

Gaebriel Lyrek
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

August 7, 2017



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

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

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

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Gaebrriel Lyrek -GL
3
4 AJ: So, hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral
5 History Project at the University of Minnesota Libraries, at the Tretter Collection at the University of
6 Minnesota Libraries. Today is August 7, 2017, and I am in south Minneapolis and I am in the home of
7 Gabe Lyrek. Lirek?

8 GL: Yes. Lyrek.

9 AJ: All right, so I just messed that up a little bit. But, how are you doing today, Gabe?

10 GL: Nervous.

11 AJ: Nervous? This is your life, you know this story better than anybody else on the entire planet.
12 So, just a few questions that I absolutely know you know the answers to. But, before we get
13 started with the interview, can you just state your name and how to pronounce it because I kind
14 of messed it up a little bit, spell it so we make sure we have the right spelling. State your gender
15 as you define it today and your gender assigned at birth – and the pronouns that you use.

16 GL: My name is Gaebrriel Lyrek. G-a-e-b-r-i-el, Lyrek is L-y-r-e-k. And, what were more of your
17 questions?

18 AJ: So, your name and spelling, your gender identity as you claim it today.

19 GL: I identify as male and I was assigned female at birth.

20 AJ: And, our mics are pretty powerful, but speak up just a little bit more so I make sure we got it on
21 there because this is important stuff, man, and inquiring minds want to know. No, Gabe – what
22 pronouns do you use?

23 GL: He, him, and his.

24 AJ: So, just to kind of get the memory bank flowing a little bit, what's the earliest thing you
25 remember in life? It does not have to be related to your gender identify, although for a lot of
26 trans people it is and if it is, that's fine – but it doesn't have to be. It could be, "I remember that
27 ice cream cone and it was dripping down my wrist."

28 GL: I don't know. The beginning of my life was pretty crappy. I think the earliest thing that I
29 remember is . . . I have snippets, so my birth mother . . . I very vaguely remember her, and living
30 in an apartment above a dentist shop with her. I think I was about four.

31 AJ: Wow. Where did you grow up?

32 GL: Montrose, Minnesota, on a dairy farm in the middle of a cornfield.

33 AJ: Really? Montrose, Minnesota, where is that?

34 GL: It's about an hour west of Minneapolis.

35 AJ: Is that right? So, out past Plymouth and . . .?

- 1 GL: Oh, yeah, it's directly west – so, Plymouth is northwest of here. Montrose would be through
2 Delano. I don't even know if that's on the map either.
- 3 AJ: I think Delano is on the map. So, Montrose . . . how big of a town was it? Or is it?
- 4 GL: At that time, it was 1,500 people. I think it's grown to about 2,000 now.
- 5 AJ: Oh, wow – population boom.
- 6 GL: Right.
- 7 AJ: Did you go to school there?
- 8 GL: No, we only had an elementary school. So, the towns out there are so small that 10 towns went
9 to the same junior high and high school, so we all got bussed to Buffalo.
- 10 AJ: OK.
- 11 GL: That's on the map.
- 12 AJ: Right. And, that's where you went to grade school and . . .
- 13 GL: That's where I went to junior high and high school.
- 14 AJ: OK. What was grade school like?
- 15 GL: Grade school was fine, you get picked on because you're a farm kid but, you know.
- 16 AJ: Really? It was all farm kids.
- 17 GL: Well, there was the farm kids and there was the in-town kids, those are the kids that walked to
18 school and brought their own lunch. The farm kids were the kids that had to ride the bus.
- 19 AJ: Came in on the bus, had to eat school lunch.
- 20 GL: Ate school lunch, yes.
- 21 AJ: And, they would kind of pick on the farm kids. Is that right?
- 22 GL: Yes.
- 23 AJ: Wow. People just have to find something to pick on people about. You kind of alluded to your
24 birth mother and I got the sense that maybe you didn't grow up with your birth mother.
- 25 GL: No. I haven't seen her in 28 years, 29 years.
- 26 AJ: Is that right? Wow. Do you know what became of her?
- 27 GL: I'm not entirely sure. I mean, I know where she lives because my brother, Matt, was really young
28 when she just kind of disappeared. He found her and then went and lived with her for about
29 three weeks and then realized why he shouldn't have anything to do with her and then moved
30 back up here. I haven't heard anything of her since.
- 31 AJ: Wow. So, you grew up with your dad?

- 1 GL: Nope.
- 2 AJ: You did not grow up with your father?
- 3 GL: Well, I grew up with my dad, not my father.
- 4 AJ: OK.
- 5 GL: My birth mother was kind of a mess. She was 15 when she had me and the man that she was
6 married to was not my father and then she joined the Army and left me, then came back and
7 had two more kids . . . don't know if they're his either. But, at any rate, they got a divorce and
8 he gave up parental rights to us so then she had the three of us, and then she met Ed and
9 married him and he adopted us. So, when she disappeared, he kept us.
- 10 AJ: OK. If I'm getting too painful, please let me know. This is kind of some tough stuff.
- 11 GL: That's fine, yeah.
- 12 AJ: So, went to school in Buffalo, riding the bus – you're a farm kid and they're kind of picking on
13 the farm kids. Was there any sort of bullying at all related to your gender identity or your sexual
14 orientation? Or, did you have any thoughts around those issues at that point in time?
- 15 GL: I was held back a year in kindergarten because my teachers told my parents that I didn't know
16 the fundamental difference between boys and girls and that was something I needed to
17 understand in order to move past kindergarten because it was something that everyone needed
18 to know.
- 19 AJ: So, everyone needed to be well steeped in patriarchy and . . .
- 20 GL: Yes, and I demanded that she . . .
- 21 AJ: Gender-stereotypical roles.
- 22 GL: And, I was demanding that she call me Christopher and not my name that I was given, so that
23 was kind of . . .
- 24 AJ: And, they held you back?
- 25 GL: Yes.
- 26 AJ: That is fascinating.
- 27 GL: Yes, held me back.
- 28 AJ: That's gender terrorism.
- 29 GL: Now. At that time, it was . . . you know. Yeah, so I needed to understand the difference.
- 30 AJ: I've got to write that phrase down. I think I might trademark that.
- 31 GL: Gender terrorism.
- 32 AJ: How did that make you feel?

