

Aidan Kay
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

January 23, 2016



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

The Transgender Oral History Project will collect up to 400 hours of oral histories involving 200 to 300 individuals over the next three years. Major efforts will be the recruitment of individuals of all ages and experiences, and documenting the work of The Program in Human Sexuality. This project will be led by Andrea Jenkins, poet, writer, and trans-activist. Andrea brings years of experience working in government, non-profits and LGBT organizations. If you are interested in being involved in this exciting project, please contact Andrea.

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1 Andrea Jenkins -AJ

2 Aidan Kay -AK

3

4

5 AJ: Well, hello.

6 AK: Hey, hey.

7 AJ: My name is Andrea Jenkins, and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral History Project.
8 I'm here today with Aidan Key. Today is January 23, 2016, and we're at the Creating Change
9 Conference in Chicago, Illinois. So Aidan, if you don't mind, please introduce yourself, spell your
10 name, state your current gender identity, your preferred pronouns, and your gender assigned at
11 birth.

12 AK: OK, well. Aidan Key. You said spell it?

13 AJ: Yeah, just so the transcriptionist . . .

14 AK: A-i-d-a-n, which people forget the second a, A-i-d-a-n. Last name is K-e-y. My gender identity . .
15 .

16 AJ: Gender identity today.

17 AK: Today, is layered.

18 AJ: Layered.

19 AK: I always love to say it's strategic, so it depends on where I am and how I describe it.

20 AJ: Wow, that's interesting.

21 AK: Absolutely – and to what end, that that matters a lot. So, but for me to people who really want
22 to know, I identify as trans male, I identify as butch, I identify as gender fluid or gender queer,
23 and all of that works pretty good for me – and I was once a little girl.

24 AJ: Works for me. What is your earliest memory, Aidan? The first thing you remember in life? It
25 could be around gender, it doesn't have to be . . . just, you know.

26 AK: I remember being at my great-grandparents house in the fall with my grandfather raking leaves
27 into big piles and jumping in them.

28 AJ: Really?

29 AK: That was in Kalamazoo, Michigan, so the trees there – they dropped some leaves. Absolutely.

30 AJ: I've never been to Kalamazoo, but I grew up in the Midwest so I know there's a lot of leaves.
31 Yeah. So, you were born in Kalamazoo, Michigan?

32 AK: Yes.

33 AJ: That's fascinating. Did you grow up and go to school there and do all of that stuff?

- 1 AK: No, no. My mom was raised by my great-grandparents and it wasn't working for her. The
2 generational gap between them, the time – the mid-1960s, she really was a free-spirit
3 independent and she wanted to get unleashed. Well, she happened to get knocked up which
4 doesn't help a lot, but ultimately she did try to have a brief marriage with my father and that
5 didn't work – he was abusive, drinking problem, and all of that. So she cut out of there pretty
6 quick, probably within the first year of that relationship and then, I believe, it was probably a
7 couple years later she threw two little toddlers, because I have an identical twin sister . . .
- 8 AJ: Is that right?
- 9 AK: That's right.
- 10 AJ: Wow, identical twins. Any more siblings, or just the two of you?
- 11 AK: I have half siblings that I don't know, with the exception of one half-sibling from my biological
12 father who has recently friended me on Facebook.
- 13 AJ: Your biological father?
- 14 AK: My biological half-sister.
- 15 AJ: Half-sister – wow.
- 16 AK: My biological father passed away, but my mom threw us in the car and we drove across the
17 country to California, to the L.A. area, where she tried to do both . . . be a young independent
18 free-spirited woman in the 1960s and raise two kids. It was a juggling . . . she got some of it
19 right on each side and some of it wrong on each side of that equation.
- 20 AJ: Hey, she's a human being, right?
- 21 AK: Yes, she is.
- 22 AJ: That's kind of what happens. So you actually grew up, then, in California? Or parts of
23 California?
- 24 AK: No.
- 25 AJ: OK, all right.
- 26 AK: There's more.
- 27 AJ: I'm just going to keep following this story and I'm going to hand on, it sounds like it's a ride.
- 28 AK: Oh, let's see. We lived in El Segundo, I think a few other places, but that's the place I remember
29 up until I was about seven. She met a fellow, a boyfriend, and he said, "Come with me to
30 Hawaii," so we zipped over to Hawaii. That was an interesting experience, I wasn't there very
31 long. One thing that was pretty exciting is that you could go to school in shorts and barefoot, so
32 that was not something that could happen at our other school.
- 33 AJ: Certainly not in Kalamazoo.

- 1 AK: No, no. The other thing was that all the kids were the children of the plantation farmers, so my
2 sister and I were the only white kids in the school. That was really . . .
- 3 AJ: What was that experience like?
- 4 AK: It wasn't bad and it wasn't good, it was silent. So, coming from L.A., a very racially diverse
5 neighborhood and school and all of that, this was my first experience at that age, that young
6 age, of seeing something different. I might have one other thing to say that will back me up a
7 moment.
- 8 AJ: Go ahead.
- 9 AK: But let me just finish about Hawaii and that we, it's not the royal we – we my sister . . . that's my
10 first pronoun preference.
- 11 AJ: We, OK.
- 12 AK: That's how I grew up – we. We'd go try to talk to another kid or go over by the swing set or
13 engage some different way in the class, and the kids would just get up off the swings and walk
14 away – just quietly. And so any place that we did, and that was a really . . . I don't know what
15 you'd call it, it was just a . . .
- 16 AJ: Discomforting?
- 17 AK: I understood it was about skin color, but I can't tell you why I understood that except that we
18 were the only white kids there. So while it wasn't . . . like I said, it wasn't awful, it was just kind
19 of strange. We weren't there very long so I suspect that over time, that would have changed.
20 But, it definitely was a seed planted, like an observation – like the many information seedlets
21 that we get over time informs the rest of my life. The other experience that was pretty pivotal
22 for me was being at a friend of my mom's house, or apartment, and we were playing with their
23 kids in this girl's room and we were probably . . . again probably 6 or 7, and this was an African
24 American family and the girl says, "Don't stand close to the window." "OK, why? Why?" "My
25 cousin got shot at through that window."
- 26 AJ: Oh, wow.
- 27 AK: So immediately I feel afraid because who wants to get shot. But what was also interesting to me
28 was seeing how she just talked about it, it's her bedroom – it's where she sleeps, it's where
29 theoretically you're supposed to have a great degree of safety, and she has to warn us to stay
30 away from the window.
- 31 AJ: Was this in Los Angeles or . . .?
- 32 AK: Yes.
- 33 AJ: OK, so it was in Los Angeles. Wow. In El Segundo.
- 34 AK: Yes, exactly. Those two instances were my first experience of understanding some elements of
35 racism.

