Osiris Coleman Narrator

Andrea Jenkins Interviewer

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

September 21, 2015



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

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

Andrea Jenkins jenki120@umn.edu (612) 625-4379

1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ 2 Osiris Coleman -OC 3 4 AJ: Hello, my name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian with the Transgender Oral History 5 Project. Today is September 21, 2015, and I am in Arlington, Virginia, and I'm talking to Osiris 6 Coleman. Can you tell me your name, your preferred gender pronouns, your gender assigned at 7 birth, and your sexual orientation? 8 OC: OK. So my legal name or . . . 9 AJ: Yeah. 10 OC: Yeah, Osiris Coleman. 11 AJ: OK. 12 OC: I'm 44. What else do you want to know? 13 What's your preferred gender pronouns? AJ: 14 OC: Male gender pronouns – him . . . 15 AJ: So he, him. 16 OC: Yeah. 17 AJ: OK. What was your gender assigned at birth? 18 OC: Female. 19 AJ: Is that right? 20 OC: Yes. 21 AJ: OK. So I just want to start off with just a really simple question, Osiris. Tell me what was your 22 earliest memory. 23 OC: Of what? 24 AJ: Just – period. The first thing that you really remember in your life. 25 OC: I was turning four years old and they had a birthday party at my grandmother's house for me. 26 So they invited the kids from the neighborhood and I was upstairs and they wanted me to wear 27 a dress for the birthday party and I refused – because I never wore dresses. My father he 28 bought my clothes basically and . . . 29 AJ: So you weren't having it? 30 OC: Yeah. He let me pick out my own clothes, I always picked out boy clothes – jeans, corduroys. So 31 when this 4th birthday party came around they wanted me to wear this dress and I was told by 32 my mother and my grandmother that if I didn't wear this dress that there wasn't going to be a

party, that they was going to send everybody home. I said, "Oh well, there just won't be no

33

2		my birthday party with my friends.
3	AJ:	It was your birthday party?
4 5	OC:	It was my birthday party, I was turning four-years-old. I'll never forget – that's my earliest recollection.
6	AJ:	That's your earliest memory of something, recollection.
7	OC:	Yeah.
8	AJ:	That's deep.
9 10	OC:	But eventually they let me go down with my pants on, play the Pin the Tail on the Donkey, all of that.
11	AJ:	So you had a good time.
12	OC:	Yeah, I had a great time.
13	AJ:	And you stood your ground, you stood on your square.
14 15	OC:	I stood on my ground at four-years-old, I wasn't doing it. They threatened to send everybody home, I wasn't getting no presents, no cake. I was like, "Oh well."
16	AJ:	Where did you grow up?
17	OC:	I grew up in Philadelphia, West Phillie.
18	AJ:	Is that right?
19	OC:	Yes.
20	AJ:	Did you go to grade school in Philadelphia?
21	OC:	Yeah. I went to public school for a couple of years and then after that I went to Catholic school.
22 23	AJ:	What was that like? Were you a good student? Were you bullied in school? Were your teachers cool?
24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33	OC:	I was kind of bullied as a child, even before I got to school. The girls didn't want to play with me, they would call me a boy and I would break down and start crying. They saw that and they sensed a weakness in me and they would just mess with me every time I would come outside, tease me. But I was cool with the boys though. It was funny because I would do boy things — climb trees, we were running through the alleyways, climbing over people's fences, doing all type of stuff. But my parents and my grandparents didn't want me hanging with the boys so they wouldn't let me go outside. They told me, they said, "You're a girl, you're not supposed to play with boys so we can't have you outside." The only way I could go outside was if I played with the girls so I would go out and go over to the girls and they would be double-dutch jumpers, double-dutch rope, and I would beg them just to let me be involved so I could stay out. So they let me turn.

1	AJ:	The girls let you turn.
2	OC:	Yeah, I was a turner, that got me outdoors.
3	AJ:	And then you were able to stay outside.
4	OC:	And then I'd sneak off with my guy friends, my buddies after a while.
5	AJ:	That is hilarious. But school was kind of a rough time for you?
6	OC:	Yeah, school was kind of rough. I got pregnant at 14.
7	AJ:	Oh wow.
8 9 10 11	OC:	I was being molested by my cousin and it made me promiscuous, I guess. I don't know. I started doing things with other guys, my playmates. This person was my next-door neighbor. We were just friends and I don't know, it just happened and I got pregnant at 14 and I hid it for the whole nine months – up until the time I went into labor.
12	AJ:	Is that right?
13 14 15	OC:	But my father would ask me. "Girl, you gaining weight?" And he's kind of crazy. He grew up in an abusive family so I was abused at times physically by him, so I was scared to death to tell him anything like that.
16	AJ:	Wow. So you grew up being basically being raised by your dad?
17 18 19 20 21 22	OC:	From the time I was nine or ten because my mother had a nervous breakdown when I was a kid, very young. She became how can I put it? Fanatical about religion. She would take me out in the street, like I thought I was going shopping, but she was telling me to go talk to people about God. I was traumatized. That's why to this day I'm not really a religious person. Basically I believe religion is put here to brainwash us as Black people – through slavery and everything else that they did to us, to keep us complacent.
23	AJ:	That's interesting. Say more about that – a little bit more about that.
24	OC:	About?
25	AJ:	The church and the role and how you think the Black church plays a role in the Black community
26 27	OC:	Because they gave us the white Jesus as God, so basically our enemy became our deity. Do you know what that means?
28	AJ:	I do know what that means.
29 30	OC:	All right, so it's hard to raise up against a person that you're looking to as God. So that's basically how I look at that situation.
31 32 33 34	AJ:	OK. So your mother sort of checked out of the family while you were at a pretty young age – eight or nine years old. And then you were raised with your dad I know when we were talking earlier you said you were talking about how your dad, himself, was abused as a child and created some really significant abuse for you. Do you want to talk about that?

