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Interviewee: Amanda Porter [now known as Amanda Hecker]

Interviewer: Liam Fuller

Date: August 16, 2017

Place: Telford, Pennsylvania

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Abstract:

Amanda Porter [now known as Amanda Hecker] was born in 1950 in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. Amanda is a trans woman and transgender rights educator and activist. In this interview, Amanda repeats her goal of wanting to make transgender people visible everywhere. She discusses her time in the Air Force and in college, during which she thought of herself as “cross-dressing.” She then later explains how she began to learn the word “transgender” and ultimately identified as such. Amanda also explains her relationship with her wife, children, and friends before her coming out to them, but also elaborates on her time hiding her true identity. Furthermore, she touches on her current life being retired and owning a business. Finally, Amanda expands on how being a part of a transgender support group gave her the courage to be comfortable with herself as a woman, in addition to how it eventually led to her presenting on public speaking platforms and wanting to support others who struggle with the implications of being transgender in society.

Liam Fuller: Hello, my name is Liam Fuller. I am here today with Amanda. Today is the...

Amanda Porter: 16th.

LF: 16th of August and we are at Amanda’s home in Telford, Pennsylvania.

AP: Right.

LF: And the first question I want to ask you is, do I have permission to conduct this interview?

AP: Yes.

LF: Okay, awesome. And also, I want to ask you sort of where you were born and when you were born?

AP: Born 1950 and I— in Lansdale [Pennsylvania]. I grew up in Lansdale.

LF: Okay, and can you walk me through sort of your early childhood development? What it was like growing up? Things of that nature?

AP: Well generally, I was an only child, [clears throat] working class parents and family. And I grew up pretty normal, played sports a lot: football, track— winter and spring track [clears throat]. And you know, I had a lot of friends and went to college— went to a college out near Western Pennsylvania, Grove City College and ran track there. And after that, I went into the Air Force.

LF: Okay, and can you tell me a little about your educational history? What kind of student you were and things of that nature?

AP: I was probably, a little above-average student. I was not top of the class for anything. I would say B-average student. [LF: Yeah]. [Air conditioning running sound] And I was not particularly good in college, my goal was to go to the Air Force. I went into pilot training after the Air Force and that was always my goal. After I got out of the Air Force and went to graduate school, and I did pretty good there. I enjoyed graduate school and I went into— I started teaching. I was a shop teacher.

LF: Okay. And what did you study in college and then in graduate school?

AP: Well, I studied History in college and I studied industrial arts education in graduate school. [LF: Okay]. I had a lot of engineering courses that type of thing.

LF: Okay. And then, did you like school growing up?

AP: Yeah, I was— I did not— I was not a good student in that, I did not enjoy studying. [Laughs] School was fine. High school was fine. I mean, I know basic trauma and I know college was okay but I could not— I wanted to get out of it. So, I did not do well my first semester. I was a physics major and I did not do well there so— because I was not a good student, I mean I did not know how to study. I did not— I never studied in high school and so I never studied in college and then, that kind of caught up with me. But once I learned how to study, I was okay.

LF: And so then, can you walk me through your job history? And can you talk a little bit about the Air Force?

AP: Sure. I graduated— I was ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] in college. I graduated as a second lieutenant. And went to pilot training in— at Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Georgia. I was sixth in my class there, however I had an inner ear infection which actually grounded me and I never finished pilot training [LF: Okay], which caught— [clears throat] the war was ending, this was 1972/73 actually. The war was ending and they had a surplus of pilots and what they would have fixed a couple years before they did not choose to ignore at this point. So I was— it was called “Ripped” (?). I had a reduction enforced and I was discharged from the Air Force, which I was pretty upset about. And after that, I sort of— I was married— I got married half way through pilot training. And after that, I kind of bounced around for a couple months and I took a job up in New Hampshire and ended up on the — I went to the New Hampshire State Police Academy [LF: Mmhmm] and was a police officer in national New Hampshire for a while. Until— but before I went up there, I had applied for graduate school at Temple [University] and I had not heard back. And actually once I was on the job for the police force for a while, about six months, I had heard back and was accepted into grad school. So, I actually left there, which I felt kind of bad about and went to graduate school at Temple.

LF: Okay. And what was it like being in the Air Force for you?

AP: Oh, it was wonderful. [LF: Yeah?] Yeah, I enjoyed it. It was about the only time I— as a matter of fact, from a transgender standpoint...of course that term had not been coined at that point [LF: Mmhmm], but my cross-dressing, if you want to call it that, at the time, I thought

because of the years I thought I had outgrown it. I thought it was juvenile for me because I did not have the desire in pilot training because it was so competitive and such a macho environment and you know, you had very little free time [LF: Mmhmm]. So, it was the kind of thing that was—I really enjoyed and I enjoyed the flying, of course it was fun. And you know, of course right after that then— when I— after a couple years, it started to creep back up in.

LF: So then did you sort of forint (sp?) any sort of like cross-dressing in childhood?

AP: Yeah, yeah. I started probably when I was in third grade. I remember that for sure. I do not remember what the actual you know chain of events was. I knew I tried on my mother's clothes occasionally and all that. And of course at that age, it was not anything sexual about it or anything, but just something you did. And I asked my mom to make me up as a girl for Halloween in third grade for Halloween, which she enjoyed because she kind of wanted a girl anyway. And it was fine. Then, either the next year or the year after I wanted to do it again, but she was a little hesitant [LF: Hmm]; although she did it. And when I came home from trick or treating, I did not want to get undressed and my dad sort of baraided (ph) me pretty much [LF: Hmm] and that is when I realized it was no— this was not going to float in our family. And after that, I hid it pretty much and did it when I could.

LF: Yeah, so you kept on doing it without getting caught?

AP: Yes, yes, when I could. My grandmother lived with us, but she lives upstairs and my mom and dad both worked and I played sports. So it was not—I did not get home until they were home however... and I did work in the summer time also. I mean— this was as I got older, but there were times I could try on her clothes and make up and stuff. I did not have my own, I just used hers, she was only 5'2" so— but her stuff kind of fit me. [LF: Yeah]. So...

