

Roxanne Anderson (#2)
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

July 20, 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.

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Roxanne Anderson -RA
3

4 AJ: Hello.

5 RA: Hello.

6 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project
7 at the University of Minnesota. Today is July 20, 2017. It's super muggy, we're kind of in the
8 dog days of summer, and I am here today with Roxanne Anderson. Hello, Roxanne.

9 RA: Hello.

10 AJ: I know this is our second interview and I'm so thrilled that you are willing to sit down with me
11 again. You were actually the second interview that we did and now you will be the 177th
12 interview.

13 RA: Wow. I thought I was the first, Andrea.

14 AJ: Were you the first? You were the first.

15 RA: I think so.

16 AJ: I think you were the first – yes, you were absolutely the first. You're right.

17 RA: You were still getting used to your camera friend and figuring it all out.

18 AJ: Yes, to this whole interview process and all of that good stuff. And now, we're 176 interviews
19 down the road. I feel like I've gotten a little bit better. But before we go on, why don't you just
20 say your name, spell it again, what's your gender identity today, and what was your gender
21 assigned at birth, and the pronouns that you use.

22 RA: All right. My name is Roxanne Anderson, R-o-x-a-n-n-e; Anderson with an s-o-n. A-n-d-e-r-s-o-
23 n. My gender identity currently is gender queer, I identify as trans . . . not really within the
24 binary, gender non-conforming, masculine of center person, and I was assigned female at birth.
25 I think I forgot the last question.

26 AJ: Pronouns.

27 RA: Oh, pronouns – yes. I like they and them but will answer to anything that is respectful.

28 AJ: Yeah, that's awesome. Has your gender identity shifted or changed since our first interview?

29 RA: Well, I don't know that it has. I might have stated it differently. It's been a minute since we did
30 that first interview. I typically identify as gender queer, both as an orientation and as a gender
31 identity, and usually that has the connotation of masculine of center.

32 AJ: Wow. So, Roxanne, you and I both have been in the community for a long time, but even more
33 so engaged in advocacy work, in policy work, in supporting young trans people from . . . oh my
34 God. I remember District 202 is when, I think, we first really connected. I knew you because
35 you were working with Minnesota Men of Color prior to that.

- 1 RA: Correct.
- 2 AJ: But, that had to be . . .
- 3 RA: That was 1998.
- 4 AJ: 1998.
- 5 RA: 1999.
- 6 AJ: So, almost 20 years.
- 7 RA: Yeah.
- 8 AJ: That's an incredible track record.
- 9 RA: It is.
- 10 AJ: I mean, you have been sort of recognized for your service, you've been awarded for some of
11 your service, what stands out for you as one of the proudest things that you have done around
12 trans and gender non-conforming advocacy?
- 13 RA: Oh, I don't know if there's something that stands out specifically. I think the thing that I feel
14 most accomplished about is the relationships – the connections with the individuals. One thing
15 that's locked into my mind that I'll never forget was the opportunity to spend time with a young
16 trans person who got to hang out on a beach in Florida when we did the Stonewall education.
17 So, not only were they brilliant as we presented to this national forum on education with
18 educators, but I got to watch them experience the Atlantic Ocean for the first time. And those
19 things are most important to me. It's all the community building that we've done together, but
20 it's also hanging out and being able to be social and having real conversations with you as my
21 friend and mentor. Those are the things that I feel most proud and accomplished of – those
22 relationships and connections that I have with people.
- 23 AJ: So, the other day we were together and we were in a formal environment talking about trying to
24 get resources for some of the organizations that you have been involved in. A part of the
25 discussion came up around social development, and your response made me think about this
26 question, but the outside world really focuses on physical transition as it relates to transgender
27 people.
- 28 RA: True.
- 29 AJ: And, I know that it is a really big part of the trans experience in terms of some people,
30 particularly when early, early, early into transition, they are deeply focused on access to
31 hormones and surgeries and anything that they can do to physically transform or assimilate into
32 broader culture and society. And, I think that's important, but I'm curious, what do you think
33 about the social transition? Since you brought up the fact that you're really most proud of these
34 relationships – like what is the significance of the social aspect of gender non-conforming
35 transgender people assimilating into culture and society?

