

James Schwartz
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

June 15, 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 James Schwartz -JS
3
4 AJ: Good morning.
5 JS: Morning.
6 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project
7 at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota Libraries. Today is June 15, 2017.
8 JS: Wow.
9 AJ: I'm on campus at the University of Minnesota and I'm speaking today with James Schwartz.
10 How are you, James?
11 JS: I'm doing pretty well.
12 AJ: Yeah?
13 JS: Yeah.
14 AJ: Hey, I just want to thank you for sitting with us today and sharing a little bit of your story for this
15 very important project.
16 JS: Absolutely.
17 AJ: So, if you can just start out by stating your name, spell your name so we make sure we have all
18 of that correct, tell me what your gender identity is today, and your gender assigned at birth, as
19 well as the pronouns you use.
20 JS: OK. And you want me to spell my full name?
21 AJ: Sure.
22 JS: OK. So, my name is James Schwartz. That's J-a-m-e-s S-c-h-w-a-r-t-z and today, like most other
23 days, I identify as a trans man. I was assigned female at birth and I generally go by he/him/his
24 pronouns.
25 AJ: So, you said, "Like most other days" . . .
26 JS: Yeah.
27 AJ: Are there some days when you feel a different identity? I'm only . . . I think it's amazing, I
28 experience that same feeling sometimes myself, but I'm just curious about your experience.
29 JS: Some days I feel less like a trans man and just more like feeling comfortable with the term trans.
30 But, it doesn't change the way I express my gender or necessarily dysphoria feelings. There are
31 days when I don't feel like . . . I don't really like to identify as a man because there's so much
32 toxicity behind being a man.
33 AJ: Right.

- 1 JS: But, I would say 95% of the time I would say trans man because that's separate from saying I
2 identify as a man, usually.
- 3 AJ: Talk a little bit more about this toxicity.
- 4 JS: So, it's very prevalent, even within trans masculine communities, I would say. And, definitely I
5 find myself online in certain groups, like Facebook groups, where it's just trans men or trans
6 masculine people. There's a lot of toxic masculinity that happens, so this idea of them over
7 compensating to be men – so, taking masculinity to that extent of what normal men do, or what
8 we're saying cis gender men . . . yeah. So, feeling possessive over women and saying very gross
9 things, not being very feminist or inclusive, having preferences over who you're dating and stuff
10 like that.
- 11 AJ: You know, I just think that that's just such a fascinating viewpoint that I think a lot of the trans
12 masculine or trans men, people that I talk to, are grappling with and it has the potential to help
13 shift masculine behavior or masculine ideas. I know for a fact that it is not happening right now,
14 but it does have the potential.
- 15 JS: Yes.
- 16 AJ: Thank you for elaborating on that. I appreciate it. What's your earliest memory in life, James?
17 It does not have to be related to your gender identity, although what I find is that a lot of times
18 when I'm talking to trans-identified people, their first memories are sort of around gender stuff.
19 But, it doesn't have to be.
- 20 JS: Earliest memories? This is difficult, often times, for me to think about earliest memories
21 because a lot of my younger years I don't remember, for trauma-related reasons and abuse and
22 stuff like that.
- 23 AJ: And, if it's too challenging, don't drudge up . . .
- 24 JS: I mean, there's a lot of good memories around going to . . . I have one of my grandparents who
25 lives on a lake and going and being on a boat on a lake and kind of enjoying the really big yard
26 that she has.
- 27 AJ: Where's the lake?
- 28 JS: It's in Maple Grove . . . I can't remember the name of the lake. I've been there so many times.
29 Yeah. But, yeah, she lives in Maple Grove, still lives on that lake.
- 30 AJ: Wow – and you grew up in Maple Grove, right?
- 31 JS: I was born in Maple Grove, that's where my parents grew up. But, we did move out to
32 Monticello, Minnesota, when I was in the 2nd grade. So, I spent most of my life in Monticello
33 and that's where my parents live right now.
- 34 AJ: Oh, wow. So, Monticello, that's a pretty small town . . . would you say? How would you
35 describe Monticello?
- 36 JS: Now it's not super small, there's about 12,000 people.

- 1 AJ: OK.
- 2 JS: So, that's not a small . . . like, tiny Minnesota town, but it's a medium-size suburb I guess. My
3 graduating class was about 290 and how I would . . . it's a very . . .
- 4 AJ: It's smaller than Maple Grove, though, right?
- 5 JS: Oh, yes, absolutely. Much smaller than Maple Grove. My parents graduating class was 600 or
6 more, I think, so definitely much larger. Monticello is pretty religious and conservative.
- 7 AJ: Really?
- 8 JS: Yes, yeah. Even though they're up near St. Cloud, it's still . . . yeah, pretty religious and
9 conservative. It's a part of Wright County, which is a pretty conservative county in Minnesota.
- 10 AJ: St. Cloud is kind of conservative and religious too, I'm just saying.
- 11 JS: Oh, absolutely. I mean, it's a bigger town up there so there's a little bit more diversity, but yeah.
- 12 AJ: A little more.
- 13 JS: Yeah, definitely still conservative.
- 14 AJ: Yeah, so you . . . in 2nd grade, you guys moved to Monticello. What was going to school like
15 there?
- 16 JS: It was a good education, they had fairly good teachers there, they had a good curriculum plan
17 for kids. I didn't like going to school there. I definitely think that there is a lot of things I lacked
18 coming into college. So, it's a very white area, so I didn't have a lot of people that I knew that
19 were people of color or even religious minorities or people of other faiths.
- 20 AJ: What about sexual and gender expression?
- 21 JS: Yeah, so there weren't really anyone . . . so, when I was in high school, I was out as queer.
- 22 AJ: Really?
- 23 JS: Yes, I was. I wasn't out as trans, but I was out as queer.
- 24 AJ: Wow – in Monticello?
- 25 JS: Yes.
- 26 AJ: OK, how did that go over?
- 27 JS: I mean, I had a few friends that I told and then I'm sure that other people knew. So, I presented
28 very masculine-ly throughout all of high school so I would imagine that word went around, that
29 people had their suspicions.
- 30 AJ: That you were butch dyke?
- 31 JS: Yeah, exactly.
- 32 AJ: Were you bullied or harassed at all?