LF: And there were no set of consequences for that going forward from there?

AP: Well they did not know about it... [LF: Yeah, yeah] Not that I know of any way. I know my dad did not and if my mom knew, she did not tell him [LF: Mmhmm]. My dad was a wonderful person, great— good guy, but because of people in that generation, he was ex-military... and people in that generation just did not get that sort— you know— were— that was not acceptable behavior. [LF: Yeah]. So you know, no really— no one really knew about it. I— even in pilot training quite often I lived— for a while I lived by myself in the bachelor's office quarters. I had my own room and you know, I wore panties to bed, that was about it [LF: Yeah]. In college, I would occasionally wear panties to bed, but I generally was either in a dorm or had a roommate [LF: Mmhmm], so it really was not something I could do. But, I did have the desire to do it. [LF: chuckles] It was hard to not do it sometimes. And every once a while, when I got home, I would be able to do it so...

LF: Yeah. Then what was it like being on the police force for that period of time?

AP: Well, meaning from a transgender standpoint or...?

LF: Just in general.

AP: The police force was interesting to me. When I got out of the Air Force, I was very upset because that is where I wanted to make my career and that is what I had— ever since I was a

youngster that is what I wanted. Then, that was sort of taken away from me. And just so happened, that I heard the national police force was accepting applications and that is where I was living at the time, in Nashua, New Hampshire. So, that was— and they were— back in that point of time, it was a paramilitary thing; you stood inspection in the beginning and all that sort of stuff. And I liked that. And I was never really interested in law enforcement, but I got right on because I was a college graduate [LF: Mmhmm]. And like I said, we went to the— well many of the cops in New Hampshire at the time went through New Hampshire State Police Academy, which I did. I found it interesting... I liked the guys I was with and— however, one of the things I really did not like about it—and this was the really overwhelming thing for me was usually police officers have friends which are police officers. It is hard but it is not entirely true, but it is hard to mingle with people [LF: Mmhmm]. It is easier now, but back then because of drugs and what not, you never got invited to parties, or nobody ever invited you anywhere. They were also friendly to you... [LF: Yeah], but— which was alright. I mean, I can deal with that. But because you get to a point where everyone lies to you. When I came home, I remember one time in particular, I was working, I think, an 11 to 7 shift and I came home and— or some— I forget what shit. But anyway, I asked my wife what she had done that day and she said she went to grocery shop and I started looking around for the bags to prove that she went grocery shopping. And I figured this is no— being untrustworthy like this is no way to live a life [LF: Mmhmm]. And so, I thought— well we did not have any kids at the time, so I thought well how am I going to trust my kids if I do not even trust my wife? You know, so I— that is when I became— and oddly enough, right about that time, my acceptance to grad school came in, so I accepted it [LF: Mmhmm].

LF: So then, did your wife move with you when you went to grad school?

AP: Well, yeah. We moved back to here because we are from here so... [LF: Yeah, okay]. So, I mean, I was from here and she was from here also. Actually, so we moved backed from Nashua and let me see, we moved in with her parents [LF: Okay]. And then, I started teaching right away actually [LF: Mmhmm] because at that time, you could teach without having a degree in what you taught [LF: Okay], you know, if they needed a teachers and they did at that time. They were shortage of industrial arts teachers, so I started teaching right away. And I was what they called an interim teacher until I got my Master's [Degree], which was in '78. And then, I was a certified, full-pledge teacher.

LF: Yeah. And then, how long did you teach?

AP: Four years then. I taught four years and then I— meanwhile, we had bought a house— a rural house and I remodeled that. And then, I left there, went to engineering—I had an engineering— because I had so many engineering courses in graduate school. Even though I was not a graduate in engineering, I kind of fit in with that type of environment. So, I became a— I worked for a company, I was a— I did field design modifications, we made aerial devices like buckle trucks type of thing [LF: Hmm]. And I was a hydraulic systems designer and stuff like that, it was kind of a general realm. And I did that for five years [LF: Mmhmm] and then, I started my own business, my cabinet making business, which I did for 13 and I got tired of that. And in 1995, I went back to teaching [LF: Mmhmm] and I retired from teaching then in 2014.

LF: Okay. So then, was there any sort of like religious presence in your childhood?

AP: Oh yeah, quite a bit actually. My dad was very active in the church [LF: Mmhmm]. It was not a, you know—I do not know, it was not real—he was not an evangelists or anything like that [LF: Mmhmm]. But, he was just very active in the church. And he became religious during the war, I think, World War II. And he was four years over in Africa and in Italy. And you know, of course for me, most Sundays were spent Sunday school in Church and—which was okay. I did not really care for church that much, I did not dislike it but I had a lot of friends here and we had fun [LF: Yeah], a lot of my friends. So, you know then when I went to college, I went to a Christian college [LF: Mmhmm]. Not because of the religions in it, but because at the time there was only four colleges in Pennsylvania that had Air Force, ROTC, and Grove City [LF: Oh] was one of them. And also, they were private school and subsidized, so it was very cheap to go [LF: Mmhmm], which is for a private school, I mean, they are pretty highly looked at or thought about back then, even though I was not particularly a good student. But, what happened—and we had mandatory church every Sunday and chapel at least three or four days a week [LF: Mmhmm], we had to go, I forget how many times exactly every day. And we had a year of religion which we had to take, which I did not mind outside of history. Being a history buff, so I did not mind. However, what for me—what Grove City did for me was to make me question organized religion quite a bit [LF: Hmm]. I am still quite cynical, especially now given the turn political situation. I do not—it is a point for me where—and I do not want to get on a religious rant or anything like that, but it seems to me that the people who spout to be the most religious are actually the least religious, so... [LF: Hmm] And I—although we raise our kids, you know, going to church and we thought we should; and as it stands now, really none of them go to church at this point [LF: Mmhmm]. My daughter did have a—her daughter baptized in the church [LF: Mmhmm], but they do not really attend. But it is fine with me [LF: Yeah]. But—so we did raise them with a religious background [LF: Mmhmm. Okay].

