

Denise Sudbeck  
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     Denise Sudbeck           -DS  
3  
4  
5     AJ:     So hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for The Transgender Oral  
6             History Project at the University of Minnesota.  
7  
8     DS:     Right.  
9  
10    AJ:     Today is January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016. I do want to note that it is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s actual  
11             birthday.  
12  
13    DS:     Yes.  
14  
15    AJ:     And that he is one of my inspirations, and I just think it's important to mention that. Uhm,  
16             Denise, I am going to ask you, uhm, I'm here with Denise, and I'm just going to ask you to state  
17             your full name, and please spell your last name for our transcriber, uhm, tell me your gender  
18             identity currently...  
19  
20    DS:     Mhm.  
21  
22    AJ:     ... your gender assigned at birth, and your preferred gender pronouns.  
23  
24    DS:     Okay. My name is Denise Aideen. That's A.I.D.E.E.N. Sudbeck. S.U.D.B.E.C.K.  
25  
26    AJ:     Uhuh.  
27  
28    DS:     And, uh, uh, what was the second question?  
29  
30    AJ:     Uhm, what is your gender identity today?  
31  
32    DS:     I'm, I'm female.  
33  
34    AJ:     Okay. And your gender assigned at birth?  
35  
36    DS:     I was male.  
37  
38    AJ:     And your preferred gender pronouns?  
39  
40    DS:     Female pronouns, please.  
41  
42    AJ:     She/her?  
43  
44    DS:     She/her, right.  
45  
46    AJ:     Diva?  
47

1 DS: Well...  
2  
3 AJ: [Laughs]. Alright. Queen now?  
4  
5 DS: Well, that's said. That is true. It's all true.  
6  
7 AJ: Yes.  
8  
9 DS: Yeah, you can tell that queen works.  
10  
11 AJ: Uhm, Denise, tell me what is your earliest memory in life?  
12  
13 DS: My earliest memory?  
14  
15 AJ: Yep.  
16  
17 DS: Uhm, my earliest memory probably is, uh, my mother always had flower gardens, and she raised  
18 the most beautiful gladiolus. And I would be out in the gardens. I grew up in a farm family, and  
19 that would have been probably some of my earliest memories...  
20  
21 AJ: Huh.  
22  
23 DS: ... uh, on the coast.  
24  
25 AJ: Fields of flowers?  
26  
27 DS: Uh, it was. It really was. Uh, I'm from Downeast, Maine originally. Uh, I'm the first...  
28  
29 AJ: Is that a town? Region? Or...  
30  
31 DS: Well, no that kind of a region.  
32  
33 AJ: It's a region.  
34  
35 DS: I grew up in a fairly small fishing village. Uhm, it is as far east as you can go in the continental  
36 United States without being in Canada.  
37  
38 AJ: Without... oh, okay.  
39  
40 DS: Or being in the ocean.  
41  
42 AJ: Or I was going to say without dropping into the ocean.  
43  
44 DS: Right, or being in the Atlantic. I'm from as far east as you can possibly go...  
45  
46 AJ: Uhuh.  
47

1 DS: ... and still be in the continental United States.  
2  
3 AJ: So you grew up on the coast?  
4  
5 DS: I did. I grew up on the salt water.  
6  
7 AJ: Huh. What kind of fishing did they do there?  
8  
9 DS: When I was a kid, uh, a lot of that was fishing for herring...  
10  
11 AJ: Mhm.  
12  
13 DS: ... which, uh, would be, uh, processed into sardines. Uh, a lot of lobster fishing.  
14  
15 AJ: Yeah, I was going to say lobster and...  
16  
17 DS: Oh, right. And back when I was a kid...  
18  
19 AJ: Any salmon? Any salmon?  
20  
21 DS: No. Uh, salmon runs in that point in my life had dwindled off to little or nothing because  
22 pollution had decimated it at the time, and, uh, no, it was, uh, haddock, cod, salt water fish.  
23  
24 AJ: Okay. Uhm, what about elementary school?  
25  
26 DS: Well, uhm...  
27  
28 AJ: You went to elementary school in Maine?  
29  
30 DS: I did. Uh, my mother was a retired school teacher, and I had my mother, uh, as my first-grade  
31 teacher which is a fate worse than death.  
32  
33 AJ: [Laughs].  
34  
35 DS: And she would agree with that one-hundred percent.  
36  
37 AJ: Uhuh.  
38  
39 DS: Uhm, when she started teaching school it was a one room schoolhouse and, uh, by the time I  
40 got to school it was a two-room schoolhouse. She was one of two teachers.  
41  
42 AJ: Mhm.  
43  
44 DS: And so there really wasn't a lot of options so I had my mother as my teacher my first grade.  
45  
46 AJ: How was it? I mean, I, you, it's a fate worse than death you say...  
47

- 1 DS: You know, all kidding aside, all kidding aside, uhm, I learned how to read very young. Long  
2 before I got to school.  
3
- 4 AJ: Uhuh.  
5
- 6 DS: And a lot of that was due to my mother.  
7
- 8 AJ: Sure.  
9
- 10 DS: And I've always, uh, counted on my ability to read and comprehend and those really grew to be  
11 one of my greatest assets so I really do owe that to her. So from the time I got into school I was,  
12 especially when it came to reading, I was always well I hit on my grade.  
13
- 14 AJ: Yeah, so it was a small school? Two rooms.  
15
- 16 DS: Right. There was, my mother taught grades one through four.  
17
- 18 AJ: Uhuh.  
19
- 20 DS: And I think there may have been, my recollection is there might have been eight or nine kids or  
21 something like that in first grade. I don't know.  
22
- 23 AJ: Yeah, but not a lot.  
24
- 25 DS: No, no, no.  
26
- 27 AJ: Not thirty plus like some classrooms.  
28
- 29 DS: No, I didn't, and then, uh, after that year we moved into the interior part of Maine. My father  
30 got a new job.  
31
- 32 AJ: Mhm.  
33
- 34 DS: He worked for the phone company, and he got a new job. And when we moved my mother  
35 started teaching there as well. And that was larger classes. That was a town of probably eight or  
36 nine thousand people so there were larger schools.  
37
- 38 AJ: What was that town called?  
39
- 40 DS: That's called Skowhegan.  
41
- 42 AJ: You gotta spell it.  
43
- 44 DS: [Laughs]. It's just the way you, just spell it the way it sounds. It's S.K.O.W.H.E.G.A.N. It's an  
45 Indian name.  
46
- 47 AJ: Okay.

1  
2 DS: Skowhegan, Maine is. And that's where we lived, uhm, from, I was probably seven, I guess, until  
3 some years later.  
4  
5 AJ: Okay.  
6  
7 DS: And my parents, and my family still living in Skowhegan.  
8  
9 AJ: Mhm. What was your home environment like? You had a school teacher for a mom. And your  
10 dad was a phone engineer or a phone company executive?  
11  
12 DS: He, he, no, he worked, he worked in maintenance in, I mean, an office. Electrical and electronic  
13 maintenance.  
14  
15 AJ: Mhm.  
16  
17 DS: Uhm, I come from kind of a, it's a different sort of family, I think, maybe to me that I came from.  
18 Uhm, both sides of the family were subsistence farmers basically. And in that part of Maine,  
19 Washington County, Downeast Maine, in some respects is sort of like Appalachia.  
20  
21 AJ: Mh.  
22  
23 DS: There's not a lot of cash.  
24  
25 AJ: Mhm.  
26  
27 DS: Not a lot of jobs. People kind of take care of themselves as best they can.  
28  
29 AJ: Okay.  
30  
31 DS: And I was, oh I don't know, I probably was seven years old before I saw, I ever saw American  
32 television.  
33  
34 AJ: Wow.  
35  
36 DS: I grew up on Canadian tv what there was of it. So I wasn't exposed to a lot in the world. It was  
37 fairly parochial.  
38  
39 AJ: Mhm.  
40  
41 DS: And, uhm, so that, you know, that's the way life started out for me. At the same time, it's also  
42 true for the rest of my family. I also come from a family whose chief form of entertainment as I  
43 said for a long time has been argument.  
44  
45 AJ: Uhuh.  
46

- 1 DS: And, uh, about anything. About religion. About politics or what have you. I come from a very  
2 conservative, very evangelical, uh, ultraconservative family, yes.  
3
- 4 AJ: Uhuh, uhuh. Wow.  
5
- 6 DS: And that's what I, that's what I grew up with. Uhm, I grew up— and it was also a family where  
7 we knew how to keep secrets.  
8
- 9 AJ: Mmm. Brothers and sisters?  
10
- 11 DS: I had, uh, two brothers. I'm the oldest in the family, and I had a younger brother who was four  
12 years younger than myself who died about the time he was forty. He past away. Uhm, he, uh, I  
13 think that's the results of alcoholism. I'm a recovering alcoholic myself.  
14
- 15 AJ: Mhm.  
16
- 17 DS: And I survived. He didn't. And I have a kid brother who is about twelve years younger than I am.  
18
- 19 AJ: Mhm.  
20
- 21 DS: There were three of us.  
22
- 23 AJ: Okay.  
24
- 25 DS: But, uh, twelve year is a lot of time between kids, you know.  
26
- 27 AJ: Yeah, that's a big gap.  
28
- 29 DS: That's almost like— that's almost like having a second family.  
30
- 31 AJ: Mhm, yeah. So you may not have been as close to your baby brother as you were to your middle  
32 brother.  
33
- 34 DS: No, we're not, we're not, right, we're not— yeah, we didn't grow up together and , uh, I left  
35 home relatively early. Uh, I was sixteen. I'm a high school dropout.  
36
- 37 AJ: Okay.  
38
- 39 DS: And, uh, because back in the late sixties it was a different time, different place. And, and so I  
40 was gone, you know, he wasn't very old when I left the house so we lost those years as well.  
41
- 42 AJ: Hmm. Uh, what, what prompted your leaving school earlier?  
43
- 44 DS: Uhm, well I was, I was often in some kind of trouble or other. I was pretty rebellious and, uh, I  
45 had also started drinking a lot— this is the sixties. We're all doing stuff.  
46
- 47 AJ: Yeah.



