

Tamara Urban  
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 Tamara Urban -TU  
3

4 AJ: Good afternoon. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender  
5 Oral History Project at the University of Minnesota Tretter Collection. Today is January 22,  
6 2017. I'm at the Creating Change Conference and I'm here today with Tamara Urban. Tamara,  
7 why don't you introduce yourself – state your name, spell your name, and tell me what your  
8 gender identity is today, your gender assigned at birth, and the pronouns you use.

9 TU: My name is Tamara Jeanne Urban, that's T-a-m-a-r-a; middle name Jeanne, J-e-a-n-n-e; Urban,  
10 U-r-b-a-n. My pronouns are she/her/hers. I'm retired, but I'm more busy now than I ever have  
11 been since I left a working career.

12 AJ: Is that right?

13 TU: Because I'm doing quite a bit of activism work. My gender identity is definitely female. I was  
14 born with an intersex condition. I did not discover that until three years into my transition  
15 process when I finally was able to start seeing an endocrinologist and when he did a pelvic exam  
16 of me during the initial intake, he told me that I had undergone gender assignment surgery as an  
17 infant and later blood testing proved that I am intersex. His first comment when he got the  
18 results back was that my hormones are completely wacky.

19 AJ: Wow. Wacky meaning . . .?

20 TU: Wacky in that they're not what they should be if I was male.

21 AJ: OK, wow. Do you know what your intersex condition is called?

22 TU: Not 100% sure.

23 AJ: Because there's a huge spectrum of intersex.

24 TU: There is, yeah, they ruled out the more common ones like partial androgen insensitivity  
25 syndrome, CAH is another one that's quite common, they've tested for all the ones that my  
26 Medicare health insurance would cover. The condition that they suspect that I have is kind of  
27 related to CAH, it's called Three Beta HSD Deficiency. I have to look it up on the internet and I  
28 don't know if I could even pronounce the actual full name of it.

29 AJ: OK, don't even try.

30 TU: Unfortunately, my health insurance won't cover the test and it's about a \$7,000 test to have  
31 run.

32 AJ: Wow.

33 TU: So, there's no way I could afford to do that out-of-pocket. I'm very active in transgender  
34 activism work in South Dakota. I'm a member of the Board of Directors of Equality South  
35 Dakota. I'm also the President and Founder of Trans Action South Dakota, which is a new

- 1 organization that we started up last year to allow transgender people to advocate for  
2 themselves.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, and I think . . . I was on the Trans Justice Funding Project and I think you guys got support  
4 from the Trans Justice . . .
- 5 TU: Yes, we did.
- 6 AJ: Congratulations.
- 7 TU: Yeah, that was the grant that got us off the ground.
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 TU: And then we got a second grant already when they did a second round of grants to everybody  
10 that had already previously received grants.
- 11 AJ: Nice, right.
- 12 TU: Which was also a huge help because that money came in just at a time when we really needed  
13 it.
- 14 AJ: And, a huge surprise.
- 15 TU: Yes, I wasn't expecting it. I've got a lot of work to do when I get home because I've got a lot of  
16 grant writing work because this year's rounds of grants are . . .
- 17 AJ: Are starting to become due, right?
- 18 TU: Yes, so I've got to get busy and get my new grant app in with the Transgender Funding Project.
- 19 AJ: So, can you tell me this, Tamara? What is your earliest memory in life? What's the first thing  
20 you remember? And, it doesn't have to be related to your transgender identity, although if it is,  
21 that's perfectly fine.
- 22 TU: I have a few, very surprisingly, early memories.
- 23 AJ: OK.
- 24 TU: One of my earliest memories is of my mother bathing me in the kitchen sink, that's one of my  
25 earliest memories.
- 26 AJ: Wow, OK.
- 27 TU: I also have memories of having a very vivid nightmares as a child of undergoing surgery.
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 TU: And that used to terrify me and, in retrospect, I kind of suspect that they might have been  
30 triggered by the gender assignment surgery that I underwent as an infant.
- 31 AJ: Right. What does that even mean – that you had gender assignment surgery as a child?

