NEW YORK CITY TRANS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

BRYCEN GAINES

Interviewer: Eve Elle

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Transcribed by Jamie Magyar (volunteer)

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Eve Elle: Hello, my name is Eve Elle, and I will be having a conversation with Brycen Gaines 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 experience of trans-identifying people. It is April 29, 2017, and this is being recorded at SAGE [Services & Advocacy for GLBT Elders] in Midtown, Manhattan. Hello, how are you today?

Brycen Gaines: Great, how are you?

Elle: Pretty good, thank you. Thank you for being here. So, my first question is going to be, um, when did you first become aware of your gender identity?

Gaines: The first time I became aware of my gender identity was in college. Um, I’m a bit of a late bloomer [laughter]. Uh, I came across a video of a trans man, um, on YouTube. I was in my dorm, and I just remember realizing—like, something just clicked in my head, like, “This is me,” you know? I—you know, I saw this man, and I was—I was just like—I was just enamored. I was just very interested in—in this person’s story and transgender people. And then I went to, uh—then it kind of brought up questions within myself about my own identity, and, um, that’s when I sought out therapy, because I wanted to do the right thing before I took steps medically. And, uh, yeah. And I was actually a psychology major in college, so, you know, I kind of knew that—I knew how important therapy was in anything, especially, like, transitioning. Yeah.

Elle: Okay, wonderful. Um, so how long have you been identifying, um, as male?

Gaines: Uh, for about ten year—well, yeah. Yeah, probably—seven or eight years, yeah. So, um, I discovered that I was trans when I was like, 20, 21, and now I am 28, so, yeah.

Elle: Okay, wonderful. Now, let me ask you, um—because of that, um, have you faced discrimination in New York City or anywhere else?

Gaines: Not because I’m trans, more because I’m a black male. Yeah.

Elle: I see. And do you—did you experience any discrimination before you changed your gender identity?

Gaines: No.

Elle: Okay. Uh, what does it mean to you to be yourself, or to be, um, the real you, to be authentic?

Gaines: Um, what does it mean to me? Uh, living—living how one feels most comfortable. Um, yeah. Being happy with oneself, whether—you know, inside and out, you know? Yeah.

Elle: Do you have, um, a family that supports you?
Gaines: Yeah. I was blessed to have a family that—that's very supportive, yeah. Um, it was—it was a bit of a shock to them—well, probably not, because I've always been masculine, and, um—I've always dressed like a man, you know, had a voice—just very masculine in the way I talked and everything. Um, but, you know, they're very supportive. They don't judge me. Uh, sometimes they'll get—uh, mess up my pronouns and name sometimes, but, you know, yeah.

Elle: I understand, but as somebody who's just looking at you, I wouldn't—I would think it would be difficult for somebody to mistakenly misgender you. So, do you ever experience that outside of your family, or, um, is it just your family that do that?

Gaines: It's just my family, I guess because they knew me from before, and it's kind of funny, because my grandmother, specifically, she'll use the right name and pronouns while I'm doing something masculine, [laughter] and the wrong when I'm doing something not masculine—she uses like, the other pronouns, so, yeah.

Elle: That's—that's great. Uh, when you were growing up, did, uh—did your family encourage your interests, or your friends?

Gaines: In transitioning?

Elle: Uh, in anything that you participated in.

Gaines: Uh, yeah. Yes. Um, my family was very supportive, yeah. Um, anything that I was into, they would, you know, try to encourage me to do.

Elle: Wonderful. That's great. Not everybody has that in their life.

Gaines: Yeah.

Elle: Um, you know, living in New York City, how do you think it might be, um—well, you live in New Jersey, correct?

Gaines: Mhm.

Elle: So, um, is there a big community of trans males—or, trans men, rather—in New Jersey, or do you find more of that here in New York City?

Gaines: There's absolutely no LGBT community at all in New Jersey, which is why I commute almost every day to New York to be a part of things like this and stuff like that. I mean, I really wish there could be resources in New Jersey. I kind of want to bring resources to New Jersey, but there aren't any, yeah. And it's—yeah.

Elle: Interesting. So, um, between—you know, there's a big, um, LGBT—LGBTQ community in Philadelphia. Do you ever, um, go there?
Gaines: I—mmm, not really, because I live closer to New York. I'm in northern New Jersey.

Elle: Okay, I see. Oh, okay. So, what does companionship mean to you, um, in relation to—to now identifying as male?

Gaines: Relationship-wise, like in a romantic way?

Elle: Mhm.

