

Tracie Jada O'Brien  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

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

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

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- 1    Andrea Jenkins            -AJ  
2    Tracie Jada O'Brien       -TJO  
3
- 4    AJ:        So, hello.
- 5    TJO:       How you doing? Welcome to San Diego.
- 6    AJ:        Thank you, thank you, thank you. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the  
7               Transgender Oral History Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. I am  
8               in San Diego, California today. Today is January 13, 2017. It is Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> and I am proud to  
9               say that it is a very lucky day for me – and it's a lucky day because I get to sit here with Tracie,  
10              the legend, Jada O'Brien. How you doing today, Tracie?
- 11   TJO:       I'm doing wonderful.
- 12   AJ:        Yeah.
- 13   TJO:       I'm doing wonderful. I'm blessed, I'm so happy that you're here and I'm doing wonderful.
- 14   AJ:        Wonderful. Thank you so much. It's Friday – have you had a good week?
- 15   TJO:       I've had a wonderful week – wonderful blessings throughout the week, wonderful blessings.
- 16   AJ:        So, just to make sure we have all the spelling right and pronunciations and everything, can you  
17               state your name, spell your name, and then tell me what is your gender identity today and what  
18               was your gender assigned at birth, and then what pronouns do you use? That's a lot of  
19               questions, so if you need me to help out remembering just . . .
- 20   TJO:       I did my research last night so I knew those questions were coming and here we go. So, my  
21               name is Tracie Jada O'Brien. Tracie, T-r-a-c-i-e; Jada, J-a-d-a; O'Brien, O-'-B-r-i-e-n. I was  
22               assigned male at birth, I identify as female now. My preferred pronouns are she, her, diva, and  
23               legendary.
- 24   AJ:        Yes, see I knew legendary.
- 25   TJO:       Yes, you did; yes, you did; yes, you did. Did I forget one, did I forget something?
- 26   AJ:        No, you got them all - you were perfect, spot one.
- 27   TJO:       Good, good.
- 28   AJ:        So, Tracie, this is one of the questions that I ask and you did your research so you may know,  
29               what is the earliest thing you remember in life?
- 30   TJO:       I remember that question too. The earliest thing I remember in life was that I was different. I  
31               didn't know what it was, but there was something about me that was different. It was just  
32               something that was different. I can't identify what it is, but it was different – I just knew I was  
33               different. A feeling, an existence . . . yeah, I didn't feel connected. I didn't feel connected – I felt  
34               lonely and lost.
- 35   AJ:        Wow. Was there one specific thing or that's just kind of your feeling as a child?

- 1 TJO: Well, I think this is where it stems from. My mother had three children and I'm the youngest of  
2 three children. My mother and father were never married and my father's parents raised us  
3 and my brother and sister lived with my father's parents, and I spent the first five years with my  
4 mother and then I was taken to live with my grandparents. And there is when . . . I felt  
5 abandoned. I didn't have any types of feelings – I just felt alone, scared, and abandoned. And  
6 then being a child of an African American family, you don't question nothing – you don't say a  
7 word, you just do.
- 8 AJ: You just do.
- 9 TJO: And I did it, but it didn't feel right to me. I felt that she'd abandoned me, I didn't want to be  
10 with my grandparents. But I was there, I had my brother and my sister who were older than me  
11 . . . it just didn't feel right to me, it just didn't feel right.
- 12 AJ: Yeah, no – I can imagine how that could make you feel like you were not connected and  
13 different, right?
- 14 TJO: Different, yes.
- 15 AJ: Because, literally, you were treated like you were different – your other two siblings went away  
16 and you were there. Where did you grow up?
- 17 TJO: I grew up in St. Louis. I grew up in St. Louis in the 1950s and the 1960s.
- 18 AJ: St. Louis, Missouri.
- 19 TJO: St. Louis, Missouri, on the west side. St. Louis, Missouri – in an all African American  
20 neighborhood.
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 TJO: We were the first Black family to move into the west side of St. Louis when we moved in there.  
23 By the time I left at 19, it was a completely Black neighborhood – this was the 1950s and 1960s.
- 24 AJ: Right, so it was pretty segregated.
- 25 TJO: Yes.
- 26 AJ: What was it like as a young Black person growing up in the 1950s? Jim Crowe was still . . . I  
27 mean, Jim Crowe . . . well, it hasn't really ended yet, but it was sort of in decline, I would say, but  
28 were there still colored-only signs and those kinds of things when you were coming up?
- 29 TJO: In St. Louis, no. I had no knowledge of any of that that was going on until we became teenagers.  
30 I think living in St. Louis, that was in that era where African Americans were migrating from the  
31 south.
- 32 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 33 TJO: So, from Mississippi and Arkansas and that nature. My grandparents are originally from  
34 Mississippi and so they came up to St. Louis and Chicago for a better life – to get good jobs.
- 35 AJ: Yes, my story is exactly the same.

- 1 TJO: It's exactly what they did and did a very good job of it – migration and starting a family and  
2 making a life as an African American family unit, going to church and everything like that. So, I  
3 didn't know nothing about any of that until later on with Martin Luther King and then John F.  
4 Kennedy. I knew about it then but it was from afar – on television.
- 5 AJ: It wasn't a personal experience.
- 6 TJO: It wasn't happening in St. Louis. It wasn't personal to the point where I could not go to school.  
7 We were even bussed, we were bussed to white schools and we thought it was fun. We'd say,  
8 "Oh, my God, it's fun." There was nothing there from the grown-ups to make us think that there  
9 was any type of danger or any type of difference – it was exciting.
- 10 AJ: That's good.
- 11 TJO: I think, looking back in hindsight, to be raised by my grandparents was really significant and  
12 really a good gesture on my parent's part because back in those days it was kind of customary  
13 for the whole extended family, young adults having kids and having their parents raise the kids –  
14 they couldn't take of the kids. The African American structure had a strong foundation then  
15 with the grandparents and the aunts and the great-grandparents. It was a nice family structure,  
16 which I totally, totally loved.
- 17 AJ: Yes, absolutely.
- 18 TJO: I totally loved that, I always felt safe in my family structure. My grandmother was in a  
19 wheelchair and my father died when we were 8. My mother, she was away – she was with  
20 another person.
- 21 AJ: Sure.
- 22 TJO: I always wanted to be with her so I was always acting out and trying to be with her and not  
23 understanding what was really going on, feeling abandoned, feeling pain, feeling hurt. And at  
24 the time, feeling like I was trapped in the wrong existence, if you will – always feeling I was  
25 female even from a very, very early age.
- 26 AJ: Did other people pick up on that? Did you express that at all?
- 27 TJO: Yes, yes – I expressed it at a very early age and I learned at a very early age that that was not to  
28 be tolerated.
- 29 AJ: Yes.
- 30 TJO: I learned at a very early age that was not to be tolerated. It destroyed my brother because he  
31 felt like he had to take up for me, he was embarrassed of me, and so it really made me feel bad,  
32 but then here I'm trying to figure out what's going on. And then also, the whole family thing of  
33 not talking about it.
- 34 AJ: Yes.
- 35 TJO: There's this elephant in the room named Tracie but nobody is talking about this effeminate  
36 child, just giving the effeminate child these looks and these whoopings and stuff and acting a

