

Rehema Mertinez
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

March 28, 2016



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

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

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

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Rehema Martinez -RM
3

4 AJ: So, hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral
5 History Project at the University of Minnesota Tretter Collection. Today is March 28, 2016, and
6 we're in south Minneapolis and I'm here talking with Rehema Martinez.

7 RM: Hi.

8 AJ: How are you?

9 RM: I'm great, how are you doing?

10 AJ: Wonderful, wonderful. So, Rehema, I'm going to ask if you'd just introduce yourself. Say your
11 name, maybe spell your name just so that the person who is transcribing for us can have the
12 correct spelling, right.

13 RM: Yeah.

14 AJ: State your gender identity as you identify yourself today and your gender assigned at birth, and
15 your preferred pronouns . . . or your pronouns, I should say, because it's not our preferred
16 pronouns, right? It is our pronouns. I'm trying to get in the habit of dropping that preferred.

17 RM: Yeah.

18 AJ: Go ahead.

19 RM: Well, Rehema Martinez. R-e-h-e-m-a M-e-r-t-i-n-e-z. And, I am a trans woman of color.

20 AJ: Right.

21 RM: My pronoun is she, them, and they. What else? What was the other one?

22 AJ: What was your gender assigned at birth?

23 RM: My assigned gender at birth was male.

24 AJ: OK. All right. So, Rehema, I'm so glad to be here with you today, I haven't seen you for a long
25 time. I just want to say we're really good friends, so I miss you, but I'm glad that you're here.
26 Tell me, Rehema, about your earliest memory in life. It could be about gender but it doesn't
27 have to be about gender. It could be, "I remember eating a caramel apple popsicle when I was
28 three." What's your earliest memory?

29 RM: My earliest memory would probably be . . . the first thing that comes to mind would be playing
30 with make-up, Barbies, just playing with hair and just singing with an imaginary microphone and
31 just in my own little world.

32 AJ: Wow, so it is around gender.

33 RM: It is, for me.

34 AJ: So how old do you think you were at that point in time?

1 RM: I feel like I was always like that but when I started to remember or starting to take notice, I was
2 probably like four or five.

3 AJ: I'm remiss because you're holding a little . . .

4 RM: Puppy.

5 AJ: A puppy in your arms and maybe since your puppy is here, you should introduce them.

6 RM: This is Beco, gender queer Beco. He likes he, she, they and them.

7 AJ: All right.

8 RM: So however Beco feels today.

9 AJ: OK, that's pretty cool. I love that. What makes Beco gender queer? Like why do you think Beco
10 . . . because Beco can't really talk, but I know dogs do have personalities.

11 RM: To me, I think Beco portrays gender queer. Beco just seems like gender isn't important – like
12 everything else is important. I also have a cat named Maltese who, to me, is gender queer as
13 well. They're best friends, they cuddle, they play fight, they sleep together, they groom each
14 other.

15 AJ: Wow.

16 RM: I don't want to say they hump each other because they're both neutered but yeah, they don't
17 give that masculine vibe and they don't give like a certain feminine vibe. So it's just neutral.

18 AJ: That's very clear and understandable. It is sort of unusual for dogs and cats to be friends, right?

19 RM: Yeah, like best friends.

20 AJ: Best friends, so there is something happening with their personalities or their gender that is
21 allowing them to . . .

22 RM: They love each other, I think there's love there.

23 AJ: Oh wow.

24 RM: Or I think they're just blind sighted to the fact that they're different kinds of animals.

25 AJ: They just don't see it.

26 RM: Right, yeah.

27 AJ: That's beautiful, really beautiful. Where did you grow up?

28 RM: Well, I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I grew up here, like the beginning of my childhood
29 was in Minneapolis. I lived in Plymouth, Minnesota, for a while and went to elementary school
30 out there for a while. And then, I moved to Australia when I was . . . I had my 8th birthday . . . or
31 my 9th birthday in Australia and I did the rest of my schooling out there – like high school and
32 stuff.

- 1 AJ: Wow.
- 2 RM: It was a complete culture shock – just everything. My whole life just went . . . like upside down.
3 I had to learn everything.
- 4 AJ: How did you end up moving to Australia?
- 5 RM: It was my mother's wishes. She was in the middle of a career change, she was tired of the
6 career . . . the path that she was going down. She wanted to pursue something else and we
7 actually had a relative that lived in Australia for 20 years prior. We visited a couple of times and
8 . . . I don't know, it was a thought that came into her head and she just followed the process of
9 making that happen and we just did it.
- 10 AJ: Wow.
- 11 RM: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: Australia.
- 13 RM: I know. I'm 8 years old, I'm just like, "I'll do whatever, I want a new house – whatever."
- 14 AJ: Right. Do you have siblings?
- 15 RM: I do, yeah.
- 16 AJ: You did at the time too?
- 17 RM: One other sibling.
- 18 AJ: OK, OK. Female, male?
- 19 RM: Female, older sister.
- 20 AJ: How did they respond to being in Australia?
- 21 RM: I feel like . . . our house really was just the three of us – my mother, my sister, and I. I just feel
22 like when we moved to Australia, this huge change in our lives, it affected us differently – all
23 three of us. I took something from that experience and likewise for my sister and my mother.
24 Yeah. So I can't really say how they feel about it.
- 25 AJ: Right, right. So where in Australia?
- 26 RM: Perth – western Australia.
- 27 AJ: OK. You've said that already.
- 28 RM: Perth is on the west side. Sydney is on the way other side – so you can kind of picture.
- 29 AJ: It's backwards from the United States, so the east coast is the warmer side or . . .?
- 30 RM: Oh, good question.
- 31 AJ: What was the weather like in Perth?

