

Julienne Brown
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

May 6, 2016



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

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

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

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

- 1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ
2 Julienne Brown -JB
3
- 4 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project at
5 the University of Minnesota. Today is May 6, 2016 . . .
- 6 JB: I know, 2016 - four years away from 2020.
- 7 AJ: It's crazy. Oh my goodness. I am here with Ms. Julienne, Mizz June, Brown. What's up?
- 8 JB: I'm well. I'm honored to be here, first and foremost.
- 9 AJ: Oh my goodness, thank you. I'm honored to have you here.
- 10 JB: Thank you. I am excited to tell my story. It's interesting when people ask me to tell my story
11 because I've always felt like my story is just my story, it may not help people. But I'm honored.
- 12 AJ: Well from what I have learned about you, I think your story is fascinating and will help many, many
13 people. But before we get into just digging deep into your story, can you just state your name, spell
14 it for our transcriber, and then state your gender identity today as you see yourself, what pronouns
15 do you use and then what was your gender assigned at birth?
- 16 JB: OK. My name is Julienne. J-u-l-i-e-n-n-e Brown B-r-o-w-n. My professional name is Mizz June, M-i-
17 z-z- J-u-n-e. And I identity as a female, a trans woman because I do believe that trans women are
18 women, female – period.
- 19 AJ: Absolutely – no question.
- 20 JB: I was assigned male at birth and I still identify as a trans woman, as a female – period, that's it.
- 21 AJ: Wow. So she and her pronouns.
- 22 JB: She and her pronouns, yes.
- 23 AJ: OK, Mizz June . . .
- 24 JB: Right on, right on.
- 25 AJ: Tell me what is your earliest memory in life, what is the first thing you remember? It doesn't have
26 to be around your gender identity, even though if it is around your gender identity that's all good.
- 27 JB: Wow, that's not a question anyone has asked me before. I feel like my earliest memory in life may
28 have been time with my family, and Christmas – getting gifts from my auntie and my grandfather
29 who passed away last year.
- 30 AJ: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.
- 31 JB: That's fine. And just being with family – family always comes to mind first. My birthday, my 6th
32 birthday, is also another memory.

- 1 AJ: Really, when you turned six.
- 2 JB: Six - yeah, weirdly.
- 3 AJ: When is your birthday?
- 4 JB: My birthday is October 16th. I don't want to say the year.
- 5 AJ: You don't have to say the year, it's all good.
- 6 JB: But, 10/16, I am a fall baby.
- 7 AJ: Where did you grow up?
- 8 JB: I grew up in New York City, lower east side of Manhattan, in the 1980s and 1990s.
- 9 AJ: Is that near Hell's Kitchen?
- 10 JB: No, Hell's Kitchen is near mid-town. The lower east side is actually right at the tip of Manhattan, the
11 island of Manhattan. At one point it was the place that people didn't want to go to because there
12 were folks who immigrated from different places, Italian families, Puerto Rican, and Chinese –
13 because Chinatown is right there, and Little Italy is over there. A few Black families, we were a few
14 of the only Black families that were down there. A lot of Jewish folks down there, Orthodox Jewish
15 people. It wasn't until I would say the last maybe 16 or 20 years that the lower east side has
16 become the place that everybody wants to move to.
- 17 AJ: So gentrified?
- 18 JB: Gentrified – backwards, forward, in and out. And, my family still lives down there. They're like a
19 community institution – my grandfather passed away when he was 99.
- 20 AJ: Oh my goodness, he lived a long time.
- 21 JB: Yeah, he was blessed and he was my best friend.
- 22 AJ: Really?
- 23 JB: He was, he accepted me for who I am, even though . . .
- 24 AJ: Yes, a right grandpa.
- 25 JB: Yeah, even though he used the right pronouns.
- 26 AJ: Right, but he loved you.
- 27 JB: He still loved me and he still cared for me and he was still there for me. The reason why I say he
28 passed at 99 is because I wanted to give you an idea of how long it had been that him and my
29 grandmother came to New York, they were in the 20's when they came to New York. So I want to
30 say my family has been in the lower east side for 60, maybe 70 years.
- 31 AJ: Where did they come from?

- 1 JB: My grandfather and grandmother? Mississippi.
- 2 AJ: Mississippi, wow.
- 3 JB: The delta area.
- 4 AJ: Yeah, when you think about Black migration patterns, the Mississippi people tended to go up to
5 Chicago and . . .
- 6 JB: My ex told me that. He discussed how typically people go to the Midwest because Chicago is right
7 there, or Louisiana or Tennessee or maybe even to the west coast, not necessarily to the east coast.
- 8 AJ: Right, because the east coast folks, you meet a lot of people whose families are from Georgia . . .
- 9 JB: South Carolina, Georgia – not mine.
- 10 AJ: Yeah, Mississippi, right? They took a different route.
- 11 JB: Yeah, I think . . . my family is different. On my father's side is West Indian, Bajans. I wasn't raised by
12 them so even though I know my father, I'd rather not get into that . . . my mother's side of the
13 family was the side of the family that raised me and I feel like my grandfather . . . I didn't have the
14 father that I wanted to have, I had a grandfather. I didn't have a great father, I had a grandfather.
- 15 AJ: You had a grandfather – I love that. That's great – I might have to steal that.
- 16 JB: That's OK.
- 17 AJ: So Bajan. What does that mean? How do you spell it?
- 18 JB: Barbadian. So people from Barbados saying Barbadian very quickly but it's Bajan. Bajan, bajan,
19 bajan. I think the appropriate way is B-a-j-a-n, but I know it's . . .
- 20 AJ: So it's almost a slang.
- 21 JB: It's a slang term for Barbadians. Yeah, but it's Bajan.
- 22 AJ: Thank you. So what was it like growing up on the lower east side of Manhattan?
- 23 JB: It was interesting because I was very sheltered. My mother, back when I was about maybe 8-years-
24 old, which is why my 6th birthday and early Christmas are fond memories, she became a Jehovah's
25 Witness.
- 26 AJ: OK.
- 27 JB: And that is one of the most restrictive religions ever.
- 28 AJ: From Christianity, yeah – it's pretty strict.
- 29 JB: To me it was a cult and it separated my mother from the rest of the family. I think it created a lot of
30 division and it made me feel even more . . . like more of an outcast than I already knew that I could
31 potentially be because I knew at a very young age that I was transgender – I knew.

