

Hunta Williams
Narrator

Andrea Jenkins
Interviewer

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

July 18, 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 Hunta Williams -HW

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5 AJ: So, good afternoon. My name is Andrea Jenkins. I am the oral historian for the Transgender
6 Oral History Project at the University of Minnesota. Today is July 18, 2016, and I'm actually on
7 the campus of the University of Minnesota, in the Anderson Library, and I have the honor and
8 pleasure today to interview Hunta Williams. Hello, Hunta.

9 HW: Hi, I'm very fortunate to be invited here today and I've been looking forward to this.

10 AJ: How are you feeling today?

11 HW: I feel a little bit nervous right now, but excited. I'm very honored and happy, just being in the
12 deaf community and as a transgender deaf person, this is really an inspiring and, I think, also an
13 important project. I'm very happy to be here to share my experience, have people look and see
14 what my experience has been. I think it's going to be a real joy.

15 AJ: I'm deeply happy that you're a part of this project, Hunta. So how about if we start, can you just
16 spell your name . . . state your name, spell your name, and then tell me what is your gender
17 identity today, what was your gender assigned at birth, and what pronouns do you use?

18 HW: OK. My full name is H-u-n-t-a, Hunta, my last name is Williams, W-i-l-l-i-a-m-s. And that's my
19 name sign that I just showed you. The pronouns I prefer are he and him. The gender identity I
20 am currently is a man. I was born female, or assigned a female label at birth, and through that
21 experience it's been very interesting.

22 AJ: Yeah, well we hope to get to talk about some of that interesting stuff. Hunta, what is the first
23 thing you remember in life? It doesn't have to have anything to do with your gender identity,
24 although if it does that's fine, but just tell me what is the first thing you remember.

25 HW: The first thing I remember really. . . I think it was feeling different, like internally. There was just
26 a difference, not like outside and how people looked at me, it was just internally different and I
27 don't know what that was. I think just being a young person, very young, and just feeling like I
28 didn't necessarily fit but that feeling kept going and I think youth often times feel like they don't
29 fit but then I want to say four or five years ago I met a person that identified as a trans person
30 and why I met them, I don't know. I got to understand that I was feeling the same thing, but
31 there was nothing wrong with me. This difference I was feeling didn't mean there was
32 something wrong with me, but when I met this person and we got to converse and I realized
33 how many things I had in common with them and that feeling of like not fitting – my inside and
34 my outside didn't match. Dressing as a male or walking strong and tough, it didn't seem like the
35 female thing and this kind of crossing your legs and the things that females tend to do. I think
36 my emotions tend to be more male and that was my entire childhood experience and so that's
37 how I was raised and that's how I felt, but I didn't know about my identity at that time. And so
38 as I conversed with this person, I really felt like this – this is exactly what I've been feeling for so
39 long. That was my first feeling, that's the first thing I remember.

- 1 AJ: About how old were you when you starting having these feelings?
- 2 HW: I want to say age 6, maybe 5 or 6.
- 3 AJ: Where did you grow up?
- 4 HW: I grew up in New York City, in Brooklyn. Born and raised.
- 5 AJ: We're Brooklynite, we're Brooklynite. Wow.
- 6 HW: I love that city, I love that city.
- 7 AJ: What brought you to Minnesota?
- 8 HW: I grew up there, I moved here I want to say six years ago, moved here to Minneapolis. Started
9 school to become a chef. I went to the Art Institute of Minnesota, that's in downtown
10 Minneapolis – that's where I went to school. So I graduated from there after about four and a
11 half years and I was the first deaf person to graduate from there.
- 12 AJ: Oh, wow . . . congratulations. That's awesome. What do you like to cook? What's your favorite
13 thing to cook?
- 14 HW: Jamaican food, like soul food – that kind of thing. International food. I'm sorry, I don't really
15 like American food – sorry.
- 16 AJ: Is your family Caribbean?
- 17 HW: Yes, all my family are from the Caribbean – from my grandma. A lot of respect for my grandma,
18 she did pass away. She died while I was in high school, before I graduated she died. She's the
19 one that taught me everything about cooking, about cooking from scratch, she taught me how
20 to cook outside, how to make the fire pits, how to make some of that Jamaican food and just so
21 much inspiration came from her. Honestly, she was a slave a long time ago and her history, her
22 heritage that was really the inspiration for me and that's how I got going with food and it kind of
23 took off from there. The love of food and passion for food, yeah – a really rich experience for
24 me.
- 25 AJ: OK, she couldn't have been a slave, right? She was a servant maybe.
- 26 HW: Yeah, a long time ago – her family heritage.
- 27 AJ: OK.
- 28 HW: No, no, no – she wasn't that old. My grandma . . . like great-great-grandmothers were slaves
29 and they actually ran away and they ran to New York City from Atlanta. I don't know when that
30 . . . ever since I was born that's what they taught me was food, so I've got to thank all my
31 grandmas for that.
- 32 AJ: What was it like growing up in Brooklyn as a child who felt different from other kids?
- 33 HW: Well, I was definitely isolated being the only deaf kid in the family, everyone else in the family
34 could hear. Most of the kids they would play and everything and I was usually off by myself just
35 kind of observing. I did have one cousin that would play with me – they would have a doll . . .

