

Branwen Zakariasen
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

March 21, 2017



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

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by

Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

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- 1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Branwen Zakariasen -BZ
3
- 4 AJ: So, hello.
5 BZ: 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 in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
8 Today is March 21, 2017, and I have the honor today of interviewing Branwen Zakariasen.
- 9 BZ: Yes.
- 10 AJ: Did I say that correctly?
11 BZ: You did, you did.
- 12 AJ: Wow. Just to be on the total safe side, I'm going to ask you to state your name, spell your name
13 – just so we make sure we have it all spelled correctly, tell me your gender identity as you define
14 it today, your gender assigned at birth, and the pronouns that you use.
- 15 BZ: All right. So, my name is Branwen Zakariasen, that's B-r-a-n-w-e-n Z-a-k-a-r-i-a-s-e-n.
- 16 AJ: That's quite a name.
- 17 BZ: It is quite the name. It's my wife's last name, which I did not take when we originally got
18 married, but am taking now.
- 19 AJ: Wow, I want to ask you something about that when you finish up with your response.
- 20 BZ: Sure, sure. So, I am a trans woman, my pronouns are she/her, and I was born male – I was
21 assigned male at birth.
- 22 AJ: Got it, wow. So, just out of curiosity, what was the decision point to take on your wife's name?
23 What process did you go through? And, your first name too, for that matter.
- 24 BZ: Right.
- 25 AJ: You're a whole new person.
- 26 BZ: I am.
- 27 AJ: You didn't hold on to any of the former names.
- 28 BZ: Well, I did a little bit. So, I actually changed my name when I was younger. I was on a pretty
29 self-destructive path as a teenager and through a becoming of age ritual I sort of created for
30 myself and did, I came to realize the way I was interacting with my peer group was not healthy
31 for them or for me and that I wanted to dramatically shift. The nature of the experience lend
32 itself to me looking at ravens and I took the name Corvus. I decided at that point to keep . . .
- 33 AJ: Corvus – C-o-r-v-i-s?

- 1 BZ: U-s.
2 AJ: V-u-s.
3 BZ: Yes, it's Latin for raven.
4 AJ: OK.
5 BZ: And so, I used raven as a sort of a symbol for myself into my adulthood and I kept my last name
6 because it was a part of me I felt still very deeply rooted in that experience, even though my
7 family experience growing up was not a positive one, and I moved my first name to my middle
8 name. Now, that I'm coming out as a trans woman and changing my first name to Branwen,
9 which is Welsh for beautiful ravel, or white raven.
10 AJ: Oh, wow – so you're sticking with the raven name.
11 BZ: I'm changing my middle name to Danielle so I'm keeping my birth first name, just in a feminine
12 form.
13 AJ: OK.
14 BZ: But, I have very little . . . I feel so much freer from the trauma of my childhood that I no longer
15 feel the need to sort of wear that old last name as a badge of survival anymore. I have survived
16 it, I've grown well beyond the instincts that I developed as a traumatized child, and I wanted to
17 also fully express how meaningful my wife and her family's acceptance of me at every stage
18 along the way – even when sometimes her family has difficulty understanding what I'm going
19 through, they're there and they love me and they support me and I wanted to really embrace
20 and honor that.
21 AJ: I always say to people, "Man, if I don't understand it, I'm pretty sure you're not going to
22 understand it." So, understanding is not the requirement, right?
23 BZ: And I've always asked them to please ask me your questions, because a lot of times I don't even
24 know what questions to answer for people – and they don't know what to ask, so as they occur
25 to you, go ahead and ask. If it's offensive, I won't get mad, we'll learn about why it's not an OK
26 question and we'll move forward together.
27 AJ: Got it, wow. So, tell me a little bit about your earliest memory in life, Branwen. What's the first
28 thing you remember?
29 BZ: The first thing I remember?
30 AJ: And it does not have to be around your gender identity, but if it is, that's OK. I just don't want
31 you to get hung up on thinking, "Hmm, when did I decide . . .?" That's not the question.
32 BZ: In retrospect, so much of my early memories have to do with gender identity, and it took me 49
33 years to figure that out.
34 AJ: Wow, OK.

- 1 BZ: But, this particular memory has to do with empathy and where sort of my sympathies lay as a
2 child. We had moved to Metairie, Louisiana, at a young age. The house we were living in had an
3 empty lot next door and when they went to build on it, they brought out a bulldozer and they
4 bulldozed down the trees that were in the lot. I remember holding my arms and feeling the pain
5 of the trees as they were ripped up from the earth.
- 6 AJ: Yeah, that is so violent.
- 7 BZ: And crying.
- 8 AJ: Wow.
- 9 BZ: An attended memory with that that is so deeply connected to it, because I was very young – I
10 was two, because I moved a lot as a child I have strong memories going back much early than
11 many people I know, but I also remember having the mumps at a young age and my father also
12 having them and it being a deep concern because as an adult having mumps, that's very
13 dangerous.
- 14 AJ: Yeah.
- 15 BZ: And so, I remember having to be extra quiet and on my extra best behavior, not because of my
16 illness but because of my father's.
- 17 AJ: Yeah. Because, yeah, kids get the mumps and they get sick for a day and then they're kind of
18 over it, they're just swollen. But adults . . .
- 19 BZ: Yes, it takes much longer.
- 20 AJ: It takes much longer. Where did you grow up? You said you moved a lot. But you were in
21 Metairie, Louisiana.
- 22 BZ: I joke that I did. I spent what should have been my formative years in Texas and did all of my
23 growing up, once I finally escaped. So, before the middle of 2nd grade, I'd lived in Louisiana,
24 England, and New York – two different cities in New York. And then we wound up in central
25 Texas and I was there for 13 years – so through high school, three years out of high school.
- 26 AJ: Military?
- 27 BZ: IBM. My father was brilliant and impossible to work with. He would go very impatient with all
28 the idiots around him and seek another position, and people would be glad to see him go – and
29 very happy to see him arrive, because they knew how brilliant he was. And then, after a short
30 time in a new position, they'd be very happy to have him go because they were all idiots in his
31 eyes.
- 32 AJ: Oh, wow. So, New York City?
- 33 BZ: No, outside of New York City. We lived in a place called Saugerties, which is a small town to the
34 northwest of the city, I believe, and then central New York in Newark Valley, which is a tiny little
35 town south of Ithaca.

