

Arin McNeese
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

January 12, 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

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Arin McNeese -AM
3

4 AJ: Good afternoon.

5 AM: Hello.

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, and today is January 12, 2017,
8 and I am here in not so sunny San Diego. It's a little overcast. I grew up listening to the song *It*
9 *Never Rains in Southern California*, girls let me warn ya . . . but I think there's been quite a bit of
10 rain happening here in the last couple of weeks here. I'm here today with Arin McNeese. How
11 you doing, Arin?

12 AM: I'm good.

13 AJ: Yeah. So Arin, for the sake of our cameras and our transcriber who documents and takes all the
14 notes for this, can you state your name?

15 AM: Yes.

16 AJ: Spell your name, and then state your gender identity today – however you define that, and your
17 gender assigned at birth, and then your pronouns.

18 AM: Perfect, OK. So my name is Arin McNeese. Arin is A-r-i-n and McNeese is M-c-N-e-e-s-e. And I
19 would say society-wise I identify as a trans male, I was assigned female at birth and I actually use
20 all pronouns. I feel more that it's somebody else's discomfort and not mine because I'm pretty
21 comfortable in my skin as I am.

22 AJ: So they/them, she/her, he/him.

23 AM: All of them – yeah. So even on my nametags and labels, it says he/she/they.

24 AJ: Oh wow, OK. Wow, that's cool. And you said you identify as trans masculine, or trans male?

25 AM: I said trans male and I think it's more of a societal thing because I kind of . . . I'm just me, I'm a
26 person and I'm not ashamed to say, "Hey, I have a vagina, and yes I use it," or whatever. It
27 doesn't mean . . . so it's just kind of a broad term.

28 AJ: So for . . . sort of societal purposes, that makes people more easily able to communicate with
29 you, trans masculine – or trans male, I'm sorry.

30 AM: It's actually . . . it's more of a blending in, feeling safe. I've traveled all over the country and I
31 never felt unsafe until I moved to California.

32 AJ: Oh wow, really. Why do you think that is?

33 AM: Because I actually had people say, "Look at that," and get very hostile, and just be very
34 aggressive towards me. I'd never had that before. I've been stared at, I've been looked at, but
35 when I started working in Orange County I had a couple of incidents like that and it just really
36 shook me to my core. And also I asked about queer people in San Diego and I was told they
37 were underground. So it wasn't like . . .

- 1 AJ: Like literally underground or just kind of . . .
- 2 AM: That's just kind of what they said or they were like . . .
- 3 AJ: They're not mole people though?
- 4 AM: No, not mole people – they just weren't real out here. It was very binary here when I got here,
5 so it was really uncomfortable for me because, for so many years it was just Arin was Arin and
6 Arin was going to do their thing.
- 7 AJ: Right, no specific gender identity.
- 8 AM: Nope.
- 9 AJ: Yeah, because we met for the first time about eight years ago, I would say, in the LAMPP,
10 Leadership . . .
- 11 AM: Advocacy something . . . Minnesota Priority Populations.
- 12 AJ: Yeah. That's a long acronym. But about eight years ago, and I know you were certainly a part of
13 the queer cohort, but it was always sort of ambiguous, I would say, around gender identity.
- 14 AM: Yeah, because it was just me. It didn't matter. It's like . . . I had very large breasts at that time.
15 My partner, at that time, had a picture of me on their computer and people thought it was
16 offensive or disrespectful to me, but it wasn't. It didn't bother me. Sometimes it's OK to have
17 cleavage, sometimes it's not. So it didn't bother me, but other people are like, "No, that's Arin
18 and Arin wouldn't want that."
- 19 AJ: Wow, so people are very protective of you too.
- 20 AM: Yes.
- 21 AJ: Arin, before we get too deep into that, just to get your memory juices flowing, tell me the first
22 thing you remember in life.
- 23 AM: Oh my gosh, I don't know. Growing up in a bar and restaurant, my first kiss was a girl.
- 24 AJ: Wow, your first kiss was a girl.
- 25 AM: My first kiss was a girl. I was crushing on her and I was walking her home, and this was an older
26 girl, and she's like, "Are you going to kiss me or what?" And I was just like, "Ahh, OK."
- 27 AJ: How old were you when that happened?
- 28 AM: 5th or 6th grade.
- 29 AJ: So 10, 11.
- 30 AM: Yeah, pretty young.
- 31 AJ: 12 – right in there.
- 32 AM: Yeah.
- 33 AJ: Where was this at?
- 34 AM: This was in Wyoming, Minnesota.

