

Barbara Satin  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

November 4, 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 Barbara Satin -BS

3

4 AJ: So, good afternoon.

5 BS: Good afternoon.

6 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian with the Transgender Oral History Project  
7 at the University of Minnesota. Today is November 4, 2015, and I am here with a local icon and  
8 legend and national faith leader, transgender leader, activist, advocate, organizer, Barbara Satin.  
9 So, Barbara, I'm just going to start by asking you to state your name, what your preferred  
10 pronouns are, and your gender identity currently, and your gender assigned at birth.

11 BS: Barbara Satin, my preferred pronouns are she/her/hers, trans woman identified, and at birth –  
12 male.

13 AJ: OK. Barbara, can you tell us a little bit about your earliest memory? What's the thing that sticks  
14 out in your mind as your earliest memory? It doesn't have to necessarily be related to your  
15 gender identity, though if it is, that's fine too.

16 BS: Probably one of the earliest things I remember is that . . . I grew up in St. Paul, born and raised in  
17 St. Paul. I grew up in a family where my father died when I was a year old. My mother was  
18 trying to raise . . . I was the youngest and she was trying to raise four children. I had two uncles  
19 who were really, really supportive of us and provided financial support to allow us to live in a  
20 really good neighborhood, safe neighborhood, but I remember that I always, almost every  
21 morning, would go out and play with my neighbor boy a couple houses away. After we played  
22 for about an hour, I would take him home and tell his mother that he was hungry. He really  
23 wasn't hungry, but I was, and so she would feed both of us. That went on for a while and she  
24 finally figured out what was going on. So, I was apparently pretty manipulative, even at an early  
25 age.

26 AJ: Oh, wow. Thank you for sharing that story. So, you grew up in St. Paul. What elementary  
27 school did you go to?

28 BS: I went to kindergarten at Randolph Heights and then, I grew up Catholic, and went to Holy Spirit  
29 grade school, which is in the Highland Park/Macalester/Groveland area. It was a really good  
30 experience, but during all that time – probably almost from kindergarten on, I realized that I had  
31 something going on, but remember I was born in 1934 so we didn't even have any history or  
32 even any vocabulary around the feelings that I had.

33 AJ: Yeah, Christine Jorgensen was still a baby.

34 BS: Yeah. Yeah, that didn't take place until I was a freshman in college. So, I just knew that I had  
35 these feelings that I liked things feminine and that made me feel really good and excited and  
36 wonderful. But, I also realized very quickly that probably nobody else seemed to feel those  
37 kinds of things, so probably the best thing to do is just not even talk about it. As I mentioned,  
38 my mother was a widow and I wasn't going to burden her with it, she had enough things that  
39 she was trying to overcome. I knew that I couldn't go to the priest in the church. I was pretty

- 1           savvy about the fact that all that I would get from that would be don't do it, don't feel like  
2           you're feeling, don't do what you're doing – it's all bad.
- 3   AJ:     And, here's a couple of Hail Mary's.
- 4   BS:     That's right. So, that wasn't an option. Basically, I spent, like so many trans people my age, we  
5           just stuffed it all inside and occasionally would let it out over the period of our growing up – but  
6           it was always there.
- 7   AJ:     Did you ever express yourself or experience any sort of harassment at school because of your  
8           identity?
- 9   BS:     No, because I think, again, like so many . . .
- 10   AJ:    You hid it well.
- 11   BS:    We hid it well and part of hiding it well is to be as boy-like or guy-like as you possibly can. When  
12           I tell my story, and tell stories of other people, I tell people that I could raise a brigade of  
13           Marines who are trans because that was the thing to do – you did the most macho thing you  
14           could. I eventually went into the Air Force as a jet pilot because . . .
- 15   AJ:    Oh, really.
- 16   BS:    . . . what else could I . . . how better to prove that I was very macho. And, I could wear a white  
17           silk scarf.
- 18   AJ:    Oh, yes, that's right. With the bomber jackets – did you guys have the leather bomber jackets?
- 19   BS:    That's right. But, in my grade school experience – at the end of my grade school experience, I  
20           went into the seminary. In the Roman Catholic Church at that time, they used to have what was  
21           called a preparatory seminary and that meant you went through high school and the first couple  
22           of years of college to see whether there was really a vocation to the priesthood. We basically  
23           lived away from home, we lived out at what was then called Nazareth Hall out in the Falcon  
24           Heights area, now it's . . . they sold the property to Northwestern University, Northwestern  
25           College.
- 26   AJ:    OK.
- 27   BS:    A very conservative Christian college. But, when I was there, I was there for a couple of years  
28           and it was a lovely experience. We were separated from our families; our families could only  
29           come to see us every two years . . . every two weeks, I'm sorry. And, they would bring us  
30           goodies and bring our laundry home and do all those things. But, one Sunday in sort of the late  
31           fall/early winter, we were having visiting Sunday and I was in the gym playing basketball with  
32           the sophomores, I was a sophomore, and we were playing the juniors. I was a good basketball  
33           player and somebody through me a pass and I missed it completely – my mind was elsewhere.  
34           As I sort of trotted back up the floor, I realized that I had to leave the seminary because the  
35           reason I was distracted was there was this girl that was standing in the balcony watching the  
36           game. To this day, I can't tell you what she looked like, but I could tell you exactly what she was

- 1           wearing and I loved her outfit. I realized, “Oh, this is not going away and this is not going to  
2           work very well as a priest.”
- 3   AJ:     Oh, my goodness.
- 4   BS:     That was when I decided that I had to figure out something else for my life. I came back into the  
5           cities, graduated from Cretin High School, went to St. Thomas College, did all the good  
6           traditional things, went into the Air Force, as I said, out of St. Thomas, got married thinking that  
7           the love of a good woman – I found a lovely woman, would solve all those problems and make  
8           everything go away. I quickly found out it didn’t change things. The only thing that changed  
9           was the fact that I now had a commitment that I had to live up to. So, I did. The result of that  
10          was three wonderful kids and a very successful business career and very lovely home life and  
11          very active work within the City of St. Paul, within the church. So, I had really wonderful things  
12          going on in my life that I took a lot of great pleasure in and had a lot of impact on a lot of people  
13          as my guy-self. But, underneath it all was still this sort of undiscovered . . . I knew a little bit  
14          more about what was going on but it still was not real clear in my mind what was actually  
15          happening. I knew my attractions, I knew what it all led up to, and I just fought it. And then, I  
16          had a long business career in St. Paul. I was the public relations director for a major  
17          international corporation and that was very . . .
- 18   AJ:     Can you say which corporation?
- 19   BS:     St. Paul Companies, now Travelers.
- 20   AJ:     Yeah, that’s a pretty big company.
- 21   BS:     So, I was there 30 years and had really good success and was very active in the city as a result of  
22           that. I was asked to run for mayor of St. Paul and there was absolutely no way in my mind . . . I  
23           said, “There’s absolutely no way I’m going to open myself to the possibility of anybody  
24           discovering all of that about me.” But, it was an honor to be asked. So, I just kept battling  
25           through this identity issue. And then, I retired. I took an early retirement, which was a real  
26           boon to me and after about four or five years of retirement, one of my children . . . I have to  
27           pause and tell you I have three children. My oldest son is a physical therapist; my second oldest  
28           son is a psychotherapist; and my daughter is a cosmetologist.
- 29   AJ:     Oh, wow.
- 30   BS:     And, if you think about that, I have the best of all worlds. If my body goes, I go to my oldest son;  
31           if my mind goes, I go to my second oldest; and if I need my hair done, I go to my daughter.
- 32   AJ:     There you go. She probably is pretty good with a make-up brush too, huh?
- 33   BS:     Right. So, I got a call from my second oldest son, the psychotherapist, saying, “Dad, can you and  
34           I go and have a beer and a hamburger someplace, I want to talk?” And I thought - well, sure, I’m  
35           sure he wants to ask dad for his wisdom on some subject. Well, it turned out we went to a  
36           neighborhood bar and had a hamburger and he said, “I’ve got to ask you, something is going on  
37           with you, you’re different. In just the last few years you’ve gotten harsh and critical and you’re  
38           not the same guy that we’ve known all of our lives. So, what’s going on?” So, I said, “Jamie, I’m