- 1 AJ: OK. So, what was family life like? If it's too painful, you've already indicated that there were
2 some challenges. To the extent you feel comfortable . . .
- 3 BZ: Sure, I will preface that by saying that I've learned in my life being a somewhat public figure
4 within the video game industry for a number of years, the more vulnerable I am, the stronger I
5 am. And, so I've learned to just go ahead and try and share to the limit of what's appropriate to
6 the format.
- 7 AJ: There you go.
- 8 BZ: But, I had a very abusive childhood – a very abusive upbringing. It ran the full gamut, there was
9 sexual abuse in my household, certainly emotional abuse, physical abuse. There was emotional
10 incest, which is . . .
- 11 AJ: What is that?
- 12 BZ: Unnatural attachment to a child, as if they were your significant other, that does not manifest
13 itself physically, but where the child is saddled with the emotional obligations of a primary
14 relationship with a parent.
- 15 AJ: Sure, wow.
- 16 BZ: And so, it was tough. I learned to hide really, really well, because justice was arbitrary. There
17 were no set rules, the only rules were, "Don't be noticed," and when you were noticed in the
18 wrong way at the wrong time, the punishment was swift and brutal. And so, I learned to walk
19 within very narrow lines, to the best of my ability.
- 20 AJ: Was the emotional . . . what was the phrase you used?
- 21 BZ: Emotional abuse?
- 22 AJ: The emotional abuse . . .
- 23 BZ: Or, do you mean the emotional incest?
- 24 AJ: Emotional incest, I'm sorry. Was it painful at the time?
- 25 BZ: No, my mom loved me – it was nice.
- 26 AJ: Yeah, sometimes I can imagine that being . . . if there is a partner-type attachment, that means
27 that there is some love and some care and some . . .
- 28 BZ: Yes, but there was also . . . so one of the methods by which I escaped more brutal retribution at
29 the hands of my father, was to suffer premature abuse at the hands of my mother because she
30 wanted to keep me from getting into more trouble. But, the model in the household for
31 punishment was marshal in nature and she fell into that trap as well.
- 32 AJ: So, physical.
- 33 BZ: Yes. And so, it was nice, and I know now, when . . .

- 1 AJ: Did your father get jealous? If you were experiencing that, I'm sure other people in the
2 household were experiencing it too.
- 3 BZ: I believe that he has high functioning autism and is not capable of emotional connections to
4 people.
- 5 AJ: OK, so he didn't read those clues, really.
- 6 BZ: I do not believe that he, on any sort of conscious level did, I suspect he didn't notice them at all
7 – or was grateful that it didn't fall to him, because my mother had clear emotional needs that he
8 could not meet and was not willing to try.
- 9 AJ: Wow. Siblings?
- 10 BZ: Yes, older sister – five years older.
- 11 AJ: Were any of your experiences around your gender identity apparent at an early age?
- 12 BZ: I believe that they were much more than I am aware.
- 13 AJ: That makes sense.
- 14 BZ: I know that . . . my sister has told me that my mother went to great lengths to protect me from
15 ever being alone with my father because of the sexual abuse. And, I suspect that gender
16 boundaries were rigidly enforced as not attracting attention. I have some memories of being
17 very performative and very story-driven and very dramatic and that sort of being closed down
18 and carefully contained – not that that is necessarily a gender-identity issue but I do think it is
19 attached to my gender identity. I also was constantly, now I would say, correctly gendered by
20 strangers when I was a child, through middle school.
- 21 AJ: So, they were referring to you as a girl.
- 22 BZ: They would refer to me as a little girl. My mother would get very frustrated with this and like,
23 kind of go into a frenzied . . . I'm going to say attack mode. She wouldn't literally attack people
24 but she would try to get at, "Why? Why, why would you say that? Why would you say that he's
25 a girl? He's a boy, why do you think he's a girl?" And, they would puzzle over that and they
26 would look at me and say, "I think it's the nose."
- 27 AJ: OK.
- 28 BZ: Which seems odd to me that a nose could be the primary feature that . . . but they were looking
29 for something and on the defensive because she gets very intense when she's questioning. So,
30 that to me, seems a pretty clear indication that there was . . .
- 31 AJ: There were some signs.
- 32 BZ: There was something.
- 33 AJ: Did kids bully you at all?
- 34 BZ: Oh, yeah, I was terribly bullied.

- 1 AJ: Was that related to gender or . . . ?
- 2 BZ: It was always more because I was an other when we moved to Texas.
- 3 AJ: You were the new kid.
- 4 BZ: Yes. When we moved to Texas, I was smart, I did homework, I liked to read, and the most
5 popular kids in school were the twin sons of a local wrestler. So, it wasn't a really good culture
6 fit for young Branwen. And, Texas reinforced that every day that I lived there for 13 years – it
7 was not a good culture fit.
- 8 AJ: What part of Texas?
- 9 BZ: Central. Austin and surrounding areas. Austin is a liberal bastion but it's still in Texas – there's
10 still plenty of rednecks.
- 11 AJ: And it has, just more recently, become a liberal bastion.
- 12 BZ: Exactly. This was the 1980s . . . 1970s and 1980s and it was far less liberal then than I'm sure it is
13 now.
- 14 AJ: Yeah, wow. What about high school? Did you go to high school in Texas?
- 15 BZ: I did. I moved and my parents divorced and so I was suddenly free of my father's authority. My
16 believed that if she, at that point, exhibited any authority over me I would run away – which is
17 probably not far from the truth. So, I was suddenly free to be whoever I wanted to be.
- 18 AJ: So, she just was hands-off.
- 19 BZ: She did, yes. No curfew, no condemnation for drinking or experimenting with drugs, no
20 warnings against having premarital sex – nothing. It was all sort of just gone.
- 21 AJ: Wow.
- 22 BZ: I came out as bi- in high school because I was looking for a way to say, "I'm not a man, I'm not
23 the person you think I am."
- 24 AJ: Yeah, yeah.
- 25 BZ: But, I didn't have a vocabulary at that time beyond gay, straight, bi-, and I knew that I didn't like
26 the vast majority of men that I met and didn't trust any of them without a long, slow period of
27 getting to know somebody – years and years and years.
- 28 AJ: Smart girl.
- 29 BZ: Right? Particularly in Texas where one minute you're having a perfectly pleasant conversation
30 about the latest X-men comment and then somebody tells a racist joke or a sexist joke and says,
31 "It's just a joke, relax." I always felt betrayed by that – at every turn . . . it's never just a joke.
32 The words we use matter and if you use hateful words in your humor, that's a reflection –
33 you're perpetuating hatred. So, anyway, so I came out as bi- and it didn't really fit and I didn't . .
34 . in Texas in the 1980s, being bi- meant no gay men trusted you anyway, women were . . .

