

Emani Love
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

February 9, 2016



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

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

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

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Emani Love -EL
3

4 AJ: So, good afternoon. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender
5 Oral History Project at the University of Minnesota. Today is February 9, 2016. I am in Mankato,
6 Minnesota, and I am here to interview Emani Love. Emani, can you just tell me your name, spell
7 it for our transcriber, tell me your gender identity today, your gender assigned at birth, and
8 what pronouns do you prefer?

9 EL: My name is Emani Love, E-m-a-n-i L-o-v-e. My gender, I identify as non-binary, and my
10 pronouns are she/they and goddess.

11 AJ: Hi goddess.

12 EL: Hi goddess.

13 AJ: Wow, thank you for being willing to sit down. I know you are in town to do a panel discussion
14 around the film that you were involved in. What's the name of the film?

15 EL: The film is called *Treasure*, that's the short title. The entire title is *Treasure: From Tragedy to*
16 *Trans Justice, Mapping a Detroit Story*.

17 AJ: OK. And essentially it's about transgender life in Detroit.

18 EL: Yup, and the film focuses around the tragic murder of one of our beloved sisters named Shelley
19 Hilliard. It talks about that tragedy, what the community as a whole and the family endured as a
20 result of her murder due to many oppressive intersections. The film also shows a Detroit trans
21 community empowered to resist violence and to resist anything that could stop trans people in
22 Detroit from having access to sustainability. So it's a film that speaks about tragedy, but it also
23 speaks about just the power and the hope that tragedy can sometimes bring about.

24 AJ: Wow. I'm looking forward to watching the movie. It sounds like a very powerful story and that
25 it documents sort of the lived experiences of trans women in Detroit, trans women of color I
26 would suspect.

27 EL: Yes.

28 AJ: So, Emani, tell me about your earliest memory. What's the first thing you remember? It doesn't
29 have to do anything with gender identity, although if it does that's perfectly fine. But I just want
30 to know what's the first thing you remember in life?

31 EL: I think of . . . I'm going back as far as I can, one memory that I do have – I couldn't have been no
32 more than maybe three or four years old, and I remember my mom threw me, I have a twin
33 brother . . .

34 AJ: Oh, wow.

35 EL: Yeah, and my mom threw us a birthday party and I just remember there were several cakes and
36 there was just an aluminum pan full of hot dogs and just all kind of food. We were just eating so
37 much and we were having fun. I remember that vividly but also vaguely in some ways.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, you sound like you were pretty young.
- 2 EL: Yeah, that's one of my earliest memories that I can recall.
- 3 AJ: Is that right? Where did you grow up?
- 4 EL: I grew up in Detroit – technically, Highland Park, but Detroit for real.
- 5 AJ: Highland Park is kind of like a neighborhood in Detroit.
- 6 EL" Yeah, it's . . .
- 7 AJ: Or is it a suburb?
- 8 EL: It used to be a suburb, there was a time you had to have money to live in Highland Park, but
9 over time, with the downfall of . . . kind of economic downfalls.
- 10 AJ: The auto industry.
- 11 EL: Yup, and the car industry was originally used to be run out of Highland Park, we have the historic
12 landmark – the Model T Ford factory where the first car was made.
- 13 AJ: OK.
- 14 EL: In Highland Park. It's actually a city much like Detroit – an uprising architecturally and business-
15 wise.
- 16 AJ: Nice. So you feel like Detroit is on the rebound, on its way back.
- 17 EL: Yeah, the rebound that I think of when I think of Detroit, is people . . . it's just really community
18 work - community healing and community effort, I'm so blessed to witness so many movements
19 just blossoming – everything from food justice and urban farming to trans justice having more
20 visibility in the city of Detroit. I'm seeing so much as far as our activism and organizing.
- 21 AJ: That's wonderful.
- 22 EL: And that's where I see our restoration.
- 23 AJ: Right, right. So, you said you grew up in Detroit or just right outside of Detroit, and you have a
24 twin brother. Do you have any other siblings?
- 25 EL: Yeah, I have four siblings, one of whom has joined the ancestors.
- 26 AJ: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Does your twin have any sort of gender alternative struggles going on
27 in their life?
- 28 EL: No, he is a straight up cis hetero and he is wonderful. I love him. We've come a long way as far
29 as understanding and acceptance.
- 30 AJ: Are you guys identical?