- 1 JS: No, I think that people that felt uncomfortable about it, they just didn't talk to me.
- 2 AJ: Yeah.
- 3 JS: But, there was no one else, at least in my class of 290 people, that I knew, that was out.
- 4 AJ: So, you were a GSA of one?
- 5 JS: Yeah, exactly. So, it was a very lonely and I definitely, once I came to college, realized how much
6 I didn't like high school because of the community that I found on campus.
- 7 AJ: Cool.
- 8 JS: Yeah.
- 9 AJ: Although you sort of presented masculine or masculine-ish, I would say maybe, and were sort of
10 openly queer, maybe not to everybody but to certain groups, right.
- 11 JS: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: What about your family? Did you identify as queer to your family?
- 13 JS: Yeah, I did. So, I grew up in a very queer and trans-friendly household.
- 14 AJ: Awesome.
- 15 JS: My entire family . . . so, one of my grandparents is trans and also queer-ish. I've never really
16 asked her how she identifies. I would imagine she identifies as a form of queer.
- 17 AJ: One of your grandparents is trans?
- 18 JS: Yeah, Debra Davis – you actually know her.
- 19 AJ: I do your grandmother. Oh, my goodness – that's incredible.
- 20 JS: Yeah. That's my grandma.
- 21 AJ: Really? Wow. Say hello to your grandmother for me.
- 22 JS: I will, yeah. So, I grew up . . .
- 23 AJ: If this interview was about me, I would just go on and on – like lavishing praise on your
24 grandmother because she helped me come out at my job.
- 25 JS: Yeah, she's amazing. Right, yeah – she's talked about that.
- 26 AJ: That kind of was her thing. Yeah. All right, so you've got a queer grandma.
- 27 JS: Yup, yup – so I grew up going to Pride . . .
- 28 AJ: I mean, a trans queer grandma.
- 29 JS: Yes. I grew up going to Pride because she always was there with her non-profit.
- 30 AJ: Yes, Gender Education Center.

- 1 JS: Yup. I was on the float with her in the parade when she was grand marshal. So, our family was
2 very queer-friendly. So, in high school, I did come out to my parents. I had already been out for
3 a few years to a few friends in school. It was fine, they were like, "OK, that's cool."
- 4 AJ: Let's do this, huh?
- 5 JS: Exactly.
- 6 AJ: When did you first realize that you were not the gender you were assigned at birth?
- 7 JS: That was a little later. I was in college . . . it was a few years ago. It was probably when I was
8 around 19 or 20 when I started questioning my gender. But, I had always done things . . . and,
9 this was over the course of like a year. I was trying to figure out how I identified and why there
10 were certain things that I felt really uncomfortable with . . . kind of that imposter syndrome of,
11 "Well, am I actually trans? Am I trans enough?" So, yeah . . . it's been about two years now that
12 I was like, "Yes, this is for sure a thing." But, there were a lot of things when I was younger that I
13 should have been like, "Wow, I was really uncomfortable in my gender," and what I felt was
14 being forced on me.
- 15 AJ: Yeah, it takes time. Did you have siblings? Do you have siblings?
- 16 JS: Yes, I have two younger brothers.
- 17 AJ: Really? How are they with your gender transition?
- 18 JS: So, that's another fun thing. I am not fully out to my immediate family.
- 19 AJ: OK.
- 20 JS: Mainly, just because . . . so, I came out over social media . . . I wanted to do that to the majority
21 of the people in my life because I have a lot of friends on there, so I was just like, "I'll do this." I
22 have some family members that also have Facebook, so they saw it and that's how they found
23 out. But, my parents don't have Facebook, which is kind of funny. So, it's been like another part
24 of this process for me to have to figure out how I want to tell them.
- 25 AJ: Wow.
- 26 JS: And, we're still working on that. But, I don't know what my brothers will think. It will be
27 interesting. They follow me on certain social media, so they see things.
- 28 AJ: So, they kind of have a . . .
- 29 JS: Yeah, but we don't talk about it, so I don't know what they think.
- 30 AJ: How much younger are they?
- 31 JS: The middle of the three of us, he's going to be turning 20 in November, so he's 19 right now.
32 And then the other one, he's 17.
- 33 AJ: So, they're not babies.

