

Terry Dickelman  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

May 26, 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](mailto:jenki120@umn.edu)  
(612) 625-4379

- 1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ  
2 Terry Dickelman -TD  
3  
4
- 5 AJ: So, hello.
- 6 TD: Hello.
- 7 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project  
8 at the Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota. Today is May 26, 2016, and I am here  
9 with a really, really dear friend and colleague and, in many ways, a brother – a trans sibling,  
10 Terry Dickelman. How are you doing, Terry?
- 11 TD: I'm doing great, Andrea. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this project.
- 12 AJ: Oh my goodness, well . . . thank you for allowing me to be in your home and invade your deep  
13 personal history because that's what we're getting ready to do today.
- 14 TD: That's OK. All right.
- 15 AJ: No, I'm just kidding. It's just as much information as you choose to share is going to be  
16 phenomenal. So Terry, to start out, can you just state your name, please spell it for our  
17 transcriptionist, and how you identify today in terms of your gender and what was your gender  
18 assigned at birth?
- 19 TD: OK. My name is Terry Dickelman. D-i-c-k-e-l-m-a-n. It means little fat man in German.
- 20 AJ: Oh really, OK. Dickelman.
- 21 TD: Yeah. And I identify as male, but I was assigned female at birth.
- 22 AJ: So what pronouns do you use?
- 23 TD: I use masculine pronouns today. When I was born in 1960 and . . .
- 24 AJ: 1960, not 1916.
- 25 TD: Right. I'd look pretty good for being 100 years old.
- 26 AJ: Yes, exactly. You look good anyway, Terry.
- 27 TD: Thank you. But, you know, back then we really didn't have any language for transgender  
28 people. I grew up my whole life being referred to as she and her. I think that's one of the things  
29 that was really difficult for my family to wrap their head around was this change in pronouns.
- 30 AJ: Really? That was a tough part of the transition for them, huh?
- 31 TD: Yeah, and in some ways . . . I don't know, should I just ramble on?
- 32 AJ: You can ramble a little bit, but I got some questions that I want to make sure we get to.
- 33 TD: OK, good. I should say that I come from a small family – mom, dad. I had one sibling, a sister.

- 1 AJ: OK.
- 2 TD: And me. I happen to be adopted. But, the pronoun thing, my sister really struggled with it for  
3 quite some time and sometimes during that period I thought that she was deliberately calling  
4 me she – as not being accepting or being . . .
- 5 AJ: As an insult.
- 6 TD: Yes.
- 7 AJ: As a derogatory way to hurt you.
- 8 TD: Yes, right. She finally stopped when I said, “Jane, if you keep saying she when I look very much  
9 like this, people are going to think you stopped taking your medication.”
- 10 AJ: Right, then she thought about it, huh?
- 11 TD: Yeah, she thought about it and it was like after that it was he all the time.
- 12 AJ: Wow, that’s an effective strategy that hopefully other people will pick up on and use with their  
13 relatives who refuse to use the right pronouns, particularly in public it can be really  
14 embarrassing and downright dangerous nowadays.
- 15 TD: Yeah.
- 16 AJ: You know, Terry, before we go deep into the interview, and I really appreciate you sharing that –  
17 that’s really poignant and very real and I can tell that it’s very emotional for you, tell me about  
18 your earliest memory in life. What’s the earliest thing you remember in your life? It does not  
19 have to be related to your trans identity, though if it is that is quite OK. But what’s the earliest  
20 thing you remember?
- 21 TD: I think probably . . . well, probably the very earliest thing I remember is being a little bit older  
22 but still in a crib.
- 23 AJ: Oh, OK. Like you were too old to be in a crib?
- 24 TD: Not to be old to be in a crib but . . . still at crib age but not . . .
- 25 AJ: On the tail end of it, OK. All right.
- 26 TD: Right. I remember thinking in pictures about how to get out of the crib and so I just visualized,  
27 because I didn’t have language skills so I wasn’t talking to myself like, “Well, all you have to do is  
28 stand up, go over to the corner, hang on, and throw your leg over.” No, I just thought all of that  
29 in pictures.
- 30 AJ: Really? And you remember that?
- 31 TD: I remember that.
- 32 AJ: Wow. That’s pretty fascinating. And so you were like 18 months old or . . .
- 33 TD: Right, yeah.

- 1 AJ: Boy, that's pretty fascinating that you're able to remember that. So where did you grow up?
- 2 TD: I grew up in Des Moines, Iowa. For those of us in the know, it's Dead Moines.
- 3 AJ: Wow, OK. All right.
- 4 TD: Not a lot going on – sleepy, little Midwestern town.
- 5 AJ: Isn't that like the biggest city in . . . well, Iowa City.
- 6 TD: It's the capital city.
- 7 AJ: OK, it's the capital city. Iowa City is a little bigger.
- 8 TD: I think Des Moines is still the biggest, but Iowa City is definitely the most liberal city.
- 9 AJ: Got it.
- 10 TD: It's where the University of Iowa is and they tend to be really liberal.
- 11 AJ: OK. So you grew up in Des Moines.
- 12 TD: Yes.
- 13 AJ: What was that like – other than dead?
- 14 TD: Yeah. Very conservative, very *Leave It To Beaver* – dad went to work, mom stayed home and  
15 raised the kids and most families that lived in our neighborhood were like that.
- 16 AJ: Including yours?
- 17 TD: Including mine. We were expected to grow up and follow the rules as they were laid out to us. I  
18 was a tomboy, which was OK for a while. There's sort of this time in childhood where you're  
19 sort of genderless, you know.
- 20 AJ: Yes.
- 21 TD: But anytime that we would go out in public, say to church or to eat or that kind of thing, I was  
22 expected to wear female clothing and I hated it – hated it.
- 23 AJ: Wow.
- 24 TD: I cannot stand Easter to this day because there was all this hype leading up to it about the frilly  
25 dress and the hat and the black patent leather shoes and the whole thing.
- 26 AJ: The little handbag.
- 27 TD: Yeah, everything. It was awful for me and really emotionally torturous. But it was very difficult  
28 to explain that to my parents. They knew from a very early age that I went running around  
29 saying, "I'm a boy, I'm a boy." They would go like, "OK, you're a tomboy but you'll grow out of  
30 it."
- 31 AJ: You'll grow out of this – yes. And you never did?
- 32 TD: I never did.