- 1 AJ: That might still be the case.
- 2 BZ: I'm sure. I know it is other places too, but then there was a panic if I ever told someone I was . .
3 . told a gay man I was bi-, there was actual panic, as if I was now a danger to them.
- 4 AJ: Right, right. Wow.
- 5 BZ: So, I never felt particularly included in the LGBT community, nor did I feel particularly committed
6 to living a bi- lifestyle, whatever that means. I was not particularly upset at the loss of absence
7 of men in my life, in trying to establish primary relationships with them.
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 BZ: So, yeah, I switched that to queer as soon as I started reading William S. Burroughs. I realized
10 that queer was a better label because it just meant I didn't quite fit, it was a more umbrella term
11 that I felt much more comfortable with – there was some amount of defiance to it, which I very
12 much appreciated.
- 13 AJ: Wow. This is actually one of my questions – what's the spanse of labels that you have identified
14 yourself with over time? And, you're just sort of naturally answering.
- 15 BZ: Knocking them off. I wore queer for about 20 years and was just comfortable that it meant, "I'm
16 still figuring stuff out, there's a difference . . . I'm not afraid of . . ." And, as I started to resolve
17 my issues with men, I found a larger percentage of men attractive and more and more
18 comfortable around some men – more willing to give men a chance to get emotionally close to
19 me. But, that was still a long struggle. And then, my world changed when I decided to start
20 taking anti-depressants and suddenly I wasn't struggling just to cope in my world every single
21 day and I realized I could wear dresses in public and be well-equipped to deal with it. Before I
22 was always like, "I really wish I could wear skirts or I could wear dresses in public because I just
23 feel I'd be more comfortable, I feel it's a more valid expression of the type of person I want to
24 be."
- 25 AJ: So, you had this clear thought . . .
- 26 BZ: Yes, early on, but I always was too afraid at the fights I would have to get in over it, and I was
27 too exhausted just surviving in the world. I didn't want to give people more targets, I was
28 already enough of a target just being me, I felt. And, a lot of that was the trauma from Texas, a
29 lot of that was the trauma from growing up, and I've worked to heal that. But, even as I worked
30 to heal it, it wasn't until I started actually taking anti-depressants and balanced out my neuro-
31 transmitters that I suddenly had the reserves to start expressing a more feminine side of myself.
32 I spoke with my . . .
- 33 AJ: When was that?
- 34 BZ: That was the beginning of 2015.
- 35 AJ: OK, wow – so it took a little while.
- 36 BZ: Yeah, pretty recently.

- 1 AJ: So, it took a little while.
- 2 BZ: Yes. It took a long time. And so, then I started going with the label non-binary trans.
- 3 AJ: Non-binary trans. What does that mean to you? I kind of know what it means, but we're on
4 tape so we've got to explain it to the other 80 million people who are going to watch this . . . it's
5 probably going to be like eight people, Branwen, so don't get your hopes up too much.
- 6 BZ: I'll tap my social network and we'll turn that eight into 16, it will be fine. To me, non-binary
7 trans means I do not identify as a man, I do not identify as a woman, and I'm OK with that.
- 8 AJ: Wow.
- 9 BZ: Some of my favorite stories about myself are people pointing out that I'm not a man. I had a
10 lesbian friend in the early 1990s who looked at me after I said something and said, "You really
11 are a lesbian separatist feminist trapped in a man's body," to which I now say, "I am no longer
12 trapped."
- 13 AJ: Right.
- 14 BZ: And then I had a little girl, four years old and I spent time with her family, she and her dad one
15 day were talking about the men in her life and she was listing off her uncles and her friend's
16 fathers. I spent a lot of time with this family and I was very close with these little girls, and their
17 father finally said, "What about Branwen?" At the time, he used Corvus, but what about . . . and
18 she said, "Oh, daddy, they're not a man; Corvus is Corvus." I clung to that because somebody
19 saw . . .
- 20 AJ: A four-year-old.
- 21 BZ: Yeah, somebody saw that whatever masculinity culture put on me or that I tried to live up to,
22 was totally irrelevant to the person I was trying to be. So, I decided I wanted to go on hormones
23 because I wanted to more fully physically express being non-binary and I called the Center for
24 Sexual Health at the U and for the first time in my life, I was completely honest with a medical
25 institution. For the first time ever, I just said what I felt and said what I needed and it felt so
26 good that when I . . . and to have it validated, and when I hung up the phone, I just sobbed. It
27 was such a relief, and two days later that comfort, that finally just feeling comfortable talking
28 about my medical self, my biological self, I realized that I am not non-binary and I never have
29 been. I'm a trans woman.
- 30 AJ: Wow.
- 31 BZ: And I decided that I am going to fully . . .
- 32 AJ: And that's where you're at right now? That's the label you're on – trans woman.
- 33 BZ: That's where I'm at right now, yes.
- 34 AJ: Wow, this narrative that you just shared is really . . . sort of exemplifies the sort of spectrum of
35 gender identity, and sexual identity.
- 36 BZ: Yes.

- 1 AJ: What's your sexual identity today?
- 2 BZ: I still very much like queer. I tend to use queer in all my public profiles because, again, it speaks
3 to a defiance, it speaks to a none of your business.
- 4 AJ: But you're married.
- 5 BZ: I'm married. I'm married to a cis woman, a cis . . . a woman who is now very, very happy to
6 accept the label lesbian, identify as a lesbian.
- 7 AJ: So, not queer.
- 8 BZ: Before she met me, she believed that she was a lesbian. And we met and she fell in love and
9 that was kind of that . . .
- 10 AJ: And discarded lesbian.
- 11 BZ: And said, "Well, I guess I'm not a lesbian." But it always was one little thing that kind of
12 bothered her, like she always, "I'll never be in a long-term relationship with a woman," and now
13 she gets to be and she gets to stay married to me and do it at the same time. So, that's pretty
14 wonderful.
- 15 AJ: That is – that's wonderful.
- 16 BZ: But, I wrote on your form, and this is the first time I've sort of done this out loud or on paper, I
17 think that pansexual is also a very valid description of my sexuality. I am monogamous, by
18 nature. I've had a lot of . . . I really need that close, intimate emotional support of a single
19 partner, I know that I struggle with jealousy, and so, at this point in my life, I'm not interested in
20 other partners – but, I also acknowledge that both gender and sexuality is this vast, enormous
21 thing that we're still trying to figure out, even those of us that are more versed in it are still
22 really trying to fully understand and create a vocabulary so we can all talk to each other – and
23 everybody is beautiful. I now find everybody beautiful. They have to be personally ugly in spirit
24 to me for me not to see the beauty in them and I feel that pansexual is a more sort of gracious
25 and open embracing of that concept – that your gender identity and your sexuality aren't
26 stumbling blocks for me to get to know you as a person and I can appreciate you on the levels
27 that you want to be appreciated at.
- 28 AJ: Have you ever dated a trans person?
- 29 BZ: I have not – that I'm aware of.
- 30 AJ: That you're aware of, that's a good point.
- 31 BZ: I've not been sexually active with everyone that I've dated so . . . and most of the people I've
32 dated would have said no, but now that I'm very publicly out and I'm still connected with most
33 of the people I've dated in my life they now get to say, "Yes, in fact, I have."
- 34 AJ: They've got to change their story. Oh, wow.
- 35 BZ: So many of them have actually told me that lots of things make more sense to them now too
36 about our relationship, which feels good.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, that's usually a fairly common outcome or by-product, if you will. What is your
2 relationship like with your family now?
- 3 BZ: I am in contact with my sister and her son, my nephew. I am in contact with my cousins on my
4 mother's side and sort of through them, my aunt and uncle, their parents, and one of their
5 children, who is an artist, on Instagram – we interact frequently because I love her art and she's
6 very supportive. Everybody that I am currently in connection with is very supportive and very
7 open about it and very, very lovely.
- 8 AJ: What about your mom?
- 9 BZ: I have not spoken to my mother since 2000.
- 10 AJ: Wow, 17 years.
- 11 BZ: Yeah, and I don't see that changing.
- 12 AJ: So, this had nothing to do with your gender identity?
- 13 BZ: It had to do with the way she treated the woman I was engaged to at the time. I realized that
14 while it's one thing for me to deal with people who won't deal with their own mental illness in
15 order to treat the people around them better . . . it's one thing for me to say, "Well, she's my
16 mother, I will try to work with this," but I'm not subjecting the people I love to it. I'm not. My
17 friend, my fiancé, was subjected to it and that was it, that was it. There was other signs, too,
18 that she wasn't taking care of her mental health well and I can't . . . I had my own mental health
19 to deal with. I'm not . . . there are things that she could do that would cause me to accept
20 communication with her again, with very strict boundaries, and recognizing the need for strict
21 boundaries is one of the things that she could do to make me comfortable being in touch with
22 her again.
- 23 AJ: Chicken or the egg.
- 24 BZ: Yeah, exactly.
- 25 AJ: What about your dad?
- 26 BZ: No. He cut off his relationship with me when I asked him to stop sending around racist email
27 forwards during the Gulf War.
- 28 AJ: Yeah, well – that will do it.
- 29 BZ: And he decided I was not the type of man he raised.
- 30 AJ: Oh, boy.
- 31 BZ: Which, clearly I'm not – something I take great pride in actually.
- 32 AJ: Are your parents from the south? I mean, you guys lived in the south.
- 33 BZ: My father is from the south; my mother is from Minnesota – but my father was from the south.
- 34 AJ: Got it.