- 1 TU: Well, basically I was born with ambiguous genitalia – I was born with both a vagina and a small
- 2 penis. I had what they called hypospadias, which means the urethra opening isn't where it's
- 3 supposed to be for a male, it was where it was supposed to be for a woman.
- 4 AJ: Sure.
- 5 TU: They did surgery to go and re-route my plumbing so I could pee standing up, basically, and
- 6 sewed my vagina shut. When I was four years old, I had cancer prevention surgery, or at least
- 7 that's what they called it, which, I believe, removed my ovaries.
- 8 AJ: Where did you grow up?
- 9 TU: Sioux Falls and Flandreau, South Dakota. I was born in Sioux Falls.
- 10 AJ: Which . . . Flan . . .?
- 11 TU: Flandreau – it's a French name.
- 12 AJ: How do you spell that?
- 13 TU: F-l-a-n-d-r-e-a-u. It's a small town, 45 miles north of Sioux Falls. It's the location of the smallest
- 14 Santee Sioux reservation and it's also one of the locations for one of the few remaining
- 15 operating Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding schools.
- 16 AJ: OK, wow. So, you've lived in South Dakota all your life?
- 17 TU: Pretty much, yeah, except for a couple of years when I went to college in Iowa.
- 18 AJ: OK.
- 19 TU: Where I actually was studying to become a minister at the time.
- 20 AJ: Is that right?
- 21 TU: Yeah.
- 22 AJ: So, what was your childhood like in South Dakota? Especially with this ambiguity around your
- 23 gender identity.
- 24 TU: Yeah, well, Flandreau is kind of a real small town, it was kind of like an Andy Griffith Mayberry
- 25 RFD type . . .
- 26 AJ: Floyd's Barbershop and . . .
- 27 TU: Yeah, sort of like that. Our police chief, he was a bit like Andy Griffith in some ways, but with a
- 28 drinking problem.
- 29 AJ: OK. So, he was a combination of Andy Griffith and the town drunk all in one person.
- 30 TU: Kind of, yeah. I grew up, literally, in my parent's jewelry store business, which was on Main
- 31 Street, and we lived in the apartment directly above it. So, like I said, I really did literally grow
- 32 up in the jewelry business. And, we had a liquor store right next door and the sheriff, or I mean .
- 33 . .

- 1 AJ: So, your folks owned the store too – the liquor stores.
- 2 TU: Yes, they owned the store and the building.
- 3 AJ: So, you guys were pretty upper middle class, I would suspect. I mean jewelry and booze, those
- 4 bring in profits.
- 5 TU: Well, we weren't in the booze business but the business next door was a liquor store.
- 6 AJ: Oh, so you didn't own the business next door.
- 7 TU: We didn't own the liquor store, no. That was owned by the school janitor at the time, who was
- 8 also drinking buddies with the police chief.
- 9 AJ: Small circle, huh?
- 10 TU: Basically, the police chief – every night he'd go and make his rounds downtown, checking all the
- 11 doors of businesses and making sure they were locked, do a patrol around town, and then pull
- 12 in back behind the liquor store next door and then go inside and drink until 4 o'clock in the
- 13 morning with the janitor and then go out and park in front of the post office and then sleep it
- 14 off.
- 15 AJ: Oh, wow. He wouldn't go home?
- 16 TU: No, not right away.
- 17 AJ: Because actually, now you can get a DUI for sitting in your car if you're intoxicated.
- 18 TU: Yeah, of course, who would have given him a ticket?
- 19 AJ: He's the guy who gives out the tickets, huh?
- 20 TU: Back then, yeah.
- 21 AJ: So, were you . . . what was family life like? Did you grow up in an intact family?
- 22 TU: My parents were very busy and involved with the business, but my parents were really good.
- 23 They weren't abusive at all, they were very loving and caring.
- 24 AJ: Did you have siblings?
- 25 TU: Yeah, I have one brother who is about eight years older than I am. We're not that close, though,
- 26 because of the age difference.
- 27 AJ: The age difference . . . so, it's not related to your gender identity?
- 28 TU: No. But, yeah, growing up I did have issues and stuff. I do clearly remember the first time that I
- 29 kind of realized that I wasn't a boy was, I believe it was my 5<sup>th</sup> birthday party.
- 30 AJ: That's actually one of my questions, you know. So, thank you. So, your 5<sup>th</sup> birthday party.
- 31 TU: Yeah, my 5<sup>th</sup> birthday party. One of the gifts that I got was the board game, Risk, and so we
- 32 were sitting there playing it and I really realized that how everybody else was playing it was

1 completely different than the way I was trying to play it and I just realize that there was this  
 2 disparity between how the boys were acting and the way I was acting was so totally different  
 3 and I just . . . I knew there was something going on there. I never really felt like I was male, so  
 4 that did cause me a lot of confusion because everybody was telling me that I was male. Of  
 5 course, this was growing up in the early to late 1950s and into the early 1960s that I grew up.

6 AJ: How old are you, Tamara?

7 TU: I'm 63. I don't tend to look my age.

8 AJ: Yeah, no, you look great. So, were you harassed in school? Were you bullied?

9 TU: Yes, I was. I was bullied a lot, especially in junior high and high school.

10 AJ: Wow.

11 TU: Not so much in grade school, but in junior high it really started to stand out.

12 AJ: Was it related to your . . . ?

13 TU: Gender identity, yeah – definitely. I was acting kind of girly and I was always the cry baby.

14 AJ: You kind of had a high-pitched voice . . .

15 TU: Yeah, my voice never broke when I went through puberty, such as it was. My puberty was kind  
 16 of this on again/off again thing. It was like it was having trouble to decide which gender it was  
 17 going to go. And then, I was put on testosterone shots, but I was told that they were allergy  
 18 shots because I've always had problems with allergies and asthma, ever since I was a young  
 19 child. And so, of course, I never thought anything about it.

