**Jamison Danielson**

**Narrator**

**Samantha Aamot**

**Interviewer**

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**Duluth, Minnesota**

Jamison Danielson -**JD**

Samantha Aamot -**SA**

**SA**: Okay, I'll have you state your name and tell me you give me permission to record you.

**JD**: Jamison Danielson, I give permission to be recorded.

**SA**: Do you want to start with talking about your childhood? Or we could start with the work you do here. Really wherever.

**JD**: There's a lot of space between that, holy shit. So, I have a very interesting past. I am one of five children and four of us are living. My life changed drastically the day that my sister died. She died when she was nineteen days old of SIDS and it was extremely rough on my parents. They couldn't bring themselves to stay in the house that she died in, and they couldn't bring themselves to not stay in the house that she died in. So, their grief stricken course of action was to stop paying the mortgage and pretty much stay there as long as they could, but also being forced to leave, which was, I don't know, I was in second grade, so it was complicated in my mind. Eventually, we got our twenty-four hour notice. From there we stayed with my mom's friend, who was pretty toxic. Her husband was an alcoholic.

**SA**: You and your four siblings?

**JD**: Yeah, me and my four brothers. I am the oldest--now I'm twenty-eight. My other brother is twenty-five, my next brother is seventeen, the next one is eighteen, so there's a bit of a gap in between us.

**SA**: This is in Duluth?

**JD**: Yeah, here in Duluth. That all went down in 1996. From then we stayed in campgrounds and hotels and it was just kind of a rough go of things. Then we were able to access transitional housing through Salvation Army, and we were like on an on-sight managed program for some time just to see like, "Are these people respectful? Do they behave? Are they worthy of our resources and time?" So after, I don't know, six months or a year there we were given an opportunity to live in a house instead of a managed house, which is really rad because the Salvation Army has three of those on Park Point. So, to be a poor kid and get to live out on Park Point coming from nothing was really fucking rad. Yeah, it was really cool. Like I said my sister passing really damaged my family, and so I grew up in a pretty toxic household. There was a lot of emotional abuse and physical abuse, and me and my mom just didn't get along. I acted out quite a bit as a teenager due to that. I ended up on probation as a teenager. I was locked up a lot.

**SA**: Do you remember if this is middle school or high school?

**JD**: This is, I don't know, however old you are in ninth grade. I don't know, high school was really abnormal in comparison to most people's experience. So, yeah, however old you are then. I just couldn't live with her. I acted out because when the social workers would come over she would behave, the house would be clean, because they would say, "Hey, we are going to come next Tuesday at four." So they aren't getting an accurate view of what my life was like. My brothers were younger and just didn't experience as much as I did, so they defended her, which we have had conversations about now that we are older. They feel bad for not speaking their truth, but I can't fault them for that. So, yeah, I was just kind of locked up a lot. When I was fifteen years old I moved into Renaissance, which was a transitional housing program for teens in Duluth ran through Lutheran Social Services. That was where I came out as gay. It was a really cool experience for me; a lot of the staff around me were also gay. I lived with two lesbians, a bi man, and a gay man, so that was really rad to experience that at fifteen years old. That was one of my comings out. So, I lived there for a while. I just kind of went through a lot. No one would rent me, so I was just kind of stuck in that space for a while. Then eventually did rent my own SRO, or single room occupancy. Just kind of a shitty room like this. It was better than being outside where I have slept before in my life.

**SA**: Especially here.

**JD**: Yeah, yeah it's cold much of the year. That's why I try to get outside as much as I can because I've got like a three to four month window otherwise it's Netflix and snacks, which would be why I'm a big dude. [laughs] I lived there for a while. I then was in a long term relationship for five years so lived with her. That was kind of messy. I think the first time you love someone is messy, especially when you're young. You don't know what the fuck you are doing and there's a lot of great things that happen; you make a lot of mistakes because you just don't know better. You just don't know how to value something or care for it. It's kind of like if somebody gives you some kind of rare plant and says, "Good luck," and tells you nothing. [laughs] Half the plant might live, half the plant might look like shit and you are like, "I don't know what I'm doing." So that relationship ended.

