

Lawrence Tanner Richardson
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

June 10, 2016



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

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

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

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- 1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Lawrence Tanner Richardson -LTR
3
- 4 AJ: So, hello.
- 5 LTR: Hello.
- 6 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project
7 at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is June 10, 2016. I am in St.
8 Joseph, Minnesota, and I am here today with Lawrence Richardson, and sometimes you go by
9 Lawrence Tanner Richardson, so you've got to talk to me a little bit about that. But, I'm here
10 today with Lawrence Richardson. How you doing, Lawrence?
- 11 LTR: I'm doing great, I'm doing great – and really happy to be a part of this. So, thank you.
- 12 AJ: Oh, my God, thank you. I'm so happy that you said yes and you're willing to participate. So,
13 let's just start with a few questions. State your name and how you spell it. Also, state your
14 gender identity today, your gender assigned at birth, and your pronouns.
- 15 LTR: OK. Well, my name is Lawrence Tanner Richardson.
- 16 AJ: Haha, see – I told you.
- 17 LTR: Tanner is my middle name and I use that entire name when I'm speaking specifically about my
18 identities because that's the name I got to choose for myself. My name is spelled L-a-w-r-e-n-c-
19 e T-a-n-n-e-r R-i-c-h-a-r-d-s-o-n. And I was born in St. Paul, Minnesota. I use male – he/him/his-
20 oriented pronouns. I identify as a trans man and my identity as far as my sexual orientation
21 goes, I identify as queer.
- 22 AJ: OK. What was your gender assigned at birth?
- 23 LTR: I was assigned female at birth.
- 24 AJ: Really?
- 25 LTR: Yes.
- 26 AJ: OK, all right. Lawrence, please . . . I just want to get us in a reflective mode. What is the first
27 thing you remember in life? What's your earliest memory?
- 28 LTR: My earliest memory is when . . . oh, my gosh. My earliest memory is when I was playing at my
29 home with my cousin, my older cousin, and she had to leave. I remember being really
30 devastated and that was the first time I remember being devastated.
- 31 AJ: Wow, OK. Devastation.
- 32 LTR: It's a fleeting memory, it's not anything . . . but, I remember the color of the carpet and I
33 remember her walking out the door and I remember just being left and feeling . . .
- 34 AJ: Sadness.

- 1 LTR: Sad.
- 2 AJ: Yeah. Wow, it's an emotion – sadness is an emotion that all humans feel. So, that's your first
3 memory, huh?
- 4 LTR: And I was like four.
- 5 AJ: OK. And this was in St. Paul?
- 6 LTR: It was.
- 7 AJ: You grew up in St. Paul, what was that like?
- 8 LTR: It was . . . I had a difficult childhood, to be honest. I'm the oldest of three and my mother was
9 convinced that I was a boy when she was pregnant with me, and was very shocked when I was
10 born and never hid that. There was some disappointment on her part, but also I look exactly
11 like my father. They had a really difficult relationship and he was very abusive, and so when
12 their relationship ended then her disappointment for me changed from how I was born to I
13 looked just like my dad. And so, just kind of being that reminder of her pain. She suffered with
14 a lot of mental illness, so in addition to the physical abuse, she was now suffering in a lot of
15 ways and wasn't really receiving treatment because now as a single mom she's working and
16 trying to do all this stuff. And here is this reminder of why she's suffering. She took a lot of that
17 kind of pain out on me and it was just a really difficult time for a few years and she, basically
18 when I was nine, threw me out. I think it was kind of a favor though. She knew that, honestly,
19 she had the ability to kill me and she probably would have had I stayed longer.
- 20 AJ: So, it was an act of love, almost.
- 21 LTR: Really, I think it was. Both my parents are deceased but I feel like with my mom, especially, she
22 was afraid of what she might have interrupted because she knew that as much as I had all of
23 these reminders for her, that I really was capable of doing so much in the world and she knew
24 that if I had a chance, that I could do better than her. I feel like she wanted me to do better
25 than her.
- 26 AJ: That's powerful.
- 27 LTR: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: So, you had three other siblings . . . two other siblings.
- 29 LTR: Two, two younger sisters. One of my sisters is bisexual and she is married to a woman and they
30 have . . . well, two boys, and what's so great is that they've essentially grown up in a really queer
31 family. So, their normal is two moms, a trans uncle . . . that's their normal.
- 32 AJ: And all the friends.
- 33 LTR: All the friends, all the outfits.
- 34 AJ: Family that comes along with that.

- 1 LTR: And going to Pride and face painting and . . . like they love rainbows. One of my nephews is
2 really masculine, but he'll wear a rainbow anything because he grew up with rainbows in the
3 house.
- 4 AJ: Right, rainbows are cool.
- 5 LTR: Right. So, he has his basketball shorts on and his hair cut, and he just loves rainbows.
- 6 AJ: Wow.
- 7 LTR: So, that's pretty cool.
- 8 AJ: That is, that's amazing. But you had this rough childhood. So, you left home at nine. Where did
9 you go? What happened?
- 10 LTR: So, I went to live with my grandmother and I lived there from nine until 17. The healing and all
11 of that happened in the first few years of me living with her, kind of overcoming some of the
12 abuse that I endured and finding my identity as far as I'm a human being and I have value and I
13 have worth and I'm not just some burden on society. But, the interesting thing is that as I was
14 figuring that out, I was still wrestling with the questions of gender identity – like I thought I was
15 a boy, and then my mom was like, "No, you're not." I was like, "Well, what am I?" But I didn't
16 know I was a girl.
- 17 AJ: Right.
- 18 LTR: So, I didn't have language for what I was experiencing, I just knew that I wasn't either.
- 19 AJ: So, your mom wanted a boy, thought you were going to be a boy – all of this stuff, and then you
20 . . . you were.
- 21 LTR: Yeah, and I thought I was until . . .
- 22 AJ: And you are.
- 23 LTR: I thought I was until she said I wasn't and I was like, "What do you mean, I'm not?" And then I
24 go live with my grandmother and I got to be . . . I got to be a little boy living with my
25 grandmother.
- 26 AJ: Really?
- 27 LTR: Until it was time for church. At church, I had to wear dresses and the shiny shoes and all that.
28 But, at home . . .
- 29 AJ: Hmmm, the ruffled socks.
- 30 LTR: So, you know, at home, I went shirtless in the summer and just had shorts, played around with
31 all my little friends that were boys in the neighborhood, climbing trees and all that kind of stuff.
32 That was just normal. And then, puberty started.
- 33 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 LTR: That started at 10 and I'm like . . . I'm dying, there's something happening – like, I'm bleeding to
2 death. And my grandma is like, "No, you're a woman now." I'm like, "What do you mean I'm a
3 woman now?" But that's when it shifted for me, because before I wasn't really anything. And
4 then, at 10 I was told I was a woman. I was like, "OK, so I guess I have to become a woman."
5 And so, I worked really hard from 10 until about . . . I would say 17, to really be a woman. I did
6 everything that women did, or what I thought. And my grandmother ate it up. When she got
7 closer to the end of her life, she said, "I knew something was different about you." And that's
8 why she was so supportive with me taking modeling and etiquette classes and how do you walk
9 as a lady and how do you sit . . . she ate all that up because she wanted me to be a very feminine
10 person and she had . . . like my family had a really, really big place in our national denomination,
11 she had a lot of power – so image was really important to her, like, "When you're in the church,
12 this is how women are, this is how men are." So, I did a lot of that.
- 13 AJ: So, you grew up in a religious household.
- 14 LTR: Very, very, very religious.
- 15 AJ: What denomination?
- 16 LTR: Baptist, Southern Baptist.
- 17 AJ: Southern Baptist, wow. So, the prestige and the big hats and all day at church on Sunday.
- 18 LTR: And, because of my family, I rose to positions of leadership very quickly.
- 19 AJ: Really?
- 20 LTR: Very quickly, and I got to do a lot of traveling, speaking engagements as a young person doing
21 these things. I got a lot of speaking engagements because kids weren't doing that.
- 22 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 23 LTR: So, the fact that I wanted to do that, they were like, "Oh, we'll pay to send you here, there,
24 wherever – because you're 13, 14, 16 and you want to do this."
- 25 AJ: As a young lady.
- 26 LTR: As a young lady – as a young lady that wanted to serve God. But, I had a secret life. So, at
27 school I was an overachiever and I excelled, but I also knew that I was attracted to women and
28 men.
- 29 AJ: Wow, OK.
- 30 LTR: So, I dated women and men in school without thinking that St. Paul is still the same city as . . .
- 31 AJ: And all the first mothers of the church.
- 32 LTR: And some of their kids went to the same school as me so all of those . . . I look back now and I'm
33 going, "How did I think that nobody would ever find out?" But my grandma found out my junior
34 year. She saw me holding hands with an androgynous person and she was waiting at home for

