

Jae Bates
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

June 28, 2016



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

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

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

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Jae Bates -JB
3

4 AJ: Good afternoon. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender
5 Oral History Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is June 28,
6 2016, and I am at the Edina Public Library and I'm talking to a young person by the name of Jae
7 Bates. And so, Jae, could you introduce yourself? Spell your name, state your gender identity
8 today, your gender assigned at birth, and the pronouns that you use.

9 JB: My name is Jae Bates. I spell it J-a-e B-a-t-e-s. I identify as a trans man or a trans male. I was
10 assigned female at birth. I use he/him pronouns. Is that . . . ?

11 AJ: That was pretty much it. Thank you so much. So it's a pleasure to be with you today, Jae. We
12 had scheduled our interview for . . . almost a year ago in Seattle because you're a student at the
13 University of Puget Sound in Washington State.

14 JB: Yeah, in Tacoma.

15 AJ: And for whatever reasons that didn't work out so I'm very happy that we get a chance to sit
16 down again today. So Jae, tell me what's your earliest memory in life.

17 JB: My earliest memory . . . I think the earliest memory I have that is very vivid would be . . . actually
18 also related to my gender, coincidentally – probably because it was one of the hardest memories
19 from my childhood. I used to play baseball when I was a kid, just the local baseball team –
20 whatever, down the street. I'd say I was maybe in 2nd or 3rd grade and I said to my mom, "Oh,
21 the coach said that everybody needs to get nut cups because that's . . . you know, we need to do
22 that." I just thought I was like every other boy on my team and the coach said that so I had to
23 do that. And my mom kind of just laughed at me and then turned to her friend and laughed and
24 told her what I had said and said, "Oh, don't kids say just the funniest things, isn't this just so
25 funny." And I genuinely did not understand why is this funny, why are you laughing.

26 AJ: Yeah, like, "We need to go to Target and get this thing."

27 JB: "I'm not going to be able to play." I guess what I wasn't understanding was that there were
28 differences in my body and what she wasn't understanding was that I didn't understand I wasn't
29 a boy. So I remember very distinctly going home and being very upset that she had laughed and
30 not understanding why we didn't have a conversation about it, she just thought I was confused
31 about what the coach had said. And so, that's probably one of my earliest vivid memories -
32 walking through the parking lot, having her tell people, "Oh, isn't this so funny, my child said
33 this." So I remember that being one of my most early memories and also just . . . it was almost
34 traumatic but it wasn't even because she did anything that was vicious, it was just like, "I'm
35 confused." So that's actually one of my earliest memories.

36 AJ: How old do you think you were at that time?

- 1 JB: Probably 8. Yeah, I was probably eight. I knew that people used she/her pronouns for me and I
2 knew that people called me a girl but I just thought that words were just words. I was like, "OK,
3 you can call me that but I'm a boy and I know that." I thought I was just like all the other boys.
- 4 AJ: How long have you known that you are a boy? Clearly it was before you were eight.
- 5 JB: Yeah. Probably when I was four, whenever it is that kids kind of start to tell you what they like
6 and what they don't like and I could dress myself and say this is what I want to wear. So ever
7 since I was four it was like, "I want short hair," and would do masculine things and like knew
8 that I was a boy. I have a brother and most of my cousins are boys and so I grew up just thinking,
9 "Oh, I do all these same things, I'm just like all the other boys." Always played on boy's
10 recreational teams.
- 11 AJ: Really?
- 12 JB: Or co-ed teams. It was weird because co-ed teams were fine because we're all just playing
13 together. So probably as early as four, but didn't know that people didn't see me that way.
- 14 AJ: Right. Did you ever talk to people or tell anyone about it?
- 15 JB: I don't distinctly ever telling my mom, "I'm a boy," but I loved imaginative plays, I loved to role
16 play when I was a kid, and it was always . . . I think there were some big red flags, there would
17 be some big signs. I would always play male characters, I would always want to be the dad, you
18 know – like in house, I would take on male roles and say, "This is who I am."
- 19 AJ: Sure.
- 20 JB: I think in the early 2000s and late 1990s, my parents were really familiar with the idea of like
21 tomboy and so it was like, "Oh, that's pretty typical, that's fine." So it was hard because I never
22 really felt comfortable articulating to them, "I'm a boy," but I was sending some pretty strong
23 signals.
- 24 AJ: Wow. So what was your home environment like? You said you have one sibling?
- 25 JB: Yeah, I have one older brother. My older brother is also adopted, he's 23 right now. So he's 23,
26 it was just him and I growing up and then my parents are together. So just my parents, my
27 brother and I.
- 28 AJ: Where? Where did you grow up?
- 29 JB: Originally, when I was like a baby, we lived on kind of the edge of Edina and Hopkins and then
30 we moved to the border of Hopkins and Minnetonka. So I kind of identify with Hopkins as my
31 hometown. I went to Hopkins High School, most of my friends live in Hopkins. I'm right on the
32 border of multiple suburbs so I also sometimes just say I grew up in the west suburbs because
33 it's kind of the easiest thing to indicate where I grew up.
- 34 AJ: But Minnesota is where you grew up at?
- 35 JB: Yeah, Minnesota. I was born in South Korea in 1996 and my mother was, at the time, unwed,
36 escaping a bad marriage, she has two other children. Met my father, they had a thing, but she

- 1 didn't trust him so she gave me up – she tried to raise me so I lived with her for about five
2 months, she couldn't do it just because she was unemployed and didn't have a college
3 education. So she put me up for adoption and I was adopted at almost one-year-old. I came to
4 the U.S. and then grew up in Minnesota my whole life.
- 5 AJ: Wow. That's quite a story. I know that there are a lot of, particularly Korean adoptees, but . . .
- 6 JB: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: But many other . . .
- 8 JB: I just did a ton of research about that actually.
- 9 AJ: Is that right?
- 10 JB: Yeah. It comes out of the Korean War, heavily out of war time. So Vietnam, Korea, and China
11 are the big three where people tend to be adopted from in Asia.
- 12 AJ: I was going to mention and just kind of see what your thoughts are, is that so many people are
13 becoming politically active around being trans-racially adopted. What do you think about that?
14 Are you involved with that movement at all?
- 15 JB: I follow it a lot, there's a big movement to end international adoptions. It's a big form of
16 imperialism, it's very . . . mostly from countries that are majority people of color to the U.S. So a
17 lot of white families, and then even just domestic adoption is heavily race savior-y.
- 18 AJ: Savior-y. I like that phrase.
- 19 JB: And I very much follow the movement of folks that are . . . there's actually two women, I think,
20 from Minnesota who work heavily on trying to change policies both in Korea and in the United
21 States.
- 22 AJ: JaeRan Kim and Sun Yung Shin.
- 23 JB: Yeah, to slow down and stop international adoption. And then there's the other side which is
24 the heavily Christian Evangelical groups that are trying to increase international adoption. And
25 so, I haven't gotten super into it. I started to run into it a lot when I got to college but most of it
26 was actually here in Minnesota or it's in Korea. There are a lot of adoptees who moved back to
27 Korea actually in order to affect policy change there – and do politics there. It's easier to stop
28 the flow of it from the sources.
- 29 AJ: From the source, as it is to do it from the United States. Thank you for just sharing that. I mean
30 I'm not trying to stir up anything but I just know it's a really big movement and it's a real issue
31 and just kind of wanted to hear what your thoughts around it are.
- 32 JB: Yeah, I definitely . . . I did a project actually about the effect of international adoption on the
33 racial identities, particularly of like Korean-American adoptee kids because it contributes to the
34 production of white-wash Asian kids and kind of the whole idea of Asian advantage and all these
35 things that I grew up really grappling with and not fully understanding what it meant to be Asian
36 American with white parents and not connecting with other people of color because I felt very