20 AJ: Did that help at all?

21 TU: No.

22 AJ: It didn't help masculinize you nor did it help with the allergies?

23 TU: Well, it helped masculinize me a bit. It definitely caused my facial hair to grow in. It didn't  
 24 lower my voice, which was really surprising. I never developed an Adam's Apple.

25 AJ: You clearly never got male-pattern baldness.

26 TU: No, which is surprising because pretty much all of my relatives on both my mom's side and my  
 27 dad's side all had it, all the males.

28 AJ: Wow.

29 TU: All had male-pattern baldness. My grandfathers on both sides; my uncles on both sides all had it  
 30 pretty much.

31 AJ: It's definitely a hereditary trait, that's for sure. But, if you're 63, you probably have bypassed it,  
 32 I would suspect.

33 TU: Yeah, and I didn't start on hormone therapy until 2012. I actually started my transition in 2007.

- 1 AJ: What kinds of medical interventions have you undergone? And, only to the extent that you feel  
2 comfortable talking about this, Tamara.
- 3 TU: OK, I'm completely comfortable. Basically, so far, I've underwent 236 hours of electrolysis to  
4 remove my facial hair. I've been on hormone therapy since March of 2012.
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 TU: I did do a little DIY hormone therapy on and off for about a year and a half prior to that, but  
7 there was gaps of about six months and eight months between each time because I just couldn't  
8 afford to buy any off of the internet at the time.
- 9 AJ: Do you have any thoughts or ideas around gender affirmation surgery or gender confirmation  
10 surgery at all?
- 11 TU: I want to get surgery. I haven't had it yet, but I really, really do want to get it. That's one of the  
12 things I'm really concerned about now with the Trump administration and the obvious moves  
13 that they're making to go and nullify all the advances and gains that we've made in the  
14 transgender community.
- 15 AJ: Including the ACA, which covers transgender . . .
- 16 TU: As well as the Medicare ruling a few years back that dropped their ban on covering transgender  
17 surgery under Medicare. I've been trying to find a surgeon that takes Medicare, that's been  
18 pretty tough because there's very few that do.
- 19 AJ: Are there any surgeons in South Dakota, at all?
- 20 TU: No, there are no surgeons.
- 21 AJ: Are there any health care services for transgender people?
- 22 TU: There are two endocrinologists in Sioux Falls – one at each of the two major hospitals, that are  
23 both very good and experienced. We have Dr. Keith Hanson and Dr. Richard Crawford. Dr. Keith  
24 Hanson is with Sanford Women's Health and Dr. Crawford is with Avera McKennan Reproductive  
25 Health and Endocrinology. Both are very good. Dr. Hanson has been treating transgender  
26 people with hormone therapy for over 20 years now.
- 27 AJ: What's the name of the clinic?
- 28 TU: It's Sanford Women's Health.
- 29 AJ: No, the other clinic.
- 30 TU: Oh, the other one is Avera McKennan, that's the Catholic-owned hospital.
- 31 AJ: Avera. A-v-e-r-a.
- 32 TU: Yeah.
- 33 AJ: McKennan.
- 34 TU: McKennan, yeah.



- 1 AJ: OK. I just want to make sure I'm spelling stuff right. Thank you. So, what is the climate like for  
2 the transgender community in Sioux Falls and in the state more broadly?
- 3 TU: Sioux Falls is kind of South Dakota's bastion of liberalism.
- 4 AJ: OK, thank goodness.
- 5 TU: So, it's not bad in Sioux Falls at all. I've had very little problems since I started transitioning. The  
6 majority of people that I meet are very receptive to listening to hear me talk about it and explain  
7 it to them, which has really been good because it's allowed me a lot of opportunities to educate.  
8 I'll educate people while I'm standing in check-out lines at the stores and stuff about it.
- 9 AJ: Nice. Are people receptive?
- 10 TU: Yes, surprisingly people have been very receptive. I've never had a bad experience doing that –  
11 so far. Although, I suspect the climate is changing somewhere because of the change in  
12 administration and all the anti-trans rhetoric that is being expounded, and just being put out  
13 there now.
- 14 AJ: Sure.
- 15 TU: It's just gotten so horrible and I expect that it's going to get worse.
- 16 AJ: How does that make you feel? Do you feel frightened? Do you feel concern?
- 17 TU: I'm more concerned for my personal safety and for the safety of my friends in the community in  
18 South Dakota. We just had a transgender woman of color, a Native American woman by the  
19 name of Jamie Lee Wounded Arrow, who was just murdered January 1<sup>st</sup>. She was a friend of  
20 mine. And, I was really shocked. The last communication that I had from her was her wishing  
21 me a happy new year about 20 minutes before midnight on New Year's Eve.
- 22 AJ: I'm so sorry for your loss.
- 23 TU: She was murdered just hours after that.
- 24 AJ: I'm so sorry for your loss.
- 25 TU: It was quite a blow. We've also had a couple transgender suicides since the election, both of  
26 them happened right around Thanksgiving time, which is a real hard time for a lot of  
27 transgender people.
- 28 AJ: Generally, right.
- 29 TU: A lot of them have been kicked out of their families and stuff so they don't have anybody to go  
30 and have the family connections anymore and the support. That makes it very tough for a lot of  
31 people. I've had to do a lot of counseling with people who were very suicidal during that period.  
32 One of my friends attempted suicide during the Thanksgiving holiday.
- 33 AJ: Wow, I'm so sorry.
- 34 TU: And the two other people that committed suicide were both people that I know. One of them,  
35 the first one to commit suicide, Elizabeth Waite, she was a transgender woman that I started

