

Renae Pagel  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

August 23, 2016



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

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

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- 1    Andrea Jenkins            -AJ  
2    Renae Pagel              -RP  
3
- 4    AJ:      So, hello.  
5    RP:      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. Today is August 23, 2016, and I am in  
8            Ramsey, Minnesota, in the home of Renae Passel?  
9    RP:      Pagel.  
10   AJ:      Pagel.  
11   RP:      Pagel, yes.  
12   AJ:      How are you doing today?  
13   RP:      I'm doing good.  
14   AJ:      Renae, first of all, I just want to say thank you for being willing to be a part of this project. But,  
15            can you just state your name and how you spell it so that we make sure we have it right for our  
16            transcriptionist, but also tell me your gender as you identify today, your gender assigned at  
17            birth, and then what pronouns do you use?  
18   RP:      OK. My name is Renae Pagel, R-e-n-a-e P-a-g-e-l. I identify as female; my assigned birth was  
19            male.  
20   AJ:      And your pronouns?  
21   RP:      My pronouns is she/her.  
22   AJ:      She/her/hers.  
23   RP:      Hers, yes.  
24   AJ:      Wow.  
25   RP:      Late for supper.  
26   AJ:      Right. Well, Renae, can you just tell me what is your earliest memory in life?  
27   RP:      In life?  
28   AJ:      Yeah, the first thing you remember.  
29   RP:      I think I go back . . . oh, well, my memory without seeing videos, home videos, but my earliest  
30            memory, I think, is around 8 or 9 years old. I don't really remember too far back beyond that.  
31   AJ:      What was it? What was going on?

- 1 RP: Actually, the first ones not related to being transgender or anything, where it was probably just  
2 with my dad as far as remembering mowing the grass or just stuff around the house.
- 3 AJ: Is that right?
- 4 RP: Yeah.
- 5 AJ: Where did you grow up?
- 6 RP: I grew up in Cannon Falls, Minnesota.
- 7 AJ: Oh, really?
- 8 RP: Yes.
- 9 AJ: Wow, that's a bucolic, beautiful part of Minnesota.
- 10 RP: Yes, I grew up on a hobby farm.
- 11 AJ: Is that right? When you say a hobby farm, that means . . . ?
- 12 RP: It was like 25 acres so we had horses, chickens, I had ducks, we had a goat in the yard. We had a  
13 few pigs so just . . .
- 14 AJ: Just a small but working farm? I mean, did you guys grow anything?
- 15 RP: Not working, we didn't grow nothing – besides a garden. It was just more or less dogs and cats .  
16 . . just hobby farm stuff.
- 17 AJ: So, living in Ramsey, Minnesota is sort of a nod back to your childhood, huh?
- 18 RP: Yes, yes.
- 19 AJ: I would say it's pretty rural here, it's beautiful.
- 20 RP: Yes.
- 21 AJ: We're sort of in the middle of the country.
- 22 RP: Yes, we are in the middle of the country.
- 23 AJ: Do you grow anything here? You said you have 10 acres.
- 24 RP: I have five acres, I just have a small garden right now, which isn't doing well this year at all.
- 25 AJ: Oh, wow. Well, you travel a lot with your job, right?
- 26 RP: No, it's occasionally right now so I don't really travel a lot right now. But, yeah.
- 27 AJ: What do you grow in your garden?
- 28 RP: Well, I try to grow some potatoes, I've got a few onions, I did radishes. Cucumbers I do every  
29 year so I can make pickles . . . and I think that's about it this year.

- 1 AJ: So, tell me a little bit about growing up in Cannon Falls. Did you have brothers and sisters?  
2 Siblings?
- 3 RP: I have five sisters, I was the only boy.
- 4 AJ: Really? You were the only one that was assigned as a boy.
- 5 RP: Yes, only one assigned as a boy. I do have a half-brother and a half-sister. I have a very large  
6 family, so as far as cousins and everything. My mom has a twin.
- 7 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 8 RP: And with the twin, they live out in southwestern Minnesota, out by the Marshall area, and they  
9 had a real farm – cattle, crops, and I would spend every summer out there.
- 10 AJ: Right.
- 11 RP: And help on the farm and then hang out with the boys and everyone else there too.
- 12 AJ: So, you had some farm in your . . .
- 13 RP: A little farm, yeah.
- 14 AJ: Wow. I assume you went to school in Cannon Falls then.
- 15 RP: Yes, I went to school in Cannon Falls.
- 16 AJ: Yeah, what was elementary school like?
- 17 RP: Small. It's a small town so it was just a small school.
- 18 AJ: Any sort of bullying or anything in school?
- 19 RP: No, no. Our school . . . it was a pretty calm school. We didn't really have . . . not like today. It  
20 was just typical, I guess . . . I don't want to say typical country school, but small town.  
21 Everybody got along, small town and everybody knew everybody.
- 22 AJ: Did you, by any chance, express your gender identity at all while you were in school?
- 23 RP: No. I was still hiding.
- 24 AJ: Yeah, wow. So, none of your brothers and sisters or your mom and dad, anybody, really had a  
25 sense of what was going on with you at all?
- 26 RP: No, probably . . . I'm sure back in their mind they probably knew something was different, but I  
27 don't think they knew.
- 28 AJ: No one ever said anything or confronted you or anything like that?
- 29 RP: Yeah, no.
- 30 AJ: So, you dated girls in high school?

