

Donna Ewing
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

March 27, 2017



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

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

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

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

1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Donna Ewing -DE
3

4 AJ: How are you?

5 DE: Oh, I'm fine.

6 AJ: Hey, so. My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral
7 History Project at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota Libraries, and today is March 27,
8 2017. And I am at the Augustana Nursing Home today with Donna Ewing. Hey, Donna!

9 DE: I'm 84 years old. I don't have sex anymore, I just dream about it.

10 AJ: Just dream about it! So Donna, this is our second interview. We've already done one, which was
11 really amazing, and you know, I don't know if you use the internet or not, but when I put your picture up
12 on facebook, so many people were like "Oh my god, how is Donna, tell her I said hi, we miss her, is she
13 still alive, I can't believe she's still alive," like - you have a lot of fans out there, Donna!

14 DE: Yeah.

15 AJ: A lot of people really, really love you. How does that make you feel?

16 DE: Makes me feel good, but. I don't - you know, when I was working there, everybody...would take
17 me out and see me, and come out. But now when you get old and you can't get out as much and you're
18 in a nursing home, people forget all about you.

19 AJ: Yeah.

20 DE: You're not a person anymore, you're just a number.

21 AJ: Just a number. Well, this project is to keep your memory alive, to keep your thoughts alive, to
22 let the world know that you are a person and you are still here. So - wow, you just had a birthday.
23 Turned eighty-four years old. That's pretty amazing.

24 DE: Yeah. For the life I've lived in my days, I never thought I'd live this old.

25 AJ: Yeah, well - tell me about some of that life.

26 DE: Well, I traveled a lot, had lots of sex, and I...I guess I lived a reckless life. I mean, I was popular
27 and as far as sex goes, the gay kids liked me just as friends, I never had sex with gay people because I
28 had a very small pecker and they liked the big peckers. But I had a lot of friends that were gay and they
29 liked me because I was always full of fun and I had nice parties and went and traveled a lot and did fun
30 things.

31 AJ: Where'd you travel around to? What are some of the places you went to?

32 DE: I went to Holland twice. I went to England. I went to Canada, different parts of Canada. I went to
33 San Francisco, Seattle, Washington, and...New York, twice.

- 1 AJ: You went to Mexico.
- 2 DE: Yeah, Mexico.
- 3 AJ: Were you performing when you went on these trips, or...?
- 4 DE: Sometimes I was and sometimes I wasn't. So, I used to work for my father in the summertime,
5 and the wintertime there was nothing to do on the farm, so I would get money from my folks and I'd
6 travel in the wintertime, you know. Go different places.
- 7 AJ: You showed me a picture of you when you were a very young man. Can you hold that picture
8 up?...I think we may have put it over on this pile over here...Let's see.
- 9 DE: Yeah, see if it's there.
- 10 AJ: So you worked on the farm?
- 11 DE: Yeah, I cooked for a while, and a hired man stuff. My father was a big farmer.
- 12 AJ: Yeah? What did you guys grow on the farm?
- 13 DE: Grain, flax, wheat, barley, oats, potatoes.
- 14 AJ: For...sale, or just...?
- 15 DE: No, for sale. One time he was - he would've retired, he was a millionaire. So I was spoiled when I
16 was younger.
- 17 AJ: Wow. You were spoiled?
- 18 DE: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: Wow. You were a handsome young guy.
- 20 DE: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: But that wasn't...
- 22 DE: I don't know if I was - I should've been a hermaphrodite or what, but I had a very small pecker.
23 He took me to the University, I mean Rochester, for a checkup one time because I had a hard time
24 learning and stuff, and they said that I was very feminine, and I had more women genes in my body than
25 I had men, and I had a very small pecker. When I got a hard-on, it was about five inches. When I went in
26 drag, it was about as big as my finger, so I put a band-aid over it.
- 27 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 28 DE: I didn't have to hide it. Some of the kids had to wear two girdles and tape their big peckers
29 down, but that wasn't mine.
- 30 AJ: Really? Let's see some pictures of you as a performer...Oh. You loved the red hair
- 31 DE: Yeah.

- 1 AJ: That one's pretty....Then you went with the white hair.
- 2 DE: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: Platinum.
- 4 DE: Yeah.
- 5 AJ: So, who has more fun? Blondes or redheads?
- 6 DE: I think redheads have more fun. Blonde makes you look cheap.
- 7 AJ: You think so?
- 8 DE: Here, this one committed suicide. This one died from cancer.
- 9 AJ: Really?
- 10 DE: These are -- these two youngsters, he was a jeweler.
- 11 AJ: A jeweler?
- 12 DE: And that was his lover.
- 13 AJ: Oh, wow. So friends of yours.
- 14 DE: Yeah, this was at a house, I was at a party and I was laying on piano.
- 15 AJ: Wow. That's gorgeous.
- 16 DE: Sad to go, but...
- 17 AJ: So Donna Dawn.
- 18 DE: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: Tell me about Donna Dawn.
- 20 DE: Oh, I was a - I did comedy, I did a ballet number. Two ropes in my garden. I was in a babydoll
21 outfit, and I was fat. And then I did a comic strip with different pettycoats that says don't pay here, you
22 know. I had tassels on my tits that went around.
- 23 AJ: Uh huh. Little tassels?
- 24 DE: Yeah. And sign that said pay as you enter.
- 25 AJ: Say it again?
- 26 DE: A sign: "Pay as you enter."
- 27 AJ: Oh, pay as you enter. A sign, okay!
- 28 DE: Yeah. And that was from our party.
- 29 AJ: Nice. So all of this traveling, did you - like, did you go with your boyfriends, your -

