

Marlene Somers
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

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

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

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

Andrea Jenkins

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Marlene Somers -MS
3

4 AJ: Hello, my name is Andrea Jenkins.

5 MS: Hello Andrea.

6 AJ: How are you?

7 MS: I'm great.

8 AJ: Very good. I'm the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project at the University of
9 Minnesota Tretter Collection. I'm very thrilled that Marlene Somers is here with us today to talk
10 about some of her experiences and talk about her life and talk about her gender identity for our
11 collection. So, Marlene can you tell us just a few things about yourself. What are your preferred
12 gender pronouns, what is your gender identity as you know it, and then what was your gender
13 assigned at birth?

14 MS: Well hello everybody. I am Marlene Somers. I'm a male to female transsexual. I am pre-
15 operative, and basically I guess I've been in two lives at once.

16 AJ: Wow.

17 MS: I do have many other obligations in my other life and I become Marlene whenever I can. It helps
18 me to feel like the woman I always knew I wanted to be.

19 AJ: How often is that – when you are able to express yourself as Marlene?

20 MS: It goes back many, many decades but whenever I have a chance I do. Gosh, it's very, very
21 difficult to say, it's very sporadic. But I have . . . over the years I've been going out in public
22 constantly and there's never any question about who I am or how people react to me, it's
23 always as a female.

24 AJ: So it's a positive experience?

25 MS: Oh very much so. Basically a gender . . . well, you just don't even think about it, you just blend
26 in with all the other genetic women of the world, really, and that's what we're trying to do. At
27 least some of us are, not all.

28 AJ: Yeah, some people embrace the difference in different ways and hope to stand out as unique
29 individuals, I think.

30 MS: So, do I prefer . . . which pronouns? It depends. If I'm presenting as Marlene, obviously she and
31 her is who I am, that's who everybody refers to me as such when I'm out talking with them. And
32 when I'm presenting as the other person that lives in this house, it's just the normal life of that
33 other person. So it's a blending of two lives in one, which is difficult. But it's . . . well, a
34 psychologist at the Clark Institute in Toronto, Canada, Ray Blanchard, I believe, was his name, he
35 expressed the theory, because nobody really knows why it is that . . . the exact cause of why we

1 do what we do, transgender people, but he came up with the autogynephelia theory. Are you
2 familiar with that?

3 AJ: I am familiar, but you can talk about it though.

4 MS: Many males are sexually aroused by the thought of having female bodies and this often leads to
5 sexual re-assignment surgery. I do fit that category but over the years, as you progress, it kind
6 of maybe fades but the idea of being female is there, it's natural, and it kind of overtakes
7 everything on the sexual side. But I do fit that mold. It started . . . well, I go back to maybe age
8 six or seven. I can recall being fascinated with ladies clothing, I don't know why. I think I was
9 probably enamored by the beauty of women in all their finery and so much that I wanted to
10 emulate them and be part of it. I think I do recall one time getting some of my mother's nylon
11 stockings, taking them to my bedroom, under the sheets and trying them on. Well mother came
12 in, removed them. I think that happened twice. I don't know why I did that, but I did it. I do
13 remember thinking they were way to big and I looked forward to the day when they'd be taut.
14 Why these things start, who knows? But it kind of took off from there.

15 AJ: So where did you grow up, Marlene?

16 MS: I grew up in Minneapolis.

17 AJ: In Minneapolis.

18 MS: Hometown, right.

19 AJ: North Minneapolis, South Minneapolis – what part of town?

20 MS: South. I lived here, well – all my life, in the upper Midwest area here.

21 AJ: Would you consider your family to be middle class, upper middle class? How would you
22 describe your upbringing?

23 MS: Oh, I guess it was upper middle class. My parents are both deceased but they lived long lives.
24 My father was a professional person. They stayed together all their lives.

25 AJ: Did your mom work outside of the home?

26 MS: No she didn't. She didn't. She was a college graduate but she didn't have to do that and she
27 really . . . oh, I guess for a while she worked for father, but that was way back. And they knew of
28 my, I guess you'd call it, cross-dressing or transvestism, but to me I was always so embarrassed
29 as a young person.