- 1 RM: It was hot, our winters were basically like our spring here, but rainy. It would be rainy and kind
2 of cold, you would probably need like a sweatshirt.
- 3 AJ: Jacket.
- 4 RM: But nothing more than that.
- 5 AJ: You went to high school there and you said you were playing with make-up and hair and dolls
6 and everything when you were four, or around that age. So I'm imagining that that didn't stop
7 when you . . . as you got older, or did it?
- 8 RM: Well, that's a good question. It did, I kind of grew out of that. I was getting a lot of flak in
9 school, as I got older. I was getting a lot of . . .
- 10 AJ: You were being bullied.
- 11 RM: Yeah, I was always that kind of person that stood up for myself, I would get into fights – I would
12 be fighting somebody. "How dare you call me a girl or blah, blah, blah."
- 13 AJ: Right.
- 14 RM: But it just got to the point where I said to myself, "I don't want to be called these things
15 anymore, I don't want to be teased," or whatever, by these boys. I had a lot of friends that were
16 girls but I was like, "I don't want to have to deal with this." So I kind of, at a certain age – I think
17 it was like, around maybe 3rd grade-ish, you know, is when I said to myself, "I'm going to make a
18 change and try to fit in more."
- 19 AJ: And that seems like that's kind of when you moved to Australia, huh?
- 20 RM: That was more like 4th grade.
- 21 AJ: OK. So you made this decision . . .
- 22 RM: A little earlier, prior to moving.
- 23 AJ: Prior to moving. Did you carry that . . .?
- 24 RM: I feel like by moving to Australia, I said to myself, "This will be a perfect opportunity to start
25 fresh. I'm going to have friends that are guys, I'm not going to get teased. I'm going to be a
26 regular boy." That's what I said, and I kind of suppressed all the wanting to be a girl. I just kind
27 of pushed that away.
- 28 AJ: Yeah, that happens to a lot of people. When did you decide that you were no longer going to
29 suppress that?
- 30 RM: When I got kicked out of home when I was . . . when I was about 15 years old. I was
31 experimenting with my sexuality; I was very confused. I knew I was attracted to men but I didn't
32 want to admit to myself that I was gay – like, that just didn't sit with me. So I was more
33 comfortable with the idea that, "OK, I'm bisexual," or something. But when I got kicked out of
34 home, I kind of felt a certain sense of freedom, of course, and with that freedom I experimented
35 more with my identity and who do I want to be and what do I like, when it comes to how I

- 1 present myself. I kind of noticed . . . it was kind of like a snowball effect, like I started to dress
2 more feminine but it just happened slowly and gradually as time went on. I was kicked out of
3 home and as I gained more responsibility and I grew up and became more mature, that's when I
4 . . . it just kind of snowballed effect. And then I was very feminine and I was dressing very
5 feminine, but I didn't know anything about what it was like to be trans.
- 6 AJ: A trans identity, yeah.
- 7 RM: I was not educated at all. I didn't even know it was possible to take hormones. And then when I
8 found out that was possible, it was like, "Hallelujah."
- 9 AJ: (singing) Hallelujah!
- 10 RM: It was like the answer, I was like, "Oh my God. Are you telling me I can be what I want to be and
11 that's even possible?" I was like, "Oh my God, I have to do it, that's it."
- 12 AJ: So you were kicked out of your home because you were having sex with men or thoughts of
13 having sex with men?
- 14 RM: I got kicked out of home because . . . no, it was a lot of things. Some of it was, I was very
15 depressed and the way I acted when I was depressed . . . like, I would go to school and if I got
16 called gay at school or whatever, that would literally shut me down. I would feel crushed. So I
17 would go home and I would just be withdrawn and depressed and I wouldn't talk to anyone –
18 my sister, my mom. And then my mom and I would get into a lot of arguments and it just . . . it
19 caused a lot of tension. I feel like with all this confusion, this not knowing about my sexuality,
20 just not knowing what do I do . . . I don't like the way I look when I look in the mirror, I am very
21 depressed when I look at myself, I'm seeing myself turn into this man, I'm dealing with puberty
22 and I'm grossed out. I'm going to school and I'm being judged. I'm trying so hard to act straight
23 or look straight, how you're supposed to act in school or whatever, like the other guys. I'm
24 trying so hard and I'm still being called these things and it really would crush my heart. And so
25 that played a big effect on me and that played out on my relationship with my family. And then
26 also, I wanted to experiment with my sexuality so I would reach out, or I would go on these
27 websites – you know, that you're meant to be an adult, you know what I mean? And I'm like 15
28 years old and I'm just trying to see . . . talking to somebody that understands, that likes the same
29 thing because I don't want to talk to my mom about it, I don't want to talk to anybody about it
30 because I felt ashamed.
- 31 AJ: Sure.
- 32 RM: It just kind of all played with that. And also, hanging out with friends – friends that weren't a
33 good role model for me, and then I would hang out with them and then I wouldn't communicate
34 with my mom. She would say, "Call at this time," and I wouldn't call. "Come home after
35 school," and I wouldn't come home. I would skip school and everything. I was like, "Fuck
36 school."
- 37 AJ: Yeah. Did you finish high school?
- 38 RM: I didn't finish high school.