- 1 DE: No, just myself.
- 2 AJ: By yourself?
- 3 DE: But I'd meet interesting people wherever I went.
- 4 AJ: Were you ever married?
- 5 DE: Nope.
- 6 AJ: Never married.
- 7 DE: Could've got married twice, but one was an alcoholic and the other one was from a good family
8 and I didn't want to marry him because he was real reckless and he killed himself in a car accident,
9 speeding, and he hit a bridge and killed himself.
- 10 AJ: Oh boy.
- 11 DE: But there was difference in our age and he came from a wealthy family and I wanted him to
12 have the best, you know?
- 13 AJ: Yeah.
- 14 DE: He was kind of a playboy.
- 15 AJ: You came from a pretty wealthy family too!
- 16 DE: Yeah.
- 17 AJ: So - but you had some long relationships in your life.
- 18 DE: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: Do you feel like you had love in your life?
- 20 DE: I don't know so much love. I knew I was good for sex. I felt like I was a sex machine, that's all I
21 was good for, is sex.
- 22 AJ: Oh, wow. How did that make you feel?
- 23 DE: Bad.
- 24 AJ: Yeah?
- 25 DE: Cause I mean...there's men that were married that said I satisfied more than their wives did
26 cause I did things to their bodies and stuff. I was a hornbag, let's face it.
- 27 AJ: Yeah?
- 28 DE: I knew how to get a man wild.
- 29 AJ: You know how to make them feel good.
- 30 DE: Yeah.

- 1 AJ: But they -
- 2 DE: You can't live on that alone.
- 3 AJ: No, you can't. So they - but they wouldn't commit to you, they wouldn't...
- 4 DE: No, they just wanted - use me and said they love me and wanted to go away, but...I guess I was
5 smart enough that I knew that eventually, if I did what they wanted me to do, they would hate me,
6 because I wanted - she loves him, but you want the best for him, you know what I mean?
- 7 AJ: Right, right.
- 8 DE: You don't want to drag him down.
- 9 AJ: No, that's very true. So Donna, when did you have surgery?
- 10 DE: I think it was...19...I was...I think twenty six or twenty four.
- 11 AJ: So very young.
- 12 DE: Yeah.
- 13 AJ: And you're - I think the last time we talked, you told me your father was supportive, right?
- 14 DE: Not at first. My mother was and my sister was, but after I had the change, and they found out
15 how happy I was, he finally came around. At first he was against me.
- 16 AJ: Mmm. But he paid for it though, right?
- 17 DE: No he didn't.
- 18 AJ: No?
- 19 DE: I was on the search program. In fact, after I had the change, he gave me a nice car.
- 20 AJ: Oh, really. How did you pay for it?
- 21 DE: Huh?
- 22 AJ: How did you pay for it?
- 23 DE: I was on a search program for Donald Hastings. He did ten people down at the university. It was
24 supposed to be our ten year program where they study us, you know. We were guinea pigs. But the
25 program, after a while, it ran out of money. I had to pay for my own electrolysis and buy my own
26 clothes. Some of them got their clothes bought and electrolysis bought. But some of us got short
27 because they ran out of money.
- 28 AJ: Oh, really. Huh. So what - how did you feel after the surgery? Was it...
- 29 DE: For me, it was...I felt good. Easy for me, because my voice, and everything, I don't have a lot of
30 Adam's apple. A lot of people talk to me and they didn't know I was a sex change and the other ones
31 around me, they could tell they were sex changed. Their Adam's apple showed, they had deep voices.
32 But they never clocked me.

