

Sakura Sirisavath
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

February 24, 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

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Sakura Sirisavath -SS
3
4 AJ: So hello.
5
6 SS: Hi.
7
8 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for The Transgender Oral History Project
9 at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota Libraries, and today is February 24th,
10 2017. Uhm, I am here interviewing Sakura Sirisavith.
11
12 SS: Sakura Sirisavith.
13
14 AJ: Alright.
15
16 SS: It's a mouthful.
17
18 AJ: I screwed that up royally so what I'm going to ask you to do is state your name.
19
20 SS: Sure. Uhuh.
21
22 AJ: Spell it. So we make sure we spell it right.
23
24 SS: Sure.
25
26 AJ: And then tell me what is your gender identity today. What was your gender assigned at birth?
27
28 SS: Yes.
29
30 AJ: And your pronouns.
31
32 SS: Sure. Hello everyone, my name is Sakura Sirisavith. It's spelled [spells name out but stumbles
33 and misspells it on accident]. S. A. Q. I'm sorry. I am messing up on my own name.
34
35 AJ: Ah. [Laughs]. Okay. Your own name.
36
37 SS: [Spells out name]. S. A. K. U. R. A. It means cherry blossom in Japanese.
38
39 AJ: Oh.
40
41 SS: Yes. And then my last name—
42
43 AJ: S. A. K. A. R. A.?
44
45 SS: S. A. K. U. R. A.
46
47 AJ: Oh, U. R. A.

1
2 SS: U.R.A.
3
4 AJ: Okay.
5
6 SS: Yeah. And then my last name is Sirisavath. To start off with, like the siri app. Uhm, savith
7 [pronounced sloboth], and it's a Thai originated name cause I was born in Thailand.
8
9 AJ: Ah.
10
11 SS: Uhm, and my—
12
13 AJ: How do you spell your last name?
14
15 SS: Oh, I'm sorry. My last name is spelled S. I. R. I. S. A. V. A. T. H.
16
17 AJ: Got it.
18
19 SS: Yes.
20
21 AJ: So beautiful name.
22
23 SS: Thank you.
24
25 AJ: Cherry Blossom.
26
27 SS: Thank you. Thank you. And, uhm I and trans female.
28
29 AJ: Mhm.
30
31 SS: My gender identity today is female. I use the female pronouns like she, her. Uhm, and, uhm,
32 yeah that's what I am today. And I was assigned at birth male.
33
34 AJ: Okay. Wow. Thank you so— I'm so happy that we finally get a chance to sit down and chat for a
35 little while and get to know each other a little bit better.
36
37 SS: Me too. I feel honored because I look up to Andrea as, you know, a great role model for our
38 community, and I respect her a lot and what she's doing.
39
40 AJ: Awe. [Laughs].
41
42 SS: Glad to be a part of this big project in any part, shape, or form so I'm honored. Thank you for
43 having me.
44
45 AJ: Your voice is an important voice, and we need to make sure that it is included, and, uhm, and
46 elevated and lifted up. So Sakura tell me what is your earliest memory in life? Like what's the

1 first thing you remember? And it does not have to be about your gender identity, but if it is
2 that's okay.
3
4 SS: Sure.
5
6 AJ: I just want to know what do you remember first of all in your whole life.
7
8 SS: What do I remember first of all in my whole life?
9
10 AJ: [Laughs].
11
12 SS: Uhm. Wow. Guess I'm going to have to rewind my memories back to when I could first think or
13 talk, I guess, maybe? I would say when I was first, uhm, when I was really young before I came to
14 this country back in, uhm, outside of the U.S., I believe I remember the first memory I had was in
15 one of the refugee camps.
16
17 AJ: Mhm.
18
19 SS: It was either in the Philippines. We kept transferring back and forth between. No, not between,
20 but we were transferred from Thailand refugee camp to the Philippines refugee camp. So I am a
21 refugee immigrant.
22
23 AJ: Okay.
24
25 SS: Uhm, from the Post-Vietnam War era.
26
27 AJ: Wow.
28
29 SS: Uhm, my parents got accepted to come to come to America cause we passed our interview for
30 immigrants..
31
32 AJ: Mhm.
33
34 SS: ...during that screening process. But it was a twist of fate actually. I would have probably, our
35 family would have ended up somewhere else since it was kind of the last minute that we found
36 out that we were finally accepted to America. We were actually ready and packed to go to New
37 Zealand..
38
39 AJ: Wow!
40
41 SS: ...instead of coming here to America. Yeah. Right? I kind of thought, "That's not so bad."
42
43 AJ: Yeah.
44
45 SS: New Zealand is beautiful.
46
47 AJ: It would have been interesting.

1
2 SS: It would have been interesting but I think I wouldn't trade it. I mean, I wouldn't, uhm, I think it
3 was a good twist of fate cause America is a great country to live in and have all these
4 opportunities. You know, we still have like some issues about social justice and everything, you
5 know, and I'm a part of the community that needs to be voiced the most...
6
7 AJ: Mhm.
8
9 SS:and being a part of like a colored minority too...
10
11 AJ: Yeah.
12
13 SS: ...I think it's time for us to also be equally represented and have the equal rights and
14 treatment...
15
16 AJ: Mhm.
17
18 SS: ...And uhm.
19
20 AJ: When you say you're part of a community, which community are you thinking on?
21
22 SS: The LGBTQ community. Uhm, since I identify myself as transgender.
23
24 AJ: Sure.
25
26 SS: You know, uhm—
27
28 AJ: I just wanted to clarify, I mean, I kind of thought that's what you were talking about.
29
30 SS: Yes. Yeah. Thank you for asking. You can ask anything to clarify anything. Uhm, so my first
31 memory was in the camp and it was like little bits and pieces of what— was going on in the
32 camp. I remember the, uhm, I'm sorry, I remember the waterfall, the bus. I mean, we were
33 waiting at a bus stop with our luggage. I think it was a rest stop in— we were in the Philippines. I
34 don't even understand how I can remember this at such a young age.
35
36 AJ: Wow.
37
38 SS: I was like a toddler.
39
40 AJ: Uhuh.
41
42 SS: And it was very vivid to me about what I saw and remember. And it was just so beautiful seeing
43 this waterfall for the first time in my life as a human being and seeing how high above I was and
44 seeing how loud it was. It was just, like, uhm, enormous beautiful thing to see. I guess I was
45 brave enough to go to the edge of the cliff.
46
47 AJ: Wow. As a baby? [Laughs].

1
2 SS: With my parents, you know, holding my hand. Of course.
3
4 AJ: Yeah.
5
6 SS: I just remember a cube of ice I had in my hand and just threw it over the waterfall...
7
8 AJ: Awe.
9
10 SS: ...just to see how far down it was. I was curious at that age. I was curious about everything...
11
12 AJ: Mhm.
13
14 SS: ...even our transportation from there on the dirt roads and seeing some native, indigenous,
15 maybe, tribal people coming out. Seeing a bus, a vehicle pass by, and I asked my mom, "Who
16 are those people?" She was like, "Oh, they are the tribal group of this country."
17
18 AJ: Mhm.
19
20 SS: And then in an instant my shirt flew away, my favorite shirt. It was an American shirt actually. It
21 had the ABC's on it.
22
23 AJ: Awe.
24
25 SS: It flew out the window, and the bus kept on going, but I saw it flew over to where the tribal
26 group emerged up from the woods. And I was like, "No." It was like an emotional attachment to
27 this shirt I first had. It was really colorful. And then, uhm, I believe that's also— that's when my
28 memory stops. Everything else, like, I don't remember but that was the most vivid moment in
29 my life of coming over to America. But also boarding the plane for the first time was a great
30 experience for me as a child to come to America. It was the first time I saw a carpet in the aisles
31 of the airplane...
32
33 AJ: Wow. [Laughs].
34
35 SS: I was never used to feeling something so soft, uhm, cause we were used to sleeping on the floor
36 on like straw mats in Asia.
37
38 AJ: Mhm.
39
40 SS: So, like, feeling this new texture and sensation of the floor on the airplane was great. I mean, I
41 rolled around on it. It was unbelievable.
42
43 AJ: That's a powerful memory.
44
45 SS: It was a powerful memory, and I'm surprised I can remember it.
46
47 AJ: [Laughs].