1 was it GI Joe? I can't remember. It was like GI Joe, those soldiers. We would play . . . they
2 would also have Barbie and Ken, whatever those are, back in the day. I'd just destroy them and
3 then throw them back. Some of the boys would play ball, basketball or something, and that's
4 what I felt like growing up – that's what I wanted to do. I went to a deaf school, once I got into
5 the deaf school there was a lot of boys and less girls so there was just . . . and I didn't fit with the
6 girls, I fit with the boys. I would chat with them and we would talk about basketball and we'd
7 talk about Army stuff, different kinds of stuff, and that's where I felt the strongest. I felt like
8 running around and biking with those boys and if I got hurt or fell down or something like that, I
9 didn't cry. I was a tough kid and I went with it. I used to make fun of the girls a lot, they were
10 like sissies to me – they'd cry like little babies. But that was back in the day.

11 AJ: Did the boys respect you?

12 HW: Right away, right away – I got that respect right away. They called me homeboy or my brother
13 or, "What's up? What's happening? How you doing?" I felt a strong connection with them. I
14 think that respect feeling was there and if I felt disrespected they were there for support. Yeah,
15 it was always there and that was my experience growing up. Some of the bad boys . . . there
16 was two groups, right? There was the good boys or the guys that do all right and then the bad
17 boys, so to speak. Bad boys and the . . . in terms of the way I define it, the good guys might kind
18 of tease each other and rib each other a little bit, but the bad boys, they're a little bit more
19 harmful and hurtful – bullies, if you will. So I was definitely in the good guy group, not so much
20 with the bad boys. In Brooklyn there is definitely two groups like that.

21 AJ: Right. What part of Brooklyn?

22 HW: In New York City, just Brooklyn in general. It was the south . . . if you ride the train . . .

23 AJ: Bedford-Stuyvesant, Flatbush, Jamaica . . . well, Jamaica that's in Queens.

24 HW: Yeah, that's in Queens. Let me see, Flatbush . . . what was the other one?

25 AJ: Park Slope.

26 HW: Pennsylvania Avenue, Cosgrove Avenue. But really, at that time Brooklyn was a dangerous place
27 . . . back then it was rough. Now it's better, it's a lot better. But back then it was rough.

28 AJ: A little more gentrification coming in now, huh?

29 HW: Yeah.

30 AJ: Starbucks, Whole Foods.

31 HW: Yeah, but back in the day – no, we didn't have that. There were no playgrounds – basketball
32 maybe. Every once in a while you'd find a corner store, maybe there would be food on the
33 corner or something like that, but it was 24-hours . . . corner, corner. I remember that
34 neighborhood. A group of us boys we'd go to KFC – maybe \$2 or \$3 for fried chicken and we'd
35 do that all the time, all night. We'd just kind of . . . being pretty mischievous. It was fun though.
36 Now I think you have to kind of back off and say, "OK, that's not my life anymore."

37 AJ: Do you have a lot of brothers and sisters, or any brothers and sisters?

- 1 HW: I'm the oldest one, I have one brother and one sister. I'm the oldest and then the second oldest
2 is my brother and then I've got a baby sister.
- 3 AJ: So Hunta, when was the first time . . . and I know you said like maybe six years ago you met this
4 person, but when was the first time that you really knew that you were different from all other
5 little girls?
- 6 HW: High school. When I really knew, I think it was middle school but I didn't say anything until high
7 school. Back then I think there was a lot of discrimination, a lot of negativity. "You've got to
8 dress like a girl, you've got to dress like a girl." There's a lot of discrimination, a lot of criticism –
9 a lot of negativity. With being Black and white and the whole kind of segregation of that and
10 then obviously there's some discrimination against deaf people and then there's Black
11 discrimination and then coming out as a woman, obviously I got discrimination there. And then
12 transgender discrimination . . . I didn't come out until high school and that's when I kind of came
13 out and decided, "Hey, I feel that something is wrong with me," and my family was like, "Wait,
14 there's something wrong with you? You were born fine, you've got to accept who you are and
15 stop with this thinking . . . you're being silly or you're being kind of ridiculous, stop with these
16 silly thoughts about your gender identity. You've got to think about and focus on school and
17 you've got to get into school, you've got to dress like a woman." That was all I was getting from
18 my family time and again and it was hard to put up with but I did. I think my grandma already
19 knew, I think she already suspected. She knew that inside I was definitely identifying as a male.
20 She didn't say anything but my grandma was just always trying to . . . she gave me love and took
21 care of me and stuff like that, but I think she knew. I think she was the one person that knew.
22 All the grandparents knew.
- 23 AJ: Was your mom and dad in the household too?
- 24 HW: No. My dad wasn't in and . . . my mom and I didn't get along most . . . really, it was just me and
25 my grandma and my dad wasn't involved.
- 26 AJ: OK. At the top of this video I should have mentioned that James and Steven are the interpreters
27 that are helping Hunta and I conduct this interview so I just want to make sure to acknowledge
28 that they are here and that they're helping us out.
- 29 HW: No problem.
- 30 AJ: So you grew up primarily with your grandmother. Is she still alive?
- 31 HW: No, she died. She died the day I graduated from high school.
- 32 AJ: Wow, I'm so sorry. So do your brother and sister know about your gender transition?
- 33 HW: I actually just told them three months ago.
- 34 AJ: Is that right?
- 35 HW: Yes.
- 36 AJ: How did they respond?