- 1           certain way. But what did happen was affirmation – affirmation through touching, affirmation  
2           through sexual proclivity with little boys. Everybody picked up on it because I used to play  
3           Tarzan and I was always Jane. And there was always this touching and feeling which affirmed  
4           my femininity and that's how it kind of affirmed my femininity.
- 5   AJ:     Tracie, I don't usually talk about myself in these interviews, but you know I grew up 500 or 600  
6           miles away from St. Louis, up in Chicago, and maybe 10 years later than you, but I actually had  
7           those same . . . we would play house and I would be the momma. And little boys, they just  
8           knew . . . I don't know how they knew, but they did. So, that happened to you . . . so, when you  
9           were in school were you picked on in the neighborhood, did kids try to beat you up?
- 10   TJO:    Well, not necessarily, because I had an older brother and sister. And, we were particularly close  
11           as a family unit so that very seldom happened - just very seldom happened; sometimes at  
12           school that would happen but not too much because the thing about it was, I was really afraid. I  
13           really was always nervous about not knowing what was going on and not wanting to be beat up  
14           or be taken advantage of.
- 15   AJ:     Be picked on, yeah.
- 16   TJO:    Be picked on. So, I was always very cautious but then it was OK. I was kind of a small, chubby  
17           child, but then at 14, I sprouted up to 6'3" and I've been this height since I was 14.
- 18   AJ:     Is that right?
- 19   TJO:    And no one bothered me.
- 20   AJ:     No one messed with you.
- 21   TJO:    But then often what I did was, I said, "I'll become the clown." Nobody laughed at the clown,  
22           they laughed with the clown.
- 23   AJ:     Right.
- 24   TJO:    So, I became the clown, the class clown. And so, everybody loved me. I was just this tall lanky  
25           cissy silly person.
- 26   AJ:     Oh, wow.
- 27   TJO:    And then going to school following in my brother and sister's footsteps because I was always a  
28           year or two years behind them. So, people knew I was coming because I had older brothers and  
29           sisters. So, to me, it was such a wonderful time growing up except for that part of me that  
30           wasn't acknowledged – that silent part of me that kept me in so much pain, that silent part of  
31           me that kept me so isolated from everybody else. I didn't know what was going on and nobody  
32           would talk about it, nobody could help me figure it out – only this occasional touch, this  
33           occasional caress, just occasional affection from strangers on the street. You understand?  
34           That's what it was.
- 35   AJ:     Yeah, wow. So, when did you begin to really express your inner-self?

- 1 TJO: From the very beginning, but I think I felt more freer, if you will. I felt more freer at 15. I got a  
2 job at the International House of Pancakes.
- 3 AJ: IHOP.
- 4 TJO: IHOP, as a busboy. And, that's when I saw the nightlife of St. Louis. The Gaslamp Quarter in the  
5 1960s.
- 6 AJ: The Gaslamp Quarter.
- 7 TJO: The Gaslamp Quarter in the 1960s. It was this . . . that's where Ike and Tina Turner was.
- 8 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 9 TJO: Yeah, Ike and Tina Turner and there was BB King, all these kind of people - there was this whole  
10 jazz and blues scene down there. And, I would come home late at night, catching the bus home,  
11 and I saw all kind of fantastic stuff. I saw prostitutes, I saw pimps, I started . . . people that were  
12 dressed as females but they weren't females - I saw drag queens, I saw a drag queen. But then  
13 also, let me go back. Another thing that kept me safe growing up - every place I went to school,  
14 there was a cissy. Every place I went to school there was a person like me there - even in grade  
15 school, even in high school, by the time I got to high school there was about eight of us. I'm  
16 serious.
- 17 AJ: Did you all hang out together?
- 18 TJO: We hung out together - yes we did. We hung out together, we'd get chased down the street.  
19 At the time, it was the 1960s, we wore pea coats and then we wore these ski caps, and we  
20 permed our hair and had our hair going back. We had the pea coats in the back of our head, like  
21 a chignon - like a chignon or a fall back here.
- 22 AJ: Oh, yeah.
- 23 TJO: With our pea coat. And we'd be walking down the street and people would throw rocks at us.
- 24 AJ: Oh, no.
- 25 TJO: One time, we were literally running for our lives - they were throwing bricks and rocks and glass  
26 bottles at us. This was our life, if you were a cissy in St. Louis and they chased you, you had to  
27 run for your life.
- 28 AJ: Right.
- 29 TJO: And I literally ran up out of there at 19. I sure did. I couldn't take it. I knew . . . At 14, I knew my  
30 destiny however it was going to be, that I was going to be as female as I could possibly be  
31 because I found the Christine Jorgensen story at the library. That's how my path laid itself out to  
32 me. I was at the library and I found the Christine Jorgensen story. I took the book home, I stole  
33 it, and put it under my bed. I had it under my bed for the rest of the time I was in St. Louis. So, I  
34 knew there was a way, a path.
- 35 AJ: There was a possibility.



- 1 TJO: There was a possibility and a path for me. So, but being 6'3" at 14, I still came . . . I was so  
2 depressed. I was so depressed - all my friends were like 5'3", 5'7", 5'8" and I'm 6'3" and I'm  
3 trying to fit into my female self.
- 4 AJ: Right.
- 5 TJO: So, I said, "OK, I'm not going to eat." So, I stopped eating - I stopped eating. I guess I may have  
6 developed an eating disorder. I could see myself being big and big and big, because it was all  
7 about, for me, trying to be safe.
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 TJO: It was all about trying to get from one point to another point without having bottles thrown at  
10 you. I've had some awful, awful words said to me all of my entire life. And bullying - bullying  
11 comes in many forms - emotional bullying, verbal bullying, etc. And there wasn't much physical  
12 bullying, but there's a lot of verbal bullying - like "faggot," "cissy," "punk." All these kind of  
13 awful things. I endured that, I endured that. I'd go home, I wouldn't tell anybody about it, I'd  
14 just keep it all in. And then, I'd be traumatized. I was sexually molested during that time as well  
15 by my stepbrother. I was sexually molested but I didn't know at the time that that was sexual  
16 molestation. I thought that was affirmation of my femininity - it came to me in that way. I was  
17 really confused, because it's really sad and it's really unfortunate that gender-variant people,  
18 non-binary people, can grow up in the construct of male and female and not have a place - not  
19 have a place of nurturance, not have a place of understanding because those formative years  
20 are very, very, very important. I know it's important . . . it would be just as important for me as  
21 it is today, it's very important.
- 22 AJ: Oh, wow. So, you ran up out of St. Louis at 19. Where did you go?
- 23 TJO: Well, let me go back a little bit. So, I met my friend, we were all friends, and there was this ball  
24 in St. Louis called the Miss Fannie's Ball.
- 25 AJ: Miss Fannie's Ball.
- 26 TJO: Miss Fannie's Ball. And this was a drag queen ball, they'd have it every Halloween in the Black  
27 neighborhood and everybody went.
- 28 AJ: Oh, wow - even the straight people that called . . .
- 29 TJO: Oh, yeah - the straight people went, it was a straight affair. It was a straight fair. And like I said,  
30 there were beauticians around and they were very gender-variant. OK, this was during the  
31 Motown era where the Diana Ross hairstyle was in nature, so the beauticians who were gay  
32 guys . . .
- 33 AJ: The big bouffants.
- 34 TJO: They would have their hair done and they'd still have on boy's clothes - it was called jojo drag.  
35 It was called jojo drag - half in drag, half not in drag, and these were those effeminate  
36 beauticians. I would always see them and which my mother was . . . later, attached me to later,  
37 my mom did. So, I saw this. At 17, I went to my first drag ball and that's how I met some other