- 1 AJ: Never clocked you, huh.
- 2 DE: No, they thought I was real.
- 3 AJ: Yeah. Well, you are real.
- 4 DE: And when I told them what I was, they couldn't believe it.
- 5 AJ: Really.
- 6 DE: That was a g - in the picture when I lost a lot of weight, right there with the fur on.
- 7 AJ: Which one?
- 8 DE: With the fan.
- 9 AJ: Oh, with the fan. This one here?
- 10 DE: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: Where was that taken?
- 12 DE: At the Gay 90s.
- 13 AJ: So you worked at the Gay 90s.
- 14 DE: Yeah.
- 15 AJ: For a long time.
- 16 DE: Twenty-one years.
- 17 AJ: Twenty-one years. You met a lot of people there.
- 18 DE: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: One of the people who you met, you showed me a picture. RuPaul!
- 20 DE: Yeah, he was there twice.
- 21 AJ: Really.
- 22 DE: As an entertainer.
- 23 AJ: And that's you in the photo with him.
- 24 DE: Yeah.
- 25 AJ: So he's a big superstar now.
- 26 DE: Yeah.
- 27 AJ: Who are some of the other people you met at the Gay 90s?
- 28 DE: Oh, I met...oh, what was her name. She was Italian and she...she got kicked out of the United

- 1 States, she's a rock girl. Um...she sang, she was an entertainer, I met her. We had lunch together.
2 Eartha.
- 3 AJ: Eartha Kitt? No...
- 4 DE: She's the one that assaulted the president and went to another country to live for a long time
5 before she came back. She sang like a pussycat.
- 6 AJ: Oh, my goodness. I will think of her name before we leave here today. Did you ever perform at
7 the 90s?
- 8 DE: Yeah.
- 9 AJ: Yeah? You get a lot of tips?
- 10 DE: No, not so much. I got a lot of wine bought for me, and I got some nice tricks to go home.
- 11 AJ: Oh, okay. Wow. You...you worked there for a long, long long time. Twenty one years. That's a
12 long time.
- 13 DE: Mmhmm.
- 14 AJ: Any - so no regrets after your surgery, huh?
- 15 DE: No. Only - only regret, I wish I was - didn't, was in better health and could read and write and
16 have a better education. I mean...could have been smarter and I could have did more. You know?
- 17 AJ: Mmhm. Right.
- 18 DE: I did all I could with what I had, you know.
- 19 AJ: Yeah. So. When did you know that you wanted to be a woman? That you were a woman?
- 20 DE: Oh, when I lived on the farm I used to dress up all the time and go to parties and stuff in drag. I
21 used to even go out in the bunkhouse and the men were flabbergasted, because they - I ordered some
22 nice clothes and I looked good, you know, wig and all that. They were surprised I looked as good as I did.
23 And I used to dress up in Mama's clothes when I lived with my mother years ago. And I went to the big
24 cities and I remember Halloween parties and Christmas parties. And I'd go in drag. And I used to drive
25 my dad's big Chrysler. I wore a fur coat and when there were cops out in front they'd say "She's real." I'd
26 have a nice dress and fur and a nice purse. And I got in and drove away in my dad's big car.
- 27 AJ: Oh wow.
- 28 DE: They thought I was real.
- 29 AJ: So the police never bothered you?
- 30 DE: No.
- 31 AJ: Do you think being transgender, did it ever affect you to get jobs?
- 32 DE: No, not me, because I worked at the 90s and I cleaned houses. I was lucky enough with my

- 1 education and I worked for strippers and gay people at the 90s. I was lucky - I always had jobs and I
2 worked for a gay publishing company, and worked for them for a few years. And I always - they always -
3 they all knew what I was, but I mean, I fit in, you know?
- 4 AJ: Right.
- 5 DE: And I guess the best thing I had was my personality.
- 6 AJ: Yeah. Fun. Everybody liked to be around you.
- 7 DE: Yeah. Yeah. I was a party girl.
- 8 AJ: Right. So, I'm trying to imagine - so you worked at the 90s. You probably would sleep 'til, what,
9 noon, one o'clock in the afternoon?
- 10 DE: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: And then party all night?
- 12 DE: Well, I'd go to work at five o'clock and the bar closed at two, and then sometimes we had a
13 drink or two after the bar closed, so I probably wouldn't get to bed 'til three, three thirty. And I sleep 'til
14 twelve, one o'clock. And then I go, sometimes I go - my mother lived with me, and I'd go shopping
15 sometimes, or just have lunch with somebody, and...
- 16 AJ: Oh. So your mother lived here in the Twin Cities?
- 17 DE: Yeah.
- 18 AJ: You said your mother was very accepting, so you guys - clearly you had a good relationship,
19 then.
- 20 DE: Yeah, with my mother.
- 21 AJ: Yeah. She - did she say she knew that you were...?
- 22 DE: Oh, she was always on my side. My mother was real sweet and I'd have a lot of gay friends over
23 and parties and stuff. She liked my friends, and they loved her, because she was - you know, accepted
24 me and was mother. She wasn't critical of them.
- 25 AJ: Right.
- 26 DE: And she was hip mother. I used to sell crosses, you know. She'd help me count out the crosses
27 and put them in the bag and put them in my brassiere, and people would check their coats in and leave
28 the money in their coat and I'd sell crosses, and I had marijuana under my wig, because I sold marijuana.
29 And the cops asked - they'd go one time, and he said, "Does Donna sell drugs?" and he said "No," - he
30 knew I did, but he said "She's too fucking dumb to sell drugs." So nobody ever bothered me. I never got
31 busted.
- 32 AJ: Oh, really. When you say crosses, that's like -
- 33 DE: Speed.