30 AJ: They did know of it?

31 MS: Well my mother could tell that her clothing was re-arranged and things like that. Same old
32 story. One time I was out, a teenager – I just couldn't stay in, I had to get dressed and go out,
33 and I came home and they came home before I did and oh dear. To make a long story short, it
34 would have been a perfect time to start talking about myself but I undressed in the garage and

- 1 went in the house and they started talking and I just pretty much clammed up – embarrassing.
2 Had I been more . . . and I think the young people of today have so much more knowledge about
3 the subject, they're talkative of it – even at the grade school level.
- 4 AJ: Sure.
- 5 MS: Anyhow, I just pretty much wouldn't talk about it. So it was always private.
- 6 AJ: Did you have siblings?
- 7 MS: One brother, quite a bit younger. He's fine. He has no knowledge at all. Actually nobody does.
8 I do have a family, my own family, and my significant other, for lack of another word, knows of
9 my cross dressing but she hates it, really hates it. So I have to do it in private. And so I just do it
10 in private.
- 11 AJ: How does that make you feel?
- 12 MS: Well, I understand how she feels. It doesn't bother me, it would be nice if it was the other way
13 around. But it makes life complicated, so I live with it.
- 14 AJ: So does your younger brother know about your . . .?
- 15 MS: No, most people would be totally flabbergasted if I were to say, "OK world, here I am." They
16 would be flabbergasted, it wouldn't fit the mold at all. So I just keep two separate lives, I guess.
17 It's temporary, when I get a chance I get out.
- 18 AJ: Are you familiar with Caitlyn Jenner?
- 19 MS: Yes, I've seen her on television.
- 20 AJ: She waited until she was 65 years old to really come out and tell the world about her truest
21 identity. How do you feel like that impacted you personally, but also the transgender
22 movement or the transgender phenomenon as a whole?
- 23 MS: Well I think Caitlyn is such a prominent person in the world today with her background as an
24 Olympic athlete. I don't pay any attention to the Kardashian family but I understand they have
25 quite a following in the entertainment world and apparently he or she, whichever it was, was
26 part of that program. So a lot of people . . . and her coming out has put transsexualism in front
27 of America very, very . . . more so than it has been in the past. So I think it's a door opening, or
28 showing a new window – something to see what's going on in the transsexual community. I do
29 think Caitlyn, she's sort of pretty in her own way but she needs a lot more work, I think, as far as
30 feminine mannerisms, voice training. In fact, I've watched her on TV a few times and she's said
31 she hasn't done anything with her voice, and that really distracts, but maybe it will change later.
32 What do you think of Caitlyn yourself?
- 33 AJ: What do I think of Caitlyn?
- 34 MS: Just briefly.

- 1 AJ: I think that she certainly has created a greater awareness around the issues of transgender and
2 transsexual people. Her sort of outspokenness has created conversations with people who
3 probably never, ever thought about this issue and never had any contact with people who
4 identify as transgender or transsexual. I think that she was able to have a lot of surgery and
5 things before she fully came out into the world, which is not always an option for most
6 transgender people and so that has helped. But also, I'm amazed that – you know, for the most
7 part, the reaction to Caitlyn has been pretty positive.
- 8 MS: I noticed that. I think it's wonderful.
- 9 AJ: And she, you know, has sort of been able to be out and be herself in a world that's accepting of
10 her so I think that means that things are starting to change in our society.
- 11 MS: I think you're right. Many people are accepting it and it's not so much strange as it used to be.
12 That's nice for people like us that would like to go that route.
- 13 AJ: Absolutely. So, how do you describe yourself today? You said a male to female transsexual.
- 14 MS: I wish to be a female but right now it doesn't seem to be in the cards because I probably don't
15 have the courage to jump on the bandwagon. I still probably would . . . to explain me to all
16 these people, friends, you can understand that it's difficult. I guess when people do it, finally
17 they get it behind them and then they move on. I haven't got to that point. Chicken.
- 18 AJ: Have you always described yourself as a male to female transsexual or has that changed over
19 time?
- 20 MS: No, it's always been that way. There's nothing in-between . . . well, I guess . . .
- 21 AJ: Some people identify as a cross dresser and they just like to wear women's clothing but they
22 never think about having surgery.
- 23 MS: It's way beyond that. I guess it's different than that because when I dress as a woman it makes
24 me feel like I am the woman that I want to be. But I'll admit that early on, there was a sexual
25 nature to it all. You can only really get sexually aroused by thinking of yourself as a female.
- 26 AJ: And that's true for you?
- 27 MS: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: The only way that you can really ever be aroused sexually was to think of yourself as a female?
- 29 MS: Pretty much, yeah. When I'm with a genetic woman, I would be aroused but I'd have to think of
30 myself as such.
- 31 AJ: So in that situation, you thought of yourself as a lesbian?
- 32 MS: No, no. Well, I would just think of myself as a female doing female things, whatever it was.
33 Many things. Well, it was just a fantasy in your mind. I was always a female relating to a male.
34 Males to male, I don't like that at all. If other people want to that it, that's their business, but to