1  
2 DS: It wasn't just alcohol [Laughs].  
3  
4 AJ: Yeah?  
5  
6 DS: I was working— once it got around we even in, in Maine, you know, where we lived there was  
7 always something to imbibe or partake of.  
8  
9 AJ: Yeah [Laughs].  
10  
11 DS: And I was doing it.  
12  
13 AJ: Yeah. So...  
14  
15 DS: And I, uh...  
16  
17 AJ: There was a lot of pot and...  
18  
19 DS: Oh yeah.  
20  
21 AJ: Heroin.  
22  
23 DS: Oh yeah. I, I grew up, uh...  
24  
25 AJ: Pills.  
26  
27 DS: Oh yeah, all that stuff. Yeah. Well back when it was pot and LSD, you know, the hallucinogenics.  
28  
29 AJ: Yeah.  
30  
31 DS: And I grew up also as part of the anti-war protests...  
32  
33 AJ: Mhm.  
34  
35 DS: ... and I was pretty much influenced by that.  
36  
37 AJ: Okay.  
38  
39 DS: And being, being a part of a family that was very conservative, uhm, that...  
40  
41 AJ: That didn't fight.  
42  
43 DS: ... they were very argumentative.  
44  
45 AJ: Flower child is not a mix.  
46

1 DS: Oh yeah. There were a lot of, there were a lot of tense situations and arguments. It was not easy  
2 being part of a family at that point.  
3  
4 AJ: Mhm.  
5  
6 DS: And, uhm, and, uh, I spent my seventeenth birthday on the road. At sixteen, uhm, at sixteen I  
7 left home and, uh, within one year I hitchhiked between Maine and Florida twice.  
8  
9 AJ: Hmm. Wow.  
10  
11 DS: So as a teenager...  
12  
13 AJ: That's a long... journey.  
14  
15 DS: So I spent a lot of time, I spent a lot of time out on the road and taking care of me.  
16  
17 AJ: Straight down the east coast from the top to the bottom almost.  
18  
19 DS: I did. I— the first place I went to was, uh, Orlando, Florida.  
20  
21 AJ: Hm.  
22  
23 DS: And that kind of set the tone for the rest of my life. I've been— I've been kind of, sort of a  
24 wonderer for many years. Uh, I lived in, uh, eleven different states plus a U.S. territory.  
25 Sometimes more than once. Uh, from the Caribbean to the Arctic.  
26  
27 AJ: Which states?  
28  
29 DS: Well, let's see. I've lived in Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, uh, North Carolina, Florida,  
30 Illinois, Minnesota a couple of times, this is my second time in Minnesota. I've been in Alaska  
31 twice. That's what comes to mind right off the top of my head. Virgin Islands.  
32  
33 AJ: Were you in the military or something?  
34  
35 DS: I, I, I was. I'm a veteran.  
36  
37 AJ: Oh, okay.  
38  
39 DS: I'm a Navy veteran but it wasn't all military either. I've been— that was only a little over four  
40 years that I spent in the Navy so...  
41  
42 AJ: Honorable discharge?  
43  
44 DS: I do.  
45  
46 AJ: Okay. Would you— what was your specialty?  
47

- 1 DS: I was in the submarine service.  
2  
3 AJ: Oh wow.  
4  
5 DS: Well, it was [laughs] it was just kind of a challenge for—  
6  
7 AJ: Were you ever on a submarine?  
8  
9 DS: Oh, yeah.  
10  
11 AJ: Yeah?  
12  
13 DS: Yeah. You know, even, even then I knew then that I was different than a lot of the guys.  
14  
15 AJ: Mhm.  
16  
17 DS: So when you're locked up for weeks at a time in really close quarters with— and you're a trans  
18 woman with a hundred plus men—  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm.  
21  
22 DS: And all that testosterone and male sweat flowing, I mean...  
23  
24 AJ: [Laughs].  
25  
26 DS: Challenge? Oh yes.  
27  
28 AJ: [Laughs].  
29  
30 DS: It was, it was rough.  
31  
32 AJ: Really? Rough in terms of control your urges?  
33  
34 DS: Well that and, and to, to— I've always— I've been in the closet— I've been in the closet since  
35 probably I was fifteen years old.  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm.  
38  
39 DS: I knew who I was and I just chose to do that. I wasn't— that would have been— there was no  
40 option for coming out.  
41  
42 AJ: Mhm.  
43  
44 DS: Kind of culture I lived in that just wasn't gonna happen so, uh, and it was, in the middle of all of  
45 that, uh, by the age of fourteen I was using alcohol. So...  
46  
47 AJ: Sort of self-medicating you feel like?

1  
2 DS: Oh absolutely, and that's what I tell people. That's what I was doing.  
3  
4 AJ: Wow, uhm, wow I didn't realize you were a veteran. Thank you for your service.  
5  
6 DS: Well, thank you. Uh, and I know and I met a lot of other trans people who were vets as well.  
7  
8 AJ: Yeah.  
9  
10 DS: Yeah.  
11  
12 AJ: I've been meeting quite a number of veterans, uh...  
13  
14 DS: Oh I'm sure you have.  
15  
16 AJ: ... who identify as transgender.  
17  
18 DS: I'm sure you have. Did you know that the VA Center here in Minneapolis has more trans clients  
19 per capita than any other VA Center in the United States?  
20  
21 AJ: I did not know that. I knew that there was a...  
22  
23 DS: There's a lot.  
24  
25 AJ: ... transgender support group at the VA.  
26  
27 DS: Mhm. Mhm.  
28  
29 AJ: I did not know it had more per capita than any other...  
30  
31 DS: Yep.  
32  
33 AJ: ... VA, uh, facility.  
34  
35 DS: It's true. So that's what I did, you know.  
36  
37 AJ: Quite fascinating actually. Uhm, so you realize that you were not quite the gender you were  
38 assigned at birth at around ten years old.  
39  
40 DS: I figured. Somewhere around— about the time when I realized that, that there was a difference  
41 between boys and girls where there really was something more than just the obvious.  
42  
43 AJ: Mhm.  
44  
45 DS: That's the time when I realized, you know, that the way men and I... really not with the boys.  
46  
47 AJ: Well you probably figured that out before you were ten years old.

1  
2 DS: Maybe I did. This is what I recall.  
3  
4 AJ: Right, okay.  
5  
6 DS: It's what I can remember. I mean that was, that was over fifty years ago so...  
7  
8 AJ: [Laughs].  
9  
10 DS: ... that's a long time ago.  
11  
12 AJ: Yeah.  
13  
14 DS: You know? And it was very suppressed. I, I did, I did everything I could to—  
15  
16 AJ: But around ten you really kind of knew.  
17  
18 DS: Well, my mother, uh, my recollection of my mother when I was quite young really wanted to  
19 have a girl.  
20  
21 AJ: Mhm.  
22  
23 DS: And the thought occurred and I knew that she was, she was kind of transparent about that. And  
24 my recollection at the time was, "Well, gee you kind of have one but you— nobody is saying it."  
25  
26 AJ: Yeah. Wow.  
27  
28 DS: So.  
29  
30 AJ: That's poignant. Uhm, did she, I mean, so she said that quite frequently, uhm, I mean, did she  
31 treat you in ways that—  
32  
33 DS: [Sighs]. Well, you know, I learned how to do things at the time that, uh, women and girls things  
34 to do.  
35  
36 AJ: Mhm.  
37  
38 DS: I mean, there was all this sexual, gender stereotyping.  
39  
40 AJ: Yeah.  
41  
42 DS: I grew up in a home that just never really emerged out of the fifties.  
43  
44 AJ: Mhm.  
45  
46 DS: So, in some ways, I mean—  
47

1 AJ: The women cooked, the men cut the wood...  
2  
3 DS: Well, yes. At the same time it was different to some extent because both my parents worked,  
4 and that was fairly unusual.  
5  
6 AJ: Mhm.  
7  
8 DS: But, uh, I learned how to, I was in the kitchen cooking and doing stuff like that. I was the oldest  
9 with two parents who were working. When I came home from school if I didn't start...  
10  
11 AJ: It was sort of a necessity that you...  
12  
13 DS: That's right. If I didn't start supper we weren't— supper wasn't going to be ready...  
14  
15 AJ: Right.  
16  
17 DS: ... cause neither one of the were home so...  
18  
19 AJ: Mhm. Yeah, uhm, so you described yourself as a female now.  
20  
21 DS: Mhm.  
22  
23 AJ: Have you ever used the term transgender or transsexual or gay or...  
24  
25 DS: I usually, I usually refer to myself probably as a trans woman.  
26  
27 AJ: Okay.  
28  
29 DS: Uh, I'm proud to be trans.  
30  
31 AJ: Uhuh.  
32  
33 DS: Uh, I, with due respect to other people, I don't. I'm not stealth. I'm out as a trans person...  
34  
35 AJ: Sure.  
36  
37 DS: ... everywhere but... and I function, myself personally, on the gender binary. For me a gender  
38 binary from male to female...  
39  
40 AJ: Mhm.  
41  
42 DS: ... makes a lot of sense. At the same time I realize that there's a whole other world full of people  
43 for them which makes no sense...  
44  
45 AJ: Mhm.  
46  
47 DS: ... at all.