- 1 BZ: He feels most comfortable there.
- 2 AJ: I mean, not that that is any determinate of people's sort of racial predilections, however . . .
- 3 BZ: There are racists everywhere.
- 4 AJ: There are, trust me.
- 5 BZ: There are open, out racists everywhere, but the overall culture in Texas, it's easier to . . . it's a
6 little easier to be outspoken about your racism than it is in other areas of the country.
- 7 AJ: Very well stated.
- 8 BZ: Where it has to be cloaked in cultural nicety.
- 9 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 10 BZ: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: So, wow. 2015 is the first time you went to the University of Minnesota program.
- 12 BZ: That's the first time I called them and then I got put on a long waiting list. I started going to
13 group and started wearing make-up. Because I was moving to a cold climate from a moderate
14 climate, I threw out my entire wardrobe and bought all new clothes from the women's
15 department and when we closed on our house in Portland and we put aside a budget for B's
16 transition is the official budget title, and I bought the wig and went to the MAC counter and
17 bought ridiculous amounts of makeup and . . .
- 18 AJ: The expensive makeup.
- 19 BZ: Well, I have very sensitive skin and a lot of makeup makes me break out immediately and MAC
20 makeup does not.
- 21 AJ: No, it's good, it's worth it.
- 22 BZ: But, it's expensive.
- 23 AJ: Actually, I use MAC products too but they are kind of spendy.
- 24 BZ: They are.
- 25 AJ: So, but my point was that you're relatively new to this experience.
- 26 BZ: I am.
- 27 AJ: I'm absolutely positive that it was an internal struggle for quite some time.
- 28 BZ: My life, yes.
- 29 AJ: But, externally . . . so what has been some of the challenges for you since you've come out,
30 Branwen?
- 31 BZ: Dealing with the in-laws, being patient and loving while they mis-gendered me and used my
32 dead name, placing my distress over that where it belonged.

- 1 AJ: Was it unconscious or was it intentionally destructive?
- 2 BZ: It was not intentionally destructive, it was . . .
- 3 AJ: Because there's a difference, right?
- 4 BZ: There is a very clear difference, there is a very clear difference. It was not intentionally
5 destructive, it was based on religious belief that God would want me to stay as I was assigned at
6 birth. But, education has helped with that.
- 7 AJ: I always say, "Well, why did God makes surgeons then?"
- 8 BZ: Right, right – yes.
- 9 AJ: If God, in his infinite wisdom . . .
- 10 BZ: I posted . . . I think this was a Twitter thread where someone said we shouldn't play God and I
11 said, "Well, where do we draw that line? If I have a headache should I not take an analgesic?"
- 12 AJ: Yeah.
- 13 BZ: "If I break my arm should I not get it set? If I have a heart attack, should I not have heart
14 surgery? If I have cancer should I not have it cut out? Where do we stop playing God?"
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 BZ: If I'm born with poor eyesight should I not wear glasses? We could take that to just about any
17 extreme really.
- 18 AJ: It's sort of ridiculous.
- 19 BZ: It is. But they've been very wonderful, actually, and have sought a Christian therapist who is
20 very supportive and says, "What would Jesus do? The loving thing, what would the loving thing
21 be in this situation?" And they're coming around and they use my name, and they use my
22 pronouns and it is wonderful. And throughout it all, even when they weren't, they were still
23 saying that they loved me and still asking questions and staying engaged, so it was good.
- 24 AJ: That's important. It's not an easy thing for people to understand.
- 25 BZ: It is not. It's not easy for me to understand and I'm going through it. I doing it and I'm
26 embracing it and I love it, but it's still a lot for me to learn. So, some of the biggest challenges,
27 when I first interviewed for the position at my current company, on the phone screen I had to
28 correct pronoun usage and I thought when I hung up, "That's it, they're not going to call back."
29 But they did, and here I am working there and they're wonderful.
- 30 AJ: Oh, to the interviewers.
- 31 BZ: Yes, to the interviewers, I had to correct their pronoun usage. It was at the very end of the call
32 and they said, "Well, I'm going to take this up to the team and I'm going to tell them he said . . ."
33 I went, "Ahh, just so you know, my correct pronouns are she/her," and didn't miss a beat, kept
34 doing it and then corrected and restated with she pronouns, but I still was like, "That's it, that
35 was the thing." But it wasn't, and they hired me. On International Women's Day, a man at work

