

Venus de Mars  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

May 3, 2017



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

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

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

Andrea Jenkins  
[jenki120@umn.edu](mailto:jenki120@umn.edu)  
(612) 625-4379

1    Andrea Jenkins -AJ  
2    Venus de Mars -VD  
3  
4    AJ:     So, hello.  
5    VD:     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. Today is May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017. I'm in  
8           south Minneapolis and I am in the home of Venus de Mars. How are you, Venus?  
9    VD:     I'm good, I'm good.  
10   AJ:     What's going on?  
11   VD:     I am too busy, that's really what it is, and stuff that I don't want to do but I have to do.  
12   AJ:     So, listen, let me ask you this, Venus, just to get us started. Can you state your name?  
13   VD:     Venus de Mars.  
14   AJ:     Spell your name.  
15   VD:     V-e-n-u-s d-e-M-a-r-s. And so, so it's like Venus de Milo, Venus of Milo, and so mine is Venus of  
16           Mars.  
17   AJ:     So, it's d-e . . .  
18   VD:     Small "d".  
19   AJ:     Capital M-a-r-s. Two words, right?  
20   VD:     Venue de Mars, yeah.  
21   AJ:     Venus, what is your current gender identity today?  
22   VD:     So, I . . . ugh, OK, I'll try to do this because I know we're . . .  
23   AJ:     Take your time, dear – please.  
24   VD:     I do feel completely female, but I didn't grow up female, I grew up trans.  
25   AJ:     OK.  
26   VD:     And, I grew up as a closeted trans kid, so I didn't have the same history or the reinforcements or  
27           that kind of thing that a biological woman would have growing up as a little girl. I grew up as a  
28           little boy with a secret. And, that was very unique to how I became who I am, you know how  
29           that happens. So, I don't identify as male, but I don't feel comfortable saying that I'm female  
30           because of that unique history. So, I'm more . . . the way I describe it is that I feel that I'm a  
31           trans female. So, I'm a trans person – male to female.  
32   AJ:     Got it.

- 1 VD: In that way, I want to acknowledge my unique history growing up and what I dealt with and  
2 then all the way up to where I am now. And, my voice, I sing, I like the range of my voice, so I  
3 don't want to do any surgery to lose the low end of my voice.
- 4 AJ: No, your voice is amazing.
- 5 VD: And, so I don't want to do that and so that puts me in this kind of ambiguous dualistic place.  
6 But, that's . . . so that's a complicated answer but that's what I can say.
- 7 AJ: This whole issue is complicated. What pronouns do you use?
- 8 VD: So, I don't use he and her . . . or, I mean, he and him. I appreciate he and she . . . or she and her.  
9 I'm stuck in this binary.
- 10 AJ: She and her.
- 11 VD: She and her, I feel, is complimentary and it makes me feel fine and I always feel discouraged if  
12 somebody is addressing me in the male pronoun. But, again, that goes into that mix of not  
13 knowing exactly how to simply state my gender identity. So, for now, that is the options we  
14 have. I don't do they or them because that feels too much straddling and I am not straddling  
15 between the genders. I am definitely over on the female side.
- 16 AJ: Sure.
- 17 VD: I am not ambiguous on that.
- 18 AJ: You're not non-gender binary?
- 19 VD: Right, right – yeah, no, I'm not pursuing the androgynous thing. I definitely would prefer to be .  
20 . . I would love to just not even have the trans issue. Life would be so much easier if I didn't  
21 have that.
- 22 AJ: I agree.
- 23 VD: But, on the other hand, what that has done since I've been out for so long, what it has done is it  
24 has put me forcibly on the forefront of being out as trans publicly. And, in doing that, I have, not  
25 by choice but by circumstance, become involved in being an activist.
- 26 AJ: Yeah.
- 27 VD: Because I have to. And, being in rock-n-roll and touring and going overseas and dealing with  
28 customs agents from all over the place, I have had to deal with all of that confrontation because  
29 my legal name is still male identified. And, that is a choice that my spouse and I made because  
30 we were married 34 years this year – in June.
- 31 AJ: Wow, congratulations – that's incredible.
- 32 VD: And so, because I came out early in our marriage and it was a very fragile time and nobody else  
33 was doing that, we didn't have any guidelines or anything, it made my spouse comfortable for  
34 me not to change my legal name or my gender identity, but I did take on my persona name.
- 35 AJ: Sure.

- 1 VD: So, that becomes an issue when I travel and I have to do my legal license – and it still does. I still  
2 am on the forefront about that and have to do a lot of self-advocacy. Whenever I interact with .  
3 ..
- 4 AJ: Your passport, driver's license, all of that stuff.
- 5 VD: Passport, everything. So, I'm still right there on the front lines.
- 6 AJ: Yeah, wow. So, let's just be real clear right up front. I consider you a rock icon, a rock star. You  
7 are a professional musician; you've toured all around the world. You've had multiple bands, you  
8 have a very prominent solo career now. I'm not going to judge whether it's successful or not, I  
9 will let you be the arbiter on that.
- 10 VD: I am established on the underground music scene and I think my band, All the Pretty Horses, has  
11 been established on the underground scene for quite a time. But, that being said, because I  
12 came out at such an early time, the industry was very afraid . . . the industry was afraid of  
13 anybody being out as gay, let alone being trans. I've always felt the trans community was like 10  
14 years behind the gay community in progress.
- 15 AJ: Yes.
- 16 VD: So, there was no way that I could ever entice a label or an agency or representation to take me  
17 on to help us move beyond the underground scene. The underground scene is a true indie artist  
18 . . . in the true sense, not in the fake sense that big labels are telling people. This is the true  
19 sense, where you do everything yourself – you wear all the hats and maybe your bandmates  
20 help you out and you finance everything on credit cards, which I did.
- 21 AJ: So, you had four recorded albums?
- 22 VD: Oh, yes – I've got more than that. Now, I've got like eight, I think. But, I did . . .
- 23 AJ: Oh, wow – OK. And they've all been self-produced?
- 24 VD: Yes. Self-financed, but I brought on a producer, a friend of mine, that I met out in New York,  
25 Barb Morrison, and she became my producer. In music and in film it's different. A producer in  
26 music is a person that you work with to create and realize the musical vision you have for your  
27 project.
- 28 AJ: Right. In film, they finance.
- 29 VD: In film, they finance. So, I still have to finance everything.
- 30 AJ: Right.
- 31 VD: Although now with Kickstarter and Indiegogo, I've been able to sometimes do that, but before  
32 that I would take out loans or I would just put it on a credit card. I easily, and with tours and  
33 everything, I easily spent \$100,000 on credit cards – maybe more. We've mortgaged our house  
34 three times in order to pay off the credit cards and I held that debt through all of that time. So,  
35 20-some years.
- 36 AJ: Has it been worth it?

