

Toni Pajak
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

November 23, 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 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Toni Pajak -TP
3
4 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project
5 at the University of Minnesota, the Tretter Collection in GLBT Studies and today is November 23,
6 2015. I am here with Toni Pajak.
7
8 TP: Pajak, yes.
9
10 AJ: And Toni, state your name and how you prefer it to be pronounced, your preferred pronouns –
11 gender pronouns, tell me what your gender identity is now and what your gender identity was
12 assigned at birth.
13
14 TP: My name is Toni, the last name is Pajak. I’m going to stick with Toni, I prefer the spelling “i”.
15 When I was a little boy, I showed up to a couple birthday parties where they spelt it with an “i”
16 and they apologized profusely and I was like, “No, no, it’s not a problem.” Because I do know
17 Tony’s with a “y” that would be ticked when that happened.
18
19 AJ: Yeah.
20
21 TP: I identify as transsexual, I’m a transsexual woman because I am transitioning from my birth
22 gender, which was assigned male, to female. Was there another question in that group that I
23 missed?
24
25 AJ: No, that was it. So, you’re paying attention – good job.
26
27 TP: I want people to call me what they’re most comfortable with right now because I am in the
28 middle of my transition. But I prefer she, her, and so that’s just my preference.
29
30 AJ: OK, all right. How does your family refer to you?
31
32 TP: Right now, most people, except for my childhood friends and my transgender friends, still refer
33 to me to what I think they’re just so comfortable doing all these years.
34
35 AJ: Your trans friends?
36
37 TP: No, no – my trans friends refer to me as her and she, my family says he, him. And I think it’s
38 mostly just because of habit, it’s just what they’re used to doing. To me, context and tone are
39 far more important than what pronoun comes out of their mouth.
40
41 AJ: Absolutely.
42
43 TP: And with my childhood friends, there’s a really good group of friends that I grew up with in
44 North Minneapolis, they all make sure to say, “Toni with an ‘i’” and “her” when they right me on
45 Facebook and things like that – and her and she and that’s really cool with them. So family it’s a
46 little bit harder for, I think.
47

- 1 AJ: Right, right. It takes time.
2
- 3 TP: Yeah. And they don't have what I call the plausible deniability that friends have, where people
4 go, "Oh, that's your father," or, "That's your son," and they think there's a direct relationship or
5 even a connection to the fact that I'm transsexual, like my children are going to carry on a
6 genetic trait that makes them . . . future generations more likely to be, which I don't believe is
7 the case based on what I've read and researched. But too bad they feel that way because I think
8 that's the way society has made them feel, which is what made me stay in the closet as long as I
9 did was society.
10
- 11 AJ: Yeah. Tell me a little bit about the first thing you remember, Toni, in life – like your earliest
12 memory.
13
- 14 TP: The earliest memory for me is probably kindergarten. I remember just going to school, I was
15 really excited to go to school. I liked school, I always did. I liked getting patted on the back for
16 doing a good job. I know I'm kind of traditionally a pleaser but that was important to me to
17 hear, "Oh, Tony did really good at this," or that and the other. And I just remembered I really
18 liked school from the get-go. I might have been scared that first day, my mom would have a
19 better memory of that. But I definitely liked school straight from kindergarten on.
20
- 21 AJ: That's awesome. Where did you go to elementary school at?
22
- 23 TP: Hamilton in North Minneapolis, it's just off of 42nd Avenue and . . . I want to say Dupont or
24 Emerson.
25
- 26 AJ: And so you liked school, your friends were pretty cool to you and you got along with most kids?
27
- 28 TP: Oddly enough, my grade school class, we just had a reunion a few years ago and . . .
29
- 30 AJ: You still hang out with your grade school friends?
31
- 32 TP: No, no. I went to Minneapolis North but I was supposed to go to Henry. Henry was having a
33 reunion for the high school and I found out about it, because I was supposed to go to Henry and
34 I still was friends with a lot of them and in the summer I played baseball with them. I said, "Hey,
35 I'd totally love to go if you all don't mind an interloper." And they said, "Toni, we would love to
36 have you, we haven't seen you in years." And so when I went to that there was a whole lot of
37 people from my 1st grade class there. So some of the gals got us reassembled and we re-created
38 a picture of that. I didn't realize it, but me and Scott Foslund, I believe, were the only two boys
39 in the entire class.
40
- 41 AJ: Is that right?
42
- 43 TP: Yeah, so I obviously got along really well with everybody in class back then because I don't think
44 anybody . . . I mean, there was no conflicts or anything like that. I liked playing foursquare with
45 the girls and hopscotch and stuff like that, but I don't think anyone noticed really – maybe a
46 couple teachers saying, "Hey, you need to go . . ." because I remember a couple times they
47 shooed me over. I never felt it was anything like oppressive or awkward, it was just more like,

- 1 "Oh, yeah, that's right, I should probably wander over there where the boys are, I don't want girl
2 germs or anything like that."
3
- 4 AJ: Don't want that. So, no bullying and all of that kind of stuff?
5
- 6 TP: No, luckily my mom, I want to say, was part of the reason . . . and of course my dad was, my dad
7 wouldn't put up with me not sticking up for myself and my mom just wanted the best for us. So
8 she would say things like, "You've got to stand up for yourself, and you should stand up for
9 others too." I think, if anything, that helped take away the focus of me necessarily defending
10 myself, I just felt like I was defending people – and it worked. I was also huskier and bigger and
11 no one wanted to really . . . oddly enough I want to say, that era there was just a little bit
12 different social aspect to it where people were just more . . . just friendly it seemed. I know
13 everyone says that about their generation, so that's probably what it is.
14
- 15 AJ: What timeframe was this?
16
- 17 TP: It was early 1970s when I was going through grade school, because I was born in 1968. Yeah,
18 disco era, I remember going to . . . my mom brought me and my brother to a disco at Folwell
19 Park. Very awkward but I loved dancing, that's another one of my first memories is an
20 immigrant from Persia, I want to say is what I was told when I was little, had a son that I hung
21 out with all the time and he was in a ballet class and a tap dance class and I couldn't stand . . .
22 the kids who eventually became my best friends and I used to hang around with him all the time
23 and I so wanted to be in ballet and tap dance class with him. I would dance in the house during
24 the day and my mom told me, once she told me I remembered, one day my dad came home and
25 I was tap dancing, I wasn't trying to do ballet or pirouettes and he flipped out. "I don't want no
26 son of mine dancing," and this, that and the other. I guess it was kind of bad. My mom and dad
27 fought bad and my mom said my brother would cry and I would go off into imaginary land. I
28 didn't realize it.
29
- 30 AJ: As a protection mechanism, self-preservation.
31
- 32 TP: I think so, it makes sense. Because then when she brings up certain things I then go, "Oh, yeah, I
33 do remember that." One time where I intervened when my brother was balling and my mom
34 was crying and my dad was hollering and I stepped in, I was probably six or seven. I didn't
35 remember that until my mom reminded me and I go, "Oh, yeah, I do remember that." But yeah,
36 I can't say my dad was awful because when my mom and dad got divorced, I went to live with
37 my dad because he did look out for me, he did teach me a lot. He was rough, he was tough, but
38 he was never, I thought, unfair. He didn't beat me or anything like that. I was never . . . some
39 people would say I was maybe psychologically abused because of how bad he'd yell and stuff
40 like that but he was a coach, he was a former Marine, and I just thought it was tough dad – do
41 you know what I mean? And to be honest, I think that's probably what it was.
42
- 43 AJ: That's probably what it was, yeah.
44
- 45 TP: Exactly. I loved my dad too and I thought he was going to be alone, and he already had been for
46 a while when I moved in there. And so it was kind of cool. And then I spent the remainder of
47 my childhood growing up with him and . . .

1
2 AJ: Is he still alive?
3
4 TP: Yeah.
5
6 AJ: What's your relationship like with your dad now?
7
8 TP: It's OK. It's different, it's changed in the last year and a half – since I came out to him. But it's
9 OK.
10
11 AJ: So you just came out?
12
13 TP: I came out to myself January 21, 2014, a little over a year and a half ago. I immediately, within a
14 couple of weeks, came out to . . . I was going to come out to my ex-wife first, even though we
15 had been divorced for 20 years, just because I was looking for someone to confirm some things
16 and she's the one who knew me intimately like nobody else, even better than my parents. And
17 so I wanted to talk to her, but things just didn't work out. And so, I came out to my cousin, who
18 is a minister, because I wanted her to make sure I didn't have demons or anything like that. My
19 way of dealing with it my whole life, was to think I was crazy - ever since I saw Christine
20 Jorgensen's book when I was about nine years old. I'm like, "Oh my God, that's me." And then
21 I'd go, "No, she actually looked pretty as a boy, look at me, I must be crazy." That became my
22 go-to line and so . . . I played with it as I got older. My motto was, "Crazy like a xof," which is fox
23 backwards because foxes are clever and . . .
24
25 AJ: OK, right.
26
27 TP: . . . and I'm secretly a fox backwards. But it did work.
28
29 AJ: Like a xof. OK.
30
31 TP: It seemed so Dr. Seuss-ish and I loved Dr. Seuss so I just played with it. Oddly enough, I got my
32 first tattoo, not in the Marine Corps, but about four months ago which is a cute little fox with
33 pink, white, and baby blue for the transgender flag colors, and "Crazy like a xof" written there.
34
35 AJ: Wow, so you are committed to this phrase.
36
37 TP: Yeah, because I always said I would never get . . .
38
39 AJ: You have a tattoo of it now.
40
41 TP: I always said I would never get a tattoo unless it's something meaningful and I know Semper Fi
42 and the Marine Corps was meaningful, but this is meaningful. You know what I mean?
43
44 AJ: So when you were in the Marine Corps, you didn't get a tattoo like most Marines do?
45
46 TP: No.
47

1 AJ: So you must have known something.

2
3 TP: I think I knew . . .

4
5 AJ: Like you didn't want to have that marker on your body.