- 1 AJ: Racism . . . you also, I mean the experience you described in Hawaii gave you a sense of being
2 the other and the sense of being in the minority.
- 3 AK: Yeah. It was . . . I think one of the gifts that the universe, or God or whatever you want to call it,
4 gave me, was my best friend in the womb with me.
- 5 AJ: Yes.
- 6 AK: And forward. That helped temper a lot of situations in life because I always had my best friend
7 with me. So what those situations might have been like, just as a single kid – a solo kid, might
8 have been different. But also, because there was no expressed animosity it was just more
9 intriguing. What is this? What does this mean? What is this about? Yeah. And just at a
10 surprisingly young age, I feel like I just understood some things that I would later give language
11 to and broader context and all of that. But yeah, it was interesting.
- 12 AJ: That's quite an interesting upbringing so far and we're still only at seven years old. Where did
13 you go to high school?
- 14 AK: Up in Alaska.
- 15 AJ: Wow, so you went from one extreme to quite another one.
- 16 AK: After a second grader in Hawaii was trying to sell me and my sister some pot, my mom said, "I
17 can't raise the kids here."
- 18 AJ: Wow.
- 19 AK: He said, "Well, let's go to Alaska, that's another place that I like." So we went up to Alaska. I
20 will say that that was roughly around age seven then, because they were short jumps. And
21 ultimately we had a lot of moves after that. When I think of home, where did I grow up, I think
22 of Juneau, Alaska.
- 23 AJ: Juneau, Alaska.
- 24 AK: And I did ultimately graduate from high school there, in 1982, and decided to . . . I was going to
25 college and drove my little VW bug on to the ferry and had it all packed and tried to do my first
26 year at college.
- 27 AJ: Right. Before we start talking about your college experience, when was the first time you
28 recognized your true gender identity?
- 29 AK: I think the way I'll answer that question is to just re-frame it a little bit and say, "When did I
30 realize that other people did not see me in the way that I felt?"
- 31 AJ: Got it – perfect. I love that.
- 32 AK: And that's . . . that's those moments when different people – your parents, your teachers, or
33 whoever says, "You need to do something different." "No, you can't wear that shirt to class
34 because today is your school pictures day and even though that's your favorite shirt, that's a
35 boy's shirt." Having a lunch box that, I'll never forget it because it was the most terrible

- 1 experience ever to have to carry this lunch box – it said “Beauty Queen” on it. Pink and gowns
2 and . . .
- 3 AJ: Sparkles and . . . ?
- 4 AK: Yeah. I don’t want a beauty queen . . .
- 5 AJ: Did your sister have one just like it?
- 6 AK: Yes, she did.
- 7 AJ: Did she love hers?
- 8 AK: I don’t remember. I’m sure she wasn’t distressed about it in the same way that I was.
- 9 AJ: Right.
- 10 AK: What’s wrong with Spiderman? I saw a Spiderman lunch box. Different things like that, but
11 sometimes . . . what was interesting in my recognition of certain moments is that on one hand I
12 had a mom who was a self-proclaimed feminist and empowerment and all of that. She just
13 encouraged me in many, many ways that were not traditionally female ways. So it was always
14 kind of a surprise when I would have to wear that outfit, but that outfit would be, “Oh, it’s
15 because it’s a gift from your grandmother and we’re going to this special occasion or going to
16 church or whatever.” So I had these kind of messages that said, “Well, if it was up to me as your
17 parent, you could do whatever you want,” but there’s repercussions for choices made that will
18 impact my mother more so. So that her choice . . . I could tell that she would insist, every once
19 in a while, that I would wear a dress to church. But, not every time – but the important times.
20 Mother’s Day, Easter – those special occasions where I recognized what was up . . . that she
21 would get more shit than I would.
- 22 AJ: Than you would.
- 23 AK: Yeah. And she’s . . . the boyfriend came and went, she was a single parent and she’s a sexy
24 woman – a young woman. And yeah, divorces happen, it’s not as stigmatized as it was then so
25 she was suspect from day one.
- 26 AJ: From the beginning – yes.
- 27 AK: Also, while we lived in Alaska, that relationship came and went. We were living in this tiny little
28 mobile home that’s rotting, it’s got two planks down the little narrow hallway because the floor
29 is all rotted out, and it’s cold – there’s thick ice on the inside of the windows, not just the
30 outside. So she’s a single parent with . . . how do you raise these two kids? Who scooped her
31 up? Her gave her support and community? It was the fundamentalist Christians, so that was
32 her entry and, of course, my entry into that Bible church environment and community. When
33 I’m out in the world talking to reporters and stuff like that, they ask that question, “When did
34 you know?” Well, OK – I’m not going to go into some of the things I’m talking about right now,
35 but . . .
- 36 AJ: I appreciate that, yeah.