- 1 girls that were in drag that were engaging in cross-gender apparel – dressing up in female  
2 clothes. That was fun and one of the girls had came to San Francisco. Now we're teenagers,  
3 we're all teenagers now – 17 and 18, and she had came to San Francisco, she had just came back  
4 and said it was beautiful out in San Francisco – you could be yourself, you could make money  
5 and stuff like that. But, "I had to have sex for money." Girls could go out there and make  
6 money. I said, "What are you talking about? I would never do that for money."
- 7 AJ: Right.
- 8 TJO: So, that's how I heard about San Francisco. OK. So, then, like I said, I was away from my mom –  
9 my mom was often not in the picture, so she moved back to St. Louis and she got married. I was  
10 acting up – I was 17, and I eventually went to live with my mother. I got the chance to move  
11 back in with her. So, I was so happy to move in with her and she gave me these strict rules that .  
12 . . and this really hurts me to this day. She said, "I'll give you a key to the back door, you can't  
13 use the front door. You're going to go to school to be a beautician because that's what you folks  
14 do."
- 15 AJ: Wow.
- 16 TJO: And, "There will be none of your friends over here." I'm like, "OK." So, that was it. I went to  
17 beautician school, I went to cosmetology school. I didn't like it, but I went. So, I was trying to be  
18 with her but I was 18 and going on 19 and it just wasn't working for me. It just wasn't working. I  
19 just didn't feel whole, I didn't feel together. So, the opportunity presented itself and I left and  
20 went to San Francisco and I've never been back. I have never been back to St. Louis – and that  
21 was 1970. I arrived in Palo Alto, California, in 1970 with some other girlfriends of mine who had  
22 already been out here. So, I stayed with some girlfriends of mine and then we started the  
23 transition process. We started taking hormones and then we started to come to San Francisco.
- 24 AJ: Underground hormones or were you getting it prescribed by a doctor?
- 25 TJO: It was called the Center for Special Problems in San Francisco.
- 26 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 27 TJO: The Center for Special Problems.
- 28 AJ: The Center for Special Problems.
- 29 TJO: I went there, you could see the doctor – he would do an examination, he would give you this  
30 little envelope full of hormones - these were red pills, little red magic pills. And then he also  
31 gave you a letter to take to the DMV to change your name and your gender marker on your ID.
- 32 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 33 TJO: And that's how mine was changed. And to this day, I've had nothing else done with that. So, at  
34 that very same time, I took it to the DMV and I went to the DMV and I got my name and my  
35 gender marker changed. So, I've always been Tracie O'Brien and female gender since I was 19. I  
36 never had it legally changed because it didn't matter to me if my ID says a certain thing.
- 37 AJ: Sure, yeah.

- 1 TJO: And now when I get my social security, it just comes together because I only worked two years  
2 prior to transitioning. But, I had the same social security card number, but just both names  
3 come. So, that was never an issue for me. I didn't work again until I was 40. I was living the life.
- 4 AJ: The life, yes. The life – what is the life? Tell me about the life.
- 5 TJO: Looking for a place to belong . . . looking for a place to belong. That's why I moved to San  
6 Francisco. Looking for a place to belong. When I got there, I found the bars, I found the streets,  
7 I found fun, I found drugs, I found just a whole way of life that was totally foreign to me. But, it  
8 was what I was shown. There were girls walking the streets, there were girls on the stage  
9 performing – that's what I saw, so that's what I did. So, I met other people there . . . one thing  
10 about San Francisco, everybody there was from someplace else.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 TJO: Detroit, Hawaii, from all over the world.
- 13 AJ: Japan.
- 14 TJO: Japan – yeah. That's what I liked about it – all types of girls and we all hung together. That's  
15 where I first learned that hurt people hurt people. I mean, there was so much pain. I could  
16 never understand why the girls would hurt each other and take advantage of each other. I  
17 didn't understand that until years later when I got clean and sober and I re-evaluated my life  
18 and I realized it. How can you expect people, who leave home without many social or  
19 educational skills, to be able to act in any type of mature way? I'm a trans woman, I'm a woman  
20 of trans experience, none of that was ever nurtured in me. I was always trying to present  
21 myself, I was always trying to get to a place where I'd be OK – not knowing how really to  
22 communicate, not knowing really how to be intimate, not really knowing how to feel. All I knew  
23 was that I was different, I was hurt, I was angry – and that's how I interacted in the world.  
24 That's how almost everybody else interacted in the world but just didn't realize it at the time.  
25 That was the life in San Francisco. We were bar girls, we were show girls, we were hookers, I  
26 went to jail. It was fun, it was very much like Stonewall. There was nothing to being in a queen's  
27 bar and the police pull up, clear out the bar, put us in the paddy wagon and we'd go to jail for  
28 the night.
- 29 AJ: So, was this in Palo Alto or San Francisco.
- 30 TJO: San Francisco – this was in San Francisco.
- 31 AJ: There's a club in San Francisco . . . I've been there.
- 32 TJO: The Black Rose?
- 33 AJ: Not the Black Rose.
- 34 TJO: Divas?
- 35 AJ: Divas – yes. Divas.
- 36 TJO: Divas on Post Street.

