

Meredith Verzina
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

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

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

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

Andrea Jenkins

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Meredith Vezina -MV
3
4 AJ: So good afternoon.
5
6 MV: Hi.
7
8 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for The Transgender Oral History Project
9 at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota Libraries. Today is 1/13/17. Friday the
10 13th...
11
12 MV: 13th.
13
14 AJ: ... 2017. I am in San Diego, California, and today I'm actually at the Lambda Archives. San Diego's
15 LGBT or is it GLBT, I don't know.
16
17 MV: LGBT here.
18
19 AJ: LGBT, uh, history and learning center.
20
21 MV: This is, this is where all the photographs, the documents, the papers, uhm, a lot of people who
22 have died have donated their materials.
23
24 AJ: Mhm.
25
26 MV: It's like any other archives but it just focuses on LGBT.
27
28 AJ: LGBT. Absolutely. So it's a beautiful space. I hope to get a little footage of what's going on
29 around here.
30
31 MV: Alright.
32
33 AJ: Uh, but, uhm, I'm here today with Meredith Verzina.
34
35 MV: Yes.
36
37 AJ: Yeah?
38
39 MV: Yep.
40
41 AJ: Meredith, uh, how are you doing today?
42
43 MV: I'm doing just fine. Uhm, I wish it was a little bit warmer but, uhm, it's...
44
45 AJ: Yeah.
46
47 MV: ... not quite San Diego's weather but I'm doing really well.

1
2 AJ: Well if you know anything about me I live in Minneapolis, Minnesota.
3
4 MV: Oh, this must be balmy for you then.
5
6 AJ: It's, it's quite balmy at sixty degrees right now.
7
8 MV: Yeah, well, for us San Diegans it's cold.
9
10 AJ: Yeah, I can imagine. So Meredith, can you do me a few things? Uhm, state your name...
11
12 MV: Okay.
13
14 AJ: And spell it so that we make sure we have the correct spelling...
15
16 MV: Okay.
17
18 AJ: ... and correct pronunciation. Also, uhm, tell me, what, how you identify your gender today.
19
20 MV: Okay.
21
22 AJ: What was your gender assigned at birth? And, uh, what pronouns do you use?
23
24 MV: Okay, so those are a lot of questions. You gotta remember I'm old. So you should have given me
25 one at a time.
26
27 AJ: Anytime you need help, let me know.
28
29 MV: Okay, uhm, Meredith. M.E.R.E.D.I.T.H. Vezina. V as in Victor. E. Z like a zebra. I.N.A.
30
31 AJ: Uhuh.
32
33 MV: I got used to saying that because people are always misspelling it.
34
35 AJ: [Laughs].
36
37 MV: Uhm, I go by the pronouns she and her.
38
39 AJ: Okay.
40
41 MV: What— what else? See I told you.
42
43 AJ: Uh, identity, how you describe yourself today.
44
45 MV: As a transwoman.
46
47 AJ: Transwoman. And your assigned gender at birth.

1
2 MV: Male.
3
4 AJ: Okay. Thank you so much.
5
6 MV: Mhm.
7
8 AJ: Uhm, so I really want to talk a little bit about this archives but before we dig into all of that good
9 stuff, I just want to know what is your earliest memory in life, Meredith? Like the first thing you
10 remember.
11
12 MV: My earliest memory in life?
13
14 AJ: Yep. The first thing you remember.
15
16 MV: Not about trans stuff? Just earliest memories, huh?
17
18 AJ: If it's about trans stuff that is perfectly fine...
19
20 MV: Nah, nah. No, no.
21
22 AJ: ... but if it's about playing on the schoolyard with a chicken, that's perfectly fine too.
23
24 MV: My earliest memory is when, I was probably like three or four years old.
25
26 AJ: Uhuh.
27
28 MV: We lived in an apartment building. Uhm, it only had four apartments in it, but we were on the
29 top floor.
30
31 AJ: Mhm.
32
33 MV: And [clears throat] one day my dad went out. This, this would have been in the mid-1950's.
34
35 AJ: Okay.
36
37 MV: And those were the days where you had antennas on the roof, and he went out to, out now four
38 stories up to adjust the antenna on the roof to try to get a better reception. And he didn't know
39 that, that I followed him up on the roof. And I was only like three or four years old.
40
41 AJ: Uhuh.
42
43 MV: I remember kinda like walking on the roof, remember we're up four stories here...
44
45 AJ: Wow.
46

1 MV: And I remember saying, “Hi, Dad.” And I remember him just looking at me and going, “Hi,” and
2 smiling...
3
4 AJ: [Laughs].
5
6 MV: ... and just coming over and grabbing me. So that’s my earliest memory.
7
8 AJ: Really?
9
10 MV: Yeah.
11
12 AJ: He must have thought you were—
13
14 MV: Taking me off the roof.
15
16 AJ: He must have thought you were like on top of the Sears tower or Empire State Building or
17 something like that.
18
19 MV: I guess I really didn’t know what I was doing.
20
21 AJ: Yeah.
22
23 MV: But he saved me so I remember that as my earliest memory.
24
25 AJ: Cool. That’s a great memory. Where, where was this? Where did that happen?
26
27 MV: Berlin, New Hampshire.
28
29 AJ: Okay.
30
31 MV: Berlin, New Hampshire is up by the Canadian border.
32
33 AJ: Uhuh.
34
35 MV: And it’s, it was a, uhm, a mill town, basically lumber. A lumber mill. All based on that. Uhm, had
36 a population of about thirty thousand people.
37
38 AJ: Berlin. B.E.R.L.I.N.
39
40 MV: L.I.N. Just like Berlin, Germany.
41
42 AJ: Okay.
43
44 MV: Okay. It’s still around. It’s much— it’s, uhm, just a shell of its former self now that the lumber
45 industry is gone.
46
47 AJ: Mhm.

1
2 MV: There may be ten, twelve thousand people left there.
3
4 AJ: Yeah, I, uh, went to graduate school in Manchester, New Hampshire.
5
6 MV: Okay. I know Manchester.
7
8 AJ: They took all the mini mills...
9
10 MV: Mhm. And they converted some into...
11
12 AJ: ... into them into condos and...
13
14 MV: Right, they made museums out of some of them.
15
16 AJ: Museums and restaurants and shops.
17
18 MV: Yeah. Well, Manchester, Manchester is a big city.
19
20 AJ: Yeah, all one-hundred thousand people. [Laughs].
21
22 MV: Mhm.
23
24 AJ: Yeah, it's a big city for New Hampshire though I think.
25
26 MV: Yes, it's where we used to go if you needed a specialist. You know, we had doctors but if you
27 needed a particular kind of doctor you had to go to Manchester.
28
29 AJ: Mhm. Sure. You'd go to Manchester. Absolutely. Uhm, so you grew up in New Hampshire, in
30 Berlin all your life?
31
32 MV: No. Uhm, until I was, uh, seven years old.
33
34 AJ: Mhm.
35
36 MV: And then we moved on, we moved down to Long Island.
37
38 AJ: Okay.
39
40 MV: So my formative years were spent in New York [pronounced without the 'r'].
41
42 AJ: New York.
43
44 MV: New York. I learned how to talk that way. Uhm, but I went to, back to college at the University of
45 Vermont.
46
47 AJ: Got it.

