

Ash Farah
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

June 1, 2017



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.

Andrea Jenkins
jenki120@umn.edu
(612) 625-4379

1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Ash Farah -AF
3

4 AJ: So, hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins. I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History
5 Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota Libraries. Today is June 1, 2017.
6 I am in south Minneapolis and today I am chilling with Ash Farah.

7 AF: You got it.

8 AJ: Is that the right way?

9 AF: Yes.

10 AJ: All right, Ash Farah.

11 AF: I mean, I won't make you roll your r's because we'd be here all day.

12 AJ: OK. Farah.

13 AF: Yes.

14 AJ: Hey, Ash, how are you?

15 AF: I'm good, how about you?

16 AJ: I'm doing pretty good. It's been kind of a long day, but I'm so glad that I'm here with you this
17 evening. I appreciate you being willing to participate in this project. So, Ash, let me ask you to
18 state your name, spell your name so we make sure we have it all spelled right, tell me your
19 gender as you define it today and your gender assigned at birth, and the pronouns that you like
20 to use.

21 AF: So, my name is Ash Farah. It is spelled A-s-h F-a-r-a-h. I use he/him pronouns and the way I see
22 my gender identity is that I'm a trans man. I exist in the world as a man, to be otherwise is a lie
23 to me – it really is.

24 AJ: Wow.

25 AF: But, the title is about my history so I put trans in front of it. As for my gender assigned at birth,
26 it was a little bit complicated because I happen to have an intersex condition when I was born,
27 with my gonads, at least. That was surgically enhanced and everything else checked out for the
28 female box, so they were like, "Hey, why not?" The doctor played God a little bit and clicked the
29 box and that's how I've lived and been conditioned since I was little.

30 AJ: Wow. Yeah, no – that's a real thing.

31 AF: The butchering of intersex babies.

32 AJ: Yeah. So, where were you born?

33 AF: I was born in the middle part of East Africa, which is the way my nana used to put it. Since
34 colonial lines were bullshit, to be quite honest . . .

- 1 AJ: Colonial lines, true – yes.
- 2 AF: They divide families.
- 3 AJ: They’re artificial.
- 4 AF: Yes, they divide families, they’re not even built along rivers – no physical things, just based upon
5 what some old white guy wanted to buy. So, I was born in the border lands of Kenya and
6 Somalia in a small village there, a small farming village there actually. So, yeah.
- 7 AJ: Do you identify as an immigrant.
- 8 AF: Yeah, for the . . . literally, I just got citizenship last year.
- 9 AJ: Oh, wow – congratulations.
- 10 AF: Something a lot of people don’t know about the whole immigration process here – it isn’t three
11 days under express and you’ve got your citizenship papers.
- 12 AJ: Yeah, not like getting a new driver’s license, right?
- 13 AF: Right. It’s actually more complicated. You have to get vetted. I was a toddler when I came
14 here, quite frankly. It was 2002, we arrived in New York, post 9/11 which was difficult, to say
15 the least, for a new immigrant family.
- 16 AJ: Oh, wow . . . wow.
- 17 AF: That’s probably why I speak so damn fast to begin with. But, the only reason we got our visas
18 was because my grandfather knew Italian and was a translator and we came from a certain
19 amount of privilege. The reasons why our names didn’t get vetted wrong was because we could
20 talk and advocate for ourselves.
- 21 AJ: You could communicate, right.
- 22 AF: Yeah, a lot of people were left to die in these refugee camps and a lot of them grew up with me
23 and I was friends with them and all these things.
- 24 AJ: Wow. So, you have only lived in post-9/11 America.
- 25 AF: That’s all I ever knew. I used to think that the older people in my family were crazy to be like,
26 “Oh, there was a time people could go and fly into the United States, fly back, bring gifts.”
- 27 AJ: Right.
- 28 AF: It was a lot more relaxed and laid back.
- 29 AJ: Yeah.
- 30 AF: They had this idea that America was this very wealthy but welcoming place.
- 31 AJ: What’s it like in your experience now?
- 32 AF: It ain’t got any gold roads and Lady Liberty is a lie to me.

- 1 AJ: There are no gold paved roads and Lady Liberty is a lie. Why do you say that?
- 2 AF: Because of all the experiences I've had from the minute I got here. The church where we were
3 staying at, there was protestors. When I entered 1st grade and kindergarten, I was immediately
4 called Towel Head, and ever since then I've had to basically defend my existence and my right to
5 be here – as an American, as a human being in this country, almost every single day. And to
6 wake up when you're 17 and you just got your citizenship papers, you think you're going to be
7 valued as a human being finally, to turn around and read that there is a Muslim ban . . . on your
8 phone. So, that's a little bit jaded and nihilistic, but at the same time, it's called for.
- 9 AJ: The struggle is real, real, real, real, real.
- 10 AF: Right. I've been praying – like, "Uncle Sam, just give me one thing to be like this was the
11 America my nana thought about when she was dying in her bed and telling me it was going to
12 be better here. Just one thing; I just want one thing."
- 13 AJ: But, you worked it out and you are a U.S. citizen now, so you can't be deported.
- 14 AF: I can't.
- 15 AJ: Do you feel like you can travel back and forth?
- 16 AF: That's the thing. It will be difficult because no fly lists are a thing and my last name, Farah, is
17 really common. It means happy actually, and Ash . . .
- 18 AJ: Really? OK. And Ash?
- 19 AF: It means life – so life happiness. I brought none of that.
- 20 AJ: How did you come to your name?
- 21 AF: So, it was a variation on my birth name, my birth name being Asha, of course. And, that meant
22 life or living, and Ash actually came . . . in English it means the opposite, it's like what happens
23 after you live.
- 24 AJ: Right, ashes to ashes.
- 25 AF: Right. But, I found a Kenyan translation of the name to mean the same thing – life, a tree and
26 things that are living. I was like, "I like that more." I like the little dichotomy of both – somehow
27 here it means death and there it means life.
- 28 AJ: Wow. So, always sort of straddling this sort of duality, right?
- 29 AF: Yeah.
- 30 AJ: Interesting. So, you were in kindergarten and they were calling you Towel Head.
- 31 AF: Yeah.
- 32 AJ: That's awful. Where did you go to school, Ash?
- 33 AF: I went to school in various places. The first school I went to, of course, was in New York. I don't
34 even remember the name.

- 1 AJ: So, you lived in New York City?
- 2 AF: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: It doesn't matter the name – PS-something, right?
- 4 AF: It's always Lincoln or something.
- 5 AJ: Washington, yeah.
- 6 AF: Named after somebody that killed my people.
- 7 AJ: That's real. Speak.
- 8 AF: So, yeah, that was just so difficult.
- 9 AJ: So, New York City – is this where this was happening at, in New York?
- 10 AF: Yeah. We were so fed up with the state of affairs in New York and how high the rent was and
11 how my mom was struggling and all these things, that we actually went back.
- 12 AJ: Really?
- 13 AF: We went back to the war zone, guilt ridden . . .
- 14 AJ: Because it was so hard in New York City?
- 15 AF: It was so bigoted and intolerant in New York City.
- 16 AJ: Wow. You'd rather live in a refuge . . . I mean, your family – because you didn't really have a
17 choice?
- 18 AF: Yeah, I was Shorty – I didn't know any better.
- 19 AJ: But, your parents were like, "Man, we'd rather be in a concentration . . ." I mean, not a
20 concentration camp but a refugee camp, which is . . . I mean, you're sort of under surveillance
21 and . . .
- 22 AF: No privacy . . .
- 23 AJ: No privacy, yeah – wow.
- 24 AF: So, we went back for a little bit and, of course, we kept hearing about these humanitarians
25 coming up and talking about sanctuary cities and stuff like that and places that were coming up,
26 particularly, were Sweden, Minnesota and . . .
- 27 AJ: Really?
- 28 AF: I'm serious. And, all these places to the point that even . . .
- 29 AJ: So, super, super white, white places.
- 30 AF: Yes. And this is the part they didn't warn nobody about.
- 31 AJ: With a lot of snow.