- 1 AJ: Is that right?
- 2 JB: Yes, I knew. I knew that I was a girl. I used to draw myself as a princess, as a Disney princess and as
3 a woman, as a girl.
- 4 AJ: How old was this?
- 5 JB: I was probably maybe five years old, six years old, which is why five or six, that always comes . . .
6 that time period sticks with me because it was a very happy time. And then as I got older, things
7 just changed. My mother really stuck with the Jehovah's Witness religion and she decided to pursue
8 it and intentionally became a Jehovah's Witness, like she was baptized into their religion and
9 everything, and everything changed – no more Christmas, no more . . .
- 10 AJ: Birthdays.
- 11 JB: No more birthdays, no more anything – no more friends. I didn't have many friends growing up
12 where they could call the house unless they were Jehovah's Witness kids. And so it kind of locks a
13 person into that place, which is why I say it's a cult because it creates co-dependency on the people
14 who are within that organization.
- 15 AJ: Did you have siblings?
- 16 JB: I do. I have an older brother and a brother from my father's side, an older brother from my father's
17 side – so two older brothers. I'm the baby.
- 18 AJ: Two older brothers. Was your brother who lived in the house with you, was he involved in
19 Jehovah's Witness too?
- 20 JB: Not really. We were both . . . obviously once our mother became formally a Jehovah's Witness we
21 would have to go to the Kingdom Hall and everything. But we weren't as involved in it as I know
22 that she was. I think that . . .
- 23 AJ: You did not embrace it in those same ways that your mother did?
- 24 JB: No. She was, and I hate to say this about her, but she was fanatical about it and still is. I respect her
25 perseverance, I respect her ability to want something and stick with it, but it ruined our family.
- 26 AJ: Oh boy, I'm sorry to hear that. But people make choices, that's how life . . .
- 27 JB: Yeah, and you have to respect people's choices.
- 28 AJ: Exactly. Wow, so you were five or six when you first realized . . .
- 29 JB: That I'm transgender.
- 30 AJ: So you were painting – you were drawing pictures . . .
- 31 JB: It's funny you slipped up and said painted because I remember a not-so-fond memory where I had
32 painted my fingernails red with a magic marker.

- 1 AJ: Oh, and it wouldn't come off.
- 2 JB: It wouldn't come off and my mother was livid.
- 3 AJ: Oh my goodness.
- 4 JB: My aunt was like . . . my aunt said that she did it to protect me.
- 5 AJ: Oh boy.
- 6 JB: But I did it.
- 7 AJ: You had allies even as a baby – five or six years old.
- 8 JB: Yes, because they knew my mother was just very against it. She was adamantly . . . this has to fit
9 this specific way of thinking – like gender is not fluid, gender is . . .
- 10 AJ: Rigid.
- 11 JB: Rigid, and ideas are rigid which is why I think the whole Jehovah's Witness religion appealed to her
12 because there is a rigidity, there's something very hard about . . . it's a cult, you have to fit their
13 ideals and she liked that and that's just not me.
- 14 AJ: Yeah, it's just interesting – we're here in Minneapolis and so, Prince was a Jehovah's Witness.
- 15 JB: Yes, he was.
- 16 AJ: Michael Jackson was raised as a Jehovah Witness family and still . . . he practiced Jehovah's Witness
17 as an adult too.
- 18 JB: Who, Michael?
- 19 AJ: Michael.
- 20 JB: Really? I heard that he didn't.
- 21 AJ: Well, he grew up in a Jehovah's Witness family for sure.
- 22 JB: It messes people up, I think. I think that that whole cult . . . like I'm getting to a place where I'm
23 finally letting go of things and I'm finally learning how to be a better person and a better me – and
24 be happy.
- 25 AJ: I'm thrilled to hear that.
- 26 JB: Thank you. But it really . . . like that whole . . . I just cannot begin to tell you how just damaging that
27 experience can be to a person and I was only around it for . . . let me do the math. Maybe seven or
28 eight years. That was like a blip of my life, but some . . .
- 29 AJ: Those were very formative years.
- 30 JB: Yeah, exactly – they were formative years and 20-some odd years later, I'm just now realizing, "Oh,
31 that's why I can't do this or I feel like I can't do this." Or I have issues with doing this or issues with
- The Transgender Oral History Project

- 1 doing that – oh, that’s why this upsets me or this makes me think about that or this makes me
2 question this, because of that. I don’t blame my mother for it because, like I said, I appreciate her
3 stick-to-it-tiveness and her ability to find something that she loves or feels works for her and stay
4 with it. And it also helped me with my reading and verbal comprehension. The literature and
5 everything that they give to kids is way above the level of just normal children’s literature.
- 6 AJ: Right.
- 7 JB: So I knew and could comprehend what adults would say to me at . . .
- 8 AJ: At a younger age than most kids.
- 9 JB: Yeah, at 9-years-old I knew exactly what people were saying. So I’m grateful for that and I’m
10 grateful for the discipline that it gave me because people who are in that cult are very disciplined
11 people. So I’ve learned how to be very disciplined but it also . . . it left some damage as well.
- 12 AJ: What’s your relationship like with your birth family now?
- 13 JB: I have a decent relationship with my aunts, I have two aunts. I have an estranged relationship . . .
- 14 AJ: These are your mother’s sisters?
- 15 JB: My mother’s sisters, yes. I have a strained relationship with my mother, a strained relationship with
16 my brother, and my grandfather passed away – and that was my biggest support, he was my biggest
17 supporter.
- 18 AJ: Wow. So when you say strained, do you spend the holidays with your family?
- 19 JB: That’s a good question. Yes and no. I think it depends on where the holidays are at.
- 20 AJ: Well the holidays don’t really exist for your mother though, right?
- 21 JB: They don’t exist for my mother, even though she tends to bend rules as she’s gotten older.
- 22 AJ: She’s like, “I need to see my people.”
- 23 JB: Yeah. They wouldn’t like that. But, you know . . . yeah, the holidays are a time when I learned to
24 reflect on myself and my own whatever – my own year, my own growth, and I search for the ability
25 to spend time with people outside of my family.
- 26 AJ: So you have chosen family and . . .
- 27 JB: I have chosen family, I have a best friend who I’ve been friends with for . . . geez, almost 20 years. I
28 have a sister back home, not a real sister . . . I don’t have any biological sisters, but yeah. So I do
29 have folks but . . .
- 30 AJ: And support.

- 1 JB: Yeah. But when it's not that family . . . and I do have some family support, like I said my aunts, but
2 they're women of a certain age and when that happens it can get a little tough, it can get a little
3 difficult.
- 4 AJ: I mean, you know, you can't tell them everything because some things they . . . well, I don't know,
5 we don't give people enough credit because they were our age at one point in time, so they know.
6 But it is . . . they haven't experienced a transgender experience and that's just something that, you
7 know, a lot of people can't understand.
- 8 JB: Comprehend – yeah, that's true. And I think one of my major gripes with my family is because
9 they're not ignorant people.
- 10 AJ: No.
- 11 JB: No, seriously.
- 12 AJ: They're brilliant probably.
- 13 JB: My aunt was an assistant principal before she retired, my mother's oldest sister. The middle sister
14 was in the music industry and successful. My mother was a model and entertainer and an English
15 teacher. She went to school for science and math, so they're not stupid people – they're not dumb
16 people at all. My brother went to a boarding school on tuition . . . on scholarship.
- 17 AJ: On scholarship, wow.
- 18 JB: Yeah, so they're not dumb people. Academic scholarship.
- 19 AJ: Not sports.
- 20 JB: Not sports. But it's funny how a person can be book smart and just not have a high emotional
21 quotient. You know what I mean? It's just sad because how can you not understand that an
22 experience like this is a difficult experience.
- 23 AJ: Yeah.
- 24 JB: Do you know what I mean?
- 25 AJ: Yeah, I think I do. How was school for you?
- 26 JB: Oh boy, school was interesting. I went through many different phases in school. I'm cut from the
27 cloth of educators and performers so I both performed as class clown and was a book worm,
28 advanced placement in school and then I realized who I was – like the whole trans thing came
29 knocking on the door again. That's when I began to experiment with clothing and different things.
- 30 AJ: What age? What grade were you in around this time?
- 31 JB: That was my . . . I want to say my sophomore year of high school, or junior year of high school. Up
32 until that point I had done very well in school and once I hit, I want to say, like the last years of my