- 1 AJ: OK.
- 2 RM: Because I got kicked out that last year and that really showed in my school reports and stuff,
3 there was a huge drop in my grades – to the point where I would have to repeat the year. And
4 so, when I found that out, I saved up my money and I moved back to America by myself.
- 5 AJ: Really? Wow.
- 6 RM: Yeah, I did it.
- 7 AJ: So you came back to the United States at 17 – 16 or 17 years old.
- 8 RM: Yup. And I did it without my mom's consent, I took my passport from her – I tricked her into
9 giving me my passport and she thought I was just going to get it for getting an ID or something. I
10 knew that I had a ticket already and I just didn't give it back to her – she kept my passport.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 RM: And I didn't give it back to her and it was a couple days later, I jumped on that plane and came
13 back here all alone. I never did that trip before by myself, I didn't know what to expect when I
14 got off the plane, when I arrived in America.
- 15 AJ: Did you come back to Minneapolis or . . . ?
- 16 RM: Not at first. I tried to see a relative and everything, a relative that I hadn't seen since I was a
17 baby.
- 18 AJ: Oh wow.
- 19 RM: So, I don't know . . . I don't know what I was expecting. I was just hoping for the best.
- 20 AJ: Were they helpful at all?
- 21 RM: Well, actually, my relative, my sister, she was living with some family friends of hers so she
22 didn't really have the say if I could stay with her or not. So I found out after arriving that I
23 couldn't stay with her, so I had to go on my MySpace at the time, and message one of my
24 friends that I knew that were staying near my sister, that I so happened to become friends with,
25 and they offered to let me stay at their house.
- 26 AJ: Oh wow.
- 27 RM: That situation could have went so bad. There's so many ways that could have went horribly
28 wrong.
- 29 AJ: Horribly wrong.
- 30 RM: And it didn't, and I feel really grateful.
- 31 AJ: You're blessed. So, you sort of talked about this a little bit, but when did you really realize that I
32 am not the gender I was assigned at birth?
- 33 RM: I realized that . . . like four or five years old.

- 1 AJ: OK, and then you repressed it.
- 2 RM: Well, not at that time, but at 5 years old, I'm like, "I'm not a boy, I'm a girl." I used to get in
3 fights because you're calling me a boy. I used to demand people to call me Victoria. I would get
4 so mad. I used to pray I would go to sleep and wake up a girl. Just wish – like, "Oh my gosh."
5 And then as I got older, obviously that's not going to happen, and then I just kind of told myself .
6 . . like, "Well, if you don't want to deal with this, if you don't want to be teased, or if you don't
7 want to go through this trouble at school, something is going to have to change. You can't dress
8 up to school anymore, you can't dress up when we go to the grocery store and everything."
- 9 AJ: So you would dress as a girl?
- 10 RM: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: To go to school?
- 12 RM: My mom would allow me to do that.
- 13 AJ: And to the grocery store?
- 14 RM: She would tell me . . . she would tell me, "There's safe people and there is not safe people," and
15 your family is the safe people that you can do that around. But there's going to be people here
16 that are not OK with that.
- 17 AJ: So your issues with your mom wasn't necessarily around your gender identity, it was more
18 around you just not following the rules and not communicating and . . .
- 19 RM: It was more around me being a teenager and . . . she didn't know about my depression.
- 20 AJ: Being a jerk – she felt like you were being a jerk.
- 21 RM: She didn't know about my depression, she didn't know about the . . .
- 22 AJ: Internal . . .
- 23 RM: Yeah, the shit that I was going through.
- 24 AJ: Anxiety, yeah.
- 25 RM: And it was coming out in that way where it really put a strain on our relationship to the point
26 where she was like, "You're going to have to leave if you're not going to respect this household."
27 Which I totally understand why she did that. I wish that I could . . . I wish I could talk to that
28 person, that person at that time, that was going through all that and like talk to them and just
29 tell them, "It's OK to talk to my mom," and just open up a little bit. I put this huge guard up to
30 protect . . . I don't know why. You would think my mom would be the best person to talk to, but
31 I don't know.
- 32 AJ: Yeah. Clearly there was some reason why. If there was no reason, that's the reason . . . people
33 don't talk to their parents about really deep things in their lives – right away, anyway.
- 34 RM: Well, I didn't even know what it was yet. I don't think I even had the words to even talk about
35 it.

