

Awen Briem
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

December 28, 2015



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 Awen Briem -AB

3

4 AJ: Hello, my name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History
5 Project at the University of Minnesota. Today is December 28, 2015, we're winding down to the
6 final hours of 2015.

7

8 AB: Yeah, we are.

9

10 AJ: I'm here with Awen Briem, who is a good friend and colleague. We have done some work
11 together, we'll get into that in a little bit. But Awen, can you just introduce yourself and maybe
12 spell your name for our transcriber? And state your gender identity today, your gender assigned
13 at birth, and your preferred gender pronouns.

14

15 AB: Sure. My name is Awen Briem, spelled A-w-e-n B-r-i-e-m.

16

17 AJ: Preferred pronouns?

18

19 AB: Preferred pronouns are he, him, his. Gender identity, I have found is a lot more complicated
20 than it seems at face value for a lot of folks, so I go by transgender most of the time. If it's
21 somebody that I'm not out with, than male. But I struggle with there being such a binary limited
22 set of options.

23

24 AJ: Yeah. And then what was your identity assigned at birth?

25

26 AB: Female.

27

28 AJ: I want to clarify, don't shy away from that because . . . that's sort of the point of this whole
29 exploration is to think about how so many people are thinking about gender in new ways and in
30 different ways. Hopefully, this is not a topic that is off the record for you because it's really
31 interesting to understand or to get a little bit more understanding about how people are
32 thinking and feeling and identifying. So don't be shy.

33

34 AB: OK.

35

36 AJ: So Awen, just to kind of get us in the frame of thinking about our past, can you tell me what's
37 the earliest memory you have.

38

39 AB: I think the earliest . . . like in relation to gender?

40

41 AJ: It does not have to be related to gender at all, although if it is certainly please feel free to share
42 that. But no, I want your first earliest memory.

43

44 AB: I do think that my earliest memory probably is related to gender. I don't remember exactly how
45 old I was but I would guess maybe three and I was watching cartoons on TV on a Saturday
46 morning in the living room, just sitting on the floor kneeling like little kids do watching a show,
47 but it was summertime and I didn't have a shirt on because it was hot.

48

1 AJ: OK, OK.
2
3 AB: And my brothers, I have two older brothers and they, when it was hot, would go without shirts
4 and just wear shorts around the house or whatever, so I was hot and I did the same thing. And
5 then my mom came in the room . . .
6
7 AJ: Did you get chastised for it?
8
9 AB: My mom came in the room and was just shocked that I was topless and watching cartoons.
10
11 AJ: Oh wow.
12
13 AB: And I just remember as a little kid being totally perplexed. It didn't make any sense to me why
14 the rules were different for me than they were for my brothers. So in hindsight, when I look
15 back on that, that gives me some information about where, as a kid, I was even viewing myself
16 on the spectrum.
17
18 AJ: On the spectrum and sort of having these . . . even though, you didn't necessarily have the
19 language at that point, but these thoughts and ideations around gender and gender
20 appropriateness, sort of gender policing if you will.
21
22 AB: Yes. Exactly.
23
24 AJ: Wow, so your earliest memory seems to be around gender.
25
26 AB: Yes.
27
28 AJ: That's pretty fascinating. Where did you grow up?
29
30 AB: Syracuse, New York.
31
32 AJ: Upstate New York, really?
33
34 AB: Syracuse.
35
36 AJ: Syracuse, all right. So is that not upstate?
37
38 AB: I don't even know, I don't think so.
39
40 AJ: OK. What was it like there? Did you go to elementary school there and all that good stuff?
41
42 AB: Yeah, I went to school there . . . well I went there through 2nd grade and then we moved to Iowa
43 and then I went to school in Iowa from 3rd grade through high school.
44
45 AJ: What part of Iowa?
46
47 AB: Des Moines.
48

- 1 AJ: Des Moines, Iowa. Wow. What was elementary school like for you?
2
- 3 AB: I have fond memories of elementary school in New York and then elementary school in Iowa
4 was pretty rough.
5
- 6 AJ: How so?
7
- 8 AB: For a long time I attributed it to being the new kid because all the kids there, literally pretty
9 much all of them, had known each other their whole lives going to school and here I come in 3rd
10 grade. I was from New York so I spoke differently at the time than what they were used to. So
11 for a while I attributed it to that, but I experienced a lot of bullying. I didn't fit in, I wasn't
12 included, and ultimately I had a group of three or four friends that I made in 3rd grade that were
13 my friends all the way through high school and there was never a tremendous amount of friend
14 circle that expanded beyond that. I know that just kind of became a safe little group that I stuck
15 with until later in high school I met some queer kids most . . . well, actually not most, all of
16 whom went to other high schools but we met at a queer gathering place that we'd sort of
17 carved out for ourselves.
18
- 19 AJ: Was it a designated space or you guys kind of created it?
20
- 21 AB: It was designated for youth, it wasn't a queer-designated space – but that's where everybody
22 just showed up.
23
- 24 AJ: Gathered.
25
- 26 AB: Yeah, once a week on Sunday nights.
27
- 28 AJ: Oh wow. So, you had some, albeit small, some community around queer identity.
29
- 30 AB: I did and it was definitely a lifesaver at the time. I don't know if you want me to stay in that
31 period of time or not, ultimately you may . . .
32
- 33 AJ: Move around, my questions will bring you right back. Do what you need to do.
34
- 35 AB: Just as a . . . yes, I had that community then, it's here we are a couple decades later and I'm the
36 only one of them that's still alive. They've all since passed on, either from suicide or HIV or hate
37 crimes. So, that's a whole other defining moment to meet that community and be in that
38 community and that safe space, but then it's another defining moment years later to realize that
39 they're gone and what we lost them to and then kind of figure out what I do with myself and my
40 life.
41
- 42 AJ: And you said it was a pretty small group – like four or five people?
43
- 44 AB: Yeah.
45
- 46 AJ: Oh boy, that's tough.
47
- 48 AB: Yeah, it's pretty intense to find that out.

1
2 AJ: And so ultimately, at least in that context, you're a survivor.

3
4 AB: Yeah.

5
6 AJ: Did you have brothers and sisters, siblings, growing up?

7
8 AB: Two older brothers.

9
10 AJ: OK. So, two-part question. The bullying and sort of outcast feeling that you experienced in high
11 school, do you feel like that may have been related to your gender and/or sexual identity and
12 what was your relationship like with your two older brothers? Were they sort of bullying too or
13 were they nurturing?