1
2 SS: Yeah, I think as a kid I was very curious about a lot of things, and I guess I wouldn't— I was just
3 stay put in this aisle and rolled around in it. I wanted to sleep in the middle of the aisle of the air
4 plane cause this carpet was so soft.
5
6 AJ: [Laughs].
7
8 SS: And I just remember when we first lived in the U.S. country we landed in, I think, on the east
9 coast. We came through New York I believe. We got transferred over to our relatives place in
10 Hartford, Connecticut. I remember, I think, my first memories of living with my aunts and uncles.
11 For the first time we needed sponsors to help us get, you know, situated in America. Cause since
12 we're newly refugees immigrants in, like, finding the ropes of, uhm, how to adapt to—
13
14 AJ: Find a job.
15
16 SS: A job, yeah. Get a job.
17
18 AJ: Adapt to the culture.
19
20 SS: Resources, yeah, and, uhm, I remember the, to me, before, uhm, there was no gender identity
21 or gender differences between individuals and I just gravitated more towards girly things,
22 feminine things. Dolls, dresses, and long beautiful hair.
23
24 AJ: [Laughs].
25
26 SS: But I didn't think that it was a big deal that I liked those things until it was seen as not the norm
27 to cross over the gender that you were not assigned at birth or the opposite gender identity and
28 try to, uhm, present yourself that way cause I remember that time when I told my parents, "I
29 want to be a girl. Why can't I be a girl like my sister who was born in Connecticut?" They were
30 like, "No, you are a boy. You have to be a boy."
31
32 AJ: Awe. How many other siblings do you have?
33
34 SS: I actually have one sister and then two brothers.
35
36 AJ: Are you the eldest?
37
38 SS: I am the eldest, yes. And being the eldest was a way for me to bulldoze every issue. I feel like
39 being the eldest is a huge challenge cause you're the eldest, they look up to you as role models.
40 You experience everything in life first. Then you care for your siblings, and you guide them
41 through the same processes that you experience and then you're kind of like a bulldozer for
42 them, you know.
43
44 AJ: Mhm. It's a lot of responsibility.
45
46 SS: It is a lot of responsibility. And being from an Asian culture— my background is actually a
47 mixture of Laotian, Thai, Vietnamese, and some French and Chinese.

1
2 AJ: Wow.
3
4 SS: So all over, yeah. And I could speak Laotian and Thai, cause both of those languages are pretty
5 close to each other.
6
7 AJ: Okay.
8
9 SS: Very similar. I would say as similar like maybe, I don't know, the difference between, uhm,
10 English from Europe.
11
12 AJ: So it's like a little different in dialect
13
14 SS: Different in dialect and maybe some different vocabulary and words.
15
16 AJ: But very similar?
17
18 SS: Very, very similar. Like if you can learn one of the other languages you could still understand the
19 other without studying it that much cause it came from the same family language.
20
21 AJ: Language family?
22
23 SS: Language family, yeah.
24
25 AJ: Wow, so, Hartford, Connecticut, how long did you guys live there?
26
27 SS: I think we lives there about under a year until like my dad thought it was a good idea to come to
28 Minnesota and see— and cause he heard there's more resources for immigrants and jobs and
29 opportunities here from a friend of a friend. And then we came to Minneapolis, not having any
30 other relatives here to support us, but we had his friends and we lived in the projects.
31
32 AJ: Oh, wow.
33
34 SS: Yes.
35
36 AJ: Where, projects?
37
38 SS: In north Minneapolis over by Olson Memorial Park.
39
40 AJ: Okay, right.
41
42 SS: You know what area I'm talking about? Now it's like newer home models. Before then—
43
44 AJ: It's called Heritage Park.
45
46 SS: Heritage Park! Now they have like beautiful homes there but I grew up there.
47

1 AJ: Really?
2
3 SS: Mhm.
4
5 AJ: That's fascinating. So there was a lot of Hmong families around that community.
6
7 SS: Yup. It was a mixture of Hmong, Laotian, a lot of Asians, uhm, everybody.
8
9 AJ: And African Americas.
10
11 SS: And African Americas, yeah, all colored.
12 AJ: Was there any hostility between the ethnic groups at all?
13
14 SS: No! We, we didn't understand that when we were young and like naïve and innocent.
15
16 AJ: So everybody—
17
18 SS: Everybody— there's actually a neighborhood, like a playground in the center of all the units.
19
20 AJ: Mhm.
21
22 SS: Whenever it's time after school we all go there and play with each other no matter who you are
23 or what color you are, you know? It was no problem. There was no issue with that. It was just
24 normal to all of us, you know?
25
26 AJ: Wow, that's great.
27
28 SS: We all had fun and got to know each neighbor kid. And from there on we moved away from the
29 projects to a Minneapolis public housing home in south Minneapolis over by the Lyndale
30 neighborhood. Yeah, it improved our life a little bit more.
31
32 AJ: Mhm, mhm.
33
34 SS: And we got to live in a duplex but I did miss my friends growing up from the projects. But it was
35 pretty diverse there too and the new neighborhood I was in there was African American kids,
36 there was Native American kids that I grew up with. We were best friends in our childhood.
37 There was Hispanic, you know, Caucasian, that's what I like about south Minneapolis that
38 there's so much diversity.
39
40 AJ: Yeah. So you would tell your parents, and you said this is after you're little sister was born, so
41 you wanted to be a girl. That must have been like three of four years.
42
43 SS: Mhm. Yeah, I was just like why is it not fair— why wasn't I born a girl? Cause that's what I
44 wanted to be. I thought it was okay for me to be like my sister. I was like, "Can I just wear the
45 same things that she does or wear a dress?"
46
47 AJ: [Laughs]. Right.

1
2 SS: I mean, I was playing with her dolls too and everything. I was really discouraged from uhm,
3 coming from my culture, it's not encouraged whenever there are signs of anything from the
4 norm of our culture. It's often discouraged and not talked about and bottled up cause
5 sometimes we come from a culture that's not understanding, about sharing our emotions and
6 our thoughts with each other.
7
8 AJ: Cause it's interesting, I mean, in Thailand there are lots of katoeys and—
9
10 SS: Yep. There's a lot of—
11
12 AJ: K. H. A. U. T. H. O. Y. Is that a derogatory term?
13
14 SS: It is sort of, but it's been in the history for years, you know?
15
16 AJ: But it refers to—
17
18 SS: It's kind of like—
19
20 AJ: Boys who are women.
21
22 SS: Yeah. Yup, yup. I mean that's probably the only word to describe individuals who are male to
23 female, you know?
24
25 AJ: Transgender people.
26
27 SS: Transgender people. And it was used as a derogatory term to describe everybody under the
28 LGBTQ umbrella.
29
30 AJ: Oh, so it's not—
31
32 SS: There's no differentiation.
33
34 AJ: Right.
35
36 SS: So if you are gay, if you're lesbian, if you're transgender, you are a katoey.
37
38 AJ: Oh wow.
39
40 SS: And it's like, you know, don't be a katoey or look like a katoey.
41
42 AJ: Oh wow.
43
44 SS: It's kind of used in that tone.
45
46 AJ: Uhuh.
47

