

Paulina Angel  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

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

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

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- 1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ  
2 Paulina Angel -PA  
3
- 4 AJ: So, hello.
- 5 PA: Hi.
- 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 University Libraries. Today is December  
8 8, 2016, and I am in the lovely city of Washington, DC, the nation's capital, and I am here today  
9 with Paulina Angel . . . Angel . . . Paulina Angel.
- 10 PA: Paulina Angel.
- 11 AJ: Paulina Angel, what a sweet name.
- 12 PA: Thank you.
- 13 AJ: So, beautiful. How are you today, Paulina?
- 14 PA: I am fabulous.
- 15 AJ: Yes, you are; yes, you are. It's so good to be here with you. And, Paulina, just to get us started,  
16 can you state your name and how you pronounce it, spell it, state your gender identity as you  
17 describe yourself today, your gender assigned at birth, and the pronouns that you use?
- 18 PA: My name is Paulina Angel, that is P-a-u-l-i-n-a A-n-g-e-l. My gender . . . well, I identify as a trans  
19 woman. I was assigned male at birth and my pronouns are she and her.
- 20 AJ: Yay. Paulina, tell me what is the first thing in life you remember. What's your earliest memory  
21 in life? It does not have to be gender related; if it is, that's OK, but just what is your first  
22 memory?
- 23 PA: I'd probably have to say when my father gave me my first record player. I think I was about four  
24 or five years old at that time.
- 25 AJ: Really?
- 26 PA: It was a very white record player with a black kind of . . . record playing space, you know, the  
27 turn table. And then he gave me two records. The first record was the Beatles 1967-1970.
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 PA: AKA, the blue album.
- 30 AJ: The blue album, that's a great album.
- 31 PA: A great, great album. And this 45 of the Beatles, as well, called *Nowhere Man*.
- 32 AJ: *Nowhere Man*?

- 1 PA: Yeah.
- 2 AJ: Wow, that's interesting. One of my first memories is of a Beatles record too – a 45 on the Apple  
3 label. Those were on the Apple label, right?
- 4 PA: Let's see, the blue album was on the Apple label – it had the Apple with the blue background on  
5 it. And then, the 45 was on a Capitol orange and yellow swirl.
- 6 AJ: OK, so they had ended their relationship with Apple Records.
- 7 PA: No, actually, the history about that . . . I can't believe we're doing this, is the Beatles were signed  
8 to Parlophone Records in England.
- 9 AJ: Which one?
- 10 PA: Parlophone.
- 11 AJ: Oh, OK.
- 12 PA: They're a British record label owned by EMI Records. And then they got a distributing deal with  
13 Capitol Records in 1964 and then they formed their label, called Apple, in 1968. So, both labels,  
14 Parlophone and Capitol, were distributing their records on behalf of Apple Records.
- 15 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 16 PA: So, even though it was Apple, it was still Capitol or Parlophone – it all depends on what country  
17 made what version of the album.
- 18 AJ: And, you know this because you are a musician.
- 19 PA: Yes.
- 20 AJ: Tell me about your musical Life.
- 21 PA: It's basically some type of a birthright. On my dad's side of the family, my dad is a guitarist, as  
22 well as his two brothers. His father was a guitarist and then his father's father was a guitar  
23 player as well. On my mom's side, even though my mom didn't play music, her mom was a  
24 pianist and singer and then her mom was a pianist and singer, as well.
- 25 AJ: Wow, so your great-grandmother, your grandmother, your dad, your grandfather, and your  
26 great-grandfather.
- 27 PA: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: So, it is something of a birthright. What instrument do you play?
- 29 PA: I play guitars, bass, piano, and drums. I also song write, produce, and sing.
- 30 AJ: Wow. So, you consider yourself a professional musician?
- 31 PA: Semi-pro. I always feel that professionals are people who actually that get paid to do music and  
32 I'm not getting paid to do music.

- 1 AJ: Well, that is kind of the definition.
- 2 PA: Not yet.
- 3 AJ: But you're working towards that goal.
- 4 PA: Yeah.
- 5 AJ: Awesome. So, where did you grow up?
- 6 PA: I grew up in the town of Indio, California, which is about 15 miles south of Palm Springs.
- 7 AJ: Indio. Can you spell that?
- 8 PA: Indio. I-n-d-i-o.
- 9 AJ: Oh, wow, that's pretty easy.
- 10 PA: Indio was his name-o.
- 11 AJ: And Indio was his name-o. What part of the state is that in?
- 12 PA: It's in southern California, in Riverside County, which is also known as Inland Empire.
- 13 AJ: Wow. What's your ethnicity?
- 14 PA: Hispanic.
- 15 AJ: OK, from South America? Mexico?
- 16 PA: That's a good question.
- 17 AJ: Latin America?
- 18 PA: My grandparents were born and raised in America.
- 19 AJ: So, you're multi-generation American.
- 20 PA: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: So, you don't . . . they don't talk about where they were born?
- 22 PA: Not really. They never really talk about that kind of stuff. We're not into the whole . . . our
- 23 heritage and all . . . it's not like we live in a house that's all very Alamo-esque. We don't even
- 24 worship . . . worship is the wrong way to say it, but idolize or look up to people like Pancho Villa
- 25 or . . . my grandmother, her whole house is nothing but Elvis Presley.
- 26 AJ: Is that right?
- 27 PA: And my dad's house is nothing but the Beatles.
- 28 AJ: Yeah, he gave you your first record player and two Beatles albums, that's kind of funny.
- 29 PA: All my other uncles, they either like Beatles or they like Elvis Presley or Stevie Ray Vaughan and
- 30 Eric Clapton.

