INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

EVE ELLE

Interviewer: Brycen Gaines

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Transcribed by Jamie Magyar (volunteer)

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Brycen Gaines: Hello, my name is Brycen Gaines. I will be having a conversation with Eve Elle for the New York City Trans Oral History Project, in collaboration with the New York Public Library’s Community Oral History Project. This is an oral history project centered on the experiences of trans-identifying people. It is Saturday, April 29, 2017, and this is being recorded at SAGE [Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders]. How was your childhood?

Eve Elle: [laughter] My childhood, huh? Well, uh, for me, I—I grew up with, um, five older siblings, um, and two parents. I was adopted as a child, uh, from Guatemala, and I lived in the Pacific Northwest of the United States for the first eighteen years of my life. My childhood really was, um, I think isolated, in a sense. If you—if you asked my mother how she would describe me as a child, she would tell you that I was reserved. And that was sort of a word that kind of carried through, uh, my whole life, really, for a long period of time, and I struggled with what that really meant, and how—and why—how and why that was applicable, uh, to me in my life. And, um, at an early, early age, um, before even going to preschool, I—I knew that I was transgender. However, when you’re that young and you’re not really exposed to it in the outside world—or in your own little world, really, um, other than your own self and what you feel inside—there’s no particular way to, um—to define that. You don’t really know what that is. And sometimes, you know, if you act upon how you feel, uh, when you’re trans, um, it—it becomes sort of, um, put out, like a fire. Um, you know—and again, at that period of time, too, transgenderism wasn’t really prominent in media or, um, really defined for the—um, for the public to really understand, and so it was very difficult for me to—to allow myself to, uh, express my gender identity.

Gaines: What time period did you grow up in?

Elle: What time period did I grow up in? Well, I would—I would say in the 90’s. I would say that I was a 90’s kid, um, because—well, I was born at the end of the 80’s, and so I didn’t really experience, you know, so many of the wonderful things that happened in the 80’s. Uh, and so I would say the 90’s. And then, um, going into high school, it was in the 2000’s.

Gaines: When did you, um—when were you able to ex—well, when did you start to discover that you were trans? Like, when did—I mean, you said that you weren’t able to express that part of you because, you know, it would—it would be put out. It would be, uh, dismissed. But when did you start to—I don’t know—like, bloom, so to speak [laughter].

Elle: Well, uh, I knew—again, I did know that I was trans, and—or, not necessarily trans, but I knew that I didn’t feel, um, male, when I was a child, from the earliest memories of—of being a child. You know, everything was either, um—well, it was always wanting to be, uh, engaged with things that were feminine, like, um, wearing a dress, for example, or wearing makeup, or playing with dolls, or, um—you know, that sort of thing. You know? That was very, um, normal to me, uh, until I started going to—to school. In kindergarten, you know, everything is either A or B. You’re either a boy or a girl. You’re a boy, you’re a girl. Everything—there is—and again, in that period of time, it wasn’t what we have today, where we have, um, more, uh, ability to see and understand transgenderism. So when I was going to school, I felt as though, you know,
I had to—had to sort of conform to—to the identity that I was not, that just didn't—it didn't feel right.

**Gaines:** How were your teenage years?

**Elle:** Well, um—in my teenage years, I—you know what? I dealt with a lot of depression, you know, for, um—for, I would say, the majority of—of my childhood. And, um, you know, it—once you get to, you know, your teenage years, there's a lot of self-discovery that—for everybody. But, um, I felt as though I identified as a gay male at that time, and as a matter of fact, um, I was engaged when I was in high school, to my first boyfriend, as a matter of fact. And, um, it was—for me—I was very involved with, um, dance. I was a dancer for over twenty years. So, I was very involved with that, and that was sort of my—my outlet for, perhaps, the void of not being able to express my gender identity. And, um, then having to sort of identify with being a gay male—it was like, a step towards it, but it wasn't really the full—the full feeling. I wasn't fulfilling myself, exactly, uh, the way I kind of thought I was. Um, so, I'm sort of drawing on—on the performing arts and being a gay male, at the time, and, um, using those things as—as sort of something to balance out, maybe, the depression that I probably had. Um, and, you know, once I moved to New York City when I was eighteen, um, you know, that just completely changed my life. I mean, I went from, you know, the Pacific Northwest to the Northeast of the United States—New York City, of course, near the mecca of LGBTQ. So, um, my—that was a period of time where my life definitely changed.

**Gaines:** How'd it change?

**Elle:** [laughter] Well, you know, uh—I was, um, very independent then, you know? I moved to New York and I was, you know, a part of the arts. I went to a prestigious school. Um, I lived not too far from here. I lived on 5th [Avenue] and 30th [Street]. And, um, you know, I experienced—[laughter] I experienced, uh, so many other things besides just the performing arts. I experienced, um—oh jeez, ugh—experimented with a lot of things in a way people do—young people do. And, you know, you have a freedom. You're, um, you know, a kid in New York City who's having the time of their life, um, with the—with just so many opportunities, you know? Good and bad opportunities, uh, not—you know, um, to discover even more.