- 1 VD: Yes. But, it took such a toll and a lot of stress and that eventually led to a two-year struggle with  
2 the Minnesota Department of Revenue who challenged me on the losses I was taking, trying to  
3 be the record label for the band.
- 4 AJ: Sure.
- 5 VD: And pursuing the opportunities that came up that don't come around twice, so you have to take  
6 advantage of them and sometimes I would . . . often I would end up having to spend more than I  
7 was taking in per year in order to pursue those leads and those tours. But, we did generate  
8 money. I was averaging about \$20,000 a year up and down for income, but I would spend more  
9 than that in order to pursue the opportunities. When the documentary came out . . . I'm going  
10 down a rabbit hole.
- 11 AJ: No, no.
- 12 VD: When the documentary came out, *Venus of Mars*, that opened up so many more . . .
- 13 AJ: *Venus of Mars*, a cult hit.
- 14 VD: Yeah.
- 15 AJ: Right, I love that film. I'm not a big rock-n-roll head – I loved the film, I loved the music. The  
16 music is amazing.
- 17 VD: Thank you. Yeah, so that opened up . . . that was a new and unique perspective on a  
18 rockumentary back then because it showed us as people, the filmmaker followed us around and  
19 she didn't go down the typical sensational road, she actually stepped back when we had our big  
20 blow-ups and our arguments and pursued the deeper story – the relationship with my spouse  
21 and I and how we were navigating rock-n-roll.
- 22 AJ: Right, I know. That was so incredible.
- 23 VD: And so, that's what that film did. And so, it was popular enough when it came out, and unique  
24 enough, I think, that we did an actual three-year film festival run of constant screenings and  
25 promotions and invites to perform.
- 26 AJ: Would you show up and perform at the screenings?
- 27 VD: I would perform every time I could and some of that would involve the full band and I would  
28 finance what I could, which the film festival could not pay for. We'd get us all overseas or I  
29 would get us across the country, so I paid for a lot of plane tickets when my bandmates couldn't  
30 afford it. I was the record label, so I paid for it. But, all of those opportunities . . .
- 31 AJ: Like a true record label, did you make them pay you back?
- 32 VD: Well, we had strategies and I tried to but, you know, they're my bandmates.
- 33 AJ: You couldn't hang them out the window like a lot of record companies do.
- 34 VD: No. And the idea . . . we were climbing fast and the audience was there for us, so I had  
35 confidence that we would catch at some point and we would get the financial backing or the

- 1 investment and then we would be able to recoup all of that investment. I was convinced that  
2 that would happen and so I pushed it and expected . . . that was my defense in this whole  
3 Department of Revenue thing. I expected to make a profit, I expected to turn everything around  
4 – that was always my focus, and still is.
- 5 AJ: You guys won that case.
- 6 VD: We did win because the original auditor had made up his mind before he even interviewed me  
7 or talked to me and so, he used the interviews as a way to enforce his pre-determined outcome  
8 of that.
- 9 AJ: They were trying to say this was a hobby or . . .
- 10 VD: They were saying it was a hobby and that I wasn't an artist and that this was not legitimate –  
11 that I was basically pretending to be a business and to do this as a business, which was not the  
12 case. And the interviews are supposed to allow you to . . .
- 13 AJ: Uncover that, right.
- 14 VD: To explain that. I was completely fine with an audit and completely fine with paying any  
15 penalties if I had done anything wrong with claiming something I shouldn't have claimed – or  
16 whatever, that's part of being in business. But, when it became that attack on me with a pre-  
17 determined . . . it became obvious it was a pre-determined decision that I couldn't stop.  
18 Anything I said, it would be turned around and used against me. And, taking stuff from my  
19 Facebook, taking stuff from my blog, taking all of that stuff and used against me. Because I'm a  
20 public figure, I make everything public. It became . . . I had to get a lawyer and we were able to  
21 finally explain how and why my business unfolded the way it did for those times and justify the  
22 losses. Those losses are legal if you explain them.
- 23 AJ: Yes, absolutely – and can document them.
- 24 VD: And can document it – and I was very good at documenting everything. Anyway, after two  
25 years, it did finally resolve and they . . . I finally got a new appeals group of auditors, two  
26 auditors, and they did see and understood and absolved that.
- 27 AJ: Yeah, I was happy to be able to have performed at a fundraiser, at one of the fundraisers you  
28 guys held to help with legal fees at the Triple Rock.
- 29 VD: Triple Rock, yes, that was the last one. And the funny thing is . . . see, I wasn't going to go down  
30 rabbit holes. I did that big fundraiser and that was wonderful . . . because I had to get letters, I  
31 had to get people to try to say this is . . . that I worked in a business manner, I pursued that – all  
32 these letters to justify all the things that I was doing; I was collecting evidence.
- 33 AJ: Sure.
- 34 VD: And the Triple Rock was the first club to really go out of their way to say, "Yes, this is this," and  
35 wrote a very wonderful letter of support.
- 36 AJ: Yeah, you guys played the Triple Rock quite a bit, right?

- 1 VD: Yes, they're really strong supporters of the band. So, that was the perfect place to do the fund  
2 raiser. After . . . that was getting towards the end of the fight, so that was about a year and a  
3 half into it, but it was about two weeks after that that I started getting chest pains and I . . . it  
4 turned out I almost had a heart attack and I had to get two stints in my heart and that was  
5 primarily because of the stress of doing all of that.
- 6 AJ: Oh, boy.
- 7 VD: And also, as it returns to the trans issues, it was because when I transitioned and started my  
8 hormone therapy, I did it on my own with my doctor, I didn't go through a program or anything.
- 9 AJ: Sure.
- 10 VD: At that time, what it did is the side effect, it raised my blood pressure and there wasn't the  
11 medication that worked for me as a performer to keep that blood pressure down because I  
12 needed to have the energy on the stage.
- 13 AJ: Yeah, your performances keep the pressure up, right?
- 14 VD: Yeah, so I needed that flexibility and the only blood pressure medications they had were  
15 restricting your heart rate and I couldn't perform. And so, I went for probably 15 years of very  
16 high blood pressure, which stretched out my veins and caused scarring. When we finally did get  
17 the blood pressure under control, then they went back to normal size, but then there's all that  
18 scarring . . . stretch marks, kind of like. And then, even though my cholesterol level is really  
19 good . . . I make all my own food, I cook, blah, blah, blah, I don't do anything crazy, everything is  
20 really good. So, my cholesterol level is really good but the stress hormones from that fight,  
21 kicked out a bunch of the bad stuff and that collected up and eventually clogged the main  
22 artery.
- 23 AJ: How is your health now?
- 24 VD: It's good. That happened now three years ago and I didn't have damage. I actually went in early  
25 enough so that it didn't . . . I didn't go into a full heart attack, it was just about a month of pains .  
26 . . or a week of pains.
- 27 AJ: And you went in right away.
- 28 VD: I didn't, actually. It was a nurse practitioner after I had gotten one from a nightmare and I woke  
29 up with it. And, it was all stress related or heart rate related. I talked to a nurse practitioner  
30 and she insisted that I go in and I just didn't believe her. I ended up driving myself in because I  
31 had just had that incident that morning, but I had calmed down and I felt OK, but she was  
32 adamant that I do that and she deserves a thank you for that. But, I did go in, and they didn't  
33 think . . . look and shape, I was in good shape, and they kind of . . . I thought I had strained a  
34 muscle at that performance. See, I'm going down a rabbit hole. Anyway, so it kicked into I was  
35 doing a stress test and it triggered another episode and they said, "You're not going home."  
36 And they kept me there and suddenly I had to go through all this angiogram and stints and that  
37 was a whole recovery issue and blah, blah, blah – but, it all worked out.
- 38 AJ: So, you're still here.