- 1 AF: With a lot of snow. So, basically, my grandma went first, of course – it's more expensive to send
2 everybody. She was like, "Well, first I'll go and see how it is," and when she came back she
3 basically told us in the form of stories, because we didn't understand as little kids, like how
4 Minnesota really was. All she would talk about was the immense amount of water she saw
5 everywhere – to the point where I thought this was going to be like Cirque du Soleil met
6 Valleyfair waterfalls.
- 7 AJ: Don't go chasing waterfalls.
- 8 AF: But, seriously, I just thought it was going to be this giant waterfall and water was always a
9 scarcity – like a thing I valued there. It's all green and there's funny sounding white people who
10 pronounce everything with extra O's.
- 11 AJ: Minnesoota.
- 12 AF: And they all look different, there's all these different groups of people – like I've never met this
13 kind of group. She was trying to describe Native Americans and there was no frame of
14 reference, so she was like, "They're not whites but they're . . . not white." So, that was
15 interesting.
- 16 AJ: And the family said let's go, huh.
- 17 AF: "Let's go, let's try this out." Nice white people . . . it was the same as chasing gold under a pot . .
18 . like a rainbow. So, we came and we were invited into the Catholic Church that was doing
19 outreach which, thank God that they were doing it, but at the same time there were some
20 issues.
- 21 AJ: Yeah, it had its challenges.
- 22 AF: So, we met a worker named Julie who basically taught us kids how to assimilate really well.
23 Unfortunately, I, out of the siblings in my family and all that, couldn't really assimilate because I
24 couldn't speak. So, that posed its own issues on top of . . .
- 25 AJ: So, you had . . .
- 26 AF: No, I was mutant until the age of seven.
- 27 AJ: My question was going to be you had some physical issues with being able to speak.
- 28 AF: Yeah, I just physically could not do it.
- 29 AJ: Really?
- 30 AF: I could mumble and try making fairly audible sounds until the age of 7 years old.
- 31 AJ: Did you understand what was happening around you?
- 32 AF: That was the interesting part. People always assume that you're . . . that there's retardation
33 somehow or I'm deaf and they would treat me differently, like I wasn't there. For most of my
34 life, people assumed I wasn't there so they felt free to be their most vile, their most disgusting –
35 to have a grown adult staring at me and not think I was intelligent to the point that, to this day,

1 despite all the IQ tests and highest honors and all this nonsense, still do not believe that I am
2 good enough because I wasn't a human for seven years.

3 AJ: In their eyes, yeah.

4 AF: Yeah.

5 AJ: Hmm, wow. That's a big challenge, Ash. So, you came here to Minnesota, you really had a
6 challenge assimilating because of this speech problem/challenge.

7 AF: Right.

8 AJ: But then, you were able to speak.

9 AF: Yeah, through a lot of . . . there was a lot of therapy and voice therapy where the lady would do
10 various odd tactics that I highly doubt that they do anymore – with pencils and your fingers to
11 try to get you to speak.

12 AJ: Oh, wow.

13 AF: Yeah, like literally twist until you say something, or mutter something, or try.

14 AJ: Really?

15 AF: So, I learned English by fire basically.

16 AJ: Wow.

17 AF: Yeah.

18 AJ: And so, all of this time, you had this intersex condition that was sort of . . . I'm doing air quote,
19 "corrected at birth," how did you feel?

20 AF: How did I feel about it? I didn't know until . . .

21 AJ: You didn't know, but how did you feel . . . did you feel like you were a boy? I'm pretty sure you
22 were being socialized like a girl.

23 AF: Oh, my God, to the point where when I was 5 . . .

24 AJ: Because your family is Muslim, right?

25 AF: Yeah, they're Muslim, so they raised me like the most gendered way possible – women are
26 supposed to do this and this and this.

27 AJ: So, you wore a hijab.

28 AF: Yeah, they made me do the whole nine yards. When I was 5 years old, the most distinct
29 memory of this I have was up until then it's fine for kids to cross gender play and do all this,
30 because they're under 5, they don't even have a brain yet basically. So, my dad came up to me
31 and was like, "What are you doing?" I'm like, "Riding my bike." I had this bright red bike, I loved
32 this bike, and he was like, "No, boys do that." Everything I would do that day he would say, "No,
33 boys do that," "Boys do that." I was obsessed with Bill Nye . . .

- 1 AJ: The science guy.
- 2 AF: Yeah, which is probably why I'm such a geek now. He was like, "No, that's basically the study of
3 math and science and stuff like that, that's for men." And he would see all the doctors on TV
4 and he would literally flip through American TV to prove this to me.
- 5 AJ: Right, and if you do that it pretty much shows you that all doctors are male, because that's the
6 images that get produced.
- 7 AF: So, my little brain is like . . . well, I don't know what this maleness is.
- 8 AJ: And they were white males, right.
- 9 AF: Right. So, not only could I have that side of me be derailed – I was derailed for being Muslim, I
10 was humiliated for having voice issues, I was lied to about my gender identity, and on top of
11 that, here, this person that I think is my father figure and the best person in the world to me,
12 everything I love points me to this abstract concept of maleness that I didn't have any concept
13 of because I just did whatever I wanted. I lived in my mind, it didn't matter.
- 14 AJ: Yeah, and at five . . . gender is not really a construct that 5 year olds really fully comprehend.
- 15 AF: Right, so I tricked him and eventually when he started handing me Barbies and don't play with
16 Legos and stuff like that, I was like, "Well, I guess the boy thing is pretty good too. I'm a boy
17 now," and decided to be a boy. I was like, "Hey, if all the things that I love match this idea of
18 gender, then I guess that's what I am." I'm like, "OK, I never thought otherwise – like I never
19 really fit into any of the boxes for female that they wanted me to."
- 20 AJ: How did people respond to that?
- 21 AF: Oh, they flipped. You could hear a pin drop in that living room when I said that. God. Oh, my
22 God. And, it took a good minute to say it too because I had to sign and basically tell them
23 somehow – like it was Barbie girl, Lego boy, trying to explain it in the littlest way. I just . . . this
24 took 30 minutes for him to realize that I was like, "Fuck you," essentially.
- 25 AJ: Right, exactly. "I'm a boy."
- 26 AF: Yeah. "I'm a boy, it's fine, it's fine." But, I have to convey it to the adults and once they finally
27 got it, they flipped to say the least. My dad basically told me I'm not raising no fags, pulled me
28 by the ear, took me outside – paraded me basically to discipline me somehow.
- 29 AJ: Wow.
- 30 AF: Yeah, I was like, "I'm never going to have to deal with this again, hopefully." And, birth mom, of
31 course, defended me. At that time, she was like, "What are you doing with my child?" When he
32 eventually left because, in my culture, they believe in curses and stuff like that – they believed
33 that I was a cursed child – the reason why I couldn't speak, the reason why I liked such odd
34 things, why I was always such a burden, I wouldn't listen to them.
- 35 AJ: And your genitals were ambiguous, at best, right.