- 1 AJ: So, a very American family?
- 2 PA: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, well you guys are Americans so that makes sense. What was home life like with all of  
4 these musical influences all around?
- 5 PA: It was very interesting. It was a very interesting kind of home life. Since three of my uncles  
6 were guitar players, there was always get-togethers where they would be in the porch drinking  
7 beer, or in my dad's case, Pepsi.
- 8 AJ: And jamming out, huh?
- 9 PA: Jamming out, rock 'n roll stuff. And all the kids would get into it as well. A lot of my cousins and  
10 my brothers and sisters are into music as well, but they're not into music in the way that I am  
11 because I'm only one of three people in my generation, in our family, that are musicians.
- 12 AJ: Do you ever make music with family members?
- 13 PA: Not really, no, because I have a certain sense and style of music that not many of the others are  
14 into. I mean, I do play music with my dad from time-to-time, we'll do like classic rock stuff, but  
15 it's not like I can get him to say, "Hey, do you want to do this song, it's by Kylie Minogue?"
- 16 AJ: Who is . . . Kylie?
- 17 PA: Kylie Minogue, she was a dance pop singer from Australia, came into prominence in 1987.
- 18 AJ: Do you know how to spell her name?
- 19 PA: Kylie Minogue – K-y-l-i-e M-i-n-o-g-u-e.
- 20 AJ: Oh, OK.
- 21 PA: But, yeah, my younger brother, Michael, he's a musician as well, he goes under the name  
22 Wasteful, and his music is very industrial Gothic kind of music. And so, we're both like day and  
23 night. I'm day because my songs are very nice and peppy and sunshine; while his music is all  
24 dark and death and . . .
- 25 AJ: Wow. So, what was elementary school like in . . .?
- 26 PA: It was interesting. I never really had much friends growing up, truthfully. For some reason, as a  
27 kid, I never really had much connection with kids my age. I had no connection with kids,  
28 whatsoever, because I was more . . . possibly, intellectually advanced than kids. I didn't find  
29 them interesting to listen to. I was more of those kind of kids that hang around teachers  
30 because I liked to hear grown-ups speak.
- 31 AJ: Well, you were listening to the Beatles when you were four.
- 32 PA: Yeah. And even . . . well, that sort of stemmed from home life because I had cousins and a sister  
33 and they all did not want me to hang out with them because me being the male-born, assigned  
34 at birth, and all my cousins were girls. We had a very big female . . .

- 1 AJ: Dominated . . .
- 2 PA: Yeah, dominated cousins and sisters and stuff, so they didn't want this boy hanging out with  
3 them. It was like, OK – what do you do when you're not hanging out with kids your own age  
4 because they don't want to hang out with you? You get busy growing up. So, I would read  
5 intellectual kind of books, books that would have been too advanced for a 5- or 6-year old to  
6 understand, but I understood them perfectly and I loved watching documentaries on TV and  
7 listening to teachers talk about certain things. It was when I was young, when I was about 4- or  
8 5-years old that I did start to become fully aware of my gender identity and what it was, even  
9 though I didn't know what the terminology was of what I was. All I know is that my uncles were  
10 watching TV one day, and I think Boy George came on TV and when I saw Boy George I was like,  
11 "I think that's me, because I feel like a girl and this boy is dressed like a girl." And then all I  
12 heard from my uncles, "Fag, queer," and like, "F'ing faggot," and stuff like that. I remember like  
13 my grandmother saying, "Thank God, none of my kids are like that. If I ever would have had a  
14 kid like that I would have kicked them out of the house."
- 15 AJ: Oh, boy.
- 16 PA: And hearing that at 7- or 8-years old, was like, "Holy fuck, I probably should not say nothing  
17 around them – what I'm feeling and stuff," because that's what I'm feeling. I feel like I should be  
18 that or even a more advanced version of that, if it did exist. All the kind of stuff I liked watching  
19 at that time, the stuff I related to at the time, was if a guy was dressing like a girl or . . . there  
20 was a movie that I remember coming out that really struck a chord for me was something *To*  
21 *Wong Foo Thanks for Everything Julie Newmar*. And one other movie . . .
- 22 AJ: With . . .?
- 23 PA: Patrick Swayze, John Leguizamo and Wesley Snipes.
- 24 AJ: You got it, there it is.
- 25 PA: Those kind of movies, I related to. And even if something came out on TV that their character  
26 was going to cross dress, I was like, "Oh, that's me." And then, as I grew up, got older, then I  
27 started to learn, "OK, well, what you're feeling, you're not a cross dresser because you want to  
28 be this 24/7." And so, it wasn't until probably when I came out as gay that I learned what  
29 transgender was.
- 30 AJ: OK, so you did come out as gay?
- 31 PA: Yes.
- 32 AJ: When was that?
- 33 PA: I came out during September 2004.
- 34 AJ: Oh, wow – you remember the exact month. Were you dating men at the time?
- 35 PA: No, but I was becoming more and more self-aware of what I was and it was this thing that I just  
36 really couldn't hide. It was impossible for me to hide because I was watching all these shows on  
37 TV that were so gay oriented at the time. I was so into *Will & Grace* and I was very much into