- 1 AJ: Yes.
- 2 TJO: Divas, at the time Divas Bar was called the Roadrunner and the Track and the Black Rose and the  
3 181 – and the Windjam. That was the disco days too. It was wonderful . . . it was wonderful. It  
4 was always misty and raining. I loved the misting and the rain – it always had this romantic feel  
5 to it.
- 6 AJ: Sylvester – did you ever meet Sylvester?
- 7 TJO: Yes, I met Sylvester. I met Sylvester with the Cockettes. The Cockettes was this type of avant  
8 garde show production of live performers. There was a drag show performance and there was a  
9 live performance. Sylvester was a part of the Cockettes, as a matter of fact, the only Black  
10 person in the Cockettes. Speaking about . . .
- 11 AJ: The Cockettes? How do you spell that, do you know?
- 12 TJO: Cockettes?
- 13 AJ: Oh, the Cockettes. C-o-c-k-e-t-t-e – yeah, the Cockettes. I remember them. That's how  
14 Sylvester started.
- 15 TJO: Yeah, that's how he started. And then he went on, his claim to fame was the Cockettes. And  
16 the thing about it was, it was one of the only Black gay bars in San Francisco where Two Tons of  
17 Fun used to work at the door.
- 18 AJ: Oh, really.
- 19 TJO: Yeah, it was all a part of the community. It was called Bojangles, the only Black LGBT bar that  
20 was downtown, in the Tenderloin of San Francisco. The Tenderloin was a seedy part of town in  
21 San Francisco that was the world for the Black LGBT – for all the LGBT, most of the trans  
22 community.
- 23 AJ: Mostly trans.
- 24 TJO: Mostly trans – of all different ethnicities.
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 TJO: And the men who loved them.
- 27 AJ: Yes.
- 28 TJO: And the men who loved to pay them – and the men who loved to kill them.
- 29 AJ: It's Raining Men! Hallelujah!
- 30 TJO: I tell you . . . oh my God, it was fun. It was just heaven on earth. But then, it was almost like a  
31 whirlwind. It was almost like Dorothy going to the Wizard of Oz.
- 32 AJ: In the hurricane or the tornado or whatever.
- 33 TJO: Yeah, it was just so fast, you could really get caught up. Getting high was an occasional thing, it  
34 was the 1970s, you know – indulging. And what I realized I was doing was I was getting high
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- 1           because I was so depressed. Also, let me go back to when I was in high school. My sister went  
2           to college, my brother was a track star and I had envisioned myself with this big afro, this long  
3           maxi skirt and going to Lincoln University as my female self. But that didn't happen because I  
4           just couldn't see myself being able to do that. I hadn't transitioned. But what life did show me  
5           was the Streets of San Francisco.
- 6    AJ:     Yeah.
- 7    TJO:    And that's where I was. It took a while for me to understand this can't be it for me, this can't be  
8           it for me. This is what the world is showing me what people like me do. I didn't have the  
9           wherewithal to do anything different, I didn't have the confidence to know that I could do  
10          anything different – that's where I was.
- 11   AJ:     Do something different, yes.
- 12   TJO:    And so, I almost died. One thing I can say for certain, one thing I can say for certain, is that I  
13          grew up in church and I have this . . . I remember going to Sunday School, went to 11 o'clock  
14          service, went to the Easter Cantata, the Christmas Cantata – I really grew up in church. I loved  
15          going to church and I loved the choir. We had the traditional choir and we had the Gospel Choir.  
16          The Gospel Choir used to give me chills – for whatever reason, it used to give me chills. And  
17          there's this song called, "Jesus be a fence, all around me every day. Jesus, I want you to protect  
18          me as I travel along the way." That's my song, that's my song.
- 19   AJ:     Wow, Jesus Be a Fence Around Me Every Day.
- 20   TJO:    So, I clung to that – I clung to that and I used to look up at the sky and ask God to please help  
21          me, to please take care of me, and he did – he always did. When it was time to leave San  
22          Francisco, my God plucked me out of San Francisco and brought me here, because had I not, I  
23          probably would have been dead by now – dead from prostitution, dead from murder, dead from  
24          drugs, or dead from HIV/AIDS. I would have been. So, I came to San Diego in 1980 and I came  
25          here and I continued to be a hooker. By that time I was so deep into my depression and my  
26          drug use, I didn't see any way out, so I went into the nightlife of San Diego and that's where I  
27          just inhabited for almost the next 10 years and then I started going to jail down here, as  
28          opposed to San Francisco. In San Francisco, I went to jail for obstructing the sidewalk and I'd get  
29          out the next day. I have about 100 citations.
- 30   AJ:     Oh, wow.
- 31   TJO:    When you go to jail here in San Diego for prostitution, you stay a while. So, I would go to jail  
32          and I stayed a while many, many times. And the last time . . .
- 33   AJ:     Were you in the men's penitentiary or the women's?
- 34   TJO:    Oh, no. We were in the queen's tank. Every county jail has a queen's tank.
- 35   AJ:     What?

- 1 TJO: Every county jail had this place for the effeminate queens, it's called the queen's tank. And  
2 that's where the girls would go and that's where the trustees would flock to try and take care  
3 of us and try to get to have sex with them.
- 4 AJ: Really?
- 5 TJO: "Which broad would do sexual favors?" I learned that a long time ago, since I was a kid, use  
6 your sexual proclivity to get what you want.
- 7 AJ: Right.
- 8 TJO: And I think that was my type of intimacy because I didn't know any other type of intimacy  
9 growing up. If you touched me, I felt affirmed. I couldn't talk to you and get any kind of sense  
10 out of that. So then, so the last time I went to jail, I had got to a point in my life where I was  
11 homeless, I was toothless, and I was 39 years old. I was walking down the streets downtown  
12 San Diego and I looked into a store window and I saw a reflection of a person I didn't know.
- 13 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 14 TJO: I saw an old toothless man looking back at me. I had never, ever seen that before.
- 15 AJ: Wow.
- 16 TJO: I was like, "Oh, my God." And shortly thereafter, I got busted and I was supposed to go to the  
17 penitentiary because I had petty theft, I used to steal out of the stores for my habit.
- 18 AJ: Sure.
- 19 TJO: I was living the life, I was a downtrodden transgender person. I'm proud of that to this – it's  
20 who I am. It's a part of who I am and a part of my history. I lived . . . I went to any length to be  
21 real to myself, to be my transgender female self, just doing and showing what we could do. I  
22 always wanted to do better but I didn't know how. So, I went to jail but this time it was the  
23 height of the HIV pandemic and I was . . .
- 24 AJ: The 1980s, yeah.
- 25 TJO: Yeah. And I had got really thin; really, really thing since I was homeless on the street and I  
26 thought I was HIV positive. And also, I had a petty with a prior which was automatic prison time.
- 27 AJ: Because this was . . . three strikes in California, right?
- 28 TJO: Right, so I thought I was going to go to prison. I thought, "OK, I'll get me a husband and I'll get  
29 some new teeth." So, still thinking that street . . .
- 30 AJ: Stinkin' thinking is what they call it, right?
- 31 TJO: Stinkin' thinking, that hustler . . . that low-life level of living low. So, I went to jail. I had an HIV  
32 test and the test was negative. I was like, "Hmmm, interesting." Then I went to court; the petty  
33 theft charge did not come up but an old prostitution case came up. They gave me six months in  
34 the county jail.
- 35 AJ: Wow.