1  
2 AJ: Mhm.  
3  
4 DS: So I've always been really careful to say when I talk about that, that's me talking, that's not—  
5 I'm not talking for other people.  
6  
7 AJ: Sure. Absolutely. No. This is, this is your interview. This is about Denise.  
8  
9 DS: Yeah, yeah so that's how I, that's how I talk about it, and, uh, less often, uhm, I have also  
10 identified as, I mean since I came out as a bisexual trans woman.  
11  
12 AJ: Okay. Okay. Uhm, have you, uh, faced any challenges since you've begun to express your true  
13 gender identity?  
14  
15 DS: Well, yes, like a lot of people. Uh, I was married at the time when, when I came out. And, uh,  
16 she knew this, uh, she knew that I cross-dressed.  
17  
18 AJ: Mhm.  
19  
20 DS: But as long as that was something I did at home it was never an issue.  
21  
22 AJ: Sure.  
23  
24 DS: But when you start talking about transitioning publicly as a woman that becomes a different  
25 matter.  
26  
27 AJ: Yeah.  
28  
29 DS: And she couldn't personally deal with that. Uhm, I have, uh, a long history of marriages.  
30  
31 AJ: Okay.  
32  
33 DS: Uh, I've been married three times...  
34  
35 AJ: Okay.  
36  
37 DS: ... prior to this. And I feel—  
38  
39 AJ: And you were just recently married.  
40  
41 DS: That's right.  
42  
43 AJ: In December 2015.  
44  
45 DS: That's right. That's right. We had— we've had some long conversations about this because, you  
46 know, I have this, I'm sort of the poster child for serial monogamy.  
47

1 AJ: [Laughs].  
2  
3 DS: And— but I tried doing— I kept trying to do the same thing over and over again, and one of the  
4 things to me in our society, stereotypically...  
5  
6 AJ: Mhm.  
7  
8 DS: ... in order to prove how masculine you are is you get married, you have kids...  
9  
10 AJ: Mhm.  
11  
12 DS: ... and I sw— I kept doing that repeatedly thinking that somehow that would fix things...  
13  
14 AJ: Yes.  
15  
16 DS: ... which would— certainly didn't, and it wasn't fair to the women I was married to either.  
17  
18 AJ: Mhm.  
19  
20 DS: And I've always taken responsibility for that. Uhm...  
21  
22 AJ: Were there children?  
23  
24 DS: I do. I have, uh, three children from my first marriage.  
25  
26 AJ: Okay.  
27  
28 DS: I have grandchildren.  
29  
30 AJ: Are you connected to your children?  
31  
32 DS: Some of them yes, some of them no. It's kind of a mixed bag.  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm. Mhm.  
35  
36 DS: So— but that's been my— that's been my sense of being married. So when I, when, when I,  
37 when we got separated when I came out five years ago, uh, I figured well that's about it. I'm  
38 never gonna have the chance to ever doing this again and that's just— I sort of resigned myself  
39 to being single.  
40  
41 AJ: Uhuh.  
42  
43 DS: Uh, that was a real challenge to be, to, to, again, once again lose a family, lose a home, to have  
44 to learn how to recreate myself.  
45  
46 AJ: Yeah.  
47



1 DS: Uhm, what happened at the same time five years ago, uh, I got sober and came out at the same  
2 time.  
3  
4 AJ: Wow.  
5  
6 DS: I did.  
7  
8 AJ: Two big life changing events.  
9  
10 DS: Well, in the, in, it, it was December of, uh, 2010. Uh, my alcohol use, my drinking got so bad.  
11  
12 AJ: Mhm.  
13  
14 DS: Uh, you know, when you're drinking somewhere in excess of a liter of hard liquor every day and  
15 then who knows what else you're doing...  
16  
17 AJ: Yeah.  
18  
19 DS: ... that, then you're, you know, it's disaster.  
20  
21 AJ: That's a lot of booze, yeah.  
22  
23 DS: And, uh, and I at the time in December, uh, I, uh, made a suicide attempt and wound up in the  
24 hospital and coming out of that whole experience, uh, even before I talked to anybody, I  
25 realized at that time that I had, that I had to deal with my alcoholism, that I had to deal with my  
26 gender. I couldn't just do one and wait on the other one.  
27  
28 AJ: Sure.  
29  
30 DS: I knew I was biting off a lot, a pretty big chunk but I just, there was no other way to do it.  
31  
32 AJ: Survival.  
33  
34 DS: That's right. I, I— this either had to work or I just wasn't gonna make it. So, uhm, when I went  
35 into treatment centers when I was looking for help, I would tell people that, uh, uh, I— "You  
36 need to know that I'm a trans— I'm transgender..."  
37  
38 AJ: Uhuh.  
39  
40 DS: ... and that, "I'm going to be coming out as transgender during this process." And I kept it up  
41 until I found somebody who could deal with that.  
42  
43 AJ: How did people respond?  
44  
45 DS: Well, the place where— that I used for— that I got, you know, treatment from...  
46  
47 AJ: Mhm.

1  
2 DS: ... when I told them that they, uh, "So we don't know anything about being transgender but we  
3 do know something about addiction."  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 DS: "So, we'll help you with addiction if you help us with transgender."  
8  
9 AJ: Huh.  
10  
11 DS: And so that's what we did. We, we had a mutually working arrangement...  
12  
13 AJ: Right. Wow.  
14  
15 DS: ... to do that.  
16  
17 AJ: And so we did.  
18  
19 DS: I'm a product of the, uh, Center of Human Sexuality at the U.  
20  
21 AJ: Really?  
22  
23 DS: That's how I did that.  
24  
25 AJ: Uhuh.  
26  
27 DS: Well, I know that's just— that was a personal decision. That's— so I've dealt with the practical  
28 struggles of dealing with gatekeepers and all that sort of stuff.  
29  
30 AJ: Yeah. [Laughs].  
31  
32 DS: Yep, and it has its pros and it has cons but that's how— that's how I did it, and, uhm...  
33  
34 AJ: What was that experience like for you?  
35  
36 DS: Well, I don't know. Maybe it's because, you know, I've been in the military. I'm used to people  
37 telling me, "This is what you gotta do to do, to accomplish certain things." Maybe that's part of  
38 it.  
39  
40 AJ: Yeah.  
41  
42 DS: I don't know. And so I can deal with requirements.  
43  
44 AJ: Mhm.  
45  
46 DS: But I know that, there again I'm just speaking for me, that—this— Other people have their own  
47 take on that, and I understand, I've heard plenty of stories as well but so...

1  
2 AJ: But everybody has a different experience.  
3  
4 DS: That's it. You know, I got through just fine...  
5  
6 AJ: Yeah.  
7  
8 DS: ... uh, with it.  
9  
10 AJ: Are you still involved with PHS today at all?  
11  
12 DS: No, I'm not. Well I, I know...  
13  
14 AJ: I know they have like social groups and...  
15  
16 DS: No, I have no, I have none of that kind of contact with them anymore. Uh, I see, well, I tell you  
17 where I, I see people who were at TDOR.  
18  
19 AJ: Oh, okay.  
20  
21 DS: That's, I'll see them and we kind of—  
22  
23 AJ: Transgender Day of Remembrance.  
24  
25 DS: That's right. Transgender Day of Remembrance. So we sort of touched base again and we knew  
26 our contacts.  
27  
28 AJ: Yeah.  
29  
30 DS: But so those were all challenges. Those are the really big challenges I faced.  
31  
32 AJ: Those are some pretty big ones.  
33  
34 DS: And, uh, I've had to deal with the financial issues. Uh, the most I've ever worked, am able to  
35 work since I've transitioned, uh, was thirty-two hours a week. Uh, I'm a former employee of,  
36 uhm, one of the treatment centers here in town.  
37  
38 AJ: Okay.  
39  
40 DS: I went and did that for a while. Uhm, that was a big challenge.  
41  
42 AJ: Mhm.  
43  
44 DS: And—  
45  
46 AJ: What did you do prior to coming out?  
47

1 DS: [Laughs]. Well, I've done in my life, I've done all kinds of different things. I've— different kinds of  
2 work. Uh, part of the largest part of it is from mid-eighties through to, uh, 1998. I was an  
3 American Baptist pastor.  
4  
5 AJ: Okay.  
6  
7 DS: And I pastored churches. I pastored churches in Maine, in Minnesota, in, in Alaska.  
8  
9 AJ: Okay.  
10  
11 DS: So, that's, I spend so many years doing that.  
12  
13 AJ: Mhm.  
14  
15 DS: Uh, I left that in '98. And then I worked for quite a while, uh, here in the Twin Cities working  
16 social media...  
17  
18 AJ: 'Kay.  
19  
20 DS: ... for various companies until that sort of ran out.  
21  
22 AJ: So you're pretty computer savvy?  
23  
24 DS: Don't tell everybody I know that. [Laughs].  
25  
26 AJ: [Laughs].  
27  
28 DS: But I have. I've worked around computers and social media a lot, for years so...  
29  
30 AJ: What have been some of the really positive aspects of coming out?  
31  
32 DS: Really positive aspects? [Sighs]. When I came, when I came out I was fifty-seven.  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm.  
35  
36 DS: And I felt for the first time, I finally got a chance to live as me. I'm Denise. Uhm, that's a long  
37 time for any person to carry that kind of burden, and nobody else to know...  
38  
39 AJ: Hm.  
40  
41 DS: ... but I did it for many, many, many years. So on the positive end of that it's just, when you  
42 finally let— when I finally let go of that, uh, just setting that down, that's what's really positive  
43 about it. Other things that I've noticed, uh, and it has something to do with sobriety as well as  
44 transitioning, uhm, I have many more friends. My social circle is much larger. Uh, I get treated  
45 better. I get treated with more respect because I think part of that is that I respect people as  
46 well as myself better than I ever did before.  
47

- 1 AJ: Mhm.  
2
- 3 DS: Uh, that's all been part of what's really positive about this. Uhm, it hasn't always been easy. Uh,  
4 my own family, my own nuclear family, family of origin, uh, they're well aware, I mean, you  
5 know, I don't go anywhere but I'm Denise. Uh, while I'm with them and all the communications,  
6 uhm, I'm always misgendered.  
7
- 8 AJ: Mm.  
9
- 10 DS: And I'm always called by my birthname.  
11
- 12 AJ: Wow. Are your parents still alive?  
13
- 14 DS: They are. They're, they're both in their eighties.  
15
- 16 AJ: Okay.  
17
- 18 DS: Uhm, and they refuse to do anything different than that. So I had to make some decisions about,  
19 you know, what could I live with and what couldn't I live with.  
20
- 21 AJ: Mhm.  
22
- 23 DS: And so I did. I made the decision that said basically who I am as a person is not dependent upon  
24 the opinions of other people. That's the bottom line of it. And so, uh, I still— I go back once a  
25 year or so and check on them and see how they're doing. And I'm there for three or four days,  
26 and we're fairly cordial but that's about it.  
27
- 28 AJ: Mhm.  
29
- 30 DS: We're not particularly close. Uhm, but I get to do that. I get to be able to do that and I don't put  
31 that weight on me anymore. I can live with that.  
32
- 33 AJ: So there's some relationship between you and your birth family?  
34
- 35 DS: Oh yes. Yeah. Uh, it's a small family so there's not that many of us.  
36
- 37 AJ: Mhm.  
38
- 39 DS: Uh, but in the greatest scheme of things the only people in this world who constantly,  
40 consistently misgender me or call me by my birth name are my family of origin and even then  
41 not all of them do it.  
42
- 43 AJ: Mhm.  
44
- 45 DS: And also my, uh, ex-spouse.  
46
- 47 AJ: Okay.