- 1 helping a few years back when she contacted me looking for assistance and help – where to go  
2 to start on hormone therapy. I basically helped coach her through every single step of her  
3 transition process, all the way through getting an orchiectomy surgery. So, that was really quite  
4 a blow when I got the news that she had committed suicide because it was so unexpected.
- 5 AJ: Yeah, I'm so sorry. How about your family? Are you still connected with your parents and your  
6 brother?
- 7 TU: My parents both passed away several years back, so I never had the opportunity to come out to  
8 them – although, I'm pretty sure that they had to have known that I was intersex because of the  
9 surgeries.
- 10 AJ: Right, they had to approve those – somebody had to approve them.
- 11 TU: Yeah. And one of the clues that I had to my possibly being intersex, before I got actual medical  
12 proof of it, was this odd story that my mother once told me which was that basically when I was  
13 born in 1953, or basically . . . she said before I was born, all the doctors were absolutely certain I  
14 was going to be born a girl and that her and my father were so certain that I was going to be a  
15 girl that they didn't even consider a male name for me and that they had only pre-bought  
16 clothing, pink-colored clothing for girls and when they had the baby shower all the . . .
- 17 AJ: So, the ultrasound diagnosed you as a girl?
- 18 TU: Well, back in 1953, ultrasound didn't exist. The only way they had to kind of sort of test for  
19 possible gender was through amniocentesis or take a sample of the embryonic fluid from the  
20 womb to measure the hormone levels and generally the way that worked was if there was high  
21 testosterone levels in there, they would consider the child being a boy and if there were higher  
22 levels of estrogen instead of testosterone, then they would assume that the child was going to  
23 be a girl. But amniocentesis also had a reputation for being rather inaccurate in a lot of cases.
- 24 AJ: Sure. Wow.
- 25 TU: And mom went on to say that basically it was a huge surprise to everyone when the doctors  
26 finally announced that I was a boy. That was kind of one thing that always puzzled me because  
27 she said, "finally." Not that they announced that I was a boy, but . . . and, on my birth  
28 certificate, it wasn't filled out for almost a week and a half after I was born, which is a little odd  
29 too.
- 30 AJ: Sure.
- 31 TU: Which means that there had to have been a period of time where they were deciding whether .  
32 . .
- 33 AJ: Some debate about which . . .
- 34 TU: A girl or a boy. The standard that they used back in that time period to go and determine if an  
35 intersex child with ambiguous genitalia was male or female wasn't by . . . they didn't have DNA  
36 testing, and chromosome testing they did have back then, but I don't know if that was kind of