- 1 HW: You have to understand, I hadn't told my mom yet. About two months ago I told my brother
2 and sister about going through the transition and they said something about the way I was
3 dressing. I said, "No, no, you have to understand, I am transitioning from a woman to a man
4 completely, I'm not just talking about my outer dress or appearance, I'm talking about my entire
5 being." So then they were like, "Wait a minute, you're going to change different parts of you?
6 You're going to have things removed, etc.?" "Hang on, wait a minute, let's back up here." "You
7 now have another sister," or excuse me, "You don't have another sister anymore, you now have
8 another brother." My sister was like, "Oh, I have another brother? I have another brother –
9 what?" And then my brother was responding, "What do you mean I have another brother?" I
10 said, "Let me explain it to you." So I had to wait for them to catch on and I was telling them
11 through a video relay interpreter so it was kind of a little cumbersome at first and they said,
12 "Can I ask you a question?" I said, "Sure, ask any questions you want." "Do you like women
13 now or do you like men?" My brother actually wants to transition from a male to a female now
14 that I've come out to him.
- 15 AJ: Your brother?
- 16 HW: Exactly.
- 17 AJ: Mind blown!
- 18 HW: So I guess the two of us have the same . . . we've gone on the same path. I'm five or six years
19 older, we went along this path – same path growing up, I think, but he didn't really come out or
20 share or talk about anything or share with anyone. He saw a lot of things growing up, he saw a
21 lot of people that were gay and how they were abused and bullied and some of them actually
22 murdered or killed, and so he knew to keep everything inside and not to . . . we both did. Don't
23 share what we know because we're already dealing with our African American heritage which
24 we didn't want to come out as that. So him transitioning to a woman, he kind of rebelled
25 against that at first. Most people are born the appropriate gender but some places . . . in some
26 situations you're born the wrong gender and you have to think of what it is to do. So he
27 informed me that . . . I informed him I was becoming a man, so he had all these questions about
28 how I went through that. And so, we had this very in-depth conversation in person later, but
29 going through the interpreter was really cumbersome at first. He said he wanted to become a
30 woman but he was actually really afraid to go through the process. I told him I understood so
31 now our sister just said, "As long as you stay the identity you are, I love you. Whoever you are, I
32 love you no matter what." So she's been very supportive of both of us. About two or three
33 weeks ago I tried telling my mom, but mom . . . she didn't really . . . my mom, she didn't have a
34 mother/daughter relationship, a mother/son relationship . . . we didn't really have any type of
35 relationship whatsoever actually. That's the hardest part for me to tell her . . . she didn't want
36 to hear or deal with the criticism, I didn't want to hear that from her. So, I told her what I felt
37 and she said, "Huh, OK. So all along you've been wanting to be a boy?" I said, "Yeah, actually
38 that's what has been going on, that is my identity is and I feel like my brain and my emotions are
39 finally catching up with my body." It's been hard for me but at the same time she's accepting
40 me as her son. She is calling me Hunta, which is great.
- 41 AJ: That's awesome.

- 1 HW: She obviously wanted to learn some more and learn to be more respectful of me. I said, “You
2 can be respectful of me but you have to be respectful of transgender people in general.”
- 3 AJ: So you’re educating.
- 4 HW: A little bit, just a little bit. We’re doing baby steps.
- 5 AJ: Baby steps.
- 6 HW: I teach her a little bit more each day – how to say the right word, how to say the right gender.
7 Before she called me “she,” and I said, “No mom, he – I’m a he now, not she, he. Let’s get the
8 pronouns right.” So she’s trying to . . . I wasn’t being disrespectful back at her or being angry
9 that she used the wrong gender, she’s been calling me she my entire life and I don’t expect her
10 to change overnight to call me the right gender immediately. So I’ve just got to give her time
11 and a little space and teach her more and more about transgender people and the pronouns to
12 use and you just have to give them time. It could take up to a year before they recognize and
13 start using proper pronouns appropriately – nothing is going to happen overnight.
- 14 AJ: Wow.
- 15 HW: That’s my opinion anyway.
- 16 AJ: This is fascinating. I’ve interviewed . . . you’re the 90th person that I’ve interviewed so far and I
17 have . . .
- 18 HW: I’m #90? Wow, that’s really cool.
- 19 AJ: But I don’t think I’ve talked to anybody who has had a transgender sibling so that’s kind of
20 fascinating. So Hunta, to the extent that you feel comfortable, what medical interventions have
21 you undergone up until this point or do you have plans to do any medical interventions? You
22 don’t have to answer that question if you don’t want to.
- 23 HW: Sure, I would love to share that part. About two or three weeks ago there was a big deaf
24 community event and somebody asked me about my transition process and I said, “Sure.” First,
25 I started with hormone injections with testosterone.
- 26 AJ: How long?
- 27 HW: This month, July 18th will be one year.
- 28 AJ: Wow.
- 29 HW: Then I had a double mastectomy on March 2nd, actually just this past March I had a double
30 mastectomy and I plan to do what they call bottom surgery at some point. That one is a little bit
31 tougher for me because I have to contact some other states – like California, Canada or Florida,
32 Texas. There is only a few places that do the bottom surgery for transitioning from female to
33 male. I wish they did that here. So I’m going to fly to these different locations, get some
34 consultation done, meet the different doctors, and all of this is out-of-pocket expenses.
- 35 AJ: Yeah, that’s a lot of money.

