

Nicole Vanderheiden
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

May 17, 2016



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

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

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

Andrea Jenkins

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Nicole Vanderheiden -NV
3
4 AJ: So hello.
5
6 NV: Hi.
7
8 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for The Transgender Oral History Project
9 at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. And today is, uhm, May 17th, 2016. And
10 I am here with Nicole Vanderheiden. And, uhm, so hello Nicole.
11
12 NV: Hi.
13
14 AJ: I am just going to ask if you would state your name and please spell it.
15
16 NV: Okay.
17
18 AJ: Uhm, so that we make sure we have it spelled correctly. Uhm, state you gender identity today
19 and your gender assigned at birth, uhm, as well as what pronouns you use.
20
21 NV: Okay. Uhm, my name is Nicole Vanderheiden. That's spelled V.A.N.D.E.R.H.E.I.D.E.N. Uhm, I'm a
22 woman, and my pronouns are feminine. She/her. Uhm, I was assigned male at birth.
23
24 AJ: Huh, nice. Thank you so much.
25
26 NV: Mhm.
27
28 AJ: Such a pleasure to be here with you today. It's a beautiful spring day.
29
30 NV: It is.
31
32 AJ: Uh.
33
34 NV: Finally.
35
36 AJ: Finally. So Nicole, uhm, just to get our juicers flowing here can you, uhm, just tell me what, uhm,
37 is your earliest memory in life. Like what's the first thing you remember. And it doesn't have to
38 be related to your gender identity though if it is that's okay but just, you know, what, what do
39 you remember about life?
40
41 NV: I think my earliest memory was when I was old enough that I no longer had to take a nap at
42 daycare.
43
44 AJ: [Laughs]. Oh, okay.
45
46 NV: So all the other kids were napping...
47

1 AJ: Uhuh.
2
3 NV: ... and I got to go out and explore the backyard at the daycare.
4
5 AJ: Were there other kids who couldn't nap or were you like the only one?
6
7 NV: I was the only one.
8
9 AJ: [Laughs].
10
11 NV: I was the only one my age. I think all the other kids were off at Kindergarten, and all the younger
12 kids still had to nap.
13
14 AJ: Oh.
15
16 NV: I was so proud of myself.
17
18 AJ: That must have been pretty exciting. [Laughs]. So, uhm, where did you go preschool like?
19
20 NV: It was, uh, it was a home daycare center.
21
22 AJ: Uhuh.
23
24 NV: Miss Bucalatee.
25
26 AJ: Miss Bucalatee.
27
28 NV: Mhm.
29
30 AJ: Do you... I'm sure you don't remember how to spell her name. [Laughs].
31
32 NV: I have no idea how to spell her name. I don't even hardly remember her at all. I just know
33 saying... it's a fun name to say. [Laughs].
34
35 AJ: Yeah. Absolutely.
36
37 NV: Cherie Bucalatee. Cherie Bucalatee.
38
39 AJ: Cherie Bucalatee.
40
41 NV: In Aurora, Colorado.
42
43 AJ: Oh, so this was in Aurora, Colorado.
44
45 NV: Mhm.
46
47 AJ: Uh, pretty close to Denver.

1
2 NV: Right. Suburb of Denver, yep. Just, uh, east of Denver.
3
4 AJ: Uhuh. Uhm, so is that where you were born?
5
6 NV: I was born in Marquette, Michigan.
7
8 AJ: Okay.
9
10 NV: Uhm, with, uhm, I was third of four. I have three brothers.
11
12 AJ: Mhm.
13
14 NV: Uhm, and my folks relocated to Denver. Uhm, cause my mom got a job out there as a civilian
15 nurse in the Army.
16
17 AJ: Hm.
18
19 NV: So I moved up there when I was one and a half. I don't even remember life in Michigan so.
20
21 AJ: Huh. Okay. Well, uhm, and, uhm, then you guys moved to Minnesota?
22
23 NV: Mhm. Yep, uhm, in the mid-nineties, uhm, Bill Clinton kind of slimmed down the military a little
24 bit...
25
26 AJ: Mhm.
27
28 NV: ... and shutdown Fitts and Zimmer Medical Center where my mom was a nurse.
29
30 AJ: Uhuh.
31
32 NV: So in order to, uhm, remain federally employed...
33
34 AJ: Sure.
35
36 NV: ... she, uhm, got a job at the, uhm, Federal Medical Center in Rochester. It's a, uh, prison medical
37 center with the Bureau of Prisons.
38
39 AJ: Oh, wow.
40
41 NV: So she was a nurse there for, that's, uhm, she just retired this year from there actually.
42
43 AJ: Is that right?
44
45 NV: Mhm.
46
47 AJ: So how long did you guys live in Rochester?

1
2 NV: Uhm, we moved there, was that in '95?
3
4 AJ: So she must still be there then if she's...
5
6 NV: They just sold their house. They're doing the cliché thing. The just sold their house. They're
7 moving to Florida.
8
9 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].
10
11 NV: But first they're going to take, like, a massive road trip all across the United States.
12
13 AJ: Oh, wow.
14
15 NV: They're big last hurrah.
16
17 AJ: Hey, that's cool though.
18
19 NV: Take off retirement with a bang so they got an RV. They're going out west. Taking a cruise to
20 Alaska, and going to the west coast so.
21
22 AJ: Huh. Yeah. So you grew up in a household with three brothers.
23
24 NV: Mhm.
25
26 AJ: And mom and dad and family intact like...
27
28 NV: Yep.
29
30 AJ: ... both parents were in the home.
31
32 NV: Mhm. They remain married to this day.
33
34 AJ: Is that right?
35
36 NV: Yeah.
37
38 AJ: That's cool. Uhm, so what was home like life? Home... life... like. [Laughs].
39
40 NV: It was, uhm, sometimes chaotic. Uhm, sometimes dramatic. Uhm, we, me and my three
41 brothers are all within five years of each other.
42
43 AJ: Oh, wow. [Laughs].
44
45 NV: So we're, I think it was like '82 to '86 or '81 to '86, uhm, we were all born within there. Uhm, so,
46 my older two brothers were kind of, they were like fifteen months apart. And then it was two

1 years before me and then my younger brother and I were fifteen months apart so they kind of
2 hung out together and then me and my baby brother kind of spent more time together...
3
4 AJ: Uhuh.
5
6 NV: ... kind of divided up that way but sometimes it was us versus them...
7
8 AJ: [Laughs].
9
10 NV: ... but, I mean, I don't know. We were, we were a crew though.
11
12 AJ: Yeah. Cool. Uhm...
13
14 NV: Between the four of us we knew half of Rochester. [Laughs].
15
16 AJ: So you got along well with your siblings?
17
18 NV: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, there has never been any, like, between me and any of them, there have
19 never been any dramatic disagreements. Uhm, between each other they had had some strife
20 along the way...
21
22 AJ: Hm.
23
24 NV: ... but I think that we're in a place where we really value our family connections.
25
26 AJ: So you're still pretty connected to your family then today.
27
28 NV: I am. Yeah. Yeah, uhm, I tried to talk to my parents weekly.
29
30 AJ: Okay.
31
32 NV: Uhm, I'm really bad at keeping in touch with my brothers but I try to stay in touch with them
33 and keep up with the updates in their lives and...
34
35 AJ: Do they still live in Rochester?
36
37 NV: My eldest brother, Eric, and his wife and his two kids are in Rochester. They both work at the
38 Mayo Clinic.
39
40 AJ: Okay.
41
42 NV: My baby brother, Ryan, is in Rochester. Uhm, he's working as a server someplace or a
43 bartender. I'm not sure.
44
45 AJ: [Laughs].
46

1 NV: Uhm, and then my older brother, Jason, uhm, is in the Air Force and he's stationed in Omaha
2 with his wife and son.
3
4 AJ: Oh wow. So you guys kind of grew up in this military-ish family, I would say.
5
6 NV: Yeah. Military-ish.
7
8 AJ: Yeah.
9
10 NV: I mean we didn't move around with the military, like, but we spent, a lot of my childhood was
11 spent on base.
12
13 AJ: Mhm.
14
15 NV: You know, the Army kids, uhm, daycare, summer, summer daycare was out at the Army base all
16 the time and...
17
18 AJ: Right.
19
20 NV: So, yeah.
21
22 AJ: Huh. Uhm, so you went to the same school then for a while. You weren't sort of moving all
23 around.
24
25 NV: No, yeah. It... all of my elementary school in Aurora up to fifth grade, uhm, halfway through fifth
26 grade, uhm, we moved to Rochester. So I finished up the last half of that year in Rochester and
27 then did middle school in Rochester and high school in Rochester.
28
29 AJ: Okay. Any, any challenges in school, like, bullying or...
30
31 NV: Yeah. Yeah. I, uhm.
32
33 AJ: ... around your gender identity or around your sexuality or how would you describe it?
34
35 NV: Well, so, I mean, I thing about my background is that, uhm, I grew up in a very conservative
36 religious evangelical family.
37
38 AJ: Okay.
39
40 NV: Uhm, and I was brought up into that mindset.
41
42 AJ: Mhm.
43
44 NV: And so when it came to my sexuality, I'm bisexual, and my gender identity...
45
46 AJ: Uhuh.
47