1 me man to man is funny. Two ladies together, that's kind of nice, I guess. But it's like Ray
2 Blanchard said, a lot of gentlemen from the Clark Institute . . .

3 AJ: Clark Institute?

4 MS: Yeah, it's up in Toronto. I've read thousands of stories about . . . ever since . . . well, I go back to
5 Christine Jorgensen in the 1950s and over the years I just did a lot of reading and everything. At
6 any rate, I was basically born a male, still am, but I have this category of wanting to be female.
7 So I just have it categorized and whenever I get a chance, she comes out. It would be nice to be
8 forever but . . . you get all these obligations and if you don't . . . when you're young, if you
9 decide to go the route of transitioning, it's much easier to do it than if you go to college, a
10 career, military if you do that, marriage, family, children. Now all of a sudden you've got a
11 tremendous amount of baggage to deal with, it makes it harder to do what you always wanted
12 to do. Some people can go ahead and jump in with both feet, but so far I've been chicken to do
13 that. At any rate, I have a wonderful life on the other side of the fence too so it's hard to . . .

14 AJ: Absolutely. Let me ask you this, Marlene. If there was a pill that you could take to make you
15 not feel like a woman, would you take that pill?

16 MS: No. And I've read many, many articles about that pill and there are various answers. I admit
17 that it would certainly make life a whole lot easier, a whole lot. You spend hours and decades of
18 time involved and your desires, you know. And if you didn't have that, gee I probably would
19 have built a monument or something, I don't know. At any rate it's such a wonderful, exciting
20 feeling to feel this way and present as such – and be accepted as such, that's what is so nice.
21 Over the years I've kind of developed a persona that allows me to go out in public and nobody
22 ever bothers to say, "What are you? Are you strange?" Earlier when you don't have any
23 experience, it's kind of awkward. I remember going out to a nightclub and somebody sat down
24 talking to me and I didn't have a personality. I was always this other person and now all of a
25 sudden I'm presenting as such, how do I act? What do I say? There was nothing there.

26 AJ: How did you develop a personality?

27 MS: Oh it just comes with time – and you go out and you talk to people, you read about things. I've
28 met other girls like myself and there's all different kinds of us as there are all different kinds of
29 so-called straight people. So you learn a lot. What was your question? How did I learn to do
30 that?

31 AJ: Yeah, how did you come to developing . . .

32 MS: You know, I guess it just comes with practice. You observe genetic women and how they talk
33 and move their body and that and you try to emulate that, pretty soon it just happens.

34 AJ: Sort of like a lot of people describe it as growing up all over again, like learning this new way of
35 being in the world.

36 MS: I guess so. But for me it goes back so far I can't really remember anymore. It just kind of grows
37 and you put the pieces together – it seems to work. Like I said, I do have other friends in the