- 1 HW: Someone said . . . there was one doctor who would do the bottom surgery, he just happened to
2 be here at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester . . . he didn't want me to be his first patient.
- 3 AJ: Why do you think that is?
- 4 HW: I don't know if he was worried about being embarrassed or ending up being in the newspaper
5 being the first patient. I didn't know if he would be overly demonstrative, like, "Oh, look, this is
6 my first patient." I want this to be a private thing. I want somebody who has been doing the
7 bottom surgery for quite some time and knows what it is that they're doing. I want to be able to
8 meet the doctor, talk about the procedure without having to go through the transgender culture
9 and all this other stuff. Being the first patient with this other person I would have to do all this
10 back fill and education.
- 11 AJ: So you didn't want to be the first person?
- 12 HW: Right.
- 13 AJ: OK, got it. Wow, thank you for sharing that. You've done quite extensive medical interventions
14 up to this point.
- 15 HW: Yes. It's tough, especially dealing with the insurance companies. That was another issue.
- 16 AJ: Having done that, do you have any . . . is there anything that you would have done differently up
17 to this point?
- 18 HW: Hmmm. Before I started doing the hormone injections, I did a lot of questioning of people who
19 had gone through the double mastectomy, gone through the hormone treatments and got their
20 reactions for what it is they went through. So I did a lot of research, I did a lot of research to see
21 what insurance covered. I asked people if they were happy when they had their breasts
22 removed. Having the identity doesn't mean you have to get rid of everything or add everything.
23 Identity is not about the physical attributes but more of the person themselves so I wanted to
24 ask a few questions before I did any medical interventions. The reason why I did decide to do
25 the medical interventions is I didn't want to feel remorseful about having done anything before I
26 went and did it. So when I made the decision to go in and ask the doctors for the hormone
27 treatments, I hadn't decided about the mastectomies yet – I wasn't sure about that part of it yet
28 because I didn't know what it would feel like. Did I have an emotional attachment to my
29 breasts? So when I started the hormone shots I realized there was a big difference and my body
30 changed. My voice, being deaf, I didn't recognize it myself because I couldn't hear it but people
31 were saying that my voice, when I would use it – that the tone would be lower and lower and
32 lower when I started the testosterone treatments. So I decided to ask some people about the
33 breast surgery and the bottom surgery as well. So when I decided to ask these questions about
34 the top surgery, I asked them why did you do that? "I didn't like all this extra stuff here, it
35 wasn't me," is the common response I got, they wanted to be flat like a man. I wanted to have
36 them removed so I asked some questions. How was this going to affect me? I had a lot of
37 questions I was asking, I did a lot of soul searching myself. I did that for almost a year before I
38 made the decision to have the mastectomy. So then I had the double mastectomy. I was
39 actually really afraid, of course – once they're gone, how was I going to look? What was my
40 chest going to look like? I was really, really thankful though for the experience, having gone

- 1 through it now. Dr. Buckley was my surgeon. He or she helped me really understand what the
2 specifics were and what was going to be successful and how it may or may not feel. I was really
3 nervous at the time, I was really excited at the same time. When I finally went back to the
4 doctor to have the surgery done, I had these bandages and when I had the bandages off . . . I
5 removed the bandages and looked in the mirror and went, "Yes! Finally." I was so happy. I
6 finally saw myself.
- 7 AJ: Wow. Did you used to wear binders?
- 8 HW: Yes, before surgery I used . . . there was these tan bandages I would stretch over my breasts,
9 those were really painful. So I started looking . . . I met this one group here, a transgender
10 group. They had a meeting and I met some different people and they were showing different
11 binders that could be used. That was completely new to me, I didn't do a lot of research about
12 binders or packers for the bottom. I didn't know about all this stuff that was available. I was
13 like, "Oh, this is all available?" My mind was opened to try a variety of different things. So I
14 tried on the binders, you know. This was before surgery . . . I was like, "Huh." I still wasn't
15 satisfied with the binders, it just wasn't me. When I would take it off, the breast would still be
16 there – they didn't match with what was going on in my head. So finally when I took off, I can
17 swim without my shirt on, I don't have to worry about putting on a bra or anything like that. I
18 am finally . . . I love women, don't misunderstand me – I love women, but the breasts were not
19 for me though.
- 20 AJ: Speaking of women, who do you date? Men? Women?
- 21 HW: I date women, sometimes I end up dating transgender women – those who are going through
22 the process themselves.
- 23 AJ: Have you ever dated a man?
- 24 HW: No. Well, that's a good question. I don't think so.
- 25 AJ: I don't know – a lot of transgender men, once they start on hormones and have breast surgery
26 realize that they actually enjoy being with men as well as women.
- 27 HW: Yes, I can feel that. For me, when I was a woman before I started the shots, I wouldn't consider
28 myself straight before I did the transition. I don't use labels – I'm just Hunta, I like men and
29 women. No matter who they are, it depends on whether or not I like them.
- 30 AJ: Got it.
- 31 HW: I fear, in some ways, if I date men people are going to start calling me gay and I don't feel gay.
32 So there's a lot of emotions involved when it comes to relationships for me. It's harder for me
33 to understand all the emotions inside that. "Oh, you're a transgender man," but I already loved
34 him before they transitioned, so now that they're transitioned does that mean that I don't love
35 them anymore? It's harder for me, I think, to understand what the emotions are going through
36 this process.
- 37 AJ: Are you in a relationship right now?
- 38 HW: Yes, I have a partner.