- 1 me. She was like, “Who was that thing? Was that a boy or a girl and what’s wrong with you and
2 what are you? I knew something was wrong with you.” All of that, and I got kicked out.
- 3 AJ: Really? Again?
- 4 LTR: Yes.
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 LTR: This time, though, I had nowhere to go. So, the family piece has always been kind of awkward
7 because I was a straight A student, I graduated with above a 4.0, I got into every college that I
8 applied for, I’ve excelled in every major area of my life, but I got lumped in with the crackheads
9 and the deadbeat dads and the demons. I had exorcisms performed on me, I’ve been
10 threatened by family members, I’ve been physically assaulted by family members trying to
11 wrestle the demons of homosexuality out of my spirit – all of that. And so, family and childhood
12 . . . once I got to be like 18 and started college, it was like I got to create my own life, my own
13 world.
- 14 AJ: What’s it like with family today?
- 15 LTR: Well, most of the people that gave me most of the issues are dead so I don’t have to deal with
16 as much. But being an adult and also having the agency that I have and being able to really . . . I
17 have a lot of resources and I have a lot of connections and I work really, really hard, and I’ve
18 excelled a lot.
- 19 AJ: Yes, you have.
- 20 LTR: For some of my family members, they are still in the same space as they were in when they
21 were criticizing me and they were convinced that I was going to hell. So, now some of them are
22 looking like, “Well, your life is really great – you’ve come a long ways, and we’re still struggling
23 with this over here.” It’s like, “Yeah.” But they also look in my eyes and they see that I am
24 happy and happiness can only come from one place and that’s the soul – you can’t make up
25 happiness. And so, for the ones that are super, super religious, they haven’t been able to
26 reconcile my happiness because it is proof that God, or their understanding of God, is blessing
27 me. And you can’t deny that kind of presence when you see it in somebody.
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 LTR: And that shakes up their faith foundation.
- 30 AJ: Yeah, because you’re supposed to be . . .
- 31 LTR: Broke down and miserable. I did everything I did in my life without them, I have a support
32 network – so it wasn’t all me, but it wasn’t them. And I think that that’s the part that . . . I want
33 trans people, especially, to know a lot of my story because they feel like, “Oh, if I lose
34 everything, then everything is done – life is over.” No, it’s not. You have to re-build, and I’ve
35 had to re-build a few times – a few times.
- 36 AJ: Yeah, that’s a lot of resilience. When did you first realize that you were not the gender you
37 were assigned at birth?

- 1 LTR: I've always struggled with that because I never related with any gender until I heard the word
2 trans. So, throughout childhood, when my mom was like, "Oh, I thought you were a boy and
3 you're not," and I was like, "Well, OK, then what am I? Because I am a boy." And my grandma
4 was like, "Oh, you're a woman." I'm like, "Not really." It wasn't until I was 28 . . .
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 LTR: And I was talking to a friend of mine and I was just explaining all of my questions about identity.
7 My mother had just passed away; I was married and my marriage was not . . . I knew that
8 happiness was a thing that I wanted, and I wasn't happy there – and not because of anything
9 that my ex-spouse had done, but just me.
- 10 AJ: Do you mind saying if you were married to a male or female?
- 11 LTR: I was married to a woman.
- 12 AJ: To a woman, OK.
- 13 LTR: She was wonderful, but I was not where I needed to be, and so obviously, we had several
14 problems that stemmed from that. But I was talking about just . . . like, "I don't fit anywhere.
15 Am I a boy or a girl and why don't I feel like a girl?" All of that, and I'm talking to my friend, and
16 she's about 20 years older than me – close to 20 years older than me. So, she's kind of looking
17 at me with that wisdom thing – like, "Child?" And she just said something so simple, she said,
18 "Have you ever thought you were transgender?" I'm like, "What does that mean?"
- 19 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 20 LTR: She was like, "You've been advocating for LGBT people throughout college and seminary, you
21 don't know what the T stands for?"
- 22 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 23 LTR: And I was like, "No, I thought that the T . . ." I had gone to Gay 90s a couple of times and I had
24 seen a couple of drag shows at The Town House, so I thought the T were drag queens and drag
25 kings.
- 26 AJ: Yeah.
- 27 LTR: That's what I thought it was.
- 28 AJ: Somebody wrote a book called *The T is Not Silent* – I'm just saying. Go ahead, I'm sorry.
- 29 LTR: Right, education is so necessary. I Googled it though, I Googled the word transgender and my
30 whole everything changed.
- 31 AJ: Wow.
- 32 LTR: Because that was the first time in my whole life that I actually knew that other people felt the
33 way that I feel, but that it wasn't something that was wrong – that they didn't have something
34 wrong with them. They had similar feelings and here are the things that they did to live a whole