- 1 SS: But I guess—
2
- 3 AJ: Well I didn't mean to offend.
4
- 5 SS: No, no! Not at all! No. Not at all! It's, uhm, now we're trying to like maybe take back that word
6 and use it in a positive light.
7
- 8 AJ: Right.
9
- 10 SS: Actually now I educate my parents, you know, there are differences in our LGBTQ community.
11 We're not all katoey.
12
- 13 AJ: Right. [Laughs].
14
- 15 SS: I mean, I had to explain to them. I was like, dad, mom, there's gay men. They typically identify as
16 men but they are attracted to the same gender. And then there are transgender who are— they
17 are conflicted with their assigned birth and feel more comfortable being who they are inside,
18 whatever their mind or heart feels like they are supposed to be truly who they are. And they
19 thought they were the same, the gay men and the transgender. They just thought like, I mean, it
20 was kind of like seen as a joke to see a man wearing a dress at the time. It was a stereotype and
21 that's why katoey was like a word that they used to mock LGBTQ people.
22
- 23 AJ: Sure.
24
- 25 SS: They fit us under one term but there is still that going around in Thailand even though there's
26 like a lot of trans in that country.
27
- 28 AJ: Mhm, yeah, a lot of transgender people.
29
- 30 SS: Yeah, emerging into society and they're trying to make a difference, actually. They are now in
31 mainstream media, as spokespersons, as models, as educators, as politicians and they're
32 working for social justice and changing their livelihoods there. I feel proud that they are doing
33 that there, but, even though you see that many transgender people in that country, there's still
34 a lot of work that needs to be done.
35
- 36 AJ: And that's discrimination.
37
- 38 SS: There's still a lot of discrimination, a lot of misunderstandings. I believe there's also, I want to
39 say, maybe if a transgender person committed a crime, they would be sent to an all male prison.
40
- 41 AJ: Oh boy.
42
- 43 SS: I think they still have that. And no protection. I think there's not still that many protections.
44
- 45 AJ: Even though so many people from the United States go to Thailand to get their gender
46 confirmation surgeries.
47

1 SS: I like that new term. Yes, to confirm your gender. Yes, it's like the mecca for that.
2
3 AJ: It is.
4
5 SS: And, it is. They have great doctors for that I hear. Personally, I would like to get it done here in
6 this country so that I have closer follow ups, you know, I don't want to travel across the seas
7 to— just in case there's some complication.
8
9 AJ: If something goes wrong, you have access to your doctor.
10
11 SS: Yeah. You have access to my doctor. They do that like year-round. They're in Thailand.
12
13 AJ: Yeah, it's like a vacation. I mean people—
14
15 SS: Yeah, there's a word for it.
16
17 AJ: Plan a vacation.
18
19 SS: Yup, yup. It's medical tourism.
20
21 AJ: Right, medical tourism. And it's not just gender confirmation surgery. People go there for hip
22 replacement and—
23
24 SS: Yup, yeah, yeah. Thailand is known for their health care.
25
26 AJ: Heart transplants and all that kind of stuff.
27
28 SS: Yeah, their health care quality is very good there, great there actually.
29
30 AJ: And low cost.
31
32 SS: And low cost, yeah. A lot of foreigners go there.
33
34 AJ: And it's beautiful there.
35
36 SS: I know right?
37
38 AJ: A double bonus.
39
40 SS: Yeah, it's a double bonus.
41
42 AJ: In the rooms, they're like hotel rooms where you rest after your procedures or whatever.
43
44 SS: Right, but, uhm, as I was saying there is still that stigma towards transgender community in
45 Thailand but we are, I think they are doing their best to work towards getting a powerful voice
46 and making that difference, differentiation between katoeys, transgender, gay men, queer,
47 gender non-conforming, non-binary. It's probably educating the society and the culture.

1
2 AJ: It is. Absolutely.
3
4 SS: It's like what we should all do around the world wherever you're from.
5
6 AJ: Mhm.
7
8 SS: And it's interesting to see how far along each place comes, and I'm glad that there now using
9 not katoeys. They're using— there's another word for it. It's call Sāw. It's longer so bear with
10 me.
11
12 AJ: Okay.
13
14 SS: It's called— transgender females are called Sāw, which means girl or prapatso, which means
15 female, the third gender female.
16
17 AJ: Oh wow.
18
19 SS: Yes, which is a more politically correct way—
20
21 AJ: Do you know how to spell that?
22
23 SS: You could say S. A. O. but don't quote me on it.
24
25 AJ: But what was the other one, the one that means third gender.
26
27 SS: That is the one. Sao prapatso. Pat is gender, sao is two. It means female— the second gender
28 female, if that makes sense in English. The second gender for females.
29
30 AJ: Oh. Oh my goodness. So there is some language for people who are starting to recognize—
31
32 SS: to change, yeah, to realize that. And I for one like watching some Thai shows and media
33 portrayals of transgender women, which were very negative. I would say growing up, because
34 my mom would watch a lot of series, they're called lacans, kind of like soap operas.
35
36 AJ: Right, yeah.
37
38 SS: And I would love that. I would watch it with her growing up with a lot of the transgender. There
39 were seen as a comedic relief.
40
41 AJ: Yeah.
42
43 SS: Uh, something funny.
44
45 AJ: Something funny, everybody would laugh.
46

- 1 SS: Everybody would laugh at or as like the bad person. You know, like probably the villain
2 sometimes or like the, you know? I've actually seen less and less of that now in their media
3 which is great. They're making a change, and that's what kind of made me suppress my
4 transgender identity...
- 5
- 6 AJ: Sure.
- 7
- 8 SS: ...my feelings because I was looking back at that at a young age and, seeing that, I was like, "Oh
9 my gosh, I don't want to be mocked like that. I don't want to be exactly like they're portraying
10 what I could be possibly. And parents had said that too. Like, they would point that out that it's
11 a katoey. Don't wear female clothing or else you're going to be katoey.
- 12
- 13 AJ: Right.
- 14
- 15 SS: And then I see katoeys portray in the Thai lacans or the Thai series. And it's in a negative light.
- 16
- 17 AJ: Mhmm.
- 18
- 19 SS: So I would kind of loath, not loath, but have this self-hatred towards my true identity on the
20 inside. I would suppress it for such a long time. I mean I would see a drag queen and be like
21 embarrassed by them, and—
- 22
- 23 AJ: When was the first time you ever met another transgender person? I mean, I know you saw
24 them on television.
- 25
- 26 SS: Oh, actually my mom, we lived in the apartments of Minnesota off of Lake Street— no, I want to
27 say off of 36th Ave by 35W, the highway 35W, 36th Ave. Those apartments over there they would
28 take in like new refugees and immigrants. There were a lot of them. There were a couple of
29 transgender ladies that would live in the basement or that were from the same country as we
30 were.
- 31
- 32 AJ: Oh really?
- 33
- 34 SS: They were actually from Laos, and they would come to my mom since she's a seamstress and
35 ask her to fix their clothing or hem their dress or whatever. And that was the first time I'd seen
36 them when I was like four or five years old.
- 37
- 38 AJ: Oh my goodness, really? [Laughs].
- 39
- 40 SS: And I was curious. I was actually kind of frightened of them.
- 41
- 42 AJ: Yeah, that's scary kinda.
- 43
- 44 SS: It was like, "These people are different." But, uhm, I was wondering are they like just, I mean, I
45 just remember seeing one coming up to my mom, her makeup and everything. She had a deep
46 voice, and I was confused. I was like, "Is she a male or a female?" And that's when I learned oh
47 there are katoeys from my parents and family but they seemed really nice. That was the first

1 contact I had with— but I was really shy approaching them. I was really shy kid growing up and
2 very timid, didn't talk much.
3
4 AJ: Did you ever get bullied in school?
5
6 SS: I did. I did get bullied in school. My first bullying experience would be I would say in third grade
7 when I was picked on at the bus cause I had like a lot of feminine traits.
8
9 AJ: Energy.
10
11 SS: Energy and behavior and people would call me katoey already at that age.
12
13 AJ: Oh wow.
14
15 SS: They would be like, "Look at that katoey."
16
17 AJ: So you went to school with a lot of other immigrated children.
18
19 SS: Immigrated children, yeah. They were from the same country, and they all knew what that word
20 was.
21
22 AJ: Right.
23
24 SS: And they would make fun of me.
25
26 AJ: Oh boy.
27
28 SS: Yeah, so I was bullied on the bus by older, I think they were like sixth grade and I was in third
29 grade, and they were calling me katoey, and they were like, "Do you like boys? That's
30 disgusting." And they were like, they were harassing me, like sexually too I would say. It was
31 kind of traumatic. I don't know if I should share this in front of the camera but on the bus they
32 were inappropriately touching themselves and then using their hands to touch my face. And
33 they were like, "Do you like that?"
34
35 AJ: Oh, wow.
36
37 SS: It was really traumatic for me as a child.
38
39 AJ: I'm so sorry.
40
41 SS: Yeah.
42
43 AJ: I mean, you can say whatever you wanna say.
44
45 SS: Are you sure? Okay. I wanted to make sure it was not inappropriate.
46
47 AJ: No, no, no, no.