- 1        *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. And, I was like, “Well, I think I can identify with these shows  
2        because they were just around,” but there was nothing trans at that time. But, it wasn’t until I  
3        came out as gay that I went to a youth center that was for LGBT youth and I started to go there  
4        – I was like 21 or 22 at this time. And, so I was talking to one of the girls over there, and we  
5        were talking about things and she was like, “Well, honey, I have news for you – you’re not gay?”  
6        I was like, “I’m not gay, then what am I?” “You’re transgender.” I was like, “I’m transgender?”  
7        And she was like, “Yeah.” “I didn’t know there was a term for it.” “Yeah, it’s called transgender  
8        or transsexual.” And I was like, “Oh, that’s so cool.”
- 9    AJ:     So, you were feeling that but you never had the language, and then someone gave you that  
10        language.
- 11   PA:     Gave me the right terminology.
- 12   AJ:     Were you on . . . did you search online and have sort of online community at all?
- 13   PA:     Yeah, at that time, that’s when Myspace was big, not like now – Facebook took over.
- 14   AJ:     Yeah, Myspace is pretty much no space right now.
- 15   PA:     Yeah, no space. So, I found my community on there. There’s this awesome girl that I met on  
16        there that really gave me a 101 on trans issues. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of her, but her  
17        name is Danielle Askini or Danni Askini.
- 18   AJ:     Yes, from Seattle?
- 19   PA:     Yeah.
- 20   AJ:     A-s-k-i-n-i. Danni – yeah. I’ve met her once, but we sort of have an online friendship.
- 21   PA:     Yeah, we began as an online friendship. At the time, she was living in Maine – she was doing her  
22        stuff out in Maine where she was originally from. And we stayed friends for so many years,  
23        we’ve been friends for about 13 years and we finally met each other in 2011, when she was in  
24        San Francisco. Now she’s in Seattle doing Gender Justice League and . . .
- 25   AJ:     Yeah, she’s doing amazing work.
- 26   PA:     I’ve met her – I bumped into her twice when I went out to Seattle.
- 27   AJ:     So, you guys now have a real-life friendship too.
- 28   PA:     Yeah, it’s not like, “I wish I could meet you,” “I wish I could meet you too.” It’s more like, “Oh,  
29        hey, I can’t wait to see you next year in Seattle.”
- 30   AJ:     Yeah, cool. Yeah, Danni is amazing. Would you consider her sort of like the first transgender  
31        person you met?
- 32   PA:     Pretty much. She was the first . . . well, first transgender person I connected with. The first  
33        transgender person I met, her name was Jennifer, and she was working in my town. I was told  
34        by a co-worker . . . at the time when I was working at Wal-Mart . . .
- 35   AJ:     Oh, wow – OK.



- 1 PA: She was like, "I know a girl that is trans and you should meet with her." "OK." So, I met with her  
2 and we're still friends to this day.
- 3 AJ: Were you out when you worked at Wal-Mart? Were you an out trans?
- 4 PA: I was out as gay at the time. It was . . . it wasn't until 2007, this was about two-and-a-half years  
5 after leaving Wal-Mart that I came out as trans. At that time, I was working at Hollister.
- 6 AJ: Oh, so you do a lot of retail.
- 7 PA: I haven't done retail since 2007.
- 8 AJ: OK.
- 9 PA: After 2007, I devoted full-time to my studies in college so I was able to get a job in college as a  
10 student worker, so I was doing that more. Thank God for that, because it was through my work  
11 as a student worker that I really got involved in student government, student politics. At the  
12 time, I was also beginning my first year as the GSA president on my campus.
- 13 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 14 PA: Which I did two terms of it. It was around that time that I was also working on trying to  
15 transform my college to become a transgender-friendly college, a trans-inclusive college.
- 16 AJ: What college?
- 17 PA: It was called College of the Desert in Palm Desert. It was a community college. At the time  
18 when I was going there, they didn't know how to handle transgender students. I had to teach  
19 them – like, "OK, this is what it means to be transgender." Transgender people . . . I basically  
20 gave them a 101 thing, so like what I'd learned through Danni and other stuff I was learning at  
21 the time, because I was always buying books at Borders on transgender issues.
- 22 AJ: Oh, wow – educating yourself so you could educate others.
- 23 PA: Yeah. I would do college theses in psychology and English writing all about it and my professors  
24 were always blown away by what I was presenting them. They were like, "This is amazing  
25 information, you should go and do advocacy full time." I didn't think about advocacy at that  
26 time but then things started to role that way because I got involved with the student  
27 government there. I ran for office; I became the first transgender student to become part of  
28 their student government. I ran for a position that was called External Affairs and it was  
29 recommended to me by our student life director because he was working with this group in  
30 Sacramento called the Student Senate for California Community Colleges and he was like, "Well,  
31 we took you to that conference last year and you met some people there and then we went to  
32 do this thing in Sacramento and you still knew all those people – you still kept in touch with  
33 them, so you should run for this position and then you can work with them even more." So, I  
34 did and I ran and then I became . . . was able to work with them, and then I became the first  
35 trans person to become senator for their organization.
- 36 AJ: Oh, wow. Which organization was this again?

