

Elliot Winter  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

June 8, 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.

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

1    Andrea Jenkins            -AJ  
2    Elliot Winter            -EW  
3

4    AJ:      So, good afternoon. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender  
5    Oral History Project at the University of Minnesota Tretter Collection. Today is June 8, 2016, and I am in  
6    LaCrosse, Wisconsin and I have the honor and the pleasure to be sitting here today with Elliot Winter.  
7    How are you, Elliot?

8    EW:      I'm good, how are you?

9    AJ:      Doing pretty good. So, Elliot, if you don't mind just introducing yourself, state your name, and  
10    how you spell your name, as well as your gender identity today, your gender assigned at birth,  
11    and your pronouns that you use.

12    EW:      OK, so my name is Elliot Winter. It's E-I-I-i-o-t and I identify as male. I was assigned female at  
13    birth so I am a female to male transgender. Yeah, that's it.

14    AJ:      Pronouns?

15    EW:      Oh, my pronouns are he/him.

16    AJ:      OK. That's pretty awesome. So, Elliot, what is the earliest thing you remember in life?

17    EW:      Earliest thing I remember in life? Probably gender was one of the earliest things I remember.

18    AJ:      Really?

19    EW:      Just how much it was a . . . how much of a fight it was growing up, just with clothing and things  
20    like that. I really think that was the earliest thing I really remember about that.

21    AJ:      Your childhood.

22    EW:      Yeah, just fighting with clothes and not really understanding where I fit in about . . . why what I  
23    was doing was wrong. I guess that's the biggest thing I remember or the first thing I remember.  
24    I don't remember a lot from my childhood actually. That's a lot of what I do remember.

25    AJ:      Where did you grow up?

26    EW:      I moved around a lot. I grew up in . . . mainly Georgia but . . . probably in the first six years of my  
27    life, I moved from Ohio to New Jersey, from New Jersey to Georgia and then spent the bulk of  
28    my life in Georgia.

29    AJ:      I noticed on your personal information form that you stated that you were born in Seoul.

30    EW:      Yeah, I was adopted, so the first thing I actually remember is . . . well, not that I remember it,  
31    but I guess I was adopted from Seoul, Korea, at four months and then I was brought to Ohio, so  
32    that was the first . . . on my birth certificate it will say that I was born in Ohio even though I  
33    wasn't. When I was adopted I got immediate citizenship, so when they . . . I don't know, there's  
34    something weird about birth certificates. But, yeah, it will say . . . I think even on my passport it

- 1            says origin of birth . . . oh, maybe it says Seoul. I don't know, but it is kind of confusing. So,  
2            yeah, I was born in Seoul.
- 3    AJ:     You were born in Seoul, but you have no memory of Seoul, basically.
- 4    EW:     No, not at all.
- 5    AJ:     Have you ever been back there?
- 6    EW:     No, I haven't. I would like to go back there but I haven't been back yet.
- 7    AJ:     So, you're Korean, raised in an adopted family.
- 8    EW:     Yes.
- 9    AJ:     Where did you go to elementary school?
- 10   EW:     I went to three different elementary schools. The first one, I can't remember what it was called,  
11            but the second one was, I think, Mansfield Elementary, which is in New Jersey, and then I went  
12            to Sixes Elementary, which is in Georgia.
- 13   AJ:     Which elementary was it?
- 14   EW:     Sixes Elementary.
- 15   AJ:     So, S-e-x-i . . .
- 16   EW:     S-i-x-e-s. Sixes.
- 17   AJ:     Oh, Sixes.
- 18   EW:     Yeah, so Sixes Elementary in Woodstock, Georgia, I believe. I think it was Woodstock, one of  
19            those – Woodstock or Canton . . . actually, I think that was in Canton and then my further  
20            education was in Woodstock.
- 21   AJ:     OK. What was elementary school like? You said you remember struggling with clothes, was  
22            your gender identity an issue for you as a young child?
- 23   EW:     It was without verbalization of it. I guess, just because of clothes and fighting with clothes and  
24            things like that.
- 25   AJ:     With your parents?
- 26   EW:     Yeah. And, yeah . . . I mean, I think too, I guess school was also . . . it was just difficult. I was  
27            very different from a lot of other people in school, whether it was gender or race or anything  
28            like that.
- 29   AJ:     Yeah, not a lot of Korean kids in New Jersey or Georgia.
- 30   EW:     No, definitely not in any of the places I lived. I had a brother and he was also adopted from  
31            Korea, two separate families. So, I guess that was really the only person that I saw or really  
32            recognized as being the same look, that looked the same as me. But, yeah, we never really  
33            talked much about it. We saw each other go through . . . I watched him go through the same

- 1 struggles I went through as far as, at really young ages, being bullied a lot for being the race that  
2 we were. I think because kids just didn't understand why we looked so different.
- 3 AJ: You guys grew up in the same family or in different families?
- 4 EW: We were from different biological families but we grew up in the same family.
- 5 AJ: Got it, now I understand. So, your adopted brother.
- 6 EW: Yes.
- 7 AJ: And he's Korean too.
- 8 EW: Yes, he is.
- 9 AJ: Wow. Were there other siblings?
- 10 EW: No, just us two.
- 11 AJ: OK.
- 12 EW: I don't know if it matters but my parents couldn't have kids and they wanted a girl and a boy, so  
13 that's what they got – they thought anyways.
- 14 AJ: That's what they thought they got.
- 15 EW: Yeah.
- 16 AJ: What were your folks like? Were they wealthy, middle class, white, Black?
- 17 EW: My parents are white; my dad is mainly European white and my mom I don't really know much  
18 about her but she grew up in the United States. Yeah, my dad . . . I think we were probably  
19 upper middle class, lived in pretty nice . . . I mean my dad did create a pretty solid financial  
20 stability for us growing up. My mom didn't have to work so she was a stay-at-home mom for  
21 quite a while until we were older and she wanted to do something for herself. But, as far as  
22 financially, probably until I was in high school they were higher middle class, upper middle class.  
23 My dad was a corporate America guy, he worked in marketing, some decent money I guess.
- 24 AJ: So, you guys were sort of bullied around ethnicity and race, what about gender? Were you a  
25 tomboy?
- 26 EW: I was a tomboy at the point when I realized that that was a thing I could do. I just remember  
27 meeting a girl . . . my mom tried to do the most feminine things for me as far as Girl Scouts,  
28 gymnastics, wearing dresses . . . doing the whole female role kind of thing. I remember going to  
29 a Girl Scout event and there was this girl there that dressed completely masculine and I, of  
30 course, was like, "Oh my God, that's so masculine." But she just . . . a lot of people thought she  
31 was a boy and I just . . . I don't know, it was like a light went off for me and after that point  
32 that's all I ever wanted to do was dress like that. That was me, I guess, understanding that  
33 people could dress like that without . . . or, what I thought at the time, without some type of  
34 persecution, I guess. So, I tried. I mean, I did wear a lot of . . . I did start being extremely  
35 tomboy – and before that, even looking back at pictures and stuff, like body language and things

