Gavin Rouille Narrator

Andrea Jenkins Interviewer

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

November 3, 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.

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1 2 3	Andrea Gavin R	Jenkins Rouille	-AJ -GR
4 5 6 7 8	AJ:	History Project. already into No shining. Gavin,	name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian with the Transgender Oral I'm here today with Gavin Rouille. Today is November 3, 2015 – wow, we're vember, and it is the absolute most stunning today. It's 70 degrees, the sun is why don't you state your name and pronounce it the way you do. Tell us your, your gender assigned at birth, and what are your preferred pronouns.
9 10	GR:	My name is Gav pronouns.	vin Laurence Rouille. I am male, born female at birth, FTM, and prefer male
11 12 13	AJ:	first thing you r	So, Gavin, can you just talk a little bit about your earliest memory? What's the emember in your life? It doesn't have to be related to your trans identity, nat would be great.
14 15 16	GR:	my cat down th	s one of my more vivid first memories, I think the first memory I had was chasing e driveway and falling. I was wearing a Mickey Mouse jumpsuit and I scratched a e and I was very sad.
17	AJ:	Oh, wow.	
18 19 20 21	GR:	class into male felt like I didn't	first memories was from elementary school and the teacher was splitting the and female for health discussions and I was quite a tomboy growing up. I really know which side of the room I was supposed to be on. I remember struggling of situations, but that was one of my oldest memories.
22	AJ:	Where did you	go to school? Where did you grow up?
23	GR:	Burlington, Veri	mont.
24 25	AJ:	OK, so pretty ru most cities thou	ral? Or, I guess Burlington is the biggest city in Vermont, but it's smaller than ugh.
26	GR:	Yes, this is true.	
27	AJ:	And, your elem	entary school was in Burlington?
28	GR:	Well, South Bur	lington.
29 30 31	AJ:	around where t	ol like? You mentioned that you had these sort of struggles and challenges o line up for lunch or recess and all of these kinds of things, but did you sort of bullying or any sort of adverse stuff in school?
32 33 34 35	GR:	remember just bullying I receiv	er much of school. I feel like I pushed a lot of that out. I was very quiet, I being really shy and not communicating a whole lot with people. The only red, I think, was in high school that I can really remember. I just remember, there was this circle loop between the lobby and the library, and I was walking

2		didn't know there was transvestites in our school." At that time, I didn't even identify as transgender so I was really shocked by the experience.
4	AJ:	Wow.
5	GR:	I did confront them, which felt really good and empowering but it was a very scary moment.
6	AJ:	And they backed away or?
7	GR:	Yeah, nothing else came of it, but yeah, that was my most vivid real bullying in high school.
8	AJ:	What was your home life like for you? Do you have many brothers and sisters?
9 10 11 12	GR:	Two blood sisters. My parents divorced when I was four and both of them got remarried around the time that I was 12 and so I gained some step-siblings. Only one side of them do I really know, so I gained two step-sisters and a step-brother that I'm close to. I came out a lot $-$ I came out as lesbian, bisexual, and then
13	AJ:	As which kind of sexual?
14 15	GR:	Bisexual, and then lesbian again, and then queer and then transgender and then back to lesbian. And then eventually back to transgender, and then bisexual again.
16	AJ:	So, how do you identify today?
17	GR:	Transgender and bisexual.
18	AJ:	Transgender, bi
19	GR:	Queer.
20	AJ:	And, that has morphed though up and down over time.
21	GR:	Definitely.
22	AJ:	The fluidity of gender and identity.
23	GR:	Yes.
24	AJ:	So, home life was just pretty basic, pretty normal?
25 26 27	GR:	I'm very blessed. I had a very accepting family, for the most part. I think my dad struggled more with my lesbian identity than my trans identity, and my mom struggled more with my trans identity than my lesbian identity.
28	AJ:	Wow, that's interesting.
29 30 31 32 33	GR:	Yeah. It took me a while to come out. I came out to my mom every time pretty much right as soon as I kind of was able to put words to what was going on. But, I was much more afraid of coming out to my dad – more so because he had expressed some pretty clear homophobic views when I was a child. Vermont was the first state to ever pass civil unions and I remember watching that on the news, when it happened, at my grandmother's house with my dad. My