- 1 AJ: Right.
- 2 DE: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: Okay, yeah. And mom would help out a little bit?
- 4 DE: Yeah.
- 5 AJ: Yeah? Wow. You had a pretty good income. You worked all the time, made a little money on the
6 side.
- 7 DE: Mmhmm. Oh yeah, I lived well.
- 8 AJ: Yeah? That's how you were able to go on all those trips.
- 9 DE: Yeah. I invested in stocks and bonds and stuff I had about almost 200,000 dollars stuck away for
10 a rainy day. And I lived well. Bought a lot of jewelry and lot of clothes, I - every time there was
11 something, a party or something, I had a new outfit made. Dressmakers would whip up - I'd buy material
12 and they'd whip me up a gown or something.
- 13 AJ: Oh, so you would go and get custom-made clothes.
- 14 DE: Yeah.
- 15 AJ: Oh my goodness. Wow.
- 16 DE: I made several seamstresses very happy.
- 17 AJ: Yeah, I guess so. Yeah, cause custom clothes, they aren't cheap at all.
- 18 DE: No.
- 19 AJ: Yeah. So, Donna, tell me about your favorite boyfriend. What's the - you said you still dream
20 about sex. Who do you dream about these days?
- 21 DE: Oh. Well, my friends - went to the cities to stay with me, in my apartment - lives with me in
22 Crookston. I had a two bedroom apartment and he'd come over and sleep with me and one time the
23 bed broke down. Mother says - "God I thought - " and I says "Oh, you're just jealous you didn't get
24 none." And she made breakfast for us. Him and I. My mother was very - I had different ones live with
25 me, and my mother accepted them, you know.
- 26 AJ: She was very accepting, yeah.
- 27 DE: Yeah. And wash clothes and iron clothes, and I didn't like to iron, Mother ironed. He said "Now
28 you make your mother iron my clothes? You iron my clothes!" So I would iron a little bit and then he'd
29 leave and mother would take over, because I couldn't iron as good as she could. She knew I didn't like it.
30 But he didn't want my mother to -
- 31 AJ: Do all the work?
- 32 DE: Do all the work for me that I was - I was the one that was sucking his dick, and I should.

- 1 AJ: You should be the one doing the work.
- 2 DE: Yeah.
- 3 AJ: Wow. Wow, that seems like - the sex should have been enough work, you would think, but
4 uh...How did he make you feel?
- 5 DE: Good, but sometimes he'd - I'd have to buy him beer, he'd have to have a little beer when he
6 had sex. The beer was like a little bribery for him. And it pissed me off at times.
- 7 AJ: Yeah. He didn't come over if you didn't have beer?
- 8 DE: Yeah.
- 9 AJ; Wow. That would make me upset, I think.
- 10 DE: Yeah. He wanted both beer and sex.
- 11 AJ: He wanted his cake and eat it too, huh?
- 12 DE: Yeah.
- 13 AJ: Well, guys haven't changed very much since then.
- 14 DE: No, they're all...
- 15 AJ: They're still pretty much the same.
- 16 DE: One guy I went with - he worked on a farm, a neighbor guy. And I loved him. But he'd pawned
17 his watch for beer and then I'd get his watch out anytime he'd drink, he'd pawn it again. I was always
18 getting his watch out of the...
- 19 AJ: Pawnshop.
- 20 DE: Pawn - he'd - but for the bar, for beer. And I was always getting his watch back. Finally I just said
21 "Leave the watch in the goddamn pawnshop."
- 22 AJ: Pawnshop, huh. Tell me about the Golden Squirrel? What was that place like? I never...I think
23 that was before my time.
- 24 DE: Oh, that was a sleazy bar. Strippers and whores. It was across from the 90s.
- 25 AJ: Oh, really? Oh, okay. So right on Hennepin Avenue?
- 26 DE: Yeah - Copper Squirrel.
- 27 AJ: Oh, the Copper Squirrel.
- 28 DE: Yeah.
- 29 AJ: I called it the Golden Squirrel. The Copper Squirrel.
- 30 DE: Yeah.