- 1 junior high years and going into high school, that's when I became class clown. I still performed well
2 academically but I was trying to take the focus off of the fact that I'm very different.
- 3 AJ: Yeah, right.
- 4 JB: And make everybody laugh, perform.
- 5 AJ: Deflecting, right?
- 6 JB: Yeah, deflect. When I became a junior I was like, "I can't deflect anymore, I just have to be me." I
7 had to seriously fight after that time, like physically I learned how to defend myself by any means
8 necessary.
- 9 AJ: So you were expressing your gender . . . ?
- 10 JB: Well, I wasn't really expressing my gender, I wasn't going full on . . . drags, as they would call it. But
11 I would incorporate feminine things, like a coat here or a top there or some sunglasses or bell
12 bottoms. Everybody was looking at me like, and I went to school in Harlem – I went to high school
13 in Harlem by the City College. So yeah.
- 14 AJ: So they were thinking, "This is a gay boy."
- 15 JB: This is different than what we saw last year and we will not tolerate that, not in Harlem.
- 16 AJ: Really?
- 17 JB: Yeah, and I was ridiculed, I was made fun of, people were really cruel and then there were people
18 who were like guys who were curious and wanted to use me as an experiment. So I learned a lot, I
19 want to say, in those last couple years of high school and I transferred out and went to an
20 alternative high school and graduated from there. I went away to school.
- 21 AJ: To college?
- 22 JB: To college.
- 23 AJ: Oh cool. Where did you go?
- 24 JB: Initially I went to Purchase College. I wanted to get into one of the conservatories for dance or
25 music and I decided I was going to go and do sociology, the average Joe way, the traditional way.
26 Then I got the brilliant idea to transition while . . .
- 27 AJ: In college.
- 28 JB: In college since I was away from my family. It was like . . . well, my mother would never go for that,
29 so while I'm away from her I can make it work this way because this is something that will not go
30 away and I cannot not be this person. I have to be this person.
- 31 AJ: You are this person.

- 1 JB: Yeah. Double negative means it needs to move forward. So double negative means yes – she’s she.
2 That was another added struggle that I didn’t even realize, it didn’t dawn on me that it would be an
3 added struggle. I didn’t move on being my, or living my, truth based on my IQ, I did it on my EQ. I
4 came from an emotional place of doing it. I just did it. When I say it was so difficult, I experienced
5 homelessness then, I experienced ridicule not just from other people but from my family because
6 they were like, “What is this? How are you . . . what are we supposed to do? How does this make
7 us look as a family?” I was like, “I didn’t realize that your . . .”
- 8 AJ: Well-being or self-image.
- 9 JB: Yeah, “ . . . your self-image is compromised because of my life.” So it was very difficult.
- 10 AJ: So this is in Purchase, New York.
- 11 JB: Purchase, New York. I had to transfer out because it was that difficult. So right before I was going
12 to audition for one of the conservatories, I transferred out and I left school for like a year. I ended
13 up going back to school in the city, at John Jay, and I graduated with my bachelor of science in legal
14 studies – completely different.
- 15 AJ: Oh wow, that’s awesome.
- 16 JB: Thank you. I was like I don’t want to deal with entertainment because I went to Purchase and all the
17 people I thought were open-minded entertainers ridiculed me and were mean and . . .
- 18 AJ: I’m sorry.
- 19 JB: Like the industry was . . . I had done a lot of stuff and worked in the industry and I was . . . it’s insane
20 and people aren’t going to accept me as I am and there was just a lot of connections with
21 entertainment and pain with me. You understand what I’m saying?
- 22 AJ: Yeah.
- 23 JB: So even with my mother . . . my mother, who was an entertainer before she became an English
24 teacher. There was pain there, so I associated pain with entertainment. I was like, “I don’t want to
25 do this anymore, I want to go into legal studies, I want to try my hand at this because it’s steady.”
- 26 AJ: Sure.
- 27 JB: And it’s solid.
- 28 AJ: So when you were at John Jay, were you living full-time as a woman?
- 29 JB: I was living full-time as a woman. I was what many people would call, which I hate this term and I
30 think you know what I’m about to say . . . passable.
- 31 AJ: Yes, because you’re a beautiful woman.
- 32 JB: Thank you, thank you very much. And so people think that equates passability, but to me passability
33 it has nothing to do with beauty. Women come in all different shapes, sizes, beauty ideology . . .

- 1 AJ: Yes, skin tones.
- 2 JB: Skin tones.
- 3 AJ: But that sort of helped you, your physical appearance helped you.
- 4 JB: It did help me, but at the same time it hurt me because I wasn't living my truth. I wasn't being who I
5 am, which is a trans woman. So it was difficult because guys wanted to date.
- 6 AJ: Oh, so you were in the closet?
- 7 JB: I was in the closet at school and guys wanted to date me and I was like, "Ahhh, how do I do this?
8 This is weird." At the same time I was living this life where I was surviving on my own in and out of
9 my grandfather's house because my grandfather wouldn't let me go. He was like, "You've got to –
10 no, you're staying with me and your aunts, I'm not going to let you go and sleep on your friend's
11 couches." But between my aunts and my mother and my brother, there was that conflict so I would
12 leave to engage in survival sex work and sleeping on friend's couches for months at a time and then
13 come back and grandpa would . . . you know.
- 14 AJ: Open the doors for you and welcome you back in.
- 15 JB: Yeah. It was tough. I had a very . . . I don't want to say it was a tough life because I know people
16 who have struggled and have had a lot less than I had, but it emotionally challenging – very
17 challenging.
- 18 AJ: Yeah, well everybody's struggle is real to them.
- 19 JB: Exactly. And it's very different, but it was very real – it was very real. And to have your foundation
20 and people who are supposed to build you up and keep you strong, shake you – before the world
21 tries to shake you. That's tough.
- 22 AJ: That's tough, it absolutely is. Wow. So I guess you sort of already answered my next question.
23 What challenges have you faced in expressing your true gender identity? But you've talked a lot
24 about that though.
- 25 JB: Yeah.
- 26 AJ: So what was the resilient point that . . .
- 27 JB: Got you to where I'm at now?
- 28 AJ: That got you to where you are now? What helped you to overcome that?
- 29 JB: That's a good question. I feel like even though like my aunts would give me a lot of flak, there was
30 still love there. A lot of that also came from me. There is something within me, I mean my
31 grandfather technically . . . his DNA is inside of me, so he was a very strong person.
- 32 AJ: I'm going to argue that your mother's DNA is inside of you and your mother, you described as very
33 determined.

1 JB: She is a very determined individual. My father, my biological father, is also very strong and very
2 determined. So I think it's just a matter of DNA, it's a matter of not quitting and even when there is
3 a feeling that quitting is an option, it's like something . . . like a fail-safe snaps and, "Actually no it's
4 not – gotta go, gotta go, gotta make it." I don't know, it's . . . yeah, it's intense. I've had a lot of
5 moments in my life where I've wondered why am I here, what is my purpose? I think a lot of people
6 ask themselves that question, like what is their purpose in life.