6
7 TP: Well one, it wasn't that . . . oddly enough it wasn't that big of a deal to me. I went to the Marine
8 Corps because I thought the Marine Corps would help me become a man and the way I got
9 there was interesting. I'll back track a bit. I was in high school and I had met a cute girl and we
10 started dating and we kind of became high school sweethearts. We got sexual at too young of
11 an age and I remember I had confused her with some of my questions. We had some things
12 that went weird and then, I believe, she started cheating on me. She says she didn't but . . . if
13 anything, she was running around with a former best friend of mine and even that got where
14 people would see things like . . . maybe not having sex but way too cutesy with each other. I
15 know it started off with her lining her friend up with his now best friend. So I broke up with her
16 and that's when I kind of was thinking . . . something is not right about me. I know when I was
17 younger the whole Christine Jorgensen thing . . . that's when I knew I'm not supposed to be a
18 boy. I started dealing with that, I think, psychologically and I started getting depressed. I
19 remember I missed a whole bunch of school too, and I'd had perfect attendance . . . basically
20 perfect attendance until my senior year, the only time I missed school was when my dad
21 brought me hunting. And, the thing was is that my mom and her mom, because I lived with my
22 dad – me and my mom didn't even talk at the time, showed up at his house to tell me and him
23 that I've gotten my ex-girlfriend pregnant. I'm like, "No, you need to talk to my old best friend
24 who she is sleeping with, or messing with." And my mom grabbed me by the ear and brought
25 me out in the hallway and she says, "Tony, you're not an idiot, you know girls don't find out
26 they're pregnant the next day – she's about two months pregnant, when did you two last have a
27 sexual relationship." And I said, "Oh my Lord, ironically enough, it was Thanksgiving back then,"
28 because this was in January and I said, "At Thanksgiving we had a rendezvous thing," because
29 we had already been broke up but we had . . . I don't know, the holidays or whatever. I'm like,
30 "Oh my God, it could be." I remember in the hallway, underneath the stairwell, I told . . . my
31 mom said . . . she went back after I came out to her and she goes, "That explains why you said
32 this so weirdly." I said, "What did I say?" And she said, "You said . . ." She said, "You didn't say,
33 'I don't know how to be a dad,' you said, 'I don't know how to be a man.'" And she thought that
34 was weird I chose "man" and not "dad". I didn't even think of it. I get it, because I was
35 struggling to try to be a man.

36
37 AJ: So she hung on to that for all of that time.

38
39 TP: She obviously did, yeah. There was a couple other things she hung on to though, that when I
40 came out to her then suddenly got fuzzy – like she's the one who reminded me of the tap
41 dancing and that incident how he blew up about that. And then when I remembered telling her
42 that and she goes, "No." But the funny thing is that was when I first came out to her and I could
43 tell she was in shock, she even said at first she thought it was a phase – that she was just trying
44 to play through.

45
46 AJ: Oh yeah. "Oh, this will pass, she's just a kid."

- 1 TP: Exactly. Either that or they think that you were so able to stuff it down for forty-six years, you'll
2 be able to stuff it down again. My dad especially thought that and my brother kind of did too. I
3 get that.
4
- 5 AJ: So just one brother.
6
- 7 TP: Yeah, one brother – a younger brother, a couple years younger.
8 AJ: No sisters?
9
- 10 TP: No sisters, no. So probably one of the reasons why I . . . I know a lot of my friends cross dressed,
11 I did not cross dress. I was afraid to, quite frankly. I remember when my girlfriend dressed me
12 up in her prom dress and put make-up on me and I acted like I was horrified just doing it
13 because she wanted to and I was so excited and happy about it. But I was a good actor and I
14 acted like I was sore about it. I acted like I was sore, but being a good sport.
15
- 16 AJ: Right, exactly. "I'm doing it for you baby."
17
- 18 TP: Yeah, and then I know one of the things she mentioned is that when I was in the Marine Corps I
19 used to wear like a nightshirt thing of hers that she thought was really feminine and she thought
20 that was weird. She never said anything until after I came out to her just about a year and a half
21 ago.
22
- 23 AJ: Were you guys . . . so was she stationed with you?
24
- 25 TP: Oh yeah, because once I went into the Marine Corps to learn to be a man, I figured . . . a few
26 different birds. One, I wanted to get out of Minnesota, I wanted to run away; two, I needed to
27 come up with child support in case that was my child. So I thought two birds, one stone – I'll be
28 making money and possibly learning a trade so that I can pay child support and take care of this
29 kid.
30
- 31 AJ: So we're dying to know, was it your kid or not?
32
- 33 TP: While I was in boot camp my mom sent me a letter, the Marine Corps wouldn't let you get child
34 support to send back home unless you get a blood test. So, blood test was inevitable . . .
35
- 36 AJ: Which was actually a good thing.
37
- 38 TP: Yeah, it's actually a really good thing. Except for, I didn't need the blood test after I got mom's
39 letter. She says, "I'm sorry, Tony, to share this news with you while you're under such pressure .
40 . ." or something silly like that. She says, "But, there is nobody else on the planet with earlobes
41 like this." And the funny thing is, when she said that I knew exactly what she meant and she was
42 right. So it was going to be a formality, and that was fine. But what I didn't know was then
43 immediately after I . . . I immediately felt like I needed to raise my child. So I started writing her
44 letters and when I came home on leave I asked her if she would try to make it work and marry
45 me because I would like to raise my son. I know that was important for her too because she was
46 raised in a broken home and her stepfather was awful. I don't think she wanted her son to start
47 out with a stepfather at least – eventually that did happen though because we did get divorced

1 only a few years after we were married. It was . . . we were too young, for one, and two, I'm
2 sure I was sending her mixed signals. We've talked about it now, she said that so many things
3 that were so confusing to her even all these years, suddenly made sense once I had told her.

4
5 AJ: So you came home on leave, you guys got married . . .

6
7 TP: No, actually I told her I would like to marry her and she was still dating my former best friend.
8 Ironically enough, they had a car break down – him and his buddy, and she said, "He's going to
9 be mad that I even visited you." And I'm like, "Well let me go talk to him because I'm going to
10 let him know that I've asked you to marry me and you said that you were willing to give it a
11 shot." So obviously their relationship wasn't all it was cracked up to be, at least not at that time.
12 So I went and picked him up and, of course, I have the aura of being a Marine out of boot camp,
13 so both of them, I thought, were maybe a little bit nervous but they also probably had the, you
14 know, "Tony was our friend at one time," so there was probably a little bit of that too because
15 they both took it rather well, at least with me – I don't know how it went with her because then
16 I had to leave for school after a couple of weeks. And then she didn't come down right away,
17 she came down a couple months later. She was hemming and hawing, she wasn't sure either –
18 and I get it, it wasn't an easy decision because now she's leaving home to be with someone that
19 she's struggled with recently. But she did and we gave it a shot for a couple of years, we were
20 married. Unfortunately I was sent to Japan for seven months, which I think we did OK with – we
21 had a horrible phone bill, but then I came but then back Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and I
22 was almost back for only a couple of months and I had to go back out. And then she . . .

23
24 AJ: Was that Operation Desert Storm?

25
26 TP: Desert Shield and Desert Storm, yeah. And so, I think she had kind of a breakdown and then
27 things got bad. She said she drank, but more importantly she cheated on me with . . .

28
29 AJ: Multiple people.

30
31 TP: Yeah, unfortunately. But, oddly enough I said, "That's fine as long as you love me I can work
32 with that." At first we were going to separate but then we tried to work it out because that's
33 what I said. And I actually think we were doing OK but the thing that broke the marriage finally
34 up was I got exhausted with her constantly expecting me to get revenge by cheating on her and
35 that just wasn't something that . . . I don't see me ever doing.

36
37 AJ: So she was very jealous.

38
39 TP: Yeah, yeah. But it just got tiring hearing that all the time. I'd come home from work 10 minutes
40 late, "Why are you late?" It was crazy bad. And she recognizes that nowadays. And I remember
41 for years we blamed, we – me included, blamed her for the divorce but the night I came out to
42 myself . . . or the day I came out to myself, I called her that night and said, "Kelly, I need to
43 apologize to you." And she goes, "What? What about? What did you do now?" Thinking I did
44 something stupid with the kids. And I said, "You know how we've kind of been blaming you all
45 these years for the divorce," and she says, "Yeah, I did some things." I said, "Yeah, but I'm to
46 blame too." And she goes, "Yeah." I said, "No, but I realize now I'm really to blame, I didn't give
47 us a chance." She says, "Wow, you've had an epiphany." I said, "Yeah, you could say that." And

1 so were planning on talking but we just didn't. It wasn't until I came out to my daughter about a
2 month later that my daughter said, "You need to talk to mom." I said, "I know, I've been
3 wanting to." So then I did and then that's when she said . . .

4
5 AJ: So how many kids?

6
7 TP: Two. I have two – a son who is older and then my daughter. My son just turned 28 and my
8 daughter 26. My daughter just got married last November – 2014.

9
10 AJ: Congratulations.

11
12 TP: Thanks. And I think that was a . . . knowing that when her fiancé came and asked me for her
13 hand in marriage, that was one of the dominos that kind of led to me saying, "OK, my children
14 are now both grown."

15
16 AJ: And you did the whole walk down the aisle thing.

17
18 TP: I did. I don't say this because I feel strongly that if someone is transsexual they should not let
19 children hold them back. It was just me and my warped . . . because society set expectations,
20 my Catholic upbringing set expectations, I think – like a base point. But then you get that into
21 my mind and with fear and whatever concerns and overthinking I'm doing make it even worse.
22 "Oh, you can't possibly do that with children." I just think that was me putting that on me. I
23 remember even when my . . . when I was told that that might be my child, I'm like, "Oh my God,
24 I've got to put my life on hold now," because you've got to take care of your kids. And so I guess
25 I just fell into that mode and I was so deep in denial that whenever my thoughts went there . . .
26 and a few things that me and . . . I did have a serious relationship a couple years after me and
27 my ex got divorced. It was also a female and she was a wonderful, wonderful person – just the
28 right person for me at that time in my life, from a mental perspective. But, you've got to raise
29 those kids and so I just fell into that mode of doing what you're supposed to do – like I always
30 did. I wanted to get approval from my parents that I'm being a good dad just like I wanted to be
31 good at math, good at English, good at parenting.

32
33 AJ: So you did a good job, you got them all raised.

