a very practical standpoint, this voice doesn't, for many people, doesn't match the
35 appearance. So there is that question.

- 1 AJ: But you could not be lying and say, “Hey, I had throat cancer and they did a surgery and now my
2 voice is like this.”
- 3 EK: Right – yeah. But, that’s a . . .
- 4 AJ: There’s a number of different reasons . . .
- 5 EK: I know, but that’s an element of duplicity that I don’t want to go into with someone.
- 6 AJ: Well, you had surgery and your voice has changed.
- 7 EK: Right.
- 8 AJ: So it’s not lying.
- 9 EK: But here’s the practical . . . the more practical is that if you go online and you Google Ellen Krug,
10 you will easily get a hundred references to me about being transgender.
- 11 AJ: Got it.
- 12 EK: I write for *Lavender* magazine, I’ve written my book, I’ve had pieces appear in *Huffington Post*,
13 Minnesota Public Radio has interviewed me a couple of times, Iowa Public Radio. I’m frequent
14 on MyTalk 107.
- 15 AJ: So your identity is . . .
- 16 EK: It’s out there. I did that consciously because, and what we haven’t talked about is that apart
17 from my job as a non-profit person, I have this other life goal which is to try and make a
18 difference in the world in a very positive way. And so, early on, I did make the decision that I
19 would write about me, I would write about my story. And because I learned – you know, Brene
20 Brown, that vulnerability is a powerful, powerful thing. And I learned that at my trial, the trial
21 that I told you about – telling, particularly women jurors that I’m transgender. I mean, I was
22 pretty certain I was going to win the case just simply because I did that, they would feel closer to
23 me and that they would trust me more with what I would say about the evidence. And so, I just
24 . . . there are a lot of people lost, you know this. There are people who are searching – I got an
25 email last week from a 62-year-old man in a southern Minnesota town who had heard me speak
26 earlier in the fall, who was about to come out to his adult children. And so . . . and on top of all
27 of that, as I was growing up, Dr. King and Robert Kennedy – they were alive, and I was a pretty
28 smart kid and I would listen to them and both of them talked about we have an obligation to
29 leave this place better than what we encountered it. So all of that goes into the mix – so no, on
30 the romantic front, it’s just who I am.
- 31 AJ: That was the answer I was hoping for, Ellie, I just wanted to pull it out of you. As you know, I am
32 a very open person about my identity, but I do know that the reality is that there is such a thing
33 as having a stealth identity, if you will.
- 34 EK: Yes, and I respect that.
- 35 AJ: And it just creates less drama in some people’s lives – at some point. Maybe at some point it
36 might create more drama – who knows. And I respect it, but this is how I choose to live my life
37 and certainly this is your conscious choice as well and is very much appreciated.

- 1 EK: It's not that I haven't had relationships. I've dated two women and one man since I
2 transitioned, but they just . . .
- 3 AJ: But you're just not in a relationship right now.
- 4 EK: Right, and I think the odds . . . I mean, now I'm encountering . . . I'm a close to 60-year-old
5 woman. There are a lot of 60-year-old women out there that don't have dates because of their
6 age and because of where they are on the spectrum. As I said, for the most part I'm OK, I have
7 my moments, but I'm all right.
- 8 AJ: I totally get it. When is the first time you ever met a trans person?
- 9 EK: Oh God. That's a great question. In Washington, DC . . . at Coe College, where I went to college,
10 they had a DC term where you could go and live in DC for a semester. The house where we lived
11 was right off of Dupont Circle and there were some trans people in that area, it's a very LGBTQ
12 area, and I remember getting cat calls from trans girls. I absolutely remember one of them
13 asking if I wanted to get dressed up with her. I think I had a beard and I was kind of scruffy at
14 the time, but there must have been something letting them know – I don't know. That scared
15 me, I was like, "Whoa."
- 16 AJ: Yeah, 19, 20 years old.
- 17 EK: Yeah, 20, 21 . . . 20, yeah.
- 18 AJ: What do you think the relationship is like between the L, the G, the B . . . ?
- 19 EK: And the Ts?
- 20 AJ: And the Ts?
- 21 EK: I think the relationship is a heck of a lot better than what it was, maybe even five years ago.
- 22 AJ: OK.
- 23 EK: I think that as trans people have become more visible we've certainly gotten to know the Gs and
24 the Ls and the Bs better, and I think that they've had an opportunity to get to know us. For
25 example, last year there was a gay men's book club comprised of mainly older men – so retired
26 men, so we're talking men in their 60s and some in their 70s, who had read my book. They
27 asked me to come talk to them as part of their discussion about the book club. We talked a little
28 bit about the book, but a whole lot about my story. At the end, one of them said to me, "You're
29 really the first transgender person I've ever really gotten to know." He said, "I've always had
30 this different impression about transgender people," and really what he was talking about was
31 drag queens and the drama. And, he said, "You're just normal." We had a big laugh about that
32 because, of course, that would be with asterisks. But, what that experience led me on to was
33 that just simply showing up as . . . and I try to be a compassionate and kind person, I try and
34 make those two things, kindness and compassion – loving kindness, particularly part of my
35 hallmarks. I think that just showing up, other people are just like, "She's just like us." I think
36 that's the best thing that we can do, I think that that is the most, in my book and I know there
37 are various forms of advocacy, but in my book that is, I think, the most effective form of
38 advocacy possible. It's about getting people to get to know you and they share a little bit about