1
2 MV: So when I was eighteen, I moved out of that area...
3
4 AJ: Mhm.
5
6 MV: ... and, uh, lived in Vermont, got married, uhm, but then that's when I decided to transition and
7 came out to California.
8
9 AJ: Okay, huh, so when you were in school in, on, on the Island, [laughs] as they call it in New York,
10 Long Island, did you have any sense of your gender identity?
11
12 MV: Sure. I didn't really understand what it was.
13
14 AJ: Mhm.
15
16 MV: Uhm, I just—
17
18 AJ: You mean you didn't use the language, "I'm a transgender woman."
19
20 MV: Not in 1965.
21
22 AJ: [Laughs]. Okay.
23
24 MV: Uhm, I really didn't understand what it was, what it was but I knew that, uhm, you know, I
25 excelled in sports so I, I played, you know, baseball, football, everything.
26
27 AJ: Mhm.
28
29 MV: And, uhm, I always yearned to be the cheerleaders, you know.
30
31 AJ: Yeah. Wow.
32
33 MV: I mean, for some reason I would always look over at them and say, "I wish I was with the
34 cheerleaders" instead of the, instead of the players.
35
36 AJ: Wow. Even though you were good at it and...
37
38 MV: Yeah, I was pretty good but I still wanted to be a cheerleader. So, you know, it, it, it was a
39 constant, uhm, uh, it was constantly in my mind in the sense of things could trigger me. I'd see,
40 uhm, the cheerleaders or somebody in school, and, and I would just yearn to be a woman, you
41 know. I couldn't explain it. I kept it hidden. I wouldn't say anything to anybody.
42
43 AJ: Mhm.
44
45 MV: I acted out a few times when I was young. Uhm, but my parents, uh, made sure that I knew it
46 was wrong, you know.
47

1 AJ: Okay.
2
3 MV: I remember I got one time into my mother's makeup. One time I put on one of her slips. Uhm,
4 they discovered me, and they shamed me.
5
6 AJ: Mmm.
7
8 MV: And it was, you know, a bad scene. So I knew that that was the wrong thing to do.
9
10 AJ: Sure.
11
12 MV: So, you know, I repressed it. At least outwardly but in my mind never went away.
13
14 AJ: Yeah, no. I understand and lived through very many of those same feelings.
15
16 MV: Yeah. I'm sure.
17
18 AJ: Uhm, so, so your school was pretty, I mean, you had these internal feelings but outwardly
19 nobody really knew, nobody bullied you or...
20
21 MV: Nope.
22
23 AJ: ... made fun of you? What about your family?
24
25 MV: I remember, I remember, I remember my, uhm, uh, the, uh, the girl that I went to, uh, the prom
26 with.
27
28 AJ: Mhm.
29
30 MV: Uhm, the closest I got to anybody knowing, uhm, she one time said. I was at her house and her
31 parents were gone and she said, "Let me dress you up as a girl." And I didn't, I said, "Okay, we'll
32 do it as a joke."
33
34 AJ: Yeah.
35
36 MV: You know. And, and that's about the closest— I almost told her but I didn't. I just kind of went
37 along with the whole thing.
38
39 AJ: Yeah. Uhm, wow. [Laughs]. It's like a transgender person's like dream. [Laughs].
40
41 MV: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's why I said I didn't object.
42
43 AJ: [Laughs]. Right. Uhm, but she was just kind of joking. It wasn't like she—
44
45 MV: Yeah, I mean she was doing it kind of like a lark sort of thing...
46
47 AJ: Sure.

1
2 MV: ... and, and, uh, uhm, you know, so, but you asked about if I ever...
3
4 AJ: No, no, no. What was family life like? Did you have siblings?
5
6 MV: I have two sisters who are much younger than me...
7
8 AJ: Mhm.
9
10 MV: ... uhm, by fifteen years.
11
12 AJ: Oh, wow.
13
14 MV: Yeah, so, uh...
15
16 AJ: So you really didn't grow up with them?
17
18 MV: No, no. I babysat them for a while.
19
20 AJ: Uhuh.
21
22 MV: You know, I did that when I was like sixteen, seventeen years old.
23
24 AJ: Sure.
25
26 MV: And they were just one and two.
27
28 AJ: Toddlers.
29
30 MV: Yeah. Yeah. Uhm, but then I went away to school. So I never really connected with them, you
31 know.
32
33 AJ: Yeah. You love them. They're your, they're your siblings.
34
35 MV: I'd come back for Christmas and things like that, but I wasn't, I didn't grow up with them.
36
37 AJ: Right.
38
39 MV: So, you know.
40
41 AJ: Exactly.
42
43 MV: And my parents were decent people. Uhm, they were always, you know, we lived in middle
44 class, uh, suburban, uh, basically, uhm, I had a pretty good life. My father was always involved in
45 my sports activities or in Boy Scouts.
46
47 AJ: Mhm.

1
2 MV: And he was, you know, very active, and my mother was always supportive and stuff.
3
4 AJ: Wow. And, to, intact family, both your parents were there for your entire...
5
6 MV: Yep, yep.
7
8 AJ: ... growing up and all that good stuff.
9
10 MV: Yep, they were married about, I think about sixty years. Both of them are dead now but they...
11
12 AJ: Oh wow. So when did you first decide to deal with your gender identity?
13
14 MV: Uhm, it was in Vermont.
15
16 AJ: Mhm.
17
18 MV: I had, I, I grad— I, uhm, I didn't graduate. I left school. And I got a job, uhm, in a, in a clinic. It
19 was, uh, a clinic, a group six doctors that ran this country clinic, and I, uhm, was in charge of
20 running the clinic, and I was also in charge of the pharmacy that they had in the clinic.
21
22 AJ: Hm.
23
24 MV: And I started, uh, taking female, female hormones, at the time birth control pills. Uhm, I wanted
25 to see what would happen.
26
27 AJ: Unprescribed?
28
29 MV: Unprescribed. Yeah. But it was my way of forcing the issue out because I knew something I had
30 to do and I didn't have the courage just to do it. So I took this stuff and eventually someone saw
31 me taking it because, I, I make no bones about it. I just go in the cabinet and take it.
32
33 AJ: Oh wow.
34
35 MV: So I was doing it, you know, uhm, not trying to really hide it and when I look back on it I think I
36 was doing it to get caught, to have a big upset, to get fired to, uhm, and then come out.
37
38 AJ: Right.
39
40 MV: You know. It, it kind of forced my hand.
41
42 AJ: Is that how it worked?
43
44 MV: Yeah. Exactly. Exactly. They, they found out. They decided, uh, they weren't going to prosecute
45 me or anything. They just fired me. So I said, "Fine, I'd leave."
46
47 AJ: Mhm.

1
2 MV: And that's when I, uhm, opened up to my wife, and, uh...
3
4 AJ: So you were married at the time?
5
6 MV: I was married. No children. We were married for about five years.
7
8 AJ: Mhm.
9
10 MV: And, uhm, uhm, she, uh, told me that she didn't marry a lesbian so, uhm, that wasn't going to
11 work out. And so I decided that I didn't have, I didn't want to transition, uhm, back east. I just
12 didn't have the, I just didn't want to be around people that knew me.
13
14 AJ: Sure.
15
16 MV: So I left. And actually it was on my way to San Francisco because I heard that's where everybody
17 is supposed to go...
18
19 AJ: [Laughs]. Right.
20
21 MV: ... is San Francisco, right. But as I was coming across the country I got, uhm, one day I, I, I got into
22 Tucson. It was really late at night, and I went to sleep at a rest stop, and when I woke up in the
23 morning there were all, there were all these cactuses around. And I just fell in love with the
24 desert and the place...
25
26 AJ: Uhuh. Uhuh.
27
28 MV: ... and the way it was, you know. So I stayed in Tucson. Got a job in Tucson. Uhm, worked for this
29 company for two years, uhm, as a woman. I transitioned at the time. I went into this hotel room
30 and came out as a woman and never changed again.
31
32 AJ: Uhuh. Is that right? Wow.
33
34 MV: Yeah. So, uhm, you know, I, I, it was relatively easy for me to pass.
35
36 AJ: That's like a superwoman, uhm [Laughs].
37
38 MV: Yeah, it was relatively easy for me to pass so I had that privilege.
39
40 AJ: Uhuh.
41
42 MV: And I went and got a job, did well at the job. Uhm, so they sent me out to San Diego to run the
43 office that was out here. It was a medical supply house.
44
45 AJ: Okay.
46
47 MV: And, I got out here, and that's how I got out to San Diego...