34
35 TP: I did an OK job, they're mom did a really good job. I did an OK job – I did the coaching thing.

36
37 AJ: What sport?

38
39 TP: I love baseball and I was pretty good at baseball, but I also coached some football. But my
40 favorite coaching was when I coached girls softball for a few years. I just felt a really cool
41 connection with them. I like how girls relate with one another better and just treat each other
42 better. I shouldn't say better – differently. And it's the way I guess I always liked, that's
43 probably why I always kind of . . . like even at jobs, I know a lot of people say a lot of
44 transsexuals do tend to hang around with more females. As far as personal relationships at
45 work, as far as sharing, "Oh at home this is going on, that's going on" – like personal stuff, it
46 wasn't with guys so much. I had a couple of friends, Steve and Sean, but it was mostly girls – like
47 Deb and Terri and a few others, just because I always felt more comfortable with girls. I didn't

- 1 even . . . I mean, it's not like I was saying, "I'm a girl," because I was sure I was crazy when I
2 thought that stuff, you know? I just got along with them more easily, it was my demeanor I
3 think.
4
- 5 AJ: I can relate.
6
- 7 TP: But I did have a temper. A lot of people think temper means you're a guy, you're like your dad.
8 My ex-wife has as bad a temper as my dad. I've always said girls and guys both have tempers,
9 it's just what sets you off.
10
- 11 AJ: Exactly, that's very true. So you used the term transsexual to describe yourself. Has that
12 changed over time? How do you define that term?
13
- 14 TP: What that term means to me, because it's probably different . . . there seems to be, I know
15 everyone kind of has their own spin on it - even in the transgender community, but I do think it's
16 a little bit different than those who I've encountered so far in that I am trying to accept that I'm
17 not a boy, and I knew that. But I'm also, unfortunately, because of physical situation, I'm also
18 not a girl. But I do think the brain, the structure of the brain, all the chemistry things that they
19 say go on during development as a fetus. It just makes so much sense, just the way that I
20 always, from a body perspective . . . and I used to think . . . I said, "You know, I do think I have
21 the wrong body, I think I'm a boy in a girl's body." But as I've researched it, I've read a lot . . .
22
- 23 AJ: A girl in a boy's body, right?
24
- 25 TP: Yes, exactly - I'm sorry, did I say that wrong? I might have confused that - yes, a girl in a boy's
26 body. I just knew I wasn't right as a boy when I was little and then when I saw Christine
27 Jorgensen and then, oddly enough, not long after that I . . . I always felt I had to get something
28 inside me, even when I was little when you shouldn't have even been thinking about stuff like
29 that - I don't think . . . I guess I don't know, I'm not a professional.
30
- 31 AJ: Well, you were thinking about it though.
32
- 33 TP: Yeah, and I remember I would rub on things and it was really weird. Even my friends, because I
34 got caught a few times, "What the hell are you doing?"
35
- 36 AJ: Rub it with your hands?
37
- 38 TP: No, no . . . I can't believe I'm saying this on video, but I would sit on the end of the bathtub or on
39 the edge of the hamper and I would grind. Then when I got older and I saw magazines . . .
40 because I had seen women topless and things like that, just as a kid you bump into that. But
41 when I saw my very first vagina, that's where I kind of almost shuttered and like, "Oh my God, I
42 swear I'm supposed to have a vagina." "You must be crazy, Tony." Because I'd already seen the
43 Christine Jorgensen thing and thought I was crazy. I had a homosexual uncle that I know I had
44 heard people say things like that about homosexuals, even my dad, and stuff. So I was afraid of
45 being crazy so I guess I took ownership of it and said, "I'm afraid to be crazy." "Hell, I'm crazy."
46 "Everybody is a little crazy." And I actually, oddly enough, believe that in a way anyways
47 probably because I pounded it in my own head. But I got used to just saying, "I'm crazy."

1
2 AJ: So you think the grinding . . . was that sort of a part of some sexual exploration?
3
4 TP: I think that and kind of a fulfillment . . . then eventually as I got older and . . .
5
6 AJ: So, some people will cross dress and you would . . . ?
7
8 TP: Yeah, exactly. And when I was little, no. When I was little I was just trying to get to something
9 that . . . I don't know, like from my nervous system or something because it felt good to me to
10 do that, where normal . . . like a boy, I didn't get . . . I mean, I did eventually learn how to do that
11 once I was in the Marine Corps.
12
13 AJ: So, normal kind of male masturbation . . .
14
15 TP: Yeah, I didn't do that until I was in the Marine Corps. I knew what it was, my friends would talk
16 about it. Not me. There is another kid, his brother and my brother, Tommy, caught me
17 humping something and my brother goes, "What the hell?" because he was embarrassed that
18 he walked in on it with his friend and his friend goes, "Oh my God, my little brother does the
19 same exact thing." Like he thought his little brother was the only person that did it and then
20 now there's me, and I wonder to this day, was . . .
21
22 AJ: Did they ever try it?
23
24 TP: Well, no I didn't think that, I always wondered if maybe his little brother had the same . . .
25
26 AJ: Concerns around gender.
27
28 TP: Yeah, you know . . . and to this day I wonder. Poor kid. But yeah. And then when I got older
29 and I realized what it was, and one of the things I had to apologize to my ex about was I
30 remember . . . I loved her, I did, but when we got sexual part of it was exploration for me, and I
31 remember that – I even remember distinctly thinking that, and I'm sure everybody does to some
32 degree, at least maybe that's just me wanting to feel better about something I thought that was
33 unfair. And like I said, "I said I'm sorry that I, in a sense, used your body to try to find out what
34 my body was supposed to be like." And she understood that, though, and she said, "No need to
35 apologize for that." Because she also recognized that we did, at one time, love each other and
36 were high school sweethearts and all that stuff. Yeah, we probably started things too young but
37 it was legitimate. But there was the whole . . . here's the thing that does kind of bother me to
38 this day about my reality and people when they . . . when I share my sexuality, because I do
39 know my mom once said, "You seem to be one of the most sexual people I know." She knew me
40 and my girlfriend and my ex-wife both had a lot of intimacy in our relationships and she also
41 knew about me humping on things. So she said, "You are one of the most sexual people I
42 know." So she always said that, and that is something that I am and I think that why is it OK for
43 straight people or people who were born male and stay male or born female and stay female
44 because they're comfortable with that and they don't have the conflicts going on internally that
45 we do, why is it OK for them to be sexual, but when I bring it up it makes me a pervert or a freak
46 or that's why you think you're supposed to be the opposite – you want to be because you're a
47 pervert. And that's not what it is. For me, it was – that's why I like that you brought up the

1 whole . . . for some people they cross dress and for me it was that, because once I did learn
2 what a female was all about, that is how I escaped. I don't ever recall watching porn or reading
3 stories where I wasn't the girl in my mind.
4

5 AJ: So you always fantasized as a female.
6

7 TP: Yeah, I don't ever remember being a guy, I don't ever remember wanting to . . . for lack of a
8 better term, f— that girl. I always . . .
9

10 AJ: You can say it, we're all . . .
11

12 TP: Fuck that girl. I always wanted to be the one to be fucked. And that reminds me of when I came
13 out to my dad, I thought he's either going to kill me or he's going to say, "But you played
14 football." And oddly enough, for some reason that stuck in my head – even before Marine and
15 baseball player, and baseball is what I was good at and Marine we both did. Sure enough, the
16 first thing out of his mouth was, "But you played football, Tony." Like football is this magical
17 elixir that means you're definitely a guy – not Marine Corps, not baseball, not hunting. I didn't
18 like hunting and he knew that - it was one of those things. But after I went over there the next
19 day, because we had already kind of not been talking for a bit because we had had an argument
20 – and that was another reason why I finally came out, it led to me thinking about oh my God,
21 this is one of those situations where you have an argument with your parent and they pass away
22 and that's the last interaction you have with them, that's going to be awful. What would you do
23 if dad passed away? Well, you know what you'd do? You'd finally transition. I'm having this
24 conversation with myself internally and I said, "OK, the bolt is busted, you have now gone
25 batshit crazy." And so that's why I called the VA and said, "You need to see me, I'm going
26 crazy." And they go, "Why?" And I said, "Because I've always thought I was supposed to be a
27 girl but now I'm certain – I need to transition or I'm going to die." I had been praying to God for
28 many years – just let me die. When I got really huge, I was up to almost 370 and I found out I
29 was diabetic, I didn't react like I guess normally because the doctor said, "Wow, you don't seem
30 like you care." "Well, I don't mind. I figured I was going to get diabetes eventually." And he
31 goes, "That's not the reaction I normally get." And I said, "Well, whatever." I kind of
32 downplayed it because in reality . . .
33

34 AJ: How are you doing with your diabetes now? You clearly don't weigh 360 or . . .
35

36 TP: No, as a matter of fact my last two A1Cs were actually in the normal range – not low range for
37 diabetic, normal range like a normal person without diabetes and it's because I have lost a lot of
38 weight.
39

40 AJ: Congratulations.
41

42 TP: Well, my daughter says honest living. Once I came out to myself that's when I started losing
43 weight. Well, I did lose weight before that from Ketosis when I didn't know I was diabetic – so I
44 did go from 365 down to 320 through that. And then I would lose weight every once in a while
45 with challenges at work and things like that, but I'd always go back to 320. It wasn't until I came
46 out that I started going . . . now recently with hormones and stressing out about how things are