2	OC.	once I became pregnant with a child, he beat me every day because of that. Instead of him finding out what happened, he beat me every day. So I left.
4	AJ:	You ran away from home.
5 6	OC:	Yeah, I ran away early – maybe 15 or 16. Well first he sent me to live with my grandmother in Chicago and I left Chicago and came back to Phillie. I ran away. I don't know.
7	AJ:	So what happened with the baby?
8 9 10 11 12 13	OC:	Oh, I'm talking too far he got married to a woman. He beat me every day because of that, because he claimed that because of me he had to marry this woman to take care of my child. I have a big family in Chicago, I have about eight aunts and my grandmother once I got to Chicago I found this out. My grandmother wanted her — she was like, "We have another grandbaby in this family we need to get to Chicago, we're going to take care of her and make sure she's all right." But I didn't know that. But eventually he did send her to Chicago, my aunt raised her. She's 30 now.
15	AJ:	Is that right?
16	OC:	Yeah, she's 30 years old.
17	AJ:	So you have had contact with her?
18 19	OC:	Yeah, recently. She found me after 30 years – it hasn't even been a year yet. I think it was last October, 2014.
20	AJ:	Is that right?
21	OC:	Yeah, she looked all over for me.
22 23	AJ:	That's kind of that's a pretty traumatic thing, Osiris. Did you think about this child throughout your life? What kind of thoughts did you have?
24 25	OC:	I did. I would wonder what she was doing. I figured she probably hated me because I left. I didn't think she would understand. I didn't know what my father or my family had told her.
26	AJ:	So you didn't know that she was being raised by your family?
27 28 29 30	OC:	I thought she was still with my stepmother in Philadelphia all this time. I knew she was grown but I thought that's who raised her — my stepmother. So I was not aware that she was in Chicago until I spoke to her on the phone and I heard the Chicago accent. I knew right away that she grew up in Chicago.
31	AJ:	So you left Philadelphia and Chicago and you just never had contact with your family again?
32 33 34 35	OC:	I would run into my uncle – like my mother's brother, I ran into a couple of times in Phillie and he was like, "Oh, that's messed up, you left home." I was just traumatized, he didn't know what happened. I didn't want to get into it with him because he's nothing but a drunk and a crackhead. So I just it moving. She was the first person she found me on Facebook, I think

1 2 3 4 5 6		she found me – saw me. Once I changed my name it kind of she hit a roadblock and it took her awhile she kept seeing the other name and she didn't know who it was. She didn't know if maybe I got married or what. She found me on Facebook and now she's looking at a man. She called my brother and she asked my brother, "Yo, do you know who this is?" And he said, "No, but that looks like my sister." And my daughter was like, "It is, I think it is." So he hit me up, he sent me a message – because she was scared.
7	AJ:	Oh wow.
8 9 10	OC:	So he was like, "Yo, is this my sister?" I'm like, "What? This is my little brother." We texted and he's like, "Roxanne is the one who found you." So eventually we wound up talking and he's telling me that she was the one that found me.
L1	AJ:	So that's your daughter's name, Roxanne?
12 13	OC:	Yeah. And that she was scared to contact me – because they weren't even sure if it was me or not.
L4	AJ:	Right, right.
15 16 17 18	OC:	He told me that she wanted to speak to me so I gave him my number and she called and I broke down into tears because I couldn't even talk. I had to talk to her the next day, I couldn't even talk. We just text for the rest of that night. So once I got my emotions together, I was able to talk to her and then she explained to me what she's been doing. She works for United Airlines, she flew in to see me.
20	AJ:	Which United Airlines?
21 22	OC:	Yeah, she works with United Airlines. She's a supervisor for the baggage people. So she flew in to see me like right away.
23	AJ:	Right away?
24	OC:	Yeah, we seen each other right away.
25	AJ:	So you guys had a happy reunion.
26	OC:	Yeah.
27 28 29 30 31	AJ:	Well that's a great part to this story. Wow. So you recognized that your gender didn't quite match up with how you were feeling inside, the gender you were assigned at birth didn't quite match up when you were four-years-old, because you talked about this birthday party. When did you decide to really sort of act on making some changes in your life to make your gender more conforming with the way you were thinking and feeling? Do you remember? (pause) Do you want me to turn it off for a minute?
33	OC:	Yes.
34 35	AJ:	So we're back, took a little break. So, Osiris, when was the first time you ever saw a transidentified person and what was that impact on you?

1 2	OC:	I was in New York. I was in Barnes and Noble and I was just looking through the gay and lesbian section that they have in there.
3	AJ:	Right.
4 5 6 7	OC:	At the time I didn't have a job, I was in the shelter. I had just came to New York and I was trying to get a place. So to kill time I would go to the Barnes and Noble and read books, try to keep myself productive, my mind going. So I came across a book, it was like more of a photo album and on the cover it was a white male, a transsexual male. His name was Jamison or something.
8	AJ:	Jamison Green?
9 10	OC:	I forgot I don't know the guy's name. He did the book – a picture book of trans men back in the day.
11	AJ:	Oh, Loren Cameron.
12 13 14	OC:	Loren Cameron – yes, that was the book I saw. I opened it and I saw a Black trans man in there and that really blew my mind. I knew that's what I had never knew before that time, I know it sounds
15	AJ:	So you were an adult?
16 17	OC:	Yeah, I was like 22 or 23. I didn't even know that you could transition from a female to a male, I'd never heard of it. I know that sounds crazy but I did not know.
18	AJ:	No, that doesn't – that's real.
19 20 21 22 23	OC:	Until I saw that book and I knew that's what I wanted to do – but at the time you know, I was in a shelter, I'm trying to get my place, trying to find employment. I was stuck in survival mode more than anything so that had to go on the back burner. I didn't want to be transitioning and worrying about a job. I wanted to wait until I was more financially stable and I could get the surgeries and everything I needed, and do whatever I needed to do.
24	AJ:	So what kind of work do you do?
25	OC:	I work for the New York City Department of Sanitation.
26	AJ:	Is that right? How long have you been working there?
27	OC:	2001, August of 2001.
28	AJ:	OK, so this is 2015, so you're almost 15 years in. Wow.
29	OC:	I'm a supervisor.
30	AJ:	That was right before September 11 th .
31 32 33	OC:	Yeah. I was the last class hired before September 11^{th} . My first day on the job was September the 11^{th} , my first official day. I went down to the World Trade Center – I worked one day down there.
34	AJ: The Tra	Is that right? ansgender Oral History Project Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies

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1	OC:	Yeah, I was covered in the dust.
2	AJ:	Wow. What feeling did you have personally and describe the feeling of the city, because I always wonder
4 5	OC:	I remember all right, I'll tell you what happened in my situation. I was going through training, on-the-job training, at the time with the Department of Sanitation.
6	AJ:	Right, right.
7 8 9 10 11	OC:	It was my last day, I had went in for the midnight shift on September 11 th . It's a garage in Harlem where I live, it's close to my house – it's walking distance, I don't have to drive. I finished my shift, I got off at 8am that morning. The next day I was supposed to report, which was the 12 th , I was supposed to report back to the classroom training center so we could get our orders and go on the job. That was my last day of training.
12	AJ:	So training was done.
13 14 15 16 17 18 19	OC:	Yeah. So I got off at 8 o'clock that morning, walked home, took a shower, turned the TV on about 8:45 and I'm watching the news and they're showing a plane hit the World Trade Center and so I'm like, "What the hell is going on?" I'm thinking I'm watching a movie or something but then I'm seeing it's the actual news and I'm just sitting there looking at it. So eventually I fell asleep because I had worked all night. So I woke up about 3 or 4. I'm not a person who cooks, I go outside thinking I want to get something to eat. When I went outside, it was a ghost town. There wasn't a store open, there wasn't a soul on the street – and mind you, I live in Harlem and I'm going down to 125 th Street.
21	AJ:	There's always people in Harlem.
22	OC:	There was nobody out. I was the only person walking.
23 24	AJ:	There's hundreds of people at all times of day, thousands of people during the busiest part of the day, and you're telling me there was no one out on the streets.
25	OC:	No one. Like 4 or 5, I would say – it was getting towards the evening hours. No one was out.
26	AJ:	Wow.
27 28 29	OC:	And the stores was closed. There might have been a couple of stores open here and there, like corner stores, but the major stores – clothing stores, all that stuff was closed. Nothing. The State Building was shut down, because I live up the block from the New York State
30	AJ:	From the Federal oh, OK.
31 32 33 34 35 36	OC:	Yeah, that was closed. So it was a somber situation. I tried to call my job because I'm like now what do I do – am I going back to the training center or what's happening. They called me and they said for me to report back to the same garage I did my training in, which was close to my house, so I was like, "OK." So September 12 th , I show up I think it was 6am or 7am and they threw us all into a van and took us down to the World Trade Center, and some of the stuff I saw I'll never forget. I didn't even go I guess because I was a rookie, I didn't really go into the

1 2 3		rubble but I was around in the area, I was more I was a couple of blocks down where the sanitation clinic is and they have a bull, it's called like Bowling Green – it's like a bull there It's in the middle of the Broadway.
4	AJ:	Wall Street?
5	OC:	Yes, there's a big bull right there. I was right there in that area.
6	AJ:	OK.
7 8 9 10 11	OC:	There was a group of us and all of a sudden we're there working and I just hear all this noise out of nowhere, trucks coming barreling down that Broadway where the bull is at and this woman, I'll never forget – she was a cop, a white lady. She said, "Run, run. Just run." You could see it in her face – so we just dropped everything and just run and run and run – we don't even know what we're running for. I see the trucks barreling down the Broadway so we wind up we're all the now in what you call Battery Park, which is by the water.
13	AJ:	Right.
14 15 16	OC:	Where they have the Staten Island Ferry and so on and so forth. And we're like, "Yo, what was we running for?" We're trying to find out – we wasn't going to ask no questions at the time but now that we
L 7	AJ:	Right, kind of feel safe a little bit.
18 19	OC:	Yeah, so come to find out another building had fell down the next day. I don't know if you were aware of that.
20	AJ:	No.
21 22 23 24 25	OC:	Another building collapsed. It was kind of shaky and then it came down while people were I don't know if anybody got hurt, I don't remember. But they didn't let us go back in there to work for the rest of that day. They basically put us back in the van and took us back to the garage or whatever. But, because I worked down there that one day, I'm in the process now of getting into the registry or whatever.
26	AJ:	For first responders and
27 28	OC:	Yes, first responders – they have a couple of programs so I'm trying to because you never know. Even though I feel fine, you never know.
29 30	AJ:	Yeah, that was a very traumatic experience, I think, for well, clearly for our nation but even more so for New Yorkers and it sounds like it was a very personal experience for you.
31 32 33	OC:	Yeah. When I went there when we went down there that day, I saw a car smashed into the ground like a sardine can – like if you smash a soda can flat to the ground, a car cars and all the vendor carts - the hot dog carts, the bagel carts were just left there with the bagels
34	AJ:	They were still there.