- 1 RA: Well, I think that the social transformation is the most important and some people might debate
2 that with me. But, the reason that I believe that is because when we see young children begin
3 to socially transform and be recognized as the gender that they identify as, their spirits
4 transform. That is beyond a physicality, that's beyond sexual orientation, or even this notion of
5 societal cues about gender. And so . . . and, that spans across what that particular society's
6 views on gender norms are. So, that tells me that the physical transformation, while it is vital
7 and very important to many, many people, many transgender folks don't actually want or need
8 to do physical alterations to their body. As they begin to recognize themselves as the gender
9 that they identify as and push that out to the rest of society, and society accepts that, that's the
10 true start of anybody's transformation.
- 11 AJ: Yeah. So, yesterday, you were at an event that has been . . . or, a hearing, I guess, actually, that
12 has been in the media and that has been . . . I know you and many other people have been
13 working on for a very long time, can you speak about that a little bit? I think it was the
14 Minnesota Department of Education.
- 15 RA: Yes.
- 16 AJ: And they have, with the work of you guys, have developed a toolkit for educators and teachers
17 on how to deal with trans and gender non-conforming young people in the schools.
- 18 RA: Yes, that's exactly correct. It's K-12 geared and it's a toolbox or toolkit or a guidance to help
19 folks give information, informed decision-making ability, to schools about choices that they
20 could implement to help trans and gender non-conforming, and all students, have access, equal
21 access. And that toolkit isn't policy, it's a guide.
- 22 AJ: Right – recommendations . . . or, it's not even recommendations, is it?
- 23 RA: It's not even recommendations. It's a way for schools to create their own policies and give them
24 the tools to find and dig deeper.
- 25 AJ: So, what was the hearing like?
- 26 RA: The hearing was difficult and I think the room was probably split half and half.
- 27 AJ: How many people were there?
- 28 RA: I would say somewhere around 200.
- 29 AJ: Wow, that's a big turnout for a public hearing.
- 30 RA: It is. And, the hearing was really . . . it was their meeting and so it was a procedural motion to
31 move forth work that has been going on in a very public way for a long time. And so, what was .
32 . . the room was kind of thick. I was joking with a friend earlier today, it was kind of thick with
33 this icky feeling of hatred – just to be real.
- 34 AJ: Wow.
- 35 RA: And, to oppose that was this brilliancy of love and so, those opposing this guidance all wore red
36 and those for the guidance wore purple.

- 1 AJ: Really?
- 2 RA: You know why we wear purple.
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 RA: So, I think that it was really a kind of beautiful answer to hate, to have lots of parents and
5 educators, and, in fact, the Minnesota Department of Ed, say, "Actually we are going to take a
6 stand for all students and these policies affect all students, no matter what their sexual
7 orientation or gender identity or gender presentation is." And, like access to all different kinds
8 of health care, young people get to access that through the school whether their parents say yes
9 or no.
- 10 AJ: Wow. So, was there any decisions made on the guidance?
- 11 RA: Yeah, the guidance was passed and . . .
- 12 AJ: Congratulations.
- 13 RA: Thank you. It was a lot of hard work by a lot of organizations and a lot of individuals who came
14 together over . . . I think it was an 11-month process.
- 15 AJ: Which organizations, do you mind?
- 16 RA: Transforming Families, OutFront Minnesota, RECLAIM!, individuals like Alex Nelson and Dave
17 Edwards and folks like that came to lend their expertise and their opinions. Parents gave
18 feedback and, in fact, parents and school administrators are what drove this guidance in the first
19 place. It was an answer to them that MDE was given, "Here's a bunch of resources, go forth and
20 create policies in your own school." And they did that because schools and administrators were
21 asking for an answer to all the trans and gender non-conforming students throughout the state
22 that were coming out in schools.
- 23 AJ: Wow, that's awesome, even though it's really sad and painful . . . you talked about the hatred.
24 You actually . . . I read a post that you put up on Facebook yesterday about some of the
25 comments that were being stated from the podium. Do you want to share that?
- 26 RA: Well, you know, the thing that, I think, got me . . . and, I think it got me because of my position.
27 I was following this woman, I was paying attention to her in a way that I don't maybe sometimes
28 do when people are spewing hate. Often, you were . . .
- 29 AJ: Because you were the next speaker after her.
- 30 RA: The next speaker after her, so sometimes we use a technique where we mesh, or we envision
31 something different, so we're not taking that hatred in. But, I was kind of paying attention to
32 her because I was following her in line and she said, "You know, trans women will never be real
33 women and trans men are not real men." And that just made me feel really out of sorts, it made
34 me feel like I needed to defend myself and defend my friends. I think that's probably . . . maybe
35 a little core reptilian thinking because I know that it would have . . . I could have maybe
36 delivered in a different way if I wouldn't have let her get to me. But, I also know that the
37 universe has things for us and sometimes you have to be actually human, you have to admit