- 1 VD: I'm still here.
- 2 AJ: Let's go back a little ways, Venus. Where did you grow up?
- 3 VD: Duluth, Minnesota.
- 4 AJ: Duluth, Minnesota. Siblings?
- 5 VD: One older sister, six years older. So, my parents . . . I was the last chance they had. There was a  
6 few miscarriages before me and so I was kind of like the last possibility and so my parents were  
7 older when I was born. But, yeah, so it's just me and my sister.
- 8 AJ: What's your earliest memory in life? What's the first thing you remember?
- 9 VD: Really? My memory goes way back. I remember playing with the mobile above my crib.
- 10 AJ: Really?
- 11 VD: Yes, I remember touching . . . I remember touching the little marshmallow-like pieces . . .  
12 animals, I remember that. They were on little strings and I would touch them; I was fascinated  
13 with them.
- 14 AJ: So, a mobile in a crib, that's like 18 months or less.
- 15 VD: Yes. And, I thought that was a fake memory until I found it in our storage and I was like, "I  
16 remember this." So, that is my first memory. I remember getting baths in the sink and playing  
17 with the shower in the sink, so I remember being small enough to sit in the sink.
- 18 AJ: Wow, that's pretty impressive. So, you've mentioned that you were . . . you grew up as a little  
19 girl with a secret.
- 20 VD: Little boy with a secret.
- 21 AJ: A little boy with a secret.
- 22 VD: Yeah.
- 23 AJ: Did anyone know?
- 24 VD: Suspect? No, no, I was really good.
- 25 AJ: So, you were just a normal little boy – on the outside anyway.
- 26 VD: I cried a lot until the testosterone kicked in, which was slow to kick in. So, I was kind of labeled  
27 as a crybaby for a while, but then once that came in then I had the hormonal tools to keep that  
28 under control.
- 29 AJ: Fortitude. Were you picked on or bullied in school? How was your school experience?
- 30 VD: Every now and then, every now and then. But, I was also, as you become aware that you may  
31 be vulnerable, you learn tools to sidestep that, so I became a very good negotiator and I would  
32 dialogue and I chose my friends the right way and I kept my distance from the ones I knew were  
33 going to give me trouble. So, I sidestepped a lot of it, but it did happen every now and then and

- 1 I would have to try to use all my skills of negotiation to untangle myself from things. But, I never  
2 did get really beat up or jumped. I got pushed around, I would get teased – that kind of thing.
- 3 AJ: But it wasn't around gender though, really?
- 4 VD: Well, not specifically gender – no, because I was careful about that. I was born in 1960, so this  
5 would have been way back there. And so, it just wasn't . . . I didn't even know what that was.
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 VD: There was no word for it, there was no understanding.
- 8 AJ: There was no language.
- 9 VD: So, what . . . so I didn't have that. But, I, of course, experimented and played when I was young.  
10 I remember putting on my sister's petticoat when I was like four years old and just fascinated  
11 with that whole texture and feeling. I would cross dress the Barbie and Ken.
- 12 AJ: Is that right?
- 13 VD: Yeah, so I would do a lot of things to try to explore that duality. And actually, since then I have  
14 discovered . . . before my mom died, I had some surgery when I was a baby, which I suspect  
15 meant that I was born with dualistic aspect of some sort. They closed a fissure, they said, in my  
16 genitals. I suspect that that was . . .
- 17 AJ: Sort of an intersex condition.
- 18 VD: A little bit, yeah, because the testosterone took forever to kick in and I always remember feeling  
19 awkward about gender. I actually started growing breasts in junior high school before . . . when  
20 everybody else's voices were changing and everything, I began to grow breasts. My mom  
21 brought me in to talk to the doctor and the doctor was like, "Ahh, it happens sometimes, just  
22 give it time, blah, blah, blah." He didn't seem to think it was a big deal. My mom was very  
23 startled. I don't even remember my voice changing.
- 24 AJ: Were you glad about the breast development?
- 25 VD: I didn't really understanding, I didn't really know what was going on. Kind of - yeah, it was kind  
26 of exciting. But then, the testosterone eventually took over and then all of that went away and  
27 the testosterone became the primary hormone. So, that delay and all of that kind of reinforces  
28 this . . . I think that was a physicality aspect.
- 29 AJ: Yeah, wow.
- 30 VD: Which doesn't dismiss anything else.
- 31 AJ: That's what I was going to ask you – does it matter if it was physiological or . . .?
- 32 VD: No. I think we all have . . . I think it has much more to do with all the chemistry in who we are.  
33 It doesn't necessarily have to reflect in a birth physical difference. I think it can be . . . it's  
34 internal.