- 1 distanced from white people, because I'm obviously not white. I grew up with a lot of troubles
2 and confusion around identity, more particularly to my race than almost anything else.
- 3 AJ: Even more so than your gender?
- 4 JB: Yeah, I think gender was more clear cut for me.
- 5 AJ: Really?
- 6 JB: This is what I'm doing, this is who I am – let's go for it. My adoption and race is particularly what
7 I'm still working on the most and talking to people about the most and talking about it in
8 therapy the most.
- 9 AJ: That's fascinating to me.
- 10 JB: Really trying to work through it, but yeah, I completely support the end of international
11 adoption and have had some very complicated conversations with my mom about it. She really
12 understands why but also understands the other end of it's a beautiful thing for the parents and
13 it's not necessarily entirely negative for the child – it's just that there are different negative
14 things.
- 15 AJ: It's complicated.
- 16 JB: So it's just a trade-off. I would have grown up in poverty, like in complete poverty if I'd have
17 stayed there and maybe not have been able to come out as trans. But here I had so many issues
18 around race and racialized bullying and stuff like that. So it's just a trade-off, you never really
19 know.
- 20 AJ: So you were bullied in school?
- 21 JB: Oh yeah. I went to . . . so there are two junior highs in the Hopkins district, West Junior High
22 and North Junior High. Hopkins is a very racially diverse . . .
- 23 AJ: Which one did you go to?
- 24 JB: I went to West Junior High. Hopkins is a very racially diverse district, more so than the other
25 districts in the west metro because . . .
- 26 AJ: Interestingly, but it is.
- 27 JB: Yeah, we give the most money to open enrollment so we allow the most amount of people to
28 open enroll in our district as opposed to Minnetonka or Wayzata or Eden Prairie. So we service
29 suburbs all the way up to . . . there are kids all the way up from Brooklyn Park, Robbinsdale, into
30 North Minneapolis. There are families from South Minneapolis. We service the widest area and
31 a ton of Hmong kids in particular from Minneapolis and St. Paul as well. We have a larger
32 English as a Second Language program, all that stuff. My parents chose specifically to live in the
33 Hopkins district because they wanted me to go to a more racially diverse K-12, which is great,
34 but it still didn't fix kind of the problems that they thought that that would alleviate. I think it
35 did more so than if I had gone to Eden Prairie or Minnetonka. I think that that would have been
36 a lot worse for a lot of different reasons. In junior high I got bullied a lot for both my sexuality

1 and my race. The bullying about my sexuality, or my gender identity . . . it was more about my
2 gender expression at the time, which they thought was tied up in my sexuality because I had
3 come out as queer. But it was really typical and it was straight forward. It was, "OK, they hate
4 me because I'm queer and that's fine because I know that they're wrong." It was very straight
5 forward and I could just ignore it. But the bullying especially about my race was more . . .
6 coming even from people that I considered friends and so it was racism that was very
7 normalized and just coming from people who I thought I cared about and even other people of
8 color and other Asian kids. It was just very constant kind of jabs at particularly my . . . like where
9 I'm adopted from. Something I get a lot is kids make jokes about Kung Jung-il to me or call me
10 that when I was in school and call me like a Communist or a Commie, which now that's not such
11 a . . . whatever. But it was very, "You're this and you come from a fascist country." Just
12 assumptions that I was from North Korea, which is weird, I'm from South Korea. And I was
13 always very adamant about that. I was very into being South Korean when I was in junior high
14 because people were always attacking me and I just wanted to so badly be like, "This is who I
15 am, this is where I'm from. I love it." I always wanted to cook Korean food when I was in junior
16 high. I did a lot of cooking when I was in junior high. I wanted to learn how to cook all the
17 Korean food that I had eaten at camps and stuff like that. But yeah, kids would just . . . I used to
18 get called chink a lot when I was in junior high. I would also get called . . . the weirdest thing is a
19 lot of kids would know the word gook, which I thought was weird because I was like that's a
20 pretty generational specific racial slur.

21 AJ: Right, and sort of Vietnam-era.

22 JB: And so this kid called me, I remember it distinctly – I was in junior high and this kid called me a
23 gook. I was like, "Do you hang out with a lot of Vietnam-war vets? Do you have Vietnam War
24 vets in your family?" I didn't, at that moment, know what that word even meant and then I had
25 told somebody that this kid called me that and they had to explain to me what that meant. At
26 the time, I was like, "I know that's not nice, I know that this word is not nice."

27 AJ: Yeah, it wasn't a cool thing but you didn't know exactly what it meant.

28 JB: I just remember that being really weird. But yeah, I used to get called chink, gook, kind of all the
29 different racial slurs related to my eyes – all those slurs under the rainbow about Asian kids, I
30 used to get called in school. And the weird thing was when it was coming from my friends, they
31 thought it was funny, like, "Oh, we can call you this, it's fun." But because I was sometimes one
32 of the only people of color in my friend group, I would be like, "Oh, ha-ha, yeah – whatever,
33 that's funny." And kind of just roll with it and then would start to make jokes, to pre-empt their
34 jokes, like, "I'm going to make jokes about myself so that you can't."

35 AJ: Sort of a protection mechanism kind of thing.

36 JB: Yeah, so then it's kind of like they're not making it about me, I'm making it about me and they
37 can laugh with me instead of at me. So yeah, and so that turned into something that was really
38 hard – and then eventually I just kind of learned if I don't want people to talk about race with
39 me, or bully me for race, or bring up my race, then I just have to act as white as possible, or I just
40 have to not ever talk about race. So then somewhere at the end of junior high it was kind of
41 complicated, I didn't want to talk about South Korea anymore, I didn't want to do cultural things

- 1 anymore. My other friends who were Asian American students, we had had this group for a
2 while where we would all cook dinner together and hang out and watch foreign films. And that
3 was really cool for me and then towards the end of junior high when white kids started to say,
4 “Oh, you guys are being reverse racist, this is whatever.” And white kids started making a big
5 thing about it, all my friends kind of slowly started to drop out because they didn’t want people
6 to start calling them about their race. Mostly all my friends in that group just started to drop
7 out, like, “Oh, I don’t want to do this anymore, I don’t want to meet anymore, I don’t want to
8 hang out.” And we all just kind of separated because they didn’t want to talk about it anymore,
9 they didn’t want to do anything.
- 10 AJ: Sure, wow.
- 11 JB: That was my experience in junior high and particularly around bullying and race, in particular.
- 12 AJ: Did it impact your studies at all? I’m going to go out on a limb and say you’re probably a pretty
13 good student because you got accepted into a really good college.
- 14 JB: Yeah. So high school I did really, really well. Junior high was harder. So junior high was when I
15 was trying to figure out my gender expression and my sexuality, while simultaneously getting
16 bullied about race and so it was literally everyone just coming at every part of my identity.
- 17 AJ: Yeah, because you mentioned earlier that you came out as queer pretty early.
- 18 JB: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: How old were you?
- 20 JB: The end of 7th grade, early 8th grade.
- 21 AJ: So 13, 14-years-old.
- 22 JB: Yeah, I think probably 13 when I came out as queer, as liking women. So that would have been,
23 at the time . . . I identified as gay because I was identified by other people as a woman who liked
24 women. And then it was funny, one of my . . .
- 25 AJ: But you’re really a straight guy.
- 26 JB: Well I still identify as queer. My sexuality developed more as I figured out more parts of who I
27 was. But the only boy that I had ever tried to date, came out like a year after me as gay. And so
28 when I came out as trans, as a trans man, we had Panera together and he was joking at Panera,
29 like, “Oh, we could actually date again, it would be fun.”
- 30 AJ: Did you?
- 31 JB: No, but we’re really good friends. It just is funny.
- 32 AJ: Because now that you’re a man, he could go out with you then. That is funny, that is hilarious.
- 33 JB: We’re really good friends. But junior high was tough. I was trying to figure out sexuality so I’d
34 come out and I thought that would fix . . . because I was very depressed and I thought, “This is it
35 – cool, I know I like women, that was the problem, I was sad because I didn’t know who I was