- 1 PA: The Student Senate for California Community Colleges.
- 2 AJ: Oh, so for the whole state community college system.
- 3 PA: Yes.
- 4 AJ: Wow.
- 5 PA: And, I primarily worked on LGBT student rights in bills. I was like one of two people that  
6 authored a letter, by request from Governor Jerry Brown, to pass the Fair Education Act. He  
7 asked us to look at it and he asked us to write a recommendation, so I was in charge of that  
8 along with my friend Sean. We wrote it and then a month later, he signed it into law.
- 9 AJ: Wow, that's incredible. That's very impressive.
- 10 PA: At that time, I was writing my own resolution, a student resolution, that would basically pre-  
11 date everything that we would now that is Assembly Bill 1266, was the School Success and  
12 Opportunity Act, which is where if you're transgender you can use whatever restroom you want  
13 to use, if you're a trans girl you could join the cheerleading or softball team, if you're a trans boy  
14 you can join the football team if you want, and all these other kind of things and use the  
15 restrooms that you want to use.
- 16 AJ: Right, and locker rooms.
- 17 PA: And locker rooms. And so, I wrote a student bill that pre-dated that, and I was working on that.  
18 It wasn't until afterwards that we were having a lunch out there and one of my friends, Sean,  
19 said, "You know, you're an activist," and I was like, "I am?" He's like, "Yeah, you're an activist  
20 because you're out there doing work for transgender students. When you're doing stuff like  
21 that, that automatically makes you an activist."
- 22 AJ: So, somebody named you transgender and then they named you an activist and now you're a  
23 transgender activist.
- 24 PA: Yeah.
- 25 AJ: I'm smiling, but all of those things were already inside of you, right? People didn't put that on  
26 you, they just recognized that within you and labeled it.
- 27 PA: And, at that time, I wasn't even thinking in that kind of aspect of things because I grew up  
28 wanting to be a musician, I wanted to be a songwriter, I wanted to be Paul McCartney – which I  
29 think a lot of musicians would love to be Paul McCartney.
- 30 AJ: Ahh, I think a lot of people, period, would love to be Paul McCartney – yes.
- 31 PA: And so, I never thought of myself as ever becoming an activist. To me, to be an activist was  
32 someone that is smart, college educated, sort of privileged, and stuff. I never thought of myself  
33 as that – I never thought of myself as smart and as college educated. I had to drop out of  
34 college. I never thought of myself as privileged, which I really am not. I come from a very  
35 low/middle class family and we don't have money and stuff. Even to this day I still don't feel  
36 that way, but . . .

- 1 AJ: But other people think you are.
- 2 PA: Other people saw it in me.
- 3 AJ: And that's because you have been exhibiting those leadership qualities and skills.
- 4 PA: And, it should have been bright as day, to me, that I was going to be a leader because ever since  
5 middle school I was always doing student involvement stuff – I was always a part of my GSA in  
6 middle school, I was part of GSA . . . not GSA, but student body in middle school, student body in  
7 high school, I was part of this youth advisory council for the City of Indio. But I wasn't thinking  
8 in terms of being a leader, I was just thinking more in terms of I like doing extra-curricular  
9 projects because I like keeping myself busy and I saw this project and was like, "Oh, maybe I'll  
10 learn something from this project." But, I think it was prepping me to someday becoming a  
11 leader.
- 12 AJ: Do you consider yourself to be an introvert or an extrovert, Paulina?
- 13 PA: Remind me what those are?
- 14 AJ: So, an introvert is someone who sort of is less comfortable in public spaces – not a loner, but I  
15 guess the technical definition is an introvert gets their energy drained when they're in a big  
16 crowd and an extrovert gets energized from being in a big crowd and meeting people and  
17 talking to people.
- 18 PA: I'd have to say . . . it's hard to say which one I'm which because I am a bit of both. I like being  
19 around big crowds but I feel a little bit uneasy in big crowds. I'm a naturally shy person, even  
20 though I'm naturally outgoing.
- 21 AJ: Yeah, a bit of both, huh? Wow. Let's talk a little bit about what challenges have you faced since  
22 you've begun to express your true gender identity?
- 23 PA: Well, family is one, which I think for many of us that is a big one.
- 24 AJ: Absolutely.
- 25 PA: I was my dad's first son, he had high expectations for what he wanted for his first son because  
26 he would tell his friends, "Well, when I have my first son I'm going to name him Paul, he's going  
27 to be a musician, and he's going to be a man like me and probably have kids and probably have  
28 a son of his own to play music with as well – we're going to do music." For overall things, for my  
29 family – especially for my grandmother, because all my cousins – there's a lot of girl cousins,  
30 before me there was only one boy cousin but he was always so far away because my uncle lived  
31 in Hawaii and stuff.
- 32 AJ: Oh, wow – OK.
- 33 PA: So, for my grandmother, she always wanted to have a grandson here because she only had . . .  
34 she only had seven sons, she never had daughters.
- 35 AJ: Oh, really.
- 36 PA: She loved having sons.