LF: [Clears throat] and then, shifting gears, can you walk me through your coming out process?

AP: Well, it is still happening actually [LF: Yeah]. I am sure you talked to a lot of people. I am 67, so the whole you know—really in a nut shell... I mean after I got married, and we—I was out of the Air Force and I was back here and teaching and all that, I told my wife I wanted to start wearing panties to bed and she was okay with that. And so—but you know, it got to be more. I was able to dress without her knowing [LF: Hmm] and I would have told her, I think, when I got married; but, I thought, like I said, I had outgrown it because I did not have that desire at pilot training. So now I got married in pilot training, so I did not really—I have always been honest with her, so I tried to be open. But, eventually it got to a point where I wanted to have my own dress, and bra, and things of and this nature. And you know, she did not like it but you know, as long as we kept it here, it was not a big deal. This was right around the time I—the Internet became available to everyone, sort of like early mid-90's type of thing; and I became aware that there were other people like me. You know, I knew there always were but I was not aware—I mean, I had never heard the term “transgender;” although, I could remember I had heard the term “pervert” and of course, I did not consider myself one. Cross dressing, which I called it at the time [LF: Mmhmm], was not really ever a sexual thing for me so it was a, you know—but anyway, I started to—I had a dress and a bra and I would wear it around here. And once you would be able to order things online, it became easier. And you know, it was okay for a lot of years. The complaint my wife had, her name is Debbie, the complaint she had was that, she said “you always seem to want more” and it was true. I did not—I was never really satisfied. And I had by this time, say my early 50's, a small collection of clothing and I brought a wig—

oh no, I have not brought a wig yet. I used one of her old ones [LF: laughs]. She had an old one from years ago, really a rat's nest [Laughs] [LF: Laughs]. So, I heard about the Renaissance Transgender Association [LF: Mmhmm], which is up in Allentown [Pennsylvania]. And we have a house up in the mountains, which is a vacation home which we brought around 2007, I think. And I was, you know, a little bit less strict about getting seen out there, because I did not care too much about if they would see me as Amanda. And I went to the Renaissance group first time; and it was kind of odd because I still had a mustache [LF: Mmhmm], but I dressed up and went down. And I will never forget the president there, I mentioned it to her. I went down as a male and asked if I could get changed and asked if I would be, you know— if I would make anybody uneasy with my mustache and she said “no, go ahead.” So, I get changed and I— when you went around and talked because Renaissance is a support group, and I said I felt bad about the mustache and this and that. And she said that “do not worry. You have friends here.” And that made a lasting impression on me [LF: Mmhmm] and I thought you know, everybody is very friendly. And that is the only time—I do not get that emotional, but I get emotional when I think about that because that for me was the a) turning point in my life. I kept the mustache for about a year and then I shaved it off. And I did a lot of research. I am kind of a technical person. I like to find out why things are; and so, I did a lot of research and I found that the vocabulary in the transgender community did not fit and there is still no given vocabulary in the transgender community. What is one definition of a cross-dresser for one person is different from someone else and different— there is just no standardization. And so, I started working on one; and I realized that at the time, I called myself a cross-dresser and I realized I was not a cross dresser, but I was in fact transgender [LF: Mmhmm] because it was not the clothing that made me feel special or feel good, it was being accepted as a women [LF: Mmhmm], and that is what I needed. And from then on, I started going out more; and I became a vice president of renaissance and I had been for like six or eight years, I guess. And I do a lot in the Lehigh Valley [Pennsylvania] as Amanda. I have a “business,” where I give transgender education presentations and that type of stuff. However, so I am completely out, there is people that only know me as Amanda. Down here, my kids know. I told my kids earlier this year, back around March I think [LF: Mmhmm]. And however, Debbie is not really overly happy about me telling people around here. So, I do not really go out too much in the local area. Our friends do not know. And so as far as coming out, I am out a lot but in some places I am not [LF: Mmhmm] so...

LF: Yeah. Sort of going back a bit, you said that you really did not have like a sort of, what is the word, notion of what the word “transgender” meant [AP: Mmhmm] until doing more research on the Internet and stuff of that nature. And then, you used sort of other negative terms to describe what you yourself was experiencing at that time. What was that like to have a lack of language and then also have this sort of only being able to use negative words to describe what you were feeling?

AP: Well, I was not— I did not— it was not what I was describing, what I was feeling; it was what other people were using [LF: Yeah]. You know, I— up until my mid 40's, I never really gave it much thought. It was something I did. As far as I was concerned, I was not hurting anyone and I did not— I would not say it was no big deal because it was kind of important to me, but it was something I felt I needed to do. And it was not— I just did not see it as being a big deal [LF: Mmhmm]. It was not in the news everyday like it is now, was because now it— so I just did not even think about it, really [LF: Hmm]. And you know, as far as other terms what people used, I— on the off-chance that you would hear somebody like talk about— again, they

did not use the word “transgender,” talk about a guy wearing women’s clothes it was “fairy” or “pussy” or whatever. I knew I was not a fairy, I knew I would not a pussy. I was just a regular guy and that is why at the time— when I finally found out that there were other regular guys out there, it was kind of a revelation for me [LF: Mmhmm] and that was only because of the Internet [LF: Yeah]. You know, I mean at the time and still now, if you were to Google “transgender,” you would get a lot more information now. But back then in the 90’s [LF: Hmm], if you would Google “transgender” or Yahoo at the time, you came up with a lot of drag queen, a lot of sexual stuff you know that really, I did not find pertaining to me at all.

LF: And then can you talk to me a little bit about your family life? What it was like raising a family? Your coming our process with them as well?