7 AJ: Yes, I've asked myself that many, many times.

8 JB: I think it's just to live, do you understand? I really like . . . I'm trying my hardest to just go along for
9 the ride and I honestly . . . when people have told me that I helped them by either living my life, by
10 telling my story, by living my truth, by being myself, by accomplishing different things – like *Charm*
11 that I'm here for.

12 AJ: Yeah, we're going to talk about that in a little bit.

13 JB: Or the other things I've accomplished in entertainment. When people tell me that I've influenced
14 them or helped them, that is a huge . . . I want to say ego boost, but it's also a huge feeling of pride
15 and it makes me feel good to know that, "Oh, I helped this person just by existing, just by living." It
16 makes it worth it, it makes all the pain and all the drama that I faced and all the emotional upheaval
17 that I've overcome worth it.

18 AJ: Wow, so beautiful.

19 JB: Thank you.

20 AJ: What have been some of the more positive aspects of expressing your gender identity?

21 JB: The men.

22 AJ: Yes.

23 JB: I've had really good relationships. I want to say one of the more positive is the relationship I've
24 developed with myself.

25 AJ: Yes.

26 JB: And feeling like, "Wow, I, for once, feel normal. I feel like a normal person even though . . ." It's
27 funny because you would think if a person is off their rocker . . . let me not say that. If femininity is
28 so weak and womanhood, being a woman, is weakness and people think it is insane for a cis male,
29 cis gendered man, to be or feel that they're not cis gendered, that they are actually transgender or a
30 transgender woman, if people feel like that is insane, then having those closest to you and strangers
31 taunt you and tell you what you're doing is wrong, what you're doing is wrong over and over and
32 over again, you would think that would deter a person to make them, "OK, well then – no." But it
33 hasn't, for me. It made me that much more convinced that they're scared because I'm showing
34 them that this is right and they would have never thought that this is right. It's sad, because it's like
35 . . . with me, transgenderism and being a woman, being a trans woman, it has unlocked so many
36 different . . . it's so powerful how much strength I have as a trans woman and how much strength

- 1 other trans women have and how beautiful we are. There is an air of beauty from trans women,
2 even trans women who have said that they don't think of themselves as esthetically beautiful, the
3 way that they carry themselves – people take notice, people turn their heads. People are like, "Who
4 was that? What just happened?" And even those that don't say anything, they notice.
- 5 AJ: They notice.
- 6 JB: Because there's power there, there's strength there. There's a spiritual energy there that I think has
7 been heightened because of our answering, our calling, our being who we are internally and having
8 that internal spirit reflect itself externally. Do you know what I mean?
- 9 AJ: Wow. I don't think I've heard it quite phrased that way. I've heard a lot of people talk about the
10 spirituality of transgender identity, but beautifully put.
- 11 JB: Thank you. Thank you very much.
- 12 AJ: So you mentioned *Charm*. So you are the lead character in the show at the Mixed Blood Theatre
13 called *Charm*.
- 14 JB: Yes.
- 15 AJ: *Charm* is a . . . well, you tell the story.
- 16 JB: All right. *Charm* is a play at Mixed Blood, like you said before. It is a teacher drama dramedy –
17 drama/comedy. It is based on Miss Gloria Allen, who . . .
- 18 AJ: So a true story?
- 19 JB: A true story . . . well not . . .
- 20 AJ: Loosely based on a true story.
- 21 JB: Loosely based, yeah. A dramedy based loosely on a real person.
- 22 AJ: Yes.
- 23 JB: Yes, fictional events based on a real person and Miss Gloria Allen, who is sickening in person – she's
24 gorgeous.
- 25 AJ: Yes, she is – she's a queen.
- 26 JB: Yes, she is.
- 27 AJ: Literally.
- 28 JB: A queen diva, who I did not even realized existed because the way the script is set up, they thanked
29 Gloria, they didn't say . . . if I remember correctly, that it was based on her. They thanked her, so I
30 was just like, "Oh, OK – they're thanking Gloria Allen, that's cool." And then I did my research and I
31 found out who she was and I was like, "Whoa – oh." And it's an amazing story I think. One of those
32 teacher narratives, you know – the tropes of the teacher in a rough neighborhood trying to have the

- 1 kids come to her and establish her authority and they go through their ups and downs, without
2 giving everything away.
- 3 AJ: Sort of like *Dead Poet's Society*.
- 4 JB: Yeah, yeah – or what's another good teacher . . . ?
- 5 AJ: *To Sir with Love*.
- 6 JB: *Stand and Deliver* - yeah, yeah. With a trans lead, a trans main character and trans characters
7 within the play. This is the first time that the play has been done with actual trans performers,
8 which I applaud Mixed Blood Theatre for doing – Black trans folks and performers.
- 9 AJ: And you're from New York City. They flew you in to be a part of this production.
- 10 JB: I'm from New York, they flew me in to be part of this and put me up and worked me hard. But, still
11 flew me in and put me up. I'm just really blessed, I am charmed to be here – ba-dum-bum.
- 12 AJ: It's interesting, when I mention the show to people they almost inevitably say *Charmed*, like the TV
13 program.
- 14 JB: Oh yes.
- 15 AJ: But this is not that.
- 16 JB: It's not, it's not a witchy show – even though Momma Darling works her magic really well, and that's
17 another thing – I want to go back to what we were talking about before, if you don't mind. Trans
18 women are magic. I think we are . . . I think we have a very magical quality about us, we are
19 spiritualists, we are priestesses, and we answer our calling because it is engrained within in, and I
20 think particularly with trans women of color there is a deeper connection to this calling – like we are
21 of the . . . I think a diaspora that leads with emotion, leads with heart, leads with a connection to the
22 spiritual and to the earthly and to the otherworldly as well – at the same time. Earthly and
23 otherworldly at the same time. So we get it, we understand it and it's an unspoken understanding. I
24 think, at the same time . . . well, it's not Gloria Allen, I actually made this mistake when I was on
25 stage. I was like, "Hi, my name is Miss Gloria Allen, I mean Miss Darleena."
- 26 AJ: Oh, that did happen.
- 27 JB: It did happen. Goodness, and Addy was in the audience and she was like, "Doh." I could hear her
28 go, "Doh." But Mama Darleena spins that magic as well, she leaves that magic with the kids.
- 29 AJ: I was there on opening night and I actually had the privilege and the honor to escort Mama Gloria to
30 the production, she was thrilled – she loved it.
- 31 JB: I heard she was crying in the audience.
- 32 AJ: She was crying, I was sitting right next to her – the tears just falling down.
- 33 JB: That makes me very proud.