- 1 AJ: So, she loved boys around.
- 2 PA: Yeah, she always said that she never wanted to have daughters – she could never handle having  
3 daughters; having sons were more manageable for her. From the stories I heard, she is probably  
4 the most sane person I ever met. She will tell me stories about shit that my dad did, shit that my  
5 uncles did – a lot of very interesting stuff. And so, when I was born she told me that it was the  
6 most happiest day of her life. She knew that my dad lived in Indio, she lived in Indio, so she was  
7 going to be seeing me all the time. And so, when I came out as trans, it killed my dad inside and  
8 it killed her inside, it killed a lot of my other uncles inside because they're like, "Oh, great, you're  
9 crossing to the other side and you're going to be a girl now, that's stupid – that's stupid of you."  
10 And so, that's my ultimate biggest challenge was trying to get them to see things my way. It  
11 took a lot of crying and a lot of heartbreak just to get them to see things eye-to-eye with me.  
12 It's a little bit all right now, we still have little intense arguments about it but . . .
- 13 AJ: About your life?
- 14 PA: Yes.
- 15 AJ: Wow, yeah, I don't understand why people feel like they can tell other people how to live their  
16 lives -even if they're family. But, yes, it happens all the time. So, you do have relationships with  
17 your family now? You're not estranged from your family?
- 18 PA: No.
- 19 AJ: Like, do you go to your grandma's for Thanksgiving and the holidays?
- 20 PA: Well, I live with my grandmother.
- 21 AJ: Oh, you live with your grandmother – wow.
- 22 PA: I've lived with her all my life. And the reason why it's that is because my . . . I became estranged  
23 to my mom probably right at birth.
- 24 AJ: Really?
- 25 PA: I have no memory of my mother growing up because she sort of abandoned my older sister and  
26 I. But my sister has memories of her, but I don't. It took my mom and I until I was about 14 or  
27 15 to finally have some kind of a relationship. So, I never lived with my mom before. For my  
28 dad, when he divorced my mom he ended up living with my grandmother, so we lived with her  
29 and stuff. Then, he got remarried and he had us live with him and his wife for about four years,  
30 but then his wife was so abusive to me – she was physically abuse to me so that I kept crying  
31 and telling them, "Let me live with my grandmother again, I want to live with my grandmother."  
32 So, it took this very big nasty fight that the cops had to get involved that I had to . . .
- 33 AJ: I'm sorry.
- 34 PA: So, I had to straight out live with my grandmother and stuff.
- 35 AJ: So, you still live with your grandmother today?
- 36 PA: Yes.

- 1 AJ: How do you guys get along?
- 2 PA: Nowadays we get along great. I'm always taking care of her. I'm basically her accountant, her  
3 assistant, her bookkeeper, her historian, her caregiver and stuff.
- 4 AJ: Wow. Who does the cooking – you or grandma?
- 5 PA: She cooks her own food because she likes the way that she cooks.
- 6 AJ: OK.
- 7 PA: Plus, I would never want to cook for anybody. I don't trust my cooking for people because I  
8 make things in a very weird way.
- 9 AJ: OK.
- 10 PA: Only I can eat my food.
- 11 AJ: Only you can eat your food - got it. Well, I'm glad that you still have a close relationship with  
12 your grandmother. What about your dad and his new wife? She's not new anymore, she's been  
13 around for a while.
- 14 PA: Well, he divorced her, that wife.
- 15 AJ: Oh, the abusive woman.
- 16 PA: Yeah, in 2002. And then he remarried in 2006, he has a new wife now and me and her, we're  
17 like besties when we see each other and stuff.
- 18 AJ: Oh, wow – that's cool.
- 19 PA: We love watching the romantic comedy movies – what they call chick flicks. We love watching  
20 those movies and my dad would never like to watch those. And so, I've always been like a  
21 second daughter to her. So, we get along, but it took a little while for my dad and I to talk . . . to  
22 really have very serious conversations with each other. We still have that wacky kind of  
23 conversation . . . not conversation, relationship with each other. Somedays it's good, somedays  
24 it's bad.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, well – that's like any parental relationship really, right?
- 26 PA: Yeah.
- 27 AJ: What about your chosen name and pronouns? Are your family members . . . ?
- 28 PA: My biological mom, she calls me Paulina.
- 29 AJ: Really?
- 30 PA: She calls me her daughter, she calls me mija. My stepmom will call me Paul, for my dad's sake;  
31 my grandmother would never call me Paul because she still wants to hold on . . . I mean, she will  
32 never call me Paulina because she wants to hold on to Paul, the idea of Paul. She's going to be  
33 90 in about two weeks, so I gave her that. I was like, "OK, you don't have to call me Paulina, you