- 1 AJ: Wyoming, Minnesota.
- 2 AM: Yeah, my dad had a restaurant up there.
- 3 AJ: Is that right? So you grew up in Minnesota.
- 4 AM: Well, up until about that point, then I moved to Florida.
- 5 AJ: Oh, OK. Well tell me a little bit about your childhood in Minnesota. Your dad had a restaurant
6 in Wyoming.
- 7 AM: Yeah, my dad had a restaurant – and my dad went all around the Midwest opening restaurants
8 for folks. I’m the youngest of 12.
- 9 AJ: Wow, big family.
- 10 AM: And they were all just kind of in and out, because half were from my mom and half were from
11 my dad. It was always . . . what is the saying, “The grass is always greener over the septic tank,”
12 so they’d come stay with us and not like it and go back to their other parent.
- 13 AJ: OK.
- 14 AM: And so basically I was raised as the golden child because I was the only one that was theirs
15 together.
- 16 AJ: Oh, got it – OK.
- 17 AM: So I didn’t have a different mom or dad to go to because I was raised with them.
- 18 AJ: You were theirs so you were there to stay.
- 19 AM: Yeah.
- 20 AJ: Funny. So man, all of these siblings coming in and out. You said you were born and raised in a
21 bar and restaurant.
- 22 AM: Yes, like literally in a bread basket – when I was an infant they would put me in it, they would
23 put me in blankets in it. When the restaurant closed, they would lay out beer cases and I would
24 go to sleep on beer cases.
- 25 AJ: Oh wow.
- 26 AM: I also started working at a really young age too. As soon as I was big enough to start washing
27 glasses behind the bar – yeah. Child labor laws, no – not so enforced.
- 28 AJ: Were you . . . you kissed your first girl in 5th grade, 6th grade. You had some ideas around your
29 sexual orientation, what about gender identity? When did you first realize that maybe you’re
30 not the gender you were assigned at birth?
- 31 AM: It’s hard to say because I’ve always been allowed to explore or express pretty much anything –
32 maybe not consciously, but I know that I never wanted to wear a shirt for some reason as a child
33 and that drove my mother nuts. I think I really got to look a lot more at it when I was working at
34 the pharmacy in Uptown and the pharmacist wanted us to get together and help out the trans
35 community with their hormones and stuff. So the more people I got to meet, I got to think
36 about those things – and really think about it, and had the opportunities. People would go,

- 1 “Well when are you transitioning?” I didn’t want to, I didn’t care to, and I also didn’t think peer
2 pressure needed to be a part of it. So, it was just . . .
- 3 AJ: Yeah, peer pressure should not drive people to shift their gender. People can do that, but it
4 shouldn’t be because their friends tell them that’s what they should do.
- 5 AM: In their own way, in their own time. It was really nice because the community in Minneapolis
6 really just embraced me for me, including the pharmacy that I worked for from a very young age
7 – I worked there for over 20 years. I ended up having these amazing mentors – they looked at
8 me and they were like, “Yeah, you don’t look like the rest of us in the company but you work
9 hard, you do good work,” and they just taught me . . . they worked with me. And it’s nice
10 because I’m still in touch with them now. I left and I looked one way and now I look much
11 different . . .
- 12 AJ: Yeah, I would say.
- 13 AM: They hadn’t seen me in five years and just was in Minnesota in June and we all went out for
14 happy hour and it was just fine, nobody batted an eye. It’s just like, “This is Arin, Arin has always
15 done Arin and go.”
- 16 AJ: Wow. So, can you say the name of the pharmacy or you’d rather not?
- 17 AM: Oh, absolutely - yeah. It had multiple names but it’s most known for when it was Chronimed
18 Pharmacy and we had the mail order in Minnetonka.
- 19 AJ: Wow, and so your co-workers embraced you, but this was . . . I suspect this was after high
20 school and college and all of that stuff.
- 21 AM: Right after high school, I just never went to college. So yeah, I started working there . . . before it
22 became Chronimed it was Diabetes Service Center and I was kind of off away from the rest of
23 the office, because our pharmacy was someplace different. I wore leather coats and I wore
24 ripped jeans and I wore cut-off t-shirts. And, it didn’t matter. Then when they started going in
25 the other direction, just because of my attitude and the changing of pharmacy, they were like,
26 “That’s why we want you to learn this stuff because you know things just need to get done.”
27 And so when I got to be too mean, they sent me to, “How do you play nice with others,” classes.
28 So they gave me all of these tools to work with, so it was just kind of a really nice growing
29 experience.
- 30 AJ: Were there trans-identified people that worked there? Or was it more that you met trans-
31 identified people sort of through the hormone stuff?
- 32 AM: I met . . . yeah, that’s how it was. We were specifically . . . I shouldn’t say specifically targeting,
33 we were reaching out to the trans community because they weren’t being serviced or treated
34 respectfully. Like the woman I started working for was like, “That’s just wrong,” and she
35 understood and she got it. She’s like, “This is what we’re going to do, we’re going to offer these
36 things to these folks so they can be treated with dignity and respect.” And the first meeting that
37 she and I walked into together, we thought we were in the wrong place because the two trans
38 males that were running the group, they just looked like a couple of college guys. We had no