- 1 AK: I share one story with them pretty regularly because it was really pivotal. It was at age 9, there
2 was a time between Sunday School and church where there's roughly 15 minutes and we kids
3 would run around and play and whatever, and adults talk, and then you file in and sit down and
4 listen to the sermon. This was one of those days I had to wear the dress and it's . . . I will never
5 forget it because it felt like you may as well have put me in that room naked – in the foyer of the
6 church naked and put a spotlight on me. That's how strange and exposing it felt to wear that.
7 So I don't do my usual – I'm not engaging with my friends, I'm not running around, I want the
8 wall to open up and suck me in so I'm not visible. I'm trying to just hold really still, I don't want
9 anybody to talk to me, but also as I'm standing there . . . because the last thing I want to hear is,
10 "Oh, you look so pretty in that dress."
- 11 AJ: Exactly.
- 12 AK: I'm looking around though, and I see this couple with a couple of young kids and I realize that
13 that's what they expect me to do – I'm supposed to grow up, get married, have a family . . .
14 that's the future. It's the first time I could contemplate that in a forward way and go, "That's so
15 wrong, that's so wrong." And I also, at the same time, said, "I want to get married and I want to
16 have a family – but I want to be a husband and I want to be the dad."
- 17 AJ: You said that at nine years old? To yourself?
- 18 AK: Yes. And, of course, it's coupled with that despair because that's impossible. That memory is
19 really a powerful one that has served me well even to this day because when families who have
20 trans kids that are nine years old, "Aren't they too young to know?" Or they'll say, "Well, some
21 kids just say, 'I wish I was born a boy so I could do all these other things, but they don't really
22 want to be a boy.'" Well, you know what? In that moment, that was all I could possibly
23 imagine: I wish I was a boy. Instead of saying, "I am a boy." These kids today, they say, "I am,"
24 and that shocks me.
- 25 AJ: I am, right. Yes.
- 26 AK: The boldness, because for me – at nine, no way. Why don't you sprinkle some fairy dust on me?
27 It's absolutely impossible.
- 28 AJ: You knew who you were, but you also knew who you wanted to be.
- 29 AK: Yes. I knew in my heart who I was and the packaging wasn't there.
- 30 AJ: Yes.
- 31 AK: And when my body started changing in puberty, again despair and this strange sense of shame
32 that actually has nothing to do with gender in a weird way that I'm not sure that I'll be able to
33 articulate. But, it wasn't about, "I don't like being a girl, I think boys are better. I want to be a
34 boy." It wasn't about valuation, it wasn't about internalized misogyny, whatever some of the
35 things that people speculate, it was - my body is changing in ways that I know it's not supposed
36 to. And it's that simple.
- 37 AJ: It's just that simple, yeah.

- 1 AK: So what do you do with that? I say, "Oh well, I'm going to make the best of it." Fast forwarding,
2 one thing that my mother still was pretty good at was she was so very encouraging of anything
3 non-traditionally female.
- 4 AJ: OK.
- 5 AK: She told both of us, "You can be anything you want to be, but do not be a nurse or a secretary."
6 She had a real handle on those two because she didn't want us to get trapped, she wanted . . .
- 7 AJ: In those traditional sort of . . .
- 8 AK: . . . possibility, yeah. I should never have dropped that typing class though because computers
9 came along.
- 10 AJ: Yeah. You're the one-finger . . .
- 11 AK: Oh, I finally took a class. I've got more fingers involved these days – thank God.
- 12 AJ: So when you introduced yourself, you talked about these sort of layered terms that you use to
13 identify yourself. Do you want to say more about that?
- 14 AK: I do, I absolutely do. Labels are interesting – we hate them and we love them, we want them
15 and we don't want them.
- 16 AJ: Right.
- 17 AK: My first label, besides girl, is twin.
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 AK: And twin ranked up high – the highest probably, because of how it impacted my experience.
20 Moving forward in life, I finally . . . I started distinguishing myself from my sister and not
21 intentionally but just because I'm me and she's her. So when I'm thinking about . . . I'm hitting
22 junior high school and I watched this cool dude walk by in the hallway, the way he's walking, so I
23 start walking a certain way – my sister, no – not at all. As a matter of fact, when we both hit
24 puberty, I will absolutely never forget I'm standing there talking to her at school, in the hallway,
25 and some boy walks by and says something to her and she turns to say whatever and her face
26 just goes beat red and she cannot get a word out of her mouth.
- 27 AJ: Right.
- 28 AK: I just looked at her like, "What is wrong with you?" And I went home and I told my mom,
29 "Something is wrong with Brenda."
- 30 AJ: Oh boy.
- 31 AK: And I told her what happened and she just got this smile and said, "Nope, just wait, within six
32 months you'll be doing the same thing." That was kind of her recipe for whatever and I'm like,
33 "Hm-hmm, nope, not going to happen." So ultimately that stupid blushing and articulateness
34 did show up when I turned 19 and had some type of Epiphanes moment that, "Oh, I'm actually
35 attracted to girls, not boys." That's when I got stupid. I had a brief time in the lesbian