1
2 AJ: Wow.
3
4 MV: ... as opposed to being in Tucson.
5
6 AJ: So you never made it to San Francisco? [Laughs].
7
8 MV: No, no.
9
10 AJ: Just kinda pitched your tent right here and...
11
12 MV: Yep.
13
14 AJ: In San Diego, huh?
15
16 MV: Yep, and that was 1978.
17
18 AJ: So you never went to like therapy and...
19
20 MV: Well, I joined, I got into a program here in San Diego. They had a gender, uhm, program at, at
21 UCSD that you could, that you could go into, and I went into the program.
22
23 AJ: And that was in '78? 1978?
24
25 MV: 1978. The program started in '77. And...
26
27 AJ: So you were very early into their work. I mean at like the beginning stages of it.
28
29 MV: Yeah. Yeah. But they only lasted, I've been doing some research on them, and they only lasted
30 until 1986.
31
32 AJ: Okay.
33
34 MV: So they weren't around for very long because they got sued by a bunch of trans people...
35
36 AJ: Uhuh.
37
38 MV: ... I found out, and they stop doing the procedures so...
39
40 AJ: Wow.
41
42 MV: ... but it was part of a, it was part of the program. You know about the Harry Benjamin
43 Standards? That sort of thing?
44
45 AJ: I do.
46

- 1 MV: Well, they were very much in that and so they put you in the program and you had to go and see
2 their psychiatrist. You had to go and see their endocrinologist. You had to go to all these
3 different doctors, and do this for two years.
4
- 5 AJ: For two years in the gender of your choice, yeah.
6
- 7 MV: Right, right. And, and that was, that was part of the program.
8
- 9 AJ: When you were in that program, was it primarily, uhm, male to females or did they have female
10 to males involved in the program?
11
- 12 MV: There were maybe ten or twelve of us in the program at the time.
13
- 14 AJ: Mhm.
15
- 16 MV: And there were a couple of, uhm, uh, female to male. Uhm, but predominately male to female.
17
- 18 AJ: Yeah.
19
- 20 MV: But I made a really good friend in San Ysidro which is down by the border who was, who was a
21 female to male person.
22
- 23 AJ: San Usedro?
24
- 25 MV: San Ysidro.
26
- 27 AJ: Oh.
28
- 29 MV: Ysidro.
30
- 31 AJ: How do you spell that?
32
- 33 MV: S.A.N. and Y.I.S... no it's spelled, oh, you can't spell it. Uhm, we'll spell it later for you.
34
- 35 AJ: Okay. Very good. And I mean, you know, it's a geographical location so I, uhm, can look it up.
36
- 37 MV: San Ysidro.
38
- 39 AJ: Yeah, and, uh, border town in, in...
40
- 41 MV: It's a border town right, right near Tijuana.
42
- 43 AJ: Yeah. Cool. Uhm, so you went through this program at UCSD and by this time are you divorced, I
44 mean.
45
- 46 MV: Yeah. Uhm, well. Officially divorced. I'm not sure because it seemed to me that that happened
47 over a period of a few years later. Uhm, but I wasn't really in contact with my wife at the time...

1
2 AJ: Mhm.
3
4 MV: ... you know. Uhm, I think the divorce papers probably... I wasn't interested in anything official
5 but she was so I remember being served with papers but it seems like it was maybe about a few
6 years after I was here.
7
8 AJ: Sure. Did you, uhm, so, you know, I don't know. This question kind of feels a little foolish but I
9 just want to...
10
11 MV: Yeah, go ahead.
12
13 AJ: ... make sure we're, we're covering all the ground because you, you went. You walked into this
14 motel room and you came out a woman and you got a job and...
15
16 MV: It all happened, it all happened really fast.
17
18 AJ: Uhuh.
19
20 MV: Uhm, my first job, I should backtrack a little bit. I walked out as a woman, got a job in a call
21 center but only worked there for about two weeks and then found this job with this, uhm,
22 medical supply.
23
24 AJ: Has, has living your truest gender identity ever had an impact on your career? Either negatively
25 or positively?
26
27 MV: Uhm, no. Because I never lived my true identity until about three years ago. Uhm, from the time
28 I transitioned back in the '70s until three years ago, uhm, I presented as a lesbian. Strictly a
29 lesbian.
30
31 AJ: So you were stealth.
32
33 MV: Cis lesbian. Stealth. And Ellen and I have been together for over twenty-five years. And we just
34 presented as two lesbians.
35
36 AJ: Did Ellen know?
37
38 MV: Oh yeah. Yeah, I'd make sure that Ellen knew. Ellen knew before we hooked up together.
39
40 AJ: Okay.
41
42 MV: Once we started dating, I think maybe, I don't know, like the third date or something I told
43 them. So... but, uhm, that's how we presented in our neighborhood, that's how we presented
44 when we went out to places. Nobody ever questioned it, and, and that's kind of what I was—
45 thought I was supposed to do.
46
47 AJ: Right! I mean that was the, that was the message from a lot of the gender identity programs...

1
2 MV: Right. Right.
3
4 AJ: ... is that you go to a new town...
5
6 MV: Right.
7
8 AJ: ... you become a woman, you forget your past. You don't forget it but you don't talk about it,
9 right.
10
11 MV: Right.
12
13 AJ: You just blend into society.
14
15 MV: And that's really hard not to talk about your past. You know, people don't understand that.
16 That's what really got to me. That was the hardest part about being stealth is not talking about
17 it. We'd be at a dinner party, and there would be all these, you know, couples around and the
18 guys would be talking about their, their sports stuff...
19
20 AJ: Right. Uhuh.
21
22 MV: ... and everything, you know. And, and, you know, I couldn't say I played baseball.
23
24 AJ: Yeah.
25
26 MV: I had to pretend I played softball.
27
28 AJ: Right.
29
30 MV: I couldn't, you know, so I certainly couldn't let people know I played football.
31
32 AJ: Right. [Laughs].
33
34 MV: You know, [laughs]. So there's a lot of things you just have to hold back and you just kind of sit
35 there politely and you can't talk about your life.
36
37 AJ: Yeah.
38
39 MV: You know.
40
41 AJ: And it's sort of, uhm, demeaning in some ways. It makes you feel inauthentic...
42
43 MV: Yes. Yes, it does.
44
45 AJ: ... when, when...
46
47 MV: You're right about that.

1
2 AJ: ... this whole process is about, is actually being authentic, right?
3
4 MV: Yes.
5
6 AJ: Being your truest self.
7
8 MV: Yes, yeah.
9
10 AJ: Uhm, have you ever watched the film, uhm, Transamerica?
11
12 MV: Yes.
13
14 AJ: Did you like what did you think about that then? I mean that was kind of all about this story that
15 you're telling.
16
17 MV: You know, I must admit that, that so... I buried myself so deep that when things came, that
18 when I saw stuff that was trans related, you know...
19
20 AJ: Mhm.
21
22 MV: ... I would kind of, uhm, almost not want to look at it. Not want to kind of, uhm, you know... Now
23 I embrace trans people. Now, but for a long time I just thought of myself, "Okay, now I'm a
24 woman. I'm gonna go do this, and I don't want anything to do with the trans community."
25
26 AJ: "I have transitioned. I am not transgender. I'm a woman." Right. Yeah.
27
28 MV: Right. Exactly. Exactly. You know, and it wasn't until about three years ago, I mean, with people
29 like Janet Mock and Laverne Cox and started coming forward and started talking, and I started
30 catching glimpses of them on television and stuff and I finally said to Ellen, "Hey, you know, why
31 do we, why do we have to live like two lesbians?" One, we just, you know, we're still two
32 lesbians but...
33
34 AJ: Right. Exactly.
35
36 MV: ... but, I mean, you know I can tell people I'm trans.
37
38 AJ: Yeah.
39
40 MV: And then we went out and told everybody so.
41
42 AJ: Oh my god, I gotta tell Janet and Laverne that they helped you come out.
43
44 MV: [Laughs]. Yes!
45
46 AJ: [Laughs].
47

1 MV: I already told them actually.
2
3 AJ: Oh, okay. Well good. Alright. Uhm, yeah, no. That, that's, I'm just really fascinated. So, to the
4 extent that you feel most comfortable, Meredith, can you talk about what medical, uh,
5 interventions you've had...
6
7 MV: Sure. I had, uhm, breast augmentation in Tucson.
8
9 AJ: Uhuh.
10
11 MV: Okay. I had a trachea shaving in Tucson. So I did that.
12
13 AJ: Mm.
14
15 MV: Uhm, and then I had, uh, I'm not sure what the proper term is anymore. Gender reassignment
16 surgery.
17
18 AJ: Mhm. Gender confirmation surgery...
19
20 MV: Confirmation surgery...
21
22 AJ: ... I think is what I think they call it.
23
24 MV: whatever that is. That was in, uhm, 1980.
25
26 AJ: Oh wow.
27
28 MV: So...
29
30 AJ: Here in the States? Did you go overseas.
31
32 MV: Yeah, as a matter of fact, you know, I had a pretty good job at the time.
33
34 AJ: Uhuh.
35
36 MV: And I'm not sure exactly what went on to this day but, uhm, I was in charge of a fairly big group
37 of orthopedic doctors. I did their, the business aspect of it for them, and I had maybe about ten
38 or twelve people in the office that were under me.
39
40 AJ: Mhm.
41
42 MV: And I took care of all the insurance for the people, our medical insurance so I got in pretty tight
43 with, uhm, the, uhm, the, I think it was Northwest Insurance or something like that.
44
45 AJ: Mhm.
46
47 MV: And, uhm, uh, asked them in confidence about, uhm, you know, uh, surgery.