AP: Well, my kids are in their 30’s now. I have three kids and they are all two years apart, so 37, 35, and 33. And I think— I do not know, my son is pretty tight-lipped about a lot of things, I think he knew I wore panties occasionally because you know kids snoop sometimes and I think I had them on my dresser [Burps] excuse me, and— but I do not think the girls knew. And so, there was really no— I mean because if I ever chose to dress up further than that, then I had to wait until they were not around or they were in bed or whatever. And that is what I would do quite often, I would wait until they were in bed and I would kind of hide down here, you know just for— I would be dressed up 10 or 15 minutes and then take it off [LF: Mmhmm]. And you know, very unfulfilling, not only because the fact that it was a short period of time but because, as I said, wearing the clothes was never— as it turns out, was not what I needed. It was not, you know— I need to be— as I said as it turns out, I need to be accepted as a woman more than anything.

LF: And then, what was that experience like, that sort of period of hiding for you?

AP: Well, it was a pain you know— it was a pain in the neck. It was unfulfilling and because Debbie was not overly accepted, it was something that I did knowing she was not happy, you know? But that being said, I did not feel bad about myself. I know a lot of trans people do, but I did not. I did not feel bad about myself because I knew that I was okay. You know, so it was fine I mean, but it was not what I needed.

LF: And what is your relationship with Debbie like today?

AP: It is very good. I mean, we have been married for 44 years [LF: Yeah], so we had— we were having problems about a year ago. You know, I needed to do more as Amanda— and at the time she had— and for years, she had said “I am never going out with you if you are dressed as Amanda;” and she said “if you decide to change genders, I am leaving you.” I do not think she meant that, but I know she meant she would not go out with me. And it got to the point where it was a sticky thing for us and we went to counseling and the best thing we ever did [LF: Mmhmm] because it showed to me the things I was doing wrong in the relationship [LF: Mmhmm]. And without getting into a lot of detail, basically, she was internalizing some things that I did not know and all this sort of stuff and you know, women [Laughs]. So—but— and we were able to talk about it and get it out. And she understood it was not a fetish thing for me [LF: Mmhmm], that it was not a phase [LF: Mmhmm]. I mean God, it has been how many years? [Laughs] But even so, she thought maybe it was a phase or something and get it out of my system and she realizes it was not. And I tried to be— I was never overtly disrespectful of her,

but I tried to I guess be unselfish in that type of thing. And now we do go out, not here, not down here, but we do go out together dressed up. I mean we— up the mountains, we go to yard sales that we went to, a couple National Parks, and dinners, stuff like this. So, it is good.

LF: And what is your relationship like with your daughters as Amanda?

AP: Yeah. I told my kids back in March and it went really well. I got them all together, I had a little note— a little letter actually and this sort of stuff and I explained to them. My son, that day was fine with it, as it turns out he was a little confused and needed to get more information or whatever and he is still pretty tight-lipped about it. And I hear—but him and his wife and daughter live in South Philadelphia, so I go down quite often as Amanda. I have lunch with his wife, she is a nurse and she has different hours, so we have lunch together. And she is perfectly fine, but as far as Brian is concerned, he said— he tells her “I am fine with dad”—and I do not mind him calling me “dad,” that is fine with me. He said he came— he is fine with it, but he does not tell me so I go out of my way to not, you know, be dressed in front of him. My daughters on the other hand, my one daughter lives right behind us [LF: Mmhmm], so there is no hiding that. And they see me all the time that is no big deal [LF: Yeah]. I was just going to say something if we have— I forgot, I will think about it I guess [LF: Yeah]. Yeah, but so they are fine with it.

LF: Okay. And can you talk a little bit more about your involvement in Renaissance?

AP: Yeah. The Renaissance, when it first started in 1990 and through the 90’s, was very big. They would have— where Renaissance used to be, if you are not familiar with it, Renaissance used to be a national organization. Matter of fact, I think Trans Central was a Renaissance chapter at one time. I could be wrong about that. But, anyway, due to some financial things, Renaissance National broke up. Then there was still several area around. The Lehigh chapter was one which I— which is where I wanted to go. So, I went up there and I guess it started probably in 2005, I do not even know, but around that time. By that time though, membership had dropped from probably coming to a meeting of maybe 50 people down to 12. And as I got— continued to go to Renaissance every month, sometime it would get down to six or seven. But those, say 10 people, we were all very close, very good friends and we enjoyed seeing each other every month. It was a lot of fun. So I really— I did not like ever miss a meeting, I might have missed one. But seldom would I ever miss a meeting; even now I do not, because I needed that at a time, from a transgender standpoint. As I became more emboldened to go out and you know became accepted and realized going out was not a big deal and people did not really care. You know if I was transgender... I made a point to actually to tell people I was transgender. I still do. And Renaissance came— kind of took a little bit different of a meeting for me. By the time I was vice president and I started to— we had had a website, but it was managed by a group— a person from the King of Prussia Renaissance group, who meet in King of Prussia [Pennsylvania]. And they lost that person, so our website actually kind of canceled out [LF: Mmhmm]. We had no website. We had no advertising, so I did not know anything about developing a website. I did— we have a Yahoo group, which I started to manage and try to promote; but, people were not really looking at Yahoo groups that much. So, I have learned how to develop a website and I developed a new website for Renaissance [LF: Mmhmm]. And when I did that, my friend— what I got from Renaissance, during that time was— has changed. I no longer need Renaissance as a transgender person [LF: Mmhmm]. I do not need Renaissance, but other people do. And what I wanted to do was help other people [LF: Mmhmm] experience the same type of goodwill or whatever I had at Renaissance. And so, for probably the last four years or so, that has been my

focus. I— we kept our website for about a year. And then, a woman came to Renaissance, Karin Goodwin (sp?), [Burps] excuse me, who has very— who has a lot of expertise in that area, so she redid it. It is a really good website right now [LF: Mmhmm]. And we started actively promoting it through— promoting Renaissance through all the things I was going through, because I go to a lot of networking events. I am going to one tonight as a matter of fact. We have Valley Women of Style. And I am going— and I always promote Renaissance. And my goal was to make Renaissance— when everyone one thought of transgender, in Lehigh Valley, they thought of Renaissance and that is what I wanted to do [LF: Mmhmm]. We got considerably bigger. We are averaging between 20 to 30 people at our meetings now [LF: Hmm] and we merged with the Lehigh— with the Bradbury-Sullivan LGBT [Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender] Community Center and which is— has some good and some bad. But, we still tried to maintain autonomy and so that is my— that is how I—what I do with Renaissance I guess.