- 1 clue, we were like, “We’re sorry, we think we’re in the wrong place.” And they’re like, “No,
2 you’re not, come on in.”
- 3 AJ: Wow. Funny.
- 4 AM: And just started working with us and with that going on and then what is the . . . the health
5 conference every year? The trans health . . .
- 6 AJ: The Minnesota Trans Health Coalition?
- 7 AM: Yes, so going to those different groups and meetings and stuff, I just kept meeting more and
8 more people. So, it was just kind of a growth exponentially. Also, being in recovery – so I would
9 meet people in recovery, and I was one of the people from the beginning that did the first trans
10 recovery group.
- 11 AJ: Wow – where? Where was this at?
- 12 AM: Rhys Preston, Dr. Preston, offered up his chiropractic office and he opened it up for us and it just
13 grew.
- 14 AJ: So it wasn’t through Pride Institute or anything . . .
- 15 AM: No, no. And it actually started from one of the Trans Health Coalition meetings. There were
16 people in there talking about it and wanted it to start and Rhys offered up the space and then a
17 few of us just got together and just kind of went with it. It kept going and we . . . there might be
18 days there where it was just me or it might be days that it was just Rhys, it was really interesting
19 because one of my amazing mentors was like, “Oh no,” because we would decide and we would
20 just go for coffee. “No, because if that one person is coming late, that’s what it’s about.”
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 AM: And that’s what it ended up being about and then it grew and it sounds like there have been up
23 to 30 people in the meetings now.
- 24 AJ: Wow, you should be very proud. How long have you been sober?
- 25 AM: Almost eight years.
- 26 AJ: Wow. Yeah, that’s pretty . . . growing up sleeping on a case of beer . . .
- 27 AM: Yes, yes.
- 28 AJ: To now eight years clean and sober.
- 29 AM: My last partner pointed out in all the pictures, “Do you know there’s not a single picture of you
30 growing up that there’s not a beer sign or cigarettes or something?” I’m like, “Oh,” it was just a
31 way of life.
- 32 AJ: Right, wow. What has life been like . . . I guess, you said your gender and sexuality was just kind
33 of who you were, were you harassed in school? Or people just accepted you and . . .?
- 34 AM: I was like the popular kid for some reason – just because I got along with everyone. I think it’s
35 because it didn’t matter to me if you were a stoner or a book nerd or whatever it is, or a jock, I
36 don’t know – I kind of always did my own thing.

- 1 AJ: So no harassment, none of that kind of stuff? That's good.
- 2 AM: No. The only thing that ever happened to me is I lived in England and I got thrown in the bushes
3 and it wasn't because of who I was; it was because I was an American staying over there.
- 4 AJ: Oh wow. As an adult or . . .
- 5 AM: In high school, I was there for a year.
- 6 AJ: Really? What was that like?
- 7 AM: Interesting. Our school bus was a Greyhound bus, so you don't . . . not like the yellow bus, and
8 so I just went to school on a military base over there and just lived in the town.
- 9 AJ: So, did you go there was an exchange student or was your . . .?
- 10 AM: I went and lived with my sister. My parents were in two different states and I didn't know
11 where I wanted to live, and my sister and her husband offered to take me in. They're like,
12 "We're going someplace." I thought I was going to Australia but then I ended up in England, but
13 that's OK – it's an experience.
- 14 AJ: Overseas – yeah.
- 15 AM: Got to go to Holland, so that was good.
- 16 AJ: That's awesome, that's really cool. So, how has life been for you? What challenges have you
17 faced since you've decided to really more outwardly express your gender identity? I mean, I
18 know you said for some part, when you first moved to California, people were hostile.
- 19 AM: It was really tough at first and it's so funny, not many people knew that I went on hormones so
20 my partner, and I told my manager because I didn't know . . . you hear all these stories about . . .
- 21 AJ: Right, what's the impact going to be and all this?
- 22 AM: Well that and am I going to get mad? Am I going to have a reaction? I'm in sales, I have to be
23 nice.
- 24 AJ: And you don't want a roid rage scenario thing to happen.
- 25 AM: I never said anything to anyone so it was kind of an interesting thing because then all of a
26 sudden you would hear people start to go, "She," "He," "She," and even before the hormones I
27 asked if I could go to a women's conference and I was told no because I was trans. I was like,
28 "We never had that conversation, I identify as a person. I was told I need to wear a tie for work
29 here." That's . . . you know. And somebody found out that I was going and she just looked at
30 me and she shook her head and she said, "Wear a purple shirt, you'll be OK." So, there really
31 weren't too many challenges because . . . again, I'm doing me and I'm doing it in my own way,
32 on my own time. So some people finally started to ask questions, others make assumptions,
33 and so it's just like . . . all right.
- 34 AJ: So out in the world, I mean this was in your workplace, but what about in the world?
- 35 AM: Well, my work place is out in the world.
- 36 AJ: Well, that's true.