14
15 AB: My two older brothers are a lot older – they're 11 and 16 years older than I am. So they were
16 kind of off doing their own thing and they were protective older brothers because they were so
17 much older. And, they stayed in New York when we moved to Iowa, so they also weren't a part
18 of my daily childhood from 3rd grade on. So when I connected with them and talked with them,
19 they were very nurturing, kind, and playful. And, the question about the bullying and gender
20 identity, in hindsight now, yeah - it's absolutely what it was about. At the time I didn't have
21 words for it so I didn't understand what was happening. And then, for a while, like I said earlier,
22 I thought it was being the new kid, then I thought it was being from the east coast and moving
23 into the Midwest and that kind of a cultural difference.

24
25 AJ: Right.

26
27 AB: Then for a long time I thought well maybe it was homophobia, which it was certainly
28 contributed to it. But I see gender as being primary to what feeds homophobia . . .

29
30 AJ: I couldn't agree more.

31
32 AB: . . . and so I think that they were picking up on the fact that I was different much earlier than I
33 understood how I was different and that I was being targeted because I didn't fit in in the ways
34 that . . . it was the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th grade form of gender policing.

35
36 AJ: Sure.

37
38 AB: Like you said earlier, they were punishing me for not fitting in in the ways that they thought that
39 I should. I didn't understand that I wasn't who I knew myself to be.

40
41 AJ: That totally makes sense. What were your parents like during this time period? What was
42 home like? Because essentially you were kind of an only kid, an only child? At home anyway for
43 your childhood.

44
45 AB: Yeah, very much so. My parents were tender, nurturing parents. I don't think that they knew
46 how intense what I was going through was and I didn't have words at the time to really convey
47 how bad it was. I also knew that they are people that don't like conflict and aren't ones to raise
48 a ruckus. They avoid confrontation.

1
2 AJ: Stir up the dust, if you will.
3

4 AB: Yeah. So the times that I do remember talking to them about it, I remember them saying things
5 like . . . kind of the old adages that you hear, "Well, they like you so they're focusing on you
6 because that's how they're showing that they like you." That kind of stuff, which I understand
7 from their perspective and from my perspective now as a parent, you're trying to say things that
8 make things feel better or seem better. But at the time it was really confusing because I knew
9 they didn't like me, there was no doubt. And trying to reconcile, "OK, well, this person likes me
10 and that's how they treat people they like or that's what you put up with from people who like
11 you." So it really just further deepened my confusion and isolation around how to interact with
12 people.
13

14 AJ: Wow. But both your parents were home for your childhood?
15

16 AB: Yeah, my dad had a job where he traveled a lot, frequently most of the week he would be on the
17 road traveling. But they were together and they lived at home.
18

19 AJ: What did your dad do?
20

21 AB: He was a minister. He's retired now.
22

23 AJ: So you grew up in a pretty religious household then?
24

25 AB: Yeah, very progressive and social justice oriented. But yeah, I was a minister's kid.
26

27 AJ: What faith?
28

29 AB: United Church of Christ.
30

31 AJ: Wow, what was that experience like? Were you really engaged in the church as a young
32 person?
33

34 AB: No, I never really felt attracted or really attached or committed to it, it just never resonated with
35 me. And then as I got older and homophobia started being an issue and religion being used
36 against queer communities, that distance for me just increased and increased and increased.
37 And the UCC, to be fair, is a reconciling congregation and they've done a tremendous amount of
38 advocacy but I feel like when I'm seeking out a safe space, I still don't want to feel like I'm being
39 reconciled or I don't want to feel like I'm being welcomed or tolerated. So it's just something
40 that's never . . .
41

42 AJ: A trained welcome. They go through the 101 steps of how to welcome someone into their
43 community, like that's not what you're seeking, right?
44

45 AB: I just want to show up like everyone else does and not have to have conversations and
46 workshops and processes around it. And I respect tremendously the work that's been done, I
47 don't mean to take away from that – for me it just doesn't . . . I'm not into processing.
48

1 AJ: I'm not trying to put it down, but if somebody has to go get a workbook to understand, to figure
2 out how to relate to you, then that's a challenge. I'm just saying.
3

4 AB: Exactly. Yeah, I totally agree. I totally agree.
5

6 AJ: Oh boy. Wow. So, when was the first time you had this realization, beyond the 3-year-old sort
7 of eye opening, if you will? When was the first time you thought – wow, something is really
8 happening here, I don't quite feel like the gender I was assigned at birth?
9

10 AB: I think that I can go back and pinpoint multiple times through childhood that I clearly felt that
11 way. I think that the most challenging one for me was in adolescence when my body started
12 changing and I just felt desperate because all of a sudden nothing made sense and I felt out of
13 control and really depressed and really resentful and really angry. And that was . . . I got away
14 with being a so-called tomboy most of my childhood, which as a minister's kid, at least in the
15 communities we were in, was, I know, hard on my parents.
16

17 AJ: You were pushing the envelope quite a bit.
18

19 AB: Yeah. But then when adolescence happened, the gender policing really intensified because it
20 wasn't cute to be a tomboy anymore. You had to have confirmation dresses and you had to
21 have your hair done, you had to have make-up.
22

23 AJ: And the patent leather shoes and . . .
24

25 AB: Yeah, and my mom loves and values those things. And so it was just really tremendously
26 difficult to try to navigate that change. I always, I think in hindsight again, I was always aware of
27 it but it got really real and really hard when I couldn't navigate my way around it anymore and
28 was really faced with the expectations of presentation and being what I was expected to be
29 based on other people's perceptions. But even then I didn't really have the language, I just . . .
30 instead of being able to say how I felt or what I needed, we argued about dresses – because I
31 didn't have any language around it. I didn't know anybody who was transgender, I didn't know
32 it was an option, I didn't know it was anything – I was just unhappy and confused.
33

34 AJ: No, I totally get it. I think I've experienced some of those things myself. And certainly, there is a
35 difference between recognition of that gender confusion, if you will, in yourself, and then the
36 actual acceptance of that.
37

38 AB: Yeah, that's a big difference.
39

40 AJ: Right, exactly. So when did you accept that fact? And I know there's probably a lot of space in
41 between that adolescent experience.
42

43 AB: Yeah, and I think even different levels of accepting it. So I think I first started to accept it maybe
44 eight or ten years ago and the first step I took that acknowledged the beginning of accepting it
45 was the name change.
46

47 AJ: OK.
48

1 AB: And that was before I was even able to acknowledge to myself that I was transgender, but I
2 think it was a baby step in stepping outside of that identity that I was assigned at birth, so I'm
3 going to change my name and start to reclaim my life and who I am. So I did that about nine or
4 10 years ago and then once that happened that kind of freed me up to try a little more and try a
5 little more. But I think that's what started the ball rolling.