- 1 AJ: Was it, like, gangsters and pimps?
- 2 DE: No, everybody went in there.
- 3 AJ: Yeah. Did you ever go to the Saloon?
- 4 DE: Yeah. That's why -
- 5 AJ: What about Moby Dick's?
- 6 DE: I went there because the 90s owned it. The bosses owned it. But it was sleazy. A lot of gangsters
7 at Moby Dick's. And the Flame was the place to go to pick up men. They had shows in the back and a
8 country western and a Hawaiian show from a Hawaii drag queen. And in front they had country western
9 music and they had two different places where they had music. And a lot of pimps and whores would go
10 in there.
- 11 AJ: Really.
- 12 DE: I was with my girlfriend one time and we were sitting at the bar and this construction man - we
13 both had money by our drinks, you know. And he said, can I borrow a couple dollars from you to get a
14 drink? And I hand him two dollars, and my girlfriend wouldn't give him any money. And later, we were
15 there for a while, later the bartender came around and brought us each a drink from that man. And he
16 gave me an envelope. I had a hundred dollars in my envelope and she didn't have nothing. He was a
17 construction owner. He was a millionaire.
- 18 AJ: Oh, really!
- 19 DE: But, see, he - if I were, if she were to give her money, he would've given her a nice tip too, but
20 she didn't give nothing.
- 21 AJ: Too cheap.
- 22 DE: Too cheap.
- 23 AJ: Wow. That was a pretty nice evening.
- 24 DE: Yeah.
- 25 AJ: And you didn't even have to have sex with him.
- 26 DE: No. And another time, I was at the 90s and I just got out of the hospital and I was in the happy
27 hour and I was talking to the bartender. But I'd just got out of the hospital and I had surgery, you know.
28 And this guy overheard it.
- 29 AJ: Not your gender surgery? Was it your -
- 30 DE: No, it was one of my surgeries - my voice, my tits or both, yeah. And this guy overheard me
31 talking and I said yeah, I'm not working now, I'm on relief. I says, it doesn't go very far, and he - the guy
32 brought me a couple drinks. And he said, I want you to have something, buy something nice. And he
33 gave me some money and I just took it and I said oh, thank you very much. And after he left I went to
34 the bathroom and there was four twenty dollar bills.

- 1 AJ: Oh, wow. Wow.
- 2 DE: So.
- 3 AJ: So you just had that kind of magnetism.
- 4 DE: Yeah. Eighty dollars for nothing.
- 5 AJ: Right. Yeah. Well, for being sweet, and being -
- 6 DE: Nice. Mmhmm.
- 7 AJ: Yeah. How did you decide on the name Donna?
- 8 DE: Well, cause my name was Donald before, and I wanted something simple to write and spell out,
9 and I thought if someone started saying "Donald," they could say "Donna," you know? And correct
10 themselves.
- 11 AJ: Right.
- 12 DE: And I kept my last name and my cousin was mad 'cause her name was Donna. She had no write-
13 up, I mean - her name wasn't just for her, it's a simple name. And then my uncle wished I had changed
14 my last name. I said I was born a Ewing and I'll be a Ewing 'til I die.
- 15 AJ: Wow.
- 16 DE: And that pissed him off too.
- 17 AJ: So when you became out, you said your mother and your sister were very accepting.
- 18 DE: Yeah.
- 19 AJ: What about the rest of your family?
- 20 DE: Well, that was - my aunt and uncle never came, but my mother and my sister came and talked
21 to the doctors at the university. My father when he didn't want me to have surgery, said I can - if you
22 ever want to see me, I can pee on his grave, and I said I will. And then after I had the surgery he talked
23 to mother, and mother said how happy I was and I didn't have a car and he had several cars on the farm,
24 and he gave me one. It wasn't a new car, but it was in nice shape.
- 25 AJ: Right. Yeah. So he kind of came around.
- 26 DE: Yeah.
- 27 AJ: But your aunts and uncles...
- 28 DE: They were all good to me. Especially on my mother's side of the family. My father's side of the
29 family, my...uncles weren't, they weren't too accepting, but they put up with me because my father
30 was, always accepted me, was good to me. And -
- 31 AJ: It makes a difference when your family accepts you, right?
- 32 DE: Yeah.

- 1 AJ: Then other people...
- 2 DE: Yeah, they figure your family accepts you, then you must have... in fact, people tell my father
3 and say that they respected my father, you know, I cost him a lot of money, but they respect him, he
4 was good to me, he didn't kick me out or disown me.
- 5 AJ: Sure.
- 6 DE: And they respect him as a father.
- 7 AJ: Mmhmm.
- 8 DE: My mother got mad at a lady at work - she worked at a hospital - and this lady, I was a
9 premature baby, and I was sick, mother had to feed me many times, keep my food down. And when it
10 came out that I was gay, this woman said "I bet you wished you didn't take so good care of him." You
11 know, like I should've - she should've killed me off. My mother never talked to that woman again. To this
12 day. Mother thought that was very rude of her.
- 13 AJ: That was very cruel.
- 14 DE: Cruel.
- 15 AJ: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I'm glad you had good relationships with your family, that's really -
- 16 DE: That's good always.
- 17 AJ: Yeah. Sometimes when transgender people come out...
- 18 DE: Their family won't - yeah, they don't want to ever see you, and you're dead to some families.
- 19 AJ: Right. Exactly. When did - when was the first time you ever saw a transgender person?
- 20 DE: Oh...I must've been in my early - I went to fairs, and transvestites from big cities worked
21 carnivals or fairs, you know, travel in the summertime.
- 22 AJ: Really!
- 23 DE: Yeah. And I think I met some on my work in sideshows and with the fairs and carnivals. I got to
24 meet some of them there, you know. And I thought that -
- 25 AJ: What would they do at the - at the county fair, or state fair?
- 26 DE: Yeah, well they'd try to work for the people that had the rides and the different side shows, and
27 they worked. It was their job.
- 28 AJ: Okay. So they were just regular carnies or...yeah.
- 29 DE: Yeah. And they'd travel and they got lots of sex 'cause you travel, you meet a lot of interesting
30 people along the way.
- 31 AJ: Right. Wow. Did you ever have anybody in your life that kind of helped you to become a woman,
32 or a best friend who sort of looked out for you?