- 1 themselves and we can laugh a little bit, maybe we can cry a little bit, and in the end we feel
2 closer to each other – back to Brene.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, exchange stories and realize that you love your kids just as much as I love my kids and
4 blah, blah, blah.
- 5 EK: Absolutely.
- 6 AJ: Do you think there is an agenda for the trans community?
- 7 EK: Well, first of all I think that the phrase, “trans community,” is misleading because I think that it’s
8 actually a collection of a lot of different groups with various forms of agendas and so I don’t
9 know . . . I don’t think it’s possible to say that there is an agenda. What I do believe is that
10 everybody wants to be accepted and everybody wants to be able to live authentically without
11 the fear of marginalization, the fear of physical violence, or great emotional distress. I think that
12 a lot of how we get there depends on how we individually, as we each have our own ways of
13 doing things, how we interact with the cis gender community. And so, I think that together, in a
14 variety of ways, we will find that piece, we will find that acceptance. I think that we’re getting it,
15 we’re watching it happen at light speed as we sit here right now. Who could have ever
16 imagined Caitlyn Jenner?
- 17 AJ: You must be reading my mind, that was the question that was burrowing to pop out.
- 18 EK: Who could have ever imagined . . .?
- 19 AJ: Tell me, what are your thoughts about Caitlin? Yeah, who could imagine – 65 years in the closet.
- 20 EK: An American icon, American hero. My thoughts, first thought is thank God, thank God you
21 showed up. Thank you for elevating the discussion from one level to 18 higher levels than what
22 it was, thank you so very much. My other thought is that there’s more to leadership than simply
23 giving a telephone or a television interview to Diane Sawyer. And I don’t think, with great
24 respect to Caitlyn, I don’t think she’s ready to be a leader. I don’t think she is equipped to do it.
25 When I heard on national television that she had never met a transgender person before . . .
- 26 AJ: Before her TV show.
- 27 EK: Yeah, it’s just mind boggling. And when I heard her ask on national television, “What’s the
28 Human Rights Campaign?” I was like, “How could you not know that?” And so . . . and I don’t
29 want to be critical of her, I get she’s 65 years old and in the closet for a long time . . .
- 30 AJ: And in a Hollywood bubble too, right?
- 31 EK: In a bubble.
- 32 AJ: A celebrity bubble.
- 33 EK: And I get that, but there’s great value to showing up at the Town House on a Thursday night at
34 8pm and staying until 11pm and just being able to get to know people. And so . . . she had
35 never done that and I don’t know if she still has done that. But, I still thank God she exists,
36 thank God she had the courage to come out. She, for all of that I just said about her leadership,
37 she represents absolutely the direction and the acceptance that we want – that we crave.