1 2		grandmother is very religious, was, and my dad was very drunk and he said something about the faggots on TV.
3	AJ:	Oh, wow.
4 5 6 7	GR:	And my grandmother said, "Well, if you don't pray for them, you're just as bad as they are." So, from that moment on, when that happened I was like 11 or something, I knew that it may not be safe to be out with that side of my family – though that shifted drastically as I grew older and became closer to my dad.
8 9	AJ:	Oh, wow – that's great. What kind of challenges have you faced since expressing your true gender identity?
10	GR:	Well, as a white guy I kind of moved up the social ladder.
11	AJ:	Yeah, that's a real sort of reality.
12	GR:	Definitely.
13	AJ:	What is that like?
14 15 16 17	GR:	Well, as a person who has always identified as a feminist and always really been aware of patriarchy and privilege, I think becoming a white man really scared me. I don't know I'm still working on that. I'm still trying to navigate how I feel about that. I mean it is what it is, but it definitely is a shift in identity that I struggle with.
18	AJ:	How long have you been out? When did you come out?
19 20	GR:	I started officially transitioning in 2009, but had come out I changed my name to Gavin, not legally but started going by Gavin when I was 15, so that was 12 or 13 years ago.
21	AJ:	So, you're 26?
22	GR:	Twenty-seven, I'm almost 28.
23	AJ:	So, you've been out for quite some time.
24	GR:	Yes.
25 26	AJ:	To the extent that you are comfortable, tell me about any medical interventions that you have undertaken or that you plan to engage in.
27	GR:	I've only been on hormones so far and hopefully getting top surgery within the next few weeks.
28	AJ:	Oh, wow. Surgery.
29	GR:	Yes.
30	AJ:	That's pretty intense. That's a big step down the road.
31	GR:	Yes, a long time coming.

1 2	AJ:	And hormones, I mean you say, "I've only been taking hormones," but that's a pretty big medical intervention too.
3	GR:	It is, definitely.
4	AJ:	How did you feel once you started on testosterone?
5 6	GR:	I didn't feel much of a difference. I definitely had seen documentaries of other people who like immediately when they stuck the needle in were just like, "Ahh," and had this immediate
7	AJ:	Machismo.
8 9 10 11 12 13	GR:	Yeah. I didn't have that. I didn't feel great shifts in personality or well, I guess I always struggled with whether or not life was based on nature or nurture and I've definitely come to terms that it's just both because previous to taking hormones, I would never have imagined saying or acting on sexual impulses towards friends or partners. And then, once starting testosterone, sometimes I just had these instincts to slap a girl's butt, and I'm like, "That's not appropriate." It was very strange to have those types of feelings.
14	AJ:	Like a stranger, just walking down the street smacking girls on the ass?
15 16 17	GR:	No, no – not strangers. But, more like friends and partners, being more just a lot more sexual and not really filtering immediately whether things were appropriate or not. I don't know. It's interesting.
18	AJ:	And there were, of course, physical changes?
19 20 21 22	GR:	Yeah. It took a while for some things. I was on the wrong testosterone for quite a few years, the generic just didn't work for me. But, I was so distracted with school that I didn't notice that I kind of had plateaued for two or three years. So, now I'm back on stuff that actually works for me.
23	AJ:	Wow, OK.
24 25	GR:	So, just in the last year I've seen a lot of growth in facial hair whereas I feel like after I don't know, what has it been? Seven years on testosterone? I should have a full beard.
26	AJ:	Oh, wow. Yeah.
27	GR:	That would be my preference.
28	AJ:	Really? The hipster look.
29	GR:	Well, I don't necessarily want to grow it all out, but I want that ability.
30	AJ:	Sure. Well, congratulations on your impending surgery. I hope everything goes well.
31	GR:	Thank you.
32 33	AJ:	Good healing vibes to you. What have been some of the positive aspects of expressing your true gender identity?