- 1 RP: Yes, I did – not very much though. I’ve always been an independent person so, you know, I
- 2 dated on and off a little bit, but not too much.
- 3 AJ: Right. Wow, so when was the first time that you realized that you were not the gender you
- 4 were assigned at birth?
- 5 RP: Well, I think it was probably around 9 years old or so – I think as far back as I remember.
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 RP: As far as crossdressing and stuff.
- 8 AJ: Sure. So, you sort of started crossdressing when you were nine.
- 9 RP: Yeah. At that time, I didn’t know what it was.
- 10 AJ: Right, yeah. You didn’t say, “Hey, I’m a transsexual,” or . . .
- 11 RP: Yeah, back in those days we didn’t have the internet and everything to kind of search and . . .
- 12 AJ: I do recall.
- 13 RP: So, yeah. I just knew I was different at that time.
- 14 AJ: Right.
- 15 RP: Yes. And, I didn’t learn until . . .
- 16 AJ: But, you knew – you understood.
- 17 RP: I understood . . .
- 18 AJ: That you liked wearing women’s clothes.
- 19 RP: Yes, I understood that, yeah. And, hanging out with the girls and I would rather do girl stuff. I
- 20 don’t want to define it as that but . . .
- 21 AJ: Right.
- 22 RP: But, you know.
- 23 AJ: And your sisters, I mean did you hang out with your sisters or did you hung out with other girls?
- 24 RP: I hung out with my sisters.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, but I guess you really didn’t have a choice. That was it, right? There was four girls and
- 26 you.
- 27 RP: Not too much, yeah.
- 28 AJ: Well, there was your dad. How was your relationship with your dad growing up?
- 29 RP: It was good, he’s always been like a quiet guy growing up. But, it’s good.

- 1 AJ: You said he trained you to become a mechanic.
- 2 RP: Yes, he started when I was 8-10 years old, working on lawn mowers and this and that – and cars.  
3 So, I learned.
- 4 AJ: Wow. Is your mom and dad still alive today?
- 5 RP: My dad just passed away earlier this year from Alzheimer's.
- 6 AJ: I'm so sorry.
- 7 RP: That's OK. I believe in a higher power so we're good.
- 8 AJ: Yeah, good.
- 9 RP: My mom is still alive.
- 10 AJ: Yeah?
- 11 RP: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: Wow. So, did your dad know Renae?
- 13 RP: That was kind of an unfortunate part. He developed Alzheimer's before I came out and  
14 everything. I did tell him but I don't know if he received it or understood it. He knows now.
- 15 AJ: Yeah, he's looking down.
- 16 RP: He knows now.
- 17 AJ: How do you think he would react?
- 18 RP: I think he would have been fine with it?
- 19 AJ: Yeah. He was a pretty open-hearted guy, open-minded guy.
- 20 RP: Yeah, he was pretty . . . he's always been open-minded and just . . . whatever, a simple guy.  
21 He's always been a simple guy, nothing complicated.
- 22 AJ: Sure. How's your mom?
- 23 RP: My mom is good.
- 24 AJ: She's accepting of your transition?
- 25 RP: Oh, yes – yeah. She told me right away when I came out, "You've got to live your life, it's your  
26 life."
- 27 AJ: Really?
- 28 RP: She didn't have no problem with it.
- 29 AJ: Is that right?

- 1 RP: Actually, my whole family has been awesome. I've been very blessed not to lose any of my  
2 family.
- 3 AJ: Wow.
- 4 RP: They've all stuck by me.
- 5 AJ: Your sisters . . .
- 6 RP: Sisters, cousins, everybody.
- 7 AJ: Were you ever married?
- 8 RP: I was married. When I was in the service I got married to a girl, so I was married for seven years.
- 9 AJ: OK. Any children?
- 10 RP: No children, not with that marriage. I don't have any children living, I should say. I always say I  
11 don't have any children, but I do. My last relationship with a girl, before I transitioned, we  
12 didn't know she was pregnant, and I had a stillborn nine-month baby girl. So, yeah, we had a  
13 funeral for that.
- 14 AJ: Sure.
- 15 RP: So, that's . . .
- 16 AJ: So, there was a child but . . .
- 17 RP: There was a child, but not a child.
- 18 AJ: Yeah. Do you still ever talk to any of those relationships? Those exes?
- 19 RP: I'm still friends with my ex-wife and then my last girlfriend I'm still friends with.
- 20 AJ: OK.
- 21 RP: So, yeah.
- 22 AJ: So, they've met Renaë?
- 23 RP: Yes, they've met Renaë.
- 24 AJ: And they're accepting?
- 25 RP: They're accepting and fine with it.
- 26 AJ: You're a lucky sister. And, I only say that because so many people really become disconnected  
27 from their families.
- 28 RP: Yeah, they do.
- 29 AJ: It's really unfortunate, but . . . So, you were in the military?