LF: Mmhmm. Yeah. And why do you think there was that sort of decrease in membership during that time?

AP: It was easier for people to come out I think, and also easier for people to be out. I think starting, pick a number around the year 2000 maybe '98 and again, I tribute this to the Internet because people saw that there were other people like them; so, naturally people would decide they could get together. And it began back then; but of course now if you want to go to a transgender event, you can go to one every night of the week [LF: Mmhmm] and especially near a big city, Allentown somewhat but especially Philadelphia. There is a lot of places and a lot of group that you can meet up with. So, people did not need too much to go to a support group like Renaissance— and our group is not really social in that we do not— we try to do social things, but we really do not go out partying. They did initially, there was two— and they usually picked gay bars. There was two gay bars up Allentown they would go to. The one closed down [LF: Mmhmm], but after the meeting. But most of us did not and for me, it was always an hour— however I go there was an hour ride back. Whether I am here or up the mountains, so I really did not feel like dinking until two o' clock in the morning and then, you know, driving home. But, I think a lot of the primarily women that came wanted that type of social outlet so they start going out on their own and formed, you know, social groups [LF: Hmm], that type of thing. And most of the transgender groups I am familiar with kind of went membership around that time.

LF: Yeah. And was there anything else you— any sort of projects you undertook as vice president?

AP: Not specifically. I mean, we— there was the website, the Yahoo group, the merger with the Bradbury-Sullivan Center, but my goal— and this is like pulling teeth through of these people, but my goal is to get transgender people out in mainstream society [LF: Mmhmm]. And so to do that, we have— I did not start this dinner, but we would have a dinner beforehand, you know, in a regular restaurant and people go out there and you want people to get used to seeing transgender people out. One thing I did just this past year— this June, which was really neat... are you familiar with the Iron Pigs? Iron Pigs are a baseball team, it is a Philly's Triple-A group. They have a Coca Cola Park out in Allentown that is where the Iron Pigs play. And so they— I wanted to do something with the Iron Pigs as for Renaissance. So, they made us their community spotlight organization for a game and we had a table there with literature and there was four of us from Renaissance. And you know, a whole bunch of people saw us and I set that up. So that was

really— that is the kind of things I like to do. I want to get people outside of the LGBT community, I want to see— I want them to go— set up stuff, so we can go to the zoo and hear that. And we tried, but we have not had a whole lot of luck with them. But, we are working on it. It is usually the same four or five people go to all of them [LF: Yeah]. So...

LF: Yeah. And then what was the merger like with the Center? What was that process like?

AP: Well, it was a little troubling for a lot of people. I do not know if you know much about the— if you study the history of transgender history and the LGBT community. There has been a lot of justifiable hesitancy of transgender people to associate with the LGB part [LF: Mmhmm] because throughout, even up until the '90's— frankly, even up to like the early 2000's [LF: Laughs] groups like the Human Rights Campaign [LF: Mmhmm], GLAD [Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders] did not put for transgender rights the way they pushed for LGB rights. The Human Rights Campaign and even Senator Barney Frank threw transgender people under the bus one day trying to get the ENDA legislation passed [LF: Hmm], Employees [Employment] Non-Discrimination Act. And they would not get passed with the transgender people, so we took them out of there entirely [LF: Mmhmm]. So, it was big distrust for some people, between transgender people and the LGB part of the community [LF: Mmhmm]. My feeling is that those days are over. We have got nothing but support from the Bradbury-Sullivan Center [LF: Yeah]. And although they are just like in the cisgender community, there is people— there has been gay people that do not understand us [LF: Mmhmm]. But, you know, we felt that as we— as Renaissance at the time, well still, it was not a 503c or 50 c3 or whatever it is organization; and so, we theoretically could not accept donations and we had no insurance if someone wants to sue us for something, you know, whatever. So we went, it was kind of a pragmatic thing, and we thought also that the merger would help us become more visible in the community. I think that has happened, but there was push back in our own group that there were sort of people that had hard feelings that we did associate with them. So—and a lot has to do with the person that was a leader there [LF: Mmhmm]. He was a very nice guy, but he is very pushy. So—but we have and we are going to review it this— in January. We merged with them in— last January—well actually before that, but officially it was in January. And we are going to review it this year and see how they feel, if it is something they want to continue or not [LF: Mmhmm]. But you know, it has been overall good so far [LF: Mmhmm].

LF: And have you had any involvement with the Keystone Conference?

AP: Yeah, yeah. I have been going for five or six years. I have been a speaker there for probably three or four times [LF: Yeah], I do not know. The— you know, it is really nice, not only because it is so many people in the small hotel, I mean... do you go? Have you been?

LF: No, I have never been [AP: Well...] I am kind of not from the area....

AP: Oh okay. You know, it is a lot of people there. A couple times— usually we have the whole hotel, which is kind of a detriment. But, the first couple times we went out, we did not have the whole hotel and there was a boy's hockey tournament for youngsters— of course they were there with their mom and dads... and they are walking around with all these— you know it is a saying in the transgender community that the men are tall and the women are short— or the women are tall and the men are short [LF: Laughs]. And so, one guy said to me, "you guys better start a

basketball team because here you have these 6'2" women with five inch heels" and you know, this sort of thing. But, we all got along pretty good. So, it is a nice event— a lot of people prefer the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference, which is in a couple weeks [LF: Mmhmm]. Karin, from our group, and myself are also speaking there. And it is bigger, a little more— it is less personal, but kind of in a good way. I mean, it is not really— you do not have the— make the relationship— [Touches shoulder] [ooh] I have a bad shoulder excuse me [Chuckles]. You do not make the relationships there that you do at the Keystone Conference, but it is free [Both chuckles] so it is easy from that standpoint. But, the Keystone Conference is a lot of fun.