- 1 JS: No, they're not. We're all going to be adults. Well, Ricky, my youngest brother, he's not quite
2 an adult yet, but, yeah, we're all adults basically.
- 3 AJ: And, your parents are the only two people on the planet that don't have Facebook.
- 4 JS: I know, and they're both . . . they both just recently turned 40 this year.
- 5 AJ: What are they, Instagrammers? Are they anti-social media, in general?
- 6 JS: Yeah, I mean . . . so, my dad, he doesn't have social media because he's afraid that it would be
7 dangerous for him. He's a police officer.
- 8 AJ: Smart guy.
- 9 JS: Yup. And he's a police officer in St. Paul.
- 10 AJ: Oh, wow. Yeah, social media has gotten a few cops in trouble in St. Paul.
- 11 JS: Yes. He's never had a Facebook. Which, to be fair, I don't think he would even if he wasn't a
12 cop – he's just not that type of person.
- 13 AJ: Yeah.
- 14 JS: But, yeah, he doesn't have it and my mom doesn't have it for similar reasons.
- 15 AJ: I'm totally joking. People have their reasons for wanting to be on social media and/or not.
16 Wow, that's interesting though, your dad comes from Monticello to St. Paul to work every day.
- 17 JS: Yeah, it's about a 45-minute commute. He's been doing that for, I want to say probably 10 years
18 now.
- 19 AJ: OK, that's not a bad commute, I guess. Forty-five minutes.
- 20 JS: I think it would be good for them to move closer.
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 JS: Yeah, definitely.
- 23 AJ: Maybe you would visit more, is that what you're saying?
- 24 JS: Yeah, definitely.
- 25 AJ: So, you talked a little bit about some of the terms that you've used to describe yourself – queer,
26 I think. Do you still identify as queer?
- 27 JS: Yes.
- 28 AJ: Trans, as an identity – trans man, as an identity. Are there others that you have used to identify
29 yourself over time?
- 30 JS: When I was in high school I didn't identify as queer, I identified as gay.
- 31 AJ: OK.

- 1 JS: I've never identified as lesbian because it always really made me uncomfortable, and now I
2 understand why.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, wow – that's interesting. That's really interesting.
- 4 JS: Yeah, I always was like, "I just don't like the term lesbian, it just makes me really
5 uncomfortable." But, I . . .
- 6 AJ: Because lesbians who are lesbians, love it.
- 7 JS: Yes, exactly. But, I was like, "Ahh, I just don't like it." And, when I was in college I was like, "Oh,
8 that makes a lot more sense why I didn't like it, because I didn't feel like I was a woman." So,
9 yeah.
- 10 AJ: So, gay and that's pretty much it.
- 11 JS: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: That's a lot.
- 13 JS: Yeah, I mean, I think that . . . so, it went from gay to queer. Queer in college because once I
14 started more exploring my gender, my sexuality became . . . I was like, OK, my sexuality is a little
15 more fluid now. I feel more comfortable with the idea of dating people of other genders. I
16 wouldn't be opposed to dating another trans person or like a trans man or a trans woman, or
17 someone who is non-binary. So, then I was just like, "I'll just identify as queer because it's a very
18 good umbrella term."
- 19 AJ: Would you ever date a guy?
- 20 JS: Potentially.
- 21 AJ: I mean a cis guy, I should have said?
- 22 JS: Yeah, maybe. Gay men can be a little iffy in terms of their inclusivity to trans people. But, I
23 don't think that I would ever write it off.
- 24 AJ: Huh, wow.
- 25 JS: But, generally I date people who are femme presenting or cis women.
- 26 AJ: Sure. What challenges have you faced since expressing your true gender identity?
- 27 JS: I think feeling comfortable with myself and also learning to do what I want to do and not what
28 others might have expectations for me. So, not hiding things that are my truest forms of
29 expression just because I'm afraid of . . . it might make other people feel uncomfortable or
30 people might say things.
- 31 AJ: Right. That's a big one. I mean, that's a thing that I think everybody on the planet has to really
32 try to overcome, I just think most people don't recognize it in ways that trans and gender non-
33 conforming people do or sexual minorities tend to have to grapple with that in very real ways.
34 But, the pressure to conform to society and to your parent's ideas of who you should be, or your
35 partner's ideals of who you should be . . . or, you know, that's a struggle for a lot of people.

- 1 JS: Yeah.
- 2 AJ: So, I'm glad you've been able to work through some of that. What have been some of the
3 positive aspects of life since you have begun to express your true gender identity?
- 4 JS: I've definitely found that people tell me I'm a lot more comfortable, that I seem more
5 comfortable, I seem a little bit more relaxed, less on edge. I've definitely noticed less stress in
6 my life, a little bit less. And, also finding more people to talk to about . . . finding community
7 and finding people with similar experiences that I can really talk to. That's been a really positive
8 part – and also, finding resources to further that process of becoming more of like me and stuff
9 like that.
- 10 AJ: Wow. So, you said your relationship with your birth family is pretty good right now, though
11 they're just not fully aware. But, they see you.
- 12 JS: Yeah.
- 13 AJ: Do you bind when you're around your folks?
- 14 JS: Yeah. We have a very intense amount of image impression and control over the image of the
15 family. So, I don't think . . . if they're upset, they wouldn't tell me. It's a very Minnesotan,
16 passive-aggressive sort of . . .
- 17 AJ: Wow.
- 18 JS: But . . . yeah, I've talked to my mom about being trans before. I called her once and I was just
19 like, "Hey, so this is something that I'm feeling." So, that conversation happened but we never
20 really talked about it. I've had other phone conversations before where I've talked to her about,
21 you know, "I'm starting therapy where I'm going to be talking to someone at the Program in
22 Human Sexuality and the focus is going to be on gender, although I'll work on other things, but
23 that's going to be my main focus." So, I've been fairly . . .
- 24 AJ: You've dropped some bread crumbs.
- 25 JS: Yeah, I've been fairly transparent with them, but yeah. They might still be processing.
- 26 AJ: But the relationship is still solid, it's still there?
- 27 JS: Yeah, for the most part, I would say.
- 28 AJ: You go home for Thanksgiving and spring break and . . .?
- 29 JS: Oh, yeah. I go home for holidays but I'm finding that I don't spend as much time there anymore,
30 just because I have so many people . . . I have such a large support system here in Minneapolis.
- 31 AJ: So, do you have what a lot of queer and trans-identified people call . . .
- 32 JS: Chosen family?
- 33 AJ: Chosen family, thank you, James.
- 34 JS: Yeah.