1 NV: ... uhm, I really repressed a lot of that. And I did what I could to not express it.
2
3 AJ: Mhm.
4
5 NV: Uhm, or to not make it blatantly obvious I guess.
6
7 AJ: Sure.
8
9 NV: Uhm, but still I... I don't know. I was never like the other boys. And I, uhm, really got, there was a
10 lot of strife. I kind of fought my way through middle school. Uhm, did not have too many friends
11 in middle school. Uhm, in high school I kind of grew my friend circle with the artsy kids and the
12 theater kids.
13
14 AJ: Mhm.
15
16 NV: Uhm, but even there, I mean, there was still a lot of bullying and fighting.
17
18 AJ: Hm.
19
20 NV: Uhm, defending myself, and I guess, you know, after a while, you know, defending myself, an
21 offensive strategy I guess.
22
23 AJ: Oh so you kind of would...
24
25 NV: I wouldn't wait for them to hit.
26
27 AJ: Right. [Laughs].
28
29 NV: Yeah. You know?
30
31 AJ: You kind of became a little aggressive yourself.
32
33 NV: Right.
34
35 AJ: Yeah.
36
37 NV: Yeah. Just the walls you put up to protect yourself, you know?
38
39 AJ: Mhm. Absolutely. Uhm, when did you first realize that you were not the gender you were
40 assigned at birth?
41
42 NV: Well, so, like I said about my background, uhm, a thing about the religion that I was brought into
43 was that Jesus could read your mind. [Laughs].
44
45 AJ: Okay. Yes.
46

- 1 NV: And so I had all the pieces, all the puzzle pieces right there in front of me and if I had taken the
2 time to analyze them and think about them critically and understand different things about the
3 world and different people who are actually like me.
4
- 5 AJ: Mhm.
6
- 7 NV: So not feeling like I was the only person who was like me or that like everybody is secretly like
8 me. Uhm, I was never able to put those puzzle pieces together. I never really allowed myself to
9 go down that path. Uhm, so I repressed a lot of it, uhm, until I was an adult. I, I finally sloughed
10 my religion, uhm, and it was at that point that I was able to start looking at that arbitrary shame
11 that I had carried with me my whole life.
12
- 13 AJ: Mhm.
14
- 15 NV: It was really heavy, really heavy shame. Uhm, and I just started looking at it like why am I
16 ashamed of this and that and, uhm, really came to accept, uhm, first actually my gender
17 identity...
18
- 19 AJ: Mhm.
20
- 21 NV: ... which was most pressing on my mind I suppose.
22
- 23 AJ: Sure.
24
- 25 NV: And then, uhm, my bisexuality thereafter. Uhm, but, I mean, as I look back the clues are there
26 since my earliest memories. Like those puzzle pieces...
27
- 28 AJ: Uhuh.
29
- 30 NV: ... I mean, I don't know. My favorite game growing up was, was dress up with the neighbor girls.
31 And, you know, like...
32
- 33 AJ: [Laughs].
34
- 35 NV: ... I, I don't know. I, I keep thinking in, as I interact with people these days, I keep thinking of like,
36 "Wow, that was a very strange thing for anybody else to have done but obviously, you know, I'm
37 trans, and it's working its way out."
38
- 39 AJ: Mhm. It was, it was working its way out you said?
40
- 41 NV: Yeah. Yeah, I, I mean, I couldn't... I, I never put the pieces together but the pieces were always
42 there.
43
- 44 AJ: Mhm.
45
- 46 NV: Like I've always been trans. Like it's looking back now I can see...
47

1 AJ: Sure.
2
3 NV: ... like obviously.
4
5 AJ: Mhm.
6
7 NV: This that and the other thing.
8
9 AJ: What, what would be one example?
10
11 NV: Uhm.
12
13 AJ: Like you named, you named like your favorite game was sort of playing dress up with the girls...
14
15 NV: Mhm.
16
17 AJ: ... but is there another...
18
19 NV: Uhm,
20
21 AJ: ... clue or... [laughs]?
22
23 NV: I had always, uhm, I mean for a while I thought I was a crossdresser like that was...
24
25 AJ: Mhm.
26
27 NV: ... secret closet crossdresser.
28
29 AJ: Sure.
30
31 NV: Uhm, I would just lock myself in the bathroom for hours and do my makeup, and, you know...
32
33 AJ: Yeah.
34
35 NV: ... get dressed and then think that I hear that someone might be home, and, you know...
36
37 AJ: Right.
38
39 NV: ... get rid of it all.
40
41 AJ: Yes.
42
43 NV: I'd, you know, gather up some nice outfits and then I'd purge them all and then I'd get some
44 new ones and then I'd purge them all. I went through those cycles...
45
46 AJ: Sure.
47

1 NV: ... of exploring my self-expression in private.
2
3 AJ: Mhm.
4
5 NV: I mean, that was, that was since middle school or earlier.
6
7 AJ: Mm.
8
9 NV: Uhm, so, I mean, that's, that's always been there. And there, there are myriad of other things
10 along the way that I can't think of a specific...
11
12 AJ: Right.
13
14 NV: ... example right now.
15
16 AJ: Right, yeah, no, that's fine. Uhm, so... when did you figure out, "I need to express this." I mean,
17 you said when you became an adult...
18
19 NV: Mhm.
20
21 AJ: ... but was there...
22
23 NV: So yeah.
24
25 AJ: ... a girl in your adulthood.
26
27 NV: I was, I had. I graduated high school. I went to college for a year, ran out of money...
28
29 AJ: Mhm.
30
31 NV: I joined the Air Force for six years.
32
33 AJ: You joined the Air Force? So you're military?
34
35 NV: Right.
36
37 AJ: Okay. Wow.
38
39 NV: Uhm, after I got out of the Air Force, I went back to school...
40
41 AJ: Uhuh.
42
43 NV: ... uhm, for global studies. And one of my first classes was, uhm, history through the lens of
44 revolutionary thinkers, and it looked at the... as, I mean, nearly the complete works, like, we
45 went through a lot of readings...
46
47 AJ: Uhuh.

1
2 NV: ... of, uhm, Darwin, of Marx, of Freud, of Einstein, uhm, and I was just obsessed— they talked
3 about everything, of course. They talked about the economy, they talked about evolution,
4 biology...
5
6 AJ: Mhm.
7
8 NV: ... chemistry, the universe, what have you but I was always obsessed with what each of them
9 had to say about God.
10
11 AJ: Huh.
12
13 NV: And by the end of that course of looking at what these great minds had to say about religion and
14 God...
15
16 AJ: Mhm.
17
18 NV: ... uhm, I realize that I needed to stop making excuses for the giant holes that I had seen in
19 religion in general. So after that point I, uhm, started to, I started down the road of acceptance.
20 So I probably accepted my identity as a woman in two thousand... late 2013, early 2014.
21
22 AJ: Hm.
23
24 NV: Uhm, so at that point I was twenty-eight.
25
26 AJ: Okay.
27
28 NV: So, yeah. Well into adulthood.
29
30 AJ: How, how did you sort of suppress your feelings or thoughts or ideations while you were in the
31 military? Or did you, did you express your gender fluidity? [Laughs].
32
33 NV: I, I really avoided expressing my gender fluidity outside of Halloween.
34
35 AJ: Oh?
36
37 NV: Or, I don't know, there, there, there would be occasions when you could, you know, play it off
38 as a joke or something. Uhm, but in general, uhm, I absolutely just suppressed it.
39
40 AJ: Just suppressed it.
41
42 NV: You just don't, you just don't, uhm.
43
44 AJ: So you're in the military, Don't Ask, Don't Tell...
45
46 NV: Mhm.
47

1 AJ: ... became, uhm...

2

3 NV: Right, that was, that was a thing still, until after I got out, uhm, yet, I did start to play around

4 with my bisexuality at the same time. Uhm, I mean, cause the military at that point, the lower

5 echelons of the military, the lower and lesser ranks were millennials.

6

7 AJ: Mhm.

8

9 NV: And we don't care about...

10

11 AJ: Right.

12

13 NV: ... we don't care about sexuality. It's whatever. So, I mean, there were a number of people who

14 were queer, uh, bisexual...

15

16 AJ: Mhm.

17

18 NV: ... uhm, or gay or lesbian, and, uhm, I mean, it was pretty known. If you knew them well, then,

19 you know, they didn't feel like they needed to hide it from everybody.

20

21 AJ: Sure.

22

23 NV: People didn't know for sure and certainly not their commanding officers but if you're friends

24 with somebody then that's not going to be a thing.

25

26 AJ: Right.

27

28 NV: So, uhm, I was actually roommates with one, one fellow who was either gay or bisexual. He was

29 kind of in an open relationship with another guy that we knew and...

30

31 AJ: Mhm.

32

33 NV: ... uhm, I mean, we didn't, we didn't do anything sexual but, I don't know, we had some, we had

34 a connection.