1 and then I came out.” And then everyone was like, “Oh, this is so great.” And everyone was
2 very accepting and Hopkins became known for being one of the more LGBT-friendly schools out
3 there. I was like, “This is it, this is going to be good.” It helped a little but it wasn’t quite . . . I
4 was still not really able to focus on school, so I got pretty bad grades in 7th and 8th grade in
5 particular. Just couldn’t focus, wasn’t really asking for help, I didn’t really . . . I just wasn’t good
6 at partnering up with people because I was afraid of other kids judging me and I wasn’t very
7 outgoing. I didn’t want to do the partner work and I just kind of was in my own world. I didn’t
8 want to do things with other kids. So yeah, I got pretty bad grades – particularly in 7th and 8th
9 grade. Ninth grade it was kind of, “Kick your butt into gear otherwise this isn’t going to work
10 out.” Ninth grade, you’re still at the junior high but you’re getting graded for high school. And
11 then 9th grade was when I started to figure more stuff out and was able to take classes more
12 that I was really, really interested in and learn about things that related to who I was. So I
13 started to do better in 9th grade and particularly the middle of high school was really, really
14 great for me just because I was able . . . I came out as trans at the very beginning of high school
15 – like 10th, 11th – like that.

16 AJ: You came out as trans?

17 JB: Yeah. I had just turned 16 when I came out as trans. And so I was able to . . .

18 AJ: Who was the first person you told?

19 JB: I remember I used to work at the Minnesota Zoo and I was sitting before . . . I did kid camps
20 there, I was like a camp counselor, and I was sitting before that and I realized, “OK, I need to tell
21 somebody,” and I texted my friend Tia, who I was at Pride with this past weekend. I said, “Tia,
22 I’ve got to tell you something, I identify as a boy and I want to use he/him pronouns and I chose
23 this name. I’m trans.” I remember her being just very, very supportive – it was great. And then
24 I texted a couple more people. The more, I think, that I got positive responses the more
25 comfortable I felt just telling more people. Actually the reason that I figured out that I was trans
26 was my ex-girlfriend’s ex is a trans man and I had hung out with him a lot while I was early high
27 school and started to talk to him about his experience and who he was a little bit. He would
28 share just bits and pieces, he wasn’t as open with his identity necessarily. But he could kind of
29 tell I was kind of struggling with gender so he would talk to me. And then I got on the internet
30 and YouTube, and that’s how I figured out I was trans – just kind of reading more and learning
31 more about the way that people identify and just realizing that’s who I am and that’s who I
32 identify as. For a long time I had known about the word gender queer and thought that kind of
33 applies to me. I would tell people, “Oh my gender is more like gender queer,” but I wasn’t using
34 any particular pronouns. I didn’t really know what that meant but I just know that I’m not a
35 woman. And so before I came out as trans, I was just kind of telling people, “Oh, my gender is a
36 little bit more gender queer but I don’t think I’m a trans man.” And then eventually it was just
37 like, “I can’t . . .” I had bought myself a binder online without telling my parents and just kind of
38 was trying to get through it and then just realized at the beginning of high school, “I can’t do this
39 anymore.” So I just decided to come out. My mom was the first person in my family that I told.

40 AJ: So how did they deal with this? You had already come out as queer in 7th grade.

- 1 JB: Yeah, I remember . . . so the first time I came out, I went on a walk with my dad actually and
2 then at the end of the walk we were getting our mail and he turns to get the mail and I just
3 blurted out, "Dad, I think I'm gay." And then my dad said, "Oh, you know, we'll always love you
4 – you could be whatever and we'd still love you. You could turn into a rabbit and I'd still love
5 you." Whatever.
- 6 AJ: I'm sorry.
- 7 JB: I said, "OK, cool, I'm just telling you I'm gay."
- 8 AJ: "We'll just give you carrots and . . ."
- 9 JB: So he was just kind of . . . "You could be whatever and we'd still love you." So then I
10 remembered that as I was trying to come out as trans – OK, he said no matter what they'll love
11 me, so it will be OK. I texted my mom and told her and then I remember I purposefully went
12 over to my friend's house for dinner because I didn't want to be home, so I texted my mom this
13 really long text and I was like, "I'm trans and this is what that means. I want to go by this name
14 and these pronouns." And just this really, really long text and waiting for her reply was very
15 painful, nerve-racking. Finally she responded and she's like, "OK, that's OK, I've known this for a
16 while, but you need to come home – you can't stay at your friends." And I was like, "Shoot, that
17 was my buffer." So I went home and she was cooking dinner and she kind of didn't say anything
18 and then she just started crying when we were eating dinner and I was like, "What's wrong? Are
19 you OK?" And she told me that mostly she was really upset about violence against trans people
20 and what does that mean for me. She knows about just systemic violence against trans people
21 and so she said it was OK but what does this mean for college and where am I going to go and
22 how am I going to make sure it's going to be OK, the cost of transitional care and how am I going
23 to afford that and who is going to do that and where do we find it. It was just more . . . she
24 works a lot in logistics and she thinks about the details. So she was like obviously going through
25 the emotional mourning of her child changing but she was also very stressed out about, "You're
26 still a minor so we together have to do this if you want to do this." And so her questions were
27 all about safety and logistics and what's going to happen. So for a long time she was like, "I
28 don't want you to leave the metro area, I don't want you to leave Minneapolis or this area for
29 college, you should just go to the U of M." I don't have a problem with the U of M but I always
30 thought a smaller school would be better for the way that I learn.
- 31 AJ: Yeah, that's huge – that's a huge school.
- 32 JB: So I was really scared – like, "I just locked myself into . . ." If it was between transitioning and
33 having to go to the U of M, that would be fine. But yeah, my mom just kind of said, "I don't
34 want you moving anywhere else, I want you to live here near me for the rest of your life." And I
35 was like, "I've got to get out of here." I'd always imagined, at least moving away to see a
36 different part . . . for just a small bit. I love Minneapolis, I'd love to maybe move back but I don't
37 want to be constricted to that. So yeah, her things were mostly safety, what are we doing. My
38 dad when I came out, his reaction was, at first, he literally said the word . . . I was at Pizza Luce
39 with him for dinner and my mom went to the bathroom and I told him, "Dad, I'm trans." Just
40 blurted it out again.