- 1 GL: I was pretty confused. I didn't really understand what the problem was. I had lots of brothers.
2 There's eight of us and so I have five brothers and I just didn't . . . I didn't understand anything
3 about it because they got to run around with no shirt on, why can't I?
- 4 AJ: Right.
- 5 GL: I didn't have anything to cover up so . . . and then, the next thing that I can remember about my
6 gender . . . so, I would have to milk cows because I was one of the older kids and when I would
7 have to go milk cows by myself, I would sneakily take a sock rolled up and stuff it in my pants
8 because that's . . . I thought that that's what farm boys do.
- 9 AJ: Sure, right.
- 10 GL: I didn't see myself as a farm girl, I saw myself as a farm somebody but . . . so, I would do that
11 sneaky, and then my mom and dad would . . . when my dad met the person who I call mom,
12 they would fight about it all the time because why was I doing that and why was I wearing boy
13 clothes and why did I want to shop in the boy's section and why did I want to cut off my hair and
14 everyone is going to think I'm a lesbian.
- 15 AJ: Who was concerned?
- 16 GL: My mom. She was really adamant that I wear a dress like my sisters. I was 11 and she bought
17 my sister and I these matching dresses for a 4th of July parade. They were the exact same awful
18 looking thing, except one was in pink stripes and the other one was in blue stripes but, they
19 were both dresses nonetheless. I would not wear it. I refused to put it on kicking and screaming
20 and then she said I was grounded and I didn't care. My dad . . . we didn't all fit in the same car
21 because there were too many of us, so my dad said that he was going to . . . I could ride with
22 him and he'd make me put it on. And then, he didn't make me put it on, he gave me a t-shirt
23 and some pants and said, "Put these on." And so, I put on the t-shirt and the pants and I
24 showed up at the 4th of July parade and boom – my parents got in this huge fight because I
25 wouldn't wear the dress.
- 26 AJ: Wow. There were some gender challenges happening in your childhood.
- 27 GL: When I was 13 and still running around outside with no shirt on and my mom and dad called me
28 in the house and they said I needed to sit down and my mom had a training bra and pantie-
29 matching set that had bears and hearts all over it.
- 30 AJ: (laughing) I'm sorry. Care Bears?
- 31 GL: Yeah, just little brown teddy bears with hearts all over them and they were a matching set.
- 32 AJ: That sounds cute.
- 33 GL: And I sat down and I said, "Who are those for?" And she said, "They're for you," and pushed
34 them across the table. I went, "The hell that they are."
- 35 AJ: Oh, wow.

- 1 GL: I was not going to put those on. My dad said, "Well, you can't be running around with no shirt
2 on, you're too old to be doing that." I'm like, "What do I have to cover, I have nothing." He's
3 like, "Well, you know, it's not right." So, then I made a deal with him. I said, "I won't wear both
4 of them at the same time. I'll either wear that bra or I will wear a shirt, I won't wear both of
5 them at the same time." So, that was the deal my dad made and my mom wasn't happy about
6 it. But, I think he . . . I mean, he said, after I actually came out when I was older, my dad said
7 that he knew since I was 9 and that that was something that they had talked about.
- 8 AJ: Oh, really, but she just kind of wanted to . . .
- 9 GL: Yeah, my mom just couldn't . . .
- 10 AJ: Try to force it.
- 11 GL: So, I would wear just the bra outside, no shirt on over it, and my mom would be so mad – so
12 mad.
- 13 AJ: Not to school though.
- 14 GL: No, no – but outside, like at the farm. She would get so mad.
- 15 AJ: Wow, that's fascinating. What did your eight brothers think at the time?
- 16 GL: Nothing, because I could beat all of them up.
- 17 AJ: Really?
- 18 GL: They didn't say anything about it.
- 19 AJ: Were they older or are you the oldest?
- 20 GL: I have one sister who is older than I am.
- 21 AJ: OK.
- 22 GL: But, everyone else is younger so they knew that if they said something stupid that I'd whoop
23 them.
- 24 AJ: Wow. OK, that's cool. When did you first realize . . . I mean, you were having all of these sort of
25 moments of rebellion. I mean, the way you've described it maybe . . . I don't know if it was
26 confusion because you kind of knew what was going on. But, when did you realize that you
27 were not the gender you were assigned at birth?
- 28 GL: I don't know. I always just kind of thought it, but I didn't have the language to express exactly
29 what was going on.
- 30 AJ: I mean, you were putting a sock in your pants.
- 31 GL: But, I thought when I got older, obviously hindsight is 20/20, like, "Oh, yeah, now I know what's
32 going on," but at that time . . . and, I still didn't catch on to what exactly that was until much
33 later. When I was 15, one of my friends outed me to everybody at school.
- 34 AJ: Outed you about . . .?

- 1 GL: Being a lesbian – like liking women.
- 2 AJ: So, at 15, you kind of knew you liked girls – or other people knew you liked girls?
- 3 GL: Yes. I mean, I had told her that I liked women and then she outed me to everyone – and, in a
4 small town, that stuff spreads like wildfire.
- 5 AJ: Man, friends – how many of us have them?
- 6 GL: But that label just felt gross . . . like a gross misrepresentation of exactly how I felt.
- 7 AJ: Sure.
- 8 GL: But, then I thought well maybe it was because it was just a word that you have to get used to,
9 it's got such negative things attached to it – that maybe I just need to get used to that word and
10 then it won't feel so mis-categorizing.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 GL: And, so I fully embraced being a riot dyke – kicking and screaming the whole way.
- 13 AJ: Like, were you pretty butch? I mean, I don't . . . what's a riot dyke? I don't know that term.
- 14 GL: Like a 1990s riot girl.
- 15 AJ: Oh, riot girl – yeah, yeah, yeah.
- 16 GL: I figured if I was going to get shit for it, that I might as well take it on because I was so mad
17 anyway all the time.
- 18 AJ: Yeah.
- 19 GL: My dad did a lot of really good things, but my dad was also super abusive – physically abusive
20 when we were kids and mentally abusive, verbally abusive. So, I was really mad – like angry all
21 the time. And then, this just made me more mad and then people, of course, in a small town
22 like that, you get all kinds of crap for it. It just fed that hatred, so I was mad all the time, but I
23 was like, “Well, this must be what it's like to be gay because this is just what it is.”
- 24 AJ: So, combat boots and leather jacket.
- 25 GL: Shaved head. I loved Donnie Defranco.
- 26 AJ: OK – Tori Amos?
- 27 GL: She was a little maudlin for me – she whined a little too much.
- 28 AJ: But, that's an interesting thing because . . . I don't know, one of my personal theories is that
29 trans masculine folks tend to come out of a lesbian political framework or feminist political
30 framework. Were you engaged in that sort of strand of queerness at the moment?
- 31 GL: As much as you can be living in an extremely Republican-like upbringing and everyone around
32 you is Republican. So, you try to talk about what you know, which isn't much. And so . . .