1
2 AJ: Uhuh.
3
4 MV: And they said, "Yeah, we'll pay for it." And I was like stunned because I didn't think they would.
5 And I thought I was really going out on a limb here.
6
7 AJ: Uhuh.
8
9 MV: Not only did they pay for it, but I had my surgery done in Los Angeles in a little private Catholic
10 hospital. Uhm...
11
12 AJ: What?! [Laughs].
13
14 MV: The doctor who did the surgery was a South African doctor who had moved to Los Angeles a
15 couple of years before that. By the way I found out recently that he's, the he died in jail for
16 murdering somebody. Like this was many years after he did my surgery...
17
18 AJ: Right.
19
20 MV: ... but he was involved in a murder, and, and, you know, so just a little...
21
22 AJ: Like a medically related or...
23
24 MV: No, no. Somebody...
25
26 AJ: Like...
27
28 MV: ... somebody from South Africa had owed somebody a lot of money, and, and they, the guy
29 came to live in the United States. And so this other guy followed him, went to my doctor in a
30 pair— cause I was reading what was going on in the trial...
31
32 AJ: Mhm.
33
34 MV: ... and my doctor gave the guy the gun that the guy went out and sho— killed this other guy with
35 for the money.
36
37 AJ: Oh wow.
38
39 MV: So they put both of them in jail.
40
41 AJ: Yes, so it's like an accessory to murder or something.
42
43 MV: Right, right.
44
45 AJ: Wow.
46

1 MV: But, anyway, uhm, they gave me the surgery. My employer didn't even know because they,
2 uhm, uh, basically said it was a hysterectomy. That's the only way that the, uhm, the hospital
3 would take me in. They wouldn't take it in for, you know, for doing just gender confirmation...
4

5 AJ: Sexual reassignment surgery.
6

7 MV: Right, right. But if, well, if we said we just kept it quiet, we said it was a hysterectomy. They
8 were fine with it so.
9

10 AJ: [Laughs]. Wow.
11

12 MV: Yeah, yeah. I feel very fortunate.
13

14 AJ: Take that pope! [Laughs].
15

16 MV: Yeah. There you go.
17

18 AJ: Yeah. Wow.
19

20 MV: Yeah.
21

22 AJ: So 1980.
23

24 MV: 1980.
25

26 AJ: That's, uh...
27

28 MV: Been a long time.
29

30 AJ: Been a long time.
31

32 MV: Yeah.
33

34 AJ: What, uhm, I know you sort of have been on the peripheral of the trans community. I mean,
35 based on what you told me...
36

37 MV: Yeah.
38

39 AJ: I don't know this but you told me that...
40

41 MV: Yeah.
42

43 AJ: ... you were stealth, and you were kind of not necessarily engaged in the trans community, but
44 certainly, you know, you live in America, and what has been some of the most dark changes that
45 you have seen or witnessed over these forty...
46

47 MV: In terms of trans stuff?

1
2 AJ: ... plus years that you've been...
3
4 MV: Yeah, about forty years.
5
6 AJ: Yeah.
7
8 MV: In terms of trans stuff?
9
10 AJ: Yeah. I sure the transgender quote "movement," if you will, uhm,
11
12 MV: Oh, I'd say just the fact that, that it's out now but the thing that impresses me the most are the
13 little kids.
14
15 AJ: Yeah.
16
17 MV: The kids that are coming out saying, "I'm trans."
18
19 AJ: Isn't that fascinating?
20
21 MV: And, and the parents that are supporting them.
22
23 AJ: Mhm.
24
25 MV: You know, I mean, to me that's the biggest thing I've ever seen. And, and just the idea that, you
26 know, trans is respectable.
27
28 AJ: Mhm, mhm.
29
30 MV: It's okay to be trans, you know, and back in the, back in the '70s and '80s...
31
32 AJ: Mhm.
33
34 MV: ... pfft, you wouldn't want people to know that, you know.
35
36 AJ: No, no.
37
38 MV: So, so that's a big change.
39
40 AJ: Yeah.
41
42 MV: And it's a big change for me because I struggle with it. I was embarrassed by who I was. And
43 now with, with, you know, what's, what's happened over the last few years, I've gained enough
44 confidence to come out and be proud of who I am so.
45
46 AJ: Wow. That is so fascinating. Absolutely. Uhm, so, I know you said your, your parents are
47 deceased.

1
2 MV: Mhm.
3
4 AJ: Did they ever know?
5
6 MV: Yeah, yeah. They knew, and they never accepted me that way. It was, it's always been... It's
7 been one of the, uhm, one of the negative things where I've, for, for the thirty, thirty-five years
8 that they were around that I had transitioned, uhm, I would go back east to see them. They
9 would actually come out here to see me but we would never talk about it. And they wouldn't
10 talk about it with me.
11
12 AJ: Mhm.
13
14 MV: And, and they, uhm, we were always fighting over pronouns. We were always fighting, I mean,
15 there was this constant struggle for thirty years.
16
17 AJ: Wow.
18
19 MV: Yeah, yeah. And, and, you know, some people might have said, "Gee, I don't want to have
20 anything to do with these people. They're triggering. They won't use your correct pronouns."
21
22 AJ: Sure.
23
24 MV: "They won't do anything," but they were my parents, and, you know, I wanted them to, to, uhm,
25 support me. And I knew that they loved me, but they never gave me the satisfaction of, of
26 saying, "You did the right thing."
27
28 AJ: Of recognizing you.
29
30 MV: Of recognizing me for who I am. So that's always be a, uh, a difficult thing for me in that respect
31 so.
32
33 AJ: What about your siblings?
34
35 MV: Yeah, my sisters, my sisters are okay now. They, at the time, back when, you know, in the 1970s
36 and '80s and maybe early, up until the early '90s or something, uhm, they always kind of, you
37 know, because they were so young, uhm, they always, uh, were influenced very much by my
38 parents.
39
40 AJ: Parents.
41
42 MV: And it wasn't until they came into their mid-twenties they actually started reaching out to me on
43 their own.
44
45 AJ: Mhm.
46
47 MV: And now we have, now we have decent relationships.