- 1 AJ: The brain is not firing on all cylinders yet.
- 2 JS: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I definitely have a chosen family. I think a large part of that would be
3 from my work here on campus. I'm meeting a lot of different people – a lot of different queer
4 people, and having really close relationships with the other students that I work with. There's
5 about five of us that work at the Center and we've all gotten to know each other really well.
- 6 AJ: And really supportive of each other?
- 7 JS: Oh, absolutely.
- 8 AJ: You spend time together outside of school and . . . ?
- 9 JS: Oh, yes. Actually, later today I'm going to go spend time with one of my friends from there.
- 10 AJ: Cool, that is so cool. Support and connection, I think, is a really big way for trans and gender
11 queer and gender non-conforming people to be able to really thrive and to grow.
- 12 JS: Oh, absolutely.
- 13 AJ: You mentioned seeking out therapy at the Program in Human Sexuality. What other . . . to the
14 extent that you feel comfortable, what other medical interventions have you pursued or plan to
15 pursue, relative to your gender transition? Or, your gender confirmation is probably a better
16 term.
- 17 JS: Yeah. So, I definitely will . . . I'm working on, in therapy, figuring out what other things, in terms
18 of physical transition, I want to do. At this point, surgery . . . so, top surgery is definitely
19 something that I'm going to be doing at some point and I'm hoping that . . . you know, with
20 planning with my therapist and what not, that that can happen maybe within the next couple of
21 years. Hormones, are something that I go on and off about. So, I'm still processing through
22 what that means for me and why I feel like that. But, for most of the time, I do feel like yes, I
23 want to start hormones and testosterone.
- 24 AJ: Sure.
- 25 JS: Yeah.
- 26 AJ: So, talk to me . . . because so many people sort of equate medical intervention with being a real
27 trans person, and I get the sense, based on your identity, you consider yourself a trans person.
28 How does medical, surgery . . . how does that interact for you?
- 29 JS: With being trans?
- 30 AJ: Yes.
- 31 JS: I mean, the way I see it . . . so, this idea of being trans and having to have medical intervention, I
32 think one of my friends who identifies as . . . he's been out for a really long time and has had
33 surgery and started hormones, and he's been on hormones for many years now, he introduced
34 me to the term truscum.
- 35 AJ: What's it called?

- 1 JS: Truscum. I think it's t-r-u-s-c-u-m. And, it's this idea that you are only trans if you have some
2 kind of . . . you know, you go through surgery and hormone replacement therapy, that truscum
3 – that those are the real trans people.
- 4 AJ: Right, yes.
- 5 JS: Which I don't agree with. I think that that's . . .
- 6 AJ: So, this is your . . . they introduced you to the term and they feel that to be . . .
- 7 JS: They don't, thankfully. They don't feel like that to be true. But, they did introduce me to it
8 because I didn't know that that was a thing. I knew that there were people out there that had
9 said, "Oh, well, you're only trans if you feel dysphoria," or, "You're only trans if you want to
10 have any form of surgeries that are out there," or, "You're only trans if you want hormones and
11 stuff like that."
- 12 AJ: Or, you knew when you were four years old.
- 13 JS: Exactly – or, you knew when you were younger, which I don't agree with. Not in terms of . . . I
14 don't know. I go back and forth on hormones but I've always felt like I want surgery, but that's
15 not necessarily . . . I don't equate my transness to needing to have surgery, it's because I want it.
- 16 AJ: Right.
- 17 JS: To feel more whole. So, I think . . . yeah.
- 18 AJ: No, I get that. I get that. This person . . . you mentioned this person, who was the first trans
19 person you ever met?
- 20 JS: Oh, it had to have been my grandma.
- 21 AJ: OK. Debra – yeah.
- 22 JS: Had to have been. If I were talking outside of my family and the first person I got to know well,
23 it would have probably been someone in college because I didn't know anyone else who was
24 really trans that I got to know well. I knew so many trans people growing up because of my
25 grandma. When we would go to Pride, she knows everyone.
- 26 AJ: Yeah, we probably met at some point.
- 27 JS: Yes, I would imagine we probably did meet at some point when I was younger. It probably was
28 Stef over at the Center.
- 29 AJ: Sure, Stef Wilencheck.
- 30 JS: Yeah, or . . . I'm trying to think of who else. Someone else that I met in college.
- 31 AJ: When you met a person like Stef, how did that make you feel?
- 32 JS: In terms . . . I think the reason I realized that I was not . . . that I identified outside of the gender
33 I was assigned at birth in college was because I found people that I was like, "I really connect
34 with you and your experience." I had done this . . . when I was younger, I would go online and