- 1 AJ: So, it was more of a cultural kind of thing, not as much political.
- 2 GL: Yeah. And, I took this class in high school, it was called, "Minorities," and it was taught by an old
3 white guy named Gerry Bakke and he was . . . but, he was one of the most amazing teachers I've
4 ever had because he would start off the class saying, "Minorities, I'm not a fucking minority,
5 what do I know about it? But, I'm going to show you a whole bunch of movies and then we're
6 going to talk about it." He did . . . it was interesting, he did the Civil Rights Movement and he
7 did Japanese-American Internment and all this stuff. But, when he got to the GLBT section of
8 this class, you had to sign a waiver, your parents had to sign it, and it was not taught during
9 class, it was taught after class.
- 10 AJ: What?
- 11 GL: So, during your . . . I don't know what they call it now, but . . .
- 12 AJ: Study hall or something?
- 13 GL: Yeah, your study hall, and sometimes he would do . . . because it was extra on your grade
14 because he couldn't . . . the school wouldn't allow him to talk about it during class hours so
15 that's why . . .
- 16 AJ: So, he couldn't grade you on it because it was not really a part of the class.
- 17 GL: Yeah, an extra credit thing. But, he took the time to do it any way that he could to make sure
18 that this is included in this curriculum – yes, it's extra, but it's still just as important.
- 19 AJ: It's important, yeah. So, you guys learned about Stonewall and all of that stuff.
- 20 GL: He was limited on what he could show us also. He showed us a couple episodes of *Ellen*.
- 21 AJ: OK. A little *Will and Grace*.
- 22 GL: Yeah, he was limited in what he could allow us to talk about so sometimes he would try to shut
23 down talk about lesbian sex or gay sex or STD testing. He would sometimes try to turn the
24 conversation away from the real things because he didn't want to get in trouble also. But, it was
25 never successful and the class always ended up in this fight and uproar – half the class feels this
26 way and the other three people in the class feel this way, and then there's one person going, "I
27 don't know."
- 28 AJ: Wow, but he tried.
- 29 GL: He tried, yeah. He tried.
- 30 AJ: You've got to give a guy credit for that. And, you actually had some dialogue . . . I mean, some
31 kids in high school don't talk about LGBT issues – at all.
- 32 GL: Yeah. He said that he was the best person to teach it because he was the wrestling coach and
33 he saw lots of homo-erotic things that happened with wrestling that no one wants to talk about,
34 so he was like, "We're going to talk about this."
- 35 AJ: OK, Mr. Bakke.

- 1 GL: Yeah, he was pretty great.
- 2 AJ: That is hilarious. So, at 15 you got outed, which is really horrific and sad and difficult to deal
3 with, because you had three more years of high school to go.
- 4 GL: It was pretty awful.
- 5 AJ: How did the rest of your time go with that?
- 6 GL: It was pretty bad.
- 7 AJ: Did you get in a lot of fights and stuff?
- 8 GL: I got in a lot of fist fights. I had 5th degree assault charges pressed on me because there was
9 another kid that got outed and it was a guy and a kid on the bus called him a faggot and I just
10 laughed at him and I said, "You should take a look in the mirror." And, then he called me a dyke
11 and went off, so I broke his nose. I got suspended, I got 5th degree assault charges pressed on
12 me, but I said, "That's fine, I'll press sexual harassment charges." So, then the charges got
13 dropped. But, yeah, I got suspended, I think, five times for fighting – like physical fist fights. I
14 had Bible verses taped to my locker – almost daily. I had really obscene things written on my
15 locker in Sharpie that the custodian would always have to come and wash it off. My friend,
16 Jeremy, just for being friends with me, had the windshield wipers on this car snapped off during
17 a rainstorm – just for being my friend.
- 18 AJ: Wow.
- 19 GL: Yeah, it was pretty awful.
- 20 AJ: That's pretty bad, I'm sorry. What . . . so, you've identified sort of as a lesbian, a riot girl, and
21 you didn't really identify as lesbian – that was put on you, right?
- 22 GL: Yeah. It was the closest word that I had to describe what it was.
- 23 AJ: Are there other identities that you sort of assumed prior to coming to male?
- 24 GL: No. I never identified as gender queer or zee or them or anything like that.
- 25 AJ: Just straight to male.
- 26 GL: Yeah, once I knew the word for it and that there was something . . . the first trans person I ever
27 met was this guy . . .
- 28 AJ: That was going to be my next question. I swear to God, that was going to be my next question.
29 So, who was it?
- 30 GL: He used to be a Minneapolis police officer, Alex Nelson. He was the first trans person I ever
31 knowingly met. I met him at District 202 and someone outed him to me.
- 32 AJ: Wow.
- 33 GL: In that space he got outed – because he wasn't out to the youth. It was his own thing.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, I know Alex. He was pretty male, masculine presenting and nobody really knew he was a
2 cop for a little while. In fact, he sued the Minneapolis Police Department. I think you know that.
- 3 GL: Yes, he was doing outreach at that time with Streetworks – Project Offstreets and stuff. One of
4 the youth who went to Offstreets and Youthlink, somehow found out that he was trans and
5 then outed him to me. So, I didn't believe her, so I went directly to him and say, "Hey,
6 somebody's spreading a whole bunch of crap around about you and saying that you're trans or
7 whatever." And, he didn't say anything, and I was like, "Oh, OK, all right." She wasn't wrong,
8 but it wasn't cool that she was outing him either.
- 9 AJ: Right.
- 10 GL: So, then I just went to him and said, "I have a whole bunch of questions because I didn't know
11 that you could do that." You hear about trans women all the time – male to female, and you
12 hear about it in really derogatory terms all the time – like crossdressers or transvestites or drag
13 queens and none of those things are the same thing, they're all different things. But, when you
14 hear about trans women, all of those things are synonymous with them being a trans person in
15 the way that everyone else talks so I didn't understand that there are trans women and there
16 are these other things and they are not the same thing – like, a crossdresser is not a trans
17 woman. They can be, but not necessarily.
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 GL: So, I didn't know that trans men existed, I didn't know what that meant. And then, when I
20 found out about Alex, I was like, "Oh, my God, you can go the other way too. Whoa." So, then I
21 asked him a whole bunch of questions and then I didn't say anything to anybody for quite a long
22 time, probably a good year and a half while I just looked on the internet while I was at work and
23 trying to look at all these things and then finding myself being jealous – like, "Oh, I wish that my
24 chest looked like that," or, "I wish that I had a beard," or, "I wish that my body looked like that,"
25 or whatever. I didn't say anything about it, but my partner, at the time, she just asked me, "Do
26 you want to be a guy?" I was like, "I ah, ah, ah, ah . . ." And, in the back of my head I'm going,
27 "Say no, say no, say no." And then, before I could even think about what I was saying, I said,
28 "Yeah, I do." And then I realized what I said and I was like, "Oh, shit – oops."
- 29 AJ: What do you think made her ask that question?
- 30 GL: I don't know. I'd been drag since like 1995.
- 31 AJ: OK, so you were a drag performer?
- 32 GL: Yes. And, I think that maybe she saw me taking on the character that I had created – this male
33 character that I had made. I think that maybe she saw me taking on more of his characteristics
34 in my daily life and not just being him at a show.
- 35 AJ: On stage, yes.
- 36 GL: But, him trickling over into my life.
- 37 AJ: Life, yeah.