- 1 TJO: I sat there and watched all the girls I was in the queen's tank with, they all went to prison except  
2 for me.
- 3 AJ: And you thought you were going to prison.
- 4 TJO: I thought I was going to prison. I was just dumbfounded. So then, this other girl came in and  
5 she had been to Stepping Stone. I said, "What is Stepping Stone?" Well, Stepping Stone is a  
6 drug and alcohol program – you can go there, get your hormones and you can get yourself back  
7 together, get real pretty, and go back to the stroll. "What? I'm going to go there." That's what  
8 she told me. I said, "I'm going to go there, I'm going to go there." This is my fence, this is my  
9 Jesus built a fence, this is my fence. So, I called them and I talked to Scott Miller, and Scott  
10 Miller said, "OK, Tracie, you want to come to Stepping Stone, OK. Call me every Tuesday." So, I  
11 found myself calling him every Tuesday and my release day was December 25, 1991.
- 12 AJ: Christmas Day.
- 13 TJO: Christmas morning – early, like 2 o'clock in the morning. And Stepping Stone was there to pick  
14 me up. I was so scared, but I went – I was so scared, but I went. They picked me up and took  
15 me to Stepping Stone. It was the middle of the night. They gave me a blanket, I went to one of  
16 the houses – I was on Central Avenue, I went to sleep. The next morning, it was Christmas  
17 morning, I was a Christmas baby. I was sitting in the corner. I have a picture, I was so tore up.  
18 Everybody hugged me and gave me presents. I was just standing there like this, I didn't know  
19 what to do.
- 20 AJ: Yeah, just frightened.
- 21 TJO: Just frightened. That's when my life changed – that's where my life changed. My first thought  
22 was that I would get myself together, I would take hormones, and I would get some clothes and  
23 then I would go back to the stroll, be a hooker. But, I started listening, I started paying attention,  
24 I started participating. I started feeling different. I stayed there for 21 months.
- 25 AJ: Wow.
- 26 TJO: I have the distinct honor of being the longest resident at Stepping Stone – ever.
- 27 AJ: Is that right? They're like, "Tracie, you've got to move girl."
- 28 TJO: That was 25 years ago . . . that was 25 years ago.
- 29 AJ: Wow.
- 30 TJO: And from Stepping Stone, I went to school. Matter of fact, Major, Miss Major and I, connected  
31 with each other. And, she took me to City College because I was afraid to go. She said, "Girl, I'm  
32 going to get some information, I'm going to go up to financial aid, come go with me." I was so  
33 afraid – I was so afraid, because this was living in the daytime, not at night, living in the daytime  
34 as my female self. At 40, I didn't know how to do that – I was a night creature. Miss Major  
35 walked me all through that campus – financial aid, the counselor's office, the cafeteria, the  
36 library, the parking lot. She didn't get financial aid – I went to City College.
- 37 AJ: Wow.

- 1 TJO: That started my professional career. And, I became a counselor and I started working at  
2 Stepping Stone. I wanted to do something particularly for the transgender community. This  
3 was like 1995, and this was still at the height of the HIV pandemic.
- 4 AJ: Sure. And this is in San Diego, right?
- 5 TJO: In San Diego. In my recovery, I thought about who you are and so I heard the term transgender  
6 and so I said, "OK, I guess I'm transgender, that's what it is." I became Tracie the transgender. I  
7 was in an LGBT recovery home, so I had to own that part of me because a big part of my issue  
8 was not accepting myself – a big part of my issue was that disconnect of my identity from my  
9 body, my identity from my genitalia. I'd never quite got that, it was such a mismatch in my head.
- 10 AJ: Sure.
- 11 TJO: So, at Stepping Stone I had to get completely naked and that means clothes, spiritual, just let  
12 everything go and build myself back up again – of acceptance, to break down and destroy all  
13 those old tapes I'd heard as a child, all those old tapes I'd heard in school, all those old tapes I'd  
14 heard from my parents – that I'm not wrong, that I'm OK. I'm whole, I'm OK – I'm whole. And I  
15 built myself back up again and now I love myself. I was always OK. I don't need SRS, I don't need  
16 to look cute, I don't need none of that – I'm OK from the very beginning. And that's the sad part  
17 – transgender folks don't hear this message from the very, very beginning and that is what fuels  
18 what I do today. I think that's another reason why people say, "Why are these young people  
19 identifying as non-binary?" "Why are these young people identifying as other than  
20 transgender?" Because they can, because they can.
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 TJO: We have laid the groundwork for these young people to be able to say, "I don't need to be in  
23 this box, don't put me in this box, I can be who I want to be." You can imagine how freeing that  
24 is, you can imagine having that power at such an early age. That's why I'm visible, that's why I'm  
25 loud, and that's why I love our young people.
- 26 AJ: And that's why I love you. Oh, my God.
- 27 TJO: That's why I love our young people and I have two young people here today. I wanted to bring  
28 them in because it's almost like passing it on to other people. It's AT and Celia, they may be  
29 outside. I want to bring them in just to show that . . .
- 30 AJ: AT and . . .?
- 31 TJO: Celia.
- 32 AJ: Celia. OK.
- 33 TJO: Celia. They're probably outside. I think . . . I know that when I was growing up, all I ever wanted  
34 to do was to belong somewhere. I never belonged in my family structure because the whole of  
35 me was not nurtured. They didn't know, they didn't accept . . . they should have talked about it.  
36 They never talked about it. What that did, that did more damage to me than anything else in  
37 my life.



- 1 AJ: Silence equals violence.
- 2 TJO: Silence equals violence, confusion. And that led me to do all those awful things. I had no value  
3 in my life, I didn't care about what I did. But, I'm so blessed now – that fence, Jesus and that  
4 fence, had me all this time. Now, I'm 65 and I cannot do nothing but do what I do – you know  
5 what I'm saying? And another thing about being an African American trans woman in these  
6 spaces, in these spaces of change where we're almost invisible, it's not always an easy position  
7 to be in. Because I had walked in here, in the San Diego LGBT Center, and folks have looked  
8 right through like I wasn't even here.
- 9 AJ: Yeah.
- 10 TJO: They can look . . . yes, so I stand in my honor, but I can imagine how other trans folks of color –  
11 either Latino, Latina, Black, Asian, how they are treated. This world is really strict, it's hard.  
12 People have their own -isms and everybody is not open to differences – not even in the LGBT  
13 community.
- 14 AJ: Yeah, and sometimes it's worse within the LGBT community, right?
- 15 TJO: Yes, yes.
- 16 AJ: For people of color, for trans people of color.
- 17 TJO: Once again – hurt people hurt people. So, I have to stand up for myself and for other people.  
18 Here in San Diego we have a day of empowerment that was started by me 16 years ago, when  
19 the first transgender program was funded here in San Diego. I was hired to run this program. It  
20 was a research program to gain information about the transgender community.
- 21 AJ: Sure.
- 22 TJO: And that's another thing, that analysis was done in 2003 and here we are in 2017 and the  
23 National Center for Transgender Equality just did another needs assessment. If they do one  
24 more assessment, I'm going to . . . I'm serious, if they do one more assessment, I'm going to  
25 scream. They know what we need – you know what we need.
- 26 AJ: Yes.
- 27 TJO: Housing, access to employment, education, safety, medical, medical recovery – everything. So,  
28 let's stop doing these needs assessments and do some direction and do some service provision.  
29 You know what I'm saying?
- 30 AJ: Yes, some intervention, right?
- 31 TJO: Intervention, service provision. Like I said, if you do one more needs assessment, I'm going to  
32 scream – I'm going to scream.
- 33 AJ: Yes.
- 34 TJO: And as I'm sure you know, as a person of color, a transgender person, I think you know, I just  
35 want to say I think it's really, really important that trans people understand that you can do  
36 anything that you want to do as long as you can face the consequences, as long as you can stand