- 1 expensive and I don't know if they did it – and it's even expensive now to have it done. But, it  
2 was a ruler.
- 3 AJ: So, the length of the . . .
- 4 TU: The length of what they would call a phalocitoris because they weren't sure if it was a small  
5 phallus or a large clitoris so they would call it phalocitoris and they would measure the length of  
6 that and the standard was three-quarters of an inch. If it was less than three-quarters of an  
7 inch, they would automatically assign the child as a girl and perform the surgeries accordingly;  
8 and, if it was three-quarters of an inch or longer, they would automatically assign the infant as a  
9 male and do the surgery to assign the child male.
- 10 AJ: So, your story that you're sharing, Tamara, gives so much credence to the statement, "assigned  
11 [insert gender] at birth." Right?
- 12 TU: Yes.
- 13 AJ: Because it is a sort of arbitrary designation in many, many . . . in most instances, for that matter.
- 14 TU: And, according to statistics, the best statistics they have, the surgeons, when they've assigned  
15 infants as male or female that were intersex, only get it right, at best, one-third of the time and  
16 I'm sure it's probably actually worse than that.
- 17 AJ: Right. So, what has been terms that you've used to describe your identity over time?
- 18 TU: Well, initially I described myself as a transsexual, because that was the terminology I was  
19 familiar with and, at the time, I didn't know that I was intersexed.
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 TU: Although I did have suspicions about it. One of the reasons is because of all the scarring that I  
22 have down there in my genital area.
- 23 AJ: That would be a clue.
- 24 TU: Very extensive scarring, actually.
- 25 AJ: Oh, my goodness. I'm so sorry.
- 26 TU: If you were to go and look up in a medical journal, surgical diagrams of how they performed the  
27 hypospadias surgery to go and take and re-route the urethra and basically construct a more or  
28 less functional penis as far as it comes for urinating, the scarring is 100% consistent with that.
- 29 AJ: Wow. So, transsexual . . . any other?
- 30 TU: Well, nowadays I pretty much describe myself as a transsexual individual who just happens to  
31 have an intersex condition.
- 32 AJ: So, who are you attracted to, Tamara, in terms of a sexual orientation? Do you date men? Do  
33 you date women? Are you married? Have you been married?
- 34 TU: I've never married, I've hardly ever dated.

- 1 AJ: You have been married, you said.
- 2 TU: No, I've never been married.
- 3 AJ: You've never been married? OK.
- 4 TU: I only dated a little when I was living as a male. I've never dated since I've transitioned. I've
- 5 actually never had sex.
- 6 AJ: Never.
- 7 TU: I've never had consensual sex. I was molested on three different occasions as a child.
- 8 AJ: Oh, no.
- 9 TU: Between the ages of three and a half and seven, on three different occasions.
- 10 AJ: But, in terms of your adult life . . .
- 11 TU: That's the closest I've ever come to having any kind of sexual encounter.
- 12 AJ: Wow.
- 13 TU: I've never had sex as an adult.
- 14 AJ: Is the desire there? Do you have the desire?
- 15 TU: Yes, it is. A lot of it has been because of fear, to a certain extent, especially with not having the
- 16 proper genitalia. I believe, partly, because . . . and probably, because of the sexual assaults and
- 17 the trauma from that, that I really have a fear of having anal intercourse. And so, I can only
- 18 envision myself as having vaginal intercourse and, of course, I don't have the proper equipment
- 19 for that and so I've never tried to pursue a relationship.
- 20 AJ: Sure, wow.
- 21 TU: That, and I've just never met anybody that I've really clicked with in that way, that I've had the
- 22 chemistry with.
- 23 AJ: Wow. You mentioned that you have been doing a lot of advocacy.
- 24 TU: Yes.
- 25 AJ: Where do you think this transgender movement is at? Is there an agenda for the transgender
- 26 community and, if so, what is it?
- 27 TU: Well, the only agenda we have is to raise our status from second-class citizen status to the full
- 28 equality that everybody else enjoys. As a transgender person, I don't have protections for
- 29 employment, housing, public accommodations. I can be fired from a job because I'm
- 30 transgender, and I have actually been fired from a job because of being transgender.
- 31 AJ: What kind of job?

- 1 TU: It was driving a cab for a cab company and the owner's girlfriend saw me coming out of a bar  
 2 with some of my friends dressed up in femme, back when I was first starting my transition  
 3 process and first started going out publicly to bars for karaoke and stuff like that. I came out of  
 4 the bar and she was parked right there by the front door and she saw me when I came out. I  
 5 was fired the next day.
- 6 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 7 TU: The excuse that they used for firing me is because I honked the horn of the taxicab when I  
 8 picked up a fare at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, to let the fare know that I was outside their house.
- 9 AJ: Isn't that . . . that used to be standard taxi activity, right? Before cell phones.
- 10 TU: I know, that's one of the reasons why I was astonished that they used that as such a flimsy  
 11 excuse for firing me.
- 12 AJ: Yeah, that's what you had to do back then.
- 13 TU: They were saying that the fare complained that I was honking the horn and so they let me go.  
 14 But, it wasn't that great of a job. I kind of hated it.
- 15 AJ: You came out in 2011, right?
- 16 TU: Well, that's actually when I got my legal name change. I came out in late 2007, actually it was  
 17 December 2007 when I came out and finally accepted myself as being trans. Up to that point,  
 18 for the couple years before that, I was sitting on the fence trying to decide, "Am I trans? Am I  
 19 not? Is this just something that . . . some sort of wishful-thinking fantasy? Or, is this real?"
- 20 AJ: Yeah.
- 21 TU: And, what kind of pushed me over the edge was actually, my body decided for me.
- 22 AJ: How so?
- 23 TU: Well, basically, and rather bizarrely, I started undergoing a spontaneous sex change without any  
 24 hormone therapy where I . . . the first clue I had was I started losing weight dramatically. In  
 25 December of 2007, when I finally decided I had to transition, I was about 230 pounds. By mid-  
 26 March of 2008, I had dropped down to 170 pounds.
- 27 AJ: Wow, that's a significant weight loss.
- 28 TU: Which is a dramatic weight loss, no explanation for why it happened. I didn't have any medical  
 29 insurance at the time so I couldn't afford to see a doctor to find out what the hell was going on.  
 30 I felt fine so the only concern was that I was losing so much weight so dramatically. By mid-  
 31 March, friends of mine that had visited me during the Christmas holiday season, couldn't even  
 32 recognize me because my appearance had just changed so dramatically – not just the weight,  
 33 but my skin had started softening. Of course, at that time, I was already starting to experiment  
 34 with dressing up as female and I had already been in therapy for a couple of months now, at  
 35 that point.
- 36 AJ: This was pre-hormone . . . you said you did do some underground . . .