- 1 going with my transition, I've gained some weight, which upsets me but I'll shake it I'm sure of
2 it. It's different . . .
3
- 4 AJ: But it's in different places, which could lead to this question. Can you describe what challenges
5 you've faced since you've been expressing your true gender identity? Because you came out to
6 yourself.
7
- 8 TP: I thought I was crazy, I went to the VA and they said, "No, you're not crazy, you're transgender."
9 And then with my new job my health coverage, oddly enough health care before would let me
10 go to the VA, because they were really good with diabetes and that's why I kept going to them,
11 this one you had to get referred there and I thought, "Ahh, that's too big of a pain." But I was
12 able to go to Fairview and they referred me to the Gender Clinic over at the U of M, which I'm
13 really grateful for because when I told the gal at the VA about that, and the gentleman who was
14 my therapist, they both said, "Go to the U of M. We're OK, we're trying our best here, but they
15 know what they're doing." So I went to the U and basically started over from scratch.
16
- 17 AJ: To the program on human sexuality?
18
- 19 TP: Yeah, the human sexuality program. And I started from scratch and went in there and said,
20 "Yeah, I know I got permission . . ." because I was afraid to cross dress, so I got permission to do
21 that from my therapist at the VA, "No, it's not going to make you more transsexual, it's probably
22 going to give you some relief." And it did. It was almost to the point where I almost cried. It
23 was such a weird relief, I can't explain it.
24
- 25 AJ: So do you live . . . ?
26
- 27 TP: I live alone now.
28
- 29 AJ: 24/7 as a woman now?
30
- 31 TP: Well I do, and that confuses some of my friends because I remember growing up, my first really
32 good friend was probably Lars, but also Roxanne who went by Rocky. I actually hung with Rocky
33 more than Lars and Rocky is the one that when I sucked at baseball, she got good at baseball
34 and was doing better than all the boys and made me feel like, "I can do this too." I just
35 remember her and a girl named Bobbi Jo Denny. I really admired tom girls – or tomboys, I
36 should say. And Jo from . . . I can't remember the name of the show right now, but I remember
37 that Laura Ingalls Wilder was like my . . . I remember people would say, "Who's your hero?" And
38 I would say . . . well, every once in a while I'd say Johnny Bench, the catcher for the Cincinnati
39 Reds. My favorite color was red, my birthday was May 5th, so 5 was my favorite number and he
40 wore five and I became a catcher because of that. And then I met him when I was in the Marine
41 Corps overseas because . . .
42
- 43 AJ: No way.
44
- 45 TP: He was with Bob Hope. I was their security when they were in Bahrain.
46
- 47 AJ: Is that right? So you met Bob Hope too then.

1
2 TP: Yeah, and his hands are as huge as the biography says. He has huge hands. I was a catcher too
3 and I'm like, "What?" My hands are small compared to his. So, that was really neat. I tell
4 people, "Yeah, that's maybe who my idol is," but I don't really have any idols, but in reality I
5 loved Laura Ingalls Wilder to death. But you can't say that as a boy. You should be able to . . .
6
7 AJ: You should be able to.
8
9 TP: But back then you couldn't, maybe today you could.
10
11 AJ: Society . . . and I'm not sure if they wouldn't have some challenges today.
12
13 TP: I think they probably still would – sadly.
14
15 AJ: So you're accepted at your job? You said your job referred you.
16
17 TP: I'm out at work to the people that matter. I consider myself fully out at work even though I
18 dress like this – because I work in dusty, nasty places.
19
20 AJ: OK, where do you work?
21
22 TP: I work for the State of Minnesota as an IT professional assigned to the Department of Public
23 Safety and recently I've been doing a project where I've been outstate at all these little
24 locations. It's a lot of manual work, not just technology work, and it's dirty and stuff like that.
25
26 AJ: Outdoors? Are you outside?
27
28 TP: No, but you're underneath desks that sometimes haven't been cleaned in a while – and
29 computers collect dust, the electronics just become a magnet for that. And it's a lot of lifting
30 and things like that so I work . . . the girls in my field, they dress like this too – sweatshirts and . .
31 . now, they wear make-up where I don't wear make-up because I'm not into shocking people.
32 But that being said, work knows, my bosses know. They know that I am now, outside of work,
33 doing what I feel comfortable with. When I met you at Transgender Day of Remembrance, I was
34 in a dress.
35
36 AJ: Yeah, cute dress.
37
38 TP: Just six months ago I would not have done that, not because I wasn't comfortable out in public
39 because I'm a pretty big person. I've done some things in the spotlight where I can handle a
40 little bit of heat, I just couldn't handle it getting back to work and then finding out that it ain't
41 going to fly at work – you're out of a job, because too many of my friends don't. And though I
42 work for the State and there are protections, I've worked at other places where other
43 protections failed people because, you know what? If someone wants you out, they find a way
44 to get you out regardless. So I was super fearful of that but now I'm not.
45
46 AJ: Is this job at the State new? Is this a new job for you?
47

- 1 TP: It's just . . . I got it a couple months after I came out to myself and I specifically chose that job
2 because of Minnesota's laws, because there was an opportunity for me at Edina Realty that paid
3 a lot more for a position that I had been doing at the time. I did take a step back to take this job.
4
- 5 AJ: So coming out has . . . even though you feel comfortable with this job, you lost some income?
6
- 7 TP: Oh, I lost a lot of income. My daughter even questioned whether it was something I was going
8 to be able to do – you know, "You're used to this type of living." But I cut back a lot of things –
9 even though I've added some new expenses, sadly.
10
- 11 AJ: Do you think you could ever go back to what you were doing?
12
- 13 TP: Well, oddly enough, I'm actually looking at possibly doing something similar with the State and
14 they've asked me to come work with them even though they're aware . . .
15
- 16 AJ: What did you do before?
17
- 18 TP: I was a server . . . I moved into servers and server operations, server support as opposed to
19 desktop support, which is what I'm doing now. But the team, a couple of the gentlemen I came
20 out too, it was just the right time, because they were saying, "You should apply, you need to be
21 on our team, you're a hard worker," and this, that and the other. I'm like, "Yeah, but I'm going
22 through a lot in my personal life." And they go, "Come on, you can tell us – how long have you
23 known us? We're good guys." I'm like, "Yeah, I guess I've been thinking about telling you guys
24 anyway, but you're not going to believe me." And I told them, and the one goes, "You mean like
25 Caitlyn Jenner?" I go, "Yeah, more or less." And he goes, "Well then perfect, you'll fit right in on
26 our team." And that made me feel so good that he said that, "You will fit perfect on our team."
27 It just told me that they don't care.
28
- 29 AJ: So are you going to apply?
30
- 31 TP: Yeah, it's going to open soon and I'm going to apply for it and hopefully I'll get it because then I
32 would feel like I've made up some ground that I gave up on purpose.
33
- 34 AJ: Well good luck, I'll be rooting for you.
35
- 36 TP: Thanks, that's awesome.
37
- 38 AJ: So you mentioned Caitlin Jenner.
39
- 40 TP: Yeah.
41
- 42 AJ: What do you think of Caitlin?
43
- 44 TP: I owe Caitlin a debt of gratitude because she saved my relationship with my mother. Me and my
45 mom already had had a rough relationship from when I moved in with my dad back when I was
46 a teenager after the divorce and it had always been contentious, even though right before I

1 went in the Marine Corps I stayed with her for a while, when I got divorced I rented from her for
2 a little while – even in those situations, it was always just tense.

3
4 AJ: So you’ve always kind of had challenges with . . . ?

5
6 TP: A thing with mom, yeah. And then when I came out to her she was OK, she thought it was a
7 phase – that’s why she seemed OK that first time. But then the second time I saw her, because I
8 would see about once every other . . . every couple of weeks or once a month, something like
9 that. She was bad – just awful to me, ignored everything I tried to ask her about. Always, “Oh,
10 I’m so glad to hear from my boy.” It’s like, “OK, mom, I get it – you’re going to make sure my
11 brain goes back into boy mode because obviously it’s in a phase.” And then it got to the point
12 where it was just getting progressively worse and worse and I’m like, “Oh my God, I don’t know
13 if I’m going to be able to see her,” and my brother said, “Yeah, don’t go see her.” And she called
14 me up right before my birthday and asked to bring me out to dinner. I was out on a walk on a
15 Sunday, doing my walk along the river, and I almost started crying because I had a voicemail
16 from my mom asking me to go to dinner. I’m like, “Oh my God, I can’t believe my mom is talking
17 to me.” Because I always loved my mom, even when it was stressful and tense. I called her up
18 and she said, “Yeah, I want to bring you out to dinner for your birthday.” My mom has no
19 money, I have to bring us out to dinner – she’ll help, she’ll give a coupon and kick in some
20 money, but I won’t let her pay, she can’t afford that. But she said, “Yeah,” and I’m like, “Oh my
21 God, this is either going to be an awful birthday dinner or something’s up.” I had watched the
22 Diane Sawyer interview, I didn’t know that my mom had – if anything, I thought she would avoid
23 it like the plague. So I pick her up the day that we’re going out for my dinner for my birthday. I
24 start the car, we’re in her driveway, and she says, “I just want to say God works in mysterious
25 ways. God sent me Caitlin . . .” Well at the time, Bruce, “. . . at just the right time.” I’m like, “Oh
26 really, mom.” I’m hesitant to go here.

27
28 AJ: So this was just earlier this year?

29
30 TP: Yes, yes. Me and mom had a rough go for about a year – I’d say about a year it was really rough,
31 maybe longer.

32
33 AJ: I’m sorry for interrupting.

34
35 TP: No, no – that’s OK. It’s actually interesting because I didn’t realize that wow, we did really have
36 a bad . . . she was awful for a whole year, I didn’t realize that. When I saw awful though, I mean
37 just awful in not trying to deal with it.

38
39 AJ: Right, just awkward.

40
41 TP: Yeah, and then kind of rude to me and cutting me off.

42
43 AJ: But she didn’t damn you to hell or anything like that?

44
45 TP: Well, hmm . . . kind of, but not horribly. She didn’t lock me out of the house and be like, “You
46 can’t come over here anymore,” though it got to the point where it was like, “Maybe you
47 shouldn’t come over here,” which is still better than saying not come over here.