- 1 life – that was amazing. I'd never lived a whole life, I'd struggled my whole life. So, to have this
2 opportunity to just find a sense of being congruent and settled and satisfied – I jumped on that.
- 3 AJ: So, you knew you were queer.
- 4 LTR: Yes – yes.
- 5 AJ: And you were married to a woman but you had no concept or realization of this word
6 transgender or this identity, transgender, until Google?
- 7 LTR: And at that point, like when I was a little kid, I started stuffing socks in my underwear because I
8 thought my penis was going to grow in and I needed to . . .
- 9 AJ: Protect it.
- 10 LTR: Right. I thought that, and I still didn't know . . .
- 11 AJ: So, yeah, you had feelings but no language and no way to describe those feelings – is what I hear
12 you saying.
- 13 LTR: Right, exactly. And in the Evangelical Church World that I grew up in, everything is gay or
14 straight. And gay means everything that's not straight, and so I'm like, "Well, then . . ."
- 15 AJ: And everything that's bad.
- 16 LTR: I was like, "Maybe I'm gay?" "No, this has nothing to do with who I'm attracted to, this has to
17 do with me and how I feel about me." And there was no other words for that because I didn't
18 have them at that time. So, it was like, "OK, I'm not gay, so maybe I am just queer." I've had
19 that label, actually, since about 9th grade.
- 20 AJ: OK.
- 21 LTR: Because I knew I wasn't gay and I knew I wasn't straight, and I knew it didn't have anything to
22 do with just attraction, it had something to do with my identity as a person, but I had no
23 language.
- 24 AJ: So, you've been using queer as an identity for a long time. And, you still claim that identity?
- 25 LTR: I do. The difference is that when I claimed it as a youth, it was about sexuality, it was about
26 everything – I just knew I was different. But now, it's specifically about my sexual orientation
27 and my gender identity, I have a different term for that.
- 28 AJ: So, you're identifying as queer . . . did you ever have labels around . . . like I'm a dyke, a butch
29 dyke or diesel femme or all of these sort of gradations of lesbian . . .
- 30 LTR: Never heard of any of them.
- 31 AJ: Did you even identify as a lesbian? Not really, huh?
- 32 LTR: No. And most of my friends thought I was straight because I dated guys and girls. So, then if
33 you date a guy then that trumps the fact that you date girls, right?
- 34 AJ: Right.

- 1 LTR: You're just experimenting or you like to have fun. There's no real value that you can have with a
2 woman so you're just straight and you like to have these . . . and that's what a lot of people
3 thought. But I was a very . . .
- 4 AJ: Because people place value on male/female relationships and less value on every other kind of
5 relationship.
- 6 LTR: Exactly. Able-bodied heterosexual relationships get a lot . . . but I was a very feminine woman –
7 long hair, nails, always in either dresses or skirts – dress suits and things like that.
- 8 AJ: Wow.
- 9 LTR: Manicures, facials, everything.
- 10 AJ: This vision just does not compute.
- 11 LTR: I could spend at least four to six hours in the salon every two weeks getting hair, make-up, nails,
12 facial – everything. And that just was . . . I needed to do that because this is how a woman is
13 and this is what a woman does. I trained myself, but almost kind of like brainwashed myself, to
14 try to be this ultra-feminine woman so that I could . . . I was trying to convince myself, I was
15 trying to do everything that I could so that I just fit and felt comfortable one day and I just never
16 did. I felt always like I was wearing someone else's identity and at home, I would literally come
17 home and take it off at the end of the day – and get in my boxer shorts and my basketball shorts
18 and be like, "Ahhhh."
- 19 AJ: Phew. And then you married a woman.
- 20 LTR: At 21 – on my 21st birthday, my friends in college were like, "You need to go out . . ." and they
21 took me to a bar. She walked in and was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. We talked
22 every day after that and within three months we were living together, within nine months we
23 had our commitment ceremony, and we stayed together for seven years.
- 24 AJ: When did the U-Haul truck come in?
- 25 LTR: She was more of the soft butch lesbian, so she had her own ways of moving things around – so
26 we had friends trucks show up and within the first three months, all moved in. But, yeah. Our
27 relationship . . . I mean, we had many . . . I had a lot of things that I needed to sort through and
28 so there is . . . I don't feel like one person is responsible for why our relationship ended, it was
29 just a season of life that ended, but a large part of that was my transition.
- 30 AJ: Really? Was she opposed to it?
- 31 LTR: She wasn't opposed to it. She, at one point, did state that, "If I wanted to be with a man I would
32 have married one."
- 33 AJ: Yeah, yeah.
- 34 LTR: That makes sense, you're a lesbian.
- 35 AJ: Right, exactly – I get it.

- 1 LTR: I totally get it. But she very much loved and affirmed me through figuring out what that meant,
2 what does transition mean for you. And, I was like, "I think it means everything. I want surgery,
3 I want hormones, I want a name change – I want all of it." And so, that's when she was like,
4 "Well, I need to pursue something that is right for me while you pursue this thing that's right for
5 you." So, we kind of parted ways at that point. But then, again, the homeless thing happened
6 again and I had to start over again.
- 7 AJ: Then rebuild.
- 8 LTR: And rebuild.
- 9 AJ: Wow.
- 10 LTR: And that was six years ago.
- 11 AJ: OK, how has things been since that moment?
- 12 LTR: Well, I have been rebuilding. The same friend that gave me the language of transgender, I
13 ended up moving in with her and started renting a room and just kind of working my way back
14 into whatever it meant life was for me. And it took about . . . I would say a year. It took about a
15 year for me to go from, "OK, I have nothing and I need to re-assess everything," to, "I am
16 Lawrence, I have had surgery, I am on hormones, I have meaningful relationships." But it took
17 about a year for me to feel like I wasn't in survival mode anymore. And then I started a
18 company and then I started a ministry and then I started all these different organizations where
19 I could have more freedom to then start to be creative and dream and look at life. Now that I'm
20 whole, I can do all this other stuff. But everything else was always on hold because I was always
21 trying to figure out who I was.
- 22 AJ: Yeah, that makes total sense. Can I ask what . . . and you brought this up, but to the extent that
23 you feel comfortable, what medical interventions have you done related to your gender
24 identity?
- 25 LTR: I have had top surgery; I've had a hysterectomy and an oophorectomy. I've had hormone
26 replacement therapy, or I have and I'm still undergoing. I've had the first stages of phalloplasty,
27 so metoidioplasty is what . . . they're two separate surgeries and often times if you end up
28 wanting to get a phalloplasty you have to start with a metoidioplasty, but some people stay at
29 the metoidioplasty, which is the . . . basically a hood release, clitoral hood release, and then
30 removal of excess skin. I'm going back and forth – I think I might stay there, but I'm not totally
31 closed off. But as far as the medical interventions, those are the surgical and medical things.
32 And then obviously therapy and coaching and things like that.
- 33 AJ: What's an oophorectomy?
- 34 LTR: An oophorectomy is when you get your fallopian tubes and your ovaries removed.
- 35 AJ: OK. And so, I imagine that's probably a fairly common term that you could easily Google. Do
36 you know how to spell it?