- 1 AM: I drive all around the county, so I'm in different agencies, different offices. I'm at . . . I do a lot of
2 dinner programs. That's probably the only one where there were ever any challenges is a
3 couple of folks that I work with were like, "Where's my girl? She, she." And I was like, "Wait a
4 minute, the staff is calling me he, I've got to pee." I'm like, "So let's just . . . just don't say it, it's
5 OK, we don't need to use any pronouns." Because people see what they want to see.
- 6 AJ: Yes.
- 7 AM: Because there are people still that will very much say she, even if I haven't shaved.
- 8 AJ: But because they know you, they've known you over a period of time.
- 9 AM: Yeah, so it's like, "It's OK."
- 10 AJ: What about when someone first meets you for the first time – like if you meet someone today?
11 Their perception probably is you're a guy, just a regular old guy.
- 12 AM: Yes. And recently, even at work, somebody . . . and I'm very out because we talk about these
13 things all the time. In the front office and all of a sudden this woman, and she had just gone to
14 an event with me, and she was like, "Whoa, whoa – wait, wait, are you saying your trans?" I
15 started laughing and so did their manager because I was like, "Yeah, you didn't know? I'm
16 pretty out about it, we've had a lot of conversations." I'm like, "I forget what I look like." I
17 talked about wearing a dress in front of these doctors that I'd never met before and you see
18 them blink and I'm like, "Oh yeah, I don't look like . . . yeah."
- 19 AJ: Right. Wow. What have been some of the joys since you've decided to fully express your
20 gender identity?
- 21 AM: I have to be completely honest, the best thing ever is not having a period.
- 22 AJ: Break it down, keep it 100 baby.
- 23 AM: And I think I'm just more confident and I don't know if it's just from that or the way that people
24 treat me, because I'm actually really uncomfortable being called, "Boss." They do that all the
25 time and I'm like, "I'm just a customer." Whatever. But I have more . . . I'm more confident in
26 myself than I ever have been – to leave my job of over 20 years was not of my own accord. I did
27 it, I moved across the country, I had nobody here in San Diego, and I took on a job that was high
28 stress and I'm still here. So it's just kind of like – there's nothing I can't do now. That's probably
29 the biggest change.
- 30 AJ: Kind of when you transcend gender, the obstacles become a little less ominous to you, I think.
31 It's like, "Man, I knocked that down, I can knock down anything." Yeah. What sort of medical
32 interventions, and please – to the extent that you feel comfortable answering this question . . .
- 33 AM: I'm pretty comfortable.
- 34 AJ: What medical interventions have you undergone as a part of your gender journey, and what do
35 you anticipate or think about or plan to do?
- 36 AM: Well, even before going on hormones I had always known that I didn't want to be a DD, so I
37 actually had my top surgery years ago in Minnesota, and that was amazing and freeing. And
38 then hormones and speaking to . . . you know, you have to speak to a therapist before you can

- 1 go on hormones. It was somebody that I knew and we had to have the conversation. I'm really
2 not into have any more surgeries, but I am fascinated with being able to stand up and pee. It
3 doesn't mean it will never happen, I don't know anymore. At that time, I was like, "I don't
4 know, I'm like I look but I don't know that I really want to go through all of that."
- 5 AJ: They have some . . . don't they have some tools and things that can help that.
- 6 AM: They do, and I'm no good at them. I've tried a bunch of them.
- 7 AJ: Yeah. Well, you know, there is surgical intervention that can be a part of that too.
- 8 AM: Yes.
- 9 AJ: Wow, well thanks for sharing about that. Have the hormones . . . what has been some of the
10 impact on the hormones? Have they been as helpful as you thought they would be?
- 11 AM: Yes, because I'm pretty much invisible now as I walk through the world. That's kind of what I
12 wanted, just let me do my thing. I don't mind you paying attention to me.
- 13 AJ: Pretty much a white male, and I know you identify as Native American, but even I think . . .
- 14 AM: People can't tell, yeah.
- 15 AJ: Unless you self-disclose that. What Native community are you from?
- 16 AM: Cherokee. I'm in the sun all the time, we're having an extreme winter, so I'm usually much
17 darker than I am and it's very funny because then people here think I'm Latino so they start
18 speaking to me in Spanish and I'm like . . .
- 19 AJ: Do you speak Spanish?
- 20 AM: No – un poquito.
- 21 AJ: Yeah, because San Diego is pretty close to the Mexican border here.
- 22 AM: Yes. And I actually work, literally, on the border often.
- 23 AJ: Have you ever had any negative interactions with . . . in the workplace, from customers or
24 whatever, or interactions with police or medical staff?
- 25 AM: I am so blessed. Seriously, I have been very fortunate, no real police interaction, other than
26 younger and back in the day. But, I had to find a doctor when I got out here. I looked on one of
27 the websites and I found two doctors and I was like, "All right, I'm just going to go see one of the
28 doctors," and my doctor is amazing. She's a pediatrician and we just had a conversation and she
29 was like, "OK." So yeah, she'll work with me on that. I threw out my back and I was like, "Does
30 it make a difference, do I need to disclose this or not?" And so, I asked and the staff was a little
31 not real sure, because I was like, "I don't know if bone structure . . . this is something different."
32 And met with a chiropractor . . .
- 33 AJ: Medication dosages, all of those kinds of things to deal with.
- 34 AM: Yeah, he thought it was fascinating and thought it was fine, and no, you didn't have to. So, I've
35 just been really lucky. And, customer-wise, I'm at the LGBT Center often and I service a large
36 Latino community and it's interesting, because that's the community that embraced me when I

1 got here. One of the agencies realized that I was really here to help people. I didn't come to
2 California to be in the Sunshine State, whatever – I came here for a reason and I would not come
3 here unless I had a job that was getting to help people. So that was really nice, they were like,
4 “Wow, you really mean it, that's really what you do.” They've been awesome to work with, it's
5 so funny trying to communicate – because if somebody is monolingual Spanish and I'm
6 monolingual . . . we get it, we get it done, sometimes it's a little slow but we get it done. So it's
7 really nice.

8 AJ: Cool. And I know, we were talking earlier and you were saying that a lot of your work, or at
9 least recently anyway, has been around working with police departments and law enforcement
10 agencies to try to improve interactions with trans and gender non-conforming folks. Do you
11 want to talk about that at all?