LF: Yeah. And what sort of like subjects do you speak on? [AP: At the conferences?] Mmhmm.

AP: Primarily actually, it is personal protection, I am a 50 (____???) Black Belt [LF: Oh okay], so in Taekwondo. So, I teach— I do not teach self-defense. I mean, I show a few release moves but I teach how to avoid confrontation [LF: Mmhmm], you know, how to dress and where to do this and that type of thing as best as you can to keep yourself protected, so you do not get accosted or worst [LF: Yeah]. And I also have taught— I have spoken at the— next Wednesday I am actually speaking at St. Luke's for the nurses, but I speak— I have spoken at several medical colleges: Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and also the Geisinger Medical School [LF: Mmhmm]. And on how to transition at work also about the— I have a presentation and I have a transgender Question and Answer. I do different things just to educate basically on what it means to be transgender [LF: Mmhmm. Yeah]. Speaking of my kids too by the way, I almost forgot to tell you, you know, I have a website [LF: Mmhmm] and I pointed it out because there are a lot of pictures of me on the website [LF: Mmhmm]. And so, I use that for my business also.

LF: Okay, awesome. And how do you think your trans identity has sort of like affected other aspects of your life, sort of be it your social life, family life, or sort of political awareness, religiousness, spirituality and things of that nature?

AP: Well, big question there. You know politically of course, [coughs] and I do not know if it has to do with trans, I am sure that is part of it, but I remember back, maybe 2007, 2008, I read something or whatever on the Internet— or saw something, I do not know where, about how a gay person can be fired from their job if they were gay. My wife was in human resources and I asked her and said "Is that right?" she says, "Oh no, you cannot be fired, you cannot be fired." And the next day she came home, I said, well look into it for me. So, she looked into it and said "you can be fired because you are gay" [LF: Mmhmm] and I looked into it and that was a big changing point in my life, politically. Because I said, "well, wait a minute. In this country, that type of open prejudice should not be legalized. You cannot control a person's bigotry, but you can control legalized discrimination" and that did not seem right to me. I had been a Republican up to that point [LF: Mmhmm]. I was always in the middle of the road. I was never a right-wing type of person, about some things I was conservative and some things I was not. And so, I just looked into it and the more I looked into it, the more disappointed I was with the Republican Party and their stance, especially Evangelical Christians [LF: Mmhmm]. It was— it is not an exaggeration to say it is inferiorating because it was and it continues to be [LF: Yeah]. And so, you know that was a big change for me, another life changing event really because I started to look at things a little bit differently. I never cared, all through my teaching career or whatever. I never cared if a person was gay at all. It did not bother me. I was not gay, but you know going through as a teacher, we— I had several kids come through who were openly gay. And it was

interesting because, being a shop teacher—I taught shop and art by the way, they are the dichotomy right? [Laughs] [LF: Mmhmm]. But as a shop teacher, I taught mostly guys and if a person was openly gay, they were actually pretty good with it. The person they suspected as being gay, that they did not admit it or whatever, that they were kind of hard on. But, I never cared about when a person was gay or transgender or anything like that. I had two trans kids come through when I was teaching and so—but the more I looked into it, the more I became kind of (____???) opposed to the fact that that type of discrimination continues to be legal [LF: Mmhmm]. I find it reprehensible in our country for that to happen [LF: Yeah]. So what was the other part of your question?

LF: Yeah, like social life, religious life, and spiritually, sort of life and things of that nature.

AP: Well religious life, I kind of elaborated on. I will say that I go to, there is—I do not go to church down here dressed—I only go to church a couple times a year: Christmas, Easter and that is about it. But occasionally I go because we meet in a church—Renaissance meets in a church, and in this building there are actually three churches, there is a Catholic church meets there, United Church of Christ meets there, and an independent church, Metropolitan Community Church of Lehigh Valley, which was actually our sponsor for many, many years. We just moved there with them when they moved there a few years ago. And I have been to all three churches and the people—you have to assume people going to church are kind of religious, they are wonderful [LF: Yeah], have no problem what so ever. It is the religious leadership I have an issue with. And of course, I call them ‘alt-right religious,’ but whatever term you want to use. The fundamentalist Christians that you know, cannot accept somebody that is different than them. You know, they want religion in the schools as long as it is theirs, that type of thing. So I am very—well I do not dislike religious people and I admire the fact that they have those beliefs—I, myself believe in God but I cannot abide by the people that do not have an open mind [LF: Mmhmm]. So religiously, that is that. What was the other part? [Laughs]

LF: I think it was family life, civil life, spirituality.

AP: Well, civil life, I mean I kind of said that. My life as Amanda becomes more and more prevalent. It is hard to keep the two—my male name is Byron, so it is hard to keep the two separated sometimes [LF: Mmhmm]. And socially, I mean, I do a lot as Amanda. And as my wife knows, and daughter, I have to do that. It is not an option for me, it is not—it is a part of me that I have to do that. And so, a couple days a week I have things planned: maybe it is visiting somebody in the hospital, which I have been doing; or I go to these networking events and try push my transgender education presentations or whatever. But, I do a fair amount as Amanda [LF: Mmhmm]. And of course as Byron, I am just me around here. And I think for a long time, Debbie was afraid I would want to transition. I do not think I ever will—excuse me, of course, you never going to know what will happen tomorrow, but I enjoy being part of the gender spectrum [LF: Okay] rather than being at either end of it, so I do not think that will happen.

LF: Mmhmm. Okay. And is there anything about your like awareness of or engagement within the LGBT community that we have not talked about that you want to talk about?