1
2 AJ: But this moment in the driveway?
3
4 TP: Yeah, it was really like . . . whoa!
5
6 AJ: May 4th and you said your birthday is the 5th, right?
7
8 TP: Well, yeah, and we . . . it was probably like the 8th or 9th when we went out. And so, I'm like, "So
9 what do you think?" And she said, "When you first told me this, I thought it was a phase, and
10 then when you stuck with it I was like . . . oh, I don't get it. Tony was the leader of the pack, he
11 played all these sports, he was a Marine." Ironically enough, when I was younger, she came to
12 me when I was living with my dad and I was visiting her at the house, she said, "Hey, do you
13 think your brother is gay?" "Joel? No, why do you think that?" "Well, a couple of us are
14 starting to wonder." It came from my grandma, oddly enough – who, my uncle . . . my uncle
15 who is a homosexual . . .
16
17 AJ: So your mom's brother?
18
19 TP: Yeah. And so, he was left for dead in the deserts of Las Vegas because of his sexuality. And so,
20 of course, my mom, her whole life, was terrified that one of us would be a homosexual or gay
21 and thus ridiculed and possibly murdered. So she was probably worried about that for my
22 brother but I was really pissed about the way she came at me about it and more or less . . . the
23 way she was talking about my brother, who wasn't even there, and that there was something
24 wrong with him or wrong with that. And the worse part was, I'm like - first of all, I don't think
25 they're right, and how the hell have you not figured out my problem yet? I didn't say that to her
26 but I'm thinking that in my head as I'm really mad at her, "You don't know what you're talking
27 about mom, you can't assume that."
28
29 AJ: Was that after you came out?
30
31 TP: No, no, this was when I was still a kid – like in high school.
32
33 AJ: Oh wow.
34
35 TP: Yeah, and I'm like, what? You guys can't be saying that, you know what I mean? This is
36 ridiculous coming to that conclusion. And I'm thinking that in my head, "You all think you've got
37 Joel figured out and you're wrong, and then you don't have any clue about my situation." But I
38 get that, I didn't give any clues – I made sure not to.
39
40 AJ: You tried hard to fit in.
41
42 TP: Oddly enough, my ex is probably the only one who probably had any real clues. But, she said,
43 "Bruce Jenner was an icon and I loved Bruce Jenner, I had a crush on Bruce Jenner he was our
44 Olympic hero in 1976. You liked Bruce Jenner." "Yeah, I did – I remember that." I was huge for
45 the bicentennial that year – 200 years, red, white, and blue everything. It was so cool to me. I
46 love the colors, so red, white and blue everywhere was awesome. She says, "And if Bruce
47 Jenner can be transsexual, then Tony you can be too." And ever since then it's slowly gotten

1 better and better and she actually . . . I remember about two months ago, gave me some purses,
2 some jewelry.
3
4 AJ: Really? That's a big thing.
5
6 TP: It is huge. It was so . . .
7
8 AJ: That is a big thing.
9
10 TP: It was so awesome – it was. It was very awesome.
11
12 AJ: Bruce, you did good.
13
14 TP: I owe Caitlin a . . . you know, I disagree with a lot of Caitlin's politics and beliefs, but I do have
15 hope – like Jennifer Boylan seemed to, that with learning about a lot of other people's struggles,
16 because Caitlin hadn't been around anyone else that was transgender to understand the
17 difficulties, didn't grow up in North Minneapolis, didn't have to enlist in the military where
18 there's still a lot of poor people to see that it's just not easy – it's just not, "I can afford a plastic
19 surgeon easy." But at the same time, I don't hold that against her either because I have lots of
20 advantages. I was a white male, I am not ignorant of those advantages. When I was in the
21 Marine Corps, my best friend was part-Puerto Rican, part-African American, which a lot of
22 people would say, "Oh, that's African American." "No, that's different."
23
24 AJ: Yeah, that's different.
25
26 TP: When we were roommates in the Marine Corps, we'd go out partying once in a while and I
27 remember, we were chased out of Asheville, North Carolina, and they wanted to kill me worse
28 because I was the white person with a Black guy. And that's where I go, "This is fucking 1991,
29 we're both veterans of a war, we both fought for this country, and you people want to lynch
30 us." That's when I realized that wow, it's still bad. I was a little bit . . . I remember when I got
31 into an argument on the ship, not a bad argument, but there were four of my friends who were
32 African American marines that didn't realize I was sitting on the steps from the helipad because I
33 had just got done jogging, and they were lamenting about white people holding them down and
34 this, that, and the other. I interrupted them and I said, "Guys, no." Yes, there's obvious racism,
35 because I didn't realize – I hadn't had this interaction yet where I was about to be lynched about
36 six months later, but I said, "You know, it's really more about class." And I still think it is more
37 about class, but sadly ever since the end of slavery, what has the African American community
38 been doing? Trying to catch up and haven't been given a fair shot.
39
40 AJ: Even if it is about class, and I try not to say much in these interviews but I've got to address this .
41 . .
42
43 TP: No, no – please do, because I'm always looking to learn.
44
45 AJ: Even if it is about class, Black people have less resources because of racism.
46

- 1 TP: Yes, exactly right.
2
- 3 AJ: So whenever you bring in class, or economics . . .
4
- 5 TP: But that's why I say, my ignorance on that ship is proven in the fact that I argued with them
6 about class and then months later realized, "Holy shit, racism is really there." I went to
7 Minneapolis North, I went to all great history classes and learned all about all that stuff.
8
- 9 AJ: Poor white people don't get threatened to be lynched, they only get threatened to be lynched if
10 they're hanging with Black people.
11
- 12 TP: Yeah, I learned that then months later and that's where it was . . . so I'm one of those folks that
13 tend to remind people that, no – it's not as simple as you think. Equality might be there on the
14 surface, but it's not there. And a lot of people who have had the same education as me don't
15 get the chance to work in computers because they didn't get the chance to go in the Marine
16 Corps or . . .
17
- 18 AJ: Because of their race.
19
- 20 TP: Well, not necessarily that but even their upbringing because their parents never even had a
21 chance to think about these things. I went through anger management, unfortunately . . .
22
- 23 AJ: Because of racism – I've got to keep saying that. Because of racism . . .
24
- 25 TP: Well let me explain why. Exactly, you're right. And here's where the thing that happens . . .
26 because of racism that held them back and only allowed them to learn certain tools, because I
27 remember when I went to anger management and they said, "Well here, you don't have the
28 tools to learn how to deal with situations that make you angry, here's new tools – you weren't
29 raised with them." People in the African American community are not raised to receive those
30 tools because their parents never got those tools and don't know how to deliver them to them.
31 And that's what I tell people, "Racism exists, it's real, it's still a problem." And they go, "Well no,
32 these people aren't trying hard enough." First of all, they're not going to get the chance, let's
33 just be quite frank – they're not going to. I mean, I can go interview for 50 jobs and I'm going to
34 have a real shot at 50 jobs. No offense.
35
- 36 AJ: Yeah, yeah – and if I go interview for 50 jobs, I might have a shot at two of them.
37
- 38 TP: Right. I get that.
39
- 40 AJ: All that being said, even when their parents do have the tools, because a lot of parents do, Black
41 parents. Even when they have all the tools, still those children aren't going to go as far as they
42 could if it weren't for racism.
43
- 44 TP: You know what? You're right, you're absolutely right.
45
- 46 AJ: I have experienced it and I know . . .
47

- 1 TP: We know people who won't hire us because we're transgender, we also know people that won't
2 hire you or my other African American friends because they're Black, and that to me is
3 ridiculous. Now obviously, people will say, "Well you have ulterior motives, you're transsexual
4 so you need to think that way." Well, no, I'm human I need to think that way. Why the hell
5 doesn't everyone think that way, I don't get it – I don't.
6
- 7 AJ: Wow, that's cool. Tell me about . . .
8
- 9 TP: Sorry, I can get sidetracked.
10
- 11 AJ: . . . your relationships. You've talked a lot about sex and being sexual, you were clearly in
12 relationships with women.
13
- 14 TP: Two women.
15
- 16 AJ: What's your sexual orientation now?
17
- 18 TP: I've always wanted to be with a guy. How do you admit that? I couldn't.
19
- 20 AJ: You just say it.
21
- 22 TP: I couldn't though. I couldn't admit I was transsexual either. I remember that was some of the
23 stuff that came out with me and my girlfriend before we got married, that threw her for a loop.
24 I remember even when we were married . . . you know, things come up. "Oh, a threesome," or,
25 "What do you think about so-and-so, they did this?" Because we had friends that told us about
26 how they had a threesome and it was a guy, his wife, and his buddy. My ex-wife, or wife at the
27 time, said, "Well, Tony would like to do it with another girl." And I'm like, "How can you say
28 that?" Because she always used to joke that she always liked how trustworthy I was because
29 she could throw me in a room full of Playboy bunnies and I wouldn't cheat on her. But then she
30 says I would love to do a threesome with another girl. And I said, "What? Why would you say
31 that because whenever we've talked about threesomes I always say I'd like to do it with another
32 guy?" Because that's what I wanted to do, I knew what I wanted to have happen and I knew
33 what I wanted to have happen once that happened. I thought I'd conveyed that to her to some
34 degree but I realized that I wasn't real definitive or descriptive. I just thought that was really
35 weird that she thought it was a girl because I always wanted it to be a guy and I would say
36 because I want to see what it's like for you to feel pleasure even though I could see that when
37 me and her would do stuff, it's just because I . . . I needed to be with a man and that's the only
38 way I could justify it. We even did some stuff with . . . I always get so uncomfortable talking
39 about details, but I do think it's important, a dildo and doing some anal stuff with her and then
40 she wanted to try it with me and I liked it. I didn't even understand about the prostate. I think
41 most people, if they don't have any hang-ups they are fine with it – most guys. But for me, I
42 could just tell . . . it was like, "Yes, I'm supposed to be penetrated, to be taken." And then
43 another incident happened later on after we were married and in the Marine Corps that freaked
44 her out – and it's because I enjoyed us doing another situation really similar. I lost myself in the
45 moment and said some things that I'm sure were very troubling for her being married to this
46 person – me. That's another reason why I feel guilty about having married her. But, I just knew.
47 And then when I got divorced and I dated Kristin, who was wonderful, I knew I couldn't marry

1 her and she couldn't marry me anyway because she had a strong religious background and I
2 didn't. I walked away from my religion, I believed in God – I still read the New Testament
3 regularly.
4