- 1           going to tell you something I have never told anybody, I'm transgender." And his response was  
2           to put his hand on mine and say, "Dad, we've been waiting for you to tell us." They knew.
- 3   AJ:     Really?
- 4   BS:     The kids knew. My wife, I had tried to sort of passive-aggressively raise the issue and it became  
5           very clear from her response that . . . she said, "I wouldn't want anything like that in my life."  
6           So, that's . . .
- 7   AJ:     Passive-aggressive – like how?
- 8   BS:     I'd make an excuse . . . I'd be able to go to a party and dress as a woman and see how she  
9           reacted to that. It was a pretty typical reaction of somebody that hasn't yet explored what that  
10          might mean in their lives. So, I basically just still kept it under wraps with her. But, my son was  
11          very open and supportive and one of the first things he said to me was, as a psychotherapist he  
12          said, "Would you want to see a therapist?" I said, "I never have but I wouldn't mind." He was in  
13          a clinic where the clinic lead, the owner of the clinic, was one of the gurus around the trans  
14          community. I'm trying to remember what her name was.
- 15   AJ:     Sharon? Was it Sharon Satterfield?
- 16   BS:     No, not Sharon Satterfield. She was on Snelling Avenue and she did a lot of the confirmations  
17          for getting approval and all that.
- 18   AJ:     Hormones and surgery.
- 19   BS:     And so, my son said a lot of the community would come through the office. He said from the  
20          standpoint of relationship between he and his boss, he didn't think it would be appropriate . . .  
21          she didn't think it was appropriate for me to see anybody on their staff, but they found me  
22          somebody. And, they found me somebody who was really good and I went to my first session  
23          and sort of laid out for her all that was in my head that I had kept hidden for all these years.  
24          When I tell my story, I say to the people I'm talking to, "You know, stop and think about that –  
25          how unfortunate that is that somebody has to keep inside for all this length of time their  
26          deepest thoughts about who their authentic self is."
- 27   AJ:     I think about that with Caitlyn Jenner.
- 28   BS:     Yeah, yeah. That was the first thing that came to my mind when that broke. So, the therapist's  
29          response to me, this was the first session, she said, "You know, I know you think of this as  
30          you've been cursed by God with this 'affliction of some sort'." She said, "Have you ever stopped  
31          to think about the fact that maybe this is the way that God made you and that maybe rather  
32          than a curse this may be a blessing from God?" I said, "Well, living it as a curse hasn't been  
33          much fun, so maybe I should take another look at that." And so, I basically sort of changed my  
34          whole attitude and direction around what this means. Until Jamie, my son, made those  
35          connections for me, I had been tangentially involved with the trans community, was a member  
36          of the City of the Lakes Crossgender Community, CLCC, and, in fact, ended up being the  
37          president of CLCC.
- 38   AJ:     What years were you president, do you remember?

- 1 BS: Well, I followed Patricia Wynn.
- 2 AJ: I know Patricia.
- 3 BS: So, it probably . . . it was a while ago.
- 4 AJ: In the mid-1990s?
- 5 BS: Probably the early 1990s because the 1993 Human Rights Protection for GLBT came through  
6 while I was president, and that was fascinating because we had about 400 members who, not  
7 everybody showed up for every meeting but it was a really tightly disciplined group, we didn't  
8 let anybody in without a lot of . . .
- 9 AJ: Without meeting up for coffee and getting an application filled out.
- 10 BS: Getting a couple of references.
- 11 AJ: Swearing to secrecy.
- 12 BS: Oh, yeah – all of that.
- 13 AJ: I was a member, so I know.
- 14 BS: Yeah. And then, all of a sudden, we became less and less of an organization. By the time I  
15 stepped down, I was president for maybe six or seven years, I don't remember, but during that  
16 time the Human Rights Protection went into place for trans people and we basically became a  
17 going out of business sale because the trans community quickly realized that we didn't have to  
18 meet in the basement of Club Metro.
- 19 AJ: Right.
- 20 BS: We can go upstairs to Club Metro or we can go wherever we want to go. It was one of the most  
21 freeing experiences for so many in the community. It gave them an opportunity to get out of  
22 the gay bars, which, for many of them, was a real question, "Why am I here? I mean, I'm not  
23 gay." Well, you're here because they're the only ones that are willing to say, "Come on in." So,  
24 but anyway, as a result of that therapy session, I did a lot of soul searching and trying to figure  
25 out who I was and I realized I had to spend some time getting to know who this person was  
26 inside, who Barbara Satin was. The Barbara Satin name came well before this. Do you  
27 remember community bulletin boards? They pre-dated the internet.
- 28 AJ: The internet – yes, I do remember.
- 29 BS: There was one in Eagan called Carolyn's Closet and there were a number of trans community  
30 bulletin boards, but they all had a fee – you had to pay upfront to be a member. Carolyn's  
31 Closet was free. When I discovered there was a 651 number, or whatever it was, that I could  
32 just sign on to, it was quite freeing but one of the first things was you have to have a user name  
33 and you had to have a feminine name, and I hadn't even thought of that. So, the name I came  
34 up with was Barbara Satin and Barbara was the name of, I guess, my first crush on a young  
35 woman; the Satin is the fabric of my life.
- 36 AJ: Right, wow – it's a beautiful name.

1 BS: Yeah. I always wear something satin – you may not see it, but it’s there.

2 AJ: But, it’s there – yes.

3 BS: So, I decided I had to figure out who Barbara Satin really was. And so, I left my marriage and  
4 that was challenging. Growing up Catholic, my wife and I never divorced, it was always a  
5 question that I did what I felt I had to do and she, unfortunately, was the one who suffered as a  
6 result of it. So, I left and sort of lived . . . I decided I was so well known in St. Paul that I didn’t  
7 want to live out in our community, which included her community. So, I moved to Brooklyn  
8 Park and thought I would be this quiet suburban housewife trying to figure out who I was, and  
9 that didn’t work out because I wasn’t quiet.

10 AJ: Or suburban.

11 BS: Or suburban. But, I also left the Catholic Church because I realized that not only was there little  
12 room for women in ministry in the Catholic Church, there was absolutely going to be no room  
13 for a trans woman in ministry in the Catholic Church. So, I didn’t want to . . . I just thought I’d be  
14 spiritual on my own and I didn’t want to go church shopping. I thought I could do this just in a  
15 direct relationship with God. I quickly discovered, after three or four months, that I needed  
16 community to make my worship experience viable for me. And so, I decided I’d try and find a  
17 church that would be accepting of me. I knew that there was All God’s Children, because they  
18 advertised in the local LGBT newspapers which, if you remember, at the time we had a couple of  
19 them.