- 1 when something gets to you. I think it's really important for those folks who get called into
2 leadership to say, "Wow, I dropped the ball today," or, "Wow, I wish I would have chosen my
3 words differently." She got to me. And, that's kind of what happened yesterday. I got a lot of
4 positive feedback about just being vulnerable and saying, "I do this a lot, but today I was
5 vulnerable . . ."
- 6 AJ: So, were you able to respond at all?
- 7 RA: Yeah, I still delivered, but instead of saying all the things as eloquently as I would have liked to, I
8 spent . . . we only had two minutes, so I spent a little bit of my time saying that I am here, I am
9 alive, I am real, I am trans, and my pronouns are, which isn't something that I might normally
10 feel like I need to insist upon.
- 11 AJ: Sure. Yeah, but . . . I'm trying to think of this quote by Audre Lorde that's . . . I'll just paraphrase
12 it, I guess, but we have to speak up even when our voice breaks.
- 13 RA: Right.
- 14 AJ: Right. That sometimes is the most powerful message that we can send.
- 15 RA: I think that that's true and as a person who gets called to speak often, you have that little thing
16 about, "Oh, I could have said that better," or, "I could have done that better," or, "I didn't follow
17 my own notes." Which was the thing for me. Sometimes I do just speak from the heart but I
18 really wanted to make sure that I thanked MDE for their hard work and that I said things about it
19 being a toolkit and not a policy, and things like that. And so, I was beating myself up and I
20 remembered that I'm human and it's OK to say I'm human. The feedback that I got was that it
21 was the right thing and that it did speak to a lot of people.
- 22 AJ: Wow.
- 23 RA: Now I'm OK with it, but right after it I was feeling it a little bit, a little of the red embarrassment
24 of not being as eloquent as I wanted to be.
- 25 AJ: Wow. I just want to say thank you for standing up for this community, for me, but more so for
26 young people and putting in that work over an 11-month time period. I'm pretty sure it was all
27 volunteer.
- 28 RA: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: And then, showing up at the hearing. So, thank you very much.
- 30 RA: Well, thank you, because without your leadership and without your mentorship, I wouldn't be
31 sitting here right now. I think that that's true for a lot of us 170-folks on this journey.
- 32 AJ: 177 now.
- 33 RA: 177. And, while you may not have known all of those individuals, I think folks like you, and you
34 specifically, have given a point of access for all of us to be able to speak up and share our stories.
35 So, thank you – and Tretter.

- 1 AJ: Thank you very much. So, you said a word when you were describing your experience at the
2 school board hearing, Department of Education hearing, mesh.
- 3 RA: Mesh.
- 4 AJ: Which is a term that I am know from the Rockwood Leadership Institute.
- 5 RA: Yes, exactly.
- 6 AJ: That was specifically, at least my cohort was specifically LGBTQ.
- 7 RA: Yes, mine was too.
- 8 AJ: Is that right?
- 9 RA: Yes, mine was too.
- 10 AJ: What did you think of that experience, the Rockwood experience, and what does the word mesh
11 mean to you?
- 12 RA: Rockwood was life changing, mind altering, soul bending, elevator ride to the depths of my soul
13 kind of experience.
- 14 AJ: Wow.
- 15 RA: And, it changed dramatically the way that I think about my work and the way that I think about
16 myself and helped me realize what I already knew, which was that I was on the right path and
17 what my path is. I, too, learned that technique at Rockwood. We developed a sidebar to the
18 meshing technique.
- 19 AJ: Really.
- 20 RA: And we called it Teflon.
- 21 AJ: Because meshing is just sort of like letting things go through you, right.
- 22 RA: Through you. It's like image yourself as a screen door and all the stuff is just going through you
23 and the people in my cohort were like, "Ick, I don't want that ick to go through me."
- 24 AJ: Right. So, we're just going to put some Teflon on the screen door.
- 25 RA: Yeah. So, I'm not sure if it was Mr. Bell or TC, but one of those two geniuses said, "Teflon maybe
26 would be a better answer to that."
- 27 AJ: Wow.
- 28 RA: So, I often am able to kind of imagine myself as a skillet with Teflon coating and nothing is going
29 to stick to me and that technique of meshing or Teflon is what allows me and you and other
30 people to be in all kinds of spaces and so whether that's showing up for an MDE meeting where
31 people are going to say that trans people aren't real and that they don't deserve to use the
32 bathroom or whether I'm listening to a young person tell me about self-harm or suicide, it
33 allows me to be there and to be present and not have to carry away that trauma or grief.