- 1 there's . . . you know, back in the early 2000s is when YouTube started and so there were
2 YouTubers that were trans men, they were trans masculine folks, and I would watch them and I
3 would be like, "Oh, that's really interesting." But, I didn't realize at the time that it was me
4 feeling interested – like, "Oh, that's interesting because that's what I felt." But once I met
5 someone in person, I was like, "Oh, I really connect with you," and when we had real
6 conversations, that's when I kind of was like, "OK, this is . . . I'm connecting with you because
7 this is a shared experience."
- 8 AJ: Right. Cool. Has there been a specific moment, person, or organization that has had an impact
9 on you related to your gender identity? I guess we kind of know the answer to this question.
10 You knew your grandma, but I don't think she pushed you to be trans or anything like that?
- 11 JS: Oh, absolutely not. Yeah, no. I think that the impact that she had on me and the non-profit,
12 because I did help her with mailing out letters to colleges. She did a lot of university speaking
13 back when she was really working a lot. I went to a few colleges when I was in middle school
14 and high school with her and watched her speak, but the biggest impact she had was me feeling
15 comfortable in knowing . . . feeling comfortable in the fact that I was trans, or feeling less
16 internalized transphobia because I grew up with trans people, I grew up around the queer and
17 trans community. So, I didn't have this separate notion that a lot of people, unfortunately, grow
18 up around – that internalized transphobia and really struggling with that. Which, granted,
19 society really pushes that on you anyway, so I think that to a certain extent, I still do experience
20 that.
- 21 AJ: Say . . . I mean, I know what internalized transphobia is, but just for people who may be feeling
22 this, they may or may not have a sense of what that means.
- 23 JS: Internalized transphobia, I think . . . the best way to describe it is putting your . . . when you put
24 yourself down in terms of your identity, or think of yourself as, like, "Well, it's just so gross that I
25 feel this way and I really wish I didn't because this is wrong." That's internalized transphobia.
- 26 AJ: Less than . . . the feeling of being less than or abnormal.
- 27 JS: Yes, exactly. Or, feeling like, "Oh, well, I'm just like this other." Like not feeling like a human or
28 not feeling like another person.
- 29 AJ: Sure, thank you. So, are you in a relationship right now?
- 30 JS: Sort of. I've been dating someone for a few months now. Yeah, it's pretty casual. But, yeah.
31 It's been going really well.
- 32 AJ: That's cool.
- 33 JS: Yeah, and I'm really . . .
- 34 AJ: Cis? Trans?
- 35 JS: She's a cis woman.
- 36 AJ: A cis woman. OK. Cool. It's pretty casual.

- 1 JS: Yeah.
- 2 AJ: Are you feeling like it's going to grow and blossom?
- 3 JS: Um, I mean, it has, over time, a little bit, so we . . . we'll chat every day for the most part and
4 we'll see each other maybe like once a week. But, she just recently graduated and is going to be
5 leaving the Twin Cities at the end of the summer.
- 6 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 7 JS: So, I don't know how far it will go. But . . . yeah. I'm enjoying it as it comes and goes.
- 8 AJ: I mean, technology and social media and Google Hangout and Snapchat and all of this stuff can
9 help us feel closer and more connected than, I would say, 25 years ago. But, long distance is a
10 thing.
- 11 JS: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: Well, I'm glad you're experiencing some good feelings right now.
- 13 JS: Yes, absolutely.
- 14 AJ: Who knows where that will come. Have you experienced any challenges finding employment or
15 accessing health care or accessing academia or any of the systems that, you know, some trans
16 people feel shut out of? And granted, you are a white presenting masculine . . . which carries
17 some privilege.
- 18 JS: Oh, absolutely, it really does. Since I've come out, I haven't gotten any . . . I haven't gotten a
19 new job, so I haven't had . . .
- 20 AJ: So, you've been working the same job.
- 21 JS: Yes, I've been working at the same couple jobs since I've come out.
- 22 AJ: So, you didn't get fired.
- 23 JS: No, I didn't get fired, so that was . . . yeah, very much a privilege to not have gotten fired from
24 either of those jobs.
- 25 AJ: I hate to put it in terms of a privilege, because I don't really think it is – you should not get fired
26 from your job for being trans.
- 27 JS: Oh, of course.
- 28 AJ: So, don't hear me putting labels on it. I'm not trying to do that.
- 29 JS: Yeah.
- 30 AJ: I'm just saying, it wasn't a challenge because you didn't get fired.
- 31 JS: Yes, yeah. I applied for a job, but they didn't know I was trans because I just put James down.
32 Now, if I'd gone to interview . . . they had wanted me to come in for an interview but it just

- 1 didn't end up working out because of commute and stuff like that, but my legal name isn't
2 changed, so that could have been an issue.
- 3 AJ: That could have been a challenge, yeah.
- 4 JS: But, I will never know. So, yeah. Health care, I feel very fortunate that I haven't run into too
5 many issues.
- 6 AJ: Do you still see your same pediatrician?
- 7 JS: No, I don't actually. I usually just go to Boynton here on campus for the most part, and my
8 health insurance, under my dad's coverage, is very good as a police officer.
- 9 AJ: Yeah, St. Paul cop.
- 10 JS: Yeah, he has very good health insurance. But, I have run into a few issues with my health
11 insurance not fully covering my therapy right away.
- 12 AJ: Really? Did you have to fight for it?
- 13 JS: Slightly. I had to work with the Program in Human Sexuality and they were really good about
14 doing most of the interface between my insurance company and them. But, I did owe some
15 money for a little while, so I had to pay off some of my therapy – and it's not cheap to go to
16 therapy there.
- 17 AJ: Ahhh, no. It's not cheap.
- 18 JS: But now I've been fully covered so I can continue going there. I'm very grateful that I can go to
19 therapy there just because it is so expensive – a lot more expensive than most other therapists.
- 20 AJ: What's been your experience? There are some trans community members who are really
21 critical of the Program in Human Sexuality? I'm not trying to get you to speak either way, I just
22 want your thoughts about it. It seems pretty positive but . . .
- 23 JS: Yeah, I have my critiques for how they run PHS and who is doing what. Their research that they
24 do, and it's run . . . I think currently they are doing . . . it's a comprehensive plan or something
25 they're working on currently.
- 26 AJ: Oh, really.
- 27 JS: They presented it . . .
- 28 AJ: Individualized comprehensive plan or for the whole program?
- 29 JS: I'm not sure . . . two of the psychologists or therapists there are working on . . . they presented it
30 at the last gala they had. I can't remember what it's called.
- 31 AJ: Yeah, the Center for Gender Spectrum Health.
- 32 JS: Yes. So, yeah, they're working on that, but what I can remember about it is it's two white cis
33 women working on it.
- 34 AJ: Yes.