1 community and really was just happy and celebrating and feeling like I found a fit for stuff. It
2 wasn't all there, it was just part there – it was like that's part of the story but I didn't have
3 enough awareness to think about the rest of it. But then, I started noticing some of the dykes in
4 my community and there was kind of this little posse of folks that I would see at a regular point
5 in time and they had the black leather on and I was like, "Ohhh, what's that?" Just like a moth
6 to a flame. They were, most of them, older than me – 15 or 20 years older, and so I was just a
7 little baby and they just scooped me up. I remember actually going to a conference and the
8 discussion was about butch or whatever, and I remember standing outside that door just going,
9 "Oh, I want to go in there, I can't go in there." And finally a friend said, "What are you doing?
10 Are you coming in?" I said, "I don't know if people consider me butch enough." "Get in here."
11 Drug me in there, and that was that. That is still, to this day, one of my most dear labels
12 because it was finally somebody that said, "I see who you are and I value who you are and this is
13 not . . . masculinity is a beautiful thing and it doesn't matter who is wearing it – you're wearing it
14 and you're wearing it well." That was fantastic. So that's a label that when I started
15 contemplating gender and the possibility of transitioning, I'll never forget some younger dyke
16 coming to me and saying, "So, what? You still identify as butch?" Like that was the most
17 ludicrous thing possible. I remember in that moment just thinking, "Do I let this young person
18 take this away from me?" No. And I just said, "Yeah, yeah, that's mine."

19 AJ: That's my identity.

20 AK: And I don't care if it doesn't make sense. So, yeah.

21 AJ: So you've been through twin and I'm sure you're still twin.

22 AK: Yes.

23 AJ: We, lesbian, butch.

24 AK: I never used the word lesbian.

25 AJ: Never?

26 AK: No, that time frame for us . . . we felt a little edgier to say dyke, so we always used dyke.

27 AJ: Got it.

28 AK: And yeah, then I came out into the leather scene and that was really an amazing wonderful
29 experience. I learned so much about power, who has it when, shared, when you gift it, when
30 you receive it – that kind of thing. I had a tight community. This was a subset in this broader
31 lesbian community and I actually felt like I got some family back, a community family. Because
32 of the loss of the Christian contingent, right.

33 AJ: OK, wow.

34 AK: You come out as a lesbian and there's no room in fundamentalist Christianity for that. So, yeah.

35 AJ: So your relationship with your mom, is it . . .?

36 AK: It's good – absolutely.

- 1 AJ: All right, so you didn't lose your mom.
- 2 AK: No, nope. She said, "I suspected." And I said, "Why didn't you tell me?" She said, "Well, I was
3 just kind of hoping I was wrong." That was hard, now it's not so bad. She's not there now, she
4 celebrates my life.
- 5 AJ: And your twin, I happen to have had the honor and pleasure to meet your twin, so I know you
6 guys are still very close.
- 7 AK: Yeah. But, I tell you what, me sharing with her any of these . . . well, actually I didn't talk to her
8 much about the leather community.
- 9 AJ: Right.
- 10 AK: That's my private business, but as far as coming out as a dyke and then coming out as trans, the
11 first one I told her . . . I was in Seattle and she was up in Alaska and we talked on the phone and I
12 told her on the phone. She was really blown out of the water because the person that she
13 knows the most and is closest to and we know theoretically our most intimate details of our
14 lives and thoughts and all that, here is this big huge thing that she didn't know. But what she
15 didn't understand is that I didn't know either. I just told her as soon as I could. So the gender
16 piece I decided that I wasn't going to wait until I had any solid foundation on it, I was just going
17 to take her with me and tell her I was contemplating this and thinking about it, I didn't know
18 what I was going to do, if anything, or what it meant. Poor thing, she's got no frame of
19 reference for it. She says, "Does this mean that you are a man trapped in a women's body?"
20 And I said, "Not exactly." And with hindsight, the kind thing might have been to say yes so that
21 she would have . . .
- 22 AJ: It would give her something to hold on to.
- 23 AK: But I didn't do that because I wasn't ready to make it . . . it wasn't simple. I liked the
24 layeredness. But when I was talking to her about it, probably within the space of just a few
25 seconds I saw fear, rage, confusion, hilarity, all these emotions just whoosh, whoosh, whoosh –
26 through this crazy weird morphing thing that I just wish I could have filmed that.
- 27 AJ: Wow.
- 28 AK: That would be the world's shortest, most powerful movie about emotional experience ever.
- 29 AJ: Right.
- 30 AK: Oh God, I'll never forget it.
- 31 AJ: So your sister rode that train with you from the beginning.
- 32 AK: Yeah.
- 33 AJ: The journey to . . .
- 34 AK: You know, at this point, I had been in a relationship for a number of years – this is a number of
35 years later, I'm in my early 30s by the time I'm really digging into gender, or looking at gender.
36 While I had become aware of the possibility of transition, I sort of said, "Well, they're kind of like

1 us.” Meaning us in the dyke community – the butches. “They’re like us.” But I still didn’t bring
2 it that close to home yet – it was probably another . . . I don’t know, maybe even decade before
3 I did that.

4 AJ: I want to go back to the leather community for a minute. What identity do you sort of hold in
5 that space?

6 AK: Well, the primary identity that I had was as a butch bottom and definitely more . . . I really loved
7 the physicality of the leather community, so more of the role playing and stuff like that was not
8 so much for me, but the physical aspect of it. I’m not going to elaborate a whole lot.

9 AJ: No, that’s fine, but that’s where you were.

10 AK: Yeah, and I really loved that. It tied in with the athletics that I had done in high school. I trained
11 as a power lifter for a while, and that’s an intense mental and physical, obviously, sport that
12 requires one’s mind to really align well to navigate it. So when you train really heavy, for heavy
13 lifts, and compete, there’s times where you’ve got wraps around your knees when you’re about
14 ready to do a squat. The weight is so heavy you have to wrap them so tightly that you don’t
15 blow your knees out by squatting down once and coming back up. You can’t bend your leg at all
16 – like you’re walking stiff legged, and then at some point you’re dropping down with your
17 weight and you’re coming back up and it’s excruciating – just the wraps digging into your legs,
18 but you’re doing it because you want to accomplish something, you want to achieve this, you
19 want to say, “I can do this.” And so in a very similar way, my experience in the leather
20 community was like that too.