GR: 1 I think it's really helped me to be able to connect with people of many different walks of life and 2 really see a lot more of the world from different perspectives, actual aid in understanding . . . or 3 at least be more willing to understand other people because of my experiences of not being 4 understood. So, even my experiences with my family and watching them grow from my 5 experiences and choices and things they've chosen to participate in because of that. I can see a 6 lot of positivity in that and many of the people I interact with, whether it's through my work at a 7 homeless youth shelter or as an artist who makes personal work about my transition and being 8 able to share that with people, and educate people. Yeah, it's been really useful in those ways.

- 9 AJ: What kind of art do you make?
- 10 GR: I'm a print maker, a trained print maker, but I do a lot of multimedia stuff as well. I've dabbled 11 in installations and sculptures, to a degree, but mostly print making.
- 12 AJ: OK. Does your work take any sort of social justice track too or is it sort of art for the beauty of making art?
- 14 GR: No, I'm the type that doesn't believe art needs or should be beautiful.
- 15 AJ: OK.

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- 16 GR: Art is extremely powerful and can really be used as a tool for many, many different things. I
 17 often use the example that Hitler was well known for banning a lot of art and stealing art
 18 because he knew the power of it.
- 19 AJ: Sure, wow.

So, I try to make things that really say something, that's more of my preference and it's more of GR: what I'm attracted to. Not that I have problems with art for beauty's sake, but my art is . . . well, as I have changed and grown, my art has really followed that progress with me. But, it really started when I first came out and I was using it as a tool to kind of echo my transition and my thoughts and feelings, who I wanted to be, what I wanted to do, what did gender mean to me. And so, there was a lot of coming out pieces and once I kind of was out, I started to research more about the transgender community at large, what it meant to be transgender in this world - past, present, possibly future. And, a lot of the information that I found out was really scary and I started making work about a lot of the research I was finding or the things I was researching about the murders of transgender people, the lack of rights protecting transgender people, mostly in the United States but definitely being aware of what was happening in the rest of the world as well. And so, the art really took a turn to this kind of darker area, trying to kind of share that information with my audience, and I kind of went down that road for a while. And, I think, it really affected me and my own energy because I was putting so much energy into that work and the work was so dark and I felt it. I had to, after I graduated for my undergrad, I had to take a couple of steps back from looking into that stuff, researching it, thinking about it. And, when I entered grad school a few years later, I kind of started back on that track for a little bit, but soon after realized that I needed to actually completely revamp my direction on how I was making work because it was affecting me too much. So, I've now tried to come at these topics, not necessarily just about transgender identity, but much more broad version of anybody who

1 2		has been, "othered" and trying to kind of question what that means and why that happens, and mostly through text.
3	AJ:	Wow, so printed letters and words and?
4 5 6 7	GR:	Yeah, in different ways and usually words that are distorted or difficult to read, to force people to change their perspective in some ways. I don't know if you've ever seen you probably have, those holograms of Spiderman and you see him and he's like Peter Parker and then you turn the card and he's flying through
8	AJ:	Yeah, like Spidey.
9 10 11 12	GR:	So, I've learned a technique of doing that on paper just by folding and so you look at the piece in one direction and you can read one thing and then you turn it the other way and you can read another. So, one of my favorite ones is a piece that reads, "I disapprove of you," one way and then the other says, "I'm afraid of who I am."
13	AJ:	Wow.
14	GR:	So, it's kind of that inner/outer relationship
15	AJ:	Dialogue.
16 17	GR:	Dialogue between what I think about you outwardly and what that actually means to me on the inside.
18	AJ:	Sure, wow. That sounds powerful. Is there a place online where your work can be viewed?
19	GR:	Definitely. Google my name.
20	AJ:	OK.
21	GR:	gavinlaurencerouille@wordpress.
22 23 24 25	AJ:	Wordpress – all right-y. Wow. So, what were some pivotal moments? I mean, if you look back over your decision to really be authentic with yourself, with other people, what would you say are some pivotal moments that define this sort of new outward expression of your life? Would you have done anything differently?
26 27 28 29 30 31	GR:	No, I wouldn't have done anything differently. I don't believe in regrets. But, pivotal moments specifically? I definitely think starting testosterone was huge and coming out to well, specifically to my dad just because I think it was eating at me for so long. That's a good question. There's probably lots of them but everything just kind of seemed to flow so naturally. There aren't many things that stick out as this huge event, it's just kind of the process has been fairly smooth.
32	AJ:	That's good, right?
33	GR:	Yeah.