**Gaines:** When did you start to transition, medically?

**Elle:** Um, medically... So, I started to transition—[sigh] during the recession. And, you know, that was a difficult period of time for the world and for people in the United States, and very difficult for me as a trans person, uh, of course. Um, I had to—excuse me—I sort of had to like, get pushed into, um, the decision, because I sort of lived a very, um, androgynous life. And, um, it was sort of to the point where it was—my androgyny was very—I could physically see the frustration in other people when they were speaking to me, because they had no idea what pronouns to use for me. And when I would be at work, for example—um, I worked in an art gallery—and, um, you know, people would just—they would just physically have this just unknowingness—um, just had no idea how to really approach me, and they were frustrated. I could just see all this frustration in people because they weren't able to label or define me as A
or B. So, um, at the time, I was dating somebody—and, um, he's somebody who's very, very assertive and incredibly arrogant—and he told me that I had to choose. I had to choose, uh, my gender. I couldn't just stay fluid in my gender. I couldn't be non-binary; I had to be—I had to be female. Um, and I think the thing is that I knew that I was, but it's also very scary, um, and so uncertain to, uh, completely change your identity. There's just so many things that you—[sigh] you question and, you know—and I think there's also a fear of loss, as well—you know, a fear of loss of, um, friendship, and family, and respect, um, and—and the fear of not being comfortable.

Gaines: Hmm. How was dating them like?

Elle: [laughter] Dating, hmm... Well, you know, I realized—um, hmm... A lot of the times, um, before I transitioned—um, well, first of all, again, I was engaged, so, uh—from my first relationship and, um, you know, that lasted for, at the time, what seemed like what would be, like, an eternity. And like, it was a long period of time, but—I mean, I think it was about, like, what, three or four years? And so, um, before transitioning, while living in New York, it was like—it sort of was like, I would date, but it didn't—it didn't quite work, but it wasn't really understood, because I wasn't really in my own identity yet. So, um, you know, it would—I dated, um, but I wasn't always really satisfied with the type of people who I attracted—um, because again, they weren't really, uh, dating me for who I am now. They were dating me for who I wasn't quite yet. Um, so, now that I've transitioned, I feel as though—um, well, once you go Eve, you never want to leave! [laughter] So, um, you know, I've dated so many—um, I wouldn't say “so many,” but the people I've dated—it seems like there are people who are still, um, uncertain about dating somebody who's trans and committing themselves to that. However, I feel in the most recent period of time, within the past two—two years, two or three years, um, I—I think the rest of the world is sort of moving so much more towards acceptance, um, that I think that more people, because they're accepting trans people, the people who appreciate trans people for a relationship are becoming more accepting of themselves for that concept. So, um, currently—currently, hopefully not forever—I am single. Um, however, I—I date here and there. So, um, you know—and you know what's really interesting? Recently, I met somebody who, um—who was married to somebody, um, transgender—a transgender female. So, you know, when you hear stories like that and, um, you know, you sort of get this idea of, um, things that worked or didn't work for that relationship—and other people's as well—it kind of—it kind of starts to dissolve. I think what a lot of parents fear is that somebody's never going to love their child or, um, all that concern that you have because clearly, it can happen. And, um, you know, I don't feel as though, um, I have to be committed at the moment. Uh, and if it happens, it happens. It'll be organic.

Gaines: Do you have any plans for the future, as far as family is concerned? Like, having children, or...?

Elle: Um... [laughter] Well, let's first find me a good man. Uh, yeah. Um, you know, I think about it. I think about it, you know? Um, my younger sister—my youngest sister, as a matter of fact—just recently had a baby and, you know, I think, uh, before that situation of her getting pregnant, I was very much so against the idea of me, personally, having kids. Um, and of course, even when I was a child, I would say that if I ever did have kids, I would adopt—um, because I,
myself, am adopted and so are, um, seven other of my siblings. Um, so, after—after my sister gave birth and—um, I sort of realized, um, how that changed her life for the better, and after finally meeting the baby, uh, recently—and he's—he was born in September 2016, and now it's, um—where are we?—April 2017. Um, you know, after meeting the baby, I'm absolutely enamored with this child. He's just so sweet and so cute and adorable and, um, funny, and just—I just absolutely adore this baby. So, for me, um—again, just as, I think, a relationship would happen, it would be an organic thing, and if it—um, if it happens, it happens, and if it doesn't, I think I would be okay with that, too.

**Gaines:** Do you have anything else you would like to share?

**Elle:** Anything else I would like to share? Hmm. Uh, well...

**Gaines:** Any messages for future people?

**Elle:** Oh, uh, for people who are going to transition?

**Gaines:** Anything. Yeah, maybe that, or—yeah, people listening, or...

**Elle:** Um, well—I think—I think the one thing that we can really, um, all probably agree on is that, you know, if—if you see somebody who is trans, or you suspect that they are, um, to just be respectful, you know? Because life is hard enough as it is, in so many ways. Um, I mean, just getting here today was a challenge. I mean, the train station was closed, and then I had to transfer to the bus, and then the bus stopped running, and then it was like, “Oh, god.” And it’s hot as hell outside today, too. So, you know, it was—you know, again, that's just an example, you know? Life is hard enough. So, um, be easy—easy-breezy, you know? Let your life be easy-breezy, um, and allow others to have that, uh, privilege as well.

**Gaines:** Thank you, Eve Elle.

**Elle:** Thank you.