- 1 RP: Yes, I was.
- 2 AJ: Wow. What was that like?
- 3 RP: Different.
- 4 AJ: Which branch?
- 5 RP: I was in the Army from 1985-1990. I was a mechanic there. It's different . . . it's hard to  
6 describe to somebody who has never been in the military.
- 7 AJ: Sure, I've never been in.
- 8 RP: Compared to being in civilian life, it's way different. It's kind of like being . . . it's kind of like a  
9 club, kind of like you belong to a club – brothers and sisters.
- 10 AJ: Sure, a fraternity maybe, or sorority or something like that.
- 11 RP: A fraternity or . . . you have your brothers and sisters and . . .
- 12 AJ: Everybody takes care of each other, looks out for each other and you guys eat together, sleep  
13 together.
- 14 RP: Yes.
- 15 AJ: Party together.
- 16 RP: Pretty much, yes.
- 17 AJ: Fight together.
- 18 RP: Yes, we're like one big family.
- 19 AJ: Yeah. Wow. So, how were you able to conceal your identity while you were in the military?
- 20 RP: It was hard – very, very hard. And then I didn't have . . . obviously living in the barracks and  
21 stuff, I couldn't go out and buy clothes or anything. So, it was probably a long stretch of my life  
22 where I just put everything inside. Yes.
- 23 AJ: Shut it down.
- 24 RP: I pretty much shut it down, yeah.
- 25 AJ: You were married when you were in the military, right?
- 26 RP: Yes. My wife knew about my crossdressing but I was still in denial, I call it, because I was like,  
27 "Well, I'm just a guy that likes to cross dress."
- 28 AJ: "So, don't worry."
- 29 RP: Yeah. And it's been like that for most of my life, denial I call it.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, it's kind of scary.
- 2 RP: Yes.
- 3 AJ: I mean things have gotten somewhat better now but 10, 15, 20 years ago, it was a big risk to  
4 come out.
- 5 RP: Well, yeah, the biggest thing is the fear of losing your family and everything.
- 6 AJ: Right. So, she was accepting.
- 7 RP: She was accepting of that, yes.
- 8 AJ: So, you guys didn't get divorced because of the gender identity?
- 9 RP: No, I've never ended any relationship because of my gender identity.
- 10 AJ: Wow.
- 11 RP: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: What do you think made her stick around in the relationship? I have a sense; clearly, she loved  
13 you, I guess.
- 14 RP: Well, yeah, probably – love, and I was open and honest and said, "Hey, this is me."
- 15 AJ: Right.
- 16 RP: It's like my last girlfriend, when we started dating I told her right away, "This is me, this is what I  
17 do." I said, "You can either walk away or stay."
- 18 AJ: Sure.
- 19 RP: So, it's pretty much their choice.
- 20 AJ: And she stayed for a while.
- 21 RP: Yeah, actually my last relationship was nine years.
- 22 AJ: OK.
- 23 RP: We were actually engaged but then we never got married or anything.
- 24 AJ: Are you in a relationship now?
- 25 RP: No, just doing my own thing.
- 26 AJ: Yeah. Are you dating?
- 27 RP: No. I've decided not to date. So, I decided . . . I started my transition by starting to see a  
28 therapist four years ago. I decided I needed to concentrate on me. I didn't want the  
29 complications of a relationship while I was transitioning. I need to figure out me, my life and

- 1            what I really want first. And, it's not easy. As independent as I am, I do get lonely at times or  
2            whatever, but I think it's a sacrifice . . . you know, it's for the better.
- 3    AJ:     And there's time.
- 4    RP:     Yes, and there's time and I'm fine being single.
- 5    AJ:     If you met someone today would you . . .
- 6    RP:     Get in a relationship?
- 7    AJ:     Yeah.
- 8    RP:     Oh, yeah.
- 9    AJ:     OK.
- 10   RP:     I wouldn't throw nothing away for . . . yeah, that would be foolish.
- 11   AJ:     But, you're not pursuing it.
- 12   RP:     I'm not pursuing or looking – no.
- 13   AJ:     No, I think that is wise – really take some time to understand who you are.
- 14   RP:     Yeah, it is. I think anybody that's . . . not just people that are transgender, anybody that has  
15            been in relationships or whatever, instead of jumping from relationship to relationship, take  
16            time for yourself and learn to love yourself is the biggest thing. Learn about yourself and then I  
17            think you'll be ready.
- 18   AJ:     Yeah, wow. That's good advice.
- 19   RP:     That's my advice.
- 20   AJ:     So, to the extent that you feel comfortable, Rena, tell me about any medical interventions that  
21            you have had as a part of your transition.
- 22   RP:     Most of it was the medication, estrogen – taking estrogen, testosterone blockers. I did take  
23            progesterone for a little while and so far I haven't had anything . . . well, the one thing I've had  
24            done is my breast augmentation.
- 25   AJ:     OK.
- 26   RP:     I haven't had anything else done.
- 27   AJ:     Are you thinking that you might pursue . . .?
- 28   RP:     Gender reassignment surgery? Yes, I am. I actually have . . . it's scheduled for next June out in  
29            California with Dr. Bowers.
- 30   AJ:     Oh, OK.

- 1 RP: Yeah, I have that scheduled. There's still some more I want to do – like facial hair removal and  
2 I'm not sure about if I want any facial surgery or anything beforehand . . . I'm not sure about  
3 that.
- 4 AJ: Dr. Bowers is a very good surgeon and actually they're getting the Distinguished Alumni Award  
5 from the University of Minnesota next month. Did you know she went to medical school here at  
6 the University?
- 7 RP: I think I read about it, I just don't remember.
- 8 AJ: So, wow. Congratulations. Now, you mentioned that you work for a company that has benefits  
9 that would cover . . .?
- 10 RP: Yes, yes.
- 11 AJ: Do you feel comfortable stating the name of your corporation?
- 12 RP: Oh, yes. I work for Wells Fargo. I've been with them for 10 years so they're very progressive in  
13 LGBT aspects of it. They cover GRS, my medical covers all my medication I need, the doctors'  
14 appointments, the therapists. So, they've covered a lot of that which has been greatly helpful.  
15 And then inclusive they just wrote for breast augmentation to cover that.
- 16 AJ: Oh, wow – and you took advantage of it.
- 17 RP: I took advantage of that.
- 18 AJ: Right away.
- 19 RP: Right away. I think it's a step forward . . . another thing too is that I've been with the company  
20 for 10 years and they have short-term disability that I can . . . I'll be off for three months after  
21 the GRS surgery, so I'll get a paycheck for 100% of my pay for three months.
- 22 AJ: Wow, that's quite a benefit.
- 23 RP: Yes.
- 24 AJ: So, from what we've discussed, you've only been out for . . . when did you come out?
- 25 RP: I came out in the fall of 2012. I started seeing a therapist and slowly started coming out to my  
26 family, friends, and stuff. And then, in the spring of 2013, I saw a doctor and started getting the  
27 medication and then I officially came out to work and then everybody else.
- 28 AJ: So, you came out at your job and you're still there and still . . .?
- 29 RP: Yes.
- 30 AJ: Still gainfully employed with good benefits.
- 31 RP: Yes, still there, good benefits.
- 32 AJ: No harassment?