- 1 AF: Right, symbol of the devil – all these things. So, they were like, “Well, this child is obviously
2 cursed, I’m going to go marry another woman. Good luck with you and your three kids in the
3 middle of God damn nowhere with white Minnesotans that pronounce their O’s weird.” And he
4 left.
- 5 AJ: So, he bounced.
- 6 AF: 2007. Of course, I started getting better around the same time, which my mom thought, “Oh, a
7 blessing.” And people came around and were like, “Hey, maybe, it was on him – maybe the
8 curse was on him and it was his issue.” It probably was a good thing for my mom, but for me it
9 meant that I could express myself more and with the expression it created way more issues for
10 me – like a Pandora’s box of issues because I did not agree with the Quran, I did not like it, I did
11 not like going to Sunday School, I did not like the forced box of female that I was in so I would be
12 the most tomboy person you’ve ever seen and the hijab was always askew.
- 13 AJ: (laughing) I’m sorry.
- 14 AF: It’s true. I was wearing jeans that were always dirty and ripped and torn.
- 15 AJ: Sneakers.
- 16 AF: Right, so messed up.
- 17 AJ: Were you sagging?
- 18 AF: I wish I was sagging.
- 19 AJ: Oh, my goodness. Did you get teased at school?
- 20 AF: Oh, constantly. I barely had . . . like I had two friends throughout the span of elementary here in
21 Minneapolis. It was brutal. The only way I could find friends was through the intelligence I had
22 because of all those years of people ignoring my existence and me being obsessed with books.
23 So, I’d sell my homework and in return, “Hey, play with me at recess,” or something like that. It
24 was really depressing and sad because all the interactions I’ve had with humans was basically a
25 zero sum, “Give me this, give me that,” sort of deal. Yeah.
- 26 AJ: When did you . . .
- 27 AF: There’s a lot.
- 28 AJ: Right, I know. I’m getting tongue-tied here a little bit. But, you already kind of said you sort of
29 figured out your gender identity when you were like five. Right?
- 30 AF: Right.
- 31 AJ: But when did you really begin to express yourself as . . .?
- 32 AF: Right around 5th grade and 5th grade was a difficult time for me because they made me skip 4th
33 grade because I was excelling when I started to learn to speak.
- 34 AJ: You really caught up fast.

- 1 AF: They were like, “You were smart the whole time.” I was like, “Yeah.” They skipped 5th grade –
2 they made me skip 5th grade. They put my 4th grade ass into a middle school, a hormonal-filled
3 festival that I had no concept of and . . .
- 4 AJ: Which is the hardest time in kid’s . . . 5th and 6th graders are just really mean to each other – and
5 7th graders.
- 6 AF: They’re just brutal. So, basically, it was the first time I ever heard the word faggot actually
7 expressed, because kids aren’t supposed to curse, and all these things. I was like, “All right, I’m
8 no fag,” which is weird because to have internalized homophobia, have me express my gender
9 finally, is such a weird thing to describe because I was like, “All right, if you’re a guy and you are
10 dressed in pink and wearing dresses and wearing hijabs, what the fuck does that make you?”
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 AF: Right. I was like . . . and then, the words of my dad kept echoing in my head, “I’m not raising no
13 fag,” and stuff like that. So, I’m like, “All right, then I’m not going to be like that, I’m going to
14 wear jeans and I’m going to be masculine-ish.” It failed, because I’m a geek.
- 15 AJ: Well, there are geeky guys that exist in the world too.
- 16 AF: I didn’t understand anything past the binary though.
- 17 AJ: Right, there you go.
- 18 AF: So, around then I was like, “All right, I’m going to cut my hair, I’m going to do what I need to do,
19 I’m going to show it.” Which was like a pariah – like to the point where birth mom was already
20 struggling with the fact of being a Black single woman in Minneapolis raising three kids.
- 21 AJ: Are your siblings younger or older?
- 22 AF: Oh, they’re younger. The other ones were from a . . .
- 23 AJ: So, you’re the oldest.
- 24 AF: Yeah, the other ones were from a past marriage and are unrelated to me.
- 25 AJ: OK.
- 26 AF: So, yeah.
- 27 AJ: You were kind of talking about going to middle school, 5th grade.
- 28 AF: Right, so I just really started expressing, “Hey, I’m a dude, I’m fine with this, this is how I am.”
29 But then, of course, puberty is like, “Well, psych, you’re not going to be a full girl, but you ain’t
30 going to be no dude.”
- 31 AJ: Right, wow.
- 32 AF: I had gotten my period really late, if I got it . . . it was not like a real one, basically. And, didn’t
33 really develop fully because I had CAH, which is an intersex condition based solely on hormones.
- 34 AJ: What is it called?

- 1 AF: CAH, so C-A-H. C-A-H, yes.
- 2 AJ: CAH, so what does that mean?
- 3 AF: Congenital Adrenal – something. I should know it by now.
- 4 AJ: But what does it do?
- 5 AF: Basically, it affects your gonads and your levels of hormones inside your body and, in puberty
6 and development, it typically makes people have . . . almost show symptoms of PCOS, almost.
- 7 AJ: I don't know what PCOS is either. So, I'm unintelligent around this issue.
- 8 AF: Oh, it's fine. I wish I was a doctor on this. PCOS is Polycystic Ovary Syndrome – something along
9 those lines where your ovaries are overproducing hormones.
- 10 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 11 AF: Right. And, in the case of CAH, it's your adrenals that are overworking themselves- or under. It
12 depends on which way . . .
- 13 AJ: So, you were having lots of estrogen or not enough?
- 14 AF: Not enough, to the point where I was masculinized but still feminine because, of course, there's
15 going to be some – I'm not fully XY, that's not how I am. It wasn't a classic intersex syndrome
16 where XXY, like Klinefelters, for example. It wasn't like that, that's why the only external way
17 that I've ever found out would probably be through birth if they hadn't corrected me. So, that
18 was going on, so I wasn't pretty enough to be a girl. I wasn't a woman, and there's all these
19 milestones that you have to hit to be a woman, of course – because, binary. I certainly wasn't a
20 boy because I was 4'11" and barely 100 pounds. So, I looked forever like this Peter Pan, no
21 genderist character of a human, and I would just get teased from both sides endlessly no matter
22 how much I tried to fit myself into one mold or the other, it wasn't going to work.
- 23 AJ: Wow. Man, Ash, you are a fighter.
- 24 AF: Right, God.
- 25 AJ: Because now you get mad respect, you get mad love from the community – or is that true?
- 26 AF: I'm so glad I met the queer community.
- 27 AJ: I mean, is that . . . maybe I'm just projecting onto you. Is that a reality for you?
- 28 AF: So, of course middle school was hard and birth mom ultimately does not accept my gender
29 identity and goes through various exorcisms, pray away the gay, and that fails and I run away
30 and she kicks me out ultimately and all this stuff. I stumble upon this little café or whatever on
31 35th and Chicago.
- 32 AJ: Oh, really?
- 33 AF: It was right by the gym/school – online gym building that I knew and I was like, "OK, there's a
34 little café there, I can ask for extra food or something." So, I walk in and I immediately see