1
2 AJ: Nice. Yeah, uhm, what was it like coming out as transgender so late in life?
3
4 MV: Uhm, it was a big relief. It was a big relief to go, uhm, I live in a very rural area up in the
5 mountains...
6
7 AJ: Mhm.
8
9 MV: ... east of here. And we have a small community, uhm, that's called Cuyamaca Woods.
10
11 AJ: Okay, you gotta spell that one. [Laughs].
12
13 MV: C.U.Y.A.M.A.C.A. Cuyamaca. It's an Indian name.
14
15 AJ: C.U.Y.A.M.A.C.A. Okay. Woods.
16
17 MV: Woods.
18
19 AJ: Mhm.
20
21 MV: That's the name of the community. It's probably, maybe, oh, I'd say probably about less than a
22 hundred people that live in the community, but we went and told the woman who knows
23 everybody that's the big, you know, blabbermouth in town that tells everybody everything. And
24 we told her that I was trans. We told her to tell everybody.
25
26 AJ: Mhm, mhm.
27
28 MV: And she did. So now everybody knows.
29
30 AJ: [Laughs]. She did her job.
31
32 MV: Yep.
33
34 AJ: She did her job.
35
36 MV: But, you know, there hasn't been any, uhm, negative, uh, uhm, situations. We still have our
37 dinner parties. They still, uhm, uh, I thought there would be a problem with some of the men
38 but no, you know. They got to know me first. That's the big difference...
39
40 AJ: Right.
41
42 MV: ... in terms of how people, uhm, perceive trans people.
43
44 AJ: But they knew you guys as a lesbian couple anyway, right?
45
46 MV: Yeah, they did. So I'm saying they got comfortable with me, and it didn't matter to them, "Okay,
47 you're trans," you know, I mean, because they knew me.

1
2 AJ: Right.
3
4 MV: But it's hard for people who just go in, and, you know, saying they're trans to somebody who
5 doesn't know them.
6
7 AJ: They might have a bit more of a challenge, yeah. Huh, wow. What made you decide to move
8 to... Cu—? God, words.
9
10 MV: Cuyamaca.
11
12 AJ: Cuyamaca.
13
14 MV: Uhm, I lived in New Hampshire. I lived in Vermont. I like rural, uh, living.
15
16 AJ: Mhm, mhm.
17
18 MV: We live on a few acres there where— we're actually off the grid. We're, so.
19
20 AJ: Really?
21
22 MV: We have our own system so we do a lot of stuff ourselves and stuff, and it's kind of a lifestyle
23 I've always liked, you know. Uh, we get snow in the winter so.
24
25 AJ: In California?
26
27 MV: Yeah. You can go an hour from here and see snow.
28
29 AJ: [Laughs]. I'm cool on that.
30
31 MV: No, I didn't think you'd want to do that but...
32
33 AJ: I've seen enough snow in my life.
34
35 MV: But if you go from here, you got the ocean. You go for an hour into the mountains...
36
37 AJ: Uhuh.
38
39 MV: ... and then you drop down another hour and you're in the desert.
40
41 AJ: Oh wow.
42
43 MV: So, so it's really, uhm, a unique place to be.
44
45 AJ: That's a very diverse climate, uh...
46
47 MV: Yes.

1
2 AJ: ... state. Uh, boy. Can you talk a little bit about, you know, you lived off the grid.
3
4 MV: Mhm.
5
6 AJ: But you're doing this technology project. You're doing, it's called transgender narratives.
7
8 MV: Trans— Trans Narratives.
9
10 AJ: Trans Narratives.
11
12 MV: Right.
13
14 AJ: Tell me about this project.
15
16 MV: Uh, the reason, the reason I started, and it's kind of a natural thing, uhm, a couple of years after
17 Ellen and I hooked up, we started a business.
18
19 AJ: Mhm.
20
21 MV: Uhm, and named the—
22
23 AJ: And Ellen is your...
24
25 MV: My wife.
26
27 AJ: Wife.
28
29 MV: The wife you met. Uhm, it's called Traditions Military Videos.
30
31 AJ: Mhm.
32
33 MV: And we produced videos primarily based on the Vietnam War.
34
35 AJ: Mhm.
36
37 MV: And we sold them to veterans.
38
39 AJ: You weren't in the military?
40
41 MV: Nope, no, but we, uhm, uh, I have a master's in history, and Ellen has a, uh, degree in
42 Journalism. So we kind of put those two things together, and we decided to focus on the
43 Vietnam War, and we interviewed a lot of, uhm, veterans. I've interviewed hundreds of veterans
44 over the, over a period of about twenty-two years we've had that business.
45
46 AJ: Wow. Okay.
47

1 MV: And, uhm, uh, I'm getting ready to retire now...
2
3 AJ: Mhm.
4
5 MV: So the last couple of years instead of interviewing veterans, I've turned to trans people.
6
7 AJ: Wow.
8
9 MV: And I kind of do it as a, uhm, I want to interview trans people, you know.
10
11 AJ: Mhm. Yeah. [Laughs]. Is that a public service or a...?
12
13 MV: Yeah. I see it as a public service. I really do, you know. And I also want to, uhm, work, working
14 very hard on trying to flesh out a trans history of San Diego cause I think that the community
15 needs to have a history. Not a, not a lesbian, gay history but just a trans history.
16
17 AJ: Mhm. Sure.
18
19 MV: And it's there. It's, it's worth fleshing it out but, uhm...
20
21 AJ: Mhm.
22
23 MV: ... you know, there's a lot of, uh...
24
25 AJ: Piece by piece.
26
27 MV: Yes. Yes.
28
29 AJ: About how many people would you say you've interviewed so far?
30
31 MV: Pretty close to fifty.
32
33 AJ: Nice.
34
35 MV: Yeah.
36
37 AJ: Do you have any specific... is it only people that live in San Diego or are you all over the state or
38 all over the country?
39
40 MV: No, no we're interested, we actually, uhm, uh, the parents who came down here, they had a
41 little trans five-year-old, and we interviewed her.
42
43 AJ: Mhm. Oh my goodness. Wow.
44
45 MV: And she was from San Francisco.
46
47 AJ: Uhuh.

1
2 MV: So, uhm...
3
4 AJ: You interviewed the five-year-old?
5
6 MV: Yeah, with the parents.
7
8 AJ: With the parents. Okay.
9
10 MV: So that was, that was an interview we did.
11
12 AJ: That's fascinating, yeah.
13
14 MV: Uhm, no, we started in San Diego cause it's obviously the easiest thing to do but like we're
15 gonna go back and interview Randy Wicker and, uhm, I, I'd interview anybody any place actually
16 if I could.
17
18 AJ: Yeah. Wow. Randy Wicker is a person who lives in New York City and was—
19
20 MV: That was, that was, uhm, Marsha P. Johnson's roommate.
21
22 AJ: Wow.
23
24 MV: And so that's why I want to interview Randy because anybody that lived with Marsha for eight
25 years must know a lot, you know.
26
27 AJ: Yes.
28
29 MV: So I'd like to ask Randy about Stonewall. And I'd like that because she was living with him...
30
31 AJ: Uhuh.
32
33 MV: ... when Stonewall happened.
34
35 AJ: Right.
36
37 MV: So I'd like to get that information...
38
39 AJ: Yeah. No.
40
41 MV: ... before it gets too old.
42
43 AJ: That would be fascinating.
44
45 MV: Yeah, yeah.
46

1 AJ: Uhm, and, as I mentioned, I would love to be a part if you guys do or are successful in bringing in
2 Randy to, uh, San Diego.
3
4 MV: Yeah, I'll let you know. I will let you know.
5
6 AJ: I would like to be a part of that conversation.
7
8 MV: Okay, uhm, little bit off topic, but Randy is an interesting person because in 19— I saw a
9 television interview with that, that was done with him 1962.
10
11 AJ: Mhm.
12
13 MV: And the title of it was "Meet the Homosexual," and this is 1962, and he's doing this interview.
14 Tells you a lot about the person.
15
16 AJ: Yeah. Out.
17
18 MV: Yeah. Yeah.
19
20 AJ: Like openly...
21
22 MV: Right. Not that open because, uhm, tell you a little Marsha story...
23
24 AJ: Uhuh.
25
26 MV: ... that he told me that I know it's true because other people have said the same thing too. Uhm,
27 he took Marsha in, uhm, into his Brooklyn apartment but made Marsha change into male
28 clothes every time she left and came into the apartment because he was worried about...
29
30 AJ: Safety.
31
32 MV: ... what other people might think.
33
34 AJ: Uhuh.
35
36 MV: And he could get kicked out of his apartment. So she, she— accommodated him.
37
38 AJ: Mhm.
39
40 MV: She, uhm, ended up leaving his apart— she lived in his apartment, you know, as, as, uhm,
41 presented as female...
42
43 AJ: Mhm.
44
45 MV: ... uhm, but when she left the apartment she put on an overcoat, and she, you know, made the
46 appearance of walking out as a man and then...
47