- 1 JS: And, I was like, "OK." I'm feeling very critical of that and I feel a little strange about them doing
2 that work, granted, it's important that not just trans people are doing that work.
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 JS: But, I was like . . . I would like to know more about who are you involving in the project and who
5 is your clientele that . . . because if you don't have health insurance, you can't go to the Program
6 in Human Sexuality, most likely.
- 7 AJ: It's just unattainable - unless you're wealthy.
- 8 JS: Unless you have a lot of money. But, for the most part, my experience there and going to
9 therapy, has been very positive.
- 10 AJ: OK.
- 11 JS: I've definitely heard, and I have friends who went there for a little while, and they're like, "I
12 went there for six months, I don't feel like I have any mental health issues, I don't have
13 depression, I don't have anxiety, and they wanted me to talk about my feelings . . . all I wanted
14 was to start hormones. So, they had me sit there for six months and nothing happened." So,
15 I've definitely heard that narrative a lot there. But, for me, that's what I think I needed. I
16 needed to talk about and work through all of this. So, I think . . . yeah, I've heard not so great
17 things.
- 18 AJ: I think that's healthy, actually.
- 19 JS: But, I've definitely also heard that people weren't able to access things that they were wanting
20 to. But, yeah, for the most part it's been very positive.
- 21 AJ: Awesome. What is your thoughts about the relationship between the L, the G, the B and then
22 the T? Do those . . . does that acronym belong together or should the T sort of go off on its own
23 and do its own thing, in your opinion?
- 24 JS: No. I don't think it should. I think that the acronym should change. I think that there should be
25 a further . . . there should be other genders we're including in that, there should be other
26 sexualities we're including in that, because I think that if we're talking about, "OK, the T is just
27 going to go off and do its own thing," that kind of feels like what the L, G, and B already . . . they
28 forget about trans folks all the time. I have so many queer people on Facebook that say
29 transphobic things and not even realize it. And, they claim to be an ally to trans folks. I'm like,
30 "Hey, what you're saying here might be . . . you're saying something about how this person isn't
31 being queer or gay inclusive, but what you're saying in response to that, is transphobic or not
32 trans inclusive."
- 33 AJ: Can you think of an example? That would be interesting.
- 34 JS: I had a discussion on Facebook, it wasn't really an argument - it was more me feeling the need
35 to educate this person, and they were very receptive, so it wasn't an issue, but it was them just
36 not thinking of trans folks.
- 37 AJ: Right, it just didn't occur to them.

- 1 JS: Which happens all the time, but they were critiquing an instructor of an online course here at
2 the university and it was . . . I think one of the public health courses on sex or something. And,
3 the instructor posed these questions on relationships on this online homework that you had to
4 do. This person was upset and screenshotted their answers and posted them on Facebook and
5 was talking about their frustrations with this instructor and some of their answers were
6 transphobic in terms of how people have sex. So . . . I'm trying to remember. The biggest thing
7 that comes up, so often, in terms of how queer people are forgetting about trans people is when
8 they're talking about sex and relationships. Because . . . and I have to tell people this all the
9 time, not all women have vaginas and not all men have penises. There are some men that have
10 periods, or menstruate and . . .
- 11 AJ: Have babies.
- 12 JS: Yeah, exactly. And, not all women are going to feel connected to the earth and all of that weird
13 stuff that people put out in the world. So, in that particular example . . .
- 14 AJ: Wait a minute – every human should feel connected to the earth.
- 15 JS: Yes, I . . . I mean, I agree with that. That idea of women are closer to nature because of their
16 bodily functions and stuff, but . . .
- 17 AJ: Sure, yeah.
- 18 JS: Yeah, in that particular instance, I had to be like, “Hey, you can use . . .” It was about condom
19 usage and internal condoms and stuff like that – yeah.
- 20 AJ: Wow. Yeah, it's a constant education.
- 21 JS: Yes.
- 22 AJ: Have you thought about what the agenda for the transgender community should be moving
23 forward?
- 24 JS: I don't know. I think that there needs to be more talk around this idea of being trans enough
25 and also who's included under the umbrella of trans.
- 26 AJ: Sure.
- 27 JS: Because, I'm having conversations with people who present in a more binary way, like myself,
28 and kind of identify in a more binary way in terms of being trans, who will say things like, “Oh,
29 well, non-binary people aren't trans.” It's like they can't identify as trans, whereas I don't agree
30 with that.
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 JS: I think that non-binary, gender non-conforming identities are absolutely trans and they can
33 identify as trans or they can identify just as non-binary . . .
- 34 AJ: Well, they absolutely are transgressing gender norms, that's for sure.
- 35 JS: Yeah, exactly.