- 1 started bothering a woman on his team because she didn't offer to get him coffee when she
2 went downstairs, only another woman on the team. And I, wearing my red shirt, and they were
3 also wearing red, I said, "Actually, today is the day we're not doing free emotional labor. If you
4 want coffee, you should go get it yourself and it might be nice if you offered to get us some
5 too."
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 BZ: And he was very upset by that and it was difficult, I suddenly panicked, "Oh, no, now I've done a
8 thing that's going to be frowned upon." So, on the one hand it felt really good, because here I
9 was being a woman in solidarity and standing up as a woman and being perceived as a woman
10 and reacted to as a woman in that moment. But, I was terrified. And then, walking to my car
11 that night . . . and all of that resolved really well – his team lead thanked me for speaking up,
12 other people have pinged me since and said – from other departments, "I understand you had a
13 rough time the other week, I just wanted to make sure everything is OK." It's been wonderful.
14 But then, walking to the car that evening, I was cat called on the street. A gentleman said, "Hey,
15 beautiful." And then took a second look and kind of laughed. I went from being momentarily
16 sort of thrilled that I was perceived as a beautiful woman and then angry that that would be the
17 response to seeing a beautiful woman on the street, an unwelcome comment, and then terrified
18 what might happen if he discovered I was trans and decided that he needed to compensate to
19 prove his masculinity for no reason. Again, it all went fine, it all went well. I walked on, no
20 further contact was had, but Facebook reminded me this week that a couple of years ago I said,
21 "I don't want to be a woman . . . why would I want to be a woman in this culture?" The things
22 that women have to put up with.
- 23 AJ: Oh, this is one of the memories that popped up.
- 24 BZ: A Facebook memory, and I was specifically talking about women who work in the video game
25 industry where I worked for a decade. I said, "I can't imagine how terrible it must be to be a
26 woman in this industry. I would never be able to do it." Now, I realize that I have to and my
27 empathy for what women go through, and that empathy that I've had my entire life, makes a lot
28 more sense to me now and I feel that I am equipped because of being raised as a boy and some
29 of the freedoms that come with being raised as a boy about being able to speak your mind and
30 stand your ground are still there.
- 31 AJ: Yeah, some of that male privilege translates, right?
- 32 BZ: It does. I'm not sure it translates into me now. I think that now I would be very judged if I
33 come across as too male – by men and women alike. But, the training is still there – that ability
34 to not . . . that willingness to stand up and say, "No, I don't have to accept that; as a woman, I
35 don't have to put up with that behavior." That training comes from being afforded male
36 privilege throughout the majority of my life at this point. I really hope that I get to spend more
37 than half my life as a woman – that's my goal, I want to spend more than half of my life as a
38 woman so that I can have new training and new experiences, more authentic experiences, and
39 eventually forget or at least . . .
- 40 AJ: I'm approaching that mark.

- 1 BZ: Are you? How lovely. Does it feel good?
- 2 AJ: It feels good, it's a long journey – but, yeah, it does. What have been some of the great things
3 about . . . ?
- 4 BZ: How excited my wife is. I was concerned about what it would mean for our relationship, not
5 because I mistrusted her . . .
- 6 AJ: Clearly, since over 50% of people who come out to their spouses end up in divorce – messy,
7 painful divorces.
- 8 BZ: Yeah. And I've got friends that are going through that and have gone through that. And so, I
9 was nervous, but she has been thrilled and it's given her an opportunity to really re-connect
10 with who she is and she's talked . . . it has deepened and enriched our relationship in ways that I
11 didn't imagine possible, so that has been a delight. It is so freeing to not be at parties and feel
12 like I need to stand in a room of guys talking about guy things and find a way to contribute. I am
13 so happy that everybody now just expects me to go hang-out with the women and talk about
14 women things and it's OK. Whereas, before there was always awkwardness around it – because
15 I always did that. I never wanted to sit around and talk with the guys for very long; I always
16 wanted to go . . .
- 17 AJ: About the Vikings or . . .
- 18 BZ: Yeah, or even the guys who were into board games or video games or even art or performing, or
19 the things that I love.
- 20 AJ: You just didn't want to talk to them . . .
- 21 BZ: I just never really felt like talking to the men about those things; I wanted to talk to the women
22 about those things. And now, that's so much . . . the social ease of which I do that is so freeing
23 and lovely.
- 24 AJ: Yeah.
- 25 BZ: There is nothing better than watching a good button-down Minnesotan sort of register that I'm
26 a trans woman and then be unable to contain their happiness that they get to treat me like a
27 human being and with courtesy. I don't know if I'm fully explaining that right but it's . . .
28 Minnesotan's have a very hard time, by and large, expressing their emotions – positive or
29 negative, I find. They're very supportive and they're very kind, but they tend to be very
30 moderate – particularly strangers. So, they're friendly but they're not . . . but, when I see people
31 get to sort of reflect on themselves as better versions of themselves because . . .
- 32 AJ: Because they recognize your humanity?
- 33 BZ: Yes. That's problematic, right? And, on some level I should be like, "Well, you shouldn't be that
34 delighted just to treat me like a human," but I see it as almost like they're delighted that they
35 get to prove to themselves that their humanity exists.
- 36 AJ: Oh, OK.

- 1 BZ: Because it's not about me. That response has nothing to do with me.
- 2 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 3 BZ: At all, and so I could be like, "Well, but . . ." and it's not everybody, but when a waitress comes
4 over to a table and says, "Can I get anything else for you ladies?" And, you can just tell she's like
5 so grateful to be a part of my positive experience in public, in a way. And, I know that she's
6 probably imagining that I have it off far worse than maybe I do because there is not a lot of direct
7 conflict that I have over being a trans woman – there's a lot of stares at grocery stores. We've
8 been staying in Eden Prairie with my mother-in-law while we get the house closed and dealt
9 with, and going to the grocery stores there, there are a lot of long stares at my pink purse –
10 long, confused stares at that, as if that is what they're confused about. So, I think – yeah, I am
11 grateful that they want to make an effort, I'm grateful that they're happy to make an effort, and
12 if it reinforces their sense of their own humanity, I hope that that carries through to some day
13 when they need to stand up for a trans woman in public who is being harassed – that that gives
14 them the courage and momentum to do the hard work as well as the easy work, because it's
15 easy to be smiley and happy to see me when you hand me a coffee.
- 16 AJ: Right, and they want a tip too, right?
- 17 BZ: Not at Starbuck's, but yeah at the restaurants. But, it's harder to stand up for somebody when
18 you see them being the target of abuse. And so, I hope that there is momentum there, I guess.
- 19 AJ: That's beautiful. To the extent that you feel comfortable, talk to me about medical
20 interventions. You mentioned that you just started hormones a week, did you say?
- 21 BZ: Yes, today is the seventh day, so tomorrow will be one week.
- 22 AJ: Today is the seventh day. Wow. Are you perpetually starving?
- 23 BZ: I am not, actually. I have an odd relationship with eating anyway, but no – I've been doing
24 pretty well.
- 25 AJ: All right-y. It's coming, dear.
- 26 BZ: Yeah, I'm sure it is – I'm sure it is. I usually have very quick reactions to side effects from
27 medication but this isn't exactly medications and it's nothing I've experienced before, so I'm
28 expecting that in a week or two or three or when I'm least prepared to deal with it . . .
- 29 AJ: I think everybody has . . . because it's a fight, it's sort of a . . .
- 30 BZ: Right, balancing my levels.
- 31 AJ: Testosterone versus estrogen and . . . it takes a while for estrogen to get its strength up to deal
32 with the testosterone, which is very powerful. So, it takes a little while to kind of build up.
- 33 BZ: Yeah, I'm sure it's coming. I've been told it will be like going through puberty again and I've
34 decided to cast that as a positive thing because now I get to go through puberty as the correct
35 gender. So, bring it on puberty.
- 36 AJ: Right – wow. Any other plans beyond hormones?