- 1 EL: No, we're fraternal, but we favor each other for sure. We've come a long way with
2 understanding and acceptance and I'm grateful for the relationship we have. He's nothing but a
3 blessing to my life.
- 4 AJ: Wow, that's wonderful.
- 5 EL: And that's a blessing to be able to say because that's not the reality for a lot of trans people.
- 6 AJ: It absolutely is not. What about the rest of your family? Your mother and . . . did you grow up
7 in the house with your dad as well?
- 8 EL: No, I didn't grow up with my dad, it was mostly my mom and her partner and my brothers
9 mostly, and my uncle.
- 10 AJ: So what's the relationship with your family like nowadays?
- 11 EL: I have an appreciation for my family. Of course there are some of them who are still stuck and
12 their consciousness has not quite shifted to be as fully understanding and loving as they could
13 be towards myself or any other trans person, for that matter. But I definitely sense growth and
14 I'm just appreciative, always, for love, kindness and respect when I'm with them. I think things
15 are still . . . my family as a whole, myself included, are still growing to really understand each
16 other, to be able to communicate more efficiently, to be able to support each other – we're still
17 growing in that regard and I'm just grateful that that growth is even happening.
- 18 AJ: Yeah, no – that's a beautiful thing. So I'm going to go just deep and personal, so you can still go
19 to your mama house on Christmas?
- 20 EL: Hm-hmmm. Oh yeah.
- 21 AJ: All right, that's good. Relationships with families are always complicated no matter what your
22 gender identity is. But we do know that statistics say that trans people who, trans and gender
23 non-conforming people, who have relationships with their families tend to do much better in life
24 in terms of creating that safe and sustainable situation that we all deserve. So, I'm glad to hear
25 that there is some relationship there. When was the first time you sort of realized that you
26 were not on this gender binary that you were assigned at birth?
- 27 EL: I was about . . . I was about 14 years old, I was just getting ready to transition out of middle
28 school and I just . . . I used to wear bracelets up to my elbows, I used to wear all the color that I
29 could get away with because that's what resonated with me. Yeah, things that our society
30 deemed as feminine, I've always kind of tried to incorporate into my mannerisms and my
31 appearance.
- 32 AJ: Wow. And you expressed that in middle school or high school?
- 33 EL: Yeah, yeah – in middle school. I could not help it, I guess. Maybe I did it in a way that was not
34 absolutely dissatisfying although maybe it was disappointing to a lot of the adults – the adults in
35 my life at that time.
- 36 AJ: Did you feel like you were hassled or bullied or harassed by your classmates and people in your
37 neighborhood?