- 1 AJ: What was the interaction like between you and her after the production?
- 2 JB: I don't know. I think I was very tired afterwards. I just really wanted her to be proud and feel proud
3 of me. I'm very big on people who came before me – giving them that respect as well as . . . I
4 believe I am, as well as when I'm portraying a role doing it accurately and one of the things that
5 scared the hell out of me once I found out that this character was based on a real, living person and
6 she is really coming to this play to see it. I, pardon my French, was like shitting my pants. I was like,
7 "Did they pick the right girl? Do you feel like they . . . did you feel like I portrayed you, or her, well?"
8 I feel like I was a puppy, like jumping up in her lap peeing on her. I was like, "Did you like it? Did you
9 like it? Did you love it? Did you love it? No? Yes? Maybe?" And she was like, "You did well, baby."
10 She was like, "Baby, you did well."
- 11 AJ: Go over here and sit down.
- 12 JB: And cool off, baby. So, there was that. I think she was happy with the performance. Like I said
13 before, I was so tired after all of that so I couldn't really tell.
- 14 AJ: Well I interviewed her the very next day after the show.
- 15 JB: OK, and what did she say?
- 16 AJ: She loved it.
- 17 JB: Oh my gosh.
- 18 AJ: Absolutely loved it. She was so proud of each and every one of you. She was mostly proud that it
19 was all trans people of color that were in the production – or all trans people, and primarily,
20 predominantly, trans people of color. She absolutely loved it.
- 21 JB: Whew – that's what I needed to hear.
- 22 AJ: You know, the thing about that weekend, you bring up this word magic. Gloria Allen is 70-years-old.
- 23 JB: She looks fucking amazing, like they . . . can I just say, they had to like pad me because she . . . her
24 hips don't lie. Her hips . . . that woman is the body, that line, "Here comes the body," from the play
25 – Lord, that woman. She looks fucking phenomenal.
- 26 AJ: She's phenomenal, but her spirit . . . she was an R.N. for 35 years.
- 27 JB: Jesus.
- 28 AJ: She was a registered nurse for 35 years. She's been out since . . .
- 29 JB: Wait – an RN and out as trans?
- 30 AJ: She was a registered nurse . . . this is what she told me, how she described herself when I asked her
31 the same question I asked you. She was like, "Baby, I came out of the womb with a pink purse."
- 32 JB: Oh I see. As trans.

- 1 AJ: So she was like . . . when she was five, little boys were hitting on her like she was a little girl, that
2 was her thing. So yes, she was out as a transgender woman.
- 3 JB: At work and everything.
- 4 AJ: For 35 years – and prior to that. She was a performer, she went to New York and sang and danced,
5 then she went back to college and got her degree.
- 6 JB: And became a registered nurse.
- 7 AJ: It's interesting, your guy's stories are somewhat similar. Her mother was a performer and then
8 became an educator.
- 9 JB: Really?
- 10 AJ: And then eventually became . . . her mother was an LPN, but she taught in nursing school too. So
11 yeah, an interesting story. Her mother was a cover girl for *JET* magazine.
- 12 JB: That's funny.
- 13 AJ: And performed with Eartha Kitt. So her mother was a performer, she was a performer.
- 14 JB: My mother actually . . . the theatre that Harry had dealt with in New York, my mother was one of
15 their original performers.
- 16 AJ: Is that right?
- 17 JB: I asked Harry, "Do you know my mother?" And he was like, "No." I was like, "You know my
18 mother." I was like, "I look just like my mother, you know my mother." She was in the original *For*
19 *Colored Girls*. My momma, she was one of the colored girls.
- 20 AJ: One of the ideas that I just floated on Twitter today, if you follow me on Twitter – if you don't, you
21 should.
- 22 JB: I don't, I will – once I turn the phone on.
- 23 AJ: I tagged Aly, because this is Aly's idea actually.
- 24 JB: With the colored girls all trans – yes, yes.
- 25 AJ: So I tagged her and I tagged LaVerne, and I tagged Janet and I'm like . . . because Janet Mock was on
26 Twitter, "Oh my God, I just went to see *The Color Purple* last night, it's so amazing and so beautiful
27 blah, blah, blah." And I'm like, "Yes girl, let's do this production with all trans women."
- 28 JB: We need to do that.
- 29 AJ: We need to do that.
- 30 JB: I would love to be in that.
- 31 AJ: So you're an actress, let me ask you this. What's your thoughts about . . .?

- 1 JB: Well, I'm a multi- . . . I'm a multi-dimensional performer or a multi- . . .
- 2 AJ: No, but acting is a part of that.
- 3 JB: I understand what you're saying.
- 4 AJ: So acting is a part of that.
- 5 JB: Yes.
- 6 AJ: You sing, you dance.
- 7 JB: All of the good stuff – the goodies. I bake.
- 8 AJ: Do you garden? Do you have a garden?
- 9 JB: No. I don't do windows, I don't do it all.
- 10 AJ: OK. But, there is this debate about who gets to play transgender characters, what's the role of trans
11 actors and actresses in Hollywood or in theatre. Share your thoughts. What are your thoughts?
- 12 JB: Well. If it's a question, I kind of almost feel like it's a question that shouldn't be asked. You know
13 what I mean? I think that when people ask who should play transgender roles, transgender people.
14 Do you know what I mean? Who should play Black roles? Black folks. Unless, I think, the actor
15 brings something really special to the table. I think a cis person should not play a transgender role
16 because there are way too many trans performers out there and trans talent out there. We had a
17 showcase the opening week of *Charm* and I was blown away. I had to get myself together for my
18 performance but just from hearing, I couldn't even see it but I heard some of the people singing. I
19 was like, "Who is that singing? Is that Luther Vandross? Did somebody resurrect Luther? Luther!"
20 Pulling the panties off and throwing them at the monitor. Seriously. I was floored.
- 21 AJ: And these are trans people?
- 22 JB: These are trans people – Aly did a poem and talking about Black women. The talent that is in the
23 community . . . so, I say if there is a cis actor who can play a trans role, but even then – no. It should
24 be a trans person because it's not done often enough.
- 25 AJ: Well what about the show . . . I'm going to push back a tiny bit, so *Transparent*?
- 26 JB: It's not a trans actor.
- 27 AJ: It's not a trans actor and the character is actually transitioning. So . . . you know.
- 28 JB: Well I've never actually seen the show. From what I hear it's a good show and it also does employ a
29 lot of trans people across the board.
- 30 AJ: So trans writers.
- 31 JB: Yes. I think that there are . . . I'll say this. If you're going to have a production where the cis actor
32 gets the trans role, then you're going to have to employ trans actors or performers throughout that

- 1 whole production – like hire some trans writers . . . equality. If it's going to be a story focused
2 around a trans person, then you have to give back to the trans community. It's a balance. You have
3 to balance it out – it's all about balance.
- 4 AJ: I love that.
- 5 JB: Thank you.
- 6 AJ: But I will just say this for the record, this is not my interview – this is your interview, but Jaye
7 Davidson gave me life in the role . . .
- 8 JB: *Transparent*?
- 9 AJ: No, *The Crying Game*.
- 10 JB: Oh yes – yeah, yeah, that's true.
- 11 AJ: You know, a cis gender male but . . .
- 12 JB: Who looks completely different now. Have you seen what Jaye Davidson looks like now?
- 13 AJ: No, I haven't.
- 14 JB: You should Google Jaye Davidson. Completely does not look like that at all.
- 15 AJ: That was probably 20+ years ago, at least. But that was a . . . they put everything in that role, it was
16 good.
- 17 JB: Yeah, they did.
- 18 AJ: I thought they did a great job. Well, yeah, thank you for sharing that. I'm so thrilled that you were
19 selected to play that role.
- 20 JB: Thank you.
- 21 AJ: I thought you did an amazing job. And, as I said, the woman who the play was inspired by also was
22 deeply moved by your performance and by everyone's performance. I think the young lady who
23 played Ariela . . .
- 24 JB: Oh, Rehema, who I love.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, has really impacted the Twin Cities stages in a major way. I think she is really growing.
- 26 JB: She is, she really is. She's amazing and she's a good person. I have a lot of love for Rehema and Aly,
27 who is planning on coming back here. I'm proud of both of them.
- 28 AJ: What is that like? The three of you guys, and I would assume the rest of the cast too . . . I know, I've
29 been in many plays and productions, so I know that people bond together and it's sort of like a
30 family, it becomes like a family. But what is it like with three trans women of color?
- 31 JB: In the play?