- 1 TU: Yeah, I did . . . that I didn't do until 2010.
- 2 AJ: Oh, so this was after that.
- 3 TU: Yeah, this was before I started on any do-it-yourself hormone therapy.
- 4 AJ: Yeah.
- 5 TU: And, it's just a . . . I was completely baffled by it.
- 6 AJ: Has the doctor explained that at all?
- 7 TU: Well, yeah, my endocrinologist and stuff, when I wanted to prove that I was intersexed we  
8 discussed it, and one of the theories that we have is that it seems plausible is that when I hit the  
9 age of 54, what natural testosterone production I had started to drop off as I was aging – which  
10 is natural as you start getting into your 50s and stuff. And, for whatever reason, in spite of  
11 having what ovarian tissue I had had being surgically removed when I was 4 years old under the  
12 guise of cancer prevention surgery, was that somewhere estrogen was being produced in my  
13 body other than from ovaries and my body just started naturally feminizing.
- 14 AJ: Wow.
- 15 TU: I didn't even realize that I was growing breasts until other people starting noticing it, before I  
16 even was aware of it.
- 17 AJ: Really?
- 18 TU: In July of 2008, I was severely injured in a work accident that left me more or less permanently  
19 disabled. I had a piece of real heavy sound equipment . . . I worked as a stage technician doing  
20 lighting and sound work, and I had a double-stack PA amplifier rack at a concert topple over on  
21 me. It weighed about 1500 pounds and partially crushed me and severely dislocated my right  
22 shoulder, really tore up the muscles and the tendons in my right shoulder, put a gash in the back  
23 of my head that took seven staples to close, injured my neck and my spine. As a result, my  
24 hands are numb all the time, they feel like they're asleep. So, I can't really tell if I'm gripping  
25 things properly a lot of times. I've learned to compensate over the years now, but boy, the first  
26 couple of years there . . . I destroyed a cell phone because I was holding a cell phone in my hand,  
27 left hand, and I went and made a motion like that and it went flinging across the room, slammed  
28 to the wall, and then slammed to the floor and shattered into a bunch of pieces. I had to go out  
29 and get a new cell phone after that, so that was the end of having a Blackberry and I switched to  
30 Android then.
- 31 AJ: Wow.
- 32 TU: So, it's taken me a while to get over that and because of it, my typing speed went from 55-60  
33 words a minute down to 13 words a minute because I can't feel if I'm on the home keys or not.
- 34 AJ: Sure.

- 1 TU: So, that's been a setback to me as far as . . . because I really like to do a lot of work with my  
2 hands – fine, detail work. Having grown up in the jewelry store business, my dad taught me how  
3 to work on watches and clocks and jewelry at a very early age.
- 4 AJ: Sure.
- 5 TU: And, I can't do that.
- 6 AJ: Is that accessible to you at all anymore or not at all?
- 7 TU: No, because I just can't . . . I don't have the tackle feel and now, in the last couple of years, I've  
8 developed what they call an essential tremor in my hands and arms where my hands aren't  
9 steady anymore. Unfortunately, I felt my medication back in Sioux Falls in my rush to get to the  
10 airport. I had them all laying out on the counter, right there ready for me to go – all I had to do  
11 was grab them and throw them in my bag and I forgot. I had them all in my little pill boxes for  
12 my evening meds and my morning meds and forgot them.
- 13 AJ: Well, you're on your way home. Tell me what has been one of the highlights for you in terms of  
14 transgender people and issues at this conference.
- 15 TU: One of the highlights is definitely all the incredibly amazing people in the transgender  
16 community that I've met and gotten to know. There are some really, truly remarkably talented  
17 people in the transgender community.
- 18 AJ: Absolutely.
- 19 TU: And, I think it's just such a horrible waste that there is so much discrimination in employment, in  
20 particular, because there are some extremely talented people that can do some amazing work if  
21 they were only given the chance. And that's been proven in some cases where a transgender  
22 person has been given the opportunity where they've really excelled. An early example would  
23 be Dr. Lynn Conway who was significant in creating the technology that made the  
24 microcomputer possible, thus introducing the PC and information technology revolution that  
25 we're all experiencing today.
- 26 AJ: I think she lives in Michigan, right? Lynn Conway.
- 27 TU: Yeah, Lynn Conway – yeah, she's still teaching up at the University of Michigan – electrical  
28 engineering.
- 29 AJ: Is she a friend of yours?
- 30 TU: No, I've never met her but I've followed her website quite extensively because she has a lot of  
31 really good information.
- 32 AJ: Who was a transgender . . . who was the first transgender person you ever met and what was  
33 that experience like?
- 34 TU: Let's see. The first transgender person I met was somebody at a model train conference,  
35 surprisingly.
- 36 AJ: OK.