- 1 AJ: It's who we are. I know a lot of people in the past would try to explain their gender dysphoria, if  
2 you will, by the number of hormones or . . .
- 3 VD: Yeah, I think that's a dangerous place to go. I think, because that dismisses so many people that  
4 have genuine feelings of ambiguity as far as gender. I hate the term gender dysphoria because I  
5 was never confused – everybody else was confused. I knew. So, I hate that term.
- 6 AJ: Yeah, you were gender confident and everybody else was dysphoric around your gender.
- 7 VD: Yes, exactly.
- 8 AJ: Wow. So, at some point you decided this is who I am. When did you first realize that you were  
9 a woman? Because that's how you started this – you said you feel like a woman.
- 10 VD: I feel female.
- 11 AJ: Yes.
- 12 VD: So, I wouldn't say a woman again because that has so much specific history to it, but I feel like a  
13 trans woman – let's put it that way, that might be the best way to say it.
- 14 AJ: OK.
- 15 VD: And then we can talk all about the pass ability and all that stuff, because then we have all kinds  
16 of other levels. But, that . . . the feelings of wanting to present femininity in my identity would  
17 never go away. I kept it quiet and secret for years and years and years, and then when I married  
18 my spouse, Lynette, I was confident it would go away. That was naïve of me, but we got  
19 married young . . .
- 20 AJ: But, you hope . . . yeah.
- 21 VD: And, of course, the world was a much darker place for trans people back then, and that would  
22 have been in the early 1980s. We got married and I was sure it would go away, but it didn't go  
23 away. I became extremely depressed because that was the big thing and it was – well, finally,  
24 I'm going to get a handle on this and I didn't, so I got terribly depressed. It started threatening  
25 our relationship because of my depression. We started going to a lot of counseling sessions,  
26 marriage counseling sessions, and then that still didn't seem to work so then the psychologist  
27 who worked with us kind of split us up and we did individual. The counselor that I had, had me  
28 take one of these big questionnaires, I think Minnesota was one of the first ones . . . I forget the  
29 name of that questionnaire.
- 30 AJ: The MMPI.
- 31 VD: Yes, you know it. So, I took that when I was . . . early days, this would have been early 1980s  
32 when I took it. I did, I did everything and was as honest as I could – and that came up. And so,  
33 my psychologist, at that time – who I am very sure was gay, part of the community, but that was  
34 a time when he would not be able to tell me that; that couldn't be out because his job would  
35 have been threatened. So, this is really dark days – it's hard to even understand this, but  
36 everything had to be talked about in code or in metaphor or in suggestion. So, I understood, in  
37 effect, that he was part of the community, he was much more open to be able to try to help me

1           – even though once I said, “Yes, I think that is an issue,” that meant that he could no longer  
2           officially help me because being trans, back then, was basically a deviation and a perversion.

3   AJ:     Wow.

4   VD:     So, there was no insurance coverage for anything like that – that kicked you out of the ballpark.  
5           You were not under the umbrella anymore.

6   AJ:     Right.

7   VD:     So, that basically kicked me out of the pool. But, he was very . . . this was a huge breakthrough,  
8           finally I admitted something that would explain everything – all my depression and everything.  
9           So, we talked about it; he did some research and found an underground independent group,  
10          support group, for crossdressers it was called then, it wasn’t called trans. And, he . . .

11   AJ:     Was it CLCC?

12   VD:     It was, it turned out to be CLCC but this is before the internet, this is before any of that.

13   AJ:     Wow.

14   VD:     So, he just found in the files a number and he wrote it down. So, I had this paper with a number  
15          written down, that’s all . . .

16   AJ:     No name.

17   VD:     No name, nothing – nothing. And, he said, “I don’t know if this will be helpful, it’s not part of . . .  
18          there is nothing, there are no resources here for you.”

19   AJ:     Sure.

20   VD:     But, he did say, “You can do anything you want. People go through this, they’ll start a whole  
21          new life, they’ll go through transition . . .” All of that sounded so exciting and freeing to me, that  
22          I had that freedom – but, it was wilderness, there was no guideposts.

23   AJ:     There was no guideposts.

24   VD:     It was like, “You’re on your own, but I’ll try to help you as much as I can, and I have this.” So,  
25          the next session we had . . . and he said, “You have to talk to your spouse, you have to say this.”  
26          So, I had become . . . by that point, I had become very suicidal, and so this was . . . that was the  
27          biggest thing to take on. Here comes Lynette . . . do you want to say hello?

28   Lynette: I hope I’m not interrupting too much.

29   AJ:     No, hello – how are you?

30   VD:     Come here and sit for a second so people know you really . . .

31   Lynette: I didn’t realize you were doing this on camera.

32   AJ:     You’re on camera – hey, Lynette.

33   Lynette: I’m really here.

- 1 AJ: How are you?
- 2 Lynette: Good to see you.
- 3 AJ: Good to see you too.
- 4 VD: I'm talking all about our terrible history.
- 5 Lynette: I know about that – you've got to write more songs about that.
- 6 VD: Yeah, we're talking about songwriting.
- 7 Lynette: Good news with the solid waste transfer station . . .
- 8 AJ: This is all going on tape; I'm just letting you know.
- 9 VD: Go fast, we're limited.
- 10 Lynette: I got the voucher and they're open until 7:30pm.
- 11 VD: Oh, great – good.
- 12 Lynette: We can go after your exercise.
- 13 VD: Perfect.
- 14 Lynette: I'm going to school right now so I'm going to quietly get ready. Good to see you.
- 15 AJ: So great to see you.
- 16 VD: All right. So, yeah – so, I was very suicidal and no insurance and I struggled and I did realize I  
17 had to tell Lynette. I did and she was very worried and she was worried that I was gay, which  
18 meant that we had no hope for a relationship. But, when I said that I was a crossdresser, that's  
19 the term I used back then, it seemed possible that we could figure out how to navigate that  
20 because it seemed . . .
- 21 AJ: What an amazing partner you have.
- 22 VD: Yeah, I know – right. So, we did, and I did call that number twice. The first time I got scared and  
23 I just . . . because it was a male voice that was on an answering machine. I was like, "Oh, my  
24 God, I can't . . ." And then, I thought, "Oh, I have to – I have to find someplace . . ." I was so  
25 scared and felt so alone, so I called back again and then I very carefully left a message that said,  
26 "I don't know if I'm calling the right place but this is what I'm dealing with. If you are, then this  
27 is my number blah, blah, blah." I got a call back within about an hour and we set up a time to  
28 meet – this is back in the day when everybody was afraid and everybody's careers, social life . . .
- 29 AJ: Family.
- 30 VD: Everything, was in jeopardy – so this was super secret, a super-secret society. We had to meet  
31 without crossing, with the president and one of the officers . . . they did try to have a structure,  
32 at a sports bar. It was a hamburger place.
- 33 AJ: Very macho.