- 1 AJ: Yeah.
- 2 JB: Well, here's the thing. So they're . . . so you've been in many casts before so you know that there
3 are people that really bond and group together and then there are people who don't necessarily.
4 They're cool, they're part of it . . .
- 5 AJ: They're part of the family but they're like a distant cousin.
- 6 JB: Yeah. So I would say that between me and the two girls, yes – we have bonded very tightly. It took
7 its time, I want to say, because most of it was because I was being drilled and I didn't have the time.
8 I was fucking tired.
- 9 AJ: Right – yes.
- 10 JB: "Do this, do that, do this, do that."
- 11 AJ: Yes, rehearsing, learning your lines, and all this stuff – yeah.
- 12 JB: All this stuff. And then I had to take some additional time to actually fall into the character after
13 being thrown a damn near 100-page script to learn. But once all that was out of the way, we
14 bonded very tightly and closely, I think.
- 15 AJ: Do you guys hang out, like after the show?
- 16 JB: We hang out after the show when we're not all tired – well, they're never tired, but when I'm not.
- 17 AJ: Well they're babies.
- 18 JB: When I'm not super tired.
- 19 AJ: She said they are never tired.
- 20 JB: They're never tired, but they also . . . they don't have as much dialogue as I have so it's like I'm
21 always on that stage and I'm always doing something behind.
- 22 AJ: You're not just standing there.
- 23 JB: No. So they get a chance to go upstairs and sit down and relax and then come on and perform, and
24 then take another break. But they're also babies. So – yeah. But we have . . . we've learned, I think,
25 about each other. We've had some bumps here and there, but I appreciate them because they
26 taught me some things about myself.
- 27 AJ: They call you mama.
- 28 JB: Yeah, they do call me mama.
- 29 AJ: Not because you're Mama Darleena . . .
- 30 JB: But they say I have a motherly spirit and I've never . . . I've never had somebody . . . I'll tell you this,
31 Andrea, I've always wanted to have kids and I still want to have kids. But, because of my strained
32 relationship with my mother, I've always feared having children because I didn't want to be that

- 1 same way as my mother was. I didn't want to inflict that kind of pain on to children because there
2 are so many angry Black, insert men or women, walking on this earth, I don't want to create any
3 more. And so to hear brilliant girls call me mama or Rehema calls me Sis, it is heartwarming. I'm
4 such a crybaby, just like little Aly. I'm a big crybaby, she's a little crybaby – I'm a big one. But to hear
5 them call me that and to show me that love is very sweet and I never thought that I would get that.
6 And it's weird – you know what I mean? It's weird.
- 7 AJ: I'm going to flip up a little bit and, to the extent that you feel comfortable with this, tell me about
8 any medical interventions that you have had around your gender expression, identity, transition.
- 9 JB: Well, I mean . . . I don't know. Because I know that there are folks who . . . other people who will be
10 watching this . . .
- 11 AJ: Yes.
- 12 JB: I'm going to kindly bow out of sharing that part of my anatomy because I feel like with trans folks
13 are . . . any medical procedures or things that have been done to our bodies, our bodies are always
14 objectified and thought of as these anomalies – just a freak show. Do you know what I'm saying?
15 Like, "Look at that." I've been actually been called that before, so I'd rather not make the focus
16 about . . .
- 17 AJ: That's perfectly fine. Tell me about love and relationships.
- 18 JB: Thank you.
- 19 AJ: Who you sleeping with?
- 20 JB: Who I'm sleeping with . . . currently it's a dry situation, a little dry spell.
- 21 AJ: You're not looking for love right now.
- 22 JB: I'm learning how to love myself better.
- 23 AJ: Good.
- 24 JB: I'm learning how to love Juienne and Mizz June because Mizz June is that stage presence and
25 Julienne is who you see right here. Even though there's some Mizz June that's been peppered
26 throughout this interview. But yeah, I'm learning how to love my ability to perform and excel at that
27 and my ability to excel and perform in life. You understand?
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 JB: That's my love affair right now. I welcome it. I'm on these social . . . what is it? The dating app
30 thingy, which I don't think works because guys on there are just looking to fuck – let's be real.
- 31 AJ: Right, yes.

- 1 JB: But, I mean – you know, I was in a relationship for a while and it didn’t work out because I think we
2 should have just been friends. We were both looking for a specific kind of love, and I still love him
3 very much but there were just other factors there that just did not make it work.
- 4 AJ: So you consider your sexual identity as heterosexual?
- 5 JB: No. I do sometimes think I’m a straight woman because I like men and I’m a woman who likes men,
6 but the things that I like to do with the men . . . and I had to question myself about that because it’s
7 so easy to fall into heteronormative ideals of what it means to be a woman in a relationship with a
8 man and what that means, what labels mean. I’ve lived this life for so long and I’ve been this
9 identity for so long, why would I want to identify myself as queer or other, and then realizing well
10 what is normal – you understand? Aly told me, “You say, ‘you understand?’ all the time, why do you
11 do that?” I just caught myself when I just did that . . . that little girl, she’s too cute. But she’s real –
12 she’s honest. Some people don’t understand me, it’s as though I’m speaking another language – I
13 just want to be understood.
- 14 AJ: Oh Lord, please don’t let me be misunderstood.
- 15 JB: Right. I see myself as a woman who partners with men, I’m open to being with trans men as well.
- 16 AJ: OK.
- 17 JB: And that’s it, it’s not heterosexual and it’s not queer.
- 18 AJ: But you’re attracted to masculinity or masculine . . .
- 19 JB: Yes, I love like a solid chocolate bar with big walnuts.
- 20 AJ: All right.
- 21 JB: I’m blind, I’m a New Yorker. I like my . . . I’m a vegetarian, but I like my meat cooked, nice and
22 browned.
- 23 AJ: Nice and browned, right. Nice. When was the first time you ever met a trans person?
- 24 JB: That’s a great question. I was 15 or 16 and Christopher Street, the pier, the West Village. I was
25 going out there back when I was in high school and my freshman year of high school, this was right
26 before, like I said before, where I began to incorporate some things . . . well maybe two years before
27 that happened, but this was the introductory period where I was like, “This exists?” I was like,
28 “What is going on?” I didn’t even know she was a trans woman – we met this one young woman.
29 What was her name? Terri – her name was Terri. She was gorgeous – very tall, statuesque, very . . .
30 I want to say the trans ideal or the video ideal.
- 31 AJ: Yeah, body . . .
- 32 JB: Body audy audy. But not exaggerated body, but it was just like body. Very pretty, dark brown skin
33 with long flowing weave. I remember she had a very raspy voice and I thought she was just a cis
34 gendered woman. I didn’t even know . . . and I remember somebody saying, “Oh, we know what