1
2 SS: Okay, that was my first traumatic experience with being bullied, being called katoey. It's the
3 equivalent term for like...
4
5 AJ: Faggot?
6
7 SS: ...fag or faggot. Exactly. And they were older than me. I was scared. A lot of them were
8 influenced by the gangs, like the crypts and the blood back then. There were already wearing
9 like reds, and blue rags at the time. And I was so scared. I cried after they bullied me. I didn't
10 want to say anything. I tried keeping it to myself, but it was too hard for me to keep it in.
11
12 AJ: Yeah.
13
14 SS: I balled in school. When I went to class after getting off the bus the teacher was asking, "What
15 was wrong, what was wrong?" until a friend of my, she was a close friend of mine too at the
16 time, she was a girl and we spoke the same language. She was Laotian, and she had to do the
17 interpreting, the translating.
18
19 AJ: Mhm.
20
21 SS: Cause I couldn't form my words in English at the time or what was going through my head. It
22 was just too traumatic. And they brought in an interpreter.
23
24 AJ: Oh wow.
25
26 SS: And she sought after the boys who bullied me on the bus, and we all had a talk, and they finally
27 confessed to the interpreter what happened on the bus. You know, cause I couldn't say it. I was
28 scared I was going to get beat up...
29
30 AJ: Sure. Right. Yeah.
31
32 SS: ... if I told them the truth, and one confessed and they were like, "Yeah, he acts so much like a
33 girl. He's a katoey. That's why we did this. That's why we made fun of him."
34
35 AJ: Awe.
36
37 SS: Yeah, and the interpreter was like, you know, "Don't do that. Don't bully each other like that."
38 They [the boys] were like, "Don't, tell him not to look at us cause we don't like him looking at us,
39 blah, blah, blah." And then she was like, they were using he at that time, that pronoun, and she
40 was like, "What are you guys supposed to look at? I mean, look at the floor the whole time or
41 what? I mean, people will look at you no matter what, you know, or glance at you."
42
43 AJ: Right. [Laughs].
44
45 SS: It doesn't mean anything, and I wasn't intentionally staring at them or anything. I think they just
46 had an issue with me being too feminine or whatever.
47

1 AJ: Oh no.
2
3 SS: At the time, yeah, I was scared of what would happen after—
4
5 AJ: Did anything happen to the boys or?
6
7 SS: They kind of warned me that I'm going to get beat up.
8
9 AJ: Wow. [Laughs].
10
11 SS: Yeah. So I kept my distance away from them, those two and everything, but I was still like picked
12 on too after that.
13
14 AJ: Mhm.
15
16 SS: And don't know, it was just, it was quite a traumatic experience for me, and—
17
18 AJ: Where did you go to high school?
19
20 SS: I went to South High, actually.
21
22 AJ: Okay. Did things get a little better?
23
24 SS: Uhm, things got a little better. I didn't have any traumatic like bullying experiences but from
25 that experience I started to suppress my feelings or my identity more, and not being able to
26 comfortably express them. I wanted to hide them.
27
28 AJ: Sure.
29
30 SS: I wanted to be more masculine, butch it up, and avoid the tension.
31
32 AJ: Sure.
33
34 SS: Even though it naturally happens, the way I walk, the way I carry myself, the way I talk...
35
36 AJ: Right, you're beautiful.
37
38 SS: Thank you, Andrea. It's just who I am. And people who nitpick at you or like find it. They were
39 like, "Why do you talk like a girl? Why are you swaying your hips like that? Stop that. You know?"
40
41 AJ: Right.
42
43 SS: And then I tried to straighten myself, and I didn't even know I was doing it the whole thing.
44
45 AJ: [Laughs].
46

- 1 SS: It was just all natural, self-consciously. I was trying to suppress it, and be more, be better at
2 acting like a male. A male or a masculine butch person that society wants me to be and my
3 family wants me to be so I wouldn't be picked on or bullied again.
4
- 5 AJ: Did you ever date girls?
6
- 7 SS: Uhm, I avoided the dating scene. I avoided the socializing whatsoever. I was really timid and shy
8 and outcast. I did not have many friends growing up especially in high school. That's when
9 hormones were going through my mind and my body changes are happening. And my voice
10 dropping. I guess I remember like when my voice dropped it was a shock to me cause other
11 people would hear how I sound, I think. They were like, "Your voice got deeper." But then in my
12 mind my voice is still this high pitch voice...
13
- 14 AJ: Right.
15
- 16 SS: ... because to me it sounds like the voice I want it to be and in my mind it's very high and
17 feminine. You know, I think I still sound like that at the time but people would point it out. And I
18 would here a recording of myself sounding like really low.
19
- 20 AJ: Oh, wow.
21
- 22 SS: I was like, "Oh my god. I sound ugly. I sound hideous, but I was like, "It's natural I guess." You
23 know, if I had to live my life as a boy so be it.
24
- 25 AJ: Mmm.
26
- 27 SS: And that's where I had depression going on with my identity. I really didn't associate much with
28 anybody at the time. I kept things to myself a lot growing up in high school. I would sometimes
29 sit by myself during lunch. I would have just one or two friends but it was not like all the time. I
30 guess I was still, a lot of people still speculated too what was wrong— like why was I so
31 feminine? Am I gay? I was asked that a lot too.
32
- 33 AJ: Wow.
34
- 35 SS: Yeah, if I was gay, and uhm—
36
- 37 AJ: People would just ask you that?
38
- 39 SS: Yeah, yeah. People would ask that or be like, "Oh, he's gay." You know, like you're gay. That
40 made me so embarrassed. Like, no, I'm not trying myself to look gay or seem gay, but that was
41 when I thought, uh, was the best way at the time maybe to identify myself. I mean if I wanted to
42 keep the appearance of being male— cause I was, uhm, my sexual identity I was attracted to
43 boys. And then I was actually in the closet for that too as well and didn't express that either. So I
44 didn't date. I did not date whatsoever. No dating life whatsoever.
45
- 46 AJ: Yeah. Just didn't. [Laughs].
47

- 1 SS: No love whatsoever.
2
- 3 AJ: Yeah.
4
- 5 SS: Just trying to be a good student and a good son throughout my high school years. I guess, uhm, I
6 mean, some girls find me cute, even some boys that I kind of suspected find me cute. But I just
7 get like very bashful and shy.
8
- 9 AJ: [Laughs].
10
- 11 SS: I turn away. I run away the other way cause I didn't even know what to say to them. I don't
12 know how to even express what I'm going through but it was an adjustment— it was like a
13 depressing time for me.
14
- 15 AJ: When did you decide to live your inner truth on the outside?
16
- 17 SS: Uhm, okay, uh, it was I want to say after college.
18
- 19 AJ: So not while you were in college?
20
- 21 SS: Well not while I was there in college, nooo.
22
- 23 AJ: [Laughs]. Where did you go to college?
24
- 25 SS: I went to Mankato State University. So I went there first for aviation program cause I wanted to
26 fly planes.
27
- 28 AJ: Wow.
29
- 30 SS: And become a pilot. And I got the experience of flying an airplane and getting in the aviation
31 program, but it was a really expensive program at the time cause gas is just really high. And I
32 had to quickly change my major cause I was exhausting my financial aid budget for that
33 program. And it was the most expensive program there is there. So I switched my major to
34 nutrition, emphasizing in food service management.
35
- 36 AJ: Okay.
37
- 38 SS: So I got a bachelor's degree in that...
39
- 40 AJ: Mhm.
41
- 42 SS: ... because I decided to go towards the business route, and hopefully someday open my own
43 restaurant cause I love food. I love to cook, you know? Yeah. So after college that's when I
44 started to— I couldn't take it anymore. Like maybe balling everything up, you know? I took one
45 thing at a time. Maybe it's safer to come out as male being attracted to another male, as gay.
46
- 47 AJ: As gay.