1 2 3	OC:	They were still there, the bagels still there. People were walking around like zombies holding pictures of loved ones coming over to us, "Have you seen this person?" They had made collages on walls and fences with pictures of all their loved ones.
4	AJ:	Wow.
5 6 7 8 9 10 11	OC:	People wanted us to give them rides, but we couldn't do it. We were like, "We would love to but we're down here working sanitation, we can't give people rides." But it was just a bad situation. So after that happened, I worked the one day and they asked for volunteers to go work at the World Trade Center, so I didn't get forced anymore. And it went by seniority so because I was new, I was a rookie, I didn't make it anyway. So I stayed at the garage working. I only worked the one day, but a lot of those guys who volunteered to work down there, a lot of them guys got sick and died.
12	AJ:	Oh no.
13 14	OC:	Yeah, there's a couple of them I know. They got money and stuff but they didn't make it. Whatever that stuff they were breathing down there, it was rough.
15	AJ:	Wow.
16	OC:	It was a serious thing.
17	AJ:	That was a very painful time in history, in human history I think.
18	OC:	Yeah.
19 20 21	AJ:	So you said you saw this book, Loren Cameron, but you kind of knew that you wanted to wait until you were more stable with housing and financial, employment, that kind of thing. And then you got this job at the city, so did you transition at your job?
22 23 24	OC:	Yeah, but I waited. I didn't do it right away. I waited – I should have did I wish I would have did it before I came on the job then I wouldn't be going through the things I go through – the discrimination.
25	AJ:	What kind of things?
26 27 28 29 30 31	OC:	Well once I came out as being trans, I had worked there for so many years and they knew me as the other person. And so now I've come out to them as Osiris Coleman, I'm a male now. I showed them my birth certificate well I hadn't had the birth certificate changed at that point, that took some time. I showed them my name change papers and my driver's license. They said I needed something, I forgot what it was. Oh, they said I needed my birth certificate in order for me to change I said, "No, I don't." And they told me, "Oh, hold on for a minute."
32	AJ:	OK.
33 34 35 36	OC:	And they went, and I found out what they did – they called the lady from EEO and asked her, she told me later on when I went to her for something. They didn't know how to deal with me. And then the man came back and he apologized. Someone asked me a question the other day, I told them about the incident and they said, "Oh, so you were all right, you accepted that?" And

1 I guess I did, I shouldn't have – they should have known how to deal with it. I should have made 2 a big deal about that at the time. And the person told me that, you know, they said to . . . you 3 know, this person is a lawyer, and they're like, "So you accepted that they didn't know how to 4 deal with you and they told you you needed your birth certificate changed and you didn't?" I 5 said, ""Yeah, I guess I did. I dealt with a lot of . . ." It took me a while to even go and bring them 6 up on . . . a few years I dealt with this, being mis-gendered, being written up for any little thing, 7 people talking about my surgeries I'm hearing – at the sanitation clinic laughing and making 8 jokes about my surgeries and stuff.

- 9 AJ: Are there any protections in New York City for trans people?
- OC: Yeah, supposedly, but the city who implemented these laws don't follow them themselves, they don't implement them in their work place at all. All of this is illegal in New York but this is the city itself- that's what makes this so bizarre. You're the one that put these laws into place and here I am being discriminated in every way.
- AJ: Wow. So you've faced some real significant challenges in employment. Have you ever
 experienced any discrimination in any other institutions like the medical industry, the
 educational system?
- 17 OC: Social Security.
- 18 AJ: Social Security.
- 19 OC: When I went to change my social security – the name and the gender, they wrote me a letter. 20 Basically I submitted the paperwork – my name change paper, the letter from the therapist, everything that I was told by people who that's what they do or the organization that I was with 21 22 - CK Life. They told me exactly what I needed because they deal with people who do this, so 23 they knew exactly what the protocol was. So when I went there and I handed in my paperwork 24 to them . . . first of all, I was stupid. I didn't get anything from them saying that I handed them 25 this stuff. All of a sudden, I waited like two or three weeks from them, I get a letter from them, 26 "Oh, we changed your name but we can't change your gender because you don't have the birth 27 certificate . . . " No, it wasn't the birth certificate, you only had your top surgery, you have to 28 have our bottom surgery they were saying to me in so many words in the letter. So that's . . .
- 29 AJ: That's not true.
- 30 OC: No, that's true. So I go there now and you know where I made a mistake, let me back up. I 31 went to the Social Security Office in Harlem, in the Black neighborhood. First of all it was an 32 awful office. We were there all day – people fighting over their social security benefits and a lot 33 of older people there, they just have you there all day. So I made a mistake with that. So I go 34 there and I'm like, "You know, what happened?" I show the lady the letter, "This is not the case, 35 do you know the laws?" So they come and they show me something out of a book or something 36 they had saying that I must have had gender change . . . but it wasn't being specific about what 37 type. So I'm telling them that me having this top surgery in New York state law, that this is a gender changing surgery. So I said, "Well where's all the papers at that I submitted?" They had 38 39 no record of me being there, they acted like they didn't know what I was talking about. The only 40 proof I had was that letter that they sent me. They had lost my name change papers that I gave

them – everything. And I had gave them all official documents – disappeared, disappeared.

When the lady went back and was talking to the other ones, I seen them like looking and whispering, like, "I got that." A couple of them came over and was like, "Well this is this, this is that." I was like, "All right, whatever." So I went home and I was sitting down and thinking, "You know what? I made a mistake. I shouldn't have ever went to take care of my business in the Black neighborhood." Because these were all Black people I was dealing with and they were acting just like . . . I hate to say it, niggers.

8 AJ: OK.

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OC: They were acting like a bunch of unprofessional, whispering about me – you know what I'm saying? Didn't know what they was talking about, misplaced my paperwork. I should have brought them up on some type of . . . but I just wanted to get my business taken care of. So I went . . . so I'm sitting there thinking, "All right, I'm going to go to the main Social Security Office down where the white people go and I know they got to know their laws, that's the main office." So I go there – get there, first of all it's like in an immigration building. I don't know if it's immigration but they got a lot of state agencies in there – it's like a federal building, you've got to go through security. So I go through the security and all that, go up there, get up to the Social Security Office. I'm thinking this is going to be like 125th Street, a welfare office with 100 people. There was only two people in there, the security guard and one other person waiting. A nice security guard too – a Black chick, she gave me her number and everything. Told me to fill out this paper about why I'm there. By the time I filled the paper out, I went right to the window.

22 AJ: You were the next person.

23 OC: Get to the window, never forget it – it was a white lady there. I didn't say one word to her. I 24 handed her the name change paper, the letter from my therapist, and the other letter that they 25 sent me and a new application. She didn't even say nothing to me. She started typing on her 26 thing, looking at what I gave her, bam, bam, bam, pushed it back and she said, "All right, Mr. 27 Coleman, your name is already changed, we'll be sending you another card in two weeks and 28 that other thing will be changed." I said, "What? You don't need to make copies or nothing?" 29 And she said, "No, no, no – I'm the boss here, once I see it that's enough. I just input it in the computer." She said, "You're fine, go, have a nice day." Just that easy. I was there 10 minutes 30 31 maybe.