1 AJ: How long?

2 HW: That's complicated. We were really good friends for a long time but we've been in a
3 relationship for the last four months but we've been friends for quite some time.

4 AJ: OK, nice. Very nice. Hunta, so you have walked through this world as a Black female and now
5 you are and you're being perceived as a Black male in this culture and society. What's different
6 for you now?

7 HW: It's such a big difference for me. As a Black woman, I experienced a lot of discrimination – as a
8 Black woman. It's hard to explain but as a Black man, it's almost like a triple threat of
9 discrimination – or triple the discrimination, especially here in Minnesota. In Minnesota, we
10 have a lot of Black culture – we have Black women, we have Black men. For example, in New
11 York City where I lived, everyone was pretty much the same, perceived the same, but how they
12 looked to the outside world was very different and how they reacted to the outside world,
13 depending on if you are a Black man or a Black woman there specifically when dealing with the
14 police. I'm not sure if I've even answered your question.

15 AJ: Well, you said that it's different. I'm really curious about these police interactions though
16 because as being a deaf person, a lot of what happens with police is vocal. They tell you to stop
17 or put your hands up. As a deaf person you may not always recognize their commands right
18 away.

19 HW: Yeah, I've been stopped a few times. I've experienced that a few times. When I was going to
20 school, I was walking downtown Minneapolis. I was going through some kind of construction
21 and a police officer came up to me – I didn't know what to do or what happened or what it is
22 that I did, so they decided to grab me and throw me down on the floor. He started talking at
23 me. The police had a Taser, I think – the Taser wasn't on but they had it out and I screamed and
24 I said, "I can't hear you." I let out this guttural scream, I was very aggressive and so they, of
25 course, arrested me because I was being aggressive. They put me in their car. I waited until
26 someone came and I still said, "I can't hear you." And so they looked at me as a Black man and
27 then the thing that they looked at the most was the deafness – and then they looked at Black
28 and then they looked at man. So that's how they perceived me. If I was hearing, of course, they
29 would have looked at the blackness first. If I was a hearing Black man the thing that they would
30 have focused on the most was the color of my skin. And once they realized that I was deaf, I
31 was so angry and just so hurt.

32 AJ: Did you go to jail?

33 HW: No. Another man came who knew some sign language. I told him I was deaf and the police
34 explained to me . . . you know, he can hear, he screamed. And he told the police I was hurt, I
35 hurt, because of what they were doing to me. I have a right to scream if you're hurting me,
36 that's how much pain I was in when you threw me down to the ground. It was a hard cement
37 floor that you threw me on. So I screamed, I have a right to scream because you hurt me. So I
38 got an interpreter there and they asked if I wanted an ambulance or anything like that. They
39 asked me if I was going to press charges against the police for what they did to me and I didn't
40 see them, there was nothing going on – I was just walking outside enjoying the day. I had just
41 left class and I was enjoying the day. So that experience really frightened me – being deaf, and

- 1 then Black, and then finally male. They always see the blackness first until they realize that I'm
2 deaf and then it's deafness, blackness, and then my maleness.
- 3 AJ: Wow, that's fascinating. I'll make a note of that – deafness, blackness, and maleness. So, has
4 there been a specific moment or person that was pivotal in your transition, Hunta?
- 5 HW: I think my . . . as a deaf transgender person, there is an interpreter named Alex.
- 6 AJ: Oh yeah, Alex Nelson.
- 7 HW: Nelson – yes. He really inspired me, Alex really inspired me. Just amazingly supportive person,
8 great friend. He's very well known all over. I'm sure you've probably met Alex.
- 9 AJ: Oh I know Alex very well. I had a crush on Alex a long time ago. He's beautiful.
- 10 HW: And he's the one that really got through to me, got through to my heart. His experience, his
11 support, his empowerment – especially in this community, especially for a young person and as
12 a transgender person. He's the one who really helped me go through it.
- 13 AJ: Hmm, wow.
- 14 HW: Yeah, and especially as a deaf person because I met him and I had just moved here, I was going
15 to school and trans deaf people . . . there weren't any at the time. No deaf trans, at least at the
16 time. So I got involved in some of the hearing community activities – sure, yeah. There are
17 hearing transgendered people, but there wasn't anybody in the deaf community at that time –
18 at least not people that were out, nobody had come out at that time. So I think there was a lot
19 of fear – being deaf and then being a Black man or female, that's a lot to handle also along with
20 the religion aspect and family and all that stuff. I got it, I understood that fear. I totally got it.
21 So Alex was the one that I met, we chatted, he helped me through the deafness part of it, as
22 gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans – in that community, the GLBT community, but also I was able to put
23 aside some of that stuff and focus on the trans, where are the deaf trans people? That was
24 some of my fear and I think trying to decide to kind of ignore that and just say, "Hey, I'm here
25 and I can get support, come out as you are," and stuff like that. That was my pivotal moment.
- 26 AJ: So have you found trans deaf community in this area?
- 27 HW: No, not yet. I think I'm aware of people but not necessarily them coming out. I think maybe if I
28 see them . . . I've had people ask me about the deaf trans experience and ask me certain
29 questions. I've gotten a lot of questions – I've had questions about hormones, I've had
30 questions about the top surgery. I've responded and said, "Hey are you considering to be a
31 trans?" I just kind of leave it alone at that. I don't want to put any pressure or any kind of
32 cajoling, just kind of letting people be who they are and in their time. But, really – I'm open to
33 conversation and that's fine with me.
- 34 AJ: You're like a pioneer, Hunta. You're making space for other deaf trans people to see that there
35 is some possibilities. That's awesome.
- 36 HW: Yeah. And I'm looking forward to that. I've started signing, working with a family tree clinic
37 talking about trans issues in using ASL and there's one person there that is doing the close
38 captioning and we're going to put the ASL video . . . I think it was just about two weeks ago we