**SA**: Five years is a long time.

**JD**: Yeah, I was with her from sixteen until I was twenty-one. I guess that's kind of where things get a little messy. I am trans. I am a trans guy, but I didn't want to be trans. Being gay was hard enough. I was really struggling with that, and I pushed my ex away a lot. You know, I have my own drug history. I was using, I guess I'll say I was a garbage can user; anything that came my way or whatever. Anything that made you feel good or made you feel nothing was something I was really interested in.

**SA**: Did that start earlier? Eighth grade, ninth grade?

**JD**: Yeah, I had always been a pot smoker. Pills here and there, and a fuck ton of drinking as a teenager. Fuck tons of drinking. Yeah, I mean I kind of dabbled in stuff. As I got older it escalated, and I had friends who were heavily using. I've never injected myself, but I did use a lot of hard core stuff. I damaged or lost a lot of important things in my life due to that. There kind of came a point where I had to deal with my gender identity stuff. Well, I guess I hate the word 'identity' because I don't identify as, I am. For lack of better language tools I'll say that. So, yeah, I really had to deal with that because it really came to a point where I felt like I had to transition or I was going to die. There was just no in-between. Oh, I found it. Okay, when I was a teenager--so I'm twenty-eight years old--when I was a teenager I remember Googling trans things and being like really fucking freaked out. Trying to delete everything, every time my mom walked by I clicked onto, I don't know--

**SA**: The newspaper.

**JD**: Right, right. [laughs] Anything but that. I remember when I was reading about trans people and people who had transitioned the only stuff I really read about were people who were using hormones and people who were having surgery. At that time the concept of hormones was like a whole new thing, so I didn't know how I felt about that, and surgery from the get-go was something I just never really wanted because I was comfortable with my parts and what was going on, but I didn't like myself when I looked in the mirror. When I Googled these things a lot of people were like, "If I don't have bottom surgery, I'm going to kill myself." And I could never relate to that. I stayed closeted as a trans person for many years because, "I'm not trans enough to be trans," you know. When I look back on that--and I help quite a bit with the trans group here in Duluth--I'll have a lot of people who are just starting their journey and they'll come to group and they'll be like, "Well, I don't know," and whatever and it's like, "Dude, you are trans enough to be you. You are enough. You don't want to have to have hormones, you don't have to medically transition. If that is who you are then that's who you are." I decided that testosterone was for me, but still no interest in surgery, which is kind of an interesting concept for people because a lot of trans people that know me view me as some super macho dude, however my nickname is Daddy Twink Bear because there's a good mix of both!

**SA**: Did you come up with the gummy bear road? [laughs]

**JD**: I did not, that's all Maggie! [laughs] But it's hilarious. So, yeah, I came to a point where I was going to take steps I needed to take to transition or I couldn't see myself being on earth. I don't know if you know much about trans stats or anything, but forty-one percent of trans people attempt or complete suicide. That was a very real thing for me and the way I felt was very scary. Living in Duluth there is a population of eighty-six thousand people. For many years I didn't know or hadn't met anyone like me. Yeah, I felt really, really, really alone. I educated myself on the path I needed to take to start T, and so I was like okay I need to talk to a therapist, they write some kind of letter, then I see a doctor who looks at the therapists' letter that says I'm good enough for hormones. It didn't go well at first. I found a therapist and I remember walking into his office and he had his degree's on the wall and his name was very religious. I was like, "Okay, that doesn't necessarily mean anything." Then I take a bigger look around and there are crosses, and he was looking at me like I was an insect. What the fuck is happening. I was like, "I don't give a fuck. I need that letter really bad." So, he wants to talk to me, I lay out my whole story, and then he says, "Well, thanks for sharing, but I don't do that. I don't do that." You think he would have stopped me like fifteen minutes in and been like, "I don't need to hear anymore. This is a waste of your time, this is a waste of my time." I felt like he was super judgmental and then obviously couldn't help me and had no one to refer me to. So I was like, "Cool, now I'm just stuck back at square one." I let a couple more months go by because I felt discouraged, and just didn't know any resources or anyone. Then think I did some Googling, but there was a woman here and she had gotten her degree, I don't know much about college shit, she got her degree and had to do like supervised hours. She wanted to gain some experience writing letters for trans people. I saw her. I didn't really like her, but I was like, "Alright, I have to jump through your hoops to get what I want." I remember one day when I was seeing her--she had couches in her office--and I was sitting in the recliner with my feet up, but she was talking about my ex that I was with for five years, and she had asked if I would attempt to get her to come to a session because she thought that would be helpful for us to maybe have some peace or whatever. That made me really angry. So I was sitting up there with my feet and stuff, but I did get like loud, but I didn't move or anything, and she was like, "You're acting aggressive," and I was like, "Or I have feelings and you brought up a touchy subject and I'm going to get loud about it."