6
7 AJ: So a little more visual expression.

8
9 AB: Well, the funny thing is, I think I've always presented the same way as long as I could dress
10 myself.

11
12 AJ: Right.

13
14 AB: But it took a lot of years, even once I changed my name, to have the courage to connect with a
15 therapist who could help me connect with a physician, who could help me connect with the
16 hormones and to have the courage to commit to that level of physical change. It felt like
17 jumping off a cliff and I was terrified.

18
19 AJ: So tell me about this name. How did you come to a name and what does it mean for you? I've
20 known you for quite some time and I'm pretty sure I'd known you pre-name change. I can't
21 remember the old name.

22
23 AB: Yeah. I chose a name that was similar to my birth name but I wanted to go with something that
24 had a cultural connotation because I identify strongly with my Irish culture history.

25
26 AJ: Irish culture?

27
28 AB: Yeah. I wanted something that was unusual and old and so I went with Awen, which is a Gaelic
29 – Irish Gaelic, Welsh Gaelic, there's a crossover in the name and has Druidic connotations of
30 unlimited possibility.

31
32 AJ: Druidic?

33
34 AB: Yeah.

35
36 AJ: OK. Like Druids? Druidic.

37
38 AB: Yeah. Ten years ago I really needed some unlimited possibilities.

39
40 AJ: Wow.

41
42 AB: And that's the translation that I have always found with the name.

43
44 AJ: I think it's fascinating because I think the existence, the mere existence of transgender people
45 symbolizes unlimited possibilities. That is fascinating.

46
47 AB: I didn't even know the road I was heading on when I chose the name.

48

- 1 AJ: Really.
2
- 3 AB: In hindsight . . . it was a good name, it fits well.
4
- 5 AJ: Thank you for sharing that, I appreciate it. What terms do you use to describe yourself now –
6 today? And how has that changed over time? Was there ever a time when maybe you
7 identified as a lesbian or as bisexual or as stone butch dyke? We use so many different labels
8 for ourselves.
9
- 10 AB: I tried them all on and they never . . . most of them really never resonated. I came out when I
11 was 16 as LGB and I tried lesbian, I tried dyke, I tried all kinds of things and really, for the
12 majority of my life, I just went by gay or queer. Again, before I was in touch with the aspect of
13 my gender identity, I didn't understand why but it just felt disingenuous. It didn't feel right to
14 be referring to myself as a lesbian and dyke felt a little more fitting but maybe because in my
15 perception that was more masculine or something, I don't know.
16
- 17 AJ: Sure.
18
- 19 AB: But really the majority of the time I just went by gay or queer and have now settled on queer
20 because that was way too confusing . . . it's not confusing. I'm not into the labels now. Yeah,
21 it's just who I am.
22
- 23 AJ: Can I just ask, do you mind turning off your phone or do you need it to be on for a special
24 reason?
25
- 26 AB: No, oh jeez.
27
- 28 AJ: Thank you.
29
- 30 AB: Yeah, I totally forgot about that.
31
- 32 AJ: Thank you. I think that's really fascinating, though, that you say you never felt comfortable with
33 that term lesbian, but you were attracted to women?
34
- 35 AB: Yeah, I've dated women since I was 16.
36
- 37 AJ: So, in your head what was going on?
38
- 39 AB: I just didn't like the word. I think for a long time I tried to unpack whether it was internalized
40 homophobia or what that was about, but then once I started acknowledging my gender identity
41 I was . . . it just wasn't me. It makes sense that it didn't make sense.
42
- 43 AJ: Oh boy. What have been any challenges that you have faced? Well, I guess before we get into
44 that question, so you kind of went through a series of "labels" and eventually sort of getting
45 closer and closer to what felt right and today that is, most of the time, just transgender male or
46 male?
47
- 48 AB: For gender identity?

1
2 AJ: Yeah, for gender identity.
3

4 AB: Yeah. If it's somebody that I feel comfortable with, I'm out as transgender. If I'm seeing clients
5 at my business they assume I'm male and I just don't get into it with them.
6

7 AJ: There's no reason to tell everybody unless you're going to do a strip tease show or something.
8

9 AB: Yeah, I mean the way I feel comfortable presenting, I like facial hair, I run a lot, I like to work out
10 so I'm more comfortable with a muscular, athletic build. I've always dressed in a way that is
11 perceived more masculine so that's how I'm comfortable presenting. So that's how I identify
12 but I don't really claim man or male necessarily, I'm just kind of trying to show up as who I feel
13 like and that's the default in our culture.
14

15 AJ: What's your business? What's your work?
16

17 AB: I'm a tattoo artist.
18

19 AJ: Ahh, how long have you been doing that?
20

21 AB: About 22 years.
22

23 AJ: Wow.
24

25 AB: A long time.
26

27 AJ: So you create a lot of visual art?
28

29 AB: Yes, all custom designs for each person. Some people bring in what they want, others bring in
30 their idea and I design it with them or work with them.
31

32 AJ: That's awesome. I've got to admit, I know about your work as a tattoo artist because you have
33 been helping me to create some designs and do some things over the years. In fact you are the
34 only person . . . well, there's one other person, but you have provided the vast majority of the
35 ink that is on my body.
36

37 AB: Awesome, thank you.
38

39 AJ: Thank you very much.
40

41 AB: Absolutely.
42

43 AJ: How does your profession play a role in your life and gender identity? Being a tattoo artist is an
44 independent sort of world that you can create in and of itself and in and on your own. Was that
45 a factor for you? Do you feel like you would be a tattoo artist regardless of whatever your
46 gender identity is?
47

1 AB: Well I did deal with homophobia in the workplace early on, before I was a tattoo artist. I guess I
2 never really thought about it that way, but I think when the opportunity to learn to tattoo
3 through an apprenticeship became an opportunity for me that part of the appeal was . . . you
4 know, a more self-identified career path where I'm not having to fit into a corporate box or
5 show up from 9-5 or deal with other people in the office everyday who have different
6 perspectives that might not support me being who I am. And then as far as coming out as trans,
7 I was really stressed out about it because there aren't a lot of female tattoo artists and a lot of
8 my clients over the years have been women who wanted a woman to tattoo them – or guys
9 who are more comfortable with a woman tattooing them rather than . . .

10
11 AJ: Because it's kind of an intimate experience.

12
13 AB: Yeah, and you feel vulnerable and if a guy feels more comfortable with a woman tattooing him
14 so that he's not having to put on the macho max for another guy. So I was really concerned
15 about how it would affect my business and if I would still have a clientele or how it would
16 change or if I would have friction with clients. And it felt like a really huge barrier and I had a lot
17 of fear about it, but I also had hit a point in my life where I just had to do what I had to do and it
18 had to just unfold. So I did and for the most part it's been fine. I see people coming in now who
19 haven't seen me in three or four years and I can see them adjust their face and expectations,
20 but most of the people have just kind of rolled with it.