- 1 BZ: Yes, I'm already doing some research and looking into gender confirmation surgery.
- 2 AJ: Oh, wow – that's big stuff.
- 3 BZ: It is something I very much want to do.
- 4 AJ: Have you checked into your insurance to see if they will cover it?
- 5 BZ: Yes. If I've been on hormones for a year and have been living as a woman for a year and have
6 the appropriate letters, it is something my insurance will pay for.
- 7 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 8 BZ: So, that is good. It's a couple years out, but I'm fighting for it – we're saving for it. I'm starting
9 hair removal this weekend so that I can stop shaving, which really tears up my neck, which
10 makes me very happy.
- 11 AJ: Are you going to do laser or electrolysis?
- 12 BZ: I'm going to do laser. I have some gray in my facial hair so there will have to be some
13 electrolysis, but we'll start with laser and get rid of the bulk of it. And, I'm considering top
14 surgery but that is for a ways down the road.
- 15 AJ: You've got to see what the hormones . . .
- 16 BZ: Exactly, what do the hormones provide me with and where do I want to go from there, and that
17 could take a few years.
- 18 AJ: Yeah. Wow, thanks for sharing that. I appreciate it. Was there a specific moment or person or
19 an organization that had a significant impact on you related to your gender identity? I know you
20 mentioned to me that this Minnesota Transgender Health group that you go to, they sort of
21 were helpful around hormones and resources.
- 22 BZ: They've been very wonderful – just giving me information, watching women's experiences at
23 various stages in the process, hearing stories about the number hormones were doing on them
24 and their thought processes. I'm in a very different situation than most of the women in that
25 group, I am older than most of the women in that group, I'm in a different financial position
26 than most of the women in that group. So, I sometimes feel that gulf very strongly but what I
27 mostly feel there is sisterhood, just complete and total accepting sisterhood, and that I very
28 much appreciate and it's been very helpful.
- 29 AJ: Wow, that's awesome. When is the first time you ever met a transgender person – that you
30 knew was transgender?
- 31 BZ: Oh, that I knew was transgender? That is a very good question. I briefly met a trans woman in
32 the early 1990s in Santa Cruz – like through a friend of a friend, but not well enough to talk
33 about anything super meaningful other than the recent earthquake and the price of rent and
34 things like that.
- 35 AJ: So, you didn't share your internal struggle?

- 1 BZ: No, no. And then I've met, in the more recent years – in the last 17 years through my time in
2 the video game industry, I've met many trans women and have talked, at great length, about
3 gender identity and sexuality and their experiences and my experiences and that has been very
4 formative and very helpful. There is . . . I have one non-binary trans friend who said, "I hope I
5 don't look back at this in 20 years and think it was just a fad and regret having experienced this."
6 I said, "I don't think that will be the case, I think that the conversations that we had 10 years
7 ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago around gender identity were not very nuanced and we are
8 gaining a lot of nuance and a lot of understanding and the momentum is growing and in the
9 public discourse there are a lot more labels, there are a lot more identities, there is a lot more
10 conversation, there's a lot more comparing of experiences and I only see that getting stronger
11 going forward and more prevalent going forward." And, I have seen conservatives hostilely say
12 that there are a million genders and I don't want to have to learn them all, and I think that
13 would be wonderful – I think it would be wonderful if there were a million genders and I
14 couldn't learn them all.
- 15 AJ: There's a lot, there's a lot of them.
- 16 BZ: Yeah, but I don't see . . . I think that's wonderful. I think that being able to express ourselves as
17 we feel ourselves to be is important and I think that if we can break down these cultural barriers
18 that would be wonderful. I think the people that have managed to do that in their lives and find
19 comfort expressing themselves as they express themselves, more power to them. I hope they
20 also give themselves permission to go in a different direction at some point if they feel pulled to
21 do so – it's never too late to change, or transition.
- 22 AJ: Or transition – or evolve and grow, which is hopefully what all humans are doing.
- 23 BZ: Yes, exactly.
- 24 AJ: We do know that some people stagnate their own evolution, but that's on them, I guess.
- 25 BZ: Exactly.
- 26 AJ: So, what was coming out to your wife like?
- 27 BZ: So, she's a . . .
- 28 AJ: Did you write her a letter? Did you send an email? Text?
- 29 BZ: No, we'd been talking about it since I called . . . we'd been talking about it every step of the way.
30 She's been asking questions ever since I started going to cocktail parties wearing dresses.
- 31 AJ: Oh, OK.
- 32 BZ: Earlier last year.
- 33 AJ: Did you guys discuss that?
- 34 BZ: Yes, absolutely.
- 35 AJ: Prior to the . . . ?

- 1 BZ: Yes, absolutely. She went dress shopping with me.
- 2 AJ: OK, good. I just didn't want . . . I was trying to figure out if you guys met up at the cocktail party
3 and you were wearing a cocktail dress and she was wearing Levi's.
- 4 BZ: No, she came dress shopping with me – and they were fancy cocktail parties so we were all
5 dressed up. But, I talked about how excited I was to wear a dress and went out and found
6 dresses that worked for me. I was, for a while, trying to just wear the dress but still presenting
7 very male, as I was at the time. And, we talked about that – she said, "I don't find that as
8 attractive as when you go full drag." I had done full drag several times in my life, usually for
9 Halloween or Cons or things like that.
- 10 AJ: Sure.
- 11 BZ: And, have often been completely mistaken by people I know very well for a woman they've not
12 met before.
- 13 AJ: OK.
- 14 BZ: Which is another little interesting tidbit that I failed to mentioned earlier. So, that was part of it
15 and then we started talking about . . . she said, "Well, do you think you'd want breasts?" I was
16 like, "I don't know, I don't know if I'd want breasts, I don't know if I'd want to get breast
17 enhancements or not." And so, we bought some false breasts and I tried them and it was a little
18 odd at first and then I scaled back, but then I started wearing a bra and inserts to work under my
19 work shirts because it made me feel more confident and more me to just do that little thing for
20 myself. And we've talked every step of the way. Our early courtship was hammering out a
21 language that we would use to discuss our relationship.
- 22 AJ: Which on the language?
- 23 BZ: It was working out a language . . .
- 24 AJ: Oh, hammering out a language. OK, I'm sorry.
- 25 BZ: Yeah, hammering it out – working on it together to figure out what did we mean when we use
26 certain terms so that we'd be on the same page.
- 27 AJ: Got it.
- 28 BZ: How would we talk about talking about our relationship, how would we – when we were at a
29 conflict point, how would we resolve that, what would it look like.
- 30 AJ: So, good communication techniques.
- 31 BZ: Communication has always been huge in our relationship and it continued throughout this
32 process. So, she was actually working out of the city the day that I posted to Facebook, "So,
33 guess what? I am a trans woman, my name is Branwen Danielle Zakariasen, my pronouns are
34 she/her."
- 35 AJ: You came out on Facebook?