- 1 queer things and I'm like, "All right, this is the thing my mom told me not to do." And, of course,
2 I have a lot of guilt and so I'm really awkward and shy and I'm sitting and I can't even order a
3 fucking croissant because I'm so . . .
- 4 AJ: Uncomfortable.
- 5 AF: Ann is behind the register, "Hey, kid, do you want anything?" And I'm like, "Do you have any
6 extra food?" They were like, "There's a food shelf down there in the Exchange . . ." And
7 explaining basically the set-up.
- 8 AJ: All the resources.
- 9 AF: Yeah, of Minnesota Trans Health Coalition. And, Rox is like, "What's wrong?" – eventually,
10 because I was tired, ragged, I probably smelled like death.
- 11 AJ: So, you were at Café SouthSide.
- 12 AF: Yeah, it was luck. I don't know what it was, but I'm so glad . . .
- 13 AJ: Which is sort of the de facto queer person of color community center.
- 14 AF: Place to be.
- 15 AJ: That's kind of the queer trans community center.
- 16 AF: It's the only café that is run by and for queer people of color, has health resources right next
17 door to it and a food shelf and youth programs and all these things, but I didn't know none of
18 that. I was just walking into some café.
- 19 AJ: Right.
- 20 AF: Rox sat me down and I talked about the stories that I went through, blah, blah, blah – birth mom
21 is horrible probably because I'm a faggot and they were like, "No, that's not how things go, we
22 can take you to the Bridge and there's all these resources." If they hadn't done that, what I was
23 basically planning to do to make money was selling drugs and partying and doing all these illicit
24 hustling . . . basically hustle to get money.
- 25 AJ: Right, you've got to eat – people have got to eat.
- 26 AF: And they showed me there was another way. In that way, I'm lucky because I had a positive first
27 queer experience. A lot of the POC queer people that I've met have not had that, they've been
28 encountered with organizations that are run by cis gender white gay men who either do not
29 understand their identity or outright disrespect it. They don't get the resources they need and
30 ultimately feel like they can't and will never trust resources like that again. They were put in the
31 cycle and it's just really sad.
- 32 AJ: So, wow, you had this amazing sort of first experience to walk into Café SouthSide. I know
33 Roxanne and Anna and they are both amazing human beings – very, very adamant and
34 committed to their support for queer and trans youth of color, which you clearly are.
- 35 AF: Yay.

- 1 AJ: So, man, so what's life like for you now? You're a U.S. citizen . . . where do you work?
- 2 AF: Oh, let's start there. So, right now, I'm leaving Seward Coop because of a lot of issues.
- 3 AJ: The Friendship Store?
- 4 AF: No, the Franklin one – the big one.
- 5 AJ: OK, so you were from Franklin – Seward Coop.
- 6 AF: So, I'm leaving there. I'm starting an internship at OutFront to do basically the work . . . to
7 extend the work I was doing in the Minneapolis Public Schools with educating educators and
8 voting rights and registering and all these things.
- 9 AJ: Oh, wait a minute. We're going to get back to the OutFront Minnesota because we've got all
10 this experience, but you did some amazing organizing at South High.
- 11 AF: Right. So, I started at the beginning of the year, at the beginning of senior year quite frankly, to
12 be like, "Hey, I'm always getting hit – little gaybies coming up to me and complaining about
13 certain teachers, certain behaviors, the fact that the gender-neutral bathroom we fought so
14 hard for to create, a multi-stall gender neutral bathroom in a public school . . ."
- 15 AJ: So, you were a part of that effort to create that.
- 16 AF: Yeah.
- 17 AJ: Oh, my goodness – wow.
- 18 AF: To a degree, but I wasn't the lead person at that time because I had a lot of guilt and I was
19 struggling with homelessness at the time.
- 20 AJ: Yeah, that's real.
- 21 AF: I did what I could, but ultimately, they noticed a lot of closing down the bathrooms and teachers
22 not respecting their identity, not using the correct pronouns, kids just being upset with their
23 interactions with administration and all these things. But, I just could not keep doing it on a
24 one-by-one case process because, honestly, I wasn't being paid enough to be Minneapolis' . . .
25 or South High's point person for it.
- 26 AJ: Right. And when you say not enough, you weren't being paid at all, right?
- 27 AF: Whatsoever. So, I thought, OK, we have this group of kids that are young, they want to help,
28 they're part of this GSA, why don't we just utilize the resources we already have and know,
29 within each other, to create 20 four-part workshop series for teachers to attend to learn about
30 our community, prevent instances of kids being called out on their gender identity, kids being
31 outed to their parents and left on the streets the day after and things of this nature. But, we
32 first needed to prove that there was a need because often times we get hit with the, "Well,
33 trans kids only make up 1% of the population," – whatever bullshit statistic they come up with.
- 34 AJ: True.
- 35 AF: Even the part in the sense of where are you getting these numbers. Anyway . . .

- 1 AJ: Because we've been doing our own research.
- 2 AF: Right, and that's not the case – there's a lot of kids that aren't out. And, for the very reason that
3 they're being denied things. I needed to prove to the administration that there was a need, so
4 we partnered up with HECUA which is a film project, social justice oriented club at the U of M
5 and we were like, "Hey, we want you guys to . . ."
- 6 AJ: Higher Education . . .
- 7 AF: I don't know, it's something awesome.
- 8 AJ: Consortium . . .
- 9 AF: Almost there.
- 10 AJ: HECUA . . . H-E-C-U . . . universities and . . . association? I don't know.
- 11 AF: Something funny like that.
- 12 AJ: HECUA.
- 13 AF: And, we partnered up with them because some of them were South alums and we were like,
14 "Hey, we want you to create a film based around a survey we're going to conduct in our school
15 and we want to post these results and we're going to have an auditorium to prove the need of
16 our community to the school." Honestly, it was absolutely horrid, the results we got. We did
17 randomized classrooms and randomly approached kids on purpose, and the percentages of
18 questions like, "Do you believe being transgender is a choice?" "Do you think it's OK to out
19 someone?" And these are just students and the results were horrible. "Do you agree with the
20 need for a gender-neutral bathroom?" and all these things. Basically, the comments were the
21 ones that were even more horrid towards us. We immediately knew that there was a need and
22 when we showed the video, teachers were coming up to us like, "What do we do? We don't
23 know." We approached the principal like, "Hey, we want to do a staff meeting. You guys have
24 those boring staff meetings every morning, you all talk about the same wait time or some boring
25 teacher technique that they've heard a million times, why don't you just let us do a quick
26 presentation?" And, we got the results back from the teachers that were almost identical
27 except, of course, they're not being adults – they're not going to outright tell a kid, "Oh, yeah,
28 I'm totally fine with you being abused in the hallways." But things like, "Do I feel in control of
29 my classroom with issues of gender identity and transphobia and homophobia?"
- 30 AJ: Right.
- 31 AF: The results were 1-2-3 and, of course, this is a 5-point scale, but that is absolutely horrid to have
32 one in four teachers know absolutely no idea what to do or how to intervene when these
33 instances happen in their classroom. And, we convinced, with the help of our awesome advisor,
34 in finessing the school district to basically give teachers credit, like professional development
35 credits, to attend workshops led by us.
- 36 AJ: Wow. Who is your advisor?
- 37 AF: Oh, Sarah Minette, who also happens to be the Guitar/Music point person at our school.