21
22 AJ: New clients don't have a clue.

23
24 AB: It's been fine and new clients don't know me any differently. So . . . yeah. So, so far so good.
25 Just a day at a time.

26
27 AJ: What have been some of the challenges that you have faced since coming out?

28
29 AB: I had a couple of people tell me before coming out that you just had to be ready to let go of
30 everything and I didn't really appreciate . . . on the one hand, I very much felt that way. Like I
31 said earlier, it felt like jumping off a cliff and not being able to take it back. On the other hand,
32 you can't really appreciate that until you experience it and I definitely found it to be true
33 because there's nothing that doesn't change even though other things feel like they stay the
34 same. I still feel like the same person that I've always been only more so. I'm calmer and more
35 peaceful but there's been a lot of challenges with friends and community, and I think the biggest
36 surprise in that were with people that I expected, because they're very progressive and . . .

37
38 AJ: Or queer.

39
40 AB: And queer - they have been some of the most judgmental people. That was hard to swallow
41 and has been surprising. Now I'm not so much surprised by it when it happens, I'm just like,
42 "Oh, that – your circus, your monkeys." That kind of thing. But that was probably the most
43 painful part community-wise, I was just not seeing that coming. I was expecting more from
44 those progressive political queer camps – any or all of those.

45
46 AJ: What about in the lesbian community? Even though . . . like you said, you didn't fully embrace
47 that label but I know you were at minimally, peripherally involved with the lesbian community.
48

1 AB: My partner and I have been deeply involved in the queer community, have been for decades. I
2 was never involved in the softball, stereotypical Michigan women's music festival aspect of the
3 community, but there's been . . . it's been an issue for a significant number of people who, from
4 my perspective, seem unsettled or threatened by my transition. It's kind of that mentality it
5 seems like of the women's community needs it's strong butch women so why are you
6 abandoning us or why are you changing teams or why are you being a traitor? Which, again, I
7 find interesting because I don't subscribe to the binary concept, I think people are people.

8
9 AJ: Right.

10
11 AB: And if I'm more authentic as a person, I think that serves everybody better in the big picture
12 than being unauthentic and being something that I'm not doesn't serve the big picture.

13
14 AJ: It certainly doesn't serve you.

15
16 AB: And it doesn't serve me, but it doesn't serve my community or my family, my child, my spouse,
17 my friends either if I can't be available. So it's definitely something that stretches some people.

18
19 AJ: Yeah, I mean there's just a lot of dialogue, I think, that happens, even more so . . . and this is not
20 to pick on anybody but in the lesbian community, there is a lot of viewpoints about transgender
21 people generally, either identified lesbians who transitioned to become transgender men or
22 transgender women and what's their level of authenticity? That seems to be a bigger
23 conversation coming out of the lesbian community, which I think is related to the very deep and
24 real connections around feminism and sort of the politicalization of the lesbian identity which
25 feels a little less politicized than gay male identity, which tends to be more about fun and sex.

26
27 AB: And I've experienced that in the lesbian community as well as the straight cis gender feminist
28 community – that's what you were saying.

29
30 AJ: Yeah, I think that's sort of the connections that happen. So yeah, I don't know – you just made
31 me think of that. I don't really have a question about it, unless you want to talk about it more.
32 What have been some of the positive aspects since you've begun to express your true gender
33 identity?

34
35 AB: Just being able to breathe. Just breathing every day. Literally, clear memory - just a few days
36 after starting hormones, I was out running errands somewhere and just suddenly took this
37 reflexive, not even on purpose, just sucked in this huge breath. I caught myself at the time, but I
38 felt like I had just come up from being underwater for a long time – it was like I just had to stop
39 and breathe for a minute. So yeah, that's the first thing that comes to mind. All the other
40 struggles and frustrations really fall by the wayside when I can just breathe – wake up in the
41 morning and not wonder how I'm going to pull it together for another day. Just being able to be
42 who you are is priceless – a priceless thing and it counterbalances the struggles when they do
43 come up.

44
45 AJ: Cool, yeah. Tell me about your current relationship with your birth family and chosen family if
46 that exists for you.

47

1 AB: Well, I came out to everybody at the same time . . . actually I came out to my parents probably .
2 . . maybe close to a year before I came out to everybody. I have to think that through . . . it was
3 a few months before I came out to everybody and they didn't seem receptive, just very shutting
4 down – like, couldn't go there. So I just let it rest for a while.

5
6 AJ: How did you . . . did you write a letter? Did you go home?
7

8 AB: My mom asked a question when we were there at the holidays about a name that my son was
9 calling me. I answered it and there was pushback and then I just kind of let it rest because it was
10 like, "I'm not going to go into this in front of him." But then when I got home I wrote a letter
11 and sent it to them and then it just seemed like they couldn't hear it at the time, so I just let it sit
12 for a while figuring, you know, I'm an introvert, I appreciate needing time to let things percolate
13 for a while. So I just let it sit for a while and months later wrote a different letter that was much
14 longer and in much more detail and then sent that to my parents and both my brothers and one
15 nephew that I am in touch with pretty regularly. I didn't hear anything back from my parents for
16 a long time again, which is what I kind of expected at that point because I think they needed
17 time to think things through. Both my brothers responded right away and expressed their
18 support. I don't see them very often so . . . I haven't seen them in years, in person, but we are in
19 touch through Facebook and texting and stuff like that.
20

21 AJ: Yeah, modern technology – sometimes that makes you feel closer than . . .
22

23 AB: That's true. And then my nephew and his wife responded immediately and were super
24 supportive. His wife is a fierce ally, taking on all kinds of conversations and advocating. That's
25 been fun to see, I've met her in person just a couple of times but it's a perfect example of
26 developing a relationship through social media and getting to know each other that way. So it's
27 been fun to see her take that on and take on those conversations.
28

29 AJ: It's nice when you have allies like that. I'm careful to tell my family and I don't want to usurp
30 your interview, but you don't have to fight my battles, right? But being an ally is taking up your
31 own battles, right?
32

33 AB: Right, exactly.
34

35 AJ: It's great when that can happen. So you still have a pretty close relationship with most of your
36 family.
37

38 AB: Yeah, I don't see everybody very often and my family doesn't talk a lot or spend a lot of time
39 together, but we're all in a relationship.
40