- 1 GL: So, yeah, she just asked me and I said yes. And then, I didn't know what to do. What do you
2 do?
- 3 AJ: Now what?
- 4 GL: It's like 2000 and what do you do? No one talks about it, your insurance doesn't pay for this
5 stuff, your friends barely know about this stuff, the only person you even know who dresses like
6 a woman on TV who is a man is RuPaul – that's people's exposure to trans women when they're
7 not. And so, it just . . . I didn't know what to do. So then, I asked Alex a whole bunch of
8 questions and then decided that before I was going to take any physical steps to transition that I
9 needed to talk to my parents and I needed to talk to my siblings first.
- 10 AJ: Wow, how did that go?
- 11 GL: I told all my siblings first – well, I told all my friends first and they were just like, "Well, yeah."
- 12 AJ: All of your friends in your hometown or . . . ?
- 13 GL: No, my friends here. I moved to Minneapolis right after graduation – so 1999. I went to St.
14 Kate's, an all-girls Catholic school and here I am a boy.
- 15 AJ: Well, they have . . . it's co-ed now, isn't it?
- 16 GL: Now it is, yeah – but not at that time, it was not. And so, I was at an all-girl's Catholic college
17 and then trying to tell my friends, "But, I'm a boy," and not knowing really how to handle that or
18 what to do, and so then, my friends started looking up things like, "Hey, there's this trans thing,"
19 and then it became this, "Everything that's trans, just go tell him and then he'll want it and then
20 he'll go." So, it was things that had nothing to do with trans men or how I . . . nothing. But, they
21 were trying to be helpful, and it was really helpful.
- 22 AJ: Yeah, they loved you, they wanted to help you out.
- 23 GL: And then I told my siblings. I had a pretty good response from most of my siblings. I had one
24 brother that didn't speak to me for, I think, five years. He converted to an even stricter religion
25 and has lots of opinions about it. He speaks to me now, but he has told me directly to my face,
26 like, "I'm supposed to love the sinner, not the sin." He's like, "You're my sibling, you'll never be
27 my brother, but you're my sibling." And he said, "All I can do is pray for your soul and all I can
28 do is love you while you're here because when you die, you're going to go to hell and then I'm
29 never going to see you again." I'm like, "Hmm, well, at least he said it to my face."
- 30 AJ: Yeah.
- 31 GL: I give him credit for that because he could have just kept saying it behind my back.
- 32 AJ: Sure.
- 33 GL: And, if it's your convictions, then hey – you're . . .
- 34 AJ: Everybody's got a right to believe what they believe and I've got a right to do what I've got to do
35 for my life. How did your folks take it?

- 1 GL: Well, my mom is a pretty dramatic person and everything is about, "How does this reflect on
2 me?" "How does this affect me?" "What does it make people think of me?" "What am I going
3 to do about this?" "How could you do this to me?" All that kind of thing.
- 4 AJ: Even though she wasn't even your birth mother?
- 5 GL: Right. So, I decided I was going to tell my parents in a public place so that my mom could not do
6 that – she could not make a scene. So, I went and I had two friends with me and my partner.
7 My two friends and my partner sat at a different table and I sat down with my parents. My dad
8 was just like, "What is going on?" I had written them both the same letter, but I wanted them to
9 read it first so that they couldn't just interject and like disrupt what I was trying to tell them. So,
10 I wrote an identical letter to both of them and I said, "I want you to read it completely before
11 you say anything – just read the whole thing and then you can ask questions." And so, they both
12 did read it, and my mom just kind of sat there staring at the table and my dad . . . my dad sat
13 back in the booth and my dad is 6'5", 250 lbs, bearded farmer.
- 14 AJ: Wow, big guy.
- 15 GL: So, he sat back from the table and he just looked at me and he was like, "Well, that's it?" I said,
16 "Yeah, that's it." He was like, "Ahh, I thought you were dying of cancer or something."
- 17 AJ: Wow, OK.
- 18 GL: "Nooo, that's it." I said, "Do you have any questions?" He's like, "Oh, yeah, I got one. It's pretty
19 expensive to do this?"
- 20 AJ: I said, "Yes."
- 21 GL: He was like, "Does your insurance pay for it?" I said, "Nope." And he said, "Well, are you going
22 to get your hoots chopped off?" I said, "Something like that." He's like, "Yeah, I saw something
23 about that on Oprah." And that was it. He's never asked me why, he's never asked, "Did
24 something happen to you?" "Is this because you were adopted?" He's never blamed . . . he's
25 never verbalized anything to me that he may be blaming himself or asking those kinds of
26 questions, because I think that he realizes it doesn't matter. Even if any of those things were
27 true, that that's what made me this way, it doesn't matter.
- 28 AJ: Right, you're still this way. You can't go back and change that stuff.
- 29 GL: So, he just . . . that was it. He doesn't talk about it. He says, "This is my son." Even when he
30 would get the funny looks, like, "That's your son, is it?"
- 31 AJ: "Yup, that's my son." That's cool.
- 32 GL: Yeah, that's just the way it was. He doesn't really talk very much either, so if he didn't want to
33 answer any questions, he wasn't going to. He talks when he wants to – he's a pretty quiet guy.
- 34 AJ: What about your mom?
- 35 GL: My mom. My mom has tried to talk me out of everything – every step of the way.
- 36 AJ: Every step of the way.