- 1 EL: Yeah, I think I definitely . . . like a lot of trans people have had to deal with. I dealt with
2 classmates who were just totally disrespectful and ignorant, for that matter. Of course, dealing
3 with transphobic slurs throughout, that still happens. But yeah, definitely. I can recall times to
4 where I was enraged and even saddened, just by people perpetuating stigma and perpetuating
5 ignorance by saying unmindful things.
- 6 AJ: Wow. Were you able to stay in school and graduate from high school?
- 7 EL: No, I dropped out of school in the 9th grade just due to not personally feeling safe. I went to a
8 school . . . the high school that I attended, which was not very long, I don't think that I may have
9 even gone to school there – not even 15 days, probably much less than that, and I just
10 remember just feeling very uncomfortable. There were questions around my gender, most
11 people . . . I was 15 and I think most of the students assumed that I was female assigned at birth
12 and may have thought that I was a lesbian who was just a bit more on the masculine side
13 because I had feminine mannerisms, I kind of tried to maintain my physical appearance as
14 feminine as possible, but I still had no ruling over what clothes I could buy so I was wearing male
15 clothing so that's what made them . . .
- 16 AJ: Right.
- 17 EL: And that just kind of made me feel unsafe a little bit and I was also just . . . at that time I was
18 experiencing some hella depression, still coping with my family not being even adequately
19 resourced to support me and love me the way in the most efficient way.
- 20 AJ: Sure.
- 21 EL: So yeah, I dropped out of school in the 9th grade and I was about 15. Later on, at about 17, I was
22 out of school and I went into an alternative school to try to make up some credits to get my high
23 school diploma and even that didn't work. I had some hassles with some students, like there
24 were some students who were uncertain about my gender and many various things, and I got
25 tired of it – I had a big blow-up and I just said, "Fuck this."
- 26 AJ: Right, right.
- 27 EL: And I ended up leaving that alternative school but I was fortunate enough to meet with an
28 educational counselor at Wayne State University who helped me to get into a community
29 college, so I was able to . . . I've done two years of community college so far.
- 30 AJ: Wonderful, that's good to know. What terms do you use to describe yourself? You said a little
31 bit in the beginning but tell me about this non-binary identity.
- 32 EL: Yes, so non-binary, what that means, for me, is that I don't understand my gender in a category,
33 I understand my gender very fluidly. I affirm my femininity, I affirm my masculinity, I embrace
34 them both, I'm willing to explore both. And, I think basically . . . that's what it means to me.
- 35 AJ: That's what it means to you.
- 36 EL: Yeah, just being able to embrace my body and embrace every part of me, and just feeling that
37 out. I think right now, at the age of 22, I embrace the term non-binary as a way to just affirm

- 1 who I can become. I don't know where I will be as far as understanding my gender in 10 years,
2 but I embrace the journey.
- 3 AJ: Wow, that's beautiful. So that's a pretty complex, very well thought out analysis that it would
4 seem that it would take some time to get to that label or that identity. How have you identified
5 in the past?
- 6 EL: In the past, when I first started . . . I'm sorry, let me think back. I always felt very feminine and
7 so just the idea of being a girl always resonated with me. So, for most of . . . so since probably
8 the age of 15 until, even until now, I'm just coming to a place of understanding myself as non-
9 binary, but I've carried the identity of being transgender for a long time. I still honor that as a
10 part of me, but I do not label myself as that specifically just to reserve room for those who that
11 identity really is their reality and experience.
- 12 AJ: Wow. So, you've never took on the label of like a lesbian or gay person?
- 13 EL: No . . . well, I guess I used to call myself gay, just before I knew anything.
- 14 AJ: Right, OK. That's what I was trying to get at. So you've talked about some of the challenges
15 that you've had since you began to express your true identity, primarily with school. Have there
16 been other challenges for you, Emani? Employment? What are some of the challenges that
17 you've faced as a non-binary identified person?
- 18 EL: I think . . . yeah, for a long time I understood myself as a woman and that journey, specifically, I,
19 of course, faced a lot of emotional turmoil just dealing with it. When you know in your heart
20 and soul who you are, for anyone or anything to tell you otherwise is just so unsettling and it
21 puts you in a bad space. I've definitely had my share of micro-aggressions related to gender,
22 I've had my share of missed pronoun and mis-gendering. Yeah, I've had to experience a lot of
23 the backlash of daring to be anything other than the binary.
- 24 AJ: Wow, what about some of the joys. Have there been some joyful moments in this journey for
25 you?
- 26 EL: Yes, I can definitely say it's . . . I never knew anyone who was not binary growing up, everyone I
27 knew was binary.
- 28 AJ: Right, exactly. Males over here, women over . . .
- 29 EL: I remember it was so funny, in the 8th grade it was so hilarious . . . it was so funny, my instructor
30 told the boys to line up on one side and the girls to line up on one side, and I stood in the
31 middle.
- 32 AJ: Ohhh.
- 33 EL: Because I'm like, "Bitch, you're not about to . . ."
- 34 AJ: "You're not about to put me on blast like that."
- 35 EL: "OK, I'll just . . ."
- 36 AJ: Wow.