1  
2 DS: And other than that everybody knows me as Denise.  
3  
4 AJ: Hm.  
5  
6 DS: So...  
7  
8 AJ: Uhm, Denise, to the extent that you're comfortable can you tell me about any medical  
9 interventions you have undergone as a part of your transition?  
10  
11 DS: Uh, I found early on that, uh, using estrogen...  
12  
13 AJ: Mhm.  
14  
15 DS: ... made a real significant impact on my life.  
16  
17 AJ: Mhm.  
18  
19 DS: And, like many trans women—  
20  
21 AJ: How has it impacted you?  
22  
23 DS: Very positive.  
24  
25 AJ: Okay.  
26  
27 DS: Like many trans women the reason why I started taking estrogen is so I'd look like this.  
28  
29 AJ: Yes. [Laughs].  
30  
31 DS: And, uh, uh, but the most significant effect of that was not physical is what happened up in my,  
32 my brain, in my mind...  
33  
34 AJ: Yeah, yeah.  
35  
36 DS: ... my spirit.  
37  
38 AJ: Your heart.  
39  
40 DS: That's it. And, and all of a sudden things start to make sense to me. Uh, I don't usually share too  
41 much about gender reassignment...  
42  
43 AJ: Yeah.  
44  
45 DS: ... stuff other than to say this...  
46  
47 AJ: Whatever you're comfortable with.

1  
2 DS: Yeah, that's, that's fine. Other than to say this. My take on this is that, uh, anybody's gender  
3 doesn't depend upon genitalia.  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 DS: And for, for people who really need, feel the need to do something about that, I'll advocate for  
8 them as long as I possibly— as long as I can.  
9  
10 AJ: Mhm.  
11  
12 DS: The, uh— especially for veterans...  
13  
14 AJ: Sure.  
15  
16 DS: ... cause as of this date the VA still has not come on board with that.  
17  
18 AJ: Really?  
19  
20 DS: Oh I think they will eventually. Oh I can go to the VA. I can get estrogen. I can do everything else  
21 but that. And I think that's just a matter of time when there's enough pressure that's gonna  
22 happen. Uhm, sometimes, uh, I felt this tension within the trans community about this.  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm.  
25  
26 DS: Uh, that somehow somebody is more trans than somebody else, you know...  
27  
28 AJ: Right.  
29  
30 DS: ... or when you or I'll hear, "Well when you complete your transition," you know, those are the  
31 words that get used...  
32  
33 AJ: Uhuh.  
34  
35 DS: ... and my reaction is that, you know, "I want to be polite about this but I don't buy any of that."  
36  
37 AJ: Yeah. [Laughs].  
38  
39 DS: You know. Uh, as far as I'm concerned I'm who I am, and I don't have to explain that to people  
40 or defend that...  
41  
42 AJ: Good for you.  
43  
44 DS: ... and I would encourage anybody to— to have, have strong enough self-identity to do that.  
45  
46 AJ: Mhm. Absolutely. Uhm, yeah, we don't go around showing our genitals to very many people  
47 anyway. [Laughs].

1  
2 DS: You know and, and you know, here's the thing, uh, I'm in uh. I'm currently married, and I've  
3 been in this relationship for quite a while now.  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 DS: And we identify as a lesbian couple.  
8  
9 AJ: Sure.  
10  
11 DS: And the status of my genitals really doesn't enter into that...  
12  
13 AJ: Yeah.  
14  
15 DS: ... for us. So, so why should, you know, for anybody else?  
16  
17 AJ: Yeah. Absolutely. Well, thank you. Uhm, looking back over your decision to express your true  
18 gender identity, what were some pivotal moments that defined your new life and would you do  
19 anything differently?  
20  
21 DS: I live daily almost with the decisions I have made and have made through the years. Uhm, I'm  
22 not an alcoholic because I'm trans. I'm not trans because I'm an alcoholic but to think that  
23 somehow the two don't intertwine in some kind of a dance would be a big mistake.  
24  
25 AJ: Mhm.  
26  
27 DS: Uhm, and in the course of that whole thing through all these years there has been a lot of lost  
28 opportunities. There's been, there's been a fair amount of destruction and in this— and that's  
29 effected numerous people in my life. Uh, and sometimes it's a temptation for me to wish that  
30 that had not happened that way.  
31  
32 AJ: Mhm.  
33  
34 DS: On the other hand, it did happen. So, uh, yes, I'm reluctant to, to go back, and I don't live in that  
35 past. Well I do have a past.  
36  
37 AJ: Yeah.  
38  
39 DS: Uhm, in terms of pivotal moments it was during the— it was during the spring towards the end  
40 of my last marriage when, uh, finally we came down— this, this was the pivotal moment. Finally  
41 came down to as simple as this. She said to me, she said, "Are you going to, are you going to  
42 actually do this? Are you actually going to transition?"  
43  
44 AJ: Uhuh.  
45  
46 DS: The, the question was that basic. And it couldn't be avoided. We danced around it for quite a  
47 while but we got down to that point.



1  
2 AJ: Right.  
3  
4 DS: And I said... and that's when I had to, to decide and for that moment for the first time in my life,  
5 "I have no choice about this. I have to do this or I don't live."  
6  
7 AJ: Mhm.  
8  
9 DS: And she said, "Well, I'm, I'm, I— I didn't sign on for a lesbian relationship. I, I like gay people just  
10 fine but I didn't—  
11  
12 AJ: Right, "I'm not."  
13  
14 DS: That's right. And, and so that was the moment, that is when it all happened right in that  
15 moment, and it happened all in about maybe thirty seconds.  
16  
17 AJ: Wow.  
18  
19 DS: That's when the decision happened right then. And everything after that was sort of  
20 anticlimactic.  
21  
22 AJ: Hm.  
23  
24 DS: That was when it came to me that, you know, I either had to do it or not. And so I stepped out  
25 and did it. Uh, I'm not sorry I did although sometimes and some days it's just like wow really?  
26 But I'm still here.  
27  
28 AJ: Right. [Laughs].  
29  
30 DS: See I'm still here. I'm still— and I'm prospering. I'm healthy.  
31  
32 AJ: Uhuh.  
33  
34 DS: I'm sober. It was the right decision to make, but I would never tell anybody that it didn't come  
35 with a price tag. It really did.  
36  
37 AJ: Yeah. It does. So, uhm, you know, one of the things that you, you, so you, you disclosed that you  
38 dropped out of high school...  
39  
40 DS: Mhm.  
41  
42 AJ: ... but we also talked and you're currently pursuing a doctoral degree.  
43  
44 DS: I'm one of the oddest people you will ever meet. Uh, everything that I've got in my life came all  
45 from a GED.  
46  
47 AJ: Okay.

1  
2 DS: Uh, I, uh, but I dropped out of high school. I wound up living with an aunt and uncle for a while  
3 in Charlotte, North Carolina.  
4  
5 AJ: Uhuh.  
6  
7 DS: And I went to— when I was in Charlotte I went and got my GED. And then I've made a board of  
8 attempts to go to college but at that point in my life I wasn't sober enough to do it, you know.  
9  
10 AJ: Mhm.  
11  
12 DS: Actually when you start college you have to actually show up for classes. People expect you to  
13 do that.  
14  
15 AJ: Yeah, they like it when you come to class.  
16  
17 DS: That's right. Yeah. And I would rather be off and do something else. So, uhm, it was quite some  
18 years after that before I went back. And I've always been a, uh, I've always been a non-  
19 traditional student.  
20  
21 AJ: Mhm.  
22  
23 DS: Uhm, my bachelor's degree is, uh, I have a dual major in Psychology and History, and I did that  
24 as a, with a starting degree program from what was then the State University of New York. I  
25 never set foot on the campus.  
26  
27 AJ: Okay.  
28  
29 DS: And, uh, and I did that more or less at the same time that I was going to seminary, the school in  
30 Maine...  
31  
32 AJ: Mhm.  
33  
34 DS: ... to get my master's degree. And currently I'm just finishing up, I hope.  
35  
36 AJ: [Laughs].  
37  
38 DS: I'm working on my dissertation...  
39  
40 AJ: Wow.  
41  
42 DS: ... uh, for, uh, a doctorate in a Ministry degree at the United Theological New Brighton.  
43  
44 AJ: Which... what's the title of your dissertation?  
45  
46 DS: Uh, it's—  
47

- 1 AJ: Working title.  
2
- 3 DS: Working title. So I haven't settled on a title.  
4
- 5 AJ: Mhm.  
6
- 7 DS: Basically, what I'm working on is a, uh, a new trans theology that's trans specific. Uh, as far as  
8 theology goes for trans people most of the time it gets sort of assumed under the heading of,  
9 uh, queer theology.  
10
- 11 AJ: Mhm.  
12
- 13 DS: And, uh, but I'm taking a new tact on that. I'm writing about, uh, the question, uh, whether or  
14 not trans people are created in the image of God... fundamentally. Uh, it seems to me that much  
15 of the opposition that we face in our culture, in our culture, you know, from, you know,  
16 American...  
17
- 18 AJ: Uhuh.  
19
- 20 DS: ... Western culture, uhm, is because when we are talking about is the assertion that, no, we are  
21 not made in the image of God and that we are subverting the image of God. And, uh, I'm taking  
22 that on theologically.  
23
- 24 AJ: Wow.  
25
- 26 DS: And, uh, so I'm working right now, uh, and, uh, basically in liberation and feminist theologies  
27 and queer theologies and find was to, to use some of that as a foundation for a new, a  
28 specifically trans focused theology. I'm a theologian. I'm not a pastor any longer. I'm not a, I'm  
29 not a minister. I'm not doing programmatic stuff.  
30
- 31 AJ: Uhuh.  
32
- 33 DS: I'm actually doing theology.  
34
- 35 AJ: Explain theo— theologian or—  
36
- 37 DS: What that means?  
38
- 39 AJ: Yeah.  
40
- 41 DS: Uhm, it— my goal is to provide tools for pastors of churches, a theology they can take and, and  
42 use themselves to, as a foundation for whatever ministries, whatever programs they're doing.  
43
- 44 AJ: Mhm.  
45
- 46 DS: Uhm, it's a mistake, in my opinion, to— fundamental mistake to start developing programs  
47 without building the foun— the theological foundation for it. Uh, now that...