- 1 AJ: Sure, that makes sense. So, when you came back to the United States, is that when you started
2 sort of living your life as a woman? Or were you still trying to live up to this societal thing?
- 3 RM: When I came back to the states, that's when I came out. That was my coming out, by me
4 basically getting on a plane and flying across the world, I just . . . I'm like, "That's it, I'm out." I
5 was dressed in very feminine clothes, I was wearing make-up, I was arching my eyebrows. I still
6 didn't know anything about trans stuff. It wasn't until I eventually got back to Minnesota and I
7 was going through homelessness and going in the youth shelters, that I came across . . . I want
8 to say, First Avenue . . . Youth Avenue.
- 9 AJ: Oh, Avenues for . . . Avenues for Homeless Youth, right?
- 10 RM: Yeah, I went there for a night and that's when I met Katie Burgess.
- 11 AJ: OK.
- 12 RM: And she was the overnight staff there. She did the intake and everything and we just had this
13 long conversation. She was the first trans woman that I ever met in my life.
- 14 AJ: Oh wow.
- 15 RM: I just felt a sense of like . . . breath of air, like, "I feel so comfortable, just to be around you," and
16 then she just educated me. And she was like, "Yeah, this is possible, yeah you can do these
17 things." I was like, "Really? How? Tell me?"
- 18 AJ: Yes.
- 19 RM: And she told me and I was so overwhelmed.
- 20 AJ: So she connected you to resources and those kinds of things.
- 21 RM: Yeah, I was so overwhelmed.
- 22 AJ: Wow.
- 23 RM: As soon as she did that, I did everything I could to get connected and that was my transition.
- 24 AJ: Sure, wow. So what terms do you use to describe yourself today and how has that changed
25 over time?
- 26 RM: As far as pronouns?
- 27 AJ: No, I mean more like identity. But it could be pronouns too, that's all a part of our identity.
- 28 RM: You know, I see myself a very open-minded person. I'm a very accepting, such a nice caring
29 person because I know what it's like to be really hurt so I hate to see that to somebody else.
- 30 AJ: Sure.
- 31 RM: I love to help people. Over time, it has changed. I wasn't like that before. Before I was very shy,
32 very . . . you know, sheltered, afraid to be 100% myself, and speak my mind. I wasn't fully like . .
33 . bloomed. Nowadays, I speak my mind. I'm very outspoken and I just . . . I can take a lot of shit
34 and I can dish it back, but back then I was too afraid. I would let little things crush my spirit but

- 1 now I feel like I have a good armor because of just experience, and just because you've been
2 down that road it allows you to just be like . . . you can educate people and stuff. That's all.
- 3 AJ: How old are you?
- 4 RM: I'm 23.
- 5 AJ: 23 years old. Wow, you're so young. So you just got back from Perth? No, I'm teasing. It's
6 been a while, you've been back for a while.
- 7 RM: Yeah, like eight years.
- 8 AJ: Is that right? OK. So you met Katie, Katie turns you on to these resources and things, and so
9 now you . . . you said earlier in the interview that you identify as a trans woman of color. What
10 does that mean to you to be a trans woman of color?
- 11 RM: To me that means to be a male to female trans woman. Of color, that could be just any
12 ethnicity other than Caucasian. That's what it means.
- 13 AJ: Yeah. What's your nationality?
- 14 RM: I'm mixed race. I have roots that come from Jamaica and Puerto Rico.
- 15 AJ: OK. Is your dad . . .?
- 16 RM: I don't know who my dad is, but assuming he's Puerto Rican.
- 17 AJ: Wow.
- 18 RM: That's what I hear.
- 19 AJ: And so, thus the name – Martinez. What challenges have you faced since you began to express
20 your true gender identity, Rehema?
- 21 RM: Challenges? Real life basically, that's the challenge – just dealing with real life.
- 22 AJ: Real life, you said.
- 23 RM: Yeah. At the end of the day, after you may realize who you are and you may look at yourself
24 and be completely satisfied but when you walk out the door, there's real life and you may come
25 across people that aren't as open-minded, as spiritually connected as you are. So, that's always
26 a challenge. And challenges that I face are just like being an adult, being a grown woman, and
27 being a grown trans woman of color – that can be a challenge. But I wouldn't take it back for
28 anything.
- 29 AJ: Yeah. So, that brings me to the next question, what are the joys that you've experienced since
30 coming out?
- 31 RM: I feel like I'm so connected. I feel a lot of trans people, gender non-conforming . . . people that
32 really take the time to make themselves spiritually happy, they are on a different level
33 spiritually. They know themselves a lot more and they're able to see things differently. So I feel