- 1 AJ: Wow.
- 2 JB: And he takes a sip of his beer and he just goes, “No, you’re not.” And I was like, “OK, sounds
3 good, let’s just eat our pizza.” And then that was it, we didn’t talk about it again. I think more
4 what he meant was . . . he knows that being trans is a thing and it’s real and that’s OK, but he
5 just felt more like, “I think that your gender is different and I think you express it differently, but
6 I don’t think you’re a trans person.” So his reaction was just denial – just kind of like, “No,
7 you’re not, you’re a masculine woman, that’s OK, don’t let anyone tell you that’s not OK but
8 you’re not trans.” And so just at dinner I just didn’t want to fight about it, but I just kind of
9 swallowed it back in and was like, “We’ll have this conversation later.” And I think for him it
10 really took the therapist saying it. He’s really, to be honest, like a little more elitist – kind of like,
11 “I need a professional to tell me that these things are happening. I’ll listen to your doctors and
12 I’ll listen to the therapist but just kind of not being able to listen to me about who I am and just
13 him being like, ‘I’ve known you for 16 years and this isn’t what you’re doing’.”
- 14 AJ: Like, “You’re not the expert on your life, I am.”
- 15 JB: Yeah. So it was very like that and I was like, “OK, sounds good.” So I went to the program at the
16 University of Minnesota.
- 17 AJ: Oh really, the Program on Human Sexuality.
- 18 JB: Yes. And so the therapist there, we did a couple of first appointments and then sat my parents
19 down and said . . . I think, at the time they were still calling it gender dysphoria - it was still on
20 the DSM at the time I had come out and then it came off the DSM the next year or something
21 like that. They finally told my parents, “This is what’s happening, if you support him you’re
22 going to have to go with whatever he says.” And that’s kind of when my dad started to finally
23 realize he couldn’t just ignore it. But yeah, they took it relatively well compared to other
24 people. After the initial coming out it took them a very long period of . . . like a very, very long
25 period of adjustment to do pronouns and name. My therapist had to have us do a gender jar
26 where they have to put coins in every time they misgender me – when I had first come out, they
27 don’t misgender me as much anymore.
- 28 AJ: Did you get to keep the money or did they?
- 29 JB: I got to keep it. So my parents would have to put in coins every time they misgendered me. I
30 think I made like \$5.00 but I was like, “OK.” And that was kind of what it took to get them to just
31 . . .
- 32 AJ: What about your brother? How did your brother handle things?
- 33 JB: Yeah, so he was in college at that point. I think he was a freshman in college – or a sophomore
34 in college when I came out. So he was away and I didn’t really know how to talk to him about
35 it. I think my mom ended up talking to him about it because I . . . I’ve never had a super, super
36 close relationship with my brother where we can talk about feelings or emotions or
37 experiences. So I kind of let my mom do it, she asked me if she could and I told her she
38 could. So that’s what she did. And then he messaged me about it, sent me a long message
39 supporting me, telling me he still loved me. But then kind of . . . as he started to see all of the

- 1 things that I had to go through and the stress that it was putting on my mom, my brother is very
2 intuitive about people's feelings and so he gets very upset by other people being upset. He
3 came back from college, I think maybe for winter break or something, and he said, "Can't you
4 just be who you are and tell people this, but just remain the way that you are?" So kind of,
5 "Can't you just socially transition but not do all these documents and this medical?" I think he
6 was just more stressed out by . . .
- 7 AJ: "Can't you just make us feel comfortable?" Basically.
- 8 JB: Yeah, like really like that and kind of . . . it wasn't even for his sake, he just hates when my
9 parents get stressed out. So it was really just, "Can't you just not do this so that mom and dad . .
10 .?"
- 11 AJ: So mom and dad can be OK.
- 12 JB: Yeah. And so, that was definitely hurtful. Eventually he understood why different parts of
13 transition are really important. He's a lot better, particularly in the last year. All his friends that
14 he still hangs out with, he hung out with in high school, so they all knew me before I came out,
15 but none of his friends have ever misgendered me or deadening to me in our house, so he very
16 clearly . . . I don't know if it was him or my parents – like I don't know who it was, but clearly
17 they laid it down for his friends that this is what's happening. His friends are very respectful,
18 very nice to me. And so clearly he's done some stuff on his own that maybe we haven't talked
19 about before. And then him and his girlfriend, they came to some of the Trans Ally Trainings
20 that I was doing.
- 21 AJ: Nice.
- 22 JB: He definitely tries. The couple years I marched in Pride he came with his girlfriend and my
23 parents to watch.
- 24 AJ: Were you like the grand marshal of Pride one year?
- 25 JB: No, I wasn't. I marched in yours when you were the grand marshal.
- 26 AJ: Yes, there you go.
- 27 JB: Just to march with other random groups. Yeah, so he's better but he goes to school at St. Cloud
28 State University, a more conservative area, he had more conservative friends than I did in high
29 school and just really isn't really into the language around social justice – especially queer,
30 language around queer folks and gender identity . . . he just doesn't really know any of that,
31 which most people don't encounter that in their life. But he, in high school particularly, kind of
32 had the guy friends in the high school who were kind of the perpetrators of kind of some of the
33 homophobic jokes and stuff like that. He's definitely tried though, because when I told him,
34 "You can't use these words around me at least or in our house," he listened. His friends stopped
35 saying like, "That's so gay," and different slurs and stuff in the house. He's done a lot better and
36 we have a much closer relationship now that I've come out – before I was not comfortable
37 socializing with anybody and he thought I was really anti-social, and he's a really social guy. He's
38 total Type-A personality, loves making friends with literally everybody. Before I came out I was

- 1 so shy, I didn't want to be friends with anybody, I wanted to just stay like me and maybe two
2 other people and I just hated meeting people. But now that I've come out it's easier for him to
3 socialize with me.
- 4 AJ: So now that you've come out, Jae, what have been some of the challenges that you've faced?
- 5 JB: Particularly around health care, I think, is the hardest one for me. In particular, dealing with
6 insurance companies and stuff like that.
- 7 AJ: Really?
- 8 JB: Yeah. I'm lucky enough to be on health insurance still.
- 9 AJ: Your parents?
- 10 JB: So originally it was through my mom's employer and then . . . my mom is now unemployed, she
11 was laid off within the last couple of years and we're now paying out of pocket. I think there
12 wouldn't be as big of a push to remain on such good health care if I wasn't getting transitional
13 health care, if I wasn't on hormones and stuff, because the rest of my family doesn't use a ton of
14 health care – doesn't use a ton of the insurance. I'm the main user of almost . . . almost
15 everything. So on top of being trans, I have other chronic conditions and so it's been really hard
16 to kind of balance my other health conditions and being trans and asking the insurance company
17 for things. Every time that I renew my prior authorization for my testosterone, getting denied
18 again and again and again and having my doctor have to send two letters and waiting months.
- 19 AJ: Just for the prescription?
- 20 JB: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: Wow.
- 22 JB: This happens every time we get new insurance, which has been a couple times in the last year.
23 It also happens a year after the prescription has been made, so it happens multiple times in a
24 year. The first time it happened was really bad. Now that I know that it can happen, I kind of
25 keep enough testosterone around so that if I have to go two months without, then I can still
26 survive and feel good. But yeah, I've been having such a hard time with . . . luckily I haven't
27 gotten to the point where I have to sue them, but it's to the point where every single time they
28 give me a little bit harder . . . it's a little bit harder every time.
- 29 AJ: Wow.
- 30 JB: The first time that I ever filled a prescription, they were like, "Cool, yeah, great." They didn't
31 kick it back or anything, and I was like, "Oh, this is very un-normal." And then the next time that
32 I had to renew it, they were like, "No, absolutely not, this is why, you don't have these
33 diseases." The main reason that I couldn't get it was like, "You don't have HIV or AIDS." I'm like,
34 "Yes, I'm very happy that I don't have HIV or AIDS."
- 35 AJ: Yes, thank goodness.