5 AJ: Do you feel like you were not accepted at church or wouldn't be accepted at church?
6

7 TP: No, no, I was still in hard core denial thinking I was crazy. And plus, everybody is a damn sinner,
8 there ain't no way around that. So, I guess it just . . . there was a lot of hypocrisy that I just
9 didn't like and then I saw other people of other faiths when I was . . . especially when I was in a
10 prayer group in the desert with people of all different faiths and the chaplain was there. I
11 remember meeting some of the Muslims from there, because I'd known American Muslims, but
12 seeing some from there – from Jordan and a few other Middle Eastern companies that were
13 working in Bahrain, because they have a mercenary . . . not an Army, but they hire people to
14 come be their Army. And to see them pray the way they did and do all that stuff, I'm like,
15 "Wow, that's serious devotion." Daily – five times or six times a day towards Mecca. I still think
16 there's no right answer but I can't say that they're going to hell because they didn't choose to
17 believe in Jesus. It's just ridiculous to me, and that's how she felt, and she said . . . I knew I
18 couldn't marry her for me, I knew I couldn't be a husband. Even though I was still in denial, I
19 knew I couldn't be a husband – I didn't even have to deny about that. Plus I had kids, she
20 needed to have kids and I didn't want to reset that timer. And that's where it goes back to
21 something you mentioned earlier where I think my whole life I knew this was eventually going to
22 happen, because I do talk about this timer. The timer started from when my mom and her mom
23 showed up telling me she was pregnant and I just had to stop. And so I didn't want to start that
24 timer over with Kristin and I felt bad I couldn't tell her that. And she had questions, I'm sure,
25 about me too. So then we broke up and I said after that no more, I can't.
26

27 AJ: So are you into guys? Are you dating a guy now?
28

29 TP: No, I just stayed . . . well, for one, being with a girl was actually enjoyable from . . . I've got nerve
30 endings, I can make it work. I've got an imagination, I can pretend I'm the girl. Me and my ex
31 used to do stuff like that. Actually, me and my ex used to do that quite a bit. I didn't do that
32 with Kristin, I don't think. But, where I would feel like I was the girl even though I obviously
33 wasn't. It felt to me that I was the one being penetrated, and it was nice for me – it probably
34 wasn't for her. At the very least it was very confusing for her. But then after that I just stayed
35 single, it was just easier. Being with a guy . . . I didn't think about it like that, even though every
36 time I looked at porn or read a story I was the girl and I was with a guy. I just couldn't go there
37 because this body is not right.
38

39 AJ: So you're not on a website?
40

41 TP: No, no. Now that being said, my daughter, a few years ago, was worried about me being lonely
42 because I'd been single for almost two decades, not even dated anybody. I had friends that
43 were girls at work but I didn't date anyone. People would tease me, "Oh, you should date so
44 and so." "No, we're just friends." But I tried plenty of fish and I met a girl who, oddly enough,
45 who worked for the State and who now I'm friends with and we hang out once in a while and
46 she knows I'm out. But I remember we went on a few dates and she said, "You've not kissed me
47 good bye yet." I'm like, "Oh, I'm just really uncomfortable, I've been single for so long, it's just

awkward for me.” And then finally after the sixth date she kissed me and she said, “Oh my God, you are uncomfortable,” because I was totally . . . if lips could be thumbs, my lips were all thumbs. So then, oddly enough, I got put back on night crew, which was great, because then I had an excuse to break it off. So we broke it off. And then my daughter goes, “Ehh,” you know, and so the next summer I’ll try it again – like you can only load the barrel once a summer. And so, I dated another girl like three times and she was really thrown off when I asked her if she wanted to go over to my daughter’s house, because my daughter got a new apartment that she got with her roommate. I thought we could go over there and play games because we didn’t know what else to do. And she was like, “Oh no, it’s too early for family.” That stressed her out or something and then the next day she called me and said, “Yeah, we shouldn’t see each other anymore.” Well, that’s weird. So that summer I lasted three dates, I shut it off. Then the following summer, I can’t remember if I followed up immediately that third summer or if I took a summer off, because I might have taken a summer off. But then I remember I finally tried it a third time, the old baseball analogy – three strikes. It was a nurse and she was so philosophically, spiritually, politically . . . it was almost like we were the same person. I loved hanging around with her. I wish to this day I could still be her friend because we just saw so eye-to-eye on so many things. But I shot that in the foot too because when we did break up she said, “Well, we can stay friends.” “No, I got enough friends.” But she doesn’t realize what I went through because what had happened was, also – like with that first girl . . . woman, I was not kissing her goodbye, so it came up. “Yeah, I did this a couple years ago, it was uncomfortable then too.” So then she worked through it, and I didn’t get put on night shift and break off the relationship, and finally one day I was like, “You know what? I’m going to invite her over to my house, maybe we just need to break the ice.” And she was, I could tell, sexually frustrated because it had been a couple of months now and she talked about how women are more fired up in their 40s because they no longer have to worry about pregnancy and all that stuff, and I get that – that makes a whole lot of sense. But, I had her over to my house, we had some dinner, and then we started . . . she started making out with me on the couch and I was . . . I was fine when I was younger, I was just done – I didn’t need to experiment anymore. I didn’t need to find out what it was like and ask questions. She just said, “Oh, you’re really awkward, it’s like being with a 13-year-old boy.” And I’m like, “Yeah, I know, I’m sorry about that.” She said, “No, it’s OK, would you be more comfortable if we went down to your room?” So then we went down to my room and I performed oral on her and I was enjoying making her happy and thinking, “I’m supposed to be the one that to be the one with a vagina, why am I doing this?” And I’m like, “Why do I think I’m the one who is supposed to have a vagina?” I’m having this huge wrestling match in my brain like I so often did have when I was younger. Then she wanted to return the favor and I’m not . . . a certain part of me isn’t showing any interest in this whatsoever, even though I was feeling good about making her feel good and helping her release some pent up frustrations. I told her, “I’m sorry, it’s the old saying – it’s me, not you, but it really is.” I couldn’t tell her because I just realized that I can’t even pretend to try to like women anymore. And so she left and then we broke up the next day and I said, “No, we can’t be friends,” even though I should have said yeah let’s be friends. And then I was done. That’s when I really started reading about it, other people’s accounts. That’s the thing, I knew about Christine Jorgensen but there was a girl who posted her transition video. Her name is Sona Avedian, she’s on my friends list on Facebook. I saw her video on YouTube and she was a former Marine, or was a Marine like I was.

AJ: Oh, OK.

- 1
2 TP: And to watch her transformation . . . it was like you don't have to be beautiful like Christine
3 Jorgensen to do this. Oddly enough, she turned out beautiful in the end, but I remember when
4 she was going through a phase that was very awkward and she knew she didn't look that great.
5 At that point in her video, she made the one statement that I think probably saved my life. I was
6 only praying to die, but at what point does a person become suicidal? I don't know, thank God.
7 But I've got a funny feeling it just happens. Would it have been two days later? Would it have
8 been a month later? A year later? Would I have made it to the end of my life? I don't know.
9 But her line said, "I'm not doing this for you, I'm doing this for me." And that's when I realized –
10 yeah, you don't do this for other people, you don't do this for your children obviously, you don't
11 do it for your mom, your dad, you don't do it for society. But you know what? You also don't
12 not do it for your children, you don't not do it for society, you don't keep pleasing them and
13 living your life like you think makes them happy because you're just still miserable. Your whole
14 life you're looking for some type of meaning that you can't ever seem to find.
15
16 AJ: And her name is Sona?
17
18 TP: Sona Avedian. Something like that. I can pull it up on my Facebook and let you know. But it
19 was amazing. And there were lots of transition videos that I had seen of girls that had
20 transitioned, but so many of them were so pretty already. But to see her as a tough, lean, mean
21 Marine Corps machine . . . and then she gained weight too, not nearly as much as I did, but a lot
22 of weight too. And was miserable and talked about the misery of being married and knowing
23 but not saying anything. So yeah. I still thank her to this day.
24
25 AJ: Oh wow, that's awesome. Online has been such a huge . . .
26
27 TP: It is and a lot of people say, "Oh yeah, this is the work of the devil." "No, this is the work of God,
28 finally helping to set us free." I do think . . . I believe in God, and God oddly enough . . . the
29 reason I came out on January 21st – January 20, I was lying in bed. I pray every night before bed
30 ever since I can remember. And then I pray to God throughout the day sometimes.
31
32 AJ: Sure.
33
34 TP: And I've never yelled out loud at God. I've had other people say that God does these . . . "How
35 can God do this?" "How could . . .?" There's always a reason, I don't know why. Sometimes
36 awful things happen, I still believe there's a reason for it – lessons to be learned. I yelled at God.
37 I said, "God, I need you to bail me out or just let me die and come back as a girl, I'll try this all
38 over again as long as I can come back as a girl. Or maybe, just maybe," because I didn't think it
39 was possible, "Let me know it's OK to transition because maybe I'm supposed to be
40 transitioning, maybe I'm not catching your message and I'm supposed to transition." I don't
41 know why I thought that and I was driving myself crazy, that's why I called the VA, "Please tell
42 me I'm crazy." I wake up the next day, I have to work from home because we're doing patching
43 and we do that from home. And HR has called me before to shut off people's accounts. HR
44 called me and my brain said, "They're calling to lay you off." They had just done layoffs a month
45 ago and I had thought that was pretty rude to do that right before Christmas, why didn't they
46 wait until January. They did a second round of layoffs that no one knew about except for a few
47 people and it was January 21st. And I just took that as a sign from God to say, "Yes, here, you're

- 1 getting laid off, you know you can't transition there." Two of my best friends, they worked for
2 me at Piper and I was now working for them at Carewise.
3
- 4 AJ: At where? I'm sorry . . .
- 5
- 6 TP: Carewise Health. They're actually out of Louisville, now I think Philadelphia – purchases of
7 companies have happened since I left. But I couldn't do that in front of them. Even though
8 they're really cool guys and I've come out to them and they're both good about it, I couldn't do
9 that at work like that – not there. I can do that where I'm at now, oddly enough, because they
10 don't know me for a decade and a half like these two. And so I thought, "You know what? I can
11 go in there, I can start fresh, I don't have to act fake," because I used to plan when I would go
12 into a room how I was going to act and how I was going to control a room. It was like an attack
13 plan, like drawing up a football play. I would do that almost every day of my life, every meeting
14 of my life, every . . . it was weird. I thought maybe everybody does it . . .
15
- 16 AJ: That's actually not a bad strategy.
- 17
- 18 TP: It worked. I got promotions and things like that.
- 19
- 20 AJ: So tell me about any medical interventions that you have taken on so far – to the extent that
21 you're comfortable. If you don't want to talk about it, that's fine.
22
- 23 TP: I can talk about anything and everything. I'm an open book. I'm going to share my sexuality
24 because I think people need to hear – yeah, OK I'm sexual. Sorry, I've done some things that are
25 weird.
26
- 27 AJ: So you're a pansexual, you never said. I want you to answer the other question, but you never
28 said if you're heterosexual. I know that you . . .
29
- 30 TP: Ideally I'm a heterosexual female who dates men – ideally. That being said, I love people. I
31 could probably be intimate with anybody, which I know the religious people are going to go ape
32 shit over, but I just mean that if I can't have what I think is right for me, because I don't know if a
33 guy would take me being transgender.
34
- 35 AJ: Well let me assure you that very many transgender women have . . .
36
- 37 TP: Husbands?
- 38
- 39 AJ: Husbands, boyfriends, booty calls, lovers, one-night stands – they have it all.
40
- 41 TP: I am hopeful but I do say that . . .
42
- 43 AJ: That world exists.
44
- 45 TP: I do know that, I'm very just afraid of not having it work for me.
46
- 47 AJ: In fact there are many guys who are very interested in trans women.