- 1 GL: I consulted her on my name because all of my brothers have biblical names, that's a tradition in
2 my family. So, I gave her three options and she hated the one that I picked because she wanted
3 these two other ones but by the time she picked them . . . she said she did not want Adam
4 because it was blasphemous, she liked Lucas but I had met a trans guy in that time frame whose
5 name was Lucas. I said, "Well, Lucas is out because I already met a guy named Lucas." She was
6 like, "I hate the name Gaebrriel – I hate it." I said, "Well, that's the one you're getting."
- 7 AJ: Gaebrriel is an angel.
- 8 GL: She hated that name. I think she hated it because I liked it. So, she was not happy about that.
9 And then, when I had top surgery in 2007, she was not happy about that either. She was like,
10 "Well, what if you change your mind? Can you put them back on?" I'm like, "I'm not going to
11 change my mind." And she was like, "But then you're going to have these big giant scars and
12 then everybody is going to know, everybody is going to know you had boobs." I'm like, "No one
13 is going to know, mom." She's like, "Yes, they will, and you're never going to pass – no one is
14 ever going to think you're a man, nobody."
- 15 AJ: Wow.
- 16 GL: I said, "Why do you think that?" She's like, "Your face will always give it away. You have girl
17 eyes."
- 18 AJ: What is that?
- 19 GL: OK – long eyelashes and the way that they're shaped. I have girl eyes, according to my mom.
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 GL: "So, no one will ever think that you're a man because your face is always going to give you away
22 and people are going to think you're weird." I'm like, "OK." And then when I had a
23 hysterectomy, she tried to tell me that that kind of a thing was too dangerous to have done for
24 no reason. I said, "Well, it's not for no reason." I'd been on testosterone for 10 years at that
25 point and I started bleeding again out of nowhere. I said, "It's not for no reason, my body is
26 saying, 'Hey, it's time, something's going on on.'"
- 27 AJ: Yeah, you've got to make some changes here.
- 28 GL: I had a hysterectomy in 2013 and then she was telling me about a friend of hers who almost
29 died from having it done, this blood clot thing and all these things – and it could kill me. I'm like,
30 "Well, you know, I'm going to do it, so just pray for me."
- 31 AJ: Right.
- 32 GL: And then when I had phalloplasty in 2015, she tried to talk me out of it – up to the day that I had
33 it done. She said that, you know, "Once you do this, you can't go back. From the things that I've
34 read, it's not functional anyway and it just looks like crap and you're not going to be happy with
35 it and you're going to have all these big nasty scars all over your body and people are going to
36 ask questions and then how are you going to explain that." I said, "Well, you know, it just is

- 1 what it is. I can't look down . . . I can't stand to see what I see right now, that's not . . . I don't
2 want that. For me, it does not belong there."
- 3 AJ: Sure.
- 4 GL: So, up until the day I had it done . . . and then I had it done, and then I didn't hear from her for
5 three weeks before she finally called me and asked, "Well, how did it go?" I'm like, "Well, I'm
6 not dead."
- 7 AJ: Wow. So, she didn't come and try to help.
- 8 GL: No, I was in Chicago anyway.
- 9 AJ: Dr. Schechter?
- 10 GL: Gottlieb.
- 11 AJ: Gottlieb.
- 12 GL: At the University of Chicago.
- 13 AJ: Is that right?
- 14 GL: Yes.
- 15 AJ: Wow. How do you like your phalloplasty?
- 16 GL: I love it. I don't think there's a better toy on the planet. I like to surprise Angela sometimes.
17 She's talking to her mom and I'll just walk through naked or she'll come to go in the bathroom
18 and I will purposely be doing jumping jacks when she walks into the bathroom.
- 19 AJ: So, do you . . . can I ask this question?
- 20 GL: Yes.
- 21 AJ: And, feel free to say no, I don't want to answer that.
- 22 GL: Sure.
- 23 AJ: Did you get to pick the size?
- 24 GL: No, I wish . . . everybody has this thing in their head about size – like penis size is what makes
25 the man and all this stuff.
- 26 AJ: Yeah, no – I get it.
- 27 GL: But, I mean, with phalloplasty . . . when you're born with one, you don't get to pick the size
28 either.
- 29 AJ: You don't get to pick the size – no.
- 30 GL: And when you have phalloplasty, you don't get to pick the size either.
- 31 AJ: OK.