- 1 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 2 AF: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: Minette? M-o-n-e-t.
- 4 AF: M-i-n-e-t-t-e.
- 5 AJ: Oh, OK. So, she kind of helped kind of guide the group to some extent?
- 6 AF: No. She is super a fan of having the laid-back advisor position because, of course, every school
7 group . . .
- 8 AJ: So, she was more of a liaison between the group and staff.
- 9 AF: Yeah, basically. We interacted with staff themselves, but administration was just too much of
10 an issue, too much of a disrespect issue because there's not enough understanding that, as a
11 student, I have a voice, we have merit, what we say is true and all these things. So, we basically
12 told Ms. Minette all the things we wanted, she wrote it down, we explained and she did the
13 talking to administration. But, we made all the workshops, we set the dates up, we presented
14 every single one. We had times from literally 6am to 7 because we knew some teachers weren't
15 going to come in the afternoons or during school.
- 16 AJ: Wow.
- 17 AF: This was serious because we had three different workshops and one was targeted toward sexual
18 orientation, because that's still an issue – it's real, not a lot of people know about it because
19 they think it's all good because gay marriage got passed.
- 20 AJ: Right, exactly. Yeah.
- 21 AF: Now gay marriage did the Obama effect in the queer community.
- 22 AJ: Wow, right. Yeah.
- 23 AF: It's true – racism is dead because of Obama; homophobia is not a thing because of gay marriage.
- 24 AJ: Yeah, it's real.
- 25 AF: And the second one was, "Break the Binary," which focused on supporting and creating a safe
26 environment for gender non-conforming students in general. And the last one is, "It's Not a
27 Phase Mom: How to Deal with Parents and Parental Guardians and all the Issues Related to
28 Family Rejection with LGBT Kids."
- 29 AJ: Wow, that is incredible.
- 30 AF: So, we gave them strategies and ways to actually . . .
- 31 AJ: Do you still have ownership of this curriculum?
- 32 AF: We still have ownership of this curriculum.
- 33 AJ: I mean, I know you sort of know it, but . . .

- 1 AF: By memory. I created it, quite frankly.
- 2 AJ: Wow, that's deeply admirable. Have you gotten any recognition for this work at all?
- 3 AF: Ed Graff, who is the superintendent of Minneapolis Public Schools, sent a letter to me specifically
4 thanking me for the work I've done with LGBT people at my school.
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 AF: The HECUA presentation I did led me to ultimately win the Leadership . . . what was it called? It
7 was called something funny – it wasn't just a leadership award, it was like Leadership Beyond.
8 Basically, out of the senior class who deserved to have recognition as a leader in the school. So,
9 I got that.
- 10 AJ: Congratulations. And you just graduated?
- 11 AF: Yeah, like a day ago. This is the most intense go, go, go.
- 12 AJ: You graduated yesterday?
- 13 AF: Yeah, and my graduation – like the ceremony itself is this Saturday.
- 14 AJ: Is that right?
- 15 AF: Like in two days.
- 16 AJ: Oh, my goodness, Ash. I'm giving you an air hug right now . . . air hug. Congratulations. Yeah,
17 because of all of the challenges that you have . . . I don't want to say overcome but you have
18 certainly worked through – and, you seem so joyous.
- 19 AF: Well, there's no way to be because . . . I don't know. It's kind of . . . I consider myself so lucky. If
20 any one thing went wrong in my life, I could end up with a completely different route. I
21 wouldn't be graduating with highest honors, I wouldn't be recognized as a leader, I wouldn't
22 have more improvements in my life because, quite honestly, trans kids and LGBT kids in general
23 are two times as likely to graduate high school let alone continue off to college and have it fully
24 paid because of their leadership work.
- 25 AJ: And/or get a job and then get an internship so . . . you've got a job.
- 26 AF: Or get out of homelessness.
- 27 AJ: How did that work? Were you . . . and I want to talk about the homelessness issue too, but . . .
28 were you out at the coop?
- 29 AF: Oh, yeah. I think the time that I stopped being out at work was working one odd shift, but ever
30 since 2013, any job I've had I've been out fully.
- 31 AJ: Really?
- 32 AF: It's always an interesting encounter.
- 33 AJ: And you get hired? You don't have problems getting the job?

- 1 AF: Because, quite frankly, I target . . .
- 2 AJ: You're very smart.
- 3 AF: I target when there's places that high turnover or really need the workers to overlook a lot of
4 stuff.
- 5 AJ: That's smart – that's a smart strategy.
- 6 AF: And honestly, I just needed a job. I just needed something to get me through, something to pay
7 the rent.
- 8 AJ: Because you were dealing with homelessness and you said . . . so, how did you overcome that?
9 Or, was . . .
- 10 AF: It was an issue.
- 11 AJ: Was Café SouthSide sort of helpful in helping you find . . .?
- 12 AF: Totally. Basically, they found emergency placement for me, they found a Bridge shelter, which I
13 went to and stayed for a good minute – a good minute. After I got, ultimately, sick of that, they
14 helped me find a lovely queer couple in Powderhorn to take me in for a little bit. When,
15 ultimately, that didn't work, I found another place through, just connections, and they found a
16 way to make it legal because the legality was the ultimate issue.
- 17 AJ: And, so now you're part of the Host Home Project.
- 18 AF: The Host Home Project is run by Avenues for Homeless Youth, they're an organization that's
19 been around for 40 years.
- 20 AJ: Yeah, they've been around a long time.
- 21 AF: And, they have a branch for LGBTQ kids, in particular. I had an issue with the state's . . . because
22 CPS was eventually involved because of the exorcisms and getting them off of me, essentially. I
23 needed . . .
- 24 AJ: So, these were real exorcisms. You weren't just saying this as a . . .
- 25 AF: No, this ain't no pray away the gay, Fr. Finnigan telling you you were wrong, this is you having a
26 blanket over your head and water being thrown down your throat.
- 27 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 28 AF: To make you think you're drowning but you're not. I don't want to make this super depressing .
29 . .
- 30 AJ: So, like waterboarding. Yeah, wow. So, but you were, "I'm out, I can't do this."
- 31 AF: I can't do it. I'll accept that I'm the devil – honestly, that's what I came out to be. I was like,
32 "Fine, I give up, I'll get wings someday - sorry mom."
- 33 AJ: Right. Deuces and you bounced. So, through Host Home you were able to get somewhat stable
34 housing.