- 1 RP: No harassment. They've been awesome. Their HR Department already has a plan in place when  
2 somebody comes out. They work with managers and everything and notify your immediate co-  
3 workers.
- 4 AJ: Co-workers or whatever.
- 5 RP: So, there was . . . it was pretty nice to have that.
- 6 AJ: What do you do there?
- 7 RP: I work in IT, I work on desktops, laptops, printers – everything.
- 8 AJ: Is that right? So, you program them, you . . .
- 9 RP: I don't program them, I do desktop support. So, I basically fix . . .
- 10 AJ: So, if my email is not working right, I'll call you up and you'll come . . .
- 11 RP: Yes, that stuff too. Yeah.
- 12 AJ: Wow. And I suspect you probably install the new computers and all of that.
- 13 RP: New computers and the software, I deal with the hardware and all the troubleshooting stuff.
- 14 AJ: Wow, that's a great job.
- 15 RP: It is, I enjoy it very much. It's a field . . . coming from being a mechanic, what we call a blue-  
16 collar field, I think the corporate world is more accepting than a blue-collar field of being  
17 transgender.
- 18 AJ: I don't know where you worked when you were a mechanic, but do you think you would have  
19 been able to come out at your job?
- 20 RP: I would have been able to come out, but I think it would have been hard. I think there would  
21 have been a lot of harassment – just because of the mentality in some fields.
- 22 AJ: Wow, that is quite fascinating. You have sort of had some of these . . . what? What some  
23 people would call hyper-masculine . . .
- 24 RP: Jobs, yeah.
- 25 AJ: Jobs.
- 26 RP: Yes.
- 27 AJ: The military for five years, a mechanic for . . .
- 28 RP: For 20 years. I spent 20 years as a mechanic.
- 29 AJ: For 20 years. And even, IT support is sort of heavily . . .
- 30 RP: Male dominated.

- 1 AJ: Dominated by men but more and more women are certainly entering. And, I think all of those  
2 fields nowadays. But, was there something that drew you to sort of these more masculine type  
3 occupations?
- 4 RP: Well, the mechanics stuff, in the military, I followed my dad's footsteps. So, I was trying to be  
5 "the man." So, I was basically . . . yeah, I need to be a man so I need to do this.
- 6 AJ: To sort of overcompensate or overcome these . . .
- 7 RP: Overcome – so you'd overcome these . . .
- 8 AJ: These feelings of being transgender.
- 9 RP: Yeah. And working out at the gym and . . .
- 10 AJ: Were you ever an athlete?
- 11 RP: I wasn't an athlete in high school, I just worked out in the gym – and I still work out now.
- 12 AJ: Really?
- 13 RP: I've come to accept myself . . . my female trainer, she's muscular. I've come to say it's OK for  
14 girls to have muscles.
- 15 AJ: Yeah.
- 16 RP: So, I work out.
- 17 AJ: You shared a little piece that you wrote earlier that sort of relates to this idea of still working  
18 out. I suspect you might fix your car when it breaks down.
- 19 RP: Yeah, cut a tree down with a chain saw, right.
- 20 AJ: Right. Would you mind sharing that piece?
- 21 RP: Sure, I'll read it off here. So, "Being transgender does not define me and I still like doing the  
22 things I enjoyed as a man. Why should I give up any hobbies that I enjoy? The things we do in  
23 life should not be defined by gender." So, that's the little thing I wrote.
- 24 AJ: Wow, that's so beautiful. You wrote that as a part of a speech?
- 25 RP: Yes, yes. It was with Wells Fargo – their Pride Network that they have. They had a conference  
26 call and I actually did a full PowerPoint with that explaining my . . . my transitional pictures from  
27 the old me to the new me and did a little . . .
- 28 AJ: Really? At your job?
- 29 RP: At my job, yeah.
- 30 AJ: How did people respond?
- 31 RP: They liked it.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, wow. So, you got a lot of support, a lot of love, people came up and gave you hugs.
- 2 RP: Oh, yes – yes. And Wells Fargo has like an ally program so I have an ally at work and if I ever  
3 need to talk to her, I talk to her.
- 4 AJ: Yeah.
- 5 RP: It's a good program.
- 6 AJ: So, you guys get along pretty well?
- 7 RP: Yes.
- 8 AJ: You and this ally woman.
- 9 RP: Yes, yes we do.
- 10 AJ: Wow, that is awesome.
- 11 RP: Yeah.
- 12 AJ: I'm really quite blown away by the policies and the acceptance that you have received at Wells  
13 Fargo because . . . I don't know. I think you have these, clearly, misconceptions about corporate  
14 America and how they are dealing with these issues, particularly with the bathroom bills that  
15 are circulating all around the country and the hatred that we even saw here in Minnesota with  
16 the government not wanting young high school students to come out and be able to use the  
17 locker room or play on the sports teams that they want to. How do you feel about all of this  
18 discrimination that is still present?
- 19 RP: It upsets me, honestly. I don't know why they have to worry about it, you know. It's just . . .  
20 again, like at the gym, I don't use a women's locker room or anything because I can't until after I  
21 have my surgery. And so . . .
- 22 AJ: Is that a requirement that they have?
- 23 RP: Yeah.
- 24 AJ: But, you can't go to the men's locker room – you're a hot babe.
- 25 RP: Thank you. I use the family locker room and they have individual places you can go change.
- 26 AJ: Really?
- 27 RP: Yes.
- 28 AJ: So, it's sort of accommodating then.
- 29 RP: It's accommodating but not all places obviously have that. Obviously, when I'm out in public, I  
30 just use the women's restroom or whatever. On one side, using the family room is a little bit  
31 more comforting for me because it does scare me to . . . you know, if I'm somewhere out in