- 1 community. In fact I'm going out with another one of them tomorrow and she completed her
2 transition a little over a year ago. Everything is fine, going real well.
- 3 AJ: And you guys are friends?
- 4 MS: Oh yeah, close friends.
- 5 AJ: Have you ever been involved in any organizations or been to any conferences for transgender-
6 identified people?
- 7 MS: No. I did talk to somebody for . . . I don't know if it's still in existence, City of Lakes Cross
8 Dressers Club, I guess. CLCC.
- 9 AJ: Yeah, it still . . .
- 10 MS: I did talk to them. Are they still in business?
- 11 AJ: It's still in business, I guess you can call it.
- 12 MS: I did. I'm not sure what happened but I never proceeded . . . I never did join, put it that way.
- 13 AJ: OK.
- 14 MS: My dear friend, Cheryl, she, I think, went there for some . . . but such a wide variety of different
15 girls go there. So, no – direct answer to your question, no. Again, I'm kind of cloistered in two
16 different worlds and to take a week off and go someplace would be kind of difficult.
- 17 AJ: A little difficult, yeah.
- 18 MS: So that's why.
- 19 AJ: Do you live in Minneapolis currently?
- 20 MS: Yes. Retired from a career. So whenever I get the chance I put all my previous experience
21 together and here I am, talking to you today. I like it.
- 22 AJ: What work did you do before you retired?
- 23 MS: I was in the aviation business. That gave me a chance to do some traveling and some of the
24 time that I was not involved, I would be able to practice my new self.
- 25 AJ: Were you a pilot?
- 26 MS: Yes. And over the years everything just kind of fit together.
- 27 AJ: So when you would take long trips and then maybe . . . because I know you can only fly so many
28 hour, would you, if you were in a different city, would you then express yourself as Marlene?
- 29 MS: If everything worked . . . well, it gets a little complicated, but yes. I would be able to find time.
30 That worked, but it was all part of it. Putting all these pieces together to look at what you're

- 1 looking at now. But I relate to people – men and women both. Very genuine, more relaxed
2 than in the other mode.
- 3 AJ: Were you ever in the military yourself?
- 4 MS: I was.
- 5 AJ: Which branch?
- 6 MS: Army. I kept my other self to me, nobody ever knew. Once in a while, I did get time to go
7 separate on my own, but I always enjoyed doing what guys go – you drink beer and chase girls.
8 That was fun. So I was never . . . and I kind of like sports a little bit. I lot of the girls I read about,
9 they just never could play ball or any of that. To me it was OK, I was not a big person but I was
10 coordinated, I kind of enjoyed that.
- 11 AJ: Women play sports.
- 12 MS: Pardon me?
- 13 AJ: Women play sports.
- 14 MS: Yeah, they do. But I think a lot of girls like us want to say, “No-no, I’m strictly female, I don’t
15 have anything to do with those.” They won’t admit to themselves that there is any maleness in
16 you. But a lot of us are kind of go both ways, I guess.
- 17 AJ: Sure. How long were you in the military? In combat?
- 18 MS: No, no – nothing like that. There was peace time when I was in, two years. It was a time filler. I
19 went to college for a while, I didn’t like that. So then I worked for a little while, didn’t like that.
20 So I went in the military – just something to do for a couple of years.
- 21 AJ: Sure.
- 22 MS: And then I got out, OK – I better get settled down. So I went back to college and did that. And
23 then . . .
- 24 AJ: Did you go to college here at the University of Minnesota? Or where did you go?
- 25 MS: Well, Mankato. Over the years I had a lot of girlfriends, but I always kind of put off getting
26 married, I just really didn’t want to. Finally I just ran out of excuses and so I did – and that’s fine,
27 it’s good. But I always had this other albatross on my shoulder to live with. So I’m living with it.
28 I have a good life otherwise and I’ve got this . . . some people would call it a problem, but it’s a
29 fun problem. I can see where it really be great if you’re able to completely erase the past and
30 look to the future, but that’s another story.
- 31 AJ: So how many children do you have?
- 32 MS: Two. And they’re adults and they have no clue.
- 33 AJ: They have no clue. Do they have children?