20 AJ: Yeah, there were a few newspapers.

21 BS: As opposed to now. And then Spirit of the Lakes. And so, on a Sunday morning in June, I was  
22 sitting out on Lake Street in my car. I think I was reading *Gays* at the time, looking at the ads  
23 and trying to figure out where I should go, and it was five minutes to 10 and one of the services  
24 started at 10:00 and one was at 10:30, and I looked up and I realized, “Oh, I’m right in front of  
25 Spirit of the Lakes Church and it’s five minutes to 10, so I’ll go there.” So, I walked into Spirit of  
26 the Lakes, which was a GLBT church. It was formed by gay, lesbian, bisexual and one ally, who  
27 had actually been part of the MCCs All God’s Children and realized the worship experience was  
28 too high church for them and so they wanted something more plain and simple. I walked into  
29 this GLBT church, which had never had a T. So, it was a learning experience for both them and  
30 for me. In fact, the music director at the time came up to me about six months later and he  
31 said, “You walked in that door on Sunday and I could see you from where I was sitting and I  
32 thought to myself . . .” He said, “I had a sick feeling in my stomach and I said, ‘He should go  
33 someplace else, he shouldn’t come here’.” And then he put his arm around me and he said,  
34 “You’re the best thing that’s happened to this church.” So, it was a good experience for them  
35 and it was a really good experience for me. But, it led me into my work within the United  
36 Church of Christ, which has been both local and national.

37 AJ: UCC – is that the acronym?

38 BS: United Church of Christ, UCC – yes. The LGBT group within the denomination . . . the United  
39 Church of Christ has a reputation of being very progressive. It is, and it isn’t. A portion of about  
40 one-third of the church is very progressive, one-third of the church is very conservative – very



1 conservative, and then there's a third that's trying to figure out where do we fit in. But, Spirit of  
2 the Lakes is on the very progressive side and the LGBT group that was part of the denomination  
3 holds an annual gathering called The National Gathering and I was invited to attend shortly after  
4 I joined Spirit of the Lakes Church. And, they had never had a conversation about what it means  
5 to have a trans presence in the congregation and what is the trans person looking for and what  
6 is the congregation's response to that. So, they asked me if I would do that and I thought,  
7 "Well, I've not been out all that long and I'm probably not the best person to do it, but it's  
8 important that they have that conversation and since they asked me I'd say yes." A week later, I  
9 got an email from them saying, "Oh, by the way, we forgot to mention, we would like you to do  
10 this in song or in dance, in poetry, dramatic reading, whatever." And I thought, "Oh, God, I  
11 don't do any of those things." I'm a great audience; if you do those things then you want me in  
12 the audience because I will applaud widely for you. But, I don't do them myself. On the other  
13 hand, I thought, it's still too important of a situation to say no. And as a result, I wrote back and  
14 said, "I will make something happen."

15 AJ: OK.

16 BS: So, I went to Chicago and they were at the University of Chicago for their conference. I came to  
17 the plenary session and there were about 200-300 people in the audience. They had just  
18 finished their worship service in the morning and the stage was set with the communion table  
19 and they had moved all the covering and vessels off that, it was just a blank table. I came out, I  
20 was David – my guy self. I had a long black terrycloth robe on, no make-up, I wore my hair just  
21 as I normally would wear it as a guy, I wasn't wearing my hair long so I didn't have a ponytail.

22 AJ: Sure.

23 BS: I set my make-up kit on the table and a mirror, which actually wasn't a mirror it was just a blank  
24 ...

25 AJ: A rectangle.

26 BS: I started making myself up and telling my story. At the end of my story, I was finished and I  
27 reached back and I had a wig on the back table and put it on and dropped my terrycloth robe  
28 and I had on a fabulous gown and I introduced them to Barbara Satin. I got lots of reaction then,  
29 and I still get it even today and it's almost 20 years later. But the most important part of the  
30 story is not what happened in Chicago, although that was wonderful and meaningful to me, it  
31 was about six months later, back in the Twin Cities and we were having a multi-church  
32 Thanksgiving gathering at Mayflower United Church of Christ. And, a woman came up to me  
33 and said, "Can I talk to you after the service? I want to talk to you – you changed my life." OK,  
34 obviously, I wanted to find out about that. So, at the end of the service we went off into a  
35 corner and she said, "I saw you in Chicago and my father is a crossdresser. I've known that for  
36 many, many years and I didn't want any of that in my life and I cut myself off from my father.  
37 We have not had a conversation or talked in years. I watched you and I realized that's my dad  
38 up there telling his story. I went home and I re-connected with my dad and we have had just  
39 this wonderful re-connection and wonderful renewal of our relationship." I realized all that it  
40 took for me was the ability to be out and to tell my story and there are so many of us within the  
41 community that aren't able to do that and that I needed to be as out as I could be, to be as

- 1 present as I could be. And so, I started with . . . eventually people began calling my ministry a  
2 presence. I showed up wherever I could to let people know that there is a trans person in the  
3 room – whether it’s at the Guthrie, whether it’s at the neighborhood theatre, whether it’s at the  
4 bowling alley, whether it’s Gay Men’s Chorus where you look around and there’s nobody that’s  
5 trans.
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 BS: And, I just felt it was important for people to see a trans person. One of the things that I have a  
8 reputation of dressing sort of high fashion, and I do it on purpose – because I want people to  
9 pay attention to me. I want them to see me and I want them to see me as a trans person. I’m  
10 not looking to pass. People say, “Oh, you pass beautifully,” that’s fine, but what I really want  
11 them to see is there’s a trans person and they may say something to me and I have never  
12 experienced anybody harassing me about it. I’ve had lots of people ask me about it, “What  
13 brought this on? What’s all this about?”
- 14 AJ: Sure.
- 15 BS: But, I want them to even just go home and think about it. “Oh, there’s a trans person and the  
16 walls didn’t cave in.”
- 17 AJ: Exactly.
- 18 BS: So, that’s been sort of a guiding element of the years that I’ve spent doing advocacy work  
19 around trans issues – was the fact that we have so many in our community that, still, we may  
20 see them when we’re out and about, we may see them and think, “Oh, they’re out.” But, when  
21 you come and talk to them, “No, nobody knows this, nobody knows that.”
- 22 AJ: Right, yeah.
- 23 BS: So, their stories aren’t being told. So, that’s wonderful that this project is being done. That’s  
24 important.
- 25 AJ: We’re trying to uncover those kinds of stories.
- 26 BS: Yeah.
- 27 AJ: Wow, you went a long way from my question about elementary school – which is great, it’s  
28 wonderful. I love it. One of the things you mentioned was . . . you mentioned so much that I  
29 need to circle back to, but you talked about being in the Air Force and being a fighter pilot.  
30 What was it like being in the military and knowing that you had this . . . maybe you didn’t have  
31 the language, trans identity, at the time, but you certainly recognized from your experience in  
32 high school that, “I want to dress like that girl.” So, how was it being in the military?
- 33 BS: It was interesting because it was my first time really living independently because when I went  
34 to college, I lived in St. Paul, lived at home like so many kids at St. Thomas did. So, there wasn’t  
35 a lot of independence, even though I was at an age where I could be independent.
- 36 AJ: Sure.