- 1 JB: But I am trans so I would like my testosterone. And they were just . . . it took a month for them
2 to even review it. So it takes about a month and in that month if I run out it's depression, no
3 energy, because of my other chronic conditions – it really screws those up. It got so bad, I think,
4 during one period where they had denied me my testosterone that I did some blood work and
5 my doctor called me a couple days later, "You need to come in immediately, your blood work is
6 so bad that it's like an emergency." This was my freshman year of college, "Well that's
7 interesting because I am in the middle of Montana on my way to college and I can't come in so
8 what should I do?" And they were like, "Ahh, do you have insulin with you, do you have all
9 these things?" And I was like, "Yeah."
- 10 AJ: So you're diabetic?
- 11 JB: Yeah. And they were like, "Well, make sure that you take care of yourself because this is not
12 good." And so I was quite mad at Blue Cross Blue Shield, that's who has my insurance.
- 13 AJ: Absolutely.
- 14 JB: And I had been doing so well with all my other chronic conditions and then that completely . . .
15 my body has been recovering from that one experience two years ago . . . it's been almost two
16 years. My body has had to completely recover from just one experience of going off of
17 testosterone for a month. So health care is definitely the one thing that I've been extremely
18 passionate about talking to people about and telling other, particularly cis folks, about struggles
19 in health care systems. I've also had bad experiences in the ER and stuff like that with nurses
20 who just don't know what's going on – they say things or do things that aren't appropriate. I've
21 had to ask for different nurses before.
- 22 AJ: Really?
- 23 JB: Yeah. So I've been doing a lot of research on health care and discrimination against trans folks
24 and giving talks to the Bio-Ethics Club at my college for people who want to become doctors and
25 kind of say, "If you all want to be health care professionals, this is why trans health care is really
26 important – even if you're going to be an ear, nose, and throat doctor, trans folks have . . .
- 27 AJ: Ear, nose, and throats.
- 28 JB: So you need to be competent enough to talk to trans folks. So I've had a lot of experience – and
29 I see so many doctors and I go to so many appointments, that luckily I haven't run into explicitly
30 transphobic doctors but I've run into a lot of doctors who ask and say very unnecessary things
31 and give you that run though. I went to see just my pediatrician to go on my trip, just saw my
32 pediatrician. I should have only been in there for 20 minutes but I was in there for an hour
33 because he just wanted to talk about . . . vaguely, like my transition and just kind of say, "Oh, it
34 seems to be going so well." And I was like, "You're not my transitional care doctor."
- 35 AJ: Right, "So this is not your conversation."
- 36 JB: And it wasn't even about changes to my body or my health, it was very much about my personal
37 life. I was like, "You're my pediatrician and you're taking up 20 minutes of my time to just try to
38 say that you're an ally but I just need to get out of here. I just wanted my shots and I need to

- 1 leave.” So health care has been something . . . and because I spend so much time in the health
2 care system, it’s something that I need to start changing – the cost of it, the way that it works,
3 everything.
- 4 AJ: What about school?
- 5 JB: College.
- 6 AJ: Yeah.
- 7 JB: College has been . . .
- 8 AJ: Some people come out after college or while they’re in college, you went to college as an out
9 trans person.
- 10 JB: Yeah. So I made the decision to not be what everyone calls stealth – I wanted to be out because
11 . . .
- 12 AJ: What is stealth?
- 13 JB: Stealth is . . . I don’t want to be what people call stealth, which is not telling people that you’re
14 trans and saying that you . . . basically just not disclosing your trans status.
- 15 AJ: Making up a false identity that’s not really who you are.
- 16 JB: Yeah, so I chose to be out, openly trans, because I knew that Tacoma was a safe area to do that,
17 but also because on my social media and everything that I did in Minnesota, it was impossible to
18 hide. But then also I wanted it to be able . . . so that I could connect with other trans people on
19 campus because I wanted to make friends specifically who identify as similar to me. Yeah, so I
20 went to college and I had a roommate and I told him, “I’m trans, whatever.” His parents were a
21 little bit weird about it but he was just this real quiet guy who only ever played video games.
22 “All right, cool.” We never said a word to each other, best living situation ever. We spoke
23 maybe two words to each other a day but it wasn’t in a . . .
- 24 AJ: And you think it would have been the same way whether you were trans or not.
- 25 JB: Yeah, he was just . . . really just a quiet guy. So it was probably the most ideal living situation
26 that I could have had freshman year, but it was more about the way that freshman dorms are
27 set up that I had a problem with. So I had really bad housing problems freshman year and
28 college was very hard my freshman year because of my trans identity, but it wasn’t necessarily
29 because of . . . usually it’s like, “Oh you’re living with someone who is transphobic and that
30 sucks.” This was very like . . . he was great.
- 31 AJ: Structural.
- 32 JB: Very systemic problems. The bathrooms and just . . . I just couldn’t do . . . the way that the
33 showers were set up, even though my RA tried to make it as private as possible, it was still . . .
34 even though I was out, I was still afraid of being outed in the bathroom, which was weird
35 because it was like, “Yeah, I’m being open about being trans but I’m very afraid that when I’m in
36 the bathroom someone is going to confront me about it.” So I was always very afraid to go to

- 1 the bathroom. I ended up getting a kidney infection my freshman year because I just didn't
2 want to use freshman bathrooms. Even some of the building bathrooms, I was like, "I don't
3 know where people are at." I heard some people say very transphobic things, particularly about
4 my other trans friends and some of their partners who are trans. It was more just that I didn't
5 know the landscape. I just jumped in and was like, "Oh, it's the Pacific Northwest, it's fine." And
6 then kind of had to re-adjust and focus and be like, "OK, actually no – transphobia exists
7 anywhere." So I just had to re-adjust my expectations. Growing up in the Midwest, people are
8 always like, "Oh Midwest is the backwards place and the Pacific Northwest is liberal and
9 progressive."
- 10 AJ: Progressive, liberal, utopia kind of place.
- 11 JB: Yeah, and I got there was like, "Oh no, they lied. The Midwest is not any more racist or
12 transphobic or homophobic than here, it's just different." So I just had to re-adjust. College has
13 been great but in very specific ways, and it's been horrible in very specific ways.
- 14 AJ: What about names and . . . ?
- 15 JB: I'd already changed all my documents so I got there and it was fine.
- 16 AJ: So . . .
- 17 JB: Yeah, the only document I don't have changed is my birth certificate, which you rarely have to
18 show people.
- 19 AJ: So let me ask you this, Jae, and please, to the extent that you feel comfortable answering the
20 question – if you don't want to answer, don't, have you undergone any medical interventions
21 around your gender identity beyond what you've already discussed with this hormonal therapy.
- 22 JB: I had a bi-lateral mastectomy when I was a senior in high school, which is actually why I ended
23 up stopping track. I was a thrower when I was in track and field.
- 24 AJ: Oh really.
- 25 JB: I ended up getting my chest surgery during track season so it was just . . . you know, you can't
26 do anything for months.
- 27 AJ: Yeah, you can't lift your arm over your head.
- 28 JB: Yeah. So I got surgery when I turned 18 because that was the policy on my insurance – you had
29 to be 18 or you had to be at least two years on testosterone, which I wasn't. So I waited until I
30 was 18, I got the surgery at the University of Minnesota, and that's the only thing other than
31 testosterone that I've done. They recommend that you get a hysterectomy to prevent diseases
32 and cancers on the uterus and stuff like that but I'm just too nervous and afraid to go see an OB-
33 GYN so I just haven't done anything related to . . .
- 34 AJ: Because of your trans identity?