- 1 MS: Pardon me.
- 2 AJ: Do they have children?
- 3 MS: Yes, we have some – wonderful, lovable family. Everything is fine – we get along fine, it's just
4 that I've got this little quirk, some would call it. So it makes it difficult, so I just have to do the
5 best I can. Coming over here, and talking with Lisa – I think I called Lisa about two years ago . . .
- 6 AJ: Lisa Vecoli?
- 7 MS: Yes. Because I read about the Tretter Collection in a newspaper article and I had the Marlene
8 Somers collection. It wasn't that at the time. I had a collection going back to the dark ages on . .
9 . well, what it was was 14 grocery bags filled with magazines, newspaper articles, plum full.
- 10 AJ: Where did you keep all of this stuff? You're married, you had children.
- 11 MS: You have to learn to find a spot in your adobe that you can keep things secret. It worked. I read
12 a lot about girls doing the same and their family runs across that but I guess I was stealth
13 enough to take care of it. At any rate, Lisa told me later that she about fell off her chair when I
14 told her what I had, hoping that she would get this information. So I made an appointment and
15 I came over and had a tour of the library – or the vault in the basement. I pretty much
16 immediately said this is a wonderful place for all my collection. Over the years, that was my
17 connection with the world of . . . there wasn't a lot of organizations back then. There were
18 some.
- 19 AJ: There were a few but not . . .
- 20 MS: Not like now. So I kept going to the newsstand, bookstores – adult bookstores were wonderful.
- 21 AJ: Did you say adult bookstores?
- 22 MS: Yeah, they always had a good section of transsexual information. And then the regular
23 newsstands – there was old magazines . . . well, at any rate, I just collected all this. At any rate, I
24 brought it over one day and put it on a cart and they were whisked away and just a little while
25 ago Lisa took me downstairs and showed me it all lined up – seven boxes. So everything is there
26 and they'll be there for generations to come.
- 27 AJ: For perpetuity. The Marlene Somers Collection.
- 28 MS: That's what it's called, she put a name on it.
- 29 AJ: It makes you feel good. How so?
- 30 MS: I've never even thought about having a legacy or anything, it never bothered me in my so-called
31 other life. And then all of a sudden . . . well, that's kind of neat. Here's something with my
32 name and 100 years from now somebody will say, "Oh, look at this."
- 33 AJ: They'll also be able to now look at your interview and learn even more about Marlene Somers,
34 the person. They'll be able to see those magazines but that's what you collected, that's not

- 1 necessarily you – per se. But this added with that will give people, I think, a little more insight
2 into Marlene.
- 3 MS: I'm just another one of the girls. But I've noticed . . . I remember many, many years ago, I think
4 we're all the same but . . . just like the straight community, so to speak, everybody is different.
5 Well in our community everybody is different too. I go out to a place that caters to gay people
6 and then there's some transgender people there too. I've noticed there's all kinds – some are
7 very masculine and then they may dress like ladies but they don't act like them. That's not me,
8 so I can't really relate to them but they're doing what they want to do.
- 9 AJ: Yes, exactly.
- 10 MS: I'm sure what I'm doing is totally goofy to somebody else who doesn't understand our
11 community, but that's the world. So, hello everybody.
- 12 AJ: Yeah. How does it make you feel when you go to gay establishments? Do you feel like you're
13 accepted in the gay community? Or do they treat you like an outcast? How does that feel?
- 14 MS: Most of them don't even pay any attention to you. Well, no . . . I would say over the years, I
15 remember going a long time ago, to me they're always kind and gentle. I never had any . . . but I
16 did notice a lot of them don't even look at you because they've got their own . . .
- 17 AJ: They're just into guys.
- 18 MS: Yeah, the guys. I guess not too many guys . . . now Cheryl tells me that she has a lot of guy
19 friends. I had more ladies, lesbian ladies I guess. Just conversation, they like to talk. But the gay
20 scene is not of interest to me.
- 21 AJ: So have you ever fantasized about men or being with men or have you ever been with a man?
- 22 MS: If I were . . . I can conceive . . . no, but I can conceive that because of what this autogynephelia
23 situation is, that's what you kind of fantasize yourself being a woman and doing things from
24 shopping to having sex with a man because that's what . . . now, not everybody wants to do that
25 but I could conceive that that would probably be the case. Caitlyn Jenner, they keep asking her
26 that question.
- 27 AJ: Yeah.
- 28 MS: And she doesn't have a good answer for it. I don't know what she . . . obviously she doesn't
29 know, I guess.
- 30 AJ: I think she's struggling with that.
- 31 MS: I've got a feeling she thinks it would be OK to be with a guy but she doesn't want to admit that
32 right now. That's my guess.
- 33 AJ: That's my feeling too.
- 34 MS: Is it? OK.