- 1 AJ: So, you were a self-described tomboy – or a boy.
- 2 TD: Boy.
- 3 AJ: In this bucolic *Leave It To Beaver* town in Iowa. What was school like? Did you go to public  
4 school? Private school? Catholic school?
- 5 TD: I went to public school.
- 6 AJ: OK.
- 7 TD: And during the 1960s, during my elementary school years there was a dress code and girls had  
8 to wear dresses. So I was in a dress every day at school.
- 9 AJ: Oh wow, in public school.
- 10 TD: In public school. I remember one time coming home, it was in the spring and my mom and the  
11 next door neighbor wanted to take a picture of me and my next door neighbor, Brian, because  
12 we were coming home from school . . . nice new spring outfits and whatever. I was like, “No, I  
13 want to go change my clothes.” They’re like “No, we want to take your picture like this.”
- 14 AJ: Wow, so that was a constant struggle for you, the clothes thing.
- 15 TD: It was a constant struggle. And then they dropped the dress code requirement, I think when I  
16 was about in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and as my mother said, “She put on pants and I never got him out of  
17 them since.”
- 18 AJ: That was the opening of the door, huh?
- 19 TD: That was it. I never wore . . . well, I had to wear dresses from time to time, but I never ever felt  
20 comfortable in them.
- 21 AJ: Wow. No, that’s a fairly common refrain. Did you experience any bullying or any sort of  
22 harassment because of your ideations around being a boy?
- 23 TD: No, not really when I was younger. When you get a little older you just learned to keep your  
24 mouth shut.
- 25 AJ: Yes, for safety reasons or emotional . . . people want to be liked and loved.
- 26 TD: There was no way to reality check things back then. I couldn’t say, “Oh, I feel like a boy,” and  
27 have someone or people or information out there going, “Yeah, that’s real, it’s true, it’s valid.” I  
28 remember one time, I suppose I was just coming into puberty where I asked my female neighbor  
29 friends, “Aren’t you guys just pissed off you weren’t born a boy?” And they looked at me like I  
30 had three heads and they were like, “No.”
- 31 AJ: “We hate boys.”
- 32 TD: Yeah, why would we want to be a boy? And right then and there I knew I could never talk about  
33 it out loud again or people would think that I was crazy. And so I didn’t get bullied because I  
34 kept my mouth shut, but when I went to college and I came out as a lesbian, I was bullied by the  
35 girls in my dormitory room.

- 1 AJ: Where did you go to school?
- 2 TD: Iowa State University, or as we call it Iowa Straight University.
- 3 AJ: Iowa Straight University. So coming out as a lesbian was not a friendly experience for you.
- 4 TD: No, it really wasn't. A lot of harassment, people went through my desk and they found a book  
5 entitled, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*
- 6 AJ: Wow, OK.
- 7 TD: They gave me fits about that, never mind that they violated my privacy.
- 8 AJ: What's the genesis of *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* I'm just curious.
- 9 TD: It's a religious book, it's about Christianity and Christians accepting homosexuality.
- 10 AJ: So it's around acceptance.
- 11 TD: Right. And when I was a sophomore in college . . .
- 12 AJ: And they saw this book that's talking about tolerance and you give you crap for it? They gave  
13 you shit for it?
- 14 TD: Yeah.
- 15 AJ: Wow.
- 16 TD: Yeah, they didn't read the book. I read the book.
- 17 AJ: They just judged the book by its cover.
- 18 TD: Yes, literally. And when I was a sophomore I was involved with a support group for gay  
19 students. I was asked, as a part of that support group, if I would be willing to tell my story and I  
20 began to do GLBT education when I was 19-years-old. We went around and we talked to all of  
21 the Resident Assistants at all the dorms and stuff like that.
- 22 AJ: Wow, so you've been an activist for a long time.
- 23 TD: Yeah. I just figured that the only way that you can move forward is to have an open discussion  
24 about things and to not hide things. And that was true then and it's true now.
- 25 AJ: So, when is the first time you really recognized that you were not the gender you were assigned  
26 at birth?
- 27 TD: I was very, very young – I'd have to say that I always knew.
- 28 AJ: Really?
- 29 TD: Yeah. I never felt like a girl, I never embraced anything girly. I always felt like I should have  
30 been in a different body and I had these sort of magical thoughts and hopes that when I came of  
31 age, instead of beginning to menstruate, I would magically grow a penis. Didn't happen.  
32 Instead I grew very large breasts, which was really difficult to deal with for a long time but it was  
33 like, "I don't have any choice, this is what I was dealt." I remember when I had my top surgery