1 2 3	AJ:	Have you been involved in any organizations or have there been any specific people that sort of gave you this, "ah-ha" moment? Like, "Oh, yeah. I saw Buck Angel and now I need to do this." I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, but just trying to give some examples.
4 5	GR:	I grew up as soon as I came out when I was 11 or 12 as a lesbian, I started going to this youth organization in Burlington, Vermont, called Ouright Vermont.
6	AJ:	I know of this organization.
7	GR:	I grew up there.
8	AJ:	Is that right? Within the that was your yeah. Were you ever on staff?
9 10 11 12	GR:	No. I volunteered there after I kind of got more comfortable. I went there for a good couple years and started going by the name of Gavin as a youth there as well. So, that was really pivotal and definitely the people who worked there and kind of led groups and stuff. And all the youth, the whole experience, was huge for me – to have that space where I felt safe and
L3 L4	AJ:	They used to have buses that would go pick up kids from rural parts of Vermont and bring them to the center to hang out.
15 16 17 18	GR:	Yeah, it was amazing. Just to not be alone, to meet people, and get crushes. The whole experience. And then, I think the other most pivotal people were probably from my undergrad education. My professor there, Adriane Herman, who we really didn't like each other at all at first. She scared me.
19	AJ:	Wow.
20	GR:	She was very challenging, challenged a lot of the work I made.
21	AJ:	Is she trans identified?
22	GR:	No, just so smart and just very blunt.
23	AJ:	Where did you go to?
24 25 26 27 28	GR:	Maine College of Art in Portland, Maine. But, she just challenged me to really think harder and to challenge my audience more, just gave me amazing advice and people to look at – other artists who kind of contemplate and all that. She's really been my mentor and I still consider her she's like family to me at this point. She's been huge, always been a huge supporter. She introduced me, not literally but, to an artist, Adrian Piper.
29	AJ:	Yeah.
30 31 32 33 34	GR:	Who is one of my heroes. I absolutely love her work, as somebody who was also kind of on in the middle between two identities, you know, this Black woman who passed as white and kind of went through the world examining that. During my undergrad experience, a lot of what was doing was quite similar but between male and female and really tried to figure out you know, experiment with that and analyze my own gender and how people react to me if I took up space on the sidewalk or if said hello or if I made eye contact, or if I didn't do these things and

1 2		how people would interact with me differently. Whether I passed or not. So, she was a huge influence and continues to be somebody I re-visit often.
3 4	AJ:	Love, relationships. How has that been impacted by your gender identity? Are you currently in a relationship? And, if so, with who?
5 6 7 8	GR:	When I was a lesbian, I had no problems getting dates with women, flirting. I was just like a little social butterfly around people I was interested in. And then I well, it wasn't actually until I really started to transition that I started to put words to it and came out and requested that people use male pronouns
9	AJ:	And then the dates just started flooding in.
10 11 12	GR:	And then my anxiety came out and I started to struggle with panic attacks and general anxiety. I really struggled with meeting people and getting out of my house. Thankfully I already had a partner when I had started, though that didn't last long into my transition.
13	AJ:	Do you think the break-up was because of the transition?
14	GR:	I think it played a part, though she knew the whole time we were together that I was
15	AJ:	Moving in that direction?
16	GR:	Yeah.
17	AJ:	And, I imagine you were pretty heavily butch identified to start.
18	GR:	Yeah, yeah.
19	AJ:	But she didn't site that as a reason, like, "Dealing with this transition is too difficult."
20 21 22 23 24 25 26	GR:	No, I mean there were parts like that where she specifically said I was acting like her exboyfriends or I was different. I didn't notice that though, that wasn't my experience of what was happening. Maybe it was what was happening. But, as I've been able to feel more comfortable in my body, muscle mass and facial hair, I've definitely felt more comfortable getting out and meeting people. I've definitely been a user of online dating because I think that makes it a lot easier to just initially be like, "I'm trans," and be out and so that anybody I interact with immediately knows and it's not like I meet somebody out at a bar and have to disclose.
27	AJ:	Or, wonder if they might be interested in me.
28	GR:	Yeah, that just creates a lot of anxiety.
29	AJ:	Right.
30 31 32	GR:	I think's what I was afraid of, in the beginning. So, that has been a good tool and I've met a lot of great people, though none of those relationships worked. But, that's how it goes. I am currently seeing actually a transgender woman.
33	AJ:	Really?
34	GR:	Which is the first time I've ever dated a transgender woman.