- 1 you are.” She was like, “Love it – trans and real and proud, yes.” And just the assuredness, the self-
2 love, or the picture, the image, of self-love, whether it was real or not at the time, that image that
3 she portrayed, that her being sure of herself made me so obsessed and enamored and I was like,
4 “Huh? She’s really amazing and she used to be a he, and I always thought of myself as a she, am I
5 like her?” I was how does one even do that? Once I met her it was like the gears started turning
6 and I was like, “Ohhh, this can happen – maybe this can actually happen.” And then from there I
7 went into my own ideas of self and exploring self. So it was from Terri – I remember her.
- 8 AJ: As an actress, you got to play the icon, Gloria Allen, which, of course, it was loosely based on her,
9 they changed her name.
- 10 JB: It scared the crap out of me when I met her in person.
- 11 AJ: But you also performed Marsha P. Johnson.
- 12 JB: Yes, I also performed in a play called *O, Earth* based on . . .
- 13 AJ: What was it called?
- 14 JB: *O, Earth*.
- 15 AJ: Old . . . ?
- 16 JB: Like O . . . O comma Earth.
- 17 AJ: All right.
- 18 JB: I think it’s based on . . . there’s like a scripture in the Bible and there’s something about O, Earth.
19 But it is loosely based, for legal reasons, on *Our Town*. I played Marsha P. Johnson in that.
- 20 AJ: How the hell do you get to play two transgender women icons and what is that like?
- 21 JB: It is daunting. OK – do you understand that? It is scary as shit for a lot of reasons. Well, not so
22 much – Marsha was fun because I had a lot of time to fall into Marsha. I was reading for Marsha . . .
23 I was part of the workshop development of the play. So I was . . . when the play was in production
24 and they were like, “We’ve auditioned other girls, but we want you because you’ve been here and
25 you’ve got it.” It just made sense and I fell right into her. And so Marsha, I loved Marsha, but that
26 wasn’t the question.
- 27 AJ: Well you can tell me – yeah, yeah.
- 28 JB: Well, Marsha, it was daunting because there were people, obviously still in New York who knew
29 Marsha – actually somebody on the cast worked with Marsha in *Hot Peaches*, so that was scary.
- 30 AJ: What’s *Hot Peaches*?
- 31 JB: It was the theatre group she was a part of – the *Hot Peaches*.
- 32 AJ: The *Hot Peaches* – OK.

- 1 JB: Yeah, she toured with them and everything. And Mo, she was an actor for years and years and
2 years – she’s part of the people who do that play . . . anyway . . .
- 3 AJ: People knew her.
- 4 JB: Yeah, people knew her and so that was scary. With Gloria, she’s a living person. Marsha is not
5 living.
- 6 AJ: Right, Marsha is no longer with us.
- 7 JB: She is no longer with us, in this realm. So, there was . . . I wanted to be the best Marsha I could
8 portray . . .
- 9 AJ: But you didn’t feel . . .
- 10 JB: But I didn’t feel that much pressure because I wouldn’t be meeting Marsha right after the play and
11 saying, “Hi, Marsha, please tell me I did a good job.” But with Gloria Allen, it was completely
12 different and they saw me being Marsha and they were like . . . first I actually auditioned for Janelle.
13 I didn’t want Mama actually. This is something I don’t think I’ve told people outside of the cast. I
14 auditioned for Aly’s role and I got it, and I was supposed to play Janelle. Then Aly auditioned and I
15 think the people . . . somebody they wanted for Mama didn’t pan out and they were like . . . they
16 saw me, they saw the reviews for *O, Earth* and Marsha, and they wanted me to audition for Mama.
17 I was like, “Are you sure?” It was because I knew I read the play and I did it, and I got it. I think it
18 was just a matter of me wanting to just be a part and tell trans stories, Black trans stories – of Black
19 strong trans women, that aren’t told. If I am the conduit to do that, then so fucking be it. You know
20 what I’m saying?
- 21 AJ: It blows my mind that you have . . . I’m just considering this, that you have had the opportunity to
22 bring to life two iconic trans women of color. It is a lot of pressure but you have carried it off with
23 amazing aplomb honey.
- 24 JB: Thank you.
- 25 AJ: Thank you for continuing that history, that legacy of strength and resilience and power and beauty –
26 stars.
- 27 JB: Thank you. They are stars. Every night when I would get into Marsha I would pray, and pray I’d tell
28 her story right. With Gloria as well, I would just pray that I’m playing this role, based on her story, to
29 the best of my ability and that people . . . because I can’t pray to wherever Gloria is because she’s
30 here with us, but I would just be like to Marsha, like I would meditate, “Wherever you are, whatever
31 realm, if you hear me work through me.”
- 32 AJ: Wow. Have you ever worked with any trans or LGBT organizations?
- 33 JB: I have, yes.
- 34 AJ: OK. And you’re just leaving it at that?

- 1 JB: No – I thought there was a second part to the question.
- 2 AJ: Have you ever worked there, what was it like? Which ones? Who?
- 3 JB: SRLP.
- 4 AJ: So the Sylvia Rivera Law Project.
- 5 JB: Sylvia Rivera Law Project, which is where I know Rena from – and a lot of, a whole bunch of other
6 people. SRLP, Sylvia Rivera Law Project . . .
- 7 AJ: Gabriel Foster.
- 8 JB: Yeah, that project actually gave me . . . that organization gave me the ability to really branch out
9 into my community. It taught me . . . it didn't teach me more about Marsha, because I already knew
10 about Marsha before, because I'm a founding member of FIERCE, Fabulous Independent . . .
- 11 AJ: Oh yes.
- 12 JB: Do you know about FIERCE?
- 13 AJ: Yes, I know FIERCE. Absolutely. You're one of the founding members?
- 14 JB: There were like 10 of us, I think the number is 10 – and I'm one of those 10.
- 15 AJ: You guys were the talk of the nation, everybody wanted to have a FIERCE in their community.
- 16 JB: Really?
- 17 AJ: Yes, you guys were FIERCE.
- 18 JB: I don't know about all of that.
- 19 AJ: The façade.
- 20 JB: The idea of it – I guess kids doing something that would . . . yeah, I can understand that. I believe
21 that – yeah. But yeah, so FIERCE, I said SRLP. I was the communications coordinator for SRLP and
22 once I left they got rid of that role and re-did the structure of the organization. ALP, Audre Lorde
23 Project – TransJustice. GMHC, I did a campaign with GMHC.
- 24 AJ: Oh really, OK.
- 25 JB: That's not trans – Gay Men's Health Crisis. But they wanted to have a trans component and they
26 brought me on as a . . . this is years ago.
- 27 AJ: Outreach coordinator maybe?
- 28 JB: No, not an outreach coordinator but it was a media . . . I was the media intern. And so I came in and
29 I created a campaign for them and . . . I've done a lot of different things.
- 30 AJ: You worked with some of the most major trans people of color, organizing spaces in New York City.