- 1 can hold on to that image if you want,” even though she knows that that’s not really what I am  
2 anymore.
- 3 AJ: Sure, yeah. What have been some of the more positive aspects of expressing your true gender  
4 identity?
- 5 PA: I have to say confidence. I’m more confident now than I was being Paul, which I’ve noticed that  
6 while we’re doing this interview that I told everybody my dead name. But that’s OK, that’s part  
7 of the story.
- 8 AJ: Yes, it is – I didn’t ask though, so you volunteered that.
- 9 PA: I offered it, not knowing that I offered it. But, I’d just say a lot of confidence in myself. I’m more  
10 creative now and I’m not as . . . I don’t censor my work now as I did before, as a writer. I  
11 remember I was trying to record an album back in 2002 and some of the stuff I was writing came  
12 off as girly, even though I really wasn’t intending to write it that way. When my producer, he  
13 was looking at the lyrics I was writing and he was like, “This song is coming off as gay.” And so, I  
14 was looking at it and was like, “What’s gay about this song?”
- 15 AJ: How does a song come off as gay, I’m not sure?
- 16 PA: Probably how I was wording it or something, I don’t know. But, I don’t have to censor myself or  
17 the things I say nowadays, coming out as trans. I’m more happier now and a lot of my friends  
18 have seen it too. I remember going to my high school reunion back in 2011 . . .
- 19 AJ: Wow, you went to your high school reunion? As Paulina?
- 20 PA: Yeah, and nobody recognized me and that was so cool. I was like, “Hey, it’s so cool to see you  
21 again.” And they’re like, “Did you go to school with us?” “Yeah, I went to school with you, you  
22 don’t remember me?” It was like, “No.” “You’re serious, you don’t remember me?” And  
23 they’re like, “No.” I was like, “Well, we were in this class together.” And they were like, “Did  
24 you go by . . . what was your name?” “Paulina Angel.” “I don’t remember a Paulina Angel.”  
25 “Well, I went under another name.” “What was your other name?” So, I told them and they’re  
26 like, “Ohh, wow, you’re a girl now? Awesome.” And so . . .
- 27 AJ: And so, people were pretty accepting and excited?
- 28 PA: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: That’s awesome.
- 30 PA: The greatest thing is all the people that didn’t want to talk to me growing up, now wanted to  
31 talk to me.
- 32 AJ: Is that right?
- 33 PA: It’s like they all . . . one of the people that bullied me, they were a jock and they bullied me a lot,  
34 he pulled me aside at our high school reunion and he was like, “I just want to say that I am so  
35 sorry for all the shit that I put you through in high school. I want to say that you now, being  
36 yourself, being the woman that you truly feel and know that you are, is the most bravest thing

- 1           that I could ever, ever think of a person doing. So, I want to say that you're doing a great job at  
2           what you are and that I see more sunshine in you now than I did back in high school and you  
3           were probably dealing with your own demons at that time. I now see the smile in you that I  
4           never saw before, so keep it up."
- 5   AJ:     Wow.
- 6   PA:     I was like, "Thanks."
- 7   AJ:     That's the most beautiful thing I've ever heard, I think. That is fascinating. Wow. Paulina, to  
8           the extent that you are comfortable, and if you don't want to talk about this at all you don't  
9           have to, but have you pursued any medical treatments as a part of your transition if that's what  
10          you call it?
- 11   PA:     Yeah, I began hormones back in . . . well, I began self-medicating myself back in 2007 and then I  
12          stopped in 2010 because it was affecting my health. But since 2014, I've been back on  
13          hormones but this time in a legit way.
- 14   AJ:     Through a medical doctor or program?
- 15   PA:     Yeah. So, I've been two years on hormones.
- 16   AJ:     Where did you get underground hormones? How did that happen?
- 17   PA:     Myspace.
- 18   AJ:     Really?
- 19   PA:     Because there would be like these groups that you join and then they tell you, "Oh, you can go  
20          to this website and you can buy the hormones there and it will only cost you about \$60 to get  
21          acetyl and your spironolactone there," so I would do that. I would be taking the pills and some  
22          people on the message boards would be like, "I suggest that you take this amount of this and  
23          this amount of this each day," so I was following those directions.
- 24   AJ:     When you said that it started to affect your health, like how so? How were you feeling?
- 25   PA:     I developed kidney stones and ended up going to the hospital for it.
- 26   AJ:     Yeah.
- 27   PA:     I didn't tell any of my family that I was taking these underground pills. Then again, they were  
28          blaming it on my Pepsi addiction.
- 29   AJ:     Oh, you like Pepsi, huh?
- 30   PA:     Yeah. But even at that time . . .
- 31   AJ:     You and your dad. I kind of heard your dad . . . I heard that – your uncles are drinking beer and  
32          he's sitting there drinking Pepsi.
- 33   PA:     Well, he was never a Pepsi drinker until he decided to go sober. But, yeah, I did like Pepsi a lot  
34          but at that time I was not drinking a lot of Pepsi because at that time I was taking yoga in college