1 AJ: Wow.
2
3 MV: ... changed again to go out and do whatever she did.
4
5 AJ: Uhuh.
6
7 MV: So I thought that when you say, "Oh, he was really out and open," you know, a lot of grey areas
8 there right.
9
10 AJ: It's grey area, right? Exactly. Uhm, you know, I think it's interesting that, you know, many, many
11 young people now today refer to Marsha P. Johnson as a transgender person. And, and that
12 probably is an accurate term, but I know that the language of the day was drag queen like...
13
14 MV: Yeah, she would have been, she would have been referred to that.
15
16 AJ: She called herself a drag queen and...
17
18 MV: Yes.
19
20 AJ: As did, uh, Sylvia Rivera...
21
22 MV: Right. Right.
23
24 AJ: ... you know. You know, so...
25
26 MV: But they presented female when they could outside of drag.
27
28 AJ: Oh, I understand.
29
30 MV: You know, so.
31
32 AJ: I understand, yeah.
33
34 MV: Oh, no, I know you know. I'm just kind of like say so I, I think that we can say that, that, uhm, if,
35 if they, you know, that if Marsha could, if she would have presented 24/7, she could have...
36
37 AJ: Right.
38
39 MV: ... but I think she was forced into, to...
40
41 AJ: Mhm. And if this language had have been readily available, they probably would have used
42 that...
43
44 MV: Yeah, yeah.
45
46 AJ: ... language too.
47

- 1 MV: Perhaps, yeah. Yeah, I mean, I, I think that, yeah, I think they probably would have.
2
- 3 AJ: Mhm, yeah. Uhm, so what have been the joys of, uhm, being able to live your true gender
4 identity?
5
- 6 MV: Uhm, telling my story, getting other people to tell their stories. Uhm, just being a lot more open
7 and a lot more comfortable.
8
- 9 AJ: Mhm.
10
- 11 MV: And not, you know, I mean, that's the biggest joy for me is not having to hide anymore.
12
- 13 AJ: This is, this interview is so fascinating to me because you have been... I mean you transitioned
14 quote "forty" years ago. [Laughs]. And, but, it feels like you just came out.
15
- 16 MV: Transitioned three years ago. Yeah. Exactly, as, as a trans person. I was in the, the San Diego
17 community here even before I met Ellen and very active in the lesbian community. And, I mean,
18 you know, working on projects, just like I do in the trans community, I was in the lesbian
19 community at the time.
20
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
22
- 23 MV: And, uhm, you know, that's just what I thought my life was...
24
- 25 AJ: Uhuh.
26
- 27 MV: ... and just kept my big secret. Uhm, there was one incident. You might enjoy this story because
28 some of it is, uh, I always, uh, look back on it.
29
- 30 AJ: Mhm.
31
- 32 MV: I was dating this, this lesbian at the time. We were together for a number of years. She finally
33 broke it off with me, and I was very distraught because she broke it off with me. And I went and
34 told a couple of other lesbian friends...
35
- 36 AJ: Mhm.
37
- 38 MV: ... and before you know it, I was, uhm, uh, I was in this, uh, lesbian book group.
39
- 40 AJ: Mhm.
41
- 42 MV: And they kicked me out because as soon as they found out that I was trans, they didn't want to
43 have anything to do with me. So, yeah.
44
- 45 AJ: How did they find out?
46
- 47 MV: I told them.

1
2 AJ: Okay.
3
4 MV: I, I was distraught because of the...
5
6 AJ: Was that because of the break up?
7
8 MV: ... of the break up. And there were a couple of people, couple of lesbians, women, that I thought
9 I could confide in...
10
11 AJ: Yeah.
12
13 MV: ... but I couldn't because they told other people. And then other people told other people. So I
14 kind of was outed in the lesbian community. And that's when I left and went, and actually kind
15 of actually at the same time I had met Ellen and, uhm, started dating her and, and, uh, she lived
16 in Alpine, which is about thirty, thirty-five miles from, uh, east of here.
17
18 AJ: Mhm.
19
20 MV: And so when I was living in a place called Campo at the time, which is even further out, and so
21 we connected there, and then we made our lives like away from...
22
23 AJ: the intercity.
24
25 MV: ... the LGBT community.
26
27 AJ: Oh, okay.
28
29 MV: So our lives ended up being much more rural and confined to that.
30
31 AJ: Sure.
32
33 MV: And I left, uhm, pretty much left the LGBT community, and, uh, just dropped back in three years
34 ago.
35
36 AJ: So what do you think, I mean, there's a, there's a term for the women who excluded you from
37 the...
38
39 MV: TERFs you mean?
40
41 AJ: Yeah.
42
43 MV: The TERFs.
44
45 AJ: Trans exclusionary radical feminists.
46

- 1 MV: Yeah, I don't think they were hardcore TERFs. I just think they, uhm, you know, uh, the '80s was
2 a rough time. I mean, the, uhm, with Janice Raymond's book, you know, *The Transsexual*
3 *Empire*.
4
- 5 AJ: *The Transsexual Empire*. yes.
6
- 7 MV: How we were, how we were infiltrating women's spaces...
8
- 9 AJ: Mhm.
10
- 11 MV: ... and we were going to take over, and we were part of a plot by the patriarchy to come in and
12 take over women's spaces and all of that sort of stuff. Uh, you know, I remember sitting in
13 women's studies classes, and being part of the discussions and not being able to say anything.
14
- 15 AJ: Mhm.
16
- 17 MV: You know. And that, I remember that being very, uh, difficult.
18
- 19 AJ: Wow, yeah.
20
- 21 MV: You know.
22
- 23 AJ: I mean, even as a lesbian you didn't feel like you could defend...
24
- 25 MV: Not defend, not defend the transsexuals.
26
- 27 AJ: Really.
28
- 29 MV: When everybody else was like going after them, uhm, I just kept my mouth shut and my head
30 down.
31
- 32 AJ: People were going really hard, huh?
33
- 34 MV: The professor was.
35
- 36 AJ: Yeah.
37
- 38 MV: You know.
39
- 40 AJ: Wow.
41
- 42 MV: I mean we read, we read her book so it was part of the class so it was kind of, you know...
43
- 44 AJ: Yeah. Boy. Uh.
45
- 46 MV: So, so, you know, I was just one of those people that just kept my head down, and, and I
47 certainly wished I would have done things differently but...

1
2 AJ: You didn't bash the trans?
3
4 MV: No, I didn't bash the trans...
5
6 AJ: [Laughs].
7
8 MV: ... but I wouldn't, but if someone said something negative I wouldn't have stood up for it, you
9 know. I would have just kind of slinked away.
10
11 AJ: Sure. Absolutely. No, it's, uhm, it's a very, very nuanced, uhm, position, and I think people don't
12 recognize our, the safety factor that's involved, you know. And I'll ask you about this because,
13 you know, uhm, this person actually is from California and so you may know a little bit, just have
14 a more closer sort of psychic connection or whatever but, uhm, Caitlyn Jenner, who, uhm,
15 waited until her mid-sixties...
16
17 MV: Sixty-five actually.
18
19 AJ: ... yeah, yeah, to come out. Uhm, what do you think about Caitlyn and, you know, sort of all the
20 controversy that surrounds that.
21
22 MV: I don't think we have enough time really to discuss that do we?
23
24 AJ: [Laughs].
25
26 MV: But, uhm...
27
28 AJ: Well, you can give me the thumbnail sketch I guess.
29
30 MV: Okay, uhm, I don't like her politics. Uhm, but she's older, uhm she's privileged, and, uhm, uhm,
31 [clears throat] I guess she is who she is. I don't quite get as upset as everybody else does on
32 Facebook when she says something stupid because, you know, uhm, in some respects, uhm, you
33 could say that she kind of learned on the job, you know, I think that, and I think that helped a lot
34 of the stuff. I could think of a lot of stupid things that I might have thought and said when I first
35 starting learning about...
36
37 AJ: Yeah.
38
39 MV: ... trans, you know, and stuff. So, so I try to cut her some slack there.
40
41 AJ: Yeah.
42
43 MV: But, uhm, she's going to lose some points with me if she goes to the inauguration. I mean, I, I
44 think that would be a stupid thing for her to do but I've been reading that she was invited, and
45 she's looking for somebody to go with is what I read, but, uhm...
46
47 AJ: Oh well, I have a friend named Aaron who might want to go with her...