- 1 up for yourself and be true to yourself. Do you know what I'm saying? Because I remember so  
2 many times how I felt like I had to be this or that for other people. I've only had to be this for  
3 myself.
- 4 AJ: Sure.
- 5 TJO: Just for myself.
- 6 AJ: Tracie, are you in a relationship now? What's love . . . you talked about it a little bit where when  
7 you were growing up it was affirmation, but now you love yourself. Have you been able to be in  
8 a relationship with other people.
- 9 TJO: No.
- 10 AJ: No?
- 11 TJO: No. And, I regret that to this day. I've had significant others, mind you. I've had plenty of them.
- 12 AJ: Oh, I'm sure.
- 13 TJO: But I think it gets . . .
- 14 AJ: You're beautiful, I can't see why not.
- 15 TJO: You get to a point that . . . I think I love my sisters, I love my community, better than I love a  
16 man.
- 17 AJ: Yeah.
- 18 TJO: When I'm having sex, I love men. And then, I'm a very sexual being from a very early age. Like I  
19 said, affirmation came from sexual prowess and through my surgery and through my medical  
20 interventions, my sexual prowess diminished. I don't want to get too deep into it but . . .
- 21 AJ: No, but talk to me sister.
- 22 TJO: It diminished to the point where I wasn't aroused and that's the only way I knew how to do sex.
- 23 AJ: Sure.
- 24 TJO: I never really learned how to be intimate, to have a conversation with a person. I would try to  
25 have relationships but I would get bored – men bore me. They bore me, perhaps I should be a  
26 lesbian. I don't know.
- 27 AJ: Men bore me too, honey.
- 28 TJO: My last relationship lasted for three years. A very nice guy, a very nice guy. We were together  
29 for three years and on my birthday . . . I'm going to tell you this. On my birthday, he came over,  
30 he gave me a present. And, we hadn't made out in a long time.
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 TJO: I took him into the bedroom, we started making out, and there was this knock on the door. It  
33 was my best girlfriend – so I stopped. He's just lying there.

- 1 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 2 TJO: That was the last time I saw him.
- 3 AJ: Wow.
- 4 TJO: I was like, "Wait a minute." I felt . . . I live in a senior complex now, OK.
- 5 AJ: OK.
- 6 TJO: And this guy named Richard, sweet old, cute old man. He has this cool hat on and stuff and he  
7 always tries to come on to me. I can go out to dinner with him, I can hang out with him, but I  
8 said, "You know what? I am not going to that to him because I know that I'm not able to give  
9 him what he wants – besides a quickie."
- 10 AJ: Right.
- 11 TJO: And I'm not into that anymore. So, I think, that's another thing. I think being able to  
12 differentiate love from touching, intimacy from mind, body, and soul. I'm going to venture to  
13 say that I'm not the only girl who has went through that, especially a sex worker, especially a  
14 person who came up having their femininity affirmed by a touch, having their femininity . . .
- 15 AJ: And having to make a living through sex work.
- 16 TJO: Yes, yes.
- 17 AJ: That is still a thing today, right?
- 18 TJO: Yes.
- 19 AJ: Particularly trans women of color and I know white trans girls, they do sex work but it's more in  
20 film and video and porn and those kinds of things, and certainly everybody on the planet has got  
21 to make a living, right. And you've got to figure out how to do that the best way you can, but  
22 what . . . so many people are forced into that, and not physically by some pimp or something,  
23 but by circumstances.
- 24 TJO: Circumstances – yes, yes.
- 25 AJ: Right. "I can't get a job, no one will hire me, I get kicked out of school," all of these kinds of  
26 things. How do we deal with that, Tracie? I mean, these young . . . and it's not only that, a big  
27 part of it too is kind of like what you were saying when you were coming up and coming out,  
28 people told you that was the only way to make a living. So, what do you tell these young people  
29 today?
- 30 TJO: Well, I think people like Janet Mock, people like Laverne Cox, people like Miss Ross.
- 31 AJ: Angelica, yeah.
- 32 TJO: Angelica Ross. All these wonderful people, there's also a girl Lina with Whoopi Goldberg, she  
33 has this book – she's like a DJ.
- 34 AJ: Oh, yeah – what's her name? I don't think I know her.

- 1 TJO: I'll show you her Facebook page.
- 2 AJ: All right.
- 3 TJO: She was a part of . . . in the Stonewall movie some time ago. The little neighbor's girl, Lina, she  
4 was a dancer with Candis Cayne – Candis Cayne who's on the Transgender Showgirl. And so, all  
5 these girls that are doing stuff. I also try to help people understand that you've got to make a  
6 change, that you can make a change. But, like I said, once again, it's easy to be so  
7 disenfranchised from your family and your school and you walk down the street and some men,  
8 "Woot woot, come here," and they give you some money.
- 9 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 10 TJO: That's affirmation and money, so it's an easy trap – it's an easy trap. But like I said, if girls can  
11 kind of combine that, especially now that the government has censored Backpage.
- 12 AJ: Right, that's a very new development.
- 13 TJO: That's a new development and that's a big warning, a wake-up call for the girls to do different. I  
14 have this one girl right now, I'm working in the prep for transgender program. Prep is a new HIV  
15 medication that prevents you from catching HIV, it fortifies your T cells so the HIV virus will not  
16 transmit into your T cells. If you take this medication daily, you are protected if you find  
17 yourself in the case of not using a condom.
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 TJO: So, the girls I work with now, they're sex workers and one girl she is in her third year of college,  
20 this is her last year, and she's a sex worker. And she is so dedicated to what she does, she's so  
21 dedicated. But, she's also going to school so I try to always affirm her and say, "OK, this is really  
22 great, girl, but keep going to school. Register for school." Because she wants to be a journalist.  
23 She's very intelligent, very beautiful – but she doesn't see it.
- 24 AJ: Wow.
- 25 TJO: She does not see it. All she sees is that she must have her boobs done, her body done, her nose  
26 done. I think that comes from not having early affirmation.
- 27 AJ: Sure.
- 28 TJO: Thinking that you've got to conform to something and not recognizing your initial beauty. That's  
29 what I do now with the girls I work with now, especially with the young people now. Here in San  
30 Diego we have a very, very interesting, diverse transgender community. I know you met some  
31 people last night – the young lady that runs the TransFamily organization.
- 32 AJ: Yes, I did. Exactly.
- 33 TJO: Wonderful, wonderful organization. We have all these young adolescents that are trans – all  
34 different colors. And then we have a very good generation of young folk in college and we have  
35 a nice generation of a lot of professional trans people here in San Diego.
- 36 AJ: Wow.