1  
2 AJ: So how does that—  
3  
4 DS: This is... In other words this is God talk.  
5  
6 AJ: Uhuh.  
7  
8 DS: You know, how does God talk about this? How do we talk about this with God about gender and  
9 how gender gets expressed? The, the— what's called the imago dei is, uh—  
10  
11 AJ: Say that again. I'm sorry.  
12  
13 DS: [Laughs]. It's Latin for image of God but the concept called imago dei...  
14  
15 AJ: Uhuh.  
16  
17 DS: ... is a fundamental theological concept that, that's part of theology that's been for the last  
18 two thousand years.  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm.  
21  
22 DS: So, without dealing with some of these really fundamental questions, anything else we do is  
23 kind of hit or miss it feels like to me.  
24  
25 AJ: How does liberation theology factor into your concept of trans theology?  
26  
27 DS: Well most of the liberation theologians I'm working with are Latin American.  
28  
29 AJ: Yes.  
30  
31 DS: That's kind of the, the, the origins—  
32  
33 AJ: That's the origin and home base...  
34  
35 DS: That's right, of, of— and, uhm, that has to do, uh, essentially with, uh, the relationship between  
36 communities of faith and civil government.  
37  
38 AJ: Mhm.  
39  
40 DS: And there's a lot in that Latin American experience that plays out in other contexts as well I  
41 think. So that's how I, I, I— I'm trying to be really careful when I do this kind of work to not  
42 appropriate somebody else's culture or expectations. There's a fine line there somewhere  
43 between doing that and trying to understand, to learn from somebody else what they have to  
44 say about this.  
45  
46 AJ: Mhm.  
47

- 1 DS: Uhm, but that's essentially— I work, uh, I'm working pretty much with, uh, the work of Marcella  
2 Althaus-Reid who, uh, is the originator of something called Indecent Theology, which is, uh—  
3
- 4 AJ: Indecent Theology?  
5
- 6 DS: Indecent, right?  
7
- 8 AJ: Okay.  
9
- 10 DS: Which is not only about liberation theology, uh, but, uh, about breaking through cultural, sexual  
11 gender barriers.  
12
- 13 AJ: Hm.  
14
- 15 DS: Cause part of the issue has been... don't get me started on this...  
16
- 17 AJ: [Laughs].  
18
- 19 DS: Part of the issue has been that liberation theologians has been essentially male dominated.  
20
- 21 AJ: Yes.  
22
- 23 DS: And, and they have left sexual diversity out of the picture, but there are other theologians who  
24 have said, "Well, wait a minute. This is something we need to be talking about."  
25
- 26 AJ: Mhm.  
27
- 28 DS: So that's what I spend time with right now.  
29
- 30 AJ: And say her again.  
31
- 32 DS: Her name is Marcella Althaus-Reid.  
33
- 34 AJ: A.L.T.O.S.?  
35
- 36 DS: A.L.T.A.U.S.  
37
- 38 AJ: Okay.  
39
- 40 DS: And then R.E.I.D. She's, uh, a theologian professor. She's in the U.K. now but she's a native of  
41 Buenos Aires.  
42
- 43 AJ: Got it. I mean you guys communicate online and...?  
44
- 45 DS: Well, I've not communicated directly with her but I—  
46
- 47 AJ: But you're working with her theories and...

1  
2 DS: ... with her material.  
3  
4 AJ: ... theological viewpoints.  
5  
6 DS: Right. A lot of that.  
7  
8 AJ: Wonderful. Uhm, well good luck.  
9  
10 DS: It gets rather heady. I mean, you know, it's pretty abstract.  
11  
12 AJ: Well, once you get into the doctoral all of that stuff is sort of abstract.  
13  
14 DS: [Laughs]. Well, yeah, its, yeah, it sort of is so.  
15  
16 AJ: [Laughs]. Tedious and academic and...  
17  
18 DS: Yep.  
19  
20 AJ: Yeah. Good luck...  
21  
22 DS: Uh, I appreciate that.  
23  
24 AJ: ... with your educational pursuits.  
25  
26 DS: I appreciate that.  
27  
28 AJ: Uhuh. Uhm, just, you know, we've, we've mentioned your current relationship but just tell me a  
29 little bit about your, your partner and, you know, how, and, even more importantly, how has  
30 your gender identity impacted your, uhm, ability to have relationships and romance and love.  
31  
32 DS: Uhm, I was sober for a while before I started looking for a new relationship.  
33  
34 AJ: Uhuh.  
35  
36 DS: And, uh, which is common practice to do that.  
37  
38 AJ: Mhm.  
39  
40 DS: And I was, you know, I wound up with all kinds of people I wanted to be friends with but that  
41 was it. And, uhm, and like some of the trans women, uh, I've been, I have been propositioned  
42 for sexual one night stands kind of thing that happens with trans women...  
43  
44 AJ: Mhm.  
45  
46 DS: ... especially if you're pre-op...  
47

1 AJ: Mhm.  
2  
3 DS: ... to use a kind of coarse way of putting it but that's, that's the status of it.  
4  
5 AJ: [Laughs]. Yeah.  
6  
7 DS: And, uhm, there was, uh, it was one night it happened at church. Uh, we were all kind of  
8 hanging around after some kind of program, and I said to her, I said, "I'm so smooth, I tell you.  
9 I'm so smooth," I said to her, I said, "You know, I'd go on a date with you sometime."  
10  
11 AJ: Uhuh. [Laughs].  
12  
13 DS: And she said, "Okay." And I said, "Really?"  
14  
15 AJ: [Laughs].  
16  
17 DS: And, uh, we started— we'd known each other for a couple of years, and so we started dating  
18 and then one thing leads to another. And I am always amazed. I've never lost my sense of  
19 amazement at how she perceives me as so feminine and so female.  
20  
21 AJ: Mhm.  
22  
23 DS: You know, and I've had to try to stop trying to get my mind around that because I can't. I just  
24 have, I, I accept that from her.  
25  
26 AJ: Wow.  
27  
28 DS: That that's, that she genuinely that's how she sees us.  
29  
30 AJ: Uhuh.  
31  
32 DS: And my sense of it is that any kind of definition of love, that's it.  
33  
34 AJ: She, she—  
35  
36 DS: She, she—  
37  
38 AJ: Do you know if she had ever been involved with a trans person before, a trans woman?  
39  
40 DS: Uh, no. Not really. No.  
41  
42 AJ: Does she identify as a lesbian?  
43  
44 DS: Yes.  
45  
46 AJ: She does?  
47

1 DS: Yeah.  
2  
3 AJ: Okay.  
4  
5 DS: And her past relationships have been lesbian.  
6  
7 AJ: Okay.  
8  
9 DS: And, uhm—  
10  
11 AJ: Which actually is even more fascinating.  
12  
13 DS: Yep.  
14  
15 AJ: I mean this issue, this, this, concern that you talk in terms of accepting the reality that she  
16 perceives you as female and she's lesbian identified and has had, I would assume, many  
17 relationships with women. Uhm, the fact that she sees you as a woman is, uhm, pretty  
18 outstanding.  
19  
20 DS: Well, it is. It does happen. Uh, I know of at least a couple of other occasions where it's  
21 happened...  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 DS: ... that way, something similar. But it's not very often, and, uh, what's interesting about it too is  
26 that when we're around— sometimes we're in lesbian gatherings...  
27  
28 AJ: Sure.  
29  
30 DS: ... and, uh, the other women there, uh, not one hundred percent but the vast majority of them,  
31 uh, they just accept that I'm a woman and I'm a lesbian like everybody else.  
32  
33 AJ: Absolutely.  
34  
35 DS: It's not, it's not, it's just has not caused a problem. So, but to try for me to try to think about  
36 that and analyze that, I'm not [makes "psh" sound].  
37  
38 AJ: [Laughs]. Yeah, well...  
39  
40 DS: It just is. I don't know. And, uh, uh, at the same time, she's been incredibly supportive of me  
41 going— I wouldn't be back in school right now if it wasn't for her.  
42  
43 AJ: Hm.  
44  
45 DS: Uh, for one thing, I couldn't afford to do it.  
46  
47 AJ: Yeah.