- 1 BS: So, when I went in the Air Force it was, “Wow, I can be who I want to be,” except who I wanted  
2 to be was not someone . . .
- 3 AJ: That the Air Force was clearly accepting of.
- 4 BS: They wouldn’t think that was really too great. So, it was quite tough. It still was . . . my true self  
5 was in there someplace and I had learned more and more about what it was that this was all  
6 about. When I was a freshman at St. Thomas College, I was walking to Biology class, this would  
7 be 1953, and somebody ran up to me and said, “Did you hear about this guy that went to  
8 Denmark and came back as a woman?” That was Christine Jorgensen. I thought to my myself . .  
9 . he thought it was hilarious and I thought to myself, “Oh my God, there’s somebody else out  
10 there like me.” Because, as you probably experienced, so many of us think that we’re the only  
11 ones.
- 12 AJ: Yeah, I thought that for many, many years.
- 13 BS: It was the one thing – the idea the computer bulletin boards, and then eventually the internet,  
14 has been so freeing to allow us to understand that there are others in various stages of  
15 exploring their gender identity and expression but it was . . . I remember, even after I was out of  
16 the Air Force, I still didn’t know anybody who was trans. The St. Paul newspaper used to run a  
17 section called, maybe once every two weeks, Crime and Punishment, and they would give the  
18 names and addresses and a little story about somebody who was picked up for drunk driving or  
19 for stealing something, and occasionally, maybe once a year, somebody got picked up . . .
- 20 AJ: For wearing a dress.
- 21 BS: For wearing a dress.
- 22 AJ: I remember that.
- 23 BS: I remember one of them, and somebody who lived near me in Highland Park, who got picked up  
24 for wearing a skirt and a sweater and a black bra and black panties – they even went that far to  
25 describe it.
- 26 AJ: Wow.
- 27 BS: And I thought, “Oh my God, I’d like to meet that person.” And, I actually . . . I don’t know if I’ve  
28 ever told this, I actually wrote a note and he lived in an apartment building. I wrote a note and I  
29 slipped it under his apartment door with my telephone . . . how did I do that? I didn’t have a cell  
30 phone at that time . . . I think I may have given him a mailing address or something. I just  
31 wanted to meet somebody and talk. And then, I did meet somebody . . . I don’t even remember  
32 where I found the ad or something, somebody wanted to give away some books. So, just off of  
33 Franklin, right near Park Avenue, somebody lived in an apartment building and I went there on a  
34 noon hour and he sat way off in the corner with no lights on and wouldn’t let me come in past  
35 the front door and it was this voice out of the darkness that was talking to me. It was the  
36 strangest thing. So, all of my experience was . . . I still don’t know anybody who is trans. It was  
37 so isolating.
- 38 AJ: When was the first time you met a trans person?

- 1 BS: I'm trying to remember. There was an event held at one of the hotels . . . maybe it was a Pride  
2 event that they were going to have a costume ball. I went down as my guy self, just to look.  
3 That was, I think, the first . . . and I don't know whether I made any contact with anybody at the  
4 time. Then I ran into . . . how did I find out about CLCC? In fact, I didn't find out about CLCC,  
5 there was another organization that was a spin-off from CLCC, not Trias – there was actually  
6 three trans groups going. Twin City . . . well, whatever the name was, that's the group I  
7 connected with at first to see about attending one of their meetings, and I did, and eventually  
8 became very involved with them. But, it was a long, sort of strange process to even get to know  
9 who the community was.
- 10 AJ: Did you have like a trans sister that sort of guided you through the process at all? A trans  
11 mother maybe, I don't know?
- 12 BS: At my age it was a trans sister, nobody was that old to be my mother. I'm trying to remember  
13 what her name was, but it was the person who did the interview. And then, just sort of kept in  
14 touch with me and said, "Are you going to come? Here's what you should do."
- 15 AJ: Sure.
- 16 BS: Like so many, I think I went to the first meeting and never went into the door and turned around  
17 . . .
- 18 AJ: Turned around, yeah.
- 19 BS: Did my purging like everyone else did.
- 20 AJ: Really? How often would you say you purged? Talk about that a little bit. These young people,  
21 that is not their experience. What was that like? How did it feel? How many times did you do  
22 it?
- 23 BS: It was so thrilling to find lingerie, bras and panties, a dress, a skirt, a sweater that you really  
24 liked. And then, some modicum of make-up.
- 25 AJ: And that fit, right?
- 26 BS: Yeah, yeah.
- 27 AJ: Because that was a challenge for me.
- 28 BS: And for me too because of the height. Now, as I get older and shorter, I don't need to go to the  
29 tall girl's shop. Remember there was Sally's for tall girls.
- 30 AJ: Sally's Tall Gals, yeah.
- 31 BS: So, it was always thrilling to have these clothes, but then the other issue was where do you hide  
32 them because nobody can find them because all hell would break loose. And then there was the  
33 guilt. So, you would dress, get satisfaction from it – whatever that meant for you, and then  
34 you'd feel bad about what you'd been doing. And, so between the fear of being caught and the  
35 fear of doing something others would think was bad, this whole idea of the evidence was these  
36 clothes and so you'd get to the point of, "I'm never going to do this again," and the only way out

- 1 of that is to just get rid of things. It happened probably four times, maybe more, but four times  
2 where there was a fair amount of clothes. Now, I couldn't purge if I wanted to because I have a  
3 whole basement full.
- 4 AJ: Now you're trying to purge and you can't do it. Oh, boy.
- 5 BS: Right.
- 6 AJ: Wow, well thank you for sharing about that. Like I said, a lot of the young people that I'm  
7 interviewing, that's just not their experience. What have been some of the positive aspects of  
8 expressing your true gender, Barbara?
- 9 BS: I'm a lot more peaceful, stress-less than I've been in the past. You know, my demeanor always  
10 has been one of sort of being a conciliator, but sometimes that's seen, within a guy, as being a  
11 weakness. You've got to be firm and you've got to make decisions rather than to allow people  
12 to . . .
- 13 AJ: Run over you.
- 14 BS: Or allow people to have a conversation and then come to a conclusion that everybody can feel  
15 relatively good about. So, that was part of my feminine make-up, but I sort of tried to work to  
16 keep it in tow so nobody would see that as a pejorative and judge me on it. So, the ability to not  
17 have to worry about that was just very relaxing. And, I also found because I really feel  
18 comfortable in who I am, and I really feel comfortable in my relationship of Barbara and myself,  
19 my inner self expressed through Barbara in my relationship to God, I really feel good about my  
20 relationship to God rather than, as my therapist said, rather than thinking of this as a curse from  
21 God, I really believe that I have been blessed with this opportunity to be both an expression of a  
22 masculine side and a feminine side and to allow people to see how gender can be so broad and  
23 cover so many things, and yet where I feel the most comfortable is the feminine side.
- 24 AJ: So, you still have a close relationship with the church and faith community?
- 25 BS: Yes.
- 26 AJ: Where do you go to church now?
- 27 BS: Well, Spirit of the Lakes continued to be my home until our building sort of collapsed on us and  
28 we had to find a new place to worship. We were just going to begin starting on a housing  
29 project. Our original intent was we were going to rent a space for a year and then come back  
30 and have a new church on the first floor of the building, Spirit on Lake. But, our housing . . . our  
31 building got moldy and leaky and we had to find a place to worship earlier. We came across  
32 Minnehaha United Church of Christ, which is in the south part of Minneapolis, which was going  
33 through some turmoil. They had just . . . they had been a very progressive church and then they  
34 had a pastor that came in expressing support for LGBT issues but when push came to shove,  
35 they didn't want that. So, they had to let him go and, in the meantime, a lot of people who had  
36 been members because of the progressiveness of the church, had also left. So, they were  
37 looking for bodies, and we were bodies, so we worshipped together without the idea of merger