- 1 like that's one of the great things about being who I am because I feel like my eyes are much
2 clearer.
- 3 AJ: Wow.
- 4 RM: I'm not clouded. I feel very experienced.
- 5 AJ: So you see this as a spiritual journey?
- 6 RM: I do, I do.
- 7 AJ: That's interesting. I agree. I don't hear that all the time though, I think people may be afraid to
8 name it as such – and maybe a lot of trans people just don't feel it either, but I think you're right
9 in saying that a lot do. What's your relationship like with your family now? Your birth family –
10 and do you have a . . . have you sort of created a chosen family?
- 11 RM: Yeah, so I have an adopted family and I have a biological family. And, I guess you can say I have
12 a chosen family as well. None of those families are perfect.
- 13 AJ: Right.
- 14 RM: I'm really trying to re-build my relationship with my adopted family because that's been broken
15 and tarnished for some time now. When I moved to a different country, I kind of left them
16 behind because my reasons and what not. So, I'm trying to re-build that, that's where I'm at
17 right now.
- 18 AJ: OK.
- 19 RM: There was once upon a time where being connected with my biological family was the only thing
20 that mattered – finding myself with my biological family. "I need to find who I came from," and
21 everything like that. Once I found out, I found out . . .
- 22 AJ: OK, that's good, right? I guess.
- 23 RM: And then I moved on. It's not important to me anymore.
- 24 AJ: Oh wow, that's amazing. That's beautiful.
- 25 RM: I have chosen people in my life that are there for a reason. People, they come and they go and
26 that's just a part of life.
- 27 AJ: The reason why I say that it's beautiful is, I think it's beautiful . . . not that you feel like, "I met
28 them, now I've got to move on," but that you had the self-awareness to be able to say, "I know
29 who they are and they are who they are and I'm not really down with that so I'm going to keep
30 it moving."
- 31 RM: I'm glad that I went through that journey. Yeah, I took that journey, it was important once upon
32 a time, and when I found out I went through what I went through and everything happens for a
33 reason.
- 34 AJ: Were they accepting of your gender identity or expression?

- 1 RM: Well, you know, some were and some weren't. At the end of the day I had to tell myself, "They
2 don't know you, they didn't know you . . . they might as well be strangers to you." I just . . . it
3 was so important once upon a time.
- 4 AJ: Yeah, yeah.
- 5 RM: And then I found out and they saw me for who I was, I wasn't trying to hide it and I think I
6 needed that for my . . . I needed to close the door basically. I was like, "OK, now I can close that
7 door and now I can move on," which I'm glad I did that at an earlier age instead of at an old age.
- 8 AJ: Wow. Rehema, to the extent that you feel comfortable, can you please tell me about any sort of
9 medical interventions that you have . . . ?
- 10 RM: Medical?
- 11 AJ: Interventions or medical procedures or hormones or whatever that you've done along your
12 journey of gender transition.
- 13 RM: OK, is that the only topic – gender transition?
- 14 AJ: Yeah, I mean . . . I don't know, unless you had a heart attack or something. I'm not trying to be
15 funny, maybe you do have some health issues . . . I don't know. You're only 23, but . . .
- 16 RM: I haven't had any surgeries, hopefully in the near future. I feel like surgery is great, it's for you
17 and yourself and whatever, you can make that choice. But, you know, as of recently I did have a
18 health scare. I showed signs of pre-cancerous cells.
- 19 AJ: Oh no.
- 20 RM: High grade, so I actually had to get a procedure done recently where they had to burn certain
21 tissue, laser . . . they had to damage the tissue so that the new growth, the new tissue, could
22 hopefully be not as of a high grade.
- 23 AJ: Oh wow.
- 24 RM: Because the way they grade it, Level 6 is cancer – I was at Level 5.
- 25 AJ: Oh boy.
- 26 RM: So they had to damage that tissue so that hopefully the new growth will be like a Level 2, that
27 would be a more comfortable level to be at.
- 28 AJ: Sure. Well, I'm glad they caught it.
- 29 RM: I'm glad too.
- 30 AJ: Yeah, that's awesome. And I hope that it doesn't materialize into something else. Have you
31 done any hormonal therapy at all?
- 32 RM: Yeah, of course. I started my transition when I was like 17.
- 33 AJ: OK, so you've been taking hormones for a little while now.

- 1 RM: I'm moned up.
- 2 AJ: Yeah, oh man.
- 3 RM: I don't think I can get any more moned up.
- 4 AJ: Moned up – all right. So, you're thinking that maybe surgery might be an option somewhere
5 down the line?
- 6 RM: Maybe. I'm not going to rush to it, if it happens it happens.
- 7 AJ: That's cool. So just thinking back over your decision to express your truest gender identity, what
8 were some of the pivotal moments that defined your new life? And you just told me . . . actually
9 I don't know why I'm asking, you told me that flight back to the United States was a really
10 pivotal moment and then meeting Katie Burgess at Avenues for Homeless Youth was a really
11 pivotal moment. Are there any other moments that you can point to that's like you had that
12 Hallelujah moment?
- 13 RM: Those are really those main ones, you basically just said them. When it comes to just doing
14 something for me and just knowing that by doing this, it's going to help or it's going to change
15 my life in some way or another. Yeah, that's pretty much it.
- 16 AJ: Hmmmm, wow. My next question – you already answered that. Has there been a specific
17 moment, person, or organization that has changed or had a significant impact on you? So you
18 talked about a person, but an organization?
- 19 RM: TYSN, I would say was an organization that really educated me and helped me. I felt a part of . .
20 . I felt that not only was I a youth that was going there, but I felt like I had some say and some
21 control. I really got awareness of how to . . . or the knowledge of just kind of how to run a
22 program or how to facilitate.
- 23 AJ: Right, public speaking.
- 24 RM: And how to run a group and educate others.
- 25 AJ: So for people who may not know what TYSN is, what is TYSN?
- 26 RM: TYSN is the Trans Youth Support Network. It used to be on 34th and Chicago . . . 34th or
27 something.
- 28 AJ: Yeah, yeah.
- 29 RM: It was like I just kind of felt at home, kind of, when I would go there. I just felt comfortable.
- 30 AJ: Yeah. So I know TYSN was around for a while, for about 10 years, but it's no longer in existence.
- 31 RM: It's no longer.
- 32 AJ: Why do you think TYSN ended?