12 AM: A little bit. I get a little gun shy talking about it just because we're . . . again, I've been so
13 privileged, I've been so lucky, I've seen other folks go through very different experiences. We
14 have the first transgender police officer here in San Diego that transitioned on the job. I think
15 nothing of it, I just see another trans person and I've embraced her and taken her in and then
16 somebody pointed out that she had a gun on her and I'm like, “I didn't even notice.” Again, me
17 – not a big deal, and I do a lot of events at the Center and I say everyone is welcome and there's
18 been a lot of controversy around that. So my thing has been like how do we bridge those gaps.
19 You met with somebody at the Center who works directly with the police department and is
20 working on those things and I'm just kind of a one-person side show trying to navigate both
21 sides of everything. Same thing, we also have Trans Pride here, trying to navigate those things –
22 do we have the police there? Do we not have the police there? Or how do we do that? And
23 how do we, again, bridge those gaps and be safe. We have to get along.

24 AJ: So wow, you've been involved with a number of LGBT-identified organizations since you've been
25 here.

26 AM: Yes.

27 AJ: Do you want to name a few or . . . ?

28 AM: Well, I just most recently . . . the one that I'm enjoying the most right now is I'm on the Board of
29 Directors for Trans Family Support Services, which is . . .

30 AJ: Wow, is that working with young people?

31 AM: They don't have an age limit, but mostly it is youth and getting youth on hormone blockers or
32 helping the families navigate the whole journey. I have also . . . I am on the board for Project
33 Trans and I do a lot of support groups at the LGBT Center, some of them are . . . one is Shades of
34 Color.

35 AJ: Oh wow.

36 AM: Again, I'm very honored that I get to go in there and to be in a very masculine space and they've
37 embraced me.

38 AJ: Wow. I'm just sending Katie a message that we'll be down in about 30 minutes.

39 AM: OK.

- 1 AJ: Because I think they're here.
- 2 AM: Is that why my phone just keeps going off over here? I'm sorry.
- 3 AJ: That's possible but she also texted me and we now have this conversation on tape – yay!
- 4 AM: Yay!
- 5 AJ: What about in the Twin Cities, what LGBT organizations were you involved in there?
- 6 AM: Well, I would have to say it was more HIV there. I volunteered at the Aliveness Project. I took a
7 week off every year to do the holiday baskets. I was involved just going to conferences with the
8 Minnesota Trans Health Coalition and marketing at Pride for the pharmacy. The Shot Clinic was
9 just getting running before I left.
- 10 AJ: Oh wow, that's awesome man. I know that I mentioned a little bit earlier that we were sort of
11 working together in the LAMPP or the Leaders . . .
- 12 AM: Yes, the tobacco policy.
- 13 AJ: Exactly. But we were involved in the LGBT sort-of break-out group, policy group, that was
14 working in coalition. What do you think about this whole concept of coalition building and
15 working together across identities? So, to make the question a little more succinct, the L, the G,
16 the B and the T, should we all be working together or should everybody go off and do their own
17 thing?
- 18 AM: Absolutely. No, we should all be working together. What do they say? There's power in
19 numbers, but as a collective we have a stronger voice. We'll talk about the T for a second – all
20 right, trans people want trans people to speak for trans people.
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 AM: I'm sorry, I don't always agree with that because there are times that I tell you what, instead of
23 me speaking for myself, I would ask my ex-partner to – who could beautifully articulate the
24 needs and desires and whatnot. The same with the woman you met at the Center today. So
25 sometimes I think people that . . .
- 26 AJ: Carolina?
- 27 AM: Carolina, yes . . . can really do a good job of articulating and help bringing those things together.
28 And if we just didn't just dismiss each other.
- 29 AJ: Right. Yeah, I mean . . . I think a big part of why that conversation continues to bubble up is
30 trans women, and specifically trans women of color, were really on the front lines of the gay
31 liberation movement, and then they've been sort of relegated to the back room, the day care
32 center or something, while the big kids get to get married and do all this other stuff. And so,
33 yeah. I think that's why that question sort of continues to crop up.
- 34 AM: Well it does. It irks me because we talk about risks or whatever. I mean, what are the chances
35 of me being murdered versus a trans woman of color. If I'm not mistaken, if I have my numbers
36 right still, it's like one in eight. How could you . . . I can't even imagine . . .? I know what it was
37 like to be in a little bit of fear but to still navigate life and not have to go through all of that. If