- 1 BZ: I did, but she and I had talked about it. So, she was not at all blindsided by this.
- 2 AJ: She was not totally surprised, OK.
- 3 BZ: And, I then called her and talked to her at the first opportunity and said, “So, as we’ve been
4 talking about, my mind is made up, I announced it on Facebook.” She immediately went to
5 Facebook to go and heart my post and voice her support.
- 6 AJ: Ohhh, that’s a lovely coming out story. Oh, my God.
- 7 BZ: Yeah, and the support from my friend group has been amazing and incredible.
- 8 AJ: You were living in Portland at the time?
- 9 BZ: No, I was living here – yeah, that was after we moved back here. But, the Portland family has
10 been very supportive, the Minneapolis family . . . yeah, I lived here for 13 years – from 1991 to
11 2003.
- 12 AJ: So, you had a lot of friends.
- 13 BZ: I have a lot of friends here that I’ve known for a very long time and they have all been so
14 wonderful. The first time I went to a party after having announced that, everyone was,
15 “Branwen,” and gave me big hugs. It was really, really . . . I couldn’t have had a better coming
16 out I don’t think.
- 17 AJ: That’s so sweet. What about your sister?
- 18 BZ: I actually decided that I should re-connect with her. I had disconnected from her on Facebook
19 for a while. Our relationship can be difficult. We grew up in . . . I like to say we grew up with
20 hell and we each carry a piece of that hell with us and it makes it hard sometimes.
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 BZ: So, I re-connected with her on Facebook and shared with her. She was completely supportive
23 and wonderful and loving.
- 24 AJ: So, social media has been your friend?
- 25 BZ: It has, it has. I learned to become very reliant on social media when I worked in the video game
26 industry.
- 27 AJ: And you’re techy – that’s what I was going to ask you about this whole . . . because you’ve
28 mentioned it a couple of times. What did you do in the video industry?
- 29 BZ: I was a writer and designer, primarily writer, mostly on mobile and casual games – games
30 targeted to women age 30-45.
- 31 AJ: So, like Candy Crush or something?
- 32 BZ: More of the narrative and story-based games.
- 33 AJ: Oh, OK. So, you’re a writer.

- 1 BZ: Yes.
- 2 AJ: OK. Do you do the actual behind the scenes development of games?
- 3 BZ: Not of games. I do do programming and I've taught programming to elementary school kids. I
4 have a rather creative and exploration-driven method of teaching programming that works
5 better for creative kids, at-risk kids, rebellious kids – kids who are a lot like me growing up. I
6 have learned how to sort of teach programming more like a liberal art and something to be
7 excited about, rather than a stale cut-and-dried logical approach.
- 8 AJ: That's cool.
- 9 BZ: That's what I was doing in my last job in Portland, teaching kids, particularly kids from low
10 income schools and at-risk kids.
- 11 AJ: Do you feel . . . you mentioned earlier that the video game industry is sort of sexist, you didn't
12 use that language but you said . . .
- 13 BZ: It is, yes.
- 14 AJ: . . . women have a hard time.
- 15 BZ: It is, it is sexist and racist.
- 16 AJ: Do you think you could work in that industry now?
- 17 BZ: I don't think that I want to.
- 18 AJ: I'm not sure, but it seems like your current position is a departure from sort of the . . .
- 19 BZ: It's a little departure from that, but it is about communication and it's about communication
20 around technology.
- 21 AJ: OK.
- 22 BZ: And one of the things I really struggled to do in my current role providing tech support is provide
23 education and help develop self-sufficiency and mastery among our customers so that they feel
24 empowered to more effectively use our tools and not just turn to us every time they have a
25 problem. We're happy to help them, we love to help them, but I also want to . . .
- 26 AJ: Yeah, because don't you charge them every time you help them?
- 27 BZ: No, no – that's part of their plan. They get it as part of their annual plan so we don't charge
28 extra.
- 29 AJ: So, you charge them up front.
- 30 BZ: Yes, they get charged for the service and the help comes with the service.
- 31 AJ: OK.
- 32 BZ: But, I do want to help people better understand technology using creative metaphors and
33 different approaches to talking about things, and so I'm using this as an exercise to take that

- 1 approach to an older generation. So, I'm not working with kids right now, I'm working more
2 with adults – solopreneurs and things of that nature, which will only make me a better
3 communicator about technology. Eventually, I suspect I will go back to teaching.
- 4 AJ: What about to the video game industry?
- 5 BZ: So, when I left the video game industry it was because . . .
- 6 AJ: Because it still is on an upward swing right now.
- 7 BZ: Yes, it is. So, I decided I was not a large enough lever to make a change from the inside. I did
8 not have that sort of cache. I ran for the board of the organization that represents members of
9 the video game industry, the IGDA, and I was not elected in favor of electing someone who is a
10 big-name designer in the industry that was widely recognized. And, I decided then that I was
11 not going to be able to effect the change I wanted to change from within the industry, so I
12 would go to the next generation of kids who want to make video games and teach them
13 teamwork and communication along with their development skills and show them that you
14 don't have to be a white boy to be successful as a programmer and just provide tools and
15 opportunities to kids and show them how many free tools there are out there for them to use
16 right now to make games and connect with that and make the change in the future.
- 17 AJ: Sure.
- 18 BZ: To benefit them, as opposed to trying to make a change right now to benefit . . .
- 19 AJ: Wow, that's awesome. You talked about your wife sort of re-connecting with this identity
20 around lesbianism, that's not really a word . . . around being a lesbian.
- 21 BZ: Yes – as a lesbian.
- 22 AJ: And, you've sort of gone through some machinations around sexual identity, what do you think
23 the relationship is between the L, the G, the B, and the T? Does the T belong?
- 24 BZ: I think it does when you look at it from a socio-political standpoint. The rights . . . so, first of all,
25 from a cultural standpoint, gender and sex are horribly conflated in non-productive ways, by
26 both people outside the LGBTQIA+ community, and within it. And so, I think . . .
- 27 AJ: I think it's so conflated because there are some real . . .
- 28 BZ: Yes, there's a lot of overlap – yes.
- 29 AJ: Yeah.
- 30 BZ: Yes, they're distinct things, but they're not necessarily separate things, if that makes sense.
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 BZ: And so, I think politically it is important for us to recognize where our commonalities are and
33 work together to support each other and not throw each other under the bus because we get
34 our agenda forward over someone else's agenda, which I think often times happens as well
35 within the community. And I'm starting to feel this about feminism as well. There has been a

- 1 recent conversation around feminism and what it means for trans women and whether or not
2 trans women are women or if they're just trans, etc.
- 3 AJ: It's a long-standing conversation but it has been heating up lately – yes.
- 4 BZ: It is, but there's been a recent uproar over it and it's got me thinking that certainly my
5 experiences as a trans woman growing up and not being aware of it are very different from a cis
6 woman growing up and being aware that she is a cis woman.
- 7 AJ: Yeah.
- 8 BZ: Absolutely, they're very different and unique. But, my experience growing up as a trans woman
9 is very different than your experience growing up as a trans woman, and they're both very
10 unique. We have commonalities and we have things that we need to support each other for,
11 and we need to have a common language about how we talk about our place in the larger
12 community, but we also need to respect and recognize that you have different needs than I
13 have, you need different support – it's equity, right. We can't just give everybody the same
14 level of support or the short people still can't see over the fence and the tall people can still
15 reach the fruit on the trees.
- 16 AJ: That's the definition of equity.
- 17 BZ: Exactly. We have to really apply . . .
- 18 AJ: We need to put a stump so that the shorter person can actually . . .
- 19 BZ: Right, the short person needs a higher box; the tall person doesn't need a box at all.
- 20 AJ: Exactly.
- 21 BZ: And so, I think that's important for us all to really focus on and yes, trans women are women;
22 yes, there is also a different dialogue around us, but cis women need to recognize that there is
23 still a greater cultural conversation around just the state of womanhood, that it is important
24 that we're included in. I think the same is true for the LGBTQIA+ crowd. Yes, we are unique.
25 We have struggles that gay white men do not.
- 26 AJ: Right.
- 27 BZ: But, wins for them should be wins for us and they should also help us get the wins we need.
- 28 AJ: Well, wins for us should be wins for them.
- 29 BZ: Yes, exactly.
- 30 AJ: And, I guarantee you that it is. I don't want to make this interview all about me, but I just briefly
31 will state that homophobia is really about transphobia or gender phobia or gender non-
32 conformance, because when somebody is driving down the street and they yell, "Faggot," they
33 have no idea who you sleep with.
- 34 BZ: Right.