- 1           like that, minus everything but the clothes I was wearing, I was very . . . seemed very masculine.  
2           And that's when the clothes came out, when I realized that that was something that I could do.  
3           But the bullying, as far as the gender – like for what I was wearing, didn't start happening until  
4           probably late elementary school and all the way through middle school. Middle school was  
5           probably the worst, but I think it's the worst for a lot of people, in general.
- 6   AJ:     It's a tough time.
- 7   EW:     Middle school in general is pretty terrible.
- 8   AJ:     No matter what gender presentation you're giving, yeah. What was high school like?
- 9   EW:     I was really kind of . . . I don't know. One of the nice things about high school is that there were  
10          a lot of feeder schools into my high school so there was a lot more people. There was probably .  
11          . . . anywhere from 3200 kids up and each year it got higher. In my graduating class, there were  
12          500 kids, plus.
- 13   AJ:     Yeah, that's a pretty big school.
- 14   EW:     So, it was really big so it was easier to kind of blend in. I got really involved in things in high  
15          school as far as sports and student government and my studies – and everything. I really didn't  
16          ever find a place to fit in but I feel like the bullying wasn't as apparent because they kind of went  
17          their way and I went mine.
- 18   AJ:     Sure.
- 19   EW:     So, yeah.
- 20   AJ:     What sports did you play?
- 21   EW:     Soccer.
- 22   AJ:     Yeah, were you pretty good?
- 23   EW:     I was OK. I played prior to that so, yeah, I think I was all right. I just really enjoyed it.
- 24   AJ:     It was fun – you had a good time.
- 25   EW:     Yeah, it was a lot of fun.
- 26   AJ:     Cool. So, when did you first realize that you were not the gender you were assigned at birth?
- 27   EW:     I don't know. I've thought about that question a lot and I think a lot of it . . . because I have seen  
28          stories of kids who just never . . . without language, without anything like that, never really . . .  
29          from their first words said that they were a boy or said they were a girl. But, that wasn't the  
30          case for me. I guess I kind of just accepted what people told me. I know I didn't feel it or maybe  
31          didn't necessarily believe it, but I just kind of didn't question it. When I knew I could question  
32          what types of clothes I could wear and where I could fit in and things like that, I did, and I think  
33          that was kind of the theme throughout my whole life was until I knew otherwise, I didn't do  
34          anything.
- 35   AJ:     You just kind of followed the script.

- 1 EW: Yeah, and tried to make do the best I could. I think . . . I don't know, I guess it is part of my  
2 story, drugs played a major part in my coping with that. I think that was maybe how it was a  
3 little bit different. I started using at a very young age, like 10.
- 4 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 5 EW: So, yeah. And I think that's where my red flags kind of come in, not so much . . . I don't know.  
6 So, yeah, I think as far as . . . I didn't actually start saying I was . . . I guess using the words of,  
7 "I'm a man," or anything like that until I met other transgender people.
- 8 AJ: Sure, that makes sense.
- 9 EW: It was an online kind of thing. I went to an online community and it was interesting because  
10 people were talking about their experiences and things like that and it was kind of like  
11 everything kind of hit me – that's me.
- 12 AJ: It made sense to you.
- 13 EW: Yeah, it just clicked and I was like, "That's who I am." Yeah, it just was kind of freeing in a way, I  
14 guess, but I guess it was like . . . I wanted to learn everything about transition and stuff like that  
15 and how to fix it as quick as possible, not that I was . . . but I did feel like there was something  
16 wrong with me and that I needed . . . it looked more like a treatment than anything other than  
17 that. It was just like, "This is how I'm going to feel better and alleviate all of my issues." Yeah,  
18 and so I did that as soon as I found out. I guess I just say that because some people that I know  
19 really have to struggle with, "Should I do this? Is this the right thing for me?" as far as surgeries  
20 and hormone therapy and things like that that are permanently altering.
- 21 AJ: Sure.
- 22 EW: But for me, I was never like that.
- 23 AJ: You didn't question it.
- 24 EW: Which is funny, because I question . . . or no, I guess it is like a theme in my life because it was  
25 like . . . yeah, I didn't question anything that I was told before and then when I found out that  
26 this is who I am . . .
- 27 AJ: A possibility.
- 28 EW: Yeah, it was like . . .
- 29 AJ: Full guns blazing.
- 30 EW: Yeah, it was. I think the biggest thing that was hard was that it was going to . . . I knew,  
31 realistically, it was going to take me a while to get to a point where I wanted to be or where I  
32 thought I needed to be for my own comfort level.
- 33 AJ: Wow. So, how old were you then when you were doing this online exploration? Were you a  
34 teenager? An adult?

- 1 EW: Well, there was . . . I think I was, I believe, 18. I think I was 18 . . . 17 or 18, I think . . . it was  
2 probably 18, more along those lines. Yeah, and that was . . . I started communicating with those  
3 people online and made some really good friends and just kept everything a secret until I had  
4 enough money to do what I needed to do and all that kind of stuff. So, yeah, those people are  
5 still a part of my life today – in that community.
- 6 AJ: Really? From that online community?
- 7 EW: Yeah.
- 8 AJ: What was it called? Do you remember?
- 9 EW: Laura's Playground.
- 10 AJ: Whose?
- 11 EW: Laura's Playground.
- 12 AJ: Laura's Playground. Oh, wow.
- 13 EW: Yeah. It's just a chat kind of thing. I don't know how well they're doing now because I rarely go  
14 into the chat anymore because I've made a lot of friends through it and just really . . . I became a  
15 moderator on there for a little while.
- 16 AJ: Really?
- 17 EW: Yeah, and they offer crisis . . . they train their moderators on crisis counseling and things so you  
18 get a lot of people . . . because one of their biggest things is the suicide . . .
- 19 AJ: Suicide prevention.
- 20 EW: Yeah. So, that was one of the biggest thing they try and aim to kind of help with, so all of their  
21 moderators are trained in suicide prevention. So, I think, whether they're a greeter or not, I  
22 think they're all trained. So, yeah, it was a pretty good experience. But, like I said, I don't know  
23 how . . . I know they were going down in numbers at some point, but when I was going through  
24 there, I think it was thriving for a while and there was a lot of people. They had all kinds of  
25 rooms and they had one strictly for female to male and they'd have a group once a week and all  
26 that. We'd just go on there and there'd be like . . . in the high-volume times, 10 people at a  
27 time.
- 28 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 29 EW: And then more possibly throughout the day or whatever. I think, for a while, I would stay on  
30 there for hours. Some days I would never log off. I'd maybe go out and do something but I  
31 would come back.
- 32 AJ: You'd still be logged on.
- 33 EW: Yeah. I mean, it has a timer so it would kick me out but I would always come back and . . . yeah,  
34 it got me through some really, really tough times.
- 35 AJ: So, that was your community?