- 1 VD: Yes, a hamburger place, which I think is still there. And, this in the early 1980s and Lynette came  
2 – I said, “Can my wife come?” and they said yes. So, we went there and we just talked and I felt  
3 so validated because they said, “Oh, yeah, no problem – we just needed to meet you and make  
4 sure you were for real. Here are the rules, nobody knows your last name.”
- 5 AJ: You’re not a cop and all of this stuff.
- 6 VD: You come up with your own name, your femme name, because basically it was all clandestine.  
7 And then there was a meeting place once a month where you could come and either transition  
8 there, clothing-wise, or you could arrive there . . . that was up to you. So, yeah . . . and so we  
9 went to the first one. I had started to pull together clothing, Lynette helped me do that, and we  
10 went to this first one. She met the other . . . it was open for everybody in that crossdressing . . .  
11 so it was open to male to female, female to male.
- 12 AJ: Oh, wow. Were there very many female to male people?
- 13 VD: No. I think it was . . . those were still such early days that there was still such a division between  
14 the gender spectrums that didn’t cross over. It was technically open . . .
- 15 AJ: It was technically open but, in reality, it didn’t really manifest.
- 16 VD: And, it turned out that most of the people were crossdressers kind of in middle life and who had  
17 some financial success, and they were the ones who were able to organize and put together safe  
18 houses, they would host a party, or we eventually started renting one of those hotel . . .  
19 independent hotels where you rent a townhouse.
- 20 AJ: How long did you stay involved with CLCC?
- 21 VD: I became one of the people that went and interviewed new people.
- 22 AJ: Really?
- 23 VD: Yeah, so I went on interviews and I was very adamant to say, “We have to follow up on these  
24 outreaches because people are scared to death, we have to go.”
- 25 AJ: Yeah.
- 26 VD: And we can’t put this off, they need us. I stayed and became one of their officers. I did the art  
27 for it, for the newsletter – so I designed the art with kind of the 1920s . . .
- 28 AJ: Sure – the hat.
- 29 VD: That was me.
- 30 AJ: We have some of those newsletters – we have quite a few of those newsletters.
- 31 VD: Those would have been my time there.
- 32 AJ: I think I even published a poem in one of them before.
- 33 VD: Yeah. It was such an important thing . . .
- 34 AJ: Who were some of the players involved – do you recall?
- The Transgender Oral History Project

- 1 VD: Oh, gosh. Who was the trans woman that Obama brought in officially to represent the trans  
2 community?
- 3 AJ: Barbara Satin?
- 4 VD: Yeah, I think so. She was part of the group.
- 5 AJ: She was a part of the group? OK.
- 6 VD: Yeah, I think she the president for a while.
- 7 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 8 VD: And, Jane Fee. She was part of that group from the beginning. I remember her . . . and you just  
9 interviewed her I saw.
- 10 AJ: I did, yeah – it was incredible, down in Florida.
- 11 VD: So, she was one of the people that was on the forefront. She would host with the places she  
12 lived in and she was even on a Jessy Raphael show that . . .
- 13 AJ: Yeah, Sally Jessy – yeah.
- 14 VD: I remember having one meeting where she showed the video of that.
- 15 AJ: Yeah.
- 16 VD: But those were still such early days and very few of us went beyond that, everybody was very  
17 careful. I, being in rock-n-roll, I eventually came out to my band, All the Pretty Horses.
- 18 AJ: How did you do that? Did you write them a letter, did you take them all out to a bar?
- 19 VD: No, I was at a rehearsal. That was Ed Ford and Bill Bailey, those were my original bass player  
20 and drummer. Bill was my drummer; Ed was my bass player. And, that was at the Dupont  
21 House; they had a recording studio called Mirror Image, which is still in existence on Dupont, up  
22 there in Uptown. Our rehearsal space was that studio; Bill's family owns the studio. So, it was  
23 in the control room there, and this was when the Pretty Horses was very early, we hadn't even  
24 put out an album yet. I said, "Guys, I got to tell you something." I said, "This is who I am and  
25 this is what I'm doing and I need to be out about this – and onstage, and project as much as I  
26 can." They were very cool about it there. Ed said something like, "OK, well, let's use it and get  
27 famous."
- 28 AJ: Yeah.
- 29 VD: I remember him saying that. But, a mutual friend of ours, Tonya, who eventually worked as my  
30 manager when I toured with Laura Jane Grace, but we talked about it after that and she said,  
31 because we were all friends back then, and Billy, I guess, had called and talked to her and they  
32 were freaking out – I guess they absolutely didn't know what to do with it. They were very . . .  
33 they didn't know what to do, they didn't know what to expect, they were kind of scared about  
34 the whole thing – but they were willing to do it because we all wanted to be rock stars. So, they  
35 put up with it, I think, basically. And so then I began to be out on stage and projecting that trans

1 identity back then and kind of following in the footsteps of Ziggy Stardust and that kind of  
2 gender ambiguity without saying it, per se. But eventually it became obvious. I weathered Bill  
3 leaving the band, we put out our first album . . . Matt Batchelor eventually, through a couple of  
4 different drummers in-between, Matt Batchelor became my drummer to replace . . . and then  
5 we began to tour. I had already gone out to New York on a travel study grant. I had gotten to  
6 know John Killacky, he was the performance art director at the Walker, and I was going out  
7 there to study with Meredith Monk with performance art and I got a travel study grant for that.  
8 It turned out that I wasn't able to follow through with all of the aspects of that because of her  
9 circumstances . . . she agreed to it all but her circumstances didn't allow . . . so I spent more time  
10 out there with another friend of mine, Karen Plaid, who is a cartoonist, a lesbian. She  
11 introduced me to the whole New York scene, the club scene out there – all the rock-n-roll  
12 nights, and then it was like oh, this is how it works. You don't just go to the club, try to get a gig  
13 and then try to navigate into what your lineup is. You create an event and then you invite bands  
14 and you control the whole thing. It was a paradigm shift. So, Squeeze Box was out there, that's  
15 where Hedwig started, at Don Hill's. There was Fraggie Rock, there was the Meow Mix had their  
16 thing going on.

17 AJ: When you say, "That's where Hedwig started" . . .

18 VD: Yeah.

19 AJ: Say more about that.

20 VD: So, Hedwig started there. John Cameron Mitchell had a band out there and he was a house  
21 band, his band was a house band at Don Hill's. They hosted a night called Squeeze Box and  
22 what they would do is they would close the night and they would do a specialty show, a tribute  
23 of some sort, or some sort of interpretation of songs or whatever. They would close the night  
24 with that, it was theatrical. New York understood the whole drag show, so they were coming  
25 from that drag perspective.

26 AJ: But, are you saying *Hedwig* was not a theatrical production first?

27 VD: No, no – it was one of their theme nights and it was a persona that he developed for one of  
28 these nights and just kept coming back to it and coming back to it.

29 AJ: And then it became a Broadway show.

30 VD: He got inspired to do a show and so I went to see the off-Broadway, the original ones.

31 AJ: Is that right?

32 VD: Yeah, so I was there, and a friend of ours, at that time, knew the . . .

33 AJ: Was it in Manhattan or Brooklyn?

34 VD: Manhattan. And, a friend of ours, a mutual friend of ours, knew the hairdresser who was doing  
35 the wigs and so he got ground floor seats – everybody that bought something had to sit in the  
36 balcony around there, we got right in the middle on the main floor, because we were special.  
37 So, I got to see the original.