- 1 done many years later, when I was in my 30s, one of my friends looked at me and said, “Now  
2 you look like you fit into your body.”
- 3 AJ: So that was an acknowledgement from a friend.
- 4 TD: Right, yeah.
- 5 AJ: And was your top surgery a step towards your gender confirmation?
- 6 TD: Yes. Back then, this would have been in the early 1990s, you had to live in the gender of your  
7 choice for at least six months. And by living they mean go to work, go to school, shop at the  
8 grocery store. So everything that you normally do in your life and do it in the gender of your  
9 choice. But my breasts were so large that I couldn’t bind myself to the point of being able to  
10 pass. So, they made an exception in my case so I got my top surgery done and then I began to  
11 live as male.
- 12 AJ: Wow. Thank you. So you realized when you were very young but there was no real language  
13 around it, like you said there were no real role models – particularly for trans masculine  
14 identified folks at that time. I mean, there were very few for anybody but there were the drag  
15 magazines for trans women. But, what . . . so what terms did you use to sort of describe  
16 yourself and how has that changed over time? And you said you came out as a lesbian in  
17 college, at 18, so I know one of the terms you used to describe yourself. I would imagine some  
18 people, even within the context of being lesbian – like butch lesbian or those kinds of . . .
- 19 TD: Yeah, I considered myself a butch lesbian, but people who were more butch than me would look  
20 at me as femme because I had really large breasts. It’s like, “That’s . . . oh, OK, you’re a  
21 woman.” But I always . . .
- 22 AJ: So they would hit on you?
- 23 TD: Yeah, but I always considered myself butch.
- 24 AJ: Did you ever date any butch women?
- 25 TD: No.
- 26 AJ: Really?
- 27 TD: I take that back – once for a short period of time. I was attracted to . . . well, I’m attracted to  
28 people with a good sense of humor because that’s how I deal with the stress in my life.
- 29 AJ: So you’re a comedi-sexual.
- 30 TD: Yeah.
- 31 AJ: A comedy sexual – or humorsexual.
- 32 TD: There you go.
- 33 AJ: We just made up a new term, Terry.
- 34 TD: Yeah.



- 1 AJ: A humorsexual. You're attracted to people with a good sense of humor, but what's their  
2 physical . . . femmes?
- 3 TD: I don't really have . . . yeah, femmes. But I don't really have a good physical type. I don't have  
4 to have the model skinny person. Just regular folks. I never talked about how I felt about my  
5 gender . . .
- 6 AJ: In your relationships?
- 7 TD: In my relationships, until shortly before I decided that yes being transgender is a real thing and  
8 yes I need to pursue that avenue so that I could be happy in my life.
- 9 AJ: And then you started talking to your partner or partners about it?
- 10 TD: Yeah.
- 11 AJ: How did that go over?
- 12 TD: Well, it was very strange because I ended up . . . I was living in the foothills of the Ozark  
13 Mountains, a very rural area, in southern Missouri.
- 14 AJ: So you had left Des Moines by this time?
- 15 TD: I had left Des Moines and moved into a little cabin in the woods so that I could be, in my mind,  
16 the male that I thought I was. If I don't have to deal with the rest of the world calling me she  
17 then I can live my being . . . live feeling male as I was and not having any external distractions to  
18 remind me that I wasn't, that my body wasn't male.
- 19 AJ: So you did almost like . . . kind of *The Rogue* kind of thing, huh?
- 20 TD: Exactly. But I ended up meeting a woman down there whose stepfather happened to be female  
21 to male.
- 22 AJ: What?
- 23 TD: Yeah.
- 24 AJ: Shut the front door.
- 25 TD: Yeah, they weren't from there. They were originally from Rockford, Illinois, but they moved  
26 down there.
- 27 AJ: So the Ozarks, the foothills is like this sort of magnet for trans men?
- 28 TD: Well, sort of alternative . . .
- 29 AJ: Rugged trans men.
- 30 TD: Alternative people in general.
- 31 AJ: All right.

- 1 TD: A lot of new-age hippie type people down there, but a lot of rednecks. But through him I  
2 actually . . . he gave me the information that he had from the Janus Society, which I don't even  
3 know if it still exists.
- 4 AJ: What's it called? J-a-m-a?
- 5 TD: J-a-n-u-s. Janus.
- 6 AJ: Oh, Janus. I'm not familiar with the Janus Society.
- 7 TD: I think they were one of the first that put out information on transitioning.
- 8 AJ: Oh wow.
- 9 TD: And it had information about how to bind and what not, those type of things.
- 10 AJ: So was it specifically geared towards female to male trans people?
- 11 TD: No, the Society – the Janus Society was for all trans people. The information I got was  
12 specifically for female to male.
- 13 AJ: OK, got it.
- 14 TD: Yeah. So that was . . .
- 15 AJ: So was this person, this stepfather guy – was he the first trans person you ever met?
- 16 TD: Yes.
- 17 AJ: Yes. Did he have a big impact? Well clearly he had some impact on you because he gave you  
18 this information that you used to go on and transform your entire life.
- 19 TD: Yeah.
- 20 AJ: Are you still in contact with him?
- 21 TD: No, it was a very dysfunctional family and I left as soon as I figured that out, never to return  
22 again.
- 23 AJ: Oh wow. OK.
- 24 TD: But as you can imagine, it's very difficult to transition in a rural area.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, talk to me about that.
- 26 TD: I was working at the mental health agency in town at the time. I told them what was going on  
27 with me and what I was doing. They were a little freaked out. They didn't want to fire me  
28 outright because they were afraid of a lawsuit so what they did was they more or less starved  
29 me out by putting me into an office with no windows and giving me just busywork to do and I  
30 had no connection with anybody really in the agency. And that was after they decided that I  
31 would make an announcement to the entire agency, including people in satellite offices – we  
32 were the main office and the little towns often had satellite offices. So they closed the agency

