

Cal Evoniuk  
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins  
Interviewer

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

October 15, 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 Cal Evoniuk -CE

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5 AJ: So, hello. My name is Andrea Jenkins and I am the oral historian for the Transgender Oral  
6 History Project. Today is October 15, 2016, and I am at North Dakota State University at the  
7 Dismantling Walls Conference and I am sitting her today with CJ . . .

8 CE: Cal.

9 AJ: Cal, I'm sorry.

10 CE: CJ's chilling over there.

11 AJ: OK, CJ is chilling over there. CJ is up next, but this is Cal. How are you doing, Cal?

12 CE: I'm doing really good.

13 AJ: So, Cal, state your name, spell your name and your gender as how you identify today and your  
14 gender assigned at birth, and your pronouns that you use.

15 CE: I'm Cal, C-a-l. I identify as male so he/him pronouns and I was assigned female at birth.

16 AJ: How do you spell your last name?

17 CE: Evoniuk. E-v-o-n-i-u-k.

18 AJ: All right, thanks Cal. So, wow, where are you from?

19 CE: I am from Belfield, North Dakota.

20 AJ: Belfield, North Dakota. What's Belfield like?

21 CE: It is a very, very little, tiny town in the southwest corner of North Dakota. Very little tiny rural  
22 farming community.

23 AJ: Yeah, did you grow up on a farm?

24 CE: No, I grew up in town but you grow up around farms, you kind of grow up on a farm even if you  
25 don't live on one – everybody is on a farm.

26 AJ: Right.

27 CE: Even when you're not.

28 AJ: It's just one big farm.

29 CE: Yeah, everything is a big old farm.

30 AJ: So I take it you went to school there and everything in Belfield?

31 CE: Yeah, it was a K-12 school so I went there up until my sophomore year and then I moved to a  
32 slightly larger school.

- 1 AJ: Oh, so you went to one school for . . .
- 2 CE: Most of my life, yeah.
- 3 AJ: Was there any bullying, harassment or anything that you experienced in school?
- 4 CE: I never personally experienced anything because I was a little terrified of coming out so I kind of  
5 kept silent about it.
- 6 AJ: Yeah? Very understandable.
- 7 CE: But there was a lot of . . . there was always kind of the whispers and like people using . . . like  
8 the jokes about various sexual identities and gender identities and those things being used as a  
9 joke and as an insult, which kind of scared a person into the closet a little more. So I was always  
10 very aware that the way that I felt about my gender wasn't normal, according to the very  
11 conservative population that I grew up in.
- 12 AJ: Wow. When is the first time you became aware of your different gender identity from how you  
13 were assigned at birth?
- 14 CE: I think I've always kind of been aware of it a little bit. I remember when I was a little kid telling  
15 my mom, "I feel like a boy." And even growing up playing games with my friends I was always  
16 like the boy character in the games that we played, but I never really had a word for it until I was  
17 14. I was watching a TV show and there was a transgender character and I was like, "That's how  
18 I feel, that's a thing." So, kind of knowing all my life but not having a way to put it into words.
- 19 AJ: The language.
- 20 CE: Yeah.
- 21 AJ: Wow. Did you come out in high school? Let me ask you this, have you ever had any other  
22 identity other than girl? Right? That was your sort of identity that was placed on you and then  
23 trans. Were there identities in-between that?
- 24 CE: In high school I came out as gay, as a gay female.
- 25 AJ: So lesbian.
- 26 CE: Yeah, I identified as a lesbian for a while but it didn't feel exactly like that was what was right  
27 because I felt like my attraction to girls was a boy attracted to girls, I didn't feel like female. So it  
28 was always kind of a weird thing for me when I would date people because they would see me  
29 as, "Oh, I'm dating a girl," and I would be like . . . on the inside it's not how I . . . no.
- 30 AJ: Wow, do you still identify as lesbian too?
- 31 CE: No, now I identify as a straight male.
- 32 AJ: There you go. Heterosexual.
- 33 CE: Yeah, it's a weird thing to think about because I'm . . . I'm straight now, it's a weird concept  
34 because that was another thing that I grew up not feeling right about. As being assigned female  
35 I felt like I shouldn't like girls and when I was like, "Oh, but I feel like a boy, so am I straight, am I

- 1            gay? Where do I fall in this?” And now that I’ve come to terms with my gender identity I’m like,  
2            “OK, this is where . . . this is my little . . . this is where I’m at on this thing with the labels.”
- 3    AJ:        Nice. So, we were talking a little bit earlier, when did you come out?
- 4    CE:        I came out last Thursday – literally. This is a very new process for me. I’ve been thinking about  
5            this for . . . I attended a conference last year during my freshman year and they keynote speaker  
6            was a trans man, Ryan Sallans.
- 7    AJ:        What’s his name?
- 8    CE:        Ryan Sallans.
- 9    AJ:        Ryan . . .
- 10   CE:        Sallans. S-a-l-l-a-n-s.
- 11   AJ:        OK.
- 12   CE:        He was kind of the first trans guy that I had met where I was like . . . I can feel this way and come  
13            out OK on the other end of it.
- 14   AJ:        Sure.
- 15   CE:        It was kind of what I needed, my little push to send me in the right direction. This is something  
16            I’ve been working on and talking to people a little bit about for almost a year now. Last  
17            Thursday I was like, “OK, it’s time.” So I told my family, I told my friends and I’m out now.
- 18   AJ:        How did your family experience that?
- 19   CE:        They were . . . they’re a little shaky on it.
- 20   AJ:        You’re still alive, they didn’t kill you.
- 21   CE:        Right, yes. Mostly positive. They’re kind of like, “We don’t get it, but we will be here to support  
22            you.” And I’m totally willing to explain it to them and sit down with them and say . . . I’m willing  
23            to help them get to that point of understanding.
- 24   AJ:        Oh, that is so awesome. Because we know the research says that people with supportive  
25            families are less likely to be murdered, less likely to be homeless, less likely to be unemployed,  
26            and less likely to drop out of school, and all of those things.
- 27   CE:        Yeah, I’ve very fortunate in that department. I’ve had a lot more support than I initially thought  
28            I would – so it’s been positive.
- 29   AJ:        Well, being out less than a week you are very articulate around this issue. Thank you for  
30            sharing.
- 31   CE:        No problem.
- 32   AJ:        Is there one thing that you would want to share that I didn’t ask?

- 1 CE: I think another aspect of my life, this has kind of been particularly . . . it's been very present in  
2 my life. I'm an RA here on campus so I'm working with students, I'm working with other  
3 students, and I have these residents that I want them to know that there is nothing wrong with  
4 identifying this way because if . . . if I'm out there and I'm being who I am and I'm living my life  
5 the way I feel I should be living it, then other people are less afraid to come out also. I'm just  
6 trying to do my best to be a good support system for others who need that. That's just kind of  
7 the impact I want to have. This part of my life is important, I guess.
- 8 AJ: That's incredible, Cal. Thank you so much. Good luck on this journey that's just beginning for  
9 you.
- 10 CE: Thank you.
- 11 AJ: All right. Bye-bye.
- 12 CE: Cool.