1	AJ:	What's that like?
2	GR:	New, and interesting and exciting. I think we understand a lot, in very different ways.
3	AJ:	But, there are some similarities to the struggle no matter which direction you're going.
4 5	GR:	It's nice to know that it's an understood thing and we can communicate about those experiences and just
6	AJ:	Those microaggressions that happen every day.
7 8 9	GR:	Yeah, and we can both be aware for each other instead of sometimes I get really anxious and be like, "Did you notice that?" Other people are like, "You're overthinking it, you're over reacting." And then being with somebody who will be like, "Yeah, that is going on."
10	AJ:	What kinds of microaggressions do you experience in the day-to-day world?
11	GR:	Thankfully I don't experience much.
12	AJ:	You're just oblivious.
13 14 15 16 17 18	GR:	I am. I mean, I pass in so many ways. I think it's more things that I I think it's more things that I notice connected to female-identified people. I'm working with a lot of young men and the way that they talk about women and relationships with women and how they express their masculinity. But, I don't often experience those situations in relation to gender identity or at least in identifying as a transgender person. I probably do actually and I just don't always notice it. I mean, I've noticed it when people call me pretty or beautiful, those moments when I'm just like, "You don't know that that's not" I don't know.
20	AJ:	Like that's not a compliment for me.
21 22 23	GR:	Yeah, or I guess like in online dating situations where people just say really inappropriate things based on my transgender identity or asking inappropriate questions or making assumptions about me that are uninvited and gross.
24 25	AJ:	Sure. What about your interactions in institutions and medical facilities and the criminal justice system, educational system? Have you had any challenges in those areas?
26 27 28	GR:	I think I often feel like I become a sort of poster child for the transgender people. So, it becomes kind of like this commodity where people want you to be involved in something because you make it more interesting.
29	AJ:	So, almost tokenization.
30	GR:	Yeah, totally. But, it got me into grad school for free.
31	AJ:	Wow.
32	GR:	I'll take that.
33	AJ:	Yeah, exactly.