- 1 public . . . I've gotten better at it to use the female rest room, sometimes I'm a little scared or  
2 something.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, absolutely.
- 4 RP: I just don't know why they can't let people be.
- 5 AJ: Yeah. I mean, it's the most basic human function beyond breathing.
- 6 RP: All the reasoning . . .
- 7 AJ: I mean, we've got to pee. Everything on the planet has to get rid of waste.
- 8 RP: I grew up on a farm, we used a bush if we had to.
- 9 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 10 RP: Yeah, all the reasoning against it I think just doesn't make any sense – about people raping  
11 people or . . . you know what I'm saying? All this weird hyped up stuff that they're trying to  
12 scare people for is just ridiculous.
- 13 AJ: Yeah. So, have you, or are you involved in any sort of advocacy-type groups? Have you ever  
14 worked for an LGBT organization or transgender-specific organization?
- 15 RP: I haven't, no I haven't. I've never really been involved in some of that stuff.
- 16 AJ: Like volunteer at all?
- 17 RP: I do volunteer through my work and other places, but I haven't done that through any LGBT or  
18 specific . . .
- 19 AJ: Well, you said you're involved with the Pride Network at your job.
- 20 RP: Yeah, the Pride Network – yes.
- 21 AJ: Well, that's an LGBT organization, I guess.
- 22 RP: I guess, yeah.
- 23 AJ: Even though it's under the auspices of Wells Fargo, but still.
- 24 RP: My thing is for any of these lawmakers and anything, I would say . . . you know, tell them to get  
25 out of their comfort zone, go meet a transgender person, sit down and talk with them – not just  
26 in a court, a hearing or something, where they're debating a transgender bill, a bathroom bill or  
27 some . . . get out of your comfort zone – go meet them, talk to them and find out. They're just  
28 human, they're not some scary monster that's going to go and rape your children.
- 29 AJ: Exactly.
- 30 RP: We already have laws against that – hello.



- 1 AJ: Right, yeah. Wow. So, has there been a specific person or organization or something that  
2 helped you identify that this is who I am and that I can be comfortable coming out?
- 3 RP: Probably it would be like anybody in my family and close-knit friends, my therapist, and stuff.  
4 All of them. Facebook is a huge thing. I only keep people on there that's family and friends and  
5 they always support me if I'm having a down day or something. So, I think the biggest thing is  
6 just support around the people I know.
- 7 AJ: When is the first time you ever met another transgender person?
- 8 RP: Probably as I was deciding . . . when I was working with my therapist, I actually did meet another  
9 transgender person and talked to them and everything. So, I kind of did like a . . . as I was  
10 deciding and before I started taking medication, I kind of reached out. I went to a transgender  
11 group and then I actually talked to people and stuff. I think that's very good for people to do.
- 12 AJ: Where did you do your therapy at?
- 13 RP: My therapy is in Maple Grove. I can't remember it off the top of my head without looking it up.
- 14 AJ: OK, but they had groups and stuff out there.
- 15 RP: Well, that wasn't a group – my therapy was just an individual therapist.
- 16 AJ: So, what group did you go to?
- 17 RP: The group that I went to was . . . it's a Minnesota group, I'm trying to think of the name of it. It's  
18 blanking my mind, I'm sorry.
- 19 AJ: No, that's fine.
- 20 RP: If you just Google Minnesota Transgender crossdressing groups there's a few of them out there,  
21 it was one of them. I actually met a couple of people from there.
- 22 AJ: There's a City of Lakes . . .
- 23 RP: Yeah, that might have been it too, I can't remember off the top of my head.
- 24 AJ: Wow.
- 25 RP: And then, another thing what I did was I joined a meet-up group to find friends and stuff to do  
26 stuff. I met a group . . . it was like a lesbian group and then I met some people at a baseball  
27 game, a Twins game, and they actually . . . they have their own softball team.
- 28 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 29 RP: It's a gay/lesbian softball team with some straight people and so I made some friends there.  
30 That's really helped a lot too.
- 31 AJ: So, you play on the softball team or you just go watch them?
- 32 RP: I don't play, I just watch them or take pictures. I just support them.