1
2 SS: Yeah, but that was not it.
3
4 AJ: Did you publicly come out?
5
6 SS: I did not publicly come out.
7
8 AJ: But you tried living a gay lifestyle?
9
10 SS: Uhm, not so much.
11
12 AJ: [Laughs]. Okay.
13
14 SS: I don't know. It was kind of like. Oh gosh, it was like, I was still scared, you know, to come out as
15 gay or trans or whatever but—
16
17 AJ: But you took baby steps?
18
19 SS: I took baby steps. That's why it took me a long time to come to where I'm at right now and be
20 who I am, to be complete who I am and comfortable with myself. I guess I took little baby steps
21 at a time throwing it out there little at a time and see what people's reactions are and how they
22 would take it. That's what I was, I was afraid of what people would say, what people would do,
23 what people thought at the time. I was young, uhm, didn't know any better.
24
25 AJ: Mhm.
26
27 SS: Uhm, it was hard though. Like, even coming out as gay. I told my close , I guess, friends, a couple
28 of them. And they were like, "We knew. We always knew."
29
30 AJ: [Laughs].
31
32 SS: And then, uhm, I think— and then my parents started to catch on to it, you know?
33
34 AJ: Mhm.
35
36 SS: I didn't directly come out to them but they were starting to catch the signs and seeing me
37 transforming.
38
39 AJ: The changes? Yeah.
40
41 SS: The changes. Uhm, and so were my friends. I was beginning to be more brave and courageous
42 you know, after college to live the life I wanted to be and be who I wanted to be.
43
44 AJ: Wow.
45

1 SS: And I started seeking out friends who were in the GLBT or LGBTQ community and seeing if there
2 was somebody I could talk to. I first joined the, uhm, I guess I joined the volley ball group to
3 make friends in that community. And I met a lot of great people that way.
4
5 AJ: Like a gay volley ball team or?
6
7 SS: It was like GLASS. Have you ever heard of GLASS? Gay Lesbian Amateur Sports.
8
9 AJ: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. They play around Lake Harriet, I think.
10
11 SS: No, they play over at Nicolet, Martin Luther King Community Center.
12
13 AJ: Oh, okay. Uhuh, uhuh.
14
15 SS: They have like open gym every like Sunday, I think. They have the rainbow tournaments. It's not
16 like exclusively gay. I met some women there. I met some lesbians there. I met some straight
17 people there. So everybody.
18
19 AJ: So everybody, yeah.
20
21 SS: It was everybody.
22
23 AJ: Mhm.
24
25 SS: Uhm, so that's when I took my first step into diving into the community, the LGBTQ community.
26 And also, I wanted to open a business too. First it was like a restaurant business I wanted to
27 start up, but I met a lesbian women who we became close friends with cause we went to
28 Chicago together, Boystown.
29
30 AJ: Oh wow. [Laughs].
31
32 SS: And yeah, we saw there was a huge LGBTQ community there. They have their own block there.
33
34 AJ: Yeah.
35
36 SS: Businesses.
37
38 AJ: Wow.
39
40 SS: Local bars and whatever.
41
42 AJ: Very much a whole neighborhood.
43
44 SS: Yeah, exactly. It was very much a whole neighborhood. Like how come there's nothing like that
45 in Minneapolis? You know, where people can go to a store catered to the LGBTQ community
46 and go by Pride year or be comfortable buying makeup there and wigs and shoes, you know?
47 There's not anything there in Minneapolis like it. So we talked closely together about starting a

1 business together because we were tired of working like our normal jobs, and we were
2 ambitious and talked about running a being our own boss and being successful and helping the
3 community out and seeing the need for it. We thought it was a good idea. I don't know how
4 though but we did it. We executed it. We opened up our first storefront in Uptown. It was
5 called— the store was called the GLBT Spot.
6
7 AJ: Wow. [Laughs]. In uptown?
8
9 SS: In Uptown!
10
11 AJ: I don't remember this place.
12
13 SS: Yeah, yup, yup. We were—
14
15 AJ: Where was it at?
16
17 SS: Where was it at?
18
19 AJ: Yeah, do you remember?
20
21 SS: Yeah, it was off of 24th and Hennepin right next to Spyhouse Coffee shop.
22
23 AJ: Wow.
24
25 SS: And across the street from the Fifth Element, near that Walgreens—
26
27 AJ: Oh, so it's on 24th.
28
29 SS: It's on Hennepin.
30
31 AJ: Oh on Hennepin.
32
33 SS: Yeah, and the intersection was 24th.
34
35 AJ: Okay.
36
37 SS: So we were there. We found a spot that was vacant and we thought, "This is the perfect spot."
38
39 AJ: Yeah.
40
41 SS: Cause we know there's like a market there for the LGBTQ community to shop there. We actually
42 renovated the place, you know, we rented it. It used to be a head shop. It was like we worked
43 day and night to make the place look very nice...
44
45 AJ: Mhm.
46

1 SS: ...and comfortable. Like an actually retail spot. Because before then it was a head shop that was
2 run down, the ceilings were falling apart, the tiles were ripping apart. It had a really bad smell.
3 There was stains on the wall, graffiti. Nobody wanted to rent it but we dedicated our blood,
4 sweat, and tears into it and made it very clean, nice, comfortable shopping environment catered
5 to the LGBTQ community. And what we had available there was, uhm, we kind of wanted to
6 model off of the store that we saw in Chicago out of Boystown. It was called Beatniks.
7
8 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].
9
10 SS: I don't know if you've ever been there.
11
12 AJ: No, I've never been there, no, but—
13
14 SS: Okay, well we had bracelets, rainbow bracelets, rainbow lanyards, uhm, t-shirts that had sayings
15 like with same love symbols or pride sayings, like LGBT positive sayings.
16
17 AJ: Right. Mhm. Sure.
18
19 SS: And some comedic sayings, you know.
20
21 AJ: Yeah. [Laughs].
22
23 SS: We also had corsets and dresses for people who were transitioning too. And, you know, swim
24 suits and binders for, uhm—
25
26 AJ: Trans guys.
27
28 SS: Trans guys, from FTM. We tried to cater to everybody in the LGBTQ community. We tried to
29 target everybody and have it be known that we have a safe space to come in and shop.
30
31 AJ: Is that store still going?
32
33 SS: Uhm, that store was up for two years.
34
35 AJ: Wow.
36
37 SS: Yeah, uhm, there was good reaction towards it off of Hennepin but we didn't get enough
38 business to pay for the overhead costs...
39
40 AJ: Mhm.
41
42 SS: ... in Uptown because it was so expensive, and being a store owner, it's like you're there day and
43 night. You're married to your business.
44
45 AJ: Yes. [Laughs].
46

- 1 SS: But it was— what I love about that was that I got to meet new friends and make new friends
2 and interesting customers and helping them out or whatever— or whatever they need you
3 know. We sold a lot of like uhm sex and wellness products there for protection. We sold lingerie,
4 we sold wigs, we sold jewelry for drag queens, everything.
5
- 6 AJ: Mhm.
7
- 8 SS: We pretty much tried to make it as successful as possible but in the end it's the customers that
9 shape your business.
10
- 11 AJ: Yeah. You gotta have what they want otherwise they don't come.
12
- 13 SS: You gotta have what they want. You gotta meet demands otherwise they don't come. Then we
14 started uh, me and my original business partner started falling apart. We had arguments and
15 differences and she left and I bought her out.
16
- 17 AJ: Mhm.
18
- 19 SS: So I was flying solo for the last couple few months running the business before our lease ends
20 there on Hennepin. So I had to rebrand it cause she took the name.
21
- 22 AJ: Oh wow.
23
- 24 SS: And she wanted to create her online stores. So we parted ways, uh, you know? It wasn't— it
25 wasn't too bad but we parted ways fairly. And it's always hard to maybe start a business with a
26 partner.
27
- 28 AJ: Yeah, it's tough.
29
- 30 SS: It's tough.
31
- 32 AJ: But you have a new store.
33
- 34 SS: Yeah, I have a new store. So I rebranded it. And then I opened it up next to the 19 Bar. And it
35 was more like a clothing store and a rave shop into one...
36
- 37 AJ: Uhuh.
38
- 39 SS: ... because we had some people asking for glow sticks and like spirithoods that are animal
40 printed...
41
- 42 AJ: Oh okay yeah.
43
- 44 SS: ...for the rave scene but that was, uhm, my new business— I picked up a new business partner
45 with new ideas at the time. And he brought it along but I still had the pride items. And I still had
46 the same customers that follow me there, you know? Until my lease ended there I decided not
47 to pursue that renewal that lease and then I decided to break away from the rave scene cause it