35

36 AJ: Yeah.

37

38 NV: Yeah, we had a little...

39

40 AJ: Did you make out?

41

42 NV: We made out a little bit. Handholding so so.

43

44 AJ: Yeah. Supporting each other sort of.

45

46 NV: Mhm.

47

1 AJ: Yeah.
2
3 NV: Yeah.
4
5 AJ: Sweet, sweet. [Laughs].
6
7 NV: But, I mean, once again, I was never able to fully accept my sexuality until, you know 2013, 2014
8 so it's just one of those things where that's an impure thought. You need to stop.
9
10 AJ: Uhuh. Yeah.
11
12 NV: Repress it, stop it.
13
14 AJ: Mhm.
15
16 NV: Push it down.
17
18 AJ: Yeah. What was your rank in the military?
19
20 NV: I worked my way up to, I worked my way up to staff sergeant pretty quickly.
21
22 AJ: Oh cool.
23
24 NV: Uhm, my brother was kind of mad at me because he joined like three years before me, and we
25 got staff sergeant the same cycle. [Laughs].
26
27 AJ: Oh wow. [Laughs].
28
29 NV: Uhm, I'm a really test taker, I guess, and a big part of promotion was...
30
31 AJ: How well you do on the test.
32
33 NV: Mhm. And he had gotten some unfair reviews earlier in his career that held him back.
34
35 AJ: Mhm.
36
37 NV: But...
38
39 AJ: Hm.
40
41 NV: But, so, yeah, I became staff sergeant the same time as my older brother did.
42
43 AJ: So you feel good about your career in the service?
44
45 NV: Uhm, I'm very proud of it. I had a net positive impact. Uhm, I spent some time in Bagdad. I felt
46 like that was, I had a very positive impact in Bagdad, uhm, providing for the security of the
47 people of Iraq.

1
2 AJ: Mhm.
3
4 NV: Uhm, and interacting with Iraqi security forces...
5
6 AJ: Mhm.
7
8 NV: ... and intelligence, uhm, organizations and sharing where we're at on certain, uhm, estimates
9 and analyses and, uhm, exploring how to get there with them. So, it was, I feel good about what
10 I did.
11
12 AJ: Nice, no.
13
14 NV: I'm very proud of my time in the military and certainly my time in Iraq. It's probably my, one of
15 my proudest personal achievements.
16
17 AJ: Yeah. Well, I just want to express my gratitude for, uhm, committing yourself to service for this
18 country, and, and to the safety of the citizens of the United States. Thank you so much. Uhm...
19
20 NV: It actually, I heard from Sparta. It's like a, a trans network for vets.
21
22 AJ: So can you say that, SPARTA?
23
24 NV: Uhuh.
25
26 AJ: S.P.A.R.T.A.?
27
28 NV: Yeah. I think they're trans exclusive but they might be LGBT.
29
30 AJ: No, I think you're right. It's pretty, uhm, I don't know what the acronym stands for.
31
32 NV: Right.
33
34 AJ: Service Persons... something, something.
35
36 NV: Are Trans and Super.
37
38 AJ: Yeah. [Laughs].
39
40 NV: And Awesome. [Laughs]. I don't know. Uhm.
41
42 AJ: So you heard from them...
43
44 NV: That trans people are twice as likely to join the military as the general public.
45
46 AJ: Is that right?
47

1 NV: Mhm.
2
3 AJ: Wow.
4
5 NV: We are...
6
7 AJ: I don't think I've ever heard of that stat before.
8
9 NV: We are represented twice the rate of the general public.
10
11 AJ: Are you a member of SPARTA?
12
13 NV: I am... I don't know if they have a membership. I'm also associated with... I keep ties with them
14 and keep track of where they're at and what they're doing and...
15
16 AJ: Mhm.
17
18 NV: ... uhm, I haven't really had an opportunity to get too involved in it but yeah I'm on the
19 peripheries.
20
21 AJ: Yeah.
22
23 NV: So.
24
25 AJ: Do you, so, so you know then that, I mean, the Justice Department, the Pentagon are thinking
26 about, deeply considering, uhm, sort of allowing transgender people to openly serve?
27
28 NV: Yeah.
29
30 AJ: Uhm, A. what do you think about that, and then B., uhm, what's the likelihood of it happening?
31
32 NV: Yeah.
33
34 AJ: And I guess C., uhm, do you support it?
35
36 NV: Uhm, so absolutely. I one hundred percent support it.
37
38 AJ: Yes. [Laughs]. I don't know why I asked that dumb question but...
39
40 NV: Obviously. But, uhm, yeah, I think that it's a sure thing at this point. I, I understand that right
41 now they're exploring how to integrate trans people, uhm, at like what, you know, what may
42 preclude somebody who's being— who's trans from being in the military. I don't know if it's
43 going to be like if they're going to cover operative, you know, interventions...
44
45 AJ: Mhm.
46

1 NV: ... or if it's going to be people come in and they just don't kick them out if they're trans or if they
2 transition or, uhm, if, because I know right now I talked to a recruiter actually because I'm
3 planning on, I'm hoping to join the reserves for the National Guard.
4
5 AJ: Oh really? Okay.
6
7 NV: Uhm, as an officer, joining the officer corps, if I can. Uhm, and right now my preclusion is that,
8 uhm, HRT is...
9
10 AJ: HRT, so hormone replacement...
11
12 NV: Yeah, hormone replacement therapy.
13
14 AJ: Sure.
15
16 NV: So, my, uhm, testosterone blockers and my estradiol. Uhm, they preclude me from service right
17 now, and...
18
19 AJ: Hm, why is that?
20
21 NV: It's, I don't know, regulation. I can't be on those medications and enlist or get a commission.
22 Uhm...
23
24 AJ: Unless, I'm sorry, I missed it.
25
26 NV: I, I can't be on those medications and enlist or get a commission for an officer.
27
28 AJ: Oh, wow.
29
30 NV: Uhm, also on the regula— on the regs officially...
31
32 AJ: Uhuh.
33
34 NV: ... uhm, you can't be trans. You can't cross-dress. You can't do any of that.
35
36 AJ: Mhm.
37
38 NV: Uhm, I mean, and, I guess it would assume like based off of the your sex assigned at birth, I
39 don't know. Uhm, but, yeah, they're still working off of old definitions of it being a sexual
40 perversion.
41
42 AJ: Hm.
43
44 NV: You know, unprofessional conduct or whatever.
45
46 AJ: Wow.
47

1 NV: Uhm, but they're no longer kicking trans people out. So there are a number of, uhm, service
2 members who are currently serving who, uhm, have come out as trans and have started a
3 transition to their actual gender. Uhm, and the military is not allowed to kick them out.
4
5 AJ: Wow.
6
7 NV: So it's just a matter of time before they decide how and when and what the procedures will be
8 for allowing, uhm, already out trans people to join.
9
10 AJ: Hm. Wow. Okay.
11
12 NV: So, it's going to happen, and I think it's going to happen this year. Uhm, if it doesn't happen this
13 year...
14
15 AJ: Uhuh.
16
17 NV: ... and the GOP wins the presidency.
18
19 AJ: [Laughs].
20
21 NV: Cause it's really the president's organization. He's the commander-in-chief.
22
23 AJ: Right.
24
25 NV: That would put things back. Uhm, if it doesn't happen this year and the democrats win the
26 White House, I would assume that there would be continued forward progress on that.
27
28 AJ: Yeah.
29
30 NV: Because both democratic candidates...
31
32 AJ: Mhm.
33
34 NV: really support the transgender community.
35
36 AJ: Yeah. So, uhm, you heard it here first, ladies and gentleman, [laughs] Nicole predicts...
37
38 NV: It's happening this year.
39
40 AJ: ... trans inclusion in the military...
41
42 NV: This year.
43
44 AJ: ... 2016.
45
46 NV: 2016.
47

1 AJ: Wow. Uhm, so do you receive, uhm, medical services through the VA?
2
3 NV: I am treated at the VA, yes. They have given me an income, uhm, waiver. So they cover
4 whatever treatment my insurance doesn't.
5
6 AJ: Okay.
7
8 NV: Except for, uhm, it's been legislated that they cannot provide surgical interventions for
9 transgender individuals so there's no, no, uhm, genital reconstructive surgeries allowed by law.
10
11 AJ: Wow.
12
13 NV: Even though medical assistance has already been, it's already been like... or Medicare, it was,
14 there was like a supreme court ruling...
15
16 AJ: Yes.
17
18 NV: ... that Medicare must, there is a constitutional obligation to provide for a transgender
19 individual's surgical care.
20
21 AJ: Mhm.
22
23 NV: So, I mean, if it's already expressed as a constitutional responsibility of government...
24
25 AJ: Sure.
26
27 NV: ... then that also rests on the VA but right now their hands are tied with legislation and so
28 they're trying to figure out where to go with that, and I think it's... they're, they're working on
29 getting rid of it...
30
31 AJ: Mhm.
32
33 NV: I'm working my way around it but either that legislation has to be repealed...
34
35 AJ: Mhm.
36
37 NV: ... either by the legislature or in a lawsuit.
38
39 AJ: Or an amendment or a lawsuit, yeah.
40
41 NV: So time will tell. Maybe a few years. It's too slow.
42
43 AJ: So, what, uhm, medical interventions have you, uhm, undergone to this point? You talked about
44 HRT...
45
46 NV: Yeah.
47