1
2 MV: [Slight laugh].
3
4 AJ: ... maybe we can connect those two.
5
6 MV: Okay, well, okay.
7
8 AJ: [Laughs].
9
10 MV: Alight. Uhm.
11
12 AJ: Uhm, no, I, my heart actually goes out to Caitlyn. I mean...
13
14 MV: Really?
15
16 AJ: ... to, uhm, you know, just, just, I agree with you whole heartedly around the politics as well as
17 sort of the, I mean, you didn't necessarily say this but I think there's, uh, an obsession with, you
18 know, beauty and, uhm, femininity...
19
20 MV: Yes.
21
22 AJ: ... that is very stereotypical, but it also is very much a part of a young, of a young trans person.
23 And when I say a young trans person I mean a trans person who just came out.
24
25 MV: Exactly. Exactly.
26
27 AJ: Right? And so, uhm, but to wait to have to endure that level of, you know, you talked about it
28 when you were in, in high school, and your feeling is, uhm...
29
30 MV: You know, it's a differ— in some ways it's a double edged sword because even though I
31 transitioned when I was in my twenties, okay, and so I feel like I kind of saved myself all these
32 years in the sense of not have to deal with not being able to transition.
33
34 AJ: Sure.
35
36 MV: But I've met a lot of trans people, a lot of trans women who transition much later in life like
37 Caitlyn. Maybe not quite that old, but transitioned in their forties and fifties and stuff.
38
39 AJ: Mhm. Mhm. Yeah.
40
41 MV: And one of the advantages that they've had is that they've been able to have families, and
42 they've raised families and they got children now and they've got.... And I kind of look back on
43 that and, you know, uhm, one time I thought about adopting and I looked into it and when I
44 talked to the social worker they said, "Well, they'll never let a trans person adopt anybody." So,
45 so I was kind of just after that I was dismissed being able to have a family.
46
47 AJ: Mhm.

1
2 MV: So I see that my transitioning early in what, at least the way I bought into it, uhm, I wouldn't
3 mind having, I think I would have made a good parent but I kind of let that go.
4
5 AJ: Sure.
6
7 MV: And I see that the older trans people that I know that are part of this, I started this group called
8 Trans Elders.
9
10 AJ: Okay.
11
12 MV: And so we have a breakfast meeting once a month and a lot of them are older trans people that
13 transitioned in their forties and fifties. And they all talk about their children, and I see them
14 posting on Facebook with their children and their grandchildren and stuff like that.
15
16 AJ: Mhm.
17
18 MV: And it makes me sad.
19
20 AJ: Yeah, you know, I, just from my own, and I certainly understand that. I do have a twenty-eight-
21 year-old daughter myself.
22
23 MV: Okay.
24
25 AJ: So I, I have sort of walked that path, and I wouldn't change that for the world.
26
27 MV: Mhm.
28
29 AJ: Not even on iota. However it's a challenge to come out to your children. I mean it's just like
30 everything else except for it's an even bigger thing to think, "Oh my god, I could lose my
31 relationship with my children."
32
33 MV: Yeah.
34
35 AJ: Many people do.
36
37 MV: Yes. Yes, I know people who have.
38
39 AJ: You know, I personally, uhm, didn't, and, uhm, and I think god for that every day but, uhm, you
40 know. I think my daughter is actually calling me right at this moment. Uhm, but, uhm...
41
42 MV: So you understand. It's nice to have that.
43
44 AJ: No I get it. It's, uh, it's a really, uhm, you know, I was talking to somebody the other day, and
45 they were saying how they wish, it was a person who had transitioned from female to male, and
46 they were saying, you know, they're in a relationship now and, uhm, they want to have children
47 but the, no doctors, nobody ever, like, gave them an option of like preserving their, their eggs.

- 1 So I mean I think family planning is a, uhm, is a huge issue. And, and sometimes in the haste to
2 really become your full self, you don't always think about those...
3
- 4 MV: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I never thought about it, that's for sure.
5
- 6 AJ: [Laughs]. Yeah.
7
- 8 MV: But I understand what you mean. But, you know, getting back to what you said about, uhm,
9 looks and how you look and everything, you know there's this thing in the trans community
10 where we shouldn't be, uhm, looking at passing. We shouldn't be looking at... and I, I agree with
11 all of this that, that, that someone doesn't have to fit the, uhm, uh, the gender norm in order to
12 be part of society. They can be, they can be any place that they want to be.
13
- 14 AJ: Right. Mhm.
15
- 16 MV: But Tracy O'Brien who I interviewed, uhm, told me, and this always stuck with me, is that, uhm,
17 passing is something that trans people do for safety reasons and, and, and the thing that I've
18 realized is that someone with more privilege like me doesn't have to endure what people with
19 less privilege like, for example, people that have to, uhm, ride public transportation...
20
- 21 AJ: Mhm.
22
- 23 MV: ... are a lot more susceptible...
24
- 25 AJ: Or vulnerable.
26
- 27 MV: ... to getting har— vulnerable to getting harassed, to getting people, you know, going after them
28 and everything than somebody driving around in a car and going to the shopping mall and
29 getting back in their car and going someplace else, you know, I mean. So you start to realize
30 that, uhm, you know, there is a safety issue for trans people.
31
- 32 AJ: Oh, absolutely. No, I, as a person who walks through the malls and gets stared at quite a bit
33 [laughs] I certainly understand and kind of appreciate the, the benefits of passing.
34
- 35 MV: Yeah, cause you're always afraid somebody is gonna run up on you and do something.
36
- 37 AJ: It's distracting, exactly. And you just never know. Uhm, and, and there are, there are these
38 different levels of privilege, right, that we all, that we all have...
39
- 40 MV: Right.
41
- 42 AJ: ... uhm, to a certain extent so, uhm, and, you know, yeah, I'm glad you, I'm so glad you brought
43 that up. This idea of passing. I absolutely belief that it is a, uh, issue of safety. It's an issue. And
44 even beyond the safety, it's really a issue of, uhm, be— we all want to be connected in society.
45 Like that's...
46
- 47 MV: Right.

1
2 AJ: ... you know, people who don't want to, they get, they're called hermits or, you know, uhm, you
3 know, loners. I don't know, but we all want human connection.
4
5 MV: Yes.
6
7 AJ: And, and the best way to achieve that is through conforming to the cultural norms.
8
9 MV: Right.
10
11 AJ: Right? And, uh, but as transgender people we already supersede those norms. And so we try to,
12 you know, and maybe I'm theorizing too much now but...
13
14 MV: No, go ahead.
15
16 AJ: I think we sometimes try and pull ourselves back, uhm, through this notion of passing to be able
17 to have those conformative, uhm, I think necessary experiences of feeling connected to a
18 broader, uhm, community outside of ourselves so.
19
20 MV: I think so too. Uhm, but, you know, and I'm sure you're well aware of it that our community is
21 extremely diverse.
22
23 AJ: Mhm.
24
25 MV: And, you know, it's, the whole political spectrum, so the whole idea of passing, not passing,
26 what's appropriate, what should, what should you be thinking, how you think, uhm, constantly
27 being bombarded, you know...
28
29 AJ: Mhm.
30
31 MV: ... I, I, uhm, I'm never sure sometimes of what to say because I'm afraid that, you know, I'm, I'm
32 really when I'm in our community I really think about what I should say and what I should not
33 say in the sense of, you know, who I'm talking to...
34
35 AJ: Yeah.
36
37 MV: ... and everything, you know.
38
39 AJ: I know. It's, it's quite, it's quite something.
40
41 MV: But it's, in some respects it's invigorating because the community is, excuse the pun, in
42 transition...
43
44 AJ: [Laughs].
45
46 MV: ... because we're constantly, we're constantly evolving as to— I remember the big discussions
47 about putting an asterisk next to trans.