1
2 TP: That's true.
3
4 AJ: So. Tell me about the medical stuff though.
5
6 TP: But because I've been with a woman already so I think at the very least I'm bi, but I admit that
7 I'm probably pansexual. I don't hold nothing against nobody. But at the same time I'd feel bad
8 with a transsexual woman or a woman because I think that would be because I would be settling
9 and that's not fair to them. I don't know that for sure because sometimes when you meet
10 somebody and you just fall in love, love happens. Like shit happens, love happens. So it's
11 possible, I can't say it's not possible because anything is possible. I just know that in my mind,
12 my whole life I've seen me with a guy.
13
14 AJ: So medical.
15
16 TP: So medical . . . I started losing weight right away. My daughter says that's just because I was
17 honest with myself. I would go to people, because of my diabetes . . . education classes,
18 therapists, "Why do you over eat?" And they'd have a list of twelve things: For fun? To reward
19 yourself? For depression? For happiness? Boredom? And they'd get to the end of this list of
20 twelve things, and it happened more than once at a couple different places. I'd say, "Yes." "To
21 which one? All of them?" I'd say, "Yes." I'd think, "How have they not heard this before?"
22 They said they did but they said it was always surprising when they heard, "All of them." Usually
23 that makes their job harder because they're trying to focus on the one thing and trying to help
24 you with it. So there was nowhere to focus. I've gained weight recently and it's stress – I only
25 eat now when I'm stressed. Over eat, I should say, when I'm stressed. And that's good to know.
26
27 AJ: Are you taking hormones?
28
29 TP: Yeah, I started hormones.
30
31 AJ: Because hormones make you eat.
32
33 TP: I know that too.
34
35 AJ: So it's a little bit more than just stress.
36
37 TP: This is true, this is true. Because my endocrinologist warned me about this, especially having
38 been Type 2 diabetic in the past. So, I started hormones on July 4th because it was an important
39 date for me because I was two months premature, born May 5th. I loved Independence Day
40 because of the bicentennial, from 1976, so my mom told me back then, "You know, you were
41 supposed to be born around July 4th, you might have been an Independence Day baby had I not
42 had you premature." So I was going to start hormones on May 5th, because I like to do things
43 that are meaningful – like my tattoo and other stuff. I wanted to do it on my birthday, but then I
44 realized, "You know what? I was supposed to be born on July 4th, I was supposed to be born a
45 girl, let's fix both of these things. And it's Independence Day, I'm declaring my independence
46 from testosterone." So that's why I settled on July 4th, so luckily I got everything lined up and

- 1 had patches ready to go and started patches on July 4th. And so, yeah, I'm sitting on my butt
2 check – right where you put your patch.
3
- 4 AJ: Did you do electrolysis?
5
- 6 TP: I've been doing laser. I started doing laser about a month after my daughter's wedding because
7 I knew . . . when I first came out to myself, that January 21st, first of all I was listening to a song
8 called, "Pompeii" and I love the song but I had the words messed up. I am listening to the song
9 and I'm hearing words that sound different than what I'd always thought it was, and I thought,
10 "You know what? You're just thinking this because you're going crazy." I went online and I
11 looked it up and I go, "No," because the words I was now hearing were the right words. It's like
12 I suddenly was hearing them clearly when I hadn't been hearing them clearly. And it's talking
13 about how nothing has changed even though you think you've changed things, because you've
14 never really changed anything. It's my song, it's my favorite song because it's exactly how I live
15 my life. I was expecting things to change even though I was never even trying to change them. I
16 just knew then that I was going to do all this, so I wrote down 12 steps, because I was like, "You
17 know you're going to transition all the way." Well, that's not right to think that – maybe you're
18 going to find a spot where you're comfortable and you can stop there and be happy and make
19 everybody else happy too. So I wrote 12 steps and some of them overlap and I've been doing
20 them. Actually, it started off originally, I think, as 8 steps but then it grew to like 12 or 14. But,
21 hormones I started them, laser I started right after my daughter's . . . about a month after her
22 wedding. I have not talked to surgeons yet but that's inevitable because now, after I've gone
23 through this many stages, I do stop and pause like I told myself I would, and I know a lot of
24 people who are like, "It's a self-fulfilling prophecy." "Yeah, it is, sorry." And, so I'm going to
25 transition fully.
26
- 27 AJ: But you plan to do . . .
28
- 29 TP: Yeah, I plan to if I can afford it.
30
- 31 AJ: Gender confirmation surgery.
32
- 33 TP: Yeah, I'll upset everybody by . . . here's the thing, when I was 370 pounds, people would say,
34 "Man, you're going to die, you're never going to live . . . you're going to work until you're dead
35 and you're never going to get to retirement." I'm like, "I ain't making it to retirement, I'll be
36 lucky if I make it to 55," is what I used to say. Five is my favorite number and 55 was just a good
37 year. And so I would always say that. I now realize that I was going to die, probably, very young.
38 My A1Cs were always over 11, they were bad. They wanted to put me on insulin and I changed
39 doctors. Now that I'm getting better I realize that my retirement money is irrelevant. I wouldn't
40 make it to it if I weren't transitioning. So I'm going to, sadly, be one of those people that I will
41 ruin my 401k.
42
- 43 AJ: So you're going to use that to do your surgery?
44
- 45 TP: Yeah.
46
- 47 AJ: I think your medical insurance might help.

1
2 TP: Maybe, some of it.
3
4 AJ: At the State I'm pretty sure.
5
6 TP: It's listed as an exclusion.
7
8 AJ: Yeah, but you can fight that. The American Care Act just said it cannot be excluded.
9
10 TP: Yeah, an exclusion does say that some stuff can be done with a doctor.
11
12 AJ: Unless it's medically . . .
13
14 TP: Like they won't cover laser and electrolysis.
15
16 AJ: Unless it's medically necessary – take my word for it.
17
18 TP: See my facial hair is the most stressful part. So I've been paying that out of pocket.
19
20 AJ: No, yeah – I get it.
21
22 TP: That's the beautiful thing about hormones even though I wish I could look pretty and have a
23 figure. But, even if I don't, I'm already so happy because my body hair used to upset me and I
24 wasn't even that hairy. And now that I'm . . . I just feel more right.
25
26 AJ: That's wonderful.
27
28 TP: I don't even know how to explain it, it's just more right.
29
30 AJ: No, that's beautiful.
31
32 TP: So even if nothing else happens, I'm already happier just from that standpoint. I remember
33 when I did start . . . I did actually start . . . oh my gosh, I'm having a brain fart . . . the
34 testosterone blocker, spironolactone, in June in preparation for my July 4th independence. I
35 remember a few days into that, like four or five days, I'm like, "This has got to be a placebo
36 effect." And I talked to Phillip, my second therapist – because I'm on my third now for this
37 gender stuff. He said it could be a placebo but he's heard other people mention it, and then I
38 researched online, I just remember sitting at home, it was a Saturday . . . or a Sunday, it was
39 definitely the weekend though because I was on my couch, and I said, "Man, I feel pretty good
40 right now." Not good, as in, "Wow, my favorite team just did something good." I'm a
41 sportsaholic, I became one. Or dancing, I love dancing, people say, "Oh my gosh, you seem like
42 you're having so much fun." Well of course I'm having fun when I'm dancing. I just felt good
43 and I explained it to him like this because this is how it felt to me that afternoon, I said, "Man, I
44 haven't felt just . . ." because I always was silly, I always was trying to make people laugh, I
45 always said, "You always have to try to laugh no matter how serious the situation is because life
46 is tough enough." I was sitting there feeling good without trying to make anyone laugh for the
47 first time since I was probably 11 or 12. I just remember that distinctly and I'm like, "I

1 remember when I could sit around the house when I was a kid and just feel good, and I feel
 2 really good right now.” And I think it’s because . . . I remember I had this theory that my body
 3 could not handle testosterone, especially my brain, and I just thought . . . where do you come up
 4 with this cockamamie stuff? I’m into science, I’m into all that stuff, and I took a lot of science
 5 classes and courses in college and high school – science/math magnet program, all that stuff.
 6 But this was stuff where I’m like, “No, no, you’re coming up with this stuff off the top of your
 7 head.” But something, now after that spironolactone, I do think that my body . . . parts of my
 8 body do not react well with other parts of my body. My hormones coming off testosterone,
 9 don’t work with, I think, the receptors in my body. I kind of wish I could donate my body to
 10 science and they could figure things out at the end, where they would go, “Not only is Toni’s
 11 brain structured more like a woman’s, we’re finding that the receptors in Toni’s body are more
 12 receptive to estrogen.” I know that’s cockamamie and far-fetched but there is just something
 13 that always bothered me that way and then when I started taking that, to feel that, maybe . . .
 14 again, self-fulfilling prophecy, placebo effect, yeah maybe . . . something just felt that different.
 15 It wasn’t euphoria, I know a lot of people said that. It was almost just like a mellow, you know
 16 what I mean? Just a comfortable mellow, no longer that whole life . . . you know what I mean? I
 17 can’t say I hated life but it was . . . I was lucky, I saw the world as a Marine, I have kids that were
 18 cool and awesome, I had relationships that at one time were loving. I’ve been very lucky. That’s
 19 another thing too, I feel like . . . I hope God has given me the right path and I talked to God
 20 about it all the time, because I get why people think it’s a slap in the face especially when you’ve
 21 lived a life like mine where I have to admit that I’ve been very lucky – to the point where I’m
 22 almost survivor’s guilt.