1 put it out. And so tomorrow we'll start talking about hormone injections, top surgery, bottom
2 surgery – we'll start kind of explaining what that experience is like and what the process looks
3 like and try and disseminate that stuff and get it out into the community. My goal is to be an
4 advocate, a Black trans man advocate. I think trying to get this information out there and get it
5 out to the greater community is really what my goal is. And then, get it outside of Minnesota
6 and keep going and saying, "If you're here and if you're deaf . . ." For me, deafness is my
7 heritage, it's my culture and feeling that that is my number one identity, that's who I am first.

8 AJ: I can't wait to read your book. You've got to write it.

9 HW: I'm not so good at writing English, I'd be better at writing at an ASL book.

10 AJ: Hunta, what do you think the relationship is between the trans community and the gay, lesbian,
11 bisexual community?

12 HW: There's been a few times when I've had to answer that with other people. Are you ready for
13 this? I think for the GLB community and the trans community, I think it's GLBT . . . I get that, I
14 get that that's what the label is, or LGBT. As a trans person and a fully transitioned man now,
15 like before I was a lesbian and I was in the lesbian world. I get that. And now to transition over
16 to the trans world, I look back and I go, "Wow." I feel like trans people get ostracized in some
17 regards. The support and all that stuff, yes – I think there is some of that and I get it. But, once I
18 transitioned I was like, "Where's your help now?" I support you through gay marriage and
19 getting your marriage license and equality and all this stuff and all these opportunities, but now
20 where is ours? Like first off, our identity, you know – for insurance, for health insurance, for
21 going through transition surgeries, gender construction, the surgeries alone. Many of the issues
22 in our trans communities are . . . we need their help, but right now that relationship if for events
23 and it's like it's great, it's fine, but then where are you after that? Where is that support,
24 supporting us? Like that coalition, that collaboration, is gone it seems like when it really
25 matters. Where is it? And so right now I feel . . . wow, I've had both experiences. I look at both
26 communities and it's hard. I don't think they realize that both need to work together. We have
27 to have a relationship – period. It's not like just because we're in the name and it's by name
28 only – no, I don't care about the name. It's about this group, these groups of people – they
29 should be collaborating, they should be together not apart – period. And that's what I believe. I
30 don't know if other people look at it and they don't think the same, like, "Well, I don't feel like
31 the same as trans people." Well I feel like that is disrespectful. I feel like that is shunning us. I
32 think that's something that we need to work on, we have to work on that. I think it's people in
33 the leadership roles in the trans community and the community all over – we have trans here
34 and trans there, come on out and help us. Help us. "I've transitioned, I'm on with my life, I'm
35 not going to come back and help this culture." No, no, no you have to come back, you have to
36 come back with us, support us and still be a part of us even after your transition. I think that's
37 what is disappointing – to see what we've all gone through. I'm through it, I'm done in a matter
38 of ways but I'm not finished with it all. You think about your experiences as a trans person and
39 empowering others in the future that haven't transitioned yet maybe. That's what we need, we
40 need help, we can't do it alone – they can't do it alone. There are people out there screaming
41 for help.

1 AJ: That's why you've got to write your book, Hunta. So what have been some of the more positive
2 aspects of you coming out as being transgender? What has made you happy?

3 HW: Hmmm, some of the positives. There's been a lot of positives. I don't struggle anymore. When
4 I was trying to hold it in as a child growing up with my parents and people, having to be a yes
5 person and then finally when I'm 18 and 19 and getting out, still struggling but then finally I
6 don't feel like I have to struggle anymore. I feel like that weight is off my shoulders, I am free –
7 free. What I've gone through is done. The discrimination part – yeah, it's still there. But finally,
8 I can speak out and I feel like that's a positive. The things that I've been going through, they've
9 been positive. I can finally stand up on my own for what I want, what I decide, how I feel –
10 that's it, it's me now. Period. If you don't like me, OK fine – but goodbye. Simple. I'm free.

11 AJ: What about some of the challenges? What have been some challenges?

12 HW: Challenges – you mean now or before?

13 AJ: Since you've been out? I guess coming out, you've talked about some of them – medical
14 insurance, police interactions. How was school? Did school . . . were you out at school when
15 you went to college?