- 1 GL: There's an artery in your arm and where that branches, that's where they're going to start. For
2 me, mine branched all the way up here, so I ended up with the entire length of my forearm. I
3 have two friends who are quite a bit smaller . . .
- 4 AJ: That seems pretty big.
- 5 GL: It's not easy to manage, I'll tell you that.
- 6 AJ: And do you have to go with that . . . with the artery?
- 7 GL: He said, "Where it branches and then later we can discuss if you need some of it to come off."
- 8 AJ: A penis reduction – said no guy ever.
- 9 GL: Right, right. Unless they're dealing with 10 inches of soft penis all the time.
- 10 AJ: "Dr., I need to talk, can you cut off some of my penis?"
- 11 GL: That ended up happening, not by my own request.
- 12 AJ: Oh, so you did have that done?
- 13 GL: No, I did not – my body decided that's what was going to happen. So, I got a blood clot in my
14 groin a year and a half ago . . . no, it was two years ago, in my groin and it cut off the blood
15 supply to my femoral . . . so, where the vein was grafted to my femoral artery, there was a 7 mm
16 blood clot that had formed right there, so it cut off the blood supply to my penis.
- 17 AJ: Oh, boy.
- 18 GL: So, I ended up losing an inch and a half and then it killed about a third of my urethra. So, then
19 now I've gone through the last year and a half of trying to fix the urethra part so that I can stand
20 and pee. So, I finally had the 10th surgery on June 9th and it was successful. It works – so, that
21 was great, but . . .
- 22 AJ: So, you've got blood flowing . . . I mean, do you get an erection from stimulation or thinking
23 about sex or do you use a pump?
- 24 GL: The unfortunate thing about . . . well, fortunate or unfortunate, it depends on how you look at
25 it, it doesn't get hard on its own. Phalloplasty, you have to have a pump or . . .
- 26 AJ: So, everybody has to have a pump.
- 27 GL: Or the malleable rod, right.
- 28 AJ: OK.
- 29 GL: I don't want what is available now for erectile pumps because they're not made for trans man,
30 they're made for cis penis that already have those channels in there, so they put those into
31 those pre-existing channels to simulate blood flow, but we don't have that so it doesn't quite
32 function the way that you think it's going to. So, there is a company now in Switzerland, thank
33 God for the Swiss, they make one that is for trans men – for phalloplasties, and they're seeking
34 FDA approval right now. So, we'll see how that goes.

- 1 AJ: OK, wow. But, you have an enjoyable sex life.
- 2 GL: I think so. I haven't heard her complain yet.
- 3 AJ: Thank you for being so honest about your medical interventions. I know . . . if you notice, we
4 didn't get into medical until 40 minutes into the interview so, in my mind, it is not the most
5 important aspect of being a trans-identified person. But, it is a part of it, and I know some
6 people get really kind of guarded about having that discussion, if you remember the infamous
7 Laverne Cox/Katie Couric interview where she kind of schooled Katie about asking about
8 medical stuff. But, you know, in my mind it is . . . as you said, you would look at pictures online
9 and be jealous. I remember walking down the street and saying, "Wow, that woman is beautiful
10 – and not because I was sexually attracted to her but because I wanted to be her."
- 11 GL: Wanted to be here – right.
- 12 AJ: In fact, I still see beautiful women and I'm like, "How come my stomach can't be flat?" No, but
13 thank you so much for sharing about that. But, I do want to talk about love and relationships
14 and such because just based on your conversation, it seems like you've had relationships along
15 the way. Some have ended, so they're just like any other human intimate relationship.
- 16 GL: I've only had two relationships during the 15-17 years of my transition. I was with my former
17 partner, we were together for 15 years.
- 18 AJ: Is this the person who asked, "Do you want to be a guy?"
- 19 GL: Yes.
- 20 AJ: And they stayed after you said yes.
- 21 GL: Yes, and our relationship did not end because I was trans or anything having to do with that. It
22 ended like any regular old, straight, blah couple.
- 23 AJ: You didn't pick up your clothes and you never would cook dinner and never wanted to take her
24 out.
- 25 GL: Right, and I never bought her flowers.
- 26 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 27 GL: Everything ends for all the things . . .
- 28 AJ: I'm totally teasing you, Gabe. I know you are the best partner on the planet.
- 29 GL: I think so. But, you know, our relationship ended for a multitude of reasons and not a single one
30 of them had to do with . . . that she didn't agree with me transitioning. Some of what got rolled
31 into our problems was that she was a lesbian-identified person when we started dating . . .
- 32 AJ: Yeah, that's going to be my next question so keep talking.
- 33 GL: And she would out me to affirm . . .
- 34 AJ: To keep her queer identity.

- 1 GL: Yeah, and so she would out me to people that she didn't need to, to justify her use of her
2 lesbian identity. Like, "Oh, well, I am a lesbian – well, yes, I'm married to a man, but he's trans."
3 So, I'm "less than".
- 4 AJ: Yeah, so, he's not a real man.
- 5 GL: "He's not a real guy, he's a trans guy." But, that wasn't the major part of our issues – it was just
6 one of a multitude of problems.
- 7 AJ: Sure.
- 8 GL: But, we have a beautiful 10-year-old daughter together, who is amazing.
- 9 AJ: Wonderful.
- 10 GL: Who just recently found out that I'm trans.
- 11 AJ: Really?
- 12 GL: Yeah.
- 13 AJ: Wow. How did that go over?
- 14 GL: We never made it an issue, it was always something . . . I never came out and said, "Oh, well,
15 Maddie, I'm trans." It was just something that . . . as any situation that happened, I would just
16 talk about it as it happened. Like, one of my brothers didn't want me to babysit his kids because
17 his wife has some religious issue with me being trans and we got in a huge fight about it. I said,
18 "Well, I don't know what the hell he thinks – does he think that I'm going to come babysit his
19 kids and he's going to leave two little girls with me and then they're going to come back and he's
20 going to have two little boys?" Or, am I going to say, "Well, girls, I would have been your auntie
21 but life didn't go that way."
- 22 AJ: Right.
- 23 GL: I've said those things in front of Maddie and so she always . . .
- 24 AJ: So, she had a sense that something was different.
- 25 GL: She always had the parts, she always had the information there and she knows . . . she knew
26 what the word transgender meant, but she just never put all of my pieces together with this
27 word.
- 28 AJ: Got it.
- 29 GL: And then her friend that she hangs out with, her friend and her dad were in the back yard
30 having smores with us and the girl's dad just said, "I need to ask you something." I said,
31 "What?" He's like, "Are you trans?" I started laughing and I said, "Yeah, how did you know?"
32 He's like, "I saw your arm." I was like, "Oh, OK, that's cool."
- 33 AJ: Most people don't know what that surgery is . . . is he a doctor?
- 34 GL: He's pretty queer – he's a psychologist, but he's also queer.