41 AJ: Including your parents?
42

43 AB: Yeah. Like I said, we don't see each other or talk all that often.
44

45 AJ: But when you do it's good, it's there.
46

47 AB: It's fine, yeah.
48

- 1 AJ: Absolutely. You talked a tiny little bit about this, or you alluded to it let's say, but to the extent
2 that you feel comfortable, can you share any medical interventions that you have undergone or
3 thought about up to this point?
4
- 5 AB: Sure. I started seeing a therapist who helped me get in touch with a physician and with that
6 physician I started hormones. Then about a year ago, she helped me connect with another
7 physician and with that physician I was able to get top surgery done. I feel at peace with that.
8
- 9 AJ: That's usually a big deal for a lot of people. Any thoughts about additional . . . what about
10 hormones? Are you dealing with hormones at all?
11
- 12 AB: Yeah. Yeah, I started hormones about three years ago.
13
- 14 AJ: What's that transition been like?
15
- 16 AB: That's been great. It was like three days after the hormones that that experience of taking the
17 deep breath happened and that was surreal because, like I said, it just felt like this reflexive gasp
18 – like when you come up out of a pool or up out of the lake and you're taking air in after being
19 under for too long. That's exactly what it felt like. I was out running errands and I'm sure
20 people were like, "What's your problem?" But suddenly I could breathe.
21
- 22 AJ: All that fear for 20, 30 – whatever, multiple years, of, "Oh my God, the world is going to end if I
23 come out," and then finally doing that and realizing not only is the world not going to end, it's
24 actually opening up.
25
- 26 AB: It's just starting in a lot of ways, yeah. Absolutely.
27
- 28 AJ: Awesome. Well good luck with whatever you decide to continue to do medically with your
29 transition. Do you think there will be other . . . ?
30
- 31 AB: No, I feel really at peace so I feel like I'm good at this point, comfortable.
32
- 33 AJ: Awesome. When you think about your decision to express your true identity, what were the
34 pivotal moments that defined your new life and would you do anything differently? So you've
35 really talked about this, when you took that big deep breath that you were able to take without
36 water filling in your lungs. It seems like that was a pivotal moment.
37
- 38 AB: Yes, definitely.
39
- 40 AJ: Were there others?
41
- 42 AB: I think just being . . . well not just, but being able to say it to myself first and then to my partner,
43 who has always been supportive, but it's still a scary thing to say because it's one thing to be
44 supportive intellectually and another thing to have somebody faced with reality.
45
- 46 AJ: Right, because you guys were in a relationship . . . I mean, your partner, who I know and
47 identifies as female, was in a relationship with, albeit a butch or maybe . . . I'm sure you guys

1 talked about gender conformity not being a very comfortable thing but as far as she knew, she
2 was in a relationship with this female-identified person.
3

4 AB: Yeah, and so much of your community centers around that, or your identity. I mean even with .
5 . . I'm kind of speaking on her behalf at this point but it's something she's talked about quite a
6 bit. I think one thing that was hard for her was feeling a loss of community because if you're not
7 queer anymore or if you're not lesbian anymore, as far as other people's perceptions, she really
8 grieved that loss of other people's perception of her identity.
9

10 AJ: Because I imagine when you guys go to Macy's or Burger King, or wherever you go – I'm sure
11 you don't go to any of those places, but wherever you go – theoretically, the sales clerk is
12 thinking, "Hey, this is the all-American family right here."
13

14 AB: Yeah.
15

16 AJ: Because you guys have a kid too.
17

18 AB: Yeah. I think the harder part of that is being somewhere, like at the state fair or Renaissance
19 Festival or Roller Derby or wherever you are, and seeing two women together and trying to
20 make conversation with them there.
21

22 AJ: And they're like, "Why is this hetero couple . . .?"
23

24 AB: "Why is this creepy hetero couple talking to us?" When in reality we're like, "You guys are
25 awesome, we just want to hang out with you." That's . . . she grieves that a lot, and I do too
26 because I'm more comfortable hanging out there than I am with straight people.
27

28 AJ: With Sally and John down the street, yeah.
29

30 AB: This is the community that I spent my life in and often have more in common with.
31

32 AJ: Do you guys have hetero couple friends now though?
33

34 AB: Yeah, we do. We always have though. So I don't think that we have more. In some ways those
35 straight couples have been more supportive of our family.
36

37 AJ: That's interesting.
38

39 AB: I'm an introvert, I spend a lot of time in my head unpacking stuff and thinking stuff through. I
40 feel like they've been more unquestionably supportive of us, in many cases, than the queer
41 community in our lives because . . . they seem less threatened by the transition. They seem like
42 they have less at stake or they seem to feel less abandoned or they seem to feel . . . I'm still
43 struggling to really uncover it but that's the sense that I get is it's literally been a non-issue for a
44 number of cis gender straight people in our lives in a way that feels very different from a
45 number of queer, gay or lesbian people in our lives.
46

47 AJ: That is interesting.
48

1 AB: Yeah, and I didn't expect that either.
2
3 AJ: It's true, it's a journey.
4
5 AB: Every day it's something new.
6
7 AJ: Oh boy. We've kind of delved into this question a little bit, but, you know, romance and
8 relationships and love and how it's been impacted by your gender identity. I have to say, having
9 interviewed a number of people and identifying as a transgender person myself, that it's a little
10 uncommon that a relationship survives a gender shift or gender transformation. What do you
11 think has been helpful in your relationship? Because you guys have been together for 20+ years
12 now?
13
14 AB: Going on 25 years, yeah.
15
16 AJ: Twenty-five years. Wow. What do you attribute the ability to sort of transcend that – or if you
17 haven't overcome, at least continue try to overcome, that challenge?
18
19 AB: Well I think a big part of it has been my partner's identity that she shared with me, early on –
20 before I was aware of my gender identity or at least accepting my gender identity, was that she,
21 probably just a couple years into our relationship, talked about how she felt like she was more
22 attracted to gender than she was to biological sex. She doesn't like labels, she doesn't use the
23 word lesbian hardly at all – if ever. And so, often the men that she has dated have been very
24 soft, more effeminate men and the women she has dated have been stronger, more masculine –
25 butch. And so, I think, it seemed like it just kind of popped in her head one day that maybe all
26 those humans kind of in the same general area on the spectrum . . . and so obviously that would
27 plant a seed somewhere in the back of my psyche that this person was less attached maybe
28 than other people . . .
29
30 AJ: Could potentially be.
31
32 AB: Yeah, to . . .
33
34 AJ: Comfortable . . . or more comfortable.
35
36 AB: And so then a few years later she just point blank asked me if I thought that I was transgender
37 because she thought I was, and I was like, "No."
38
39 AJ: Wow.
40
41 AB: Because I wasn't self-aware of it. Of course you asked me that a long time ago too and I was
42 like, "No." It wasn't something I was able to deal with at that point. So then years and years
43 later when I finally said to her, "I think that I am," she wasn't surprised, but it was still scary
44 because it's one thing to theoretically have that in your mind and it's another thing to be faced
45 with it as a reality. Even then, as things unfold over years and you experience the ways that
46 people interact with you or your family differently or loss of community in some ways – you
47 know. We've gone through layers of processing together and therapy and processing some
48 more. But, I think it boils down to that probably really truly being how she's attracted to people,

1 which I'm really fortunate to have connected with a person that sees the world that way and
2 then just working really hard at communicating and being honest and courageous.