- 1 AJ: OK.
- 2 RP: One thing about coming out is I've gained so many new friends, friends I never would have  
3 gained in life. I've gotten out of my comfort zone and I've . . . it's been awesome.
- 4 AJ: Really, wow. So, your transition has been pretty good.
- 5 RP: It's been pretty positive. I'm very, very lucky.
- 6 AJ: Now you live in a pretty rural community, Renae. You know, you've been living here for . . .
- 7 RP: Eight years.
- 8 AJ: Eight years, so the first four years you were a different person.
- 9 RP: I was a different person. All my neighbors and stuff, when I knew I was transitioning, I went to  
10 all my neighbors and told them.
- 11 AJ: Is that right?
- 12 RP: And they've all accepted me.
- 13 AJ: Nobody said, "Get the hell out of here."
- 14 RP: Nobody said, "Get the hell out of here." Not yet. But yeah, I think Minnesota is a pretty . . .
- 15 AJ: I didn't see any graffiti on your garage or anything like that.
- 16 RP: No, I think Minnesota is a pretty accepting place. I really do. I've never had a problem. I was  
17 transitioning just . . . you know, the local Wal-Mart, Menards or wherever else, nobody has ever  
18 said anything to me. In the back of your mind you're always wondering how people look at you.
- 19 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 20 RP: And you have that – like, "Oh, my gosh, am I passing?" "Is my voice going to throw me away?"  
21 But, most people have been really accepting.
- 22 AJ: You bring up this word passing.
- 23 RP: Yeah.
- 24 AJ: What do you think about that?
- 25 RP: I hate it, because I just wish people could be people. It's society, we have to always try and fit . .  
26 . we have to always try and fit into those norms of what females look like and what males look  
27 like.
- 28 AJ: Women come in all in shapes and sizes. There are women bodybuilders, women mechanics,  
29 women with long hair, women with short hair.

- 1 RP: Obviously we don't want guys walking around in dresses because they don't look good in  
2 dresses. But, we just . . . my dream is that someday people won't have to worry about passing,  
3 they don't have to worry about coming out, they can just be who they are.
- 4 AJ: Yeah.
- 5 RP: It would be nice.
- 6 AJ: Wow, so have you ever had any sort of harassment at trying to get your name changed or  
7 getting stopped by the police or anything like that?
- 8 RP: I've never been stopped by the police. Actually, I live in Ramsey and the police department here  
9 is awesome. It was normal paperwork and . . . I did have trouble at the DMV – not surprising.
- 10 AJ: Not surprising.
- 11 RP: Even though I had the papers from the court for my name and gender change, because  
12 Minnesota allows that.
- 13 AJ: Right.
- 14 RP: I had trouble with them getting my gender changed on my license. I got my name changed and  
15 then, of course, I had to re-do it and had to pay again.
- 16 AJ: Right.
- 17 RP: And they were having a hard time believing the court papers that were official.
- 18 AJ: Really?
- 19 RP: Yeah, and they didn't know their own policy. I had to look up the policy about allowing your  
20 gender to change without having surgery. I had to call the DMV themselves and say, "Here's  
21 your policy, here's where it's at."
- 22 AJ: But, the DMV is actually administered by the counties, so this was Anoka County that was giving  
23 you the problem?
- 24 RP: Yeah, yeah. I don't know if it was too much of a huge problem, it was just more or less them not  
25 understanding . . .
- 26 AJ: Red tape then.
- 27 RP: Red tape, them not understanding their own policies and stuff. I didn't get personally harassed  
28 at the DMV or anything.
- 29 AJ: Sure, and once you showed them the policy then they made the change?
- 30 RP: Yes, then they made the change. So, yeah.
- 31 AJ: OK. Have you gone back and tried to get your DD214 changed?

- 1 RP: I haven't yet, I haven't done my military change yet. So, I've got to work on that. I haven't gone  
2 back to my colleges that I went to and had them amended or anything. So, I've got my birth  
3 certificate amended and my driver's license.
- 4 AJ: OK, wow.
- 5 RP: Name changes are a pain.
- 6 AJ: Yeah, it's just a lot of red tape.
- 7 RP: A lot of red tape and just a pain.
- 8 AJ: And you've got to pay for it too.
- 9 RP: Yes.
- 10 AJ: Just recently, the Department of Defense announced that transgender people can now openly  
11 serve in the military.
- 12 RP: Yes, that's awesome.
- 13 AJ: What do you think about that?
- 14 RP: I think that's awesome.
- 15 AJ: Yeah. Did you ever think that would happen when you were in the military?
- 16 RP: No. I didn't think they would allow gays and lesbians or anything.
- 17 AJ: Yeah, because you were actually before Don't Ask, Don't Tell.
- 18 RP: Don't Ask, Don't Tell – yeah, pretty much.
- 19 AJ: So, there was nobody . . . nobody came out.
- 20 RP: Nobody, yeah. No. If you came out, you got discharged. It's about as simple as that.
- 21 AJ: Really. Honorable or dishonorable?
- 22 RP: I don't recall exactly what it was.
- 23 AJ: But you were gone, you were booted.
- 24 RP: You were gone, yeah.
- 25 AJ: Wow. Did you ever cross dress while you were in the military at all?
- 26 RP: I didn't really have . . . when I was married I did, because then I had my wife's clothes. But, no I  
27 didn't.
- 28 AJ: And you guys lived off base.
- 29 RP: We lived on base but in a house.