- 1 AJ: Well, that sort of explains it.
- 2 GL: But, my daughter overheard him ask me and I said, "Yeah, I am." Maddie, very promptly turned
3 around and said, "You are." I said, "Ahhh . . ." Your inkling is to lie to her and say no, but I said,
4 "Yup." She's like, "Oh, that's cool," and then went back to playing with her friends." She didn't
5 even care. And then, I sat down with her later just to make sure that . . . do you have questions,
6 do you really understand what you heard? At first she didn't want to talk about it, she was just
7 like, "I know what it means."
- 8 AJ: Right - kids.
- 9 GL: OK, OK. And then, I tried to talk to her another time about it and I said, "Do you understand
10 now why mom's friend Steve had to help make you?" She's always known that. So, do you
11 understand that?" And she said, "Yeah – no, I get it." I said, "Do you have any questions?"
12 She's like, "No." She just knew. When she finally put all the pieces together, then she . . . it
13 finally clicked and then she didn't have any questions.
- 14 AJ: Wow.
- 15 GL: I've always explained to her about . . . like people's body parts, I've never said, "Boys have a
16 penis," or, "Girls have boobs." I've always said, "Some people have this, some people have
17 this." When she asked where babies came from, I always said, "Well, when sperm and egg are
18 introduced . . ." It was never like, "Well, a guy and a . . ."
- 19 AJ: "A guy and a girl . . ."
- 20 GL: No. So, it was just never a thing. So, you've only had two relationships since you've been out.
21 The 15-year one that's not happening anymore.
- 22 AJ: No, we got divorced three and a half years ago.
- 23 GL: So, you were married.
- 24 AJ: Yes. Gay married, huh.
- 25 GL: Yeah, because when we got married, gay marriage wasn't even on the ticket to be voted for.
- 26 AJ: Is that right?
- 27 GL: No.
- 28 AJ: But, now you're in a long-term relationship?
- 29 GL: I would like it to be long term. It's been a year and a half.
- 30 AJ: A year and a half . . . in some trans lives, that's pretty long term. But, I guess in your situation,
31 coming out of a 15-year marriage, a year and a half is kind of like a little drop in the bucket. But,
32 so here's my question though. You are a remarkable looking guy, right, and you've got the
33 package with anywhere from 12 to 10 inches . . .
- 34 GL: Eight and a half . . . now the Tretter Collection knows.

- 1 AJ: OK. But, and . . . your last relationship you were with a cis gender woman. Are you dating a cis
2 gender person now?
- 3 GL: I think she is. She has not told me anything different – she’s shaking her head yes.
- 4 AJ: So, when you are out in the world with your 10-year-old daughter and your cis gender woman,
5 you guys are pretty much a straight-appearing family.
- 6 GL: It would seem to be.
- 7 AJ: How does that impact you, if at all, and do people sort of treat you guys like a straight cis family?
8 A hetero-cis family?
- 9 GL: Yes, they do. They do treat us that way. It depends on where we’re at whether or not it bothers
10 me. It does not bother me in my daily life because I identify as straight . . . I don’t identify with
11 straight culture, that’s a different thing. But, I like women and I identify as male and that’s that.
- 12 AJ: So, you’re a straight guy. So, they’re reading that piece correctly.
- 13 GL: But, my partner is very queer and so it definitely affects her and she’s had to process through
14 some of that as being erased and invisible. I feel that way sometimes, that I can end up being
15 invisible in my own community that I was born from. I have a friend who wrote a paper about
16 that very thing and talking about becoming involuntarily invisible. I think that trans men, the
17 further you take your medical transition, the more invisible you become – until you just blend
18 and that’s that and if that’s what you want, that’s great. I don’t mind . . . I like blending in my
19 professional life, because it’s none of their business. Straight men, especially straight white
20 men, hear you differently when you’re one of them. So, when they’re making misogynistic or
21 racist comments and you call them on it, they hear you differently than if they were to know
22 that I’m trans and then I would call them on it and they’d be, “Well, he’s just a lefty weirdo or
23 whatever.” So, then they hear you different. So, I don’t mind being involuntarily . . . I don’t
24 mind being invisible in that aspect of my life. In my personal life, I still do drag shows sometimes
25 and it’s very well known that I’m trans. We made a calendar and I was naked in the calendar.
- 26 AJ: Do you have more of those calendars? Is that the only one?
- 27 GL: There’s two left and Andre has claimed the other one.
- 28 AJ: I was going to say, man, you should donate that to the collection. That’s pretty amazing. If you
29 find one you should . . .
- 30 Woman: I had called tabs on the other one, but I’ll give it to the Tretter.
- 31 AJ: Really?
- 32 Woman: Yeah, of course.
- 33 AJ: Wow. It’s kind of a difficult conundrum because really, I think, everybody on the planet basically
34 just wants to live a normal, happy life.
- 35 GL: Yes, just be.

- 1 AJ: Just be who they are and . . .
- 2 GL: Yeah, I think that was . . . Alex Nelson, when I first started transitioning, I think that that was the
3 best piece of advice I had gotten about transitioning. When I first came out and was telling my
4 friends and whoever had their ears open that I was a boy and I was going to transition, I was
5 going to be a man and I was super high strung about it and really up everybody's ass about it.
- 6 AJ: Yeah.
- 7 GL: They'd she me and I'd be like, "he".
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 GL: Kind of freak out and be super offended. But, Alex one time, he said, "You've got to calm
10 down." He was like, "Why are you trying so hard to be something you already are – you can just
11 be it. If you are a man, then why don't you just be a man and stop trying to be one?" I was like,
12 "Yeah, you're right." So, then, I think, at that point, I just started to be one instead of trying to
13 be one.
- 14 AJ: Tell me about your tattoo.
- 15 GL: This one, was my medical start date of testosterone
- 16 AJ: Oh, it's a date.
- 17 GL: It's a date.
- 18 AJ: So, when did you start?
- 19 GL: And then . . . December 2, 2005.
- 20 AJ: So, that's your birthday – your transaversary as people call it.
- 21 GL: And then this one, I was a little bit obsessed with *Boys Don't Cry* and my friend, Lucas, and I
22 went to Brandon Teena's grave on that day.
- 23 AJ: Is that right? 09-06-08.
- 24 GL: Yup. This one, my ex-brother-in-law had a brain tumor, so that has nothing to do with any of
25 the other things.
- 26 AJ: Wow. That was a sad story, the Brandon Teena story. We need to kind of wrap up a little bit,
27 but what do you think the difference . . . or not the difference, what is the relationship, in your
28 mind, between the L, the G, the B and then the T? So, is there a relationship? Should we all be
29 working together or should trans people go off on their own and try to create more
30 opportunities for trans folks? What are your thoughts?
- 31 GL: I think all of that. I think that the T is different because it's not a sexual orientation, it's a gender
32 identity. However, I would not have come to my trans realization without having gone through
33 being a lesbian and figuring out what that meant and being in that community of people that
34 just accepts you just . . . there you are. If you say you're one of us, then just come on and . . . I
35 mean, it's not all Twinkies and flowers, everybody knows that. But, if I wouldn't have found