**SA**: She asked.

**JD**: Right, like don't fucking ask me things if you don't want--I'm not a robot. I'm going to react to stuff. Then I felt kind of icky about her because she was like, "Testosterone can make you aggressive. I don't know if you're ready for that. She pretty much, I felt, was just waving my letter above my head, which was really hard. It was especially hard to see a cis person about this kind of stuff, and I still think that that's not something trans people should have to do. I have to go convince a cis person why I'm trans and have them diagnose me with being trans and have them decide that it's time for me to start T? Like bitch I know. I know myself.

**SA**: And then tell you it's going to make you more aggressive.

**JD**: Yeah, which actually I've been on T now for two years. I think that when I get angry I'm able to manage myself a lot better. I think that has a lot to do with just being happier as a person. Being able to be more present with myself. I got my letter, and I had to wait fucking ninety days until the endo had an opening. Even though you receive your letter they have to get a fax from the office. So I finally got this golden ticket, which is fucking worthless, and then they tell me ninety days. But then I had an appointment, took my first shot, and it's real fucking rad. There was a trans group that was kind of meeting that I heard about and so I guess this is before T, so I'm telling it a little backwards, whatever. I had an incident one day when I was really close to starting T before my coming out thing, and one of my ex-girlfriends was a TERF, or a trans exclusionary radical feminist, so I told her what was going on, and she was fucking horrible to me. Said some of the worst things I've heard in my life to this day. Then I decided that I wanted my ex that I was with for five years to come comfort me. I decided to--I was drinking because, you know, that's intelligent when you're angry [laughs]--and so she came and met me at the bar and she was sober and I was just drunk and belligerent and I made her bring me through Hardee's and I just acted a little crazy, I bought cheeseburgers, I whipped them around her car because I was angry and whatever. She kicked me out of her car. My phone was dead, and I just wanted to get from Superior [WI] to Duluth. I walk into this bar and I ask to use the phone and there's this female bartender and one guy sitting at the bar--pretty dead. So I walk in and I show her my phone and I was like, "Hey, I have a phone but it's dead, I just really need to use the phone." She looks at the dude, she looks at me, and she just kind of laughs. She comes over and slams the cordless down on the bar and she goes, "It, or whatever, needs to use the phone." So I grabbed the phone, you know, and I've already had a really emotional day, and so I use the phone to try to call my parents, they didn't answer, I go to make a second, local, free call, and she goes, "I said you could make one call." So I was like, whatever, I continued trying to use the phone, and I got off the phone and she just starts calling me and 'it' and she called me a 'cunt' and so I whipped my fucking barstool at her. I was drunk. It was probably the worst day of my life, one of them. Of course she called the cops, I was arrested for disorderly conduct, and I was booked for one night in Douglas County [WI] and then you get there and they aren't competent with trans issues, and so when it came to handing over the binder they assumed I was smuggling drugs, I must have this strange vest or something stuffed with cocaine was what they thought I had! [laughter] It just couldn't be a binder, and I was like, "No, it's like a binder," and I broke it down for them and on my personal inventory list they wrote down 'binder question mark' and I was like, "No, that's not a fucking question mark. Google this!" They didn't know where to put me because they have zero experience with trans people, so I sat in a little cement room by myself the whole night, which was a good time. Fast forward, on T. So right after that jail experience I found this local trans group that was meeting, so I sat in a room of five trans women I had never met and just started crying about my jail experience or whatever, and then kind of connected with them, took the journey that I explained to you about T. And then that group kind of died off. There was one person running it, and it's fucking exhausting to be a community organizer and have so many people heavily relying on you and looking to you for everything, so I understand why she did that. So, me and a friend and a couple of other people--I guess he wasn't really a friend at that point. There were a couple of trans people in town that decided like, "Hey, let's sit down and see what we can do." And so that's when I met who is now one of my best friends, and we decided to revamp the group. It's now called Trans Plus. We have support group and work group. Work group is kind of like what can we do to change things on a local level, and, you know, advance our place in the world because not a whole lot of people care about our community. So we kind of revamped that and that's been going on for a couple of years now. We have, I don't know, anywhere from ten to thirty people attend group, which I never thought in my life I would ever know thirty trans people from Duluth. And now I, I don't know, I see a trans person just living their life every day and say, "Hi," to them on the street. Some of my best friends are trans. My partner is trans. And so it's really a night and day difference to my world.