- 1           and I wanted it to work. So, I swore off Pepsi for about four or five months at that time. I was  
2           drinking tea a lot . . .
- 3   AJ:     Very California, very southern California it sounds like.
- 4   PA:     But then I developed the kidney stones and I stopped, but I didn't tell my family that I got it  
5           because I was self-medicating. So, after that I was not taking any of the pills – I threw them  
6           away. It was a struggle after that because I really wanted to continue taking the pills because I  
7           really wanted to continue to transition. At that time, in my valley we didn't have the resources  
8           for trans – now we do, but back then we didn't.
- 9   AJ:     So, have you thought about any surgical interventions or have you undergone any surgical  
10           interventions?
- 11   PA:     I hope to. I'm just hoping to get a job where I can actually have the kind of medical coverage for  
12           that kind of stuff because I really want to get the bottom surgery – that's the only thing I want. I  
13           don't care about breast augmentation. My face is naturally feminine looking anyway, so it's not  
14           like I have to go under a knife to change that or anything.
- 15   AJ:     Right, wow. Well, good luck, if that's what you want to do I hope that works out. Looking back  
16           over your decision to express your true identity, what were some of the pivotal moments for  
17           you? Was there one day or a time period . . . and I know you talked about when you were in the  
18           student . . . in the youth LGBT center and you had this interaction with this young woman and  
19           she said, "You're trans." So, clearly that was a pivotal moment. Were there other things that  
20           sort of stand out for you as a turning point?
- 21   PA:     Let's see – that is such a good question. That is such a good question. I think my pivotal  
22           moments are nowadays.
- 23   AJ:     That's cool.
- 24   PA:     Just being out, especially in my community now, as trans. People see me the way that I want  
25           people to see me and people are just being accepting and looking at it like, "Oh, it's so awesome  
26           to see you this way."
- 27   AJ:     Do you . . . so what work do you do now?
- 28   PA:     I do a lot of voluntary work nowadays, basically. I'm part of the Palm Springs steering  
29           committee for the Human Rights Campaign.
- 30   AJ:     Oh, wow. HRC?
- 31   PA:     Yeah. I've been doing that for about a year and a half now. I do a lot of volunteer work with  
32           Equality California. I do some volunteer work for the Transgender Educational Resources. I  
33           recently became a board member for Palm Springs Pride.
- 34   AJ:     Oh, wow. OK.
- 35   PA:     And Executive Director of Trans Community Project.
- 36   AJ:     Wow. Tell me about Trans Community Project, what is that?



- 1 PA: It was started in mid-2014, by these two awesome women, both of them have a long history of  
2 doing various projects in other parts of the state – Seattle, Arizona, San Francisco. And, they do  
3 a lot of community work for the trans community out in the Coachella Valley. They don't focus  
4 themselves just on one city. We're spread out. I got involved with them mainly on a volunteer  
5 aspect during . . . at the time that they started, even though I was not officially part of them, I  
6 didn't have a title or anything. It went dormant during the summer of 2015, then they decided  
7 to give me the organization but they didn't want to have anything . . . they didn't want it  
8 anymore, they didn't want to do nothing with it anymore so they gave it to me and I took it  
9 over.
- 10 AJ: What do you guys do?
- 11 PA: We do a lot of events that are aimed towards public education on transgender issues. We either  
12 will do Transgender Day of Visibility or things like at a local bar or something that allows us to  
13 tell people about what issues we're facing right now or things that are in the works that we  
14 need help on. We also are going to . . . something that I'm going to start working next year is  
15 we're kind of going to start ally training, which is we can train businesses and other people how  
16 to be allies. One of the things I want to do with that is also make these stickers where how HRC  
17 has their own sticker on businesses . . .
- 18 AJ: The equals symbol.
- 19 PA: Yeah. We'll have like our sticker on their business to show people that this is a trans-friendly  
20 business as well.
- 21 AJ: Oh, wow. That's a great idea. Do you guys raise money? Do you do fundraisers? How do you . .  
22 .?
- 23 PA: Well, I'm beginning that process right now. When it started, it was not a 501c3 because . . .  
24 when it started, they didn't need to become a 501c because one of the girls that founded it, she  
25 had money.
- 26 AJ: She was just doing it all out of her own pocket.
- 27 PA: Yeah, so, for her, it wasn't like they needed to fundraise because she was handling all the stuff.  
28 But now that I have it, I'm in the process of trying to make it a 501c3. As a matter of fact, that's  
29 one of the things that I'm going to be working on as part of the board for Palm Springs Pride  
30 because they want to be the fiscal sponsor for us.
- 31 AJ: Great.
- 32 PA: So, I'm going to be beginning to do that next year. But the organization . . . at the moment, the  
33 organization is just me because I have no finance going into it, it's not like I can hire other  
34 people to serve different jobs.
- 35 AJ: No other volunteers or anything?

- 1 PA: No, but we do a lot of collaboration with other people in our community, so in a way, sort of like  
2 a revolving door kind of situation where nobody has a title, but they're an honorary member of  
3 our organization.
- 4 AJ: That's great, wow. You do a lot in your community, Paulina. We're here in DC, Washington, DC,  
5 for the International LGBT Leaders Conference. What made you come here?
- 6 PA: It was part of my fellowship for the Victory Fund. I'm part of the Empowerment Fellowship. It  
7 was one of the things that they require for you to attend. I'd never heard of it before but upon  
8 reading more about it, I'm glad I came because there's so many things that I'd like to learn more  
9 that I could do, that I could probably use in my own organizing – or political kind of work.
- 10 AJ: Are you going to run for office someday?
- 11 PA: Maybe. There's so much . . .
- 12 AJ: You have a long history of political engagement and college and high school and middle school,  
13 so it's a natural skill.
- 14 PA: It might be in the cards. At the moment, there is so much work that needs to be done for the  
15 transgender community. I want to focus on that at the moment before I decide to run for office,  
16 even though that I know having one of us in office will be very, very handy to move the agenda  
17 forward.
- 18 AJ: Yes.
- 19 PA: So, I don't know – maybe in four years I might run for something. Maybe for state assembly or  
20 state senate.
- 21 AJ: Wow.
- 22 PA: Whatever I'm up to working on.
- 23 AJ: Have you ever had any problems with institutions like college or the police department or  
24 medical institutions?
- 25 PA: Not really. I've always . . . there's this thing I always tell people, when it comes to me I tell  
26 people I'm sort of like that *Get Smart* character – because back in the 1960s there used to be a  
27 show called *Get Smart*.
- 28 AJ: I remember that show very well.
- 29 PA: There used to be a character in that show called Simon the Likable and the personality of that  
30 character is he is so likable that people will do things for him. He'd go into the bank and say,  
31 "Hey, can I have \$1 million?" And they would look at him like, "Here you go." And so, I have that  
32 kind of Simon the Likable mentality to me that I could go into a police station and ask for help  
33 and they would be like, "Yes, we'll definitely help you with that."
- 34 AJ: Oh, wow.