- 1 DE: No, some of them helped me with my makeup and stuff and taught me how to wear makeup,
2 and do my eyes, and my eyelashes, and...paint myself up, you know?
- 3 AJ: Right. Yeah.
- 4 DE: Tom Hill [unclear], the tips to wear heavy earrings, take gum - put on wigs, you know? Put it on
5 behind your earrings and put them on your ears so they don't fall off. Spirit gum.
- 6 AJ: Spirit gum. Yeah. Wow. It's interesting that nowadays -
- 7 DE: I always learn how - I don't - jewelry and clothes, just, you'd always picked out the stuff and I
8 had a good eye for things that match and look good.
- 9 AJ: Oh, yeah. Your clothes are - your clothes were beautiful.
- 10 DE: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: And I remember seeing you at the 90s, you would always be dressed very nice, with a dress on,
12 and a fur coat sometimes in the wintertime, and your heels and big brooches. You dressed really nice, all
13 the time.
- 14 DE: Yeah. Those days are come and gone, and I'm still living.
- 15 AJ: Yeah. What do you think nowadays - you know, it used to be, when you were coming up, you
16 know, transgender people, transsexual people -
- 17 DE: And what gets me now is transsexual - all those things, fights in different cities about the
18 bathroom. I never had no trouble in the bathroom. I'd go in and go to the bathroom, and some of them
19 in there would know I was, you know, a transsexual. Nobody ever made a crack about me going to the
20 women's bathroom. And now they have all this trouble.
- 21 AJ: Right. And you're eighty-four years old, you've been going to the bathroom all your life.
- 22 DE: Yeah.
- 23 AJ: Why do you think people are doing this now?
- 24 DE: I don't know, it's just some...
- 25 AJ: You know...
- 26 DE: Why are people still prejudiced against the different nationalities? I mean, that should be over, I
27 mean - maybe my grandfather and my relatives years ago, a hundred years did bad things, but they
28 didn't hold me responsible for them. That was a hundred years ago.
- 29 AJ: Yeah. What do you think about all of this visibility in the trans community? I mean, there are so
30 many people, like Caitlyn Jenner, and Laverne Cox, and RuPaul has a TV show...like, transgender people
31 are in the mainstream media now.
- 32 DE: Yeah. Yeah, and a lot of their parents are sticking up for them to go to school and all that. I think
33 it's good. I think someday - see, years ago, it was different, but someday I think it's going to be as

- 1 common as an appendicitis operation.
- 2 AJ: Yeah. I think you're right.
- 3 DE: And it's going to be accepted.
- 4 AJ: It's going to be accepted. Yeah.
- 5 DE: And if there's going to be more of them, you're going to accept their marriages and all that.
- 6 AJ: When you were young, did you ever think that this day would come?
- 7 DE: No. Never. And what gets me is all these wars, different nationalities, different colors. Do you
8 know what I say?
- 9 AJ: Mmhmm.
- 10 DE: No matter what religion you are or what color you are, we all bleed red blood.
- 11 AJ: Yeah.
- 12 DE: And we should learn to love one another and get along with one another.
- 13 AJ: We're all humans, right.
- 14 DE: Yeah.
- 15 AJ: No, I agree, I agree with you very much. Have you been following the news? You know we have
16 a new president.
- 17 DE: Yeah.
- 18 AJ: What do you think of our new president?
- 19 DE: I don't think much of him. I don't think he'll make it. I think he'll be impeached or somebody will
20 shoot him or something will happen.
- 21 AJ: Oh, boy. Well, I hope no one shoots him, but...
- 22 DE: He's got to change his ways.
- 23 AJ: He's got to change his ways. He's a pretty...pretty mean guy.
- 24 DE: Mmmm.
- 25 AJ: He lies a lot.
- 26 DE: Yeah, he's a bitch or a liar. I don't believe a thing he says.
- 27 AJ: Yeah, not at all. Not at all. So Donna, you were one of the first people in that program at the
28 University of Minnesota.
- 29 DE: Yeah.