- 1           for a half a day, everybody came into the main office and I was told that I needed to tell  
2           everybody what I was going to do.
- 3   AJ:     Wow.
- 4   TD:     And that really opened me up to a lot of . . . I don't know, pain and suffering. The things that  
5           people were saying.
- 6   AJ:     Hostility and . . .
- 7   TD:     Yeah. It's like you're re-creating the trauma of your childhood but I didn't have any trauma in  
8           my childhood. It was really interesting because all of the counselors and the mental health  
9           professionals, that was their line of thinking – like, "This is just really crazy, off-base." And all of  
10          the support staff, like the secretaries . . .
- 11   AJ:     They had no understanding of these . . .
- 12   TD:     They were like, "Well, we don't really understand it but we'll support Terry in what he thinks he  
13          needs to do." I thought that was really interesting.
- 14   AJ:     Yeah – so this was the support staff and not the trained psychologists and social workers.
- 15   TD:     Exactly.
- 16   AJ:     Wow.
- 17   TD:     So eventually I moved here to Minnesota because I had friends here. I really didn't know what a  
18          rich environment Minneapolis/St. Paul was for the LGBTQ community. I was really able to . . . by  
19          the time I moved up here I was passing as male full time.
- 20   AJ:     OK. When do you think that was? Do you remember?
- 21   TD:     That was in the fall of 1993. It was about a year after I'd started taking hormones. So my hair  
22          started to fall out of my head and start growing on my face.
- 23   AJ:     You had immediate affects, huh?
- 24   TD:     Immediate affects.
- 25   AJ:     Wow, OK. Oh man.
- 26   TD:     It's just been really good here and I've been a part of the community and I've met a wonderful  
27          woman and married her and we've been married for 15 years.
- 28   AJ:     Wow, congratulations.
- 29   TD:     Yeah.
- 30   AJ:     I have the good fortune of knowing that beautiful woman, your bride, and she is amazing. But  
31          you know, Terry, I want to go back to this sort of idea that, you know, you grew up and came out  
32          in the lesbian community. And during that time period, lesbian was pretty strongly identified  
33          with feminism and so I'm wondering what is the experience like, for you, transitioning from  
34          lesbian to trans man. What were some of the challenges involved with that? And then also, did

- 1 that experience being in the lesbian community, sort of impact your own politics around  
2 patriarchy and male privilege and all of those kinds of things?
- 3 TD: Well, I'm definitely a feminist and I was pretty active and vocal about that in my youth, meaning  
4 college plus – and still am. Sometimes when I'm around gruff men who objectify women it just  
5 galls me to no end and actually makes me feel like I want to vomit.
- 6 AJ: Wow.
- 7 TD: I try to say things to enlighten people but stop short of actually getting into an argument with  
8 them. I think I have a pretty good idea of what feminism is about and like to be seen as a man  
9 who is a feminist because I think that when we include all people in our humanity we all become  
10 better. Yeah, I don't know. I don't know if people listening are aware of an event called the  
11 Michigan Women's Music Festival, which is a music event that is held every year, in Michigan!
- 12 AJ: Well, I think the last one was last year though. They ended it.
- 13 TD: Oh they ended it. Wow, see I didn't know that because see once I transitioned I could never go  
14 back. But I would always say that that is the only time in my life when I felt really good about  
15 being female – was going to the Women's Festival.
- 16 AJ: The Michigan Women's . . .
- 17 TD: The Michigan Women's Music Festival.
- 18 AJ: Wow. And so you felt embraced in your lesbian community. What happened when you came  
19 out? You couldn't go back to the Women's Music Fest.
- 20 TD: Right, right.
- 21 AJ: How did the lesbian community respond? Were you still able to get dates? Were you still able  
22 to have your same social circles?
- 23 TD: By the time I got up here I was passing as male, but I was always very out about who I was.
- 24 AJ: About your trans identity.
- 25 TD: Yes. And the friends who invited me up here to live were lesbians and their friends, in turn,  
26 were lesbians. They all knew about me. I happened to have met a woman and we got married  
27 and the marriage fell apart after a year because she was a lesbian-identified woman. She  
28 happened to be a teacher at a Catholic school and I think she thought of me as sort of like the  
29 perfect person in her life to give her cover as being a straight woman in a Catholic school, but  
30 yet . . .
- 31 AJ: In a queer or . . .
- 32 TD: Right.
- 33 AJ: Relationship.