1 AJ: ... or hormone replacement therapy.
2
3 NV: Yep, HRT. Uhm, I've, I mean, gone through laser hair removal.
4
5 AJ: Mhm.
6
7 NV: I actually had a pretty, a pretty thick beard actually.
8
9 AJ: Oh wow. Okay. Hard to imagine, but I'll take your word for it. Your skin is beautiful.
10
11 NV: Thank you. Uhm, and the VA has provided me, kindly provided me, with, uhm, uh, speech
12 pathology...
13
14 AJ: Uhuh.
15
16 NV: ... so, uhm, they've helped me grow into a more feminine voice. Something more suited for,
17 something I'm more comfortable with hearing myself as.
18
19 AJ: Mhm. So speech pathology.
20
21 NV: Right.
22
23 AJ: Okay.
24
25 NV: Speech therapy, speech pathology, so.
26
27 AJ: Mhm.
28
29 NV: Uhm, it's been, it's been really good.
30
31 AJ: Yeah.
32
33 NV: I haven't sought too many other interventions at this point, uhm, but I've got a short list.
34
35 AJ: [Laughs]. What's, what's on your list if you mind?
36
37 NV: That's fine. Uhm, I'm certainly looking forward to genital reconstructive surgery.
38
39 AJ: Okay.
40
41 NV: Uhm, I need a trach shave.
42
43 AJ: Mhm.
44
45 NV: Uhm, and I know I don't... everybody lets me know that I don't need it, and I know that I don't
46 need it to pass but I need it to see myself.
47

1 AJ: Mhm.
2
3 NV: I'm gonna get facial feminization surgery...
4
5 AJ: Huh.
6
7 NV: ... just cause looking in the mirror there are too many things that I see that I just associate with
8 masculinity.
9
10 AJ: Mhm.
11
12 NV: Uhm, and I'll probably get top, like, top surgery too and probably breast augmentation as well.
13 Uhm, so that's...
14
15 AJ: Yeah, that's quite a bit.
16
17 NV: ... that's the list.
18
19 AJ: [Laughs].
20
21 NV: We'll see.
22
23 AJ: Yeah.
24
25 NV: I'm still out right now.
26
27 AJ: Well, thank you for being willing to share as well.
28
29 NV: Yeah.
30
31 AJ: Something so personal and best of luck to you, best wishes as you go down that path, uhm.
32
33 NV: Mhm. Right now I'm stalled out on being able to cover it so that's...
34
35 AJ: Right now.
36
37 NV: For the foreseeable future it's not an option...
38
39 AJ: Mhm.
40
41 NV: ... but I did just get a job today.
42
43 AJ: Wow. Congratulations!
44
45 NV: Yay!
46
47 AJ: What are you gonna be doing?

1
2 NV: With the federal government.
3
4 AJ: With the federal government, okay.
5
6 NV: At the social security office.
7
8 AJ: Wow.
9
10 NV: And I'll either be processing, uhm, claim disputes or, uhm, uhm, doing card services, name
11 changes, new cards, whatever. Uhm, so it's just a temporary job for now.
12
13 AJ: Mhm.
14
15 NV: Uhm, it's a summer job.
16
17 AJ: Okay.
18
19 NV: But they said that often they're converted into permanent positions...
20
21 AJ: Mhm.
22
23 NV: ... and I think that at that point I'll probably be eligible for the medical benefits.
24
25 AJ: Mhm.
26
27 NV: Uhm, and federal insurance covers everything.
28
29 AJ: Yeah.
30
31 NV: And there's paid medical leave, and it would all happen.
32
33 AJ: That's wonderful. When do you start?
34
35 NV: I start on Monday.
36
37 AJ: Wow. I'm so happy for you. Uhm, yeah, because, uhm, you know, employment and
38 unemployment are some really significant, uhm, challenges for transgender identified people,
39 particularly transgender women. Uhm...
40
41 NV: Mhm.
42
43 AJ: What have been some of the challenges that you have faced, uhm, Nicole, since you've decided
44 to express your true gender, including employment?
45
46 NV: Well, yeah, since we're on the topic I'll start with employment.
47

1 AJ: Mhm.
2
3 NV: Uhm, since transitioning, which was right near the, I started my transition right near the end of
4 my college career.
5
6 AJ: Okay.
7
8 NV: Uh, right before like, a semester or two before I graduated.
9
10 AJ: Mhm.
11
12 NV: Uhm, and so when I graduated I was very visibly trans.
13
14 AJ: Mh.
15
16 NV: Uhm, and...
17
18 AJ: How did the school deal with that?
19
20 NV: The school did okay. I didn't push too much at that point. I was, I was closeted until the end of
21 my last semester.
22
23 AJ: Okay.
24
25 NV: So even though I had started transition, I was not sharing.
26
27 AJ: Mhm. Yeah.
28
29 NV: Uhm, I still need to change my name on my transcripts. I printed out the form the other day. I
30 need to take care of that.
31
32 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].
33
34 NV: Uhm.
35
36 AJ: There's a lot to do with gender identity.
37
38 NV: I went through a big spurt right when I got my name changed, and then I kinda stalled out. It
39 was just such a long list of things that need to get changed.
40
41 AJ: Yes.
42
43 NV: But, uhm, so, oh yeah. Uhm, discrimination in employment. Uhm, from that point forward, even
44 though I've got, I got a 3.96 GPA...
45
46 AJ: Mhm.
47

1 NV: ... in my major, uhm, I am a veteran...
2
3 AJ: Yes.
4
5 NV: ... with veteran's preference in a lot of places in the public sector. Uhm, I have— there's always
6 been a point in the hiring process where it has come out that I'm trans.
7
8 AJ: Mhm.
9
10 NV: Every single job. Uhm, and only twice have I gone further in the hiring process after it was
11 known that I was trans.
12
13 AJ: Hm.
14
15 NV: Every other time once they find out I'm trans, I'm suddenly not going anywhere else in the hiring
16 process. And there's no smoking gun. There's nothing to say that every time it was
17 discrimination.
18
19 AJ: Mhm.
20
21 NV: Uhm, but I've gone through a lot of jobs that I was perfectly qualified for, and I, I... I have strong
22 doubts that... I think, I think it's incredibly likely that discrimination against me as a transgender
23 individual has played into the difficulties in securing a job for two years since I've graduated.
24
25 AJ: Sure.
26
27 NV: Uhm, dozens and hundreds of job hiring processes.
28
29 AJ: Mhm.
30
31 NV: Uhm, but Senator Al Franken's office was good. They, I...
32
33 AJ: Okay.
34
35 NV: ... was able to move forward in the hiring process after it was known that I am trans there.
36
37 AJ: Mhm.
38
39 NV: And, and...
40
41 AJ: Did you get the job?
42
43 NV: I did not get the job.
44
45 AJ: Okay.
46

1 NV: No, ultimately, they hired somebody else. I think, I trust that that person was simply more
2 qualified...
3
4 AJ: Mhm.
5
6 NV: ... for the position. It also involved relocation. They weren't going to pay for the relocation, and I
7 would relocate but that might have been a factoring issue too.
8
9 AJ: Oh, so the job was in D.C.?
10
11 NV: No, it was in southern Minnesota.
12
13 AJ: Okay.
14
15 NV: So I was like...
16
17 AJ: Like a field organizer or...
18
19 NV: Mhm.
20
21 AJ: Yeah.
22
23 NV: Yeah. Like a field representative. So it would be like, I think all of southern Minnesota like
24 Mankato, Rochester, and La Crosse or La Crescent I guess and then out westward too,
25 whatever's out there, that dark corner of Minnesota that nobody knows anything about.
26
27 AJ: Yeah. [Laughs]. Okay.
28
29 NV: [Laughs]. Uhm, so I didn't get that job. I think they hired somebody that was more qualified,
30 and, and probably geographically...
31
32 AJ: Closer.
33
34 NV: ... closer. Uhm, and then the other time that I was able to move forward in the hiring process
35 was the job that I got today.
36
37 AJ: Wow.
38
39 NV: And I came out to, uhm, the assistant director...
40
41 AJ: Uhuh.
42
43 NV: ... of the Minneapolis office in, early in the hiring process, and we were able to keep it just
44 between the two of us for most of the process.
45
46 AJ: Mhm.
47

1 NV: Uhm, so I think even now going into the job, I'm thinking and hoping that I'm not even going to
2 be helped right when I get there.
3
4 AJ: Sure.
5
6 NV: So...
7
8 AJ: What's your thoughts about that? You know, uhm...
9
10 NV: I'm never, I'm never gonna go stealth.
11
12 AJ: Yeah.
13
14 NV: Uhm, I feel like, I mean, if I were...
15
16 AJ: I mean, it's a, it's a place of safety.
17
18 NV: It is. It is. And there's a, I mean, I'm very ambivalent about it.
19
20 AJ: Mhm.
21
22 NV: There's this big part of me that wants to just go through life like any other woman.
23
24 AJ: Yes.
25
26 NV: Uhm.
27
28 AJ: And you deserve that.
29
30 NV: I do deserve that. Uhm, and I don't deserve for it to be an issue that I'm trans, that I was
31 assigned male at birth. That should not be a thing. Uhm, but it is. And, the, the thing that keeps
32 me out...
33
34 AJ: Mhm.
35
36 NV: ... about my transness is thinking of all of the amazing trans people who are coming after me.
37
38 AJ: Mhm.
39
40 NV: That when we are out we make progress. That was what happened in the gay rights movement
41 forty years ago. Uh, gay men and lesbians came out in droves...
42
43 AJ: Mhm.
44
45 NV: ... and now we're at full marriage equality, and, uhm, it's no longer, I mean, you're not as likely
46 to get your ass kicked if you're, you know, openly gay. You might get some funny looks holding
47 your girlfriend's hand or something...