23
 24 AJ: Well, we’re at an hour and a half now, Toni.

25
 26 TP: Wow, sorry.

27
 28 AJ: No, that’s fine. But, just . . . is there anything else that you want to say that I may not have
 29 asked or that you want to be sure that people who are looking at this 20 years from now, 30
 30 years from now, 50 years from now, should know. And maybe I should pose it to you in a
 31 question. Where do you think the world will be 50 years from now for transgender people?

32
 33 TP: I hope it will be inclusive. I don’t know what will happen. Political turmoil, natural disaster –
 34 these things, I think, destroy any gains that we make for any of the LGBT community. So
 35 hopefully none of that happens. And if none of that happens, there is a chance it will be better.
 36 I think specifically about transsexual people, transgender, especially . . . you know, younger kids,
 37 because if I would have been dealt with when I was younger, in my generation, guess what? It
 38 wouldn’t have worked out so well. But, I think nowadays we need to make sure that it works
 39 out well because this is real. If I could have transitioned and been accepted at a younger age, I
 40 would have been so much better off. I had a good life, don’t get me wrong, but it was because I
 41 was doing what I was told and acting. I get it, a lot of people say that’s what life is – but no,
 42 there’s more to life than that. I want them to have more to life before they’re 46 or 47. How
 43 old is Caitlin?

44
 45 AJ: 65.

TP: Yeah, I mean when I see kids that get . . . I get it, not having them take hormones but to block them I understand. I used to not think that way either, but because I know how I would have . . . I would have so been ready to do that at a very young age and people don't get that. Because they saw me play baseball and run around with a toy gun when I ran around with dolls too and played house. I was a girl with Colleen and Darla and I would have preferred to do that more. That's the way, I think in a way, that I do believe God had a say in all of this, and I was born perfect as a transsexual. If I was born a girl and followed the rules, I wouldn't have learned some of the valuable things I learned in this lifetime. I think every life, because I believe in more than one, we learn lessons that we add on to previous lessons we learn in previous lives and I needed to learn some things about being a boy even though I'm not a boy. My soul is a girl, but it's going to allow me to be freer in my future – future lives. I think I'll have an understanding of boys better . . . as weird as that sounds.

AJ: Wow, that's a great way to end this. Thank you, Toni, so much for sharing your story and your life.

TP: Well thanks for listening.

AJ: Good to luck in everything.

TP: Thanks.

AJ: Thank you.

TP: Thank you.

Addendum to an Interview

This is an addendum to an interview I did back on November 23rd, 2015. The interview was for the Transgender Oral History Project at the University of Minnesota. I'd come out on January 21st, 2014 because I simply couldn't fight it any more.

About two decades before I came out I began giving up, shutting down, and frankly only worried about my kids, which kept me going. Food was my distraction, my drug. I more or less eliminated any social life, stopped trying to date, and the only thing I did of note was work and coach some of my children's team which was fun. My weight went all the way up to nearly 370, I became a Type II diabetic at 30 something and settled in at 320 pounds for the better part of a decade and figured that was just my weight.

A funny thing happened when I came out, my daughter attributed it to living open and honestly which I think is right, I started to lose weight. I didn't do much but become more open, social, and active. OH, and I started to care about life, I wanted to live THIS life. My authentic life.

1
2 The interview reflects so much of that optimism that I had, even though many of my transgender friends
3 had kind and wise words of warning that storm clouds still could be looming ahead, but I figured that
4 “my” slow and methodical course would help me navigate around them. Life suddenly seemed easy to
5 live after a lifetime of difficulty. I had this figured out like few others had.

6
7 While I reviewed the transcript of the interview I thought to myself “this is very incomplete, and
8 obviously immature” and I had spoken too soon. As the famous radio host Paul Harvey used to say “and
9 now for the rest of the story.”

10 *The Rest of the Story*

11
12 Now after two plus years of being out and actually transitioning, I have seen the negativity and
13 depression that can come from losing the respect of loved ones, or simply any non-demeaning
14 interaction. My mother and father I expected to struggle due to their age and generational differences.
15 However, I didn’t expect to have to basically lose any semblance of a relationship with my mother. For
16 my own well-being I had to tell her to call me if there is every an emergency or if she wants to talk to me
17 respectfully.

18
19 That was almost a year ago, I’ve not heard from her. Once about four months ago I called her only to
20 hear toxic and angry words that left me shaken and down. Fortunately I had been working hard to
21 steady myself the previous few months and I weathered the storm and accepted that reality I may never
22 speak with my mother again for my own well-being, but it still hurts. When I was little I feared I would
23 be viewed as crazy and cast away, this almost confirms that. It sadly happens to too many transgender
24 children, and thankfully I was a grown and self-sufficient one.

25 Being a late transitioner has its definite cons, but the one big pro is that I am able to take care of myself.
26 I have built a career, gained enough wisdom to make sure I found a safer job environment all though I
27 took a pay cut for that security. There is a roof over my head, and I can afford food (though too regularly
28 as I have returned to a weight that’s been sitting around 310.) I am not homeless, didn’t have to take to
29 prostitution to stay alive, and again have learned a lot the last year for sure and since I have been out in
30 general. It’s not easy, but it is better than life had been before I came out. A lot better, even without
31 mom and a few others.

32
33 My daughter. She is LGBT friendly, but she admitted that she was finding it difficult that her this was her
34 father who was transgender and that it shouldn’t be any different. Things began to diminish notable
35 once I began actually showing signs due to HRT (hormone replacement therapy.) Though I went slow
36 with all my family, dressing more masculine around them, not working on my voice, my daughter lives in
37 Chicago and well. She did not see me as often, so the changes I fear seemed more dramatic.

38
39 We both reacted poorly when my mom was in the hospital when my daughter saw me dressed more
40 feminine with makeup and dangling earrings in. Her and my bother asked me to take my earrings out,
41 and as I was about to protest at how petty that seemed, I took them out. When they asked me why I
42 was going so fast with this, that I did not handle so well. I sternly reminded them I had been out over
43 three years, lots of people start presenting the day they come out. That was the last time I have actually

1 seen my daughter, she does not respond to my voice mails, emails, or texts. I tried a lot that first month
2 or two. Once recently when I found out she gave birth to her second son, I found out at a family
3 wedding she was not at.

5 When it comes to my brother, he is a busy guy and we never really talked a lot. Just a few times a year,
6 that's about the same. He's been cool, but a little awkward, but he is worried about mom and dad. Sadly
7 he now has to all by himself because even my dad, who I was pretty close with me isn't really
8 communicating with me either, and he used to visit multiple times a week and often spend the nights to
9 watch movies. That was before I came out.

11 Dad's done an admirable job, and when I visit him or bump into him he's become nice again. He went
12 through a stage of giving me an extraordinary amount of misogynistic and queerphobic shit, which is
13 sort of his way with everyone, but he'd never done that with me before but now I was suddenly an
14 ACTUAL queer, and his... Queer... Kid. His former football playing, baseball throwing, Marine Corps
15 marching kid who'd done well as a man now suddenly not? Not what? A man? Or all those things? He is
16 confused, but I don't think angry, more just uncomfortable.

18 He has not visited since. He did have to stay with me once, for about three weeks to recover after a
19 heart attack and procedure. I could tell he did not want to, but no one else could or would
20 accommodate him and he didn't want to be in a nursing home. It was more awkward for him than me,
21 he was on my turf, and I was hoping he'd see I am still all those things, just minus the man part. It didn't
22 work that way. As once he was able to live alone again, he's not visited since.

24 There have been a few times I have visited him, because he is pleasant and doesn't give me a hard time
25 any more, just a rare joke to test my funny bone. I oblige, sometimes joke back to keep him in check. It's
26 not toxic to me, though some not understanding the context of our relationship might think it still is. No,
27 the only problem is he is afraid to visit me. Just recently he left a number of boxes of gifts for my
28 grandkids and me. He won't visit them anymore either, because he has a grudge with my son and his
29 wife unrelated to me. It does help me not take it so personal, but wait, he shouldn't have a grudge with
30 me just being me should he? Luckily I know the answer is he has no reason to, and it is after all his
31 problem. In a way he did visit me I guess, just not in person. Perhaps, it's a baby step?

33 Ultimately, in the end, things all in all are okay, but I went through a bad first two years of transition and
34 can see why so many struggle even as they are getting the help we need with HRT and living openly,
35 honestly, and authentically. It really is far more difficult to deal with the loss of even just a few loved
36 ones that you realize. You find yourself happy with you finally, only to find so many that are important
37 to you unhappy with you.

39 This is why it is a must to persevere, be in therapy if you can, thankfully I was, because you trade self-
40 unhappiness, and it is a culture shock, with others. You knew you had to live your life a certain way or
41 they wouldn't accept you and damn sometimes it sucks to be right. And when they celebrated all the
42 other things in your past that made you proud or even happy, they celebrated with you. But this, this
43 one MOST important celebration in your life. Which is you, you yourself, finally being happy being open
44 as your authentic self. They not only refuse to celebrate, they show disdain, and some of it even feels

1 like hate.

2

3 Thankfully things are improving, and I have always had great supportive friends and co-workers, so I
4 consider myself as a lucky one. Actually I know I am! And yet I too have felt the depths of despair all
5 over again, had to find my way back up from the same low that happened for the reasons I always
6 feared. That they'd reject me like I thought I would, if I stopped rejecting me. This is why we end up
7 navigating our ways into new family units not based on blood shared genetically, but rather from blood
8 spilled in a shared experience.

9

10 Sincerely,

11 Antoinette "Toni" ←with an "I" ☺

12 August 15, 2018