- 1 EL: Yeah, I think a lot of the joy is that I was able to find one home in the community that was really
2 beautiful – just embracing all of the ratchetness and all of the beauty and spirituality of the
3 trans black - queer and trans community.
- 4 AJ: Yes, wow. That’s awesome. So is that like a house – like the ball housing or . . . when you say
5 you were able to find a house or home?
- 6 EL: The home basically, just being able to be around people who were like me in some ways. We
7 were able to empathize with each other on certain levels. I’m not a part of the ballroom scene
8 specifically, but I have been involved a lot throughout my work and outreach with the Ruth Ellis
9 Center.
- 10 AJ: OK. So you worked at the Ruth Ellis Center?
- 11 EL: I worked at the Ruth Ellis Center for three years. I just recently transitioned out this past Friday.
- 12 AJ: Is that right? Wow. What did you do there?
- 13 EL: Ahh, a lot. I started off as an outreach worker in the drop-in center, they have a drop-in center
14 program that is open three days a week. They serve hot meals, have a food pantry, shower
15 access – just basic services for the LGBT community in Detroit. I started off doing outreach and
16 later on down the line we got funding . . . there was a program facilitated by Monica Hudson,
17 she is a prominent member of Detroit’s ballroom community and she did a powerful program
18 for trans women of color in Detroit called, “Girl Talk.”
- 19 AJ: OK. Girl Talk?
- 20 EL: Yup, it was called The Girl Talk Retreat and I went to it a number of times when I first started
21 going to Ruth Ellis. I think my first one may have been 2012.
- 22 AJ: OK.
- 23 EL: And it was beautiful, it was just all these amazing trans women, trans femme people, trans
24 feminine people just living out loud, living boldly, having a real conversation. It was beautiful
25 and I got hired later on down the line after I had completed the summer internship as an
26 outreach worker. So that was my role for the three years, as well as the trans Just Us
27 coordinator. Trans Just Us was a program that was inspired . . . Trans Just Us is a continuation of
28 the Girl Talk Retreat. Trans Just Us is for . . . there are two retreats held every year for trans
29 women of color in Detroit and I was the facilitator of that for the three years that I was there.
- 30 AJ: Awesome. Wow. So, Ruth Ellis Center is LGBT Center for Black, queer identified people, or is it
31 open to all gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender?
- 32 EL: It’s open to everyone, it’s open to everyone non-binary basically and even those who are binary
33 can be in a space to affirm and respect who the space is for. But, I’m sorry, primarily Black LGBT
34 people in Detroit.
- 35 AJ: OK, yes.

- 1 EL: Yes, Ruth Ellis Center is really dope. I definitely appreciated my time there, even transitioning
2 out is bittersweet. I'm going to miss those connections, I'll miss being up there with my people,
3 just carrying and kiki-ing and having fun. I was basically . . . I wasn't even doing . . . I wasn't even
4 working sometimes, I was just chilling.
- 5 AJ: At work having fun, this is my life, right?
- 6 EL: Yes, and it was so beautiful. I was grateful to have done it. Yeah, Ruth Ellis Center, they work
7 with the Black LGBT community specifically in Detroit with a particular focus on LGBT youth
8 homelessness.
- 9 AJ: OK, that's awesome. Wow. To the extent that you feel comfortable, if you don't want to
10 answer this question don't, but have you undergone any medical interventions in your journey
11 of becoming, or do you consider . . . are you considering any medical interventions?
- 12 EL: No, I haven't had any medical interventions. I definitely was . . . I thought for a long time and
13 I've come to a place of peace with not really finding it necessary for me to undergo medical
14 transition.
- 15 AJ: OK, wow – that's cool. Have there been any specific people or moments or organizations that
16 have had a big impact on you related to your gender identity?
- 17 EL: For sure. I can think of a couple. One, of course, being the Ruth Ellis Center. Another . . . I've
18 been blessed to be able to travel a lot and see a lot of the country and connect with amazing
19 people. I'm grateful to have met organizers for the Trans/Gender Non-Conforming Intersex
20 Justice Project based in Oakland.
- 21 AJ: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.
- 22 EL: TGIJP.
- 23 AJ: Yes, exactly.
- 24 EL: And they are amazing. I've met Danielle Woods, who is an amazing comrade. Janetta Johnson.
- 25 AJ: Janetta, yes.
- 26 EL: My auntie Janetta and Mama Major.
- 27 AJ: Mama Major.
- 28 EL: Yes.
- 29 AJ: We love her, Miss Major.
- 30 EL: Miss Major, I love her. And yes, even I was blessed to go to a youth organizing summit in 2012
31 that the organization based in New York called FIERCE, they organized the summit for youth of
32 color organizers and it was really dope and I got to meet amazing people there and I got to
33 connect with . . . some of my favorite organizers in this movement are based in Chicago. So, I
34 got to meet a number of amazing people who work with YWEP, the Young Women's
35 Empowerment Project before they underwent their dissolution process.