I'll talk a little bit about my work stuff. So I initially started doing harm reduction work for Center City housing, and I worked at their San Marco location. So, it's a harm reduction facility for alcoholics who are actively using. Before San Marco existed in Duluth many of them were making frequent visits to hospital, jail, detox; it was costing a lot of money, and these people had no where to live. They were just going through this revolving door, which just wasn't helpful to our community, and to those people, you know, more importantly. So they opened San Marco and there are two sides: one is low-income housing side. Some of them drink, some of them don't. They don't require much care from the staff. They just kind of exist. And then the other side--I can't remember the exact number, I'd say somewhere around thirty. It's for people who are chronic alcoholics, so they are often drinking to the point of black out daily. There are just different ways we treat, you know--some people had to have alcohol plans, so maybe instead of a liter of vodka they got a pint of vodka daily and a six pack of beer, or something. But I felt really good about doing that kind of stuff because of their addiction they have nothing and no one. A lot of their families won't speak to them. While that's sad, you know, sometimes we have to suffer the consequences of our choices while we're using. So, they hadn't personally impacted me so I was able to be friendly and talk to them and be open to them.

**SA**: What do you think got you started with harm reduction? Like walking in the door and knowing you wanted to work there?

**JD**: I guess because I like to live really authentically. I'm a trans guy who works at a needle exchange and lives in an artist coop. [laughs] And so I never like did the college thing because, yeah, money is cool and you need it to live, and whatever, but I'd much rather be rich in happiness than be rich in green pieces of paper.

So I had worked at a group home with individuals who were mentally ill, chemically dependent, or both sometimes. I was onsite staff there, and I was just kind of sick of living where my, you know I had my own apartment, but I was kind of sick of living on sight. So I looked around and found out about San Marco, and then a friend of mine is the sight director there, and she has known me since I was eleven years old. She was actually my parent's case manager at some point. So she knew everything. She knew that I really got it. I really--having been in dark places, dark times in my life, I really want to do that kind of work because I know that those kind of people--nobody wakes up and decides, "I'm going to be an alcoholic" or "I'm going to be a drug addict." Those things are because of trauma and disconnection, and I really understand those things. So I wanted to not wear a suit and tie and be able to say, "Fuck," at work if I wanted to say fuck. [laughs] And I wanted to be able to be useful to people, and really let them know that somebody was there that really understands it and doesn't judge them. I think I'm really good at making clients feel that. I'm often told, you know, "You're easy to talk to. I feel comfortable talking to you. It feels like you get it." Clients are going through things and they bring stuff up, you know, not to take away from their experience, but I'll minimally insert something about my life so they know, you know--in the winter we have clients who come in here and they are cold and they are like, "My feet are wet." We get sock donations from a thrift store down the block. And so I'm like, "Hey, man. I've fucking slept outside. I fucking understand." And we look through the socks and wet socks are the worst. Exactly. So, yeah I just wanted to live authentically and actually make a difference with people.

And then I really liked my job there, but that's kind of where I went through my name transition. A lot of them were older, white, cis men, veterans, and those are not very open minded people. So I had a guy, he came up and whipped a Bible at my head and told me that's what I needed. Some of them threw all kinds of, you know, their booze bottles at me, or an open beer can so I'm covered in beer and trying to work. Some of them would come up to the desk and be like, well, you have these parts so that's what you are. Or Kyra, who was the site director there, "Kyra says we are supposed to call you this now, but this is your *﻿real*﻿ name."