- 1 to see how this would go. It's been a really good relationship and so we both changed our  
2 names to Living Table United Church of Christ.
- 3 AJ: Oh, OK – Living Table. I never knew how that came about.
- 4 BS: Yes, so that's at 38<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup>.
- 5 AJ: And you're still a member there.
- 6 BS: I'm still a member, yes. My other involvement, I mentioned the fact that I went to the coalition  
7 and did this presentation as David and then introduced them to Barbara, what came from that  
8 was an invitation to go on the Board of the LGBT Coalition, the denominational UCC group. And  
9 I did, and I became the chairman of the board. At that point, our executive director resigned for  
10 another position. And, when she left she had been on the executive council of the United  
11 Church of Christ, which is the governing body. So, when she left, I took over her position, so I  
12 became the first trans woman in leadership within that denomination.
- 13 AJ: Wow.
- 14 BS: And, that was quite exciting, but one of the interesting experiences from that was I went to my  
15 first convening of the executive council and as I walked into the building in Cleveland, that's the  
16 headquarters of the UCC, I realized that this was going to be a little different because I'm used  
17 to going into places where people are going to feel relatively comfortable around LGBT stuff, but  
18 this is the broader church which, as I mentioned, is one part progressive and one part very  
19 conservative and all of these people are going to be in that room. And, before I went down to  
20 my first meeting, I picked up HBO and on the cover was a preview of something that was going  
21 to be on HBO that night called *Normal*. Have you seen *Normal*?
- 22 AJ: I have seen *Normal*.
- 23 BS: I had not, I wasn't quite sure . . . I read, so I understood what it was about, but I had no idea  
24 whether it was going to be good, bad, or indifferent. The cast made me think it was probably  
25 going to be pretty good – Tom Wilkinson and Jessica Lange.
- 26 AJ: Right, yes.
- 27 BS: So, I went down to the meeting and the chairperson of the executive council wanted to  
28 introduce me to the whole group, which is about 150 people. And so, she said, "I want to  
29 introduce you to our newest member from Minneapolis, Barbara, Satan." She was so nervous.  
30 And there was this moment of great silence . . .
- 31 AJ: (laughter) I'm sorry.
- 32 BS: Embarrassed silence and then everybody started to laugh. It broke the ice and it was very good,  
33 and at the end of the meeting, end of the day as people were going to go back up to their room,  
34 I asked for a moment of personal privilege and I said, "If you're going back up to your room and  
35 you're not sure what you want to do tonight, you might consider turning on HBO and watching  
36 *Normal*." I said, "I can't vouch for it, but it's, I think, going to be a story that you might find of  
37 interest around a transgender person making a change in their lives after having established a

1 family relationship and a community relationship and a church relationship. And, come and talk  
 2 to me in the morning if you have any questions.” A number of people did and it was quite  
 3 revealing to them that, “Oh, wow, these are pretty normal people.” So, it was a really . . . I still  
 4 think that God was watching over me with that one because the timing was so perfect.

5 AJ: Wow. So, you also have a national role with the National Gay Lesbian Task Force around faith  
 6 issues and faith community. Talk a little bit about that. What is your role?

7 BS: I’m the . . . I guess, as of now, I just am promoted to the Deputy Faith Work Director for the  
 8 National LGBTQ Task Force.

9 AJ: Congratulations.

10 BS: Thank you. The work that I do comes out of work that was done by others before me, not  
 11 related to the task force. The Institute for Welcoming Resources was a gathering of faith  
 12 groups, LGBT faith groups, within denominations of Christian churches. The United Church of  
 13 Christ Coalition was a member and the More Life Presbyterians and the Reconciling in Christ  
 14 Lutherans and the Reconciling Methodists Network, Alliance of Welcoming Baptists – all had  
 15 groups that were aimed at helping to move their denomination towards affirmation and  
 16 welcome of LGBT people. Rebecca Voelkel, who was the pastor of Spirit of Lakes Church when I  
 17 was there, eventually became the leader of the Institute for Welcoming Resources, and she  
 18 asked me to be a part of that as a consultant. And so, I did some work for them and then  
 19 around that time, the task force, the national LGBT task force, decided that it had to do more  
 20 work within faith communities. We had gotten badly beaten in a number of election campaigns,  
 21 particularly around marriage. If you recall, I don’t recall the exact year, we had 13 constitutional  
 22 amendments across the country and we lost every single one of them. The consensus of why  
 23 we lost them was because we didn’t do much good work around getting faith communities to  
 24 understand what we were trying to do and to support us. And so, the task force finally came to  
 25 realize that they hadn’t done their homework around faith groups. They basically, when they  
 26 were running a campaign, would do all the organizing and street work that campaigns normally  
 27 do, and then at the very last would say, “And, oh yeah . . .”

28 AJ: “Let’s go talk to the . . .”

29 BS: “Let’s have a sermon, maybe we could ask the pastor to do a sermon to support . . .” Without  
 30 realizing that you’ve got to do your work months ahead – months and years ahead. So, the task  
 31 force approached the IWR, the Institute for Welcoming Resources, and asked if they could  
 32 acquire the IWR and the board of the IWR became an advisory council and the task force  
 33 basically took the responsibility for the funding of the Institute for Welcoming Resources.  
 34 Shortly after that, and part of . . . the IWR was located here in Minneapolis, and when we agreed  
 35 to the merger with the task force, one of the stipulations was that we would keep the office  
 36 here. Rebecca, shortly after that, decided she was going to have a child and so she asked me if I  
 37 would be her maternity fill, her interim during the maternity process, and so I did and then I  
 38 stayed on with the task force. My focus, my work, I work only 20 hours a week, half-time. My  
 39 focus is on transgender affirmation within faith communities, aging issues – faith and aging  
 40 issues, I do some work around asylum for LGBT people. And, some leadership training for trans  
 41 people, we have a trans seminarian cohort that we use to help young . . . I shouldn’t say young,

1 because not all of them are young, to help people in formation for ministry to develop  
2 leadership skills other than the type of skills that they would get out of seminary – leadership  
3 skills to help them take their churches and faith communities outside of the church walls and  
4 actually be active in their communities.

5 AJ: Wow, that's fascinating.

6 BS: Yeah, it's good stuff.

7 AJ: Yeah. Tell me a little bit about Spirit of the Lakes. You mentioned it was a part of your church  
8 plan to re-build the church, but it became something different.