- 1 TJO: So, I'm really proud of the community here but this community here in San Diego is not the  
2 norm.
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 TJO: But then we have another part of the community, the African American transgender community  
5 is relatively very small here. There's a minimal-size community but it's very stealth.
- 6 AJ: You don't see them on the street.
- 7 TJO: You don't see them on the street, you might see them at an event – they're stealth. I don't  
8 think no one in the African American community transitioned to be transgender. I know I didn't.
- 9 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 10 TJO: I came into the profession for political reasons because I'm an advocate.
- 11 AJ: Yes.
- 12 TJO: I don't expect another person to have that same road.
- 13 AJ: Right.
- 14 TJO: I don't have the expectation that service providers here should have the expectation that trans  
15 women of color . . . I think that speaks for itself. The spaces of power in the LGBT community,  
16 they're vacant, there's only a few of us . . . there's only a few of us. There's Valerie, there's me,  
17 there's you, there's Angie . . .
- 18 AJ: Angelica.
- 19 TJO: Angelica Ross.
- 20 AJ: Yes.
- 21 TJO: And there's other girls, you know. So, it makes you wonder, OK – so, I'm transitioned to be  
22 myself, I'm not transitioned to be a transsexual, I'm not transitioned to be transgender, I'm  
23 going to be my female self. I think in this world of everyone being true to themselves, we have  
24 expectations that folks will still come up to the plate and be active, unless they want to – as  
25 opposed to other communities.
- 26 AJ: Yeah.
- 27 TJO: Which is prevalent here in San Diego, it's very prevalent.
- 28 AJ: Wow. This is such an amazing conversation. Literally, almost every question that I have to ask,  
29 you have answered it without me even asking.
- 30 TJO: Really?
- 31 AJ: Which is amazing – that is so beautiful and it's clear to me that you have a strong sense of who  
32 you are and this journey that you have been on to become who you are today. Tracie, let me  
33 ask you this, and I do want to acknowledge on tape that you were the grand marshal of Pride  
34 here in San Diego, right?

- 1 TJO: Yes.
- 2 AJ: How did that feel? What were your feelings about that? Let me preface this question a little bit.  
3 I was grand marshal of Pride in Minneapolis in 2015, so I kind of know how I feel and I'm  
4 wondering how you felt about it.
- 5 TJO: OK. So, you were grand marshal of Pride?
- 6 AJ: In the Pride parade – the big Pride parade, with all the white kids. It was 400,000 people out  
7 there – yeah.
- 8 TJO: How many grand marshals were there?
- 9 AJ: I was it – there was one.
- 10 TJO: Congratulations, congratulations, congratulations. There were three of us.
- 11 AJ: What?
- 12 TJO: There were three of us. Let me tell you, I felt . . . it wasn't a good feeling, it wasn't a good  
13 feeling. There are a few people here in San Diego . . . I've been active in the community since  
14 1990. There are other people that were around at that time too. People that came behind me,  
15 they decided to give the entire transgender community grand marshal.
- 16 AJ: Really?
- 17 TJO: And then made me a champion and made Connor a champion and a therapist a champion.
- 18 AJ: And not even a trans person – the therapist?
- 19 TJO: She's a therapist for transgender people.
- 20 AJ: But she wasn't transgender.
- 21 TJO: She wasn't trans – she wasn't trans.
- 22 AJ: Right, OK.
- 23 TJO: So, yeah. I think that answers for itself.
- 24 AJ: I think that answers my question – yeah.
- 25 TJO: Yeah, yeah. And I think that that speaks volumes of San Diego's LGBT community – this place as  
26 well, this place as well.
- 27 AJ: The Center? Wow.
- 28 TJO: That speaks volumes. And people say, "Oh, you should be happy, you should be happy." I say,  
29 "No, I would have been happy had they really done it how it should have been done and just  
30 gave it to me as one person."
- 31 AJ: Right.

- 1 TJO: But rather than give it to me, I mean I would have loved to have been there at that meeting  
2 where they decided that. Who has done all this work, who's done this, who's done that, who's  
3 been around the longest and done this? Tracie O'Brien. "OK, but she's Black."
- 4 AJ: Break it down.
- 5 TJO: Or, "She's got a big mouth." I don't know. So, it made me wonder – it actually hurt my feelings.  
6 But, guess what? It rained that day too – it poured. I walked in the rain for a while and then I  
7 got in the car and I went home – I went home.
- 8 AJ: I know, that's right.
- 9 TJO: The parade started at 11am, I was home, on the couch, laughing at 12. We were in a BMW  
10 convertible and they could not let the top down because of the rain.
- 11 AJ: Because it was raining – and it never rains in San Diego.
- 12 TJO: Never rains. It poured, it poured. And the kids walked in the rain. I was in the car . . . I had fun  
13 though, I had fun.
- 14 AJ: Yeah.
- 15 TJO: But, the whole thought of it . . . it made me feel bad. But I'm going to tell you something – I'll  
16 give you another example. Major lived here before too, and in the 1990s, Major used to take  
17 care of a lot of people who had HIV. The organization that fed people with AIDS was called  
18 Mama's Kitchen and they had this contest every year about who's our mama of the year. So,  
19 the guys voted for Major and there was all this commotion about . . . you know, Pride was  
20 coming up and they had a float and so Major would be on the float.
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 TJO: There was all this little whispering and murmurs about them not wanting her on the float  
23 because she wasn't a proper esthetic for the float and all this kind of thing. Miss Major rode on  
24 the back of the float, on the very back of the float – like she's riding in the back of the hate  
25 truck.
- 26 AJ: What?
- 27 TJO: This big petticoat – with this big petticoat on. She made the best of it, but that's what I'm  
28 talking about.
- 29 AJ: Oh, my gosh.
- 30 TJO: It's alive and well. That's why this Trump administration, we're living in a system that is not  
31 meant for us to be – do you know what I'm saying?
- 32 AJ: That does not want us to exist.
- 33 TJO: Yes - or succeed, or to be in spaces.
- 34 AJ: Yeah. Where do you see the transgender community . . . I'm so glad I asked you that question  
35 about the grand marshal thing because it really illustrates how racism, transphobia, all of those