3
4 AJ: Boy, I just got emotional right there for a minute just thinking about how deep the love is – and
5 how challenging it is for the partner of a trans person even when they are open and loving and
6 understanding because yeah, they are opening . . . I don't even think that they recognize what
7 the perception of the world . . . because one of the things that you described earlier, when we
8 were talking about what challenges you and what is the great thing and you said being able to
9 breathe. But also, you've been dealing with this all this time on your own and that was a
10 challenge and a drain but once you come out and you start to feel comfortable, now the issue
11 becomes the world and how they deal with it. And that's the same thing in a relationship
12 situation too . . . OK, now this person is involved with a trans person, what does that say about
13 them? It's unfortunate that that happens but the reality is that happens. I got emotional just
14 because it's so beautiful and so amazing that you guys have been able to work through all of
15 those challenges and maintain this 25-year relationship that seems to be going pretty strong.

16
17 AB: Yeah.

18
19 AJ: Congratulations.

20
21 AB: Thanks,

22
23 AJ: Quarter of a century.

24
25 AB: That's a long time.

26
27 AJ: That's quite an accomplishment my friend, for any combination of relationships.

28
29 AB: What you're saying is interesting, it just made me think of it in a way I hadn't thought of it
30 before which is it seems like I was finally able to show up as a whole person, as a parent and as a
31 partner, and so that fed our family in a more holistic way which then the trade-off is, like you
32 said, no longer is the challenge at home where I was dealing with issues and not as present as I
33 could have been. Now I am, but now it was the world . . . just like you said. So now home feels
34 better and more whole and tight, solid, in a way that it hasn't before. And in some ways maybe
35 that pushes us together because then you turn around and . . .

36
37 AJ: Now you have this adversity thing that you've got to sort of struggle together against.

38
39 AB: And she's super protective so part of it is her own process and her own loss certainly, but at the
40 same time she's feisty and she just gets outraged when she knows that I'm dealing with
41 somebody – insurance companies or paperwork or whatever it is, and they're being difficult.
42 She's one that just . . . she'll go out and fight for it but that feels really personal to her too. So I
43 think in some ways that fight pushes us together, why that pushes us together when for other
44 people that feels more divisive or hard I don't know. It's just how it is, but we're fortunate that
45 it is that way.

46
47 AJ: That it's working out that way, absolutely. Wow, you're a pro at this, Awen, you led directly into
48 my next question.

1
2 AB: All right.

3
4 AJ: Have there been times when somebody has been really helpful or really insensitive related to
5 medical personnel, the criminal justice system, or other institutions and systems that we have to
6 deal with? The criminal justice system or . . .

7
8 AB: Yeah, I think that throughout my life there has been different instances of stuff. I think that
9 since coming out as trans the biggest, hardest one has been insurance companies and medical
10 care, which, at least for me, have been impossible to navigate.

11
12 AJ: It's pretty challenging for everybody on the planet, or at least everybody in the United States
13 anyway – we have this really crazy . . . but I think transgender people who are seeking
14 transgender specific healthcare have some additional hurdles to cross over. What's that been
15 like for you?

16
17 AB: Just a constant struggle. Basically insurance doesn't pay for anything transgender specific.
18 Thankfully my physicians have been . . . I have one primary one and then the surgeon I saw and
19 they've been tremendous advocates and they've worked really hard to help me get the care that
20 I needed to have. So I'm tremendously thankful to them but the insurance . . . there hasn't been
21 a helpful person in the insurance companies.

22
23 AJ: Wow.

24
25 AB: At all, and there have been some people who have been just seemingly obstinately difficult even
26 to playing games with, "What is your gender?" "Well, it says here that you're female, but you're
27 telling me you're male and if you're male then this surgery is not going to be covered because a
28 male can't have a hysterectomy." Hours and hours of arguments like that on the phone with
29 people who you know have to understand what you're saying.

30
31 AJ: Right.

32
33 AB: But it's like they can so they do and it's just impossible.

34
35 AJ: I think when people hear the word transgender their whole . . .

36
37 AB: Just pschew. . .

38
39 AJ: Yeah.

40
41 AB: Yeah, the wheels come off. I don't know it's . . .

42
43 AJ: All of a sudden they just lose all their powers of comprehension.

44
45 AB: Yeah, it really is fascinating. Like this is not complicated, this is what I want you to . . .

46
47 AJ: Right.

48

- 1 AB: But it's been impossible. Thankfully, the physicians that I have been able to work with have
2 been really helpful, which doesn't mean that it made it any easier for us financially but at least
3 they helped navigate things to the point . . .
4
- 5 AJ: So you haven't been able to get your insurance company to cover any of your medical transition
6 costs at all?
7
- 8 AB: I had a hysterectomy and that was covered, that was also before I changed documentation and
9 my physician . . .
10
- 11 AJ: And was it already medically necessary or was it an elective process?
12
- 13 AB: I think it was legitimately considered medically necessary but it wasn't an emergency. I have the
14 feeling . . . I'm not a physician so I don't know, but I feel like my physician was being proactive in
15 helping it happen by saying, "Yeah, this is medically necessary enough that let's do it." That kind
16 of thing. So that was covered, but that was before I changed any documentation and everything
17 else. And then the top surgery and the hormones are not covered so all of that was out-of-
18 pocket and that was after nearly 30 hours on the phone with six different insurance companies
19 asking questions and trying to find written information that they could send. Some of them
20 don't have it written down, their policies, others have it written but they have to mail it to you,
21 it's not online with all the rest of their policies. You know what I mean? It's just such a game it
22 seems like. But it seems like that is changing, I just didn't want to wait two or three years. It
23 wasn't that I didn't want to, I couldn't wait.
24
- 25 AJ: You couldn't, right. Life is at issue here. Yeah, I think there are some small but positive changes
26 happening and on the horizon that is going to kind of create a better landscape but it's still going
27 to be something that I think people are going to have to fight for and really advocate.
28
- 29 AB: Yeah, it's so slow.
30
- 31 AJ: Yeah, it's so slow. When was the first time you ever met a transgender or gender queer person?
32
- 33 AB: I think . . .
34
- 35 AJ: And did it have any impact on you at all?
36
- 37 AB: Well I think the first thing that sticks out in my mind is . . . I spent a lot of time when I first came
38 out hanging out with male friends that did drag.
39
- 40 AJ: OK.
41
- 42 AB: Which is different and I think that's part of why I was attracted to that energy. The first gender
43 queer person I met was . . . I want to say maybe 19 . . . 19 or 20. And I met him at a college gay-
44 straight alliance that I went to with a girlfriend I had at the time. And he presented female but
45 was using male pronouns at the time which just blew my mind – and he was clearly not
46 performing and clearly not . . . like this is who he was.
47
- 48 AJ: Right.