- 1 TD: Right – yeah. It was interesting in that a couple of her friends who didn't know about me were  
2 very standoffish with me when they first met me – and every time that we had an encounter,  
3 until they found out that I was a trans man. Then they were warm and accepting.
- 4 AJ: Oh wow, that's interesting.
- 5 TD: It is, but I don't think it's any better than the other position because they're both from a position  
6 of prejudice.
- 7 AJ: Yes . . . and we have a grandfather clock.
- 8 TD: It's the mantle clock.
- 9 AJ: The mantle clock.
- 10 TD: Thank you mantle clock. It's over 100 years old.
- 11 AJ: Oh wow. You guys have some beautiful clocks in your home.
- 12 TD: Yeah, Janet likes them.
- 13 AJ: Is that your wife?
- 14 TD: Yes, Janet is blind. She's my wife, they make noise – lots of things. Everything in this house  
15 either talks, beeps or has a dot on it.
- 16 AJ: OK. So we'll know the temperature outside pretty soon because there's a thermometer that will  
17 tell us.
- 18 TD: Yes.
- 19 AJ: That's pretty awesome. So you didn't have . . . I've talked to other people who have sort of  
20 experienced being shunned within the lesbian community when they come out as trans men,  
21 but that wasn't necessarily your experience?
- 22 TD: No, it wasn't necessarily my experience at that point in time, until I got a divorce from my first  
23 wife.
- 24 AJ: Oh.
- 25 TD: And then nobody wanted to have anything to do with me. It was like they chose sides and they  
26 chose her side.
- 27 AJ: OK. Do you think that had to do with your identity or just sort of the regular old divorce friends  
28 take sides?
- 29 TD: A little bit of both, I think. Yeah, I think a little bit of both.
- 30 AJ: Yeah. What challenges have you faced since you've come out as being transgender, Terry?
- 31 TD: I guess I would have to say that most of the challenges I've faced had to do with the early stages  
32 of my transition.
- 33 AJ: OK, that makes sense.

- 1 TD: You know, when I wasn't quite passing and didn't know if I would be called he or she, telling my  
2 family, friends . . . you know, some stayed and some left. It's fine that they self-select because I  
3 don't want to be around any negativity – it's hard enough to do this as it is, you need all the  
4 support you can get. My family wasn't really supportive. I guess in a way I would describe them  
5 as lukewarm because, as we talked about earlier, my mom and my sister really had trouble with  
6 the pronouns – they finally came around and mom, until the day she died, called me he and  
7 even when referring to my childhood still used masculine pronouns.
- 8 AJ: Really? Way to go, mom.
- 9 TD: Yes. And so she should be commended for that, but she also did some really crappy stuff – like  
10 when my favorite uncle died, and you're talking about shunning – I mean, I was shunned from  
11 the funeral and that was extremely painful emotionally and it was just completely over my  
12 mother's head. She just had no empathy for me at all and she said she didn't want to have to  
13 answer questions about me to family members she hadn't seen in 20 years.
- 14 AJ: Wow.
- 15 TD: And my reply has always been, "You don't have to answer the questions, I will. I'll talk to them."  
16 But she was like, "No." And just didn't tell me what the arrangements were for his funeral. She  
17 got there and she said, "As it turns out, I had to answer questions about you anyway."
- 18 AJ: "Why isn't Terry here?"
- 19 TD: Right. "What's she doing these days?" That type of thing. On the other hand, when I went to  
20 Montreal to get my bottom surgery done, my dad came with me.
- 21 AJ: All right.
- 22 TD: So he was supportive. He always said, "I don't really understand this, but I love you and I want  
23 you to be happy."
- 24 AJ: Wow, that's beautiful. So you had some positive experiences with family and some not so  
25 positive.
- 26 TD: Yes.
- 27 AJ: Any impacts on your professional life beyond the early days of coming out and you were in the  
28 Ozarks and they sort of iced you out of your job?
- 29 TD: Right, exactly. No, really, not . . . because as I said, I was passing when I was up here and so I  
30 was hired as male and the only time it ever actually came up again was when I needed time off  
31 for my bottom surgery. I told my supervisor at work, I said, "I'm transitioning and I need six  
32 weeks," or whatever. He said, "Are you going to tell your clients?" I work in the field of mental  
33 health. I said, "No, why should I?" And my supervisor said, "Because don't you think it will be  
34 very difficult for them when you come back and you're a woman?" I went, "Oh no, no, no."  
35 (laughter)
- 36 AJ: Oh wow.