- 1 LTR: O-o-p-h and then something that ends with y. The hysterectomy is what's more common for
2 trans people, trans man or masculine people, because it's the removal of your uterus. But you
3 still have your eggs so you can still have children, but I got all of that taken out.
- 4 AJ: No kids, or at least not biologically from your body.
- 5 LTR: Which is good for me.
- 6 AJ: Yes, yes. Do you see children in your future?
- 7 LTR: Lots of children, just not necessarily perhaps in my care. I have a dream of . . . like some sort of
8 home or school where kids of color, and especially gender non-conforming kids of color, can
9 come and just learn and be and thrive and grow and have a platform to be launched from. I
10 would love to be in that space, and kind of be the director of that school. So, in that sense, I see
11 lots of children in my future. And I mentor kids, but I travel way too much and I love my job way
12 too much to have children because I want to be a parent that's 100% invested – not, whenever I
13 see you is whenever I see you.
- 14 AJ: Yeah. What's your work?
- 15 LTR: I am a minister and a digital media strategist.
- 16 AJ: Yeah, those two don't necessarily always . . . you don't always hear those combined together.
- 17 LTR: No, and I've created a really good position for myself.
- 18 AJ: A minister, as in a spiritual leader, right?
- 19 LTR: Yes, I'm a United Church of Christ pastor authorized in the Minnesota Conference. I've been
20 able to use my ministry and my digital communications background to kind of create a position
21 called digital evangelism.
- 22 AJ: Wow.
- 23 LTR: And so, what I do is I use the social media and communications platforms to curate and
24 generate content that specifically builds and nurtures communities and promotes faith
25 formation. Obviously, in the business world that's marketing – marketing and advertising.
26 You're taking the message of your community or your organization and you're creating products
27 and trying to get people to establish relationships with you and your products. It's the same
28 exact thing, it's just non-profit, it's spiritual.
- 29 AJ: It's not profit driven, per se.
- 30 LTR: It's value driven.
- 31 AJ: Because you called it your work, so I mean there's some remuneration, I suspect, somewhere
32 down the line.
- 33 LTR: Absolutely. Part of it is that when you're promoting a church or an organization or
34 denomination, you're building relationships with people but you're also trying to leverage those
35 connections to look at how you can utilize each other's resources. And so, that's . . . there's a

- 1 market for networking and community building, and that's kind of really what I love to do is
2 connect people to the things and other people that they need.
- 3 AJ: That's fascinating. Are you involved in a physical church? Are you a minister in a physical
4 church?
- 5 LTR: So, I am a minister at Linden Hills UCC. I'm contracted to do evangelism and discipleship. I
6 pastor an online church, actually two, and that's just out of my love for trans people, gender
7 non-conforming people, people that I meet when I travel and wanting to kind of stay connected
8 to them and help walk alongside them in ways and pastor them from afar, but also connect
9 them to local churches and ministers in their areas where they can have relationships with them
10 in a more personal way. I can pastor somebody in a different state, but I can't show up to the
11 hospital if they are having surgery or pray for them if their mom gets sick. But, if I can connect
12 them with a community where they are received and they have that connection, then it expands
13 their network as well.
- 14 AJ: You were ostracized by very religious people, you self-disclosed that exorcism . . . I don't know if
15 you were absolutely serious about that but . . .
- 16 LTR: I was.
- 17 AJ: That people have really done you harm in the name of religion.
- 18 LTR: Yes.
- 19 AJ: How are you able to reconcile that past sort of abuse and come out on the other side, remaining
20 faithful and not just as, "I go to church every once in a while or on Sundays," but you are a
21 minister and you're helping other people to heal. How did that come about? How did you get
22 to that place, Lawrence?
- 23 LTR: I encountered God for myself. I actually had a transformative spiritual encounter with God.
24 Before that, I had only known God through other people's eyes, so then whatever people said
25 about God, that's what I thought about God.
- 26 AJ: Sure.
- 27 LTR: And then, a year after I was homeless in high school, and I had started college, my plan, in my
28 mind – because your mind is your strongest asset, right?
- 29 AJ: Absolutely.
- 30 LTR: My plan in my mind was I was going to finish school, I'm going to prove everybody wrong, I'm
31 going to have this successful life and I'm going to do all this stuff and no one is going to be able
32 to touch me. But I didn't have anyone or anything to care for my soul and the abuse and the
33 pain that I did experience really started to eat me alive and I couldn't overcome my mind at that
34 point because the pain was just too much. And no matter what I thought or tried to look at
35 down the line as being my goalposts for life, the pain was just still there and I started to feel
36 isolated and alone and lonely, and then I started getting really depressed. I was like, "Why am I
37 doing all this? I don't have family, these people at this school aren't really my friends because

1 I'm just meeting them for the first time – they don't know me." I don't have anybody, all the
2 people that I grew up with in my church that were my friends, they don't speak to me – so, all of
3 this loneliness really started to eat away at my mind and I started to do a lot of really destructive
4 things. I tried to commit suicide and I ended up overdosing on a combination of 60 pills and one
5 of the school officials at my college actually drove me to the ER when she realized that I was
6 acting a little different. I was really convinced that I was going to die because I was convinced
7 that God hated me, that my punishment was the isolation that my family and everyone who had
8 rejected me – they were powerful and they were doing well. They had homes, they had cars,
9 they had resources and so if they had all of that and were rejecting me, then maybe they were
10 right – maybe God does hate me. Maybe this lifestyle or whatever the feelings I have, because
11 there was no lifestyle at that point, right? They were just all feelings and questions. And I was
12 like maybe they're right and I'm just going to hell. I said, "God, if you're real, because I've been
13 praying to you all these years, I have all these Bible verses memorized, and I've been going to
14 church faithfully, but if you're actually real and not just this thing that we do and talk about,
15 then just let me go because this sucks." I remember saying if I'm going to live in hell and I'm
16 going to die and go to hell, why am I alive then? There's no reason for it. And so, I wrote all the
17 notes to everyone letting them know my feelings, my thoughts, I separated all my belongings, I
18 planned my funeral. I thought I was going to die because I was so convinced that the image of
19 God as being judgmental and hateful and angry and all of that, I bought hook, line and sinker
20 and I thought I'm going to hell so I might as well just save y'all the time and money. And then I
21 woke up in the hospital and I was like, "Wow, I'm still here." And then I heard this voice and it
22 wasn't like someone in the room voice, but it was like this deeper, knowing kind of voice that
23 said, "I love you just as you are." I knew that was God's voice because I had never heard that
24 from anybody before – ever. At that point, I was like, "OK, show me how to love myself then,
25 show me how to be alive, show me how to be OK, and show me how to do this because I don't
26 want to do this anymore. I'm tired of being alone and I'm tired of feeling like I'm a terrible
27 person because I don't fit anywhere." I was 20 when that happened and I started to go into
28 really deep prayer and really deep discernment and I came out with this . . . in a few months, a
29 plan – like 7 years. I'm all biblical and I won't go into that, but the number 7 – seven years and
30 how something can really change in seven-years time, but it would take that time for me to
31 really learn and grow. So, I started studying psychology, relationships, communication,
32 spirituality, religion, God, Theology – everything I could study about life – philosophy, everything
33 I did for seven years. And not just I want to learn about philosophy, but I want to study the rules
34 of life – universal laws and principals that people who have lived, and all this stuff. And then I
35 started to find the common thread throughout everything and that's what I call God, because if
36 all throughout history all these people and all these circumstances achieve all this stuff and
37 underneath it all is this sense of awareness that we are a part of this thing but we're not the
38 only thing – that's when it was like, "OK, God, I know that what you are is different from what a
39 lot of people think you are and what that church taught me about you. Now I need to go and
40 use what I have gained to help set other people free because I was convinced that I wasn't loved
41 and this love has transformed me and if it has done this for me, what can it do for other people.
42 And so, I feel like God has called me to use my experiences to help set other people free, but
43 more than anything – to just love people because now I know what it feels like. It kills me to
44 think that there are people, especially children, who don't know what love feels like.