21 AJ: It replicates that.

22 AK: Yeah. And I wanted to get in my body and that was a way that I could just really kind of
23 experiment and push myself and, “How does this feel? How does that feel?” And think about
24 physical pain – what is physical pain? It hurts a lot more if you’re scared of it. If you’re not
25 afraid of it, it’s just a sensation that can be moved through with some good . . . I don’t know
26 what? Concentration or contemplation or focus, all of that kind of stuff.

27 AJ: You bring me to an interesting question and one that I don’t think I’ve asked to date. What
28 percentage, would you say, the transgender experience, for you, is about body and physicality
29 versus emotionality and sort of internal feelings?

30 AK: That is an excellent question and I would say that . . . there is a much higher percentage that is
31 about the physical. Like, what do I expect my body to feel like? What do I expect to see when I
32 look in the mirror? And it’s so much less about man and woman, it’s about I want to see me.

33 AJ: Right.

34 AK: Yeah. Additionally, I don’t hear much about this from people within the trans community,
35 although I think that’s changing more and more, which is when I would be around a group of
36 people discussing gender, they would talk about, “Oh, I always felt myself to be a boy,” or, “I
37 wanted to do this or I wanted to do that.” Just these different things – or, “Everybody made me
38 wear a dress.” Oh God, so traumatizing. But . . . where was I going with that?

- 1 AJ: The question was around physicality versus sort of emotional and . . .
- 2 AK: There's something I wanted to say – anyway, it will come back. Oh, I know – when I actually
3 decided to move forward and take a step towards transition, let's try some hormones, let's see
4 what do I feel about that, what do I think about that. And I started progressing and I thought,
5 "Well this is good." A relief, like this is how I'm supposed to feel, this is how my body should
6 respond in this situation and that could be in the bed, sexually.
- 7 AJ: Right, right.
- 8 AK: I had a very difficult time – it's one thing to please a partner but then to receive was
9 outrageously difficult. I'm like, "OK, so you had seven orgasms, where's my one – I just want
10 one, OK."
- 11 AJ: Just one.
- 12 AK: Stuff like that.
- 13 AJ: But I don't want you to touch this part and you can't touch that part.
- 14 AK: But I would try, I pushed myself – because I wanted to find out. Honestly, if she's having so
15 much fun, I want that fun too.
- 16 AJ: Sure.
- 17 AK: And why can't I have that fun? There's no reason that I could identify. I don't have a history of
18 sexual abuse – what, what, what is it? Having no name for it and just being frustrated with the
19 fact that I don't want to be there, I'd like to be proactive and move through that. And the
20 leather community and other situations, I would work it and actually going to places of really
21 physical discomfort. Like, "Yeah, no I don't want you to touch me there but I actually do want
22 you to because I want to see if I can move through some things." So I did a lot of work there and
23 ultimately that's what led me to transition.
- 24 AJ: Hmm.
- 25 AK: Because that's what changed. So again, not about identity as a man or a woman in the world. I
26 had a lot of empowerment as I grew up, with the cards I was dealt. I was out and proud and all
27 of that. I had good friends, good community, wasn't interested in losing any of that. I just
28 wanted my body to be more like I expected. And what was also interesting is that my
29 community, that butch femme community especially, they all got it. Maybe they didn't talk
30 about it, but they got it.
- 31 AJ: They got it.
- 32 AK: I'll never forget going to a store, I was going to get a few shirts and I was trying some on. I
33 would try it on in the dressing room and then step out. My girlfriend would look and say, "Yeah,
34 I like that one," or, "No, I don't." Every time I looked in the mirror, they were different . . . sort
35 of stripes or things like that. Some of them the stripes or the way it was cut would show the
36 curve of the breast and some made me look more . . .
- 37 AJ: Sort of straight on . . .

- 1 AK: Flat and straight, yeah. So I noticed, I paid attention. I knew I didn't want this shirt because it
2 emphasized my breasts more, so every time I'd step out and she was like, "No, not that one."
3 One that flattened or didn't emphasize that, "Oh yeah, that one looks great." Shirt after shirt
4 after shirt, right on the mark. Did we talk to each other about that that's the detail that we're
5 paying attention to? I never did talk to her about it.
- 6 AJ: But she picked up on it.
- 7 AK: I think there was a lot going on in the community. I remember one person saying, "Well why do
8 you want to transition?" This is somebody else in the dyke community. "Why do you want to
9 transition? I get it about the phantom penis and the this and the that . . ." - naming all these
10 things that she had experienced with other butch partners and then she's telling me she doesn't
11 get it. What don't you get? You just named it all?
- 12 AJ: Right, exactly.
- 13 AK: It's this weird thing. Anyway, what I feel like, and I think my age plays into this pretty
14 significantly, is that I'm hitting this older dyke community that has a different sense of man and
15 woman, of masculinity and femininity, of sexuality and all of that, and I'm just the kid soaking it
16 up. I'm like, "OK, yeah." I tell them, if they are open to listening, that you led me there – you
17 led me straight to this door and then you said, "Don't go through it."
- 18 AJ: Right.
- 19 AK: And for me it's just this little . . . one more step, for them it was, "You crossed the line from us to
20 them, from good to bad, from amazing women to bad men."
- 21 AJ: Did you lose lesbian community?
- 22 AK: That's a really good question. I was part of many conversations where this issue was discussed,
23 "We're creating women-only space, so what does that look like?" Dyke space, leather dyke
24 space. Creating a conference – what's that about? Who gets to go? And I watched this line
25 being made over and over that did this and snaked over here to grab this person and then got
26 that person but not them. "Oh yeah, not the drag queens," which was their term for trans
27 women.
- 28 AJ: Right. And to be fair, trans women referred to themselves as drag queens at some point in time.
- 29 AK: Right, but a number of . . . yeah, yeah.
- 30 AJ: Not today, but . . .
- 31 AK: I felt in this particular case it was being disrespectful and just . . . they're not women, they're not
32 women. It was hard for me as a younger person to be in on those conversations because I
33 would think, you know what? If someone goes to such huge lengths to become who they are
34 and risk ostracism from everyone, who am I to say they're not a woman? Who am I to say that?
35 So I want, myself and a few other people would say, "Well why don't we just let people self-
36 define?" And always in the minority and the majority were trying to find these fancy ways,
37 again chromosomes and body parts and this and that, and I watched the hypocrisy because
38 some of the people in the leadership were trans men or a part of our community and women