32 AJ: So, that was a good experience.

OC: Yeah, but I'm saying why in the Black community where I went I had such a hard way to go. And then somebody else called me, because I had told some people about it, and somebody must have told this guy, "Oh, well Osiris had the same problem." So the guy hit me up on Facebook, he was like, "Yo, I went to 125th Street, same thing happened." He told me the whole story. I said, "Say no more. Go down to the main Social Security Office and they're going to take care of you." He thanked me. He called me after he went, "You know, I wasn't even in there 10 minutes and they took care of me." It's a shame that us as Black people, a lot of times . . .

1 2	AJ:	So you think it's primarily because it was in that community, in that neighborhood that you had . \hdots
3	OC:	I know so.
4	AJ:	OK.
5 6 7 8 9	OC:	Because when I did my license, I went down to the Village to do my gender change on it. I didn't want to go through what I went through because I had did the Social Security first, so now when it came time to do the license, I went down to the Village and I had no problem. The girl looked at the paper, whatever, and did everything – gave me new license, name change, boom. They deal with that all the time – that's the village, that's the gay area.
10	AJ:	Right.
11	OC:	Location is everything.
12	AJ:	Location is everything, I guess. Wow. So you transitioned on your job.
13	OC:	Yeah.
14	AJ:	Have you ever done any medical interventions throughout your transition?
15	OC:	What do you mean?
16	AJ:	Hormones? Have you had any surgeries?
17	OC:	Yeah, I take testosterone. I've had a lot of surgeries – a few surgeries. Yeah, I've had a few.
18	AJ:	What surgeries have you had?
19 20 21	OC:	The first surgery I had was the top surgery – they called it a double mastectomy basically. So I have a male chest. The second surgery I had was two weeks after I had no it wasn't, a couple of months – two months. I had a hysterectomy and an oophorectomy they call it.
22	AJ:	OK.
23	OC:	That's basically removal of ovaries and some stuff.
24	AJ:	Did you have did your insurance cover any of that?
25	OC:	Yeah, insurance covered everything.
26	AJ:	That was good.
27 28	OC:	Being a city employee does you know, medical benefits for city employees so it was no problem. Earlier this year, 2015, I had a phalloplasty.
29	AJ:	Wow. That's pretty significant. Are you pleased with your results?
30	OC:	Yeah, I only had the first stage so far. I'm going for the second stage in a couple of months.

31

AJ:

So it has to happen in stages, the phalloplasty?

1 2 3	OC:	It has to happen in stages. Some doctors have more stages than others. My doctor, he only does two – depending on where he's taking it from in your body. If it's a bigger guy, it might take three stages but for me it was only two stages.
4	AJ:	Who is your doctor?
5	OC:	Dr. Crane.
6	AJ:	Dr. ?
7	OC:	Crane. Curtis Crane. He's in San Francisco.
8	AJ:	So C-r-a-n-e? Crane – like a crane?
9	OC:	Yes.
10	AJ:	OK, Curtis Crane.
11	OC:	Yes, cool guy – young guy too. He looks maybe younger than me.
12	AJ:	So you live in New York City?
13	OC:	Yeah, I live in New York City.
14	AJ:	And you went to San Francisco for the surgery?
15	OC:	I went to San Francisco.
16	AJ:	What made you go to San Francisco to see Dr. Crane?
17 18	OC:	Because there's only a few places they do it. He's the best. He studied overseas in what do they call that? Serbia – or one of those European countries where they originated that surgery.
19	AJ:	Oh wow, OK.
20 21	OC:	Because I know a lot of the guys back in the day, they paid money to go to I think it was Belgrade or something.
22	AJ:	OK, maybe so.
23 24 25 26 27 28	OC:	And they would pay the money to go to Belgrade and get the surgery done, they didn't even do it here. Insurance definitely wasn't covering it — we're talking like maybe \$50,000 they were paying. So Crane learned basically with them and now he's back over here. Now you have other surgeons, I don't know where they studied. You have one in Florida and one in Chicago but I know guys who are going to them and I hear about a lot of complications with them — especially this guy in Florida, Salgado, Dr. Salgado.

- 29 AJ: So you did your research before . . .
- 30 OC: I did my research of course, of course. Yeah, I had to go to the best.
- 31 AJ: Yeah, it's a pretty life changing thing. So you're happy with the results?
- 32 OC: Yes, yes.

1	AJ:	That's awesome. Congratulations.
2	OC:	Thank you.
3 4 5	AJ:	So, what do you think about the trans community and its relationship to the lesbian, the gay, and the bisexual community? Is there a relationship? You know, the letter is LGBT but do you
6	OC:	They don't respect us.
7	AJ:	Really?
8 9 10 11	OC:	They don't respect us. I'm not saying everybody but the majority. It's like a joke to them. They'll mis-gender, they'll mis-pronoun – call out your pronouns. Me, as a trans man, I'm kind of under the radar, they don't know. So I've been at events, LGBT events, and I'm getting hit on constantly by the gays.
12	AJ:	So you're hearing?
13 14	OC:	I'm hearing from them disrespectful things about trans people and they don't even know that I'm sitting in front of them and I'm trans. It's funny.
15	AJ:	So you don't think there is a strong connection at all?
16	OC:	I think we're trying extra hard to be connected with them for whatever reason
17	AJ:	We meaning?
18 19	OC:	From the powers to be, like these people these high profile trans people, like Laverne Cox and
20	AJ:	Janet Mock, yeah.
21	OC:	Janet Mock, yeah.
22	AJ:	Caitlyn Jenner.
23	OC:	Yes, yes.
24 25	AJ:	You have some pretty strong feelings about Caitlyn Jenner. What do you think about her transition?
26 27 28	OC:	I guess she had to do what she had to do, but don't act like she's the first that ever did it. Why when white people do something it's like we never I'll never forget when I was a kid, they had a movie out called 10 with Bo Derek. I don't know if you ever saw it.
29	AJ:	I remember the movie.
30 31 32 33 34	OC:	I used to hear my grandma, now I'm a baby about 4 or 5, and I hear grandma and them saying, "Yeah, this white chick got corn rows in her and they going to act like she the first one that ever . . Cicely Tyson been wearing corn rows," my grandmother said, "And nobody cared but it was a big thing once Bo Derek wore it in this movie 10." That's what brought the corn rows to the forefront. So it takes for them to do it, I guess, for it to mean something. ansgender Oral History Project Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies

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1	AJ:	It seems like that's been the story with Miss Jenner.
2	OC:	I mean hey, God bless her.
3	AJ:	Do you think there is a transgender agenda?
4	OC:	I don't really follow that type of
5	AJ:	So you're not involved in sort of activism or
6	OC:	No, I have friends that
7	AJ:	Trans equality or trans rights and that kind of stuff?
8 9	OC:	Nah, I'm too busy trying to get my own stuff. I'm fighting with my job and living my life, getting to know my daughter again and other things. I really don't have time.
10	AJ:	Understandable, that's understandable.
11 12 13	OC:	I don't have a problem with nobody I got a lot of friends, you know. And I love that. One of the guys I'm real cool with, Sean Coleman, he's great. He has this organization Destination Tomorrow.
14	AJ:	Destination Tomorrow.
15	OC:	Yeah, he's doing a lot of great thing.
16	AJ:	I've heard a lot of great things about that organization.
17 18	OC:	Yeah, he's a beautiful brother. You've got to come to New York and meet him, he's one of my people.
19	AJ:	I've met him before.
20 21	OC:	Oh you met Sean, OK. OK. Now I was thinking maybe I could do something with him because me and him clicked so much.
22	AJ:	You talked about this organization called CK Life.
23	OC:	Yeah, I started with them.
24 25	AJ:	Right. And they sort of helped you through transition and understanding some of the legal aspects of what you needed to do?
26	OC:	Yeah, they helped me a lot.
27	AJ:	So that's what their mission is? They help transgender people transition?
28 29 30	OC:	Yeah, they help people transition. They try to get people surgeries and the medication. They have a program at Bronx-Lebanon Hospital where they get people seen by doctors there. They have a little trans clinic within the hospital.
31	AJ:	Within the hospital.

1 2	OC:	Within the hospital, yes. And they have groups every Friday there so people can talk about things and
3	AJ:	Whatever their issue is, huh?
4	OC:	Yeah. So it's not bad, they're doing good stuff.
5	AJ:	Right, that's great. And that's in the Bronx, I think?
6	OC:	Yeah, in the Bronx in New York. Kim Watson.
7	AJ:	Oh great, another friend of mine. Kim Watson is doing some really great things.
8	OC:	Nice lady.
9 10	AJ:	So, where you do think the transgender community is going to be in the next 50 years? Do you think \dots ?
11 12 13 14	OC:	It looks like we're making a lot of inroads as trans people, it's becoming more accepted – especially since Miss Caitlyn Jenner, like you said – it's all right now sister, they done did it. They say if you're white you're all right, if you're Black stay back. Yeah. In a way her doing this is bringing it to the forefront, so it's not a bad thing. It takes for a white person to do it for it
15 16	AJ:	I don't know if you know this or not, but in 2015, there have been 20 trans women of color who have been murdered so far this year.
L7	OC:	It was 20, wow.
18	AJ:	Yeah.
19	OC:	And the year ain't even up yet – wow, that's
20 21 22 23 24	AJ:	Yeah, we're just now in September. So while there's all this visibility from people like Laverne Cox and Janet Mock and Caitlyn Jenner and all of these kinds of things, there's still some really, really hard times for trans people who are Black or people of color who don't have access to employment or housing. What are your thoughts? You live in Harlem so I'm sure you probably see a lot of these
25 26 27	OC:	There's a big stroll over where I used to work at the sanitation garage, because it's underneath like an elevated train and then going between the that whole area, you've got the projects over there. They're on drugs and when
28	AJ:	So what's a stroll because some people might not understand what the stroll is?
29 30 31 32 33 34	OC:	They're going back and forth with the cars and driving, looking to jump in or do whatever they do – guys walk up and pick them up. I just seen it all. My understanding is they were squatting in an abandoned house around there or something. I just from what I see, they kind of bring it on themselves a lot of times because you're out there, putting yourself out there – what do you expect to happen? You're going to have these problems. I'm not saying it's right but I was minding my business, I'm driving through there and I'm stopped at the light. Now I've got an older car and something was wrong with the window – this side wouldn't roll down, on my side

1 2 3 4 5		So I had the other windows open and I'm at the light, they're on the corner – the girls, I see them. "Ahh, look at you, you've got your window rolled down, you tricking or what? You've got your window down on that side." Like saying some ill stuff to me, like getting "Hey, what you want to do? You tricking or what? How big is your?" Now what if I had been a crazy dude and jumped out I'm minding my business.
6	AJ:	Right, yeah.
7 8 9 10	OC:	Once the light changed I just pulled off, but then I'm thinking to myself - that's why have these problems a lot of times because they shouldn't have never said anything to me. I was minding my business. They don't know what kind of maniac or why you ever saying anything? I'm not saying they all do it but some of them are very outspoken, they'll say whatever.
11 12 13	AJ:	Absolutely. And a lot of times I would imagine that most people who have to who deal with that lifestyle is not necessarily a choice, it's that they can't find a job or they can't get their social security card changed and their ID changed and all of these
14	OC:	Why can't they?
15	AJ:	Or all of these things that you have done. Well, that costs money, right?
16 17 18	OC:	I'm hearing they have programs I didn't go through any programs, I paid. I'm hearing they have programs in New York where they will pay for your name change. It might take a little longer.
19	AJ:	Is that right?
20	OC:	Yeah, you can get it done for free or little or nothing.
21	AJ:	So there is access, there's more and more access.
22	OC:	Yes, there's more and more access – yeah, there is. A lot of them are strung out on the drugs.
23	AJ:	So drugs.
24 25	OC:	Yeah, drugs pays a major part – but they don't want to do anything other than just getting high and turning tricks.
26 27	AJ:	Why do you think drug abuse and alcohol abuse and those kind of things are more prevalent in the trans community?
28	OC:	I guess they're trying to escape reality, running from yourself.
29	AJ:	Lots of depression, thoughts of suicide.
30 31	OC:	I guess to ease the pain – self-medicating, I guess. Lots of suicide, yeah. I guess people are unhappy with their lives, they don't want to live their life anymore and they just give up.
32 33 34	AJ:	When we were talking before though, even though you don't really work with an organization or anything, but I got the sense that you mentor a lot of young trans men who are coming out and trying to find their way to manhood.