**SA**: Not a safe working environment.

**JD**: Right. And the staff at Center City were excellent to me. I have not a bad word to say about them. But, you know, kicking these clients out because they are treating me this way is not an option, or not what I wanted because they are the hardest people to house. And it just wasn't working. They just weren't getting it and I was not able to--I just couldn't do it anymore.

So one guy came up one night and he was just especially awful to me. And instead of reacting to it because often times when clients go off I don't react to it. I'm just calm and cool and like, "okay, whatever." So he goes off on me and expects me to probably engage with him. And I ended up shutting--we had half doors and then top doors if shit go rowdy. So I pulled both the top doors and I sat down at the computer and I just took a deep breath, and I started writing my two week notice [laughs] And I was like this is recording. So I left there because of that.

And I was looking around for jobs, and so I was browsing Craig's List and there was an ad that was like, I don't remember the exact language, but 'working with difficult populations, need to have a sense of humor, maybe some life experience, a degree preferred,' which was a turn off for me, and so I almost didn't apply for it. But I sent an email and I said, "Hey, this is a little bit about me, blah blah," and I knew when I was looking at the article I was like this is some kind of harm reduction thing. They don't want you to know what they are because--they are just being really veiled about this ad. So I was like this is totally probably a syringe exchange for sure. So I emailed back and forth a bunch with Maggie [Kazel] and then we set up a time when I could come in. And she was working solo at that time, which I don't fucking know--she did that for six months. I work solo for like three days if she is on vacation and I'm like, "I'm going to die."

So we had set up the time for me to come in--

**SA**: Do you know what year this is about?

**JD**: This is early 2015. So yeah I came in and she had a couple of people in the lobby. She was busy doing other stuff, and I later found out she just wanted to see how I would interact on the fly, you know.

**SA**: Wow.

**JD**: Yeah! [laughs] I came in and she was like, "Uh, go keep those folks busy." Or whatever. And it was a group of young Native girls. They were obviously pretty high on what I assume--what I think is meth, actually, and they were just coloring and talking and having a good time. So I just--I don't really treat clients any differently than I treat my friends. I mean there's some shit I wouldn't tell them. But beyond that I just walked up to them and was like, "How's it going man? What are you coloring? What are you doing today?" Just making convo. So Maggie kind of saw me do that. So the ad said degree preferred, but I had almost ten years of experience working with mental illness and chemical dependency and harm reduction stuff, so I had some really solid letters of recommendation, and she saw me interact with those guys. I guess she had interviewed like ten people maybe, and I'm sure several of them had degrees. So, I don't know. She offered me the job and here I am.

**SA**: Was your use ever to the point where you had to go to treatment?

**JD**: I did go to treatment as a youngin because they didn't know where to put me anymore. So I didn't really need treatment at that point in my life. It was just the place to put me. The state put me in a place because it was convenient. Which, funny enough, so I was seventeen when they did that to me. I was, I don't know, I think I left in like two weeks. I'm not trying to get up in the morning. I don't want to go to no fucking group that I don't need to go to. And I don't want your shitty breakfast. [laughs] No thanks, no thanks, no thanks. So they didn't really like me. And then so minors in treatment--but I shouldn't be smoking cigarettes, so they kicked me out for using tobacco as a minor on their grounds. How they kicked me out they were like you have a half hour to figure out how you are getting yourself--and it was from Cloquet to Duluth. I don't drive. [laughs] And so they were like you have thirty minutes to figure out a ride or a sheriff can come pick you up. I was like that sounds fucking terrible. So I ended up calling my ex that I was with for five years at the time and she was in high school. And at the time I obviously didn't sound like this, so I called her high school and talked to the secretary and I was like, "Yeah this is her aunt so-and-so. There's a family emergency." So they went and got her and I was like you better come pick me up right now or a cop is going to pick me up." I don't know how she did it, but she made it from Superior to Cloquet in like twenty minutes. So that was rad. [laughs] But yeah, so that was an unnecessary adventure. But there were periods of time in my life where I was using a lot of opiates. I have experienced withdrawal. I have experienced just not liking who I was and what was going on in my life. I think a lot of that probably had to do with the crowd I was hanging out with too. I had a lot of friends who were IV using. I'm really thankful that I never did because I probably would not be sitting here because drugs are fun. They make you feel good. If I liked snorting pills or smoking them off tin foil or whatever I'm sure I would have loved injecting them. So I'm glad I didn't choose to do that because I would have been lost or dead.