1
2 AJ: Yeah.
3
4 NV: ... but, uhm, we've made a lot of progress because people are out.
5
6 AJ: Mhm.
7
8 NV: And if the transgender community wants to make progress we have to come out. People have to
9 know my daughter is trans, my son is trans, my cousin is trans, my nephew or niece are trans...
10
11 AJ: Yes.
12
13 NV: Uhm, and once people start recognizing cause nobody knows us. Nobody... what is it like ninety
14 percent of the population thinks they don't know anybody that's trans.
15
16 AJ: Right.
17
18 NV: They do know people who are trans. They think they don't.
19
20 AJ: They think they don't, yes.
21
22 NV: What are we, like one in three hundred people.
23
24 AJ: Yeah, I don't know the numbers. It's, it's pretty, I mean, there's no a lot of transgender people
25 relatively...
26
27 NV: Right.
28
29 AJ: ... speaking.
30
31 NV: Right.
32
33 AJ: Uhm, so...
34
35 NV: A million about, I mean, or like 700,000 or something like that.
36
37 AJ: Yeah. I heard 700,000 from some people but, again, it's so hard to determine because so many
38 people are so frightened to be out. Either they're stealth, and they just go about their lives,
39 which I think is fine.
40
41 NV: Right, that's fine.
42
43 AJ: Or they are transgender, but they haven't come out because of family and, and employment
44 and, you know, physical concern for their physical safety. So it's just really impossible...
45
46 NV: And too many of us who come out...
47

1 AJ: And there's no sense to questions that ask, you know, are you transgender so, you know, it's
2 going to be awhile before we really know the full numbers.
3
4 NV: Right. And too many people do come out, and then wind up killing themselves early in
5 transition.
6
7 AJ: Yes. Exactly.
8
9 NV: Or killing themselves before they are able to come out.
10
11 AJ: Mhm.
12
13 NV: Or...
14
15 AJ: Yeah.
16
17 NV: You know, so.
18
19 AJ: Yeah, so there's some deep, deep, deep challenges. What's your relationship like with your
20 family today...
21
22 NV: Uhm, it's pretty positive.
23
24 AJ: ... since you've come out?
25
26 NV: Yeah, it's, I mean, I came out to my eldest brother really early on. He's one of the first people I
27 came out to. Uhm, he has a somewhat conservative religious outlook on life but...
28
29 AJ: Mhm.
30
31 NV: ... uhm, his attitude about his religion is that those are his convictions with how he should live
32 his life.
33
34 AJ: Right.
35
36 NV: Not that it should apply to anybody but him.
37
38 AJ: Hm.
39
40 NV: It's his personal revelation that he lives.
41
42 AJ: Sure.
43
44 NV: Uhm, and so he supported marriage equality.
45
46 AJ: Mhm.
47

1 NV: And, uh, I've— I know that compassion is more important to him than judgement. And so I felt
2 really comfortable coming out to him really early on.
3
4 AJ: Hm.
5
6 NV: Uhm, it was about six months later once I was deeper into transition once things were starting
7 to show...
8
9 AJ: Mhm.
10
11 NV: ... that I came out to, uhm, my parents and my other two brothers, and a letter I wrote was ten
12 pages long.
13
14 AJ: Oh wow.
15
16 NV: Uhm, I hoped to answer as much of their questions as a could in the first place but...
17
18 AJ: Mhm.
19
20 NV: So my baby brother was great right off the bat. I was a little nervous cause he's been a little
21 homophobic at times.
22
23 AJ: Sure.
24
25 NV: Uhm, when it comes to his family, you know, he's, he's—
26
27 AJ: Been there.
28
29 NV: Ever since school he's been my little pitbull.
30
31 AJ: Oh wow. [Laughs].
32
33 NV: He's, he's loyal and protective and loving...
34
35 AJ: Awe.
36
37 NV: ... to the nth degree.
38
39 AJ: That's so sweet.
40
41 NV: He's a great guy. Uhm, my older brother took some more getting used to it.
42
43 AJ: Mhm.
44
45 NV: Uhm, so yeah, that was a challenge. It's been a challenge. Our, our relationship is recovering.
46 Uhm, and he's been reaching out to me.
47

1 AJ: Mhm.
2
3 NV: And, I mean, I think that we're really on the road to healing.
4
5 AJ: Oh nice. I'm glad to hear that.
6
7 NV: My parents have had a much harder time than anybody else. Uhm, I still get misgendered...
8
9 AJ: Mhm.
10
11 NV: ... by my parents. Wrong pronouns. They use my name which is huge.
12
13 AJ: Yeah.
14
15 NV: And they are not opposed to using my pronouns.
16
17 AJ: They just can't remember. [Laugh].
18
19 NV: They, well I feel like they haven't made it a priority...
20
21 AJ: Sure.
22
23 NV: ... to change their habits.
24
25 AJ: Mhm.
26
27 NV: So I think they could if they wanted to. Everybody else has been able to. I mean my brothers
28 have known me my whole life so they do just fine with it.
29
30 AJ: Right.
31
32 NV: But it's been a challenge for my parents to change that habit of using masculine pronouns when
33 referring to me even though they refer to me by my correct name consistently. So, I mean,
34 we're working on it. I— it was rough for us coming out to my parents.
35
36 AJ: Do you still have a copy of the ten page letter?
37
38 NV: I do.
39
40 AJ: Wow.
41
42 NV: Yeah, it's on my hard drive. But I, I modify it for everybody. Uhm, I mean cause I came out to the
43 people closest to me...
44
45 AJ: Uhuh.
46
47 NV: ... with that letter around Pride weekend.

1
2 AJ: Okay.
3
4 NV: Uh, 2014.
5
6 AJ: Okay.
7
8 NV: And I came out to the general public, uhm, on National Coming Out Day October 2014.
9
10 AJ: Oh wow.
11
12 NV: So at that point I was ready to step into the world as a woman.
13
14 AJ: Mhm.
15
16 NV: Be myself. That was when I, I guess started fulltime I guess is what people call it although I don't
17 know.
18
19 AJ: Sure.
20
21 NV: I felt like I kind've been doing fulltime before that but...
22
23 AJ: Uhuh. Well I love how you sync, sync your sort of coming out process with these sort of national
24 momentous days where everybody is sort of thinking about it and, "Oh by the way. Yeah, I'm
25 one too." [Laughs].
26
27 NV: Yeah. I'm, I'm very, a big picture thinker, I guess.
28
29 AJ: Mhm.
30
31 NV: And so like, like what I, what I, how I talk about, uhm, being out as a trans person.
32
33 AJ: Sure.
34
35 NV: How if we as a community can do this then it can do great things.
36
37 AJ: Yeah.
38
39 NV: I mean, that's kind of how I see National Coming Out Day is like, it's a big deal. We as a
40 community can step up and say I'm queer or I'm trans...
41
42 AJ: Mhm.
43
44 NV: We're here.
45
46 AJ: Yeah.
47

1 NV: Deal with us.
2
3 AJ: Right.
4
5 NV: Uhm, then that's how change happens. I mean when we unite, when we do those, those great
6 moments together.
7
8 AJ: Mhm. No, I absolutely agree.
9
10 NV: Yeah.
11
12 AJ: Absolutely. Uhm, so looking back over your decision to express your gender identity, what were
13 some of the pivotal moments that define your new life and would you do anything differently?
14
15 NV: Uhm, well if I could I would have put things together earlier.
16
17 AJ: [Laughs]. Yeah.
18
19 NV: That's not how it works. Uhm, I don't know. I really try not to focus on regrets.
20
21 AJ: Sure.
22
23 NV: Uhm, I don't know if there's anything that I could have done differently. I mean at this point I've
24 gone as far as I can and...
25
26 AJ: Mhm.
27
28 NV: ... I've stalled out because of, you know, insurance...
29
30 AJ: And resources.
31
32 NV: ... issues. Resources and time off.
33
34 AJ: Mhm.
35
36 NV: Uhm, but... I don't know. I went through a couple of names actually.
37
38 AJ: Really? Talk to me about names.
39
40 NV: So, uhm, Nicole, I... for some time I went by Megan...
41
42 AJ: Okay.
43
44 NV: ... after I had moved away from my, uhm, named assigned at birth.
45
46 AJ: Mhm.
47