- 1 AF: Right. Because Host Home has case workers and a certain level of established prestige to help
2 people like me. So, when the state gave me the option of living in a group home, go to a
3 transitional living program for alcohol and drug addiction or sexual violence, which never fit me
4 – and that was the judge’s problem, because they didn’t have the heart to just release me
5 because that would mean releasing me back to my mother. But, also, to put me in all these
6 cycles would . . . the foster care system is like a system of instability.
- 7 AJ: Yeah, and institutionalization.
- 8 AF: It ruins people. Yeah. I’ve known kids that got into the foster care system and are now on
9 Haldol and all these highly potent drugs just to go through the day because of the stuff they’ve
10 been through. So, the judge was ultimately like this liberal white lady, tm, was like, “I want to
11 let you go, but you are 16 1/2 , I can’t. Please just find . . . I’ll give you three months to find an
12 outlet for me to write you off to.”
- 13 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 14 AF: So, I began this search for, basically, roommates essentially – a shady search. This was the most
15 shady search there ever was until one day I was just broken and I didn’t have the heart to go
16 back to Café SouthSide after all the work they’d done. I tried . . . it’s like a coping mechanism for
17 me to be like, “Everything is fine, everything is OK,” when it’s not. I don’t know. I bought into a
18 lot of binary ideas, I guess, until I was broken down in Central Mercado which is a Mexican
19 restaurant near my school. I called up Blaine Kelley from OutFront and was like, “I don’t know
20 what I’m going to do. I don’t know who I’m going to be with, this is scary, I have 10 days until
21 court and they’re going to place me in a group home with people who are coming in and out of
22 juvey – I’m done, I’ve given up.” Honestly, at the brink of exhaustion. He was like, “Nope,
23 we’re going to go to Rox.” All the way in the car, I was like, “I don’t want to, I don’t want to do
24 it. Rox is going to be mad at me, I failed.” And all these things.
- 25 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 26 AF: When I got there, they were super loving and were like, “Here, have a mocca, it’s going to be
27 OK, we’re going to find people.” And, of course, people came – people came in droves and they
28 were like, “Hey, we went through the same thing.” That’s the thing that people don’t
29 understand – like I can’t describe about the LGBT community. Either our elders, their stories
30 may not be there, but you can feel them being there when you need people because they didn’t
31 have anybody so they’re more likely to give back.
- 32 AJ: Wow. That’s . . . you’re breaking my heart, Ash.
- 33 AF: It’s true though – they went to bat for trans kids.
- 34 AJ: Right, for real.
- 35 AF: I ain’t calling Blaine no elder though – sorry.
- 36 AJ: So, let me ask you this, lets switch up a little bit.
- 37 AF: Yay.

- 1 AJ: What is the most positive aspect, or what are some of the most positive aspects of you now
2 expressing your true gender identity?
- 3 AF: Oh, my self-esteem has went up, my auditory skills have gotten better because I didn't have the
4 weight of, "Is this masculine? Is this too feminine?" I never have to do that because, honestly,
5 fuck it. If people don't respect my identity then they wouldn't even if I had a voice that sounded
6 like an 808 drum.
- 7 AJ: Right, exactly – 808.
- 8 AF: I have just felt like I can do the work that I want to do, I can be the doctor, I can be the things I
9 want to do, I feel just ecstatic. It's like I wasn't living, I think, until around 9th grade and a half
10 when I openly decided, "Hey, I'm trans, the world can go fuck itself, I am the devil, it's fine,
11 there's nothing wrong me, there's something wrong with it." And, in that moment I felt my
12 mental health get better, I found people that loved me for me. I don't know, I just had this
13 tremendous growth in the last three years because of such a simple thing – a simple statement
14 like, "I am a man."
- 15 AJ: Yeah, wow. That's powerful. What's the current relationship like with your birth family – your
16 siblings, your mom?
- 17 AF: They're getting there. The state . . . the part that was really difficult was when the state
18 ultimately got involved, my mom suffered some repercussions from it and being in poverty
19 already, that limited her jobs to, like, zero, so she is always struggling and I have to deal with the
20 backhand guilt of that. Ultimately, my siblings are the ones that suffer.
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 AF: I wish the system understood that.
- 23 AJ: You were trying to be yourself and . . .
- 24 AF: Right, and birth mom, honestly, let me walk out the door, all I needed was a resource to go to.
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 AF: But, ultimately suffered . . . the people who ultimately suffered were my siblings because birth
27 mom is unemployed.
- 28 AJ: So, they kind of blame you.
- 29 AF: Yeah, of course they blame me. If they can't get Eid presents, who are they going to blame?
30 The black sheep of the family who ran off at 13, the one that they never get to see because . . .
31 you know. To walk up Cedar Avenue dressed like me would mean death to even go see them.
32 So, I hate . . . it's all arbitrary because when I get birth mom now by herself she wants to accept,
33 which is the hardest part for me – she wants to . . .
- 34 AJ: But it's her cultural . . .

- 1 AF: Her culture, her community. She's like, "How can I be proud of something that's supposed to
2 disgust me?" That's literally what she just said to me like two weeks ago, when she ultimately
3 agreed to go to my graduation.
- 4 AJ: Yeah. She sounds like she's going to come around.
- 5 AF: I'm hoping. I'm missing my siblings again.
- 6 AJ: Have you undergone any medical interventions at this point.
- 7 AF: I got on T, which was a battle because I had no legal guardian and doctors were like, "I ain't
8 getting sued."
- 9 AJ: Right.
- 10 AF: So, I got help and started T about two months ago and got off of it because – hey, insurance is a
11 thing that you get off of when you're off the state insurance, because once foster care left, I had
12 no resources. I couldn't access jack and I had no health care. So, either I continued to take
13 these really high levels of testosterone with no control or labs, or I go off for a little bit and be
14 sad.
- 15 AJ: I think there's some free clinics, though – or sliding scale clinics.
- 16 AF: True. And, I've just found out about Family Tree, for example.
- 17 AJ: Family Tree is the one I was going to say, yeah.
- 18 AF: Right, it has a sliding scale fee I can go into so I'm going to start up again and with the newest
19 refill – that's exciting.
- 20 AJ: Do you have any other plans for medical stuff? You can say no, I don't want to talk about that,
21 Andrea, because gender is not about what's in-between your legs, it's really about how we view
22 ourselves and our internal realization of who we are.
- 23 AF: If I really could just get my brain to agree with that statement, it would save me like \$100,000 . .
24 . I don't know how much. So, I got a PFund Scholarship, which is \$10,000.
- 25 AJ: Nice.
- 26 AF: Yeah, originally for school but when I emailed them saying, "I magically paid off my school loans
27 through a competition for leadership or something," they were like, "Hey, do you want to use
28 these funds for surgery?" So, I'm going to have my top surgery, which will remove these things
29 off of my chest.
- 30 AJ: What?
- 31 AF: Right – in August. So, my graduation goals were simple – like, you're going to get all your
32 college paid for, you're going to find a house, you're going to leave this system, and you're going
33 to get top surgery before you go into college. You're going to go in as Ash Farah, the fucking
34 dude.
- 35 AJ: What? You've been accepted into college? What college are you going to?

- 1 AF: I'm going to go to Augsburg College.
- 2 AJ: Wow. What do you plan to study?
- 3 AF: Pre-med.
- 4 AJ: Because you want to be . . .?
- 5 AF: I want to be one of the firsts, because I found out that there's actually another trans surgeon
6 out there who is bad-ass.
- 7 AJ: Right.
- 8 AF: I want to become one of the first Black trans men surgeons there is because . . . hey, wouldn't
9 that be bad-ass to walk into a place, like a surgeon's office, and go, "Hey, of course he's going to
10 respect me for being trans, he's trans."
- 11 AJ: Yeah. I'm so looking forward to that day because I know it's going to happen.
- 12 AF: I'm very goal driven.
- 13 AJ: Your spirit and your goals are incredible. So, you got a full ride to Augsburg.
- 14 AF: Yes.
- 15 AJ: And then PFund is like, "Well, why don't you just take this \$10,000 and use it for your own
16 personal . . ."
- 17 AF: Needs.
- 18 AJ: Needs – right. Your own self-care, really, is what it comes down to.
- 19 AF: That's the best gift I could have been given.
- 20 AJ: That is incredible. Wow, I love this story. And, talk to me about relationships. Are you in a
21 relationship?
- 22 AF: Oh, Lord.
- 23 AJ: What's your sexual identity?
- 24 AF: I'm a fuck boy.
- 25 AJ: A fuck boy – what's a fuck boy?
- 26 AF: Ahhh . . .
- 27 AJ: Trap music. Define fuck boy, I don't know what fuck boy is.
- 28 AF: Somebody who doesn't really have serious relationships and just goes around. Which is fine,
29 because I never really . . . it's disrespectful to be like, "Hey, I've got the time for you," when
30 really I've got three hours and I'm spending it with Andrea this week.
- 31 AJ: Exactly. So, "I'll see you next week." No, that's what's up.