- 1 AJ: In your own house.
- 2 RP: But, yeah, when I was in the barracks and stuff, I didn't have anything to do. I could wrap a  
3 towel around me as a skirt and say, "OK, here's a skirt." But, no, I couldn't.
- 4 AJ: No, I know. It's very, very difficult. But, you know, I also know how intense the feelings can be  
5 and sometimes a lot of trans people take risks that they might not ordinarily take.
- 6 RP: Oh, yeah. I mean, not when I was in the military because I kind of put it away, but yeah, I've  
7 done the whole take risk – go out in public cross-dressed late at night when I was younger and  
8 stuff.
- 9 AJ: Wow, man. So, I know you've probably heard about Caitlyn Jenner, Laverne Cox, and all of  
10 these sort of highly visible transgender people.
- 11 RP: Yes.
- 12 AJ: What do you think that kind of celebrity does for the community? Or, for you personally?
- 13 RP: For me or the community, I think it has some both positive and negatives. I think the positive  
14 being that it brings light to us. Being on TV, people that aren't subject matter in small  
15 communities or wherever, it helps – especially with the internet and everything because kids  
16 nowadays come out at 2 years old or whatever. I think it helps with people being more  
17 accepting. As far as a negative thing, I think it brings too much light if someone is a celebrity like  
18 Caitlyn Jenner, she has a lot of money – I'm just looking at facial surgery and this and that.  
19 There's a lot of people that don't. I'm lucky to have a job that has benefits and a career - and  
20 even with good benefits, they don't cover everything.
- 21 AJ: Sure.
- 22 RP: I think that it needs to be more spun in a positive way. There needs to be more of a national . . .  
23 somebody, like Caitlyn or somebody, it would be nice if she didn't really have a lot of money and  
24 she was still the national star and she brought to light the medical issues that transgender  
25 people face.
- 26 AJ: Right.
- 27 RP: It's expensive.
- 28 AJ: Oh, it's very expensive.
- 29 RP: Very expensive. I wish it was actually all companies and all insurance would cover what you  
30 need to get done, because it's not a want.
- 31 AJ: Right, it's a medical need.
- 32 RP: It's a medical need and it's even written in the manuals for the . . .
- 33 AJ: Well, the DSM-IV, I think now – or 5, but . . .

- 1 RP: I wish it would bring to light the negative stuff and realize that there are people that live on the  
2 streets, sell their bodies and stuff to afford the surgeries and get whatever they need. There's a  
3 lot of ugly side to it.
- 4 AJ: Yeah, like . . . what? I kind of know, but tell these people we're talking to.
- 5 RP: There's people that lose their jobs if they come out, there's people that can't come out – like  
6 people in the military. There's people living on the streets that are selling their bodies for sex to  
7 get their medication. There's a lot of good places out there that offer you free shots and stuff  
8 for your medication.
- 9 AJ: Sure, but those are hard to come by.
- 10 RP: They're hard to come by. It's not just the rich people or people like me that are lucky and have a  
11 good job and a career.
- 12 AJ: Yeah, no – there's a lot of . . . particularly women of color who just don't have the resources,  
13 can't get hired at jobs, being sort of booted out of their families for a variety of reasons but  
14 primarily because they're transgender.
- 15 RP: And the suicide rate is high. I always hear stories about transgender people getting beat up or  
16 murdered.
- 17 AJ: Right.
- 18 RP: That scares me.
- 19 AJ: Yeah, absolutely.
- 20 RP: I have a conceal and carry now to protect myself.
- 21 AJ: Oh, wow. OK.
- 22 RP: You never know.
- 23 AJ: You never know.
- 24 RP: But, yeah, there's just . . . I wish insurance would eventually evolve to cover that stuff and there  
25 would be more to help people that don't have jobs and don't have . . . I know we have  
26 Obamacare or whatever, the insurance, but even that doesn't . . .
- 27 AJ: Fully cover, yeah.
- 28 RP: Medically necessary.
- 29 AJ: I think transgender people are included in Obamacare but I'm not sure if surgery is.
- 30 RP: Yeah. I mean, I think it shouldn't just be the gender surgery. They should be able to . . .  
31 medically necessary if they want facial surgery or have the Adam's apple or voice changed, hair

- 1 removal. There's so many aspects to it. I know a lot of women have some facial hair and stuff,  
2 but it's not like a guy. They don't shave everyday like I do.
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 RP: I'm still shaving every day. Women might have some facial hair but you don't see them shaving  
5 every day.
- 6 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 7 RP: I can't afford laser electrolysis. I've had a little bit done, but not much.
- 8 AJ: Would your company cover that?
- 9 RP: No, they don't cover . . . electrolysis, facial feminization, voice surgery, it's all considered  
10 beautification, which is just foolish.
- 11 AJ: Yeah, because as you mentioned earlier, the DSM-IV states that all these medical procedures  
12 are medically necessary.
- 13 RP: Yeah, and the medical field characterizes only certain things as secondary sex characteristics,  
14 like your genitals or whatever. They don't even consider breast augmentation because that's  
15 beautification. I'm like, "Wait a second, there's something wrong here." With testosterone,  
16 your bones are different, they change different.
- 17 AJ: Right.
- 18 RP: It should just cover that, it should all be considered secondary sex characteristics.
- 19 AJ: Right, yeah. Pretty much all women have breasts unless they've had a mastectomy.
- 20 RP: Right, and there's a lot of women out there that obviously have small cups and stuff, but there's  
21 still breast tissue there.
- 22 AJ: Wow. Man, it's just really great to sit here and speak with a trans person who has had a  
23 relatively positive experience with their transition.
- 24 RP: Yeah. Is it rare? I don't know.
- 25 AJ: You know, I think it is a little rare. I'm smiling – you guys can't see me on camera, but I'm really  
26 smiling because I'm just really happy and sort of blown away by . . . your family has been very  
27 supportive, you sited them as being the people who really helped you to get through. You did  
28 mention that you have some down days, what is that all about?
- 29 RP: Well, I do suffer from depression and anxiety. I have days where it's tough, just my depression.
- 30 AJ: Is that related to the gender identity, do you think?
- 31 RP: I don't know if it is or not, to tell you the truth. I think I've had it most of my life, but it could be.
- 32 AJ: Do you see a therapist around that?