1 was kind of negative at the same time cause in the rave community there's like the drugs going
2 on and I didn't want to deal with those reper— uh, legal issues if anything happens, you know?
3
4 AJ: Sure. Mhm.
5
6 SS: Or be liable for anybody...
7
8 AJ: Right.
9
10 SS: ... that's underage.
11
12 AJ: [Laughs].
13
14 SS: So me and that business partner separated ways, and he opened the rave shop on its own on
15 Hennepin. And I helped him start that up.
16
17 AJ: Okay.
18
19 SS: So it's there still off of 31st and Hennepin. And then I parted ways and opened up a boutique
20 with a new business owner who was female, a cisgender female, and she has a boutique in
21 Rosemount in their shopping mall plaza.
22
23 AJ: Mhm.
24
25 SS: It had sexy denim, cator, blouses, more women focused, which is what I wanted, which I liked,
26 you know? And then that's when my transition started beginning.
27
28 AJ: Oh. Okay.
29
30 SS: I started becoming— I was starting to blossom.
31
32 AJ: uhuh.
33
34 SS: So, I mean, she let me borrow her clothes, she handed me down her old clothes that didn't fit
35 her anymore, and I loved it all. I felt like myself. I felt comfortable in them. I felt beautiful. I was
36 like, "This is who I am."
37
38 AJ: So how, how has your family reacted and your friends?
39
40 SS: Uhm, my family, they, boy, it was already hard enough coming out as gay to them.
41
42 AJ: Mhm.
43
44 SS: Cause, you know how I came out to them as gay? I was like, "Mom, dad I'm gonna open up an
45 LGBTQ store."
46
47 AJ: Oh, okay. [Laughs].

1
2 SS: And you're gonna like it no matter what.
3
4 AJ: Right.
5
6 SS: But I didn't sit down and say, "Mom, dad I'm gay."
7
8 AJ: "I'm gay." Yeah.
9
10 SS: I'm like "Look what I'm doing right now." So I like put it in their faces with rainbow flags and
11 rainbow necklaces.
12
13 AJ: Oh wow. [Laughs].
14
15 SS: Uhm, the buttons. Whatever, you know. And so surprisingly they were very supportive of the
16 LGBT community.
17
18 AJ: Really?
19
20 SS: For my business. At first I thought they wouldn't want anything to do it, they wouldn't want any
21 part of it.
22
23 AJ: Uhuh.
24
25 SS: My mom was the biggest supporter of them all.
26
27 AJ: Oh my goodness. That's awesome.
28
29 SS: She was always right by my side. You know, when I was flying solo she was the one—
30
31 AJ: She would come to visit the business and stuff?
32
33 SS: She would come to visit the business. My customers would know her. She would be the one
34 helping out, talking to them. She was a people person.
35
36 AJ: Oh wow. [Laughs].
37
38 SS: And she would take care of them as well too. "I'm busy with a customer." She would go and see
39 what they need. I mean her English isn't really good but she's still able to communicate, to make
40 jokes with you, make you laugh, make you happy, make you comfortable, whoever you are, you
41 know? And, uhm, she's a loving mother in that aspect, and I can't imagine doing it without her
42 or by myself at the time. After my business partner left the first year I started the business when
43 I was on my own but she was always there. After she came from work she would come to my
44 shop and help just do little like, do whatever she can to help out. She doesn't know how to
45 check out customers, she would clean the racks, the store pictures, adjusted jewelry,
46 remerchandise everything with me, hang the new merchandise up, keep inventory up. She was

1 that supportive of me and so was my dad. He would help with heavy lifting and stuff and moving
2 furniture.
3
4 AJ: Wow. [Laughs]. They still thought you were gay at this point?
5
6 SS: Yeah, they still thought I was gay at the time.
7
8 AJ: Uhuh.
9
10 SS: And, uhm, cause at the time I saw how they reacted to gay people. They seemed to not be very,
11 I mean, I saw that they didn't react—
12
13 AJ: They weren't as mean.
14
15 SS: They're not as mean as I thought they were going to be. They surprised me. I mean it was all in
16 my head.
17
18 AJ: Yeah.
19
20 SS: You know, like, whatever stop me earlier on from coming out or expressing my true identity was
21 whatever was in my head, you know? And they surprised me tremendously with their support.
22 When I was shoving this all in their faces, whether they like it or not, I was just like, "Okay, what
23 are they going to say if they see that, the two males' shirts holding hands or the gay pride items
24 and, you know, the pro-gay stuff, and like my customers. They didn't blink.
25
26 AJ: Not a blink.
27
28 SS: They didn't flinch.
29
30 AJ: [Laughs].
31
32 SS: You know, I was like, "I don't know what I was afraid for." I didn't know what I was afraid of, you
33 know. But there was not a lot of—
34
35 AJ: But you knew you were not gay?
36
37 SS: I knew I was not gay. No, I knew I was not gay.
38
39 AJ: So how are they now? Do you get along with your family now?
40
41 SS: Yeah, I get along with my family now. Uhm, I mean [sighs] there were times before I came out as
42 trans to them that they were, they were like, "You know, please—." They want the best for me.
43
44 AJ: Yes.
45
46 SS: Most parents do for their child. They don't want to see their child endure so much and in a lot of
47 pain, yeah. So many prejudice. They want the best for me. And in their own way they love you

1 but at the same time you don't understand like why they're not accepting right away or why
2 their not fully understanding who I am or not fully getting the term and the differentiation
3 between gay and transgender.
4

5 AJ: Mhm.
6

7 SS: They don't understand why I want to live my life the way I am, you know, as a woman. While I
8 can just be more stealth, living my life as a male, and that way I would be looked at as normal. I
9 mean, being gay, I guess in a way, you can kind of conceal your sexuality.
10

11 AJ: Mhm.
12

13 SS: Right?
14

15 AJ: Yeah.
16

17 SS: Uhm, so that's what they were, "Don't." It kind of hit me when I came out as gay to them but
18 then they were like, "Don't dress up as a girl, please."
19

20 AJ: Mmm.
21

22 SS: Be, be the gay that's masculine. Be the gay that's normal looking and don't cause attention.
23 Don't be a katoey. And all those memories from childhood flashback.
24

25 AJ: Wow.
26

27 SS: And like oh my god I can't fully come out to them. I can't really dabble dabble with what I want
28 to try on, what I want to wear, what I want to be that day or how I want to express myself. I was
29 like, "Maybe I should just like, kinda like ease them in a little bit, you know, since it was already
30 too overwhelming, I mean, I thought it was too much to handle already with the business and
31 all. Uhm, and then maybe if I came in with a dress it's gonna be too much for them to handle.
32 But, uhm, I, I guess that change in them when I, uhm, started wearing female clothing and
33 makeup more often and I wanted to identify myself more and more with a female, you know,
34 and what my thought process was like, you know, I can't become a gay person because this is
35 not who I really am.
36

37 AJ: Mhm.
38

39 SS: And my parents, how am I going to have my parents see this without them hurting me, you
40 know, cause it's already hurting me knowing that they don't accept that type of life.
41

42 AJ: Mhm.
43

44 SS: You know? But then, they're kind of, it seems like they're tolerant enough to an extent, to a
45 limitation but I was hoping they would be open about, you know, open to anything, you know,
46 accepting me, loving me unconditionally, whoever I am.
47