1
2 AJ: Yeah.
3
4 MV: Oh, we need to put an asterisk next to trans. No, no, no more trans. If you put an asterisk now
5 you're not on it.
6
7 AJ: Right, yeah.
8
9 MV: You know what I mean so, you know, all kinds of stuff.
10
11 AJ: Oh wow. That is funny. I, yeah, I, I tiptoe very lightly into those landmines myself so I fully, fully
12 get it.
13
14 MV: Yeah.
15
16 AJ: Uhm, wow, you, you enjoyed— what's some of the biggest things that you've learned from the
17 Trans Narrative Project?
18
19 MV: Uhm, to be more humble. Uhm, I've interviewed a lot of people with a lot of less, a lot less
20 privilege than me.
21
22 AJ: Mhm.
23
24 MV: and it's made me realize, uhm, a lot of stuff that a lot of people don't. You know, a lot of people
25 that come from my background.
26
27 AJ: Mhm.
28
29 MV: Uhm, are totally oblivious to it. Probably by choice. They don't want to learn about it, you know.
30 And one of the things that I am really grateful for being trans is that it's put me in a position of
31 at least opening my eyes and seeing what other people are going through, you know. Uhm, so,
32 so that's been, I feel really good about that, you know.
33
34 AJ: Yeah.
35
36 MV: I'm not saying I understand everything, and I'm, you know, on top of everything but it's certainly
37 been a, uhm, you know, interviewing people who are homeless.
38
39 AJ: Mhm.
40
41 MV: Uhm, interviewing people who have been beat up. Interviewing, you know, it's, it's, uh, uhm,
42 the whole, uh, gamut.
43
44 AJ: Sure.
45
46 MV: And that's been good.
47

- 1 AJ: Uh, what do you see the trans community, uhm, heading in the next fifty years?
2
- 3 MV: Oh, fifty years. Wow. I hope that in the next fifty years it isn't, it doesn't, either, even in, to be
4 an issue anymore. I'd like to hope that would be the case within the next twenty or twenty-five
5 years but certainly within the next fifty years. But, uhm, I do see the trans community evolving,
6 and I think as we became, become, uhm, more visible, uh, you know, reasonable people are
7 gonna be okay with us.
8
- 9 AJ: Mhm.
10
- 11 MV: You know. It's just a matter of getting to know us, and, uhm, and people, people will, uhm,
12 people will be okay. So I hate to make any sort of predictions fifty years from now.
13
- 14 AJ: [Laughs]. Uhm.
15
- 16 MV: But, but...
17
- 18 AJ: But.
19
- 20 MV: Right now I'd like to see the trans community expand more out of the trans bubble because I
21 think sometimes everything we do is within the bubble. We have events for ourselves. We have,
22 you know, all this sort of stuff like the Trans Elders breakfast which is for the trans people. And
23 we should have these events.
24
- 25 AJ: Sure.
26
- 27 MV: But not, not just these events because I think that we need to...
28
- 29 AJ: Not to the exclusion of the broader community.
30
- 31 MV: Right, right. And, and so, uhm, one of the things that I'm trying to do as my little part is I joined
32 the National Organization of Women.
33
- 34 AJ: Yeah. NOW.
35
- 36 MV: And, and they convert— NOW— and they've been very receptive to having trans women there.
37
- 38 AJ: Yeah.
39
- 40 MV: And so, uhm, I'm trying to bring the, the these women together with our, our, uhm, group of
41 Trans Elders, and we're having a dinner, and we're gonna bring them together and form the
42 beginnings of a coalition where we can, you know, uh, help one another. So, so I think...
43
- 44 AJ: You have to have that.
45
- 46 MV: Yes. Yes. So I think that, that, you know, this coalition building is, uh, is important. That trans
47 people get outside that bubble and start going to other groups and, uh, and there are people

1 that are a lot more out in terms of doing that sort of thing that I am. There are, there are people
2 in our Elders group that are members like the iguanas, and they're out at the iguanas.
3
4 AJ: Yeah, exactly.
5
6 MV: And, and they don't get any recognition for that, you know. All the stuff that's like, hey, you
7 know, everybody gets, uhm, uh, you know, uh, pat on the back for, uh, all of the things that they
8 do within the community. They put on this event. They do this event.
9
10 AJ: Right.
11
12 MV: They do this event.
13
14 AJ: Uhuh.
15
16 MV: But then you have these other trans people working outside the community going and giving
17 speeches to Cuanas to VFWs to that sort of stuff, and they kind of get ignored by the
18 community.
19
20 AJ: Sure, yeah. Yeah, it's, uh, it's a conundrum I think, uhm, having worked in City Hall for twelve
21 years, uh, which is, you might imagine, is not, as an out trans person, I mean, and that is...
22
23 MV: Okay.
24
25 AJ: ... that is not a trans community...
26
27 MV: No.
28
29 AJ: ... in any shape or form. Uh.
30
31 MV: In Minnesota?
32
33 AJ: In Minnesota, yeah. And so, uhm, yeah, I, it's, it may even be more important to do that work
34 than, uhm.
35
36 MV: Is Minnesota is where Michele Bachmann is from or is that...?
37
38 AJ: No, you're right. That is where Michele Bachmann if from. [Laughs].
39
40 MV: Hey, Minnesotans.
41
42 AJ: [Laughs].
43
44 MV: What the hell are you guys doing? You know.
45
46 AJ: Stop.
47

1 MV: Get rid of her. Okay. I thought you guys were a good group of people there.
2
3 AJ: Well she's gone. [Laughs]. She is gone from the public scene now but, uh, thank you for that
4 message. That was hilarious. Uhm, wow, I just can't say thank you enough, Meredith, for your
5 willingness to sit down and, and share a little bit of your history and your life and your work...
6
7 MV: My pleasure. It really is. My pleasure.
8
9 AJ: ... uhm, your thoughts. It's just been a fantastic hour. Uhm, I really deeply appreciate it. Is there
10 anything that I didn't ask that you feel like incredibly, uhm, compelled to, to...
11
12 MV: Nothing compelled. I could probably talk to you for another four or five hours...
13
14 AJ: Yeah.
15
16 MV: ... but nothing compelling. I mean, no. It was good.
17
18 AJ: You sure? I mean some of the messages that you hear from some of your, from, from you doing
19 these interviews. In fact let me ask you this question...
20
21 MV: Yeah.
22
23 AJ: ... because I've been doing this...
24
25 MV: Right.
26
27 AJ: ... for two years now. And you're actually the second person that I've interviewed who also
28 documents transgender people's lives.
29
30 MV: Okay. Right.
31
32 AJ: What is the most important reason why you're doing these documentaries if you will?
33
34 MV: Good question. Obviously as a historian I want to document this stuff. We're giving it to Lambda
35 Archives here, and they will be available for people in the future.
36
37 AJ: Sure.
38
39 MV: But what I feel personally, and I, this goes back to when I, when I interviewed veterans.
40
41 AJ: Mhm.
42
43 MV: Okay. When you're doing an interview with somebody, you're validating them. And that is
44 important to them. You know. That they become validated. That their story is out there.
45
46 AJ: Mhm.
47

1 MV: And I really feel like, uhm, I'm doing something special.
2
3 AJ: Wow.
4
5 MV: So.
6
7 AJ: That's so beautiful and so true. Uhm, yeah. I mean I can't tell you the number of emails and
8 direct messages and texts I get...
9
10 MV: Mhm. Sure.
11
12 AJ: ... like, uh, "When are you going to interview me, Andrea? Like, what, what's the problem?"
13
14 MV: Yeah. I get the same thing too. I get people all of the time, you know, asking about interviewing
15 them.
16
17 AJ: Yeah. Well I'm so thrilled that you're doing this work. Uhm, I'm so thrilled to get the opportunity
18 to meet you.
19
20 MV: I'm so thrilled that I got an opportunity to meet you.
21
22 AJ: And, and also that your work will live on here at the, uhm, San Diego Archives. I think that's,
23 uhm, incredibly important. And, uhm, wow.
24
25 MV: Yeah.
26
27 AJ: Thank you so much.
28
29 MV: My pleasure. Alright.
30