- 1 EW: Yeah, it was. It was my only community, really. I didn't have anyone else that I really talked to.
- 2 AJ: And where were you living at the time?
- 3 EW: I think when I first started, I was in Georgia, and then the most amount of time I spent on it was  
4 when I was in California, that was when I was living out there because that was actually when I  
5 started my transition too was out there – in California. But yeah, I'd say it probably started in  
6 Georgia and then I kept it all the way through the next moves that I had.
- 7 AJ: So, you've medically transitioned?
- 8 EW: Not completely. I've had top surgery; I've been on hormones for four or five years . . . maybe  
9 four years I think.
- 10 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 11 EW: And then I . . . I think that's all I've done. I'm trying to pursue bottom surgery but it's very  
12 difficult because of insurance and all that.
- 13 AJ: It's a pretty expensive proposition.
- 14 EW: Yeah, it is – and my insurance does not cover it, it doesn't even cover my hormones or anything  
15 like that. It doesn't cover anything – everything has been out of pocket, which is a common  
16 story for a lot of people.
- 17 AJ: It is, unfortunately. Are you . . . when you say my insurance, are you on your parent's  
18 insurance?
- 19 EW: Yup, until next year – yeah.
- 20 AJ: Wow. Do you know people who have had bottom surgery?
- 21 EW: Not . . .
- 22 AJ: Personally?
- 23 EW: Yeah, like I've met people . . . because that was one of the things online that was really cool was  
24 to watch people transition or, I guess, even on YouTube. I watched stuff on there too, but even  
25 people in the chat community would go through their top surgery – or vice versa because there  
26 were also female or . . . male to female and so they were going through surgeries and you could  
27 learn about that, so all that kind of stuff. Those are the type of people that I knew. So, I knew . .  
28 . and there were definitely far less people getting bottom surgery because of the obstacles that  
29 were in front of them. But, there were quite a few and still . . . so, I got to speak with them  
30 about it and still follow people on other avenues. I don't really, really use Tumblr all that often,  
31 but YouTube or there's private Yahoo! communities too where people will share their  
32 experiences and shut it down once it's finished. So, yeah, as far as a one-on-one in-person  
33 relationship, I don't think I've known anyone really – that has told me anyway, I suppose.
- 34 AJ: Yeah.
- 35 EW: No one has to tell me that kind of stuff.

- 1 AJ: No, not at all. So, do you have a sense of how much bottom surgery costs for female to male?
- 2 EW: It's a lot. I would say probably close to . . . I don't know, \$80,000.
- 3 AJ: Wow, that's a lot of money.
- 4 EW: Yeah, if not more. It just depends out of pocket how much stuff is – because you have to have . . .
- 5 . there's just so many stages and each . . . just even the hysterectomy out of pocket can be as
- 6 high as \$10,000, if not more. So, yeah, and you need that before . . .
- 7 AJ: Yeah, you need to get that before you can even get started, right?
- 8 EW: Yes. So, that's the part I've been working on the most. Actually, I need the money and stuff,
- 9 and I'm starting to save for it and things like that, but as far as finding the right . . . because a lot
- 10 of it is not just getting it, it's also the planning – finding the right doctors, finding the right . . .
- 11 and so it's just . . . the money is just one piece of it. And so, I feel like that's the same way that I
- 12 did my top surgery, as well, because I paid it out of pocket.
- 13 AJ: Did you really? Wow.
- 14 EW: I did a lot of research – well, and I think it helped keep me a little busy as far as like, "Ahh, I have
- 15 so much money I still need to get together before I can have it," and just making sure that . . . I
- 16 knew that's what I wanted but I wanted to go with the surgeon that I was happy with. There are
- 17 a lot of times that . . . it's not even getting the surgery and it's like everything is great. There are
- 18 people that botched surgeries and it's just total regret.
- 19 AJ: Especially people of color.
- 20 EW: Well, there's not a lot of people that really understand . . . I don't know how it is for anyone else,
- 21 but for Asians, the healing process is a lot different. We have keloided scars and things . . . I
- 22 mean, keloided scars is the biggest thing I can think of because that's what I got and no one ever
- 23 told me . . . I mean, I researched and researched, but because there aren't a lot of . . . at least
- 24 here, I didn't see anything . . . nothing came up in my research about keloided scars. And so, I
- 25 found out later that there were other things I could have researched as far as maybe a different
- 26 technique, because there's not just one technique of doing it. It just, it's kind of . . . it's such a
- 27 gamble. Even when you think you're doing everything right, you're still taking a huge chance
- 28 when it's like . . . it's hard not to get frustrated because it's like . . . I don't know. To play the
- 29 poor me card, if I didn't ever have to do this anyways, we would have been . . . but, it is. It's just
- 30 a very long, difficult road. Even if you have all the money in the world, I feel like you could still
- 31 run into snags and just . . . so, yeah. But even people of color, that is a really interesting point
- 32 because I lot of the botched surgeries I've seen have been with people of color.
- 33 AJ: Yeah, unfortunately I just think the medical profession and institutions in general just don't have
- 34 the same regard for people of color as they do for non-people of color.
- 35 EW: Yeah, that's something that I've been getting more, I guess, in tune with, I suppose. Obviously, I
- 36 grew up in the south so I'm familiar with it but I suppose, you know, because . . . I guess, I've
- 37 never really had to, or felt like I had to, play a race card in any form.