1 come in all shapes and sizes and you'll see some women that don't really look like you'd expect
2 a woman to look because they want their friends and fuck buddies, or whatever, to go. And
3 then, "Oops, they break up," and now it's like, "No, no trans men, they want their cake and eat
4 it too, they have to make up their mind, privilege, blah, blah, blah." And just this personal
5 break-up that didn't go well turns into a political statement. That's bullshit, don't go there.

6 AJ: Wow, you are giving me everything right now, Aidan.

7 AK: I got lots.

8 AJ: Yes, you do. You touched a little bit on sort of hormones. To the extent that you feel
9 comfortable can you talk about any medical transition-related stuff?

10 AK: Absolutely. Testosterone didn't scare me, it seemed I was ready for it and I wanted to. The part
11 that scared me was what does it mean to transition and what will my life look like. But when I
12 started with testosterone, it just felt like the missing piece. My body changes, my emotional
13 responses to situations were more like I felt like I wanted them to be. And not that my
14 emotions themselves were any different, but my physiological response to them was different.
15 And I really was grateful for that and ultimately it led to a recognition that cis men are such bull
16 shitters about their physical supremacy because, I'm sorry, there's just an advantage.
17 Testosterone builds muscle, it makes you stronger, you can have more energy. Estrogen is laden
18 with gravity.

19 AJ: Yes.

20 AK: It makes your body heavier and it pushes your emotions all the way to the surface, every single
21 one. So, yeah – anyway. But also, as somebody who'd had this really wonderful . . . I had an
22 encouraging upbringing, be who you want to be kind of thing. And then I had this mentoring
23 from these bulldaggers and femme dykes that really just showed me love for quite a number of
24 years. But that needle in the butt is the crossing the line, it was very difficult for them and I
25 understood all the debates because I'd been part of them – and the discussion about butch
26 flight was present, and here's where my age comes into it. I'm naïve. I think, "Well if they're
27 just worried about that, I'm not going anywhere." Oh my God, how naïve I was. So I thought, "If
28 that's one of the complaints, I'm just going to stay." And so I did, and what I did day-by-day was
29 continue to show up. I showed up at the dyke bar, I showed up at the women's play parties, I
30 showed up at our social events. I just continued to say, "I'm here, I'm here." It was
31 uncomfortable. I would grab a friend and I'd say, "Please, will you go with me to the Wild
32 Rose?" the Seattle lesbian bar, "Will you go with me, I just need to be there?" They need to see
33 me because if I don't go for six months or a year or whatever, and my physical changes . . . I
34 could be standing right in front of me and they'll say, "You're gone," because of the bigger
35 effects. So I viewed it as going to work, "I'm going to work." And I'd sit at the bar . . . whatever,
36 I'd sit there chit-chatting with my friend and then the drinks flow and as soon as everybody has
37 enough booze in them, they're coming over asking questions. So, that was my first activist act
38 as a trans person.

39 AJ: Wow, just showing up in women's space.

40 AK: Not leaving.

- 1 AJ: And not leaving, yeah. Any other surgical things or . . . ?
- 2 AK: I didn't really get to your question actually. I had chest reconstructive surgery, I wanted that
3 really bad and I also was terrified because that was a . . . you know, they're gone, they're gone. I
4 didn't have the crystal ball.
- 5 AJ: But you can stop testosterone.
- 6 AK: Right. And that's the only way I could start was by telling myself, "You can stop any time you
7 want."
- 8 AJ: Right.
- 9 AK: So you don't have to look at this in a big picture and if it's too much for you, you can take your
10 dose way down. You can stop, you can start again – whatever. But surgery, not that there
11 wouldn't be things I could do if I decided I wanted them back, but I couldn't imagine that. So,
12 yeah, I went and had chest surgery. And as far as any kind of lower surgery, I've not been
13 interested in that. I've been curious about it, but ultimately the thing that I talked about . . . the
14 challenge that I had sexually in bed, especially orgasming, was gone and I did not want to fuck
15 with that. It's like, "It's working, it's working."
- 16 AJ: As soon as the T started flowing.
- 17 AK: That's right. And I wanted that because, you know, the partners that I've had have been very
18 amazing and generous with their bodies and we did some beautiful things together, so they
19 gave me a gift that I just couldn't give back. That mattered to me. Not only do I want to have
20 some good feelings, but what a beautiful experience and I can't show up to it – and not because
21 I'm not trying.
- 22 AJ: The body just was not functioning the way you needed it to. Can I just give you a fist bump of
23 love on camera? Pow.
- 24 AK: Absolutely.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, no – that's incredible. One of the reasons why I'm so thrilled that you are here for this
26 interview and willing to sit and share, is I believe you're the founder of this amazing conference
27 that happens in Seattle called, "Gender Odyssey."
- 28 AK: That's right, Gender Odyssey.
- 29 AJ: When did you start that?
- 30 AK: Well, there's a hint in the name. The conference started in 2001, so we called it . . . it started
31 actually as a trans male conference. We called it *FTM 2001: A Gender Odyssey*, after *2001: A*
32 *Space Odyssey*. It was this playful sort of insert name until we find the real name, and it just
33 never went away. We did drop the FTM, the desire was that there were a few conferences that
34 were more heavily attended by trans women, trans feminine people.
- 35 AJ: Southern Comfort, Fantasia . . .