1  
2 DS: And, uhm, I'm not working. I haven't been working since I started school. That's what I do. I go  
3 finish work on this fulltime.  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 DS: So she's holding down the financial end of this.  
8  
9 AJ: Okay.  
10  
11 DS: So she's been, she's making the sacrifice to do that because she believes in what we're doing  
12 together.  
13  
14 AJ: Sure.  
15  
16 DS: So—  
17  
18 AJ: And what you guys are doing together is nothing sort of actually changing the world.  
19  
20 DS: Well, that's what it's coming down to in ways that I don't think either one of us... It's just  
21 developed, it evolves. I'm not sure—  
22  
23 AJ: You're just having your little relationship but it's having a big impact on other people.  
24  
25 DS: Well, there's, there's no great, there wasn't any great plan.  
26  
27 AJ: Right. [Laughs].  
28  
29 DS: This wasn't all thought out. This wasn't that intentional so.  
30  
31 AJ: Wow. That's a beautiful story. Thank you for sharing that. Uhm, what's her name? Do you mind?  
32  
33 DS: Yeah, Amy.  
34  
35 AJ: Amy?  
36  
37 DS: Amy.  
38  
39 AJ: Wow. That's great. Has there been times when someone has been like really helpful and/or  
40 really insensitive related to like medical personnel or the criminal justice system or even in this  
41 educational institution that you are in since you have come out.  
42  
43 DS: I'm very fortunate that I have not run into those kinds of issues...  
44  
45 AJ: Mhm.  
46

1 DS: Uh, uh, within both, and I don't run into it at the VA. Uh, and prior to that I was part of the  
2 heath partners system here in, in the cities...  
3  
4 AJ: Uhuh.  
5  
6 DS: ... and I, I was always treated with respect there.  
7  
8 AJ: Great.  
9  
10 DS: Uh, I am acutely aware that not everybody shares that same experience.  
11  
12 AJ: Right.  
13  
14 DS: And, honestly, uh, my—  
15  
16 AJ: Particularly women of color, transgender women of color.  
17  
18 DS: I think, I think, I think some of it, I, there's no doubt about it in my head...  
19  
20 AJ: Uhuh.  
21  
22 DS: ... that I operate from, uh, uh, a position of some privilege.  
23  
24 AJ: Mhm.  
25  
26 DS: You know, I get treated differently.  
27  
28 AJ: Sure.  
29  
30 DS: And that's just how it is, and I acknowledge that, and, uh, there is no way at all that I condone  
31 that or I think that's right.  
32  
33 AJ: Mhm.  
34  
35 DS: That should not be.  
36  
37 AJ: Right. Period.  
38  
39 DS: Somethings are not right and that is simply not right. And, uh, but where I go to school, uh, I'm  
40 current— unless something has changed this fall I don't know about— uh, right now I'm the only  
41 trans student where I go to school.  
42  
43 AJ: Okay.  
44  
45 DS: There's not many, there's not many of us that do this.  
46  
47 AJ: Mhm.

1  
2 DS: You know, well there aren't, you know, there's a lot of trans people but then again clergy,  
3 that's—  
4  
5 AJ: Yeah, there's, uh, there's a pretty negative relationship between the transgender community  
6 and the religious, uh, institutions.  
7  
8 DS: Well, there is and I hear about it sometimes. Yeah. Yeah, I hear about it. I hear about it. And I,  
9 uh, acknowledge that. I really do. I understand, well, cause I've been through that too for years  
10 and years I had a knappy relationship with the church too.  
11  
12 AJ: Mhm.  
13  
14 DS: So, but, I have come back to where I'm at and I'm working with that and trying to— my goal is to  
15 simply try to build bridges where I can.  
16  
17 AJ: Yes.  
18  
19 DS: And, uh, but in— so I've run into almost uniformly positive relationships, uh, every now and  
20 then some negative stuff happens...  
21  
22 AJ: Mhm.  
23  
24 DS: ... I mean, it happens to everybody. Uh, it happens in public. Uh, I've had store owners be less  
25 than respectful.  
26  
27 AJ: Really?  
28  
29 DS: Yeah. I've had problems—  
30  
31 AJ: What is— can I get an example?  
32  
33 DS: I've had problems with restaurants here in the Twin Cities but not very often. But I have had  
34 problems sometimes. I was out with a gay friend of mine, uhm, after a twelve-step meeting.  
35  
36 AJ: Sure.  
37  
38 DS: And we were having coffee, and I went to pay my bill. And, uh, I went to the counter and—  
39 sometimes people don't realize I'm trans until I speak.  
40  
41 AJ: Uhuh.  
42  
43 DS: And they here that voice, and so I've, uhm, the guy behind the counter, I think was like a  
44 manager type, uh, he's telling me how much I owe and so I'm digging around in my purse  
45 looking, just, you know, for my card.  
46  
47 AJ: Right.

1  
2 DS: So, I pull my card, and he's gone.  
3  
4 AJ: Mhm.  
5  
6 DS: When he realized I was trans he just disappeared.  
7  
8 AJ: Wow.  
9  
10 DS: And he got one of the junior guys to come out and deal with me so...  
11  
12 AJ: Really?  
13  
14 DS: So I paid my bill and I said to my friend standing behind me, I said, "Did what just happened, is  
15 that what I think just happened?" He said, "Oh yeah." He says, "It was. I watched the whole  
16 thing."  
17  
18 AJ: Uhuh.  
19  
20 DS: Uhm, I've had, uh, I've been, uh, on occasion I've been consistently, constantly misgendered in  
21 my relationship with a, now which is a fast food outlet here in South Minneapolis...  
22  
23 AJ: Uhuh.  
24  
25 DS: ... uh, that was never really sufficiently resolved but so I have maybe a handful of those kinds of  
26 examples that have happened.  
27  
28 AJ: Mhm. Sure.  
29  
30 DS: Uh, but there again I think the reason why I don't have more has to do with privilege.  
31  
32 AJ: Hm.  
33  
34 DS: I really do.  
35  
36 AJ: Yeah.  
37  
38 DS: Uh, and I don't know, I've worked with a law enforcement. I mean one of the things that I've  
39 done in my life, I spent about three years when I lived, when I first lived in Alaska, I've been a  
40 police chaplain.  
41  
42 AJ: Oh really?  
43  
44 DS: Yeah, I've been around law enforcement so I have a fairly id— good idea what police culture can  
45 be like.  
46  
47 AJ: Yeah.

1  
2 DS: And, uh, but I get a lit— it happens— I get away with stuff.  
3  
4 AJ: What do you mean?  
5  
6 DS: I don't know— I mean, I mean...  
7  
8 AJ: What are you out here running lights and... [Laughs].  
9  
10 DS: Well, I don't know, let's see, what was it? I don't make a habit of being a real outlaw but...  
11  
12 AJ: [Laughs].  
13  
14 DS: I had two other trans women with me in the car. We were coming from a meeting.  
15  
16 AJ: Mhm.  
17  
18 DS: And, uh, I was going northbound on Nicolet Ave. and, uh, Nicolet to Lake St.  
19  
20 AJ: Okay.  
21  
22 DS: And, not paying attention, I turned right and that intersection is, there's a sign there that says  
23 no right turn.  
24  
25 AJ: Mhm.  
26  
27 DS: Well I had a Minneapolis cop right behind me.  
28  
29 AJ: Mhm.  
30  
31 DS: And she pulled me over, and that exchange was rather intense.  
32  
33 AJ: Yeah.  
34  
35 DS: And, uh, I had the distinct impression at the time that if I hadn't been white it would have  
36 developed into something more than.  
37  
38 AJ: Wow.  
39  
40 DS: You know?  
41  
42 AJ: Mhm.  
43  
44 DS: And I didn't get ticketed because I think she found something more important to do, you know, I  
45 got a lecture like...  
46  
47 AJ: Don't let this happen again.

1  
2 DS: "Stop doing stupid stuff." "Yes, ma'am."  
3  
4 AJ: Right. Okay. Yeah.  
5  
6 DS: And I, and I, I was on my way but if I had not been white, I don't know if that would have  
7 happened.  
8  
9 AJ: Yeah. I suspect that happened to me, an African American transgender woman...  
10  
11 DS: It might have been quite a different, a different outcome.  
12  
13 AJ: I may have, I certainly would have gotten a ticket.  
14  
15 DS: Oh, you would have gotten the ticket, right. So I mean those, those kinds of things, I've had  
16 happen but...  
17  
18 AJ: But, for the most part, I mean because we all have little interactions with people, customer  
19 service people that aren't always pleasant but, uhm, the misgendering piece is real and can be  
20 painful.  
21  
22 DS: It, it is. And, and, but I got to the point where, uh, depending on my mood or the phase of the  
23 moon, or whatever, I don't know how it is, the time, I have said to people, "Sir, do I really look  
24 like a Sir to you?"  
25  
26 AJ: Mhm.  
27  
28 DS: "Cause if you'd known Denise very long you'd know— unless it was a really cold day in the  
29 middle of January, I'm always wearing skirts."  
30  
31 AJ: [Laughs].  
32  
33 DS: Cause that's just me.  
34  
35 AJ: Yeah.  
36  
37 DS: Do I really look like a Sir to you?  
38  
39 AJ: It's a cold day in the middle of a January right now. [Laughs].  
40  
41 DS: No, it's not! I'm talking about minus twenty-five, thirty. Then I think about it so but...  
42  
43 AJ: Oh boy. When is the first time you've ever met a trans identified or genderqueer person?  
44  
45 DS: Uh, when I started going to, uh, the U.  
46  
47 AJ: The program in Human Sexuality?