- 1 AJ: Sure, absolutely - which is good for you.
- 2 EW: Yeah, it is, but I feel like there may have been times where I just kind of took it when I didn't  
3 have to, you know what I mean? Because I didn't think as an Asian person, I didn't know where  
4 I fit into the race talk and all of that stuff. Especially growing up in the south it was very  
5 confusing because I was really worried to meet . . . this is just a small story about my friends and  
6 things like that when I was growing up.
- 7 AJ: Please.
- 8 EW: I found out what rednecks were and what their views on race was and all this stuff. So, when  
9 my friends would tell me their parents were rednecks, I'd be afraid to go to their houses, I'd be  
10 afraid to meet people in another generation who still were kind of stuck in that confederate's  
11 mentality and all that stuff. And then one day my friend pulled me aside and she was like, "Why  
12 don't you want to meet my family?" And I was like, "Well, because you told me they were  
13 'racist'." And I don't really know how else to say it, but this is her own quote, "Oh, we just don't  
14 like Black people." That was all she said.
- 15 AJ: Really?
- 16 EW: So, there's a skewed race thing in the south, it's not any other race but one. Do you know what  
17 I mean? And so, then there are people that are super 100% racist against all races. But, I was  
18 like, "Do you guys understand how ignorant that is when you say you're a racist but you're only  
19 against one race?" So, anyway, that was just one thing that really confused me on the whole  
20 thing and so I didn't feel like . . . you know, am I allowed to say . . . but anyways, as I've gotten  
21 older and things like that, and I've had some people treat me certain ways or have lost out on  
22 jobs or lost out on this, or have been sort of treated unfairly by some people, it's coming up  
23 more and more where people will say, "Well, do you think it's because you are Asian?" "Do you  
24 think it's because of this?" And being in this kind of community especially, where the  
25 predominant Asian community is Hmong. It is an interesting conversation because I have . . . I  
26 don't know, I guess I don't know. I didn't necessarily choose to be . . . how do I say it? I don't  
27 know. I guess, it's just I wonder, thinking back, did I face oppression growing up and things like  
28 that – besides the whole being bullied and things like that? But as far as my chances and  
29 opportunities and things like that. I guess, what I'm trying to say is that I don't think I've  
30 become as . . . well, I haven't been as aware of it as I am today and I think because a lot of  
31 people are talking about it too, and not just in one dynamic of one race.
- 32 AJ: Black and white, but more broadly around other . . .
- 33 EW: Yeah, because I remember one of my friends, she's in college right now, and she was doing  
34 some kind of, I don't know, a research project, and she a survey and it was asking a bunch of  
35 questions based on . . . and it wasn't just Black and white too, it was based on . . . I guess, the  
36 color of your skin was maybe what it was. I was surprised at how many questions I could  
37 answer yes to. I was like, "Huh?" It really is an interesting point because I think a lot of the time,  
38 Asians do get a little lost in the conversation – as well as other ethnicities too.
- 39 AJ: Absolutely.

- 1 EW: And so, yeah, I don't know.
- 2 AJ: Yeah, I think that's absolutely true.
- 3 EW: Yeah.
- 4 AJ: You're talking a little bit about sort of oppression and discrimination, do you feel like you've  
5 been discriminated against because of your transgender identity?
- 6 EW: I think the biggest place where I felt that is in the hospital setting with the medical community.
- 7 AJ: Really?
- 8 EW: Yeah. And, I don't know, I think a lot of the times when I think I have been, it comes down to  
9 education and things like that where I think that people haven't been educated properly or at  
10 all. But, I have felt very violated in terms of people not understanding and either using the  
11 wrong language or being directly . . . I don't know, harsher to me than they would have been if I  
12 had just been unbiologically born female.
- 13 AJ: Right, or male.
- 14 EW: Yeah, or biologically male or any of those things. The transgender part of it just made things  
15 different. Yeah, so, I think I have felt discriminated against in that sense and in order to . . . and,  
16 it's kept me from getting proper medical care too because I've been scared to meet doctors and  
17 been scared to pursue treatments, because if there isn't anyone that outwardly expresses that  
18 they have worked with the transgender community, or worked for the transgender community,  
19 how would they know? And I've gotten better about it, to like . . . I kind of started off when I go  
20 and meet someone new, I'm like, "Have you ever met with a transgender person? Have you  
21 ever done this?" And then kind of being in charge of my own comfort level. I've kind of had to  
22 take charge of that. And I'm trying to think if I've dealt with it anywhere else.
- 23 AJ: What about school?
- 24 EW: Yeah, I did, I think. I don't know if it was necessarily because of my transgender status, because  
25 obviously, I wasn't out at this point in middle school, but because I dressed very masculine and  
26 acted very masculine and was bullied, I had a lot through middle school. I had a lot of people  
27 that, you know, I think back that had they been educated on trans people they might have been  
28 able to assist me better, but because of them not being and other reasons, I had some lady . . . it  
29 was a counselor who, at one point, was trying to push me and say that she thought I was gay.  
30 She would be like, "It's OK to be gay." But telling me that I was gay. It didn't seem right to me.
- 31 AJ: Yeah, "I'm not gay."
- 32 EW: I was like, "What are you talking about?" It's shocking to think back that it was from a counselor  
33 who could have been so much more useful than that. But, I also had a literature teacher who I  
34 respected a lot, up until this point, and she said to me, "You know, if you don't like getting  
35 bullied so much, why don't you just dress like a girl?" And that was a big twist for me, because  
36 that's when my drug use really escalated and then also I started trying to play the role of my  
37 assigned gender and it just caused me a lot of problems. Because nobody there knew, and I feel

- 1           like there's some kind of . . . I don't know if it's a responsibility, but people that are working with  
2           kids at a very vulnerable point in their lives. How was I supposed to know? But maybe they  
3           could have, if there had been education in the schools or education in the . . . or even just  
4           training.
- 5   AJ:     Right.
- 6   EW:     But, yeah. Obviously, I could have maybe still stuck it to the man and been like, "Well, because I  
7           like dressing like this." But, that wasn't the kid that I was.
- 8   AJ:     So, you tried to conform.
- 9   EW:     I did for a good part of my life.
- 10   AJ:    And it didn't work?
- 11   EW:    No. I was heavily addicted to opiates and that was the only way that it worked was that I was  
12           completely numb to everything.
- 13   AJ:    Oh, wow.
- 14   EW:    And it wasn't until I started sobering up, which having bouts of sobriety where I was able to  
15           freely think and . . . it was funny because . . .
- 16   AJ:    And get back to your body, so to speak.
- 17   EW:    Yeah, because the times that I did sober up, you would see a drastic change in my clothing  
18           choice and the way that I acted; whereas, if I was using I was very like, "This is the way I have to  
19           be." I really tried to put on that mask. And I really do believe that the only way I was able to do  
20           that was through drugs.
- 21   AJ:    So, in some ways you're . . . what I hear, and please correct me if I'm off-base, but your drug use  
22           was connected to your gender identity.
- 23   EW:    Very much so.
- 24   AJ:    But really trying to conform.
- 25   EW:    Yeah, I think that would be accurate. Because even thinking back to when I first started using  
26           was during the early onset of puberty, which for me, when I think about it, that was my way of  
27           dealing with it – essentially it was around puberty that makes me . . . I kind of am glad that I had  
28           drugs at that time because I know how hard it was for a lot of people.
- 29   AJ:    Yeah, it's a tough time.
- 30   EW:    Yeah, and even with drugs it was difficult. But, I feel like it was easier and I could deal with it –  
31           my body was changing and there was nothing I could do about it. So, this is the way I dealt with  
32           it.
- 33   AJ:    Just numbed myself out.