- 1 AF: Because nothing is a bigger turn off than being like, “Can I schedule this date three weeks in
2 advance?”
- 3 AJ: Yeah, that kind of sucks too. But, what’s your orientation? Who do you . . . I mean, do you date
4 guys, do you date women? Do you date trans people?
- 5 AF: That would be awesome . . . is there a word for that?
- 6 AJ: Trans on trans dating – I don’t know.
- 7 AF: That sounds like Black on Black crime. I don’t know about that. Oh, my God, a relationship
8 would be a beautiful thing. So, I identify as bisexual so I like people who are femme and people
9 who are masculine – their identity doesn’t matter to me. They could be trans, they could be
10 androgynous.
- 11 AJ: Cis.
- 12 AF: Cis – yeah. It doesn’t matter.
- 13 AJ: Which is nice.
- 14 AF: But, also really no excuse for why I can’t find nobody.
- 15 AJ: I know, you’ve got a pretty broad range.
- 16 AF: Right, the whole ocean.
- 17 AJ: Well, I think maybe the fuck boy status might have a little bit to do with that.
- 18 AF: OK.
- 19 AJ: But, at this point in your life, I think that’s fine. Actually, at any point in your life if that’s what
20 you choose to do, that’s what’s up. What do you think the relationship is between the L, the G,
21 the B, the bisexuals, and the T? Because you worked in . . . when you were in high school, you
22 worked in an LGBT organization and you’re getting ready to start working at another LGBT
23 organization. In your opinion, how is that?
- 24 AF: Drop the T is real.
- 25 AJ: Drop the T is real?
- 26 AF: Yes.
- 27 AJ: What is Drop the T? Say more about that. I mean, I know what it’s about, but maybe our
28 friends who might tune into this at some point may not be aware.
- 29 AF: Drop the T is when, in the acronym LGBT, people don’t focus on . . . they focus specifically on
30 LGB and nothing on T, to the point where LGB issues are the only ones present and they use the
31 full acronym to describe that as the whole community. For example, LGBT issues on this list of
32 issues that we could talk about as a GSA, immediately the ones that were like given to us, or
33 whatever, was gay marriage and issues like gay marriage, adoption, and things like . . . I was like,
34 “What about trans day of remembrance? Why is that not on there? They’re killing us.”

- 1 AJ: Yeah.
- 2 AF: Literally, across our school, the little Wendy's we go to eat – across from it there's a Schooner's
3 Bar where CeCe got attacked and jailed in a male prison as a trans woman and nobody knows
4 about that.
- 5 AJ: Yeah, less than two blocks from your school.
- 6 AF: Less than two blocks from South, and all these issues – and none of it gets brought up because
7 trans people are just left under the rug and they have the audacity to let some white boy from
8 Kansas play the first rioter in some movie called *Stonewall*. There's interracial history and this
9 push for being normal, like heteronormative, to the point where we can sell LGB but we can't
10 sell the T so we're going to drop it.
- 11 AJ: Wow.
- 12 AF: And that's what ultimately started happening in organizations like the Human Rights Campaign
13 and all these other places – even here in Minneapolis.
- 14 AJ: Actually, to be fair, the Human Rights Campaign actually . . .
- 15 AF: True, fixed it.
- 16 AJ: . . . said no, "No, we're not." But some of the other major organizations were really having
17 these discussions.
- 18 AF: Right.
- 19 AJ: And, I'm not a fan of HRC, I just want to be . . . we've got to give them credit, right?
- 20 AF: Right, they've been doing shit.
- 21 AJ: They did their thing on that particular issue – they did, in the past, throw the trans community
22 under the bus, which they have never really been forgiven for, but rightfully so.
- 23 AF: But, they're certainly not the only organization who's done that.
- 24 AJ: No, not at all. What do you think the agenda for the trans community should be going forward,
25 Ash?
- 26 AF: Ahh, agenda. We have no agendas. If Bill O'Reilly, or whoever the fuck is watching this, we
27 have no agendas, no little lists. But, honestly, some agendas, I think, should be . . . the focus
28 point is where we're hurting the most, to me: homelessness, joblessness, and, honestly,
29 violence – to the point that we need resources going to this. And, of course, the bathroom bill
30 laws are real but they're basically chosen horses to dissimilate and destroy all other forms of
31 life.
- 32 AJ: Right – speak young man. I'm loving this.
- 33 AF: But, it's true. Those bathroom bills have a lot of words and once you start reading them you
34 find out, "Oh, this is deliberate, there's other things involved."

- 1 AJ: Right.
- 2 AF: It's not just about where you get to pee because there's no officer that's going to stop anybody
3 from walking into any bathroom.
- 4 AJ: Exactly. And people have been peeing for the last thousands and thousands and thousands of
5 years in bathrooms, trans people, so give me a break.
- 6 AF: God. And, health care – being trans will be considered a pre-existing condition. You can't get a
7 job and once you can't get a job you are forced to what I had to deal with – hustle, basically.
8 Once you get into that there's this whole prison . . .
- 9 AJ: Criminal, prison industrial complex stuff kicks into place.
- 10 AF: Yeah, bullshit where trans people get stuck and LGBT people get stuck and aren't going to . . .
11 and there are all these things that are interlocked but once you start to focus on where you're
12 hurting the most, you can heal the whole wound. That's the way I see it.
- 13 AJ: So, homelessness and employment are really, and access to medical . . . yeah, the violence goes
14 down. If you've got a home and a job . . .
- 15 AF: Stable and . . . once you get money in America, that's what leads you to vote.
- 16 AJ: Yeah, the likelihood of being murdered decreases. I mean, it's not . . . transphobia is real.
- 17 AF: It's significant. If you had a home and agency then it's . . .
- 18 AJ: Yeah, then you can navigate through some of that stuff.
- 19 AF: Right. You're going to have a lot better interaction with police if you have a lawyer, that kind of
20 thing – all these things. We really should focus on that, and by we, I mean the LGB as well.
- 21 AJ: Yeah, I hear you. Where do you think the trans community is going to be in the next 50 years,
22 Ash?
- 23 AF: Oh, gosh. This is the part where I'm not malistic.
- 24 AJ: You'll still be here, I might not be here.
- 25 AF: Oh, come on – you might pull a Miss Major, it will be fun.
- 26 AJ: That's my girl, Miss Major. I love that you're dropping all this history and knowledge today.
27 CeCe McDonald . . .
- 28 AF: Because we need to remember our history.
- 29 AJ: Yes.
- 30 AF: I felt disrespected when I found out about Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson and Miss Major
31 because I was downright – like, nobody ever told me about this. I knew about Oscar Wilde and
32 that was the only gay man I've ever read about.
- 33 AJ: OK.