- 1 RM: You know, I don't quite know. I know that I stopped going to TYSN just for my own personal
2 reasons. And I just . . . I would hear and I would see there was a lot of changes – different
3 people running TYSN, youth were running it.
- 4 AJ: So it became a youth-run organization?
- 5 RM: Yeah.
- 6 AJ: Which was what it was always intended to become, but you have to help youth build that
7 capacity to do that.
- 8 RM: It just felt like as soon as these youth had that control, it kind of stopped. It kind of went
9 downhill. But maybe it was going downhill before that.
- 10 AJ: Yeah. I think it was a lack of support from adults and from the broader community too. I think
11 that people of color-led organizations don't always get the kind of support that they need –
12 particularly trans organizations and then particularly youth.
- 13 RM: Right.
- 14 AJ: But it's sad that it's gone. The Tretter Collection where I work, we actually have the papers of
15 TYSN, some someone donated all of the organizational papers from TYSN.
- 16 RM: Oh really?
- 17 AJ: Yeah.
- 18 RM: What have you kind of done with that?
- 19 AJ: Well, you know, we're just going to preserve them and keep them in the library. We're not
20 going to change them at all, but if people want to come and find out what was happening at
21 TYSN or who was running TYSN when, like all of that information is there.
- 22 RM: Wow, I might want to check that out.
- 23 AJ: Yeah, you absolutely should.
- 24 RM: Just to read, educate myself.
- 25 AJ: Yup, come over to the University of Minnesota and I can give you a tour and we can a look at
26 those papers – yeah, absolutely. So, have there been times in your life when somebody has
27 been really helpful or somebody has been really insensitive, and I'm thinking more like in terms
28 of medical, the police department or school or places like that, and you said you just had a
29 medical procedure recently. How did that experience go?
- 30 RM: That was actually great, I didn't have any negative experience with that.
- 31 AJ: That's wonderful, that's awesome.
- 32 RM: I've definitely had . . .
- 33 AJ: What hospital did you go to?

- 1 RM: Park Nicollet. I've definitely had bad experiences with cops, people of authority, teachers . . .
2 what else? People that have authority, people with power.
- 3 AJ: Like mis-gendering you or . . .
- 4 RM: Yeah, mis-gendering me or just being violated by the cops, sexually harassing me – being just
5 awful.
- 6 AJ: Wow. So do you think police in this city can benefit from sensitivity training or trans education?
- 7 RM: Trans education, yeah. I believe so. And not only that but just proper training when it comes to
8 dealing with people – like I don't feel like violence is always the answer. I feel like there is other
9 avenues that police or people of authority can go down. You don't always have to pull out your
10 taser and tase somebody. I feel like we can talk.
- 11 AJ: You have not been tased by the police, have you?
- 12 RM: No, I haven't.
- 13 AJ: Thank God.
- 14 RM: I was just using that as an example.
- 15 AJ: Absolutely, yeah.
- 16 RM: Or threatening to use violence when the person is just wanting to ask you a question, or if
17 they're just wanting to ask why am I being . . .
- 18 AJ: Being detained?
- 19 RM: Or why am I going through this? What did I do? And if they can't even get an answer, but
20 instead, "Put your hands up now."
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 RM: "You have three seconds or I'm going to tase you." It's just brutality.
- 23 AJ: Yeah, I'm sorry that you . . .
- 24 RM: I feel like a lot of us trans people, we have dealt with some sort of brutality of some sort.
- 25 AJ: Discrimination.
- 26 RM: Discrimination.
- 27 AJ: Yeah, targeting, I believe.
- 28 RM: Yeah, definitely.
- 29 AJ: Rehema, or can I call you ReRe? I love calling you ReRe.
- 30 RM: Of course you can call me ReRe, Andrea.