1  
2 DS: Yeah.  
3  
4 AJ: Okay.  
5  
6 DS: Uh.  
7  
8 AJ: That was pretty late in life.  
9  
10 DS: Huh?  
11  
12 AJ: That was pretty late in, in life.  
13  
14 DS: It seems like— my— from what I hear is, is that trans women, like myself, a fair number of us do  
15 that in our mid-fifties. We got by with the secrets for all those years...  
16  
17 AJ: Mhm.  
18  
19 DS: ... and then finally something happens, we just, you know. We're either imploding or whatever it  
20 is. We just can't continue to lie anymore so...  
21  
22 AJ: Sure. Uhuh. Yeah.  
23  
24 DS: But, uh, I really didn't know anybody. I avoided that. Honestly, through the years, I've moved  
25 through some pretty evangelical circles.  
26  
27 AJ: Yeah.  
28  
29 DS: I've been on that side of the coin too so I know an idea about what they do.  
30  
31 AJ: Yeah. Right. Yeah. Wow. That's, that's, that's kind of a long time. Uhm, what do you think the  
32 relationship is between the L, the G, the B, and the T?  
33  
34 DS: [Laughs]. You know...  
35  
36 AJ: The lesbian, gay, bisexual, and the transgender community.  
37  
38 DS: You know, I wasn't out very long before I realized this all wasn't just one big happy family.  
39  
40 AJ: Yeah.  
41  
42 DS: And I thought it was, I thought, "Oh, well, gee, everybody is gonna be great here." Everybody is  
43 gonna understand, especially when I go to church with a whole bunch of gay and lesbian, you  
44 know, it's gonna be wonderful.  
45  
46 AJ: And what church do you go to?  
47

- 1 DS: All God's Children.  
2
- 3 AJ: All God's Children. Yeah. Over in South Minneapolis.  
4
- 5 DS: That's right, yeah.  
6
- 7 AJ: Mhm.  
8
- 9 DS: You see at the time I was— I didn't hold on to that idea for very long. And then I realized that,  
10 well, no that's not how this all works. For one thing, I wasn't doing this too long before I realized  
11 that, uhm, I couldn't count on gay and lesbian people to understand trans people any more than  
12 the rest of the world.  
13
- 14 AJ: Right.  
15
- 16 DS: That, that became quite obvious to me. That, that, that, then, that wasn't too long. So, uh, I  
17 think it's... it's more than unfortunate and my way of talking about it is a crying shame.  
18
- 19 AJ: Mhm.  
20
- 21 DS: It really is. And I've done everything and I continue to do everything that I can do to build the  
22 bridges. To me the way to do that is to keep telling stories, to keep talking about who we are. I  
23 don't ever shut up.  
24
- 25 AJ: [Laughs].  
26
- 27 DS: You know, as people will tell you, uhm, and it's had an impact to some degree.  
28
- 29 AJ: Mhm.  
30
- 31 DS: Uh, you know, uhm, but that's just— we still have a long way to go. And I'm not, I'm not, and I  
32 know this, to scream about this, I'm not of the mindset that says that the team should separate  
33 itself out away from everybody else.  
34
- 35 AJ: Okay.  
36
- 37 DS: I, I would prefer to keep trying to find ways to build bridges and, you know, at the same time,  
38 uhm, frankly with large national organizations, I don't have a lot of faith in that. I don't invest  
39 myself trying to save large national LGBT organizations.  
40
- 41 AJ: For example...  
42
- 43 DS: Uhm, well used to be, with, what's called now, National LGBTQ Task Force.  
44
- 45 AJ: Uhuh.  
46
- 47 DS: Or, uh, HRC.



1  
2 AJ: Mhm.  
3  
4 DS: Uh, I don't have, I don't have a lot of... I'm not, I'm not allowing my eggs in that basket.  
5  
6 AJ: Yeah.  
7  
8 DS: I'm more interested in doing what I can locally...  
9  
10 AJ: Uhuh.  
11  
12 DS: ... with people on the street. And I work a lot with other people who are addicted and other  
13 trans people.  
14  
15 AJ: Okay. Uhuh.  
16  
17 DS: And, uh, yeah, so I'm an intellectual. I'm a white intellectual. There's no doubt about it. But I'm  
18 working, I've spent a lot of time with all kinds of people, including people of color...  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm.  
21  
22 DS: ... who struggling to not to shoot up.  
23  
24 AJ: Yeah.  
25  
26 DS: And...  
27  
28 AJ: It's important work.  
29  
30 DS: And so, uh, to me where we make a difference is local. Where we make a difference is right here  
31 on the street.  
32  
33 AJ: Mhm.  
34  
35 DS: It's, uh, I don't have, yeah, the, the national sort of focus. That's sort of lost on me. And I don't,  
36 I'm really, personally, I'm not all that crazy about the celebrity status either of people.  
37  
38 AJ: Wow.  
39  
40 DS: Uh, I, uh, I have a...  
41  
42 AJ: Okay, uhm. So, uhm, celebrity status brings me to me next question. Uhm, the most famous  
43 transgender person on the planet right now...  
44  
45 DS: Yeah.  
46  
47 AJ: ... is a woman by the name of Caitlyn Jenner.

1  
2 DS: That's right.  
3  
4 AJ: Uhm, who I, I just gotta say to come out and sixty-seven? Is she... how old is she?  
5  
6 DS: I can't remember. I don't know exactly.  
7  
8 AJ: Sixty-five? It, it breaks my heart...  
9  
10 DS: She, she's a little older than me.  
11  
12 AJ: ... that, uhm, you know, she had to wait that long or she felt like she needed to wait that long to  
13 be able to be her true self... but what's your thoughts about—  
14  
15 DS: Well, see I could—  
16  
17 AJ: ... her and her celebrity and...  
18  
19 DS: I get asked a lot about this.  
20  
21 AJ: Mhm.  
22  
23 DS: And, and to tell you the truth, I get asked by gay people a lot about this...  
24  
25 AJ: Oh, sure, sure.  
26  
27 DS: ... because also, well I may be the one trans person they know.  
28  
29 AJ: Uhuh.  
30  
31 DS: So that makes me the Caitlyn Jenner expert...  
32  
33 AJ: [Laughs].  
34  
35 DS: ... which is not true at all.  
36  
37 AJ: Right.  
38  
39 DS: Uhm, and I have kind of a mystery reaction to that because, uhm, is has to do with privilege.  
40  
41 AJ: Mhm.  
42  
43 DS: And, uh, the other person that I know that's like this is, is Jenny Boylan.  
44  
45 AJ: Yeah.  
46  
47 DS: Jenny, Jenny Boylan was one of the first trans person I ever saw publicly.

1  
2 AJ: Okay.  
3  
4 DS: And I saw an interview that she was doing with Oprah Winfrey.  
5  
6 AJ: Mhm.  
7  
8 DS: And my reaction to that at the time was, well... and Jenny Boylan is from a town just above the  
9 town where I had my first church.  
10  
11 AJ: Okay.  
12  
13 DS: So we all know the same location.  
14  
15 AJ: Uhuh.  
16  
17 DS: And I'm thinking, "Well, if Jenny Boylan can do this, I can do this."  
18  
19 AJ: She's an intellectual as well.  
20  
21 DS: That's right she is. And, uh, so I'm thinking, "Well, you know, it's just a misreaction to it." On the  
22 one hand, honestly, I was enclosed by that. On the other hand, through all the years, especially  
23 when I started spending, when I spent— I can't see much of a connection sometimes between  
24 that and the young gender non-conforming person, whether they're genderqueer or trans or  
25 however they identify, who, who, is on the straight and can't stay sober and, and doesn't know  
26 how they're going to feed themselves and take care of themselves from one moment to the  
27 next without prostituting. Where, where, I, I can't make the connection. So I just don't spend a  
28 lot of time getting caught up in the hoopla that goes with it.  
29  
30 AJ: Yeah.  
31  
32 DS: And, and I've had people insist that this kind of visibility has done all this for the trans  
33 community.  
34  
35 AJ: Mhm.  
36  
37 DS: You know, unconditionally done this.  
38  
39 AJ: Right.  
40  
41 DS: And I say, "Well, you know, that's kind of a mixed bag too."  
42  
43  
44 AJ: Yeah.  
45  
46 DS: So...  
47

1 AJ: Say more about that.  
2  
3 DS: Of being a mixed bag?  
4  
5 AJ: Yeah.  
6  
7 DS: Well, I don't think, I mean, you know, I'm tired of going TDR, Transgender Day of Remembrance  
8 where we watch all this... people die.  
9  
10 AJ: I know.  
11  
12 DS: You know, I'm, I'm sick of it.  
13  
14 AJ: Last year we read eighty—  
15  
16 DS: Eighty-five.  
17  
18 AJ: —five names.  
19  
20 DS: Yes. Well, and you know what the candles were like.  
21  
22 AJ: Yeah, they were melting all over...  
23  
24 DS: Yeah. It was like a, it was just a congregation, and, and, and a symbolic congregation as well. Uh,  
25 you know, a part of this, my impression is due to the increased visibility, kids are getting  
26 targeted now more, I think. Uh, the issues, that we just haven't, you know, recently with St.  
27 Paul, that St. Paul charter school.  
28  
29 AJ: Right.  
30  
31 DS: That's just one example amongst many, uhm, uh, so—  
32  
33 AJ: And the issue at the St. Paul charter school was... cause, remember, we're doing this for...  
34  
35 DS: Well, sure, sure.  
36  
37 AJ: ... for the future so people may not know.  
38  
39 DS: Well, the, the, the backlash coming from right wing anti-LGBT, you know, organizations.  
40  
41 AJ: Uhuh.  
42  
43 DS: It's a backlash that I— as I understand it.  
44  
45 AJ: Uh, so at the St. Paul charter school, I believe that there was a young student, first or second  
46 grade...  
47

1 DS: That's right. It was a first grader who was transitioning and, uh, uh, with the support of parents  
2 and the, uh, as I understand, the pressure is on the school to not let that happen...  
3  
4 AJ: Right.  
5  
6 DS: ... within the school contest. And it all seems to devolve into the bathroom issue.  
7  
8 AJ: Yes.  
9  
10 DS: So, uhm, that kind of backlash, uh, I'm not sure that one causes the other but there is a direct  
11 correlation between the amount of that that I think we're all experiencing...  
12  
13 AJ: Mhm.  
14  
15 DS: and decreased visibility.  
16  
17 AJ: Wow.  
18  
19 DS: And some of that may be unavoidable. Maybe this is just the price we pay for being, for  
20 becoming more increasingly visible and we just have to pay it. I mean, we meaning the, the  
21 larger trans community.  
22  
23 AJ: Mhm.  
24  
25 DS: On the other hand, that's a hell of a price to pay because people are dying, and it's because  
26 people being murdered and people committing sui— taking their lives, people committing  
27 suicide.  
28  
29 AJ: Sure.  
30  
31 DS: Young people doing that.  
32  
33 AJ: Yeah.  
34  
35 DS: You know, I, I couldn't come out when I was a teenager.  
36  
37 AJ: Mhm.  
38  
39 DS: And I'm not sure I'd be any better now than if I was a teenager now, really.  
40  
41 AJ: There's a lot of teens who are...  
42  
43 DS: At the same time...  
44  
45 AJ: ... able to make their way in the world.  
46