- 1 AJ: Wow, that's a powerful story.
- 2 LTR: Thank you. And God, in my interpretation of God, God is love and that's what the Bible that I
3 read says and that's how I interpret God to be in my life and so I feel like if anybody preaches
4 anything other than love, they're not preaching God.
- 5 AJ: Come on, preach it. So, Linden Hills UCC.
- 6 LTR: I'm under contract there for another year and after that, I don't know . . .
- 7 AJ: Is that a good spiritual home for you right now?
- 8 LTR: Absolutely. I have a few things kind of in the pipeline but I don't really want to speak too soon,
9 but right now it's great where I'm at.
- 10 AJ: Wow. So, when did you make this decision to pursue living your true self? I know . . . you sort
11 of alluded to it, but you haven't given me . . . you know, you had this marriage, and having
12 thought about being transgender, and that ended. Is that when you really pursued medical
13 transition.
- 14 LTR: Right around that time it is. So, in 2009, my mother passed away and . . .
- 15 AJ: I'm sorry.
- 16 LTR: Thanks. And the year before that, it's interesting – because that was the seven-year mark – the
17 year before that.
- 18 AJ: Right, so you had hit the seven-year mark.
- 19 LTR: I had hit the seven-year mark, so I knew all of the things – so the equivalent of an advanced
20 degree. I graduated with a couple of masters and I knew all of this stuff that I needed to know
21 and then I said, "OK, God, now I'm ready to be who you are calling me to be." And then my
22 mom died and I was like, "Huh, this is important because in order for me to be who I need to be,
23 I can't be connected to people or situations that require me to be diminished or something
24 other than who I am." And when she died, that was kind of the final release, because at that
25 point my grandmother had passed away, my dad had passed away, and now my mother was
26 gone, and I felt like, "OK, now I'm free to be."
- 27 AJ: Sure.
- 28 LTR: And then, shortly after that – shortly after my mother's passing, that friend said the thing about
29 transgender. And then, within a month, I had come out to everybody that I had known, as
30 transgender. And then, February of the following year – so like three months later, I started
31 seeing a therapist; that June I was on hormones; the following March I had surgeries. And so . . .
- 32 AJ: How has being transgender impacted your professional life?
- 33 LTR: It's been great.
- 34 AJ: Really?
- 35 LTR: It's been great. I mean . . .

- 1 AJ: I'm not quite sure if I've heard that before. I'm not saying it's not true, I absolutely believe you,
2 but . . .
- 3 LTR: This is the piece that's difficult to hear and so I'm going to say it because I feel like it needs to be
4 said. I live in a state that has a lot of racial dynamics that aren't really . . . we don't even know a
5 lot of what is happening because we haven't really created a culture in Minnesota where we can
6 dialogue at length about the deep impact of racism in our society. So, I would not have thrived
7 otherwise as a Black man in the same ways, but I'm less threatening as a trans Black man.
- 8 AJ: Hmmm.
- 9 LTR: And so, I can walk into some of the spaces because of the knowledge that I have and the
10 experience that I have, but then I can sit down at the table because I check off enough boxes
11 and I'm nice and I'm kind and I'm a polite Black man. And, all of those things essentially
12 communicates to me is that because I have this spirit that I do and I am as approachable as I am,
13 I can walk into some of these spaces that my skin color would not allow me entry into
14 otherwise. So, being trans has been the entry point for many conversations that if I just walked
15 in as a Black man . . .
- 16 AJ: That is an extremely astute observation. But, not everybody knows you're a trans man. You
17 encounter . . . I noticed in your personal information form, you live in . . .
- 18 LTR: Lakeville.
- 19 AJ: If somebody pulls you over for blowing through a stop sign, they don't know you're a trans man.
20 So, what is your interactions with institutions and other medical industry, educational industry,
21 police . . . ?
- 22 LTR: So, I'll talk about police first, just because that's so pressing.
- 23 AJ: Yeah, it is.
- 24 LTR: I'm terrified of the police. I know that all cops are not the same, just like all Black people or all
25 trans people are not the same. But, all cops are trained by the same system and they receive
26 the same information about people that they are paid to encounter. I live in a state that is very
27 segregated and I haven't been . . . like racism in Minnesota is very subtle, so I haven't had
28 anybody burning crosses in my yard, but I did get letters and concern when my two African
29 American nephews, who are under the age of 10, were at my home because neighbors were
30 scared that Black men were running loose in the neighborhood and were threatening to call the
31 cops and get the police involved. And that immediately sent me into fear . . .
- 32 AJ: Wait a minute – how old did you say these kids were?
- 33 LTR: Seven and nine now, but at the time they were six and eight. And so, the threat of . . . the fact
34 that the police station is less than a mile from my house, my nephews and I could be sitting on
35 my deck and get shot because we're threatening.
- 36 AJ: Right.