1 OC: Yeah, I do – there's a few. They look up to m	1 OC:
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- 2 AJ: Right.
- 3 OC: They call me Unc.
- 4 AJ: Oh really?
- 5 OC: Yeah, yeah.
- 6 AJ: So they're like nephews to you?
- 7 OC: Yeah, I've got a few nephews yeah.
- 8 AJ: OK. What's that relationship like? How does one become a family member like that?
- 9 OC: I don't know because I was never like . . . you know, like in a barroom scene and they'll be like,
 10 "Oh, that's sister." I was never into anything like that. But I don't know, I just met these guys, a
- few guys and they just clung to me. I don't know, they just came up under my wing.
- 12 AJ: Right.
- 13 OC: They just kept hanging around. They wouldn't go away. They look up to me. They'll go, "Hey
- 14 Unc, what's up?" I'm in my 40s and these cats are like in their 20s and stuff.
- 15 AJ: So what kind of things do you impart with them? What kind of wisdom do you share?
- 16 OC: I try to tell them how to stand up and hold their own as a man. These boys, they still want to be
- mama's boys, they want to live off of women and then wonder why they're right back at
- 18 mama's house. "Y'all," I said, "You have your own, the woman is going to respect you more –
- 19 you're going to get more respect." Like they say, "God bless the child."
- 20 AJ: Right.
- 21 OC: I try to instill that in them, and other things if they have any questions about surgeries, but I've
- 22 basically been through everything so I try to help them with stuff like that.
- 23 AJ: Right.
- 24 OC: You know, just teaching them being male in general. That's it.
- 25 AJ: Well that's a beautiful thing. They're very lucky to have somebody like you to help sort of lead
- the way and show the path you're sort of like a pioneer in terms of really transitioning at work,
- which is something that a lot of Black men don't do at least from what I can understand.
- 28 OC: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: And you said, you're 44, so you've been at this for a little while. You're kind of a pioneer.
- 30 OC: OK, all right thank you. I ain't never look at it like that.
- 31 AJ: One time you told me you were quite an athlete.
- 32 OC: Yeah, I played basketball. That's my other self.

The Transgender Oral History Project

1	AJ:	Really.
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- 2 OC: I was All-American and I played overseas for a little while.
- 3 AJ: Is that right?
- 4 OC: Yeah.
- 5 AJ: What was that experience like?
- 6 OC: It was something else, there's a lot of women. I tell you, they love basketball players.
- 7 AJ: Is that right.
- 8 OC: That's all I've got to say. No, but it was a hell of an experience. The relationships I made that I still have to this day. It was . . . I got to travel and see things, see all the cultures. That's why I've
- 10 always had an open mind about things.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 OC: It was nice.
- 13 AJ: And you still travel quite a bit today.
- 14 OC: Yeah. I go to South Africa a lot, my best friend lives there.
- 15 AJ: Is that right?
- 16 OC: Yeah. I think when I retire . . .
- 17 AJ: Johannesburg?
- 18 OC: He lives in Johannesburg well, he lives in Ramberg which is a suburb of Johannesburg.
- 19 Ramberg. But I've been to Cape Town. Once I retire I want to have dual-citizenship South
- 20 Africa and United States. I can, as a non-resident of South Africa, get residency based on if I
- 21 have a certain amount of money as a retirement I can get a retirement visa they call it. If I'm
- 22 getting a certain amount of money in my pension sorry.
- 23 AJ: Oh wow.
- 24 OC: I can have dual-citizenship go back and forth.
- 25 AJ: And that's your plan?
- 26 OC: Yeah. I'm going to have dual-citizenship. I'm going to stay there sometimes when it's warm and
- 27 then come back here for a while. It's beautiful there, I love it. The women are nice, it's a nice
- town.
- 29 AJ: I've heard a lot of Black people say when they go to Africa that they sort of feel like they're
- 30 going home.
- 31 OC: Yeah.
- 32 AJ: Do you have that experience or have you . . .?