1 DS: If they're— if they can connect with somebody. So, so I'm all about whatever they need to  
2 have... I'm all about seeing whoever it is gets what they need.  
3  
4 AJ: So I understand you, uhm...  
5  
6 DS: But that's, that needs to be where the focus needs to be. Not on some of the other stuff that...  
7  
8 AJ: Sure.  
9  
10 DS: ... you know, media tends to make us think.  
11  
12 AJ: So I understand that you actually, uhm, facilitate the group for trans identifying people at your  
13 church.  
14  
15 DS: I do, I do.  
16  
17 AJ: What's it called?  
18  
19 DS: Uh, Transcend.  
20  
21 AJ: Uhuh. And what do you guys— is it a support group, is it, uh...  
22  
23 DS: Well, it's been, uh...  
24  
25 AJ: A how to group, like, what, do you guys do pray, I mean, what is it?  
26  
27 DS: No, this is, this does not have a strong spiritual connection with this. This is mostly in terms of  
28 social programming.  
29  
30 AJ: Okay.  
31  
32 DS: Uhm, we do educational things. For instance, we're trying to do some special events on things  
33 that other trans groups don't always do. For instance, we've had Phil Duran from Out Front  
34 come and, uhm, speak to the group about, uh, health concerns. And he answered health related  
35 questions.  
36  
37 AJ: He's the legal director at Out Front.  
38  
39 DS: Yeah, he's the, he's the legal guru with Out Front.  
40  
41 AJ: Yes. [Laughs].  
42  
43 DS: Uhm, we're, uh, trying to offer people more social interaction as well.  
44  
45 AJ: Uhuh.  
46

1 DS: Uhm, and we're building a database. One of the problems we experience is that, uh, uh, when  
2 trans people are all looking for help everything that we share is kind of by word of mouth. It's  
3 been a lot of, uh, well, who knows who?  
4  
5 AJ: Mhm.  
6  
7 DS: And, so, we're trying to establish, we're working on establishing a database.  
8  
9 AJ: Okay.  
10  
11 DS: So, when somebody walks into the door and says, "I'm, I'm, this is who I am, and I need help."  
12 We've got a current, not outdated, but a current list of, of, you know, well, who do you talk to?  
13 Where do you go for this, that, or the other thing?  
14  
15 AJ: Mhm. Wow.  
16  
17 DS: You know?  
18  
19 AJ: That's great.  
20  
21 DS: So, all one centralized place.  
22  
23 AJ: How, how many people would you say come to this group?  
24  
25 DS: Well, like most support groups, we've had anywhere from a small handful to maybe a dozen.  
26  
27 AJ: Okay.  
28  
29 DS: It kind of goes back and forth.  
30  
31 AJ: Do you have to get—  
32  
33 DS: That's general of most small group dynamics.  
34  
35 AJ: Sure. Do you have to be a member of All God's Church to participate?  
36  
37 DS: No, no, no, no. Not at all.  
38  
39 AJ: Do you have to be a Christian?  
40  
41 DS: Huh?  
42  
43 AJ: Do you have to be a Christian or...?  
44  
45 DS: Oh, no, no, no. No. Uh, the, uh, the AGC support this but there's no, there's no connection like  
46 that.  
47

- 1 AJ: No direct connection.  
2
- 3 DS: Now I have a lot of spiritual, uh, I'm, I'm known as a religious leader here in the Twin Cities but  
4 in terms of this particular program we're doing...  
5
- 6 AJ: Uhuh.  
7
- 8 DS: ... this is meant for anybody. And, uh, the last meeting we had, we, you know, it was like  
9 popcorn night and we watched uh, the, uh, the film Boy Meets Girl.  
10
- 11 AJ: Mm. Okay.  
12
- 13 DS: So, we'll do things like that. Uh, we're also, I also have, uh, on tap, uhm, people who will come  
14 and do, uhm, for trans women to do things like makeup and that sort of stuff.  
15
- 16 AJ: Oh my god.  
17
- 18 DS: So, we're, you know, what is it gonna take to make your life livable.  
19
- 20 AJ: Uhuh.  
21
- 22 DS: Okay. It's whoever you are. The one thing we have not done and the one thing that's really kind  
23 of a large hole and we need to address it better, and I'm not always sure how to do it. And that  
24 is how to reach trans men.  
25
- 26 AJ: Oh, okay.  
27
- 28 DS: And try to reach also people who are not on the gender binary...  
29
- 30 AJ: Mhm.  
31
- 32 DS: ... which is a big order.  
33
- 34 AJ: So more gender non-conforming.  
35
- 36 DS: That's right. You know, just because I find myself on the female end of the gender binary doesn't  
37 mean that everybody else does.  
38
- 39 AJ: Yeah, it's a spectrum.  
40
- 41 DS: So, I mean, that's, but that's part, we're just starting this, we're just starting to grow this so but  
42 we're aware of that.  
43
- 44 AJ: Well, wonderful. Denise, we're getting to our last question. Where do you see the trans  
45 community in the next fifty years?  
46
- 47 DS: Wow, that far out? Sometimes I can't see any further than next week.



1  
2 AJ: [Laughs].  
3  
4 DS: Uhm...  
5  
6 AJ: Well, just think about this. We're, we're getting close to fifty years out from, uhm, Stonewall.  
7  
8 DS: Sure. Stonewall, that's right. Uhm, we're, we're constantly playing this catch up game with the  
9 rest of the LGB— LGB community.  
10  
11 AJ: Uhuh.  
12  
13 DS: I see that gap narrowing, slowly but surely.  
14  
15 AJ: Mhm.  
16  
17 DS: Uh, I don't see any— there's no doubt in my mind that, uh, uh, this is inevitable. That gender is  
18 going— is being perceived differently just in our society, our culture.  
19  
20 AJ: Mhm.  
21  
22 DS: This is evolving, this is changing, and that's a tide that I don't think can be turned.  
23  
24 AJ: Okay.  
25  
26 DS: The, the reactions that we are getting to— the violent reactions to the, uh, craziness. The  
27 violence against, uh, people of color to, to children, to young people...  
28  
29 AJ: Uhuh.  
30  
31 DS: Uh, that's not sustainable. That will, that will, you know... I think in our culture over time it's  
32 gonna take incredible amounts of work, incredible amounts of resistance to that...  
33  
34 AJ: Mhm.  
35  
36 DS: ... but I am confident that trans people, all of us together, uh, can, can, can materially affect that  
37 and will over time. I have no doubt about that. Part of the key to that is how well we do this  
38 together.  
39  
40 AJ: Mm.  
41  
42 DS: Okay. I think we still struggle and we're gonna struggle for some time over issues of class and  
43 color.  
44  
45 AJ: Mhm.  
46  
47 DS: particularly within the trans community.

1  
2 AJ: Yes.  
3  
4 DS: You know, I, I'm, I'm always very open about that.  
5  
6 AJ: Race.  
7  
8 DS: Race. Co— uh, color. Education. Always all get tied together in all kinds of different ways. Uhm,  
9 the more we do to be unified with each other, the more that process evolves. At the same  
10 time— and the faster it evolves. At the same time it will evolve. I think we've gotten past the  
11 point of no return. There will be no going back to the way things, doing business the way we've  
12 always done it as a culture.  
13  
14 AJ: Hm. Wow.  
15  
16 DS: I don't... I just don't, I just don't see that happening. Uhm, there's no—  
17  
18 AJ: The horses have left the barn.  
19  
20 DS: Yea— essentially. We've turned, we've turned a corner. Uh, there's no going back. And I work, I  
21 work in one of the most highbrow institutions our culture knows. Nobody evolves any slower  
22 than the church, granted, the universal church.  
23  
24 AJ: Right, yes.  
25  
26 DS: And there's no going back there. That, that will... but there will be, there will be struggles would  
27 be... Well, just today. I just noticed today, I heard the word that, uh, the international Anglican  
28 community or whatever it's called...  
29  
30 AJ: Uhuh.  
31  
32 DS: ... just suspended the American Episcopal Church from their, from their international body for  
33 three years... be—  
34  
35 AJ: Why?  
36  
37 DS: Well, because they ordain and recognize LGBT people.  
38  
39 AJ: Hm.  
40  
41 DS: To the best of my knowledge outside of the church that I'm part of, the first church in the  
42 United States, the first denomination to, to really address trans people in terms of ordination  
43 and non-discrimination was the Episcopal Church...  
44  
45 AJ: Mhm.  
46

- 1 DS: ...cause the Counsel of Bishops did that a couple of years ago or more. They came out and said,  
2 "No, there's not going to be any discrimination." Well, if, but, so they've been suspended from  
3 the international for three years. I don't know what they're gonna do with that. There will be  
4 things like that happen.  
5
- 6 AJ: Mhm. But those are minor setbacks in your mind?  
7
- 8 DS: Well, they could be, they're, they're setbacks, yes, but the, the progress, the tide of progress is  
9 inevitable.  
10
- 11 AJ: Yeah. Wow.  
12
- 13 DS: I, I just—  
14
- 15 AJ: Denise, I want to thank you for being so open and so willing to share. Your— your history...  
16
- 17 DS: Thank you for asking me. I'm kind of... I love to talk so.  
18
- 19 AJ: ... and your insights about the movement, about the community and thank you for your work in  
20 helping to support young people who are, uhm, just beginning on this journey. Uhm, it's  
21 fascinating and, uhm, until we meet again my friend.  
22
- 23 DS: You bet. Thank you for asking me.  
24
- 25 AJ: Thank you.