- 1 TD: It was like, “Oh, yeah, OK. I guess not everybody knows this about me.” So then I told him the  
2 truth. Actually and anecdotally I ran into an old client of mine who didn’t know I was trans  
3 when I was seeing him and someone at my old office told him I was trans. And he said, “Terry’s  
4 a woman now?” They had the same exact . . .
- 5 AJ: Wow.
- 6 TD: Yeah.
- 7 AJ: Oh man, that makes me think about this term passing, because you’ve used it a couple of times.  
8 What do you feel about the term? What do you feel about the concept? And you’ve also said  
9 you were pretty open about coming out, where are you now about your trans identity?
- 10 TD: I’m still very open and I feel like education is crucial to people being able to move forward on  
11 many, many, many fronts. The term passing, it’s so engrained in the trans culture that I grew up  
12 in . . .
- 13 AJ: And I’m not criticizing you for using the term, please don’t hear that. I’m just asking you about  
14 the term.
- 15 TD: I don’t think of myself as, “Oh, I’m passing for male.” I’ve always thought of myself as, “I am  
16 male.” There’s a lot of people out there who are really androgynous or gender neutral and I  
17 really don’t know what they are and then I think, “Well, I don’t really have to know.” They look  
18 and . . .
- 19 AJ: Unless they want to use the bathroom, then you need to know.
- 20 TD: Right – in North Carolina, and then they do genital check. I have no idea . . . but yeah. So yeah, I  
21 don’t think about it that way anymore and I don’t necessarily go up to people and go, “Hi, I’m  
22 Terry the transsexual.”
- 23 AJ: Right.
- 24 TD: But if people ask me anything, I’ll tell them.
- 25 AJ: It’s a complicated phenomenon, if you will, because passing is about safety for people too. If  
26 you are perceived as transgressing gender, in either direction, it can be some life threatening  
27 consequences that ensue. It certainly can present a challenge for people.
- 28 TD: Yeah, and even if it doesn’t go to the point of being life threatening, you might imagine there  
29 could be some awkward encounters with the police, for example. If somebody thought . . .
- 30 AJ: Which, in my case, can be life threatening as an African American trans woman, encounters with  
31 the police are not at the top of my list.
- 32 TD: You definitely have a bullseye on you.
- 33 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 TD: Unfortunately. Even if people think that I'm in the wrong bathroom, if they . . . on a school  
2 campus or something and go get the security guard or something, "There's a man in the  
3 woman's bathroom." My experience in the men's bathroom is nobody really pays attention.
- 4 AJ: I feel embarrassed to ask this question but I think just because of all of this talk that's going on,  
5 do you ever go in the women's bathroom?
- 6 TD: No, never. No.
- 7 AJ: I just can't even imagine you stepping foot into that space anymore.
- 8 TD: Not at all, but if I had to present my birth certificate . . . it doesn't now, but it had at one time  
9 said female.
- 10 AJ: So you've had that changed?
- 11 TD: Yes.
- 12 AJ: Talk to me about your medical history, Terry. You have disclosed that you've had top surgery,  
13 went to Montreal with your dad and had bottom surgery. So you're pretty open about your  
14 medical status and medical transition, but what was it like and what all procedures did you  
15 have?
- 16 TD: I gotta tell you . . .
- 17 AJ: To the extent that you feel comfortable, because I don't want this to feel like I'm an interloper  
18 or . . .?
- 19 TD: Sure. Well, as I mentioned, I was very top heavy. It took four surgeries to reduce me, that's  
20 how large I was.
- 21 AJ: Four? My goodness.
- 22 TD: Yes. It was such a relief.
- 23 AJ: Did you save a bra from that?
- 24 TD: No.
- 25 AJ: Just as verification. Oh wow.
- 26 TD: And emotionally it was such a relief, and physically too because of the back problems.
- 27 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 28 TD: Yeah. And I lived with just that amount of surgery for a number of years – like probably around  
29 seven. I then had . . .
- 30 AJ: Were you taking hormones at the time?
- 31 TD: I was taking hormones the whole time.
- 32 AJ: Testosterone.



- 1 TD: Yes. I then had a hysterectomy and about a year after that I went to Montreal to have  
2 phalloplasty.
- 3 AJ: P-h-a-l-l-o-p-l-a-s-t-y.
- 4 TD: M-o-u-s-e.
- 5 AJ: OK.
- 6 TD: I had . . .
- 7 AJ: Is that a multiple stage surgery?
- 8 TD: Yes it is. The first stage is to create the new penis; the second surgery is to do an implant so that  
9 you can have an erection and the third surgery is where they insert testicles – silicone testicles.
- 10 AJ: Wow.
- 11 TD: Testicles.
- 12 AJ: Wow, so you got a whole new package.
- 13 TD: I got a whole new package . . . and I like to open it up and play with it.
- 14 AJ: That's . . . wow. Painful?
- 15 TD: You know, it really wasn't because the nerves go numb and so you're really in this numb stage  
16 for quite a while - with a phalloplasty, in particular. The other two were a little more touchy.
- 17 AJ: Does the feeling come back?
- 18 TD: Yes.
- 19 AJ: Thus, the like to play with it part.
- 20 TD: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: That's awesome. So, you're married.
- 22 TD: Yes.
- 23 AJ: For 15 years.
- 24 TD: For 15 years, yes.
- 25 AJ: What's your sexual identity today?
- 26 TD: I would have to say heterosexual for the most part. If I'm 100% completely honest, I guess it  
27 would be bi-sexual because I'm attracted to both women and men, but I'm more emotionally  
28 attracted to women than I am to men.
- 29 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 TD: I used to say I'm quadrasexual because I've been with women as a woman and I've been with  
2 women as a man, and I've been with men as a woman and I've been with men as a man. So  
3 quadrasexual.
- 4 AJ: Quadrasexual. OK, so you have two new terms today. A humorsexual and a quadrasexual. You  
5 are a unique human being, Terry.
- 6 TD: I'm my own thesaurus.
- 7 AJ: Exactly. Oh wow. This is all just really fascinating to me. What do you think your gender identity  
8 . . . you've been pretty fortunate as a trans person to have been married twice. Has your gender  
9 identity played a role in your relationships and love or do people look beyond that?
- 10 TD: Well, I think my gender identity definitely played a role in my first marriage and then when that  
11 ended, dating was kind of difficult. I fortunately never had to make this decision but when do  
12 you tell someone? Do you tell them right as you're starting to date? Before the first kiss? After  
13 the first kiss? Because me saying that I was born female could bring up a lot of feelings for my  
14 partner around their own sexuality, you know. But fortunately, my wife of 15 years knew before  
15 she ever met me that I was transgender.
- 16 AJ: OK.
- 17 TD: And it became a non-issue for her. She thought at first that I would sound very feminine or  
18 something and be very strange and awkward, but . . . well, I am strange and awkward but not  
19 because I'm trans. But yeah, she didn't have a problem with it and I actually prefer that people  
20 know I'm trans so that if I'm talking about my past or whatever, I don't need to hide anything, I  
21 don't need to be careful about how I talk about my experiences and that's very freeing. I have a  
22 stepson and I told him and he is now married and my daughter-in-law . . .
- 23 AJ: I can't believe he's married.
- 24 TD: I know.
- 25 AJ: Just blows my mind – but I guess it has been 15 years.
- 26 TD: Yes it has.
- 27 AJ: So your daughter-in-law, I'm sorry?
- 28 TD: My daughter-in-law knows too, but her parents are very strictly Christian and they will never  
29 know. My wife's sister, so my sister and brother-in-law, they know, but Janet's elderly father  
30 will never know.
- 31 AJ: What is that experience like? Because they still know you, they know you – it's not like you're  
32 just gone. They know you as Terry, Janet's husband.
- 33 TD: Right. Yeah.
- 34 AJ: Do they really need to know that you're trans? Do they need to know?