9 BS: Well, what happened . . . shortly after I came to Spirit of the Lakes as their first trans member, a  
10 number of other members of the City of Lakes Crossgender Community, decided that if I could  
11 go there then maybe they could go there. So, we had a fair number of trans people start coming  
12 to Spirit of the Lakes and one of them, Gail, went home on a Sunday night and suffered a stroke.  
13 As a result of that, Gail went to Hennepin County Medical Center and they basically de-gendered  
14 her. Gail had to become Glenn and then when Glenn was transferred to the VA as a veteran,  
15 the VA also did that – it had to be Glenn, and then in rehab, the same thing. We realized,  
16 Rebeca Voelkel, the pastor, myself and another member of the church had a long conversation  
17 about aging issues are going to be a significant future for the LGBT community and we don't talk  
18 about it. It's sort of the elephant in the room that nobody wants to talk about and we need to.  
19 So, we started an organization called GLBT Generations and the idea behind GLBT Generations  
20 was to talk to our own communities, the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender community  
21 about aging issues and what the prospects are and what the concerns are, issues are, that  
22 you're going to face, but also talk to the broader community about why aging for LGBT people is  
23 the same in some respects, but also different in many other respects and those need to be  
24 understood and respected. As we began sort of taking GLBT Generations out of the church, we  
25 realized that we needed to have people with expertise in the area of aging issues and geriatrics  
26 and that type of thing, so we began bringing other people into the organization and we  
27 separated from Spirit of the Lakes. Spirit of the Lakes still was very supportive of it. One of the  
28 things we talked about was housing. We had done a survey, as GLBT Generations, we did a  
29 community survey around what, as an old LGBT person, what are your concerns and what do  
30 you want to see? And one of the things was, "I want supportive, respectful, safe housing." So,  
31 we thought maybe we could do something with that because we had this little church set back  
32 on this big parking lot on Lake Street and the city was looking at Lake Street to try and re-  
33 develop it and was looking . . . we had developers knocking on our door saying, "We'd like to  
34 buy you out and send you into the suburbs." We said, "No, we want to do something, we want  
35 to do it for the neighborhood but we also want to do something for our community." So, we  
36 decided let's try to build senior housing. We happened to find PRG, Powderhorn Residence  
37 Group, which is a non-profit developer that focuses on underserved populations and they right  
38 away said, "You fit what we want." So, they came onboard as doing all the . . . we could never  
39 accomplish this without them. But, originally what was going to be two units of cooperative  
40 housing, which means ownership, and that was wonderful. As people began to hear about it,  
41 we had about 75% of the units that were spoken for.



- 1 AJ: Wow.
- 2 BS: And then the housing market collapsed and, with that housing market collapse, a lot of people  
3 lost the equity in their homes that they were going to use to buy into the coop.
- 4 AJ: So, clearly this was around 2008 or so.
- 5 BS: Yes. So, the result was that we didn't have the 75% that we needed to get construction started  
6 and get the funding. We thought we were done, but PRG said, "No, let's think about this."  
7 Because we had done this survey and we had reached out to people and we had people  
8 responding and PRG said, "A lot of the people who responded said they wanted the same thing  
9 – safe, supportive, respectful housing, but they couldn't afford ownership so maybe we need to  
10 re-think what our market is." So, we went after affordable rental and we downsized some of  
11 the bigger units and we made 46 units of affordable rental and got all the previous funders to  
12 sort of shift their funding with us and we were able to keep it going. We found another  
13 developer that specializes in rental to help us with that. And then, 2013, September of 2013, we  
14 opened Spirit on Lake. It's a fascinating experience because it took a long time to make it  
15 happen. And because of the Fair Housing Act, you can't discriminate on the basis of age . . . you  
16 can discriminate on the basis of age if you have elder funding, specialized funding, otherwise  
17 you can't. Or, you can't discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, that's  
18 a protection for us. But on the other side, if you're trying to do a GLBT, you can't discriminate.
- 19 AJ: You can't use federal dollars to do it anyway.
- 20 BS: Right, right. So, our housing is a mixture of about 60-65% GLBT seniors and the remainder are  
21 non-LGBT, and what's fascinating is that the primary population is Somali, east African.
- 22 AJ: Wow.
- 23 BS: You would think that would be oil and water, that they would not mix.
- 24 AJ: Is there a strong number of LGBT-identified people that live in the building?
- 25 BS: Oh, yes – 65%.
- 26 AJ: Oh, 65%. OK. I thought you said 65% were Somali.
- 27 BS: No, no, no – the other way around. Sixty-five percent are LGBT and the rest are Somali.
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 BS: And they get along just beautifully. We've even, at the suggestion of the Somali families, we  
30 had an imam come in and do an evening presentation around what Muslim, the Muslim religion,  
31 talks about, what it's about, and what are some of the prohibitions and what are some of the . . .  
32 just to help people understand. Another thing that's sort of fascinating, I don't live there but I  
33 get all these stories, the Muslim religion says that dogs are impure, dirty and shouldn't be  
34 touched. We allow our residents to have pets and most of them have dogs – some have cats,  
35 but most of them have dogs, and they take them out for walks.
- 36 AJ: Sure.

- 1 BS: We have some young Somali families that have children who just love the dogs.
- 2 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 3 BS: It's interesting – the older Somalis sort of stay away, but the kids are hugging the dogs. So,  
4 we're breaking some barriers there.
- 5 AJ: Some cultural barriers, wow. And congratulations on that project. And then, I know there is  
6 another community partner that is a part of the project too.
- 7 BS: Clare Housing.
- 8 AJ: Clare Housing and Quatrefoil Library.
- 9 BS: Oh, that's right – thank you. When we decided that we were going to merge with Living Table  
10 United Church of Christ, or merge into Living Table, we stayed with Minnehaha's building but we  
11 wanted to have the first-floor space, which was going to be non-residential. We wanted to be  
12 sure it was LGBT-friendly and so we did a lot of searching trying to find an organization that  
13 would fit in there well and Quatrefoil happened to be in a situation where they were sort of  
14 restricted by size and space of what they can do and display in their location in St. Paul, but they  
15 still had a lease to go through. By the time we got ready to open, their lease was out and we  
16 were able to work out an arrangement, and they're in there and they're loving where they're at  
17 – they've got a beautiful space.
- 18 AJ: Yeah, it's gorgeous.
- 19 BS: We share a conference . . . they have a conference room which is also the facility's community  
20 room. They do some projects together.
- 21 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 22 BS: Yeah, it works out beautifully. But, the other partner . . .
- 23 AJ: Is that the second senior housing project for LGBT . . .?
- 24 BS: We were the second one. The first one was Triangle Square in Los Angeles, and that's about 150  
25 units; we're 46 units. And, Triangle Square was 2007 and we're 2013. Then, shortly after we  
26 opened, about another six months later, John Anderson apartments in Philadelphia opened.  
27 That's another 50 units and I think the senior housing that's over the Whole Foods in Chicago  
28 has opened, I think that's another 50 units. But, if you stop and add those together, that's less  
29 than 500 units of LGBT-friendly senior housing that's available across the country. There is just  
30 such a need for it, but there's no funds, which is challenging. But, the other partner I was going  
31 to mention is Clare Housing. Five of the units that we have in the building are reserved for  
32 people who HIV and AIDS and who have been homeless.
- 33 AJ: OK, wow.
- 34 BS: Clare Housing is responsible for vetting those residents and then doing case management for  
35 them to keep them in those apartments.
- 36 AJ: And healthy and all that stuff.