- 1 EW: Yeah. I think it was a very . . . it is accurate to say that that's what I used to help myself conform  
2 to society's way that I should be.
- 3 AJ: Right, right. Did you . . . so, what terms have you used to describe yourself over time related to .  
4 . . ? Like, "I was a tomboy." Did you ever identify as a lesbian or queer or whatever? Or, I don't  
5 know.
- 6 EW: Um . . . I'm trying to think. I did take the label of tomboy, a lot, but because that's how it was  
7 presented to me. My mom was like, "You're just a tomboy, this is just a phase," and all that  
8 stuff. So, I really identified with that tomboy label and things like that. I adamantly, adamantly,  
9 opposed to being lesbian and I think that . . . and not today, but then, I did come from a very  
10 religious household and I was so distraught and thinking that people actually thought I was a  
11 lesbian.
- 12 AJ: OK.
- 13 EW: It just . . . I don't know, it was a hard thing. I had that label thrust upon me throughout my  
14 whole life. I remember at one point when I was being bullied, someone had a girl come and ask  
15 me out on a date – like as a joke during a fire drill. Everyone thought I was a lesbian, like a butch  
16 lesbian. It sucked because I was like, "I'm not, I know I'm not." But at the same time, I don't  
17 think I even allowed myself to even start exploring who I was attracted to and I tried to force  
18 myself to be attracted to men, but . . . I would even say, "No, I'm totally straight, I like men."  
19 But, I don't know. I think it stopped at, "I'm not a lesbian, period," and then I never really got to  
20 explore anything with that. So, as far as a lesbian, I don't think that was ever a label that I took  
21 on and I think that trans and FTM, and transsexual and words like that were the only words that  
22 I ever really identified with when I got to that point.
- 23 AJ: OK, that's interesting.
- 24 EW: It is.
- 25 AJ: So, who are you attracted to now?
- 26 EW: Women – actually, both.
- 27 AJ: Yeah? Would you call yourself bi or queer?
- 28 EW: I think it changes. Sometimes . . . I think I'm becoming more comfortable with saying that I'm  
29 bisexual on a consistent basis. I'm in a committed relationship right now with a woman.
- 30 AJ: Cool, awesome.
- 31 EW: Yeah, and so I felt like the whole label didn't really matter that much anymore to me, but I also  
32 didn't want to be afraid to say I was bisexual either. It was something that I really went through  
33 at the beginning of my transition was sexuality, because sexual . . . it was something that was  
34 told to me and then it really kind of helped me explore everything, was that sexuality and  
35 gender identity were different, they were separate from each other. And, so that really helped  
36 open it up for me. But I also . . . I was afraid to be attracted to men because . . . I don't know,  
37 because of maybe society and the way that . . . so, I am a man so then I can't . . . and I'm a

- 1 female to male transgender so I can't be attracted to men because it would be too confusing to  
2 people.
- 3 AJ: Right.
- 4 EW: And I just wouldn't allow myself and anytime I found myself become attracted to a man, I would  
5 try and shut it off and say that I'm a straight man and that's all I can be and it's OK and all this  
6 stuff. And then when I started to . . . I met one guy, in particular, that had come to terms or was  
7 coming to terms with being trans and gay, and strictly gay – he didn't like women. He had tried  
8 to like women but he didn't.
- 9 AJ: Right.
- 10 EW: And so, he kind of helped me kind of explore it and come to terms with it and yeah, one of the  
11 biggest things that I still question today, is even though I am attracted to both and I do believe  
12 that, is that whether my attraction to men was more of an envious kind of thing – like, that kind  
13 of penis envy or whatever. That I really was . . . I really wanted so much or felt so much like that  
14 and was there somehow . . . it just got confused in a way. I don't know if that is the case, but I  
15 kind of . . . if I ever were to break up with the relationship that I'm in and then have to pursue  
16 that, maybe I'll do it with a lot less restriction and be able to move forward with that. But, yeah,  
17 like I said I am in a happy relationship and I've been in it for three years, a little over three years.
- 18 AJ: Nice, congratulations.
- 19 EW: Thank you. That was another thing that came from that community, that online community,  
20 because I met a lot of people from all over the world. I actually, through one of them who lives  
21 in Australia, introduced me to one of his friends from Australia as well and I met this girl. When  
22 I went over to meet him, I met her and ended up . . . we had started an online relationship  
23 before that, but it wasn't anything super serious or whatever, it was what it was. And then I  
24 met her and it was just like . . . I don't know, we tried to commit to a relationship and we've  
25 seen each other four times since then for pretty significant chunks of time and have really just . .  
26 . we're trying to get her a visa to move here.
- 27 AJ: So, she's not here right at this moment?
- 28 EW: No.
- 29 AJ: Is she Australian?
- 30 EW: She is, she's Australian.
- 31 AJ: Wow.
- 32 EW: She hopefully going to relocate and . . .
- 33 AJ: And you've been to Australia?
- 34 EW: Yes, I've been there.
- 35 AJ: And she's been here to visit.

- 1 EW: Yup. I've been there three times and she's been here once.
- 2 AJ: Wow, that's pretty amazing.
- 3 EW: Yeah, it's interesting. It's still kind of blows my mind sometimes.
- 4 AJ: And you guys are monogamous?
- 5 EW: We are. We've had conversations of polyamory before and I'm not sure if it was because of the  
6 distance that I was exploring that or not. She's completely . . . she wants to be monogamous, I  
7 think, at this point. It was a conversation we had had, especially when I was exploring the  
8 whole, "Am I attracted to men? Am I attracted to women?" And maybe kind of introducing a  
9 man into the relationship at one point, but I think at this point we're monogamous.
- 10 AJ: Monogamous, that's cool.
- 11 EW: But it was an exploration. And I think that it's . . . I think it comes with the freedom of being  
12 myself, or the freedom to be myself now that I'm able to explore some of the other avenues  
13 today – because that would be something that I would have never, ever thought to even think  
14 about or allow myself to think about, let alone discuss with someone else. But I did. It was just .  
15 . . there is a freedom that comes from being who you are that allows you to really think more  
16 freely in every aspect, really.
- 17 AJ: I think so.
- 18 EW: I don't know if I'm answering all your questions. I kind of keep going off on tangents.
- 19 AJ: No, you're . . . this is absolutely perfect, Elliot. What's your relationship like with your family  
20 now?
- 21 EW: It's pretty good.
- 22 AJ: Do you still live with your folks?
- 23 EW: I don't. I actually just recently moved out on my own, which has been really good for me.
- 24 AJ: But they're very aware of your gender transition?
- 25 EW: They are, they are. And, like I said, I transitioned while I was out in California, so it was kind of  
26 with them kind of removed from the situation – for about two years or so. But, I did tell them.  
27 And that was . . . it was a big problem. My mom is very religious and her family is very religious.  
28 There was a point where I really thought she was going to disown me and she almost did. I think  
29 that if things had not happened in the way that they did, that she probably would have. But  
30 because I had started transitioning out in California, they offered for me to come move here and  
31 they saw me . . . through the transition, they saw me change my name and they saw me do all  
32 this stuff, and it became real for them. And so, she slowly just . . . actually slowly at first, but  
33 then quite quickly came around to it. I thought it was going to be either years or never, but I  
34 think in total it took her three or four years to really become accepting and just . . . she calls me  
35 "her son" today.
- 36 AJ: Wow.