- 1 TD: Well Janet at first didn't want to tell her sister because she thought that she would have some  
2 problems with it and when we did tell her, Janet thought that she really wasn't as comfortable  
3 with it as she said she was. But we ended up telling them because of all the drama around my  
4 uncle's funeral. They kind of had questions about why is Terry just being cut out of that. And so  
5 we had to tell them – and we did. We sat in the living room and told them and my brother-in-  
6 law went, "You're trans? That's it? I thought you were an ax murderer or something." And now  
7 I don't think it really crosses their mind much anymore.
- 8 AJ: Just regular old Terry.
- 9 TD: Just regular old Terry.
- 10 AJ: You know, there was a time Terry, I know, you went on some wilderness excursions – beyond  
11 the Ozarks. You canoed down the Missouri River was it?
- 12 TD: 450 miles – from Yankton, South Dakota to Kansas City, Missouri.
- 13 AJ: What was that like?
- 14 TD: Awesome.
- 15 AJ: You went with a trans buddy too, right?
- 16 TD: Yeah, he hadn't decided to transition yet. He was always very masculine looking, a lot of the  
17 time got mistaken for male when living as female. A lot of old women walking out of the  
18 bathroom and double checking the door to see if they accidently walked into the wrong one.
- 19 AJ: Went into the men's room.
- 20 TD: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: Wow, my eyes are playing tricks on me.
- 22 TD: Yeah. But he decided after that trip that he would transition and he says it pushed him over the  
23 edge when people assumed we were married to each other. "I can't believe people thought I  
24 would marry you."
- 25 AJ: Funny.
- 26 TD: Yeah, but for the most part . . . once I've transitioned and I look like this, I can use a urinal, there  
27 really hasn't been much drama because people just see me as male. The only time that I've  
28 been questioned was when I was on the phone for work one time and I was talking to a police  
29 officer and she in turn called me both she and he and knowing that people get really wrapped  
30 up about gender, I thought I'd make it easier for her and I said, "Well, just so you know, it's he."  
31 And she said, "Well, I didn't know so I called you both and know you told me and I still don't  
32 know."
- 33 AJ: Yikes.
- 34 TD: I was like, "OK."
- 35 AJ: I just told you. What do you think she was confused about? Your voice?

- 1 TD: My voice – yeah.
- 2 AJ: Even after you told her she just didn't want to believe you.
- 3 TD: Yeah, she just didn't want to . . . I think it's one of those things where she probably had the sort  
4 of personality where you're just not going to tell me what to do.
- 5 AJ: Right. A police officer.
- 6 TD: Exactly.
- 7 AJ: Oh wow. Hey Terry, what do you think is the relationship between the L, the G, the B, and the  
8 T?
- 9 TD: Well I don't know if I can digest all that and pull it all apart. I used to tell people with LGBTQ,  
10 I've been all of them – start with the L. Back in the day, we used to just say gay and that was  
11 umbrella for homosexual men and lesbians. I think that in the beginning of sort of the LGBT civil  
12 rights movement at Stonewall Inn, that we began to become more aware, more aware of  
13 ourselves as a community and of our differences.
- 14 AJ: Within the community?
- 15 TD: Within the community. And shared struggles and different struggles. I know that just because  
16 you say that you are a member of the LGBT community doesn't mean that you're necessarily OK  
17 with all of the elements within that community. I think that there is transphobia among gay and  
18 lesbian and bisexual people probably too . . . maybe. So I think that we need intercommunity  
19 communication as well as we need to communicate with the outside world, which . . . you know,  
20 by default the only normal human being is a white heterosexual male. Right?
- 21 AJ: Yeah.
- 22 TD: And everyone else is other.
- 23 AJ: Yeah, that's true.
- 24 TD: And I think we have to, as a community, embrace all of ourselves, all of our differences, and  
25 continue to educate other, read – you, Joe Six Pack, about how human beings come in all  
26 flavors. We are not a one-species fits all. So yeah. And I think the dialogue needs to continue  
27 and it's still going to be . . . we've come a long, long way since I started talking about gay and  
28 lesbian issues in 1979.
- 29 AJ: Wow.
- 30 TD: And I'm astounded when I look back on it today where we have been and where we are now  
31 and it's been in a relatively short period of time. The Stonewall Riots were in 1969 and, you  
32 know, it's sort of like it builds slowly and then all of a sudden it's like this momentum and it's  
33 like a snowball rolling downhill and it just gets bigger and bigger and bigger.
- 34 AJ: Yeah.