**SA**: Do you want to just go through what you do here? Or what a normal day looks like if there's such a thing as a normal day. [laughs]

**JD**: There's not! [laughs] That's a cute question. There is not a normal day. Every single day of my life is different, which I really appreciate. I have a lot of friends who do the same monotonous thing all day every day. That's just not for me. So what I do here is syringe exchange or syringe access. I do HIV testing. I do Hep C testing. I do Narcan training and give out Narcan kits. Really, I mean it's hard to describe what I do because I don't have any degrees in counseling or any degrees in anything, but I feel like daily I'm a counselor. I help people find housing. I don't know. I had a guy come in and he's pretty seriously ill and he needed three bucks for his co-pay. So I gave him three bucks for his co-pay. I really do just about anything that needs doing. Sometimes there will be a young mom in here. She's got her kid. Maggie is really good with the young mom's, so I'll babysit the little kids. They look at my piercings like holy shit this guy! I just try to interact. Yeah, so really a lot of everything.

**SA**: Have you seen harm reduction change since you've been--you've been working with it for a long time. Through a lot of different places.

**JD**: I think one of the main things is that people are becoming more aware of it. People are a lot more accepting of it, which I think is really necessary. One of the comparisons that Maggie likes to make that I really appreciate is sometimes when we do presentations we bring out a shot glass. We go, "How many of you have used this in the mast month or the past six months?" Most people raise their hands. Well, alcohol is a drug, and a shot glass is a way you administer the drug. It is a drug utensil. So why should we look at people who are using a different drug and they need a different utensil? We are all altering our state of mind just in a different way. So I think I'm seeing a lot of people coming around to that. Or people who have never heard of it and I explain it and they are cool with it. Just, "Wow, I've never heard of that, but that's cool."

I guess when I first started doing this job I was talking to my grandparents about it and they were like, "Wait, wait. So you're giving syringes full of heroin to people?" And I was like, "We do not have a budget like that!" [laughs] Right, like--I mean supervised injection and all that shit is really rad, I wish we could do that. Maybe some day. But yeah, just taking them from a very ground level and being like, "No, honey. No." [laughs]

I guess while I'm on this little tangent I'll talk about something that happened just recently. So I posted an article from December 2016 that was posted by NBC, so really mainstream--I find that sometimes when I post stuff like that on Facebook they are more receptive to it. However, I totally post cowgirls riding syringes that say "fuck safe shoot clean" so there's a little bit of everything in between there. But so the NBC article was 'overdoses now kill more Americans than car crashes.' I had, I don't know, twenty-seven comments on that status from people all over my life. One of which I was really surprised with. We used to work together. He is religious and he is now a police officer. He was like, "How can I get Narcan? Do they sell it at CVS? I really want this." And so I did not expect him to be open about it at all. There's a shit load of positive comments between he and I. And then at two in the morning this fucking idiot that I used to work with at San Marco, so he's done harm reduction with alcoholics, comments and says, "Well why do we give a fuck if drug addicts overdose?" Right. And there's been people in my life that I've told this story to recently and most of them are supportive. I'm part of an intersectional feminism group and I told them this story and it got a couple hundred likes and people were all over it. So anyways he comments "Why do we give a fuck about drug addicts overdosing." So, I won't use his name, but I said, "You know," and I tagged him in the comment, "I want to write this big long thing and break it down for you, but we fucking work together doing harm reduction for people using alcohol, so I don't understand why you don't get it." Then last year, sometimes we'll browse Craig's List ads just kind of to--what's the fuck climate in Duluth? What are places we could target for testing? Or whatever. So I remembered last year I was browsing Craig's List and there was an ad titled 'tranny,' which is you know a horrible trans slur. So it kind of irritated me, but I was curious because Duluth is so small. I was like I kind of want to fuck with this person and get them to send me a face picture. So I played them and I got them to send me a face picture. Well it turns out it was the guy who commented 'why do we give a fuck about drug addicts.' So there's that back story. So, yeah, 'you should get it, we've done harm reduction work together, also I know for a fact that you're cheating on' and I tagged his girlfriend's name. They live together, they've been for four years. I said I'm too tired right now. It's three in the morning, but hey girl let me know if you want that screenshot tomorrow.' And I dug it up and I sent it to her and she broke up with him. So he could have just scrolled by, but his hate and his stigma for drug addicts was so strong that he felt the need at two in the morning to say why the fuck do we give a fuck about these human being dying!