1
2 AB: So it was just the first time that I was introduced to that as even a possibility and we went on a
3 road trip for a weekend and hung out and it was just a blast but it was so out of the realm of
4 what I had experienced before. It was definitely a gift to make that connection. We're not . . . it
5 was a fun weekend that the three of us, my girlfriend and I and he, we just hit the road – we
6 went to a . . . it was Pride Weekend at a local – well, a community college a few hours away. So
7 we just hit the road and went to that, had a big fat queer party weekend and it was just fun.
8 Came back and didn't really even keep in touch but just that connection was such an eye-
9 opening, positive experience – really affirming.

10
11 AJ: Do you have a lot of trans-identified friends in your life now?

12
13 AB: Yeah, yeah – quite a few.

14
15 AJ: So you've been able to find community and create sort of a friendship and chosen family
16 network for trans identity?

17
18 AB: I don't spend a ton of time in trans-specific community, but yeah. I'd have a hard time trying to
19 make a list of all the folks that I know that fit so when I think about it that way, I'm like – yeah,
20 wow, that's awesome that I know so many. Like I said it's not super tight relationships but it's
21 definitely nice to have those connection points.

22
23 AJ: Sure, absolutely, and just know that you're not alone out there.

24
25 AB: Absolutely.

26
27 AJ: What do you think the relationship is like between the L, the G, the B, and the T? And we talked
28 about this a little bit earlier but any further insights? Does the T belong with the LGB?

29
30 AB: That's a good question. I mean I guess off the top of my head, part of it is probably informed by
31 the fact that I'm just used to it being connected so there's a part of me that feels like it does
32 because, in my experience, so much of homophobia is based on really gender bias and gender
33 policing.

34
35 AJ: If you had to put a number on it, what would you say the percentage of homophobia is related
36 to gender?

37
38 AB: Oh, without having spent time thinking about it in depth before you asked me that question, off
39 the top of my head I would be like 100% because all of the biblical passages that are quoted are
40 like, "Well men are supposed to be this," it's all gender policing and that's what makes it not OK
41 for two guys to kiss.

42
43 AJ: Right.

44
45 AB: It's all about gender.

46
47 AJ: The people who get harassed on the street are guys who are presenting too feminine or . . .
48

- 1 AB: Or not acting masculine enough based on what someone else defines as masculine.
2
- 3 AJ: And women who are too masculine and not feminine enough.
4
- 5 AB: Yeah, it's all gender policing, they're not being what they're supposed to be – whatever that
6 means. That said, I think there is a lot the LGB folks can learn about T because it seems like a lot
7 of people assume that it's all the same battle and it's not. I liked something I read . . . I think you
8 may have posted it, that Tiq Milan said about preferring the term "coming out" less than
9 preferring the term "letting in".
10
- 11 AJ: Yeah.
12
- 13 AB: And I've had that conversation a lot with people who, for the first year or so after I came out,
14 were freely sharing my story with other people in their lives, which I appreciate their
15 exuberance and enthusiasm but I was like, "You know, that's not really how it works," but
16 they're like, "Well, queer people come out all the time and it's really empowering." I'm like,
17 "Yeah, but it feels different now." I could never really put a . . . it was hard to explain why it felt
18 different, like why I was so out as a gay person and why it feels different, not that I'm closeted
19 now but I would pick and choose who I come out to and in what context whereas before it was
20 just . . . it just was. And then I read when Tiq Milan said that and I was like, "That's it, that's
21 what it feels like." It's not so much coming out as it is choosing to let people in. I think that's a
22 big disconnect in just the difference in life experience, at least one version of life experience.
23 But it's different to be gay or lesbian or bi than it is to be trans. So in that way, the four are kind
24 of hard to lump into one big group. So I see similarities and I see differences, I guess.
25
- 26 AJ: That's a good answer. Tiq is brilliant.
27
- 28 AB: Yeah, that whole interview was fantastic.
29
- 30 AJ: It was, that was really awesome. I hope I can include him in this project.
31
- 32 AB: That would be awesome.
33
- 34 AJ: One of these days, right. So do you think there is an agenda for the transgender community
35 going forward?
36
- 37 AB: Oh there are just so many issues – yes. Are you going to ask me to outline it?
38
- 39 AJ: Well, give me the salient points of the agenda – the top three bullet points in your mind.
40
- 41 AB: Well, I'm a big advocate for health care because I think that helps mental health tremendously.
42 I think that acknowledging and respecting the body/mind connection is huge.
43
- 44 AJ: And there is so much suicide in our community.
45
- 46 AB: Yeah, and then when you're in a better place mentally and emotionally then it's easier to keep a
47 job, or get a job, it's easier to have more stability in your life, and to advocate for yourself to be
48 able to get those things. Because if you're dealing with adversity and transphobia and

1 depression and everything else, it's an impossible hill to climb in a lot of ways. So, I'd like to just
2 see medical stuff, the mind/body connection be respected and acknowledged, and then access
3 to the necessary care to help people get their feet underneath them. That seems to me like a
4 good cornerstone step, however you still, while you're doing all of that, need a place to live, you
5 need income, and you need safety. It's hard for me to really determine what comes first – the
6 chicken or the egg.

7
8 AJ: How to prioritize.

9
10 AB: Because there's just so many issues.

11
12 AJ: Right. I don't know, I would probably argue for stopping the murder of trans women of color,
13 but if you had the healthcare and you had access to employment, I think those . . .

14
15 AB: Yes, if you had safe employment.

16
17 AJ: . . . I think those numbers would decrease dramatically. So which comes first?

18
19 AB: Exactly, yeah.

20
21 AJ: Have you ever worked or volunteered for a trans or LGBT organization?

22
23 AB: Yes, for a long time. Different ones.

24
25 AJ: Really? Like . . . name a couple.