- 1 AF: That and Alexander the Great, but that was a whole thing.
- 2 AJ: Keep it 100, wow.
- 3 AF: That will do it, you've got to learn about it.
- 4 AJ: But, what do you think about the future?
- 5 AF: Oh, that. I'm really hopeful – to a point where it's almost childish. I think that's the only
6 immature part of me is the blind hope, because I can see it. I can see the change.
- 7 AJ: That's not immature, that's real. Your last president wrote a whole book called *The Audacity of*
8 *Hope*.
- 9 AF: To be able to say it's going to get better when it's absolute shit.
- 10 AJ: And I don't think he's immature.
- 11 AF: Yeah, he's definitely not. I definitely think it's going to get better because I got to see it in the
12 eyes of all the youth that I work with and the changes we could make. And, if a couple little
13 punks can make all these changes, imagine if all these little punks grew up and had money and
14 had jobs and voted and did all these things.
- 15 AJ: Right, and became surgeons.
- 16 AF: Right. Then, of course it's going to get better.
- 17 AJ: Wow. So, this is Ash leaving you guys with some hope because as President Obama has said, it's
18 easy to be cynical but hope is better. So, stay hopefully. Ash, I've just got to say I'm so honored
19 that you are willing to share your story today. I guess the last thing I would ask you about
20 because you, I believe, identify as an ex-Muslim.
- 21 AF: Which is hard.
- 22 AJ: What does that mean to you?
- 23 AF: It means that you disagree with the fundamental tenets of Islam, that you do not agree with the
24 social . . . the public, the mainstream, social tenets of Islam, the social issues. Islam and the
25 Quran is not like the Bible. People often equate the two because, of course, they're Abrahamic
26 religions and they're similar. But, the Bible has stories and histories and all these things
27 intertwined. It's not a singular book, it's a library, basically.
- 28 AJ: Right, yeah. It's a collection of books.
- 29 AF: Right. But, the Quran is one book. It is a manuscript for how you're supposed to live your life –
30 down to the dime. I was told whenever . . . the moment you're born, you have a good angel and
31 a bad angel and they record every little thing you've ever done and they point it out on the day
32 of judgment and you're going to have it scaled. Islam is very mathematical, it's very concrete –
33 because it wanted to be accessible throughout all the cultures.
- 34 AJ: Sure.

- 1 AF: Which is the one good thing about Islamic, it could spread like crazy because it had no race tied
2 to it or all these things.
- 3 AJ: Interesting.
- 4 AF: But, it's a lot of bullshit because what also it was tied to – the homophobia, the transphobia, and
5 other bigotry at the time. The misogyny because it was a male-dominated society, classism – to
6 the point where nowhere in the Quran, here's the part where people are going to disagree with
7 me, does it outright ban slavery. It doesn't condone it, it doesn't want you to, it has protocols
8 for how you free your slaves and how that can get you to heaven and stuff, but it does not
9 outright condone it.
- 10 AJ: Wow.
- 11 AF: So, from the beginning, I was being taught that my existence was from the generosity of
12 someone else. Women, in general, aren't respected and people will argue that it's no fault of
13 the Quran but the way it's applied – but, application is all that matters.
- 14 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 15 AF: I don't get to see the ideal Islam, you get to see the ones people produce and the ones people
16 produce is filled with hatred, it's . . . the thing that's difficult talking about being ex-Muslim is
17 that you're expected to ride this line of simultaneously defending Muslim people as human
18 beings because your criticism will be weaponized against you.
- 19 AJ: Yeah, that's a man.
- 20 AF: But, at the same time defending your right to live and your apostasy, because in Islam apostasy
21 is . . . you have to die, there's no other rule, it's just met with death. Once you accept Islam and
22 you de-accept or you're ex-Muslim, you just die, that's the way you should go. It's honorable to
23 do that.
- 24 AJ: Wow.
- 25 AF: To the point where we have people being beheaded because they listen to some rap lyric in
26 Saudi Arabia.
- 27 AJ: Oh, my goodness.
- 28 AF: Right, this is the truth, when you take the most extreme form of it you get to see the way it is.
29 When you water it down, you put your own cultural values and stuff like this . . . it becomes a
30 more beautiful thing and it becomes more stories and morals you live by. But, the vast majority
31 of the world aren't living by that. In Indonesia, a recently – recently homogenized Muslim
32 population is now caning gay people. It is a direct correlation, and in my culture, the word libab,
33 which meant trans, is erased from their vocabulary around the same time Islam because fully
34 prominent, where Jews were exiled and left out to Ethiopia and it became fully homogenized,
35 these words disappeared and words have history too.
- 36 AJ: So, you're saying trans identity has always existed in "East African culture" or Somali culture.

- 1 AF: Right, because you can see it . . . in older people, when I say the word libab, they recognize it.
2 They're like, "Oh, those people." They lived in blah, blah, blah woods, they're traditionally
3 pagan, they have memories. But, once you go down two or three, no recollection. "What do
4 you mean?" Because there was outright . . .
- 5 AJ: How do you spell libab?
- 6 AF: L-i-b-a-b. Libab.
- 7 AJ: Oh, wow – libab.
- 8 AF: Yeah, and it just means gender non-conforming, but people use it for trans. So, yeah. It's just . .
9 . it's so hard to talk about Islam because simultaneously I want to defend the poor woman who
10 is being harassed on the street because of her hijab. She has no business . . . nobody has
11 business being harassed.
- 12 AJ: Right.
- 13 AF: But, at the same time, this whole . . . it's an unholy book to me, just filled with . . . I can't even
14 recite to you the verses most of the time. People don't take the time to actually read it. And, of
15 course, there's beautiful things like the one chapter saying, "You have your religion and I'll have
16 mine," but the ones following after that is the slaughtering of that very person who said that.
- 17 AJ: Wow.
- 18 AF: On the doorsteps of the hedge, which is the ultimate . . . you know, temple.
- 19 AJ: Well, all of those religions, their mission was to try to . . .
- 20 AF: Convert.
- 21 AJ: Convert other people to their religions.
- 22 AF: To the point where they freed a slave, called Bilal, which is . . . the funny part is originally his
23 name, Bali, or whatever, was a demon at the time and all that. But, Bilal, because they
24 humanized the name, he became Muslim, one of the first "slaves", one of the first Black people
25 – they don't teach . . . they teach Americans the first slave to become Muslim, they teach others
26 the first Black person to become Muslim, because he basically took a beating to the point where
27 he kept saying, "There's only one God," all these things, and he converted. And, because of his
28 conversation, he was let to be free and was given money and status. That was applied
29 throughout East Africa with traitors promising wealth and money and all these things.
- 30 AJ: If you convert to Islam.
- 31 AF: If you convert. So, to convert is to lose your social standing, to lose your support system, and to
32 become an ex-Muslim is to become an outcast.
- 33 AJ: Well, I appreciate you being willing to talk about this. This is in no way . . . I think what . . . I just
34 read a Facebook post today from a Black trans person saying how difficult it is to talk about
35 transphobia and homophobia in the Black community without giving fodder or language for

- 1 critics and opponents to weaponize that language. And so, it's a very tight line that you have to
2 walk.
- 3 AF: Right. Do I translate this verse for him so he can walk out and harass the nearest Muslim he
4 meets? Or, do I keep it to myself and take the hatred I get from my own community and just let
5 it die with me?
- 6 AJ: Yeah, that's a tough place to be. It's, unfortunately . . . you know, a dichotomy, I think, that a lot
7 of trans people face with their identity versus whatever religious position that they sort of were
8 indoctrinated into as a child. So, I honor that struggle and deeply respect your courage to be
9 who you are. It's so important, Ash. Thank you so much for sharing your time and your story.
10 Until we meet again.
- 11 AF: Right. It's OK, gaybies – it's fine.
- 12 AJ: It gets better.
- 13 AF: It is going to get better.
- 14 AJ: All right. Peace.