- 1 AJ: I think she wants to . . .
- 2 MS: Try it but that sounds too goofy.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, it sounds a little scary.
- 4 MS: Yeah, I think so.
- 5 AJ: You know, you've been out for . . .
- 6 MS: Ever.
- 7 AJ: To yourself, anyway.
- 8 MS: Oh yeah.
- 9 AJ: Right?
- 10 MS: Oh sure.
- 11 AJ: What person influenced you? What gave you the courage to even come out to yourself?
- 12 Because it's difficult . . . you talk about how hard it is to come out to the rest of the world, but
- 13 it's also difficult to just come out and be honest with yourself. What gave you the inspiration to
- 14 be able to do that for yourself?
- 15 MS: I don't think it was ever difficult. I just knew . . . as I say, when I was a teenager, Christine came
- 16 on the scene and that kind of got the wheels turning.
- 17 AJ: Christine Jorgenson?
- 18 MS: Yes. And that got the wheels turning that hey, this is something that could happen. But it
- 19 didn't. I suppose that was . . . up until then, I was fascinated by ladies clothing and did wear it a
- 20 lot. But now when that happened it was oh boy, this could be something I could do forever and
- 21 ever. But as I say, when it came to the fork in the road I took it, as Yogi Berra used to say. Well,
- 22 I took the one and got all the other obligations to live with but it hasn't been a bad life. I've just
- 23 got this one branch of the tree that is pretty big. So I deal with it – you've got to deal with it.
- 24 AJ: Have you ever lived anyplace other than in Minnesota?
- 25 MS: No . . . well, some time in Wisconsin but up in the upper Midwest.
- 26 AJ: Upper Midwest.
- 27 MS: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: Do you feel like your gender identity or expression has created any issues for you around your
- 29 professional life? I know you haven't . . .
- 30 MS: I kept it all separate so there was no issues.
- 31 AJ: So there was no impact?

- 1 MS: No. I notice today a lot of organizations are explaining to companies how to handle that with
2 your employees. Apparently a lot of people are getting it taken care of – times have changed.
- 3 AJ: Times have changed, that is true.
- 4 MS: And they're changing for the good.
- 5 AJ: Have you ever had a situation where you were expressing yourself as Marlene and you were
6 stopped by the police?
- 7 MS: Yeah, yes I have.
- 8 AJ: How did that go?
- 9 MS: I just gave them my ID as they requested. It was a traffic situation, it was a simple thing.
- 10 AJ: Didn't turn on your blinker or . . . ran a red light or something?
- 11 MS: Seat belt, I think. It seems to me it happened twice. But I did not try to conceal who I was. I
12 understand Minnesota has some law that there is nothing wrong with presenting as the other
13 sex.
- 14 AJ: No, it's not illegal.
- 15 MS: So it didn't bother me. Way back when I started it was that way. But at any rate, to answer
16 your question directly, yeah they stopped me. I just gave them my regular ID, they went back
17 and checked and I never have had any tickets . . . for decades, everything was clean. But I did
18 notice . . . I smile to myself about it, when the officer came to the window he says, "Excuse me,
19 ma'am, I noticed that you weren't wearing your seat belt so I'm going to have to check your . . ."
20 And he came back and he really didn't say "ma'am" anymore but he was not being mean or
21 anything, he was just doing his job.
- 22 AJ: Does your personal physician know about your gender identity?
- 23 MS: No, it just never comes up.
- 24 AJ: Have you ever been to a therapist or any kind of facility to talk to people about your gender
25 identity?
- 26 MS: No, I haven't but my transsexual friends have so I kind of know what they talk about. I know
27 some of them are still going to the University of Minnesota but that is really a lot of hoops to
28 jump through. Another gal I know went to Park Nicollet and she's kind of just sailed right
29 through. They don't have nearly the hoops to jump through. The University of Minnesota still
30 works on the . . . oh, they've got a criteria that's really, really involved.
- 31 AJ: It's the Harry Benjamin's Standards of Care, which they have modified over time and so now
32 they do require you to have a year of therapy and then a year of living as the opposite gender
33 than what you were assigned at birth. And so, yeah, that does present a challenge for some
34 people. I personally think it's . . .