- 1 TU: That was a hobby that I really got involved with – actually, it’s one of the few good things that  
2 my brother ever got me into was working on scale-model trains, which I’ve developed into quite  
3 an art form. I’ve done some very good high-quality work. I’ve built models of structures, in  
4 particular, that I really enjoyed building that I’ve sold for fairly significant sums of money.
- 5 AJ: Really?
- 6 TU: I’ve built a couple of displays that used to be in the airport lobby in Sioux Falls that aren’t there  
7 now, that was quite a few years ago . . . that was back in the 1980s that I built those.
- 8 AJ: Sure. Wow.
- 9 TU: And, my work is considered to be among some of the best in the world, at least according to  
10 people that are in the know in the model train publications.
- 11 AJ: So, you met this person there.
- 12 TU: Yeah.
- 13 AJ: Who was it, do you remember?
- 14 TU: I can’t remember her name right offhand.
- 15 AJ: But what made it stand out for you?
- 16 TU: Well, the fact that you could tell the person was apparently male but had breasts and was  
17 dressing and presenting as a woman. It was a rather large person, large hands, and very  
18 masculine features but was definitely living and presenting as a woman. That was my first  
19 encounter with actually meeting somebody who is transgender. I actually sat next to them at a  
20 dinner once and got to talk with them and that was when I was very early in my transition and  
21 was still very reluctant to come out. I did talk with them a little bit and that was a bit of an  
22 education for me. I do remember very early TV news reports about Christine Jorgensen that  
23 always stuck with me. And, I remember the story about, “Former GI becomes blonde beauty.”
- 24 AJ: Right, blonde bombshell some said.
- 25 TU: Yeah, blonde bombshell was another headline; on the TV news, it was a blonde beauty. This, of  
26 course, would have been in the 1950s when she came out publicly. That all stuck with me. And  
27 then my next encounter with something about transgender people was in a *Hustler* magazine  
28 that somebody showed me that featured a photospread of a trans woman that was pre-op.
- 29 AJ: Wow.
- 30 TU: And then, of course, I read some of the Greek mythology and stuff about Hermaphrodite from  
31 which the term hermaphrodites originate from and the story about that and that always kind of  
32 resonated with me in some ways.
- 33 AJ: You brought up this whole thing about the 1960s and 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s even. During  
34 that time, transgender identity or transsexualism as it was called, was very objectifying, very,  
35 sort-of, porn based. Did porn play a role in your sort-of psychosexual development?



- 1 TU: No, not really.
- 2 AJ: I know a lot of people . . .
- 3 TU: No. I've never really been that interested in porn that much. For a number of years, I had a
- 4 friend who would keep his porn collection at my place and he'd always order new porn films off
- 5 the internet and stuff, and he would keep it at my place because he didn't want his wife to know
- 6 that he had it. So, he'd bring it over and watch it. I'd, a lot of times, fall asleep on him while
- 7 watching it. The only porn films that I actually found interesting were the ones that were
- 8 started being made by women that actually told a real story, not just very lame pretense for
- 9 somebody to hook-up – the whole wham, bam, thank you ma'am.
- 10 AJ: The pizza deliver guy.
- 11 TU: Get the shot at the end and stuff. And that just bored the stuffings out of me.
- 12 AJ: Wow. Where do you think this movement is headed in the next 50 years, Tamara?
- 13 TU: Gosh, yeah. I hope that we will achieve full equality. A lot of times our opponents out there are
- 14 claiming that we're trying to get special rights – we're not. We're not.
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 TU: All we're asking for is the right to have a job and a home over our heads and to be able to use
- 17 the public accommodations that are appropriate to our gender identity.
- 18 AJ: Wow, yeah – absolutely.
- 19 TU: We only want to pee, we're not there to go and molest anybody. For gosh sakes, the majority of
- 20 transgender women I know are deathly afraid of being assaulted when they go to use the
- 21 restroom and several of them won't even use a public restroom, they'll just hold it and hold it
- 22 and hold it until they can get home.
- 23 AJ: Right.
- 24 TU: Or, to go someplace where they know it's safe to go to the restroom. Thankfully there are a
- 25 growing number of businesses that are now putting in non-gendered restrooms like the grocery
- 26 store where I do most of my shopping at for groceries. They did a major remodel a few years
- 27 back and when they did that, they removed the multi-stall restrooms and put in single use
- 28 restrooms that they labeled family restrooms and made them a little bit larger restrooms with
- 29 changing tables and a much nicer atmosphere with some artificial plants and pretty décor and
- 30 stuff. I was really impressed by that.
- 31 AJ: Made it very comfortable for everybody.
- 32 TU: Yeah, very comfortable.
- 33 AJ: Disabled people, families with children, trans-identified people.
- 34 TU: And that's been a huge, huge improvement.
- 35 AJ: Tamara, is there anything that I haven't asked you that you feel a burning desire to share?