**SA**: And differentiating them from alcoholics.

**JD**: Right! And he is at the bar every single night. I would feel comfortable saying he's an alcoholic as well. So there was just something really satisfying about him trying say bullshit and I'm not terribly close to either of them, but I felt bad for his girlfriend ever since I have had that information, and it's a face picture of him with their dog. And so that's what I sent--and it had the title of his ad and whatever. And so he got that bomb dropped on his skull because he had to go be hateful for no reason. He could have kept scrolling and thought whatever thoughts he had to himself, and he still be in his relationship and everything would be find. [laughs] Karma rained on his skull! I've since been unfriended and blocked. But his ex-girlfriend is still my friend. So there's that.

**SA**: Any stories that you feel comfortable sharing about clients that have come in that have really affected you?

**JD**: I have so many fucking stories. One that always sticks out to me. Young guy, early twenties. He robbed a gas station and he stole a couple rolls of lottery tickets and cigarettes, whatever, and so he got caught and they just flew his fucking mug shot all over social media, all over the newspaper, just everywhere. He was booked. He was there for only a couple of days. So he gets out and he came in and I could tell he was just like looking at the floor like really embarrassed or whatever. So I just walked up to him and like playfully tapped his arm and I was like, "What up, Mr. Famous. What's going on." And it made him giggle. So he was able to kind of come out of his shell a little bit and he was able to ask for what he needed. And he overdosed and he died that weekend. I know that at the end of his life he was experiencing some really hard stuff. And to have him feel comfortable enough to walk in here and have that happen to him, and be able to kind of--

**SA**: You made his day.

**JD**: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. So that felt really good. It's just so hard to think of like individual stories. One thing I guess I'll say though is I live like three blocks from the exchange here, and so people see me all over all the time. It's really cool because a lot of people are really comfortable  talking to me in public, and they talk to me like I'm their friend. I can walk down the street and say, "Hey man, how's it going?" And talk about the Wild game, talk about my dog, or whatever they did last night.

Another thing that's been interesting working here is you know Duluth is small and I know a lot, a lot of people. I've had friends of mine come in here--people I've known, and one of them is just like--well one, came in, saw my face, turned around and walked out. Facebook messaged me and came back a few days later. Then another friend of mine came in and we just had a long discussion and I was able to hook her up with stuff and she was just really thankful that I didn't judge her. Obviously I would never speak to anybody about that. That's her business. She, you know, she probably thinks I saw I wouldn't judge you to her face because I'm trying to make her feel good or something but I'm sitting here talking to you and you don't fucking know her and I don't judge her at all. I'm happy she came in and talked to me and was comfortable coming in to get stuff and is using clean stuff. That's good. Like I said there're just so many clients.

**SA**: Anything you wish you could do here and can't because you just don't get enough funding? Any way you'd like to see this move in the future?