- 1 AJ: Wow, that's awesome. I love that, Teflon. I'm going to have to try to incorporate that into my
2 repertoire because . . .
- 3 RA: Right, because you need it.
- 4 AJ: We need it, man – we all need it. There's just so much coming at us from all angles – attacks on
5 our transgender identity, attacks on our Blackness, attacks on our class and income levels. And
6 so, that seems like one tool that can sort of help deflect some of that.
- 7 RA: Yes – yes, yes.
- 8 AJ: I think you need a whole bunch of tools to deflect all of that. You know, Roxanne, it's
9 interesting. I know that you . . . you just stated your identity as being non-binary masculine of
10 center trans. I suspect when you sort of navigate the world, a lot of people read you as male.
- 11 RA: Oh, yeah, for sure.
- 12 AJ: So, how does that impact you when you go to the restroom or you get pulled over by the police
13 or you are standing in line at the grocery store? How does that play out?
- 14 RA: Well, you know, I've been slammed over the hood of my trunk more than one time.
- 15 AJ: By the police.
- 16 RA: By the police. I've been profiled by security. I remember one time I was literally walking from
17 the government center to the Red Door Clinic. I had a suit coat on and my fedora on and I was
18 presumed to be a Black man and I was presumed to fit the description. I'm not sure what the
19 description was, but that's what the white coat security guys said to me. And so, I think that
20 how that shows up is the typical profiling and sometimes it's interesting in the bathroom, I'll use
21 the Minnesota term "interesting".
- 22 AJ: OK.
- 23 RA: Sometimes I have to prove that I am in the right bathroom, if I'm in the female bathroom. A lot
24 of times I do opt to take the female bathroom because I don't want to have to . . . I can prove
25 my gender assignment, I can prove my genitalia and so, to kind of keep in step with staying alive,
26 I often opt for the female-identified bathroom. Wherever I can, I go into the companion, family,
27 unisex . . .
- 28 AJ: Gender-neutral.
- 29 RA: Gender-neutral, whatever – single stall bathroom, but unless I'm feeling pretty safe or unless I
30 have my crew around me, I'm probably going to opt for the female bathroom. And, then I can
31 do things like make sure that I'm standing up straight and sticking out my chest, which is kind of
32 a weirdness because I'm often the opposite of that. I'm often kind of trying to deflect or deflate
33 my chest.
- 34 AJ: Sure.
- 35 RA: And so, that navigation as a Black male is . . . to sum it up, I think, you know, scary.

- 1 AJ: Yeah.
- 2 RA: Yeah, sometimes it's scary.
- 3 AJ: Has your identity impacted your ability to work or to access health care or go to school?
- 4 RA: Yeah, sure, because people see my name and they go female. When they hear me talk on the
5 phone, they might be a little bit confused but they remember their Aunt Bertha or whoever in
6 their family who has a deep voice and then they're like, "OK, I can adjust that." And then, when
7 they see me, they might even also be able to adjust, but seeing me, hearing me, and kind of
8 listening to what a lot of more femme friends might identify as a male voice or male gaze, kind
9 of confuses people. I think sometimes that is a rejection of smartness or knowledge. And
10 sometimes, my experience with people that aren't all the way woke is to push off of that, and
11 often Black men will push off on that in a kind of chest puffy, "I'm more man than you," kind of
12 way.
- 13 AJ: Really?
- 14 RA: And, that's not all Black hetero males. It is males who haven't done the work around feminism,
15 it's males who feel like they have to puff their chest out in a lot of other kinds of ways. And so,
16 sometimes that's difficult. I think with women there's a general acceptance and not kind of a
17 finny girl, so there is not that kind of that femme catty thing that sometimes happens. I don't
18 usually get that from women and so that allows me to have conversations in a different way. I
19 think with guys who are woke or guys who are queer or trans men, I come across in a different
20 way, I'm not threatening to them.
- 21 AJ: Wow. Man, there has been an explosion of trans men to become more visible, more vocal,
22 more out since 20 years ago. What do you think the trans masculine identity has done for the
23 transgender movement?
- 24 RA: That's a super loaded question. Well, we live in the patriarchy.
- 25 AJ: Yes.
- 26 RA: And so, whatever is male gets prioritized. I think that the real is that because there has been
27 this explosion in visibility of trans men, that it has pushed to the forefront trans identity in a
28 different way. Even as strong as Sylvia and Marsha and all the wonderful warrior women that
29 have come before us were, the impact of trans was different. I also think that media, social
30 media – the ability for everybody to have an encyclopedia in their hand, to have the library in
31 their hand, is different. And so, people can look and they can say, "Oh, what did that person
32 mean by a male gaze." That's one of the first things that people told me before I kind of had
33 trans identity or awareness is, "You're a super bull dykey dyke, a butchy butch butcherson . . .
- 34 AJ: Right, butcherson.
- 35 RA: . . . who has such a male gaze, that you're like a dude." That's kind of how people . . .
- 36 AJ: What's a male gaze?