- 1 RP: No, I take medication for that.
- 2 AJ: OK. So, your medical doctor prescribes stuff.
- 3 RP: Yeah, but it's . . . so, with depression, it doesn't matter if you're transgender or not, you just get  
4 down days and stuff but being transgender compounds it.
- 5 AJ: Yeah.
- 6 RP: So, not just having somebody that is depressed and now you're going through a transition and  
7 you get depressed, it gets tough.
- 8 AJ: I mean, just being a human being on the planet is kind of a tough thing. Life is not always a bowl  
9 of cherries, as someone once said.
- 10 RP: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: There's pits in there.
- 12 RP: My animals help me a lot, though.
- 13 AJ: OK.
- 14 RP: I have two dogs and four cats. My dogs are like my . . . they're my comfort zone. They help with  
15 my depression and stuff. My dogs know if I'm feeling down, they'll snuggle next to me. Dogs  
16 are amazing.
- 17 AJ: That's awesome. But, you did say once you came out you got all of these new friends that you  
18 never thought you would have.
- 19 RP: I got all new friends.
- 20 AJ: What about friendships though? Has that shifted? Your family has been great, but . . .
- 21 RP: Yeah, I don't think it's really shifted that much.
- 22 AJ: Do you hang out with any of your Army buddies at all?
- 23 RP: I don't . . . I lost touch with any Army buddies after I left the military.
- 24 AJ: Really?
- 25 RP: It's been 25 years.
- 26 AJ: High school friends?
- 27 RP: Yes, I still have some high school friends. I went to my high school reunion as the new me, just  
28 last year.
- 29 AJ: Is that right? What was that about? How did that go?
- 30 RP: I have a small class, so there was . . . my class was only around 80-some, but I think . . .



- 1 AJ: So, everybody knew already.
- 2 RP: Yeah, and there was probably only 20 people there, but yeah, they had no problem with it. And,  
3 then I got up and gave a speech and I thanked everybody for accepting me. I got some  
4 compliments – some of the guys said I had nice legs.
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 RP: I was like, “Oh, really?”
- 7 AJ: OK.
- 8 RP: So, yeah. I was very nervous but it worked out in the end and I reconnected with some of my  
9 high school friends and we had a blast.
- 10 AJ: So, what are some of your hobbies?
- 11 RP: Oh, my hobbies are working out, I still go to the gym, working in my garden, my flower beds. I  
12 do everything according to season in Minnesota.
- 13 AJ: OK.
- 14 RP: Someday I’m going to get a motorcycle again. I’d like to get a snowmobile again, because I love  
15 snowmobiling. Just working in my yard.
- 16 AJ: Did you ever go ice fishing?
- 17 RP: Ice fishing, I don’t do that too much. I like to fish though in the summer – or in the fall time  
18 when it’s not hot.
- 19 AJ: Yeah.
- 20 RP: I hate hot weather.
- 21 AJ: OK.
- 22 RP: So, I love the fall time. I love mowing my grass, it’s peaceful. I cut wood with my chain saw.
- 23 AJ: You probably need a big riding lawn mower to cut this grass.
- 24 RP: Yeah, I have a big riding lawn mower and I have my garage, my tools still. So, I’ll work on my  
25 own car, putz around and stuff. I love watching movies and stuff. I have a wide variety of  
26 hobbies. I think it’s seasonal for Minnesota – the fairs we have and whatever else.
- 27 AJ: Are you going to go to the state fair, do you think?
- 28 RP: Yeah, I’m actually volunteering for a day – for the Veterans for that day.
- 29 AJ: Is that right?
- 30 RP: Yeah, through Wells Fargo.

- 1 AJ: Through your job?
- 2 RP: Through my job, yes. But, I'll still have some time after the volunteering to run around, to see  
3 the horses. I love animals.
- 4 AJ: Yeah, it was kind of fun being greeted at the door by your puppies.
- 5 RP: Yeah, my puppies.
- 6 AJ: They are very friendly.
- 7 RP: Yes.
- 8 AJ: So, Renaë, is there anything that I haven't asked you that you feel is really important that we  
9 should talk about?
- 10 RP: I could talk all day on stuff. I'm trying to think here – we've covered a lot. I can't really think of  
11 anything right now.
- 12 AJ: So, the fact that you are transgender, I mean I didn't ask this question, but I think you answered  
13 it. It seems like it hasn't really had a negative impact on your professional life.
- 14 RP: No, it hasn't.
- 15 AJ: Would you say it has enhanced your professional life, maybe?
- 16 RP: Yeah, because it's a lot on me right now. So, I'm not hiding, I'm a lot more happier. If you look  
17 at a lot of my old pictures I was hardly ever smiling. So, I'm more of a happy person and open  
18 and I'm not hiding. So, yeah, I think that it enhances everything – not just work, everything.  
19 Friendships and everything, because I can be me. I laugh now and I smile and I'm more  
20 outgoing, I'm not so introverted.
- 21 AJ: Wow, that's a beautiful thing.
- 22 RP: It's a very beautiful thing – yes.
- 23 AJ: Renaë, I am just so happy that you invited me out here.
- 24 RP: Thank you for coming.
- 25 AJ: I'm thrilled that you were willing to be a part of this project and . . . thank you.
- 26 RP: Thank you.
- 27 AJ: Until we meet again.
- 28 RP: OK, thanks.
- 29 AJ: All right.