- 1 AJ: Wow, great answer. Thanks for that insight. So, now you're working for an organization that is
2 not specifically transgender and I can appreciate . . . for 12 years I worked in City Hall and you
3 can bet that was not transgender focused at all. So, showing up is a big part of my advocacy as
4 well.
- 5 EK: Yes.
- 6 AJ: So I can appreciate that. Have you ever worked or volunteered in any LGBT-specific or
7 transgender-specific organizations? If so, which ones?
- 8 EK: Well, sure. I'm on the board of the Minnesota Lavendar Bar Association, so it's the largest group
9 of queer lawyers, professional queer lawyers in Minnesota. In Iowa City, before I moved here, I
10 was the president for two years and then a board member of an organization called
11 Connections, which was LGBTQ education oriented and it would do various programs – we had
12 monthly meetings where they would bring in a speaker to talk about something related to the
13 LGBTQ community. I was also a speaker for them as well.
- 14 AJ: Cool.
- 15 EK: I have put on, at this point . . . probably 150 to 200 talks about being transgender. Those talks
16 have been to such organizations as Target Corporation, Fairview Health, a national banking . . . a
17 federal national banking organization that I'm under contract not to name, multiple law schools
18 and universities.
- 19 AJ: Is it an acronym – like FDIC?
- 20 EK: Multiple law schools to organizations of therapists and counseling organizations. And so in all of
21 that, I'm showing up and doing education and advocacy. And then I've helped organize LGBTQ
22 lawyers to serve LGBTQ youth. And, I mentor . . . every time I speak, Andrea, I tell the audience
23 that I have a standing offer that I will meet with any human to talk about trans or LGBTQ or
24 anything else related to the human condition, that I will meet with them for up to an hour in a
25 public place. I tell people, and it's in writing as well in the materials that I hand out, "You may
26 contact me," and then they have my email. And people take me up on that. I've talked with
27 trans people, I've talked with Ls and Gs, I've talked with a queer woman who didn't want to talk
28 about being queer but wanting my advice on her career path.
- 29 AJ: Wow, awesome.
- 30 EK: So it's exceedingly honoring that people would contact me and do that, but I view that as part of
31 my obligation, part of my . . . we're back to Dr. King and Bobby Kennedy, about having an
32 obligation to make this place better.
- 33 AJ: "A drum major for justice," I think Dr. King said.
- 34 EK: Yes. And so, absolutely. I mean, I'm not Dr. King and I'm not Bobby Kennedy, certainly not now.
35 I'm just small, but I'm willing to show up, as we've been talking about.
- 36 AJ: Wow. Well, I really appreciate you taking time out of your busy and illustrious life to share a
37 little bit of your story, a little bit of your history for the Tretter Collection. What do you think
38 this sort of patchwork of community, in your terms, will be like 50 years from now?

- 1 EK: Oh, God.
- 2 AJ: And maybe if I rephrase the question a little bit, how would the world accept this patchwork
3 community 50 years from now, in your opinion?
- 4 EK: Well, that answer is dependent on what happens with the rest of the world. We're . . . on a
5 political and religious front right now, we are at a crossroads with talk of a third World War,
6 with talk of religious fanaticism, and that may end up dramatically changing the way the world
7 is. If secularism continues to prevail, my prediction about trans people 50 years from now is
8 that it will be a non-issue, that we will have people at five or six saying, "Mommy, mommy, I'm
9 really not a boy, I'm a girl," and parents understanding, some therapy still involved to confirm
10 and ascertain, and then after that everyone will understand, just as I think we're already getting
11 to the point of understanding about gays and lesbians.
- 12 AJ: We're close, yeah.
- 13 EK: And so, in that world, which I won't inhabit but my children will, I so look forward to because
14 that would be a wonderful, wonderful world for all of us, and I would hope that along with that
15 world the color of your skin, the place that you were born, the religion that you practice, would
16 be viewed as compliments to the tapestry of a wonderful quilt that would make the world a very
17 satisfying and enriching place to live. On the other hand, if we don't tackle hard issues, if we
18 aren't honest with ourselves, if we don't give people the respect that they deserve, this world
19 will be much different. And I think the question of somebody being able to prevail with their
20 gender or sexual identity will become so far back, so second tier to just simply surviving. You
21 know, the world where we live right now, in many places if you're gay or you're lesbian or
22 you're transgender, it's a death sentence. They're pushing people off of 14-story buildings in
23 occupied Syria right now . . .
- 24 AJ: Literally.
- 25 EK: . . . because they're gay or lesbian.
- 26 AJ: Yeah.
- 27 EK: And so if that world prevails, it's not going to be pretty – not just for the Gs, the Ls, the Ts or the
28 Bs, it's not going to be pretty for a lot of people.
- 29 AJ: Right. Wow, what a great summary to this great interview. Thank you, Ellie, for sharing. Until
30 we meet again.
- 31 EK: Thank you, I'm honored to be asked. Thank you.
- 32 AJ: All right.
- 33
- 34