1 2 3	GR:	But when applying to jobs, I've definitely noticed everybody is pretty open to diversity now and welcomes that, and so it does become this thing that people are attracted to, but I don't know. Sometimes, it can be it just feels a little weird sometimes.
4	AJ:	So, no negative interactions with the police or anything like that?
5	GR:	No, thankfully.
6	AJ:	You're finding housing, employment.
7	GR:	No problems.
8	AJ:	Where do you work?
9 10 11	GR:	Currently, I work at Avenues for Homeless Youth and I came out to the person who interviewed me the first day. I came out to everybody who interviewed me the first day, and then I basically stopped coming out.
12	AJ:	OK.
13 14 15 16	GR:	So, a few of definitely a good handful of my co-workers are aware of my transgender identity and then there's a lot of grey area where I'm not sure if people know. There's definitely a large population of staff that are involved in the church in whatever way the church is whatever you consider that.
17	AJ:	OK.
18 19 20 21 22 23	GR:	And, I think that brings a lot of anxiety for me and that was a big part of the reason why I kind of stopped talking about it. And also, realizing that the work I do at the homeless youth shelter is about the youth and unless it's a good segue of me talking about it with the youth that will actually help them, uplift them, aid them in whatever they're going through, just doesn't seem necessary to come out. We have such a high turnover, otherwise it would be like every other day I'd be introducing myself, "Hi, I'm Gavin, I'm transgender."
24	AJ:	Right.
25	GR:	It's not about me and my shit.
26	AJ:	Are there queer kids that come through there at all?
27	GR:	Once in a while, yeah.
28 29	AJ:	Because, I mean, sometimes it's sort of nice to know that you're in a space that identities like yours are welcome and supported.
30	GR:	Totally.
31 32	AJ:	What do you think the relationship is between the L, the G, the B and the T? In your own experience?
33	GR:	The relationships?

1 2 3	AJ:	Yeah, like there's the lesbian, gay, bisexual and then the T process. Some people feel like there is some tensions between people don't. I'm just curious how you feel about it.	
4 5 6 7 8 9	GR:	I think it really depends on the community and the group. Outright Vermont, there was a whole mix of us in there. It kind of we were all in it together. But, as you kind of It to the gay bars or read newspapers and do more research see more of it. But, I don't have a whole lot of personal ex guess I try not to look at it that way and I don't know.	didn't feel those kind of layers, just don't know, as I've grown up and go about LGBT community, I definitely
10	AJ:	Were you involved in the marriage equality campaign? Ha	ve you worked on any of those?
11	GR:	No. I'm not a huge supporter of marriage in general.	
12 13	AJ:	OK. Marriage is an antiquated concept that is designed to that we need to eradicate from our culture and society.	subjugate women and it's something
14	GR:	It just needs to be different maybe.	
15	AJ:	I'm putting words in your mouth.	
16	GR:	Yeah, I mean I totally agree with	
17	AJ:	Quote Gavin.	
18 19 20 21	GR:	Quote me on that one. I just never felt like that was where think marriage is what defines love or what defines relation thought we should be putting more money into education acceptance within starting in elementary school and least	nships, by any means. So, I always and helping build more tolerance and
22	AJ:	Employment opportunities for queer and homeless youth,	that would be something.
23	GR:	Wouldn't it. I think we might have to wrap it up soon thou	gh.
24 25	AJ:	OK. I just want to know, what do you think the agenda sho community going forward?	ould be for the transgender
26	GR:	I don't even know.	
27	AJ:	What would you like the world to look like in 50 years?	
28 29 30	GR:	That this didn't even matter. What it looked like before it complete acceptance. I imagine a world kind of like oh, Edge of Time. Have you read that?	•
31	AJ:	I have not.	
32	GR:	It's a utopia that is absolutely amazing. That's how I would	I
33	AJ:	Women on the Edge of Time.	
34	GR: The Tra	Yeah. ransgender Oral History Project	Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies

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1	AJ:	I'll have to pick that up.
2 3	GR:	Definitely. It's really queer and just it's so smart for something that was written, I think, back in the 1960s or 1970s. It was totally out of its time.
4 5	AJ:	So, everyone loves everyone for who they are and not necessarily for what body parts they bring or what gender identities they bring.
6 7 8 9	GR:	Yeah, they all use gender-neutral pronouns and men can be mothers and women can be fathers. You can have large groups of parents, but none of them are your biological parents and the way they handle conflict resolution the whole thing is just really an amazing way of imagining the future.
10	AJ:	Wow, what a great utopian vision to end on.
11	GR:	Yeah.
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12 13	AJ:	Thank you so much for your time, Gavin. I really appreciate it. Again, all the best with your upcoming medical interventions.
	AJ: GR:	
13		upcoming medical interventions.
13 14	GR:	upcoming medical interventions. Thank you.
13 14 15	GR: AJ:	upcoming medical interventions. Thank you. And, good luck in this new relationship.