1 AJ: Sure.
2
3 SS: No matter who I am. Uhm, just as long as I'm not a bad person, you know?
4
5 AJ: Mhm.
6
7 SS: So I tested the waters out with wearing like women's jeans at first with the little bling.
8
9 AJ: [Laughs].
10
11 SS: You know it's like here now and the caters stuff with the lace and the prints. Uhm, and I did drag
12 a couple of times, I wanna say.
13
14 AJ: Really?
15
16 SS: And I loved it.
17
18 AJ: Where? Like the 90s?
19
20 SS: At the Saloon.
21
22 AJ: At the Saloon?
23
24 SS: And then I, I actually dated somebody who was like, "Let's go out to the Gay 90s and dress in
25 drag." I was like kind of hesitant, like, "No, why do you wanna do that?" cause I was really, uhm,
26 that was at the time when I was still suppressing those feelings.
27
28 AJ: Sure.
29
30 SS: You know, I was afraid of being the katoey that was stereotyped when I was younger and
31 remembering like the negative like reaction towards it especially when I got bullied for it too.
32
33 AJ: Right.
34
35 SS: I tried not to cause so much attention towards myself. Otherwise, why not, you know, just for
36 fun one night in a dress and wear makeup and I loved it. That's when I felt liberated.
37
38 AJ: Really. [Laughs].
39
40 SS: Yeah, uhm, then I started to understand it more and then started watching youtube videos.
41
42 AJ: Mmm.
43
44 SS: And identifying with transgender people.
45
46 AJ: Mhm.
47

- 1 SS: And having the same feelings that they're going through. So I came towards accepting myself
2 fully when I went out a couple times in drag and then started wearing makeup and also
3 watching more videos and meeting trans people and talking to them, going to support groups,
4 and that's when I realized I'm different than a gay man, you know?
5
- 6 AJ: Yeah.
7
- 8 SS: I don't— I actually don't— I don't think like a gay male you know. I identify myself as a woman
9 more like the way I think, the way I talk, my emotions, my heart and my bones and my soul.
10 Uhm, I relate more to women, and, uhm, I was like, "This is, I guess this is who I am." I came to
11 accept those terms and that fact about myself.
12
- 13 AJ: Which is sometimes the hardest thing to overcome, right?
14
- 15 SS: Yeah! Yeah. Exactly. And it's like coming out again to everybody.
16
- 17 AJ: Mhm.
18
- 19 SS: You know? And having them use the correct pronouns now. Before then my friends knew me as
20 male and trying to have them use the female pronouns. It's kinda hard for them to adjust
21 sometimes, but I will correct them. And using the new name too, Sakura.
22
- 23 AJ: How did you come to the name?
24
- 25 SS: How I came to the name? I wanna say Sakura was always, I've heard of the name before. It's a
26 Japanese name, meaning cherry blossom. And it was a character, a Japanese Character from, I
27 think a comic or like I was kind of like a comic geek at the time.
28
- 29 AJ: [Laughs]. Yeah.
30
- 31 SS: A video game nerd.
32
- 33 AJ: Uhuh.
34
- 35 SS: So there was a character on one of those things called, named Sakura. And she was a strong girl,
36 always my favorite picks in the games.
37
- 38 AJ: Mhm.
39
- 40 SS: Uhm, I was like, "Sakura." And the meaning of it, blossom. And I'm blossoming.
41
- 42 AJ: Mhm. Yeah.
43
- 44 SS: And it's one of my favorite flowering trees. I plant one, I planted Sakura tree in the front of my
45 house.
46
- 47 AJ: Really?

1
2 SS: Yes! Yes, yes.
3
4 AJ: Wow.
5
6 SS: So it symbolizes me in a way. I planted it myself, uhm, it's right in the front. It blooms in May...
7
8 AJ: Awe. So beautiful.
9
10 SS: ... for eleven days. It's really beautiful.
11
12 AJ: Uhuh.
13
14 SS: I open up the windows in the spring.
15
16 AJ: The white, yeah.
17
18 SS: The white, the tint of pink in the center.
19
20 AJ: Uhuh.
21
22 SS: And then the breeze coming in. Uh, it smells so good.
23
24 AJ: It's a wonderful smell, yeah. It gets really strong towards the end, the last few days.
25
26 SS: Yeah, it's a very gentle, feminine symbol to me and I feel like I'm sensitive, I'm feminine, I'm
27 gentle like a Sakura, and I'm still blossoming.
28
29 AJ: That's so beautiful.
30
31 SS: Yeah. It is really beautiful.
32
33 AJ: Let me ask you this. Uhm, and you don't have to answer this if you don't want to but you kind of
34 indicated that maybe someday you might want to have surgery but what medical interventions
35 have you done to date on your journey, on your transgender journey.
36
37 SS: Sure, sure. To answer that I have, uhm, since I began my transition I started on HRT, which is
38 hormones replacement therapy.
39
40 AJ: Right.
41
42 SS: And that's going really well so far.
43
44 AJ: Uhuh.
45
46 SS: Uhm, I'm experiencing some physical changes, uhm, which I love.
47

1 AJ: [Laughs].
2
3 SS: Yes, I notice people noticing too, that I'm glowing.
4
5 AJ: Yes.
6
7 SS: Uhm, I feel happy and confident, uhm, I am— I'm liking the results at the rate I'm going, and, for
8 when I can afford it, I would like to do more, you know, for procedures, surgical procedures.
9
10 AJ: Uhuh, sure.
11
12 SS: I would like to have my top surgery done and my bottom surgery.
13
14 AJ: [Yawns]. Excuse me.
15
16 SS: That's okay. So, as far as surgeries, I have none surgeries so far coming up but I am taking
17 hormones to prepare for these surgeries.
18
19 AJ: So you're planning to...
20
21 SS: Yes, I am planning. It's gonna be a journey. It's always gonna be a journey for all of us, yeah. So
22 yeah.
23
24 AJ: Wow. Would it— you know, uhm, Sakura, yesterday or the day before yesterday, I believe it
25 was. No it was— Wednesday!
26
27 SS: Mhm, no problem.
28
29 AJ: Uhm, number forty-five. The dude who sits in the house in Washington D.C. 1600 Pennsylvania
30 Ave. but I can't say his name, like it's— I just can't say his name but they, the president...
31
32 SS: Yes.
33
34 AJ: Uhm, decided to roll back protections for transgender youth. What do you think about that?
35
36 SS: [Takes deep breathe]. That I really, uhm, and I, I'm really, I don't know there's no word to
37 describe how angry I was towards that attack on, on our community.
38
39 AJ: Mhm.
40
41 SS: Especially trans youth, you know?
42
43 AJ: Sure.
44
45 SS: They are the most vulnerable, and I work with children...
46
47 AJ: Mhm.

1
2 SS: ... in my daytime job.
3
4 AJ: Sure.
5
6 SS: And there are trans kids in my job or queer identifying kids.
7
8 AJ: Mhm.
9
10 SS: And—
11
12 AJ: Are they frightened?
13
14 SS: I— since this law just got revoked, I, I would think they are frightened. Otherwise they haven't
15 approached me yet but I'm ready.
16
17 AJ: Sure.
18
19 SS: You know, to be open to have them come talk to me.
20
21 AJ: Mhm. Mhm.
22
23 SS: Be that person, be that role model.
24
25 AJ: And support them, yeah.
26
27 SS: Support them. I even talked to the principal about it, you know, and it's great that the
28 superintendent wrote an email to the whole district of Minneapolis public schools...
29
30 AJ: Oh really?
31
32 SS: ... reassuring that with that revocation our transgender students are still going to be treated the
33 same.
34
35 AJ: Mhm.
36
37 SS: And they shouldn't feel unsafe at all.
38
39 AJ: Wow.
40
41 SS: And that they will be fine. And with that assurance I think that's, that's a great thing for our
42 superintendent, you know. He's actually new to the district too.
43
44 AJ: Yeah.
45
46 SS: And with that email I think that's a great first step in his career to approach that issue, you
47 know? It's, I mean, I love kids, I mean the kids I work with, they, I want them to feel safe. I mean,