- 1 MS: Too much.
- 2 AJ: No, I actually think it's a good thing.
- 3 MS: For some people, I think it's individual. I suppose a therapist can pick that . . . they know the
4 right questions to ask and in the therapist's mind she'll say, "OK, this person has to go here, this
5 one we'll put her on the fast track."
- 6 AJ: Not so much, I think it's more about really helping you understand yourself and sort of giving
7 you courage and permission to be able to deal with . . . because, as you have sort of indicated,
8 it's one thing for me to understand about myself but now when I present myself to the world,
9 how do people respond to me. And most people aren't quite ready for that. We've struggled
10 with this all of our lives internally, but then the external presentation creates a whole new set of
11 problems. And I think people need a little help – or some people, not all, as you noted, but
12 some people need a little help to work through some of those things.
- 13 MS: I think a person's age makes a difference - if you've been around for a long time. I always tell
14 my girlfriends that, you know – if I go into this program, I think I've already completed the one
15 year. What do they call that?
- 16 AJ: Oh yeah, you've got that. The real life time is what they call it.
- 17 MS: That's all done, I've got that in my file – here it is. OK, you go over . . . but if you're 20 years old
18 and all that, it probably is . . . I don't know.
- 19 AJ: You have clearly worked through a lot of that stuff in your own mind. I'm really fascinated by
20 this interview, Marlene.
- 21 MS: Fascinated?
- 22 AJ: I'm really inspired by your resilience to sort of live, as you have stated, two lives.
- 23 MS: True.
- 24 AJ: Essentially. And that's a difficult and challenging thing for a lot of people. In my own personal
25 story which I don't want us to spend a lot of time talking about me, I want to talk about you.
- 26 MS: Tell me some.
- 27 AJ: For me, the living of two lives became overbearing and I just could not – I had to make a choice.
28 I had to either stay as the person and gender that everybody knew or I had to take a different
29 path and really express my fullest, truest identity. I was just overwhelmed by that reality of a
30 double life. And so, to hear you talk about it and to hear you talk about it with class and with
31 acknowledgment of the joy that you find in your family life but also the joy that you find in
32 expressing yourself as Marlene.

- 1 MS: Well it also would feel . . . you feel for your other family members. You know the upheaval and
2 the discomfort and everything, I hate to dump that on somebody else. I guess I haven't reached
3 that breaking point and, at this age, I probably won't.
- 4 AJ: You never know.
- 5 MS: It would be very nice to be like this all the time.
- 6 AJ: You have some beautiful jewelry on, tell me about these rings that you wear. They're emerald, I
7 think.
- 8 MS: I think emerald is my birthstone. May I think is . . .
- 9 AJ: When is your birthday?
- 10 MS: May. Gee, I don't know. Just over the years I've collected tons of jewelry. I didn't have to have
11 diamonds, I can have a broken beer bottle put in there and it would be just as fine, as long as it's
12 pretty. Some people just get enamored with big fancy, "Well, I've got a lot of money, you
13 know." That's nothing to me. But at any rate, it's nothing – it's all inexpensive. And I, over the
14 years, you just buy it and then you have to hide it.
- 15 AJ: So where do you keep your stuff? Your clothing, your jewelry? The publications that you
16 collect?
- 17 MS: You can rent lockers and that, a lot of girls do that.
- 18 AJ: OK. So is that what you do?
- 19 MS: Yeah, it has been. I just seem to make it work. You've got to have two wardrobes and I think
20 one is probably better than the other – this one.
- 21 AJ: Which one is better?
- 22 MS: This one.
- 23 AJ: OK, Marlene's wardrobe is better than the other.
- 24 MS: I think so. That wardrobe gets a lot more attention, the other is kind of, "OK, put it on." At any
25 rate it's fun. I always liked the classy, dressy look. Today I thought I was coming in for an
26 interview so that's what I felt like.
- 27 AJ: You look fabulous, you look great.
- 28 MS: Thank you so much, Andrea.
- 29 AJ: So, Marlene, is there anything else that you want people to know about you and your story and
30 your life that I haven't asked?
- 31 MS: I guess it's just a life of two people in the same body. One and the other are different,
32 obviously. So far I've been able to keep it in a . . . I'm not going crazy over this. Like you said