- 1 AJ: The original *Hedwig*.
- 2 VD: The original *Hedwig*, and I used to perform in Squeeze Box with the house band. I was not there  
3 when he was doing the Hedwig persona, but he was doing other themes and other things. We  
4 were always the opening act.
- 5 AJ: What's this person's name?
- 6 VD: John Cameron Mitchell.
- 7 AJ: John Cameron Mitchell, OK.
- 8 VD: Yeah, he's the one that did the . . . he's the one that's behind *Hedwig* and performed . . . and in  
9 the movie and . . . yeah.
- 10 AJ: Wow.
- 11 VD: And actually, *Hedwig* came out right when *Venus of Mars* was coming out, so we were scared  
12 because I did a bunch of animation and they were talking about *Hedwig* with all the animation  
13 and we have . . . the filmmaker, Emily Goldberg, I made up these . . .
- 14 AJ: Oh, I know Emily.
- 15 VD: I made these little postcards that said, "Never mind *Hedwig*, here's Venus de Mars," going after  
16 the Sex Pistols. So, we had these flyers and she gave one to him.
- 17 AJ: So, you were competing with *Hedwig* at the time.
- 18 VD: We were competing – yeah. And he was just like, "All right – yeah." He did not appreciate the  
19 humor.
- 20 AJ: I'm pretty sure.
- 21 VD: I imagine he felt just as vulnerable as we did, but we didn't see it – we saw him and that whole  
22 project as established and they had nothing to worry about. We were the underdogs – we were  
23 just like, "Hey, look at us."
- 24 AJ: Yeah.
- 25 VD: Silly, but yeah.
- 26 AJ: Unbelievable story – wow. When did you first meet a trans person? And, I also wanted to say,  
27 you really came out to the world on stage.
- 28 VD: Yeah, pretty much. I did . . . there was . . . two questions there, I'm going to think about the first  
29 one a little bit, because I want to remember . . . I do remember. OK, I'm going to go right to that  
30 first question – the first trans person. I was at one of the first . . . my previous band was called  
31 Straight Face, this was before I came out, this would have been early 1980s, this is what moved  
32 me down to Minneapolis from Duluth. We had a management agency down here called West  
33 Bank Booking, Twin /Tone was the other.
- 34 AJ: Oh, I remember Twin/Tone.

- 1 VD: Yeah, they were the other major manager corporate group, and then ours was West Bank  
2 Booking. West Bank Booking brought us down and then went bankrupt as soon as hit town,  
3 basically. So, we got an EPA recorded . . . or EP recorded . . . EPA? Trump and all of that.
- 4 AJ: Oh, my God.
- 5 VD: Politics. EP recorded at . . . I think it was the Flaming O's had a recording studio, one of the guys  
6 from Flaming O's had a recording studio in Uptown, so we recorded that there. We also went to  
7 Blackberry Way to do some mixed downs and some vocal work, which was in Dinkytown. But,  
8 we lost our support. Mike Burke was the person who ran West Bank Booking and he tried to  
9 help us out as much as he could but he didn't have a business anymore after we got there. So,  
10 we lost everything. The Replacements were just up and coming; we were at the same places as  
11 The Replacements. We would support The Suburbs, who was the big band back then; we would  
12 front for them when The Replacements wouldn't be able to do it – so we were the replacements  
13 for The Replacements.
- 14 AJ: What?
- 15 VD: And we were The Freaks, because back then me, pursuing it, but my synthesizer . . . oh, God, I'm  
16 just going to talk forever. My synthesizer player was all into the Japanese visual rock.
- 17 AJ: Kabuki.
- 18 VD: Yes, but there was this whole Vis Rock, they called it back then, and they were taking the kabuki  
19 stuff and doing these very theatrical rock and roll shows – lots of the kabuki. So, we started  
20 doing that. But, everybody thought we were trying to be like KISS, because they didn't know  
21 that – too subtle. But, I loved it because then I could play with makeup, I loved that. So, we  
22 were the freaky people.
- 23 AJ: Did you guys ever cross paths with Prince?
- 24 VD: On occasion. Not directly, I didn't talk to him directly, but I would see him in clubs – at First Ave  
25 every now and then. His bass player came to see us – from The Revolution came to see us at the  
26 Seventh Street Entry when we were performing at Seventh Street Entry and they were  
27 performing at . . .
- 28 AJ: At First Ave, yeah.
- 29 VD: Yeah, he came over and he was trying to teach my bass player how to do the pick and slap,  
30 "That's all you got to do." So, Dave Frame was my bass player then, he was thrilled. So, they  
31 came to see us.
- 32 AJ: It seems like there was a similar path.
- 33 VD: It was about the same time, yeah.
- 34 AJ: And, Prince played with gender quite a bit too.

- 1 VD: He did. And, that was fascinating to me because I saw what he was doing, although he didn't  
2 come out as trans. I would say that I think he might have been . . . I'm pretty convinced he was  
3 part of the community. He grew up around the time I grew up and I'm sure he had . . .
- 4 AJ: Yeah, you guys are pretty much the same age.
- 5 VD: And I'm sure he had the same kind of weight and he was also more religious and I think that  
6 might have kept him keeping that all in check; although, I'm pretty sure he was but he never  
7 came out as such.
- 8 AJ: Pretty sure he was gay or trans?
- 9 VD: Trans. I'm pretty sure he was trans.
- 10 AJ: I suspect . . . I'm in the same age group as you guys, I would see Prince around.
- 11 VD: I have a little bit more information on that but I'm not going to say it; I'm pretty sure, but he was  
12 not in a position to do it, and actually, at that time, it might have been a problem for his career  
13 and his career was going so well that he couldn't afford to do that. I felt bad, because he could  
14 have done a lot.
- 15 AJ: So, the first trans person – that's where your story was going.
- 16 VD: In this band, we would do the gay Pride – the early gay Pride where nobody showed up and it  
17 was at the Loring Park only and the march would go down Hennepin Avenue, right in front of  
18 our house, and it was just a collection of a few hundred people and that was all it was. This was  
19 early 1980s and my bass player's younger brother came out as gay, so he was our conduit to  
20 start playing at Pride and I had my little secret, but I didn't want to reveal that yet. So, I was fine  
21 with doing it, so we played a couple of the parties, we played at the Saloon Block Park when  
22 InSoc played there, Information Society, when they were first starting with their Minneapolis  
23 group – they played synthesizers on ironing boards.
- 24 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 25 VD: They were one of the other bands when we performed that and we also played in the park, and  
26 so there is the first trans person I saw. I saw this gorgeous woman walking and she had on like a  
27 big hat, she had nylon stockings with Cuban heels with the back seam, and this wonderful  
28 striped tight fighting skirt – she looked like a French model from like the 1940s. It was that kind  
29 of persona she was doing – short-crop top, two piece, and heels. I was just fascinated – that  
30 was like, "Oh, my God." And, this was at the end – we were cleaning up and loading up and  
31 everybody else had pretty much gone – this was the remnants of the celebration.
- 32 AJ: Sure.
- 33 VD: She was walking down the sidewalk at one of the lower parts . . . probably over by where the  
34 cathedral, St. Mark's Cathedral, is at the end of the park. She was walking through by one of the  
35 sidewalks and I was just thrilled and amazed at how beautiful she looked and then I felt like,  
36 "This is who I am; I want to be like that person – I need to be like that person, I need to find that  
37 person in me."