AP: Let us see, I have told you about the animosity that can exist on some [LF: Mmhmm] levels [LF: Yeah] between the two. No. I mean, you know, I think maybe being transgender, I am more open minded about most people. But, there is, for instance, there is a gay campground about an hour from here called the Woods Campground. I do not know if you ever head it or not. But, it is clothing-optional and of course, you know, gay guys loving the weather and that sort of stuff. Anyway, there is this guy called Mr. Woods Leather and he used Renaissance as a fundraiser to make us money. They sold stuff or whatever they did, I do not know. But over the past year— and so, I am going there to receive a check for a little bit less than \$3,000 on the seventh of September [LF: Oh my God], which is a lot of money for us [LF: Uh huh]. And my point is he is gay and of course, the people he is soliciting are gay, I guess, I do not know but I assume mostly, probably you know. And so even though we may be on different sides of the boat, I think we are all on the same boat [LF: Laughs]. So [LF: Yeah] -- and eventually we are mingling a bit better, more than we have in the past [LF: Mmhmm]. So, you know, I hope that answered your question.

LF: Yeah, you know, totally. I mean if someone is against gay people, they probably do not feel too well about trans people [laughs].

AP: Well, I think that is probably a very accurate statement. [Both laughs] Yeah [LF: Yeah. And...]. Well oddly enough, there used to be that all the cool people knew a gay person [LF: Mmhmm]. Well, it got to a point where being gay is not a big deal anymore, now they cool people know a trans person. [LF laughs] So it is, you know... And I just thought to throw that in.

LF: And are there any like important events or turning points in your life that we have not touched on?

AP: No. Telling my kids was one [LF: Mmhmm]. You know, I mentioned about being in my beginnings at Renaissance was one. And I had several little ones you know. I get affirmed every time I go out because I have never been hassled by anyone. I have had people look at my sideways sometimes, but I am actually a very friendly person and I am kind of open. I do not believe you should take— have your personal life out there on a sleeve or anything or whatever [LF: Mmhmm]. I am not one of these people on Facebook that tells you every little thing every time your nose hurts or whatever. But you know, when I go out— for instance, I was— I know a woman who is a movie actress— she is not an actress, she has done commercials, she is with one of the networking groups. Anyway, they were filming a movie up in Allentown and she asked me if I had liked to audition for a part [LF: Hmm]. So, I did; and it was a speaking part. Well, I am not going to get it because my voice is too low [LF: laughs] and I knew that but it would be fine. I said “look;” I said “Valerie” (sp?); I said “no problem if I do not get this part, I understand” and I said “but if you have any room for any extras, let me know. I would like to come out as an extra.” Okay, so I do not know, a few weeks later I get an email from the director [LF: Mmhmm], which I would be an extra in the film— in the dinner scene, it was over in New Jersey. I said “yeah.” So, I go there and the camera man is the same guy that filmed me for my audition. And I introduced him to myself and he said, “I know you Amanda, I know you Amanda. It is no problem.” I said ‘look, I understand I am transgender and I appreciate being here,’ but I said “if there is— if my being transgender is going to have a negative impact on the film” I said “if you want to send me home, I will understand.” “No, no, no. No problem, no problem. We will get you in.” So, I am sitting there with all the other extras and we are talking

and I do not know how it came, but I mentioned to them all that I was transgender and whatever and it— they were very receptive. And I have not seen the movie. I do not know if my part got cut out, but I was in a few of the scenes [LF: Laughs]. And what I am trying to make is the fact that, that is the social interaction. That can be life changing for me because, I mean, well I have built up a little too much [LF: Laughs]. Not life changing, but it is very reinforcing to me— affirming, I guess you would say. Because you know, okay she is transgender and we talked and you know, we had something to drink and something to eat and stuff like that. And now they left, they said “well, I met a transgender person here today and you know, she was okay, just a regular person.” That is my goal at this point in my life. You know, I want to be out with as many people as I can and do know that we are suddenly or just blatantly that I am transgender and it is not a big deal [LF: Yeah]. When I met— when I went down for lunch one time with my— well the first time actually with my daughter-in-law in south Philly [Pennsylvania], and of course we were walking down and pushing her daughter— baby. She said, “I have a lot of friends down here. How do you want me to introduce you?” I said “you can introduce me as your father-in-law” I said, “that is what I am.” She says, “well, I do not want to embarrass you.” I said, “No, I am not embarrassed, you know?” And we did not meet any of her friends, but the waitress was a friend of hers and she introduced me as her father in-law. She said “Oh.” I said “yeah, I am transgender.” It was right around the time it was Transgender Day [of] Visibility [LF: Hmm] and I said “okay well now your job is to— is you have to home and tell three people you met a transgender person today” [LF: laughs]. It was a— but every time I go out and I get that kind of affirmation, it makes me feel good [LF: Mmhmm]. So, that is what I want to do. That is what I want.

LF: Yeah, yeah. And what like changes have you seen in terms of like acceptance or celebration of the community? And what challenges do you think still remain?

AP: Well, I mean that is a whole day’s worth of topic there [LF laughs]. I already alluded to the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Smith on the street, I would say 85% are perfectly okay. You know, not saying they want their son to come home and say he is transgender, but if they meet somebody that was trans or they know somebody that was transgender or whatever. It is just somebody, you know, that they met. And usually they are friendly, if not accepting. And so that is getting more and more and more [LF: Mmhmm]. On the other hand, and again, I do not want to be political, but because of the [2016 Presidential] election, people that have the opposite agenda, such as HB2 [House Bill 2] in North Carolina and the Texas thing and all that, that feeling bold and to push that. The really nice thing about that is, and my feeling is every time the word transgender gets mentioned on the news, it is a positive thing because people get used to hearing it [LF: Mmhmm]. And so, however negative— negativity can come out of it. But what I would like to see is, and this is not across the border but whenever they have these things... Let us take the transgender military, okay; the president [Donald J. Trump] tweeted and then tried to make— well is in the process of making a policy towards transgender people do not want to be a part of the military. The people that are opposing the most were the generals, you know? And to paraphrase, basically what they say is “well this has not been a problem for us. It is not a problem,” you know? Not to say individual people may not have a problem but as a general holding service, not a problem. I remember I went through the police academy with the first woman that went through and they gave her a hard time. It is proven to be not a problem. As a matter of fact, women have brought to law enforcement— have brought a different skill set than macho, bully men have. Macho would jack the guy up, but women bring a softer set and it works