- 1 about yourself, you just had to do something. I've done lots of reading, you hear that often – I
2 just had to do something, I couldn't continue, and they do - then the family splits up. I've heard
3 many, many biographies and that's extremely interesting to hear the difficulties that others go
4 through with their transition. Gosh, I've read . . . I can't think of all their names right now, but I
5 see my close friends and they go through it, and they do a wonderful job. They look great and
6 they've got their careers going on. Sometimes the family is there and often it isn't. I was
7 watching this Caitlyn's show on TV the other day and a girl named Boylan or . . .
- 8 AJ: Jenny, Jenny Boylan.
- 9 MS: I read her book and kind of know what it's like. But she's still with her wife, as far as I know.
10 She was on the show the other day and she was really pushing Caitlyn for, "OK, what are you
11 going to do? Men or women?" She was pushing it, I go, "Lay off, she'll figure it out." But
12 there's a lot of those girls that transition that wrote books. It's fun to read that and know how
13 they did it. So far I don't have anything to write about.
- 14 AJ: How does that make you feel, though? The fact that when you first came out, or the first time
15 you heard about the transgender phenomenon, or the transsexual phenomenon, it was through
16 Christine Jorgenson and it was all this sensation and all of this stuff, and now you can sit in the
17 comfort of your home and watch a show like Caitlyn Jenner, "I am Cait" I think it's called. How
18 does that make you feel?
- 19 MS: I think it's wonderful. It makes me feel good that our situations are out in the public and they
20 seem to be accepted by the public. Way back when it really wasn't that way. How does it make
21 me feel? It makes me feel good, I guess.
- 22 AJ: You said your wife hates this . . . hates this quirk of yours as you called it. Has it impacted your
23 relationship at all? Your marriage? Or she just says, "Don't do it," and everything else is fine.
- 24 MS: It's not discussed so she probably knows and then . . . she doesn't know the extent to which I get
25 involved. And so it just kind of . . .
- 26 AJ: Has she ever seen you as Marlene?
- 27 MS: Yeah, a long time ago but I wasn't very good at it at the time. At any rate, I just keep it . . . I
28 know that's what her wishes are so I just don't push it.
- 29 AJ: So you haven't discussed it in the past 10 or 20 years or so?
- 30 MS: It's kind of like it's there but it's not talked about so that's basically where it is. It would
31 probably be a lot better to talk but I'm chicken – chick, chick, chick.
- 32 AJ: So no impact on your relationship then, really?
- 33 MS: It must have some but whatever it is I don't know, we keep on going.
- 34 AJ: You guys are happily married, right?

- 1 MS: I guess so. We've kept together for a long time. You love the family and see the new
2 generations come along. Somebody told me recently if I had known that grandkids are going to
3 be this much fun, I would have had them first.
- 4 AJ: Oh wow.
- 5 MS: I thought that was cool. That kind of sums it up.
- 6 AJ: I have grandchildren myself so . . .
- 7 MS: They're fun.
- 8 AJ: It's a lot of fun.
- 9 MS: Do they know you as Andrea or did they ever know you . . .?
- 10 AJ: They've only known me as Andrea.
- 11 MS: And that works out?
- 12 AJ: Yeah, they love me.
- 13 MS: That is so cool.
- 14 AJ: They come running when they see me so that makes me feel good.
- 15 MS: I guess what I do think . . . I try to look at individual family members and what would they think
16 if I told them. It's hard to know.
- 17 AJ: It's hard to know. You can kind of guess a little bit. It's hard to know exactly what they would
18 think.
- 19 MS: Some are more open to a subject like that, many are not. At any rate . . . not discussed too
20 much, or at all.
- 21 AJ: Well Marlene, thank you for your contribution to the Tretter Collection. Thank you for taking
22 the time to sit down and share a little more insight into your life and into the intimate details
23 about Marlene. Thank you for being yourself and being out in the world in the best way that
24 you can. We appreciate it.
- 25 MS: You're very welcome, Andrea. I think it's a wonderful program and to all you people in the
26 world out there that are like us, look at all these videos and maybe some of what the folks that
27 have come and gone before you might help you make a decision. I would recommend to go for
28 it early, before you get involved in a lot of obligations. It makes it much easier to make a
29 decision, so go for it young.
- 30 AJ: I would agree. Thank you, Marlene.
- 31 MS: Happy New Year.