- 1 EW: She still struggles with her own family but they've disowned me so that doesn't really matter to  
2 me, but I'm sure it's hard for her. So, yeah. My dad, he . . . my dad and I, our relationship is kind  
3 of a difficult relationship anyways, but surprisingly, he was the most accepting.
- 4 AJ: Really?
- 5 EW: Yeah, and he was just like, "You know, whatever." He was like, "I don't . . ." I don't know if he  
6 realized how serious it was, but it was just kind of like, "OK, if you want to do that, that's on  
7 you." He cared more about me being sober and happy, I guess. I don't know if happy is really a  
8 thing, but sober . . . because I was wrecking his life, a lot. So, yeah. But, yeah, today they're  
9 extremely supportive, I guess. It seems extremely supportive to me because of how non-  
10 supportive my mom was at one point. I couldn't ask for anything more, really, at this point. But,  
11 as far as the other relationship . . . because we've had a lot of issues besides the trans issue.
- 12 AJ: Yeah, I can imagine – the opioids at 10.
- 13 EW: Yeah.
- 14 AJ: That's got to get your parents a little upset.
- 15 EW: Yeah.
- 16 AJ: Because they could tell. Opioid is not the kind of addiction that you can hide very easily.
- 17 EW: Surprisingly, they actually didn't . . . they didn't actually know a lot of the childhood and the  
18 usage, I mean, until I came crashing down because I was very functional for a long time – I hid it  
19 very well and I kind of lived two different lives for a really long time. And then when I was . . .  
20 there's like a progression of addiction and when I lost that functionality piece, that's when they  
21 finally realized. And, I think they were in denial for a long time too. They didn't want to see the  
22 red flags or anything like that. But not until my first year in college did they know anything  
23 about drug use or anything like that. So, yeah. But, even all that caused a lot of problems. So,  
24 yeah. I think, though, now especially with me having recently moved out and kind of doing my  
25 own thing has really helped the relationship a lot.
- 26 AJ: I bet.
- 27 EW: My dad is my dad and he's a little . . . I don't know how to say it – like controlling, I guess. So,  
28 yeah, it's been awesome and I think it's helped . . . I don't know. The trans thing, with our  
29 family, it just really kind of became a moot point, I think, about two years ago. It's becoming  
30 progressively easier to discuss certain things with them because before my mom just didn't  
31 want to hear it – it was better not to discuss anything. But now, I can tell them . . . like I can  
32 share things with them about the surgeries that I need to have. My mom actually came, when I  
33 got my top surgery, and she took care of me.
- 34 AJ: She was there for you.
- 35 EW: At first it was going to be my brother. It was in Florida and my brother lives in Georgia and I was  
36 going to have him come down and all this stuff. And he couldn't do it, so my mom was like, "OK,  
37 let's do it." It was hard. I struggled through it. I have a very low pain tolerance and she was still

- 1 in that stage of, “Why would you do this to yourself?” That kind of thing. So, she kind of . . . the  
2 empathy and stuff was kind of lacking there and it caused a little bit of tension because she was  
3 like, “Well, you didn’t have to do this and blah, blah, blah.” But, I think in the bigger picture . . .
- 4 AJ: And you weren’t doing pain killers or anything like that, huh?
- 5 EW: I had sobered up, probably two days before my surgery. So, yeah, it was an ongoing problem.  
6 But I knew that I couldn’t. It was . . . I don’t know, it was a struggle, because I almost didn’t  
7 make it to my surgery financially because of the drug use that I was doing. But, yeah, I wasn’t  
8 using going into the operating room but I was using shortly before that. I think that that’s still  
9 something that they don’t know about. Anyways, but overall with everything, I think that  
10 experience between my mother and I really helped the relationship later on.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 EW: And even just the fact that she said she would go wasenough, regardless of whatever happened  
13 down there – she went.
- 14 AJ: She was there. What about your brother? Are you guys close?
- 15 EW: Yeah, I mean he never really cared much about the gender. He didn’t. I don’t really know if he  
16 ever . . . I think he was probably the one who saw . . . it was the most non-surprising to him, I  
17 think. But, at the same time, it was like he . . . yeah, he’s a realist, I guess, and he was like,  
18 “There’s bigger problems than your gender. If that’s what you want to do, do it.” And so, we  
19 didn’t really discuss it. He wasn’t a big shoulder to lean on through the whole process, but it  
20 was just someone that I knew who didn’t judge me or didn’t care about what I was going to look  
21 like – or anything really . . . if it was going to impact his life or, you know. It just was what it was  
22 and he didn’t care.
- 23 AJ: So, do you feel like . . . does he love you? Do you guys still love each other? Are you close?
- 24 EW: We’re not so close . . . I think we have the potential to get closer, but I think like everything, my  
25 drug addiction had a lot to do with the relationship more so than my gender. So, I think that as I  
26 remain sober and become a productive member of society, our relationship will get a lot closer.
- 27 AJ: Yeah. But the relationships are still there with family?
- 28 EW: Oh, yeah. I never . . . well, I can’t say I never lost a relationship, but what I kept from it was a lot  
29 better than what I lost. I did lose an entire half a family – my mom’s family just completely . . .  
30 they wrote me . . . my mom’s sister wrote me a letter basically saying I was an abomination and  
31 all this stuff.
- 32 AJ: I’m sorry.
- 33 EW: No, I mean compared to a lot of things that have happened to people, as far as becoming  
34 homeless and things like that, it was hurtful but I still was able to see what I still had. But, yeah  
35 – so I lost . . . and I grew up with my cousins, so I lost those relationships too, all because of  
36 religion. And so, that . . . it wasn’t so much my anger towards them as it was organized religion,  
37 so I have a very big distaste for organized religion and any type of religion, I think.