16 HW: At the very last . . . I came out at my last . . . close to graduation. It was in December. I wasn't
17 sure where I should come out – should I come out with my friends, my family, and then also at
18 school, at the government level, at the political level, licensing and stuff like that? Should I go
19 ahead, should I keep it . . . that was a challenge actually. The name change itself was a
20 challenge, I'll say that. License, getting my license changed. Birth certificate – that was a
21 challenge. And then insurance, of course. I think the name change . . . it wasn't too much but I
22 had to prove my name and why I wanted my name change and all that kind of thing. It was kind
23 of boring paperwork kind of stuff, but lots of paperwork. My license, let's see . . . that was
24 tough because I'm from New York. My ID said female, so I had to go back to the doctor and get
25 two different kinds of forms – like proving that yup, I'm on hormones, I'm going through these
26 things and doing this. And then I got that turned down, denied. So then I had to call for my
27 birth certificate where I was born. I had to call and explain the situation and they were like, "Oh
28 yeah, no problem, we already have the transgender process in New York, it's already set up
29 here." So it was easy there but I had to wait two months. I wish it was just lickety-split but it
30 wasn't. That was the most challenging. Go there, ask that, get that all ready and then I get this
31 paper and it's official, I get the M on my birth certificate and it says right there – I kiss it, hold it
32 up, got that done. Go back to the license department, show them, finally they change it on my
33 license and then it's done. I said, "Is that it?" But man, was it a long time – a long process. So
34 for you Minnesota people that are born here, you can just show it right away. But if people are
35 born in another state, you have to wait two, three, four months for this process – boy. And then
36 for insurance, the surgery – the double mastectomy, that was one of the most challenging parts
37 for me because of my age. So I had to go and get a mammogram. But seriously, I have to go
38 through a mammogram – but that was the insurance. "Really?" So I met with the doctor and
39 we kind of haggled for about two hours. "No, no, won't do it – you've got to have a
40 mammogram. At your age you shouldn't have a mammogram blah, blah, blah." It's like, "Well,
41 I'm trying to get a double mastectomy," and so then the doctor realized . . . and that group of
42 doctors didn't understand about transgender issues, so that was a problem. So I had to get the

- 1 mammogram, double mammogram, and then got that done and then it seemed like everything
2 was going along and going to go through OK, and then another problem showed up and it was
3 for bottom surgery. The bottom surgery is a long process, and I get that, but I'm already
4 identifying as a male, it's in my insurance, it's on there. But I have to get a hysterectomy for the
5 bottom surgery. So one person that had gone through it said that it was very frustrating and
6 they were telling me about it and that kind of scared me a little bit. They got turned down by
7 insurance because they were already identified as a male. "Well, you don't have this." And
8 then you have to explain the whole situation again and you have to change to female, go back to
9 being a female for a little bit, to prove it to the insurance, and then go back to the insurance and
10 then once that's done, once that bottom surgery is done, then I have to go back to male. And so
11 now it's my turn to go through that very same thing.
- 12 AJ: Wow.
- 13 HW: So finally, I will be having surgery in August.
- 14 AJ: Bottom surgery?
- 15 HW: Yes.
- 16 AJ: Or a hysterectomy?
- 17 HW: Yeah, for the hysterectomy – not the bottom surgery. And that's August and that is where I feel
18 kind of the insurance . . . that's where you don't get a lot of the support. The insurance is like,
19 "Well, you have to go and do this, you have to be a female again, and then be male." "Wait, I've
20 already changed myself, I'm already transitioned to a male. I've already gone through this."
21 Well then you have to call and change it back and then you have to jump through this hoop and
22 go back to that hoop. It's just that – it's silly, it's ridiculous. So I'm a little afraid of what is going
23 to happen for young trans people too. I just don't want them to have to go through that. I think
24 that that is the biggest challenge in terms of the process.
- 25 AJ: Yeah, that's a lot. So have you ever worked with or for a transgender or LGBT organization
26 before, Hunta? Like volunteer or paid job?
- 27 HW: I'm trying. I'm trying to get involved but it seems like as a deaf person there's been a little bit of
28 a hiccup so I'm going to roll up my sleeves and get to work and get it out there and say, "Hey,
29 it's OK to talk with me and work and we can get interpreters." I think that's the new thing for
30 the trans community, "Oh, deaf trans person – wow, OK, what do I do with that?" So I think
31 that's . . . sometimes there's a first for everything. The first time for everything can be a
32 challenge and as a deaf person and also mingling with the hearing world, we deal with that
33 every day and you have to. Sometimes you just have to stand up, roll up your sleeves and say,
34 "Hey, here we go, this is how this works." It's exactly like what I'm doing today.
- 35 AJ: That's beautiful. Hunta, talk to me about . . . man, I've been feeling really distressed the last . . .
36 I don't know, couple years really, but these last few weeks . . . the young man in Falcon Heights
37 was murdered, Philando Castile, the brother down in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Alton Sterling, and
38 then recently police officers have been murdered in Dallas and Louisiana. How are you feeling
39 about all of this as a Black person? What are your thoughts?