- 1 AK: Yup, yup, yup. That was what I had heard is that people who had gone said, “You know, but
2 there’s just no programming, we need more programming, or whatever.” And so I thought well
3 why not establish that foundation and so that was the first year, 2001. It drew about 300
4 people, which was fantastic.
- 5 AJ: That’s significant, yeah.
- 6 AK: Ultimately the stuff that I learned early through my transition, and with my dyke community,
7 was that if I could sit down with them and have a conversation and we’d just lay it out, they say
8 what makes them angry, what they’re afraid of, ask questions, whatever – just put it all on the
9 table. We laugh, we cry, we get angry. Three hours later, we were back together in our
10 connection, in our close way. The difference that they had felt was happening, this huge chasm,
11 was now actually not that big of a deal and they understood more . . . they’re like, “Oh, it is a
12 smaller choice rather than a bigger choice.” And I decided also that it was impossible to have
13 the number of conversations I needed because they’re exhausting – three hours of emotional
14 turmoil for everybody and getting to the other side. I wanted to see what could be done if we
15 bring more people together. I started a workshop, I went to that same bar, and I made up little
16 flyers that said all the things that . . . oh, you’re just jumping on the bandwagon, or this is
17 trendy, or you just want male privilege. I put all the most audacious statements that are out
18 there on the flyer, “Come have a conversation.” One of the scariest things I’ve ever done, just
19 taking those flyers and handing them to people. They would take it and they would look at me,
20 look me up and down, and have interesting looks on their faces. But ultimately people showed
21 up. I did another one, people showed up. There was so much to talk about that our couple
22 hour session just got nowhere near it, so I created a six-part series and broke it down – let’s talk
23 about our gender in relation to our age, our class, our race, just a number of different things like
24 that – or our ability. It was over a three-month period, every other week, and each one got
25 bigger and bigger and bigger until we had . . . I don’t know, maybe 150 people in the room, in
26 Seattle. I didn’t even know there would be that many people remotely interested.
- 27 AJ: Interested – sure.
- 28 AK: And then Gender Odyssey pulling people together. I’m only two years into my transition at this
29 point – so two years, I’m still figuring up from down, I’ve got a little scruff on my face. I’m kind
30 of looking like instead of 35, I’m looking like I’m 22 and all the fun that goes with that – probably
31 younger than that actually. But, I needed to hear from more people and that’s why I started it.
32 Now what I would recommend to you or anybody ever who says, “I want to put something
33 together because I want to have these important conversations,” it doesn’t work.
- 34 AJ: Run, should I run?
- 35 AK: No. If you’re putting the conference together you’re not in those rooms having those
36 conversations.
- 37 AJ: Got it.
- 38 AK: Because you’re busy mopping the floor or troubleshooting different things.
- 39 AJ: You’re not having the conversation.

- 1 AK: I get to sneak off every once in a while and dive into a workshop, which I just love, love, love –
2 and also one of the reasons why it's awesome to come to Creating Change.
- 3 AJ: Tell me about your Creating Change experience. How has that been this weekend?
- 4 AK: I have been coming to this conference . . . I've been probably four or five times. This weekend
5 has been short, but it's the first time . . . my visit has been short, I'll only be able to take in about
6 two-and-a-half days, but it's the first time I had a workshop approved, which is awesome.
- 7 AJ: What's your workshop?
- 8 AK: I did one called, "Navigating the Human Barrier: Doing Education on Trans Inclusion in K-12
9 Schools." And more specifically elementary schools and for very, very specific reasons. So I got
10 to talk to a packed room of people who want to know how to navigate questions, how to
11 advocate for kids, how to handle all that stuff that comes. "What about the bathroom?" That
12 should not be a statement, it's always put forth as a statement – nobody wants to stop and say,
13 "OK, let's talk about the bathroom." So I wanted to share with people lessons learned over the
14 past decade of how I get in the door. I'm an out trans person – how is it possible that I'm going
15 to elementary schools? How is that possible? My mind says there is no way that will ever
16 happen and yet that's all I'm doing.
- 17 AJ: Wow.
- 18 AK: Pretty intense. And, I'm talking to those people that I already discarded because they already
19 discarded me – meaning cis gender, heterosexual populations. I never thought that I would be
20 where I am, talking to them about how they can receive these children. And what it's done for
21 me in this really amazing way that I'm so so happy and amazed, is that I could come in and make
22 the world a different place for those kids so that they actually have some room to find their
23 gender without the panic that goes with it and my little 9-year-old gets to see the possibility, the
24 amazing beauty – and my little 9-year-old feels pretty damn fucking happy right now because I
25 didn't know how much I turned off at that time, how much I pushed down and just said, "It's not
26 possible." And now I get to have my little 9-year-old show up and I didn't know. I'm really
27 passionate and excited about sharing what I'm learning with my queer community, my adult
28 queer community, because as much as I didn't see it before I see that many of my peers, my
29 mentors and all of that, they don't see what I see about what this means for the queer
30 community. My parents of these little kids, these little trans babies, are not . . . they are not cis
31 allies, that's not working for me. They are trans, they are my trans community, they are the
32 ones holding me and moving a queer movement forward without even knowing it in ways that
33 are not just going to help that trans kid, but it's going to help that little boy that's going to grow
34 up to be gay, the young gal that's going to be lesbian, bisexual, pansexual. All these things,
35 there's a . . . the iceberg is not visible and I want to show everybody what I'm seeing.
- 36 AJ: Yeah. One of the highlights of 2015, for me, and 2015 was kind of a big deal year for me. I was
37 the grand marshal of the Pride Parade in Minneapolis, but one of the biggest highlights was I
38 had the honor of being the keynote speaker, one of the keynote speakers, for the 14th Gender
39 Odyssey.
- 40 AK: That's right.