1 NV: Uhm, I don't know why. I liked the sound of it.
2
3 AJ: Yeah.
4
5 NV: No particular reason. I felt like it suited me.
6
7 AJ: Mhm.
8
9 NV: Uhm, but when I came out to my parents, uhm, about two weeks after I gave them that letter,
10 they asked to meet up.
11
12 AJ: Uhuh.
13
14 NV: Uhm, very difficult conversation. A lot of things that I wish hadn't been said that still haunt me.
15
16 AJ: Oh.
17
18 NV: Uhm, but one thing I was able to ask my mom was, "If you would feel comfortable letting me
19 know, I would love to know what you would have named me."
20
21 AJ: Mhm.
22
23 NV: And she wasn't comfortable right there letting me know that.
24
25 AJ: Yeah.
26
27 NV: And she expressed some nervousness that I wouldn't like that name...
28
29 AJ: Mm.
30
31 NV: ... and, and I think that she was apprehensive about taking part in my transition.
32
33 AJ: Yeah.
34
35 NV: Uhm, but then she let me know that she would have named me Nicole.
36
37 AJ: Oh, wow.
38
39 NV: Uh, it was actually later that day she texted me and said, "This is what we would have named
40 you. Do with it as you like."
41
42 AJ: Uhuh.
43
44 NV: And I developed an immediate emotional connection to that name.
45
46 AJ: Oh my goodness. That is so beautiful.
47

1 NV: This is the name my mother gave me.
2
3 AJ: Wow.
4
5 NV: So... that's my name.
6
7 AJ: Oh my god, I'm getting emotional right now.
8
9 NV: Yeah.
10
11 AJ: Wow. That's super sweet.
12
13 NV: Yeah.
14
15 AJ: Uhm, have you, uhm... so what is the first time you ever saw a transgender identified person?
16
17 NV: I know this is, this is so sad. And this is why, I think this is a big part of why it took so long for me
18 to put it together.
19
20 AJ: Uhuh.
21
22 NV: Uhm, in 2012 I got really involved in the, uhm, Vote No Campaign...
23
24 AJ: Okay.
25
26 NV: ... to defeat Amendment 1 which would ban marriage equality...
27
28 AJ: Right.
29
30 NV: ... for gays and lesbians.
31
32 AJ: In Minnesota.
33
34 NV: In Minnesota. And so there was so many awesome, you know, queer people, straight people,
35 gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals...
36
37 AJ: Sure.
38
39 NV: ... who were, you know, organizing this great movement to defeat this amendment. Uhm, and
40 the very first trans person that I met that I knew to be trans...
41
42 AJ: Mhm.
43
44 NV: ... uhm, is now a friend of mine. Uh, he lives in Wisconsin, and I met him during the Vote No
45 Campaign, and we worked together.
46
47 AJ: Wow.

1
2 NV: And shortly thereafter, uhm, one of the people that was kind of organizing our campus, uhm,
3 resources, our, our branch, I guess, of the campaign...
4
5 AJ: Uhuh.
6
7 NV: ... also came out as trans. Uhm, right around the time that I did. So— which is...
8
9 AJ: Hm.
10
11 NV: ... a year and a half, two years later, like, you know, it's, you need those things, you need to
12 know people to be able to put it together. You need to know it's a thing, you know?
13
14 AJ: Yeah, yeah.
15
16 NV: I didn't know it was a thing.
17
18 AJ: [Laughs].
19
20 NV: And within a couple of years of meeting somebody who was out as transgender...
21
22 AJ: Do you feel like you could name that person or... you know, I mean, you don't have to but it's
23 just...
24
25 NV: You know, I, I don't think he would mind. Uhm, uhm, Alic Bitney.
26
27 AJ: Okay.
28
29 NV: Uh, lives in Wisconsin.
30
31 AJ: Mhm.
32
33 NV: Uh, he's a good friend of mine, and, uhm, he had a...
34
35 AJ: B.I.T.N.E.Y.?
36
37 NV: N.E.Y. I believe so.
38
39 AJ: Okay.
40
41 NV: A.L.I.C.
42
43 AJ: Oh, okay.
44
45 NV: Uhm, he had a big impact on helping me realize that trans people exist, that, that it's a thing.
46
47 AJ: Mhm.

1
2 NV: That that's, that there is a thing called transgender.
3
4 AJ: Right. And working on a political campaigns and...
5
6 NV: Right.
7
8 AJ: ... they can go to the bathroom.
9
10 NV: Right. And so, uhm, and also Reese Rathgen is really involved in, uh, a lot of amazing things. And
11 he, uhm, I worked with him in the Vote No Campaign, uhm, shortly before he came out, and,
12 uhm, today he's, he's involved in great powerful things, you know, at the national level. He's
13 been involved in campaigns in D.C., and I'm not sure what projects he's working on right now
14 but he's continuing to do many things...
15
16 AJ: Mhm. Pretty actively engaged.
17
18 NV: So...
19
20 AJ: Do you know, can you spell Reese's last name? Do you know?
21
22 NV: R.A.T.H.G.E.N. I think. Rathgen.
23
24 AJ: Rathgen. Okay.
25
26 NV: I think. Yeah.
27
28 AJ: Wow. So those two individuals had a, an impact on your ability to see the reality that
29 transgender lives can exist.
30
31 NV: Right.
32
33 AJ: Yeah.
34
35 NV: Yeah.
36
37 AJ: Have you ever been involved with any, uhm, LGBT or trans specific organizations beyond the,
38 uh...
39
40 NV: The Vote No Campaign.
41
42 AJ: ... the Vote No Campaign?
43
44 NV: Uhm, not prior to that.
45
46 AJ: Okay.
47

1 NV: Afterwards a slew of them.
2
3 AJ: Uhuh. Sure, yeah.
4
5 NV: Uhm, so.
6
7 AJ: Which ones?
8
9 NV: Oh. Uhm, I am pretty connected with the Minnesota Transgender Health Coalition.
10
11 AJ: Oh good. Okay.
12
13 NV: Uhm, and I, let's see, there's, uh, uh, Queer Veterans Support Group held by Lutheran Family
14 Services here in Minneapolis.
15
16 AJ: Yeah.
17
18 NV: Uhm, I am connected with the, uh, kind of, uh... an unofficial, I guess, network of, uh, trans
19 people at the VA getting treatment at the VA here in town. Uhm, it's actually a lot more than I
20 would have expected.
21
22 AJ: Yeah.
23
24 NV: Uhm, twenty to thirty people in the young adult group.
25
26 AJ: Yeah, that's for most folks.
27
28 NV: Uhm, and I have worked some with Outfront.
29
30 AJ: Okay.
31
32 NV: I've been involved in some of their lobbying efforts and, uhm, whatnot.
33
34 AJ: Mhm.
35
36 NV: Uhm, Rare Productions.
37
38 AJ: Yeah.
39
40 NV: Uhm, uh, Roxanne Anderson is an amazing person.
41
42 AJ: Sure.
43
44 NV: Very important to, I think, the Minneapolis trans community.
45
46 AJ: I would agree. And a very different of mind person will bring something.
47

1 NV: Yeah. Yeah. I've always been... I try to keep close track of what, what they're up to...
2
3 AJ: Mhm, mhm.
4
5 NV: ... and what types on things they're doing so...
6
7 AJ: Sure. That's great. Uhm, what about, uhm, relationships. Are... you said you're bisexual.
8
9 NV: I am.
10
11 AJ: Are you in a relationship now, uhm...
12
13 NV: I'm not.
14
15 AJ: How do you find relationships?
16
17 NV: I actually don't find it too difficult.
18
19 AJ: Oh cool.
20
21 NV: I, I know a lot of trans people have trouble dating.
22
23 AJ: Uhuh.
24
25 NV: It's never really been a problem with me.
26
27 AJ: Oh.
28
29 NV: Uhm, so I am bisexual and like probably middle of the road...
30
31 AJ: Uhuh.
32
33 NV: ... fifty, fifty. I might lean slightly towards a preference...
34
35 AJ: Uhuh.
36
37 NV: ... for women, but...
38
39 AJ: Okay.
40
41 NV: ... all my long-term relationships have been with women.
42
43 AJ: Uhuh.
44
45 NV: Uhm, so many interactions I've had with guys on a romantic level has been pretty low key. Not
46 like long term relationships stuff.
47

1 AJ: Mhm.
2
3 NV: Uhm, my marriage. Uhm, I was married.
4
5 AJ: Yeah, I was going to say.
6
7 NV: We had two kids together.
8
9 AJ: Uhuh.
10
11 NV: But biologically this was before my transition. I was married to a woman.
12
13 AJ: Sure.
14
15 NV: Uhm, and she... it was hard for her kind of understand that I'm trans...
16
17 AJ: Mhm.
18
19 NV: ... right when I came out. We had a rough couple of weeks to a couple of months...
20
21 AJ: Mhm.
22
23 NV: ... of her getting used to the idea. Uhm, but she's always been very pro-LGBT. Her brother is gay.
24 Uhm, and she's worked with trans people. Uhm, so she certainly had a great sympathy, and I
25 think that she regretted her reaction.
26
27 AJ: Mm.
28
29 NV: It was a very emotional reaction, a very personal thing. I mean, I did not hold that against her at
30 all. She became one of my greatest supports in the early stages of my transition.
31
32 AJ: Nice.
33
34 NV: Uhm, she really pushed me to be myself, to explore myself, to express myself. Uhm, she held my
35 hand as I came out to my family, as I came out to her family...
36
37 AJ: Mhm.
38
39 NV: ... uhm, as I came out to the world. Uhm... but, after I graduated, uhm, I had trouble finding a job
40 and my transition was not going as best as I had hoped. I fell into a bit of a depression. She was
41 not able to, well, I'm not going to blame her. I was unable to be the person that she needed me
42 to be. I was not, I was certainly not the person she married.
43
44 AJ: Sure.
45
46 NV: We had both transformed a lot...
47