- 1 AJ: At that time, were you a part of CLCC yet? Or, this was previous to that.
- 2 VD: No, this was before that. But, Lynette and I had already married . . . I believe we had. So, we did  
3 have a relationship but this was a rekindling of that sense of myself which was beginning to  
4 make it known that I was not going to get rid of it by being married and trying to be this  
5 heterosexual rock-n-roll tough guy.
- 6 AJ: Let me ask you this, Venus, and you kind of alluded to it a little bit. Have you undergone any  
7 medical interventions in terms of your transition?
- 8 VD: The hormones, I did the hormones, and then I also had nose surgery. So, I had two nose  
9 surgeries – this would have been . . . I'm thinking in albums, this would have been *Queens and*  
10 *Angels* album era, so that's our second album that go on Twin/Tone, but not appreciated. It  
11 caused a big rift between the two owners – Pete Jespersen and the other guy. Pete was the one  
12 that did not like us being on there because he thought we pulled . . . we destroyed the whole  
13 punk ethic. I'm sure that had to do with me being trans. And, also the goth aspect, but he felt  
14 like we were not true to the tough punk image that Twin/Tone had developed and he was not  
15 happy. The other guy has just flown out of my head now, he was supportive and he liked it. A  
16 friend of mine was our A&R guy who got us onto the label for that. But, once we got on and we  
17 got the album *Queens and Angels* out, it all fell apart. I made a video, this was back in the old  
18 days – no YouTube, no nothing. I was on the internet, I was one of the first ones on the internet  
19 where you had this long-convoluted way to find it – nothing simple, no Facebook, nothing like  
20 that. We had to be on that website and updating it all the time . . . I'm going down so many  
21 rabbit holes here, I'm just going to chatter. So, coming back to that *Queens and Angels* time,  
22 and at that time we were trying to get support – because we had a record label, we had  
23 Twin/Tone, which was called TRG Record Group at that time, but we were on the main label,  
24 which was Twin/Tone. And so, we were trying to get help and we were sending stuff out and  
25 there was an agency that wanted stuff and I was trying to do that. I was feeling like . . . at that  
26 time, Lynette and I were beginning to go out, me as trans – I would transgender cross, and we  
27 would go to the 90s every week and then we would go to the Saloon and I had a friend, Michael,  
28 who was doing the whole androgyny thing and so he and I would go clubbing all over all the  
29 time. I would always fully transition, I was all over the club scene back then – First Ave and blah,  
30 blah, blah. So, I was going out a lot – but, my nose was giving me away as male and then I would  
31 get shit from people when I was out of the club . . . going from the car, to the car, driving home  
32 even at stoplights and everything. It turned out that I had broken my nose when I was in  
33 Straight Face at Seventh Street Entry and I came down on a microphone stand and shattered my  
34 nose. So, it was very prominent and I really wanted to get rid of that because it was becoming  
35 oppressive. I did go through surgeries and I talked and came out to the surgeon – I paid for it. I  
36 told the surgeon I was trans and so that's the direction we went with it, to feminize the nose.
- 37 AJ: But you also . . . I mean, it was health reasons too, right? If you broke it . . .
- 38 VD: Mostly cosmetic.
- 39 AJ: Mostly cosmetic, OK.
- 40 VD: Yeah, it was mostly cosmetic – mental health issues, yeah.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, yeah. OK.
- 2 VD: It took two surgeries because the first one, the scar tissue started growing back so then they had  
3 to do a second one.
- 4 AJ: Do you feel like your transgender identity has helped or hurt your career?
- 5 VD: Oh, good question. Who knows? Well, you know . . . I am happy with what I've done and I'm  
6 happy being trans and I'm happy with the changes that I didn't think that I would ever live to see  
7 unfold with the trans community. I thought I would die still underground as being out, but being  
8 seen as a deviation or perversion and publicly being seen as that. And, being part of this whole  
9 underground scene. That's what I thought – I would die, I thought I would be in the middle of  
10 that right now and in the next 20 years I would wind down and move on to the next adventure,  
11 still living in this whole underground world. I could not conceive the progress that we made in  
12 the last 10 years, it floors me. Honestly, I could not see it happening. I met Jane County in New  
13 York.
- 14 AJ: Who is Jane County?
- 15 VD: Jane County used to be . . . James County. He, as his previous self, was a rock-n-roll . . . early  
16 punk rocker during the Max's Kansas City era, out in New York, which I just missed. I was out  
17 there with the CBGB's era but the Max's Kansas City was right before that and that would have  
18 included Bowie, all of those . . .
- 19 AJ: Warhol.
- 20 VD: Warhol, all of those – I just missed all of that. But that was the scene, right before I went out to  
21 New York and Jane was part of that, and Jane transitioned to become Jane, on stage, in rock-n-  
22 roll, but stayed true to her punk roots. So, she would come out and she was seen as a huge  
23 groundbreaker in the trans community and rock-n-roll. If you Google her, you'll find out all  
24 about her.
- 25 AJ: Yes, and I will be doing that.
- 26 VD: Yeah, she's still around. I hope she would remember me, she knows Shannon – she has stayed  
27 in touch with Shannon.
- 28 AJ: Sure.
- 29 VD: I got some photographs with her at CBGB's and we worked together a couple of times, we had  
30 some other mutual friends in the trans community. But, yeah, so she went through all of that.  
31 So, I saw what she did in the community but I thought I would follow that same path, where it  
32 would just be . . . you would be in the underground forever.
- 33 AJ: Right.
- 34 VD: So, we always had the audience and we made a difference with the audience. We had so many  
35 opportunities to go so far and see so much. I really, I experienced the whole underground music  
36 scene back in the day when it was exciting and dangerous and amazing. And, I was part of it,  
37 which I value so much. I don't know if I would have survived an above-ground career if I had not