- 1 things are still alive within the LGBT community. But let me ask you this, where do you think the  
2 transgender community is headed in the next 20 years?
- 3 TJO: I think it's heading in a very, very good direction. It's headed in a very good direction. I think  
4 that this Trump administration is going to come and it's going to go.
- 5 AJ: It's going to come and go.
- 6 TJO: We've had other presidents – Reagan, Nixon, we've had other presidents that were . . .
- 7 AJ: Carter . . . not Carter, I meant to say Clinton.
- 8 TJO: Clinton – OK. We've had other presidents, so it's like . . . I think it's good. We have so many  
9 young folks, so many young folks who are transitioning, so many young folks who are vocal –  
10 people have been very diversified, which is really, really great. So, I think we're going to move in  
11 a good direction, a powerful direction – a direction of power and acceptance and tolerance. I  
12 think that's where we're going. I think the transgender community is the last bastion of a  
13 community of people that are downtrodden, that is different from everybody else, and I think  
14 our time has come – medically and in society.
- 15 AJ: Sure.
- 16 TJO: There's a lot of work in medical and healthcare for the transgender population and what our  
17 doctors at our clinic once said was, "You know, transgender medicine is the last field of the  
18 medical profession – it's the last medical . . ."
- 19 AJ: Frontier.
- 20 TJO: Frontier, the last frontier of medical work. And there's a lot of interest in it and now that  
21 insurance covers transgender surgeries here in California, and hopefully other places too.
- 22 AJ: In many other places, not every place but many, many other places. Well, Obamacare, it was  
23 everywhere but now that might . . . we don't know if that's going to be around or not.
- 24 TJO: Exactly, exactly. It will be funny to see where that goes but it kind of reminds of me in the  
25 1970s. In the 1970s we had . . . I don't know if that was Carter, I don't know who that was . . .  
26 Ford? I don't know who that was, but we had something like the Affordable Care Act where  
27 care was more accessible.
- 28 AJ: Right, I remember that. I used to have a green card.
- 29 TJO: And that left, so yeah – so I think we'll get through this and it might be hard for some people,  
30 but we'll get through this. But, what's happening now is that with Obamacare and the  
31 Affordable Care Act, working in our medical center, we are referring our transgender clients –  
32 our guys with top surgeries, our girls for breast implements or orchiectomies to Medi-Cal. So,  
33 we're trying to rush all those through before something happens. But, I'm really, really proud of  
34 Marci Bowers.
- 35 AJ: Yes, she's a friend of mine actually.



- 1 TJO: She is willing to see our patients in northern California or southern California and take Medi-Cal.  
2 We've got one person waiting to see her now because her wait list is so long. The consultation  
3 is not until April but I applaud Marci Bowers for taking the Affordable Care Act and for taking  
4 Medi-Cal for gender-reassignment surgery.
- 5 AJ: Yeah, because most of those doctors, they want their money upfront.
- 6 TJO: Yes, they want it upfront. I'm really proud of the medical progress that we've made. Like I said,  
7 my girlfriend just had reconstruction work – the silicone malady, the girls that rely on silicone for  
8 their aesthetic changes and now we have doctors that are willing to do bilateral mastectomies  
9 and reconstruction at an affordable case with Medi-Cal. So, things are happening, things are  
10 changing even for new girls and for girls that are getting older – because we're living longer  
11 now. Because, you know, at first the lifespan for an African American trans woman was 35. It  
12 was 35. I'm 65. Sixty-five.
- 13 AJ: Come on, baby.
- 14 TJO: I'm here to tell you, just keep going – just keep moving forward.
- 15 AJ: All right.
- 16 TJO: Put your best foot forward, have faith, make a change – do better. Go higher – like Michelle  
17 Obama said, "Go high."
- 18 AJ: Go high – when they go low, go high.
- 19 TJO: It's not always easy, but go high. I like her.
- 20 AJ: Tracie, I can't . . . I'm just so grateful. I've learned so much. I've been out for 25 years and I'm . .  
21 . you know, I'm still learning, I'm still growing every day. You have just given me a whole  
22 Ph.D./Master class today.
- 23 TJO: Ahhh – oh, my God; oh, my God.
- 24 AJ: And, I am so deeply grateful for your powerful testimony and your sharing and your heart and  
25 your love for this community that is so clear. It comes through so clear and so powerful,  
26 because you're right. I didn't want to be an advocate – people don't come out to be a  
27 transgender advocate. You just want to . . . well, for me, when I found Christine Jorgensen's  
28 book when I was 14 years old at the library, I didn't take it home – I read it in the corner in the  
29 library, the whole book in one afternoon.
- 30 TJO: OK.
- 31 AJ: I was scared to bring it home because somebody might see me with it. But, I was trying to save  
32 my life. I wasn't wanting to be some kind of advocate or something, I was doing it like you said –  
33 for me to be able to live. And, yeah – I just appreciate your story, your standing up on the front  
34 lines for these young people that are coming out. Thank you, Tracie.
- 35 TJO: Can I bring the two people in – just for the end, is that OK?
- 36 AJ: Yes, yes. Let's bring them in.

- 1 TJO: I just want you to see . . . (pause)
- 2 AJ: So, who are these people, Tracie?
- 3 TJO: This is the next generation, this is why I do what I do – it's for the kids. It's for the next  
4 generation of powerful, prolific speakers who know where they're going, know what they want  
5 and know how to get there. Introduce yourselves.
- 6 CE: My name is Syra Evans. I'm from San Diego, California, born and raised. I'm originally from the  
7 community of southeast San Diego. I got into community . . . probably now around five years  
8 ago, almost, so I was like 18 or 19 years old. And these wonderful people next to me saw  
9 something in me and have been supporting me ever since.
- 10 AJ: Oh, that's so beautiful. Thank you.
- 11 TJO: And you are?
- 12 ATF: I am A.T. Furuya and my pronouns are they, their, theirs, and I am the Trans Youth Services  
13 Navigator at the Center. I've been working with trans youth basically for the last few years and I  
14 do direct action activist organizing and everything in-between. I have an amazing mom and  
15 sibling and I think that our focus is just where is the movement going, how do we take care of  
16 each other, what is our family.
- 17 AJ: Wow, that was just what we were just talking about.
- 18 ATF: Same page.
- 19 AJ: Yeah, same page. The vibes, the vapers – right.
- 20 TJO: This is where the movement is going – this is where the movement is going.
- 21 AJ: Yes, yes. Gender queer, gender . . . so, can you guys just spell your names just so I can make  
22 sure that I have the right names.
- 23 SE: So Syra is spelled S-y-r-a; last name E-v-a-n-s.
- 24 AJ: OK.
- 25 ATF: A.T. Fuyura, F-u-r-u-y-a.
- 26 AJ: All right. Wow, next generation. I got to say bye because they're ready to drag me out of here  
27 in handcuffs, but thank you guys so much for being a part of this conversation. Tracie, thank  
28 you. I love you, I love you for supporting these young people, I love you guys.
- 29 TJO: This is our future.
- 30 AFT: Just really quick, I wouldn't have access to hormones if it wasn't . . .
- 31 SE: For this woman sitting right here.
- 32 AJ: Oh, my gosh.
- 33 SE: I would not have the hormones that I have if not for this being here.

- 1 AJ: Oh, I love this. I love this so much. Thank you.
- 2 TJO: Thank you.
- 3 AJ: Peace.
- 4 TJP: Peace. OK, thank you.