- 1 AJ: Yeah, I love YWEP, they were really good. Y-W-E-P – Young Women’s Empowerment Project.
 2 Yeah, I’m sad to see them go away.
- 3 EL: Yeah, but the work and legacy still lives on – they just transformed.
- 4 AJ: Yes, yes. Wow, drop some names.
- 5 EL: Oh my goodness – Dominique, who worked with YWEP, that’s my baby – I love her. I love her,
 6 that’s my baby. Shira Hassan is an amazing . . . I got to meet Angel Torres and Akea Torres, they
 7 were both youth organizers with YWEP. I got to meet the amazing Coco Ma.
- 8 AJ: Coco Ma.
- 9 EL: Yes, she is definitely an inspiring Black woman.
- 10 AJ: Have you been in touch with her at all lately?
- 11 EL: She reached out to me, I haven’t got a chance to really communicate back to her, but I’m going
 12 to definitely hit her back up. But, I was fortunate to meet her through my experiences.
- 13 AJ: Because some people can get traumatized by this movement and I think, unfortunately, Coco
 14 Ma got sort of caught up in some of the drama that happens in our community.
- 15 EL: There’s always something. I think sometimes even . . . I think being critical has a place, and I
 16 think that, you know, can we go about being critical in a loving way, I wonder sometimes
 17 because I think sometimes we can really overlook . . . we can really overthink things and be
 18 really critical of things and not even know simple details, but have a hell of an opinion. That’s
 19 just one example of trauma that could happen in movement work.
- 20 AJ: Yes. Talk to me about romance and love and relationships. How do you identify sort of
 21 orientation-wise, are you in a relationship right now? Do you want to be in a relationship?
 22 What’s going on?
- 23 EL: Yeah, I’m not in a relationship currently. As far as my attraction, I definitely appreciate cis male
 24 bodies, but I appreciate all masculinity and I’m comfortable with . . . I don’t think gender
 25 necessarily is a cap on for me when it comes to attraction. I identity as pansexual, so just
 26 whatever the vibe is, if the vibe is appropriate then you know . . .
- 27 AJ: If it feels good.
- 28 EL: If it feels good.
- 29 AJ: If it feels right. OK. Have you had any people that have been really helpful or insensitive related
 30 to the medical community or the criminal justice system or even the educational system?
 31 We’ve talked about some of this already, like school was not really a great experience, but then
 32 you met this person at Wayne State who sort of helped you get back into school. What about in
 33 some of these other institutions like the medical system or criminal justice system?
- 34 EL: Yeah, in the medical system I have witnessed myself and other trans people experience a
 35 number of . . . just totally so much discrimination and it’s just unacceptable. I’m always
 36 reminded about how much shift in consciousness needs to happen around gender in so many of