26
27 AB: OutFront Minnesota, GLCAC back in the day when it was that before it was OutFront Minnesota.

28
29 AJ: Wow, OK.

30
31 AB: Philanthrofund, Queer Street Patrol a long time ago.

32
33 AJ: Did you guys wear the red berets?

34
35 AB: No, I think we had buttons that we wore, pink buttons.

36
37 AJ: Got it. Awesome.

38
39 AB: Pride, I've done security at Pride and different . . . all kinds of different . . .

40
41 AJ: You've paid your dues.

42
43 AB: Yup.

44
45 AJ: Wow, Awen, we're at the last question.

46
47 AB: All right.

48

1 AJ: Well, maybe second to last question. I kind of want to know, there's been just some
2 tremendous visibility for transgender people in the last couple of years, months, and one could
3 probably even say days with the new movie, *The Danish Girl*, just opened up on Christmas Day,
4 which spurred a whole other round of broad international conversation around transgender
5 identity. What's your thought about Caitlin Jenner? We'll wrap this up and make it the last
6 question, what's your thought about Caitlin Jenner and where do you see the transgender
7 community in 50 years?
8

9 AB: Well I have mixed feelings about Caitlin Jenner. She's not someone who lives in the same world
10 that I live in or the same world that anybody I know lives in. There's a tremendous amount of
11 privilege there and ignorance about how most regular people live . . . or most regular people
12 and then most regular trans people, to a whole other level.
13

14 AJ: And then even more sub, most regular trans people of color, right?
15

16 AB: Yeah, absolutely. At the same time I am also a firm believer of everybody having a place and
17 belonging, so I do feel frustrated when people are extremely critical of her and I guess, my
18 compassion comes out because I'm just thankful that my transition hasn't been televised.
19

20 AJ: Yeah.
21

22 AB: I recognize some of the steps that she's gone through in terms of bumpiness with figuring out
23 language and figuring out who she is and I know that she chose to do the show but she was
24 already, also, a celebrity who didn't have the option to transition privately. So in some ways I
25 respect that she kind of took the bull by the horns and just put it out there instead of trying to
26 hide it, which in some ways probably would have created much more negativity because the
27 media would have possibly been more free to just make up whatever they wanted to make up.
28

29 AJ: Right.
30

31 AB: So Cait's not perfect and she's pulled in some tremendous trans women to have on the show.
32 Chandi, Jenny Boylan, all of these . . .
33

34 AJ: Candis Cayne.
35

36 AB: Candis Cayne is a kick. I feel like they've done a really great job of schooling her, pretty directly
37 with compassion so that's been kind of a nice story to see unfold.
38

39 AJ: One of my sheros was on there . . . now I can't think of the woman's name.
40

41 AB: One of who?
42

43 AJ: One of my personal sheros and friends, which is a shame because I cannot think of her name.
44 Kate Bornstein was on the show and giving her some real solid advice, like embrace your
45 freakiness because most of the world, I know you think you're a perfectly sane person but most
46 of the world is going to think you're a freak – so embrace it.
47

1 AB: Yeah, just be OK with that. So, she's certainly made a lot of missteps and that's caused a lot of
2 pain for a lot of people and I respect that she, then, has the strength and the courage to
3 apologize and own it. I'll give her props for that.
4

5 AJ: Absolutely.
6

7 AB: And for having the self-knowledge or . . . what do I want to say? Just for making the good choice
8 to have women on the show who can educate, because she's not equipped to – it's too early for
9 her.
10

11 AJ: That's why college takes four years and not one day. You don't get it all in the first day, you've
12 got to spend some time and you need some good teachers and all of that good stuff.
13

14 AB: I try really hard in life to subscribe to the idea that you can agree to disagree and you can
15 respect each other, so I get frustrated seeing the trans community divide over Caitlin. So I won't
16 dis her, I won't put her down, I'll point it out when she says something offensive or does
17 something that's harmful, but I really get frustrated and sad when I see the division happening
18 because I don't think it helps when we rip on each other. So, I just think it's all so new for her
19 and I cringe at the thought of . . .
20

21 AJ: And we were all there.
22

23 AB: . . . the past three or four years of my life being on TV for everybody to pick apart and dissect.
24 So I have a lot of compassion for her, it doesn't mean that I agree with everything she says but I
25 will support her because she's my sister and going through it – like you said, we've all been
26 there.
27

28 AJ: Exactly.
29

30 AB: Thankfully nobody ripped me apart at a certain point so I don't really want to see that happen to
31 her.
32

33 AJ: 50 years?
34

35 AB: 50 years from now, where do I see . . . what was the question again? Where do I see . . .?
36

37 AJ: Yeah, do you think transgender is going to be this big, sort of weird, phenomenon like it is now
38 or will it just be part of our normal nomenclature?
39

40 AB: Well, I'd like to think for . . . that? Two or three generations from now that it will be much less
41 of a lightning rod for people to be so triggered by. So I'm hoping there will be a significant
42 difference, I'm not so sure that it will be. I think 50 years probably isn't enough time to undo all
43 of the entrenchedness that we have around gender stuff now. But I would see it being significantly
44 more at ease than it is now. I don't know whether that means there will be things more
45 accessible in terms of housing and health – you know, it's not that long to really undo a lot of
46 that systemic stuff, but on the other hand, already even my son's generation it seems like it's so
47 much of a lesser issue. And if that can happen to that degree in one generation, then 50 years
48 from now it could be significantly different – so hopefully there will be a significant . . .

1
2 AJ: So you're feeling a little optimism? Is that fair to say?
3
4 AB: I think so. We don't have Donald Trump for president yet, so we'll see where that goes. I think
5 there's been so many positive steps and those steps have created small amounts of change but
6 it's still change and if change tends to snowball then hopefully those small steps will take on
7 some momentum. Already more people seem more comfortable coming out and being in the
8 public eye and that helps others who aren't feel more supported because they see people like
9 them in the media. So, I'm hoping that it will take on momentum and exponentially improve.
10 I'm going to go with that – we'll see. Ask me in 50 years.
11
12 AJ: In 50 years, we'll check in, we'll do another interview and see how it goes. Hopefully, Donald
13 Trump will not be president.
14
15 AB: Hopefully not.
16
17 AJ: Awen, thank you so much for being willing to share so many deeply personal and intimate
18 thoughts about your life and some of the joys and some of the challenges that we all face as
19 humans on the planet. But I think there is a particular sort of trajectory of the journey of
20 transgender people that makes our lives quite interesting. I'm honored and very grateful that
21 you took this opportunity to share with us.
22
23 AB: Well thanks for asking, I appreciate being included.
24
25 AJ: Thank you.