- 1 PA: Or, if I go to the hospital and say, “Hey, I’m feeling sick and I was wondering if you could help me  
2 with this. I’m transgender.” And they’re like, “No problem, we’ll help you.”
- 3 AJ: Wow.
- 4 PA: So, I know that the trans community, they’ve always had issues with hospitals and law  
5 enforcement, for me – I don’t.
- 6 AJ: That’s awesome.
- 7 PA: I always give out that vibe that people would love to help me. I know how to do things in a very  
8 proactive kind of way that allows work to get done. So, that’s . . . especially in our area, like  
9 Palm Springs, we have such a great police department that they are totally behind the LGBT  
10 community out there, especially the transgender community. When we had our thing for Pulse,  
11 we had our vigil for Pulse, the entire police department . . .
- 12 AJ: The nightclub in Orlando that burned down, right? Or, got shot up – it didn’t burn down.
- 13 PA: We had a rally in Palm Springs in solidarity of what happened and all the police officers went to  
14 this rally – not just in case someone started shit, but they went because they’re behind the LGBT  
15 community and they know how beautiful our community is because we’re such a very calm  
16 community – we don’t start riots, we don’t start fights or anything. They’re very much . . .
- 17 AJ: Supportive.
- 18 PA: Yeah. They’re like family to us, so it’s not like how it is in San Francisco or LA or other parts  
19 where the trans community and the law enforcement community are at odds with each other.  
20 We have a very harmonious thing going for us.
- 21 AJ: Wow, that’s great. It sounds like you are living a pretty happy life in Indio – yeah, wow, that’s  
22 incredible. We should tell more trans people to move there – or not.
- 23 PA: Yeah, come to Palm Springs if you want to – you’ll love it in Palm Springs. Our valley, it’s a  
24 growing valley and people are just so amazed when you move over there, especially the trans  
25 community. People move there and they’re like, “Wow, you guys really have it going on over  
26 here.” It’s like, “Yeah, we do.”
- 27 AJ: I know this is getting exhausting, so last question, what do you think the transgender community  
28 will be like in 50 years from now?
- 29 PA: All of our rights are met, no more struggles, no more killings, no more suicides, total acceptance.  
30 As long as we keep electing officials that are going to help move our agenda along, the better  
31 things are going to get for us. I know that in the next four years, if the electoral college doesn’t  
32 vote for Hillary – which we’re hoping that they do . . .
- 33 AJ: Yeah, well don’t count on that. I’m just . . .
- 34 PA: I live with hope.
- 35 AJ: You live with hope, all right.

- 1 PA: But if it ends up not happening and we have to go through four years of the orange clown . . .
- 2 AJ: Yes.
- 3 PA: We have our work cut out for us, but I'm determined to do the work. I'm determined to fight  
4 for our community. We need so many people out there to fight for us and I'm glad that I'm  
5 putting myself out there as one of the people that are willing to do the work for us – even if it  
6 kills me. Back in . . . last year, two friends of mine were attacked in Palm Springs. George and  
7 Chris Zander. My friend, George, ended up passing away from his injuries a month later.
- 8 AJ: Oh, wow. Were the transgender identified?
- 9 PA: No, they're gay. It happened in Palm Springs, too, which was like the weirdest thing ever. But, I  
10 remember talking to my grandmother because when she heard about it she was very concerned  
11 about my safety and stuff. I told my grandmother, "You know what? I could go back to the  
12 closet to try and make sure that nothing happens to me, but that's not living. I'd rather be out  
13 there doing the work for our community." Hey, if I end up dying doing the work that I'm doing,  
14 at least I know I'm going to be dying . . . I'm going to die actually knowing that I did some work  
15 for our community, that I helped do the fight. If it happens, it happens, but I'm going to  
16 continue doing the work and continue doing the fighting. I think that will be a better investment  
17 of my time than anything, to do that.
- 18 AJ: Wow. Well, I'm praying that nothing happens and I'm deeply inspired by your commitment to  
19 doing the work. Thank you so much for sitting down and talking with me today and sharing your  
20 story – it's powerful, it's inspiring, and it's beautiful. Thank you, Paulina.
- 21 PA: Thank you so much for interviewing me.
- 22 AJ: All right, until we meet again.
- 23 PA: Until we meet again.
- 24 AJ: Peace.