- 1 HW: Am I allowed to curse?
- 2 AJ: Ahhh, yeah.
- 3 HW: I'm like, "Fuck you."
- 4 AJ: Oh wow.
- 5 HW: As a male, as a Black male, and my identity as a Black man, I'm afraid to go out there. I'm afraid
6 every day. I'm afraid something is going to happen to me. A few years ago when I was . . . or
7 the man in Louisiana and the cops in Dallas, how that happened and what's been happening . . .
8 what was before? Two guys, Mike . . .
- 9 AJ: Mike Brown, yeah.
- 10 HW: And then there was . . .
- 11 AJ: Eric Garner. Trayvon Martin. We can name off a lot of people.
- 12 HW: Yes.
- 13 AJ: Jamar Clark.
- 14 HW: One of the things that pissed me off the most, it pissed me off the most, is that . . . it's like
15 equality but it's not enough. It's like where is our justice? Whether it's the police that hurt us,
16 but where's the justice? Just admit that there is injustice and the violence and the escalation . . .
17 you don't want to see that. I know the police, I know some police that are horrible – that can be
18 horrible cops, and I'm like, "You cops, fuck you." And all the petitions are lost, all this stuff . . .
19 and where is the spotlight? And just because people . . . we, as the Black community, it's our
20 lives. We're the ones losing out. I can't imagine if it was me, I can't imagine if this happened to
21 me. I would make sure that people were videotaping it, that there would be some kind of
22 justice and that somebody would be responsible. But they get off for free. I don't think they get
23 off for free – no jail for them, no justice. That's where I feel like what is happening to this world.
24 I'm like, "Fuck that." You're talking about police are doing a good job and doing their work and
25 I'm like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah – whatever." How do you approach a Black person? It's awful – it's
26 awful. For example, with Philando, I have a conceal and carry permit, and he still shoots him
27 when he was reaching for his wallet. And that's where I'm afraid that if that happened to me
28 and I get pulled over and as a deaf person, what am I supposed to do? Are they going to shoot
29 me if I raise my hands up and try and say something? All this stuff that is happening, "Hands
30 up," and people put their hands up and get shot. It's happening time and again and I'm like,
31 "What the fuck? What the hell?" I'm so angry and hurt, I feel hurt. I'm disgusted. I'm scared –
32 period. That's it. I don't trust the police – I don't. I know there are good ones and bad ones, I
33 don't care. You see how many Black people have died over these little, little things – they get
34 killed, and they're making a big deal . . . we can't have mistakes? No, there's no mistakes – it's
35 just that simple. A Black person can't make mistakes. I'm like, "Fuck that."
- 36 AJ: Take care of yourself, my friend. Ride your bike, play some hoops, walk around the park, see
37 some greenery. Trees are healing. Be gentle with yourself and tell your friends and family you
38 love them.

- 1 HW: That's what we're trying to do every day, just tell people we love them. If you're mad or upset
2 just say, "Hey, look – I love you." I've been doing that every day, especially for the children.
3 One thing that I think has hit me the hardest is I have a four-year-old son and how . . . Philando's
4 four-year-old son, that four-year-old son that was in the car with Philando, how does a child
5 witness that? How does a child witness that and what does he go through? That feeling . . .
- 6 AJ: You have a four-year-old child?
- 7 HW: No, I meant in the car – that four-year-old that was in the car that witnessed.
- 8 AJ: Yeah, the little girl.
- 9 HW: I do have a four-year-old son . . .
- 10 AJ: Oh you do – wow.
- 11 HW: I have four sons.
- 12 AJ: Oh my goodness.
- 13 HW: And I've already told them, "Be careful, you've got to be careful." In college and stuff, be
14 careful. "Why?" "You're Black, it's raw out there." I just told them, "You've got to be careful."
15 Really, technically you've got to be careful – you've got to take care of yourself. Everywhere you
16 go you've got to be . . . I don't care if you're here or there or wherever, you've got to be careful,
17 period.
- 18 AJ: So Hunta, last question.
- 19 HW: Sure.
- 20 AJ: There's been a lot of visibility for transgender people lately – Caitlyn Jenner, Laverne Cox, CeCe
21 McDonald – there's a new movie coming out about CeCe in a couple of weeks. Transgender
22 issues, transgender people have been really getting a lot of attention. Where do you see the
23 transgender community in 50 years from now?
- 24 HW: For the people that are actually getting in the spotlight, I don't care about the money so much –
25 I don't care about donating to the cause, but come back and help. I think in terms of the
26 community, the transgender community, in 50 years, I think we'll have a strong foundation. We
27 have a strong foundation in this community and I think if we can stay together and we can build
28 that collaboration, that's my hope, and then we can be successful, we can make improvements,
29 we can be better. I think maybe in 50 years, if I'm still alive, I'll be raising my old hand up and
30 saying, "Right on."
- 31 AJ: You'll be around, my friend.
- 32 HW: Yeah, I can't move . . . but yeah. So yeah, I hope we get bigger. I think especially for the young
33 trans people and to collaborate with them and the people out in the spotlight, "Hey, we're still
34 here. I'm here to help you, don't forget about us – fight for us. We're still here." I don't want
35 what happened to us to happen to them – the younger people.

- 1 AJ: Wow. Hunta, I am so inspired by listening to your story today. Thank you so much for sharing
- 2 your heart and your spirit and your words. It's been truly a joy and a pleasure. I hope we just
- 3 keep working together in the future.
- 4 HW: Yeah, let me know please. I'm here – I'm here. Thank you so much for the dialogue and really
- 5 everything. I appreciate it – thank you. Let's spread the word. Advocacy – let's spread it.
- 6 AJ: All right. Peace, my friend – until we meet again.
- 7 HW: Right on – yeah.
- 8 AJ: All right.