- 1 AJ: They just know that you're transgressing the gender norms that they have. To me, that is the
2 conflation of gender and sexuality. So, if gay people want to end homophobia, then they need
3 to start with ending transphobia. That's all I'll say.
- 4 BZ: OK.
- 5 AJ: What, in your opinion, Branwen, is the agenda for the transgender community? I know this is
6 sort of a . . . I mean, I can only imagine that . . . you're pretty newly out, and so maybe a lot of
7 your intention is really focused internally and on yourself, which is completely understandable,
8 but, you know, it is a part of a larger social construct and a political movement as well as this
9 deeply personal internal struggle.
- 10 BZ: Yes.
- 11 AJ: And so, what do you see as the agenda for the transgender movement going forward?
- 12 BZ: I think that our most immediate and necessary actions are to fight to keep anti-trans legislation
13 from being put into effect. In every state and every city, we need to fight to not only keep
14 harmful legislation from being put into effect, we need to pre-emptively get legislation that
15 protects our rights in place and locks down. That's a complex task because it's not just a matter
16 of pushing legislation through, right? It's a matter of educating the public so that they are in
17 support of it and they see the benefit.
- 18 AJ: And electing officials who will do that too.
- 19 BZ: Yes, exactly. It's a huge task, but it seems to me to be our most compelling thing is right now we
20 need to do everything we can to establish a legal precedent for giving us the rights that we
21 deserve as human beings, who happen to be trans people.
- 22 AJ: Yes, and the right to . . .
- 23 BZ: The right to use our restrooms, the right to change our birth certificates gender markers, the
24 right to health care, the right to a harassment-free school environment, the right to be trans in
25 public without hiding it – or worrying about the social and cultural backlash. I should not have
26 to be worried about getting fired because I'm a trans woman – and I'm not in my current
27 company . . .
- 28 AJ: Yay.
- 29 BZ: . . . because they've been wonderful and supportive and amazing.
- 30 AJ: And because people have created those protections that you talked about, at least here in the
31 state of Minnesota.
- 32 BZ: Yes, so we need those protections in every state because we're certainly not going to get them
33 at the federal level right now and . . .
- 34 AJ: Maybe not right now, but it can happen.
- 35 BZ: It can happen, but it's going to be a fight and I'd like to see that done at the local level first and
36 then we bring it to the nation and say, "Look, we've woken up all of these people at the state

1 level who now are on our side, this is a done deal – make it federal.” If there’s a federal
2 government left in four years.

3 AJ: Wow.

4 BZ: It seems to be being dismantled from the inside so, I’m not sure.

5 AJ: Yeah, that’s a longer conversation, I think.

6 BZ: Different interview.

7 AJ: But one that we need to have as a culture and as a society, as Americans I think we need to
8 make some choices about what America we want to live in.

9 BZ: Someone said to me, “Wouldn’t this have been a lot easier to do 20 years ago?” I said, “It
10 absolutely would have been and it’s probably good that I’m doing it now when it’s harder.” It’s
11 probably good to come out as a trans woman. I think it’s . . .

12 AJ: Who said that to you?

13 BZ: A friend who has known me for a long time.

14 AJ: A trans friend?

15 BZ: No.

16 AJ: OK.

17 BZ: They said, “Why didn’t you do this years ago?”

18 AJ: It’s a little easier now than it was 20 years ago.

19 BZ: It is, it is. But they were like, “You had a really liberal social friend group, they were very open –
20 like the political climate wasn’t as toxic and awful it is right now.” I went, “Well, from your
21 perspective,” like maybe it’s not, but it’s not been a great political climate for a lot of people for
22 a long time, but OK.

23 AJ: For a long time, yeah.

24 BZ: But, I actually think . . . it’s right when it’s right, it happens when it happens. I am glad that I get
25 to be an example of someone going through this when it might be tempting to hide it, and being
26 very open about it because I know my friends are already talking to their kids about it in positive
27 and encouraging ways.

28 AJ: Yeah.

29 BZ: They’re letting their kids know, “Hey, whatever you need to do, whoever you are, you can tell
30 us. We love Branwen, we always have and we’re always going to, and she’s brave and
31 courageous so you can be as brave and courageous about anything you need to be as well.”
32 And so, the fact that my friends are talking to their young kids about this stuff where they would
33 not have had an opportunity to necessarily otherwise, makes me very happy.

34 AJ: Oh, wow – that’s so amazing. Branwen, last question.

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- 1 BZ: OK.
- 2 AJ: Wow, I'm having a hard time getting it out. I'm just going to ask, is there anything that I haven't
3 asked you that you feel really compelled to talk about?
- 4 BZ: No, I think if I were put on the spot by someone trying to understand what I'm going through
5 who wasn't pushing through with me and proving to be very resistant, which I have not dealt
6 with at this point, I would just talk about authenticity and how authenticity is something we all
7 deserve and we should all be striving to live, to be truly authentic in every moment of our lives
8 and not feel that we need to carve ourselves up to fit into the work box and the home box; we
9 should strive to be authentic at all times and that's . . . my being a trans woman is a reflection of
10 my struggle to be authentic, to be truly me in all situations. I feel that's a right everyone should
11 be afforded regardless of their gender identity or sexuality. In that way, that's something I have
12 in common with even people who try and say I don't have the right to be a woman because of
13 the arbitrary declaration at birth that I was a boy – they also strive to be their authentic selves,
14 whether they know it or not, and I wish that they had the freedom to do that so that they didn't
15 feel the need to push outward and try to harm other people's authenticity because I think if we
16 truly live in a culture where people were fostered and encouraged to be their authentic selves, it
17 would solve a lot of the misunderstandings and we'd have a lot more conversations and a lot
18 fewer shouting matches.
- 19 AJ: Wow, very well stated. Branwen, I just want to say thank you so much for being a part of this
20 project, for meeting me here today, for sharing so much of yourself – for being authentic.
- 21 BZ: Thank you. It's a real pleasure and an honor to be a part of this.
- 22 AJ: Wonderful.
- 23 BZ: It makes me . . . I have never been a part of a community before where I felt so much a part of a
24 community before I felt I put in the time. It's lovely and wonderful and validating and I
25 appreciate it.
- 26 AJ: Wonderful. Until we meet again, my friend.
- 27 BZ: Thank you very much.