- 1 AJ: Or, transcending gender norms, transforming gender . . . there is a trans prefix on what they're
2 doing.
- 3 JS: Yeah.
- 4 AJ: So, I think there needs to be more discussion within the trans community about inclusion and
5 also talking about toxicity and transphobia and stuff like that. In terms of moving forward, I
6 don't know. Right now, politically it's very hard to be a trans person with our administration. I
7 don't think a lot about moving forward because it just seems so much more difficult – there's so
8 many more barriers right now and it just seems impossible.
- 9 AJ: Yeah. Well, you know, I mean, there's been more movement for the trans community in the
10 past 10 years than there has been in the history of the country, I would say.
- 11 JS: Oh, absolutely – yes.
- 12 AJ: But, I think you have a point that, right now, it feels like we just have to maintain what has been
13 gained.
- 14 JS: Yes.
- 15 AJ: And, it makes that being able to look forward a little bit more difficult, I think. Have you ever
16 worked for any queer or trans-specific organizations or groups? Or volunteered?
- 17 JS: I did work with my grandma growing up.
- 18 AJ: Yes, the Gender Education Center.
- 19 JS: Yes, I did. And, then I've also worked for the Center. So, I have had a fair amount of . . .
- 20 AJ: Which Center?
- 21 JS: The Gender and Sexuality Center here on campus.
- 22 AJ: OK, the Gender and Sexuality Center on campus. And that's not the full name of it, is it? It's
23 called . . .
- 24 JS: The Gender and Sexuality Center for Queer and Trans Life.
- 25 AJ: There you go.
- 26 JS: It's a long name now.
- 27 AJ: Right, exactly. But, folks just call it the Center, huh?
- 28 JS: Yeah, I guess we call it the Center, I don't know if it's really caught on on campus. The new
29 name has not been around for even a year yet.
- 30 AJ: Right, it's just about a year.
- 31 JS: Yes.
- 32 AJ: What was that like? I mean, what has it been like to work in queer organizations?

- 1 JS: It's very . . . it feels good. It's like . . . what I like to say about the Gender and Sexuality Center is
2 that it's like a home on campus. I can always go back there.
- 3 AJ: And, what people may not know, man – this is a huge campus. It's like a city in and of itself.
- 4 JS: Oh, yeah, absolutely. There's no way that you would be able to know the majority of the people
5 that you'll go to class with or see on campus. There's just so many people. But, the Gender and
6 Sexuality Center feels like a second home and the supervisors there care so deeply for their
7 students. And, the way that they approach professionalism is unlike probably anything I will
8 ever experience in a job because they respect us so much and they really value our work and
9 our worth as individuals, which I don't think happens often when you're in a job setting. Your
10 supervisors have their job and they don't necessarily always look to you as individuals with your
11 own vast amount of experience.
- 12 AJ: Sure.
- 13 JS: But, it is also exhausting to do queer work. It's exhausting emotionally, it can be physically
14 exhausting from all of that emotional work.
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 JS: But, with the exhaustion comes fulfillment often times too.
- 17 AJ: Good. How did you come to the name James?
- 18 JS: That's a good question. So, I was trying to figure out what name would really fit me. My birth
19 name really just didn't fit me. I didn't mind it for a really long time, I was like, "OK, this is just
20 kind of what it's been for the last 19 years and that's what people call me." But, I was like,
21 "What if I tried out a new name? What would that be like? How would I feel?" I was trying to
22 figure out something that really felt like it fit. And, so I was looking online, looking at names and
23 I couldn't really see anything that felt right. But, I was watching this documentary . . . or, it
24 wasn't a documentary, it was an independent film on Netflix one day and it's called *52 Tuesdays*
25 and it's about a . . . it's a young, coming of age story about this young girl who, one of her
26 parents comes out as trans. And, her story, over the course of a year of him transitioning and all
27 the emotions that he's experiencing and her emotions . . . she's kind of documenting it and also
28 their relationship as it grows and kind of falls. But, his name was James and I really liked it. So, I
29 couldn't find anything I liked more than that. And, it wasn't necessarily because he was trans, it
30 was just that, "Oh, I hadn't come across the name James before." So, I had a few friends start
31 calling me that for a little while and I was like, "Yup, that's it." It just kind of stuck.
- 32 AJ: Cool.
- 33 JS: Yeah.
- 34 AJ: So, the protagonist in the movie is female to male trans identified?
- 35 JS: Yeah.
- 36 AJ: I've heard of this film but I've never seen it.

- 1 JS: Yeah, it's interesting. I actually wrote about it in one of my classes. I took an elective course
2 through the GWSS department here on campus and . . .
- 3 AJ: GWSS, the Gender, Women's . . .
- 4 JS: Gender, Women's & Sexuality Studies.
- 5 AJ: We've got to clear up the acronyms for folks, James, that's all.
- 6 JS: It was Queer Cinema was the course.
- 7 AJ: Yeah.
- 8 JS: So, I took that.
- 9 AJ: Aren't?
- 10 JS: No, I took it . . . what was it? Like, a year ago now. I can't remember the instructor, but they
11 always have new instructors coming in and out and teaching that.
- 12 AJ: Yeah.
- 13 JS: So, I did my final paper on that movie and I learned a lot about this idea of . . . living an authentic
14 life is a theme of the film. And so, the main protagonist who's trans, the actor is a gender queer
15 person in real life, so they hired a real trans person to play a trans character.
- 16 AJ: Perfect.
- 17 JS: And, they filmed it over the course of 52 Tuesdays, so they did film it over the course of a year.
- 18 AJ: Wow, so they were really true to the . . .
- 19 JS: Yes, it's very fascinating to learn about and watch.
- 20 AJ: So, it took a year to film.
- 21 JS: Yes, and they would film from dawn to dusk, they would make sure that they were only filming
22 on Tuesdays for a whole year.
- 23 AJ: Awesome.
- 24 JS: Keeping it authentic.
- 25 AJ: I've got to check this out, it sounds fascinating. What do you think the future is going to be like
26 for gender and the transgender community?
- 27 JS: I see a lot of growth happening. I am reading about and hearing more about young people
28 identifying in more diverse ways and a lot, over half, of the young population is identifying as
29 queer or some gender other than the one they were assigned at birth.
- 30 AJ: It's inciting.
- 31 JS: Yeah, which is amazing.