- 1 AJ: Understood.
- 2 EW: So, yeah.
- 3 AJ: What have been some of the positive aspects of expressing your true gender identity? One  
4 thing is, it sounds like now that you've been able to come out and be who you are, the anxiety  
5 and the drug use has subsided or gone away – or you're able to control that better.
- 6 EW: Yeah, I had to . . . it was kind of a hard thing for me to accept because, at first, when I had been  
7 addicted for however long and I finally discovered this is who I am and started transitioning, that  
8 I thought that my drug addiction would just go away. I thought this was the reason I started  
9 using, I'm no longer going to be a drug addict, I have no reason to use anymore. But, the  
10 problem that I had to come to understand was that regardless of why I started using, it became  
11 my coping mechanism for everything and that wasn't just going to go away – and just because I  
12 am who I am and I've accepted that, doesn't mean that I'm not going to be an addict anymore.  
13 Once an addict . . .
- 14 AJ: And there's some physical aspects that happen too once you start using . . .
- 15 EW: Oh, yeah, it was still a struggle for me and it took another . . . gosh, probably another four years  
16 to really sober up. I've only been sober now five months.
- 17 AJ: OK, congratulations.
- 18 EW: Well, thank you.
- 19 AJ: I know it's one day at a time.
- 20 EW: It is, but geez, it's been awesome. I don't know, it was difficult to have to spend that long really  
21 trying to separate the two – that the gender and the addiction were two separate things. Yeah,  
22 but I think also the . . . and I think this time in treatment, because I just went to treatment –  
23 that's how I've stayed sober this long . . . well, not how I've stayed sober this long but it was the  
24 starting point. And one of the things, my gender was kind of explored a lot more this time  
25 around, because before I didn't want to talk about it and I really didn't want to explore it, it just  
26 wasn't anyone else's business and whatever. This time, regardless of what I said, this counselor  
27 really was like, "All the stuff that you've been through, you know, I think that it's an asset to  
28 your recovery." Regardless of that, it just really . . . I don't know, it really helped to really be . . .  
29 for her to explore just even the tiny bit that she did and to really . . . I don't know, just accept  
30 that . . . because I've been living stealth for the last . . . since I've changed my name, I guess –  
31 even before I changed my name.
- 32 AJ: Yeah, because you look like a straight dude.
- 33 EW: Yeah, once I passed I really didn't want to tell anyone. I think some of it was safety and some of  
34 it was all the shit that I had dealt with before. I was like, "I'm not in a good place, I don't to risk  
35 it." I felt like a sort of entitlement or whatever. I'm slowly breaking that down a little bit. There  
36 is some good that I can do, not only in the trans community but also the addiction aspect of  
37 things because there are a lot of people like me that . . . addiction is a big part, I mean not a big  
38 part, but it is a common thing with people that are trans.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, absolutely.
- 2 EW: And I don't think people ever talk, really, much about that. The trans community is aware of it,  
3 but I don't think other people really are.
- 4 AJ: The broader community?
- 5 EW: Yeah. So, I don't know, just the ability to really explore that this time in treatment and have  
6 someone unafraid to ask me – even though they probably didn't understand it completely, but  
7 they were like . . . I don't know, just saw the benefit in it. I don't know, it really helped this time  
8 around because it is part of who I am, whether I want to run from it or not. It is a part of me  
9 and all that stuff is part of what made me who I am today.
- 10 AJ: Right.
- 11 EW: And I'm OK with that today and I think that that has been one of the biggest helps in sobriety  
12 this time because before it was like, you know, "Oh, I found the reason why I started using, now  
13 I shouldn't need to use anymore."
- 14 AJ: Right.
- 15 EW: And I didn't get it, it was like, "What's wrong? Why isn't this working?" But, part of addiction is  
16 the insanity of continuing to try and do the same thing over and over again and expecting it to  
17 be different.
- 18 AJ: Exactly.
- 19 EW: But, I did things a little differently this time and I think it's been better. This, I never would have  
20 done. I would have been like, "I am male," and probably would never sign up to speak about it –  
21 yeah.
- 22 AJ: Oh, wow. OK.
- 23 EW: Because, I don't know . . . I just have been really closed off to it for a really long time. So, I don't  
24 know.
- 25 AJ: Well, I am so grateful that you are here, this has been an amazing conversation. So, you know,  
26 there's been a lot of visibility around transgender people, transgender issues, particularly in the  
27 last . . . I don't know, four or five years. Laverne Cox on the cover of magazines, *Orange is the*  
28 *New Black*, Caitlyn Jenner, *I am Cait*, you know . . . what do you think about that level of visibility  
29 and how that impacts the life of transgender people. Is it a good thing? Is it a bad thing? And  
30 then, do you think that has helped your parents come around a little bit? Because when you  
31 were talking about your mom, that's one of the questions that came in my mind was all this  
32 visibility. Is that helping or not?
- 33 EW: Well, I guess I'll start with the second question first. So, I'm not really sure with my mother how  
34 much of her watching me helped or the media and stuff, because before I had offered to send  
35 her information about it and things like that, and she just didn't want to hear anything about it.  
36 But, I will say my father, as far as all the stuff in the media, the biggest thing that impacts him  
37 are the stories not so much about people that have high profiles in the media and things like

- 1           that, but the smaller stories – like about college students, about getting on a men’s swim team  
2           when they’re transgender and having this beautiful story about how this guy was going to  
3           forego his comfortableness or whatever to continue to swim on the women’s team. He was  
4           going to forego his hormones and all this stuff, but he got his surgery but he wasn’t allowed to  
5           take hormones to continue swimming, but he loved swimming so much he was going to swim on  
6           the women’s team. But then his coach saw how much he was struggling and asked the men’s  
7           coach if he could swim for his team.
- 8   AJ:     Wow, that’s a great story.
- 9   EW:     And the coach said, “He’s a man, he might as well.” And, he did it. Those are the kinds of  
10           stories that my dad shows me and those are the kinds of ones that impact him. As far as like  
11           Caitlyn Jenner and *Orange is the New Black* and Laverne Cox and things, I don’t think that they  
12           pay much attention to it.
- 13   AJ:     Sure.
- 14   EW:     Yeah, so . . . I don’t know why that is, but I kind of like it because I like hearing that he read  
15           about this story, about this kid, or things like that that are similar to their experiences.
- 16   AJ:     Homecoming kings and all of that kind of stuff.
- 17   EW:     Absolutely.
- 18   AJ:     No, that makes sense.
- 19   EW:     And so as far as me, I don’t know how . . . I have listened to a few of Caitlyn Jenner’s interviews  
20           and they have been a little bit painful to listen to, but, you know . . . I mean, for me, it’s kind of  
21           interesting because it shows that we’re human too and just because Caitlyn Jenner is trans does  
22           not mean that she understands everything about the trans community or any of this stuff. But,  
23           at the same time, I don’t think that’s how media works and I think that they expect her to be . . .  
24           or the community, not just our community, but the community at large just kind of views her as  
25           the speaking person, or a speaking person, for the trans community. So, I think that in itself is a  
26           little dangerous because it creates some issues and . . . Caitlyn Jenner might be the only trans  
27           person someone knows or sees and I think that’s a little scary.
- 28   AJ:     Yeah, that’s only one story.
- 29   EW:     Yeah, and I think that . . . I don’t know why the idea of individuality gets lost all the time. Even in  
30           addiction, for example, people keep trying to find the one thing that’s going to cure everybody,  
31           but it’s like one size doesn’t fit all – it’s an individual program and people need to find what  
32           works for them. Being put in jail is not going to help this person or everyone, or the drug court  
33           program is not going to help everyone. I think the same thing goes for a lot of things – like, you  
34           know, we’re all different and we all require different things. So, to think that . . . I don’t know. I  
35           do think that the one good thing about them being in the media or just having more visibility, is  
36           the dialog that’s coming from it and people are talking about it. The word is not so . . . like  
37           scary, I guess, to people. So, people . . . I don’t know, so I think that kind of outweighs the bad  
38           things that are happening right now – at least, in my opinion. I think that it’s better that people