- 1 our institutions. I'm starting to notice . . . it's powerful to even notice when there are changes
2 and language in the medical industry on how they reference trans and gender non-conforming
3 people. I think it was . . . was it last year? I don't remember, probably about two years ago, I
4 was on my way back from Kentucky from doing an event and we went to Cincinnati, Ohio, and
5 they had a hospital, like a transgender wellness clinic for trans youth as young as, I believe, four
6 or six.
- 7 AJ: Wow.
- 8 EL: Yeah, just young children having medical support, to support their child in however they wanted
9 to identify and I found it to be so powerful and beautiful. So that's just one example that
10 definitely needs to be more widespread.
- 11 AJ: Right, right.
- 12 EL: But the fact that it exists is powerful.
- 13 AJ: Yes. I'm going to take a little break here for one minute.
- 14 EL: OK.
- 15 AJ: So, we're back and we're just going to finish up with the last few questions. I love that idea that
16 you talked about with the young people and the medical facilities. What do you think is going to
17 be the next trend in transgender movement and identity, particularly as it relates to young
18 people coming up?
- 19 EL: I think . . . it's really powerful, like I'm starting to notice just trans people just getting younger
20 and younger. It's just beautiful. They definitely still have their share of bullshit, but the fact that
21 trans people are getting positive and consistent mainstream visibility is really . . . the
22 mainstream visibility that the trans community is getting at large, I think, is definitely an
23 important piece of the gender revolution. What I'm starting to notice is that people are starting
24 to understand, especially a lot of youth and elders alike, are just starting to understand that
25 human beings are much more complex than any binary and no matter how someone
26 understands themselves, it is OK. And that's, for some, not enough because we still have violent
27 trans people, just an obscene amount of violence even still. One trans life lost is too much.
- 28 AJ: Absolutely.
- 29 EL: So I think what I'm starting to notice is that when it comes to education, that a trans identity is
30 starting to have much more of a . . . discussions around non-binary identity and attraction at
31 least are starting to become more relevant and more prevalent in education, and I think that
32 that will absolutely continue to take place. I feel like when we solidify supportive structures for
33 trans youth in our schools and education system, when it becomes so widespread that . . . I
34 would like to see our educational systems reach a place to where no youth is bullied and no
35 young person is bullied because of their gender or attraction is not . . . whatever, the norm, the
36 binary – whatever that bullshit is.
- 37 AJ: Yeah. What do you think about the relationship between the L, the G, the B, and then the
38 TGNC? So the lesbian, gay, bisexual versus the transgender non-conforming?

- 1 EL: Yeah, I absolutely understand why we would want to be very clear that there is a total
2 difference between attraction and gender, so I appreciate the T . . . is it TGNCI?
- 3 AJ: Yeah, you could say that. I meaning intersex, right?
- 4 EL Yeah, it is what it is. I think we face different struggles. You know LGB people have a different
5 journey than transgender non-gender and intersex people. All-in-all, I think it's important to
6 have a healthy distinction and I think that people should be nothing but receptive to it. Anyone
7 who is not receptive to affirming gender alone, and separating from attraction, has a lot of work
8 themselves to do.
- 9 AJ: Although recognizing that trans and gender non-conforming people do have sexual orientations
10 – they can be gay or lesbian or bisexual.
- 11 EL: Absolutely.
- 12 AJ: Or, as in your case, pansexual, right? People do have a sexual orientation but it's different from
13 their gender identity.
- 14 EL: Yeah.
- 15 AJ: Do you think there is an agenda for the trans community moving forward? And, if you do,
16 what's the agenda?
- 17 EL: I haven't really thought about what an agenda is. I think, what I do know is that is our work will
18 definitely continue and it will consistently have change and a powerful impact. So, I think if we
19 do have an agenda that is just to create change, to transform minds, and to provide a more
20 supportive healing, affirming outlook.
- 21 AJ: Hmmm, wow.
- 22 EL: I'm sure, you know . . . I don't know what the trans movement is going to look like specifically in
23 the field of politics five years from now, but wherever the movement is happening there will be
24 powerful change. I think the change piece is simply enough, as simple as that sounds, but it
25 definitely is at the forefront of our agenda, if there is one.
- 26 AJ: Yeah, yeah – I hear you. Who knows if there is a written agenda somewhere, but I think we're
27 all sort of moving towards human equality and dignity.
- 28 EL: Right. Support trans women, give every trans women of color everything she needs and support
29 her and give her the tools she needs to maintain and sustain.
- 30 AJ: That would sort of be my agenda – at the top of my agenda.
- 31 EL: Hello, let's please . . . I mean, people make shit more difficult than they've got to be. Be
32 supportive, it's that simple.
- 33 AJ: So, Caitlyn Jenner is . . .
- 34 EL: Bruce Jenner.
- 35 AJ: OK, if you . . .