in some environments, you know? Same with women in the Air Force or military, but I am more familiar with the Air Force. Women can work to go to pilot training, but they cannot fly fighters. Well, women are flyer fighters and they are flying combat, okay? And they are doing fine. And it is the same way with transgender people. So what is nice to see about all of these negative things that are happening politically and in the news, you read about them every day, is the pushback, the positives as far as I am concerned, it is positive pushback you get from these people— people in authority even, or (____???) said well, the truth. I forget the context, but what he basically said was transgender people do not have any say in what they are, they just are. That was positive for me [LF: Mmhmm], you know? It is only a matter of time until— and I do not know. I guess I am 67, it will take five years, ten years, twenty years, I do not know; but being transgender will not be a big deal at all. When I was a kid in the '60s, I was going through— if you saw a Black guy holding hands with a White girl, it was a big deal. Salt and pepper, everybody talks salt and pepper, salt and pepper. You see it now, what is the big deal? Nobody cares [LF: Mmhmm], you know? Frankly, even seeing two guys holding hands, well women have held hands forever but—do guys hold hands? And oh two gay guys, yeah, three gay guys and that is it. Back in the 60's, a Black guy got killed or beat up, you know, if it was somebody's sister [Laughs], you know? I have faith in human beings. I do not necessarily have faith in government, but I do have faith in human beings. And I do not think human beings really want to discriminate. They want to be accepting and that is where I feel that is a real positive thing.

LF: And you kind of gone into it a bit, but I have been asking the same question to a bunch of the people I have been interviewing this summer. So, I want to know from you what is it like being trans during the Trump presidency?

AP: Well, it is a lot scarier than it was during the Obama presidency. You know why people do things I do not understand. I do not understand— let us take Charlottesville [Virginia]. I mean, I do not understand how somebody can hate somebody because of the color of their skin. Now, if you are a Black guy and you robbed a liquor store, I do not like you; or if you did something negative, I do not like you. I think you should be put into jail, but I think the same thing if you were White. You know, why do people hate somebody because of what the person looks like or whatever? And because— of course, there has been a lot of increase in that negativity since the Trump presidency and that shack goes into the transgender community. I do not have a hand on how many trans people have been killed this year. Last year I think it was 25, I think, but I know we are ahead of the bar [LF: Right, close to late teens, I think]. Oh, really? [LF: Yeah, early or late teens]. I think it was 15 the last time I heard or up there or so. So what does that mean as a trans person? Well, it means that you can— I feel safe being down in the city, but that can be a fallacy. I mean, you can meet somebody that if you know you are trans or if you are with a group of trans people [LF: Mmhmm] that they can just shoot you just because you are trans. And I think that danger has increased, I think, exponentially since the election [LF: Yeah]. And where does these people come from? I do not know, I do not get it. You know, it just does not make sense to me. A lot of the trans women, they were not all women who were killed last year, I think it was one guy, but the women— a lot of them were sex workers; and I guess the guys feel that is open target, open season, I do not know. But, I know trans people since the election are a lot more afraid than they used to be [LF: Yeah]. And I think it is justifiable [LF: Yeah] Justifiable.

LF: Yeah. So, is there anything we have not touched on that you want to bring up?

AP: No. You said in your note things, that I have a couple people you can contact [LF: Okay] if you wanted to [LF: Yeah]. I could give you their email address.

LF: That would be great if you can send along their contact information.

AP: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I can do that. I can just email it to you [LF: Mmhmm]. Okay. And the one is president of Renaissance [LF: Yeah]. She has been president of Renaissance since 1992. And have you talked to— with Rake! Hebron (sp?)

LF: I emailed her and I have not gotten a response.

AP: [Laughs] yeah she does not return my calls either [LF: Yeah]. Another was Karin Goodwin (sp?), I do not know, she is our webmaster.

LF: I do not have her.

AP: She would be a good one to interview. But, she is very intelligent. She was vice president of a Fortune 500 company [LF: Hmm]. She is very dynamic, very intelligent and be a good person to talk to [LF: Yeah]. But other than that, that is about my life story I guess.

LF: Uh-huh. Do you have anything you want to ask Amanda?

Barry Loveland: Just maybe to elaborate a bit more on, you talked about you have a business now that you do presentations and training and things like that. Just elaborate a little bit more on what you do with that.

AP: Well I have— I— it is really sort of a tooth full business. A lot of this stuff is pro bono work because I am retired. I am not financially in bad shape, so I do not really need to make a lot of money. So what I usually talk— when I go to medical schools or I talk to psychological counselors and that type of thing who are surprisingly ill-informed as far as transgender people are concerned, I do not usually charge for it and it is mostly just informational things. Things they may not have known. Well, I get and speak with my networking group sometimes and just give them a little bit about transgender people are and just to inform them. And from a business standpoint, I try to contact business and I have not been too lucky. Excuse me. But to help people deal— human resources people primarily deal in a proactive way with a transgender person that make come up to them one day and say “I am going to transition on the job.” Well, if you stumble around in the dark, eventually you are going to stub your toe [LF: Laughs] and things do not work quite well. And you know, and sometimes they do. Sometimes a transgender person is real accommodating and sometimes the human resources people are real accommodating and I say let us make it work, let us make it work, you know? But sometimes, surprisingly, the transgender person is an asshole and human resources people are saying “do it our way or else” and then that is a— that can be a real problem. So Rakan Hebron, the president transitioned at Mack Truck and she was the first one to transition. There is two others now following her. Now she is retired, but you know it was a struggle for her [LF: Yeah]. Yeah. And I know a couple other people who transitioned on the job and some of them work out and some of them have hiccups along the roads [LF: Hmm]. So, my goal is to help out with that [LF: Yeah]. So... [LF: Okay] [BL: Yeah]. *Www. Amandaportner.net* if you want to get on [LF: Laughs].

LF: Okay, yeah. So I guess that is it. [AP: Okay]. Thank...