- 1 AJ: Talk to me about romance, relationships, love. Who do you love? Are you in love right now?
2 Do you date men? Do you date women? Are you gender queer? Talk to me.
- 3 RM: I would say I'm gender queer. Obviously a lot of my relationships have been with men, but
4 some of them have been with women. I don't like to allow myself to just give myself just a snap
5 and that's it. "I only like men, I'm straight, blah, blah, blah." I just don't think that's living life. I
6 want to have my brain open to different possibilities because if you only have a tunnel vision,
7 you don't see anything else.
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 RM: So I feel like I'm gender queer, is that what you just said?
- 10 AJ: Yeah, gender queer – or just queer.
- 11 RM: I'm gender queer. And you know what? Somedays I don't even feel like a woman when I wake
12 up. Somedays I don't even feel like . . . I just feel like I'm . . . I don't want to be a gender, I don't
13 want to be anything.
- 14 AJ: Wow, sounds like non-binary.
- 15 RM: I just want to throw on some clothes, get my mail, go to the corner store. I don't want anybody
16 to whistle at me or honk at me, I just don't want any attention and I don't think that's a crime.
- 17 AJ: No, it's not a crime. So some days you just want to be like Beco, huh?
- 18 RM: I want to be Beco? Can we swap?
- 19 AJ: Are you in a relationship right now?
- 20 RM: Love in my life . . . I am, there is somebody that I'm in love with. I've only been in love once and
21 I've been with this person for about seven years.
- 22 AJ: Oh wow. So you guys are in a relationship now?
- 23 RM: Six or seven years. We've kind of been going through a rough patch these past couple of
24 months, but . . . yeah.
- 25 AJ: The seven-year itch. Have you ever heard of that?
- 26 RM: No, I haven't.
- 27 AJ: It's just . . . I don't know. It may be true, it may not, but when relationships get around the
28 seven-year mark people start getting kind of crazy or wanting to try something new. They just
29 get antsy. But, who knows if that's true or not.
- 30 RM: We've definitely been doing it for a long time. I think it's more like six years, I think I added a
31 year to that. It feels like forever, but yeah – I love him. He's a bastard, but I love him.
- 32 AJ: Are you happy?
- 33 RM: I feel like love is like . . . if they're not your best friend, if you don't feel safe, whole and just like
34 yourself . . . I feel like I can be myself, I don't have to try to be anything else. I don't have to be

- 1 super girly, I don't have to be any of that. I feel like that's artificial. If that was the case, I mean,
2 it's not going to happen – I'm going to lose somewhere. Just kidding.
- 3 AJ: Oh wow. So, when you came out to your family, what did you say? What's your coming out
4 story? How did you tell your family?
- 5 RM: It wasn't as much coming out as in words, it was more like, "Look at me now."
- 6 AJ: Like, "Here it is."
- 7 RM: And it's not changing.
- 8 AJ: So deal . . . so deal with it.
- 9 RM: Basically.
- 10 AJ: Do you ever think about the L, the G, the B and the T. Right? What do you think the
11 relationship is between gays and lesbians and bisexuals and the transgender community? In
12 terms of political organizing and solidarity . . . in that kind of way?
- 13 RM: Well, I feel like there is a lot of shade when it comes to the gay community towards the trans
14 because a lot of the gay community assumes that trans people are gay too and they're basically
15 just full-time drag and I don't like that.
- 16 AJ: Which is so fucked up.
- 17 RM: Yeah, I don't like that. I feel like that's discrimination too and it comes from both sides of the
18 spectrum – like with straight people and it comes from gay people and it's kind of like . . . kind of
19 stuck in the middle. I don't know, I don't really think too much about LGB, I kind of just focus on
20 me, myself, and I.
- 21 AJ: Yeah, yeah.
- 22 RM: I have a lot of friends that are LGBQA, whatever. But it's definitely not on my mind, I don't think
23 about it.
- 24 AJ: That's cool. There's been a lot of transgender visibility lately – Laverne Cox, Janet Mock, people
25 on TV shows and on the cover of magazines and all of this business. And then Caitlyn Jenner
26 came out last year and visibility just skyrocketed. What do you think about Caitlyn?
- 27 RM: I love that there's trans visibility – I love it, I love it, I love it. I'm just so glad that it's happening,
28 it feels great, I wish it had happened sooner. As far as Caitlyn Jenner goes, I think good for her,
29 more power to her. Who am I to say anything? She's just one person and it's everybody else
30 that are choosing to pay so much attention to her.
- 31 AJ: That's true, that's very true.
- 32 RM: She's just another woman to me – a very rich woman.
- 33 AJ: A very rich woman.

- 1 RM: But yeah, I don't really have an opinion when it comes to her. I just think it's great as long as
2 she . . . you know, is an advocate for the trans community then I respect her.
- 3 AJ: Cool. ReRe, I just recently saw you on the cover of *Lavender* magazine, the Twin Cities leading
4 sort of LGBT publication. It was a beautiful cover, so congratulations on that.
- 5 RM: Thank you.
- 6 AJ: But, it's promoting a new show that you're going to be in.
- 7 RM: Called *Charm*.
- 8 AJ: OK, tell me about *Charm*.
- 9 RM: It's about a group of trans and gender non-conforming people that are in this etiquette class in
10 this community center.
- 11 AJ: In an etiquette class.
- 12 RM: Yes. This famous trans woman from Chicago is running that etiquette class and so it basically
13 just really touches on each character's lives and it just kind of allows the audience to kind of
14 educate and learn something from each person's lives because it kind of like is an image on
15 reality that is happening nowadays. These characters are a great example of everyday life.
- 16 AJ: For transgender people.
- 17 RM: Yeah, and gender non-conforming – you know, people that are in this community.
- 18 AJ: Where is the show going to be?
- 19 RM: It's going to be at the Mixed Blood Theatre, which is downtown Minneapolis, and we will be
20 performing. The dates should be on the Mixed Blood website – www.mixedblood.com. But it
21 should be on the website and then also it should be next month we start performing. So it
22 should be great.
- 23 AJ: So April 2016. That's awesome. It's really great to see a pretty mainstream theatre venue to
24 produce a story about a transgender woman of color, particularly at a time when so many trans
25 women of colors lives are literally at stake, when there's so many laws about transgender
26 people using the bathroom, and all of this business that's happening today – to have this play
27 come out now, I think is very timely. I'm so glad that you're in it.
- 28 RM: I'm so honored to be a part of such an amazing cast of talented people.
- 29 AJ: Congratulations. I look forward to seeing it. You have been in a lot of productions, Rehema. I
30 know that I worked with you and other folks at TYSN, the Transgender Youth Support Network,
31 and we worked on a writing workshop and you wrote some really beautiful things. Are you still
32 writing?
- 33 RM: I'm not writing. I really should get back into that.
- 34 AJ: Yeah, you've got to get your pen and pad back going.