- 1 District 202 with all the queer little weird kids, and been there and just been able to figure it out,
2 then I wouldn't be sitting here doing this trans videography.
- 3 AJ: Oral history.
- 4 GL: Yes, oral history. But, I do think that trans people need to also create more spaces and more
5 events that focus on the T part. I was at Pride one year and the guy at Loring Park had a
6 clipboard and it was for HRC and they were pushing gay marriage really, really hard. This wasn't
7 the time that it was the vote no thing, this was prior to that when it didn't go anywhere.
- 8 AJ: Yeah, it wasn't on the ballot and all of that stuff.
- 9 GL: So, he was pushing it really, really hard and so I stopped and read through the thing, and I said,
10 "It says nowhere in here about trans people." And he was like, "Well, you know, dude," because
11 I passed, "You know, dude, sometimes you've got to leave a few behind to further the majority."
12 I smacked it back down and I said, "I am one of those you're leaving behind." And, he just
13 stared at me, like, "Oh, shit." I just walked away. He thought I was just another gay man
14 walking by at Pride and had the audacity to tell me that I was . . .
- 15 AJ: This is the strategy, right.
- 16 GL: Yup, "Well, we're just going to leave them behind." Like, "Shhhh," without realizing that he was
17 talking to one that he was leaving behind.
- 18 AJ: Wow. Oh, boy. Man, Gabe, this has been really amazing and fascinating.
- 19 GL: Thank you.
- 20 AJ: Inspiring. Two last questions. Where do you think the trans community is going to be 50 years
21 from now and just thinking, like kids are coming out at eight and getting on hormone blockers
22 and their parents are all supportive and the medical industry is supportive. So, what is trans life
23 going to look like 50 years from now and is there anything that I didn't talk about that you want
24 to talk about? One of the questions that I usually ask is around have you ever volunteered or
25 worked at a queer or LGBT, but you hung out at District and you kind of . . . it sounds like you did
26 some help around there.
- 27 GL: Yeah, I worked at District 202 and volunteered there for 10 years. That's where I met Roxanne.
- 28 AJ: And, then you've been doing drag performance and . . . which is, a lot of times, those shows –
29 they raise money and donate it to different charities and different causes and things, so that's
30 kind of volunteer work too in many ways. But, is there anything that I didn't ask you about?
31 And, trans life 50 years from now.
- 32 GL: I think in 50 years we're still going to be kicking and screaming.
- 33 AJ: Yeah.
- 34 GL: Trying to have somebody hear everything that you're trying to tell them and still trying to get
35 people to listen. We've come a really long way, but I'm watching the health insurance debate
36 very closely because I need to know is my testosterone still going to be covered or am I going to

- 1 be paying \$190 out of pocket? Am I going to . . . maybe something happens with my penis and it
2 gets coded wrong at the doctor and then what? Then I have to pay for that out of pocket? Or,
3 just because I'm trans, will that make me a pre-existing medical condition? I'm already diabetic,
4 but does me having to have a mental illness diagnosis of GID, what does that mean for me and
5 with the medical health care fight? I think that we made a lot of steps forward when Obama
6 was there and now I think we've made just as many steps backwards.
- 7 AJ: Unfortunately.
- 8 GL: And, it's really unfortunate. I have been fortunate enough with all of my surgeries to have all of
9 it covered under insurance by not taking no for an answer.
- 10 AJ: Really?
- 11 GL: I was denied short-term disability because phalloplasty is an unnecessary medical procedure,
12 but I argued with them after they denied me and said, "OK, so I have two psychiatrists, a
13 psychologist, a hormone doctor and my insurance that says it's medically necessary and that
14 they're going to cover it, but you're going to tell me that I can't have short-term disability
15 because it's not medically necessary? You're going to argue with all of these people?" So, then I
16 had to submit 27 documents to them proving that yes, this is medically necessary – but, it was
17 the same 27 documents of documentation that I had to had to send to my insurance company
18 also to get them to say, "Oh, yes, you do need a penis." So, yeah, don't take no – don't take no.
- 19 AJ: There you go.
- 20 GL: I don't . . . I think in this project that you're doing that maybe some partners should be
21 interviewed too – like however . . . because you've asked the question about being in a
22 relationship with someone – your transition doesn't affect just you, it affects . . . everyone with
23 you has to transition.
- 24 AJ: Yeah – your momma, your daddy.
- 25 GL: Your siblings, your friends.
- 26 AJ: Your partner.
- 27 GL: Transitioning is a really . . . it has to be a really selfish thing because you have to focus on what
28 am I doing, what things do I want, what things don't I want, what kind of an XYZ him/her other
29 person do I want to be. But then, while you're trying to figure that out, all these other people
30 are trying to figure it out too.
- 31 AJ: I think that's a valid point. Maybe another part D – Trans Oral History Part D.
- 32 GL: It's like Medicare.
- 33 AJ: Exactly. No, I think that's really fair but I think it's really important in this particular phase to
34 really hear directly from the community themselves as opposed to however loving and well-
35 meaning our families and supportive people are. They can only tell their story, they can't really
36 tell our story. But, I am in no way discounting the realities of loving someone who is trans
37 identified and the challenges that we have to overcome in order to remain that loving person.

1 Wow, it's been fascinating, Gabe. Thank you so much. You mentioned that you're diabetic and I
2 know you've got to get out to the pharmacy and get your insulin before they close and we want
3 to make sure that happens so, I'm going to sign off and just say until we meet again, my friend.
4 Peace.