- 1 LTR: So, that's a reality that I live with every day. So, I'm not saying that the police specifically have
2 given me a reason to feel that way, but the dynamics in the neighborhood, the dynamics in our
3 state, in our country, all give me reason to feel that way.
- 4 AJ: Make you very aware, right.
- 5 LTR: So, that's how I feel about the police.
- 6 AJ: Oh, OK.
- 7 LTR: I've had to call the police – my nephew had an asthma attack and I called 9-1-1 and the cops got
8 there before the ambulance did and as the cop is trying to assess the situation . . .
- 9 AJ: Figure out the relationship.
- 10 LTR: He has his hand on his gun the whole time.
- 11 AJ: Wow.
- 12 LTR: I'm frantic. My nephew can't breathe and he's standing there asking questions with his hand on
13 his gun.
- 14 AJ: Hmmm.
- 15 LTR: So, that's how I feel about the police – the same way they feel about me, suspicious.
- 16 AJ: Suspicious.
- 17 LTR: Other institutions, I feel like I had a really great time in college and in high school and things like
18 that, so as far as the education system is concerned, I feel like there needs to be, obviously, a lot
19 of work in every institution regarding identities and regarding people and relationships and all of
20 that. But, I have not . . . I didn't transition in school so I never had to navigate that.
- 21 AJ: You identified as queer in those situations, but that never really came up in terms of . . .
- 22 LTR: No, because at that time I was still labeled as a Black woman and Black women are basically
23 invisible or really not as visible in major institutions of our society.
- 24 AJ: Sure, yeah.
- 25 LTR: So, I was able to fly under the radar as a perceived queer Black woman and then gain entry to
26 spaces that wanted to have a feminist voice because queer and Black and female automatically
27 means feminist.
- 28 AJ: Feminism, right.
- 29 LTR: That stopped, though, when I wrote a poem in college that ended up getting published called
30 *My Face of Feminism* and talked about how I was constantly being invited to all of these
31 predominantly white spaces but I was never really allowed to be there. They invited me to be
32 there, but none of the issues ever spoke to my issues. That's when I stopped getting invitations.
- 33 AJ: What was the title of this piece?

- 1 LTR: *My Face of Feminism.*
- 2 AJ: *My Face of Feminism.*
- 3 LTR: And, I say all that to say that we dress up a lot of the problems in our institutions by diverting
4 our attention to other things. That is . . . you learn that art, it's kind of a skill as a survival
5 mechanism that I use for my advantage. So, I navigate the systems very well because I know
6 that that's their intention – their intention isn't to care deeply about me, but their intention isn't
7 to harm me either. The intention is to kind of make sure that everything is OK and if that means
8 that we just pretend that everything isn't as bad as it is, then we will. But we see how that . . .
- 9 AJ: But that's harmful.
- 10 LTR: It is.
- 11 AJ: Yes.
- 12 LTR: It is.
- 13 AJ: It's not your intention but it's still very damaging – yeah.
- 14 LTR: It's like I know that I could talk about and name these things, but I have to assess whether or not
15 this group of people really cares enough about that, or do I need to advocate for those things in
16 another way because to spend any energy in this particular area is . . . not necessarily a waste of
17 time, but a waste of energy. And that's how I look at navigating in institutions – knowing when
18 to make a big deal out of something, knowing when to push the envelope, knowing when to
19 fight or advocate/push back or to just kind of remain. Survival is my goal with everything and it
20 always has been, my whole life. And so, anytime it feels like my survival is in jeopardy, then I
21 have to re-assess how things are going. But otherwise, staying alive, prospering, thriving – that's
22 where I'm at.
- 23 AJ: Yeah, that's your goal. Medical community? Have you experienced challenges or has that been
24 sort of a good process for you, as a trans person accessing trans-specific medical health care?
- 25 LTR: I've had no problems in Minnesota with that. Part of why I feel like I travel so much for work,
26 but it's like I have to keep my home base in Minnesota because I've had such success.
- 27 AJ: Wow, OK.
- 28 LTR: With the medical fields – access to medicine, access to insurance, all of that. I've had no
29 problems.
- 30 AJ: That's awesome, I'm happy to hear that.
- 31 LTR: I am too. Like surgeries – everything paid for. Hormones, everything – all of it, paid for. I was
32 homeless at the time that I got all of this started, and I had no money. I had savings for rent and
33 food so it was like I'm paying rent for this room, or whatever room I'm staying in, but I don't
34 have money for surgery.
- 35 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 LTR: And all of it, I managed to . . . again, navigate the systems to the point where I got everything
2 paid for.
- 3 AJ: Oh, wow. What do you think the relationship is between the L, the G, the B, and the T?
- 4 LTR: Communities who suffer are strengthened when they unite together. Sex and sexuality have
5 been lumped together for a long time because in this country, especially we were founded by
6 these pilgrims – these very pure people, all of it's been lumped together because they don't
7 want to really dig into talking about all of that because we, pure people, we don't talk about sex
8 and sexuality but we are sexual beings and there are some people who just can't hide who they
9 are and there are some people who would rather hide who they are because it's easier. But, the
10 out-LGBT people, or the LGB people, I think banded together because they had to. Sex and
11 sexuality, whether it's your orientation or your physical identity, all of those things – we didn't
12 go into those details, you just knew that you were . . . something.
- 13 AJ: Yeah, something . . . something other than straight.
- 14 LTR: And you had to be that something with other people who were also in that space because
15 society did not care for people enough to ensure that out LGB people could still have housing,
16 could still have families, could still have church homes, could still have jobs. So, we had to kind
17 of become community together, but I feel like we're past that point because I feel like it's one
18 thing for society to lump us all together and for us to find each other . . . kind of like when Black
19 slaves were brought to America, all of them spoke different languages and came from different
20 places, but they're all put on this boat at the same time and they're all dropped to all these
21 places where their identity has now become who they're with.
- 22 AJ: Yes.
- 23 LTR: But then when you separate beyond their skin color, they still have separate issues, they still
24 have separate lives, they still have things that impact them differently, and it's though they
25 decided, "We're not going to separate and care for ourselves, we're just going to still remain
26 one unit." Families would not have formed, all of these different organizations that were
27 started and initiatives/efforts/movements can't start from people that have just one identity.
- 28 AJ: Right.
- 29 LTR: And I feel like the LGB community banded together because we need safe spaces. Well, we're
30 beyond safe spaces now, we're beyond legislation for access to marriage or access to equal
31 opportunities for employment – we're beyond that. Not that those things have been secured for
32 everyone, but it's only been about gay and lesbian people.
- 33 AJ: Yeah.
- 34 LTR: And, the B gets drug along but how many out bisexual people are represented in mainstream
35 society that aren't stigmatized? How many out trans people? It's the same thing, but we have
36 gay and lesbian people that lead in many areas of our country. And yes, they still, obviously still
37 have some difficulties, but they can still have families, they can still get jobs, they can still go to
38 the bathroom legally. And they don't have to defend who they are. But if a bi- person says, "I'm

1 bisexual,” they have to now defend who they are. Or if a trans person says, “I’m trans,” they
2 have to wonder, “Can I go to the bathroom here?” So, I feel like we need to now separate from
3 being one community that . . . one rainbow flag with all these letters, but nobody really knows
4 how each of those letters are impacted every day and what the needs are specific to those
5 communities. I feel like we lost our identities because we stayed one identity for far too long.
6 That’s just my opinion, but I feel like there is a lot of trans activists that are making that very
7 known and taking the T out of that and saying, “Here are the things specific to our community
8 that we need to look at.”