- 1 BS: Yeah, it's working beautifully.
- 2 AJ: Do you know if there are any trans-identified that live in the building?
- 3 BS: Yeah, from the very get-go there's a trans woman that's been living there. I think there was one  
4 other gender non-conforming person. So, yeah.
- 5 AJ: Yeah, well – man, your footprint is quite large, Barbara. Talk to me a little bit about romance  
6 and relationships and love and how has that been impacted by your transgender identity? Are  
7 you in a relationship now?
- 8 BS: I have returned to my wife.
- 9 AJ: OK – your wife who had challenges with this whole . . .?
- 10 BS: Yes. She has some physical issues that make it difficult for her to . . . she has arthritis and she  
11 has a familial tremor in both hands, which makes doing lots of things challenging. I realized it  
12 was important for me to be back in that relationship. And so, we make this work as best we can.  
13 She knows what I do, she acknowledges and applauds me for what I'm doing, but it's still not  
14 something that . . . she didn't marry Barbara, she married David. My kids, on the other hand,  
15 are very supportive of what I do. They come to church with me on occasion, we socialize  
16 together.
- 17 AJ: You spend holidays together and all of those sort of traditional family things?
- 18 BS: Yes, but I'm also David, because my grandchildren . . . I have seven grandchildren. The two  
19 oldest grandchildren know about Barbara. The oldest one has been to Pride with me and all of  
20 that. The others are younger, they're getting older, but I've left it to my kids to say . . . at some  
21 point in time, they're going to have to know and you're going to be the ones that have to tell  
22 them. I'd rather have you tell them than have them discover it on their own. When one of  
23 them gets a driver's license and is out and around and all of a sudden sees grandpa. So, that's  
24 an ongoing unveiling.
- 25 AJ: Is that a challenge for you, Barbara? How are you dealing with that?
- 26 BS: Not really, not really. I feel . . . my original therapist retired and then I found another therapist  
27 who deals with the trans community, and she said, "You know, you are a transsexual, but you  
28 don't have all of the issues around . . . you're very comfortable with what your life has been,  
29 you're probably more, as a transsexual you're probably more a transgender-ist, able to live  
30 comfortably in both genders." I have a body of work as David that I'm very proud of – things I've  
31 done for the city. At one point in time, my involvement with the Catholic Church – I was the  
32 chairman of the Archbishop's Council.
- 33 AJ: Wow, I don't know what that is, but it sounds really important.
- 34 BS: It was. The Archbishop of Minneapolis and St. Paul has this council of religious and lay leaders  
35 that he relies on and I was the chair of that group.
- 36 AJ: Wow.

- 1 BS: Under Archbishop John Roach and he would probably turn over in his grave if he knew . . . or  
2 maybe not, maybe not. So, I have all these things I've done as David that I'm very proud of, and  
3 all these things that I have done, and am doing, as Barbara that I'm very proud of. So, I'm very  
4 comfortable with where I'm at.
- 5 AJ: That's wonderful. And it's absolutely possible and I think it's wonderful that you are. I know  
6 that some people do have challenges with, "Oh, they call me he," or, "They should call me he."  
7 But, I'm really thrilled that you're able to put together a life that you are happy and comfortable  
8 with – because that's what we're all striving for.
- 9 BS: Right, right. Andrea, when I came out, I came out at age 60 and so my health is really, really  
10 good – I'm 81 now.
- 11 AJ: You're 81 now?
- 12 BS: 81. My health is really good; my health was good then. I probably . . . I shouldn't say probably, I  
13 didn't – and I wouldn't, I didn't want to do anything to change that. I didn't want to mess with  
14 Mother Nature – even taking hormones was something that I thought, "Well, everything is going  
15 well, why add something in that might cause more challenges if I didn't need it." It's been a very  
16 interesting experience. If I maybe had come out much earlier, things may have been different.
- 17 AJ: You just answered one of my questions which is, to the extent that you're comfortable, please  
18 tell me about any medical interventions that you've undergone as a part of your transition.
- 19 BS: I'm basically non-operative and for both emotional reasons, but also physical reasons, I don't  
20 need that to make me feel . . .
- 21 AJ: You know who you are.
- 22 BS: Yes, right. Right.
- 23 AJ: Absolutely. So, you're still with your wife. So, you identify then as a . . . what is your sexual  
24 identity if you can put a word on it?
- 25 BS: It's fascinating. When I tell my story, I always . . . if I don't get the question from students, I'll  
26 ask it myself . . . because I still don't understand it. As Barbara, I'm attracted to men and I want  
27 men to be attracted to me. As David, I have no attraction to men – none. I have guy friends  
28 who are friends, but there's just no glimmer of any sort of sexual energy or anything like that.  
29 But, with Barbara it's completely different. Barbara also has attraction to women. So, I classify  
30 myself as bi.
- 31 AJ: Bi – well, there you go. Oh, boy, this journey is really powerful.
- 32 BS: Yes, our journeys are really something, aren't they?
- 33 AJ: Yes. So, Barbara, you've had a lot of interaction since you've been out in 20+ years, which is still  
34 a long time in transgender years, but you've had a lot of interaction with the L, the G, and the B  
35 community. What do you think the relationship is between those communities and the trans  
36 community?

1 BS: Good question, I'm glad you asked. Early on, after I finished my role with City of Lakes  
2 Crossgender Community, I realized that what was also important was the fact that the LGB  
3 community didn't understand us, didn't know us – in many cases, didn't want to know us, didn't  
4 respect us. And so, I decided that CLCC is going to continue on and do their thing and the trans  
5 community has their own support system, I needed to get involved with the GLB community.  
6 So, a lot of my ministry or presence has been to be a trans presence within LGB groups. So, I've  
7 sat on the board of OutFront, I've been on the board of PFund, I've been on the board of GLBT  
8 Generations, I've been on the board of Training to Serve, I'm on the board of Clare Housing . . .  
9 there's a couple of others I'm not thinking of right now.

10 AJ: OutFront . . . you mentioned OutFront.

11 BS: I was on the OutFront board for seven years. And, I just felt it was important for the trans  
12 community, and you're doing the same thing, to actually be involved with the LGB community  
13 so that they see us as more than just this acronym . . . sort of end of the acronym group that we  
14 don't really understand. So, I probably have as much, or maybe even more, identity within the  
15 LGB community than within the current T community, because I spent so much of my time doing  
16 that with the idea that . . .

17 AJ: Building those bridges.

18 BS: Right, so they know who we are and can understand us. If they get to know me, maybe they're  
19 willing to get to know somebody else and . . . you know. So, it's been a meaningful journey for  
20 me. I've made some really good friends too.

21 AJ: Do you think there is an agenda for the transgender community? Or should there be an  
22 agenda?

23 BS: Hmm. I'm not a big one on agendas. I suppose maybe some of it is my age, I'm just . . . agendas  
24 start to talk about long-term strategies and that type of thing. I'm more about what do we do in  
25 the next month, the next week, maybe the next year is far enough out. I think we have to still  
26 work on affirmation from both the straight community, the cis community, and also from the  
27 LGB community. And we still have a lot of work to do on some of the issues of equity for the  
28 trans community. But, I also think it's important to remember that a lot of the things that we  
29 have, particularly here in Minnesota, about equality for the LGBT community, included the T  
30 community, simply because the LGB community stepped forward and said, "You know, we're  
31 not going to do this if we don't bring the T community along." The famous story of . . . I'm not  
32 going to remember her name, when the conversation . . . when Allan, Senator Allan Spear, when  
33 they were going to introduce the Human Rights Protection, he was adamant that the T  
34 community should not be a part of that.

35 AJ: And, I think who you're referring to is Representative Karen Clark.

36 BS: No . . . no, it was activist from St. Paul, a lesbian who was formidable in her own right, who in a  
37 conversation . . . and I wasn't a part of the conversation, but I've just had this repeated to me a  
38 number of times. In a conversation with Allan Spear, she said, "Allan, we're going to do this  
39 with the T community and if you don't agree, I'm going to move into your district, I'm going to  
40 run against you in the next election, and I'm going to beat you – and you know I can."