- 1 people can't respect, or try to at least have some understanding of it, that's tough in and of
2 itself and we should all work together because we should raise everybody up – it doesn't
3 matter.
- 4 AJ: Yeah, absolutely. Talk to me about relationships. Who do you date? Who do you love? What's
5 your sexual preference?
- 6 AM: Ahhh, well I say . . .
- 7 AJ: And I will say I understand, because we've been having a lot of conversations, this is a little bit of
8 a sore subject for you right now.
- 9 AM: Yeah, it's a little tricky. Yeah, I moved to California to be with my lovely ex-partner. Things kind
10 of fell apart. I still have all sorts of love in my heart for her. Again, that is also the person I want
11 to speak on my behalf still, even though we've had some tough . . . whatever. I leave myself
12 open to dating, I am typically drawn to women. I'm not saying that I wouldn't date a man
13 because I don't believe . . . never say never, because you don't know what's going to happen. I
14 dated men when I was younger but I just got bored, and now I have a different . . . and I'm sure
15 it's the hormones, a different perception and attraction towards men than I did before.
- 16 AJ: What's that about? How does it manifest?
- 17 AM: Well, something about . . . not the machismo, it's more about the male body. I'm into the body,
18 the human body period – men and women. And so women, I like mine curvy . . . let's have a
19 little extra something, and then when it's men it's a very chiseled something – whatever,
20 heteronormative lens – Mr. All, Captain America for some reason. I don't know where that is.
21 Hands down, if it's somebody that gives a good hug, I'm done – that's it. A good hug, I'm done.
- 22 AJ: So you're into huggers.
- 23 AM: I wouldn't say that I'm into huggers, but I don't know . . . there are just some people that just
24 give hugs that just kind of like . . . like you feel it through your whole body.
- 25 AJ: Wow.
- 26 AM: And I think that's a very powerful thing.
- 27 AJ: Cool. Baby, you give good hug. All right. Who has been the person or persons or groups of
28 people that have sort of helped you navigate and come to this journey in your life?
- 29 AM: 100%, hands down, it's Loretta Worthington.
- 30 AJ: Wow.
- 31 AM: She walked me through everything – talked to me, listened to me. Yeah.
- 32 AJ: Wow, getting a little misty there.
- 33 AM: A little bit, yeah. I went to college because of her.
- 34 AJ: Yeah.
- 35 AM: And after she got me through my bachelor's, I realized on my own I could do my masters.
- 36 AJ: Yeah. So you now have a masters degree?

- 1 AM: I now have a masters degree, and I ran my first half-marathon – which, in Minnesota . . . yeah.
2 You said you recently interviewed Ani, ask Ani about my running. Yeah, I couldn't run at the Y
3 from one end to the other, just of that track.
- 4 AJ: And now you've just done a half-marathon.
- 5 AM: Yeah, so yeah.
- 6 AJ: So she's pretty influential.
- 7 AM: And she is. I even tell her in texts and stuff, I copy her. Like the kick-off for Pride at the bowling
8 alley. I'm like, "Yeah, we started doing ice cream socials here." She's like, "Why are they about
9 ice cream?" I'm like, "I'm copying you, it's a sober event – that's what I'm doing." I copy a lot. I
10 currently . . . I've taken a trademarked event that I've been given a one-time license for so we'll
11 be playing bingo tonight.
- 12 AJ: Oh cool. Dildo Bingo?
- 13 AM: Dildo Bingo – yes. The Smitten Kitten gave me a one-time license so that we can do it here in
14 San Diego. Love them!
- 15 AJ: Are they contributing gifts?
- 16 AM: They gave me the license . . .
- 17 AJ: Just the license.
- 18 AM: No, they just gave me the license . . .
- 19 AJ: So you're working with a store here that's providing the actual sex toys. Or is it . . . are there no
20 sex toys?
- 21 AM: It's all sex toys, but because it's trademarked by the Smitten Kitten, that's the only shop that we
22 will talk about, promote, or whatever. What we did was we actually went out and got cash
23 donations so we could purchase items.
- 24 AJ: Nice! From Smitten Kitten.
- 25 AM: From Smitten Kitten, from other places. We also . . . the Minnesota Nice Bear Skn started there,
26 they donated gift certificates for us so the Bears can get their special underwear.
- 27 AJ: Tell me about Bear Skn, you've mentioned this a couple of times – what is Bear Skn. Because
28 the people on the tape, they don't know.
- 29 AM: Yeah. A couple of guys in Minnesota realized that heavier men have problems like with their
30 underwear rolling up, people get hot and sweaty and they get smelly, and so they created . . .
- 31 AJ: Swamp butt, I think I've heard it referred to at one point in time.
- 32 AM: So, yeah – they designed these underwear and they have a special mesh crotch, basically it
33 absorbs odors or whatever, and they don't roll up.
- 34 AJ: It allows you to breathe, I would think – get fresh air.

- 1 AM: And where the fat is between the legs there, they don't roll up. I've actually gotten them and
2 they're great, I love them.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, all right.
- 4 AM: And I'm so excited, they got boxer briefs they just came out with this week. I will be partaking.
5 I'm like, "Why do I have to really give these gift cards to bingo games?"
- 6 AJ: I'm not sure that I've met many people who are that excited about underwear before, but it's
7 cool. I've got to check these guys out. Bear Skn.
- 8 AM: Yes – and it's S-k-n at the end. So it's Bear and then s-k-n.
- 9 AJ: S-k-n, OK. No i.
- 10 AM: No i.
- 11 AJ: So they have donated to this fundraiser too. Where do the funds go?
- 12 AM: It's being split between two groups. I am the co-chair of an annual women's conference for
13 women that have HIV. The ladies have actually asked for bags that are not branded because if
14 they get them from, say, my pharmacy, it will have my pharmacy name and they have their own
15 logo – they used to get them years ago. So half the money will go to them towards that, and the
16 other half will go to Trans Family Support Services.
- 17 AJ: Oh wow. So supporting the trans families of multiple ages and all of that.
- 18 AM: And the direct services that Cathy does. She is on the road all the time.
- 19 AJ: You've told me about some new initiatives that you guys are thinking about, particularly around
20 hormone blockers, and this is at your pharmacy that you work at.
- 21 AM: Yes.
- 22 AJ: What's happening with young people? I mean, are you seeing more people accessing and
23 wanting access to hormone blockers.
- 24 AM: Yes, because the education is starting to get out there more and more, so people are coming out
25 at much younger ages. I mean, how many youth do we know that are queer now, or gender
26 fluid or . . .
- 27 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 28 AM: So it's amazing, and I don't know how it is that the parents are learning and hearing this stuff. I
29 know a lot of times it's word of mouth where people hear about Cathy and they call Cathy
30 directly. Random, my last manager I just had who I had to tell I was on hormones, has a
31 transgender son who came out and I think he was eight years old.
- 32 AJ: Wow.
- 33 AM: And I know that there have been a couple hundred youth here in San Diego County put on
34 hormone blockers since . . .
- 35 AJ: Is that right?