- 1 RM: Yeah. I think of a lot of great things but just putting it on paper . . .
- 2 AJ: That's the hard part is getting it down.
- 3 RM: Yeah.
- 4 AJ: Well, I think you're a great writer so hopefully you can pick that back up.
- 5 RM: Yeah, I think I should too.
- 6 AJ: Are you involved in any LGBT . . . any other LGBT organizations? I know you were involved with
7 TYSN for a long time, you're doing this theatre work, you were just in a production at 20%
8 Theatre, right?
- 9 RM: Yeah.
- 10 AJ: *The Naked I*.
- 11 RM: *The Naked I* was such an amazing show. I did such a . . . it was just so amazing because the piece
12 that we did was called, "My Dear Selene."
- 13 AJ: Celine – C-e-l-i-n-e.
- 14 RM: With an S – Selene.
- 15 AJ: Can you spell it?
- 16 RM: S-e-l-e-n-e.
- 17 AJ: OK, Selene – beautiful.
- 18 RM: Yeah. It was just very magical and it was about goddesses and just finding your inner goddess,
19 your inner . . . your true self and just about embracing that. The production, *The Naked I*, it was
20 a bunch of different pieces, poems, dance work, choreography, different pieces put into one
21 production but the piece that I did, it was just about that, which was . . . it was really cool.
- 22 AJ: It was outstanding, huh?
- 23 RM: Yes.
- 24 AJ: I've been in a couple Naked I productions myself and so . . . yeah, I know how they kind of
25 weave together all of these different stories to make one big story. Congratulations on that one,
26 I heard it was sold out every single night.
- 27 RM: Every single night.
- 28 AJ: Wow. How does it feel to be a star?
- 29 RM: It feels good, I love it.
- 30 AJ: Well, you are a star. Any other trans or LGBT organizations that you've been involved with?
- 31 RM: No, I'm not. I think that says something right there. A friend of mine, we want to start a group
32 that really targets trans women of color, just a group that we could connect and we could do

- 1 different things – just kind of build a good social group and do things – educate ourselves, have
2 classes, have just like a meeting just to talk and maybe eat or just have classes on how to do
3 name changes and how to do hormone shots or whatever.
- 4 AJ: Right.
- 5 RM: Just stuff, we need that sisterhood – something, because there’s really not much out here that
6 really focuses on trans women of color.
- 7 AJ: Yeah, not much at all.
- 8 RM: Right. And so, a friend of mine – we really want to get that going. I think it will be great.
- 9 AJ: Well please keep me informed, I want to help and be a part of that.
- 10 RM: Definitely.
- 11 AJ: Yeah, it sounds amazing. ReRe, what do you think the transgender community will be 50 years
12 from now?
- 13 RM: I think our community will definitely be more visible, much, much, much more visible. I feel like
14 it will be to the point where we won’t be necessarily a category of our own. I feel like there is . .
15 . we’re just going to be . . .
- 16 AJ: Blended into society.
- 17 RM: Just blended in, I think so. I hope so, actually.
- 18 AJ: I feel pretty much the same way myself. I do.
- 19 RM: I feel like . . . I think 50 years from now, people will be kind of surprised that somebody may
20 purposely kind of like pick a trans person out or just like, “Oh, you’re trans - uhhh.” I think 50
21 years from now it’s just like, “And . . .”
- 22 AJ: And . . .
- 23 RM: Where were you 20 years ago? Where were you 30 years ago?
- 24 AJ: Oh man, I love it. Is there anything else you want to share?
- 25 RM: No, I love . . . I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me.
- 26 AJ: Oh my goodness, I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me.
- 27 RM: I could talk all day.
- 28 AJ: Absolutely. And there may be, hopefully, a chance for us to sit down and talk again.
- 29 RM: Yeah, we have work we could be doing – we’ve definitely got work to do.
- 30 AJ: Oh, we got work to do – get ready. You’ve planted the seed, so now it’s time to go to work.
- 31 RM: Yes.

- 1 AJ: Well, thank you so much. It's nice to meet you Beco. All right, ReRe, until we meet again, my
- 2 friend.
- 3 RM: Thank you, Andrea.
- 4 AJ: Bye.
- 5 RM: Bye.