- 1 AJ: Wow. I've got to figure out who this is.
- 2 BS: I will find out. She was . . . used to hang out at the Town House quite a bit. I have her name  
3 someplace, but she was . . .
- 4 AJ: She was adamant.
- 5 BS: Oh, she was adamant. I just think we owe so much to the GLB community to bring us along,  
6 because we weren't . . . at that point in time, we didn't have the strength . . . we were pretty . . .  
7 looking after ourselves.
- 8 AJ: Introspective, I would say.
- 9 BS: Yes.
- 10 AJ: In the closet, or if we weren't we were, like you said, sitting in the basement of Club Metro and  
11 kind of not wanting to be seen even.
- 12 BS: Right. I mean outside of Jane Fee and . . .
- 13 AJ: Debra Davis.
- 14 BS: Yeah, Debra probably a little bit. Even at that point, Debra was still just evolving. But, Jane was  
15 probably the most visible. And, Jane had actually said, again from what I was told, that she was  
16 not going to stand in the way if they wanted to introduce it without the T.
- 17 AJ: OK.
- 18 BS: And this lesbian said, "No, no, that's not going to happen – we're going to do this together."
- 19 AJ: Wow.
- 20 BS: So, we . . . I think we still have a lot of work to do. And one of the things that always surprises  
21 me about our community, and I guess I can say this about the LGBT community too, but  
22 particularly the trans community. We tend to sort of fight among ourselves and waste a lot of  
23 energy without getting very far on issues. We tend to sort of scratch each other and fight  
24 among ourselves rather than to sort of pull in our claws and focus on the broader issues.  
25 Sometimes agendas sort of lead us into chaos.
- 26 AJ: Yeah, I'm not advocating one way or the other, I'm just asking the question. Hey, Barbara, I  
27 know that . . . well, (a), it's November and so it's sort of Transgender Awareness Month and  
28 November 20<sup>th</sup> is Transgender Day of Remembrance and you have been a strong local organizer  
29 and activist around that issue. Can you tell us what Trans Day of Remembrance is and what has  
30 been your involvement, what attracted you to it?
- 31 BS: I'm trying to remember . . . this is the 16<sup>th</sup> or the 17<sup>th</sup> . . . here in the Twin Cities, I started it the  
32 year after the first one was held in San Francisco. It was done as a memorial to a trans woman  
33 who was killed the year before in Boston and a group in San Francisco held a memorial service  
34 for that person. The following year it . . . others thought this was a wonderful thing to do and  
35 Gwendolyn Smith sort of took it on as her project to sort of keep track of the deaths. This is a  
36 memorial to remember trans people and trans-identified supporters who have been murdered

1 over the last twelve months. I'm trying to remember the name of the woman in Massachusetts  
2 . . . Hester? That this was all started around . . . she was killed on November 20<sup>th</sup> and that was  
3 when they held . . . a year later they held the first Transgender Day of Remembrance. Now, this  
4 is 16 years later, we've . . . it's maybe the 17<sup>th</sup> one, but the 16<sup>th</sup> one here in the Twin Cities, and  
5 I've been coordinating it all this time. It's just, to me, a very meaningful . . . not time to feel  
6 sorry for ourselves, but a time to remember people who have been killed and also to reflect on  
7 the violence that we face and to bring as many supporters and allies into the Day of  
8 Remembrance so that they can take that message back to a broader community – particularly  
9 this year, the violence here in the United States that trans women, particularly trans women of  
10 color, have faced has been just so devastating.

11 AJ: Heartbreaking, yeah.

12 BS: The numbers just are incredible. And, you multiply that times 10 or 20 times when you look at  
13 the rest of the world, this is an international Day of Remembrance. It's held in about 300 cities  
14 across the world and some do it on days other than November 20<sup>th</sup>, but November 20<sup>th</sup> tends to  
15 be the time. And basically, what we do here in the Twin Cities is gather people together, this  
16 will be at Living Table United Church of Christ, 38<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> Street in Minneapolis, at 7:00pm on  
17 Friday, November 20<sup>th</sup>. And we just read the names and we have conversation around what this  
18 all means and how it affects us and what our thoughts are.

19 AJ: I know the few times I've been, there's been some art involved and singing and even like a  
20 church service almost.

21 BS: Well, it is and it isn't. I've tried very hard to keep it from being a church service because I know  
22 that so many in the trans community have been so hurt by churches that . . . what I try to urge  
23 churches to do is, preceding the Day of Remembrance, talk about trans violence and talk about  
24 trans issues and then get your members and congregation to come to the Day of Remembrance,  
25 which is going to be, basically, a secular memorial service. I think the first year somebody did a  
26 prayer and I've, since then, been very vehement about the fact that that's not the appropriate  
27 thing to do.

28 AJ: I was there that first year.

29 BS: You may have been. Poetry is fine and singing is fine and most of the songs we sing are not  
30 hymns, they're basically . . .

31 AJ: Secular music.

32 BS: Yeah, secular music that's appropriate. One of the things . . . in fact, I was going to ask you, and  
33 maybe we can wait until after this . . .

34 AJ: Yeah . . .

35 BS: I was going to ask you because of the heavy, heavy toll on the trans women of color, I wanted to  
36 somehow bring in somebody from Black Lives Matter or from . . . to talk about the issue of  
37 violence as it affects that community. I don't know who might be a possibility.

38 AJ: I'd be happy to talk to you about it, but I'd rather keep the focus . . .

- 1 BS: Yeah.
- 2 AJ: . . . for this conversation, on you, because you're the subject. But yes, I would absolutely be  
3 happy to let you know some people, some names, of who I think might be appropriate for that  
4 conversation.
- 5 BS: And maybe you'd like to do something.
- 6 AJ: It's quite possible.
- 7 BS: OK.
- 8 AJ: Wow, Barbara, I really appreciate this opportunity to sit down and talk to you and learn so much  
9 about you. I guess the one last question I would have you ponder on is where do you see the  
10 trans community in 50 years?
- 11 BS: In where?
- 12 AJ: In 50 years.
- 13 BS: Fifty years?
- 14 AJ: Yeah. I know you're not a big fan of the agenda and the long-range planning but . . .
- 15 BS: No, this is different. I think we still will have pockets of challenges that will face us, but I'm just  
16 so confident from what I'm seeing in my kids and my grandkids in how they . . . and from others  
17 that I talk to about how the younger generation responds to the issue of gender identity, gender  
18 expression, gender non-conformity in such a healthy, wholesome way. They don't . . . they  
19 really don't see the issue and I'm sure that they're still going to be lots to do but I think the  
20 majority of people will be very comfortable in people living their lives in a way that is most  
21 authentic to them – whether it's expressing themselves as a trans woman or a trans man or  
22 whether it's just being fluid in their gender expression. I think it's going to be . . . I think our  
23 rights will be pretty well protected in most parts of the country. I think that the demographic  
24 shifts that are going to be happening . . . I think maybe one of the biggest challenges is going to  
25 be as we shift from being a sort of white majority population to a population where the Latino  
26 population is going to be much stronger, the African American community is going to continue  
27 to grow. I think our work will be cut out, particularly because of the strong faith communities  
28 that often times find it challenging, find us challenging. Our work over the coming decades is  
29 going to have to focus on trying to shift the faith narrative around LGB and T so that the  
30 progress we've made continues. So, I'm very positive about where we'll be in 50 years. Yeah.
- 31 AJ: Barbara, thank you.
- 32 BS: You're welcome, thank you for the opportunity.
- 33 AJ: You are welcome.