- 1 RA: I think a male gaze is maybe how you take in and view women. The way in which you might
2 push forth ideas, the way in which you might take up space, and the way in which you might
3 state something. With a dominance or really misogyny and the patriarchy if you want to get
4 technical.
- 5 AJ: Right.
- 6 RA: So, I think that, you know, some of my more feminine friends, more feminist friends, would say
7 things like, "Whoa, that's some dude talk," or, "That's how a dude would say that, what's up
8 with you." Kind of before I had this identity as trans masculine, I remember being at 202 and
9 this kind of spark started and one person came out as no gender and people were like, "What is
10 that?" And, then one or two and then it was five people came out as trans male or trans
11 masculine and the way that community and the way that the adults responded to that was
12 super peculiar to me. There was questioning that I hadn't heard people apply to trans women
13 and there was wonderment about how that transformation would physically impact trans men.
14 I'd never heard people talking about that with trans women. It felt really kind of hypocritical to
15 me. I think what I recognize now is that some of that fear was about folks really didn't know a
16 lot about what testosterone was going to do when people were injecting it on a weekly basis.
17 We learned really quickly that people were dosing way too high way too soon and people were
18 having muscles slough off their tendons because their tendons and their ligaments weren't
19 growing as rapidly as their muscles and people's Achilles tendons were popping. So, we learned
20 things kind of early on in this growth of trans men that the trans women community had been
21 learning over a longer period of time.
- 22 AJ: Sure.
- 23 RA: So, I think those two kind of things, three things – the patriarchy and just the fact that men's
24 issues take up more space and get more weight and get more funding and get more
25 prioritization. And then, the impact of the interwebs and having knowledge available at your
26 hands.
- 27 AJ: Wow. How did you come to your trans masculine of center . . . ?
- 28 RA: Identity?
- 29 AJ: . . . non-binary identity?
- 30 RA: Well, I think 46 years of processing. I think the first clue I got was when I was little – little little.
31 And, those are things that I can kind of look back in hindsight and be like, "Oh, yeah, I've always
32 been this way." But, the first kind of thing that I remember from childhood is never wanting to
33 be the girl when I played with my other girlfriends or my cousins. I was always the uncle, I was
34 always the dad, I was always the brother. In a way, maybe to try and help re-align gender roles
35 for me, or re-direct the things that I wanted to play with, my mom and my grandparents and
36 then all my family would send me dolls – the dolls would be what I would get for presents. And
37 so, I had this doll collection and I remember that there was this doll that came out and my best
38 friend and I had the same doll. Her doll was Chrissy and my doll was Christopher.
- 39 AJ: Oh, wow. OK.

- 1 RA: The Chrissy doll had hair that could grow – you pulled the cord and her hair got longer or
2 shorter. I took Christopher’s pony tail out. Christopher could not grow his hair long, he had
3 short hair only.
- 4 AJ: OK.
- 5 RA: And, those kind of clues when I look back and I’m like, “Oh, yeah, that was always a part of me.”
6 My mom gave me this word tomboy and I think that that word, even when I was little, helped
7 me kind of have this masculine pass ability, it was OK because I was a tomboy. And then, kind of
8 when I got in high school, I was athletic and so it was OK for me to have muscles and to run and
9 to jump off of stuff and ride my skateboard, to have a BMX bike. Those things were OK because I
10 was a tomboy and I was athletic. I think that the gender thing really didn’t slam me hard until
11 maybe I was a senior or a freshman – when that thing kind of happened. All my girlfriends had
12 boyfriends and they spent a lot of time in the mirror trying to apply make-up. While I would like
13 to watch them apply their make-up, applying the make-up to myself felt weird. It felt weird. It
14 felt not unlike it felt when my mom used to make me wear a dress or panty hose on Sunday to
15 church.
- 16 AJ: Yeah.
- 17 RA: I know what that is now . . . it’s almost like crossdressing or like being in drag. Then, I didn’t . . . I
18 had no idea what that meant. I just thought it was weird or I could fall back on the tomboy
19 thing.
- 20 AJ: Where did you grow up?
- 21 RA: I grew up in Indiana. I grew up in Anderson and then when I got kind of in high school, we
22 moved to southern Indiana – to a small town called Spencer - which, by the way, is now the
23 number one best Pride celebration, small rural town Pride celebration in Indiana.
- 24 AJ: Go Spencer.
- 25 RA: Go Spencer. Spencer . . . I went to prom with one of the folks that helps lead Spencer Pride.
- 26 AJ: Oh, really?
- 27 RA: Yeah, we were like, “Ahhh, when we saw each other many years later.”
- 28 AJ: So, you both have come out.
- 29 RA: We’re both queer.
- 30 AJ: Different paths.
- 31 RA: Yeah.
- 32 AJ: Do you think your sexual identity had any impact on your gender identity?
- 33 RA: No, I think my gender stuff probably formed before that. It’s kind of . . . when I think back, I
34 think back to what are the games I played, what are the ways in which I interacted, and maybe it
35 was a both/and. Maybe I didn’t want to play the girl role because I wanted to be the husband of