- 1 EL: I'm just kidding. No, how dare she?
- 2 AJ: Yeah, well let me finish the question and then I'm dying to hear what you've got to say.
- 3 EL: Don't put this out last.
- 4 AJ: So Caitlyn is the most visible face for the transgender movement right now, whether we like it or
5 not. She is the most famous transgender person in the world. What do you think that level of
6 visibility is doing for the transgender community? Is it harmful? Is it helpful?
- 7 EL: I hate to say it, but there's a little bit of both. Yeah . . . you know, trans visibility is trans visibility
8 no matter what the color and that should not suggest that this visibility validates the
9 experiences, the reality, of all trans people. Yeah, there are people who lead far shittier lives
10 than Caitlyn and I think even she knows this. She definitely does have a relevant and important,
11 on a mainstream scale – for sure. The work I do is much more community based and it is
12 definitely absent of the mainstream. In doing that work you come across a multitude of
13 powerful experiences, whether helpful or hindering experiences. And, I just . . . yeah, Caitlyn
14 has her place in the movement. She's not down in the trenches with some of us, she's just
15 holding it down in the upper echelon.
- 16 AJ: Yeah.
- 17 EL: But she's trying.
- 18 AJ: We need people at all levels in the movement, right?
- 19 EL: We need people at all levels, yes. You know what? I think the only thing that's really stopping
20 me from giving a much more thought out whatever . . . articulate . . .
- 21 AJ: Response.
- 22 EL: Yeah, is just some of my thoughts about her and some of the things that she's said.
- 23 AJ: Personally.
- 24 EL: Yeah, that's just pissed me off.
- 25 AJ: Yeah. Well, if you won't say it, I'll say it. She has been problematic on a lot of issues and needs
26 a lot of education.
- 27 EL: Yeah.
- 28 AJ: Anything that I didn't ask that you think is really important for us to know - about you? About
29 the movement? About Detroit? About trans women of color?
- 30 EL: One thing I can say is I am like beyond just thankful to be a part . . . for my movement, for my
31 role in movement work being initiated in Detroit. There's been a lot of grief and loss just in the
32 recent months over trans murders, of people whom I knew closely. And, I'll just . . . I look at this
33 tragedy that happens as something . . . we have to continuously be active and encourage
34 people. I think that simply enough, despite all of the other complicated answers that we could
35 probably give – encouragement is so . . . it's a term, it's such a simple term and a simple

1 meaning. Encouragement is something that is so powerful and when we can constantly do that,
2 there are not enough people in the trans justice movement in Detroit, there are very few of us.
3 The few of us that are along with our allies, accomplices, comrades, what have you, we're doing
4 what we can to hold it down and it would just be wonderful . . . well, understanding the impact
5 of trauma, the impact of oppression. We also have a compassion and empathy of
6 understanding why people are not necessarily just throwing themselves into movement work. I
7 think, for me, I'm just grateful to be a part of a community where I can constantly encourage
8 other girls and other people to understand that life itself comes with sacrifice and struggle, let
9 alone the movement. But we have the power to always uplift and encourage each other and I
10 think there are a lot of things we have to work through around community about how we look
11 at each other, how we think about each other, how we address each other, and how we love
12 each other. I think that's pretty much all I would have to say is . . . yeah, Detroit's trans justice
13 movement is really something unprecedented and I'm grateful to be a part of it.

14 AJ: Oh wow. That's a beautiful way to end. Thank you, Emani, for being so gracious with your time
15 and with your wisdom even . . . well, I don't know how to say this without sounding maybe
16 ageist or whatever, but at 22 years old you have shared quite a bit of wisdom today. I
17 appreciate it.

18 EL: Thank you.

19 AJ: Until we meet again, my friend.

20 EL: I stand on your shoulders girl, don't you ever forget it.

21 AJ: All right.

22 EL: You paved the way for me and shit.

23 AJ: Thank you.

24 EL: I know it.

25 AJ: All right.