- 1 AJ: Do you remember some of the other people?
- 2 DE: Donna Cathy. She was a big black girl.
- 3 AJ: Okay. Donna Cathy?
- 4 DE: Yeah.
- 5 AJ: Okay.
- 6 DE: And Lovie was over there in the program, and Sophie Hollower. Sophie lives at the Towers. She
7 was one of the first. And there was a couple black ones.
- 8 AJ: Sophie Holloway?
- 9 DE: Hollower.
- 10 AJ: Hollower.
- 11 DE: Yeah. Pronounce her last name. And there was a couple other ones - one was from St. Paul, he
12 was a hairdresser. There was a couple - and there was a couple that drank himself to death, and one
13 committed suicide.
- 14 AJ: Oh, no.
- 15 DE: You know - sex changes, a lot of them either get AIDS because they were a gay boy, catch AIDS
16 and die. I don't know, three, four of them died from AIDS.
- 17 AJ: A lot of people died from AIDS in the eighties.
- 18 DE: And they drank and took drugs and stuff and lived a reckless life.
- 19 AJ: Mmhmm.
- 20 DE: Sophie was just eighty-two. She was eighty-two or eighty-three the day after Christmas. And I'm
21 eighty-four. There's not too many of them that live that old.
- 22 AJ: Right. What was - Doctor Haskins like?
- 23 DE: Doctor Hastings.
- 24 AJ: Hastings - I'm sorry.
- 25 DE: He was an older man, but very wonderful. He was like a father to us, and he was very kind and
26 very accepting, and he was all for us.
- 27 AJ: Really. Smart?
- 28 DE: Yeah. Very smart. He was a brilliant man.
- 29 AJ: Wow. That's good. Do you know what happened to him?
- 30 DE: He died.

- 1 AJ: Passed away?
- 2 DE: Yeah. From heart trouble, I guess. He was old.
- 3 AJ: Yeah. But he did a good job?
- 4 DE: Yeah, yeah yeah yeah. He was...if it wasn't for him, we wouldn't have - I wouldn't have had
5 surgery. He was very kind and considerate of people.
- 6 AJ: How did you find out about this program?
- 7 DE: It was in the paper. And then I went to see my regular doctor in Minneapolis, and then he had to
8 write me a letter for...
- 9 AJ: A referral?
- 10 DE: A referral, and I went there. And I didn't think I would pass. I was real big at the time, I had to
11 lose a hundred pounds before surgery.
- 12 AJ: Oh, really?
- 13 DE: And then because I couldn't read or write, you know, I had to have - all the tests had to be oral.
14 And I didn't think I'd make it. But I...I didn't lose as much weight as I should, but I came - I had surgery
15 and I came - I had better luck than some of the other ones.
- 16 AJ: Really? I know some of the people who I've talked to from the early days, you know, they say
17 the vagina wasn't deep enough...
- 18 DE: No, mine wasn't. I had to have a - surgery where they took part of my...gut and staple part of it
19 off to make my pussy deeper so I could take care of a ten inch dick. And Sophie had it done too. But
20 Sophie - anesthesia, the doctor knew we were friends and he came to my room, because we were both
21 at the hospital at the same time. And he said "I just about lost your friend," he said, "she wouldn't wake
22 up out of surgery, I'm not going to do any more of those -" we called them gutbusters. And he wouldn't
23 do any for a while and then he went back and...
- 24 AJ: And did it again.
- 25 DE: And did it again. 'Cause they were the most stressful for him [unintelligible 40:50] cause if you
26 have a pussy you can't get much cock in it, what good is it?
- 27 AJ: Right. Yeah.
- 28 DE: Did you have trouble?
- 29 AJ: Uh...no, no. you know, it's -
- 30 DE: You had a big dick though.
- 31 AJ: Yes. I think that they have gotten better at doing the surgery.
- 32 DE: I think they wanted to have the bigger dicks. 'Cause you had more to work with, 'cause the skin
33 from your penis goes inside it. But the ones that had small peckers, they didn't have much to work with.

- 1 AJ: Yeah. That's true. That's very true.
- 2 DE: And some of the drag queens I know some of the colored girls that we were at the bath house
3 all the time and all that, they had big dicks, ten-inch dicks.
- 4 AJ: Oh my goodness. Wow. So, what do you miss in life? What do you miss now? You're here in
5 your room all the time...
- 6 DE: Well, I think...In a way, gay life was interesting. I met a lot of handsome men. I think in the gay
7 world, you met more interesting people than you did with a sex change.
- 8 AJ: Really?
- 9 DE: Yeah. I mean, some people - some people take the sex change, but a lot of people, being gay - a
10 lot of people in tattoo and show business thought gay people were lucky. They were superstitious, you
11 know.
- 12 AJ: So they'd keep -
- 13 DE: Hire them. Yeah. Can you put this away? I've got to go pee again.
- 14 AJ: Yeah.
- 15 DE: Can you unhook me? I've got to go pee.
- 16 AJ: Okay. All right. Let's get you unhooked here.
- 17 DE: I haven't had sex for so long, my pussy's gotten so tight. You don't use it, you lose it.
- 18 AJ: Yeah, that's what I've heard.
- 19 DE: Huh?
- 20 AJ: That's what I've heard.
- 21 DE: A lot of them have a pussy to play with and to pee out of but they can't get a big dick in their
22 pussy 'cause it's too tight.
- 23 AJ: Too tight! Too small.
- 24 DE: Too small.
- 25 AJ: Yeah.
- 26 DE: Too bad they can't get a way to keep it open. You don't use it, you lose it.
- 27 AJ: Do you masturbate still?
- 28 DE: Once in a while. Not too often. Once in a while.
- 29 AJ: Yeah? Yeah.
- 30 DE: I can still come.