1 AJ: Mhm.
2
3 NV: ... since we got married. Uhm, but ultimately she, uhm, decided that our relationship was not
4 something that... she could live with, and, uhm, she let me know shortly after we split, uhm, she
5 was dating, uhm, somebody I knew to be one of her close friends.
6
7 AJ: Hm.
8
9 NV: Uhm, so I can't say exactly when that relationship started but, I don't know, I'm not going to
10 speak anything I don't know.
11
12 AJ: [Laughs].
13
14 NV: But so she, uhm, asked for divorce and then she fell in love with somebody else.
15
16 AJ: Mhm.
17
18 NV: No particular order, I don't know.
19
20 AJ: [Laughs].
21
22 NV: And, uhm, now we're co-parenting our two children.
23
24 AJ: How old are your children?
25
26 NV: Three and four.
27
28 AJ: Oh wow.
29
30 NV: Jackson is four. Odessa is three...
31
32 AJ: Oh boy.
33
34 NV: ... and a girl. They're best friends.
35
36 AJ: Uhuh.
37
38 NV: It's wonderful. They're so cute. Uhm, and they spend a week with me and then they spend a
39 week with mama.
40
41 AJ: Oh wow. So you guys have been able to sort of, you know, figure out a...
42
43 NV: Yeah.
44
45 AJ: ... good, uhm, co-parenting relationship.
46

1 NV: Right. I mean, we're not, I wouldn't, we're not best friends. I wouldn't go over for a barbeque
2 but we can work together in the kids' best interests.
3
4 AJ: Yeah.
5
6 NV: So...
7
8 AJ: Mhm.
9
10 NV: And we do.
11
12 AJ: That's, that's incredible for, certainly for the kids' sake and...
13
14 NV: Right.
15
16 AJ: ... I would imagine that the young people bring you much joy in, in terms of having a family of
17 your own.
18
19 NV: They're why I'm alive.
20
21 AJ: Yeah.
22
23 NV: I would not be alive if it weren't for my babies. I would have quite.
24
25 AJ: Mhm. Wow. Well I'm happy that you have your babies.
26
27 NV: Me too.
28
29 AJ: Yes, absolutely. Uhm, what do you think the relationship is between the L, the G, the B, and the
30 T?
31
32 NV: I think that as a community the vast majority of us have lost sight of our roots.
33
34 AJ: Mhm.
35
36 NV: I mean when you look at Stonewall, there we were.
37
38 AJ: Sure.
39
40 NV: You know?
41
42 AJ: Mhm.
43
44 NV: That was our movement. It was...
45
46 AJ: Transgender women.
47

1 NV: ... trans women. It was...
2
3 AJ: Trans women of color.
4
5 NV: ... gay men. It was, it was lesbians. We were all there.
6
7 AJ: Right.
8
9 NV: Uhm, and that, that fell apart really quickly actually. So quickly. Uhm, to the point where, uhm,
10 Sylvia Riveria was getting booed off stage, what, in the early '70s?
11
12 AJ: Yeah. Yeah.
13
14 NV: Uhm, and, I don't know. I think that when you look back and you see, like I kept saying, when we
15 work together we do great things.
16
17 AJ: Mhm.
18
19 NV: Trans people were huge, hugely involved in, you know, the push for marriage equality.
20
21 AJ: Absolutely.
22
23 NV: And sometimes it feels like that same urgency and rush towards human rights is not reciprocal
24 by those individuals who are not transgender who belong to the LGBT community.
25
26 AJ: Hm.
27
28 NV: It's easy for form hard feelings. I like to build bridges.
29
30 AJ: Yeah.
31
32 NV: Uhm, a lot of people have issues with HRC...
33
34 AJ: Mhm.
35
36 NV: ... even it's campaign for kind of, I mean, not even just sometimes cutting out trans people from
37 their deals...
38
39 AJ: Mhm.
40
41 NV: ... but also whitewashing what it means to be gay.
42
43 AJ: Yeah.
44
45 NV: You know, the cute white suburban thing...
46
47 AJ: Sure, mhm.

1
2 NV: ... when queer is big. It's diverse.
3
4 AJ: [Laughs].
5
6 NV: Uhm, so, I mean, a lot of people really, really don't like HRC and won't work with them but I
7 think that we need to build bridges. We need to continue to try to come together. I mean a lot
8 of people have issues with Outfront Minnesota.
9
10 AJ: Yeah.
11
12 NV: It has, has done some things that has hurt the trans community that have marginalized trans
13 advocates here in the Twin Cities.
14
15 AJ: Mhm.
16
17 NV: Uhm, we need to continue to work together. We need, when we work together we do great
18 things. And that means that it's terrible, yes, when the LGB cuts out the T.
19
20 AJ: Right.
21
22 NV: And it's just as terrible when the T turns their back on the LGB.
23
24 AJ: Yeah.
25
26 NV: Like it's a two-way street. So it's not... it's never going to be perfect. There are hugely
27 transphobic gay men, hugely transphobic lesbians.
28
29 AJ: Yes.
30
31 NV: They will always be with us. They will always be part of our LGBT community.
32
33 AJ: Mhm.
34
35 NV: Uhm... but it seems like those organizations at the top echelon of like advocacy are trying when
36 they can to be that inclusive voice, to be that unifying voice, accepting everybody, representing
37 everybody. They're trying.
38
39 AJ: Mhm.
40
41 NV: They fail. They're trying.
42
43 AJ: Sure.
44
45 NV: And they need us.
46
47 AJ: Mhm.

1
2 NV: If we turn our backs on each other then there will be no trans representation in HRC and it will
3 never get better.
4
5 AJ: Right.
6
7 NV: If we want to fix HRC we need to do it with HRC. If we want to fix Outfront we need to do it with
8 Outfront.
9
10 AJ: Mhm.
11
12 NV: So...
13
14 AJ: Yeah. I agree.
15
16 NV: So that's... yeah.
17
18 AJ: You know, prior to the, uhm, to turning on the camera you had mentioned that you had been
19 sexually assaulted, uhm, since you've come out.
20
21 NV: Mhm.
22
23 AJ: Is that something that you feel comfortable discussing on camera or...?
24
25 NV: Sure, I mean, I mean, in general terms.
26
27 AJ: In what terms?
28
29 NV: In general terms.
30
31 AJ: General terms, okay.
32
33 NV: There are a number of challenges that you encounter when your trans.
34
35 AJ: Mhm.
36
37 NV: Uhm, and it's difficult to know when it's safe to come out. Uhm...
38
39 AJ: Like literally walk out your door and go outside is what you're saying.
40
41 NV: Well, that's difficult. I was very agoraphobic in the early stages of transition. I did not leave, I
42 hated to leave home.
43
44 AJ: Wow.
45
46 NV: I had to leave home to get the kids to the playground.
47

1 AJ: Uhuh.
2
3 NV: It was so hard for me to get those kids to the playground. Somedays I just could not, could not.
4
5 AJ: Mm.
6
7 NV: Uhm, just the looks, the disgust...
8
9 AJ: Mhm.
10
11 NV: ... the anger that you encounter being a visibly trans person.
12
13 AJ: Yeah.
14
15 NV: I, I couldn't deal with it, uhm, until I started to pass.
16
17 AJ: Mhm.
18
19 NV: And then that kind of fell away. Now I go through life and people don't realize I'm trans until I
20 tell them.
21
22 AJ: Right.
23
24 NV: Uhm, and now my challenge is knowing when it's safe to come out and let people know that I'm
25 trans...
26
27 AJ: Mhm.
28
29 NV: ... which is why I said, you know, early on while it's important to me to be out as a trans person I
30 don't want to come into a new job where everybody knows I'm trans.
31
32 AJ: Sure.
33
34 NV: That's my news to share...
35
36 AJ: Yeah.
37
38 NV: ... with whom I feel safe...
39
40 AJ: Absolutely.
41
42 NV: ... sharing it with.
43
44 AJ: Mhm.
45
46 NV: Uhm, and I will. I'm sure by the, you know, this time next year if I'm still working there...
47

1 AJ: Yeah.
2
3 NV: ... I'm sure everyone is going to know that I'm trans.
4
5 AJ: Yeah.
6
7 NV: But I need to do it my way.
8
9 AJ: Mhm.
10
11 NV: Uhm, and so another one of those things that, I don't know, I was, you know, met this cool guy
12 through some friends. Uhm, we had a great, long conversation and, uhm... I let him know that I
13 was trans. I felt safe letting him know that I'm trans.
14
15 AJ: Mhm.
16
17 NV: He's a progressive individual, you know.
18
19 AJ: Right.
20
21 NV: Uhm, and... then he got handsy.
22
23 AJ: Hm.
24
25 NV: And, and... I froze up and then really handsy. I froze up. He let me know. He was like, "Hey, I'm
26 curious."
27
28 AJ: Mhm.
29
30 NV: Just helped himself...
31
32 AJ: Oh wow.
33
34 NV: ... to my body. I mean it was really rough. It was, that's my, that's mine.
35
36 AJ: Sure. Absolutely.
37
38 NV: Uhm, and I mean...
39
40 AJ: I'm so sorry.
41
42 NV: ... there's, it's not... I've not been raped. I've not, I'm mean, there's so much worse that so many
43 trans women deal with...
44
45 AJ: Mhm.
46
47 NV: ... on a regular basis.