Gaines: Uh, I've always been a horrible dater [laughter]. So, I mean, it—it hasn't changed, you know? I'm still very clueless and sometimes very awkward, so, I mean—I mean, it's not that big change. Yeah.

Elle: I see, I see. So, are you single now?

Gaines: Yes.

Elle: Okay. And, um, where did you go to school?

Gaines: Uh, college?

Elle: Uh-huh.

Gaines: Fairleigh Dickinson University. I'm actually still working on that right now.

Elle: Oh, okay.

Gaines: In New Jersey, yeah.

Elle: Wonderful. Um, and you don't—even in the school, you don't see any, um—does the topic of “transgender” come up at all in that—in your school?

Gaines: You know what? Yeah. I should rephrase—I mean, I should rephrase what I said earlier. The only places where there is a—any type of LGBTQ people or community, or trans people, is in college. You have to be a part of a college. That's where everybody is, and you have to be a part of the Gay Straight Alliance, and that's where you'll find people, but other than that, there's not a lot of people. So, I do—I have met some trans men on campus.

Elle: Oh, wonderful. Uh, do you feel that you've had to choose between expressing your gender identity and economic security?

Gaines: No. Yeah, I—that's kind of like, deep. No, I haven't—I've been lucky enough not to encounter that, yeah. I mean, I did have a job where I was early in my transition—I was actually transitioning on the job, and I was at CVS, but they didn't really care. And actually, the job had a policy where they could not discriminate based on your gender identity, so...
Elle: That's good that they implemented that policy. What is your experience with healthcare? Big thing these days.

Gaines: Uh, yeah. I mean, for New York, it's really good. Um, I mean, I go to Callen-Lorde [Community Health Center] here in New York, and that really helps me out. Um, that's where I get all my hormones and things like that. But, um, I—since I don't live in New York, I don't get the benefits for like, you know, surgeries being covered by insurance, or things like that, so that's very difficult. Uh, yeah.

Elle: Wonderful. What is your relationship with other trans, um, people, or other gender-nonconforming people, um, outside of—of, um—well, anybody, including transgender females or transgender males, or, um, non-binary?

Gaines: What...?

Elle: What is your relationship like?

Gaines: Relationship?

Elle: Like, yeah. Like, friendship, or like...?

Gaines: Oh, yeah. They're—they're great. I mean, I have a lot of trans friends—genderqueer friends, trans men, trans women—and it's great. We just hang out. We do—go clubbing, and just do different things. Yeah.

Elle: I see.

Gaines: Yeah.

Elle: Do you ever feel as though, um—when you're in a group, that—of people who are transgender, that you collectively are more visible because of your genders?

Gaines: No. I mean, I—I know there—the group gets more attention sometimes because, you know, some—some of us, you know, more of a—stand out more than others, I guess, but no.

Elle: Um, what is your earliest memory?

Gaines: Of—um, in general, or...?

Elle: In life.

Gaines: In life. Oh, man. Uh... I can only think of going skateboarding on my skateboard when I was like, ten.
Elle: Oh, okay. Well, that's—

Gaines: That's the thing that stands out.

Elle: Well, what's a moment you're most proud of?

Gaines: Um, finish—graduating from college. I'm graduating in May, yeah. Not—the two-year, but it's still something, you know? And then I'm going to continue on to four-year. I have one more year left there, and—on my Bachelor's, so...

Elle: Wonderful. And once you—once you acquire that, um, what do you plan to do, and, uh—for a career and, um, how do you think your career could help the trans community?

Gaines: Uh, I've always been into psychology. That's what I've always studied my—most of my life, and everything in my revolves around that. I was going to be a therapist—I had decided I was going to be a therapist for a long time—one-on-one therapy—but then I thought of branching into experimental psychology. But actually, doing these interviews today made me realize that I want to do one-on-one therapy. So, I want to do that, and I want to help LGBT people in therapy—yeah, in talk therapy.

Elle: Wonderful. And would you want to gear it specifically towards the LGBTQ community, or, um, is there some other approach you would take?

Gaines: Um, well, I mean, not only, just—I want to help everyone, so, yeah.

Elle: Understood. Uh, how do you feel, emotionally, mentally, and bodily right now?

Gaines: I feel great. I feel great. Um, sometimes I feel confused, because someone's always thinking, you know, but that's just—that's just what it is.

Elle: Okay. If you wanted to be remembered for one thing, what would it be?


Elle: Good. Um, is there anything else you would like to add?

Gaines: Uh, well, I want to tell people not to be afraid, and to live life to the fullest, however cheesy that sounds [laughter].

Elle: No, it sounds very nice. It's encouraging. Well, thank you so much for being here today.

Gaines: No problem.