- 1 the girl. And so, it could be hand-in-hand, I'm not sure if they go together or not. But, I think . . .
2 what I remember most is feeling like I didn't want to be the girl over I wanted to be the husband
3 – if that makes sense.
- 4 AJ: Yeah, wow. That's fascinating. So, clearly you have worked for a number of LGBT-specific
5 organizations over the years. Name a few. I mean, I could go through and name them but . . .
- 6 RA: Oh, I've been employed by OutFront and District 202 and the Minnesota Men of Color.
- 7 AJ: Three major LGBT institutions in the Twin Cities.
- 8 RA: Sure, yes. I was at the kitchen table, so to speak, in the formation of Rainbow Health Initiative
9 and engaged with them in a number of ways – from being part of the advisory board to later
10 being a grantee. I've been engaged with Twin Cities Pride for many, many years as the conveyer
11 of the Power to the People area. I've been on the advisory board for TYSN and RECLAIM! and
12 the GLBT Host Home Program. Black Pride, Women of Color building project.
- 13 AJ: Wow.
- 14 RA: PFLAG, part of REI for PFund.
- 15 AJ: Yeah. What is your assessment of the LGBT non-profit . . . ?
- 16 RA: Oh, you're trying to set me up now.
- 17 AJ: No, I mean . . . I want to get a really broad perspective about the landscape here from somebody
18 who I love and respect and a person of color.
- 19 RA: OK. I think we have great organizations. We have resources like many places don't. And, I think
20 like many charitable non-profit kind of models, most of those organizations were built by and
21 for white liberal well-meaning folks, for white well-meaning liberal folks.
- 22 AJ: Yeah.
- 23 RA: And, that doesn't include trans bodies or trans people and that doesn't include people of color.
24 Now, that doesn't mean that those organizations don't care about, don't work with, don't have
25 in mind sometimes maybe even prioritize, but when you build a thing without those threads and
26 fabrics intentionally woven in, it makes it hard to kind of come back and re-direct. So, what I
27 mean by that is I think it's very hard for those organizations to take a stance on white
28 supremacy, to take a stance on racism, to take a stance on real economic empowerment and
29 development within the most marginalized communities, and not take the tokenized charitable
30 model stance which is, "We're going to do this thing and then we're going to ask you to come in
31 and give the thumbs up to this thing and validate it for us."
- 32 AJ: Right.
- 33 RA: And, I think that what's proven over and over and over again is that doesn't work. We learned
34 that in HIV. We can look right now at, you know, a very well-known rapper, hip-hop artist who
35 is testing hundreds of people a day at a trap house. And, the reason that he's able to do that
36 and to connect with the people in his community and do things like real HIV testing and

- 1 outreach is because he's not tokenizing folks, he's meeting people where they're at, he's asking
2 people to come into an environment that they feel comfortable and safe in, even though it's a
3 trap house.
- 4 AJ: OK, what's a trap house?
- 5 RA: So, a trap house is . . .
- 6 AJ: For my listeners. I'm educated, but . . .
- 7 RA: Of course. A trap house is either a legal or an illegal establishment, usually in the heart of urban
8 areas, in which people gather to listen to music, to hang out, to socialize, to get resources. In
9 white communities, we call them community centers.
- 10 AJ: Ahh, OK. Honestly, I did not know that term trap house, so thank you. I know the concept
11 clearly, but no, I think for our listeners it is important to kind of . . .
- 12 RA: We've had these establishments forever, right. In the 1920s, we called them juke joints and
13 underground clubs and all those kinds of things. We have them in Minnesota and we have them
14 in every state in the union and they are places where people can go and hang out and just really
15 be themselves.
- 16 AJ: Does that include ball culture or . . .?
- 17 RA: I think, yeah, definitely includes ball culture and ball houses. We're not going to maybe call it
18 the trap house, we're going to call it the House of Revlon or the House of Khan.
- 19 AJ: What's the ball scene like here in Minnesota, do you know?
- 20 RA: The ball scene here in Minnesota, I think, is fluid. I think it changes over time. I hear tell that in
21 the late 1960s and early 1970s, Minnesota had a hopping and popping ball scene over in north
22 Minneapolis. That kind of died out with AIDS. Twin Cities Black Pride brought the ball scene
23 back to Minneapolis where we brought Benny Ninja and the great Fatha Jazz Bordeaux and then
24 Jazz came to the Twin Cities on a more permanent basis and blessed us with their knowledge of
25 house ball and created a really dynamic house ball scene. Unfortunately, like many other kind
26 of POC-driven by and for things that are queer in the city, the infrastructure isn't there to
27 support it. And so, what happens is that thing that we create becomes a tokenized thing and
28 whether that's taking house ball culture and pairing that with HIV community, and so that what
29 becomes a house . . . what was a house ball now becomes an HIV testing party. It's a very
30 different thing. And so, we've seen that in community in lots of different ways – be it Soul
31 Friday or Flava Cabaret. We created this awesome cabaret that was by people of color for
32 people of color and by the time it closed down, the people that were sitting in the audience
33 were all white folks, or a majority of white folks. And, because those people have the ability to
34 buy fast online, to dip out of work and go get tickets and things like that, we see that these very
35 grassroots community-based underground driven from social need kind of things become kind
36 of tokenized and overtaken by larger communities.
- 37 AJ: Wow. Flava Cabaret.