1 it's not about me, you know? When it comes to identifying myself as transgender in the
2 workplace but I do it for like the kids who are experiencing the same things too. I want them to
3 see me as someone they can relate to and come to for anything.
4
5 AJ: Mhm.
6
7 SS: Or talk to me about anything. And they love that, uhm. So I want to be that support for them.
8 And that's what I said to the principal, you know. I don't, it's not about me and how this stuff is
9 treating me right now, it's about the children.
10
11 AJ: How are the staff treating you right now.
12
13 SS: Right now, uhm, yeah, a lot of them, two of them, I call them my fairy godmothers.
14
15 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].
16
17 SS: And I want to shout to Shelly and Julia.
18
19 AJ: Alright. Go Shelly and Julia.
20
21 SS: Yeah, they are my— they work in the health office in Whittier School, and they were the ones
22 who are like supportive in my transition and me coming out at work and, uhm, being supportive
23 of me. And they went shopping with me for the first time to get sized, you know, to have my bra
24 sized cause, you know, these girls are popping up, right, with the hormones.
25
26 AJ: Yeah, nice.
27
28 SS: And they hurt.
29
30 AJ: Yes, they do.
31
32 SS: Welcome to womanhood, right?
33
34 AJ: Yes.
35
36 SS: So, and they're like, you know, "If anybody gives you a hard time have them come to us."
37
38 AJ: Oh wow.
39
40 SS: We will show them what's up.
41
42 AJ: Okay. [Laughs].
43
44 SS: So it's great to have their, that kind of support...
45
46 AJ: Absolutely.
47

1 SS: ... and backup. And also the principal too was supportive or is supportive.
2
3 AJ: Mhm.
4
5 SS: And she's like, "If you have any issues with the staff or the adults let me know right away." And I
6 was just like, you know, "Do you know that we do have transgender kids here or queer
7 identifying kids here? I want them— my purpose here is to have them feel safe and let you
8 know that they're visible and they're welcome. Even though if they're not, outside of school, if
9 they're uncomfortable with expressing that in their families, cause of what I've gone through
10 too.
11
12 AJ: Sure.
13
14 SS: I want her to understand, you know, that school should be a safe place for, uhm, transgender
15 kids or queer kids or LGBTQ kids, you know? No matter what they're values, uhm, from their
16 family had taught them or instilled in them as they're growing up.
17
18 AJ: Sure.
19
20 SS: Cause I don't want them to experience what I've experienced with bullying and the self-esteem
21 and body images and depression and being alone. And that's what I felt throughout, uhm, my
22 student years in elementary and high school and junior high. But yeah. And it's great that also
23 there's like maybe training for staff there, uhm, for someone to come and train people.
24
25 AJ: Mhm. Mhm.
26
27 SS: And how to, uhm, talk to adults and staff. And how to, uh, be accepting and welcoming and
28 understanding about the LGBTQ community and how to make us feel safe and equal and fairly
29 treated there, no matter what, you know. This new president is— he makes me angry too right
30 now.
31
32 AJ: Yeah.
33
34 SS: It breaks my heart, you know, but we all have to support each other and stick with each other as
35 a community and work hard towards our goal— towards our equal rights.
36
37 AJ: Mhm.
38
39 SS: Our human rights. It's not just a state by state case, you know?
40
41 AJ: Right.
42
43 SS: Yeah. It's a human rights issue.
44
45 AJ: Human right issue.
46

1 SS: Yeah! Human right issue. And that's why I feel at awe and humble. I feel honored to be
2 interviewing with you, Andrea, because you are trying to make a difference for all of us, for us
3 girls, for us guys. Uhm, with your leadership on the things you've been doing for the community,
4 I respect that a lot.
5
6 AJ: Wow.
7
8 SS: And I actually want to do more like you too.
9
10 AJ: Uhuh.
11
12 SS: I wanna be an advocate for our community, and—
13
14 AJ: Well, you are. You're—
15
16 SS: I hope so. I hope so someday.
17
18 AJ: You are a business owner. You are a, uhm, youth worker. You are a fashion designer.
19
20 SS: Designer! Yes, I'm a realtor too part time.
21
22 AJ: You are a realtor.
23
24 SS: So, I'm trying to like, there's not many transgender realtors out there catering to the LGBTQ
25 community so I'm trying to reach out to the LGBTQ community and letting them know that
26 there's, uhm, realtor services offered by LGBTQ people like me.
27
28 AJ: Mhm.
29
30 SS: I understand your needs.
31
32 AJ: Right.
33
34 SS: And, whatever, fashion, houses. Also I'm a part of the, I'm excited this year, I'm a part of the
35 Transgender Health Coalition.
36
37 AJ: Oh my goodness.
38
39 SS: Yes. I forgot to mention. I'm sorry.
40
41 AJ: Uhuh.
42
43 SS: But I just heard the news yesterday when I went to the trans support group.
44
45 AJ: Oh wonderful. Congratulations.
46
47 SS: Thank you! I applied and got accepted. Hopefully I'll be volunteering more and helping out.

1
2 AJ: Is that the city of Minneapolis Transgender Commission?
3
4 SS: Yep. Oh, the Health Coalition? Yep.
5
6 AJ: Oh okay.
7
8 SS: Do you know the Shot Clinic where they—
9
10 AJ: Oh the Shot Clinic! Yeah, yeah, yeah.
11
12 SS: Yeah, the Shot Clinic.
13
14 AJ: Wow.
15
16 SS: And I'm also doing International Women's Day with KFIA Radio so I'm in the community for that.
17
18 AJ: Sure.
19
20 SS: And on their sponsoring portion, in like seeking out visible businesses to help sponsor our event
21 on March 8th and March 9th, uhm, a celebration for all women, you know?
22
23 AJ: Well I'm so proud of you.
24
25 SS: Thank you.
26
27 AJ: And I'm so happy we were able to have this conversation today, Sakura.
28
29 SS: Me too. Thank you for having me.
30
31 AJ: And, you know, I just want to say is there one last thing that you wanna say, something that I
32 forgot to ask you about, uhm, that you want to mention.
33
34 SS: Uhm, I just want to say, you know, like for people listening or watching this don't be afraid to be
35 who you are or let anyone stop you from you becoming who you wanna be in life cause you
36 have only one life to live and to be happy. I would say you never know, you know, if you try,
37 uhm, to live that life you never know surprising who would support you.
38
39 AJ: Mhm.
40
41 SS: Cause I was surprised with them about the support I would get. Don't be afraid. Have courage.
42 Be kind to people, you know, and then it will come back around.
43
44 AJ: The kindness comes back.
45
46 SS: Kindness comes back around and don't forget who you are, uhm, and also help our future
47 generations growing up too who might be experiencing the same issues, uhm, cause that makes

1 an impact on their lives. I mean I do have a soft side for children, you know, and I never thought
2 of wanting or the thought of having kids for myself before I worked with kids directed. But now
3 that's changed. Maybe someday I would like to adopt some kids.
4

5 AJ: Oh wow.
6

7 SS: When I have a spouse and they, they would, like, they would surprise you sometimes in the
8 most, in the most unexpected ways. They are curious. They know a lot than you think. Uh, but
9 they are the future and it's good that we take care of our, of each other and our community and
10 the younger generations and protect them from, you know, the harm and the damaging
11 thoughts and ideas that might be going around in our everyday lives or in politics or in our
12 government. Uhm, we need to just come together as community and work towards, uhm, the
13 better quality in our life in general, whether in our health or in our community in our society, in
14 our professional life, you know. And it's great to have role models like Andrea...
15

16 AJ: Oh.
17

18 SS: ... who is transgender woman herself too and seeing what she does, you know? And then you're
19 trans, and if you're trans self-identifying yourself she is a great role model to look at or me
20 myself you know? I'm still, you know, I'm still learning too, uhm, but I am a business woman. We
21 can do whatever we can when we set our mind to it. If you wanna be teacher, if you wanna be a,
22 uhm, business owner, if you wanna be a writer.
23

24 AJ: If you wanna be a pilot.
25

26 SS: If you wanna be a pilot! Don't let your gender identity or your sexual identity stop you or scare
27 you from having the courage to do what you want to do and be who you wanna be. Uhm, yeah.
28

29 AJ: Wow. Thank you so much, Sakura.
30

31 SS: Thank you. Thank you Andrea. Thank you for having me.
32

33 AJ: Until we meet again, my friend.
34

35 SS: Until we meet again! Thank you.
36

37 AJ: Peace! [Laughs].
38

39 SS: Peace!