- 1 AJ: And it amazed me how many young trans people, and their families – as you noted, they’re
2 moving the trans community, the queer community forward in ways that allies never could. And
3 so, that was one of the biggest highlights for me, so my question for you is what is the new, I
4 guess, edge that you see in this transgender movement. Can you put a name on it? Can you put
5 some vision to it?
- 6 AK: What I see is a complete and utter reframing of what we think of as LGBT community, and
7 additional letters – however many you want to put after that.
- 8 AJ: QIA.
- 9 AK: AAPD, there’s lots of letters, right?
- 10 AJ: Sure.
- 11 AK: There’s a million Qs and all of that. In that . . . every one of my generation talks about the ability
12 to express femininity or masculinity but that’s in the binary, right? Masculinity in men,
13 masculinity in women – the range that you can do as a woman is quite broad, less so for men,
14 but ultimately we all just believe that there was some magic dividing line and end of story. So
15 these younger generations are not trapped by that framework and it is so difficult for people
16 who are walking side by side in these hallways and creating change, to recognize the huge
17 chasm between their understanding. And that’s the metamorphosis that we’re going through
18 right now and what it’s also going to do, these younger generations are saying, “My gender is
19 expansive, the way I want to express it is expansive, my orientation is more than just sex – it’s
20 my romantic attractions, it’s who do I want to be romantic with, who do I want to have sex with,
21 and who do I want for a long-term partner?” They can all be different.
- 22 AJ: Yeah.
- 23 AK: And people of different genders and/or expressions. So the expansiveness is so significant and
24 then many of us are trapped by our generational trappings in that, that we can’t see how
25 revolutionary it is and what I believe it will do is absolutely erode away at the boundaries
26 between LGBTIQQAPD, etc., alphabet and them, the het’s, the cis folk, because heterosexual
27 people and cis people are just as hungry for that freedom.
- 28 AJ: Absolutely.
- 29 AK: And those younger generations also are having exposure to expanded concepts and there will
30 be a couple walking down the street that you or I might look at and go, “Oh, look at the young
31 heterosexual couple.” And they’re not, they’re using . . . I know these people, they’re out there,
32 they exist right now. They’re using they and them pronouns, they are talking about their
33 differing identities in relation to gender and that they don’t have just one. But it kind of
34 depends on the context. And so, I’m quite excited about what that might mean and I see that . .
35 . I guess what it means for me is that I don’t want to sit and vilify in our political conversations,
36 our conversations around faith, whatever it is I don’t want to vilify the heterosexual people, the
37 cis people, as being the bad guys because they’re not. We’ve got that . . . if we can’t figure out
38 how to say we with them, then we’re not going to be able to do we within this conference.

- 1 AJ: Wow. Aidan, I am just so blown away by your generosity, by your insights, which come from
2 experience, and your willingness to share that with me – and us, today. So, I know I've got to
3 get you on a flight.
- 4 AK: Ah, yes.
- 5 AJ: So you can head back to the west coast. Thank you so much for sharing – until we meet again,
6 my friend.
- 7 AK: Absolutely. Thank you.
- 8 AJ: Any last . . . maybe I should do this, any last thing you want to say that I may have missed?
- 9 AK: There's so much to say. I can't do that, but I guess I would love to just share . . . yesterday was
10 my birthday.
- 11 AJ: Happy birthday.
- 12 AK: And I'm also at Creating Change and I got to be around so many people that I love. I did this, I
13 did that, I did my workshop, I got to hang with these folks, I got to hang out with some buddies
14 that I never get to hang out with – all in one group.
- 15 AJ: I heard you were hanging out with the magnificent Kylar Broadus.
- 16 AK: Right, and Willie Wilkinson and Theo Cotton and just so rich and what an amazing conversation
17 we had. One of them forewent an opportunity to go have some fun, other types of fun, just to
18 stay because our conversation was so good. But then I came back and I stopped in the lobby on
19 my floor before going into my room, I didn't want to wake up my hotel mate, and I was looking
20 at something and a person was sitting there, this had to have been almost 2am, a conference
21 goer – young African American, shy. I could tell he was a very shy person, but he said hello. And
22 so I said hello and the conversation that we had was so amazing and we got to go to this really
23 great, hugely powerful place, and intimate at the same time. And he told me this experience
24 he'd had in a workshop where he said . . . I said, "Well, how did that workshop go?" And he
25 said, "Well, actually I didn't engage in it very much because I recognized that my presence, or
26 my participation, in it could be triggering for other people." And we moved the conversation on
27 from there and then at the end, after we'd had this amazing conversation, I just said, "You know
28 what? Don't ever do that again – you get in that circle and you let your light shine. If your
29 existence, if you check out because it triggers somebody else, that's not your responsibility –
30 they need to manage that for themselves, you need to show up and let your beauty come out."
31 And that is the highlight of my conference.
- 32 AJ: On that note, no more questions – we're gone, peace.
- 33 AK: Thank you.
- 34