- 1 RA: Took you back, didn't I?
- 2 AJ: Yeah, that was one of the first times I ever got on stage at Pillsbury House Theatre. That was
3 started by a very beautiful gay Black man.
- 4 RA: Andre Guess.
- 5 AJ: Andre Guess, yeah. Wow, yeah, you went back into some deep history. What is . . . because
6 you mentioned in the 1920s and 1930s north Minneapolis had this ball scene, what's the
7 importance, in your mind, of documenting and preserving gay and queer and trans history?
- 8 RA: It's vital . . . I mean, it's vital. I know that as somebody who never met Sylvia Rivera, when I see
9 a picture of her with her fists up in the air or when I need to get a pump, I watch her video,
10 calling people out and telling them to get it together. Those are powerful, powerful moments
11 and they need to be captured, they need to be preserved, they need to be documented. It's
12 vital to future generations to be able to see us, to hear us, to understand why we're doing what
13 we're doing.
- 14 AJ: Yeah. So many people who have a trans experience or, even less so, an LGBT experience
15 nowadays, but they feel like they are the only person in the world that has these thoughts or
16 these imaginations or these internal feelings. The reality is that trans and gender non-
17 conforming people have been here since people have been on the planet.
- 18 RA: Of course we have.
- 19 AJ: But, how do we access that information, how do we learn that? How do we really incorporate
20 that into our mindset so that people can be less stigmatized, less afraid, less reluctant to be
21 their true selves.
- 22 RA: Yeah. I think that's one reason why we can kind of see this explosion or kind of wave of change.
23 Beth would say a moment in this movement about trans masculinity is because there is instant
24 documentation, people are taking selfies and posting it where everybody can see. One of our
25 biggest group meetings for the trans masculine group, every year, is top surgery show and tell.
- 26 AJ: Wow. Did that just happen recently?
- 27 RA: It just happened recently. So, a support group which normally might have 10 or 15 people in it,
28 maybe 20, now is exploding to 65 people.
- 29 AJ: Wow.
- 30 RA: Because everybody kind of wants to see firsthand, even though they can see it on their phone,
31 they can't interact with that person. And so, there is an accessibility that people didn't have
32 before. And so, while we can look back . . . I just saw a picture of trans warriors from 1920
33 hanging out in front of a brownstone stoop, everybody is all decked out and the girls are looking
34 super-hot and the boys are looking super dapper and they're just chilling.
- 35 AJ: Are these Black folks?

- 1 RA: No, there are a couple of people of color in this picture, which also is a certain interest to me – is
2 it the coloring of the picture, I'm not sure, but that says that we've been documenting ourselves
3 since the 1900s. We know stories of trans masculine people being in World War I and World
4 War II and skirmishes long before that. So, we know, we see documentation of two-spirit and
5 gender non-conforming folks in Native populations, in African tribal populations. So, we know
6 that we've been in existence for forever, but now we have the ability to document, to record, to
7 reach out to somebody, to chat with somebody online, to learn how to do things with make-up
8 and clothes instantly to alter our appearance.
- 9 AJ: Yeah. I know one of the big phenomenons in the last, I don't know, 10 years maybe, is that
10 young people are documenting their transition online.
- 11 RA: Yeah, they are.
- 12 AJ: For a year, they may make a video every day. "This is Day 35 of my testosterone."
- 13 RA: Sure.
- 14 AJ: Or, "This is month three of my estrogen therapy and look at my breasts, how they're growing."
15 It's just fascinating how the world has changed.
- 16 RA: It is fascinating. One of our local trans activists, heroes, was one of the first people to document
17 online, that I know of, in an ongoing fashion. Pastor Lawrence, and he did that in a very
18 educational way, teaching people how to safely inject their own hormones, and he did that
19 on a weekly basis. He documented himself taking a shot, which also showed his transformation,
20 his physical transformation, and it was real. I remember one little video clip . . . I don't think he
21 nicked a vein or something, but it didn't quite go in in a way that felt good and he even talked
22 about that. I think that, for me, that was like, "Wow, this is one of the first series of
23 documentation of a trans masculine person showing the weekly effect of testosterone."
- 24 AJ: Wow. Yeah, I've interviewed Rev. Lawrence Tanner Richardson. It's a great interview. I didn't
25 know that they did that documentation process though, that's fascinating.
- 26 RA: Yeah, they did.
- 27 AJ: It really is incredibly important that we do that. You know, I asked you the last time what do
28 you think the future of the trans community is 50 years from now. I'm sure you gave a very
29 eloquent response. So, I'm going to try to ask it in a little bit of a different way, but still sort of
30 getting at that. And so, we've been talking about this so much right now, just you and I, about
31 the young people that are . . .
- 32 RA: Babies.
- 33 AJ: Yeah, the babies that are coming out and having support from their families, pushing school
34 boards to have these kinds of conversations like the ones that you were a part of yesterday. You
35 know, what do you think their impact, these 6, 7, 8 year olds, Jazz is turning 17 now.
- 36 RA: Wow, that's amazing.