- 1 JB: Yeah, I guess.
- 2 AJ: That's amazing.
- 3 JB: Thank you, thank you.
- 4 AJ: Wow, what an inspiring person.
- 5 JB: Thank you, thank you.
- 6 AJ: What do you think the relationship is between the L, the G, and the B and the T? Specifically,
7 because you worked at Gay Men's Health Crisis, I know some of those people and, in my opinion, it
8 was a little transphobic.
- 9 JB: Your opinion is correct.
- 10 AJ: And a little sexist.
- 11 JB: It's not a little transphobic, it is transphobic. I think people don't even realize how detached and
12 fractured our communities are. There's just so much of a disconnect between our communities
13 because I think for a lot of folks, being trans is seen as . . . well trans women, being M to F, is seen as
14 exaggerated gay men.
- 15 AJ: Yes.
- 16 JB: And I've heard this before, and I think it's insane. And it's coming from gay men and lesbians. I feel
17 like even bi-sexual folks get more of a pass, they're like unicorns to people whereas trans people are
18 side-show clowns. I'd rather be a unicorn. I think that a lot of folks are so defensive that they're not
19 willing to hear that this is what it is and hurt people hurt people. So when gay folks and lesbian
20 people are ostracized and told that they are other and disgusting, then they create something that
21 emulates . . .
- 22 AJ: More other or more disgusting.
- 23 JB: Yeah. Or looks at . . . they don't create us, they create . . . no, no – that's not what I'm saying. They
24 create a heteronormative way of life for themselves to show their bullies that, "Oh look how much
25 like you we can be, and look at them – look at the transsexuals or whatever they want to call
26 themselves today, look at how 'other' they are, we're not like them. Boo, transgenders." And so
27 there's that – do you know what I mean? It's like those who were told no, now get to tell other
28 people no, so now they're happy.
- 29 AJ: Wow.
- 30 JB: That's what I've seen. It's like that in GMHC. I don't know how it is now because I haven't been
31 there in over a decade, but they were really . . . they actually pitted me against another trans
32 woman who had actually been there and we took the bait because we were so young and we didn't
33 know . . . you know, growing up and seeing how women, we had said this off camera, how women
34 are pretty much trained and taught to be divisive and misogynist – internalized misogyny. We

1 thought, "Oh, we're supposed to be catty at each other," and they're just having fun with us or
2 they're looking out for us when they were really trying to divide us because they were about to give
3 us both the chop.

4 AJ: Right. Wow.

5 JB: And take our ideas and run with them, and that's exactly what they did.

6 AJ: Well I feel like I've got to ask you this question just because you've had so much organizational
7 experience advocating in trans community as well as you've played these two amazing women.
8 What do you think, Mizz June, the agenda is for the transgender community going forward?

9 JB: I think that's a tough question to answer. I don't think that's a question that can be answered
10 without other folks giving their input, because I know that within the trans community . . . the
11 difference between the trans community and why I feel like we're going to take some more time to
12 move forward . . . I'll say this, I'll answer it in different ways.

13 AJ: OK.

14 JB: We'll need more voices for that answer to occur. There are multiple different ideas and messages
15 and gender identities within the trans community, which separates us from the other – the L, the G,
16 and the B.

17 AJ: Right.

18 JB: Which is why our messaging and our cohesion cannot occur because we have gender queer, we
19 have transsexuals, people who identify as transsexuals. We have transgender women who identify
20 as just women, we have transgender women. We have M to F, we have F to M, so because it's who
21 we are and not who we sleep with, we have different messages so we can't have the same message
22 moving forward. We have to agree across the board that we're different and that it's OK for us to
23 be different across the board. And then move forward as different entities. You understand?
24 That's what I'm saying. We're beginning to emulate our bullies where we're saying . . . so the gays
25 have said, "We're going to be heteronormative and we're going to have what heterosexual people
26 say we should have as a gay couple." Lesbians have done the same thing and have ostracized us,
27 trans people, because we don't fit the look that they're looking for. We're what they call men trying
28 to be women, or women trying to be men, to put it bluntly – in laymen's terms. And so now within
29 the trans community, after having years and years and years of being bullied by the L and the G, we
30 are starting to bully each other and we're saying, "Oh, you can't be that kind of woman, you can't be
31 trans and be a lesbian. You can't be a butch-y trans woman," or, "You can't not be pretty and be a
32 trans woman." "You can't not wear wigs and weaves, you cannot . . ." Do you know what I'm
33 saying?

34 AJ: I absolutely understand.

35 JB: We're beginning to replicate the same trash that has been poisoning the L and the G for years
36 because they've been other and now we're othering each other. Even though our variety is what
37 makes us beautiful. Out of the entire LGBT community, which I use that term loosely because I

1 don't think we're all the same community – because we're not, but out of that whole . . . whatever,
2 we have the most difference. You can see so many different people who identify as or on the trans
3 spectrum, and within the trans community it is a rainbow – we are our own rainbow.

4 AJ: Yes. Double rainbow even.

5 JB: Seriously. So I feel like we need to accept our double rainbows and rainbows and accept that the
6 messages are going to be different – and that's how we're going to move forward.

7 AJ: Wow. Very insightful. Anything that you want to share that I didn't ask you about, Mizz June?

8 JB: Wow – no. I don't know. Yeah, you know what? Actually there is. I've had so many issues. I am a .
9 . . I don't know if I said this, I'm a Black trans woman, or a Black woman first. When people see me
10 they see my color, then they see that I'm a woman and I've had issues with my community, the
11 Black community, not understanding that trans women exist, that Black trans women exist. And
12 that's something that I've had a problem with, and I've said this before to somebody – here,
13 actually, is that I should not have to either be Black or trans, I should not have to take up for the
14 cause of the Black folks or the cause of the trans people. I am one in the same, so there will be no
15 division. I feel like that's something that, within the Black community, we need to really . . . well not
16 we, the folks who are doing it – they need to cut that shit out. It's not cool. This divide and conquer
17 is real and it's, once again, just like how the L and the G has been dividing itself from us and saying
18 that we're other, that we're so othered, that we cannot sit and eat with them and now we're doing
19 it to each other – the Black community is doing it to us, for those of us who are Black trans or Black
20 gender non-conforming.

21 AJ: Yeah.

22 JB: So that is a problem for me because, like I said before, I love my meat cooked and I've had issues
23 with being with Black men or men of color who feel like their masculinity is being questioned
24 because they're in a relationship with a trans woman or they have to question what their identity is
25 because they're in a relationship with a trans woman. I'm like – you're the same person you were
26 before we started sleeping together, does it matter?

27 AJ: You are you.

28 JB: You are you – exactly. When labels start to box people off, that's when I think we need to stop
29 putting labels on people and put them on some fucking shoes, and put those shoes in boxes and put
30 them in the closet.

31 AJ: OK. Well, on that note, I think we'll end this interview right here.

32 JB: I'm such a fucking lady. I don't talk like this on stage.

33 AJ: Mizz June, thank you.

34 JB: Thank you, Miss Andrea.

35 AJ: I love you.

- 1 JB: I love you too.
- 2 AJ: Peace.
- 3 JB: Thank you.
- 4 AJ: Keep burning up the stage.
- 5 JB: Thank you.
- 6 AJ: All right, baby.
- 7 JB: All right.