- 1 are talking about it because there's more of a chance for people to get educated on it than it is  
2 to just not talk about it at all and just keep it a huge secret.
- 3 AJ: Absolutely.
- 4 EW: So, I don't know.
- 5 AJ: Has there been one person or organization or somebody, a specific moment, that has been  
6 really impactful in your transition or your gender identity? You told me about Laura's  
7 Playground and how impactful that was.
- 8 EW: Yeah.
- 9 AJ: When was the first time you ever met a transgender person?
- 10 EW: Hmm. You know, I mean, I've met trans people in person and stuff, but when I started to it  
11 came after meeting them through Laura's Playground. So, I met up with someone in California  
12 and then I also met up with those people in Australia. But, I think Laura's Playground was the  
13 most . . .
- 14 AJ: It was the most impactful?
- 15 EW: Yeah, because I'd already known those people by the time I met them, so meeting them wasn't  
16 any . . .
- 17 AJ: Revelation or anything.
- 18 EW: Yeah, it really wasn't. I mean, I really bonded with these guys. We'd stay up on video chats and  
19 drink and have fun. It was just like I was hanging out with people in real life. It . . . I don't know.  
20 The internet and meeting people, that was not weird to me. Some people are like, "Oh, wow,  
21 you met people online – that's kind of bad, why are you doing that?" But, for me, it was like . . .  
22 no, it wasn't any different. I don't know. I think that it was awesome that that resource was  
23 available to me because I don't think that even if I had this kind of environment in my  
24 hometown, I probably wouldn't have gone to it because I was that . . . oh man, I don't know. I  
25 just am very . . . well, I've gotten better and I think it has to do with transitioning and being  
26 comfortable with who I am, but I was very introverted and very anti-social and all of these  
27 things. A social group like this is not something that I probably would have ever let myself do,  
28 and so I think Laura's Playground was the most impactful for me because I was able to . . . I can't  
29 even express how awesome that was for me when that light just went off with all those people  
30 – just like, this is what I have been looking for my whole life, this is who I am. When you realize  
31 that that's who you are, when it's staring you right in the face – it's crazy. I don't know, but  
32 yeah, I think that was probably the biggest thing, and the people that I met there.
- 33 AJ: OK, that's cool. Where do you see the transgender community in 50 year from now?
- 34 EW: Whoa, 50 years – man. I hope a lot more visible. I don't know how to explain it but, you know,  
35 like maybe as visible as the gay community or if not, better. I mean, 50 years is a long time but I  
36 know the struggle for the gay community has been probably . . . I don't know much, but  
37 probably just about as long.

- 1 AJ: Well, it's been about 50 years now of active political engagement – yeah.
- 2 EW: So, yeah, I'd hope somewhere like that, because there's still a lot of things that aren't talked  
3 about obviously that are really important – like insurance, obviously. Now I'm going blank but . .  
4 .
- 5 AJ: Employment, health care.
- 6 EW: Yeah, employment, health care.
- 7 AJ: Safety. I mean, trans people are getting murdered out here.
- 8 EW: Yeah, and that's the thing is that people don't talk about that, people that . . . it is dangerous for  
9 people . . . more so in certain parts of the United States, or even in the world. It happens and  
10 people . . . I don't know. And too, the other thing I was going to say is there are still a few states  
11 where you can't change your birth certificate for the gender, which is a problem. Obviously, my  
12 birth certificate is run through Ohio, which is one of those states. So, getting married is not  
13 something that I'll . . . most places a birth certificate is required and because I'm still labeled as a  
14 female, I would have to get married as a gay person and not as a man. And so, that's really kind  
15 of disheartening and I think that . . . so, there's those things too, and the military too. You know,  
16 we can't serve in the military which has been an obstacle for me because I did want to serve in  
17 the military but I couldn't. So, yeah. And I know people that have joined the military as a  
18 woman who were men because they wanted to serve their country so badly – and then how  
19 much trouble people can get in for doing that.
- 20 AJ: Yes.
- 21 EW: Or doing it the other way, and things like that. So, I don't know – there's just so many things that  
22 I hope change. And in 50 years, even not so much in the community – like the community at  
23 large, but also within our own community as far as like surgeries being more up-to-date and  
24 more possible and the research that they're doing for cis people is looked at as important as for  
25 transgender people as well.
- 26 AJ: Yes.
- 27 EW: Then in 50 years, and maybe it's a long shot, is that we're equal – better equality all across the  
28 board.
- 29 AJ: Wow.
- 30 EW: Every year we're getting better but also it feels like we're taking steps backwards. One group  
31 goes a little farther and then some other groups take some steps back and it's like maybe if we  
32 have another 50 years to do it better it will get better. I don't know – I hope, I really do, because  
33 it sucks. I don't understand why it's so difficult for people to see that just every human is the  
34 same.
- 35 AJ: Yeah.
- 36 EW: I don't understand why. I was just watching . . . this is kind of off topic, but you know *Roots*?

- 1 AJ: Yeah, I watched it myself.
- 2 EW: Did you watch the re-make of it?
- 3 AJ: Yes, I did.
- 4 EW: So, I was just like . . . I don't know, just even that and stuff . . . I don't know why it's so . . . like  
5 how people couldn't see how enslaving someone is wrong. How is any one human life less than  
6 another? Like that concept has ever been a thing – it blows my mind and I don't understand it  
7 and how people could do that. I don't know, it's bizarre and I hope that it does get . . . we've  
8 come a long way since then . . .
- 9 AJ: Yes.
- 10 EW: But it's . . . I don't know why it's so slow.
- 11 AJ: We still have a long way to go.
- 12 EW: I know, it's very . . . I mean, one of the things, and I can't remember what they said verbatim,  
13 but about how the chains are now just metaphors – they still exist but they're not visible, you  
14 can't see them but they're there. Yeah, it's sad – it really is sad.
- 15 AJ: It is. We've got to break those chains, Elliot.
- 16 EW: Yeah, absolutely.
- 17 AJ: All right. Well, I really appreciate you being willing to sit down and talk with me today. Thank  
18 you so much for your time and your honesty and your forthrightness in sharing your story.  
19 These are the kind of stories that your dad likes so . . . overcoming adversity.
- 20 EW: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: All right, Elliot. Until we meet again, my friend.
- 22 EW: Yeah, definitely.
- 23 AJ: Thank you.
- 24 EW: Yes, thank you.