- 1           been trans. If I had just tried to follow the traditional route and just been regular old rock-n-roll  
2           guy, I don't think I would have had those experiences and I probably would not . . . I probably  
3           wouldn't have been unique enough or interesting enough for anybody to pay attention . . . I  
4           wasn't interested in all of that music, I was interested in Ziggy Stardust.
- 5   AJ:     Right.
- 6   VD:     I was interested in the odd balls, I was interested in the outsiders because that's who I was.
- 7   AJ:     But, the talent and musical proclivity is there.
- 8   VD:     Well, thank you – that's very generous of you.
- 9   AJ:     No, that's the truth.
- 10   VD:    Well, I worked and I was constantly working and I think that just happened because I kept  
11           working at it. I had a story to draw from, to write the music, and to explore and then to present  
12           on stage. I think it helped me, it absolutely helped me to make me who I am now, and I don't  
13           want to be anybody other than who I am.
- 14   AJ:     Sure.
- 15   VD:     So, in that way is how I can answer the question. How we doing? We're almost gone.
- 16   AJ:     No, we're good – we're good. So, wow – you talk about this progress that has been made in the  
17           last 10 years, which has been outstanding.
- 18   VD:     Oh, it's amazing – amazing.
- 19   AJ:     Where do you think the trans community will be 10 years from now?
- 20   VD:     Well, I'll tell you. I'm writing a memoir. I'm to the stage now of piecing together my timeline,  
21           deciding my timeline arc. Luckily a fan of mine had saved all of the band newsletters that I  
22           would send out, so I have an extremely detailed timeline.
- 23   AJ:     Wow, you have that?
- 24   VD:     I have that and I'm slowly putting it together in this graph. It's 1996-2006, so it's a 10-year span,  
25           which includes the filming of the documentary *Venus of Mars* and the film festival run, the three  
26           years of film festival run – all the way up to the hiatus, when I took a hiatus from that line-up of  
27           the band. So, it's kind of like that climb up with the band and then we started descending and  
28           that's when I went on the hiatus. So, it was kind of like I went through the pinnacle of our band  
29           and our push to try to break into the above ground music scene, which we were never able to  
30           do.
- 31   AJ:     Sure.
- 32   VD:     So, yeah, I have that whole timeline, so I'm writing a memoir . . . why did I go down this  
33           explanation? What was the question?
- 34   AJ:     The question was where do you see the trans community 10 years from now.

- 1 VD: Ten years from now, yes, this is what I was going to say. When I started writing the memoir,  
2 that was about 10 years ago – I started writing essays and blah, blah, blah; started pulling back  
3 from my blog and started trying to write more privately to gather stories for this, then I did this  
4 timeline – and then everything changed. Eight years ago, everything changed. The world . . . it's  
5 like the sun came out and I couldn't believe it, and the acceleration of the changes, acceleration  
6 of acknowledgement. Suddenly, I wasn't a pervert.
- 7 AJ: Right.
- 8 VD: We weren't mentally ill anymore, we were real people and we had a real community and we  
9 had people who were activists and we had a sense of deservedness and rights.
- 10 AJ: Sure.
- 11 VD: I grew up thinking, "Well, of course, this is the way it is, I have to expect this." Now people are .  
12 . .
- 13 AJ: "No way, I'm not taking this."
- 14 VD: The kids are saying, "No way, let's march, let's do something, let's change it." I saw the  
15 beginning of that out in San Francisco with some of the film festival things out there. I saw the  
16 beginning of that movement out in San Francisco, and then it took over the whole country. And  
17 then, everything exploded and then the TV shows, *Orange is the New Black* – everything  
18 changed. And then it got into popular culture and then it was like, "Why am I even writing this  
19 memoir? It's all done, there's no story to tell anymore." And so, that kind of cooled me on  
20 doing it and I didn't really know what I was going to do, and then we had our election – with  
21 Trump. I think, Obama embraced the trans community and made it a part of the dialogue of  
22 oppression and how to change that. And that, I do think that coupled with the same-sex ruling,  
23 got all of the . . .
- 24 AJ: Marriage equality, right.
- 25 VD: Yeah, got all of those people who were too conservative, socially conservative, to try to change  
26 things back to the way that they felt more comfortable and I think that's what got Trump in  
27 office. I think that the rest of us, like me, thought everything was done – we've done it, we've  
28 achieved what we wanted to and now we can sit back and enjoy it. And, we sat back and  
29 enjoyed it and this . . .
- 30 AJ: And then this happened.
- 31 VD: Yeah, then this happened. So, now we're being reminded of the dark days of oppression and I  
32 think, in 10 years . . . I think we'll get through it because this is an older population of people  
33 that are pushing this forward. I think it's their last chance to try to establish . . .
- 34 AJ: Last gasp.
- 35 VD: I think so. And, I think they're going to do a lot of damage and they're going to set us back, but I  
36 kind of think we're going to get back on track after these four years – maybe even two years  
37 we're going to start seeing that happen. I think the trans community, this is what I think, I think

- 1 with the medical community also coming around that when kids are beginning to try to  
2 understand how to transition and to understand who their gender is, they're going to get the  
3 medical help to do that early – postpone regular puberty and be able to do a transition more  
4 seamlessly.
- 5 AJ: Sure.
- 6 VD: I think people . . . like all of us in the trans community now, that carry this duality in our bodies, I  
7 think we are going to be slowly diminishing. We're going to be a unique group of people, I think  
8 – I think this may be a generation from now. But, I think trans people are going to be much  
9 harder to identify in the future. I think it's going to change who we are, we're not going to be  
10 carrying the kind of baggage and the damage that we've had to heal from and build from. Those  
11 are important things and we need to go through this, this is an important time and we need to  
12 be those pioneers, I guess. But, I think the future generations, at least in a privileged company  
13 like America, I think we're going to see those of us that carry that duality diminish and we're  
14 going to see people who are more concerned with regular life issues and not that kind of issue –  
15 and, I'm curious to see what happens at that point. I'm curious.
- 16 AJ: Wow, well now it's Wednesday and the tornado warnings are coming on. I think we better wrap  
17 up, Venus. But, I guess I will ask you one last question. Is there anything that I didn't ask you  
18 that you feel compelled to add.
- 19 VD: Well, I'd love to do another interview because I have so much.
- 20 AJ: I'm glad you said that.
- 21 VD: I'd love to do that, so if you want to do that.
- 22 AJ: We can schedule it right now today, if you want to.
- 23 VD: For this session . . . there was a time when I felt like this is the worst thing that could have ever  
24 happened to me and that life was not worth living. I know that so many kids or adults – and  
25 other countries that are going through this, the oppression that is happening in other countries,  
26 is horrendous. I think we are forgetting because we live within our own circle and our own life  
27 and our own experiences, we ignore the terror that's happening to trans people around the  
28 globe and gay people around the globe – the killings and the torture, the horrendous things that  
29 the rest of the world is enduring in our community, and I think we have to not put blinders on  
30 and forget that we have so much more work to do. That would be what I would say.
- 31 AJ: Wow, thank you so much, Venus.
- 32 VD: All right.
- 33 AJ: It's been a fascinating conversation. And, I look forward to sitting down and turning on the  
34 camera again with you.
- 35 VD: Let's talk more.
- 36 AJ: All right.



- 1 VD: All right.
- 2 AJ: Peace.