- 1 TD: It's a wonderful thing to see but also, I think that's why we're getting pushback – like with the  
2 bathroom bills. I always think of every system wants to meet . . . have an equilibrium and it's  
3 sort of like if the pendulum swings way far one way, it's got to swing almost as far the other way . .  
4 .
- 5 AJ: Before it balances out.
- 6 TD: Before it comes back to some type of homeostasis.
- 7 AJ: I love that word homeostasis.
- 8 TD: Yeah.
- 9 AJ: It's so queer.
- 10 TD: So I kind of am viewing some of what's going on now politically in that light.
- 11 AJ: Got it. It's funny, since you identify as L . . . at some point in your life as LGB or T – or Q, I could  
12 have just asked you what's your relationship with yourself.
- 13 TD: Mostly right handed, sometimes the left. No. I hope that's OK.
- 14 AJ: It's perfectly OK with me.
- 15 TD: I don't know, I guess I really don't think of it much. I'm very versed in 1980s lesbian music.
- 16 AJ: OK.
- 17 TD: I know when I've talked to people . . .
- 18 AJ: So Joan Armatrading.
- 19 TD: And Holly Near, Ronnie Gilbert. So, when people ask me, "What kind of music did you listen to  
20 in the 1980s?" I say, "I was in my lesbian phase."
- 21 AJ: Funny.
- 22 TD: So I feel like I have . . . I feel like my community, that my culture, in a way is the queer  
23 community. I feel that's where I fit in best. People are just going to assume I'm straight because  
24 I'm married and if they don't know about me, they don't know.
- 25 AJ: You're fairly Ozzie and Harriet.
- 26 TD: Yeah. I don't . . . what was I going to say? I don't necessarily feel 100% comfortable or  
27 confident – for example, with my daughter-in-law's parents because I feel, "I have a secret."  
28 And I can't tip my hand and show that secret to them or bad, bad things are going to happen.  
29 So I'll never feel totally comfortable in a just straight environment.
- 30 AJ: Interesting. Have you ever worked for or volunteered for any trans or LGBT organizations?
- 31 TD: Yeah. You know that, because you and I do this, we talk to the U of M medical students and also  
32 at the Mayo Clinic. I did some volunteering with RECLAIM! as they were setting up their trans  
33 youth support group. There is such a need for it. The group kept getting bigger and bigger, we

- 1 outgrew the RECLAIM! office. We moved to a secondary location and we outgrew that office.  
2 We then separated ourselves from RECLAIM! and renamed our group Transforming Families and  
3 it's a peer support group for youth and their families. It is well over 100 families, I think, now.  
4 We have kids as young as 5, we have a siblings group, and it's all done by people in the  
5 community and there is just a wealth and depth of knowledge that all of these individuals have  
6 established because of doing their own research because their kid or whatever is transgender  
7 and, "What do we do about that?"
- 8 AJ: Is there any support for children or young people who have transgender parents within  
9 Transforming Families?
- 10 TD: Not to my knowledge of that. There have been a few family members who are in some ways  
11 gender queer. I know there was one family member who decided that she wanted to transition  
12 to he and that was not going over well with her partner because her partner was identified as a  
13 lesbian. But as far as the kid went, that wasn't an issue because the kid was female to male.
- 14 AJ: Oh, the kid was trans?
- 15 TD: Yeah.
- 16 AJ: OK. So wow, so you've done quite a bit of volunteer and employment. What do you think the  
17 agenda is for the trans community going forward? And let me add to that question – you've  
18 already sort of identified some things around backlash and such. I mean, the visibility of the  
19 transgender community has just skyrocketed – like you just identified. I mean, what we've  
20 witnessed in the past five years I, 15 years ago, had no rationale vision that this could happen.
- 21 TD: Yeah.
- 22 AJ: What's your thoughts about that? And then what do you think is the agenda for the trans  
23 community going forward?
- 24 TD: It's still a struggle. There is a lot of education that needs to be done around transgender stuff,  
25 especially in regards to institutions – schools, which bathroom are you going to go into? The  
26 military, incarceration, and . . .
- 27 AJ: Employment.
- 28 TD: Employment. And like we had just got done talking about, transgender youth. I think they . . .  
29 we are now in a time when people recognize that being transgender is a real thing, it's not made  
30 up, it's not a phase, you are not mentally ill. They are now recognizing that very often people  
31 know early, early on – like I did. I never not knew. As I stated, we have a 5-year-old in our  
32 group. Now the 5-year-old doesn't sit around and talk about gender.
- 33 AJ: Right.
- 34 TD: The little kids color and play with toys but they can go there and express their gender freely and  
35 not be afraid.
- 36 AJ: Sure.

- 1 TD: So if there's . . . I think it's harder for little boys who want to be little girls, than it is for girls who  
2 want to be boys because I think there is so much homophobia regarding men that if you look  
3 like a sissy, you're in your dress and your name is Marcus or whatever, that a lot of people are  
4 going to have a hard time wrapping their head around that. So it's a safe place for the very  
5 young kids to go and express themselves.
- 6 AJ: So where do you see this snowball effect that's really just taken off in the last 50 years? Where  
7 do you see things headed in the next 50 years? Fifty years from now – let's put it that way . . .  
8 when people are watching this tape and we'll both be very, very old.
- 9 TD: If alive. I would like to think that our progress will continue sort of exponentially to the point  
10 where we don't have to discuss it, where it's just a non-issue – you are what you are. Also, I  
11 think for people who identify as gender queer, like the rest of the world is like, "What? What  
12 does that mean?" I think for those people especially, being accepted as OK we don't have to put  
13 you in a box of male or female, that that is really going to be freeing, where there is an  
14 acceptance of sort of a third gender . . . third or fourth or fifth, infinite expression of gender. I'm  
15 hoping in 50 years from now that nobody is talking about it, we're just doing it – whatever it is.
- 16 AJ: Gender doesn't matter.
- 17 TD: Gender doesn't matter.
- 18 AJ: Wow, that's a great place to end.
- 19 TD: Yeah.
- 20 AJ: Thank you, Terry, for your generosity of spirit and humor and sharing your story with us today.
- 21 TD: Thank you. You know I love you.
- 22 AJ: Ohh, I love you too. Peace out.