9 AJ: Sure. And you think that is important?

10 LTR: Absolutely, because no one is going to do it for us. That’s like saying women waiting around for
11 men to change the laws that advocate for their best interests. No man is going to, just on his
12 own, wake up one day and say, “You know, I really want to make sure that every woman gets
13 paid the same amount as men.”

14 AJ: Right. Yeah, there’s no incentive for that – particularly since men are the primary owners of
15 corporations and all the things that generate money in our society.

16 LTR: And that’s why it’s important for us to be our own advocates and not really . . . I feel like for the
17 LGBT community, we expected everyone to advocate for us because we’re all in this community,
18 but when the most powerful people in the community were the gay and lesbian people and they
19 only advocated for their best interest, then we learned really quickly that the B and the T were
20 not really necessarily a part of the community, we’re just tacked on. But our issues were never
21 prioritized the same way that the issues for the L and the G were prioritized.

22 AJ: How does race play a role in LGBT communities?

23 LTR: This entire country was founded on the idea that Black people were sub-human, and that
24 message permeated every facet of our society. Everyone who has been born in this country
25 grew up with that same understanding and conditioning. Now however they perpetuate it, is
26 very different, but we all started from the same place and even Black people started from the
27 same place of, “We’re not valuable, we don’t have value.” If Black churches up until the 1980s
28 and 1990s had pictures of white Jesus, and Black people still using skin bleaching cream because
29 they feel like they have to be lighter in order to survive and the jobs and the opportunities go to
30 lighter skinned people, I don’t care if you’re gay or straight, you still have that same conditioning
31 where you believe or were taught that the lighter your skin is the better, the smarter, the
32 prettier, the further, etc., etc. And I feel like a lot of gay people, a lot of lesbian people, bi and
33 trans people, feel like well because we have shared oppression then we’re beyond the racist
34 part, and it’s like, “But, we haven’t even reconciled the racism and the pain and devastation that
35 racism has perpetuated, so how can we just skip past that and then talk about being trans
36 together?” We can’t.

37 AJ: Wow, what an analysis. Yeah. Have you ever worked for or volunteered at an LGBT-specific
38 organization? If so, which ones?

39 LTR: Yes. I volunteer for the Minnesota Trans Health Coalition.

- 1 AJ: Cool.
- 2 LTR: I did some work with OutFront Minnesota.
- 3 AJ: Were you a shot caller?
- 4 LTR: Yes, I was a shot caller – and some other things. I’ve built shelves and help decorate things.
5 OutFront Minnesota, I did some stuff with faith organizing, especially around the time of the
6 marriage amendment.
- 7 AJ: Marriage equality and all of that stuff, yeah.
- 8 LTR: And those are the two . . . oh, Black Trans Men, Incorporated.
- 9 AJ: Oh, really?
- 10 LTR: Yup. I did some work in the beginning years, doing a lot of workshops and trainings and we had
11 some partnerships with kind of getting products and stuff to trans people, transition supplies.
- 12 AJ: Sure. Yeah.
- 13 LTR: And then, I mean church – faith-based LGBT work, I’ve been doing for a while.
- 14 AJ: I know you invited me to the Black Trans Man’s Conference and I wasn’t able to go. Were you
15 able to go?
- 16 LTR: I ended up not going.
- 17 AJ: No?
- 18 LTR: Yeah. I felt like . . .
- 19 AJ: Have you been in the past?
- 20 LTR: Yes.
- 21 AJ: What is that environment? I mean, to see . . . I mean, we’ve come a long way from no trans
22 visibility whatsoever to now a specific Black Trans Man Conference that I think has been going
23 on for maybe five years now, at least – or for some time.
- 24 LTR: At least four or five years. Carter and Espy Brown, who are the organizers . . . I didn’t think I’d
25 cry so much throughout this conversation, they’ve basically created a family of several hundred
26 people that get together every year and it seems simple, right? Family reunion.
- 27 AJ: Right.
- 28 LTR: But none of the people there could go to their family reunions and be the fullness of who they
29 are.
- 30 AJ: OK, now I’m going about to cry.
- 31 LTR: And so, for a whole week we have workshops - workshops that talk about financial planning,
32 workshops that talk about family planning, workshops that talk about spirituality, wellness,

- 1 fitness, health, end-of-life planning, estate planning, all this stuff that you could get anywhere.
2 But not as a Black trans person. And so, then you have all those workshops and they're taught
3 mostly by trans people, almost exclusively Black people, but there are some white presenters
4 and some non-trans folks, but predominantly trans. And, you walk around and you see these
5 beautiful chocolate trans people – all different shades and shapes and identities. One year,
6 there was a pool party and it didn't matter if you had surgery or not, you could just be out in the
7 pool having a good time, right? And guys with their shorts on, their swim trunks, they don't
8 have to be in this hot binder and uncomfortable – they get to just be, man, out in the pool
9 having a good time.
- 10 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 11 LTR: They get to bring their wives or their girlfriends or their husbands or boyfriends, they get to
12 have family picnics and they get to bring their kids and have three-legged races and, you know,
13 barbeques. We don't get that. And so then, the last night or two there is an award ceremony
14 where everyone who has done anything to advocate on behalf of us as a whole, is nominated
15 for something or wins something. There's tons of categories and we recognize each other. It's
16 one thing when somebody else recognizes what you do, but it's another thing when you're
17 recognized by your own people.
- 18 AJ: Your own people, your own community.
- 19 LTR: And so, we're recognizing each other, lifting each other up. And then also that empowers us to
20 go back to the spaces where we come from, where we don't have as much support, and get
21 back on that grind – because you know that these people are watching, affected, and they care.
22 And then there's a ball – now I'm not big into the whole ball scene just because I have never
23 been connected, but there's a pageant, there are people that perform, that are celebrated for
24 who they are – their gifts, their beauty, their strength. They get to walk, they get to show who
25 they are, and then they get a chance to compete for prizes and money and travel and all this
26 stuff.
- 27 AJ: And prestige.
- 28 LTR: And prestige. And they're up against some really amazing people that do this for a living, so it's
29 not like, "Oh, this is just some . . ." Like in college, I threw a drag show and that was like people
30 that had never even seen drag, doing drag, but this is a ball scene where professionals who . . .
- 31 AJ: Do it every night.
- 32 LTR: Right. And then the week ends with a spiritual, interfaith worship service led by . . . the last time
33 I was with there was a non-denominational person, a Christian person, a Jewish person, and
34 then a person . . . Hindu. And we each led from our own spaces and, at that particular time –
35 you know, everybody is not Christian so everybody is not going to come up to me and ask for
36 prayer.
- 37 AJ: Right.