- 1 AM: . . . 2012, if I have my dates correct. So . . .
- 2 AJ: So it's becoming a real thing.
- 3 AM: Yes, and I know that there are roughly 30 clinics across the United States because I've been
4 trying to do some research. Somebody asked me about it and it's just kind of like . . . in there.
5 I'm trying to figure it out, because so often things are different in each part of the country.
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 AM: It doesn't matter what it is, so I've been kind of trying to do a broader scope of things than just
8 my little pocket here.
- 9 AJ: No, that's cool. But it is becoming sort of a national thing, right? People are really creating
10 access and space for young people to explore their gender identity. One of the things that I was
11 struck by when you said earlier that when you came to San Diego you had a hard time sort of
12 finding community and people were . . . I mean, to quote you, "underground," right? But also
13 you said people were so binary.
- 14 AM: Very binary. I started going to one of the FTM support groups, just because I didn't know
15 anybody and I was just working and trying to figure it out. You had to specifically identify as
16 male and you could only use male pronouns. I was like, "What about queer people? I actually
17 use all pronouns." It was really interesting, I don't even want to repeat some of the things that
18 they said about queer people.
- 19 AJ: Ooh.
- 20 AM: Basically, you know, some of it would be like, "Fake trans," and some other things.
- 21 AJ: Really?
- 22 AM: So it was just . . . I was just shocked. Coming from this background where everybody is just
23 themselves – you get to do whatever you want, however you want, with whoever you want.
24 And so it was very much like that, and even still today going into the group, people are
25 becoming a little more open about pronouns, a little bit better about being able to be queer.
26 But I find it . . . and I'm sure it's different in all groups, but the one that I go to is very often very
27 heteronormative and I'm like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa – what about boys too?" And so then
28 all of a sudden I'll have these one-off conversations, I'm also on the prep committee for the
29 Center. These are people we want to get tested, we want to get them on prep, but because
30 we're so heteronormative dominated in these meetings, people aren't always comfortable
31 having those conversations.
- 32 AJ: Got it, yeah. Because prep is about men who have sex with men, right?
- 33 AM: No, it's not – it's for everybody, it's for everybody. It's for anyone who is having sex. So any
34 woman on birth control, that conversation should be being had because the majority of the
35 women that are contracting HIV are getting it from their partners that are on the down-low. So
36 if you're taking birth control, potentially you're having sex so let's reduce the risk of HIV also on
37 top of it.
- 38 AJ: Wow. Man. Have you come out to your family and friends and what was that like?

- 1 AM: Again, everything for me has been just a natural progression. I just do my thing. I had one
2 brother who was like, "This isn't easy." I'm like, "You think it's not easy? How about you not
3 know what gender you are from minute to minute, or feel masculine one minute and then
4 feminine the next?" I'm like, "How am I supposed to have you navigate that . . .?" My father
5 passed away but my mother has Parkinson's, so I tell people . . . because stress can exacerbate
6 it, so I tell my family, "Just let her go." She knows and Loretta has had conversations with my
7 mother, so I just let her go say whatever she's going to say. She would call us and she'd be like,
8 "Girls." She did that at the pool when I went and took her for surgery. I'm in my swim trunks,
9 my sister is in her bathing suit and I'm like . . .
- 10 AJ: Yeah, no shirt – you've got no shirt on.
- 11 AM: I'm like, "Not it." Yeah, I had . . . yeah, so we just kind of let it go. But then all of a sudden when
12 I'm around her and other people, then she'll go, "Oh yeah – he." But I'm not going to force it.
- 13 AJ: Sure. And you leave that open to the rest of your network and your world and friends and
14 family too, right?
- 15 AM: Yes.
- 16 AJ: Any pronoun will do.
- 17 AM: Yes.
- 18 AJ: I'm noticing your tattoo sort of under your shirt. Was that a reaction or result of your top
19 surgery?
- 20 AM: It was, yeah. So, I . . .
- 21 AJ: I've noticed a lot of trans masculine people doing that. What's the story behind yours?
- 22 AM: My surgery was done at a teaching school and so when the students were done, the doctor
23 didn't like it and knew that I wouldn't be happy, so I got opened back up. So, I was open for
24 many hours so my scars were pretty wide and I also didn't do anything to help myself really. So I
25 had decided to cover it up, had gone over it for years, "What's it going to be?" For some reason
26 a buffalo is very sacred to me. My father used to take me to pet the buffalo when I was a child.
27 So it's just been something very powerful in my life.
- 28 AJ: Symbolic.
- 29 AM: And so my tattoo artist is from Minnesota. I had been looking for three years and a story came
30 across, he actually moved out here to do . . . he opened up a mastectomy shop. He does . . .
31 women fly . . . breast cancer survivors fly from all around the United States to get a tattoo by
32 this guy. His work is beautiful and so I went in, I met the wife, and I knew he was the one. I just .
33 . . . everything, she was like, "Make sure your pictures face this way, do this, do this." Shane's the
34 artist, get your stuff together and that's what we did. We put together some pictures and at the
35 same time, we also met with Meredith from Trans Narratives and she did a little mini-
36 documentary. We did a little five-minute documentary on scar cover-up. It's an option. And he
37 also does 3-D nipples. They're amazing. When mine was being done, he was like, "Do you want
38 this nipple or not?" I'm like, "You're the artist." He's like, "Nope, it's going to go." And he put
39 my tattoo over it. So, yeah.