**JD**: There're only two hundred and twenty exchanges in the country. I wish that there was more access for people who use drugs. I wish that there were more places like this so I could talk to people who do the work I do because that's one thing that's really hard about doing this work is, you know, I can talk to my partner about it. My partner has a really long title, I can't exactly remember it, but they're the GLBT director at the University of Minnesota Duluth. So I can talk to them, but what we do for a living is very different. My day has often started before I have my first sip of coffee with somebody coming and being like, "I need Narcan. My friend died last night. I brought him back to life. Oh my god." So I'm holding space for that person before--I'm not even awake. I don't have coffee with me. I just unlocked the door. I've barely got the lights on. So I can unpack that with my partner and they are fucking fantastic, you know, they are really kind and understanding and listen to me. But it would be a world of difference if I could call the harm reduction center in West Duluth and say, "Hey, you know how this goes. Can we meet up for coffee sometime this evening and just unpack this." Especially with client deaths or really traumatic client stuff. So I'm super grateful for Maggie. Yes, we are co-workers, but Maggie is my family. I call her mom-dad. That's my name for her. We are there for each other through a lot. We are able to talk to each other in a way that most people who work together can't just because of the intimate work that we do. So that's really valuable.

**SA**: Is there any place like this anywhere nearby?

**JD**: There is. It's across the bridge in Superior. They have a syringe exchange. It's AIDS Resource Center Wisconsin. There is one staff member that works at that location. And she also does HIV case management for positive clients in six northern Wisconsin counties. So she's almost never there. And then as with anybody in the world we all don't get along and whatever. I don't feel like her and I click. I would never call her and talk to her about anything. We see each other at World AIDS Day, and we see each other at Pride. We have our friendly small talk. I don't want to talk to her about my shit. No thanks. But it would be cool if there were people I felt comfortable talking to. And people that I could bounce stuff off of or whatever. Or just get their tips and tricks about this stuff because I've been doing this for a long time, but I'm not perfect. Harm reduction work is--you don't have much time to think. It's a lot of on the fly reacting. I have to be different with every person. Even tone and the way I say things. If some rowdy guys come in I have to be like, "Hey guys, one at a time. You need to go back and sit there. You can come up it's your turn." Whereas maybe the next minute I have a young, single mom come in and she's crying. So when she comes in maybe I'll go up there and offer her kid a coloring book. I'm kind of softer with her and I'm like, "Hey, want to come up? What's going on today? You look upset. I've got some cookies. I've got some hot tea." You know? So you really just have to know how to interact with people in different ways very quickly. And I can oftentimes have those interactions back to back. I really have to be mindful of myself, too because if I'm having a fucking shit day and someone comes in I need to be able to hold that space for them and put my own shit aside because the way I serve them could determine a lot about what they are going to do in that day. I need to be mindful that I just need to be a certain way sometimes. Which, you know, I often on the weekends like to drink beer, go hiking, play with my dog, be with my friends. I have to do the stuff I love. Being a native Duluthian I am always doing something in Lake Superior. I have already been kayaking this year, which was frigid. I went underneath the lift bridge in between the canal--in between the piers. A fucking big boat was coming out. A big thousand footer. I was with a friend I was like, "Rachel I'm going to die!" She was like, "Just keep paddling, Dory. Just keep paddling." So I wave my paddle in the air and I'm like, "I hope you see me giant ship!" Try not to tip and die in this current. The water was super cold. The surface temp right now is like thirty-seven degrees. And she--so my friend is tiny so all her life jackets are mediums, so I'm like it's on the kayak and I'll grab it, but I'm not wearing that! So, yeah. I definitely have to find ways to relax and just kind of decompress in my life, which I'm pretty excellent at given my own trauma. I know stuff that I've had to deal with and apply that. I've had to be a grown up for a lot longer than most people my age.

**SA**: Do you see any difference between Minneapolis--the cities--versus up here in Duluth? Are you in contact with anyone down there?

**JD**: I've talked to some people who do similar stuff down there, but they're busy as fuck. We're busy as fuck. So we see each other at conferences or trainings, but I won't get a change to really know them. I don't really go to the cities that often. Everybody is like, "Ooh, the cities!" I go there for sports. I go there for concerts. I go there for work. But it's big. It's full of people. There's no grass. Where would my dog pee? So that's just--I really like being in the woods and being away from people. I don't really care to go there.

**SA**: Anything else we didn't talk about that you want to bring up? Anything before we wrap up?

**JD**: It's been a log day. It's been a long week. So, I think--I probably said a lot.

**SA**: A lot of great things. Thank you so much.

**JD**: Yeah, thank you.

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