- 1 LTR: But, some people might go to this guy and chant with him or this woman and hold a space of
2 silence. And so, just recognizing that we all have different faith traditions as Black people. But
3 that week, or that organization, has changed my life because I didn't grow up around a lot of
4 Black people outside of the Black church. So, my context for relating to Black people has only
5 been through the Black church.
- 6 AJ: Sure, religious sort of connections.
- 7 LTR: And all of the Black people in the Black church said these things and did these things to me, and
8 then I had some Black friends at school, but as far as deep relationships . . . I mean, I only dated .
9 . . I think I've only been with one Black woman.
- 10 AJ: Really? OK.
- 11 LTR: And now I'm about to marry one. So, that's great.
- 12 AJ: Oh, my goodness. OK.
- 13 LTR: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: You're in a relationship now.
- 15 LTR: I am, and it's the one I feel like.
- 16 AJ: This is the one. "I'm about to marry her now." You just said that.
- 17 LTR: And she knows that I'm trans and she grew up in the same kind of environment that I did. We
18 speak the same language.
- 19 AJ: In the Black church?
- 20 LTR: Yes.
- 21 AJ: Is she involved in the church now?
- 22 LTR: No, but she does religious and interfaith work and she graduated from seminary with the ability
23 to do some work outside of the church but within the structures of how people gather in
24 spiritual community. So, I feel like it is still church, but it's beyond what we know of as church.
- 25 AJ: Sure.
- 26 LTR: It's intentional communities and faith forming that isn't tied to one institutional marker.
- 27 AJ: Right.
- 28 LTR: And so, in that way, she's brilliant and her work complements mine because, as much as I am a
29 minister, she's the daughter of a minister. But she does work to bring people to a deeper space
30 and knowing of spirituality and God, but not necessarily this particular denomination.
- 31 AJ: Oh, wow. I'm so happy for you.
- 32 LTR: Thank you.

- 1 AJ: That's incredible.
- 2 LTR: Yeah, thank you. It's funny, I met her at the Creating Change Conference . . .
- 3 AJ: Really? Which one?
- 4 LTR: January. We saw each other before that at a work conference.
- 5 AJ: So, in Chicago?
- 6 LTR: Yes. We saw each other at a work conference last fall and talking about work, I meet a lot of
7 people at work conferences. So, it's like, "Oh, yeah, we should connect and do this project, do
8 that – great."
- 9 AJ: And then nothing ever happens.
- 10 LTR: Nothing happens. And then I saw her at Creating Change and I'm like, "Hmmm, I really do want
11 to work with you, we've got to figure something out." And then we ended up kind of having an
12 impromptu date, we didn't call it a date but that's really what it was. We were having dinner
13 and drinks and talking for four hours – that's a date. And God, I haven't stopped thinking about
14 her ever since. It was like . . . that was the first time, as a man, I was sitting across from a
15 woman and we were just . . .
- 16 AJ: Dining.
- 17 LTR: That was awesome, and I've never been that comfortable with a woman before, in that sense –
18 as me. And I'm like if she can receive all me and I can be all of me, I need to make sure that this
19 is a thing. And so, I started to slowly pursue her without her really knowing that that's what was
20 happening. She was finishing up her internship in her masters. She lives in Chicago.
- 21 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 22 LTR: And so, she's like, "I've just got so much on my plate." She was talking about coming out to her
23 family as queer and all this stuff going on. So, I was like, "OK, I don't want to add any more
24 pressure, so I won't . . ." She doesn't remember saying this, but she said it, "I don't have time to
25 be thinking about dating anybody and all that, I've got to do this, this, and this." I was like, "OK,
26 well I'll wait until these things are done and then . . ." Seriously, the day after her graduation, I
27 was like, "So, now that that's over, what about this?"
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 LTR: She's awesome.
- 30 AJ: Well, good luck with everything. I hope that really works out.
- 31 LTR: I do too.
- 32 AJ: Have you guys been able to connect with each other? Chicago is not that far away.
- 33 LTR: No. She graduated in May and we had been talking now and then, but the day after she
34 graduated and I started to tell her about my feelings, then at the end of May, I got in the car and
35 I drove to Chicago and I asked her to be my girlfriend, talked to her dad and told her dad . . .

- 1 AJ: Really?
- 2 LTR: Yes.
- 3 AJ: Wow.
- 4 LTR: Yes, and . . .
- 5 AJ: Lawrence, this is a thing.
- 6 LTR: It is a thing and we're planning what that thing looks like for the future. But, she loves me and
7 it's a God kind of love.
- 8 AJ: Love is so beautiful.
- 9 LTR: It empowers me because I feel like in this season, God is calling me to love at a greater level and
10 I can't love at that level if I don't have love at that level. So, I feel like this is a gift because I'm
11 ready to go out and do so much in the world, but I need to be able to also express that energy in
12 a personal way. So, it's a great feeling.
- 13 AJ: Wow. Where do you see the trans community in the next 50 years, Lawrence?
- 14 LTR: Oh, my goodness. Before that, I see trans presidents . . .
- 15 AJ: Oh!
- 16 LTR: Heads of state.
- 17 AJ: Alrighty then.
- 18 LTR: I see book projects and movies and not just featuring trans people but written by trans people.
19 And, so well-integrated in society that the way we talk about, "Oh, this woman XYZ," we'll say,
20 "This trans person XYZ," and it's not going to be a negative thing for people. And in some cases,
21 it might not even be necessary, but as we continue to try to find language, I think our language
22 even for trans people in the next 50 years will change. I don't think that we will have the same
23 words that we use right now. I think that we'll be such an advanced society, only because of the
24 activism of trans people.
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 LTR: But I think that trans people in the last five years have accomplished more than any other group
27 of people in the same amount of time. You talk about when I first came out, Googling the word
28 – some resources came up. Now you Google the word, books come up, people come up,
29 pictures of people with the President come up. That's all been in the last five years.
- 30 AJ: Yeah.
- 31 LTR: Fifty years? We're going to have . . . I'm telling you, heads of state, presidents in our own
32 countries and islands and resort companies. We have a trans camp right now, we have a couple
33 of organizations that host camps for trans people, but we're going to have resorts, we're going
34 to have organizations that aren't just for trans medical care but spiritual care, athletes, sports
35 care. I just see the trans community really blossoming because now that we know we can

- 1 thrive, we will. Before we thought we had to hide and many did, and they lived wonderful lives
2 – some of them.
- 3 AJ: Some.
- 4 LTR: And many of them didn't though because you can't thrive in isolation.
- 5 AJ: Right.
- 6 LTR: And now that we see all of these trans people around the world doing all this stuff in all these
7 countries and legislators and stuff, I'm like . . . social media gives us a window that we didn't
8 have before and that window inspires so much hope. So, in 50 years, glass ceilings are going to
9 disappear.
- 10 AJ: Wow. I am just so honored, so delighted, so inspired by this conversation.
- 11 LTR: Thank you very much. Likewise. Thank you for everything that you do, but also understanding
12 that the fight isn't a choice, it's just what we do because it's who we are.
- 13 AJ: It's because of who we are. Lawrence, thank you.
- 14 LTR: Thank you.
- 15 AJ: Until we meet again.