1	OC:	When I first went I traveled with a group, that's how I
2	AJ:	Became familiar.
3 4	OC:	Yeah. And we had the guide pick us up from the airport, an African guy. He was a guide or whatever and he was like, "Welcome home," when we got off the plane.
5	AJ:	Wow.
6 7 8 9	OC:	And you should have seen when we came off the plane, the people who worked at the airport just stopped and looked – they stopped what they were doing and looked at us American Black people coming off I guess the way I dress, they probably was like, "wow." They just stopped what they were doing and we was just looking at each other like I could have cried.
LO	AJ:	Really? It was emotional, huh?
111 122 133 144 155 166 177 188 199 200	OC:	They could tell that we'd just came for the first time and they just looked at us I guess because we had a certain look, they knew we weren't African – they knew we were American. But it was funny – once I went back the second time and I'm doing more and I'm going around with my friend or whatever, people talked to me once I'm hanging out with him in Africa – they didn't know that I was American until I actually opened my mouth, there was no way to tell. I started trying to dress a little more African – I kind of toned down my New York, throwing them a little bit. But I kind of had the, "What the hell?" So I kind of had to tone it that's how I was fitting in more and they would be speaking to me – especially the ladies would be talking to me, so now when I open my mouth they're like I started getting treated different, sometimes it's good and sometimes it was bad. Sometimes they didn't want anything to do with me once they heard that I was
22	AJ:	Your American accent.
23 24 25 26 27 28	OC:	Yeah. One girl said to me, "Where are you from?" She didn't even want to talk to me. But then you have girls that are like, "Let me see your phone, let me put my phone number in there." I had these girls fighting over my phone to put their number in it. And my friend, she's watching them. She's like a sister to me. I met her on Facebook. It's funny – I was traveling and you know how you have friends on Facebook, we were actually a member of the same group – it's a group called Black Knowledge on Facebook.
29	AJ:	OK.
30 31 32 33	OC:	So we liked something or whatever, and we became friends – she hit me up and now we're good friends. So, I go to Africa. So I'm taking pictures in Johannesburg – so she hit me up, she's like, "Yo brother, you're coming here and you don't tell me." I said, "Oh, well we're just Facebook friends." She said, "Listen, where you at, I'm coming." But she brought her husband, but I'm like they took me out, I had the best time of my life with them.
35	AJ:	Is that right?
36 37	OC:	They took me to parties and everything. Man, listen – they had the girls for me, they brought some girls for me. They was treating me like I can't wait to go back just to see them. They

1 2		ask me all the time. I call her my sister now. I've stayed at their house – they treated me like a brother.
3	AJ:	Wow.
4 5	OC:	It's funny – we as a people by nature are such a loving and welcoming people – we love everybody.
6	AJ:	Right, right – the African spirit.
7 8	OC:	Yeah, it was lovely. I could cry about it. So I got family, I got family – I can just go there and stay if I want.
9 10	AJ:	Tell me about love and relationships and dating – because that was one of the things that you didn't answer I don't think.
11	OC:	About what – there ain't nothing happening.
12	AJ:	What's your sexual identity?
13	OC:	Oh, I'm straight – I like women.
14	AJ:	You like women.
15 16 17 18 19	OC:	I have dealt with men – like I told you when I was getting molested I thought that was just a reaction from that, but once I got old enough to know what I wanted it was women – I love women, there's no doubt about that. I lived my life as a lesbian all those years. Now that I'm a man it's funny, because those same girls that dealt with me as a lesbian, they still want me now as a man.
20	AJ:	You're the same person.
21	OC:	Yeah, but not much of a lesbian – I'm a man now. I don't even have any female parts anymore.
22 23	AJ:	Yeah, well I think sometimes people may get into relationships because of who the person is regardless of what their body parts are.
24 25 26 27 28	OC:	That's it. I thought lesbians they're always, "Men are bad" or whatever. That's the one thing I didn't like when I was in the lesbian community. They act like the man was the enemy – especially the Black man, the Black man is the enemy – because you sleep with a man you're nasty they would say. They'd say, "You eating that bitch pussy and she done slept with the niggers, you must to be nasty." They're rough, the lesbians are rough.
29	AJ:	I think that has changed some though.
30	OC:	You think it has, OK.
31	AJ:	That has changed a little bit.
32	OC:	Oh it has.
33	AJ:	Yeah.

1	OC:	All right.
2	AJ:	Are you in a relationship now?
3	OC:	No. I haven't been in a relationship for about seven years.
4	AJ:	Is that right?
5	OC:	Yeah.
6	AJ:	So just dating?
7 8	OC:	Just dating – little flings here and there, nothing serious. I just haven't found the right one, I don't know. I'm doing my thing – trying to get myself together.
9	AJ:	Are you looking?
10 11 12	OC:	I don't go out looking for it but if I meet somebody I meet somebody, but I'm not looking, I'm not running girls down and going out, especially to meet women or going through Facebook looking to meet
13	AJ:	Trolling.
14	OC:	Yeah, trolling. No, I don't troll – yeah, that's what they call it.
15 16 17	AJ:	OK. Well, I have to say, Osiris, I really appreciate your openness and your willingness to talk about your life and some of your journey as becoming the person who you feel most comfortable being. What are some of the positive things of your transition?
18 19	OC:	Positive? Oh, the male privilege I receive. That's nice, people move out of my way. I don't really have any problems.
20 21	AJ:	Have you experienced does racism feel different as living life as a woman as it does now living as a man?
22	OC:	Oh yeah. I had a couple interactions with the police.
23	AJ:	Or a Black man I should say.
24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32	OC:	Yeah, I had them run up on me. What they do is they see me I'm coming out of the store, I've got a bag no, as a matter of fact I'm coming out of the liquor store with a bag, I'm crossing in front of them in an unmarked crossing, they make a left and another left and meet me at the next corner, jump out on me. "Yo, what's in the bag, man?" I'm like, "A bottle of Bailey's, a small bottle of Bailey's." I think it was Christmas or something, Christmas night. "Oh, have a nice night," or whatever. And then one time I'm walking, going to the store — now they had a cop stationed on the block because we had had a couple of shootings around there and so they had a guy walking the beat or something, he was just standing. So he's on his cell phone when I went to the store. Coming back, I got the beer in a bag and he's on his cell phone talking about, "Ah, excuse me, what's in that bag?" "Man, you better go finish your conversation."

Oh wow.

34

AJ:

1 2 3 4 5	OC:	So they try. I see them I drive an older car so they don't really bother me driving. I see them, they check you out more as a Black male than as a woman – I never had no run-ins with the police, they never stopped me for nothing but now this is a whole different scene. And these are other Black cops a lot of times, it doesn't have to be a white I don't think. They're all blue – one color, it's not Black or white it's a blue thing.
6	AJ:	So it's a police thing.
7	OC:	Yeah.
8	AJ:	Anything else you want to share with me about this journey you've been on?
9 10	OC:	I can't think of anything. I think we covered just about everything. I'm tired now, I'm ready to you wore me out.
11	AJ:	I know, it's quite an emotional journey. Thank you, Osiris. I appreciate your time.
12	OC:	All right.
13	AJ:	Peace.
14	OC:	All right, thank you.
15		