- 1 AJ: Would you be interested and willing to show your tattoo?
- 2 AM: Oh, hell yeah. I don't even think I should go to work with a shirt on anymore. I told my boss . . .
3 Carolina that you met, she made me open my shirt up in the middle of the Center after a
4 meeting one night.
- 5 AJ: Is that right?
- 6 AM: Yes, no – I love my tattoo. I've been dog sitting, to help get more of a discount on the next one,
7 for the tattoo artist. So I actually go at the end of this month for my next consult.
- 8 AJ: Oh my God, look at that.
- 9 AM: So yeah.
- 10 AJ: Wow, I'm just going to tighten in on the tattoo. So you can talk about it.
- 11 AM: So the buffalo is . . . for my father, the roses are for my mother, and then . . .
- 12 AJ: Hmmm, blue roses.
- 13 AM: Yes, red is her least favorite – any other color is great. And then there's sunshine and that is
14 because Loretta was like my shining light, sunshine, through it all. Like I said, she's walked me
15 down this amazing path.
- 16 AJ: Wow.
- 17 AM: And then there's just a little wave and it's because we're all attracted and drawn to water. So
18 just kind of . . . it brings it all together.
- 19 AJ: Wow, what a beautiful story.
- 20 AM: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: And a beautiful tattoo, it's gorgeous.
- 22 AM: Yeah, I pretty much got pretty teary-eyed because he nailed it on the first . . . I was like, "Oh my
23 gosh, you took and did that from those random pictures that we looked at."
- 24 AJ: How long did it take?
- 25 AM: Six hours.
- 26 AJ: Did you do it in one sitting?
- 27 AM: No. I slapped him too. I didn't mean to, I was talking to his wife. So the second round, or third
28 round, on my sternum, I just was distracted so I slapped his hand and I didn't know . . . I was like,
29 "How much longer?" And he had already had the outline done and had already started . . . I'm
30 like, "Oh yeah, I'm good, I'm done." So I had to go heal and I had to see the doctor in the middle
31 of that and I was like, "Can I have something just a little stronger than ibuprofen pretty please?"
32 So I'm taking my shirt off at the doctor's office, I'm like, "I just really want to get this tattoo
33 finished." She was like, "I've got a tattoo, I understand."
- 34 AJ: Right.

- 1 AM: Yeah, so it was pretty funny. They were like, "OK." So they knew . . . I took a couple of Vicodins
2 and I was good. I was good.
- 3 AJ Knocked the rest of it right on out, huh?
- 4 AM: Yup.
- 5 AJ: So, what do you think the world is going to be like for the trans community and gender non-
6 conforming community in the next 50 years, Arin?
- 7 AM: Oh my gosh. I think it's going to progress so far. I understand people are having concerns and
8 reservations around all the political stuff right now, but I think it's kind of like when the damn
9 breaks . . . I think that it's getting there.
- 10 AJ: Yeah.
- 11 AM: It's like when PFLAG decided to not be rainbow flag-y and they got the white book because they
12 worked with the movable middle and I think if the trans community keeps working with the
13 movable middle, it's just going to progress that way.
- 14 AJ: Wow. Well, Arin, I can't thank you enough for being willing to sit down and talk with me today
15 and share about your personal life, your ideas about this movement, about these young people
16 that are really coming into their gender identities at much earlier ages. You are a part of . . . at
17 least a small part of helping that to come to fruition. Is there anything that I didn't ask you that
18 you think you really want to make sure is a part of this conversation?
- 19 AM: I don't think so, other than I will add one thing. You talk about young people, I actually have
20 been connected with somebody, so I actually am mentoring a young man right now.
- 21 AJ: Is that right? Wow.
- 22 AM: Yeah, it sounds like the last mentor . . . because they try to get people that are closer in age and
23 it's super awesome, our stories are almost identical.
- 24 AJ: Oh my goodness.
- 25 AM: So it's been really fun to work with him and watch him grow and change and try to navigate
26 things. He's like, "Someday I'm going to be like you," because he's got far more anxiety than I
27 do.
- 28 AJ: OK. Well, I'm so honored that you shared your tattoo on film because it's amazing and I think
29 it's really beautiful that you're working with young people and just helping them navigate these
30 crazy thing called life. We lost Prince early last year, who was a Minnesota icon as I know you
31 know, that was the opening line to one of his songs, right? "How do we get through this thing
32 called life." The example that you set for a lot of people are really helping people get through
33 this cray thing called life.
- 34 AM: I hope so.
- 35 AJ: So thank you, Arin.
- 36 AM: All right, thank you.
- 37 AJ: Until we meet again, my friend. Peace.
- The Transgender Oral History Project