1
2 AJ: Women. Period.
3
4 NV: Women. Period. Although trans women are targeted at a higher rate for sexual assault and trans
5 women of color especially.
6
7 AJ: Mhm.
8
9 NV: Uhm, but, I mean, it's just that, it's that objectification, that sexualization that, that happens
10 with trans people on a, trans women on a greater level than women in general...
11
12 AJ: Sure.
13
14 NV: ... where in the media we are sex workers. In the media we're, you know, sluts.
15
16 AJ: Yeah.
17
18 NV: We're sex addicts. We're sexual deviants.
19
20 AJ: Mhm.
21
22 NV: Uhm, that's not who we are.
23
24 AJ: Right.
25
26 NV: But that's, you know, when people see a trans woman they see a sexual object.
27
28 AJ: Mhm.
29
30 NV: So...
31
32 AJ: Yeah.
33
34 NV: One of the many challenges to navigate.
35
36 AJ: Well, I'm so sorry. Were you, have you sort of dealt with therapy or did you guys talk? Did you
37 confront the person afterwards or...?
38
39 NV: I'm so bad at, I don't...
40
41 AJ: No, I'm not trying to blame you.
42
43 NV: I know. I know. I'm, I'm trying not to blame me too.
44
45 AJ: Uhuh.
46

1 NV: Uhm, it's difficult. I... I like to think that I'm reactive, that I'm good at, in situations, but I just
2 turned into a deer in headlights.
3
4 AJ: Mm.
5
6 NV: I had no idea how to deal with it, how to confront it as it was happening, afterwards. I don't
7 think, to this day I don't know if he knows he did anything wrong.
8
9 AJ: Okay, okay.
10
11 NV: Uhm, I don't, I'm not on speaking terms with him.
12
13 AJ: So you guys aren't communicating anymore?
14
15 NV: I've never, no, I never heard from him or got in touch with him after that night.
16
17 AJ: Okay.
18
19 NV: But, I don't know. I've thought about letting him know. "Hey, remember that one thing that was
20 really not cool."
21
22 AJ: Right.
23
24 NV: But, I don't know, how do you start that conversation with somebody? I don't know. And I'm not
25 gonna, I'm not going to press charges or anything certainly.
26
27 AJ: Mhm. Yeah, cause it's going to the police as a trans woman can be a whole other nightmare.
28
29 NV: I, I tense up unbelievable around law enforcement.
30
31 AJ: Mm.
32
33 NV: I, it is a frightening experience to be pulled over.
34
35 AJ: Mhm.
36
37 NV: I've been pulled over a couple of times since transition.
38
39 AJ: Since transition. How did they, how were you treated by the police?
40
41 NV: Uhm, with dignity each time.
42
43 AJ: Oh good.
44
45 NV: Each time.
46
47 AJ: Ma'am. Did they refer to you as...?

1
2 NV: The first time my ID had my name and not gender.
3
4 AJ: Sure.
5
6 NV: Uhm, they just avoided gendering me.
7
8 AJ: Wow. That's pretty impressive.
9
10 NV: So I don't think there was a ma'am. I don't think there was a sir.
11
12 AJ: Right. It was just Nicole. Did you know...
13
14 NV: "Can you put your..."
15
16 AJ: "hands on the steering wheel." Or whatever.
17
18 NV: Yeah. Mhm. Uhm, I was pulled over on a suspicion of drunk driving. I was not driving drunk.
19
20 AJ: Mhm.
21
22 NV: So we did the sobriety test.
23
24 AJ: Sure.
25
26 NV: I passed cause I wasn't drunk but...
27
28 AJ: [Laughs].
29
30 NV: ... uhm. And then the other time like the guy just had a stick up his butt. He was, he was crabby,
31 crabby, crabby. And so, I don't know, there wasn't... but I, my ID matched my gender, my name.
32
33 AJ: Mhm.
34
35 NV: So I don't think that he knew that I was trans. It wasn't an issue. But still it just takes one. One
36 transphobic cop, one transmisogynistic cop...
37
38 AJ: Mhm.
39
40 NV: ... to put me into a mental facility.
41
42 AJ: Yeah. It's all it takes.
43
44 NV: You know, I think of CeCe McDonald and her amazing struggles.
45
46 AJ: Mhm.
47

1 NV: Uhm, what a fantastically powerful individual. Fierce. Uhm.
2
3 AJ: She's everything.
4
5 NV: She is.
6
7 AJ: [Laughs].
8
9 NV: She is. Uhm... but, I mean, and, and there's sectionality with her struggle too. I mean, she's a
10 trans woman, uhm, who is black like and that I think played a lot into it.
11
12 AJ: Mhm. Absolutely.
13
14 NV: Uhm, but trans women get thrown into mental facilities all the time for, uh, charges they are
15 completely innocent of. And...
16
17 AJ: They're completely...
18
19 NV: Innocent of.
20
21 AJ: Innocent of, yes.
22
23 NV: Or that have deep shades of grey.
24
25 AJ: Right.
26
27 NV: You know? And I'm, anytime I'm around law enforcement I'm tense.
28
29 AJ: Yeah.
30
31 NV: So...
32
33 AJ: I can imagine. I— well... as am I.
34
35 NV: Right. Yeah.
36
37 AJ: Uh, as a person who lives those intersections that you talked about, uh, related to CeCe. Uhm,
38 so, you know, transgender people have really been getting a lot of visibility lately...
39
40 NV: Mhm.
41
42 AJ: ... uhm, for some really positive, uhm, visibility and there's been some really negative, uhm,
43 visibility that has been at the forefront, uhm, recently, you know?
44
45 NV: Mhm.
46

1 AJ: What's your thought about visibility, and what do you think the future is for the trans
2 community?
3
4 NV: I... [sighs], I mean, I think about martin Luther King Junior and his, his proclamation that the arc
5 of justice... or the arc of history is long...
6
7 AJ: Mhm.
8
9 NV: ... but then restores justice.
10
11 AJ: Yes.
12
13 NV: I would love to think that within my lifetime trans women will be women.
14
15 AJ: Yes.
16
17 NV: Trans men will be men.
18
19 AJ: Mhm.
20
21 NV: Genderqueer people will be people, you know...
22
23 AJ: Right.
24
25 NV: ... who are respected for who they are.
26
27 AJ: Mhm.
28
29 NV: Uhm... we'll see how that plays out, I guess.
30
31 AJ: Uhuh.
32
33 NV: Uhm, with regards to visibility right now, I mean, in North Carolina House Bill 2 just got passed,
34 banning trans people from...
35
36 AJ: You mean Hate Bill 2?
37
38 NV: Hate Bill 2. That makes sense. Either way, HB2.
39
40 AJ: Mhm.
41
42 NV: Uhm, banning trans people from using the bathroom.
43
44 AJ: Mhm.
45
46 NV: Also banning raising the minimum wage and, you know, discrimination lawsuits...
47

1 AJ: Right.
2
3 NV: ... for employment. Uhm, I mean, this is bigger than a trans thing...
4
5 AJ: And housing and...
6
7 NV: Absolutely. It's bigger than a trans thing but the way that they're pushing it through and the way
8 that it's getting through...
9
10 AJ: Mhm.
11
12 NV: ... is by using trans women as a scapegoat.
13
14 AJ: Sure.
15
16 NV: Uhm, men in dresses is what they call us.
17
18 AJ: Yes.
19
20 NV: Uhm, a danger to your daughters and wives. And, I mean, like I said, trans women and trans
21 women of color especially are targeted for sexual assault at rates far higher than the general
22 public.
23
24 AJ: Mhm.
25
26 NV: If we're going to protect our daughters and wives wouldn't we start with the most vulnerable
27 groups amongst them?
28
29 AJ: Yeah. [Laughs].
30
31 NV: If we're gonna, if we're gonna look at protecting people's privacy. It's a privacy issue, they say.
32
33 AJ: Right. Yeah.
34
35 NV: It's a privacy issue. What about my privacy?
36
37 AJ: Mhm.
38
39 NV: To not have my transness plastered on, painted on my forehead.
40
41 AJ: Right.
42
43 NV: I mean, I've talked to you about how hard it is to get a job when people know that you're trans.
44
45 AJ: Yeah.
46
47 NV: I, I can't go through life with trans tattooed on my forehead.

1
2 AJ: Mhm.
3
4 NV: Like, I can't, and I won't. Uhm, but I don't know. Apparently when it comes to privacy that's for
5 cis people.
6
7 AJ: Mhm. Wow.
8
9 NV: And when it comes to protecting women and daughters, women and girls, that's for cis people.
10
11 AJ: Yeah. Well, you know, we gotta mobilize and we gotta...
12
13 NV: Mhm.
14
15 AJ: ... tell our stories.
16
17 NV: Right.
18
19 AJ: And share, uhm, share our stories in ways that really lift up our humanity. And so I thank you,
20 Nicole, for being willing to, to share your story with the Tretter Oral History Project and
21 ultimately with the world. Thank you very much.
22
23 NV: It's a pleasure.