- 1 JB: Yeah, yeah. I need to research trans-friendly OB-GYNs because I'm sure they exist, I just haven't
2 had the time. It's one of those things where you have time but you just avoid it and avoid it. It's
3 not necessarily the most fun to do even if you're a cis gender woman.
- 4 AJ: It's pretty invasive.
- 5 JB: So that's . . . I think that I will do that eventually because they recommend it for your health, and
6 then also the insurance would really have no choice but to give me testosterone.
- 7 AJ: Yeah, they would cover that and then . . .
- 8 JB: Immediately, because you have no hormones left. But yeah, that's the extent of what I've had.
- 9 AJ: OK, well thank you. What have been some of the more positive aspects of expressing your true
10 gender identity?
- 11 JB: Meeting other trans and non-binary folks. I think the friends that I've made in . . . just the LGBT
12 community in general, but specifically other trans folks, especially at college, has probably been
13 one of the most positive things about my transition – other than like the personal being able to
14 be a very happy, well-adjusted person and all that. I think the thing that . . .
- 15 AJ: Which is important I would suspect, I'm just going out on a limb here.
- 16 JB: I think one of the more tangible super-positive experiences has been meeting other folks and
17 just hearing about what their identity means to them. I think one of the most fulfilling things
18 has been to talk to young trans folks, in particular – non-binary kids. So I did a lot of youth work
19 when I was at . . . I was interning at OutFront and I was working a lot with . . .
- 20 AJ: OutFront Minnesota?
- 21 JB: OutFront Minnesota – yeah. And I was working a lot with schools and youth, so kids K-12 and
22 just meeting other kids who were in the midst of the 7th grade – younger and younger than I was
23 when I came out. So that's been really cool, to just talk to them and be like . . . not necessarily
24 that, "Oh, it gets better," but just, "It is OK, it's cool."
- 25 AJ: Yeah, life can happen, you can be happy and work. The world doesn't end when you come out.
- 26 JB: Yeah, so getting resources to other trans folks and working with them and hanging out with
27 them. So yeah, just befriending people and making more friends, I think, has been one of the
28 most positive experiences. There's a good group of trans and non-binary kids that I hang out at
29 college.
- 30 AJ: Is that right? Cool. Are you involved in any sort of LGBT groups or activism at college?
- 31 JB: Yeah, I mostly do campus organizing at school. I haven't gotten super out into state-wide stuff,
32 but just locally in Tacoma. I do my school's Queer Alliance, I'm the co-president with my best
33 friend. My best friend, Rory, is the other co-president. I think almost all of our officers of the
34 Queer Alliance, except for one person, are people of color.
- 35 AJ: Nice.

- 1 JB: We're really trying to get more queer and trans folks of color to come to Queer Alliance because
2 historically college queer spaces have been very white. I'm working really hard on that, in
3 particular, right now. And then I also do a club called Deconstructing Masculinity for folks who
4 identify as masculine to talk about the rape culture on college campuses and ending all forms of
5 violence. So it's just kind of anti-violence work. I attend other groups from time-to-time, mostly
6 around immigrant injustice because my best friend comes from family with . . . a lot of her
7 family members are undocumented and she is Mexican American and so she does a lot of
8 campus activism around immigration injustice and deportation. I just attend random other . . .
- 9 AJ: You're an intersectional superstar.
- 10 JB: It's fun because it's a small campus so when you're involved in one group it's like you are . . .
11 you're at least connected to the other groups.
- 12 AJ: It has a ripple effect.
- 13 JB: Yeah, it's easier to show up for other people and learn about other identities. We have one
14 student diversity center and it houses everyone from the Jewish student groups to justice for
15 undocumented folks to Queer Alliance. We're all very interconnected and it makes it very easy
16 to learn more about other people's identities instead of having like a Queer Center and a Center
17 for People of Color.
- 18 AJ: Yeah, it's all sort of one big happy social justice family.
- 19 JB: Yeah, yeah. The building has to be intersectional.
- 20 AJ: That's awesome. So looking back over your decision to come out, would you do anything
21 differently?
- 22 JB: I would probably not do it over text so much. I think a problem . . .
- 23 AJ: With your mom, you mean?
- 24 JB: Yeah. I mean with other people too. It's just a generational . . . it's harder and harder to have
25 in-person exchange.
- 26 AJ: Yeah, nobody makes phone calls anymore – that's just what happens.
- 27 JB: I think my mom really would have liked it if I had just told her in person but it's something that
28 she had known for a while so it was just more about that direction communication. But I mean,
29 coming out . . . the only other thing I would have changed is doing it younger, just because I
30 would have had more time, I guess, to figure . . . to really be involved and figure things out,
31 maybe at a little slower pace. When I came out in high school, it was still pretty early in high
32 school, but it was like, "We need to figure out everything and do it before you go to college so
33 that college isn't so hard," I guess. Or the transition to college isn't so hard. So yeah, it was a
34 little bit like rushed, like, "Here's the thing, we have to go do this." It all got lumped into my
35 senior year and so I missed a lot of class senior year just doing court and going to the DMV and .
36 . .
- 37 AJ: And for the surgery.

- 1 JB: Yeah, surgery and being at home. I ended up dropping my senior year math class because it was
2 like, "I don't need that credit and also, I can't keep up because I'm at home." So yeah.
- 3 AJ: Did you go to the prom?
- 4 JB: I went to prom my sophomore year because I was dating an older girl. I didn't go for my junior
5 prom and then didn't go . . . my senior prom, I was still bandaged up.
- 6 AJ: Oh wow.
- 7 JB: Didn't want to jump around.
- 8 AJ: So dating and relationships? Are you in a relationship right now?
- 9 JB: I am in a relationship right now. I've been dating my girlfriend, Erin, for about a year and eight
10 months. We met through mutual friends. She identifies as asexual and biromantic and so . . .
- 11 AJ: Asexual?
- 12 JB: Asexual and biromantic.
- 13 AJ: Biromantic. So explain that to me.
- 14 JB: She identifies as asexual, which means that she doesn't experience sexual attraction to anybody
15 and doesn't make sex as part of intimacy in relationships. So doesn't have . . . she just doesn't
16 have interest in sex. And then biromantic, so she is romantically interested in . . .
- 17 AJ: Multiple people.
- 18 JB: Yeah, and multiple genders.
- 19 AJ: And multiple genders.
- 20 JB: Yeah, multiple genders. So yeah, I met her through mutual friends and knew that she at least
21 liked men, but I also knew that she was asexual. So I asked her out on a date, it was pretty
22 normal college date. We went for frozen yogurt for our first date. So it was pretty normal in
23 terms of the way that it happened. And then just didn't really talk about me being trans until . .
24 . we were figuring out if we were going to date and I was kind of like, "You already know this,"
25 because we go to Queer Alliance together, and we kind of just talked about it – or I just . . .
- 26 AJ: You thought you should be more specific or more intentional about it.
- 27 JB: Yeah, so I was like, "So you know I'm trans." And she was like, "Yeah, that's fine." I was like,
28 "OK." That was really all we talked about and the big problem was that her parents are very
29 conservative and she's not out at home as biromantic. She didn't think it would be a problem
30 because I look very much like a man. So she hadn't intended on telling her parents that I was
31 trans. So she didn't tell her parents immediately that we were dating and then her neighbor or
32 something saw it on Facebook and told her parents – but not like in an angry way, just like, "Oh,
33 Erin has a boyfriend." So they were just interested in knowing who I was and they looked me up
34 on Facebook or something and they saw . . . my Facebook is just queer stuff.
- 35 AJ: Right, it's like pink and blue and . . .