- 1 TU: Well, one thing I guess I'd like to share is that one of the types of harassment that I received  
2 early on was in junior high and it was from the physical education coach. I was singled out in  
3 front of a PE class once. Because I have asthma, I've never been very athletically inclined and  
4 stuff, so I was never very good at sports because I just didn't have the wind capacity for doing a  
5 lot of vigorous activity. And, so I never really had much of an interest in sports. Of course, a lot  
6 of the kids that teased me were the jocks. So, I avoided going to any sports activities – like the  
7 basketball games and football games and stuff like that, wrestling matches and so on. The  
8 junior high PE coach was also the junior high basketball coach and he called me out in front of  
9 the entire class after talking roll call one morning and asked me how come he never sees me at  
10 any of the basketball games – why am I not out there supporting the home team and stuff?  
11 And, he basically . . . I said, "I've got better things to do than watch some stupid basketball  
12 game," which didn't go over very well. And he said, "What's more important than watching and  
13 supporting your basketball team?"
- 14 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 15 TU: I said, "Well, doing my homework for one and then I like to work on my model trains." He just  
16 got red-faced angry and he went and told the entire class that if I did not show up and he did  
17 not see me at the next home basketball game, that he was going to give everyone in the class an  
18 F for the entire semester.
- 19 AJ: What?
- 20 TU: Needless to say, that painted a very big abusive target on my back and that was when the abuse  
21 really started – the bullying really took off after that. At one point, it got so bad that my parents  
22 had to hire an attorney and threaten to sue the school if they didn't do something to curb the  
23 bullying and the abuse and the beatings that I was getting.
- 24 AJ: Wow.
- 25 TU: I was frequently being jumped and beat up on the way home from school. My parents just  
26 wouldn't tolerate it and I'm very lucky that I had parents that were tolerant and understanding.  
27 I really would like to think that they would have fully supported me if I had come out as  
28 transgender back when they were alive.
- 29 AJ: I'm sure they would have – you're a very lovely woman.
- 30 TU: Especially since they would have had to have known I was intersexed to begin with, because I  
31 believe they would have fully understood that the doctors made the wrong choice when they  
32 recommended that they assign me as male. That was another thing, I always was more  
33 interested in female activities – like when my family would get together to visit relatives, my  
34 mom had a bunch of sisters and they'd all get together in the kitchen and be working on cooking  
35 the meal, while the men would all be in the living room watching the football game. I was bored  
36 with football, I just had no interest. So, I'd go into the kitchen and I'd sit there with the women  
37 and I'd help peel the potatoes or peel the eggs for an egg salad and things like that. I was much  
38 more interested . . . to me, they were talking about a lot more interesting things and stuff. It  
39 just was a much more familiar fit.

- 1   AJ:     Are you a good cook now?
- 2   TU:     Yeah, I'm not a bad cook at all.
- 3   AJ:     Good.
- 4   TU:     I just wish I had all my mom's recipes – she had some really great recipes. I came from a
- 5         predominantly German family background, although I'm a bit of a Heinz 57-European blend of
- 6         German, French, English, and Bohemian. I kind of like to think I lean more towards the
- 7         Bohemian side of the family – at least as far as the way I like to live.
- 8   AJ:     Well, the fact that you don't have your mom's recipes highlights the importance of this project
- 9         in that we try to collect as many voices as we can for posterity. I just want to thank you so
- 10        much, Tamara, for being a part of this. We are going to come to Sioux Falls and visit and try to
- 11        interview some more folks there, but I am so appreciative of this opportunity to speak with you
- 12        today.
- 13  TU:     I really thank you for this opportunity too.
- 14  AJ:     Yeah. Until we meet again.
- 15  TU:     Yes, Andrea.
- 16  AJ:     All right. Bye-bye.
- 17  TU:     OK, bye.