- 1 AJ: She just turned 16. *I am Jazz*, who has a reality show on TV. But, what do you think these young
2 people's impact is going to be on the concept of gender.
- 3 RA: I think they're just going to obliterate it.
- 4 AJ: I'm just talking about the world's . . .
- 5 RA: I think they've already began to blow it up. It's already crumbling. They've already placed the
6 detonation in places that are vital and the construct of gender has radically changed in the last
7 five years. And that push, I feel, was really palpable 20 years ago, where people were saying,
8 "We need to think about gender in a different way." Not only are there people who are
9 intersexed, there are people who have a broad range of how gender norms and expectations
10 affect them, and whether that person is trans or queer, the impact of gender expectation affects
11 everyone. And so, I think that young people are just like, "Pfft." It is a construct, gender is a
12 construct, and it's a perpetuation of boxing people in to doing things a certain way, probably
13 mostly for capitalism. And, they know it, and they are like, "No."
- 14 AJ: "Ain't having that."
- 15 RA: "Not having it." And, if you can say that right now in America we have different ideas about
16 what it means to literally wear a dress and who can do that, and it means something different in
17 America than it means in southeast Asia or Africa, then that proves that gender is kind of bogus.
- 18 AJ: Yeah.
- 19 RA: And, I think that they've said that because now we can look and we can see that in America, if a
20 man wears a dress or something that's not pants, we will conceive and perceive and label and
21 think a whole bunch of different things about that individual, but men all over the world wear
22 things that aren't dresses right now and we don't speculate about their sexual identity or their
23 gender presentation or the role that they have within society.
- 24 AJ: I think they wear things that can be considered dresses.
- 25 RA: Of course they do.
- 26 AJ: But yet their gender is not questioned.
- 27 RA: Associated with it – at all.
- 28 AJ: Exactly. No, that's fascinating. I hadn't really thought about it in that particular regard. So, we
29 just got a couple more minutes. What would you like to share that I haven't asked you about?
30 And one thing I actually was going to just mention relative to this whole gender realization, I
31 don't know . . . phenomenon that's going on, is that you and I both are a part of a very early
32 project called the Center for Gender Spectrum Health.
- 33 RA: Yeah.
- 34 AJ: Which is really sort of all about really trying to help the broader community understand that the
35 issues that they have around transgender people are not just transgender, it's related to gender

- 1 itself and that we all have a gender and we can all be more expressive and in touch with our
2 own individual nature if we were to loosen our expectations, our ideations around gender.
- 3 RA: For sure.
- 4 AJ: Do you want to talk about that process?
- 5 RA: Yeah, I mean I think it's . . . I think that that impact, if those outcomes and goals can be met, are
6 about really kind of accepting people where they're at, believing people when they say this is
7 my experience, and doing that in a way that is affirming to an individual and not medicalizing for
8 an outcome. I think that that is profound and I think it's needed and I think as trans people come
9 into their own power, that has to be instilled and infused and I think that the way that folks are
10 doing that is important when they're asking community leaders and people who have those
11 identities to weigh into the process early on, to be part of the original conversations. It means
12 something very different. It's not unlike the Trans Equity Work Group. It would be a very
13 different thing, the Trans Equity Council, would be a very different thing if it just came from cis
14 gendered straight folks at the City. And because it didn't, those threads and fabrics of trans POC
15 community-based identities are intentionally woven into the fabric of that cloth. I think that
16 Katie and Diane and others at the U are really trying hard to make sure that they have some of
17 those threads in their fabric.
- 18 AJ: Sure. Yeah, I'm glad you mentioned the Trans Equity Commission and Work Group, which is a
19 part of the City of Minneapolis, which is really all about promoting transgender well-being as
20 residents of the City of Minneapolis and how the City responds to, and communicates with, and
21 supports the community. And now there is a formal Transgender Commission which advises the
22 City Council on issues related to the trans and gender non-conforming community, which is
23 huge.
- 24 RA: It is huge. It has a dynamic impact and I am so excited to see kind of the roll-out this year of the
25 City of Minneapolis really going, "Yes, trans people look like this, they live here, they are part of
26 our City, who is welcoming."
- 27 AJ: Right. Wow, this has been a fascinating . . . little bit over an hour and 10-minute conversation,
28 Roxanne. I always learn from you every time we are together, and cherish the time that we get
29 to spend together. Like you said, just in relationship, not necessarily talking about issues or
30 projects or . . . you know. So, I just want to express my deep gratitude for your willingness to be
31 a part of this project – to help us start the project and now as we're rolling towards the end of
32 the project, to come and share your wisdom and thoughts again. And, more importantly, to
33 allow some of this history to be documented.
- 34 RA: I appreciate you and thank you for the honor.
- 35 AJ: All right. Peace.
- 36 RA: Peace . . . and chicken grease.