- 1 JB: Yeah, Black Lives Matter, they're very conservative people from the suburbs of Seattle. So it
2 was like their worst nightmare because I was into racial justice, I was a Democrat . . . well, not a
3 Democrat, but democratic stuff, and all this queer and trans stuff. So they were not happy
4 about that and it was a very big struggle for a couple of months there. Her dad would . . . when
5 they found out, he tried to come to campus and talk to her about it.
- 6 AJ: Really?
- 7 JB: Yeah, it was a big thing. Now it's better.
- 8 AJ: Do they know she's asexual? Like there's really no sex . . .
- 9 JB: She's not out at all because she doesn't think they would understand any of it. So it's . . . it's
10 gotten better, but it was hard for a couple months.
- 11 AJ: Asexual seems like the kind of thing you might feel comfortable telling your parents about
12 because most parents would be like, "Yay!"
- 13 JB: But yeah, it's been hard. Eventually it got better – like I can go over there now but her parents
14 still aren't big fans of me.
- 15 AJ: I'm sorry. How long have you guys been hanging out?
- 16 JB: So I've known her for like two years but we've been dating for a year and eight months. So
17 yeah, her parents are getting over it. I've been to her house and I've stayed at her house and I
18 went to their cabin with them – or whatever.
- 19 AJ: So it's getting better.
- 20 JB: Yeah. We've hung out before with her parents, so it's more just kind of her . . . especially her
21 mom, I guess, or whatever she told me. I think they're getting over it and I think it's particularly
22 because I perform masculinity in a way that is more traditional or what they see as traditional. I
23 wear very masculine clothes and I can talk about football, which is funny because I don't like it
24 but I had to learn perform masculine . . . that's the interesting thing, when I transitioned I had to
25 learn how to perform . . . I was already very masculine but then I had to learn how to over
26 perform masculinity.
- 27 AJ: But you were socialized as a young woman.
- 28 JB: Yeah, as a girl.
- 29 AJ: A young girl.
- 30 JB: So I had to learn how to socialize with men, it was weird. I had to learn . . . there were all these
31 things that people expected me to know how to talk about so I had to Google stuff and I had to
32 learn how to socialize with men, which is not always a healthy thing. So I learned how to
33 healthily socialize with other men, but also not buy-in to toxic socialization.
- 34 AJ: Sure.

- 1 JB: I had to learn random things about random sports that people like to make small talk about –
2 especially Minnesota, the Vikings – like how are they doing? And Seattle with the Seahawks.
- 3 AJ: Oh my gosh, they love the Seahawks out there.
- 4 JB: Yeah. So in order to perform masculinity in college and also to get her parents to like me more, I
5 had to learn about the Seahawks and I had to be able to talk about them for a couple minutes.
- 6 AJ: But you like sports, you were an athlete.
- 7 JB: I like sports, but I had to over perform it. I had no interest in learning about this – I like watching
8 the Super Bowl and athletics, but it was like I really need to know my stuff in order for her
9 parents to kind of accept me as a man – and so kind of do traditional masculine roles. I'm
10 always kind of aware when I'm with them with performing masculinity so that they can see us as
11 a hetero, normative couple. So that's how dating is with me. Before that I was just kind of
12 worried about dating. I've always been . . . like when I came out as trans initially I was very
13 worried. The person that I was dating when I came out was, at the time, identified as bi-sexual
14 and then just came out, after we broke up, came out as a lesbian and kind of realized that she
15 doesn't like men. She had dated two people who are now trans men before.
- 16 AJ: Oh wow.
- 17 JB: So I think she just realized that that was kind of a factor, she saw us both as men but just didn't
18 want to date men. I can't speak for her but I think that's . . .
- 19 AJ: Yeah, I mean in some ways that's somewhat comforting.
- 20 JB: Yeah, kind of like, "OK, well that's validating."
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 JB: But yeah, so I was always kind of worried, "Will I be able to date? Will I always only have to look
23 for bi-women?" And then as I progressed through high school, I realized, "Oh, I'm not a straight
24 man." I am attracted to men and I would like to date men but I think I was always just afraid of
25 dating men before I had transitioned because I hadn't spent a lot of time around men and I was
26 bullied primarily by boys in school, so I didn't socialize with a lot of boys except for queer men,
27 in particular. And I'm still really not friends with many men except for queer men. And so, yeah,
28 I just grew up really afraid to socialize with men. But now that I've transitioned and people read
29 me completely as male, it's more comfortable for me to say, "I'm a queer man, I'm comfortable
30 around other men, and I want to date men the next time that I'm in the dating pool."
- 31 AJ: That might be an option?
- 32 JB: Yeah. So I identify as a queer man because I'm much more comfortable with my sexuality now
33 than I was before.
- 34 AJ: Wow, I love it. So you won an award from OutFront Minnesota.
- 35 JB: Yeah. I can't remember what it's called . . . The Visionary Award.

- 1 AJ: The Visionary Award. Tell me about why you were selected for that award. What was the work
2 that you did that sort of put you in that spotlight?
- 3 JB: I did a lot of work on Safe Schools when that was happening and then I did a lot of work on trans
4 . . . the Minnesota State High School League stuff. I can't remember if that was before that or
5 after that, I don't know. But I was doing a lot of work with trans youth in particular. It was
6 actually a complete surprise to me, I had just been called by Jeanne, who used to work there,
7 and she told me that they had nominated me and that I'd won. I didn't really know what was
8 going on but they . . . I found out when I found out that I had won that there was even a thing.
9 So, I'm still feeling like what did I do, so I don't know. I don't like receiving awards, I really don't.
10 I'm still like, "What did I do?" I think it was mostly my work with trans youth. I was running a
11 series of what we called Trans Ally Training, so just teaching community members about what
12 pronouns are and different gender identities that exist – just Trans 101-kind of basics. I think it
13 was mostly around that and the safe school stuff, which I testified and did a lot of lobbying and
14 was at the . . . not the Trans Youth Summit but the youth summit that they had in St. Paul.
- 15 AJ: Which is a big deal for a 17, 18-year-old, to go and talk to the state senators and legislators,
16 politicians. That's a really big deal, Jae.
- 17 JB: It was a really big honor but it was . . . yeah, I still am sometimes like . . . I don't know, there are
18 so many people who I feel like deserve recognition and getting awards always makes me just a
19 little uncomfortable – but not because I don't value the work or anything, it's just mostly
20 because I'm that kid who is like, "I feel like everyone should get an award for doing the work."
- 21 AJ: Absolutely.
- 22 JB: I don't like singling people out. I have complicated feelings about some of the work that I did
23 sometimes because sometimes the youth work feels like you're becoming a poster child for anti-
24 bullying work or being trans youth of color. And I know some other youth had trouble with why
25 am I here, what is the work that we're doing kind of just around being young and being in the
26 work . . . sometimes you feel like a show pony when you go to these events. "These are the
27 youth." "The Youth."
- 28 AJ: The youth – yeah.
- 29 JB: Particularly youth of color. "Look, they're thriving and successful." So going to a lot of the
30 conferences and fund raisers and the gala is just kind of like, "Look at this kind of shining
31 person."
- 32 AJ: Tokenization.
- 33 JB: Yes, being tokenized. I don't think anyone was intentionally tokenizing me but it was just that
34 feeling of like, "What am I receiving this giant glass trophy for?" I know it was from the
35 community work I was doing – for trans communities, but it's still . . . I don't like the stand-up
36 recognition.
- 37 AJ: Well, congratulations anyway.
- 38 JB: You too.