- 1 AJ: I've been out for 25 years, I'm doing this project, and it is blowing my mind.
- 2 JS: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: Yeah. When I came out, most trans people were, you know, binary, "I'm a woman, I only date
4 guys, that's what the world expects of me and that's what I expect of myself." And now,
5 anybody under 25 is just blowing all of that right out of the water. In fact, I met a young person
6 yesterday who identifies as a gender annihilist.
- 7 JS: Wow, I don't think I've ever heard of that.
- 8 AJ: Yeah, I hadn't heard of it either. That's why it kind of shook me up a little bit.
- 9 JS: Yeah, absolutely.
- 10 AJ: Not in a bad way, I was just like, "Whoa."
- 11 JS: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: Like, "You want to annihilate gender. I like that concept."
- 13 JS: Yeah, me too. But, yeah, I do see this . . . yeah, like a shift of how we think about gender and,
14 hopefully, a societal shift in how we're thinking about gender and gender stereotypes and the
15 ways in which we're being oppressive to people and how we're putting them in boxes and how
16 people are supposed to act and stuff like that.
- 17 AJ: Wow. Well, James, this conversation has been really fascinating. I'm so thrilled and honored to
18 have this opportunity.
- 19 JS: Yeah.
- 20 AJ: Is there anything that you want to be sure to share that I haven't asked you?
- 21 JS: I don't think so. No, I don't think so.
- 22 AJ: You know, I was kind of thinking, what are you studying in college? What are your future plans,
23 because you're a college student?
- 24 JS: Yeah, so I'm going to be going into my fifth-year next year, I'll be graduating next spring.
- 25 AJ: Congrats.
- 26 JS: Thank you. I'm getting my degree in forest and natural resource management. My emphasis
27 within that degree is in parks and protected areas.
- 28 AJ: That feels like kind of a masculine career choice.
- 29 JS: It is.
- 30 AJ: It shouldn't, but given our culture and society it fits in that category, I would say.
- 31 JS: Yes, it definitely is. It definitely is, and I also be getting a minor in sustainability studies, so I have
32 that as well.

- 1 AJ: Cool.
- 2 JS: And, I picked this degree out when I was a sophomore, so it's been a few years since I've picked
3 that out and kind of gone through my courses. I don't mind my courses at all. I have had many
4 a class that I really enjoy, but ultimately, as I've kind of . . . I'm getting to the end of my studies
5 and I'm finding that I don't know if I'll go into that when I'm done with school.
- 6 AJ: Were you a camping, woodsy kind of kid?
- 7 JS: Yeah, growing up we did a fair amount of camping, we did a lot of traveling. But, I've always had
8 an interest in the environment and environmentalism and wanting to be more sustainable and
9 how we're treating the planet. But, I think if I had to do it over again, I don't know if I would
10 have gotten my undergraduate degree in what I'm getting mine in. I think that I would have
11 gotten it in a social science. But, what I do plan on doing once I'm done with school is I hope to
12 work for a parks and rec department. If I stay in the Cities, maybe like Minneapolis or St. Paul,
13 do some educational work on whatever they happen to need – so native plants in the parks or
14 just kind of doing programming for folks in the city. But, I think I'll probably go back to school
15 and get a masters in something. Right now, I've kind of got two ideas that I'm interested in and
16 one of them is higher education and would probably work in student affairs, because that's kind
17 of what my job has been on campus for four years.
- 18 AJ: Sure, in the Center for Queer and Trans Life.
- 19 JS: Yeah, and I really enjoy that work and I've definitely had Stef, Jason Jackson, and Frankie tell me,
20 "Are you going to stick around and do this more? Are you going to do this the rest of your life
21 because you're good at it?" So, that's always an option.
- 22 AJ: That's an option, huh.
- 23 JS: Yup, and then I also am interested in . . . there's a program here, specifically here at the
24 University in the Humphrey School for Public Affairs – it's the Masters in Urban and Regional
25 Planning.
- 26 AJ: Yeah.
- 27 JS: I have an interest in finding a way to intersect environmental planning, so like green space
28 planning within urban areas – so thinking about parks and stuff, and how we're intersecting that
29 with social justice. So, kind of finding a way to intersect these two passions that I have in my
30 life.
- 31 AJ: Wow.
- 32 JS: And, thinking about how can we make parks in urban areas accessible and the most beneficial
33 rather than making it harmful in any way. Because there's definitely been, in histories past,
34 issues with park development and green space development within urban areas and
35 gentrification and other issues of accessibility . . .
- 36 AJ: And equity.
- 37 JS: Yeah, and universal design and stuff like that. Yeah.

- 1 AJ: Wow, fascinating.
- 2 JS: Yeah, so I kind of have two very different ideas but they both are kind of calling to me right now.
- 3 AJ: Hey, James, we're at the end of our tape, but I really appreciate the opportunity to get to know
- 4 you a little bit better, to document this very small part of your life. Thank you so much.
- 5 JS: Yeah, thank you.
- 6 AJ: And, until we meet again.
- 7 JS: Yes.
- 8 AJ: All right, peace.