- 1 AJ: Really? So - even with the surgery, you were able to still have an orgasm?
- 2 DE: Yeah. Yeah.
- 3 AJ: Wow. Did you ever in your life meet Christine Jorgensen?
- 4 DE: Yeah.
- 5 AJ: Yeah? You know who she is, right?
- 6 DE: Yeah, yeah, she was the first one to have surgery.
- 7 AJ: Right. When'd you meet her?
- 8 DE: I met her in Florida. She was working at a club in Florida. When I was there -
- 9 AJ: In a night club?
- 10 DE: Yeah. She had an act, you know. G.I. Act, she'd go behind the stage and she'd come out with G.I.
- 11 clothes, and she'd take off and put her dresses on, and her makeup and wig. She was good looking.
- 12 AJ: Yeah? Yeah, she was pretty stunning. Was her show good?
- 13 DE: Yeah. 'Cause she had a - I guess, not a very good life. She drank and did a lot of drugs.
- 14 AJ: Really? Hm. Wow.
- 15 DE: She had surgery in Denmark.
- 16 AJ: She had her surgery in Denmark. Exactly. Was she nice to you, though?
- 17 DE: Oh, yeah. She was nice, and very...understanding.
- 18 AJ: Uh huh. Wow.
- 19 DE: She was good looking. Beautiful, really. And nice - she made a lot of money. Had beautiful
- 20 clothes, and...she had a few people that traveled with her, that she made enough money to keep a
- 21 small...
- 22 AJ: A little staff?
- 23 DE: Yeah. Keep her hair and her clothes and...
- 24 AJ: Mmhmm. Wow. Well, that's pretty amazing.
- 25 DE: Do you remember...[unintelligible, 45:36], she worked at the 90s. She was from Cuba or
- 26 something, and she was - worked at the 90s. She was a foreigner. She was small boned. She had a rib
- 27 taken out, and she worked at the 90s and she made a lot of money. "My pussy is real tight! Men like my
- 28 pussy!" and somehow she got - somebody, she bought a guy a motorcycle and he robbed her. She
- 29 stayed in the hotel across from the 90s, that they tore down and built a new one there. And...she'd say
- 30 "Me make lot of money! Men like my pussy!" she said, "One man stole from me, another man give me
- 31 lots of money. He loved my pussy. He loves to kiss it."

- 1 AJ: What's her name?
- 2 DE: Um...It was, um. She was, um. Oh...can't think of her name. She had a kind of a name from a
3 foreign country. She was from a - she looked like a real bumner. She was small, and she had her dresses
4 taken in tight and had big tits and all that. She was very popular. Men would give her a lot of money to
5 fuck her.
- 6 AJ: Wow. No, I don't think I remember her. Well, Donna, I - I don't have any more questions, but I'm
7 just wondering...do you have anything that you want to say to folks that I didn't ask you about?
- 8 DE: No, I just wish that all the people that knew me in Minneapolis and thought I was so wonderful
9 and they looked up to me and they loved to be in my company. They've, now since I've gotten old,
10 they've all forgot about me. And I don't get out very much anymore and I get - I feel sorry for myself,
11 you know.
- 12 AJ: Yeah. Well, you know, don't feel sorry for yourself.
- 13 DE: I figure if I die, nobody gives a shit.
- 14 AJ: Oh...we do care. People do love you. And we're thinking about you always and sending you best
15 wishes. Life is so fast nowadays, and so busy, that...But I do understand, and I know it's tough. It really is
16 tough. So...what do you want to say to those friends?
- 17 DE: When we were younger, and we're out in the out life, and wear the beautiful clothes and do the
18 interesting things, we were just...it was fun, but it doesn't last forever, you know? Life is not a party
19 after party. It's down to...death, and...
- 20 AJ: It gets real sometimes.
- 21 DE: It's real. Sometimes it gets too real.
- 22 AJ: Yeah. Life is...life is tough for everybody.
- 23 DE: Yeah.
- 24 AJ: Well, thank you so much for inviting me over again. I really appreciate it.
- 25 DE: Yeah - well, when you have time, come over - we'll run some of the tapes and see about maybe
26 what you think of the tapes, if they'd be an interesting story.
- 27 AJ: Right. Mmhmm.
- 28 DE: Do you know anybody at [unintelligible 49:11].
- 29 AJ: I do. I do. So we'll make a date, and we'll come over and go through some of the dates and go
30 get some food and figure out all those steps.
- 31 DE: Yeah. I appreciate that.
- 32 AJ: So...wave bye. And we'll see you next time, okay?
- 33 DE: All right.

- 1 AJ: All right. Bye.
- 2