- 1 AJ: What's next for you? What's your vision for the next five years of your life? You're a junior in
2 college now.
- 3 JB: Yeah, so originally I went into college and I was like, "I'm going to do psychology because I'm
4 going to work with . . . I want to work in the health care system and work with trans youth and
5 reduce health care services for trans youth of color." And all that stuff. But then I got to college
6 and I was like, "Oh yeah, I hate science and I'm really bad at it, so I can't do psychology. I can't
7 be a doctor." Which I didn't want to be a doctor but I had thought psychology would be OK. But
8 that just doesn't work with the way that I learn. So I found the Study of Religious Studies and I
9 found . . . I'm an African American Studies, Gender Studies and Chinese Language and Culture,
10 which sounds like a lot. People are always like, "That's insane." But they're all very . . . they
11 intersect very well, so most of those departments you can take classes and it double counts. It's
12 not as bad as people think it sounds. So I'm very into the humanities and I'm very into . . . so I
13 thought maybe I could apply for pre-law or something and then work in trans law. I really
14 wanted to do something that was intentional so I could continue to work in queer and trans
15 communities, but then I got selected to work in residence life and I started to work in student
16 affairs at my college and at student centers and work with other students and realized that I
17 really liked that work – working with young people but in a way that's kind of just more on an
18 equal level instead of, "I'm this lawyer and I'm top down, I'm going to help you with this
19 service." But more just kind of talking and working together and so I think that I'd really like to
20 go into student affairs like at a college when I'm done, and work with students from
21 marginalized backgrounds and minoritized students on college campuses because the people
22 that I've met who do those jobs have completely changed my experience in college and have
23 made it bearable and wonderful and positive.
- 24 AJ: Nice.
- 25 JB: We do great things, so I would love to do that and especially because we'll be . . . this is the first
26 year, but I started the Trans Non-Binary Housing Program at my college.
- 27 AJ: Really?
- 28 JB: Yeah, so that's what I'm an RA for, residence assistance, to run that program – or not run it, run
29 it, but to do that program. I really think that after college I'd love to . . .
- 30 AJ: And it's called the Queer . . .
- 31 JB: It's called the Trans and Non-Binary Housing at the University of Puget Sound. So I figured out –
32 you know, I really like working in the Student Diversity Center and I really like working with
33 residents and helping them figure out there are resources on this college campus for you even
34 though this college campus wasn't built with you in mind. So, doing that kind of work is what I
35 think I want to do.
- 36 AJ: And you think after college you'll pursue the academy and work within the institution?
- 37 JB: Yeah, it will depend on if I can afford it. So I'm currently receiving enough scholarships to cover
38 my undergrad for full ride except for about \$4000 that I pay.

- 1 AJ: Nice, that's pretty amazing.
- 2 JB: Yeah, I receive a lot of grants and scholarships through religious and spiritual life. We have a lot
3 of scholarships for students from marginalized backgrounds so I apply for so many of those that
4 I'm able to afford undergrad. So going on to see if I can get a graduate degree to do student
5 affairs will depend on if I find one of those employment programs that helps you pay for it or if I
6 can get a good enough job out of college to be able to pursue that. But I would like to get . . .
7 because there is a degree program for student affairs that you can do these jobs, so hopefully I'll
8 be able to do that. And actually the office that I work for at my college is going to hopefully
9 soon be offering a post-graduate program so after you get your BA and before you figure out
10 what you're doing with the rest of your life, they have a paid position for someone to work in
11 student affairs and to learn about what that's about.
- 12 AJ: I'm going to predict you get that job.
- 13 JB: I'm hoping that I'm able to do that job. But that's what I'd like to do in the next five years.
- 14 AJ: Where do you see the transgender community in the next 50 years? There's been so much
15 visibility, so much progress even though we're witnessing a lot of backlash from the H2 Bill in
16 North Carolina to the murders that happened in Orlando recently. But what do you see . . . or
17 where do you see the transgender community headed in the next 50 years?
- 18 JB: Fifty years is a long time. I feel like a lot of stuff has rapidly . . . or not rapidly, but comparatively
19 to other things, kind of rapidly come into the mainstream as an issue at least. Liberation isn't
20 happening at necessarily the same pace as visibility is happening.
- 21 AJ: I love that.
- 22 JB: Which I think is the real program I'm having – a lot of folks can read Janet Mock's book and . . .
- 23 AJ: Watch *Orange is the New Black*.
- 24 JB: And watch *Orange is the New Black* and love LaVerne Cox and have the *Vanity Fair* cover of
25 Caitlyn Jenner or whatever they think is ally ship but it's not really . . . they can say . . . wear
26 buttons that say, 'I'll Go With You' and they can think that going to the bathroom with their
27 trans friends will help. And they can shop at Target all they want to support, but it's just
28 visibility happens so much faster than any of the liberation work. So now it's like . . . I think
29 especially cis folks are under the impression that liberation has happened with visibility and that
30 rights are coming faster than before or something. I'm hearing a lot of people talk about it and
31 name drop all these great people and this terminology, but I'm not seeing any change in terms
32 of insurance companies and discrimination and firing practices and hiring practices and every
33 day safety. In 50 years I would hope that the systemic violence – like violence in the health care
34 system and discrimination is, at least, closer to the average amount of whatever people already
35 experience of non-trans folks. And I would hope that a lot of the individuals, like the personal
36 violence, has been reduced. But I think in 50 years we'll be probably in the same place with
37 assimilation that I think queer folks are at. I already see it happening right now, which is the be
38 just like all the other cis people and just kind of molding us into . . . you know, the military letting
39 trans folks be out in the military, so not talking about what's wrong with the military and what's

1 wrong with the state and violence against trans folks. But, “You can be part of us now, you can
2 do this now.” I kind of see it moving . . . that’s like with a lot of social things, just move the
3 marginalized folks into here and then that will make it better, instead of figuring out what our
4 differences are and how those can still be beautiful if you just don’t commit violence.

5 AJ: So assimilation.

6 JB: Assimilation, yeah. I see it kind of moving towards there – like here’s what it is and just kind of a
7 treat being trans so that you can pass as cis is kind of where I’m worried it will move towards,
8 just kind of . . . health care might get easier but not really to benefit us, really. We can make
9 sure that trans folks are all transitioning and that kind of stuff. So still no room for gender
10 queerness and non-binary. I would hope that there is room for that but I’m just kind of guessing
11 – at least the mainstream is very . . . like trans women, trans me – great, sounds good, move
12 them in with the rest of the folks so that they can do their jobs and go to work 9-5, do that
13 thing.

14 AJ: All those other weirdos stay over there.

15 JB: Yeah. So I’m kind of worried it’s moved in the same direction, focusing on these very particular
16 things that cis folks think are very important – kind of the way that queer liberation people
17 thought stopped at marriage when it doesn’t.

18 AJ: Right.

19 JB: Yeah, I’m just kind of worried that what is important is going to get lost along the way. But
20 overall I think it’s going to be safe, like a lot safer to be trans – hopefully.

21 AJ: Yeah. There’s no right answer, we’re just visiting your future.

22 JB: Fifty years is a long time. But yeah, that’s kind of what I think. Assimilation is what we’re
23 moving . . . what a lot of people are moving towards.

24 AJ: Wow. Well I can’t thank you enough, Jae, for this conversation.

25 JB: Yeah, thank you so much.

26 AJ: You are my new hero right now. I know you’re headed off to South Korea.

27 JB: Yeah.

28 AJ: I just want to wish you safe travels and good luck on this journey in your life.

29 JB: Thank you, I’m excited. Thanks.

30 AJ: Peace.

31 JB: Thanks.

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